

O le Lagi. Ma le Lagi. Ma le Lagi.

Moana Films and the Re-imaging of Belonging

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no materials previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. McCartney', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Tavu'i Marina Alofagia McCartney
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ABSTRACT

Through the practice-led component of the thesis, the film *The Return*, this study examines how a ‘Moana’¹ worldview has influenced the film form of Moana filmmakers². As a focus on films made by Moana creatives increase (Strong, 2025, para. 5), the literature has historically explored the politics of representation on screen. Rather than only interrogating Moana representations in the film text, this research considers the *vā* (relationality) between filmmaker and film to investigate how it informs creative decisions made during the creative process.

The Samoan tradition of *su’ifefiloi* (Ellis, 1998; Figiel, 2006; Tielu, 2016), is employed as a framework to thread together the *gafa* (genealogy) of *The Return* with constructions and explorations of Moana identity, and how these manifest in the themes and aesthetics of Moana films. *Tala fa’a’aiga* is used as a secondary framework that emerged in response to the *su’ifefiloi* as a methodology. These frameworks allow for a combination of Moana creativity and spirituality that developed the short film *The Return* and explored a theoretical approach to analysing the Moana films *O le Tulāfale* (Tamasese, 2011), *Hiama* (Freshwater, 2021), *Vai* (Arahanga et al., 2019) and *O Tamaiti* (Urale, 2019). These films are explored through the lens of the Moana values of *vā*, spirituality and/or *fa’aaloalo* (respect) to understand how film form is shaped by the identity reference of the filmmakers.

The research adds to the canon of Moana film by considering whether a Moana film grammar is emerging. The films discussed have had at least one key creative stage located and funded by a government organisation outside the filmmaker’s ancestral homeland. The study seeks to situate Moana film within the Moana rather than under the umbrella of diasporic or accented cinema. By doing so, the research reveals how Moana films can nurture the *vā* between *mafaufau* (mind), *tino* (body) and *agaga* (soul) for both the Moana filmmaker and the audience.

The thesis consists of three components: a narrative short film, a contextualising exegesis that includes *tala fa’a’aiga*, which contextualise and position the creative researcher(s). The central component of the work is *The Return*, with the exegesis and *tala fa’a’aiga* being produced in response to the creative practice. The study is significant as it is the first PhD study in Aotearoa New Zealand by a practising Moana screenwriter and director to specialise in Moana film.

Keywords: Moana film, Indigenous film, Asiata, *vā*, Pacific Studies, Pacific history, Samoan studies, Samoan history, *su’ifefiloi*.

¹ The term ‘Pacific’ was introduced to the region by a Portuguese explorer in 1521. Please see the section on terminology that discusses the use of the term Moana.

² Moana filmmakers as used in this research follows the convention of identifying those of Pacific heritage working in Pacific art in Aotearoa New Zealand.

INTRODUCTION

The study considers how a ‘Moana’ worldview influences the creative decisions in the films of Moana filmmakers. This is examined through the practice-led component of the thesis, the film *The Return*. The three components of the thesis are 1. a narrative short film; 2. a contextualising exegesis; 3. tala fa’a’iga narratives within the exegesis that contextualise and position the creative researcher(s). The central component of the work is *The Return*, with the exegesis and tala fa’a’iga being produced in response to the creative practice.

Research Questions

The thesis asks the following questions:

1. How does a Moana identity reference influence the film form³ in the short film *The Return*?
2. How does Moana film engage with and reflect an emerging Moana film grammar that is based on a Moana identity reference?

As *The Return* is the central component, the value of vā is explored in more depth as its significance increased during the creative process. Rather than only interrogating Moana representations in the film text, the research considers the vā between filmmaker and film to investigate how it informed creative decisions. The research aims to contribute to the Moana film canon by exploring an emerging Moana film grammar.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 introduces the study's rationale and provides background on the Moana diaspora and key Moana values important to the Moana filmmaking process. The values the study focuses on are vā (relationality), spirituality and fa’aaloalo (respect), which came to the forefront of the creative process during *The Return* and/or became significant in the exploration of selected Moana films analysed in Chapter 3. Therefore, these analyses also provide a contextual review of these Moana values.

Chapter 2 explores the research frameworks, both Samoan methodologies, which underpin the development of *The Return*. Su’ifefiloi is a methodology which allows for a Samoan lens to be activated during the creative process. In response to this methodology, another research framework arose, tala fa’a’iga. Both frameworks are rooted in a Samoan worldview and allow *The Return* to be created and explored from within the Moana.

Chapter 3 moves into a close textual analysis of four films written and directed by Moana filmmakers. These films are *O le Tulafale* (2011) by Tusi Tamasese, *Hiama* (2021) by Matasila Freshwater, *Vai* (2019) by Becs Arahanga, Amberley-Jo Aumua, Matasila Freshwater, Dianna Fiemana, Miria George, ‘Ofa Guttenbeil-Likiliki, Marina Alofagia McCartney, Nicole Whippy and writer Sharon Whippy, and *O Tamaiti* (1996) by Sima Urale. These films are explored through the lens of the Moana values of vā, spirituality and/or fa’aaloalo to understand how film form is shaped by the identity reference of the filmmakers. This chapter is not intended to present a comprehensive review of Moana film as a whole, nor does it intend to consider all parts of film form within the texts. Instead, I have focused on cinematography and mise-en-scène, including colour, setting, and actors. This contextual review aims to contribute to an emerging theory of Moana film, as well as Indigenous film worldwide, by focusing on the space between the filmmaker and the text. All of these films and *The Return* have had at least one key creative stage⁴ occur and have been funded by a government organisation outside their ancestral homeland. While I do not explore the political economy of their production, I acknowledge that narrative film operates in a different space to the visual arts sector in Aotearoa New Zealand [Aotearoa]⁵.

³ Film form refers to the creative aesthetics of the film and includes the cinematography, editing, sound, mise-en-scène.

⁴ Development, pre-production, production, post-production.

⁵ Te Rumu Whakaata Taonga The New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) is a government agency that invests in New Zealand films, develops filmmakers and markets the New Zealand screen industry internationally. It is accountable to the Ministry of Culture and Heritage (MCH) and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) (NZFC, 2022, p. 8)

Chapter 4 considers the gafa (genealogy) of my work through the films *Granda* (2010), *Milk & Honey* (2012), and the Samoan vignette of *Vai* (2019) and expands the focus on Moana values to include the Moana mafaufau (mind), tino (body) and agaga (soul). Examining how mafaufau, tino and agaga have been impacted by colonisation provides a context for how Moana films can nurture the vā within for both Moana filmmaker and audience.

Chapter 5 analyses the central component of the thesis, the film *The Return*, exploring themes of disconnection, connection and in-betweenness (Taumoeofolau, 2013, p. 116) and how the Moana value of vā is used to communicate these themes. It provides a close analysis of *The Return* and considers how it seeks to nurture and heal the vā within.

The exegesis concludes with a section that is part tala fa'a'aiga and a summary of the ideas explored. It considers the research's contribution to the canon of Moana film and the potential for future scholarship. Most importantly, it presents the significance of the Moana filmmaker's journey through this PhD with Creative Practice.

Terminology

“Moana”, “Moananui”, “Moana Film”, “Moana Cinema”

The term ‘Pacific’ was introduced to the region by a Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan, in 1521 (National Ocean Service, n.d.; Chitham et al., 2019, p. 16). It is a colonial name derived from Magellan's term *Mar Pacífico*, which means “peaceful sea” in Spanish or Portuguese and frames the area as passive and tranquil (Spate, 1977), nurturing the idea that it is a space and place ripe for consumption (McDonnell, 2018, p. 414). Transliterations of the term - Pasifika, Pasefika or Pasifiki - have been used by Pacific people in an attempt to indigenise a colonial-imposed label; however, these labels still have colonial roots, phonologically, genealogically and ideologically (Chitham et al. 2019, p. 16). Similarly, the tripartite labels Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia are European constructions stemming from a eugenicist and Eurocentric worldview of the Pacific. Polynesia was named for its many islands⁶, Micronesia meaning small islands⁷, and Melanesia meaning black islands⁸, named after the skin colour of the people. These labels carry racist ideologies that perpetuate belittlement, colourism and isolation.

French cartographers first introduced the term 'Oceania' in the early 19th century (Chitham et al. 2019, p. 16), and has been widely used as an alternative to the label ‘Pacific’. The term gained traction amongst the artistic and academic Moana community in the late 19th century when Tongan writer and scholar Epeli Hau'ofa argued for the use of Oceania, which captured the vastness and interconnectedness of a sea of islands, rather than the colonial construction of small islands in the sea (Hau'ofa, 1993, p. 32). While this shift encourages a reframing of scale and connectedness when thinking about the Pacific, the word Oceania still has colonial linguistic roots. However, Hau'ofa's shift in perspective laid the philosophical groundwork from which scholars and artists have expanded upon, and eventually encouraged a shift to the term ‘moana’, which has indigenous roots to the region, culture and language (Ka'ili et al., 2017, pp. 1–17; Chitham et al., 2019, p. 16).

The word ‘moana’ is a Proto-Polynesian word, meaning ocean or sea, and exists in approximately 35 contemporary Polynesian languages, including Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Hawaiian, Cook Islands Māori and Tahitian, which reveals a shared Indigenous ancestry (Mana Moana, n.d. para. 2). Its use as a regional descriptor has been championed by Moana artists and scholars, particularly in Aotearoa, as a deliberate move away from colonial-language constructs toward an oceanic, relational worldview (Māhina, 1999a, 1999b; Mallon et al., 2012; Eshraghi, 2015; Lopesi, 2021, p. 15).

The current scholarship explores the terms ‘Moana’, ‘Moananui’, ‘Moana Oceania’ and ‘Moana Pasifika’ to refer to the Pacific region or various regions, nations and oceans within the Pacific (Chitham et al., n.d.; Māhina, 1999a, 1999b;

⁶Polynesia was coined by Charles de Broses in 1756 (Tcherzkéoff, 2003, p. 179).

⁷Louis Domeny de Rienzi first used the term Micronesia in 1831, which was later popularized by French navigator Jules Dumont d'Urville (ibid., p. 180).

⁸Jean-Baptiste Bory de Saint-Vincent coined the term Mélanésie in the 1825 (ibid., p. 179)

Mallon et al., 2012; Eshraghi, 2015; Thomsen et al., 2022, p. 347)⁹. During a Vā Moana Talanoa session in June of 2019, a group of Pacific scholars and artists met to discuss the term Moana as a replacement for Oceania. While many supported the use of the term, artist Julia Mage'au Gray, who is of Papua New Guinean heritage, did not as she felt it did not reflect her linguistic history and participants were not able to agree on the use of this term (Diaz, V. et al., 2019). Lopesi explains that during a session at the 2019 Association for Social Anthropology Conference, some researchers working in or with heritage to the regional areas of Melanesia and Micronesia felt excluded by this term (Lopesi, 2021, pp. 15-16).

Despite the contested nature of these terms, they have become a part of the Moana academic and artistic discourse in Aotearoa. Mallon, Māhina-Tuai & Salesa use it in their history of Pacific peoples in New Zealand (2012), and scholars Leali'ifano Albert Refiti and Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul founded the AUT Vā Moana Research Centre, which uses Moananui and Te Moananui as central labels in their research programmes¹⁰ (AUT Vā Moana Research Centre, n.d., para 2). In 2015, Eshraghi applied the term Moananui to Pacific arts practice in Australia (pp 62-67), while Ka'ili theorises that the term Moana "helps Moanans retain their memories of the past and awareness of its presence" (Ka'ili, 2018, p. 24, as cited in Lopesi, 2021, p. 15). Lopesi uses the term Moana "to refer to the Pacific region, Pacific people and Pacific ways, rather than the terms Pacific/Oceania/Pasifika, in alignment with other Moana scholars who acknowledge that Pacific is a colonially imposed term placed on the region" (Lopesi, 2021, p. 15). Thomsen, Lopesi & Lee (2022, p. 347) use 'Moana', 'Moana Oceania', 'Pacific' and 'Pasifika' interchangeably, acknowledging the diversity of terms Pacific peoples use for their culture and region; subsequently, Thomsen et. al co-edited "Uplifting Moana Perspectives" a special issue of the Journal of New Zealand Studies (2021), while Gordon-Smith and Lopesi co-founded *Marinade: Aotearoa Journal of Moana Art*, also in 2021. Refiti et al. (2022) acknowledge the term Moana "is still debated with respect to its capacity for inclusion or exclusion" while simultaneously using it throughout their article "A Different Kind of Vā" (Refiti et al., 2022, p. 375-376). Aia-Fa'aleava also states, "I use the term 'moana people' (Hau'ofa 1998; cited in Fa'avae 2019a, 4) instead of Pasifika "to actively disrupt the colonial naming of the people in the Pacific region, as it acknowledges our connection to each other through moana" (Fa'avae 2019a, 4)", (2024, p. 1). Therefore, while Moana and Moananui are contested terms in Pacific Studies discourse, they are not without precedent or support.

In Aotearoa, Mok (2000, cited in Mila-Schaaf, 2010, p. 24) found that NZ-born Pacific youth hold pan-Pacific and ethnic-specific identities simultaneously and strategically. These identity labels coexist and shift depending on context and responses to marginalisation and belonging (Mok, 2000, as cited in Mila-Schaaf, 2010, p. 22; Borell, 2005, as cited in Mila-Schaaf, 2010, p. 22). These blanket terms leverage economies of scale by strengthening access to resources and encouraging political influence. In the screen sector, for example, films from the Moana are not labelled Samoan, Tongan or Kuki Airani films. They fall under the category of 'Pacific'. This grouping is strategic and enables advocacy for targeted funding, inclusion, and legislative change¹¹. The power of this grouping is evident in Aotearoa's Pacific screen industry advocacy group, PISA (Pacific Island Screen Advocacy Group), and in the US through PEAK (Pasifika Entertainment Advancement Komiti). This is also seen through the inclusion of Moana short films in New Zealand's largest film festival through the establishment of New Zealand's Best and Ngā Whanaunga Māori Pasifika Shorts section in 2012, which has now become Ngā Whanaunga: Aotearoa New Zealand's Best short film competition (<https://www.nziff.co.nz/2026/tamaki-makaurau-auckland/nga-whanaunga-aotearoa-new-zealands-best-2/>, para. 2, 3).

In keeping with Epeli Hau'ofa's desire to break free from a colonial subjugable imagination of the Pacific, and Hūfanga-He-Ako-Moe-Lotu Professor 'Ōkusitino Maāhina's call for bravery by moving away from colonial imposed labels, including Oceania, this research uses the terms 'Moananui' to refer to Polynesia and 'Moana' to refer to the wider Pacific region (Hau'ofa, 1993, p. 32; Chitham et al., n.d., para. 3). I use these terms as placeholder terms as I

⁹ During the June 2019 at a Vā Moana Talanoa session, a group of Pacific scholars and artists met to discuss the term Moana as a replacement for Oceania. While many supported the use of the term, artist Julia Mage'au Gray, who is of Papua New Guinean heritage, did not as she felt it did not reflect her linguistic history (Diaz, V. et al., 2019).

¹⁰ Vā Moana: Space and Relationality in Pacific Thought and Identify (2019-2023) and Artefacts of Relations: Building in Te Moananui (2022-2025) are research programmes funded by the Marsden Fund, Royal Society Te Apārangi

¹¹ Creative New Zealand funding is governed by The Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa Act 2014, which states one of its main purposes as recognising and allocating funding to Pacific peoples and the arts of the Pacific Island peoples of New Zealand (Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa Act 2014, ss 3, 7, 10). This Act has ensured that funding is ring-fenced for group known as "Pacific peoples" in the Arts sector in Aotearoa.

acknowledge the Moana is a diverse region reflecting a multitude of realities (Thomsen, et al., 2022, p. 347). I also use the terms ‘Moana film’ and ‘Moana cinema’ interchangeably to include films made by filmmakers with gafa from the Moana¹². The use of umbrella terms in film studies has precedent as seen in the general frameworks of First Cinema, Second Cinema, Third Cinema, Fourth World Cinema, Accented Cinema, Diasporic Cinema, which group diverse cultural cinemas under collective labels (Solanas & Getino, 1969; Barclay, 2003; Naficy, 2001).

My use of these terms is influenced by my worldview as a filmmaker of Samoan heritage, born and raised in Aotearoa. As a Samoan, they are part of my linguistic genealogy and the artistic and scholarly discourse I move through. I acknowledge these terms are part of the evolving and contested nature of Indigenous linguistic reclamation; however, they are productive. This research does not propose a checklist of Moana film characteristics or a universal Moana aesthetic. Instead, it offers a way for people to consider and theorise the film language of Moana filmmakers from within the culture, instead of applying non-Moana value systems. Moana cinema, or Moana film, works similarly, providing a relational framework that has emerged from Moana practice, with Samoa as my anchor.

“The West” and “Western”

This research uses the terms “the West” or “Western” to refer to Euro-American thinking and philosophy that underpins Eurocentrism. Mignolo (2017) theorises the West as an epistemological category rather than a geographical one, with its foundational knowledge originating in Europe during the Renaissance and later distributed globally through Christian theology. From the Enlightenment period, secular philosophy combined with theology to continue “the European epistemic and ontological march on the rest of the world” (pp. 287-288). Mignolo further identifies US imperialism as an extension of European imperialism despite differences in historical and geographical context (Mignolo, 2017, p. 299).

However, I have made some changes throughout the exegesis using the terms “hegemonic culture”, “dominant culture”, “non-Moana”, “colonial”, “colonial patriarchal” where appropriate.

“Geordie” and “Romanichal”

While I sometimes refer to myself as English, I use the label Geordie because my Father used it to describe himself. To be a Geordie is to come from Newcastle, located in the far North-East of England. Geordies also have their own accent and dialect. Romanichal refers to a sub-group of Romani people who hail from England. I am Romanichal on my paternal Nana’s side.

Use of AI

Portions of this exegesis benefited from generative AI support using OpenAI’s ChatGPT (GPT-4, 2025) and Anthropic’s Claude (Sonnet 5 Medium, 2026). While the tool assisted with structural suggestions and organising key ideas in some sections, all critical and creative content remains authored and verified by the supervisory team and me.

¹² I have not explored films by Māori filmmakers in this research as scholarship by Māori exploring film form does exist (see works by Barclay, Mita, Waititi). Instead, I follow the convention of identifying those of Pacific heritage working in Pacific art in Aotearoa, as scholarship addressing the film form in work by these filmmakers is sparse.

LINK TO *THE RETURN*

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Return is currently under an embargo while it completes its film festival run.

CHAPTER 1: THE MOANA

Tala Fa'a'aiga 1



Figure 1. Asiata Leaoa Lameko Tavu'i Solopo (n.d.)
B. 1910 – D. 1986
© Marina Alofagia McCartney

I remember the day I found out my Granda¹³ died.

It was during my primary school years, on Sunday 29 June 1986, when my Dad brought my younger siblings and I back to my Mum after our weekend with him. My Mum and Dad separated when I was 5 years old, and we stayed with Mum and alternated weekends and Sundays with Dad. We lived on Berwyn Avenue in Takanini, Auckland at the time and my Granda had come from Samoa for medical treatment and was staying with us. When we turned into Berwyn Avenue, both sides of the road were lined with cars. As we neared our home, about halfway down the street, we realised the cars had branched out from our long driveway, spreading out down both directions of our street. I got excited and remembered telling Dad that it was a big party because Granda had recovered. As the three of us walked down the driveway, a 10-year-old, 8-year-old and 5-year-old, we could hear singing in Samoan. The garage door was up, and I could see all our large household furniture items stored in there. There were buckets of povi masima (salted beef) and rolls of 'iē toga (fine mats). I did not recognise many people in the garden and around the entrance way.

My Mother came out and bundled us inside the door. Sounds from a piano, which we did not previously have, were playing, and people were sitting one behind the other right throughout our house, even down the hallway. Our home was filled with Samoan people and song and, it seemed, not much else. We were taken straight to the bathroom, and while we played in our bubble-filled bath, the singing continued. At one point, the bathroom door opened, and Uncle Tavu'i Mapesone was on the floor, twisted in pain, clutching his chest. The door was quickly shut, and my sister Natalie and I looked at each other awkwardly because we had no idea what was going on. Mum came in and helped us dress. Our hair was brushed, and we were ushered past all the people down the hallway, through the dining area and into the lounge.

I do not have a memory of Mum telling me my Granda had passed, but I do remember approaching his body lying in state in the middle of the lounge surrounded by Samoan faces all watching the only 'afa kasi (half-caste) grandchildren

¹³ As a sign of respect for my parents, grandparents and elders, I use the convention of capitalising Mum, Mother, Dad, Mama, Granda, Nana, Aunty, Uncle when it is used in place of their name.

of the well-known and respected ali'i tulāfale (high chief and orator) and the sa'o¹⁴ (titular head) of our aiga potopoto (extended family), Asiata Leaoa Lameko Tavu'i Solopo [Asiata Leaoa], greet him in death for the first time. I remember going over and looking at him. It was the first time I had seen a dead body. I was a little scared, but I was not emotional. I looked at my Mum, who gave a small smile encouraging us to go to him. I gave him a kiss on his cheek. He was cold and his face was hard. I remember worrying what people thought because I showed no emotion. Then we were taken away. What followed were days of hundreds of people visiting to pay their respects. It was an immensely sad time for my Mum and her siblings, but it was a time filled with no school, playing with our cousins well into the night, until we fell asleep exhausted.

I had my first trip to Samoa as an adult. My Mother, Tavu'i Mapuni Leaoa [Tavu'i Mapuni], migrated to Aotearoa in the 1970s like many immigrants, not only for a better life in the land of milk and honey but to send remittances home to her parents, my Nana Sevai Leleisi'uao [Nana Sevai] and Granda Asiata Leaoa. My Mother met my Father, Stuart Stanley McCartney [Stuart], and had three children, including myself, within a five-and-a-half-year period. Their relationship was messy and full of upheavals and uncertainty, which defined my early years, and they finally separated when I was five. They were both worse off financially, and Mum struggled with three children under the age of six, often living below the poverty line. This meant that trips back to Samoa were non-existent. Mum finally returned to Samoa without us, in 1986 to take my Granda's body home, and she travelled back again when my Nana passed a few years later.

Due to our financial situation, we did not have the opportunity to physically connect with Samoa, even though we were surrounded by our culture daily as children. Our Mother was fiercely Samoan and a matriarchal knowledge holder of the aiga potopoto. We were raised surrounded by the Samoan language, although our Mother never taught us to speak or understand it. The racist experiences she was subjected to in Aotearoa resulted in her pushing us to do well at school; "Master the Western education system", she said. And I did well in an advanced placement class and leadership roles in high school; a prefect in 6th form, Deputy Head Girl in 7th form, and leader of the Manurewa High School Samoan cultural group, which my Mother established. We had strong relationships with our cousins because my Mother had strong relationships with her siblings and cousins. We were often surrounded by the aiga potopoto (extended family) of our branches of Sāmoeleoi (the clan of Moeleoi) and Sālilomaiaava (the clan of Lilomaiaava). The only thing we missed out on was church, because we would be with Dad every Sunday, but Mum made sure we had the opportunity to join Girls Brigade through the church and the Christian Club at school.

When I finally visited Samoa, I was an adult, and it was with my Mum. As I stepped off the plane, a blanket of unfamiliar heat hit me. But when I walked across the tarmac, I experienced an odd sense of déjà vu. Samoa felt familiar to me. It felt like a return to a place I knew, even though I was visiting for the first time. During this trip, I had many wonderful experiences, but even though the place felt familiar there were so many things about my Samoan culture that were not.

On the main road from the airport to Apia, I noticed a ute being driven very slowly. There was a coffin lying on the back, and men were walking in a procession behind it, with one shouting. I asked my Mum, "What's happening there?". She just said, "Oh, that's normal. A matai (chief) has passed away, so the tulāfale (orator) are saying the formal things they need to say for that person". She added, "That's what happened when we brought your Granda home, but we took him to your Auntie Sao's family in Apia before we took him home to Savai'i". I was fascinated by this, by the passionate 'shouting' and the journey the living takes with the dead, to wherever they need to go.

When my Mother passed away, we also took her body back to Savai'i. We hopped off the ferry at Salelologa¹⁵ and a van was waiting and a choir singing. Her coffin was loaded onto the van, and in what seemed like a surreal turn of events, we drove her back to Satupa'itea¹⁶, with the processional convoy, which I found out later is called an 'āuala, and the announcements done by the tulāfale using a megaphone. The only stop we made was at the Maota i Leulunui,

¹⁴ The sa'o is the principal matai or titular head of a family. They are the paramount chief of a village.

¹⁵ A district in Savai'i where the wharf is located.

¹⁶ My Mother was born in the district of Palauli in Savai'i, my Nana's home, and raised in the neighbouring district Satupa'itea, Savai'i, my Granda's home.

the residence of the Leleisi'uao¹⁷ matai, in my Nana's village of Vailoa, Palauli, where our Leleisi'uao family gifted the 'afuelo 'ie toga¹⁸, over Mum's casket.

I had also become fascinated by the Samoan belief that the souls of our dead travel across land and water, from east to west, until they reach the water's edge near the village of Falealupo¹⁹. Here, Le Fafā, the gateway to Pulotu²⁰, the Samoan Elysium, is located. The souls walk towards an underground cavern and leap into the water, the entrance to the next world (Kramar, 1994, p.24).

The image of a woman leaping into the moana and toward Pulotu has fascinated me for over 20 years.

The journeys from the physical world to the place of the dead and the spiritual captivated me. I have thought constantly about the journey my Granda's body took from Aotearoa on a plane back to Upolu, then to Apia before heading back past the airport, to the Mulifanua Ferry Terminal, over the Apolima Strait to Savai'i, over the land from Salelologa and back to Pito Nu'u in Satupa'itea. I have thought constantly about the journey my Mother's body took from Aotearoa back to Pito Nu'u in Satupa'itea and how, other than the trip to Apia, it mirrored my Granda's.

Then I wondered, would my body and soul take this trip?
Will I leap off the edge of the land at Falealupo toward Pulotu?

And as I pondered this over many years, insecurities slowly crept in, thieves of belonging.

I am a Samoan, English and Romanichal woman who was born outside Samoa, does not speak the language and who, despite being surrounded constantly by my culture, still finds many cultural rituals and behaviours foreign.

I started asking the questions:
What journey will my body take when I die?
What journey will my soul take when I die?
Where will I be welcome?
Will I follow the journey of my Mother and Granda?
If my culture feels foreign at times in life, will it in death?
Will my mind, body and soul embark on a return home?
And where is that home?

These explorations and the image of a woman leaping into the moana toward Pulotu have stayed with me and spawned the beginning of a film idea that has led to this PhD.

¹⁷ Leleisi'uao is the paramount title from my Nana's village in Vailoa and associated with Sālilomaiaava.

¹⁸ The 'afuelo refers to a Samoan fine mat that is placed over a casket. The word 'afu means to wrap or draw (a blanket, sheet etc) over the body. The word elo means the smell of death. This signifies a family member has passed.

¹⁹ Falealupo is a district located in Savai'i.

²⁰ Pulotu is considered the Samoan Elysium or afterworld.

Rationale of the Study

For almost a century, the Moana and her peoples have been the subject of a colonial cinematic gaze²¹ (Pihama, 1994, p. 239). Films made primarily by outsiders have contributed to a pervasive and persistent set of exotic, romantic, and often erotically charged visual tropes. Scholars have explored these cinematic tropes, focusing on misrepresentation (Suaalii, 2000, p. 93; Brawley & Dixon, 2015, p. xi-xii), Orientalism in the Moana (Suaalii, 2000, p. 94-95), imperialism (Pearson, 2010, p. 106, 110) and post-colonial resistance (Shohat & Stam, 2003).

In Aotearoa, the Moana population is characteristically young and growing (Salesa, 2017, p. 7-8), and as a result, Moana stories are gaining traction in the domestic and international film industry. As the number of films with Moana characters and content increases (Strong, 2025, para. 5), existing literature has explored issues of sovereignty, self-determination, Indigenous agency and the political economy of production in cinema (Hereniko, 2008; Mercier, 2007; Pearson, 2005, 2010; Waititi, 2006, 2008, 2011). Māori filmmakers have contributed significantly to this field; for example, Barry Barclay's formulation of Fourth Cinema (2003a), while Merata Mita (1992) laid the groundwork for thinking about Indigenous aesthetics. However, the pool of filmmakers of Moana heritage remains small, and as a result, academic analyses of work(s) by Moana filmmakers are limited. This study is significant because it examines how a Moana worldview shapes the creative aesthetics of films by Moana filmmakers and explores this topic through the creative outcome, *The Return*.

For Moana people, traversing the Moana to increase our cultural and social capital is an ancestral practice that has existed for thousands of years (Niech, 2006, pp. 200, 233). Many Moana filmmakers navigate a colonial-constructed film industry and discourse but still draw on their Moana worldview, which is "inclusive of both ancestral knowledges and global connections" (Van Art Gallery, 2019, para. 2). They occupy a space that allows them to traverse the filmic space, threading together various influences to create their work.

Since the Moana came into contact with foreigners, her people have grappled with a dichotomy of values and beliefs that emerged from this encounter. At these cultural boundaries, the most innovative things can happen, and this is happening in the cinematic realm. Understanding the values underpinning Moana Cinema may offer funders, festival programmers, critics, film scholars, and sales agents an alternative way to assess Moana films that do not fully fit Western film conventions²².

Therefore, this study will make a significant contribution to the understanding and evolution of Moana film and will add to the discourse around Indigenous film. In addition, the creative-led component engages with and reflects an emerging Moana film grammar that is informed by Moana values.

The Moana Diaspora and Film

For 4,000 years, the people of the ocean or Tangata o le Moana, have travelled into the unknown and settled an area that covers a third of the earth's surface (Salesa, 2024, p. 25). The desire to increase their social and cultural capital, combined with colonial state-imposed relationships, has resulted in the expansion of the Moana world beyond its physical boundaries. Moana peoples have continued to remap geographical boundaries and develop their peoples by drawing upon their ancient ritual of voyaging, exploration, and cultural exchange (Hau'ofa, 2008, pp. 32-33).

The contemporary Moana diaspora is shaped by settlement in cosmopolitan metropolises located in Aotearoa, Australia and the United States of America²³, which now rival or surpass that of the ancestral homeland (Salesa, 2012, p. 337). Moana people grapple with ongoing tensions resulting from colonialism, economic disparities and ethnic inequalities (Gershon, 2007, p. 475), along with identity issues resulting from displacement, assimilation,

²¹ *Moana of the South Seas* (1926), 85 min., dir. Robert J. Flaherty, is hailed as the first film to capture life in the Pacific.

²² See the following texts for definitions of what is now conventionally known as dominant Western/Hollywood film conventions; "The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960" (Bordwell, D., Staiger, J., & Thompson, K., 1985); "Narration in the Fiction Film" (Bordwell, 1985); and Classical Hollywood cinema: Narrational principles and procedures" (Bordwell, 1986).

²³ These nations have complex histories of colonialism with Pacific nations.

discrimination and racism. Despite this, distinctive identities have emerged that integrate Moana values of the homeland with the way of life in their adopted diasporic homes.

These Moana values are seen and felt in the 'fa'a-Moana' or the Moana way²⁴, including contemporary Moana storytelling. Māori filmmaker Merata Mita surmised that film created celluloid memory pictures from the storyteller's imagination and therefore only expanded the oral tradition of storytelling by transferring these pictures from the mind's eye to the body's eyes (Lamche, 1984, p. 25). Mita argues that, because film is an extension of an Indigenous storytelling tradition, she was in an advantageous position to "unite the technical complexity of film with a traditional Māori philosophy" (Lamche, 1984, p.3).

The Moana filmmaker not only brings a history of storytelling from the Moana but threads this together with Hollywood industry practices of filmmaking. The Moana values of "respect, reciprocity, communal relationships, collective responsibility, gerontocracy, humility, love and charity, service, and spirituality" (Naepi, 2019, p.1) are integrated into a filmmaking convention that is situated within an industry centred on Hollywood as the world capital of filmmaking and commodified visual storytelling. This meeting and jarring of value systems and storytelling methods has produced Moana films that are as distinct as the Moana identities explored in the study.

Moana Values and Identity

Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi (from here on will be referred to as Tui Atua), former Head of State for Samoa, first uses the term 'Samoan Indigenous reference' to describe one's knowing of oneself as located within a lived cultural heritage:

In my Samoan (indigenous) reference, we, as Samoans, Pacific or Māori peoples, are not individuals; we are an integral part of the cosmos. We share a divinity with our ancestors - the land, the seas and the skies. We are not individuals because we share a *tofi* (inheritance) with our families, our villages and our nations. We belong to our families and our families belong to us. We belong to our villages and our villages belong to us. We belong to our nation and our nations belong to us. (2008, p. 212)

Tui Atua does not specifically address whether this is 'inside' or 'outside' the person's ancestral homeland. This study, however, understands the Samoan Indigenous reference as being applied to both conditions. It is used here for a Moana person who, while physically located in the diaspora, brings ways of knowing, seeing and being that are informed by the Moana while simultaneously living in colonial society. Melenaite Taumoeofolau (2013) writes that New Zealand-born Moana people may be raised with an understanding of Moana values transmitted to them in English while Island-born Moana people will understand "Pacific values as encoded in their indigenous Pacific language" (p. 115), and both are influenced by hegemonic culture.

Research has mostly explored how values and institutions contribute to the Moana reference and how these may relate to identity and well-being (Taumoeofolau 2013, p. 115; Tiatia 2012). Research has also examined how the Moana reference, or worldview, is expressed through the arts, particularly the visual arts (Mallon & Pereira, 2002). What remains to be examined is how the Moana worldview works its way into and is expressed through the medium of film by Moana filmmakers.

In this research, the concepts of *vā*, spirituality and *fa'aaloalo* will be explored in a selection of Moana films, including my own.

Vā

George Pratt, who wrote the first Samoan dictionary in 1893, defines *vā* as merely "a space between" (p. 331). Albert Wendt's 1999 description of a contemporary Samoan worldview of *vā* is much more complex:

²⁴ 'The Moana way' used here references Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's use of the phrase "The Pacific Way" which he coined in 1997 (The Pacific Way, 2020).

Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of Va or Wa in Māori and Japanese. Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change. [...] A well-known Samoan expression is “Ia teu le va”—cherish, nurse, care for the va, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group unity more than individualism, that perceive the individual person, or creature, or thing in terms of group, in terms of va, relationships. (p. 402)

Rather than a space that requires occupation or closing, vā is filled with interwoven and interdependent relationships between the environment and the animal world, humankind and the cosmos (Kumar, 2011, pp. 11-12). In a Samoan worldview, vā consists of two interconnected spatial conditions: vā tapua’i, sacred/spiritual space, and vā fealoaloa’i, social space. Sa’ili Lilomaiva-Doktor describes vā tapua’i as establishing and guiding spiritual boundaries (2009, p. 14) while Puogafa Tuagalu describes it as worshipful space that is “activated through prayer or ritual” (2008, p. 110). Vā fealoaloa’i is explained as underpinning and guiding social behaviours and relationships between people and the environment (Lilomaiva-Doktor, 2008, p. 14). It establishes the social structure within the aiga (family) and the nu’u (village) giving Samoans an understanding of their place and role within the collective (Tuagalu, 2008, p. 111, 112).

Population mobility, migration and the expansion of the Moana population have brought with them new understandings and imaginings of vā as relationality, a concept that has become a general understanding of vā in the contemporary Moana world. Artistic practice and scholarship continue to develop how the vā relates to Moana identity (Webb-Binder, 2009; Whimp, 2009). In addition, the collapsing of space and time through the internet has introduced new ways to ‘teu le vā’, or care for and nourish relationships, and this is seen in the stretching of communities across oceans while simultaneously sustaining and strengthening relationships (Lilomaiva-Doktor, 2009, p. 9; Lopesi, 2018). Bernida Webb-Binder discusses Lily Laita’s painting *Va i Ta Taeao Lalata E Aunoo Ma Gagana* as an embodiment of vā Moana. Through its negotiation and expression of Moana identity in an Aotearoa context, she can draw attention to its performance in the space between the Moana and the non-Moana (Webb-Binder, 2009).

For Moana filmmakers, the vā exists not only between them and their audience, but also between filmmaker and film. This vā is the space I am interested in exploring in relation to Moana film.

Spirituality

The significance of the vā, in its various forms throughout the Moana, derives from a particular spiritual belief and understanding of how the world operates. The New Zealand Ministry for Pacific Peoples state their ongoing commitment to Moana peoples and acknowledges the values that underpin a Moana worldview (2018). One is spirituality, “the cornerstone of traditional Pacific values and cultures” (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2018). Tui Atua describes Samoan spirituality as having a dual relationship between, and an acceptance of, both Christian and ancestral Gods (Tui Atua, 2008).

This ancestral spirituality, whether a belief in ancient ancestral deities or a connection to those who have passed, is consistently seen in Moana art. In theatre, through an incantation of a Samoan creation story in Albert Wendt’s play ‘The Songmaker’s Chair’ (2003) (O’Donnell, 2017), or painting, as in Loretta Reynolds’ exploration of the Rarotongan God Tangaroa (Reynolds, 2010), explorations of the relationship between the spiritual and Moana people persevere. As a result, the ancestral and present worlds stay connected. Historically, films that include representations of Moana people have alluded to the spiritual within their narratives. The inclusion of Moana deities in major studio movies, such as Disney’s *Moana* (Clements, Musker, 2016), indicates the acceptance of Moana Indigenous spirituality as part of contemporary life. Two of the film’s major turning points rest on a belief in ancestral spirituality. The Act I turning point²⁵ has Moana’s grandmother on her deathbed, urging Moana to leave the island, something no one has done for a millennium. This act is akin to the Samoan concept of mavaega, a dying person’s last wish or verbal last will (Tui Atua, 2008). The Act II turning point²⁶ shows Moana at her lowest point, ready to abandon her quest when her

²⁵ A major twist in a film narrative that dramatically affects the protagonist’s life and launches them onto a different path.

²⁶ A major twist that forces the protagonist to take action and move the narrative toward its climax and subsequent resolution.

grandmother's spirit, seen as a stingray, reminds her what she is capable of. These two major turning points hinge on an enduring belief in the ancestral, even if non-Moana filmmakers present it as a primordial belief.

Pre-colonial Indigenous Samoan belief posits that Samoans originated from the progenitor and first ancestor Tagaloalalagi, through their descendants Lagi and Papa. Therefore, a divine connection exists between Samoan and Creator as Creator is also ancestor (Betham, 2008, p. 6).

Fa'aaloalo

Respect or 'fa'aaloalo' is another value that informs the Moana reference (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2018). The English word 'respect' is defined as "holding someone or something in high regard" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). However, this definition is somewhat limited in its application to a Moana reference, since it cannot render the complex beliefs associated with the Samoan fa'aaloalo, and the Tongan equivalent, faka'apa'apa, which are important to the Moana worldview (Taumoeolau, 2013, p. 118). Taumoeolau explains that faka'apa'apa and fa'aaloalo are rooted in Moana beliefs of mana and tapu, which are in turn steeped in complex spiritual beliefs concerning spiritual or mystical qualities and a sense of sacredness or holiness, respectively. Taumoeolau describes mana and tapu as the:

...mystical quality of extraordinary or supernatural ability to do things – or make things happen – that cannot be explained or fathomed by ordinary humans, hence a sense of superiority and power about possessions of mana. Tapu is the feeling of almost fearful forbiddenness about someone or something, which gives rise to a sense of sacredness, holiness, purity, or blessedness about them. (Taumoeolau, 2013, p.119)

These attributes of the gods became associated with their descendants; human beings (Taumoeolau, *ibid.*). Therefore, for Tongans and Samoans, the values of fa'aaloalo and faka'apa'apa are part of their acknowledgement and understanding of the spiritual, and they inform the protocols for their interactions with the world. For Moana people, the interpretation of these values manifests in the diaspora through ways of behaving and speaking, be it through the lowering of their body accompanied by a "tulou" (pardon me) as they pass in front of another person or through deferring the first take of a meal to the elderly.

According to Tongan artist, Hulita Kolo'i, the foundation of her artistic practice includes "faka'apa'apa (respect), Anga fakatokilalo (humility), Tauhi vaha'a (kinship) and Mamahi'i me'a (loyalty)" (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2019, para 1). Samoan artist Fatu Feu'u explains:

In my culture, values are expressed in various forms, religious and traditional. Fa'asamoa values are manifested in the conventions of ava (respect), fa'aaloalo (reverence) and alofa (love, compassion and concern). They form the basis of the spiritual and cultural identity of the Samoan people. (Tautai Trust, 2020)

Mangaian artist David Teata's piece "The Haka" is made to evoke "timeless values of strength, integrity and respect" (Tautai Trust, 2020), while Samoan artists, Lalovai Peseta, Francis Pesamino and Wong Chiu Tuipoloa, exhibit artworks in Samoa about the concept of fa'aaloalo (Tautai Trust, 2019). These artists demonstrate how the value of fa'aaloalo guides their work or is significant enough to warrant being a major theme of their artistic works.

How does fa'aaloalo, which demands a particular behaviour, an acknowledgement of status and the etiquette associated with this status (Careerforce, 2017) inform the directorial decisions of a Moana filmmaker? Does this influence where the director places the camera, or the angles associated with particular characters, or the placement of the characters within the frame? Does it inform the type of musical leitmotifs associated with particular characters? How does the value of fa'aaloalo/faka'apa'apa and its Moana equivalents effect film form in Moana films?

These questions are explored in several ways through this research.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Tala Fa'a'aiga 2

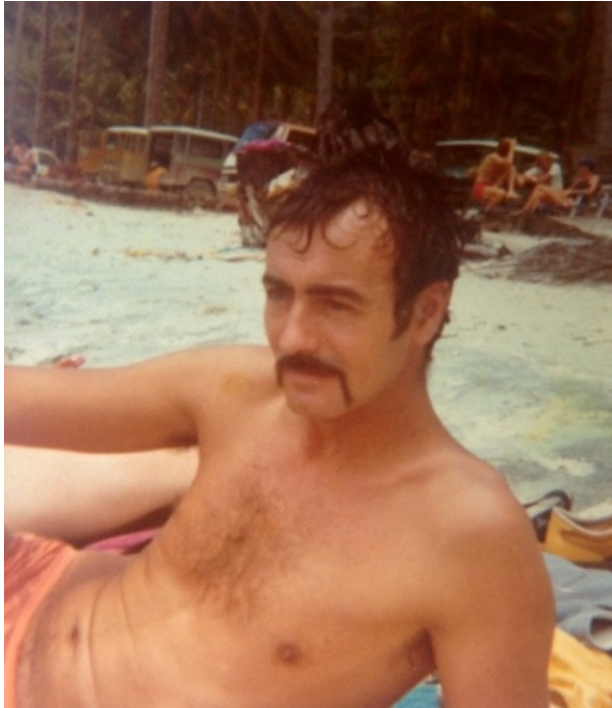


Figure 2. Stuart Stanley McCartney (1978), Bougainville
B. 1938 – D. 2012
© Marina Alofagia McCartney



Figure 3. Dad and me (2005), Taupo
© Marina Alofagia McCartney

On the 12th of July 2012, I lost a baby through a traumatic miscarriage. I plunged into a deep depression and was prescribed antidepressants. I was familiar with this medication, as I had been on and off it for most of my adult life. In the weeks after my miscarriage, I hadn't seen my Father, who was the most important person in the world to me, as much as I usually would. In August 2012, a friend whisked me away on a Friday afternoon for a weekend of rest. I talked to my Dad over the phone on Saturday and he told me he was not feeling himself but as I had travelled in my friend's car I had to wait to come back with her on Sunday. As soon as I arrived home, I drove to see him with a bag packed for a stay of several days. A few days later, he was admitted to hospital and after a 5-week stay and a diagnosis of terminal lung cancer, we took him to one of my sister's homes. We began a 24-hour roster, caring for him ourselves as he did not want to go to hospice. On 16 November 2012, my brother Jason's birthday, my Father took his last breath surrounded by most of his children and their partners. When he passed, one of my brother-in-laws, who is Māori, began reciting through tears, a poroporoaki, a final farewell to the dead. Maybe this is part of why I used a Lagi (an oratorical funeral ritual) in *The Return*. The day after we buried our Father, my Mother's sister called urging us to see her immediately, as we hadn't seen much of her during the time we cared for our Father. Mum revealed she also had cancer, and it was terminal. In many ways, what my siblings and I learned from caring for our Father prepared us to care for our Mother. And within a day we mobilised and initiated our 24-hour roster system again, caring for her at home. My Mother passed away three weeks after Dad, on 10 December 2012. To date, these five months were the most traumatic of my life and left me struggling daily as I attempted to navigate grief and life after three losses: my baby, my Dad and my Mum. For nearly six years after this period, I stayed on the antidepressants.

In March 2018, I began practising meditation. I did not really know what I was doing at the time, but I knew I needed to change something in my life. I was now a single Mother of a 4-year-old; I was still on antidepressants, and the last film I made, *Milk & Honey* (2012), was released six years prior. My meditation practice consisted of me sitting cross-

legged on the ground, breathing in and out slowly and deeply with my eyes closed to a timer, upon waking and before bed.

Around the same time, I was fortunate to be selected as part of a group of Moana women who would write and direct, the portmanteau feature film *Vai* (Arahanga et al., 2019). Each woman had a genealogical connection to different nations in Moananui and would create a vignette for a character named 'Vai' at different periods of her life. In May 2012, we all attended a writing retreat to generate the first draft of *Vai*. There were nine of us along with the producers, Kerry Warkia and Kiel McNaughton. I introduced the idea for my vignette; an exploration of the space after death because the intangible spiritual world was part of the tangible Moana world. I was met with harsh criticism and strong resistance to the idea, from one of my Vai sisters. It felt like she ripped the idea apart, beat by beat, metaphor by metaphor, theory by theory. When we moved on from my idea to that of the next Vai sister, I sat in our fono (meeting) trying to contribute while insecurities crept in. I did not have another idea, and we were required to turn around a 10-page draft by 9am the next morning. I had nothing to write. Maybe I was not the best Samoan woman for the Samoan vignette. Maybe I was the weakest creative link; after all, I hadn't made a film in six years. Maybe I should not make a film again. Maybe I wasn't worthy of this creative opportunity. Maybe I was not Samoan enough to write and direct a Samoan story.

I forced myself to eat dinner, despite a tummy filled with anxiety and a head filled with unshed tears that I did not want anyone to see. A pressure grew in my head and when I retired to my room for the evening, I knew I needed to cry to release, but no tears came. I ran the shower and stepped under the water hoping it would provide some sort of cleansing. Nothing came. And finally, out of pure frustration I shouted, "Mum. Why didn't you teach me Samoan?". Then, the tears poured out, and I wept for a long time. Exhaustion set in and I still had no story ideas for the first draft vignette I was required to present at 9am the next morning. I set my alarm for 4am, calculating that if I wrote 2 pages of script per hour, I could write 10 pages by 9am. Before I went to bed, I sat cross-legged to meditate. I was really scared, and maybe this is what prompted me to do what I did next. I closed my eyes and breathed in and out five times. Then I said:

I call upon my Samoan ancestors.
If there is a story you think I am worthy enough to tell, please send it to me.
And if my McCartney ancestors and my step-Mama's Kuki Airani ancestors think they might help,
please do.
And God, if you think I am ready, please open my heart to receive it.

I hopped into bed and fell asleep almost immediately. Early in the morning, I woke abruptly, wide awake. The clock showed 3.06am. I got out of bed, opened my scriptwriting software on my computer, and began to write. I do not know where the words came from, but they poured out. And as I wrote, I cried, because the characters that appeared on the page bore names I knew. Vai became Sevai, my Nana's name. Sevai's Aunty became Pepe, after a beloved Aunty of mine. Photographs of Sevai's parents, who featured in the script, were of Asiata Leaoa, my Granda, and Sevai Leleisi'uao, my Nana²⁷. As Sevai dances, she passes long-dead ancestors who appear to her. Their names were Tailoto Tavu'i, my Granda's Mother and my great-Nana. Other ancestors who appeared bore the names Tupa'i, Tavu'i and Levalasi. Other than my Nana, who is from Sāililomaiaava (clan of Lilomaiaava), all these names or titles are significant in the gafa (genealogy) of Sāmoeleoi (clan of Moeleoi). All these characters who appeared as I wrote, are names bound to me through blood.

The script was initially six pages long, but the foundation for the story was there, and I met the 9am deadline. In my Samoan vignette for *Vai*, the protagonist Sevai, invokes her parents for guidance; her ancestors answer. In my own life, I invoked my ancestors for guidance; my ancestors answered. In both story and life, we were gifted the alofa (love) that comes from our gafa. *Vai* was my first spiritual experience with story. It is also the beginning of a practice that underpinned the methods used in *The Return*. Also, when I left the retreat, I was no longer taking antidepressants.

²⁷ As the drafts of the script evolved, these photographs were changed to the graves of Sevai's parents, in response to the location and what would work and have the most visual impact with the one-shot approach for each vignette employed by the film.

Methodologies

This chapter explores the methodologies used in the research and the short film *The Return*. The research is situated within the framework of su'ifefiloi, the Samoan performance and oral storytelling tradition (Silipa, 2008). As the research progressed, another methodology intuitively emerged; tala fa'a'aiga, which I use as a Samoan focused approach to auto-ethnography.

Su'ifefiloi

Novelist Sia Figiel describes how she employs the Samoan tradition of su'ifefiloi in her own writing practice. She likens it to the threading together of a variety of flowers to create an 'ula or necklace (Ellis, 1998, p. 74). She further explains:

What I'm doing here in narrative stems from the culture. We have the tradition of su'ifefiloi, which you can see in a flower garland - su'i means to sew, fefiloi means mixture, so it's a mixture of different flowers that we sew together...at the end, you hook them up, and they become an 'ula, a necklace of flowers. (ibid.)

Hence, while each element exists independently, together they create something new.

Amy Tielu surmises that su'ifefiloi is a methodology that can “interweave paradigms and systems of knowledge [including Pacific and non-Pacific realities] to create something new” (Lupe, 2014, p. 30). This framework is appropriate for the Moana reference, and the metaphor of carefully threaded flowers which create a garland that can be applied to the sewing together of Moana values, voices and stories to explore Moana films.

Su'ifefiloi makes space for the many voices that influence my own storytelling. In a previous interview discussing the film *Vai* I stated that most of my films explore my lived experiences and, at times insecurities, of:

...being a diasporic New Zealand-born Samoan/Geordie and how this affects my connection to Samoa and Samoan culture. I am the Mother of a 5-year-old and my Mother is Samoan, so the piece weaves together my experiences, influences, thoughts and hopes with those of my Mother, daughter, sisters, Aunties and the other women and matriarchs in my family. (Ordonza, 2019)

Tui Atua advocates for the blending of cultural influences without apology. In a chapter from the book 'Su'e Su'e Manogi', Suaalii-Sauni et al. (2008) explain “Tui Atua's cultural blend seems not about creating a hybrid self, but rather unapologetic selves, where the Samoan gave equal time and respect to the different cultural references they took on board as important to shaping their lives” (p. 6).

This process of threading together influences is not new; it is embodied in the ancient practice of venturing out beyond the borders of the fanua (land) to find husbands and wives and to facilitate exchange across the Moana. This threading together of cultural influences, which is nevertheless anchored in the ancestral Moana, is akin to the process of su'ifefiloi. Rather than being organised or structured, su'ifefiloi is based on intuition and guided by the Moana reference. It is not a discarding of the old or a replacing with the new but a threading together of influences, past and present (Tui Atua, 2008).

In the context of art practice in Aotearoa, the process of su'ifefiloi can be seen, for example, through dance. Lisa Taouma writes that “Pacific dance breaks out of the boundaries of our performance past, with 'Polynesian dance' now including Japanese Butoh movement, Samoan faleaitu satire, fa'afafine cabaret, and heavy borrowing from the hip-hop culture of music videos” (2002, p. 133). Ojeya Cruz-Banks (2013) states that dance throughout the Moana grapples with “postcolonial, pan-indigenous, multicultural and diasporic contexts that provide windows into how Indigenous people construct their identities and generate their worldviews through dance” (p. 24). This practice of blending different strands of cultural influences and experiences has created a Moana reference that has influenced the evolution of Moana dance.

As a methodology *su'ifefiloi*, allowed me to thread together various influences, values and experiences to explore the narrative and creative aesthetics of *The Return*, and it encouraged me to consciously explore how my spirituality influenced my creativity. The sewing together of methods, some which could be described as sitting in another 'space', resulted in decisions which moved *The Return* towards its finished form.

Tala Fa'a'aiga

The methodology of *tala fa'a'aiga* emerged as response to the *su'ifefiloi* methodology. In Ellis et al. (2011) autoethnography is described as:

...an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)...A researcher uses tenets of *autobiography* and *ethnography* to *do* and *write* autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005 as cited in *ibid.* para. 1).

The benefits of an autoethnographic approach²⁸ have been described as:

- therapeutic, as writing about the self gives one an opportunity to explore the personal context.
- relational, as it considers the self in relation to others.
- recognising that truth can be constructed not only by the narrator but also by the genre of writing (*ibid.*, para. 25, 28, 32).

The Samoan self *only* exists in relation to others. There is no singular self, only a collective self. (Lopesi, 2021, p. 132). In the Samoan worldview, the multiple self as the collective self sits at the centre of Samoan identity, while the self or individual self is relegated to the margins. Samoans view their existence in the *vā* together with others, animals, the environment and the cosmos. Therefore, one's existence is not singular or individual (Refiti, 2014, p. 18 as cited in Lopesi, *ibid.*).

Tala fa'a'aiga, in this context, is a Samoan term which translates to a story about the Samoan personhood. *Tala* means 'story' or 'stories' or 'to talk'. *Fa'a* means 'the way of' or 'the manner of'. *Aiga* means 'family' but this encompasses relatives beyond the 'immediate' family, to include different generations and wider clan relations.

Therefore, *tala fa'a'aiga* is to story the way of the family as the collective. Or one may consider it storytelling situated in the collective. While an autoethnographic approach has its merits, it assumes the positionality of the 'individual' self in relation to others. Another theory is that the autoethnographic self is a multiple self, where the self becomes different versions of themselves as it navigates different research spaces (Boll, 2023, p. 2).

A *tala fa'a'aiga* methodology is a re-imagining of an autoethnographic approach where the self is neither individual nor multiple versions of the self. Through a Samoan lens, to story about the 'self' is to story about the collective self. *Tala fa'a'aiga* emerged after sessions of conversing with my ancestors, a method covered later in this chapter. These thoughts and musings not only shaped of the narrative and directorial approach, but they are also present in my positionality as a researcher within the research. Each *tala fa'a'aiga* inscribes who I am within my work and the research.

The Creative Led PhD

A practice led PhD, consists of the creative project and the exegesis. While there are several different models of PhD exegeses, the model for this exegesis is a 'connective' model (Hamilton & Jaaniste's, 2010, p. 39). A 'connective' model is one where the exegesis is a living artefact that responds to, discusses and contextualises the creative practice (*ibid.*). Ings describes an exegesis at Auckland University of Technology as consisting of "an introduction, a

²⁸ Some of the criticisms for an autoethnographic approach are that it is not 'scientific' enough, it fails to meet the standards required of rigorous social science methods and it relies too much on explorations of the self rather than the observations, analysis and the theorising of others. (as cited in Ellis et al., para. 36, 37)

positioning of the research and researcher, a review of contextual knowledge, a discussion of methodology and methods, a discussion of critical ideas underpinning the project and some form of critical commentary on the work produced” (2015, p. 1280).

At the beginning of my research, I aimed to explore through the short film *The Return* how a Moana identity reference influences the film form in Moana films and how *The Return* engages with an emerging Moana film grammar. I set out to explore a Moana identity and its relationship to Moana films while working on the short film script, searching for the right producers and securing funding to cover the production of *The Return*. However, no matter what I tried, I could not progress the theoretical writing and exploration. When I turned to the creative practice, it became clear that the writing of the script would be a lot more challenging than I had initially realised. I leaned into my spiritual practice for comfort, and what emerged was the realisation that I was exploring much more than a short film idea and theory. Eventually, I abandoned the theoretical model as a generator of the project and leaned into the creative practice.

Leaning into the creativity meant leaning into the spirituality, and from the spirituality emerged explorations into difficult things that had been buried deep within. I essentially began writing about my own insecurities, deeply embedded hurt and trauma, my relationship with my Mother and myself. And under all of this sat the passing of my step-Mama in July 2010, the passing of my Father in November 2012, followed by the passing of my Mother in December 2012.

I kept being led back to my own stories, musings, ponderings about life and collective experiences. I was also a single Mother of a 5-year-old daughter when I started my PhD, so this deep work was also happening during a time when I was on my own and in the most unstable financial situation I have ever experienced, as the stakes are high when one is a Mother. All I could do was continue to lean into my spirituality, trust the process, and hope that whatever came would move my research forward.

What happened was unexpected, as the spiritual became the journey and everything else, a product of that.

There have been many critiques of the values and processes underpinning Western research methods and its relationship with Indigenous peoples, the most famous being Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s influential book ‘Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples’ (1999). While writing this section of my exegesis, I remembered an assignment I completed as part of my undergraduate study with Dr Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni. The assignment asked students to explore in an essay the key features of an indigenous Moana research model and how these may contrast with a Western Science model. The characteristics of Western research were described as rigid, time-bound, the focus being the end result and the message and the motivation being knowledge for knowledge’s sake. The characteristics of Indigenous research were described as flexible, non-time-bound, the focus being on the relationship as well as the end result and on the messenger as well as the message; and the motivation being about people (McCartney, 2007, p. 5).

My PhD journey had to be flexible due to the nature of everyday life as a single Mum, and therefore a single-income household, with limited support from my extended family as they do not live close by. While a PhD is time-bound to a submission date, I began exploring things that could not be held to the date of my original deadline. I believe the PhD journey or process became more important than the end result; the PhD. The focus was not only on the message or ideas in the creative project, but the experience I went through to achieve the PhD.

Shawn Wilson, an Opaskwayak Cree academic, explains that there is no separation between the researcher and their work:

Our own relationships with our environment, families, ancestors, ideas, and the cosmos around us shape who we are and how we will conduct our research. Good Indigenist research begins by describing and building on these relationships. (2007, p. 194)

From an Australian First Nations perspective, it has been noted that Indigenous spirituality has largely been dismissed as a valid and accurate source of knowledge (Walker, 2001, as cited in Saini, 2012, p. 8). And yet the Aboriginal

worldview considers “Earth and their life on Earth as an interconnected web of life functioning in a complex ecosystem of relationships” (Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006, as cited in Saini, *ibid.*). Tui Atua explains that the Samoan person is simultaneously relational and communal, rather than an individual, due to our shared place in the cosmos with our ancestors (Tui Atua, 2008, p. 212).

If the Samoan self is the collective self, then the messenger is a collective one. The research methods employed throughout this PhD have not been employed by an ‘individual’ nor does the output consist of a singular voice. *The Return* has been birthed from an amalgamation of voices from different times and spaces. I am “we”, with the research guided and produced by “us”.

“I does not exist. Myself does not belong to me because . . . I is always we”. (Figiel, 1996, p.135)

Research Methods

The methods employed in this research work for three very different roles; Marina the writer, Marina the director and Marina the creative scholar. All three wear different hats that require juggling, or which need to be worn at the same time. As a writer, my pre-writing ritual included tapua’i followed by morning pages, which evolved into tala fa’a’aiga. These methods were also adopted for both director and creative scholar roles to explore ideas for all stages of film production and the creation of this exegesis.

Part of the director’s toolkit is the director’s treatment which is used to communicate the creative direction of the film. It was also used to secure production funding from investors and commitment from creative heads of department (HODs) and cast. The gafa method employed was not planned but arose in response to tapua’i.

Tapua’i

After my spiritual experience described in Tala Fa’a’aiga 2, I would start my meditation with a simple invocation, asking for guidance from my ancestors. However, when my PhD research commenced, I learned about anapogi and realised my mediation bore some similarities to this.

Anapogi, to fast and meditate, involves the weaving together of voices from different times and spaces to converse with an intangible world and those who have passed on. Moana beliefs are rooted in ancestral spirituality, so we continue to be connected to our ancestors, knowing they have a significant place in our present. Therefore, the past and present sit within a continuum of life, like an ‘ula with no end. As Figiel states, “...there's no break between stories. The story is being continued” (Ellis, 1998, p. 74).

Another example of anapogi comes from Karen Lupe, who appeals to her late Great-Grandmother Tuame asking how one should communicate with their ancestors²⁹. Tuame’s response was, “...anapogi in the evening, this is the best time to talk, quiet, away from other people, very easy...There is nothing to be afraid about. We only speak to our family in loving ways” (Lupe, 2014, p. 239).

Anapogi became a method I practiced before putting fingers to keyboard or pen to paper. I anapogi to connect with my ancestors. It is my practice to centre the agaga within the collective self, which combines the past and the present, before embarking on the crafting of a narrative that traverses Moana identity politics. This return to anapogi confirms, focuses and clarifies the main thread of the narrative I want to explore. While the physical aspect of myself sits firmly in a colonial settler nation-state, my spiritual, emotional and mental self has begun the shift to the realm of the wider Moana.

²⁹ Karen Lupe’s chapter is a response to an address given by Tui Atua (Suaalii, et al., 2014).

There were a few differences with my ‘anapogi’ practice, compared to the anapogi described by Karen Lupe. The anapogi I practiced takes place in the morning with fasting taking place overnight as I slept. I rise at 5am each morning and light candles placed in a circle in the lounge. The act of lighting candles starts the practice. At 5.05am I sit cross-legged on a meditation pillow, wrapped in a blanket. I use the Insight Timer app to time a 30-minute meditation, which includes a 5-minute warm up period where I chant a prayer. The invocation is one I created myself and has evolved over time. During the invocation I call my ancestors from Sāmoeloeoi, Sālilomaiaava, my Romanichal and Celtic ancestors into the present. I ask for guidance to ensure the right path is walked and if it is appropriate, to provide guidance toward a balancing of the vā within, nurturing harmony between mafaufau (mind), tino (body) and agaga (soul). I focus on the breath and at the end of 5-minute warm up period, a bell from the Insight Timer app rings. I sit in silence and stillness and except for the candlelight, the darkness, with my eyes closed for 25 minutes. This is a sacred time to commune with ancestors and receive their guidance for the day or the creative session ahead.

Immediately after this sacred time, I write stream of consciousness to candlelight for another 30-minutes, from 5.30am to 6.00am. This has been my routine for several years.

One night, I woke close to midnight. My daughter was asleep next to me and as much as I tried, I could not fall back to sleep. Eventually, I picked up my Kindle and I scrolled through my library. I found a thesis I downloaded a few years earlier with the intention of reading, but I ignored it in favour of the fiction books I prolifically devour in the evenings. It was titled “Tapuai: Samoan Worship” by Fanaafi Aiono – Le Tagaloa. I could not put it down and when I finally came upon a section in the final chapter of the thesis I wept.

Le Tagaloa’s research uncovered an account of her Mother, Aiono Fana’afi, where she writes of finding a paper written by a Rev. James Edward Newell (1852-1910) titled “O Faamalama, o le tapuaiga faapaupau”³⁰ when translated means “the heathenish worship” (as cited in Aiono, 2003, p. 63). Newell describes this pre-Christian Samoan worship:

[the Samoan heathen worship] placed importance on the lighting of the fire until the flames shoot up and lit up the whole house; this was referred to as *fanaafi o faamalama*...The *Fanaafi o Faamalama* was observed twice a day; in the early morning, approximately five o’clock by the *palagi* watch and in the evening when the fires are blown – *ula afi*”...Newell’s article stressed the fact that Samoans went about bare bodied. But...at this worship the priest/priestess raised his/her right hand for the *vala* or the thick mulberry bark cloth with which he/she wrapped him/herself. (ibid., pp. 64-65)

When I first started meditating in 2018, I had been on anti-depressants for around six years since the passing of my parents. Within six weeks, I was medication-free, which continues to date. Until I read this account, I did not know why this practice felt right for me. When I read Newell’s words, I wept, because I had intuitively arrived at a practice which mirrored several aspects of tapuai, Samoan worship.

Le Tagaloa (2003) writes that “The giving and receiving of information is closely dictated by observance of the *Va*. Information will not be given in breach of the *Va* or if the researcher breaches or violates the *Va*” (p. 11). While Aiono writes about this with respect to questions asked of a Samoan by a researcher, I feel this applies to the knowledge given through tapuai by one’s ancestors. If the vā is not observed and nurtured, the right type of information and knowledge will not be given, or it will not be given at all. After each tapua’i session, I would sit at my desk and write three pages of stream of consciousness to candlelight. This next method became the medium, through which the knowledge received via tapua’i was communicated.

Tala Fa’a’auga

I was inspired by Julia Cameron’s Morning Pages³¹ method (1994), where I write three pages of stream of consciousness writing most mornings after tapuai. As part of my morning pages approach, I bought a leather bound

³⁰ The date of Newell’s account is not recorded.

³¹ Morning Pages are part of a programme called *The Artist’s Way* which Cameron describes as “a spiritual path, initiated and practiced through creativity” that helps free one’s creativity (1994, p. xi).

A4 sized book and new writing pen, tools which ensured the daily experience was as enjoyable as it could be. Funnily enough, this was a suggestion made by Selina Tusitala Marsh an amazing Moana poet, who I ran into on the ferry from Waiheke Island to Auckland city, after the *Vai* writing retreat. Upon completion of tapua'i, I make a cup of coffee, sit at my desk wrapped in a blanket and I write three pages stream of consciousness to candlelight. Three pages takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Initially, I was not sure what would happen when I wrote these pages. There were times where I would write "I don't know what to write..." repeatedly, but as I continued to lean into the process, what emerged were not only thoughts and musings around *The Return* and this exegesis, but an exploration of who I am as a person and collective being.

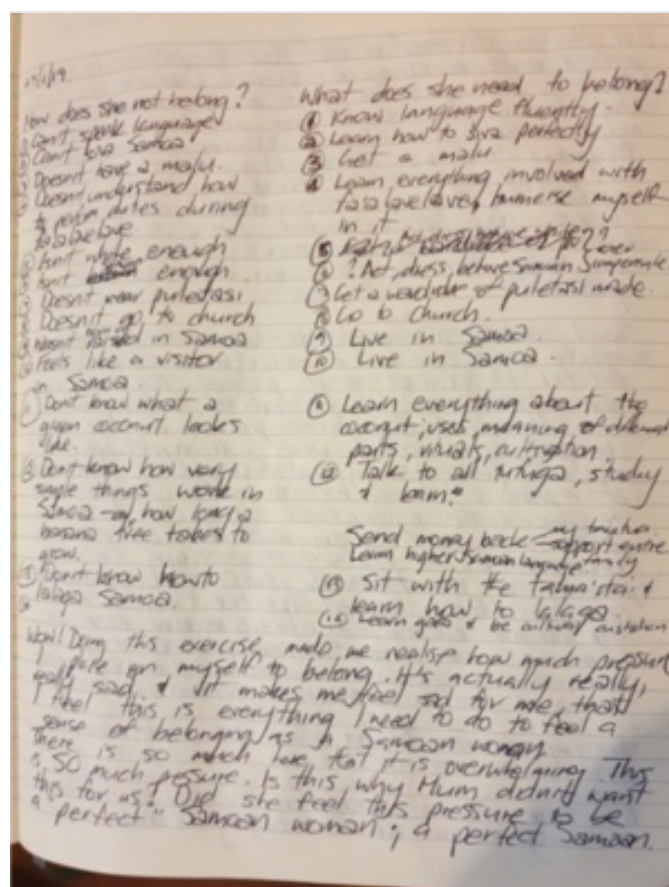


Figure 4. A page from my morning pages dated 29/1/2019
© Marina Alofagia McCartney

For the short film script *The Return*, I used these musings to shape character and establish story beats. An example, pictured above, is the brainstorming of how my protagonist does not feel she belongs to her Samoan culture versus what she thinks she needs to belong. It enabled me to develop the character by exploring deeper more complex motivations and to sharpen the "what she needs" versus "what she wants" conflict. However, what began to emerge during these writing sessions to explore creativity, were pages where I explored myself; and as I explored myself, Lupesina, the protagonist in the film, evolved.

On 4 August 2020, I received my malu (Samoan women's tattoos). In the six weeks preceding, I began waking at 4am to tapua'i. It was not a conscious decision, but my body just decided to wake earlier than the usual 5am. The morning pages I wrote after each tapua'i intensified. I started writing about my body and her history, my evolution from Marina the innocent teenager, to Marina the model and Miss New Zealand³², to Marina the Mother. I wrote about my relationship with my Mother, my sisters, and other women. I wrote about my Mother's experiences and how they

³² In 'Tala Fa'a'aiga 4' and 'Chapter 4: The Gafa Behind My Lens', I briefly explore my previous vocations.

impacted my siblings and me. I wrote about my Mother's relationship with her parents, her brother, her family, her village and her culture. I wrote about how this drove her, and how those motivations shaped our upbringing. I wrote about experiences I had buried, deep within. Each day at 4.30am after tapua'i, for six weeks, words and tears poured out.

There was no work on my PhD during these six weeks. All I could do was tapua'i, write, care for my daughter and myself, eat, sleep and repeat. And as I leaned into this process, something in my mafaufau, my thoughts, my being shifted. These morning pages became something much more than musings about trauma or grief; I began writing my way back to myself. As I nurtured the vā with God and my ancestors, I nurtured the vā within. This stream of consciousness writing became a way to story the guidance that comes from tapua'i. The writing became tala fa'a'aiga – stories that came from a dialogue with family and ancestors.

Tala fa'a'aiga presents my positionality as a researcher within the research and provides a context not only for the exegesis, but also each individual chapter. The work on my PhD I thought I was not doing, emerged as a significant method and methodology. Tala fa'a'aiga, enabled me to explore and progress Lupesina's journey, by exploring who I am.

Gafa

Gafa: Lineage, genealogy (Milner, 1992, p. 74)

Puogafa Tuagalu (2023), theorises gafa as being “a type of vā” (p. 242). For Samoans, gafa is more than genealogy or lineage; it carries an energy that guides people, who are genealogically linked, together (ibid., p. 243). Gafa is also powerful as it connects to matai titles (chiefly titles) and land. It is therefore protected and kept hidden, in the private domain of the family, as it can be manipulated for economic influence and status.

From a Samoan worldview, Tuagalu theorises that gafa, as a type of vā, is not linear but flows between generations in a circuit (ibid., p. 243). Part of the way this circuitry is energised, is through the spoken word which calls a Samoan to action. Lāuga (oratory) is one of three methods (ibid., p. 197) that encourage action and enable gafa to travel through place and time. They include parts of various fa'alupega³³ which anchor a Samoan to place, regardless of their current geography (p. 207). Therefore, the recitation of fa'alupega is akin to calling into being and the present, ancestral connections.

My ritualistic practice of tapua'i includes the invoking of my ancestral lines, Sāmoeleoi, Sālilomaiaava as well as my Romanichal and Celtic lineages. The prayer also invokes specific ancestors in my family lines; Nafanua, Tilafaigā and Taemā³⁴. Vā consists of both vā tapua'i (sacred or spiritual space) and vā fealoaloa'i (social space). Tuagalu continues to theorise that vā tapua'i is energised by ritual or prayer, which in turn fuels and activates vā fealoaloa'i resulting in social action (ibid., pp. 23, 25). As I leaned into tapua'i for guidance, things or signs would happen within a few days; the invoking of my ancestors through tapua'i activated the gafa.

In many ways, my journey since my Mother passed away in December of 2012 has been to learn how to navigate my Samoanness without her protection, security and guidance. My Mother was careful and deliberate in terms of who she engaged with, when she engaged with them, why and how. This meant I was cautious of approaching the right people within my family for advice, but I also did not want to feel like a burden to some of my Aunties and Uncles.

There were several instances where I felt I required guidance with cultural elements featured in *The Return*. These included, the malu (women's tatau) and the lāuga (oratory). An Uncle of mine, Su'a Tavu'i Pasina Iosefa Ah Ken, is a Tufuga Tātatau (master tattooist), the first to practice in Aotearoa (Mallon, Thomas and Brunt, 2023, para 5). He

³³ Tuagalu defines fa'alupega as “a charter of the founding titles that also relates to land ownership of a village within which every village member and their family can place themselves...[and links] the genealogies of villagers to the chiefly titles of that village, but also to other villages in a region...[and]...to all Samoan villages nationally” (2023, p. 22).

³⁴ Nafanua and Tilafaigā are ancestors in the Sāmoeleoi line and Taemā is an ancestor to the Sālilomaiaava line. They are also significant and powerful deities in Samoan history.

married my Auntie Tai'ese Ah Ken³⁵, who is my blood relative. I did not approach them first because while we are close, I hadn't seen them for several years since Mum had passed. I did not want to be *that* relative who only turned up to ask for help. Therefore, initially, I looked outside of my family for guidance. While I waited for a response from another Tufuga I contacted, it did not feel right so before they replied, I asked for guidance through tapua'i. I wanted to know if I should go to my Auntie and Uncle for help. I invoked my ancestral lines and asked my Mum and Granda for guidance. As I waited, the signs began to manifest in my body; a sore stomach if it was not the right thing to do or a wave of warmth if I was heading in the right direction. After being enveloped in warmth, I contacted my Auntie Tai'ese and, in a few days, I arrived with a chocolate cake and an open heart. And the guidance did not disappoint. My Auntie said very firmly and with so much alofa, "We are family. You come to us for help". What I did not know until that day, was my Uncle and my cousin, his son, had both been bestowed a few years earlier with the title Asiata.

Uncle Su'a Asiata Tavu'i Pasina Iosefa Ah Ken [Su'a Asiata Pasina] and my cousin Asiata Francis Ah Ken [Asiata Francis], not only advised on the tatau scene but Uncle gifted the use of the malu design which features in the film. I wanted non-actors for the tatau room scene who had a malu rather than trained actors without a malu, as I felt they would have an authentic understanding of how to move in the tatau space. Uncle and Auntie suggested some women who might be appropriate and introduced me to them. All the women who feature in the tatau room scenes in *The Return* not only wear the malu gifted by Uncle, they are related to me by blood or through marriage.



Figure 5. On the set of *The Return* with family and actors³⁶
© The Return Film Limited

Things were beginning to happen. The gafa had been activated through tapua'i and in the vā tapua'i (spiritual space). This in turn, fuelled the activation of the gafa in the vā fealoaloa'i (social space).

I experienced another activation of my gafa when it had been challenging to touch base with my Uncle Asiata Faumuina Lautoa Lavea [Asiata Lautoa], a gifted orator. We kept on missing each other via phone and sometimes we would not touch base for months. This was also the result of me not wanting to reach out too often, as I did not want

³⁵ My Auntie is my second cousin, as our grandfathers are brothers. However, as she is closer in age to my Mother, I refer to her as Auntie, and her husband as Uncle, as a sign of respect.

³⁶ For a list of names please refer to the credits in *The Return*.

to be a burden. There were many frustrating days where I felt my PhD and *The Return* were not progressing. On one of these days, I sat on my couch feeling overwhelmed by the lack of progress. I decided to tapua'i for guidance, even though I was not sure what type of help was needed. The next day, I had a medical appointment and as I sat in the waiting room the receptionist chatted to and consoled the only other patient in the room, an older woman. She had tragically lost her daughter several years ago and the anniversary of her death was approaching. I was moved by her story and when they finished, I said, "I'm so sorry for your loss". I then asked her if she was Samoan. She was and, of course, the question she asked was "where are you from?". When I replied, "Satupa'itea and Palauli", she exclaimed that she was sure one of her husband's matai titles was from Satupa'itea. When I asked her what it was, she said, "Asiata". Eventually, we parted ways and as I returned to my car, I saw an older Samoan man sitting in a van. I went up to him and asked if he was Asiata. He was and I introduced myself and explained I had been talking with his wife, and we realised there was a connection. He told me the year he was bestowed with the Asiata title, and we realised he received Asiata at the same saofa'i as my Mum's brother, Asiata Leaoa Fa'afaga Soa Faivaotoa Lameko [Asiata Leaoa Faivaotoa] and Uncle Asiata Lautoa. As I left the carpark, I thought to myself, "The Lagi [funeral chant] I want to use in *The Return* is a Lagi that could have been recited, for this couple's daughter, as the daughter of Asiata". I thanked my Mum and my Granda for their guidance and I phoned Uncle Asiata Lautoa straight away. We connected, and a few days later I was on his doorstep with another chocolate cake in hand and from there, the Lagi was written and gifted for *The Return* and a date set to record it at the studio.

I realised, that if I trusted and nurtured the vā tapua'i, the vā fealoaloa'i was activated, and once this call to social action took place, the gafa was activated. *The Return* became what Tuagalu describes as a vā-force, something that prompts a Samoan to act (ibid., p. 5), pushing me into the circuitry of gafa, and back towards Asiata. The answer to many things requiring guidance or inspiration, seemed to lie in and with Asiata.

I explore the gafa of my films in Chapter 4. My films start with my Granda and move through him and beyond, because he is "we", and we are Sāmoeleoi. Thus, gafa emerged as a significant method in shaping not only the narrative of *The Return*, but the path I needed to follow to delve deeper into who I am.

Director's Treatment

The director's treatment is a document communicating the overall vision for a film to funders, key collaborators, crew and cast. It can establish tone, mood and the director's understanding of the theme(s). The director's treatment allows me to articulate and focus my thematic and aesthetic aspirations for my films to key creative collaborators³⁷ as well as the cultural and socio-political reasons behind my decisions. This has been instrumental for encouraging a 'buy in' of my decision-making process and gives my team direction as Heads of Departments (HODs) in their own area. It also enables me to delve into motivations behind my creative decisions and serves as a re-focusing tool during the various stages of production.

It can include, but is not limited to:

1. Director's Vision
 - a. Mood Board:
 - i. Colour Palette
 - ii. Production Design
 - iii. Cinematography
 - iv. Story Boards
 - v. Cast
 - b. Supporting Statements and Information:

These written statements provide support for the visual document, which is the most important part of the director's treatment. The director's statement summarises the director's vision and can include personal motivations for telling the story and exploring the theme(s), shaping the film style, casting, and approaches to editing, soundtrack and special effects. The rest of the information

³⁷ Producer, cinematographer, production designer, costume designer, editor, sound designer, and composer.

supports the creative approaches. This is discussed in Chapter 5 which provides a close analysis of *The Return*.

- i. Director's Statement:
 - ii. Cinematography
 - iii. Production Design
 - iv. Visual Effects (VFX)
 - v. Sound Design
 - vi. Music Composition
 - vii. Editing
 - viii. HODs and Key Collaborators
 - ix. Cast
2. Creative Written Materials:
 - a. Logline
 - b. Synopsis

A mood board acts as a segue between concept and production and is used to convey the tone³⁸, mood and colour palette for a film. It can also include reference images from films and other visual mediums to convey an approach to cinematography. These references can demonstrate camera angles, composition, lighting and lenses and how they might be used to convey theme, tone, character and narrative points (DeGuzman, 2025, para 13, 14). In *The Return*, several films, artwork and personal photographs are used as inspirational references to communicate the directorial vision.

My director's treatment opened with two photographs; one of myself, at White Sunday³⁹, visibly fairer than other children in the photo, and another with my Mother. These photos were used to introduce the idea of in-betweenness⁴⁰ and to give some context to the personal nature of the narrative.



Figure 6. Marina Alofagia McCartney (middle front row)
White Sunday at the Papakura Methodist Church
Around 5 years of age - date of photo unknown
© Marina Alofagia McCartney



Figure 7. Tavu'i Mapuni Leaoa & Marina Alofagia McCartney
(11 March 2008) University of Auckland
© Marina Alofagia McCartney

The Return's mood board uses imagery that inspires the interior and exterior colour palette, the interior production design, the malu as well as doorways, another important visual motif.

³⁸ I use tone to convey a feeling or mood in a film rather than colour. New Zealand director Robyn Grace discusses this briefly in Script to Screen's Paerangi tutorials (2022, Script to Screen, 0:12:54).

³⁹ White Sunday is an important holiday in Samoa and the Samoan diaspora which celebrates children. Children wear white and participate in performances at church.

⁴⁰ In-betweenness is discussed in Chapter 5.



Figure 8. Marina Aloffia McCartney
4 August 2021 © Marina Aloffia McCartney

Visual references for cinematography were grouped into areas covering composition that nurtured isolation; space as character; close-ups and extreme close-ups to encourage identification with the protagonist; and wide shots that use space in interesting ways.

Cinematography: Shot Types – CU & ECU

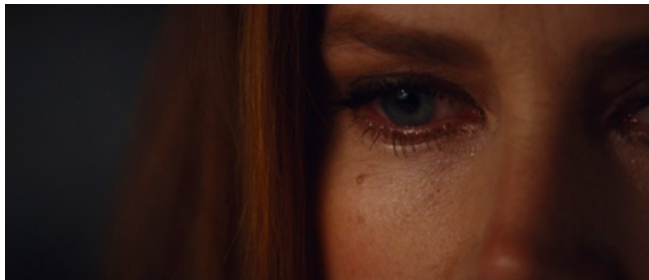


Figure 9. *Nocturnal Animals* (Ford, 2016)

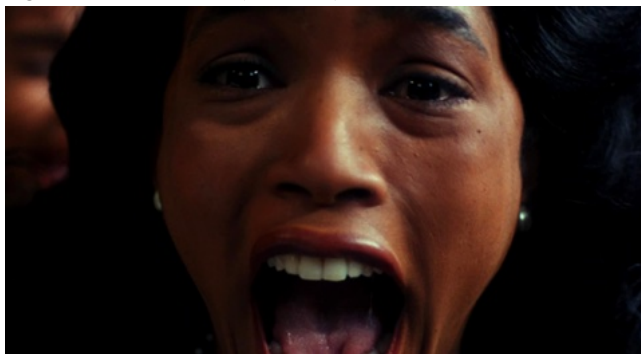


Figure 10. *Malcolm X* (Lee, 1992)

Cinematography: Space as Character



Figure 11. *Shame* (McQueen, 2011)

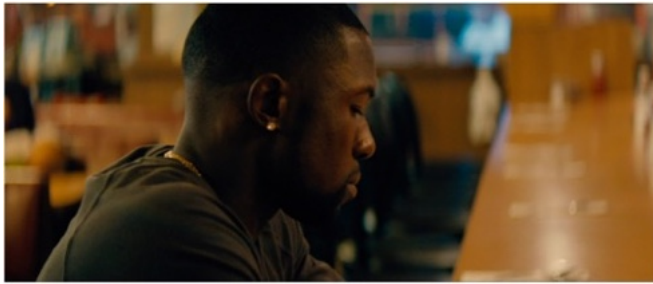


Figure 12. *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016a)



Figure 13. *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016b)

Cinematography: Shot Types – Interior WS



Figure 14. *One Thousand Ropes* (Tamasese, 2017)

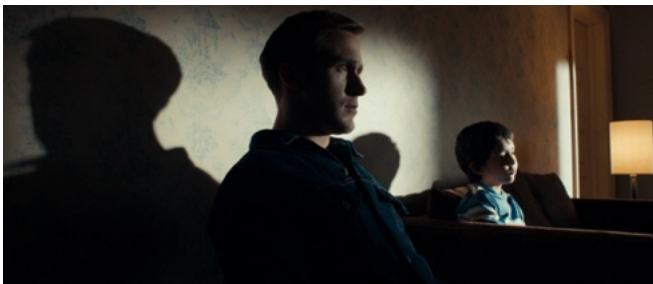


Figure 15. *Drive* (Winding Refn, 2011)



Figure 16. *The Homesman* (Lee Jones, 2014)

Storyboard artists were engaged to draw boards for the scenes requiring VFX to show how I would achieve the effects. Headshots of either confirmed cast or potential cast were included too.

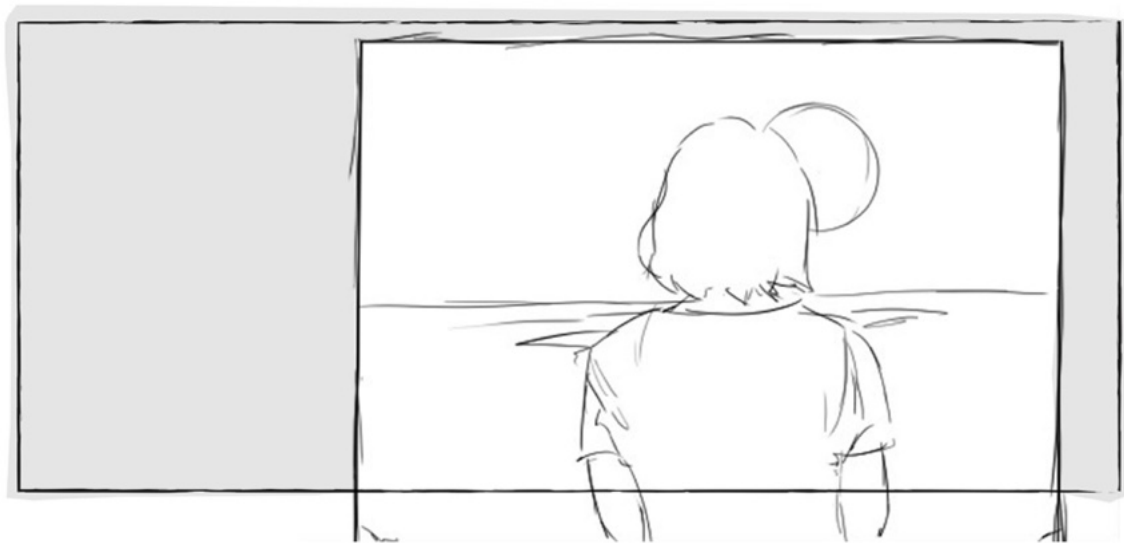


Figure 17. VFX: Moonlight's reflection sparkles off each surface hinting at a painting coming to life. Waves begin to roll.
WS of painting (with Lupesina in foreground)
(Storyboard Artists: Madison Zusak, Cato Refiti © The Return Limited)

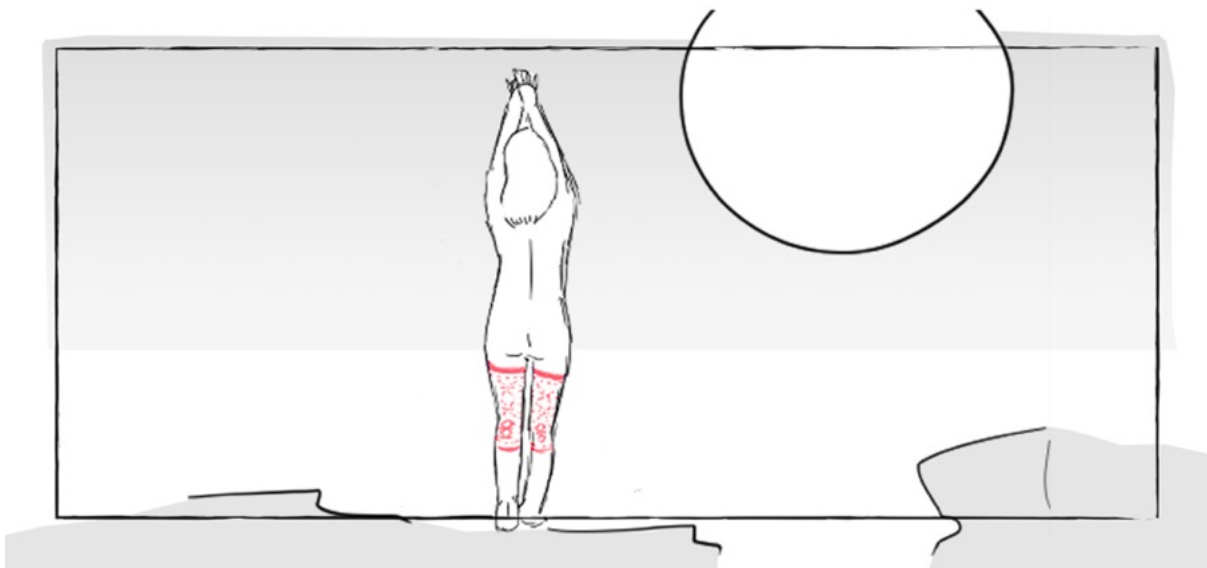


Figure 18. Ocean, moon respond to ancestral chant. Malu shimmers to tapping (TA TA TA...).
Full malu appears on legs in blood as Lupesina dives into the ocean.
WS Lupesina and Le Fafā
(Storyboard Artists: Madison Zusak, Cato Refiti © The Return Limited)

As the treatment was also used to secure funding, it included my biography and filmography (as shown in Appendix 1), which communicates industry and creative experience, festival screening history and accolades, and personal context.

Funding bodies such as the Te Rūmū Whakaata Taonga New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) require the logline and synopsis to be submitted as part of the funding application. A logline can be described as a one sentence summary of a script or film that draws in the reader's interest and outlines the central conflict (Script to Screen, 2022, 1:22). It is used for marketing and development and can reveal story issues if the writer finds it challenging to distil the story into a logline (ibid., 0:09)

A synopsis is a longer summary, usually one page, of all the significant beats in the script⁴¹, key characters and it reveals the full story including spoilers. This is also used as a marketing and development tool to secure producers, funders and investors, and distributors (Leighfield, 2024, para 2).

While there are always differences between what was planned and what was shot, the director's treatment gave me an anchor from where I could launch into the planning and shooting of *The Return*.

Chapter 5 provides some further exploration into the realisation of the director's treatment into *The Return*.

Contextual Review

In Chapter 3, a contextual review examines the creative aesthetics of selected Moana films. These films include *O le Tulafale* (Tamasese, 2011), *O Tamaiti* (Sima Urale, 1996), *Hiama* (Freshwater, 2021), and *Vai* (Arahanga et al., 2019). I have selected these films as examples of Moana filmmaking which reveal a Moana value system embedded in the creative aesthetics; cinematography, sound, mise-en-scène and/or editing. In addition to this, a review of my own work in Chapter 4 examines how Moana values motivate my body of work. These close analyses of Moana films will be compared with an exploration into the shaping and re-shaping of the mafaufau (mind), tino (body) and agaga (soul) to see whether Moana films can contribute to a nurturing of the vā within.

Conclusion

As a New Zealand born woman of Samoan, Geordie and Romanichal descent, who is exploring how my Moana reference intersects with who I am, my research required methodologies that make room for different spaces; vā tapua'i and vā fealoaloa'i.

Refiti (2015) describes how the framework of su'ifefiloi allowed for a patchiness or psychedelic effect in his research, where the gaps provide room for the "generation of perspectives to continue" (p. 39). Su'ifefiloi gave me permission to embrace the gaps while leaning into the spiritual, which eventually provided what was needed to fill them. Examples of 'gaps' could be story plot points or character dialogue, guidance on who to engage with, or even an emerging secondary methodology; in this case, tala fa'a'aiga. It also ensured a Samoan lens, nurtured in the vā tapua'i and activated in the vā fealoaloa'i, was embedded into the process of creating *The Return*.

When creating *Vai*, there was one last piece within the story that did not feel right for me. In the script versions I wrote before we secured our location or rehearsed, it described how the protagonist Sevai continued to drop the nifo 'oti (ceremonial knife) while practicing. Losing confidence, she appeals for help from her parents through their photograph, as she feels like she is shaming them. A few days before shooting, I made a creative decision to change this oral appeal, from the photograph to two actual graves located outside the fale (house). This was due to the photographs being more challenging to visually capture with the one-shot approach to shooting the vignette. Sevai invokes her parents' names, my grandparents' names; Asiata and Sevai. However, I did not feel comfortable with this,

⁴¹ These beats include the inciting incident, climax and other major turning points.

because all the names in the script and the photographs have ancestral connections to me, while the graves did not. But we had committed to this switch and had to work with what was available and possible with the shooting style.

Before we shot, we had an ‘avā ceremony in Lepuia’i, Manono Island, where filming took place. My Mum’s brother, Uncle Asiata Leaoa Faivaotoa, represented myself, crew and cast. As a significant cultural ritual⁴² the lāuga (oratory) performed during the ‘avā ceremony can confirm connections between aiga (families), nu’u (villages) and itūmālō (districts).

On the *Vai* Facebook page, I wrote about a behind the scenes experience:

On the morning of the shoot I was told that the man whose house we filmed in had connections to us; his Mother is from Satupa’itea and his family are connected to the title Asiata. So in the film when Vai invokes the names of her parents...my own grandparents...the ancestral connection was real. This could be interpreted as a beautiful serendipitous moment, but for me, particularly when my piece explores ancestral spirituality, I believe all of those who have passed on, my Mother, Nana and Granda, my ancestors led us to that particular fale [house], in that particular village and on that particular island in Samoa. (Bright Sunday, 2019)



Figure 19. Behind the Scenes of *Vai Samoa* ©Vendetta Films
Fiona Collins (‘Sevai’), Alena McCartney-Aitken (‘Moana’ and director’s daughter)
And Marina Alofagia McCartney (Writer/Director)

Su’ifefiloi allows for meaning to come from various places within the culture and to stitch together inspirations and inquiry from and through the vā.

Serendipity can be described as “the faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for” (Merriam-Webster, 2025). However, there is no serendipity when nurturing the vā, because when you allow for the seemingly intangible to guide, inspire and create, this activates the gafa; and the gafa is aware of exactly what it needs to search for.

For the research, this required the researcher to return to herself by activating the energetics the gafa.

⁴² Tuagalu describes the avā ceremony as having both social and spiritual functions in that it reinforces chiefly lineage and status while also providing a connection back to the progenitor Tagaloa, therefore nurturing the vā tapua’i (2023, p. 112)

CHAPTER 3: MOANA CINEMA

Tala Fa'a'aiga 3



Figure 20. Step-Mama, me and Dad (2009)
Faculty of Arts Graduation Ceremony



Figure 21. Me and Mum (2009)
Faculty of Arts Graduation Ceremony

When I returned to university as a ‘mature’ student, I enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Film and Media Studies and a minor in Pacific Studies. My goal was to finish my undergraduate degree, as soon as possible so I could enroll in the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Screen Production, where students write and direct a short film. I never thought I would enjoy theory and scholarship, but my mind was blown. I started in summer school with two film papers. In Semester one I sat in my first Pacific Studies class listening to Dr Melenaita Taumoeofolau and Dr Melani Anae. It was the first time I had been exposed to Moana thought in an academic setting and I listened in awe at these amazing Moana women scholars talk about colonisation, mind shifts and our people in a way that did not focus on the deficits, without apology. In that lecture theatre, my heart sang.

I was plunged into a space where I heard people that looked like my Mum, my Aunties, Uncles, my cousins and me articulate the experiences and feelings I had buried deep inside. They connected some of these experiences to the colonial context, but more than that, they talked about how our values influenced how we moved through the world. Suddenly, I was learning about the Moana and Samoan values we practiced every day, and I had words to understand and explain why we did them. It was not just “that’s fa’a Samoa” or “just do it”. For someone without the language, this gave me another pathway into my own culture, context, and in many ways, my own mind.

But as I navigated the disciplines of Pacific Studies and Film, I noticed differences that went well beyond the subject rules and conventions. As I progressed, I tried to combine what I learned in Pacific Studies with film theory. In an assessment for a stage 2 media course, I focused how Rotuman filmmaker and scholar, Vilsoni Hereniko, resists the colonial construction of the Dusky Maiden in his critically acclaimed film *Pear ta ma ‘on maf* (*The Land Has Eyes*) (2004).

I had recently read Haunani-Kay Trask’s “Pacific Island Women and White Feminism” chapter from her book “From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai’i” (1993). It is still one of my favourite essays today. I became firmly entrenched in the belief that our contemporary status as Moana women is a consequence of a colonial patriarchy. When exploring *Pear ta ma ‘on maf*, I used examples throughout the film that show how Hereniko’s Rotuman lens constructed and presented Viki, the Warrior Woman and the ritual clowning practice by Rotuman women, to resist the docile, eroticised dusky maiden trope. I drew on Trask’s assertion that self-determination of Hawaiian women would not come from Western feminism but through their own culture and people, including their

men. I extended this notion, to a Rotuman male director re-presenting Moana women through a Rotuman lens, as opposed to what may result from a white woman director telling a Rotuman story. I received a response from the white female lecturer and marker to this extension of Trask's Moana feminist notion to representations of Moana women by Moana male directors. The comment she gave was "be careful what you are saying here". It was the first B grade I received for a paper in Film Studies. Maybe she was merely stating I need to be careful of making unsubstantiated claims. However, her comment was directed at the section where I stated a Rotuman male director is more likely to present Rotuman women in a culturally authentic way because of his Rotuman worldview, than a white woman director. Who knows?

Recently, I listened to an interview given by Samoan writer and director Miki Magasiva (Madman Entertainment Pty Ltd., 2025). His film *Tinā*, a heartfelt story about a Samoan woman's journey after the death of her daughter, has been a commercial success, loved by both a Moana and non-Moana audience. In his interview he said, "You can't make a Samoan film without a bit of comedy" (ibid., 00:00). I understood why he said this, as it piggy backs off a history in Aotearoa where Moana people have historically been presented through a comedic lens⁴³. When I heard this though, I thought of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's famous Ted Global talk where she discusses the danger of a single story (2009):

...Show a people as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become (00:09:17)...The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. (ibid., 00:13:01)

And I began to wonder about the danger of promoting one type of Moana film. If we have been historically constructed by the coloniser for their benefit, are we still buying into these constructions?

When we make statements like "you can't make a Samoan film without a bit of comedy" are we continuing to promote a single story? What does this mean for the Samoan films that sit outside this description? Are they not Samoan? Can a Samoan film, or a Moana film, not be all or any of the genres available to Pālagi (white) filmmakers?

And it made me realise how important it is that we not only make films that sit on the entire spectrum of filmmaking, but we need to critically analyse and write about them too. We need to deconstruct them to look beyond representations of bodies on the screen and examine how we make creative decisions and why. Because if we are not writing about our own films through the lens of film theory *and* a Moananui worldview, then others are writing about them and us. And if others are writing about them and us, without an understanding of our historical, socio-political context *and* our Moananui worldview *and* an understanding of the political economy of film *and* an understanding of film theory, then we risk the articulation of our filmmaking through a non-Moana lens.

If there is a dearth of scholarly writing about Moana film form from a Moana perspective, will students continue to receive comments on their essays like "be careful what you are saying here" which impacts our overall grade average, and can have financial ramifications for academic scholarships? Or will our own people continue to buy into the idea of a single type of Moana film, which only adds to a colonial discourse of what our films should be?

Recently, there was a call for chapters on Moana film by non-Moana editors. While they are inviting Moana voices to contribute, as the editors they make the decisions about who is included, who is not, and the direction and focus the publication should take. It therefore potentially risks translating what Moana film is through a non-Moana lens. This is one of the reasons I am doing a PhD; to add to the canon of Moana film theory, where "we" talk about us and through us.

⁴³ This is part of the legacy of the successful run of *Bro Town* (Haysom, T. 2004-2009), *Sione's Wedding* (Graham, 2006) and *Three Wise Cousins* (S.O.S., 2016). *Three Wise Cousins* is the only production named here which is produced by Moana creatives. It also plays on the stereotype of the happy-go-lucky islander.

Moana Cinema?

While referring to diasporic cinema, Hamid Naficy mentions films that have “authorial, narrative, linguistic [and] stylistic” characteristics specific to the experiences of the filmmakers creating them (2019, p. v), and posits that:

[T]he presence of large numbers of displaced and globalized populations with different positionalities and identities—asylee, refugee, exilic, diasporic, émigré, indigenous, ethnic, racial, sexual, transnational, and cosmopolitan—as both producers and spectators of movies is another key factor in the emergence of this evolving multiplex cinema as well as this cinema’s historical debt to “accented cinema,” produced by displaced populations... (Naficy, 2019, p.vi)

Arezou Zalipour (2019) identifies an accented New Zealand cinema with diasporic filmmakers of different cultural backgrounds, including Chinese, Samoan, Fijian, Indian, and Korean, all of whom are now based in Aotearoa. However, Samoa and other Moana nations have their own unique colonial history with New Zealand, which makes their experience and connection to New Zealand different from other migrants, a distinction this chapter returns to below (Thomsen, Lopesi, and Lee, 2022, p.120). They and their films are part of a “new emergent New Zealand cinema” (p. vi) while simultaneously exhibiting their own aesthetic, narratives and themes specific to their experiences as diasporic and migrant filmmakers (Naficy, 2019, p.vi).

Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay coined the term Fourth Cinema to describe films situated within an Indigenous framework and operating outside the national orthodoxy (Barclay, 2003a, p. 4). He asks readers to imagine whether “the makers of Fourth Cinema come to accent whanaungatanga or wairua or aroha in their productions” (ibid., p.6) and argues that Māori have already found ways to embed their cultural values into how they create, produce and present their films (ibid.).

Are Moana films a part of Zalipour’s ‘accented New Zealand cinema’ or Barclay’s ‘Fourth Cinema’? Or do they move between them?

Barclay (2003a) points out that the reading of films, through an analysis of its exteriority, is preferred to an exploration of its interiority, because interiority or the ‘essence’ of a film is more difficult to locate, interpret, and deconstruct (p. 2). He describes the exteriority of Māori films as the surface features seen in the film text; “the rituals, the language, the posturing, the décor, the use of elders, the presence of children, attitudes to land, the rituals of a spirit world” (ibid., pp. 1-2). The interiority is what Dr Rangihira Panoho refers to as the heart of the film (cited in Milligan, 2015, p. 350). Delving deeper into the notion of interiority, Barclay draws on the Māori spiritual to suggest that when constructing film images, Māori intuitively embed *Te Ao Māori*⁴⁴ (the Māori worldview) into their film processes (ibid.).

Although, he does make a point of finishing his ‘Celebrating Fourth Cinema’ address by stating that,

It seems likely to me that some Indigenous film artists will be interested in shaping films that sit with confidence within the First Second and Third cinema framework. While not closing the door on that option, others may seek to rework the ancient core values to shape a growing Indigenous cinema outside the national orthodoxy. (Barclay, 2003a, p. 11)

Whether or not those Indigenous filmmakers who make films that sit within the first, second and third cinema framework are excluded from the category of Fourth World cinema is yet to be explored. However, for the purpose of this review, I have selected films by Moana filmmakers which embed a Moana worldview into the aesthetics of their film. I argue that their aesthetics, or exteriority, are influenced by the interiority of the filmmaker and therefore, communicate a worldview, that sits in a space beyond the film text itself.

⁴⁴ In another speech given later in 2003, Barclay explains that *Te Ao Māori* includes “a whole cosmology, a world of physical and spiritual things, a world of spirits and gods” (2003b, p. 14 as cited in Milligan, 2015, p. 350)

O le Tulāfale (2011)

Tusi Tamasese is a Samoan born filmmaker who moved to Aotearoa at the age of 18 to study film through the academy (NZ On Screen, 2020). He made his first short film, *Va Tapuia* in 2009 followed by *O le Tulāfale* in 2011. *O le Tulāfale* garnered much success not only as a breakout debut feature film for Tamasese, but also as the first film to be shot in the Samoan language and in Samoa. It received a special jury mention in the Orizzonti (New Horizons) section of the Venice Film Festival when it premiered in 2011 (NZ On Screen, 2020). Tamasese's next feature film *One Thousand Ropes* was shot and based in Aotearoa and achieved critical acclaim with its premiere in the Panorama section of the 2017 Berlinale Film Festival (NZ On Screen, 2020).

O le Tulāfale is a film about love, forgiveness and standing tall in the face of adversity. When his family land is threatened, Saili, a dwarf without an orator's title, must convince his village he is worthy of one so he can keep his land. When his wife Va'aiga's family try to force her to come back to their village after years of enforced exile, Saili must learn how to find and use his voice or lose Va'aiga and his family land forever.

Tamasese's cultural worldview is embedded strongly in *O le Tulāfale*. He states during a press conference at the Venice Biennale that he wanted to make a Samoan film (BiennaleChannel, 2011) and the influence had to come from the land. For Samoans, the relationship with the land is an integral part of the Samoan understanding of the world. Tui Atua explains "the Samoan term 'elele' meaning earth and 'palapala' meaning mud are also the words for blood. *Fatu* meaning rock is also the word for heart. 'Fanua' meaning placenta is also the word for land" and that these connections between humans and environment are further enforced "by the ritual burial of the pute (i.e. the umbilical cord) and fanua (i.e. placenta) into the land or earth" (Tui Atua, 2008, p.107). He describes this connection as being more than symbolic and rooted in spiritual beliefs associated with the creation of both land and humans and, therefore, the continued nurturing of the vā between both to ensure harmony (ibid.).

Tamasese's directorial decisions reveal his way of seeing the world and his cultural reference point. In *O le Tulāfale* the physical landscape of Samoa is more than a setting; it is a main character. The framing of the environment, its soundscape and the colour palette are used to inject life into it. The opening shots of the film feature eleven frames of the physical environment before we are introduced to a person, the main character Saili, although we see and hear proof of human presence through a roof of a fale (Samoan style of house) in shot 2 and voices from shot 3.

The first and final frames are important storytelling tools in films. An opening shot(s) can introduce the viewer to the film's theme(s), premise, main characters and tone while the final shot(s) of a film can cement the theme while connecting back to the opening images. *O le Tulāfale*'s opening montage reveals a Samoan spiritual worldview through the echo of the Samoan creation story (Table 1 and Images 1 to 11).

Opening Montage of *O le Tulāfale*: Images 1 to 11

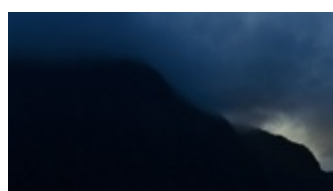


Figure. 22: Shot 1 Opening Montage

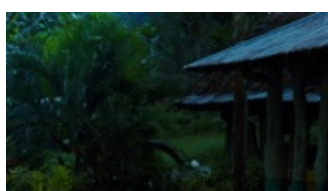


Figure. 23: Shot 2 Opening Montage

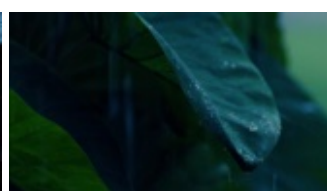


Figure. 24: Shot 3 Opening Montage

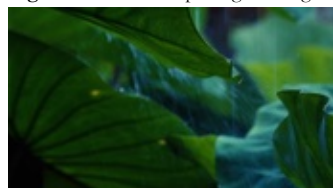


Figure. 25: Shot 4 Opening Montage

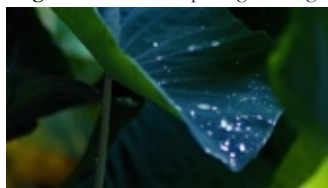


Figure. 26: Shot 5 Opening Montage

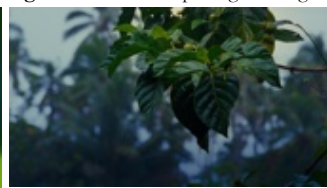


Figure. 27: Shot 6 Opening Montage



Figure. 28: Shot 7 Opening Montage



Figure. 29: Shot 8 Opening Montage



Figure. 30: Shot 29 Opening Montage



Figure. 31: Shot 30 Opening Montage



Figure. 32: Shot 11 Opening Montage

In Samoan mythology, the heavens and water on earth existed first. The progenitor God Tagaloa created a place on earth where he could stand, a rock called Manu'atele which was divided into stepping stones. These became the islands of the Moana. He then sent his son, the sacred vine Fue, to grow and spread over the rocks. Rotting leaves from Fue become worms and from worms Tagaloa creates people (National Park Service, 2020).

Table 1: Close analysis of opening montage in *O le Tulāfale*

	Samoan Indigenous Creation Story	<i>O Le Tulāfale</i> – Opening Montage
Shot 1	Rock	Rock: Mauga (mountain) as rock.
Shot 2 to 6	Vegetation	Vegetation
Shot 7		Rock/Vegetation/Sky: Connection between the environment and the heavens
Shot 8		Vegetation/Sky: Looking toward the sky through the vegetation – connection between environment and the heavens
Shot 9	Animal (worm or maggot)	Animal (gecko)/Earth
Shot 10	Man	Man/Earth: Returns to the land through death
Shot 11		Man/Earth: The cycle of life - viewer is introduced to main character Saili as he walks toward his parents' graves.

O le Tulāfale's producer, Catherine Fitzgerald, stated that the film incorporated the Samoan belief that the "...relationship between the heaven and the earth and the land and the people and the people and the people, is all connected..." (BiennaleChannel, 2020). The opening montage draws on the Samoan history of creation, not only introducing the land as a living breathing entity but, cementing the connection between human, animal, cosmos and the environment. These shots further introduce the viewer to the *vā* that exists between the four entities. Tui Atua talks about the four harmonies needed between humankind, animal world, cosmos and environment to ensure the balance of peace (2008 p. 105). The negotiation and subsequent restoration of *vā* is seen by comparing the opening and closing montage.

Closing Montage of *O le Tulāfale*: Shot 1a to 3



Figure. 33 Shot 1a Closing Montage



Figure. 34 Shot 1b Closing Montage

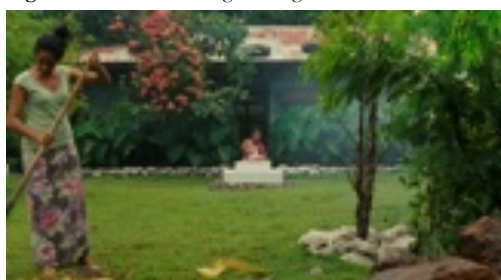


Figure. 35 Shot 2 Closing Montage

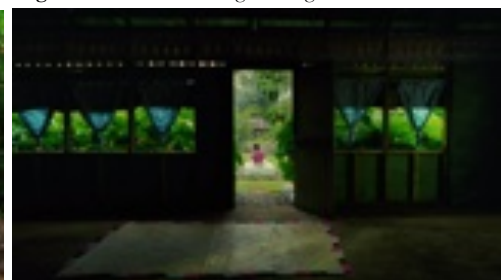


Figure. 36 Shot 3 Closing Montage

Shot 11 seen in Fig. 32 from the Opening Montage presents two graves framed off centre and from a slight high angle (HA). All other shots within the opening montage are centred. This shot reveals the imbalance in harmony; the breach of the *vā*. As the story unfolds, it is revealed why the breach exists and how this is related to the location of the graves. In comparison to the presentation of the graves in Fig. 10, the closing montage shows a restoration of the *vā* between the living and the dead. The closing montage of the film features three shots of Saili sitting on Va'aiga's grave with Litia's baby while Litia sweeps in the background. They also show that his parents' graves have been moved from their previous location and are now situated in front of his home. Fig. 13 and Fig. 14 feature Va'aiga's grave at a neutral angle centred within the frame. Tui Atua posits that burying the dead in the home of the living comes from the Samoan "principle of continuity, where the medium for dialogue between the living and the dead requires proximity between them" (2008, p. 96). The framing of the graves and the angle used confirm the *vā* has been nurtured and harmony restored.

Hiama (2021)

Matasila Freshwater is an award-winning New Zealand-born Solomon Island (Roviana) and English writer and director. She has an academic background having completed a Masters in Screenwriting (2018) through Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka. *Hiama* (2021) is a short film she wrote and directed as part of a contemporary horror anthology based on Pacific Island legends (Neon, 2021, para 1). It follows Vani, a Solomon Island teenager who is bullied and experiences micro-aggressions at her all-white school. She receives guidance from her family's guardian, a Hiama, who reminds her of the strength that comes from her Roviana⁴⁵ culture (Coconet, para 1, 2, 3). Freshwater explores themes of kinship and Indigenous spirituality using the horror genre trope to subvert ideas of blackness and the monstrous Other.

People of the Solomon Islands are guided by the wantok system and kastom. Wantok is characterised by collectivism, kinship and reciprocity (Nanau, 2018 p. 244). Kastom, is a Pijin⁴⁶ transliteration of the word custom and refers to past and present Solomon Island beliefs and practices related to the arts, economics, genealogical and ancestral connections, and spirituality (Hundleby, 2025, p. 185). Anything that originates from the land is a fundamental aspect of kastom (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo, 2001, p. 59)

⁴⁵ Roviana refers to the wider area and the lagoon in Nusa Roviana, Solomon Islands. It is also an identity marker for the people from this area and the language they speak.

⁴⁶ Pijin (Solomon Islands Pidgin) is a language spoken in Solomon Islands

Freshwater's worldview is deeply embedded in kastom and wontok. She explains her Mum's Great Aunty or Grandfather's sister Lupatina was a Hiama, a shaman, family guardian or spiritual teacher. This genealogy inspired a motivation to subvert colonial views of Solomon Islanders in her film (Coconet, 2021, 00:51). One way *Hiama* does this, is to use colour in the mise-en-scène to subvert racist colonial ideas of Solomon Islanders and Melanians.

Historical representations of Black women and girls have served to dehumanize and associate them as Other (Toliver, 2023, p. 708). This representation was extended to the people of Melanesia, the only area in Moananui to be named after the physical appearance of the people; melan, meaning dark or black in Greek for the colour of their skin. This racial naming reflected colonial beliefs which located 'white' people at the top of the evolutionary ladder and 'black' people at the bottom (Kabutaulaka, 2015, p. 112).

The ignoble savage stereotype is a racist trope strongly associated with the region, with Melanesian people described by Dumont d'Urville⁴⁷ as:

...more or less black in colour, with curly, fuzzy or sometimes nearly woolly hair, flat noses, wide mouths and unpleasant features, and their limbs are often very frail and seldom well shaped. The women are even more hideous than the men, especially those who have suckled children, as their breasts immediately become flaccid and droopy, and the little freshness that they owed to youth vanishes at once. (Dumont d'Urville 2003, 169 as cited in Kabutaulaka, 2015, p. 114).

This is in contrast to Moananui where the people are often described as having golden or copper skin, with well-proportioned bodies or limbs; akin to the noble savage or dusky maiden (ibid., pp. 115-116)⁴⁸.

In *Hiama*, Vani's blackness stands in contrast to her white peers and she eventually becomes what they see as a type of monster causing the earth to shake and terrifying all around her. However, the positioning of Vani as both protagonist and the victim of racial micro-aggressions, subverts blackness as evil or danger. At the midpoint of the film, a major turning point, Vani is woken from her sleep by her Hiama, another Black woman. This woman is dressed in Indigenous Solomon Island wear, with Indigenous markings on her forehead and teeth stained red by betel nut. Vani, while surprised is not scared (Freshwater, 2021, 05:03). In this scene, blackness finds strength in blackness and it is the ancestral remembering gifted by her Hiama, that empowers her to call upon her genealogy to face her bullies.



Figure 37 *Hiama* (2021) © Tikilounge Productions

⁴⁷ Rear Admiral Jules-Sébastien-César Dumon d'Urville is a French botanist and explorer who divided Moananui into three colonial regions - Melanesia, Polynesia, Micronesia. This was popularized in his 1832 essay "Sur les îles du Grand Océan" (Kabutaulaka, 2015, p. 111)

⁴⁸ Deborah Gabriel covers the origins of colourism and the system of privilege based on the colour of a person's skin, with 'lightness' being more prized than 'darkness' in her book "Layers of Blackness: Colourism in the African Diaspora" (2007).

The words Vani's Hiamā uses to empower her to remember Solomon Islands' beliefs around creation, particularly those connected to Nusa Roviana are,

Some of us came from the deep sea
Some from the wind
But we came from the earth
You think them to be friendly
That the wind and sea were made to caress you.
You float on the waves and in the breeze
But you forget
How they tear down mountains
How they reshape worlds
But we live very long in the deep earth
We must wait until she splits and pours out her fury
So we become free.
That's why we don't forget who we are.
(ibid.)

Freshwater's Grandfather, Mr Sae Oka, is recorded in a 1997 interview relaying the histories of banara (chief) and the story of Tiola, a chief and ancestral God of Roviana (NGO Pasifika Renaissance, 2017)⁴⁹. He describes the story of Tiola and his five brothers and their different journeys and experiences when Heleveni, one of the brothers and the 'bad banara' wanted to become more important. While they explore different parts of the environment, the sea and wind and through various associations with animals, out of anger Tiola chases one of his brothers Simbo into the earth. Tiola digs and burrows deep until he reaches the earth's centre. From there a great wind blows him into the air and he falls on Nusa Roviana (ibid.). In *Hiamā*, Vani's ancestor calls upon this ancestral memory to empower Vani before she bites Vani's neck with red stained teeth. In the morning, Vani goes to the toilet only to find she is menstruating, but the blood is almost black rather than red. This dark blood signifies the beginning of a transformation for Vani, and it is again through blackness or darkness that her strength grows.

When Europeans first encountered the red betel nut-stained teeth of Melanesians, they saw this as a marker of the savage and unclean, while Missionaries saw betel nut chewing as an immoral and ungodly practice (Brown, 2007, para 40). These perceptions have not changed much as revealed in a contemporary account from an Australian police officer deployed to the Solomon Islands during civil unrest:

...Betel nut is destroying Honiara...The problem is all the betel nut. I do not understand why anyone would chew them. Disgusting. All they do is leave stains, on your teeth, the area around you, everywhere...Doesn't it look like blood?...so disgusting. Tourists come to the Solomon Islands for the untouched environment. Its beautiful islands.... (Hobbis and Hobbis, 2023, p. 37)

These views connect to ideologies around the Solomon Islander as savage, monstrous Other. However, betel nut chewing is a long-established practice in the Solomon Islands and the wider Melanesian region. It is used in both formal and informal settings such as sacred ceremonies and rituals, oratory practices, as ornamentation, and to convey hospitality, friendship and respect (Pratt, 2014, p. 114; Calvo, 2023, para 3). Therefore, while the red-stained teeth of Vani's Hiamā may be seen through a racist colonial lens as savage, unclean or monstrous, from a Solomon Islands perspective Hiamā and her red betel nut-stained teeth come to Vani in allyship.

⁴⁹ A comprehensive and complete version of this history can be found in an interview along with a transcript in English on YouTube. See link in References section.



Figure 38 *Hiama* (2021) © Tikilounge Productions

In *Hiama*, Freshwater subverts colonial ideas and horror tropes associated with blackness and the monstrous Indigenous Other and connects these to ancestral and cultural power, and kinship. As a result, the Indigenous Black woman is re-presented as kin, ally, teacher and ancestor. These re-presentations of colour embedded into *Hiama*'s mise-en-scène reflect Freshwater's Roviana worldview where wontok and kastom underpin social and spiritual relations, and where the spiritual is also the ancestral.

***Vai* (2019)**

The *Vai* collective consists of writer/directors Bees Arahanga, Amberley-Jo Aumua, Matasila Freshwater, Dianna Fumana, Miria George, 'Ofa Guttenbeil-Likiliki, Marina Alofagia McCartney, Nicole Whippy, writer Sharon Whippy and producers Kerry Warkia and Kiel McNaughton. *Vai* (2019) is the second film in a trilogy of films that follows a framework Warkia and McNaughton developed that aims to support women of colour in Aotearoa. *Waru* (2017) was the first film which was written and directed by 9 women of Māori descent while *Vai* was written and directed by 9 women of Moana descent. The last in their trilogy, *Kainga*, is written and directed by a collective of Pan Asian women.

Vai is a portmanteau drama that follows a woman Vai over her lifetime and her "journey of empowerment through culture" (imdb, 2020). Each writer/director has a genealogical connection to the Moana culture featured in the film. The cultures and their island locations, in story order are, Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Samoa New Zealand (Aotearoa), Cook Islands Māori, Samoa, Niue and Māori (Aotearoa). *Vai* is unique in that the writer/directors enter an existing creative framework, created by the producers, that they must adhere to. The guidelines stipulated that each vignette needed to:

- be a maximum of 10 minutes;
- explore female empowerment through culture;
- feature the same central character at a pivotal moment in her life;
- feature water as a visual metaphor and connector;
- be shot in one take if possible; and
- have the main actress for each segment played by an actress Indigenous to the culture portrayed in that segment (Croot, 2019).

Although the influence of New Zealand as a diasporic location and its influence on Moana people is present, the narrative, settings and Moana macro-character of *Vai*, speak to ancient Moana connections (McCartney, 2025, p. 137). Warkia states:

She [Vai] represents, both in name and also the image system through the film, water, and the fact that the ocean holds us all, and is our highways [sic], and is our connector – not something that divides

us...That came out in terms of the themes that we wanted to discuss and talk about – people leaving, people staying, people coming home, people empowering others to go.... (Fenwick, 2019, para. 3)

In terms of its creative aesthetics *Vai* employs the methodology of su'ifefiloi. Water, as the visual thread, sews together the physical setting and actresses to create a feature-length storyline which explores disconnection while simultaneously cementing the theme of continuous connection in the Moana. While the Moana isn't necessarily present in all of the vignettes, they feature water in some way (McCartney, 2025, p. 134).

Water as the Visual Thread in *Vai*



Figure. 39 Fiji © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)



Figure. 40 Tonga © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)



Figure. 41 Solomon Islands © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)



Figure. 42 NZ Samoa © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)

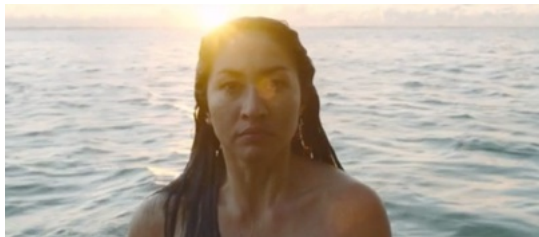


Figure. 43 Kuki Airani © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)



Figure. 44 Samoa © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)

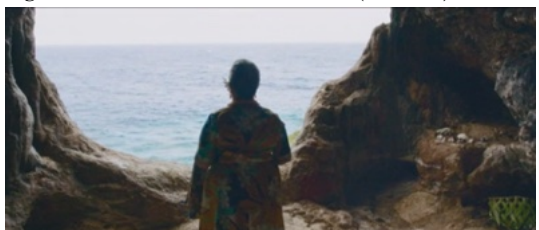


Figure. 45 Niue © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)



Figure. 46 Aotearoa © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)

The Fijian vignette features rain which prompts Vai to meke⁵⁰ with abandon. In the Samoan New Zealand vignette Vai moves through the stark interior of a tertiary institution grabbing a bottle of water to sip before she heads into an important meeting, suggesting not only a diasporic “fish out of water” but also the cultural disconnect to the environment she currently inhabits. And in the Aotearoa segment, water is featured through the spiritual importance of the awa (river) for Māori. The use of water in the mise-en-scène reveals that no matter how thin the thread, it is still present.

The use of different Moana actresses who embody the same character of Vai nurtures the idea of connection rather than disconnection. While Vai struggles at times with the tensions resulting from migration, the use of eight different actresses from different Moana cultures reveals a connection that sits beyond political borders and firmly in the shared experiences of women from all over the Moana (Chapman, 2019, para. 5). The tradition of su'ifefiloi is used to stitch

⁵⁰ Fijian cultural dance

together different Moana actresses, locations and vignettes to create an overall Moana character, recall the Moana as a communal and relational space and create a feature film that speaks to the Moana experience; *Vai* acts as a reminder of the ancestral and genealogical connections of tangata o le Moana.

The changing faces of Vai in *Vai*

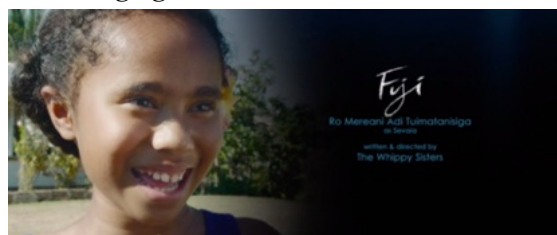


Figure. 47 Fiji Vai © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)

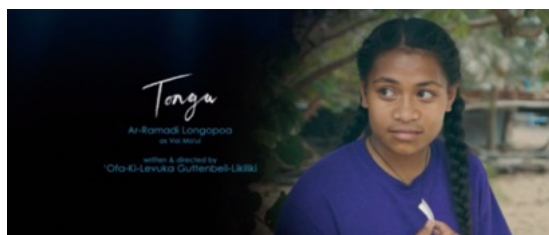


Figure. 48 Tonga Vai © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)

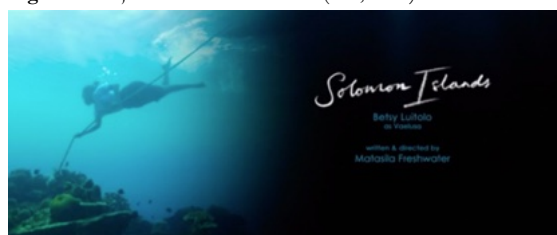


Figure. 49 Solomon Islands Vai © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)

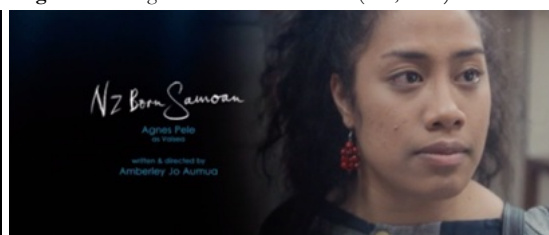


Figure. 50 NZ Born Samoa Vai © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)

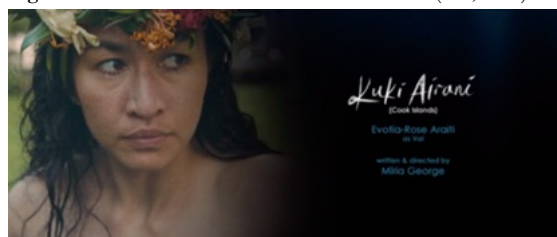


Figure. 51 Kuki Airani Vai © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)



Figure. 52 Samoa Vai © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)



Figure. 53 Niue Vai © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)



Figure. 54 Aotearoa Vai © Vendetta Films (*Vai*, 2019)

The threading together of different Moana components within the mise-en-scène nurture the *vā* between island nations within the Moana. Sa'iliemanu Lilomaiaiva-Doktor (2009) argues that scholarly research on Moana migration and development has historically assumed Western models and dichotomies of local/global, core/peripheral, rural/urban and origin/destination which promote ideas of disconnection and a world where Moana peoples are geographically dispersed “without roots or a place to call home” (p.6). She argues these models do not understand the Moana concept of *vā* nor the ancient practice of voyaging and, as alternatives, promotes Samoan malaga (mobility, journey), Fijian wakolo (pathway), Chuuk ppaileng (horizon) and Moana perspectives of mobility (p.6). These rituals and practices, which all aim to “ie teu le *vā*” or “ia tauhi *vā*” (nurture the space that connects), are a dominant reason to journey because they develop, re-establish and strengthen kinship relations as well as other social connections (Lilomaiaiva-Doktor, pp. 17-18). By threading together eight different Moana locations to create one Moana geographical space, *Vai* visually nurtures the *vā* between each distinct Moana nation. It reminds the viewer of the space that connects rather than the space that separates, promoting transnational connection rather than transnational divide (McCartney, 2025, p.138).

O Tamaiti (1996)

Sima Urale is another Samoan born filmmaker and actor who migrated with her family to Aotearoa when she was 7 years old. Her first film *O Tamaiti* (1996) garnered much success winning the best short film award at the Venice Film Festival. Her subsequent films including the short films *Still Life* (2001), *Coffee and Allah* (2007), documentary *Velvet Dreams* (1997), and feature film *Apron Strings* (2008) have won numerous awards nationally and internationally (The Arts Foundation, 2020). *O Tamaiti* is a coming-of-age story that is told from the perspective of an 11-year-old Samoan boy. Tino, the eldest of five children, acts as guardian to his siblings while his parents struggle with the pressures of their new life in Aotearoa. When a new baby arrives and adds to his responsibilities, he must learn to be resilient for his siblings when tragedy strikes.

Urale states that *O Tamaiti* was based on her observations of Samoan life in Aotearoa, where the pressure placed on Samoan children was often overlooked (NZ Film Commission, 1996). Along with themes that explore the bond between Samoan children and migrant financial insecurity, her filmic style comes from her socio-cultural context. Samoa is predominantly a gerontocratic society (Tiatia, 2012) and Samoans are taught from birth to respect authority and seniority (Siauane, 2004). Failure to embody fa'aaloalo (respect) reveals that one has not been raised in the correct Samoan way and that their aiga (family) also does not embody fa'aaloalo (Siauane, 2004).

In *O Tamaiti*, the sound privileges the position of Samoan adults in Samoan culture. Urale explains that “*O Tamaiti* is about children’s powerlessness in an adult world, so the children are only seen and rarely heard while the adults are heard off screen” (New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English, 2009, p. 60). Other than the laughter or crying of the children, they do not speak. However, the adults are heard giving, and often shouting, instructions or orders to the children, arguing or conversing about the stresses and demands of life. In keeping with the fa'aaloalo shown to one’s parents, the children do not talk back but respond through action, obeying adult and parental authority or anticipating what their parents need before a situation escalates.

While the use, or non-use, of dialogue highlights how little voice Urale feels Samoan children have in Samoan society, the cinematography is utilised to convey the narrative from the perspective of the children. Throughout *O Tamaiti* the camera is predominantly placed at the level of the children and other than the last two shots of the film only parts of adult faces through extreme close ups (ECU), or adult faces hidden by shadow are, shown.

The Framing of Adults in *O Tamaiti*



Figure. 55 Adult face shadowed

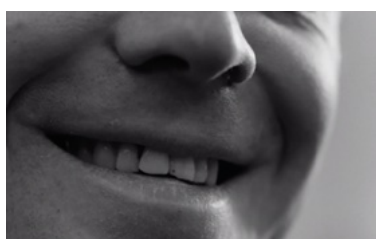


Figure. 56 Stranger



Figure. 57 Father



Figure. 58 Auntie

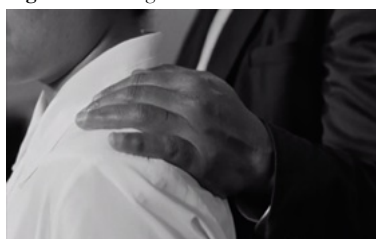


Figure. 59 Mother & Father



Figure. 60 Church Minister

Urale (2009) states:

The films I like to make usually have a strong underlying message and theme, and it’s the theme or message that gets me really excited because it’s what inspires the visual storytelling...As the Writer and

Director, I already had very strong visual images of how to portray the children in a world full of hidden dangers, loneliness and isolation. (New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English, p. 60)

While contemporary filmmaking is also an aural medium and the parents are given a voice through dialogue, the visual nature of film accords the children status and therefore fa'aaloalo. Urale uses the camera to subvert the status of Samoan adults, and fa'aaloalo is transferred from adult to child through the privileging of the child's worldview and the near invisibility of adults. The close ups (CU) of the children are utilised to further cement the child's point of view and to give the children a visual voice. This contrasts with the ECUs which present a "visual decapitation of speaking adults" (Marsh, 2000, p. 557).

Children seen but not heard in *O Tamaiti*



Figure. 61 Children



Figure. 62 Children



Figure. 63 Children



Figure. 64 Tino



Figure. 65 Tino



Figure. 66 Tino

Tui Atua surmises that from a Samoan perspective, harmony at a macro level can only exist if there is harmony at a micro level; between parent and child (Tui Atua, 2008, p. 110). He states that the Samoan proverb "pii pii ama vae vae manava" or the Tongan equivalent "piki piki hama vae vae manava" means to hang on to the outrigger and to share the womb (ibid.). This saying refers the nurturing of vā between parent and child and that while children have a responsibility to show fa'a'aloalo toward their parents, parents have a responsibility to imbue their parenting with wisdom, fairness and love (ibid.).

Urale explains that after observing young Samoan children regularly caring for their younger siblings at events, this reliance on children for childcare could verge on neglect and abuse if left unmonitored (Freeman, 2017). While this practice of sibling care might work in a Samoan village setting where you are surrounded by your aiga potopoto (extended family) and the fale (house) are an open style and therefore easily monitored, when transplanted to a diasporic setting where family are geographically dispersed, the children bear the burden. Urale uses *O Tamaiti* to explore one potential outcome of Samoan immigrant parenting practices without the support of the nu'u (village) setting; a breach of the vā between parent and child. Rather than work to "teu le vā" *O Tamaiti* leaves the vā as it is; unbalanced.

While the children are given visibility throughout the film and their perspective privileged, the final scene and frames confirm the vā has not been restored. The final scene shows the family at the funeral service in church for their baby brother. Tino is told by his Father that the children are being too noisy and to take them outside. Fig. 67 shows a low angle (LA) and wide shot (WS) of the children walking out of the church, with the back of adult heads seen, but faces still hidden.

Final Shots in *O Tamaiti*



Figure. 67 Shot 1 Final Scene

However, in the last shot, Fig. 68, Urale inverts the convention she has used throughout the film of privileging children's faces and rendering adult faces invisible. Here, for the first time in the film, the adult faces are seen while the faces of the children are hidden. The final scene reveals the children have not only been further silenced by their parents but are rendered invisible after being ordered out of the space by their Father. They are now neither seen nor heard, so harmony has not been restored and the breach in *vā* continues.

Final Shots in *O Tamaiti*



Figure. 68 Shot 2 Final Scene

Conclusion

These films give voice or visibility to the under-represented, under-served, minority or the invisible Moana communities in Aotearoa. Saili, the protagonist in *O le Tulafale*, must find his own voice in a culture where *lāuga* (oratory) is at the centre of Samoan cultural being (Muaiva, 2022, p. 8). In *Hiama*, Vani and her Hiama, subvert racist tropes about the Melanesian woman by re-presenting blackness as power and therefore providing a different type of visibility. *O Tamaiti* highlights the silencing of Samoan children by emphasising their visibility. *Vai* calls ancestral connections of Moananui into being by threading together an all-Moana-woman, who is often the most marginalised in the diaspora (Sumeo, 2022, para 17), and re-presenting her through a lens of resilience that comes from Moana cultures. Each of these films embed some form of reclamation, re-presentation of the culture and its people into the film form and, stand in opposition to historical and dominant representations and constructions of Moana cultures.

The filmmakers not only communicate this visibility or voice through the narrative but through the aesthetics of the film. Therefore, the 'exteriority' Barry Barclay (2003a) refers to, is an expression of the 'interiority' or internal *vā* of the filmmaker. It is influenced by what sits in the mind, body and soul of the Moana filmmaker, which is discussed further through an analysis of my films in the next chapter. While Barclay points out that Fourth World films operate outside the national orthodoxy, these films have been funded by the Te Rūmū Whakaata Taonga New Zealand Film Commission, a government organisation, and therefore operate within the national orthodoxy. Despite this, the analyses show that one can still work to reclaim and re-present narratives that sit outside colonial views of Moananui, while operating within a colonial structure. This is part of the resilience of Moananui filmmakers as we experience a double bind out of financial necessity, when working within colonial structures while simultaneously trying to tell stories that subvert colonial constructions of us.

While these films are funded by government organisations, which means we navigate the conditions that come with them, these films do not necessarily operate within a diasporic logic. As filmmakers who create "off island", our work

is anchored within Moananui, through a worldview that values kinship and collectivism, spirituality and gafa, fa'aaloalo and alofa and a deep desire to tell stories that reflect our Moana worldview. While we are 'diasporic' in New Zealand, we are not diasporic to Moananui. In the Moana filmmaker's world, Moananui is a relational vā that transcends colonial borders. Lana Lopesi explains that:

Within Vā Moana, it is not the geographic boundaries or borders that make up one's world but rather their social and kinship networks predicated on vā relations...Leuli Eshrāghi comments that "a Moana imaginary is linked to the network that we unconsciously or consciously interact with and are a product of". (Lopesi, 2020, p. 146, 147)

By decentering the relationship between coloniser and the colonised and focusing on a Moananui worldview, we move from the idea of 'diasporic' or 'accented' cinema to a more inclusive Moana cinema, which falls under the umbrella of Barclay's Fourth World cinema. Through this lens, Moana cinema reflects a vā that is not only relational but spiritual, and which speaks to internal vā of the filmmaker. Ultimately, these films can create a space beyond the film text and provide an opportunity to nurture the vā within the Moana filmmaker and audience.

The next chapter explores the gafa of my films and how they have nurtured the vā within, by nurturing a return to the Moana self.

CHAPTER 4: THE GAFA BEHIND MY LENS

Tala Fa'a'aiga 4

I am the researcher, but I am also the research.

I still remember the day I heard a Pālagi woman, my then white partner's ex-partner, suggest the only reason he was with me was because he liked 'brown girls'. My reaction was intense. Heat literally enveloped my body from the inside out. I was enraged. This comment kept me up at night. I would hear it repeatedly in my head. I understood the racial connotations, but I could not quite articulate why it was racist. My body knew though.

I remember being primary-school-aged and playing at the house of a neighbourhood friend. We were the only Moana family down our street in Takanini, Auckland. My friend's parents were Scottish, and she had many Barbies, which we did not have because Mum could not afford them. The mother was cold toward us, and I had an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of my stomach as she watched my sister Nat and I play with her daughter. When I was older, my Mum told me that a neighbour-ally revealed to her that this girl's mother asked, "Why are you friends with a coconut⁵¹?" As a young child, my body knew she did not like us.



Figure 69 Tavu'i Mapuni Leaoa (date unknown)
B. 1945 – D. 2012



Figure 70 Mum and me (1984), Auckland

It was a humid day, and Nat and I played on the berm at the bottom of our long driveway. I was about 8, and Nat about 7 years old. The blonde Pālagi brothers from across the road whizzed past on their bikes. "Coconuts!" they shouted. While we did not quite understand what this meant we knew it was a derogatory term. We shouted insults back. Finally, we ran inside and told Mum they were making fun of us, but we did not mention the coconut label. She suggested we ignore them and quoted the old saying, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me". We followed her instructions and continued to play outside. The Pālagi brothers called us coconuts again. Despite our Mother's advice, the names did hurt us, so we confronted them, and I pushed one of them off his bike. When he started to cry, we ran inside and told Mum what had happened. She told me off for pushing the Pālagi boy but when she heard they called us coconuts, she immediately marched over to their house with us in tow. She knocked on their door and their Mother answered. She looked my Mother up and down and I had the same feeling in my

⁵¹ The use of the label 'coconut' in Aotearoa to describe Moana peoples is a derogatory and racial slur. It does not have the same meaning as 'coconut' as it is used in Australia and the UK to describe someone who is brown on the outside but white on the inside; that is, acting or behaving white.

tummy as I did when the other neighbour's Mum watched us playing Barbie's with her daughter. My Mum stood tall in a power pose and eye-balled this woman. In a calm voice that sounded like she was reciting poetry she said:

Your sons have been calling my daughters coconuts.
Children always learn names like that from someone.
I want to tell you something about coconuts.
They are treasured throughout the Pacific;
they are sweet and tasty, the materials are used to clean, cook and build.
But you know something else about coconuts?
(Mum taps her own head with the knuckles of her clenched fist)
They are very hard to crack.

The butterflies in my tummy turned from nervousness to excitement. My beautiful Mother pivoted and walked away, straight back and head held high. We followed her in awe and my butterfly filled body knew my Mother had won that battle (McCartney, 2008, pp. 3-4).

It was a beautiful summer's day in high school, and I was 13 and sitting on the field with my middle-class friends, two white girls and an Indian/Pālagi girl. They started sharing glances with each other, then singing the lyrics from the Mouseketeer's TV show, "Now it's time to say goodbye to all our company...". They proceeded to infer I was not pretty or cool enough to hang out with them anymore. I tried to channel my proud Mother and hold my head high as I walked away, but tears eventually came as my body knew better.

When I was 14, I won a national modelling competition with top modelling agency Visage SRA, in Aotearoa. One of my prizes was a week's modelling course. Every morning, I caught the early morning train from Manurewa to Auckland Central, then I would walk back to Parnell. As I arrived at the agency, girls were being dropped off by their parents in late model European cars. I was one of maybe two 'brown' girls at the course and the youngest. Again, the butterflies told me this was not right for me, so at the end of the course, I decided not to join the agency. When I was 17 years old my Kuki-Airani step-Mama suggested I enter Miss Pacific Islands. "The girls would be like you so you should enjoy it more". "Like me?" "Yes, brown!" From there my modelling career recommenced. I progressed from second place in Miss Pacific Islands, to eventually winning Miss Auckland and from Miss Auckland to winning Miss New Zealand 1997⁵². My face and body began to win competitions, and it felt good.

⁵² For further reading on the politics and cultural standards of beauty and beauty pageants, please explore these seminal texts: *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*, by Sarah Banet-Weiser (1999) *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race*, by Maxine Leeds Craig (2002) *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South*, by Blain Roberts (2014) "The persistent problem of colorism: Skin tone, status, and inequality", (2014) by Margaret Hunter in *Sociology Compass*. "Eating the Other: Desire and resistance", in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* by (1992) bell hooks.

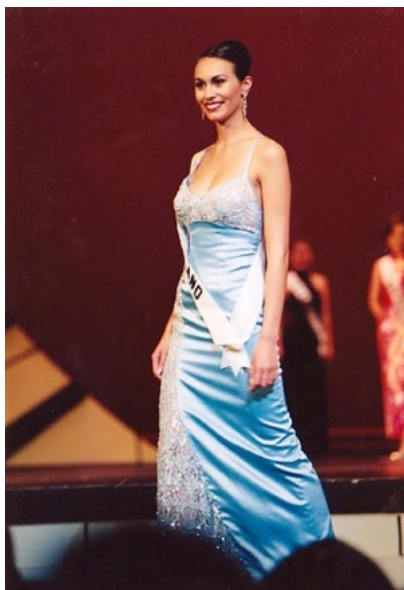


Figure 71 Marina Alofagia McCartney
Evening Wear competition at Miss Universe 1997
© Marina Alofagia McCartney



Figure 72 Marina Alofagia McCartney
Swim Wear competition at Miss Universe 1997
© Marina Alofagia McCartney

During my reign as Miss New Zealand, I was a special guest at a special event at the Ellerslie Racecourse. While I mingled in the member's only area, I met a wealthy elderly Pālagi couple. As the wife went to get drinks, the Pālagi man asked me "how much do you charge?". Later, at home I cried, my 19-year-old body felt dirty and shameful.

As a former Miss New Zealand and one of the only fashion models of Moana descent working in the country, I remember my agent describing me to a French scout. "Marina has a 10 body and an exotic but classy look". I wondered what this meant. Did my 'whiteness' give me the 'class' my 'brownness' did not? (McCartney, 20028, p. 8). My body is a 10 and I liked it.

While my mind hadn't quite grasped the intricacies of the systems I existed in, I started to understand that my body and beauty gave me, a brown woman, access to spaces other Pālagi women, who did not fit the dominant culture's ideas of beauty, could not access. My body, beauty and eventually my sexuality, became weapons of exclusion as those who had historically excluded me, either wanted to sleep with me, spend time with me, or they could not access my social orbit. My body felt powerful. I felt powerful, and I wielded this weapon without apology.

But if one considers Audre Lorde's contention, "The Master's tools will never dismantle the master's House" (1979, as cited in Lorde, 2008, p. 112) was I ever really the enlightened and empowered young woman I thought I was? Can one use the tools constructed by a colonial patriarchal system to fight the very same system? And the modelling industry - and wealthy men I dated - some insanely wealthy like the son of notorious Saudi arms dealer; or the infamous world-renowned polo player; or the retired tech millionaire - consumed me, used me and abused me. My body was packaged as a sexual object for consumption. Exotic but classy enough to be kept around like the Versace and Armani handbags I was gifted, or chauffeured in the red 360 Spider Ferrari or bright yellow Testarossa Ferrari one of my partners had. But, when my South Auckland⁵³ mouth would show its face, or the pull toward my Samoan culture that I could never quite let go of, reared its savage head, I was never classy enough to marry...

He's only with her because she's brown.

The brown cunt⁵⁴. It's magic lures Pālagi men away from deserving Pālagi women.

⁵³ South Auckland has historically been presented in the media as socially disadvantaged with high crime and gang affiliations. It also has a high population of Moana peoples (Fresno-Calleja, 2016, p. 92).

⁵⁴ It was suggested I should rethink the use of the word "cunt," due to potential readers being my family and descendants. I considered changing it, but decided it would diminish the violence named in this creative piece. The piece includes three perspectives: the internal monologue of the

He's only with her because she's brown.
The magical brown cunt. Exotic, but not quite classy...
He's only with her because she's brown.
The magical brown erotic cunt, who deserves to be punished, consumed, pounded into her place.
He's only with her because she's brown.
This never really means he's only with her because she's brown.

What happens when you're too brown to be white and too white to be brown?
Either way, my "cunt" seems to stay magical, brown and erotic...until they see it as middle-aged lol.

The Vā Within

This chapter explores the Moana self and my previous work through my films *Granda* (2010), *Milk & Honey* (2012) and the Samoan vignette in *Vai* (2019). Each film coincides with a pivotal shift or communicates a significant turning point in my identity journey. Together they provide a context for my leap into *The Return* and my developing voice as a filmmaker. A close analysis of each film and the creative decisions made behind the lens will provide a creative gafa that reveals an evolving worldview and its relationship to who I am.

I am the daughter of two migrants, a Samoan Mum and a Geordie and Romanichal Father, and the stepdaughter of a Kuki Airani step-Mama. As a diasporic Samoan, Geordie and Romanichal woman who can only speak English, my context has shaped the stories I tell. Disconnection, connection and belonging are recurring themes that underpin my work and have influenced the decisions I've made in the space behind the camera.

While this chapter is not an analysis of vā, it does present a reflection of how my earlier films have gently explored a fracturing and a healing of the vā within, and this exploration is both a cinematic and personal one. The first half of this chapter explores how the mind, body and soul have been impacted by colonisation. The second half of the chapter analyses my films which explore how identity is impacted by connection and disconnection to culture, and the in-betweenness that comes from straddling a Moana and non-Moana world. Together, the films present a body of work that reveal recurring themes, developing stylistic choices and a healing and balancing of the vā within.

Māfaufau - Mind

Moana scholars have consistently theorised that the most significant barrier to Moana thought is the colonisation of the mind (Hereniko, 2001). Epeli Hau'ofa's 1993 seminal essay "Our Sea of Islands" explores the colonial hangover that belittlement continues to have on Moana peoples (Hau'ofa, 2008, p. 29). The idea of the small MIRAB Moana nation, its dependence on colonial powers and its inability to fight the tidal wave of globalisation has been used to continue this notion of belittlement. Hau'ofa surmises that a shift in mindset which sees a vast sea of islands rather than small islands in the sea is needed to heal the damaged Moana psyche (ibid.). Hereniko presents a parallel argument where we cannot deny the size of our land masses which we need to live on, but we can continue to protect ourselves through an innate knowledge of who we are and our potential (Hereniko, 2001).

The meeting of Moana and non-Moana peoples through colonisation and migration has birthed people with multiple cultural and ethnic backgrounds who straddle different worldviews. 'E iloa le tagata Samoa i lana tu ma ana aga' is a Samoan saying that suggests a Samoan person can be identified by their demeanour and behaviour (Suali'i-Sauni et al., 2008). Furthermore, Mageo (1991) asserts that, "Samoan personality is based on the persona, rather than the ego", as a result, "the subjective elements of the self are relegated to the background of personality" (Mageo, 1991). Therefore, the self is motivated by the expectations of Samoan society, and it is communicated via the mask that one

Pālagi woman, the colonial gaze of the Pālagi male, and the voice of the Moana woman (me). The Pālagi voices reveal the objectification and dehumanisation of the Moana woman, which is discussed later in this chapter, thereby justifying possession of and therefore violence against her. The use of the word "cunt" is a part of that violence. The Moana woman using that word in relation to herself is part of the stripping of the power of that word in that particular moment. It isn't a word I use regularly, but writing that piece was cathartic. I chose not to change it, as its use felt authentic to me in that moment.

presents to the world. For the non-speaking Samoan raised outside of Samoa and in a Western society that nurtures the individual, this can present an ongoing tension that impacts not only how one accepts themselves but how others accept them. And if these dualities result in continuous tension, then one can surmise, that from a Samoan perspective there is disharmony within the self (Tui Atua, 2008).

Lateral violence describes the anger and frustration directed by members of an oppressed group towards each other and is the result of oppression. Part of the colonisation process involves the coloniser pushing ideas of their own superiority on to the colonised (Whyman et al., 2023). As a result, the Indigenous is often framed in opposition to the colonial state through binary opposites (Said, 1978).

Indigenous vs State
Them vs Us
Black vs White
Dirty vs Clean
Weak vs Strong
Traditional vs Modern
Old vs New
Uncivilised vs Civilised

These binary oppositions nurture the inferior Indigenous and over time the feelings can become internalised. Lateral violence is the result of internalised oppression being directed outward and toward members of one's group.

Blood quantum ideology was used as a science-based method to measure blood purity and is underpinned by colonial beliefs about race. It was used as a tool to further promote the superiority of whiteness and eradicate Indigenous ancestry. In places such as the Americas, blood quantum ideology was politicised and legalised to disenfranchise Native Americans from the land (Kang, 2024) while intermarriage was a tool to “breed out the Indigenous blood and ways” (Edwards, 2020) thereby eventually eliminating the Indigenous (Ellinghaus, 2009 p. 59) through biological absorption.

Edwards explores blood quantum theory in a Māori context and theorises that “blood quantum standards divide and alienate communities, and perpetuate a discourse that promotes internalised self-hatred, alienation, and fractionation” (2020, p. ii). Extending this beyond Māori, one can surmise this internalised oppression leads to fragmentation and alienation of other Moana peoples, including Samoans.

On the eve of Samoan Language Week 2022 in Aotearoa, scholar Patrick Saulmatino Thomsen published an opinion piece about identity and Samoan language (2022b). He talks about how a lack of Samoan language is weaponised by Samoan speakers against non-speakers or a lack of English language is weaponised by non-fluent Samoans against fluent speakers.

Scarcity theory proposes that a lack of perceived or real opportunities and resources, impacts behaviour, thinking and leads to tension within the self and with others (Civai et al., para 1). Weaponising the lack of Samoan language against the non-speaking Samoan, or weaponising the measure of Samoan blood, could be seen as a way to balance the scales. This scarcity mindset is internalised by our own people to disenfranchise Samoans without the language or who aren't considered to be 'full blood'. This punching across instead of up, only further serves to divide and alienate Samoans from each other and leads to a type of cultural 'gatekeeping' (Thomsen, 2022b).

As a non-speaking diasporic Samoan, I have experienced this punching across from other Samoans, particularly women. From experiences in primary school, through high school and well into my adult years, I continue to experience this. Yet, even as I write this I wonder if I am doing my Samoan community a disservice by talking about lateral racism instead of the racism we experience from the dominant culture. However, when I watch a video of Auckland based Mai Morning Crew radio DJs joking that when they see a Wellington Islander with doc martens, a nose piercing and a pashmina, they know that 'islander' is not for them, I reconsider this doubt (Mai Morning Crew, 2025).

I remember a time when I was with friends, other Moana mothers and their young daughters. My young daughter selected a song on our Spotify playlist. It was Sarah Hester Rose's version of Wyndreth Berginsdottir iconic and Norse inspired *Savage Daughter*, a song we both love and have enjoyed (Rose, 2020). A Samoan friend of mine, turned to me after my daughter ran off and mocked, "What type of Samoan listens to that type of music?". I did not reply but I did wonder, "What type of music is a Samoan supposed to listen to?"

In October 2024, controversy erupted on social media in response to Hana Schmidt's interview on the Breaking Waves podcast after she stated:

I feel that the Samoans in New Zealand need to be humbled. Majorly humbled...when it comes to their culture, they're too entitled about what they should be gifted from culture and how they can express themselves culturally in other spaces. And having the [thinking] that 'I'm Samoan enough because of my blood'. I don't agree with that. What truly makes you Samoan is how you serve your family and how you serve your village. (Chapman, 2024, para. 5)

She continues, providing clarity as to which New Zealand Samoans she is talking about, "No offence to afakasi but mostly afakasi in high positions that make decisions" (Chapman, 2024, para. 7). Madeline Chapman, editor of The Spinoff, and of Samoan and Pālagi heritage herself, responds with an opinion piece where she points out that while Samoans with fair skin have historically experienced a privilege when securing jobs, they are still Samoan but more importantly, the question Chapman asks is, "If Samoans in New Zealand don't represent Samoans, then who do they represent?" (Chapman, 2024, paras. 9-10).

When I consider Chapman's question I am reminded of my Mother, who held a deep well of Samoan knowledge and was a matriarchal knowledge holder within our aiga potopoto (extended family), explaining many times that while we may have a shared understanding of Samoan values, there are different ways to practice fa'a Samoa and this can be different from aiga (family) to aiga, fale (house) to fale, and nu'u (village) to nu'u,

When I think of my Mother's words, I reconsider the Samoan saying 'e iloa le tagata Samoa i lana tu ma ana aga'. If a Samoan person can be identified by their demeanour and behaviour (Suali'i-Sauni, et al., 2008) who decides who is Samoan; which Samoans need to be "humbled"; how a Samoan should dress; how a Samoan should serve their family and community; and what music a Samoan should listen to? And I ponder whether this saying is sometimes being weaponised by us, against us.

Tino - Body

As a former Miss New Zealand and fashion model, beauty dominated my teens and early adult life. It was, after all, how I made a living and negotiated a social status within Aotearoa. However, as one of a handful of Moana full-time working models at the time, there existed a tension between who I felt I was on the inside and how people saw me on the outside. "Marina has a 10 body and an exotic but classy" look". What did my modelling agent mean by this? Did my 'whiteness' give me the 'class' my 'brownness' did not? (McCartney, 2008, p. 8).

Beauty and femininity are evolving cultural constructs that are symptomatic of the prevailing beliefs of the time. These beliefs motivate behaviour, and these behaviours enable society's idea of beauty and femininity. Make-up application, fashion, hair removal, body size, hairstyles, adornment, beauty regimes in pursuit of a youthful appearance, and exercise regimes tailored to obtain a particular body shape, are all shaped by the prevailing idea of beauty.

Prior to the arrival of missionaries in Samoa in 1830, women kept their hair short and bleached a red brown colour with breadfruit sap used to set it rigidly while styled upwards (Meleisea, 1987). Pubescent girls kept their head shaved, except for the left temple which featured a lock of hair or a tail, while others wore both (Mageo, 1998). In other Moana nations, such as Hawai'i, Tahiti and Tonga, a larger body size was a signifier of prosperity and status as it revealed that one had access to a wealth of resources (Gould, 1997). The modification of the body through tatau (tattoo) was a widespread practice for all genders and represented a variety of functions, socially and spirituality (Gell, 1993). For Samoan women, the malu (Samoan women's tattoos) "was the highest form of attire one could wear". (Wendt, 1996,

para. 6). In addition to this, everyday nakedness and various forms of undress were not eroticised nor sexualised throughout Moananui.

However, when Christianity was introduced to Moananui it brought with it colonial ideals of femininity, beauty and propriety. Values from the Victorian era, worked to reshape appearances, behaviours and the bodies of the Moana woman as they were converted to Christianity. When Queen Victoria ascended to the throne in 1837, fashion evolved from dresses emphasising the smallness of the waist and the décolleté⁵⁵ into the more modest, pious style she appreciated (Fashion History, 2020). Gitter (1984) writes about the power of abundant golden hair, likening it to a having a magical totemic power. However, while women kept their hair long, it was pinned back in public as “taking the comb out of a married women’s hair, such that it fell down, was one of the four personal offences that received public punishment” (Mageo, 1986).

Missionaries were shocked at the nudity which they perceived as rampant displays of sexuality (Mageo, 1986) while the practice of tatau was seen as heathen (Gell, 1993). Cesare Lombroso, considered the father of contemporary criminology, cemented the European middle-class prejudice for tattoos through his quasi-scientific theories connecting tattooing with criminality (ibid.). When examining the skull of a well-known criminal his insight is telling:

At the sight of that skull...the problem of the nature of the criminal – an atavistic being who produces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals...enormous jaws, high cheek-bones...found in criminals, savages, and apes, insensibility to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies and the irresistible craving for evil for its own sake.... (Lombroso 1911: pp. xiv-xv as cited in Gell, 1993).

The negative image of tattooing as savage and criminal combined with Victorian ideas of femininity, beauty and virtue stood in stark contrast to what was considered feminine, high status and socially acceptable from a Moana perspective.

Despite Missionary attempts to shape Moana people into Christian fearing subjects, the idea of a sexually liberated people, especially Moana women, captured a colonial imaginary. Sheffield states that while the “savage indigene is usually negative...the sexualised, erotic/exotic indigene is seen as the positive ideal of native feminine beauty” (2000). This construction of an exotic/erotic Moana Other was strengthened by consistent colonial constructed images disseminated by media and literature, and she became known as the Dusky Maiden (ibid., 2000).

Sheffield further explains that one of the motivations for the Dusky Maiden construct is that the Moana woman stands in as a metaphor for the land colonial powers wished to ‘discover’ and control (Sheffield, 2000). The Dusky Maiden was fashioned as possessing a natural and modest beauty, her face fine featured with inviting and alluring brown eyes. Her long dark hair falls freely to her waist, her skin painted by the sun, and her body, slim and coffee coloured, is unashamedly exposed, with a touch of ‘native’ in the only piece of clothing she wears. She is removed enough from Western society to be eroticised; a spiced-up version of the white woman, close enough to be familiar but removed enough to be sexualised as an available exotic (Sailau, 2000).

⁵⁵ French for low neckline



Figure 73 Hawaiian Hula Girl
Photo: Henry L. Chase (c. 1880s)

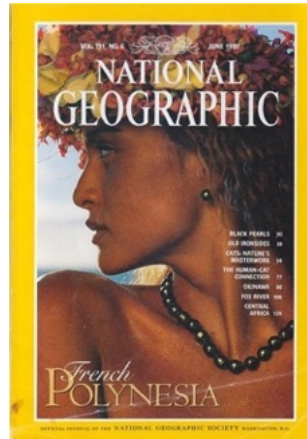


Figure 74 National Geographic
June 1997 French Polynesia
Vol. 191 No. 6



Figure 75 Island Girl
Photo: Herb Ritts (1995)

The Dusky Maiden therefore encapsulates an acceptable in-betweenness; 'Dusky' referring to neither dark nor light and 'Maiden' referring to 'untouched', 'childlike' and 'virginal' (Fa'ara-Reynolds, 2024).

The 'native belle', 'South Seas beauty', 'South Seas maiden', 'nubile savage' or the 'Dusky Maiden' allows colonial desire for the land to be transferred, to the Female Other; possess the woman, possess the land (Sheffield, 2000).



Figure 76 *The Tattooist* (2007)



Figure 77 Marina Alofagia McCartney, n.d.



Figure 78 Marina Alofagia McCartney
Ralph Magazine, n.d.

The myth of the Dusky Maiden is enduring and still exists centuries later through a variety of mediums and industries, such as advertising, tourism, media, and film. The impact of the Dusky Maiden construct continues to serve a capitalist colonial patriarchy, reinforcing ideas of contemporary femininity, the devaluation of and entitlement to the Moana woman. A 1998 found that Moana women living in the diaspora were more body conscious and began moving towards the prevailing body-shape ideal at the time, which was slimmer than the average Moana woman (as cited in Schaaf, 2005).

Sina

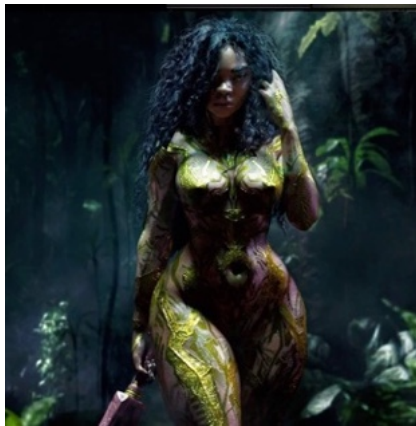


Figure 79 *Song of Sina* (2019)

Kim Kardashian



Figure 80 New York Post (Kato, 2022)

In more recent times, the ideal body type has moved toward the Kim Kardashian ‘slim-thick’ body ideal which researchers describe as consisting of a big butt, thighs and breasts, and a flat tummy with a small waist (Kato, 2022). The study found that the latest trend directly contributes to the dissatisfaction women have with their bodies (ibid.). These ideals continue to be internalised by Moana people and can impact how they construct Moana femininity. The image above is from an animation project titled “Song of Sina” developed by three Samoan creatives⁵⁶ in collaboration with Floating Rock Studio (Floating Rock Studio, n.d.). Sina channels an over-sexualised Kim Kardashian, therefore tapping into this colonial ideal that continues to sexualise the Moana woman as the exotic, erotic Other.

Agaga - Soul

Alongside the reshaping of the Moana mind and body, came the colonisation of the soul. The Doctrine of Discovery is a legal principle and dogma, with ideological roots in 15th and early 16th century Catholic Papal Bulls. The Doctrine justified a state’s colonial invasion and seizure of Indigenous lands and people (Tika Tangata, 2023, para. 1). Ngati Porou activist Tina Ngata, argues that the Doctrine of Discovery has become more than an international legal principle, but over time its ideologies have become part of the social psyche, influencing the ways in which we nurture relationships with each other and our world (Arnold & Bigtree, 2023, 00:03:35).

Feminist and activist Sally Roesch Wagner theorises the Doctrine of Discovery was used to target the power of women with the objective of controlling them (Arnold & Bigtree, 2022, 02:16). Through the Catholic lens there are two ways to obtain absolute authority over people; “control the creation of life...[and]...the reproduction of daily life, the food, the water, the essentials that we need to survive. If you control land, if you control Mother Earth, [you have] the ability to essentially control human beings” (Arnold & Bigtree, 2022, ibid.). This ideology took the power from the hands of the wise woman, the crone, the healers and matriarchal leaders, who in their own way held sacred power within their communities, and shifted it to the Catholic Church, which fell under the control of the patriarchy (Arnold & Bigtree, 2022, ibid.).

Tina Ngata refers to the subversion of a spiritual hierarchy, as Christianity looks to the heavens in the sky for the Christian God as opposed to below, to the Earth Mother or Papatūānuku (Arnold & Bigtree, 2023, 00:10:04). It is through this desanctification of Mother Earth which enables not only the colonisation of the spiritual, but the people, land and her resources which become accessible for exploitation. Ngata explains that a significant motivation of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery is to make what was sacred, outside of Catholic worldview, not sacred (ibid., 00:10:54). And when something is not sacred it can be consumed. Here, the vā becomes imbalanced by targeting the Indigenous cosmos and it is through devaluing it, that the exploitation of people, animal and land by colonial powers becomes justified.

⁵⁶ Abba-Rose Dinah Vaioaga-Ioasa, Jeremiah Tauamiti and Jacob Luamanuvae.

In Samoa, prior to Christianity, the most important relationship that existed was the sacred covenant between brother and sister, called feagaiga. This covenant revealed a pre-colonial Samoan worldview, where the women were accorded sacred power therefore giving them a revered place in Samoan society (Latai, 2015, p. 92). She was seen as a conduit to the spiritual and therefore a tamasā, or sacred child, with her brother showing her deference, respect and service (Latai, 2015, p. 93). As part of the conversion process, missionaries worked to focus on the role of women as wives and mothers, therefore minimising the role of women as feagagia (ibid., p. 92). In addition to this, feagaiga was transferred from the brother-sister, where the brother held secular status and the sister held sacred status, to the congregation-minister relationship. By minimising the role of the sister as sacred, and increasing the focus on women as wife and mother, women became desanctified over time. Simultaneously, the Church minister's role as the conduit for the Christian God, cemented his status as feagaiga in Samoan society (ibid., p. 96).

As a result, Christianity not only shifts the power of the Indigenous sacred to the Christian sacred but by doing so, desanctifies the Moana women and the land.

Balancing the Vā Within

Since colonial contact, a reshaping of the Moana mind, body and soul has taken place. The Moana mind has been subjected to notions of belittlement through colonial ideologies which has in turn led to a grappling and questioning of our identities even within our own communities. The Moana woman's body has simultaneously been devalued and sexualized by a colonial patriarchal gaze, while the Moana soul has been Christianised, through a process of desanctifying the Moana woman and land.

Samoan indigenous belief posits that peace within the self only exists when tino, mafaufau and agaga are in harmony (Tui Atua, 2008). If there is a reshaping of the Moana self through colonisation, which has resulted in a struggle or challenge to straddle multiple worldviews, then one can surmise that this has impacted the harmony of the self.

As a diasporic woman from a Samoan Mum and a Geordie and Romanichal Father, and the stepdaughter of a Kuki Airani step-Mama, who is only fluent in English I have consistently grappled with my identity. The vā within certainly hasn't felt 'harmonious' or 'balanced' and for most of my adult life I struggled with anxiety and depression. My filmmaking has given me an opportunity to explore this wrestle with myself and massage or reshape my mafaufau, tino and agaga, and as a result it has given me an outlet to communicate my own truth, not only to myself but to the world.

My Cinematic Gafa

All my fictional narrative films are a visual tala fa'a'aiga as they have been inspired by my experiences or those of close family members. Other than the collaborative documentary series *Ser un Ser Humano* (2011), shot in Samoa which I directed, my narrative films have all been written and directed by me. *Granda* (2010) is a film I made as part of my Bachelor of Arts (Hons) at the University of Auckland. It was inspired by my own childhood experience of meeting my Samoan Granda for the first time. He spoke no English, and I spoke no Samoan. I was interested in how the vā between family is nurtured when you cannot communicate through a shared spoken language. *Milk & Honey* (2012) was made as part of my Master's of Arts (First Class Honours) at the University of Auckland. It was inspired by my Samoan Mother's experience during the Dawn Raid period of the 1970s. I wanted to capture the experience of our people who migrated to Aotearoa for a better life, only to be faced with racism that threatened their dignity and their place in their new homeland. My Samoan vignette in the portmanteau film *Vai* (2019) was inspired by an amalgamation of my experiences, my Mother's experience and ancestral guidance. Writing *Vai* was the first time creativity and spirituality combined to generate story. This experience also started a process of rediscovering a spiritual path, which slowly guided me towards *The Return*, my gafa, and back to myself.

Granda (2010)

Short Film

<https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/granda-2010>

Milk & Honey (2012)
Vai (2019)

Short Film
Feature Film

<https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/milk-and-honey-2012>
<https://www.amazon.com/Vai-Fiona-Collins/dp/B07TDYMKF8>
(Time code for Samoan vignette 49:12)

Māfaufau

Granda, *Milk & Honey* and my Samoan vignette in *Vai* highlight the complexities of the diasporic and migrant Samoan experience and identity. They all explore connection to and disconnection from culture and the in-betweenness experienced when straddling two cultures. In many ways, they explore the impact of colonisation and assimilation on the Moana mind.

Granda is the first film I made; it was both an experiment and a cinematic baptism of fire. The narrative follows the protagonist, Robert, an 8-year-old boy meeting his Samoan Granda for the first time. The film explores how one nurtures the vā between grandchild and grandparent, younger generation and older generation, NZ-born Samoan and Samoan-born Samoan and the fluent and non-fluent.

Robert's silent observation of his Granda signifies the non-fluent diasporic Samoan, often left watching but not fully participating in Samoan family events. In the first half of the film, the camera often starts on a shot behind Robert, before moving to lingering close-ups of his face. It then switches to his perspective of his Granda: close-ups of his Granda's face, or extreme close-ups of his eyes, mouth and hands.



Figure 81 Robert in *Granda* (2010) © Marina Alofagia McCartney



Figure 82 Robert in *Granda* (2010) © Marina Alofagia McCartney

As a result, the audience is encouraged to see Robert as being on the margins, disconnected from culture and his Granda, before cutting to Robert's face where the audience is encouraged to consider his thought process and his observation. The handheld camera nurtures a gentle observational cinematography that encourages an intimacy with the characters, despite the distance between Robert and his Granda. While Robert resists a connection to fa'a Samoa (the Samoan way) and his Granda at the beginning of the film, a hint of his pride in his identity is seen in the black jacket he wears in the opening shot. This jacket states his identity as 'Satupa'itea', 'Palauli', 'Geordie', names that reflect where my parents were either born or raised – my Mum was born in Palauli, my Nana's district, and raised in Satupa'itea, my Granda's district. My Dad was born and raised in Newcastle and referred to himself as a Geordie⁵⁷.

The decision to name the film *Granda* while depicting a Samoan grandparent was not one made lightly. I was questioned by a Samoan matai (chief) who I approached to potentially collaborate with, in another area of the film. He read the script and told me it was culturally incorrect, inappropriate and I should change the title as it was not Samoan. When my Mother heard of his criticisms, she was furious and organised a meeting with him, as she had read the script and said it was an authentic representation of the relationship negotiation between my Granda and myself. My art director, also Samoan, and I were dressing the house for the shoot when my Mother arrived after their meeting. She walked in head held high and immediately explained that this matai was very surprised when she spoke to him using gagana fa'aaloalo (the language of respect). She then informed me that he would help with my film, and he would help me for free; and that was that. Within 30 minutes of my Mother arriving at my place, I received an email from this matai stating my Mother "was very firm with her understanding of fa'a Samoa" and he would help me in any way he could.

⁵⁷ Geordie is an English dialect that emerged from the Northumbrian dialect and is also used as an identity label for those from the region.

The title *Granda* reflects my Father's influence, as the McCartney grandchildren referred to our paternal Grandfather, John Henry McCartney, as Granda. This is a popular Irish label for one's grandfather which was used in my McCartney family, possibly reflecting the influence from a direct paternal ancestor, John McCartney, the first McCartney in our ancestral line to migrate from Ireland to Newcastle in the late 18th century. I was an infant when my paternal Granda died but this label was transposed to my maternal Grandfather. In the context of a non-speaking diasporic Samoan, English and Romanichal woman, the title *Granda* is a type of *su'ifefiloi*, a weaving together of seemingly random influences, that when joined with all other seemingly random influences from the variety of backgrounds I was exposed to, make the whole that is me.

Beyond the label 'Granda', the character Granda acts as an anchor for the negotiation of *vā* between grandfather and grandchild. It is through Granda's patience and humour that Robert can connect to both grandfather and culture on his own terms and in his own time. This mirrors my relationship with my Granda, who forgave the lack of *fa'aaloalo* (respect) his NZ-born grandchildren showed as he understood we were raised in a different environment. In doing so, what he revealed was despite an ocean that had divided us, *alofa* (love) is always present. It is through this *alofa* that the *mafaufau* can reach beyond what we internalise as a 'lack of' and nurture what already exists in the *vā*⁵⁸.

Milk & Honey was my second short film and explores a Dawn Raid experience from the dual perspective of a Samoan woman and a Samoan police officer, both about to become first-time parents. It juxtaposes the perspectives of the Moana accused, Tailoto the Samoan Mother-to-be, and the use of the Moana enforcer, Constable Salevao, the Samoan Father-to-be. It explores this in the context of a racist society, while hinting at the impact on the Moana enforcer.

When writing *Milk & Honey*, I was interested in how the two characters could work as a metaphor for the Samoan collective. For Samoans, there is no individual self. In a Western legal system, people are considered separate entities, however in the Samoan Indigenous legal system, all are members of a group and therefore the actions of one represent the actions of all (Mageo, 1998, p. 27). Tailoto and Constable Salevao are two sides of the same coin: a collective protagonist. This encouraged a duologue between the two characters, which represents a conversation with the self. Tailoto signifies the side steeped in *fa'a Samoa* while Constable Salevao signifies the side that experiences a pressure to assimilate (McCartney, 2012, p. 3). The objective was to present a collective protagonist that straddles two different cultures as well as the inner conflict that arises from this.

The *mise-en-scène* in the home environment was encouraged by the idea of culture on display. Photographs of parents who are either alive but in Samoa, or who have passed, bring them into the diasporic space and the present, reminding Samoans of their *tautua* (service) to and *alofa* for their *aiga*. In *Milk & Honey*, Tailoto reads a letter from her Father, then lays it down next to his photo. There were many times where my Mother received letters from her Father giving her an insight to village and family activities and politics as well as requests for help with upcoming expenses. The photo is an actual photo of my own Granda. It is a type of visual invocation, which calls him into being, not only for the protagonist Tailoto, but also for me as the director. He is a reminder of my Mother's *tautua* and therefore my obligation to family and village. My Mother's *tautua* included what was described in the letter Tailoto reads in film, and my Mother did pay for Granda and Nana's corrugated iron roof, the first in the village. However, my *tautua* looks a bit different; I may not be able to contribute in the same way as my Mother, but I can be a part of a Moana cinematic community who wants to re-claim, re-tell and re-present our history. *Milk & Honey* is a part of that *tautua* and the photo of my Granda was a reminder of that.

⁵⁸ Puogafa Tuagalu writes about the forces or *alofa*, *mana* and *tapu* as characterising various types of *vā* and motivating Samoans intra-mentally and extra-mentally (2023, p. 29)



Figure 83 Frame grab from *Milk & Honey* (2012)

The song featured during the credits and intertitles is a ‘Song of the Mau Rebellion’, performed by an unidentified choir in the 1940s and later released by Richard Moyle (Moyle, 2009). The song laments the atrocities committed against Samoa by the New Zealand administration. It specifically refers to New Zealand’s attacks on the Mau movement and its leaders, many of whom hailed from Samoa’s major political families. It also refers to the introduction of the Spanish influenza by New Zealanders, which killed 22% of Samoa’s population (Manatū Taonga — Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2020). The start of this song coincides with Tailoto leaving the police station and follows over the intertitles that provide a history of the Dawn Raids as a racist strategy used by the National government. It then continues over the credits before it fades out with the end of the film. I made a creative decision not to feature the translation as subtitles in the film. This was so the film offered something for older Samoans, similar in age to my Mother, who are more likely to have been migrants during the 1970s. It was a mealofa (gift) for them, particularly because as far as I am aware, *Milk & Honey* was the first fictional narrative film in the history of New Zealand cinema to offer an Indigenous perspective of the Dawn Raids, and one which was made by a writer/director from the Moana community.

The use of a dual protagonist, a mise-en-scène that situates ancestors and culture in the present and the use of song by Samoans for Samoans is another type of su’ifefiloi. It weaves together cultural influences in a way that resists some patterns seen in Western cinematic storytelling; a singular protagonist and the subtitling of non-English lyrics that move the narrative forward.

Vai was the third fictional narrative film I made and the first outside the academy. As part of a portmanteau film with nine other Moana women it is a production that leaned into the strength of Moana collectiveness. My vignette explored the anxiety that comes with questioning one’s worthiness as a Samoan woman, when physical connection to the Motherland has been absent for decades. The narrative was inspired by an amalgamation of experiences and thoughts from various women relatives and friends - siblings, my Mother, Aunties, cousins, close friends – all whom have storied these to me through tears, laughter, outbursts of anger or words of relief, but most of all with so much alofa. And while my *Vai* vignette is a su’ifefiloi of experiences, it is in essence an exploration of my own vulnerable hope, that regardless of the feelings of isolation I have from my own Samoan culture, there would always be connection if I believed in my worthiness as a Samoan woman.

The protagonist Sevai, experiences anxiety at having to perform and lead as the taupou at an event or ceremony, to celebrate the major anniversary of a church. Her anxiety lies not so much with her ability to dance but more with her ability to dance well enough, so she does not bring shame upon her family. It is an autobiographical story, but in my personal life, I declined my Mother’s request to dance as the taupou at a major event in Auckland acknowledging then prime minister Helen Clark’s apology to Samoa for atrocities committed by New Zealand (Gregory, 2002). I declined

because I did not have enough faith in my ability to honour my family and village with my siva skills. Instead, my Mother danced and she was incredible.

When we were helping Mum prepare for the event, I remember my Auntie Pepe Leleisi'uao, enquiring why I did not want to dance. I recalled my reason being that if I danced, I needed to be better than those who were 'full Samoan' because I would be judged as someone who wasn't. Back in 2002, I was still in the public eye as a high-profile Miss New Zealand of the previous decade, so to dance and fail in front of my aiga (family) and nu'u (village) was a mortifying thought, especially as someone of a mixed ethnic background. My Auntie Pepe's response was "It's in your bones". This phrase has stayed with me for over two decades. Auntie probably does not realise exactly how much influence it has had during times of insecurity about my own worthiness as a Samoan woman. This phrase is also used in *Vai* and comes just after a major turning point for the protagonist Sevai (Vai, 2019, 53:55). These words from Sevai's Auntie Pepe, a character named after my own beloved Auntie Pepe, are the last push Sevai needs to commit to her decision to dance.

Sevai's anxiety is seen in the lingering close-ups of her face and the silence in between sparse dialogue. The village represents the Samoan collective and provides a visual reminder that as a Samoan, one's actions never just represent themselves. This idea of culture and connection is further seen in the colours used in costumes. Thematically, vai (water) was used throughout the portmanteau film as a metaphor for cultural connection and life (McCartney, 2025, p. 134). The villagers are dressed in blue, signifying the Moana and nurturing the idea that even though conflict is present in the first half of the vignette between the Samoan collective and Sevai, it does not mean that culture is absent. The blue represents the potential of cultural connection and when Sevai does make the decision to dance, the village join and support her, therefore nurturing the vā between Samoans in Samoa and Samoans residing in the diaspora. Difference, distance and disconnection may be present, but at a macro level, transnational connection trumps the transnational divide (McCartney, 2025, p. 138).

As an autobiographical story, my Samoan vignette in *Vai* was a way of reclaiming an experience I felt too unworthy and insecure to be part of. Over 20 years ago, I was happy to sit on the sideline as a Samoan woman supporting my Mother as she danced with grace and beauty as the taupou. With *Vai*, while I am not physically dancing, I have, in a different way, taken control of my identity narrative through the medium of film.

Granda, *Milk & Honey* and *Vai* have all helped me purge some of the colonial refuge from my mafaufau. Each film gave me a way to explore my feelings of disconnection from, and simultaneously my connection to, my Samoan culture and part of the intergenerational context contributing to these feelings. As a result, each film has nurtured my mafaufau moving me closer to a different and new understanding of who I am.

Tino

Granda, *Milk & Honey* and my Samoan vignette in *Vai* present characters that resist a colonial construction of the Moana woman. The themes explored in my films, do not necessarily tackle the subversion of a colonial gaze directly, however, it is a by-product of making films that explore who I am.

The main characters in *Granda* are two males, Granda and Robert, while Robert's Mother Sofia is a supporting character. However, she is not passive, nor does she exist for the colonial male gaze. Instead, her purpose is to model fa'aaloalo as her Father's child, which her son Robert learns, in turn, by watching. The use of camera framing emphasises familial intimacy and Sofia's presence shows a confidence in who she is as a mother and child, as she allows Robert and Granda the space to negotiate their own relationship. In *Milk & Honey*, Tailoto, is presented as a quiet figure who, while confined by two male police officers, is not passive nor submissive. Although, physically contained Tailoto's body defies a racist state through her stoic presence. She chooses when to speak, how to speak and who to speak to which reveals a resilience despite her circumstances. In *Vai*, Sevai also has limited dialogue, but the camera's framing of her face creates an intimacy with the audience and encourages them to clock the gentle shifts in her emotional journey. In all three films, silence serves as strength, subverting the idea of a Moana woman silenced in her position as a member of one of the most marginalised groups in New Zealand society (Sumeo, 2022, para 17).

The protagonists, both male and female, in *Granda*, *Milk & Honey* and the *Vai* Samoa vignette stand in as versions of me. Through each film there is a reclaiming of the Moana body through the narrative and directorial choices, particularly in *Milk & Honey* and *Vai* as the lead actors are women. While the protagonists, Tailoto and Sevai, do not necessarily say much, their presence is not erased nor is it presented as spectacle. Both bodies endure the pressures of racism and assimilation, but they do not yield to colonial domination. In *Milk & Honey*, Tailoto's body is literally imprisoned by a colonial state, but long lingering shots where she sits uncomfortably in silence suggest her mind may neither be there nor confined.



Figure 84 Tailoto in *Milk & Honey* (2012), © Marina Alofagia McCartney

When she is released from jail, she leaves slowly, in her own time, and silently. The scene cuts from her leaving the jail cell to her walking feet as she exits the police station. This shot coincides with the start of the Mau song suggesting the many faceless Samoans who suffered during the Dawn Raid period. Despite this experience, Tailoto keeps moving forward because that is all she can do. This is juxtaposed with a previous scene of Constable Salevao, who is left unmoving on his bed as he ponders not only his obligation to his parents, wife and baby, but his actions in his role as Moana enforcer, to secure their financial future. Constable Salevao's body is free, but his mind and spirit are confined and trapped by colonial pressures.

In *Vai*, Sevai attempts to practice with the nifo 'oti, a ceremonial knife used in dance performances such as the taualuga (last dance). However, her body cannot do what she wants it to do, and she drops it several times during the practice, resulting in her giving up. While Sevai is not physically trapped like Tailoto, her mind is confined by her doubt about her worthiness as a Samoan woman to perform. Her physical distance from Samoa over the previous decade has resulted in a disconnection with both Samoan mind and body. It is not until she appeals for help and forgiveness from her deceased parents that she is able to invoke the spiritual and begin a journey of re-connecting mind and body.

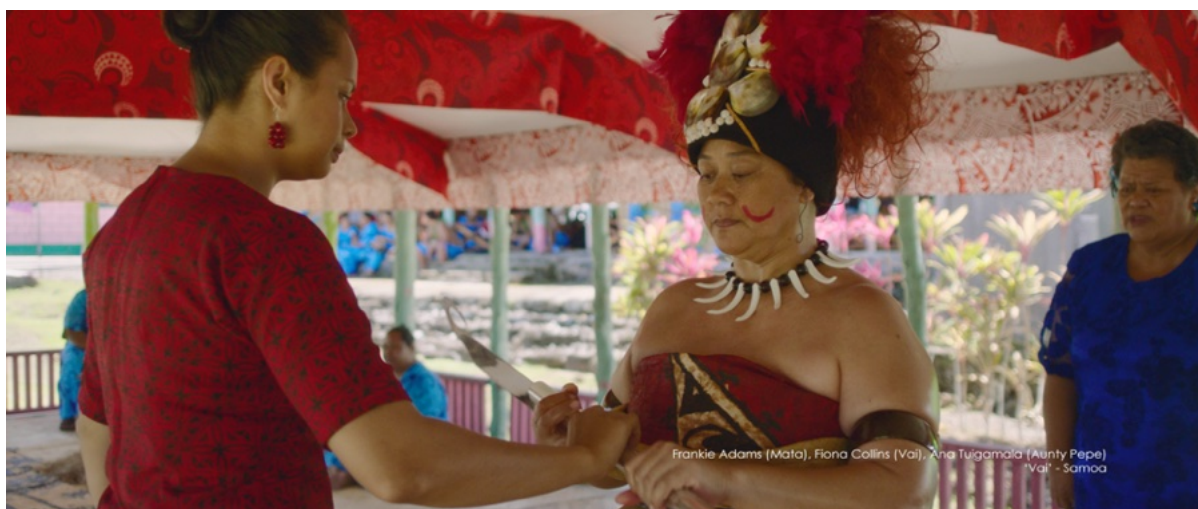


Figure 85 In the Samoan vignette of *Vai* (2019) (© Vendetta Films)

Both women have long hair, sun-kissed skin and in some ways fit the physical attributes of the Dusky Maiden. Their casting is more a reflection of me casting myself. However, they subvert the Dusky Maiden trope as they are neither eroticised nor sexualised for colonial male consumption. In their own way, Tailoto and Sevai are strong and assertive, working to reclaim control of events and experiences despite conflict and adversity. They represent my own desire to reclaim myself as a non-sexualised Moana woman, hence the camera acting as witness to their stories and resilience rather than a colonial tool to consume.

In the *Vai* vignette, the young girl who runs to her Nana at the end, is fair-skinned. This was a conscious directorial choice that posed the question “What does a Samoan look like?”. The 4-year-old actress is my daughter, Alena McCartney-Aitken. Her casting was intentional to resist the idea of blood quantum defining who is and who is not Samoan. Alena is Samoan not because of the measure of her blood but because of her gafa. One of Alena’s middle names is Sevai, named after her Great Nana. Alena’s physical presence in *Vai* provides a gene-archaeological matter to the film. Refiti (2005) explains that the foundation of a Samoan lies in the genealogical ties with aiga, nu’u and ancestors which combine as gene-archaeological matter (p. 6):

This involves the understanding that you – your body and being – represent a line of ancestors/land/community/family, which are part of you...consequently your ‘being there’ allows these ancient bodies to be present, too. This gives meaning to va relationships – va spaces, that which is in-between us that is more than you and me, what in you that is more than you. (ibid.)

Alena’s presence on screen combined with my presence behind the camera calls into being Asiata and Sevai, the names which Sevai utters as she calls for help from her parents. Asiata is my Granda and Sevai is my Nana. Therefore, the vā that connects director to actor and both to ancestors is nurtured on both sides of the camera through director and actor as gene-archaeological matter. The *Vai* Samoa vignette becomes a narrative portal through which ancestors from Sāmoeleoi, my Granda’s clan, and Sāilomaiaiva, my Nana’s clan, are invoked into a film which explores ancestral spirituality.

Agaga

As my filmic journey progressed, I began to explore ideas of bloodlines and ancestral spirituality. After my cinematic baptism of fire with *Granda*, my next films, *Milk & Honey* and *Vai*, gave me an opportunity to advance both thematic ideas of blood and bloodlines through the mise-en-scène, and a type of narrative gene-archaeological matter through the naming of characters. This invocation of the ancestors further evolved into the more literal representation seen in *Vai*. Creating *Vai* became my first exploration into Moana ancestral spirituality and mirrored my personal spiritual journey behind the camera.

The first time I consciously clothed a character in red, was in *Milk & Honey* where Tailoto wears a red lavalava. While I understood red to be a colour associated with tapu (sacred and forbidden) and the Gods throughout Moananui, in *Milk & Honey* it was used to signify the blood on the hands of the New Zealand state (McCartney, 2012). This blood referred to the many Samoan victims of the New Zealand Administration. These include the paramount ali'i (high chief) and prominent leader of the Mau Movement⁵⁹, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi-o-Aana III, who was assassinated in 1929; the victims of the Spanish Influenza introduced to Samoa in 1918 through the gross negligence of the New Zealand Administration; and the victims of the Dawn Raids.

In the Samoan vignette of *Vai*, the characters Sevai, Mata and Moana (three directly linked generations) and the ancestors, are the only characters wearing red. The colour red acts as a visual su'ifefiloi, threading together those connected by blood, signifying gafa. The space between those who are living and those who have passed is bound by red, drawing the ancestors into the physical world. The decision not to use visual effects to 'other' the ancestors speak to the Moana spiritual, where the intangible is tangible. It is only through the sound design which drops in volume and becomes slightly muted when an ancestor appears, that the audience understands something spiritual is happening. And while it can be argued that the vignette presents the ta'alolo as spectacle, Sevai's journey is not, nor does it exist for colonial consumption. Her journey is ancestral and spiritual while resisting the stereotype of the supernatural Other. As the writer and director of this piece, the exploration of ancestral spirituality as a pathway to cultural connection, was a reclamation of or return to pre-colonial Moana spirituality. However, it still acknowledges the role of Christianity in our lives as Sevai's journey ends at a Christian church, where the waiting Christian minister and congregation greet her.



Figure 86 Film still from Sāmoa vignette in *Vai*.
© Vendetta Films, 2019

Sevai as taupou, who leads the village in a celebration or ceremony, is a cinematic reclamation of the Moana woman as sacred and spiritual conduit. She sits in direct contrast to the Dusky Maiden taupou representations used for tourist consumption (Taouma, 2002, p. 135).

⁵⁹ Samoa's pro-independence movement.



Figure 87 Photos of Tuiuli, the taupou of Saolufata.

Andrew, T. (1896).

Photo Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0 Übersee-Museum Bremen.



Figure 88 Thinking Woman.

Andrew, T. (1890). [Thinking Woman].

Photo Attribution: Thomas Andrew

In *Vai*, the siva (dance) of the taupou, the taualuga, is re-presented as spiritual, where she not only displays the mana of the village but she nurtures the vā between the living and dead. The result does not necessarily shift the power back from the Christian sacred to the Indigenous sacred, but in the 10-minute narrative, it visually elevates the status of the taupou back to the sanctified.

As a nation of titleholders, matai titles are carriers of history, genealogy as well as power through the right to speak at village functions and meetings and the right to access land associated with that title (Tuimaleali'ifano, 2006, p. 1). Therefore, names are not just identity tags for Samoans.

Since the beginning of my filmmaking journey, I have used family and ancestral names and labels for my characters, or those names have been referred to in the narrative. As explored previously, using the term of endearment, Granda, as the title of my first film, was a conscious decision that reflected the context of my personal identity. However, from *Milk & Honey* onwards, naming my characters after ancestral names, has become an important creative decision during the writing process.

Ancestral and Family Names Featuring in my Films

Milk & Honey (2012)

Tailoto Tavu'i

Solopo Tavu'i

Constable Salevao

Tailoto and Solopo are my great Grandparents on my Mother's paternal side – i.e. the parents of my Granda Asiata Leaoa. Tavu'i is an ali'i title associated with Sāmoeleoi and the district of Satupa'itea. Salevao is the name of one of my Mother's brothers.

Vai (2019)

Sevai⁶⁰

Asiata

Pepe

Sevai comes from my Nana, Sevai Leleisi'uao. My first cousin is also named Sevai and it is my daughter's middle name. Asiata is an ali'i tulāfale matai title held by my Granda, Asiata Leaoa. It is currently held by my Mother's brother, my Uncle Asiata Leaoa Faivaotoa. Pepe is the name of my Auntie Pepe Leleisi'uao. Leleisi'uao is an ali'i title associated with Sālilomaiaava and the village of Vailoa, Palauli.

⁶⁰ The name Sevai was used in my individual Samoan vignette. However, to ensure consistency within the film, Sevai is referred to as Vai across all vignettes in official promotional material from the producers, distributors and funders.

For Samoans who hold matai titles, they are vessels for the founding ancestor of the title as well as subsequent ancestors bearing it after (Tcherkezoff, 2005, p. 261). The decision to use ancestral and family names in my films became more than a reminder of tautua to family, community and culture. It became a way to call these ancestors into being, to hold me accountable for the stories I tell but more importantly, I felt protected while telling them. This became a type of name-vā, anchoring me back to my ancestors and reminding me that my gafa is not just a history of where I come from, but an integral part of my spirituality.

Healing the Vā Within

Granda, *Milk & Honey* and my *Vai* vignette are explorations of my heritage and intergenerational memory. From a creative perspective, each film marks a progression in my filmmaking voice, storytelling approach, and aesthetic choice. From a personal perspective, each film marks a progression in my identity journey. While the films tend to explore the themes of belonging, disconnection from and connection to culture, they have also sought to nurture the mafaufau, tino or agaga.

The use of colour to connote blood connections and gafa in the films has sat alongside ancestral names and images to invoke my ancestors into being, on the screen, behind the lens and within the narrative. The actors and characters are presented as versions of myself and subversions of the Dusky Maiden, which have contributed to shifts in my understanding of my own identity and context. And as part of my cinematic gafa, there has been a progression from the nurturing of vā fealoaloa'i (relational space) to vā tapua'i (sacred space).

Making *Granda* was not only a cinematic baptism of fire, but it also helped me explore what I had internalised as a 'lack of' in terms of my Samoan language, and, that this did not matter when alofa was present. *Milk & Honey*, provided me with an opportunity to understand my Mother's emotional and mental trauma from her Dawn Raid experience while pregnant with me, which influenced her later decision to focus on a Western education for her children, at the expense of our Samoan language. My Samoan vignette in *Vai* gave me the first experience where my ancestors were not only concepts but collaborators in my creativity. Each film has therefore, nurtured the vā with mafaufau, tino or agaga.

During the course of this research, something became clear; my Granda and Mother are present in some way in all my films. My first film *Granda* explores my early relationship with my Granda, with my Mother as observer. My second film *Milk & Honey* includes a photograph of Granda, which the camera lingers on, a reminder to me of the obligation to and love for my family, village and community. But it is my Mother who is the protagonist. My Samoan vignette in *Vai* invokes him into being through Sevai's utterance of his matai title, Asiata. Part of this story was inspired by a memory I have of my Mother studying a photo of her parents and calling them into being during a time of need. My Mother and Granda were symbolic anchors within my films for connection to culture, which I did not realise at the time of writing and shooting each film. However, their omnipotent presence in my films encouraged me to delve deeper within myself. It felt like a calling to consciously explore how creativity and spirituality, as gafa, might combine to heal the vā within for both character and filmmaker. My next film, *The Return* is the product of this exploration.

CHAPTER 5: THE VĀ IN *THE RETURN* (2025)

Tala Fa'a'aiga 5



Figure 89 Tapaeru Nancy Armstrong (date unknown)
B. 1956 – D. 2010



Figure 90 Step-Mama, me and Dad (early 2000s), Auckland

On 17 July 2010, I was at a bar in Ponsonby on a Saturday night. I glanced at my phone to see several missed calls from my Dad and step-Mama's place. I worried as they did not usually call on a Saturday night. When I called home, my sister answered and I immediately asked, "What's wrong with Dad?". But it was not Dad. It was my beloved step-Mama. My sister told me she was being 'worked on' by the paramedics and to get home as soon as possible. I picked up my brother and brother-in-law on the way and during that journey it felt like we encountered all sorts of obstacles to getting home quickly; an empty petrol tank and red light after red light. I even hit a kerb, worrying my brother enough for him to urge me to focus on getting us home safely. When we arrived the paramedics were still working on her but within a few minutes one of them announced something that changed our family forever. They turned to my Dad and said, "Mr McCartney, what has happened is Nancy has died".

When I reflect on this night, I realise we could have crashed so many times but all the obstacles we came across slowed us down. My sister, her husband and my sister-in-law rushed in a panic from Tauranga to Auckland as soon as they got the news. They too encountered many obstacles slowing them down; they got stuck behind an ambulance driving slowly over the Kaimai Ranges, a 1.5-to-2-hour drive, then a falcon appeared out of the blue on the road in front of them, causing them to stop the car. My sister explains they felt these were reminders to slow down and once they accepted them, a calm and safety descended over the trip home.

I often think of my step-Mama, Tapaeru Nancy Ratumu McCartney, in that space between life and death watching over us and occupying different spaces while we all made our way to my Dad, safely. It is another version of a return home.

The film script has had many iterations inspired by these experiences around death. From the 'auala I first saw in Samoa; to the pondering about my Granda and my Mother's return to Samoa after their deaths and their own 'auala to Satupa'itea; the musings about their journey and those of millions of Samoans to Le Fāfā; to the journey home to my step-Mama on that Saturday night. The script explored different locations and spaces. An early draft was half set in Aotearoa, with the other in Samoa. One draft was set in a church and an urban house, another set in a house and a car, where a mother drove around urban Auckland with her dead daughter's spirit in the back seat. The plot has changed many times and explored many locations. Many iterations of conversations between my Mother and myself have played out. Versions of conversations between Samoan women who have criticised and excluded me, and conversations between racist Pālagi and my Mother, sister, an Auntie or myself, have also been written. The plot has changed many times as I tried to find the right story for the message. What hasn't changed is the final image in the film; a woman stepping into Le Fāfā after her journey from wherever the previous chapter of her life ended. It is fitting as it is also the image that birthed the film that has become *The Return*.

When I began this research, the statement below, from an address I gave at Māoriland Film Festival (2019) reflected my view of myself and this became a place from which to leap into explorations of the themes of connection and disconnection to culture, in-betweenness and belonging within *The Return*.

I am a daughter of the diaspora;
An English and Moana diaspora. I operate within a colonial patriarchal system that wasn't built to benefit me
And yet at times I experience a privilege that some of my other sisters of darker shades, or with more island looking features do not experience.
I am simultaneously the Dusky Maiden, a South Seas belle;
And a fia Pālagi (wanna be white person) or Pālagi valea (stupid white person)
To some who seek to "put me in my place" a conversation is sometimes prefaced with, "I don't know if you know much about Samoan culture but..."
And yet, to others, I am a coconut, a fob (fresh off the boat), someone who should "go home"
I am a white bitch
I am a brown bitch
I am the stereotype – a single Samoan Mother with no assets to my name
And yet, I am told I have beaten the stereotype because
I am Samoan and have three degrees and am studying for a fourth; a PhD
I am an English-speaking Samoan woman who cannot speak Samoan fluently.
I am 'afa kasi (half caste);
two halves of different things which don't necessarily make a whole
And yet, I am whole to my parents.
And to my 5-year-old daughter I am Mama,
who loves her more than anyone in the world. (McCartney)

This statement represents the many complexities of a Moana identity, that is shaped and constructed outside of the Motherland. It is not unique to me, but one that reflects the identity journey many diasporic Moana women navigate every day. *The Return* attempts to explore this navigation through a young woman, who by answering the call of her ancestors must prove her worthiness as a Samoan woman or stay stuck in the in-between.

Embedded in the film's processes, narrative, themes and aesthetics is the centrality of vā within relational, spiritual and inner spaces. *The Return* presents a world within a world in that the journey is set in a Western style house, where the house is a metaphor for the self. The journey is a metaphor for the battle to shed colonial constructions of the diasporic born, non-Samoan speaking, Samoan self; colonial constructions which have been accepted by many of our own people as cultural truths. While Lupesina's dramatic want is to gain access to Le Fafā, the gateway to the Samoan Elysium, Pulo, her dramatic need is to balance the vā within, bringing together mind, body and soul in harmony. Therefore, the directorial approach uses an exploration and negotiation of vā to underpin the visual storytelling and explore themes of alienation, isolation, disconnection from, and connection to culture and oneself.

The message for the audience is that no matter how connected or disconnected one feels, or that others try to make you feel, from your culture, no one can take away your gafa (genealogical roots). *The Return* works at a metaphorical level, utilizing several metaphors and symbols to enhance the message of the film. This chapter provides a close reading of *The Return* and how it has been influenced by the Samoan value of vā.

The Message in the Narrative

Synopsis of *The Return*⁶¹

LUPESSINA (Samoan/European, 20s) is lured by a tapping sound down a hallway. She opens a door revealing a SAMOAN WOMAN receiving a malu (Samoan female tattoos) from a SAMOAN MASTER TATTOOIST, face buried in her task. Enamored with the scene, she joins a group of SAMOAN WOMEN SUPPORTERS, but when they notice she does not speak the Samoan language, they reject her. Ashamed, Lupesina returns to the hallway.

Beckoned by voices calling her, she arrives at a painting titled *Le Fafā* (The Gateway) of the ocean lapping against rocks and lit by moonlight. Ocean sounds and tapping grow as the painting comes to life, drawing her in. The sound of children's laughter distracts her, and she follows it to a bedroom where her Mother LEVALASI (Samoan, 50s) holds vigil over an unseen person. Lupesina confronts her for not teaching her enough and her Mother scolds her and leaves. When Lupesina runs after her, she is transported to her childhood classroom, filled with the familiar sound of children's laughter. She faces a Pālagi (white) classmate who repeats a bullying incident only to be confronted with another traumatic experience at a Samoan event.

The memory plays out and when Lupesina does not follow correct Samoan protocol while serving she is ridiculed as a Pālagi valea (stupid white person). When mocked about Levalasi's parenting skills, Lupesina bites back and storms out of the room only to be beckoned back to the painting. But when presented with the painting without life, she charges towards a door only to find it locked. After several attempts to break through, she experiences warped versions of previous memories, and she panics, calling for her Mother. The door opens and she enters the bedroom where the previous encounter of her Mother and a version of herself play out. When they leave, Lupesina sits beside the bed, revealing her own DEAD SELF.

Facing anxiety about her own death and uncertain of what to do, she races after her Mother. Instead, she enters the earlier room with the Samoan women who shunned her. Fury growing, Lupesina demands acknowledgement and confronts the Samoan Tattooist who finally looks up. As Lupesina stares into her own face, mocking words of being exposed and naked without the language swirl. The devastation of realizing she is her own antagonist sets in and angry and desperate, she rips off her clothes until she is naked. Breathing in calm, she spots the 'au tā (tattooing tool) and claims it. She exits empowered.

Lupesina stands at the top of the hallway as the ocean sings from outside the front door that opens revealing *Le Fafā* (The Gateway). The full moon rests on the horizon, its magical hues flooding sky and ocean. Lupesina's ancestors call while Samoan oratory of her lineage beckons her home. As she takes in *Le Fafā* a malu is tapped onto her legs from the inside out. Lupesina exits through the doorway, malu complete and leaps into the ocean toward her return home.

In-betweenness

The Return is a drama featuring Samoan spirituality. It explores the experience of a NZ-born Samoan/Pālagi (European) woman Lupesina who is forced to explore in death what she was unable to in life. To enter *Le Fafā*, the gateway to the Samoan Elysium, Pulotu, Lupesina must find her way through the maze that is her identity to prove her worthiness. When challenged by her lack of Samoanness, her spirit confronts her Mother, whom she blames for leaving her unprepared for this next chapter of her life. As she attempts to continue her journey, she must learn to accept herself as she is or risk being stuck in the in-betweenness.

Many NZ-born Moana people experience what has been described as 'in-betweenness', where they feel neither a full member of their traditional Moana society or culture nor of the New Zealand dominant culture (Taumoeofolau, 2013, p. 116). Much of this comes from not knowing their Moana language or culture, a product of assimilation and colonisation, and this leads to feelings of alienation, loneliness, rejection and confusion. As someone who sits in this

⁶¹ This 500-word synopsis follows screenwriting conventions which require present tense, character names to be capitalised when they first appear, plot progression outlined, the ending revealed, culturally specific terms explained within the word count or minimised.

in-betweenness, the narrative explores exchanges between Lupesina and a section of her Samoan community who have bought into colonial beliefs and constructions about who is or who is not Samoan. *The Return* explores the experience of a NZ-born Samoan/Pālagi (European) woman who constantly negotiates this in-betweenness, the desire to belong and the redemption that comes from returning and belonging to the Moana-self.

Through Lupesina we explore the space between the Moana and non-Moana, fluent and non-fluent, life and death - until she can find solace for her soul through herself. In one moment, it touches on parental decisions made from a place of both love and trauma and the long-lasting effects on the next generation. Our protagonist in *The Return* must learn to discard constructions and expectations of who she is and return to her Moana-self. It is this metaphorical removal of the societal mask that enables rebirth. And it is through this rebirth that intergenerational trauma is addressed and hopefully healed.

It is intended that the audience, irrespective of their background, will be moved by Lupesina's journey because all of us, in one walk of life or another, have had to negotiate a return.

Pulotu

In the Samoan Indigenous religion, Pulotu, the afterworld, is the resting place for those who have passed on (Kramar, 1994, p. 24, 51). Once someone has died, their spirit makes their way to the most Western point of Savai'i, Samoa, the village of Falealupo, to walk into Le Fafā, which leads them to Pulotu. This has been recreated as a filmic journey exploring the metaphor of *The Return* to the Moana-self, while transplanting it into the New Zealand context which is my context. *The Return* is an interpretation of a journey home.

Tui Atua states that:

In the Samoan indigenous religion there are three key parts to a person or self: the *tino* or body, the *mafaufau* or mind and the *agaga* or soul. Harmony with the self requires harmony between man and his inner self. (2008, p. 112)

If the colonised self, experiences in-betweenness⁶² where they are neither members of their Moana culture nor of New Zealand mainstream culture, how does one achieve harmony when they experience feelings of alienation, loneliness, rejection and confusion? This question spurred further questions that aided in the crafting of the narrative and influenced the aesthetics of the film. Questions such as:

- Who decides who is Samoan and who is not?
- If a person's identity is consistently questioned, can one find harmony between *tino* (body), *mafaufau* (mind) and *agaga* (soul)?
- How does one nurture the *vā* that connects *tino* (body), *mafaufau* (mind) and *agaga* (soul)?
- How does one balance the *vā* within?

Initially, I tried writing from existing research, focusing on the theory first, but I continued hitting a writer's block. Something stopped me from progressing and kept driving me back to the story. Eventually, I realised that to explore the theory, I had to not only clarify the message of the film, but I had to explore the written and visual narrative first, because this story is my personal story. Through creating *The Return*, I explored who I am, and my sense of belonging, which evolved over the course of the study.

Just as I explored the space between the Moana and the non-Moana, fluency in gagana Samoa (Samoan language) and non-fluency, life and death, the marked and the unmarked, Lupesina also explores these in the film. The desire to belong is a deep primal need and to feel validated in who we are, as we are, is a powerful human desire. In *The Return*, Lupesina finds solace for her soul by balancing the *vā* within.

⁶² Melani Anae also discusses identity conflict as a NZ-born Samoan and the socio-psychological issues that arise from this in her PhD thesis *Fofoa-I-Vao-'Ese: Identity Journeys of NZ-born Samoans*.

The Vā in the Language of *The Return*

The dialogue used in the script consists of English and Samoan. Words in a language convey culturally specific concepts that shape a worldview and as language is a carrier of culture, a lack of fluency in one's Mother tongue can result in a lack of knowledge of one's culture. Taumoeolau (2018) posits this can result in feelings of insecurity and alienation from one's Moana community (p. 116). Melani Anae (1997) states that NZ-born Samoans who are unable to tautala fa'a Samoa (speak Samoan) can result in an inability to fully participate in Samoan customs and rituals while being subjected to derision by their Samoan speaking community (p. 132). Therefore, language becomes a powerful relational tool between a person and others, and their culture. Specific words used in *The Return* provide a push and pull between our protagonist and her antagonists, and her connection not only to culture but also herself. They function on multiple levels as barriers and connectors, planting narrative seeds and nurturing tension throughout the film.

The term 'fo'i mai, which translated means 'return home' or 'return here', is presented as non-diegetic ancestral whispers. The exception to this, is during the bedroom scene where Lupesina's Mother tells her to "return home" in English. These are also the last words her Mother utters to her directly in that world. The phrase works on several levels where it urges Lupesina to return to her Samoan culture, return to her family, return to herself and lastly, return to her spiritual home. As the phrase is uttered at different stages throughout the film, its objective is to strengthen the idea that none of these things were ever lost to Lupesina, and the presence of her ancestors, culture and home are within herself and will always be present despite her insecurities.

The script includes several pieces of dialogue that refer to the nakedness and exposure that comes from not knowing one's Samoan language.

Samoan dialogue

'ua kelefua

Ua fa'aluma lou laulau faiva

Oā nei Tinā ua fa'atunoa lana fanau?

English translation

She's naked

Your tongue. Exposed.

What type of Mother leaves her child exposed?

These lines are delivered by other Samoan women in response to their realisation that Lupesina does not speak Samoan. Their function is to nurture division between the fluent and non-fluent in Samoan language, where language is weaponised against the non-fluent and used to exclude them from their own Samoan culture. It is in these moments that alienation is forced upon Lupesina from external forces, which she has then internalised throughout her life. They also plant narrative seeds which pay off in the penultimate and climactic scenes.

These lines of dialogue draw inspiration from the well-known Samoan muagagana⁶³.

Samoan

E tā muamua gutu, ona tā ai lea o le tatau

English translation

Tattoo the mouth before you tattoo the body.

The meaning of the words refer to the need to understand the language and the culture before you can be tattooed with a malu (Samoan woman's tattoos) or a pe'a (Samoan men's tattoos).

As a screenwriter of Samoan, English and Romanichal descent and someone who is not fluent in my Samoan mother tongue I was interested in the different layers of meaning these words have for my body. Albert Wendt explores the post-colonial body as a naked human body that needs to be clothed (1996, para. 4). However, he surmises that from a Samoan perspective, one is already clothed if they have a tatau. "...Being clothed (lavalava) had little to do with clothes...[tatau and malu] were the most desired and highest status clothing anyone could wear" (Wendt, 1996, para. 6). Wendt explains that the word malu has several meanings; to be shaded or protected, coolness or to soften (Wendt, *ibid.*). The word 'malu' is a derivative of the word 'mamalu'. According to Milner (1992), this means 'honour' or 'dignity'. Allardice's (1985) dictionary includes the descriptors 'majesty', 'glory', 'prestige'.

⁶³ Samoan common saying or saying of wisdom.

Considering this, if one is clothed, protected, sheltered and honoured when they have a malu, but one can only receive a malu if they are fluent in Samoan and knowledgeable in our culture, where does this leave someone like me? Due to the racism and trauma my Samoan Mother experienced in Aotearoa, she pushed her children to master the English language, leaving us monolingual. As a first-generation New Zealand-born Samoan who is not fluent in Samoan due to my Mother's trauma, where does this leave me? Am I not eligible for the protection, dignity and honour a malu gifts her wearer, because of my non-fluency in Samoan language and culture? As a product of colonial violence, non-fluency is a marker of intergenerational trauma within the diaspora. However, when acceptance into one's community becomes dependent on the fluency of language rather than one's gafa, this enables another version of colonial violence; lateral violence (Thomsen, 2022b, para. 17).

The words 'naked' and 'exposed' suggest a fracturing of the vā within the non-fluent Samoan category. My own journey to receive my malu and the process of writing *The Return*, gave me an understanding, that at some point in my life I would need to accept my own 'exposure' and 'nakedness' and give myself permission to receive my malu, even if I did not speak my Samoan language. This experience directly influenced Lupesina's journey to strip off the layers of colonial noise, represented by Western style clothing, and embrace who she is, as she is. It is in this embrace that her literal nakedness becomes a strength, and it is through the acceptance of who she is, that she becomes clothed with a malu that was always on the inside; a balancing of the vā within.

The Vā in the Aesthetics of *The Return*

Vā Metaphors

The camera is not only an observer but an architect of truth. For Indigenous filmmakers, it can become a relational tool nurturing the vā connecting filmmaker and story, where story can capture a version of a Samoan truth. The aesthetics of *The Return* work to capture my truth as a diasporic New Zealand-born Samoan woman who consistently negotiates spaces in-between. This is reflected in the film by Lupesina's negotiations of vā fealoaloa'i and vā tapua'i as she moves towards a balancing of the vā within. *The Return* uses thresholds as visual metaphors to encourage the themes of in-betweenness and disconnection and connection to culture. It also uses space to foster feelings of isolation for the viewer. Therefore, an exploration of vā negotiation is further encouraged through film form in addition to the dialogue of the actors.

Liminal spaces⁶⁴ are littered throughout the film, from the entire house to spaces within its interior where the hallway, doorways, and a painting are presented as transitional spaces. As the film progresses, the space of the film becomes ambiguous and uncertain, where Lupesina is neither here nor there in both time and space. These spaces represent the in-betweenness explored in *The Return*.

The setting of a colonial diasporic house works as a metaphor on several levels. It represents the colonised Samoan mind, body and soul as well as a transitional space between the end of one life chapter and the beginning of another. It also stands in contrast to the openness of a fale Samoa which has no doors. Refiti (2015) describes the relationship between various Samoan buildings as being connected to the idea of openness and orderliness. In *The Return*, the colonial style house boasts an openness with spaces that appear without order. Lupesina opens doors that do not necessarily lead to spaces she expects, and these doors are both connectors from one space to another, while simultaneously being disconnectors of spaces. This suggests that Lupesina is trapped within her colonial self, despite being presented with several opportunities to move on from the space, through the painting as another portal to Le Fafā. Therefore, the house works as a double metaphor, a liminal space as well as the colonised Samoan self. It is only when Lupesina faces herself, or the image of herself she has developed over a lifetime in response to her experiences, that she is able to leave the confines of the colonial house.

⁶⁴ Homi Babba draws comparisons between the function of liminal spaces in architecture to create pathways and therefore connection, and a hybrid space or third space, which is created when the colonised and coloniser interact. It is an evolving space as identity and culture are continually negotiated and therefore new identities and cultural meaning is produced (Babba, 1994, p. 21-33)

Doors are a significant metaphor in *The Return*. They act as gateways that grant or bar entry, barriers to tangible and intangible spaces including cultural and knowledge spaces, as well as being portals to other times and realms. The doorway itself is a threshold, as it sits in between two spaces. As a connection between realms and micro spaces, within the larger macro space of a house, the doorways act as a visual thread throughout in that they appear in every scene either visually, or aurally, for example, through the bang of a closing door. There are two moments in *The Return* where Lupesina does not have to physically open a door. The first is when she looks up after reclaiming her name and she is transported from the classroom to the event hall. This is the first moment where Lupesina actively decides to reclaim power in a discriminatory experience. This decision propels her into the next space by eliminating the need for a doorway which acts as a barrier to cultural connection. The second moment is in the final scene, where the doors between the interior and exterior open on their own. This is the moment where Le Fafā is realised in its living form and Lupesina has earned her transition from one life to the next, or from the colonised self to the vā-self, where there is harmony between mafaufau, tino and agaga.

The painting is a portal to another realm; Le Fafā, the gateway to Pulu. It is a space that is only accessible when Lupesina is connected to culture and herself. But it is a portal which is easily overwhelmed by the expanse of the hallway and the noise of the colonial experience, that is, discrimination and racism. It is an ancestral presence and a visual reminder to Lupesina of what is possible if she rejects the colonial noise that is her self-doubt as a Samoan woman - balance, harmony, love, progression, and ultimately, a return to self.

The hallway is a space that both connects and separates. It is a transitional space not meant to stay occupied but to allow movement from one place to another. Designer, Keely Smith observes, “when people look at liminal spaces, they may feel a sense of uncertainty, unease or even fear...because liminal spaces are often associated with transitions” (as cited in Hoyt, 2024). The hallway in *The Return* is used to encourage feelings of isolation. It’s the only space where Lupesina is visually alone. However, while we cannot see anyone, we can hear the presence of others:

People:	children’s laughter, tapping of the tufuga wielding their tool
Animal:	birdlife
Environment:	ocean, wind
Cosmos:	ancestral whispers, Lagi o Asiata



Figure 91 Hallway in *The Return* (2025) © The Return Film Ltd

The hallway space while visually empty, “is not empty at all signifying that vā is not empty space, but space that connects” (Wendt 1999, p. 402). In the final scene, the hallway moves from a space of uncertainty to a space of potentiality, becoming the space where the vā within is balanced for Lupesina. It has evolved into a place that is a pathway to fulfilment where Lupesina is not only wrapped in culture through the climactic sounds of ocean, tapping and the Lagi chant associated with Lupesina’s gafa, but also with her malu which manifests on her skin from the inside out. The threshold as a concept in the film acts as ongoing reminders of in-betweenness, connection, and disconnection to culture and the self.

Vā Body

During early colonial contact with Moana peoples, Christian teaching sexualised their nakedness, deeming it inappropriate, and demonising tatau as a heathen practice associated with biblical sin (Aia-Fa’aleavea, 2024). Lupesina features in various stages of dress in *The Return*. She is clothed in a European style dress, her legs bare, in contrast to other Samoan women who wear puletasi or lavalava that covers their legs. She moves from this dress to a state of undress in the penultimate scene, where she strips off her clothes in protest at the accusations that she is without her culture, naked and exposed. Finally, after accepting herself as she is, she walks towards her return home as her legs become clothed in a malu that appears in blood from the inside out. Lupesina is no longer naked or exposed but sheltered and protected. Her unclothed body becomes the empowered body as it is only when she strips herself of the colonial refuse that she can accept herself. A shot lingers on the pattern of the malu which pulses on the back of Lupesina’s leg, driving home the idea that Lupesina is sheltered and protected. As Lupesina stands at the top of the hallway, the double doors open revealing Le Fafā outside and we hear the voices of the ancestors’ beckon, “Measina o Samoa” which translates to “Treasure of Samoa”. This phrase has two functions in that it firstly refers to Lupesina as a daughter and treasure of Samoa, but secondly, to the malu which is often referred to as a measina of Samoa.

Vā Cinematography

In *The Return*, space is another character which directly relates to Lupesina’s need to balance the vā within, therefore, embedding vā into the creative aesthetics of the film itself. To achieve this, I explored how the placement of actors, negative space and shot types would encourage themes and feelings of connection, disconnection and isolation for the protagonist.

Shots and scenes from *Nightcrawler* (Dan Gilroy, 2014) and *Shame* (Steve McQueen, 2011), inspired an exploration into how the placing of Lupesina in different thirds of the frame to other actors might create a sense of isolation. Apart from one shot, Lupesina does not appear in the same spatial layer as the Samoan women in the tatau room scene, nor does she appear in the same third of the frame as them. These women represent the Samoan collective and only appear as a group in shots. In one shot Lupesina lowers herself into the mid-ground which the women occupy, but we cut out of this before we see her settle into it. This technique encouraged a them vs her, thereby isolating her from her community and Samoan culture.



Figure 92 *Shame* (McQueen, 2011b)



Figure 93 Event Hall scene *The Return* (2025) © The Return Film Ltd



Figure 94 Tatau room scene *The Return* (2025) © The Return Film Ltd

The only time we see Lupesina in the same spatial layer as another character is in the classroom scene with a Pālagi child. This scene is the mid-point of the film, a significant turning point where Lupesina makes the first attempt to reclaim some power over her discriminatory experiences which have shaped her sense of self. Both actors are placed in the mid-ground on opposite sides of the frame facing each other.



Figure 95 Classroom scene *The Return* (2025) © The Return Film Ltd

While the space between them could be interpreted as the distance between the Moana and the dominant culture, I see this as representing a negotiation of the relationship between Lupesina's Moana self and the colonised self. In this scene, Lupesina has begun the process of shaking off the colonial refuse, therefore nurturing the *vā* within. While she might still feel disconnected, the *vā* within exists and therefore connection is always possible. The use of space represents the potential of connection.

Close ups of Lupesina's face have been used to isolate her emotion so the viewer can identify with her journey, as well as keeping her isolated from others. This stands in opposition to other characters who do not appear in shots closer than a mid-shot. The only exception is Lupesina's Mother who we only ever see in a medium close-up. The conversation between Lupesina and her Mother is the most significant conversation in the film and the only one which presents a reciprocal conversation. Filming the Mother in a medium close-up was intended to encourage viewer identification with how difficult it was for her Mother to say the things she needed to say to her daughter. Her Mother knows she is conversing with her daughter's spirit. The tough love she expresses is akin to a cutting of the umbilical cord; for Lupesina to find the strength within herself to face her own identity demons, her Mother needs to set her free.

Vā Production Design

The Samoan houses I grew up in had a particular feel to them - gentle shadows, earthy but muted colours. Sofas draped with sheets sat on floors covered with fala (mats made from pandanus) and later replaced with cheap Chinese imported synthetic mats. The walls or small enclaves revealed what Samoans held dear; photographs serving as memories of loved ones past and present and Christian pictures that speak to the Samoa's national motto "Fa'avae i le Atua Samoa" (Samoa is founded on God). Splashes of colour were seen through clothing, accessories like flowers in the hair, bright coloured 'ula (necklaces) draped over photographs/memories of loved ones and religious pictures. They are displays of Samoanness and carriers of Samoan culture. The interiors for *The Return* draw upon the idea of culture on display and used the photographs of Mark Adams and Edith Amituanai and the sparse interiors of Tusi Tamasese's *One Thousand Ropes* (2017) as inspiration.



Figure 96 Edith Amituanai



Figure 97 *One Thousand Ropes* (Tamasese, 2017b)



Figure 98 *One Thousand Ropes* (Tamasese, 2017c)

My intention was for the interior colour palette and production design to nurture warmth, in opposition to cinematography that nurtured isolation. This juxtaposition felt ironic to me, just as there is an irony that exists for the New Zealand-born Samoan who does not speak her mother tongue due to assimilation and is therefore not considered a full member of Samoan society, but her Samoan heritage does not grant her full membership to the New Zealand dominant culture either (Taumoefolau, 2013, p. 116).

The only exterior setting is in the final scene, where Lupesina has finally balanced the vā within, bringing together mafaufau, tino, and agaga, and ready to leap into Le Fafā. Le Fafā, both in the painting and the last scene, has a different colour palette and temperature with the original inspiration from an exterior scene in Barry Jenkins *Moonlight* (2016).

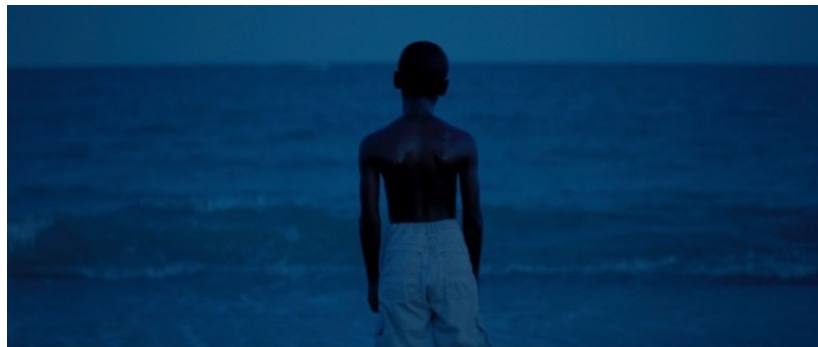


Figure 99 *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016c)

Using the blues of the Moana and the cool white of the moon, this scene works in stark contrast to the interiors, emphasizing the malu that appears in blood on Lupesina's legs. However, once I understood the translation of the general part of the Lagi, my approach changed in response to the line “gase toto o le masina”, which refers to a blood moon or a lunar eclipse (Muaiva, 2022, p. 291). Translated this line can mean “the moon is blood tired” or “the moon had died from haemorrhaging” or “the blood of the moon has stopped beating”. I was interested in how it might be juxtaposed with the idea of the beginning of life or a new life chapter.

In this scene, Lupesina is evolving and transitioning from one spiritual plane to another. Therefore, while she experiences a death in one space, she undergoes a rebirth into another. As the scene progresses, the colours of dusk and a blood moon – yellow, orange and red - are introduced, changing the colour palette from cool to warm within minutes. This movement of colour suggests transition, evolution, and the vibrancy of life.

While there are some splashes of colour in earlier scenes, the use of red is largely absent. This is a conscious directorial decision to nurture the idea of Lupesina experiencing disconnection from culture. However, the malu appears in blood red, from the inside out, on her legs in the final scene instead of the black tatau ink used to mark the body. In Samoa, the colour red signifies the presence of mana and was associated with the Samoan progenitor Tagaloa

(Auckland Museum, 2022). In the film, the colour red works as a metaphor for bloodlines, past, present and future and cultural connection. As the malu appears on Lupesina's legs from the inside out, both malu and blood as signifiers for culture denote that one is never disconnected from their gafa, which they carry on the inside.

Re-balancing of Time

Visual metaphors relating to pre-colonial measures of time are used in *The Return* to further the idea of discarding the colonial mask. While Lupesina moves through the house and into different spaces and time periods in her life, the narrative starts at dawn and finishes at dusk. There is no exposition reflecting or describing the time of the day. However, the lighting changes in each scene to mimic the lighting as a day progresses from dawn to dusk.

Early missionaries to the Moananui used a 'time of darkness' to describe pre-Christian Moana culture as sinful juxtaposed with a 'time of light' to refer to post-Christian Moana cultures (Press, 2011). In addition to this, pre-colonial Moana cultures and time were organised around the phases of the moon (Tui Atua, 2008). The introduction of Christianity restructured Moana life based on a Gregorian calendar and a Christian worldview which privileged the Sabbath and the Christian origin story over a six-day period (Salesa, 2015). This resulted in a deep reshaping and restructuring of Samoan life.

In *The Return*, Lupesina journeys from a time of light into a time of darkness, from the rising of the sun to the rising of the moon. However, she is not blind as the dark approaches. Again, she is shaking off the colonial refuse and reclaiming her culture and identity on her terms. In Lupesina's journey, going into the dark becomes a transition into the light. This visual reclamation of time subverts the colonial idea of the 'time of darkness' and pre-Christian Moana cultures.

Vā Sound

Sound is used as another character in *The Return*. The leitmotifs of the tapping of the 'au tā (tattooing tool), the Moana, children's laughter, the ancestors' collective voice and the breath are used to move the narrative forward and strengthen themes of cultural connection and disconnection.

It was integral to the story that the tapping of the 'au tā was used in a positive way. The New Zealand horror film *The Tattooist* (2007), was written by Pālagi screenwriters Matthew Grainger and Jonathan King and directed by Māori director Peter Burgess. The film follows the protagonist Jake Sawyer, a white American tattooist who steals a Samoan 'au tā at a tattooing festival. In doing so he unleashes an evil avenging Samoan spirit who targets the clients he has tattooed. The clients are killed when their tattoo morphs into a pe'a and consumes their body from the inside where they cough up blood and ink. The tapping of the 'au tā is used to signify the coming of evil and danger. Burger states, "I knew that he [the Samoan spirit] was going to be black, or very dark" (Kara, 2007, para. 11).

He further explains he wanted this blackness to stand in opposition to the colour of the Otara Markets, a well-known Moana market in South Auckland, "The colours of life are the rainbow colours and the angry spirit is the opposite, with an absence of colour" (Kara, 2007). These comments strengthen the colonial idea of black and darkness as evil and white and light as good. As Frantz Fanon (1986) notes:

In the collective unconscious of homo occidentalis, the Negro...the color black-symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, famine...when a blue Negro-a coal-black one-comes to visit, one reacts at once: 'What bad luck is he bringing?' (p. 191)

In *The Tattooist*, the use of the tapping of the 'au tā to signify evil and mortal danger, followed by the appearance of the evil Samoan spirit as the black monstrous Other, works to strengthen the colonial idea of tatau as sinful and evil.

In *The Return*, the tapping of the 'au tā is used to strengthen narrative moments when Lupesina is denied access to culture, and moments where she is called to embark on a journey to return to self. The intention was to use moments when Lupesina makes active decisions that move her towards cultural connection to drive the tapping sound.

Therefore, the sound of the 'au tā becomes a positive signifier of cultural connection, belonging and strength within self. This is used in opposition to the sound of children's laughter which signifies the colonial noise, and the specific words and phrases from the Samoan women collective that signify Lupesina's lack of language and culture. In the final scene, the tapping is directly associated with ancestral spirituality. It is a cinematic reclaiming of the tapping of the 'au tā to the realm of the spiritual rather than the supernatural.

The sound of the Moana and the ancestral whispers are used to signify a subtle but omnipotent ancestral presence. The Moana has been used as a metaphor for genealogical and cultural connection despite physical distance and this is seen more overtly in my previous film *Vai* where I invoked Teresia's Teaiwa's well known saying, "We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood" (Teaiwa as cited in Hau'ofa 2008: 41).

Even when Lupesina is visually alone and when she feels alone, the sounds of connection reveal otherwise. If the Moana is yet another type of threshold that can enable disconnection and connection, then the sound of the ocean works to collapse distance and therefore disconnection. Even within the seemingly empty tangible space of the colonial fale and the hallway where Lupesina always appears visually alone, the space is filled with intangible connection. It is not empty space, but space that connects. Once the doors open in invitation for Lupesina to return home, this becomes the physical manifestation of the sound vā heard through the Moana and ancestral whispers. In this final scene Lupesina is surrounded by Moana as ancestor.

At the beginning of the film, and before *The Return's* visuals open, the film begins with sound, an exhalation. At the end of the film, after the visuals and the Lagi chant, *The Return* finishes with sound, another exhalation, before it moves into the film's credits. When my Father passed away, he was surrounded by his children. I vividly remember listening to his breath as the space between them became longer as he approached death. When he exhaled his last breath, we waited for another breath in. After a period when it did not come, we knew he had passed. This experience of listening attentively to my Father's breathing and his last breath, haunted me for years and inspired the motif of the exhalation used in *The Return*. In some ways it was a reclamation of the breath to signify the cyclical nature of life, rather than its conclusion. While Lupesina has experienced a physical death in one plane, she transitions to the next. Life is equated with death and death with life (Tui Atua, 2009).

Vā Visual Effects

Visual effects were integral to magnifying the emotional intensity of the spiritual. While they are littered throughout the film, the focus of the visual effects (VFX) work centered on Le Fafā the painting, Le Fafā realised (in the final scene), and the appearance of the malu on Lupesina's legs.

The movement in the Le Fafā painting hints at a world within a world, and that not all is as it seems. Visually, *The Return* seemingly begins as a drama but transitions into the spiritual when we see life in the painting. This is the first hint that the filmic world includes the intangible.

The appearance of Lupesina's malu from the inside out and in blood is a signifier of cultural connection and worthiness as a Samoan woman, which Lupesina must find acceptance of within herself. Therefore, the VFX that enabled the malu to appear on Lupesina's legs were integral to not only moving the narrative forward but also toward the climax in *The Return*, where Lupesina finally achieves a balancing of the vā within. The malu acts as the visual manifestation of this balance, signifying a balance to mafaufau, tino and agaga; no matter how removed one may seem from their culture, no-one can remove them from their own gafa. The appearance of the malu, the most visible marker of Samoan femininity, appears from the inside out, representing the belief that one is always connected to their gafa and ancestors.

The final scene used VFX to create a representation of Le Fafā. Despite several past trips to Le Fafā the film's production budget, filming logistics, spiritual and safety considerations did not allow for this scene to be filmed at the actual location of Falealupo. Instead, after a collaboration with my producers and cinematographer, a location was found in Auckland, where we could take a plate shot and I could work with the visual effects team in post-production to create a representation of Le Fafā that invoked the same feelings I felt at Falealupo – beauty, spirituality, vastness, power, peace.

The VFX, aided by expert colour grading, which enhanced the colour transitions and palette, constructed a scene where the metaphoric seeds planted throughout *The Return*, paid off. These were realised through:

- the beauty of sunset as a representation of the transition back to darkness
- the moon as a representation of a return to Moana time
- the Moana as a representation of cultural connection and a macro vā body

The VFX in the final scene enabled image, in combination with sound, to strengthen the idea of the vā within restored, thereby enabling Lupesina to return home.

Fa'atulou le Lagi

When I first envisaged *The Return*, I always imagined an ancestral call inviting Lupesina to return home.

My Mum's brother in Samoa, Uncle Asiata Leaoa Faivaotoa does not speak English, and as I am not fluent in Samoan, I asked him to suggest a trusted relative based in Aotearoa who is fluent in both Samoan and English and who is as gifted with lāuga as he is. He suggested I contact my Uncle Asiata Lautoa who was blessed with the Asiata title at the same sa'ofa'i.

Before and after a matai is interred, a funeral chant that signals the pardoning of the heavens is performed; a fa'atulou le lagi (Muaiva, 2022, p. 287). It is also used for ali'i rather than tulafale (ibid. p. 289). The title Asiata is the only matai title in Samoa that can speak with the to'oto'o (orator staff) on both Savai'i and Upolu. Another way to consider this, is it is the only matai title in Samoa that holds both Tumua and Pule, with Pule referring to the orator groups from Savai'i and Tumua referring to the orator groups from Upolu (Eteuati, 1982). The Tumua ma Pule can be seen to lead the national affairs of Samoa (Eteuati, 1982). Asiata is both an ali'i and tulafale title and the Lagi would be performed upon their death.

While the Lagi contains general information used in all Lagi, the Lagi used in *The Return* has specific reference to my family Sāmoeleoi, and the female descendent or daughter of Asiata. As the granddaughter of Asiata, who would also be referred to by the honorific of Valasi So'oa'emalelagi to those outside my village, it felt appropriate to use a Lagi specific to my gafa.

The lagi performed in *The Return* was gifted and performed by my Uncle Asiata Lautoa of Sāmoeleoi.

Transcription⁶⁵ of "Lagi fa'aka'oko o Samoa"⁶⁶ Funeral chant of Samoa for the Taupou o Asiata

O lagi fa'aka'oko o Samoa^[1]

Funeral chant of Samoa

Samoan honorifics pertaining to the funeral ceremonial rites of passage

Kulouga le 'Laulua o le Fagu' o le Malo o Gafagua olo'o kagu i Falekoi

Salutations and lamentations to the 'Laulua o le Fagu' of Nafanua's Government buried at Faletoi

With all due respect to the cracked bottle of Nafanua's government buried at the famous meeting space of Satupa'itea.

This refers to the bottle that held the sacred oil gifted by Nafanua to Asiata as a representative of the Laulua.

The laulua is the honorific name for the relationship between Satupa'itea and Palauli, the vessel that holds Nafanua (due to the two brothers, Lafaitupa'itea and Lafaitetana who established Satupa'itea and Palauli respectively).

⁶⁵ As evidenced in I'uogafa Tuagalu's analysis of the fa'alupega for Satupa'itea (2023, p. 283), translations or lāuga can be subjective. Therefore, this translation was initially transcribed and translated by Muliagatele Dr Vavao Fetui. Lemoa Henry S Fesulua'i, a well-known orator provided additional translation, and my primary PhD supervisor Leali'ifano Dr Albert Refiti provided assistance too.

⁶⁶ The lagi is chanted in the Samoan orator dialect, which uses 'k' instead of 't', 'g' instead of 'n'

Nafanua gifted the bottle of sacred oil directly to Asiata, when the clans met for the dispersal of the Pāpā (four paramount chiefly titles – Tuia'ana, Tuiatua, Gato'aitele and Vaetamasoaali'i) after the war.

Asiata buried this bottle on the land of Asiata thereby cementing Nafanua's government in Faletoi, the famous meeting space of Satupa'itea.

O le lagi legā e fa'asigo ia Asiaka o le Vaimalae.

The ritual chant of Asiata of the Vaimalae

This is an honorific acknowledgement reference pertaining to Asiata title as the Vaimalae.

The Vaimalae is the honorific reference to Asiata's vā in the malae (internal affairs) of Satupa'itea.

Kulouga a le lagi, kulouga a le lagi, kulouga a le lagi, ma le lagi, ma le lagi, ma le lagi Kulou.

Salutation to the heavens, and to the heavens, and to the heavens, salute!

With all due deference to the funeral ceremony.

Repeating 'ma le lagi' respectfully relates to other chiefly lagi of Samoa.

Acknowledgements of the connection of the lagi (heaven or spiritual realm) and lalolagi (Earth or physical realm)

Kulouga a le lagi

Salutation to the heavens

Kulouga a le lagi, ma le lagi, ma le lagi, ma le lagi Kulou

Salutation to the heavens, and to the heavens, and to the heavens, and to the heavens, salute!

Kulouga ia le ka'ape o Pāpā

Salutations to the passing/dispersal of Pāpā (four paramount clan titles)

O le lagi e fa'asigo i le Aiga Sā Moeleoi

The lagi belonging to the Sā Moeleoi clan.

An honorific committal/funeral chant pertaining to the family of Sā Moeleoi.

Kulouga ia le Kō le Kimu Kafea o le Kau'ofe

Salutations to the rain downpour and the bamboo raft that has been washed away.

This personifies the deceased from Sā Malietoa to the bamboo that holds against the water, being washed away by a surge of water, the intensity being like a tsunami.

O le lagi fa'asigo i le Aiga Sā Maliekoa

The lagi of the Sā Malietoa clan

An honorific funeral chant pertaining to the Sā Malietoa clan.

Kulouga a le Gau Olosa'a

Salutations to the broken pigeon snare

In honour of the broken pigeon snare, hence not a pigeon is cooing.

This personifies the deceased from Sā Tuala to the pigeon snare and laments their loss, likening it to the breaking of the pigeon snare, used in the sport of the matai. Without the pigeon snare one cannot catch the lupe and therefore one can no longer hear the coo of a pigeon.

O le lagi e fa'asigo i le Aiga Sā Kuala

The lagi of the Sā Tuala clan

An honorific funeral chant pertaining to the Sā Tuala clan

Le aiga fa'alagilagi

The family that is revered.

An honorific reference to Sā Tuala.

Kulouga a le Gaugau o 'Auka

Salutations to the broken drums

Referring to the wooden drum sticks for the village that have broken.

This personifies the deceased from Sā Tupua to the wooden drum sticks for the village drum. Without the sticks the drum cannot beat.

O le lagi lega a Sā Kupua

The lagi of the Sā Tupua clan

An honorific funeral chant pertaining to the Sā Tupua clan

Kulouga a le Gasekoko o le Masiga mafuli o le La

Salutations to the blood moon, the sun has tilted/fallen

Reference to the blood of the moon that has stopped beating, or a full eclipse and the sun has lost its colour because of the death.

This personifies the deceased from Sā Levalasi to a lunar eclipse, where the earth passes directly between the sun and moon, resulting in a loss of light.

O le lagi lega e fa'asino i le aiga e paia o le Aiga Salevalasi

Lamentation directed to the holy family of the Levalasi Clan

Kulouga ia le Usuia o le Fogo.

Salutations to the chief departing to his last fono

Usuia o le Fono refers only to the death of a matai tulāfale (orator), not a matai ali'i (chief)

O le lauu'a lega e fa'asigo i Faleupolu uma o Samoa

The sacred cloth of the orator clans of all Samoa

Lauu'a is a respectful term for tapa cloth gifted for all the faleupolu of Samoa.

Faleupolu is collective honorific for all the orators of Samoa.

Kulouga a le Moku o le Soa a le Valasi

Salutations to the broken garland worn by Valasi

This laments the passing of Valasi, Asiata's taupou.

This personifies Valasi to her garland and her passing like the breaking of the garland.

O le lagi lega e fa'asigo i kama'ika'i mauululuga uma o Samoa

The lagi of the sacred women of all Samoa

This lagi expresses grief relating to the matriarchs of Samoa.

Fa'agaugauga o Pāpā auā ua gape papa

The Pāpā have folded because the solid rocks are weakened/fractured

This signifies profound grief/expression of sorrow due to the dispersion of the four paramount titles.

Ua gausia 'au makakao

The war spears are broken

This personifies the person who has passed to an important weapon, a war spear. The spear is broken; therefore, the armoury is incomplete.

Ua laina u ua kafea lili o le sami

The wooden arrows are discarded, and the sea is rough or furious/rough sea is relentless.

This personifies the person who has passed to an arrow, an important weapon, being lost. The grief from their passing is likened to the intensity of a furious or rough sea.

Aua ua moku le 'asoa lavalua ua ku'umalo Valasi So'oa'emalelagi

Because Valasi So'oa'emalelagi's garland is broken, and she has departed/passed.

Valasi's broken garland is a metaphor for her death

O le Kaupou a Asiaka e ogaiga Sālevalasi

Asiata's Taupou presides over the Sālevalasi clan and owns the Sālevalasi clan.

The taupou is the daughter of the high chief and ceremonial hostess. She is seen to carry the “mana” of the Salevalasi clan and therefore helms or possesses the future of the clan.

E oga Aiga Sālevalasi uma i Samoa

The Sālevalasi clan connects and tends to Samoa

This acknowledges ownership and or relationship/interconnection to all Sālevalasi titles in Samoa.

The Sālevalasi clan connects to all chiefly titles in Samoa.

Kulouga ia ... Kulouga lava ...

Salute! Salute to you all!

Deferentially now...humbly ever after.

My intention is not to conduct a close analysis of the Lagi. However, I have included the transcription and translation because it refers to my own gafa as the granddaughter of Asiata. Part of my motivation for including the Lagi in *The Return* was to showcase the beauty of Samoan oratory. It is not subtitled in the film, and I do not think it needs to be; although there is a version that includes subtitles for Samoans who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. The emotion and lamentation carried by Uncle Asiata Lautoa Lavea when performing the Lagi is enough to convey a depth of feeling and mood. The art of oration is not only in the words chosen but also in the orator's performance.

While the Lagi is performed for ali'i, it is used in *The Return* as a metaphor for ancestral and spiritual connection. This aids the nurturing of the vā tapua'i, between the living in this world and the living in the next. It also represents the final balancing of the vā within, as Lupesina can only hear her gafa and fa'alupega recited in the Lagi once she has cleared her mafaufau, tino and agaga of the colonial noise. It is a pivotal moment in Lupesina's spiritual journey, and this is reflected in the creative decision to continue the Lagi over black at the end of the film. Lupesina's life in one world has ended, but it is not a spiritual death as her gafa not only remains but continues, just as the oratory continues over the sound of the Moana, a signifier in *The Return* for cultural connection, to the exhalation before the closing credits. While the lamenting heard in the Lagi reveals the respect and grief felt for her passing, it is also a welcoming of Lupesina home, therefore invoking the cyclical nature of life.

The Return as a Mealofa

At the beginning of this chapter, I included a statement that reflected the pain and frustration of my inability to balance the dualities of moving between different worlds. This pain is reflected in Lupesina's journey, her scream mirroring the pain I have carried with me on the inside.

Balancing the vā within was not only Lupesina's goal, but my own, and creating *The Return* gave me an opportunity to delve further into my identity. Initially, an exploration of how vā might influence aesthetics on screen was a creative and academic interest. However, one cannot explore vā in isolation. It is not only conveyed through the language, image, and sound, but also through the filmmaker. The space behind the screen is not an empty space. Relationships are nurtured between filmmaker and the screen, filmmaker and the audience, filmmaker and fellow creatives, filmmaker and the self to produce work with the objective of connecting with other people.

For Marina the filmmaker, *The Return* was an opportunity to push my creative boundaries within the filmic space.

For Marina the person, *The Return* was an opportunity to push the boundaries within myself;

To explore and face the pain that comes from feelings of alienation, isolation, disconnection from and connection to my culture and myself;

To reimagine conversations with my Mother before she died;

To ask my Mother why she did not teach me Samoan;

To eventually realise that my Mother gifted me with something else, an inner strength that is stronger than I believed it was and that the vulnerability to face my own identity trauma could be fashioned into something productive; *The Return*.

In *The Return*, vā is not just a creative inspiration or a thematic element that underpins the film. It is embedded in the aesthetics, the processes, and the spirituality of the film and filmmaker. It is a living relational space that offers something beyond its narrative. It is a mealofa to those who have struggled in the space between, a love letter to other Indigenous women who ponder where their place is in this world and the next.

As a filmmaker I hope *The Return* will add something to the canon of Moana filmmaking. As a human being, I hope *The Return* will remind others like me that regardless of where others see our place in the world as being, we carry our malu or pe'a on the inside, tapped into our blood and bone given to us by our ancestors.

We are enough.

CONCLUSION

When I began this PhD research, I was interested in whether a new type of cinema was emerging from the Moana and whether my own film, *The Return*, would be influenced by this research. I had grand plans to interview Moana filmmakers, find out which Moana values were important to them, then analyse their films through that lens. Each time I sat at my computer ready to ‘theorise’ Moana cinema, no ‘theory’ came. And while this was happening, the creative component of the research, *The Return*, took the smallest and slowest steps. I worked with my secondary supervisor Shuchi Kothari and my producers, to develop the script and it was a painful process, both creatively and personally, because *The Return* was my return; I just did not know it yet.

In 2024, I had another moment of overwhelm, wondering how I was going to make some headway with this PhD. Progress had stalled again; as a single Mama it can be challenging to balance life, work and study commitments. I sat down in the middle of the day to tapua’i. This time, I asked my Mum for guidance, and I sat in my own silence with my eyes closed while listening to the sounds of the day; birds, the wind, the voice of someone walking past. I finished and continued with my day. The following day, my Auntie Fuli, my Uncle Asiata Leaoa Faivaotoa’s wife, tried to Facetime me. I could not answer it as I was in a day-long Zoom meeting. Later that evening, she called again and I was able to answer. Her face and my Uncle’s appeared on my phone screen. Uncle does not speak English, but Auntie knows a few words.

This is how our conversation went:

Auntie: “Marina. Satupa’itea. Tesema (December)”
Me: (thinking - Who can I call to translate?)
Auntie: “Marina. Satupa’itea. Tesema”
Me: (awkward smile still thinking – who can I call to translate?)
Auntie: “You. Satupa’itea (points to the ground). Tesema. Tavu’i”.
Me: “Me (points to myself). Alu (go). Satupa’itea. December?”
Auntie: (smiles and points to me) “Tavu’i”.
Me: (I take some time to decipher what she means and which Tavu’i she is referring to)
Me: (an idea slowly dawning) “Saofa’i?”
Me: Tavu’i?
Auntie: Claps her hands, nods her head and laughs.

I was shown again that the answers to my PhD studies lay in my gafa, because my research was about something other than an emerging Moana cinema, or creating a short film that did well on the festival circuit or proving whether the film I created is Samoan enough. My research became a personal journey of a return to a self I never really left; the film and these words are but a by-product of this return.

The last word my Granda uttered to my Mother before he passed was “Asiata”. It was his mavaega, his dying wish or a final command, to her; a sacred and final instruction, usually carrying the weight of a chief’s wisdom and authority, that must be honoured.

I will not go into why this was his final wish, but until my Mother’s death 26 years later, it drove the direction of her life, her actions within her aiga (family), aiga potopoto (extended family) and her nu’u (village). What I did not realise is how much this influenced my life, and my own return. So, in December of 2024, my daughter and I returned to Pito Nu’ū, Satupa’itea, and on 28th of that month, I sat across from my Mother’s gravesite as I was blessed with the matai title, Tavu’i; the same title she was blessed with 30 years previously in March of 1994.

In the gafa of Sāmoeleoi, Tonumaie’a Tauilili married three times. His first marriage was to Liogitui, his second to So’oa’emalelagi, and his third was to Moeleoi; this is the origin of Sāmoeleoi. But Moeleoi also married Tonumaie’a Tauilili’s brother, Tupa’ivailigi. They had two children, Loli and Asiata; this is the birth of Asiata. Loli married Vaivaipua’a and had two children, Taio’opō and Tavu’i; this is the birth of Tavu’i. The parents of the Sāmoeleoi line are Saveasi’uleo, the God of Pulu and Tilafaigā, one of the Siamese Goddesses of tatau (Kramar, 1994, pp. 128-

129). I used to wonder why I was so strongly led to story and a spirituality that features Le Fafā, the gateway to Puloṭu, the malu, and Asiata. The answer has always been in my gafa, because all of these ‘things’ are a part of my gafa. *The Return* is about a gafa-return.

It was only after my saofa’i, when I officially became Tavu’i, that I could write the theoretical part of my PhD; because what my ancestors were telling me, is that any feelings of inadequacy I may have as a Samoan woman, were my own. It was this realisation that enabled me to begin writing about the journey of *The Return* while unpacking my creative motivations. The creative was ancestral, the ancestral was spiritual, and the spiritual was creative.

As an oral culture, our words delve into the metaphorical and conjure up images in the space between the mind and the eye. When one is orating, one is not simply crafting words; one nurtures histories and ancestral connections. As a community that has historically been crafted by outsiders, Moana film provides another pathway to visually recraft, reshape and reclaim our histories. And this is not only communicated through the narrative but the aesthetics of the film text itself.

When we move from the coloniser-colonised relationship and situate ourselves within our Moana worldview, interesting things happen with practice, theory and the Moana-self. Chapter 2 of the exegesis outlined how the research methodologies came from a Moana understanding of the world. Su’ifefiloi, as a research framework, provided a flexibility to access spaces and knowledge beyond the tangible, which have not historically been considered valid from a Western research perspective. The secondary framework of tala fa’a’aiga came from the vā tapua’i that su’ifefiloi allowed for. Both these frameworks, that came from a Moana worldview reshaped the methods of meditation and stream of consciousness writing and shifted them into the Moana; becoming tapua’i and tala fa’a’aiga. And when one activates the vā tapua’i, the gafa as a method is called into being and activated. If one is committed to the essence of Moana filmmaking, one must look at the signs, because these signs are not symptomatic of serendipity, but knowledge being produced from and within the Moana.

Chapter 3 shows that when we continue to move away from the coloniser-colonised relationship, we move away from labels of diaspora and accented cinema, which denote a transnational divide (McCartney, 2025, p. 138). Barry Barclay’s analogy of “The First Cinema Camera [that] sits firmly on the deck of the [intruder’s] ship”, shows how this camera is outside the Indigenous community looking in (2003, p. 5). I want to extend this analogy to Moana films under the categories of accented and diasporic cinema. By locating Moana cinema under this umbrella, we situate it within labels that have come from outside our culture. Instead, we can consider Barclay’s second analogy of, “The Camera Ashore, the Fourth Cinema Camera...one held by the people for whom ‘ashore’ is their ancestral home” (2003a, p. 5). If we extend this second analogy to Moana film theory, we situate it within our culture, where our worldview and values guide how we move through various spaces, and direct us in the space behind the camera.

Therefore, we can consider Moana film as being situated within the Fourth World Cinema context and alongside other Indigenous films. Moana film moves away from off-island versus on-island ideology and into transnational connections, which are rooted in understandings of our world that existed long before colonial contact (McCartney, 2025, p. 138). Through a Moana lens we can further consider Moana film as reflecting an internal vā, grounded in both vā tapua’i and vā fealoaloa’i, instead of having accents or diasporic traits.

When we centre “us” within “us” a shift with mafaufau, tino and agaga takes place. Chapter 4 and 5 trace the gafa of my films and how they reflect shifts for my own mafaufau, tino and agaga and towards evolutions in my identity. These correspond with my journey to balance the vā within through *The Return* to the gafa-self.

This research initially sought to explore how the creative component of the research, the film *The Return*, revealed how Moana values influenced the film form of narrative films made by Moana filmmakers. As the journey of *The Return* evolved, so did the nature of the research. This is reflected in the pivot from a focus on the work of others, to a focus on the gafa of my films and how they nurtured a balancing of the vā within.

There are opportunities for further research into Moana films through a Moana lens. As far as I am aware, this PhD thesis will be the first by a screenwriter and director of Moana heritage in Aotearoa that explores Moana film. It

shows we need more scholarship from within our Moana community that explores how our worldview influences the creative aesthetics of our narrative films. This is important because when we work with government institutions that fund our work as well as non-Moana key creative collaborators⁶⁷, having the language and knowledge to communicate the influences behind the camera is a powerful tool. As directors, we are leading the creative vision, and we must be able to communicate this vision in a way that inspires every person on and off set⁶⁸ to help us achieve it. The more expansive the canon of Moana film from Moana film scholars, the more tools our filmmakers can access to support their decisions. This is important when being questioned by non-Moana gatekeepers in the screen industry who have their own ideas about what Moana film is or should be.

Films by Moana filmmakers that align more with First, Second and Third World Cinema, are additional areas for future research. Just as we deserve to have films that fill the spectrum of representation, we should be able to move between different types of cinemas, just as the hegemonic cultures do. However, the opportunity for deeper exploration and expansion in Moana cinema, where narrative and aesthetic styles and motivations reflect our values and the internal vā of the filmmaker, needs to grow as the number of Moana films expands.

I am unsure what the journey of *The Return* will be on the film festival circuit and whether it will resonate with others, but it has certainly been a significant part of my own identity journey and a healing of the vā within.

I am Tavu'i.

I am my Mother.

I am Granda and Nana.

I am Sāmoeleoi. I am Sāilomaiaiva.

This is not the end nor the beginning.

This is not a return because **we** never left.



Figure. 100 Tavu'i Marina Alofagia McCartney (28 December 2024)
Saofa'i for Tavu'i, Satupa'itea, Savai'i, Samoa

⁶⁷ In Aotearoa, we have very low representation for Moana technical creatives in key below-the-line positions with significant experience on larger budget productions, such as cinematographers, production designers, editors and visual effects supervisors. Increasing capacity in these roles has historically focused on gender and Māori. There are no solid statistics that support this as no reports with a focus on Moana creatives in these roles on the big screen have been commissioned by specialist guilds or the Te Rūmū Whakaata Taonga New Zealand Film Commission. This is my observation as a filmmaker who has tried to secure Moana people in these roles and with advanced technical expertise for all her films and found it challenging to find them. Part of my team's response to building capacity for Moana creatives was to ensure we offered opportunities to either observe or crew on the set of *The Return*. Observation roles were given to a Fijian director and a Kuki Airani cinematographer, and we included two Samoan writer/directors aspiring to larger budget productions and a Samoan art assistant wanting to move into production designing.

⁶⁸ *The Return* had over 30-40 people on set each shoot day and many people involved during the pre-production and post-production stages of the project. For a full list, please see the credits at the end of *The Return*.

GLOSSARY

Sāmoan words and concepts

'afakasi	part-European
afi	fire
anapogi	fast
'afuelo	fine mat laid over the corpse of a chief
agāga	soul
'āiga	family, kin, relatives
'āiga potopoto	collective term for all members of a lineage who have the right to be present at, and take part in the election of a new <i>matai</i> .
ali'i	chief, lord
alofa	love
'au	tool; shaft
'au tā	the tapping tool of the Tufuga Tatatau
'āuala	party of ceremonial mourners
'ava	kava, shrub (piper methysticum)
'ele'ele	earth, blood
fa'aaloalo	respect
fa'afafine	in the manner of a woman, third gender
fia Pālagi	wanting to be like a European person
fa'alupega	naming of chiefly titles used in formal gatherings
fala	mat
fale	house
faleaitu	comic turn, comedy, clownery
fanaafi o faamalama	the heathen worship with fire
fanua	land; after birth, placenta
feagaiga	sacred covenant between brother and sister
fue	general name given to creepers and lianes.
gafa	lineage, genealogy
gagana	language
'iē toga	fine mat
itūmālō	district
lagi	sky, heaven; funeral ceremony
lāuga	speech
mafaufau	mind
malaga	journey, trip
malu	shelter; women's leg tattoos
mamalu	dignity, majesty; honour; prestige, influence
mana	(supernatural) power
māsina	moon; month
matai	titled head of a Samoan extended family
mauga	hill, mountain
māvaega	farewell, parting words; last wishes (of a dying person); will
meaalofa	present; charity
measina	fine mat; treasure
muāgagana	saying, proverb
nifo 'oti	ceremonial knife
nu'u	village
pālagi	European, European ways
palapala	earth, soil; dirt, mud
pe'a	tattoo
pitonu'u	sub-village
povi masima	salted cow, beef
puleitasi	cultural two-piece Samoan women's outfit
pute	navel
sā	sacred
Sā	extended kin group
sa'o	title given to paramount chief in certain areas or districts; chief or head
saofa'i	cultural ceremony to officially confer a matai title on a person

siva	dance
su'ifefiloi	to sew a mixture
tā	(of blow) strike
ta'alolo	a formal procession where a group, usually from a village or district, moves toward a specific site for a ceremony.
tala	story
fa'a'aiga	of the family
tamasā	sacred child
tapu	be forbidden
tāpua'i	act of worship
tatau	tattoo
taualuga	sacred and formal dance performed by a taupou or manaia (male equivalent of taupou) at the end of a ceremony or celebration
taupou	ceremonial hostess; daughter of a high-ranking chief; village maiden
tautua	service
teu le vā	tend to the space between
tino	body
tofi	position, appointment
to'oto'o	stick, staff (esp. that symbolical of, and carried by, an orator and which he holds when speaking in the open).
tufuga	expert or master
Tufuga Tatatau	Master Tattooist
tulou	expression to show deference or to beg someone's pardon
tulāfale	orator, talking chief
Tumua ma Pule	Savai'i and Upolu (the titles given to the six towns in Savai'i who have traditional privileges) and the (titles given to the five towns in Upolu who have traditional privileges)
'ula	garland, necklace of flowers
vā	distance, space (between two places, things or people)
vā fealoaloa'i	rules of behaviour, etiquette (sometimes shortened to vā fealoa'i)
vā tapua'i	sacred space (also sometimes referred to as vā a')
vai	water (esp. freshwater as opposed to salt water)
vala	small piece of bark cloth
valea	be stupid

Samoa Place Names

Apia	capital city of Samoa
Apolima Strait	the body of water lying between Upolu and Savai'i
Palauli	a village and district in Savai'i
Pitonu'ū	a sub-village in the village and district of Satupa'itea, Savai'i
Salelologa	a village district and main entry point in Savai'i
Satupa'itea	a village district in Savai'i which consists of four sub-villages
Savai'i	the largest island in Samoa
Upolu	an island of Samoa and where the capital Apia is located
Vailoa	a sub-village and capital of Palauli
Falealupo	a village in Savai'i

Samoa Names of Cultural and Historical Significance

Le Fafā	colloquial term for Fafā o Sauai'i, the sacred rockpool that is the gateway for the spirits to the Samoan Elysium.
Pulotu	the Samoan Elysium
Tagaloalagi	the supreme creator and progenitor in the Samoan Indigenous worldview (also known as Tagaloa)

Samoa Chiefly Titles and Clan Names

Asiata	tulāfale and ali'i title associated with Sāmoeleoi
Leleisi'ua	ali'i title associated with Sālilomaiaava
Tavu'i	ali'i title associated with Sāmoeleoi
Sāmoeleoi	the clan of Moeleoi
Sālilomaiaava	the clan of Lilomaiaava

Tongan words and concepts

faka'apa'apa	respect
fakatokilalo	humility
ia tauhi vā	taking care of sociospatial ties
mamahi'i me'a	loyalty
tauhi vaha'a	kinship

Māori words, concepts and place names

aroha	affection, sympathy, charity, compassion, love, empathy
awa	river, stream, creek, canal
poroporoaki	eulogy, farewell speeches to the dead
wairua	spirit, soul
whanaungatanga	relationship, kinship, sense of family connection
Papatūānuku	Earth, Earth Mother and wife of Rangi-nui
Te Ao Māori	the Māori worldview

Solomon Islands words, concepts and place names

banara	chief
kastom	the culture including religion, economics, art, magic and kinship
hiama	family guardian, ancestral spirit; priest
wantok	one talk, meaning a shared language and cultural background as a connector
Pijin	Melanesian pidgin language spoken in the Solomon Islands (also known as Solomon Islands Pijin)
Heleveni	one of five brothers and a bad banara who started sacrificial ceremonies
Nusa Roviana	an island located in the Roviana lagoon on the south-west coast of New Georgia
Roviana	refers to the wider area and the lagoon and an identity marker for the people from this area and the language they speak
Tiola	one of five brothers and an ancestral chief of Roviana

Fijian words and concepts

meke	dance
wakolo	pathway

Chuuk words and

ppaileng	horizon
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Filmmakers Biography and Filmography

MARINA ALOFAGIA MCCARTNEY

SCREENWRITER, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, ACADEMIC

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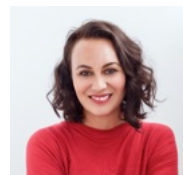
BIOGRAPHY:

MARINA ALOFAGIA MCCARTNEY is an award-winning filmmaker and scholar. Her films have featured in festivals, including Palm Springs, NZ's Best in the NZ International Film Festival and ImagineNATIVE. Marina wrote and directed the Samoan piece for *Vai*, which opened the NATIVE section at the 2019 Berlinale, and has screened at SXSW, Edinburgh Film Festival and Melbourne International Film Festival.

Marina is an experienced assessor completing over 200 assessments across short and feature films, longform projects in 2022 for the NZFC, NZWG, GSTV and Script to Screen. She created the first incubator for Moana Pasifika women writers, to develop their feature films through WIFT. Marina was selected for the 2019 DEAGNZ Women Directors' Incubator Programme, Script to Screen's 2022 FilmUp programme and completed a writers' room placement in 2023 for showrunner Dr Vanessa Alexander on a Big Story Company (Australia)/Playground Entertainment (UK) co-production. She also writes scripts for tv, such as Season 4 & 5 of *My Life is Murder* starring Lucy Lawless.

Marina has a scholarly piece on Moana Pasifika film in the 2024 *Routledge Handbook of Indigenous Film* and in 2025 she will complete a PhD in Moana Pasifika filmmaking. Marina completed her NZFC Catalyst funded short *The Return* in May 2025 and has several features and long-form projects in development including her next feature *Dusky*.

Marina holds the matai title (high chief) of "Tavu'i" from her village of Pitonu'u in Satupa'itea, Savai'i, Samoa.



SĀMOELEOI- Pitonu'u,
Satupa'itea, Savai'i, Samoa

SĀILOMAIABA – Vailoa,
Palauli, Savai'i, Samoa

GEORDIE – Newcastle,
England

ROMANICHAL – England

IN DEVELOPMENT:

TV SERIES

The Last House in Westmere (Drama/comedy). Created by Marina Alofagia McCartney & Matasila Freshwater. Produced by Kastom Films.

Queens (Mockumentary). Created by Marina Alofagia McCartney & Matasila Freshwater. Produced by Kastom Films. With development support from NZ on Air.

Telesā (Urban fantasy/romance). Developed for TV by Marina Alofagia McCartney & Matasila Freshwater. Produced by BSAG.

FILM

Dusky. Written and Directed by Marina Alofagia McCartney. Produced by Run Charlie Films and Kastom Films. With development support from NZFC He Ara & Catalyst Fund.

Searching for Asiata. Written and Directed by Marina Alofagia McCartney. Produced by Kastom Films.

VODCAST

Through the Moana Lens. Created by Marina Alofagia McCartney. Produced by Kastom & Electric Shoelace Productions.

COMPETITIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES:

2024/5 Strength in Numbers (for Kastom Films with Matasila Freshwater)
2023 Ockham Collective Artist
2023 NZFC Screen Capability Business Innovation Programme (for Kastom Films with Matasila Freshwater)
2022 Script to Screen, Film Up
2022 WIFT Moana Pasifika Women's Screenwriter's Programme
2022 He Ara Business Development Grant (for Kastom Films with Matasila Freshwater)
2021 Script to Screen UCLA Scholarship, Writing Screenplay Coverage
2020 Finalist, WIFT Awards "Women to Watch"
2019 DEGNZ Women's Incubator Programme
2019 DEGNZ Directing Actors Masterclass with Ian Hughes
2019 DEGNZ Directing Masterclass with Howard Fine
2018 Accelerator Plus participant, Melbourne International Film Festival
2013 Commonwealth Shorts Production Lab

EDUCATION:

Current PhD with Creative Practice, Auckland University of Technology
2012 Masters of Arts with 1st Class Honours (Screen Production), University of Auckland
2010 Bachelor of Arts (Hons) with 1st Class Honours (Screen Production), University of Auckland
2009 Bachelor of Arts (Film, Television, Media & Pacific Studies), University of Auckland

2023 Dame Dorothy Winstone Doctoral Completion Award
2021 Ministry of Education, Tagaloa Doctoral Scholarship
2020 ASAO Pacific Islands Scholars Award
2019 New Zealand Graduate Women Fellowship
2019 AUT University Artistic Performance of the Year
2019-2022 AUT University, Vice Chancellor's Doctoral Scholarship
2019 AUT University Cultural and Artistic Blue Award
2017 SEED Grant for Innovation in Teaching, University of Auckland
2012 The University of Auckland Blues Award for Most Meritorious Performance in Arts and Cultural
2012 The University of Auckland Cultural Blues Award
2011 The University of Auckland Graduate Scholarship
2011 The University of Auckland Faculty of Arts Maori & Pacific Leadership Grant
2010 The University of Auckland Cultural Blues Award
2010 Pacific Islands Polynesian Education Foundation Postgraduate Scholarship
2009 The University of Auckland Faculty of Arts Pacific Leadership Award
2009 The University of Auckland Maori and Pacific Graduate Scholarship
2009 Kate Edgar Educational Charitable Trust Bachelor (Honours) Degree Award
2009 Senior Prize, Film Television Media Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland

INDUSTRY ADVISORY POSITIONS:

2025 Writing mentor. Someday Stories
2021-Current Programme Consultant. Women in Film & Television
2024 Fresh Shorts writing mentor. Script to Screen
2024 Pasifika Youth Short Film Competition Judge. Poparazzi Productions
2024 Writing mentor. Someday Stories
2023 Programme Consultant. GSTV Tāhuna Residency

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE:

WRITERS' ROOM:

2025 *Blue Murder Motel*. Great Southern TV
2024 *My Life is Murder*. Greenstone TV, CJZ Productions
2023 *Savage Street*. Greenstone TV
2023 *Telesā*. BSAG
2023 *Stranger Times*. Playground Entertainment/Big Story Company (Placement)
2022 *My Life is Murder*. Greenstone TV
2021 *Endling*. Tomorrow Rain
2021 *Mau*. Tikilounge Productions, BSAG Productions, Sweetshop & Green, Sunpix Limited
2020 *Telesā*. BSAG

DIRECTING:

2025 *The Return* (14 mins). Short Film. Produced by Run Charlie Films. Funded by NZFC & PIC
2023 *Friends Like Her*. TV Series. Director's Placement. Produced by GSTV
2019 *Vai* - Samoa (10 mins). Portmanteau Feature Film (88 mins). Produced by BSAG
2019 *The Legend of Baron To'a*. Feature Film. Director's Placement. Produced by BSAG
2012 *Milk & Honey* (15 mins). Short Film. Produced by Marina Alofagia McCartney
2011 *Ser Un Ser Humano* - Samoa (60 mins). Portmanteau Documentary Series. *Sustenance* - Samoa (10 mins). *Love* - Samoa (10 mins). *Hope* - Samoa (10 mins). *Fear* - Samoa (10 mins). *Faith* - Samoa (10 mins). *Culture* - Samoa (10 mins). Produced by EICTV, Zanna Gillespie, Vanessa Alexander
2010 *Granda* (12 mins). Short Film. Produced by Marina Alofagia McCartney.

SCRIPTWRITING:

PRODUCED WORK

2024 *My Life is Murder*. Series 4. Ep 6. The Good Oil. Comedy/Drama TV Series. Produced by Greenstone TV, CJZ Productions. TVNZ
2019 *Vai* - Samoa. Portmanteau Feature Film. Produced by BSAG
2012 *Milk & Honey*. Short Film. Produced by Marina Alofagia McCartney
2010 *Granda*. Short Film. Produced by Marina Alofagia McCartney

IN PROGRESS

2025 *Blue Murder Motel*, Series 1. Ep 6. Untitled. Comedy/Drama TV Series. Produced by GSTV. TVNZ (Upcoming)
2025 *My Life is Murder*, Series 5. Ep E. Bad Chemistry. Comedy/Drama TV Series. Produced by Greenstone TV, CJZ Productions. TVNZ (Upcoming)
2022 *The Gulf*, Series 3. Episode 2.1. Co-writer. Produced by Lippy Pictures Ltd
2022 *The Gulf*, Series 3. Episode 2.2. Co-writer. Produced by Lippy Pictures Ltd
2022-Current *Dusky*. Feature Film. Produced by Run Charlie Films, Kastom Films

PRODUCING:

2025 *The Return*. Short Film. Executive Producer
2021 *Sista*. Short Film. Producer
2015 *Akilah's Miracle*. Short Film. Producer
2012 *Milk & Honey*. Short Film. Producer
2010 *Granda*. Short Film. Producer

2022 Moana Jury. Wairoa Film Festival
 2023 Programme Consultant. Tāhuna Writer's Residency. Great Southern Television.
 2022 Fresh Shorts writing mentor. Script to Screen
 2022 Creator WIFT Moana Pasifika Women Writer's Programme. Women in Film & Television
 2020 Short Film Jury. Melbourne Women in Film Festival
 2019-Current Development and Funding Assessor. NZFC, NZOA, NZWG, GSTV, Script to Screen, PASC
 2019 Moana Jury. Wairoa Film Festival

FESTIVALS AND ACCOLADES:

A more comprehensive festival list is available upon request.

Vai (2019)

2019 Berlinale International Film Festival (Opening night film NATIVE programme), Germany
 2019 SXSW Film Festival, Austin TX, USA
 2019 Sydney Film Festival, Australia
 2019 Edinburgh International Film Festival, Scotland
 2019 Melbourne International Film Festival, Australia
 2020 Best Narrative Feature – DisOrient Asian American Film Festival of Oregon
 2019 Special Jury Award for International Narrative – LA Asian Pacific Film Festival
 2019 Winner Best Narrative Feature – Roxbury International Film Festival
 2019 Runner Up Jury Award for Best Dramatic Feature – Woods Hole International Film Festival Cape Cod, USA
 2019 3rd Place, People's Choice Award - Melbourne International Film Festival - MIFF 2019
 2019 Nominated, Best International Feature Film – Edinburgh International Film Festival
 2019 4th Place, Golden Space Needle Award Best Film – Seattle International Film Festival

Milk & Honey (2012)

2012 Palm Springs International Film Festival, Palm Springs, U.S.A.
 2013 ImagiNATIVE, Canada
 2012 Finalist, NZ's Best Shorts- New Zealand International Film Festival
 2012 Top 3 New Zealand Short Film Script - Script Writers Awards New Zealand
 2012 Finalist Light in Motion Award - Foyle International Film Festival, Ireland
 2013 Runner Up Overall Film & Audience Award - UniShorts Student Film Festival, New Zealand

Ser Un Ser Humano (2011)

2012 Winner Category: Everyday life and Social Change ("Culture") - Spanish American Independent Documentary Festival, Mexico City, Mexico
 2011 Winner - Category: International Documentary Length - ICAR XIV Festival Film, Guatemala
 2012 Göttingen Ethnographic Film Festival, Germany
 2012 Havana Film Festival, New York, USA
 2012 International Exhibition of DOCTOWN, Ensenada, Tijuana, Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico
 2012 Imago Festival, Facultad de medios audiovisuales del ISA, Cuba
 2011 Festival Internacional de Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano de La Habana, Cuba
 2011 International Film Festival Foundation & Global Development, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
 2011 Sala Iberia of Casa de América, Madrid, Spain
 2011 Festival de Cine Invisible, Bilbao, Spain
 2011 The London Latin American Film Festival, UK
 2011 UNESCO Headquarters Paris, France

Granda (2010)

2010 Winner - Audience Award - 20108 Pollywood Film Festival, Auckland, New Zealand
 2012 Home Akl, Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand
 2011 Short Film 2, Tagata Pasifika, TVNZ, New Zealand
 2010 Hawai'i International Film Festival, USA
 2010 World Indigenous Film Festival, Samoa
 2010 20108 Pollywood Film Festival, New Zealand, 2010

Sista (2020)

2021 NZ International Film Festival
 2022 Maoriland Film Festival, New Zealand
 2022 Show Me Shorts, New Zealand

Appendix 2: Script

THE RETURN

Written by

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Italicised dialogue is English Translation.

COLLECTIVE WHISPERS
Fo'i mai.

COLLECTIVE WHISPER (O.S.)
Return home.

FADE IN:

1 INT. HALLWAY OF SUBURBAN BUNGALOW - DAWN

1

LUPESSINA, a Samoan woman (20s), stands in a bungalow hallway dressed in a bohemian-style top and knee level skirt.

Mesmerised by a large painting titled "LE FAFĀ" (The Gateway) she is drawn in by the scene of a full moon, its light cast over the sea sitting between horizon and rock basin on land.

Muffled WHISPERS like the wind. A very faint TAPPING, the low HUM OF THE OCEAN. A SPARKLE of moonlight off water, a ROLL of a wave. Her eyes explore.

Lupesina slowly raises her hand towards the painting, ear cocked towards a building TAPPING seemingly from the inside of it. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

COLLECTIVE WHISPER (O.S.)

Lupesina.

Her hand hesitates, the TAPPING FADES, but she regains confidence and raises it again. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA, the TAPPING BUILDS.

COLLECTIVE WHISPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Lupesina.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

LUPESSINA

It was Lupesina...

The TAPPING fades. Muffled WHISPERS retreat into the wind. The MOVEMENT in the painting slows. Lupesina's eyes strain for movement in the painting.

LUPESSINA (CONT'D)

...but they changed it to Sina.

SILENCE. Then, a whisper of CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER from somewhere else. Decision made, she turns from the painting and follows the CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER around the corner of the hallway to a closed door.

2 INT. TATAU ROOM/HALLWAY - MORNING

2

As Lupesina opens a door a TAPPING replaces the CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER. She walks through and closes the door behind her. She takes in the scene.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

A room bereft of furniture, floor covered in fala (Samoan pandanus mat). 3 TATAU SUPPORTERS (Samoan, female) sit atop. They epitomise Samoan femininity; puleitasi (Samoan women's outfit), hair in perfect buns, legs comfortably crossed, graceful.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

MALU WOMAN (Samoan) lies on her stomach, face buried in her arms which support her head, lavalava hitched up to the top of exposed legs stretched out.

MAUL WOMAN SUPPORTER (Samoan) holds Malu Woman's hand gently in support. TWO SOLO (Samoan female, 20-30s) stretch the skin on her legs. 'AU TĀ (traditional tattooing tools) and ink sit next to a TUFUGA TĀ TATAU (Samoan Master Tattooist) (female) her face hidden, while buried in her task.

The Tufuga etches the marks of the malu (Indigenous Samoan female leg tattoos) into Malu Woman's skin. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. The Solo hold the legs to stop movement as 'au (tattooing comb) hits skin. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

Lupesina looks from face to face for a sign of welcome. Rewarded, she finds a spot to sit and mirrors the crossed legs.

She smooths skirt over her knees. Lupesina attempts to cover bare legs.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. Lupesina watches as 'au connects.

Strong words of encouragement for Malu Woman come from the Supporter collective.

TATAU SUPPORTER 1
Mālō le 'a'ao solo.

TATAU SUPPORTER 1
*Your skilful hands are
admirable.*

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. Both Solo move to the Tufuga's needs.

TUFUGA
(without looking up)
Mālō le tapua'i.

TUFUGA
(without looking up)
Your encouraging support is admirable.

Lupesina attempts to follow this call and response.

TATAU SUPPORTER 2
Osina, 'o le lagi mālōfie.

TATAU SUPPORTER 2
Our presence is for the blessing of the tattooing.

TUFUGA
(without looking up)
**Afio mai, alala tapua'i,
ali'i osi lagi.**

TUFUGA
(without looking up)
Remain and lend your prayerful support during this time.

Lupesina stretches out her legs. Supporter 3 throws her a lavalava in reprimand. Lupesina immediately retracts them back into crosslegged position.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. She watches on in discomfort.

Supporter 1 begins to sing.

TATAU SUPPORTER 3
**O le mafua'aga lenei ua
iloa, o le taaga o le tataui i
Sāmoa.**

TATAU SUPPORTER 3
This is the known origin of the permitted tattooing in Sāmoa.

The Supporter collective joins in.

TATAU SUPPORTERS
**O le malaga a teine to'alua,
na fe'ausi mai Fiti le
vasaloloa.**

TATAU SUPPORTERS
The journey of two sisters who swam in the ocean from Fiji.

They motion to Lupesina to join in. Lupesina is lost.

TATAU SUPPORTERS (CONT'D)
**Na la aumai ai o le ato au,
ma sia la pese e tūtūmau.
Fai mai e tatā o fafine ae lē
tatā o tane.**

TATAU SUPPORTERS (CONT'D)
They brought with them a basket of the tataui tools and the song they repeated. It is said only the women receive the tataui and the men do not.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. The Supporters notice her silence and stop singing.

TATAU SUPPORTER 1
Talofae. O ai si ou Tinā?

TATAU SUPPORTER 1
Alas. Who is her Mother?

LUPESINA
(whispers to herself)
Tinā.

LUPESINA
(whispers to herself)
Mother.

Lupesina searches her memory bank for a word. Quest successful she attempts a translation.

SINA
(In English)
Tinā. Mother?

A disapproving look from Supporter 1, one of sympathy from Supporter 2. Supporter 3's head nods slowly in understanding.

TATAU SUPPORTER 3
(slaps her thighs)
'Ua kelefua.

TATAU SUPPORTER 3
(slaps her thighs)
You're naked.

Lupesina waits for further clarification. It doesn't come.

The eyes of the Supporter collective on her. Tufuga and Solo still buried in their task.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

LUPE SINA
(hesitantly in broken
Samoan)
Leai...le talk Samoa.

LUPE SINA
(hesitantly in broken
Samoan)
No...talk the Samoa.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

Lupesina shifts her legs self-consciously to the side as she searches for a response.

MALU WOMAN
(to her Supporters)
**E tā muamua gutu, ona tā ai
lea o le tatau.**

MALU WOMAN
(to her Supporters)
*Tattoo the mouth before you
tattoo the body.*

Lupesina squirms under her confusion.

MALU WOMAN SUPPORTER
Tattoo the mouth before you tattoo
the body.

The Supporters shift their bodies away from Lupesina. The Tufuga continues to work, the tapping fades to SILENCE. Lupesina no longer exists.

Lupesina waits, hopes for a reprieve. Nothing. She rises slowly, folds the lavalava carefully, an attempt at dignity, and exits the room.

3 INT. HALLWAY - MID-MORNING

3

Lupesina pushes the simmer of resentment down and walks, her back straight, towards the area with the painting on the wall.

A blank wall. Confusion.

The Tatau Room door BANGS shut. CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER whispers. Dignity discarded, she strides back to the Tatau Room.

Opens the door and barges through...

...but is back at the front of the closed Tatau Room door.

Confused, she tries to get her bearings. She turns the doorknob with determination and steps through the doorway. And she is back at...

The Tatau Room door.

Her frustration grows. She grabs the doorknob and enters.

BACK AT

The Tatau Room door. She throws the door open again and pushes through.

BACK AT

The Tatau Room door. Through again...

BACK AT

The Tatau Room door. Lupesina attacks the doorknob and bulldozes through.

BACK AT

The Tatau Room door. She tackles the doorknob which doesn't open. She bangs on the door.

LUPESINA
(while banging)
MUM!

She wrenches the doorknob which suddenly opens and stumbles into...

4

INT. FAMILY LOUNGE - NOON

4

...the doorway of the family lounge. BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT. BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT as she surveys the scene. Eyes fixed on someone in the room she throws an accusation out.

LUPESINA
You didn't teach me Samoan.

'Ula (necklace) framed photographs of family and Christian themed paintings adorn the walls. Her Mother LEVALASI (Samoan) sits in silence, her back towards the doorway, shielding the face of a PERSON in a hospital bed.

LEVALASI
(whisper)
Return home.

Lupesina walks towards a chair opposite Levalasi and waits.

Levalasi strokes the hair of the Person in the bed, their face still unseen.

LUPESINA
Mum.

Levalasi's eyes close in response to Lupesina's appeal.

LEVALASI
(still focused on the
Person)
I taught you what you had to learn.

Levalasi glances at the graduation photograph of Lupesina.

Lupesina's eyes follow her Mum's before she turns towards the photos on the wall and studies them. Family smiles on display, Mother and daughter, photos of grandparents. A proud Levalasi smiling at Lupesina in University graduation robes.

Lupesina sits down and wills her Mother to look at her.

BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT. BREATHE IN, OUT. HEART BEAT speeds up, like the tapping of the 'au ta. BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT. No response from Levalasi.

LUPESINA
It's not enough.

Levalasi looks up and into Lupesina's eyes. Lupesina's breath catches in her throat. Their eyes locked in a hold until she can't any longer. Her attention turns towards the Person in the bed. She considers their FACE.

She is looking at her DEAD SELF (Dead-Lupesina), a little gaunt, eyes closed.

LEVALASI
You have everything you need.

A faint TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. Obscure WHISPERS that sound like the wind.

Lupesina shakes her head, control nearly gone. Tapping and whispers fade, overtaken by a HEART BEAT that speeds up again BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT.

LUPESINA
It's too hard.
I have nothing.

LEVALASI (severely cuts her off) LEVALASI (severely cuts her off)
 --'Uā 'uma. --Stop.

Lupesina flinches at the severity of Levalasi's voice.

Levalasi rises as she eyeballs Lupesina.

LEVALASI (CONT'D)
 You. Are. Everything.
 And what I did not teach you to be,
 is weak.

Taken aback by the intensity of Levalasi's words, Lupesina watches her Mother walk towards the lounge door.

LUPESINA
 (a desperate appeal as she
 stands)
 Mum?

Levalasi looks at her daughter as she stands in the doorway, her eyes blazing.

LEVALASI
 Take what you need (she clenches
 her fist in the air to drive the
 point home)...

TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA.

LEVALASI (CONT'D)
 ...and then...return home.

Levalasi closes the door behind her.

TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA.

Lupesina stares at the door before she snaps out of the shock of her Mother's departure. As she rushes towards it the TAPPING fades.

LUPESINA
 Mum.

The LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN grows. She exits through the doorway and into...

5 INT. CLASSROOM - EARLY AFTERNOON

5

...Lupesina halts, eyes dart back and forth, at the scene in front of her. The distant SOUND OF CHILDREN in a school playground.

Small chairs surround small tables covered with crayons and paper.

SHILOH (Palagi, 8) sits at one table and colours in her drawing with enthusiasm. Opposite her sits a DRAWING without an artist. Lupesina spots something familiar in it and studies it.

Sand, trees laden with coconuts, an UNFINISHED OCEAN, a Mummy and daughter hands clasped with the labels "Mummy" and "Lupesina" written above. Lupesina lovingly smooths her hand over the picture.

A faint TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. A barely audible hum of WHISPERS.

SHILOH
Coconut, coconuts.

The LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN builds.

SHILOH (CONT'D)
Loo-pee-see-nah. Poo-pee-see-nah.
Loo-pee-see-nah. Poo-pee-see-nah.

Shiloh giggles. Lupesina's heart BEATS faster, her BREATHING SHALLOWS.

SHILOH (CONT'D)
Loopy, Loopy Sina. Poopy Sina.

A CHORUS OF CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER fills the air. Shiloh grabs Lupesina's DRAWING, and a blue crayon to write "Poopy Sina" in the UNFINISHED SECTION OF THE OCEAN.

Heart BEATS. HEAVY SHALLOW BREATHING. CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER.

Shiloh jumps up, giggles at her handiwork and gaps it past a shocked Lupesina and through the doorway.

Lupesina considers her drawing and smooths her hand lovingly over the figure of her and her Mum.

LUPESINA
(whispers)
Mum.

She picks up the blue crayon and colours in the unfinished ocean. CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER fades as "Poopy Sina" becomes a FINISHED OCEAN.

She writes her full name LUPESINA over top of the FINISHED OCEAN.

A faint TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA TA TA from the door. Barely audible WHISPERS.

When Lupesina looks up she is in...

6

INT. FUNCTION ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

6

...an event hall, two tables in the background. The remnants of a Samoan feast (SOUND SFX: Cutlery scraping on dishes, faint HUSTLE and BUSTLE of a crowd not seen).

At the table closest to her a SAMOAN WOMAN (40s) looks Lupesina up and down. Lupesina's outfit is conspicuous compared to the formal puletasi she wears.

Behind her table, A SAMOAN GIRL (pre-teen) dressed in equally beautiful puletasi stands at her allocated table. She pours a cup of tea for another SAMOAN PATRON (woman, 30s).

Lupesina tries to decipher what to do. She locks eyes with SAMOAN GIRL who now fans the food, then gestures for Lupesina to follow her lead. The Samoan Woman stares at Lupesina, waiting.

Lupesina clocks a folded hand towel, large bowl and dish with soap. She channels her respectful Samoan girl and moves bowl and dish to Samoan Woman.

Samoan Woman washes her hands with soap and water. When finished she hangs her hands over the bowl and waits for Lupesina who is distracted as she studies the interaction between Girl and Samoan Patron.

Samoan Woman CLICKS her tongue in impatience.

SAMOAN WOMAN
(under her breath)
Palagi valea.

SAMOAN WOMAN
(under her breath)
Stupid white person.

Lupesina's heart BEATS faster. BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT. BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT, BEAT. BREATHING SHALLOWS.

SAMOAN WOMAN (CONT'D)
(to the Samoan Patron)
'Oā nei Tinā ua fa'atunoa lana fanau?

SAMOAN WOMAN (CONT'D)
What type of Mother leaves her child exposed?

The mention of the word Mother calls Lupesina to attention.

LUPESINA
What did you say about my Tinā? My Mum?

The Samoan Woman ignores her.

Lupesina grabs the towel, eyeballs her and throws it down in front of her.

Slightly louder tapping from the door - TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. Growing collective WHISPER, nearly audible.

Lupesina storms out through the doorway and into...

7

INT. TATAU ROOM - DUSK

7

...the earlier scene of the Tatau Room. The Tufuga, face still buried in the task, Solo stretch skin, Supporters sit in solidarity.

No-one acknowledges Lupesina.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

LUPESINA
(silent shout)

Hey.

Lupesina clutches her throat.

LUPESINA (CONT'D)
(silent shout)

Hey.

The tapping begins to boom. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

No acknowledgement from anyone.

Desperation sets in and she strides over to the Tufuga. Lupesina places her hand on the Tufuga's shoulder. Everyone gasps at the break in protocol.

The Tufuga swivels round and Lupesina stares down into her own FACE. She is the Tufuga.

HEART BEATS faster. BREATHING SHALLOWS. Everyone in the room begins to LAUGH, MURMOUR, STARE.

TATAU SUPPORTER 3 TATAU SUPPORTER 3
Ua fa'aluma lou laulau faiva. *Your tongue. Exposed.*

The despair of realizing she is her own antagonist sets in.

TATAU SUPPORTER 1 TATAU SUPPORTER 1
Kelefua. *Naked.*

Lupesina backs up, like a trapped animal.

TUFUGA LUPESINA
 (Surveys Lupesina up and
 down)
**E tā muamua lou gutu, ona tā
 ai lea o le tatau.**

TUFUGA LUPESINA
 (Surveys Lupesina up and
 down)
*Tattoo the mouth before you
 tattoo the body.*

Lupesina follows their gaze and surveys her clothes, her
 body.

She grabs at her top as if it burns against her skin.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA
 TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. HEART
 BEAT pounds, SHALLOW BREATH heaves, a MESS OF WHISPERS.

Lupesina tugs at her clothes.

She pulls her skirt off.

Next her top.

Her bra.

Her shoes.

Each item of clothing, piece by piece.

Until she stands naked and hurls a SCREAM at Tufuga Lupesina,
 who simultaneously reciprocates with a SILENT SCREAM.

SILENCE from EVERYONE ELSE fills the room. Lupesina's body
 heaves with breathlessness. BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT. BREATHE
 IN, BREATHE OUT. BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT.

She spots the 'AU next to Tufuga Lupesina, strides towards it
 and grabs it with authority.

She swivels and walks out of the room with dignified fire.

8 INT./EXT. HALLWAY/LE FĀFĀ - NIGHT

8

Lupesina stands naked at the top of the hallway.

The door to the Tatau Room CLOSES behind her. SILENCE.

As the freedom of shedding the weight of expectation sets in,
 tears fall freely down her face.

She revels in the moment and breathes in the SILENCE.

She smiles as the joy of freedom washes over her.

The SOUND OF THE OCEAN sings from the direction of the FRONT
 DOOR. (SOUND SFX: "Kigi" ORATORY cue - funeral chant
 associated with Lupesina's specific genealogy)

Lupesina walks, unhurried, towards the door that slowly opens. The Ocean's call grows. She drops the 'au.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

A hint of RED SHIMMERS on Lupesina's legs. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

Le Fāfā (the Gateway), a small circular basin amongst rocks in the sea. A huge full moon sits just above the horizon out over the water. Her light throws magnificent magical hues into the sky and onto the Ocean. The Ocean SURGES in response to the music of the TAPPING.

Lupesina stands at the doorway and stares at the scene outside the door. RED SHIMMER on legs. Laughter through tears of happiness.

TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA. TA TA TA TA TA TA.

Lupesina steps over the threshold of the doorway...

9

EXT. LE FĀFĀ (THE GATEWAY) - NIGHT

9

ANCESTRAL WHISPERS
Measina o Sāmoana.

ANCESTRAL WHISPERS
Treasure of Samoa.

...a MALU appears on her legs in full, from the inside out, MARKED IN BLOOD.

She stands and inhales Le Fāfā.

ANCESTRAL WHISPERS (CONT'D)
Fo'i mai.

ANCESTRAL WHISPERS (CONT'D)
Return home.

Lupesina dives towards her return home.

CUT TO BLACK.

Appendix 3: Electronic Press Kit for *Granda*

Granda

Written, Directed, Produced and Edited

By Marina Alofagia McCartney

PRESS KIT



When first impressions don't last.



CONTACT

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Director/Writer/Producer/Editor	Marina McCartney
Length	10:47:00
Year of Production	2010
Aspect Ratio:	1:77
Sound:	Stereo
Colour:	Colour
Exhibition:	

LOGLINE

When first impressions don't last.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

When Robert meets his Samoan Granda in Aotearoa for the first time he approaches him with caution. Granda cannot speak English and Robert cannot speak Samoan. As the day progresses he observes minor actions and reactions from and toward his Granda which encourage him to let down his guard. A strong bond between Granda and grandson is inevitable.

LONG SYNOPSIS

A "traditional" Samoan man, visits his "modern" daughter, Sofia, and young grandson, Robert, in Aotearoa for the first time. For Robert it is the first time he will meet his Granda. Granda cannot speak English and Robert cannot speak Samoan. Robert finds Granda's style of dress, physical features and speech unfamiliar and he approaches his Granda and fa'aSamoa defensively and cautiously.

While Granda's life back home is steeped in fa'aSamoa he is aware of the different upbringing his grandson has had. He understands that many New Zealand born Samoans move between two worlds; the West and fa'aSamoa. As a result he responds with patience and understanding.

As the day progresses Robert observes minor actions and reactions from and toward his Granda. Some come from those Robert is familiar with while others come from the most unexpected people. These eventually encourage Robert to lower down his guard.

His Granda's visit has sparked a desire to explore his culture and before the end of the day Robert subtly reveals that he is open to embracing his Samoan culture. A strong bond between Granda and grandson is inevitable.

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FILMCREW SERVICES



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Generator Equipment
Unit Equipment

Continental Power
Loaded Bases

Stills Photographer
Editor
Score
Colourist
Sound Mix

Prue Cunningham
Marina McCartney
Maua Miller
Claire Eastham
Joseph Jujnovich

“Swag Like Whoa”
Gangsta Players
© 2009 MuzicHeads.com

“Chop Shop”
E3
© 2009 MuzicHeads.com

Film Post Facilities

FTVMS Department
University of Auckland

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Matt Hunt
Stacey Hoggard
Andy Roelants
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Tavui'i Mapuni Leaoa
Stuart and Nancy McCartney
Natalie and Lincoln Lane
Lianna and Jakhana McCartney
Kathryn and Simon Royal
Craig Macdonald
Anne Ferguson
Rene Naufahu
Martin Hansen
Peter Simpson
Caroline Grose
Ben Crowder
Jeremia Family
Zara Hayden
Arnette Arapai
Louise Tu'u
Sophie McCartney
Jack Lawrence
Georgia Macdonald
Tony “Spotty” Keddy
Mike Westgate
Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland

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CAST

Robert
Granda
Sofia
Cool Samoan Boy
Babysitter

Kahukura Royal
Rapi Ileremia
Karena Lyons
Beulah Koale
Prue Cunningham

CREW

Writer/Director/Producer
Executive Producer

Director of Photography
Production Manager
1st Assistant Director
Focus Puller
Clapper Loader

Gaffer
Best Boy
Key Grip

Sound Recordist
Boom Operator
Art Director
Art Department Assistant
Key Makeup
Makeup Assistant
Location Manager
Catering

Unit Manager
Child Chaperone
Cultural Consultant
Cast Driver

Production Assistant
Continuity
Production Runner
Crew Agents
Casting

Camera Equipment

Grip Equipment
Lighting Equipment

Marina McCartney
Vanessa Alexander
Zane Holmes
Andrew McGeorge
Rebecca Jellie
Katrien Lemmens
Caleb Staines
Amber Marie-Smith
Alex Glucina
Thad Lawrence
Merlin Wilford
Evan Pardington
Mike Coney
Ande Schurr
Ben Vanderpoel
John Ioane
Kezia Henchey
Lee-Ann Smith
Daisy Ram
Prue Cunningham
Sioux Macdonald
Rebecca Jellie
McCartney Family
Hell Pizza
Jono Harvey
Gabrielle Blackwood
Tavu'i Mapuni Leaoa
Natalie Lane
Brett Graham
Jono Harvey
David Green
Glenn Horan
Jono Harvey
Filmcrew Services
Marina McCartney

c4 Camera
Metro Film
Grip Solutions Ltd
Fat Lighting Ltd

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

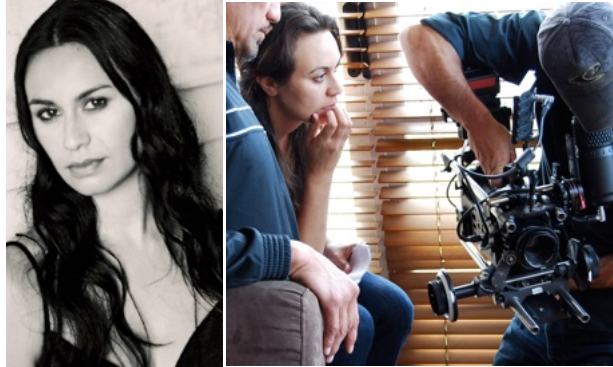
Granda is a modern day adaptation of my own childhood experience meeting my Samoan Granda for the first time. He spoke little English; I spoke little Samoan. Yet through his patience and humour he was able to easily form a bond with his afakase grandchildren.

His words of advice and subtle lessons still resonate with me today and I feel they are a powerful reminder of how many of us negotiate our identity in the diaspora. Culture is not static but a dynamic and resilient creature transforming, adapting and evolving depending on the situation. For me, this short is my first attempt to visually capture that negotiation.



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DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY - MARINA MCCARTNEY
BA, BA(Hons) in Screen Production with First Class Honours



Marina McCartney was born and raised in Manukau City. From an English Father and a Samoan Mother she has always been powerfully aware of her cultural heritage and how this can affect the way we are viewed, as well as how we view others.

After completing Bursary at Manurewa High School she enrolled in a Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Auckland. In 1995 Marina left University to pursue a successful modeling career. In 1997 she was crowned Miss New Zealand and went on to represent New Zealand at the 1997 Miss Universe competition. After 12 years of working in the fashion and beauty industry she returned to the University of Auckland in 2007 to complete a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Film, Television, Media Studies (FTVMS) with a minor in Pacific Studies. She completed her Bachelor of Arts at the end of 2008 after only two years of full time study, which also included two consecutive years of Summer School.

During these two years, Marina was selected for the Faculty of Arts Maori and Pacific Leadership Programme. As part of this programme she completed an internship as a tutor within the FTVMS department. In addition to this selection, she was appointed the Tuakana Mentor for the FTVMS department. As a result of her internship and role as Tuakana Mentor she obtained her first academic credit by co-presenting an academic paper at two conferences titled *"Te Wero: Laying down the challenge; creating an aspirational learning environment for Maori and Pasifika students in their first year of university study"* under the guidance of Margaret Henley.

As a result of her academic success and her involvement in the FTVMS department Marina was offered the following awards for 2009:

- The University of Auckland Faculty of Arts Pasifika Leadership Award
- The University of Auckland Maori and Pacific Graduate Scholarship
- The University of Auckland, Faculty of Arts, Senior Prize in Film, Television, Media Studies
- The Kate Edger Charitable Trust BA(Hons) Award

Marina is currently enrolled in the MA in Screen Production. She has been awarded The University of Auckland Maori and Pacific Graduate Scholarship for 2010 and tutors Stage 1 Media and Film theory at the University. Her BA(Hons) Short Film, *Granda*, won the Audience Award at the Pollywood 82010 Film Festival in March of 2010. Her academic areas of interest are based on the representation of "Pasifika" through the mediascape and how this affects "Pasifika" identity formation in the Diaspora. It is her hope that the stories she tells visually will encourage a trust and faith in the ability of various cultural groups to move between the Western world and their own Indigenous worlds successfully; and that these stories will appeal not only to them but the rest of the world as well.

Marina hopes that *Granda*, her first venture into film-making, will be the beginning of many to come!

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Appendix 4: Electronic Press Kit for *Milk & Honey*

milk & honey



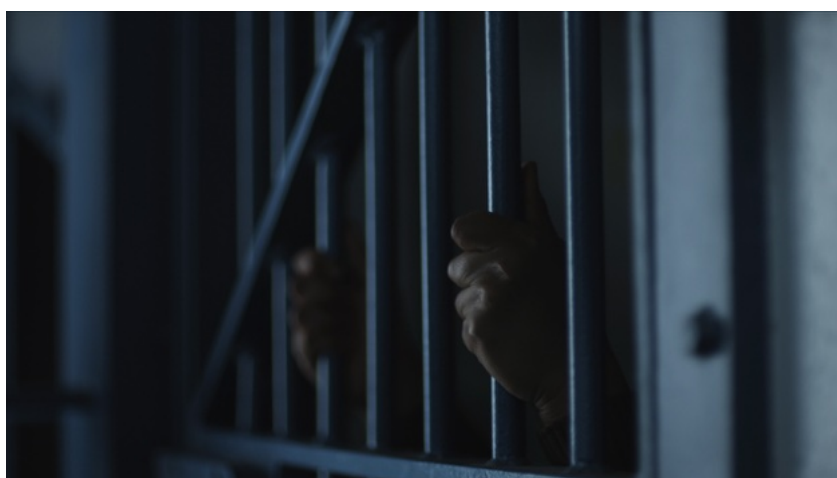
**TOP 3 SHORT FILM
SCRIPT FINALIST**



**TOP 6 SHORT FILM
FINALIST**



PRESS KIT



milk & honey

written and directed by marina alofagia mccartney

2014	DOWN UNDER BERLIN	OFFICIAL SELECTION
2014	WORLD FILM AWARDS	WINNER, BEST
		INTERNATIONAL FILM
2014	ASIA PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL FILM AWARDS	WINNER, RISING STAR
		WINNER PLATINUM
2014	REEL BRAZIL FILM FESTIVAL	OFFICIAL SELECTION
2013	imagineNATIVE	OFFICIAL SELECTION
2013	BANGKOK INTERNATIONAL STUDENT FILM FESTIVAL	FINALIST
2013	PASIFIKA FILM & ARTS FESTIVAL	OFFICIAL SELECTION
2013	PACITA FILM SHOWCASE	OFFICIAL SELECTION
2013	UNI SHORTS STUDENT FILM FESTIVAL	RUNNER UP OVERALL FILM,
		AUDIENCE AWARD
2012	FOYLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL	OFFICIAL SELECTION
2012	POLLYWOOD TEN2012	OFFICIAL SELECTION
2012	PALM SPRINGS SHORTFEST	OFFICIAL SELECTION
2012	NZ INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL	FINALIST TOP 6 NZ SHORT
		FILMS
2012	NZ WRITERS GUILD	TOP 3 FINALIST NZ SHORT
		FILM SCRIPT
2012	WAIROA MAORI FILM FESTIVAL	OFFICIAL SELECTION

INTERNATIONAL SALES

MCCARTNEY PRODUCTIONS LIMITED

PO BOX 47 387 | PONSONBY | AUCKLAND 1144 | AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

PHONE +64 21 936 908 | EMAIL INFO@MCCARTNEY.NET.NZ

PRODUCTION NOTES

Writer/Director/Editor	Marina Alofagia McCartney
Producers	Angela Hicks, Marina Alofagia McCartney
Production Company	McCartney Productions Limited

Digital	Dolby Digital	Colour	14:26	1:1.85
---------	---------------	--------	-------	--------

TAGLINE

When a new life is not so sweet.

SYNOPSIS

(120 words)

A young Samoan immigrant's desire to provide a better life for her family sees her embrace New Zealand as home. As Tailoto anticipates the arrival of her baby, events take place that will change her forever. It is the 1970s and race relations in Aotearoa New Zealand are at an all time low. Pacific Islanders are terrorised during dawn raids, arrested as suspected overstayers and threatened with deportation within days if they cannot produce the required documentation. With limited English and unable to produce her passport, which is with Immigration, Tailoto tries to persuade Samoan Constable Salevao, to help her. As a heavily pregnant Tailoto contemplates her future, Salevao must consider his own in the land of milk and honey.

(90 words)

Tailoto, a Samoan immigrant, embraces New Zealand as home. As she anticipates the arrival of her baby, events take place that will change her forever. It is the 1970s and race relations are at an all time low. Pacific Islanders are threatened with deportation if they cannot produce the required documentation. With limited English and unable to produce her passport, Tailoto tries to persuade Samoan Constable Salevao, to help her. As a heavily pregnant Tailoto contemplates her future, Salevao must consider his own in the land of milk and honey.

(65 words)

Tailoto, a Samoan immigrant, embraces New Zealand as home while she excitedly anticipates the arrival of her baby. However, poor race relations threaten her happiness and she is arrested during the infamous Dawn Raids. As she desperately tries to persuade Samoan Constable Salevao, to help her, he faces a dilemma as he considers his own future in the land of milk and honey.

(20 words)

A chance meeting between two Samoan immigrants forces them to contemplate their future in the land of milk and honey.

WRITER/DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As the daughter of immigrants, a Samoan Mother and English (Geordie) Father, I have always been interested in how culture can affect the way we are viewed, as well as how we view others.

Milk & Honey is a historical exploration in to the experiences of Pacific Island immigrants in New Zealand during the Dawn Raid period of the 1970s. It was always a period I wanted to explore further, however, it wasn't until I asked my family about their thoughts on this time that I realised how closely this had affected us.

After 30 years of silence, my proud Mother explained that she had been taken by the Police from the factory she was working at, and in front of all the other workers, on suspicion of being an overstayer. She was held in a police cell overnight while my Father tried frantically to find a lawyer to assist them. My Mother was 8 months pregnant with me at the time.

The challenge was to ensure that my emotions did not override the storytelling process and that this very personal story was shaped into a narrative which did justice to the experiences of Pacific Islanders during this time.

It is my hope that *Milk & Honey* has captured the experience of ordinary people seeking a better life in a land filled with promise, while facing a not so ordinary situation.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Marina McCartney is a graduate of the MA with First Class Honours in Screen Production from the University of Auckland. From a Geordie Father and a Samoan Mother she has always been powerfully aware of her cultural heritage and how this can affect the way we are viewed, as well as how we view others.

Her University of Auckland postgraduate short film, *Granda*, won the Audience Award at the Pollywood 82010 Film Festival in March 2010 and screened in competition at the Hawai'i International Film Festival 2010 and the World Indigenous Film Festival in Samoa 2010.

In 2011, Marina was selected from hundreds of applications to be one of six directors from around the world to create the UNESCO funded six-episode collaborative documentary series *Ser un Ser Humano*. The series has screened extensively through out the world. Her MA thesis short film *Milk & Honey* was selected from over a hundred submissions by renowned film maker Roger Donaldson (*The World's Fastest Indian*, *Smash Palace*, *The Recruit*) for the inaugural New Zealand International Film Festival's 2012 short film competition, along with five other short films. Shot on a production budget of NZD5,000.00 *Milk & Honey* competed against films produced on budgets of up to NZD125,000.00. In June 2012, *Milk & Honey* qualified for Academy Award qualifying festivals, A-List 2012 Palm Springs ShortFest and Foyle Film Festival. It was awarded the Top 3 New Zealand short film scripts in the 2012 New Zealand Script Writer Awards.

She is also currently in the post-production phase of a one-hour documentary project, *Voices of Samoa*, and she is preparing to embark on her next two projects, a short film *Going Home* and her creative doctorate in film at the University of Auckland in 2016 where she will begin to write her first feature film.

CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Tailoto Tavu'i	NORA AATI
Solopo Tavu'i	HANS MASOE
Sergeant Stan	WILL WALLACE
Constable Salevao	ROBBIE MAGASIVA
Salevao's wife	YVONNE TAUFA

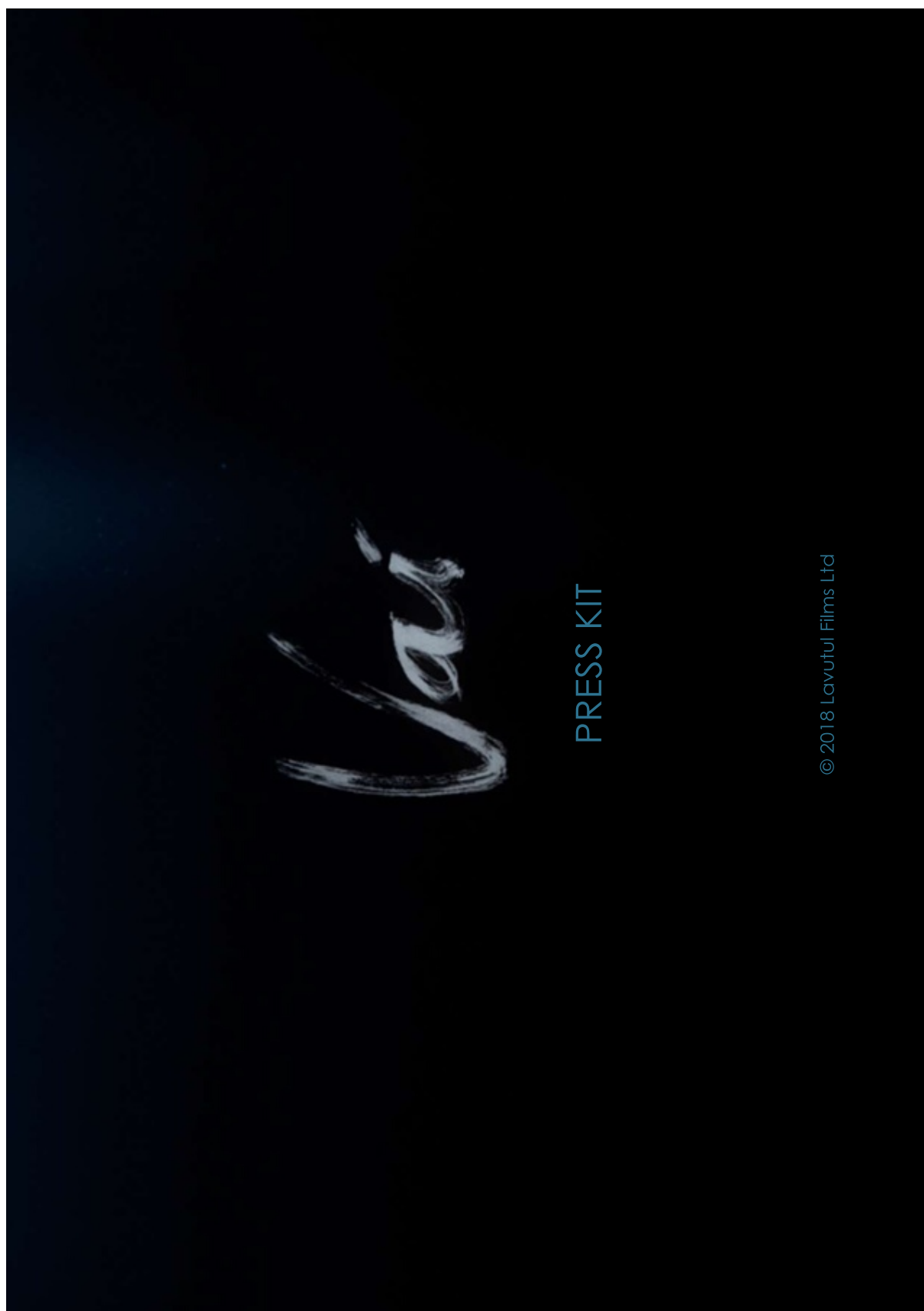
CREW

Writer/Director	MARINA MCCARTNEY
Producer	ANGELA HICKS
	MARINA MCCARTNEY
Production Manager	CLAIRE CAMPBELL
Production Assistant	ZULEIKA GILBERT
1st Assistant Director	QUENTIN WHITWELL
2nd Assistant Director	PRUE CUNNINGHAM
Script Supervisor	SHANA LANG
Script Translation	KISA TUISALEGA
University Supervisor	VANESSA ALEXANDER
	DR SHUCHI KOTHARI
Director of Photography	ANDREW MCGEORGE
Camera Operator	ULRIC RAYMOND
Focus Puller	GRAHAM MCFARLANE
	RYAN SPEARMAN
	BRADLEY WILLEMSE
Clapper Loader	DAVID STEEL
Data Wrangler	PRISCILLA NORTHE
Gaffer	THAD LAWRENCE
Best Boy	MERLIN WILFORD
Lighting Assist	BEN CORLETT
	HANNAH LEY
	NICK PRETSCHERER
Gaffer	PHIL TOTORO
Best Boy	DANNY FEPULEAI
Lighting Assistant	TOMMY DAVIS
	ROYCE DAWSON
	TUFALE MATAFEO
	TROY VAN DER WAL
Key Grip	GARY ILLINGWORTH
Grip Assistant	JONATHAN BIXLEY
Sound Recordist	MARK WILLIAMS
Boom Operator	KYLE GRIFFITHS
	CJ WITHEY
Production Designer	JOHN IOANE
Art Director	SARAH BEALE
Stand By Props	SAMANTHA CONNOLLY
	LISA IOANE
Art Assistant	CRYSTAL GORHAM
	ELOISE GORHAM
Key Makeup	MIRANDA RAMAN
Makeup Assistant	KATIE ROGERS
Key Wardrobe	CHARLOTTE TURNER
Key Wardrobe	CELIA WALSH
Location Scout/Manager	PHIL AITKEN
Location Manager	JORDI SCOTT-SMITH
Catering	ROB & ANGELA HICKS
	LYNNE MACSWEENEY
	SIOUX MACDONALD
Unit Manager	MARK HENDRY
	DON ANDERSON
Unit Assistant	SARAH MOORE
Location	TAKAPUNA POLICE STATION
Location Liaison	GARY KEMP
Crew Agent	FILMCREWS
Production Stills	SERENE TIMOTEO

milk & honey

Production Office	ROBBERS DOG FILMS FILMCREWS
Camera Equipment	DEPARTMENT OF SCREEN PRODUCTION UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND PANAVISION
Grip Equipment	DOLLY SHOP
Lighting Equipment	FAT LIGHTING LIGHTSPEED LIGHTING
Location Equipment	LOADED BASES LOCATION SERVICES WEST
Prop Vehicle	TERRY NICOLAS
Communications	RADIO RENTALS
Post Production Supervisor	GRAEME E. BIBBY
Editor	MARINA MCCARTNEY
Editing Consultant	SREYA CHATTERJEE
Sound Design	KAHRA SCOTT-JAMES
Graphics	NEIL GRUNDY
Editing Facilities	UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Colourist	GRAEME E. BIBBY
Technical Support	MARTIN HANSEN PETER SIMPSON
Music	TRACK 6", MAU, ARCHIVE OF MAORI & PACIFIC MUSIC, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Insurance	CROMBIE & LOCKWOOD
Film Permits	FILM AUCKLAND
WITH MUCH ALOFA	TAVU'I MAPUNI LEAOA STUART MCCARTNEY NANCY MCCARTNEY MCCARTNEY AIGA DR MELANIE ANAE TREVOR BROOKS DAMON FEPULEAI REBECCA FLORES ZANNA GILLESPIE CAROLYN GROSE MARGARET HENLEY MICHELLE MARCHANT DR RICHARD MOYLE MARAMA PAPAU TIM ROBINSON DR TAMASILAU SUAALII-SAUNI DIANNE TAYLOR ANTONIO TIBALDE STALLONE VAIAOGA-IOASA ANTHONY WILSON DR ARNOLD WILSON MARIA WILSON
IN ASSOCIATION WITH	UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND, FACULTY OF ARTS, MAORI & PASIFIKA LEADERSHIP GRANT PIPEF POST GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP McCARTNEY PRODUCTIONS LIMITED

Appendix 5: Electronic Press Kit for *Vai*



VAI

Durata 9 minutes
 Theatrical CP
 FPS: 24
 Aspect ratio: 1.39 : 1
 Country: New Zealand
 Language: English, Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic, Irish Gaelic, and
 Maori
 Filmmaker: Peter Jackson

Logline:
 A family of four are taken to a remote island where they are
 held captive by a group of mutants.

Synopsis:
 A family of four are taken to a remote island where they are
 held captive by a group of mutants. The family consists of
 a mother, a father, and two children. They are taken to the island
 by a group of mutants who are looking for a new home.

VIGNETTES (in order of appearance)

Fiji:

In a modest dwelling in Fiji a 7 year-old girl with boundless energy tries to understand why she has to say goodbye to her home country and extended family as her mother prepares her to leave Fiji.

Written by: Sharon Whippy & Nicole Whippy

Directed by: Nicole Whippy

Vai: Mereani Tuimataniisiga

Tonga:

Vai, now 13, dreams of going to NZ to sing but her day-to-day chore of filling up water bottles from the neighbourhood water tanks makes her feel as though she will never leave Tonga.

Written & directed by: 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Gutfenbell-Likiliki

Vai: 'Ar-Ramadi Longopoa

Solomon Islands:

While fishing from a small canoe off the coast of the Solomon Islands, 16 year old Vae argues with her mother about the correct way to bait the fishing hook.

Written & directed by: Matasila Freshwater

Vae: Betsy Luitolo

NZ Born Samoan:

Having worked hard to get into university, 21 year old Vai is now a top student, and one of only two Pacific Islanders in her class but with her attendance waning due to pressures at home, she finds it difficult to get support from her tutor and struggles to find her voice in a system that isn't built for her.

Written & directed by: Amberley Jo Aumua

Vai: Agnes Pele

VIGNETTES (in order of appearance)

Kuki Airani (Cook Islands):

Amidst apathy, fear and the trappings of colonialism Vai makes a stand for change on her island of Rarotonga, finding her voice as an activist.

Written & directed by: *Mirria George*

Vai: *Evofia-Rose Araihi*

Samoa:

In her 40s now, Vai returns to Samoa to perform for an important event but, having been away for many years, Vai struggles with her connection to the performance.

Written & directed by: *Marina Alofagia McCartney*

Vai: *Fiona Collins*

Niue:

Vai, now 64, tries to convince her granddaughter, Moana, that leaving the island of Niue will give her an equal start in life.

Written & directed by: *Dianna Fuemana*

Vai: *Maliaga Erick*

Aotearoa:

An elderly Vai, 80 years old, gathers with her whānau (family) by the river's edge to perform a naming ceremony for her great granddaughter, Vai.

Written & directed by: *Becs Arahanga*

Vai: *Hinetu Dell*

CREDITS

Directed by:

Nicole Whippy, 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbel-Likiliki, Matasila Freshwater, Amberley Jo Aumua, Miria George, Marina Alofagia McCartney, Dianna Fuemana, Becs Arahanga

Written by:

Sharon Whippy & Nicole Whippy, 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbel-Likiliki, Matasila Freshwater, Amberley Jo Aumua, Miria George, Marina Alofagia McCartney, Dianna Fuemana, Becs Arahanga

Producers:

Kerry Warkia & Kiel McNaughton

Director of Photography:

Drew Sturge

Production Designer:

Riria Lee

Costume Designer:

Lindah Lepou

Music by:

Lauren King

Editor:

Dione Chard

Casting Director:

Christina Asher

CAST CREDITS

Lead Cast:

Fiji	Mereani Tuimataniaiga
Tonga	'Ar-Ramadi Longopoa
Solomon Islands	Betsy Luitolo
NZ Born Samoan	Agnes Pele
Kuki Airani (Cook Islands)	Evotia-Rose Araiiti
Samoa	Fiona Collins
Niue	Maliaga Erick
Aotearoa (NZ)	Hinetu Dell

Supporting Cast (some of):

Frankie Adams, Ana Tuigamala, Ateca Ravuvu, Milame (Mima) Radinasawa Mafi, Vao Langi, Sami-Pola Z.B.C Likiliki, Indira Moala Stewart, Rokalani Lavea, Kathy McRae, Patricia Wichman, Taungaroa Emile, June Baudinet, Sarrah Magaoo, Rhonda Tibble, Kasina Campbell.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT CAST

Fiji: 7 year-old actress Mereani (Vai) and Mima (Yaca) have never acted before.

Tonga: None of the cast had ever acted before. Ar-Ramani (Vai) has the job of collecting water for her family in real life.

Solomon Islands: Betsy Luitolo (Vae) has never acted before.

NZ Born Samoan: Agnes Pele (Vai) has never acted before.

Kuki Airani (Cook Islands): Evotia-Rose (Vai) has never acted before.

Samoa: The hair of Moana from Disney's 'Moana' was modelled from Fiona Collins (Vai). Frankie Adams (Mata) stars in US sci-fi series 'The Expanse'.

Niue: The entire cast were first time actors.

Aotearoa (NZ): Hinetu Dell (Vai) has never acted before. Rhonda Tibble (Mata) adjusted the ceremonial chant to suit each pepi (baby) who was playing Pepi Vai in the different takes.

BIOS

Becs Arahangā (*Kai Tahu/ Ngāti Raukawa ōku Iwi, Kaiti Mako te Hapū*):

Becs wrote and directed the short film *Laundry* at the end of 2016. *Laundry* was selected for the NZIFF Best Shorts and Show Me Shorts, where it was nominated for four awards: Best Edit, Best Screenplay, Best Director, and Best Film. *Laundry* is still in it's festival life, having recently played at ImagineNative in Toronto, San Diego, FIFO in Tahiti, Tampere Film Festival, and Seattle International Film Festival. Becs has also just completed filming on her next film, *Hinekura*, which follows the journey of a young girl, Hine, as she comes of age and enters the sacred space of women where she is nurtured, challenged and then celebrated. *Hinekura* is set to release in 2019.

Amberley Jo Aumua (*Ngāti Hāua - New Zealand / Salelesi, Toamua, Mamau Tai - Samoa*):

Amberley Jo Aumua is of Samoan and Māori descent from Manurewa, New Zealand. She is a writer/director who holds a Bachelor of Performing and Screen Arts. Her first short film *Waiting* (17) won the Jury Prize for Best Film at the New Zealand International Film Festival (17), Best Student Film at the Show Me Shorts International Film Festival (17) and was in competition at the Toronto International Film Festival (17). It has currently screened in over 20 film festivals, most recently at the BFI London Film Festival (18). Her recent short film *Moa Ma Le Pinko* (*Chicken & Bingo*, 18) made with two other indigenous key creatives, was created as part of the Native Slam film challenge for Māoriland Film Festival where it won the Audience Award and was selected to screen at ImagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival (18). She is currently researching and writing her feature film and working on other projects.

Matasila Freshwater (*Nusa Hope, Roviana Lagoon (Western Province) / Matakota, Dugaha and Baguri / Vuregare*):

Matasila is a writer/director with a background in anthropology, film, and animation. She is passionate about exploring cultural complexities through storytelling. Matasila's last NZFC funded short animated film, *Shmeat*, was an NZIFF Official Selection for New Zealand's Best Short Film and appeared in a number of festivals including 2016 Sitges International Fantasy Film Festival and was awarded Best Animation in A Night of Horror Film Festival in Sydney.

BIOS

Dianna Fuemana (*Mutalau - Niue / America Samoa / Pago Pago*):

Dianna's career as a playwright and theatre director spans 20 years with her plays being published and produced internationally. She delved into film making in 2012 when she won the Script to Screen Writers Internship with Killer Films in NYC. Her first short film *Sunday Fun Day* was shot in 2016. It won the Sun Jury Prize at Imaginative Film Media Arts Festival, Toronto, 2017.

"Bringing Niue and her people to the screen is a rare opportunity. This film gives rise to the women on Niue who keep our traditions, our language, our home fires burning. They allow me to roam free and return to a unique culture that is mine, away from the noise of the world." Dianna Fuemana

Mīria George (*Arorangi, Rarotonga and Areora, Aitiu / Te Arawa and Ngāiti Awa*):

Mīria is a poet, and writer, director, producer of theatre. An award-winning playwright, Mīria's work has toured New Zealand, Australia, Hawai'i, Canada and the United Kingdom. Her plays include *And What Remains*, *Sunset Road*, *The Vultures* and *The Night Mechanics*. Mīria recently directed the Premiere Season of *Bless The Child* by Hone Kouka for the New Zealand Festival & Auckland Arts Festival. In 2017, Mīria was the Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer in Residence at University of Hawai'i and won the Bruce Mason Playwriting Award. Mīria holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the International Institute of Modern Letters. Also a published poet, *The Wet Season* is Mīria's debut collection of poetry, published by the Wai-te-ata Press. Vai is Mīria's film directorial debut.

'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki (*Talau & Falaleu - Vava'u / Vaini & Malapo - Tongatapu*):

'Ofa-Ki-Levuka ('Ofa) Guttenbeil-Likiliki holds close to her heart her relationship with God, her grounded principles in gender equity, feminism, human rights and the right of every human being to live a life of dignity regardless of colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and religion. She does many things but what she loves most is telling stories in whatever possible way she can. She prioritises giving voice to the lived realities of women and children's stories across the Pacific.

BIOS

Marina Alofagia McCartney (Pito Nu'u, Satupa'itea, Savai'i - Samoa and Vailoa / Palauli, Savai'i - Samoa / Geordie - England):

From a Geordie Father, Samoan Mother and Cook Islands step-Mother, Marina is powerfully aware of her cultural heritage, how this affects the way we are viewed and how we view others. She holds an MA in Screen Production (First Class Honours) and is an award-winning filmmaker and teaching fellow at Pacific Studies, University of Auckland. Her academic areas of expertise are Pacific Studies, Pacific Filmmaking, Pacific representation on screen and representations of the Pacific woman.

Nicole Whippy (Tota, Matagali - Mavana, Vanua Balavu, Lau, Fiji / Savusavu, Vanua Levu, Fiji / New Caledonia / New Zealand):

Nicole Whippy was born in Suva, Fiji where she lived for the first couple of years of her life until her family migrated to NZ. She is best known for her work as a Television and Theatre Actress. Vai will be her film directorial debut.

"It is an absolute honour to find myself here creating Vai with my sister and 8 other strong, inspiring Pasifika women. I hope that as a roopu we each represent our island with dignity while showcasing the uniqueness of that nation, its people and landscape."

Sharon Whippy (Tota, Matagali - Mavana, Vanua Balavu, Lau, Fiji / Savusavu, Vanua Levu, Fiji / New Caledonia / New Zealand):

Kai Loma, 'in between', that's me, that's where I write from, my writing inhabits this space. Fiji born with roots in Savusavu and Vanua Balavu, I grew up in Auckland, now I live and work in Melbourne. I've written all my life – poetry, prose and short stories. To see our stories brought to life is a privilege, it shouldn't be, but it is.



PRODUCER BIOS

Kerry Warkia (Papua New Guinean / Scottish) is a producer who has been at the forefront of some of New Zealand's most innovative content for film, television and web. Passionate about telling Māori and Pasifika stories she has just produced her second feature film *Vai* set in 7 Pacific island countries.

In 2016 Kerry produced, groundbreaking feature film *Waru* made up of 8 vignettes - made in collaboration with 9 wāhine (female) Māori film-makers.

Kerry was awarded the SPADA Independent Producer of the Year in 2017 and in 2014 Kerry was acknowledged as that year's "Woman to Watch" at the NZ WIFT Awards, a testament to Kerry's determination to tell a diverse range of stories that ignite her passion.

Kiel McNaughton (Māori - Waikato-Tainui / Chinese / Pākehā) is a director and producer most experienced in television comedy and drama.

After spending four and a half years in front of the camera as a core cast member on New Zealand's most watched soap *Shortland Street*, Kiel moved behind the camera to direct and executive produce the award-winning comedy series *Auckland Daze*. He has since directed full seasons of *Find Me A Māori Bride* and *This Is Piki* and co-produced feature films *Waru* and *Vai*.

In 2017 Kiel was awarded the SPADA Independent Producer of the Year.

Kiel's first film as a director will be *The Educator* - a fast-paced action/comedy set in a cul-de-sac in New Zealand.

Appendix 6: Lyrics for ‘The Song of the Mau Rebellion’

Samoa Songs: An Historical Collection. Music of Oceania series, Musicaphon BM30SL2705, 1989.
Used with permission. Richard Moyle.

Sāmoa e 'ua te'i
'Ua taunu'u mai Mata'u
Le ali'i le Tamatoa e lua ona manua
'Aumai le vaegā'au mai Niu Sila 'ia fa'a'uma si ata Mau.

*Samoa was astonished
When Mata'u[tia] arrived
The Commodore with his two ships
Bringing the army from New Zealand to finish off our beloved Mau.*

'Ua o'o 'i le tasi aso 'ua i uta 'o le fitafita
'Ua la'u mai fana ta'avili o ali'i 'ua fia misa
Sāmoa e, 'ua foligi na'o lima
Ma si ana fu'a o le tōgiga.

*And so, eventually, the soldiers moved inland
Carrying the machine-guns of a provocative people
Samoa, fall-in without your weapons
And wearing your flag as a uniform.*

E ui 'ina 'e fa'avauvau
'Ae iloga lou māfaufau
..... [indistinct]
..... [indistinct] fia tau
'Ua ou fuatia nei 'oe i le fua fa'atautau
Māmāsagia lou tino e pei 'o se lau lā'au.

*Although you are lonely, your mind is known.
.....[indistinct]
I have measured you with a plumb-bob
Your body is very light, like a leaf*

'Ave ia 'o se uaealesi 'i le Tupu 'o Siasia
A'oa'i ia le Niu Sila lenā 'ua na'o le oti
Na oso 'o si ona fiva 'o feagaiga 'o lo'o 'ua soli
'Ua tele 'o le talapelo o le Ta'ita'i 'o Litisoni
Fai mai 'ua ou fa'alēaogāina si o'u fu'a
'O lo'o agiagia nei i o'u luga.

*Send a cable to King George
Admonishing that New Zealand who brings only death
His fever came upon him, and he is breaking the agreements
Richardson, the Administrator, is telling many lies
He says that I am rendering useless my beloved flag
Fluttering above me.*

'Ailoga 'ā taumate Niu Sila lou māsiasi
Nusiapa 'o lo'o 'ua alu 'ua so'o le lalolagi
'A 'o fea lau āmio tonu ma lou sasagi?
Tālofa 'e te lē mamate.

*I doubt that you realise,
New Zealand, your shame
Newspaper accounts are going
Going to all parts of the world*

*Where is your justice and your boasting?
What a pity that you are not all dead.*

'Ua tagi 'o si o'u loto 'ua tepa 'i puapuagā
Tālofa iā Sāmoa 'ua 'ave 'i le Alekasā
Sā tulituli e fana fa'afagota
La'u i motololi 'i Vaimea.

*My heart grieves from gazing at the suffering
Have pity on Samoa, they are taken to Alcazar Garage
Chased by harpoons
Herded in motor lorries to Vaimea*

'Ua fai 'o le poloa'iga a le ali'i ta'ita'i'au:
“Ua lava 'o Vaimea i le fā selau
'Ua lava 'o Vaimea i le fā o selau”
'Ae 'ave tu'u na'o se isi vāega 'ua 'ave'ave tia'i i Afega.

*The army leader made the announcement
That Vaimea was sufficient for 400 [prisoners]
Vaimea was sufficient for 400
And that only the remainder were to be taken and dumped at Afega*

Na fai le su'ega o le Mau
'A si'o e le vaegā'au
I ā lātou pelu ma fana 'ua fa'aututau
“Sāmoa 'ia tu'u le Mau
'Ā lē tu'uina 'ole'ā fa'a'uma e le vaegā'au.”
'Ina tūla'i Tamasese:
“Mātou fesili mamā Amene
Mātou te lē toe fo'i pe fefe
'O Sāmoa 'uma e tatanu i lenci 'ele'ele.”

*The search for the Mau was mounted
And they were surrounded by the army
With their swords and loaded guns
“Samoa, abandon the Mau
Or else youi will be finished off by the army”.
Then Tamasese stood up,
“In innocence we ask, Amen
We will no retreat or be afraid
All of Samoa will be buried in this ground”*

Ē, Sāmoa 'ia filēmū, Sāmoa 'ia fa'apenā
Ma lau āmio mālo'i, ma lau āmio fa'aaloalo
'Ua musu lava 'Ā'ana 'ua lē toe lavā tau
Ma tepa nei 'i sasa'e 'i le sāvali i ō
'O le puapuagā
Tāisi 'o lo'o 'ua alu
'O lo'o 'ua alu 'i Europa.

*Of Samoa, be quiet, be like that
Samoa, be quiet, be quiet
In your resolve and in your courtesy
A'ana District is reluctant, and no longer able to fight
Looking eastwards at the distant messenger
What a calamity
[While] Tāisi has gone, en route to Europe.*