



The Taonga's role in the Maori economy

Make art or make business?

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The Taonga's role in the Maori economy. Make art or Make business?

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Introduction

With this study, I explore the meaning of *taonga* in the Maori's economy and which path this specific exchange followed during the centuries till today, focusing particularly on the social and historic context of the New Zealand Maori¹ tribes.

Taonga are all those goods considered precious for their moral, social and artistic values; either are exchanged for other goods or are given as gifts during the community's ceremonies. The act of giving is functional as it represents the prestigious of the families involved in the exchange as well as a tool to keep the peace in the community.

Eldson Best first and Raymond Firth then, have been the firsts to bring *Taonga* on the table of the anthropological debate with their ethnographic essay then inherited by next generations of anthropologists. In the study, I explain how the role of *Taonga* and their exchange shifted after New Zealand colonization both political and cultural, and considering how historical facts weighted on the trade-network through studies based on local anthropological sources.

An example is given by the alterations occurred to the artistic and hand-crafted textile sector. From being artistic pieces to be donated according to solemn and rooted rituals, *Taonga* became goods to be traded in the market.

The merge between the act of giving and the trade system brought new meanings to exchange as either treasures or valuable goods.

Such shift is visible with the rebirth of the economical textile sector closely connected to the actual job of the weavers women of *Taonga* who are facing a global market with different needs compared to the one of the traditional tribe economic structure.

During my stay in New Zealand back in 2005¹, I concentrated on the textile field and on the weavers' job focusing on how women attribute a symbolic rather than tradable value to the goods they produced and what emerges from this study will be explained in the last part of the essay in order to add a stronger meaning to the current role of *Taonga* in the Maori's culture.

The gift in the pre-colonial age

The first ethnographic sources concerning the social and cultural Maori's system are attributed to the experience of Eldson Best (1856-1931). Best carried his researches in behalf of the New Zealand government aiming to a better understanding of the native culture. In 1982 Best founded the *Polynesian Society*, a government association which aimed to carry on researches in native communities.

The load of documentation the anthropologist collected is incredible and is mainly focused on the Tuhoe, population of the southern isle; due to his appointment as secretary of the Urewera Commission, Eldson Best stayed with the tribe for more than 15 years. The result of such stay in the and his participation to the tribe's daily life, is a monograph dedicated to the native community of the South's island entitled "*Tuhoe Land: on the Origin, Customs etc.. of the Tuhoe or Urewera Tribe* " (1897) published by *Dominion Museum of Wellington*.

Best research-on-the-field ethnographic experience gave the chance to the professor to gain as much

¹ The field research in New Zealand from September 2005 and December 2005 was part of my thesis degree project in Italy about the Maori Mana Wahine.

information through an informer, Tamati Rampiri, whom words Best translated and interpreted as well as Maori's concepts and terms. He is the author of the expression *hau che* which Marcel Mauss recalls in his essay about the gift:

“Je vais vous parler du hau... Le hau n'est pas le vent qui souffle. Pas du tout. Supposez que vous possédez un article déterminé (taonga) et que vous me donniez cet article ; vous me le donnez sans prix fixé 6. Nous ne faisons pas de marché à ce propos. Or, je donne cet article à une troisième personne qui, après qu'un certain temps s'est écoulé, décide de rendre quelque chose en paiement (utu) 7, il me fait présent de quelque chose (taonga). Or, ce taonga qu'il me donne est l'esprit (hau) du taonga que j'ai reçu de vous et que je lui ai donné à lui. Les taonga que j'ai reçus pour ces taonga (venus de vous) il faut que je vous les rende. Il ne serait pas juste (tika) de ma part de garder ces taonga pour moi, qu'ils soient désirables (rawe), ou désagréables (kino). Je dois vous les donner car ils sont un hau 8 du taonga que vous m'avez donné. Si je conservais ce deuxième taonga pour moi, il pourrait m'en venir d'un mal, sérieusement, même la mort. Tel est le hau, le hau de la propriété personnelle, le hau des taonga, le hau de la forêt. Kali ena. (Assez sur ce sujet.)” (Mauss, 1968,158)

Eldson Best's ethnographic material for Marcel Mauss was a very important historic source as he started from Best's study to get to his theory of the *taonga*'s exchange and the *hau*'s meaning.

The activities of exchanging gifts are deeply analysed by Mauss's essay. According to the French academic, the concept of gratuity leaves the gift as inserted in a context with specific rules which set out the trade.

The trade happens according to peculiar dynamics such as giving, accepting and returning.

Among the Maori, the exchange of gifts follows a ritual based on reciprocity and compensation. According to Mauss, there is a sense of obligation in giving, accepting and returning; so, who gives expects as well something of the same value back and is aware to have to return something. These actions are connected and gain significance if seen as an unicum, as a one completed action (Mauss 2002,8-9)3.

Maori consider the goods alive once they are part of the exchange network, meaning that they have a vital essence although objects.

“ they are alive as inside them there is the life essence and the soul of who belongs the gift “ (Best, 1922, 29).

According to Marcel Mauss the *hau* is the life essence and the spirit of what has been given and it holds the spirit of the earth, the soil and woods.

“Les *taonga* et toutes propriétés rigoureusement dites personnelles ont un *hau*, un pouvoir spirituel. Vous m'en donnez un, je le donne à un tiers ; celui-ci m'en rend un autre, parce qu'il est poussé par le *hau* de mon cadeau ; et moi je suis obligé de vous donner cette chose, parce qu'il faut que je vous rende ce qui est en réalité le produit du *hau* de votre *taonga*.” (Mauss, 1968,159)

According to this interpretation the *hau* is part of the person who gives which circulates and conveys to everyone who gets in touch with that gift. For this reason, the gift isn't lifeless as its spirit can avenge itself if not honoured. This understanding is considered by Mauss as a bond between souls because “a same thing has a soul, it belongs to the soul” (Mauss, 2002, 20).

Accepting a gift then, means to accept someone's soul essence which could be dangerous, even mortal, if not conveyed through the ritual of reciprocity. Here stands the magic of the *hau*. In fact, the *hau* is the magic feature that can be attacked by the black-magic and the gift can spread the sorcery to the addressed one (Best, 1922, 30-32).

The juridic tie bond of the exchange corresponds to a series of commitments between the ones involved in the link bond.

During the years, Marcel Mauss' theory has been criticised despite its fascinating side, sometimes a

valuable tool, as it highlights the spirit and magic of the gift. Among the criticisms, the most notorious one was arisen by the French Claude Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss claimed that Mauss's theory - based on giving, receiving and returning - should have been built on the concept to apply to all the parts a source of energy which operates the merge (Levi-Strauss, 1968, XXXVII). Thus, to put together all the parties in the exchange there is a “supplement need” of what Mauss would have called *hau*:

“Le hau n'est pas la raison dernière de l'échange : c'est la forme consciente sous laquelle des hommes d'une société déterminée, où le problème avait une importance particulière, ont appréhendé une nécessité inconsciente dont la raison est ailleurs.” (Levi-Strauss, 1968, XXXIX).

For the structuralist-supporter ethnologist, “ the *hau* is a product of the native culture”, is part of a concept that it is closer to the native world, if compared to a western lookalike although it still is a theory which has been scrutinised by an objective criticism (Levi-Strauss, 1968, XXXIX).

The debate over the meaning of the *hau* hosted the anthropologist Raymond Firth's interpretation according to which Mauss research on the meaning of the *hau* was carried on in order to provide a solution to his expectations both personal and anthropological. Raymond Firth, who dedicated himself to the study of the Maori's economical system, thinks that the native refer to the *hau* as something of passive and amorphous (Firth, 1977, 49).

The *hau* itself doesn't have any power whereas it needs either the white or black magic to be effective. When, for instance, a lack of reciprocity occurs during a negotiation the *hau* couldn't negatively harm the donor; the black magic is necessary in order to activate the revenge dynamics against the donor.

Firth though, supports the idea that reciprocity and the gift system are observed and respected in order to keep the right balance among the community and who, eventually breaks such social rules would be fined and rejected by the tribe (Firth, 1977, 420-421).

Compared to Marcel Strauss's point of view, Raymond Firth's offers an interpretation of the gift system and its features which is functional to the safeguard of the tribes internal social balances.

As emerged from his ethnographic experience, Firth highlights that when an exchange actually happens, the donor says these words “*tenei te taonga ki akoe*” (Firth, 1977, 315).

The exchange may involve two different tribes or groups as well as two individuals. The transaction is functional to strengthen a relationship between tribes or families although it may be used to celebrate the donor when is hosted.

As Mauss did, Firth points out that there are two principles in the act of giving: reciprocity and equivalence.

“to give as much as possible in return for anything received” (Firth, 1977, 423).

It is possible to return the same or equivalent valuable gift although the best option would be to increase the value of it as it wouldn't be a good idea to offend the partner during a negotiation by decrying the gift and the thought of it.

The exchange must then consider another important element of the Maori's philosophy, the *mana*. *Mana* could be defined as the social position occupied by the subjects involved in the exchange. Two different people with two different *mana* may attend the negotiation and the *taonga* that have been exchanged play a functional role in the transaction as neutralize both the social statuses of the two parts.

What so far analysed refers to the traditional exchange and to the value given to the negotiations in the era before the colonization until the arrive of the Europeans and based on what reported by

ethnographers.

The meaning of giving hasn't changed nor canceled by the subsequent colonization although it has been modified and then involved in the dynamics of globalization.

Taonga and the transition toward the market

Taonga as we have seen, put the goods on the exchange table. Those are precious objects representing the prestige and the donor social status.

Hirini Moko Mead, founder of the native Maori's Studies anthropological school at the Victoria University of Wellington, recently defined the gifts as objects with both symbolic and sacred values whose importance is a collective celebration (Mead, 2003, 182). Among the precious gifts there are the *heitiki*, *kaitaka*, *whare wakairo* and *waka*.

The *hei tiki* are nephrite carved pendants, a stone the Maori considered highly precious. From nephrite jade is extracted as final result and has a green-coloured shade and is quite resistant. The *hei teki* represents women ability of reproduction and follows the mother's descending line; usually is given by a grandmother to a granddaughter as wish of fertility, happiness and luck. Is part of the family treasure. The *kai taka* are scarves shred together by the eldest women of the community when a new baby is born and become part of the *mana* belonging to him. Are shred with linen fibres as well as with rich materials as birds' plumage and animals fur. The government of New Zealand has recently set out a series of rules to limit the employ of specific species of linen, or fur and plumes supported also by the Maori's tribes. The women working as spinners must follow specific rules which move along with the reproductivity season of animals and plants when is prohibited to harm such natural elements. Are whereas interdict to be touched other protected-species as the ones of the *kiwi* a terrestrial bird symbol of New Zealand.

The *wahre wakairo* and *waka* are the products of sculpture. The firsts are engraved works representing the history of the tribe and of its chief; along with the *marae*, the *whare wakairo* are part of the community religious and political treasury.

The *waka* are war-canoes representing tribes migratory origins. According to the Great Fleet theory, each *waka* was made by a group of tribes acting as crew of the canoe itself.

These are only a few of the goods called *taonga* by Maori which then became the first to spread the markets due to the globalization process. The first contacts with Europeans are dated back to the end of the XVIII century when the tribes along the coast started to exchange goods, food, linen and nephrite for metallic tools, clothes, and food totally unknown to their eyes such as potatoes, cauliflower and corn (Corteggiani, 2002, 208).

Objects involved in the negotiation eventually became goods to exchange. Maori started creating specific tools the English sailors were mainly interested in with the aim to exchange them with European goods.

The symbolic and sacred value was replaced by the one given by the market and the exchanged features followed the western degree of appreciation.

The reality now was that the shift of such important meaning would have led to the next conflicts between local tribes and Europeans.

The first conflict focused on the principle of land-owning as the British headed the colonization following the concept of private property which eventually clashed with Maori's divine right to populate and settle the lands inherited from gods. A series of battles followed and ended with the Waitangi Treat (1841) which ruled the land-ownership. However two copies of the treat have been set out: in the Maori's version the *kawanatanga*, or land administration was under the British responsibility

while the Maori would have kept the privilege of sovereignty, *rangatiratanga*. Instead, the British version of the treat set out that it was in the hand of the Queen the both the sovereignty and the administration of the land as only ruler enclosing the pre-empt right all over the lands (Corteggiani, 2002, 45).

The value attributed to the *hei tiki* and to the gift exchange during a wedding ceremony is an example of how the *taonga* started to be valued differently with colonization. The *hei teki*, the nephrite pendants, after first exchanges started to be very much appreciated by the Europeans who bought them or received them from local tribes. Soon the production couldn't cope with the demand of West citizens and for this reason the pendant manufacture was moved to Birmingham and then sold on the markets of New Zealand.

If at the beginning pendants were offered to the market as native tribes treasures increasing so their value, later on, nephrite beauties became the result of mass-production.

Furthermore, although the *hiki*, fetus-shaped pendants used to remind women fertility, with start of commerce they turned into mere pretty and exotic objects.

Another significant example of the shift of meaning of the *taonga*, lays in the II World War.

During the days of war, the Red Cross used to give the nephrite pendants to convalescent soldiers spreading the idea that they were lucky charms for warriors.

In this specific case, the *tiki*, symbol of fertility, became a way to honour and strengthen soldier virility. The misunderstanding between the natives and colonists about the act of giving could be also seen in the misinterpretation of the gift exchange during the ritual of wedding.

As tradition recalls, a monologue by the groom opened the ceremony focusing on the *taonga* given to the bride until that moment (Makereti, 1986, 65-69). The father of the bride answers the monologue by celebrating the *marae* and *taonga*.

If *taonga* are considered highly precious this is reflected in the families' speeches. The gifts given by the groom, part of his family treasure, now belong to the bride, who will own them for the rest of her life meaning that they will never be part of any of the husband's property.

Westerns understood that the gifts exchange as a way to buy the bride (Makereti, 1986, 103). The value of the gift was seen as the price to own a woman because it was placed under the Victorian Age² trade logics context which was the reality British were coming from.

From what explained so far, Western culture introduced different measures to weight the meaning of *taonga* among the social and economical native culture.

Starting from 1840, the years after colonization, Maori's tribes went through a very tough time which threatened the collapse of their social system (Corteggiani, 2002, 209).

Maori's economical identity rose back in the '70s, when the dispute for the identity and for the rights of land-ownership started the followed by the Renaissance Period.

The Renaissance Period was a very important stage for Maori; despite the colonization, Maori started to build up their army and political assets. In the '80s, a series of campaigns backing social rights took place and the Waitangi Treat was scrutinised as tribes claimed back the rights over the lands British smartly took away in 1841.

² The error in which the British colonists fell, was to confuse their spheres of economic exchange about marriage with the native ones. The exchange of goods at the time of marriage was the amount of the price to pay for the wedding, the ritual had a shared social value that should be regarded as a transition. Women were not for sale but they just followed the Protocol consolidating the rituals of community life (Makareti 1986 :103-104).

In such political and historical context, Maori started building a new economical system which didn't forget the traditional breath and at the same time, it absorbed and accepted the new values of capitalism. Being able to develop a new dimension embracing both capitalistic and social values as well as the exchange of gift and the trade of goods, is part of the complex Maori's economical system as local model of hybrid economy.

Weaving and the taonga's value

“The desire for artistic expression provided one of the motive forces in a number of maori activities. Wood carvings, tatooing, weaving, were all regulated to a greater or less degree by such canons, and in non-material spheres, as in poetry, music, posture dancing, and even in oratory, the influence of the aesthetic emotions was a fundamental factor.”
(Firth 1977: 184)

As a very important part of the maori's identity were seen art and its representations: the artistic dimension of life is among the different sides of artistic inner spirituality. For the Maori, art is an indispensable category as, basically, represents the *mana* of the tribe and shows itself in the daily life (Corteggiani 2002, 157).

In a new space where trading values changed the ones of *taonga* as art works, weaving (*te raranga*) is a new frontier.

Weaving was passed over to young generations of women by the elder members of the tribe; the act of treading together wires and linen leaves is the metaphor of the necessity of keeping tight relationships with both relatives and ancestors as well as the need of building up each own future. Each weave may represent a relationship, an ancestor or a beloved one.

Today the art of weaving is taught at Maori's universities and *marae* and of course, is one of the main employment sector especially for women. Classes on art of weaving let *marae* to become the shelter for traditional culture.

The weavers may decide whether to put on sale the *taonga* they made and it would be interesting to summarize the relationship between art and economy and try to understand how *taonga* affected the modern demand-response trading system.

Weaving is rooted in the *maori's* mythology and explains the link between art, environment and holy halo.

Three are the goddess who embrace such archetype: Hine-te-iwaiwa, Huna and Rakutia. With her great strength, Hine-te-iwaiwa is in charge for the flow of tides and is the mother of traditional weaving. Huna represents the holiness of weaving and the word *huna* means *to hide* or *shelter*.

Rakuita created the art of weaving and the meaning of her name is *to weave, to link together*. As outlined by mythology, weavers embodied a quite holy power which must be pulled over in order to keep such holiness alive (Harrison, Te Kanawa, Higgings, 200, 124).

Weaving can be studied both chronologically and historically.

Recent studies brought to life the existence of three different evolutive era: the classical or pre-european era, the period of transition and the modern period (Harrison, Te Kanawa Higgings, 2004, 127-128).

Maori described the classical period as the time of free art when the artistic soul was no yet affected by pre-colonialism.

At the time, daily-life tools , such as fish nets, baskets and kites, were weaved-objects as well as art works which were valued differently as they expressed the prestige and the amazing skills of the woman who weaved the craft thought to be a gift.

Fine lines and *muka*, extracted from the plant of flax, were the preferred fabrics for *taonga*.

The period of transition can be dated back to XIX century and is characterized by the fair evolution of the art-crafting after the arrival of the European culture.

The traditional approach to the exchange of art works as well as the interpretation of art itself, have been affected by new tools, fabrics and a brand new market.

The colonization got deep inside the local native economical system modifying the production, distribution and employment of goods. The mass-production system took the scene in order to respond to the increasing demand for tribal art crafts from the West (as happened for the *tiki*). From the local hand-crafted system to the production-in-series.

Weaving was hit by the introduction of new European tools as the materials matched better and quicker the community's necessities (as wool and cotton to dress with that left behind line, so far very important). As consequence, weaving lost its power as the European innovations became essential and *taonga* lost their intrinsic artistic side as the hunt from collectors started and brought them into nice displays of museums as main players of the *art biz*³.

Then, the art of weaving faced a tough crisis which threatened the pull over of all the techniques left over by all the previous generations.

The modern period started at the beginning of '900 and made the art of weaving shown high again. As subject, weaving had an important role in the path to the recovery of *maori's* tradition and suddenly turned itself into a voice claiming back native identity along with the art of tattoos and political struggles.

Despite the effects of colonialism, the art and its secrets were still pulled over by women but in the '50 the crisis hit the sector and if crucial steps wouldn't have been made, tradition may have been gone. The *Maori Welfare League* helped relieving the hard time by organizing an association of women who would have thought to young girls all the different techniques and explore innovations.

The group then became the “Te Roopu Raranga o Aotearoa” which means “the New Zealand weaving group” that gathers twice per year to exchange new tips and share experiences (Harrison, Te Kanawa, Higgings, 2004, 128).

Today, the transmission of traditional techniques is quite spread in New Zealand and *marae*, campus and universalities hold classes on *raranga*, weaving.

Weaving, along with tattoos and sculpture is part of the identity on which the fashion industry could focus as a new way of expression for young artists.

Contemporary weavers carry a luggage of new experiences that keep alive the act of giving, the first native expression in the global scenario.

Women working as weavers of taonga and the market

Women employed in the weaving sector negotiate the value to be attributed to the art craft according to the tradition and the actual retail price.

³ With the abbreviated expression "art biz" I refers to fact that the art market has become a business today, a way to make money.

As emerged from the qualitative research⁴ I conducted in New Zealand in 2005 with the pursuit of interviewing those women to closely examine their work, emerged important details on the relationship between gift, market economy and weaving.

The women that I interviewed belonged to three different groups of weaving: the first is a free-course held at the Orongamae Marae of Upper Hutt, the second group comes from the campus of the Te Wananga o Aotearoa University of Porirua and the last one is a group of women from the Ngati O' Raukawa University.

From the interviews it emerged a clear awareness of the change occurring in the trading sector in which is a must to be active in order to survive and being an important part of the work force. Furthermore, weaving is seen as a way to keep on hold the roots of the family and to highlight *maori's* identity. For example, this is what Ana, a 26 years old girl from Te Wananga o Aotearoa university said during one of our meetings on the matter:

“the first reason because I ‘m learning to weave it’s about the *tikanga*, it’s important to respect the protocols, you know *tikanga* is about the protocols at the marae how do you have to behave in the *wharehau*, it’s about speaking the maori language...and So I start to study the protocols and for me was important to start weaving. It makes me happy, I still enjoy that. Weaving it’s a way to keep the tradition”.

Weavers place their art crafts on the market through different media: souvenir shops, art galleries or private collection and museums.

Joan, a weaver from Ngati Raukawa University spoke on the sale of *taonga* noting that times are changed and that weavers and their art have been inevitably part of such evolution:

“If we go back in the old times, we don’t find these kinds of things, because the *taonga* used to be gifted or they were part of the exchange, but the days and world evolve, the times changed and the people and weaving too, so I accepted”

A way to face changes is to merge with the new economical system that rules the sale of *taonga*.

Weaving becomes an economical source (in all its meanings) that doesn't put forward the financial weight it has on the single but it is seen as a way to keep the traditional habits alive. Again, Joan explains me that the secret of weaving is to help the native tradition to live:

“The meaning of weaving it’s to keep it alive. Because... a lot of weaving done today it’s really contemporary, we don’t have a lot of people who do traditional, my work is doing traditional weaving, what I do is to catch the tradition outside the things. So it’s to keep the tradition alive, or we can lose forever”

Another matter which may strike with what stated so far, is that despite the two trading systems merged, women became aware of how *taonga* lost the spiritual symbolism. Hine Winiata, both partner and student at the Ngati O'Raukawa University, spoke about the difference between the act of giving and the in-shop sales:

“There is a huge difference, because when you sell a part of it gone to the piece and you don’t know if someone can appreciate it. My pieces for my families, they pass through the generations and you know that they look after them yeah...it’s a huge difference...But a part of me goes in to the process”

In New Zealand there are many stores that sell weaved art crafts mass-produced by the same women, making visible the loss of spirituality in the act of weaving. On this matter, Hine points out that:

⁴ In qualitative research standardized instruments are permitted. In the case of my research I used open-ended questions, interviews, observations, stories.

“I can’t produce a lot, there are people who can make a piece and another one, and then another. I can’t do that because it’s quite personal to me. I can’t produce a piece and after another one, and another that they just look the same. I can’t it’s boring”

As tradition teaches, the weaver always know who the *taonga* is made for but mass-production kills this fundamental principle bringing up tensions then solved according to the demand-response law of the market. Hine speaks about the criteria set out to price art crafts:

“oh it’s really hard especially when you are selling the products to your friends, it’s really hard to put a price because I love more give it then sell it. For a stranger I just put a price on it, when you don’t know the person it’s ok, if you know it’s hard.”

Claire, teacher at Orongomai Marae University, also said to feel uncomfortable when comes to price a craft:

“It takes you a long time to make it, it’s so hard. I’m terrible with that. I used to ask How much do you want to pay for this? I suffer...it’s really hard for us. I don’t know”

Concerning how *taonga* are valued, Joan's point of view is quite interesting:

“if you make two kete just same and you sell one in a very expensive shop they put on it 100 dollars, and you give the other one to a cheaper shop like a two dollar shop, when you just come outside the road and you look at those two, you think which should I buy? I will go probably to the cheaper one because I can’t afford the other, but maybe you don’t pay attention on it, if you loose you buy another one, but if you buy the dear kete you treasure it, because you spend more money on it and you look after it better. Do you know what I mean?”

The words she spoke pointed out that a person who for the first time met the art of weaving, will attribute a price to the craft with a Western eye which inevitably leads to the concept for which the more you spend the more the object is worth. Unless not being economically able to afford it.

On pricing Joan says:

“I still exchange my gifts and I don’t take so much money as what they worth. I look at the person, you know. You have to know that a lot of American and German come here to buy a lot of the maori things and they want to spend more money and buy the dear stuffs, because they think that they have the better quality, they always do that. If I have to do a work for people from overseas I put a higher price because they expect. Do you know what I mean? It’s a western model to value but not mine! People want always buy the expensive things not the cheaper, because they think that they are the real things like a painting, does it make sense?”

Trading is the logic which price a product in a faster and concrete way pairing the global needs and is under this lens that weavers produce following what the customers' needs are: if a buyer is ready to pay a quite amount of money per-piece, the crafter will address the art work to art galleries. Somehow, new strategies are needed to keep up working and to smooth clashes between the two systems.

Women also looks at the time spent and the materials employed for the creation of objects to price their work. Hine for instance, is very careful when comes to choose materials and the time spent working:

“It depends on the material, on the time that I spend to make it, if I use the muka fibre; I have a certain price in my mind. So I pay attention of all these things to put a price. It really depends on the materials”.

The act of giving keeps its value when weaving is employed to create *taonga* addressed to be a gift to a beloved one (either as present for wedding, birthdays and funerals) or as a concrete form of teaching. This concept is for Joan a gift to future generations:

“When we weave we have a protocol, we have the tikanga but today it’s slowly disappeared because we are always in hurry. But when I teach, I always teach in the right way, because every person maybe can teach to another two, so it carries on. So if you’ve got a good tutor you have a good outcomes, you know we talk about not only tikanga but the spiritual side of weaving as well. Never take something for granted, work hard to receive and to take, being humble...a lot of aroha, peace, faith.”

Our chats made clear that weavers agreed to all the different needs the market brought over without loosing their will of pulling over pure values of the traditional art of weaving.

Basically weavers' last word set out whether *taonga* should have been either a gift or a good for the market.

Women in the sector are active players in the reality which was born from the merge of the markets meaning that market changing dynamically despite modern trading values.

Weavers keep looking at the weaving art as a channel to show off their *mana* and consider *taonga* as precious objects reflecting *maori's* people. On this matter, Clair explains her vision of weaving:

“To weave is a taonga for me and for the other people. I enjoy myself, I love my kete and I love to give them away. By weaving you affirm the mana that you have, the prestige. You have the mana but you have to look after the mana of weaving because it has a own mana. The kete are just like us, they born and they dye, it’s a cycle when they are old they come back to the bush”

The co-existence of two different economical system made women highly skilled with new managerial abilities applied to smooth and constantly stimulate tradition with fluid⁵ trading processes where the gift is a floating concept⁶.

⁵ The term fluid upon is used to underline the complex socio-cultural reality in which weavers are located in New Zealand today. The theme of the fluid can be examined in anthropology by Post Colonial Studies, for example in Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivack.

⁶ About the “floating concept” i need to explain that the gift today can be interpreted as a concept in which its original meaning shifts in a spin glocal dimension, in which the elements belonging to the local values are connected with the global reality (Canevacci 1999: 171). A different study on the floating concept is made by Zygmunt Baumann.

Conclusions

"Intervening in a interconnected world, one is always, to varying degrees inauthentic: caught between cultures, implicated in others"

James Clifford 1988 pg11

With this essay I wanted to explore the reality around the act of giving and the role *taonga* played among *maori* community before Colonialism. I looked at the changes these objects went through after Europeans arrived and I examined how the industry of weaving brought to life a new conceptual frame around the main picture where *taonga* wear contemporary clothes.

I would like to end my work by supporting the idea that the art of weaving and the value of *taonga* represent a "point-of-contact" among the global reality.

In his vision where museums are a point-of-contact, James Clifford states that private collections displayed in museums become a kind of manifesto of the current political, historical and moral condition (Clifford, 1999, 238).

The art of weaving in the contemporary world represents the space where is still alive a political, historical and moral chapter focused on the post-colonial Western trade system together with its rules and, on the other side, the meaning of *taonga*. Weaving shows the hybrid soul of *maori's* culture as result of strategies out in place to survive. Furthermore, in a vision where *taonga* and weaving are seen as point-of-contact, *maori's* contemporary culture is the answer to an era of oppression and struggle in which women of the weaving sector, are the main characters.

Today weavers can choose whether being artists and "make art" or "make money". One doesn't exclude the other.

Weavers defend the treasure of the gift traditional value and at the same time, they are trader of themselves as they are free to accept or reject the trading rules. Plus, is thank to such conflict that the creation of a new dimension ruled only by women's voices was possible as they supervise the borderline where the concept of *taonga* as gift, or as good, lays.

The process of pricing an hand-craft according to its final destination, is the result of a cultural choice and of an historical and political growth that took place where global and native merge.

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