

## The Postcolonial Subject in a Global Era: The Cultural Imaginary in Alan Duff's *Dreamboat Dad*

Yanwei Tan  
University of Otago

Since the publication of his sensational first novel *Once Were Warriors* (1990), the Māori novelist Alan Duff has been preoccupied with criticising what he perceives to be an unthinking violence and an unwillingness to take personal responsibility for oneself in traditional Māori culture. This “Māori bashing” has elicited a hostile response from both Pākehā liberals and Māori apologists alike. As one commentator noted in 1995, “[t]here is an active politics of exclusion at work which serves not only to marginalise Duff, but to discredit him personally as well” (Brown 75). In 2008, Duff’s work was still viewed as being “marginal to identity politics at the national level,” with Duff himself being discussed as something of a “Brown Man’s Burden” (Wilson 115).

With the passage of time, however, Duff seems to have been trying to untangle himself from his earlier confrontational engagement with Māoridom in New Zealand. With the exception of *Jake’s Long Shadow* (2002), the last in the Jake trilogy, Duff’s novels in the new millennium—*Szabad* (2001), *Dreamboat Dad* (2008) and *Who Sings For Lu?* (2009)—all have international settings, with or without Māori characters. One critic accounts for this change by imputing a financial motive: “If Duff is endeavouring to write his way out of debt [incurred by imprudent financial ventures]—he will need an international hit, not just a local one” (Morrissey 90). Duff’s desire to explore an imaginatively constructed international scene, however, has implications that transcend the realm of financial considerations. Moreover, even though the paradigm shift evident in Duff’s writing can be viewed as a transition “from biculturalism towards a glocal culture” in contemporary Māori cultural practice (Riemenschneider 139-60), this alone is not sufficient to account for the more complex issue of how an individual subject’s self-development is related to the formation of a cultural imaginary amid social change.

This article will focus on how the Māori protagonist of *Dreamboat Dad* attempts to achieve a fantasized identity in a setting fraught with diverse cultural currencies, both indigenous and international. The past and the present, in terms of the protagonist’s subjective experience, intertwine to inform a cultural imaginary which bears the imprint of the cultural logic of globalizing capitalism, along with the various questions concerning race that inevitably ensue from it. In view of the incessant dissemination through transnational capitalism of dislocated, fragmented scenes of life, I will emphasize

the individual subject as the ultimate locus where, despite the inevitable enmeshment of private desires in discursive circulation, psychological development still needs to occur in an immediate environment which can provide accommodation and response. I will take a largely psychoanalytic approach to the issue of the cultural imaginary, on the grounds that such an approach can look beneath the agendas of power relations and cultural hegemony often assumed in postcolonial studies and cultural studies, and reinstate the importance of the individual's experience and assessment of a cultural community—thus providing clues to the question of how alternative lifestyles and wisdoms contained in a minority culture may survive and develop in a global era.

For the sake of clarity, I would like to specify that my use of the term “imaginary” is located in the space between two major post-Freudian psychoanalytic traditions, represented respectively by Jacques Lacan and D.W. Winnicott.<sup>1</sup> In the context of Lacan's three orders relating to the human subject—the imaginary, the symbolic and the real—the imaginary is the realm of images, imagination and illusions. It is structured by the symbolic (the realm of signifiers in language) in order to approach the real, which is the undifferentiated, chaotic realm of being—“the domain of that which subsists outside of symbolization” (Lacan 324). No self-image is unmediated by language—the discourse of others. Judged in this context, the human subject, after entering the realm of language, is intrinsically split, remaining forever beyond hope of achieving wholeness as the possibility of satisfying one's desire is doomed to be lost in the labyrinth of arbitrary signifiers.

The picture of human self-completion may not be so gloomy, however, when viewed from a Winnicottian perspective. The mirror stage, the constitutive moment for the Lacanian imaginary order during which the infant (mistakenly) identifies its own uncoordinated body with the wholeness of its image in the mirror and thus initiates the alienating and impossible quest for the mastery of self, has, for Winnicott, a fundamentally different meaning. As Ian Craib summarizes, for Winnicott “the mirror is the mother's face and it offers a reflection of the self that the infant can take on as part of its move to integration” (131). Consequently, the gaze of others, which is intrinsically alienating for Lacan, can be much more benign if it takes place in a facilitating environment; as Winnicott puts it: “When I look I am seen, so I exist. I can now afford to look and see” (*Playing* 154). In brief, if for Lacan there can be no “self” but a fragmented “subject” held together only by an imaginary wholeness, then for Winnicott it is possible to have a healthy self which is in phase with its own genetic potential and creative with its environment.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of the disagreement between Lacan and Winnicott over the metapsychological status of self-image, I suggest that their theories can be profitably integrated for the purpose of examining Duff's depiction of the subjective process involved in the formation of the “cultural imaginary” in relation to social change. I use the term “cultural imaginary” to refer to the discursively mediated images that

inform an ever-evolving culture, images with which the human subject tends to identify. An individual's imaginary identification through the medium of culture, therefore, involves freewheeling fantasies as well as constructive associations, with the difference between the two depending upon the extent to which the subject can rise above mere narcissistic desire to also incorporate an appreciation or reconciled understanding of his or her own interpersonal environment.

In what follows, I will first look at the familial and communal background of the protagonist of *Dreamboat Dad* in order to trace the different cultural images involved in his tentative search for imaginary identification. Next, I will analyse the social change that underlies the protagonist's prioritization of certain cultural images. Then, after examining the protagonist's overcoming of mere narcissistic concerns for self-image and his eventual attainment of a more collective understanding of identity, I will conclude by pointing out the implications of the cultural imaginary for such collective agendas as race relations and nation-building.

### Imaginary Identification as Psychic Compensation

As its title suggests, *Dreamboat Dad* is very much about the role played by the father imago in the protagonist's growing-up experience. This father imago, insofar as it is the subjective product of an individual growing up in culture, is not only familial but also deeply cultural. In Lacan's formulation of the subject's normative entry into the symbolic realm of culture, the role of the father cannot be too strongly stressed, as is evident, *mutatis mutandis*, in his observation concerning the development of sexuality:

the fixation of an imaginary 'ideal' [ . . . ] determines whether or not the 'instinct' conforms to the individual's physiological sex. [ . . . ] But what interests me here is what I shall refer to as the 'pacifying' function of the ego-ideal: the connection between its libidinal normativeness and a cultural normativeness, bound up since the dawn of history with the imago of the father. (95)

However, rejecting the posthumanism in Lacan's view on the subject's relation to the symbolic order, I will argue that as well as being conditioned by the father imago to some extent, the protagonist is in fact experimenting with different cultural currencies in order to boost his sense of self-esteem. In other words, the protagonist's construction of an imaginary self-identification can be interpreted as his active attempt at psychic compensation for felt familial and communal inadequacies.

Like so many characters in Duff's other novels, Mark, the protagonist in *Dreamboat Dad*, feels the destructive effects of living in a disharmonious family. Mark's half-caste Māori mother, Lena, is married to a proud Māori man, Henry. She had an affair with a black American soldier, Jess, who was based temporarily in New Zealand while Henry was away fighting Italian and German fascists. As the son born out of that affair, Mark, though sharing the surname of his

nominal father Henry, has never received any emotional affirmation from him. What is worse, Mark has had to witness the periodic abuse inflicted by Henry upon his mother as a punishment for her bringing into the household the lasting stigma of an illegitimate child: that is, Mark himself.

It is Mark's primal sense of an insecure identity that draws him towards sources of identification beyond his immediate experience. To shore up Mark's self-esteem, the kind-hearted old woman Merita, speaking of Māori chiefs having had slaves in old times, lies to Mark that his mother is descended from a high-born family. This lineage, if true, would render Mark high-born according to Māori tribal tradition. Mark's immediate reaction is to conjure up the picture of a deadly confrontation:

The high-born endure pain as a mark of their superior status. This high-born kid endures the pain of living in Henry's house.

One day I'll make you one of my slaves, Henry Takahe. One day my father is going to arrive and then we'll see you tremble in front of a real man. Kneel, slave, my father will say. And you will kneel. Then he will behead you for how you treated his son. (31-32)

In Lacanian parlance, this would be a peculiar manifestation of the Oedipus complex in which there is a strange confrontation between the imaginary father (Jess), who is "the composite of all the imaginary constructs that the subject builds up in fantasy around the figure of the father" (Evans 63), and the symbolic father (Henry), who regulates desire and imposes law on behalf of the social-cultural establishment. The irony of this situation, however, is that instead of the father figure structuring the son's initiation into culture, the whole scenario is fantasized by Mark as having the backing of matrilineal power; that is, of a mother now believed by him to be high-born. It is reasonable to argue, therefore, that what Mark seeks in his fantasy is not only a loving father but also empowerment and esteem more generally.

Of course, there is no way for Mark to play out this slavery script in 1960s New Zealand. Nonetheless, the unknown birth father strides into Mark's imaginary—if not seriously to assist the physical disposal of the adolescent's nominal father, then definitely as an appealing imago full of cultural connotations until it is eventually overridden in Mark's experiential engagement with social reality. Called "Yank" by his fellow Māori boys, Mark has been fancying the return of his absent American birth father since a small boy:

[O]ne of those Yank tourists could be my father come back to search for me. He could be any one of those I'd shown copycat contempt, to impress the older boys. Could be rich, live in a huge mansion in—where? California somewhere. New York. He could live anywhere in that vast country . . . soon my atlas at school becomes a much studied work. (13)

The biological father here is entirely Mark's wishful construct, underpinned by his fragmentary impressions of America: big money, fashionable lifestyle, glamorous cities and vast territory, etcetera. It is worth noting that these impressions seem to have been derived not

only from American tourists, but perhaps also from the American entertainment industry—represented especially by Hollywood in California and Broadway in New York.

More tangible proof of the influence of American pop culture is seen in the portrayal of Mark reacting to news about his birth father. When Lena eventually receives a letter from Jess—for Mark, the first confirmation of the existence of his birth father in America—we see that his attempt to construct a father imago is imbricated with American film imagery. “What if he’s not a cowboy figure hero, a war hero, a film star, is just an ordinary person?” is one of the immediate questions Mark asks of his mother (54). Never feeling satisfied with the information he selectively obtains from Lena, Mark increasingly prefers to model the imago of his birth father on John Wayne, a Hollywood epitome of rugged masculinity. Furthermore, having established contact with Jess by mail, Mark writes ever more enthusiastically about his passion for music, which mainly consists in imitating American pop songs, especially those by Elvis Presley. As his mother worries, “Yank had this romantic notion his father was a white John Wayne or Elvis Presley, and Negro was the last notion in his mind” (140). The physically absent birth father, therefore, has become the symbolic point of convergence for the fragments that constitute Mark’s imaginary conception of America.

In contrast to the increasing potency that American imagery has for Mark, there is a loosening of the influence of Britain on the imagination of the younger generation of Māori. As Mark observes of the framed photographs of British monarchs adorning the walls of houses in his village: “British royalty doesn’t mean the same to us kids. Though at the picture theatres we have to stand up for *God Save the Queen* or get chucked out, or get a whack from an usher’s torch” (15). This relative indifference to symbolic vestiges of former British rule does not mean that the colonial legacy has become irrelevant in the lives of young Māori; rather, it indicates a shift in orientation in the subjective structuring of images that come from beyond immediate experience.

## The Social Logic of the Evolving Cultural Imaginary

Although Mark’s construction of a cultural imaginary relates closely to the Māori community in which he lives, it also reaches far beyond it. This outward extension, while typical for an adolescent, nevertheless points to tensions between the traditional Māori lifestyle and certain globalizing cultural trends. A key factor involved in those tensions, I suggest, is the individual’s heightened pursuit of personal freedom in the era of a global capitalism. In this section, I will focus on the impact of changing social conditions on the formulation of Mark’s cultural imaginary, and then look at the initiative he takes to reconfigure this imaginary once he realizes the naivety of his earlier wishful fantasies.

Life in the close-knit Māori village simply proves too stifling for Mark, who has to put up with lack of recognition and even

discrimination. His nominal father cold-shoulders him most of the time. His nominal grandmother shows affection only to “my [Mark’s] sister, Mata and Wiki, and especially *my little Manu*—her *real grandson*—right in front of me” (14). What is perhaps worse, personal disgrace is perpetually remembered and even relished in communal gossip. In Lena’s words, life is “difficult in a small village with everyone related and knowing one another’s business and the communal baths being one of the social gathering places” (40). It is no surprise, therefore, that the impetuous Mark, though heartened by his mother’s love, is not satisfied with life in the Māori community.

Mark becomes increasingly infatuated with iconic figures in American pop culture in his effort to escape the interpersonal constraints imposed by his traditional community. Beginning with silver-screen Western heroes like John Wayne, he proceeds to idolize the singer and actor Elvis Presley: “He came like a letter from America, addressed *Dear Young World . . . I, Elvis Presley, give you permission to be whatever you want*” (67). Such cheap promises of unrestrained freedom—usually at the price of a theatre ticket—are riveting not only to Mark but also to many of his teenage peers, irrespective of their familial background. As a result, Mark and his peers “packed every seat and sat gobsmacked in every aisle unable to get enough of the King, unable to believe such a person existed and yet he was *ours*” (67 my emphasis).

While this enthusiastic identification with iconic American images is undoubtedly a reaction against the confining effects of living in a small Māori village, these icons are not in fact “ours,” but, because of the commercialized culture that surrounds them, very much alien to the traditional Māori world view. As John Tomlinson points out in *Cultural Imperialism*: “The colonisation of the social imaginary restricts individual autonomy by imposing a set of ultimately vacuous imaginary significations—significations which Castoriadis claims (with some justification) as already in crisis in the West” (163). Furthermore, the commercially contrived imaginary significations are often rendered so exotic and appealing that there is always a distinct possibility that the viewing subject will be wrenched away from local cultural roots, unappreciative of the values that have been culturally sustaining a long-evolved local network of interrelated individuals. For any positive culture to evolve constructively, its individual practitioners indeed need to strive towards new horizons; nevertheless, if, in doing so, they identify with illusory or erroneous ideals, that is likely to produce negative implications for themselves as well as for their local community.

In the case of Mark, the cultural imaginary he derives from the American entertainment industry, though it indeed boosts his self-confidence by giving rise to new aspirations, nevertheless blocks him from a constructive engagement with his interpersonal environment. How should we read Mark’s exclamation that “[s]ingle-handedly, Elvis Presley rocked society yet brought something breathtakingly exciting, of true meaning” (68 my emphasis)? I would suggest that this “true meaning” resides in Mark’s new-found belief in an individualism

uninhibited by familial background, cultural expectation or social conventions. To use Mark's own words: "We could be whatever we chose to be" (67). Imbued with the values of this new cultural imaginary, he apparently feels both able and entitled to transcend the immediate environment to realize some self-designated form of existence.

This sense of the possibility for individual self-fashioning is excessively exaggerated. Ironically, while Mark wishes to act as if he can be the self-appointed sole creator of his own lifeworld, he has to fuel his enthusiasm by retaining a feeling of interpersonal connection and recognition—in ways either primitively sensual or extremely narcissistic. Mark manages to combine the two ways in the pursuit of his music dream: "During the night glorious performing in return for adulation: we can have any young woman we want. Which spurs us young men to greater heights of being desired" (111). Furthermore, this narcissistic catering to the sensual self strips Mark of qualms about having a secret affair with the mother of his music partner, Nigel. Self-centredness also leads Mark to distance himself deliberately from his long-time Māori best mate, Chud, who is deemed by him to be not musical enough, and who, for lack of love and care, gradually drifts into delinquency.

Even if all of Mark's activities were to be considered above reproach from a standpoint that privileged individual freedom, it is nevertheless easy to pinpoint in him an erroneous belief that cultural predispositions are the result of genetic inheritance. He seems to have nurtured this belief to reinforce a sense of his own personal distinction, which requires him to deny an equal potential in his fellow individuals—thus ironically contradicting his apparent subscription to the notion of the unbounded potential of the individual. As he compares himself with other Māori, Mark ponders: "Must be from my [never met American birth] father to have this curious mind wanting answers, even enlightenment" (14). With his white music partner, Nigel, he tries the reverse: "I assume being Māori our race is musical and rarely does a white person have the talent" (64). Nevertheless, his enduring fantasy that his American birth father is white plays an exceedingly important role in his construction of a superior self-image. All those essentialist assertions of his own advantageous potential are evidence that, despite his individualistic attempt to transcend existing social boundaries, Mark still cannot do without a collage of racial stereotypes—collective images shaped by social bias and circulated in social discourse.

In view of this inescapable implication of the personal in the social, Mark's evolving cultural imaginary, which depends so strongly on images derived from imported cultural products, needs to be appraised in the context of a new development in the social sphere: the expanded network of capitalist production and distribution. While individual freedom is already theoretically guaranteed in New Zealand because of its liberal democratic national polity, capitalist globalization promises an even greater personal mobility. The ever more technologically advanced mass media—which have a built-in tendency

to reinforce prevailing values—are thus able conveniently to project individual success stories across national borders, often using cultural particulars in a fragmented, shallow way so as to cater to the tastes of a variety of audiences from different cultural backgrounds.

The media/cultural globalization process, therefore, is bound to create tension between its reductionist, universalistic promotion of individualistic values, and the hindrance of an ideal realization of those values due to the particular difficulties in an audience's environment. Mark, absorbed in glamorous images produced by the American entertainment industry, has for a long time blamed the existence of that tension on the environment in which he has been raised. To compensate for this, he relishes an imaginary identification with his absent American father, whom he sees as his potential deliverer. It is not until the shocking revelation that his father is black that he is able to pay critical attention to the more sinister side of the media, beginning to recognize how the marginalized representation of black people in American films serves to obscure their victimization. Confronted with photos of his birth father produced by his mother, and barely able to overcome an impulse to deny the reality of it, Mark reflects: "I had never seen one Negro tourist in Waiwera. In fact never set eyes on a Negro, period. Just on the movie screen, playing servant roles and over-acting the buffoon for the white master's amusement" (113). It is only subsequently that Mark begins to realize that "I'm prejudiced too" (114-15).

Such a recognition of one's own prejudice is a testament to the gullibility of those preoccupied with the pursuit of individual autonomy. But if they are blinded to the larger picture of the unequal social distribution of individual freedom and dignity, then how can they accommodate the particular difficulties of a given society and culture in their search for self-realization? In other words, if popular representations of seemingly universal values are necessarily reductionist for purposes of targeting diverse audiences, then how can affected social agents constructively deal with the inherent discrepancy between globally circulated individualistic ideals, and tasks on the ground that often require interpersonal commitment and compromise? In this regard, Ernesto Laclau, a theoretical advocate of contingent universals and agonistic pluralism, provides a partial answer:

If social struggles of new social actors show that the concrete practices of our society restrict the universalism of our political ideals to limited sectors of the population, it becomes possible to retain the universal dimension while widening the spheres of its application—which, in turn, will define the concrete contents of such universality. Through this process, universalism as a horizon is expanded at the same time as its necessary attachment to any particular content is broken. (34)

It should be said that Laclau's approach to the question of how to determine the worth of a universal ideal born amid hegemonic discursive interference, and of how the application of an ideal can be widened amid a plurality of agonistic "social actors" with conflicting vested interests, leaves much to be desired.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, rather than representing a golden principle according to which social struggles

should be mobilized, this approach, with its emphasis on looking at the unfair social distribution of the purported universal, can be turned into a suitable paradigm for individuals needing to reckon with the prejudices and self-interests imbedded in their own perception of the universal. This urgent need for self-education, I suggest, is, among other things, behind Mark's eventual decision to meet his "Negro" birth father in what was once his dreamland of individual freedom and success: America.

## The Cultural Imaginary, Race Relations and Nation-building

The fictional adventure in 1960s America undertaken by the protagonist in *Dreamboat Dad* can be regarded as a thought-experiment in which Duff considers how an individual may act in the extreme circumstances of a racial struggle. While the setting is temporarily moved overseas, the outcome of the protagonist's expanded experience is an enhanced understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand, consisting mainly of an appreciation of the personal freedom accommodated (though not uninhibited) by the social and cultural particularities of his home country. The cultural imaginary of the individual, when expanded to take cognizance of social relations and group welfare, consequently also has major implications for such collective concerns as race relations and nation-building.

Mark's journey into the Southern United States, at that time still dominated by the Ku Klux Klan and stained with blood from lynchings, soon impels him to modify the rosy picture he has painted of the country that has contributed so much to his imaginary ideal. The egregious injustice in the area of supposedly "universal" human rights is dramatized in the actions of two cops who, after provoking and brutally manhandling Mark, issue a warning to Mark's father:

This here could be a nigger who wants to *revolt* against time-honoured law and order, as practised and enforced by law-abiding white folk [ . . . ] Son of a bitch civil rights man, you better not be walking all over *our* civil rights. We got our eyes on you, Jess Hines. (213)

While it now becomes plain to Mark that race alone is sufficient cause for an individual to be stripped of freedom, his appreciation of the weight of the collective dimension of existence is soon enlarged to include a recognition of the internal contradictions that reside within a collectivity. As Jess grumpily explains to Mark, who gets harassed by some black men for not looking black enough, inner divisions, and even bitter infighting, persist within the black community: "In every town and city it's black on black and still we don't get it that we been turned against ourselves. Ain't no one talking revenge against the ones who been hurting us for centuries" (225). Despite Jess's angry exaggeration, he himself is one among the innumerable participants of the civil rights movement, which is fast changing American social discourse.

It is important here to discuss the relation of the individual to

social discourse, as this has implications for how collective action happens despite the existence of inner divisions within a group. And the key to this discussion, I suggest, is the cultural imaginary variously established by individuals, yet shared at a collective level. In the context of the part of the novel set in America, despite the varying perspectives offered by the multiple narrators, the message of black suffering is delivered in all cases through the use of vivid symbolic imagery. In Jess's narration, there repeatedly appears the startling image of the "strange fruit" of a black body hung on a tree (125; 80; 30; 243), which for him is far more than a linguistic construction from a poem that he has read, but apparently is also the crystallization of his experience of actually witnessing a black woman being lynched (176-80). Jess, in turn, is later lynched for killing two white thugs who threaten his son's life. His dead body is described by a fellow black woman in a letter addressed to Mark as a strange thing hanging on a telephone pole, and is depicted similarly by a white witness in a newspaper article which Mark reads (238-42; 43-46). The succession of images of black suffering culminates in the inclusion of Richard Wright's poem "Between the World and Me," at the end of the novel, which vivifies the horror felt by a victim of lynching, through the use of the image of the "strange fruit" (251-52). The poem is presented as the conclusion of the novel in such a vague way that it cannot be determined whether the use of the poem can be ascribed to a character such as Mark, or only directly to the author of the novel. The indeterminacy surrounding this poem, in terms of who has borrowed it, who is using it and for what specific purposes, further highlights the wide applicability of the message of black suffering and racial injustice.

At this point, while it is reasonable to adopt the Lacanian view of language as invoking the "big Other," as the medium of alterity through which subjects try to strike a relationship with each other (in this case, to form an alliance for purposes of a racial struggle), the poignant images being discursively circulated have nevertheless gone beyond being arbitrary signifiers organized merely by convention in language. Those who are involved in the generating or relating of such images have established strong identification with those images—through, for example, the bodily association between lynching and a "strange fruit." And it is on the basis of shared identification with certain images projected by various subjects into the social discourse that intersubjective recognition and communication can in one way be reinforced. In other words, collectively shared imagery can be the result of the overlapping between subjective projection and discursive circulation. Winnicott, in his observations on the acquisition of culture by healthy babies, emphasizes the duality inherent in cultural imagery when he points out that "symbols [ . . . ] stand at one and the same time for external world phenomena and for phenomena of the individual person who is being looked at" (*Playing* 146-47). For Winnicott, images in the external world become meaningful only when the individual subject can personally relate to them, and it is on this basis that certain images can become reference points in a wider social

discourse (Lacan's symbolic order) for interpersonal communication. One implication of the Winnicottian take on symbols (personally invested objects representative of ideas that can be discursively circulated), therefore, is that the subject's apperception of cultural phenomena is essentially an extension of his or her immediate life experience—despite the increasingly decentred production and distribution of indifferent or abstract information in human society.

When Winnicott's perspective on subjective agency in relation to social discourse is used as a framework for looking at the protagonist's American journey, it becomes apparent that Mark undergoes education at three levels: that relating to society as a whole, that relating to interpersonal relations and that which relates to the development of the self. On the surface, Mark gains a new social understanding through the comparisons he is prompted to make, as when he observes, following his return trip, that he had arrived "back to the safety of my homeland, my tiny country with its affairs so minor and petty as to be farcical in comparison. Yet when I got back there, was never more pleased to be home" (237-38). From a Lacanian viewpoint, this realization would be nothing but a differential effect of signifiers, with social realities remaining forever floating impressions on the subject. As Slavoj Žižek—who is jocosely designated by Terry Eagleton as "Lacan's representative on earth" (139)—avers: "The subject cannot grasp Society as a close Whole, but his impotence has, so to speak, an immediate ontological status: it bears witness to the fact that Society itself does not exist, that it is marked by a radical impossibility" (201). While it is indeed extremely difficult for anyone to understand society in its entirety, it is nevertheless wrong to deny the subject any capacity for perceiving the consequences that ensue as a result of the overall socio-political conditions of society. Evidence of the existence of this capacity is visible in two remarks made by Mark after he returns from America: "We have law on our side, do Māoris, and rights [sic]" (204) and "To my knowledge my country has never had a single lynching" (205). Even if his knowledge about racial law and lynching is mere hearsay, Mark's capacity for assessing the relationship between a social milieu and one's personal safety and dignity—now that he has outgrown the excessively narcissistic self-obsession that he displayed earlier—is undeniable.

At the level of interpersonal relations, what Mark has gained is an appreciation of cooperation and mutual respect within a collectivity structured on the basis of social and cultural particularities. In America, he learns to adapt his personal will to the instructions of his father in the fight against white oppression and aggression. Reflecting on previous experience, Mark remarks: "I guess meeting Jess changed my view of Henry: made me realise how your birthplace, your culture, can make you" (246). The cultural imaginary of individual freedom and success as epitomized by John Wayne and Elvis Presley is still cherished, as is evident in Mark's apparent approval of his mother's divorce from the once violent Henry and of her starting her life anew with a Pākehā businessman. Yet as Mark has come to see the individual in the context of the factors affecting the collective, he

behaves more constructively with regard to the cultural traditions shared by a community, beginning to reconcile himself with Henry, who, despite his past violence, is in many respects a decent man with a devotion to the welfare of his Māori village.

It is important to note that Mark's transformation is underlain by a maturational process in which the self attunes itself to the environment culturally. Admittedly, the adolescent Mark's imaginary identification is one that is profoundly shaped by cultural currencies in accordance with their power to activate discursive constructions that lie beyond convenient empirical scrutiny—a fact which echoes Lacan's point that "as a characteristic of an animal at the mercy of language, man's desire is the Other's desire" (525). This point is valid, however, only in the sense that "man" has to use language to procure survival, security and satisfaction in an interpersonal network composed predominantly of other people; but the human animal's developmental cycle of birth, growth, and death entails that "his" innate adaptability and creativity need be attuned to the growing self with all its inborn and acquired peculiarities. In other words, "man's" desire can never only be the indiscriminate Other's desire, but is always a result of the interplay between a peculiar self and its changing, changeable environment. A theoretical counterpoint to the Lacanian view here is again provided by Winnicott:

In the healthy individual who has a compliant aspect of the self but who exists and who is a creative and spontaneous being, there is at the same time a capacity for the use of symbols. In other words health here is closely bound up with the capacity of the individual to *live in an area that is intermediate between the dream and reality, that which is called cultural life.* (*Maturational Process* 150; my emphasis)

From the Winnicottian perspective, the evolution of Mark's cultural imaginary is essentially a manifestation of a self in negotiation with social discourse. The anachronistic imaginary of becoming a slave-owning Māori chief, despite its allure of superiority, therefore, is bound to be replaced with something more in line with social acceptability. Mark's intuitive efforts at self-assertion through identification with an absent American birth father, who is virtually an assemblage of popular images gleaned from the entertainment industry, also have to be revised once Mark realizes that his wishful thinking has been unsupported by actuality. In particular, the realization that his birth father, being black, is subjected to social injustices further prompts him into rethinking the relationship between the individual, the collective, and social discourse. As Mark matures, he eventually adopts a position in which his personal development is in confident interaction with his immediate environment, the particularities of which, although once considered by him as too limiting, nevertheless remain a major source for his cultural sense-making. As Merita points out near the end of the novel, after confessing to having fabricated the aristocratic lineage for Mark, he is now "strong enough to accept being ordinary, which is not such a bad thing" (247). An old woman steeped in Māori tradition, Merita here is

apparently pointing to Mark's eventual rapprochement with his own cultural environment.

As I have demonstrated so far, the onset of global capitalist modernity, in Duff's fictive representation, has significantly undermined the continuity of subjective identification for Māori with a tribally-based cultural tradition, promoting instead an individualistic culture through its economic, political and cultural arrangements. This is not only true of Mark, but also of some other Māori characters, such as his mother who chooses to remarry outside the Māori community in pursuit of individual happiness. Such primacy of the individual, no doubt, has made essentialist accounts of cultural belonging more problematic. However, the individual subject still remains intrinsically capable of relating to different layers of collective concerns, such as race issues and nation-building. The reason why this is possible is that an emotive use of symbols hinges upon the connection between one's inner reality and the outside world, with the overlapping imaginary of different subjects forming collective concerns. Although commercially-driven cultural globalization inundates the subject with a plethora of social discourse, it is the connectedness between a peculiar self and its environment which determines the quality of a cultural life. From this perspective, race relations and nation-building can by no means be reduced to a political arrangement of arbitrary signifiers, but should involve a constant working out of tensions between particular traditions and new challenges in such a way that people involved can relate themselves to the social milieu in an intimate, creative and peaceful manner. Just as the "strange fruit" image is collectively nurtured and discursively circulated by Black Americans in their racial struggle, in the peaceful environment of New Zealand the collective goals of Māori should also be recognized as signifying genuine aspirations of Māori individuals. And just as the matured Mark becomes capable of reconciliation, a facilitating social environment will not result in mere agonistic struggles in the pursuit of self-interests.

Duff's later novels, in developing an international vision, represent a bifurcation of his concerns. On one hand, some of his later novels champion a kind of individual self-fashioning stripped of any sustained ties to a collectivity; on the other hand, *Dreamboat Dad* represents a nuanced understanding of the individual in relation to the socio-cultural tradition. This bifurcation of concerns perhaps can be said to reflect the primordial tension between the human necessity to survive independently in various environments and the need to feel a sense of belonging. Realistically speaking, in the new millennium in which neoliberalism has been the norm of the capitalist world, it is indeed not easy—especially for Duff, in his apparent attempt to attract an international readership with his realistic exploration of life—to formulate a widely applicable alternative to the primary reliance on oneself when it comes to personal economic considerations. Nor can we easily escape the anxiety brought about by the Lacanian big Other—the overwhelmingly vast amount of social-cultural discourse mostly alien to us. This existential condition is reflected in Duff's early

novels in the way many Māori characters exhibit a deep sense of doubt about the viability of their own tradition, partly as a result of the difficulty they experience in absorbing and digesting the overwhelming onslaught of ideas from the larger world. As Otto Heim, writing before the appearance of *Dreamboat Dad* noted, Duff can be said to belong to a small group of Māori writers “whose sense of their Māoriness [ . . . ] has been shaped by their engagement with the Pākehā world and in response to their, at times shameful, exposure to the way others perceive them” (14). In his later novels, Duff seems to propose a way of life that mainly consists of making sense of one’s troubled self in variable (even international) environments—which is indeed a heroic way of handling both financial and emotional difficulties. Overall, Duff may not have been inclined to embrace Māori family and community life to the extent that some other major Māori writers such as Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace have—stressing, instead, “the individual acceptance of responsibility to become different” (Prentice 160). Yet, in exploring individual self-fashioning in *Dreamboat Dad*, Duff, once a maverick on the Māori cultural scene, has apparently brought himself around to the possibilities of reconciliation, respect and mutual support among the individuals who share a cultural tradition in the face of cultural globalization.

## Notes

1. Winnicott and Lacan, two towering psychoanalysts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both claim to be Freudians, yet pursue radically different paths in their practice and theorization. For recent attempts in the psychoanalytic field to conduct dialogues between the Winnicottian and Lacanian traditions, see Zinkin; Ireland; Luepnitz; and Kirshner.

2. Winnicott has even developed such concepts as “True Self” and “False Self” (*Maturation Process* 140-52), though they are never rigidly defined by him for fear of theoretical dogmatism, and smack of romantic essentialism to some of his critics. My view is that certain factors in an individual, such as the peculiarities in his or her genetic composition and early prelinguistic relationship to the mother, may indeed provide a basis for our talk about his or her seeking a realization of the True Self in relation to society. I should add, though, that the ontological stability of the True Self should not be exaggerated in view of the extent to which individual life constantly has to adjust to conditions, regulations and changes that are beyond individual control, especially in a mass society.

3. Rejecting the notions of “human nature” and of “a unified subject” as essentialist and unable to provide legitimacy for social struggle, Laclau, together with Mouffe, declares elsewhere that “[w]e shall call *Relations of oppression*, in contrast, those relations of subordination which have transformed themselves into sites of antagonisms” (Laclau and Mouffe 153-54). My view, however, is that

while any understanding of human nature is always discursively mediated and subjectivity is indeed fragmented especially in our era, an excessive denial of commonality in human beings would not only render such notions as “justice” and “progress” groundless, but more practically, make the organization of social struggle too diffuse to take shape.

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