

Michaela Moura-Koçoğlu, *Narrating Indigenous Modernities: Transcultural Dimensions in Contemporary Māori Literature* (Rodopi, 2011)

In her 2011 monograph, Michaela Moura-Koçoğlu argues that a transcultural reading of contemporary Māori narratives reveals a more accurate understanding of Māori indigenous identity than ‘the picture Pākehā [white New Zealand settler] politics has drawn’ (xvii). Moreover, she claims, the narratives reveal that Māori identity is situated ‘increasingly in a context that is perceived as multilateral, modern, and global’ (xviii). To substantiate her claims, Moura-Koçoğlu provides readings of a number of contemporary English language texts by Māori authors, which she categorises in three loosely chronological phases: roughly matching Peter Beatson’s two phases in *The Healing Tongue* (1989), she calls her first two phases ‘Narratives of (Be)Longing’ and ‘Narratives of (Un)Belonging,’ and she posits the contemporary third phase as ‘transcultural’ works that illustrate ‘attempts – both failed and successful – to explore and come to terms with the hybrid nature of indigenous identities at the intersection of multiple modernities and altered socio-cultural conditions’ (149).

In her first chapter, Moura-Koçoğlu gives a historical overview of Pākehā–Māori relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand in order to conclude that contemporary Māori identity does not originate from a single coherent cultural stream of tradition but that it is articulated with aspects of that derive from many sources, including, of course, the Pākehā people they have been living alongside for over 200 years. Moura-Koçoğlu draws largely from histories by Michael King and Ranginui Walker, showing that Māori identities have ‘been subject to manifold disruptions and influences’ and that they ‘constitute novel forms generated in the process of formulating indigeneity’ (47). This chapter may be helpful for readers approaching Māori literature who are less familiar with the cultural context of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Chapter 2, ‘Fragmentation Reconsidered,’ sets up the framework Moura-Koçoğlu employs in her transcultural readings, defining her method as one that leads to ‘a modern sense of indigeneity, one the Māori maintain not despite but in reference to Pākehā elements they have appropriated to indigenous cultural forms’ (52). While she is clearly not a purveyor of ‘biased dualities of colonizer/colonized and Self/Other’ (57), one dichotomy that Moura-Koçoğlu sets up and engages with throughout her book is that of successful versus failed transculturality. For example, she describes one character who spurns her own Pākehā blood as ‘an instance of failed transculturality’ because ‘the character subscribes to a distinct Māori identity’ (57). While she does consider types of both instances under her transcultural analysis, it becomes clear through repetition that Moura-Koçoğlu valorises those characters that ‘acknowledge hybrid realities’ (144).

Chapter 3 treats the first main phase in Māori literary output, which Moura-Koçoğlu chooses to represent by Hone Tuwhare’s *No Ordinary Sun* (1964) and Witi Ihimaera’s *Tangi* (1973). The texts of this era, she claims, were engaged in ‘staging an indigenous viewpoint’ (73) and typically expressed ‘characters’ need to remember traditional values, re-imagining communal ways of life with *whānau* and *iwi* which they conjured up as intact worlds’ (77). Ultimately, Moura-Koçoğlu’s transcultural analysis finds only subtle examples of ‘cultural blending’ in either Tuwhare’s or Ihimaera’s early texts, but identifies both as texts that ‘paraded indigenous “otherness”’ (78), reveal ‘a mid-twentieth-century society which harbours two different cultural worlds, divided and seemingly incommensurate’ (86), and ‘foreground nostalgic grief at *Gemeinschaft* lost’ (93).

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In Chapter 4, Moura-Koçoğlu moves on to the second phase of Māori literature, in which, she claims, Māori writers began to express political resistance to Pākehā dominance. Examining two well-known texts, Patricia Grace's *Potiki* (1986) and Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* (1990), Moura-Koçoğlu argues that the second phase is when Māori writers began 'steering a course towards a renewed indigeneity that is capable of adapting to change while translating cultural tradition into an altered environment' (122). This chapter is particularly insightful in its contextualisation of these texts alongside Māori activism such as the Great Māori Land March and the persistent Māori warrior tradition, as emphasised in the Māori Battalions sent to WW1 and WW2.

In her fifth chapter, Moura-Koçoğlu completes the trajectory of her progression of Māori literature in her examination of twenty-first century texts that exhibit most completely the transcultural elements of which she had thus far only found traces. Here she examines five texts: Ihimaera's *The Uncle's Story* (2000), Kelly Ana Morey's *Bloom* (2003), Paula Morris's *Queen of Beauty* (2002), Renée's *Kissing Shadows* (2005), and Lisa Cherrington's *The People Faces* (2004). Moura-Koçoğlu's choice of texts here is interesting in its currency; other than Ihimaera's, none of these texts are yet part of the Pacific literary canon.

In the book's final chapter, 'Navigating Transcultural Currents', Moura-Koçoğlu considers the possibilities for reading and writing in Aotearoa New Zealand with a transcultural approach. She argues that her readings have revealed

a paradigm shift in literary constructions of Māoriness that requires paying critical attention to the way in which Māori culture and traditions are remembered, retold, recombined, and revalorized in the context of a modern global world order. (248)

'Paradigm shift' seems a bit strong, considering that Moura-Koçoğlu herself shows that Māori people have long been engaged in struggles to represent themselves to the world.

The book's contribution to the study of Māori literature is in its close readings of so many under-studied texts and placing those texts in conversation with one another. However, the basic premise of the author's argument requires some further development in order to be fully convincing. Some of the author's claims seem a bit dated. For example, she asserts that 'precisely what the transcultural approach unravels' is the argument that 'contemporary indigeneity is a mere reflex to processes governed by a dominant "West"' (255), which seems like a variation on the fatal impact theory which has long been refuted by writers across the Pacific. Moreover, parts of Moura-Koçoğlu's analyses read like two-column tables, labelling characters as transcultural or not – by which she means having 'essentialized notions of Self/Other, colonized/colonizer' (173). While Moura-Koçoğlu is justified in troubling these binaries, her valorisation of hybridity is celebratory in a way that sometimes overlooks a long history of colonial violence that persists today.

While not the fault of the author, the book's copy-editing could have been more attentive to certain details. Many of the book's early chapters are so burdened by footnotes that the reading experience drags considerably. Typographical errors occur frequently – in the Māori language text especially, which suggests that Dutch publisher Rodopi did not hire a copy editor with Māori language experience. Finally, the imprecise term 'Polynesian minority,' which stands in for 'Māori' and the Anglo-centric pejorative term 'Antipodean' should be avoided.

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