

'The samenesses and the differences': Representations of Māori femininities and sexualities in Ngahuia Te Awekotuku's short story collections *Tahuri* (1989) and *Ruahine – Mythic women* (2003)

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Abstract

While Ngahuia Te Awekotuku holds a central position in Māori feminist activism, she has also staged a wide range of femininities and sexualities in her fictional oeuvre. Her short story collections *Tahuri* (1993 [1989]) and *Ruahine – Mythic women* (2003) in particular offer diverse perspectives on Māori women. Whereas *Tahuri* focuses on the eponymous lesbian Māori character, *Ruahine* provides an innovative retelling of mythological Māori women.

How does Te Awekotuku's conception of Māori femininities in the twenty-first century differ from her previous notions of gender? Is there a perceivable development of such diverse manifestations of femininities? And if so, how is this shift influenced by Māori mythology? Focusing on a comparative approach towards Te Awekotuku's works, this article will provide an analysis of the different (but sometimes similar) representations of female images in her short stories. Thereby, we will consider not only concepts of gender and sexuality, but the impact of Māori culture and traditions on the portrayal of Te Awekotuku's female protagonists.

Keywords

Femininity, Māori lesbians, female spaces, Māori literature and culture, female empowerment, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, male gaze, woman-sight

Introduction

Ngahuia Te Awekotuku is widely known as one of the most influential figures in Māori lesbian feminist activism. She is a versatile author of both fictional and non-fictional works, which are highly influenced by her socialisation as 'activist, curator, and professor' (New Zealand Book Council, 2011).

It is often said that being Maori and feminist must be a contradiction; that feminism is some imported pakeha idea about being female and being put down for being female, that it has no place in the Maori world, that it imposes a foreign way of seeing, and of being. I disagree, because feminism is what we make it; it's a matter of how we define it for ourselves, in terms of our own oppression as women. And no one can deny that in the last two centuries Maori women have lost, or been deprived of, economic, social, political and spiritual power; and this loss, this erosion of power – or mana – or authority, invites a feminist analysis, or feminist view, of what has happened (Te Awekotuku, 1991, p. 10).

It is this programmatic framework which characterises the uniqueness of her narratives. Her short-story collections, as well as her non-fictional works, have had a major impact on today's status of Māori women in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Within her narratives, a large and complex range of femininities and female images can be explored: 'They looked at each other. Sat back, slightly away from each other, and they gazed and gaped, at the ways they were so different, and yet so much the same' (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 91). These 'samenesses and differences' (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 92) will be the focus of the following comparative analysis of her two short story collections *Tahuri* and *Ruahine* – investigating the various portrayals of Māori women in the context of four different motifs. Therefore, an exemplary choice of stories was taken, selecting the narratives that included the

most condensed and powerful manifestations of the respective motifs. Nevertheless, all stories within the collections mirror Te Awekotuku's efforts in terms of constituting a framework of modern feminist Māori literature.

The article will firstly centre upon the different sexualities of Te Awekotuku's protagonists, displaying the multiplicity of both hetero- and homosexualities. Subsequently, the protagonists' family and amity ties will be analysed in respect to their impact on the main characters and their life worlds. Thirdly, notions of female strength will be examined in terms of their individual characteristics and their role within fictional accounts of Māori culture. Finally, the interrelatedness between Te Awekotuku's female heroines and their spatial surroundings will be connected with Māori understandings of space.

From the 'male gaze' towards 'woman-sight'

Outspoken about gender roles, homosexuality and Māori cultural frameworks since the early 1970s, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku has critiqued the colonial assumptions of indigenous peoples as male with woman fulfilling a rather decorative or supportive function. In a 2004 speech, she recalls that early settler colonisers

have adapted, if they use the phrase at all, the nineteenth century notion that tangata no longer means person or human, but means only this – man. The father, the leader, the cornerstone of the family, the patriarch of the microcosm. With woman as his handmaiden. There can be nothing, no one, in between (Te Awekotuku, 2004)¹.

With these accounts, the author successfully reverts not only such a masculinist (and ultimately heteronormative) stance of Māori culture but the 'male gaze' of the coloniser by relegating the position of the viewing subject to her female, lesbian Māori woman protagonists. This way, men, if they play a part in the narratives at all, are placed in a rather uncomfortable position, being 'caught in the other's gaze' (López, 2005, p. 15).

Traditionally, the male gaze has meant that 'men look at and objectify women' (Bannister, 2005)². This subsequently entailed that '[t]he masculine body [was] not available "to-be-looked-at" in the same way as the female, because of the possibility of arousing or becoming the object of male homosexual desire' (ibid.). Such powerful and profoundly ideological masculine iconography is rejected in *Tahuri* and *Ruahine* as Te Awekotuku implements Māori women as not only returning the gaze of a masculine (and often white) system of authority but substituting it. As 'the very power of naming, the attributes of sight, insight and intellect were taken to be male prerogatives' (Olsson, 1989, p. 3), Te Awekotuku seems to implement what Suzan Olsson has called 'woman-sight', a woman's sight, insight and intellect, as an attempt at decolonising language, breaking away from the 'male gaze' and an alternative to the dominant realist 'patriarchal cultural mode' in New Zealand writing. Female narratives, Olsson claims, increasingly move beyond the depiction of 'woman as victim' and break the tradition of women's voices as a gap or silence by rewriting and revising the past and the present. This way, Te Awekotuku 'subverts social construction of women merely as sex-objects within the male gaze' (Stachurski, 2009, pp. 79-80), instead positioning her lesbian Māori reflector-protagonists as manifestations of self-determination or tino rangatiratanga, able to 'gaze' and 'voice' on their own terms and conditions and against a firm background of Māori tradition and mythology³.

To some extent, *Tahuri* and her companions therefore avenge what Cathie Dunsford has described as 'survivors' of (post)colonial systems. Instead of echoing suppressed (indigenous) women's voices, her fiction displays '[n]o longer women's bodies through "the male gaze" - but women's bodies that revealed hidden truths' (Dunsford, 1993, p. 3). Dunsford sees such literary practice of women as the *subjects* defining the gaze and not the (sexual or exotic)

object of artistic creativity as a strong positioning that intimidates men and empowers women as female and indigenous bodies, whose ‘voices take on a radical new dimension’ (Dunsford, 1993, p. 3). Such affirmative action sits well with Te Awēkotuku’s political programmatic and counters the threat of possible misrepresentation from the radical place of Māori lesbians. Questioning whose gaze views the body of the woman, she draws out the beauty of the female, lesbian Māori experience from the inside out, not from the outside looking in, and literally and symbolically frees Māori women from both the experience of the male and the Pākehā gaze.

Representations of Māori femininities and sexualities

In the following section Te Awēkotuku’s images of women in her work will be analysed in respect to various determinants. With *Tahuri* comprising a series of stories about ‘coming to terms with being a young Māori lesbian in a traditional village environment, being a young Māori woman with a heap of hassles, being a little Māori girl who is loved by her kuia’ (Te Awēkotuku, 1989, p. 19), the story’s relevance to our approach becomes palpable⁴. *Ruahine*, in contrast to that, is a ‘reworking of Māori tales of mythic women’ (Lawn, 2011) and uses the mythicity of historical Māori women⁵ – thereby clearly differing from *Tahuri*. The long hiatus between Te Awēkotuku’s publications and the variation of their content offer a great variety of possible interpretations. The different sketches of women in both the collections of stories in *Tahuri* and *Ruahine* allow the reader to compare and contrast, as well as consider the development of Te Awēkotuku’s perception of women. She herself links her two narratives by stating that ‘Tahuri has some friends now’ (Te Awēkotuku, 2007, p. 142). Te Awēkotuku manages to connect her works not only content-wise, but also by equipping her protagonists with resembling traits of character. But how far are the women in *Ruahine* really related to the protagonist of Te Awēkotuku’s first publication? Are they shaped in the likeness of Tahuri, or are they in fact the embodiment of Tahuri’s desires? By analysing the effects and consequences of the familial and amicable bonds between the characters in *Ruahine* and *Tahuri* and opposing these to the different portrayals of sexuality within the narratives, this posing of a question will be analysed and answered.

Family and female bonds

In her treatise ‘Weaving the Wahine Takatāpui: Mirimiri and Tahuri’, Michelle Elleray states

[j]ust as Māori must move between the languages, cultural systems and social categories of both the Māori community and the wider, pākehā-dominated New Zealand community, so too the Māori who is lesbian, gay or transgendered moves between indigenous formulations of sexuality and the Western-oriented queer community (2004, p. 178).

The category ‘Māori lesbian’ serves as an indicator for two important conditions. On the one hand, the term inhabits ‘two separate genealogies, since “lesbian” is a Western term, implicated in Western history and politics’ (Elleray, 2004, p. 175); in other words a Western concept that contradicts the cultural history of being Māori. On the other hand, it is the illustration of denial experienced by Māori lesbians within their native community (Elleray, 2004, p. 177). Since Māori language does not have a word for lesbian, but only for male homosexuals, Māori activist Te Awēkotuku demands to be called ‘wahine takatāpui’ (Elleray, 2004, p. 177). Takatāpui, of which the pre-colonial meaning was ‘close companion of the same sex’ (Reed, 1964, p. 73), has been expanded to describe an ‘inclusive identity, [which] acknowledges that non-heterosexual Māori have cultural validity’ (Wall, 2007, p. 50), and is thus an umbrella term for all kinds of identities differing from heteronormativity. Wahine, which means ‘wife’ or ‘woman’ (Reed, 1964, p. 89), would then signal the feminine part of being takatāpui. This

linguistic phenomenon can easily be assigned to the struggle with sexual identity the protagonist of Te Awekotuku's eponymous first short-story collection Tahuri has to face.

The different stories give an insight into the life of the young Māori girl Tahuri, who grows up in very traditional surroundings. Within her family there is neither a representation of homosexuality as such, nor anything differing from heteronormativity. Her friends and cousins all pursue heterosexual relationships, which result in Tahuri being a 'misfit'. The discrepancy between her cultural conscientiousness and her sexuality stands for a major conflict which leaves her contradicted within herself. Through her actions and her fondness for knitting, weaving, cooking and traditional dances and music (Te Awekotuku, 1993, pp. 81-84) we learn about her awareness of tradition and her sense of family. She feels a certain urge to prove herself within her community as a Māori – a fact that becomes obvious by her stating that the pā is her home ground, her place (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 83). When she meets Mirimiri – a member of a visiting Māori music group – she encounters her personified opposite. Mirimiri maintains a certainly intentional casualness when speaking about her homosexuality – a circumstance that might be explained by her aunt being lesbian, too (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 90). Although Mirimiri is not allowed to talk about her aunt's sexual orientation outside the family (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 90), the affectionate gestures Mirimiri's aunt exchanges with another woman towards the beginning of the story (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 79), are revealing. Besides that, they are also witnessed by Tahuri, who is struck by the image of 'the big woman and the little one' (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p.80), picturing herself and Mirimiri in the same manner. She perceives the tender intimacy between the two Māori women in an equally tender manner – she beholds their bonding with a female sight. Thus, Tahuri's being the focaliser⁶ in this very scene is not only of importance on a narratological level, but also from a gender perspective. At this early stage of the short story 'Mirimiri', the reader is able to understand and interpret Tahuri's feelings for these women.

It is exactly this attitude that enables Mirimiri to maintain a certain insouciance regarding her sexuality. To better capture this circumstance, Michelle Elleray introduces the concept of 'whakapapa' (2004, p. 178). Whakapapa is understood 'as a list of the familial links tying an individual to his or her ancestors' (Elleray, 2004, p. 179). Customarily, homosexuality would 'figure as a terminal disruption' (ibid.) of this tie, but, in Mirimiri's case, she is intrinsically embracing her whakapapa, by linking herself to her aunt. Put another way, Mirimiri and her aunt start their own branch within their family's whakapapa.

For Tahuri, the admission of being gay is of more serious consequence than for Mirimiri. Not intending to trivialise the difficulty of Mirimiri's situation, the ramifications of a possible coming out might be harder for Tahuri. The complexity of her conflict also becomes apparent if one places Tahuri's sexuality in relation to her whakapapa. The short story does not provide explicit information about sexual peculiarities within her family and thereby implies that there are no gay or lesbian ancestors to Tahuri. Admitting her homosexuality and thereby preventing herself from starting a family and having children would result in her breaking the line of her family's whakapapa. Although she feels connected to her native Māori heritage, the identification with her cultural background is bound to be obstructed by her lesbian identity.

Within Te Awekotuku's second short story collection, *Ruahine*, the complexity of family duties and ties is of even greater extent. Annie Mikaere argues that:

It is often assumed that, according to tikanga Māori, leadership was primarily the domain of men and that men in Māori society exercised power over women. However, evidence abounds which refutes the notion that traditional Māori society attached greater significance to male roles than to female roles (Mikaere, 1994, p. 1).

Taking this statement as a starting point for the following analysis, Te Awekotuku's intention in retelling Māori mythology is emphasised. By giving the mythological women of her ancestry a fictional voice, she enables the reader to discover a whole new perspective on Māori culture. The reader not only learns about the feelings of the protagonists, but sees everything through their eyes, is able to observe everything by means of woman-sight – Māori women like Wairaka and Huritini become the focaliser of their stories. They dominate over what the reader sees and learns about their lives. By vesting her protagonists with the power to retell Māori mythology from their perspective, Te Awekotuku tries to introduce these female characters as role models for Māori women within contemporary society. She animates Māori mythology and thereby utilises the powerfulness of the *female* personae as a metaphor for the power every Māori woman merits and should obtain. Moreover, Jenny Lee states that 'storytelling has always been one of the key ways knowledge was sustained and protected within Indigenous communities. Reclaiming story-telling and retelling our traditional stories is to engage in one form of decolonization' (Lee, 2009, p. 2).

Thus, Te Awekotuku's retelling can be defined as an act of emancipation from the foreign influences Māori culture was exposed to, as well as an emancipation of Māori women from their allegedly male-ruled family ties.

Throughout the retold stories, the influence of familial duties and family-imposed diligence on the mythological characters is evident. In "Whakatāne" Te Awekotuku describes the consequences of patriarchal pressure for the story's protagonist:

[Wairaka] was not familiar with men, but recognised that she had to marry and have children. She noticed a good-looking visitor, and advised Toroa one night that the man of her choice would be marked the following morning. Maiurenuī, one of the visitor's companions, overheard the conversation and contrived to be in the visitor's sleeping place. He deceived Wairaka in the darkness, and she marked the wrong man. She was deeply humiliated, but confined by her word to her father (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 53).

This passage emphasises how she is torn by her traditional duties and striving for another life beyond the boundaries of her tribe's expectations. This leads to a dilemma between her inner wishes and her conscientiousness regarding her cultural environment. Wairaka, who is a 'woman of extraordinary courage and initiative' (ibid.), is in love with her kinswoman, Muriwai. The two share most of their lives with each other. Abandoned by Muriwai, who eventually decides to marry a man and have a family of her own, Wairaka, aching for Muriwai, ultimately bows to her father's demands. He 'leaned on her, pressured her, to make the new land truly theirs, to claim all of its bounty, they needed children. She had to do her share' (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 65). But, as suggested by the aforementioned passage, the man Wairaka chooses will not be the man she marries. After ending the childless marriage to Maiurenuī, Wairaka gives birth to a son from Te Rangikitua, the only man she was ever attracted to. Having fulfilled her duty, she soon realises that being a mother is not for her. So, as her man takes their son, Wairaka, too, goes on a journey – a journey to find herself and her place in life. Since she is not willing to identify with her traditionally assigned role within the community as a mother, she is constantly defending her personal freedom as a woman and individual human being:

[Wairaka] resolved to find one for herself. A cave. Or a mountain, because mountains had muscle. There had to be one out there, waiting. Just for her, a mountain. And she found it, her mountain. She noticed it smiling at her, as the waka nosed to the shore. her mountain. Green rising high, between two seas. Owairaka (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 72).

The location of Wairaka's eponymous mountain gives some indication of her positioning with-

in her family. She deliberately chooses a place between two seas – between the two conceptions of herself. On the one hand, she feels an urge to fulfill her father’s demands to extend their family and ensure their properties, but on the other hand, she has to follow her own aspirations in life – to live freely and in a place of her choice, with the partner of her choosing, regardless of their sex.

In contrast to the ending of “Whakatāne”, the story of “Huritini” closes in a different manner. Huritini, who is forced into a marriage with a noticeably older kinsman, emancipates herself from her abusive husband by choosing to commit suicide (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p.103). Unwilling to endure the violence within this arranged marriage, she drowns herself in the lake that has always been her home, seeing death as a last resort to emancipate herself from her torments. Here, the daughter sacrifices her desire to live with a woman – namely Hieke, a carver who has lived with her family for a while – to her father’s wishes. Huritini’s father thwarts his daughter’s will and thereby ultimately drives her to suicide.

Te Awekotuku intentionally retells this version of the story around Huritini, admitting at the very beginning that there are several legends involving her protagonist:

Some claim she died of unrequited love; others say that she was escaping from an arranged marriage to an abusive but powerful chief. [...] Others believe that Huritini left her greenstone ornament beside that spring, telling her mother of her fate. But did that really happen? (p. 89)

She chooses to rewrite the most tragic version of the myth around her protagonist, to reinforce its impact and to underline the danger of patriarchal abuse within a family.

Sexuality

Displays of sexuality are a recurring motif within Ngahua Te Awekotuku’s short story collections. The author exerts a conspicuous influence on the reader’s impression of the narrative’s depiction of sexual encounters by effectively deploying different exchanges of focalising authorities. Throughout the different stories, the author shows the impact of both positive and negative sexual relations by alternating between excruciating explicitness and sensitive detachment to the sexual acts, depending on the story’s focaliser and elucidating the crucial differences between the male gaze and woman-sight.

Te Awekotuku’s short-story collection *Tahuri*, as mentioned above, tells the story of a young Māori girl experiencing her lesbian orientation through a collection of very different short stories. The very first explicit sex scene within the narrative, though, is the portrayal of a heterosexual act. Tahuri observes her cousin’s encounter with her secret boyfriend:

From the dark narrow crack at the bottom, to the huge bulk across the top; and down the roped and corded hardness of his flanks, the high ridged hollow of his spine. [...] Wow, she thought, pleased with herself. What a neat back. I’d love to have a back like that one day, and feel someone’s fingertips playing with my muscles. That’s what I want. Big muscles and a back like that and a girlfriend, too. Just like that, that’s what I want. To be like him. Yeah. To be like Heke (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 29).

With the heterosexual act being perceived through the eyes of the young lesbian girl, who functions as a focaliser in this scene, this sexual encounter is transformed into an epitome of lesbian desire. Choosing the young protagonist as the spectator can, furthermore, be seen as an act of empowerment, focusing on the female perspective of sexuality, because through her subjective and selective eyes, the reader experiences not only a somehow ‘homosexualised’ image, but more generally a woman’s point of view or woman-sight. It is through the abovementioned tenderness and sensibility that Tahuri appreciates the beauty of a heterosexual act and a male person, although her lesbianism should conflict with this sentiment. Thus, she is not impressed by her cousin’s lean and feminine figure, but by the bulkiness of her partner.

Tahuri's desire to be like Heke is soon proven to be unobtainable, as she is described as short and petite (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 89); her preference for masculine bodies is then projected to her female partners. Hence the depiction of Mirimiri's body is highly interesting, picturing her as a tall and muscular woman with both very strong and very soft features – a blending of Tahuri's wishes to be with women and her interest in male physique (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 91). The encounter with her, though, is as short as Tahuri's previous acquaintances with women. She meets girls, spends a seemingly meaningful night with them and is then left behind, leaving her to fantasise about her ideal woman.

The abovementioned display of heterosexuality is the only consensual sex act between man and woman throughout the collection of short-stories – a peculiar fact, bringing up the question as to whether Te Awekotuku deliberately influences the readers' attitudes towards the male characters within the stories. Accordingly, before Tahuri has the chance to experience her own sexuality, she is raped by a friend of her brother:

[H]e furiously slammed himself somewhere against her hip bone. She thrashed and shrieked, he growled, kept hitting her head, as she clawed at his ears and neck and hair. Pushing down, thrusting hard. With a gasp, he jerked fiercely, quickly, sighed, then fell back, pushing her on to the floor. Globes of white goo oozed down her thighs, messed thickly in her bruised, sticky hairs... (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 41).

The unflinching explicitness of this scene is highly disturbing, maximising its powerful impact. This effect is interestingly not achieved through focalisation, revealing Tahuri's feelings to the reader, but through an external perspective. The reader is keeping the protagonist's distance and is yet confronted with Tahuri's horror at a fearful pace. It is also the language that creates the horrifying image of this abuse. The high density of adverbs accompanying verbs of abrupt movement engenders an intense perception of the velocity and abomination of the rape. The staccato syntax, stringing together fragments of cruelty, increases this impact on the reader.

In contrast to this stands the tender and passionate night Tahuri spends with Mirimiri:

They looked at each other. Sat back, slightly away from each other, and they gazed and gaped, at the ways they were so different, and yet so much the same. [...] Their bodies fitted together. Their mouths met, softly moist and flowering open, licking and leafing delicately (Te Awekotuku, 1993, pp. 91-92).

The affection the two girls share for each other is shown in a forthright, yet respectful manner, contrasting Tahuri's earlier experiences and showing that she somehow escaped the horror and is able to candidly be with a partner. The language used is more gentle and empathetic than in the passage above – reflecting the affection the two girls share for one another and contrasting the atrocity of the rape and intensifying its horror. The sensuality of the language and the narrator's sight of the girls' encounter reminds the reader of Tahuri's affection towards Mirimiri's aunt and her partner, only on a different level. The way Te Awekotuku presents her protagonists' sexual explorations shows the great significance of woman-sight to the events, maybe even pointing out that it is 'a woman defining the gaze' (Dunsford, 1993, p. 12), because it is not the exploitation of a mere avidity, but the witnessing of female desire.

In Te Awekotuku's later work *Ruahine*, the author again displays the power relations between men and women through explicit and shocking portrayals of sexual acts of violence, as in the short story "Huritini":

It was like sticking himself between the strakes of his canoe. He forced her onto her front. Took her like the dogs down at the beach, forcing a fist beneath her belly. Shoved himself in, jerked, grunted, hauled at her hair, scraping it taut from her head. Finished. And rolled off, sated. "That's all a woman is for," he sniffed at her in the dark (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 102).

The intransigent narrative style is uncompromisingly distinct, exceeding the impact of the analogous passage from her earlier work. For Te Awekotuku is giving the violator a voice, she

is intensifying the reader's abomination towards him. Huritini is treated like an animal, dehumanising her in a violent manner. Also the violator himself, as well as his actions, are described by means of animal-like vocabulary: 'jerked, grunted, hauled' (ibid.), thereby reinforcing his inhuman demeanour. Another peculiarity of this passage is the male entity of focalisation. As mentioned above, the reader experiences the rape through the eyes of the man. It is his male gaze that promotes the repulsive reaction of the reader. Te Awekotuku skillfully deploys narratological devices to poignantly illustrate the difference between the male and female gaze. Cathie Dunsford states that 'there are some universal experiences women share and being the object of the male gaze is one of them' (Dunsford, 1993, p. 13). Thus, Te Awekotuku's portrayal of rape can be seen as a crass corroboration of this shocking conjuncture – a stark way of speaking up to the male mannerism of instrumentalising female bodies.

The passage, which was taken from "Huritini", ultimately precedes the protagonist's suicide – decisively connecting the two events with one another. While Tahuri, Te Awekotuku's heroine of the first collection, is able to experience love after the horror of her rape, this change of conditions is denied Huritini. Her love for Hieke, the young female carver, which is one of the two explicit portrayals of lesbian sexuality within the short-story collection, is narrated retrospectively, giving her hope during the wedding procession to her later husband, enabling her to remember the positive emotions connected to that night.

Wairaka, another female protagonist of *Ruahine* who has previously been mentioned, somehow manages to overcome the horror of her rape, thereby clearly contrasting with the myth around Huritini. As stated above, she emancipates herself and escapes from the clutches of her family, deciding to live the life of her choice, detached from the limitations of her fictional environment. With her not only having the spirit of a fighter, but also the appearance (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 58), she is in a way the incarnation of Tahuri's ideal woman – linking again the two narratives by Te Awekotuku.

The spectrum of female lives and destinies portrayed in Te Awekotuku's later work, from suicides to absolute empowerment, from heterosexual love to acts of violence, imply a great spectrum of addressees. The circumstance, that all these women are part of Māori mythology, opens up a great number of readings. The author gives the women of her cultural ancestry a voice; she shows their emotions. But how can she provide such a different perspective on well-known herstories?

Alongside 'race', the author's sexual identity and orientation also became an important determinant in deciding who wrote what. While their heterosexual counterparts recovered the stories of first-wave feminists who fought to raise the age of heterosexual consent, lesbian writers offered readers a parallel history' (Daley, 2005, p. 49).

Her status within the Aotearoa New Zealand lesbian activist community gives Te Awekotuku a different point of view to her cultural background. She breathes life into the heroines of her history, her mythology, showing aspects that may not have occurred to readers before. She uses the power and strength of mythological Māori women as a metaphor for strong women in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, because if the fighting women in *Ruahine* can be ideal women to *Tahuri*, why shouldn't they be icons for every Māori woman?

Female strength

Te Awekotuku's short stories further include illustrations of female strength, which can be separated into representations of physical strength and mental strength. Tahuri's depictions of her ideal self-image, in particular, are worth looking at due to the perpetual inclusion of physical power. When she watches her cousin Cassina having sexual intercourse with a boy, Tahuri comes up with a vision of her perfect body in the course of the story "It Looks Pretty Dopey to

Me". She grounds her thoughts on the partner of her cousin, Heke, and dreams of having muscles and a back like him (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 29). The repetitive mention of muscles as a major element of Tahuri's reflection reveals her wish of being physically strong. As mentioned above, it is interesting that her description is not based on the observation of a female body but of a *male* body. This makes her wish even stronger, because she decides to take the most clearly recognizable example of strong physicality in order to shape the mental picture of her ideal body. A similar explication of Tahuri's desires is to be found in the story "Watching the Big Girls":

Ben sometimes came in too, by herself. Bennie was special – she was different, and she was kind, too. ... She never looked quite right, though; her feet looked too big for her shoes, and her shoulders were as wide as Heke's...Her clothes weren't very interesting either; really dry and colourless – purple shirt, black jerkin and grey pleated skirt, which hung half-way down her densely muscled, rocklike calves...Tahuri decided that Bennie would've made a really handsome boy...Bennie'd be luscious too...if she really tried, thought Tahuri (Te Awekotuku, 1993, pp. 61-62).

Compared to the previous passage, Tahuri's second description comprises the same aspects and enhances the outline of her vision, although she is inspired by a female character in this case. It is noticeable that she refers to the specific feature of muscles and Heke as a model for her own ideal for a second time. Tahuri introduces the most important element of strength relating to a natural image. Bennie's 'rocklike calves' (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 62) are striking, because they make the reader visually shape these. By equating Bennie's calves with rocks, their extraordinary condition and visible energy is underlined. Furthermore, Tahuri points to Bennie's 'dry and colourless' (ibid.) clothes, which shows that they are not worth looking at from her point of view. Using these words and imagery, the attention is channelled towards Bennie's outer appearance and finally Tahuri's own focus – gazing at Bennie due to her physical strength – becomes supported. Tahuri's dreams are transferred into reality when she meets Mirimiri in the eponymous short story:

[She] was big; football shoulders and strong neck, and dusky shadows in her throat, dipping in to full breasts that sat up high and round, and jiggled slightly when she moved her arms. One was draped across her chest, covering its points, the elbow resting on her puku, a hard bed of muscle (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 91).

Mirimiri represents Tahuri's visions. When looking at her, Tahuri vividly sees her ideal image come true. This way, physical strength as one important element of Tahuri's perfect self-image is underlined. The abovementioned passages share one essential feature, as the respective characters and their bodily features are described by Tahuri. Hence these serve as examples of 'woman-sight', in which the female protagonist is the only perceiving entity. This means that Tahuri's concentration on aspects concerning strength solely eventuates from her point of view. This way, Te Awekotuku enables her protagonist to emancipate herself from the male gaze by perceiving the world in her very own manner, with literally strong eyes.

When examining the women in *Ruahine*, strength seems to play an even more crucial role than in *Tahuri*. The most obvious examples of physical power are Muriwai and Wairaka, who draw out a canoe from the water (Te Awekotuku, 2003, pp. 53-72). Beyond that, Kurungaituku, who is introduced as being 'huge, with long, strong legs and arms that swept across the sky like vast wings, trailing soft, glossy feathers' (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 75), embodies a physically strong woman character. In her case, the level of mental strength also comes into play. She has to endure the death of her companions, who are killed by Hatupatu (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 79). Instead of giving up, Kurungaituku manages this situation and is able to maintain her emotional stability:

Her anger was snarling, immense, but she contained it, controlled it, turned it into shafts of speed that glittered through her bloodstream, spiking her feathers, sharpening her talons, stretching her jaw. Her grief was thin and pointed and she directed it, beaming a long, fine light from behind her tear-streaked eyeballs (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 80).

In the end, she ‘tore out his tongue. Crushed his back teeth to a pale, ashy powder...Silenced his voice. Forever’ (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 85). Kurungaituku’s reaction is finally a combination of her physical and mental strength. She is only enabled to use her bodily power because she bears her emotional pain. When looking at the aforementioned passage more closely, it becomes clear that Kurungaituku’s animalistic side comes to the fore when she predominantly applies her physical strength. Words such as ‘snarling...shafts of speed...spiking’ (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p.80) back up this way of reading the text. She completely directs her attention to becoming a bird chasing its prey, thereby incorporating her mental pain. This process builds the platform for the energy she requires in order to take revenge on Hatupatu and to eventually find her inner peace. Her strength is further underlined by her bird’s eye perspective. In this case, Kurungaituku’s female gaze equals power, as she is able to control her prey Hatupatu from above. When searching for possible connecting lines between both short story collections, the portrayals of women in *Ruahine* are directly related to Tahuri’s future images of herself. Tahuri’s visions are equivalent to the depictions of female characters in *Ruahine*. Māori women such as Wairaka, Muriwai, and Kurungaituku can be considered as mythological manifestations of Tahuri’s images.

In all of her narratives, Te Awekotuku (re)tells stories of women and enriches them with elements of physical power and mental strength. In her representations of femininity, the protagonists are equipped with the ability to actively and meaningfully employ their energy. By associating women with these traits, Te Awekotuku establishes a specific perspective on Māori women, which is linked to the history of Aotearoa New Zealand. Due to the country’s colonisation, Māori culture and traditions were influenced by the cultural values of the British colonisers, because ‘when the missionaries and early settlers arrived in Aotearoa, they brought with them their culturally specific understandings of the role and status of women’ (Mikaere, 1994). As a consequence, the ‘re-telling of Māori cosmology led to a shift in emphasis, away from the powerful female influence in the stories and towards the male characters’ (ibid.). Hence, Te Awekotuku’s short stories introduce a new way of perceiving Māori culture, because her rewritings literally empower women and actively demonstrate how female strength can be included in Māori narratives. Thereby, perception becomes emphasised due to the fact that the author actively and strategically implements women’s points of view. Her stories offer a decolonised ‘woman-sight’, which directly transports the Māori women’s life-worlds to the readers without being disturbed or transformed by an alien perspective.

Further, Te Awekotuku’s stories, which match the long-held Māori understanding that ‘the very survival of the whole was absolutely dependent upon everyone who made it up, and therefore each and every person within the group had his or her own intrinsic value’ (ibid.), are in harmony with the Māori concept of time. ‘They enter the future with their eyes on the past, keeping their ancestors in sight and honouring their achievements while stepping into the future’ (Majid, 2008, p. 117). *Tahuri* and *Ruahine* therefore stand for ‘new stories, describing [Māori] worlds, as new women, new men’ (Morrison, Spivak & Te Awekotuku, 2005, p. 722). By linking past and present, Te Awekotuku eventually leads the way to an innovative fictional conception of individual Māori women and continuously struggles against the marginalisation of female power.

Female spaces

When examining notions of space in Te Awekotuku's short stories, it soon becomes apparent that this dimension carries distinctive meaning as all the female protagonists share a special relation to their surroundings. In the following, space is referred to as 'the fictional space in which a narrative takes place' (Fludernik, 2009, p. 42) and in many of the stories, women inhabit their own individual spaces. In "Mirimiri", Tahuri's very own place is introduced as follows:

She felt like she weight a ton, and she kept hearing Kuikui's voice, telling her she was getting too old for this stuff. Too old and too big...She shifted her right knee, wedged it along the other side of the tree's smooth trunk, balanced her bum on the very slightly swaying branch. If any of the old people saw her, that would be it. No excuses and no mercy...Tahuri hoisted herself up further, into the branches. Bird's eye view, all right... This was *worth* all the risk. And the shame, if she got caught. Or worse still, fell down (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 76).

The passage underlines the significance of the tree in the context of Tahuri's life. It is pointed out that it has been used by Tahuri over a long period of time and that she still enjoys being there. Apart from that, Tahuri is willing to take the risk of being discovered. This means that, by staying in the tree secretly and hidden from the rest of the world, it becomes an even more personal area, from Tahuri's perspective. In this way, she is able to create her individual refuge and her own female environment. This situation means that Tahuri can watch other people while not being seen herself, indicating that Te Awekotuku aims at empowering women's perspectives in her short stories. The spatial arrangement is especially important, as it is Tahuri and not a male person who is gazing at the event from the elevated position of a tree. She is thus offering a woman's sight on what is happening in the beginning of the story. Both sides of Tahuri's thoughts – on the one hand, the delight of being in the tree, on the other hand her fear – are linguistically realised due to the arrangement of the sentences. When reading the text, the reader experiences Tahuri's alternating emotions. In order to design this section more vividly, Te Awekotuku chose to let Tahuri imagine the voice of her Kuikui. For these reasons, the reader textually feels with the protagonist and her concerns become more easily comprehensible.

Besides Tahuri, her female companions also establish their own spaces in the story "After the Game":

The girls sat by the foot pools at Kuirau, stuffed...They relaxed, enjoying the soak, enjoying the big risk they were taking, because the waiariki here was no longer theirs. Not any more – it belonged to the Borough Council, and that was that. If anyone from the Borough Council offices caught them...they'd be in for it, then. But that wasn't likely, on a day like this. With the rain belting down on and off, and the hautonga whistling in from the south. Pakehas like that stayed home all cosy and safe on wet Saturdays, and they drank tea and did their knitting and read books (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 16).

Just like Tahuri, the girls also construct their own place and are not willing to give it up. In contrast to Tahuri's tree, the risk accepted by the girls is much bigger in this case. They are officially banned from going to the pools. Nevertheless, they are not only 'enjoying the soak' (ibid.), they are 'enjoying the big risk they were taking' (ibid.). This anaphoric use of the word 'enjoying' (ibid.) not only emphasises the recreational nature but also the women's attitude towards this place. No one can take away their personal refuge. Even though the pools are officially no longer theirs, the women will always inhabit this space spiritually, which makes them feel good about the risk they are taking. Hence, they still relax there and transfer their emotions into their fictionalised life worlds. In the women's understanding, the pools are a natural component of their Māori identity. They occupy them mentally and being at the pools means fictionally acting out exactly this perspective on what it means to be and feel Māori. In both examples, the fact that these Māori women are actually not allowed to inhabit the respective areas highlights their value. Furthermore, the connection between space and identity

is emphasised. By interpreting the occupation of the hot springs as uniquely Māori under the given circumstances, the girls distance themselves from Pākehā culture and thereby stress their affiliation to the Māori community.

In *Ruahine*, similar spatial structures are established. At the end of the story “Whakatāne”, the protagonist Wairaka, who draws out a canoe from the water with her companion Muriwai (Te Awekotuku, 2003, pp. 53-72), begins to search for her individual place, because Muriwai ‘gave birth to a son ... [and] had moved away’ (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 70):

Muriwai had a cave. Wairaka thought about that. She wanted one too. She resolved to find one for herself. A cave. Or a mountain, because mountains had muscle. There had to be one out there, waiting. Just for her, a mountain. And she found it, her mountain. She noticed it smiling at her, as the waka nosed to the shore. Her mountain. Green rising high, between two seas (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 72).

Being inspired by Muriwai’s cave, Wairaka wants to find her own mountain. The continuous repetition of the word ‘mountain’ (ibid.) underlines how fundamental it is for Wairaka’s life to find her very own space. Furthermore, the passage ‘a cave [...] or a mountain’ (ibid.) linguistically emphasises that the mountain is a kind of substitute for Muriwai’s cave. Of course, the mountain is supposed to be ‘just for her’ (ibid.), but Wairaka still feels a connection to Muriwai by similarly inhabiting her individual place. Nevertheless, Wairaka separates herself from Muriwai by choosing a mountain. Therefore, she conceptually searches for the same kind of refuge, but selects another kind of natural scenery for herself. When looking at the location of the mountain itself, it becomes apparent that it is not as closed and protected as a cave but that it is exposed and open to the sky. Hence, Wairaka changes perspectives and is able to overlook the surrounding landscape from her mountain. This also means that she can literally take a breath of freedom whenever she wishes to do so. Wairaka is able to act out a female indigenous gaze while standing on her mountain and watching the rest of the world. For these reasons, this process expresses her fundamental wish of discovering her own place. Beyond that, it symbolises Wairaka’s living conditions of being on her own and thus free and apart from the rest of the world. Also in Wairaka’s story, inhabiting her mountain signifies a constitutive part of her identity and means the completion of her happiness. From a spatial point of view, Wairaka’s mountain is the ultimate and most explicit realisation of female gaze that is ‘the question of the seer and the seen’ (Dunsford, 1993). She is literally on top of the landscape, being able to visually perceive everything from its peak. She is the one who sees and, therefore, represents Te Awekotuku’s rejection of the male gaze as the only way of looking at the world. Hence, Wairaka’s design of individual space is one way of rewriting Māori myths with women being at the centre of attention.

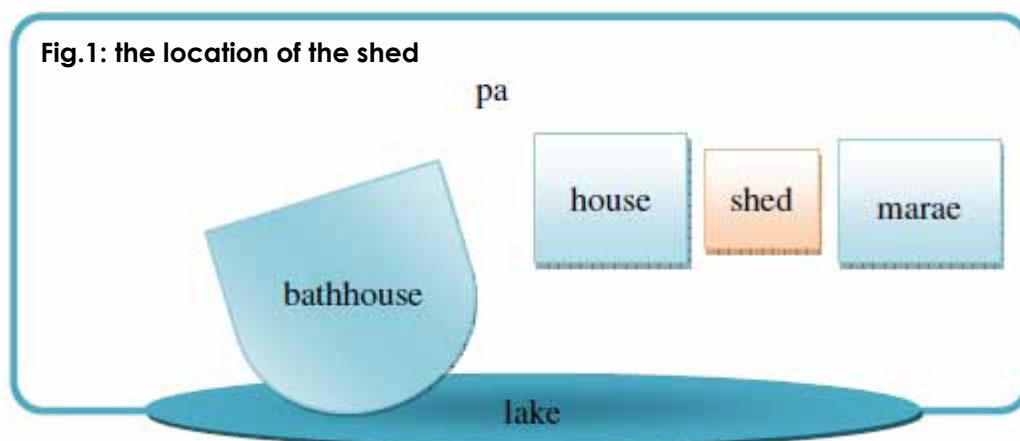
Another relevant character is Kurungaituku, because she and her companions ‘lived together in a cave overlooking the forest, which rolled out rippling below them, a raw whāriki of dark treetops’ (Te Awekotuku, 2003, p. 76). The forest thus marks Kurungaituku’s ‘home space’ (Connor, 2003, p. 159), which is emphasised when she hunts Hatupatu due to the fact that she fails to catch him in his native land (Te Awekotuku, 2003, pp. 82-83). On the one hand, it illustrates Kurungaituku’s inability to occupy alien landscapes such as Hatupatu’s natural surroundings, because she does not stay there for a longer time and thus does not get used to other landscapes than the forest. On the other hand, it highlights her strong bond with her space, the forest. She is only able to feel comfortable and secure in the forest, the space she knows and she calls her home. Next to Wairaka and Kurungaituku, Huritini serves as a third example:

She slid her feet into the soothing water...Huritini loved this pool. Pale spirals spread across its surface, tiny circles of air blistered angrily within the curving lines as the centre heaved its mass of oily mud, erupting high, spattering out towards the edges... Dead flesh did not last long in these waters, though they sustained the living. For her, this was special...it was the perfect place to lie alone and watch the sunlight, the starlight (Te Awekotuku, 2003, pp. 89-90).

Compared to the other women, Huritini also possesses her individual area with which she identifies and which represents her refuge from the rest of the world. In her case, the water is an element of specific importance. When looking at the passage, it is described in great detail and equipped with unique characteristics. Many of these features relate to human behaviour, especially ‘angrily’ (ibid.) and ‘the centre heaved its mass of oily mud’ (ibid.). They make the reader imagine the water becoming a human being with emotions. Therefore, it seems as if Huritini is welcomed by an old friend when sliding into the pool. The water almost hugs her body, protects her and keeps her warm. Moreover, Huritini and nature become one, because the water embraces nearly her whole body. Huritini’s pool thus is a natural place which is able to support her every time she is searching for relief. She is uniquely connected to this space and bodily senses this relation when she is there.

Significantly, every place mentioned so far is to be found in nature and is part of the New Zealand landscape. None of the women is able to identify with an artificial construction such as a house or another kind of building, but they all have a sense of identification with and comfort in their natural surroundings such as the hot springs, the forest, or trees. This indicates that the Māori women within Te Awekotuku’s stories are closely connected to nature and their respective territories. When opening up this observation towards possible links with Māori culture, the Māori understanding of land comes into play. It not only represents cultural heritage and home space, but is also a fundamental aspect for the construction of Māori identity (Connor, 2003, p. 159). Taking into account this crucial aspect of Māori culture, the significance of nature in Te Awekotuku’s short stories becomes explicit. Her illustrations of gendered spaces merely work in the context of Māori tradition. This means that only in nature can the elements of the spatialised female identity and the construction of Māori identity get together.

The aforementioned Māori concept of space and land is raised to another level when examining the spatial dimension of the short stories more closely. Within *Tahuri*, especially, the story “Mirimiri” offers extraordinary possibilities and fictionally represents the close interrelation between the protagonists’ identities and their environment. When concentrating on Tahuri as central protagonist, the shed is of particular importance for Tahuri’s and Mirimiri’s identity. The shed, which is situated on the ground of the pā (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 81), is ‘a small wooden shack behind Auntie Tui and Uncle Jack’s house which faced on to the marae’ (ibid.). This unique location of the building means that it is spatially surrounded by tradition (see Fig.1). The area of the pā stands for the already introduced relation between Māori people and their land (Connor, 2003, p. 160). The house represents tradition due to the description of the kitchen as typically female space (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 86). Finally, the marae symbolises the centre of Māori culture.



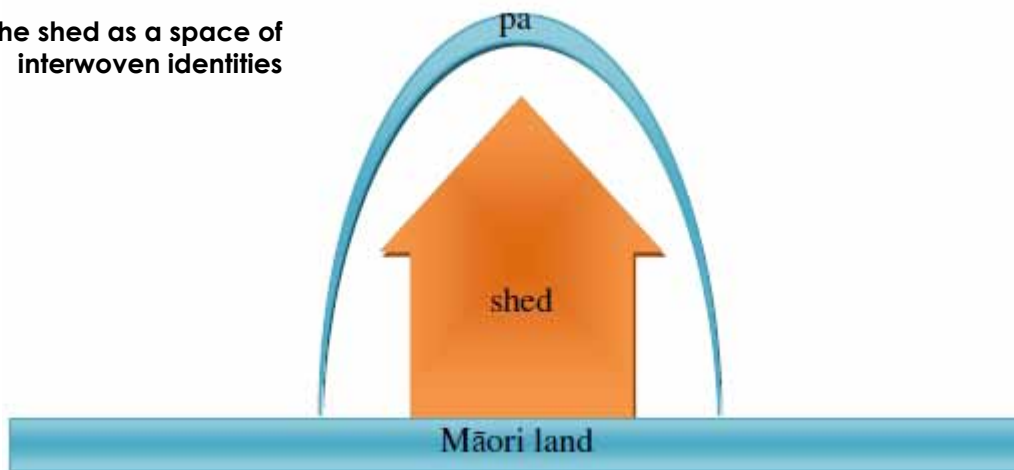
From the beginning, the shed is characterised as a special place hosting noteworthy objects such as ‘stored treasures’ (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 81). Its walls consist of ‘layers and layers of paint’ (ibid.), which points out not only the exceptionality of the building but also its diversity. Next to that, the layers allude to the visibility or invisibility of different levels, which are superimposed upon each other. This matches the complexity of Tahuri’s identity as a lesbian Māori woman. She is not only Māori, homosexual or female but identifies with all of these elements at once. Furthermore, not every dimension can be seen from the outside as they are concealed by other layers of her identity.

Also, the inner and outer territories of the shed can be clearly separated. Due to the present location of the shed, its outdoor area signifies Māori traditions and Tahuri’s and Mirimiri’s identity as Māori. The indoor area is a symbol for Tahuri and Mirimiri acting out their complex identity as lesbian Māori, because the shed is the place where they spend a night together and where they have sexual intercourse (Te Awekotuku, 1993, pp. 90-93). The shed is the space where Tahuri’s and Mirimiri’s identity as Māori is merged with their lesbian identity (see Fig.2). In this context, the connection to Māori land still exists while being in the shed. Although Mirimiri and Tahuri are separated from the rest of the pā by the walls of the shed, they still stand on Māori ground. This relation is of great significance as

Māori identity is positioned in terms of physical and cultural geographies, whakapapa and tupuna, notions of *turangawaewae* (a place to stand) and *papa kainga* (home base). Connection to traditional land remains very important for maintaining a sense of Māori identity within contemporary society (Connor, 2003, p. 160).

Therefore, Mirimiri and Tahuri do not lose their relation to their Māori identity by standing on Māori land inside of the shed. Due to this spatial arrangement, the unique delineation of the building is mirrored on the level of the storyline. For the first time of her life, Tahuri is enabled to fully experience being a lesbian Māori woman, which underlines the outstanding function of the shed as space. The words ‘going in, going home’ (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 92) nicely express this notion and ultimately point out that Tahuri’s and Mirimiri’s identities are made up not only of being Māori, but also of being lesbian.

Fig.2: The shed as a space of interwoven identities



Next to that, the shed, being separated from the rest of the pā by its walls, is the perfect place in order to point out the significance of the female gaze. Mirimiri’s body and the relation of both bodies are described explicitly from their own points of view (Te Awekotuku, 1993, pp. 91-93). This symbolises ‘that women come to an awareness of their position and their own ability to redefine the myths, reclaim their bodies for themselves’ (Dunsford, 1993). By letting *Tahuri* determine what is perceived by the reader, Te Awekotuku solely offers a female point of view.

This means that Tahuri's and Mirimiri's bodies are presented in a decolonising way, without being influenced by the male or the Pākehā gaze. The presentation of the girls' bodies completely remains within their control, unaltered from any other than the feminine perspective. Their interwoven identities are not only staged spatially within the context of the shed, but the narrative technique of the female gaze supports the fact that Tahuri and Mirimiri perspectively remain untouched.

In *Ruahine*, a similar pattern is to be found in the story of Huritini. She falls in love with Hieke and has sexual experiences with her in her pool (Te Awekotuku, 2003, pp. 99-100). The hot spring is the place where being Māori and being lesbian are unified, too. In the case of Huritini and Hieke not only the storyline can be compared to the chronology of the events in "Mirimiri" but also the overall meaning of space is the same. Huritini's hot spring equals the shed in "Mirimiri" and is the place where the identificatory dimensions of being Māori, lesbian, and female finally merge.

Concerning space, Te Awekotuku portrays women who are able to create their individual spaces and master their surroundings. She furthermore underlines the significant relation between Māori femininity and a coherent environment. Only if women are able to create their very individual places, do they feel comfortable. This means that such areas make up one important component of female identity. Ultimately, they also support the women's construction of a unique Māori identity in opposition to Pākehā culture.

Such an understanding of space can easily be referred to the Māori perspective on land, which can be described as follows:

Cultural space for Māori is that space which is imagined as home and home is *Papatuanuku*, Mother Earth. The land, personified as *Papatuanuku*, is a geographic space and an emotional space and identity formation for Māori is rooted in this home space of the traditional landscape. The land has been called into being by our *tupuna* (ancestors) and represents not only our ancestral links and *whakapapa* (genealogy) but also the culture of which we are part (Connor, 2003, p. 159).

In this context, Te Awekotuku's short stories do not only portray women who are able to create and master their individual spaces, but who are aware of their own traditions. They recognise that land is significant to Māori culture and actively make use of this knowledge in their everyday lives.

In *Tahuri* and *Ruahine*, a concept of gendered spaces is established in which female spatial empowerment is combined with women being conscious of the importance of their individual surroundings and their culture. This fits with the fact 'that although women in the history that Te Awekotuku works from may have been relegated to being secondary, the narrative of *Ruahine* makes them primary' (Allport, 2009, pp. 124-125). With Māori women being the focus of attention, Te Awekotuku gives these female characters a voice and a means of sight and thereby the possibility to empower themselves. This can also be applied to *Tahuri*, as Māori women make up the centre of the plot. Finally, the examination of space in both short story collections leads to the insight that Te Awekotuku creates a new perspective on Māori femininity by re-writing traditional narratives and thus innovatively repositioning strong women of Māori myth (Morrison, Spivak & Te Awekotuku, 2005, p. 722).

Conclusion

Our comparative approach towards Te Awekotuku's short story collection vividly shows that while *Tahuri* succeeds in retelling stories of a manifold of Māori femininities and sexualities, *Ruahine* manages to powerfully reintegrate women of Māori myth into the twenty-first century. The 'samenesses and differences' (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p.92) that play out across these two publications can be traced by looking at the four motifs of family and female bonds, sexuality,

female strength and female spaces. As *Ruahine* can be understood as a mythological embodiment of Tahuri's visions and dreams, it becomes observable that Ngahuia Te Awēkotuku carries her Māori lesbian feminist design into contemporary times.

Te Awēkotuku herself unveils *Tahuri* as the foundation for her later work *Ruahine*. Nevertheless, the notions of femininity in *Ruahine* put her pivotal understanding of women into another context, which enables Te Awēkotuku to utilise not only a broader range of imagery, but to take her characters to a higher level of empowerment. The mythological features equip and intensify the protagonists' portrayals and therefore reinforce Te Awēkotuku's primary goal: introducing her wahine toa into her narrative texts – combining her activist writings with Māori mythology. This unique way of adapting her own culture highlights Te Awēkotuku's exceptional status within Māori lesbian feminism. Hence, both *Tahuri* and *Ruahine* fictionally mirror her programmatic framework and open up diverse possibilities for Māori women all over Aotearoa New Zealand to identify themselves with a highly innovative way of perceiving indigenous womanhood.

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Notes

1 <http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/10289/783/1/Ma%20hea.pdf>, 16.10.2011.

2 http://www.genders.org/g42/g42_bannister.html, 16.10.2011.

3 In 2004, Ngahuia Te Awēkotuku repeated her comment that takatāpui marks an established identity even prior to colonial contact: 'Like other Pacific societies, Maori enjoyed same sex erotic contact and relationships. The boundaries between male and female, masculine and feminine, were often extended or obscured...but that is another paper for another time. Same sex partnerships occurred and flourished', <http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/10289/783/1/Ma%20hea.pdf>, 16.10.2011.

4 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 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.

5 A wide range of Māori scholars and writers have referred to an indigenous conception of history and myth opposed to Western understandings of the like. Instead of a linear chronological conception of historicity and mythology Māori acknowledge the intricate nature of the past, the present and the future in the well-known phrase 'walking backwards into the future'. This conception entails that in order to go forward, Māori simultaneously need to focus on the past, thus their 'real' or 'mythological' ancestors.

6 Focalisation is a literary concept, coined by the French scholar Gerard Genette. It refers to the perspective of a narration, rather than the figural narrative situation. (Wolf, 2004, p. 65).

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