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HERITAGE AND INNOVATION II
POLYNESIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH
F. J. Frisbie, Patricia Grace and Sia Figiel: Three Generations of Authors

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí diplomové práce:
PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M. A.

Zpracovala:
Teata Binarová
Studijní obor:
Anglistika a amerikanistika – Španělština

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V Praze dne

I dedicate this thesis to Florence (Johnny) Frisbie, Patricia Grace and Sia Figiel, and to all the Polynesians who have the courage to speak out.
I apologize to the authors if they find inaccuracies in what is written in the thesis.

I thank my supervisor PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M. A. for setting off with me once again on this new exploration and for helping me paddle and navigate this canoe in the open sea.
I thank all the persons who have helped, encouraged and inspired me on this voyage, especially my Family, Richard, Flora Devatine and René-Jean, and Nick Stuart.

I thank you in Tahitian: Mauruuru.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

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Ka pu te ruha,

Ka hao te rangatahi.

The old net is laid aside;

A new net goes fishing.

Maori proverb

A new generation takes the place of the old…

Witi Ihimaera

Introduction

The aim of this Master's thesis is to develop further the theme of Polynesian literature in English that was introduced for the first time into the Czech context in my previous Master's thesis entitled *Heritage and Innovation: Polynesian Literature in English* defended in September 2012. The title of my second thesis indicates that it is directly connected to the first introductory volume, in which the new Polynesian post-colonial literature in English was mapped, its birth and development delineated and its main characteristics outlined. The problems related to Polynesian studies were concretely treated through the presentation of three key indigenous authors – the pioneer poet Alistair Te Ariki Campbell (1925-2009, Cook Islands) and the prose writers of the first generation Albert Wendt (b. 1939, Western Samoa) and Witi Ihimaera (b. 1944, New Zealand) – and through detailed analyses of their representative literary works from the viewpoint of the dialectics of "heritage and innovation". This approach to their texts was selected, and is selected once again in this second volume, due to the fact that to inherit and to innovate, in other words to acknowledge past cultural expressions by developing them in relation to the present, appear to be the fundamental creative principles of the Polynesian authors who have opted for English as their language of literary expression.

In the present work, three other representative indigenous writers, for whom there was not enough space in the previous thesis, are introduced – F. J. Frisbie (b. 1932, Cook Islands), Patricia Grace (b. 1937, New Zealand) and Sia Figiel (b. 1967, Samoa) – in order to complete and specify the offered panorama of Polynesian literature in English. The fact that these influential figures of the emerging literature are women gives an opportunity to provide the female point of view on the post-colonial problems to counterpart the masculine perspective examined previously. The main objective is to trace in detail three significant stages of the development of the given new literature from the 1940's to the present through the presentation of these women writers belonging to three different generations and post-colonial contexts, and through the analysis of their

literary production. Due to the nature of the selected subject, the present thesis alternates descriptive and analytical sections, which aim is to contextualize the literary interpretations of key motifs of the chosen texts.

In the conclusion of the first thesis, it is stated that this last is "only a completed carved canoe to be embarked on and put to sea for the exploration of the other areas of contemporary Polynesian literature" (p. 105). To try to fulfil the ambitions of the present volume has indeed been the start of a long sail in the open sea because the exact destination was not determined by then and it would show itself only progressively. When I began this new investigation, I did not know what results it would bring. What is more, I had to face similar difficulties as when writing the first thesis: the lack of accessible primary and secondary sources and restrained financial means to attain them all. Once again, it was necessary to contact persons from abroad to send at least some of the indispensable materials and to draw the maximum information from those that were to hand, even though they were not directly related to the Anglophone Polynesian literary area treated here, but for example, to the Francophone one.

Nevertheless, this time, I had at disposal the whole theoretical framework of Polynesian literature in English that had been exposed earlier in my "carved canoe", on which this study could be based, and which is frequently referred to throughout the thesis. This framework worked for me just as the star-studded sky did to direct the ancient Polynesians on their journeys across the seas into the unknown.

In particular, often alluded to are the Polynesian diaspora theory, the established dichotomy between the "insiders" – the autochthones themselves – and the "outsiders" – the Westerners – and the process of indigenous post-colonial "recreation" that the authors view as a "turning of things over" and as "writing from the inside out". These principles have been formulated in the formerly introduced landmark compilation of essays by indigenous writers entitled *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, published in 1999. The advocated "inside out" position enables the natives to respond to the distorted representations of them that have been fashioned from

the "outside" and, at the same time, to accept the unavoidable blending of the "inside" and "outside" and use it as a potential creative ground for cultural and identity reconstruction. Actually, according to the indigenous intellectuals, the Polynesians are "indigenising" the imported colonial heritage: its culture, language and written tradition.

The blending of the "inside" and "outside", or of the indigenous and of the European inheritance, is a highly complex practise reflected in Polynesian literature in English that I intend to define in my work. Indigenous theory is supplemented with concepts and terms from works of international literary and post-colonial theorists in order to facilitate the characterisation of these procedures.

I denominate this merging of two heritages generally as "syncretism", a term used by the French researcher Sylvie André in her study *Le Roman autocthone dans le Pacifique Sud: Penser la continuité* (2008) or as "syncreticity", borrowed from *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989) by B. Aschcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin. These terms appear to be prioritized in theoretical articles to characterize Polynesian texts. The word "hybridity" is avoided due to the fact that it is usually perceived negatively by the indigenous authors:

> What is the post-colonial body? It is a body "becoming," defining itself (…) It is a blend, a new development, which I consider to be Pacific in heart, spirit and muscle; a blend in which influences from outside (even the English language) have been indigenized, absorbed in the image of the local and national, and in turn have altered the national and local. You'll notice I use the terms *blend* and *new development* and avoid *hybrid* (…) Why? Because it is of that outmoded body of colonial theories to do with race, wherein if you are not pure Caucasian or "full-blooded" Samoan or what-have-you, you were called "half-caste," "quadroon," "mixed race," "colored," "a clever-part Maori," and inferior to the pure conduct (…) *Hybrid* (…) still smacks of the racist colonial![1]

[1] Albert Wendt: "Afterword: Tatauing the Post-colonial Body" in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, ed. by Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., United States 1999, pp. 410-411

To describe the strategies of "indigenisation" of the English language, the terms "code-switching", as used by Michelle Kewon in her influential study *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aoetaroa / New Zealand and Oceania* (2007), and "inter-language", as employed by Sylvie André, are applied. The usage of an imposed major language by a minority or by a colonized group of people in order to subvert the dominant culture is characterized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as "linguistic deterritorialization" in *Kafka: pour une litérature mineure* (1975). This concept is utilized because it parallels pertinently the mentioned "indigenisation".

Finally, the merging of the indigenous oral tradition with the imported written tradition and literary forms that engenders a new intermediary genre is defined as "oraliture", a term borrowed once again from Sylvie André, or "orature" according to B. Aschcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin.

In addition to these main theoretical pillars, there are also references to other secondary sources when appropriate, for example, to Homi Bhabha's notion of "border identities", Edward Said's "orientalism", Gérard Genette's "intertextuality" and "paratext", Stuart Hall's concept of "cultural presences", Audre Lorde's "biomythography" and others.

The thesis is divided into three parts, each corresponding to a detailed study of each of the mentioned writers. The parts follow one another so as to reproduce the chronology of the emergence of Polynesian literature in English: from its founding text, being Florence Frisbie's autobiography *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* published in 1948, through the first generation of Polynesian authors of the 1970's represented by Patricia Grace, to the contemporary indigenous literary scene of which Sia Figiel is a leading writer. The individual parts contain three systematically organized chapters.

The first chapters present brief biographies of the concerned authors and are entitled according to their names. Their aim is to familiarize the readers with them and with their immediate context. The second chapters examine one by one the three key stages of the development of Polynesian literature in English to which each of the writers belongs, from the 1940's to the present. The

transforming post-colonial situation of Polynesia is defined together with the local specificities of the distinct islands of origin of the individual authors, namely the Cook Islands, New Zealand and Samoa. The surveys concentrate principally on the writers' differing attitudes to their respective contexts that are expressed in their literary production through their thematic, linguistic and formal choices. The main objective of these chapters, named in function of the particular phases to which they correspond, is to seek out the main post-colonial concerns of the indigenous authors, and to see if, and to what extent and how, the authors "indigenize" the English language and the Western novel form.

Finally, the third chapters present analyses of the initial prose works of the three autochthones – *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka: The Autobiography of a South Sea Trader's Daughter* (1948), *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* (1978) and *Where We Once Belonged* (1996) – from the perspective of "heritage and innovation", such as was done in the previous thesis. The choice of these works was given by the fact that they represent landmarks in the birth and development of this new literature, and because they are interesting to study from the selected viewpoint. The interpretation of the novels concentrates on the dominant references to specific cultural elements of the Polynesian heritage, or in the case of Florence Frisbie, of the European heritage, – be it mythology, literary canonical works, symbols or traditional beliefs – that appear in them and fulfil a decisive function in their structure and contents. The purpose of the designated method of looking at the texts is to record the transforming relationship of each author to her indigenous, or European, mythical and cultural inheritance, and her varying strategies of its innovation throughout the modifying post-colonial context.

Actually, these three initial works display the same type of main character, a female adolescent, who is as well the internal narrator, and whose attitude towards her cultural background reveals more deeply the position of the author to the problems of post-colonial culture and identity reconstruction. It is in these chapters that the main differences between the male and the female perspectives are observable. What is more, due to the fact that Florence Frisbie, Patricia Grace

and Sia Figiel come from distinct island groups of the Polynesian triangle, the variations in the ancient diasporic cultural heritage of their three places of origin is perceivable. As was shown in the previous thesis, Samoan mythology differs the most from that of the other archipelagos because of the very early migration of its inhabitants from the Polynesian hub called Hawaiki.

The Parts I to III are separated by two interludes that function as helpful transitions between the individual authors and the stages in the development of Polynesian literature in English that they represent. Finally, the conclusion records the "dry land" reached by the present investigation by the means of a summarizing comparison of the results of the studies of the individual authors. The comparison sheds light on the general transformations of Polynesian literature in English from the 1940's to the present. Moreover, suggestions for further explorations of this new literature are proposed.

At the end of the thesis there are ten appendices. The appendices I and II are related to the first part of the volume and present two photos: Florence Frisbie in 1950, or two years after the publication of *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*, and R. D. Frisbie with his children in Puka-Puka in 1941. The second photo has been selected just as a matter of interest because it completes interestingly the documentary nature of Part I. Appendix III is a copy of a map entitled "Travels of Johnny Frisbie in the Central Pacific" and "Travels of Johnny Frisbie in the Eastern Pacific" drawn by Florence Frisbie herself to represent her own Pacific "odyssey". The map is attached to her autobiography.

The appendices IV, V and VI are connected to Part II. Appendix IV is a photo of Patricia Grace at the time she became a full time writer in the 1980's. Appendix V is a painting by the Czech artist Gottfried Lindauer (1839-1926), well-known for his portraits of Maori chiefs, that features a woman chieftain holding a "Mere". The document is integrated in order to exemplify the central motif of the author's novel *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* dealt with in Part II, Chapter 3. Appendix VI is a version of the Maori mythical tale about Rona and the moon provided by the writer herself at the end of her novel. This segment is

reproduced here because the textual analysis of Patricia Grace's first work is based on the given myth.

Finally, the appendices VII to X supplement Part III. Appendix VII is once again an illustrative photo of the studied author, here Sia Figiel. Appendix VIII presents fragments from Samoan mythology explained and recounted by the missionary George Turner, the anthropologist Peter H. Buck and the professor Robert D. Craig in their respective works *Samoa: a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (1884), *Vikings of the Pacific* (1938) and *Handbook of Polynesian Mythology* (2004). The segments – "The Supreme God Tagaloa", "The Sacred Bird Tuli", "The Creation of Samoa", "The War Goddess Nafanua" and "Pili the Lizard God" – have been included because they are referential sources for the study of Sia Figiel's handling of Samoan mythology in her novel *Where We Once Belonged* in Part III, chapter 3. Readers can compare the rendered English versions of the myths with the ones found in the novel. Appendix IX, George Turner's explanation of Samoan beliefs concerning the soul and incarnations of gods, has been added in order to elucidate this aspect of the indigenous culture that appears significantly in the book and its interpretation. Finally, Appendix X is a photo of three Samoan chiefs. The one in the centre is a Samoan "tulafale" or talking chief wearing the symbols of his status: the "To'oto'o" – a wooden staff – and the "Fue" – a fly whisk. These symbols play a major function in Sia Figiel's analysed novel and are included here again for illustrative purposes.

As a last point, it is important to comment on the fact that, throughout the thesis, Polynesian words are reproduced according to the orthography of the studied authors who generally omit the use of the macron codified in dictionaries.

When I think of the past I often picture myself as a sort of Miss Ulysses, wandering from island to island in the Aegean Sea…

Florence (Johnny) Frisbie, *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* (1948)

I. *MISS ULYSSES FROM PUKA-PUKA* BY FLORENCE (JOHNNY) FRISBIE: THE FOUNDING TEXT OF POLYNESIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

1. Florence (Johnny[2]) Frisbie

The life of the sixteen-year-old author of the founding text of Polynesian literature in English, the autobiographical novel *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka: The Autobiography of a South Sea Trader's Daughter*, is inevitably closely connected to her family.

Florence (Johnny) Frisbie was born in 1932 on the island of Tahiti, in French Polynesia. Her father, Robert Dean Frisbie (1896-1948), was American. He came to Tahiti in 1920 as a disabled veteran of the First World War living on a regular monthly pension delivered by the American army. In 1924, he travelled to the coral atoll of Puka-Puka, situated in the northern part of the Anglophone Cook Islands archipelago, to work as a trader for the company A. B. Donald, Ltd. He married Ngatokorua à Mataa (? -1939), a native Puka-Pukan. They settled on the atoll and had five children, of which Florence is the second; the firstborn son was bestowed to relatives[3]. "Ropati", as R. D. Frisbie was called by the autochthones, also dedicated himself to writing. He wrote mainly adventure novels and romances based on his experiences in the Pacific. For example, *The Book of Puka-Puka – A Lone Trader on a South Sea Atoll* (1929), *My Tahiti* (1937), *The Island of Desire* (1944) or *Amaru: A Romance of the South Seas*

[2] "Johnny" is the nickname given by the author's father Robert Dean Frisbie.

[3] Adoption was a common practice in traditional Polynesian society and is perpetuated to some extent until today.

(1945). He was also regularly publishing articles mainly for literary and cultural magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly* or *The Pacific Monthly*.

Although the Frisbie children had American citizenship, their mother tongues were Polynesian languages: Puka-Pukan and Rarotongan[4]. They were nurtured according to the Puka-Pukan indigenous culture. However, their father also taught them English. After Ngatokorua's premature death in 1939 caused by tuberculosis, R. D. Frisbie raised the four children alone, which he did against the Polynesian conventions of his wife's family. In 1942, at the beginning of the Pacific War, he left Puka-Puka and started to travel with his offspring within the Cook Islands archipelago until his health condition deteriorated in 1945. Then, the family settled down, first, in Western Samoa and, finally, in Hawaiʻi.

During the four-year voyage, Ropati provided the education for his children mainly in English. He assumed two roles: that of a single father and of a teacher. Florence was highly influenced by him: it was he who encouraged her to write her autobiography *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* and who organized its publication in 1948. Unfortunately, he died the same year. After his death, the orphaned children were taken over by relatives in Hawaiʻi and experienced a long lasting diaspora.

Since then, Florence Frisbie has lived in Hawaiʻi, Japan, New Zealand and the Cook Islands. In 1959, she published another autobiography *The Frisbies of the South Seas: How Robert Dean Frisbie Raised His Four Polynesian Children*.

Although the author's professional career was very varied, she was always involved with literature and culture, and her ambitions were directed towards the preservation and the transmission of her Polynesian heritage. Most of the time, she was a volunteer worker. She kept on writing and published short stories and children's books in English and in the indigenous languages. She contributed to the second anthology of Pacific literature in English *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980* (1995) with her short story "The Bed".

She worked at the University of Otago and joined the Maori and South Pacific Arts Council of New Zealand, whose objective is to enhance the revival

[4] Rarotongan is the language spoken on Rarotonga, the central volcanic island of the Cook Islands.

of the Polynesian indigenous culture. She worked as a television presenter, as a representative of the Cook Islands, and also as a model and a performer of Cook Islands traditional dances. In the 1990's, she returned after more than thirty years to the Cook Islands and settled down on the island of Rarotonga where she worked for some time as a volunteer in a library.

2. *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*: the founding text of Polynesian literature in English

As already mentioned, the publication of Florence Frisbie's autobiographical novel, *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*, was suggested and fuelled by her father. R. D. Frisbie made the arrangements with the publishing house Macmillan Company to have it printed in New York in 1948. Indeed, the autobiography is the result of the collaboration of the teenage Florence with her father, the "trader" mentioned in the subtitle, who presents himself also as the editor and the translator in the brief introduction to the book. This last is dedicated to her deceased Puka-Pukan mother, Ngatokorua.

Ropati wrote the "Introduction", in which he insists on the work's value as "unique in South Sea literature, being the first book, to my knowledge, written by a native South Sea Islander."[5]

It is necessary to rectify this affirmation. It is possible indeed to consider *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* as a founding text, but only in the realm of the determined Anglophone Polynesian literary region treated in the present thesis, instead of the vast South Sea or Pacific region stated in the quotation. Moreover, it has to be said that it is the first book by a Polynesian autochthone with the important difference that the author chose English as her language of written expression. R. D. Frisbie is here overlooking the fact that the autochthones had been becoming literate since the late eighteenth century. Actually, teaching the autochthones to read and write in their indigenous languages was an essential

[5] R. D. Frisbie: "Introduction" in F. J. Frisbie: *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka: The Autobiography of a South Sea Trader's Daughter*, The Macmillan Company, New York 1948, p. viii

part of the programme of evangelisation of the London Missionary Society that landed first in Tahiti in 1797. Consequently, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the literary production of the natives in their respective languages was flowering considerably. For example, in the 1920's, the Tahitian queen Marau (1860-1934), Pomare V, was already composing her large historiographic work about French Polynesia and her memoirs for publication. What is more, she was writing it in English.

Therefore, *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* is definitely "unique" as being the first published book written in English by a Polynesian author from the studied Anglophone Polynesian area that was under British colonial rule. It was only seven years after its publication that another Cook Islander, Tom Davis (1917-2007), issued his autobiography in English *Doctor to the Islands* in 1955 and, five years later, in 1960, the novel *Makutu* that is considered as the precursor of Polynesian fiction writing in English.

Even though Florence Frisbie's work is an autobiography and not fiction, it represents the first essential step towards the creation of a new Polynesian literature in English, so it has the important function of being a founding text. Indeed, as the influential Francophone indigenous contemporary writer Flora Devatine explains, in the Polynesian region where transmission was originally oral, it is the sole act of "writing" and the unrestricted creation of a corpus of miscellaneous texts by anyone who has a message to pass on that has been vital to the birth of an authentic indigenous literature. Thus, Polynesian literature has been born through "writing", primarily of autobiographical texts, and has been progressively passing to fiction:

> I prefer to speak rather about writing than about literature. By writing, I mean any transcription of words, while literature is created on the basis of the aesthetic value of words and on the background of fiction. I define it like this. In order to encourage literature in Polynesia and in order to make the world and ourselves think that we write, I include anyone who has written something in literature. I consider writing as the most important thing, any text. What I mean are, for example, the texts of queen Marau, the daughter of the chieftainess Ariitaimai, who left her memoirs. However, there are also poems. The memoirs

> contain everything: mythical stories, chants, poems, genealogies. This is how we speak and narrate in our region, everything is related and inter-connected. As far as literature in the true sense of the word is concerned, I think that it is only now, in the twenty-first century that we can speak about authentic authors.[6]

According to Flora Devatine, at the dawn of indigenous literature in French or in English, it is crucial to consider all the texts because there are still no defined internal criteria for their judgement and classification.

In fact, in the titles of the first Pacific and Polynesian anthologies published between the 1980's and the years 2000, the word "writing" or the more specific generic term "poems" are prioritized: *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980* (1995), *An Anthology of Maori Writing: Into the World of Light* (1982) or *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English* (2003). The term "literature" was widely used for the first time at one of the first key gatherings of Anglophone Pacific writers at a conference entitled "From the Inside Out: Theorizing Pacific Literature" held in Hawai'i in 1994. The compilation of theoretical essays on the new post-colonial literature that sprang from this pan-Pacific reunion has been mentioned in the introduction.

Being the first attempt of a young autochthone at writing in English and at adopting the European novel form and, due to the significant involvement of her American father, a writer himself, *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* strictly follows the norms of the Occidental literary canons in terms of its language and structure. In the mentioned "Introduction", R. D. Frisbie explains his intensive collaboration with his daughter. Florence Frisbie based her narration on their respective diaries. Her diary was written in three languages: Puka-Pukan, Rarotongan, and English, and the father's only in English. She wrote the manuscript of the autobiography in these three languages and then, he corrected the English and translated the bits written in the Polynesian languages. Therefore,

[6] Moe a Teata Binar: "Francouzská Polynésie se musí pustit do psaní! Rozhovor s tahitskou básnířkou Florou Devatine o odkazu předků, oralité, hlubokých údolích markézských a Češích na Tahiti" in *Souvislosti: revue pro literaturu a kulturu* (číslo 1/2015, ročník XXVI), Praha 2015, p. 75 (my translation)

according to him, the book manifests Florence's process of learning his first language:

> While writing Part Three, Johnny's head was confused by a knowledge of many languages, among them Samoan, Fijian, English and of course Rarotongan and Puka-Pukan, and while writing Part Four she was in the period of transition from Polynesian languages to English. It was not until toward the end of the book that English became her spoken language.[7]

R. D. Frisbie describes how his daughter was passing from one language to another when she was producing her text: "When it was a matter of straight narrative, Johnny managed pretty well in English, but in exposition, description and imaginative work she usually resorted to one of the Polynesian languages."[8] In addition to that, he comments on the nuances between the different conceptual frameworks of the three language systems and praises the richness of the Polynesian languages which are usually considered inferior compared to those of Europe:

> In translating Johnny's Puka-Pukan I have, time and again, found my English inadequate to interpret her mood, humor, and ingenuous philosophy of life. Puka-Pukan is an excellent medium for poetical expression. It is not a primitive language serving only the bare necessities of intercourse, as so many of my European friends believe. A story can be told in Puka-Pukan as well as it can in English, and some stories can be told much better. The same applies to Rarotongan but in a lesser degree, for it has been corrupted by foreign influence. I only wish you could read the Polynesian languages, for then we could offer you a much finer story.[9]

Therefore, the passage from one language to another effectuated throughout the composition of the book was simultaneously a transition from one way of thinking to another according to R. D. Frisbie. Consequently, as the father states, the autobiography is valuable also as a "record of a young mind, striving

[7] R. D. Frisbie: "Introduction" in F. J. Frisbie: *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*, p. vii
[8] Ibid., p. vii
[9] Ibid. p. vii

for self-expression and progressing from the Polynesian to the European way of thinking."[10]

Nonetheless, an interrogation arises concerning R. D. Frisbie's presentation of the indigenous and the English languages and the particular "way of thinking" that each of them conveys according to him. Despite the fact that he celebrates the richness of the Polynesian languages, he also appears to create implicit parallels between the Puka-Pukan language and his daughter's childhood and "ingenuous philosophy of life". Thus, he also implies that the process of Florence's intellectual maturation is related to the acquisition of the more rational and structured English. This interpretation could explain more thoroughly R. D. Frisbie's systematic interventions in the text, his efforts in structuring it and adapting it to the European norms of novel writing, as developed below. At the same time, it can elucidate the importance of his role as Florence's mentor, suggested in his "Introduction".

He points out that his daughter started to write her autobiography in January 1945 and he edited the revised and translated final version in August 1946, which corresponds to the time when they had settled down in Western Samoa and when Florence started to attend school in English. However, the correctness of the written Standard English and the frequent use of the formal register reveal the abundant intervention of the father in the text. It is improbable that the young girl would be able to handle her second language at such a level throughout the described learning process. Actually, the function of R. D. Frisbie's "Introduction" is not only to explain the context of the writing but also to stir the indulgence of the exacting Anglophone readers: to excuse the possible "unevenness in diction" and his obvious interference: "and I hope you will forgive the all too evident signs of the meddling hands of the middle-aged father."[11]

In her narration, Florence Frisbie also comments on the issues exposed in the introduction by her father Ropati: the practise of writing, the use of the three

[10] Ibid., p. viii
[11] Ibid., p. viii

languages and the collaboration with her father. She appears as a highly present narrator, which reveals that she was conscious of the fact that her text was intended for publication. She constantly addresses the readers and reminds them of the two different narrative timelines between which she keeps shifting: one that corresponds to the production of the autobiography, between 1945 and 1946, and the other, corresponding to the retrospective story of her life recorded in her diary.

She dedicates a whole chapter, "How I write my book", to explain the circumstances of the creation of the text. She explains that she received a notebook and a fountain pen from her father right before the family left Puka-Puka in 1942, three years after her mother had passed away, in order to write her journal. She quotes her father's words: "'Now, Johnny,' he said, 'because we are leaving Puka-Puka to start a new life, and you are learning English, this will be a good time to start keeping a diary.'"[12]

She identifies her level of knowledge of the various languages she uses and her assimilation of English as her gradual tool for literary expression: "I was supposed to write my diary in English, but for the first year or two I found that I could express myself well only in Rarotongan or Puka-Pukan, so most of my diary is written in those languages until towards the end, when we came to Samoa in 1945 and English for the first time really became my spoken language."[13]

She started writing her diary at the family's first destination, the uninhabited Suvorov coral atoll also called Treasure Island, and stopped in Samoa in 1945 in order to use it as the basis for the composition of her autobiography: "at Suvorov it was officially opened, on January 11, 1942; and now, in Apia, four years and six months later, the big bookkeeping journal is full to the last page."[14]

[12] Florence (Johnny) Frisbie: *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka: The Autobiography of a South Sea Trader's Daughter*, The Macmillan Company, New York 1948, p. 117
[13] Ibid., p. 117
[14] Ibid., p. 117

She declares that, in order to avoid her autobiography being considered counterfeit, she prefers to confess her weaknesses in the English language and admits that her father has helped her considerably in its composition: "but I don't want this to be a 'fake' book, so I will tell you that my father polishes everything I write and does lots of the translating."[15] She affirms also that she is using her father's diary in order to complete the missing information, which gives evidence of the important guiding role of the father. However, by quoting an extract from his journal written in the form of disconnected phrases rather than in continuous prose, she makes clear that she is not copying it: "'Blowing great guns. At Nataimba. Owner Hennings. Fred Rebell stopped here aboard 18′ skiff *Elaine*: later to Samoa, Puka-Puka, Honolulu, Los Angeles where he piled up his skiff to get past immigration authorities. See his book. Title? (…)'"[16]

The autobiography is proportionally divided into four parts, further separated into chapters, which figure out four decisive moments in the young girl's life up to the moment of writing, in chronological order. This linear structure manifests once again the interference of R. D. Frisbie, organizing the text according to the standards of the Western novel form. Therefore, the autobiography that is addressed primarily to a reading American and English audience has evidently gone through the polishing hand of the American writer who does not let a word in the native language nor any "indigenised" expressions escape in order to fulfil all the criteria of the literary genre. There is no visible attempt at taking up the strategies of the autochthonous oral tradition. Consequently, the question arises of whether the text has not been impoverished to a certain extent by its constant re-adaptations.

It is only through the contents of the book that the reader can access the specific "local colour" and the particular worldview of the young author. The fact that all the events are described from the perspective of a thirteen to fourteen year old girl, half Polynesian and half American, gives an exceptional dimension to the narration.

[15] Ibid., p. 117
[16] Ibid., p. 118

Now, what is the postcolonial context in which Florence Frisbie grows up and what is her attitude towards it? The autobiography spans the period from approximately 1935 to 1945. The administration of the Cook Islands archipelago was conferred to New Zealand in 1901, after its first annexation by the British Empire in 1888. The colonial political centre is set on Rarotonga, the largest volcanic island of the archipelago. The remote atoll of Puka-Puka in the Northern Cook Islands is still protected from imperial impact and Westernization, and the indigenous language and culture remain dominant. There is no threat of foreign hegemony. Florence Frisbie grows up within a traditional Polynesian background not affected by colonialism and Occidental civilisation. She comes into contact with this last through her father and his occupation as a trader and, above all, during her trips to the central islands of the archipelago, Fiji and Samoa. Her work reflects a functioning and healthy allegiance to her native environment. In this sense, it is free from real post-colonial concerns.

On the one hand, Florence Frisbie appears to consider herself as a Polynesian, and pleased to present her culture to foreign Anglophone readers. First, she introduces her autobiography according to the principles of Polynesian traditional oratory by a presentation of her genealogy as taught to her by her mother. The recital of the family genealogy is the first step to identify oneself in Polynesian traditional culture:

> My grandfather Mataa was descended from the war lords of Mangaia (…) At Puka-Puka he married Tala, of the tribe of the Kati (…) and he had twelve children, most of whom were daughters. My mother was his fourth daughter. (…) My father came from Tahiti to Puka-Puka in 1924, in Captain Viggo Rasmussen's schooner the *Tiaré Taporo*, to open a trading station for A. B. Donald, Ltd., of Rarotonga. (…) Then he married Ngatokorua (…)"[17]

Then, in her frequent digressions, the author initiates the supposedly unaware Anglophone readers into the Polynesian customs that are fully alive in her surroundings and transmitted from generation to generation. For example, she presents the transmission of the family oral tradition:

[17] Ibid., p. 3

> Also Mataa taught us our Puka-Pukan family tree right back to the *Te Maté Walo*, or The Great Death, about two hundred and fifty or three hundred years ago; for it is part of the schooling of every atoll child to learn the family tree on both the father's and mother's side of the family. The kings can name their ancestors back fifty or sixty generations, to the gods, but we Puka-Pukan children learned them only to *Te Maté Walo*. (…) When we had learned our Puka-Pukan family tree we learned the names of our Mangaian ancestors; and then Mataa started taking us to our family *po* or burial ground, and showing us where our anestors were buried.[18]

She explains the traditional chants and mythology and emphasizes the important place of music and dance as part of the common diasporic Polynesian patrimony. In addition to that, she can compare the cultures of the various island nations. For example, she seems fascinated by the joyful lifestyle of the inhabitants of Manihiki who "live only to sing, dance, and make love."[19]

Not only does she show great erudition in Polynesian traditions and arts, but she also exhibits great knowledge of her atoll's flora and fauna and of the indigenous traditional crafts devised for the exploitation of the natural environment. Finally, she can analyse the behaviour of the few Western travellers that she meets from the point of view of a native. She projects a highly critical eye on the American and European traders in the Pacific who are characterized by their narrow-mindedness, their lust for money, power and sex, and their lack of morality. Despite the fact that her father is an American trader himself, she explicitly positions herself on the side of the autochthones:

> No two atolls are alike. I have heard traders and supercargoes say that when you have seen one atoll you have seen them all; but that sort of people sees nothing in an island except copra, shell, pearls, home-brew, and women. Oh, I know all about them! What they mean is that copra and trade, beer and women are the same on all the islands. All day long they sit by their storehouse underweighing copra or stand behind the trade-room counter overcharging for goods; and all night long they sit in the trading station drinking home-brew or sneak into the village to commit adultery. They brag about how they cheat my people; then they get

[18] Ibid., p. 21
[19] Ibid., p. 67

> drunk and spoil the young girls. And they are so shameless they do not mind if children hear their drunken talk.[20]

The autobiography reflects as well a turning point in the history of Polynesia which is the Pacific War that started in 1941. The construction of military bases on the islands lead to essential socio-economical transformations and reinforced the British and American hegemony in the region by the introduction of capital. The author perceives how the arrival of the American soldiers and of their wealth corrupts and destroys the humble and decent Polynesian social life in Tongareva (Penrhyn Island). Thus, she prefigures the fatal transformation of Polynesia caused by the impact of Occidental capitalism arriving through the European and American travellers:

> And only four months ago Omoka Village in Penrhyn had been as quiet and sleepy as Roto Village in Puka-Puka. I wonder if Puka-Puka would be destroyed if a thousand soldiers landed there? I'm afraid it would. I'm afraid my people wouldn't see the danger as I, who have travelled so much, can see it. My island and my people would be destroyed overnight. No longer would old Tapipi and the rest of the village fathers stand on the beach with drinking nuts to offer to strangers from the ship. All the beautiful old life would disappear. Just imagine a Puka-Pukan boy meeting a stranger with, 'Hello, Joe; gimme a smoke!' or a Puka-Pukan girl offering herself to a soldier for money! I can't bear to think of it![21]

However, on the other hand, in some instances Florence Frisbie is also equally able to adopt the standpoint of a "white man". She manages to reverse her point of view and look at her indigenous background from the perspective of a Westerner. She can analyse with an equally critical distance her Puka-Pukan culture. She sees it at the same time from the "outside", from a European point of view organized around the dichotomy between "savagery" and "civilization": "Our Puka-Pukan relatives often were angry with my father because of his white man's ways; but my mother knew he was right, for she had lived in Tahiti, where she learned civilized ways and to speak French. You would never know my

[20] Ibid., p. 185
[21] Ibid., p. 210

mother was a Puka-Pukan unless she told you so."[22] After her first contact with urban life in the colonial centres that she visits, she nearly rejects her Puka-Pukan identity and expresses her desire to imitate the Occidental lifestyle: "I love Puka-Puka; I intend some day to return there; but I want to return as a civilized young lady who has seen the world and has a rich husband and nice clothes; I don't want to be a ragged, ignorant Puka-Pukan with bugs in her hair!"[23]

Therefore, Florence Frisbie adopts a double position towards her Polynesian context: from the "inside" and from the "outside". On the one hand, she praises her indigenous heritage and criticizes the Anglophone traders and soldiers and, on the other hand, she negatively assesses her native background and is inclined to adopt the Occidental culture and lifestyle. Thus, she appears to stand at the border between the two cultures with which she is in contact.

She is well aware of the dissimilarities between the autochthones and the "white men", and perceives how these differences are frequently a source of tensions between these two confronting groups. Her position "in-between"[24] enables her a double critical perspective. She learns about, observes and judges alternatively the Polynesian and the European customs and mentalities. Her age permits her to approach the respective cultural differences with ease and innocence and to adopt spontaneous attitudes towards them. Also, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that, due to her age, her critical thinking is undoubtedly influenced by her father's strong presence – his education and opinions – and by her Polynesian environment.

Therefore, her autobiography can be perceived rather as the result of the author's "transcultural" *engagement* with Western discourses than as an attempt at their assimilation and reproduction as it might seem at first view. Mary Louise Pratt defines this *engagement* in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*:

[22] Ibid., p. 8
[23] Ibid., p. 109
[24] Homi Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, New York 1994

> In very elaborate ways, these early texts undertook not to reproduce but to *engage* western discourses of identity, community, selfhood, and otherness. Their dynamics are transcultural, and presuppose relations of subordination and resistance. Those dynamics continue, I would suggest, in contemporary autobiography and related forms such as oral history, testimony, vernacular art (…) As I suggested above, when such "autoethnographic" texts are read simply as "authentic" self-expression or "inauthentic" assimilation, their transcultural character is obliterated and their dialogic engagement with western modes of representation is lost.[25]

This "transcultural" status of *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* – expressed in the passage from the indigenous languages to written English, the adoption of the Western novel form, and the "border identity" of the first Polynesian author shaped in the blend of the indigenous and the Anglophone Occidental inheritances – represents the first step in the birth of Polynesian literature in English and foreshadows its "syncretic" nature.

It should be added that Florence Frisbie's second published work, the autobiography *Frisbies of the South Seas:How Robert Dean Frisbie Raised His Four Polynesian Children*, may be considered as a rewriting of *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*. The author narrates once again her childhood in Puka-Puka, but with the difference that she is now retelling it from the perspective of an independent adult woman of twenty seven, and that the story ends at the moment of her father's death in 1948. She remakes the retrospective tale of her life in an English that she now masters very well and without the encouragement and the help of her now deceased father. In 2002, Florence Frisbie explains in an interview for the review "New Literatures" that, after her father's death, to start writing again was a manner of retying the lost family bonds. For this reason, she decided to begin each new chapter of her book by a quotation from one of her father's novels:

[25] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, first edition by Routledge in 1992, second edition by Routledge, New York 2008, page 100

> At the time I was writing the latter[26], I was missing my father terribly, I was not able to give him up, for dead, as it were. Moving from home to home left me insecure, but there were valuable lessons to learn, I must admit. Therefore, beginning each chapter with something of his was an act of longing to connect, to firm our bonding even though he was gone. It was a way of making believe that we were still together and I was listening to his instructions, guidance and or contributions. (…) I wanted, needed, to bring him to life, to recreate a life only he made possible for us. [27]

Therefore, writing is a way to connect with her American father and to reunite the separated family for the Polynesian author: "It's keeping the family intact, it's like watering the family tree."[28]

Finally, as a last point, it is worth commenting on the fact that it is very interesting to read *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* and *Frisbies of the South Seas* in parallel with the short story entitled "Frisbie of Danger Island[29]" written by James Norman Hall (1916-1951), the North American co-author of the famous *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1932) with Charles Nordhoff. The family life of the Frisbies' presented in both autobiographies is here retold from the perspective of the American father and of his friend and patriot James Hall.

The short story is part of the collection *The Forgotten One and Other True Tales of the South Pacific* (1952) where the American writer, who emigrated to Tahiti after the First World War, documents the individual destinies of American and European travellers to Polynesia that he met. Among the mentioned personalities, there also surprisingly figures the Czech immigrant known as Rivnac, the owner of the hotel "Chez Rivnac". As James Hall explains in the story, their friendship began around Antonín Dvořák's *Symphony of the New World.*

In the last "true tale" of the collection dedicated to R. D. Frisbie, the author describes their first meeting on the harbour of Tahiti at his arrival and their growing friendship: "I first met him on the island of Tahiti on the day in the

[26] *Frisbies of the South Seas*
[27] Elizabeth De Loughrey: "The Whole is Made up of Many" – An Interview with Johnny Frisbie, *New Literatures Review* (n. 38), 2002, p. 82
[28] Ibid., p. 82
[29] "Danger Island" is the name that was given to Puka-Puka by the British Naval expedition in the region in 1765.

early nineteentwenties when he stepped ashore from the monthly steamer from San Francisco, and the friendship then begun lasted until the day of his death in November 1948."[30] After R. D. Frisbie had travelled around the Pacific and when he settled down in Puka-Puka, their close friendship continued through correspondence. James Hall's narration of Frisbie's life in Polynesia, especially from the year 1934, is illustrated by reproduced letters that they had sent to one another. The American writer draws a different portrait of R. D. Frisbie than the young daughter. He accentuates his personality as a dreamer, his passion for literature and his endeavours to be recognised as a writer, in which, despite his efforts, he does not seem to succeed.

In the same way, in his letters, Ropati draws a portrait of Florence from his perspective as a father and retells, from his own point of view, the same events described by her in *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* such as, for example, the birth of Florence's siblings, Ngatokorua's death, the four year journey, his literary production, etc.

Therefore, in the three books, there appear complementary testimonies of the heterogeneous life of the Frisbie family: indigenous and American points of view, young and adult ones. In all the cases, the narrated stories have the value of historical documents of encounters with the "Other"[31] in Polynesia and are all most touching.

3. The Function of Homer's *Odyssey* in *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*

Paradoxically, the founding text of Polynesian literature in English inscribes itself into the Western cultural and literary tradition based on the Greco-Roman inheritance by its title. The studied autobiography is "intertextual"[32] and is part of the series of literary works such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) or Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990) that refer to Homer's *Iliad*

[30] James Norman Hall: "Frisbie of Danger Island" in *The Forgotten One and Other True Tales of the South Pacific*, Commemorative Edition, Mutual Publishing, Australia 2007, p. 154
[31] Tzvetan Todorov: *La conquête de l'Amérique: la question de l'autre*, Ed. du seuil, Paris 1982
[32] Gérard Genette: *Palimpsestes*, Seuil, Paris 2003

and *Odyssey*, themselves the founding works of European literature that symbolize the passage from orality to literacy. By alluding to the mythical archetypical heroes and their destinies, the individual writers provide a second level of reading of their texts and, thus, widen their scopes of meaning. However, each of them makes use of Homer's canonical work differently and with a distinct purpose in the function of his or her identity and national, historical and literary contexts.

In the case of *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka,* it is important to consider the fact that the reference to the *Odyssey* was not chosen and developed by an established and conscious adult fiction writer such as the mentioned authors James Joyce or Derek Walcott. It is the first attempt of a teenager at writing about her own life during the complex period of coming of age and, what is more, in a second language that she is striving to learn. It is the fruit of the imagination of a young half-Puka-Pukan and half-American, who tries to understand and structure her experience and identity, and looks for a functioning reference in order to achieve that. Due to the fact that the autobiography is embedded within a mythical realm, it can be characterized as a "biomythography". This term was created by the Caribbean-American writer, Audre Lorde (1934-1992), to define her own autobiographical novel *Zami: a New Spelling of my Name* (1982) that also displays a quest of the self through the blending of reality and myth in her own cultural background of a young Caribbean growing up in Harlem.

Florence Frisbie mingles the references to Ulysses with allusions to "cowboys" that directly represent her American cultural background. The "cowboys" are mentioned in the titles of several parts and chapters of the book: "The Cowboys at Puka-Puka", "Cowboys in the jungle", "The Cowboys abroad", and throughout the narration. She compares herself and her siblings to cowboys and it appears that their father calls them this way. She explains that their father used to be a cowboy when he was living in the United States and that is the reason why the natives call him also "Ropati-cowboy". For the young Puka-Pukan, whose knowledge of this profession is based only on what she has heard

of it, it is connoted with exotic thrilling adventures. She seems to be idealizing Ropati's unknown "cowboyland" and is very curious about it. She dreams of receiving money for the publication of her book and having the means to discover the United States: "My book published? A voyage to San Francisco! Visits to the zoo, the circus, the Wild West Show, and the theaters I have heard so much about! It sounds like a dream!"[33]

Therefore, Florence Frisbie mingles indiscriminately her immediate Polynesian background with high classical allusion but also with popular elements of American contemporary culture, which supports the idea of the "transcultural" nature of her autobiography as *engaging* a range of Western discourses without fully assimilating them. Thus, it also exemplifies her previously mentioned "border identity".

Nonetheless, the given mentions of the "cowboys" do not acquire a deeper meaning such as the references to Homer's *Odyssey* that come to form the frame of the narration and with which the eponymous hero, the author, identifies as the title of the book suggests. In the interview for the *New Literatures Review*, Florence Frisbie reveals that in her Polynesian environment, Homer's epic poem was part of the very few intermediaries of her father's cultural heritage: "Isolated on atolls I was growing up as an island girl, culturally. To have some of my father's European heritage, there was only one available, namely, writing (and also classical music) and all that goes with it to make it happen (books, words, spelling, Ulysses, cyclops, and Chaucer)."[34]

In the given context, the *Odyssey* represents the distant and unknown Western civilization, of which the young Puka-Pukan is as well the inheritor through her father, and which she longs to discover because of that. The Polynesian author demonstrates a deep knowledge of Homer throughout her autobiography. She is acquainted with Ulysses' journey home by her own reading of the classic and by word of mouth, in the Polynesian way, through the

[33] Florence (Johnny) Frisbie: *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*, p. 118
[34] Elizabeth De Loughrey: "The Whole is Made up of Many" – An Interview with Johnny Frisbie, p. 82

recounting of her father. As mentioned above, Ropati was regularly teaching his children:

> For almost every bright star or constellation my father had a story. If it was Sirius, he would tell us about the pyramids and how, thousands of years ago, the same star that we watched from the *Taipi*'s deck shone down a long tunnel onto the dead face of a Pharaoh (…) A and B Centaurii would remind him of the ancient people who were half horse and half man, and the Pleiades and Hyades would awaken stories of nymphs and fauns in ancient Greece. (…) That was the way we cowboys learned the names of the stars and the principal constellations; but even better than the star stories were the ones about Ulysses and Aeneas. I don't know how many times we have heard those stories of Troy and its heroes, but they are just as exciting today as they were when first we heard them.[35]

It is interesting to comment on the fact that R. D. Frisbie dedicated himself to the oral transmission of his cultural inheritance not only to his children but also to the natives: "And one of my father's biggest jobs in Puka-Puka, after doctoring, was teaching the people stories like the ones of Ulysses and Aeneas, which they made into theatricals for May Day and the King's Birthday."[36]

Viewed from the young girl's Polynesian perspective, the *Odyssey* acquires an exotic dimension. Indeed, what she emphasizes in her understanding of the epic poem are the retold sensational sea adventures set in the exotic environment of ancient Greece: "After he told us these true things, and found what a big boy we made of him, how our eyes popped and we wagged our heads with astonishment, he started making up adventures as thrilling as the story of Ulysses."[37] Or, on another occasion, "Some day I will fill a book with those stories I heard at night on the beach of Yato, particularly about the heroes who sailed their canoes to distant lands where they had as exciting adventures as Ulysses"[38].

On the other hand, as it arises from the preceding quotation, the theme of the adventurous sea journey is, at the same time, what the author perceives that

[35] Florence (Johnny) Frisbie: *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*, pp. 121-122
[36] Ibid., p. 105
[37] Ibid., p. 46
[38] Ibid., p. 25

she has in common with the *Odyssey*. Her everyday life is imminently connected with the Pacific Ocean and she is a descendant of the Polynesian diaspora. Thus, she performs what B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin would call an act of "appropriation"[39]. A major part of the indigenous oral tradition records similar adventure stories of individual heroes who have undertaken dangerous sea voyages in order to find their homeland or their "Ithaca" in mythical frameworks. In Polynesian mythology, every island of the triangle, except Samoa and Tonga, has various versions about its discovery and settling by a venerated divinity or mythical hero. However, the main difference between Homer's epic poem and the Polynesian diaspora is that the journey of the Western hero is not a journey of discovery but primarily a journey to a concrete native island. Consequently, Florence Frisbie's text presents her own strategy of "appropriation" of the Occidental myth, or her understanding of it from a native point of view as an adventurous journey into the unknown.

Her reworking of Homer's work is a means to create a bond between her two heritages: the Occidental literary tradition and the Polynesian oral one. She compares the parallel histories transmitted through both of them: "When the white men were living in caves my ancestors were sailing their double canoes in the Great Migration from Asia to the Pacific islands; when Ulysses was returning from Troy, the Polynesians were having equally thrilling adventures in the Great South Sea"[40].

She applies the epic chants about the theme of the adventurous sea journey also to her own life. In fact, the major focus of *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* is the story of the young girl's trip around the Polynesian region: since her first boat trip to Fiji and Samoa in 1940, through the decisive departure of the family from Puka-Puka in 1942, the successive landings on the various islands of the Cook Islands archipelago, to the final stop in American Samoa in 1945.

The analogy between Ulysses' sea itinerary and that of the young Puka-Pukan results in a complete identification of the latter with the Greek hero. The

[39] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin: *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*
[40] Florence (Johnny) Frisbie: *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*, p. 65

Odyssey becomes the frame of Florence Frisbie's narration retrospectively: after the author has re-read her diary and started to write her autobiography: "When I think of the past I often picture myself as a sort of Miss Ulysses, wandering from island to island in the Aegean Sea."[41]

Homer's work stirs the imagination of the teenager and the given comparisons come out as a sort of juvenile game: she indulges in imagining herself as the ancient hero and in elevating her everyday reality to heroic dimensions. The first explicit identification of the Polynesian teenager with Ulysses occurs when she retells the first departure from the isolated atoll of Puka-Puka in 1940 on the leper ship via Fiji:

> I'm afraid I wasn't as homesick as I should have been. As soon as I got over being seasick, which was in two days, I had as exciting a time as Ulysses in his hollow black ship. It was a good deal the same, too, for you must remember that I was a wild little savage from the most primitive island in Polynesia. I had never seen a dog or a horse or a motorcar, or heard a radio or a phonograph, or a 'talkie', or ever seen a white man except for the South Sea traders, missionaries, and officials who visited Puka-Puka twice a year. (…) I didn't know what a mountain looked like, or a river, lake, or town (…) So foreign lands to me were as strange and romantic as the Greek isles must have been to Ulysses.[42]

Here, what links the author to Ulysses is, first, the passion for exploration, although the interpretation is questionable since the hero is perseveringly striving to go home in the course of ten years. Secondly, it is the discovery of unknown islands and inhabitants. It has to be noted that, as the author remarks in the quotation, coming from an atoll characterized by a deserted natural environment made mostly of plane surfaces of white sand and ocean, seeing for the first time mountainous volcanic islands with rich flora and fauna must have made a strong impression on the young girl. She perceives the new reality that she is discovering as "supernatural" as the Cyclops, the Sirens or the Lotus Eaters and enjoys comparing herself to Ulysses confronted by "strange" or "romantic" creatures on the individual islands.

[41] Ibid., p. 128
[42] Ibid., pp. 57-58

In the following quotation, the given analogy is also used as a means to make the narrated events and her state of mind easier to envisage for Western readers acquainted with Homer:

> Now I hope you will understand what I felt when we sailed into Suvorov's lagoon in the early dawn, and later when we broke into the bush to feel the mystery of an uninhabited island. Hidden away in the jungle there might be a beautiful witch like Circe, giants like the Cyclops, or another Calypso – but the feel of the place made me think more of sirens or old King Aeolus.[43]

From chapter 23, entitled "Miss Ulysses at Sea", a complete transposition of the epic poem on the narration of the nomad life of the young girl from 1942 to 1945 takes place. The author creates obvious analogies between a number of events or encounters that occur to her and episodes or characters from the *Odyssey*, which has some similarity with the narrative structure of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

She explains her own method of transposition. She intuitively sees the world around her through the prism of Homer's work:

> I find myself explaining things by some story in Homer. For instance, there is a beachcomber on the island where we now live, who has a beautiful wife with the eyes of a witch. She is leading her beachcomber husband into the jungle of madness, where all is confused and there is no way out (…) And how can I help but think that a South Sea Circe has turned another of her lovers into a swine? And there are six or eight white men who live in one of the clubs of Apia. All have money. They have nothing to do but loaf and drink beer, eat the wonderful meals Mrs. Somebody cooks for them, go to the picture show, and sleep. This is all they have done for years, since I was here the first time, because they are like the strange people in the *Odyssey*, the lotus-eaters.[44]

The stopover on the island of Manihiki corresponds to the episode of Ulysses' crew passing by the sirens' rocks. The Polynesian atoll is described as "the most beautiful green siren isle in God's beautiful green world – a land no

[43] Ibid., p. 128
[44] Ibid., p. 128

one has written about because scarcely anyone has been there."[45] The association with the Greek epic is based on the fact that the local inhabitants are famous for their affectionate nature and their love of singing and dancing. The women are graceful and have beautiful voices like the sirens: "Excitable and emotional, song and dance, love and laughter were all they understood. And their voices! They didn't talk; they sang! They had lilting voices."[46] However, contrary to the ancient hero, Miss Ulysses has not resisted the call and has landed there: "As for me, I was Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka. I had broken the ropes that bound me to the mast; I had taken the wax from my sailors' ears; ashore I saw the sirens beckoning and I heard their song."[47]

Manihiki is pictured as an enchanting island where the Frisbie family finds shelter after having survived a hurricane on Anchorage Island and stays there longer than expected. On the hospitable island, the young girl initiates an innocent love relationship with a Manihikian boy called Willie. However, as she explains, it is only a fleeting enchantment since the boy, though convincing her of his affection, will certainly find another sweetheart as soon as she leaves, which is later confirmed.

Moreover, on the "Siren's Isle", her father gets involved in a "bewitched" relationship with an analogue of Calypso: "Papa got mixed with an emotional type he called Calypso because she tried to keep him in Manihiki for seven years."[48] The sea nymph is here a simple-minded autochthonous young girl, in love with the author's father, who keeps on going after him: "Calypso was a number-one man chaser. There was no escaping her once she had made up her mind to get her man."[49] Due to her insistence, they end up employing her as their housekeeper. When the Frisbies manage to leave Manihiki on the *Tiaré Taporo* via Rarotonga in 1943, Calypso hides herself on board and shows herself only after the ship has already left the harbour: "Calypso had stowed away on

[45] Ibid., p. 140
[46] Ibid., p. 186
[47] Ibid., p. 186
[48] Ibid., p. 198
[49] Ibid., p. 198

Ulysses's raft."[50] Nevertheless, in Rarotonga, R. D. Frisbie persuades her to return home by the same ship.

Florence Frisbie creates direct analogies also between the Trojan War retold in Homer's *Iliad*, from which Ulysses comes back victorious, and the occurring Pacific war. As has been said before, R. D. Frisbie's initial reason for their departure from Puka-Puka in 1942 was to join the American army in the Second World War. The Frisbie family is compared to the awaited Greek warriors who will ensure victory in the Trojan War:

> …we still remembered and talked about our Uncle Sam's warriors at the gates of Tokyo. We began to half believe that those warriors were waiting for us, as the Greek heroes waited for Achilles; and we half believed that the war could not end until our father arrived to chase the Japanese Hector around the walls of Tokyo, slay him, and drag him behind his chariot.[51]

Moreover, the author adds that, paradoxically, the circumstances of the Trojan War are more tangible to her than those of the surrounding Pacific War. She comments on the fact that, on the isolated atolls of the Cook Islands archipelago, the impact of the Second World War is minor compared, for example, with Rarotonga. Access to information is much more restricted; it is less available than Homer:

> To me World War II had been no more real than the Trojan War. I knew about the latter by reading Homer and talking about the Greek heroes with my father; and I knew about World War II by reading scraps of radio news and talking about it with South Sea natives. And, because Homer was more convincing than the man who wrote the radio news, the Trojan War was more real than World War II.[52]

By naming herself "Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka", Florence Frisbie accentuates important differences between her and the Greek hero, which emphasizes her individuality. First, the difference of sex and of age: she is a young girl. Secondly, her different origins: her native island is Puka-Puka and

[50] Ibid., p. 211
[51] Ibid., p. 164
[52] Ibid., p. 224

not Ithaca. Thus, the re-adaptation of the epic poem presents essential variations. The readers are confronted with a reverse version of Ulysses: an eponymous heroine that provides a female perspective, relative to her young age, on her life as a sea journey in the realm of the archipelagos in the distant Polynesian region.

The European heritage and the Polynesian context thus interwoven reflect Florence Frisbie's "in-between" identity mentioned in the previous chapter. By referring to both of them, she manifests the recognition of her belonging to the two sides of herself and of her double legacy. On one hand, she displays a deep rootedness in her indigenous culture and, on the other hand, she identifies with a Western classical hero.

The fact that the given unification is possible emphasizes the universal dimension of Homer's epic poem due to its metaphorical meaning. George Chapman, one of Homer's translators, defines it as: "The information or fashion of an absolute man, and necessary (or fatal) passage through many afflictions…to his natural haven and country is the whole argument and scope of this inimitable and miraculous poem."[53]

Actually, behind Florence Frisbie's ingenuous narrative voice and her apparent playful use of the analogies to Ulysses' adventures lie extremely difficult and painful experiences of "epic" dimensions: the premature death of her mother, the separation from the Puka-Pukan family and the homeland, life on the deserted Suvorov atoll and the survival of the terrible hurricane on Anchorage Island, her father's critical health and deportation to American Samoa and the context of the Pacific War.

The reference to a text that represents the father's culture – a patriarchal text – can equally be perceived as a consequence of the early rupture with the mother, to whom the autobiographical novel is dedicated, and with the native island. It manifests the necessity of the adolescent to create a new orientation point. The identification of Florence Frisbie with one of the most representative figures of Western civilization instead of with a legendary hero from the

[53] George Chapman: "Introduction" in Homer: *The Odyssey*, translated by George Chapman, Wordsworth Editions, Great Britain 2002, p. XIV

Polynesian oral tradition reveals the influential role of the father and her need to reinforce the latent bonds with the remaining up to now less present American cultural background.

In this sense, Florence Frisbie's autobiography may indeed be viewed as a metaphor of a "journey home", an attempt at recovering an emotional basis so as to find a new home or to find herself. It embodies the strife to unify the author's divided Polynesian and American identity at the critical moment of her coming of age. It follows the young girl's process of learning her father's language through writing, the exercise of which is at the same time a means of reconciling her omnipresent Polynesian cultural background with her European one. This development appears in the transposition of the *Odyssey* on the young Polynesian's everyday reality.

As a final point, it is necessary to comment on the fact that *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* has been edited with a detailed map of the region drawn by the author herself and entitled "Travels of Johnny Frisbie in the Central Pacific" and "Travels of Johnny Frisbie in the Eastern Pacific" (see Appendix III). The function of the map is to illustrate the itinerary of the teenager among the islands of Polynesia to the border with Melanesia, or from Tahiti in French Polynesia to Fiji.

The individual visited islands are outlined according to their main geographical characteristics and the author has drawn the means of transport by which she travelled, be it a schooner, a steamer or a plane. These representations parallel the text, in which Florence Frisbie pays attention to the transports and distances in her descriptions. For example, the only represented plane leaving Penrhyn Island echoes the last chapter of the book "The Bomber, the Commandant, and the Jeep", in which the abandoned children take a plane for the first time in their life in order to join their hospitalized father in American Samoa in 1945: "It was very cold. I had never known that the air could be so bitter cold. Flying in a navy bomber, we four children huddled together on a pile

of mail bags, bundled in woolen blankets. It was the morning after VJ day and we were being flown the eight hundred miles from Penrhyn Island to Tutuila, American Samoa."[54]

Moreover, the map is a useful orientation tool for the readers who are not acquainted with the region to visualize and more easily follow the travels of the narrator. Finally, the geographical representation of Florence Frisbie's itinerary intensifies the analogy with the antique hero Ulysses whose journey from Troy to Ithaca, though mythical, has been traced with precision within existing stopovers in the Mediterranean Sea.

Therefore, the map, together with the title itself, the dedication to her deceased mother and her father's "Introduction" studied in the previous chapter can be all considered as important "paratexts" according to the definition of the French literary theorist Gérard Genette in *Paratexts. Thresholds of interpretation* published in French as *Seuils* in 1987. These elements, indirectly linked to the main text itself, are complementary, they add to the contents of the novel and help create its autobiographical as well as mythical frame.

What is more, *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka: The Autobiography of a South Sea Trader's Daughter* blends not only two distant cultural heritages but also different ways of perceiving and expressing the author's complex surrounding Polynesian environment with the aim of finding and creating an identity. Florence Frisbie fuses autobiography, mythology, epic narrative, history and geography or, in the words of the Caribbean-American poet Audre Lorde, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, she merges "dreams/myths/histories"[55].

In this sense, despite the efforts of R. D. Frisbie to fulfil the established standards of the English and American novel as has been shown previously, the work diverges from the traditional principles of the autobiographical genre and can be associated rather with the innovative genre of the "biomythography". This

[54] Florence (Johnny) Frisbie: *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*, p. 233
[55] Audre Lorde: "Acknowledgements" in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name – a Biomythography*, Persephone Press, U. S. A. 1982

alternative autobiographical genre as produced by Florence Frisbie results from her "appropriation" of several Western discourses, or of her *engagement* with them. It attests the "transcultural" character of her text and prefigures the innovative "syncretic" nature of Polynesian literature in English.

Interlude

The founding text of Polynesian literature in English raises questions related to post-colonial identity. The problems of identity are handled by a young girl growing up at the border of the Polynesian and the Occidental cultures that co-habit rather peacefully in her background. She is immersed in the still functioning traditional Polynesian life and, through her father, she naturally inherits his very different Western patrimony and the English language. Although this first work of Polynesian literature in English is manifestly moulded by the guiding hand of Florence Frisbie's American father who adapts it uncompromisingly to the criteria of Anglo-American novel writing, the process of its production is an invaluable record of a first attempt of an autochthone at merging the indigenous and Occidental heritages.

Florence Frisbie's identity quest is more internal than political since she has not practically experienced direct colonial domination. This fact enables her to have a balanced personal approach to Polynesian identity reconstruction that will culminate in the 1970's. For her, the indigenous cultural inheritance and the European one are inextricably interwoven in an equal and positive manner, and she shows a will to "appropriate" and blend these two in order to find her "home".

The follower of Florence (Johnny) Frisbie, the second representative Polynesian woman writer who has opted for English as her language of expression, is Patricia Grace. She is as well of mixed Maori and European descent and publishes her initial works of fiction in the 1970's, already as a mature woman in her thirties. The context has changed categorically. The indigenous population of New Zealand is under the threat of complete acculturation caused by the impact of British rule in the settler colony and Patricia Grace is one of the first to lift her voice to prevent the irretrievable loss of Maori cultural identity and to encourage a "Maori Renaissance". She belongs to the first generation of Polynesian authors writing in English because they all share the same cause in their own countries. Her texts manifest clear post-

colonial concerns: they actively call for indigenous self-assertion and propose urgent solutions to cultural reconstruction. Submerged by the hegemonic European culture, the itinerary of Patricia Grace's "journey home" is the other way round: to learn and revitalize the Maori language as well as re-discover and put forward her indigenous cultural patrimony through her writings.

Nevertheless, both Florence Frisbie's and Patricia Grace's ways lead to the same end: the "syncretism" of the respective heritages.

'They think that's all we're good for', I said. 'A laugh and that's all. Amusement. In any other week of the year we don't exist. Once a year we're taken out and put on show, like relics.' (...) Then old Hohepa, who is bent and sometimes crabby said: 'It is your job, this. To show others who we are.'

Patricia Grace, "Parade" in *Waiariki* (1975)

II. PATRICIA GRACE AND THE FIRST GENERATION OF POLYNESIAN AUTHORS WRITING IN ENGLISH

1. Patricia Grace

Patricia Grace was born in 1937 in New Zealand, in the city of Wellington which to the Maori people is known as "Te Upoko o Te Ika, the head of the fish, that a long time ago was fished up by the demigod Maui from the great Ocean of Kiwa"[56]. Her father was a half Maori, a descendant of Ngati Toa, Ngati Raukawa and Te Ati Awa tribes, and her mother was of European descent. Being of mixed parentage, Patricia Grace grew up at the border of the two conflicting cultures of her country. She has experienced life in the so-called "pakeha"[57] city at the time of the Maori rural exodus, but also in the traditional, indigenous community life in the rural areas, on her ancestral land in Hongoeka Bay, Plimmerton, where she now lives.

She obtained a Diploma in the Teaching of English as a Second Language and practised this profession until she was given a writing fellowship from Victoria University in 1985 and became a full-time writer. She started her literary career by publishing her pieces of writing in various newspapers and, mainly, in the first indigenous magazine *Te Ao Hau*, created in the 1950's by the Maori Affairs Department. She also joined a Penwoman's Club while living and

[56] Patricia Grace: "Influences on Writing" in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, ed. By Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., United States 1999, p. 65

[57] "Pakeha" means "white" in Maori and is used to refer to the descendants of European settlers.

teaching in Auckland. Her first collection of short stories, entitled *Wairiki and Other Stories*, was issued in 1975 by the publishing house Longman Paul Ltd. The publication of her first novel *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* (1978) by the same publisher followed three years later. These two are landmark works in the development of Polynesian literature because they represent the first works of fiction written in English by an indigenous woman author and, through them, Patricia Grace becomes an essential representative of the first generation of Polynesian writers.

Her succeeding literary creation was and still is very abundant. She published a number of short stories within the following collections: *The Dream Sleepers and Other Stories* (1980), *Electric City and Other Stories* (1987), *Selected Stories* (1991), *The Sky People* (1994) and *Small Holes in the Silence* (2006). Her ensuing novels have been: *Potiki* (1986), *Cousins* (1992), *Baby No-Eyes* (1998), *Dogside Story* (2001), *Tu* (2004) and *Ned and Katina* (2009) which is a biographical work.

Patricia Grace also published illustrated books for children. They are written in English with Maori words included in order to encourage the learning of the indigenous language. Generally, the individual books also have parallel editions entirely in Maori: *The Kuia and the Spider / Te Kuia me te Pungawerewere* (1981), *Watercress Tuna and the Children of Champion Street / Te Tuna Watakirihi me Nga Tamariki o te Tiriti o Toa* (1985, published also in Samoan), *The Trolley* (1993) and *Areta and the Kahawai / Ko Areta me nga Kahawai* (1994).

The author's desire to take up and transmit further Maori cultural heritage is also manifested by her publication of *Wahine Toa* (1984), illustrated by Robyn Kahukiwa, in which she presents a unique study of Maori mythical goddesses. She explains that the given mythological stories "are both contemporary and ancient"[58].

[58] *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, ed. by Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie, Oxford University Press, Auckland 1998, p. 215

The work of Patricia Grace has been praised not only by Maori people but also by New Zealanders and an international audience. She has received a number of prestigious literary prizes right from the start of her career, such as the New Zealand Book Award for Fiction (1987), the Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize for fiction (2001), the Deutz Medal for Fiction & the Montana Award for fiction (2005) and the Neustadt International Prize for Literature (2008). She was awarded the Queen's Service Order in 1988 and was honoured with the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in 2006 due to her significant contribution to New Zealand literature. She was made a Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to literature in the Queens Birthday Honours in 2007. In 1989, she was given an Honorary Doctorate of Literature from Victoria University in Wellington and in 2005 she was honoured as a living icon of New Zealand art by the Arts Foundation of New Zealand.

The important recognition of an indigenous author demonstrates a will and a disposition of New Zealanders to listen to the voices of the Maori minority, as expressed through her lifetime's work.

2. Patricia Grace and the Maori Renaissance

As has been said, Patricia Grace is the initiator of female Polynesian literature in English because she is the first woman writer among the first generation of indigenous authors. The writers of the first generation, namely Albert Wendt (b. 1939), Epeli Hau'ofa (1939-2009), Witi Ihimaera (b. 1944), Keri Hulme (b. 1947) and Kauraka Kauraka (1951-1997), who are the continuators of the pioneer poets Hone Tuwhare (1922-2008) and Alistair Te Ariki Campbell (1925-2009), took part in the decolonizing process of the Anglophone Polynesian region which was under British colonial rule, in the struggle for political, social and cultural self-assertion and in the indigenous identity reconstruction from the 1960's on. They have been already introduced in

the previous thesis together with the large context of the dawn of Polynesian literature in English.

Patricia Grace is also a key figure in the local New Zealand indigenous movement called the "Maori Renaissance" with the two mentioned Maori authors: the poet Hone Tuwhare with his collection *No Ordinary Sun* from 1964 and Witi Ihimaera with *Pounamu Pounamu* and *Tangi* issued in 1972 and 1973. These last two books represent the first collection of short stories and the first novel in English published by a Polynesian writer. Actually, the Maori cultural revival is embedded in the mentioned larger indigenous movement of anti-colonial resistance and self-assertion of the overall Polynesian region which has been progressing since the 1960's.

In the previous thesis, the differences between the post-colonial concerns of the Maoris and those of the autochthones of the other former British colonies such as Tonga, Samoa, the Cook Islands and Niue as reflected in the emerging Polynesian literature in English were outlined. Contrary to the four smaller insular territories where the indigenous population remained in the majority in spite of the impact of the British political and cultural hegemony, New Zealand was annexed as a settler colony through the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 between the British Crown and the Maori tribal chiefs. While the autochthones considered the treaty as a means to obtain the protection of the foreign empire without compromising their rights over their territory, the foreigners immediately took command of the sales of land, started to implement the empire's sovereignty and initiated the settlement of the two main islands. This misunderstanding based on the dissimilar versions of the legal document in English and in Maori inevitably led to warfare between the colonists, supported by the British Army troops, and the indigenous tribes. The strong resistance of the autochthones enhanced the stereotyped image of their so-called "warrior culture". However, the wars ceased in the 1870's and Maori land confiscations ensued. The diminishing indigenous population was gradually being pushed to the rural areas and, thus, to the margins of the dominating society of European settlers who progressively formed a strong imperial nation. New Zealand became a Dominion

in 1907 and the administration of the neighbouring British colonies was being conferred to the flowering country that achieved constitutional autonomy in 1986 through the New Zealand Constitution Act.

Therefore, unlike the other Polynesian peoples of the studied Anglophone area whose indigenous population, language and culture have never been under threat despite colonial impositions, which facilitated the ensuing achievement of their independence or high degree of autonomy since the 1960's, the Maoris were dispossessed of their land and became a minority in the ruling settler nation. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was generally believed that the autochthones of New Zealand would progressively die out. Thus, the post-colonial struggle of the surviving Maoris consists in being accepted and integrated in their own country with equal rights with the descendants of the emigrants and in that their language and culture be considered as a dignified part of the heritage of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The "Maori Renaissance" arose as a reaction to the menace of a definitive loss of "Maoritanga"[59]. After the Second World War, during the process of industrialization, the autochthones had to move increasingly to the city centres to seek better working opportunities and social standing. This rural exodus is regarded as a second Polynesian diaspora. However, the autochthones automatically joined the "urban underclass vulnerable to unemployment in times of economic crisis"[60] and the result of their integration into the Occidental city lifestyle is highly complex. It caused a series of serious social issues such as inter-racial conflicts, criminality or drug addiction and an ongoing acculturation because of the loss of contact with the indigenous language and culture as practised then only in the rural traditional communities. Until the 1960's, New Zealand was a mono-cultural and monolingual country and, the Maoris themselves insisted on learning English at the expense of their own language as a means to achieve social improvement. For example, Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera were denied the possibility to learn Maori until their adulthood when

[59] "Maoritanga" means Maori cultural identity.
[60] Michelle Keown: *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa / New Zealand and Oceania*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007, p. 138

they alone decided to assert their indigenous identity and learn their Polynesian language. However, the crisis of Maori identity that culminated in the 1960's triggered at the same time a strong reaction that enhanced its revival through political and social activism and cultural renewal. From the 1970's onwards, as a result of the protests and marches of the indigenous people for their rights, New Zealand started a process of transformation towards biculturalism and bilingualism.

In the preface to *Into the World of Light*, the first anthology of Maori writing in the English and indigenous languages published in 1982 by the autochthones themselves, Witi Ihimaera synthesizes pertinently the given crisis that triggered the Maori Renaissance or the "turning of the tide":

> Continued alienation of Maori land and of Maori people from their culture meant that the Maori was becoming landless and cultureless in his own country. As well, he was moving in greater numbers from rural areas, the earth base of his culture, into urban areas where traditional tribal values and transmission of culture by Maori methods could not be sustained; nor were urban areas equipped then for providing for the transmission of the culture. The result was a dislocation and a disruption to cultural continuity. As the faultline began to widen, the sense of loss – magnified by memories of past injustices and the resolve to assure cultural regeneration for Maori children being born within the Pakeha framework – coalesced into a period of political and cultural protest.[61]

One of the main manifestations of the Maori cultural revival was the return to the oral tradition; especially to the old manuscripts, where part of the transmitted indigenous patrimony had been transcribed, since very little has survived in the living culture. One of the essential references has been the work of Sir George Grey (1812-1898), *Polynesian Mythology* (1906), written in collaboration with the natives and his edition of manuscripts written by Maori sages in the vernacular language without translations in English *Moteatea me Nga Hakirara o Nga Maori* (1853). In the contemporary context, it is the New Zealand researcher Margaret Orbell (1934–2006) who is considered as an

[61] Witi Ihimaera: "Contemporary Maori Writing: A Context" in *An Anthology of Maori Writing: Into the World of Light*, ed. by W. Ihimaera and D. S. Long, Heinemann, New Zealand 1982, p. 3

authority in the recovery of Maori poetry in the indigenous language. She published a number of anthologies of autochthonous poetry, songs and mythology with translations in English and erudite explanations such as for example: *Traditional Songs of the Maori* (1975), *Maori Poetry: An Introductory Anthology* (1978) or *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Maori Myth and Legend* (1995). Moreover, Margaret Orbell was the editor of the magazine *Te Ao Hou* from 1961 to 1965 and she succeeded in her endeavour that Maori literature be included in anthologies of New Zealand literature as in the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1985). In this last, there do not appear only poetry records from the indigenous oral tradition but also contemporary poems written in Maori, published with parallel translations.

The revitalization of the indigenous oral tradition and the emergence of a new poetry in the vernacular language was an essential initial step in securing the continuity of the native language, culture and identity since the Maori was under threat of becoming "simply a brown pakeha"[62]. The second step in Maori revival is represented by the rise of indigenous authors who decided to write in English, on the one hand due to their lack of knowledge of Maori, and on the other hand, in order to be understood by all New Zealanders and attain a larger international audience. Despite the fact that they chose to use the tools of the colonizer – the English language, the written tradition and the European literary forms – they expressed their own indigenous contemporary reality from the "inside". Moreover, they mingled these imported tools with the ones inherited from the Maori oral tradition and thus created their new and distinctive literary expression as a vehicle of their cultural self-assertion and identity reconstruction.

Patricia Grace's work has to be conceived in the context of the introduced Maori Renaissance that is comprised within the pan-Polynesian literary movement started in the 1960's. At present, the place of the indigenous author in the given cultural revival and her attitude to the raised social, political and cultural issues that she conveys through her linguistic and literary choices will be examined.

[62] Ibid., p. 3

In her short stories and novels, Patricia Grace portrays Maori life from her indigenous perspective. She reverses the position of the speaker and thus provides the "inside-out" point of view forwarded in Polynesian post-colonial theory. It is the first time that a Polynesian woman has shared her "insider's" perspective on her indigenous culture and the postcolonial problems. She challenges the textual representations of the Maoris and of the indigenous women as constructed by the Occidentals, from their external standpoint. By retelling the destinies of a myriad indigenous characters of all ages throughout her work, she offers a fresco of Maori contemporary life, including values and traditions, everyday urban and rural reality, cross-cultural conflicts and racial problems in the frame of the dominating society and culture. In her essay "Influences on Writing", she gives an apt description of the concerns of her overall work:

> I'm interested in the day-to-day lives of ordinary people and in exploring those lives. I'm interested in relationships; in particular, wider family relationships – those between young and old, children and parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, people living in wider family relationships, people living in communities – because this is what I know and understand. Also, there are relationships between people and the environment, people and the spirit world, people and the authorities that govern their lives. There are interracial relationships, and people relating to their pasts and to their futures. But I'm also interested in dislocation, people removed from their groups, the breakdown of communities and the forming of new ones as people find themselves on the fringes…[63]

In an interview with Vilsoni Hereniko, the author insists on the necessity that the "day-to-day lives" of the indigenous people should also be represented in literature because it never has been before:

> There are characters who haven't been written about, there's language that hasn't been used in writing, customs that haven't been exposed. We have our own communities to write about, our own interrelationships, our own view of the world, our own spirituality. We have

[63] Patricia Grace: "Influences on Writing", pp. 70-71

> our own ancestors, our own legacy of stories. We have our own particular culture to draw from, but we have our own 'world culture' as well.[64]

In her texts, Patricia Grace proposes various ways to create a bridge between the Maori past and present in order to ensure the continuity of the indigenous patrimony, but also between the Maori heritage and the European one. As she affirms: "We can take what we want from the colonizing culture too, because we're part of it."[65] One of those bridges is her use of language that blends English and Maori. The author writes in Standard English, uses a simple language register that is very close to oral discourse and very frequently introduces words, expressions, chants or short dialogues in Maori:

> When we were little boys we often used to go around the beach for kai moana. And when we reached the place where the rocks were we'd always put our kits down on the sand and mimi on them so the shellfish would be plentiful. Whenever the tides were good we would get our kits and sugar-bags and knives ready, then go up at the back of our place to catch the horses (…) And people who lived inland would ring and ask us about the tides. 'He aha te tai?' they'd ask over the phone – 'What time's the tide?' and we'd tell them. All morning the phone would ring; 'He aha te tai? He aha te tai?'[66]

The constant shift from one language to another is defined by Michelle Keown in *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa / New Zealand and Oceania* (2007) as "code-switching". This last occurs not only at a lexical level but is also apparent in the lack of punctuation and the repetition of words and expressions as in the previous quotation. Moreover, Maori grammatical and syntactic patterns are frequently transferred into English:

> Old now these bones, and one leg with a stick to help it, old now. He sits, this old one with his stick, on the beach and the agar about him all spread dry. It is good, the stick, to turn the spread agar, and to poke the ashes round the big camp oven. She makes the camp oven bread, my daughter, in the morning early, early, as did the mother before her. Good bread,

[64] Vilsoni Hereniko: "An Interview with Patricia Grace" in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, p. 81
[65] Ibid, p. 81
[66] Patricia Grace: "Waiariki" in *Waiariki and Other Stories*, Penguin Books, New Zealand 1975, p. 32

> this of the camp oven, and the work of this old one to poke the ashes and turn the spread agar with the stick.[67]

The practice of "code switching" is a strategy of "linguistic deterritorialization" such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define it in *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* (1975). In terms of Polynesian post-colonial theory, it is a method of "indigenising"[68] the imported colonial language. Patricia Grace declares that the "deterritorialization" of the English language occurring in her texts is the result of her will to render a realistic portrait of Maori reality: "I use Maori language in my work where I believe it is right and natural to do so, where the people that I've created demand that I do so because the words are their words."[69] In addition to that, she explains that she does not put the Maori words in italics because they are not "'foreign' to me or my characters and are indigenous to my country."[70] Actually, "code-switching" is part of everyday Maori life:

> My first language is English, and my knowledge of Maori is limited. When I was a child playing with my cousins and interacting with my father's family, we spoke all the time in English, but in our English sentences we sometimes used Maori words. In some of the more rural areas of New Zealand the reverse would have been the case: Maori would have been spoken, but the occasional word in English would have been used.[71]

Indeed, in Patricia Grace's novels and short stories, different levels of "deterritorialization" of the English language can be observed. It depends on the linguistic situation of the portrayed characters, which is relative to their age, their place, their linguistic and cultural environment, and their attitude towards the two respective languages. In the last extract from the short story "Huria's rock", the degree of "linguistic deterritorialization" is important due to the fact that it is retold from the perspective of a Maori grand-father who comes from a more

[67] Patricia Grace: "Huria's Rock" in *Waiariki and Other Stories*, p. 48
[68] Albert Wendt: "Introduction" in *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980*, Auckland University Press, Auckland 1995
[69] Patricia Grace: "Influences on Writing", p. 72
[70] Ibid., p. 72
[71] Ibid., p. 72

traditional background. On the other hand, in the novel *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps*, a lesser degree of "linguistic deterritorialization" can be noticed, which is due to the fact that it is retold from the perspective of a young Maori woman. This last shows a tendency towards a "mimicry"[72] of the pakeha lifestyle such as that of the majority of her generation. In fact, she wants to be called by the Occidental name "Linda" instead of "Ripeka" and "Ngaio", which were the ancestral names given to her by her Maori family.

Throughout Patricia Grace's work, it is possible to remark that she makes fewer and fewer concessions to the non-Maori-speaking readers. Right from the publication of her second novel *Potiki* in 1986, she stopped providing glossaries with explanations of Maori words, expressions or concepts at the end of her books. She decided not to include either translations or cultural explanations in the text itself in the way she did in her initial works. The given choice reveals the increasing self-confidence of the minority author, encouraged by the growing wave of self-assertion triggered by the Maori Renaissance. It also shows her engagement in the revitalization of the indigenous language. In fact, Maori became the co-official language of Aotearoa / New Zealand in 1987.

Even though Patricia Grace's decision implied that her texts would be less accessible to a wider audience, it represented an essential step in the reinforcement of indigenous post-colonial reconstruction. The author's linguistic choices correspond intrinsically to her political positioning:

> …writers of small population cultures must have the same freedom as other writers to be true to what they know and true to who they are. I need to be free to write in the way that I judge best for the stories I want to tell. I want my writing to be able to stand with the rest of the writing of the world without encumbrances such as glossaries, italics, footnotes, asides, sentences in brackets, introductory notes, or explanatory paragraphs disguised as plot. (…) When I'm writing I never want to think of readers, or audience…[73]

[72] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin: *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*, Routledge, 1998
[73] Ibid., p. 71

Finally, as Sylvie André explains in *Le Roman autochtone dans le Pacifique Sud: Penser la continuité* (2008), the free blending of the two co-habiting languages is also part of the process of literary creation. The Polynesian writer is developing a new literary language that the French researcher calls an "inter-language", in which English loses its colonial contents and the author can push forward at liberty her own world-view and aesthetics. It becomes a creative ground.

Patricia Grace "indigenizes" not only the English language but also the European literary forms and genres. She transposes narrative techniques inherited from the Polynesian oral tradition into her novels and short stories. The multiplicity of narrators and points of view that is characteristic of Patricia Grace's work is a strategy that comes directly from the indigenous oral storytelling.

The Maori tribes, like the peoples of the entire Polynesian region, used to gather in meeting houses, called "wharenui", that were situated on the spiritual ground of the "marae". Every official event would take place there: weddings, funerals, political meetings, rituals, festivals etc. The wharenui was also the "Maori school" where tribal knowledge was transmitted to younger generations by word of mouth: the "whakapapa"[74], traditional dances and songs or artistic skills like carving. The art of oratory, "whaikorero", that has a determined protocol and a defined structure would be taught and practised there. During the meetings, several "korero" would alternate to deliver their speeches in which they would retell the tribal mythology and history. Each of them would present a different perspective on the selected topics, would vary the timelines and include a number of digressions for the sake of originality.

Patricia Grace transfers these rhetorical strategies of the whaikorero ceremonies into the narrative structures of her novels. They are even more apparent in her collections of short stories, in which a number of characters take turns retelling their own stories that take place in diverse times and places and

[74] "Whakapapa, genealogies, in Maori traditional literature, record the origins and histories of tribes, families and individuals, giving them an important part of their sense of identity and interrelationship." Definition from *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, p. 584

where everyone presents a different attitude towards the unifying problems of Maori identity in the contemporary context.

In "Influences on Writing", Patricia Grace explains how and to what extent the non-linear but circular structure of Maori traditional storytelling inspires her in her narrative choices:

> I decided to use the pattern of whaikorero for the shape of *Potiki*. (…) But it's what I wanted to do, to give a circular shape suitable to the storytelling content of the book and to reflect the way that talk moves in a circular fashion inside the meeting house. These orations may begin with a tauparapara, which draws attention to the speaker, and may be in the form of a chant, a song or a haka. After the tauparapara, the orator goes into the main body of the speech and at the end sings his or her waiata, usually accompanied by others. The waiata may be followed by a few final words. So I shaped *Potiki* in that way. I begin with a chant, move into the main story, then end with a song and a final greeting. And then at the very end are the words 'ka huri', words that turn the talk over to the next speaker.[75]

The selection of the structure for *Potiki*, as mentioned in this quotation, was given by the fact that one of the main themes of the novel in question is traditional carving. Actually, the Maori wharenui are decorated with woodcarvings that represent Polynesian gods or famous ancestors and their histories, and on which the figure of the spiral is the repeating motif. The given form symbolizes the cyclical conception of life shared by the Polynesian peoples. Therefore, Patricia Grace's narrative choice also acquires a symbolic meaning. Like a spiralling carving, the message of the novel is to ensure the continuity between the Maori past and present and, through its final "ka huri", it is an invitation for others to take the turn of Patricia Grace, lifting their voices for indigenous self-assertion. In this way, the author fulfils at the same time the social function of the traditional korero or that of the spokesperson of her people. What is more, her words have to be conceived in the traditional sense, as fulfilling a performative function, or as actions.

[75] Patricia Grace: "Influences on Writing", p. 72

Therefore, it arises that the blending of European prose and Polynesian traditional storytelling traduces once again a political intention of the author: to encourage Maori self-assertion. Besides, in the same way as language blending, it offers ground for experimentation and leads to the creation of a new literary genre in itself. Being at the border of the "written" and "oral" traditions, it can be defined as an "orature", a term used in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989) by B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin, or as an "oraliture", a word coined by Sylvie André in the mentioned study *Le Roman autochtone dans le Pacifique Sud* to characterize the new Polynesian and Pacific literatures.

Patricia Grace's direct engagement in political and social issues concerning the rights of the Maoris is manifest, likewise in the choice of the themes of her texts. The author has been active especially in the polemics over the expropriations of Maori land by the British settlers. One of the results of the land claims of the autochthones has been the establishment of the Waitiangi Tribunal in 1975 for the protection of their ancestral ground. However, the given matter is not entirely solved so far.

In a number of her works and particularly in the novels *Potiki*, *Cousins* and *Baby No-Eyes*, Patricia Grace treats this subtle problem in depth. She emphasizes the traditional spiritual tie to the land that all diasporic Polynesian societies have in common and that Bruno Saura characterizes as "the metaphysical attachment to the earth" in his extensive study on this archetypical theme *Entre nature et culture: la mise en terre du placenta en Polynésie française* (2005). In the referred essay, Patricia Grace describes a number of confrontations that occurred in the 1970's between the Maori and pakeha parties relating to land properties, even ones concerning her family land:

> These were the national events that we all took interest in. But in the writing of *Potiki* there were issues closer to home that had an influence. The private land where we live (…) has for many years been under one threat and another, from housing developers, industrial developers, shipping companies, local council, the lands and survey and conservation departments, all wanting a slice, or a reserve, or public access. We have always had to be

> watchful and resistant regarding our land and our privacy, and land issues are very much part of our everyday lives in the place where we live, as they are in the lives of many Maori people throughout Aotearoa.[76]

The problem of land property is vital for the Maoris and the Polynesians who have been dispossessed of their "whenua", because for them: "to regain one's ancestral land, is to recuperate one's identity."[77]

Patricia Grace's treatment of Maori postcolonial problems and the linguistic and stylistic strategies she opts for in her works reveal her active engagement in the political, social and cultural concerns of the Maori Renaissance. She manifests a strong resolve to ensure the continuity of the autochthonous culture and, in order to achieve this, she uses effectively both the Maori and the English tools. As a result, she manages to innovate both of them as she forms a new "inter-language" and creates a new intermediary literary genre between the written and oral traditions: an "oraliture". By so doing, she "indigenizes" the colonial heritage and offers sensible possibilities for cultural renovation of the minority population.

The Maori writer's "syncretic" approach to postcolonial cultural reconstruction through literature is common not only to the fellow authors of the Maori Renaissance, particularly Witi Ihimaera, but also to the entire first generation of Polynesian authors writing in English. The specificity of Patricia Grace resides in the fact that she provides for the first time the point of view of an indigenous woman.

The next chapter will examine how she revitalizes other essential components of the indigenous heritage that are its cultural symbols and beliefs, and its mythology.

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[76] Ibid., p. 69

[77] Titaua Porcher: "Écriture et fonction syncrétique à travers trois regards féminins: Déwé Gorodé, Chantal Spitz, Titaua Peu" in *Littérama'ohi* n. 18, French Polynesia September 2010, p. 127 (my translation)

3. The function of Maori cultural symbols and beliefs, and of the mythical character of Rona in *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps*

Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps published in 1978 is Patricia Grace's first novel. The narrator is a young Maori woman in her twenties who writes about the development of her love relationship with a descendant of the British settlers. The relationship grows inevitably against the background of the cultural differences of the opposed environments of the two lovers. The young woman has to cope with the manifest disapproval of her Maori family who is struggling to maintain the continuity of the indigenous heritage. Actually, the story is set in an unnamed coastal rural area where the native minority tries to maintain a traditional way of life during the time of the rural exodus and indigenous ongoing acculturation. The internal focalization, which the author has opted for, helps to trace the evolution of the inner conflicts of the young woman in her choice of a pakeha husband. It is the first time that this type of challenge is being retold exclusively from a female indigenous perspective.

The progression of the story is not linear but rather circular, which shows Patricia Grace's intention to transpose techniques of Maori oral storytelling into her writings right from her first novel. There are principally three narrative timelines interwoven into the twenty-two rather short and untitled chapters. In addition to that, a series of digressions are inserted into these. The first narrative timeline opening the novel is the one describing the days before the wedding of the main character. This initial narrative timeline is interrupted right from the second chapter and reappears again only in chapter fourteen to be developed until chapter twenty-two or to the end of the novel. This time, the events are narrated in chronological order: right before and after the wedding, the moving of the newly wed couple to the city due to the husband's work, the breakdown of the indigenous young woman, the birth of the child and its bestowment to her widowed Maori mother and her return to the city in order to reunite with her pakeha husband. Between chapters two and thirteen, two retrospective tales alternate. First, memories of significant moments in the narrator's childhood

when she was nine to eleven years old: the discovery of the greenstone in the creek, and the last day of Primary school when the relationship with her great friend of European descent, Margaret, suddenly ended, and when she had her first menstruation. Secondly, her first meeting with Graeme when she was nineteen years old and the development of their relationship over approximately two years until their marriage.

What connects these three narrative timelines is the main character's questioning of her Maori cultural background by contrasting it with that of the pakeha and her attempts at finding her own position towards the two. These interrogations are triggered by the family's argument against her marrying a descendant of the British colonists: "'Perhaps you and Graeme might be more different from each other than either of you can tell.' It startled me for a moment to hear my own fear spill out into the room on my father's voice."[78] and culminated in a breakdown during her first stay in the city, far from her family and natural environment.

The Maori cultural heritage plays an essential role in the main character's quest for answers. She bases her reflexions on mythology and a set of indigenous symbols and beliefs related to nature. On the one hand, they embody orientation points that consolidate her sense of allegiance to the indigenous people and that uplift her in moments of identity crisis. On the other hand, they represent as well an oppressive burden that she does not want and from which she feels the need to liberate herself.

A central motive of the novel is the Mere (see Appendix V), which the narrator never denominates directly. She refers to it as to "the stone" and declares that she calls it "…a stone to give less meaning, to simplify feeling."[79] The character's reticence to call the object by its right name and her reason for it immediately reveals the complexity that it carries for her and the sense of taboo assigned to it. She explains how she discovered it in a gully when she was nine years old and how the Maori elders reacted: they immediately brought it back to

[78] Patricia Grace: *Mutuwhenua: the Moon Sleeps*, first edition by Longman Paul Ltd. in 1978, second edition by Penguin Books, New Zealand 1986, p. 2
[79] Ibid., p. 3

the creek and buried it. It is only through the descriptions of the stone and of the situation that a reader, knowledgeable of Maori culture, could understand that the recurring motive is a Mere. It is a revered weapon in the form of a tear made out of nephrite jade, a precious stone called Pounamu in the indigenous language. It was worn by indigenous chieftains, men or women, as a symbol of their power or "mana" and was passed through generations. It acquired spiritual values and was buried if the legitimate owner died. Consequently, it is out of respect to the Mere and to its past generations of chiefs that the relatives of the narrator are urged to return it back to earth and make sure that it is not found again: "They told us how they had stood at the top of a rise and thrown the stone piece into a deep gully. And the next day they went back again with a tractor and graded the top of the hill down into the gully where the stone was, covering it with fall after fall of rock and earth."[80]

This event has great impact on the small girl: it reveals her visceral belonging to Maori culture. She realizes to what extent the indigenous beliefs are part of herself. Contrary to the pakeha boy who discovered the stone with her, she understood intuitively why the greenstone had to be buried in the creek: "Because of my belief in the rightness of what had been done with the stone, my clear knowledge at nine years of age of the rightness (to me), I can never move away from who I am." After many years, she still feels the spiritual presence of the stone: "I can feel its weight in my hands and the coldness of it, and I can see its dull green light"[81], and she comes to compare herself to the stone: "As though part of myself is buried in that gully."[82] Like the Mere, she is intrinsically tied to her ancestry and thus, to Maori identity: "The stone was my inheritance"[83]. This connection is effectuated through the deep earth and it will never be pulled out from her; her indigenous identity cannot be altered: "There is part of me that will not change, and it is buried under a ton of earth in a deep gully."[84]

[80] Ibid., p. 8
[81] Ibid., p. 8
[82] Ibid., p. 8
[83] Ibid., p. 121
[84] Ibid., p. 8

However, the analogy between the greenstone and the young woman's identity implies at the same time that she has to carry the weight of that unmovable affiliation, which becomes a source of internal tensions: "I have put many things aside over the past few years but the stone remains with me. The stone and the people do not let me forget who I am although I have wanted to many times."[85] Indeed, at various stages of her maturing, the narrator manifests a desire to get rid of her indigenous cultural heritage that she perceives as a burden and a limitation.

She attributes the sudden loss of the eight years of friendship with her classmate Margaret to the stone. When she shares her secret concerning the Mere, she suddenly realizes that her friend cannot understand its significance and that, consequently, a whole cultural heritage separates them. She becomes aware of the fact that the only persons with whom there can occur a deep mutual understanding is her Maori family: "Running home over the hills that afternoon I realised I was going towards the only place in the world that I knew. In the world. And towards the people that I knew."[86]

However, she does not accept this limiting fact and decides to negate her culture and identity, which she performs in a Polynesian way, through her change of name:

> And over the next few years I decided that if I had the chance I could be someone different, and thought that it would be much better to be a girl in buckled shoes bowing a violin than the girl I was. There was a different world that I knew nothing about. When I started at the new school I would not be called by the old name that had been given to me. And I would not be called by the new name that had been given because of the planting of a tree. I gave myself another name, Linda, certain that this was the beginning of a new, a different life for me.[87]

She opts for the "mimicry" of the dominating culture of her country, of which the mentioned shoes and the violin in the quote are representative.

[85] Ibid., p. 3
[86] Ibid., p. 24
[87] Ibid., p. 24

Moreover, she chooses a common Occidental name, Linda, instead of that of Ripeka which she inherited from her Maori grandmother according to the indigenous traditions and also instead of that of Ngaio, attributed to her after the ritual planting of her tree of the same name after her birth. The girl's family accepts her change of name, conscious of the fact that it is common among the younger generations to want to adhere to European culture at some stage: "My mother hadn't seem to mind when I'd given myself another name, and to my surprise all my father said was, 'Every Maori goes Pakehafied once in his life.' Then he said, 'But don't forget.'"[88]

In spite of the strong will "to be the person that my name said I was"[89], Linda feels restricted within the realm of her over-protective family and experiences the heaviness of Maori custom that makes her personal aspirations impossible to fulfil. She desires to escape the suffocating environment:

> …but I seemed to be confined always by the closeness of my family, by Lena sharing my lunch, by Harry and Toki always there making fun, not letting me ignore them. So despite the new name, new interests, new friends, my life didn't change much at all. Not the way I'd hoped and imagined. But I knew it would be different once I'd left school altogether and gone away from home. Away from my parents and all their old ideas. Away from old Nanny Ripeka. From my aunties, uncles and cousins…[90]

However, even after her school leaving exams, influenced by her "whanau"[91], she stays and works in the area. She envies her cousin Toki who has lived several months away, in a big Occidental city:

> I envied him. It thought it would be exciting to come and go the way he did, and thought, if I'd been the son my father had always hoped for, things might have been different. But being a girl and the only child…and Dad being Dad…some things I couldn't have merely for the asking, not even from my father. 'What do you want to leave here for?' my father had asked.

[88] Ibid., pp. 25-26
[89] Ibid., p. 26
[90] Ibid., p. 25
[91] "Whanau, or extended family (…) This is the basic social group among Maori, offering intimacy and mutual support (aroha). It is also the household unit and can include three or four generations, sometimes outnumbering more than thirty persons." Definition from *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, p. 584

> ‘You can get a good job in town, or if you like you can stay home with your mother, but there’s plenty of good work in town.’ ‘But I want to do something different’, I’d argued vaguely. ‘Be someone different.’ So I’d cried and sulked about for a few days but my father didn’t give in to me the way he usually did (…) Instead he’d gone into town and found office work for me, which I quite liked after all, but I had the feeling I would like to do more and know more, and I wanted to *be* different.[92]

The figure of the father appears to be dominant and influential. Like the grandmother, he is a representative of the past and functions as a guarantor of the transmission of Maori traditional values. Being an only child, Linda carries more responsibility since she is the only one expected to forward the indigenous cultural inheritance to future generations and to keep the family land, conceived as a “spiritual sanctuary”[93]. And, being a teenage girl, she is constantly under the protection of her father and of the other males of the family, such as her cousin Toki, which is made apparent as she starts meeting Graeme. These meetings are watched even more carefully due to his white ascendance. The impact of the masculine presence on the main character suggests the patriarchal nature of the Maori traditional social system.

Linda feels uncomfortable in her indigenous family environment and searches for ways of evasion such as reading books. Besides, the starting of the relationship with the pakeha young man might also be viewed as a means of escape. However, the recurring motive of the Mere arises as a possible insurmountable barrier between the mixed couple. She is afraid that, as happened with Margaret, telling Graeme about it might reveal that they are culturally too different and this will end their relationship. Her fear disables her from speaking about it with him: “I had always wanted to tell Graeme about the stone (…) But I was afraid of what I might come to know about him and me, of what there could be between us, what differences.”; “There were other things to share too but not those things which could have shown what might be different between us, remembering the loss of my golden twin, the loss of Margaret.”[94]

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[92] Ibid., p. 11
[93] Ibid., p. 121
[94] Ibid., pp. 110-111

In *Les premiers romans polynésiens: naissance d'une littérature de langue anglaise* (1992), Sonia Lacabanne characterizes the greenstone as the materialization of the gulf that separates the two respective cultures and, consequently, Linda and Graeme. Indeed, from the day the stone was found, the narrator grew convinced "that in some things there can be no bridge to understanding."[95]

Linda's reticence to communicate what is intrinsically "part of her" leads to her nervous breakdown after she starts living in the unfamiliar and unhospitable environment of the city where Graeme works as a teacher in a Primary school. The stone comes to stand for the Maori belief in the supernatural that Linda is afraid to share with her husband.

Indeed, in the new house, she does not feel secure, becoming more and more frightened and has a repetitive strange dream of "a tall woman with a moko[96] on her chin"[97] who beckons Linda to come to her. These symptoms get worse when she is pregnant. She starts avoiding being in the house when Graeme is away, and roams the streets. She is persuaded that she can confide these sensations only to her family, which she does through a letter, because, as she repeats: "But how could I say anything to him?"[98]; "…because what could I say?"[99]

The explanation of the indigenous family is "old matters", conform to their spiritual belief in the tight connection between the past and the present and between land and man: "These are old concerns and we would have to go back a long way to know exactly. But where you are is a bad place for you. It must be a burial place for this to happen. It should be left to those who were there first and it is no place for you."[100]

The mother intervenes when Linda is already on the verge of giving herself to the Maori woman appearing in her dreams: she is prepared to jump

[95] Ibid., p. 121
[96] "Moko" means tatto in Maori.
[97] Ibid., p. 125
[98] Ibid., p. 127
[99] Ibid., p. 128
[100] Ibid. p. 129

from a mountain over the sea leading to the underworld or Hawaiki. The character's mother immediately forces her to tell her husband about that hidden "part of herself" embodied by the Mere, which she finally does while he is driving the car around the city the whole night listening to her:

> So then I told him, a fusion, perhaps a confusion, of past things and what was happening to me then, and why. The streets were emptying and I was like those emptying streets as I spoke about my whole life, and about what was in me that was buried and unchangeable and significant. Talking on and on as we drove – until there was nothing more.[101]

Graeme accepts Linda's Maori world vision. Instead of separating them, her confession reunites them. The Mere is no more a barrier between them. The narrator is reassured of their mutual love that incentivizes them to try to understand each other's differences.

In her study of the novel, Sonia Lacabanne interprets the repetitive dreams of the main character as a reflection of her feelings of guilt about abandoning and, thus, profaning her cultural heritage through her marriage with a pakeha. The vision of the woman with the traditional tattoo would be a representative of the Maoris and would come to remind Linda of her duty towards her people and her land. It would be possible to suggest then that the woman could possibly be the ancient owner of the Mere.

The French researcher also points out that, in order to be able to form a "second sanctuary" for Linda within the Occidental society, such as the father resigned himself to hope, after the couple's reconciliation, a sacrifice is required. That sacrifice is the first-born baby. Indeed, Linda owes it to her indigenous background as represented by the Mere: it is her son. She gives him to her mother to replace the recently deceased father after whom he is named so that the chain of transmission is not interrupted. This act puts forward once again the important role of men in Maori society as the protectors and transmitters of the indigenous heritage. Linda bequeaths a living part of herself to her ancestral land

[101] Ibid., p. 137

and whanau and she can then return with a clear conscience to her husband who "had not once failed to love."[102]

The motif of the Mere acquires progressively different levels of meaning: from a Maori symbol of chieftain power, it becomes an embodiment of the main character's belonging to "Maoritanga", then, it stands for indigenous beliefs in the supernatural and, finally, it is a materialization of the cultural chasm between the autochthones and the pakeha.

Linda's rootedness in Maori culture is also represented by the recurring motive of trees, namely the Macrocarpa, the Ti Kouka (Cabbage tree – Cordyline Australis) and the Ngaio (Mousehole tree – Myoporum laetum). In the same way as the stone, the three trees that stand on the main character's family land and that accompany her growth carry a symbolic value based on the ancestral indigenous worldview.

The Macrocarpa is the oldest tree, which is illustrated by the surname given to it "papa rakau" that means the "father tree". It is described as "the big old one, father of the others."[103] Due to its age, it has strong roots, is high and has a multitude of branches: "…with nodules of cones crowding the long rocking limbs and hiding among the scented sheaths of green spikes and tangles of dead twigs. I don't know how old it is. I know only that its roots are thick and heavy and that they spread wide and deep."[104] One of its branches is called "Leaping Branch" which the main character was trying to reach in the course of her growing up:

> There was a time when I was too small to tip the overhanging branch (…) Then one summer day I'd reached it on my own. One day I was tall enough to very lightly touch the drooping tip; and soon I could touch it easily. Finger-tips first and then the whole hand. Then both hands at once. And, later, two hands gripping even the highest part of the branch…

The "papa rakau" is the protector of the other trees – the Ti Kouka and the Ngaio: "…its sap flows thickly under the flaking hide and that, without its

[102] Ibid., p. 153
[103] Ibid., p. 10
[104] Ibid., p. 1

strength against the wind that licks through the gully there, the others (…) would not have taken root and flourished."[105] At the same time, it is considered as the protector of the family: "and it was our protector"[106], which echoes the mentioned function of men in Maori society. The given human value assigned to it reveals the indigenous traditional conception of trees as representatives of Men. This analogy comes from the indigenous belief in the reciprocity between humans and the land: each Man has a tree that represents him and links him to the primordial parents of Maori cosmogony, "papatuanuku" or "mother earth", by its roots, and to "rangi", the "sky father", by its branches. It enroots him as well to a particular family land or "whenua" and, thus, to his ancestors who lived on that place. Consequently, the tree symbolizes one's identity. Indeed, the Macrocarpa had been planted when an antecedent or probably the founder of Linda's whanau was born on the given territory. Papa rakau represents the family ancestry and its connection with the present. It is the ancestors, represented by the tree and spiritually still present, who keep protecting the family.

Actually, in Maori thinking, trees represent the genealogy. In her study *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Islands Literatures*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey explains the given concept: "As oral productions, whakapapa Maori trace 'descent' rather as 'ascent', from the originary ancestor to the current top layers, with roots in the originary ground of being, Papatuanuku, the Maori earth deity / mother."[107] The image of the genealogical tree is found equally in the Western tradition. However, the direction of family growth is reversed: "In fact the English words 'descent' and 'ascent' suggest, like written genealogical trees, a corporeal history that is rendered from top to bottom, signifying a linear human trajectory from past to present."[108] These representations traduce the different concepts of time of the two cultures.

It is interesting to add that the narrator refers to the genealogical tree in order to justify her choice of a non-Maori husband. She explains to her

[105] Ibid., p. 1
[106] Ibid., p. 49
[107] Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey: *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Islands Literatures*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu 2007 p. 164
[108] Ibid., pp. 163-164

disapproving grandmother that their tree is saturated. The branches rising from the same trunk cannot "ascend" anymore: "Then I began to recite the old names to her, the ones from the wall and the ones before them, and the ones before that (…) 'But that's only the trunk of the tree,' I said, 'the length.' (…) 'Now these are the branches that spread everywhere,' and I continued the recitation, linking every name until there were no more. 'And every branch reaches out,' I said. 'Touches every other.'"[109] She is suggesting that a new type of marital union has to occur for the genealogy to continue; a new seed has to be laid in the earth.

By the end of the novel, three trees that represent three succeeding generations surround the "father tree". The Ti Kouka represents the narrator's father. It was planted soon after he was born: "The ti kouka had been brought down from the bush when my father was a small boy".[110] The two share similar characteristics:

> The ti kouka is a tree with nothing hidden. It has a straight trunk, difficult to climb and with no secrets once you have levered your way up the abrasive bole. There is nowhere to hide among the upward-snaking limbs or the green tousles of head (…) My father is a man with nothing hidden. When I introduced Graeme to him I knew he would have something to say and that whatever it was it would not be said with gentleness and tact.[111]

When Linda's son is born, she plants another Ti Kouka, which seals up the connection between the baby and his Maori grandfather: "Later, although it was summer, I went to plant a tree, a ti kouka, beside the other one."[112] They have the same species of tree and the same name. One died and the other was born to replace the deceased and carry on the family tree or the masculine paternal line. At the same time, Linda is planting a new tree that is going to enhance the regeneration of the saturated whakapapa that she had exposed to her grandmother. Her half Maori and half pakeha son comes to stand for the new blended generation.

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[109] Patricia Grace: *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps*, pp. 100-101
[110] Ibid., p. 1
[111] Ibid., p. 16
[112] Ibid., p. 152

The main character has also her own tree, the Ngaio. It was planted when she was born and she is named after it. It stands in front of her father's Ti Kouka. Once again, similar characteristics can be observed between her and the tree: "From without it has a peaceful appearance, the ngaio tree, with its tidy rounded shape and its even green. Not until you get in close to it do you discover the pained twisting of its limbs and the scarring on the patterned skin, but even so it is a quiet tree."[113] The quietness of the Ngaio can be assigned to Linda's seeming passivity in fulfilling her aspirations while the "pained twisting of its limbs" and the "scarring" can be viewed as an image of her more profound internal identity conflicts.

When the narrator receives Graeme at home, she introduces him to the trees. It is while they are sitting on the Ngaio that she manages to talk to Graeme about her culture. Contrary to the Mere, she is able to speak openly about the significance of her tree:

> Then in my own tree, which is a quiet tree, we sat on my own branch, still smooth and warm, and talked about thousands of things, but not the one thing. But I did tell him about the tree and its name. Told him the new name and the old name, and told him the new name which I had chosen for myself because it had seemed important when I was younger to try to be different from the person I was.[114]

She confesses that, in spite of the cultural gulf between her and her lover represented by the stone, Graeme is the only person with whom she can "share her tree": "We could sit together on a warm gnarled branch and share our dreams and know together the perfection of leaves and the softness of shaded berries. (…) There had never been anyone else to share my tree, not Toki, Lena, not in the way that Graeme and I shared. This was new."[115]

It is important to comment on the fact that the name Ngaio is new in her family, which corresponds well to the character. Indeed, Linda or Ngaio comes to innovate the whakapapa by uniting it with a European lineage.

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[113] Ibid., p. 1
[114] Ibid., p. 94
[115] Ibid., p. 110

Finally, the Ngaio puts forward the identification of the narrator with the mythical character of Rona (see Appendix VI). It is interesting to comment on the fact that Patricia Grace provides a version of the myth at the end of the book with a glossary, which shows that, in her initial work, she aims to revive the forgotten indigenous oral tradition and she is willing to make concessions for non-Maori readers.

Rona is mentioned only in the last sentence of the novel when Linda has decided to leave her whanau and her child, and remembers the day of Rakaunui: "I went, remembering that day of Rakaunui, the time when you can see the shape of the tree that Rona clutched as the moon drew her to the skies." [116] Rakaunui is the day of the full moon when, according to the oral tradition, Rona appears on the face of the moon together with the Ngaio tree to which she had held onto to prevent the offended sphere from taking her with him[117]. The mythical character controls the high tide propitious for fishing for sea food.

In that final moment, the main character remembers Rakaunui due to the fact that it was on such a day that her father had given his benediction to her marrying Graeme. In addition to that, she has now overcome her identity crisis and can decide for herself with confidence. She achieves spiritual plenitude: "So it was time for me to leave them. I could go without sadness, knowing my decision was the right one"[118].

Before that, Linda's state of mind was represented by the phase of the new moon, which is perceived negatively in the indigenous system of thought as complete darkness and arouses fear. She was anguished because she was divided between two men representing the two opposing cultures between which she was vacillating: "There was no light at all, it being the night of Mutuwhenua, when the moon is hidden, when the moon goes underground to sleep. And in the darkness my thoughts were a confusion, thinking of what the old lady had said to

[116] Ibid., p. 153
[117] In Maori mythology, the moon is a masculine deity called Marama.
[118] Ibid., p. 152

me, thinking of my father and of what the past had given me and of what the future held."[119]

Ngaio's identification with Rona consists of the fact that she feels that she is equally committing a certain profanity by distancing herself from her cultural heritage and her child, and by being driven to the "white" world. She experiences this separation as a rupture of the same intensity as when the mythical character is taken by force to the moon because she insulted him. However, according to several versions of the myth, when the moon who has fallen in love with Rona gives her the choice to return home to the earth, she gives a negative answer because she feels happy with him. In the same way, the narrator chooses to leave her home to find her happiness close to her different husband and different world. She has bestowed her son, a living part of herself to the ancestral ground to ensure the continuity of the indigenous patrimony, and she takes her Ngaio that represents her unconditional belonging to Maori ancestry together with the Mere, the Papa Rakau and the Ti Kouka with her. It is the blending of the two co-existing cultures that enables Linda to recover an emotional basis and to find a functioning identity.

[119] Ibid., p. 75

Interlude

Patricia Grace in *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* is the first woman to portray, from her indigenous perspective, a recurring critical moment experienced by the Polynesians of her generation which is "the shock of the two cultures"[120]. She traces the growing up of an indigenous girl from childhood to adulthood at the frontier between two separate worlds: the rural Maori lifestyle, in which the older generations struggle to keep the indigenous traditions going and perpetuate them through the children, and the dominating modern Occidental world of the settlers. The main character, Ripeka, Ngaio or Linda, undergoes a frantic paradoxical situation. On one hand, she suffocates under the weight of imposed Maori custom and, on the other hand, due to her visceral attachment to her indigenous origins, she has great difficulty to integrate and assimilate the pakeha environment to which she aspires. This identity crisis is accentuated by the fact that her feelings are involved since she falls in love with a pakeha young man.

The author works with Maori cultural symbols and beliefs and with mythology in order to express this cultural challenge. The Mere, the Papa Rakau, the Ti Kouka and Ngaio trees, the beliefs related to the phases of the moon and the myth of Rona represent the vast Polynesian heritage that has formed the main character in her growing up and in which she finds referential points while interacting with the "white" world and searching for her own position. However, these also represent burden, which shows that an urgent transition is necessary. Patricia Grace justifies the validity of the Maori heritage that she intentionally modernizes in the context of the Maori Renaissance and, at the same time, she calls for the creation of a bridge between the past and the present or between the cultures of the minority autochthones and the European immigrants.

In the 1990's, at the time when Patricia Grace's female follower, the Samoan contemporary author Sia Figiel, started to write, these post-colonial concerns had almost been solved thanks to the militant voices of the

[120] Sonia Lacabanne: *Les premiers romans polynésiens*, p. 167

autochthones and of their spokesmen, the Polynesian writers of the first generation. The threat of acculturation has been remedied by the political activism of the natives, by the revitalization of the original languages and cultures, and by the emergence of new indigenous artistic and literary forms. Bridges of understanding have been crossed in both directions, by the indigenous peoples and by the descendants of the colonial powers, and attempts have been made at reciprocal linguistic and cultural inclusion. The new challenge of independent countries such as the Independent State of Samoa is to find political and economic stability cleansed of internal corruption and to resist the modern form of neo-colonialism that is Occidental capitalism and globalization.

However, at present, the indigenous writers have the freedom and firm bases to develop further the creative potentials of the emerging new "syncretic" Polynesian culture and identity, which is expressed in the developing "oraliture" in an "inter-language", in order to face impending post-colonial problems. In this new context, the Samoan representative of contemporary Polynesian literature in English has already come to terms with the "in-between" identity as dealt with by Florence (Johnny) Frisbie and Patricia Grace in their works, and has found her "Ithaca" precisely in that creative "border" ground as described by the Indian researcher Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. She can now take the floor with confidence and speak out specifically for Polynesian women, not only to deconstruct Western distorted representations of them but also to reveal the weaknesses of the independent indigenous societies and "counter the violence"[121] that is imposed on females from the "inside". She has the local and the imported inheritances at her disposition to break the silence and express herself without taboos.

[121] Raylene Ramsay: "Indigenous Women Writers in the Pacific: Déwé Gorodé, Sia Figiel, Patricia Grace: Writing Violence as Counter Violence and the Role of Local Context" in *Postcolonial Text* (Vol. 7, No 1), 2012

As I thought these thoughts, the Tuli of tomorrow flew high up in the sky, a fue tattooed on her wings, a to'oto'o tattooed on her peak. The Tuli called me, her voice music to my feet, and I began walking…walking-walking… (…) towards the new gathering place where 'we' once belonged.

Sia Figiel, *Where We Once Belonged* (1996)

III. SIA FIGIEL AND THE POLYNESIAN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY SCENE

1. Sia Figiel

Sia Figiel was born in 1967 in the village of Matautu Tai in the Independent State of Samoa to a Samoan mother and a Polish-American father. She spent her childhood on her native island and then went to New Zealand to complete her secondary education. She pursued her university studies in the United States where she obtained a Bachelor's degree in art and history.

It was only during her stay in Europe where she travelled after the completion of her studies that she started to write. Before that, her tools of expression were mainly painting and performance poetry inspired from the Samoan oral tradition. Indeed, by 1994, her paintings were exhibited in Berlin and she had won the Polynesian Literary Competition. In an interview by Juniper Ellis, "Moving the Centre", Sia Figiel explains that it was in Prague that the transition to the written word occurred: "…the leap into writing came in 1994, I actually started putting the stories on paper after I was in Prague."[122] She describes how the city inspired her due to its storytelling tradition (Kafka, Kundera) and due to the great similarities that she found between Samoa and the Czech Republic in the nineties:

[122] Juniper Ellis: "Moving the Centre: An Interview with Sia Figiel" in *World Literature Written in English* (Vol. 37, 1-2), Canada 1998, p. 70

> …seeing these people reminded me so much of home, especially in the market squares where you go in Prague (…) I came into contact with people who bought tea for four Koruna, whereas in the city where the tourists are, it's like forty Koruna. And even though these people had so little, and such a terrible history, besides all this, they were open to people like me, and were very friendly, even though you could tell that there was a melancholy behind the smiles. But it was those smiles that reminded me so much of home.[123]

Moreover, it were reflections on Prague's structure where "there were really two centres to the city, two markets, the Old City and the New City"[124] that gave the germ to her first piece of writing entitled "The Centre". In this last, Sia Figiel questions the national assumption that Samoa is a centre by itself. According to local mythology, Samoans originated on their own island - unlike the other peoples of Polynesia who worship the mother island Hawaiki.

After Sia Figiel's return to Polynesia from Europe, she continued performing her written texts around the region and it was the influential writers of the first generation, Epeli Hau'ofa and Albert Wendt, who encouraged her to "put this into a book" and "write it down"[125]. This way, "The Centre" has been included as a chapter of her first novel *Where We Once Belonged* published in 1996. Considered as the first novel by a Samoan woman writer, it was awarded the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Fiction for the South East Asia–South Pacific Region in 1997.

From then on, her literary career took off. She published three more works: *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996), an experimental novella that blends prose and poetry, a prose and poetry collection *To a Young Artist in Contemplation* (1998), and another novel *They Who do not Grieve* (1999). She has held writer residencies at distinguished universities and academic centres in Spain, Fiji, Australia, and Hawai'i where she taught creative writing and Samoan culture. Her joint performance with Teresia Teaiwa – the I-Kiribati and Afro-American poet – at the twenty-fifth Pacific Islands Studies Conference held at the University of Hawai'i in 2000 was recorded as the album *Terenesia*. In

[123] Ibid., pp. 70-71
[124] Ibid., p. 71
[125] Ibid., p. 77

addition to that, she contributed with her poems to the first anthologies of Polynesian literature in English, *Whetu Moana* and *Mauri Ola – Whetu Moana II* published by Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan in 2003 and 2010.

Even though Sia Figiel is today a leading writer on the Polynesian contemporary literary scene, she insists on the fact that orality, the indigenous means of expression, is essential to her work, which also reveals her political position in terms of the post-colonial problems of the region: "I think of myself first as a performance poet. And second as a writer. Writer to me is a very western thing, the mere act of writing is non-Pacific Island in origin, which is why I do not prioritize it."[126] Therefore, her written works are designed at first to be spoken aloud and listened to. As is common in the oral tradition, they are open to improvisation: "For me, every time I read, because I read so many times, sometimes I'd delete or add something depending on the mood of the audience(...) I didn't want these stories to be in a book, because I thought, it will lose this thing that I've been trying to do, this oral thing."[127] Consequently, her texts do not have a rigid form fixed on the paper but are flexible. She considers books only as useful means to forward her messages further to persons that her own voice cannot reach:

> And one reason why I'm so glad that I actually put it into a book is the fact that people who would otherwise never know about me as a performance artist, because I'm based in the Pacific, would find out a little bit about Samoa through the book. So in that sense, that's how I saw the book: the importance of having a book is the fact that it can reach people that I would otherwise never reach because I live in the Pacific Islands.[128]

At present, Sia Figiel lives in Florida and is preparing the publication of her next novel entitled *Headless*.

[126] Ibid., p. 77
[127] Ibid., pp. 76-77
[128] Ibid., p. 77

2. Sia Figiel and the Polynesian contemporary literary scene

In the development of Polynesian literature in English, Sia Figiel is the first Samoan woman writer and one of the main continuers of the first generation writers, the contemporaries of Patricia Grace mentioned in the preceding part of the thesis. She represents the second generation of Polynesian authors born in the 1960's during the indigenous struggle for independence and self-assertion, the creation of autochthonous university and cultural centres and the emergence of Polynesian literature in English. Together with the two other prominent writers of her generation, the Niuean John Pule (b. 1962) and the Maori Robert Sullivan (b. 1967), Sia Figiel takes over what was initiated by the literary predecessors who opened the way for the natives to speak up.

In the 1990's, the majority of Polynesian nations under British colonial rule had already gained independence or a high degree of autonomy, and New Zealand is now a bilingual and bicultural country that supports the cultural ebullition of the Polynesian immigrant communities. Therefore, anticolonial resistance, nationalism and militant self-assertion are no more actual. The most difficult barriers – the passage from the indigenous languages to English or the other way round, and from the indigenous oral tradition to Western literary forms – have been overcome and the contemporary authors can express themselves more freely in their two languages without being forced to make concessions. They are striving to complete the construction of a new "syncretic" Polynesian identity through their literary works that aim to be "free of the taint of colonialism and based firmly in our own pasts."[129]

Since the beginning of the 1990's, there has been a major increase in the number of Polynesian writers and it is manifest that the autochthones also started exploring other modes of expression such as art, theatre and film. The indigenous artistic, cultural and literary flowering has been taking place in the already established contemporary diaspora hubs, mainly in New Zealand and the United

[129] Albert Wendt: "Towards a New Oceania", in *The Arnold Anthology of Post-colonial Literatures in English*, ed. by John Thiemes, London 1996, p. 644

States or in the universities of Fiji, Hawai‘i or Papua New Guinea. Thus, contemporary arts and literature are born at the crossroads of the various indigenous languages and cultures of the Anglophone autonomous nations gathering in the mentioned communal centres and within pan-Oceanic, pan-Pacific, and in this case, pan-Polynesian movements.

The life and literary work of the Samoan author exemplify the changes of direction of Polynesian literature in English since the 1990's. Before focusing specifically on her, it is necessary to outline briefly the post-colonial context of her native country.

Western Samoa gained independence from New Zealand in 1962 to become the Independent State of Samoa. It is the first Polynesian nation to become emancipated from the British imperial power. It is a parliamentary republic and a member of the Commonwealth of Nations since 1970. Contrary to New Zealand, Samoa has never been a settler colony but an invaded society, and the indigenous population remains in the majority. Consequently, apart from the significant introduction of Christianity, Samoan traditional culture and lifestyle, "fa'a Samoa", have not been fundamentally touched by colonisation compared to the Maoris. Until today, the indigenous language has been the first language of Samoans and it is being prioritized in primary education. However, the main issues of current post-independence Samoa are internal political corruption and the negative consequences of modern Western capitalism and globalisation on the indigenous traditional system and culture, caused partly by the contemporary diaspora. These last points are perceived as a form of neo-colonialism.

Presently, it is possible to pass on to a panoramic study of the Samoan contemporary female author. Obviously, the shortly presented national context will be developed further in relation to her. Because in the two previous parts of the thesis the attention was drawn chiefly to the prose works of her antecedents, the presentation of her literary production is going to concentrate mainly on her novels.

Sia Figiel has experienced the contemporary diaspora. She has taken part in the wave of migration from Samoa to the economically stronger countries of

New Zealand and the United States in search for better education, job opportunities and social standing. Besides, as a recognised author, she has travelled throughout the Pacific region and stayed at the mentioned university centres to share her work and culture with artists and writers from other Pacific and Polynesian countries, and in turn, be influenced by them. Therefore, her literary creation is tightly related to what is called contemporary "diaspora culture"[130].

Moreover, the diaspora experience stands as a major theme in her works. For example, in the novel *Where We Once Belonged*, the readers witness the main character's transition from childhood to adolescence in Samoa and, in the later novel, *They Who Do Not Grieve*, the same character reappears as a grown-up living in New Zealand and assuming the new environment. Some characters go through extremely painful returns to Samoa after long stays abroad, which unfortunately, in some cases, even leads to suicide. The author comments on the fact that the character of Siniva from her first novel reflects her own return to the native island:

> And I had to talk about why I left Samoa, which is all in Siniva, with the exception that I'm sitting here and she's not. That was such a real thing to me - the choice [of suicide] that Siniva took was one that I considered for a very long time. Because when you come back and you're educated and you come with a completely different value system, and the youth think that they know more than the people who stay back. And of course, it was awful, not only for me but my family, my whole village. I was actually the first to go to university, not only in my family but in my whole village. So it was just a big disgrace when I stopped going to church, and started investigating the old religion, and it was just a major fuss in our village.[131]

Another aspect of the contemporary diaspora that Sia Figiel focuses on are the effects of the introduction of modern consumer goods such as televisions, refrigerators or cars into Samoan society. They are usually sent by relatives

[130] Michelle Keown: *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa / New Zealand and Oceania*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007, p. 188
[131] Juniper Ellis: "Moving the Centre: An Interview with Sia Figiel", p. 72

working in the diasporic centres and they are considered as a sign of wealth and comfort among the inhabitants of humble Samoan villages. The positive perception of these articles encourages the intrusion of Western civilisation and capitalism into the mores of the country and is a threat to the preservation of the local traditions and culture.

It is necessary to mention that the majority of Sia Figiel's works are set in Samoa and, therefore, they are directly linked to that particular context. Indeed, the author affirms that she has been widely inspired by her Samoan compatriot, Albert Wendt, who traces as well the fates of Samoan characters in or outside the country after its independence. The works of the two Samoan writers reflect similar concerns. In the same way as Albert Wendt, Sia Figiel focuses on the social, economic and political changes following the country's independence and represents the consequences of these on the local indigenous people: "Like Wendt, Figiel has engaged with the complex effects of colonization, independence and migration upon the socio-political dynamics of Samoan culture, and she shares her compatriot's interest in existentialism and the corruptions of consumer capitalism."[132]

However, contrary to her literary precursor whose main characters are nearly always men, Sia Figiel focuses on the way in which the given context affects Samoan girls, teenagers and young women. She provides the female perspective on the reality of post-independence Samoa, the diaspora and modernisation. Consequently, it is possible to perceive the two writers as complementary: "Figiel's writing differs from Wendt's (…) in its specific focus on Samoan female subjectivity, and she has pointed out that she developed her own particular style and subject matter 'specifically because of what was *missing*' from Wendt's work."[133]

In an interview with the Indo-Fijian researcher, Subramani, incorporated at the end of *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, the writer explains that it was the fact that she could not identify with the Polynesian male characters represented in the

[132] Michelle Keown: *Postcolonial Pacific Writing: Representations of the Body*, Routledge, United States and Canada 2005, p. 38
[133] Ibid., p. 38

majority of the indigenous texts published so far that triggered her to write. She considered it necessary that the specific experience of Samoan women be integrated into the body of the emerging Polynesian literature.

What is more, in the interview "Moving the Centre" she explains that during her travels abroad, she has been confronted with "orientalist"[134] images of Polynesian women perpetuated in the Western tradition:

> Maybe for me it's because I have been outside and these are the stereotypes by which people identified me. For example, when I was in America, I got the Margaret Mead a lot, you know the free love thing a lot. When I was in Europe, I got the Gauguin thing a lot, I was the Gauguin person who just walked out of a painting, and all this. So because it had touched my life in all these different ways, I think that's why I decided to write about it.[135]

It is particularly the well-known works of the American and the New Zealand anthropologists Margaret Mead (1901-1978) and Derek Freeman (1916-2001) that influenced the Occidental perspective on Samoan adolescent girls and the development of their sexuality. In her influential study *Coming of Age in Samoa: a Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies* (1928), Margaret Mead presents the sexual growth of Samoan teenagers as free from any constraints and where sexual promiscuity before the marital union is encouraged. This fact explained why they were less subject to neurosis than the American youths. Derek Freeman harshly criticizes Mead's results in *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (1983) and provides a reverse representation of Samoan female sexuality as conditioned by the severe observance of taboos and extremely controlled by violent male authority. The publication of these two contradictory books has triggered one of the most intense controversies in the history of the anthropological discipline.

According to Sia Figiel, both Mead and Freeman forward erroneous conclusions – idealised or dystopian – on the sexual life of Samoan teenagers and, regrettably, they have been spread around. She declares that it is vital to

[134] Edward Said: *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, U. S. A. 1994
[135] Juniper Ellis: "Moving the Centre: An Interview with Sia Figiel", p. 76

"write back" to these "external" distorted representations by giving the "insiders'" point of view since it has never been done before and give the natives' answer to the given controversy:

> And also because it was an extremely painful time growing up in Samoa. And yet coming to the west and having all these images of easy-going, non-jealous adolescence and oh-la-la that goes with it, I felt so insulted. I said, What ease are you talking about? And I wasn't going out there to correct the image of Samoa that's out there. That was not my intention. It was the empowerment of people from the inside that I was more concerned with.[136]

With the intention of deconstructing these "orientalist myths", Sia Figiel chose Samoan teenage girls as the heroes of her novels: Samoana, in *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, is ten years old and, Alofa and her friends Lili and Moa, in *Where We Once Belonged*, are between ten and seventeen years old. They appear as internal narrators and the emphasis is put precisely on their subjective perception of their sexual growth. Eventually, the cited anthropologists are referred to very often. For example, in *Where We Once Belonged*, the named adolescent girls discuss the Mead and Freeman polemic that they have been taught at school. Their comments on the given theories reveal the "insider" perspective. The fact that the girls do not identify with what has been said about them puts into question the validity of the anthropological statements and subverts them:

> Mead was a palagi[137] woman who wrote a book on Samoan girls doing 'it' a lot…and they were loving and loved 'it' too. Freeman was a palagi man who said that Mead, the palagi woman, was wrong about Samoan girls doing 'it' a lot…and that Samoans are jealous, hateful, murderous people who do not know how to do 'it'. (…) 'How did the palagi woman know that we do 'it' a lot?' 'You do 'it' a lot, not *we*,' said Moa to Lili. (…) 'And what about that palagi man?' I asked. 'What about him? How does he know that we…I mean, that people like Lili *don't* do it a lot? Ha!' 'I wouldn't know', said Moa. 'Maybe he was talking to someone like Fauakafe, who'll be a spinster for the rest of her life…or to some matai, like

[136] Ibid., p. 76
[137] "Palagi" is the Samoan word to refer to a "white person" in the same way as "pakeha" in the Maori language.

your father, who are too embarrassed to tell palagis where their hundreds of children come from.[138]

In her work, the author reacts as well to the whole corpus of exotic texts and art produced by Occidental foreigners about Polynesia such as Paul Gauguin, R. L. Stevenson, Hermann Melville, W. S. Maugham, Pierre Loti etc. She is concerned by the fact that the modern tourism industry uses the perpetuated clichés that insist on the natural beauty and sexual easiness of the indigenous women in order to promote Polynesian destinations.

On the other hand, Sia Figiel also chose to adopt the subjective point of view of young female characters for an internal reason: to speak out for that particular social group. Indeed, as she explicates, in Samoa, the opinions and views of children and, particularly girls, are not taken into account: "And within the social hierarchy young girls are at the bottom of the pecking order. I wanted to prioritize their voices. No one asks for an opinion from a child, unlike in the West where children's opinions are sometimes so powerful they put their parents in jail in some instances…"[139]

Therefore, her thematic and narrative choices are the result of a double reaction to the status of women determined from the "outside" as well as from the "inside". As the Samoan researcher Selina Tusitala Marsh asserts, the specific female experience is still lacking in the indigenous literature and it is compulsory to break the silence – not only to respond to the West but also to be heard among the autochthones themselves: "As Pacific Island women, we need our own voices to be asserted, heard and heeded. For the colonizers also prescribed roles for us as the sexual servant, the dusky maiden, the exotic native, the innocent savage, 'the happy-go-lucky fuzzy-haired' girl. We must not consent to our own abasement, or invisibility."[140]

Sia Figiel is the first writer in her country to give the floor to women. In fact, the innocent voices of her young characters reveal a violent everyday reality

[138] Sia Figiel: *Where We Once Belonged*, Kaya Press, United States 1999, pp. 209-210
[139] Juniper Ellis: "Moving the Centre: An Interview with Sia Figiel", p. 75
[140] Michelle Keown: *Postcolonial Pacific Writing: Representations of the Body*, p. 39

differing largely from Mead's idyllic conception of Samoan coming of age and stereotypes attributed to Polynesian women. The readers learn that the female adolescents grow up in a rigid patriarchal society that imposes taboos on their starting sexuality. These restrictions come out as the result of the blending of the hierarchal indigenous traditional system with imported Christian dogma. Girls suffer fierce and humiliating punishments (beating and shaving of the head) in case of violation of the rules while adult men profit from their authoritarian status and repeatedly break the instituted taboos by committing adultery or by having forced sexual intercourse with the minors. Consequently, Samoan village life is governed by false appearances: abused girls are powerless or voiceless against accusations following their discovered pregnancy.

In her article, "Indigenous Women Writers in the Pacific: Déwé Gorodé, Sia Figiel, Patricia Grace: Writing Violence as Counter Violence and the Role of Local Context", Raylene Ramsey aptly characterizes the conditions, in which female sexuality develops according to Sia Figel's texts:

> …harsh, unforgiving punishment over generations for pregnancy or sexual relations out of wedlock, as well as physical punishments of children for disobeying parental or *aiga* (extended family) rules. Behind the appearances of communal harmony and strict religious moral observance, what is revealed in the insider portraits is male pre-eminence in a physically violent culture.[141]

The author of the article views the novels in question as "breaking the taboo of silence" and, thus, denunciating "the abuses of post-independence patriarchal structures of power." The expression of the ongoing violence faced by girls and women is precisely an attempt to "counter this violence"[142]

Therefore, through her writings, Sia Figiel challenges not only external representations of Samoan women but also the indigenous society where she comes from. Actually, in one of the mentioned interviews with the author, Subramani points out that he sees the function of her work "to bring to the

[141] Raylene Ramsay: "Indigenous Women Writers in the Pacific: Déwé Gorodé, Sia Figiel, Patricia Grace: Writing Violence as Counter Violence and the Role of Local Context", p. 4
[142] Ibid., pp. 1, 4

surface repressed or tabooed subjects, for instance, child abuse and suicide (…) so that society can re-examine itself."[143] The writer agrees that she is indeed "exposing" Samoan society and that, consequently, it is inevitable that it should cause criticism and violent reactions in the concerned "very small island"[144]. She has been accused of disrespect to her culture and has been asked why she does not rather speak about its positive aspects.

Actually, the message of "counter-violence" is at the same time accompanied by a sense of humour conveyed through the innocent eyes of the teenagers who manage to find their own ways to cope with the complex system in which they grow up. One of the positive aspects is friendship. This last evolves in the realm of regular meetings of the adolescent girls during which, like the adults, the girlfriends enjoy sharing their "secrets" about their sexual development, gossiping about the villagers, reciting genealogies and talking about mythology. The comic tonality of the novels can be illustrated by the earlier quote, in which the girls' circle interprets the anthropological theories of Margaret Mead and Dereck Freeman.

Not only the author's thematic choices illustrate the evolution of the autochthonous literature in relation to the transforming post-colonial context, but also her use of language and her narrative techniques. Indeed, in terms of language, a clear emancipation in the handling of written English compared to the founding text of Polynesian literature and the works of the first generation of indigenous writers can be observed. The writer pushes further the "indigenisation of English". She utilizes the possibilities of "code-switching", to a greater extent than her precursor Patricia Grace, and is not afraid to use every day spoken language be it English or Samoan. What is more, she accomplishes another step, which she describes as the "Englishisation"[145] of the indigenous language by the transference of the lyrical and "sing-song" rhythms of Samoan into English. Her "deterritorialization" of the English language is without compromise. As a poet,

[143] Wendy E Cowling: "Island Lives: The Writing of Sia Figiel (Samoa) and Celestine Hitiura Vaite (Tahiti)" in *Junctures* (No 12), New Zealand 2009, p. 34
[144] Ibid., p. 34
[145] Juniper Ellis: "Moving the Centre: An Interview with Sia Figiel", p. 72

Sia Figiel makes use of the infinite creative possibilities of the two languages that she has at her disposition in order to innovate them and fuse them into an "inter-language" par excellence.

She conveys the experience of her heroes by transposing and mingling colloquial English and colloquial Samoan into her writings:

> I combed my hair, rubbing Sione's hair-grease into my curls. Comb-comb…comb straight…making the hair go straight…making the hair look like Jill's hair on *Charlie's Angels*. I knew what they would say. 'O le fia Jill ia o lea mea ailalafa! Kope le seluga o ou fugu koeikiiki sau le pasi! Akoga le kausaga o ku koeikiiki ka'e le kioaka i le…' I closed my ears…closed my hair to their mumble-mumble. Mumblings – they were just jealous because they were too old and they couldn't fit into anything. 'Faapaku i luga lou ulu! Can I come with you?' I pulled the hair together in a bun, and held the bun with the back of the turtle formed into a comb…a buncomb. Then over to Pisa, who gave me the twenty tala. '*Please*, can I come with you?' Pisa gave me the verbal list. 'Kasi le kaukalo, coconuts, taro leaves, esi e la loomakua aua gei galo, a pumpkin…'[146]

In Samoan language, formal and informal speech differ significantly and are reserved for determined situations. The principal sign of colloquial Samoan is the pronunciation and the use of the letters "k" and "g" instead of the letters "t" and "n". The usage of the given register represents a challenge to the norms of her native culture. However, by so doing, her texts become more actual and accessible to the younger generations that she is depicting and to whom they are addressed: "In a society that maintains strict protocol regarding appropriate forms of speech and writing in Samoan, these are bold strategies that have made her work particularly appealing to young Samoan readers."[147]

In the quotation, the repetition of the words "comb-comb" or "mumble-mumble" is an example of syntactic "code-switching" frequent in the author's work. In Samoan, repetitive actions are expressed by the duplication of the verb. Besides, the repetition of the words "hair", "straight", "closed", "bun" and

[146] Sia Figiel: *Where We Once Belonged*, pp. 36-37
[147] Michelle Keown: *Pacific Islands Writing*, p. 171

"comb" is one of the rhythmical devices that the author transfers from the indigenous orality into English.

Even though there is a glossary at the end of *Where We Once Belonged*, it presents only key words and the Samoan expressions present in the given quote remain untranslated. In *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, there is no glossary at all despite the fact that the author uses the indigenous language in the same way as here. Therefore, some parts of the books are intentionally accessible in its totality only to Samoan speakers.

As Sia Figiel explains, the selected oral mode of the first person narration conceded to Samoan girls and teenagers required a great effort of observation: "…because the characters were young girls, the language had to have that energy that is characteristic of the way young people speak. Before I wrote *The Girl* I spent nine months listening to the way 10 year old girls talk."[148] In fact, her intention is to represent faithfully everyday life in Samoa, which, in order to succeed, has to be done also through the language. One of her main aims is that Samoan readers would finally be able to identify themselves with a written text and its language, which reveals the author's politics of language:

> I'm working a lot too with English itself (…) I'm just trying to make English make sense to the Samoan or to the Pacific Islander, which is why there's so much Samoan in the book. Here in the Pacific, especially within an English context, a novel is really a book from an English context. To have Pacific Islanders open up that book and see that their languages are prioritised in an English context means a lot to the Pacific Islander or Samoan person. Because they never thought that possibility existed.[149]

The utilization of the colloquial register goes hand in hand with the oral dimension of Sia Figiel's work. As it has been indicated above, she is inspired by the Polynesian oral tradition and her work is at first determined for performance. Her narrative techniques are directly derived from Samoan storytelling, called

[148] Wendy E Cowling: "Island Lives: The Writing of Sia Figiel (Samoa) and Celestine Hitiura Vaite (Tahiti)", p. 32
[149] Juniper Ellis: "Moving the Centre: An Interview with Sia Figiel", p. 73

"fagogo"[150]. The principles of fagogo are almost identical with those of the Maori whaikorero described in the previous part of the thesis: various orators take turns in telling different stories that are, on the whole, inter-related. Compared to Patricia Grace, the fragmentation of the narration springing from these oral strategies is employed even more freely by the Samoan contemporary author.

For example, in the novels *Where We Once Belonged* and *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, there is a multitude of unnumbered but titled chapters of disproportionate length. The chapters themselves are divided into various smaller subparts by asterisks. Even though the internal narrators, who are as well the main characters, remain central until the end of the two novels, several chapters are retold by minor characters through internal focalisation or by omniscient narrators in a third person narrative mode. Consequently, there is no linearity in the narration: due to the alternating narrative voices, the spatial and temporal frames, as well as the themes and styles, change at the beginning of each new chapter so that each one of them appears as a distinct story. In parallel with these shifts, the prose is constantly interspersed with poetry and songs or rhythmical prose in English or in Samoan.

Sia Figiel affirms that she intended to transpose a particular genre from the Samoan oral tradition called "su'ifefiloi" where different songs are sung one after another in the way a flower garland is sewn:

> …su'i means to sew, fefiloi means mixture, so it's a mixture of different flowers that we sew together. And then at the end, you hook them up, and they become an ula, a necklace of flowers. We have a last dance that sums everything up in a ceremony, what everybody's been doing. (…) Now people will sing this very long song so that more alofa[151] is shown, you know, so they'll go from one song and then they'll hook that up to another one and another one, stringing all these songs together, and these songs are absolutely independent songs that are just stuck together so that more people come up.[152]

[150] Fagogo: "a performing art, almost a type of theatre, where people, events and stories are brought to life through the skills, voice and action of a narrator." in Sean Mallon: *Samoan Art and Artists: O Measina a Samoa. Nelson*, Craig Patton Publishing, New Zealand 2002. p. 163
[151] "Alofa" means love in Samoan.
[152] Juniper Ellis: "Moving the Centre: An Interview with Sia Figiel", p. 74

In this way, the chapters of her novels are to be conceived as individual apparently unrelated "flowers" that, tied to one another, create one unified tale or "garland": "Each piece in those books can stand independently on its own and yet, at the same time, is connected to the others."[153] Thus, in the same way as Patricia Grace whose narrative structures reflect the Maori ideological concept of the spiral, Sia Figiel's novels are built on the basis of the shape of the circle, a central notion in Samoan thought and worldview. The "syncretism" of the strategies of indigenous orality with the novel form lead once again, as in the case of her female predecessor, to the creation of an intermediary literary genre, an "oraliture" or "orature", at the border between oral and written expressions.

However, Sia Figiel marks a transformation in the innovative intentions of Polynesian writers in her unconstrained blending of the two heritages that give an experimental dimension to her novels. Her works have been defined as post-modern. However, that Western literary classification has been refuted. As her compatriot and example Albert Wendt affirms: "…postmodernism is not new to the Pacific indigenous cultures, where storytelling is always seen as a process which changes according to the mood of the teller and the reactions of her audience, and where art is a commodity produced for the community."[154]

It can also be noted that, in comparison with the author of the founding text of Polynesian literature in English, she continually performs acts of "abrogation" of the colonial heritage simultaneously with its "appropriation", through her use of English. According to B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, "abrogation" is "a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in the words"[155] and it is an essential step in the process of "indigenisation" of the imposed tools: "It is a vital moment in the decolonizing of the language and the writing of 'english'"[156].

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[153] Ibid., p. 74
[154] Albert Wendt: "Introduction" in *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980*, pp.4-5
[155] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin: *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, p. 38
[156] Ibid., p. 38

In the next chapter, it will be shown how the contemporary author drives further the possibilities of innovation and "syncretism" or "syncreticity" that offer another essential component of the indigenous inheritance that is the Samoan cultural heritage.

3. The function of mythopoeia in *Where We Once Belonged*

Where We Once Belonged published in 1996 is Sia Figiel's first novel. The novel deals with the young Alofa Filiga's coming of age in post-independence Samoa. The central character, also the main first person narrator, imparts unity to the fragmented novel built according to the structure of the "su'ifefiloi". Throughout the continual changes of points of view and shifts in the narrative timeline, the challenged readers witness the main character's growth suggested by her progress in the education system: from primary to high school. The multiple retrospective stories reach as far as her seventeenth year and she is doing exams in order to continue her studies in New Zealand.

Alofa Filiga is maturing in a Samoan village society that is split between the traditional customs and superstitious beliefs of a rather patriarchal system on the one hand, and imported Christianity, Occidental culture and capitalism on the other. The ancient religion, founded on the local cosmogony and mythology, has been completely abandoned and an austere and dogmatic practice of Christianity has been established. What is more, it appears that, despite the acquired independence of the country, the indigenous heritage is being progressively replaced by the Western modern lifestyle. The main character strives to orientate herself within her sundered cultural background. Paradoxically, despite the imposed observance of taboos, she is the witness of the refraction of these by her own father, of sexual violence, of fierce punishments and of suicide. The stories that she hears in the "circle" display a number of villagers, especially women, with tragic fates most often caused by the oppressing social organization that excludes those who do not conform to its rules. Consequently, the main character

constantly asks herself: "What is *that* supposed to mean?"[157] and tries to define her own self in this frantic environment, in which individuals are defined by their belonging to the collective "we".

It is Alofa's aunt Siniva, "the blind village fool", that provides answers through her connection with the disregarded indigenous ancestors. Indeed, the disappearing Polynesian mythological heritage functions as a vital source of reference. The novel is interspersed with a high number of allusions to the Samoan lore that, due to the proximity of Melanesia, presents several important variations in comparison with the other Polynesian islands of the triangle.

First, Sia Figiel refers to the cosmogony: the creation of Samoa by the supreme god Tagaloa residing in the Ninth Heaven, the first natural divinities such as Salevao, the god of rocks, and Laueleele, the earth goddess, the underworld Pulotu and the birth of humans out of worms. Secondly, there appear mythical gods or demi-gods and their deeds: Pili, the son of Tagaloa embodied in a black lizard, Nafanua the war goddess, Aolele, the wandering cloud or the broken-hearted Apaula, who transformed herself into a river through her never-ending tears. Thirdly, the author mentions ancient religious beliefs concerning the soul or "agaga", the incarnation of the gods or of souls of the dead into animals, especially birds, or into living persons, and some traditional customs related to the recital of genealogies, the umbilical cord and healing. It is interesting to note that, contrary to other Polynesian peoples, Samoans did not represent their gods in carved figures in wood or stone, which is why they were considered as godless. However, since they believed in the incarnation, their gods or divine entities were embodied in living nature. Finally, popular superstitions surrounding dreams, menstruation – the moon sickness –, ghosts of suffering souls and haunted houses are equally omnipresent. The last of these are presented as an inseparable part of Samoan everyday village life and are the subjects of the contemporary oral tradition as discussed at the gatherings of the teenage girls among themselves or with their families or elders. They reveal the

[157] Sia Figiel: *Where We Once Belonged*, p. 12

evident paradox that resides at the core of the local society since it is ruled by Christian dogmas.

The fact that the references to the indigenous heritage are so numerous is a manifestation of the author's acquired creative freedom in its handling within the European novel form. It is necessary to remember that Sia Figiel insists on the "oral" dimension of her work, not only in its structure but also in its contents.

It is impossible to encompass all the references to indigenous mythology in *Where We Once Belonged* in the present chapter. Therefore, the first point to be concentrated on is Sia Figiel's adaptation of the creation myth about Samoa and the village of Malaefou because it aptly illustrates the proceedings of the contemporary author in the process of inheritance and innovation of the cosmogony. The second point of focus is the function of the references to Samoan mythology that are relevant to the evolution of the main character and which bring possible solutions to her own questionings and, more generally, to the contemporary problems of Samoan and Polynesian culture and identity.

The main sources for the comparison of the Samoan oral heritage and its treatment by Sia Figiel are George Turner's[158] *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific* (1861) and *Samoa: A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (1884), Peter Buck's[159] *Vikings of the Pacific* (1938) and Robert D. Craig's[160] *Handbook of Polynesian Mythology* (2004). It is difficult to indicate the exact sources from which the Samoan author, erudite in the local oral tradition, drew inspiration herself.

[158] Reverend George Turner (1818-1891) was a missionary of the London Missionary Society in Samoa who studied Samoan traditions, customs and lore extensively. During the evangelisation of the natives, he transcribed Samoan myths in *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific* (1861) and *Samoa: A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (1884) and in *Nineteen Years in Polynesia: Missionary Life, Travels and Researches in the Islands of the Pacific* (1861).

[159] Peter Buck, Te Rangi Hiroa (1880-1951) was a half-Irish and half-Maori doctor and anthropologist who undertook a travel throughout Polynesian to study the migrations of the Polynesian peoples. The oral tradition of each destination was an invaluable source of information to trace the travels of the individual tribes.

[160] Robert D. Craig (b. 1934) is professor emeritus of Pacific history at Alaska Pacific University. He has made a vast investigation into Polynesian history and mythology in his works *A Dictionary of Polynesian Mythology* (1989), *A Handbook of Polynesian Mythology* (2004) and *A Historical Dictionary of Polynesia* (2011).

Indeed, it is necessary to remark that, as a consequence of the process of evangelisation started at the beginning of the nineteen century in Samoa, a great part of the religion and mythology has been rejected by the natives themselves, re-adapted, or lost. The transcriptions that spread out from the collaboration of the natives and the missionaries later became a fundamental source of reference. Some manuscripts written autonomously by the literate autochthones remain in the possession of the extended Samoan families and are being progressively made accessible to a wider audience since the cultural revival initiated in the 1960's. Several myths have remained alive in the oral tradition, belong to the collective consciousness and are being transmitted by the guarantors of the oral tradition, the "tulafale" or talking chiefs, the counterparts of the Maori "korero".

The reference to the myth about the creation of Samoa appears for the first time in the middle of the chapter, "The Center", as an individual part separated from the others by asterisks: "Samoa was once sacred to Moa. Moa was the son of Rocks. Rocks married the Earth and the Earth was pregnant and a male-child was born and he was called Moa. His father Salevao, god of the rocks, called his son after moa (the middle, the centre, the motion in the middle of his mother's womb)."[161] In this unexpected digression, the author reproduces the patterns of mythical accounts. From realistic prose, she passes to an incantatory rhythm and a simple syntax based on accumulation and repetition. The passage focuses on the description of genealogies and on the explanation of names: "Everything that grew out of the soil would be 'sa ia Moa', sacred to Moa–taro, bananas, taamu, mangoes. Maggots were sa ia Moa. So were the rocks and the earth. (…) And even after it, the sacredness of everything was still known as sa ia moa. So is the name 'Samoa'. So is Samoa."[162]

The myth counters the rush, tumult and chaos of contemporary Apia, the capital of the Independent State of Samoa, that is decribed in the given chapter by an omniscient narrator. This is a comment on the fact that the notion of the centre in the contemporary stratified Samoan society varies according to each

[161] Ibid., p. 75
[162] Ibid., pp. 75-76

inhabitant of Apia, depending on his or her individual interests and activities, as well as according to the various animals or plants:

> Soia Le-Guguku-Sole-Fesili-I-Ke'i-Ua-Lua-Fekoa'i-Ma-Se-Fagakikili, a catholic woman from Moamoa, might just say (…) that the centre of Apia is the Cathedral…the catholic Cathedral, that is. (…) On the more vernacular side of things Alaisa Fiaola-Confusion, the half Chinese boy from Alamagoto, might think of the kung-fu theatre in Taufusi as the centre of Apia. (…) Tu Lou, the cricket ball maker from Kapakapao, thinks (economically) without questioning Le Fale o Pakele or Bartley's as the centre of Apia. (…) The dead dogs of Apia don't give a damn about the centre. Nor do the pigs, guava and mango leaves.[163]

The superimposition of the two contrasting representations of Samoa, in the present and mythical times, suggests that, according to the author, the archipelago has lost its sacredness, which is one of the main messages of the novel – already anticipated in its title. The times when Samoa was indeed a unified "center", the place of origin of all Samoans[164], seem to be over.

Looking at the mentioned non-fictional referential books on Samoan mythology, it can be seen that the interpretation of the creation myth of Sia Figiel's native country corresponds to the recorded mythology (see Appendix VIII). Nevertheless, despite the fact that, at first, the forwarded mythical tale coincides with the transcribed versions, it reappears again later in the novel, this time with an important variation – the first-born child and divinity Moa is a daughter: "Salevao, the god of rocks, married the Earth…and the Earth was pregnant. The pregnant earth gave birth to Moa. Moa was female. Motion in the middle of the earth, she was. Moa had a brother, too."[165] In George Turner's work, Salevao does indeed have a daughter, but she is called Lu and is the second born. However, the missionary also provides other versions of the explanation of the name Samoa and, in one of them, Lu is also a son. This fact reveals a significant aspect of the oral tradition that is its flexible nature. Sia Figiel affirms

[163] Sia Figiel: *Where We Once Belonged*, pp. 68-73
[164] In Samoan mythology, the autochthones were created on their archipelago, therefore, they do not worship the mother island Hawaiki such as the other Polynesian peoples.
[165] Ibid., p. 196

that it is precisely the movable character of the orally transmitted mythology that interests her:

> …in Samoan, the character of Pili, appears differently in different locations. If you go here there's a story about Pili, and somewhere else there's another story about Pili. This is another story about the same event. So that you have about thirty, forty, fifty, sixty different stories about Pili, about the same event. Which is really something characteristic of an oral tradition. There is no absolute truth in mythology. People have their own truths according to their village, their district. (…) That is what I wanted to bring across, the many different versions in an oral tradition.[166]

A significant example of Sia Figiel's work with the inhomogeneity of mythology, effected by its oral transmission, is the account of the cosmogony of the village of Malaefou in the chapter "Origins (of wo-men) and the birth of Alofa". Actually, Alofa Filiga's native Samoan village is fictive. Nevertheless, like every existing Polynesian village, Sia Figiel endows it with an account of its birth and an explanation of its name in the same way as she does when she interprets the creation of Samoa. The invented creation myth about Malaefou presents all the aspects of mythological accounts commented on earlier and is based on authentic fragments of the Samoan oral tradition. For example, the god Pili appears as one the main protagonists and has his traditional attributes: he is the son of Tagaloa, a black lizard who has the ability to transform himself into various shapes, human or animal. However, he is introduced into the name and mythology of the non-existing village:

> Before our village was called Malaefou it used to be Malaefoupili. Malaefoupili was born out of the mouth of a shell–a sacred shell that was 'sa i le la,' or sacred to the Sun. It was blown down from the heavens by Matagi, the god of Wind (…) Malaefoupili became the resting place of Pili on earth. Pili the Lizard was the only son of the creator Tagaloalagi.[167]

The fact that Malaefou was born from a sacred shell "sa i le la" integrates the fictive village in the creation myth of Samoa. Moreover, the celestial places

[166] Juniper Ellis: "Moving the Centre: An Interview with Sia Figiel", pp. 73-74
[167] Sia Figiel: *Where We Once Belonged*, p. 143

and divinities that are mentioned in the story correspond to the inherited cosmogony: Lower Heavens, Ninth Heaven, Vanimonimo, Pulotu (the Samoan underworld) or Aolele, Matagi and Fe'e the Octopus god. Despite this seemingly authentic mythological frame, what differs are the deeds of the acting well-known characters. Thus, Sia Figiel creates a new version out of the existing stories of them in order to reproduce the usual proceedings of the oral tradition. What is more, Malaefou is the setting of the writer's second novel, *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, in which the village story again presents diverse variations from the recorded mythology:

> It's interesting, I use the same legend to explain Malaefou, you know the village in both books, and it's different in *The Girl in the Moon Circle* than in *Where We Once Belonged,* and that's what I want the reader to be aware of. There are different ways of telling stories according to people's memories, you know, Alofa tells it differently, the leaves in *The Girl in the Moon Circle* with Samoana tell it differently. But it's the same village.[168]

Therefore, Sia Figiel dynamically re-interprets the mythological heritage and interweaves this freely with fiction. Consequently, it is possible to characterize her work as mythopoeic.

Now, how is the revision of the myths effected and what is its function in the novel? It is interesting to comment on the fact that Pili, contrary to his usual representations, receives a rather negative interpretation as a lustful god and is defeated by the beautiful goddess Aolele whom he tries to seduce. According to Peter Buck and Robert D. Craig, Pili is venerated in the Samoan oral tradition as the creator and ancestor of the first districts and chiefly houses of Upolu (see Appendix VIII) while in Sia Figiel's version he is banished from the earth, deprived of his power of metamorphosis and despised by the inhabitants of Malaefou:

> The 'Pili' that once combined with 'Malaefou' was removed from the name Malaefoupili when Pili was banished back to the Ninth Heaven by the sons of the Earth. (…) Since then, Pili (…) appears only in his permament condition as a reptile. When he does appear (which

[168] Juniper Ellis: "Moving the Centre: An Interview with Sia Figiel", p. 74

is only rare) the people of Malaefou throw stones at the sight of him, killing him over and over…[169]

The lizard is found as a recurrent motive in the novel and is usually connoted with forbidden sexual desire or lust, especially after Alofa witnesses her father Filiga committing adultery with her teacher Mrs Samasoni: "it was even rumoured that she invited the lizard to her womb"[170], "the day the lizard crawled into my brain was the same day a lizard crawled, too, into Mrs Samasoni's stomach"[171], "Filiga, looking at a fat mo'o[172] on the ceiling"[173], "Would I have turned out differently had I not seen the dance of the eel and the lizard mouth?"[174]

The character that arises as victorious in Sia Figiel's account of the village creation is the goddess Aolele thanks for the protection and sacrifice of her seven brothers and it is she that is conceded the role of the founder of the chiefly houses of Malaefou: "Aolele herself became stronger. Her mana was increased due to her brothers' sacrifice for her life. To show alofa for her brothers, Aolele wove and wove sinnets and pola, and chopped wood with stone, and gathered stones, and built seven fale on Malaefou."[175]

Therefore, what is characteristic of the writer's interpretation of the mythical heritage is the change of gender roles: the first-born child Moa and centre of Samoa reappears as a girl and Aolele defeats the hero Pili and founds the village of Malaefou. Thus, she re-adapts Samoan cosmogony by placing women at its core. Actually, Alofa Filiga explains that when she heard the story of Aolele when she was still in the womb, she "willed herself female"[176] against her mother's wishes. In fact, in the indigenous patriarchal society, this would be better accepted in her lover's 'aiga[177] if the child born from adultery would be a

[169] Sia Figiel: *Where We Once Belonged*, pp. 145, 148
[170] Ibid., p. 59
[171] Ibid., p. 178
[172] "Mo'o" means a lizard in Samoan.
[173] Ibid., p. 183
[174] Ibid., p. 220
[175] Ibid., p. 149
[176] Ibid., p. 149
[177] "'Aiga" in Samoan has the same meaning as the word "whanau" in Maori. It means extended family.

boy: "As Pisa thought these thoughts, she thought too that if she, a nobody in the eyes of the Filiga family (and Malaefou), could give Filiga a son all her problems would be solved."[178]

What is more, the author faithfully takes over one of the few myths representing a powerful woman that is offered in the oral tradition: the war goddess Nafanua who, disguised as a man, waged a war against a tyrannical ruler and saved men from the terrible punishments that he used to impose (see Appendix VIII). The story of the mythical woman inspires the main character that lives in an oppressive environment and, in which, being a girl, her mother decided to make her "look" and "feel ugly"[179]. It motivates her to have the courage to value herself as a female and be more confident: "'I am a warrior,' sings Nafanua. 'I am a warrior.' 'I am,' sings Alofa."[180] Before the discovery of Nafanua, Alofa kept repeating: "'I' is 'we'…*always*."[181], "'I' am 'We'. 'I' does not exist."[182]

Thus, in the everyday life of contemporary Malaefou, considered as "the village of God"[183] by the villagers, young women are depicted as victims of an austere patriarchal system while in the referred revised mythology they replace men in their function as original creative entities and defend themselves from masculine violence and abuse. They are represented as strong and dignified. Indeed, as the researcher Judith Raiskin points out: "Figiel changes the traditional stories to emphasize embedded female strength and authorize gender relations that value and protect girls and women…"[184]

Moreover, in the mythological fragments only, men also acquire positive roles as unconditional protectors, such as the seven brothers of Aolele and as devoted and guardian lovers as the war octopus god Fe'e that Alofa's soul or "agaga" goes to meet at nights:

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[178] Ibid., p. 152
[179] Ibid., p. 154
[180] Ibid., p. 197
[181] Ibid., p. 137
[182] Ibid. P. 142
[183] Ibid., p. 221, the Christian God.
[184] Judith Raiskin: "Telling Tales Out of School: Sia Figiel and Indigenous Knowledge in Pacific Islands Literature" in K. E. Ferguson and Monique Mironesco, eds.: *Gender and Globalization in Asia and the Pacific: Method, Practice, Theory*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 2008, p. 20

> After each war I come here. All bloody and full of wounds, too, is my body–all weary. I go to the side of the sea and rest there…calling to you, oh great octopus…calling to you my lover. / 'Alofa is weak,' I say. 'Alofa is dying. Alofa needs water.' You crawl out of your coral home…out of the stomach of the sea you crawl, to the surface (…) You come to me…your eyes so beautiful…your mouth so delicious…you, my lover…my alofa…la'u manamea. (…) You embrace me. You rock me till the sun comes up…until the day is born…[185]

Again, it is a woman who has inherited the status of talking chief, a part traditionally reserved for men, that initiates Alofa to the empowering function of myths:

> Alofa listens to Siniva's legends carefully and as an abused girl in a village where girls are subject to harsh disciplinary and sexual violence, she finds through these Samoan tales a place in the world for a separate soul, her own *agaga*. She can find her place in this series of legendary tales, perhaps because Siniva has modified them, shifting the focus of central Samoan myths.[186]

The "shift of the focus" mentioned by Judith Raiskin is precisely the intentional change of gender roles. It is Siniva and not her brother Filiga, Alofa's father, who has been chosen by the ancestral gods to forward the abandoned mythological heritage. Indeed, the function of the author's references to the local mythology is not only to counter the patriarchal system of Samoan society but also to emphasize the importance of the indigenous past in the contemporary post-colonial context.

Siniva is the only villager that sees clearly the degradation of Samoan culture. She becomes conscious of this fact through an ancestral ritual: she is anointed and blinded by a bird that flies to her from the "Lightness". The author refers to the ancient religion according to which gods could incarnate themselves into living beings, in this case a bird, and communicate with humans (see Appendix IX). What is more, the bird in question appears to be the daughter of

[185] Sia Figiel: *Where We Once Belonged*, pp. 197-198
[186] Judith Raiskin: "Telling Tales Out of School: Sia Figiel and Indigenous Knowledge in Pacific Islands Literature", p. 19

the supreme creator Tagaloa who was sent by him to explore the newly created earth in the form of a snipe, called Tuli in Samoan. According to the version rendered by George Turner, the Tuli brought a vine branch to the earth and this last rotted and swarmed with worms that transformed into men and women (see Appendix VIII). Therefore, the sacred bird can be viewed as the first mediator between the earth, the humans and the gods, which is the role Sia Figiel gives it. The Tuli gives Siniva access to the disappearing ancestral knowledge through the eating of its egg and gives her the mission to transmit it further orally. The eating of the egg is again an example of the author's free variations of the indigenous heritage:

> Siniva listened and listened and agreed with the bird. And the bird laid an egg in a nest nearby and ordered Siniva to eat the egg. 'Eat the shell, too, especially,' said the bird. Siniva tasted mythologies in the shell of the egg. She drank legends, too, in the yolk of the egg…licking fagogo…tasting the adventures of Sina and Tigilau…tasting eels, turtles, owls, sharks and other war gods worshipped in the Light…worshipped by all of Samoa. (…) Tell them about us, Siniva. Tell them about our Lightness. Tell them that we are still here, that we live on.[187]

Thus, the character is assigned the role of a guardian warrior of Samoan mythology, such as the goddess Nafanua, and of an orator or talking chief by the mythical bird. The given status used to be handed down from generation to generation in her 'aiga and was also originally transmitted to her ancestors by the same bird. Through the incarnated god, Siniva is given the right to inherit the ancestors' tools and symbols: the To'oto'o – a wooden staff – and a Fue – a fly whisk (see Appendix X):

> This is wisdom. They belonged to a talking chief. When a talking chief dies, he passes these on to his sons and daughters. He hands on his wisdom through the strength of the to'oto'o and the fue. These were given to my father by my grandfather. My grandfather's father got it through his grandfather. 'His grandfather's father got it from a bird.[188]

[187] Sia Figiel: *Where We Once Belonged*, p. 193
[188] Ibid., p. 202

Sia Figiel is here alluding to the authentic attributes of the Samoan art of oratory which stretches backthrough history to the divine founders of the individual chiefly houses or ‘aiga. Siniva’s disciple is the inquiring Alofa to whom she teaches the importance of the oral tradition in order to be free and live in the “light”. The “Lightness” and the “light” is a double reference. First, to the primal division of the world between “Te Po” – darkness – and “Te Ao” – light – before the process of creation started according to the Polynesian cosmogony. Secondly, it denotes the accepted notion that the arrival of Christianity ended the period of pagan “darkness”, in which Samoans were living and brought “light”. Epeli Hau‘ofa explains this division pertinently in his influential essay “Our Sea of Islands”:

> The wholesale condemnation by Christian missionaries of Oceanian cultures as savage, lascivious, barbaric has had a lasting and negative effect on people’s views of their histories and traditions. In a number of Pacific societies people still divide their history into two parts: the era of darkness, associated with savagery and barbarism, and the era of light and civilisation ushered in by Christianity.[189]

According to the blind but sighted Siniva, the phase in which Samoans are living now is not the “light” brought by Christianity as it is believed, but “darkness”: “‘We are *not* living in Lightness,’ she would say. ‘We are not. Lightness is dead. Lightness died that first day in 1830 when the breakers of the sky entered these shores, forcing us all to forget (…) ‘Now’, says Siniva. ‘Is our turn to re-evaluate, re-define, remember…if *we* dare. For *this* is Darkness.” She disapproves not only of the imposed religion but of the introduction of money and consumerism that destroy the sacredness of the relations of humans to their natural environment and towards themselves: “‘Everyone is blinded,’ said Siniva. ‘Blinded by too many Bibles. Blinded by too many cathedrals…too many cars…too many faleapa…six million dollar men…”[190] She puts “inside out” the

[189] Epeli Hau‘ofa: “Our Sea of Islands” in Epeli Hau‘ofa: *We Are the Ocean: Seleceted Works*, University of Hawai‘i Press, Honolulu 2008, p. 28
[190] Sia Figiel: *Where We Once Belonged*, p. 237

received concepts and asserts that the present "light" of the autochthones is their ancient indigenous heritage.

Paradoxically, the mediator between the ancestral gods and the living is one of the first Samoans to come back from New Zealand with a university degree. In fact, having gone through the Occidental education system of the ex-colonial power, she is able to have an insight into the negative effects of colonialism and modernisation. However, she faces the narrow mindedness of the villagers. Because she urges them to reconsider their own heritage that has been doomed as "darkness" and does not conform to the established order and values of her village that she criticizes openly, she is considered to be crazy or possessed by a ghost. Consequently, according to the customary practice, she is excluded from the society:

> Siniva was banned from our ʻaiga and Malaefou after she returned from New Zealand, and told everyone that Jesus Christ was not Samoan and that people were living in the darkness. The faifeau said she was pitiful and it was such a waste. Siniva was such a waste, said everyone. They thought her a fool and cut the umbilicus that connected her to her mother, Malaefou.[191]

The refusal of the inhabitants of Malaefou to remember the past with which Siniva is confronted leads her to commit suicide. Her decision stands for the contemporary situation of Samoa that, according to her, is itself constantly committing suicide when it is abandoning its ancestral heritage for an unrestrained "mimicry" of the Occidental religion and modern lifestyle that destroys the sacred earth where "'we' once belonged" and kills the agaga of the people:

> 'Suicide – it is the only way. For isn't that what we're all slowly doing anyway? Each time a child cries for coca-cola instead of coconut-juice the waves close into our lungs. Each time we choose one car, two cars, three cars over canoes and our own feet, the waves close in further. Further and further each time we open supa-keli…pisupo…elegi instead of fishing

[191] Ibid., p. 199

> nets…raising pigs…growing taro…plantations…taamu…breadfruit. Each time we prefer apples to mangoes…pears to mangoes…strawberries to mangoes. (…) We suffocate ourselves – suffocate our babies and our reefs with each plastic diaper…formula milk…baby powder…bottled baby food and a nuclear bomb, too, once in a while. (…) We kill ourselves slowly. (…) Each time we switch something ON (radio, lamps, TV, ignitions…) means a nail in our coffin. And agaga we once knew it dies in our still biologically functionable bodies, full of junk-food…darkness-food…white-food…death food. [192]

Siniva opens the eyes of the main character on the current "darkness". The ancient mythology raises a source of strength and identification for the disciple whose soul has learned to leave the body at nights to communicate with the ancestral gods (see Appendix IX). She understands why she is striving to find a meaning without success within her imbalanced and violent background. As she becomes conscious of this fact, she is able to detach herself from the suffocating grip of the village, free herself from it and find her own identity: "After reading Siniva's thoughts I am silenced. Alone. For the first time I am alone. I am alone. I am 'I' in its totality–'I' without 'we'"[193]

The Tuli appears to her and she inherits the role of the tulafale herself after Siniva's death. Nonetheless, as the novel ends, there is a hope that Alofa will fulfill her responsibility and bring back the "light" onto the once sacred "malae"[194], the privileged space of the tulafale, through her words: "As I thought these thoughts the Tuli of Tomorrow flew high up in the sky, a fue tattoed on her wings, a to'oto'o tattoed on her peak. The Tuli called to me, her voice music to my feet, and I began walking…walking-walking…away from Siniva's grave…walking now towards Malaefou, towards the new gathering place where 'we' once belonged."[195]

Sia Figiel's innovative work with the Samoan mythical heritage within the frame of the novel form is highly complex. Her first novel *Where We Once Belonged* amplifies the conception of contemporary Polynesian literature as an "oraliture". The author plays with the many layers of the oral tradition as it was

[192] Ibid. pp. 237-238
[193] Ibid., p. 239
[194] "Malae" is a sacred gathering ground.
[195] Ibid., p. 203

practised in the past and as it is practised today. She insists on the flexibility of the orally transmitted heritage and the frontiers between myth and fiction are blurred. In fact, the mingling of realism and myth are similar to that found in South American Magic Realism and, especially, G. G. Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which focuses on the functioning of the fictive village Macondo, Malaefou's counterpart.

On one hand, through her alter ego Siniva, Sia Figiel harshly criticizes the consequences of colonialism and Occidental capitalism on the autochthones and advocates an urgent "enlightenment" by the past religion and mythology. She expresses concern not only for Samoan contemporary corrupted social structures, culture and identity but also for the degradation of the natural environment caused by modernisation. On the other hand, she re-interprets Samoan mythology in order to grant more power to women in the traditional patriarchal system or, in the words of Raylene Ramsay, she is "constructing women's myth" as a form of "counterviolence". Actually, the novel is dedicated to girls and women.

The two seemingly contradictory functions of the references to the local mythology in the novel imply that the writer's proposed answer to the problems of contemporary Samoa and Polynesia is to revise the indigenous heritage, which is an indispensable source of identity, and to adapt it so as to make it functional in the post-colonial contemporary context threatened by internal corruption and "mimicry" of the Occidental lifestyle. Sia Figiel's implicit solution echoes the conception of culture as a continual process of adaptation of various cultures or "presences" in one place as described by the Jamaican-born cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1932-2014) in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora".

Judith Raiskin aptly describes the intentions behind the author's literary proceedings:

> Figiel does not simply juxtapose the colonial stories about Samoa and the damaging lessons of colonial education with 'authentic' precontact Samoan legends to prove their cultural superiority. Far more subtly, she suggests that the originary legends, *as they have been preserved*, contribute to the degradation and misery of Samoan women and girls today. By changing the emphasis of these tales, remembering them differently, Figiel suggests a

positive strategy for valuing Samoan culture as part of a contemporary feminist critique of both western coloninalism and Samoan patriarchy…[196]

Thus, Sia Figiel's mythopoeic literary strategies that achieve an absolute "syncretism" represent a new stage in the transformations of post-colonial Polynesian literature in English the main aim of which is to construct a new Polynesian culture and identity.

[196] Judith Raiskin: "Telling Tales Out of School: Sia Figiel and Indigenous Knowledge in Pacific Islands Literature", p. 21

I took in a big breath, filling my lungs with sea and air and land and people. And with past and present and future, and felt a new strength course through me. I lifted my voice to sing and heard and felt the others join with me. Singing loudly into the darkest of nights. Calling on the strength of the people. Calling them to paddle the canoes and to paddle on and on. To haul the canoes down and paddle. On and on –

'Hoea ra nga waka
E te iwi e,
Hoea hoea ra,
Aotea, Tainui, Kurahaupo,
Hoea hoa ra.

Toia mai nga waka
E te iwi e,
Hoea hoea ra,
Mataatua, Te Arawa,
Takitimu, Tokomaru,
Hoea hoea ra.'

Patricia Grace, "Waiariki"

Conclusion

The “dry land” has been reached. This conclusion is the record of the attained destination.

The detailed exploration of the development of Polynesian literature in English since the 1940’s to the present through the three studied representative women writers belonging to three different generations reveals that a movement of colonial emancipation and cultural and identity reconstruction has been gradually intensifying. Like a resonating Polynesian conch shell, the quotation from Patricia Grace’s short story “Waiariki” that announces this conclusion metaphorically illustrates this on-going process.

The given rhythmical movement is observable at first in the emerging literature – from its founding text, through the Maori Renaissance, to the Polynesian contemporary literary scene. Also, in the described transforming post-colonial situation of the Polynesian region, in the changing attitudes of the authors to their contexts, traduced in their thematic, linguistic and formal choices, and in the manner in which they inherit and innovate Polynesian and European mythology, literary canonical works, cultural symbols and ancient beliefs.

What is more, the slight disproportion of the individual parts of the thesis is in itself evidence of the paced development of this new literature and of the parallel growing body of indigenous post-colonial literary criticism. It shows also the rising international interest in this new literature, manifested in the increasing number of theoretical articles and reviews on the subject. For the study of Florence (Johnny) Frisbie, there is a minimum of secondary literature at one’s disposal, whereas when I was examining the work of Sia Figiel, the opposite situation occurred, it was necessary to make a careful selection of the supporting materials to be used. It has to be added here that specific emphasis is put on Sia Figiel, both her context and literary production, also due to the fact that the Polynesian contemporary literary scene was introduced only roughly in the

previous thesis – contrary to the other stages of the development of Polynesian literature in English.

The analyses of the changing post-colonial contexts of the different islands of origin of the Polynesian authors exemplify the general move from British colonialism to indigenous independence. At the time when Florence Frisbie wrote her autobiography, the region was fully under colonial control. Although she does not deal directly with that background, the presence of the British and American traders as well as the surrounding Pacific War uncover the fact that she lives in an invaded society. On the other hand, the following Maori Renaissance, to which Patricia Grace actively participates with the first generation of indigenous writers, illustrates the culmination of the struggles of the autochthones for political independence occurring from the 1960's in the entire Polynesian triangle and that went hand in hand with waves of militant self-assertion and linguistic and cultural revivals. Finally, Sia Figiel's Samoa is already an independent state that seeks to recover an internal political balance, to fight the latent forms of neo-colonialism that are globalisation and Occidental capitalism, and to put the finishing touches to post-colonial cultural and identity reconstruction.

The positions adopted by the women writers in relation to their respective contexts usually conform to the outlined changing atmosphere. Florence Frisbie does not express explicit post-colonial concerns in her autobiography while Patricia Grace and Sia Figiel are actively engaged in the indigenous affairs of their times, which is later transposed in the selected privileged themes of their works.

The designated movement of emancipation is also reflected in the literary production of these three Polynesian authors in a progressive liberation from the norms of written Standard English and of the European novel form. In terms of language, there is a clear passage from "English" to "english", such as it is described in *The Empire Writes Back*: "We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial

centre), and the linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world."[197]

Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka exemplifies the imposition of Standard English over the vernacular languages and the process of its learning by the autochthones. Florence Frisbie attempts to fulfil its code, which is achieved through the corrections of her American father. On the other hand, Patricia Grace marks a transition from "English" to "english". She starts to diverge from the standard code by practising "code-switching" and she intentionally "deterritorializes" the imported language. Finally, Sia Figiel achieves an absolute "indigenisation" of the English language. She turns the hierarchies of the two inherited languages "inside out" by characterizing her usage of English as the "englishization" of the Samoan language. By so doing, she gets to create a new "inter-language" *par excellence*.

Similarly, the founding text of Polynesian literature in English responds to the standards of imported novel writing whereas Patricia Grace and Sia Figiel intend to "indigenize" this literary genre by integrating more and more narrative techniques from the inherited oral tradition so as to establish a distinct indigenous genre characterized as "oraliture" or "orature". It comes to the point that Sia Figiel prioritizes oral performance over writing.

The progressive liberation from colonial hegemony is likewise manifested in the way the three writers refer to the Polynesian and European cultural heritages in their novels. Polynesian literature in English starts with a key thematic reference to a canonical literary work of Occidental civilisation but proceeds with allusions primarily to indigenous mythology, cultural symbols or traditional beliefs that are interwoven each time more abundantly into the novels so as to fulfil a crucial function in their structure. The increasing number of documents used to illustrate the Polynesian heritage present in the Appendix attests this move.

[197] Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen: *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, Routledge, New York 1989, p. 8

The transforming approach of the indigenous women writers to language, writing and culture demonstrates the main developing tendency of Polynesian literature in English towards a "syncretism" or "syncreticity" of the autochthonous and European heritages. The merging of these two leads inevitably to their bilateral innovation. The present investigation uncovers the growing effort of the Polynesian writers to integrate the indigenous heritage through the imported tools – English and writing – so as to achieve an authentic blending that forwards a truly Polynesian literature expressive of a new Polynesian culture and identity "free of the taint of colonialism and based firmly in our own past"[198].

The author of the founding text, who was born "in-between" the two contrasted heritages, foreshadows this "syncretism". Actually, the three treated authors are themselves descendants of the racial mixing between the "pakeha" and the autochthones, which proves the undeniable fact that "'the outside' is already very much 'inside' the cultural-identity ingredients"[199] of Polynesians. What is more, Patricia Grace's main character in *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* asserts that "a bridge" between the two opposing cultures must be crossed so that they can regenerate themselves, which echoes Albert Wendt's words "Like a tree a culture is forever growing new branches, foliage and roots (…) No culture is ever static and can be preserved"[200]. Finally, Sia Figiel shows, in her novel *Where We Once Belonged*, that the inherited indigenous culture equally has its weaknesses. She calls to the necessity of its revival and adaptation to the challenges of modern post-colonial Polynesia, even if it implies an altering of its mythology and a breaking of its taboos.

Therefore, this second thesis demonstrates on concrete examples that "syncretism" has gradually become the main creative "border ground" and the proclaimed principle that fuels Polynesian emancipation and post-colonial "recreation"; "Syncretism" is articulated through this emerging literature.

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[198] Albert Wendt: "Towards a New Oceania", p. 644

[199] Rob Wilson: "Introduction: Towards Imagining a New Pacific" in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, p. 2

[200] Albert Wendt: "Towards a New Oceania", p. 644

As a last point, a comparison deserves to be made between the male and female points view as revealed in the textual analyses of the representative works of the six Polynesian writers studied in the previous thesis and the present one. The male and female characters – real or fictional – displayed in the six works in question have in common the fact that they are undergoing an identity quest. They are all torn between the co-existing indigenous and colonial legacies. The Polynesian cultural heritage comes to fulfil the function of a crucial referential source of identification that helps them to solve this internal conflict, except in the case of Florence Frisbie, in which that source of reference is a Greco-Roman myth. The situation of the Puka-Pukan author differs because, contrary to the fictional characters, she grows up in a functioning traditional Polynesian society, does not experience direct colonial hegemony and views positively her father's language and culture that she "appropriates".

Now, the main difference between these men and women writers resides in the way they handle the indigenous cultural heritage. Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, Albert Wendt and Witi Ihimaera refer primarily to the indigenous mythology in the analysed poetry collection *The Dark Lord of Savaiki* (1980), and the novels *Sons for the Return Home* (1973) and *Tangi* (1973). They select one fundamental mythical segment – the mother island Hawaiki, the demigod Maui, the creation myth of Rangi and Papa – that they develop throughout their entire works as a leitmotiv. This gradually acquires crucial importance in the process of identification of the lyrical subject and of the main characters. Florence Frisbie follows similar straightforward principles when she uses the *Odyssey* in her autobiography.

In the case of Patricia Grace and Sia Figiel, the references to the Polynesian heritage reach a larger span. The Maori writer gives the myth of Rona an implicit central function in her novel *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* and, in addition to that, she alludes to the symbol of the Mere, which significance progressively transforms, and to the whole set of inherited beliefs and cultural representations such as, for example, those related to trees. Later, the Samoan author stretches even further the possibilities of employment of the oral tradition.

The ancient religion plays a major function in the studied novel *Where We Once Belonged,* together with the symbols of the traditional orators "tulafale". Moreover, Sia Figiel simultaneously refers to a number of various fragments of Samoan mythology and alters them in order to create new myths based on the old. It is important to be reminded that the mythical stories are transformed so as to change the gender roles in Samoan mythology and, consequently, confer more power to women in society.

Thus, another important difference between the male and female indigenous authors arises: Patricia Grace and Sia Figiel are concerned with the specific status of women in indigenous, colonial and post-colonial societies in addition to the general problems of indigenous cultural and identity reconstruction. This would explain the reason why their usage of their Polynesian heritage appears to be more composite. Not only do they expose their "insider's" perspective through their writing, but they also speak out for the silenced women in order to "counter the violence" imposed on that particular group from the "outside", through the stereotyped images of them, but also, from the "inside".

Finally, it is interesting to comment on the influential role of the paternal figure observable repetitively in the three presently studied works. The fathers appear as authorities and they seem to function as representatives and transmitters of their respective cultures. Due to this fact, it is possible to view the heritage transmitted by them as a patrimony. Florence Frisbie emphasizes her paternal heritage in *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* due to the important guidance of her father. In the cases of the characters of the two works of fiction, Linda and Alofa, the cultural impositions or prohibitions effected by their indigenous fathers are also perceived as suffocating and generate traumas at times.

In contrast, in the previously studied works of the three Polynesian men, it is the presence of the mothers that prevails. The male perception of the maternal figure appears to be more abstract: it represents rather a visceral rootedness than concrete manifestations of culture, and is connoted with land. The analogy between the mother and the land comes from the Polynesian concept of identity as defined by one's allegiance to a piece of earth effected through the ritual

planting of the placenta. However, in Albert Wendt's novel *Sons for the Return Home*, the Samoan mother of the anonymous main character shares similar characteristics as the fathers of Linda and Alofa in the way she pressurizes her son to adopt and follow the customs of the native island and she is opposed to his relationship with a "papalagi" girl.

In order to conclude, it is necessary to point out that the subject treated here is truly vast and there is a number of its aspects that have not been studied in detail due to the determined aims of the thesis and should be developed more in depth in the future. Moreover, there are still more regions of Polynesian literature in English that need to be explored and presented to the Czech audience. As this volume has endeavoured to show, this new literature is blossoming, and all the time there are more and more writers who appear in its constellation and deserve to be known and studied. Also, there are other perspectives than the one of "heritage and innovation" as selected here, from which Polynesian literature in English should be studied. For example, it has been viewed that the interaction between the "insiders" and the "outsiders" is at the core of the indigenous literature. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to study the representations of the Polynesians created in the texts of the English and American "outsiders" and contrast them with the literary responses of the "insiders", such as has been done when analysing Sia Figiel's answer to the Mead and Freeman anthropological controversy.

Because the literature in question is part of a pan-Polynesian movement, the next important step would be to map other Polynesian post-colonial literary areas, that of the American territories – Hawai'i and American Samoa – , the francophone area – French Polynesia – and that of the Chilean territory – Easter Island. However, these suggested further investigations would have to be enriched with sources that are not attainable here or in Europe, but only *in situ*.

An attempt at delineating the colonial history of the Spanish speaking area and at defining the "outsiders" representations of Easter Island in Chilean literature has been made in my essay entitled "La representación de la Isla de

Pascua en la novela *La Reina de Rapa-Nui* del escritor chileno Pedro Prado"[201], presented at the twentieth edition of the Premio Iberoamericano in 2015.

Moreover, as a first initiative in presenting Polynesian literature in French, I have published, in collaboration with Moe Binar, an interview with the contemporary Tahitian poet Flora Devatine in the Czech literary and cultural revue *Souvislosti* (2015), entitled "Francouzská Polynésie se musí pustit do psaní! (Interview s tahitskou básnířkou Florou Devatine o odkazu předků, oralité, hlubokých údolích markézských a Češích na Tahiti)"[202].

Finally, another essential step is to translate into Czech the representative works of Polynesian literature studied in my theses, as well as other significant texts. They are difficult to find in Europe even in their original language. Their translation would help divulge them and would give the possibility to non-English speaking Czech readers to discover the unique worldview and experience of Polynesians.

Now, I finish the thesis in Tahitian, with the traditional finishing sentence of the oral tradition:

Atira ra parau.[203]

[201] "The Representation of Easter Island in the novel *The Queen of Rapa-Nui* by the Chilean Writer Pedro Prado" (my translation).
[202] "French Polynesia has to start writing! (Interview with the Tahitian poet Flora Devatine about the ancestral heritage, orality, the deep valleys of the Marquesas islands and Czechs in Tahiti)" (my translation).
[203] "It is the end of my words" (my translation).

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Appendices

I *Florence (Johnny) Frisbie (1950),* photo from *The Honolulu Advertiser*, Hawai‘i 26.04.1950, in Frisbie, Florence (Johnny): *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*: *The Autobiography of a South Sea Trader's Daughter*, The Macmillan Company, New York 1948

II *R. D. Frisbie and his children (Puka-Puka 1941) – Florence Frisbie is on the right side*, photo from Frisbie, Florence (Johnny): *The Frisbies of the South Seas*, Doubleday & Co., New York 1959

III *The map by Florence Frisbie included in Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* in Frisbie, Florence (Johnny): *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*: *The Autobiography of a South Sea Trader's Daughter*, The Macmillan Company, New York 1948

IV *Patricia Grace*, photo from the back cover of *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps*, Penguin Books, New Zealand 1986

V *Gottfried Lindauer: Pare Watene (1878) – Maori woman chieftain holding a "Mere"* in *Gottfried Lindauer: 1839-1926 Pilsner Painter of the New Zealand Maori*, ed. by Aleš Filip and Roman Musil, Arbor Vitae – The Gallery of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Plzeň 2015, p. 171

VI *Rona* in Grace, Patricia: *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps*, pp. 154-155

VII *Sia Figiel*, photo from http://www.rochefortpacifique.org/2014---bios.html

VIII *The Supreme God Tagaloa* in Buck, Peter H.: *Vikings of the Pacific*, first edition as *Vikings of the Sunrise* by Frederick A. Stokes Company in 1938, second edition by The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1959, p. 294

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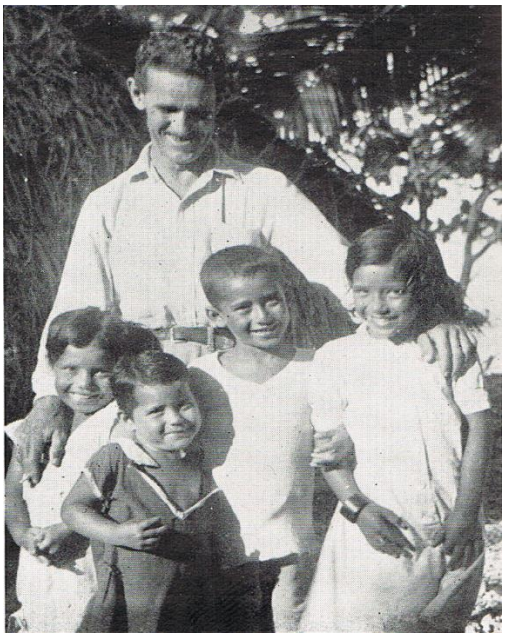
IX *Samoan beliefs concerning the soul and incarnations of gods* in Turner, George: *Samoa: a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before*, Chapter III

X *Three Samoan chiefs – The "tulafale" in the centre is wearing a "Fue" and a "To'oto'o"*, photo from http://www.wikipedia.com

I

Florence (Johnny) Frisbie (1950)

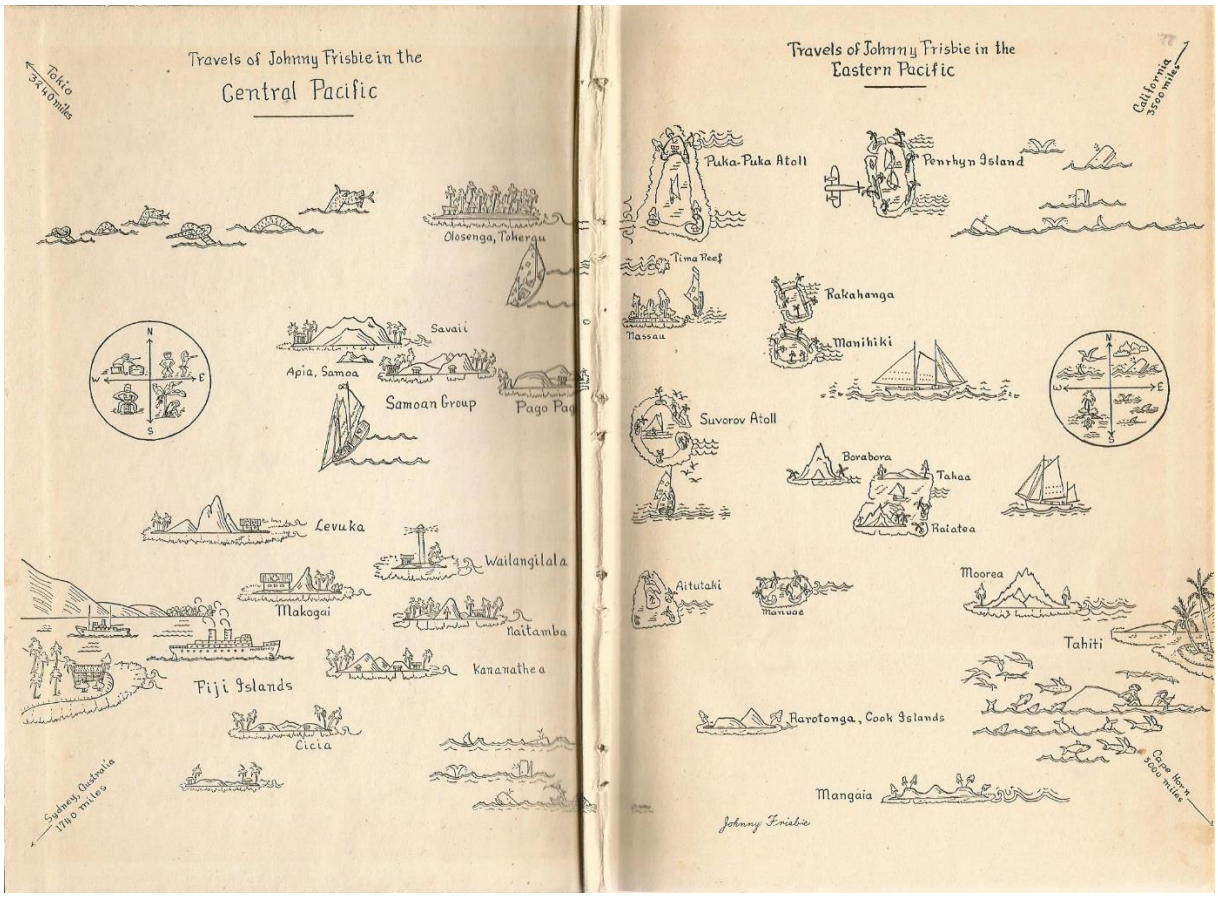
II



R. D. Frisbie and his children (Puka-Puka 1941)

Florence Frisbie is on the right side

III

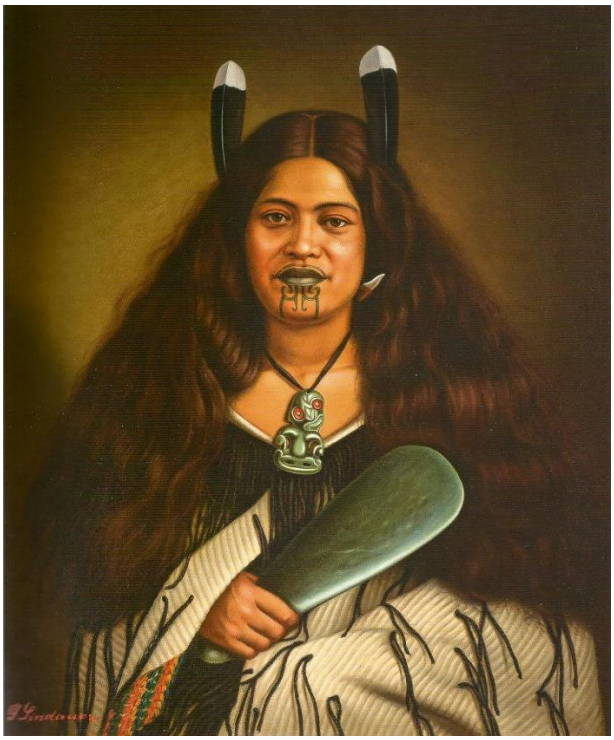


The map by Florence Frisbie included in *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*

IV

Patricia Grace

V



Gottfried Lindauer: *Pare Watene* (1878)

Maori woman chieftain holding a "Mere"

VI

Rona

One night at full moon a woman called Rona was going to the spring to fill her calabashes when the moon was suddenly obscured by a passing cloud. Rona tripped and hurt herself, so she cursed the moon for having withdrawn its light. The moon heard her, came down and snatched her up, and began to carry her away. Rona caught at the branch of a ngaio tree and clung to it, but the tree got torn out by its roots and, with Rona, taken up to the sky and placed on the moon's surface. At full moon Rona can be seen, clutching the tree and her calabashes.

Patricia Grace, *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps* (pp. 154-155)

VII

Sia Figiel

VIII

The Supreme God Tagaloa

The Samoan cosmogony commences with Leai (Nothing), which corresponds to the Kore (Void) of New Zealand. This is followed by personified rocks, winds, clouds, and heavens, and culminates in Tagaloa. Tagaloa-lagi (Tagaloa-of-the-heavens) existed in space bud he did not know how or whence he came. He threw down stones that became various islands of the Samoan group.

Peter Buck, *Vikings of the Pacific* (p. 294)

The Sacred Bird Tuli

Tangaloa the god of heaven sent down his daughter in the form of the bird Turī[1]*, a species of snipe, Charadrius fulvus. She flew about, but could find no resting-place, nothing but ocean. She returned to the heavens, but was again sent down*

[1] Turi is a variant of Tuli

by Tangaloa to search for land. First she observed spray, then lumpy places, then water breaking, then land above the surface, and then a dry place where she could rest. She went back and told her father. He again sent her down; she reported extending surface of land, and then he sent her down with some earth and a creeping plant. The plant grew, and she continued to come down and visit it. After a time its leaves withered. On her next visit it was swarming with worms or maggots, and the next time she came down they had become men and women.

George Turner, *Samoa: a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (Chapter I, 7)

The Creation of Samoa

The rocks married the earth, and the earth became pregnant. Salevao, the god of the rocks, observed motion in the moa or centre of the earth. The child was born and named Moa, from the place where it was seen moving. Salevao ordered the umbilicus to be laid on a club, and cut with a stone; and hence the custom ever after on the birth of a man-child. Salevao then provided water for washing the child and made it sa, or sacred to Moa. The rocks and the earth said they wished to get some of that water to drink. Salevao replied that if they got a bamboo he would send them a streamlet through it, and hence the origin of springs. Salevao said he would become loose stones, and that everything which grew would be sa ia Moa, or sacred to Moa, till his hair was cut. After a time his hair was cut and the restriction taken off, and hence also the rocks and the earth were called Sa ia Moa, or as it is abbreviated, Samoa. (…) Tangaloa of the heavens had two children—a son called Moa, and a daughter called Lu. Lu married a brother chief of Tangaloa, and had a son, who was named Lu after herself.

George Turner, *Samoa: a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (Chapter II, 1-2)

The War Goddess Nafanua

This was the name of the goddess of a district in the west end of the island of Savaii. She was the daughter of Saveasiuleo, the god of Pulotu, and was hidden inland, or in the bush, when an infant by her mother, who was ashamed of the illegitimate birth. She came from Pulotu, the Samoan haedes, at a

time when the ruling power was so oppressive as to compel the people to climb cocoa-nut trees with their feet upwards, their heads downwards, and to pluck the nuts with their toes. As she passed along she saw a poor fellow struggling up a tree with his head downward, and calling out in despair that he could endure it no longer. She told him to come down, and that she would put an end to it. She summoned all to battle, took the lead herself, and completely routed the enemy, and raised the district to a position of honour and equality. When she went to the fight she covered her breasts with cocoa-nut leaflets that the enemy might not see she was a woman, and the distinguishing mark or pass-word of her troops was a few cocoa-nut leaflets bound round the waist. After the battle in which she conquered, she ordered cocoa-nut leaflets to be tied round the trees, marking them out as hers, and defying the enemy or any one else to touch them. To this day a strip of cocoa-nut leaflets encircling a tree is a sign that it is claimed by some one for a special purpose, and that the nuts there are not to be indiscriminately plucked without permission.

George Turner, *Samoa: a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (Chapter IV, 16)

Pili the Lizard God

The story of the lizard god Pili is known throughout Samoa because he is recognized as the principal ancestor of ruling families of Samoa – the Malietoa. (The current head of state in Samoa is Malietoa Tanumafili II.) One legend claims that Pili, lizard son of the great god Tagaloa, came down to earth and fell in love with Sinaleana, daughter of a great high chief. From their union were born four sons, Tua, 'Ana, Saga, Tolufalo (the last two ere twins), and these brothers became the ancestors of the ruling families of Samoa.

Robert D. Craig: *Handbook of Polynesian Mythology* (p. 202)

IX

Samoan beliefs concerning the soul and incarnations of gods

The Samoans believed in a soul or disembodied spirit, which they called the angānga. Anga means to go or come, according to the particle of direction suffixed. Anga atu means to go away; anga mai signifies to come. The reduplicated angānga is used to designate the soul as distinct from the body, and which at death was supposed to go away from the body and proceed to the hadean regions under the ocean, which they called Pulotu. (...) At his birth a Samoan was supposed to be taken under the care of some god, or aitu, as it was called. The help of several of these gods was probably invoked in succession on the occasion, and the one who happened to be addressed just as the child was born was fixed on as the child's god for life. These gods were supposed to appear in some visible incarnation, and the particular thing in which his god was in the habit of appearing was to the Samoan an object of veneration. It was, in fact, his idol, and he was careful never to injure it or treat it with contempt. One, for instance, saw his god in the eel, another in the shark, another in the turtle, another in the dog, another in the owl, another in the lizard, and so on throughout all the fish of the sea, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. In some of the shell-fish, even, gods were supposed to be present. A man would eat freely of what was regarded as the incarnation of the god of another man, but the incarnation of his own particular god he would consider it death to injure or to eat. The god was supposed to avenge the insult by taking up his abode in that person's body, and causing to generate there the very thing which he had eaten, until it produced death. This class of genii, or tutelary deities, they called aitu fale, or gods of the house.

George Turner, *Samoa: a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (Chapter III)

Three Samoan chiefs

The “tulafale” in the centre is wearing a “Fue” and a “To‘oto‘o”

Abstract

The three Polynesian women writers – Florence (Johnny) Frisbie (b. 1932, Cook Islands), Patricia Grace (b. 1937, New Zealand) and Sia Figiel (b. 1967, Samoa) – represent three key stages in the development of Polynesian literature in English that are intrinsically linked to the transforming post-colonial context.

Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka: The Autobiography of a South Sea Trader's Daughter by F. J. Frisbie, published in 1948, is being defined as the founding text of this new literature. The autobiographical work is set in the Polynesian colonial background. Patricia Grace belongs to the first generation of Polynesian authors writing in English. She participates with them in the so-called "Maori Renaissance" that is embedded in the larger pan-Polynesian movement of resistance against British colonial hegemony and of indigenous cultural revivals started in the 1960's. Sia Figiel is a leading writer in the already established Polynesian contemporary literary scene of the 1990's. The region is almost entirely independent by now.

The privileged literary themes and the linguistic choices of these three indigenous authors, together with their selected narrative techniques, reflect the on-going political and cultural emancipation of the autochthones. The writers increasingly liberate themselves from the norms of Standard English and of European novel writing and integrate their native languages, the indigenous oral tradition and cultural heritage into these imported tools. Thus, they blend or "syncretise" the autochthonous and the European inheritances and innovate them. This "syncretism" is the proclaimed creative principle of the emerging literature and of Polynesian post-colonial cultural and identity reconstruction.

Abstrakt

Díla tří polynéských spisovatelek – Florence (Johnny) Frisbie (*1932 Cookovy ostrovy), Patricia Grace (*1937 Nový Zéland) a Sia Figiel (*1967 Samoa) – představují tři klíčové etapy vývoje polynéské literatury v angličtině a jsou úzce spjata s proměnami postkoloniálního kontextu.

Autobiografie *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka*, napsaná F. J. Frisbie a vydána roku 1948, je definována jako zakládající dílo této nové literatury. Příběh je zasazen do polynéského koloniálního prostředí. Patricia Grace patří do první generace polynéských spisovatelů píšících anglicky. Účastní se takzvané „Maorské renesance“, která je spojená s širším panpolynéským hnutím vzdoru proti britské koloniální nadvládě a kulturním obrozením původních obyvatel od 60. let dvacátého století. Sia Figiel je vůdčí spisovatelkou už etablované současné polynéské literatury 90. let. Celá oblast je dnes už téměř plně samostatná.

Zvolená témata a práce s jazykem těchto tří polynéských spisovatelek spolu s jejich vybranými narativními technikami odrážejí rostoucí emancipaci původních obyvatel. Autorky se postupně osvobozují od norem standardní angličtiny a vzdalují se tradici evropského písemnictví. Stále výrazněji začleňují do importované anglicky psané románové formy slovní zásobu a gramatické struktury vlastních polynéských jazyků, ústní slovesnost a kulturní dědictví. Tímto způsobem spojují či „synkretizují“ původní dědictví s evropským a inovují je. Vzniklý „synkretismus“ je deklarovaným tvůrčím principem této formující se literatury a napomáhá obnovení polynéské postkoloniální kultury a identity.