

'The auntie's story': Fictional representations of Māori women's identities in Witi Ihimaera's *The uncle's story* (2000) from an intersectional perspective

SVENJA BINGEL, VERA KRUTZ, KATHARINA LUH and ANNEKI MÜETZE

Abstract

While literary analysis of Witi Ihimaera's *The uncle's story* (2005 [2000]) has predominantly focused on the novel's male, homosexual protagonists Sam and Michael, this article intends to put centre stage the minor, but nonetheless innovative, and highly diverse female characters of Auntie Pat, Roimata and Amiria. The complex negotiations of modern and traditional attitudes, sexualities and ethnicities, Māori heritage and Pākehā ideologies that play out with regard to these fictional *personae* will be taken into consideration, hence opening up a scholarly space and a potential fictional point of reference for the heterogeneity of Māori women's life worlds in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. Implementing the rather novel research paradigm of intersectionality in literary and cultural theory and combining it with New Zealand-specific cultural concepts, this paper aims at spiralling in and out of the complexities and intricacies of fictional representations of Māori women's identities – focusing thus, on the auntie's story in *The uncle's story*.

Keywords

Intersectionality, Māori literature and culture, Witi Ihimaera, spiral time, identity, femininity, homo- and heterosexuality, ethnicity, takatāpui, generation, family/whānau.

'Intersecting identities' – Spiralling in and out of Māori women's identities

Over the course of the last decades, practitioners of literary and cultural studies have continuously pointed to the importance and usefulness of an enhanced analytical complexity by means of 'intersecting' or 'interweaving' identities. In her study of Māori writing, German literary scholar Sigrid Markmann (1993), for instance, has noted how

the intersections of class, gender, and race make for a more complex description of hegemony. Maori writers understand their writing as a political act of solidarity and collective self-definition. Much of their writing is concerned with securing Maori values, but also looks at the ways in which bicultural Maori tread the middle ground between their culture and the dominant culture while maintaining their essential Maoriness (p. 78).

Recently, Christina Stachurski (2009) in *Reading Pakeha?: Fiction and identity in Aotearoa New Zealand* has urged scholars to 'explore...how concepts of race and ethnicity intersect with those of gender, sex, and sexuality', while the 2010 Women's Studies Association of New Zealand (WSANZ) Conference at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, on Connecting Women, Respecting Differences encouraged papers on 'difference, diversity and intersectionality'. These current publications and discussions, which can be understood as New Zealand contributions to the study of intersectionality, demonstrate the relevance of this research perspective to the study of New Zealand literature and culture and also show how the consideration of multiple, rather than of isolated, identities provides for a more diverse impression of New Zealand cultural productions¹.

The local forerunners of intersectional theorising to a large extent have been Māori (lesbian) feminists, who, since the late 1970s challenged the second-wave of feminism in Aotearoa New Zealand for being mainly attuned to white, heterosexual, and middle-class women. Failing

to address the specific experiences of Māori (lesbian) women's experiences, an increasing number of scholars and activists critiqued the notion of 'global sisterhood' and the New Zealand feminist 'establishment' for being racist and sexist. The emergence of Māori feminism or *mana wahine* Māori and the anti-racist challenges of indigenous women to the 'white women's movement', the increasing visibility of lesbian feminists, and the largely invisibilised experiences of ethnic, sexual and gender minorities outside the Pākehā-Māori divide impacted on the movement and produced an extensive written archive by Māori women scholars about sexuality and gender (cf. Rosier, 1992). The list of Māori feminist commentators who criticised 'shared patriarchal oppression' as a culturally specific invention of white, heterosexual, middle-class women blind to the issues and particularities of lesbian and *takatāpui*² women in the discourse of Māori feminism is long. Since Donna Awatere's (1984 [1982]) challenges to racism in Pākehā feminism espousing a 'tripod theory' of oppression in her seminal publication *Maori Sovereignty*, many local voices have joined the discourse stating that:

unless feminism takes account of the multiple forces of subjugation where sexism, racism, colonialism and class combine and overlap with the political aspirations for self-determination, feminist studies will only ever, at best, take account of part of indigenous women's realities (Waitere & Johnston, 2009, p. 15).

While Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991, 1992, 2004, 2005) has been pivotal in retrieving Māori women's sexualities from a sexually tolerant Māori archive by reaffirming pre-colonial cultural concepts such as *takatāpui*, scholars such as Kathie Irwin (1988, 1992a, 1992b), Helene Connor (1997), Annie Mikaere (1994, 1999), Aroha Yates-Smith (1998), Hinemoa Awatere (1995), Clea Te Kawehau Hoskins (1997), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1992, 1994, 1997), Irihapeti Ramsden (1993), Margaret Stewart-Harawira (1993, 2007), Everdina Fuli (1995), Pania McArdell (1992), Tuki Nepe (1992), Patricia M. G. Johnston (1998) and Donna Matahaera-Atariki (1995, 1998) have worked to shed light on the 'whakapapa of Māori feminism' from the earliest female entities of Māori cosmology, to academic knowledge production, education, and Māori women's spirituality. Further crucial contributions have been made by Patricia Johnston and Leonie Pihama in their study, '*What counts as difference and what differences count: Gender, race and the politics of difference*', (1995) and Teresa Platt in her M.A. thesis on *Authenticity, identity and difference. A critical review of Maori women's feminist theory* (1998). In the field of literary studies and cultural analysis, Cathie Dunsford's gender-based anthologies (1986, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1997), Patricia Grace and Robyn Kahukiwa's (1991) *Wahine toa: Women of Maori myth*, Powhiri Rika-Heke's (1993, 1996) and Jon Lois Battista's (2004) literary analyses have marked significant contributions to the study of Māori women's identity particularities.

Against this theoretical background, it becomes evident that identities such as ethnicity, age, sexuality, and gender not only are highly intricate, therefore spiralling in and out of each other, but that fictional representations of Māori women's identities prove especially fruitful for a discussion of such identity (and hence frequently political) complexities. On the one hand, '[q]uestions of identity have always been one of the most prominent topics of literature' (Neumann, 2008, p. 53); on the other hand, narrative fiction provides a 'privileged site for identity analysis' (Bamberg, 2009, p. 133). Narratives can even be regarded as encompassing 'ways of worldmaking' (Nünning & Nünning, 2010, p. 6)³, as productive sites of active and effective identity constitution which

not only play a key role in our daily efforts at self-making, but ... also serve to forge communities. Literature and other art forms are of particular interest for studying culture(s) in the context of such an approach in that they serve to stage, thematise, and foreground the complex processes and ways of worldmaking, while at the same time conducting self-reflexive thought experiments in self- and worldmaking (p. 15).

While notions of literary self-, community-, and world-making allude to the constructedness of individual and collective identities in everyday social interactions as a potentially interminable process, they also point to the productive and exceptional potential of literature to represent alternative identities that may not (yet) exist or have a place in social reality⁴. Not only do fictional representations expose the problems, intricacies, and limitations of identity construction, but they may further disseminate new models of identities which in turn may impact on extra-textual contexts. Within a framework of accepted genre conventions and culturally admissible repertoires of identities and stories, contemporary fiction thus has the power to shape self-perceptions and even understandings of entire communities (c.f. Neumann, 2008).

In order to grasp such complexities of identity and belonging in the context of fiction, intersectionality can provide a research perspective capable of simultaneously taking into view a range of identity categories in their crucial interrelations and power differentials⁵. As Nira Yuval-Davies (2006) states:

[t]he point of intersectional analysis is not to find ‘several identities under one’ [but] the point is to analyse the differential ways in which different social divisions are concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they relate to political and subjective constructions of identities (p. 205).

In the following analysis, we⁶ will align with sociologist Leslie McCall’s (2005) ‘intercategorical approach’⁷. Intercategorical complexity entails that identity categories are maintained⁸ and focuses on the reciprocities *between* various identity dimensions. It further aims at documenting relationships of inequality (and privilege) among social groups, and their changing configurations along multiple and conflicting dimensions. Hence, this innovative approach to thinking about identity complexity and multiplicity in power relations, serves to expose

differentiated women’s experiences [and] disrupted notions of a homogenous category “woman” with its attendant assumptions of universality that served to maintain the status quo in relation to “race”, social class and sexuality, while challenging gendered assumptions (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 82).

According to anthropologist Michele D. Dominy (1990), in the New Zealand context,

Maori women have played a significant role in formulating identity, sometimes defining and redefining Maori culture through the fostering of Maoritanga, sometimes bridging Maori and Pakeha cultures, and sometimes rethinking traditional Maori gender conceptions (p. 238).

Aligning these insights to the novel, the multiplicity of Auntie Pat’s, Roimata’s and Amiria’s experiences and fictional ‘realities’ testifies to the ‘considerable variation in women’s gender conceptions’ (Dominy, 1990, p. 239) and further ‘highlights the crosscutting of identities as people [as well as fictional characters] are differentiated into particular groupings while at the same time they unite on the basis of other commonalities’ (Dominy, 1990, p. 239). While previous literary analyses of Witi Ihimaera’s *The uncle’s story* (2005 [2000]) have predominantly focused on the novel’s male, homosexual protagonists, Sam and Michael⁹, this article intends to put centre stage the minor, but nonetheless innovative and highly diverse, female characters of Auntie Pat, Roimata and Amiria (and to a lesser extent Florence and Lilly). These Māori women characters demonstrate a range of possible identity combinations such as lesbianism and ‘classical’ heterosexuality, Māori, Pākehā, and even global environments. Further, their highly individual ‘intersecting identities’ lead them along very different, but highly interconnected paths across various generations, spiralling in and out of the past and the present¹⁰, their own Māori culture, indigenous and non-indigenous, local and global contexts, as well as a variety of culturally-specific homosexual and heterosexual life-worlds. Incessantly struggling against the supposedly traditional Māori gender and sexual conceptions of their respective times, these Māori women characters present innovative blueprints for the future of their whānau and tribe. Following their profoundly interrelated journey into the twenty-first century

leads us towards an ever-increasing indigenous female (and male) empowerment in the context of what Ihimaera in his novel envisions as a 'new gay tribe' capable of integrating – in the sense of a holistic Māori world view – identities across sexualities, sex and gender, kinship ties, and even generations.

Auntie Pat – Intertwinings of past and present as female empowerment

Being Sam and Monty Mahana's sister and thus Michael's aunt, Pat Mahana – Auntie Pat – has spent parts of her lifetime with all these family members on the Mahana farm and plays a decisive role in Michael's as well as his uncle Sam's 'story'. These male characters' homosexual orientation is incompatible with their fathers' respective value systems and their seemingly 'traditional' gender conceptions¹¹. As both Sam and Michael are successively punished and expelled from their whānau, it may be argued that over the course of two generations Auntie Pat has to go through the same experience twice. What Pat Mahana has endured with one of her brothers in the past is similar to what happens to her nephew Michael in the present. However, whereas an adolescent and rather passive Pat had to largely endure the horrible maltreating of Sam and his exclusion from the family home, as a middle-aged woman Auntie Pat has grown into a powerful female character profoundly influenced by the traumatising happenings of the past, but ready to face her own sense of guilt and the identity crisis of her beloved nephew in the present. This way, Auntie Pat – despite being a minor character compared to the two homosexual first-person narrators – not only becomes a fundamental driving force on the plot level, but spirals between past and present family versions in order to solve her own identity dilemma, while also encouraging an innovative future for her family in the present and for the generation to come.

Thus, for Auntie Pat the past is a constant part of the present and her story shows in an impressive way how past and present cannot be separated from each other but are instead highly intricate. Following Eva Rask Knudsen's (2004) demand that '[t]heory should be deduced from, not forced upon, literature' (p. 17), we will therefore link Auntie Pat's story to the Māori concept of time, which focuses on the intertwining, rather than the chronological order of past, present, and future. The spiral is used to visualise an understanding of time strongly opposed to Western conceptions of temporal order that isolates past, present and future into separate entities. By contrast, the Māori concept of spiral time incorporates an understanding stressed by Witi Ihimaera himself in his speech *New Zealand dreams, Pacific destinies* addressed to an audience at the National Library's Auditorium on 2nd November 2005. Referring to John Rangihau's concept of Te Taura Tangata, the great Rope of Man, Ihimaera alludes to the inter-related nature of human beings and states: 'Te torino haere whakamua, whakamuri. At the same time as the spiral is going out, it is also going in'. Just like a spiral constantly repeats itself, the different levels of time spiral in and out of each other. Therefore, neither the past nor the ancestors may be relegated to a completed or 'past' point in time, but remain a constitutive part of the present and a powerful and enabling force in the future: 'The individual is shaped by the ancestors; each man or woman in turn, is responsible for the shaping of the people to come' (Dell Panny, 1998, p. 43). As a result, all three temporal levels of past, present and future, as distinguished from a Western cultural perspective, are highly intertwined with each other. Like the different strands of a rope or the different elements of a spiral they must hence not be regarded separately, but as intersecting¹².

Such an indigenous conception of time is 'ultimately different from the dichotomies... deciphered in postcolonial theory, because Māori cosmogony emphasises an interrelatedness – a system of spiralling relations – rather than the contrariety of opposites' (Knudsen, 2004, p. 4). Apart from resonating in different material manifestations of Māori tradition, such as carvings

and the overall structure of the whareniui or meeting house, which ‘remembers...acknowledges and iterates a connection with the past’ (McKay & Walmsley, 2003, p. 91), the spiral time concept is also

frequently encountered as a major inspiration in contemporary Māori literature - and sometimes even as the matrix of the narrative - because it offers a perspective from which Māori culture is seen to carry, intrinsically, the seeds of its own continuing renewal (Knudsen, 2004, p. 5)¹³.

In Witi Ihimaera’s *The uncle’s story*, the spiral time concept is used to underline Auntie Pat’s powerful position in the narrative and her importance for the creation of a fictional community which accepts the intersecting identities of its members. However, before Pat is capable of complementing Ihimaera’s ‘new gay tribe’ as an older Māori woman or kuia, she has to negotiate and integrate her own intersecting identity positions. Ever since the day she met Cliff Harper – her brother Sam’s white American lover – Pat constantly recalls their first encounter, noting that ‘when I saw Cliff Harper I thought he was the most beautiful man I had ever seen’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 198). Irrevocably in love with Cliff from the very start, teenage Pat is unable to reconcile her own heterosexual awakening and desire for the visiting American chopper pilot with the close and special relation between Sam and Cliff that she senses. Incapable of classifying both her own feelings and the men’s relation to each other, Pat, just like all the other Māori girls, is fascinated by the handsome and easy-going young American who served with Sam in the Vietnam War. In the course of Sam’s leave from the battle front, it becomes more and more obvious that Pat’s feelings for Cliff intensify, especially when she, her mother Florence, Sam, and Cliff talk about her past boyfriend and Pat blushes because of Cliff calling her ‘babe’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 217). The turning point eventually comes when the whole Mahana whānau is invited to a Māori wedding where Cliff Harper and his Elvis imitation are *the* attraction. When Sam and Cliff leave the party to spend time on their own, a shocked Pat reveals to her father Arapeta that she saw the two men kissing. Unable to reconcile her heteronormative Māori upbringing with her beloved brother’s ‘deviant’ homosexual behaviour, Pat is stuck with her guilt for almost her entire life. This emotional debt not only leads her to entirely renouncing her heterosexuality and dreams of marrying, but Pat tries to balance her envy of Sam and her loss of Cliff by escaping into a world of white male Hollywood heroes. The decisive role she has played in the sequence of events leading to Sam’s punishment, his expulsion from the whānau, and his death remains a hidden truth for most of the novel.

Apart from hiding her own ‘story’, Auntie Pat has also literally carried ‘the uncle’s story’ around with herself. Keeping Sam’s diary, which she was able to save from Arapeta’s destructiveness, hidden for years, the past has literally and metaphorically accompanied Pat through her entire life. By finally handing the diary to Michael, the past, namely Sam’s story, becomes part of the present and the truth can finally be revealed. As Michael sets out to find out about his formerly unknown uncle’s life by reading his diary and talking to Sam’s contemporaries – one of whom is Auntie Pat – Pat sees herself regularly put back in time. Whenever she reveals more of Sam’s story, she fluctuates between her memory of the past and her life in the present.

This spiral time character is mirrored at the level of narration itself as Auntie Pat spirals in and out of her own former and present identities and versions of her family as well as by alternating between various temporal levels. These conflicting versions of herself, however, are reconciled and integrated by Auntie Pat in the present. Having learned from her ‘mistakes’ in the past, Pat has turned into a strong Māori woman, who, through her active and determined behaviour and open mind, enables change in the present and the future. After Michael’s coming out to his family at yet another family wedding, Auntie Pat does not flee from her family responsibility by keeping silent on unpleasant issues, but contrariwise seems to intensify the

contact with her nephew by visiting him at his place in Wellington. Reminding Michael of his cultural affiliation and his central status in the whānau, Pat at first tries to make Michael choose between being Māori *or* gay when asking “‘What matters most to you, Michael? Being Māori or being gay?’” (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 22). Gradually, though, Pat is ‘beginning to understand’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 23) when Michael points out to her that he cannot choose between these two alternatives, but that both, Māori and gay, are intertwining parts of his identity. By letting Michael and his lesbian Māori friend Roimata show her *their* world, Pat enters a previously unknown arena of urban homosexuality. After taking her to various night clubs and a Girls Only bar, Pat not only shows interest in Michael and Roimata’s leisure activities, but – what matters even more – is enjoying herself, even in a surrounding which she is not used to. Instead of letting her personal upbringing prevent her from appreciating this experience, Pat deliberately acknowledges this concept of life, although, on her day of departure, she concludes with an ironic undertone: ‘Thank *you* for showing me Sodom and Gomorrah. All night I was waiting for lightning to strike me dead or to be turned into a pillar of salt!’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 27).

The time Auntie Pat and Michael spend together in Wellington has profoundly changed their relationship and has led to ‘a particular act of trust – the giving to [Michael] of the diary’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 120). However, this development would not have been possible if Pat had not experienced the destruction of Sam. Whereas, in the past, Pat has assumed a subordinate role to her father and has accepted ‘her submissive nature and her spinsterhood’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 119), Sam’s and Michael’s stories have turned her into a strong woman who starts to speak up against her father’s and brother’s wish of literally and metaphorically erasing Sam from their lives, whānau *and* whakapapa (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 120).

Compared to her mother Florence’s generation, such behaviour seems like an impossible achievement. Offered to Arapeta as a form of utu, a substitute to salvage his mana after being rejected by the woman he was supposed to marry, Florence’s only ‘function’ is to give birth to a son. Stuck in an arranged marriage with Arapeta, Florence remains largely invisible to her patriarchal husband and has to endure his highly abusive sexual behaviour, which bothers her inwardly, but which she would never dare to verbalise:

Florence, watching, felt herself trembling as she remembered her own wedding day. Something strong and good had died in her that day, and later, that night, when Arapeta had abusively thrust his penis into her every opening as if she was made of dirt (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 226).

Deeply afraid of Arapeta and his uncontrollable rage, her firmly established traditional beliefs and her liability towards her husband and her tribe prevent Florence from protecting her own son. Although Florence is aware of the violent and oppressive behaviour of Arapeta, she is unable to intervene against her husband and remains largely passive. Pat, on the other hand, has developed the ‘feistiness’ and ‘fighting spirit’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 363) of a contemporary Māori woman character capable of constructing a more liberal future. While Pat is unable to fulfil her former heteronormative ideal of marriage, she succeeds in redirecting her energy to a rather different concept of living. As Michael asserts, ‘Auntie Pat was going to make a good kuia for [their] new gay tribe’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 363), which offers Pat the opportunity to be herself and to use her knowledge to actively work on a better future.

Leaving behind the ghosts of her past, but restoring her ancestor’s story and identities, Pat acknowledges that the events of the past are intertwined with everything that happens in the present. Instead of passively accepting abusive or sexist behaviour towards her brother and nephew, Pat has advanced over her mother’s suppressed status and empowered herself. Accepting that Sam’s and Michael’s being Māori *and* being gay do not exclude each other, but

can coexist, Pat is now willing to speak up and fight for takatāpui rights, a fact that will make her a good companion for her nephew and for Roimata. As Pat, a *heterosexual* Māori woman, plays this leading role in their ‘new gay tribe’, she contributes to the tribe’s diversity, making it not an exclusively ‘gay’ tribe, but a place that welcomes all kinds of people, be they ‘lesbians, transgendered and queer – the whole takatāpui whānau’ (Diamond, 2007, p. 122).

This diversity is also observed by Lilly, Turei’s mother, who takes up the role as kai karanga, the first and sole voice at the marae, as Michael and a group of people try to bring a dead homosexual Māori man onto the marae. She initially is at a loss how to address the group she faces and cannot figure out a ‘tribal reference point’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p.359) with which to greet the arrivals. By finally admitting the group to the marae and welcoming them with “‘Haramai ki te ope tane me wahine takatāpui...’” (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p.359), Lilly, however, acknowledges the fact that takatāpui already existed in pre-colonial times and that homosexual orientations were not introduced to New Zealand by European settlers. By welcoming the group the way she does, Lilly not only *admits* them to the marae, she also *enables* their constitution as a new gay tribe which ‘would not be stopped’ (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 359). This way, Lilly proves to be an innovative and revolutionary character who, through her behaviour and her acknowledging of the fact that ‘[t]akatāpui whānau is part of the celebration of diversity of whānau’ (Reynolds, 2007, p. 120), paves the way for the future of the new gay tribe¹⁴.

By helping Michael out of his identity crisis, restoring Sam’s story and helping to powerfully retrieve and narrate it, Pat not only acknowledges Māori men’s homosexuality in the past, but succeeds in integrating it into a narrative version of present day New Zealand. Auntie Pat will further help to secure that these previously suppressed ‘intersecting identities’ will find their rightful place in a future ‘gay tribe’.

Roimata – ‘The female version’ of a homosexual Māori activist

When Auntie Pat meets Michael’s friend Roimata for the very first time and asks him “‘Is Roimata the female version of you?’” (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 24) Michael immediately knows what she refers to. His reply is accordingly “‘A lesbian? Yes’” (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 24). Roimata is homosexual and though Pat’s question is thus resolved, her remark as such – by being addressed to Michael – implies yet another commonality apart from their homosexual orientation. As Michael is not just a gay man but also Māori, his friend Roimata is likewise not just a lesbian but also a member of the tāngata whenua, hence a lesbian Māori. Judging from her behaviour throughout the novel, these two facets of her personality seem to be of great importance to Roimata’s self-conception, as they consistently manifest themselves in her actions and statements. On this basis we will examine both the homosexuality and the Māori identity of this fictional character, starting by describing each aspect of identity separately, before taking a closer look at the interaction *between* them.

Roimata’s strong attachment to her cultural and tribal origins is evident in her knowledge of specific customs and traditions, as in the case of Māori burial procedures and women’s part in it (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], pp. 358-60), or in the way she consciously acknowledges her tribal ancestry and cultural belonging in the way she dresses. Michael notices this, stating:

Roimata was looking radiant, but there was a cutting edge to her beauty. She had dressed entirely in black and had placed three white feathers in her hair. I was reminded that her mother was from Taranaki and that, by wearing the feathers, Roimata was acknowledging her ancestral links with Parihaka, the village which had been the great site of resistance during the Land Wars (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 318).

While Roimata embraces culture in this way, her behaviour simultaneously tells of her

awareness of being a member of a distinct and marginalised social group. Against the backdrop of the colonial history of Aotearoa New Zealand and the subsequent position of Māori as an ethnic minority, she regards herself as disconnected from the white majority and in consequence pointedly positions herself in opposition to it. Again it is Michael who observes:

As usual she had chosen a restaurant where we would stand out: the only brown people in the room. She liked to make visual her political position — that Maori were a minority but, dammit, we could still walk through the front door and play with the family silver (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], pp. 124-5).

As can be deduced from her work-related commitment to the funding of indigenous arts, Roimata's perception of her own social position as a Māori constitutes a motivation for her to take action on behalf of her people. While she questions Pākehā¹⁵ authority, her emphatic distancing from the white majority is further accompanied by a feeling of solidarity with other indigenous minorities that share a similar history. This becomes apparent against the backdrop of the conference of the *First Nations People* in Ottawa, Canada, where Roimata and Michael as New Zealand representatives explicitly point to the oppression of indigenous people in their speech and appeal to the present members of other nations to revolt against “[w]hite mainstream politics” (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 320). Only when they “disconnect from the White umbilical” can they regain their sovereignty, fulfill their duty towards their ancestors “to whom [they] are accountable and with whom [they] have an implicit contract” and secure the future of their cultures (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], pp. 320-1).

As for the handling of her sexual identity, Roimata's self-confident reactions in various situations imply an open attitude towards this part of her personality. She casually refers to her homosexuality in front of her long-time friend Michael, when she teasingly states: “What a pity you're not a woman” (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 127) and likewise acknowledges her lesbian identity while being with people she barely knows, like the Native Americans Lang, Sterling and Wandisa. When all of them visit a bar, Roimata candidly reacts to the approach of a male dancer:

[A] young man wearing nothing but a smile and a g-string was dancing on top of the bar. When he knelt in front of Roimata, inviting her to put some money in his pouch, she turned to me: “You do it, Michael. He's more your kind of person than mine” (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 323).

Although Roimata's direct attitude towards her lesbianism can thus be deduced from her spontaneous situational behaviour, this does not yet provide a complete picture of the way she deals with this facet of her personality. In order to fully capture the relevance of her sexual identity it must be taken into account that throughout the novel, she perceives and presents herself in relation to her surroundings primarily through an identification with her culture. In other words, the way this fictional character deals with her position as a homosexual woman can only be described in consideration of her takatāpui identity – by viewing her not just as a lesbian but as a lesbian Māori. This intersection of identities is thus determined by her principal self-conception as Māori. Hence, the handling of her sexuality is based on her conduct and social standing as a member of the tāngata whenua.

With regard to her sexual identity, Roimata also consequently distances herself from the Pākehā majority, as she perceives her lesbian minority status in the context of her belonging to a cultural minority. While aiming for a general acceptance of her cultural identity, her ambition to gain personal sexual independence is simultaneously linked to a general claim for the independence of indigenous homosexual women and men from a white heteronormative majority. She explains to Michael: “Gay men and women are strong, but we need to be stronger. We need to become more visible. You know, the problem is that our lives are controlled by the white heterosexual culture...” (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], pp. 189-90). Roimata's critical comments on

Michael's love-life further demonstrate that – since she profoundly perceives herself as Māori – Roimata also pointedly distances herself from the community of white homosexuals. For her, Michael's declared preference for white lovers stems from the fact that as a Māori, he has not only been exploited culturally by the Pākehā, but emanating from this has also fallen victim to the white *homosexual* majority, whose ideals have shaped his perception of sexual attractiveness. Along with the accusation that as a result of this 'double colonisation'¹⁶, he loses his sovereignty as a homosexual Māori, Roimata appeals to her friend to go for '*mana Maori*' (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 273). Yet, as she drops her objections against Michael's new white friend Carlos when she learns that he has Māori ancestors and is therefore Māori too, Roimata's own unconscious and colonially-biased preconceptions of indigenous identity and belonging become manifest.

While Roimata thus already emphatically distances herself from an oppressive Pākehā mainstream, it is difficult for her to unite her cultural and sexual identities – to negotiate her *takatāpui* identity – in the context of Māori culture and society as it is staged in the novel. At the afore-mentioned international conference Michael describes Māori culture as excessively homophobic:

"In my own country, my own Maori people are among the most homophobic in the world. They are strong, wonderful people but their codes are so patriarchal as to disallow any inclusion of gay Maori men and women within the tribe" (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 337).

Unlike Michael, for whom the conflict arising from this challenging situation causes an identity crisis, Roimata is moved by it to the extent that she actively wants to change the current condition. Precisely because of her strong cultural and tribal identification, she demands the acknowledgement of her lesbian orientation by *all* Māori and moreover pleads for a *general* recognition of indigenous homosexual men and women. In Canada she joins forces with some of them:

"We who are people of two spirits", Lang said, "want to make a stand. We want to introduce a resolution at the final session tomorrow, calling on the conference to recognise the contribution made by gay and lesbian men and women to our cultures" ... "Michael", Roimata continued, "the time has come to make a stand. We've got to start fighting all the homophobia. All the prejudice. It's time we came out into the full light of day" (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 326).

Apart from feeling solidarity with other indigenous minorities, Roimata connects to indigenous homosexuals and is willing to take joint action from within their respective cultures. In addition to her claim for general tolerance on a global scale, Roimata's political endeavour is further connected to a personal desire to live up to *both* her sexual and her cultural identity. While she accuses Michael of being brainwashed by the ideals of Pākehā culture and dismisses white values and norms for herself as a Māori, she picks up the idea of a 'new gay tribe'. This innovative concept offers homosexual Māori 'new forms of living together, while at the same time upholding Māori traditions' as it 'explicitly combines cultural with gender identification by incorporating members from diverse iwi who have the same sexual orientations' (Moura-Koçoğlu, 2009, p. 230). Roimata notes:

"Take, for instance, the Pakeha gay attitude to family ... The Western model de-privileges any notions that gay men or women might have children. Therefore, the White gay species is the only one which doesn't replicate itself. But our Maori model is a tribal one. It should therefore include the possibility of growing a tribe. Of having children". Roimata's passion was overwhelming, pouring out of her, and her eyes were glowing and luminous. "Don't you understand, Michael? The issues of identity and space — of sovereignty, of *tino rangatira*tanga — that our people have been fighting for within Pakeha society are the same issues for gay Maori within Pakeha gay society! That gay tribe your Auntie Pat asked about won't just happen — it will have to be created, God dammit —" (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], pp. 125-6).

Detached from the conventions of the white majority, this family model corresponds with

Roimata's ideas of cultural and sexual independence. Working for the acceptance of gay and lesbian Māori, she teams up with like-minded people, while simultaneously shaping her own life by offering Michael 'matrimonial union'. Inclusive of child-bearing, the concept of the 'gay tribe' moreover raises the possibility of procreation and the continuity of the line of descent and thus dispels the assumption that homosexuality puts an end to whakapapa.

While being Māori offers Roimata a safe haven from which to demand Māori sovereignty, her commitment to forming a 'gay tribe' aims not so much at an assertion against the white majority. Here, she is more anxious to gain respect from *all* Māori, counteracting the homophobia she experiences and, last but not least, realising her own life-plan. In this context, even this usually tough and confident businesswoman shows a vulnerable and insecure side. When Michael meets her for the first time after he learns that she wants to start a family with him, he comments on her emotionally agitated state:

I returned to the office. Roimata's eyes were red, as if she had been crying. When I took her in my arms she clung to me as if her life depended on it. "I'm so embarrassed", she said. "You embarrassed?" I asked. "That's a new one. Really, I'm honoured. Who knows? This might just be the way to win back the family". "Yours and mine", Roimata said (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 290).

Despite outer obstacles and inner fears, Roimata's overall course of action shows that she is prepared to stand up for her convictions in order to do justice to herself as a lesbian Māori and thus to fully embrace her takatāpui identity. And although in the course of Michael's identity development and self-discovery she more and more steps into the background and leaves it to him to act, her strong personality leads Michael to the firm belief: "Yes, Roimata, you will make a fine mother for this great new tribe of ours" (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 364).

Amiria – Epitome of the next Māori generation?

Whereas the fictional character of Roimata offers a highly complex picture of various intersecting identities, Michael's twin sister Amiria, at first glance, appears to be a rather conventional character. However, although Amiria's story takes up a comparatively small part of the narrative, her modern life-style runs somewhat counter to conceptions of marriage, whānau, and partnership predominant in her family. Not only does Amiria live in a Pākehā-dominated environment, spending most of her time with her Pākehā friends in Auckland, but, compared to her brother, she seems to have adopted a rather distanced attitude towards Māori culture. Whereas Michael successively rebels against the heteronormative attitudes of his father, Amiria becomes 'accustomed' to Pākehā ideologies and even marries an American (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 7). And while Michael strives to integrate his homosexuality with his being Māori, it seems that Amiria wishes to conduct her own heterosexual relationship with Tyrone at a distance from her familial background.

In the following, we will demonstrate that the specific intersecting identities of Amiria not only display that 'heterosexualities are diverse and contradictory and engaged in by those who are also significantly distinguished by ethnicity, class, age, parental status, etc.' (Du Plessis, 2004, p. 105), but also show that 'we cannot analyse sexual relationships between women and men without examining the contexts of the relationships within which they occur' (Du Plessis, 2004, p. 110). This means that although Amiria seemingly relinquishes her cultural upbringing, we cannot analyse her heterosexual partnership with Tyrone in isolation from her Māori identity. Amiria's self-conception vividly displays that, contrasted with earlier generations, Māori attitudes towards homosexuality as represented in the novel have changed. Retrieving takatāpui orientations and concepts of life from the Māori sexual archive, Amiria's generation seems to have developed an open-minded and liberal attitude, supporting others in their quest

for identity. Furthermore, the character of Amiria shows that families and family conceptions have also changed in the course of time, but nevertheless play an important role within the narrative. As the family marks a 'vital institution' and a 'primary social unit in any community' (Visser, 2005, p. 5), families fundamentally shape an individual's development and may provide an arena for individual growth or inter- and intragenerational conflict. As a storehouse of cultural traditions and values, family conceptions are also highly volatile in terms of their historicity and cultural context and, thus, can be understood as a 'reflector and indicator of social change' (Visser, 2005, p. 5). Further, as Irene Visser convincingly posits,

family and its fictions thus form the links in the chain between the past and the present and the future, in an ongoing narrative of both individualistic concerns and pursuits, but also, and perhaps more importantly, of the larger interests of the community and social environment (Visser, 2005, p. 5).

Hence, the significance of the family at the micro level of individual characters, as much as of the macro level of social structures and processes, cannot be underestimated.

Amiria belongs to a generation of Māori who have grown up *within* Māori traditions but see themselves as being confronted with an increasingly globalised world of overseas travel and cross-cultural exchange. If we get the impression that Amiria has moved towards a Pākehā point of view, her marriage with Tyrone even takes her beyond Aotearoa New Zealand's national borders and further into the Western world. Adopting Pākehā models, for instance, for her 'Pakeha wedding' (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 7), Amiria dreams of a small party, with waiters, a band and silver cutlery, instead of a noisy and grand celebration that, she fears, might evoke the impression for her American parents-in-law of having a Māori 'pow wow' (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 6). This way, Amiria's wedding plans, which lead her father Monty to indignantly note 'What kind of Maori are you!' (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 7), unapologetically point out the differences between Māori and Western notions of marriage, family celebration and family conception.

As Amiria marries into the Henderson family, a Western nuclear family consisting of mother, father and a child, and later leaves with Tyrone to live in Texas, it seems that she is turning her back on her own parents and extended family. Rather, Amiria turns *towards* a cross-cultural and intergenerational re-conception of family and marriage and therefore exemplifies the social change as indicated by Visser (2005, p. 5). Amiria and Michael's unusual relationship further extends the traditional idea of 'marriage'¹⁷. Not only do they form an extremely close familial bond by being twins, but they also transfer the heteronormative notion of marriage to their kinship relation. After finding out about Michael's homosexuality, Amiria notes that they are still 'married to each other...[f]or richer for poorer. In sickness and health. Till death do us part' (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 13). This way, Amiria demonstrates her lasting support and love for her twin brother, willingly accepts his homosexual orientation as rather unproblematic and, to a certain extent, conceptualises her brother as inextricably linked to herself. Although Michael later compares their relationship to that of 'old lovers' (Ihimaera, 2005 [2000], p. 346), the sexual connotation in this statement does not refer to a physical but rather to a spiritual connection. Their 'marriage', as deviant from the cultural norm like most of the contemporary partnerships represented in the novel, integrates not only brother and sister but also heterosexuality and homosexuality. Whereas this unusual relationship is built to last, some heterosexual relationships in the past have completely failed.

As shown above, within different times and from one generation to the next, concepts of life previously unattainable have come within reach. Auntie Pat and Amiria have had the same prerequisites but have realised them in different ways. Unlike Auntie Pat or Uncle Sam, Amiria not only finally marries her American dream boy and implements her ideal of living a Western

life-style, but also starts a family with him. Going one step beyond the family tradition of giving twins, Amiria is even about to give birth to triplets and therefore allows the line of descendents not to break up. She continues the whakapapa in a contemporary and international context, leading the family into the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Granted, Michael and Sam are the protagonists of *The uncle's story*. Yet, their story would not be the same if it were not for the strong women characters that accompany them on their way – most prominently, Auntie Pat, Roimata and Amiria. At first glance, these three supposedly minor female characters seem to be very different, as each tries to reconcile different aspects of her personality with her cultural identity. One is fluctuating between past and present, struggling with her feelings of guilt and trying to make her contribution to a better future. The other is constantly fighting for the rights of her culture, rejecting Pākehā ways of living in favour of an innovative concept that allows her to combine her homosexuality and her Māoritanga. The third is walking down her own path that geographically leads her away from her whānau to a life with her white husband on another continent.

At a second glance, though, the 'new gay tribe' offers these three women characters a room to meet and in this context, by upholding their individuality, they offer a fictional blueprint for a new future for the generations to come. That is why their role is not only decisive with regard to Sam and Michael's stories, but also crucial in the development of a structure that holistically combines a variety of generations, genders, and sexualities on the basis of their shared cultural background. The 'new gay tribe' provides space for the 'intersecting identities' of all three women: the combination of Roimata's Māoridom and her life as a lesbian woman; Amiria's struggle between a Western way of life and her Māori background; and Pat's personal crisis which is caused by Cliff's refusal of her love, his affair with her homosexual brother Sam, and the resulting complicated familial situation.

Ultimately then, while being Māori unites these outstanding female characters, the way they relate to this facet of their personality, and individually deal with their various 'intersecting identities', corresponds with the Māori spiral time concept which 'signifies change and growth, the new springing from what has gone before and reaching out toward the future' (Dell Panny 1998, p. 42) and with Amiria's triplets, right into the twenty-first century.

Applying an intercategorical intersectional approach to fiction in general, and to Witi Ihimaera's novel in particular, offers insight into the complexity of these women characters' range of identity constructions and provides a theoretical framework for analysing their 'intersecting identities'. Such an approach not only enhances analytical complexity but fits well with Māori cultural concepts such as spiral time. The conceptualisation of identities as simultaneous and intricate disrupts homogeneous notions of femininity and Māoriness and displays the workings of power as represented amongst others in narrative texts. Witi Ihimaera's innovative female characters mirror these intersectional complexities, turning *The uncle's story* into an Auntie's story as well.

SVENJA BINGEL, after graduating from secondary school in 2006, started to study English, Physical education and German for becoming a teacher at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Germany. In 2008, she spent one year in South Wales where she worked as a teaching assistant at Ysgol Gyfun Cymer Rhondda and Newbridge Comprehensive School; svenjabingel@googlemail.com

VERA KRUTZ, after graduating from secondary school in 2007, participated in a Work & Travel-program in Great Britain for seven months. In 2008, she started to study English Literature and Culture and German studies at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Germany where she is currently writing her B.A. Thesis on 'Gender Roles in Nursery Rhymes'; v.krutz@gmx.de

KATHARINA LUH is a German Ph.D. student affiliated to the GCSC (International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture) and IPP (International Ph.D. Programme) at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Germany since 2007. She is about to finish her doctoral thesis entitled 'Intersecting identities. Ethnicity, gender and sexuality in contemporary fiction from Aotearoa New Zealand'; katharina.luh@anglistik.uni-giessen.de

ANNEKI MÜETZE, after graduating from secondary school in 2006, started to study English, Latin and Politics for becoming a teacher at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Germany. In 2009, she spent one year in Edinburgh, Scotland where she worked as a teaching assistant at the Erskine Stewart's Melville College; anneki.muetze@gmx.de

Notes

1 For a more detailed analysis of the intersectional potential of New Zealand feminism(s), Māori cultural concepts (i.e. weaving or the rope of man), and representations of culturally and historically specific New Zealand identities (i.e. takatāpui) in contemporary New Zealand fiction (by Ngahua Te Awēkotuku, Keri Hulme, Patricia Grace, Alan Duff, Witi Ihimaera, Cathie Dunsford and Lloyd Jones), see Katharina Luh's forthcoming doctoral thesis on *Fictions of identities: Intersecting ethnicity, gender and sexuality in contemporary New Zealand fiction* (to be published in 2012).

2 Takatāpui marks a culturally and historically sensitive, empowering Māori-derived analytical category firmly situated in pre-colonial Māori culture and experience. Largely forgotten and suppressed in the course of New Zealand colonialism, takatāpui identities have only recently been retrieved from oblivion first and foremost by Māori lesbian feminist scholar, activist, and writer Ngahua Te Awēkotuku. Originally referring to an 'intimate companion of the same sex', contemporary takatāpui identity encompasses all non-heterosexual forms of Māori sexuality such as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, and provides Māori with a means to express their cultural and sexual affiliations simultaneously (for more information see Aspin 2002, 2005; Aspin & Hutchings 2007; Murray, 2003; Rua'ine, 2007; Tremaine, 2008; Wall, 2007).

3 Complementing Nelson Goodman's constructivist philosophy of worldmaking as delineated in his seminal study *Ways of worldmaking* (1978) with a number of disciplinary perspectives, literary and cultural approaches, and new questions, Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning (2010) posit 'narratives as ways of worldmaking' (p. 6).

4 In this article we follow the assumptions of constructivist scholars like Emiel Martens (2007), who rightly argues that neither is there a single, objective reality, nor can representation be reality itself. While fiction might reference and affect extra-textual reality, representation and reality are not congruent. Although literature depends on reality to create imaginary worlds, narrative texts do not simply reiterate reality but creatively implement it in a way that potentially and actively re-enacts upon reality in the reception process. Representations draw on reality to different extents and have the power 'to define, to order, to transform, to refer to and to make sense of the real' (ibid, p. 56). However, reality itself is also highly dependent on representations. While 'reality exists outside of texts, discourses and images, [it] has no "viability", that is, no meaning or domain, without the subjective realities of representation' (ibid, p. 51). Against this background, *The uncle's story* marks a Māori representation of (amongst others) fictionalised and narrativised Māori women's identities.

5 The notion of intersectionality was coined in the U.S. in 1989 by Law Studies professor Kimberlé Crenshaw and 'intended to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of women of colour fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse' (Davis, 2008, p. 68). In Crenshaw's 'intersectional analysis', interrelations of gender and race not only produced a specific vulnerability to sexual violence but black women were further exposed as being marginalized in both feminist and anti-racist discourses. Although these issues were hardly new in U.S. feminist debates (i.e. Black feminists and U.S. Third World feminist scholars), intersectionality emerged as a convenient concept suited to dealing with the minimum standard of 'race, class, gender' and some of U.S. feminism's most pressing concerns. Over the last two decades, the concept of intersectionality has not only been implemented in various disciplines such as sociology, political studies, and the study of literature and culture, but has also made its way to academic communities outside of the U.S.

6 As a collective of white women situated within German academia and culture, 'we' are aware of our position as 'cultural outsiders' in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand identity politics and cultural negotiations. Although some of us have conducted research on New Zealand identities for more than five years, we acknowledge that our knowledge is necessarily partial and situated within our own identity positions. Therefore, our interpretation marks one possible instead of the only interpretation of the topics in question. At this point we would like to thank the editorial board and the anonymous reviewers of our article for their comprehensive and constructive feedback.

7 In her systematic taxonomy of intersectional approaches, apart from this intercategorical approach (to which McCall aligns herself), McCall also provides the conceptions of anticategorical and intra-categorical complexity. Whereas an anticategorical approach predominantly implements poststructuralist and deconstructivist thinking and rejects the use of identity categories in general, an intra-categorical approach relies on the differences and inequalities within certain identity categories (i.e. among women) and focuses on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups. Its main focus is to reveal the experiential realities of individuals and groups positioned at specific intersections of oppression. An intracategorical intersectional analysis of the relationships among these women characters would provide further valuable insights into notions of female empowerment and community. These aspects could be a starting point for further analysis of Ihimaera's novel.

8 Although we will implement and use identity categories such as Māori, Pākehā, woman, man, homo- and heterosexuality in the following article, we do not understand them as fixed entities with an essential core. Instead of fashioning these identities as homogeneous and monolithic, we will consecutively position them in their interrelations with further identity constructions and hence, destabilise them to some extent.

9 Existing literary criticism of Witi Ihimaera's *The uncle's story* has largely focused on the Māori masculinities staged in the novel; the two gay protagonists Sam and Michael and their identity struggles (i.e. Otto Heim in his review *Wrestling with the patriarch*, 2001; see also Bourke, 2001; Prentice, 2005). Patrick Evans (2007, 2006) has discussed Ihimaera's recent cultural production in the context of (male) gay writing and emancipation, 'Pākehā-style biculturalism' and a literature of tino rangatiratanga focusing largely on Ihimaera's first novel of 'gay kaupapa', *Nights in the gardens of Spain* (1995). Michelle Keown's (2007) rather brief discussion of *The uncle's story* has largely centred on issues of masculine bravery, war and male identity crisis. Keown mentions that '[t]he novel explores in detail the prejudice against homosexuality (and lesbianism) as a perceived threat to the continuation of family whakapapa (genealogies) in Māori society' (p. 206) but does not provide for a detailed analysis of the text. Further criticism has examined the novel's fictional representation of the gay male protagonists' coming out narratives that 'capture the complexity and nuance of coming-out experiences in a way that expressivist accounts of actual coming-out stories may obliterate or obscure' (Tawake, 2006, p. 373). Although some criticism has accounted for various identity categories, none has explicitly implemented intersectional theorising, and if critics have commented on the female gender at all it has largely focused on the lesbian Māori character of Roimata. In *The ship of dreams: Masculinity in contemporary New Zealand fiction* (2008), Alistair Fox has discussed the novel in terms of inter-generational conflict and the 'Māori new man' as well as notions of sexuality, masculinity and indigenous identity. While Dieter Riemenschneider (2000/2001) has stated that the narrative, representing the tense relation of handed-down cultural values such as the warrior tradition and gayness, is 'located at the intersection of ethnicity and gender and quite generally of the global and the local' (ibid, p. 149), he has not discussed intersectional theorizing and has rendered female characters a 'related side-issue'. Like Riemenschneider, Michaela Moura-Koçoğlu (2009) has recently discussed the novel's negotiation of personal (homosexual) indigenous concerns in the context of 'glocalisation' and tribalism. While Moura-Koçoğlu has argued that the main characters construct an idiosyncratic or hybrid identity that blurs traditional boundaries and enables them to counter their 'double marginalisation', this article theorises the specific Māori solution to combine cultural and gender identification not in terms of a cumulative model, but in terms of an inter-categorical intersectional analysis.

10 In our article we follow the view that the 'double spiral is a traditional Māori symbol, fundamental to the belief that change and renewal do not imply a total rejection of the past but spring from it' (Markmann, 1996, p. 174).

11 The father figures in Ihimaera's novel have repeatedly been interpreted as Māori patriarchs, a notion that is strongly rejected by Brendan Hokowhitu (2008). Hokowhitu 'deconstructs the invention, authentication, and re-authentication of "traditional" Maori patriarchy' (p. 115) by arguing that patriarchy is a colonial invention.

12 Apart from a temporal dimension, a spatial dimension of the spiral can be identified. In a different context, Elizabeth M. DeLoughery has noted that 'the spiral is a trope that symbolizes dynamic interrelation between the temporal and the spatial' (2007, p. 162). *The uncle's story* constantly spirals in and out of different places all over the world and tribal, national, and global levels play an important role. For a detailed discussion of tribal, national and global intricacies, see Riemenschneider (2000/2001) and Moura-Koçoğlu (2009).

13 Spiral time is also stressed by Māori poet Robert Sullivan (2005) as a key concept in Māori literature as he holds that 'Polynesian writers – the narrators of the poems and stories recorded in English, and the parallel strand of writers in indigenous languages – have created literatures that accommodate multiple times and spaces' (p. 13).

14 For an elaborate, comprehensive discussion of the concept of takatāpui, see the recent collection *Sexuality and the stories of indigenous people* (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007).

15 We are aware of the fact that the term Pākehā has been discussed controversially within New Zealand academia. While Pākehā have been defined as '[w]hite New Zealand citizens who preserve and maintain Pākehā ways of life found only in this country' (White, 2007, p. 13), Ihimaera, in the contexts discussed, frequently implements a broader understanding of the term, including Western identity positions in general.

16 The conception of a 'double colonisation' draws on an additive notion, whereby the allocation to a sexual minority is added to that of an ethnic minority and thus leads to further discrimination. In contrast, the intersectional approach adopted in this article assumes that discrimination with regard to ethnicity as well as sexuality is a result of the intersection of both categories and hence a discrete form of discrimination. This understanding also applies to any other identity combination.

17 Whereas Amiria extends the classical notion of marriage by aligning it to her relationship with her twin brother, marriage and weddings in the narrative also function as crucial sites where differences occur and become visible. Whereas informal relationships between individuals (disregarding of their sexual orientation) are less problematic for being rather less obvious, the official institution of marriage drastically exposes sexual desire by institutionalizing it before the family, the Church and the law. For this reason, marriage and weddings mark a context where conflicts about sexualities avenge as particularly serious.

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