
Trade of Māori and Moriori Ancestral Remains

Alongside Wildlife Specimens From Aotearoa New Zealand and Rēkohu Chatham Islands

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Abstract

This contribution makes connections between the trade of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains and the trade of wildlife specimens from Aotearoa New Zealand and Rēkohu Chatham Islands. It highlights three key collectors, looters, and traders in Aotearoa New Zealand from the 1870s to the early 1900s, which include Henry Travers (1844–1928), Sir James Hector (1834–1907) and Andreas Reischek (1845–1902). This paper examines the ethics associated with their trading, the context of trade and its connection with the colonisation of the Māori people of mainland New Zealand, and the Moriori people of Rēkohu, the Chatham Islands. This abstract highlights the different ways Māori and Moriori engage with decolonisation in New Zealand to re-establish their connection with their whenua/henu (tribal territory), tūpuna/karāpuna (ancestors) and with taonga/miheke (cultural treasures and natural history specimens) at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). An example of this is provided in the second half of the paper.

Introduction

In this paper, I will look at the connection between the theft of ancestral remains and the acquisition of cultural objects as well as wildlife specimens. To do so, I will first sketch the history of Aotearoa and Māori culture, as well as the colonisation of both, also focusing on three key looters who were very active in removing ancestral remains and cultural heritage from Aotearoa New Zealand and Rēkohu Chatham Islands. The fight of Māori and Moriori people to regain their ancestors and sacred objects has been a long and ongoing struggle, which I will highlight in the second part of my paper. I will give an insight in the work of Te Papa and my own research, drawing on the example of a provenance research project that I took part in in the scope of a fellowship provided by the Georg August University of Göttingen. I will conclude with some thoughts on how the looting in colonial contexts could be reconciled through contemporary decolonisation practices in museology in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Background:

Aotearoa New Zealand and Rēkohu Chatham Islands

The Māori people of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Moriori people of Rēkohu, Chatham Islands are the descendants of the first Polynesian people to arrive in their respective island territories. The Māori and Moriori are closely related peoples, however, they also have distinct cultural differences and languages. Customary practices for Māori were maintained by a set of social, spiritual, philosophical, and ethical mores known as tikanga. Tikanga is a framework based on best practice principles approved by tribal members built up on knowledge generated from mātauranga Māori (ancient knowledge systems). Tikanga is still an important element for Māori when we engage with the natural environment, social interactions, with ancestral remains, and most importantly with farewell loved ones.¹

The earliest Europeans that came to Aotearoa New Zealand were those looking for new land to colonise or for fauna, flora and taonga (cultural treasures and objects of importance) that they could collect, steal, loot or trade.²

Māori were astute traders, and this continued with the arrival of Pākehā (Europeans and Westerners). Items of early interest to Pākehā included fresh produce and water, taonga in the form of high-status cultural items, timber spas, New Zealand flax, and camps set up for sealing and whaling.³ Around this time, a unique Māori cultural item was collected, traded, and looted, which was Toi moko, or the mummified tattooed heads of Māori chiefs, warriors, and captives.⁴ Between 1769 and 1840, about 300 Toi moko⁵ were traded and exchanged for Western commodities such as muskets, gun powder, ammunition, metal goods and other items.⁶

Intense trade between Māori and Pākehā, as well as Māori rangatira (chiefs) travelling to Western and European countries, made rangatira aware of Western colonisation and how this had affected other people around the world. From the 1830s, rangatira sought mechanisms to protect their trading opportunities as well as to defend themselves from colonisation. During this period, rangatira sought agreements with Western trading partners to actively engage in trade and sought recognition of their tribal authority through documents such as the declarations of independence,⁷ and finally by agreeing to become citizens of the British Empire by signing Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the original Māori language version of the Treaty of Waitangi) in 1840.⁸

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the founding document for the establishment of New Zealand as a country under the governorship of the British Crown. It is important to note that the te reo Māori (the Māori language) version of Te Tiriti reflects four key points:⁹

1. The British Crown was permitted to govern in their iwi (tribal) territories;
2. The British Crown recognised the rangatira's ultimate chiefly authority or rangatiratanga in their respective iwi territories, including existing political authority, property rights to their tribal lands, fisheries and taonga of value to them;
3. The British Crown had the first right of refusal to buy land from the rangatira if they wished to sell; and
4. Rangatira and Māori in general became British subjects with all the rights and privileges of being a British subject.

Post-1840 – The British Crown and Government Arrives

*This is a splendid country but cursed by these rascally Maories.
However they are fast becoming extinct.*¹⁰

(Sir James Hector)

From 1840, Pākehā settlers of British descent were encouraged to settle in the new part of the empire that was Aotearoa New Zealand. Some of them took kōiwi tangata (Māori skeletal remains)/kōimi tchakat (Moriori skeletal remains) from wāhi tapu/wāhi tchap (sacred repositories), or from existing or abandoned Māori or Moriori villages.

The theft of indigenous remains without the approval of their communities was a common practice of Western collectors, traders, and scientists in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This is highlighted in the 2003 report completed by the Working Group on Human Remains, which was commissioned by the British Department for Culture, Media and Sport. This department has oversight of collections in public museums within England. In reference to international human remains in British museums the report states:

*First, much of the overseas human material in English museums was removed from its original location after the death of the subject without the informed and prior consent of that person, or his or her kin or community.*¹¹

Some of the stolen ancestral remains in English museums came from Māori and Moriori communities in the South Pacific. Early colonial museums were established in Aotearoa New Zealand from the 1850s onwards, with the opening of the Auckland Museum in 1852, the Wellington Colonial Museum in 1865, the Canterbury Museum in 1867, and the Otago Museum in Dunedin in 1868.

The directors and leaders of these newly established museums had strong working relationships with each other, and many of them were experienced in collecting and recording the country's fauna and flora as well as surveying its geological features through government contracts.¹² They used their experience, connections and knowledge of wāhi tapu/wāhi tchap and tribal lands through surveying the country to access and acquire Māori and Moriori ancestral remains without the knowledge or even against the wishes of local whānau/hunau (family), hapū and iwi/imi (Moriori word for tribe).¹³

These aspects of early museums' collection practices can be hidden, as there is a tendency to only highlight the collection of natural history specimens (i.e., wildlife) without including details about ancestral remains looted by the same collector. An example of this are the collection practices of Henry H. Travers. Analysis of the Wellington Colonial Museum's archives and annual reports indicate that Travers deposited on 21 March 1872 not only over 6,500 natural history and wildlife specimens from Rēkohu Chatham Islands, but also 25 Moriori skulls, 3 skeletons and 48 miheke (Moriori cultural treasures).¹⁴ Refer to figure 1 below, which provides the list of items, specimens and Moriori ancestral remains taken and looted by Henry Travers from Rēkohu, the Chatham Islands, in 1871 and 1872.

The Wellington Colonial Museum itself played an active role in sending native wildlife, geological specimens and indigenous human remains overseas, with such actions documented in its annual reports and in the accession records of international institutions.¹⁵

Another contemporary collector of Sir James Hector is the infamous Austrian collector Andreas Reischek.¹⁶ While living in Austria, Reischek became acquainted with Ferdinand von Hochstetter, who at this time was the intendant of the Austrian Imperial Natural History Museum. Through Hochstetter's connection with Julius von Haast, Reischek was recommended as a taxidermist to the Canterbury Museum. In 1876, Reischek moved to Aotearoa New Zealand and worked for both the Canterbury Museum and the Auckland Museum for twelve years in total. Reischek undertook several journeys around the country, including along the West and the East Coast of the South Island, the Whanganui region, Te Tai Tokerau (Northland), the King Country and Waikato.

While undertaking these expeditions, Reischek would collect plant and bird specimens with the main intention of taking these collection items back to Vienna in order to sell them to the Imperial Natural History Museum. However, some of these specimens remained in collections in Aotearoa New

Figure 1 | Sir James Hector, Wellington Colonial Museum, Letter to Under Colonial Secretary, 9 March 1872, p. 3, a list of items, specimens and Moriori ancestral remains collected and looted by Henry Travers.
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List of Articles Chatham Is.

192. Bird skins ✓
 17. Bird skeletons ✓
 57. Moriori stone implements ✓
 25. Moriori shells ✓
 1. 2. Complete Moriori skeletons ✓
 2. Whales Heads
 1. Lower jaw of Whale
 1. Skeleton of Seal
 18 pieces of Moriori Carving ✓
 2. specimens of native wood ✓
 300. Rock specimens ✓
 30. Native Curioites
 6000. Postameal specimens ✓
 12. Bottles of Fish insects &c
 150. Birds Eggs (15 kinds) ✓
 10. Birds Nests.
 1. Moriori Dress
 100. Shells
 60. Crabs, starfish &c.



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Figure 2 | Image of a chick of a Putangitangi (Paradise Shelduck), collected by Andreas Reischek in December 1887. © Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2023 a:1

Zealand. An example is in Te Papa’s collections, which houses the specimen of a chick of a Putangitangi (Paradise Shelduck) collected at Paringa on the South Island’s west coast (Fig. 2).

In February 1889, Reischek left Aotearoa New Zealand for Austria with the biggest collection of natural history items to leave the country so far. This included 2,278 ornithological items and 453 ethnological specimens.¹⁷ Of those 453 “ethnographic items”, about fifty consisted of Māori ancestral remains stolen by Reischek during his journeys around the country. The most notorious theft of tūpuna (ancestors) by Reischek was the taking of two mummified remains from the Hauturu caves in Kāwhia. The theft was in violation of the expressed wishes of Tāwhiao, the Māori king who gave permission to enter the lands at Kāwhia. These two tūpuna belonged to the kahui ariki, the senior chiefly line of Tainui ancestors, and are said to be the ancestral remains of Tūpāhau, and one of his young descendants who died as a baby.¹⁸ Andreas Reischek and his behaviour are considered “characteristic of

nineteenth-century scientific thought”,¹⁹ similar in many ways to that of his peers, including Travers and Hector, who gave themselves permission to loot and trade Māori and Moriori ancestral remains.

By permitting the collection practices of the Wellington Colonial Museum, Sir James Hector, Henry Travers, Andreas Reischek, and so many others, the British Crown failed to enact and deliver on article 2 of Te Tiriti with respect to recognising and supporting Māori and Moriori aspirations towards maintaining an enduring relationship with their kōiwi tangata/kōimi tchakat, wāhi tapu/wāhi tchap, and whenua/henu. The Crown’s failure is based on three areas: first, by the Crown not recognising its obligations to Māori and Moriori as per Te Tiriti o Waitangi; secondly, the complicit nature of the Crown by doing little to stop the theft of kōiwi tangata and kōimi tchakat from wāhi tapu/wāhi tchap; and third, the extent of the number of kōiwi tangata and kōimi tchakat taken from wāhi tapu/wāhi tchap and traded domestically or internationally.

The Crown’s failure becomes more apparent in the judgement in the case of *Wi Parata v. The Bishop of Wellington*.²⁰ James Prendergast, the Chief Justice of the New Zealand Supreme Court, declared Te Tiriti as “worthless” and a “simple nullity”. In his judgment of 17 October 1877, Prendergast erroneously proclaimed that the country was acquired by “right of discovery” as the land was only inhabited by “savages”. He went even further, declaring that Māori had no ancient customary law pertaining to the ownership and use of land,²¹ which is a historic falsity as Māori had numerous tikanga pertaining to land and its ownership, guardianship, and care.²²

Prendergast based his judgement in part on the 1823 United States case *Johnson v. McIntosh*, where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Native Americans did not own land, but only had a right of occupancy. This ruling purported the U.S. Federal Government had come into ownership of the country’s territories by succession from the Crown, based on the “doctrine of discovery” as interpreted by U.S. Chief Justice John Marshall, who presided over *Johnson v. McIntosh*.²³

While Māori were trying to prevent the sale and confiscation of their land from the 1860s onwards,²⁴ they were also becoming aware that their tūpuna were being taken by Pākehā, and they began the process of transferring kōiwi tangata from vulnerable locations to places that offered protection and sanctuary from preying hands and eyes.²⁵ The Māori Councils Act of 1900 and its amendment in 1903 indicate that, in theory, the Crown approved legislation to prevent the theft of kōiwi tangata from wāhi tapu. However, despite this

act being in place, no appropriate measures were taken to stop and prevent the theft of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains, and it would remain an act without teeth.²⁶ Furthermore, in 1901, 61 years after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Māori Member of Parliament Sir James Carrol presented the Māori Antiquities Act to the New Zealand Parliament.²⁷ This legislation was enacted to stop the trade of taonga, as there was concern from both Māori and some Pākehā who were made aware of the significant issue by Māori leaders that taonga were leaving the country, and this act was designed specifically to ensure there was no further loss of taonga.²⁸

Despite the Act becoming law in 1901, Māori and Moriori ancestral remains kept leaving Aotearoa New Zealand, as the accession records of international institutions show, specifically those of the Natural History Museum in London and the museums in the State of Saxony in Germany.²⁹ Research undertaken by Te Papa into the trade of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains confirms that close to 900 tūpuna/karāpuna (Moriori ancestors) were collected, traded, or sent overseas from 1840 to the 1980s.³⁰

Reconciling Colonial Collection Practices – Göttingen University Fellowship

Having drawn an overview of the theft of ethnographic objects and ancestral remains, I will now turn to practical examples of the work Te Papa is doing in order to assure that our ancestors return home. In August 2022, I started a fellowship at the Georg August University in Göttingen, Germany. This fellowship is part of the Sensitive Provenance Research Project, which is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation as a three-year provenance research project. The project aims to research and confirm the provenance for indigenous ancestral remains collected, looted, and traded to Germany from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. My specific research project is to confirm the provenance of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains housed in two collections at Göttingen University, specifically the so-called Blumenbach Collection and also the collection of human remains housed at the Anthropology Department.

Mihi and Karakia with Tūpuna and Karāpuna (Meeting and Acknowledging the Ancestors)

An important element of Māori culture is acknowledging the passing of loved ones through a ritual funerary process called tangihanga. Important elements of tangihanga include tikanga, or deep-rooted cultural practices imbued with best practice frameworks. There are specific tikanga when engaging with tūpāpaku (the deceased) and these may include a number of the following elements: playing taonga puoro (traditional musical instruments); the call of the karanga (chanted spiritual acknowledgement by women); chanting waerea (chants to clear pathways and acknowledge historic connections); offering formal speeches through whaikōrero (formal acknowledgements by men); offering lamentations called waiata tangi; and closing the ceremony with a karakia whakawātea (chants to exit the ceremonial process). This process ensures that we offer respect and dignity to our loved ones in the most appropriate manner and way. When engaging with ancestral remains housed in overseas institutions, we take our tikanga to acknowledge them and to offer them the highest form of respect and dignity.

To honour Māori and Moriori ancestors at the university in Göttingen, I arranged separate karakia (chanted cultural acknowledgements) for the four Māori ancestors housed in the Blumenbach Collection, and the 24 Moriori and two Māori ancestral remains housed in the Anthropology Department. I also invited the research team and other fellows to attend.³¹ The visit to the Anthropology Department was first, and it was mostly the research team that joined me for the karakia.

After the ceremony, we had a discussion within our research group that dealt with questions regarding the Māori ancestral remains and their repatriation process. Several questions were put forward that, in short, deal with the issue of repatriation versus the value of specimens for science. One inquirer wanted to know what happens to the remains once they are returned to Aotearoa New Zealand. I explained that they are welcomed home through a pōwhiri (formal welcoming ceremony) on Te Papa's marae (community meeting place). They are welcomed by Māori and representatives of Te Papa as well as the New Zealand Government. After the welcoming, they are placed in Te Papa's wahi tapu (sacred repository, see fig. 3).



Figure 3 | Image of pōwhiri on Te Papa's national marae. Te Papa staff and representatives place finely woven feathered cloaks and kawakawa (greenery) on the travelling cases, which contain Māori and Moriori ancestral remains repatriated from international institutions.
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Another question touched upon the time after the remains are repatriated. What will happen when they return to their community – will they be buried, cremated, given a sea burial or something else? I answered that this is the decision of the iwi/imi or tribe. The job of Te Papa and the repatriation process is to ensure the ancestors are offered respect and dignity as well as the best cultural and conservation care from the time they are uplifted from an overseas institution, returned to Te Papa and placed into the wāhi tapu. The goal is to return them to their tribal territory.

However, there is a common sentiment conveyed by Western academics and scientists that manage indigenous ancestral remains. They believe it is a loss to science when indigenous remains are returned to their community of origin before scientific analysis (e.g., DNA and isotope testing, as well as carbon dating) is undertaken on the ancestral remains.

My response to this type of argument is gentle, yet direct. Although these ancestral remains are housed in a scientific institution, it would be ethically and morally unwise to undertake invasive scientific testing on them without the permission of their community of origin. For Māori and Moriori, permission needs to come from their iwi/imi (tribal) authority that has the responsibility for deciding on issues of importance for their respective tribal grouping. Importantly, modern institutions have a moral and ethical obligation to contact the community of origin if they wish to conduct research on indigenous human remains.

How to Research the Looting of Ancestral Remains: Two Exemplary Collections

According to te ao Māori (the Māori perspective), history is made of actions, events and people connected by whakapapa. Whakapapa is commonly interpreted into English as genealogy, or the lineage of a person, family, or tribe. However, the meaning has a broader application in the Māori world, where people, events and actions all have whakapapa. This view of whakapapa is a key element of the provenance research methodology for this project. The understanding is that all the Māori and Moriori ancestors housed at Göttingen University have a whakapapa or hokopapa that is connected to a series of people, events, and actions. Consequently, my goal is to discover and confirm the whakapapa of collection, looting and trade for these ancestors. To progress this research, I had the support of library and archival services at Te Papa, the research team at the University of Göttingen (Holger Stoecker and Sofia Leikam), the Natural History Museum in Vienna (Sabine Eggers and Margit Berner), as well as Susan Thorpe (Repatriation Researcher at Te Papa) and Te Arikirangi Mamaku (Repatriation Coordinator at Te Papa).

The Blumenbach Collection

The so-called Blumenbach Collection at the University of Göttingen is named after Johann F. Blumenbach, a collector of ancestral skulls from different parts of the world in the late 1700s, who was also a professor in Göttingen. Many of these ancestral remains were collected as part of the process of European and Western colonisation of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. In this collection, there are four Māori ancestors recorded with the accession information for these tūpuna listed below.

One ancestor³² was received in 1930 from Adolf Kluckauf of Vienna, Austria. However, the original collector of the ancestor is recorded as Andreas Reischek, who obtained the skull in 1883. The information on the note associated with the ancestor indicates that the skull is of a female of the Ngāpuhi tribe, the specific location being Taiharuru in Northland. I confirmed that Andreas Reischek had collected other ancestral remains from the specific location of Taiharuru and taken these to Vienna, Austria. Regarding the letter in the conservation box, which indicated that the trader was Adolf Kluckauf of Vienna, I received advice from Margit Berner, curator at the Natural History Museum in Vienna, who confirmed that Adolf Kluckauf was resident in Vienna in 1930. Based on the provenance research immediately above, I can confirm that this ancestor is of Māori origin with provenance to Taiharuru, Aotearoa New Zealand.

There is very limited accession information pertaining to the three remaining kōiwi tangata (Māori skeletal remains), as the related documents were destroyed during the Second World War when they were housed in a building next to the main station in Göttingen. An analysis of the word “Maori” written on each one of the three remaining skulls shows a strong similarity with the handwriting on skulls that Andreas Reischek had collected and accessioned for the Natural History Museum in Vienna. However, after comparing the handwriting of Reischek contained in his letters and notes, I assessed that he was not the person who wrote the descriptions on the skulls. I, therefore, analysed the handwriting of those known collectors and traders of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains associated with Andreas Reischek, who included Ferdinand von Hochstetter (Natural History Museum, Vienna), Julius von Haast (Canterbury Museum, Christchurch), Felix von Luschan (Royal Ethnographic Museum, Berlin) and Sir James Hector (Colonial Museum, Wellington).

The outcome of the analysis indicates that the handwriting on three Māori skulls³³ belongs to Sir James Hector. As highlighted previously, Sir James Hector actively traded in Māori and Moriori ancestral remains. Based on the above analysis, there is strong evidence that the handwriting on three of the Māori ancestors in the Blumenbach Collection is that of Sir James Hector. Therefore, those three skulls are Māori ancestors and should be repatriated to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Anthropology Department of the University of Göttingen

As my research has shown, there are several ancestral remains housed at the Anthropology Department of the University of Göttingen. University accession information indicates that the Moriori ancestral remains arrived in Göttingen from the Museum of Ethnology in Hamburg (today MARKK) after the Second World War. Guided by the research expertise of Holger Stoecker, and with the support of Sofia Leikam, I was able to locate archival documentation dated to February 1907. The sources reveal that the Umlauff Company in Hamburg offered Moriori ancestral remains to Prof. Dr Thilenius, director of the Hamburg Museum at that time.³⁴ The Umlauff Museum and company based in Hamburg was established by Johann Friedrich Gustav Umlauff (1833–1889), a collector and trader of indigenous artefacts and ancestral remains.

Furthermore, a review of Te Papa's communication with researchers and institutions in Germany uncovered another related document that was sent to the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa by Johannes Krause, co-director of the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig. The document confirms that the collector of the karāpuna was Henry Travers. It highlights that Travers obtained the Moriori ancestors in December 1906 and sent them to the Umlauff Company thereafter. By analysing these two documents, and by directly viewing the ancestors at the Anthropology Department, I detected that the remains had attached the original Umlauff Company name tags. Therefore, the ancestral remains in the Anthropology Department are of Moriori origin with clear provenance to Rēkohu, the Chatham Islands.

Colonisation Celebrated and the Legacy of a Colonial Mindset

At the beginning of this chapter, I indicated that I was the head of repatriation for the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme which is administered by Te Papa. We are the mandated repatriation programme for the New Zealand Government to seek the return of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains from overseas institutions. I began the role in early October 2007, and in November of the same year, I was travelling to the United Kingdom to uplift Māori and Moriori ancestral remains from institutions in England, Scotland, and Wales.

During the handover of the tūpuna and karāpuna at one of the institutions, the director of the institution gave an acknowledgement speech. I remember the speech for two reasons: initially, for what the chair did not say, and secondly, for something he thought was appropriate to say to indigenous representatives receiving their ancestral remains. Firstly, there was no apology for the theft, looting, collecting, trade and taking of ancestral remains. The words of “acknowledgement” that he did offer instead were phrased with him saying: “we are offering these ancestors back because they are of no value to us.” The person who said the words represented the institution at its highest level, so the sentence had meaning and purpose from an academic and scientific perspective. It was a stark reminder of how institutions viewed indigenous remains, and their value to them as specimens. This is a theme that often surfaces when I engage in repatriation conversations with institutions in Europe. They say that they need to assess the scientific value of the ancestors before they can be returned. This was also part of the conversation held during the karakia at the Blumenbach Collection. It was apparent to me that the rationale and attitude that permitted the looting and theft of ancestral remains from the 1860s in Aotearoa New Zealand is still operating in contemporary Western academic institutions. In effect, the chair in 2007 was mimicking the actions of collectors and traders such as Travers, Reischek and Hector.

What I mean by this is that they mirror sentiments and sentences that can be found already during the foundation of the Colonial Museum and the height of the theft of indigenous items. Although the Wellington Colonial Museum was established in 1865,³⁵ it only became formally part of the New Zealand Institute two years later.³⁶ The New Zealand Institute through

its 1867 Act had the specific purpose of “promoting art and science” within Aotearoa New Zealand.³⁷ As part of its inaugural address in 1868, the New Zealand Governor, Sir George Bowen, stated that the main purpose of the institute was to “provide guidance and aid for the people of New Zealand in subduing and replenishing the earth – in the ‘heroic work’ of colonization”.³⁸ This was then followed by an acknowledgement speech of William Fox, member of the House of Representatives. Fox emphasised the central role of the new British Colony by saying, “we in New Zealand were here to lay the basis of a true civilization, not only to subdue nature, and till the soil, but impelled by Anglo-Saxon ardour and energy, to develop all that was worthy of development.”³⁹ These speeches highlight the expectations leaders within the colony had for the New Zealand Institute and its Colonial Museum. They were seen and meant to be a beacon and reservoir of the “heroic” powers of Western colonisation. According to Bowen, Fox and so many others, these supposedly incredible powers would lead to taming, replenishing, and civilising the country: “The only thing in the way was the pesky and troublesome Māori.”⁴⁰

As indicated earlier, the whakapapa research methodology provides a framework through which to consider and make connections between people, events, and actions. With the establishment of Wellington Colonial Museum and the New Zealand Institute, there is an underlying theme that it would be used as a tool to colonise, till, and tame the country and put it to “proper” use by the British. In practice, both institutions were part of a series of actions by the British Crown that were implemented to actively disenfranchise Māori and Moriori from their property, their native culture, and those things of value and importance to them as protected by Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These actions were reinforced by nullifying Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1877, confiscating lands of tribes that would not sell, as well as alienating other tribal lands, converting them into individual ownership, and then putting pressure on individual owners to sell to the Crown. As part of this process, all colonial museums received, collected, looted, and traded Māori and Moriori ancestral remains. Thus, these scientific institutions profited from the colonial violence and disregard for indigenous people. Since they were considered part of the fauna, flora and wildlife of the country, the remains were also placed on display in museum institutions.⁴¹

Māori and Moriori Resistance and Their Persistence to Have Their Rights Honoured

As shown above, colonial views prevail and changes only came about due to the persistent activism of indigenous groups. One of the focuses was to seek ratification of Te Tiriti by Māori based on tikanga, or a commitment to follow the intent of the document signed by Māori ancestors in 1840, as a means to honour them and Te Tiriti. The political action taken is also tikanga based, as it recognises that the way forward is through passive resistance and by coordinated political action.⁴²

Methodical and persistent political action by Māori led to the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 by the New Zealand Government, with the purpose of considering contemporary grievances Māori had with the Crown for not abiding by its commitments to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.⁴³ In 1985, the purpose of the Tribunal was extended so it could consider complaints dating back to 1840. The actions of the Waitangi Tribunal and its recommendations provided a formal avenue for the Crown to redress Māori grievances as well as compensate Māori and Moriori. Through the Tribunal, resources are allocated by the Crown to meet its Te Tiriti commitments to protect taonga and miheke of importance to Māori and Moriori, including their languages.

At the time of the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal, there were also social and cultural changes happening within Aotearoa New Zealand. At the National Museum, the immediate predecessor to Te Papa, the key members of its Council in the mid to late 1980s were Sir Graham Latimer and Maui Pomare. Both were highly influential in seeking the return of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains in the 1980s and 1990s. It was Maui Pomare who led the development of the National Museum establishing a wāhi tapu at the museum before it became Te Papa in 1998.

In the 1990s, the National Museum became the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. As part of this development, a new piece of legislation was enacted called "Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992".⁴⁴ Significantly, it included Māori and Moriori as part of the process of telling their own stories alongside the Western and European approach to accepted museum practice. The key changes included:

1. Signalling the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi as the founding document of nationhood for Aotearoa New Zealand;
2. Biculturalism is seen as key foundation for the museum, where both Māori (including Moriori) and non-Māori traditions are acknowledged and incorporated into the museum's practices. This included being inclusive of te reo Māori and ta rē Moriori (the Moriori language) with exhibition labels;
3. Mana taonga or ensuring communities of origin of important national treasures at Te Papa are included in the conversations and development of exhibitions containing their cultural treasures; and
4. All Māori and Moriori ancestral remains were immediately deaccessioned from the collections and offered for repatriation to their iwi/imi.

The major shift for the country was recognising that the traditional Western museum practice, in which museum curators typically hold the authority to tell the story of national treasures, did not apply to taonga and miheke, and that the best people to pass on the knowledge pertaining to taonga and miheke are Māori or Moriori.⁴⁵

As highlighted earlier, taonga is a broad term and includes a range of important items, such as cultural treasures, ancestral remains, and wāhi tapu, but also the natural environment, wildlife and geological specimens. Te Papa has done this to some degree by recognising the importance of connection through its mana taonga policy, inviting iwi to tell their stories within their national museum, and through the repatriation of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains. In addition, Te Papa has already recognised its role in re-establishing the connection between iwi/imi and wildlife specimens (i.e., whale specimens, moa eggs, turtles) and geological items (i.e., pounamu) originating from their tribal territories. Examples of working in partnership with iwi include when whales and other sea creatures become stranded and die on coastal areas. Some iwi may extend an invitation to Te Papa to uplift the skeletal remains to allow for scientific examination to take place, however, when this work is completed there is an expectation that the remains will return to the tribal region and placed in a final resting place according to appropriate tikanga (rituals). Further work can be done by Te Papa and other government agencies to build on these initial steps – to build stronger connections between taonga, wildlife and geological specimens, to build a unique knowledge system that reflects peer-reviewed scientific knowledge as well as mātauranga Māori and tohungatanga Moriori (traditional Moriori knowledge).

Summary and Reflection

This paper has given an overview of the impact of British colonisation on the Māori people of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Moriori people of Rēkohu, Chatham Islands. The signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi between Māori Chiefs and the British Crown in 1840 was meant to signal the beginning of a new type of relationship between the British and indigenous people, where the property and cultural rights of indigenous people were protected by the establishment of British governorship in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The collection of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains alongside wildlife specimens reflect how Western institutions viewed indigenous people as part of the native fauna and flora, part of the wildlife that is available to be collected, looted, and traded without concern or repercussions within Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally. Decolonisation within Aotearoa New Zealand stems from the determination of Māori and Moriori who sought to hold the British Crown and New Zealand Government accountable. They finally made major inroads with the establishment of the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal in 1975.

Associated with the recognition of Te Tiriti by the Crown, Māori and Moriori were able to seek respect for the ancestral remains housed in museums around the country, and with the establishment of the Karanga Aotearoa Repatriation Programme to formally seek the return of Māori and Moriori ancestral remains housed in international institutions. However, what was highlighted by the Global Wildlife Trade Conference held at the University of Göttingen in November 2022 is that the trade of wildlife and its direct connection with Western colonisation of Africa, Asia, Southeast Asia, the Americas and Oceania is still to be fully acknowledged. Through its mana taonga policy, Te Papa connects cultural treasures with their communities of origin, despite the challenges associated with how the taonga came into its collections.

The mana taonga concept may be considered unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, however, academics have been highlighting and discussing similar concepts for some time. One example is by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. In his paper *Museum Objects as Accidental Refugees*,⁴⁶ he highlights the privilege given to western interpretations of objects, and how this devalues the story of the object from the community of origin's point of view.

Furthermore, Appadurai gives these objects the status of “refugees”, which is the state they remain in until they are uplifted and repatriated by their community of origin. The Māori and Moriori ancestral remains that were traded to Göttingen University from the early 20th century until the 1950s are examples of “refugees” collected, looted, and traded.

Fortunately for these refugees, they have returned home to Aotearoa New Zealand after more than one hundred years in Germany, as the Georg August University in Göttingen agreed to repatriate these ancestors to their homeland in June 2023. The repatriation was made possible only because both Māori and Moriori peoples have devoted their energies to ensure the safe return of their ancestors to their lands and sacred repositories. Yet, what about the wildlife specimens that require repatriation to their places of origin and remain as refugees in museums and academic collections around the world?

Neel Ahuja in his paper *Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World* offers insight into the plight of wildlife specimens housed in zoos, laboratories, museums, and academic institutions.⁴⁷ The point made by Ahuja is that wildlife specimens are treated according to the value humans give to them. In the 1800s, Europeans and Western academics relegated non-Western and non-European people to be categorised alongside wildlife. Indigenous people through their own political activism and untiring effort were able to emancipate themselves from the wildlife category, and to begin the process of seeking the repatriation of their ancestors. Considering these developments, I will ask my final question, which is, who will speak on behalf of wildlife that remain refugees housed in international collections? This is the new challenge for those working in museums, academic institutions, laboratories, zoos, aquariums, and other facilities with wildlife collections. Who indeed is brave enough to offer leadership in this important field of research, repatriation, restitution, and reconciliation?



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