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He tamaiti nā Tangaroa, He Ahuahu o Mataora (A child of Tangaroa, a journey by Mataora): Documenting Puhoro is a video documentary that revises pūrākau (Māori narrative, story-telling) to express pre-colonial cultural ceremonies, experiences, and tradition relating to a distinctive form of Māori documentary making. As a practice-led research project it asks: How might a filmmaker approach the recording of a traditional puhoro (Māori thigh tattoo) by drawing on traditional pūrākau?

The thesis seeks to reclaim, document, and preserve a traditional Māori tattoo art form, that while being connected to whakapapa (genealogy), whenua (land) and moana (ocean), is also a mark of honour in traditional Polynesian society.

Paradigmatically framed as Kaupapa Māori research, the study reflects on two issues. First, it considers the deeply embodied and culturally significant journey of the researcher's receiving of a puhoro through traditional methods. In reflecting on this rite of passage the project honours the Māori traditions and the stories that are woven into the ritual and practice. Second, the study artistically explores the nature of pūrākau methodology as a determinant in how contemporary documentary making might approach the recording and presentation of an indigenous narrative.

The significance of the research project lies in its dual focus.

Firstly, it offers a documented account of the reclamation of the Māori traditional practice of the puhoro as an intrinsic aspect of the traditional tā moko. This includes the revitalisation of tohi rituals (dedication to the gods) and karakia tawhito (pre-colonial chants and incantations).

Secondly, it reinterprets pūrākau as a culturally anchored form of inquiry and documentation. By adopting features of pūrākau (as practice), the study contributes to the expansion of discourse surrounding distinctive approaches to Māori filmmaking (Barclay, 2005; Mita, 2000; Williams, 2024).

Keywords

Indigenous filmmaking; Tā Moko; Puhoro; Wairua; Pūrākau

References

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