Tāria taku moko Māori ki ngā kiriata o te wā:

How is tikanga Māori considered through the portrayal of tangihanga in Māori film?

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An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

2025

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Abstract

This exegesis examines how tikanga Māori (customary protocol) is depicted and considered in cinematic portrayals of tangihanga (Māori funerals) in Māori film and considers the ethical responsibilities of Māori filmmakers in portraying such sacred rituals. By applying the methodological process of Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking to the depiction of tangihanga in Māori films, this research emphasises the ethical imperative for Māori filmmakers to approach such representations with cultural authenticity, humility, whanaungatanga (kinship), and accountability. It has been argued that tangihanga are not simply narrative devices in cinema but tapu rituals embedded in tikanga and whakapapa (genealogy). Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking provides the theoretical foundation for viewing these depictions as culturally sovereign acts, rather than mere cinematic choices. In this way, both Fourth Cinema and Kaupapa Māori theory reinforce the notion that Indigenous ethics and knowledge systems must guide Indigenous representation.

Note on Embargo

A permanent embargo will be placed on visual images taken by the student, of actors. This is due to not having AUT ethics approval, although the participants did give informal consent to be photographed. These images will be removed from the final (examined) version uploaded to AUT research repository. The remaining images in the final version have been sourced from internet free stock, are referenced in the reference list under the section 'Images,' and do not require third party copyright.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

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 material previously published or written by another 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.

Briar Rose Pomana
21 August 2025

Dedication

For my Mama, you are the love of my life.

Acknowledgements

I wish to extend my deepest aroha and gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Tangaroa Paora, Dr. Maureen Sinton and the faculty of Te Ara Poutama, for your guidance, patience, and unwavering belief in me. Your generosity of knowledge and encouragement have carried me through moments of uncertainty and helped shape this mahi into what it has become. I'm so proud that we accomplished a lot of 'firsts' together. Tangaroa, you will always be someone who stands in the half-light of my aspirations. Thank you, my friend.

To my AUT whānau, Whaea Hariata, Jana, Talia, Amo, Wari and Tītahi ki Tua, you have been my home away from home. Thank you for all the laughs on Jana's red couch, all the Wednesday noho at our marae, and the countless conversations in the wharekai kitchen or in parked cars. To my friends Izzy and Sam, though you may not have realised it, all those nights spent dancing in the lounge with you contributed immensely to this thesis. When I think of my twenties and the years spent with the friends turned family, it will be these mundane moments I'll treasure dearly.

Ngā Pakiaka, my creative whānau, thank you for offering a safe and inspiring space where stories could be dreamed, tested, and brought to life. Ōtaki is a portal to another world! This work does not stand alone - it is held by all of you. Tāria taku moko Māori ki ngā kiriata o te wā.

To my whānau, my brothers, my cousins and especially my Mum, thank you for teaching me the value of being a forever learner and for showing me, through your example, the strength of perseverance. I am so proud to be a Pomana woman because of you.

To my Nanny and Papa, thank you for being my favourite storytellers. The summers in Nūhaka and swims at the pipi beds with you are where I go in my dreams - I suspect this will be the case for the rest of my life.

Explanatory Introduction

Research Question

Central to this research is the question, ‘How is tikanga Māori considered through the portrayal of tangihanga in Māori film?’ This study examines the significance of applying tikanga Māori (customary protocol) in the portrayal of tangihanga (Māori funerals) in Māori films. Tangihanga are sacred, complex processes deeply embedded within Māori cultural, spiritual, and relational frameworks. They are not merely events of mourning, but are crucial for reaffirming whakapapa (genealogy), whanaungatanga (relationships), as well as cultural and spiritual identity (Nikora & Te Awekōtuku, 2013). The way tangihanga are represented on screen has real consequences for how Māori understand and relate to their practices, especially for rangatahi (younger generations) who may encounter tikanga through media as much as, or more than, through lived experience. Depicting tangihanga in film is not a neutral or purely artistic endeavour. It engages questions of cultural authority, authenticity, and responsibility.

As a Māori filmmaker, I continually reflect on how my culture influences my creativity and the art I create. Tikanga Māori and cinema are two distinct worlds with their own whakapapa and tikanga. Naturally, there are tensions when these worlds collide, such as when the real-life protocols of tangihanga are depicted fictionally in film. In te ao Māori (the Māori world), whakapapa is often described as genealogy and connections to kinship links. As Māori, we understand that our whakapapa begins from the natural environment, through Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) and Ranginui (Sky Father). These two atua (gods) begot their children, who created the world as we know it today. As Māori, we descend from these atua and in turn from the biospheres they rule. The name tangata whenua, meaning ‘people of the land,’ encapsulates this whakapapa and the relationship Māori have with the natural environment. Māori must honour their whakapapa as the descendants of atua and the domains they rule.

Te reo Māori (the Māori language) is central to this research. It is not simply a linguistic tool but a carrier of Māori cosmology, ethics, and worldview (Ruru & Nikora, 2021). By privileging te reo Māori in the naming of this exegesis, in the creative artefact, and in the ethical foundations of the overall project, this research asserts the language as an epistemic force that actively shapes Indigenous inquiry.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

This study is grounded in the principle that Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing must be privileged in research about Māori realities. Kaupapa Māori theory insists that research be conducted by Māori, for Māori, and with Māori aspirations at its centre (L. T. Smith, 2000).
In this context, representing tangihanga on film is not simply a creative act; it is a political and cultural responsibility. Depicting tangihanga without respect for tikanga risks misrepresenting and undermining the mana (power) of tangihanga as a ceremonial practice and tikanga Māori as a customary law.

The creative component of this research comprises a collection of interrelated resources developed through Wilson's (2017a) Mahi-Toi methodology. These include: a detailed film treatment containing cast breakdowns, mood boards, scene breakdowns, and tikanga considerations; a screenplay for a contemporary short film entitled *Tangi*, which explores a whānau Māori (Māori family) navigating the secret tangihanga (funeral) of their patriarch, kept hidden from their matriarch; and a director's vision statement that outlines the thematic, aesthetic, and cultural intentions of the film. This artefact serves as a site of Indigenous inquiry, aligning with Kaupapa Māori values and informed by the principles of Fourth Cinema (Barclay, 2003a), both of which will be explored further in this exegesis.

This research acknowledges that all individuals whose images appear in the visual materials associated with this artefact, including mood boards and casting references, have provided informed consent for their inclusion in this research. Participants were fully briefed on the nature, scope, and

intended outcomes of the study. They were informed of their right to withdraw and assured that their contributions would be treated with care, respect, and cultural sensitivity. This process was guided by Kaupapa Māori values of manaakitanga (care), whanaungatanga, and mana. I acknowledge and honour their contributions, which are integral to the integrity and kaupapa of this project.

This research is significant because it challenges the normalisation of Western cinematic conventions in the representation of Indigenous practices, a process where dominant, often Eurocentric, storytelling structures, visual styles, and production values are treated as the default method of filmmaking. In the context of Indigenous representation in film and media, this normalisation can lead to portrayals that frame tikanga Māori through an outsider lens. Non-Indigenous filmmakers using these Eurocentric techniques in filmmaking dull the complexity and spirituality of Indigeneity into digestible tropes for non-Indigenous audiences.

As Native American academic Michelle Raheja (2010) argues, mainstream cinematic modes often position Indigenous Peoples as objects to be looked at, rather than as subjects with agency and sovereignty. In doing so, these representations risk maintaining colonial power dynamics by privileging external interpretation over lived Indigenous experiences and knowledge. This research of tangihanga in Māori film advocates instead for the support of Māori autonomy over Māori narratives, both in front of and behind the camera, where storytelling practices are rooted in Māori epistemologies and values. In my context as a Māori filmmaker practicing Fourth Cinema and Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking, visual sovereignty means asserting creative control over how Māori identities, practices like tangihanga, and worldviews are depicted, ensuring they are grounded in our tikanga, narratives, and authority rather than filtered through colonial or outsider lenses.

This research is situated at the intersection of Kaupapa Māori Theory, Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking, and Barry Barclay's concept of Fourth Cinema, all of which fortify Indigenous control over Indigenous representation. To contextualise Barclay's theory, it is advantageous to understand the

broader framework of cinema categories: First Cinema refers to dominant, commercial, Western narrative films; Second Cinema generally refers to European auteur-driven films that seek to resist the cinematic tropes of Hollywood but often still reflect a Western gaze; and Third Cinema encompasses politically motivated filmmaking from formerly colonised or revolutionary contexts (Hokowhitu & Devadas, 2013). Barclay's Fourth Cinema goes beyond these frameworks, referring to films made by and for Indigenous people. It privileges the insider perspective, Indigenous people speaking to each other from their worldview, for their cultural purposes, through film (Barclay, 1999).

For Māori Filmmakers

This research provides a critical framework for engaging with tikanga Māori on screen in ways that are culturally grounded and ethically sound. It contributes to the development of a distinctly Māori cinematic discourse, one that challenges dominant Western film aesthetics and narrative structures. Instead, it centres mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) as a valid and powerful lens for storytelling. Practically, this study could act as a cultural resource or guide for filmmakers seeking to depict tangihanga authentically and with integrity, ensuring their work uplifts rather than distorts Māori values and practices. It encourages Māori creatives to approach filmmaking as a form of artistic expression and as a vehicle for cultural affirmation.

For Rangatahi Māori

This study supports wider efforts to decolonise media by placing cultural accountability at the forefront of Māori storytelling. It offers a model of practice where Māori voices are empowered to control our narratives, reinforcing collective cultural agency. In doing so, it enhances both the creative autonomy of Māori filmmakers and the cultural confidence of rangatahi Māori (young Māori). Rangatahi who may be disconnected from traditional practices due to urbanisation, colonisation, or diaspora can access culturally authentic representations which deepen their understanding and

connection to whakapapa. These portrayals can serve as accessible opportunities for learning and pride, reinforcing a positive cultural identity and sense of belonging.

Ultimately, the study positions Māori film not just as entertainment or education, but as a living archive of tikanga Māori, one with the power to shape cultural memory, inspire future generations, and uphold the mana of te ao Māori (the Māori world).

Positioning the Researcher

This section weaves together the personal, genealogical, and creative threads that ground this research. Guided by autoethnographic and Kaupapa Māori approaches, I draw on my own experiences of tangihanga, storytelling, and loss. These experiences have shaped not only how I understand the world but also how I approach this work. They inform the theoretical foundations of the study and breathe life into its creative expression.

Whakapapa

Figure 1

Te Poho o Te Rehu Marae Wharenui

Note. Kōwhaiwhai on the rafters of the mahau, in the wharenui Te Poho o Te Rehu in Nūhaka. Author's own photograph.

E tu ana au i te matatihi o tōku maunga rangatira

Whakarongo rā ki ngā tai

Tū mai rā te whakaruruha

Moumoukai e tū takotako nei

Ka titiro māhoi ki te waka Takitimu

ki te ngutu o te Māhia

ki a Nukutaurua

E noho ana rā Rongomaiwahine

Kō Kahungunu, te tangata whakanēnē

Taku huri wairua-a-rangi

ka hoki taku mana ki roto o Te Mahia

Ka heke mai ko ōku tīpuna

Kō Kahukuranui

Kō Hinemanuhiri

Kō Rakaipaaka te tangata e!

Ka titiro whakararo

Ki a Ngā Nūhaka,.

Puhia ngā hau ki runga I te awa Waitirohia, e rere rā!

Ko te mātāpuna o te ora,

Ngā whare rau o Te Tahinga

Rakaipaaka te iwi, e kore e maroke, e kore e ngaro.

E patukituki ake nei, ko taku manawa ki runga o tōku maunga rangatira Moumoukai.

Tīhei Mauri ora

Here I stand on the summit of my ancestral mountain

The mountain that listens to the tides

Shelters the land

Moumoukai the mountain that stands tall

I stare and see the canoe Takitimu

To the shores of Mahia

To Nukutaurua

The home of Rongomaiwāhine and Kahungunu

Even though I live afar, my spirit goes back to Mahia

I come from a line of chiefs that descend from Kahungunu and Rongomaiwahine

Kahukuranui, Hinemanuhiri, and our ancestor Rakaipaaka

I look down from our mountain

I see our land Ngā Nuhaka

The wind blows on our river Waitirohia

The river is our land's source of life

The hundred houses of Te Tahinga

The tribe of Rakaipaaka will never be dry, and will never be lost

My heart beats as I stand on my mountain, I am home!

My whānau (family) are known as the people of the clay because our whenua (land) in Nūhaka is comprised of honey-coloured uku (clay). Our maunga (mountain) is Moumoukai, named after an early encounter with a Northern war party in which my people threw their food scraps, taunting the Northerners with their abundant resources. Moumoukai translates to the wasting of food.

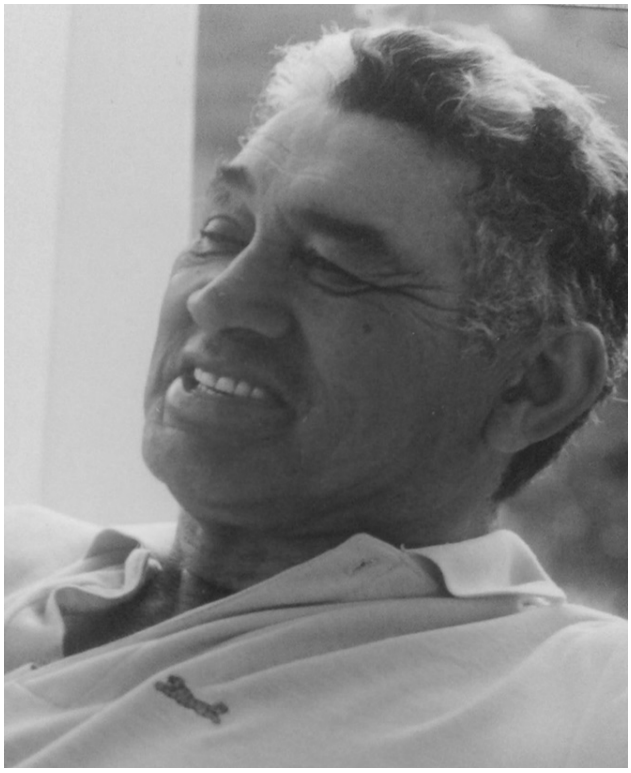
Rakaipaaka is the tipuna (ancestor) we descend from, the eldest mokopuna (grandchild) of Kahungunu and Rongomaiwahine. Many songs and pakiwaitara (stories) have been written about these two tīpuna. I was taught that Rongomaiwahine was the most beautiful woman of her time. Once Kahungunu had heard of Rongomaiwahine's beauty and status as a high chieftainess, he had to lay his eyes upon her himself. After travelling to Te Māhia, where Rongomaiwahine resided, Kahungunu competed in several challenges in opposition to Rongomaiwahine's first husband, who eventually drowned in a surfing competition. The love story of Kahungunu and Rongomaiwahine has shaped us as a hapū (subtribe) and is a pūrākau (story) I've known my entire life.

I've highlighted stories such as this one because it illustrates the people I come from and the lands from which I am sustained. These stories are taonga tuku iho (treasures passed down) that have been inherited from kaumātua (elders) by their mokopuna.

My Papa

Figure 2

Materoa Nick Pomana (My Papa)



Note. Materoa Nick Pomana (Papa), a photograph that is hung in my Nanny's house. Author's own photograph.

Storytelling is the aho (thread) that binds my whānau together. My grandfather was an incredible storyteller; my mother also inherited this trait. We are connected not only through whakapapa, but also through homes and dinner tables filled with stories, laughter, and intergenerational transfers of knowledge. In the case of my whānau, stories are integral to everyday life and the memory of time, space, and people.

Figure 3

Te Whānau o Pomana

Note. Te Whānau o Pomana at Nanny Rose's 70th Birthday, 2015. Papa is third from the right in the second row. Author's own photograph.

My Papa passed away in 2017, and it would be an understatement to say that he influenced my perspective on the world. It is through my Papa that I can recognise that a great Māori researcher and filmmaker is community-driven and personable. From this perspective, to be in good relation is dependent on how much is given back to those who have come before, as well as what will be given to those who come after. Following the arguments of Kaupapa Māori scholars Burgess and Moko-Painting (2020), when I can see both through the eyes of my Papa and the eyes of my mokopuna, I am acting in good relation and in whanaungatanga.

In both a technical and a metaphorical sense, my Papa has influenced my style of storytelling. His stories were always about someone or somewhere with which we had whakapapa connections. It did not matter whether I had met the person or been to the places he spoke of, because through him and his storytelling, I was transported.

I first noticed the impact my Papa's style of storytelling had on me when I wrote a story in primary school about my cousins. No one in my class knew who my cousins were, but I felt the urgency to document and inform my classmates about our whakapapa and the adventures we had. It reminded me of tales Papa had told us of him and his cousins.

My connection to Papa is not only emotional but also epistemological. His pūrākau offered more than narrative; they functioned as a form of embodied knowledge, transmitting values, ethics, and worldviews that have shaped my intellectual and creative orientation. The rhythm, structure, and intentionality of his storytelling taught me to recognise narrative as a site of knowledge production, where meaning is constructed through relationships, memory, and cultural context. These early encounters instilled in me an understanding of knowledge as inherently relational and grounded in whakapapa. As a result, my academic voice is informed by a commitment to narrative forms that honour these principles, while my creative practice in filmic storytelling reflects the pacing, layering, and relational focus that characterised his approach. Papa's storytelling has therefore become a foundational influence.

Māoriland

The Māoriland Charitable Trust (MCT), established in 2016 and based in Ōtaki, plays a leading role in supporting Indigenous creativity and community development in Aotearoa and beyond. The Māoriland Charitable Trust operates year-round through the Māoriland Hub, a dynamic space for Indigenous artists and storytellers. The Trust delivers a range of initiatives, including the Māoriland Indigenous Co-Lab, the Māoriland Filmmakers' Residency, and M.A.T.C.H. (Māoriland Ahi Tech

Creative Hub), which offers rangatahi Māori training in digital storytelling, creative technologies, and film production (Radio New Zealand, 2025).

At the heart of the Trust's work is the Māoriland Film Festival, the largest international Indigenous film festival in the Southern Hemisphere. Since 2014, the Māoriland Film Festival has brought together Indigenous filmmakers from around the world, using storytelling to connect communities and preserve cultural knowledge through creativity (Radio New Zealand, 2025).

Ngā Pakiaka

My involvement with Māoriland has been one of the most meaningful parts of my creative journey so far. I first joined Ngā Pakiaka, the youth collective that supports and mentors emerging Māori filmmakers, as a university student alongside my peers studying media and communications at AUT. We attended wānanga (workshops or spaces of learning) that ranged in content, but were designed to foster our storytelling abilities and gain experience working within the film industry.

Papa's Chair

Papa's Chair was written in 2021 in a Māori creative writing class. I was encouraged by Māori film educator, Jani K. T. Wilson (Ngāti Awa, Ngāpuhi, Ngā iwi o Mataatua) to "write my whānau onto the page" (personal communication, 2021) and, naturally, my Papa was the first person to come to mind. I was overseas on a student exchange in Italy when my Papa passed away, and so I was still holding on to a sense of grief and guilt surrounding his death. Before I left for Italy in the year prior, I had made a memorable trip to see my grandparents, to say my possible goodbyes to my Papa. This visit was to be the last time I saw him.

It is customary on the last night of tangihanga to host poroporoaki (eulogies) directed toward both the deceased and the whānau pani (family of the deceased). *Papa's Chair* became my poroporoaki for my grandfather.

The story follows a whānau Māori as they navigate the time immediately after a tangihanga. The film explores the quiet, stillness, and a return to the forever-changed routine of everyday life. As discussed earlier, tangihanga are not simply narrative devices but tapu (sacred, restricted) rituals. In *Papa's Chair*, I sought to honour this through a personal portrayal grounded in my own experience of loss. The main character is a young girl named Babe, who is the same age I was when Papa passed away. Babe struggles throughout the film with the loss of her Papa, with his chair becoming a vessel for his wairua (spirit) to linger. *Papa's Chair* is a deeply personal film, but as the years have passed since I initially wrote the script, I've found it to be a story many people can relate to.

Papa's Chair was the very last film in the 2025 Māoriland film festival programme, concluding with a filmmaker's question-and-answer panel that I participated in alongside three other female Indigenous filmmakers. Whakapapa was a recurring theme of the questions asked of the panel. While predominantly Māori, the audience was diverse, with people from all over the world who could relate to *Papa's Chair* and recognised the connection of whakapapa through the portrayal of tangihanga in film.

Unfortunately, a week before the film screened, Eddie Hemara, a longtime entertainer from the North and the actor who played Papa's character, passed away. Eddie's whānau attended the premiere, and as a filmmaker, I realised that whilst *Papa's Chair* was a story I had written to immortalise my own Papa, in a sense, the cast and crew had done the same for Eddie's legacy and whānau. *Papa's Chair* has become a taonga tuku iho for both of our lineages. Although *Papa's Chair* was written before the formal start of this exegesis, its evolution and reception are integral to the overall kaupapa and creative arc of this research.

Review of Knowledge

Tikanga

Tikanga underpins everything in te ao Māori. Hirini Mead (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Tuwharetoa, Tūhourangi, Tuhoe), an anthropologist, artist, and prominent Māori leader, writes that tikanga Māori and mātauranga Māori are intimately linked and are both future-focused concepts. Depending on how one engages with te ao Māori, tikanga Māori can encompass relationships, societal standards, and ethics (Mead, 2016). If we break down the word, we can understand that:

> The word 'tikanga' itself provides the clue that tikanga Māori deals with right and wrong. 'Tika' means 'to be right' and thus tikanga Māori focuses on the correct way of doing something. This involves moral judgements about appropriate ways of behaving and acting in everyday life (Mead, 2016, p. 6)

Māori art historian and researcher Ngāhuia Te Awekōtuku (Te Arawa, Tūhoe, Waikato) explains that Māori creative expression embodies tikanga and taonga tuku iho. According to Te Awekōtuku, the Māori worldview is expressed through Māori ancestral arts and innovative practices, which are essential not only in the passing down of knowledge but also in shaping our sense of place and cultural identity as tangata whenua (Te Awekōtuku, 1991).

Early Māori Cinema

The first films to portray Māori were in the late 1800s and were pivotal pieces of early cinema. According to Emiel Martens, who has written about the silver screen era in New Zealand, the first cinematic images of Māori were produced to fulfil the colonial fantasies of Europeans (Martens, 2012). This era had an industry that was Pākehā (non-Māori) dominated and hostile to Māori participation outside of their designated colonial tropes (Martens, 2012). These tropes are the noble savage and dusky maiden archetypes (Tamaira, 2010).

During the silver screen era, Ngāti Kahungunu woman Ramai Hayward starred as the leading lady of *Rewi's Last Stand* (1940), a film written and directed by Englishman Rudall Hayward. Ramai was recognised globally as a native beauty, the first silver screen actress of Māori descent. She caught the eye of many, including director Rudall, whom she married following the film's release (Martens, 2012).

Ramai gained international prominence as a filmmaker in her own right, developing her creative practice alongside her husband, Rudall. As a photographer, Ramai understood the power of the image and applied her skills to the cinematic imagery of her films (S. Smith, 2020). Together, Ramai and Rudall directed and produced documentaries such as *Song of the Wanganui* (1961) and, notably, *Inside Red China* (1958). Ramai is considered one of the first Indigenous women to direct and produce film work globally. According to Martens, Māori have explored filmmaking more extensively than any other Indigenous people worldwide (Martens, 2012).

Māori Renaissance and Fourth Cinema

Hester Joyce, a researcher in cinematic studies and the creative arts, examines the impact of Māori filmmakers such as Merata Mita (Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāi Te Rangi) and Barry Barclay (Ngāti Apa), who began experimenting with the fluidity of film work in response to the social issues Māori faced in Aotearoa during the 1970s and 1980s (Joyce, 2013). Barry Barclay's film *Ngāti* (1987) is considered the first feature-length film directed by an Indigenous filmmaker (Joyce, 2013). Merata Mita's work reflected issues central to Māori: loss of land, language, and colonisation were themes at the forefront of her cinematic work (Mita, 1988).

> At the heart of their work is the embedding of core values that govern life, whanaungatanga, mana, manaakitanga, aroha, tapu, mana tūpuna, wairua and aroha (kinship, spiritual power, hospitality, love, prohibition, descent, soul/spirit). (Joyce, 2013, p. 21)

The values both Barclay and Mita integrated into their respective films were revolutionary for the film industry at the time and are protocols derived from te ao Māori that Māori audiences instantly recognised (Joyce, 2013).

Ceremonial Practices in Film

For Māori, tangihanga is the most vigorous cultural practice still upheld, despite the profound effects of colonisation, urbanisation, and language loss. Nikora et al. (2010) point out that Māori have continued to place unconceded tapu (sacredness) on tangihanga that has not been afforded to other cultural practices. The tapu of tangihanga is what makes it particularly interesting when it comes to film. Because of the connection Māori have to tangihanga, the ceremonious grandeur of the traditional ritual becomes a powerful vehicle for storytelling.

In Indigenous filmmaking, ceremonial practices serve as doorways into the 'otherworldly,' allowing filmmakers to utilise the magic of sound and image to reflect Indigenous realities—reflecting the everyday rituals of some and transporting outsiders into the ceremony. Rudiker Janse van Rensburg, a filmmaker and art historian, argues that film in itself is a ritualistic experience:

> Film as ritual relates to collective identity creation and social relations through extensions of the cinematic experience beyond a mere physical place that provides the opportunity to watch a movie. The notion of film as ritual helps us come to terms with how films affect and influence people, their actions and their way of looking at the world–essentially transforming them, in some or other way (Janse van Rensburg, 2021, p. 2)

Wilson explores how the pōwhiri (traditional welcoming ceremony) has been portrayed in film. She considers how the "real pōwhiri influences the reel and perhaps vice versa" (Wilson, 2017b, p. 209). Contending with cinematic limitations such as time and accessibility, Wilson questions whether ceremonial practices such as pōwhiri and tangihanga have a cultural integrity that should not be replicated for entertainment purposes, whilst also noting that, according to Hirini Mead, pōwhiri and

tangihanga were events that were full of performance and amusement even before cameras were brought onto the marae (Mead, 2016).

Wilson (2017b) discusses the tensions between ritual and film production constraints:

> In film as in life, when Māori control the performance of culture and ritual, Māori identity is affirmed, and belonging to tūrangawaewae is confirmed. However, it cannot be ignored that the limitations of the cinematic medium, particularly in terms of time constraints, means that Indigenous film-makers too are forced to make decisions about what aspects of the ritual they should whiri in to the narrative, and what to leave out. Thus, despite the film-maker's best intentions to entice audiences to know about the rituals, the two-hour-or-so time restriction of a general cinematic attraction means they are disempowered from conveying more than a very few aspects (p. 214)

Although tikanga is ever-changing and adaptable, there are aspects of life where its application will be held to rigorous standards. Tangihanga are an example of this (Wilson, 2017b). Ultimately, when condensed and portrayed through film and mainstream TV, tangihanga will undoubtedly face challenges. An example could be the transmission of knowledge from one kaikōrero (speaker) to another. In some instances, this exchange between speakers can take hours. While tangihanga can be entertaining, there is no instantaneity to tangihanga, and this is the tension between tangihanga and filmmaking. Moreover, because tangihanga is a consistent theme throughout Māori storytelling, such as in origin stories of ngā Atua Māori and whānau pūrākau, tikanga must be considered and applied in the filmmaking process.

Film Analysis

Representing Tangihanga in Māori Cinema: Close Readings

This chapter undertakes close readings of four Māori films: *Ngāti* (1987), *Kerosene Creek* (2004), *Waru* (2017), and *Cousins* (2021), examining how tikanga Māori is considered in the cinematic portrayal of tangihanga. These films span a range of periods, styles, and perspectives, and together offer a diverse representation of how Māori customs surrounding death, grief, and spiritual continuity are depicted on screen. Each film is analysed with attention to its narrative approach, visual filmic language, and consideration of specific tikanga practices.

Ngāti

Film Overview

Barry Barclay's *Ngāti* (1987) is a landmark of Fourth Cinema and the first feature film written and directed by Māori (J. Smith, 2008). *Ngāti* was filmed over five weeks in the rural settlement of Waipiro Bay on the East Coast of New Zealand. Set in the fictional East Coast community of Kapua in the 1940s, the film follows a young doctor from overseas who returns to discover his whakapapa and inadvertently becomes involved in the tangihanga of a young boy, Rōpata. The film blends naturalistic storytelling with deep cultural knowledge, providing one of the earliest cinematic representations of tangihanga from a Māori perspective. *Ngāti* was a film that employed a Māori cast and crew, whilst also giving audiences a glimpse into Māori whānau dynamics and rural life (Martens, 2012).

Portrayal of Tangihanga

The tangihanga is depicted through customary elements: whānau gathering, open casket viewing, whaikōrero (traditional speeches), and shared grief. These rituals are shown with subtlety and

intimacy, reflecting the film's observational style. Whilst the marae (Māori meeting place) is a central setting in the film, the gathering of people and whānau to view Rōpata's body takes place at a homestead. A woman, separate from the whānau pani, performs a karanga (traditional call) to a group coming onto the homestead's grounds, a portrayal of tikanga wherein whānau pani are reserved the right to mourn in private.

A second kaikaranga (caller) begins, representing the visiting group. She uses a napkin in her hand, waving it as she addresses Rōpata directly: "Haere atu rā e tama e, ki o mātua tīpuna i te pō e," translating to "Go boy, to your ancestors in the dark void" (Barclay, 1987).

Following this scene, Barclay pays close attention to the informalities of tangihanga. Men are shown cutting firewood for the hāngi (earth oven) pit, and preparing food: meats and vegetables. Interestingly, this labour is being carried out entirely by men. This could be to communicate the tapu nature of women during tangihanga, but this is not mentioned in the film. We only see the women in this sequence of scenes in and around the body of Rōpata. They are the stalwarts upholding the formal tikanga of tangihanga: karanga; dressing the body; assisting the whānau pani.

At the ururpā (cemetery) we can see Rōpata's casket surrounded by whānau. Whilst there are other gravestones present in the scene, we cannot see the names on the tombs, and it is apparent that the urupā is fictional and purpose-built for the film. The use of kawakawa and fern plants is significant, as we see them not only adorning Rōpata's casket, but also some of the women's hair. Kawakawa is used in ceremonial practices and rituals such as tangihanga by Māori as a tohu (sign) of grief, but also as a natural medicinal tool of healing. (McDonald, 2010).

In the background of the soundscape, a man is performing incantations. His voice is firm, yet barely audible. He is performing inoi (Christian prayers) from a bible.

Tikanga Consideration

Tikanga is portrayed as inherent and unforced, not explained, but lived. Non-Māori characters (including the doctor) observe but do not interrupt the tikanga in action. An example of this occurs when the community leaves the cemetery, and a faucet with running water is attached to the fence. Each person washes their hands, flicks the water over themselves and others and enacts the cultural practice of whakanoa (releasing tapu/sacredness, making ordinary).

There is a scene where Te One, a small boy the same age as Rōpata, shows Greg, the young doctor, how to whakanoa when leaving the urupā. After being asked what he is doing by Greg, Te One replies, “Clearing the tapu, you should do this if you're a Māori.” To which Greg replies, “I'm only a new Māori” (Barclay, 1987). As we watch both Greg and Te One flick the water from the faucet over themselves, we engage as the audience in our whakanoa. Through humour, we as the audience are lifted out of the tapu of the urupā and made noa through the water, but also through the laughter shared. The tangihanga of Rōpata is done, and, along with it, the weight of the tangihanga is lifted.

Critical Reflection

Ngāti is a foundational film for understanding tangihanga cinematically. It stands as a powerful example of what respectful, culturally grounded representation can look like and is a reference point for how to centre tikanga visually without over-narrating it. *Ngāti* presents tikanga Māori as lived and unmediated, resisting exoticism and allowing Māori customs to exist without exposition. The primary observation of this analysis is that non-Māori characters observe but do not fully interpret Māori rituals, and the community's internal dynamics are prioritised over the understanding of non-Māori audiences.

Kerosene Creek

Film Overview

Kerosene Creek (2004), written and directed by Michael Bennett (Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Whakaue) is a short coming-of-age drama that follows two young friends, Jayde and Mu, who accompany their older siblings for a swim at the geothermal swimming hole, Kerosene Creek. The film cuts between scenes of that summer's day and scenes at the tangihanga of Mu and his older brother, which Jayde and her whānau attend. As the audience, we do not see the tragedy that leads to their deaths.

The tangihanga is shot over three days, during which Jayde must process her grief, a sense of regret and the loss of innocence. The film is shot on 35mm film and is set on Rangitihi marae in Matatā, where the director, Michael Bennett, has whakapapa.

Portrayal of Tangihanga

Three key events happen in this depiction of tangihanga: the pōwhiri, the poroporoaki, and the closing of the caskets.

The pōwhiri commences the film with two caskets being brought onto Rangitihi marae. The scene cuts to inside the wharenui (meeting house), where there is a clear separation of wāhine (women) and tāne (men). The wāhine are sitting on the ground atop mattresses around the two caskets, while the men sit on the pae tapu (speakers' bench) opposite the caskets.

When we revisit the tangihanga after watching flashbacks, we are transported to the night of the poroporoaki. It is dark, and mourners have changed out of their pōwhiri clothes and into warmer, comfortable attire. As Māori, we know it is the final night with the tūpāpaku as the whānau and community who have come to participate in the tangihanga are saying their final goodbyes, sharing memories and singing to both the bodies of the boys and their whānau pani.

Following the poroporoaki, the lighting has changed again, and it appears to be the next morning. A minister is conducting a service in te reo Māori, and as two men begin to close the caskets of the brothers, wāhine are wailing and throwing themselves across the casket. This is not an unusual occurrence at tangihanga, and given the context of this film, with a whānau losing two young men, such a dramatisation of grief would be expected. Nikora and Te Awekōtuku (2013) note, "Their grief is anticipated. We expect them to be out of it, a mess, freaking out, numb, shocked and traumatised, and on autopilot. We do not encourage them to bear up and man it out" (p. 170). The tangihanga concludes with Jayde placing a taonga (prized possession) she shared with Mu into his casket before they close his lid and carry him and his brother out of the wharenui. It is presumed that they will make their way to the burial at the urupā.

Tikanga Consideration

Of the three Māori films analysed in this exegesis, *Kerosene Creek* most explicitly foregrounds the ritualistic nature of tangihanga, making it a central dramatic component of the film's narrative arc. This film presents an immersive and candid portrayal of the mourning process, showcasing several ceremonial elements. The audience is brought directly into the pōwhiri sequence, where karanga and whaikōrero are exchanged between hosts and visitors, setting a tapu tone. We witness waiata tangi (songs of mourning), the recitation of karakia, and the emotionally charged poroporoaki, all of which are performed with solemnity and love. These rituals are not relegated to the background or abbreviated; instead, they are treated as integral to the emotional and cultural stakes of the story and its characters.

The tangihanga scenes are highly dramatised, not only through performance but also through cinematic choices. The decision to hold the tangihanga over multiple days lends authenticity and consideration, allowing it to have its moment and not be a fleeting additional scene. Throughout the tangihanga, the protagonist, Jayde, is compelled to confront not only her grief but also her guilt and

internal conflict, highlighting the transformative nature of tangihanga as both a cultural ceremony and a personal reckoning. In conclusion, compared to other films analysed in this exegesis, *Kerosene Creek* presents the most complete and traditional representation of tangihanga, giving screen time and reverence to multiple stages of the ceremonial process.

Critical Reflection

The tangihanga scenes in *Kerosene Creek* raise important ethical and cultural questions, particularly around its visual treatment of the tūpāpaku (corpse) of Mu and his brother. The film features extended and emotionally charged close-up shots of their bodies, including scenes of the bodies lying in caskets within the wharenui, with the lid being lowered and placed upon them. While these images are undoubtedly intended to convey the rawness and intensity of tangihanga, they also risk transgressing cultural and spiritual boundaries. Within te ao Māori, the tūpāpaku is considered deeply tapu; to simulate death so literally in film, as seen in *Kerosene Creek*, where actors are asked to embody a tūpāpaku, lie inside a coffin, and be filmed up close while a lid is placed over them, introduces a level of spiritual vulnerability that can have real consequences for both cast and crew. Such decisions must be critically examined.

Although *Kerosene Creek* successfully portrays the ceremonial elements of tangihanga, including karanga, whaikōrero, waiata tangi, and poroporoaki, the visual intimacy with the tūpāpaku shifts the focus from collective ritual to individual spectacle. In doing so, the film risks unsettling the tapu of the real-life wharenui of Rangitihi and transforming sacred acts into cinematic drama.

Waru

Film Overview

Waru (2017) is an anthology feature directed by eight Māori wāhine, each contributing a single, continuous-take segment, centred around the tangihanga of a child, named Waru, who has died because of abuse. While Waru's death is never directly shown, its emotional and cultural impact reverberates through each segment. The film's structure presents a multifaceted examination of the effects of trauma and grief in one predominantly Māori community. There is a scene in *Waru* that offers a distinct portrayal of tikanga. In the segment titled "Ranui," directed by Renae Maihi (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whakaue), there is an exchange between the great-grandmothers of Waru.

Portrayal of Tangihanga

"Ranui" begins with two men and an older woman sobbing in a car. The dialogue in this film is precise. It is almost entirely in te reo Māori, with English subtitles provided. The sobbing and crying throughout the film *is* the dialogue. The rhythm of the cries is instantly recognisable as deep pain. Immediately, we, as the audience, but also as Māori, recognise that there is a weight being carried by these people that transcends the realm of the living. It is spiritually charged.
The woman in the car is wearing a parekawakawa*,* a head wreath made of kawakawa foliage, symbolising a time of mourning, similar to its use in *Ngāti* (McDonald, 2010).

After arriving at the marae, the woman leads the two men toward the wharenui. This is customary for most marae and iwi. She begins to karanga to the spirit of Waru, who we assume is lying in the wharenui. She does this *before* the kaikaranga of the marae has welcomed them onto the grounds. This is a breach of kawa (marae protocol) and marks the initial moment that we, as a Māori audience, become aware of something about to occur between the manuhiri (visitors) and the people of the marae.

There is a moment upon entry between one of the manuhiri men and another older man where the older man stands to hongi (press noses in exchange of essence), but instead is motioned to hold the formalities by the manuhiri. This is yet another indication of tension between the two parties.

An older woman who is sitting with the tūpāpaku returns in karanga to the first older woman. We know through their calls and exchanged dialogue that they are both the maternal and paternal great-grandmothers. It is revealed that the manuhiri have come to take the tūpāpaku of Waru to his paternal lands so that his spirit may rest. There is resistance from the maternal grandmother, but inevitably, she cannot stop them because this is a matter of tikanga. “He kōhiwi, mō te kōhiwi” (A bone, for a bone). (Maihi, 2017). Also in the frame is a carved family heirloom, a tiki at the foot of the maternal grandmother. This is the bone that has been exchanged for the tūpāpaku.

A parekawakawa is placed on the casket as the paternal whānau pani begin to exit the marae. As they walk, they sing a waiata aroha (lament song), and another kaikaranga from the marae follows them out, performing poroporoaki.

Tikanga Consideration

Waru does not present a single, unified version of tikanga. Instead, it honours the complexity of Māori responses to grief. Some tikanga practices are shown with reverence (such as karanga and collective mourning). In contrast, others are disrupted or challenged by modern realities, such as fractured whānau relationships, disconnection from te ao Māori, or the impact of colonisation. The tangihanga functions less as a singular event and more as a cultural heartbeat, connecting each director’s story while exposing varying degrees of connection to tikanga. The grief is undeniable and feels authentically Māori. Unlike Pākehā funerals, tangihanga encourages the outpouring of public mourning, and this is communicated instantly in “Ranui.” Nikora and Te Awekōtuku (2013) write, “We recognise their agonizings, their sobbing, and public lamentation, as part of a familiar process. We create a dedicated space for this to happen, ever conscious of the need for respite from the intensity of memory and heaving emotions” (p. 170).

Waru challenges dominant cinematic portrayals of Māori death and mourning by focusing on wāhine Māori voices and by framing tangihanga as an evolving, lived reality rather than a static tradition. Its fragmented form reflects the fragmentation of Māori communities impacted by intergenerational trauma, while still affirming the power and presence of tikanga as a unifying force. *Waru* offers both inspiration and a challenge: honour tikanga Māori and rituals in film without simplification.

Critical Analysis

The filmmakers' choice to shoot each segment of *Waru* in one take and the direct nature of "Ranui" poses an inquiry into the methods the filmmaker considered and applied throughout the production process. Although the cast and director are Māori, was there a cultural consultant on set? What were the spiritual safety parameters put in place for those repetitively performing karanga and waiata tangi? Is it appropriate to subjugate cast and crew to a fictional but naturalistic tangihanga? These are gaps in the literature that this research has identified and will elaborate on in the concluding chapters.

Cousins

Film Overview

Directed by Ainsley Gardiner (Ngāti Awa, Te Whānau-a-Apanui, Ngāti Pikiao, Te Whakatōhea) and Briar Grace-Smith (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hau) and based on the novel by Patricia Grace (Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Raukawa), *Cousins* (2021) is a feature film that traces the lives of three wāhine Māori cousins across decades. The film interweaves themes of displacement, identity, and reconnection, and it features moments of tangihanga as a pivotal scene in the characters' reconnection to each other and to home.

Portrayal of Tangihanga

Towards the end of the film, Mata, a cousin who spends the film displaced, is staying with her staunch matriarchal cousin Makareta in the city, away from their ancestral home. The scene begins with Mata

returning home to find an older woman standing in the lounge, her arms open and welcoming. After we see Mata's confused reaction, the camera cuts back to the lounge, where the woman has disappeared; however, the tūpāpaku of Makareta is sitting on a lounge chair. She is peaceful, and the camera observes her in this state, with space and gentleness. There is no dialogue or music in this scene; only atmospheric background sounds are present.

There are flashbacks of their childhood as Mata returns to her and Makareta's marae, the first time she's been back since she was a young girl. Makareta's whānau pani, including Mata, bring her casket onto the marae with the men leading the way. We hear the karanga, but never actually see either the kaikaranga from the arriving ope (group) or the ahikaa (those who stay close to the marae). The third protagonist and cousin, Missy, immediately runs out of the wharenui to embrace Mata. This is the first time throughout the film that Mata breaks down. She is wailing, and this only intensifies as her cousin Missy hugs her. The two cousins create their own unique dialogue, they cry into one another sharing their pain and love. Missy then grabs Mata's hand, leading her into their wharenui, as she did when they were children.

Tikanga Consideration

In *Cousins*, the tangihanga of Makareta becomes a deeply symbolic and emotional turning point, not only for the whānau, but especially for Mata's character. The tangihanga of Makareta stands as a pivotal moment of reawakening and reconnection. Mata, who has spent most of her life alienated from her culture, language, and whānau, due to systemic state intervention, is drawn back home physically, emotionally, and spiritually through the death of her cousin, Makareta. The act of accompanying the tūpāpaku back to their ancestral land catalyses Mata's return. It is a restoration of whakapapa, whānau, memory, and rangatiratanga. This film conveys the power of tangihanga to bring people home, even after decades of disconnection, and highlights its enduring role as a site of cultural regeneration and intergenerational healing.

Critical Reflection

Cousins offers a powerful and emotionally resonant depiction of tangihanga as an opportunity to reconnect and return to whānau and whenua. However, there are moments where the ceremonial aspects of tikanga could have been more explicitly foregrounded to honour the cultural depth of the occasion further. For example, the karanga is a central ritual element of the pōwhiri process and of welcoming the tūpāpaku onto the marae, but in *Cousins* it is only heard in the background, disembodied from the person performing it. While this choice may have been made to preserve a sense of mood or atmosphere, it risks reducing the karanga to a symbolic soundscape, rather than a living, embodied act of wairuatanga (spirituality) and mana.

Summary

The films *Ngāti*, *Kerosene Creek*, *Waru,* and *Cousins* each contribute to a layered understanding of how tangihanga is represented in Māori film. In *Ngāti*, tangihanga is subtly woven into the film's observational narrative, presented with care, where tikanga unfolds naturally without the need for overt explanation. Through humour and relational cues, the film affirms that mourning is both tapu and collective; it is a process to be lived and not narrated.

In contrast, *Kerosene Creek* offers a detailed and emotionally heightened depiction of tangihanga, explicitly foregrounding each ceremonial element, from pōwhiri and karakia to poroporoaki. While the film's immersive portrayal honours a fuller observation of tangihanga, it also raises questions around cultural safety, particularly in the cinematic treatment of tūpāpaku and the potential spiritual risks of simulating such deeply tapu moments on screen.

Cousins presents tangihanga as a space of return, both emotionally and spiritually. In this film, tangihanga becomes a threshold into belonging, yet some of the ceremonial elements remain backgrounded, such as the karanga, which is heard but not seen. The absence of the kaikaranga as a

visible, embodied figure raises concerns about whose roles are honoured in the visual language of film and reminds us that Māori ritual must not be reduced to atmospheric effect.

In *Waru*, tikanga is both upheld and contested, with breaches in protocol made visible as part of the drama itself. The karanga, the parekawakawa, and the spiritual exchange of tūpāpaku are performed with emotional weight, capturing the tensions of grief, legacy, and tikanga. Yet the intense realism of the scene prompts critical questions around the spiritual toll of recreating such rituals in film. The repetition of ceremonial acts for the camera, such as karanga and waiata tangi, calls for further inquiry into the ethical and tikanga considerations observed and applied during production.

Together, these films reveal tangihanga not as a static ritual but as an ever-evolving expression of Māori relationality, spirituality, and resilience. Importantly, they also expose the responsibility of filmmakers to honour not only the form of tikanga, but its spiritual function and ethical integrity, both on screen and behind the scenes during the filmmaking process. While Kaupapa Māori and Fourth Cinema provide powerful frameworks for understanding Indigenous film, there remains a lack of sustained attention to the portrayal of tangihanga as sacred, living practice. This research positions such representations as both political and spiritual acts of reclamation, requiring ethical accountability and cultural intimacy.

Theoretical, Historical, and Critical Contexts

Kaupapa Māori Theory

As Māori, we understand that theorisation is in our blood. Our ancestors were dreamers and philosophers who observed the world around them and intellectualised systems across a broad spectrum of practices and activities. Leonie Pihama (Te Ātiawa, Ngā Māhanga a Tairi, Ngāti Māhanga), a prominent film and Kaupapa Māori scholar, states:

> The navigational expertise of our people highlights a deep understanding of a range of sciences related to building waka, tides and sea movement, distance navigation, cosmology and much more. Each of these skill and knowledge areas requires the development of frameworks for understanding and explaining the knowledge base that informs Kaupapa Māori (2010, p. 6)

These complex knowledge systems were passed down through whakapapa and have become ingrained in the everyday lives of Māori communities. In a theoretical sense, Kaupapa Māori reflects Māori worldviews and systems in research and practice. It incorporates mātauranga Māori, tikanga, and kawa, all of which are essential elements of Māori cultural ways of thinking and being (L. T. Smith, 2000). As proposed by Pihama (2010), Kaupapa Māori uses mātauranga Māori as a cultural template. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou), an esteemed Kaupapa Māori researcher and educator explains that

> Kaupapa Māori Research is neither fixed nor rigid. It is open-ended, it is ethical, systematic and accountable. It is scientific, open to existing methodologies, informed and critical. BUT, it comes from tangata whenua, from whānau, hapu and iwi. It is undertaken by Māori. It is for Māori, and it is with Māori (L. T. Smith, 2000, p. 47)

Kaupapa Māori research considers mātauranga tuku iho (traditional knowledge passed down) and focuses on Māori ideologies, examining how these interact and impact Māori communities (Barnes, 2000). Henry and Wikaire (2013) describe four principles that they believe create the foundation of

Kaupapa Māori research: being for, with, and by Māori; validating Māori language and culture; empowering Māori people; and delivering positive outcomes for Māori.

Correspondingly, whakapapa, te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, rangatiratanga (sovereignty), and mana are core values that encompass these principles. As described by Smith, these values are mātauranga-informed by ancestral traditions that exist outside of Western views of knowledge (L. T. Smith, 2015). Kaupapa Māori concepts, such as whakapapa, te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, rangatiratanga, and mana, are integral to everyday life for Māori. From the academy to the pae tapu, this is what distinguishes Kaupapa Māori from orthodox methods of Pākehā (non-Māori) research (Walker et al., 2006).

Fourth Cinema

As an Indigenous filmmaker, I will always look to those who have come before me, as they can provide a framework of practice and theory. Kahurangi Waititi's (Te Whānau a Apanui, Ngāti Porou, Ngai Tahu) 2007 Master's thesis, which explored the application of Kaupapa Māori theory to documentary film, revealed that the concepts of Fourth Cinema and Kaupapa Māori were closely intertwined. "The construction of alternative methods of filming Māori is not at all a new concept. Barclay, for example, talks about creating a category called Fourth Cinema or Indigenous Cinema" (Waititi, 2007, p. 17). This connection provides a critical foundation for understanding how Indigenous filmmakers assert autonomy over both representation and audience, a principle that not only resonates with my own creative practice but also aligns with the framework of Fourth Cinema.

To elaborate, Fourth Cinema is a cinematic category that focuses on the stories of Indigenous people. Similarly to the theoretical perspective of Kaupapa Māori, Barry Barclay's Fourth Cinema distinguishes films being made by Indigenous artists for the entertainment and enjoyment of Indigenous audiences (Barclay, 2015).

For a film to be categorised as Fourth Cinema, the filmmaker and the film's content must be Indigenous and exhibit elements of that culture, whether external, such as rituals, practices, and language, or internal, such as values, ideologies, and customs (Barclay 1999). Fourth Cinema applies the principles of Kaupapa Māori in practice, utilising the creative medium of film. Joyce (2013) conveys this connection, arguing that the core Māori values that govern Māori life, and indeed Kaupapa Māori, are at the heart of Fourth Cinema. Thus, Fourth Cinema becomes a stable theoretical perspective when conducting artistic practice-led research.

Methodologies and Processes

Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking

Derived from Kaupapa Māori theory, Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking is a methodological process that seeks to create films that are culturally sensitive and grounded in Māori values. These values include tikanga, whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, aroha (love), tapu, and wairuatanga (Waititi, 2007). Waititi (2007) explains that Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking prioritises the integration of these Māori epistemological and metaphysical traditions, not just for entertainment purposes but for the cultural safety of cast, crew and audience members.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith identifies that the creative expression of Māori film has the most significant potential through Kaupapa Māori. This is because cinema allows Māori voices and storytelling to express diverse realities and experiences (L. T. Smith, 2015). Michelle Lee (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Waewae, Kāti Mamoe, Ngāti Kahungunu, Waitaha, Ngāti Rurua), a trans-media art practitioner and researcher, uses the pae tapu as an example in her doctoral dissertation, which explores media and storytelling through Kaupapa Māori. Lee argues that Māori are natural entertainers, utilising these storytelling capabilities as a means of sharing knowledge and whakapapa (Lee, 2007). “Our oral culture can now embrace an element in which we have the opportunity to capture kaumātua speaking and interacting on film. The Māori culture survived through the passing down of narratives and experiences. It has always been important” (Waititi, 2007, p. 19). Together, Lee and Waititi highlight how film can act as a contemporary extension of traditional Māori storytelling practices, an evolving space where ancestral voices and lived experiences continue to be shared. In my own work, I draw from this understanding, seeking to create films that uphold the values of Kaupapa Māori while allowing stories to unfold through the same intergenerational exchange that has sustained our culture for centuries.

This research project has found that the primary difference between Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking and Fourth Cinema lies in their approaches to whanaungatanga. Whanaungatanga in Fourth Cinema serves as a methodology driven by industry, peer support, authenticity of the story, and audience response. While Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking also prioritises this distinction, it goes further, to include the relationship the filmmakers must have with the communities they are filming within, about, and for. Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking draws on the same responsibility shouldered by a Kaupapa Māori researcher. It embraces the full spectrum of whanaungatanga and collectivism. This finding will be expanded on in the findings chapter of this exegesis.

Mahi-Toi

Sir Tīmoti Kāretu (Ngāti Kahungunu, Tūhoe), a Māori language and arts expert, asserts that Māori intellectuals are equally creative in their academic pursuits as they are in their artistic endeavours (Kāretu, 2008). Thus, film as a form of toi Māori (Māori art) naturally conveys the conceptual world of Kaupapa Māori theory into the physical world. The academy is then, in turn, made more accessible for those who do not usually engage with scholarly work (Wilson, 2017a).

This research positions Mahi-Toi as a culturally grounded and rigorous methodology for Māori practice-led research. Developed by Wilson (2017a), Mahi-Toi draws on the structure of film production —pre-production, production, and post-production — as a methodological framework. It offers a way to navigate between academic and creative vernaculars, ensuring that Māori values, relationships, and ways of knowing remain central throughout the research process. Informed by Waititi's (2023) Toi Tuku Iho methodology, this chapter situates creative labour as a form of inquiry capable of fostering oranga (wellbeing) and mana motuhake *(*self-determination).

Epistemological Foundations

Mahi-Toi is rooted in a Māori epistemological framework, where mātauranga is embodied, relational, and situated within whakapapa, whenua, and wairua. This research recognises that knowledge is not solely transmitted through written text, but also through image, performance, sound, and ritual. It is held in karakia, expressed through toi, and nurtured in wānanga. In the interest of this research, mātauranga is transmitted through film.

Wilson (2017a) describes Mahi-Toi as a process in which theory and practice "enrich and give structure to each other" (p. 117), allowing for the artist-researcher to navigate both academic and Indigenous domains of knowledge. Waititi (2023) reinforces this position, asserting that toi provides access to "deep spaces of understanding and enlightenment through theory and praxis" (p. 32). Through this lens, knowledge is activated through doing mahi-ā-ringa (work with the hands) and arises from collective, lived, and spiritual experience.

Theoretical Positioning

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory provides tools such as contrapuntal reading (Said, 1993), which illuminate the tensions between colonial and Indigenous narratives. However, Wilson (2017a) critiques its limitations for Māori research. She argues that postcolonial frameworks, while useful in deconstructing power dynamics, often presume the existence of a time after colonisation. For Māori communities still experiencing the enduring impacts of colonisation, this framing can be reductive. Mahi-Toi instead asserts a monophonic voice, anchored in iwi-specific knowledge, where clarity and cultural sovereignty are prioritised.

Kaupapa Māori Theory

Mahi-Toi aligns inherently with Kaupapa Māori theory through its commitment to Māori ways of knowing, doing, and being. As explained in the theoretical perspectives chapter of this research, at its core, Kaupapa Māori research is about affirming the legitimacy of Māori epistemologies, privileging Māori voices, and enacting tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) throughout the research process (L. T. Smith, 1999). Mahi-Toi actualises these principles by recognising Māori creative practice, not just as an output, but as a valid and rigorous method of inquiry that emerges from whakapapa, wairua, and tikanga. As a methodological framework, Mahi-Toi enables the artist-researcher to work within a relational and reflexive cycle where theory and practice continually inform each other (Wilson, 2017a).

This alignment extends into Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking, by which Mahi-Toi situates the creative process within communal and ethical obligations to whānau, hapū, and iwi. Both paradigms resist colonial modes of production and instead privilege collaborative, kaupapa-driven processes that are accountable to Māori communities and cultural protocols.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity in this research is guided by Te Ara Tika (Hudson et al., 2010), a framework for Māori research ethics based on whakapapa (relational positioning), tikanga, mana, and manaakitanga. These values are not merely theoretical; they are enacted at every stage of the research, from the first conversation with whānau, to karakia on set, to shared authorship and community feedback. Te Ara Tika helps ensure that consent is not a one-time procedural step but an ongoing, negotiated relationship. This constant referral back to hapori (community) aligns with the previous discussion regarding Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking and the responsibility held by the filmmaker to be guided by whanaungatanga and whakapapa (Waititi, 2007).

Research Design

Table 1. Process for Mahi-Toi methodology.

Mahi-Toi Pre-Production	Mahi-Toi Production	Mahi-Toi Post-Production
Theme	Do	Last Looks
Conceptualisation	Review/revisit the concept	Release
Visualisation	Edit/re-edit	Debrief/reflection
Planning (Timing)	Complete	
Resources		
Material Preparation		

Note. Table created by author.

Mahi-Toi Pre-Production: *Te Kore*–The Space of Potential

Theme and Conceptualisation

The central theme of this research is the portrayal of tangihanga in Māori cinema. This project examines how such depictions uphold or breach tikanga, and what responsibilities Māori filmmakers carry in presenting these sacred practices. This conceptualisation is informed by Kaupapa Māori theory, Fourth Cinema (Barclay, 2003b), and the lived experiences of tangihanga within Ngāti Kahungunu.

Waititi (2023) also informs this stage by highlighting the capacity of toi to activate oranga and mana motuhake within iwi contexts. This stage draws on whakapapa as both intellectual and genealogical grounding.

Visualisation and Planning

Visualisation includes the development of a screenplay and film treatment that explores the nuances of tangihanga. These are not just creative artefacts but also sites of inquiry. Visual tools such as mood boards, scene breakdowns, and location scouting help shape the research process and clarify the ethical and aesthetic intentions.

Planning includes timelines, budget development, and a comprehensive tikanga-based briefing for cast and crew. These are included in the film treatment. Here, Te Ara Tika is operationalised to ensure research and production processes are culturally safe. It provides a values-based model for engaging with collaborators, handling data and imagery, and maintaining relational accountability to hapori Māori (Hudson et al., 2010).

Resources and Material Preparation

This phase mobilises whakapapa and whānau networks to source equipment, locations, and actors for the photoshoot included in the film treatment. The preparation of materials, script revisions, casting information, and wardrobe planning is conducted with cultural and spiritual sensitivity. Possible locations for the film are chosen not only for their visual aesthetics but for their whakapapa connections and appropriateness in portraying tangihanga.

Mahi-Toi Production: *Te Pō*–The Space of Becoming

Implementation

This phase involves the actualisation of the research plan and execution of the elements required in the film treatment: writing the screenplay, directing a photoshoot, and producing the director's vision. As Wilson (2017a) notes, this work "takes physical, mental and spiritual stamina" (p. 122). Filmmaking in this context is not a detached task but an embodied practice of tikanga. Each action, each word spoken, each image captured carries cultural weight and responsibility.

Review and Re-edit

Mahi-Toi integrates editing into the production phase, rather than the post-production phase. In conventional film practice, editing is typically positioned after filming concludes. However, Wilson (2017a) locates editing as part of mahi-ā-ringa, a craft grounded in presence, reflexivity, and real-time responsiveness. Re-editing during production enables tikanga-based reflection and ensures that cultural breaches are addressed promptly.

This phase includes community consultation, particularly with whānau and hapori who offer cultural insight and critique. As Waititi (2023) affirms, this iterative process is a strength of toi Māori, demanding intellectual rigour and cultural clarity.

Mahi-Toi Post-Production: *Te Ao Mārama*–The Space of Illumination

Last Looks

This stage involves final revisions and cultural sign-off. Colour grading, audio mastering, and translations are all checked for alignment with kaupapa. The creative work is reviewed as a taonga, not just an output but a cultural offering.

Release

The project is shared with whānau, hapori, and academic audiences. Whakawhiti kōrero (discussions) are held; mihi (acknowledgements) are given and received. The release process reaffirms the collaborative, relational, and spiritual nature of the work.

Debrief and Reflection

Final wānanga sessions offer a space for collective reflection. Community responses are documented, and any future research opportunities are identified. The project closes not with a conclusion but with a return to whakapapa, recognising the ongoing, cyclical nature of Māori knowledge and storytelling.

Mahi-Toi is more than a structure; it is a methodology rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems, artistic labour, and relational ethics. It enables Māori researchers to bring theory and practice into academia through culturally responsive, community-engaged processes. By incorporating insights from Wilson (2017a) and Waititi (2023), this chapter affirms that toi Māori is not only a valid methodology but a transformative one, capable of restoring mana, upholding tikanga, and embodying Kaupapa Māori values through every stage of research.

Overview of the Project

Conceptual Origins

The creative output for this research is a script and treatment for a film named *Tangi*. The idea emerged from a desire to explore how grief is held, witnessed, and expressed within Māori communities, especially in circumstances where the whānau is physically or emotionally fragmented. While the films analysed in this exegesis provided diverse portrayals of tangihanga, I became interested in what happens when tikanga is felt but not always followed, or when grief plays out in quiet, domestic spaces, separate from the marae and the tikanga that occupies that environment.

Drawing on my own lived experience and that of my whānau, I developed *Tangi* to explore the distinction of those small, often unspoken gestures of tangihanga and tikanga. I have attended and observed many tangihanga that have been held at marae, in the homes of whānau, at community centres, and even at schools. Each tangihanga endeavoured to uphold some degree of tikanga, and while there were often unavoidable clashes of ethics, I understand through those experiences and as a result of this research that the tikanga of tangihanga varies from space to space and is determined by those present at the time and the conditions of the environment that the tūpāpaku lay rest in.

The short film *Tangi* does not attempt to represent a full tangihanga. Split between two environments, the marae and the whānau homestead, the film aims to convey the variance in tikanga between traditional settings (the marae) and reconstructed environments (the homestead). In this way, *Tangi* becomes a meditation on anticipation, relational tension, and the unseen presence of the tūpāpaku, which in itself evokes the emotional and spiritual space that precedes the ritual of tangihanga itself.

Script Summary

Tangi is a short film about a whānau Māori navigating the tangihanga of their beloved patriarch. The story unfolds over the course of the tangihanga, shifting between the marae and the whānau home. We follow Mum 'Kimiora', her son Kahu, nephew Jojo, Nan, and Aunty Maraea as they manage both the practicalities of the event and the complex emotional labour of mourning.

The film begins in the early morning rhythms of the marae, introducing the audience to the intimacy of whānau life behind the formalities of tangihanga. Early scenes focus on small acts of care, such as preparing kai, looking after Nan, and managing the unseen labour of mourning, which gradually reveal the layers of unresolved grief within the family.

The central tension builds through Nan's increasing confusion about her husband's absence, as the whānau shield her with the gentle refrain that he has "gone for a walk." Meanwhile, the character Kahu quietly grapples with his sorrow, embodying the younger generation's efforts to uphold tikanga while processing loss in their way.

The emotional climax of the film occurs when Nan, having wandered to a public park bench, softly confronts the reality of her husband's death. In a tender scene of intergenerational support, Mum and Kahu accompany her in this moment of realisation. Nan's request to "take me to him" signals both an acceptance of her grief and a reclaiming of agency.

The film's final sequence finds Nan flanked by her whānau as she steps into the wharenui to mourn her husband. Thus, the arc is completed from denial and protection to collective acknowledgment and open expression of loss. Through this gentle but powerful progression, *Tangi* honours the relational and emotional journeys that underpin Māori funerary practices.

Character Breakdown

Mum 'Kimiora'

Late 40s early 50s, Māori woman

The emotional backbone of the whānau and a practical leader within the tangihanga space. Mum carries the weight of both cultural responsibility and personal grief, navigating caregiving for Nan while managing the logistics of the tangi. A figure of warmth, resilience, and humour, she represents the often-unseen labour of wāhine Māori in sustaining cultural practices. Though stretched thin, her aroha for her whānau is unwavering.

Kahu

17–21 years old, young Māori man

The son of Kimiora, Kahu is a sensitive, emotionally intuitive presence. He is quietly struggling with his Papa's death while taking on caregiving responsibilities for his Nan. Kahu is caught between generations; he wants to ensure his whānau is honouring tikanga and tradition and is processing grief in his way. His tenderness is embodied in small actions (holding Papa's dressing gown, reassuring Nan), making him a subtle conduit for whanaungatanga.

Jojo

19–22 years old, young Māori man

Jojo is a more extroverted, humorous presence in the whānau. He provides comic relief and emotional balance within the story, but also reveals more profound compassion and insight. He respects the tikanga of the tangi while bringing a younger, more casual energy to the proceedings. Through his interactions with his cousin Kahu and Nan, Jojo reflects how rangatahi Māori negotiate cultural expectations and emotional realities. He is a character that is used to communicate notions of tapu and

noa, such as when he uses a face towel as a tea towel in the kitchen, or when he and Kahu are removing the photographs of Papa from the hallway.

Nan (Riria)

Late 70s, early 80s, Māori woman

The whānau matriarch. Nan's presence embodies both vulnerability and mana. She is highly regarded by both her whānau and broader community. Her confusion about her husband's passing is treated with great aroha by the whānau, highlighting the ways Māori families honour and protect their elders. When Nan regains clarity and chooses to confront her grief, her arc becomes one of agency and deep emotional resonance. She embodies the spiritual and emotional heart of the story while also serving as a representation of how kaumatua are taonga in whānau Māori.

Aunty Maraea

Mid-50s, Māori woman

Aunty Maraea is a pragmatic, humorous, and sharp-witted figure within the whānau. She is a central presence in the kitchen, representing the leadership of wāhine Māori during tangihanga. Through her banter and tenderness, she holds space for the whānau grief while keeping the necessary work moving. She functions as both cultural custodian and emotional support, particularly for her cousin, Kimiora. Aunty Maraea is Jojo's Mum and represents the role of hapori that aren't whānau pani at tangihanga.

Development of the Film Treatment and Script

The writing process began with vignettes. I remembered instances from personal marae experiences, which I then wove together into a cohesive narrative. Although the story is fictional, it is based on deeply familiar spaces and dynamics that I have encountered in both my own tribal territory, Ngāti Kahungunu, and other rohe (regions). The process involved feedback from my community, whānau,

and creative peers, who affirmed the emotional truth of the work and helped shape some of the script's details.

In particular, while building the cinematic world of *Tangi,* I envisioned my whānau as amalgamated character prototypes whom I had encountered at tangihanga within our hapū. It came easily to me to imagine the people who would be attending this fictional tangihanga, as well as the specific attributes of the main characters: Mum, Nan, Kahu, Aunty Maraea, and Jojo.
The character of Mum is very closely aligned with my own Mum and the role she plays in our whānau as a leader and caregiver. When writing Aunty Maraea's character, I also drew inspiration from my Nanny Val, who, before she passed, was a stalwart in our whānau marae kitchen.

The script balances humour and grief, with scenes of dishwashing banter, shared smokes, and intergenerational teasing woven through moments of profound sadness. This tonal interplay reflects a lived Māori experience of tangihanga, where wairua and lightness coexist.

Connecting to Kaupapa Māori Theory and Filmmaking to Creative Practice

Guided by the theoretical framework of Kaupapa Māori, *Tangi* is a film grounded in values such as whakapapa, wairuatanga, and manaakitanga. It resists overt dramatisation and instead draws attention to the subtle emotional labour of tangihanga preparation. This approach reflects a belief that tikanga is lived and felt, even when not fully articulated. Characters are not didactic bearers of cultural meaning, but rather complex individuals navigating tikanga and the tangihanga of their patriarch in their own ways. In keeping with Fourth Cinema, *Tangi* is not made for an external audience; it is directed toward a Māori sensibility. It does not translate or explain; instead, it relies on shared knowledge and

cultural intuition. The most resonant moments in Indigenous screen practice often arise from attentiveness to the ordinary, where tikanga is subtly enacted and not over-explained for non-Māori.

Humour is an essential aesthetic tool in *Tangi,* as in *Ngāti*, which juxtaposes heavy subject matter with warmth and resilience. *Tangi* acknowledges the centrality of humour to Māori mourning practices. The use of conversational reo Māori and colloquial English further anchors the film in an everyday whānau vernacular. The phrases spoken are phrases my own family often uses.

In the proposed cinematography, the camera will remain intimate with the characters, privileging small gestures and sensory moments: the flickering of water in the morning outside the wharenui, the scent of a dressing gown, the gentle weight of a shared hug, or two male cousins sharing space. The script resists over-aestheticising tangihanga, instead depicting its domestic textures with authenticity. The planned soundscape features a minimal score, using real-time ambient noise, the murmur of whānau, and the occasional waiata to evoke a sense of spiritual presence.

Reimagining Tangihanga: Tikanga Considered in Creative Practice

The Dressing Gown as a Metaphor for Grief and Continuity

The motif of Papa's dressing gown operates as a quiet metaphor for the persistence of whakapapa and the intergenerational transmission of memory and emotion. When Kahu holds the gown and breathes in its scent, he is engaging in an embodied act of remembering. The dressing gown carries Papa's mauri (spiritual essence) into the present space.

This scene revealed to me that objects within the tangihanga space hold a layered significance; they are portals for grief, love, and continuity. In my directorial debut, *Papa's Chair*, it was the armchair in a whānau home that held the mauri of the character that had passed. The simple act of touching or

wearing the dressing gown became a similar visual language for connection across generations. It was a creative discovery that small material objects can carry the emotional and metaphysical weight of a story as powerfully as dialogue or explicit narrative beats.

Water as Whakanoa

At the beginning of the film, there is a scene where Mum leaves the wharenui and as she exits, she dips her hands into a bowl of water, flicking it over her shoulders and head. This is a tikanga upheld by my people at our marae, and I have observed it at other marae during tangihanga. The water breaks the tapu of the tūpāpaku. As the camera holds for a moment and captures Mum's character cleansing herself after exiting a wharenui, a Māori audience will recognise that the film is set at a tangihanga. This is a subtle consideration of tikanga that also serves as a tool to establish the setting and backdrop of the film. After analysing Barclay's *Ngāti,* I found the use of water and communication of whakanoa to be a constructive use of tikanga as a narrative tool in the portrayal of tangihanga. This topic is discussed in more detail in the findings chapter of this research.

The Vape and the Intergenerational Shifts in Grief

In several scenes, Kahu and Jojo share a vape during quiet moments. This was initially a casual detail, but through writing, it became a subtle metaphor for generational adaptation to grief. Where their elders rely on collective mourning and ritualistic practices at the marae, such as karanga, whaikōrero, and waiata, the younger characters use humour, casual conversation, and their own small rituals, like sharing a vape, to process their emotions. Furthermore, there is a scene in the film where Kimiora and Aunty Maraea share a cigarette on a bench outside the wharekai. When writing this, I imagined my older cousins and the conversations I have observed from the smokers' bench at the marae. As a whānau, we often regard the smokers' bench as the *real* pae tapu and a space where information is gathered, shared and plans are made. It was essential to depict this in the film *Tangi*.

The representation of modern, "ordinary" behaviours, such as vaping by the younger characters Kahu and Jojo, provided an opportunity to show how Māori youth navigate cultural spaces with emerging forms of relational practice. They are not replacing tikanga but adding to it. I also wanted to include a scene in *Tangi* where young Māori male characters can share a tender moment of whanaungatanga and aroha. This is in resistance to the noble savage archetype of First, Second or Third Cinema (Hokowhitu, 2013).

The Kitchen as a Space of Manaakitanga

In the scenes where Mum and Aunty Maraea work in the kitchen, the space itself functions as more than a domestic backdrop. The kitchen becomes a site of manaakitanga (care) where emotional weight is held communally. The act of washing, drying, and preparing food mirrors the emotional labour required to support the wider whānau. The kitchen at a tangihanga holds mana and tikanga. It is a space of whakanoa. Those who operate within that space are as highly regarded as those who navigate the wharenui and the ceremonial practices enacted there. Similarly, when Kahu is in the kitchen at the homestead, the main function of this location in the film is to show manaakitanga.

I realised through writing these scenes that portraying the work of ringawera (those who work in the kitchen, literally ‘hot hands’) on screen is not mundane, it is sacred and relational. The kitchen embodies the unseen leadership of predominantly wāhine Māori in maintaining cultural continuity and the transition from tapu to noa during tangihanga.

The Removal of Papa’s Photos from the Whānau Homestead

When Kahu and Jojo remove Papa’s photograph from a wall of framed whānau images, it indicates to Māori audiences that this person has passed on. These metaphors and visual motifs emerged not from conscious symbolic design, but through listening to the tikanga-led processes of my whānau. The separation of images of whānau who have passed away from those who are still living presents an

opportunity to showcase tikanga as it is practised and considered within the home, while also highlighting the distinction from the formalities of the marae.

Positioning within Māori Cinema

Tangi aligns with a tradition of Fourth Cinema films that engage with tangihanga as both a narrative device and a cultural site. In *Ngāti*, the return of a man to his ancestral village coincides with a tangihanga, foregrounding the communal role of such gatherings in reaffirming identity and community. Similarly, *Cousins* uses tangihanga as a climax of the story, bringing dispersed whānau together and surfacing intergenerational tensions and connections.
Kerosene Creek offers a raw, emotionally charged depiction of tangihanga, focusing on grief, rangatahi reactions to tangihanga and unresolved trauma. In comparison, *Waru* utilises the space to explore the interface between collective trauma and resilience.

Tangi contributes to this lineage by centring the informal labour of tangihanga. It seeks to capture the unseen work outside of the wharenui, often led and upheld by wāhine Māori. *Tangi* is about the subtle negotiations of care and the balancing of tikanga with lived whānau realities.
Where many films use tangihanga to propel plot or reveal character, *Tangi* foregrounds the social and relational toil of mourning, as well as the embodied experiences of whānau, rather than focusing solely on the ceremonial or mythic dimensions of tangihanga.

In this respect, *Tangi* contributes to an evolving Māori screen language, one that asserts the richness of domestic, intergenerational whānau life as a subject worthy of cinematic attention. It offers an unapologetically local, grounded view of tangihanga, opening space for Māori audiences to see familiar tikanga and whānau dynamics on screen.

The responsibility and accountability of *Tangi* is to portray a whānau in a vulnerable state, but without a traumatic or violent theme. In responding to existing representations, such as those analysed in this

research, *Tangi* critiques the tendency in mainstream Māori cinema to position tangihanga as either a plot device or a stylised ritual moment. Instead, the script insists on the vitality and mundane labour that sustains the cultural practice, thereby honouring the full humanity of Māori whānau as they navigate grief, humour, and tikanga in everyday ways.

I purposefully wrote *Tangi* to be set at the tangihanga of an elderly man who dies of old age, as I did not want to add to the catalogue of Māori cinema that features the death of a child or the death of a loved one under extreme circumstances. *Tangi* is accountable not only to Māori but also to other New Zealand filmmakers and actors by including them as much as possible.

Key Findings and Insights

Distinguishing Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking from Fourth Cinema: Philosophical and Practical Divergences

An outcome of this research is the distinction between Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking and Fourth Cinema. Barclay argues that by using a Fourth Cinematic approach there is freedom in creativity for Māori and Indigenous filmmakers. In contrast, this research suggests that, in the case of Māori filmmaking, a more robust production process is needed. This research recommends that Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking provides this rigour.

While Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking and Barry Barclay's Fourth Cinema are often aligned in their shared commitment to Indigenous sovereignty and representation, there are significant theoretical and practical divergences between the two that shape the cultural responsibility of Indigenous filmmakers in the film industry.

Fourth Cinema, as coined by Barclay (1999), is a political category that resists colonial cinematic frameworks and asserts Indigenous control over both content and audience. Its core ethos is "speaking to" rather than "speaking about," thereby centring Indigenous worldviews and rejecting the explanatory impulses of dominant Western cinema. It values the internal coherence of Indigenous epistemologies and encourages a filmmaking practice that privileges community knowledge and cultural rhythm over accessibility and entertainment of non-Indigenous audiences.

However, while Fourth Cinema focuses on representational politics and narrative sovereignty, Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking embeds a deeper layer of ethical and spiritual responsibility tied to the tikanga of whakapapa, mana, rangatiratanga and whanaungatanga (Smith, 2017). Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking is not just about who tells the story, but how, why, and with whom. It demands relational

accountability to the communities depicted, and requires filmmakers to engage with the material, people, and whenua in ways that are culturally safe and spiritually informed. This includes consultation with kaumātua, respect for local kawa, and careful handling of tapu subject matter, such as tangihanga and other ceremonial practices. To summarise, Fourth Cinema privileges an Indigenous facing lens, while Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking requires ongoing obligations to people and land.

Philosophically, Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking draws from a mātauranga Māori worldview that sees storytelling not just as cultural expression but as a form of intergenerational transmission, a taonga tuku iho. Practically, this impacts every stage of the filmmaking and Mahi-Toi process, from concept development and scriptwriting, through to casting, production protocols, and post-production engagement with whānau and hapori.

While Fourth Cinema may recognise Indigenous storytelling sovereignty, Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking goes on to emphasise iwi and hapū specific tikanga. These distinctions are crucial because they inform not only the intentions of the filmmaker but the ethics of the production processes and the cultural resonance of the work. In my practice, this means constantly reflecting on the spaces I enter, the stories I tell, and the people I am accountable to, not only as a filmmaker but as a mokopuna of those whose stories I am entrusted to carry. Furthermore, it acknowledges my Papa and the tikanga I was raised in.

Whakanoa as a Cinematic Paradigm: Releasing Tapu Through Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking

In the context of Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking, the principle of whakanoa, the ritual process of removing tapu and restoring balance, offers a profound and underexplored cinematic paradigm. Whakanoa, traditionally enacted through acts such as water cleansing, shared kai, or deliberate acts of levity, serves as a cultural mechanism to transition individuals from sacred states back to the ordinary

world. Within film, this process can be mirrored through narrative pacing, emotional tone, and visual or sonic motifs that perform a similar kind of release. As demonstrated in Barclay's *Ngāti,* the act of flicking water after leaving the urupā not only respects tikanga but additionally, in a metatextual sense, allows both characters and audiences to exit a tapu space with spiritual lightness. The addition of humour, as seen in the interaction between the characters in *Ngāti,* Te One and Greg, becomes a form of narrative whakanoa, gently guiding viewers out of grief and back into the everyday with restored balance.

Theoretically, utilising whakanoa as a cinematic paradigm asks filmmakers to reflect on the emotional and spiritual conditions they create through their work. What is the audience being asked to carry, and how are they being supported? This is particularly relevant in films that deal with tangihanga, death, and wairua. If filmmakers enter tapu spaces without consideration for the corresponding whakanoa, they risk burdening their audience, Māori or otherwise, with unresolved emotional weight. Practically, this requires attention not just to story structure, but to filmic elements such as sound design, editing, and transitions between scenes.

In *Tangi,* the principle of whakanoa informed several creative decisions. Examples of this are the pacing of the film, which intentionally slows after emotionally intense scenes, such as Nan's moment of clarity about her husband's passing. This allows for breath and recalibration. The use of humour is particularly displayed in the interactions between cousin characters, such as Kimiora and Aunty Maraea, or Kahu and Jojo. The humour provides a necessary release, reaffirming whānau resilience and joy even amid grief.

Initially, I hesitated to include comedic banter during scenes set in the kitchen or around Nan, fearing it might undermine the gravity of the tangihanga. However, as the writing progressed, it became clear that humour is not a contradiction of grief but a crucial mechanism of Māori responses to tangihanga. It is not uncommon for whānau at tangihanga to make jokes at the expense of the loved one who has passed during the poroporoaki. Humour is a Māori response to grief. This realisation led me to fully

embrace these moments, aligning with the view of Bannister, a media researcher who analysed the films and storytelling style of Taika Waititi, finding that Māori humour is an enactment of mana. Additionally, Bannister (2021) argues that, in Māori films that portray tangihanga, utilising Māori humour can act as a Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking technique to transition from spaces and settings of tapu to spaces and settings of noa.

The quiet domestic rituals, including dishwashing, making cups of tea, and going for a smoke, act as cinematic whakanoa. These creative choices are not simply for aesthetic purposes; they are grounded in tikanga and shaped by a belief that film, like ceremony, must hold its audience carefully and release them thoughtfully. Thus, whakanoa becomes more than a ritual reserved for tapu rituals; it becomes a tool, a rhythm, and an ethic embedded within the Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking process.

The Spiritual Engagement of Filming Tangihanga

When filmmakers choose to depict tangihanga in their films, the repetitive nature of filmmaking, multiple takes, rehearsals, resets, and camera adjustments, requires the reenactment of deeply tapu and emotionally charged rituals. Acts like karanga are not merely performances; they are invocations, spiritual portals in their own right. Repeating them for the sake of coverage or dramatic effect risks exhausting not only the emotional reserves of the performers, but also crossing boundaries of tikanga, especially when done without appropriate spiritual safeguards, such as karakia or tikanga consultants on set.

This concern is echoed in the question of including extended close-up shots of actors lying in open caskets, having the lid placed over them, and being mourned by others, such as in *Kerosene Creek*, which evokes a realism that borders on spiritual simulation. Within te ao Māori, the tūpāpaku is not a prop; it is a sacred body in transition. To ask actors to embody that state, particularly within a wharenui, introduces a level of wairua risk that must be carefully considered. Though such scenes are undoubtedly moving and intended to honour Māori grief, they also risk tipping into spectacle if the

spiritual integrity of the portrayal is not upheld. This research challenges Kaupapa Māori Filmmakers to recognise not only what is seen on screen, but what is *felt* behind it. There needs to be a consideration of what is asked of Māori actors and crew when repeatedly entering and holding the space of mourning, without respite or ritual release. As Māori cinema continues to assert tikanga on its terms, it must also lead the way in developing culturally grounded protocols that ensure wairua safety, protect the mana of performers, and acknowledge that filming tangihanga is not merely storytelling, it is an act of spiritual engagement.

These concerns around spiritual safety and the ethical treatment of tangihanga on screen significantly shaped my creative process through Mahi-Toi in the making of *Tangi*. As a Māori filmmaker working within a Kaupapa Māori framework, I recognised early on that recreating mourning spaces, even fictional ones, required more than cultural knowledge; it required cultural accountability, which once again is an embedded value in Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking.

The recommendation arising from this research is that, when portraying tangihanga in Kaupapa Māori films, there should be a formal integration of Kaupapa Māori advisors or kaumātua into the filmmaking process, not just as consultants, but as active participants with authority to guide decision-making when tikanga is being portrayed or evoked. Their presence ensures that tikanga is not simply referenced for authenticity but upheld in action. These advisors can help navigate questions such as: Who should perform karanga in a fictional context? What limitations should exist around simulating mourning rituals? How do we spiritually release actors and crew after intense emotional scenes? These are not just cultural considerations, they are matters of wairua care and creative integrity. In real-life instances of tangihanga, it is generally these people who guide and protect us; therefore, it would be beneficial for the cast and crew to have access to these kaitiaki, and for Kaupapa Māori filmmakers to be better equipped to honour the spiritual labour being undertaken.

Critical Reflection and Creative Discoveries

In *Tangi,* it is a deliberate choice of the whānau to keep Nan's character away from the tangihanga of her late husband. As a Māori filmmaker working within a Kaupapa Māori framework, I was acutely aware that this could be recognised as a dismissal of tikanga, particularly the collective obligation to grieve together and acknowledge the tūpāpaku.

This narrative tension became a critical site of reflection. It forced me to consider whose wellbeing is prioritised, who gets to decide what is 'best,' and how the consideration of tikanga plays out in contemporary Māori life. Rather than resolve this tension, *Tangi* holds space for it. The script portrays the whānau decision not as correct or incorrect, but as a profoundly human response to an impossible situation. In doing so, the film asks: What happens when the values of individual care come into conflict with the responsibilities of collective tikanga? This question, still unresolved for me, has shaped not only the ethics of this film but the way I approach storytelling, as a Māori artist committed to honouring both the traditions I come from and the emotional realities I live within.

Another insight emerged regarding the representation of intergenerational relationships. Early drafts centred more on Mum 'Kimiora' and Aunty Maraea, but, through revision, Kahu and Jojo's interactions with Nan gained prominence. Their scenes revealed how younger generations carry the burdens of tangihanga. This layered portrayal was not initially planned but became central to the film's emotional truth. In *Tangi*, Nan embodies both vulnerability and mana. She is not a peripheral or static character, but a dynamic figure whose memory, agency, and confusion drive the emotional arc of the story. I was struck, in writing her scenes, by how many Māori films position kaumātua either as stoic vessels of knowledge or passive recipients of care. In contrast, Nan is allowed to grieve, to forget, to remember, and to guide her whānau back into ceremony, not through authority, but through love. Her moment of realisation in the park and her insistence on seeing her husband one final time reposition kaumātua as emotional anchors rather than ceremonial props.

Alongside her, the characters of Kahu and Jojo offer two distinct expressions of rangatahi Māori masculinity. Kahu carries emotional weight quietly, tending to his Nan, absorbing the grief of his Mum and his personal ethical dilemma. Jojo, by contrast, brings humour and disruption, offering comic relief that is undercut by moments of profound insight. Both are affectionate, vulnerable, and expressive. Kahu and Jojo are based on my brothers, cousins and friends who are colourful characters and inspirational men. Additionally, I drew reference from Barclay's Fourth Cinema and deliberately wrote counter-narratives to the emotionally repressed or angry young Māori men often portrayed in mainstream media. Writing these characters allowed me to reflect on how rangatahi in Māori film are frequently depicted as either broken, disconnected or heroic; *Tangi* seeks a middle ground, where young men can be leaders, messy, tender, and healers in community with their whānau.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, this thesis has certain limitations. The scope of the film analysis is restricted to four selected Māori films and does not claim to be representative of all depictions of tangihanga in Māori cinema. The analysis primarily focuses on specific narrative and visual representations of tangihanga and does not extend into comprehensive industrial or audience studies. A broader exploration involving interviews with filmmakers, cultural consultants, and iwi elders would have further deepened the research, but was beyond the available time and resource constraints.

Due to the project's practice-led nature, the creative artefact consists of a short film script, a director's vision and accompanying treatment, rather than a completed film production. As such, this research cannot account for audience reception, actor performance, or the full consideration of on-set tikanga considerations. Budgetary and logistical constraints further limited the opportunity to engage in larger-scale production, workshops, or screenings.

Additionally, my dual role as both researcher and cultural insider inevitably shapes the analysis and creative decisions. While this subjectivity is an acknowledged strength within Kaupapa Māori

research, emphasising relationality and lived experience, it may also introduce interpretive bias (Smith, 2017). The prioritisation of one iwi-specific worldview may limit the resonance of specific ideas across different rohe or whakapapa.

These limitations do not diminish the validity or contribution of the research but instead point toward the importance of future, expanded work that includes multi-modal methods, inter-iwi collaborations, and audience-centred evaluations. They also highlight the evolving and iterative nature of Māori creative research, which continues to grow through collective input, tikanga, and time.

Conclusion

Revisiting Positionality

Writing this script affirmed my identity as a Māori creative. It showed me that I could honour my culture not just through language or visual symbols, but through tone, rhythm, and character relationships. The process invariably deepened my understanding of my positionality as a Mahi-Toi practitioner. Writing from within a Kaupapa Māori framework forced me to confront my own assumptions about what is 'worthy' of screen representation. Early in the writing and research process, I knew I did not want to depict specific tikanga-based rituals of tangihanga in my film. There would be no karanga, no pōwhiri, no tūpāpaku, and no casket. After many drafts, I struggled to communicate the tapu nature of tangihanga without relying on cinematic identifiers such as those outlined. As the creative project progresses, it would be imperative to collaborate with hapori and specifically with kaumātua or Kaupapa Māori advisors throughout the production process, should these elements be included.

Tentatively, through this research and creative practice, it became apparent that another consideration of the scriptwriting process was that *Tangi* should not be centred on the illustration of Māori sorrow and trauma. I came to realise that seemingly mundane aspects of tangihanga, such as drying dishes, gossiping over a smoke break, flicking water after leaving the space where the tūpāpaku is held, cleaning the toilets, and even accidentally turning the houselights on in the wharenui, are, in fact, powerful expressions of Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking.

Ultimately, the creative discovery here was that metaphor need not be abstract; in *Tangi*, the dressing gown, the shared vape, and the whānau dynamics align with the foundational principles of Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking: tikanga, whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, aroha, tapu, and wairuatanga; thereby navigating loss in a distinctly Māori manner (Waititi, 2007).

There are gaps in the literature when it comes to considering how tikanga is portrayed in media. With a growing media landscape and evolving artistic approaches to Māori film, there is a need for more academic inquiry into tikanga Māori and Māori film. Acknowledged in this research is the idea that film, as a powerful medium of cultural transmission, can either support or erode the transmission of tikanga. By centring a Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking and Fourth Cinematic approach, the study asserts that Māori cultural practices must not be adapted for cinematic convenience but upheld with integrity, accuracy and tikanga.

By applying the methodological process of Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking to the depiction of tangihanga in Māori films, this research emphasises the ethical imperative for Māori filmmakers to approach such representations with cultural authenticity, humility, whanaungatanga, and accountability. It has been argued that tangihanga are not simply narrative devices but tapu rituals embedded in tikanga and whakapapa. Kaupapa Māori Filmmaking provides the theoretical foundation for viewing these depictions as culturally sovereign acts, rather than mere cinematic choices. In this way, both Fourth Cinema and Kaupapa Māori theory reinforce the notion that Indigenous ethics and knowledge systems must guide Indigenous representation.

Ultimately, this work contributes to ongoing conversations about cultural and creative sovereignty, the protection of mātauranga Māori and the ethical responsibilities of Māori filmmakers when engaging with tapu and noa cultural practices.

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