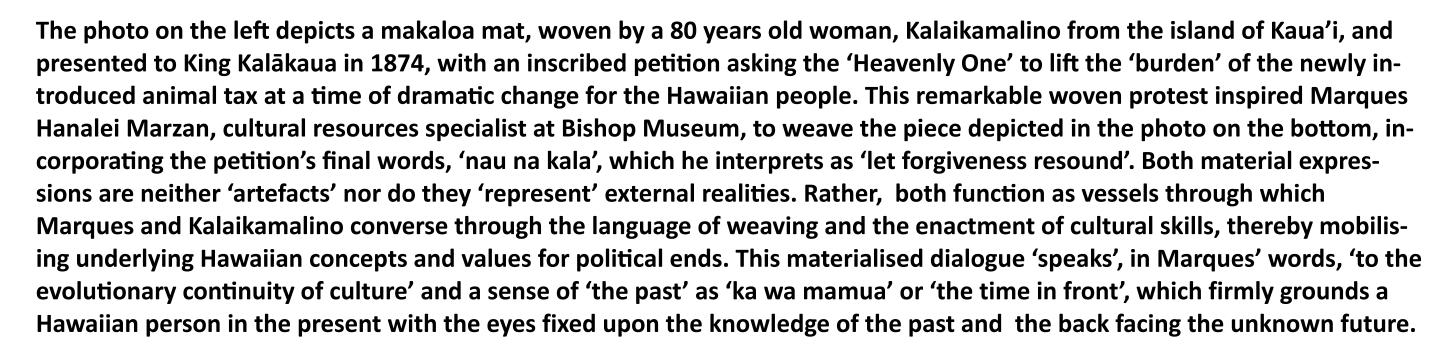
(Re)positioning Ethnological Museums through Pacific Lenses

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Since the 18th century, the discipline of ethnology has emerged through scientific exploration and colonial expansion beyond Europe, as well as the establishment of ethnological collections and museums in Europe. Ethnological objects thus influenced academic and public understandings of other cultural-geographic spaces. The often resulting Eurocentric projection of ethnological imaginations has come under severe pressure while (post)colonial renegotiations in former European colonies, such as many Pacific nations, have caused dramatic changes to ethnological practices through Indigenous curatorial practices. The project 'Assembling the Transpacific: Indigenous Curatorial Practices, Material Cultures and Source Communities' shapes a dialogue between both situations through a multi-sited, collaborative ethnographic investigation of contemporary Indigenous curatorial practices in three Pacific museums (Bishop Museum Hawai'i; Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa; Museo Rapa Nui, Easter Island). It generates historically informed, ethnographic insights into 'the figure of the curator' as an agent of Indigenous knowledge production and community engagement across the Pacific. In doing so, the project presents Indigenous perspectives that assist in reframing the curatorship of Pacific collections in, and the production of public understandings through, ethnological museums in Europe.









This materialised mo'olelo or story points to the ways in which contemporary Indigenous curatorial practices at Bishop Museum are aimed at, and informed by, the (re)development of Indigenous skills. These Indigenous skills are culturally embedded, politically enacted and historically orientated, and become meaningful through the personal investment of meaning. Thinking through variations in skill, then, facilitates an ethnographically grounded conflation of abstract dichotomies such as art versus craft, tradition versus modernity, and individual versus culture. These historically grounded ethnographic insights have significant implications for ethnological museums in Europe, which often produce and represent Hawaiian visual and material culture through the separation and imposition of alien categories such as 'art' and 'artefact'; calling for an analytical shift from the usual museological focus on exhibitionary productions and representations towards approaching curatorship as ongoing conversations which require various common languages and the translational power of cultural skills.



