

## PONO AND THE *KORU*: TOWARD INDIGENOUS THEORY IN PACIFIC ISLAND LITERATURE

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Albert Wendt's *Pouliuli* (1977), Patricia Grace's *Potiki* (1986), and Pi'ilani's *Kaluaikoolau* (2001) include components that could be used in an effort toward articulating Indigenous theory. This article surveys this emerging theory and locates some of its elements in the works of these three Polynesian authors. Components of Indigenous theory include (a) the concept of harmony or balance, which can be seen in the structure of Indigenous societies and could be described as dynamic equilibrium or pono; (b) the importance of place and history; (c) experience, practice, and process; (d) the holistic and collective nature of indigeneity; and (e) the cyclical and genealogical nature of time, represented by the spiral or *koru*. The presence of these elements in these authors' works suggests that despite the ravages of colonization/occupation, Indigenous peoples have maintained a consistent worldview, one that can be used to undermine the practices of Orientalism or Pacificism.

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Samoan author Albert Wendt's *Pouliuli* (1977) is the story of Faleasa Osovae, a *matai* (noble or chief) who awakens one day to find himself repulsed by the very nature of social relations in his *aiga* (extended family) and village. Using his position as a *matai* to his advantage, he decides to shatter the societal equilibrium and become a "free man" (Wendt, 1977, p. 10):

Faleasa Osovae—the seventy-six-year-old titled head of the Aiga Faleasa...and the most respected ali'i in the village of Malaelua—woke with a strange bitter taste in his mouth to find, as he looked out to the rain and his village...that everything and everybody he was used to and enjoyed, and had till then given meaning to his existence, now filled him with an almost unbearable feeling of revulsion. (Wendt, 1977, p. 1)

Patricia Grace's *Potiki* (1986) is a story of a Māori family and village coping with *Pākehā* (New Zealanders of European descent) intrusion on their land and their reclamation of traditions in response. In the book, the child sage Toko tells the story of his birth: "I know the story of my birth. When I was born, my borning mother was not much older than me, and now I am older than she is" (Grace, 1986, p. 42). He goes on: "Perhaps it is the magic from Granny's ear that gives me my special knowing, and which makes up for my crookedness and my almost drowning. But I have been given other gifts from before I was born. I know all of my stories" (p. 43).

*The True Story of Kaluaikoolau* (Pi'ilani, 2001)<sup>1</sup> is a moving account of the fight of a Hawaiian family to remain together in the face of the "separating disease"—leprosy or Hansen's disease, and (an illegal) government's enforcement of "resettlement" at Kalawao/Kalaupapa. In the story, author Pi'ilani illustrates her connection to place:

O ke anu iniki hoeha o na kipona wehekaiao—ua ike au,  
 O ke anu hui hoomaele ili a ke kehau poli kuahiwi—  
     ua ike au,  
 O ke anu waianuhea kokololio o na omaka Waikoloa—  
     ua ike au,  
 O ke anu mea e hoi keia e hoiloli nei I ka houpa—  
     ua ike au la.  
 (Pi'ilani, 2001, p. 83)

The pinching of the spreading dawn—I know it.  
 The cold of the mountain dew that numbs the skin—  
     I know it.  
 The chill of the rapid flowing waters of Waikoloa—  
     I know it.  
 The other kind of chill—emotional disturbance—I know it.  
 (Pi'ilani, 2001, p. 13)

These passages, by Polynesian writers from Samoa, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Hawai'i, illustrate alternative worldviews that are both unique to their geographic and cultural locations and part of a common theoretical framework shared by other "Indigenous peoples." The first passage, by Wendt (1977), illustrates a dynamic equilibrium extant in Samoan society, one that his protagonist seeks to shatter. In Hawaiian, this state of balance between various sectors of society is called *pono*.<sup>2</sup> By asserting that a child can be older than his mother by possessing a certain kind of "knowing," the second passage, by Grace (1986), reveals a view of time that is at variance with the Western linear view. This view can be visualized as a spiral or *koru*. Pi'ilani's (2001) story illustrates a kind of knowing in which place can be used as resistance. These are components of Indigenous theory that is simultaneously extant in Pacific Island cultures and emerging as a subject of discourse among Indigenous scholars and writers.<sup>3</sup>

The intent of this article is to extract this divergent theory from the three works of Pacific Island literature, as a step toward the development of Indigenous theory. The existence of such a body of theoretical knowledge suggests that Indigenous peoples have retained a coherent worldview despite the experience of colonization/occupation, and that this worldview is of more use to Indigenous peoples

than the body of theory imposed on them by the colonial experience.<sup>4</sup> These three works were selected because they represent a range of Indigenous/Polynesian experience—Wendt is a Samoan writing in “exile” from his home country, Grace is a mixed-race writer in a heavily colonized Polynesian country, and Pi’ilani told her story at a time when Hawaiian culture was largely intact, but in the midst of its political colonization/occupation. That Indigenous theory can be seen in writers with this range of experience suggests that it is authentic and that it perseveres.

## WHY THEORY?

Māori professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and other theorists note the aversion of Indigenous peoples to “theory.” The practice of explicitly addressing theory *as theory* is primarily a European (and to a lesser extent American) practice. Smith (1999) located herself within the field of research, which she viewed as a “significant site of struggle” (p. 2). Theory has not, in Smith’s view, “looked sympathetically or ethically at us [Indigenous peoples]” (p. 38).

Neil Smith (1990) quoted Cassirer’s description of tribal understandings of land, one he described as “gifted with an extraordinarily sharp perception of space” but with limitations as theory:

A native of these tribes has an eye for all the nicest details of his environment...upon closer examination we discover to our surprise that in spite of this facility there seems to be a strange lack in his perception of space.... If you wish him to draw you a map of the river and its various turns he seems not even to understand your question. Here we grasp very distinctly the difference between the concrete and the abstract apprehension of space and spatial relations. The native is perfectly acquainted with the course of the river, but this acquaintance is very far from what we may call knowledge in an abstract, a theoretical sense. (p. 72)

Neil Smith (1990) concluded:

[I]f our concept of space is the product of continual abstraction, the definition of space as an abstract framework in which all reality exists must at least be questioned. Is space “itself” a framework for reality, or is it the abstract concept of space which is a framework for how we view reality? (p. 72)

A limitation of this study, then, is that if we are to accept the assertions of Smith and others, taking a theoretical approach privileges the abstract over the concrete and maps over Indigenous perspectives “from the ground.” Thus, Indigenous peoples may legitimately question the ethics and utility of elucidating Indigenous theory.

Judging from experiences in the Hawaiian community, however, I contend that theory is critically important for decision making. Often, decisions are contested because of differing theoretical standpoints that are not elucidated—“modern”/scientific, “premodern,” “postmodern,” “cultural”—or even from different stages of “development” (see Wilber, 2000, p. 8). Further, varying historical interpretations can create trajectories of action that confound individuals and groups attempting to work toward common goals. For example, the acceptance or nonacceptance of the legality of annexation leads to differing strategies for recovering sovereignty (see Perkins, 2006). This is the cause of much contention and confusion in the Hawaiian community (see Osorio, 2006). Thus, I hold that theory is critically important to Hawaiian (and Indigenous peoples’) well-being. This essay is an effort to move toward Hawaiian theory, with Indigenous theory as a starting point.

## WHY STORIES?

Stories carry theoretical and cultural meaning in Indigenous societies. Native North American (Canadian) writer Thomas King (2003) stated that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). The narratives covered in this article connect to other, fundamental narratives that define Indigenous peoples’ identities, such as the pan-Polynesian stories of Maui, which can be seen in Grace’s (1986) story.

Often these narratives are called myths, which have come to connote falsehood in European and American modern culture, but Thomas Moore (2000) wrote, “‘myth’ doesn’t mean falsehood; it refers to the narrative that gives us an imagination of self and life, allowing us to live meaningfully and purposefully” (p. 299).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) quoted Janet Abu-Lughod to show that history is a discourse in which the “Other” is disadvantaged: “if history is written by the victor...then it must...deform the history of others” (p. 67). Thus, these narratives are central to Indigenous peoples’ identities, and these identities can be deformed by being co-opted by the dominant (non-Indigenous) culture. Similarly, if non-Indigenous writers continue to portray Indigenous stories, those stories can be deformed, distorting the self-perception of Indigenous peoples who read these accounts. It should be noted that the word for history in Hawaiian—*mo’olelo*—is the same word that means story. Because of the economics and politics of publishing in Hawai’i, until very recently most books on Hawaiian mythology were written (or retold) by non-Hawaiian writers. This inhibits Hawaiians’ ability to formulate an Indigenous Hawaiian theory.

## INDIGENOUS THEORY

Through an extensive survey of Indigenous scholarship, including the works of Pacific Islander and Native American writers (Allen, 1992; Kame’eleihiwa, 1992; Little Bear, 2000; Meyer, 2003; Smith, 1999; A. Wendt, personal communication, June 10, 2007), I have identified five recurring components in the emerging body of Indigenous theory: (a) the concept of harmony or balance, which can be seen in the structure of Indigenous societies and could be described as dynamic equilibrium or *pono*; (b) the importance of place and history; (c) experience, practice, and process; (d) the holistic and collective nature of indigeneity; and (e) the cyclical and genealogical nature of time, represented by the spiral or *koru*.<sup>5</sup> In this article I locate components of Indigenous theory in Albert Wendt’s *Pouliuli*, Patricia Grace’s *Potiki*, and Pi’ilani’s *Kaluaikoolau*. I attempt to find Indigenous theory that can be held in opposition to “Western” theory and be used to undermine the notion described by Said (1978) as Orientalism. Lyons (2006) applied the notion of Orientalism to the Pacific, with his concept of “Pacificism.” It should be noted that the very act of defining components of Indigenous theory, as it involves separation of aspects of thought, defies the holistic “component.” Thus, there is fluidity between components that clouds distinctions and categories.

## THE “INDIGENOUS” PROBLEM

There are two essential definitions for the designation “Indigenous people”: an anthropological and an international legal definition. The anthropologist views the Indigenous as aboriginal, a first people in a territory. As these groups thus defined sought to assert their rights politically on the international level, an alternative definition emerged: that of stateless minorities—a definition that broadened the number of groups that could be so defined, but included most groups from the anthropological definition.

Cornstassel and Primeau (1995) elucidated the problems with the Indigenous concept under international law. These include the facts that not all “Indigenous groups” are minorities in their respective countries; the mixed ethnicity of many Indigenous peoples—“mestizo” populations—is cited as an example. Another problem in their view is that not all Indigenous groups were conquered militarily. Finally, not all Indigenous groups were nonstate groups—Native Hawaiians, for example. So while most Indigenous peoples meet both the anthropological and the international legal definitions, some groups may be excluded on the basis of one or the other definition.

Because of the problematic nature of these definitions, I propose an alternative definition—one that may be of use *theoretically*. In my view, it is through their relationship with *land* that Indigenous peoples are capable of definition. While Indigenous peoples are profoundly diverse, most have land-based religious practices. Despite challenges to this idea, such as Krech’s (1999) *The Ecological Indian*, it is well established that ideas that could be construed as “conservationist” or “ecological” could as easily be termed “Indigenous.”<sup>6</sup> Indigenous peoples tend to adhere to an ethics that defies Western notions of reciprocity by considering the interests of future generations who offer no prospect of reciprocal gain within the lifetimes of decision makers. Because *thought* regarding their respective world-views distinguishes Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, it is through *theory* that Indigenous peoples can be defined. It is important to note, however, that this definition is obviously related to the anthropological definition—this relationship with land is linked to the original status of these peoples. In an attempt to demonstrate this relationship, what follows is an overview of Māori and Hawaiian land tenure.

## MĀORI AND KANAKA MAOLI LAND TENURE

Traditionally, in Hawai‘i, land was the basis of sovereignty, and all political power stemmed from it. Land could be given to ali‘i (chiefs) but not sold. ‘Āina (land) was controlled rather than owned. Originally the rights to land did not include the right to inheritance, so an ali‘i’s children did not automatically gain control of their father’s land. Land was usually transferred in redistribution initiatives called *kālai‘āina* (to carve the land), whenever there was a new *mō‘i*, or ruling chief (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992, p. 51). It is interesting to note that ‘āina in Hawai‘i is essentially the same word as *aiga* (pronounced *ainga*, meaning family) in Samoan. This illustrates the Indigenous relationship with land and its familial nature for Indigenous societies.

Māori land tenure consists of several layers of rights. The first layer involves the initial settlement of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Aware of themselves as a people who migrated from another place (called Hawaiiki, in Eastern Polynesia), the settlement period is divided into two periods: the *prefleet* period and the *fleet* period. The *prefleet* Māori discovered and named most of the places and resources after their arrival in 500 to 800 A.D. and possessed customary title to these lands through *whenua kite hou* (the right of discovery; Parker, 1989, p. 93). Title was maintained, as is tribal membership today, through several additional layers, including *ahi ka*—keeping the home fires burning—which amounts to a right of occupation. Title could be transferred through *take raupatu* (right of conquest), and more rarely through a *take tuku* (right of gift), *take ohaki* (right of deathbed disposition), or *muru* (law of compensation for misbehavior; Sinclair, 1992, p. 67).

In Hawai‘i, a *kālai‘āina*, in which “one of the first acts of a Hawaiian chief victorious in battle was to seize land and redistribute it to his own advantage,” was an essential component of land tenure (Cooper & Daws, 1985, p. 2). This term for a land division came to be used as the Hawaiian word for politics. Politics, then, in Hawaiian thought is concerned with the question “Who gets which land(s)?” Similarly, the Māori *whenua kite hou* illustrates the concept of indigeneity as a traditional form of land tenure.

## INDIGENOUS THEORIZING AND ORIENTALISM

I attempt here a survey of, and contribution to, the existing body of Indigenous theory. Indigenous theory contradicts an established notion described by Said (1978) as “Orientalism,” a concept that implicitly groups people of the Middle East and East Asia with many Indigenous peoples. I contend that, when considered from the viewpoint of a relationship with land, the peoples of the Middle East constitute not an “Other” to the “West,” or even a reflection of the West, but rather the West’s forgotten origin. In other words, in terms of a relationship with land, Orient (at least Said’s Middle East) and Occident are identical, and in opposition to Indigenous peoples, rather than to each other.

This is to say that the Occidental–Oriental dichotomy is not functional for Indigenous peoples. An alternative dichotomy is one that opposes groups based on their ideas and practices pertaining to land and natural resources, in short, their world(s). The Orient and the West may be complicit in their practices pertaining to land—but not in their memory of it. In *Violent Cartographies*, Shapiro (1997) described a “forgetting” of historical events connected to landscape that is part of the colonial process of “overwriting.” He described his experience growing up in Connecticut associating his family’s summer home with rest and leisure, discovering later that it was a site of the Pequot massacre. While overwriting is common in the United States, in the Orient the history of place is contested—one need only think of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, in which ancient understandings of the importance of place inform current struggles.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith cited Said’s idea of the Orient as “Other.” The assertion that research is a significant site of struggle is thus an acknowledgment of the centrality of Said’s work in hers. She went on: “in this example, the Other has been constituted with a name...*indigenous peoples*” (Smith, 1999, p. 2). Smith used Said’s notion of otherness in an explication of the creation of a hierarchy of humanity. Creating the “Oriental” imposed a construct that became part of a hierarchy that allowed for control and varying treatment of different Indigenous groups. Smith located herself in a specific position—that of an Indigenous researcher. While noting that there are many reasons for Indigenous peoples to consider the occupation of researcher a distasteful one, her project consists of representing Indigenous

peoples “back” to themselves, representing the West to Indigenous peoples, and of the “other” representing the West “back” to itself. The latter two are inversions of the original project of Orientalism—that is, “the politics of how these worlds are being represented ‘back to’ the West” (Smith, 1999, p. 37). Foucault’s notion of discipline is applied as part of Smith’s construction of the relations between Indigenous peoples and their oppressors. She viewed many Western practices, including research, as disciplining the colonized.

Smith (1999) cited Said’s questions: “Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances?” (p. 37). She viewed these questions as providing the “ingredients for a politics of interpretation” (p. 37). Smith acknowledged her debts to Western theories that are positioned as critiques of the enlightenment theoretical narrative. She listed two major examples of this “better” theory: Marxism and Western feminism (p. 43). Of the two, feminism is viewed as the more radical critique because of its challenge to epistemology, despite continuing challenges by “women of colour” (p. 43). Thus the practice of theorizing about Indigenous peoples is partially dependent on certain forms of the Western theory it attempts to oppose. This will be addressed with other issues that problematize Indigenous theory.

## COMPONENTS OF INDIGENOUS THEORY

### *Harmony/Balance/Pono*

I hypothesize that Wendt’s *Pouliuli* is a narrative that illustrates a Samoan village’s struggle at the verge of modernity. Shapiro (1999) described the transition from a static premodern society to modernity in his comparison of Stanley Kubrick’s (1975) period film *Barry Lyndon* and Steve James’s basketball documentary *Hoop Dreams* (1994). In *Cinematic Political Thought*, Shapiro compared the social stasis of 18th-century England to the compulsion to motion in the late 20th-century United States. *Barry Lyndon* makes a valiant effort to “move up in the world,” one which is ultimately stifled by the permanence of European court life. This is a type of stasis that characterizes premodern European society. The French revolution is seen as the moment at which the “obligation to mobility” (Shapiro, 1999, p. 29) is established. According to Shapiro:

If we note that the French revolution was the most dramatic assault on the aristocracy's management of the stasis governing the European society of the eighteenth century, Paul Virilio's gloss on the events beginning 1789 becomes especially appropriate. He asserts that the revolution, far from ending subjection in general, was rather a revolution against the "*constraint to immobility*." Thereafter, with the birth of the modern state, the "*freedom of movement*" of the early days of the revolution had been turned, by the exercise of state power, to an "*obligation to mobility*." (p. 28)

After the French revolution, the social arrangement requires constant motion to rise in status or merely to remain stationary. The protagonists of *Hoop Dreams* are seen in a constant motion necessary to gaining a place in the basketball industry in which their recruitment constitutes the mining of "black gold" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 32).

However, Paula Gunn Allen (1992) described what Shapiro termed the constraint to immobility *not as stasis*, but as a type of *dynamic equilibrium*, in which each movement within society is viewed in relation to all other movement:

In his introduction to Geronimo's autobiography, Frederick Turner III incorrectly characterizes the American Indian cultures as static. Stasis is not characteristic of the American Indians' view of things...all of life is living—that is dynamic and aware, partaking as it does in the life of the All Spirit and contributing as it does to the continuing life of that same Great Mystery. The tribal systems are static in that all movement is related to all other movement—that is, harmonious and balanced or unified; they are not static in the sense that they do not allow or accept change. (p. 56)

Allen (1992) revised the view of Native American culture as static, contending that it is instead “dynamic and aware” (p. 56). The perception of stasis, she suggested, may arise from the fact that “all movement is related to all other movement—that is, harmonious and balanced or unified” (p. 56). This concept, which may be termed “dynamic equilibrium,” is analogous to the Hawaiian concept of *pono*, in which balance is a component of righteousness. This, in turn, is analogous to the Native American idea that the All Spirit has “a sense of proportion and respect for the powers of [all] creatures” (p. 57).

Allen’s (1992) view that “[t]hose reared in traditional American Indian societies are inclined to relate events and experiences to one another” (p. 59), rather than to fixed dualities, invokes Kristeva’s (1980) notion of intertextuality. Kristeva revised the Western/static view, pointing out that rather than searching for a theory that perfectly describes an objective and static reality, one should compare subjective textual interpretations. In the context of texts, every text and every reading depends on prior codes and discourses. Thus, the notion that Native cultures are fixed occurs only to those who are themselves oriented to fixed (usually dualistic) notions, from which the appearance of change can be viewed.

Allen (1992) further revised historical narratives on gender relations. Allen’s gynocratic or female-centered social structures include a spectrum of mother-right societies, of which her Keres Pueblo Indians are an archetypical example. Her observations on the defiling nature of menstruation are particularly relevant to Hawaiians: “menstrual taboos were about power...[as menstruation] throws male power totally out of kilter...[such that] any male-owned or -dominated ritual or sacred object cannot do its usual task” (Allen, 1992, p. 47). This realization sheds light on the ‘aikapu (separation of gender) and the myth of Papa and Wākea as ordering narratives for Hawaiian society. Narratives that at first appear phallocentric or male oriented must be reconsidered when subversive feminine power is taken into account. In these ways Allen’s theoretical constructs suggest the balance principle is found across gender lines and is applicable to other Indigenous cultures.

### *Place*

Kame‘eleihiwa (1992) and Meyer (2003) forwarded theoretical components that constitute the beginning of a specifically Hawaiian Indigenous theory. Kame‘eleihiwa (1992, pp. 25–49) asserted that four metaphors order Hawaiian society: mālama ‘āina (care for land), nī‘aupi‘o (chiefly incest), ‘imi haku (search for mana or power), and ‘aikapu. Meyer (2003) identified five “meta epistemological threads,” one of which is the role of place, history, and genealogy.<sup>7</sup> It is the study of history, particularly when it includes a geographic component, that facilitates an understanding of the importance of place. Shapiro (1999) quoted Lefebvre: “space... tends to have an air of neutrality” despite the fact that it “has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape” (p. 15). Nonevidence is precisely the mechanism used to project such a neutrality that puts the burden of proof on the “peoples who are not easily coded within the dominant system of sovereignties” (Shapiro, 1997, p. 22), that is, Indigenous peoples.

The map, for Shapiro (1997), is “one of the rhetorical mechanisms for translating a dynamic space of encounter into a fixed space of settlement, extended into the future” (p. 26). Intrastate conflicts, which frequently involve states and Indigenous peoples, are often “invisible” because they concern peoples who are “not even *on the map*” (italics added). Unlike the co-optation of Indigenous knowledge through “researching” Indigenous peoples, it is the refusal to “map” them that constitutes the mechanism of control in this case. Shapiro’s idea of “forgetting” is inherent in settlement and the displacement of Indigenous peoples. Leroy Little Bear (2000) contended that Indigenous peoples privilege space over time.

### *Experience/Practice*

Meyer’s third meta epistemological thread, the duality of educational systems, takes the colonial experience into account. It is only because of the existence of passive, Western educational techniques that a duality exists in modern Hawaiian educational thought. Meyer (1999) addressed the notion of experiential educational practice in her poem “The Very Act”: “Where is our understanding of these things; how are we changed by the very act?” (p. 14).

Little Bear (2000) characterized Indigenous philosophy as process-oriented. Little Bear noted that this is embedded in the very structure of Native American languages: “Aboriginal languages are, for the most part, verb-rich languages that are process- or action-oriented. They are generally aimed at ‘happenings’ rather than objects” (p. 78). An implication for Indigenous theory is that it must be an active endeavor, a notion that contradicts the Western idea of philosophy as passive thought. Rather than formulating abstract qualities such as Hegel’s “mind,” Indigenous theory must be extracted from the actions of people(s).

### *Holistic/Collective Nature*

The notion of a holistic and/or collective view of things is intimately related to the concept of harmony/balance. According to Little Bear (2000), “Arising out of the Aboriginal philosophy of constant motion or flux is the value of wholeness or totality...[which] speaks to the totality of creation, the group as opposed to the individual, the forest as opposed to the trees” (p. 79). A view of the whole thus arises from dynamic equilibrium or pono. Further, Little Bear emphasized that the “ideal” [Indigenous] personality is that of a “generalist,” one who possesses the survival skills and a broad view of the whole. It is implicit in the notion of maintaining balance that one must possess such a broad view. This view contests the reductionist tendency of the natural and social sciences.

### *Time/Genealogy*

Little Bear (2000) asserted a view of time in which time is subordinated to space: “Constant motion, as manifested in cyclical or repetitive patterns...results in a concept of time that is dynamic but without motion. Time is part of the constant flux, but goes nowhere. Time just is” (p. 78). Time and space, according to Allen (1992), are viewed as cyclical and spherical, rather than sequential and linear (p. 59). In the component of time, there is a variation between Indigenous theory as drawn from Native American sources and Pacific Island (or Polynesian) ideas of time. In Polynesia, the image for time is not a circle, but rather a spiral. The fern is an often-used image to represent birth and thus genealogy. It is a sequential and genealogical notion of time that prevails in the Pacific, rather than a strictly cyclical notion and in some cases, as I will show, a spiral notion of time.

In Hawai'i, epochs of time are traditionally referred to by the name of the chief who reigned. For example, in *Ruling Chiefs of Hawai'i*, Kamakau (1992) included a chapter called "Hawai'i under Alapa'inui" (p. 66). The idea of mo'o, as in mo'okū'auhau and mo'olelo (genealogy and history), implies sequence. The sequence is not linear in the sense that it is straight. The line is curved onto itself—a spiral. It can also be considered cyclical as each part of the spiral connects to another part. This is represented in the recurring variations in names over the generations. Further, the Hawaiian orientation toward time contests the Western notion. Kame'eleihiwa (1992) asserted:

It is interesting to note that in Hawaiian, the past is referred to as *Ka wa mamua*, or "the time in front or before," whereas the future, when thought of at all, *Ka wa mahope*, or "the time which comes after or behind." It is as if the Hawaiian stands firmly in the present, with his back to the future, and his eyes fixed upon the past, seeking historical answers for present-day dilemmas. (p. 22)

## POULIULI—DYNAMIC EQUILIBRIUM

In *Pouliuli*, Albert Wendt presented a view of Polynesian society that evokes Shapiro's (1999) description of *Barry Lyndon* with Allen's (1992) "gloss." Samoa can be viewed as being in a state of dynamic equilibrium. But Faleasa Osovae's desire to shatter this state represents Wendt's act of viewing his own culture from the position of an exile. Wendt described his own condition as one of "exile, even in his own country," and the book cover states that this provides Wendt with the "insight, sometimes painful, that allowed/s him to write [*Pouliuli*]." This condition of exile allows Wendt to conceive of cutting through his society's constraints, a course of action that may not be conceivable to his nonexiled compatriots. Faleasa's frustration reflects Wendt's own frustration with the equilibrium of Samoan society as seen through the eyes of an outsider/exile. It is thus the existence of the stasis/dynamic equilibrium that is of significance in relation to Samoan society, not Faleasa's "exhilarating battle for survival as a free man" (Wendt, 1977, p. 10). That is to say dynamic equilibrium is the preexisting condition in Samoan society, and it takes an exile to question it.

Faleasa gains a position of prominence in Malaelua, reluctantly, through the channels available to him, which consist of exhibiting courage in defense of aiga honor. Defending the honor of a mother he considers a stranger, Faleasa attacks a former friend, forcing a confrontation he hopes will not be carried through to its conclusion. This suggests that constraints within dynamic equilibrium trump individual agency. If the French revolution marks the boundary to the “compulsion to mobility” that Samoa has yet to cross, it may be that modernity creates the compulsion to motion, and Samoa is a premodern society.

It is Wendt’s own position as “Native-in-exile” in modern Aotearoa/New Zealand that allows him to locate Samoa as premodern. That Faleasa, as an archetypical Samoan traditionalist, would crave freedom from the stasis (or dynamic equilibrium) of everything that “had till then given meaning to his existence” is dubious. It is Wendt himself, enunciating from a position within the compulsion to mobility of Western society, who is trying to shatter the dynamic equilibrium (pono). The stifling feeling Faleasa exhibits is thus not that of a traditional Samoan, but rather of one in exile.

A revered “madman” whom Faleasa had encountered in his youth is an inspiration for a quest for freedom in insanity, if feigned. Appointed as assistant to the man, whose “fragile beauty had been born out of the crucible of madness and suffering” (Wendt, 1977, p. 101), Faleasa dreamt the old man was his father but, unlike his real father, the old man allowed him to behave like a child, encouraged him to cry openly when he felt like it, and talked to him when he wanted to talk. The dream ended with the old man picking him up gently and—laughing until the whole earth and sky were alive with his joy—releasing him up into air as soft as feathers, where he floated, wheeled, swam, and turned cartwheels in limitless, endless freedom (Wendt, 1977, p. 100).

Faleasa’s plan backfires and he becomes trapped within the system he desperately wants to flee. He realizes that even his most loyal son, after benefiting from Faleasa’s bestowal of the matai title on him, now feels more condescension than respect:

He still refused to believe that the freedom he thought he had won was only a trap from which he couldn't escape. Of course they still needed him and he would regain their respect, he told himself. All he had to do was to reveal that he was only pretending to be insane. And admit he had failed in his quest for personal freedom? He decided against any revelation. (Wendt, 1977, p. 93)

Little Bear's (2000) contention that space, rather than time, is privileged in Indigenous societies is illustrated in *Pouliuli*. Wendt's narrative centers firmly on Malaelua, while temporally it shifts from one age to another—depicting its protagonist at times as his adult, titled self, Faleasa, and at other times as his youthful self, Osovae—out of chronological order. Wendt's description of the resting state of Faleasa further supports the conception of time as cyclical and nonlinear:

Like Pili in his bitter old age, he too had voluntarily jumped up, as it were into a living death, into the living darkness of Pouliuli. This conclusion did not frighten him: it was consoling, like being in the core of a timeless sea, without a beginning or an end; and all was well. (Wendt, 1977, p. 98)

On the cover of the book is a picture of a circle of white stones with a black stone in the center. It is the pattern of stones laid by the “madman” and is symbolic of the holistic view of Samoan society. Wendt (see Hereniko, 2006, p. 63) noted, “I love black. But I think that the way I use black is not threatening, but elegant and fertile.” During the climax of the book, Faleasa is attempting to establish traditional leaders in Malaelua, but corrupt, “modern” leaders overwhelm his efforts:

[H]e thought, this is the empty shadow of a life that many people, and especially the new leaders, are now striving for. The center has held all right, but the sickness has invaded that center and is infecting it cell by cell. (Wendt, 1977, p. 131)

The “center” (of the madman’s circle and Samoan society) is often referred to as the transition point for modernity. W. B. Yeats’s poem, “The Second Coming,” is often cited as a metaphor describing the phenomenon of entering modernity:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world

Yeats’s contention that “the center cannot hold” refers to the center of premodern society—religion—losing its centrality. That Wendt’s center holds suggests that Samoa remains, despite the pressures of modernity, holistic and in a state of dynamic equilibrium—allowing change but retaining the mutual relations within society.

## POTIKI—TIME, GENEALOGY, PLACE

Patricia Grace’s *Potiki* illustrates several of the components of Indigenous theory, including time, genealogy, and place. An image of time particular to the Pacific is that of a spiral. The spiral image recurs throughout the text: “Granny began to chant a *waiata* (creation chant)...it spiraled thinly upwards, linking the earth that we are to the sky that we are, joining the past that we are to the now and the beyond now that we are” (Grace, 1986, p. 130). The spiral image encompasses the Māori notion of time and space, showing the connections between both heavens and Earth, and past, present, and future.

The structure of Grace’s book reveals a spiral/genealogical pattern. Beginning with an ancestor, one who carves the genealogical images in the *wharenuī* (ancestral meeting house), the book progresses sequentially through the voices of its characters, all of whom are part of the same genealogical sequence, encompassing several generations. The recurring voices suggest adjacent points on a spiral line that emerges from a central source—the original ancestor whose image is on the *wharenuī*. The narrators constitute variations in that they share similarities with, and exhibit differences from, their predecessors. These variations, which might be termed genealogical layers, create tangents on the sequence, which in turn create the spiral pattern. The pattern is seen in the names of two of the book’s charac-

ters. Toko, the child prophet after whom the book is named (*potiki* means baby), is named after his great-granduncle, Tokowaru-i-te-Marama, a pattern similar to that seen in Hawaiian genealogies. Further, Toko's character represents and parallels Maui, the pan-Polynesian demigod common to both Māori and Hawaiian mythology (A. Wendt, personal communication, June 10, 2007).

A similar pattern is seen in the way the book's structure exhibits the collective nature of Indigenous/Māori social relations. The multiple perspectives seen in the chapter titles and narrators suggest that the story belongs to the entire tribe, rather than to an individual. Stories are a major theme of the book. The stories constitute a "universe" consisting of the lives and stories of ancestors. The characters in the book increasingly feel that this universe of stories can sustain them, as their ancestral land does as the book progresses:

The land and sea and shore are a book too, and we found ourselves there. They were our science and our sustenance. And they are our own universe about which there are stories of great deeds and relationships and imaginings, love and terror, heroes, heroines, villains and fools. Enough for a lifetime of telling. We found our own universe to be as large and extensive as any other universe there is. (Grace, 1986, p. 104)

The stories, which themselves are genealogies, also constitute variations creating a spiral. Toko continually emphasizes that "the stories [have] changed" (Grace, 1986, p. 103), but he sacrifices himself in a supernatural act that returns the *whanau* (family) to a traditional existence (story). After his death, in the chapter titled "The Stories," this return is evident:

And the stories continued well into the night, moving from one person to the next about the house until the circle had been fully turned. Then the people slept. But the story was not complete. As the people slept, there was one more story to be told, a story not of a beginning or an end, but marking only a position on the spiral. (Grace, 1986, p. 180)

Further, the fragmented format of many of the book's quotations suggests that quotations are always excerpts from an ongoing discourse or story.

The importance of genealogy is apparent after the wharenuī, in which the genealogies are kept, is burned by developers and an inquiry suggests the possibility that the whanau themselves had burned the house: "For us to have destroyed our own house would have meant an end with no new beginning, a nothingness—earth nothing, sky nothing, nothing in the belly of the sea, a return to the nothing where nothing stirs" (Grace, 1986, p. 152). To destroy one's own genealogical record is to lapse into a "nothingness" in which the end, which usually constitutes a new beginning, is permanent. Even the burning of the wharenuī constitutes a new beginning as the whanau begins to rebuild, but only after a period of mourning that illustrates the Māori concept of time:

For a long time no one spoke but sat quietly and wept, and  
the tears were tears that went right back into the past of  
living memory and also into the past of only spoken memory.  
But the tears were also for the now, and for the future time.  
(Grace, 1986, p. 136)

The whanau weeps before its new beginning as if all time exists simultaneously.

*Potiki* also illustrates the Indigenous concept of the criticality of place. An image abounds through Grace's novel of connection to land. The political story is a land struggle, and in attempting to explain their connection to the land to would-be developers, to themselves, and to the reader, the Indigenous philosophy regarding land is evident: "land does not belong to people, people belong to the land. We could not forget that it was land who, in the beginning, held the secret, who contained our very beginnings within herself" (Grace, 1986, p. 110).

The state of disconnection from land is expressed by the book's primary narrator, Roimata, as she contemplates a return to the land through her husband-to-be, Hemi: "Only Hemi could secure me, he being as rooted to the earth as a tree is. Only he could free me from raging forever between earth and sky—which is a predicament of great loneliness and loss" (Grace, 1986, p. 23). The connection to the land is important, in part, because of the presence of buried ancestors. As developers disrupt the *papakāinga* (cluster of houses) by diverting runoff to erode

the *urupa* (traditional Māori burial area), the whanau “eyes turned there fearing the sudden white sight of bone. All of this happened because of the stripping of the hills, the cutting away of the land” (Grace, 1986, p. 115).

The last line of the book, “*ka huri*,” at the end of a *powhiri* (reception ceremony), again illustrates the spiral (or at least curved) nature of existence. The line also evokes Hawaiian images from the *Kumulipo*:

*O ke au i kahuli wela ka honua* [At the time when the earth  
became hot]  
*O ke au i kahuli lole ka lani* [At the time when the heavens  
turned about]  
(Beckwith, 1990, p. 42)

The turning motion marks the beginning of creation for Hawaiians and the end of Grace’s book, an ending that is also a new beginning. This shows the applicability of Polynesian theoretical imagery across cultures.

## KALUAIKOOLAU—PLACE AND GENEALOGY

*Kaluaikoolau* is a story of a Hawaiian family’s struggle to remain together in violation of the laws of a contested government, the Provisional Government. At another level, it is both social commentary on the Christian-influenced laws of the time and political resistance against the Provisional Government. The story contains the theoretical components of the importance of place and the cyclical nature of time. Kaiwi (2001) related how Pi’ilani (Kaluaiko’olau’s wife) incorporates the role of place, history, and genealogy by prefacing her story with a mo’okū’auhau (genealogy). This locates her in a “genealogical line” (Kaiwi, 2001, p. 41). This practice is analogous to that of locating oneself within a theoretical discourse, one that is firmly rooted in place and family history, rather than in abstraction.

The story has a clear political dimension. In her Foreword, translator Frances Frazier noted that “the events of this story took place in 1893 in the period just after the overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani at which time a Provisional government was created” (Pi‘ilani, 2001, p. vii). While the political dimension of the story is not explicit, it is clearly extant. In the “winter of 1892” Kaluaiko‘olau, Pi‘ilani, and their son Kaleimanu “descended down this precarious trail and [were] enveloped in darkness” (Pi‘ilani, 2001, p. 11). Place is used here to describe the contentious political struggle about to begin between a Hawaiian family and the “P.G.”—Provisional Government.

Early in the narrative, Pi‘ilani relates their acquaintance with Western marriage: “Mamuli o keia mau haawina onipaa hiki ole ke pale ae, ua hoomanao iho la na luaui makua o keia mau u‘i, e like me na olelo no a ka Buke Nui e i ana, ‘He mea maikai ka mare no na mea apau” (Pi‘ilani, 2001, p. 11). In the English version: “because of the steadfastness of their attachment which would not be avoided, the parents of them both understood the words of the Great Book about marriage being good” (p. 7). Although the English translation makes their Christianity appear obvious, the use of Akua in the original Hawaiian text is slightly more ambiguous, despite the references to the “Buke Nui.” Most practicing Christians would not discuss the importance of marriage—that Pi‘ilani does so suggests that it is not invisible; that is, it is still viewed in relation to the prior Hawaiian practice of multiple “spouses”—a practice that was not considered as marriage to some missionaries. In relation to missionary-enforced monogamy, Pi‘ilani and Kaluaiko‘olau seem to be saying that if they are forced to have one spouse, then they will remain with that spouse for life. And the couple utilizes their superior knowledge of place to assert this resistance:

The pinching of the spreading dawn—I know it.  
The cold of the mountain dew that numbs the skin—  
    I know it.  
The chill of the rapid flowing waters of Waikoloa—  
    I know it.  
The other kind of chill—emotional disturbance—I know it.  
(Pi‘ilani, 2001, p. 13)

It is the couple's knowledge of the geography of Kaua'i that allows them to prevail and survive while "facing death by the P.G. guns" (Pi'ilani, 2001, p. 34) in the "hospitable valley of Kalalau" (p. 43). Certainly the Provisional Government troops did not consider Kalalau valley hospitable. In the passage the common use of geographical metaphor for emotional state can be seen: The chill of Waikoloa is juxtaposed with the chill of emotional disturbance, both of which Pi'ilani *knows*—the use of 'ike suggests both an intellectual and emotional dimension to her experience.

Pi'ilani's (2001) lament and farewell to her son Kaleimanu tie the family's political resistance to knowledge of place:

Aloha oe e kuu pualei hoa alo make a na pu Pi Ki,  
 Aloha oe e kuu pualei moelolii I na kau a kau  
 Aloha oe e kuu pualei ke kiu kiai o na pali Kalalau  
 (p. 119)

Farewell to thee, my flower garland, facing death by the  
     P.G. guns  
 Farewell to thee, my flower garland, lying at ease in sleep  
     from season to season  
 Farewell to thee, my flower garland, the watcher of the  
     Kalalau cliffs  
 (p. 34)

On her departure from Kalalau, Pi'ilani expresses gratitude to the valley that sheltered, hid, and fed her family, further showing the ways in which their ties to land were used to evade the "pursuit of the bloody-handed messengers of the Provisional Government in those days when bullets flew" (Pi'ilani, 2001, p. 44):

What is this that is stirring in my bosom and heart, what is this ache that stirs so deeply in my very bones? Yes, I know you. I greet you Kamile, the guardian of the dark spreading night of Kane, the guardian of my husband—I have only one offering to you—my love. And to you, our refuge, Kahalanui, where we sheltered in our nest, receive my affection until I return to be at ease again in your verdure. (Pi'ilani, 2001, p. 42)

Finally, Pi'ilani's (2001, p. 37) account includes a lament for Kaluaiko'olau that evokes, if not a spiral, then a cyclical view of time:

There is a season for the blustery winds  
There is a season for the gentle breezes  
There is a season for the buds to open  
There is a season for the thick leaves to fall  
There is a season for the rains to drench  
There is a season for the rays of the sun to swelter  
There is a season for everything  
There is a season for all the seasons—death.

In her footnotes, Frazier mentioned that there were “other rebellions by those who refused to be taken” and that “doctors who examined persons suspected of being lepers or police who came to get them were shot at” (Pi'ilani, 2001, p. 48). Thus, Kaluaiko'olau and Pi'ilani's case was not an isolated incident but representative of a struggle between the Hawaiian community and the series of governments in the late 19th century. The separation by government of Hawaiian parents from their children continues to be a serious issue in the Hawaiian community.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: PROBLEMATIZING INDIGENOUS THEORY

At least two issues emerge during the effort to articulate Indigenous theory that defies the essentialism that might be expected in such an endeavor.<sup>8</sup> The first is that of exile. Indigenous authors writing from “the belly of the beast” are often questioned on the authenticity of their representations of their own cultures. Second, Indigenous theory is both less developed than (in the realm of academia) and heavily reliant on Western theory. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) addressed some of these issues and, as her contention that some Western theory is “better” suggests, fell prey to others.

Said's (1978) assertion that cultural forms are hybrid and impure informs and constrains the options for theory and action open to oppressed groups because it forces them to accept the intrusion of others onto their territory. By asserting that even Indigenous peoples are hybrid, and therefore not the "original" peoples of "the land," Said's thought privileges those who claim rights as settler populations. Hybridity—the blend of influences on contemporary Indigenous peoples—applies to Indigenous theory as well. The very notion of "Indigenous theory" is, from the start, radically hybrid. Bhabha (1994) deployed the concept of hybridity as a means of dislocating and reorienting received discourses, thus creating a subversive, and ultimately liberating theoretical stance.

A related issue is that of exile. The notion of exile raises the question of whether Pacific Island authors such as Grace and Wendt, as educated elites in the Western tradition, are capable of rendering "authentic" Indigenous thought/theory in writing. However, Gayatri Spivak (1988) questioned the notion of a Native subject independent or free of the colonial experience. Further, Kaiwi (2001) asserted that Kanaka Maoli have been able to retain a Native voice and worldview despite the ravages of colonialism.

In attempting to articulate this worldview, Indigenous theorists need to establish themselves in relation to received academic discourses. While Smith (1999) unearthed some preconceptions of Western scholarship, she simultaneously inherited some of those preconceptions from those theorists to whom her work is partially indebted: Said, Foucault, Gramsci, and Marx. These inheritances include the notion of the Other from Said, discourse from Foucault, the intellectualization of political struggle from Gramsci, and Marx's historical materialism, which was a canonical doctrine for the next few generations of European scholars. I had occasion to ask Smith how, given these debts, she was able to maintain a connection with the "indigeneity" of her theoretical project. Her response was that she needed to cite these theorists to establish credibility with academia, but that the practice may no longer be necessary given the emergence of a body of work by Indigenous academicians worldwide.

Smith (1999) claimed that Indigenous peoples have been "oppressed by theory" (p. 38). But she acknowledged and asserted the importance of theory for Indigenous peoples, for whom it "gives...space...to take greater control over [their] resistances" (p. 38). Smith asserted the need for "conceptual tools," that is, research methodology with which Indigenous peoples may gain perspective on and alter their subjective position.

Smith (1999) acknowledged the relative infancy of the field of “writing theory” pertaining to Indigenous peoples in contemporary settings. This illustrates a dilemma of the emerging field of Indigenous theory: The head start possessed by Western theory creates a gap in the level of sophistication, and the lack of a rich discourse in Indigenous ideas forces Indigenous theory to enter the discourse “behind” Western theory. Smith chose to engage in a “site of struggle” that deforms her own viewpoint by entering, and challenging, Western discourse. These issues problematize efforts to move toward Indigenous theory.

A final criticism of Indigenous theory could contend that such a theory homogenizes many cultures under a (Western) constructed term—“Indigenous.” However, returning to my proposal for a new, land-based definition of the term Indigenous, I contend that this problem is inherent in the term itself, and not the product of a theory derived from the work of people who self-identify as Indigenous peoples. Cultures that have embraced the term Indigenous in an effort toward international solidarity assert that Indigenous peoples exist and have a common set of values that constitute a basis for claims against the states in which they live. It is in these values, portrayed through literature, that I seek to locate Indigenous theory.

The presence of the components of Indigenous theory in Wendt’s *Pouliuli*, Grace’s *Potiki*, and Pi’ilani’s *Kaluaikoolau* suggests that Indigenous peoples have been able to retain a consistent worldview despite the colonial experience, that Indigenous theory is applicable across (Indigenous) cultures, and that it lies in contrast to “Western” theory. A thorough comparison of Indigenous and non-Indigenous theories could contribute to reframing the Orientalist dichotomy with an Indigenous/non-Indigenous dichotomy, one that may be of greater value to Indigenous peoples. Hawaiians can utilize this theory to develop further discourse toward Hawaiian theoretical frameworks, which, in turn, could facilitate more effective decision making in the Hawaiian community.

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## NOTES

1 The story of Kaluaiko‘olau, narrated by his wife Pi‘ilani, was first published in Hawaiian in 1906. In the 2001 version, the Hawaiian text is preceded by an English translation by Frances Frazier.

2 In this article I adopt the convention used by Noenoe Silva (2004) in *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*—that of not italicizing Hawaiian words for works written in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian), because it is not a foreign language.

3 While multiple definitions for the term *theory* exist, ranging from scientific to literary and social theories, most connote an organized method for thinking about a topic that allows for prediction and acts as a lens for viewing the world. O’Brien (1993, pp. 10–11, cited in Silverman, 2001, p. 2 ) stated that theory is “a sort of kaleidoscope—by shifting theoretical perspective the world under investigation also changes shape.”

4 An extensive discourse exists on the topic of colonization in the developing world—see Ngūgī wa Thiong’o (1986), Fanon (1963), and Memmi (1991), and in the Pacific in particular—see Trask (1999). These theorists tend to focus on the process of colonization as a psychological rather than merely a political or economic process. They focus on the native psyche as a battleground of colonial practice and resistance. Using an international legal argument, Sai (2004) more recently recast Hawai‘i’s position as one of occupation rather than colonization. Because this debate is ongoing, I use the descriptor colonization/occupation.

5 The original version of this article was written for the course Introduction to Indigenous Politics (POLS 620) in the Department of Political Science at the University of Hawai‘i–Mānoa. It therefore uses many of the works of Indigenous theory assigned in that course. The components offered here extract the common themes found in those works.

6 The use of the word *conservationist* is not meant to connote the meanings attached to it by environmentalists who are sometimes cast in opposition to, and as expropriating, Indigenous worldviews.

7 Manulani Aluli Meyer's five "meta epistemological threads" are (a) the role of place, history, and genealogy; (b) culture restores culture; (c) duality of education systems; (d) experience, practice, and repetition; and (e) the role of morality, or pono (Kaiwi, 2001, pp. 27–29). Following the meta epistemological threads are seven more specific epistemological themes: (a) spirituality and knowledge; (b) "that which feeds" ('aina); physical place and knowing; (c) cultural nature of the senses; expanding notions of empiricism; (d) relationship and knowledge; notions of self through other; (e) utility and knowledge; ideas of wealth and usefulness; (f) words and knowledge; causality of language; and (f) the body/mind question; the illusion of separation.

8 Essentialism is a stance that assumes Indigenous peoples, for example, have an "essence" or pure state of being, and that such an essence can be portrayed in text. Two further issues include the debate over the "invention of tradition" (see Diaz & Kauanui, 2001; Mykkanen, 2003) in which Indigenous cultural practitioners are accused of creating inauthentic "traditions," often for profit. A second and related issue stems from the fact that most Indigenous people (particularly in First World countries) are not "pure-blooded" but are, rather, "mixedblood" (see Owens, 1998).