

River Queen

eHui Discussion Forum

Abstract: The 'River Queen' wānanga was lead and facilitated by Cheryl Smith as part of ehui on kaupapamaori.com. There were 10 participants and the wānanga took place over 4 weeks from mid August to mid September 2006. This is a lively and sometimes humorous discussion about some very serious issues that arise when non-Māori filmmakers set about the task of telling a story and representing Māori in film and television. Key themes addressed include: non-Māori gaining access and consent to make films about Māori; protection of indigenous stories; telling our own stories; representation of Māori in film and media; ethics in film production. As Paul Reynolds states: "This (River Queen) is not a Māori story. This is not a film about Māori, but a film about how some Pākehā think Māori were and still are now".



Subject: River Queen

Facilitated by: Cheryl Smith - Tuesday, 22 August 2006, 09:56 AM

Mai te maunga o Ruapehu, ka puta mai te awa o Whangaehu. Rere mai te awa ki te moana. E toru ngā awa ririki, ko Mangawhero, ko Turakina, ko Whangaehu ā ka puta mai te iwi o Ngā Wairiki.

Mai te maunga o Ruapehu ka rere mai te awa tupua o Whanganui. Nā te haerenga o te maunga Taranaki, ki tōna tūranga i te Tai Hauauru, ka pupu ake ngā wai o Whanganui. Ka whānau mai te awa. Ko te kōrero o ngā iwi o te awa "Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au".

Tēnei te mihi ki a koutou katoa, ngā mihi ki o koutou maunga, ki o koutou awa hoki.

Tēnā rā koutou.

Today begins the third discussion group for our wānanga and I have been given the wonderful role of leading a discussion about the River Queen. It will be great to hear your views about the film. Discussion is to centre around a Kaupapa Māori critique of representation in this film.

Gaining Consent for the Movie

From the iwi side, the story of how they got access to make this movie is fairly standard. A Māori liaison person, Tainui Stevens, was bought in who did the negotiation with some whānau and hapu. To cut a long story short, some people wanted to make the movie and others didn't but the persuasive factor was the promise of jobs. Those who didn't want them to come were pushed aside in the rush for all the supposed benefits that were to emerge – employment of weavers, actors etc. The following is an extract from the Whanganui River Trust Board newsletter and gives you an idea of

some of the politics:

The Awa Films Working Party was set up in August 2001 consisting of mandated representatives from hapu and Iwi mai i Te Kāhui Maunga ki Tangaroa. Its purpose was to work with Silverscreen films company (RQ) Ltd on matters of policy, protocols and process in the production of the film (River Queen). There was also a need to ensure that the intellectual property rights of Whanganui Iwi were protected and the safety of Taonga maintained. The original members were:

Di Ngarongo Hinengākau
Piripi Haami Ngāti Rangī,
Boy Cribb Tamahaki
Martha Ponga Tamahaki,
Wai Wiari-Southern Ngāti Hau
Liz Te Aho Ngāti Hau
Barney Haami Ngāti Ruaka
The late Pestall Pauro Ngāti Ruaka
Tom Treanōr Ngāti Kurawhatia
Dennis McDonnell Ngāti Kurawhatia
John Maihi Tūpoho

There have been changes to the membership.

Dardi Metekingi Mato replaces John Maihi and Martha Ponga, Liz Te Aho and Pestall Pauro are no longer with the group.

Undoubtedly some positives and negative experiences have been gained from the involvement in the production of 'River Queen'. These have highlighted advantages and shortfalls and also underpinned the need to improve our overall knowledge and processes to better prepare us for future productions (visual, audio and written) undertaken within our rohe.

Reflection over the past year reveals highs and lows during the actual filming. Some of the highs were those of us who secured roles, work in the picture; our old people visiting the film set and being treated extremely well by the cast, crew and support staff. The lows included late payment of wages especially for those who counted on this income; the four weeks hold up of filming while the main actress recovered from illness and other hiccups due to misunderstandings

All in all, however, it is important to note that some positive things came out of the filming on our beautiful Awa Tupua. The faces of our people and the roles they played in the film will be everlasting. The experience and skills gained by some in several areas, set, art, props, transport, filming and recruitment provide a favorable base for employment consideration in future undertakings.

A poroporoaki for Silverscreen Films was held on 1st December at Putiki Marae. It was hoped to also include the formal handing-over of the waka

and other Taonga. This is now deferred to a later date.

Although I was aware of the meetings I stayed away once it was decided that the film would go ahead. The hype was running high, it seemed everyone had a relation that was in the film somewhere. The rangatahi especially were excited to be part of a Hollywood production. There was a powhiri at Putiki when the main actors came in, Kiefer Sutherland, Samantha Morton and Temuera Morrison and Cliff Curtis. Suffice it to say, the benefits were actually minimal and the so called flow of income into Whanganui didn't actually happen. I will let you comment on how the film represented us.

Hopefully you have seen the film. If you have you will probably have a lot to say about it. I found it difficult to sit through the whole film. It was quite a surreal experience to watch a Te Arawa man playing a character loosely based on Titokowaru and speaking in a Whanganui dialect!!! I didn't even like the way the river was portrayed, too much dark blue light. Engari me tuhituhia ou whakaaro.
Nā Cheryl



by **Leonie Pihama** - Thursday, 24 August 2006, 01:46 PM

Tēnā koe Cheryl

I have yet to get the video out from the video shop, have walked past in on a number of occasions and thought 'no I don't want to spoil my evening tonight!!'. It is so often the case that film companies and their Māori consultants 'sell' their product to our people through the promise of employment, or seeing yourself in a film (which sadly appeals to many!) or even long term benefits to a hapū or iwi, when in fact the only benefits that accrue to anyone is that of the financial output to the company itself.

I am interested in the way that we cover the 'bad things' with the so called positive outputs which appear to be minimal to say the least. Sadly, this is not uncommon, but is in fact a common place experience of our people. What benefits have we seen in terms of our participation in films such as The River Queen, and I am not talking only of economic benefits but in fact I am talking more broadly in terms of our ability to tell our own stories and to represent ourselves to ourselves and the wider Indigenous and global world. The control of filmic representation of our people remains in the hand of the few dominant Pākehā film companies who are in turn supported by a Film Commission that does little to promote the fact that we as tangata whenua have a right to access the resources and technical support to tell our own stories.

Coming on the back of films such as *The Whale Rider* and *Crooked Earth* - two stories controlled and produced by those same Pākehā production companies, *The River Queen* merely maintains the status quo both in terms of issues of control of representation and also in terms of how we are portrayed.

So, now I guess I have to spoil at least one evening by watching it.



by **Margie Hohepa** - Thursday, 24 August 2006, 03:14 PM

Tēnā koe, Cheryl, koutou mā, ngā mihi i runga i ngā tini aituā kua pā ki a tātou katoa. ā Aunty Tai, ā Te Arikinui, ā te matua a Annette hoki, ka tangi, ka tangi.

Its been a harrowing few weeks at whānau, hapu and iwi levels right across the motu. But I think, at least at the tangi I have been to, there has been also been such celebration of lives lived well and such a show of just how greatly loved those who have left us are.

Watching 'River Queen' is not my idea of celebrating or showing love, and like Leonie, I'm going to have to steel myself for a visit to our local video shop (but there is also a wholesalers but one door down).

I have been practicing avoidance where *River Queen* is concerned for quite some time now - it sounds like I'm not alone in that. It was showing on the flight Jo Mane and I were on a few months back, which took us to a wonderful conference packed with indigenous peoples. Jo dutifully watched the movie, I donned an eye mask, used my earplugs and went to sleep. Why I haven't wanted to watch it? I think Leonie and Cheryl hit at least some of the nails on the head. Issues of control and representation go some way to explain why my puku feels bad when I think about watching it. I think those issues also relate to more personal reasons (hangups?) which probably include,

- Māori I know got sick while working on it. We heard a lot about the main female actor getting ill, but so did Māori actors, maybe one died earlier than might have, as a result?
- Our school went and watched the film 'To Love a Māori' (anyone else seen it? - I think I was 9 or so at the time) the same day we also went to see the queen (of England) who was on a visit to Aotearoa. That alone sounds quite a twisted thing to do to Māori kids growing up in West Auckland. On top of it I didn't think much of the film, it kind of sucked, and 'River Queen' doesn't sound that much different.
- A local romantic drama based in a former century, involving a Pākehā

woman coping with a Māori man - hey, sounds like my childhood.

Oh well if I must watch it - things we do for the kaupapa....



by **Donna Gardiner** - Sunday, 27 August 2006, 09:26 AM

Kia ora koutou katoa,

Ko Ngaronoa tēnei, he uri nō te moana o Tauranga.

I am sitting here on a Sunday morning back at my whare in Tāmaki Makaurau, having returned along with Leonie, Ngarimu and whānau, Marie, Mera and Tutekiha, Gail, Mere and Semi from Rotoiti. We were there for Annette's dad's tangi. It was a lovely tangi to be a part of. The gatherings were represented by people from all walks of life ranging from Rugby clubs from the Bay of Plenty, to Māori activists to the Catholic fraternity including many of us non-practicing but who still know and sing the hymns with great gusto because the tunes are so beautiful and stuck in our heads (scary that) and other many other religious denominations, teachers, in-laws and out-laws, beautiful Kuia and Koroua, cherished mokopuna, lawyers and judges, academics, singer-songwriters and filmmakers, and of course te hau Kainga and the Te Arawa paepae.

It was a lovely tangi and a fitting tribute to Annette's dad, our dear mate Annette and her whānau.

Spending time in Rotoiti provided me with a fitting reminder of the resilience, the dynamism and fortitude of our people, so it is in that vein that I will view the movie.

At the end of September I hope to workshop this same movie with my masters class in Awanuiārangi.

So e kare mā- you now know what Ngaronoa is doing today!!

Watch this space??



by **Cheryl Smith** - Wednesday, 30 August 2006, 06:58 AM

Kia ora koutou

I'm going away for six days to a cousin's birthday in Sydney so here is another piece from me. Reading what everyone has written has kept me thinking about the River Queen even though it is like picking the top off a hākihaki. When it comes to the River Queen my mind tends to stay on the issues of how did the film company get access to Whanganui? Whanganui has some really astute political activists who are very vocal and who do lead - hence the clear political stance around the awa and Pakaitore and other battles. Advice was sought from Whetu Fala and Leonie Pihama and other experts and iwi were told the issues quite clearly (so we were warned but our usual scepticism got over-ridden). So it is quite good to have this

opportunity to reflect.

I guess that people who want to exploit us use time honoured traditions. As a friend once told me the most effective abuse is when the abuser has 'groomed' the victim to believe that they were consenting to the abuse. In a similar way I think that exploitation without full, prior informed consent is the same. My view is this film was about coerced consent.

I guess there are several mechanisms for 'grooming' the victims of Hollywooditis –

One is to bring in big stars on to the marae and talk about oppression/marginalisation - even more successful if the film maker appears to be a 'marginalised' film maker, stars come from colonised peoples even better

Two - hire amusing Māori men who can entertain and sway audiences that people really like listening to and who dont appear to have any politics about who they play. Especially helps if they are good singers and can play a guitar or they are respected for other talents.

Three - tell everyone that you are working hard to make the story 'authentic', that is why you are there. You really want authenticity and are spending lots of money and creating lots of jobs to tell the real history and its better they are involved than not involved. Employ an iwi dialect coach to show how genuine you are. You need to keep up authentic so have weavers working on authentic whāriki for the mats of the authentic whare that you are filming in the background of white woman having the moko etc

Four - keep asking for what people want out of the film and keep the dialogue going on that till after the film is in the can and you are gone

Five - Invite kuia and kaumātua, iwi leaders to the set and give them a big lunch and get the Māori men to entertain and sing. Show them the authentic waka which the hapū is going to keep after the film

Six - hire lots of extras because then everyone has 'ownership' - they will get very little pay, stand around for hours and some wont even appear but they will have had an 'experience' and can say they were in a film. Hire lots of kuia as well as everyone knows that if kuia are swayed the activists will get silenced.

Seven - say you are holding the premier back in the area - its going to be HUGE for the town, bring in gazillions of bucks. But really hold it overseas and get it to the European market first. Don't let anyone see the film till the premier as they will have to back it - all the press are there!!

The sad part for me is that these are all my relations and they fell for it hook line and sinker and some even like the film.

We do need to discuss things before and obviously our ways of doing that, being the academics we are includes writing and talking so I'm pleased that people like Leonie, Whetu, Sharon and others in the film industry have been so consistent in their analysis of this area and continue to talk about film making and its impacts on Indigenous Peoples. Unfortunately this film will be put out there as a Māori film, not a Whanganui film, just as Whale Rider was put out there as a Māori film not a Ngāti Porou film. Consistent messages - make our own films and stop subjecting ourselves to others perceptions and representations. I am currently reading a new book called Ratana Revisited a book written by a pākehā writer who had no consent to go ahead and he still wrote the book and says so proudly at the front. We do have our own film makers, our own writers - its good to see them coming down the road.



Re: River Queen

by **Linda Smith** - Wednesday, 30 August 2006, 03:26 PM

Kia ora koutou

I enjoyed Cheryl's take on how to get things done without getting informed consent - it applies to many other aspects of our lives. As for the River Queen movie- the discussion is putting me off ever watching the movie at all. I am not really a great movie watcher and my current attention span is about 10 minutes before I want to go and do something else. So, watching the River Queen sounds like enforced torture - I dont even like the title and I find the images and characterisations of Māori from that period of time i.e the 19th Century quite disturbing - we are still dehumanised and savage-like. So, I am not going to watch the River Queen....yet.



by **Glenis Philip-Barbar** - Sunday, 27 August 2006, 10:26 PM

Tēnā rā koutou e hoa mā, He mihi aroha tēnei ki a koe Annette, koutou ko te whānau - pouri rawa tēnei i te rongō kua hinga to papa. Otirā kia tātau kua nohonoho i raro i ngā kapua pouri o te ngaro haere o tēnā o tēnā, kia maia, kia kaha tonu te tuku aroha ki a tātou anō, tērā pea mā te kōanga e haramai nei ka tau te rangimarie ki a tātou katoa.

Now - River Queen, hmmm. I have seen it, watched it about four or five months ago. I found the film disturbing and contradictory, framed in a similar manner to warriors part 1 & 2 with lighting that made us look stark, bleak and animal like. The story line jumped all over the place from here to there, following the fortunes of a pākehā woman who was trying to find her son, and although her struggle, her journey seems to make up the central tenet

of the story the focus seems to be on the inevitability of war, of bloodshed and the great lengths that all involved would go to in order to register a kill, although exactly what the struggle was about was seldom apparent. Titokowaru was portrayed as a semi-maniacal individual with great influence and a willing band of slaves around him ready to meet his every need or whim. Had I not known that Titokowaru was a central character and just watched the film I would never have guessed that this was the person being played by Tem. What I have read and what was portrayed just do not sync. Despite the fact that the River is beautiful, and the landscapes breathtaking the film fails to capture this, instead portraying a bleak and dark landscape full of danger and death. This was surprising, even The Whale Rider with it's problematic story line and poor portrayal of one of our iwi narratives manages to love the whenua and portrays the landscapes in their natural, beautiful state. I will obviously have to watch this torturous piece of film again to provide a more analytical piece, what is apparent at first viewing however is that whoever is in charge of the lens finds us as a people and our history a dark and dangerous journey. The storyline is so fragmented it is difficult to follow, and the end of the tale where the pākehā heroine makes the choice to join the 'dark side' and live as Māori, taking a moko kauae to further emphasise this fact I found disappointing. It's almost as if in pākehā eyes the Māori landscape cannot be rich enough on it's own without a pākehā hero or heroine in it. These kinds of films emphasis the need for us to tell out won stories - an oft stated truth that we haven't yet found a way to fund. Will get back to you when I've watched the horrid thing again. Ngā mihi Glenis



Re: River Queen

by **Leonie Pihama** - Tuesday, 29 August 2006, 01:36 PM

Tēnā anō koutou katoa. Ka tautoko ahau i ngā mihi i mihia ki a ratou kua wehi atu ki tua o te arai, haere koutou, moe mai ra. Ka huri inaianei ki a tatou te hunga ora, mauri ora ki a tātou katoa.

There was absolutely nothing surprising in The River Queen, it absolutely fulfilled my expectations of it being a film that merely provides another white filmmaker with the opportunity to express and represent their racist colonial stereotypes of us as a people. And on top of that it was just a 'bad' film!! There was no flow, no sense of an actual story line, no visual representation of the power and beauty of the awa, no sense of anything really. It is a bland hybrid version of 'Crooked Earth' and 'The Pianō' that does nothing more that affirm my belief that filmmaking in this country remains obsessed with the colonisers version of history. I find it difficult to see any semblance of representation of Titokowaru in the film and find it insulting that there would be the inference from filmmakers that the character in the film was inspired by Titokowaru. That seems to me to be another way for the filmmakers to attempt to get some kind of Māori affirmation for the film.

There is so much wrong with the film that it is difficult to summarise here, but it has inspired me to now add 'The River Queen' to my list of reviews. It is not that the film deserves that attention, as it does not, however whilst the film commission and funding bodies, and Māori advisors continue to produce these films unchallenged then we will see little more than this on our screens, and our tamariki will continue to be presented with images that are degrading of their tūpuna, their tikanga, their reo, their histories, their identity.

nāku noā
nā Leonie



Re: River Queen

by **Paul Reynolds** - Friday, 1 September 2006, 03:46 PM

Kia ora tātou

First of all I must apologise for not being more engaged here.

Second, I think River Queen stinks!

To add my little bit, there are a number of things in the movie that really annoyed and disgusted me. Well actually there was tons but just one that I can't get over.

The most vivid thing I remember was the vulgar sex act that was conducted while a "battle" was in play. Where did they get this notion about sex, war and violence and cheating? This is more a synopsis of how non-Indigenous people engage in relationships, particularly in colonising the great lands. I really cannot understand this and this is why this is mostly all I remember of the film - that it was dirty, disgusting and bleak, as already mentioned by a number of people.

Since seeing the film, the most common comment I have got from people who have seen it was that the awa was beautiful and the scenery was stunning. It is, but a pity about the stink film.

This is not a Māori story. This film is not a film about Māori but a film about how some Pākehā think Māori were and still are now.



Re: River Queen

by **Sarah-jane Tiakiwai** - Friday, 1 September 2006, 05:25 PM

Kia ora tātou

i really like Linda's idea for the film - wondered when it might be coming out??? (note: the idea is not printed in this publication)

Got dragged reluctantly to see The River Queen and ended up laughing my way through many parts of the movie - because I couldn't believe how absurd it was - and also getting to the state of almost physically being sick with some of the over the top violence and sex acts that Paul talks about.

Firstly, how can one take two Te Arawa males trying to speak another tribal

dialect seriously, Furthermore - what was up with the eyes? I remember reading an article that said something about tapping into the 'other side' that tohunga had and how that 'look' could be seen in their eyes - it came across on the movie as a cross eyed not well toned 'chief' who was so tapu that anybody seemed to be able to walk into his whare. Yes, the film was full of contradictions and inconsistencies...and I am having to dredge through memories I was trying to suppress because I am so not going to get the movie out and put myself through that torture again.

Not really knowing too much of the history around Titokowaru, I nevertheless thought it strange that two well known Māori male actors would agree to be a part of a movie that was supposed to be so much about Whanganui - the river and its people. It did bring to my mind how they might feel about others portraying quintessential Te Arawa characters like Hinemoa and Tūtanekai...while I applaud Māori making it 'big' I do think they kind of lost the plot with this story line and with agreeing to be part of the story line.

Cherryl raises really good points about how we seem to allow ourselves to be abused in these ways - how others always seem to know what is best for us, how to talk for and about us, and in this context how to portray us, and how to win over the kuia to ensure the 'show must go on'. The scene (and yes I guess I am spoiling part of it for those of you who have managed to avoid watching the movie) where Māori 'maidens' are frolicking around topless just really did it for me - that was perhaps the key point of illustrating how far we had come in New Zealand film making, and I really felt for Whanganui people in how they were being portrayed in the movie. It certainly isn't something I want to see ever again.



Re: River Queen

by **Mereana Taki** - Saturday, 2 September 2006, 08:42 AM

Kia ora e te whānau hatakihi,

Thank goodness for an enduring sense of humour, writers like Trinh Minh Ha speaking to the 'inappropriated Other' and Margie Hohepa's kōrero tino hari koa, katakata hoki. The worry would be taking any of this at all seriously as an artist. As a mother I watched this sad, sick excuse for a movie reforge old ground as an ode to failed colonialism. Shaka zulu meets bro town humpers approach to power. Cinematography simply plagiarised oriental express, kung fu dynasty sets and pasted in the Whanganui for 'local' effect. This is Edward Saids precise these about Orientalism, Nandys treatise on 'the intimate enemy' and for good measure Leonie Pihama's challenges to the Pianō.

It is a smorgasbord of white macho and very unimaginative assumptions about native erotica. It is sad, sorry and seriously in need of psychoanalysis. The bluebeard 'dark man' of the psyche has clearly taken

to the screen in this tribute to naivete. It is sober to remember that this is the mindscape - someone has chosen to construct certain ways of seeing something 'from their location'. Anei te take. The sheer arrogance of parading the peoples' economic vulnerability through the making of that mindscape, now this is where the film jumps out and enters into the peoples real lives. He tohu anō tēnā.

My first response to this film was - blank. Blank. Blank. I put it straight into my blank account. Reading Margies kōrero was way better than that film. Kia ora Margie, I love you for the sharing hari koa tōku ngākau, ka maumahara ahau i ōku kui kuia me tēnā kōrero mai. It has taken me some time to de-traumatise myself enough to make sensible contact with my whakaaro on it. I'm thinking, River Queen- Abba, Dancing Queen nope! Some kind of American gambling boat going down the Mississippi with the po blak folks, pea? My mind came back to Te Ata.

We are over due for making films that clearly speak to our own ways of seeing, knowing, loving. Heck, there is ample room for our own Mollywood after the Bollywood style. I'm for a movie genre in which Māori women are always the central comes out on the top 'star' with multiple partner choices and zero child care issues anywhere. My genre would present Māori women in every facet of the world and life styles, making babies if they want and climbing the corporate ladder with grace and style. Yes, and there would be mokopuna watching nanny go take the world and making it her own. The moko makes her own genre of movies and oh my god everyone wants to be in them but...ummm whakapapa will be the organising principle for who gets hired and casted. Next, real benefits to the people must be apparent in all contracts. Then, 15% of every film budget must be tagged to an Iwi, hapū and whānau project for 'koha'.

There is a day coming when films which highlight the depth and breadth of our ways of being find their way into a global context in which we will all be active in co-creating. I believe this to be so and not far off. Ki a koutou kei te mihi aroha, mihi māhana ki a koutou, ka huri.
Mereana.



by **Garrick Cooper** - Wednesday, 6 September 2006, 03:24 PM

Kia ora koutou

Thanx Cheryl for opening this kaupapa. I found reading the background to some of the negotiations with the tangata whenua interesting. In your second piece you talked about the mechanisms for 'grooming' the victims. I agree with Linda, although the context and details may change, these situations are probably familiar to most.

I have had some experience of working with a Pākehā TV production

company and some of these tactics Cheryl discussed they used e.g., they hired natives as director and film crew. Interestingly but not surprisingly perhaps, the natives didn't understand what the 'real' story was and having them did not aid one bit in producing a more authentic story, or 'telling' our story. Some may argue it may have been worse with an all Pākehā crew although I do not necessarily believe that in this case. In hindsight, there are a number of things that we would have done differently. I must say that you become very disempowered through the whole process. We fought with the production company for about two years after the shooting and tried all sorts – contacting those who funded the programme, lawyers etc. etc. etc. They got in a native to mediate blah blah blah. There were no guidelines (or there wasn't any when this occurred – at that time there also weren't any ethics that producers were bound by – does anyone know if that is still the case?) for producers and for those involved, and that communicating and understanding expectations from the outset is vital – assuming you know what to be aware of. In the case of the River Queen it sounds like the Whanganui received plenty of advice from those in the know but there is nothing like personal experience to 'truly' understand these things.

May I add, I think these types of situations in the future will occur more and more in TV production and in other areas. They have also occurred much in the past in other arenas e.g., research. In the future we could refuse to participate point blank and say that we will make our own productions (when we can fund them!) or could live in hope, learn and persevere and make sure that the next time it happens it is a more positive experience. In fact I think there will probably be both occurring whether we like it or not – to add to that I think both are probably important but for different reasons. Eventually, I am optimistic there will be increasing numbers of viewers who will demand more 'authentic' stories, just as there seems to be an increasing market internationally for scripts and movies written and produced by companies other than the big American ones.

I haven't seen the movie and after reading the comments do not feel that compelled to get it out. I usually like to watch mindless action movies, no twists and turns, and just zone out. I never remember them anyway and have been known to get a movie out for a second time and get halfway through the movie before realising I have already seen it!

Paul hit the nail on the head when he said 'this is not a film about Māori but a film about how some Pākehā think Māori were...'. I couldn't agree more, this was funded by Hollywood (?), created by Hollywood with Māori playing a few of the parts. It also sounds like most of the 'creative' work was being done by Americans and therefore we could not expect 'our' story to be told. Just out of interest, were any Māori involved in the development of the script?

I suppose there are real questions around the impact and influence of movies and stories like these (via stereotypes etc.) really have in adding to people's (Māori mai, Pākehā mai and others) perceptions about Māori.

Would be interesting to hear others views on this.

Kia ora Linda, I too enjoyed reading your proposal. I have many questions. I look forward to you turning this into a movie, so that they be answered!



by **Cheryl Smith** - Sunday, 17 September 2006, 12:04 PM

Tēnā rā koutou katoa,
Great kōrero from everyone.

I am sitting here in my office in Castlecliff (Paul and I both have offices that look at the sea over the top of a whole lot of state houses). I have a cot in my office now that the mokopuna has moved in with nanny.

There was one scene in the River Queen that is set at Castlecliff. It's where the military were camped. Like a lot of scenes it defies belief when you know the real setting. No-one would camp on the beach its too windy especially when you can move fifty metres behind some hills. It's a beautiful clear sunny day here and that is such a sharp contrast to Vincent Wards movies which are always wet, wet, wet and bleak. As Margie points out most tauiwi NZ film makers seem to have a really bleak strange view of nature. Nature is either attacking them or oppressing them in some way. Now there is the killer sheep movie, the spiders in King Kong etc? Aotearoa has no animals or insects that can harm people unless you got a kereru bone stuck down your throat. Mind you a stingray can get you if you happen to be swimming with them!

Last week Whanganui iwi had bad news. The ten year battle to stop Genesis power company from taking yet more water from the river was lost in the Court of Appeal. They are already taking 70% of the water in the upper reaches. If you have been on the river by boat you will have seen how high the river mark used to be before the Tongariro Power Development dams were built. Now in some places the boats scrape the bottom. The impact on the river and all of her dependents has been devastating and Genesis want to take more water. Judges obviously think that in the national interest electricity needs are higher than the life of a river.

It has been really interesting to read peoples writings over the last few weeks about and not about the River Queen. The consensus was that the movie was not really worth watching or was a trial to watch. I hope that Leonie does include this film in her book on media representation. Seeing as it was Taranaki maunga that made the Whanganui awa that seems appropriate.

Linda reminds us about all the stories that we have inside us waiting to be told or written. Film making can be so exciting. With a laptop and a camera, anyone can make movies. If given the tools what are the stories we would tell? We had a good example of that when we attended a workshop run by

Leonie and Sharon on film editing. Each of our groups made a three minute film and the range of stories was really great – one on homebirth, one on life from the perspective of rangatahi, one on the Māori party, one on the interpretation of a waiata, one on a native school. There are so many stories. And at the risk of sounding like a stereotype in a taha māori textbook – we are naturally good story tellers.

He mihi tēnei ki a koutou kua whakawhitiwhiti kōrero, he kai anō tēnā. He mihi ki a koe Leonie, Jenny mā, ngā kaiwhakahaere o tēnei mahi whakahirahira.

Cherryl