

The Archive is a tapu space. The recordings are tapu. They are alive.

They're embedded with knowledge of self, voiced by our ancestors.

But they need people to activate them and the knowledge they hold. Without people they remain cryogenically frozen in time.

We can keep our ancestors warm by bringing them out from the vaults and into the present.

~

Mum has been helping me catalogue the Tongan collection. I upload the songs to Google Drive and she checks my metadata, fixing the transcriptions where my language isn't the best.

She enjoys listening to the songs, especially the ones composed by Queen Sālote.

I've been thinking of a way to document this, but there isn't a field for it. I worry that her labour will be forgotten over time, like many others who have contributed in the past.

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Digital spaces are inherently noa.

In the Tongan language, noa is an adjective meaning common, ordinary, of no particular kind. This is similar to the definition of noa in te reo Māori.

Digital spaces don't discriminate, unless we program them to.

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For the last 50 years these taonga have found a home in this building. But there is no longer any space for them on campus.

This year we're being forced to move the archive offsite, into a storage facility called Iron Mountain. We will barcode each of the 26,000 objects before they move.

Once they go we won't see them again, in their entirety. A truck will deliver them to us in fragments, one or two crates at a time.

I think of our ancestors alone, together in that cold warehouse.

Tracks:

'Matangi Ake' performed by Mā'imoa 'a Talivulangi 'a Princess Pilolevu led by Motu'apuaka of Te'ekiu on 22 June 1973 in Te'ekiu, Tongatapu, Tonga. Accession no. ampm-17001-506-su03-pm.

Vakamalolo performed by Vua ni Bau group on 22 June 1977 in Nasaqalau, Lau, Fiji. Accession no. 77/065.05.

Vakamalolo performed by Vua ni Bau group on 22 June 1977 in Nasaqalau, Lau, Fiji. Accession no. 77/066.01.