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in a room, in a house, on an island, in an ocean



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WE CARRY THEIR VOICES: AN INDIGENOUS PACIFIC ARCHIVIST ON PRESERVING ORAL HISTORIES

HUNI MANCINI

Waipapa Taumata Rau | The University of Auckland

ABSTRACT: This paper considers how Western archives can incorporate Indigenous Pacific ways of transmitting customary knowledge systems in their practice and queries how this knowledge might sit alongside traditional archival methods. Through personal memories and accounts as an Indigenous Pacific archivist, I explore the possibilities of oral history as a way to preserve intangible cultural heritage and consider some of the challenges that are encountered as well. Rather than discussing audio preservation techniques, this paper is intended to focus on the core archival methods that are enlisted to preserve data about Indigenous collections, such as arrangement and description, as well as recent developments in digitisation, access and Indigenous data sovereignty. Drawing on my own examples from the Archive of Māori and Pacific Sound (AMPS) as well as other selected repositories in Aotearoa New Zealand, I consider how Indigenous voices are increasingly being incorporated into archival practices and, by extension, how our histories are being told and shaped.

Keywords: Pacific archive, archival practice, audiovisual archive, digitisation, Indigenous data sovereignty

In the archive there is a stillness, an air of silence animated by the low hum of electronics: servers buzzing, computer screens flickering, wires, old analogue equipment. I load an audio file into a software program with a few clicks of the mouse. Its waveform unfurls on my screen, a horizontal axis of blue lines accentuated by vertical peaks and dips. I press play and ambient sounds flood the speakers. The magnetic tape hisses, jumps and crackles as it winds along, the swell of laughter, singing voices, traffic passing by. Inflections of a bygone era. I'm transported to the memory of learning mā'ulu'ulu, a Tongan group dance, as a young girl. After church on Sundays in the middle of winter, we would pack into the cold hall for rehearsal, kept warm by the movement of bodies swaying together. This is one of my earliest memories as a young Tongan-Italian girl, a memory which seems so personal and yet is connected to a wider story of Pacific diaspora and migration. As I come to work in the Archive of Māori and Pacific Sound (AMPS) at the University of Auckland, first as a cultural collections assistant and eventually an archivist, it is my memory of learning my Tongan culture living seemingly so far away from the islands that gives me an understanding of my need to connect, and to help others connect also.

AMPS is an audiovisual archive dedicated to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage—oral traditions, ceremonies, festivals—recorded as moments of contemporary relevance as well as historical importance (AMPS n.d.). The preservation and transmission of these moments helps to counter the effects of climate emergency, diaspora and the associated patterns of loss of language and cultural knowledge. Archives are a resource that make it possible for communities to reconnect with their traditional and contemporary culture (Buchanan 2007: 44; Cook 2013: 95).

This paper considers efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage by oral history archives, and some of the challenges that are encountered in the process. Rather than discussing audio preservation techniques, it instead focuses on some of the core archival methods used to preserve relevant data and cultural information, such as arrangement and description, digitisation and community engagement (Michetti 2016: 59–60). Drawing on examples from the AMPS and other selected repositories in Aotearoa New Zealand, I consider how the inclusion of many voices can be incorporated into the shaping and telling of our histories (Flinn *et al.* 2009: 71–72).

ORAL HISTORIES

Sound is a conduit, a connector of memories, beings, generations. It allows us to communicate with and understand one another. Sound is all around us, ubiquitous, always available, and yet at the same time it is out of reach, beyond our grasp, because it does not last. When a sound is created it reverberates in the air for a while and, unless it's recorded, it's gone again.

Oceanic peoples have always used sound to preserve a record of the past. Oral traditions such as song and dance, oratory, storytelling, genealogy and countless more are interlaced with a wealth of poetic skill, meaning and mnemonic devices which together aid the remembering of important information (Mahuika 2019: 1; Wheeler *et al.* 2024: 3). They are our monuments and written documents. UNESCO defines oral tradition as intangible cultural heritage, as each expression is ephemeral in nature (UNESCO n.d.). Lilomaiava-Doktor writes, “Oral tradition is at the heart of Indigenous cultures. Despite being central to Indigenous histories, oral sources and ancient stories have not been fully incorporated into scholarly understandings of land and ‘place’” (2020: 121). Pacific oral traditions are greatly varied due to the geographical makeup of the region. Tuimaleali‘ifano and D’Arcy note that the transition from a preliterate to a literate state in the Pacific has occurred in just 200 years, and “the impact of this phenomenal revolution” is still ongoing (2023: 294; see also Parsonson 1967). They state that in documenting oral traditions, the role of Pacific anthropologists and historians “continues and must evolve as a collaboration” (Tuimaleali‘ifano and D’Arcy 2023: 294).

Oral history is generally defined as the documenting of history or particular events in history through recorded interviews with people who have lived through the events, using audio, video and transcription technologies (Hutching 1993: 1; Ritchie 2003). The personal narrative of an event is perhaps the defining feature of oral history, which can support the establishment of historical opinion by professional historians and other academics (Pasaribu 2016: 326).¹ Oral histories share the tacit perspectives, thoughts, opinions and understanding of the knowledge recorded in its primary form, providing a fuller, and at times a more accurate, picture of past and current events than do written histories. Oral histories are unique in that they contribute viewpoints and perspectives that fill in the gaps and silences in documented history, sometimes correcting or even contradicting official and written sources (Nkala and David 2015: 82).

However, for Indigenous peoples this definition is only a small part of the picture. Nēpia Mahuika writes that “Indigenous peoples have their own ways of thinking about, practicing, and defining oral history” (Mahuika 2019: 1). Wheeler *et al.* state that in the past, non-Indigenous scholars have divided Indigenous oral narratives into two types: oral history (first-person) and oral tradition (histories and teachings handed down from the past). They add that Indigenous scholars reject this division as artificial, stating, “Oral histories of individuals are part of oral tradition, as are stories and teachings, songs, chants, ceremonies, and histories about significant events” (2024: 2). Indigenous oral history therefore “includes personal stories, family stories, and community stories that may, in their telling, incorporate information about culture and tradition” (p. 3).

Oral traditions are sometimes considered unreliable as a source of historical information in favour of written sources (Mahuika 2019: 84; Ockert 2019; Thane 1999: 161). The prevalence of written sources about Indigenous oral traditions can result in a misrepresentation of those traditions (Burnett *et al.* 2023: 347). The challenge to legitimise oral histories is compounded for Pacific historians: as Leenen-Young writes, there is a “marginalisation of Pacific voices in history” (Leenen-Young 2021: 37). But in the absence of a balanced narrative it is increasingly important to preserve a record of events, both past and present, using technological means.

AMPS was established within the Anthropology Department, University of Auckland, in 1970 to preserve intangible cultural heritage from throughout the Pacific using audiovisual technologies (Moyle 1992: 220). At that time decolonisation processes had already begun in Oceania, and by the late 1970s a number of Pacific nations had achieved independence by transitioning from colonial rule to full or some form of independence. There was a growing concern that many of the older traditions had already vanished or were undergoing rapid change as a result of increasing urbanisation and

Westernisation (McLean 1978: 1). It was also a period of great advancement in technology, which gave researchers and communities the ability to record the way oral traditions were being sung, performed and expressed—“capturing the airs”, as Sir Apirana Ngata referred to it (Ngata 2004: xxiv–xxv).

AMPS’s holdings date as far back as 1910 and span the full range of audio formats from then until now. Each format has its own materiality and characteristics. Digital preservation is the latest iteration in a long line of formats, each one designed to outlive those that came before. Our earliest recordings hail from Sāmoa with copies of wax cylinder² audio recorded by Governor Wilhelm Solf in 1910. The cylinders are now held by the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. Richard Moyle, ethnomusicologist and previous director of AMPS, obtained copies from the museum and deposited them into the archive for research purposes.

These early recordings provide a window into a period of German occupation in Sāmoa under the protectorate, which ran from 1900 to 1914, and are an example of the historical significance of some archives in the AMPS repository. Governor Solf, in office between 1900 and 1911, has been remembered for his “assault on Sāmoa’s traditional authority structures” (Archives New Zealand n.d.). As the newly appointed governor, Solf abolished the office of Tupu Sili (king), leading to unrest among the Malo o Sāmoa (Samoan council of chiefs). Orator chief Lauaki Namulau’ulu Mamoe (Davidson 1970: 267) formed the Mau a Pule resistance movement in opposition to the German colonial administration, a movement which continued to gain momentum under New Zealand’s administration of Western Samoa.

Along with material held in other national government repositories such as Archives New Zealand and the Alexander Turnbull Library, AMPS audio recordings further enhance our picture of that time. A song from one of the Wilhelm Solf cylinders provides a good example.³ The song may be listened to here.  The track begins with a short announcement by a man in German, followed by a group of men singing a cappella in Samoan. The track is two minutes and twelve seconds in total. When listening to each of the Solf recordings, the voices of men and women emerge like waves across generations, across time itself. Their harmonies pierce through the distance: they sound joyous, vibrant and close—almost as they would today. Hearing those voices is so significant to history and culture and reflects the various ways that we can remember the past, as opposed to a linear view that is represented by papers, still images and the written word alone.

Yet, when you listen to them, they also reveal the cracks of the past. The crackling, scratching, pulsating sounds of the cylinder are symptoms of technical decay and almost obscure the voices entirely. These cracks indicate the passing of time from then until now. Despite being tools of preservation and resilience, the recordings’ deterioration also reveals an ongoing vulnerability; even technology is at risk of loss over time.

WEAVING MULTIPLE STRANDS

A core part of my work with Pacific audio collections is arrangement and description (A&D). A&D is one of the fundamental aspects of archiving, along with preservation and engagement. A&D is the stage where materials are brought under intellectual and physical control in order to give form to a collection, as well as the inventory which grants access to it (Meehan 2014: 63). In the process of arranging and describing, archives follow strict rules and standards set out by Anglo-American organisations like the Library of Congress (2019) and the Society of American Archivists (2022).

A question that always arises for me when undertaking A&D is: who has the power to define how the past is interpreted? Galleries, libraries, archives and museums (also known as the GLAM sector) have a part to play in upholding such power (Schwartz and Cook 2002: 1–2).⁴ Pandora Fulimalo Pereira writes, “Western museums have had two primary objectives—the collection and the display of history” (Pereira 2022: 375). And when we look closer, these collections often reflect the troubled encounters between colonists and the people and cultures they colonised (p. 375). Not only does recordkeeping and archiving play a crucial role in the progression of colonial and oppressive regimes (Evans *et al.* 2018: 129), Indigenous collections have also been rendered inaccessible to intergenerational successors (Hall and Love 2018: 63).

The cultural impact of collecting from Indigenous communities can vary for the oral history archive as the recording of oral histories requires the participation of those being recorded. Much of AMPS’s material was acquired by anthropologists and researchers in collaboration with those they recorded; the performance of a selected song or story was arranged between the recordist and performer, and performers were made aware of their being recorded. However, for much of the twentieth century, in which the bulk of collecting of the AMPS materials took place, human ethics processes were not fully developed, and agreements between recordist and recorded were oftentimes informal. In some circumstances there may have been an element of trust or good faith in the recordist, under the agreement that they would supply copies of the recordings in the future. In some cases that promise was never fulfilled, or if it was, those copies were lost to time (Moyle 2018: 497; see also Gunderson and Woods 2018).

Over time AMPS collections become further compromised by custodial neglect. A number of items in our collections, such as the Solf cylinder recordings, were recorded with Indigenous peoples’ consent but failed to include any accompanying information to identify them. Information such as the names of speakers or performers, village or island locations, exact dates, song or dance titles and composers are lacking in many of our records. The absence of basic information creates weak records, rendering the material

inaccessible in many cases. It sends the message that the humanity of these peoples and cultures are of little importance. Such gaps and silences are all too common within archives.

This lack of information is known as dissociation: the loss of data, objects or object-related data caused by a loss of relevant information, context and meaning over time (Cato and Waller 2023). Dissociation is one of ten agents of deterioration that threaten heritage objects—alongside pests and elemental damage—according to the Canadian Cultural Institute, a government agency in Canada (Canadian Cultural Institute 2017; Gloucestershire Heritage Hub 2023). Dissociation occurs when active care is not taken to preserve data and information about the collection. The result is a loss of objects or object-related data or the ability to retrieve objects or associate them with data. Dissociation affects the legal, intellectual and/or cultural aspects of an object, in contrast to the other nine agents of deterioration, which mainly concern the physical state of objects.

Another unique characteristic of dissociation is that loss in value for one or a few objects within a collection can reduce the value of the collection as a whole (Cato and Waller 2023). Dissociation results from the natural tendency for ordered systems to fall apart over time. It might begin with the processing methods of the collector and depositor of material and then be upheld by institutional practices, together leading to a flattening or whittling down of living cultural heritage in order to produce quantifiable objects of knowledge. In other words, by preserving something we can sometimes decontextualise and smother it. Through archival practice, living heritage becomes something that happened but that is no longer happening. It becomes apart from us rather than a part of us.

AMPS, now integrated into the university's library system, is at a point where it must "retrieve" information that was lost in order to improve its records and maintain good care of its collections as well as create updated processes that are more current. In the context of Indigenous collections, the challenge of updating practices has added complexity. Harris *et al.* posit that ephemeral cultural forms like oral traditions expose the limits of the archive, stating that "an archival record can only store the shadow of a song or dance" (2022: 1), and in order for it to be known, the song or dance must also be embodied. As such, heritage institutions present a limit for cultures that are embodied, ephemeral and lived. And as long as the viability of the Western archive is situated in a colonial historical framework, it is constantly at risk of slipping into irrelevance (McCracken and Hogan-Stacey 2023: 1–2). In their essay on dissociation within a First Nations conservation context, Bennion and Kelly-Mundine describe that they use a "holistic approach to conservation ... to reconcile these ontologies, enabling a two-way approach to cultural conservation, shifting focus from a materially based model to a relationship-based model" (2021: 171). In other words, increased involvement of Indigenous

communities must now take place in all aspects of archival practice in order for appropriate preservation of and access to Indigenous collections to take place.

Two recent examples in Aotearoa New Zealand shed some light into how cultural heritage repositories have begun to incorporate Indigenous Pacific knowledge systems into their practice. First is the Pacific Collection Access Project (PCAP) at Tāmaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum, which ran from 2016 to 2019 (Pereira 2022). The project, which was managed by Pasifika staff and occurred as part of the museum's Teu Le Vā framework, invited members of Auckland's Pasifika communities to share and exchange their knowledge of heritage objects such as tools, ornaments, musical instruments and carvings (Auckland War Memorial Museum n.d., 2016). With their input, the PCAP team was able to enhance and improve the museum's records, storage and understanding of its Pacific collection, as well as increase public access and engagement with the Pacific collection in ways that are more embodied, inclusive and collaborative for both the Pacific communities and the museum.

Second is Digital Pasifik, a project hosted by Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa National Library of New Zealand in collaboration with the National Library of Australia. Active since 2019, the project takes the form of an aggregator website allowing for the discoverability of Pacific collections held by various GLAM and tertiary institutions around the world (Digital Pasifik n.d.). The project enables Pacific peoples to see, discover and explore items of digitised cultural heritage that are held in these disparate locations and who may not be aware these items or records exist. So far they have partnered with hundreds of institutions across the Asia-Pacific, the United States, Europe and more (Bulamaibau 2021). Similar to PCAP, the Digital Pasifik team works alongside cultural knowledge holders from around the Pacific to identify collection material, using this information to improve collection records and generate examples of meaningful engagement (Raea 2023) where participation and co-creation is paramount.

Working to weave multiple narratives into the archive is a new and welcome challenge and champions the notion that history is told not by a single source but by many. Hoakalei Kamau'u, leader of the Hawaiian contingent at the South Pacific Festival of Arts in 1976, stated, "In Hawai'i we have a saying: A'ohe pau ka 'ike i ka hālau ho'okāhi—all knowledge does not come from one school."⁵ Indigenous methods of knowledge sharing are collective and the transmission of oral traditions is plural, requiring many voices to participate in situation over time. The concept of plurality can be found in the variety of oral traditional forms and in the ways in which the content of those forms is ordered and sequenced. The question then becomes, how might AMPS incorporate Indigenous Pacific ways of transmitting customary knowledge systems? How might these sit alongside traditional archival methods? We might look to Indigenous oral traditions in the Pacific for clues.

In Aotearoa an example can be seen in Sir Apirana Ngata, who drew correlations between whakapapa (genealogy) and archival practice. In his paper “The Terminology of Whakapapa”⁶ Ngata explored the various material ways in which whakapapa is recited by Māori:

Pervading all is the idea of order, sequence and arrangement, and in boastful mood there is a suggestion of dressing and adornment, a lifting of pedigrees from out of the ruck. (Ngata 2019: 26; see also Ngata 2021: 322)

Here he uses archival terminology (order, sequence, arrangement) to express the way in which genealogy is memorised and transmitted. Ngata describes a range of concepts used by Māori for memorising and reciting whakapapa. Each conception resembles that of meeting houses, weaving, twining and fishing techniques. For example, he starts off with the concept of aho or kaha, which translates to line, string or cord. Within this concept is the method of takiaho, the act of tracing incidents or personnel strung along a string (aho) upon which ancestors were strung one by one (taki). When the string was lifted up (hāpai), the ancestors were displayed (2019: 22).

In the Pacific, the concept of line of succession is also found to characterise oral traditions. In Tonga, the term tala-ē-fonua means telling of the land and its people, and according to ‘Okusitino Māhina, it is a mode of representing past and present events about the land and its people (fonua), passed down through generations by word of mouth (tala) (Māhina 1992: 1). In the Tongan language, the word fonua also means placenta, in addition to land. A child comes from their mother’s fonua and when they die they go back to the fonua. The umbilical cord, also called fonua, is buried in the land after birth, because in the Tongan worldview, people themselves are the land.

Forms of tala-ē-fonua in Tongan oral tradition can encompass the divine language of the extraordinary, to which tales (talanoa), myths (talatupu’a), legends (fananga), chants (laulau), poetry (ta’anga) and oratory (tufunga lea) belong (Māhina 1992: 4). For example, telling fananga, known as legends and folk tales, is largely the province of the elders, who are “the living repositories of a wealth of folklore often overlooked by their families in the face of ever-increasing European influence” (Moyle 1987: 170; see also Fanua 1982: 2). While fananga have an ability to retain collective memory, there is also room for the storyteller’s own creative interpretation (Helu 2012: 55; Moyle 1995). In this way fananga are fluid and ever-changing, with room for the story to change depending on the person telling it. Each story is grown from the structure and scaffolding of existing tellers. They are the work not of one voice but of many, over countless generations.

Collective knowledge sharing is commonly found in the Pacific. Tongan scholar Epeli Hau’ofa believed in an individual’s right to be custodian of their own knowledge, so that their realities would be not only learnt and

understood but shared (Taufa 2021: 42). But what might this look like in practice? We might look to an example from Sāmoa, the method of *su'ifefiloi*, a traditional form of storytelling where composers thread together different vignettes in the creation of one long narrative. Galea'i describes it as a "threading of different types of songs to make one very long song for a special occasion" (Galea'i 2005: iv). Lopesi describes how the *su'ifefiloi* methodology comes from "the process of selecting, then sewing or stitching various flowers to create an ula or flower garland, which combines many different parts to create something new" (Lopesi 2021: 127). The result is a tapestry made up of a wide array of styles and voices that explore and express Samoan themes, culture, history, perspectives and voices. What's more is that each shift in language, point of view, voice and form gives new meaning and function to *su'ifefiloi* (Galea'i 2005: xv–xvi). Like Ngata's conception of *whakapapa*, methods of preserving, organising and transmitting oral traditions are multifaceted, complex and well-defined. Increased involvement of Indigenous communities is required to accurately represent Indigenous collections and move away from the colonial structures embedded in archival practice. In our work with Indigenous collections, it is now vital to embrace Indigenous values and knowledge-keeping practices and necessary to expand Western colonial archival notions of provenance, original order, custody and ownership (Punzalan 2023: ix).

DIGITISATION, ACCESS AND DATA SOVEREIGNTY

A plurality of voices remembering and telling our history enables the archive to become porous, a living and breathing space. By engaging the perspectives and voices of cultural knowledge holders we lift them up to coexist alongside Western institutions. This is fast becoming a standard for all repositories. McCracken and Hogan-Stacey write:

Being accountable to Indigenous peoples means working with and alongside Indigenous communities to manage, understand, and work with archival records connected to, by, or about Indigenous peoples. (2023: xv)

At AMPS our current focus on digitisation means we can preserve our past and thereby future-proof our collections while also extending our reach to a plurality of voices with the use of digital tools.

AMPS has embarked on a major digitisation project to preserve its undigitised audiovisual recordings, which are mostly recorded on open-reel audio tape and cassette, to ensure these recordings will continue to be accessible. The project is in partnership with Memnon, which specialises in the migration of legacy media to digital formats. Memnon had recently launched a facility in Lower Hutt under contract to the Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua to run *Utaina*, a mass project in collaboration

with National Library, Archives New Zealand and the Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision archive to digitise their audiovisual collections (National Library 2024). Through this partnership we can ensure AMPS's recordings will be preserved and accessible well into the future (Hamill 2023).

The digitisation of audiovisual material is perhaps more pressing than that of paper or object-based repositories. This is because the technology to read magnetic tape is fast becoming obsolete, and archives need to ensure content acquired in that medium can continue to be accessed through multiple preservation copies that are compatible with current and emerging technologies. As a Māori and Pacific oral history archive the challenges AMPS faces in entering the digital space are multifaceted, ranging from technological to the need to respect cultural diversity, and we often strive to meet somewhere in the middle. On one hand the digital space allows us to extend our reach and promote our collections online. But on the other hand problems of ownership and sharing of restricted or culturally sensitive material online arise (Bow and Hepworth 2019; Whaanga *et al.* 2015). To navigate this tension we are guided by the recommendations set out by the Indigenous data sovereignty movement in addition to archival standards of practice (University of Auckland 2023).

Indigenous data sovereignty (IDS), sometimes referred to as data sovereignty in short, is a term increasingly being used in communities, research, policy and practice (Pacific Data Sovereignty Network 2022; Royal Society Te Apārangi 2023; Taylor and Kukutai 2016). The “movement has emerged in response to poor data practices, from the conceptualisation of data items through to reporting of data about Indigenous peoples” (Lovett *et al.* 2019: 26), and prioritises Indigenous peoples' control and governance over their own cultural and intellectual property. Policies set out by IDS groups are grounded in Indigenous understandings of sovereignty that challenge dominant “data sovereignty” discourse and practice and support and expand global human rights instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (Kukutai *et al.* 2020: 655).

One example is the CARE principles (collective benefit, authority to control, responsibility, ethics), which we adhere to at AMPS. Developed by a consortium of Indigenous data experts, CARE recognises the movement toward open data does not fully engage with Indigenous peoples' rights and interests (Global Indigenous Data Alliance 2018). They expand on the existing principles within the open data movement (e.g., FAIR: findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable), which primarily focus on characteristics of data that will facilitate increased data sharing among entities while ignoring power differentials and historical contexts (Global Indigenous Data Alliance 2018). The principles are applied to storage of physical and digital material. Just as all of AMPS's physical material is held and digitised within New Zealand borders, all digital preservation files are also fully stored on campus on secure local servers.

In addition to storage, we refer to these principles in our use of online tools connecting our users with our collections. The creation of a strong online presence is an integral first step toward extending our reach to communities, researchers and other key stakeholders. Since 2021 we have begun to migrate our outdated legacy databases over to our new information management system, ArchivesSpace (AS), a cloud-based platform that allows us to properly identify, share and update information about our collections. In the near future we will also be able to stream digitised audio through the platform using secure university web streaming links. Not only will our new platform give users an ability to browse our collections in greater detail, it will also allow them to be able to listen to them at any time without having to request access first. This will make access to our collections more equitable for people in the wider Pacific region, who will no longer need to have the means to travel to our premises and will be able to listen to this material at their own discretion.

At the time of writing, we have entered 108 collections into AS; many of these are brief records indicating to our users the basic scope of material, and will be expanded in more detail over time. So far we have expanded a number of these resources to a higher level of detail, for example the Richard Moyle Niue recordings.⁷ While this resource has been enhanced to a high level of detail, it still contains some missing information, and is an example of how we can always find ways to improve our records over time.

We plan to “open up” our doors and our collections, both onsite and online, and invite cultural expertise to enhance our records where needed. For example, this year we have embarked on two major projects to enhance the Richard Moyle Niue and Polyfest collection resources with the help of key community members and cultural experts in light of two major upcoming events: Niue’s 50th anniversary of independence in 2024 and Polyfest’s 50th anniversary in 2025. Using AS as both a discovery and input tool will give us the ability to work with cultural experts to gain feedback and provide us with any further information they might know about a recording, such as the names of performers, composers, dates, locations, use of language and so on. This will foster a more participatory means of engagement and record enhancement that is in line with the wider GLAM sector, such as those of PCAP and Digital Pasifik.

This year AS will also become a hub of information about our new permissions process, where we acknowledge Indigenous cultural intellectual property rights alongside those of copyright holders. This work is relatively recent for heritage organisations, although a small sample of Indigenous partnerships can be found in Aotearoa (Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision 2020), Australia (NSLA 2023) and the United States (Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage 2023). For AMPS this is a major development, as in the past ownership has been granted solely to the depositor, which in most cases is the researcher or broadcaster who created the recording.

Often recordings made in communities were done with the understanding that they would receive copies, but over time that sometimes did not occur. AMPS now has a responsibility to not only make its holdings known to those communities but allow the rightful return of agency around how those recordings might be represented and shared (Caswell 2018: 22; Flinn *et al.* 2009: 71–72; McCracken and Hogan 2021: 25).

The rapidly changing landscape of digital technology poses an ongoing challenge as we navigate our adoption of new tools. Already during our migration to AS we have encountered issues with web crawlers, which aggressively harvest information from our resources for search engines like Google. While we want our collections to be discoverable through the likes of Google, we must also be mindful that restricted and sensitive cultural material could end up widely available online, forcing us to implement measures to safeguard that from happening. Along with the advent of AI technology, there is an ever greater need to be diligent about making sensitive cultural information available online. In working with aggregators like Digital Pasifik and DigitalNZ, we must ensure that our own platform continues to be compatible with theirs, so that whenever we switch to a new system their users are still able to discover our collections.

AN INVENTORY OF MANY TRACES

We cannot always predict what information will be of value to others, especially the younger generations. But we can do our best to ensure they are given access to that information, so they have the ability to decide what they wish to do with it.

Improving online access allows us to respond to new modes of intergenerational language and cultural transmission (Widlok 2013: 3–4). By harnessing the power of database schema and search tools, we can cater to diverse user search behaviour in ways that cannot always be anticipated or predicted. Wherever someone is in the world, they can always connect to their cultural heritage without the need for a traditional archival finding aid or reading room. As our stories continue to expand under the forces of migration and globalisation, there is a need to expand our ways of remembering as well (Mahuika 2019: 78–84). As McCracken and Hogan-Stacey write, community-based archival description can involve elders, knowledge holders, youth and other Indigenous community members (2023: 46), whose participation works to decentre the language and overall authority of the archivist.

Being raised in the diaspora, between the United States and New Zealand, I wasn't always surrounded by the songs and stories of my people but rather by television, radio and the internet. I relied on information from repositories and searching the internet for information about my cultural roots, in addition

to whatever knowledge I could glean from family and church. I encountered music in mechanical ways: on CDs and cassettes or downloading files online, taking many painstaking hours over a clunky dial-up connection. As an avid researcher of this knowledge it has been a privilege to process our Tongan collections in AMPS. One that stands out to me personally is the Kingdom of Tonga collection recorded by anthropologists Wendy Pond and Garth Rogers between 1967 and 1975.⁸ I first came across the collection while packing up the archive in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, when we were forced to move out of the old Human Sciences Building at the University of Auckland for renovation. It was then that I discovered the breadth of the collection, which included open-reel tapes, transcripts and research papers, including handwritten and typed transcripts of oral histories and events surrounding the coronation of King Tāufa‘āhau Tupou IV in 1965. But most importantly for me, the collection contained some of the few sources of information about the Niua Islands, and in particular Niuatoputapu, an island in the northernmost region of Tonga, where my grandfather was from but about which he spoke very little.

Fast-forward to 2023, when I finally had time to process the material in our new premises in the General Library, University of Auckland city campus. This was an example of a very detailed collection, deposited with a wealth of information provided by Wendy Pond and Tupou Posesi Fanua, a lawyer and researcher for the Tongan Royal Palace, with whom Wendy collaborated throughout her research in Tonga. I took in as much as I could about the Niua as I went. I heard the Niua dialect and learned of their gods, chiefs and longstanding independence from Tonga from the multiple oral histories that were recorded in the region and transcribed into English. But I also learned that my own experience of gaps and silences can show up in unexpected ways.

One recording, a tau‘a‘alo (paddling song), was composed by an old chief, Loketi Lapuka, and performed at a faikava (kava-drinking) gathering in Hihifo, Niuatoputapu, in 1969. The tau‘a‘alo is an ancient song, sung while paddling to maintain rhythm and synchronicity. When it was transcribed and translated by Pond and Fanua, they recognised that there were two levels of meaning to its complex lyrics:

Fie tau ē pea fokotu‘u
 ‘Alu ‘o tau ‘i Futuna tu‘u
 Kae tuku ‘a Niua ni ke toka

Want to fight? Then stand up
 Go and fight in Futuna. Stand up!
 But leave Niua in peace
 Leaving Niua to be the loser.

These opening lines convey the use of *heliaki*, the Tongan art of metaphor, to celebrate the heroic eighteenth-century history of Niuatoputapu (Herda *et al.* 2017: 444; Kaeppler 1993: 497). In line 10, the nickname *Niua-teke-vaka* (Niua-which-repels-boats) is referred to. This comes from a time when the island's governing *Mā'atu* chiefs had become so powerful they were able to maintain political autonomy from Tongan rule (Pond 1990: 207). But the translators, Pond and Fanua, found Lapuka was also commenting on the generation of younger people of the twentieth century who were leaving the island to seek work and status in Tongatapu, "leaving Niua to be the loser". This *tau'a'alo* is a window into the helpless condition of modern-day Niuatoputapu, according to Lapuka—a land without leadership, living in the illusion of its past glory (Pond 1982: 31).

I thought about my grandfather, Fine Halapua, who left home for the metropolitan Tongatapu to pursue his studies with the Anglican Church, where he would meet Lesieli Pale, my grandmother, who was from the chiefly village of Lapaha. Seeing this journey through Lapuka's lens has a reparative effect for me, connecting me with a part of my own story that I had not known and which had been made silent or absent by forces much bigger than myself. This *tau'a'alo* showed me that my personal story of separation from cultural knowledge and information is part of the wider story of diaspora and migration. With Lapuka's voice in mind, I might lay claim to my own branch of experience, situating it within a larger narrative, seeing myself as one strand amongst many that intersect, overlap and coexist. Connection is an important role of the archive—to make space for a network of voices, connecting us to one another in ways that can be unexpected, inclusive and restorative.

CONCLUSION

In the West, we are often told the past is always getting away from us, a distance that expands as we face towards the illusory, impossible horizon. But in the Pacific, and for many Indigenous peoples, our way of thinking about the past is different. We look to the past with our back to the future, always learning from the past and focused on sustaining our world for those that come. This is encapsulated by the Māori *whakataukī* (proverb) "*Ka mua, ka muri*"—walking backwards into the future. In this way of thinking, the past catches up with us in unexpected ways, not in the way we'd like to think—not a simple projection forward—but rather in the way bodies, circuits, connections take unpredictable and counterintuitive forms.

The story of the past is never done; it is always forming and being formed by us. It is a tapestry woven of elements that alternate between what is told and untold, what is visible and the weight of what is left unsaid, what we thought we knew but now see through a different lens. This balance creates a tension that shapes us.

How might the archive hold these distances alongside the intimacies? How might they be strung together like words in a song, like flowers on a garland, or recordings on a ribbon of magnetic tape? When lifted up they display the wholeness of bodies, adorning the full weight of our histories.

Our oral traditions were designed with this understanding in mind, in the way they were meant to be embodied by us, to be living, breathing reminders, through forms of daydreaming, storytelling, the ecstasies of art and music, the poetic intricacies of language. Forms of “leaving” are not the opposite of authentic presence but rather forms of fluidity that shape the way we remember.

Cultural heritage archives engaging and collaborating with a range of community voices is an example of creating spaces of social inclusion and belonging, rather than bodily dissociation and emotional deprivation. It is a reminder that in addition to online discoverability, we must make space for human ways of remembering, the real lives and deeply personal histories that are embedded in the taonga (treasures) that we hold. In doing so, we reinstate the life-giving practices that ensure preservation and pleasurable and affectionate ways of connecting.

NOTES

1. Oral history is no longer only the occupation of “professionals”, as many examples of community oral history projects can be found today.
2. The wax cylinder is the earliest commercial audio recording technology. Wax cylinders are extremely fragile and prone to melting, shattering and erosion each time they are played. Due to degradation and the lack of appropriate technology to play them, preservation copies are often the only means of listening to these early recordings today.
3. Neither AMPS nor the Ethnological Museum of Berlin have a translation of this song or any further information about the recording. The track is titled “Liebes- und Tanzlied, 2 Männer (2stimmig, eur. Terzen)”. Wilhelm Solf cylinders, track 1, AMPS 2022/54, series 3, item 3/2/1, Richard Moyle Samoa recordings, Archive of Māori and Pacific Sound, University of Auckland.
4. Traditionally this power has been held by Western institutions, but in recent years this has been challenged by the establishment of Indigenous- and First Nations-led libraries and community archives (Caswell 2018: 22; Flinn *et al.* 2009: 71; Hall and Love 2018: 63–64; McCracken and Hogan 2021: 22).
5. H. Kamau‘u, Hawai‘i: 1976 South Pacific Arts Festival, 76/215.01, Mervyn McLean SPAF 76, 10 March 1976, Archive of Māori and Pacific Sound, University of Auckland.
6. “The Terminology of Whakapapa” was written by Apirana Ngata in the late 1920s to early 1930s, and copies of the original text survive in the Ngata family, the Alexander Turnbull Library and the Bishop Museum in Hawai‘i. The paper was published in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* in 2019 (Issue no. 1) and again by Te Papa Press in 2021 in *Hei Taonga Mā Ngā Uri Whakatipu | Treasures for the Rising Generation: The Dominion Museum Ethnological Expeditions 1919–1923*.

7. Richard Moyle survey of traditional music of Niue recordings, AMPS 2022/104. A list of these recordings can be viewed at: https://archives.library.auckland.ac.nz/resources/richard_moyle_survey_of_traditional_music_of_niue
8. Wendy Pond and Garth Rogers Kingdom of Tonga recordings, 1967–1975, AMPS 2022/68, Archive of Māori and Pacific Sound, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services. https://archives.library.auckland.ac.nz/resources/wendy_pond_and_garth_rogers_kingdom_of_tonga_recor

GLOSSARY

The terms in this glossary are Tongan unless otherwise stated.

aho	line, string, cord (New Zealand Māori)
faikava	informal kava-drinking gathering
fananga	legend, folk tale
fonua	the land and its people, placenta, umbilical cord
hāpai	to lift up (New Zealand Māori)
heliaki	Tongan art of metaphor
kaha	line, string, cord (New Zealand Māori)
laulau	chant
mā‘ulu‘ulu	a Tongan group dance
su‘ifefiloi	a Samoan traditional form of storytelling (Samoan)
ta‘anga	poetry
taki	one by one (New Zealand Māori)
takiaho	line of descent (New Zealand Māori)
tala	word of mouth
tala-ē-fonua	telling of the land and its people
talanoa	tales
talatupu‘a	myths
taonga	treasures (New Zealand Māori)
tau‘a‘alo	paddling song
tufunga lea	oratory
ula	flower garland (Samoan)
whakapapa	genealogy (New Zealand Māori)
whakataukī	proverb (New Zealand Māori)

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AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Huni Mancini, Archive of Māori and Pacific Sound, Libraries and Learning Services, Waipapa Taumata Rau The University of Auckland, 5 Alfred Street, Auckland CBD, Auckland 1010, New Zealand. h.mancini@auckland.ac.nz
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3505-2542>