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**RETURN MIGRATION AND MĀORI IDENTITY  
IN A NORTHLAND COMMUNITY**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.  
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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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