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## **Presentation and self-presentation of New Zealand Maori**

*Inspired by a fieldwork exercise in New Plymouth, Taranaki, August/September 2003*

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## 1. Introduction

In August/September of 2003 I spent six weeks in New Plymouth -- capital of the Taranaki province in New Zealand -- to meet the requirement of a fieldwork exercise for my Social Anthropology major at the university of Basel, Switzerland. The idea behind this requirement is that at least once during our studies, we see what it is like to gather our own information -- directly from the source -- instead of learning it from books and scientific journals.

The decision to go to New Zealand and work with Maori had been made after learning that my friend Denise<sup>1</sup> worked for the town office of the two closely affiliated *hapu*<sup>2</sup> of *Nga Mahanga* and *Ngati Tairi*. I had met her and her partner when traveling in the United States in 1999 and had stayed in touch over the years, always planning to go and visit New Zealand one day. When I told her about my interest in the Maori I was met with great enthusiasm -- and with her promise of a possibility to interview several *kuia* (old ladies, matrons) and attend one or two school camps where Maori children were taught some fundamental knowledge about Maori culture.

At first I planned to conduct narrative interviews, supported by participant observation, over a duration of four weeks, on the topic of the organization of knowledge about Maori identity, both from a layman's (the *kuia*) and expert's (the school teachers) perspective. But the first thing I learned about field work was that things often do not go quite as planned -- and I had to shift my focus away from this very specific question to the much broader topic of presentation and self-presentation of Maori in modern New Zealand society. I describe this process briefly in the second chapter of this paper.

I found it very interesting to note the different ways in which Maori present themselves on one hand and how they and their culture are presented on the other, especially towards outsiders -- be they *Pakeha*<sup>3</sup> or visitors from abroad like myself. In the third chapter, I'm using two museums I visited as examples for the first case -- one in *Puke Ariki*, the museum of New Plymouth, and one in *Te Papa Tongarewa*, the museum of New Zealand in Wellington<sup>4</sup>. Some examples for the self-presentation by Maori will be my impressions from a visit

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<sup>1</sup> Only first names will be used for the people I met and worked with.

<sup>2</sup> *Hapu*: sub-tribe, clan -- the bigger unit is *iwi* (tribe). All Maori words and expressions used in this paper are translated in Appendix 7.1.

<sup>3</sup> *Pakeha* in a general sense means 'non-Maori', but it is often used specifically for white New Zealanders and has become a part of New Zealand English.

<sup>4</sup> Translations of Maori place names used in the paper can be found in Appendix 7.1.2.

to the *Whakarewarewa* Thermal Valley<sup>5</sup> in Rotorua and my experiences with Maori in New Plymouth and Oakura and Puniho *pa*<sup>6</sup> in the area.

During the six weeks I stayed with Denise and her family, I spent some time in the office, met several of the *kaumatua*<sup>7</sup> (both in New Plymouth and at Puniho *pa*) and attended a camp for young men organized by Taranaki Sports (on the *marae*<sup>8</sup> of Oakura *pa*). These were not the experiences I had planned in advance, but I gained some interesting insights into Maori culture, met some very nice people and learned a lot about the unexpected turns fieldwork can take.

In addition to the information and ideas gained in New Zealand I have also tried to put them into a more theoretical framework -- using literature found when I was back in Basel, mainly using Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "Destination Culture" (1998). The results of this reading form the content of the fourth chapter.

My stay in New Zealand -- and this paper -- could not have happened without the help of Denise and the other people I met through *A Kotahitanga Nga Mahanga A Tairi* (the office Denise worked in) and elsewhere in New Zealand. Thank you for everything -- I hope you approve of the results.

## 2. The fieldwork experience

New Plymouth is the capital of the New Zealand province Taranaki and has about 40'000 inhabitants<sup>9</sup>. The landscape is dominated by Mount Taranaki -- which plays an important role in the stories of local Maori, especially the Nga Mahanga *hapu*. They are closely affiliated with *Ngati Tairi*, the *hapu* that is native to New Plymouth and Oakura *pa*.

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<sup>5</sup> The full name of the village is 'Te Whakarewarewatanga O Te Ope Taua A Wahiao', translated in Appendix 7.1.2.

<sup>6</sup> A *pa* is a fortified Maori village, the traditional center of any *hapu*.

<sup>7</sup> The *kaumatua* are the elders of a *hapu*. In New Plymouth the expression was used for all older members of both *hapu*, both men and women.

<sup>8</sup> The *marae* is the meeting place, the focal point of any Maori group. Strictly speaking the expression means only the courtyard in front of the meeting house (*wharenuī*), but it is generally used to describe the whole sacred area. On the *marae* special rules and guidelines apply.

<sup>9</sup> A map of the area can be found in Appendix 7.2.

With approximately ten percent Taranaki does not have a big Maori population if compared to other areas of the North Island, but it has a long history of conflict between Maori and Pakeha. I chose to go there primarily because of my contact with Denise -- who is a Maori affiliated with the *Nga Puhi* and *Tuhoe* tribes, which are based near Auckland -- but who worked in New Plymouth in the communal office of *Nga Mahanga* and *Ngati Tairi* for quite a long time. The office was founded to offer support to members of both *hapu* and make communication with government organizations easier. During my time there I also made a couple of excursions, to the tourist *marae* of *Whakarewarewa* Thermal Reserve in Rotorua and to the *Te Papa Tongarewa* museum in Wellington.

After some preparation in Basel, I spent six (rather than the planned four) weeks in New Zealand, living with Denise and her family and trying to obtain some insights into what laymen and experts see as important factors of Maori identity. The main lesson of my foray into anthropological fieldwork was that nothing turns out quite as planned -- but also that one can gather a lot of knowledge by paying attention.

## 2.1 Preparation

In preparation of my fieldwork exercise I visited a methodology class offered by the Sociology department. I also read some theoretical works on both sociological and anthropological methods and fieldwork, namely Friedrichs' "Methoden empirischer Sozialforschung" (1990), Beer's "Methoden und Techniken der Feldforschung" (2003), and Fischer's "Feldforschungen" (2002). I quickly realized I wanted to approach my research qualitatively, as there clearly would not be time to gather quantitative data. In any case, I was more interested in learning about people's experiences and subjective opinions than in trying to form an 'objective' view ( even if that were possible).

I decided to use a mix of unstructured (problem-centered) and half-structured interviews, using a list of questions as guidelines<sup>10</sup> for my main method, supporting the data collected with participant observation at the camps (and any other occasion that might occur). I also read Schütz's "Strukturen der

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<sup>10</sup> see Appendix 7.3

Lebenswelt"<sup>11</sup> (1979) to gain some insights into how one sees the world, how one acts in it and how one is influenced by it.

While I was still in Switzerland I began to keep an online journal where I wrote about my preparation before -- and my observations and thoughts during -- the fieldwork. In addition to this diary, I planned to add any head and scratch notes<sup>12</sup>, as well as transcripts of the interview tapes.

Another part of my preparation was to familiarize myself with the history, organization and present situation of the Maori in New Zealand, by attending a class on Polynesia -- and by reading several books and articles as well as some works about Maori language. I won't go into these details in this paper except where Maori concepts played a part in my research (as that would be beyond the framework of this paper).

## 2.2 Problems

I had planned to spend four weeks in New Plymouth during August and September 2003, conducting perhaps four interviews and attending at least one school camp and a camp for boys (who had been sentenced to attend courses at Sport Taranaki by a youth court) by Sport Taranaki.

I was welcomed by my friend Denise and accompanied her to her workplace at the office of *Te Kotahitanga Nga Mahanga A Tairi Soc. Inc.* -- where I met some of the people who were to help me considerably in the following weeks. Jane (who is in charge of the *marae* camps) was sick, so the first camp for young men (planned for the next weekend) had to be cancelled. Faye told me that the *kuia* wanted to meet me as a group first, before committing to any interviews. Their desire to get to know me and my plans before talking to me was understandable -- but the next *Kaumatu*a meeting was not scheduled to be held for another two weeks. I had barely arrived and my plans had already been pushed back. It became clear that four weeks would not be enough time.

Problems like this appeared all the time -- in addition to cultural differences like my impatience with 'Maori time', which is much more flexible than my

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<sup>11</sup> The English title is „Structures of the Life-World“.

<sup>12</sup> Head notes are „memory diaries“, done after interviews and events. Scratch notes, on the other hand, are jotted down during the event.

Swiss sense of punctuality. Two other camps had to be cancelled or delayed, so in the end I could only attend the Sport Taranaki camp at Oakura *pa*. The *kaumatua* were very friendly, but reluctant to talk to me. This was mainly because specific knowledge is a 'Maori thing' (as Denise put it) -- and not necessarily the business of a non-Maori, non-hapu member. The history of the different *iwi* and *hapu* is still passed on orally for the most part, so what someone tells outsiders has to be carefully weighed. Eventually a portion of the *kaumatua* group formally invited me onto Puniho *pa*. They told me some of their stories and talked about what life was like when they were young. However, only one of them -- Auntie<sup>13</sup> Ewai -- agreed to a one-on-one interview.

I had to accept that I would not be able to gather the kind of information I had come for. In addition, my use of electronic devices seemed jinxed. Whenever I used a tape recorder or video camera (to record interviews or events), something always seemed to go wrong. I ended up having to rely on my memories and head notes -- without the help of transcripts. This was interesting as it meant that I was basically following the Maori oral tradition.

Despite all difficulties I learned many interesting things about the Maori, their lives, their history and the problems they still face today -- some of which I will address in this paper.

### **3. Presentation and self-presentation**

In retrospect there seem to be two kinds of experiences with Maori people and Maori culture. On the one hand there was information which had been collected and presented mostly by non-Maori -- and on the other hand there was what could be learned from Maori themselves (either in personal meetings or directed at the general, mostly non-Maori, public). From all experiences I made, I chose to compare two museum exhibitions about Maori culture (which left quite varied impressions), and three very distinct (and varying) meetings with Maori.

This paper can not hope to be an account of the 'true' *Maoritanga* (an expression for Maori culture, the Maori way of life, which is experienced

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<sup>13</sup> 'Auntie' is a honorary term used for members of the older generation.

differently by every Maori), it can give some insight into different aspects of how Maori people -- and Maori culture -- can be presented to outsiders (like myself).

### **3.1 At the museum**

One obvious place to start learning about another culture is at the museum -- with exhibitions geared toward educating the public about history and present of a people. What is surprising is how apparently dry facts can be shown in very different ways. This struck me from the start after visiting the *Puke Ariki* museum in New Plymouth (with its exhibition on local and New Zealand Maori), when several things didn't seem to fit with what I had already read and heard. A later visit to the *Te Papa Tongarewa* museum in Wellington left me with a very different impression -- and the realization that the main difference between these museums is how the people depicted were involved in the way their culture and history is presented.

#### **3.1.1 *Puke Ariki*, New Plymouth**

The *Puke Ariki* in New Plymouth is a very modern museum which had been reopened shortly before my arrival. The Maori section begins with a recording of a Maori chant, then goes on to display the history of the Maori -- from their arrival in *Aotearoa* ('land of the long white cloud', the Maori name for New Zealand) to the conflicts with the Pakeha -- as well as including some basic facts about their social organization and culture.

There were various mediums of presentation, which included tables with graphics and written information in both Maori and English as well as cultural artifacts, such as a life-size *waka* ('canoe') or carved wood stele and miniature models. To the layman it seemed like a comprehensive overview of Maori history and culture, done by experts. Yet it brought up several questions about the way the Maori were portrayed, starting with the names of the local *iwi*, which were reduced to a single one: Taranaki. All in all there was an impression of one nearly monolithical, completely documented, Maori people.

Considering the oral history still very much alive among the Maori, this idea must be dismissed outright. Every *iwi* -- every *hapu*, every *whanau* ('extended family') -- has their own oral tradition. This includes their own stories -- their



own truths -- that are handed down through history from person to person. The question of the 'true (hi)story' is obviously still a difficult subject, because there is a clear conflict in the way the two cultures -- Western and Maori -- function.

Our white (Western) culture puts great value in written facts. In opposition to this, more basic facts -- such as family histories or legends -- are sacred to the Maori. There is no such thing as one 'Maori history' -- and for many Maori it is simply not clear why they should share their sacred tribal knowledge about artifacts, legends, genealogy and history with us Westerners.

The *Puke Ariki* exhibition tried to represent the local Maori, but in doing so mixed up different tribal traditions and even the fact that Taranaki is home to not just one, but two, *iwi*. For government administration purposes they have been treated as one -- and this has now become a museum fact, hard for outsiders to recognize as untrue.

The problem of communication between the Pakeha museum curators and the local *hapu* can be illustrated with an example from the creation of the exhibition (as told to me by my host Denise after my visit to the museum): At first the curators wanted to put an artifact from *Nga Mahanga hapu* on display -- but the *kuia* refused to tell them the story connected to the object, because it was sacred. Then the museum responded by asking someone from another tribe to tell them their story -- even though the artifact in question belonged to *Nga Mahanga*. After learning this the *kuia* retracted their permission to display the object.

This shows how fraught with difficulties the relationship between Pakeha and Maori can be -- even when it comes to something as 'simple' as history. In our society (and until about thirty years ago even in Cultural Anthropology) we still think of history as something straightforward -- composed of hard facts and truths. The Maori have always seen history as a changing entity, different for everyone. Their caution in dealing with Pakeha scientists and researchers is therefore easily understood. Without such caution they run the risk that one story -- told by one person belonging to one group -- can become the ultimate 'truth', at least where outsiders are concerned. This was a recurring theme during my stay in New Zealand.

### 3.1.2 *Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington*

The other museum I visited during my fieldwork exercise was *Te Papa Tongarewa* -- the Museum of New Zealand, in Wellington<sup>14</sup>. Once again this museum is a very modern building built especially for holding a wide diversity of exhibitions -- one of these a large section about the Maori population of New Zealand. There is even a modern-day *marae* and *wharenuī*, called *Te Hono ki Hawaiki* ('the link back to Hawaiki'<sup>15</sup>), created by Maori artists for all visitors, Maori and Pakeha alike.

Visitors enter through the *marae*, where they are asked to help polish a big greenstone<sup>16</sup> together, connecting them to the location and to everyone who touches the stone. In addition, there are several other traditional museum exhibits about Maori history and culture, as well as a rotating section devoted to one *iwi* at a time<sup>17</sup>. Again panels with graphics and texts -- as well as physical artifacts (including a traditional carved *wharenuī*) -- are used to illustrate the information provided. However, in place of presenting the information solely devised by Western 'experts', I often noticed texts that had been composed by Maori. These were designed to enhance -- or even entirely replace -- the work offered by scientists. Further, these were always credited to the *iwi* and *hapu* they came from, making it clear that a different *iwi* might have a different explanation or story about an artifact.

Thus the entire museum uses a very different approach in displaying Maori history and culture -- and how they are perceived by the visitor. Here the Maori whose stories are depicted have a choice in determining the information they want shared with outsiders.

As far as one can tell from observing these displays and exhibits, the museum curators don't appear to be attempting to impose a Western perspective on the explanations provided by different Maori. For the most part they leave them uncommented, allowing them to speak for themselves. This is especially true in the rotating exhibition, which is completely organized by members of the *iwi* on display.

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<sup>14</sup> A photo of the museum can be found in Appendix 7.4.1.

<sup>15</sup> „Hawaiki is the name of the ancestral land of origin - so Hawaiki is a concept that links all people who come to New Zealand”, as it says in a brochure about the exhibition. Normally *wharenuī* are called after a renowned ancestor.

<sup>16</sup> Greenstone is another word for jade and is more widely used in New Zealand.

<sup>17</sup> When I was there it was *Tuhoe iwi* who presented themselves, their history and *whakapapa* (genealogy).

At the same time there is an awareness of the difficulty of putting the Maori on display -- of the danger of disassociating the modern-day realities of Maori lives from what is perceived as 'typically Maori' by society -- and of commercializing these cultural traits (which comprise only a small part of what it means to be Maori -- and which often are the only things visitors see).

Yet these exact things -- the art, the history, the legends, the dances and songs -- have become a source of income for many Maori, enabling them to improve their present by using their past. This issue is addressed in part in the next chapter.

## **3.2 Meeting Maori**

A good way of getting to know people is by observing how they behave, both toward each other and toward outsiders. My encounters with Maori showed them to be very friendly people -- always ready for a chat, but also somewhat wary of strangers. Their 'Maoriness' seemed at times to be a shield -- protecting them against outside interference. This attitude -- used consciously or not -- is understandable when we consider the long history of Pakeha interference with Maori -- either designed to control them and their resources or to ostensibly help them (often with equally negative results).

Despite this, the Maori that I met were friendly and helpful. They were happy to talk to me about their history and their day-to-day lives, presenting me with several perspectives on what it means to be Maori. My host Denise was my key informant, as she knew many facts -- even though she still was an outsider (since she is not related to any of the *hapu* located in New Plymouth, as I mentioned in the introduction).

### **3.2.1 'Plastic Maori' in Rotorua**

The thermal valley of *Te Whakarewarewa* is the oldest one in Rotorua -- part in a long tradition where Maori guides show the beauty of the hot springs and geysirs to visitors. It belongs to the local *iwi* and combines natural attractions (including a kiwi house with a reversed day-night cycle) with the appeal of Maori culture presented by a *marae* and *Te Aronui a Rua wharenuī*<sup>18</sup> (where 'Maori shows' are held several times a day), a reconstructed village from

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<sup>18</sup> Photo in Appendix 7.4.2.

precolonial times and a small museum. All of this finances *Te Wananga Whakairo* (a carving school), which teaches Maori men<sup>19</sup> from all over New Zealand the traditional art of carving in wood and stone (especially greenstone) -- and enables quite a number of local Maori to earn their livelihood through tourism.

The 'Maori shows' (on the beautiful *marae* -- featuring carvings done by the carvers from the school) are replica of the *powhiri* (the traditional greeting and challenge ritual that every visitor to a *marae* anywhere in New Zealand still has to go through), with about ten costumed young Maori singing, dancing and performing<sup>20</sup>. They also tell visitors some rudimentary facts about Maori history and culture, basically presenting a 'picture-book' version of what it means to be Maori. In the evenings there is the option to attend a *hangi* (traditional feast with food baked in an earth oven) and full-scale Maori concert. It's a very 'tourist-like' way to learn about the Maori, but appealing in its color and richness -- and since it is presented and organized completely by local Maori, it feels like a legitimate form of expression.

In New Plymouth I had the chance to interview Tony (who worked at the Maori office in New Plymouth but originally came from Rotorua) shortly after my visit to *Whakarewarewa*. He told me that the Maori who perform there call themselves 'plastic Maori', which seems quite accurate considering the exact choreography and artificiality of the shows -- but at the same time it expresses their detachment and amusement at the shows they put on for the tourists.

I also asked the guide who led the tour through the reserve about how he had come to earn his money basically by being Maori. He explained that he ended up in Whakarewarewa more or less by chance, but that he had always been interested in his heritage and learned a great deal by observing what his elders were doing. He was not able to learn from his parents, as they had grown up in the period during which speaking *te reo* ('Maori language') had been forbidden. He was probably the first person I talked to who mentioned that sense of loss -- even though he (along with many others I spoke to later) understands that they didn't have a choice in the context of New Zealand society during that period. Assimilation into Western culture was the only

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<sup>19</sup> Only men are taught in the carving school, as women are traditionally banned from carving. For women there's a weaving school on the grounds of the reserve. The apprentices are taught the traditional forms, which differ from area to area and whose meanings are only known exactly to the carver. They are also taught the use of modern instruments and return to their own iwi after three years to teach others.

<sup>20</sup> Photo in Appendix 7.4.3.

option then -- and many modern Maori consider themselves lucky to be able to explore and express their heritage today.

The existence of *Whakarewarewa* in itself illustrates that current Maori are no longer required to suppress their culture, but can now be proud of it. At the same time, there appears to be a danger that their culture will be taken from them -- by being commercialized and displayed like a museum artifact, rather than as an ever changing, living entity. Here the focus must be on how much control Maori have over the aspects they want to reveal to outsiders -- and how they reveal them. Doubts about whether this is legitimate or genuine are irrelevant, as these people are not selling -- or selling out -- Maori culture. Rather, they make a conscious decision to cater to the existing public image and accordingly are able to earn money and respect -- without giving up their true whakapapa.

### **3.2.2 Kaumatua in New Plymouth**

The first time I met the elders of *Nga Mahanga* and *Ngati Tairi* was when Faye (who works for *Te Kotahitanga Nga Mahanga A Tairi*) introduced me to them at one of their meetings. They had insisted on meeting me as a group prior to having anything else happen. It was quite daunting to be measured by a circle of impressive older women and men and explaining why I had come all the way from Switzerland to learn about them. It was clear they were being quite careful about what they were telling me, wanting to make sure that everyone could agree on what was shared with this particular outsider.

Though they were not ready for the interviews I had been hoping to begin, they were happy to invite me onto Puniho *pa* and show me around -- and speak to me as a group. A handful of them<sup>21</sup> showed up and conducted a small *powhiri* for my benefit. The *kuia* who had the highest standing was sick, so they hesitated to tell me their stories. But Hone -- the only man in the group that day -- was the keeper of the story of the Rauhoto stone<sup>22</sup> (which is guarded by *Nga Mahanga*) and told it to me. The story differed considerably from one I had read before in Waswo (1999). This struck me as curious, since the book had been published by a local Pakeha. If someone from the area did not know (or care), about the different *hapu* and *iwi*, it was not surprising that the *kaumatua* were careful.

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<sup>21</sup> A photo of the group in front of *Meremere wharenui* can be found in Appendix 7.4.5.

<sup>22</sup> Photo of the stone in Appendix 7.4.4.

All *kaumatua* I met -- whether at the *pa* or at the *Kaumatua* meeting of the Maori health organization I was invited to later -- were quite happy to talk to me about what life was like when they were young. Some of them grew up on the *marae* -- where currently only one family lives as caretakers -- and at least one of them was a fluent speaker of *te reo*. When talking among themselves they often switched back and forth between English and Maori with ease. These people were obviously very comfortable with their cultural identity and their peers, despite having grown up in two very different worlds -- the world of the *marae* and the world of the English schools (where they were beaten for speaking *te reo*). Yet in spite of this, there seemed to be no resentment on their parts -- only acceptance and appreciation that today their grandchildren can choose for themselves which culture they prefer.

The choice whether young people want to learn anything about their Maori heritage is left completely up to them -- even if that means that knowledge is lost as the *kaumatua* who possess it age and pass away. This sentiment was also expressed in my interview with Auntie Ewai (who agreed to meet me after Puniho *pa*). Talking to her proved very interesting, as she was happy to talk to me about her life.

Auntie Ewai was born 1935 and grew up on the *marae*, after being adopted by relatives who didn't have children of their own (a common practice among Maori). She learned English in school and was beaten when she fell back in *te reo* still widely used on the *marae*. After school she moved to Wellington, where she lost her ability to speak Maori, until she returned to Taranaki, where at least two of the *kuia* are fluent speakers. Now she is part of the *kaumatua* group -- and when Auntie Ivy and Auntie Doreen are gone, she will be the oldest of the *kuia* that still grew up on the *marae*.

She taught her children about life on the *marae*, but, since she herself married a man from another *iwi* and lived as a housewife in the city for most of her life, she leaves it up to them how they live their lives and what they teach their children. When she was young, she had to use her eyes and ears to learn and her hands to do it, without asking questions. Therefore a lot of knowledge has been lost and will continue being lost, when none of the young people take the trouble of learning from the *kuia*. Yet she does not push her children and grandchildren to learn the old knowledge, instead she is glad that prejudice has lessened and that her grandchildren (who are half-Maori) can freely choose between two ways of life, a choice she didn't have.

Auntie Ewai has ties both to her mother's *pa* (Puniho) and her father's (Parihaka). Her family is spread out over New Zealand and even Australia, but

they are still connected and see each other regularly. They only leave the area because there are no job opportunities in New Plymouth, and most of them come back for big festivities on the *marae*. And the ones in Australia were told to come back should they get sick -- to be "buried in their own dirt".

So the old times -- with their simpler, harder, but less complicated life -- are missed and fondly remembered. But change -- whether good or bad -- is accepted and embraced as natural part of life. This perspective seems to be shared by all the *kaumatua*. Interestingly, the sentiment is not shared by those members of the younger generation who work with and for the Maori community. Instead they are afraid that traditional knowledge in this still largely oral society will be lost to the young people if it is not actively handed on to them. This perspective was very evident at the youth camp.

### **3.2.3 Youth camp at Oakura pa**

In my last week in New Plymouth I was invited to attend a camp on Oakura pa<sup>23</sup> (the *marae* of *Ngati Tairi*) by Jan from *Te Kotahinga Nga Mahanga A Tairi*. I also met Kyle and Muz from Sport Taranaki, who organized the camp with a handful of Maori boys who had been suspended from school<sup>24</sup>. Their concept is to combine group sport with Maori culture and teach the boys about their heritage in a playful way.

They see that a lot of young Maori face many difficulties in the overcrowded schools -- and in their daily lives with literacy problems, alcoholism, violence and drugs. The family system -- which has always been very important for Maori -- is also beginning to fall apart. The Maori teachers want to create a counterpoint to these negative influences. I was impressed by the passion the people I met on the *pa* displayed -- how much they want to help improve their youth to improve their situations and to be proud of who they are.

Their efforts seem remarkably effective -- at least on the small scale of the *marae* camp. During the camp another group from Sport Taranaki came by which consisted mostly of Pakeha. The members of this group behaved quite differently from the Maori boys. The discipline Kyle and Muz enforced -- in combination with fun and time to relax -- seemed to suit their charges well. They obviously enjoyed the traditional games and fights with the short stick

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<sup>23</sup> A photo of the pa is in Appendix 7.4.6.

<sup>24</sup> A photo of the group can be found in Appendix 7.4.7.

and learning about Maori culture. The other group, however, refused to cooperate.

We ate in the *wharekai* ('dining room', a separate house from the *wharenuui*) and spent the night in the *wharenuui*, which is tradition during all *marae* events (with everyone helping out wherever necessary). One day there was a traditional *hangi* to which the boys' family were invited, with lots of food, singing and laughter – it made me feel as if I was a part of something profoundly Maori for the first time. The boys performed a traditional Maori prayer as a rap and so presented themselves to their visiting families. They did not just repeat a learned song but made it their own, showing pride in their heritage and their whanau. It clearly showed the stabilizing effect of feeling part of something bigger and the importance of what teachers like Jan, Kyle and Muz are trying to do.

Such educators don't want to wait until the young people ask for it -- they want to offer them their roots and their culture in order to help them deal with the present in a predominantly Western world. In that their attitude is very different to that of either *Whakarewarewa* or the *kaumatua*. The Maori shows describe to outsiders what and who the Maori are, while the older generation does not see being Maori as something that can or should be described, but as something that just is – the focus of their identity. The teachers I met seem to use aspects of both perspectives, by teaching the young people the importance of their heritage – making it a part of their lives. In their different contexts all attitudes appear equally valid and show again that there is not only one truth.

#### **4. Theoretical framework**

In this chapter I will attempt to add some theoretical background to the ideas and impressions formulated in chapter 3, with the focus on displayed culture (such as that in the museums and live exhibitions like *Whakarewarewa*) -- and on the relations between culture and identity. For the former, I'm relying on Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's excellent book "Destination Culture" (1998), which uses New Zealand as one of the examples -- and for the latter on Fitzgerald's "Education and Identity" (1977), one of the first works on Maori identity in the late 1960s – plus some articles from Linnekin and Poyer's collection "Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific" (1990).



## 4.1 Displaying culture

It has always been the profession of anthropologists and ethnographers to report about cultures different from ours -- in writing, with visuals and artifacts. It has also been their aim to understand and explain those cultures to a predominantly Western public. This gives them a special standing and prestige in our society. They are detectives, "who toil[...] long and hard to decipher material clues" which no one else can understand the way they do. They play the role of expert mediator between the alien and the familiar, presenting their findings and objects that illustrate them in their opinion. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 33)

This means that the ethnographer's world view and background are bound to play an important role in any displays, although this role is not mentioned in the museums and exhibitions. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 2-3) says: "For this reason, exhibitions, whether of objects or people, display the artifacts of our disciplines. They are also exhibits of those who make them." If that is the case (which the two museums I visited in New Zealand seem to suggest), then there is no such thing as an objective display of culture. Everything we see exhibited has gone through "processes of detachment and contextualization", which turn them into ethnographic objects and alienate them from their original meanings and contexts. This is not just a

...necessary evil. [...] As a space of abstraction exhibitions do for the life world what the life world cannot do for itself. They bring together specimens and artifacts never found in the same place at the same time and show relationships that cannot otherwise be seen. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 2-3)

Both exhibitions I visited in New Zealand displayed an overview of Maori culture and history, showing similarities -- and thus creating a pan-Maori unity that had not existed before the arrival of the Europeans. This far they follow similar goals, but Te Papa also speaks about the different realities of Maori in different places and times. Both exhibitions therefore show something about those that created them -- and about the relationship between museum scientists and the Maori on display.

Culture in its real life form is too big in scope to be experienced in its true scale by anyone who is merely visiting. Things are too far apart -- and are frequently inaccessible to the public. Therefore museums create collections of objects and subjects of interest and display them in small, accessible spaces. To draw visitors to them they often rely on spectacular installations because

they feel that objects in themselves are not interesting enough for today's tourists. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 7)

The growing masses of tourists traveling the world from installation to installation speed up the processes – and this turns objects into ethnography and thus real life into heritage. This poses the question of what is ethically acceptable. But in modern “economy, virtualities, even in the presence of actualities, show what can otherwise not be seen. Tourists travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 8-9).

The appeal of other cultures -- according to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 48) - - lies mainly in the absence of ordinariness in the exotic, because “what they take for granted is not what we take for granted, and the more different we are from each other, the more intense the effect”. This allows visitors and visited alike to see their everyday life from the outside -- in a way that's not normally possible. The easiest way to experience this are festivals and other high-density spectacles (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 59).

Performances (like the ones in *Whakarewarewa*) are vivid and feel more authentic than objects because of the involvement of living people in the display of their own culture. Yet because of their rehearsed and repetitive nature performances, too, can become artifacts. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 64) says, they “take forms that are alien, if not antithetical, to how they are produced and experienced in their local settings”. They turn from life realities -- which are interesting because of their differences to ours -- into exoticism in the framework of “the European hierarchy of artistic expression, while establishing their performances as national heritage” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 65). This means that we do not only turn culture into an artifact, but we also “objectify the human performers” by separating them from their life realities and seeing them only in the context of their performance (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 72). The performers in *Whakarewarewa* (who call themselves “plastic Maori”) show that they are aware of this objectification and accept it. The expression is derogatory -- but whether toward themselves or toward the tourists who think that this is real, is open to interpretation.

The objections made against tourism and the display of culture make sense, especially in New Zealand. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 141) says:

New Zealand tourism projects and imagines landscape that segments the history of the country into three hermetic compartments. The nature story stops with the coming of people. The indigenous story stops with the coming of Europeans. And

the Europeans (and later immigrants) have until recently not been convinced that their story is very interesting.

Yet among Maori there also exists also the opinion that tourism has helped to vitalize traditional forms of expression (like dancing, carving and weaving), giving them new impulses -- while at the same time turning them into icons for outsiders. And although there are many parts of Maori history and culture that are not shown to tourists, this does not necessarily signify a negative, if one considers the importance of tradition inside the *hapu*. Knowledge is often sacred and not meant to be shared with outsiders (such as the meanings of traditional carvings or the *Nga Mahanga* object *Puke Ariki* wanted to display). (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 164)

Therefore this seems to me one of the most important points Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 166) makes:

What matters is not the vividness of a museum experience but the vitality, the survival, of those for whom these objects are *taonga*. That survival depends on intangible cultural property, which lives in performance. It must be performed to be transmitted. This is the source of its life. This is the source of its vividness.

Visiting a museum like *Te Papa* shows that some modern museums have adapted a changed attitude, which mirrors this sentiment. What matters are those whose culture is displayed: "A new generation of museum professionals is proactively addressing the stewardship of cultural property, its presentation and interpretation in museums." (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 165)

Not all of them feel this way, though, as *Puke Ariki* shows at least in part<sup>25</sup>. The problem is that life reality is impossible to experience from the outside. Therefore exhibitions, museums and performances fulfill a necessity in telling a story that cannot otherwise be told (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 168). A museum is still the best place to learn about other life worlds, because it compresses an entire culture into the space of a few rooms.

However, it is impossible for exhibitions to show the full scope of the life world they're displaying. They can therefore only attempt to "reveal something about the nature of what is shown that a visitor would not be able to discover at the sight itself", creating an experience that is at once true to the original and something new -- like the *iwi* exhibition in *Te Papa*, which gives total control to the displayed in what they want to reveal and how. There are always details

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<sup>25</sup> This observation is based on the permanent Maori exhibition. I also visited a temporary exhibition about *Parihaka pa*, which had been done in close co-operation with local Maori and appeared to use a much more participatory approach.

missing -- sometimes even essential ones, such as the existence of a second *iwi* in Taranaki. But if those on display control which details they reveal and leave out, visitors receive at least a glimpse of another life world. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 167)

## 4.2 Culture and identity

As has been shown, indigenous and Western perspectives can differ widely, and these differences can lead to conflicts. My experiences with the *kaumatua* showed a sometimes surprising acceptance of change -- even if it seems to be to the worse (such as the loss of knowledge that is not handed down). Yet thinking back on the action-oriented approach of the teachers I met at the youth camp and elsewhere, one should not generalize unduly. Linnekin and Poyer (1990: 6) formulate both points in the introduction to their book:

[We] venture to propose an Oceanic theory of cultural identity that privileges environment, behavior, and situational flexibility over descent, innate characteristics, and unchanging boundaries. We hasten to qualify that this lofty generalization by noting that the contrast is to some extent a matter of emphasis rather than an either/or distinction.

Even today the image most Pakeha have of Maori is very different from the one Maori tend to have of themselves<sup>26</sup> -- despite having lived in the same country for two hundred years. This shows that often the two societies have lived (and still live) side by side instead of together.

For many, Maori are no longer "real"; they are caught in a netherworld between their illustrious but all too distant past and their immediate, but none too glorious present. Pakeha blindness to the cultural integrity of contemporary Maori makes it much easier for them to pursue policies of discrimination. (Sinclair 1990: 232)

What Linnekin (1990: 157) calls "Maori ethnic categorization" is an inclusive one, with an individual's self-description as the most important factor. This makes sense, because there is hardly a 'full-blooded' Maori left and many Maori don't necessarily look what most Pakeha would consider 'typical'. Integration into Western society was the only way Maori could survive, yet despite this they managed to retain something uniquely Maori.

Similarly, Fitzgerald (1977: 2) sees modern Maori culture as a "cultural hybrid" of indigenous and Western elements. Most Maori move freely between the mainly Western New Zealand society and their own Maori subculture, taking on

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<sup>26</sup> This is of course another over-generalization, because Maori society is just as varied as any other.

different roles in different situations (Fitzgerald 1977: 5-6). Maori culture in this context is much more than what tourists and many Pakeha consider 'traditional' -- they see it as a historic leftover with no real relevance to life realities of Maori today.

The manifest traditionally based culture of the Maori, however [...] is a living culture, that is, it is expressed in the everyday life of the people and grows out of a natural interaction of individuals in group contexts. [...] Such a culture, therefore, consists of the things people do which they regard as 'Maori' customs, regardless of whether these things measure up to the Pakeha conception of the traditional culture, that is, that nineteenth century cultural model provided in anthropological textbooks. (Fitzgerald 1977: 7)

In the two hundred years since the arrival of the Europeans, Maori had to change and adapt in order to ensure their survival, but they always kept certain parts of their lives distinct from Pakeha culture -- especially in the "quality of their interpersonal relationships"<sup>27</sup>, as Sinclair (1990: 219-220) puts it. Yet there are many ways to express one's *Maoritanga*, and disagreements over these ways divide Maori society -- which is already in a marginal position in New Zealand -- and "thereby limit the possibility and effectiveness of concerted action" (Sinclair 1990: 225).

Despite the discord, a pan-Maori identity exists today, which was not there before the Europeans came. According to Fitzgerald (1977: 9), especially for urban Maori (which form the majority of the modern Maori population) this "pan-identification" helps them form a separate identity, even when they're apart from their whanau and hapu. The importance of this has been shown in my encounters with the boys and teachers from the Sport Taranaki camp.

As Fitzgerald says -- and as I also found during my time in New Zealand -- *Maoritanga* is an ever changing process, giving Maori an identity distinct from the main New Zealand society. With the traditional kinship ties weakened and the community of the *marae* almost gone, a sense of belonging helps young Maori to find and strengthen their identity in modern society with all its problems.

It is a sense of belonging to a shared past and a shared future; as such, it is constantly changing - its territorial foundations and its manifest, participational bases. Its essence remains a loosely defined network of social-cultural relationships (and shared sentiments) based on ascribed rather than an achieved identity. One is a Maori by virtue of his kinship ties, real or fictive, regardless of his manifest behaviour. (Fitzgerald 1977: 148)

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<sup>27</sup> Foremost among these aspects of behavioral interaction are obligations of kinship, mechanisms of prestige maintenance, and a growing sense of pan-Maori identity. (Fitzgerald 1977: 8)

## 5. Conclusion

Looking back on the six weeks I spent in New Plymouth -- despite all the unforeseen difficulties I encountered, I took many ideas and impressions home about modern Maori culture and the forms it is expressed, specifically towards outsiders like myself.

There are not just the 'outsider/insider' perspectives -- with Western scientists impressing their own world-view onto that of the Maori and Maori guarding their culture in the face of adversity. There appear to be as many different ways to approach the topic of how culture is presented/displayed and what role it plays in the forming of identity as there are people. On the side of the Maori different degrees of control can be exercised over how they are presented in displays, and different approaches used to deal with curious strangers as well as their own youth.

Of course any idea of formulating a generally valid thesis is preposterous considering the circumstances. Yet in comparing my own findings with even a small sample of the theoretical literature available, many of my own impressions were supported.

On the one hand I found examples for the importance of control over one's culture and heritage, and what happens if this control is taken away. Luckily it seems as if more and more scientists and museum curators realize the mistakes that have been made in the past and try to rectify them by letting the displayed speak for themselves. At the same time Maori have come to realize the potential that lies in the growing interest outsiders have in their culture. This presents the danger that it might not be Westerners who commercialize and objectify indigenous culture in the future, but the Maori themselves, should they lose sight of the difference between life realities and display.

On the other hand I realized that Maoritanga still plays an important role in modern Maori lives -- both for old and young people. It provides them with roots and a sense of belonging in difficult circumstances and connects them to others who share the same heritage. The fact that Maori managed to keep their distinct sense of identity alive through the periods of suppression and assimilation shows how strong it is. With the revival of te reo and the growing interest in Maori heritage, chances are good that most of the oral traditions

guarded by the older generation can be kept alive -- if enough young people bother to ask their grandparents for their stories before it is too late.

The main goal of the fieldwork exercise -- namely giving me an idea of what anthropological field research is like, what it requires and how much harder it is than one imagines -- was definitely achieved. Yet I felt that after six weeks I was slowly losing my outsider status, gaining people's trust as they got to know me and my motives better. It might have been interesting to see whether I could have reached my original goal if I had stayed longer, or whether growing sympathies would perhaps have made my work even harder.

I have my new Maori friends to thank for so many things. Staying with you has been a very important experience for me, even more so than I realized at the time, and I will never forget the lessons I learned.

Kia ora!

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## 7. Appendix

### 7.1 Maori glossary

Words and expressions used in the paper, in alphabetical order.

#### 7.1.1 Single words

Translations from Ryan (1994). If varying, meanings used in the context of the paper are in italics.

Aotearoa	North Island, <i>whole of N.Z.</i>
hangi	earth oven, <i>food from earth oven</i>
hapu	pregnant, <i>sub-tribe, clan</i> , conceive
iwi	<i>tribe</i> , bone, race, people, nation, strength
kaumatua	old man, <i>elder</i> , adult, become adult
kia ora	hello!, <i>thanks!</i> , may you have your health
kuia	old lady, matron
Maoritanga	Maori culture, Maori perspective
marae	meeting area of whanau or iwi, focal point of settlement, central area of village & its buildings, courtyard
pa	<i>stockaded village</i> , stockade, weir, screen of bushes
Pakeha	non-Maori, European, Caucasian
powhiri	wave, welcome, <i>opening ceremony</i> , fan
reo	voice, <i>language</i> , speech, audio
taiaha	long club
taonga	property, <i>treasure</i> , apparatus, accessory (equipment)
te	the (indicates singular)
waka	<i>canoe</i> , vehicle, container, descendants of historic canoe, confederate tribes of one canoe
whakapapa	genealogy, cultural identity, Book of Chronicles, family tree
whanau	delivery, give birth, <i>extended family, genus</i>
whare kai	<i>dining room</i> , restaurant
wharenui	meeting house (Stafford 1997: 26)

#### 7.1.2 Expressions

Puke Ariki            hill of Chiefs<sup>28</sup>

Te Kotahitanga Nga Mahanga A Tairi

the united tribes of Nga Mahanga and Ngati Tairi<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Source: <http://www.pukeariki.com> (25.7.2004)

<sup>29</sup> Source: Ryan 1994

Te Papa Tongarewa

the Treasure House<sup>30</sup>

Te Whakarewarewatanga O Te Ope Taua A Wahiao

the uprising of the warriors (war party) of Wahiao<sup>31</sup>

## 7.2 Map of Taranaki

Source: <http://taranakinz.org> [26.8.2004]



<sup>30</sup> Source: <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/SettlementPack/TheTreatyOfWaitangi/GlossaryOfMaoriWords/> (25.7.2004)

<sup>31</sup> Source: <http://www.whakarewarewa.com> (25.7.2004)

### **7.3 Interview guidelines**

Formulated before the fieldwork exercise, to memorize before interviews as a help, due to be adapted with time:

- Is it okay if I tape our conversation?
- name, age, birth place, education, profession, family
  
- I'd like to know about your youth and what it meant to you to be Maori then.
  
- How did you learn what it means to be Maori?
- What things were taught to you?
- Who taught you?
- Which are most important to you today?
  
- What does being Maori mean today?
- Is it different from when you were young?
  
- What kind of things should young Maori learn today?
- Are they different from what you were taught?
  
- Was traditional Maori knowledge important when you were young?
- Is it important today?
- In what contexts do you use it?

## **7.4 Photos**

These photos were taken by me during my time in New Zealand.

### **7.4.1 *Te Papa Tongarewa* in Wellington**



### **7.4.2 *Te Aronui a Rua wharenuī* in Whakarewarewa**



**7.4.3 Maori performance in Whakarewarewa**

Young men dancing a *haka* while the young women sing.



**7.4.4 Kaumatua in front of Meremere wharenui, Puniho pa**

Auntie Ewai, auntie Doreen, Hone, auntie Betty and her niece Beth.



#### 7.4.5 Rauhoto stone, Puniho pa



#### 7.4.5 Oakura pa



**7.4.6 Taranaki Sport camp, Oakura pa**  
The boys, Jan, Kyle and Muz.

