GRANDMOTHERING AND SOCIAL OLD AGE: AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND VARIATIONS ON A UNIVERSAL THEME

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This paper explores change in definition and relevance of the grandparenting role in a population of young-old (ages sixty-five to eighty) women in urban New Zealand, and compares the experience of European and Maori women. I focus on how becoming and being a grandparent is configured into perceptions of social old age and seniority. New Zealand women of both ethnic groups recognize becoming a grandmother as still commonly considered a key marker of social old age by society at large. Differences are evident in ideas about how the role contributes to today's self-definitions. In women's own definitions, being a grandmother is treated as part of a configuration of role change in later life, of which new commitments to social generativity, for example, or expanded opportunities for social integration are also a part. The significance of the grandmother role varies according to how it connects with these other role developments.

POPULATION OR DEMOGRAPHIC AGING has encouraged a new interest in grandparent research in recent years, with studies that address a variety of topics being undertaken in most societies of the world (Robertson 1995; Szinovacz 1998). Variation in the experience of grandparenting is evident, but more comparative studies across cultures, nations, or ethnic groups are needed to understand the range of variation and the effects of contextual factors (Ikels 1998; Szinovacz 1998). In this paper, I draw on research of social aging in a multiethnic population of urban women in Aotearoa New Zealand[1] to compare the experience of women representing the European

and Maori ethnic communities. I focus on how becoming and being a grandmother is configured into the definition of social old age.

The population of New Zealand has been aging steadily since the 1950s, and the trend is expected to continue into the 2050s. The 2001 census showed that the number of old people (aged sixty-five years and over) had more than doubled since the census of 1951. It is projected to more than double again by 2051. By the census of 2051, around 26 percent of the population will be old, up from 12 percent in 2001 and 9 percent in 1951 (Statistics New Zealand 2002).

The growing presence and prominence of older people in society has moved researchers from diverse disciplines to give more attention to studies of aging. The nation's multiethnic populations and lifestyles offer attractive settings in which to develop comparative cross-ethnic studies in the social aging domain. A major project begun by Sik Hung Ng and colleagues in 1994 has focused on positive aging and intergenerational relationships among Chinese, European, and Maori New Zealanders (Gee 2001; Ng et al. 2000). Oral history projects and life-story issues have been advanced and many include a cross-ethnic sampling (e.g., Maclean 2000). The literature on aspects of social aging in particular ethnic communities including European (Keeling 1999, 2001) and Maori (Durie 1999; Maaka 1993; Metge 1995) has grown. The study of social aging among European and Maori women on which this paper draws was designed to include definitions of who and what is socially old as a main topic of inquiry. The study's ethnic comparisons show both similarities and differences regarding the relevance of being a grand-mother. European and Maori women agree that *becoming* a grandmother is a common and generally important emblem of social old age for women in contemporary New Zealand. There are European/Maori differences in approaches to *being* a grandmother and, in particular, to how it connects with other role developments and themes of social aging.

Defining Old Age

Nationally and internationally, and throughout the Pacific, most contemporary official definitions of old age are based on chronological rather than social aging. Aotearoa New Zealand exemplifies the widespread practice of using sixty-five for national census purposes and sixty-five or sixty for most other official purposes. The advocacy organization Age Concern invites membership at age fifty. The Land Transport Safety Authority uses eighty to define a person as an "older driver" for whom stricter tests apply. However, sixty and sixty-five are the markers known to society at large.

Chronological definitions of old age typically have broad social meaning in contemporary society, and New Zealand is no exception (Koopman-Boyden 1993). The threshold designated typically coincides with a major life transition, as sixty and sixty-five have with compulsory retirement from full-time employment and eligibility for a government pension for current cohorts of old New Zealanders. The increasingly widespread practice of distinguishing between "young old" (sixty-five to eighty) and "old old" (eighty and older) in development of aging policies and programs has helped confirm the connection. The young old are generally healthy, active, engaged, and independent; the old old are increasingly frail, less independent, and more in need of support services for daily living.

As several of the papers in this issue well demonstrate (e.g., Carucci 2007; Flinn 2007), in cultural definitions of who is socially old, chronological age may or may not be important; it may or may not be closely linked to some of the social criteria that apply (retirement in New Zealand, for example); or it may be just not especially relevant (Albert and Cattell 1994). For current cohorts of old people, it may not be known though this is rare in New Zealand. At the same time, cross-cultural and cross-national surveys report general agreement regarding what social factors are taken into account (Fry et al. 1997; Sokolovsky 1994). By far the most common marker of becoming socially old is change in the set of social roles one occupies in relation to other members of society. Change in family roles prevails and many societies recognize assumption of the grandparent role as a marker of socially old. For women, the role of grandmother recurs as a primary marker but remains open to variation from the perceptions and interpretations of women themselves as well as the effects of cultural and situational factors.

Researching Ethnic Patterns in Urban New Zealand: Setting and Participants

I collected information on the views of New Zealand European and Maori women in the course of field research for a larger study of aging and old age among urban women living in the greater Wellington area. European and Maori represent the area's original and dominant ethnic communities. Members of the New Zealand European (also known as Pakeha European) community represent the nation's current ethnic majority. They are descendants of British and other Western European settlers who colonized New Zealand beginning in the early 1800s. Members of the New Zealand Maori community represent the nation's and Wellington's largest ethnic minority group. They are descendants of New Zealand's indigenous Polynesian population. Members of all ethnic communities have access to identification

as New Zealanders, but ethnic identities and life-ways remain significant and are evident in many public as well as private settings and activities.

My study included three phases of field research: a year-long phase during 1994–95, a six-week period in 1997, and another year-long phase in 2001–02. In each phase, information collection focused on in-depth interviews with a core group of forty older women with each woman participating in a series of semistructured conversational interviews. All were conducted in English, the primary language of both communities. The main topics of discussion were the contemporary definition and meaning of social old age, and the organization of social support for aging in the community. The first topic (definitions) relates more directly to the focus of this paper but the second (support networks) often yielded information that applies, for example, to woman's involvement as grandmother in support exchanges with grandchildren. Most of the findings reported in this paper are drawn from these in-depth interviews.

Information collected by means of additional interviews and observations has provided additional perspective and helped with interpretation. I completed three kinds of additional interviews. Most were with professionals and organization personnel whose work centered on older people; others were with members of the women's families and communities; a small number were with older women living in other urban places, completed as opportunities arose during travel for other main purposes.

All of the women in the core study group were in their sixties and seventies when the study began, making them chronologically young old. The Maori group compared as younger in years but not markedly. Most of the women had been married, in most cases to men of the same ethnic group. A majority of the women in both ethnic groups were married when they joined the study. The remainder were widowed or single. All of the women lived in the community in private homes or apartments. They lived alone, with a husband or partner, or as a member of simple two-generational family households. There were no cases of extended family coresidence that included three or more generations living under one roof. Two of the Maori women had units of their extended families living in the same neighborhood, and there were women in both groups who had grandchildren living near enough for regular or frequent visits. The grandchildren came for daycare by a younger grandmother, to check up on an older one, or to stay overnight on weekends. Most of the women were long-term residents of the Wellington area; more than half of both the European and Maori subgroups had lived in the area for more than thirty years, in other words for most of their adult life.

Collectively, the women presented several of the leading chronic health conditions of later life, notably arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, and hearing and vision impairments, but all of them judged themselves to be in fair or better physical health relative to other New Zealand women their age. Women of both ethnicities talked about their own experiences of the conditions in terms of slow-downs, energy losses, and not being able to walk as far as they used to. The general perspective was that they were not major issues—just "less of this and that" in the words of one of the European women. As a group, the women represented the more healthy, physically active, independently mobile, and socially involved young-old urban New Zealander.

Becoming a Grandmother: A Shared Experience

Though worldwide surveys have shown transition to the status of grandmother to recur as primary in the definition of social old age, in many of today's societies the transition is neither assured nor every woman's choice. In most societies, with increases in life expectancy, more older women are experiencing the status of grandmother and the number of years spent in the role is increasing. At the same time, as Maximiliane Szinovacz (1998) documents in a review of the situation for older North American women, other demographic trends such as more late marriage, delayed transitions to motherhood, childless unions, divorce, and singlehood are effecting limitations and will continue to do so. All of the trends are evident in New Zealand (Davey 1998; Statistics New Zealand 1995, 1996). It may be that the transition to grandmotherhood is becoming less expectable for today's older women than it was in the past.

Also commonly at issue for women in many settings is whether the transition is ascribed or achieved. In strictly biological terms, the status can be considered ascribed. When a woman's child has a child, she becomes a biological grandmother. In other cases, the status would compare as achieved, as when a woman takes on or is given the position of adoptive, step, or fictive grandmother. The demographic trends of longer lives, later marriage and parenthood, divorce, and so on are impacting this aspect of the transition as well. For example, depending on her own marital or partnered status in later life, and/or the status of her adult children if she has any, an older woman may have one or more biological grandchildren, one or more fictive grandchildren, some of both, or no grandchildren, biological or fictive. There were women of both ethnicities in my urban New Zealand study who presented themselves as exemplifying each of these possibilities.

I use fictive as a term of convenience for the nonbiological grandmother or grandchild status. It is a somewhat controversial term, mainly because it

can be taken to imply that the relationship in question is less than "real" and, as such, of less value. In the family and kinship literature, the relationships are also referred to as pseudo, but with similar negative or conditional connotations (Shipton 1987). At the same time, the literature contains numerous examples of fictive ties that appear to be stronger and more active than the comparable biological ones.

Both European and Maori, together with New Zealanders of other ethnicities, accept the English-language term grandmother as appropriate for women who are active in the role regardless of how the status was established. As Sally Keeling (2007) notes and nicely illustrates in her paper on European grandparents, strict use of the biological/fictive distinction by grandparents themselves is considered *in*appropriate in most everyday contexts. For grandchildren and their parents, terms of address serve to identify particular members of a set of grandparents. Examples from my Wellington study included "Grandma" and "Nanna" to distinguish between the members of a biological set of mother's mother and father's mother, and "Grandma," "Nan," and "Gmar" (for a stepgrandmother named Marjorie) to distinguish a trio of two biological grandmothers and a fictive one.

The contemporary Maori vocabulary includes both Maori and English terms and, as Joan Metge points out in a recent presentation, in usage both sets are used with "meanings influenced by their [other-language] counterparts" (1995, 137). However, whether Maori are speaking Maori or English, the Maori term *tupuna* (grandparent) and the English terms grandparent, grandmother and grandfather have a wider reference than the English terms do when used by European New Zealanders. They are understood by Maori to refer not only to a child's parents' parents but also to the parents' parents' siblings, cousins, and their spouses. In principle, the biological/fictive distinction is of little or no consequence as far as these kin relationships are concerned. Terms of address resemble the English-language style of favoring diminutives of the general terms, for example, "Tupu" for grandfather or grandmother; "Grannie," "Nannie," "Nanna," or "Nan" for grandmother.

The information from my Wellington study indicates similar patterns of European/Maori usage in the terms of reference for grandchildren. When European women with both biological and fictive grandchildren wanted to distinguish the fictive ones, use of the term "proxy" recurred. One woman used "honorary," another "deputy," and another "substitute." One of the Maori women used "quasi." Maori at large may use the English word "adopted" to specify grandchildren acquired under the Polynesian tradition of fostering out biological grandchildren to childless older people. More common, however, is use of the Maori word *mokopuna* (often shortened to *moko* in conversation) which is inclusive. In public settings, it can refer to all

the grandchildren of all the grandparents in attendance regardless of biological/nonbiological links. As one of the Wellington women explained the current pattern at Maori gatherings she attended: "The little ones are all looked at as mokopuna." All the grandparents take a turn at chastising, loving, nursing the children. "We don't wait around to see whose child it is." She acknowledged that things were changing, that "the young ones are getting away from it but they still respect those of us who continue." As for herself: "For the life of me, I don't know who they are. I say 'Moko, come here,' and they come." In the remainder of this paper, I use fictive for convenience in general, the biological/nonbiological distinction when it is relevant, and the women's own terms when they used one.

All but two of the women in my Wellington study presented themselves as biological and/or fictive grandmothers. The two who did not were both Maori, but their explanations seemed to be more personal than ethnic. Both had married later than was usual for their cohort of Maori women. For one, the marriage had not produced children and she had returned to her professional career. The other woman had children who were partnered but had decided not to have children of their own outside of marriage.

Among the women who were biological grandmothers, the number of grandchildren ranged from one to twenty-two. All age grades, from infants to adolescents and young adults, were represented. In line with census data showing that Maori tend to have larger families than Europeans (Davey 1998), the larger sets of biological grandchildren belonged to Maori women in the study group, and the only biological great-grandchildren belonged to one of the Maori women, but there were women in both subgroups with both younger and older grandchildren. There were both European and Maori women among the biological grandmothers who were also fictive grandmothers, and there were women in both ethnic groups who identified themselves with grandmother status by virtue of fictive relationships alone.

Exemplifying involvement with both biological and fictive grandchildren, one of the older European women presented herself as grandmother to her five biological grandchildren and "a marvelous collection of deputy grandchildren" she had acquired across the years. "They're not a burden," she was quick to explain. "I love 'em all." Some were the biological grandchildren of friends who had come to Wellington for school or work and been referred to her as a source of local knowledge and networking. Others she had "picked up" through her diverse volunteer and community service work. Her experience was not unique. Other women had similar stories. "I have lots of proxy daughters and granddaughters," said another European woman with ten biological grandchildren. Most of the proxies were the biological daughters or granddaughters of close friends and colleagues met during her long and

distinguished career as an artist and the fictive grandchild bonds included a strong mentoring element. In another European case, a woman whose seven biological grandchildren were all teenagers or young adults when we first met subsequently acquired a new fictive one. The father, an ex-son-in-law with whom she retained a friendly relationship, had no living parents and encouraged his former mother-in-law's interest in the son of his new partnership. The son called the woman "Nanna" as did her biological grandchildren; she talked about him as "my Auckland grandson," referring to his place of residence.

   Among the women who identified with the grandmother role by virtue of fictive relationships alone, relationships with the biological children and grandchildren of siblings, other kin, friends, or other nonkin were variously described. There were both European and Maori women who related to all of their sizeable number of grandnieces and grandnephews as grandchildren. Two cases, one Maori, one European, involved women who had never married who described their embeddedness in close three-generational extended families as relating them to large numbers of the youngest generation as grandchildren. The Maori woman talked about them as "my mokopuna." The European woman used "substitute grandchildren." One of the European women, married but without children, described herself as "an extra grandmother" to the young children of nieces and nephews she had always been close to. "I helped mother them," she said. "Now I help grandmother." Nonkin connections had facilitated another European woman's acquisition of three "proxy" granddaughters and an "honorary" grandson. She was married with adult children but no biological grandchildren and, for the time being at least, no expectations of any. Her proxies were the school-age daughters of young neighbors whose biological grandparents lived in Australia. The parents initiated the New Zealand relationship by asking their older neighbor to fill in on family and school occasions. The honorary grandson was a young adult "adopted nephew" of long-term middle-aged friends. The only son of a solo parent, he had opted to remain in the community when his parent moved to a distant city. He was effectively dependent on his local aunt and uncle for family interaction. He became a regular participant in the woman's family activities, as his aunt and uncle had long been, and the honorary grandmother/grandson bond "just evolved." Finally, for several of the women, both Maori and European, significant fictive relationships had developed independently of an intermediary, kin or nonkin, typically out of chance encounters in a work, education, or organization setting as illustrated above by the women with the "marvelous collection of deputy grandchildren."

   Most of the grandmothers were in regular contact with at least some of their grandchildren, but time and distance constraints affected the frequency

and mode of contact. Time constraints were a general consideration to the extent that most of the grandmothers maintained a full program of nonfamily involvements, for example, late-life learning commitments, active formal association memberships, and regular volunteer service. The constraints were more critical, however, for women still in positions of paid employment outside the home. Two of the younger Maori women, both very family centered, had arrived at quite different solutions regarding time for their young grandchildren. "I came into the workforce late in life," explained one whose career had developed in exciting ways, "so haven't been available to be the typical Maori grandmother" by which she meant one who chose to stay at home and take care of her little grandchildren. The other, also in a successful and satisfying job, had negotiated a four-day work week and set aside the freed day for care of three preschool granddaughters. In part, she was helping the working parents meet daycare needs but she also wanted regular interaction with the grandchildren while they were still young. She talked about the freed day as "my moko day." A younger European woman gave wanting to have more time with her grandchildren while they were young as one of her reasons for taking early retirement from a fulfilling professional job. "It was my selfish reason," she said.

Geographic separations were also a common constraint. While the grandmothers all lived in the Wellington area, the grandchildren were dispersed. Some of them lived in the Wellington area or at outside locations within easy driving distance. Some lived in other parts of the North Island, or lived in the South Island. Others lived outside New Zealand in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, or the United States. In all cases, contact was maintained by means of letters, cards, telephone calls, and e-mail, and in most cases there had been an exchange of visits. There were no significant differences in contact patterns between the European and Maori grandmothers. As a group, the women were in touch with their grandchildren and seemed to be well informed about their interests and activities, accomplishments, and concerns.

Being a Grandmother and Social Aging: A Diversity of Approaches

Do young-old urban New Zealand women consider being a grandmother a primary marker of social old age? Is ethnicity a factor? The Maori and European women in my core study group agreed that grandmother was one of the roles commonly included in others' perceptions of socially old. There were ethnic differences as well as similarities regarding how the role was treated in self-perceptions. In the women's own views, becoming and being a grandmother, by itself, was less important than how the new status and role

connected with other developments or themes of social aging. The experience and interpretations of the connections varied, sometimes along ethnic lines, but a shared set of other developments and themes emerged. I have previously identified a set of six such themes (Armstrong 2003). Sampled here are connections with the themes of social generativity and social integration.

Social Generativity

Women in both ethnic groups saw active involvement in grandparenting as helping to advance the sense of social generativity that is widely associated with "successful" social aging. Generativity has been defined succinctly as investment of oneself "in forms of life and work that will outlive the self" (Kotre 1984:10). Aging without a sense of social generativity has been shown to put a person at disadvantage for satisfaction and contentment in old age since an absence of generativity implies presence of the alternative, a sense of stagnation (De St. Aubin and McAdams 1995). Generativity can be biological or social. Transition to grandparent status by way of one's child having a child can provide a sense of biological generativity. Activation of the grandparent role in relation to either a biological or fictive grandchild is a potentially rich source of social generativity. Other sources increasingly available in today's modern societies include life-story writing, mentoring, and volunteering (see Gee 2001, for volunteering opportunities available to older New Zealanders), but grandparenting is available to older people everywhere.

A sense of social generativity is well documented as a key theme in the meaning of the grandmother role for American women. Women of diverse ethnicities are represented, among them White American (Vaillant 2002), African American (Timberlake and Chipungu 1992), and American Indian (Weibel-Orlando 1997; Schweitzer 1999) women. The centrality of the theme is confirmed in accounts of both negative and positive experiences.

Some of the New Zealand grandmothers in my Wellington study had experienced the generativity theme in a negative or problematic way. Cultural difference came to bear for a Maori woman, some of whose fictive children were European, when one of them wrote to inform her that he and his wife had named their recently born first child Rawhiti after "her Maori grandmother." This clashed with her Maori culture—"you don't do things with our names without asking us"—but not wanting to distress the new parents of whom she was very fond, especially in writing which was the only option at the time, she withheld comment. As it happened, her concern dissipated across the years. By the time of our first meeting, when the granddaughter now a teenager visited Wellington, her Maori grandmother took pleasure in introducing her as "Rawhiti, my namesake."

Other Maori women recounted ongoing negative or problematic experiences. For some of them, younger grandchildren who lived troubled lives as members of broken families had put the women's sense of generativity at risk. For others, young adult grandchildren who chose to distance themselves from Maori identity and culture challenged the women's sense of generativity. A European woman made the point that to have a grandchild is not necessarily to like her or him. In the course of detailed descriptions and evaluations of her ten biological grandchildren, one granddaughter was singled out as "totally different from the rest [and] the one I warm least to," due mainly to displays of selfishness, unkindness, and other characteristics the grandmother found troublesome. Another European woman described one of her three families of stepgrandchildren as "less easy to relate to" than the other two. She described them as "not very nice" and "selfish" in nature and recalled instances of "unkind" behavior she had witnessed. There were both Maori and European women who reported different patterns of interaction with different families of grandchildren as having more positive and more negative outcomes for their sense of generativity. In another shared experience, social generativity through grandmothering could also be impaired by geographic separation, especially when it involved a whole family of younger grandchildren living abroad for an extended period.

In all, however, most of the women reflected with satisfaction on their grandchildren's social development and their own sense of investment in its course. The European grandmother with ten biological grandchildren enjoyed strong relationships with the other nine. Her one-by-one descriptions covered age grade, character, activities, interests and accomplishments and conveyed her generally deep sense of generativity. The woman for whom relationships with one of three families of grandchildren were troublesome enjoyed solid and satisfying interactions with the other two. For several of the Maori women social generativity through grandmothering met a traditional cultural ideal. As one of them noted in talking about her three preschool granddaughters, later life *should* include the "joys" of being with grandchildren and watching them grow up. For another, a grandmother of sixteen grandchildren of diverse ages, seeing the older ones succeeding in their educational and other endeavors was the number one satisfaction of old age: "The best thing to see," she said with a smile. Both women had nonfamily involvements that also advanced their sense of social generativity—the first wrote children's books in Maori with Maori themes to help promote early formal learning of Maori language and culture; the other worked in several capacities to encourage more Maori youth to pursue higher education—but being a grandmother was without question their primary source. Interviews that Joan Metge completed with Maori in their twenties and thirties provide

a rare sampling of the grandchildren's perspective. Grandmothers were especially remembered for abiding interest in the achievements of their mokopuna (grandchildren) and for their quietly communicated but significant expressions of praise and encouragement (Metge 1995).

Finally, women in both ethnic groups included successful transmission of family and ethnic culture as important to their sense of social generativity. Women of both ethnicities had participated in the production of family histories. While prepared for both children and grandchildren, the grandchildren were the primary audience. In one European woman's experience, the older grandchildren had also shown more interest in the project than their parents. One of the older European women illustrated the experience of differing transmissions to biological and fictive grandchildren. With her biological grandchildren she focused on family heritage and values: watching the next generation build meaningful lives and seeing some of the culture she valued being continued. Several of the young adults among her proxy grandchildren were continuing her dedication to advancing the European community's contribution to Wellington's and New Zealand's art culture. Helping their grandchildren retain a "Maori side" in a European-dominated world through the transmission of Maori identity and culture was a focus for several of the Maori women.

Social Integration

Women of both ethnicities also viewed being a grandmother as a potentially significant link to social integration in old age. Social integration is variously defined in narrow and broad terms. I use a broader definition currently in favor in the American social aging research literature which views social integration as involving both embeddedness in a network of social relations and participation in a diversity of meaningful social roles (Pillemer et al. 2000). Being a grandmother helps maintain the network; being an active grandmother can facilitate the role development. Social integration contrasts with social isolation, or the lack of significant relationships and fulfilling roles. It has some particular salience for women aging in larger urban areas, such as Wellington, where risk of social separation and even isolation is typically higher than it is in rural places. Vicki Torsch (2007) presents a poignant Chamorro case study from urban Guam.

Grandchildren help "keep you young" said one of the European women in my Wellington study; they "keep you young at heart and up-to-date" said another; they "keep you from feeling old" said a Maori woman. The view that grandchildren help keep their grandparents socially connected and integrated in an aging society is widely held among older people in urban New

Zealand. The European and Maori women in my Wellington study described grandchild facilitation of integration in diverse domains, from information technology to religion, and at multiple levels, from family to global. My discussion samples recurring domains and circumstances and examines European and Maori experience for ethnic similarities and differences.

There were women in both groups who named grandchildren as their source of instruction in computer skills. Others had completed a course of formal instruction but retained grandchildren for review and consultation. The use of e-mail for communication helped with integration at the family level for grandmothers and grandchildren who were geographically distant. It also aided the maintenance or establishment of involvements in wider local and national communities. A European woman who was not a computer user noted her position of disadvantage. Her older grandchildren were far flung around New Zealand and abroad and all used e-mail for communication with family. A number of organizations of which she had long been an active member and wanted to remain so were in the process of transition to e-mail communication and electronic newsletters.

Three Maori women described grandchild contributions to their partici-pation in Maori community occasions for which Maori was the primary lan-guage. The grandmothers grew up during a century of drastic decline in use and teaching of Maori; the grandchildren have grown up in a period of active resurgence. One women, an active *kuia* (female elder) with good speaking knowledge of the language who was often called upon to speak for her com-munity, used a teenage grandson with superior knowledge as a consultant for special occasions on which she wanted to be sure and perform well. Two others with limited competence in the language described using Maori-speaking grandchildren who were also participating in an occasion as interpreters. In each case, the grandchild facilitated a more meaningful level of involvement in the event.

Several of the women without biological grandchildren, saw their fictive ones as contributing to various valued styles of integration. The European woman with three proxy granddaughters who lived in her neighborhood and attended local schools valued the extended family dimension they added to her life but, equally, the connection they afforded with the school system. Across the years, she had developed a rich record of service and social advocacy in the community and welcomed the opportunity to add volunteer service in the schools. Her honorary grandson, a young adult, added yet another "dimension of interest" by connecting her with the interests and concerns of local youth. For a never-married European woman, her large network of substitute grandchildren (twenty-one grandnieces and nephews) served as a link to significant forms of integration. She maintained a strong

network of close friends, another set of supportive connections through her church, and a diversity of active association memberships, but her grandchildren were a valued source of extended family ties and incorporations. As well, their various involvements in education kept her in touch with the field in which she had a significant career, and she drew security from having recently designated them as the beneficiaries of her estate.

For two of the Maori women, one married with children but no biological grandchildren, one never married, fictive grandchildren helped them meet the traditional expectation of being a grandmother for transition to the status of "female elder" and the positions of leadership and other engagements in Maori affairs the status offers. Even so, in describing her local elder activities and the "group of nannies" with whom she shared them, the married woman distinguished herself as the only one without biological grandchildren. "The others have their own grandchildren," she said. "I don't." During the second phase of my study, she became "a real grandmother." Not in good health at the time, she found the daycare responsibilities she took on demanding, but she said of her new role, "I'm loving every moment of it." Her elder role had a new and deeper meaning, too, she said now that she had her "own moko."

A number of women, both Maori and European, acknowledged appreciation of a grandchild's contribution to their social integration even when it was problematic. Their examples involved beliefs, values, and behaviors that were distasteful or distressing. An older European woman commented on the popular music preferences of her teenage and young adult grandchildren. She didn't like the music but knew it was important to them and had learned to live with it. She accepted it as part of the wider "intergenerational contract" of which she was a strong advocate. Another described a similar tolerance of dress styles. The first time the eldest of her teenage grandsons turned up on his noisy motorcycle clad in helmet, black leather jacket, and boots was something of a shock but not one to dwell on or make an issue of. What mattered were his regular visits and the good conversations they had. She was decidedly less accepting of his efforts to recruit her to the Pentacostal church he and his teenage siblings had joined. The specifics of Pentacostalism aside, she had never been a regular participant in organized religion and was not looking to become one. She continued to listen to her grandson's accounts of his Pentacostal activities, however. Her comments conveyed an interest in staying current with the grandchildren's different beliefs and behaviors and a recognition of their growing significance in contemporary New Zealand youth culture.

Both European and Maori women described their experience of direct exposure to different living arrangements and lifestyles by young adult grandchildren. Reactions varied but, overall, acceptance or resignation prevailed.

The European grandmother who found her grandchildren's music difficult was unfazed when one chose living together over marriage. Updating me on developments during the third phase of my study, she was delighted to report that a young adult granddaughter had "a partner whom I absolutely *adore*." A Maori woman who described herself as having a "good" (caring, informed, in-touch) relationship with each of her large set of grandchildren expressed a quite different but not uncommon attitude of dismay in her comment that "I don't approve of this partner thing." She chose to reserve comment, however, and had no hesitation in full acceptance of two great-grandchildren one such union produced. One of the older European grandmothers described a similar mix of dismay and resignation. A grandson had been living with his girlfriend for several years, and a granddaughter had recently become engaged and moved in with her fiancé. The granddaughter's behavior caused the greater distress. She was a favorite and grandmother and granddaughter had developed a special bond in recent years. "She's become like a friend, really," the woman said. "I see less of her now." But it was the new living arrangement that was at the root of her distress. She had come to accept it but reluctantly she said and was led to remark that her deceased husband, the young woman's grandfather, would have been "horrified."

Positive experiences prevailed in respect to grandchild contributions to involvement and integration at international and global levels. Some of the involvement was passive, similar to the vicarious experiences Sally Keeling (2001) describes for the European old people in her study of small-town aging in New Zealand. The main link was young adult grandchildren travelling overseas and sending photographs and newsletters for the grandparent to display and share. Similarly, a number of women in my urban study had teenage or young adult grandchildren travelling and/or working overseas with whom they were in regular communication and whose experiences they enjoyed learning about and being able to share. However, the majority of women also described active occurrences. They involved grandchildren of various ages and covered a range of specific experiences.

A recurring link for both European and Maori women was young grand-children living overseas with parents working in other countries—Australia, Canada, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States—during the periods of my study. Most of the grandmothers had visited, sometimes with their husbands, sometimes alone, and in some cases, when the family's absence was extended, multiple times. Some of the women maintained a pattern of regular visits each year or every other year, but additional visits were also made for special events such as the birth of a new grandchild. For a Maori woman, the birth of a first child to one of her sons occasioned her first visit to England and her first solo trip overseas. She prepared well for both firsts.

She sought advice from relatives and workmates about travelling alone and read up on Stonehenge and the other historic landmarks she expected to visit. While there, she exploited the opportunity to expand her understanding of other ways of family life in time spent with the English maternal grandmother. "I learned a lot," she said modestly but with satisfaction.

Other accounts from women of both ethnicities involved grandmothers with international travel experience for nonfamily reasons such as work or a conference giving their young New Zealand grandchildren the experience of an overseas vacation. Most cases involved a younger grandparent couple, and Australia, close in time and relatively affordable, was the usual destination. For one of the Maori grandmothers and her husband taking their three young granddaughters to Australia for a ten-day vacation at a coastal resort also provided their own first overseas travel for strictly pleasure purposes: "An exciting if exhausting adventure," the woman recalled.

Teenage mokopuna helped facilitate the special experience of one of the older Maori women when she travelled as a chaperone on overseas tours of Maori youth concert parties the grandchildren were selected for. She had travelled previously to visit families of grandchildren in Australia and the United States; the travel as chaperone for the concert parties extended her experience to the United Kingdom and most parts of Europe. Her recollections were full and informed. She took pleasure in recounting highlights such as a particularly gracious and generous hosting by the mayor of Vienna in Austria, but she also offered perceptive observations on the character and people of each place visited.

Young adult grandchildren contributed to a variety of active involvements. Two of the European women described travel to Australia and England respectively to attend a grandchild's university graduation. Another traveled as family representative and reporter to meet a granddaughter's German fiancé and his family. Two others, both widowed, used grandchildren resident in Canada and England as motivation for an overseas trip as part of eightieth-birthday celebrations. A Maori woman described her experience of a different but not uncommon form of involvement. A grandson working in Australia sent a Swedish friend to stay during the friend's visit to New Zealand. Such encounters were typically welcomed and enriching. "A real charmer," recalled the Maori women about her Swedish guest. However, the most common young adult facilitation of international integration for women of both ethnicities was a grandchild completing his or her "OE" or the year or two of overseas experience that has become an institution of New Zealand culture. The women in my Wellington study included grandmothers with grandchildren "doing their OE" in Canada and several European countries, but for those who took the opportunity to visit, the most common location by

far was England where it is relatively easy for young New Zealanders to obtain longer-term work permits. Seeing the grandchild in her or his OE environment was, of course, only part of the visit. A typical trip would include, for example, visiting other family, seeing countries like the United States or Singapore during stopovers, touring the United Kingdom, enjoying the excitement of a London theater performance, or shopping for family and friends in New Zealand. For some of the European women in particular, typical trips included a first, or rare, meeting with English, Irish, Scottish, or Welsh cousins or other extended family. All in all, being a grandmother had involved the women in my study in worldwide travel, extended visits to other countries, overseas vacations, late-life learning about other people and cultures, and otherwise led them to a varied collection of meaningful involvement and integration in world society.

Conclusion

This paper examines the place of grandmother status and role in perceptions of social old age in New Zealand using information collected from women representing the European and Maori communities in the greater Wellington urban area. The experience and views of women in the area's other ethnic groups, notably Chinese, Indian and Pacific Islander, are lacking. In addition, the study has involved only chronologically older women and was limited to women living in urban places. The views of younger grandmothers or of rural-dwelling grandmothers are not represented.

The information indicates that grandmother status remains a common and generally important emblem of social aging for women in contemporary New Zealand. Older women who do not become biological grandmothers often establish themselves in or are accorded the status of fictive grandmother, and some women are both biological and fictive grandmothers. The European/Maori ethnic comparisons show both similarities and differences. Regarding transition to grandmotherhood, the ethnic differences are, it seems, not marked. Other factors such as marital status, employment status, and personal choice seem to play a larger role. The differences appear to be more evident in European and Maori views on how the role of grandmothering contributes to self-definition as socially old by way of interplay with other role developments and themes, including the nature of contributions to social generativity and the significance of opportunities for social integration. The linkages appear to affirm contemporary treatment of grandmother as one of a configuration of emblems of social aging which for urban women of different ethnicities in New Zealand variously also includes social status, seniority, and social renewal, as well as the social generativity and social integration featured in this paper (Armstrong 2003).

Looking ahead, and beyond New Zealand to other Pacific societies, as population aging proceeds apace across the next half century as it is predicted to, it will continue to influence the grandparent experience for both men and women and, thus, its meaning for social aging. The two trends of increased life expectancy and smaller family size are already showing important effects. Of particular interest perhaps, is the extended duration of family roles and relationships such that grandparents and grandchildren can build up decades of shared experiences. It exemplifies the concept of cobiography in aging families and invites research attention to the growing presence of grand-parent/older grandchild relationships and their social significance (Uhlenberg and Kirby 1998). Positive outcomes for family solidarity and attachment of new social value to the grandparent role have been indicated in American studies though, at the time of writing, ethnic and other variations remain to be explored.

On another front, as studies from across the Pacific in Papua New Guinea (Chowning 2003), Micronesia (Flinn 2007), Fiji (Panapasa 2007), and French Polynesia (Dickerson-Putman 2007) are showing, the responsibilities of grandparents are changing. One of the most dramatic changes in recent years has been an increase in the number of grandparents who are the primary caregivers of young grandchildren. At the 2001 census in New Zealand, there were close to 5,000 New Zealand grandparents registered as "second-time parents," and the count was generally agreed to be well short of the total. The situation is known to cut across ethnic and other lines, but again, we need research and information exchange for understanding the diversity of approaches to this newly relevant link between being a grandparent and social aging and its implications for grandparenting as a strategy for coping with societal change.

NOTES

1. Aotearoa New Zealand, a recently introduced official country name, combines New Zealand, the name established with British colonization in the nineteenth century, with the precolonial Maori name in use at the time of contact.

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