Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhito

How a Māori Meeting House in England cultivated relationships and understanding

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■ **ABSTRACT:** This report discusses the overriding significance of cross-cultural relationships in heritage management and conservation with regard to *Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhito*, the *whare whakairo* (“carved meeting house”) “displaced” in the late nineteenth century from Te Wairoa in Aotearoa New Zealand to Clandon Park in England. Looking at the history and meanings of the meeting house through the relationships of those who interacted with her, it demonstrates how listening, learning, and understanding are at the heart of improving professional practice in museums and heritage practice globally. This article is derived from and expands upon an assignment written for the course MHST507 “Museums and Māori” taught by Awhina Tamarapa as part of the PG-Dip in Museum and Heritage Practice at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington in May 2020.

■ **KEYWORDS:** colonization, conservation, heritage, Hinemihi, Māori, New Zealand, repatriation, *taonga*

As a living being, she needs to be kept warm by interaction with people.

—Te Maru o Hinemihi, n.d.

The fascinating history of the *whare whakairo* (“carved meeting house”) *Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhito*’s journey reflects many issues related to the colonization, repatriation, and heritage of Indigenous material culture. This report retraces the journey of this house¹ (the only complete Māori building in the United Kingdom) as a case study of how to co-manage *taonga* Māori (“Māori treasures”) in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. In the first instance, *Hinemihi*’s may appear to be a story of opposing attitudes, opinions, and cultures, but I argue that it is ultimately one of collaboration and partnerships—*Hinemihi* as a mobile “contact zone.” Both perspectives are evidenced by considering a range of audiences: those who visited her in her original home in nineteenth-century Te Wairoa and where she ended up in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Surrey; and those who lived with, used, and cared for her—who saw her as a *taonga* *tuku iho* (“treasure handed down”) of Ngāti Hinemihi and Tūhourangi *hapū* (“subtribe”) of the Te Arawa tribe, an expression of their genealogical identity, a living being who embodies and conveys a range of ancestral knowledge, character, and values (Sully et al. 2014).

The arc of this story bends ultimately toward an interweaving of principles and understanding over many years. It may yet have another chapter as, some 130 years after she was shipped to England, an agreement in principle is in place with the National Trust for *Hinemihī* to be returned to her people (Artnet News 2019; Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga 2019) in exchange for new carvings. The central purpose of this report is to explore and document the various stages of a lengthy engagement over the years between the National Trust and Māori communities that accompanied and aided the shift in the debate around repatriation and brought us to this new beginning. There are plenty of comparative examples of restitution and repatriation in New Zealand and internationally, but I focus here on *Hinemihī*'s particular story and the players involved. I look at the original intention and multiple uses and views of *Hinemihī* over time, and then I discuss two significant developments that helped set the stage for repatriation: (1) the involvement of Māori communities in the United Kingdom; and (2) the Clandon Park fire of 2015. I briefly consider the groundwork laid for repatriation of *Hinemihī* in the context of broader movements of change in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and end by looking at the opportunities ahead for *Hinemihī* and her people.

Hinemihī o te Ao Tawhito (Hinemihī of the Old World)

Even from her conception, when the first panels were made by renowned carvers Tene Waitere and Wero Taroi, *Hinemihī o te Ao Tawhito* meant many different things. She was commissioned and built to combine several functions: a *marae* (“ceremonial gathering place”); a *whare tupuna* (“ancestor house”); the center of the Ngāti Hinemihī and Tūhourangi hapū community in Te Wairoa; and a place to accommodate tribal meetings for making important decisions, to remember the past and imagine the future, to celebrate and confirm local Māori identity and affirm *whakapapa* (“genealogies”), to celebrate births and marriages, and to mourn the dead (Sully et al. 2014).

The marae forms a *tūrangawaewae* (“a place to stand”) for the *tangata whenua* (“hosts”) who have customary and political authority within their territory. Māori meeting houses embody the living ancestors of their *iwi* (“tribal group”); *Hinemihī*, as a female, is therefore referred to as “she.” The construction of *Hinemihī* represented a statement of tribal prestige (Sully et al. 2014).²

She was also built to entertain, in part as a response to the burgeoning tourism industry in Rotorua, and her construction was made possible by the revenue that Te Arawa had amassed from visitors. *Hinemihī* could be viewed, as Hamish Coney (2019) argues, as “an assertion of Te Arawa commercial mana,” which can be highlighted further by the decision to use gold sovereigns instead of *pāua* shells, “a new world affectation, but tellingly an indication that Te Arawa were very much aware of the commercial power they had developed.” Even if *Hinemihī* was built in part for tourists who embraced an orthodox view of Māoridom, then, much like the Māori village at the 1906–1907 New Zealand International Exhibition in Christchurch, it also revealed extraordinary Māori agency at work; Te Arawa were “active participants in exhibiting a Māori past through which they imagined a future for themselves within modern New Zealand” (McCarthy 2009: 121). None of these images of *Hinemihī* are mutually exclusive, and all of these multiple uses were similarly abruptly ended in the two events that led to *Hinemihī*'s expatriation to Surrey.

The violent eruption of Mount Tarawera in 1886 not only destroyed the terraces and covered *Hinemihī* in ash, but suddenly halted the flow of visitors to Te Wairoa with which the community had become so entwined. It halted her interaction with her own people too, forcing an exodus of locals, who were to relocate, but not before assuming one final purpose. Despite the eruption laying waste to the region and taking the lives of 153 people, *Hinemihī*, which almost buckled

Figure 1. Close-up of *Hinemihi*'s external carvings (currently removed for conservation work). Photo by Chris Lacey, National Trust Images.

under the weight of volcanic debris, offered immediate refuge to a handful of survivors including carver Tene Waitere and his family. As Conal McCarthy (2020) has put it: “The house literally as well as symbolically became the bosom of the ancestress sheltering her descendants.”

The derelict state of *Hinemihī* in the years after the eruption led to the opportunity for William Hillier, Fourth Earl of Onslow and Governor of New Zealand from 1889 to 1892, to purchase a memento of his time in New Zealand in the form of *Hinemihī*’s carved pieces. It was a fairly typical arrangement in colonial times, representing an “asymmetrical relationship of economic and political power that enables the appropriation and commodification of cultural forms by one society in a way that displaces the local cultural forms of another” (Sully and Gallop 2007: 127).

One rationale might be that *Hinemihī* was being “saved” (Coney 2019), but her “abandonment,” on sacred grounds, could also be seen as an act of respect rather than neglect (Sully and Gallop 2007). However, she was also being removed from her people and homeland, perhaps forever. Alan Gallop writes that Mika Aporo, son of the late Chief Aporo Wharekaniwha, who agreed to the sale of *Hinemihī*, claimed he was unaware the carvings were going overseas and later made a plea through *The Dominion* to bring them back to New Zealand to have *Hinemihī* re-erected in a museum (1998: 95–97). The basis for repatriation claims for Māori and other Indigenous groups has revolved around the disputes of the right of an individual to sell taonga held in communal ownership, with the distinction between the legal/individual and the spiritual/customary ownership central to the return of *Hinemihī* (Arvanitis and Tythacott 2014; Sully and Gallop 2007).

The meeting house spent many decades at Clandon as a “souvenir,” a “material legacy of past relationships to prevail in the present” (Sully and Gallop 2007: 136) detached from the land, people, and the *mana* (“power,” “authority”) that granted her status as taonga. Prior to the National Trust taking over Clandon, *Hinemihī* went through various reconstruction attempts but panels were misplaced and there were failures to interpret the instructions for *Hinemihī*’s rebuilding. She served as, among other things, a folly, a “Wendy house,” a goat house, and a store house (Gallop 1998), forms that were in contravention of Māori norms of usage (Sully and Gallop 2007).³ Between 1934 and 1967, an image from a photograph of *Hinemihī*’s “Amo” carvings was used on New Zealand’s £1 banknote. “*Hinemihī* as a representation of Māori carving became a national symbol of New Zealand in this way, positioned on the banknote alongside the indigenous bird, the kiwi, and the indigenous people—both were equally endangered and in need of protection” (Sully and Gallop 2007: 139–140).

During World War I, although it is not entirely clear whether stationed or convalescing at Clandon Park, Māori National Expeditionary soldiers (Māori Pioneer Battalion) certainly visited *Hinemihī*.⁴ James (Jim) Schuster (great-great-grandson of Tene Waitere and Māori Built Heritage Adviser for Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga since 2003) comments: “They realized there was this meeting house and said ‘You’ve got it all wrong,’ and dismantled and put it back together so the carvings were facing the right way; I think taking care of her helped them recuperate” (qtd in McKee 2016). It would take many more years, but a further succession of Māori visitors to this piece of Māoridom in England (McCarthy 2020) helped redefine *Hinemihī* and steer debates toward repatriation (Burrows 2007).

“Held in Trust”

At the time that Clandon Park and *Hinemihī* came under the care of the National Trust in 1956, although there had been notable exceptions, in general Māori were not consulted or involved in—or had limited influence in—decision-making concerning their ancestral and cultural heritage in New Zealand (McCarthy 2011), let alone with museums and institutions half-way

around the world. And institutions would frequently resist calls from source communities for the repatriation of objects acquired during the era of colonization (Arvanitis and Tythacott 2014). However, this began to change in various direct and indirect ways, especially in the case of *Hinemihi*.

The meeting house took a few years to gain the attention of its new owners, but the National Trust at least recognized that the extensive restoration and refurbishment they carried out in 1960 and 1979 required some specialist help. In 1960, the New Zealand High Commission put them in touch with various Māori organizations, and consequently Māori at Taumarunui, on the upper reaches of the Whanganui River, provided native timber for repairs (Sully and Gallop 2007). With work being “supervised by consultants from various London Museums who claimed to be authorities on how buildings from the Pacific area should look” (Gallop 1998: 119), and a failure to appreciate the significance of *Hinemihi* or consult fully with the appropriate communities such as Ngāti Hinemihi (*Hinemihi*’s spiritual descendants), various restoration “errors” occurred, such as in 1975, when a thatched roof replaced a reed one dating from her arrival,⁵ a misinterpretation from an old photograph of the volcanic ash that covered *Hinemihi*. I put “errors” in quotation marks, as there is a counterargument in heritage regarding the value of features that arise out of accumulated history. Anthony Hoete explains:

In *Māoritanga* (the Māori way of life) craft can . . . assume a material intelligence . . . Given that *Hinemihi* has today spent more time in the UK (127 years) than in New Zealand (eight years), value can also be assigned to the inheritance of a thatched roof as being a more authentic *korowai* (cloak) for *Hinemihi* than the “original” shingles which were, at the time, a new building material in New Zealand. While purists might argue that this represents a dilution of the cultural object, the fabric of any living heritage means that change is always a given. (Hoete n.d.)

By the mid-1970s, Bernie Kernot, from Wellington’s Victoria University Department of Anthropology and Māori Studies, had visited the site and, while noting numerous issues with assembly and deterioration, put forward a suggestion for *Hinemihi*’s preservation in England, but with every effort to be “made to have the house restored under the direction of a qualified carver” (qtd. Hooper-Greenhill 1998: 131). He granted credit to the Onslows and the National Trust for “preserving the house when many others have been left to rot out of existence in New Zealand” (qtd. Gallop 1998: 120–121), but also argued principally for *Hinemihi*’s return to New Zealand, pointing to the inability of the National Trust to provide adequate maintenance and care. The New Zealand High Commissioner in London then offered assistance for her preservation in the hope that her exile might end (Sully and Gallop 2007).

Much of this conservation work focused on *Hinemihi* as little more than a building, without much consideration of her relationship with people. This began to change, as from the 1980s *Hinemihi* had increasing contact with Māori, who were by now living in London in greater numbers. June 1986 marked the centenary of the Mount Tarawera eruption and a visiting delegation of descendants of Chief Aporo Wharekaniwha and Ngāti Hinemihi formally asked for her return. The National Trust’s reason for declining was the same as that used by many British institutions, which is that she had been legally purchased. However, historian Alan Gallop recognized that this meeting at least laid the foundations for others, for “a unique cross-cultural partnership between the National Trust and [Māori]” (1998: 126).

Increasing Māori interaction with *Hinemihi* began to make it more difficult for the National Trust to continue to approach her as a mere building. On a visit to Clandon the same year, Emily Schuster (the great-granddaughter of Tene Waitere) explained her reaction to encountering *Hinemihi*:

We could feel the presence of our ancestors, including those who sheltered inside Hinemihī during the eruption, as well as those who didn't make it to safety. By touching the carvings, we could hear their screams, feel their pain. (qtd in Gallop 1998: 130–131)

The next centenary event in 1992, of *Hinemihī's* arrival at Clandon, was attended by John Marsh, a member of Ngāti Hinemihī and director of the Māori Arts and Crafts Institute. As Emily Schuster had done, John spoke:

directly to the meeting house and, through the building, to long-dead ancestors . . . his voice was full of emotion as he paced backwards and forwards on the great lawn, speaking as if addressing another human—which is, of course, exactly what he was doing. (Gallop 1998: 136)

Marsh appointed two young students from the Institute in Rotorua to create new carvings as a gift to the National Trust. They were no ordinary students, being Robert Rika, fourth-generation grandson of carver Tene Waitere, and Colin Tihi, third-generation grandson of Chief Aporo, who produced the work unpaid in their spare time (Sully and Gallop 2007). The new pieces were unveiled at a dawn “cloaking” ceremony on 9 June 1995, during which the National Trust handed over *Hinemihī* and its surrounding grounds to the Māori visitors, who claimed tangata whenua status (Hooper-Greenhill 1998; Sully and Gallop 2007). The ceremony (and a further one a month later involving a performance by Ngāti Rānana (London Māori Club) gave *Hinemihī* a new profile in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand. According to Dean Sully, “she has been re-imbued with a Māori physical and spiritual presence” (Sully et al. 2014: 210), and to Eilean Hooper-Greenhill it “reactivated [*Hinemihī's*] cultural significance for some of the Māori participants, and in doing so reinforced their Māori identity” (Hooper-Greenhill 1998: 142).

A year later, the National Trust received, but politely refused, a proposal for a system of co-responsibility between the National Trust and Ngāti Hinemihī, but they did begin to maintain direct contact with two Māori groups: (1) Ngāti Hinemihī; and (2) Ngāti Rānana, who began to use *Hinemihī* as a functioning marae and as a venue for Te Kōhanga Reo o Rānana (the London Māori “language nest”). This increased contact reflected a more general desire to develop reciprocal relationships between heritage institutions and source communities around the care and use of objects that the former held (Tapsell 2002).

If the National Trust and *Hinemihī's* people were making progress, a survey conducted in 2003 concluded that National Trust visitors tended to see *Hinemihī* in terms of the whole estate and “decidedly as part of British colonial history and wider dominance” (Malkogeorgou 2003: 5). Sully acknowledges that *Hinemihī's* conservation needed to have direct relevance to British cultural heritage as an essential element of a British heritage project, and in encountering *Hinemihī* people in Britain have the opportunity to reflect on Britain's colonial and postcolonial relationships and their implications in the present (Sully et al. 2014).

The National Trust's aims have evolved and expanded somewhat over the years, and now include the promotion of the social value of cultural heritage, the principle of engagement, and evolving perceptions of conservation and preservation (Lawlor and Lithgow 2007). A 2006 “statement of significance” on *Hinemihī* (Lawlor and Lithgow 2007) conveys a more considered understanding of Māori perspectives on their taonga tuku iho with relation to *Hinemihī*. And writing in 2008 on behalf of the National Trust, Julie De Long Lawlor stated: “The Trust's current approach to *Hinemihī* is that we cannot contemplate *Hinemihī's* future without what is essentially a partnership arrangement with Ngāti Rānana and Ngāti Hinemihī” (Lawlor and Lithgow 2007: 156).

Sully, a conservator and academic at University College London (UCL), has played a critical part in shifting approaches to understanding and managing the care of *Hinemihī*. In 2002, he

initiated research with the National Trust and Māori groups to establish a new strategic approach to conservation of the house, reflecting the shift in conservation thinking from preserving material fabric to developing connections between people and their heritage (Sully 2015). Drawing on fieldwork carried out in New Zealand, he devised new perspectives that questioned the approach to *Hinemihi* as an ethnographic object and advocated the active participation of Māori in the United Kingdom and New Zealand:

When conserving historical sites and objects, the traditional approach has been to understand them as objects whose fabric must be conserved. Dean Sully . . . proposed a different approach . . . in which the relationships between people and objects or sites is the essential element. (UCL 2014)

The initial result of Sully's research was that since 2004 the National Trust has engaged in a collaborative heritage conservation project with Māori stakeholders to develop *Hinemihi o Te Ao Tawhito* to meet the needs of her people (Sully et al. 2014). He recognized the important existence of an emerging "British-Māori" identity:

Hinemihi's position as an inter-cultural and trans-temporal focus for human interaction is mirrored in the lives of Māori and Polynesian communities living in Britain today, making sense of their own identity and their reciprocal relationships with British culture and people. As a result, the approach to *Hinemihi*'s long-term care is organised to reflect a contemporary reality based on lived experiences rather than a historically constructed version of past relationships projected onto the present. (Sully et al. 2014: 211)

Some of the "lived experiences" that Sully referred to took the form of several community-based events linked with the conservation of *Hinemihi*. These were "staying with *Hinemihi*" in 2010, when 43 of her people slept in *Hinemihi* and participated in an artwork; a workshop that led to the creation of traditional decorative panels, *tukutuku*, under the supervision of trained weavers; and hosting a ceremonial welcome for the New Zealand Olympic team for the 2012 London Olympics (UCL 2014). Further to this, in 2012 the volunteer custodian trust, Te Maru o Hinemihi (Te Maru), was established, comprising Māori UK residents, a move to a specifically assembled community that directly reflected the needs of the current conservation project. Its aim was to ensure effective care for *Hinemihi*; on its website, the group articulates the bicultural aspects of this guardianship:

As a vulnerable structure in the harsh external environment of the gardens of Clandon Park, [*Hinemihi*] requires regular, routine maintenance and periodic, extensive interventions in order to safeguard her long-term future. As a living being, she needs to be kept warm by interaction with people. (Te Maru O Hinemihi n.d.)

In order to realize *Hinemihi* as a functioning marae, Te Maru gathered responses to five different conservation strategies: repair, restore, reuse, redevelop, or relocate, with the result being a clear mandate to pursue restoration and redevelopment as the conservation vision for *Hinemihi* at Clandon Park (Te Maru o Hinemihi 2012). Another significant partnership was whereNOW, a program of events to develop shared community research objectives that nurture, investigate, and document the developing relationships. The latter were "seen as the first stage in a series of events to increase interaction between *Hinemihi* and her people as the necessary precursor to the development of *Hinemihi* as a centre for Māori culture in Britain" (Sully et al. 2014: 219).

In 2012, a National Trust document on the future of *Hinemihi* reflected much of Sully's and Te Maru's approaches, acknowledging the proposed conservation of *Hinemihi* as:

designed to be less a response to Hinemihī as an historic “art work,” but more as a response to the needs of her people. In doing so, the conservation seeks to ensure that in preserving the fabric of the past, we do not restrict cultural development in the future. (National Trust 2012)

At least NZ\$500,000 was highlighted as needed for the restoration necessary to realize the vision of *Hinemihī* being returned to a working marae. And over the next few years, Te Maru was in the process of helping the National Trust answer the question: “If we build it, will you come?” By 2015, the various Māori communities effectively had responsibility for carrying out certain roles of *kaitiakitanga* (“guardianship”), including “visiting *Hinemihī*, keeping her *mauri* [(“vital essence”)] alive and warm, and carrying out our responsibilities in welcoming guests” (Burrows 2007: 172). But how this worked in practice between the London Māori community and Ngāti Hinemihī was often far from simple, as Karl Burrows (2007) has noted.

Despite these progressive steps, there was still the complex issue of the identity of the host–guest relationship to grapple with. In terms of conservation, the National Trust created and hosted the hierarchy of voices in an internal logic that conformed to the working practice of the Trust and British legislative framework, but “community groups may consider such arrangements provide unsuitable opportunities for their involvement” (Sully et al. 2014: 213–214). And so the Māori concepts of *kaupapa Māori* (“Māori approach/vision”) and *mātauranga Māori* (“Māori knowledge”) were applied within the working practices of the *Hinemihī* project, side-by-side with National Trust conservation principles, and incorporated into the kaupapa of work, meetings, and events (Sully et al. 2014).

Questions still remained about the National Trust’s role as a “museum.” Several accounts (including Malkogeorgou 2003) lamented a lack of interpretation at *Hinemihī*, but in 2016 new interpretive signage was installed in the gardens, including a panel near *Hinemihī* on her history and significance. Prior to and after this, *Hinemihī* was actively interpreted in person by volunteers (who were often very involved and passionate about *Hinemihī*) engaging visitors about her story.⁶ *Hinemihī* has also been researched and described in various ways in National Trust guidebooks over the years—a key form of engagement with traditional Trust audiences.⁷

Her physical and cultural position, facing the Palladian, eighteenth-century English stately home in the gardens of Clandon Park is challenging:

The architectural and territorial configuration at Clandon within which *Hinemihī* is placed clearly reveals the legal framework of ownership. This also establishes a cultural and interpretivist hegemony within which dominant meanings will be formulated and against which alternative meanings of *Hinemihī* must be constructed . . . The huge and elaborate structure of Clandon dominates and subsumes *Hinemihī*, reducing the complexity of a different world of myth and history to a small, somewhat exotic, garden collectable. (Hooper-Greenhill 1998: 141)

However, Anthony Hoete, Chair of Te Maru, explains another significant aspect of the spatial arrangement provided by relocating her opposite the Onslow family’s residence:

Much like the traditional Māori greeting—the *hongi*—this spatial arrangement between large Palladian mansion (Clandon House) and small grass hut (*Hinemihī*) has cultural roots in a *kanohi ki te kanohi* (face-to-face) engagement. As a colonial face-off the new location symbolically mirrored the historic, and at times confrontational, relationship between Pākehā (Whites) and Māori.

Yet the siting of *Hinemihī* in the garden of Clandon House was also positively transformative: today the grass lawn also serves as *marae ātea* (a rural form of public space specific to the South Pacific). The lawn allows for the traditional ritual of *pōwhiri* (welcome) and thereby anchored *Hinemihī*’s shifting space to her new place. (Hoete n.d.)

Figure 2. *Hinemihi* on the Grounds of Clandon Park, Surrey.
Photo by Chris Lacey, National Trust Images.

Fuel and Fire

In April 2015, Clandon Park made headlines when a fire gutted the stately home. *Hinemihi*, 60 meters from the mansion house, escaped any damage, as a caretaker stood by her side with a fire extinguisher all night, but the fire destroyed the Māori taonga stored inside the house (Radio New Zealand 2015a).

Until this point, talk of returning the carvings had subsided and discussions centered on conservation, but as the clean-up operation began and the options for the National Trust came into focus, discussions about *Hinemihi*'s future were renewed (Bathgate 2019). It appeared that the extensive restoration of *Hinemihi* that was planned would be overshadowed, if not shelved, by the work required on the fire-damaged mansion house, potentially closing Clandon for years.

Opinions abounded, with most believing that repatriation would be a good idea. Alan Gallop and Jim Schuster were among those who felt this way:

This is an opportunity for them. It takes one more problem off their plate and they can then deal with the main house, Clandon House. And probably let *Hinemihi* come home where she can be cared for by the people where she came from. (Radio New Zealand 2015b)

But doubts persisted about the willingness of the National Trust to do so,⁸ as there needed to be an acknowledgment of *Hinemihi*'s status for Māori people in and around London (McKee 2016; Te Ao Māori News 2016), and the more immediate need for attention to the state of the carvings and for fundraising to be recognized (SurreyLive 2016). Even if repatriation were possible, Jim

Schuster liked the idea of a continuing Māori presence in Europe, a functional marae with a cultural center (Radio New Zealand 2015b). Sully had noted in 2014 that while opinions about the continued presence of *Hinemihi* at Clandon Park varied within the originating or source community in New Zealand, repatriation remains an open question for relocated meeting houses that can only be addressed by the participants in these relationships at particular times and places (Sully et al. 2014). Was this such a time and place?⁹ After the fire, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga initiated discussions with the National Trust, which sent representatives to visit Rotorua in 2017, with a return visit by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga to Clandon in August the following year to present its case in support of the carving exchange (Bathgate 2019).

There were also less direct influences on the progress being made at Clandon worth mentioning. Māori involvement in the New Zealand museum and heritage sector had a much longer history. Accelerated changes after the *Te Maori* exhibition of 1980–1987 (McCarthy 2011) resulted in Māori taking greater control of their heritage. The emergence of a new “reflexive” museology built upon the experiences of social and political change in the New Zealand of the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰ This transformation will have had a bearing on the approaches to the National Trust of those Māori communities associated with *Hinemihi*. As the new national museum, Te Papa Tongarewa, took shape in the mid-1990s according to bicultural principles, it viewed itself as a *kaitiaki*, a guardian or caretaker, rather than an owner of taonga (McCarthy 2018), a role that the National Trust was increasingly coming to terms with in regards to *Hinemihi* as their engagement with Māori increased.

Similarly, from the National Trust’s perspective, Britain’s colonial legacy was catching up with its institutions. Calls to redress that legacy through restitution were being heard loudly from Indigenous communities and source countries. The 1998 *Māori* exhibition at the British Museum, with a Māori-led ceremonial dawn opening, along with other significant displays, demonstrated great numbers of Māori and Pakeha being proud of what they saw. According to a review of *Māori* by Peter Gathercole: “To a remarkably compelling degree the power resided in the taonga themselves” (1999: 141). Anthony Hoete explained in an essay for the British Council how *Hinemihi* was transforming global heritage:

[I]t is no longer appropriate to apply a Western perspective[,] with its seemingly well-intended heritage practices, to indigenous culture. Māori architecture, for example, has its own *kaupapa* (values), and so *Hinemihi* teaches us something about understanding architecture from a South Pacific rather than a colonising European perspective. (Hoete n.d.)

However, by 2016, and after renewed calls from Te Maru for the National Trust to launch a serious appeal for funds to finance a restoration, it appeared recommitted to a program of conservation and protection, with conservation work focused on “protecting and conserving the physical structure of the carvings, as well as taking care of *Hinemihi*’s spiritual condition” (National Trust n.d.). Tarpaulins were placed on the roof, and a temporary weatherproof structure was erected to minimize the effects of the weather on *Hinemihi*’s roof and exterior carvings (Bayer 2016). Jim Schuster oversaw the ceremonial removal of the carvings and worked alongside a team of specialists including Sully, carefully removing, cleaning, wrapping, and transporting the 28 carvings to safe storage (National Trust n.d.).

Repatriation and Exchange

At the same time as one of the most ambitious and costly restoration projects in the National Trust’s history was being proposed, with respect to the fire-damaged mansion house at Clandon

Park (National Trust 2020), in late 2019 came an announcement from the National Trust that it had “agreed in principle with Heritage New Zealand for the historic carvings of *Hinemihi* . . . to return to New Zealand in exchange for new carvings” (National Trust 2019). McCarthy (2020) identified the National Trust’s decision as a “clear signal of how much the mood has shifted in debates around repatriation in the UK and Europe.”

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga referenced “proactive contact to return the carvings” prior to gaining the National Trust’s support (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga 2019), and in its statement the National Trust explained that the decision was based on wide consultation and careful consideration, and on the recognition of its Māori friends and partners’ “deep spiritual relationship with the historic carvings of their honoured ancestor, that they consider *Hinemihi* a living being and want her to return home” (National Trust 2019). The exchange of carvings is intended to

deepen the close Māori relationship with Clandon Park, creating a lasting presence through new carvings with spiritual significance and power which will enrich the experience of our visitors, communities and others who value this special cultural connection. (National Trust 2019)

The act of an exchange rather than a simple return of the carvings is significant, with the custom of exchange being very important as part of the return of taonga. Recasting any future transaction as a positive opportunity for exchange is something that Te Maru had been advocating for a while: “a *panui* (proposal) that overturns and mitigates the perceived negativity of repatriation by recasting any future transaction as a positive opportunity for exchange” (Hoete n.d.). Hoete (n.d.) also argued that the Māori construct of *Hinemihi* as living heritage allows her to be in two places at once spiritually, and that such a perspective can help placate and pacify competing political agendas through the very type of exchange that has since been announced.

Rangitihī Pene, Chairman of Ngā Kohinga Whakairo o Hinemihi, commented:

Our emphasis is now on strengthening the ongoing relationship between Ngāti Hinemihi, Te Arawa, Rotorua on the one hand, and the National Trust, Clandon Park and Guildford Borough Council on the other. We are planning a trip to London in June 2020 to further strengthen the partnership and collaboratively plan the building of a new wharehau [(large house)] at Clandon Park, to be named *Te Hono* (The Link or The Connection). Te Puia have agreed to carve the majority of the carvings. (Bathgate 2019)

The National Trust is continuing “a Māori meeting house presence [to take] forward the story of *Hinemihi* at Clandon Park” and their “longstanding relationship with the Māori community” (National Trust 2019). Like many museums, which see an important element of their role as introducing local people to culture from other places, perhaps the exchange offers a new and improved (in terms of interpretation, practical use, and intercultural engagement) way to do this at Clandon. Hoete (n.d.) made the important point that such partnerships require an exchange of not just material but knowledge.

In New Zealand, repatriation has been an accepted dimension of museum and heritage practice for decades, with the Ngāti Awa meeting house *Mataatua* (returned from the Otago Museum in 1996) being just one notable example. Indeed, in various postsettler nations, where museums neighbor Indigenous communities, professionals routinely send ancestral human remains and artifacts back to where they came from. Te Papa’s Māori collection is now considered to be on loan, a major point of difference with the British Museum as recently highlighted by Te Papa’s current *tumu whakarae*/chief executive, Courtney Johnston:

The British Museum will say, “no actually the best place for all of these things from all over the world is here. Because we can create the context from which people can understand them.” And you’re like: “What about the context that they were made in and the people they were taken from?” (Rose 2020)

In these instances, repatriation is seen as a beginning rather than an end—“an act of reconciliation that begets cultural exchange, ongoing relationships, and new art and culture” (McCarthy 2020).

Institutions like the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London face ever more growing pressure from Indigenous communities and source countries to engage in the ongoing, long-term process of divesting themselves of their colonial power. So for an organization such as the National Trust (with more members than the entire population of New Zealand) to embrace these principles, *Hinemihi*’s return really could be viewed as a breakthrough, part of, as Christina Kreps (2003) has written, a liberating process that allows the emergence of a new discourse, one that is not confined solely by Western reference points. This giving up of control and power can be viewed as a genuine attempt to understand the position and historical perspectives of Indigenous Peoples. This is especially relevant when one considers that the ability of the National Trust to return *Hinemihi* is also constrained by the legal framework under which the National Trust operates (Last 2007). The agreement in principle was the result of many years of change at the National Trust in terms of environment, culture, and people, enabling the sorts of conversations that they were having with Indigenous communities to be of greater importance to the organization than they had been in the past. Encouragingly, this now appears to be a part of a larger pattern across UK heritage institutions as they take more proactive positions on restitution.

Should repatriation even be viewed as the ultimate goal? Or, as Paul Tapsell has argued, should we consider the “majority of ‘Māori’ demands for the return of ancestral treasures, or taonga and human remains, a red herring that distracts from the need to address other partnership initiatives” (2002: 284)? Are the partnerships that have been built along the way and will continue beyond repatriation (the journey) as significant to Māori, Pākehā and non-Māori as the carvings’ eventual return (the destination)? Given that the repatriation will take the form of an exchange and an ongoing presence in the United Kingdom, surely that is so. And for Māori in particular, this story, where positive relationships and initiatives have evolved with respect, trust, and understanding, *Hinemihi* is a good example of the hope expressed by Te Papa’s *kaihautū* (Māori director) Arapata Hakiwai that “positive [international working] partnerships can work in the search for legitimacy” (Hakiwai 2005: 176).

A week prior to the decision, the National Trust’s president, Prince Charles, set another example by returning a historic *kāhahu* (“cloak”) that was given by a chief to Queen Victoria, at a visit to the Waitangi Treaty grounds (*New Zealand Herald* 2019). However, attempts to contextualize the agreement occurring at this particular time may miss another perspective—that the taonga themselves decide to come home:

Museums may have legal evidence to support they owned such items, but from the Te Arawa perspective, this matters little because ancestors are ordered within a genealogical matrix of belonging or whakapapa, which transcends legal parameters . . . Therefore the ancestors (taonga) decide when they were all ready to travel and will conspire to journey home once the intentions of all parties, living and dead, are in alignment. (Tapsell 2003: 246–247)

As I write, the National Trust has embarked on a potentially lengthy process of seeking formal assistance from the Charity Commission and progressing the legal consents needed from the UK authorities (National Trust 2019), highlighting the constraints of the legal framework under

which the National Trust operates on its ability to return *Hinemihi* to Ngāti Hinemihi. The June 2020 meeting—also meant as an opportunity for Ngāti Hinemihi to thank Ngāti Rānana and Te Maru for their support (Bathgate 2019)—is postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so some relationships are not currently able to flourish as they might otherwise have been. The ongoing discussions require public communications to be tempered in order to keep the many relationships involved running smoothly, with the National Trust and Heritage New Zealand being the main conduits for dialogue.

Hinemihi still currently unites the Māori population that was divided over a century ago, but what will she become next in the United Kingdom and Aotearoa New Zealand? Has *Hinemihi* been doing too much cultural “heavy lifting” for Aotearoa as a center for the activities of the UK Māori community? Could iwi-led initiatives such as overseas cultural centers be the next stage of development for Māori self-determination? Will we see other former colonial institutions take the decolonizing lead from the National Trust? Cultural value is not static; new and different values can be derived from *Hinemihi*’s carvings being back with her people while a new presence at Clandon creates and develops mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnerships—both places “imbued with her dual timeframes: her past as *Hinemihi o Te Ao Tawhito* (old world) and her future *Hinemihi o te Ao Hou* (new world)” (Hoete n.d.).

Hinemihi’s story is ultimately one of relationships, collaboration, and partnerships, showing how listening, learning, and understanding are at the heart of improving professional practice in heritage and museums globally with relation to taonga and tangata whenua. Working in a way that is informed by Māori perspectives requires engagement. Throughout 2020, physical engagement, especially across continents, has become a particular challenge, but *Hinemihi* continues to connect her many people as powerfully as she always has.

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■ NOTES

1. For a detailed history, see Gallop (1998) or Sully and Gallop (2007).
2. In accordance with this, I have referred to *Hinemihi* as she/her throughout, unless where employing language used by other persons or parties.
3. Her role as a bathhouse is often listed, but disputed (Sully and Gallop 2007).
4. The National Trust does not appear to have any record of Māori soldiers being stationed or recuperating at Clandon Park when it was used as a hospital during World War I, despite this appearing

in various histories. There are also confused accounts about when and whether World War I Māori soldiers were involved in moving *Hinemihī* to her current location: “Hinemihī was probably moved to her current location around c.1931, so Māori WWI soldiers can’t have been directly involved with this. That is not to say that other Māori weren’t involved in this move and reconstruction, rather that this is not well documented. Indeed, our sense is that there was quite a lot of visiting of her by New Zealanders and Māori in the early-mid twentieth century which is poorly recorded” (Kent Rawlinson, email to author, 14 July 2020).

5. Kent Rawlinson, email to author, 14 July 2020.
6. Of two recent volunteers, one was from New Zealand, and another actively researched the history, including traveling on his own account to New Zealand and Te Wairoa, where he reported meeting with members of Ngāti Hinemihī who thanked him for his care of *Hinemihī* and requested he continue it (Kent Rawlinson, email to author, 14 July, 2020).
7. Kent Rawlinson, email to author, 14 July 2020. This was not limited to *Hinemihī* and has been the subject of keenly debated National Trust policy (Sully and Gallop 2007).
8. Rupene Waaka, a spokesperson for Ngāti Huia, the hapū who had gifted the Onslow family many of the taonga that were lost in the fire, said they had been trying to get them repatriated for years because they were given to the Onslow family, not to the state (Radio New Zealand 2015a).
9. It may be too simple to view the fire as a main catalyst for an eventual exchange; if anything, the fire is likely to have complicated ongoing discussions. The National Trust would have been keen to keep the two issues separate.
10. In a neat parallel, responses to *Te Maori* suggest that categories of art and taonga operated separately and also fused in an unseen way (McCarthy 2011). Similarly, while the National Trust was initially looking at *Hinemihī* for the exceptional quality of its sculptural form, Māori in the United Kingdom were being reunited with their ancestors. And to borrow Mina McKenzie’s (the first Māori museum director in New Zealand) observation of the same differing of interpretations in *Te Maori*, “energy was flowing between the two concepts” (qtd in McCarthy 2011: 63).

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