

**“i am the dreams of your tipuna”:
Constructing Oceanic memory in contemporary
anglophone Māori literature**

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Abstract

Drawing on the creative output of Witi Ihimaera, Apirana Taylor and Patricia Grace, this article examines how memories related to Oceania are woven into these authors' prose and verse narratives. After a brief introduction of the concept of memory, as well as the selected literary works, the analysis will be subdivided into three broad strands: firstly, the Māori notion of whakapapa and its potential for Oceanic connectivity; secondly, different mechanisms of memory transmission featured in the literary works; thirdly, the representation of special objects embodying or aiding memories. These analytical strands lead to the conclusion that the authors feature various strategies of promoting Oceanic memories, yet are similar in their display of a strong sense of connection and their inclusion of local specificity. It furthermore becomes evident that indigenous memory networks and continuity are promoted.

Keywords: literature, Māori, memory, taonga, transmission, whakapapa

Literature, it can be argued, is a powerful agent of memory, and it has the potential to influence how the readership assesses history and its meanings. In this article, several of the forms and functions of memory in three selected works by Māori authors – Witi Ihimaera's novella “The Thrill of Falling” (Ihimaera, 2012), Apirana Taylor's poem “Lapita pot” (Taylor, 2014) and Patricia Grace's novel *Chappy* (Grace, 2015) – will be highlighted. All three pieces are united in their partial or predominant focus on the mobile Oceanian past and its influences on the present. However, they employ varying strategies and accentuate different genealogical ties. The literary works discussed can be situated within a long literary tradition of drawing Oceanic connections. The latter are, for example, very much present in Cathie Dunsford's novels or Robert Sullivan's poetry. Consequently, as cautionary remark it can be said that the current selection is only a small one and is not supposed to be representative in any way. Besides, no judgment on aspects of truthfulness or authenticity is intended, since all of the named memory constructions and their fictive representations are inherently subjective.

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In light of the fact that the term *memory* can be grasped and deployed in diverse ways, it is necessary to conduct some qualification of this notion. In a rather simplistic and metaphoric yet poignant fashion, one could say that “[m]emories are the glue that holds the past and present together” (Agnew, 2005: 19). Human memories are part of the general creation of meaning, and are thus the result of an active, fluid, embodied, subjective and context-related process. Remembering can accordingly be described as a constant “unfolding, changing, and transforming” (Zelizer, 1995: 218), and a never-ending process of negotiation. Most academic literature therefore “affords memory looseness or interpretive quality, rather than a fixity and inherentness” (Kearney, 2013: 137). Besides this intra-terminological vagueness, the reader should also note that the openness in this article extends to the inter-terminological level. That is, memories, stories and histories are treated as similar, paying tribute to the fact that rather than clear-cut borders there have always been fluid intersections, a view which seems to be promoted by the selected authors as well.¹ Doing memory research often equals doing identity research and means analysing “how people experience, relate to and narrativize the past” (Arnold-de Simine, 2013: 19), since remembering provides continuity and orientation for the self. This is confirmed by Thomas King’s famous assertion: “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (King, 2003: 2). Overall, “[t]he tracking of memory in literature yields a dazzling panorama of orientations” (Nalbatian, 2003: 3) for discussion. This potential wealth is purposefully limited by the geographical trajectory in the present article.

To facilitate the accessibility of the ensuing analysis, I will also briefly introduce the three works and the connections that they draw. Apirana Taylor’s poem is the work going furthest back in time. It was inspired by the *Oceania* exhibition hosted by Te Papa in 2011 (Taylor, 2014: 37), and allows a pot made of clay² to address the reader, beginning and ending with the words, “‘who are you?’” (ibid.: ll.1,32).³ The pot describes itself as very old and beautiful, as well as being a taonga. Furthermore, descriptive details are provided surrounding its creation, appearance, purpose and journey. The pot is endowed with sentiments, which becomes obvious, for instance, when it mentions its longing for going on another aquatic journey (ll.28-29). In Ihimaera’s “The Thrill of Falling,” a particular historical figure, Tupaea, is remembered. He was an Arioi (high priest) from Ra’iatea who sailed on the *Endeavour* to several islands, including Aotearoa (New Zealand). The novella is about a Ngāti Porou whānau (extended family) keeping the memory of this ancestor alive not only by bequeathing his name, but also by passing on the stories of his life and journey. The main narrator is Little Tu – the youngest Tupaea – whose life is traced from birth to mid-adulthood. He is the grandson of Big Tu and the nephew of Uncle Tu-Bad, whose nickname derives from a pun. They are all offspring of the priest Tupaea. Grace’s novel *Chappy* draws Pacific connections to Japan and Hawai’i through love stories. The book’s main part consists of the two Māori storytellers, Aki and Oriwia, narrating stories in turns from their past. This core is framed by Oriwia’s grandson Daniel, who comes to Aotearoa to find out about his deceased grandfather Chappy and is thus the one who initiates the

¹ Unfortunately, there is a dearth of Māori accounts written in English that specifically deal with memory. Instead, the focus is often on storytelling and historiography.

² While it is impossible to extensively comment on the historical development of Lapita pottery in Polynesia, some basic information will be provided in order to create a contextual basis for the subsequent analysis. One can say that “the word ‘Lapita’ minimally refers to a kind of ancient pottery that has been found at more than 200 archaeological sites across a broad arc of islands in the southwestern Pacific” (Terrell, 20009: 256). While it is widely accepted that the so-called Lapita people must have been at least to some extent mobile, building an inter-insular network, and that their descendants were settlers of Aotearoa (New Zealand), other details surrounding this period, including its chronology and demarcations, are still contested. What can be noted, though, is that any reference to this cultural complex from a Māori perspective also includes allusions to pre-colonial aquatic migration movements and thus aspects of ancestry.

³ From here on, only line references will be provided for Apirana Taylor’s poem.

storytelling sessions. His grandfather was an illegal immigrant from Japan who fled war and subsequently married Oriwia. Together they had two children before Chappy was deported on the presumption of being a spy. He ultimately came back to New Zealand after staying in Tokio and on Hawai'i for several years. The connection to Hawai'i was initially created through Aki, who spent a large part of his life at sea and met Ela during a stay on Hawai'i, where he lived until her premature death, only afterwards permanently returning to Aotearoa. After having provided these brief sketches, a more in-depth analysis now follows.

Oceanic whakapapa

Perhaps one of the most common and important themes in Māori fiction is that of whakapapa. It is important to underline how whakapapa is more than simply genealogy; rather, it is a complex and variable system which can function as a tool of memory, identity formation and connection. The structure of whakapapa is usually described as being layered (e.g. Walker, 2013: 37; Pihama and Cameron, 2012: 233; Te Awekotuku, 2007: 170). It is aptly described by Josph Te Rito:

The whakapapa paradigm [...] exists as a genealogical narrative, a story told layer upon layer, ancestor upon ancestor up to the present day. There are parallel lineages of characters which run vertically side by side, era by era, and incident by incident (Te Rito, 2007: 1).

However, while whakapapa entails a wealth of potential stories, like memory it is selective, since one has to decide which line to emphasise (see Williams, 2004: 29). Resulting from these choices, complex “networks of relationships, or interconnections” (Ka'ai and Higgins, 2004: 15) emerge. Whakapapa is self-evidently preoccupied with the past, but likewise entails implications for the present and future. After all, “it is the deeds of the ancestors (real and mythical) that control and guide the present generation and help determine the fate of future generations” (Roberts and Wills, 1998: 61). Against this background, it makes sense that

Maori people [...] see themselves as part of a living history, a continuum which reaches back through their *whakapapa* (genealogy), *tupuna*⁴ (ancestors) and through time, to the creator. Dotted along the way are events, people, places, objects that create a whole, which is the Maori heritage and identity (Matunga, 1994: 219).

It may not seem that the poem “Lapita pot” is overtly concerned with whakapapa. However, it does mention the ancestors, and in this context also directly addresses the reader (“dreams of your tipuna” l.2), who is thus constructed as an Oceanic descendant. Consequently, the poem seems to have a specific target audience. Besides, it discusses how descriptions forced on the ancestors by outsiders did not alter the fact that these ancestors, or their descendants, were sure of their identity and endeavours. This self-confidence is presented in a strong juxtaposition:

stories were told, we were Nordic Vikings,
aliens, the lost tribes of Israel
anything but Polynesian
we arrived by accident

⁴ This word means the same as *tipuna*, which is employed by Apirana Taylor and part of this article's title. Both spellings are dialectical variants of the same vocabulary item and are often written with a macron to indicate vowel length when pluralised.

we didn't know who we were
 we knew, who we were, where we came from
 and where we were going
 our star maps, our stick charts, our knowledge
 passed on in songs, in the
 seeds of Rangiatea, told us, (ll.12-21)

These lines demonstrate how the transmission of memory via different media (star maps, stick charts, songs and seeds) has turned out to be very successful indeed, with modern research projects confirming rather than disproving the mentioned stories of the ancestors (e.g. Rangiahua, Matenga-Kohu, and Rakuraku, 2005: 15). Besides, the passage points to a famous proverb, which reads: “E kore au e ngaro; he kākano ahau i ruia mai i Rangiatea’/I shall never be lost for I am a seed, which was sown from Rangiatea” (ibid.: 13). Mentioning this whakataukī, Mere Roberts and Peter Wills argue that it “locates all persons of Maori descent relative to an origin [...], referred to in the traditions as Hawaiiki, and today considered to be the island of Raiatea (Rangiatea)” (Roberts and Wills, 1998: 45). The pot and its story, then, have border-crossing potential with regard to time and space, drawing physical, material and navigational connections. From the poem’s description of the artefact, an Oceanic whakapapa emerges, allowing it to signify both the manual work of distant ancestors and the ancestors themselves.

Similar aspects, albeit from a later perspective, are highlighted by Ihimaera in his novella, where he questions Western historiography and the denial of indigenous agency by providing alternative stories, handed on through oral transmission and based on whakapapa. Captain James Cook’s infamous voyage to Aotearoa and the Pacific is, in this case, only a sideshow and the means to an end for Oceanic reconnection. At one point, for example, the protagonist’s grandfather Big Tu comments on one of these special occasions of reconnection in the settlement of Uawa:

We were moved by his [Tupaea’s] ancient tales of Hawaiiki, and of the current politics and culture of the homeland we had left many centuries before. He thrilled us with his stories of Mahaiatea⁵ and his queen, Purea (Ihimaera, 2012: 274–275).⁶

The overarching importance of whakapapa is further underlined by its visual presence in Big Tu’s domicile. This is already implied by the chapter heading, “HOUSE OF MEMORIES” (ibid.: 222). In this chapter, Little Tu describes his grandfather’s study room in the following way:

A huge Tupaea whakapapa chart entirely covered one wall. Two other walls had floor-to-ceiling bookcases. One was stacked with Koro’s genealogy books, carefully numbered and protected in plastic slip covers [...]. On a third wall were photographs, some very old, hand-coloured and in oval frames, of all our family ancestors. Koro also had metal cabinets full of genealogy books, maps and other memorabilia (ibid.: 223).

As is attested to by this description, in this room memories are physically and quite prominently present. The story additionally highlights how the distant Oceanic ancestor Tupaea continues to live on through the corporeal and active continuation of whakapapa by his descendants. In a way, Little

⁵ This was an important marae (religious site) on what is today called Tahiti.

⁶ Quotations generally have not been altered unless otherwise indicated.

Tu cannot be separated from his ancestor, gradually merging with him in appearance and spirit. This can be connected to the Māori understanding of ancestors as living on in their descendants, which is also mentioned in *Chappy* (Grace, 2015: 226). As Tipene O'Regan notes: "To inquire into my history or that of my people, you must inquire into my whakapapa. My tūpuna may be dead but they are also in me and I am alive. To know them, you must know me!" (O'Regan, 1993: 338). Little Tu decides to acknowledge the special connection to, and approach the memory of, his ancestor in a new way by embodying him in an international circus production fittingly called *Oceania*. It recounts the first encounters of Europeans and Pacific peoples, and consequently also parts of Tupaea's life. This story is told from an indigenous perspective, which is represented by Little Tu, thereby redistributing agency and making Tupaea the subject rather than the object of history. What the described spectacle confirms overall is that "[p]erformances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity" (Taylor, 2003: 2). As a whole, the show *Oceania* has the power to question predominant regimes of representations of the past, for example by not placing Aotearoa's discovery by Europeans at the beginning of the narrative. Little Tu furthermore succeeds in asserting his personal Oceanic identity through reenacting the past. Whakapapa thus becomes in a very literal sense "a corporeal historiography" (DeLoughrey, 2010: 161).

Ancestral memories also play an essential role in *Chappy*. Indeed, the entire book is concerned with relating stories of the eponymous character. Beyond this broader context, there are two occasions on which whakapapa is additionally highlighted. Both are weddings joining Māori and Hawaiian characters. In the first instance, Aki (marrying Ela) reflects while listening to a Hawaiian elder:

Hearing the genealogies was something I was used to when I was growing up. As a boy, I would become impatient with these recitations because I was made to sit and listen to them for hour upon hour while other children were outside playing. [...]

As I grew, I came to understand that it was through the genealogies that important links were made. At a wedding, there was often a genealogical joining between the bride's and bridegroom's families. It was a matter of those who were experts knowing the connections and going far back into whakapapa to describe the links down to the present time. [...] These are the moments when all time becomes present and you understand that you are merely a bead on an unbroken necklace which is without beginning or end (Grace, 2015: 184).

Aki's thoughts are multi-layered and deserve some more attention. First of all, what Aki says suggests that whakapapa is especially performed during important cultural events. It is a decidedly oral form of remembering that includes connections to the past and to particular people. At the same time, whakapapa has the potential to establish such relationships beyond the geographical and tribal context of Aotearoa (cf. also Farrimond, 2007: 408). Having a common memory of voyages allows cultures in Oceania to reconnect on adequate occasions and for various purposes. In addition, the metaphor of the necklace serves as an apt illustration of how everything is linked and how these connections are always present, even if they are hidden. Besides, past events and relations can seem different depending on the perspective of the beholder and the light cast upon it. In the narration, Aki proceeds:

I realised as we sat in the fading light of my wedding day, my ears attuned to the language that I was becoming more and more familiar with, that the old man was

reciting whakapapa. And as he continued I realised that what I was hearing, there in Hawai'i, was my own genealogy – the names from before the earth was made, the names from before the earth was peopled, the names from after the earth was peopled, the names before the sailing and venturing, the names to do with the sailing and venturing.

My heart was bumping against its walls. I was hearing the same names that I had heard from the lips of my elders when I was a child with a held ear (Grace, 2015: 184-185).

While Aki therefore remembers his own specific training as orator, it is in this cross-cultural context that it becomes clear how, despite some local specificities, including linguistic variation, there are still important points of intersection today across Oceania. This is reconfirmed at a later wedding, where it is a Māori elder who draws on the shared cultural knowledge.

My Hawaiian family were at once alert when they heard the names that connected them in time and place with my home family, we of Aotearoa being junior to those left behind in 'the great, far-distant, etched-on-the-heart, longed-for homeland of Hawaiki'. Beside me, so still it was as though he didn't breathe, was old man 'A'makualenalena.

Though Paa had been the ear-holder when I was a child, this was the first time I had ever heard him doing the recitations himself, ranging far and wide, down, out and along the many branches, to connect our home family to my Hawaiian family (ibid.: 185).

Besides the similarities of occasion and backdrop for both island weddings, there are thus also analogies in access to genealogy and in both cases there is a clear emotional effect as well. The unifying potential of whakapapa attests to the effective transmission over many centuries, and it also allows for a conceptualisation of relations in terms of tuakana/teina (older/younger sibling). The quoted passages confirm that "[s]killed orators recite their whakapapa (genealogy) in a manner that links them to the manuhiri [guests], to make them feel welcome and at one with their hosts" (Walker, 2011: 23). An orator is furthermore, as Aki himself points out, "the keeper, the guardian for a future time of certain knowledge, histories, genealogies, stories" (Grace, 2015: 199), and he or she can draw on the wealth of knowledge from everyone that has come before. In an academic context, this is also proposed by Moana Jackson:

Whakapapa is like a history of repetitious beginnings. Each new event, each generation of ideas and actions that shape human lives is a product of those that have gone before. Nothing exists in isolation or arises spontaneously in a vacuum of immaculate conception (Jackson, 2007: 173).

The same idea of intergenerational transmission can be found on Hawai'i. In the narration, Aki tells us that 'A'makualenalena "had his own memory of events, but added to that were the memories he had of all those who had gone on ahead of him," upon which Aki notes: "It was a familiar story in many ways, told in a manner familiar to me" (ibid.: 201). In both geographically and historically distinct contexts, the system relies on new family members willing to take on the role of collecting and furthering memories. This also includes cultural traditions. As the Hawaiian elder points out,

“the old ways [are] important for keeping families together and the culture alive” (ibid.: 111). Both of these Polynesian cultures are thus united in their orientation towards the past and ancestry.

What all of these instances of establishing whakapapa show is that continuity and repetition are essential, whether this is the case with regard to remembering a particular ancestor, as in “The Thrill of Falling,” or a broader context of relation, as in the other two works. Connections and the associated stories can only be effectively remembered if they are regularly repeated. The latter aspect agrees with the verbal character of the term *whakapapa* (see Royal, 2009: 103). All works feature an Oceanic genealogy, but also a Māori situatedness. This is emphasised through culturally specific concepts and language use. The latter is, for example, very salient in “Lapita pot,” since the relatively short poem contains a comparatively large number of specific vocabulary items, including puku (l.7), whanau (l.9), taonga (l.10), seeds of Rangiātea (l.20) and wairua (l.28.). Grace, Ihimaera and Taylor, like other authors, “highlight the unbroken validity and vitality of indigenous textual resources” (Birk, 2015: 219) and promote an understanding of memory that goes beyond an individual or unigenerational conception. Continuation, however, presupposes effective forms of transmission.

Memory transmission

Memory transmission is treated in multiple but related ways in all three works. For instance, an aspect that is particularly noticeable is the presence of specially prepared characters.⁷ Even though usually every person is capable of remembering, there are – across most cultures – also memory specialists whose “task consists in preserving the cultural memory of the group” (Assmann, 2012: 172). While these specialists are trained for the recall of cultural knowledge, “the contents of collective memory are not fixed and retrieved by them in the same way at each performance. [...] A performance of oral memory is thus an original act of interpretation” (Breyer, 2007: 60) rather than simply preservation.

As already pointed out, Aki was trained to become an orator and therefore had access to a great amount of tribal knowledge and stories. Whereas for *Chappy* the aspect of transmission was discussed in some detail in the previous section, since reflections on trans-Pacific connections are intricately linked with Aki’s contemplations on his own upbringing, in Witi Ihimaera’s story there are likewise key passages that deserve attention. In the novella, Big Tu’s attempt to find a suitable successor for the maintenance of stories concerning the whānau’s Oceanic heritage is highlighted several times. He commemorates their important ancestor by telling the entire whānau about Tupaea on frequent occasions (see Ihimaera, 2012: 219). Little Tu notes in a slightly ironic fashion:

Our family grew up surrounded by stories about the original Tupaea, the one who began our dynasty in New Zealand.

⁷ In extension, authors can also be conceptualized as “memory workers: those who would actively bring forward memories forgotten, or memories that have been systematically ignored” (Goldfarb, 2016: 58). This is closely linked to the notion of counter-memory, which was initially articulated by Michel Foucault (see Olick & Robbins, 1998: 126) and which is still important today because such marginalised memories “illuminate the past in ways that contest hegemonic memories and raise the question of who remembers, why they remember, and what they remember” (Agnew, 2005: 20). Māori literary practitioner and scholar Tina Makereti confirms that literature is “an important tool for the reclamation of histories and identities, and for the imagining of alternative possibilities” (Dahlberg, 2013: 4).

Indeed, Koro took it for granted that we would absorb the narratives by some strange osmosis; he thought that because we had the blood of all the royal kings and queens of Tahiti in our veins that they ‘spoke’ to us too (ibid.: 222).

Regarding a suitable disciple, Big Tu first puts his hopes into one of his sons, but is disappointed by him and then moves on to bestow his knowledge on Little Tu instead. Although the grandson feels enthusiasm for listening to the elder’s stories, he grapples with the burden placed on him. Experiencing a phase of adolescent deviance, his interest recedes somewhat and he comes to a point where he doubts his abilities:

‘Koro, I don’t think I can be a lawyer or whatever you want me to be. P-p-please give up on me.’

[...] ‘How can I do that?’ he asked. ‘You’re the one whose name is Tupaea.’
I pleaded with him. ‘Why should his name make any difference?’
My koro stopped the car. [...]

‘Giving you Tupaea’s name is like investing you with his spirit. [...] Somewhere inside you his mauri [life force] resides and, pae kare [by golly], boy, one of these days it’s coming out, whether you like it or not’ (ibid.: 240).

Little Tu’s delinquencies lead his parents to the decision to move to Wellington. However, this also means that the intergenerational tuition is threatened:

Mum and Dad’s action was desertion and dereliction of duty, but in Koro’s case there was more: he didn’t want me to leave. ‘[...] How will I be able to talk to him about Tupaea with me in Uawa and him down there in the capital?’ (ibid.: 244).

In spite of these doubts, adjusting to the new circumstances, Big Tu transitions to regularly calling his mokopuna (grandchild), then starts visiting and eventually moves in with the family. There are also other instances where Little Tu incidentally stumbles upon his ancestor. In one of these cases, he is very disappointed when he finds out something about his forebear that he did not know before and he blames Big Tu for it (see ibid.: 258). However, Little Tu eventually comes to understand that there may be different perspectives on the past and proceeds to acknowledge his grandfather’s stories. For example, he comments on a lecture: “[W]hile the professor was talking about Captain Cook’s voyages throughout New Zealand, I was looking *through* his words and wilfully reading the history my way, Koro’s way” (ibid.: 291). This passage refers back to a piece of advice provided by Big Tu:

‘Yes, Little Tu, we have to acknowledge that the *Endeavour*’s story belonged to Cook and Banks and, therefore, why should our ancestor have a place in the documents? Nevertheless, Tupaea *is* there. You must look not at but *through* the documents, moko.

‘Beloved grandson, look also past the written to the unwritten. Put yourself into the spaces between the words on the page. Go past the spoken to the unspoken. Seek the priest in our own language, not the language of the coloniser [...]’ (ibid.: 266).

As indicated before, Little Tu eventually finds his own way of going beyond official versions of remembrance by means of performance. This multiplies the potential audience for Oceanic memories and takes them to the public sphere. It also confirms the strong links between transmission, creativity and flexibility.

In *Chappy*, Daniel takes on a slightly different role as another character charged with the task of transmitting memory. Although he does not become an orator himself, he plays his part by recording knowledge about the past and putting it into writing. Towards the end of the novel, his grandmother Oriwia tells him:

What you've done already, putting down the stories, is a big thing for all of us. It's your contribution, nōu [sic] te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora te manuhiri.⁸

[...] Like Taana the builder and Chappy the weaver, you bring new skills to deposit in and withdraw from the shared basket – languages, new ways of telling stories (Grace, 2015: 249).

What is also emphasised is that there are different ways and circumstances of telling stories. In one passage, the narrators Oriwia and Aki are compared:

Oriwia kept all her daily activities going at once, moving from one job to another and back again, talking all the while, going from topic to topic, weaving the threads of her stories together. Aki, however, did one thing at a time, his pace leisurely. [...] One task was completed before another was begun. Once all else was done, the recorder was turned on and telling his stories became his sole task until he decided enough had been said (ibid.: 125).

However, these differences in storytelling do not influence the necessity, importance or quality of the memories provided. What is important, then, is that everyone contributes their 'baskets' to enhance the bigger whole, rather than the specific design. Another aspect that emerges from these passages – but also from the other literary works – is that of perspective. All three works deal with the dependence of memory and history on one's point of view. While this theme is especially prevalent in *Chappy* and could be analysed in great length, this article will only include a brief sketch. Suffice to say that in many instances it is demonstrated how memory transmission tends to include vagueness and even errors, is subject to editing processes, does not necessarily proceed chronologically and is often rendered in a piece-meal fashion. Besides, memories are always in a dialectic with forgetting. What these fictional accounts of different subjectivities show is something that is also anchored in Māori culture, namely

that there is never just one truth or one way of doing things. The very notion of our whakapapa implies generations of different stories layered on top of one another. Telling stories was always a journey to the point of enlightenment that we knew as the explanation or the whakamārama (Jackson, 2007: 172).

⁸ This is part of a well-known whakataukī (proverb) and can be translated as: With your basket, and my basket, the visitors will be well.

Overall, by featuring precolonial memories of Oceanic mobility, and by complementing these memories with instances of postcolonial mobility, all three works can be said to be part of a larger creative tradition that “has decolonizing potential, highlighting Pacific Islander agency and referencing strong cultural alliances” (Looser, 2014: 104). The surviving stories and memories attest to the “oceanic cultural baggage” (Hohepa, 1999: 185) that was taken from island to island and that constitutes a basis for contemporary reconnection. Such baggage can also assume a literal form.

Taonga

The last aspect to be introduced in this discussion is that of taonga. This term refers to something precious or valuable. However, it is a rather malleable concept, encompassing both non-material aspects – such as language (e.g. Patterson, 2009: 92; Solomon, 2007: 80) and knowledge (e.g. Salmond, 2012: 74) – and tangible objects (e.g. Tapsell, 2006: 17). The following analysis focuses especially on the latter. Important items usually become precious because of their association with their creators or possessors. This makes them

more than objects. They have a mauri (life force) that transcends time, connecting past generations to those of the present and the future. These taonga embody Māori cultural values, knowledge, histories and stories (Hakiwai, Smith, Davidson, Baker and Tamarapa, 2008a: 1).

Taonga can be described as “vital threads from the past, acting as here (guides) to interpreting the past” (Tapsell, 2006: 17–19). In other words, they are part of the tribal heritage. This heritage, however, is not static. On the contrary, “[i]nterpretation and reinterpretation of the past or the creation of various products of the past is a continuous process” (Wijesuriya, 2007: 65). Furthermore, “there are ‘living relationships’ between the taonga [...] and the communities and peoples from which they originate” (Hakiwai, 2007: 54).

Such a living connection can be found, for example, in *Chappy*. In this case, the taonga that are mentioned relate to the Japanese character Chappy and therefore not directly to Oceania. Nevertheless, an example is included where important aspects of taonga are introduced and the respective objects are somewhat transformed by their Māori setting. In the relevant scene, Daniel feels intrigued by his grandfather’s woven baskets. These baskets had been created among other Māori weavers many years ago and subsequently became part of the communal gift giving conventions. They are thus also integrated into collective memory, being “referred to in speeches” (Grace, 2015: 88). Encountering them in the present, Daniel narrates:

I imagined the ‘long hands’ which had threaded and tied, shaped and bound these. I thought of the young mother taking up a shopping basket and stepping out, saw her at a bench arranging flowers, or in a room placing a sleeping baby [...]. I thought of how objects can call to us from across time (ibid.: 91).

This confirms that the association of forebears with taonga is sometimes so intimate that the objects “collapse time so that descendants can emotionally engage and experience ancestral moments in the now” (Makereti, 2015: 174; see also Tapsell 2011: 10). It further demonstrates how imaginative moments can be just as valuable to a character as actual memories and make the attendant stories become more alive.

In “The Thrill of Falling,” the relationship between revered objects and descendants is also an important one. Here it is a red feather girdle and an ironwood cylinder, both initially from Ra’iatea, that are treasured. Big Tu explains: “Tupaea rescued from Taputapuatea the sacred to’o in which ’Oro resided, a cylinder sheathed in red feathers” (Ihimaera, 2012: 234).⁹ When the Arioi Tupaea came to Aotearoa, according to the grandfather’s stories he gave the mentioned items to his descendants’ tribe. Consequently, they constitute a tangible and stable connection to the priest’s homeland. At the time of the main narrative, Big Tu takes care of them. When his grandson moves to the city, Big Tu hands him one of the feathers as a means of protection. Whereas Little Tu’s mother is wary of these taonga and does not ascribe any great importance to them, the former transforms the meaning of the gifted feather for himself. This change commences with him taping the feather to an Arnold Schwarzenegger poster, making the latter look “like a mean Red Indian dude,” which is only hesitantly accepted by his parents (see *ibid.*: 249). Little Tu’s father notes to his wife: “At least Pa [Big Tu] didn’t go up to the cave in the hills and get that old piece of ironwood” (*ibid.*). When Big Tu later comes for one of his visits, Little Tu’s mother has to remind her son to remove the feather from the poster and put it in the waka huia (treasure box) as a more appropriate repository. Little Tu reflects: “The reason I had forgotten to remove the feather was that the poster was no longer Arnie looking like a mean Red Indian dude but Tupaea looking like Arnie” (*ibid.*: 261). This denotes an intermediate step in the developing relationship between Little Tu and his ancestor. In the descendant’s international performance described at the end of the story, the feather is integrated into his costume, whose overall description is an almost perfect copy of an earlier account of the appearance of the priest Tupaea (see *ibid.*: 268 and 312), thus completing the convergence. Like the feather, the ironwood cylinder is mentioned several times. It is intermediately placed “in a storage unit in Porirua” (*ibid.*: 293) and later, in the course of a joint voyage undertaken by grandfather and grandson, returned to the people of Ra’iatea (see *ibid.*: 305). The restitution of this taonga serves as a means of cultural and physical reconnection. What “The Thrill of Falling” therefore demonstrates is that objects functioning as memory devices also have the power to incite actions in the present time.

In “Lapita pot,” the protagonist itself can be considered a taonga, which is confirmed in line ten. By giving a voice to this object, Apirana Taylor enables it to provide corrections and counter-memories to popular narratives. Taken as a synecdoche, the pot demonstrates how indeed taonga are “emissaries of time and place” (Makereti, 2015: 174). It is part of the category of taonga tawhito (ancient treasures), which “are a link to ancestors and offer clues connecting Māori to the tropical Pacific islands they came from” (Hakiwai et al., 2008b: 7). In the poem, the pot describes how it was originally designed to sustain the whānau (ll.9-10) and, by providing stories, it arguably still has the metaphorical potential to do so. The fact that it was once broken and had to be pieced back together can also be seen in the context of this metaphor, suggesting that Oceanic histories can likewise be recovered.

What can be said in summary is that, like the beads in the metaphor put forward by Aki to describe whakapapa, “[e]ach taonga represents a single genealogical thread, stitching sky to earth, atua (gods) to mortals, ancestor to descendant, [and] generation to generation” (Tapsell, 2006: 19). Taonga therefore constitute an important conveyor of memory both in real life and in creative writing.

⁹ The to’o is an image representing ’Oro, the god of fertility and war. Taputapuatea is the name of a marae situated on Ra’iatea. For academic accounts featuring more general information on the importance of the mentioned religious objects, see Salmond, 2009 and Oliver, 1974.

Conclusion

The previous analysis has shown that, the three literary works feature disparate settings, times, connections and characters, but are united in conveying a strong sense of connection to the distant Oceanic past, allowing it to become present once more. The selected works can thus be placed among a larger tradition of indigenous literature from Aotearoa which “recognizes the need to restore lost links to the past to understand the present and contemplate the future” (Tompkins, 1990: 484). It follows that in creative prose and verse written by Māori, “the remembered and recounted past constitutes a critical source from which to negotiate indigeneity” (Moura-Koçoğlu, 2011: 11). In all cases, the fictional memories come to stand for a very real history of mobility, complexity and transmission that is part of Oceania. The literary pieces work with culturally specific concepts, while also drawing pan-Pacific parallels. Overall, they create a complex and open-ended network of what one may call “alter-native memory.” This network can be compared to a Māori kete (basket) or a tukutuku (ornamental lattice-work), with many different strands being intertwined. However, rather than being finished, the ends are open and allow for new threads to be added.¹⁰

The different works show that memory is assisted and enhanced through the use of whakapapa, performance and taonga. The latter are thus indeed “time travellers that bridge the generations” (Tapsell, 2006: 17). What is underlined in all cases is the fact that memories rely on the continuation of stories. After all, they “are narrative flesh on the bones of genealogy” (Murton, 2012: 98). Ultimately, memories are not only kept alive, but also retraced, relived, reinforced and complemented by new ones as the characters stride backwards into the future.

¹⁰ This idea is also put forward in Briar Grace-Smith’s play *Purapurawbetū*. In an introduction to this work, John Huria notes: “The panel embodies stories passed down to the following generations, and it cannot be woven until the story is known. As the panel is finished, the story of its local meaning is told to the new generation, and succession can occur. Ramari, however, does not finish the panel. She ties two stitches upside down for her ‘scabby mokos’ to see in fifty years time. This hints that the story is not ‘tied off’, that is has not ended, that closure is provisional. The story will be retold time and again, never complete” (1999: 16).

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Leonie John completed her studies of English, Physical Education and Educational Sciences with top marks in June 2016 at the University of Cologne and the German Sports University Cologne. Since November 2016, she has been enrolled at the University of Cologne as a literary PhD student. Her doctoral studies were initially promoted by a half-year scholarship to prepare her doctoral project. Now she is a scholarship holder at the a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities Cologne for the duration of three years. She first came to Aotearoa for a semester abroad during her studies and has since then spent several research stays there. Her academic interests include, among other things, indigenous and especially Māori literature, postcolonial and indigenous theories, memory studies, spatiotemporal conceptions and mobility studies.

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