

# *The Spiral Temporality of Patricia Grace's "Potiki"*

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IN THE PAST few years, Pacific literary and cultural critics have become involved in contentious debates as to how to interpret the temporal strategies of the Māori sovereignty movement (the indigenous peoples of New Zealand/Aotearoa) and its associated literature. Postcolonial theory has concerned itself with the process of excavating suppressed histories, but it has not theorized a strategy that can work alongside the indigenous genealogical claims that underpin sovereignty activism. Instead, critical standpoints in the antipodes have resurrected a binary system that polarizes Māori writers/activists who are perceived to essentialize a nostalgic, precolonial past against the (often) poststructuralist critic who adopts a critical eye towards movements to authenticate cultural identity. What is at stake here is not merely culturally opposed epistemologies in the discursive realm, but intellectual stases that have profoundly affected land reclamation movements for Pacific islanders.<sup>1</sup> The debate circulates around more than merely the question of historiography. What underlines this stasis is the inability to reconcile indigenous notions of sacred, spiral time (crucial to many sovereignty movements) which utilizes a *corporeal* relationship to history within an abstracted, Western linear framework. As such, this facilitates interstices between genealogically "sacred" time versus abstracted, "political" historiography. Considering the utilization of genealogical and spiral temporalities within indigenous claims to sovereignty, such a discussion is long overdue.

The investigation of the complications that arise when positioning Western constructions of linear time and expanding imperial space alongside counter/modern narratives that con-

front the colonized's entrance into "History" at the moment of contact with Europe is not new to postcolonial criticism. Yet there is significant work to be undertaken regarding how contemporary novelists reclaim the precolonial past and how that narrative reclamation works against or alongside the traditional linear, plot-driven narrative of the realist novel which is so profoundly implicated in nineteenth-century European imperialism. In other words, how can the linear structure of the novel accommodate alternative temporalities that do not celebrate individual "progress?" Such explorations can be most fruitfully taken up in an investigation of Patricia Grace's 1985 novel, *Potiki*, which disrupts the linear novel, reforming the individualistic narrative into a communal Māori narration of spiral time. Although the novel has no individualized narrator or character, the community's genealogical and cultural identity circulates around the centralized Christ/Māui character Toko. It is in this way that Grace disrupts the linear narrative trajectory. *Potiki* hybridizes master narratives from Polynesian and Christian myth, interjecting them within the story of a small Māori community whose members fight to retain their ancestral land. Rather than segregating the "past time" of the ancestors from the "present time" of the contemporary community, Grace employs a spiral temporality where past and future time is narratively re-experienced in what she terms the "now-time, centred in the being." *Potiki* deliberately enmeshes Christian and Māori narratives in a political struggle for land and cultural autonomy in a way that reaffirms the continuity between "sacred" and "political" sovereignty strategies. In this way, it mediates between the polarized positions cited above regarding indigenous historiography, choosing to avoid a reclamation of a precontact indigenous "essence" by positioning a complex, postcultural Māori community.

*Potiki* has been largely overlooked by literary critics even though the issues explored in the work offer an interesting conceptualization of how "sacred time" works within the linear narrative structure of the novel.<sup>2</sup> The "sacred time" of the Christ narrative is aligned with the ancient myth of Māui, the Polynesian demi-god. In turn, their "sacred time" encompasses

the neocolonial activities of land developers who, representing the linear time of capitalist appropriation, threaten a small agricultural Māori community.<sup>3</sup> But Grace's positioning of the interstices between such diverse temporal epistemologies within *Potiki's* narrative framework offers an important supplement to debates surrounding indigenous historiography. The resistance to Grace's novel (and other Māori novelists who employ non-linear notions of time<sup>4</sup>) reflects what Johannes Fabian finds in anthropology: "Western rational disbelief in the presence of ancestors and the efficacy of magic rest on the rejection of ideas of temporal coexistence implied in these ideas and practices" (34).

*Potiki* offers a conception of time that undermines critics' charges that certain Māori temporalities are nostalgic and atavistic. As Grace explains in the novel, time is an internal process, centred and balanced "in the being" which is then replicated in narration:

It was a new discovery to find that these stories were, after all, about our own lives, were not distant, that there was no 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 outer circles, these outer circles being named "past" and "future" only for our convenience. The being reaches out to grasp these adornments that become part of the self. So the "now" is a giving and a receiving between the inner and outer reaches, but the enormous difficulty is to achieve refinement in reciprocity, because the wheel, the spiral, is balanced so exquisitely. (39)

Grace appropriates the narrative of Christ (the New Testament's attempt to forge a more human and direct relationship to a distant, abstract God), and by intertwining this narrative with the Māui myth, the communal life of her character Toko, and the violence enacted against Māori by *Pākehā* (white) settlers,<sup>5</sup> she draws these diverse narratives from great spatio-temporal distances and localizes them in the current cultural space of Aotearoa. By doing so, she forges a link between preindustrial Christian myth and contemporary Māori conceptions of Māui. *Potiki's* main narrative shows how the individual character Toko is sacrificed for the benefit of his community (like Christ and Māui), and underlines the connections between spiral time and its medieval Christian counterpart. As Fabian observes,

Enlightenment thought marks a break with an essentially medieval, Christian . . . vision of Time. That break was from a conception of time/space in terms of history of salvation to one that ultimately resulted in the secularization of Time as natural history. (26)<sup>6</sup>

Fabian explains that such early Christian conceptions of time are “inclusive,” open to converting “pagans.” But with the desacrilization of time came a dramatic change in “temporal relations,” where “naturalization of Time” promoted “temporal relations as exclusive and expansive” (26). This temporal juncture in the West, Fabian shows, meant that where once “the pagan was always *already* marked for salvation . . . the savage is *not yet* ready for civilization” (26). What Fabian so brilliantly shows in his examination of anthropological ideology is equally valid for recent literary and postcolonial criticism. This modern naturalization of time promotes a linear trajectory of human development and excludes other temporalities. This is what is most apparent in recent arguments that certain uses of time are atavistic and nostalgic, while others are “modern” enough to have the sophistication to recognize they are culturally constructed. *Potiki* offers a way of embodying the postcultural—a movement to highlight the *process* of cultural change and rebirth—without denying the “sacred time” of ancestral presence. Such a balance between Māori tradition and regeneration offers a temporalization that represents constant spiral *and* linear movement, rather than its facile binary opposition.

### I. Linear Time and the Postcultural

Simon During’s article “Waiting for the Post: Some Relations between Modernity, Colonization and Writing”<sup>7</sup> exemplifies the current critical trend to relocate Māori efforts at historicism as incognizant of the *process* of cultural construction. During’s article interprets postculturalism as a strategy to counter “the politics of identity” he finds in some Māori discourse. Yet the “sacred time” found in *Potiki* can be used to counter During’s suggestion that Māori time should adopt the form of a poststructural simulacrum which “knows no origins” (37). Considering the politically strategic use of *whakapapa*, or genealogy, by Māori activists and writers to reclaim ancestral land from *Pākehā* settler<sup>8</sup> appro-

priation in Aotearoa/New Zealand, During's call for the Māori to abandon authentic origins is particularly dangerous. His article fails to consider the way in which "sacred time" can be used strategically against post/modern time in order to authenticate indigenous sovereignty. I am not promoting a glorification of a static or essentialized tradition, but rather an application of postculturalism that can maintain (destabilized) links to a sacred Māori past. This position engages the sacred alongside the complex structures of gendered, cultural, and national hegemony.

During's critique of Māori temporality is not without historical precedence. In Norman Simms's work, *Silence and Invisibility*, Patricia Grace is implicated in the following definition of Māori literature:

While the oral tradition (of Maori) is permeated by a spirit of proverbial history and myth and is an experience which constitutes the interlinking of past and present, the written tradition in English is virtually ahistorical . . . (it) approaches the past only as a nostalgic recollection of childhood experiences. (18)

In different ways, During and Simms suggest that Māori reclamation of a countermodern discourse is ahistorical or sentimental nostalgia.<sup>9</sup> What strikes me here is the dismissive tone towards Māori efforts to rescript a precontact past, and the fact that both writers turn towards African writers and political figures to show a more "accurate" negotiation of countermodern discursivity. What are the stakes in claiming that some postcolonial literatures are more "historical?" What are the repercussions of dismissing particular Māori narratives, and what do such dismissals say about postcolonial theory's negotiations between time, modernity, and narrativization?

The postcultural is a term coined by James Clifford who argued that to position the "native" in a homogenous, "prepositional" time antecedent to the narrative of European, Enlightenment-based progress (colonization) is to relegate pre-colonial histories to obscurification: to an undeveloped, and premature moment in the trajectory of Western biological and cultural evolutionism (see McClintock 292-93). Building upon the work of Fabian,<sup>10</sup> Clifford's term postcultural reassesses that which we term authentic culture and how such temporal

positionings of culture are unevenly dispersed across space.<sup>11</sup> During's departure from Clifford lies in his focus on the *discursive* historiography by Māori activists/authors (rather than anthropologists) who oppose *Pākehā* trajectories of linearity and progress.<sup>12</sup> His article emphasizes New Zealand's cultural historiography, where elements of Māori and *Pākehā* myths have become so intertwined as to be virtually inseparable. But the article suggests that it is Māori refusal to recognize the mutual construction of their *Pākehā*-entwined history that facilitates Māori "identity politics" (29). Since the construction of *Pākehā* history is not juxtaposed against Māori, it is suggested that Māori essentialism is the obstacle to a Western trajectory to postculturalism. During asserts, "little dialogue is possible across the difference between the Maori and Pakeha when it is supposed that Maori identity is still grounded in the aura of a time which is not yet historical, still sacred" (30). Since the article posits Māori activists as promoting a "sacred" rather than "historical" past, it is implied that Māori are the barriers to a "true, objective" history of New Zealand. Such epistemological divisions encourage a binary opposition between the secular and sacred. During argues that in the circulation of the terms postmodern and postcultural:

Not all of the communities in our countries have passed through the threshold of modernity: some are maintained, *some wish to maintain themselves*, at the far side of the difference. (27; emphasis added)

Apparently, Māori activists willfully differentiate themselves which results in the trap of "inauthentic authenticity" (36)—since all identity is constructed. It is this "wish to maintain themselves . . . at the far side of difference" or, in other words, Māori sovereignty's temporal *strategy* which is apparent in Grace's novel *Potiki*, a novel that endorses a complex spiral temporality which allows for the simultaneity or, in Fabian's term, "coevalness" of diverse experiences of time.

*Potiki* offers a way to encompass two notions of temporality within one nation without relying upon the assimilation of one into the other. Perhaps the inability to encompass the two lies not in the community advocating a corporeal (genealogical) relationship to the past (regardless of how constructed that might be) but how we imagine our present/future communities in our

linear trajectory towards national fulfillment. Ultimately, "it takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West (and anthropology) if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the Time of its Other" (Fabian 35).

Grace's novel investigates this tension-filled space between the "sacred" past and the desiring machine of capitalist land claims. Such writing introduces a complex linking of temporalities and epistemologies which ultimately mobilize Māori towards sovereignty—which I shall consider now. Because the novel focuses on the *process* of historical invention and narration in a Māori community, it undermines assumptions that a return to the precolonial past necessitates naiveté and nostalgia. Grace's use of narrative invention and re-invention, incorporating Māori, early Christian and capitalistic narratives collapse into "now-time"—a postcultural, spatio-temporal moment.

## II. *Kōwhaiwhai* and Spiral Time

*Potiki*'s construction of Māori spiral time uses a variety of forms for its narrative expression. The trope of wood carving, incantation, and Māori and English orality (from the living and dead) also enter the text importantly as "alter-native" narratives which supersede the boundaries of written standard English, and underline the "now-time" of ancestral presence. As components of spiral time, the living ancestors are called upon in *Potiki*'s use of Māori storytelling. The novel intertwines oral and written narrative throughout the text, blending the two in a way that destabilizes the traditional Western narrative structure and recentres the artistic, linguistic, and cultural history of Māori. *Potiki* foregrounds the role of the community's oral historian by opening with a Māori creation song which is followed by a highly lyrical narrative description of an artist who records their past and future in woodcarving. "The (community) came especially to listen to his stories which were of living wood, his stories of the ancestors. He told also the histories of patterns and the meanings of patterns and the meanings of patterns to life" (10), the prologue explains. The use of wood carving as an "alter-native" narrative underlines Grace's point that "there were many stories"

which do not necessarily find adequate translation in colonial language or written, linear form.

The carver is the novel's repository of knowledge and simultaneously its creator, who "procreated in wood" (11), which emphasizes the corporeal relationship to communal history. The wood carver deliberately breaks *tapu* (taboo) by carving a figure "from living memory" before his death, which underlines Grace's intent to show the continual process of social construction and deconstruction in this community. The breaking of *tapu* signals a motif familiar to all cultural histories: the necessity to transgress prohibitions to initiate cultural regeneration. In *Potiki*, the woodcarver, Mäui, and Toko's sister Tangimoana all transgress tradition in order to save the community. Grace reveals that there is no static or fetishized past here, nor is it found in Māori tradition.

The trope of creation and sacrifice, or the spirals of life and death, are foreground in *Potiki*'s preface, where the carver comments, "I was told not to give breath to wood but . . . 'a life for a life' could mean that you give your life to someone who has already given his own" (12). Once the carver blows his *tīhe mauriora* (sneeze/breath of life) into the statue, he dies. His sacrifice recalls the oblation of the demigod in the Christ and Mäui narratives. (The demigod Mäui attempted to pass through the legs of Hine Nui Te Pō in order to secure immortality for all human beings and was fatally crushed between her legs.) Since the carver is accompanied by a physically handicapped boy who is swaddled in scarves (later revealed to be Toko, the Mäui/Christ saviour of the community), Grace intertwines Christian, ancient Polynesian and her modern narrative within one character, thereby positioning the novel within spiral time. In other words, this is not a simple palimpsest; all the narratives are *anticipated and re-experienced* in Grace's novel. In the narrative time of the woodcarver's preface, Toko's birth has not yet occurred. The carver's foreknowledge (and its expression in wood) of Toko's *future* sacrifice indicates that the novel's narrative, like Christ and Mäui's, is predestined. Just as the New Testament was deliberately narrated to fulfill the desire of the Old, *Potiki* fulfills the destiny that is lyrically structured in its own prologue, which



in turn was foreshadowed by the ancient narratives of Christ and Māui. This creates an infinite series of premonitions because Christ and Māui's deaths were predestined in their own ancient structures. By localizing the epic narratives of the demi-god(s) in a Māori community's struggle to maintain their land in the face of consuming capitalism, Grace highlights the political plight of the Māori community and resistance to colonization as epic narrative. Rather than rejecting Christian elements introduced by European occupation of the Pacific, Grace reincorporates this narrative and localizes it in a way where it becomes a living *Pākehā* myth reinscribed in Māori terms. This posits a postculturalism that is firmly rooted in a corporeal relationship to local land and does not deny the process of cultural re/construction.

The physical embodiment of spiral time relies upon Māori *kōwhaiwhai*, or elaborately scrolled, painted, curvilinear designs that are similar to the spirals of Māori *moko* (tattooing), the woodcarving of canoes, *hei tiki*, and other objects. The term comes from the nineteenth-century rafter paintings of Māori meeting houses which themselves are a result of complex Māori /British contact. The spirals are common motifs that are seen in the hooked design of the *toru* (resembling the crest of a wave) and then multiplied to present an interlocking spiral pattern. Nicholas Thomas's work on *kōwhaiwhai* patterns shows that they "can be interpreted as highly schematized bodies which precede more explicit representations of the ancestors and significant individuals who were consistently prominent in the art of tribal meeting houses" (101).<sup>13</sup> These are not merely symbols, but "vehicles of a collectivity's power" through reference to genealogy (103). While *kōwhaiwhai* vary between regional *iwi* (tribes), the curvilinear patterns adopt varying degrees of "bilateral symmetry" which is punctuated when "symmetry is broken through interstitial additions" (98-99). It is this pattern of symmetry and asymmetry that Grace employs when condensing the sacred time of the ancestors and then juxtaposing the asymmetry of the Dollarman's (capitalist's) narrative. In other words, like the *kōwhaiwhai*, the novel reveals that certain "organic" forms of the community are patterned symmetrically while others are periodically "broken" by either the asymmetrical, linear time/

intrusion of the land developers, or the transgressions perpetrated by members of the Māori community. This is crucial because *Potiki* does not encourage facile insider/outsider binaries. The women characters who transgress tradition and the linear time of the capitalist developers are reincorporated into the overall design of symmetry and controlled asymmetry. What Thomas does not mention but which is equally vital to any reading of *kōwhaiwhai* is that the rafters are usually separated by flax panels which employ rectilinear patterns. Thus the intricate spirals of *kōwhaiwhai* are framed by the rectangular shape of the wooden rafters, the linear flax patterns, and the meeting house itself. As such, the *kōwhaiwhai*'s curvilinear patterns of "exquisite balance" incorporate asymmetry and in turn are offset by more linear patterns. This metaphor also symbolizes Grace's use of spiral temporality within the linear structure of the novel which anticipates structure and closure.<sup>14</sup> As such, the complex a/symmetries of the meeting house are a metaphor for the novel's structure.

Rather than posing a facile advocacy of time that repeats itself unchangingly, something that we might call "cyclical time," Grace importantly interjects how the spiral, like *kōwhaiwhai*, signifies *repetition with a difference*. Unlike simulacra, these repetitions gesture towards genealogical and cultural origins.<sup>15</sup> It is the carver's transgression against *tapu* which benefits the community, just as later in the novel it is the transgression against tradition by the character, Tangimoana (a female who does not function as the repository of cultural tradition) which rescues the community from the land developers. This is not an essentialized, static notion of "Māori time" that endlessly repeats itself unchangingly because the novel embraces and in fact sanctions appropriate "modernizations" of Māori tradition. "The stories changed," the narrators continually observe, which refutes criticisms of ahistorical or nostalgic atavism. This regenerative, spiral temporality is Māori, but also inextricably linked with early Christian myth and the linear appropriations of capitalism. The transgressions of the characters are ultimately anticipated in the a/symmetry of *kōwhaiwhai*.

### III. The "Now-time" of Western and Indigenous Myths

While critical reception of *Potiki* has tended to reduce the novel to a Māori versus *Pākehā* plot, Grace has specifically resisted this binary by conflating the two cultures, thereby constructing not the naively autonomous Māori culture, but a complex, post-cultural narrative. Her postculturalism recognizes the process of cultural exchange but does not empty the community of its living and practiced genealogy. Here, the narratives that prefigure Grace's novel are seen to be contemporaneous, refuting the segmentation of past, present and future.

The unique circumstances of Toko's birth parallel the life of both Christ and Māui, and facilitate a nascent biculturalism. According to tradition, the demigod Māui was born deformed on the shore, abandoned by his birth mother and raised by adoptive parents. As a demigod and *potiki* (youngest child), Māui's special tasks included stealing fire for humanity, slowing the path of the sun, fishing up the North Island of New Zealand (*Te Ika a Māui*) from his canoe, and trying to secure immortality for human kind. Māui's association with the sea, the strange circumstances of his birth and the way he acquires land for his community through the sacrifice of his own blood are reinscribed in Toko's experiences in the novel. Toko's birth is equally mysterious: his mentally "handicapped" mother, Mary, gives birth to him on the shore and attempts to abandon him and his *pito* (afterbirth) to the ocean.<sup>16</sup> He is taken in and raised by Mary's brother and sister-in-law (adoptive parents), and all characters remark on Toko's (the *potiki*'s) "special knowing" and highly prophetic speech. Toko's birth father remains a mystery; the characters assume it was the wanderer significantly named "Joe-billy," but the author provides an alternative, Māori progenitor. Shortly before Toko's birth, Mary is cleaning the *poupou* (ancestral sculpture/post) named "loving man," who was created by the ancient carver invoked in the prologue of the novel.

And she lay her face against the carved face, and leaned her body against the carved body. They put their arms round each other holding each other closely, listening to the beating and the throbbing and the quiet of their hearts. (22)

The carving here represents a corporeal and progenitive relationship to the community's ancestors. The *poupou* has one green eye and one blue that is replicated in Toko's eye colouring — colours that are associated with the Māori creation legend of the earth deity Papa and the sky god Rang. Clearly Toko's life is situated at the cusp between two sacrificial narratives, as the son of Mary and the carpenter Joseph, but in this novel Mary is not a vessel but a *corporeal* (and present) link to the community's genealogy. Unlike popular interpretations of Christ's sacrifice manifested as a Christian obsession with death, Toko's sacrifice is deeply regenerative of community.<sup>17</sup> When Toko's image is carved at the bottom of the loving-man's *poupou* after his death, his living image (highly stylized with traditional Māori spiral motifs) counters the image of death so often seen in the crucifixion of Christ. Grace emphasizes the relationship of people to living art forms and the artistic and regenerative cycle of the tree. "It became a people story through wood, both people and wood being parented by earth and sky so that the tree and people are one, people being whanau to the tree" (177). This strengthens the link between the carving of the *poupou* and the life stories, remembered and anticipated, of the community. "The tree and people are one," repeats a narrator which, like genealogy, solidifies a corporeal Māori/land association (the site of *Pākehā*/Māori conflict) and reveals that woodcarving is much more than a "vehicle of the community's power." In *Potiki*, linear narrative structure is subsumed by the wood carvings which represent a corporeal Māori historiography.<sup>18</sup>

#### IV. The "Dollarman" and Western Progress

The correlation between a people and their land is not a mere ecological treatise in this novel, but an "alter-native" epistemology that is opposed to the greediness of *Pākehā* corporate developers. Considering the history of Māori/*Pākehā* enmity over this continuing issue, Grace's reaffirmation of her community's corporeal and ancestral connections to the land is a political strategy. In the novel, this cultural opposition becomes most apparent when the Dollarman propositions Toko's community, which depicts a Māori dialogue with Western modernity and

competing interpretations of progress and time. "The money man was coming, to ask again for the land, and to ask also that the meeting house and the urupa be moved to another place" (88), one narrator comments. The continuative tense of this statement emphasizes the consistent pressure exerted by some *Pākehā* throughout New Zealand history. The meeting with the Dollarman takes place in the meeting house:

It was the warmth of past gatherings, and of people that had come and gone, and who gathered now in the memory. It was the warmth of embrace because the house is a parent, and there was warmth in under the parental backbone, enclosure against the patterned ribs. (88)

The "patterned ribs" indicate the previously mentioned *kōwhai-whai*, underscoring spiral time (now-time) and the continual, corporeal presence of the ancestors/history. The community's genealogical solidarity is posited against the solitary, representative developer who is asking them to move their meeting house and cemetery so that his corporation can build a tourist recreation center which will provide "development, opportunity . . . and first class accommodation" to tourists "from all over the world" (88). Māori land is perceived as a "million dollar view which needs to be capitalized on" (89). The debate between the community and the Dollarman arises over the term "progress" that Māori characters emphasize they already have. The Dollarman answers that as they are "unemployed" their progress is "not obvious," to which one of the Māori speakers responds, "'Not to you. Not in your eyes. But what we are doing is important. To us. To us that's progress'" (90). Importantly, this debate becomes anchored against competing interpretations of how temporality is related to progress. When politely refused, Dollarman eventually accuses the community, "you're looking back, looking back, all the time" to which they respond "Wrong. We're looking to the future. If we sold out to you what would we be in the future? . . . What we value doesn't change just because we look at ourselves and the future. What we came from doesn't change . . . the past is the future" (93-94). The Māori advocacy of spiral time is completely incomprehensible to capitalists, whose material interests jettison them unthinkingly towards a climactic future.

What is strikingly apparent in this dialogue is the conflict between sacred time and the evolutionists' time where "the other is constructed as a system of coordinates (emanating of course from a real center—the Western metropolis) in which given societies of all time and places may be plotted in terms of relative distance from the present" (Fabian 26). What makes this particular use of time/space interesting is that Māori live *within* a nation space directed by capitalist *Pākehā*. Yet Grace reverses this in her novel so that the evolutionist's time is contained within the meeting house and Māori spiral time. Thus the evolutionist's spatial distance is collapsed, forcing together two sensibilities of time on the same soil and time. This *simultaneity* of spiral and linear time is impossible in During's reading of the post-cultural. The Dollarman's accusation that the Māori are "looking back all the time" mirrors the post-structuralist claim that excavating a precontact past is ideologically naïve. The Dollarman might, like During, prefer to "fram(e) the past rather than maintaining or obeying it" (37). While evolutionist and post-structuralist time have very different intellectual genealogies, both result in a discomfort with the notion that "(w)hat makes the savage significant . . . is that he lives in another Time" (Fabian 27). Whether this time is chosen or imposed on "the native" is irrelevant in this case. The two epistemologies polarize notions of time which results in a stasis where "little dialogue is possible across the difference" (During 30). Grace forces such a dialogue in this chapter on the Dollarman, thereby allowing temporal coexistence.

The Dollarman cannot comprehend the coevalness of past/present/future and interprets it as becoming "a slave to past things" (94), while Māori speakers argue he is a slave to the dollar. Grace posits a reversal of Enlightenment notions of progress where, as theorists have noted, Enlightenment ideology is binarily opposed to servitude.<sup>19</sup> In this case, however, it is the "enlightened" Dollarman, who, by prioritizing capital, individualistic desire and a linear notion of time/progress, becomes the slave to teleology when his ideology promises the opposite. Here, Māori are shown to have a more comprehensive attitude towards time and an understanding of how the spiral generates its own

sense of "progress." This alternative progress cannot be measured through linear time or material accumulation. As one of the narrators comments, "money and power were not a new threat. Money and power, at different times and in many different ways, had broken our tribes and our backs, and made us slaves" (132).<sup>20</sup> Whereas the capitalist *Pākehā* has segregated past from present in a secularization of time, sacred, "now-time" facilitates Māori ability to address the (continuing) injustices of the past.

### V. Re-visioning Genealogies

The pressures of capitalist consumption cause *Potiki*'s community to re-vision their genealogies in way that solidifies Māori political and cultural resistance and foregrounds the continuing process of reconstructed lineages. Grace shows that contrary to assumptions that *whakapapa* are static and fixed, genealogies can be strategically reconstructed. It is in a community's relationship to their genealogy that the interstices between linear and spiral time are most apparent. For it seems that a corporeal relationship to history causes a problem for poststructuralism. This is seen in During's article when he quotes Donna Awatere's famous statement: "To the whites, the present and the future is all important. To the Maori, the past is the present is the future. Who I am and my relationship to everyone else depends on my *Whakapapa*, on my language, on those from whom I am descended" (During 29). During responds

She states the question of identity that she faces by appealing to the notion of time. . . . it is clear from her book as a whole that the Maori point of view is something only a Maori speaking the Maori language, living in Maori time, has access to. . . . Little dialogue is possible across the difference between Maori and Pakeha when it is supposed that Maori identity is still grounded in the aura of time which is not yet historical, is sacred. (29-30)<sup>21</sup>

To Awatere and many others, Māori identity is not essentialized or divorced from the historical influences of other cultures. In this discursive moment, Awatere is not identifying with *Pākehā* hegemony and its associated culture, but strategically strength-

ening political allegiances with other Māori (a term which itself has formed as a resistance to *Pākehā* colonialism). "When it is *supposed*" that Māori live in a time separate from *Pākehā* linearity, such assumptions can often be consciously chosen strategies of political and social defiance which suggest much about the present/future. This strategy, in Awatere's writing, cannot be simply read as a naïve essentialism of an "aura of time."

Awatere's argument cannot be simplified into something along the lines of "my ancestors were here first"; in this particular passage, it is the *present* injustices, which stem from the wronged mana of the past that must be corrected for a *future* New Zealand biculturalism.<sup>22</sup> While much of the criticism surrounding this debate seems to be concerned with the process of historiography, a myopic focus on the narrative of the past erases the past's relationship to the present/future.<sup>23</sup> As Awatere and others are quick to point out, in Māori language, the "past moves towards you" which indicates a non-linear trajectory of time. Whether this temporality is consciously adopted or not is besides the point. *Which* events and practices of the past come under scrutiny and renarrativization is a more telling pursuit about the social injustices of the present. In Grace's novel, a retelling of success against capitalist appropriation of Māori land is central because such struggles continue in the "now-time" of New Zealand/Aotearoa.

Like contemporary Māori movements to consolidate resistance against *Pākehā* hegemony and land claims through a new scrutiny of genealogy, *Potiki* traces the unification of two diverse Māori communities in their struggles against corporate development. It is only by reassessing their genealogy that the communities are able to effect a successful resistance.

The violence that results from the inability to comprehend a corporeal relationship to history is shown when the developers pressure, then sabotage the Māori community's land. A series of incidents leads to the flooding of the cemetery (a literal attack on the ancestors and Māori history on the land); arson burns down the meeting house (an attack on community); and serious damage is inflicted on the community's crops (their



sustenance). The politics of divide and rule become apparent when the developers enlist Māori workers to terrorize the community into ceding to their demands.<sup>24</sup> In the interests of material accumulation, such practices of terrorism dehumanize the developers, which is observed by Toko's sister Tangimoana, who comments, "people? . . . some people aren't people. They've *forgotten* how" (49; emphasis added). In the temporal fragmentation of linear time, the developers have lost their cultural/genealogical relationships. In their desire for capitalistic aggregation, "they have become just like their machines" (151), underlining an absent genealogy. The adoption of linear time allows *Pākehā* to divorce themselves from the expectations of their ancestors and ignore a corporeal, genealogical trajectory between *Pākehā* actions of the past and their consequences. Although During critiques particular uses of Māori *whakapapa*, he concedes that, "the loss of sacred genealogical thinking and structures helped the whites to act extraordinarily unscrupulously and viciously even by their own values" (30). By utilizing their genealogies, *Potiki's* community is able to counteract the violence against their physical and symbolic histories.

Grace's novel reveals that the reinterpretation of genealogical lines can reaffirm Māori solidarity. In response to the sabotage, Grace's community strategically aligns itself with the neighboring Te Ope, who in the novel are known for their historic resistance against *Pākehā* land developers. (*Te Ope* means the people moving together). Such an alliance creates an important genealogical change that is reflected in the carving of the new meeting house. Toko's brother James "looked back in the genealogies until he found a common ancestress from whom both people could show descent" (153), which indicates a strategic manipulation of genealogical history. In this case, it is deliberately manipulated to consolidate Māori alliance against *Pākehā* terrorism. The effort to revise and reinterpret their genealogy suggests a revision of the past; such unification, across spiral time, can only strengthen the alliances of the future. Since Te Ope are known for using more modern techniques of protest (petitioning, strikes, demonstrations), Grace shows how Toko's

community is “modernized,” not directly through its contact with the *Pākehā*, but through its association with this neighboring Māori community. Again, the past is not simply ahistorical or essentialized. As seen in the above discussion of Awatere and *whakapapa*, such personalized and politicized employments of genealogy can be used to resist capitalistic hegemony. This underlines the continual movement, or “reaching” of the spiral which incorporates new strategies.

## VI. The Spiral of Modern Resistance

*Potiki*'s depiction of a people under assault reveals the subtle transitions of a community rooted in agrarian tradition yet accommodating “modernization.” Grace’s reinterpretation of the Māui/Christ myths reveals a reluctance to essentialize women’s roles in mythological and historical narratives. While Grace certainly uses the patrilineal myths of Christ and Māui, she “re-births” the two Māori communities under a matrilineal genealogy, as seen in the discussion above of the Māori ancestress. Grace further situates female characters as often regenerative, or “modernizing,” the community’s sense of spiral time. Rather than invoking the simplistic association of women with earth and nurturance, Grace reverses the gender of Māori myths, thereby complicating women’s relationship to land. Toko’s adoptive parents Roimata and Hemi are rewritings of the earth and sky deities Papa and Rangi; but Roimata, the female character, is the “patient watcher of skies” associated with the male sky god Rangi, while her husband Hemi is the agricultural figure associated with the land. Like her characters, Grace transgresses against written Māori tradition, which likens her narrative to the more improvisational nature of oral tradition. The community Hemi and Roimata represent are “shore dwellers” (113), emphasizing the dialogue between land and sea, modernity and tradition, capitalism and agrarianism.<sup>25</sup> The liminal position of the community is indicated through their educated and somewhat radical daughter Tangimoana. Her modernized and confrontational resistance tactics rescue the community from further terrorization from the developers, but ultimately her transgression

against Māoritanga (the Māori way) is reincorporated into the larger spiral design.

Her father Hemi comments, "Tangimoana wouldn't agree with driving feelings into the soil, digging over the loss and hurt, just struggling day to day" (148). As representative of a new generation of Māori which recognizes that colonial education shows that "my ancestors were rubbish and so I'm rubbish too" (74) and are not willing to suffer quietly like many of their elders, Tangimoana transgresses protocol by adopting different resistance strategies against the developers. Such innovative changes reflect Grace's investment in Māori cultural transgression.

When the assault on Māori historiography becomes violent, Tangimoana's strategies are enacted. After the developers set the new meeting house on fire, Toko burns to death. He passes through its doorway, or "toothed aperture through which we all must pass" (183), reminiscent of Māui's attempt to pass through the vagina of Hine Nui Te Pō. After another series of investigations that refuse to fix blame upon the developers, Tangimoana and others decide to take matters in their own hands. When Tangi spends days rallying the people together, her mother comments that it is "not the usual way, but Tangimoana works alone" (161). Despite her break from consensus building, a tactic of the Māori community, they "do not question her" (161) and allow the developer's vehicles to be destroyed. Not only is the community complicit in allowing Tangi's reverse sabotage, but they deliberately cover for her and the others when an investigation is conducted. The community subversively embraces Tangimoana's tactics: the following morning they join for a "boisterous haka . . . an expression of love and a shout of joy" (167). The *haka*, a traditional dance of Māori resistance,<sup>26</sup> is then adopted to celebrate Tangi's success, reincorporating individual actions back into the community. Like the *kōwhaiwhai* patterns, her transgression (asymmetry) is reincorporated into the symmetry of the traditional dance.

Tangimoana's confrontational tactics are not necessarily "modern" (that is, Western) because they reference Māori history of resistance and a code of *utu* (reciprocity). While a Māori

warrior code has been integrated into the novel, traditionally such actions have been associated with men. *Potiki* undermines facile efforts to divide and polarize the modern and traditional codes of conduct and emphasizes the need for transgression and a constant critique of the fetish of cultural identity. Grace explicitly shows the importance of the process of cultural construction, thereby refuting a “pre-modern,” static identity. In *Potiki*, such “modernizations” of tradition lead to the developers’ eviction; the community is temporarily rescued from the devouring machine of capitalism.

Tangimoana’s strategy can be likened to what Gayatri Spivak calls “the constant critique” of the “fetish character of the masterword which has to be persistent” (4-5) in any attempt to articulate the essences which solidify sovereignty movements.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the essence “Māori” cannot be abandoned, nor can it be uncritically promoted homogeneously across time. Spivak warns that without a persistent critique, “the strategy freezes into something like what you can an essentialist position, *when the situation that calls forth the strategy is seemingly resolved*” (4-5; emphasis added). When we apply this to the situation of Māori in New Zealand/Aotearoa, we *cannot* assert that calls for legal, cultural, and material sovereignty have “been resolved.”

It is because such struggles are not resolved in contemporary New Zealand/Aotearoa that *Potiki* concludes with reference to continuing struggle. Grace resists the neatly tied closure of the traditional novel form. The last pages of the story are told through Toko’s perspective after death, in “this place of now, behind, and in” (183), a place “beyond the gentle thumbing of the eyes” (184). This indicates that the multiple stories are not finished; they cannot be concluded without contradicting the notion of spiral time. In “the place of now” Toko can see the future: more battles are taken up by the community where they are supported by the ghostly presence of ancestors who “move in silently beside them” (184). The premonition of battles to come disrupts the traditional closure of the linear narrative.<sup>28</sup> The closing Māori waiata (song) underlines Grace’s resistance to the Western climactic form and the power/knowledge of non-Māori speaking readers.

## VII. Politico-Sacred Temporalities

And although the stories all had different voices, and came from different times and places and understandings, though some were shown, enacted or written rather than told, each one was like a puzzle piece which tongued or grooved neatly into another. And this train of stories defined our lives, curving out from points on the spiral in ever-widening circles from which neither beginnings nor endings could be defined. (*Potiki* 41)

To empty out the notion of Māori time into a simulacrum is to hit the core of the indigenous sovereignty movement at the heart of its adopted epistemological difference. For those utilizing post-structural theory, it is crucial to consider the consequences of applying a simulacra to cultures that employ genealogy as a mode of historiography. During's article seems to call for a national space where "simulacra replace . . . the 'sacred' . . . reject(ing) the authority of what is inherited, framing the past rather than maintaining or obeying it" (37). Yet we wonder who benefits from release from their cultural past—Māori or *Pākehā*? The point is that a retrieval of the past—as a continual process of assessment, an inquiry, a juxtaposition of epistemologies and cultural values—should *not* necessarily entail a move where "the sacred is separated from power" (37).

Grace's definition of spiral time challenges the linear framework used by critics who find Māori reclamations of the past atavistic. According to *Potiki*, there is no linear past to return to since the past has never been separated from the present. It is the *telling* of stories that leads these characters into awareness of the spiral; the spiral "reaches" in a continual series of movements, incorporating "stories from different times and places." Such *continual* movement across space and time is a very different interpretation of the fetish of "sacred time" depicted by During. Grace's novel posits a sacred, spiral time that has very political, cultural, and social responsibilities. This is a far cry from representations of essentialist Māori temporalities. *Potiki*'s community deliberately reinvents its own traditions, has a history of transgressing *tapu* to regenerate change in the spiral, and consistently critiques the fetish of cultural identity. While the conclusion of During's article calls upon a 1863 *Pākehā* Māori text to "not—

quite—reaffirm the compact between the sacred and the political” (39), my objective here has been to explore contemporary texts which *are* reaffirming this compact. Such investigations reveal that the interstices between the sacred and political are not so wide as initially perceived. Perhaps, with more critical attention focused on how sacred/spiral time can be strategically used to counter homogenizing capitalist temporalities, we could initiate more fruitful examinations of how vehicles of modern time (such as the novel) are transformed in order to renegotiate the varying terms of this compact.

## NOTES

- 1 See Haunani-Kay Trask for a discussion of how the testimony of social constructivist anthropologists in Hawai'i has been appropriated to discredit native Hawaiian claims to US military occupied lands. See Jeffrey Tobin, "Cultural Construction and Native Nationalism," for a review of the epistemological gaps between native activists who claim a sacred past and anthropologists who favour the lens of culturally constructed histories. See Hanson for the social construction of Māori, and Jonathan Lamb's response to the cultural consequences of his framework.
- 2 See Miriam Fuchs's article for an excellent discussion and extended bibliography of the limitations of Western critical responses to South Pacific literature and Grace's novel in particular. Fuchs's work successfully uses narratology to elaborate Grace's complex temporal strategy, arguing that the novel is "controlled and directed by voice" (215).
- 3 This is not to argue for a binarily opposed "Western linear" versus "Māori sacred" time. Theorists such as David Harvey have complicated the unevenness of post-modern time dispersal. Certainly one has to question to what extent capitalist linear time is an adequate label for the traditionally agricultural economy of New Zealand/Aotearoa.
- 4 In addition to Fuchs, see Trevor James for discussion of negative responses to Witi Ihimaera's writing and the problems posed to Western critics regarding Māori spirituality.
- 5 In an interview, Grace explains the Bastion Point and Raglan Golf Course land struggles as "legitimizing" the land sovereignty issues explored in the novel.
- 6 *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*.
- 7 During has reprinted a number of versions of this article in *ARIEL* and *Sport* but my citations refer to the version in *Past the Last Post*.
- 8 The term *Pākehā*, like Māori, is a rather unstable term in the history of New Zealand, constituted from the early colonial relations between Māori (native peoples of New Zealand who represent a diversity of *iwi*, or tribes, but are homogenized—and find solidarity—under the term) and white settlers who originated from the British Isles.
- 9 See Fuchs's article for an extended analysis of *Pākehā* response to Māori literature. I do not mean to conflate the very different theoretical contributions of Simon During and Norman Simms as their projects are vastly different. Simms's

"Maori Literature in English" (1978) is an early response to Māori literature and reflects the prevalent attitudes of that time.

- 10 See note 6. It would be interesting to posit During's theory against Fabian's critique of how anthropology has been based upon the unspoken belief that "dispersal in space reflects . . . sequence in time" (12), which obviously prioritizes the "developed" time of the West against the "primitive" time of the native. As the *Pākehā* live within Maori space, During's critique cannot rely on the time/space hierarchy. But perhaps it is distance in space which allows African writing and activism a more favourable response from During and Simms.
- 11 Trevor James also argues against this movement to postculturalize Māori history, and specifically focuses on the theoretical gaps in During's article. James's definition of the postcultural is that it's a facile answer to the assumption that "Maori spirituality has been irretrievably lost," and reminds us that "culture is not a static thing" (56). Clifford and During would agree; I believe their definition of the postcultural is not to say traditions are "irretrievably lost" but are always in a process of transformation.
- 12 When During focuses on Māori discursive representations alone, the notion of postculturalism is already diminished to biculturalism because of the relative isolation of the Māori from other cultures after their migration from Haiwīki to Aotearoa/New Zealand in AD 1200. In other words, During's article suggests that New Zealand's moment of postculturalism occurs at the moment of European and Māori contact, not before.
- 13 "Kiss the Baby Goodbye." Here Thomas is relying on Robert Neich's observations in *Painted Histories: Early Maori Figurative Painting*.
- 14 As Fuchs explains, Toko's resultant murder at the hands of greedy *Pākehā* capitalists never happens in the written present but is foreshadowed and then remembered by his close family members, thereby removing the apocalyptic climax the novel structure usually suggests. The Māui/Christ myths that predate Toko's narrative are reinscribed in the sacrifice of the self motif which ensures the survival of the community, and underlines the connections between the early Christian notion of sacred, incorporative time. Grace challenges the linear, progress-oriented structure of the novel to question Enlightenment ideologies of the autonomy of the subject, the social trajectory of the individual, and the ways in which the traditional form of the novel replicates and enforces such subject constructions. These techniques call into question the tradition of "narrating the nation" in linear trajectory towards national fulfillment (see Brennan). By repeating that the "story is a retelling" (181) from many subject perspectives where "the train of stories defined (their) lives, curving out from points on the spiral in ever-widening circles from which neither beginnings nor endings could be defined" (41), Grace posits "Māori time" as a resistance to the form of the novel of individual/national progress.
- 15 Māui is an *ancestral* demi-god.
- 16 Like Māui, Toko's *pito* is left adrift in the ocean and never secures a stable terrestrial home. Such metaphors (of the broken people/land association) become more interesting when seen in relation to Māori attempts to reclaim their ancestral land from the Crown.
- 17 This motif of regenerating sacrifice is common to other Māori narratives which utilize (differently) the trope of spiral time, such as Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*.
- 18 Since it was *Tāne* (the forest deity) who separated Rangi and Papa and facilitated the creation of humankind, the link between wood, creation, and humanity is underscored.

- <sup>19</sup> See Appiah's *In My Father's House*.
- <sup>20</sup> The currency of the term "slave" is particularly interesting in New Zealand/Aotearoa because the only structure of slavery was between Māori. The fact that Grace deliberately avoids all historical accounts of Māori slavery and examination of the internal and external hierarchies could be seen as problematic.
- <sup>21</sup> Because Awatere's work as a whole aligns the Māori sovereignty movement with a myriad of other resistance strategies, it resists the simplistic essentialism suggested from the quotation. As a Māori feminist activist, Awatere (and others) have made efforts to forge alliances with feminist and Marxist activists who were not Māori, who possessed no *whakapapa*. Awatere questions a series of interlinking hegemonies to underscore that narrow identity politics cannot bring political change.
- <sup>22</sup> While the New Zealand government seeks to rectify Māori land claims along bicultural lines (Māori/*Pākehā*), twentieth-century immigration to New Zealand by South Africans, Dutch, Asian, and Pacific Islander populations makes New Zealand's demographics much more complex.
- <sup>23</sup> In this context, Fabian's assertion that nineteenth-century Western anthropologists "posited (an) authenticity of the past . . . to denounce an inauthentic present" (11) is suggestive. Appiah's work has made similar links to nativistic essentialism of the past as a resurgence of Western nineteenth-century idealism in his work *In My Father's House*. The writers I discuss do not adopt this strategy, and I am somewhat hesitant to promote the idea that postcolonial movements to reclaim the past are merely adaptations of naïve Western ideology, although I realize this argument's relevance in some cases.
- <sup>24</sup> It is important to note that the novel does not fall easily into the *Pākehā*/Māori binary. Those helping the developers are Māori, and those who support the Māori community during the sabotage are *Pākehā*.
- <sup>25</sup> Because of familial resistance to Tāne's separation of Papa and Rangī, the shore has been the site of conflict between land and sea deities in Polynesian legend.
- <sup>26</sup> The *haka* is an excellent example of appropriation and postculturalism, especially in its adaptation by the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team.
- <sup>27</sup> My thanks to Sangeeta Ray for her invaluable feedback on earlier drafts of this article, and for calling attention to the links between my argument and Spivak's more articulately nuanced position on strategic essentialism. Spivak's first significant work in this area was published in the essay, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing historiography," in *In Other Worlds*. As she has altered her position because of catachrestic uses of the term, my essay draws upon her interview with Ellen Rooney ("In a Word: *Interview*") found in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*.
- <sup>28</sup> Of course, Grace cannot merely discard the closure of the novel, the work is bound by covers and does represent a closed narrative.

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