

“My Father Didn’t Let Them Have Me”: Colonialism and the Extended Family, *Whanau*, in Patricia Grace’s *Cousins* and *Baby No-Eyes*

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Whanau, the Maori term for extended family, is the basic unit in Maori society. It includes three generations: “at least one ‘*tipuna*’ [grandparent] with three or four generations of direct descendants and their spouses” (Pere 10). *Whanau* is an important Maori cultural structure with the main function traditionally being “the procreation and nurture of children” (Walker, *Struggle* 63). More generally, it is a structure that provides collective support and responsibility and invokes *whanaungatanga*—Maori values, practices and thinking (Smith, “Development” 471). *Whanau* differs from the mainstream *Pakeha* (that is, descendants of Europeans in New Zealand) notion of family in many ways. Umelo Ojinnah notes: “Although the extended family system is practiced by both Maori and *Pakeha* in differing guises, the *Pakeha* society’s emphasis on individualism makes the nuclear family the focus. Conversely, the Maori family is all-encompassing” (31).

Closely related to *whanau*, *whakapapa* or genealogy is another central concept in the Maori system of values. In Maori society, individual and collective rights and responsibilities are tied to knowing one’s ancestry (Pere 9). This emphasis on ancestry is pointed out by one of the main characters in Patricia Grace’s *Cousins*, Makareta: “Every Maori, especially if he came of a good family, knew his or her genealogy and exact relationship to every relative. This was most important to a Maori” (37). Through *whakapapa*, the Maori have a system of social stratification that is dependent on seniority of descent among various descent-lines (Pere 9). Further,

Whakapapa links the physical to the spiritual, the cosmological to the terrestrial, the people to the land and the land to the

people. *Whakapapa* provides a map through which to explore a Maori landscape that encompasses the complexities of Iwi, Hapu and *Whanau*. (Pihama 38; see also Walker, *Papers* 169)

Thus it is not surprising that *whanau* and *whakapapa* have also become the central organizing principles in contemporary Maori research theory and practice known as Kaupapa Maori. One of the central Kaupapa Maori principles is to incorporate “cultural structures that emphasize collectivity rather than individuality such as the notion of the extended family” (Smith, “Maori Education” 67; see also Bishop; Irwin; Smith, “Whakaoho”). Many Maori research groups are constituted as *whanau*, which “attempt to develop relationships and organizations based on similar principles to those which order a traditional or literal *whanau*” (Bishop 204; also Irwin). The supporting and mentoring roles of *kau-matua*, the Maori elders, are central in research organized according to the *whanau* principles. This ensures “culturally safe” research in which “Maori institutions, principles and practices [are] highly valued and followed” (Irwin 27).

Following the idea of Maori historian Ranginui Walker who suggests that *whakapapa* forms the basis of a comprehensive paradigm (*Papers* 169), I propose that in Patricia Grace’s novels *Cousins* and *Baby No-Eyes*, the Maori concepts of *whakapapa* and *whanau* inform the representation of many contemporary Maori issues. In this article, I read the two novels with the help of these concepts and demonstrate how the novels are to be considered through the complicated contexts of individual decisions, evolving traditions, and Maori-*Pakeha* relations rather than through fixed notions about traditional Maori society.¹

The structure of this article reflects Patricia Grace’s style in which stories by various individuals create a web of family genealogies that extend both to the past and future. I have chosen to approach the novels in this manner to call attention to the need to respect and listen carefully to stories we are told particularly by the old people. The article also heeds the ‘methodologies’ and ‘theories’ embedded in the stories rather than imposing an alien structure of analysis. As Tawera, one of the main characters in *Baby No-Eyes* observes:

There's a way the older people have of telling a story, a way where the beginning is not the beginning, the end is not the end. It starts from a centre and moves away from there is such widening circles that you don't know how you will finally arrive at the point of understanding, which becomes itself another core, a new centre. You can only trust these tellers as they start you on a blindfold journey with a handful of words which they have seemingly clutched from nowhere. (28)

As the heads of the *whanau*, Maori elders are “the storehouses of knowledge, the minders and mentors of children” (Walker, *Struggle* 63). The most senior members thus carry the responsibility of passing on the knowledge of *whakapapa* (Pere 10). Further, within the *whanau* structure, children are used to being looked after by many adults besides their own parents. Walker notes: “[children] were probably more influenced by their grandparents, the *kaumatua* and *kuia*, in their upbringing” than by their parents (*Struggle* 63). Like other aspects of Maori society, kinship structures have been affected and altered by the colonial history and pressures of the dominant society's norms and middle-class values as well as by the processes of urbanization and capitalist economy. As a result, in the contemporary society the ties between many Maori grandparents and grandchildren have been eroded (Pere 45–46).

Particularly after the Second World War, there was a rapid change in Maori society, characterized by migration from rural areas to urban centers. In the decade before the War, ninety percent of the Maori population was rural (Walker, *Struggle* 197). Today, seventy percent of the Maori live in urban areas. This naturally meant changes in many cultural practices. Walker writes:

One of the most important cultural transplantations into the urban situation is the kinship network built around the primary social units of *whanau* and *hapu*. A social survey in 1967 of a hundred Maori dwellings in Otara revealed that the *whanau* been replaced by the nuclear family as the household unit. . . . The reason for this is that the nuclear family fits the demands of the industrial system more easily than the extended family. . . .

But that does not mean the death of the *whanau* and larger groupings such as the *hapu*. On the contrary, they too are transplanted, but in modified form. (*Struggle* 199–200)

These changes are also reflected in Grace's novels *Cousins* and *Baby No-Eyes* in numerous ways. In *Cousins*, we follow rural and the urban Maori lives and observe that the changes have occurred in both areas. *Baby No-Eyes*, on the other hand, demonstrates the various ways in which central cultural elements such as *whanau* and *whakapapa* are transplanted to and transformed in an urban context. Although there are countless accounts of alienation from one's language and culture once settling down in a city by indigenous writers, *Baby No-Eyes* indicates that this was not always so. The extended family and the spirit world of ancestors continue to exist in an altered form and Maori language continues to be spoken even in some classrooms. Genealogies continue to be recollected not only by grandmothers but also by younger generation in new contexts and situations such as during the occupation of a park in *Baby No-Eyes*: "And people were happy, enjoyed being together. Talk was what they wanted, which [Mahaki] noticed always came down to two things—*whakapapa* and *whanau*. Who, related to whom, from where. This, in turn, became, who am I and where do I fit in" (213). In other words, traditional family structures have not been entirely erased but rather transformed to adapt to new realities. This is apparent in Grace's work which depicts the complexities of colonial legacies in Maori lives while occasionally taking a critical look at her own cultural traditions.

I. Mata

Depicting the lives of three female cousins, *Cousins* poignantly demonstrates not only that there is no single response to colonialism but also that the various legacies depend on countless factors, generated both by Maori and *Pakeha* conventions, norms and attitudes as well as by individual choice. Mata, one of the three cousins, barely knows her *whanau*. An orphan, she grows up apart from her extended family. Her mother Anihera is disowned by her family when she refuses to follow the family

expectations placed upon her as the oldest child in the family and instead, runs off with an English seaman. When Anihera unexpectedly passes away, Mata is placed in an orphanage. Her father has no interest in looking after her but does not want Anihera's family to have her either. As Mata later reveals to her co-worker and friend Ada, she was assigned a legal guardian so that "my grandparents couldn't have me, and to keep me away from evil and sin" (72).

Alienated from her own family and culture, Mata is also marginalized in the dominant, *Pakeha* society. William McGaw remarks: "Colonialism, in its imposition of one culture upon another is, by definition, alienating. It exiles or marginalizes the local culture and very often forces the colonized, if they are to regain the centre, to pass not from one country to another but from one culture to another" (103). In Mata's case, however, there is no passing from one culture to another. She does not belong to a culture to start with and therefore, she cannot enter another. As a result, her life becomes characterized by a profound sense of emptiness and aimlessness as well as painful longing to belong. In Mata's life, "[p]eople went away, or they died" (87).

Mata exists in the world of introverted silence marked by insecurity, low self-esteem and 'in-between': somewhere between Maori and *Pakeha* worlds while dispossessed by and distanced from both. In the first part of the novel, Mata, as a child, cannot stop thinking and dreaming of the unattainable, idealized *Pakeha* world. She is also curious of the ways of the Maori world during her single visit to her family. Her painful yearning to be part of both worlds simultaneously reveals her desperation and the sense of rejection:

She mightn't see Jean again, mightn't ever go back to the Home because her grandparents would want her and keep her. Then she'd have dresses and shoes like the School kids who came out their own doors of their own houses every day, who walked along their own paths and out their own gates every morning on their way to school. Their own curtains at their own windows would shift and the mothers' hands would wave. Sometimes a mother would pop a head out of the window and

call, 'Don't forget to come straight home after school.' The girls had skipping ropes and pencil cases, the boys had threepences and marbles. (16)

Mata is further alienated from her family by having her name changed. Her Maori name, Mata Paraima, connects her with the *whanau* that she never had, and in particular, with her great-grandmother after whom she had been named. After her mother's death, however, her father changes it to May Palmer—he had not wanted her daughter to have a Maori name in the first place. The confused child finds out about her other name only when she finally meets with her grandmother Keita, who refuses to call her May.

Naming is one of the themes also in *Baby No-Eyes*. Shane's desire to know the reason for his 'cowboy' name unleashes the flood of the grandmother Kura's stories, although his request is not realized until after his death. Some of Kura's stories account the painful but very logical reasons behind giving Maori children non-Maori names: "We didn't know our children would refuse to be who we were trying to make them be. We didn't know they would demand their names, or that they would tear the place apart searching for what we had hidden from them. We didn't know they would blame us" (148). Experiences of shame and ridicule made parents to give their children foreign names that, in some cases, alienated children from their families.

Mata's life is a bleak story of estrangement and cultural dispossession. Her mother Anihera seeks to replant herself into the dominant *Pakeha* society, but due to the prevailing colonial, racist and patriarchal mentality, her plans to have a good life for her daughter fail utterly. Even later in her life, Mata is not able to connect with her *whanau* simply because she never learned how to do that. This is a stark reminder of one of the legacies of colonial boarding schools: Mata never learns to have a relationship; she simply does not know what is supposed to be involved. Not surprisingly, her almost accidental marriage to a completely unreliable man soon fails and again she is left with 'nobody.' Mata's existence is characterized by 'nothing' and 'nowhere.' She is the postmodern fragmented, fleeting subject, but only in a negative sense. Fragmentation, as

Linda Smith points out, “known under its older guise as colonization is well known to indigenous peoples . . . We know what it is like to have our identities regulated by laws and our languages and customs removed from our lives” (*Decolonizing* 97).

The attempts to find her by her *kuiia* (grandmother) Keita and Makareta’s mother remain unsuccessful until decades later, Makareta finds her cousin on the street. At this stage, Mata has abandoned her hopes to have ‘someone on her own’ in her life. One day, after being abandoned by her husband, she gets tired of waiting in an empty house and simply takes off, leaving the doors and windows wide open behind her. In the process of bringing Mata back home and to her *whanau*, however, Makareta herself unexpectedly dies. It is as if Makareta has to die to reverse the destinies of herself and her cousin Mata: Makareta’s as the privileged one who grows up and is brought up by her *whanau*, and Mata’s as the disenfranchised and excluded. Finally, however, Mata has a role to play in her family, that of bringing Makareta’s body home. Mata returns and is welcomed with mixed feelings: her family has long ago given up hopes for her return and instead, eagerly awaits Makareta’s homecoming.

Missy, the third cousin who never left her *whanau* and community despite her dreams, cannot but think: “why it couldn’t have been her instead of Makareta being carried home?” (236). Missy is not sure what use Mata would be for their family compared to Makareta, who had the knowledge of the old people and whom the children would have needed so much (235). Yet she is equally angry at Makareta who had not returned home in time to share the knowledge she was carefully given by her *kaumatua* and *kuiia*, the elders of her family, in order to pass it along to the next generation.

By reversing the roles of the two cousins at the end of the novel, Grace restores Mata’s subjectivity, Maori identity and membership in her *whanau*. Grace also illustrates the prevailing irony and unpredictability of life as a whole: instead of having Makareta teaching others, they now have Mata who needs to be taught the very same knowledge that Makareta had possessed. Yet there is an element of balance as well: the loss is complemented with gaining a ‘new’ family member.

II. Makareta

Out of the three cousins, Makareta has the strongest Maori identity. Since her birth, she is trained in *tikanga* (Maori cultural values and practices) and raised by her elders. However, she rebels when faced with a traditional, arranged marriage. Makareta respects the traditional Maori ways but feels that instead of passively following them, she wants to actively participate in the social change of her people. For Makareta, however, the pull between Maori and *Pakeha* worlds is entirely different from Mata's experience. Makareta is confident in both worlds precisely because she has, unlike Mata, a foundation in the Maori world upon which she can build her own life. Unlike Mata, she also takes her life into her own hands at an early age by refusing the life that the family has planned for her. Due to the circumstances of her dispossessed life, Mata never has this choice and potential.

Makareta represents the Maori generation who migrated to urban areas in large numbers. As Walker notes, the urbanization was a catalyst for the challenge to *Pakeha* domination in the postwar years (*Papers* 11). The urban migration was followed by the Maori politicization and the emancipatory struggle against domination. Thus Makareta's rebellion against her family does not necessarily imply a rejection of her culture and Maori background. It rather allows her to assert an alternative way of expressing her Maoriness. Instead of getting married in a traditional way, she wants to get an education in order to be able to work for her people, first as a nurse and later as a Maori activist. In her earlier novel, *Mutuwhenua*, Patricia Grace suggests that if an individual is well-rooted in her own culture, she can do just about anything and remain true to herself and who she is. This is the case with Makareta until her untimely death—she remains connected to her family and culture throughout her life despite choosing to live in the city.

III. Missy

Cousins deconstructs and undermines any clear-cut oppositions between Maori and *Pakeha* worlds and is critical of those who want to establish 'tradition' as a static entity. If Mata represents a Maori individual who is alienated from her extended family and Maori culture and Makareta

one who rejects some of the traditions, Missy is the one who ends up taking on those traditions against all the odds. While Grace is critical of the colonial practices that tear families apart, she also casts a discerning look at expectations of Maori family traditions to remain unaltered for everyone forever. It is clear that for Grace, Maori traditions and culture are a living entity and that individuals live it in countless ways; there simply is no one 'authentic' Maori existence. As it is clear in *Baby No-Eyes* as well, Maori marriage practices have adapted to the demands of the time and thus cannot be regarded as something that have been passed on from generation to the next unchanged. 'Tradition' becomes a living phenomenon that is constantly re-constructed by individuals as well as socio-political circumstances of the time.

The generational change in Maori traditions is evident in Missy's case. Like Anihera, her cousin Mata's mother, she is the oldest child in the family. Unlike one generation earlier, however, the only expectation placed on Missy is to do her mother's work when she was too weak after a childbirth or miscarriage: "Someone had to get water and wood on the days when Mama couldn't walk or lift or carry. Someone had to lift the babies when she wasn't strong. Someone had to bring the bucket, wash the cloths and clothes. 'It's only you can help me, Missy,' Mama had said, her voice just a whisper" (186).

In the first part of Missy's story, the 'speaking subject' is her stillborn twin brother. He tells their story—it belongs both to Missy and her stillborn brother—by using the pronoun 'you' when referring to Missy. He has to tell her story because he 'did not get a story of his own.' As a result of lacking of his own story, he leaves a trace of himself in Missy: "The next morning, as dawn came, our father took our placenta, our blanket (which held the only sign of me) wrapped in paper, and buried it where baby blankets go. But there is a spiritish trace of me that has curled itself in to you" (159). Every family member not only deserves but requires his or her own story. It is as if the *whanau* would not be complete without all the individual stories being told and thus, coming together as a whole.

In Maori, *whenua* is both 'placenta' and 'land,' and it is very important that after giving a birth, the placenta is buried on the family land

in the right manner. The Maori also refer themselves as *tangata whenua*, the people of the land. Walker notes: “Each generation was bonded to the land at birth by the custom of planting the afterbirth, also known as *whenua*, in the land” (*Struggle* 70). Perhaps it is her stillborn brother who links Missy so tightly to her family land that she suggests to her family to replace Makareta and marry the man that Makareta was supposed to wed. On the day of her planned wedding, Makareta bails out and leaves for the city. Missy bravely steps in and saves the reputation of her *whanau*. Perhaps because of the trace of her brother in her, Missy unexpectedly and gradually becomes the person of the land—she carries the connection to the land through her twin brother and thus, is the one that brings the families together. She and her husband-to-be “were the dreamed-of couple bringing the families together at last,” (222) and also the lands together: “After the visitors had gone Keita arranged for houses to be built on the adjacent land. It was land shared by the two families and now that the two were to be united it could be used” (223).

Missy might have been dreaming of excitement and romantic love, but her marriage ends up being for her family, for the people and therefore, also for the land, just as her Grandmother’s marriage was two generations earlier. This does not mean that there is nothing in the marriage for Missy as well. Her and her parents’ circumstances are improved and social status elevated within the *whanau*. For example, a new house is being built for parents who thus far had been living in a ramshackle house at the edge of a field: “Our mother needed a good house. It wouldn’t do for Hamuera’s family to see where their new daughter had been allowed to live” (225).

Missy’s story shows that it is the unconventional decisions and choices that solve otherwise difficult situations and allow traditions to continue in a modified form. Due to unexpected circumstances and individual choices that go against convention, not only are traditions in a constant flux, but also those who have worked so hard to maintain them are forced to change. Missy observes:

Keita was only a small woman but she knew how to be big. . . .
Also she knew it was time to forgive. Not that our mother and

father were deserving, not that they hadn't done wrong as far as Keita was concerned, but she'd been let down by Makareta, who had been given everything. I was looked upon as the one who had saved us all from shame. (224)

Missy's story indicates that only flexibility allows traditions, including the traditional ownership and belonging to the land, to live and continue to exist. At the end, even her grandmother is forced to realize and accept it.

IV. Baby No-Eyes

The theme of an unborn baby as part of the life of the sibling continues in *Baby No-Eyes*. Tawera's sister, Baby No-Eyes dies in a car accident while still in her mother's womb. Like Missy and her stillborn twin brother in *Cousins*, Tawera and his sister have a special relationship that remains, for a long time, invisible to others. Tawera's sister may be dead for the hospital staff and the coroner but is very alive for Tawera. Baby No-Eyes is not a ghost either, although there are ghosts in the family genealogy, too, as Kura's stories indicate. For Tawera, Baby No-Eyes exists like a 'real,' living sister, and Tawera is also supposed to be her eyes. She has no eyes because they are taken from the 'dead fetus' in the hospital, most likely for medical research. Baby No-Eyes tells Tawera: "I don't need to see,' she said. 'I don't need eyes. I have you to be my eyes.' . . . 'You can tell it all to me, everything you see,'" (75). Being his sister's eyes is the most important thing in Tawera's life thus far, although some years later in his life, it also becomes a source of difficulties: "She complains that I forget her, that I won't move over in the bed or make room on my chair for her. She doesn't like me to play with other kids, or talk to others. She gets me into trouble" (133).

Baby No-Eyes is not merely a figment of Tawera's imagination. When she feels ignored, she can be violent and hurt Tawera. The bruises on his arms do not go unnoticed by her mother and grandmother who are slowly able to find out that the unborn baby is very alive for Tawera. Their relationship eventually grows so intimate that Tawera starts speaking of 'we,' the Seen and the Unseen. His sister claims: "I'm you. We're

joined. We're one.' . . . I'm you, you're me. We're one—Visible and Invisible" (220). There is no doubt that Tawera has a true sister although she is invisible. Even Tawera's grandmother Kura finally accepts it after listening his explanation: "Now that I've thought about it," she said, "I suppose it means you have a true sister. I suppose it means she has a true brother" (242). As Missy has a trace of her stillborn twin brother in her—a brother who tells Missy's story in order to be part of the family genealogy—Tawera has a very real, although invisible, younger sister whose story also has to be told. These 'unseen' relationships between siblings illustrate how the Maori notion of 'family' extends beyond the visible reality and living human beings. In addition to ancestors, the spirit of contemporary family members who have died can be as alive as those of the living ones. The question for Maori is not only whether a fetus is a human being or not; it is a full family member who must be treated as such.

This is where Maori and *Pakeha* notions of family and genealogy most strikingly clash: what is a family member for the Maori is medical or genetic research material for the *Pakeha*. This is why the hospital staff do not see a problem that the eyes of the fetus that has died in a car accident are removed. The *Pakeha* medical personnel are indifferent and disrespectful toward Maori views, which greatly disturb Tawera's family members. Moreover, because of what happens to Baby No-Eyes in the hospital, she cannot join the realm of the dead immediately. She has to prove first that she is also a human being, not garbage, as Te Paania's grandfather points out:

She got to hang around for a while so we know she's a *mokopuna*, not a rubbish, not a *kai*. How do we know she not a fish if she don't hang around for a while—or a blind eel or old newspaper or rat shit. Huh. You don't expect her go away, join her ancestors, foof, just like that, and he threw his hands up. 'Not after all that business.' (83)

Mahaki, another member of the Tawera's *whanau*, is also disturbed by the treatment by the hospital staff:

[W]hat got to him now was not so much what had been done on that day, but simply that no one at that hospital had cared enough. It was if he, Kura, Niecy and Darcy were a bunch of oddities, waiting for a thing to take home and bury, for no good reason. It was as though they were not quite people, and therefore their lives didn't matter, as if they were not capable of suffering, had no right to suffer, no cause to feel distressed. . . . And there you were—each group of people seeing the other as having something missing from being human. . . . To come from a background of being white, Christian and so-called 'civilized', was to be right; was to have the power of law and state and wealth, a certain way of thinking and feeling on your side. (122)

Instead of respecting Maori views of family and considering Maori family responsibilities important, they are seen as 'primitive' by the *Pakeha*. Tawera's mother Te Paania notes: "We had no right to say no, or yes, because we weren't people. Baby wasn't a baby, wasn't the family's baby. Baby was a body, and legally belonged to the coroner" (188). As in *Cousins* where Mata's Maori family is considered too 'primitive' and 'uncivilized' by her *Pakeha* father and *Pakeha* legal guardian to allow Mata to return to her family, the same colonial mentality continues in contemporary times.

The practice of medical experimentation on indigenous peoples has a long history around the world and continues today, particularly in genetic research. As Andrea Smith notes, a biocolonial ideology casts indigenous people as guinea pigs rather than individuals deserving quality and effective health care (116). Moreover, many indigenous people consider research on the life-essence a violation of their cultural and ethical protocols and manipulation of genetic composition a serious assault to their genetic integrity of their ancestry.² Te Paania raises these concerns at the hospital:

After that she spoke about people's lives, and about different people having different knowledge of life, having different hearts and different understandings. She told it very well. 'This

research interferes in a highly sacred domain of indigenous history, survival, and commitment to future generations,' she said. 'Genes are the ancestors with us.' (*Baby No-Eyes* 280)

In addition, in *Baby No-Eyes*' case, which has many counterparts in real life, the status as mere guinea pigs is manifested in the commonplace arrogance toward views that do not conform or coincide with Western medical science. Any other understandings are dismissed as backward and ignorant, if no longer primitive and savage, in the name of science and advancement. These advances in medical research, however, hardly ever show up in the majority of world's indigenous communities. Not surprisingly, then, growing numbers of indigenous people are asking the critical question, 'Where is the money obtained as a result of the continued experimentation done on indigenous peoples?' This concern is also raised by Tawera's family in the hospital:

'There'd be no progress at all,' someone said.

'Progress of people having clean water and enough food,' she replied. Good on you, Mum.

'There are answers out there in isolated communities.'

'The new frontier,' she said and bent herself over laughing. 'And whose health problems are we talking about, answers for who? Ha ha ha.'

'Greater good, greater good,' red people were shouting.

'Which has little to do with numbers,' she said. 'It means the good of the rich, the good of wealthy nations, the good of scientists and researchers, the good of pharmaceutical companies, the good of those who have the might of states and the power of law to back them.' . . . 'None of it give food or clean water to dying communities, saves their land and protects their resources, helps the Hagahai to survive.' (*Baby No-Eyes* 281)³

Further, the clash of Maori and *Pakeha* perceptions of family and human beings result not only in radically different views and practices but these views exist in and reproduce colonial hierarchies concerning whose perspective matters. The absurd and unconscionable nature of colonialism

is tangible in the pain and distress that the family of Baby No-Eyes are forced to go through in the hospital: they have no say whatsoever about their own family member because their views and cultural understandings are more than insignificant: they do not even exist for the medical staff and legal representatives. Mahaki's and Te Paania's concerns show how colonial processes of dehumanization prevail and have far-reaching effects on indigenous peoples and their lives. The struggle to assert different views of family becomes part of a larger struggle of claiming humanity. As *Baby No-Eyes* demonstrates, 'the old new business' is not only about the gene technology (colonialism in a new guise), but also the continuing disrespect and arrogance toward indigenous peoples and their cultural and social practices.

V. Kura

In *Baby No-Eyes*, Tawera's grandmother Kura's stories play a central role in reconfiguring the *whanau* in an urban setting where it is not always easy to maintain one's family connections. After her grandson Shane's sudden death, Kura starts feeling that there is a need for her stories that have been silenced for so long:

There's a little ball inside me, a core. Round it are layers and layers, like bandages, that I've wrapped it in over the years so that it would remain hidden. Now, because of the children's children, and because my mouth has been opened, I must unwrap the little ball, find it, let the secrets free. (66)

The reason for her long silence is not only her personal pain and shame but also a desire to protect her descendants from the ramifications of colonialism: "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" (39). Kura has kept her stories and language to herself because she has come to believe that by not speaking her language or sharing her stories, the history of her people, she can save her children and grandchildren from the humiliating experiences that the earlier generations had to go through. But now that Kura's lips have parted, words start to pour out of her.

She slowly evokes her *whakapapa* (her genealogy and family history) that also serves as a commentary and a way of interpreting the present. Through her narration, the already deceased family members and the history are brought back to life and made relevant to the currently living individuals. She reclaims her role as *kaumatua*, the carrier of Maori history and knowledge who is able to use her knowledge for the collective good (Smith, “Kaupapa Maori” 12). Kura’s stories also convey the largely ignored history of Maori women in her family (Johnston and Pihama; Smith, “Kaupapa Maori” 12).

In *Baby No-Eyes*, this history comes alive in Kura’s stories, some of which are told to explain the present and some to make the necessary link with the ancestors and the practices taking place in the present. Her stories of her ancestors could be seen symbolically, if not literally, as referring to the very same ancestors whose genes and bones Maori activists are struggling to protect in contemporary times. There is a clear continuum between Kura’s stories and the Maori who build a camp in order to protect an old sacred site where the ancestors have been buried. This in turn reflects the Maori view of interconnectedness and the spiritual relationship with the land (Liu and Temara).

Another link between the land, ancestors, *whakapapa*, and *whanau* can be found in the stories of the elders whose testimonies Mahaki starts recording in his home community. Family stories that carry the links to the family and tribal lands become a means of reconnecting and recreating the *whanau* in urban setting by both reminding and teaching younger generations about these connections and by serving as records of ownership for contemporary legal and political battles.

Kura’s recounting her *whakapapa* confirms the all-encompassing nature of the extended family: not only living family members but also ancestors, future children, ghost people such as her great-uncle, individuals like Baby No-Eyes and even the land are integral elements of one’s *whanau*. Her stories also demonstrate the brevity and flexibility of Maori concepts such as family or parents: “All of our mother’s and father’s sisters and female cousins were mothers to us. We called them all *whaea*. All of our mother’s and father’s brothers and male cousins were fathers to us. We called them all *matua*” (163). In a contemporary

urban setting like that of *Baby No-Eyes*, these parenting arrangements may no longer be possible but it does not mean that all the precepts of *whanau* have ceased to exist in cities. In *Baby No-Eyes*, Tawera has a family consisting of a mother, grandmother, two fathers, and an invisible sister.

One of the stories Kura tells is the story of her cousin Riripeti who, according to Kura, is literally killed by school. As Kura recollects, a school was built on her family's land. Her grandfather had given land for it "so we could have our education" (29), a comment probably intended to be understood as ironic since, in the Maori system of learning, the grandparents are considered teachers of their *mokopuna*. Yet in those days, Maori elders were not even allowed to enter the school. Tragically, as Kura notes later, "[t]he old ones didn't know then that a school could kill their children, that a church could shrink people's souls into tiny knotted balls which would become wrapped and hidden in layer upon layer of windings inside them" (112). As a child, Kura gets the important but impossible task of looking after her in the school and teaching her how to survive there. Not surprisingly, she fails despite her best efforts. Harker and McConnochie point out that

When schooling has been provided, Aboriginal and Maori children have rarely performed the way their European teachers would wish them to. This has been widely interpreted as individual failure on the part of the children, and has been attributed at various times to the inevitable effect of belonging to an inferior species, as well as the pernicious influences of parents, genetically determined low IQs, and the inadequacies of the home environment. Rarely has the failure been attributed to the inadequacies of the education provided, to the discriminatory nature of society, or to the active resistance of Maori and Aboriginal communities to the cultural destruction implicit in many of the educational programs. (18)

Like Mata in *Cousins*, Riripeti is given a new name at school to conform to the *Pakeha* society's notions of proper Christian names. But as Kura asks, how "did she [Riripeti] know her name was Betty?" (33).

Because she did not, Riripeti ended up standing in the corner every day. Corporal punishment, including standing in the corner, was a common way to enforce school regulations. But as Walker notes, “The damaging aspect of this practice lay not in corporal punishment *per se*, but in the psychological effect on an individual’s sense of identity and personal worth” (*Struggle* 147). Riripeti is killed not as a result of physical punishment but as a result of not comprehending the alien expectations placed upon her or the teacher’s behaviour toward her.

Kura’s feelings of shame and inadequacy evoked by the sense of utter failure to protect her cousin against the mental and physical subjugation in the school turns her, decades later, into an activist when it is time for Tawera to start school. In Te Paania’s words, the whole extended family passionately participates in finding “a school safe for [its] children that wouldn’t kill them or teach them to die” (143). Tawera, who has not had the same experiences as her grandmother, sees this search slightly differently:

They’d been round schools like a band of detectives, looking for clues to find out whether I should go here and there, or whether I should be kept at home. They’d been terrorizing the school principals and teachers with their questions and their demands but in the end seemed to realize that I would be all right at our local school. (77–78)

The shame and anger that Kura feels are shared by many Maori grandparents and parents and their outrage has generated a radical change in the New Zealand education system. In some cases, the school has become a way of reconnecting children with their elders and grandparents, as is the case with Tawera’s school. Kura, described as “a Maori language activist who had made a decision never to speak in English” (145), is going to be working in the school part-time in the bilingual class, helping with Maori language. Grace hereby reminds the reader that it was Maori elders who, in the early 1980s, played a crucial role in initiating Maori language revitalization and immersion programs (Smith, “Maori Education” 63). Elders returned to their communities with an idea of immersion preschool language nurseries based on the notion of

whanau. Interestingly, Kura means ‘school’ in Maori (Smith, “Maori Education” 71).

At the time when Tawera is attending school, the process of developing Maori educational system has advanced to a stage where the pre-school language immersion program, *Te Kohanga Reo*, is no longer enough. For when “Kohanga kids turn five they leave their Maori language behind. They go into a school that’s resisting the setting up of an immersion class” (146). Some schools are thus working hard to get more advanced in incorporating Maori language and culture into their curricula although it is not always easy: “We’ve tried to put programmes in place, *kapa haka*, etcetera. But it’s not enough. No *depth*. We’re keen to have a *whanau* class, whether it be total immersion or bilingual” (146). A *whanau* class calls for implementing a wide range of Maori cultural practices into a *Pakeha* school curricula. Ideally, it would transform the *Pakeha* school system to better reflect the philosophy and practices of the *whanau* structure.

For Kura, telling her stories is a strenuous and consuming activity. She is not ‘just telling stories’ for the sake of entertainment. Her stories are much needed, but it takes a visible toll on her health, as noticed by Tawera: “She was getting smaller because of all the stories that had leaked out of her” (138). The common view shared by oral cultures of words as carrying special powers is manifested in Kura who is literally consumed by the long held powerful words. She diminishes as her stories grow. She is, like non-fictional Maori elders, a storehouse of knowledge and thus she also has the responsibility to empty herself of the crucial family genealogy.

Only after she has fulfilled her task of voicing the long-silenced stories and in that way, reconnected her immediate family with their *whanau* and *whakapapa*, can Kura leave (die) “to live in another place and another house” together with Baby No-Eyes (274). Baby No-Eyes has also fulfilled her own task as a necessary member of family and a reminder of continued colonialism, so she can also return to the place from where, in her own words, she was only “on loan.” She was “on loan” because her mother needed her in order to be and have a family (251). Even if unborn, Baby No-Eyes fulfils an indispensable role in her family: she is a

sister for Tawera and daughter for Te Paania. Without her presence, this particular family would have not been complete.

Despite the new forms of extended family, the role and significance of the *whanau* structure—“mutual obligations for loving, nurturing and caring” (Walker, *Papers* 126)—are maintained in contemporary urban contexts. Kura and Baby No-Eyes have their particular obligations towards their *whanau* and as long as they are not fulfilled, they cannot leave the realm of those presently alive. Tawera is given the difficult and painful task of confirming that they both have completed their commitments as family members and that they are ready to go to the world of the dead.

VI. Colonialism and the *Whanau*

As stories of extended family histories, Patricia Grace's *Cousins* and *Baby No-Eyes* present the changes in Maori society and culture caused by migration to urban centres. Chronologically, the events in the two novels are probably one generation apart; in *Cousins*, the events take place in the early stages of urban migration while in *Baby No-Eyes*, Te Paania's family has already established its roots in the city. In *Baby No-Eyes*, however, stories, particularly the grandmother Kura's, bring the history of the family alive, showing how various colonial forces and structures have sought to undermine and dismantle the basic unit of Maori society, the *whanau*. In the early days, it was especially the *Pakeha* education system and the church that imposed foreign notions of propriety and ‘civilization.’ Later on, the strongest assimilation pressures came from the new urban environment as Mata's heart-wrenching story illustrates. For her, without family connections, there is only “nothing” and “nowhere.” Her life is like a wind aimlessly blowing on the empty road that she finally heads to, with no idea where she is going.

Yet the Maori characters in these two novels are not represented as passive victims of the colonial legacies of assimilation and dispossession. Individual choices and adaptation ensure the continuity of the *whanau* system and its importance as a central cultural structure. In *Cousins*, we see both forced assimilation and voluntary choices by individuals shaping the destinies of people. Even Mata's life is shaped not only by colo-

nialism but also by the decisions of her Maori mother, and at the end of the novel, she is the one who brings Makareta back home, not the other way round as expected by their family.

The change in urban Maori families resembles the general pattern of migration from country to city throughout the New Zealand society (Spoonley, Pearson and Shirley 20). The radical difference, however, is in the background of the Maori. The Maori experienced additional challenges as they were also forced to transplant their culture (values, worldview, practices) into a foreign one. Unlike the Maori, for *Pakeha* migrating from rural to urban areas, their English culture and language remained as the foundation and was recognized as having worth. In an effort to sustain their culture where the traditional *whanau* was not possible, new forms were invented. Walker notes:

In the alien and hostile environment of impersonal cities, kinship bonds were formalised by the formation of family clubs, adoption of a constitution, and election of an executive for the collection of subscriptions and disbursement of funds against the contingencies of illness, unemployment and the underwriting of expenses incurred in returning the bodies of deceased persons to their home *marae*. (*Struggle* 199)

Patricia Grace explores the limits of the *whanau* particularly in the neocolonial context of contemporary urban settings. Te Paania of *Baby No-Eyes*, for example, may be considered a single mother by *Pakeha* social workers who question her (economic, if not other) abilities to raise her child(ren) properly. Yet according to Maori cultural practices, she may not even be considered the main caregiver to her children. In Maori terms, she is not a single mother suffering multiple jeopardy of marginalization, but a woman surrounded and supported by numerous family members.

Grace's novels emphasize the utmost significance of recognizing all family members, including those who are not necessarily visible to everybody. Without this recognition of every single individual, whether ancestors, ghosts, spirits and invisible living beings, the *whanau* and *whakapapa* remains incomplete. Ultimately, Grace suggests that it is not

wholly colonialism that is fragmenting essential family structures; for her the loss of individual stories, storytellers, and the family context in which they are valued is equally as destructive.

Notes

- 1 As a non-Maori (though an indigenous Sami) person, I do not seek to employ Kaupapa Maori methodology in this paper. Instead, I intend to follow and listen to the family stories, significance of which is also widely recognized in Sami culture.
- 2 There are several declarations by indigenous peoples such as The Maataatua Declaration on Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples, The Amazon Basin Declaration and The Kari Oca Declaration that address these issues and urge the governments and the scientific and medical communities to pay attention to and respect indigenous peoples' beliefs and practices. There are also indigenous organizations such as the Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism (www.ipcb.org) working to educate indigenous people on issues related to human genetic research and lobby against medical companies that carry out practices that involve collecting gene samples from indigenous people.
- 3 The Hagahai refers to the infamous case in the indigenous world of patenting human DNA. In the early 1990s, the "U.S. Patent and Trademarks Office (PTO) actually approved patents on the cell lines of a Hagahai man from Papua New Guinea. The patents were granted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute of Health (NIH) in March, 1994. Again the patent holders faced public outcry, and in late 1996 the NIH abandoned the patent. However, the Hagahai cell line is now available to the public at the American Type Culture Collection as ATCC Number: CRL-10528 Organism: Homo Sapiens (human) for \$216 per sample" (IPCP, n.p.).

For some, to talk about an unborn fetus as a baby and a human being may touch another complex and highly contentious issue, the debate commonly framed as 'the pro-life versus pro-choice.' Although in *Baby No-Eyes*, the question is not about the right to choose an abortion, one could view the two sides representing the two opposite perspectives, one that regards the unborn fetus as a full human being and the other that does not. In the mainstream public discourse, 'pro-lifers' are often seen as conservative if not right-wing individuals and groups fighting the corrupting liberal values, including women's right to their own bodies. The author of *The War on Choice*, Gloria Feldt, for example, argues in her book that the supporters of 'pro-life' stance is a 'right-wing extremist.' In the context of *Baby No-Eyes*, one can easily see that such an argument is itself very extreme and that it could not be further away from the reality of Tē Paania and her family, including Tawera who has the crucial role of being the eyes for his unborn baby sister. As Andrea Smith points out, the mainstream 'choice'

paradigm is not only framed too narrowly and simplistically to have relevance for indigenous peoples but it is also politically bankrupt in its inability to address wider socio-economic conditions and concerns (see Smith, *Conquest* 79–108). It would be thus a misinterpretation to regard the controversy around Te Paania's unborn baby's body and especially her eyes as a version of the 'choice vs. life' debate. Instead, it reflects the painful contemporary realities of indigenous people in the neocolonial, neoliberal context where indigenous peoples and their communities continue to be exploited as research objects and medical laboratories.

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