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RETURN MIGRATION AND MĀORI IDENTITY
IN A NORTHLAND COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Autobiographically motivated and using two separate approaches, the study aims at exploring interlinkages between voluntary intra-national return migration, place and identity, paying particular attention to the social, political and personal contexts within which individuals' return decisions are made. The first approach represents a theoretical one based on existing literature, discussing the three core concepts – place, identity and return migrating – independently while applying conclusions and findings to the current case study of Māori return migration.

The second part of the study consists of a field study of eight actual returnees to a Northland community, one non-returnee and two potential returnees. Information about the two potential returnees is derived from published interviews while data from actual returnees and the non-returnee is gathered by semi-structured interviews. After applying Social Identity Theory, all data is analysed qualitatively and discussed in relation to conclusions derived from the theoretical analysis, and in relation to the international context of indigenism, the national context of the Māori renaissance and to the regional context of the Muriwhenua land claim.

Confirming findings of literature about return migration returnees' characteristics vary, as do return motives which are usually deeply personal. Nevertheless, two clusters of return motives emerge amongst informants: family- and culturally related ones. Profiles of culturally motivated returnees are in line with those suggested in literature on Māori return migration of young urban individuals of Māori descent who are influenced by the current social and political context of the Māori renaissance and the propagated Māori prototype.

The study provides a departure point for practical purposes such as rural and urban planning, while arguing the importance of individuals' identification practices for return decisions in light of anticipated increases of ethnification and indigenist movements. The interdisciplinary and contextual approach appears suitable for a holistic understanding of the complex phenomenon of return migration.

Key words: Māori, return migration, place, identity, ethnification, traditionalisation, prototype, Social Identity Theory;
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## Table of Content

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1  
 1.1 Aims and research questions............................................................................. 2  
 1.2 Study location – Muriwhenua lands ................................................................. 3  
 1.2.1 Muriwhenua tribes ...................................................................................... 4  
 1.3 Timing ............................................................................................................... 7  
 1.4 Chapter outline ................................................................................................ 7  

Chapter 2 METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION ...................................... 10  
 2.1 Literature review ............................................................................................... 10  
 2.2 Interviews .......................................................................................................... 11  
 2.2.1 Method ......................................................................................................... 12  
 2.2.2 Sample – Summary of informants' characteristics ...................................... 14  
 2.3 Summary and conclusion ................................................................................ 17  

Chapter 3 RETURN MIGRATION ............................................................................. 18  
 3.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 18  
 3.2 History .............................................................................................................. 18  
 3.3 Problems for the study of return migration ..................................................... 19  
 3.4 Research methods ............................................................................................. 20  
 3.5 Recent approaches and topics ......................................................................... 22  
 3.6 Impact of return and problems of re-integration ........................................... 25  
 3.7 Motives for a return ......................................................................................... 28  
 3.8 Return and identity .......................................................................................... 31  
 3.8.1 Setting the stage ......................................................................................... 31  
 3.8.2 Methods ...................................................................................................... 33  
 3.8.3 Return, identity and transnationalism ....................................................... 34  
 3.9 Identity, the myth of return and Diaspora studies ......................................... 36  
 3.10 Ethnic return .................................................................................................. 39  
 3.11 Destination places ......................................................................................... 43  
 3.12 Māori return migration – 'Te hokinga mai' ................................................... 45  
 3.13 Summary and conclusion ............................................................................ 48  

Chapter 4 PLACE ........................................................................................................ 50  
 4.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 50  
 4.2 Social Construction Theory ............................................................................ 51  
 4.3 Place in Humanistic Geography ...................................................................... 53  
 4.4 Concepts for the study of 'place' .................................................................... 56  
 4.5 Home in a transnational context ..................................................................... 59  
 4.6 Home as site of identity: the problem of a multi-local concept ................. 63  
 4.7 Home-places as anchor for indigenous and ethnic identity ......................... 66  
 4.8 Māori place ................................................................................................... 71  
 4.9 Summary and conclusion ............................................................................. 74  

Chapter 5 IDENTITY .................................................................................................. 76  
 5.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 76  
 5.2 Ethnic movements and indigenism ................................................................ 78  
 5.3 Ethnicity – ethnic group – ethnic identity .................................................... 81  
 5.4 Ethnicity reporting and measuring ethnicity ................................................ 83
Appendix 4 EXAMPLES OF INDIGENOUS PLACE IDENTITY.........................238
Hawai‘i ...............................................................................................................238
(Australian) Aboriginal connection with land and place ................................239
Vanuatu..............................................................................................................239
Navajo perspectives on Birth, Keyah (land), place and identity ...................240
Appendix 5 MURIWHENUA LAND REPORT – SUMMARY .........................241
Appendix 6 PREFACE TO MURIWHENUA LAND CLAIM.................................242
Appendix 7 ENGLISH VERSION OF THE TREATY OF WAITANGI.................245
Appendix 8 KOHANGA REO.............................................................................249
Kōhanga Reo National Trust ..............................................................249
Kōhanga Reo – History.............................................................................249
Kōhanga Today........................................................................................250
Appendix 9 FIGURES AND TABLES .................................................................251
Appendix 10 TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS..................................................253
Abbreviated interview with Brenda Burt .....................................................253
Abbreviated interview with Nin Thomas.....................................................254
Interview with informant 1 ........................................................................256
Interview with informant 2 ........................................................................259
Interview with informant 3 ........................................................................264
Notes about informants 5, 6 and 7, the returnee host family during field trips 271
Informant 5 ....................................................................................................271
Informant 6 ....................................................................................................272
Informant 7 ....................................................................................................273
Interview with informant 8 ........................................................................273
Interview with informant 9 ........................................................................276
Appendix 11 INFORMATION LETTER............................................................278
Maori return migration and place identity ..................................................278
Te Hokianga: Te Hekenga, Te Ū-kaipo Tuakiri ...........................................279
Appendix 12 STATISTICAL GLOSSARY........................................................282
LIST OF REFERENCES.....................................................................................284
List of tables

Table 1: Summary of informants’ characteristics ........................................................ 16
Table 2: Summary of return motives ......................................................................... 143
Table 3: Summary of culturally versus family motivated returns ............................. 197
Table 4: Distribution of ethnic descent populations, 1996, percentages, for urban areas of usual residence:........................................................................................................ 251
Table 5: Percent usually resident in main, secondary and minor urban areas .......... 251
Table 6: Inflows and outflows by area type of usual residence and birthplace, total people of Māori ethnicity, 2006 census ................................................................................................................. 251
Table 7: Percent of Māori internal migrants for 1986-2006 censuses ....................... 251

List of figures

Figure 1: Map of Muriwhenua with approximate locations of the main tribes (Taonui, 2009b). ............................................................................................................................ 4
Figure 2: Personal and social identities at different levels of inclusiveness, adapted from Brewer, 1991, p. 476. ........................................................................................ 127
Figure 3: Māori ethnic group and total New Zealand internal migrant movers – percentage of each age group, 2006 census................................................................. 252