

Travelling houses: global encounters

I

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Māori and Pacific houses began to travel far beyond the sites and contexts in which they were originally embedded. They began to take part in very different exchanges from those taking place in the Pacific. Their contexts changed from potentially sacred settings to spectacular scenes, in which encounters and intersections between buildings and people became fleeting and inconsequential.

In some cases, though, collaborations developed between the houses' guardians or producers and their overseas hosts or keepers. Today, some houses support diasporic communities, while others appear to have lost all connection with their original communities. Travelling houses found and find themselves in diverse roles, changing from *taonga* (prized possession) to tradable artefact, to museum specimen, to garden folly, to theme park exhibit, to transcultural meeting space, to temporary home for a diasporic community. My paper first addresses the transformations that some selected Māori and Samoan houses underwent between the 1860s and now, en route to international exhibition environments in the USA and Europe. It then canvasses the use of Māori and Pacific Houses in museum collections in the USA and Europe. Finally, it explores the conditions of possibility that allow houses to take on different roles and support different relationships.

The histories of the houses that travelled from Aotearoa and Samoa to Europe and the United States shows the diversity and change of relationships. The earliest whare, Mataatua, was initially sent to an exhibition in Sydney, subsequently embezzled and expedited to London, then incorporated in the collections of the Otago museum, and finally returned to Whakatane in 1996. All other Māori houses, Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhito, Ruatēpupuke II, Te Wharepuni a Maui and Rauru, are likely to stay in their current locations, Clandon Park (UK), the Field Museum (USA), Stuttgart's Linden Museum (Germany) and the Hamburg Museum für Völkerkunde (Germany). Some have communities of various sizes clustering around them. Samoan *fale* travelled to the 1893 *World's Columbian Exhibition* in Chicago, the 1924 *British Empire Exhibition* at Wembley, and the 1925 NZ and South Seas International Exhibition in Christchurch, New Zealand. In the 1970s, a cluster of Samoan *fale* were included in the Little World Museum of Man in Aichi, Japan, and in 2004, a *fale* arrived at the *Tropical Islands Resort* in Brand, Germany. At the *Polynesian Cultural Center*, both *whare nui* and *fale* offer edutainment to locals and tourists, as tokens of the exotic, but also maintain, in their own ways, traditional arts and crafts.

In exploring the changing status and nature of some *whare nui* and *fale* throughout such journeys, my interest is shaped by my own affiliations. Born in Germany, I migrated to Aotearoa/New Zealand in my twenties, where I soon formed close personal and political connections with Māori, specifically with Ngāti Porou from the East Coast of the North Island. Since then, German/European and Māori (and later Samoan) perspectives on Pacific issues highlight connections between the houses for me that are less obvious in the Pacific. An example of such connections was visible at the 1924-25 British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, where Mātaatua, a *whare whakairo* (carved house) from Whakatāne, and a *fale tele* (round or guest house) from Mulinu'u flanked the official New Zealand pavilion, offsetting the local colonial power to good effect from its colonies via scale and materials. This constellation also made visible the separation between houses and their community in this situation: in both cases, the New Zealand government decided not to send "Native troupes" to Wembley to accompany the houses.¹

¹ This was to avoid "unsettling and bad after-effects which invariably follow on the return of the participants" <Memorandum Secretary, Department of External Affairs to Secretary, Samoan Administration, 25.5.1923; Memorandum Secretary, External Affairs, for His Excellency, Administrator of Western Samoa, 25.1.1923; both IT 1 EX 87/20>. Thus, the

While such connections seem less obvious in the Pacific, where a much greater rendering of details highlights other similarities and differences, viewed from Hamburg, the differences between the houses tend to disappear behind their shared difference from Europe.² This difference historically motivated (and still motivates today) their inclusion in displays highlighting strangeness. They triggered ambivalent reactions: fascination and fear, curiosity and rejection. While this ambivalence can easily tip over into hostility, it can also, as Mario Erdheim (2002: 21-22) suggests, provide space for innovation and increase people's autonomy vis à vis the familiar and customary. Is it possible, then, that fascination and curiosity, ambivalence and ambiguity, can propel an exploration of both colonial history and contemporary relationships?

For this paper, I make a distinction between houses exhibited at fairs and in theme parks and those in museum collections – a distinction, as it were, between spectacle and specimen. Both terms derive from the Latin *specere*, to look, and both are typically looked at outside of their original context. But there are differences about the ways in which “looking at” takes place, which may change an object in different ways. Things can be gazed upon in awe, with desire, through analytic intellect, calculating control, and so on. Which mode will prevail depends also on the role the ‘object’ (as taonga, shelter, artefact, commodity, etc.) can play in a given context, which always enables or prevents certain relationships between houses, makers, source communities, keepers, and lookers.

A house's change of status or way of being from sacred to spectacular implies a greater emphasis on amusement than that from shelter to specimen (which emphasises education and knowledge), but such boundaries are fluid. *Rational recreation* was a 19C catch phrase and, today, info- and edutainment have further eroded the boundaries between education and entertainment. If I nevertheless establish a tenuous distinction, it is to identify aspects and avenues of the forces motivating any kind of ‘looking at’.

In my explorations so far, many of them shared with Albert Refiti, I have tried to make sense of data and experiences (archival, literature reviews, site and case studies, interviews, conversations, participation in events) from Aotearoa, Samoa, Germany and England, mainly through European theoretical frameworks that have affinity with Māori and Pacific ways of thinking.³ In this paper, I will use, for instance, Mario Erdheim's notions of the Native and the Foreign (*Das Eigene und das Fremde*, 1992),⁴ which suggest that ambiguity and ambivalence propel cultural change. While I normally work in an environment dominated by Western traditions of knowledge production, where the integration and validity of Indigenous knowledge is still disputed, often ignored or even denied (Fuchs, 2012: 400), I imagine that the participants in this panel consider the diversity of cultural knowledge more or less a given. They will have encountered, I assume, the suspicion of Māori and Pacific scholars concerning Critical Theory approaches in Indigenous contexts, which they suspect to consolidate aspects element of victimhood caused by colonialism. Bearing in mind, then, that there

fale was accompanied not by its tufuga (master builders) or Samoan performers, but instead by Charles Reed, a trader from Apia like Moors, and ‘his half-caste wife’ <Memorandum Secretary, Administration of Western Samoa, for Secretary, External Affairs, Wellington. 25.9.1923. IT 1 EX 87/20> An image in the London Illustrated News shows the latter and two European visitors inside the fale during construction. <‘Without a Single Nail! Building a Samoan “Fale” at Wembley’ by Steven Spurrier, in The Illustrated London News (May 24, 1924, 933).>

² Therefore, before meeting with staff at Museum of Ethnology (Museum für Völkerkunde) in Hamburg, I anticipated great difficulties to explain my simultaneous interest in Rauru and in the current special exhibition of historical photographs from the South Seas “Blick ins Paradies” (A Glimpse into paradise). My anxiety proved unnecessary: the exhibition included Samoa and Aotearoa amongst several other Pacific Islands.

³ Of particular interest were concepts that went beyond or questioned the stable and autonomous self of Western Enlightenment and sought to locate more connected and distributed ways of being and acting.

⁴ The book title, *Das Eigene und das Fremde*, cannot be easily translated.

are histories of both collaborative and violent acts of translation that need to be considered, for this paper I aim to engage ambiguity as potentiality – creating space for diverse ways of knowing and expanding both Pacific and European knowledge.

An important assumption underpinning this paper is that the ways in which things are used are at least as important, if not more important, than what they are taken to be and look like (Sean Mallon at 2013 *Pacific Spaces* fono). Use strongly shapes the relationships of exchange in which Māori and Samoan whare and fale are located and relocated, defined and redefined, and looked at. The changes (or the perception of those changes) in the houses' roles and ways of being from shelter or taonga to specimen or spectacle, of course, act back on their use.

1.

This paper addresses in its first section, "From sacred to spectacular", the role of **ambivalence** in the exhibition and viewing of Pacific houses. World exhibitions, *Völkerschauen* (ethnographic shows), theme parks and resorts will be examined to consider one of the fundamental differences, following Albert Refiti, concerning relationships in Pacific and Western contexts, namely the types of exchange that prevail between self and others. There is evidence in archival data that suggests that working class Germans visiting the *Völkerschauen* were stimulated by the exposure to strange cultures, not only enjoying the escape from the drabness of everyday life but also experiencing this exposure as a relief from their restricted circumstances and the repression of their imagination (Dreesbach, 2012: 12). For their own, different reasons, members of the German nobility and grand bourgeoisie invited high born Samoans into their houses. Anthropologists were interested in the performers as objects of study (Dreesbach, 2012: 17). So, while there was clearly an interest and fascination with the foreign, an impulse to control the strange ultimately prevented the foreign and the familiar to fuse in a way that would make the familiar seem strange and the strange familiar. Yet such con-fusion is, according to Erdheim, a fundamental condition for cultural innovation (2002: 29).⁵ 'Culture' first arises in the confrontation with the foreign, it is the product of changes caused by adaptation to and the exchange with strangers (1992: 734-5). Once we get involved with the foreign, our boundaries start shifting and we must change (Erdheim, 1992: 734). The tension between fascination and anxiety can be observed in the change from sacred to spectacle brought about by specific exhibition strategies.

2.

The second section, "From shelter to specimen", engages the notion of **translation** to look at different ways of moving houses and knowledge "from one place to another", and "one language into another" (the Latin etymologies of *translation*), and how they affect the houses' performance and meaning. A typical feature of Pacific spaces, namely that their role and function changes according to context and event <needs ref?>, found a new inflection in their transport from their communities of origin to Western exhibition contexts. This raises interesting questions about issues of translation and change concerning the use of Māori and Pacific houses in US and European museum collections. Amongst contemporary curators, imperial attitudes oscillating between fascination with the strange and desire, on one hand, and fear and rejection, on the other, have given way to a greater interest in hosting and translating the strange into the local fabric. Erdheim regards this process as one of the fundamental conditions for cultural innovation (2002: 29), where ambivalence in the often chaotic encounter with the strange creates space for autonomy, while antagonism provides challenges. However, in the appropriation and disappropriation between self

⁵ The antagonisms often inherent in ambivalence forcefully keeps our spirit alive and reaching out beyond our space and time, our environment and history (Erdheim, 1992: 737, 443).

and other, at the core of the constitution and survival of self, one has to rely on a lasting commonality or agreement that allows understanding to occur (Foran, 2012: 78, 81). **I wonder how Walter Benjamin's invocation of a "secret agreement between past generations and the present one" (Benjamin, 1940/1969: 254), which commits us to redeem the past by recognizing its image in the present, may transfer to cross-cultural translations**, particularly when they concern intergenerational relationships like Māori notions of whakapapa (genealogy) and utu (reciprocity) or Samoan notions of tua'oi (neighbour and boundary) and vā fealoaloa'i (social relations based on mutual respect). Such notions establish articulated relationships of separation and connection between self and other that first enable hospitality. I will explore these aspects of relationships of exchange in the histories of the Māori wharennui Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhiti from Te Wairoa and Rauru from Rotorua in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Today, they have both been recognised by their legal owners, the UK National Trust and the Museum für Völkerkunde, and their source communities as "ambassador[s] of the Te Arawa people, and of Māori culture in Europe overall" (Te Tenehi Teira in Köpke, 2012: 18).

3.

Finally, the third section, "Translation and **re-translation: kinship**", explores the relationships of exchange, and the interpretative turns and moves, concerning a simultaneously troubling and fascinating topic from different perspectives, as different aspects of the same reality (Arendt).

When Hinemihi or Rauru were removed from their original settings and carried across to England and Germany, their meaning and function underwent the first kind of change. From giving shelter, providing refuge from danger or weather in a specific context, generating relationships, creating space for debates, and orienting those who take shelter towards a common goal or place they came to stand, as specimen, as examples of a whole group, representing its most typical features in isolation from its relational and spiritual aspects (Rauru 372). Both houses underwent subsequent changes, which were interpreted in varying and sometimes diverging ways by the legal owners and source communities. What seems clear is that these changes cannot be conceptualised along a linear scale of authentic/inauthentic or sacred/spectacular. Can an approach taking into account the various aspects of different communities eventually lead, not only to a better understanding of the relationships between the houses and those gathered around them, but also change their dynamic ex/changes?

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