Weaving the Past into an Unfolding Present:
Subject Formation in the Māori Novel

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how four of the most prominent contemporary Māori novelists—Keri Hulme, Alan Duff, Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace—have explored in their novels the significance of the Māori past in the formation of contemporary Māori individual subjects. The term "the Māori past" as deployed in this thesis refers to cultural, social and political influences from the past which are felt by Māori individuals to be particularly relevant in their subjective sense of being Māori in a postcolonial, hybrid society. While the persistent presence of a preoccupation with the Māori past in the Māori novel has been intermittently noticed in previous scholarship, this important thematic concern has most often, and primarily, been discussed in terms of its formal and cultural attributes or socio-political functions. The implications of the Māori past for Māori subjective experience, on the other hand, have not received the degree of critical attention they merit.

What I propose in this thesis is that an investigation of the formation of a subjective sense of identity on the part of contemporary Māori characters, as depicted in Māori novels, can provide a valuable insight into the ways in which the Māori past is related to as of significance by Māori individuals. Such an investigation is thus concerned with how the Māori past is demonstrated in Māori novels as being woven into lived experience in contemporary Māori life, against the backdrop of a society characterised by increasing

cultural exchange and globalisation. Through analysing a select number of novels by Hulme, Duff, Ihimaera and Grace, which represent their most intensive reflection on the Māori past, this thesis shows that their artistic explorations of subjective responses to the Māori past are not only highly distinctive, but together also constitute a wide spectrum, ranging from nostalgic longing, to a movement from frustration to reconciliation, to unresolved tensions between loyalty and reform, to a gentle embrace of cultural tradition in individual and collective experience.

Finally, the thesis concludes that individual Māori characters are shown to develop a sense of subjective agency in relation to their experience of sharing a collective identity with other Māori in a postcolonial society, which is itself marked by an inescapable cultural hybridity. The investigation also concludes that the significance of the past for the present has important implications for the tackling of tensions between individual choice and group allegiance in the project of community building in postcolonial liberal democratic societies with a significant indigenous population.

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how the most prominent Māori novelists who have been published in New Zealand to date, through their portrayal of literary characters, have explored the significance of the Māori past in the formation of contemporary Māori individual subjects. The term "the Māori past" as deployed in this thesis refers to cultural, social and political influences from the past which are felt by Māori individuals to be particularly relevant in their subjective sense of being Māori in a postcolonial, hybrid society. Though personal understandings, and indeed, subjective reconstructions, of the Māori past may vary with different Māori individuals, that past nevertheless provides an important reference framework in which a subjective sense of identity is sought by those individuals in relation to other Māori and non-Māori persons.

The present introduction aims to delineate the historical background against which the Māori novel's thematic concern with the past has taken shape, assess previous critical responses to this theme, and foreshadow my own critical approach and the analytical contents of my present study by providing a chapter outline.

1. The Rise of the Māori Novel and its Concern with the Past

The inception of the Māori novel itself took place in the context of a nation-wide impulse in

New Zealand to re-examine the past. This impulse was induced, to a large degree, by a desire

on the part of Māori to redress what they perceived as long-standing grievances and racial

injustices incurred as a result of breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. It also sprang from a

desire in Māori to celebrate their own cultural and artistic traditions, with the two motivations

being expressed in the so-called Māori Renaissance which became apparent in the 1970s and

subsequently.[1] This wide-ranging movement not only pushed for legal investigation into

allegations of contemporary and historical breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi by the Crown

in the appropriation of Māori land, but also set the stage for the New Zealand government to

"adopt the idea that the languages, cultures and traditions of both Pākehā and Māori should

be officially recognised by the state" (Hayward). The rise of Māori literature in English

during the Māori Renaissance, involving as it did "the appropriation of the written word by

an oral culture" (Valle vii), represented a further development of Māori cultural life, in the

direction that facilitated the assertion of Māori culture in a changed, and still changing,

political and social environment. Indeed, as Karen P. Sinclair points out in relation to the

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[1] It is noteworthy that the term "Māori Renaissance" is not without controversy. Witi

Ihimaera, for example, claims that "[t]he 'Maori Renaissance' is a term made up by Western

academics. There was no 'flowering' of Maori art and culture in the 70s, 80s and 90s. Maori

art has been flowering for centuries. Western academics just chose to finally notice and

externally validate that art in the late twentieth-century" (qtd. in Pistacchi 8).

Māori Renaissance, "Maori literature stands out as a means through which Maori culture can be reexamined, reevaluated, and for the most part reaffirmed" (283). Against this background, the Māori novel burst onto the literary scene with the appearance of Witi Ihimaera's *Tangi* (1973), the first ever novel by a Māori to be published (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 180). Centred around a Māori youth's return from the Pākehā-dominated cultural sphere of city life to his rural home marae to attend his father's tangi (funeral), this novel is, fittingly, saturated with a rehearsal of Māori mythology and celebration of Māori culture and ways of life.

In terms of representing the tensions and interactions between Māori indigenous conventions and Western influences, the novel as a literary genre is particularly well-suited for the purpose on account of its ability to provide ample room for many different forms of artistic expression and the representation of diverse manifestations of cultural life. Eva Rask Knudsen, for example, argues in her book *The Circle & the Spiral: A Study of Australian Aboriginal and New Zealand Maori Literature* that

of all European genres, the novel would seem to be the one least compatible with indigenous oral traditions. . . . But because of its inherent opposition to Aboriginal and Maori traditional forms, the subversive adaptation of this particular genre provides the clearest examples of how indigenous writers have in fact managed to push European forms into new territories. The novel as genre offers the scope (in terms of length) necessary for exploring the process through which 'subtexts'—often poetically or dramatically

expressed—are retrieved. (30)

Knudsen is certainly right in her assessment of the flexibility of the novel, emphasising as she does this literary genre's capacity for the recontextualisation of Aboriginal and Māori traditional artistic resources. Problematically, however, throughout her discussion of Māori novels, Māori culture is seen as capable of regenerating itself along ordained, spiralling lines, regardless of, or ultimately overcoming, contemporary politico-economic conditions. She even goes so far as to suggest that *The Bone People* (1983),[2] by the Māori novelist Keri Hulme, "evokes the ancient Papatuanuku-Ranginui theme of parenthood and expands it to make it *encompass the issue of individuation*. The renewal engendered by this expansion, however, is *ordained by tradition itself in the form of prophesy*" (153-54; my emphasis). Apparently, individuation in contemporary Māori society is interpreted by Knudsen as reducible to age-old tradition which has binding power over individual experience and agency. Such a valorisation of indigenous origins over postcolonial developments, as Simone Drichel correctly points out, dooms *The Circle & the Spiral* to fail to account for, in Salman Rushdie's and Homi Bhabha's terms, "how newness comes into the world" ("Newness" 510). A simple truth about Māori literature is succinctly summarised by Chris Prentice in her discussion of the Māori Renaissance: "The fact of writing in English illustrates the point that rebirth is not

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[2] The title of the novel, when it was originally published, was *the bone people*; but some later editions use the capitalised title, as do some critics when referring to this novel. I will use the capitalised title in keeping with the edition that I will be referring to.

a return to some mythically authentic past moment, but always into a context that shapes that to which it gives birth" ("Renaissance" 88-89).

Indeed, while many novels by major Māori novelists have displayed a strong interest in the Māori past, this preoccupation is most often contextualised and shaped by contemporary concerns. Witi Ihimaera's first novel *Tangi*, for example, though exuding a warm nostalgia for a Māori form of existence richly nurtured in indigenous folklore and cultural rituals, has nevertheless clearly not wiped out the contradictions that exist between the attraction Māori individuals feel towards a slowly-evolving Māori rural way of life and the draw of modern urban life in the Pākehā world—a theme that Ihimaera would more fully develop in his later novels. In Patricia Grace's *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* (1978), the first novel published by a Māori woman, the Māori female protagonist, while aware of a deep-seated cultural difference between Māori and Pākehā, nevertheless marries a Pākehā and is perfectly willing to work with him to resolve the cultural barriers that exist between them. Keri Hulme's only novel *The Bone People* features a female protagonist who has immersed herself in a dysfunctional form of Western individualism as much as she is ready to extol the mythical Māori past, with the paradox never really being resolved in any realistic way in the novel. In contrast, Alan Duff, starting with his first novel *Once Were Warriors* (1990), has often exhibited in his literary writing a very critical attitude towards many aspects of traditional Māori culture, invariably advocating the need to take advantage of the opportunities available in the Pākehā-dominated social system. Perspectives of a contemporary, cross-culturally informed, nature are even visible in Māori historical novels

dealing with a relatively remote past, such as Heretaunga Pat Baker's *Behind the Tattooed Face* (1975) and *The Strongest God* (1990), the former showing a ripeness for fundamental change because of the violence experienced by warring Māori tribes even before the arrival of Europeans, while the latter explores why the encounter with European settlers was experienced by Māori as inherently difficult and traumatic. Since the turn of the millennium, a new generation of Māori novelists has continued to display a similar preoccupation with the past. For instance, Paula Morris in her debut novel *Queen of Beauty* (2002), and Kelly Ana Morey in her first novel *Bloom* (2003), have deployed Māori protagonists who, while trying to understand the past of their family backgrounds, are nevertheless shifting between locations and thoroughly exposed to many walks of contemporary cultural life.

As one might expect, a number of literary critics have commented upon this ongoing preoccupation with the significance of the Māori past for the present as a recurring theme in the Māori novel. I shall now examine the range of critical views that have been expressed regarding this theme.

2. Critical Reception of the Māori Novel

When one looks at critical responses to the Māori novel to date, it becomes apparent that scholars have identified a number of important themes, including its persistent preoccupation with the past. Yet while many accounts have been offered of the formal and cultural aspects of this important thematic concern, the implications it tries to convey for Māori subjective

experience have not received the degree of attention they merit. Many of the earlier critical

reviews, which focused on formal attributes of the Māori novel in order to locate it in relation

to the Western tradition, tended to regard its invocation of the Māori past simply as evidence

of incompetence in the handling of the novelistic form. Thus, C. K. Stead, himself a novelist,

dismisses the Māori myths and legends in *The Bone People* as "almost totally spurious"

without giving thought to what cultural aspirations could have fuelled the author's efforts to

romanticise the Māori past ("Keri Hulme's" the Bone People", and the Pegasus Award for

Maori Literature" 107). Lawrence Jones, commenting on the same novel, similarly states that

"the characters cannot stand up under the mythic burden placed upon them," falling short of

analysing the deep cultural dilemmas that the author has tried to overcome in her literary

experiment of restoring a distinctively Māori cultural universe for contemporary Māori

characters (287). In comparison, Mark Williams's study of Māori novels in *Leaving the*

Highway: Six Contemporary New Zealand Novelists is much more sensitive to the different

cultural background on the part of Māori. However, preoccupied with a formalist

investigation of the realist tradition preserved in Pākehā and Māori fiction alike, Williams

tends to be very sceptical about any manifestation of textual exuberance in the Māori novels

that does not conform to that tradition—dismissing, for example, "the special effects,

mystical flourishes, and inflated rhetoric of the writing" in Ihimaera's literary dramatisation

of the bringing of the Polynesian gods to Aotearoa as producing "unconscious self-parody"

(123). Williams's approach is, in turn, rightly criticised by Bridget Orr as failing to read

Māori novels "in the terms they themselves propose," with the result that from a largely

Pākehā perspective "Māori writing is treated, in the end, as the aesthetically unsuccessful epiphenomenon of cultural conflict" (81). This criticism can be suitably extended to the formalist approach to the Māori novel at large. Indeed, it should be obvious that the novel has been adopted by Māori writers not merely for further training in the Western artistic tradition, but as a vehicle for exploring and expressing the conflicted life experience in the context of long-standing cultural difference. Accordingly, formal inconsistencies or fracture lines in Māori novels, rather than being simply dismissed as little more than manifestations of artistic failure, should be much more profitably read as indicative of the cultural tensions, dilemmas and aspirations imbedded in postcolonial Māori experience, which the Māori writers have imaginatively explored in their literary creation.

Over the years, an increasing number of sympathetic readings of the Māori novel's invocation of the Māori past have been made by literary observers, often from an indigenous studies perspective. Such readings, allowing for overlapping of research interests, can be roughly divided into two categories: those mainly concerned with identifying the indigenous artistic and cultural traditions of Māori, and those primarily aiming at attempts made by Māori writers to articulate indigenous visions for the advancement of racial or social causes. *The Circle & the Spiral* by Eva Rask Knudsen, whose ultimately unsustainable faith in cultural essentialism was noted above, falls under the first category. Another major work under this category is Nadia Majid's monograph on the mythic motifs in Māori novels, which appropriately recognises the evolving character of Māori culture while highlighting through her discussion that "myth and memory are essential components of individual and collective

Maori identity" (248). Articles of more particular concerns have also appeared in discussion

of Māori fiction, which heed, for example, the influences of traditional communal and oral

story-telling on Māori writing (McRae; Kőster); Māori conceptions of spirituality and the

supernatural (Fuchs; Benediktsson); and the traditional Māori notion of time, which features

a "regenerative, spiral temporality" (Deloughrey 68) and according to which "all times are

always present" (Martin 490). Under the second category, Umelo R. Ojinmah's 1993 book

Witi Ihimaera: A Changing Vision is the earliest scholarly monograph to focus on an

indigenous social outlook developed in contemporary Māori literature, discussing as it does

Ihimaera's evolving efforts to promote "Maoritanga" and uphold "communally-held"

traditional Māori values in the interest of advancing biculturalism (119). More recently,

Chadwick Allen's 2002 book on American Indian and Māori literary and activist texts

provides a comprehensive survey of Māori writers' self-conscious and creative deployment,

between the onset of World War II and the early 1980s, of markers of indigeneity in terms of

the triad of "blood," "land," and "memory" (220), foregrounding the strategic invocation of

the indigenous past on the part of Māori novelists such as Ihimaera, Grace and Hulme for

promoting the message of Māori empowerment in the context of the international indigenous

rights movement. The research angle adopted by Allen, valuable as it is for sorting the

indigenous symbolic resources from the Māori past, is obviously more concerned with how

effectively those resources are displayed towards multiple audiences than with how they are

integrated into contemporary Māori life. Indeed, indigenous studies as an area of inquiry rests,

if sometimes implicitly, on the basis of cross-cultural comparison and communication.

The cross-cultural approach to the Māori novel has been developed much more fully in more recent studies that focus on the appraisement of the effects of the intermingling of cultural traditions as reflected in literary representation. A major work under this rubric is Michaela Moura-Koçoglu's 2011 book *Narrating Indigenous Modernities: Transcultural Dimensions in Contemporary Māori Literature*, which is concerned with the textual articulation by Māori writers of "transcultural Māori identities" that asserts a distinctive indigenous quality while drawing on various non-Māori cultural currents (xxiv). Appearing in book form in the same year, Melissa Kennedy's *Striding Both Worlds: Witi Ihimaera and New Zealand's Literary Traditions* stands out as the most thorough case study to date of the cross-cultural influence in the literary work of a Māori writer, offering a survey of literary traditions that not only encompasses the dynamic of Pākehā-Māori biculturalism within New Zealand, but is also broadly international in scope. Kennedy concludes her study by pointing out the paradigmatic importance of Ihimaera's shifting representation of Māori culture for understanding "Māori cultural identity and its artistic expression as multiple and composite" (205). In keeping with their shared emphasis on the literary articulation of cultural identity, both studies have investigated the Māori past mainly in terms of its deployment in cultural representation and social contestation. As, for example, Kennedy has made clear in her discussion of Ihimaera's writing of the Māori legend of the seven founding canoes that first brought Māori to Aotearoa New Zealand: "[I]t is not the veracity so much as the desirability of reconstructions of the past that is important for a national imaginary. Thus, by insistently writing the myth, Ihimaera endorses its importance for contemporary identity-formation" (11).

The invocation of the Māori past in Māori literature is thus shown to be politically enabling and culturally regenerative in a hybrid social context.

While investigation of the Māori novel undertaken in both indigenous studies and cross-cultural studies has given prominence to the issue of cultural identity or identities, their common preoccupation with textual manifestations of cultural traditions has nevertheless entailed an insufficiency of analytical attention to the question of how Māori individuals living in an increasingly multicultural society respond to those traditions in different yet related ways. Indeed, the wide spectrum of stances towards both Māori and non-Māori cultural traditions displayed by various characters in Māori fiction can be satisfactorily accounted for only if the variety and subtleties of their subjective worlds are considered alongside the cultural traditions in which they are placed. Chris Prentice has touched upon exactly such a critical perspective on the literary representation of Māori tradition in her discussion of Grace's *Baby No-Eyes*, when she suggests that the Māori cultural values as textually exhibited in the novel have an integrity that "relates to the centrality of family and community as contexts for storytelling; the interconnectedness of the stories and that of the characters mean that a cultural or symbolic (reciprocal, reversible) exchange among them, and with the reader, may be adumbrated" ("Visibility" 340). In other words, whatever cultural conventions may have been foregrounded in the novelistic text for display to the reader, subjective interactions on the part of Māori characters with their environment can nevertheless provide a good starting point for a critical examination of the vitality and tension that exist in the reception of the cultural legacies of Māori tradition in contemporary Māori

life.

Such an emphasis on the subjective experience of individual characters has already

been visible in some major studies of Māori literature. In his *Writing Along Broken Lines:*

Violence and Ethnicity in Contemporary Maori Fiction, Otto Heim examines how sentience

has been written into Māori fiction through its textual articulation of the bodily dimensions of

life, in which the textual reaches beyond mere discursive traditions to accommodate

individual subjectivity. Discerning a connection between the experience of violence and a

lack of kaupapa, or purpose, Heim is thus able to see Māori fiction as participating in an

effort by a culture of survival to "realign the present with the past in a distinctive cultural

orientation"— as articulating a sense of purpose that links individual experience, collective

positions and cultural action (*Broken Lines* 23). Another perspective on the issue of

individual subjectivity as represented in the Māori novel is to be found in Alistair Fox's *The*

Ship of Dreams: Masculinity in Contemporary New Zealand Fiction, which examines the

process of subject formation for both Pākehā and Māori novelistic characters. Taking a

mainly psychoanalytic approach, Fox thus observes of the male protagonists in the novels of

Ihimaera's mature phase as a writer:

> To a large extent, the situations Ihimaera describes could be found in any
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> number of accounts drawn from psychotherapeutic practice, suggesting that
>
> the forces he shows to be at work in the fictive situations he represents are
>
> those that are characteristic of Oedipal or narcissistic conflicts wherever they

may arise, regardless of the society. Nevertheless, these conflicts are, to a certain extent, generated and intensified by values that are culturally specific, making the trauma suffered by the Maori male subject perhaps even more difficult to bear than it would be in a society with less demanding expectations. (*Masculinity* 168)

Although primarily concerned with the implications of the familial situations on male subject formation, Fox's study has nevertheless unmistakably pointed towards the implications of cultural traditions for this process. One important commonality between Heim's and Fox's approaches is that starting with analysis of the textual representation of individual subjective experiences, a picture can be painted of cultural aspects of life that have evolved from a shared past. What subjective responses to the Māori past may amount to, I would like to add, may well be a making sense of oneself in the context of interpersonal relations mediated through a shared framework of reference to the past—that is, a process of forming a subjective sense of identity against a cultural background.

What I want to propose in this thesis is that an investigation of the formation of a subjective sense of identity on the part of contemporary Māori characters, as depicted in Māori novels, can provide a valuable insight into the ways in which the Māori past is related to as of significance by Māori individuals. Such an investigation is thus concerned with how the Māori past is demonstrated in Māori novels as being woven into lived experience in contemporary Māori life, against the backdrop of a society characterised by increasing

cultural exchange and globalisation. The importance of responding to the Māori past for

individual Māori characters, it will be shown, springs from a need to develop a subjective

sense of agency that involves the sharing of a collective identity with other Māori despite the

need, and the desire, to live in a hybrid, postcolonial society. Insofar as the investigation aims

to understand subjective stances of Māori individuals to, and their various engagements with,

collective legacies, novels produced by Māori men and women seriously concerned with

representing Māori life in a changing society provide an ideal case study. As Simon During

made clear in a 1985 article when discussing a couple of outstanding contemporary New

Zealand novels, including *The Bone People*: "Novels in particular are founded on the claim to

represent individuals in society and thus society in general" (372). In accordance with such a

dynamic embedded in the novelistic genre, the present study will take individual experiences

represented in the Māori novels as the starting point, and work towards answering the

question of why, and how, a collective—e.g. communal and racial—sense of identity is felt

by Māori individual characters to be personally relevant or important. The writers to be

studied are Keri Hulme, Alan Duff, Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace from the first generation

of Māori novelists, a choice made not only because they are arguably the most prominent

Māori novelists to date, but also because, as the following chapters will make clear, their

artistic explorations of subjective responses to the Māori past are not only highly distinctive,

but together also constitute a wide spectrum. Literarily active during the Māori renaissance

and its immediate aftermath, these four authors have produced novels that represent a keenly

felt need among Māori to reassert, or revalue, the legacies of the Māori past in the space

opened by that movement of cultural awakening and renewal. It should be pointed out, though, that in focusing on such a concern in their literary endeavours, I do not mean to suggest that the Māori cultural identity should be, or become, the most valued part of identity in the minds of present or future Māori writers; rather, the critical question here is how cultural awakening and the use of a shared racial identity serves to help Māori individuals build a subjective sense of identity during a certain historical period.

3. Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 will systematically lay out the theoretical assumptions that inform the present study. It will involve a consideration of the nature of the self and its role in subject formation, an account of the location and function of cultural experience, a view of subjective engagement with the cultural realm as having transformative effects on self-development, and a discussion of the relation of the author to his or her work.

In the subsequent chapters I will focus on a select number of novels by Māori novelists Keri Hulme, Alan Duff, Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace which arguably represent their most intensive reflection on the implications of the Māori past for the formation of Māori individual subjects. With the exception of Keri Hulme, who has only published one novel to date, each writer will receive two chapters of discussion—an arrangement which is based on the combined consideration of a scholarly need to examine the evolving nature of those writers' literary careers and the allowed word length of a PhD thesis. References will be

made to other literary texts by those writers whenever useful for the discussion.

Chapter 2 will discuss Keri Hulme's only novel *The Bone People*, with a view to analysing the epistemic limits of the viable subject positions of the protagonists, limits that have resulted from their alienation from Māori communal life and cultural tradition. I will examine the irregular novelistic form in relation to wish-fulfilment exhibited by the author and interpretive fallacies displayed by literary critics. By prioritising the psychological realism contained in the novel's depiction of characters over its literary power to evoke readers' nostalgia for mythical origins, this opening chapter thus sets the tone for the discussion of subject formation in the whole thesis.

Chapters 3 and 4 will deal with Alan Duff's *Both Sides of the Moon* and *Dreamboat Dad*, respectively, with the analytical focus on how personal frustrations and desires have been projected by some of the main characters onto their conceptions of Māori history and tradition. The maturing nature of Duff's assessment of Māori tradition will be demonstrated to have been reflected in his different treatment of the theme of individual self-fashioning in the two novels. Once a maverick on the New Zealand cultural scene noted for his angry, and often simplistic, denunciations of Māori tradition, Duff will be shown in my analysis to have apparently brought himself around in his literary thinking to the possibilities of reconciliation, respect and mutual support among the individuals who share a cultural tradition in the face of cultural globalisation.

Chapter 5 will be devoted to Witi Ihimaera's twin novels *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer*, while Chapter 6 will be concerned with his *The Uncle's Story*. Of all the

four major Māori novelists to be discussed in this thesis, Ihimaera is the one with the most

dramatic U-turns in his writing career, and his vision for Māori society the most conflicted. I

will consider *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer* mainly in terms of the unsettled and

unsettling relationship between hybridisation of cultural legacies and the indigenous subject,

as embodied in the experience of the protagonist, Tamatea. I will then examine *The Uncle's*

Story in light of the agenda of reforming Māori tradition as put forward by the Māori gay

protagonist, Michael, analysing the implications of a patriarchal mode of thought displayed

by him for his political and interpersonal life.

The last novelist to be examined in the thesis is Patricia Grace, whose novels often

exhibit a positive, deep yet gentle embrace of Māori culture. Chapter 7 will discuss Grace's

Potiki, identifying a Māori metaphysics as embodied in the lifeworld of the Māori characters

in the novel, and setting out the significance of subject-object engagement for the resistance

to capitalist deterritorialisation and the continuation of communal tradition. Chapter 8 will

analyse the potent illustration offered in Grace's *Baby No-Eyes* of the enterprise of Māori

cultural renewal despite cultural disruption and alienation suffered by generations of Māori

individuals, elucidating the experiential basis for the collective dimension of identity

formation.

I will conclude the thesis by discussing the common rationale behind the concern

shared by the four major Māori novelists with legacies from the Māori past, even though they

differ in their understanding of the influence of that past on present Māori life. I will also set

out the implications of my findings about subject formation depicted in the Māori novel for

the project of community building in postcolonial societies with a significant indigenous

population.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Assumptions Informing This Study

To discuss the significance of the Māori past in the process that leads to the formation of a subjective sense of identity on the part of contemporary Māori characters inevitably involves addressing two questions: first, the nature of the individual self, and second, the implications of human discourse for the assumption by the individual of a socially recognisable identity. Any conscious knowledge of a collective past is almost always already discursively mediated, be it in the form of personal recollection, of stories heard, of cultural tradition, or of institutional teaching. The investigation of subject formation as undertaken in this thesis, therefore, will readily admit that subject positions evolve and change, partly reflecting discursive contestation at a social level during a certain historical period.

However, it is crucially important to state clearly at the outset of my investigation that cultural traditions and historical knowledge are considered in the present study to be significant not only because of the way they reflect discursive contestation at an abstract social level, but also because of the way they provide a medium through which a subjective sense of agency and belonging can be pursued in the alterable, immediate environment—in other words, in an interactive, interpersonal world. Given that such a view differs from the theoretical concerns behind much of the scholarship published on Māori novelists, which

focuses on the influence of discourse and the politics of representation with little

consideration of the agency of the individual subject, and the sense of a personal relationship

between the writer and his or her work, I shall systematically outline the theoretical

assumptions that inform my understanding of the process of subject formation in the realm of

human culture. This will involve a consideration of certain notions drawn from the

psychoanalytic field concerning the nature of the self and its role in subject formation, an

account of the location and function of cultural experience, a view of subjective engagement

with the cultural realm as having transformative effects on self-development, and a

discussion of the relation of the author to his or her work.

1. The Nature of the Self and its Role in Subject Formation

While psychoanalysis, as the talking cure, has always emphasised the role of language in

human subjective life, the object relations school of psychoanalysis, which I largely follow,

has further insisted on the primacy of interpersonal relations in the formation of the

individual's sense of self that includes verbal as well as non-verbal dimensions. As Cheryl

Glickauf-Hughes and Marolyn Wells sum up, the basic assumption underlying object

relations theory is that "the primary human motivation is to have relationships with other

people rather than to gratify sexual and aggressive drives as is postulated in classical

psychoanalytic theory" (2). Though by no means constituting a monolithic movement, object

relations theorists have generally shared the position that the human individual develops a

sense of self in relation to others in the environment, with persons and non-human entities

being experienced by the individual as evoking internalised objects from his or her earlier life,

including from preverbal infancy, and with later experiences being capable of reshaping the

individual's relation to those objects and adding to the repertoire of them.[3] The earliest use of

objects in the life of an individual, according to object relations theory, usually originates in

his or her relationship with the mother figure, the latter's breast being introjected by the

infant as a prototypical object that can be either good or bad, depending on its availability. An

"object" in this theory usually means an entity to which an individual relates as of emotional

significance, including, in the words of N. Gregory Hamilton, "a loved or hated person, place,

thing or fantasy" (5). As we will see shortly, the British paediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W.

Winnicott has extended the use of the concept of "object" to the description of phenomena in

the cultural realm.

Drawing extensively upon the object relations tradition in its emphasis on

interpersonal relations, and borrowing strength from what he calls a "revolution" in

techniques of observing and evaluating infants during the late twentieth century (38), the

American psychiatrist and psychoanalytic theorist Daniel N. Stern, in his book *The*

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[3] For a summary of the development of object relations psychoanalysis by major theorists

such as Melanie Klein, W. R. D. Fairbairn, D. W. Winnicott, Harry Guntrip, and Christopher

Bollas, and the work of psychoanalysts closely associated with this school, including Heinz

Kohut and Daniel N. Stern, see Goldstein; Greenberg and Mitchell; and Weber and Downing.

Some of those psychologists will be drawn upon in the course of this thesis.

Interpersonal World of the Infant, has laid out a very clear and useful paradigm concerning the development of what he calls "the four senses of self" (37). In Stern's theorisation, during the first two months of life the infant is forming a sense of "an emergent self" which is based on the process of integrating and organising experience. From around two months onwards, the infant appears sufficiently able to organise experience to approach interpersonal relatedness with an organising perspective, or "the sense of a core self." Around seven months, the infant begins to appear aware of the distinction between its own thoughts and experiences and those of other people, thus forming "the sense of a subjective self"; however, the gap between self and other can be bridged through the intersubjective sharing of affective states. According to Stern, these three senses of self, which are non-linguistic, will remain active throughout the rest of the individual's life.[4] It is usually not until the second year of the infant's life that the "the sense of a verbal self" emerges with the acquisition of language, so that now "the self and the other have different and distinct personal world knowledge as well as a new medium of exchange with which to create shared meanings" (162).

One important implication of Stern's paradigm is that even after our acquisition of language as human individuals, we may often just use human discourse as a medium with which we continue developing our verbal and non-verbal dimensions of self in relation to affectively important others. Such a view of the relationship between self and language is, it

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[4] For a detailed account of the development of the various senses of self, see Stern, especially Chapters 3-7.

may be worth pointing out, very different from that of the French psychoanalyst and

psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, who has had profound influence on the cultural and literary

criticism of the late twentieth century. In the context of Lacan's three orders relating to the

human subject—the imaginary, the symbolic and the real—the imaginary is the realm of

images, imagination and illusions. It is structured by the symbolic (the realm of signifiers in

language) in order to approach the real, which is the undifferentiated, chaotic realm of

being—"the domain of that which subsists outside of symbolization" (Lacan 324). Thus no

self-image is unmediated by language—the discourse of others. Judged in this context, the

human subject, after entering the realm of language, is intrinsically split, remaining forever

beyond hope of achieving wholeness, as the possibility of satisfying one's desire is doomed

to be lost in the labyrinth of arbitrary signifiers. In brief, for Lacan there can be no "self" but

a fragmented "subject" held together only by an imaginary wholeness.

While acknowledging the constitutive function of discourse in subject formation, I

will nevertheless in my discussion highlight the agentic use of available discourse by the

individual for developing a sense of self in the context of interpersonal relations. In other

words, I will mainly take an object relations approach to the issue of the assumption by the

individual of a socially recognisable identity. Given the evolving nature of discourse under

the influence of social power operating in the cultural realm, I will in the present study have

no difficulty admitting the validity of the definition of identity provided by the cultural critic

Stuart Hall: "Identities are . . . points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which

discursive practices construct for us" ("Identity" 6),[5] while adding that a subjective sense of

identity is not merely discursively written but also involves a unique self that develops from

choices that the individual makes in response to his or her encounter with, and reaction to,

cultural practices. All in all, as far as my discussion is concerned, it will be assumed that there

is indeed the potential of self-development in the individual's subjective engagement with the

realm of culture; this realm of culture, furthermore, will be viewed in light of object relations

psychoanalysis's emphasis on interpersonal relations.

2. The Location and Function of Cultural Experience

In the object relations tradition, it is D. W. Winnicott who has most influentially theorised

about culture in connection with interpersonal relations. In a 1953 article entitled

"Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," later included in his book *Playing and*

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[5] Such a definition, with its emphasis on the shaping power of discourse in subject formation,

is clearly in the tradition of Michel Foucault, whose investigation of the human subject has

mainly been concerned with questions of social power relations and cultural hegemony in

various historical forms. It should be noted that Foucault is also concerned with how the

individual turns himself or herself into a subject, although this has not been the major focus in

his investigation of subject formation. For his own summary of his study of the relationship

between the subject and power, see Foucault "Subject." For investigations of subject positions

in relation to discourse undertaken by Stuart Hall and others from a largely Foucauldian

perspective, see Hall and Du Gay.

Reality, Winnicott coins the terms "transitional objects" and "transitional phenomena" to designate any "not-me" thing or phenomenon—such as a teddy bear or a part of a blanket, or a word or a tune—to which the infant attaches great value as a stand-in for the mother's breast and which function to help the infant defend against anxiety in its transition from attachment to the breast to true object relationships (*Playing* 2-5). Importantly, this transition takes place in the intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner psychic reality and the external world both contribute—an area that will not be subjected to reality-testing by a mother or caretaker who has good enough intuitive understanding. Believing that adults continue enjoying the personal intermediate area as they did during infancy, Winnicott goes on to say that "we can acknowledge our own corresponding intermediate areas, and are pleased to find a degree of overlapping, that is to say common experience between members of a group in art or religion or philosophy" (*Playing* 18). Here Winnicott has begun to make the connection between individual subjective experience and collective understandings.

Suggesting that Freud did not have a place for things cultural in his topography of the human mind, Winnicott, on the basis of his theorisation of transitional objects and transitional phenomena, published in 1967 an article entitled "The Location of Cultural Experience," later also included in his book *Playing and Reality*. In the article Winnicott suggests that the infant's employment of a transitional object amounts to "the child's first use of a symbol and the first experience of play" (*Playing* 130). For Winnicott, the inner world of the infant is obviously not shaped entirely by the outside world, but instead develops in the infant's experiencing of it; as he explains: "if the use of the object by the baby builds up into

anything . . . then there must be the beginning of the setting up in the infant's mind or personal psychic reality of an image of the object" (*Playing* 130-31). This mental representation is kept alive and significant in the inner world of the infant by the mother figure through her availability in the environment. Extrapolating this model of experiencing onto the various stages of a human life, Winnicott claims: "The place where cultural experience is located is in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment (originally the object)" (*Playing* 135). Crucially, this potential space occurs only in relation to a feeling of confidence, a feeling that in its origin is related to the "dependability of the mother-figure or environmental elements" (*Playing* 135). For Winnicott, therefore, gratifying cultural experience takes place in a holding, and recognising, interpersonal environment.

For the purposes of the present study, it is important to draw out the implications of the Winnicottian view on cultural experience for the relationship between subject formation and a collective past. For Winnicott, cultural experience is "an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and of play" (*Playing* 133), meaning that the objects objectively perceived are not as important as the objects subjectively experienced for the human subject engaged in the cultural realm. In this light, it can be said that the significance of a collective past for the formation of the individual subject lies primarily in how he or she personally understands and relates to this past, regardless of what really happened in the actual course of it and even often despite the prevalent discursive representations of it. This is not to deny the shaping force of historical narratives on the individual, but is instead to draw attention to the psychic needs of the individual as he or she subjectively constructs memory. The French

historian Pierre Nora makes a distinction between history and memory that is useful in this context. History, says Nora, is "the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer," contrasting it with memory which "is always a phenomenon of the present. . . . It thrives on vague, telescoping reminiscences, on hazy general impression or specific symbolic details. It is vulnerable to transferences, screen memories, censorings, and projections of all kinds" (3). Such a view of memory of the past, insofar as it is grounded in individual psychology, can be said to resonate with the Winnicottian notion of cultural experience as springing from the individual's seeking of transitional phenomena—phenomena that underlie the individual's gaining of a feeling of a confidence in a responsive, recognising environment that is not ruled by emotionless, objective reality-testing. This is exactly the starting point for my investigation of the implications of the Māori past for the subject formation of Māori individual characters—that is, the Māori past will be approached less in terms of social construction and representation as in terms of the subjective reception or reconstruction by individuals in their seeking of response and recognition.

Such an approach to the Māori past inevitably involves investigating the role of an interpretive community that can provide a response, and give recognition, to Māori individuals' cultural stances.[6] It should be noted that Māori historical knowledge is not a

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[6] The concept of "interpretive communities" is proposed by the American literary theorist Stanley Fish, to designate cultural communities whose cultural assumptions inform the way their members interpret a text; see Fish, especially the chapter entitled "Interpreting the

monolithic entity with contents and boundaries clear to every Māori individual, not to

mention the fact that Māori hapū and iwi have their own, different, histories to offer their

respective members. Furthermore, due to various factors ranging from colonisation, to

interracial cultural exchange, to urbanisation, to globalisation, Māori individuals may

themselves only have a quite limited knowledge of things in the past times of Māori life,

either remote or recent. William Guynn, in talking about the psychological dimension of

history, asserts that "[t]he past is no longer alive in the collective present of the group.

Memory belongs thenceforth to the human individual, who is the only entity that remembers,

and to the disciplines of psychoanalytic theory and the therapeutic practices of psychology"

(174). Guynn's view cannot be applied without qualification to Māori life, given the very

existence of such collective entities as hapū and iwi; yet he is nevertheless right, in principle,

in emphasising that there is no collective version of the past which can coincide with the

human individual's subjective reception or reconstruction of that past. Since Māori

individuals necessarily differ in their understandings of the Māori past, in my present study

the emphasis will not be laid on defining the concrete contents of a collective past, but rather

on how a shared concern with dealing with the legacies of the Māori past informs their ways

of life.

Variorum." It should be noted that I do not suggest that the Māori past can only be interpreted

by Māori individuals but not experienced in their lives; rather, what I mean is that the

symbolic resources from the Māori past are like a text until they are incorporated into living

experience.

The Māori past, though differently reconstructed and engaged with by Māori individuals, may thus constitute a cultural medium through which those individuals conduct interpersonal relations. Winnicott speaks of the interpersonal dimension in cultural experience: "The potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world, depends on experience which leads to trust. It can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living" (*Playing* 139). From a Winnicottian view, the potential space where productive cultural experience takes place is only possible in a facilitating interpersonal environment. My investigation, accordingly, will be centred around how Māori individual characters engage in, or seek, creative living in the context of interpersonal relations that are informed by a sense of the Māori past.

3. Subjective Engagement with the Māori Past as a Transformational Process

As I have already pointed out, Māori individuals may have different conceptions, interests and attitudes in terms of their engagement with the Māori past. This, I will add, has to do, importantly, with the sense of self which is different on the part of different Māori individuals, whose respective engagement with the Māori past constitutes a subjective effort to articulate their respective sense of self. Indeed, the negotiation involved in Māori individuals' relation to the Māori past may be said to have a transformative effect as far as their articulation of a sense of self is concerned.

Drawing upon Winnicott's insights, a leading contemporary psychoanalytic theorist

Christopher Bollas puts forward the concept of "transformational" objects on account of the

transformative effect that the use of transitional objects may have on individuals. Bollas

states:

> We each live amidst thousands of such objects that enlighten our world—things
>
> that are not hallucinations (they do exist), but whose essence is not intrinsic to
>
> what Lacan calls the real. Their meaning resides in what Winnicott termed
>
> "intermediate space" or "the third area": the place where subject meets thing, to
>
> confer significance in the very moment that being is transformed by the object.
>
> The objects of intermediate space are compromise formations between the
>
> subject's state of mind and the thing's character. (*Character* 18)

The meeting between subject and object in the realm of cultural experience is a process that

generates meaning for the individual involved and can be used to affect and transform his or

her sense of self. As Bollas asserts: "We all walk about in a metaphysical concrescence of our

private idioms, our culture, society, and language, and our era in history. Moving through our

object world, whether by choice, obligation, or invitational surprise, evokes self states

sponsored by the specific objects we encounter" (*Character* 19). The very identification of

certain objects on the social scene as belonging to *our* social world presupposes the

internalisation of social discourse. Bollas's conceptualisation of self states in relation to

society, therefore, does not evade the question of the social constructedness of identity; yet, for him, a subjective sense of identity nonetheless involves the bringing in of the private idioms of the self into interplay with society.

In light of the above, it may be said that a specific engagement with the Māori past by a Māori individual can be a negotiation between his or her sense of self and the real presence of artefacts, historical narratives and social customs deriving from the past times of Māori. Such an engagement obviously involves the issue of identifying with discursive positions in the social context, yet is more than just about that. As the present study will demonstrate, Māori characters are not depicted in the novels as simply trying to represent popular Māori cultural customs or repeat the historical narratives prevalent among Māori; instead, they are actively selecting, experimenting with or, in some cases, sublating, the various objectively existing elements that underlie the matrix from which a sense of the Māori past can be drawn—in ways that can potentially transform their own self-development.

4. The Relation of the Author to His or Her Work

Given my assumption, based on a Winnicottian theory of culture, that the novels to be studied constitute a form of play on the author's part in which the author constructs a fiction that can serve as a transitional and a transformational object for his or her own purposes, it is important to pay attention to the relation of the author to his or her work. This is because, in accordance with this theory, the author's subjective engagement with the Māori past as

depicted in the novels cannot escape from being inflected with his or her personal, real-life investments, which motivated the writing of the fiction in the first place. Thus, the object of study will not be limited to the significance of the Māori past for the characters within the fiction, but will also concern the meaning that past has for the author as a result of his or her personal investments as manifest in his or her literary treatment of it via the fictional characters and the experiences they are shown to undergo.

Clearly, this investigative angle diverges from the poststructuralist position exemplified by Roland Barthes, who, in his seminal article "The Death of the Author," famously declares that "it is language which speaks, not the author," suggesting that interpretations of a literary work can do without consideration of the personal involvement of the author (143). While I agree that the reading process may indeed bring into play cultural or intertextual resources in ways that are not intended by, or even relevant to, the author, I nevertheless assert that the unique experiencing of the world on the part of the author may well be reflected in his or her literary creation. Bollas, extrapolating from his belief that the infant's experience of the mother figure's personal ways of care-giving gives rise to the first human aesthetic, points out the importance of the manner, besides the contents, of transformative experience in later living; he notes of the arranging of words in bringing about self-transformation thus: "it will be the forming of words to handle and transform the moods of the self that will frame the terms of that individual's personal aesthetic" ("Aesthetic" 43). In this light, it can be said that, while many cultural resources deriving from the Māori past may be readily available in social discourse, the unique ways of selecting and arranging them

cannot be reduced to mere play of discourse, but instead reflect a unique sense of self in

negotiation with the cultural realm. I will therefore make a point of demonstrating, where

autobiographical evidence is clear and sufficient, how the Māori authors concerned project

the tensions in their own individual lives into the playing out of novelistic scenarios involving

the novelistic characters' engagement with the Māori past. This projection is an indication, at

a non-fictional level, that engagement with the Māori past deeply concerns the negotiation

and articulation of a sense of self on the part of real-life Māori individuals.

Before embarking on the analysis of specific novelistic texts, I would like to

summarise the interpretive stance that I have adopted towards subject formation in the

context of a human environment. Gal Gerson, in talking about object relations psychoanalysis

as a political interpretation of human life, observes:

> Attachment is universal and belongs to the species' biology. The *pattern* of
>
> attachment, on the other hand, is not a natural course that is identical in all cases.
>
> It is a specific process that molds each individual into a unique personality. The
>
> formation of the adult personality therefore belongs to society and history rather
>
> than to nature. Furthermore, it never ends: The world fills the mother's place;
>
> the need to relate, directly or through shared pursuits, continues to shape the
>
> individual throughout life. (781)

Such an observation can be said to summarise my own theoretical assumptions well: the

formation of individual subjects who are both necessarily unique and yet socially informed and engaged requires an interpersonal environment that can provide intimate, personal response and a sense of shared historical and social concerns. In my present study, the Māori past will be demonstrated to provide an important reference framework in which a subjective sense of identity is sought by Māori characters in relation to other Māori and non-Māori persons.

Chapter 2

The Signification of the Past across the Epistemic Rupture: Locating the Subject Position

in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*

Most active on the literary scene in the still early years of official biculturalism in New Zealand,

Keri Hulme's writing career resonated with an increasing social awareness of the importance of

the country's Māori cultural heritage, which had hitherto been suppressed or neglected under

colonialist policies of cultural assimilation. Of mixed descent, both Māori and Pākehā, Hulme

nevertheless tended to highlight her Māori affiliations in reflecting upon herself as a writer;

as she declared: "I think of myself as a Maori writer rather than Pakeha . . . that's the strong

and the vivid and the embracing, the good side of things. That's where I draw my strength

from" (qtd. inRobinson and Wattie 248). About two years before the publication of *The Bone*

People, Keri Hulme, in an introductory essay to bicultural poetry in New Zealand, chose the

Māori word mauri as its title to indicate a possible "presence of the numinous" in the writing

under discussion ("Mauri" 290),[7] and unequivocally advocated "*Writing For A Future People,*

Drawing on the Past" ("Mauri" 307). It is obvious from her published statements that Hulme

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[7] According to Hulme, three definitions of the word mauri are: "Life principle, thymos of

Man," "Source of the emotions," and "Talisman, a material symbol of the hidden principle

protecting vitality, *mana*, fruitfulness" ("Mauri" 290).

was consciously and deliberately trying to draw upon the Māori past for a guiding spirit not only for herself, but also for fellow New Zealanders. From an object relations perspective, the search for the spiritual in the Māori past can be regarded, to use Christopher Bollas's terms, as a form of object-seeking in which the object is sought "for its function as a signifier of transformation" (*Shadow* 14). As Bollas further elaborates, "the quest is not to possess the object; rather the object is pursued in order to surrender to it as a medium that alters the self" (*Shadow* 14). In this sense, Hulme's efforts to incorporate spirituality in the Māori past into her own writing amount to literary experiments wherein a vision of better living with stronger spiritual strength is sought.

Hulme's only published novel *The Bone People* serves as a prime example of her experiments with building such a vision. In the novel, the idea of the mauri is given a literal presence as "the heart of Aotearoa" (*Bone People* 370), which has been passed down from the mythical Māori past into the present and is instrumental in bringing about fundamental transformation to the lives of principal characters, who are then portrayed as getting ready to embrace family and Māori community life. The immediate and widespread popularity of *The Bone People* might seem to imply that the idea of a wholesome and healing spirituality originating from the mythical Māori past (the mauri) held a timely appeal for the reading public. Paradoxically, however, what we witness in the greater part of the novel is a representation of the largely private lives of three traumatised, alienated, unsociable protagonists whose ties with family or community are either almost entirely missing or at best tenuous. It is as if the principles that once used to sustain life in traditional Māori culture are no longer present or

active in the protagonists' mundane existence. The contrast between this lapse in the

protagonists' understanding and evaluation of Māori culture and life, or epistemic rupture, on

the one hand, and the unequivocal gesture towards the continuation of the Māori past made by

the novel and appreciated by much of the reading public, on the other hand, raises questions as

to how to account for the signifying process of the novel which delivers a cultural message to

the readers through presenting the life trajectories of the protagonists who, for the most part,

have themselves not been able to embody the message in their subjective attitude or action.

The paradox of a predominantly private novel containing a strong evocative dimension

for the public is also very much reflected at the receiving end of the signifying process of *The*

Bone People, that is, in the bifurcation of its criticism, with some critics delving into individual

psychology in efforts to locate the source of its disturbing power, and others giving voice to

highly charged cultural expectations. The potency of the novel's psychological realism is

emphasised when, for instance, Peter Simpson claims that "[t]he relationships and inner lives

of the characters are rendered through dialogue, narrative and interior monologue with a

fullness and intensity that is all too rare in New Zealand fiction (I was often reminded of

Dostoevsky)" (8). On the other hand, the significance of the novel for those who value

collective aspiration is made evident, for instance, in Joy Cowley's exuberant remark that *The*

Bone People is the "flowering of talent which had not been transplanted from the northern

hemisphere, which owed nothing to the literary landscapes of Europe or the film sets of

California, but which [had] grow[n]—seed, shoot, roots and all—from the breast of Papa" (60).

Apart from the vegetation imagery that conveys a proud sense of local originality as opposed to

anxiety about postcolonial inauthenticity, the Māori word "Papa" (Earth Mother) further implies the critic's recognition of a bountiful heritage from the Māori past that Hulme has imported into this novel.

Undoubtedly, the transformative theme of the novel—of isolated, dysfunctional individuals being redeemed by dint of the spiritual strength derived from the mythical Māori past, and returning to a more communal form of life—has provided ample room both for an in-depth exploration of personal psychology, and for the indulgence of a collective and archaic yearning for union and human bonding. However, some readings are not content to look at the before and after pictures of the transformation, but raise further questions about the transforming process itself as it is textually realised. Lawrence Jones, for instance, comments that Hulme, in writing the novel, moves "from psychological fiction to myth" (286), resulting in aesthetic failure because "the characters cannot stand up under the mythic burden placed upon them"(287). Mark Williams also complains that Hulme's narrative method in *The Bone People* "involves . . . many disconcerting shifts from naturalism to a kind of mythopoeic romance writing" (86). Even the Māori spiritual dimension of the novel, which lies at the heart of its redeeming power, is dismissed by C. K. Stead as "willed, self-conscious, not inevitable, not entirely authentic" ("Keri Hulme's 'the Bone People,' and the Pegasus Award for Maori Literature" 104). Davinia Thornley similarly concludes that despite the use of "Maoritanga . . . as a spiritual catchall" in the novel, "Hulme's vision is a decidedly *Pakeha* one" (72).

The polyphony of criticism is in large part due to the riches, or the unsettledness, of the multi-levelled literary text. At the individual level, the novel presents three protagonists whose

painful separate life trajectories only converge as much in attempted mutual consolation as in interpersonal conflict: a one-eighth Māori female artist Kerewin Holmes, who has fallen out with her family for freedom, becoming desolate and dysfunctional yet insisting on independence; a widowed and embittered Māori worker Joe Gillayley, who lives outside his extended family and loses himself in drinking and beating his loved adoptive son; and Simon, Joe's white adoptive son, who is muted by his terrible memory of the storm which killed his parents, and who often struggles violently to get his feelings across. At a more collective level, although all the three protagonists demonstrate efforts to bond together, their temporary bonding breaks down when Kerewin, upon discovering Simon's theft of her precious knife, sanctions Joe's almost fatal beating of Simon which deprives the former of his custody of the latter. After that, the story is catapulted onto a mystical level, with Kerewin, insistent on dying from her stomach tumour in the wilderness, being cured by a dark fairy-tale figure of unknown origins, and with Joe being rescued from his half-hearted suicide attempt by an old Māori man, and succeeding the latter as the guardian of "the mauri of Aotearoa" which nevertheless has remained dormant (*Bone People* 382). Although a reconciliation with family and a return to community are sketchily staged at the close of the narrative, the reunion of the three protagonists seems imminent yet remains open to question. The conflict and unsettled relationship between the individual and the collective, and between personal nostalgia and a seemingly responsive yet elusive cultural heritage, has undoubtedly made for the vast diversity of criticism.

Presented with such a multi-levelled and seemingly incoherent novel as *The Bone*

People, how can we tease out the logic in its signifying mechanism that has generated as much

appeal as controversy? It might seem that a viable way forward would be to adduce details of

the text in support of any variety of critical readings, depending upon the subjective

inclinations of the critic. Such could be said to be Judith Dale's approach as she tries to work

out an affirmative answer to her self-posed question: "is it precisely the unresolved, unsettling,

unsettled and dissolving strands of *the bone people* which make up its attraction for other

readers as for me?" (413). Dale defines her own interpretive enterprise as "the para-literary,

creative activity of reader response . . . taken one step further in the narcissistic game of literary

criticism" (414), and goes on to offer a reading of the indeterminacy of Kerewin's as well as

Joe's sexual orientation. However, although literary criticism almost always involves, to

varying degrees, the narcissistic game of treating the literary text as something to be tailored to

one's own needs and enjoyment (which, as opposed to submission to literary authorities, is in

fact quite a democratising process for the readers), unbridled relativism would bring tangible

drawbacks. In particular, a narcissistic relativisation of *The Bone People* would easily incline

the readers to relish, or partly relish, what is relished or yearned for by the characters—personal

freedom, economic independence, warmth of family, interpersonal communication and

bonding, etc.—without reaching a dialectical understanding of the reasons behind the

contradictory attitudes in the characters themselves and the interpersonal conflict between

them. Furthermore, the invocation of Māori myth and the exuberant return of the protagonists

to a traditional Māori lifestyle could also be ready-made ingredients for the readers in

fantasising about grand origins, supernatural power, and the innocence and security of

collective living—without critical attention paid to the reluctance or incompetence of the

protagonists, prior to mystical interventions, to be reconciled with what they have left behind.

In other words, a freewheeling narcissistic reading game, in this case, will help little in

understanding the dilemmas faced by the individual characters caught uncomfortably in

between present incapacitating conditions and their mixed memories about the Māori heritage.

In order to reduce narcissistic relativism in interpretation, one must pay special

attention to the problematic signifying process of the novel: while the textual juggling between

a fragmented personal present and an interconnected collective past appeals to some readers'

sense of nostalgia, the breach of the realist form in the novel through mythical revelation tends

to further indulge their wishful thinking. However, it would be as problematic to debunk the

wish-fulfilling dimension in *The Bone People* by merely pointing out its inconsistencies in

form: as the novel is originally a European genre and was only recently adopted by Māori

writers to depict the experience of Māori individuals, such a formalist reading runs the risk of

reinforcing the cultural preconceptions of the majority of readers at the expense of neglecting

the difficulties in the expression of Māori experience.

For the purposes of reducing narcissistic relativism while trying to understand the

experience of individual characters as explored in the novel, therefore, one must see through

the irregular novelistic form to locate what the characters are realistically capable of in relation

to their own hopes and dilemmas. One reliable way of doing so, I will argue, is to regard the

protagonists in *The Bone People* as self-positioning subjects, and to study the epistemic limits

of the viable subject positions of the protagonists; furthermore, the dimension in the plot

development that is stretched beyond the reach of the protagonists' subjective agency must be examined in relation to authorial wish-fulfilment and interpretive fallacies, so as to understand the gap between the dysfunctional existential state of the characters entailed by a realist mode of writing, and the more exuberant cultural and social expectations at the time of the novel's production and reception.

Accordingly, my investigation of the signifying process of *The Bone People* will aim to locate the subject positions of the characters in the novel, with focus on their life moving from the most fragmented and personal towards the interpersonal/collective, as this trajectory is what the novel is trying to accomplish through recourse to the Māori past. In the ensuing four sections of this chapter, I will start with a relatively isolated case study of Kerewin, as the larger part of the story is told from her perspective, and as her consciousness as represented in the novel is a most telling example of the imprisonment of the self through nihilistic individualism. I will then trace the efforts made by Kerewin, Joe and Simon to build a pseudo-family, and the frustration of this attempt, highlighting the politico-economic reasons behind it. After that, I will try to strip the story of its allegorical trappings, and, in doing so, will lay bare authorial wish-fulfilment and interpretative fallacies that are prone to confuse our understanding of the subjective agency of the characters. To conclude this chapter, I will deconstruct the various pasts entangled not only with personal lives but also with myth—so as to illustrate the epistemic rupture that has traumatised the individual subjects, and to demonstrate the dilemmas and possibilities that they are faced with in carrying on the Māori legacy in their lives.

1. Kerewin: the Self

As the central, lonely character of *The Bone People*, Kerewin is no rare personality in New

Zealand literature in terms of the character's habitual aloneness, yet she is presented as living

in conditions almost outside or beyond cultural tradition. It is as if she has plunged into a new

regime of subjectivity in which she, emotionally sequestered from the rest of humanity, is

attempting to achieve self-sustenance with reference only to the personal present, and with

memories of the past repressed or made irrelevant. However, as I am going to show, such a

subject position, though facilitated by prevailing politico-economic conditions, is ultimately

futile.

Long before the publication of *The Bone People*, a "Man Alone" myth in New Zealand

literature—as illustrated by the title of John Mulgan's novel published in the 1930s—had

already been well established, owing to the creation by generations of New Zealand writers of

characters moulded by a combination of a range of elements: lonely frontier experience in a

thinly populated colony, the wish to break free from a repressive Puritanism imported from the

"home country," abhorrence for newly established social norms and state authority, and

postcolonial anxiety arising from a need to guard against the threat of a loss of identity.

Kerewin, in this light, can be viewed as a female extension of this tradition—a "Woman

Alone."[8]

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[8] For discussion of *The Bone People* in the light of the "Man Alone" tradition, see A. Fox

"Inwardness" 268-69; Thornley 70-71; and Stachurski 37-38. For detailed discussions of the

However, what is peculiar about the characterisation of Kerewin is that her background is almost completely indeterminate in terms of specifics and presented in such an elliptical way that even if the social elements represented in the "Man Alone" tradition have played a hand in her individuation, we are not invited to see its working close-up. Although her alienation from her family has had a profound effect on her state of mind, no specific reason for it is given; she has no particular predilection or abhorrence for any specific religion; politics are of no apparent concern for her; she believes herself to be a neuter with no sexual appetite, but seems not to mind other people's knowing about it.[9] In fact, quite contrary to the "Man Alone" tradition in which either material privation, or spiritual oppression, or both, are the norm, *The Bone People* presents a Kerewin who has already got more money than she needs (by conveniently winning a lottery), and is already more versatile and physically powerful than average people can ever imagine themselves to be.

It can be argued, therefore, that even if the "Man Alone" tradition underpins Hulme's creation of Kerewin, what we have in *The Bone People* is far less a continuation or extension of this tradition than its ironic playing out: we are presented with a character who, having already successfully retreated to where she can be most free, finds herself futilely wondering about the point of it all:

"Man Alone" myth, see "Man Alone, The Artist, and Literary History" in Jones 293-341.

[9] For example, Kerewin tells Joe that "I think I am a neuter" (*Bone People* 266), and tells Joe's relatives that "I'm not the marrying kind, you see" (*Bone People* 288).

"I don't want to die, but I don't know why I live. So what's my reason for

living? . . . Estranged from my family, bereft of my art, hollow of soul, I am a

rock in the desert. Pointing nowhere, doing nothing, of no benefit to anything or

anyone. Flaking, parched, cracked . . . so why am I?" (*Bone People* 289)

Instead of having ensconced herself in an enabling subject position, Kerewin is sinking

into a state of nihilism where there is no meaningful link to humanity, no purpose in living, and

where scepticism is turned upon the subject herself. The breaking away from oppression,

which is such a constant motif in the "Man Alone" myth, is thus shown, paradoxically, as

bringing about a nihilism that lays waste subjective agency.

If such a breakaway implies a disillusionment with what is undesirable in the past, then

we may further ask: what elusive hopes might there have been out there that could have

precipitated such a paradoxical outcome as a result of the souring of these hopes in Kerewin's

new life? Obviously, personal freedom from familial restraints and independent pursuit of her

precious art must have seemed desirable and viable alternatives lying ahead, the former

guaranteed by capitalist citizenship-based society and the latter facilitated by her individually

acquired monetary capacity. What Kerewin has failed to predict is that out of her

"self-liberation" from the family would emerge an incompetent or dysfunctional self. To

understand the implications of this change of mode of life, it would be useful to draw on a line

of argument that not only Freudian familialism, but also the coherent human subject could be

rendered artificial by the decoded and deterritorialised flows of desire and capital in

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capitalism—a view developed in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*:

> Capitalism tends toward a threshold of decoding that will destroy the socius in order to make it a body without organs and unleash the flows of desire on this body as a deterritorialized field. Is it correct to say that in this sense schizophrenia is the product of the capitalist machine, as manic-depression and paranoia are the despotic machine, and hysteria the product of the territorial machine?
>
> The decoding of flows and the deterritorialization of the socius thus constitutes the most characteristic and the most important tendency of capitalism. It continually draws near to its limit, which is a genuinely schizophrenic limit. It tends, with all the strength at its command, to produce the schizo as the subject of the decoded flows on the body without organs. (33-34)

As a basic tendency of capitalism, deterritorialisation—or, loosely, the abstraction and severance of human practices from their native places and people—can indeed be said to be behind Kerewin's change of "socius," or, loosely, relations in the social field. It is not hard to imagine the allure of what appears to be a freewheeling life—the limits of which are defined only by all manner of desire allowed within the ever deterritorialising (and reterritorialising) capitalist machine—for Kerewin who felt uncomfortable in the confined territories of family

and community which, by definition, are unavoidably repressive at times. Furthermore, the fact that social tradition and former family ties apparently have ceased to function constructively in Kerewin's present life also testifies to the potency of capitalism's decoding and deterritorialising tendency.

However, Kerewin—far from leading an indiscriminate, schizophrenic life, which is supposed by Deleuze and Guattari to be a logical conclusion of life under capitalism—is still capable of making firm choices despite all the ennui and anomie that have ensnared her: she even goes so far as to deliberately refuse proper medicine, preferring to die a painful death (*Bone People* 412-14). Therefore, while the instrumental role played by capitalism in the breakaway of Kerewin should be duly acknowledged, it seems that her psychic economy can by no means be reduced to involuntary flows of desire, but instead is also imprinted indelibly by different modes of perception and directed by strong intention. While I will later address the issues of epistemic rupture in perception and the return of repressed emotions, as represented in the novel, suffice it here to say that despite all the potential deterritorialising effects of capitalism, Kerewin, as she has already emerged from a past that is largely excluded from the narrative, is presented as being more of an unsettled, strong-willed woman than a totally deterritorialised schizophrenic.

In fact, Kerewin herself is quite aware where her emotional roots were and should be, yet at the same time experiences a strong sense of unsettledness and disorientation; as she expresses her feeling to Joe:

"If I was in America, I'd be an octoroon. . . . It's very strange, but whereas by
blood, flesh and inheritance, I am but an eighth Maori, by heart, spirit, and
inclination, I feel all Maori. Or . . . I used to. Now it feels like the best part of me
has got lost in the way I live." (*Bone People* 61-62)

It is interesting to see how Kerewin defines her acute sense of self paradoxically along the
racial line, and how she makes a point of identifying herself emotionally with Māori despite her
apparent alienation from a Māori lifestyle. However, the Māori people, historically, have not
been noted for an obsession with trying to define an individual sense of self. As Jean Smith
points out in an anthropological study of self and experience in conventional Māori culture,
"[a]mong the Maori . . . it would appear that generally it was not the 'self' which encompassed
the experience, but experience which encompassed the 'self'" (152), and "the individual was
not considered to be the chief agent determining his 'own' life, nor was he considered to be
altogether responsible for his experience" (145). Given the fact that it is Kerewin who opted
out of whatever Māori family and community she once was part of, it is hardly convincing that
this independent artist could have felt "all Maori," if "all" is meant to highlight the
quintessential difference—if there is any—between Māori and non-Māori perceptions of self.
Indeed, as the critic Otto Heim rightly observes of Kerewin and Joe still in their largely isolated
lives: "Their Maori identity is an important component of their biological background, but it
shows all the traits of inadequacy and incongruity that so often characterise the intercultural
experience of ethnicity at the individual level" (*Broken Lines* 222).

If Kerewin's self-perception could not have been too exclusively Māori but instead has actually been conducive to her choosing a different lifestyle, and if she still retains her emotional identification, a question then arises: what is it that has caused the new-found dysfunction and despair in herself? I would like to suggest that it has to do with a potential crisis of human consciousness coming to a head, after being precipitated by her chosen way of life. If we follow Carl Jung's tripartite division of the human psyche into consciousness, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious,[10] we can see how Kerewin's sense of self has been reduced to a desperate clinging to her isolated personal consciousness in her new environment. Apparently, Kerewin has little access to what could be in store in the collective unconscious in her present day-to-day existence, as she has no ritual or ceremonial means of relating to it in her lonely, mundane existence. Furthermore, it is also evident that she now has no practical opportunity to respond to or solve what has been repressed in her personal unconscious, as she has cut herself entirely off from former interpersonal relations which have caused her so much pain. Such an isolated consciousness can produce no meaning except a vicious solipsism, as can be best illustrated by the numerous dialogues Kerewin has had with her inner voice, "the snark," which, instead of serving as a conduit for repressed or unattended

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[10] According to Jung, "while the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity" (42).

psychic content to unexpectedly emerge, is only full of an even more exacerbated cynicism

which is so characteristic of Kerewin's conscious self.

It should be pointed out that a strong ego-consciousness has once led Kerewin to many

exploits, as she declares matter-of-factly: "Really I'm just a brilliant amateur. In everything"

(*Bone People* 55). A leisurely life, free from familial and communal restrictions, has

undoubtedly given Kerewin ample latitude to develop her potential in "everything." However,

a liberation of individual potential at the cost of human relationships also has a profoundly

negative side, which has caused her to lose interest in almost everything. In her interpretation

of the novel, Margery Fee recognises this irony: "From the perspective of Hulme's intention to

highlight the value of Māori culture it makes sense to have such a heroine. The point is that the

main character must be shown to 'have it all,' and to remain dissatisfied, because 'all' in the

Pakeha sense is not enough" (20).

While I agree with the view that it is part of the author's intention to assert the value of

Māori culture, I have to say that the seeking of self-fulfilment at the expense of spiritual and

emotional affiliations, urged by an acute self-consciousness, obviously cannot only be an

impulse that is endemic to Pākehā. Rather, the tendency in our era for the human subject to be

blocked from communion with cosmic order and collective meaning, and to rely solely on

one's own devices, I would suggest, has much more to do with the deterritorialising tendency

of capitalism that drives the human subject towards an atomistic life. I would argue further that

the actualised literary creation of *The Bone People* seems to show that established capitalist

politico-economic institutions have not only greatly eroded any cultural demarcation line

between Māori and Pākehā, but have also created profound implications for the human subject seeking reconciliation with what has been forfeited in the struggle for personal fulfilment.

Therefore, whereas Fee has contented herself with subverting the assumptions of "White critics and reviewers" by pointing out that "the fantasy of the self-sufficient individual, followed closely by the fantasy of the transforming power of heterosexual romance" in "Western culture" has been staged and then undermined by Hulme in *The Bone People* (20-21), I would like to further draw attention to the prevailing capitalist politico-economic conditions which have infiltrated the existence of individuals in a Māori setting. To be more precise, I would like to examine the politico-economic reasons behind the frustration of the efforts made by the isolated and despairing protagonists of the novel to seek transformation by reestablishing interpersonal relations—not only in "heterosexual romance" but also, and perhaps much more so, in the form of a pseudo-family.

2. Reaching out and Frustration

As *The Bone People* is very much about the futility of an isolated self as embodied by the central character Kerewin, it is no exaggeration to say that the novel also sets as its conspicuous priority the criticism and tackling of a nihilistic individualism from the very outset. Interpersonal relations between Kerewin, a Māori man Joe, and his white adoptive child Simon, are gradually ushered in to act out the scenario of human bonding in a minimalist, yet realistic, social setting up until the mystical interventions take place near the end of the novel. The

insufficiencies and frustration of subjective agency in the three protagonists' building up of a

pseudo-family, however, seem to justify the need to assess the infiltration of the prevailing

politico-economic conditions that run counter to their efforts towards reestablishing a

wholesome human interdependence and intimacy that have long been absent from their lives.

In the novel's biblically-styled prologue, Kerewin's building up of an autarkic self

reaches its zenith with, and is symbolised by, the construction of the reclusive tower. Her

attempt to seek independence and freedom through withdrawal, however, is soon vitiated by

awareness that her seclusion has become self-defeating:

> It was the hermitage, her glimmering retreat. No people invited, for what
>
> could they know of the secrets that crept and chilled and chuckled in the marrow
>
> of her bones? No need of people, because she was self-fulfilling, delighted with
>
> the pre-eminence of her art, and the future of her knowing hands.
>
> But the pinnacle became an abyss, and the driving joy ended. At the last
>
> there was a prison.
>
> I am encompassed by a wall, high and hard and stone, with only my brainy
>
> nails to tear it down.
>
> And I cannot do it. (*Bone People* 7)

As the futility of the self resulting from isolation has become evident, walking out of

her own confined space and reaching out to other people would seem a reasonable initiative for

Kerewin to take. As a matter of fact, the first chapter, which is as symbolic as the prologue, opens at a typical public place: a pub, where the heroine Kerewin and her male counterpart Joe encounter each other for the first time. However, nothing follows from this casual drinking experience: no verbal exchange, not even any eye contact between the two. Instead, Kerewin is indulging in her inner monologue—or rather, a typical dialogue with her cynical inner voice, "the snark"—about the pointlessness in either staying in such a place or even coming, while Joe is beyond himself with his drunken harangue. An impression of Joe the "working bloke" is indeed formed by Kerewin the artist: "Why this speech filled with bitterness and contempt? You hate English, man? I can understand that but why not do your conversing in Maori and spare us this contamination" (*Bone People* 12)? But instead of reaching out, these words only bounce inside the thinker and prompt her to return to the privacy of her tower—where "her concession to the outside world" is merely a radiophone, through which "[n]o one can ring her up unless they go through a toll-operator . . . but she can ring anyone she likes" (*Bone People* 23).

Such an unbelongingness in social life, as illustrated above, is touched upon by Peter Beatson in his analysis of the prevalent theme of the rural-urban dichotomy in late twentieth century Māori literature, drawing upon the sociological distinction between *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (society):

> [*Gemeinschaft*] was typified by relationships of blood, by hierarchy based on
>
> birth, on the rule of custom, tradition and religion, on rootedness in the local soil.

The world of *gesellschaft* was the world of the city where the bonds with the

land and the cycle of nature were broken, where relations were fragmented and

impersonal, where formal, bureaucratic legality drove out custom and where

rationality prevailed over spirituality. In the former world, a person was

identified with the community but was treated as a total human being. In the

latter individualism reigned supreme but only facets of the individual entered

into any given transaction, not the whole person. (13)

While the rural-urban dichotomy is far from pronounced in the novel, the community-society

contrast nevertheless finds in the person of Kerewin a reflection which suggests a psyche

uneasy in either side of the distinction. Having fled her family and community, Kerewin is

nevertheless far from willing to give herself up to the fragmented, free-connecting, socialising

activities that happen in a noisy beer bar, thus resisting the temptation to become a more

schizophrenic (in the Deleuzian sense) and presumably less burdened being. This, however,

underlines the existence of an ongoing problem: how can Kerewin break the prison of a

self-referential, nihilistic consciousness if—to preserve the distinction introduced by

Beatson—she neither goes back to community nor ventures forward into society, but is already

deeply disposed towards her own privacy?

The breakthrough, as it happens, is indeed neither a return to the roots of her former

community, nor an acculturation into a wide-open society—to be precise, it comes rather in the

form of the imitation of a typical nuclear family.

Ironically, such a development of shared privacy is in fact initiated by an invasion of personal privacy: the mute boy Simon bumps into Kerewin's tower in a stormy dark night and is stranded there because he has a badly hurt foot. If a short while earlier in the novel Kerewin was not able to assign any positive meaning to a public place such as a beer bar, this time her sense of her own place is well defined in her admonition to Simon: "Well, in case no-one ever told you before, people's houses are *private and sacrosanct*. Even peculiar places like my tower. That means you don't come inside unless you get invited" (*Bone People* 20; my emphasis). Nevertheless, from this point onward, Simon—thanks, perhaps, to all the inconveniencies of his muteness, injuries and oddities that cannot be neatly dismissed by the convenient forces of rationality or legality—drags himself, and later his adoptive father, into Kerewin's life; and various (at least simulated) forms of familial relations and tensions are thereof reintroduced to the three of them.

If Kerewin has thus been blessed with a measure of psychological rootedness to pull her back from the nihilistic tendencies of her consciousness, and if the three of them all find a sense of belonging growing day by day, why, then, cannot this trinity of a pseudo-family work out in the ordinary course of things—that is, why do they still end up going their separate ways before the miraculous mystical interventions happen? The answer to this question, I suggest, lies as much in the personalities of the three characters as in the politico-economic conditions in which they live, with the former being profoundly influenced by the latter.

Just like Kerewin, the other adult protagonist Joe, perceived by her as early as in the opening pub scene as "[a] Maori, thickset, a working bloke" (*Bone People* 11-12), also

professes that "the Maoritanga has got lost in the way I live" (*Bone People* 62). The way Joe

lives has, for a long time, been not very much more than, literally, as a "working bloke." To

illustrate this stark predominance of his economic life, here is a conversation between Joe and

Kerewin:

He sighed. "I'd love that. But I work in a factory, work in a factory, work in

a factory . . ."

"I know. I've worked in factories too."

"You know what I think's worst? It's not getting up."

"The monotony? Noise? The twits around you? Bosses?"

"No, being a puppet in someone else's play. Not having any say." He spread

his hands and looked through the fan of fingers. "It has its compensations, I

suppose. I've paid off the house, and I've got some money in the bank. We're

clothed and we eat. All the good old pakeha standbys and justifications. Though

it's hard hours. I start at seven and I never get home before five. Sometimes six.

Even seven. Too long to be away from Haimona [Simon's Māori name], eh?"

(*Bone People* 89)

The bitter nature of this situation becomes all the more apparent when it transpires that Joe

once aspired to be a priest and then a teacher, but eventually dropped out of training, largely

because of monetary restraints. As he explains: "Hana [Joe's wife] wanted me to get through,

but I wanted to get her a house, and I couldn't as a student" (*Bone People* 229). What is worse,

Hana and Timote, their only son born of the marriage, died of flu, which has always struck Joe

as "stupid and unfair. Imagine, flu!" (*Bone People* 88). Indeed, it seems a bit "stupid and

unfair" to die of flu, which has become so ubiquitous a disease yet which is usually beneath

serious notice in the normal course of life. We may stretch a point to say that, all in all, what is

particularly ironic about the life tragedy of Joe as a bereft and misfit Māori is that just as

influenza—a usually introduced disease that once decimated the Māori population

disproportionately in New Zealand in 1918—has become a bitter commonplace of life, the

introduced capitalist mode of production has, too, become too much of a commonplace not to

live with, or suffer from.

In contrast both to Kerewin, who is a leisurely yet self-assertive owner of private

property, and to Joe, who has been struggling to acquire any property, Simon is almost

uncannily portrayed as not only lacking a "proper" sense of property, but, at the same time, as

himself being treated like property. Throughout the novel, we from time to time see Simon

stealing small items from other people and smashing shop windows. His behaviour not only

frequently attracts the attention of the police, and incurs the wrath of Kerewin for the stealing

of her special knife, but also, disastrously, provokes Joe into inflicting on him a severe beating

that lands Simon in hospital and Joe himself in jail. However, even Kerewin, a victim of

Simon's theft, has to admit perplexity afterwards:

O my strange little filcher, the magpie child, what in the name of hell did you

want with all this? Not that it matters now, but I have a suspicion that, despite

Joe's efforts, you never had any sense of property, just that of need, and you

thought everyone else was really the same way too. . . . (*Bone People* 322-23)

"Everyone else" around Simon, in fact, is shown to act more or less the other way around with

regard to the conceptualisation of property, that is, they are all shown to abide by the law of

private property. If Simon can smash shop windows, he alone can by no means smash the

politico-economic establishment which has the power to constrain his actions. What is more,

Simon is in fact denied real choice in the face of the law regulating the ownership of his

custody: because his origins cannot be determined and because Joe has become bereft of his

wife, Joe's adoption cannot be finalised; because Joe criminally beats Simon, the custodianship

is removed from Joe and transferred to Social Welfare, and then to a local church, and then

again to a man called Pat O'Donaghue, against Simon's own will and despite his numerous

attempts to escape (*Bone People* 88; 306-25; 402-06). Even the aroha (love) and efforts of Joe's

extended Māori family—who have always tended to view the problematic relationship

between Joe and Simon as a family matter, being averse to having the police involved—are

powerless in the face of the law, as is evident from the reasoning of one of Joe's cousins as to

why the state does not allow him and his wife to have custody of Simon: "Because we haven't

got much money and we're Maori and we're not *really* relations and we got four kids already

and another one on the way" (*Bone People* 393).

My point in drawing attention to the frustrations and ordeals that the protagonists suffer

as a result of their paradoxical situation is not to suggest that the capitalist state is wrong in

respecting and protecting private property, or in providing a welfare network for children. On

the contrary, capitalism, to cite the Bengali historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, is, historically, still

not indefensible in upholding "the Enlightenment promise of an abstract, universal but

never-to-be-realized humanity" in our era through the rule of law—the actual results and

expenses aside (254). However, I would like to point out, in Deleuzian terms, that just as the

deterritorialising tendency of capitalism is likely to have played a hand in Kerewin's breaking

away from her original family, and in Joe's reluctance to live closely with his extended family,

it also interferes in this "parody of father-mother-child relationship" (S. D. Fox 412). It does so

by frustrating their centripetal inclinations through constantly bringing in the issues of all too

important money, impersonal law and alienating work, and by making available atomistic

lifestyles in which there could be less emotional burden and less demanding interpersonal

obligations.

The countervailing social factors that frustrate the efforts of the Joe-Kerewin-Simon

triangle to form a pseudo-family are theoretically described in Deleuze and Guattari's general

commentary on the status of the private family in capitalistic society:

> These private persons are formally delimited in the locus of the restricted family
>
> as father, mother, child. But instead of being a strategy that, through the action
>
> of alliances and filiations, opens onto the entire social field, is coextensive with
>
> it, and countersects its co-ordinates, it would appear that the family is now

merely a simple tactic around which the social field recloses, to which it applies

its autonomous requirements of reproduction, and that it counteracts with all its

dimensions. The alliances and filiations no longer pass through people but

through money; so the family becomes a microcosm, suited to expressing what

it no longer dominates. (264)

While Deleuze and Guattari may have downplayed the tenacity and flexibility of human

subjectivity, having looked at familial relations too exclusively from an economic point of view,

they have nevertheless appositely identified a tendency of capitalism that has contributed to the

vulnerability of the family and the dilution of human relations in it. The situation of the

Joe-Kerewin-Simon triangle is further exacerbated by the fact that the suffering derived from

life in their previous families—caused by bereavement, living too closely, or abuse—lingers

into the present in forms which cannot be reconciled with the new social environment, but

which, instead, are catalysts for conflict. Unresolved frustration and bitterness may not only be

behind Joe's beating up of Simon and Simon's vandalism and petty theft, but may also tend to

warn Kerewin against "alliances and filiations" which entail painful involvement, as is evident

in her fending off of Joe's overtures to get closer, and in her fitful repulsion of the often

demanding child, Simon. Kerewin's aversion to involvement comes close to being ruthless

when she refuses to help after Simon gets his thumb badly hurt by a hook on a sea fishing trip

that the three are having together, because, as she later confesses, she hates "watching anything

get hurt, helpfully or no" (*Bone People* 223). It is no wonder that Kerewin's nihilistic

individualism cannot be conveniently overcome by a hanging together with the embittered Joe and the eccentric Simon—a mimicking of family life which is not only too much shrunk by counteracting factors from the social field, but also lacks any binding measure to impose sanctioned privacy in the first place.

3. The Allegorical Dimension and its Reading

If the pains of the past have been repressed or unattended to by the protagonists, and their present efforts to bond together have proven ineffectual in the face of countervailing politico-economic conditions, what, then, can become of the human subjects caught in despair? Through recourse to mystical interventions and a miraculous revelation of Māori spirituality, the last three chapters of the novel lift Kerewin and Joe out of their experiential stagnation (and the story out of a narrative cul-de-sac) as if by helicopter, thus, apparently, subverting the centrality occupied so far by the individual protagonists, and generating a course of action of which they can by no means be the prime mover. Despite such a glaring breach of the codes of realism which could serve to signal the realistic boundaries of the characters' subjective action, paradoxically, many critical responses to *The Bone People*, even including some that deplore this breach of form, still mix subjective agency of the protagonists with agency that is beyond them. It is as if embedded in the signifying process of the novel there is a dimension that tends towards a construction of meaning that merges individual agency of the characters with a larger-than-life scheme. Such a dimension, which I will demonstrate to be allegorical, needs

deconstruction, before the subject positions of the characters can be clarified.

Criticism of the violation of realism in the novel is often based on a suspicion of escapism, as expressed by Thomas E. Benediktsson in his view that *The Bone People*, "by dramatizing the awakening of a traditional spirituality and by portraying characters who heal themselves by rejecting conflict, may be advocating quietism and avoiding the threatening but potentially more effective arena of political action" (127). Sharp as this view is in discerning a political escapism implicit in the plot of the novel, it nevertheless blurs the fact that the characters are healed by outside interventions (rather than healing themselves), thus failing to distinguish between action directed towards the characters and action taken by them. Such a failure shows that the detection of a breach of form in the novel is no guarantee of a correct understanding of the issue of subject position in the novel, as the reader, if preoccupied with questioning the overall design of the novel, might not pay nuanced attention to the realistic capacities of the characters.

A lack of critical nuance with respect to the subject positions that the characters occupy can even manifest itself when an individual subject is the focus of discussion. This can be seen in Graham Huggan's comment about Simon (and several characters from other postcolonial novels), whom he sees as illustrating the precept that "the 'muting' of the colonial subject" is compensated for by "the production and perpetuation of a system of mutual dependence in which individual creativity is surrendered to the control of the presiding 'colonial muse,'" and in which "the disempowered colonial subject must find an indirect medium through which to relate his/her past experience" (19). As Simon himself never strikes an attitude of "surrender,"

and as, instead of relating his own past, he does not even exhibit any knowledge that a quest for his past is carried out by Kerewin, Huggan's reading, in fact, amounts to a distortion of an individual character's intention, thus failing to appropriately assess subjective agency in what he calls "the disempowered colonial subject."

The misattribution of the individual characters' action or intention, however, is not only a simple matter of individual readers' oversight, but one that involves an inherent dimension of the novel which can easily trigger holistic interpretations of the individual characters' experience. To illustrate this dimension, I will demonstrate how an unobtrusive episode, which has one character as the centre of consciousness, can trigger a problematic allegorical reading; give further examples of allegorism that incorporate all the major characters as a representative whole; and then question the fragile foundation of the allegorism in *The Bone People* through an investigation of the authority and status of its author.

The episode that I am going to analyse here is unobtrusive in that it is only a personal dream in a novel which depicts numerous personal impressions, thoughts and wishes of the characters—inner activities sometimes so fragmented and whimsical that we, as we read, have to go back and forth to piece them together in order to make sense. It is, on the other hand, significant, in the sense that the scenes of elevating love and joyous union between the three major characters, as contained in the dream, can only be anticipated by the end of the novel, but have never been realised in the narrative—as if such a personal dream signifies the same wishes as the overall design of the novel does. In Simon's dream, the deep-rooted, if not primordial, human need to feel part of a family takes on a most uninhibited, exuberant form:

Kerewin turns to him saying, "That's okay with you then sunchild?" from the
top of the building where she's standing. Joe is nodding, pleased and proud in
the background, and he can feel the sun on his shoulderblades, and he can
scarcely contain the bounding joy he feels. He throws off the chains from his
head and his feet and he cries "I'm home!" and Kerewin yells, "Hey Clare says
Homai!" and Joe says proudly, "I hear! What joy!" (*Bone People* 175-76)

As is often the case with a child who has been emotionally deprived, the fulfilment of such a
need, whether it arises from an earlier personal memory of family life, or partly from an archaic
collective unconscious posited by the likes of Jung, is sought after with pertinacity. In his
waking hours Simon takes every opportunity to bring his adoptive father and Kerewin closer
and, when sensing bad feeling being nursed between the two, contrives, at the risk of getting a
big hiding, to "start a fight and stop the illwill between his father and Kerewin" (*Bone People*
192). It should be pointed out that Simon's acute yearning for bonding and his enthusiasm in
action are more than the self-fulfilling of an autonomous human subject; rather, he is
deliberately making enormous efforts to change not only his situation, but also that of Joe and
Kerewin, and to integrate the two adults meaningfully into his own life—even if his sense of
self eludes his own conscious understanding and needs to be made more intelligible to himself
through dreams.

    A dream such as that of Simon, which wishfully takes in and imaginatively mobilises

other people, is nevertheless also susceptible to interpretations that go beyond treating it as

merely the subconscious activity of one character's mind, attempting instead to see it as

embodying a holistic understanding of the cultural significance of the characters and the

overall development of their interpersonal relations. Val Melhop's interpretation of the dream

is a materialised example of this kind of potential reading (one by which I have found myself

being tempted), and is worth quoting at length:

> This dream dramatises a wish-fulfilment. In his prophetic way, Simon knows it
>
> is imperative for the three of them to live in harmony together, something he
>
> mutely tries to orchestrate throughout the novel. Given his Christlike attributes
>
> and his disciple's name, Simon Peter Gillayley—just a vowel shift from
>
> "Galilee"—he is destined to be the redeemer, the rock on which to build anew.
>
> Linguistic punning on "home," "homai" and "Holmes" is significant to
>
> meaning. Kerewin, from the top of a building, presumably a new home, offers
>
> Simon (and Joe) something infinitely precious. In the dream text, "Clare," a
>
> name evoking light (the Light of the World?), with speech miraculously
>
> restored, responds in Maori, "Homai!" or "give to me!" The triple linking of the
>
> word "home" prefigures the re-formation of "the trinity" under the protection of
>
> Holmes. Kerewin's elevated position facing into the sun in the dream presages
>
> her benevolence at the end and her hard-won capacity to face social
>
> responsibilities. (101)

Such an interpretation, it seems to me, is problematic in that it not only conflates one

character's wishful dream with the overall design of the novel, but also presumes an almost

telepathic merging of the subjective worlds of different characters. Obviously, the naming of

the characters and the linguistic punning associated with their names can only be the author's

business instead of Simon's; and it would be too much to assume that Simon can predict the

decisions and positions that are to be adopted by other characters—unless his

"wish-fulfilment" is more than an intuitive dream, and is really "prophetic" in the literal sense

of the word.

     Therefore, while Melhop's reading of Simon's dream might accurately reflect the

possible cultural message that Hulme has tried to convey in the novel, its major failing can be

said to consist in unquestioningly assuming the capacity of an individual character to embody

the author's overall design in a way that is beyond realistic credibility; and in taking for granted

a correspondence between, on the one hand, the subconscious, or at best highly personal wish

of an individual character and, on the other, the interpersonal course of action of all the major

characters.

     The urge to assign larger-than-life roles to characters, and to read a coherent,

overarching meaning into their interpersonal connections, can be further manifested in

interpretations that take all three protagonists of the novel as a representative whole. Antjie

Rauwerda, for example, structures her understanding tightly around her observation that

"Hulme addresses colonialism's legacy by presenting a postcolonial *allegory* in which Simon

stands for all things Pakeha, Joe (his foster father) for all things Maori and Kerewin for

something midway between the two" (24; my emphasis). Marita Wenzel, similarly, claims that

"the different cultures in New Zealand, represented by Joe, Kerewin and Simon have to arrive

at a solution for a future family and nation" (94). Unequivocally clear as both views are, they

fail to offer to explain what the essence of "the different cultures" is that the characters embody

in their very existence, or to examine the realistic basis of the characters' interpersonal

relationship that allegedly can constitute a solution for "colonialism," or "a future family and

nation."

Whatever specific conclusions the above-mentioned readings arrive at, with regard

either to the meaning of a character's personal dream, or to the meaning of the life situation of

the three protagonists as a whole, they are all too unquestioningly compliant with the

allegorical dimension in the novel. While abstracting representative meanings from the

personal lives and interpersonal endeavours of the characters, these allegorical readings have,

as the author has done in implanting an allegorical dimension in the novel, downplayed the fact

that the characters themselves have actually lost touch with the larger meanings that they are

supposed to represent, and have never been able, in mundane circumstances, to realise the hope

of building a common life through shared understanding and concerted action.

In other words, it is only by following in the footsteps of Hulme in wishful thinking

about love and unity without duly questioning how such wishes can be realistically realised,

that the life experience of the characters can be read as having a coherent, overarching meaning.

Otherwise, how can the mystical interventions in the last three chapters of the novel be

reconciled with the psychological realism that was manifest earlier? Any realistic

interpretation of this change of mode seems clumsily contrived at best, as is Mark Williams's

remark about Joe's encounter with the old Māori Man and the Mauri of Aotearoa: "The world

of ordinary experience has penetrated that of romance and hence, we are to assume, made it

'real'" (103). Much more fittingly, I would argue, these preternatural experiences of Kerewin

and Joe, followed by their U-turn towards the familial and tribal life, could be assumed to be

"real" only insofar as we could regard these preternatural experiences as the real expression of

agency that comes from beyond the characters themselves. While the agency at work is

presented as real magic in the novel, the enjoyment that most readers can possibly derive from

witnessing this agency can only be due to their identification with the author's wishful thinking

rather than their acceptance of this magic in real life—after all, in the absence of any social

belief in a god residing in and guarding over the nation, Hulme herself has to admit in an

interview that there is no such thing as "the *mauri* of the heart of New Zealand" and that

Kerewin is "a kind of wish fulfilment character" ("Reconsidering" 140).

To echo (but also to differ from) Roland Barthes here, the author in this case could be

said to be both alive and dead: if extraordinary conviction and determination are demonstrated

on the part of the author in getting out of the groove of psychological realism to invoke the

mythical or divine, then this act in itself paradoxically dwarfs and even ridicules her previous

efforts to create credible human bonding in ordinary circumstances. Significantly, the author

herself makes a point of downplaying personal implications in the novel by insisting in an

interview, that "I can say immediately that it [*The Bone People*] is not autobiographical at all!"

("Reconsidering" 137)—a paradoxical denial of projection of her own life experience made in spite of her acknowledgement of the apparent resemblance between her own name and that of the female protagonist in the novel, her revelation of the original inspiration for the story as deriving from her own dream, and her admittance of a significant amount of her own background information in the novel ("Reconsidering" 137-41).

The Bone People, indeed, is not autobiographical, in the sense that it does not limit its perspective to any single life, be it a character's, or implicitly the author's, but instead compresses the largely separate subjective worlds of the characters together, and finally—in order to accomplish the author's wish-fulfilment—breaks out of an apparent cul-de-sac of human relationship by resorting to preternatural power and spirituality associated with the mythical Māori past. It is through this textual sleight of hand that the personal is shifted into a realm of the familial and the collective, thus giving rise to wishful, or even fallacious readings of interpersonal relations between the characters as being a representation of dysfunctional, isolated individuals transforming into a harmonious, and even culturally significant whole.

4. Epistemic Rupture

The Māori mythical past, and the family and community life which the characters have left behind and to which they are yet to return, are what the allegorical dimension of the novel signifies favourably, paving the way for readings that arrive at supra-personal meanings at the expense of, apparently, a realistic evaluation of the attitudes and capacities of the characters. A

proper reading of the subject positions of the characters, therefore, cannot afford to avoid examining the characters' own treatment of the personal as well as cultural pasts. Moreover, with consideration of both political economy and psychological economy, a more integrated investigation of the problems or dilemmas in the characters' relationship with the past may reveal an epistemic rupture that has prevented them from establishing enabling, consistent subject positions, and from weaving the positive strands of the past into the fabric of their present life, thus giving rise to the need, on the part of the author, to breach the realistic form in order to reach an artificial solution for the experiential stagnation of the characters.

When it comes to the treatment of the personal past, it is significant that the past of Simon, out of the three protagonists, is shown to be explored by the adult characters with deliberation and zeal that are absent in the latters' relating of their own pasts—a fact that, it seems to me, reflects the adult characters' projection of their own anxiety about the past onto a seemingly most passive and vulnerable character. The misty past of Simon, who arrived in a storm which sunk his boat and killed his parents, and who has ever since lost his speech and been haunted by unspeakable dreams, immensely arouses Kerewin's curiosity (mixed with sympathy) and prompts her to look into the reasons behind the boy's troubles. Joe's recapitulation of what has happened after that primal event obviously cannot satisfy Kerewin's thirst for explanation, and she soon embarks on a quest for the child's past on her own—in order to "give Sim an understanding of his dark past," and to enable Joe to "reconcile himself with a known quantity . . . because Joe's afraid of what might be in his child's past" (*Bone People* 94).

Having as a clue Simon's exquisite rosary (with a ring on it) which has been thrust upon her by him as a gift, Kerewin Holmes, worthy of her detective-sounding last name, launches a laborious investigation which brings her to "the jeweller, the police, the library, the hospital records, even the local" (*Bone People* 97), and which finally leads her to write to an Irish earl inquiring about the ring and the rosary. It is particularly interesting to see the mixed feelings of Kerewin upon receiving a letter from that Irish noble family acknowledging the ring as belonging to "His Lordship's younger grandson," who, "with disgraceful propensities," has adventured into New Zealand (*Bone People* 99). The letter also states clearly, however, that there will be no consideration of any identification of Simon and no further correspondence (*Bone People* 99). Conceding to herself that "I've also discovered I'm a snob," Kerewin nevertheless soon balances a self-abandoning description of her own country—"this lowly colony of NZ"—with a proud self-assertion: "I was revelling in the knowledge of my whakapapa and solid Lancashire and Hebridean ancestry. Stout commoners on the left side, and real rangatira on the right distaff side" (*Bone People* 99). It is evident that at this point a typical postcolonial anxiety about historical lineage, identity, and authenticity in relation to place is surfacing into Kerewin's awareness with a vengeance in the face of snubbing from the "Old World."

Such a vicarious search for roots and origins—Kerewin declares, after reading the letter from the Irish noble family, that "I have a purpose in life again!" (*Bone People* 99)—has not only prompted her to recognise the deficiencies as well as strengths of her mundane reality, but also further inflamed her zeal for transcending mundaneness. Kerewin in her research keeps

investing Simon's background with rich religious as well as aristocratic connotations, as she

ponders "[w]hy there is a suggestion of the numinous in his shadow" (*Bone People* 96), and

just cannot part with the idea that there could be "a possible though improbable connection

between Simon P and decayed Irish nobility" (*Bone People* 99). Such a propensity for

vicarious elevation can, however, also be circumstantial evidence that Kerewin, deep in the

mire of her own nihilistic individualism, is fantasising about divine agency that is beyond the

ordinary individual, and about hierarchical order that precedes anarchy. As the grandeur that

Kerewin is in search of can by no means be introduced into her present worldly existence, such

an obsession with it can, ironically, amount to a denial or degradation of individual agency in

changing the mundane conditions of life. Equally ironically, the final salvaging of the sunk

boat—initiated by Kerewin's curiosity, allowed by the police, and carried out by a hired diver

paid with Kerewin's own money—divulges nothing romantic or noble other than twenty

pounds of pure heroin: apparently, Simon could be descended from some drug dealers! Thereby,

a romantic logic in Kerewin's wishful imagination is replaced, at least temporarily, with a

mundane logic when practicalities are involved and when reality hits home.

Such a competition, or reflexive interference, between the romantic and the mundane is

at work even in a mythical setting full of cultural connotations about the Māori past. Chapter 10

of the novel—entitled "The Kaumatua And The Broken Man"—is riddled with mythical

elements that can evoke the collective memory of Māori people and even help stir nationalistic

sentiment in New Zealand: a Māori Kaumātua (elder) has been guarding for nearly sixty years

one of the original canoes handed down from the time of Māori settlement, in which resides a

little god brooding over "the mauri of Aotearoa" (*Bone People* 382), or "this country's soul"

(*Bone People* 370). The Kaumātua, following his grandmother's deathbed prophesy, "*must*

wait until the stranger came home, or until the digger began the planting, or until the broken

man was found and healed . . . [so] they could bear my charge . . . keep the watch . . . [and]

decide the next step on the way" (*Bone People* 360). As it turns out, Joe is the stranger, and

digger, and broken man all in one, and is identified by the Kaumātua as his heir and successor.

Such a continuous succession of guardianship, however, has been anything but an undistracted

Olympian relay of some sacred torch shining above worldly vicissitudes; rather, as I will

demonstrate in the following analysis, while the people involved have been irretrievably bound

up with contemporary worldly concerns, restraints and rules, the sacred meaning remains

preserved yet unmanifested.

If with the Kaumātua's grandmother "[t]he only European thing about her was her hat"

(*Bone People* 359), then the Kaumātua has not only been brought up speaking and thinking in

English, but has also developed mixed feelings towards the task of keeping vigil over the mauri:

"I have cursed bitterly, because I am doomed to live alone and lonely, and to what end? To keep

guard over something that modern people deem superstitious nonsense. Something modern

people decry as an illusion" (*Bone People* 360-61). What is particularly problematic here is not

so much the spread of some particular "modern," disrespectful perception of the

sacred—which is surely being countered by other understandings—as the reification of

traditional spirituality, and the private and even isolated nature of spiritual observance, in a

Māori context where community is still supposed to be the norm of life. The way in which the

guardianship is passed on to Joe is even more significant. In order for the Kaumātua's deathbed

will to be carried into legal effect, a Pākehā solicitor has to be involved, who, for all his

sympathy and understanding, can only value what is passed down by the Kaumātua in

monetary terms: "The land itself is nearly worthless unless you care to develop it . . . that is all

its potential, overt value . . ." (*Bone People* 376). The prevalence of such a secular, if not

mercenary, social assumption is also expressly acknowledged by Joe and the Kaumātua

themselves in a conversation over the possibility of the mauri's ever waking up again after "the

mess the Pakeha have made":

> "I can't see that," [Joe] nodding back towards the hidden well, "ever waking
>
> now. The whole order of the world would have to change, all of humanity, and I
>
> can't see that happening, e pou, not ever."
>
> "Eternity is a long time," says the kaumatua comfortably, "Everything
>
> changes, even that which supposes itself to be unalterable. All we can do is look
>
> after the precious matters which are our heritage, and wait, and hope." (*Bone*
>
> *People* 371)

If Joe's exclamatory assertions imply frustration at the realities of daily life, and an intuitive

yearning for a societal shake-up which for him is at best utopian, then the Kaumātua's wisdom

tells us that a spirituality originating in mythical times has by no means departed from the land,

but is, essentially, capable of inspiring regeneration. What is problematic, however, is that such

a juxtaposition of personal isolation and frustration on the one hand, and the reification of

spirituality on the other, it seems, not only erases personal agency in ongoing social life, but

also reduces the yearning for ethnic pride and spiritual elevation to no more than a

wish-fulfilment in the present.

In like manner, an inner logical contradiction persists right into the optimistic,

exuberant ending of the novel where, back in a mundane setting, Kerewin seems to return

joyously to her former community, all grudges brushed aside, and where the reunion of

Kerewin, Joe and Simon seems imminent. However, a glimpse of the situation can tell us how

problematic it still is:

> History, facts, practicalities: I started rebuilding the Maori hall because it
>
> seemed, *in my spiral fashion*, the straight-forward thing to do. It didn't take long
>
> for curious locals to drift round to find out who I was and why I was playing
>
> with their relic. *I was recognised, saluted, and they shrugged when they found it*
>
> *was my time and money being given free, and left me to it . . .* only on the
>
> Saturday, a few came by to help prop up bits of four by two and handle up the tin.
>
> And by late Sunday, we've got the roof done and the outside straight and sober
>
> looking. A real working party (we weren't that straight and sober Sunday night).
>
> (*Bone People* 431; my emphasis)

It is ironic to find how sceptical the community's initial response is, and how money paves the

way for communication. Although apparently the community has begun to take concerted action, there is no other recognisable face than Kerewin's own, as if other people were shadows dancing with her own wish—after all, how else can the community be depicted? With the dilapidated Māori hall standing as a "relic," a telltale sign of the decline of traditional community life, it would not be easy to present a number of distinct individuals as all receiving the same epiphany and acting like one (wo)man, namely, Kerewin. Furthermore, even the reunion of Kerewin, Joe and Simon is presented as more of a possibility than a logical conclusion: there could be no guarantee that they will bond together even as a simulated family, given that they will have to continue to live in the practical, mundane conditions which once drove them apart. Up to the end, the problem remains: while any single subjective world is insufficient and unsustainable, intersubjective solidarity or harmony is at best still open to question.

The paradoxical textual dynamic in *The Bone People* is that while the profound exploration of individual psychology presents a picture of individualistic isolation and interpersonal conflict, the individual characters nevertheless have by no means stopped yearning and striving for collective bonding. The fact that the seemingly private stories of the protagonists in the novel take a sudden turn towards the collective also seems to suggest a social urge to bond together. Indeed, the novel can as well be read as capable of raising questions of racial relations, economic imbalance, and cultural heritage—collective issues of a young country in which the two major races, Pākehā and Māori, are still making sense of their own identity or identities. One peculiarity about *The Bone People*, however, is that collective

issues are barred from any panoramic view in textual representation, but can at best only be

inferred from the largely personal struggles of the individual characters, who almost intuitively

know what is lacking or dysfunctional in their life as a result of the alienating effects of

capitalist politico-economic conditions. We can see that as far as the principal characters in

the novel are concerned, an equilibrium between political economy and psychic economy is

eagerly sought after, so much so that once political economy has developed in a disruptive way

or to an alien degree, psychic economy will also respond with a vengeance for the restoration

of the equilibrium, whether this is attempted through anguished, violent or wish-fulfilling

means.

While capitalist political economy has profoundly changed the social fabric and opened

up many alternatives for the individual, it can be a paradoxical undoing of subjective agency if

the individual cuts himself or herself off from the traditional network of human relations for

hopes of the comfort of total personal freedom. In the case of *The Bone People*, one major

reason why the individual protagonists, prior to mystical interventions, have not been able to

find enough power within themselves to break out of the vicious constraints of nihilistic

individualism (Kerewin), defeatist violence (Joe) or communicative frustration (Simon), is that

they have long alienated themselves from meaningful participation in the admittedly far less

than perfect, yet undoubtedly bonding traditions. In other words, the transplanted capitalist

mode of production has undermined the monopoly of Māori tradition, with individuals, excited

and enabled by the capitalist ideals of free capital and free labour, tending to drift away from

the restraints entailed by collective living—until the resulting psychological alienation reaches

a breaking point.

Such a breaking point signifies, unequivocally, an epistemic rupture in the human subject's experience of, and identification with, the oppressed or disadvantaged minority culture. Instead of embodying and enunciating the continuation of their Māori past, Kerewin and Joe in a mundane setting have long drifted away and floated above their familial, tribal and cultural roots. Haunted by nostalgia yet hampered by alienating politico-economic conditions, they, relying on their own devices, have been blinded to any subject position that could enable them to look beneath and then rise above the relativism of cultural diversity—as is most evident from Kerewin's futile efforts at "charts of self-knowledge," filled in indiscriminately with "information about everything that had lived or lives on Earth" (*Bone People* 90). As the American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan points out, "*a personality* can never be isolated from the complex of interpersonal relations in which the person lives and has his being" (10). Likewise, it can be said that a healthy sense of self, insofar as it is a sense of being in the human world, cannot be sustained only through absorbing, or reconnecting with, certain forms of cultural *knowledge*, but needs to be nurtured through cultural *living* in relation with others.

Until the miraculous U-turn of events brought about through a breach of the realist form in the narrative, *The Bone People*, through its psychological realism, has profoundly demonstrated how, with an epistemic rupture caused by the transplanted capitalist system and cultural alienation, the protagonists have long disconnected themselves from the heritage of the Māori past, becoming culturally nostalgic yet essentially estranged from Māori community life

and remaining unable to be reconciled with their personal pasts. Thus, the upbeat ending of the novel, though not entirely convincingly in its literary illustration of the back-to-community reunion, nevertheless reasonably signals the importance of a collective dimension for a healthy and enriching connection with the past. It is fair to say that despite the wish-fulfilling elements, *The Bone People* nevertheless represents a promising direction for the Māori novel to follow, which involves recognising Māori cultural losses incurred during Pākehā colonisation and exploring the cultural challenges and possibilities for Māori individuals living in a hybrid postcolonial society. As the Māori novel develops, more solid representations of individuals intimately engaging with issues in Māori family, community and cultural life can be found in some of the novels by Alan Duff, Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace, which explore the significance of the Māori past for contemporary Māori life in more fleshed-out ways.

Chapter 3

Enunciation of the Cultural Past as Narcissistic Projection: Self-fashioning in Alan Duff's *Both Sides of the Moon*

Unlike Kerewin and Joe in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*, whose sense of direction has to be restored by outside intervention after their long practice of a largely atomistic life away from their Māori community, the Māori protagonists in Alan Duff's novels more often than not ultimately have to rely on themselves to solve personal problems in a concrete social setting. However, despite Duff's fictional exploration of the self-fashioning of many troubled Māori individuals,[11] and his real-life social charity efforts (e.g. his rather remarkable "Books in Homes" programme to bring books into low-income homes in New Zealand), critical reception of him as an intellectual influence on the Māori scene has remained highly controversial at best, with commentators very often voicing anger at what he depicts or even denouncing Duff

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[11] The word "self-fashioning" is used in the present study in the sense suggested by Stephen Greenblatt in his famous *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, in which the term is used to describe how one constructs and presents a public identity according to certain social standards at the time; See Greenblatt, especially the Preface. In using the term, I will critically examine the ideological underpinnings of Duff's advocacy of the ideal of individual self-making and the attendant valorisation of neoliberal values.

himself—without ever reaching any affirmative consensus. One major source of the ongoing

controversy surrounding Duff, I suggest, lies in his attitudes, expressed both in his novels and

elsewhere, towards the effects of Māori cultural legacy on the individual who seeks a sense of

self in a hybridised modern society. This chapter, with a view to identifying the powerful yet

problematic stance Duff adopts in his advocacy of individual self-fashioning as opposed to

Māori-specific social reformation, will focus on his *Both Sides of the Moon* (1998) as a case

study. I will analyse the way that the protagonist wilfully reconstructs the Māori past

according to his own narcissistic needs, so as to lay bare the self-serving biases that reside

beneath the protagonist's rather forceful understanding of his personal as well as social

problems. The anatomy of the novel, in turn, will also provide clues to Duff's problematic

narcissistic investment in his biased critique of Māori cultural legacy and social issues.

1. Duff's Agenda: Public, Literary and Personal

Duff's professed view on the handling of Māori issues is largely premised on the viability of

the prevailing politico-social system as it stands. He made this clear when he stated in an

interview that "I don't like the Maori agenda. I don't mind being called a writer who is a Maori

but I'm no Maori writer" (Duff and Hereniko 338), and went on to defend himself by asserting

that "I have never ever said assimilate to a Pakeha! It's not a Pakeha world. It's a *universal*

world" (Duff and Hereniko 343; my emphasis). His acceptance of the prevailing

politico-social system on the one hand, and his deploration of the disproportionate

underperformance and dysfunction in Māoridom on the other, led him to "start pointing the

finger back at ourselves, the Maori, at our leadership, at our structure, at our every tiny little

detail of organisation" in a series of newspaper essays collected in *Maori: The Crisis and the*

Challenge (1993) (*Maori* 4). Playing down somewhat scornfully the importance of redressing

historical Māori grievances through present-day political alternatives, Duff centred his

criticism of what he saw as the woeful situation of Māori almost exclusively on the

self-victimisation of Māori, so much so that Ranginui Walker (then Professor of Māori Studies

at the University of Auckland), in his review of the book, claimed that "[t]o the Maori, Duff is

irrelevant. He does not rate in the Maori world because he is not part of the people's struggle

for emancipation and social advancement" ("Eat Your Heart Out" 137). Even Witi Ihimaera,

who had largely been sympathetic to Duff, saw the necessity for "an antidote to all the

victim-blaming, Maori-bashing Duff *stuff*" (Vercoe ix).

   While Duff surely is an intellectual maverick, he is nevertheless relevant to the Māori

people's struggle in his own way—in his advocacy of individual self-fashioning through

education and love. While holding the discussion of "structural inequities" in society in

abeyance, Duff, in another interview, insists that "the simple answer" is to "take advantage of

the education system" (Duff and Thompson 8), going so far as to maintain that "I don't believe

in affirmative action" (Duff and Thompson 11). In his autobiography *Out of the Mist and Steam:*

A Memoir (1999), Duff presents his own life story as a shining example of self-fashioning—of

rising above insecurity, confusion, delinquency and imprisonment in early life to achieve love,

meaning and literary success. In its introduction, Duff proudly notes the achievement of his

"Alan Duff Charitable Foundation's Books in Homes programme" (*Memoir* 7), takes pride in his success as a writer, and confidently claims that "some of my writing may well force a few changes in the rules [of grammar]! I think I have made my mark. . . . We must give our children the key to the future, and that starts with love. And reading, of course" (*Memoir* 11).

If individual self-fashioning can indeed be said to be Duff's own "Māori agenda," as opposed to the popular advocacy of Māori-specific political affirmative action, then we can say further that Duff has been sparing no efforts to use his own influence in advancing this cause: both as a public figure and in his literary enterprise. Corresponding to Duff's public preaching and promotion of reading (or more broadly, education) and love, there can also be found in Duff's novels on Māori life two constant themes: love and enlightenment.

The theme of love in Duff's novels is more often than not highlighted through an exhibition of the stark consequences of lack of love, as in his two novels most exclusively devoted to crime or juvenile delinquency—*One Night out Stealing* (1992) and *State Ward* (1994). Sonny, the half-caste Māori protagonist in *One Night out Stealing*, suffers at the hands of his drinking father and mother, grows up to be a burglar breaking into people's houses, and finally kills his Pākehā crime partner because the latter is about to rape the hostess of a house who has become an idealised mother figure for Sonny. Similarly, in *State Ward*, the half-caste Māori protagonist Charles Wilson, thirteen years old, has taken to trouble-making simply because the sensation it gives rise to is "sorta like feeling wanted" (*Ward* 114), when his own neglectful parents do not even turn up at his court hearing (*Ward* 6).

The theme of enlightenment in Duff's novels usually takes the form of waking up to the

negative elements in the legacy of a warrior culture, and of taking advantages of the

opportunities available under the Pākeha system. On the whole, the Māori past emerges from

Duff's pen in a rather unfavourable light. In his début novel *Once Were Warriors* (1990), the

"half-enlightened, half-befuddled" Beth (*Warriors* 48), Jake the muss's much bashed wife,

complains that "you, the white audience out there, defeated us. Took our land, our *mana*, left us

with nothing. But the warriors thing got handed down" (*Warriors* 47). Yet at the end of the

novel, even the Māori chief exhorts a mostly Māori gathering: "Ta stop blamin the Pakeha for

their [the Māori's] woes even if it *was* the Pakeha much to blame" (*Warriors* 182). The

message, as voiced by the chief, is apparently taken up by several major characters and, in the

two sequels *What Becomes the Broken Hearted* (1998) and *Jake's Long Shadow* (2002), these

characters turn out to be faring better and better in the existing social system. However, in

fairness to Duff, he does not lose sight of all the strong points of Māori culture in depicting the

transformation of the individual characters, but stages, in the last of the Jake trilogy, a

denunciation of the excessive materialism of Polly—Jake and Beth's financially successful

daughter—and even in effect endorses Jake's vigilantism when his Pākehā friend Gordon

Trambert and his family are molested by a gang.

However, despite Duff's continued efforts to promote individual self-fashioning for

Māori people after his meteoric rise to fame, he suffered increasing hostility from his critics.

As one commentator pointed out in 1995, "[t]here is an active politics of exclusion at work

which serves not only to marginalise Duff, but to discredit him personally as well" (Brown 75).

By the year 2008, "Duff's work remains marginal to identity politics at the national level,"

with Duff himself being discussed not uncommonly as something of a "Brown Man's

Burden" (Wilson "Burden" 115).

A fundamental contributing factor in the political as well as literary marginalisation of

Duff, I suggest, can be found in Duff's audacious, and even insolent, positioning of himself in

relation to the messages that he delivers both in public and in his literary creations. His fiery

social commentary is often out of proportion to his demonstrated degree of understanding; as

one critic points out, "[s]o offensive are some of his remarks on this subject [Māori leadership]

that one is half-tempted to psychologize, to read into his analysis of authority a personal sense

of hurt" (Thompson 112). Duff's personal sense of hurt, furthermore, is made most readily

available by himself in his memoir. Like many literary characters created by him, Duff is of

mixed-race parentage. His Pākehā father, a forestry research scientist, comes from a

distinguished intellectual family, and is described as having been rational, shy and always

loving to his children; his Māori mother, by stark contrast, is depicted as a habitual drunkard,

sexually disloyal, and irresponsible with regard to the children. It is abundantly clear in the

autobiography that Duff attributes his delinquency in early life largely to the bad influence of

his mother, while setting his father up as an embodiment of many virtues that he seeks after. In

light of Duff's own exposure of his personality and troubled past, both in his numerous

television interviews following the publication of *Once Were Warriors* and later in his memoir,

one is indeed easily tempted to question the role of his personal frustration and anger in the

formation of his opinions on cultural issues; and it is no surprise that Walker could seize on this

and say in a review of *Once Were Warriors*, that "[t]his simplistic view [of the warrior tradition]

stemmed from Duff's personal experience of bad parenting, alienation and lack of knowledge about his own culture" ("Getting Real" 134).

Although it is not always fair, or even viable, for critics to tie up an author's literary creation with his or her biography, in Duff's case the many poignant elements that have been repeatedly translated from his personal life into his novels indeed suggest a strong authorial desire for self-expression, or even self-exposure. This clamouring desire—which contradicts the still ongoing trend of the depersonalisation of the author, famously laid down by Roland Barthes's declaration of "The Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault's reduction of the author to the mere "author function"—nevertheless raises the further question of how fictionalised personal intensities of the author can generate cultural controversy.[12]

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[12] See "The Death of the Author" in Barthes 142-48, and "What Is an Author" in Foucault *Language* 113-38. While Barthes's suggestion of the irrelevance of the author in the reading process is insufficient to account for the vehement public denunciations expressed by many readers against Duff the person, likewise Foucault's valorisation of social discursive formation in the question of authorship cannot satisfactorily explain the grief and anger that have been translated by Duff from his personal life into his literary work. Given the fact that the novel is a discursive form adopted by the Māori writer from the European tradition, the tenacity of authorship—dismissed in Barthes's and Foucault's general yet implicitly Eurocentric discussion of discourse which is oblivious to the authorial desire for self-expression or the evolving geopolitical situation—really needs reconsideration with regard to the particularities of the articulating human subject in terms of personal idiosyncrasies, upbringing environment, cultural tradition, and the imbalance of interpersonal

To answer the above question in the case of Duff who, as a novelist, is at liberty to position himself variously for the purposes of literary delivery, it is useful to draw upon M. M. Bakhtin's theorisation, in his comparative study of literary genres, of the special freedom exercised by the novelist:

> The novelist is drawn toward everything that is not yet completed. He may turn up on the field of representation in any authorial pose, he may depict real moments in his own life or make allusions to them, he may interfere in the conversations of his heroes, he may openly polemicize with his literary enemies and so forth. This is not merely a matter of the author's image appearing within his own field of representation—important here is the fact that the underlying, original formal author (the author of the authorial image) appears in a new relationship with the represented world. Both find themselves now subject to the same temporally valorized measurements, for the "depicting" authorial language now lies on the same plane as the "depicted" language of the hero, and may enter into dialogic relations and hybrid combinations with it (indeed, it cannot help but enter into such relations). (Bakhtin 27)

Bakhtin's theory, to say the least, is highly relevant in the study of authors whose strong and intercultural power.

desire for self-expression is combined with an urge for social engagement. His interpretive

model of the relationship between the novelist and his heroes, while admitting the projection of

personal experience, predilections and prejudices by the author into his novelistic creation,

nevertheless views "the represented world" of the novel as a hybrid locus where the normal

means of expression of any underlying authorial intention is through an engagement with his

fictional characters in the same discursive field which, in turn, is socially conditioned;

otherwise it would not only be impossible for the author to "polemicize with his literary

enemies," but even for his literary enemies (or critics in general) to recognise his message. In

the case of Duff, it can be argued that, while his view of Māori cultural legacy may be

primarily derived from his early unwholesome personal experience, as Walker claims it to be

in his criticism of *Once Were Warriors*, the fictional characters in Duff's novels must embody

some socially recognisable reasons for their existence in order for their author to become a

distinct voice on the literary scene; the self-obsession on the part of the author, however, is

bound to create awful tension in a discursive field that is publicly contested.

The treatment of Māori cultural legacy by Duff in his novels, therefore, must be

understood as arising out of the tension between his desire to recreate (and therefore

sublimate) personal traumatic experience on the one hand, and his perception of the

necessity (moral, commercial or otherwise) to maintain social engagement on the other—with

Duff himself becoming a target of public attack as a result of the varied playing out and

enunciation by his fictional characters of his own (not little known) personal problems at the

expense of received cultural traditions and social expectations. The strong authorial

projection in Duff's novels localises his outlook largely in the self-perception of characters with whom he can identify or partly identify, thus making the formation of these characters as subjects an ideal starting point for the study of Duff's extrapolation of personal issues to a wider social or cultural arena. I have chosen his *Both Sides of the Moon* for the present study precisely because this novel clearly demonstrates this intense degree of identification between author and character, with the protagonist's wilful imagination of the Māori past being strongly indicative of the author Duff's problematic approach to Māori cultural legacy in general.

2. Narcissism and Historical Imagination

Both Sides of the Moon can be said to be the fictional precursor of Duff's autobiography *Out of the Mist and Steam: A Memoir*, published a year later than the novel, as can be attested by the numerous parallels between the central character in the novel and Duff himself as portrayed in his memoir, especially in terms of their experience of growing up. While this also raises questions as to the veracity and nature of an autobiography, it most forcefully illustrates the concentrated psychological investment that Duff has made in the confused and self-searching central character of the novel. The traumatic intensity is enunciated by the first-person narrator and central character, first and foremost, in the form of "his imaginative reliving of the [personal] past as if it were in the present" (A. Fox *Masculinity* 195). Significantly, there is in the novel also a historical plot as perceived by the central

character—a distinct element that is absent in Duff's autobiography and which can be viewed

as his effort to take advantage of the special freedom of the novel form by letting his

character participate in an active historical imagination as a way of education and self-cure.

This, however, also gives rise to the question as to how to account for the relationship

between a character's perception of the environment in which he was raised and his

projective historical imagination.

As with Duff, the central character, Jimmy Burgess, also has a troubled childhood.

Jimmy's Pākehā father is well-educated, and loving towards the children; yet being "Mister

objective . . . informing from his clinical world of his logic" (*Moon* 15), he is incapable of

providing sufficient affective expression in his dealings with them. The fundamental cause of

the malfunctioning of the family, nevertheless, is attributed by Jimmy to his Māori mother

who, preoccupied with promiscuous sex, drinking and playing poker for money, is

"indifferent to us [the children]" (*Moon* 10). Deprived of emotional security, Jimmy plunges

into various adventures, ranging from being seduced by a housewife, having a sexual liaison

with a man, to violent fights which land him in borstal.

However, even Jimmy himself views his adventures as aberrations, generating mixed

feelings of excitement, guilt and revulsion, which, in turn, are always linked with the imago,

or the subjectively retained image, of his mother. The housewife Edith, who initiates Jimmy

into sex, "revolt[ed] me for the ease she betrayed her husband for me. Beginning as my lover,

she finished as my unforgiven mother" (*Moon* 89). Entangled in a sexual relationship with a

man called Dan, Jimmy inwardly reflects: "I've made a mistake . . . . Two motherless souls,

boy and man, found each other in the dark. But it could have been light" (*Moon* 110).

Significantly, Jimmy's perception of a new dawn of life, after he has served in borstal,

coincides with his giving up on his mother: "I am looking at her and my lights are on again,

my blackout period is at last over. . . . Not even my father could change her" (*Moon* 227).

　　Jimmy's long-time addiction to self-debasing sexual and violent activities as a

compensation for the absence of motherly love actually amounts to a typical case of someone

who is suffering from narcissistic wounds. Heinz Kohut discusses the narcissistic personality

type in relation to sexual fantasies and subsequent efforts to build up a stable psychological

structure, in the case of a patient whose mother's "psychopathological personality" has given

rise to his narcissistic vulnerability (66):

　　　　The sexualization of the patient's defects was due to a moderate weakness in

　　　　his basic psychic structure, resulting in an impairment of its neutralizing

　　　　capacity [the capacity whereby the sexual and aggressive impulses of infancy

　　　　are softened]. . . . The insufficiency of neutralization resulted in a

　　　　sexualization of the patient's relationship to his narcissistically invested

　　　　objects in these areas: (a) the sexualization of his idealized (oedipal) father

　　　　imago (on which he had remained fixated and which he needed because he

　　　　lacked a firmly idealized superego); (b) the sexualization of the mirror image

　　　　of his hypercathected grandiose self (on which he had remained fixated and

　　　　which he needed because he lacked a securely cathected (pre)conscious image

of the self); and (c) the sexualization of his *need* for idealized values and reliable self-esteem, as well as of the psychological *processes* (internalization) by which ideals and self-esteem are acquired. (70-71)

In the case of Jimmy, similarly, there is an idealisation of the father, with the mother, in comparison, being judged as beyond redemption. A strong urge for self-approval through an exaggerated show of machismo is also readily present—in fact, the big fight that sends Jimmy to borstal happens as a result of the diffidence and frustration Jimmy and his outcast associates feel in front of girls, which they then transform into angry violence directed towards another group of youths (*Moon* 215-16). However, it is the third area in Kohut's formulation—the urge to link the sexual or, by extension, the sensually stimulating, with the ideological—which prompts Jimmy to go beyond his immediate experience in search of cultural explanations for his own problems in the larger part of the novel.

This sensually stimulated search for answers leads Jimmy to frequent the village of his Māori relations: Waiwera, where he lives in the home of Uncle Henry—his mother's respected brother. The natural hot springs there provide Jimmy with bodily as well as emotional solace, making him feel as if "I am in life, nestled down in the motherlike comfort" (*Moon* 9). Yet his questioning mind sets him at odds with the environment: as he puts it, "who from this village of simple, honest, answering-inheriting outlook would I have told the day I saw with new eyes an old familiar sight of geyser blowing as . . . *sexual*?" (*Moon* 13; my emphasis). Even his Uncle Henry scolds him harshly—coming close to taking "physical

retribution"— for questioning "our culture, our spiritual beliefs," when Jimmy shows doubts

about the existence of ghosts (*Moon* 13). Despite this general adherence to cultural customs

in his Māori community, Jimmy's imaginative reinterpretation of Māori tradition is finally set

in full motion when Chumpy, the village bully, insists that one of Jimmy's Māori ancestors

was a coward who ran away from the battle field, thus stinging him with the suggestion of a

possible stigma in his Māori origin.

It is clear that the historical plot concerning the fate of Te Aranui Kapi and his

favourite woman Tangiwai—two direct ancestors of the present-day protagonist, Jimmy—is

presented as a reconstruction contrived by Jimmy as part of his attempt to make sense of the

Māori past in relation to himself. The basic information on his ancestral history is provided

by Mereana, an old woman who, being a motherly figure to Jimmy, is trying to steer him

away from a possible further disintegration of self-esteem by telling him of the Māori past,

and whose account echoes what Jimmy once read at the school library and at home. Viewing

written records on Māori as "no more than accounts gleaned from oral knowledge, folklore

passed down" (*Moon* 41), Jimmy, who is the first-person narrator of the present-day plot,

nevertheless also grants himself the right of an imaginative enunciation of the past—as is

evidenced by the abundant use of "I see," "I hear," or "I see and hear" (fourteen times in total)

within four pages of sensory, minute description to make the first transition from the present

to the past in the narration of the novel (*Moon* 41-44). Jimmy's imagining of the ancestral

past is further attested by his ready relating of himself to the complex inner thinking of Kapi

and Tangiwai, which is highly unlikely to be attributable to any historical record or oral

account. For example, Jimmy compares his own brawl with the experience of Kapi by stating

"[b]ut I was no Kapi asking myself for a first time what right has any man got to hurt

innocence when he watched that child drowning, what right to take life or dignity—I just hit"

(*Moon* 217). It can be argued, therefore, that while both the historical and the present-day

plots are the imaginative work of the author Duff, both plots are mediated through the

narration of the character Jimmy in service of his narcissistic self-assurance.

In addition to the above-mentioned indications that the ancestral past is presented

through the imagining by Jimmy, his anxieties and urgencies are clearly exemplified and

conspicuously foregrounded in two of his ancestors. The dynamic relationship between sex,

violence and love (or the lack of it), which is so central in Jimmy's confusion and trouble, is

deployed almost as the most dominant narrative drive for the historical plot. Kapi, Jimmy's

ferocious warrior ancestor, manoeuvres against, and eventually ruthlessly kills, his own

brother on account of the latter's having sexually forced himself upon Kapi's favourite

woman, Tangiwai. Having established himself unchallengeably as "the tribe's most venerated

warrior" (*Moon* 143), only second in status to the chief, Kapi nevertheless suffers from a

softening of heart after he, during a battle, witnesses a small child from an enemy tribe drown

in a river, with the mother looking on with agonising helplessness. This triggers Kapi's

questioning of his cold-blooded warrior code and undermines his unthinking self-possession,

which in turn culminates in his catastrophic flight before a battle, the consequence of which

leads to the destruction of his tribe by the enemy's invasion as well as by mass suicide. Only

a small number of people, led by Tangiwai, refuse to die for "the only belief they [warriors]

have known: honour" (*Moon* 148), choosing instead to flee the tribal habitat in an attempt to

ensure personal survival. The rest of the historical plot is focused on Kapi's and Tangiwai's

respective new lives. Kapi wanders into a group of social outcasts—led by a man called Wild

Hair—who have developed a habit of independent thinking, a propensity for scientific

observation, a democratic decision-making system, and a distinction between the public and

the private. Tangiwai and her followers, by contrast, bump into a pack of vagrants whose only

interest in life seems to be sensual pleasure, and whose leader repeatedly rapes Tangiwai

savagely, until she succeeds in killing him after lulling him into relaxing his vigilance by

offering sexual favours. At the end of the historical plot, Kapi—heartened by the love built

between him and a woman called Mihinui, and enlightened by his new companions who are

just coming into contact with white settlers—is shown to have begun his transformation into

a new being; and Tangiwai, with her and Kapi's son in tow, also leads her followers in search

of new hope and new life. The twin themes of an enlightened liberation from the old, violent

and unthinking ways of life, and of the search for something new and better, as illustrated by

the respective experience of the two ancestors, ultimately converge in Jimmy's determination

to start a meaningful new page in life as the narrative progresses towards its conclusion.

Jimmy's imagining of the two ancestors' transformative experience has, undoubtedly,

provided psychological reassurance for him to discard the traditional Māori lifestyle, as he

asserts near the end of the novel: "I am not too burdened with feeling the betrayer of them

[those Māori who stick to old ways] either, for how is it betrayal, as Wild Hair told my

ancestor if you think with a free mind?" (*Moon* 227).

This imagining of the ancestral past by the present-day protagonist in service of his narcissistic needs, while seeming to lend understanding and hope to he who is struggling to make sense of his own life, nevertheless renders the story of the ancestral past exceedingly artificial and even perverse. First and foremost, Kapi's sudden acquisition of a conscience is extremely problematic. If he can remorselessly kill his own brother, what possible psychological reason can there be for him to be so profoundly transformed by witnessing a drowning child and despairing mother—to the extent of, ironically, later fleeing the battle field and leaving his own tribal people in the hands of the enemy? In this regard, the narrative does not even bother to give an account of Kapi's psychological history by way of explanation, leaving Jimmy, with a childhood deprived of motherly love, as the apparent answer to the flimsy reconstruction of Kapi's transformation. Similarly, the reconstruction of Tangiwai's experience is unable to provide explanation for her supposedly ahead-of-her-times assertion of her "free will," exercised in the form of abandoning the tribal collective and scrapping the tribal honour code for the sake of personal survival in a value vacuum (*Moon* 145). Furthermore, the lurid representation of the sexual ravaging of Tangiwai can by no means be derived from any form of Māori historical record or traditional oral story-telling, but is apparently a result of the erotic imagination of Jimmy, who relishes all this with mixed feelings.

While the ancestal past is imagined by Jimmy in ways that suit his narcissistic needs, his search for a sense of direction, at the same time, prompts him to further reckon with Māori cultural legacy perceived by him as manifested unhealthily in his own life. It is this

urge for self-assertion that leads to his launching of angry charges against Māori cultural

legacy. Jimmy's unfavourable understanding of the Māori part of his upbringing environment

is, no doubt, underpinned by his bitter taste of his earlier malfunctioning life, yet the

overwhelming urgency that he feels for narcissistic assurance provides him with a skewed

line of thinking which, as I will show in the next section, leads him to posit his Māori

heritage as a scapegoat in his attempt to salvage himself.

3. The Narcissistic Subject in the Enunciative Present

As a prominent narrative feature of *Both Sides of the Moon*, the unfolding of the historical

plot as being markedly reconstructed through the present-day protagonist's perspective and

imagination suggests Duff's starting point in creating a fictive relationship between a

historical past and a personal present. To be more precise, the historical past is located in the

same discursive field as the present-day protagonist, to be enunciated by him as a way of

assisting his personal struggle. This valorisation of the enunciative present, while promising

more personal latitude in the self's emergence from the past, nevertheless creates certain

implications that, if not properly recognised, would be as negative as the repudiated aspects

of the past.

Undoubtedly, being descended from two ethnic groups has created for the present-day

protagonist, Jimmy, a conflict between his need to identify with each of them and his desire

to shape and articulate a position of his own. As he puts it at the beginning of the novel: "I am

torn; yet I am more whole. . . . I am two races, two cultures and, most of all, two different thinkings. I am in a way against myself. But I can speak for both" (*Moon* 7). However, as my foregoing analysis has shown, with regard to the cultural past enunciative agency is primarily deployed by Jimmy for purposes of self-cure and self-establishment against the negative feeling that "I am everything of my country's main racial origins and yet nothing" (*Moon* 8)—rather than for an epistemological investigation of the past *per se*. Such an enunciative process is highlighted by Homi Bhabha as a liberatory discursive strategy for those on the cultural margins:

> It is the ambivalence enacted in the enunciative present—disjunctive and multiaccentual—that produces the objective of political desire, what [Stuart] Hall calls 'arbitrary closure', *like the signifier*. But this arbitrary closure is also the cultural space for opening up new forms of identification that may confuse the continuity of historical temporalities, confound the ordering of cultural symbols, traumatize tradition. The African drumbeat syncopating heterogeneous black American postmodernism, the arbitrary but strategic logic of politics—these moments contest the sententious 'conclusion' of the discipline of cultural history. (*Location* 179)

It should be pointed out that Bhabha, adopting a Lacanian view of signs as taking on new

inscriptions of meaning regardless of subjectivity,[13] insists on changing the concept of "the

subject of culture from an epistemological function to an enunciative practice" (*Location*

177), and on locating the agency utilised by the subject of culture primarily in the articulation

of a liminal form of cultural identification (*Location* 179). However, just as there must be a

(however loose) coalition of black Americans performing the African drumbeat in order for it

to signify anything culturally recognisable (to the point of being regarded as part of an "-ism")

or politically relevant (to the point of furthering any racial or social cause), so generally there

must be interrelated human subjects fulfilling the enunciative present in order to form a

discursive field for purposes of identification. It is from this consideration that we can start to

see how the narcissistic economy of an individual subject may work to undermine politically

progressive forms of identification—if an epistemological understanding of, and respect for,

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[13] Bhabha's Lacan-inspired view of the changing meaning of signs in social discourse as

happening in the realm of the intersubjective, a realm that is deprived of subjectivity

(*Location* 191), I believe, is behind his declaration concerning the postcolonial and

postmodern situation, that "[t]he epistemological distance between subject and object, inside

and outside, that is part of the cultural binarism that emerges from relativism is now replaced

by a social process of enunciation" ("Postcolonial Authority" 57). It is worth noting, however,

that object relations theory, in particular D. W. Winnicott's proposition of "Transitional

Objects and Transitional Phenomena," offers an alternative psychoanalytic model for the

relationship between subject and object in the cultural realm, according to which cultural

meaning is inscribed in an intermediate area of experiencing, between inner psychic reality

and the external world (*Playing* 1-34).

his or her culture are not in place. To be more precise, an epistemological ignorance of the

historical conditions of his or her culture may lead the narcissistic subject to disregard the

evolving ramifications of that culture for those who live by it; furthermore, lacking an

appreciation of the often difficult processes in the adaptation of his or her culture to changing

conditions, the narcissistic subject may not be able to establish a constructive relationship

with other subjects of that culture, resorting instead to arbitrary enunciation to suit his or her

own selfish needs. These negative implications in the enunciative present, unfortunately, are

both borne out by Jimmy's treatment of the past and the present, as my following analysis

will show.

No doubt Jimmy has strong reason to look into the past, as he himself avows: "I must

know about this ancestor—my ancestry. The past of the confused side of me, Maori" (*Moon*

39); however, his overwhelming eagerness for combatting personal anxiety, coupled with his

attribution of race as being at the root of his confusion, lead him to invest his reconstruction

of the Māori past with a great deal of narcissistic projection, to the point of rendering that

past extremely ahistorical or anachronistic. The tribal tohunga, or the "village high priest" in

charge of passed-down learning and prophecy (*Moon* 78), is portrayed as a calculating

pretender whose primary concern is that "none . . . should glimpse his fallibilities" (*Moon* 78).

The lead warrior, Kapi, is imagined to have abandoned the tribal collective to the mercy of

the enemy simply because he has undergone an awakening of his personal conscience. And

Tangiwai is presented as being justified in philosophising about, and asserting aloud, her right

to exercise her "free will" in deciding to split away from her tribe, which is facing imminent

enemy attack (*Moon* 145). Although all of these individualistically-motivated behaviours are readily conceivable in the enunciative present, they are precisely the behaviours that would have made the normal functioning of a precontact warring tribe impossible. A reconstruction of the past, it is worth noting, can constitute an effort to trace social problems, as the critic Michelle Keown points out, "graphic, visceral representations of precolonial warfare [are offered in *Both Sides of the Moon*] as the putative foundation of modern Māori violence" (*Pacific Islands* 106). Chris Prentice, in reviewing Otto Heim's *Writing Along Broken Lines: Violence and Ethnicity in Contemporary Māori Fiction*, also highlights the relevance of the historical past for understanding contemporary violence by drawing attention to the latter's examination of "the epistemic violence of colonialism and its legacies in disjointed lives" ("Articulations" 158). Jimmy's reconstruction, however, is too anachronistic to yield any solid understanding of the evolution of Māori violence. It is as if a more pressing psychological motivation for the imagination of the violent past is to tear down a feebly conceived, faceless and rootless collectivity so that individualism can emerge with legitimacy and without guilt. This anachronistic valorisation of individualism, however, makes Jimmy's crude preconception—"gone was the *base* of his [the Māori man's] precious mana concept" (*Moon* 7; my emphasis)—remain underexamined in his genealogical tracing of his own ancestral past. As a result, even though he still recognises Māori as "a communal people" (*Moon* 16), it does not occur to him that concerted action may well be a powerful option to better his as well as other Māori's situation.

　　While trying to absolve himself of the burden of a collective history through a wilful

imagining of it, Jimmy, in his enunciation of his personal present, is shown as becoming increasingly preoccupied with finding ways of self-salvation, starting with the projection of his own inferiority onto his fellow Māori people whose world-view, it should be emphasised, has very much been shaped by an ethnic history that Jimmy largely repudiates. At the outset of his narrative, he expresses his belief in the centrality of the self in relation to a ready-to-be-explored outer world and a ready-to-listen audience: "Listen, I need ears to tell that I understand the world is but *the private perception* of each individual child and man and woman, but that it could be broadened" (*Moon* 18; my emphasis). Yet, his fellow Māori people are assumed to have too ossified a mindset for his perception, as Jimmy complains: "They're a simple people who only care that they are alive and well enough to continue as what they were yesterday. They would laugh at my struggling mind-torment with everything and them" (*Moon* 19). It is evident here that Jimmy, who is eager to leave behind the negative influence of Māori heritage, or what he blatantly labels as "the dark side of the conceptual moon" (*Moon* 12), does not even want to recognise a wish in other Māori individuals to strive for a life better off than yesterday.

Even though Jimmy undoubtedly has a point, underpinned by his personal suffering and shaped by his "private perception," when he dismisses traditional Māori ways of life as being insufficiently updated, it does not follow that he is willing to be a participator, together with other Māori, in a constructive transformation of that tradition. Rather, his narcissistic need for self-establishment has led him to try to extricate himself from long-evolved difficulties in Māori life, eventually producing in him a radical refusal to engage with those

who he thinks have played a part in his past confusion. This is evidenced most compellingly by Jimmy's attitude towards his mother, whom he finally comes to repudiate in his narrative of self-cure.

While, in fairness, Jimmy does register his mother's viewpoint, his anger by far outweighs his empathy, leading to his rejection of what his mother is associated with in his narrative. This is the case with his treatment of his memories of his mother's complaints against his father:

> In fact, *she's puzzled at why normal isn't considered normal*. She turns the question back on my father every time. Unless it makes such undeniable good sense and truth she can only swear at him, and give veiled hints that *any wonder she is what she is, with a husband who doesn't understand her*. But then excuses—when they can be bothered to offer one—are tools of their trade. Turn irresponsibility to a joke. (*Moon* 57; my emphasis)

It would be reasonable here to assume that cultural difference must have contributed to the cognitive and behavioural barriers between his father and mother, with latter at her wits' end as to how to cope with the marriage; yet, for Jimmy, all his mother's angry complaints can be reduced to "excuses" or "a joke." While his mother's behaviour towards her children is indeed irresponsible in many senses, and thus deserves their indignation, there can also be no denying that Jimmy, because of the narcissistic wounds in his self-sense, is refusing to

identify with his Māori mother's outlook with a vengeance. This attempt to free himself from

negative maternal influence eventually takes the form of substituting abstract ideas (or ideals)

for a mother imago that is increasingly viciously debased by him. Such a substitution is

epitomised by Jimmy's comment on his mother's melodramatic mourning at the funeral of

his brother Warren who committed suicide—in her last appearance in the novel: "I know

what class is, I know what taste is, it's not money, or form, it's another means of showing

enlightenment. A booze bitch [his own mother] can't have class" (*Moon* 226; my emphasis).

And he goes so far as to say: "I see a common woman who doesn't deserve the title of slut. A

slut is someone fallen from somewhere. A common piece of ordinariness has never risen to

fall" (*Moon* 227). Even if we do not require a clarification of the meaning of "class" or

"ordinariness," it is indeed a strange form of enlightenment that leads one to thus disown and

debase one's own mother who, for all her inadequacies, is herself a victim of an unhappy

intercultural marriage and is not without love towards her children. Jimmy's superficial

attempt to extricate himself from his difficult upbringing by resorting to fuzzy ideas (and

ideals), it can be said, is concomitant with a radical revision of his unsatisfactory emotional

investment, a revision that precludes any constructive re-engagement with people who he

believes have left him with narcissistic wounds in the past.

The enunciative present, theorised by Bhabha as the process by which those at the

cultural edge may be "turned into subjects of their history and experience" (*Location* 178), is

a liberal yet rather inadequate prescription for postcolonial discursive formation, for the

epistemological unconcern in this process might well prompt a further atomisation of subjects

rather than their strategic alliance for progressive purposes. In the case of Jimmy, the enunciative present is only directed towards a narrowly conceived end in the service of his narcissistic self, made possible by an anachronistic distortion of the historical integrity of Māori culture. Furthermore, his enunciation does not even serve any purpose of "opening up new forms of identification" (Bhabha *Location* 179); instead, in wilfully narrating against his Māori mother and, by his synecdochic extension, against his Māori upbringing environment, he spitefully leaves out any consideration of problems brought about by a history of colonisation and racial discrimination, thus removing from view any possibility of his alignment with other socially concerned Māori individuals in working out compounded difficulties in a culturally acceptable, constructive manner. All in all, the negative implications of Jimmy's realisation of the enunciative present spring from a subjective cannibalisation of a culture whose collective memory and long-evolved common aspirations are exactly what holds its members together for social advancement. While the enunciative present, as a process of bringing change to the understanding and representation of the past, will always be part and parcel of the social discursive formation, its negative implications deserve more attention in our era in which cultural traditions in general are still increasingly fragmented to the point that whatever alternative wisdom they may contain may lose legitimacy to even a dysfunctional form of individualism under a still atomising capitalism.

4. Conclusions

In *Both Sides of the Moon*, Duff creates a narrative correspondence in which the present-day protagonist draws upon an imagining of his Māori ancestral past as a way of assisting his efforts to shake off what he deems to be negative Māori influence on him and to reach "enlightenment." The novel's dismissive representation of Māori cultural legacy and communal lifestyle is in line with Duff's advocacy of individual self-fashioning as the primary way of achieving Māori social advancement, as I discussed in length in the first section of this chapter. However, as I demonstrated in the second and third sections, the protagonist Jimmy's anachronistic imaginative reconstruction of his Māori ancestry, while serving a function of narcissistic self-cure, in effect precludes any comprehensive and balanced examination of the evolution of Māori social reality—with the negative implications being that there can be no consideration of Māori-specific solutions for social problems and that there can be no chance of rapprochement based on a shared understanding of cultural difference and its attendant difficulties.

Such self-appointed interpretation or re-presentation of a culture, reliant on the authority of an insider within that culture, and exercised in the form of vehement pronouncements on cultural legacy, is problematic as long as it is driven by self-obsession. While my analysis of *Both Sides of the Moon* has shown Jimmy's anachronistic projection onto the Māori past as a result of his self-centred attempt to repair his narcissistic wounds, I now would like to draw attention back to the authorial level—to Duff's general stance towards the Māori cultural legacy, which I already outlined in the beginning part of this

chapter.

Duff's individualistic (claimed by him as universalistic) approach to solving Māori

social problems is, apparently, endorsed by the fact that Māori society has been merged in the

capitalist system which originated in the West but has increasingly gone global. Western

capitalism, in particular, has been historically associated with attaching primary importance

to the sovereign individual as against collectivity. However, even Duff's own writing points

to long-evolved differences in Māori social institutions and acknowledges the existence of

certain strong points in Māori culture. Duff's conviction of the sufficiency of individual

self-fashioning in disregard of existing Māori social-familial conditions, therefore, not only

betrays the idealised view of (Pākeha) ideology that he adopts as a buttress of his

narcissistically wounded sense of self (I made a similar argument in the second section), but

also amounts to a throwing of the baby out with the bath water when it comes to his dealing

with sometimes difficult communal and cultural issues in Māori society.

Furthermore, even Duff's polemical strategy—of pitting individualistic

self-realisation against a supposedly uncongenial Māori background—is highly dubious.

Speaking of Duff's novelistic writing with particular reference to *Both Sides of the Moon*,

Otto Heim comments that there are "two interdependent yet conflicting discourses: a fictional

imagination that is irresistibly drawn back to the sites of bad experience, and a non-fictional,

what we might call essayistic, rationalization that with equal persistence seeks to distance

itself from these sites" ("Fall and Response" 6). While the enunciation of bad experience

imparts a sense of righteous indignation, the pseudo-objective rationalisation stretches far

beyond Duff's personal scope to the point of self-servingly misinterpreting history and its

ramifications for the present. The British psychoanalytic theorist Harry Guntrip, in discussing

a patient who has suffered from the internalisation of a violent mother and therefore has

developed a persecutory "super-ego," or the psychic function responsible for our adjusting to

the moral regulations of society, suggests that apart from real bad objects such as a bad

mother, a person's perception of his objects in childhood may be "so coloured by violent

emotions through projection that he builds up phantasied monsters who never had any

existence as such in real life, yet who form the hard core of his primitive sadistic super-ego"

(104). In this light, it can be said that while Duff has made remarkable efforts, both through

literary writing and in real life, to heal his self-confessed emotional difficulties arising from

having had a bad mother, he has nevertheless projected some bad circumstances in his

personal life onto Māori cultural tradition, making accusatory generalisations that may not

correspond to reality.

As I proposed in the first section of this chapter, enlightenment and love can be said

to be the two key motifs in Duff's novels on Māori advancement, with the former serving as a

reckoning of what is wrong in the Māori upbringing environment and the latter as the way

forward. While *Both Sides of the Moon* concludes with a narcissistically-driven, rather

skewed "enlightenment" that liberates the protagonist from a warrior culture, it nevertheless

promises further exploration of the meaning of life under the guidance of love, as is

expressed by the message at the close of the novel: "Love is light. Love is light. Light is

love"(*Moon* 235). Partial enlightenment, however, means that there is still psychic energy for

Duff to further work out implications of Māori heritage, while his narcissistic

conceptualisation of love is bound to beset his efforts to articulate new meaning in life.

Further development in these two aspects is indeed taken up by Duff in his later novel

Dreamboat Dad (2008), which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

The Postcolonial Subject in a Global Era: the Cultural Imaginary in Alan Duff's

Dreamboat Dad

Alan Duff's early fiction, as I have discussed previously, is largely preoccupied with

criticising what he perceives to be an unthinking violence and an unwillingness to take

personal responsibility for oneself that marks traditional Māori culture. To counter this, he

sets up a recurrent theme of the need for Māori individual self-fashioning as a means of

overcoming adverse environmental circumstances. With the passage of time, however, Duff

in his fictional writing seems to have been trying to untangle himself from his earlier

confrontational engagement with Māoridom in New Zealand. With the exception of *Jake's*

Long Shadow (2002), the last in the Jake trilogy, Duff's novels in the new

millennium—*Szabad* (2001), *Dreamboat Dad* (2008) and *Who Sings For Lu?* (2009)—all

have international settings, with or without Māori characters. Noting this change, one critic,

commenting on *Dreamboat Dad*, tries to account for it by taking a guess at the novelist's

motive: "If Duff is endeavouring to write his way out of debt [incurred by imprudent

financial ventures]—he will need an international hit, not just a local one" (Morrissey 90).

International as Duff's target market may have become, a recurrent topic that he has

kept on exploring even in his later novels is the drawn-out enactment and overcoming of

early-life trauma as suffered by the protagonists. In *Szabad*, the initial trauma stems from witnessing a strong father being broken down by the Hungarian secret police and imprisonment; in *Dreamboat Dad*, it is caused by the painfully-felt absence of the hero's American birth father; and in *Who Sings For Lu?*, a story set in both Australia and New Zealand, it is inflicted by a rape perpetrated on the heroine by an uncle. It would seem that what Duff has been trying to do in his later novels has simply been to move his old business of making sense of a troubled self into an imaginatively constructed international scene.

This new endeavour of Duff to tap into an international imaginary, nevertheless, has implications that transcend the realm of financial considerations. Obviously, the paradigm shift in Duff's writing can be looked at in the light of a transition "from biculturalism towards a glocal culture" in contemporary Māori cultural practice (Riemenschneider 139-60). Yet if the topic of the cultural imaginary present in these novels is to be discussed merely from the perspective of the general trajectory of diffuse discursive production, this discussion would fall short of providing a well-rounded account of the relationship between the subjective experience of various discontents, attachments, anxieties and hopes on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the subject's utilisation of available discourse for self-expression. In other words, an approach that focused exclusively on the shaping power of social discourse would not be able to sufficiently answer the more complex question of how an individual subject's self-development is related to the formation of a cultural imaginary amid social change.

The question of the cultural imaginary is especially relevant to the discussion of such a moralising writer as Duff. Moralising—or what can be said to be the effusive mobilisation

of discursive power to confront desire suspected of rioting unchecked in others—always

involves a strong subjective effort to crystallise from the shared, vast and changing cultural

pool an imaginary rationale that can sanction the subject adopting a superior pose in relation

to others. By examining the cultural imaginary in Duff's later fictional writing, we can gain

insight into the ways in which subjective identification is formed amid the seemingly ever

more criss-crossing cultural currents flowing from the past into the globalising present.

In keeping with my focus on the subject formation of Māori characters, in this chapter

I will choose as a case study the novel *Dreamboat Dad*, which continues Duff's advocacy of

the need for Māori individual self-fashioning, thereby providing a good comparison with his

earlier novels. What makes the novel even more apt for the examination of Duff's evolving

cultural imaginary is its depiction of the Māori protagonist's forming and handling of life

fantasies in a setting that is fraught with diverse cultural currencies, both indigenous and

international. The past and the present, in terms of the protagonist's subjective experience,

intertwine to inform a cultural imaginary which bears the imprint of the cultural logic of

globalising capitalism, along with the various questions concerning race that inevitably ensue

from it. In view of the incessant dissemination through transnational capitalism of dislocated,

fragmented scenes of life, I will emphasise the individual subject as the ultimate locus where,

despite the inevitable enmeshment of private desires in discursive circulation, psychological

development still needs to occur in an immediate environment which can provide

accommodation and response. I will take a largely psychoanalytic approach to the issue of the

cultural imaginary, on the grounds that such an approach can look beneath the agendas of

power relations and cultural hegemony often assumed in postcolonial studies and cultural

studies, and reinstate the importance of the individual's experience and assessment of a

cultural community—thus providing clues to the question of how alternative lifestyles and

wisdoms contained in a minority culture may survive and develop in a global era.

     For the sake of clarity, I would like to specify that my use of the term "imaginary" is

based upon the British object relations psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's theorisation of

self-image. In a 1967 article entitled "Mirror-role of Mother and Family in Child

Development," later included in his book *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott proposes that the

face of the mother (or some other caregiver) functions as *"the precursor of the*

mirror"(*Playing* 149), reflecting her loving perceptions of the infant and facilitating its

development of a capacity for integrating bodily and emotional experiences and for relating

to not-me objects. Correspondingly, an image of oneself, as reflected in a real mirror, can

further assist self-development; as Ian Craib sums it up, for Winnicott "the mirror is the

mother's face and it offers a reflection of the self that the infant can take on as part of its

move to integration" (131). Consequently, the gaze of others, if it takes place in a recognising

and benign environment, can be an affirmation of the individual's sense of self in later life; as

Winnicott puts it: "When I look I am seen, so I exist. / I can now afford to look and see"

(*Playing* 154). It is worth pointing out that Winnicott's understanding of self-image is

radically different from the theorisation of the mirror stage by Jacques Lacan, who is cited by

the former as an important influence in his own thinking of the mirror-role of the mother

(*Playing* 149). For Lacan, the mirror stage is a passage to alienation, in which the infant, still

trapped in its motor impotence, nevertheless (mistakenly) identifies with the image of wholeness in the mirror. The mirror stage thus constitutes a precursor to "the dialectic of identification with the other," preparing for the emergence of the subject when the individual enters language, a realm of social determination (Lacan 76). In brief, if for Lacan there can be no "self" but a fragmented "subject" held together only by an imaginary wholeness, then for Winnicott it is possible to have a healthy self which is in phase with its own genetic potential and is at ease and creative with its environment.[14]

While acknowledging the importance of social discourse in prioritising the availability or pervasiveness of certain images, I will nevertheless follow Winnicott in his emphasis on the interpersonal dimension in the individual's relation to self-image. In the present study, I will use the term "cultural imaginary" to refer to the discursively mediated images that inform an ever-evolving culture, images with which the human subject tends to identify. In accordance with my Winnicottian-inspired approach, I will insist that an

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[14] Winnicott has even developed such concepts as "True Self" and "False Self" (*Maturational Process* 140-52), though they are never rigidly defined by him for fear of theoretical dogmatism, and smack of romantic essentialism to some of his critics. My view is that certain factors in an individual, such as the peculiarities in his or her genetic composition and early prelinguistic relationship to the mother, may indeed provide a basis for our talk about his or her seeking a realisation of the True Self in relation to society. I should add, though, that the ontological stability of the True Self should not be exaggerated in view of the extent to which individual life constantly has to adjust to conditions, regulations and changes that are beyond individual control.

individual's imaginary identification through the medium of culture involves freewheeling

fantasies as well as constructive associations, with the difference between the two depending

upon the extent to which the subject can rise above mere narcissistic desire to also

incorporate an appreciation or reconciled understanding of his or her own interpersonal

environment.

In what follows, I will first look at the familial and communal background of the

protagonist, Mark, so as to trace the different cultural images, either traditional or

newly-arrived, that are involved in his urgent yet tentative search for imaginary identification.

Next, I will analyse the social change that underlies the protagonist's prioritisation of certain

cultural images. Then, after examining the protagonist's overcoming of mere narcissistic

concerns for self-image and his eventual attainment of a more collective understanding of

identity, I will conclude the chapter by pointing out the implications of the cultural imaginary

for such collective agendas as race relations and nation-building.

1. Imaginary Identification as Psychic Compensation

As its title suggests, *Dreamboat Dad* is a novel very much about the role played by the father

imago in the protagonist's growing-up experience. This father imago, insofar as it is the

subjective product of a child, then adolescent, who is more and more steeped in the medium

of culture, is not only familial but also deeply cultural. In what follows, I will argue that in

engaging with the father imago, the protagonist is in fact experimenting with different

cultural currencies, both old and new, in order to try and boost his own sense of security and self-esteem. In other words, the protagonist's active construction of an imaginary self-identification can be interpreted as his active attempt at psychic compensation for the familial and communal inadequacies felt by him.

Like so many central characters in Duff's other novels, the protagonist Mark in *Dreamboat Dad* also feels the destructive effects of living in a disharmonious family from a young age. Mark's half-caste Māori mother, Lena, is married to a proud Māori man, Henry Takahe. She had a brief affair with a black American soldier, Jess Hines, who was based temporarily in New Zealand while Henry was away fighting Italian and German fascists in Europe. As the son born out of that affair, Mark, though sharing the surname of his nominal father Henry, has never received any emotional affirmation from the latter. To make matters worse, Mark has had to witness, with a sense of powerlessness and guilt, the periodic abuse inflicted by Henry upon his mother Lena, as a punishment for her bringing into the household the lasting stigma of an illegitimate child: that is, Mark himself.

It is this primal sense of an insecure identity felt by Mark that draws him towards sources of identification beyond his immediate experience. To shore up Mark's self-esteem, the kind-hearted old woman Merita, touching upon the topic of Māori chiefs having had slaves in old times, lies to Mark by telling him that his mother is descended from a high-born family. This lineage, if true, would also render Mark high-born according to Māori tribal tradition (*Dreamboat* 31). Mark's immediate reaction after hearing this white lie is to conjure up the picture of a deadly confrontation:

The high-born endure pain as a mark of their superior status. This

high-born kid endures the pain of living in Henry's house.

One day I'll make you one of my slaves, Henry Takahe. One day my father

is going to arrive and then we'll see you tremble in front of a real man. Kneel,

slave, my father will say. And you will kneel. Then he will behead you for

how you treated his son. (*Dreamboat* 31-32)

In Lacanian parlance, this would be a peculiar manifestation of the Oedipus complex in

which there is a strange confrontation between Jess as the father who, according to Dylan

Evans's summarisation of Lacan's interpretation of the role of the father in the child's

imagination, represents "the composite of all the imaginary constructs that the subject builds

up in fantasy around the figure of the father" (D. Evans 63), and Henry as the symbolic father,

who regulates desire and imposes law on behalf of the social-cultural establishment. The

irony of this situation, however, is that instead of the father figure structuring the son's

initiation into culture, the whole scenario is fantasised by Mark as having the backing of

matrilineal power; that is, of his having a mother who is now believed by him to be high-born.

It is reasonable to argue, therefore, that what Mark seeks in his fantasy is not only a loving

father, but more generally also empowerment and esteem.

Of course, there is no way for Mark to play out this slavery script in 1960s New

Zealand. Nonetheless, the unknown birth father strides into Mark's imaginary—if not

seriously to assist the physical disposal of the adolescent's nominal father, then definitely as an appealing imago full of cultural connotations until it is eventually overridden in Mark's experiential engagement with social reality. Called "Yank" by his fellow Māori boys, Mark has been fancying the return of his absent American birth father since he was a small boy:

> [O]ne of those Yank tourists could be my father come back to search for me. He could be any one of those I'd shown copycat contempt, to impress the older boys. Could be rich, live in a huge mansion in—where? California somewhere. New York. He could live anywhere in that vast country . . . soon my atlas at school becomes a much studied work. (*Dreamboat* 13)

The biological father here is manifested as being entirely a wishful construct of the small Mark, underpinned by his fragmentary impressions of America: big money, fashionable lifestyle, glamorous cities and vast territory, etcetera. It is worth pointing out that these impressions seem to have been derived not only from American tourists, but perhaps also from the American entertainment industry—represented especially by Hollywood in California and Broadway in New York, two places mentioned in the above excerpt.

More tangible proof of the impact of American pop culture on the protagonist becomes readily available as the novel proceeds to portray an adolescent Mark reacting to news about his birth father. When Lena eventually receives a letter from Jess—for Mark, the first smoking gun that confirms the existence of his birth father in America—we see that his

attempt to construct a father imago is intricately imbricated with American film imagery. "What if he's not a cowboy figure hero, a war hero, a film star, is just an ordinary person?" is one of the immediate questions Mark asks of his mother (*Dreamboat* 54). Never feeling satisfied with the information he wishfully and selectively obtains from his mother, Mark prefers more and more to model his birth father imago on John Wayne, a Hollywood epitome of rugged masculinity. Furthermore, after having established contact with Jess by mail, Mark in his letters to his birth father writes ever more enthusiastically about his passion for music, which mainly consists in imitating American pop songs, especially those by Elvis Presley. As his mother worries, "Yank had this romantic notion his father was a white John Wayne or Elvis Presley, and Negro was the last notion in his mind" (*Dreamboat* 140). The physically absent birth father, therefore, has become the symbolic point of convergence for the fragments that constitute Mark's imaginary conception of America.

In contrast to the increasing potency that American imagery has for Mark, there is a loosening of the influence of Britain on the imagination of the younger generation of Māori. As Mark observes of the pervasive presence of the framed photographs of British monarchs adorning the walls of houses in his Māori village: "British royalty doesn't mean the same to us kids. Though at the picture theatres we have to stand up for *God Save the Queen* or get chucked out, or get a whack from an usher's torch" (*Dreamboat* 15). This relative indifference to symbolic vestiges of former British rule does not mean that the colonial legacy has become irrelevant in the lives of young Māori; rather, it simply indicates a shift in orientation in the subjective structuring of images that come from beyond immediate

experience.

Mark's restless search for personal identification, in the context of a changing landscape of cultural imagery, raises the question of the logic behind his evolving cultural imaginary. While it is easy to say that Mark does not live out the fantasy of becoming a slave-owning Māori chief because of the all too obvious anachronism of such a situation, and that he is drawn towards an imaginary America because of his American birth father, much more insight can be gained by a close examination of the larger picture of his life. To be more specific, Mark's evolving cultural imaginary can be shown to have much to do with the new aspirations spawned by ongoing social changes.

2. The Social Logic of the Evolving Cultural Imaginary

Although Mark's construction of a cultural imaginary relates closely to the predominantly Māori community in which he lives, it also reaches far beyond it. This outward expansion of his cultural imaginary, while typical for an adolescent, nevertheless points to tensions between a traditional collective lifestyle as featured in his Māori village and certain globalising cultural trends. A key factor involved in those tensions, I suggest, is the individual's heightened pursuit of personal freedom in the era of a globalising capitalism. In this section, I will first focus on the impact of changing social conditions on the formulation of Mark's cultural imaginary, and then look at the initiative he takes to reconfigure this imaginary once he realises the naivety of his earlier wishful fantasies.

Life in the close-knit, kinship-based Māori village simply proves too stifling for Mark, who has to put up with lack of recognition and even discrimination. His nominal father, Henry, barely stops short of tossing him out of the household, preferring to cold-shoulder him most of the time. His nominal grandmother shows affection only to "my [Mark's] sister, Mata and Wiki, and especially *my little Manu*—her *real grandson*—right in front of me" (*Dreamboat* 14). What is perhaps worse, personal disgrace is perpetually remembered and even relished in communal gossip. In the words of Lena, stigmatised with an extramarital son, life is "difficult in a small village with everyone related and knowing one another's business and the communal baths being one of the social gathering places" (*Dreamboat* 40). It is no surprise, therefore, that the young, impetuous Mark, though always heartened by motherly love from Lena, is not satisfied with what he is experiencing in the Māori community.

Mark becomes more and more infatuated with iconic figures in American pop culture in his effort to escape the interpersonal constraints imposed by his traditional community. Beginning with silver-screen Western heroes like John Wayne, he proceeds to idolise the singer and actor Elvis Presley: "He came like a letter from America, addressed *Dear Young World . . . I, Elvis Presley, give you permission to be whatever you want*" (*Dreamboat* 67). Such cheap promises of unrestrained freedom—usually at the price of only a few pennies into the jukebox or a theatre ticket—are riveting not only to Mark, but also to many of his teenage peers, irrespective of their familial background. As a result, Mark and his peers "packed every seat and sat gobsmacked in every aisle unable to get enough of the King, unable to believe such a person existed and yet he was *ours*"(*Dreamboat* 67; my emphasis).

While this enthusiastic identification with such iconic American images is undoubtedly indicative of a reaction against certain unstimulating aspects and even confinement in the mundane life of a small Māori village, one problem here, nevertheless, is that the commercially promulgated imagery is not in fact "ours," but is very much alien to the traditional Māori lifeworld. This, of course, is not to say that the American entertainment industry, aggressive as its marketing practices may be, is imposing itself upon overseas consumers, in the sense that what it does is just provide commodity, the consumption of which is ultimately up to individual choice. However, just as John Tomlinson points out in *Cultural Imperialism*:

> Individual choices, then, only reflect autonomy within the range of what is "imaginable" as the attainable "good life" within a culture. The colonisation of the social imaginary restricts individual autonomy by imposing a set of ultimately vacuous imaginary significations—significations which Castoriadis claims (with some justification) as already in crisis in the West. (163)

Furthermore, the commercially contrived imaginary significations are often rendered so exotic and appealing that there is always a distinct possibility that the viewing subject will be wrenched away from local cultural roots, unappreciative of the values that have been culturally sustaining a long-evolved local network of interrelated individuals. For any positive culture to evolve constructively, its individual practitioners indeed need to strive

towards new horizons; nevertheless, if, in doing so, they identify with illusory or erroneous ideals, that is likely to produce negative implications for themselves as well as for their local community.

In the case of Mark, the cultural imaginary he derives from the imported American entertainment industry, though indeed conducive to his self-confidence by giving rise to new aspirations, is at the same time blocking him from a constructive engagement with his interpersonal environment. How should we read Mark's exclamation that "*[s]ingle-handedly*, Elvis Presley rocked *society* yet brought something breathtakingly exciting, of *true meaning*" (*Dreamboat* 68; my emphasis)? I would suggest that this "true meaning" resides in Mark's new-found belief in an individualism uninhibited by the familial background, cultural expectation or social conventions. To sum it up by Mark's own words: "We could be whatever we chose to be" (*Dreamboat* 67). Imbued with the values of this new cultural imaginary, the individual subject apparently feels both able and entitled to transcend his or her immediate environment to realise some self-designated form of existence.

This sense of the possibility for individual self-fashioning is excessively exaggerated and optimistic. Ironically, while Mark wishes to act as if he can be the self-appointed sole creator of his own lifeworld, he constantly has to fuel his enthusiasm by retaining a feeling of interpersonal connection and recognition—in ways that are either primitively sensual or extremely narcissistic. Mark manages to combine the two ways in the pursuit of his music dream: "During the night glorious performing in return for adulation: we can have any young woman we want. Which spurs us young men to greater heights of being desired" (*Dreamboat*

111). Furthermore, it is this narcissistic catering to the sensual self that strips Mark of qualms about having a secret affair with the mother of his music partner Nigel. Self-centredness also leads Mark to distance himself deliberately from his long-time Māori best mate, Chud, who is deemed by him to be not musical enough, and who, for lack of love and care, gradually drifts into delinquency.

Even if all those above-mentioned activities of Mark were to be considered above reproach from a standpoint that privileged individual freedom, it is nevertheless easy to pinpoint, in his exploration of self-fashioning, an erroneous and potentially dangerous belief that cultural predispositions are the result of genetic inheritance. This belief seems to have been nurtured by him to reinforce a sense of his own personal distinction, partly through denying from the start an equal potential in his fellow individuals—thus ironically contradicting his apparent subscription to the notion of the unbounded potential of the individual. As he reflects upon himself in relation to the other Māori among whom he lives, Mark ponders: "Must be from my [never met American birth] father to have this curious mind wanting answers, even enlightenment" (*Dreamboat* 14). With his white music partner, Nigel, he does the reverse: "I assume being Maori our race is musical and rarely does a white person have the talent" (*Dreamboat* 64), though he soon has to change this opinion after witnessing Nigel's performance. Nevertheless, his enduring fantasy, that his American birth father is white, plays an exceedingly important role in his construction of a superior self-image for himself. All those essentialist assertions of his own advantageous potential are evidence that, despite his individualistic attempt to transcend existing social boundaries,

Mark still cannot do without a collage of racial stereotypes—collective images shaped by social bias and circulated in social discourse. And if one's self-image can be so much relational to collective images which are socially conditioned, we may further conclude that a well-rounded study of an individual's development can hardly afford to exclude a look at the larger network of social issues which implicate the individual.

In view of this inescapable implication of the personal in the social, Mark's evolving cultural imaginary, which depends so strongly on images derived from imported cultural products, needs to be appraised in the context of a new development in the social sphere: namely, the expanded network of capitalist production and distribution. While individual freedom is already in theory guaranteed in New Zealand on the basis of a liberal democratic national polity, capitalist globalisation after World War II further promises an even greater personal mobility. The ever more technologically advanced mass media—which have a built-in tendency to reinforce prevailing values—are thus able to conveniently project individual success stories across national borders, often using cultural particulars only in a fragmented, shallow way so as to cater to the tastes of a vast array of audiences from different cultural backgrounds, thus expanding the scope of consumption.

The media/cultural globalisation process, therefore, is bound to create tension between, on the one hand, its reductionist, universalistic promotion of individualistic values, and on the other hand, the hindrance of an ideal realisation of those values due to the particular difficulties in an audience's environment. The protagonist Mark, absorbed in glamorous images produced by the American entertainment industry, has for a long time

blamed the existence of that tension on the environment in which he has been raised. To provide himself with a form of compensation, he relishes instead an imaginary identification with his absent American father, whom he sees as his potential deliverer. It is not until the shocking revelation that his father is black that he is able to pay critical attention to the more sinister side of the media, beginning to recognise how the marginalised representation of black people in American films serves to obscure their victimisation. Confronted with photos of his birth father produced by his mother, and barely able to overcome an impulse to deny the reality of it, Mark reflects: "I had never seen one Negro tourist in Waiwera. In fact never set eyes on a Negro, period. Just on the movie screen, playing servant roles and over-acting the buffoon for the white master's amusement" (*Dreamboat* 113). It is only subsequently that Mark begins to realise that "I'm prejudiced too"(*Dreamboat* 114-15). This urgent need for self-education, I suggest, is, among other things, behind the protagonist Mark's eventual decision to go meet his "Negro" birth father in what was once his dreamland of individual freedom and success: America.

The next section, beginning with an examination of Mark's experience in America, will be focused on the transformation that occurs in his understanding of freedom from one that is conceptualised purely at a personal level to one that is conceptualised more in terms of collective values and a concern with the common good. I will discuss the role played by the cultural imaginary in negotiating the tension between the pursuit of individual freedom, which is held up as a universal ideal of our era, and racial struggle, which certainly demands some measure of restriction and synergy in action.

3. The Cultural Imaginary, Race Relations and Nation-building

The fictional adventure in 1960s America undertaken by the protagonist in *Dreamboat Dad*

can be regarded as a thought-experiment in which Duff considers how an individual may act

in the extreme circumstances of a racial struggle. While the setting is temporarily moved

overseas to a world hegemon, the upshot of the protagonist's expanded experience is an

enhanced understanding on his part of Aotearoa New Zealand, which mainly consists of an

appreciation of the personal freedom accommodated (though not uninhibited) by the social

and cultural particularities of his home country. The cultural imaginary of the individual, once

it is expanded to take cognisance of social relations and group welfare, consequently also has

major implications for such collective concerns as race relations and nation-building.

Mark's journey into the Southern United States, which at that time is still infested

with Ku Klux Klan and stained with blood from lynchings, soon has the effect of a stark

reality check that causes him to modify the rosy picture he has painted of the country that has

provided so many of the elements that constitute his imaginary ideal. The egregious injustice

in the area of supposedly "universal" human rights is personified by the two cops who, after

provoking and brutally manhandling Mark, issue a warning with regard to Mark's father:

> This here could be a nigger who wants to *revolt* against time-honoured law
>
> and order, as practised and enforced by law-abiding white folk. . . . Son of a

bitch civil rights man, you better not be walking all over *our* civil rights. We

got our eyes on you, Jess Hines. (*Dreamboat* 213)

While it now becomes plain to Mark that race alone could be sufficient cause in itself for an

individual to be stripped of freedom, his appreciation of the weight of the collective

dimension of existence is soon enlarged further to include a recognition of the internecine

conflicts and internal contradictions that reside within a collectivity. As Jess grumpily

explains to Mark, who gets harassed by some black men for his not looking black enough,

inner divisions, and even bitter infighting, persist perversely within the black community: "In

every town and city it's black on black and still we don't get it that we been turned against

ourselves. Ain't no one talking revenge against the ones who been hurting us for centuries"

(*Dreamboat* 225). Nevertheless, despite Jess's angry exaggeration, he himself is one among

the innumerable participants of the civil rights movement, which is fast changing the social

discourse of America.

It is important here to discuss the relation of the individual subject to social discourse,

as this has implications for how collective action happens, despite the existence of inner

divisions within a group. And the key to this discussion, I suggest, is the cultural imaginary

variously established by individuals, yet shared at a collective level. In the context of the part

of the novel set in America, despite the varying and sometimes conflicting perspectives

offered by the multiple narrators, the message of black suffering is nurtured and delivered by

all those narrators through the use of vivid symbolic imagery. In Jess's narration, there

repeatedly appears the startling image of the "strange fruit" of a black body hung on a tree (*Dreamboat* 125; 80; 30; 243), which for him is far more than merely a linguistic construction of a poem that he has come across, but apparently is also the crystallisation of his experience of actually witnessing a black woman being lynched by a white mob (*Dreamboat* 176-80). Jess, in turn, is later lynched for killing two Ku Klux Klan members who threaten the life of his son. His dead body is described by a fellow black woman in a letter addressed to Mark as a strange thing hanging on a telephone pole, and is depicted similarly by a white witness in a newspaper article which Mark reads (*Dreamboat* 238-42; 43-46). Such evocation of images of black suffering, which serves a symbolic, paradigmatic purpose, culminates in the inclusion of Richard Wright's poem "Between the World and Me," at the end of the novel, which vivifies the horror felt by a victim of lynching in imagery just resembling the "strange fruit" (*Dreamboat* 251-52). The poem is presented as the conclusion of the novel in such a vague way that it cannot be determined whether the use of the poem can be ascribed to a character such as Mark, or only directly to the author of the novel. The indeterminacy surrounding this poem, in terms of who has borrowed it, who is using it and for what specific purposes, further highlights the wide applicability of the message of black suffering and racial injustice.

At this point, it seems obvious that while language serves as a medium for the conveying of images in the social realm, the poignant images being discursively circulated have nevertheless gone beyond being arbitrary signifiers organised merely by convention in language. Those who are involved in the generating or relating of such images have

established strong identification with those images—through, for example, the bodily

association between lynching and a "strange fruit." And it is on the basis of shared

identification with certain images projected by various subjects into the social discourse that

intersubjective recognition and communication can in one way be reinforced. In other words,

collectively shared imagery can be the result of the overlapping between subjective projection

and discursive circulation. Winnicott, in his observations on the acquisition of culture by

healthy babies, emphasises the duality inherent in cultural imagery when he points out that

"symbols . . . stand at one and the same time for external world phenomena and for

phenomena of the individual person who is being looked at" (*Playing* 146-47). For Winnicott,

manifestly, images in the external world become meaningful only when the individual subject

can personally relate to them, and it is on this basis that certain images can become reference

points in a wider social discourse for interpersonal communication. One implication of the

Winnicottian take on symbols (emotionally invested objects representative of ideas that can

be discursively circulated), therefore, is that the subject's apperception of cultural phenomena

is essentially an extension of his or her immediate life experience—despite the increasingly

decentred production and distribution of indifferent or abstract information in human society.

When Winnicott's perspective on subjective agency in relation to social discourse is

used as a framework for looking at the protagonist's American journey, it becomes apparent

that Mark undergoes education at three levels: that relating to society as a whole, that relating

to interpersonal relations and that which relates to the development of the self. On the surface,

Mark gains a new social understanding through the comparisons he is prompted to make, as

when he observes, following his return to New Zealand, that he had arrived "back to the safety of my homeland, my tiny country with its affairs so minor and petty as to be farcical in comparison. Yet when I got back there, was never more pleased to be home" (*Dreamboat* 237-38). While it is extremely difficult for anyone to characterise a society in its entirety, such an appreciative understanding of his own country can nevertheless be valid as far as Mark's subjective engagement with the social and cultural milieu is concerned. Judging from a Winnicottian view on cultural experience as being located in "the *potential space* between the individual and the environment" and as providing "the continuity in the human race that transcends personal existence" (*Playing* 135), Mark's experience of social atmosphere is at once a reflection of his inner psychic dynamic and a recognition of the ideas that other individuals in his social environment have formulated in their experience and released into social discourse. Evidence of such an interplay between Mark and his social environment is particularly visible in two remarks made by him after he returns from America: "We have law on our side, do Maoris, and rights" (*Dreamboat* 204) and "To my knowledge my country has never had a single lynching" (*Dreamboat* 205). From a Winnicottian perspective, even if his knowledge about racial law and lynching is mere hearsay, Mark's capacity for assessing the relationship between a social milieu and one's personal safety and dignity—now that he has outgrown the excessively narcissistic self-obsession that he displayed earlier and has started engaging with larger social issues—is undeniable, and prepares him for contribution to the cultural and social realm shared with other individuals.

At the level of interpersonal relations, what Mark has gained is an appreciation of

cooperation and mutual respect within a collectivity structured on the basis of social and cultural particularities. In America, he learns to adapt his personal will to the instructions of his father in the fight against white oppression and aggression (*Dreamboat* 214-15). Reflecting on previous experience, Mark remarks: "I guess meeting Jess changed my view of Henry: made me realise how your birthplace, your culture, can make you" (*Dreamboat* 246). The cultural imaginary of individual freedom and success as epitomised by John Wayne and Elvis Presley is, of course, still cherished, as is evident in Mark's apparent approval of his mother's divorce from the once violent Henry and of her starting her life anew with a wealthy, well-mannered Pākehā businessman. Yet as Mark has come to see the individual in the context of the factors that govern the collective, he behaves more constructively with regard to the cultural traditions shared by a community, beginning to reconcile himself with his nominal father, Henry, who, despite his past violence, is in many respects a decent man with a devotion to the welfare of his Māori village.

It is important to note that Mark's transformation is underlain by a maturational process in which the self attunes itself to the environment culturally. Admittedly, the adolescent Mark's imaginary identification is one that is profoundly shaped by cultural currencies in accordance with their power to activate discursive constructions that lie beyond convenient empirical scrutiny—a fact which echoes Lacan's point that "as a characteristic of an animal at the mercy of language, man's desire is the Other's desire" (Lacan 525). This point is valid, however, only in the sense that "man" has to use language to procure survival, security and satisfaction in an interpersonal network composed predominantly of other people;

but the human animal's developmental cycle of birth, growth, and death entails that "his"

innate adaptability and creativity need be attuned to the growing self with all its inborn and

acquired peculiarities. In other words, "man's" desire can never only be the indiscriminate

Other's desire, but is always a result of the interplay between a peculiar self and its changing,

changeable environment. A theoretical counterpoint to the Lacanian view here is again

provided by Winnicott:

> In the healthy individual who has a compliant aspect of the self but who exists
>
> and who is a creative and spontaneous being, there is at the same time a
>
> capacity for the use of symbols. In other words health here is closely bound up
>
> with the capacity of the individual to *live in an area that is intermediate*
>
> *between the dream and reality, that which is called cultural life*. (*Maturational*
>
> *Process* 150; my emphasis)

From the Winnicottian perspective, the evolution of Mark's cultural imaginary is essentially a

manifestation of a self in negotiation with social discourse. The anachronistic imaginary of

becoming a slave-owning Māori chief, despite its allure of superiority, therefore, is bound to

be replaced with something more in line with social acceptability. Mark's intuitive efforts at

self-assertion through identification with an absent American birth father, who is virtually an

assemblage of popular images gleaned from the entertainment industry, also have to be

revised once Mark realises that his wishful thinking has been unsupported by actuality. In

particular, the realisation that his birth father, being black, is subjected to social injustices further prompts him into rethinking the relationship between the individual, the collective, and social discourse. As Mark matures, he eventually adopts a position in which his personal development is in confident interaction with his immediate social environment, the particularities of which, although once considered by him to be too limiting, nevertheless remain a major source for his cultural sense-making. As Merita points out near the end of the novel, after confessing to having fabricated the aristocratic lineage for Mark, he is now "strong enough to accept being ordinary, which is not such a bad thing" (*Dreamboat* 247). An old woman steeped in Māori tradition, Merita here is apparently pointing to Mark's eventual rapprochement with his own cultural environment.

As I have demonstrated so far in this chapter, the onset of global capitalist modernity, in Duff's fictive representation, has significantly undermined the continuity of subjective identification for Māori with a tribally-based cultural tradition, promoting instead an individualistic culture through its economic, political and cultural arrangements. This is not only true of Mark, but also of some other Māori characters, such as his mother who chooses to remarry outside the Māori community in pursuit of individual happiness. Such primacy of the individual, no doubt, has made essentialist accounts of cultural belonging more problematic. However, the individual subject still remains intrinsically capable of relating to different layers of collective concerns, such as race issues and nation-building. The reason why this is possible is that an emotive use of symbols hinges upon the connection between one's inner reality and the outside world, with the overlapping imaginary of different subjects

forming collective concerns. Although commercially-driven cultural globalisation inundates the subject (him- or herself also becoming more mobile) with a plethora of social discourse, it is always the connectedness between a peculiar self and its environment which determines the quality of a cultural life. From this perspective, race relations and nation-building can by no means be reduced to a political arrangement of arbitrary signifiers, but should involve a constant working out of tensions between particular traditions and new challenges in such a way that people involved can relate themselves to the social milieu in an intimate, creative and peaceful manner. Just as the "strange fruit" image is collectively nurtured and discursively circulated by Black Americans in their racial struggle, in the peaceful environment of New Zealand the collective goals of Māori should also be recognised as signifying genuine aspirations of Māori individuals. And just as the matured Mark becomes capable of reconciliation, a facilitating social environment will not result in mere agonistic struggles in the pursuit of self-interests.

Duff's later novels, in developing an international vision, represent a bifurcation of his concerns. On the one hand, some of his later novels champion a kind of individual self-fashioning stripped of any sustained ties to any collectivity; on the other hand, *Dreamboat Dad* represents a nuanced understanding of the individual in relation to the socio-cultural tradition. This bifurcation of concerns perhaps can be said to reflect the primordial tension between the human necessity to survive independently in various environments and the need to feel a sense of belonging. Realistically speaking, in the new millennium in which neoliberalism has been the norm of the capitalist world, it is indeed not

easy—especially for Duff, in his apparent attempt to attract an international readership with

his realistic exploration of life—to formulate a widely applicable alternative to the primary

reliance on oneself when it comes to personal economic considerations. Nor can we easily

escape the anxiety brought about by the overwhelmingly vast amount of social-cultural

discourse mostly alien to us. This existential condition is reflected in Duff's early novels in

the way many Māori characters exhibit a deep sense of doubt about the viability of their own

tradition, partly as a result of the difficulty they experience in absorbing and digesting the

overwhelming onslaught of ideas from the larger world. As Otto Heim, writing before the

appearance of *Dreamboat Dad*, noted, Duff can be said to belong to a small group of Māori

writers "whose sense of their Maoriness . . . has been shaped by their engagement with the

Pakeha world and in response to their, at times shameful, exposure to the way others perceive

them" ("Fall and Response" 14). In his later novels, Duff seems to propose a way of life that

mainly consists of making sense of one's troubled self in variable (even international)

environments—which is indeed a heroic way of handling both financial and emotional

difficulties. Overall, Duff may not have been inclined to embrace Māori family and

community life to the extent that some other major Māori writers such as Witi Ihimaera and

Patricia Grace have—stressing, instead, "the individual acceptance of responsibility to

become different" (Prentice "Articulations" 160). Yet, through the distancing representation

in *Dreamboat Dad* of stories set during World War II and its aftermath, when racial equality

is not even an official policy in some parts of the Western world, such as the United States,

Duff appears to be engaging in a reflection on how individual freedom and development are

contingent upon the collective dimensions of life, a connection that Duff has tended to

downplay in his earlier novels. In exploring individual self-fashioning in *Dreamboat Dad*,

Duff, once a maverick on the Māori cultural scene, has apparently brought himself around to

the possibilities of reconciliation, respect and mutual support among the individuals who

share a cultural tradition in the face of cultural globalisation. The playing out of tensions

between individual development and traditional strictures is, in fact, a common theme in the

Māori novel, and takes the most intense form with Witi Ihimaera, as I will discuss in the next

two chapters.

Chapter 5

Divergent Cultural Legacies and the Problematic of Individuation in Witi Ihimaera's

The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer

Of all the four major Māori novelists I discuss in this thesis, Witi Ihimaera is the one with the

most dramatic U-turns in his writing career. While his fictional oeuvre is mostly about Māori

life, his literary representation of it is, nevertheless, full of inconsistencies and contradictions,

indicating a complex, unsettled and unsettling conception on his part of the subject matter, as

well as his urgent yet unresolved desire to synthesise conflicting symbolic resources from

both Māori tradition and otherwise.[15] The uncertainty and tentativeness in Ihimaera's

thinking on Māori people and culture in change are pointed out by Melissa Kennedy, when

she states that "[h]is representation of cultural change and the impact of external influences,

both past and present . . . shifts between a positive stance indicating Māoritanga's ability to

embrace modernity and a negative position in which modernity figures as mere loss of

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[15] In my use of the term "symbolic resources," I follow the developmental psychologist Tania

Zittoun. On the basis of her sketching of the historical background of the notion of symbolic

resources, Zittoun suggests that this notion "aims at offering a theoretical understanding of

people's uses of cultural artefacts, or semiotic tools, as developmental resources when they

face new, unpredictable situations" (343).

tradition" (155). Indeed, as far as Māori tradition as explored in his literary works is concerned, Ihimaera seems to have been engaged in a continuous thinking about its modern fate without reaching any conclusion about which he himself can rest assured.

The unsettled, yet persistent, engagement with Māori tradition in the larger cultural context, however, points to a desire on the part of Ihimaera to conceive a mode of Māori life that is both open to change yet capable of preserving its cultural identity. Such a desire to entertain both the changing and the familiar can be better understood in light of D. W. Winnicott's theorisation of the status of tradition in cultural experience. Expanding on his own theory of transitional objects and transitional phenomena, Winnicott suggests that our cultural experience is an adult form of play, with its origins lying in our childhood use of transitional objects to negotiate the gap between our inner psychic reality and the environment and thus to fend off existential anxiety, when the mother, or caregiver, is not immediately available (intentionally or not) for satisfying our sense of union with her and of omnipotence (*Playing* 130-31). Cultural experience thus conceptualised is therefore activated in response to the trauma of separation and otherness, yet is grounded in an expectation of retrieving what is familiar and reliable. Such a tension in cultural experience leads Winnicott to theorise about tradition thus: "The interplay between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness seems . . . to be just one more example, and a very exciting one, of the interplay between separateness and union" (*Playing* 134). In this light, Ihimaera's literary exploration of Māori life can be regarded as a playful form of cultural innovation which is nevertheless inconceivable without engaging with the familiar and

common issues in Māori culture. As I will show later on in this chapter, however, the interpersonal dimension implied in the question of cultural experience besets Ihimaera's efforts to think through the issue of individual living in relation to tradition or, indeed, traditions in a hybrid society.

The trajectory of Ihimaera as a writer of fiction until now can be roughly divided into three phases as far as his representation of Māoridom is concerned. Ihimaera's first several books, including his first short story collection *Pounamu, Pounamu* (1972), and his first and second novels *Tangi* (1973) and *Whanau* (1974), present an image of rural harmony, and are characterised by light humour, together with nostalgia in cases where Māori village life is interrupted when characters mingle with the Pākehā world in cities. Although this nostalgia was increasingly replaced by uneasiness about "the reality of the disintegrating effects of urban migration on Maori consciousness" (Ojinmah 28), especially in his second short story collection *The New Net Goes Fishing* (1976), this phase of Ihimaera's writing can, on the whole, be viewed as an extended struggle to maintain the conception expressed by the narrator of *Tangi*: "Somehow, I managed to stride both worlds" (*Tangi* 78).

However, as Ihimaera feared that his seemingly "definitive portrayal of the world of the Maori" in his early writing was in fact "tragically out of date" (qtd. in Millar 255), he imposed a ten-year embargo on his literary creation. When he returned to the literary scene with the publication of *The Matriarch* in 1986, one could easily sense a sea change in Ihimaera's attitude towards Māori issues, expressed through the angry and polemical language of the narrator. For Patrick Evans, in his examination of Māori writers' treatment of

biculturalism, this change on the part of Ihimaera amounted to a response to "the questioning

of his right to write by Maori radicals" on account of his previous self-admitted captivity to

"Pakeha-style biculturalism" (11). It seems, nevertheless, that there was more than just a

repositioning of the racial-political stance that was undergirding the metamorphosis in

Ihimaera's writing. Rather, the anger and polemics also implicated various traditions and

institutions inside Māori society, ranging from leadership contestation in the clan, as in *The*

Matriarch and its sequel *The Dream Swimmer* (1997), sexism, as in *The Whale Rider* (1987),

intergenerational confrontation, as in *Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies* (1995), and homophobia,

as in *The Uncle's Story* (2000)—with the tensions relating to all these issues mixed and

foregrounded to greater or lesser degrees, in different novels during this phase of Ihimaera's

fictional writing. It is revealing of the significance accorded to personal identity and desire,

and of the attendant anxiety in this phase of Ihimaera's thinking, that he should feature his

"coming out" novel, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1995) with a white gay protagonist—the

only non-Māori central character in his novelistic oeuvre so far.

It is only after this second phase, filled with the expression of intense conflicts, that

Ihimaera gradually came back to a less angry, more reconciliatory mode of writing. Starting

with *Sky Dancer* (2001), an animal fable with both environmentalist and anti-imperialist

overtones, Ihimaera, it seems, was trying to convey an idealistic, constructive message. This

can be seen in *The Return* in *The Rope of Man* (2005)—a revised version of Ihimaera's first

novel *Tangi*, augmented with a sequel, *The Return*. As the protagonist exuberantly puts it:

"All Maori and all New Zealanders jointly bring an example of what can be achieved in terms

of excellence, equity and justice to all mankind" (*Rope* 322). Ihimaera's more conciliatory

attitude can also been seen in *The Trowenna Sea* (2009), which contextualises the historical

grievances of its Māori characters by depicting the ordeals of characters of other ethnicities,

including Pākehā, in order to explore the possibilities of respect, friendship, and love between

people of different origins. It is worth pointing out that during this period Ihimaera also

embarked on a revision of some of his other earlier works, coming up with a completely

reworked *Whanau II* (2003) and a new edition of *The Matriarch* (2009).

The inconsistencies and contradictions in Ihimaera's attitude towards, and

representation of, Māoridom can only be understood if the unresolved conflicts contained in

the second—and the most turbulent—phase of his writing are taken into account. In particular,

The Matriarch and its sequel *The Dream Swimmer* stand out as examples of literary

exploration of competing cultural legacies and conflicting worldviews. Mark Williams,

judging the literary style of *The Matriarch* as deeply flawed, rightly points out that "the

tendency towards rhapsodic evocations of the spirit world is counterbalanced by the novel's

political anger and by its realism. The word-spinning mysticism in *The Matriarch* is merely

one among several styles and voices adopted in the novel" (122). Just as the above quote

suggests, the multitude of styles in Ihimaera's writing is correlated with the many emotional

and spiritual concerns that are being expressed. Indeed, for the obvious reason that Ihimaera

has had so many burning issues of race, history and identity to deal with, we may tend to see

a distinct possibility of there being a correlation between a hybrid, less than well-integrated,

style that the novelist came up with, and his intuitive exploration, through the point of view

of the narrator, of a self-contradictory, confused subjective world which is crisscrossed by various cultural influences.

Indeed, in the "author's note" in the new edition of *The Matriarch*, Ihimaera himself admitted to the not well-controlled style of the original edition yet explained his initial design, stating that as he tried to "write a work (or two works as it turned out) that would truly capture the metafictional and metaphysical vision I had in mind for it," what he did was to "'spiral' from past to present, from personal to political, from history to myth, from reality to fantasy, from fiction to non-fiction" (*Matriarch 2 Ed.* 495-96). And since both *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer*—no matter how many fragmented narrative vignettes they contain—are organised through the mediation of the protagonist-narrator,[16] it is reasonable to assume that the disarrangement of symbolic resources is an indication of the contradictions in the outlook as well as self-conception of the protagonist-narrator. In light of the above, I have decided to use, for the present discussion, the original edition of *The Matriarch*, which is more disorganised than the revised edition, in order to gain an extra insight into the relationship between expression and subjectivity in the second phase of Ihimaera's writing, a phase which can be characterised by the disharmonious, divided subjective world embodied by the literary characters; after all, the revised edition of the novel is produced by an Ihimaera

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[16] Although the title characters in the twin novels are not the main narrator, Tamatea Mahana, he can be said to occupy the status of protagonist in the sense that the majority of the subplots in both novels—a lot of which may not involve those two title characters at all—are either directly his own life struggles or significantly related to them.

whose subjective state and literary concerns have already morphed significantly from his second phase of writing.

In what follows, I will first examine how the protagonist-narrator in the twin novels *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer* embeds his desire for power in his attempt to articulate a hybridisation of various symbolic resources, and how this articulation is fractured and even nullified due to the protagonist-narrator's lack of concern with the different kinds of ethos carried by the symbolic systems that he draws upon. Since this lack of concern indicates an inadequacy in his empirical assessment of, and response to, the actual hybrid social ethos textured by existing social relations, I will then proceed to examine how changes in the organisation and functioning of the protagonist's Māori clan have not only made his authoritarian vision and sense of self-importance untenable, but have also alienated him from his Māori family and relatives. I will then analyse the understanding he presents of his damaged interpersonal relations, and point out why his efforts to repair them are at best only seeds of a less isolated and more relational personhood. I will conclude the chapter by commenting on the tensions in the relationship between the hybridisation of cultural legacies as socially available symbolic resources and self-identity as an embodied way of life.

1. Power Struggle and the Enlistment of Symbolic Resources

Harbouring an abundance of Māori cosmogony, mythology, history and folklore as well as elements of the Pākehā cultural heritage such as Christianity, Greek myth and Italian opera,

The Matriarch and *The Dream Swimmer* weave multiple symbolic resources together through the mediation of the protagonist-narrator. While the twin novels are indeed about the protagonist's struggles in life, they nevertheless go beyond the trajectory of his personal life to record various cultural legacies. The protagonist-narrator's painstaking assemblage of both Māori and Pākehā religious, cultural and historical elements suggests an individual whose self-identity needs to be negotiated in terms of a hybrid cultural discourse. However, as I will demonstrate in this section, the protagonist-narrator in his hybridisation of symbolic resources is preoccupied with an inherited duty, and a preconceived role, of asserting racial and personal ascendancy, so much so that the opportunity to bring out, articulate and integrate the conflicting elements in his sense of self is largely missed as a result of his failure to relate, in a discriminating, substantial way, to the respective ethea conveyed by the many symbolic resources that are tapped.

The protagonist, Tamatea Mahana, as the eldest son of an eldest son of an eldest son in the Mahana clan, is chosen by his grandmother, the matriarch Artemis Riripeti Mahana, to inherit her mantle of mana and, most importantly, to lead the fight against the Pākehā. The justification of this fight, as Tamatea has been taught to believe, is not only predicated on historical facts, but can be further bolstered by a mythological grandeur preserved in Māori lore; as the now grown-up protagonist-narrator recalls, in the novel's prologue, a childhood lesson given by the matriarch:

"E mokopuna, we ruled here for over a thousand years. This was our land.

This was our life. It is your life and land now. It has been yours even before

you took your first breath. It came to you beyond the time of man and gods to

the very beginning of Night and the Void. A thousand years and further back,

mokopuna. We had eternity in us.

Then came the Pakeha." (*Matriarch* 6)

It is not far-fetched to say that the above excerpt is an epitome of many major elements in

Tamatea's strife as represented in the twin novels: racial entitlement to land, genealogical

succession, personal assumption of power, and a grudge against the Pākehā. As the

protagonist-narrator embarks on an "imaginative reconstruction of the woman [the

matriarch]" who is now long deceased (*Matriarch* 1), the enlistment of

mythological-metaphysical Māori lore which is untestable on an empirical-rational basis,

further catapults his strife also onto the plane of symbolic construction and contestation.

This symbolic construction and contestation, while involving interaction with,

co-option of, and response to, other symbolic systems, is nevertheless carried out by the

protagonist-narrator in a spirit of apparent lack of concern with the respective ethea richly

nurtured in those systems. Most notably, Christianity, a belief system brought along by the

Pākehā foe, is tapped extensively by Tamatea for its rhetorical power and narrative paradigms

while its ethos as belief system is relegated to relative unimportance. Despite the fact that

Christianity has long become the adopted religion of his clan, he nevertheless expresses a

paradoxical—and heterodox or even pagan, if judged in Christian theological

terms—nostalgia for the passing of a spiritual world he purports to have once belonged to

Māori; as when he mourns over the last reported sighting of a taniwha, a water monster in

Māori mythology: "The next year was 1914. It was the year of the beginning of the Great War.

The long-held communion between man and the gods was coming to an end. From that year

we can date the beginning of the world of man" (*Matriarch* 439). Furthermore, as if not

shying from scepticism over God in the singular, Tamatea registers no objection when a

historian friend of his, an avowed atheist, comments:

> The ironic thing is that Europeans today are amused at the Maori versions of
>
> Christianity as set up by the Ratana and Ringatu movements. The Pakeha God
>
> was just not so fine for Maoris. . . . What I'm trying to say . . . is that the
>
> conflict was not only over the land, the tinana, but also over the spirit, the
>
> wairua. Even here, Queen Victoria was the head of the spirit, the wairua.
>
> (*Matriarch* 69)

By all appearances, Tamatea shares this central preoccupation with worldly

ascendancy in matters of religious dispute and struggle, even going one step further by

extending this explanatory model to clan affairs within the Māori race. The religious dispute

between his grandmother and his grandfather, Ihaka, for instance, is presented by Tamatea

primarily as the manifestation of a power struggle for the control of the Mahana clan, the

consequence of which only leads Tamatea, loyal to the matriarch, to hate his grandfather

more:

> Soon after her death grandfather had been converted to a new religion, and
>
> such was the power of his grip on the family that he had persuaded them all to
>
> turn away from the faith of Artemis to the new faith. And the new faith dressed
>
> them all in white and led them down to the Waipaoa, where they were baptised
>
> by immersion like doves drowning in the water. All had been forgiven him,
>
> grandfather, but I could not yet forgive, even though I realised that the new
>
> religion was still as much a force of spiritual strength to the family as the old
>
> religion had been. (*Matriarch* 226)

Tamatea has been so preoccupied with his mission, preordained by his grandmother, of

attaining the leadership of the clan that he is far more angered by his grandfather's

countermove than perturbed by any alteration in religious symbolism or substance, as is

attested by his lack of concern with the change of religion *per se* by his grandfather. Also

implied here is his aloofness, or alienation, from his faith community, as he is left alone to

presume the same "spiritual strength" still enjoyed by the clan rather than negotiating the

differences, doubts or assurances of faith with them—if, indeed, he can be said to truly have

any of it.

Despite this lack of concern with the ethos of religion, Tamatea still attempts to utilise

religious discourse as a rhetorical instrument for argumentation, even though he cannot help

but shift the ground of justification when, deep into his own argument, he comes to sense the ineffectual gap between his own intended rhetorical effects and the normative state of understanding on the part of his intended audience. A case in point is his account of the nineteenth century Māori guerrilla leader and prophet Te Kooti and his followers, which is saturated with lurid descriptions of their at times indiscriminate killings, evincing a historical view of war that is, as Nelson Wattie rightly points out, plainly "immoralism posing as amoralism" (446). Yet, styling Te Kooti's struggle as one for the "peace in Canaan" (*Matriarch* 179), the protagonist-narrator makes no bones about his utilisation of Old Testament language to rhetorically frame the "Te Kooti Retaliation" against Pākehā and uncooperative Māori alike, directly challenging the reader: "All religious wars have been marked with similar killings . . . so don't protest to me about the Te Kooti Retaliation" (*Matriarch* 170). Indeed, it might be said that insofar as Tamatea follows his grandmother in comparing Māori to Jews, represented in the Old Testament as the Chosen People, he is precisely trying to provide a kind of rationale for Te Kooti's massacres. However, since he is addressing a modern audience not so easily accepting of religious war as a moral excuse, he hastens to add: "Death is not pretty, and the people who were killed during the retaliation did not die pretty deaths. They died in pain. They died in agony. *At least let us recognise that this is the way of all wars*" (*Matriarch* 170; my emphasis). In doing so, Tamatea is in fact trying to obscure his earlier lopsided argument for Te Kooti's massacres in the face of the difficult moral questions to which his wilful adoption of religious rhetoric has given rise.

As demonstrated above, the protagonist-narrator's rallying of religious rhetoric which

is originally non-Māori alongside Māori mythology, while supposedly meant for producing

enhanced argumentative advantages, nevertheless suggests in him a lack of serious concern

with the spiritual and moral ethea of the symbolic systems that he is drawing upon, let alone a

coherent course of action to synthesise them. This is not only a manifestation of unsettled

cultural hybridity, but, troubling for his sense of personhood, also an indication of a

disassociation between his affective affiliation and his analytic toolkit. Here I am drawing

upon the anthropologist Clifford Geertz:

> As religion on one side anchors the power of our symbolic resources for
>
> formulating analytic ideas in an authoritative conception of the overall shape
>
> of reality, so on another side it anchors the power of our, also symbolic,
>
> resources for expressing emotions—moods, sentiments, passions, affections,
>
> feelings—in a similar conception of its pervasive tenor, its inherent tone and
>
> temper. (104)

Reversing the standpoint offered by the above understanding of the normative role of religion

in integrating one's perception of reality with self-expression, we may conclude that in the

case of Tamatea, he is unable to accommodate himself to the frames of reference embedded

in the symbolic resources that he is drawing upon, so much so that any analytic attempt to

build a coherent world picture is cancelled out in favour of unexamined celebration of his

own strong emotional outbursts. This is the reason why Tamatea, having heard about local

Islamic resistance against Soviet invasion when he is working for a UN assignment in

Afghanistan, would immediately indulge in an impassioned generalisation: "Although I never

saw the Falcon [local mujahideen leader] face to face, I realised that love of one's country,

love of one's soil, love of one's religion and love of one's people and history, are the same

throughout the world" (*Swimmer* 152). Since love of one's own religion and culture is always

implicated by particularities and associated with a specific ethos, the fact that he would jump

to the conclusion of its being the same everywhere, even before getting to know the local

leader of a different religion, further demonstrates Tamatea's habitual lack of commitment to

thinking through the possible theological or cultural differences between competing symbolic

systems that he is trying to incorporate in his articulation. Religion and culture, long-evolved

and collectively transmitted as they are, are therefore one-dimensionally and unilaterally

enlisted in his articulation of his own preconceptions and emotional assumptions, thus closing

off the possibility of self-transformation through seriously responding to the different ethea

richly nurtured by the various symbolic resources.

Furthermore, this privatised utilisation of various symbolic resources in service of his

preconceptions is, in fact, sapping the substance from Tamatea's proclaimed undertaking to

articulate an indigenous vision. As the protagonist-narrator states in a metafictional manner,

the stylistic effects that he tries to achieve in his articulation are meant to reflect a tribal

vision that is radically different from that embodied in the English novel:

In the English novel tradition the novelist takes life and shapes it into fiction

according to structural, narrative, stylistic and other dictates of the convention

from a beginning through a middle towards a single ending. In our tradition

life takes the novelist and forces him or her to accept the tribal, holistic,

exponential and organic nature of *our* narratives. . . . All tribal cultures know

that the one great truth to our narratives is that they do not end. They go on

and on, an unending spiral going forward and returning in a balance of

constant tension. (*Swimmer* 313)

By pitting "All tribal cultures" against the tradition from which the English novel has

emerged, Tamatea is, in effect, blotting out differences between tribal cultures, using his own

most favoured spiral model to characterise all tribal narratives. While there can indeed be

substantial truth in Tamatea's generalisation, in that tribal people tend to be more intimately

interrelated in establishing and transmitting local lore, his own articulation, as demonstrated

earlier, is nevertheless characterised by a lack of substantive concern with the ethos of what

he is putting together, thus forfeiting a "holistic" understanding as well as an "organic"

organisation of various symbolic resources. The protagonist-narrator's hard-to-end narrative

may, therefore, rather be attributable to his problematic relation to the various narrative

traditions and, by implication, cultural traditions that he is utilising. Especially, the particular

sense of self-entitlement, instilled in him by his grandmother with the use of Māori

mythology, is by no means brought into a serious dialogue with the respective ethea

represented by such world religions as Christianity and Islam, as well as by secular

rationalism; and, consequently, he is diverted by his preconceptions from even comprehending his own Māori community, as is attested by his response to his clan's change of religion. Armando E. Jannetta, in discussing *The Matriarch*, observes that while "the narrator-author tries to assure himself of his sense of identity in literature," his narrative, nevertheless, "is finally undercut by gaps and private symbolism in a time of rapid cultural change, when the validity of symbols is being questioned anyway" (25). Preserving a distinction between narrator and author, we may nevertheless partially endorse this observation by saying that it is the narrator's inattention to the difference and potential contradiction in a variety of ethea that riddles his argument with logical gaps and renders his symbolism questionable. The disintegrated form in which different cultural legacies are put together, furthermore, suggests to the reader that "Tamatea is struggling with a sense of self that is as fragmented as his narrative" (A. Fox *Masculinity* 124).

The protagonist-narrator's frustration at the level of discursive utterance thus raises the further question of what has thwarted his subjective integration of diverse symbolic resources, or, in other words, what has prevented him from embodying cultural hybridity in an affective and dynamically coherent way. It is reasonable to suggest here that the symbolic resources of Māori mythology, history as well as Christianity and Pākehā high culture may have, in the case of Tamatea, become cultural legacies which can be drawn upon in utterance, yet which have stopped short of providing a well-integrated, nourishing ethos according to which life is lived. As a privatised, yet disembodied, hybridisation of collectively shaped symbolic systems points to the paradox of an individual narrator having to present a fractured,

and confused, self in terms of ossified cultural conventions, this question needs to be further answered in light of how his sense of self is out of joint with the ethos of his contemporary social life.

2. Mana, Inherited Identity, and Alienation from Community

Tamatea's inability to adequately relate to, let alone reconcile, the respective ethea of various symbolic resources is, I suggest, not simply due to the vast diversity and complex dynamic of cultural legacies impacting on him and his fellow Māori alike; rather, it is also an indication of the extent to which he has insulated himself from experiencing how cultural legacies are being reconfigured in the living world. Clifford Geertz is highlighting the symbiotic relationship between a social ethos and the way people live when he states that "[a] people's ethos is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects" (127). Tamatea's failure to achieve a cognitive mapping and emotional appropriation of diverse cultural legacies, therefore, may well have resulted from his awkward positioning of himself in relation to a hybrid social landscape, a positioning which has barred him from experiencing and understanding how various ideas are being reconfigured in contemporary life—at the same time as he has been trying to make a revision of New Zealand history and to articulate a vision for the Māori future. With regard to self-positioning, it is especially important to point out that while a sense of self-importance and authority was deeply

ingrained in him through the teaching of his grandmother, the grown-up Tamatea now has to

confront others, including his own clan members, who challenge, or are sceptical about, his

role as prescribed by the matriarch. As his fellow Māori have become less inclined to endorse

traditional hierarchy in interpersonal relations, Tamatea's conviction in, and vehement

assertion of, his inherited right to mana and to leadership have put him at odds with, and thus

significantly alienated him from, contemporary Māori social life.

The Matriarch starts out as a probe into (extended-)family matters, as the narrator

states at the very beginning of the novel: "It was Uncle Alexis who started it all . . . it was he

who without knowing started this journey into the past and into the dynamics of an

astonishing family" (Matriarch 1). This uncle can play such a triggering role, apparently,

because he is newly blind, which is considered by many clan members as a manifestation of a

mate, or curse, originating from the family's past, especially from the favouritism shown by

the matriarch towards Tamatea—as Sammy, one of Tamatea's cousins accusingly claims:

> Our Uncle Alexis, his mate is because of you. My sister, Raina, her sickness
>
> also. Why? Because that old lady, our grandmother, she gave you our souls,
>
> Tamatea, and left us prone to all illness. Aunt Circe tried to prevent it, but you
>
> got everything, Tamatea. Everything. (Matriarch 357)

Sammy's accusation has real substance to it, as the matriarch indeed pushes the Māori

tradition of primogeniture to the extreme by insisting that Tamatea should inherit all the vast

land under her name. Although the matriarch's will is repealed after her death by the Mahana

clan's appeal to the court system, which fact Tamatea discovers only many years later

(*Swimmer* 398-403), a disproportionately large part of the land has since been kept under the

name of Tamatea's father, Te Ariki, thus generating considerable tension between the nuclear

family and the larger clan (*Matriarch* 56-58). Furthermore, Tamatea is still supposed to have

inherited the matriarch's mantle of mana, which is an all-important concept in Māori society.

As Sammy's sister Raina, who has become a victim of drugs, says of Te Ariki's nuclear

family and especially of Tamatea: "*It's all got to do with mana*" (*Matriarch* 90); or as a

Pākehā psychologist friend of Tamatea's admits: "I hadn't fully realised the extent to which

the concept of mana still controlled Maori motivation" (*Matriarch* 409).

　　If Tamatea has become the matriarch's sole inheritor in name only, he nevertheless

has retained her arrogance and her totalitarian vision in dealing with clan affairs. Whenever

Tamatea has a chance to visit the Gisborne District, he always makes a point of inspecting the

land of his native village of Waituhi—"as the one ritual that could never be broken"

(*Matriarch* 102)—in the very way as was instructed by the matriarch many years ago,

although, as his sister Teria sees it, their relations do not really like their family precisely

because "we're sort of like absentee landlords" and are "takers of life" (*Matriarch* 87).

Declining attempts by his blind yet rich Uncle Alexis—who has been sick of the matriarch's

coercive attempts to force others to acknowledge Tamatea as superior—to bribe him with

money, Tamatea emphasises that "I've never asked you for money in the past and I'll never

take your money now or ever. I'm proud of that, Uncle. It's a thing with me. I'll make my

own way" (*Matriarch* 12). The rare chance for him to temporarily command the Mahana clan

comes when a delegation composed of his clan members protest in front of the "Pharaoh," the

Prime Minister, on which occasion he feels inspired enough to suddenly take upon himself

the leadership of the protest team, issuing an order: "All of you . . . obey me" (*Swimmer*

351)—although a warning from his mother, Tiana, soon prompts him to remember how, on a

similar occasion in 1949, the matriarch's manipulation of power "had taken *her* too far"

(*Swimmer* 352).

Such a gap between Tamatea's presumptuous desire to place himself above the rest of

the clan and even in control of its destiny, and the blatant unwillingness of his immediate and

extended family members to let him get his way, is, undoubtedly, a major cause for his

alienation from his Māori community. The self-importance Tamatea accords himself, insofar

as it is the product of the autocratic matriarch's efforts to make him "into a likeness as unto

me" and inherit her mana as an exclusive leader (*Matriarch* 13), is out of place under a

changed Māori social structure. To better understand this, let us look at the concept of mana

as explicated by the distinguished Māori professor Mason Durie:

> Mana tangata refers to the authority which comes from communities and their
>
> people. If the power of a leader dwarfs the people, then there is no real mana,
>
> since mana is invested only in those who will advance the interests of the tribe
>
> (or group). Collective responsibility, rather than individual brilliance, is the
>
> norm. . . . Ultimately mana, and power, lie outside the individual and with the

people, or with the land (mana whenua), or with spiritual powers (mana atua).

(83)

In light of the above definition of mana, it is easy to detect the paradox in Tamatea's self-conception. Although Tamatea has long lived a life mainly away from his Māori relations and the ancestral land, he is, nevertheless, still trying desperately to hold onto a notion of himself as being above the collective. Furthermore, "the ever increasing dispersal of the family" due to the rural to urban drift (*Matriarch* 107) and the resultant heightened pursuit of individual success have also inclined his Māori relations to refuse the pre-arranged order of esteem, as can be attested by his Uncle Alexis's attempt to assert his own ascendancy with a show of independently acquired monetary resources, and the disputes in the clan over the appropriate portion of land to be held by Tamatea and his father.

As Māori interpersonal relations have become much less characterised by traditional hierarchical rule over collective living, the totalitarian sense of power and control nurtured by the matriarch in the small Tamatea has finally given rise to his angry, almost manic, imputation of present woes—the *mate*— in his clan to their rebellion against past preparations by the matriarch for his coming leadership. Thus Tamatea comes to attack his own mother for her refusal to cooperate with the matriarch, once accusing her of being "the cause of the mate" (*Swimmer* 371). In a similar vein, Tamatea, in response to his cousin's disgust at his privileges, declares: "No, Sammy, the reason for the troubles was not because Grandmother gave me everything but because I was left with nothing" (*Swimmer* 403).

Insofar as assertions like these are obviously exaggerated expressions of frustration and anger, not even consistently supported by his own interpretation of the meaning of the situation, they only serve to aggravate his relations with his Māori family and relations.

While vertical control of the kinship-based community, once exercised by the matriarch, has now failed in the time of the adult Tamatea, such a desire has, nevertheless, persisted in his self-conception in a pathological manner. As one critic notes, "Tamatea has the same kind of relationship to an epic past as someone in psychoanalysis has to the lost world of childhood" (Calder 83). Indeed, his grandiose sense of self is, ironically, grounded in a failure to accommodate himself to a contemporary, more egalitarian Māori society, at the expense of a wholesome relationship with his family and kinship. The distortion of blood relations can even be said to have for itself a trope embodied in flesh and blood—Tamatea's stillborn son produced by his cousin Tepora, who once tried to avenge the wrong done by him to her mother, Circe, yet fell into a love-hate affair with him (*Swimmer* 404-05). It can be said, therefore, that as long as Tamatea fails to nourish his sense of self by leading a life of positive interaction with his fellow Māori—and one that is in step with his larger contemporary society—he is bound to interpret such Māori notions as mana in a narrowly self-serving manner and to reiterate the Māori past in a less than dynamic way; and there should be no wonder why he has been unable to integrate, let alone embody, the ethea of various symbolic systems that he has drawn upon in his articulation of racial and self-identity.

3. Seeds of a Relational Self

From the analysis in the first and second sections of this chapter, it should not be difficult to identify a disjuncture between the metaphysical project by the protagonist-narrator to weave various symbolic resources into an articulation of a contemporary, informed Māori worldview on the one hand, and his life lived among his fellow Māori on the other. To be more precise, at the same time as Tamatea is trying to articulate his understanding of Māori lore, his personal life is being incessantly frustrated by the refusal of his fellow Māori to yield to his claim to an outdated, grandiose role prescribed decades ago by the autocratic matriarch. While this is not to say that Tamatea is a relic of the olden days, it does imply a self blocked from constructively applying its own understanding in contemporary social life. To achieve a healthy sense of self, therefore, Tamatea needs to re-examine his psychological history and personal vision in light of the problems embedded in his interpersonal relations. In what follows, I will analyse how his effort to do this, while promising, is troubled by a disunity between knowledge and action.

Tamatea's reflections on his damaged relations with his kindred occur mainly in the second of the twin novels: *The Dream Swimmer*. This is no coincidence, as Tiana, the title character of the novel and mother of Tamatea, is perceived eventually by him as the one most wronged in the process of his power struggle to attain what was preordained for him by the matriarch. In contrast to the highborn matriarch, Tiana is repeatedly referred to by Tamatea as "a woman of no account" (*Swimmer* 18). As a woman who purportedly possesses the eerie ability of swimming to faraway places in her dreams, Tiana, unfortunately, has for a long time

been believed by Tamatea to be the source of the *mate*—the curse—in the clan. It is only

when Tamatea "realised that Tiana only had moments to live" that "all enmity towards her

melted away from me" (*Swimmer* 385). And it is not until Tamatea has willingly followed her

instruction to break her bones after her death to prevent any possibility of her re-appearance,

that he begins to mourn: "I knew that if ever I was lost in the middle of Te Kore, my mother

would never be able to come to save me" (*Swimmer* 393). Self-centred considerations like

this, together with the inadequacy of his efforts either to accommodate his mother when she

was alive or to repent his cruelty after her death, however, make Tamatea's declaration near

the end of *The Dream Swimmer*—"Her love has been the great leitmotif of this

story"(*Swimmer* 421)—hardly more than a footnote to a life history of his own which has

been obsessed with the need for attention and adoration.

If, in the case of his mother, death has ultimately severed any meaningful channel of

nourishing communication, then what Tamatea displays in relation to Toroa, very probably

his own half-brother, is simply arrogance, as well as a lack of reciprocity or willingness to

take the initiative. Toroa, claimed by Grandfather Ihaka to be Tamatea's father's natural son,

and therefore his eldest grandson, is intended by him to be the inheritor of his mantle.

Although eventually defeated by Tamatea in the power struggle at a clan meeting, and despite

the deliberate insult Tamatea delivers to him at his wedding, Toroa nevertheless keeps in

good touch with many other clan members and receives Tamatea in a spirit of apparent

magnanimity. One golden opportunity of mutual reconciliation between them occurs when

Tamatea, despite his initial hostility towards Toroa, who has just secured the release of

Cousin Raina from the hands of a gang, has to cooperate with him to help deliver Cousin

Raina's baby. However, the opportunity is missed when Toroa, having received no obvious

gesture of welcome or accommodation from Tamatea, departs silently after the baby's

delivery, leaving Tamatea to rue: "I had wanted to thank him" (*Swimmer* 376). This belated

good will on the part of Tamatea, insofar as it is not expressed in action, remains no more

than a dormant seed of reconciliation buried inside an isolated self.

If Tamatea's flawed interpersonal relationships fail to be improved despite his own

regret, his relation to his Māori community is further characterised by a moving away from it,

despite his acknowledgement of its importance in his conception of self-identity. Michele D.

Dominy, in her characterisation of Māori values, notes that "[r]eferences to primordial criteria

of genealogy and locality resonate with Oceanic notions of personhood in which

kinship—associated with common substance and shared roots and action—and

locality—associated with ancestral spirits and legends—are concepts central to personhood"

(251). Kinship and locality, indeed, are two major concerns in Tamatea's conception of

self-identity, as is attested by his own assertion of his inherited right to mana among his clan

members and his tireless inspection of the ancestral land. However, disharmony between

Tamatea and his local Māori community, and his failed assertion of personal ascendancy in it,

are eventually turned by him, with self-persuasion, into a centrifugal force, driving his

personal quest for success in places far away.

This happens near the end of the narrative of his life story, right after he has most

consciously reflected upon the importance of both kinship and locality for himself,

emphasising that "despite their faults the Mahana family are my family and the only family I will ever have" and that "[m]y mountain is Maunga Haumia. My river is Waipaoa. My meeting house is Rongopai. I am so lucky to have a small valley to come from and a people to love" (*Swimmer* 418). His proposed way of life for himself, however, is to "be an icon of success, to show our people that there are no geographical limitations to our aspirations" (*Swimmer* 419). How self-regarding this proposal actually is is hard to determine; yet, no doubt, geographical expansion in physical movement can by no means replace the issue of interpersonal relations, but may well be an indication of his attempts to escape its difficulties. The self-deception thus involved is immediately illustrated when he deduces an apparently supportive message from his memories of his grandmother:

> So I wander from one international crisis to the next. . . . Spiralling out, out, always outward. I think this is how Riripeti meant my life to be. When she spoke so passionately on the marae in Wellington in 1949, she was talking about the Pharaoh not just in New Zealand but throughout the world.
>
> His name is inhumanity to man. (*Swimmer* 419-20)

It is hardly convincing that a tribal matriarch would have put so much emphasis on global struggle, to the extent of having intended the sole inheritor of her mantle to go on helping solve international crises one after another when the decolonisation process at home was still by no means nearly accomplished. Considering that his leadership role in his Māori clan has

always been overshadowed by a sense of failure, it is not difficult to understand why Tamatea would rather choose to extricate himself from the entanglement in Māoridom to pursue lofty ideals overseas. In the light of this escapism, one is prompted to suggest, in response to Tamatea's admission—"Although I have forgiven my clan, I have yet to find forgiveness for myself" (*Swimmer* 420)—that a better way forward may well be to start with those close to his own life, spiralling out only then in his efforts to promote whatever universal message he may envision.

Indeed, the idea of, as it were, "fighting the Pharaoh of inhumanity throughout the world," noble as it may be, is by no means the most salient content of the Māori heritage intended by Tamatea's forebears; there is a more intimately relevant paradigm embodied in a communal place of both spiritual devotion and interpersonal transaction: the Rongopai meeting house, which is so close to the hearts of its members that it is "reputed to have healing powers" (*Matriarch* 191). The vision represented by its interior designs is as beautiful as it is sophisticated:

> The dream was of a new, brave, world, the new Eden where the kowhaiwhai
> was embellished with new colours, where painted spirals and floral patterns
> provided a panacea for war and a prayer for peace. It was the kind of dream
> that people associate with psychedelia; it placed the Maori in the position of
> centrality but gave him the moko of the Pakeha. (*Matriarch* 191)

This clearly is a hybrid vision of ethnic renewal, deriving strength from both a primordial

sense of belonging as well as a willingness to embrace change and spread good will. In fact,

this Māori meeting house was built under the instruction of Tamatea's ancestor Wi Pere, a

half-blood Māori Member of Parliament who straddled both the Māori and Pākehā worlds.

While the vision therein embodied was not without its own potential problems in its

reliance on ethnocentrism, the fact that Tamatea, himself deeply fond of the Rongopai marae,

should depart from its communal spirit so much suggests that his painful self-contradictions

can be due to his failure to relate beneficially to his own community and its cultural resources

when choosing his way of life. However, communal relations and conditions need not be a

mere hindrance to one's developing his or her own way of life; just as the Confucian scholar

and humanist Tu Wei-Ming points out:

> Once the fact of human-relatedness is recognized, one can begin to assume
>
> personal responsibility for one's social role. The structural limitation that we
>
> are inevitably contextualized need not be perceived merely as an external
>
> imposition on our freedom of choice; it also provides us the nourishment for
>
> survival, the environment for growth, and the symbolic resources for creativity.
>
> (134)

Tamatea's disharmonious relationship to his own clan people and his reluctance to take the

initiative of communication and bonding with them suggest all too clearly that, having

insisted on his personal birth right to power and success on the basis of his supposedly inherited mana, he has not given due weight to that part of self-cultivation which can only be achieved by exploring the dialectic of sharing the life, and honouring the ethos, of his own living, evolving community while making innovative contribution to it accordingly.

4. Conclusions

Ihimaera's exploration of cultural hybridity in the twinned novels *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer*, astonishingly wide in scope and complex in structure as it is, nevertheless leaves the protagonist anguished and his individuation disturbingly incomplete. As Alistair Fox notes: "this consciously constructed hybridity serves to capture and represent the divided impulses and ambiguous situation of the postcolonial indigenous subject who wishes to participate in the contemporary world without losing his or her cultural identity" ("Hybridity" 100). As far as the unsettled and unsettling relationship between hybridisation of cultural legacies and the experiencing subject is concerned, we may yet further conclude that the tormenting self-division and the frustrating absence of a harmonious outlook on life in the case of the protagonist must have resulted from his failure to embody the ethos of cultural legacies in his interpersonal relations, as well as from his belief that he can achieve self-forgiveness and a preconceived self-identity in isolation from his evolving community.

Unlike Keri Hulme, who in her *The Bone People* is essentially expressing a longing for a magical reconnection between present-day individuals and the Māori past, and Alan

Duff, who tends to highlight individuals' struggle against, or coming to terms with, the negative part of their Māori heritage, Witi Ihimaera in his fictional writing is both deeply steeped in Māori traditions and as deeply concerned with how to preserve as well as renew them in a hybrid society. While Ihimaera is preoccupied with the preservation of the Māori past and the articulation of collective identity in *The Matriarch* and *The Dream Swimmer*, the former of which is judged by one critic as laying a strong claim to "being *the* novel of modern Aotearoa New Zealand" (Romaine 31), he is at the same time equally concerned, in the case of the protagonist, Tamatea, with an individual subject formation that is overshadowed by an inherited, less than dynamically coherent, identity in the face of a changing, hybrid modern society. In the light of this, it may not be surprising that Ihimaera would also make a kind of countermove in his literary enterprise by creating individuals in rebellion against social expectations and on the road to reforming traditions. A most violent, because most privately sensitive, kind of rebellion would be a struggle against the homophobia perceived in one's own family and cultural environment; and this is exactly what Ihimaera takes up in his gay novels *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and *The Uncle's Story*, the latter of which explores Māori homosexuality. In keeping with the focus of my thesis on the subjective worlds of Māori characters, I will proceed to analyse his *The Uncle's Story* in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Recognition, Political and Interpersonal: Gay Tribalism as Reform of Māori Tradition

in Witi Ihimaera's *The Uncle's Story*

With the publication of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1995), Witi Ihimaera revealed to the

public his homosexual orientation, albeit through the persona of a Pākehā gay man, David

Munro. In an interview with Juniper Ellis, Ihimaera described the novel as "a selfish book,

because I was also trying to work out my own identification and of course it's really a book

from a Pakeha perspective" (Ihimaera and Ellis 179). Five years later, *The Uncle's Story*

(2000) appeared, this time with Māori gay protagonists. The fact that Ihimaera chose to

progress from having a Pākehā as the central character to having Māori protagonists in his

exploration of gayness suggests both his initial anxiety about exposing himself too much and

his further determination to explore the relationship between sexuality and race. As some

critics have pointed out, in this Māori gay novel Ihimaera re-examined homosexuality in

relation to Māori tradition, asserting a new identity for Māori gay men and setting out to

construct the radical new vision of a gay tribe.[17] In doing so, Ihimaera combined Alan Duff's

preoccupation with individual freedom and development with Keri Hulme's nostalgia about

Māori communal life; the attempted synergy of the individual and the communal in the novel,

[17] See, for example, A. Fox *Masculinity* 171-88; and Valle 193-203.

nevertheless, points to compounded tensions at the interpersonal level, which will be the focus of my investigation.

The Uncle's Story explores the struggle of a Māori gay man, Michael Mahana, for gay rights as well as for indigenous rights. In pursuit of this struggle, Michael draws inspiration and courage from the diary of his deceased Uncle Sam. These two Māori gay men from two consecutive generations have a similar experience of growing up in a homophobic Māori society, and even share the same preference for white gay lovers. Yet unlike his uncle, Michael has a chance to push for cultural change, and adopts as his vision the idea of forming a gay tribe—of bringing about a reformed tribal mode of community which accommodates gays and lesbians who, in turn, may opt for heterosexual marriage between themselves and consequently have children as "the way to win back the family" (Story 296). The novel is also engaged in representing the public assertion—by Michael and his lesbian Māori friend, Roimata—of the rights of indigenous people and especially of indigenous homosexuals, thus adding a distinctly indigenous political dimension. As one critic aptly puts it with regard to this literary exploration of the entanglement of sexuality, indigeneity and politics: "A former diplomat, Ihimaera dwells on relationships, both political and private ones" (Meklin 31). Though Michael in The Uncle's Story cannot simply be identified as Ihimaera's mouthpiece, the construction of such a figure can nevertheless be legitimately considered as the writer's continued attempt to work out his personal and political preoccupations in a fictive setting.[18]

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[18] When interviewed about the filmed version of his novel Nights in the Gardens of Spain, in

If one considers the slogan, "the personal is the political," widely used in sexual and gender politics, one might see that the notion of a gay tribe is located in between the intimacy of the personal and the high visibility of the political, denoting an interpersonal, communal terrain capable of recognising and accommodating personal peculiarities. As I will demonstrate in the course of this chapter, the model of a gay tribe is underpinned by a desire on the part of its Māori proponents to combine the objectives of protesting against their double marginalisation in a white-dominated, homophobic society, and retaining the interpersonal connectedness in Māori tribal life. However, as I will argue in relation to the protagonist Michael, the political struggle for affirmative recognition is in fact not accompanied by a willingness to embrace mutually respectful recognition on an interpersonal basis, reflecting a patriarchal mode of thought that can be potentially damaging to his professed championship of a gay tribe.

In what follows, I will first trace the similarities between Michael's life situation and

which the white main character of the novel has been replaced with a Māori character, Ihimaera remarks that "with this particular treatment, I was going to have to come out twice—once in the guise of a Pakeha character and then turn that character around and make him into the Maori character that he was supposed to be in the beginning" (qtd. in Balham). *The Uncle's Story*, written after the publication of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* and before its film adaptation, may thus reasonably be said to serve Ihimaera's need to give a fictional expression to his emotional journey of coming out as a Māori gay man.

that of his deceased Uncle Sam, so as to study the roles played by patriarchy, and less

explicitly by race, in the formation of an oppressive gender and sexual regime, and also to

point out the tendency of this regime to split the mutuality between self and other into

domination and submission. Next, I will analyse Michael's contradictory attitudes towards

the racial other as he seeks affirmative recognition in both the personal and the political

arenas, highlighting the personal and cultural reasons that have made for this contradiction. I

will then examine the vision of a reformed Māori interpersonal network—a "gay

tribe"—championed by Roimata, a female character who is a lesbian Māori activist, and

Michael, with a view to exploring the potentiality of this seminal idea, as well as identifying

Michael's tacit acceptance of a male rationality in his approach to reform. In concluding this

chapter, I will identify the patriarchal mode of thought as one great obstacle that Michael has

not managed to overcome in his attempt to reform Māori tribal tradition, as well as extending

the discussion by drawing critical attention to the implications of patriarchal dominance,

where this may be the case, for the politics of recognition in a postcolonial era.

1. Heteropatriarchy and Splitting

The Uncle's Story starts out as Michael's quest for affirmative recognition when he decides to

come out to his family as gay after having long led a secretive sexual life away from them.

While this move on the part of Michael amounts to defying prevalent cultural norms in Māori

life, his aunt's revelation that he has a now deceased gay uncle nevertheless provides him

with a precedent in his struggle against what he perceives to be Māori heteropatriarchy. The enormous attraction that Uncle Sam's story holds for Michael derives in large part from his recognition of the many cultural and familial similarities between his experience and that of a gay man from an earlier generation. Specifically, the similar difficulties in their sense of identity, as Michael comes to appreciate, reveal a pattern that is deeply influenced by a form of patriarchy that is, in turn, subtly complicated by issues pertaining to race relations.

The novel starts out with Michael facing the tormenting task of finally having to align the two major poles of his life: personal sexual freedom and family obligations. Having been pressed by his white homosexual lover, Jason, to tell his Māori family about their relationship, Michael tries to ease his anxiety with hard drinking when travelling back home to attend his sister Amiria's wedding. Half as a result of his hangover, and half symbolically, he asks the receptionist of the motel "who am I?" in order to get an affirmation of his identity: "You're Mr Michael Mahana, Sir" (*Story* 11).

Such affirmation is in fact hard to attain in a family dominated by Michael's father, Monty, with whose will Michael's mother almost invariably complies. Having been interrupted by his father time and again, in an excessively familiar fashion, when he tries to answer the enquiries made by the visiting American in-laws about his personal life, Michael admits to himself inwardly: "It was easy to become mute around Dad" (*Story* 15). However, when his mother good-humouredly asserts, to all the guests, his supposed loyalty to his "girlfriend," Michael finally decides that "[a]fter all these years of Mum and Dad talking for me, and making up a history for me, it was time I talked for myself. It was now or never"

(*Story* 17). His reaction is a declaration: "I don't have a girlfriend" (*Story* 17). Even after his

father demands: "What do you mean! Of course you have a girlfriend. And you'll get married

like your sister. And I'll have grandchildren" (*Story* 18), Michael insists: "There will be no

grandchildren. My girlfriend is a boyfriend. Do I have to spell it out?" (*Story* 18).

Strategically speaking, even if Michael has mustered sufficient courage to fight his

parents as oppression incarnate, it is still much too hard for him to fight off such an

amorphous force as the homophobic discourse that is mobilised by his parents to shame him

in the very terms by which his identity is very much defined. As his father admonishes:

> Setting aside the way the family feels about this, Michael, do you think the iwi
>
> will still respect you once they know what kind of pervert you are? They have
>
> nurtured you, held you in their cradle of aroha, but what you do is abhorrent to
>
> them. It is anathema to their beliefs both as Maori and Christians. (*Story* 27)

The enlistment by his father of various categories of community—from family to iwi, to

Māori and Christians—in condemning homosexuality amounts to casting an ever expanding

shadow over Michael's hope of fully gaining respectful social recognition. In particular, the

last category is mobilised by his father to imply a revealed absoluteness so beyond human

bargaining that Michael has to beseech: "Does God have to come into this?" (*Story* 27).

It is in such an apparently asymmetrical warfare between Michael's assertion of

individual sexuality and entrenched, supposedly widespread, homophobia that Auntie Pat

comes to his aid. Referring to Monty's proclamation—"Nobody in our family has ever been like you, Michael. Nobody" (*Story* 28)— Auntie Pat explains to Michael in private: "Your father was wrong to say you were the first gay man in the family. He was there when our Dad, your grandfather Arapeta, kicked Sam out. And like you, Sam was afraid to tell Mum and Dad what he was" (*Story* 33). In further support of Michael, she lends to him a diary written by his now long deceased uncle. Uncle Sam, once erased from family tales and hitherto unknown to Michael, is thus brought back to provide a counter narrative that undermines the bigotry and authoritarianism of an oppressive heteropatriarchy, prompting Michael to put his own situation into perspective through an examination of the similar experience of his uncle in terms of sexual orientation, family background and cultural environment. The critic Melissa Kennedy spells out the significance of this experience for Michael: "Narration, such as reading Sam's diary . . . has several purposes, including remembering the past, clearing the air in the present, and bringing together time and space in recognition of common ground" (135).

Michael's urgent need for moral support and the absence of Sam as a real interlocutor means that as the uncle's story is being actively reconstructed from his diary by Michael's sympathetic imagination, it is at the same time being turned into the latter's intrapsychic drama. As Michael looks at Uncle Sam's photo in a newspaper clipping found in the diary, he feels that

I knew, even before I read the caption, that Sam was the one looking straight

at the camera. . . . Then suddenly it seemed he looked past the camera. By

some trick of light he was looking at *me*. His eyes drew me in.

And the past came rushing out. (*Story* 34)

What rushes out of the past is a heightened sense of struggle which, as I will demonstrate, has

very much to do with a heteropatriarchal mode of interpersonal recognition.

Indeed, the relationship between Sam and his father—Michael's

grandfather—Arapeta is, if anything, an epitome of patriarchal demand and gender

expectation, complicated by the issue of racial pride. These elements are all evident from the

beginning of Sam's story as reconstructed by his nephew from his diary, which dates from the

celebration of the signing up for the Vietnam War by him and his Māori mates. At the

ceremony held at the village marae, Sam, upon seeing General Collinson, the Pākehā

Commander-in-chief of the Army and one of his father's commanding officers during World

War II, cannot help but recall: "one of the ironies that Dad loved to recount was that

Collinson had sired only daughters" (*Story* 39). Boasting of Māori masculinity in general, and

as an expression of his personal pride in his son, Arapeta says to Sam: "You, my own son,

will maintain the fighting spirit that will ensure that the Maori does not become as weak as

women" (*Story* 42). As the masculinity theorist R. W. Connell points out, "[a]ny one

masculinity, as a configuration of practice, is simultaneously positioned in a number of

structures of relationships, which may be following different historical trajectories" (73). In

the case of Arapeta, a patriarchal tradition and a need to assert racial pride in the postcolonial

era have combined to produce in him a strong desire to impose a gender regime that is both

misogynistic, and also deeply implicated in an unwillingness to recognise as valid any form

of masculinity that does not accord with his own prejudiced and narrow notions. Significantly,

however, the upholding of racial and gender identity as conceived by his father is, at best,

only part of Sam's intention, as he feels that by going to Vietnam he is "also asserting his

independence from the man who had ruled his life since the day he was born" (*Story* 43).

It is important to note that Sam has tried earlier to gain recognition as his father's

equal, yet has been ruthlessly crushed by him. Before the Vietnam War, Sam, having tamed a

wild palomino which his father had been unable to tame, sets it free. Feeling affronted by this

symbolic gesture of Sam's, however, Arapeta eventually manages to bring the stallion back

and blows its brains out with a rifle—shocking Sam so much to the core that he begins to

suffer from the recurrent nightmare of a stallion charging against him. This thinly veiled

desire for absolute patriarchal dominance on the part of Arapeta is accusingly pointed out by

his usually obedient (because tamed) wife, Florence, this time overwhelmed by motherly

concerns:

> "You had to do that, Arapeta, didn't you?"
>
> "Do what?"
>
> "You had to do that to your son. Catch that stallion again. Break it. You
>
> had to be the king stallion. The black stallion." (*Story* 98-99)

It is due to this tension between Sam's search for independence and personal realisation on one hand, and the patriarchal cultural order represented by his father on the other, that the issue of sexuality comes to a head in the Vietnam War and its aftermath. After being sexually aroused in an intimate homosexual encounter with a white American helicopter pilot, Cliff Harper, Sam has to admonish himself: "The *mana* of a man, his value in Maori culture, was his fighting power and his warrior tradition. It was all symbolised in a man's cock. It, as much as the fighting club, personified all that a man was" (*Story* 155). With a homosexual relationship finally established between the two men, Cliff visits Sam in New Zealand after the war. However, when their affair is detected by Arapeta, Sam, though feeling torn between loyalty to his lover and his father, eventually decides to yield himself to his father's command, refusing to escape with Cliff:

> But all his life Sam had been *obedient*. All his life the one thing he had wanted was for his father to *love* him. No matter what his father was like, the template of his authority could not be broken. No matter what his people were like, he was, after all, Maori. (*Story* 254; my emphasis)

As the gender and sexuality theorist Chris Beasley points out, "paying attention to gender rather than prioritising race is commonly viewed in terms of disloyalty to racially marginalised communities" (219); a similar point may be made here concerning the relationship between sexuality and race, the reason being that a person like Sam may feel that

his peculiar personal needs should not overshadow the perceived needs and expectations of a

largely heteropatriarchal community which, after all, has bolstered him against racial

discrimination.

Significantly, however, the above excerpt also epitomises a conflation of a submission

to patriarchal demands and racial loyalty, such that Sam simply assumes that his father

deserves to command absolute obedience just as the racial collectivity does—with no ad hoc

explanation required in both cases. It is as if a psychological pattern has been established in

Sam which compels him to be obedient, to submit to an important other in a relationship and

in a community spearheaded by this other, in order to attain love and recognition. Reviewing

Freud's and Hegel's discussion of the breakdown of a relationship of mutuality into a

dichotomy in which two subjects are recognised by each other as the all-powerful and the

powerless respectively, the feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin points out:

> In psychoanalytic terms, this breakdown of wholeness is understood as
>
> "splitting." Wholeness can only exist by maintaining contradiction, but this is
>
> not easy. In splitting, the two sides are represented as opposite and distinct
>
> tendencies, so that they are available to the subject only as alternatives. The
>
> subject can play only one side at a time, projecting the opposite side onto the
>
> other. In other words, in the subject's mind, self and other are represented not
>
> as equally balanced wholes, but as split into halves. (63)

In view of the fact that Sam's struggle for independence and an equal status with his father

has been brutally crushed by the latter, it is not difficult to understand why Sam, at this

vulnerable point of being exposed as gay in the very place where he grew up, would split

himself away from a position of agency, letting his father be the all-powerful dominator and

judge. It is partly due to this psychological process of splitting that patriarchy is able to

mobilise various resources to demand and obtain submission. Not surprisingly, the patriarchal

strategy of conflating the personal and the collective can go to great lengths, if necessary, in

order to maintain domination, as is the case when Arapeta damns Sam: "In traditional times,

son, people like you never existed. . . . They would have taken you outside, gutted you and

left your head on a post for the birds to eat" (*Story* 257). Arapeta goes on to deliver an

outright condemnation: "You are an affront to your iwi. You are an affront to all that I and my

Maori Battalion mates fought for" (*Story* 257).

However, once the split dichotomy of self and other becomes unbearable and

unsustainable, the rebellion against heteropatriarchal rule can be as total as the inclination to

submit to it. Having prompted Cliff to leave, Sam is nevertheless subjected to brutal lashing

by Arapeta. Yet, when asked by Arapeta whether he has asked God's forgiveness, Sam

answers: "Look, Dad. I chose to stay home because you're my father. I choose to stay

because I realise that I have obligations to you and the iwi. Do what you have to do, but don't

bring God into this" (*Story* 259). After another round of lashing, Arapeta attempts to conflate

his domination with a religiously-coloured, transcendent, authority by demanding: "Will you

give me obedience, Son. Will you repent?" (*Story* 261). The already half-bashed Sam,

nevertheless, gives a definitive, defiant answer: "I won't bow down to you . . . I would rather rule in Hell than serve you in Heaven" (*Story* 261). Consequently, Arapeta, in an ultimate denial of Sam's dignity and even humanity, pisses on him, declaring: "You are no longer my son or a man . . . It should have been you, not Turei [a fellow Māori soldier who died in Vietnam], who came back in that lead-lined coffin" (*Story* 261). A victim of heteropatriarchy, Sam dies tragically indeed: on his way to join Cliff at the airport, he is hit by a truck, thus never able to tell Cliff of his decision to build a new life together with him.

Obviously, insofar as the tremendous influence of Uncle Sam's story on Michael derives from the similar cultural, family backgrounds of the two gay men, Michael views his uncle's story as a mirror to his own situation and an impetus to his fight for change. Michael himself admits: "So long denied knowledge about Uncle Sam, I wanted to do something for him almost as a way of recognising myself" (*Story* 270). A shared grievance against heteropatriarchy is thus turned into a motivation for Michael to struggle for affirmative recognition, as I will discuss in detail in the next section.

2. Recognition: from the Personal to the Political

Michael's endeavour to seek affirmative recognition is twofold: on one hand, he searches for, and vicariously relates to, his uncle's former lover, Cliff Harper, and on the other hand, he pursues a political agenda against perceived oppression of homosexual, especially indigenous homosexual, people. The irony of the situation, however, is that his personal attraction to

white men, including Cliff, flies in the face of his postulation of the "White man" as his

political target. To understand this irony, we need to investigate the configuration of the

relationship between the personal and the political in the context of Michael's life and

society.

Michael's most intimate interpersonal relationship—that between him and his white

lover Jason—is beset by the problem of recognition. As Jason repeatedly complains before

they finally break up: "You don't recognise me for the person I am, Michael. You don't

recognise us for the couple we're supposed to be. Until you come out to your people, we'll

never work" (*Story* 22). Michael's reply, nevertheless, is that "[m]y people are among the

most homophobic in the world. . . . I'm not supposed to exist" (*Story* 22). Apparently, the

difficulty Michael has experienced in gaining respectful recognition under a heteropatriarchal

cultural regime is simply translated into an unwillingness to recognise his own life partner as

a dignified person in his own right. As a protest against this, Jason would go so far as to say:

"it's ownership our relationship is based on. It is dependency. . . . I have to take my life back"

(*Story* 25). As examples of how Michael "denied" him, Jason lists the following instances:

"Whenever we walked down the street and saw any of your family, your Maori relatives or

friends, you always seemed embarrassed I was with you. I got sick and tired of answering the

phone and pretending I was your—your room mate" (*Story* 134). Although judgement in the

intersubjective world of lovers is not always reliable due to the distorting refraction of

information through the peculiar psyches of the individuals involved, Jason's indictment is, to

a great extent, confirmed by Michael himself, as when he realises that Jason's analyst's

scepticism about his concern for Jason "was right: I *was* concerned for myself" (*Story* 130).

The vicious circle of the denial of respectful recognition in which Michael has found himself both as a victim and as a perpetrator demonstrates his failure, hitherto, to tackle the problem of recognition by aptly adjusting his own attitudes and deeds towards the other. It is, therefore, not difficult to understand why he would, in his struggle to improve his own situation, retain such a strong desire to relate to Cliff vicariously by reading the tragic story contained in his uncle's diary, and to literally find him. As Alistair Fox notes, "Michael's exploration of his uncle's story in the past represents, in effect, his efforts to understand the cultural tensions in the present that have led to the destruction of his relationship with Jason" (*Masculinity* 183). By the same token, Michael's political efforts to achieve change function as a way of giving an outlet to those cultural tensions. However, as I will demonstrate, while Michael undertakes the seeking of affirmative recognition for the deceased Uncle Sam—and, vicariously, for himself—from Cliff with respect and affection for the persons involved, a splitting of recognition into an "either-or" type of antagonistic confrontation occurs when he turns to the political arena, where discursive utterance can be made to circulate independently of interpersonal relations.

Michael's search for Cliff is, first of all, a highly personal mission, in which the barrier of race virtually dissolves without a trace. As he confides in an imagined conversation with Uncle Sam: "perhaps it was inevitable that seeing Cliff Harper through your diary . . . I would become you and . . . fall in love with Cliff too" (*Story* 313). This imagination of love in spite of racial difference is partly based on his actual sexual preference in personal life.

When Roimata, a Māori lesbian activist and his best friend, teases him as being "colonised twice over" first by the Pākehā and then by the gay Pākehā, Michael's rebuttal is: "I like white boys. When I put my brown hands on them it makes me feel so dirty" (*Story* 131). Furthermore, it can be argued that in his search for his uncle's white lover, Cliff, Michael is also trying romantically to merge himself again with a racial other, this time in the safety of his own preconception rather than amid an emotional minefield like that which exists between him and Jason. However, when Michael gets hold of the phone number for Cliff's house after a lengthy inquiry and dials through, only to be answered by his son, he begins to feel "a sense of alarm, then anger at myself. . . . I had never expected he would be married with a wife and children. I may have countenanced a relationship—but a male one with someone who would, surely, have looked like Uncle Sam" (*Story* 309).

If, in his personal life, Michael wishes for a fusion of self and other in spite of, or even because of, racial difference, then paradoxically enough, his political pronouncement seems to be premised, to a great extent, on an antagonistic position towards a racial other—despite his claim that he is fighting for "all the Sams and Cliffs of the world" (*Story* 332). Representing, together with Roimata, the Māori of New Zealand at an international indigenous arts conference funded by the Canadian government, yet taking issue with its official theme of racial reconciliation, Michael seizes his speaking opportunity to level an accusation at the white "oppressor" (*Story* 325):

Our kind has been hunted in Tasmania, moved onto reserve lands in Canada

and the United States, assimilated in New Zealand. Although our retaliation is

an indictable act, *the real criminal, the one who should be in the dock is not us.*

It is the White man. . . . We live only by the White man's leave within White

structures that are White driven and White kept. Our jailers might be kindly,

but they are still our jailers. (*Story* 326; my emphasis)

The bottom line of this protest, as Roimata sums it up, is that the "domination of the majority

over the minority must be put to an end. This is why Michael and I have committed murder

[by undermining the conference's official theme of racial reconciliation] today" (*Story* 326).

Michael and Roimata's protest is genuine to a great extent. Yet, from a psychological point of

view, this sweeping accusation from a white-boys-loving Michael is only made possible by a

temporary suppression of awareness of the importance of the racial other in his personal life

in order to posit this other as a public target in the political arena of discursive contestation.

Indeed, the split between Michael's stance in his private life and in a public forum

suggests that, with the issue of mutually respectful recognition between himself and other

selves remaining difficult to resolve, he has tended to transmute the frustration in his personal

life into an anger towards the hegemonic social discourse—the cultural and racial

order—which has inflicted sexual and racial prejudices on his life. His rebellion may well

have started with his coming out to his heteropatriarchal family, after which he feels that

"[f]rom now on *I* would say who I was, I would tell the narrative of my life as I lived it and

not some false history voiced by Mum and Dad" (*Story* 21). Yet by breaking away from his

family, Michael has effectively lost his parents as a responsive object in his rebellion, thus

detaching the telling of his narrative, at least temporarily, from some of the most significant

people in his personal life. Furthermore, Michael's failed attempts to repair his relationship

with his white lover, Jason, who has decided to enter psychoanalysis and sue Michael in court

rather than engage with him face-to-face, followed by his efforts to relate his own life to the

story of his Uncle Sam and Cliff Harper, and finally by his public denunciation of the totally

depersonalised "White man," show that he has only been able to tackle the relationship

between self and other indirectly. In other words, the issue of interpersonal relations—the

very arena in which mutually respectful recognition between self and other can be directly

realised at an intersubjective level—remains largely unresolved in all these efforts, which

only tackle it through vicarious substitution. And as politically progressive as Michael's

manoeuvre in prompting the indigenous arts conference to adopt a motion recognising the

achievements of "gay men and women" in indigenous cultures may be (*Story* 344), such a

symbolic success still needs an interpersonal platform in order for it to be translated into

intersubjective appreciation in his off-stage life.

It is not surprising that Michael's efforts to seek affirmative recognition after his

coming out should start by engaging with a story, and then by proceeding to a political

pronouncement. Because of all the family and cultural continuities between the two gay men

of two consecutive generations, "[i]t is Michael's response to his uncle's story that effects this

transformation" (Tawake 375). The interlocked network of sexuality, patriarchy and race,

which Michael perceives to have eventuated in prejudice and oppression that afflict both his

uncle's life and his own life, further leads him to challenge certain entrenched social and cultural traditions—through the depersonalised, yet more publicly relevant, avenue of political discourse. Michel Foucault characterises the trajectory of the malleable relationship between sexuality and public concern when he notes that "[i]f sexuality was constituted as an area of investigation, this was only because relations of power had established it as a possible object; and conversely, if power was able to take it as a target, this was because techniques of knowledge and procedures of discourse were capable of investing it" (*Sexuality* 98). Michael's probe into his gay uncle's subjective world in search of support for his rebellion against heteropatriarchal power, and his wrestling with political suppression of gay histories, both resonate strongly with this observation made by Foucault. That Foucault's historical study of European sexuality can apply aptly to the experience of Michael, furthermore, suggests a convergence of Māori society and Western society with respect to sexuality, which, in both cases, has become a public concern and is politically contested. Given the postcolonial context of interracial coexistence, this convergence can be regarded as another testament to the extent to which the Māori population has been subsumed under a mass society constructed largely according to Western socio-political frameworks. However, what is significant is that Michael's struggle for affirmative recognition is not confined to asserting personal sexuality in terms of historical investigation and political discourse—he also envisions an arrangement of sexuality and life that is radically different from the Western norm: an interpersonally connected gay tribe, living in accordance with the collective values of the indigenous culture.

3. The Concept of a Gay Tribe and Male Rationality

The notion of a gay tribe, with all its connotations of a blend of sexual tolerance and communal unity, can be regarded as an attempt to reform Māori tribal tradition in the context of a liberal democratic society in which the individual, although entitled to a plurality of lifestyles under the law, may still suffer from cultural prejudice. The project of a gay tribe, it seems, needs to be approached in such a way as to guard against the centrifugal pull of the individualistic mass society, while also utilising certain prevalent social conventions for its advancement. In the postcolonial era, such a tension in approach may translate into the efforts of postcolonial subjects to grapple with various cultural influences, both indigenous and Western, and may reveal itself as incongruities in their subjective outlook. In this section, I will explore the implications of a disjuncture between Michael's public stance and his private life as he pursues indigenous gay rights, with a view to identifying male rationality as the cultural undercurrent—both in Māori society and the larger society as a whole— which has produced this disjuncture.

Given the novel's suggestion of a double marginalisation of indigenous homosexual people in a white-dominated society, it should come as no surprise that the notion of a gay tribe should have much of its meaning defined in opposition to a racial other, as when Roimata first explains it to Michael:

Take, for instance, the Pakeha gay attitude to family. . . . The Western model

de-privileges any notions that gay men or women might have children.

Therefore, the White gay species is the only one which doesn't replicate itself.

But our Maori model is a tribal one. It should therefore include the possibility

of growing a tribe. Of having children. . . . The issue of identity and space—of

sovereignty, of tino rangatiratanga—that our people have been fighting for

within Pakeha society are the same issues for gay Maori within Pakeha gay

society! That gay tribe that your Auntie Pat asked about won't just happen—it

will have to be created, God dammit— (*Story* 131)

Obviously, not only does Roimata disfavour a radical breakaway from the network of family

and kin for the sake of homosexual freedom, but she is suggesting that Western influence has

contributed to the difficulty in reforming and creatively expanding this network. The rhetoric

of Māori gay self-assertion—of fighting for identity, space, and sovereignty etc. within

Pākehā (gay) society—thus is, from an anti-assimilation point of view as espoused by

Roimata, both necessary and useful as a discursive tool in political struggle. However, the

discursive formulation of a gay tribe, insofar as it is predicated on an opposition to a

depersonalised racial other, may nevertheless create a dichotomy between self and other

which is simply too impractical to maintain in interpersonal life. A racially exclusivist motive

looms large, yet fails to deliver—for example, when Roimata tries, in vain, to break the

relationship between Michael and his white lover, Jason, by introducing a Māori gay man to

Michael (*Story* 131). A real irony manifests itself in Roimata's dealing with the seemingly

all-white boy Carlos, chosen by Michael as his new partner after his breakup with Jason.

Initially derided by Roimata, Carlos nevertheless causes an all too easy U-turn in her

estimation by claiming that he actually has Māori blood—whereupon Roimata immediately

proclaims: "I like this boy" (*Story* 279).

If the discursive boundaries of a Māori gay tribe can easily dissolve in interpersonal

encounters, it does not mean, however, that the internal logic of the proposal is implausible;

rather, it may suggest that a tribal model for homosexuals is expected to function in ways so

different from those prevalent in Western society that, rightly or wrongly, a vigilance against

further cultural erosion—and against people closely associated with Western culture—has

been felt by some proponents of this model such as Roimata. In view of the alleged Pākehā

gay apathy to family, the proposal of a gay tribe can be regarded as an attempt by its

proponents to achieve intersubjective accommodation and sustainable interpersonal ties in a

communal environment—by tapping its own cultural resources.

Given the emphasis placed by the proposal of a gay tribe on family—which in the

Māori context usually also means extended family— it should come as no surprise that its

initial sign of materialisation is marked by the occasion of Michael and Roimata leading a

group of gay and lesbian Māori to escort the body of Waka, a gay Māori who has died of

AIDS, back to his local marae. The task is as difficult as it is significant; as Michael puts it:

"Oh, I felt so proud of our ope. I didn't care that we looked a rather odd tribe. It took courage

to front up to a culture as forbidding as ours" (*Story* 364). Nevertheless, the gay tribe

eventually receives a welcome by people led by Waka's grandmother, Lilly:

> "Welcome to this marae," Lilly called. "Welcome you strange tribe I see before me! Come forward, you tribe of men who love men and women who love women! Welcome, you brave gay tribe, whom none have seen before! Come! Bring your dead who is also our dead—"
>
> Our tribe was born that day. It was born out of a grandmother's compulsion to take her grandchild back to her bosom. Out of a need to accept that a new tribe was coming. That day we signalled, "Make way, we are coming through." (*Story* 365)

It is obvious that within a tribal mode of interpersonal relations, much emphasis is placed on such primordial human ties as family and kinship, as well as on common sources of cultural identification like a marae. Interpersonal transaction therein can be as rich in particularity as it is strong in cultural resonance, providing a fertile ground for reciprocal and cooperative recognition if and when difference is acknowledged and tolerated.

Viewed in this light, Michael and Roimata's project of bringing about a gay tribe represents simultaneously a fight against homophobia both within and outside the Māori race, as well as an attempt to preserve yet reform an intimate environment for the development of a peculiar self among the recognising and responding others. However, the cultural connotations of a gay tribe may also function to inhibit the relationship between non-Māori

and Māori homosexuals; as one critic rightly remarks, "[r]aised in a Pakeha nuclear family,

Jason underestimates the extent of Michael's cultural dilemma and would probably have

considered the notion of gay tribe as aberrant" (Valle 202). It seems that joining a gay tribe or,

in the words of the Māori gay man Tane in the novel, "a tribe based not just on sexual identity

but on family" (*Story* 296), entails not only homosexuality, but also an identification with a

cultural position on collective life that is considered more Māori than Pākehā.

Given the desire on the part of Roimata and Michael to champion a tribal way of gay

life against not only homophobia, but also what they perceive to be cultural encroachment

from Pākehā, including gay Pākehā, a legitimate question may be asked at this point: do the

distinct particularities implied by the notion of a gay tribe necessarily hinder the rapport or

rapprochement between its proponents and the outside world? Some light can be shed on this

question by drawing upon D. W. Winnicott's theorisation about group formation. On the

strength of his paediatric observation of the child-mother relationship, Winnicott propounds

that the good-enough mother figure's intuitive grasp of the importance of not challenging the

child in regard to the objective reality of the objects and phenomena that the child

affectionately makes believe about allows the child to gradually enter cultural life. On this

basis, Winnicott offers his theorisation about group life: "We can share a respect for *illusory*

experience, and if we wish we may collect together and form a group on the basis of the

similarity of our illusory experiences. This is a natural root of grouping among human

beings" (*Playing* 4). Obviously, for Winnicott, voluntary group life depends a lot on a shared

respect for subjective investment in certain objects and phenomena in life, an investment

which nevertheless may be disrespected outside the group. Such a dialectic of group life may imply a certain degree of inevitability of intergroup conflicts. It can be said, however, that as far as a tribal mode of life is concerned, many objects and phenomena therein involved, such as shared geographic locations or accommodations, kinship networks and intragroup activities, can be related to, within the national legal framework, by its members without much outside interference—after all, with regard to the areas to which those objects and phenomena belong, there is such an apparently vast diversity that people will not usually be interested in finding fault with particular examples that lie outside their direct experience.

However, it should be emphasised that a gay tribe is conceived by its proponents not only as a mode of collective experience and bonding but, importantly, on the basis of a homosexual identity. Insofar as homophobia is in itself often contingent upon a binary, and certainly simplistic, conception of sexuality that rejects any human sexual liaison occurring not between the biologically male and the biologically female, homophobic attitudes are easily translated into sweeping discursive utterances that potentially target all homosexuals regardless of the diversity in terms of their actual life experiences. Much of the subjective investment in life on the part of the members of a gay tribe would, therefore, not be exempt from being subjected to disrespect conveyed by a homophobic discourse.

In light of the above, it can be said that the severity of intergroup conflicts may depend very much on the ways groups are formed—whether through a shared attachment to particular objects and phenomena, or through commitment to some generalising discursive positions. From the way the notion of a gay tribe is conceptualised by the protagonists, we

may say that a large part of the pursuit of cultural and sexual particularities will take the form of agonistic struggle on the basis of rights-based self-assertion—since while rights and duties are universalisable in public discourse, cultural and sexual objects are certainly not. Accordingly, when objects of desire cannot be shared experientially, a sense of alliance is to be attained through the building of discourse. This is the case when Michael finally meets the now married, and somewhat reluctant, Cliff Harper for the first, and perhaps last, time, in an American airport lounge just before he is about to fly back to New Zealand. Despite the vast divergence between the two men in terms of their actual cultural environment and choice of sexual partners, Michael takes the occasion to announce a course of action, suggesting a message of gay rights and individual dignity that is indeed importantly relevant to Cliff: "I've made a political commitment to change my world. To change the Maori world. I owe it to myself. I owe it to Uncle Sam—and to you—" (*Story* 358). On the other hand, the society at large can be seen as being extremely inimical just because of its condition of being saturated with discourses that are at odds with one's own views—until an ideological battle is to be won in one's own favour; as is attested by Michael's pronouncements near the end of the novel: "We must speak our stories, we must enact them, we must sing our songs throughout this hostile universe. We must bring a new promise to life and a new music to the impulse of history" (*Story* 371). This "hostile universe," which cannot be experienced or understood in its entirety, nevertheless apparently needs to be refilled by the loud assertive voices of one's own kind. Insofar as Michael's position towards the public sphere is concerned, agnostic—and even antagonistic—self-assertion is certainly the case.

However, while it should be acknowledged that an antagonistic strategy such as that adopted by Michael is commonplace in contemporary politics and useful for advancing minority causes,[19] it is also appropriate to take a critical step back and ask—insofar as sexuality and gender are concerned, both of which are indeed crucial issues in this novel—what rationale could have underlain the preference for antagonistic struggle for the advancement of one's cause? As discussed earlier in light of Jessica Benjamin's feminist theorising, the splitting of recognition into an antagonistic opposition of domination and submission has much to do with patriarchy. Benjamin also extrapolates the "deep structure of gender as a binary opposition" onto the social level, stating that "[t]his opposition, which at the psychic level is called splitting, has its analogue in many other levels of experience, and is the pattern for every form of domination" (218). She goes on to analyse the effects of male rationality (in terms of gender construction, and not of biological sex) on Western society:

> The ascendancy of male rationality results finally in the loss and distortion of
> recognition in society as a whole. It not only eliminates the maternal aspects of
> recognition (nurturance and empathy) from our collective values, actions, and
> institutions. It also restricts the exercise of assertion, making social authorship
> and agency a matter of performance, control and impersonality—and thus
> vitiates subjectivity itself. In creating an increasingly objectified world, it

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[19] For a collection of comprehensive discussions on the wide use and value of agonistic and antagonistic strategies in contemporary politics, including by indigenous peoples, see Schaap.

deprives us of the intersubjective context in which assertion receives a

recognizing response. (218)

Significantly, Michael's conception of personal identity is also inextricably bound up

with the prevalent social ideal of man as active, superior. As he reflects on his Uncle Sam's

being made love to by—instead of making love to—Cliff:

> I thought of him in surrender, in all his vulnerability. . . . In the old world of
>
> the Greeks, a man was still considered a man when he was the active partner.
>
> He remained himself, maintaining his masculinity. He could shower, put on
>
> his clothes and walk away, back into his own life. But it was different if you
>
> were the passive partner. There was no going back. . . . The masculine identity
>
> of the man inside the room had been constructed by his society. His very being
>
> had been imprinted with codes which guided him and said, "This is what a
>
> man does and this is what a man does not do." (*Story* 248-49)

Michael's antagonistic stance in the political arena, it can be argued, is the combined result of

a felt need for struggle against oppression—be it because of sexuality or be it because of

race—and a tacit compliance with the social conception of masculinity as unilateral

pre-emptive action and self-autonomy. This stance may seem an optimal, if reluctant, choice,

since the ascendancy of male rationality on a large social scale has divided life into private

and public spheres, pledging to preserve nurturance and empathy in the former yet saturating the latter with impersonal contestation. While Michael certainly has a point in opposing the Western social order which threatens both his sexual and racial identities, he has nevertheless been predisposed by Māori patriarchal culture to an easy acceptance of a breakdown of tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition. His public denunciation of the "White man," bearing a resemblance in spirit to his denial of respectful recognition to his white lover, Jason, is too much of a sweeping accusation to be respectful towards white men, from whom he nevertheless seeks love.

4. Conclusions

Near the end of the novel, Michael dreams that he is fighting back a charging stallion with a whip. The whip declares to the stallion: "I will take this no longer, I will no longer let you have power over me. From this day I will fight back and I will win"; and Michael shouts: "Oh, you bastard world!" (*Story* 361). This dream, echoing his Uncle Sam's nightmare mentioned earlier, symbolises Michael's newfound strength to fight against oppression, which he sees as having made the world detestable. Indeed, Michael's hatred of what he perceives as oppressive has become irreconcilable since his coming out. Thus he curses his high-handed grandfather: "I hope that when he died Arapeta had gone to a worse place than that to which he had consigned his son. I wanted crows to come out of the sky to take their retribution, to slash and claw and rip my grandfather, to spill his entrails open in some

sacrifice for his *unbending righteousness*. I wanted him to be denied any possibility of redemption" (*Story* 322; my emphasis).

Ironically, while there is certainly a great degree of righteousness in Michael's anger, his own unbending stance, nevertheless, may also cast shadow on what can be desirable in terms of reforming Māori tradition. When his sister, Amiria, reports to him that "[Mom] and Dad are hoping for a reconciliation," Michael responds: "That's what they say, but that's not what they want. What they want is for me to go home and tell them I'm sorry, I'll be a good boy and that I won't do it again. But that's not the way it's going to be, Sis. They're going to have to accept me as I am. *On my own terms*" (*Story* 352; my emphasis). Given such self-authority and self-assurance on the part of Michael, one wonders how a gay tribe, which supposedly is so much about family and kinship, could be integrated into his life. The problem here is not so much that Michael's own terms could be wrong, but that they are nonnegotiable. It can be said that in refusing negotiation and compromise in the arena of interpersonal relations, Michael is, ironically, following in the footsteps of the very patriarchal model of power that has oppressed him and made his interpersonal life difficult: if in patriarchy the father has absolute power and demands obedience from the sons, then here we see the son beginning to deny the authority of the father after having most resolutely cursed the grandfather—as if wanting to succeed them as the new unquestionable power holder in the family.

Michael is, therefore, essentially championing a patriarchal mode of struggle which can potentially undermine his own project—as expressed in the notion of a gay tribe—of

bringing about a tolerant and nurturing environment for interpersonal relations. As the

feminist psychoanalyst and sociologist Nancy Julia Chodorow points out:

> The relational individual is not reconstructed in terms of his or her drives and
>
> defenses but in terms of the greater or lesser fragmentation of his or her inner
>
> world and the extent to which the core self feels spontaneous and whole within,
>
> rather than driven by, this world. Even the sense of agency and autonomy
>
> remain relational in the object-relations model, because agency develops in the
>
> context of the early relationship with the mother and bears the meaning of her
>
> collaboration in and response to it. (203)

In light of the above, Michael's preference for political struggle in a depersonalised public

arena and his loathing of the notion of reconciliation at an interpersonal level, while

undoubtedly indicative of his courageous determination, may nevertheless betray a lack of

spontaneity in terms of interpersonal relations and intersubjective exchange. His ignoring of

the disjuncture between his private life and his public polemic, furthermore, suggests a

conceptualisation of agency which, possessed by him and serving him, can be applied out of

an interpersonal context. As long as this patriarchal mode of thought retains the status of a

dominant rationale, much will remain to be desired in the intersubjective project of building a

gay tribe, of preserving yet reforming Māori tribal tradition.

Writing in a white-dominated society, Witi Ihimaera has had to wrestle with various

cultural influences, both Māori and Pākehā, for the exploration of solutions to problems in

life and in society. While his efforts in *The Uncle's Story* at reforming Māori tradition against

the grain of prevalent postcolonial social norms are impressive, he has, nevertheless, not

come up with an adequate answer to the vexed question of interpersonal relations, both

intraracial and interracial. Instead Ihimaera has only created a heroic stance for the main

character which actually betrays an unacknowledged lack of resolve on the part of the latter

to tackle difficult problems in the interpersonal arena. While a distinction between character

and author has to be maintained, it is significant that Ihimaera himself appears to have come

to a similar conclusion about his own life when he posed the question in a recent interview:

"How do I make sure people do understand that I have not always been heroic?" He went on

to admit: "I was not heroic when I left my wife and became a gay man. There are many, many

times when I have not been that" (Ihimaera and Wichtel). Apparently Ihimaera has come to

the realisation that one's struggle for social recognition is not always heroic when

interpersonal relationships end up being ignored or the price paid.

The distinguished Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor asserts in his seminal book on

multiculturalism, *The Politics of Recognition*, that "real judgments of worth [of cultures]

suppose a fused horizon of standards, where we have been transformed by the study of the

other, so that we are not simply judging by our old familiar standards" (255). No viable

objection can possibly be raised to this assertion *per se* if the interaction and mutability of

cultures are to be positively acknowledged. Yet, as I hope to have demonstrated in the case

study undertaken in this chapter, the patriarchal mode of social organisation has brought with

it a splitting of recognition, so that cultural standards, no matter how fused they have become on a cognitive level, can still degenerate into double standards in people's practice. Given the historical condition of patriarchal dominance in the many cultures of our world, if postcolonial struggles such as those carried out by indigenous homosexuals are to find alternatives to the self-centred, atomistic lifestyles spawned by capitalism, the indigenous rationale for social organisation, where it has been patriarchal, may need more thorough revaluation. On the other hand, it may also befit a postcolonial liberal democracy as a whole to move beyond the mere recognition and negotiation of different cultural conventions and standards to also better foster a sense of mutuality in interpersonal transactions through the ways social life is organised—if recognition is eventually to lead to greater social bonding.

Compared with Keri Hulme and Alan Duff, Witi Ihimaera has engaged much more directly with presenting and preserving the distinctly Māori way of life in his literary career; yet it seems that the self-important, belligerent attitudes exhibited by many of his male main characters are, in fact, at odds with a communitarian lifestyle that Ihimaera has sought to eulogise as early as in his first short story collection and first novel. By comparison, Patricia Grace has explored, in her novels, a much more harmoniously interactive—though by no means idyllic—side of the communitarian lifestyle in Māori society. We will come to that in the next two chapters.

Chapter 7

Relating Subjects to the World of Objects: A Māori Metaphysics, Communal Tradition,

and Negotiation with Capitalism in Patricia Grace's *Potiki*

In terms of the literary exploration of the influence of Māori cultural tradition on present-day

individuals, unlike the nostalgic wishful thinking found in Keri Hulme, the defiance and

unease in Alan Duff, and the unsettled, unsettling love-hate complex in Witi Ihimaera, there is

in Grace's novels often a positive, deep yet gentle embrace of Māori culture, displayed as

having been passed down from the past and built on into the present in unceasing, interlinked,

and evolving communal life. In 2008, Daniel Simon, editor of *World Literature Today*,

characterised the "touchstones" of Grace's fiction as "rootedness of place, the ebb and flow

of life in New Zealand, the care and community of extended family (both immediate and

tribal, ancestral and intergenerational), the shared stories pinned together by language and

culture, ritual and respect" (3).[20] Not only does this appraisal rightly identify the appreciative

literary portrayal by Grace of place, community, and cultural resources and activities in

Māoridom, but it also points to the crucial dynamic created by all those elements in the

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[20] Patricia Grace won the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2008, a biennial

award for literature administered by the University of Oklahoma and its international

magazine, *World Literature Today*.

sustaining and flourishing of local and ethnic life. Indeed, it may be said that any

investigation of Grace's literary work from the perspective of subjective life experience

requires special attention to the issue of cultural tradition as shaped by place and community.

Grace's perception of, and attachment to, Māori culture as a continued, living

tradition are such that her literary characters are often portrayed as consciously feeling the

Māori cultural past as imparting an ethos of its own to their quotidian lives, especially in the

face of another, socially dominant, culture. In Grace's third novel, *Cousins* (1992), Makareta,

who is the most steeped in Māori tradition among the three titular cousins, expresses her

belief that "culture is deep. It is deep. Even the remnants or the memories of it are deep. It is

not something that can be adequately explained to those of another culture, but neither should

it need to be explained, I think. It only needs, at the least, to be allowed, to be let be, to be

trusted" (*Cousins* 209). It should be noted that while this can be said to characterise much of

Grace's own attitude towards Māori culture, it does not mean that she dismisses the functions

of publicity, drumbeating and contestation in cultural representation. As Grace readily admits

in an interview with Jane McRae, "[m]y work may be political. I believe it. I'm happy for it to

be so. To me good writing must define, expose, comment on the concerns that people have, the

manners and issues of the time, but my main objective is to tell stories that reflect a particular

experience effectively, completely and accurately" (Grace and McRae 295). Here Grace

seems to suggest that, although her literary work—which is mostly about Māori life and

culture—can potentially be politically agitating, the construction of generalised messages

along politically or racially dividing lines is nevertheless not her mission because of the

central importance she attaches in her writing to particular, necessarily different, experiences of characters.

Grace's artistic focus on the experiential side—if she is to present a vivid picture of Māori culture without museumising what might look exotic to readers of another culture[21]—entails bringing out by literary creation the richness and depth of this culture as embodied by lived lives. Indeed, the centrality of the experiencing individuals in her literary thinking is confirmed by Grace in another interview when she states: "My focus is on characters. The story happens because of what happens to the character. Everything belongs to that person. The environments and the circumstances all belong to the character. The voice belongs to the character. The dialogue belongs to the character" (Grace and Hereniko 81). Such an unequivocal emphasis on the centrality of "the character" raises the question of how Grace links up the unique subjective worlds of individual characters with the communally shared Māori cultural universe, for the representation of which she is famous. The artistic success of Grace in this respect, I suggest, lies partly in what remains unelaborated here by her about "the environments and the circumstances," namely, that the objectively existing environments and circumstances can be displayed in a way that shows their ability to serve as the basis for an intersubjective reference to a shared culture.

The world of objects figures conspicuously in Grace's novels, with specific objects or

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[21] It should be acknowledged that Grace in her writing does not preclude the positive effects that might come out of the enactment of Māori culture in front of racial others, as is pointed out by Simone Drichel. See Drichel "Hybridity" 597-98.

places being endowed with special significance and often acting as a link between the past

and the present in individual and collective memories. It should be noted from the outset that

this is, in essence, not a matter of object-worship as in idolatry or fetishism, where objects are

believed to possess magic power or mystical qualities. An illustration of such an emotionally

evocative, yet not magic, status occupied by objects can be found in Grace's first novel,

Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps (1978). The novel's Māori protagonist Ripeka often feels the

urge to overcome the cultural barrier between her and her Pākehā husband by telling him

"about the stone, which I call a stone to give less meaning, to simplify feeling" (*Mutuwhenua*

3). The special stone, after its discovery by Māori children together with a Pākehā boy, is

seen by the latter's father, a visiting businessman, only in terms of its market value; yet it is

returned by the Māori community to the bottom of a local gully near where it was discovered.

As Ripeka puts it, the stone is significant "[n]ot because of what the stone was, but because of

the hundreds of years and because of how it came, taking ages and ages" (*Mutuwhenua* 7).

Throughout the novel, a resonance is apparently felt by Ripeka to exist between her cultural

feelings and the perennial object world of her Māori community. Similarly, in *Baby No-eyes*

(1998), a Māori community exhibits a strong emotional attachment to Mount Anapuke, where

some of their ancestors are buried. While Grace does not repeat the theme of subject-object

attachment with the same emphasis in her later novels, it is nevertheless always in the

background. Her *Dogside Story* (2001) is all about a coastal Māori community and their plans

for what to do with their environment in preparation for the millennium celebration and the

tourism associated with it—with the word "Dogside" in the title referring to the geographical

setting of the story. In *Tu* (2004), the eponymous character, traumatised by World War II and living away from his extended family, finally decides to take his nephews to where his generation fought and died in the war, pledging that "[w]hen we return I'll rebuild the herd. I'll renovate the house and keep it warm for family" (*Tu* 282)—thus revealing a subtle, complex correlation in his memories between the emotional and the geographical landscape.

With a view to analysing Grace's literary exploration of the experience of, and the attachment to, cultural tradition by subjects through their engaging with the world of objects, I have chosen *Potiki* for the present study on account of its extensive exploration of subject-object engagement at a particular place, with objects clearly depicted as facilitating the bridging of the past and the present in the community's cultural life. Such a choice can thus provide us with a close look at the process of subject formation in light of a cultural tradition that, far from being merely discursively defined and circulated, is in fact intertwined with the intimate experiencing of place and things local. Perhaps more importantly, the Māori ethos conveyed in the novel by Grace should not be understood as something peculiar that has merely arisen from a particular indigenous cultural heritage; it may also be interpreted as a metaphysical attitude that has significant implications for present-day human dealings with the object world, when the capitalism of our time often tends to sever the bond between human subjects and their environment to the detriment of both. Speaking of the deep connection in the novel between the characters and their surroundings, one critic remarks: "Patricia Grace's symbolic, self-referential *Potiki* (1986), centred in a Maori cultural world of ceremony, wood-carving, and reverence for trees and the sea, dramatizes the struggle for

Maori land rights as reflected in the suffering and survival of a single family" (Boehmer 224).

It should be pointed out that the cultural universe in the novel is by no means self-referential,

nor is its storyline limited to just a single family; yet this remark is certainly right in pointing

to the multifaceted, comprehensive nature of the engagement of a community of Māori

characters with their surrounding object world. Indeed, *Potiki* depicts a relatively stable

natural and human setting for the individual characters, whose cultural experience, while

informed by the larger contemporary world, is not so diluted by it as to be indistinctive.

In what follows in this chapter, I will first outline the contours of the discussion by

comparing the Pākehā land developers' capitalist, predatory attitudes towards land with those

of the Māori community, so as to identify the relationship of the human subject to the object

world as lying at the heart of the difference between their respective cultural outlooks on

tradition and progress. Next, I will analyse how the subject-object engagement serves as a

basis for intersubjective communication and the continuation of communal life by drawing

upon D. W. Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory of transitional objects and transitional

phenomena—thus setting the stage for the discussion of a discernible Māori worldview as

communally embodied by the Māori characters in the novel. I will then focus on the

metaphysical elements of this worldview, pointing out its distinctive emphasis on the

intersubjective understanding of the living world rather than a direct correspondence between

the individual subject and a transcendent source of meaning. In concluding this chapter, I will

discuss the implications of the cultural tradition embodied by the Māori community of *Potiki*

for the resistance to capitalist deterritorialisation and metaphysical impoverishment.

1. Ancestral Land and the Capitalist Spirit Run Amok

The question of land occupies centre stage in *Potiki*. As *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* puts it, "*Potiki* explores the survival and fortunes of Maori peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand, especially regarding the vexed issues of land rights" (McLeod 216). Not only do the characters make a living off the land, but their lives are, to a large extent, defined by their awareness of its ancestral and communal significance. In this section, I will argue that the question of land reflects a nuanced cultural outlook of the local Māori community on issues of tradition and progress when it is confronted with a capitalist spirit of acquisition and possession run amok.

The plotline of *Potiki* is quite simple. Roimata Kararaina and her husband Hemi Tamihana live by the sea on their family land together with their four children: James, Tangimoana, Manu and Tokowaru-i-te-Marama (Toko). Toko, although cherished by Roimata and Hemi as a child of their own, is in fact born of Hemi's mentally challenged sister, Mary, and some uncertain man who might have sexually taken advantage of her. The local community in which the extended family lives also includes some other Tamihana families. The equilibrium of their life, however, is disrupted when a Pākehā businessman, Mr. Dolman (dubbed by the local community as the Dollarman) offers to buy their land for the development of an amusement park for tourism. After being turned down by the local community who refuse to give up their ancestral land to commercial and polluting use, the

Dollarman carries out treacherous sabotage by flooding their ancestral burial ground and setting fire to their meeting house, causing the death of Toko. Frustrated by a police investigation that fails to pin down the perpetrators, the local community pushes the Dollarman's machines into the sea.

The plot of an indigenous local community struggling against land grabbing may evoke such historical categories as colonial expansion and capitalist primitive accumulation. Indeed, the evocative power of *Potiki* is judged by some critics to "strategically rely upon some type of discourse of precolonial purity and unity that was eroded through exposure to modernization, capitalism, colonialism, and/or toxic pollutants" (DeLoughrey and Handley 23). This judgement, however, highlights only one side of a paradox, in that while *Potiki* may be stereotypically perceived as having drawn upon a discourse of precolonial purity and unity being eroded by outside intrusion of various kinds, the characters themselves, upon closer examination, turn out to have already accommodated themselves to aspects of a postcolonial, modernised world.

This point can be abundantly illustrated by the issue of land, which belies any simplistic or wishful conception of indigenous purity and unity. In *Potiki* there is an inset story of a Māori tribe struggling for land rights. After a court of enquiry has eventually endorsed their claim to their tribal land, disputes nevertheless break out among themselves as to how to handle the returned land:

Some wanted to sell because they felt they could never use the land. Others

said the land was theirs and always had been, and that they were going to

occupy it and build their whare whakairo [carved house] there. They were

already planning their carved meeting-house as well as the homes they wanted

to build. Quarrels began again among the people, some saying that those who

wanted to sell were interested only in money. But those who wanted to sell

said that *the others were all trying to be chiefs, and were really wanting the*

land for themselves. (*Potiki* 83; my emphasis)

The wide spectrum of opinions clearly suggests the infiltration of the market force, as well as

a popular sense of individual entitlement, due probably to the postcolonial legal and political

framework in New Zealand which has rendered much of the traditional chiefly authority

obsolete. Ironically, it is sometimes the Pākehā outsiders who need to be reminded of the

change. In reply to the question—"Are we speaking to the chief?"—posed by Pākehā

investigators into the sabotage carried out against Toko's community, Stan, acting as

spokesperson for the community, states drily: "We're all chiefs here" (*Potiki* 168). The

readiness with which Māori communities have pursued their interests along legal and

democratic principles proves the transformative success of modernity, as much as it points to

the strength of Māori subjects to resist various projections, nostalgic or otherwise, made by

outsiders onto them.

With the assurance that the novel is not a rejection of modernity or a romanticisation

of the indigenous, it becomes possible and meaningful to discuss its presentation of the

negotiations and clashes between the Māori community and the Pākehā land developers in

terms of cultural divergence stemming from different value systems—with a view to

identifying the ways in which the community depicted therein is asserting or seeking

alternatives to certain Western values that have been forcibly presented to them.

It is no accident that Mr. Dolman, the Pākehā land developer, should be allegorically

dubbed the Dollarman by the Māori community, as he represents the kind of instrumental

rationality which measures life and the environment in terms of money. Ignoring the

community's pledge that "no amount of money" would make them sell their ancestral land

(*Potiki* 91), the Dollarman just keeps raising the figures. Even though it is explained to him

that the community would not allow "the removal of our wharenui, which is our meeting

place, our identity, our security" and "the displacement of the dead and the disruption of a

sacred site," the Dollarman's reaction is to insist that they are "unreasonable" (*Potiki* 93).

Furthermore, he dismisses the community's expressed spiritual considerations about the land,

blurting out: "Just as you can become a slave to past things. And to superstition . . . and all

that . . . hoo-ha" (*Potiki* 94). Admittedly, the ontological validity of the Māori community's

claims about the sacredness of their land—what the Dollarman calls "superstition"—cannot

be scientifically established, leaving a gap between what the Māori community holds as

emotionally or spiritually valuable and what is scientifically verifiable. Yet it is important to

note here that even the very cultural tradition from which the Dollarman emerges has still

retained strong spiritual readings of the world which cannot be verified in positivist terms; as

the eminent scientist-turned-theologian Alister E. McGrath observes: "Even though Western

culture is often asserted to be 'secular,' there is widespread evidence of continuing interest in

transcendent experience, in which people form the impression that there is 'something there'"

(27).

Ironically, the Dollarman's ostensible positivist attitude in his dismissing of Māori

"superstition" does not save him from wishful thinking and logical lapses in terms of value

judgments. This is clear in his insistence that his commercial development of the land is to

bring the community "progress" (*Potiki* 90), even though that commercialisation will include

anachronistic, reifying performances in which the local Māori are supposed to "dress up and

dance and sing twice a day and cook food in the ground" (*Potiki* 97), and will certainly

damage the surrounding environment, including the sacred burial ground. To the extent that

the Dollarman, bent on profiting from the subduing of nature and the exoticising of an

indigenous culture, does not allow himself to be moved or persuaded by the unwanted

features, qualities and potentialities of the object of his enterprise (in this case, the Māori

ancestral land), he can be said to indeed typify an instrumental rationality which, fully

fledged in the secular West, is psychologically and metaphysically impoverishing.

This impoverishment in the relationship of the human subject to the object has been

elaborated by theologians in light of Western, and perhaps more broadly, modern

secularisation. As the British Christian apologist C. S. Lewis puts it:

At the outset the universe appears packed with will, intelligence, life and

positive qualities; every tree is a nymph, and every planet a god. Man himself

is akin to the gods. The advance of knowledge gradually empties this rich and

genial universe, first of its gods, then of its colours, smells, sounds and tastes,

finally of solidity itself as solidity was originally imagined. As these items are

taken from the world, they are transferred to the subjective side of the account;

classified as our sensations, thoughts, images and emotions. The subject

becomes gorged, inflated, at the expense of the Object. But the matter does not

rest there. The same method which has emptied the world now proceeds to

empty ourselves. The masters of the method soon announce that we were just

as mistaken . . . when we attributed "souls," or "selves" or "minds" to human

organisms, as when we attributed Dryads to the trees. (219-20)

It should be noted that Lewis's intention here is apparently to point beyond (or through) both

the human subject and the object world towards the Trinitarian divine which is supposed to

be the ultimate source of the rich subject-object engagement. Although it is not my intention

here to engage in a discussion of theology *per se*, Lewis's observation concerning the

subject-object relationship can still be invoked to help illuminate the cultural and spiritual

insensitivity exhibited by the Dollarman. In naming the Māori ancestral land simply as

"Block J136" and "J480 to 489" (*Potiki* 89), the Dollarman is in effect trying to reduce the

land to a narrowly preconceived object of profit-making. That the Dollarman is averse to

being touched or changed by the land and the myriad things associated with it as objects in

their own right is fully evident when he, in trying to force the local community to conform to

his will, dams a creek up in the hill and thus floods large swathes of the land, including the ancestral burial ground and the gardens (*Potiki* 127). In order to add further pressure, he goes on to commit the egregious act of secretly setting the local Māori meeting house on fire, causing the tragic death of Toko (*Potiki* 134-38).

It is no exaggeration to say that, in his ravaging of the land and the myriad things associated with it in quest of maximum profit, the Dollarman embodies some of the worst aspects of Western colonial and capitalist modes of thinking and behaving, not least on account of—to borrow from Lewis's phraseology—his attempts to engorge himself as subject at the expense of the land and its surrounding environment as object. This insensitivity to the object world, significantly, is also directly linked with an impoverishment of sympathetic capacity and cultural sensitivity, as is evidenced by the Dollarman's sabotage of the environment, which is held by the local Māori as culturally and spiritually important. Such a sharp contrast in the subject-object relationship thus leads us to ponder how the Māori characters in the novel develop an affective engagement with the world of objects.

2. Subject-object Engagement and the Building of Communal Tradition

The difference between the subjective attitudes of the Dollarman and the local Māori towards the same object can be neatly illustrated by an episode in the novel concerning the house of Toko's family. The Dollarman suggests that it should be to the benefit of the family to shift their house "nearer to town, to a more central place," whereas the family insist that "the

house was central already and could not be more central" (*Potiki* 100). Perceiving the

Dollarman's surprise and bewilderment at the response from the Māori family, Toko observes

that "[i]t was then that we all realised that the man had not, had never, understood anything

we had ever said, and never would" (*Potiki* 100). Toko's family's attachment to the house and

its surrounding environment, it can be argued, represents a paradigm of human subjects

forming affective ties with the world by engaging with and sharing objects which, in turn, can

come to have a crucial, even central, significance for them. This paradigm is underlain not

only by the subject's opinion on, and utilisation of, objects, but equally importantly, by an

intersubjective shaping of ways in which the subject engages with objects (evidenced, in this

case, by Toko's free and confident alignment of his personal opinion on the house with that of

the family in his using the plural pronoun "we"). To appreciate the kind of subject-object

engagement undertaken by the Māori characters in *Potiki* thus entails an investigation of both

the subjective and the intersubjective dimensions, the latter of which serves as a basis for a

communal tradition.

In making the above points, I am drawing upon ideas set out by D. W. Winnicott in his

book *Playing and Reality*, especially its chapters entitled "Transitional Objects and

Transitional Phenomena" and "The Location of Cultural experience" (*Playing* 1-34;128-39).

A transitional object, as put forth by Winnicott, refers to a "not-me" object such as a teddy

bear or a doll which, used by the infant initially to stand for the breast of the mother to fend

off anxiety, facilitates his or her transition from the earliest oral relationship with the mother

to "the true object-relationship" (*Playing* 2). The symbolism involved—an object standing for

the breast of the mother—also suggests that the infant is on a "journey from the purely subjective to objectivity," which is a "journey of progress towards experiencing" (*Playing* 8). Importantly, transitional objects will not be challenged according to reality-testing by a good-enough mother (or other caregivers) possessed of sound intuitive understanding, but will be allowed to exist in between the infant's inner reality and external life—that is, in "an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute," and which Winnicott terms the "transitional phenomena" (*Playing* 3). This intermediate area of experience, Winnicott goes on, "throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work" (*Playing* 19). Thus extending his theory of transitional objects and transitional phenomena to cultural experience by people of various ages, Winnicott proposes that "[t]he place where cultural experience is located is in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment (originally the object)," with the "potential space" referring to the area in between "*the subjective object and the object objectively perceived*" (*Playing* 135). The subjective aspect of cultural experience, furthermore, can be respected and shared intersubjectively; as Winnicott points out: "We can share a respect for *illusory experience*, and if we wish we may collect together and form a group on the basis of the similarity of our illusory experiences. This is a natural root of grouping among human beings" (*Playing* 4).

The relationship of the subject to the object as perceived from a Māori perspective, far from resembling what Lewis bemoans as a process of the subject seeking self-aggrandisement by reducing and appropriating the object, can be characterised by an

appreciative acknowledgement of the object in all its fullness and potential as well as by a

satisfaction derived from self-expression through the object. This is evident from the

allegorically tinged story in the prologue of the novel about a Māori carver who is very

skilful with wood:

> This does not mean that the man is master of the tree. Nor is he master of
>
> what eventually comes from his hands. He is master only of the skills that
>
> bring forward what was already waiting in the womb that is a tree—a tree that
>
> may have spent further time as a house or classroom, or a bridge or pier. Or
>
> further time could have been spent floating on the sea or river, or sucked into a
>
> swamp, or stopping a bank, or sprawled on a beach bleaching among the sand,
>
> stones and sun.
>
> It is as though a child brings about the birth of a parent because that which
>
> comes from under the master's hand is older than he is, is already ancient.
>
> When the carver dies he leaves behind him a house for the people. He
>
> leaves also, part of himself—shavings of heart and being, hunger and anger,
>
> love, mischief, hope, desire, elation or despair. He has given the people
>
> himself, and he has given the people his ancestors and their own. (*Potiki* 7-8)

The carver, as subject, obviously invests a lot in the wood as object; yet the subject-object

relationship here is more of a mutual engagement than egoistic possession. One critic

observes that carvers in *Potiki* "may lay no claim to authorship in the Western sense of the word, namely as a form of original ownership to their works' meaning. Rather their contribution to the artwork is like that of a midwife helping to bring into existence what already exists and thus has always belonged to their people" (Blassnigg 250). While this observation has stopped short of providing a discussion of the personal emotions and artistic creativity involved in carving, it nevertheless helps illuminate the relationship between the subject, the object and the cultural community in the case of *Potiki*. To be specific, the subject's artistic endeavour retains a recognition of the object in its various potentialities (the rudimentary form of wood evokes a tree with its various possible futures within the surrounding environment), and is rooted in shared memories (some carvings, for example, commemorate the ancestors of both the carver and his community members)—such that the artwork, once completed, can elicit a sense of familiarity and spontaneous response from the community with no need for the artist to act as interpreter or judge. The artwork, used as a transitional object by the carver, may thus also function as a transitional object for other community members and is likely to be preserved and passed down by them with affection.

Indeed, this intersubjective dimension of subject-object engagement serves as a basis for communal culture in *Potiki*, weaving individuals together through a sharing in, and mixing of, old and new cultural experience and expression of the object world and lives lived in it. This is reflected vividly in Roimata's musing about the book-making activity undertaken by her and the children from the extended family:

We could not afford books so we made our own. In this way we were able

to find ourselves in books. It is rare for us to find ourselves in books, but in

our own books we were able to find and define our lives.

But our main book was the whanenui which is itself a story, a history, a

gallery, a study, a design structure and a taonga. And we are part of that book

along with family past and family yet to come.

The land and the sea and the shores are a book too, and we found ourselves

there. They were our science and our sustenance. And they are our own

universe about which there are stories of great deeds and relationships and

magic and imaginings, love and terror, heroes, heroines, villains and fools.

Enough for a lifetime of telling. We found our own universe to be as large and

as extensive as any other universe that there is. (*Potiki* 104)

It should be noted that the word "universe" is apparently to highlight the comprehensiveness

and richness of the Māori community's cultural experience of dwelling in their

environment—an engagement with the world which is believed to be no lesser than anyone

else's. In Winnicottian language, what is so intimately talked about in the above excerpt can

be suitably called a cultural universe of transitional phenomena, where the myriad things in

the environment, invested with human emotion and imagination, are transfigured into stories,

art and epistemological interpretations which are, in turn, shared together.

The strong collective basis of cultural experience in the Māori community in *Potiki*

thus makes it worthwhile to examine the novel as an embodiment of a community of subjects engaging in constructing and sharing interpretations, assumptions and beliefs about the world which, in a Winnicottian sense, are respected among those subjects without resorting to scientifically objective criteria. This obviously points to the realm of metaphysics, which, importantly, is part and parcel of human intellectual engagement with the world. As the philosopher E. Jonathan Lowe points out,

> The philosophy of mind is involved with metaphysics because it has to say something about the ontological status of subjects of experience and their place within the wider scheme of things. No special science—not even physics, much less psychology—can usurp the role of metaphysics, because every empirical science presupposes a metaphysical framework in which to interpret its experimental findings. (4)

An examination of the metaphysics embodied in the novel will not only deepen our appreciation of a Māori worldview, but also help us understand the conflict between the Māori community and the larger world in *Potiki* as one between alternative, and equally subjective, worldviews, thus shedding intellectual light on the changeability of the relative status of different modes of human engagement with the object world.

3. A Māori Metaphysics and the Broadening of the Self

The representation in *Potiki* of the subjective experience of the Māori community is a mixture of the supernatural and the mundane. Yet when it comes to the subjective articulation of a worldview by members of the community, as I will demonstrate in this section, the emphasis seems to be on the intersubjective understanding of the living world rather than on any direct correspondence between the individual subject and a transcendent source of meaning. This, I argue, produces a metaphysics which encourages the subject-object engagement to flourish in an intersubjectively nurtured and appreciated atmosphere, and which enriches the self's cultural memories and thus broadens its ability to care for a human community and the object world.

As a novel replete with religious references and spiritual phenomena, *Potiki* is remarkably reluctant to offer explicit confirmation of any direct channel between the individual subject and a transcendent source of meaning, at times even pointedly accentuating the secular moorings of a situation where contact with the transcendent might be expected. A case in point is the first piece of narration in the novel by Roimata, where she recalls her childhood memories of attending school together with Mary:

> It was God's will that we sing the alphabet, the multiplication tables, the hymns and the catechism, and the toffees and the pictures of the suffering saints were kept in a green Jesus tin.
>
> . . .

We all had slates, and later books and pencils, except for Mary who had a

duster and a basket. If she was poked or teased she would sometimes laugh,

sometimes cry. If she was unhappy she would come and sit by me.

I listened to the lessons on *goodness* and knew that Mary was the closest to

the Jesus tin, being never *calumnious nor detractful, slanderous, murderous,*

disobedient, covetous, jealous nor deceiving. I knew that she needed my care.

(*Potiki* 16; my emphasis)

In spite of her religiously loaded name reminiscent of the Holy Mother, the little girl Mary

nevertheless displays more natural affinity with her fellow human Roimata who comforts

with warmth than with the supposedly revealed truth represented through Jesus and passed

down through Christian teachings. Needlessly to say, the long string of alarming adjectives in

the above excerpt is beyond both the full comprehension and the immediate concern of the

intellectually disabled, timid Mary, who holds a duster and a basket during class, obviously as

transitional objects to fend off anxiety; yet she settles well and behaves commendably in the

class, apparently because of the caring presence of Roimata. This is not to suggest that

Christianity is morally insignificant in the world of *Potiki*, given its conspicuous role in the

lives of the Māori community. Rather, the point here is that, whether or not emanating from a

transcendent source, human goodness is emphatically displayed in the novel to be nurtured

through intersubjective support and care.

Significantly, the only major character who is presented in the novel as having

supernatural abilities does not lay claim to receiving any revelation or inspiration from a higher divine source. Commentators on *Potiki* have often compared Toko to either Christ or Maui, a demi-god in Māori mythology—or more often to both (Kőster 96; Schafer 89; Deloughrey 69; Allen 148; Knudsen 207; Majid 161; Carrigan 66). Yet while the figure of Toko, on account of its implicit cultural associations, has been legitimately categorised as a hybrid embodiment of Christianity and Māori mythology, the critical literature so far has hardly started to explore it in terms of the relationship between the cultural particularities it embodies and the metaphysical implications it presents. Unlike Jesus, Toko does not even know the source of his supernatural ability of foreknowing, nor does he claim any transcendent authority. Indeed, in his own account of the day of his birth, Toko contextualises his understanding of his origins and abilities by placing them within a framework of kinship relations, set against the backdrop of the natural environment:

My uncle Stan went down to the sea to look for my other skin [the placenta] but the water held too much grey. He dived and searched until dark, and my father Hemi when he came home, and my brother James and all the people helped too. They searched but they could not find my old shell to bring home and bury. *My old self went to the stomach of a fish*, and for a long time after that there could be no fishing by anyone, no shellfishing, no swimming, no playing in the sea.

Perhaps it is the magic from Granny's ear that gives me my special

> *knowing*, and which makes up for my crookedness and my almost drowning.
>
> But I have been given other gifts from before I was born. I know all of my
>
> stories. There was nothing anyone could do about the crookedness of me.
>
> (*Potiki* 43; my emphasis)

In Toko's conception, while his old self is one with nature, the growing and knowing self—despite its congenital deficiencies—receives indispensable protection, nurture and care from his family, who have become a source of inspiration in the fruition of his special abilities. Though no transcendent moral message is ever articulated by Toko, the interlinking of his life with nature and with fellow humans provides rich existential meaning at a this-worldly level—while not in the least denying a dimension beyond it.

Just as Toko's life is not portrayed as that of a prophet who delivers a transcendent message for his people to live by, so his death is hardly presented as a radical departure from, or a transcendence of, the mundane living world. Indeed, Toko's life and death are conceptually understood by the Māori community in the context of a ceaseless procession of existence stretching from the past towards the present and the future. In answer to Toko's inquiries about some old photos of his Granny together with her brother who died in a horse-riding accident seventy years ago, his Granny explains: "The time your great-granduncle is born, that's the time all those people die of a bad sickness, tokowaru i te marama. . . . Eight in one month. But it's a good name for you Little father, your great-granduncle's name. And it's your own name now" (*Potiki* 57). As the name-sharing

(tokowaru i te marama) and the genealogically jumbled sobriquet (Little father) suggest,

deceased loved ones and younger generations of the family combine to constitute the

perennial tradition of life, death and renewal, to the point of blurring the distinction of

individual positions in the sequence of time.

This tradition, it should be stressed, is informed by an affirmation of the human

engagement with each other and with the object world—as is manifested in the incident of

Toko's own death which, though marking a boundary between the pre-mortem and the

post-mortem, nevertheless appears to return the meaning of existence decidedly to *this* living

world. Toko dies in the communal meeting house in a fire apparently set by the land

developers as a means of intimidation. It is of no small symbolic significance for the

communal spirit and morale, then, that this meeting house is renovated, with carvings about

Toko's life added to other carvings (*Potiki* 170-73). After the people, gathering in the meeting

house, have told many stories as a way of mourning and sharing, the closing piece of

narration in the novel, to be undertaken by the deceased Toko, is thus introduced: "But the

telling was not complete. As the people slept [in the meeting house] there was one more story

to be told, a story not of a beginning or an end, but marking only a position on the spiral"

(*Potiki* 180). Positioned as one among the many communal stories rather than transcending

them in terms of truth or meaning, the story told by Toko begins like this:

There is one more story to tell which I tell while the house sleeps. And yet

the house does not sleep as the eyes of green and indigo brighten the edges of

the world. There is one more story to tell but it is a retelling. I tell it to the

people and the house. I tell it from the wall, from where yesterday and

tomorrow are as now.

I know the story of my death. I tell it from the tree. (*Potiki* 181)

Almost everything about the story—from the contents (retelling), to the vantage points

adopted (the wall and the tree), to the intended audience (the people and the

house)—suggests a strong affectionate attachment to *this* world. Speaking from an afterlife,

Toko thus appears not in the least to dismiss the present world for a transcendent one, having

invested irreducibly rich meaning in what he and his community have experienced as their

own environment, life and tradition.

Such attitudes towards the meaning of being is associated with a collective ethos that

has its emphasis on the intersubjective sharing and appreciation of the object world and the

human tradition developed on the basis of it. As the critic Jane McRae puts it, "[t]he influence

of the metaphysical, drawn through the cultural and religious ethos of Maori society, comes

through in Grace's writing as something that is part of rather than imposed on life" (81).The

metaphysical elaboration of this ethos finds its most articulated expression through Roimata,

as she muses about story-telling:

The stories that I had to share were childhood stories of the railway house,

of school and holy pictures, and a boy and a girl on a horse. They were of

games and gardens, and loneliness, and of looking out at trains. They were of

going away and returning, and of death and birth.

I had other stories too, known stories from before life and death and

remembering, from before the time of the woman lonely in the moon. Given

stories. But "before life and death and remembering" is only what I had

always thought. It was a new discovery to find that these stories were, after all,

about our own lives, were not distant, that there was not past or future, that *all*

time is a now-time, centred in the being. It was a new realisation that the

centred being in this now-time simply reaches out in any direction towards the

outer circles, *these outer circles being named "past" and "future" only for*

our convenience. The being reaches out to grasp those adornments that

become part of the self. So the "now" is a giving and a receiving between the

inner and the outer reaches, but the enormous difficulty is to achieve

refinement in reciprocity, because the wheel, the spiral, is balanced so

exquisitely. These are the things I came to realise as we told and retold *our*

own-centre stories. (*Potiki* 39; my emphasis)

In this densely metaphysical passage, according to the critic John Charles Hawley, "[t]he

concepts of knowledge, learning, authority and meaning are redefined communally and

pragmatically in accord with something that, while never clearly explicated, is essentially

Maori" (63). It should be added, though, that as far as the concepts of knowledge and

authority are concerned, Roimata here may not have offered a definitive epistemological

model for the inner workings of the object world or the functioning of diverse social power

relations that are removed from immediate and convenient subjective experience. However,

she has clearly articulated a distinct metaphysics with the experiencing selves at its

centre—selves that are expected to reach out to past and future, near and far, primarily for

self-growth and self-expression.

Doubtless, such a metaphysics appears to be profoundly anthropocentric and

self-centred at first sight. Yet upon closer examination, the selves are never supposed to be

complete without embracing a human community and the object world. The individual

subjects not only relate stories about their own experience of place, time and human

interaction, but also relate *to* "stories from before life and death and remembering" as stories

"about our own lives"—thus enriching the realm of personal transitional phenomena with an

unmistakably suprapersonal dimension of communal tradition. Furthermore, while the

individual subjects may feel entitled to consider the past and the future as "part of the self,"

this entitlement nevertheless also compels them to "achieve refinement in reciprocity."

Winnicott, speaking of transitional phenomena, notes that people in a group "are pleased to

find a degree of overlapping, that is to say common experience between members of a group

in art or religion or philosophy" (Winnicott *Playing* 18). What is shown in the metaphysics

articulated by Roimata, in the light of Winnicott's observation, is that this pleasure in the

subjective recognition of common experience also gives impetus for individual subjects to

take care of and contribute to an intersubjective common ground—be it the object world or a

communal tradition.

If, in the intimately interrelated lifeworld of *Potiki*, the life story of the carver

exemplifies a rich subject-object engagement, and if the life stories of Mary and Toko

highlight a decisive attribution and strong attachment of meaning to a communally shared

human and natural environment, then Roimata's reflection on story-telling can be said to lift

the relationship between individual experience, self-growth and the cultural community onto

a philosophical paradigm that is both experientially grounded and spiritually appealing. This

point can be better appreciated in light of what the leading contemporary neuroscientist

Antonio Damasio puts forth in an exposition of the interplay between experience,

self-consciousness and memories:

> Autobiographical selves are autobiographies made conscious. They draw on
>
> the entire compass of our memorized history, recent as well as remote. The
>
> social experiences of which we were a part, or wish we were, are included in
>
> that history, and so are memories that describe the most refined among our
>
> emotional experiences, namely, those that might qualify as spiritual. (210)

The retention of spiritual experiences in memories is obviously a different matter from the

origin of spirituality. But the fact that different sorts of experiences blend in the compass of

our memorised history suggests a catalytic role played by cultural heritage and communal

tradition in the formation of refined subjective states of mind—after all, are not transcendent

claims made in religious scriptures and preached in religious institutions tremendously influential in shaping the spirituality of religious followers? What is perhaps more relevant to our discussion here, however, is that communal memories, such as shared stories, provide an impetus to self-transcendence, in the sense that the experiencing selves tend to go beyond egoistic concerns after becoming conscious of the suprapersonal components in what they hold dear. Seen in this light, Toko's death in the communal meeting house as a result of the land developers' scheming to grab the land may serve as an allegory not so much of redemption but, perhaps more humanistically, as of defending an emotionally invested object world and human community.

4. Conclusions

The Christian theologian Daniel M. Bell, believing human emancipation to be far from complete under capitalism, follows Gilles Deleuze in pointing out that "the advent of capitalism is the crossing of a new threshold of deterritorialization," characterised by a tendency to generate "the abstract, generalized flow of labor and capital" (17). Acknowledging the revolutionary potential of deterritorialised human desire as celebrated by Deleuze, Bell nevertheless adds that this may well lead to violence and conquest, as discrete individuals are "intrinsically unrelated" and "can only form relations either by forcing themselves on others . . . or by entering into a contract with the other" (34). Bell goes on to stringently criticise the Deleuzian position as lacking a "teleology," claiming that "[l]acking a

shared end and ontologically incapable of entering into non-possessive relations, liberated

univocal desire does indeed resemble a 'war-machine'" (34). Stressing the importance of

shared purpose in social relations, yet leaving aside the theological interpretations of

capitalism in the present study, I suggest that, at a cultural level, the Māori characters in

Potiki clearly represent an indigenous form of resistance to, or negotiation with, capitalism.

Such a Māori way of life, while having embraced hybrid cultural traditions, including many

popular Christian practices, nevertheless has preserved, noteworthily, its distinctive

orientation in terms of its capacity to resist capitalist deterritorialisation.

As discussed earlier, the Māori community's attachment to, and defence of, their

environment against capitalist exploitation are, to a great extent, grounded in a direct yet

shareable subject-object engagement which turns the surrounding object world into a realm of

transitional objects and phenomena such as artworks and stories about communal history and

life. This is, of course, not to say that the local community is able to remain in a space outside

the capitalist market and its attendant social and cultural logic. Despite the

mantra—"Everything we need is here" (*Potiki* 37; 38; 90)—repeated by a number of major

characters, including Hemi, Roimata and Uncle Stan, they still need—and are perfectly

willing—to sell their produce for cash, in order to purchase manufactured farming tools, send

children to school and university, as well as improve life in various other ways. In other

words, the immobility of place and the mobility of people and money have combined to

create a constant tension in local life, constituting the dialectic of the relationship between

people, their surrounding object world, and cultural continuation and change. This dialectic is

well captured in a comment on the narrative form of *Potiki* by Graham Huggan and Helen

Tiffin:

> *Potiki* . . . is both a meditation on place and an ecology of stories in which the
>
> delicate balance between embedded ('rooted') and interconnected ('routed')
>
> narratives is continually renegotiated by a shifting community of tellers and
>
> listeners that is at once profoundly local and inextricably connected to the
>
> wider world. (70)

If the wider world is to be characterised by massive capitalist deterritorialisation, then it is the

immovable, ancestral place which provides an anchorage to the Māori community, enabling

their culture to remain locally rooted. The central importance of the communally shared place

to its people is summarised well by Roimata: "we could not help but remember that land does

not belong to people, but that people belong to the land" (*Potiki* 110). The subject-object

engagement has been so much nurtured in the communal tradition that it provides a powerful

antidote to a predatory, ecologically irresponsible capitalist spirit as embodied by the

Dollarman.

Perhaps more importantly, such a contrast between the Māori community and the

Dollarman also points to the dynamic nature of the contestation of multiple subjective

relations to the object world. When the Dollarman dismisses Māori cultural manifestations of

a deep attachment to the environment as "superstition . . . and all that . . . hoo-ha" (*Potiki* 94),

he can be said to have indeed touched upon a genuine point: many elements in the Māori

worldview cannot be empirically verified nor universally appreciated. However, his own

worldview, which involves defining progress "in today's terms, money" (*Potiki* 94), is

empirically problematic and deplorably parochial in its own right—his deployment of threats,

vandalism and arson has not only wreaked havoc upon the environment and the Māori

community, thus exposing his notion of progress as ungrounded in observable reality; but it

has also failed to pressure the community into toeing his line of thinking, thus proving the

strength and resilience of an alternative way of life that he has set out to spoil. While the

Dollarman could have prevailed in a situation where the capitalist logic of deterritorialisation

has become the norm, the cultural tradition of the Māori community nevertheless has proven

to be potent enough to resist or at least reconfigure capitalist encroachment to a significant

degree. On this count, it is no exaggeration to say that the metaphysics of what counts as

felicitous life in *this* world, far from having been exhausted or blocked by capitalism, may

still be capable of bringing about both new horizons and new realities. It thus may be no

coincidence that contemporary Māori economy, with its collective bent and its extra caution

against asset sale, is quite distinct from mainstream neoliberalism.

Of all the novels discussed in this thesis, *Potiki* presents the most articulate, coherent

Māori metaphysics through the depiction of a small, kinship-based Māori community.

However, it should be pointed out that while such a metaphysics is as rich as it is vital in the

context of a local community, it has not yet fully taken account of the more serious

interruptions of communal tradition and the attendant changes in life brought about by

Pākehā colonisation and then by postcolonial capitalism. To put it another way, while the

relationship between an indigenous tradition and Western expansion may well reach a

dynamic equilibrium eventually in a postcolonial world, a Māori worldview as articulated in

Potiki has yet to deal with the once colonising, now co-existing, Other in a more

comprehensive manner. In fact, there is evidence that Grace has taken cognisance of "other"

voices in the reception of *Potiki*. As Grace admits in an interview: "Some of the reviewers

felt that in *Potiki* all the Maori characters are the good people, while the Pakeha are the

baddies. One reviewer called *Potiki* a minor 'miracle,' with its characters divided into angels

and devils" (Grace and Hereniko 80). Apparently with the metaphysical richness of *Potiki* has

also come, perhaps regrettably, a simplification of the real-life situation. Grace's artistic

response to such criticisms can be perceived to have taken a most sophisticated shape in her

later novel *Baby No-eyes* (1998), in which past memories and present realities intertwine with

each other to inform matters of racial grievance and reconciliation, as I will discuss in the

next chapter.

Chapter 8

Signifying a Māori Identity Out of the "Missing Pages" of History: the Overcoming of Cultural Trauma in Patricia Grace's *Baby No-Eyes*

While I have discussed, in relation to *Potiki*, Patricia Grace's literary portrayal of Māori cultural integrity and rural harmony, it is only fair to say that in her novelistic oeuvre she also deals with the serious challenges to, and severe disruptions in, Māori life and tradition, especially in her more recent works. As early as in her third novel *Cousins* (1992), published six years after her second novel *Potiki*, Grace engages intensely with the issue of cultural deprivation—particularly in the figure of Mata, who has been displaced from her Māori family and relatives and raised in a Pākehā urban environment. Her *Dogside Story* (2001) explores the issues of cultural commercialism in a Māori rural community and the erosion of Māori tradition due to the draw of city life, whereas *Tu* (2004) and *Ned and Katina* (2009) depict Māori individuals moving around the world due to war efforts. While the mayhem of war never fails to accentuate the transience and insecurity of human existence, Grace's literary exploration of Māori involvement in modern warfare also evokes cultural poignancy: as the critic Janet Wilson says of *Tu* and its eponymous protagonist, "the novel's shifting locations, diverse concepts of migration, home and belonging, and Tu's search for identity demonstrate affinities with diasporic fiction which in a broad sense is about cultural

minorities trying to establish a cultural identity" ("War" 91). Whatever fractures in Māori

tradition are displayed by Grace in her various novels, it is clear that the exploration of the

tensions in maintaining or, indeed, forming a Māori cultural identity in a hybrid society has

increasingly become one of her major literary concerns.

Nowhere in Grace's novelistic oeuvre is such a concern more intensely reflected than

in *Baby No-Eyes* (1998), which traces the historical trajectory of Māori cultural experience,

from one of cultural alienation, to one of cultural assertion, and to one of gradual cultural

renewal. Unlike *Potiki*, *Baby No-Eyes* does not present a virtually semi-autonomous Māori

community with well-preserved cultural legacies, but rather consists of stories that are

centred around generations of one Māori family who, in their interactions with the larger

society, have suffered from cultural grievances as often as they have experienced a deep sense

of cultural disorientation and confusion. Indeed, one critic highlights the changed social

setting for the modern-day Māori characters in *Baby No-Eyes* by observing that the novel

"reformulates the notion of family in a modern urban context, exploring the conditions of

young urban Maori and of solo parents" (Valle 159). While those characters strive to assert a

cultural identity and its expression against the background of a hybrid, Pākehā-majority

society, this struggle is pointedly displayed in the novel to be carried out within the context of

Māori interpersonal understanding and collective action. *Baby No-Eyes*, therefore, constitutes

a superb example of Grace's efforts not only to highlight the symbolic resources of Māori

cultural tradition, but also to illustrate how this tradition, despite ruptures and interruptions,

can be carried forward and lived in contemporary Māori life at both the individual and

collective levels.

Obviously, an investigation of the continuation of cultural tradition will inevitably raise the question of how the past is remembered and related to by individuals as being of significance. Previous criticism of the novel has already identified the conspicuous role occupied by the Māori past in the novel. As one critic notes, central to *Baby No-Eyes* is a literary representation of "the Maori's loss of their culture and language during colonialism, [and] the importance of memory for cultural survival" (Wilson "Literary Nationalism" 130). Another critic highlights the traditional Māori belief system as underlying Māori perception of reality by pointing out that Grace's incorporation of the point of view of Baby, the deceased titular character of the novel, "reflects the Maori belief of the lingering presence of the deceased" (Majid 210). As for the mnemonic devices involved in remembering the past, another critic points to "the communal retelling of their stories" (Calleja 43), and still another critic talks about the deceased Baby being commemorated by her brother through the latter's representing "her story in painting" (Knudsen 204). However, while various critics have drawn attention to the historical, political and religious circumstances surrounding the Māori characters' relationship with the Māori past and their means of relating to it, they have stopped short of providing an in-depth account of the subjective need felt by the individual characters to relate to the Māori past. To be more specific, those critics have not analysed why the individual characters feel it important to relate to the past and conduct their lives on a basis of their remembering or understanding of it, when, in fact, the need to adapt to constant changes in present life is exhibited in the novel to be the norm with those characters.

This is exactly the starting point for my investigation of the novel, which will not only look at the Māori past as still informing a Māori sense of identity, but also, importantly, examine how the individual characters relate to Māori cultural tradition, despite ruptures and interruptions in it, as a means of facilitating self-development in the present human environment.

In what follows, I will first trace the grievances experienced by successive generations in one Māori family, with a view to studying how the colonial policies of cultural assimilation have eventuated in difficulties that Māori individuals experience in articulating their sense of grievance. Next I will look at attempts by various Māori characters to reassert their cultural identity in the public arena, analysing the tensions between their subjective experience of this identity and the extent to which it can be recognised as effective by the larger society. Then, in relation to the child protagonist Tawera's overcoming of cultural trauma that has been interpersonally transmitted to him, I will explore how a performative engagement with cultural resources can enable the individual to attain a positive sense of cultural identity. In concluding this chapter, I will examine how the novel underscores the importance of bodily experience in the individual's development of a sense of self, arguing that the experiencing of cultural legacies in the context of interpersonal relations may, without precluding outside cultural influences, valorise a collective dimension of identity.

1. Cultural Alienation and Inarticulate Grievance

As a novel centring around the experiences of members of an extended Māori family and

their friends, *Baby No-Eyes* brings together a collection of perceived racial grievances, historical and present, that have impacted on them, and depicts a collectively evolved, emerging awareness of the need for redress. However, as I will demonstrate in this section, cultural alienation resulting from colonial policies of cultural assimilation has left some Māori characters caught in the grip of a dilemma: how to alleviate the suffering caused by ongoing racial bias in the absence of a cultural and ideological idiom that enables them to clearly articulate grievance and resistance.

In the novel, Shane is the first to make a deliberate attempt to air grievances by giving words to a vague sense of cultural deprivation. Shane and Te Paania, though newly married, nevertheless soon come to feel an emptiness in their shared life. As Te Paania puts it:

> I'd wander in and out of rooms thinking there must be more. I could see that Shane was doing and thinking the same. We'd go out partying at night, or sometimes wander about town making purchases to give evidence of our life together, but every day there were walls to return to, and little rooms, and silence that neither of us understood. There were certain spaces in Shane that I hadn't fathomed. There were places in me that he couldn't know. (*Baby* 23)

There is clearly a lack of cultural substance and emotional depth in the way they conduct their marital life, contributing to unarticulated dissatisfaction on both sides. While the novel suggests multiple potential reasons for their marital discord, it is significant that Shane's

eventual verbalisation of the frustration they feel takes the form of questioning his own

name—first raised in front of Te Paania when he broaches the topic of naming their

yet-to-be-born baby: "Am I a cowboy?" and "why was I named after a movie?" (*Baby* 25).

Apparently, Shane senses some connection between the malaise in his current life and the

absurdity of being named after a 1950s Hollywood Western movie, which then prompts him

to drive himself and Te Paania to his hometown to demand answers from the old people.

Once there, Shane becomes much more articulate about his sense of cultural deprivation,

accusing his grandmother, Gran Kura (who is also remotely related by blood to Te Paania), of

taking away "[o]ur names, the secrets, our stories" (*Baby* 26). His recriminations intensify:

> Shane for a name. Shane, Shame, Blame, Tame, Lame, Pain. . . . nothing to go
>
> with this [Shane prodding at his chest with his fingers]. How can I be Pakeha
>
> with this colour, this body, this face, this head, this heart? How can I be Maori
>
> without . . . without . . . without what? Don't even know without what.
>
> Without what?" (*Baby* 27)

It seems that, for Shane, the mismatch between his bodily identity as Māori and his borrowed,

culturally alien name has become an emblem of his problematic cultural upbringing, which

has left him with a feeling of inability, inferiority, and exasperating confusion as to where to

locate his Māoriness.

  If Shane is at a loss to understand what being Māori means culturally, then what Gran

Kura is now compelled to reveal by way of explanation is how historical circumstances changed the acculturation paradigm for Māori. Gran Kura's telling of her childhood story starts with a seemingly innocuous introduction of a social institution: "There was a school. Our grandfather gave land for it so that we could have our education. It was what we wanted" (*Baby* 29). However, the colonial condition was such that English was the only language allowed in the school. Riripeti, Kura's younger cousin, started attending school at the age of six, but was punished by the Pākehā teacher on her first day of school for being unable to respond properly in English. As Gran Kura recalls:

> Riripeti could speak some English. Of course. We all could. But Riripeti had not heard words like the words she was now hearing. "Go and stand in the corner until you learn better manners," the teacher said, but Riripeti didn't know what she was being told to do. (*Baby* 31)

If speaking English was cast as a prerequisite for good manners, presentability further entailed having an English name, which was what the teacher required Riripeti's family to do for her. However, "[s]chool turned out no good for Riripeti. How did she know her name was Betty? That second day she was in the bad corner for not answering when her name was called, and for not speaking when she was spoken to" (*Baby* 33). The critic Russell West-Pavlov speaks of the school's practice of addressing Riripeti by a new, English name in terms of the notion of interpellation, theorised by the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser as

the process whereby ideology produces an individual as a social subject by addressing him or her in particular ways. According to West-Pavlov, this type of naming represents "the archetypal form of colonial interpellation in which a European appellation draws the colonized subject into the Western linguistic system" (West-Pavlov 32). Riripeti's failure to be interpellated into this linguistic system gradually takes its toll on her physical health, as she began vomiting each day on her way to school. Despite some relief during a holiday, when it was time to go back to school Riripeti "became sick and couldn't eat. Her throat closed and wouldn't let any food down. Her skin was moist all the time and she couldn't get out of bed" (*Baby* 38). Riripeti died soon after; as Gran Kura sees it, she was "killed by school" and "dead of fear" (*Baby* 38). Gran Kura concludes her telling of Riripeti's tragedy by pleading to Shane: "We keep our stories secret because we love our children, we keep our language hidden because we love our children, we disguise ourselves and hide our hearts because we love our children" (*Baby* 39).

However, if Gran Kura has believed that the erasure of Māori culture is necessarily good for her children growing up in a society where Pākehā power has historically suppressed or denigrated it, then this belief has failed to deliver tangible benefits in the case of Shane, not least because it has not tackled the issue of unequal power relations. Shane's anger about what he perceives to be an incongruity between his name and his bodily identity—insofar as this anger is an emotionally rebellious reaction to the felt social disapproval of his inability to signify himself (especially his bodily attributes) as Pākehā—is exactly an indication of the unequal social power relations between Māori and Pākehā.

Bodily attributes, it should be stressed, certainly cannot determine an individual's cultural affiliations or capacities, as Shane's own experience testifies. Indeed, as the cultural critic Stuart Hall cautions with regard to the significance of skin colour in black popular culture: "The moment the signifier 'black' is torn from its historical, cultural and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we valorize, by inversion, the very ground of the racism we are trying to deconstruct" ("Black" 475). However, it is worth adding here that insofar as human beings are inclined to perceive and act by means of categories, a person bearing particular bodily signifiers may not avoid being subjected to racial biases that exploit historical, cultural and political contingencies.

Insofar as subjective reaction to bias, just like its infliction, is a process of value judgement, Grace shows that an even more significant cause of Shane's sense of inadequacy and inferiority in interpersonal and social life is likely to have been precisely the devaluation of the cultural signification of Māori identity in his upbringing entailed in Gran Kura's decision to push him away from Māori culture towards Pākehā culture. Despite differences in appearance and in ways of life between Māori and Pākehā, Gran Kura has nevertheless seemingly persuaded herself that the replacement of Māori cultural symbolism (Māori names, secrets and stories, etc.) with Pākehā symbolism is good for her children; as a result, Shane, bearing a bodily identity as Māori and emerging inevitably from a Māori background, has in effect been deprived of cultural pride and many cultural expressions of Māori values that could otherwise have been drawn upon as a means of buttressing himself against the effects of bias stemming from perceptions of difference, bodily or cultural. All in all, Shane's

troubled life and impassioned complaint testify to Gran Kura's conceptual failure in not

affirming the difference of Māori culture in the face of Pākehā cultural hegemony.

It is against this backdrop of a forced revisiting of her failed approach to her

children's cultural education that Gran Kura eventually experiences a rude awakening in the

aftermath of the crucial incident involving Baby, which not only most poignantly accentuates

cultural difference between Māori and Pākehā but, perhaps more importantly, fully exposes to

Gran Kura a lack of practical reasonableness and humane concern underlying certain

dimensions of Pākehā-determined social decision-making. The Baby incident, around which

the novel revolves, immediately follows Shane's emotional interrogation of Gran Kura, when

his careless driving away from his hometown leads to a car accident, in which he himself is

killed, Te Paania is seriously injured, and their Baby ends up being a stillborn corpse. As if to

add insult to injury, when Te Paania is still unconscious, doctors in the hospital remove

Baby's eyes in an autopsy without seeking consent from relatives. When, in response to the

adamant requests of the family, the eyes are eventually returned, they are unceremoniously

placed in a container inside a plastic supermarket bag. The actions of the doctors, motivated

as they are by a desire to exploit the eyes for the sake of medical expediency, nevertheless

amount to a flagrant disregard of the fact that the head is considered tapu (sacred) in Māori

culture. Gran Kura expresses a sense of deep hurt and total disillusionment:

> Our baby had been discarded, our baby had been disfigured—but we can all
>
> understand that different people have their different ways, their different

reasons for what they do. What we can't know is how different we are in our

feelings and understandings—until something happens. The eyes were brought

to us in a container inside a plastic supermarket bag. Our baby's eyes had

become food. They were pies, lollies, pickles, plums, peas. It was the

swallowing of chiefly eyes. I couldn't believe it at all. It was a terrible

nightmare. You think that people know, think that they are high-up people,

then you discover that all they are is different. To you they are empty, and you

see it. (*Baby* 64)

While traces of her old habit of deferring to Pākehā authority are still visible in Gran Kura,

she has nevertheless apparently come to the realisation that the trampling of Māori cultural

concerns in the doctors' objectification and mutilation of the dead Baby's body reflects an

attitude that is arrogant in its presumptions, and also insufficiently humane, disregarding as it

does the physical, emotional and spiritual connections that people may have to the dead

bodies of their relatives. After being censured by her granddaughter, Niecy, for her

unquestioning compliance with the hospital formalities regarding the body of Baby, Gran

Kura eventually faces up to the pernicious aspect of her submissiveness: "It took Shane to

open my mouth and it took his sister to move me. It took the two of them to stop me being

this woman of evil patience and goodness, to stop me waiting there doing what I was told"

(*Baby* 65).

The airing of a Māori sense of grievance and protest, however, may simply meet with

nonchalance on the part of some of those who feel assured in having institutional backing.

When Mahaki, a gay Māori lawyer and a friend of Baby's family, tries to pressure a doctor in

the hospital with the prospect of taking the matter to court, the latter plainly states that "[y]ou

wouldn't have a leg to stand on," which Mahaki, as a legal expert, knows to be "true" (*Baby*

120). As Michelle Keown observes of the novel, "the hospital's failure to understand Maori

attitudes to health and the body is represented as a microcosmic sample of a wider cultural

hegemony" ("Maori or English" 423). Indeed, insofar as the law is a social institution deeply

influenced, though not solely determined, by the prevailing cultural values and customs

within a jurisdiction, its application may sometimes result in a flouting of a minority culture,

to the point where minority cultural concerns can be easily dismissed by those who prefer to

see their responsibilities as primarily defined by a bureaucratic judicial system.

The influential postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points to a Māori

perception of the disorienting effects of hegemonic public institutions on life when, speaking

of *Baby No-Eyes* in an interview, she states, perhaps not without exaggeration, that "the

public-private distinction is irrelevant in terms of the socialization of the Maori" (Spivak and

Gallop 188). The Māori characters in the novel, as we have seen, indeed do not believe that

interpersonal transactions in the public arena should be carried out without taking into

account the private feelings of the individuals concerned. However, in view of the obstacles

experienced by these Māori characters in seeking public redress, the issue of public-private

distinction in this novel may be better understood through a detailed examination of the

disparities and contradictions felt by the Māori characters between their subjective

investments and the conditions prevailing in the public arena.

2. Subjective Identity and Public Contestation

As noted earlier, one significant point about the Baby incident is that it shows how Māori

cultural concerns can come into collision with the normative procedures of public institutions,

under the aegis of which doctors carry out medical, scientific and essentially objectifying

investigations on a dead body without needing to accommodate the special emotional and

spiritual investment of Māori individuals. In other words, in cases where an established social

normativity has its historical roots in the Western cultural tradition, an institutionalised

valorisation of dispassionate objectivity in the conduct of investigation and bureaucratic

decision-making procedures nevertheless puts the onus on cultural minority subjects in the

present to justify their historically shaped needs and aspirations in terms that can be

understood and accorded validity within a cross-cultural perspective. Grace shows, as I will

demonstrate, that this has many implications for the Māori struggle to redress grievances in

the public arena, creating tensions between their subjective experience of a cultural identity

and the extent to which this identity can be recognised as effective by the larger society.

In its characteristic crisscrossing of narratives from the points of view of different

Māori individuals, the novel displays how their subjective investments in the world take

shape and overlap with each other by virtue of shared feelings for some objects. This is true

with respect to another major contentious issue in the novel: a Māori ancestral burial ground

called Anapuke. Mahaki first learns about its illegal expropriation by the government and the fruitless attempts by some Māori elders to request its return when he makes tape recordings of his grandfather's stories; and he then invites Te Paania to help get more such testimonies from other Māori elders, including Gran Kura. In the process of transcribing tapes from a meeting between the Town Council and Mahaki's people over the issue of Anapuke, Te Paania feels that "I began to understand what Mahaki meant when he said it was all becoming one—the old stories, the new stories, Anapuke and the eyes" (*Baby* 149).

Evidently, having perceived injustices carried out in the name of faceless public institutions and bureaucracies, Mahaki and Te Paania now find their subjective feelings—possibly a mixture of grievance, frustration, anger and solidarity—crystallise around such objects as a piece of land and a pair of eyes. In psychoanalytic terms, both the hill of Anapuke and the scooped-out, lifeless eyes of Baby can be regarded as subjective objects. Christopher Bollas, a leading contemporary psychoanalytic theorist, defines "subjective objects" as "a vital part of our investment in the world," suggesting that "[t]hrough this particular type of projective identification we psychically signify objects, but as they retain their own intrinsic value they can be said to occupy an intermediate area between the conventional use or understanding and our private one" (*Character* 20). Understandably, Mahaki's and Te Paania's choice of "Anapuke and the eyes" for special subjective investment has been influenced by a mixture of factors ranging from Māori cultural tradition, contingent personal experience, and a sense of grievance associated with Pākehā-directed public institutions.

It is at the level of subjective investment in objects, rather than objects as objectively existing, that the novel exhibits a deep historical and cultural rationale for the hurt and frustration felt by some Māori individuals in dealing with certain established public institutions. If a Māori sense of grievance surrounding the Baby incident seems to have partly arisen from an inability to resort to the law because of loopholes in legislation over autopsy, then the Anapuke dispute further illustrates how even legal justice based on objective evidence can present particular difficulties for Māori. This manifests itself when Mahaki comes to realise the legal complications in building a case for the return of the hill of Anapuke in the absence of sufficient historical written documentation:

> Court? It was a worry. If they built a case on Anapuke being a sacred site *the courts would want their own kind of proof*. There's no way the old man would want anyone nosing round on Anapuke disturbing the dead. He could imagine the old man being asked in court how he knew about the burial caves and him saying Hori told him. All the eyeballs would fix themselves then, boring holes in the walls in an effort not to roll heavenwards.
>
> And he could imagine the old man on his feet telling them, "I am the proof. In here," pointing to his head, perhaps reciting the names, believing that would make them understand. *But even the use of that word "sacred" was off-putting. It was a word people pretended about when they were trying to be sensitive and knowledgeable.* (*Baby* 155; my emphasis)

The word "sacred" holds the key to understanding the cultural tension here. For those Māori

individuals who accept the sacredness of burial grounds, they should certainly be off limits to

human tampering. Yet, occupying a dual status as spiritual belief and material objects, those

burial grounds are not only susceptible to denial and ridicule by the unsympathetic, but can

also be physically desacralized and legally (or illegally) alienated from the individuals

believing in them. In view of such complications, it is no wonder that some particular

spiritual needs arising from the indigenous Māori tradition cannot be easily accommodated

by postcolonial public institutions professing respect for religious freedom: while the colonial

process has forcibly separated Māori subjects from control of some sacred objects, the

ensuing establishment of a bureaucratic judicial system for public management has

nevertheless hindered their subjective investment in those objects from becoming an effective

bargaining chip with public institutions that are answerable to a vast multitude of people with

different cultural attitudes and self-interests.

Given the inherent tension between "equality before the law" as a normative principle

of modern society and the practical valorisation of the prevalent values of the majority

cultural group in democratic legislation, challenges to the law made from the viewpoint of

minority cultural concerns may be perceived as flying in the face of social norms by those

who do not concern themselves with the jarring discord between the law and those minority

cultural concerns. This is the case in *Baby No-Eyes* when a large number of Māori take up

camping in a public place called Te Ra Park, in protest against the Town Council's refusal to

return Anapuke. As is observed from Mahaki's point of view:

> It wasn't all hatred. Sometimes hurt, bewilderment, people taking their action as a personal affront. Hadn't they grown up together? Hadn't they been in the same rugby team? Hadn't they always been good friends? As though this made them enemies now, opponents.
>
> They'd tried to get it across that *it was laws, not people, that were the enemy, that it was justice at stake*; or that it was fear inside people that was the enemy, not the people themselves. Getting land entitlement to unwanted land was all they were asking for, and that couldn't hurt anyone. (*Baby* 214; my emphasis)

The string of questions raised by fellow Pākehā townspeople imply an exclusive valorisation of common experience accompanied by a disregard of cultural difference that coexist in equal measure, reflecting the comfortable acceptance by Pākehā of the status quo regarding the situation with which some Māori are finding fault. The crucial issue here is that, given the overarching status of the law in social life, any assertion of cultural difference that requires a contravention of the law cannot be achieved without other sectors of the population being affected. Thus, legally unsupported claims to even apparently "unwanted" land can generate fear in many who are not even concerned with that land *per se*, prompting them to take counter-action.

Insofar as the law is a social discourse, the enunciation of any Māori desire to change

it as a result of cultural imperatives is bound to be submerged within—though not nullified

by—the enunciation determined by the majority racial group. In her brilliantly argued article

on the cultural politics in *Baby No-Eyes*, Chris Prentice points out:

> In response to theft or suppression of Maori cultural objects and practices has
>
> emerged a counter-discourse of property and rights. This is a response in the
>
> terms of the original (colonial) threat or aggression, and it inserts its subjects
>
> into the logic and social order that produced it. Expressions of difference are
>
> reduced to differences within, or modulations of, that order. In other words, no
>
> fundamental challenge can be posed to it in terms of identity or property, both
>
> of which sustain it. ("Visibility" 343-44)

Indeed, as happens in the novel, the final solution to the Anapuke dispute is still reached

within the existing legal framework, with the help of independent anthropological research,

media coverage and, crucially, the emergence of written historical evidence (*Baby* 265-66). In

other words, although the Māori characters have won the case, this is barely on the strength

of their subjective understanding of what their identity should entitle them to.

However, even though Māori subjects may not be able fundamentally to change the social

order by asserting their different cultural identity, the fact of this assertion nevertheless

remains subjectively important for the subjects themselves. One significant reason has to do

with the nature of the subject-object relationship as far as subjective identity is concerned, a dimension which is simply not included in investigations of the question that are focused on the discursive formation of identity. Grace shows this in the case of the Anapuke dispute, in the way in which the Māori characters emotionally identify themselves with the hill, investing in it their feelings for the sacred—feelings that are arguably innate in the human species and expressed variously via different discursive influences. In other words, the belief that the hill of Anapuke should remain intact there has become important in its own right for some Māori individuals, as it helps them to maintain a sense of subjective identity in the cosmic order of things, despite the fact that this identification with what is held to be a sacred hill must also have been influenced by the historical and social landscape.

The novel reveals that another reason for the importance of the subjective assertion of cultural identity is the performative nature of the asserting act, which can serve as a process of re-experiencing, if only momentarily, what has been hurt or lost in actualised history. As Mahaki in the novel observes of Māori individuals getting together for the cause of winning back Anapuke: "[P]eople were happy, enjoyed being together. Talk was what they wanted, which he noticed always came down to two things—whakapapa and whenua. Who, related to whom, from where. This, in turn, became, who am I and where do I fit in" (*Baby* 213). While the novel shows that policies of cultural assimilation, ongoing urbanisation and the market economy have combined to weaken traditional Māori interpersonal ties, those human connections are nevertheless still longed for, and are now being emphatically re-enacted by many Māori characters in the re-experiencing of a sense of collective identity. This thus leads

us to a more detailed consideration of how the cultural wounds and losses in Māori collective life inflect the Māori individual's subjective experience and expression of identity.

3. Cultural Trauma and the Expression of Intimate Cultural Experience

As noted before, Grace shows in the novel that the bureaucratic judicial system in the public domain may sometimes frustrate Māori efforts to seek the redress of grievances according to their cultural understanding, and that some of the injustices perceived by Māori individuals have not been given recognition in the prevalent social discourse. A psychic consequence of this may be cultural trauma. According to the Yale University sociologist Ron Eyerman, "cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (54). Eyerman goes on to elaborate on the function of some catalytic event in cultural trauma: "While some 'event' may be necessary to establish as the significant 'cause,' its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as meditation and representation" (54). From such a perspective, it can be said that while various policies of colonisation and cultural assimilation may be perceived by many Māori as having disrupted their social fabric and still threatening their identity, in the novel it is the Baby incident that has apparently become the focal point in the contemplation and articulation of cultural trauma by the Māori family and their circle of friends. In this sense, the titular character of the novel, the haunting Baby—whose eyes have been extracted in an autopsy by Pākehā doctors with

legal sanction and who has haunted the family ever since—may be viewed as a paradigmatic embodiment of her family's traumatic memories of the violations of their cultural feelings that they have suffered without redress in social life. Such memories are shown in the novel to have been transmitted intersubjectively and across generations, producing important implications for the psychic maturation and self-growth of Māori subjects. In what follows, focusing on the child protagonist Tawera's reception of, and reaction to, interpersonally transmitted trauma in the form of the ghostly Baby, I will examine how collective memories bear upon the individual subject, involving him in a search for means of expressing experiences and modes of life that have been marginalised or excluded from social representation.

While the presence of Baby felt by Tawera in his life may be interpreted in either psychological or supernatural terms, it is clear that his understanding of his half-sister is very much the result of family influence. A child born of a relationship Te Paania once had after her husband's and Baby's deaths, Tawera became interested in asking questions about Baby. That Baby is indelibly inscribed in the memories of the family is confirmed by Te Paania's reply to Tawera that an exhaustive telling about Baby will require input from "Gran Kura and me, and all of us in our different ways. You too, you'll have to do your part. It could take years" (*Baby* 19). In particular, such memories are so psychically painful for Te Paania that she cannot keep them from interfering with her relationship to her son, as is evidenced by Tawera's protest: "You didn't even have a very good reason for making me. It was only so I could babysit my big sister, keep *her* off your back, out of your hair, out of your eyes, your

head, your ears" (*Baby* 141). As one critic points out, this complaint by Tawera "targets his mother's delegation of the trauma of her dead child's haunting presence to her son. Consistent with this psychological dynamic, Tawera literally enacts the transgenerational trauma in a performative discourse of externalized psychic life" (Schwab 140).

Due to Grace's demonstration in the novel of the interpersonal nature of the transmission of trauma, one can infer that the formation of Tawera as an individual subject must have been deeply influenced from the start by the tensions between his immediate human environment and the larger society, with the felt presence of the haunting Baby providing the psychic platform for him to make sense of those tensions intuitively. The critic Janet Wilson observes that "because Baby lacks a name which might fix her into an identity she becomes a mobile spirit-figure, attaching herself to different characters" ("Suffering " 276). Since a lack of identity means unsettled status in the symbolic order, this observation about the haunting of Baby can also be taken—from a reversed point of view that is concerned with the psychology of the living characters—as rightly pointing to the failure on the part of the Māori characters to define satisfactorily the social status of Baby's fate. Indeed, the dominant social discourse, including the law, has not provided adequate terms in which the family and family friends can fully articulate their sense of injustice, anger and grievance about the cultural violation as reflected in the medical mutilation of Baby. In this light, Tawera's subjective performance, far from being a mere process of engaging with various available social discourses, is also decidedly a concerned response to the psychic needs conveyed, both verbally and otherwise, by his fellow humans in intimate interpersonal

relations with him. This is not to deny the discursive dimension in the shaping of the psychic needs of those around him, but to highlight the importance of the interpersonal context in his constitution as a subject.

Significantly, while the persistence of trauma in the adult Māori characters reflects their as yet unresolved frustration with the dominant social discourse, Tawera's response to the transmitted trauma indicates a subjective agency in generating highly original discourse against the grain of discursive conventions. Immersed in his psychic world in which he feels he is communicating with his eyeless sister, he is contemplating

how it was all up to me to think of words and sentences for colours. It was a good feeling to know that *these words and sentences could be any that I wanted them to be. Here I was, in charge of all the colours of the world*. "Grey," I said, "is like putting your tongue out and licking a window, starting from the bottom and going right up to the top."

"That's good," she said. "What about green?"

"Green is like sticking a pin in your arm." (*Baby* 135; my emphasis)

Urged by a desire to compensate his sister for her loss of eyesight, Tawera is experimenting with giving words to visual phenomena in tactile terms. This not only proves the plasticity of the relationship between discursive representation and experiential reality, but also points to bodily experience as an important element in meaning generation. Just as the critic Michelle

Keown observes, in developing "alternative significatory codes," Tawera has become

accustomed to "locating meaning not just in words or abstract concepts but in corporeal

sensations" (*Representations* 161). Indeed, Tawera's discursive innovation indicates that the

human body, as the material basis of subjective activities, is the site where corporeal

sensations can valorise or even invent certain significations in the face of a mass of

free-floating words and abstract concepts.

Since subjective responses to outside influences are mediated through the corporeal,

the investment of a minority group in the culturally specific aspects of their way of life can in

fact be buttressed against the larger society through cultural enactment that involves the body.

Indeed, not only does Grace display Tawera's bodily reaction to the transmission of the

trauma suffered by his adult family members as a result of the violation of their cultural

feelings, but she also explores how a sense of cultural competence and pride is instilled in

him through bodily experience. This is particularly evidenced in his enactment in a school

play of a Māori mythical figure, Tawhaki, who is seeking the revenge of the murder of his

father and the delivery of his mother from enslavement. In order to accommodate Baby's

demand to be also Tawhaki, Tawera proposes that they can play "Tawhaki Visible" and

"Tawhaki Invisible" respectively on the stage (*Baby* 193). After the successful performance,

Tawera states, "[t]he next day when I was doing my picture of Tawhaki Seen and Unseen, I

painted him as brown as rocks, as dark as rivers. . . . He looked good, I think. As I worked I

described everything. We [Tawera and Baby] were both happy with that" (*Baby* 197-98).

Thus as far as Tawera is concerned, the ghostly presence of Baby, though not made

objectively visible, is nevertheless incorporated in his own cultural enactment and alluded to in his own artistic creation.

As noted before, the awareness of the haunting presence of Baby experienced by members of the family can be interpreted as a psychic consequence of Māori cultural feelings being violated without redress. In this sense, Tawera's participation in Māori cultural enactment and artistic creation, which is performed in the ghostly presence of Baby, can be said to mark his intuitive steps towards actively facing up to, and transforming, the negative legacy of this violation. By experiencing a process of performance in a cultural setting that is emphatically Māori, he is able to attain a sense of the validity of his Māoriness. As the sociologist Paul Connerton, in his landmark work on collective memory, *How Societies Remember*, points out, "if there is such a thing as social memory, we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies. Commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative (only) in so far as they are performative. . . . Performative memory is bodily" (339). Insofar as both Tawera's enactment and artistic representation of the Māori mythical figure Tawhaki are bodily performances that commemorate the Māori mythical past, he can be said to be forming a sense of cultural identity that is undergirded by Māori collective memories.

Importantly, the formation of a subjective sense of identity on the part of Tawera is also shown in the novel to be characterised by struggle and change, suggesting an ever-expanding, conflicted engagement of the growing individual with the cultural and social environment. As Tawera enters adolescence, he is experiencing a subtle, yet acute, change of attitude towards the world surrounding him: "I'm not saying I want to be looked after all the

time, or that I want to listen all the time to warnings about life. But I know I'm fortunate to have something, someone, unchanged, even though I expect I myself will change. Something's rumbling in me. Don't know what I'll be like once I take in all of my tail" (*Baby* 284). Clearly, Tawera is readjusting his self-perception in relation to his expected entrance onto the larger social stage. Significantly, then, it is during this juncture in his life that he feels that the ghostly Baby, appearing determined to go away with the dying Gran Kura, is demanding him to say an affirmative "Yesss" to their departure (*Baby* 287). As Tawera grumpily puts it, "I was the one who'd been made to free them—of me of them, her of me of her. Geez" (*Baby* 288). But he gradually comes to convince himself that "[i]t wouldn't have been fair to have let her go without me saying it, without me allowing her" (*Baby* 289).

Tawera's anguished decision to let go of the ghostly Baby on the eve of his moving beyond his family circle, which is motivated by his desire to attain a sense of social identity, can be better understood in the light of the notion of abjection, as theorised by Judith Butler in her *Bodies that Matter*. Locating a subjective agency in the individual's assuming a sexual identity through performative engagement with social norms that he or she encounters, Butler nevertheless highlights the paradox of "the abject," defined as "those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (XIII). Butler goes on to say:

The forming of a subject requires an identification with the normative

phantasm of "sex," and this identification takes place through a repudiation

which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject

cannot emerge. . . . And yet, this disavowed abjection will threaten to expose

the self-grounding presumptions of the sexed subject, grounded as that subject

is in a repudiation whose consequences it cannot fully control. The task will be

to consider this threat and disruption not as a permanent contestation of social

norms condemned to the pathos of perpetual failure, but rather as a critical

resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy

and intelligibility. (XIII)

It should be noted that Tawera's emergence as a social subject involves more than his

sexuality, although, in a sign of his being not yet fully "sexed," he indeed seems to have been

deeply puzzled by the phenomenon of romantic love (*Baby* 282). Nevertheless, Butler's

exposition of abjection in the emergence of a sexed subject—on account of its theoretical

concern with the process of the individual's repudiating of elements in his or her life that

cannot be identified with any recognisable social norms—can be extended also to apply to the

repudiation of transmitted cultural trauma in Tawera's relinquishing the eyeless, nameless,

ghostly Baby. While Tawera's sense of the ghostly company of Baby has very much been a

product of the interpersonal, often subconscious, transmission of trauma arising from the

cultural violations suffered by his Māori family and family circle, his obsession with Baby

has grown to appear so solipsistic as to baffle even his adult family members, with his mother

regarding his frequent references to Baby's presence as indicating "something different about the way he was using words" (*Baby* 267). By releasing himself from this psychic attachment to Baby, Tawera has therefore freed himself, if only temporarily, from an obsession with the socially unrecognised that is implicit in the cultural trauma, thus preparing himself for socialisation.

Yet, just as Butler's theorisation would have it, the "disavowed abjection"—in the form of Tawera's relinquishing of the socially unrecognised and disrespected aspects of Māori culture—has produced consequences that keep disturbing him, compelling him to challenge the prevalent symbolic codes and themes of the larger society that he has entered. Indeed, Tawera finds in himself a strong urge to make "Sister Seen" through his art (*Baby* 294)—precisely when he has begun to engage with the symbolic conventions of society more extensively by "attend[ing] university where I study between the lines of history, seeking out its missing pages, believing this may be one of the journeys that will help me be an artist" (*Baby* 291). Clearly, Tawera intuits a connection between what he wants to express through his art and what is missing from narratives of history. In view of the sense of unredressed cultural grievance transmitted to him by his Māori circle, Tawera's deliberate search for artistic inspiration in the telling gaps of historical representation suggests a desire in him to give form to his subjective experience of the consequences of the historical eclipse of aspects of Māori life and culture due to colonialism and the ensuing Pākehā cultural hegemony.

However, as Tawera comes to discover, what he is trying to give an artistic form to consists of more than what has been suppressed or glossed over in the linguistic

representation of the historical past. One major problem Tawera is faced with as he aspires to be an artist is that he now finds himself unable to finish a piece of art: "each of these sketches, drawings, paintings, holds a missing piece, a section of paper that is blank. Not one is complete" (*Baby* 292). This situation is in stark contrast with "those child times," when "there were no spaces, nothing clean, no voids or chasms, no white paper remaining once I put down my brushes and pens. Every work was complete" (*Baby* 291). Furthermore, even a critical engagement with history is insufficient to provide him with a sense of what he is searching for: "I sit down to read for a while—the unsaid matters of history—but don't find what I'm looking for" (*Baby* 292). It is thus clear that he has failed to recapture what he has abjected in the process of his emergence as a social subject through inferring the suppressions and omissions in historiography—in other words, his personal sense of loss in adapting to the larger society cannot simply be mapped onto the suppressions and omissions in the discursive descriptions of social and cultural evolutions. The psychiatrist and psychoanalytic theorist Daniel N. Stern illustrates the gap between experience and language well:

> It [language] drives a wedge between two simultaneous forms of interpersonal experience: as it is lived and as it is verbally represented. Experience in the domains of emergent, core- and intersubjective relatedness, which continue irrespective of language, can be embraced only very partially in the domain of verbal relatedness. And to the extent that events in the domain of verbal relatedness are held to be what has really happened, experiences in these other

domains suffer an alienation. (They can become the nether domains of experience.) Language, then, causes a split in the experience of the self. It also moves relatedness onto the impersonal, abstract level intrinsic to language and away from the personal, immediate level intrinsic to the other domains of relatedness. (162-63)[22]

Obviously, insofar as Tawera's cultural trauma has been very much a result of his response to the affective states of his family and has even inflected his sensory exploration of the world and life (evidenced particularly by his efforts to compensate for Baby's loss of eyes), the abjection that has occurred in his socialisation cannot be fully reflected in historiography—a discourse that is at a distance from contemporary life and is even more removed from the particularities in his own interpersonal relations, after all.

Significantly, as the novel shows, it is by turning to the socially unrecognisable experiences he once had, but has since distanced himself from, that Tawera eventually

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[22] I systematically introduced, in Chapter 1, Stern's paradigm of self-development, in which he theorises about the development of what he calls "the four senses of self" in human individuals (Stern 37). It is worth reiterating here that according to Stern, even after our acquisition of language, we may often just use human discourse as a medium with which we continue developing our non-verbal senses of self, which nevertheless cannot be fully captured by language.

becomes more enabled to create artistically. Inspired by his encounter with a fortuitous phrase,

"*Try Opposite*," Tawera sets out to enlarge the empty space on the canvas by erasing what he

has not convinced himself of in his own painting, "until one night everything's gone, fallen

from the edges of the paper" (*Baby* 293). If this is a sign of his attempting to empty out all the

artistic conventions and expectations that he has not yet been able to absorb, then what

surfaces is what he feels is personally important: "My self sits inside me trembling as I

prepare a new canvas. . . . I place myself there in front of it—taking my breathing time"

(*Baby* 293). He is thus able to recreate what he has abjected, coming up with an artistic

representation of Baby: "In the scraped, clean place between her forehead and the high bones

of her face I'll make the gashes, show the invasion. The wailing from her stretched mouth I'll

paint in the form of the spirit figures—taniwha and marakihau—and her arms will reach out

to something as untouchable as a receding dream" (*Baby* 294).

It is crucially important to note that Tawera's artistic breakthrough is achieved on the

strength of a selective mobilisation of existing symbolic resources which have been imbedded

in his personal experience. Indeed, family tales of the extraction of Baby's eyes underlie

Tawera's depiction of her damaged face, and the inclusion in the painting of such spirit

figures as taniwha and marakihau derives from Māori mythology. Not only have these

symbolic resources been instrumental in shaping Tawera's sense of self in the network of

family and Māori community, but they have also formed the backdrop to the cultural trauma

that has been interpersonally transmitted to him. By revisiting this cultural trauma in a

creative process of mobilising these specific symbolic resources, Tawera is in effect

reviewing his sense of self in relation to the interpersonal network and reaffirming his own identity as Māori. It thus can be said that while he may have yet to digest his many experiences in the larger society before being able to translate them into artistic expression, his reengagement with familial and cultural memories has nevertheless provided him with a sense of agency and a context from which to create.

4. Conclusions

For a novel which features a number of Māori characters who share their experiences of cultural legacies, personal memories and participation in contemporary social events, it is only apt that the youngest of them, Tawera, should become able to relate to Māori cultural resources in a personally involved way, bringing out as he does his perception of cultural trauma in a distinctively *Māori* painting of his deformed sister, victimised by cultural disrespect. In defining an identity for Tawera, one critic observes that his "mission as an artist, like the carver in *Potiki*, is to link present and past, real and supernatural, history and myth; the representational function of Maori art and the social role of the Maori artist pose not only political claims but also convey an indigenous perspective" (Valle 163). Yet, as I noted before, history as contained in books may fail to inspire Tawera nearly so much as the interpersonally transmitted cultural understandings, which he can passionately incorporate into his cultural practice. It may thus be said that in Grace's conception an individual Māori identity is not so much about what has been recorded about the past, as about life lived in relation to the

collective as well as individual remembrances and enactments of Māori cultural legacies.

The experiential aspect of identity formation is emphatically highlighted at the

conclusion of the novel, where Tawera states after his successful depiction of Baby:

For now I'll work on this, my first incantation of visibility. It'll be

inadequate because there's so much more for me to know, so many signs to

follow, so many codes and omens to decipher, so much more absorbing of the

tail, as I go, bumping along, or lap lapping, or karm karm or on a roll, hi-aa

hei-aa.

Hi-aa hei-aa, plenty of that.

Feet at the beginning of a road. (*Baby* 294)

Evidently, Tawera does not in any way reject the abundant symbolic resources that the world

has to offer; yet, for him, the taking in of those resources coincides with his self-development

which, as the "absorbing the tail on the road" metaphor suggests, is an ongoing process of

interaction between the self and the environment.

Importantly, on account of its illustration of the bodily engagement of the individual

with the environment, this metaphor also points to an experiential basis for the collective

dimension of identity formation. As the philosopher Edward S. Casey points out in his

Remembering: A Phenomenological Study, "[t]o be embodied is *ipso facto* to assume a

particular perspective and position; it is to have not just a point of view but a *place* in which

we are situated. It is to occupy a portion of space from out of which we both undergo given experiences and remember them" (182). Since bodily experiences always take place in a concrete context instead of being confined to some abstract conceptual domain, the remembrance and mental patterning of them will be inextricably intertwined with specific fellow human beings and particular social and natural settings. It is, therefore, entirely conceivable that a grown-up Tawera, far from being inundated and washed adrift by the vast diversity of cultural phenomena in the larger society, will retain a Māori cultural outlook that has been shaped in his intimate interaction with his Māori interpersonal network and ancestral land, and will continue participating in the activities of an evolving Māori community.

In comparison with *Potiki*, which I discussed in the last chapter, *Baby No-Eyes* manifests a much more thorough engagement with the cultural disruption and alienation suffered by generations of Māori individuals. However, through her exploration of Māori emotional attachment to ancestral land, enactment of the cultural past, as well as interpersonal network of family and community, Grace has also provided a potent illustration of the enterprise of Māori cultural renewal. This enterprise, based as it is in the experiencing of interpersonal relations and cultural legacies, valorises a collective dimension without precluding outside cultural influences. For Grace, therefore, the past always feeds into the present in terms of the interaction and hybridisation of different cultural traditions and developments—yet a Māori cultural identity is underlain by collective cultural life which, in turn, has its roots in the human need for interpersonal caring and collective belonging.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have set out to study how four major Māori novelists—Keri Hulme, Alan Duff, Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace—through their depiction of Māori characters have explored the significance of the Māori past in the formation of a subjective sense of identity capable of supporting an active and productive engagement with the realities that constitute the present conditions of a postcolonial, Pākehā-majority society. While my study readily acknowledges the dimensions of social construction and cultural politics imbedded in the question of the Māori past, that past has nevertheless been approached in the thesis most importantly in terms of the subjective reception or reconstruction of it on the part of Māori individuals. Accordingly, while giving a great deal of weight to the Māori past represented in the novels in terms of symbolic resources available in the social domain, I have consistently highlighted throughout the thesis how the individual characters depicted in these novels engage with those symbolic resources by deploying, challenging or developing them in ways that reflect a negotiation by unique selves with the environment. As the psychologist Alex Gillespie points out, "Symbolic resources provide a conceptual bridge between the collective and the individual" (168).[23] In the light of this assumption, it can be said that in the context of

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[23] Gillespie discusses symbolic resources here on the basis of the developmental psychologist Tania Zittoun's work on this issue. I cited Zittoun's definition of symbolic resources in

Māoridom in New Zealand, the symbolic resources deriving from the Māori past constitute a reference frame in which Māori individuals may engage with other Māori or non-Māori individuals in ways more or less meaningful to those involved. An exploration of the formation of a subjective sense of identity thus conceived, therefore, draws special attention to the agency exercised by the individual subject in responding to circumstances so as to attain a more desirable sense of self and bring about external change in the alterable, immediate environment.

What emerges from the comparison developed in the course of this thesis is that, while all four novelists acknowledge the importance and power of its influence, they also display quite distinct conceptions of the legacies of the Māori past, as it is reflected in their portrayal of Māori characters. The process of assuming an individual identity, as depicted by those novelists, is variously informed by an awareness of the Māori past as being filled with indigenous traditions as well as colonial and postcolonial recollections. We can see that the precolonial Māori past is posited by some of Hulme's characters as a repository for what is perceived as missing in the contemporary circumstances that promote dysfunction in the form of alienation and a debilitating solipsism. We also see that Duff describes his characters as indulging in anachronistic imagining about Māori history and cultural tradition, in order to cope with their narcissistic wounds and to assist self-fashioning. Similarly, in Ihimaera's representation of characters, the Māori past clearly provides them with a background for an epic sense of struggle involving the tackling of both interracial and intraracial pressures.

Chapter 5 and I have followed her definition in the present study.

Finally, Māori myths and cultural traditions are shown by Grace to be performatively

incorporated into lived lives. This diversity in terms of the literary demonstration of Māori

characters' relationship with the Māori past not only points to that past as playing an

important role in the discursive interpellation of Māori individuals as racial, cultural and

social subjects but, crucially, also suggests the existence of a degree of contingency in those

individuals' adoption, adaption or rejection of symbolic resources deriving from the Māori

past. According to the object relations theorist Christopher Bollas, we human individuals,

whose sense of self is to a great degree grounded in the internalisation of early-life, even

preverbal experience of our self-state being transformed by the mother figure's handling of

the environment, will keep trying to bring about a transformation of the self by "seek[ing]

transformational objects to reach relative symmetry with the environment," or a state in

which the need of the self can be relatively well met in the environment ("Aesthetic" 44). As I

have shown, symbolic resources deriving from the Māori past can be said to serve as

transformational objects in the varying attempts by different Māori individual subjects to

bring about a more satisfactory state between their respective, unique selves and their

environments. This diversity in terms of the subject's personal relation to the Māori past is

not only evident in Māori literary characters but, where biographical evidence is clear, has

been shown to be a reflection of the respective personhoods of the authors themselves.

Regardless of the specific status of the Māori past as indicated in the four writers' novels, it

will have become clear from my discussion that the process of subject formation is

inseparable from a need felt by the individual to engage selectively with the symbolic

legacies of the past.

This subjective selectivity in dealing with the Māori past has been examined in this thesis, as a rule, in the context of interpersonal relations. Thus, the vision laid out by Hulme in *The Bone People*, of the healing of individual woes by returning to Māori communal traditions, has been deemed as more wishful than concrete because the novel has had to rely on a breakaway from its dominant stylistic mode of psychological realism in order to display the healing powers generated by a mythical revelation, rather than demonstrating how the healing effects can be maintained and reinforced in Māori communal life. In contrast, the denigration or downplaying of Māori cultural legacies in favour of individualistic self-fashioning exhibited by the central characters of Duff's *Both Sides of the Moon* and *Dreamboat Dad* has been shown in my analysis to result from the projection of their personal frustrations deriving from their experience of familial life onto Māori tradition, and therefore very much self-servingly biased. (Indeed, the protagonist of *Dreamboat Dad* comes to recognise this bias in the end.) Similarly, while the epic retellings of the past by Ihimaera in his novels can provide rationales for the struggle for racial justice and personal dignity in the present, his most vehemently vocal characters nevertheless often display deep troubles in maintaining egalitarian or mutually respectful relationships with those around them, thus undermining the appeal of their conceptions of what good Māori communal life should be. It is in Grace that I have found the most convincing case of the past being harmoniously integrated into a living present, as many of her characters are depicted as engaging collectively in the renewal of their tradition and sharing in the appreciation of their evolving

culture—to the extent that a distinct Māori cultural universe, with its own metaphysics of life, death, reality and knowledge, is often made tangible in the context of Māori life. While Grace shares with the three other novelists a concern with the exploration of Māori life in a changing, hybrid social landscape, she has been the most insistent and successful in exploring ways of collective experiencing, with her Māori characters' cultural experience often being depicted as being recognised and validated in an interpersonal context that evolves together with individual lives.

If one overriding theme has emerged from this investigation of Māori novels, it is that the dialectic of individual and community hinges upon dealing with the past *in* the present. While the four Māori novelists that have been discussed differ in their understanding of the influence of the past on present life, they nevertheless converge in demonstrating that individual development, insofar as it is affected by the force field created by both the attractions and tensions of community, cannot avoid engaging with legacies from the past; and that, indeed, the very sense of community exists and evolves against the background of the past, which provides community members with collectively intelligible symbolic resources and underlies their interpersonal relations by supplying precedents and customs that guide their interaction.

In previous criticism of the Māori novel, the Māori past has often been looked at, rightly, as underlying the racial and cultural identity of contemporary Māori characters, whose outlooks, struggles and aspirations reflect traditions and historical memories that can be perceived as distinctively Māori. There has, however, generally been an insufficiency of

critical attention paid to the obviously relevant question of why and in what ways such an identity, shaped by the collective dimensions of the past, is still experienced as of subjective importance by Māori characters in an era characterised by individual choice, increasing cultural exchange and globalisation. What my study adds to the existing body of scholarship on the Māori novel is that it gives an in-depth analysis of how, selectively engaging with Māori tradition and change, individual Māori characters develop a sense of subjective agency in relation to their experience of sharing a collective identity with other Māori in a postcolonial society. As I have shown in the thesis, the desire to engage with the Māori past partly has to do with the tackling of cultural trauma resulting from colonisation; yet such a desire also points beyond that to the human need to individuate in the context of a responsive interpersonal environment that accords recognition to the individual subject while at the same time providing a shared cultural reference frame that can underpin individual development.

The investigation undertaken in this thesis thus also sheds light on the broader topic of the relationship between individual and community in postcolonial societies with a significant indigenous population. Needless to say, with the onset of capitalist modernity and liberal democracy in the aftermath of Western colonisation, many indigenous traditions have undergone tremendous pressures for change in terms of the scope and content of personal choice, with individuals within those traditions experimenting with various ways of defining their own sense of self and conducting their own life. The tensions between, on the one hand, collective life patterns, where they exist, and the desire of individuals to have more latitude of action, on the other, have become even more noticeable in the recent decades given the

prevalence of neoliberalism in Western polities. The legal scholar Laura Westra, for example, recently speaks of Australia and New Zealand as "equally committed to recognizing collective indigenous rights," and yet goes on to point out that, in the context of contemporary human rights discourse, this commitment is "a difficult position to accept in general terms as the neoliberal ideal is one of maximum freedom and individual right of choice, without allowing many traditional moral and communitarian concerns to interfere with such choices" (40).[24] While capitalism, especially the neoliberal form of it, has indeed prioritised individual choice over group allegiance, an atomised individual existence is nevertheless certainly not desirable for most members of any human society—given the importance of interpersonal relations for individual development, as emphasised by object relations psychoanalytic theory. In this respect, if my study of the Māori novel has suggested anything politically, it is that the project of community building may well start with the principle of individual dignity and subjective agency, and work towards maintaining or developing a sense of the collective on the basis of interweaving the past into an unfolding present.

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[24] For recent book-length discussions on the tensions between individual rights and group rights, especially in indigenous contexts, see Engle; Ronald; Keal; Lyons and Mayall.

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