The Hair-cutting Ceremony Re-visited: Functions in a Modern Context

Although question Loomis’s (1985) notion that the pakatianga rauru is, in fact, increasing in popularity, this paper attempts to explain the seeming contradiction of the ceremony’s endurance, especially its being more persistent in Wellington than in the Cooks. It is argued that these symbols persist because such selected ethnic features retain psychological value for individuals undergoing stressful changes in their lives. The main function of such symbolic revivalism is likely the resurgence of ethnic consciousness, or "cultural" identity, at the same time as Cook Island culture is rapidly diminishing in a New Zealand context. This process of identity assertion is not haphazard but reflects the hope of maintaining continuity in face of changing circumstances. Identity, then, takes on a sort of "psychic shelter" function.

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