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### ***Maori on the Silver Screen: The Evolution of Indigenous Feature Filmmaking in Aotearoa/New Zealand***

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#### Abstract

This article examines the evolution of Maori filmmaking since the 1980s and explores this Indigenous cinema in the context of developments in the New Zealand film industry. With Barry Barclay's idea of 'Fourth Cinema' in mind, it focuses on the predominantly state-funded production of Maori feature films. The article is divided in three parts. The first part traces the beginnings of Maori cinema back to the 1970s and introduces the first three feature films directed by Maori filmmakers: *Ngati* (Barry Barclay, 1987), *Mauri* (Merata Mita, 1988), and *Te Rua* (Barry Barclay, 1991). The second part discusses the mainstream success of *Once Were Warriors* (Lee Tamahori, 1994) and the film's paradoxical contribution to Maori cinema in the 1990s. The third and final part explores the intensified course of state-funded Maori filmmaking since the 2000s and addresses some of the opportunities and challenges facing Indigenous New Zealand cinema in the current environment of institutional and commercial globalisation.

#### Introduction

Since the late twentieth century, the use of modern media has become increasingly central to the struggles of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous media emerged four decades ago as a response to the Eurocentric domination of mainstream media outlets and official state narratives and has since evolved as a critical platform for Indigenous peoples to address their political concerns and express their cultural identities in postcolonial settler societies. In an early anthropological essay on the topic, Ginsburg (1991, 92) characterised the increasing media work produced by Indigenous peoples in the 1970s and 1980s as 'new vehicles for internal and external communication, for self-determination, and for resistance to outside cultural domination'. In two later essays, Ginsburg (1993; 1997) emphasised the rise of Indigenous media as a form of cultural activism to 'underscore the sense of both political agency and cultural intervention that people bring to these efforts' (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002, 8).<sup>1</sup> By the mid-1990s, Shohat and Stam (1994, 35) considered Indigenous media as 'empowering vehicle[s] for communities struggling against geographical displacement, ecological and economic deterioration, and cultural annihilation', while Alia (2009b, 52) recently suggested that the further development of the international media movement of Indigenous peoples might even be 'key to Indigenous survival'.

The early media initiatives by Indigenous peoples in the 1970s and 1980s aimed to enhance the representation of Indigenous peoples both on-screen and off-screen by gaining visibility in, access to and control over the media content as well as the production, distribution and exhibition processes. By taking up audio-visual media on their own terms, they opened 'possibilities for "talking back" to and through the categories that have been created to contain indigenous people' (Ginsburg 2002, 51). While Indigenous media initially set off as locally-based, community-focused and language-oriented projects, with the emergence of the Internet and other digital technologies in the 1990s, these media spread around the globe establishing transnational solidarity networks among Indigenous peoples (Prins 2001; Ginsburg 2008; Alia 2009a). Within this global context, Dowell (2006, 376) describes Indigenous media as 'a practice that simultaneously alters the visual landscape of mainstream media by representing Indigenous faces, histories, and experiences onscreen, while serving a crucial role offscreen to provide a practice through which new forms of Indigenous solidarity, identity, and community are created'. As such, Indigenous media have played a significant role in the development of the concept of 'international indigenism' (Wilson and Stewart 2008) and the emergence of the 'global Indigenous movement' (United Nations Development Programme 2001).

While contemporary Indigenous media include a variety of forms, ranging from radio and television to digital media and multimedia, throughout the years the medium of film has proven itself particularly well-suited to render Indigenous stories, traditions and knowledges. From the 1970s onwards, Indigenous filmmakers have invested in the 'Indigenization' (Prins 2004, 516) of the silver screen, which for decades has been dominated by Hollywood cinema and its Eurocentric regime of representation (Shohat and Stam 1994). They started to make films that, to various degrees, offered decolonising alternatives to 'the dominant cinematic traditions' that had excluded, confined and exoticised them ever since the medium was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century (Wood 2008, 2). In the early 2000s, pioneering Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay introduced the term 'Fourth Cinema' to group the films made by Indigenous peoples:

There is a category which can legitimately be called 'Fourth Cinema', by which I mean Indigenous Cinema—that's Indigenous with a capital 'I'. The phrase Fourth Cinema comes as a late addition to the First-Second-Third Cinema framework with which you will be familiar (2003a, 8).

I am in another cinema. ... I am not in First Cinema. The cinema of America. The cinema of the international mass market. I am not in Second Cinema either; in the art house cinema for the cinema buffs of the modern nation state. ... And ... I am not in Third Cinema also. I am not living in a Third World nation state (2003b, 8).

For Barclay, the category of Fourth Cinema does not simply stand for films produced by Indigenous filmmakers, but refers to a distinct politically engaged mode of filmmaking that has emerged from the shared Indigenous experience of exclusion in postcolonial settler states and allows for film practices and images that are controlled by—and do justice to—Indigenous peoples and their concerns and customs. Murray (2008a, 18) describes Barclay's Fourth Cinema as 'a point of address, an attitude towards film in its totality that constitutes the use of the camera by Indigenous film-makers on their own terms'.

Barclay places the community at the center of Fourth Cinema. He highlights Indigenous filmmaking as an inclusive process, stressing the importance of involving, respecting and serving the community where the film is being made. On the level of development and production, this means, for example, listening to the members of the community, engaging them in the filmmaking process (both behind and in front of the camera) and employing a non-

intrusive approach to filming in the community. On the level of distribution and exhibition, Barclay emphasises the principle of reciprocity.

According to the filmmaker, any Indigenous film should first be shown to the people who have contributed to it, and then to other Indigenous communities (Murray 2008a, 24-25; see also Barclay 1990). Instead of entertainment value, the dominant value of First Cinema, Barclay suggests that Fourth Cinema is merely intended for educational value, that is, using films as teaching stories that can help and support Indigenous communities—or, as he once described it, ‘there’s invariable a point to a story, a point of instruction’ in Indigenous films (Barclay 2003b, 4).

Akin to Third Cinema, its most related predecessor (see e.g. Murray 2008a, 20-29), Fourth Cinema has historically been most engaged with documentary filmmaking, for both economic and political reasons. Wood (2008, 93) indicates that ‘Indigenous filmmakers have made hundreds more documentaries than feature films, in part because producing a documentary is generally cheaper and easier’. The Indigenous Maori peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand,<sup>i</sup> for example, have produced an independent documentary tradition representing Indigenous practices and perspectives from the 1970s onwards (Goldson and Smith 2008). However, since the 2000s, the production of dramatic feature films has also gained increasing attention from Indigenous peoples around the world. This boost has been largely facilitated by the effective provision of institutional support and capacity building to Indigenous filmmaking, with that securing ‘First Nation cinema’s location within the global screenspace’ (Mills 2009, 8).

Besides their involvement in documentary production, the Maori have been among the Indigenous peoples who have most extensively explored the field of feature filmmaking. In fact, they were instrumental to the origins and development of Indigenous narrative cinema. In the late 1980s, Barclay’s *Ngati* (1987) received widespread recognition as the first Indigenous feature-length fiction film ever made, while Merata Mita’s *Mauri* (1988) allegedly marked the world’s first narrative feature written and directed by a female Indigenous filmmaker.<sup>ii</sup> Both were commended in Indigenous communities, at film festivals and in academic circles for their sensitive and compelling portrayal of family dynamics within a rural Maori community in post-war New Zealand. Then, in the early 1990s, Barclay’s second fiction film *Te Rua* (1991) represented one of the earliest Indigenous features that explicitly dealt with direct political action to achieve Indigenous self-determination, while Lee Tamahori’s *Once Were Warriors* (1994) became the primary Indigenous fiction film to break national records and to attract large international audiences. Especially the latter, with its gritty story of a poor urban Maori family pushed into tragedy by the violent behaviour of the father, broke new grounds in the annals of Indigenous cinema.

Following the pioneering achievements of *Ngati*, *Mauri*, *Te Rua* and *Once Were Warriors*, hope was raised that more Maori feature films would appear in the New Zealand theatres. All four films were made with substantial support of the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC), the government agency that was established in 1978 with the objective ‘to support and encourage New Zealand filmmakers through financing the development and production of feature films’ (Moran and Veith 2009, 285). While the founding documents of the NZFC neglected New Zealand’s bicultural identity (Gauthier 2008, 60-61), from the late 1980s the commission started to acknowledge commitment to Maori filmmaking (Waller 1996, 253; Thornley 2006, 68). By the early 1990s, the NZFC (1992, 6) had officially declared support for ‘the aspirations of Maori filmmakers’ in their statement of purpose. According to Waller (1996, 254), this meant in practical terms that ‘Maori would be more fully included in the commission’s decision-making processes and that Maori filmmaking would be treated as a separate cinematic category’. The commitment of the NZFC to a more inclusive film climate was further strengthened from the

2000s, when the New Zealand's 'peripheral film industry' (King 2010) experienced considerable professional growth and market success as a service provider for runaway blockbuster productions, obtaining a competitive niche position in the 'global entertainment industry' (Lawn and Beatty 2005).<sup>iii</sup>

However, although Maori cinema is nowadays celebrated as one of the, if not the, most thriving Indigenous cinemas in the world, its expansion has not come without hitches. On the contrary, the gradual processes of both institutionalisation and commercialisation of the New Zealand film industry have not only presented exciting opportunities, but also new constraints for the further development of Maori cinema in the twenty-first century.<sup>iv</sup> The purpose of this article is to sketch the arduous evolution of Maori cinema and to explore the circumstances that have led to the current status of Indigenous feature filmmaking in New Zealand. While anchoring my discussion in Barry Barclay's original idea of Fourth Cinema, I will focus on specific possibilities and dilemmas for Maori filmmakers posed by the simultaneous processes of cultural nationalism and economic rationalism within the New Zealand film industry. This essay is organised in three parts that together chronicle the development of Maori cinema from past to present. The first part traces the beginnings of Maori cinema back to the 1970s and discusses the first Maori features by Barclay and Mita as activist Indigenous productions that challenged New Zealand's bicultural partnership in the 1980s. The second part reviews the mainstream success of *Once Were Warriors* and the film's paradoxical position within Fourth Cinema in the 1990s, heralding the next phase of Maori cinema in the wake of the changing dynamics in the government-funded New Zealand film industry. The third and final section considers the intensified course of Maori filmmaking from the 2000s and highlights some of the opportunities and challenges facing the Indigenous cinema in the light of increasing state regulation and market pressure.<sup>v</sup>

### **Early beginnings: the emergence of Maori feature filmmaking**

While Maori peoples have figured in many feature films since the introduction of cinema in New Zealand in 1896, they seldom exerted any control over their own image. In fact, 'from the beginnings of New Zealand film, and until as late as the 1970s, cinematic images of Maori people were produced almost exclusively by Pakeha or European New Zealanders' (Keown 2008, 197). Catering to colonialist fantasies of the racial Other, these outsider representations on the silver screen often depicted the Maori as primitive (noble) savages (see e.g. Blythe 1994; Babington 2007). From the start, the New Zealand film industry evolved under the control of Pakeha-dominated structures that continued to exclude Maori from participating as writers, directors, producers and technicians until well into the second half of the twentieth century. It lasted until the late 1980s and early 1990s before the first small body of feature films by Maori directors came to light.

These early Maori features did not emerge out of nowhere. From the late 1960s Maori cultural activism experienced a resurgence as part of the broader 'Maori Renaissance' in New Zealand (see e.g. Walker 1990). According to Della Valle (2010, 9), an important site of Maori resistance originated in the production of literary texts:

The struggle of survival of Maori identity and culture was paradoxically fostered by writing, by the very tool that had been used to silence them. This reached a climax in the 1960s when Maori writers started to publish works in English, using the means (the written word), the language (English) and the literary structures (poetry, short stories and novels) of the colonisers to subvert their dominant discourse.

This counter-hegemonic act of media appropriation and self-determination by Maori was soon followed in the field of audiovisual media production. During this period, most initial strides towards Maori filmmaking were made in the field of television. According to Mita (1992, 45-46), 'towards the end of the sixties Maori became more vocal in their demands, and broadcasting was on the priority target list'.

Probably the most significant antecedent of Maori cinema was Barclay's *Tangata Whenua* series (1974), which aired on national television for six weeks in primetime on Sunday nights: 'We might point to Barclay's *Tangata Whenua* as a point of origin for Maori cinema' (Gauthier 2008, 61-62). For the first time on New Zealand television, the documentary series presented 'Maori perspectives on the small screen, in most cases without Pakeha interpretation' (Mita 1992, 46). Although made with an almost all-Pakeha crew, the series was groundbreaking in that it framed the cultural sovereignty of the Maori people. It was this sense of control over the media content that both Barclay and Mita would pursue for their later feature film projects (Gauthier 2008, 62). The success of *Tangata Whenua* slowly opened up Maori spaces in broadcasting. Pakeha historian Michael King (1985, 126), who served as scriptwriter, interviewer and narrator of the series, argued that '*Tangata Whenua* broke the monocultural mould of New Zealand television ... and ... opened the way for later programmes, such as *Koha* and *Te Karere*, produced by Māori'.<sup>vi</sup>

While *Koha* (1980-1985) and *Te Karere* (1984-present) marked the first regular Maori (news) programmes on mainstream New Zealand television, Mita came to represent the rise of Indigenous media outside—and against—the Pakeha mainstream. In 1980, Mita started to work as a member of the *Koha* team, but there she experienced 'often bitter and demoralising' disappointment as she had to make 'programmes by Maori, about Maori for the "majority viewing audience", a favourite TV term for white New Zealand. ... We were being denied yet again, and realised that Maori people still had not qualified for equal rights' (Mita 1992, 46). Her independent documentary films set out to achieve just that, equal rights. *Bastion Point: Day 507* (1980) and *Patu!* (1983), her two most notable documentaries, were activist works that identified with minority struggles against oppression and racism. The first offered a partisan account of the Maori land rights movement, while the second documented the spread of the anti-apartheid movement across New Zealand.<sup>vii</sup>

Despite Mita's significant efforts, Maori-controlled productions continued to be rare exceptions in New Zealand's media landscape. Mita (1992, 46) argues that the establishment of the 'greater Maori presence on TV' that was anticipated following the success of *Tangata Whenua*, was 'not going to be that easy'. Barclay (1992, 124), who left New Zealand for five years after the series, recalls being 'shocked to see how little progress had been made in Maori film making' when he returned. He was particularly saddened by the lack of Maori drama. In 1986, he co-founded Te Manu Aute, a collective of Maori communicators committed to cultural sovereignty in Maori representation, or, to use Barclay's (1992, 127) words, 'the battle ... about who controls our images, our songs, our written and tape-recorded words'. The following year, they convinced Television New Zealand and the NZFC to support the first ever Maori drama series on national television, *E Tipu, E Rea* (1989):

Until the screening on Television New Zealand of ... *E Tipu, E Rea*, ... there had not been even five minutes of Maori drama on television. ... Not Maori drama as we define it—drama conceived, executed and presented by Maori. ... The arrangement under which it was achieved set an historic precedent in our country' (Barclay 1999, 64).

Around the same time as the lobby for *E Tipu*, *E Rea*, Barclay managed to deliver his first feature-length dramatic film. Nine years after the establishment of the NZFC, he was finally able to secure support funding for a Maori feature film:

By 1987, ... the Film Commission had already invested in 30 completed feature films, not one of them made by Maori. This was a public fund; why no Maori films? Politically, this was [an] untenable position for the fund managers and Government. Sensing this, I searched out a Maori writer with a story; Maori activist and writer, Tama Poata, had one sitting in short form in his bottom draw, and *Ngati* is the result (Barclay 2003b, 11).

Upon its release in 1987,<sup>viii</sup> *Ngati* became 'the first dramatic feature film by a Māori film-maker, and according to some sources, the first feature film anywhere in the world made by a member of an Indigenous culture living within a majority culture' (Gauthier 2011, 52).<sup>ix</sup> Shot over five weeks in Waipiro Bay on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island, the film portrayed the ordinary working lives of Maori families in a small rural Maori community during the late 1940s. While concentrating on the lingering effects of colonialism and the increasing pressures of industrialisation and urbanisation experienced by its members, *Ngati* ultimately suggested, at least at the surface, a hopeful future for Maori society with possibilities for productive Maori-Pakeha relations (Thornley 2006, 69-70).<sup>x</sup>

One year later, Mita released her first fiction film with *Mauri* (1988) in the New Zealand cinemas, which became known as the first dramatic feature film directed by an Indigenous woman. Like *Ngati*, *Mauri* focused on a rural Maori community under pressure, this time in the 1950s. While following the everyday activities of its members, the film's narrative addressed several urgent issues facing postcolonial Maori society, such as land ownership, urban migration and birth rights. In doing so, the film envisioned the Maori world as a more exclusive domain than *Ngati*, only allowing for 'Pākehā assistance on Māori terms rather than the other way around' (Thornley 2006, 73). For this reason, Barclay (2003b) argued that Mita's film should perhaps be seen as 'the world's first truly indigenous film, first *intensively* Indigenous film' (11), referring to *Mauri's* more radical Indigenous perspective than his *Ngati*, which was, as he himself put it, 'set nicely within both the Maori world and the national orthodoxy' (14).

Although Mita received backing for *Mauri* from the NZFC, she remembers the commission's initial unease with her firm Maori stance:

The more communal Maori approach ... caused the Film Commission some discomfort. ... But ... the Maori way was the only way to satisfy the diverse groups and interests involved. ... I was very happy to have made something for us [the Maori peoples], so relentless and uncompromising (1996, 49-53).

Despite their somewhat different methods, both Barclay and Mita used their films 'as a voice for Māori people and as a method of preserving Māoritanga or Māori culture' (Thornley 2006, 68). They effectively broke away from the exotic 'Maoriland' presented in most feature films made by non-Maori filmmakers (Blythe 1994) and for the first time in the history of New Zealand cinema offered an Indigenous perspective in both representation and production.<sup>xi</sup>

At the level of representation, *Ngati* and *Mauri* differed significantly from mainstream films in their way of storytelling. Both Barclay and Mita largely rejected Western traditions of cinematic storytelling. Instead of a fast-paced linear storyline, *Ngati* and *Mauri* offered a slow-paced multi-layered narrative inspired by the oral storytelling traditions of the Maori people. They were not so much action-driven and individual-driven, but merely flow-driven and community-driven (Parekowhai 1988b; Gauthier 2008). In their efforts to challenge stereotypical representations

of Maori people, Barclay and Mita, engaging in the strategy of positive imaging, showed the strength of Maori community. As Murray (2008b, 175-6) contends, '*Ngati* and *Mauri* place issues of Maori communal identity at the heart of their respective narratives. ... Both ... close the circle of a narrativised representation of Maori community with recourse to the positive and productive values of Maori culture'.<sup>xii</sup>

Besides their communal story perspective, *Ngati* and *Mauri* were also appreciated as the first Maori features because of their communal production approach. Both films were small-scale grassroots projects that employed the democratic-participant model to accommodate the wants and needs of the community.

Mita (1992, 53) explains that the production of *Mauri* was 'based on a *whanau* [extended family] support group of equal input and recognition rather than on strictly hierarchical roles'. Barclay similarly relied on 'production values rooted in Maori culture' and particularly 'the traditions of the *marae*—the gathering place in front of the Maori meeting house' (Gauthier 2008, 65).<sup>xiii</sup> At the same time, Barclay and Mita included as many Maori in their respective production teams as possible, providing a valuable training ground for young Maori technicians (Barclay 1990, 38). Upon completion, both brought the film back to the Maori community (and other Indigenous communities) in virtue of their reciprocal commitment.

For all the abovementioned efforts, Barclay (in Lomas 1987, 5) considered *Ngati* as a highly political undertaking:

It's about being Maori—and that is political ... Political in the way it was made, a serious attempt to have Maori attitudes control the film. Political in having as many Maori as possible on it or being trained on it. Political in physically distributing the film or speaking about it and showing the film in our own way. Political in going in the face of a long tradition in the film industry here and abroad. ... This is the Maori world, take it or leave it

...

Four years after *Ngati*, Barclay completed his second feature film, *Te Rua* (1991), with the same, if not more radical, political vision: 'It tells the story from an Indigenous perspective. I was absolutely bloody-minded about that. ... This film, more than any other project I've worked on, confirmed my early intuition that a film that is intensely Indigenous inhabits another space and every step towards First cinema is a step away from that space' (Barclay 2003, 15). After the critical success of his first film, Barclay was given the opportunity by the Berlin Senate and Film Commission (in collaboration with Pacific Films and the NZFC) to 'come up with a story that somehow married Berlin and the Maori world' (Barclay 1992, 127). Shot in Berlin, Wellington, Cape Palliser and the Wairarapa coast, *Te Rua* explored the links between Maori political activism, cultural identity and spiritual redemption in the context of postcolonial museum practices and heritage politics. The film's plot revolved around two members of a rural Maori tribe, a performance poet and international lawyer, who mount a political campaign to recover three ancestral carvings that have been stolen from their homeland and are now stored in a Berlin museum. Focusing on Maori 'cultural sovereignty in the face of the might of the majority culture' (Barclay 1992, 128), *Te Rua* was the first (and so far the last) Maori feature film to explicitly endorse direct political confrontation to achieve Indigenous community goals (Wood 2008, 161).<sup>xiv</sup> Also, as with *Ngati* and *Mauri*, Barclay second feature was rooted in oral storytelling traditions and engaged in training Maori people in film production, making it an exemplary Fourth Cinema film.

As cultural expressions and political vehicles, *Ngati*, *Mauri* and *Te Rua* were acclaimed within Maori communities, at film festivals and in academic circles. The three Maori features were readily embraced as early Indigenous media achievements throughout the Maori and wider Indigenous world (although *Te Rua* remained considerably less known). However, operating

outside the mainstream, they did not participate in the wider world of commercial film distribution and hence remained largely confined to small, specialised audiences. While *Ngati* brought in almost NZ\$150,000, *Mauri* and *Te Rua* both recouped NZ\$35,000 during their limited domestic cinematic run. In the global marketplace, their returns were even more negligible. The fourth Maori feature, Tamahori's *Once Were Warriors* (1994), experienced a rather different fate. This Indigenous film, adapted from Alan Duff's controversial 1990 novel, attracted large mainstream audiences, both at home and abroad. In fact, grossing 'approximately [NZ]\$20 million worldwide' (Matthews 1995, 30-31), *Once Were Warriors* became the most successful feature film in New Zealand history.

After the first three commercial failures, the project marked the new NZFC direction to commit funding to Maori feature films with more mainstream appeal. Yet, despite its supreme box office performance, *Once Were Warriors* received less favorable responses from the Maori community than its predecessors, in part because of its endorsement of commercial First Cinema conventions.

### **From margin to mainstream: the paradoxical success of *Once Were Warriors***

As with the first three Maori feature films, *Once Were Warriors* was met with scepticism by the NZFC. Pakeha producer Robin Scholes, who bought the film rights to Duff's novel soon after its release and assigned Tamahori to direct it, initially failed to obtain funding from the NZFC. Scholes (in Smith 1998, 78) recalls that the NZFC felt *Once Were Warriors* 'was politically incorrect, as it showed Maori in a bad light and ... it was a Maori film, and there had been no commercially successful films with exclusively Maori characters'. Lindsay Shelton (2005, 140), marketing director of the NZFC from 1978 to 2000, confirms that the film 'nearly didn't get made at all' for the reason that the Commission (first the staff and then the board) doubted 'whether a film on a violent domestic relationship would appeal to theatrical audiences'. According to Shelton (2005, 140), Scholes and Tamahori eventually got the NZFC to commit to production funding when they demonstrated the support of the Maori community for the project: 'They brought a group of Maori leaders with them. Each spoke about why it was so important for the film to be made. Lee also spoke persuasively about the film. ... This time the board said yes'.

After securing an additional production budget from New Zealand on Air and post-production support from Avalon NFU Studios, the film progressed into pre-production with assembling the cast and crew. The majority of the actors and technicians hired on the project was Maori: 'Most of the key production personnel (with the exception of the producer and the cinematographer) of *Once Were Warriors* were Maori. Apart from two police officers and a judge, all the film's major and minor speaking roles are played by Maori' (McDonald 1998, 79). When all preparations were made, principal photography commenced in Auckland. Tamahori shot the film in a rapid six weeks, thereby staying under the given budget of approximately NZ\$2 million (Lewis 1994, 102). After post-production, *Once Were Warriors* was ready for its premiere in the New Zealand cinemas, which took place on Friday 13 May 1994.

Upon release, *Once Were Warriors* met mixed reactions from Maori spokespeople. Alia and Bull (2005, 55) indicate that the film was 'not well received by Maori academics and prominent social commentators'. They particularly disapproved of the film's content on political and aesthetic grounds. With its gritty portrayal of contemporary Maori city life, *Once Were Warriors* painted a completely different picture of Maori society than *Ngati* and *Mauri*. Instead of focusing on a historic period and rural community setting, Tamahori explored the fragmented experience of Maori people as secondary citizens in a modern urban environment:

*Once Were Warriors* ... completely overturned the idea of Maori community found in *Ngati* and *Mauri*. In place of a communal wholeness informed by cultural knowledge and tradition displayed by the earlier features, Tamahori's film portrayed as a social underclass largely divorced from any sense of tribal affiliation (Murray 2008b, 177).

The story of *Once Were Warriors* centred around one Maori family—the fictional Heke family of Duff's novel—whose members are adversely affected by poor and violent living conditions. Embodying the (debated) statistics of 'Maori socio-economic disparity' (Chapple 2000), the family embarks on a path of destruction caused by poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, domestic violence, sexual abuse and gang activity.

Several Maori spokespeople were wary of hanging out such 'dirty linen', not because they denied the socio-economic problems of urban Maori, but because they were afraid of the possible repercussions of Tamahori's gritty and isolated picture of urban Maori society on the public perception of the Maori people. Understanding the mechanism of what Memmi (1965) has called 'the mark of the plural', which projects non-white racial minorities as being all the same, they knew that *Once Were Warriors* would function as an allegorical text that would speak for the entire Maori race. As such, the film had the potential of branding all Maori as inherently inferior. In particular the film's lack of historical context was considered as a major flaw. According to Goldson (1994, 18), one of the prominent standpoints in the Maori world was that *Once Were Warriors* did 'not foreground the effects of colonisation and racism sufficiently, allowing the problems witnessed to be read as natural Maori failings'. Leading Maori academic and filmmaker Leonie Pihama (1996, 191-192), for example, denounced Tamahori's film from this perspective:

*Once Were Warriors* as representation of Maori is particularly problematic because it is not located within the historical realities of this land. ... For those who know little about our people and our colonial experiences, the representation of Maori people is limited to a violent, abusive face, and the wider realities of our day-to-day experiences remain hidden.

While Pihama (1996, 192) deemed *Once Were Warriors* as 'a movie with a story that needed to be told', she did not appreciate the way in which the story was presented. Much of the criticism toward the film was leveled at its storytelling and aesthetics. Instead of using Indigenous traditions, Tamahori crafted *Once Were Warriors* into a commercial, Hollywood-influenced cinematic experience. The Maori director was greatly concerned with 'holding people in the theatre at all costs' and therefore 'dropped the story into a fairly conventional narrative structure' (Tamahori 1994, 15-16). Combining social realism with stylised melodrama (Sklar 1995), the film presented a straight, fast-paced urban story that aimed to 'interrogate contemporary social reality and appeal to a large commercial audience at the same time' (Simmons 1994, 19). The for-profit endorsement of mainstream genre conventions and aesthetics, and in particular the graphic depiction of violence among Maori men, went against the idea of 'demystifying and decolonising the screen' (Mita 1996, 49) that prevailed in Maori circles.

However, while critics maintained that *Once Were Warriors* "'fail[ed]" to be ideologically postcolonial, avoiding difficult political and cultural issues' (Featherstone 2005, 100), the Maori feature film also received widespread recognition as an emancipatory Indigenous media project—exactly because of its political and cultural significance. On the level of production, *Once Were Warriors* was praised for its substantial Maori input. The movie project was made with a largely Maori cast and crew, many of them young and inexperienced. Though suspicious of its representation of Maori, Pihama (1996, 192) acknowledged *Once Were Warriors* as 'a

production that has contributed significantly to highlighting the immense creativity, talent and ability within the Maori community that continues to be underutilised in the film and television industries'. This exercise of Indigenous self-determination on the production level strongly resembled Barclay and Mita's political filmmaking approach.

On the level of the content, *Once Were Warriors* offered a more complex account of urban Maori society than many critics identified at the time. They tended to isolate the images of violent Maori men as static attributes instead of dynamic works within the film's narrative framework. When looking at the dramatic thrust of the story, *Once Were Warriors* contained elements of postcolonial critique. According to Joyce (2009, 246), the film's exposition placed the Heke family in the historical context of colonial violence and domination:

Lee Tamahori draws attention to the postcolonial condition of the family from the onset. The opening billboard shot of a paradise of green fields is a lie. The land is fertile and full of promise but empty of people, harking back to colonial pastoral depictions. It is also a trick, for below the vista ... are the ruins of an urban Maori family. This is the dystopic outcome of white settlement in New Zealand.

Following the introduction of the Heke family, the narrative continues with a gender conflict between caring mother Beth and violent father Jake (McDonnell 1994; McDonald 1998). The first part of the film shows how Jake's pursuit of male mateship annihilates Beth's pursuit of familial ideal. Jake's violent outbursts greatly unsettle the lives of the other family members. In the second part, however, Beth gains the strength to overcome Jake's abuse and to restore her household to a productive state. She ultimately resolves the conflict through a return to the traditional *marae*, leaving Jake behind defeated in front of his local pub. Throughout the narrative Jake's violence is continuously condemned. Also, his aggressive behaviour is not triggered by his Maori identity but the result of postcolonial alienation. In fact, *Once Were Warriors* depicts Maori culture as a dynamic and transformative force. While Beth finds the solution to her problems by returning to her traditional rural roots, her sons Boogie and Nig, initially two troubled Maori teenagers, both find productive ways of 'accessing their tradition' in the modern urban setting (Gillard 2005, 122). In all three cases, Maori community, in whatever form, provides orientation and steadiness in times of crisis. Indeed, as Murray (2008b, 177) notes, the 'focal point on community, and the sense of power of film to articulate communal concerns with fidelity, is in keeping with the films of the 1980s'. By pursuing critical engagement and communal dialogue, *Once Were Warriors*, at least partly, suggested a Fourth Cinema perspective.

The circulation and reception of *Once Were Warriors* also reflected Barclay's idea of Fourth Cinema and his commitment to education and social change. Tamahori (in Thornley 2001–02, 32) saw his film as a 'defining document' of the New Zealand nation. According to Williams (2008, 184), for the Maori director, 'in spite of *Once Were Warrior's* appeal to an international audience, the film's primary audience—its stake in history—is local'. After its release, *Once Were Warriors* became a runaway success among Maori audiences. Calder (1996, 187) indicates that the movie 'dragged in people who would normally shun local films—particularly Maori audiences'. The film proved particularly popular among urban Maori who, albeit the majority of the Maori population, often felt excluded in the construction of Maori citizenship grounded in traditional rural society. For them, Tamahori's film confirmed the validity of the urban Maori experience as part of modern Maori identity. Presenting multiple notions of being Maori in contemporary New Zealand society through different family members, *Once Were Warriors* opened up new imaginary spaces of identity engagement and expression for urban Maori. As such, *Once Were Warriors* contributed to the development of a Maori cultural politics that takes account of, and provides voice for, the Maori people that dwell in the city.

Also, to some extent, *Once Were Warriors* challenged New Zealand's widespread prevalence of domestic violence. The film reportedly led to more public awareness of the oft-hidden problem and allegedly served as a stepping stone for Maori (and other New Zealanders) trapped in violent homes (Lewis 1996; Polk 1994). At the same time, the film's impact was apparent in the field of Maori arts. While *Once Were Warriors* contained negative images of Maori people, the movie ultimately highlighted the beauty of traditional Maori culture and its potential positive manifestation in the urban setting, 'celebrating a modern urban Maori aesthetic' (Joyce 2009, 247). In doing so, the film induced a visceral surge in identification with Maori culture among Maori city dwellers. At the same time, *Once Were Warriors* raised the profile of Maori culture internationally.

The Maori film successfully toured the international festival circuit, winning over 60 awards, and was sold to over 100 countries. Partly the result of such global distribution, *Once Were Warriors* inspired Indigenous filmmakers across the world and set the template for subsequent cinematic explorations of urban Indigenous identities.

The commercial success and cultural influence of *Once Were Warriors* led Thompson (2003, 230) to consider the movie as an 'Indigenous blockbuster', terms that are traditionally seen as opposites. While blockbuster films usually refer to commercial studio productions aimed at mass markets, Indigenous films are typically marked as educational grassroots productions aimed at local communities. *Once Were Warriors* landed a seemingly paradoxical position by being both at the same time. While the production was rooted in Barclay's communal idea of Indigenous filmmaking, the narrative was largely developed within the Eurocentric confines of commercial filmmaking. As such, *Once Were Warriors* undermined some of the political and cultural concerns of Indigenous cinema, yet came to function as a critical intervention in Maori and wider New Zealand society. In doing so, the film anticipated both the opportunities and challenges for Maori cinema that would increasingly arise from the 2000s.

### **Moving into the twenty-first century: new opportunities and challenges for Maori cinema**

The success of *Once Were Warriors* was expected to raise the production capacity of Maori people in the New Zealand film industry. Cook (1994) even argued that Tamahori's film marked 'a new dawn in New Zealand filmmaking'. These predictions proved to be highly premature. Opportunities for Maori film projects continued to be elusive. Two years after its release, Bieringa and Dennis (1996, 8) noted that, 'despite the fact that the most successful fiction feature yet produced here, *Once Were Warriors*, was a film largely under Maori control, acted, scripted and directed by Maori, yet its success has not translated into support or encouragement from projects under kaupapa Maori'. In fact, during the next seven years, none of the over 40 state-sponsored New Zealand feature films had a Maori director or substantial Maori production team, while only four, *The Flight of the Albatross* (Werner Meyer, 1995), *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* (Ian Mune, 1999), *Jubilee* (Michael Hurst, 2000) and *Crooked Earth* (Sam Pillsbury, 2001), had a Maori scriptwriter and significant Maori cast and thematic. According to Barclay (2003b, 16), these films were 'imitative Maori films' made by 'the white film establishment' while 'Maori applications are being mysteriously blocked'. Remarkably, it was not until 2002 that another feature film made by a Maori director and a predominantly Maori team found its way to the theatres. This was not the internationally acclaimed *Whale Rider* (2002), which was directed by Pakeha filmmaker Niki Caro and produced by a largely Pakeha crew, but Don Selwyn's little known *Te Tangata Whai Rawa O Weneti (The Maori Merchant of Venice)*, 2002). However, this Maori project was not backed by the NZFC (they repeatedly refused funding), but by Te Mangai Paho, an agency providing funding for Maori language programming on radio and television.<sup>xv</sup>

In the early 2000s, Barclay (2003c, 36) decried the persistent exclusion of Maori from New Zealand's state-supported film industry. He argued that 'a generation of Maori filmmakers has missed out. Why don't you all simply put up a sign, "Whites Only Need Apply"?' Maori actress Mabel Wharekawa-Burt (in Tran Van 2000) similarly stated that there was still

a lot of racism ... in the inequity of funding quality Maori film. The quality of the technical crew is very high for Maori but we are still in the position of having non-Maori directors responsible for Maori content films. In claiming racism, I also claim elitism because funding for film is going to the same 'old boys' schools despite the brilliant scripts and films by new and younger filmmakers.

Maori actor Cliff Curtis (in Trevett 2005) plainly expressed the feeling of disenchantment among Maori talents by stating that *Once Were Warriors* and *Whale Rider* 'were 10 years apart so you can't argue it's a trend'. However, from the beginning of the new century, the NZFC started to increasingly adapt their policies to improve Maori access to feature filmmaking. At the same time, while including the 'old boys and girls' of early Maori cinema into NZFC decision-making processes, funding was unlocked for a new generation of Maori filmmakers. As a result, from the mid-2000s, Maori narrative cinema entered its most intense state of activity—a state both supported and confronted by the industry's changing institutional and economic environment.

The NZFC initiatives in support of Maori filmmaking reflected the outcome of a more prominent and consistent policy framework for the development of 'Maori key creative talent' from the 2000s. In their *2004-2007 Strategic Plan* (New Zealand Film Commission 2004, 6), the principle that 'Maori stories and storytellers are fundamental to our purposes' was listed as one of the key operating principles. The NZFC confirmed Maori filmmaking as a distinctive category and maintained a separate funding stream to 'ensure that Maori films and filmmakers have a strong platform from which to reflect our cultural distinctiveness' (New Zealand Film Commission 2006a). They identified three key areas to achieve this goal, i.e. (1) the development of Maori talents and projects through funding; (2) the assurance of the cultural integrity of films with Maori content through Maori involvement; and (3) 'Industry Infrastructure Support' for Maori filmmakers through funding (New Zealand Film Commission 2005a, 1). In the following years, NZFC initiatives in these areas resulted in the creation of an flourishing Indigenous cinema embedded in a strong institutional framework.

From 2005 to 2009, the NZFC provided funding to more than 25 feature-length fiction film projects with a Maori director, writer and/or producer. During this period, a handful of these projects already made it to the theatres, while the others still remained in various stages of development. The theatrical releases involved *The Waimate Conspiracy* (Stefan Harris, 2006), *Eagle vs Shark* (Taika Waititi, 2007), *A Song of Good* (Gregory King, 2008), *The Rain of Children* (Vincent Ward, 2008), *The Strength of Water* (Armagan Ballantyne, 2009) and *No Petrol, No Diesel* (Stefan Harris, 2009). Some of the projects in development were—and, at the moment of writing largely still are—*Prey of Birds*, *Behind the Tattooed Face*, *Bulabasha*, *The Matriarch* and *The Fox Boy*. To ensure their cultural integrity, all these 'Maori led projects' were assessed by seasoned Maori practitioners, while production teams with 'projects that have a significant level of Maori content' were usually advised to 'seek the appropriate support for their projects from Iwi [tribe]' (New Zealand Film Commission 2007, 2). This approach largely allied with Barclay's idea of involving and respecting the community in the production process.

Besides funding for individual film projects, NZFC's support for Maori filmmaking was also manifested through three broader development initiatives.

First of all, the NZFC continued to support the activities of Ngā Aho Whakaari, a national representative body for Maori working in the New Zealand media industry. Established in 1996, Ngā Aho Whakaari (2009) committed itself to 'the advancement and protection of Māori moving images, culture and language, and the professional development and growth of independent Māori film and television production'. Secondly, the NZFC became the main sponsor of the Wairoa Maori Film Festival, which was launched in 2005 as New Zealand's premier Maori and Indigenous film festival. The event is now held annually at the Taihoa Marae in the town of Wairoa and serves as an important platform for displaying and celebrating 'Maori & Indigenous film worlds' (Wairoa Maori Film Festival 2011). Both Ngā Aho Whakaari and the Wairoa Maori Film Festival emerged as initiatives largely designed by Maori and rooted in the *tikanga* of the marae, the protocols of Maori culture. As such, they actively engaged with Barclay's idea of Fourth Cinema.

Barclay saw his vision come to further fruition with the third Maori cinema initiative supported by NZFC finance. In November 2007, he, together with Merata Mita and Tainui Stephens, spearheaded the establishment of Te Paepae Ataata, a 'Respected Panel for Maori Films', dedicated to the development of Maori feature films projects through mentoring and funding. The panel, consisting of seasoned Maori film practitioners, was created with the objective 'to support Maori cinema by ensuring that tangata whenua cinema is a dynamic constituent voice within New Zealand film' (New Zealand Film Commission 2007). Operating somewhat as a small film commission focused specifically on Maori filmmaking, Te Paepae Ataata became responsible for the development of feature film proposals by Maori filmmakers from script towards production readiness. They gained the authority to provide funding and to supervise these proposals 'in a manner that they deem to be appropriate to the needs and capacities of *iwi*' (New Zealand Film Commission 2005a, 3). The initiative largely followed Barclay's call for a Maori cinema that is rooted in Indigenous traditions and guided by Indigenous values. His long-held vision to develop a culturally-specific and sensitive Fourth Cinema was seemingly on the verge of being realised.

In his speech at the signing of the agreement for Te Paepae Ataata, Barclay (2007) stated that with 'this significant moment ... the house is restored'. Unfortunately, Barclay could not complete his life's work as he died in February 2008, at age 63, barely three months after the launch of the initiative. However, his legacy lived on. After Barclay's passing, Te Paepae Ataata continued forward and quickly made an impact on assisting the development of Maori cinema. The remaining members, including Merata Mita (who would sadly also pass away two years after Barclay's death, in May 2010; an equally big loss), succeeded in 'bringing Māori methods of doing things to films' (Te Paepae Ataata 2009) and developing at least 'one script a year to production readiness' (New Zealand Film Commission 2006b, 27). In the first two years of operation, they awarded three Maori filmmakers with Paepae support, which included 'intensive project development, visual storytelling workshops, mentoring and filmmaking support' (New Zealand Film Commission 2010a, 7).

The major institutional support for Maori filmmaking has effectuated a structural expansion of Maori narrative cinema, making it possibly the most prominent and innovative Indigenous cinemas worldwide. An increasing number of Maori filmmakers has been able to build successful careers in the industry and a rising body of Maori films has gone into production. In addition, Maori guidelines for filming have been progressively acknowledged by the New Zealand state. Filmmakers seeking to shoot on Maori land should now first consult with, and obtain permission of, the appropriate tribe. The same holds for the use of Maori intellectual property such as Indigenous knowledge, history, language and culture, for which Barclay had given directions in his last book *Mana tuturu* (2005).

The growing participation and recognition of Maori people in filmmaking processes has resulted into more culturally-specific and community-driven Maori stories on the silver screen. At the same time, these stories has generated increased interest from audiences worldwide. In today's global environment, the access to Indigenous products have intensified significantly. These products are now widely circulated throughout the world, where they participate in not only Indigenous solidarity networks, but also commercial niche markets. All these developments have provided Maori people more opportunities to capture, express and display their voices in both national and international arenas through the modern storytelling medium of film.

However, the current course of Maori narrative cinema also poses several dilemmas to its form and function. Most of all, it is the question to what extent the inclusion in a dominant framework that serves both state and commercial interests is able to provide Maori filmmaking the platform to achieve its political ambitions. Barclay's notion of Fourth Cinema has activist beginnings rooted in a commitment to the self-determination of Indigenous peoples and the recognition and protection of Indigenous rights in postcolonial settler nations.

This (media) activism has been primarily directed against the white (media) empires of state and commerce that continued to fail to understand, respect and accommodate Indigenous interests. At present, Maori filmmakers find themselves in a supportive environment in which they 'are able to participate as citizens working within government media policies' (Alia 2009b, 39). While Barclay pursued legal recognition, inclusion in a (media) state system that is still largely dominated by Pakeha structures and paradigms almost inevitably diminishes the political concerns of Maori filmmaking—concerns that remain highly relevant in New Zealand today despite the advances made in Indigenous rights over the past decades.

The political dimensions of Maori cinema are also seemingly tempered by the commercial focus of the NZFC. Already by the mid-1990s, Bieringa and Dennis (1996, 8) signaled that the New Zealand film industry had become 'more and more dominated by the market, less open to risk, driven by economic rather than creative imperatives'. The NZFC assessment of *Once Were Warriors* already demonstrated the commercial dealings of the commission in the early 1990s. From the late 1990s, its economic rationalism further intensified (Lawn 2006; King 2010). While the NZFC (2004, 6) continues to emphasise the importance of cultural storytelling, their mission remains first and foremost to achieve 'successful New Zealand feature films in the global marketplace'. In a global marketplace dominated by capitalist logics, this implies a privileging of the production of easily consumable entertainment films with a straight linear (hero) narrative and classical (Hollywood) cinematic style. Such privileging unavoidably allows less space for the framing of Indigenous cultural differences and political concerns. In addition, the aim of Fourth Cinema to engage and strengthen local Indigenous communities is then often surpassed by the need to entertain and retain 'the metropolitan gaze of international cinema, or the colonialism of the image-market' (Turner 1999, 127). In the rising niche market for Indigenous products, Indigenous stories are increasingly moulded into the language of the status quo in order to ensure 'global accessibility on Hollywood's terms' (King 2010, 158) and to satisfy the desires of mainstream (Western) audiences who are looking for delightful and comfortable images of cultural difference (Huggan 2001; Smith 2010).<sup>xvi</sup>

At the same time, the policy emphasis on cultural difference also raises questions about the position of Maori in the New Zealand film industry and society in general. The required indigeneity of Maori feature films produces a form of 'racial marking' (Urciuoli 2010) that carries the danger of reinforcing Maori people as always particularly raced. In his seminal study *White*, Dyer (1997, 1-3) has shown that in Western media, non-white people have always been 'racially seen and named', allowing them to 'only speak for their race', unlike white people who

are commonly perceived as ‘variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abled’ individuals because they represent ‘just the human race’.

According to Dyer (1997, 2) ‘there is no more powerful position than that of “just” human’, since ‘the claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity’. Since the new millennium, white hegemony has been increasingly challenged by multicultural and transnational perspectives (e.g. McLaren 1997), with the results that other-than-white racial identities are nowadays more and more able to take up the position of ordinariness in media representation. In this emerging multicultural reality, the racial marking of Maori films and filmmakers holds the risk of continuing to reduce Maori to an imagined essence that masks both their normalcy and diversity.<sup>xvii</sup>

In recent years, the new generation of Maori filmmakers has confronted the use of racial marking, with Taika Waititi as one of its most prominent representatives. In his first feature film, *Eagle vs. Shark*, Waititi did not attend to Maoriness as a specific cultural marker, but presented ‘a society where Māori, Samoan, and white characters have become interchangeable’ (Wood 2008, 175). The film was partly financed by the NZFC fund for Maori filmmakers (in fact, it was the first feature film by a Maori director to be supported by the NZFC since *Once Were Warriors*), but the story was largely set in a Pakeha environment.

As a result, *Eagle vs. Shark* was generally not regarded as a Maori film but as an independent romantic comedy from New Zealand (‘Kiwi Indie’). In an interview after its release, Waititi (in Baillie 2007) indicated that he ‘really didn’t want to be boxed into ... becoming the Maori story film-maker. ... It wasn’t a conscious decision to not do anything Maori but it was more just to do something with that community of people who just happened to be mainly Pakeha’. Also, in an email he allegedly circulated to promote his film, Waititi ironically rejected the tag of being a Maori filmmaker:

I’ve made a film called ‘Eagle vs Shark’, and because I’m Maori I recommend all Maori should go and see it. I’m also part Jewish so I recommend it to Jews. I also have black hair so people with black hair will probably enjoy it too. And I have this weird rash so people with ... Anyway, you get the point (Bits on the Side 2007).

Waititi seems to indicate a fading interest of the new generation of Maori filmmakers in dealing with cultural differences and political concerns. According to Wood (2008, 177), this might ‘at least in part to be caused by the desire of the new generations of Indigenous filmmakers in Oceania to make films that fit within the recognized genres of commercial cinema. These genres do not easily allow for an emphasis on the ways that Indigenous—or any—people differ from dominant western cultures’.

The trend of toning down cultural differences and political concerns was both confirmed and challenged by Waititi’s second and most recent feature film, *Boy* (2010). For this film, the director revisited the Maori community where he grew up, the small town of Waihou Bay on the east coast of New Zealand’s North Island. Waititi (in Werman 2012) used his rural hometown as the setting for a ‘disconnected family story’ taking place in the early 1980s. The story revolved around two young Maori boys and their father, who suddenly returns home after spending years in prison (while their mother has previously passed away). Thus, like its early predecessors *Ngati* and *Mauri*, *Boy* offered an exploration of family dynamics in a rural Maori community in past times. Also, in line with Barclay’s idea of Fourth Cinema, Waititi complied with Maori cultural protocols and hired many local Maori people as actors and crew members (New Zealand Film Commission 2010b). Still, while set in a decidedly Maori context, the film did not emphasize cultural difference and the complexities of the post-colonial world. Instead, *Boy* was molded into a ‘hilarious and heartfelt coming-of-age tale’ (New Zealand Film Commission

2010b, 3) that fit easily within the conventions of commercial cinema. As such, the film became a huge success among mainstream audiences across New Zealand. With a domestic box office gross of over NZ\$9 million, *Boy* became by far the highest grossing film ever in the history of New Zealand cinema. Being a locally produced, politically neutral, racially marked, culturally specific, easily consumable and ultimately universal Maori story, the film seemed to reflect both Barclay's hopes and fears for the future of Maori feature filmmaking.<sup>xviii</sup>

## Conclusion

Maori feature filmmaking has come a long way since its early beginnings. From the 1970s, pioneering Maori filmmakers, most prominently Barclay and Mita, have struggled to pave the way for the development of an Indigenous cinema that now receives national and international recognition. Starting out in the margins of mainstream television and independent documentary production, Barclay and Mita ventured into feature film production in the late 1980s when the NZFC could no longer continue to ignore their quest for Maori self-determination in filmmaking. They took on an alternative mode of filmmaking, founded on a commitment to Indigenous community participation and empowerment, a mode of filmmaking that Barclay would later call Fourth Cinema. The resulting three feature films, *Ngati*, *Mauri* and *Te Rua*, conveyed Maori community narratives that focused on the need to protect Indigenous rural lifestyles and cultural traditions in the face of the postcolonial encounter with the majority culture.

As both practices and representations, they functioned as forms of cultural activism that challenged Pakeha hegemony in the postcolonial New Zealand nation. In the mid-1990s, Tamahori's *Once Were Warriors* came to occupy an ambivalent position in the annals of Maori cinema. The film broke new ground in representing Maori urban life, addressing social problems and impacting large audiences, yet received much criticism for its adoption of mainstream storytelling and aesthetics, in particular its graphic and isolated depiction of Maori violence. From a Fourth Cinema perspective, *Once Were Warriors* at once showed the potential (and diversity) of Indigenous feature filmmaking and the danger of domestication (and uniformity) through its integration in national policies and global markets.

In the following decade New Zealand's state-funded film industry developed into a global commercial player, resulting in both more opportunities and challenges for Maori feature filmmaking. At present, the new generation of Maori filmmakers encounters a supportive institutional environment that facilitates a platform for Indigenous filmmakers that is unique throughout the world. Working *within* the national industry, they reflect an increasing diversity of identities and concerns, adopting a bicultural or even 'beyond bicultural' perspective that straddles the lines between Indigenous and cosmopolitan, Maori and Pakeha, tradition and modernity, rural and urban, local and global, and bicultural and multicultural. However, working within the Eurocentric confines of the state system and global market—what Barclay (2003b, 16) calls 'snapped up [by] the general industry'—also puts great pressures on the original imperatives of Fourth Cinema. While governments and audiences worldwide increasingly embrace Indigenous filmmakers as a movement, their films are often tailored to meet settler state interests and global consumption patterns.

On the basis of his own experience in Aotearoa New Zealand, Barclay (2003, 17) once suggested that there are four phases in the evolution of a Fourth Cinema. He distinguished, first, a novelty phase, in which 'a one-off Indigenous film [is] being funded by the Establishment'; secondly, a development phase, in which the Indigenous filmmaker takes 'the Establishment funder along with him' but has to work 'within the confines of the traditions and practices and words of First, Second or Third Cinema'; thirdly, a backlash phase, in which Indigenous filmmaking is closed down by the Establishment as 'projects become more deeply

Indigenous’ and are replaced by ‘look-alike films ... imitative of Indigenous films’; and, finally, a revival phase, in which ‘Indigenous artists will begin making films again’ which are, ‘some of them, at least, boldly, exuberantly, within Fourth Cinema, films that are for their own people first’. According to Barclay, in the early 2000s, Maori cinema was the only Indigenous cinema in the world having reached the fourth phase, and even the only Indigenous cinema having passed the novelty phase. In the following years also several other Indigenous cinemas entered, slowly but steadily, the next phase(s) of development. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the landscape of Indigenous cinema has become more diverse, complex and critical than ever before. Undoubtedly, regardless its evolutionary phase, Indigenous filmmaking will remain a key negotiating site in the ongoing struggle for Indigenous self-determination and cultural survival in the decades to come.

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<sup>i</sup> The term *Maori* refers to the Indigenous peoples of New Zealand. It is believed that Polynesian voyagers settled in New Zealand during the thirteenth century. The first Europeans permanently established themselves in New Zealand from the late 18th century. From this period, the tribal Indigenous peoples 'began calling themselves *tangata maaori*, "usual", "ordinary" or "normal people", as distinct from the settlers. ... At the same time the Maori started to call Europeans *paakeha*, which roughly stands for "foreigner" or "stranger"' (Van Meijl 1991, 31). The term *Pakeha* came to stand for the descendants of the European settlers of New Zealand. European settlement remained limited until the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, making New Zealand a colony of the British Empire. Following the New Zealand Wars (1860-1863), the British dispossessed the Maori from their lands and threatened their survival. In today's New Zealand, roughly 15 per cent of the national population identifies ethnically as Maori, while about 68 per cent considers themselves as European (Pakeha) and a little over 11 per cent as New Zealander (Statistics New Zealand 2006). From the early twentieth century, the Maori term *Aotearoa*, usually glossed as 'the land of the long white cloud', was used to refer to New Zealand. It is now the most widely known and accepted Maori name for the country.

<sup>ii</sup> In *Native Features*, the first book to look exclusively at feature films made by Indigenous peoples, Wood (2008) discusses three feature films made prior to 1987, implying that *Ngati* may not be the first Indigenous feature film ever made. They are the little known Indian features *House Made of Dawn* (1972) and *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* (1985), and the Papua New Guinean film *Tukana* (1984). However, the first was directed by non-Indigenous filmmaker Richardson Morse, the second was, though directed by Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva, less than 60 minutes in length (see footnote 6), and the third was co-directed by Papua New Guinean Albert Toro and Australian filmmaker Chris Owen. The first Sámi feature film, *Pathfinder* (*Ofelaš*, 1987), which was written and directed by Sámi filmmaker Nils Gaup, was released only a few months after the premiere of *Ngati*. In his book, Wood does not include *To Love a Maori* (1972), which could perhaps be seen as the first Indigenous feature film (as well as the first Indigenous feature made by an Indigenous woman) due to the major influence of Ramai Te Miha, the Maori wife of Pakeha director Rudall Hayward, on the making of the film (see footnote 10).

<sup>iii</sup> The rising global profile of the New Zealand industry from the 2000s has to a large degree been attributed to Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-03), which became one of the most successful film franchises in cinematic history. However, also many other major runaway productions have contributed to the development of a 'New Zealand service industry for transnational producers' (Lawn and Beatty 2005, 38), such as *Vertical Limit* (2000), *The Last Samurai* (2003), *Chronicles of Narnia* (2005) and *10,000 BC* (2008). In addition, several big

Bollywood films have been (partly) shot in New Zealand as well, among them *Kahoo Naa... Pyaar Hai* (2000), the biggest Bollywood commercial success of 2000 (Jutel 2004).

<sup>iv</sup> As Barclay (1999, 402) once stated, 'the cinema camera as we [the Maori] know it after one hundred years is a snake in the reeds, venomous. We play with it at our peril'.

<sup>v</sup> The feature film is defined here, chiefly in accordance with the world archivist standard, as (largely) fictional dramas with a running time of at least 60 minutes which have had an official theatrical release.

<sup>vi</sup> Goldson and Smith (2008, 159) hint towards the earlier *Survey* documentary series as an notable depiction of Maori aspects on New Zealand television, as the series included 'Barclay's portrayal of the relationship between a friendly dolphin (Opo) and a small Northland community in *The Town That Lost a Miracle* (1972)'.

<sup>vii</sup> Mita's first documentaries as a director were *The Hammer and the Anvil* (1979) and *Karanga Hokianga* (1979), which she both co-directed with Gerd Pohlmann. *The Hammer of the Anvil* documented the history of New Zealand's trade union movement, while *Karanga Hokianga* explored the synthesis of Maori and Christian religious values in the Hokianga Catholic Maori community. Then, in 1980, Mita completed *Keskidee Aroha* (directed together with Martyn Sanderson) and *Bastion Point: Day 507* (directed together with Leon Narbey and again Pohlmann). While the first, which was about a London-based black theatre group that toured rural Maori communities on the north island of New Zealand, recorded 'the cultural translations that are prompted when (post-)colonized subjects speak to each other rather than directly addressing the colonizer' (Shilliam 2011, 1), the latter became an iconic Maori activist tool, 'an act of empowerment for many of the people in the film and the wider community' (Ng 2010). *Bastion Point: Day 507*, which was only 26 minutes long, concentrated on the 507th day of the occupation of Bastion Point (1977–78), when pacifist Maori protesters were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands by the New Zealand police and army. According to Mita (1992, 46), the documentary expressed a Maori approach to documentary filmmaking: 'This film is the total opposite of how a television documentary is made. It has a partisan viewpoint, is short on commentary and emphasises the overkill aspect of the combined police/military operation. It is a style of documentary that I never deviated from because it best expresses a Maori approach to film making'. Following *Bastion Point: Day 507*, Mita, again together with Polhmann, went on to direct *The Bridge: A Story of Men in Dispute* (1982), before she delivered the first documentary that she solely directed, which was *Patu!* (1983). This powerful film focused on the violent clashes between anti-apartheid protesters and the police during the controversial 1981 South African Springboks rugby tours in New Zealand. Although *Patu!* did not deal with a distinctive Maori thematic, Mita (1992, 17) argues that it had 'a Maori perspective' that encouraged New Zealanders 'to look at themselves and examine the ground they stand on, while fighting racial injustice thousands of miles across the sea'. Goldson and Smith (2008, 160) indicate that the documentary was 'initially banned from television and showed in cinemas' before it was 'eventually broadcast ten years after its completion'. When *Patu!* was completed, Mita started to concentrate on making her first dramatic feature film, *Mauri*, after which she left to work in the United States. In the remainder of her filmmaking career, she directed four more documentaries, *Mana Waka* (1990), *The Shooting of Dominick Kaiwhara* (1993), *Dread* (1996) and *Hotere* (2001). For an insightful essay on Mita's filmmaking practices from 1979 to 1990, see Peters 2007.

<sup>viii</sup> The release of *Ngati* took place in the same year that Maori became the official language of New Zealand alongside English, which served as one of the epitomes of the official policy of biculturalism that replaced the official policy of integration from the mid-1970s. While the symbolic principles of biculturalism were more readily embraced by Pakeha than the actual (re)distribution of resources to Maori (see e.g. Sibley and Lui 2004), state funding for projects supporting Maori language and culture developed slowly. The overdue funding for *Ngati* could be seen as an example of this.

<sup>ix</sup> According to Barclay, Ramai Te Miha (later Ramai Hayward) may have been the first Maori feature filmmaker. The Maori actress married Pakeha filmmaker Rudall Hayward in the 1940s, after which they embarked on a filmmaking partnership. They made several documentaries on contemporary Maori life and produced one fictional feature film, *To Love a Maori* (1972). Barclay (2003b, 3) argues that Hayward not only worked on her husband's films as actress and camerawoman, but over time also as co-director and co-producer. From this perspective, *To Love a Maori* (1972) could perhaps be seen as the first Maori fiction film: 'There's something very Maori in this [effort]. That the film was attempted at all was very much Ramai's doing. She had been helping to raise money to keep ... a Maori training scheme going. ... The film ... [also] reminds me of something which may be fundamental to Maori filmmaking, ... that is, ... [the] point of instruction. ... Generally there's a social point to a Maori tale; a spiritual point, for through our stories, we locate ourselves, we link ourselves to the past, to the present and to the future. Maori rarely toss off stories for the hell of it, just to tell a great yarn (Barclay 2003b, 4). Barclay thus considers *To Love a Maori* as the first Maori feature because of Ramai Hayward's active role in the production and the educational value of its narrative (Gauthier 2008, 61)—honoring her as 'an oft forgotten pioneer Maori film maker' (Barclay 2003b, 4). In 2005, Leo Koziol, Director of the Wairoa Maori Film Festival, similarly highlighted Hayward as 'New Zealand's first Maori film-maker' and presented her a Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition for her pioneering contribution to Maori filmmaking (Wairoa Maori Film Festival 2005).

<sup>x</sup> Barclay (2003b, 13) has indicated that beyond the harmonious 'summer idyll', *Ngati* offered 'a side that's hidden away in the Maori world'. He here referred to the 'challenging irony' that in reality rural Maori communities were not able to survive the pressures of Pakeha modernity (see also Barclay 1999, 398).

<sup>xi</sup> Mita (in Parekowhai 1988a, 24) once explained that she explicitly aimed to confront the romantic image of the Maori noble savage that had appeared in so many Pakeha feature films: 'The thing about *Mauri* was that I really wanted to destroy the massive sentimental view of Maori people, like we're the sort of people who have this lovely mythical thing. .... I wanted to break out of a particular characterisation that Maori people find themselves in particularly in their relation to film'.

<sup>xii</sup> The positive imaging of Maori people in *Ngati* and *Mauri* was largely performed through nostalgic reflections of history. According to Murray (2011, 58), both Barclay and Mita portrayed Maori communities as 'predominantly holistic and bound together by strong ties that emphasised tolerance, respect and a connection to the positive values of the past'. Barclay explained that 'it's true, we used the tactics of nostalgia, but for the Maori audience they are the tactics of "immutability and timelessness", the tactics of "today is tomorrow is the past" (Barclay 2003b, 12).

<sup>xiii</sup> For example, during the shooting of *Ngati*, the crew developed a strategy to shoot at a distance and to remain largely invisible in order to allow unrestricted speech: 'Rather than replicating a (neo)colonial gaze, this strategy ultimately gives power to the characters and their environment; the cast members are left to talk among themselves as they might normally' (Gauthier 2008, 65).

<sup>xiv</sup> After *Te Rua*, Barclay never again received NZFC funding to produce a feature film. According to Wood (2008, 161), the film's 'endorsement of direct political confrontation likely helped dissuade mainstream funders from bankrolling Barclay's further efforts'. Following *Te Rua*, Barclay completed only two other films, i.e. *The Feathers of Peace* (2000), a dramatised documentary on the largely unknown history of the Moriori people of Rekohu (the Chatham Islands), and *The Kaipara Affair* (2005), an activist documentary on disputes over fishing rights in the Kaipara harbour on New Zealand's North Island. The first was produced by Don Selwyn's He Taonga Films, while the latter was largely funded by TVNZ and New Zealand on Air. For an

interesting essay on *The Kaipara Affair* as an innovative activist documentary, see Murray 2007.

<sup>xv</sup> Following *Te Rua*, *The Flight of the Albatross* was yet another co-production between New Zealand and Germany that remained little known, while *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* became the commercially successful sequel to *Once Were Warriors*. In the first two years of the new millennium, the rural comedy *Jubilee* (2000) and epic drama *Crooked Earth* (2001) supplemented the body of Maori content films made by a predominantly Pakeha team. All four were generally not regarded as 'pure' Indigenous feature films due to reasons of limited Maori control and perspective. In particular *What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?* and *Crooked Earth*, described by Barclay (2003c, 34) as 'badboy Maori films' made by 'Western producers', were criticised for being regressive and reactionary. *Whale Rider* answered to the 'expectation of positive imaging' (Mita 1996, 46) by representing a poetic tale about a rural Maori community on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island. The film was an adaptation from the 1986 novel by acclaimed Maori author Witi Ihimaera. While *Whale Rider* created space for a positive Maori story with 'a utopian, collective, Maori resolution ... in a time of enduring pain and struggle' (Figueroa 2004, 424), the film was not undisputed within Maori circles. Once more the limited Maori control at the production level was questioned. According to Mita (in Barclay 2003c, 33), the film caused 'rumblings from some Maori about the fact that *Whale Rider* has been adapted for screen, directed, and produced by an all-White team'. Other Maori critics argued that *Whale Rider*, in order to satisfy the international market, was turned into a generic and comfortable universal story to the detriment of Maori cultural specificities and political concerns (Joyce 2009). *Te Tangata Whai Rawa O Weneti* was considered as the first real Maori feature film since *Once Were Warriors*. This film involved an Indigenous take on Shakespeare's classic bard tale 'performed by Māori actors entirely in the Māori language' with 'elements of Māori culture in all of its scenes' (Wayne 2004, 425).

<sup>xvi</sup> Already in the early 1990s, Barclay (1990, 55) stated that audiences 'are rather greedy ... to have the ethnic milieu but still demand the established conventions' of mainstream cinema. Later Barclay (1999, 403) called these conventions 'the Geronimo formula' and argued that the use of this formula by Maori filmmakers dispossess the Maori community of 'their spiritual and warrior guides' and ensures 'legitimacy to the descendants of the first invaders as the true possessors of the land'. Besides at the level of content, the processes of institutionalisation and commercialisation in Maori filmmaking also seem to affect the centrality of community interests at the level of production. In the rush to get a film about Maori made, the steps taken to gain access to, and consent from, a Maori community could become superficial and insincere. Discussing the production of *River Queen* (2005), a big-budget feature film on the New Zealand wars, Smith (in Kaupapa Maori 2006, 6) argues that the film company employed the abusive tactic of 'grooming the community' to obtain consent for filming. She identifies this consent as 'coerced consent' as the community was made to believe that the company was committed to their cause and that they would (economically) gain from the film, while the real benefits for the community eventually proved to be very limited and short term. Te Paepae Ataata has been established to prevent these kind of abuses, but considering the institutional and commercial framework in which they operate it is the question to what degree the panel is able to provide for all the needs of the community.

<sup>xvii</sup> The use of racial marking is of course beset by questions of definition. What is a Maori film? What is a Maori filmmaker? And who determines what a Maori film is and who qualifies as a Maori filmmaker? Within the current NZFC policy framework, individual authorship (of the writer, director or producer) is the main determining factor in defining and, hence, funding Maori filmmaking. However, individual authorship is however a Western way of looking at filmmaking and largely neglects the notion of Indigenous collectivity (community-as-creator) that is so central to Barclay's notion of Fourth Cinema. Barclay (2003b, 7) encouraged the renaming in the Maori language of the key roles in filmmaking to 'get it right according to the skills required

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for each position'. He indicated that he was very uncomfortable with the tag of 'director' when working on a Maori film as it did not encompass his role: 'The sort of role-description that comes closest to how I feel when directing in the Maori world is that of lead carver. ... Our films ... [are] like a carved meeting house, rich of stories. People like myself are but the carvers'. Thus, questions of (re)definition and (re)naming are intimately related with questions of power.

<sup>xviii</sup> For *Boy*, Waititi drew inspiration from his acclaimed short film *Two Cars, One Night* (2004), which was nominated for an Academy Award. He developed *Boy* at the 2005 Sundance Writers Lab, where he 'workshopped it with [Hollywood] scriptwriters Frank Pierson (*Dod Day Afternoon*), Susan Shilliday (*Legends of the Fall*), David Benioff (*Troy*) and Naomi Foner (*Runner on Empty*)' (NZFC 2010b, 3). The film, partly financed by the NZFC, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2010 and was released in New Zealand theatres two months later. In March 2012, after successful showings at various international film festivals, *Boy* received a limited theatrical release in the United States.