





malanga

the voice of positive dissonance

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leveleva e malanga ka e tau

My words are boundless, may they bind us together:¹

¹ Translation resulting from a conversation with Hūfanga Professor ‘Okusitino Māhina, personal communication, September 13, 2014. The word malanga is translated in Tonga as speech making or sermon; in Samoan the word malaga means journey. The use of a passive “n” in the title suggests an intersection between the two Pacific cultures that make up my identity and a relationship (in this thesis) between their two meanings.



This thesis is submitted to Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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Bachelor of Art and Design Honours AUT University (2014)
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This thesis is dedicated to my children Kuldeep and Jasvinder for your
unconditional love.

Let the power of your inner being shine through in everything you do.
Be the best you can be.
Be you.

‘Oku tukupā ‘a e fisisi ni ki he’eku fānau ko Kuldeep mo Jasvinder
ko ho’omo ‘ofa ta’elaume’a.
Tuku ke huhulu ‘a e ivi ho’omo loto ‘i loto he me’a kotoa pē ‘oku mo fai.
Ke mo fai ho’omo lelei taha - ke mo hoko pē ko kimoua.

O mo’omo’oga e fa’apitoa i la’u fanau ia Kuldeep ma Jasvinder ona o lo la’ua
filiga i lo la’ua alofa le fa’atua’oia.
Ia fa’alia lo oulua loto finau e pupula ai le matagofie o mea uma ete lua faia.
Ia sogasogā ma taumafai atili, i le mafai e mafai ai. O oulua māmā nā.

ਇਹ ਖੋਜ ਮੈਂ ਆਪਣੇ ਬੱਚੇ, ਕੁਲਦੀਪ ਅਤੇ ਜਸਵੰਦਿਰ,
ਦੇ ਬੇਸ਼ਰਤ ਪਿਆਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਰਪਤ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ। ਤੁਸੀਂ ਆਪਣੀ ਜ਼ਿੰਦਗੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਜੋ ਵੀ ਕਰੋ,
ਉਸ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਪਣੀ ਅੰਦਰੂਨੀ ਸ਼ਕਤੀ ਨੂੰ ਚਮਕਣ ਦਿਓ। ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਰੋ ਕਿ ਜ਼ਿੰਦਗੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਹੁਤ ਵਧੀਆ ਬਣ,
ਆਪਣੇ ਆਪ ਨੂੰ ਨਾ ਭੁਲਾਓ।

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I retain copyright in all images and artwork produced and presented as part of this thesis apart from the following images that are the intellectual property of others:

Figure 7. *It is Itself*. (2009). Image used with permission of the artist.

Figure 8. *Waking up to my Polynesian Spine*. (1998). Image used with permission of the artist.



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 person (except where explicitly indicated), 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.

Cecelia Faumuina Khakh

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Abstract

Malanga is a creative practice thesis that proposes the notion of positive cultural dissonance. This construct questions the nature of identity loss experienced by young urbanised Pacific people in Auckland, New Zealand. Because Pacific Island youth in New Zealand are often perceived as holding more than one contradictory belief at the same time (Statistics New Zealand, 2006; Bush, Chapman, Drummond, & Fagaloa, 2009), the thesis suggests by example that such dissonance might operate as a substrate for rich cultural expression.

In considering cultural dissonance, the thesis proposes a creative re-evaluation of the conventions of *Malanga* (speech giving), such that this might contribute to an oratorical work that demonstrates how Pacific Island women’s experiences from five generations of one family, might be creatively constituted as a form of contemporary performance.

The address combines printmaking, morphing illustration, poetry and oratory to consider both people and place as sites of synergetic cultural expression. The use of performance and poetry within the oration relates to certain Pacific traditions where information is passed down lyrically through generations by modes of address that transcend the limitations of the written word.



chapter 1

introduction and overview



1:1 Positive cultural dissonance

This practice-led, subjective inquiry considers the nature of positive cultural dissonance. Positive cultural dissonance describes states that may arise when an individual participates in multiple cultural frameworks. It suggests that certain synergies are born from this relationship and these may be framed as generative and positive.

A central concern of this project was highlighted in 2012 by the New Zealand Ministry of Health in their report, *Rising to the Challenge. The Mental Health and Addiction Service Development Plan 2012 - 2017*. They noted, “Almost half of New Zealand’s Pacific population is under twenty years of age, and this young population is increasing rapidly. It is mostly young Pacific people, rather than older Pacific people, who carry the burden of mental disorder ... ”(p. 31).

Oakley Browne, Wells and Scott’s (2006) research indicates that Pacific people carry a higher burden of mental disorder than the general population of New Zealand. This research contributed to the instigation of a suicide symposium in Auckland in 2012. Here, organisers noted that young Pacific people are twice as likely to suffer from depression or anxiety issues, or to attempt suicide.²

Thus, research suggests that there are significant issues such as depression (Moor & Merry, 2014), comparatively poorer health (Statistics New Zealand, 2011, p. 13) and a lower level of economic resources (White, Gunston, Salmond, Atkinson & Crampton, 2008) facing Pacific youth in New Zealand. Accordingly, the Health Research Council of New Zealand’s (2014) report on *Pacific Health Research guidelines* recommends that a consideration of the “complex configurations and multiple ethnic identities of Pacific people³ and cultures” is necessary. It notes:

Intermarriage is common and some identify with more than two or three ethnic groups. This redefines the boundaries of individual and group identities as they embrace diversity. Some may not emphasise their Pacific heritage at all. Through the national New Zealand census, people’s ethnic categories are self-defined. For Pacific peoples, this provides them with the opportunity to explore and affirm their individual and group identities in the context of New Zealand. (p. 3)

As a woman born with both Samoan and Tongan ancestors who lives in New Zealand, this conflict existed for me. However, in my journey I have rethought the nature of cultural discord and what it is to operate between and in more than one culture. This thesis is therefore a creative application of my thinking. It suggests that the roots of identity may be linked to family and that

for certain Pacific Island youth, cultural dissonance may span generations. However, this state may be considered less of a liminal stranding in a conflicted no-man’s land and more of a rich fusion of potential.

In the thesis I draw upon the experiences of five women in my family and structurally I relate their lyrical recounting of experience to the biblical Pentateuch.⁴ I use this construct because it not only relates to the deep association of the bible to many Pacific Island families (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2008; Macpherson, 2012) but also because the nature of these books deal chronologically with the beginning (Genesis), leaving (Exodus), regulation (Leviticus), accounting (Numbers) and re-accounting (Deuteronomy) that has accompanied the women’s journeys in my family. Each of these journeys has involved negotiating worlds and dissonance, but each of these women has found through this challenge a voice of optimism that she has passed (or will pass) down through generations of her family.

Thus *Malanga* tells the stories of:

- My grandmother (Vika Lasalosi)
- My mother (Vaiola Faumui)
- Myself (Cecelia Faumuina Khakh)
- My daughter (Jasvinder Khakh)
- and her yet to be conceived child.

1.2 Purpose

Within this thesis, I wish to demonstrate that Pacific Island youth may be reconnected through generational stories. The Pacific concept of time is not linear and discrete. As noted by Pacific scholars such as Hūfanga ‘Okustino Māhina, time may be understood as an “arrangement of the past, present and future. Herein, people are thought to walk forward into the past and walk backward into the future, both taking place in the present, where the past and future are constantly mediated in the ever-transforming present” (Māhina, 2010, p. 170). Thus in the thesis, the poetic recounting of the generational stories of women in my family may be seen as existing concurrently. They reach across and into each other to show how dissonance, while conflicted, may also be considered a source of beauty and strength.

The New Zealand Ministry of Health’s publication, *The Health of Pacific Children and Young People in New Zealand*, discusses this notion of the family as an encompassing entity that may be differentiated from traditional western constructs. This is because:

Pacific cultures place great value on the family. In this context, “family” may include family members related through blood, adoption (legal or customary), and marriage. In addition, some Pacific families recognize

² Pacificology Symposium Interview with Dr Siale Foliake. Retrieved from <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/nz-born-pacific-youth-vulnerable-mental-health-risk-expert-4802991>
³ In the report, “Pacific peoples” refers to people who originate from the Pacific Islands who have migrated to New Zealand and made it their home. The term also includes people who are born in New Zealand to Pacific Island parents and those from New Zealand Pacific countries who are automatically New Zealand citizens.

⁴ The Pentateuch is a collective term for the first five books of the Bible. These are generally attributed to Moses, although the texts themselves do not clearly identify the author.



a deceased relative’s spirit as an active family member. This may be relevant when treating mental health issues; it may pose a risk that requires sensitive management, but it may also provide spiritual strength. (2008, p. 30)

This thesis is designed to be more than an academic exercise in acquiring a qualification. It is designed to contribute to a growing range of initiatives that encourage young Pacific Islanders to find a voice through art. Art in this regard is seen as something intrinsically linked to identity. Pereira (2012, p. 305) notes:

In the Pacific Island homelands there is no separation between, art, culture and life. By contrast, the boundaries and definitions of European New Zealand art present a conception of art that is not so much an expression of culture, with shifting parameters and illusive values. Whether they choose to be bound by European art ideals or not, Pacific art makers in New Zealand reflect this place, their home, in all its splendor and shame and everything in between. They commit acts of hope and optimism in a place that in turn constrains, frees, isolates, connects, ignores and enlivens.

It is my belief that a practice-led thesis might act as an artistic and cultural provocation. It might illustrate an idea that motivates wider thinking about the ability to “give voice” to thinking. In this regard I am reminded of Narayan’s observation that:

When you ignite the passion of young people and they have a platform to express who they are, it inspires them to become actively engaged in their own development. (Narayan & Taylor, 2014, p. i)

1.3 Research question

Ings notes that often in practice-led research the inquiry “may orchestrate several research questions that multiply and metamorphose” (2011, p. 230). Kleining and Witt suggest that when working with inquiries that operate beyond the application of a set formula “... the topic of research is preliminary and may change during the research process” (2000, p. 2). They note that the research question “is only fully known after being successfully explored” (ibid.), and they suggest that “the topic may be overlapped by another one or turn out as part of a different problem or just disappear” (ibid.). This propensity for

a research question to shift may be partly attributable to the protean nature of an inquiry where the subjective self forms a significant part of the topic of concern. Bullough and Pinnegar say, “Who a researcher is, is central to what the researcher does” (2001, p. 13). Accordingly, as the researcher shifts in the focus of herself and her context, so too do aspects of her inquiry. Accordingly the thesis’ research question has undergone a number of incremental changes. Initially I asked,

What is the potential of film as a form of oratory if, drawing on conventions of talanoa, Tā Vā and talking therapies, one might propose a role for art in interpreting and voicing narratives that often lie buried in statistics? (Faumuina-Khakh, Master of Philosophy thesis proposal, 2014, p. 3)⁵

However, as a consequence of the project’s development and deeper consideration, the thesis now asks:

What is the potential of positive dissonance in the design of an illustrated oratorational work that considers generational stories in a Pacific family?

1.4 Practice-led inquiry

The thesis may be understood as a practice-led inquiry. By this I mean it is an “original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice” (Candy, 2006, para.1-2). Originality and contribution to knowledge may be implicit in, and made explicit by, artifacts like soundscapes, music, illustration, poetry and the design or oratorical works. In other words, by undertaking artistic inquiry as practice, the practice leads one incrementally forward. Being engaged in action causes the researcher to think *within* the practice.

1.5 The performed work

Illustration
The illustrations that appear as prints or projections in *Malanga* creatively fuse the photographic and the hand painted. The prints displayed in the performance space combine these techniques to suggest an illusion of an etching. The projected illustrations are constructed in a similar manner and consider the location of each set of poems as dissonant. These location illustrations morph slowly behind the reading of each generation of women’s poems.

⁵ Faumuina-Khakh, C. (2014). PGR2 Thesis proposal, unpublished document.



Poetry

Like the illustrations, the poems are divided into generational sets. Because my mother’s family is Tongan, these poems draw on certain conventions of Tongan poetry including pride of locality (Helu & Janman, 2012, p. 17); the woman poet as an “emblematic figure” (Wood, 1998, p. 7); the role of the writer as social critic (Wood, 1998, p. 10); the use of *heliaki* (metaphors) (Shumway, 1977, p. 28, 29); melancholic tone (Helu & Janman, 2012, p. 53; Wood, 1998, p. 9); poetry as *faiva* (performance) (Helu & Janman, 2012, p. 49; Shumway, 1977, p. 25); and Wolgramm, 1993, p. 171); *Faka’apa’apa* (respectfulness) and *mafana* (appreciation) (Wood, 1998, p. 17; Shumway, 1977, p. 29).

In reference to the positive nature of cultural dissonance, the poems also draw on certain contemporary approaches to western poetry including elements of free verse and multilingual construction. The poems are guided by the concept of *Punake*.⁶ As such they are designed to be read and/or performed and are accompanied by prerecorded and mixed soundscapes.

Oratory

Malanga may be understood as a composite oratorical work. By this I mean all elements are brought together into a performance that is presented as a public address that speaks to a specific issue. The work exceeds the parameters of a poetry reading or exhibition because it contains a spoken introduction and conclusion that integrates and serves to contextualise its other artistic elements.

Oration has a deep history that runs through both Pacific cultures and the academy. It is within this dissonance that the project is situated. In both environments an oration may be considered as a formal public speech delivered on a special occasion. In the academy the orator may be an “official spokesman of a university” (Fowler & Fowler, 1969, p. 565), or the address may operate as “a formal academic exercise”.⁷ However, *Malanga* breaks the classical and later academic conventions of oratory with its structure of exordium, narration, division, proof, refutation and peroration (Rhetorix, 2001, para. 7).⁸ This is because it weaves together poetry performance, sound, and illustration to narrate five generational voices from the past into the future. Within this, I am positioned as the *punake* who orchestrates the performance.

1.6 Structure of the exegesis

This exegesis offers a contextualising of the final project. It consists of five chapters and an appendix.

Chapter one provides an introduction to the thesis. It outlines key ideas and briefly describes the creative work.

In chapter two I position myself as the researcher by placing the present inquiry in the context of my previous work and my experiences of a family growing through a negotiation of dissonant values.

Chapter three offers a review of knowledge impacting on the inquiry. First I position the research in relation to existing creative work in the field. I then review theoretical knowledge that has influenced the development of the creative work.

Chapter four describes and unpacks the research design employed in the explication of the project. The approach to the project is based on the principles of action research but this is supported by certain tacit approaches to questioning and discovery.

The final chapter offers a critical commentary on the work. In so doing it brings into concord the theory and practice. Here I discuss certain aesthetic and structural considerations in *Malanga* including issues relating to cultural dissonance among Pacific peoples in New Zealand, the nature and evolution of Tongan poetry, the notion of the Pentateuch in writing for the voices of five generations of Pacific women, and creative re-negotiations of oration.

⁶ Cultural expression traditionally operated for Pacific Islands beyond the limitations of the written word; knowledge and expression were shared through a fusion of music, movement, image and oratory. A Punake in the traditional Tongan sense is a master craftsman skilled in incorporating poetry, sound and movement to produce one performance and a master artist who practises all three performance arts of faiva ta’anga (poetry), faiva hiva (music) and faiva haka (dance). This is in contrast to their specialist practitioners, who are individually known as pulotu fa’u (poet), pulotu hiva / fasi (musician) and pulotu haka (choreographer). A punake is an artist who formally unifies all the three performance arts of poetry, music and dance through composing the poetry, putting it into music and then choreographing dance movements to create a single grand performance (Creative New Zealand, 2013). Retrieved from http://www.creativenz.govt.nz/assets/ckeditor/attachments/859/biography_-_metuliki_fakatava.pdf?1381350276

⁷ Collins English Dictionary, <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/oration>

⁸ This form developed from Aristotlian oration with its sequence of ingratiation, stating of case, proof of case and conclusion.



chapter 2

positioning the researcher and the research



Figure 1. My Father, siblings and me (on the right). My mother was the photographer.

2.1 Work and identity

My father was Samoan and my mother is Tongan. Both of my parents immigrated to New Zealand from their home islands in search of a better life. They did their very best to provide a good life for their children by working two or three jobs each at a time and going without in order that we might have the best opportunities possible (Figure 1). This idea of a better life was not only for themselves and their immediate family but also for their families back in their respective islands.

Growing up as a Samoan/Tongan in New Zealand, I lived an arguably dissonant life. When I went to school I learnt about western ways of being, conducted myself as a westerner and spoke English. However, when I returned home after school I lived a mostly Samoan *aganu'u* (lifestyle). I spoke Samoan and ate Island foods. I did not realise at the time that I conducted myself differently in various situations but in hindsight I know that when with Samoans, because I did not feel I fully fitted in, I would identify as Tongan and vice versa. Even now at times, I feel more comfortable operating as a westerner just because I feel it is more inclusive.

2.2 Tautalititi and Fa’aaloalo

Like many Pacific youth, I grew up in a religious family. From a young age, I remember my family would hold weekly meetings to discuss issues within our family life. These were usually held once a week after Sabbath. The meetings normally consisted of an overview of the week where my siblings and I would individually be told what we needed to improve on. Issues raised might relate to keeping our room clean or not talking back to elders. Each meeting would end with a bible reading, a hymn and a prayer. As children we would normally sit and listen to what was being said about us with no opportunity to speak our minds on the matter. Sometimes this would make me feel angry because I would not agree, or some of the interpretations of my actions I felt were misinterpreted as being *tautalititi* (cheeky). I would sit and cry in confusion and frustration. I wanted to be able to express myself but out of *fa’a’aloalo* (respect), I held my tongue and remained silent.

However in my late teens this began to change. I’m not sure why, but my father began to invite us to speak our minds in the meetings. Although I would still cry, it was a relief to be heard. It felt like a heavy burden was being lifted from my shoulders. I respected my father so when he left to work in Australia after being made redundant from his factory job, I felt lost.

2.3 The influence of my Father

As a young child, I looked forward to hearing my father retell stories of his life in *Lefaga*, Samoa. He would tell us how he would wake up early, get ready for the day and then walk to the *ma’umaga* (plantation) in order to grow and harvest food for his family. Because his family could not afford the continued cost of schooling, he was only formally educated until the age of 14. When given the opportunity to immigrate to New Zealand, he came to Auckland and worked hard to send money and resources back to his *aiga* (family) in Samoa whilst also providing for his wife and young family here in New Zealand. This proved his ability to provide and honour his family through his actions. Therefore, although he was the youngest son of 10 siblings, before she passed away, his mother gave him the *matai* title *Malae Silia*. There was much conflict over this decision, and often family members challenged his views, especially because these were not always traditional and he was not the most eloquent of speakers. However, he took the following advice to heart; “*Ua avatu le Atua le ngutu ma le fatu ia te oe. E pau a mea, e manaomia.*” (God gave you a heart and a mouth that is all you need).

I also take courage from this advice even though it is not traditional for Pacific Island women to become orators. However, I feel it is necessary, like my father, to break from tradition and convey what is in my heart. This is because

as woman I exist in a matriarchal line that gives birth to, and nurtures life. Building on a tradition of Pacific women poets and artists, I seek to encourage others to find their own voice in order that all in society might flourish.

As a child, I remember sitting with my father and watching him write and draw in his journals. He would record our family genealogy, write his *matai* (chiefly) speeches, record the minutes of large family meetings and sketch. It was here that my love of art and design was ignited; I enjoyed watching him write in his cursive calligraphy, carefully decorating and organising the individual characters so the titles would fit evenly across a page (Figure 2).

I distinctly remember one drawing my father did of a lion to depict family honour and leadership. Out of a desire for closeness I would often draw on the cover or in the blank pages of his journals (Figure 3). I was fascinated by the way that drawings could capture ideas and my father always encouraged me, looking carefully at what it was I was trying to depict and urging me to keep trying.



Figure 2. An example of a heading in my father's journal. (1986).

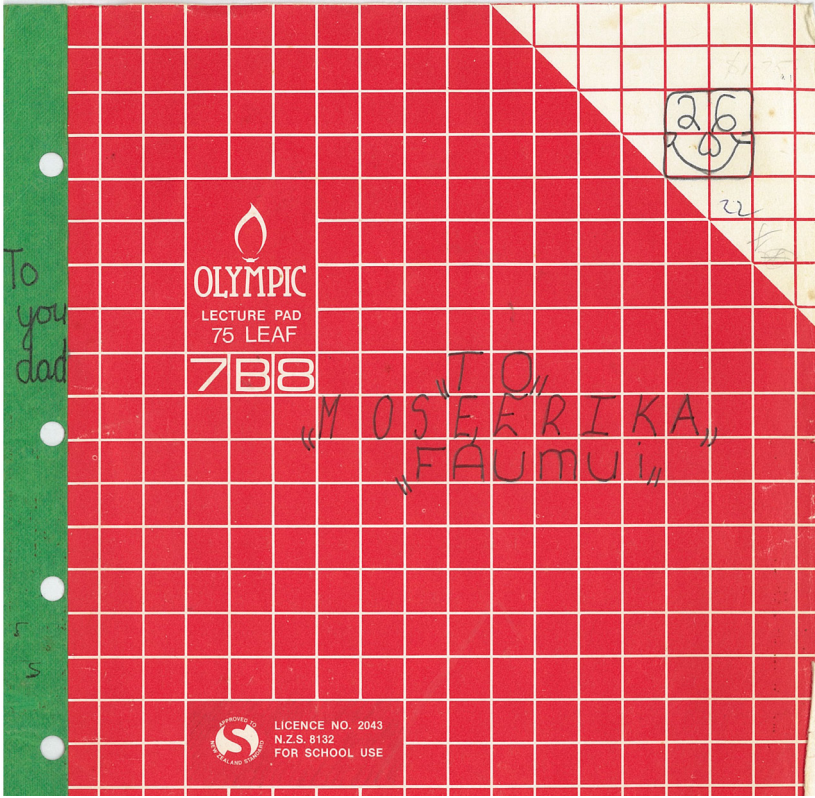


Figure 3. An example of my writing and drawing on my father's journal cover. (1986).

2.4 Formal education

Although I started out slow at school and required remedial reading tuition, I thrived on learning new things. By the time I reached intermediate school, my love for art, design and technology had begun to blossom.

In 1994 I entered university to study for a bachelor of graphic design. The discipline had been recommended to me by one of my teachers and it seemed like a way of 'giving voice' to thinking in ways that were designed to communicate articulately to a wide range of people. While studying on the

Figure 4. Exploratory illustration from a body of work that considered the lives of young people who graffiti and what drives them to gang affiliation and vandalism. (1996).



degree I became increasingly interested in how visual communication could be used as an agent for social change. Amongst a number of projects centred on urban issues was a body of work that considered the lives of young people who graffiti and vandalise property and their links with gangs. (Figure 4).

It was at this time that my father moved to Australia in search of work and I was suffering from depression. In my final year of study, employing a fusion between photography, illustration, videoed footage and sound, I developed a moving image work about Pacific teen pregnancy because this was something that my best friend was going through at the time (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Graphite drawing from *Pacific Teen Pregnancy: A moving image text*. (1997).

After I graduated I worked as an audio-visual producer. However in 2000 I returned to university to study education for a year before embarking on a career in teaching. Working in schools with high proportions of Pacific students, I saw many of the issues that had punctuated my childhood played out in a new generation. I became increasingly aware of how the absence of a voice contributed to a sense of nonidentity. I saw angry young Pacific students misbehaving in the classroom for no apparent reason, and many highly talented male students forced by their family’s financial situation to leave school in the middle of Year 11 to work in factories. However, the incident that moved me into action the most was the death of a 14 year old student from another school who, on the 9th of September, 2012, committed suicide. I watched video tributes to her made by her closest friends on YouTube and I could not believe that this young beautiful person with obvious talent and heart was now gone. I felt a deep connection to her because I realised that this could have been me when I was younger.

So in 2013, after teaching for 10 years, I returned to university to undertake an honours degree in graphic design. I was driven by an emerging desire to use my talents as a designer to address fundamental issues around identity and representation among Pasifika youth. It was also in this year that suicide rates among New Zealand’s Pacific youth prompted a suicide

symposium in Auckland.⁹

For my dissertation project I created a short, animated, public service film that considered the lived experience of depression. The fusion between film, illustration, sound and animation was designed to be loaded on to YouTube so it would have wide distribution among young Pacific students.¹⁰ The two minute, 40 second film was called *Manulua*, (Figure 6).

Manulua spoke without words but used sound, image and animation to communicate meaning. It explored the sense of confusion that young Pacific Islanders face, “feeling neither here nor there and always wondering, questioning and searching for a place of belonging.”¹¹

Despite its potential for wide online distribution, the short film lacked the ability for visceral engagement with an audience and the opportunity for them to *talanoa*¹² (talk) about their own experiences. I felt that my work might have a greater impact if it were spoken. I am reminded in this regard of Narayan and Taylor who note, “When Spoken Word is performed it gives a greater insight and a humanised experience” (2014, p. 2).



Figure 6. Frame grabs from *Manulua* (2013). The style of these images was influenced by the colouring of Ngatu. The film depicted the city life I experienced as a young person in Auckland.

⁹ Pasifikology, April, 2012. Auckland, New Zealand.

¹⁰ The film can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/80452634>

¹¹ The big idea - Te aria nui:. (2010). Siliga David Setoga. Retrieved from The big idea <http://www.thebigidea.co.nz/profile/siliga-david-setoga/27509>

¹² Vaiioleti, (2006, p. 21) defines talanoa as “a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations.” However, in using the term I am also cognisant of more complex analyses like those of Hūfanga Professor ‘Okusitino Māhina’s. He suggests that “Talanoa (Talking), relates to Tā (Space) and Vā (Time). In reality tā and vā exist in everything we do (in nature, mind and society).” He suggests that errors in thinking are caused by the separation of mind from reality. Tā in the word Talanoa refers to beating (of a drum). “When discussing and sharing our ideas together” he says, “we are beating our topic to get to knowledge ... to get real knowledge ... to get to a state of noa (zero).” (Hūfanga Professor ‘Okusitino Māhina’, personal communication, 9 April, 2013).



chapter 3

a review of contextual knowledge

3.1 Introduction

Not all knowledge resides in the written word. Because certain formative information and discourse considered in this thesis has been accessed through discussion with indigenous scholars, and in an examination of artifacts, this chapter is called a Review of Contextual Knowledge rather than a Literature Review. I have divided the chapter into two parts. The first reviews contextualising artistic practice in the field and the second considers knowledge emanating from written discourse.

3.2 Contextualising practice in the field

Malanga may be located in the context of a number of contemporary practitioners. They are significant because their work is either concerned with positive dissonance or questioning traditional Pacific practices as they occur in New Zealand urban settings. While the review is primarily focused on contributions of Pacific New Zealand educated women, it also considers the work of a small number of Pacific men. Significantly, all of these practitioners use poetic, artistic or orated forms, to address issues related to the

empowerment of Pacifica youth. Some of this work employs academic critique and some artistic provocation. As contextualising practitioners for this thesis, they may be divided into three groups:

- Practitioners who provoke through visual art
- Women Poets
- Women Academics

3.2.1 Practitioners who provoke through visual art

Two New Zealand born, Pacific Island visual artists are useful in contextualising this thesis project because both engage in a process of critique drawn from a position of cultural dissonance. They are Siliga David Setoga and Andy Leleisi’uao.

Siliga David Setoga

Siliga David Setoga is a New Zealand born Samoan visual artist with both of his parents born in Samoa. Reflecting on his upbringing on the border of fa’a Samoa and New Zealand culture in Mt Eden, Setoga is focused on the New Zealand based Pacific experience. He refers to his home as he was growing up as a “decolonized zone”¹³ where Samoan was the only language used in his

home. With strong Samoan influences at home but growing up in Auckland, he encountered a sense of confusion that he describes as “feeling neither here nor there and always wondering, questioning and searching for a place of belonging” (The big idea: Te aria nui, 2010).

Setoga often uses juxtaposition and wordplay in his artwork to draw attention to social issues in contemporary society. He is particularly noted for his critique of the church and its influence on Pacific Island families and communities. Setoga describes *It is Itself* (Figure. 7) as “playing the games back rather than continually being played” (Brownson, Māhina-Tuai, Refiti, Tavola, & Tonga, 2012, p. 94). His work is direct in its critique but often uses a thin veneer of humour as a way of navigating controversial territories.

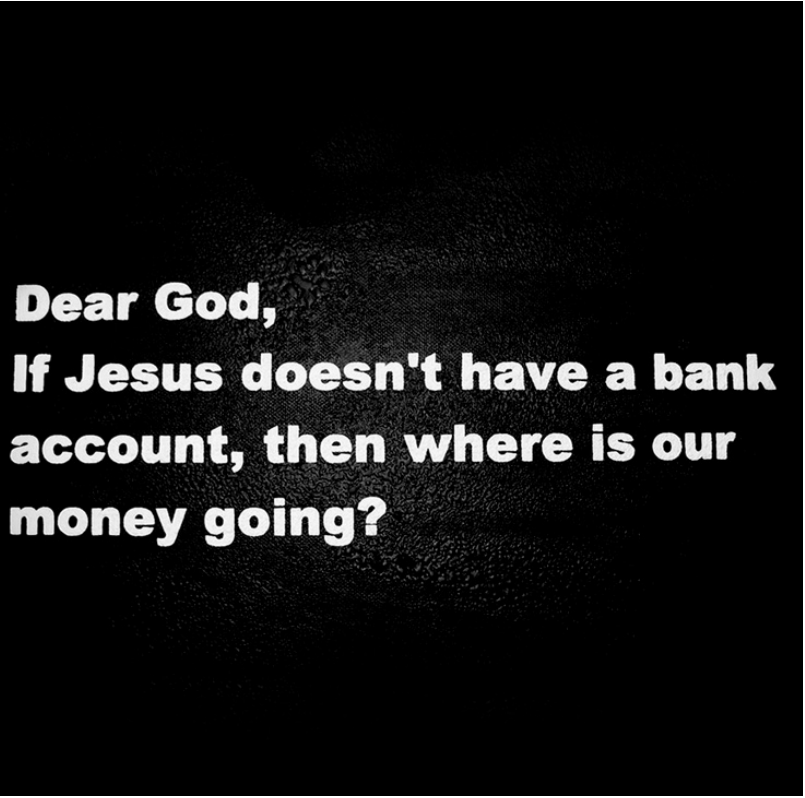


Figure 7. Detail of *It is Itself*. (2009). [Image used with the permission of the artist].

¹³ See <http://www.thebigidea.co.nz/profile/siliga-david-setoga/27509> 2010



Figure 8. Detail of *Waking up to my Polynesian Spine*. (1998).
[Image used with the permission of the artist].

Andy Leleisi'uao
Andy Leleisi'uao is a New Zealand born Samoan artist. His parents were both born in Samoa and he was raised and educated in Mangere, South Auckland. Leleisi'uao speaks from a “Kamoan”¹⁴ perspective. His early works (Figure. 8) dealt with themes such as immigration, youth suicide and religion, and explored the world between being “Kiwi” and ‘Samoan. He says of this dissonant state:

The two Testaments [Old and New] didn't help and I crashed as a Presbyterian. Puberty entered and left without warning. Island-born Samoans made me smile and wince. Kiwi culture couldn't go away and identity was a frustrated cloud. “My” New Zealand was never mine and “My” Samoa never existed. South Auckland is my home. Kamoan was, for me, the growth of wings. (Higgins & Leleisi'uao, 2009, p. 44)

Khanna (2010, para. 2) describes Leleisi'uao's paintings as “controversially exploring issues associated with the Samoan diaspora.” She notes that as his work developed he began “to both internalize and universalize these themes, exploring fantastical worlds and opening his art to a global audience” (ibid.).

Today Leleisi'uao continues to explore the possibility of self-created worlds where reality and the imaginary coexist and speak metaphorically of our present day-to-day existence. He continues a journey to inform “Kamoans” of

¹⁴ “Kamoan” is a portmanteau word coined by Leleisi'uao to describe his origins as a kiwi (a vernacular term given to those who are born and raised in New Zealand) and Samoan.

their past, present and future, stating, “We must recognise our Samoan history to understand why we must take advantage of the opportunities New Zealand offers us and use it to shape our identity for each other and our children” (Higgins & Leleisi'uao, 2009, p. 47).

3.2.2 Women Poets
Because this thesis adopts a poetic mode of address, a small number of contemporary Pacific Island women poets who either live in New Zealand or were educated in the country are of interest. Konai Helu Thaman, Grace Taylor, and Courtney Sina Meredith all discuss issues of dissonance and identity and all are significant because they treat poetry as both a written and spoken art form.

Konai Helu Thaman
Dr Konai Helu Thaman is a Tongan scholar and professor at the University of South Pacific (USP) in Fiji. To date, she has published six volumes of poetry.¹⁵ Asesela Ravuvu describes her as:

... one of the Pacific Island poets whose works are interesting to read because her poems reflect cultural contact situations facing Pacific Islanders of today. Under the title of Kakala, Tongan sacred fragrant plants, these poems convey, in a vivid and imaginative manner, not



Figure 9. *Konai Helu Thaman* by C. Faumuina Khakh. (2015).

¹⁵ *You, the Choice of My Parents* (Mana Publications, 1974), *Langakali* (Mana Publications, 1981), *Inselfeuer* (Reihe Literatur des Pazifik, 1986), *Hingano* (Mana Publications, 1987), *Kakala* (Mana Publications, 1993), *Songs Of Love: New And Selected Poems* (Mana Publications, 1999).



only the problems and issues in Pacific islands development, but also her personal observations of individuals trying to adjust to changes in the context of continuing cultural conservatism as against modern liberalism. (Pale/Creative Talanoa, 2012a)

Helu Thaman navigates “vā”¹⁶ between western and Pacific ways of knowing. She says:

*... my western education has not caused me to shift from a belief and reliance in the supernatural ... I am a Tongan woman of the commoner class, and although schooled in western ways, I continue to see myself as part of an organic unity not as a chance result of natural selection at work in a world devoid of supernatural guidance.”*¹⁷ (2003)

Her poetry often talks about dissonate states that may be cultural or academic. In *Thinking*, composed in 1999, she considers the nature of knowledge:

*You say that you think
therefore you are
but thinking belongs
in the depths of the earth
we simply borrow
what we need to know
these islands the sky
the surrounding sea
the trees the birds
and all that are free
the misty rain
the surging river
pools by the blowholes
a hidden flower
have their own thinking
they are different frames
of mind that cannot fit
in a small selfish world.*

¹⁶ “Vā is the space between, the between-ness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the unity-in- all, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. A well known Samoan expression is ‘la teu le va’, cherish/nurse/care for the va, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group, unity, and more than the individual person/creature/ thing in terms of group, in terms of vā, relationships.” Albert Wendt, (cited in Faleafa/LeVā, 2008)

¹⁷ Quote taken from Dr. Konai Helu Thaman’s keynote address at the Center for Pacific Island Studies Conference in 2003 entitled, *Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education*.



Konai Helu Thaman is important to this research because she is a living example of how a Pacific woman uses her voice to inform and educate young Pacific people to embrace the worlds in which they live and to share their experiences as a way of empowering future generations.

Grace Taylor
Grace Taylor is an *afakasi*¹⁸ spoken word poet,¹⁹ artist and youth development worker. Her father is English and her mother is Samoan. She was raised and educated in South Auckland where she is now a mentoring presence. In this environment she codirects *Niu Navigations* and cofounded both the *South Auckland Poets Collective* and the *Rising Voices* Youth Movement.

Taylor believes in the empowering potential of words, in particular through creative action. She works to provide spaces for people to tell their own stories. Her poetry draws on her experiences around identity and urbaninity. She believes that the exploration of a sense of belonging is underestimated in society. In her work with young people, she asks, “What story is it that you want to tell?” (Taylor, 2013).

One of the main catalysts for her drive to utilise spoken word poetry came from sharing her experience of being *afakasi* with larger, older Pacific audiences and



Figure 10. *Grace Taylor* by C. Faumuina Khakh. (2015).

¹⁸ A term used by Samoans to classify those who have one Samoan parent and one *Palagi* (Western) parent. The term may originate from the English word half-caste.

¹⁹ The term refers to poetry that has oral presentation as its primary mode of dissemination.



Figure 11. Courtney Sina Meredith by C. Faumuina Khakh. (2015).

the response of having people respond by voicing their connections to her story and in turn, sharing their own experiences. She realised the power of words in developing a sense of belonging and she believes that spoken word poetry, has “the ability to open up dialogue on sometimes, some really hard topics” (ibid.). She finds poetry a useful vehicle for connecting herself with other people, and she suggests that by using spoken poetry as a performative tool for young people to create their stories, we are able to provide them with a platform to share not only identities but also a sense of belonging.

Courtney Sina Meredith

Courtney Sina Meredith is a poet, playwright and musician of Samoan, Manganian and Irish descent. She has a degree in English and Political Studies from the University of Auckland, where she also studied Law. Meredith, on her blogsite,²⁰ describes her works as an on-going discussion of contemporary urban life with an underlying Pacific politiqe. Her poems often deal with issues facing Pacific youth growing up in Auckland, holding on to their heritage but existing in a contemporary world that offers potential for a positive outlook.

Robert Sullivan in his introduction to her first published book of poetry, *Brown Girls in Bright Red Lipstick*, says Meredith’s poetry demonstrates a “familiarity with Polynesian writing, she brings together an edgy singer’s strength, wry

insights, sensual material, beautiful shards, blood and breath, monsoons, and glistening water” (Sullivan in Meredith 2012, p. 1). In his foreward he alludes to a viscerality that surfaces through her paradoxically serious and frivolous manner. Inside this dynamic she grapples with issues like poverty, conflict, racism, sex, drinking and eating.

Like Taylor, Meredith considers contemporary Pacific Island poetry as transformative. She says:

If people are just willing to stand up and say what they're about ... I think that's their opportunity and what really got me into poetry and spoken word in the beginning was this ideal probably of, (for me), that poetry is this last bastion. It's that last place where it's completely lawless, the form can be personalised, it doesn't have to make sense to anyone, it can be grammatically strange. You can write it down and it might be really ugly but someone might think it's beautiful so I like that about poetry that it's a bit of a wild beast ... it's a live form that belongs to everybody. (Meredith, 2011).

3.2.3 Women Academics

A corpus of contemporary Pacific Island women’s oratory also emanates from the academy and a number of women academics have alluded to either positive dissonance or questioned traditional Pacific practices as they occur in New Zealand urban settings. In a broader context I acknowledge contributions from Pacific Island women academics who have contributed richly to discourses affecting Pacific Islanders in New Zealand. Among these are scholars like Dr. Linita Manu’atu (education and Tongan linguistics), Dr. Melenaite Taumoe folau (Pacific linguistics and Pacific vernacular literature), Dr. Michelle Schaaf (Pacific Island women, education, and the representation of the Polynesian female body image) and Dr. Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni (Pacific research epistemologies and methodologies, and Pacific health and social services research), and Dr. Monique Faleafa (clinical psychology, deputy chair of the New Zealand Psychologists Board [regulatory authority], Health Promotion Agency board). Among these women the power of oration is especially evident in the work of Professor Tania Ka’ai and Dr. Monique Faleafa. However, in terms of this thesis I am particularly interested in three additional women scholars whose research is related to Pacific Island youth, women’s poetry, mental health or identity.

²⁰ <http://courtneymeredith.com/>



Figure 12. Dr. Jemaima Tiatia-Seath by C. Faumuina Khakh. (2015).

Dr. Jemaima Tiatia-Seath

Dr. Jemaima Tiatia-Seath is one of New Zealand’s leading Pacific suicide prevention and research experts. Based at the University of Auckland’s *Te Wananga O Waipapa*, Pacific Studies, Dr. Tiatia-Seath led the *Suicide and Samoans: The Journey towards Prevention* project. This built upon both her (2003) doctoral thesis, *Reasons to live: New Zealand-born Samoan young people’s responses to suicidal behaviours*. Dr Tiatia-Seath’s parents were both born in Samoa and she was raised and educated in Avondale, West Auckland. She is currently principal investigator for a Health Research Council and Ministry of Health Pacific Partnership Programme, undertaking a national qualitative study examining suicide prevention for Tongan youth in New Zealand. She is also principal investigator for the Te Ra O Te Waka Hourua funded *Suicide Postvention: Support for Pacific Communities* national research project with Hibiscus Research Ltd.

Dr. Tiatia-Seath, in responding to suicidal behaviours, sees the need to find appropriate ways for young Pacific people to cope with depression and suicide. She says:

Culture matters. Culturally distinct approaches will address the disproportionate impact suicide is having particularly on our Pacific

youth in New Zealand. There are cultural nuances that cannot be explained solely within a Western framework. If we don’t examine the interface between diversity and suicide, the field of suicidology and mental health will continue to focus on universal approaches thus neglecting opportunities to save lives by promoting diversity and culturally relevant approaches ... Nurturing and taking care of relationships ‘teu le va’ is key for Pacific peoples... A phone call to a stranger... that is not us. Connection is vital. (Tiatia-Seath, 2012)

In presenting her findings, Dr. Tiatia-Seath emphasises that it is evident that Pacific young people live between worlds; Pacific and Western. By using the spoken forum to disseminate her research to both the academic world and in community based events, Dr. Tiatia-Seath is able to share what Meredith describes as “a gift ... talent ... voice” (Meredith, 2009) and even though quietly spoken, she assumes responsibility to inform, equip and empower others in the urban Pacific community.

Dr. Karlo Mila-Schaaf

Dr. Karlo Mila-Schaaf is of Tongan, Samoan and European descent. Born in New Zealand, she grew up in Palmerston North, went to school and worked in Tonga, and spent 10 years in Auckland before relocating to Wellington.



Figure 13. Dr. Karlo Mila-Schaaf by C. Faumuina Khakh. (2015).



She has always been interested in the cultural experiences of the New Zealand-born Pasifika population and her PhD in Sociology focused on this issue. Dr. Mila-Schaaf is also a poet. Her first collection of poems, *Dream Fish Floating*, won the NZSA Jessie Mackay Award for Best First Book of Poetry at the 2006 Montana New Zealand Book Awards. Her poetry has been published in a number of anthologies and she has had poems selected for *Best New Zealand Poems* in 2003, 2005 and 2006. In 2008 she collaborated with German-born artist Delicia Sampero to produce *A Well Written Body*, which is a combination of text and image.

Drawing on lived experience, Dr. Mila-Schaaf is currently developing a mental health intervention targeted at our Pacific young people. Her aim is to draw on, rather than compete and conflict with, Pacific ways of understanding the cause and treatment of such illnesses. Like Dr Faleafa she considers the salience of “vā” as a key therapeutic framework. In describing her own experiences as a New Zealand born Pacific person. She says:

Being of multiple ethnic heritages is a double-edged sword. There are both positives and negatives involved. One of the negatives is never really feeling like you fit in properly, you are either more or less than what you are supposed to be. This can be a really lonely place to be. Having said that, you are connected through blood and community to a diverse range of people and you learn multiple ways of being in the

world. As I get older, the cultural differences within my own family become more and more marked and I see how people see the same set of circumstances very differently, how they know the world in different ways. I cannot imagine being any other way now. (Pale/Creative Talanoa, 2012c)

Dr Mila-Schaaf says,

I have spent my whole life trying to work out where I belong, what it means to be Tongan, how I am influenced by my Samoan heritage as well. What it means to be Palagi? These meanings unfold and are part of my experience of being human at this turn of the century... everything goes into my poems. (ibid.)

These reflections illustrate to young Pacific people that there are others before them that have been able to get through the angst of growing up in the “vā”. It is also this reflection that seems to spur Mila-Schaaf on in her projects to engage and empower young Pacific people in her poetry, academic work and public orations. Dr. Mila-Schaaf encourages others by saying “you’ve gotta not be frightened to tell those stories. I don’t want other people telling them because they’re our stories, and they’re real. We must not be frightened of telling our stories because they are our stories to tell.”²¹

²¹ Tagata Pasifika Interview with Dr. Karlo Mila - Schaaf. (2008). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXpFkBDPDd0>



Dr. Selina Tusitala-Marsh

In 2004, the poet and scholar Dr Selina Tusitala-Marsh completed her doctoral thesis: *Ancient banyans, flying foxes and white ginger: Five Pacific women writers*. This study investigated the little known works of five Pacific Island women poets; Jully Makini (Solomon Islands), Grace Mera Molisa (Vanuatu), Haunani-Kay Trask (Hawai’i), Konai Helu Thaman (Tonga) and Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche (Samoa). Dr. Tusitala-Marsh considers these Pacific Island women poets opened up new areas of thought, research and development in Pacific literature while also empowering Pacific women and children to have a voice in a postcolonial era dominated by male influence. Usefully, she argues, “Poetry was used as a political voice. These women were all quite remarkable boundary-breakers” (Pale/Creative Talanoa, 2012b).

Dr. Tusitala-Marsh has done much to reinforce the growth and dissemination of Pacific Island women’s poetry. Her first book of collected poems, *Fast Talking PI*, (Marsh and Page, 2009) was awarded the New Zealand Society of Authors Jessie Mackay Best First Book Award for Poetry. She has established and coordinates an online hub *Pasifika Poetry*, which celebrates the poetry of the peoples of the Pacific, she is co-editor of the literary journal, SPAN, and is co-Chair of the South Pacific Association of Language and Literature, which hosted the 2011 conference *Reading and Writing in the Pacific* at Victoria University. She performs her poetry at a range of venues and festivals and through this process she continues to empower the indigenously poetic woman’s voice.²²



Figure 14. Dr. Selina Tusitala-Marsh by C. Faumuina Khakh. (2015).

²² Such presentations of her poetic performances also appear online. Indicative of this is her delivery of Fast Talking PI, (April, 2013) at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44mqyrvJCgY>



3.3 Contextualising literature in the field

The second part of the chapter briefly considers literature relating to Pacific youth and wellbeing that underpins the cultural concerns of the thesis.¹¹

A central concern of this project is the wellbeing of young Pacific people growing up in New Zealand. Pacific people began to migrate here from the 1950s, but the majority of the Pacific population now is born and raised here. The Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs confirms, “Today more than 60% of New Zealanders who define themselves as part of the Pacific community were born in New Zealand and are growing up here” (n.d. para. 4). The Health Research Council of New Zealand also notes, “Pacific peoples is a broad category encompassing a variety of Pacific Island nations and communities who are linguistically, culturally, and geographically distinct from each other” (2014, p. 2). It furthers adds:

Intermarriage is common and some identify with more than two or three ethnic groups. This redefines the boundaries of individual and group identities as they embrace diversity. Some may not emphasise their Pacific heritage at all. Through the New Zealand national census, people’s ethnic categories are self-defined. For Pacific peoples, this provides them with the opportunity to explore and affirm their individual and group identities in the context of New Zealand. (ibid.)

The Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs found, “by 2026, it is projected that Pacific people will be 10% of the population, compared to 6.5 % in 2001.” This is important to note because “The Pacific population in New Zealand will produce an increasing portion of the nation’s births, its student body, workforce, taxpayer base, voters and consumers of both public and private goods and services” (n.d, para. 1). Hence the health and wellbeing of young Pacific people is important now and heading into the future.

The New Zealand Ministry of Health, in their report *Rising to the Challenge: The Mental Health and Addiction Service Development Plan, 2012 – 2017* noted, “Almost half of New Zealand’s Pacific population is under twenty years of age, and this young population is increasing rapidly. It is mostly young Pacific people, rather than older Pacific people, who carry the burden of mental disorder ... ” (2012, p. 31).

One of the fundamental questions the New Zealand Ministry of Health (2008) asked when looking at major health and wellbeing issues for Pacific young people was, “What are our Pacific young people dying of?” The report found that the largest cause of mortality of young Pacific people between the ages of 15 to 24 was injury, including suicide. When looking at all the types of injury causing death, suicide was the leading cause of death, followed closely by vehicle transport accidents (2008, p.31).

Oakley Browne, Wells, & Scott, (2006) also recorded:

Pacific people experience mental disorders at higher levels than the general population... Pacific people have higher prevalences of suicidal ideation, suicide plans and suicide attempts than any other group... the prevalence of mental disorder was lower among Pacific people born in the Islands than among New Zealand-born Pacific. (p. 207, para. 1)

Many young Pacific people identify with more than two or three ethnic groups. The questions around identity and belonging that many young Pacific people face can lead to anxiety and confusion (Tamasese, Peteru, Waldergrave, & Bush, 2005, p. 304). Tiatia-Seath (2012) adds that “ways of engaging, informing and connecting with young Pacific people need to be operational in this ‘in-between’ world.” Mila-Schaaf’s (2012) research notes that a young Pacific people’s pride in their identity and placing importance on their Pacific ethnic values is associated with their likelihood to do well in school, to have future plans after school and be less likely to attempt suicide.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has been primarily concerned with contextualising knowledge relating to poetic, artistic and oratorical practice. My emphasis has focused on Pasifika women practitioners, many of whom bridge the gap between the artistic and the scholarly. It is here that my own research is positioned.

Having now considered knowledge impacting on the inquiry, it is useful to unpack the methodological framework and methods that have been integral to the development of my project.

²³ Literature related to Tongan poetry and oration will be discussed in Chapter 5



chapter 4

research design



Malanga may be defined as a practice-led artistic thesis. This chapter considers the research paradigm, methodology and its phases of implementation through which the project has progressed. It also integrates an illustrated discussion of experiments undertaken in developing the project.

4.1 Research paradigm

A research paradigm may be defined as an all-encompassing theory or group of ideas that informs one’s research or “the philosophical intent or underlying theoretical framework and motivation of the researcher with regard to the research” (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, para. 17). It might be alternatively described as the researcher’s worldview that informs the inquiry. Huitt explains this as “a frame of reference that guides one’s understanding of reality and provides the foundation by which one gives meaning to experiences and thought” (2011, p. 1).

The research paradigm on which this thesis project is established is qualitative. In this regard it is concerned with “understanding how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13).-

As an artistic inquiry the research develops its theorising out of practice. Bolt argues:

Theorising out of practice ... involves a very different way of thinking than applying theory to practice. It offers a very specific way of understanding the world, one that is grounded in (to borrow Paul Carter’s term) “material thinking” rather than merely conceptual thinking. Material thinking offers us a way of considering the relations that take place within the very process or tissue of making. In this conception the materials are not just passive objects to be used instrumentally by the artist, but rather the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist’s creative intelligence. (Bolt, 2006, p. 1)

Thus the thesis is driven by artistic inquiry and through this engagement with practice, certain contexts and theoretical considerations surface. They are “called to” the practice so they serve as a resource for its development, rather than a framework that my practice is used to illustrate.

4.2 Research methodology (Ngatu)

Methodology can be described as the process utilised in undertaking a research project. Rajasekar, Philominathan and Chinnathambi define it as “a systematic way to solve a problem. It is a science of studying how research is to be carried out” (2013, p. 5).

Although we might broadly understand the methodology used in this thesis inquiry as reflective, it draws deeply on certain Pacific approaches to describe how I inquire into and develop knowledge. I use the term *Ngatu*²⁴ to describe a linear methodology where each part of the process is blended into the next, much like the beaten mulberry layers blend into each other in the tapa making process.²⁵ Before unpacking the manner in which this occurs it is useful to briefly consider three distinct features that underpin the methodology. These are:

- Indwelling
- An appreciation of both tacit and explicit knowledge
- Being guided by the principles of *māfana* (warmth) and *uouongataha* (harmony or working gracefully together).

4.2.1 Indwelling

This project uses indwelling as a way of imagining people, places and sound. By indwelling I mean immersing myself deep into the question I am pondering and drawing out my inner spirit’s response to the subject. This can be described using the Tongan word, *faka’o’onoa*, which Toluta’u (2015) defines as “a phase of the research and artistic process where the artist/ researcher reflects and immerses in the depth of his/her creativity and inner spirit. This is done in order to unravel deeper meanings and interpretations of natural and social realities” (2015, p. 47). Moustakas (1990) suggests indwelling “carries a sense of total involvement in a research theme or question in such a way that the whole world is centred in it for a while” (p. 47). Polanyi (1962) asserts, “The tracing of personal knowledge to its roots in the subsidiary awareness of our body as merged in our focal awareness of external objects, reveals not only the logical structure of personal knowledge, but also its dynamic source” (p. 63). Thus in this process I dwell with the question, using self-exploration and self-dialogue until meanings and potentials begin to surface.²⁶

²⁴ *Ngatu* is the Tongan name given to tapa cloth or decorated bark cloth.
²⁵ In this process the surface is initially stripped from the hiapo (paper mulberry tree: *Broussonetia papyrifera*) and the inner bark is removed. This bark is then rolled inside out and the outer bark is discarded. The material is then scraped with a shell to clean it before it is beaten with the grooved side of a beater. This process spreads the fibres and widens and thins the cloth. The bark continues to be folded and beaten until it is “finished” with the smooth side of beater. The widened sheets are then weighted with stones to stretch and dry so they can be overlapped and joined, either by further beating or by using glue made from the *manioke koka’anga* tuber (tapioca: *Manihot esculenta*). Designs are then printed or painted on to the surface. Dyes are made from either earth pigments or from a range of berries, leaves and bark. Different *ngatu* patterns identify where the cloth comes from. *Ngatu* can fulfil diverse social functions. Although traditionally clothing was one of its main uses, today it is also used to present as gifts, as bed covers, curtains and wall hangings (see Pacific Pathways: Patterns in leaves and Cloth education kit; Auckland Museum, 2001, p. 3).
²⁶ In Western literature this immersive approach to research has been discussed by Ings 2011, Moustakas, 1990 and Polyani, 1962.

4.2.2 Tacit and Explicit Knowledge

In addition to indwelling, this project draws upon both tacit and explicit knowledge that is both cultural and technical. For example, when composing a poem, I may use explicit technical or literary knowledge about structure, cadence and punctuation, but I also draw upon knowledge just because it “feels right.” This ability is arguably linked to something Polanyi discusses when he states, “We can know more than we can tell” (1966, p. 4). By this he refers to a tacit dimension of thinking that is preconscious. It enables us to work with accrued knowledge that is not explicit. Polanyi notes however, that tacit and explicit knowing are not binary in nature. He says, “While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied” (1969, p. 144).

4.2.3 Principles of Māfana and ‘Harmony’

My research process is also guided by the Tongan principles of māfana and harmony. Māfana is a device that I use to help move the project forward, to check that it “feels right,” because elements within it are gracefully residing together. In the context of artistic research, Toluta’u (2015) defines māfana as “the way that the creative practitioner seeks harmony within her work. It is the interior guide that enables her to feel the ‘rightness’ of her emerging connections between ideas” (p. 56). Shumway (1977) alludes to this in evaluating a hiva (song) written by Nau Saimone when he notes:

Nau attempts to capture the unrestrained mafana or warmth that informs the highest artistic moment in Tongan faiva, when all elements of a performance come together into a gestalt of feeling known as “kuo tau e langi” (the singing has hit the mark). (p. 29)

If māfana is a sensory compass that I use to sense what is working compositionally, it is underpinned by a desire for harmony in my work (Figures 15 and 16). Māhina notes in his discussion of Tongan poetry that, “By transforming chaos to order, poetry undergoes a symmetrical re-arrangement of the ordinary language, the outcome of which creates harmony” (2005, p. 138). Tolouta’u suggests:

... one’s artistic thinking is embraced by the principle of uouongataha (harmony). On an internal level the pursuit of harmony involves the graceful alignment of ideas. When well attuned it can operate as a means of sifting out what does not work and delicately connecting what does. (2015, p. 57)

Thus, māfana may be understood as the device that I use to sense what is becoming harmonious in the process of composition. This device is applied fluidly across media forms that I use, including illustration, oration and written poetic composition.



Figure 15. (Top). An early experiment of the dissonant print Knowledge. (February, 2015). We can see it did not work because the elements were not harmonious; the weight of colour sucked the life out of the child, and she had little differentiation.



Figure 16. (Bottom). A later refinement of the dissonant print Knowledge. (April, 2015). Tone, placement, proportion, colour, and texture worked in greater harmony becauseTthe portrait and the background were more concordantly exposed.

4.2.4 Ngatu as a methodological concept

In the *ngatu* methodology a cohesive artistic artifact is composed using a process of blending and reflecting such that each element works both structurally and aesthetically with other parts of the emerging form. The process begins with one element and then gathers cohesion as materials and processes are blended. The beauty and authenticity of the integrated artwork is guided by the principles of *māfana* and *uouongataha* (Figure 17).

4.3 Research phases

In serving to unpack these processes in more detail it is useful to consider each of the phases discretely.

4.3.1 TŌ (Plant): Imagining/Indwelling

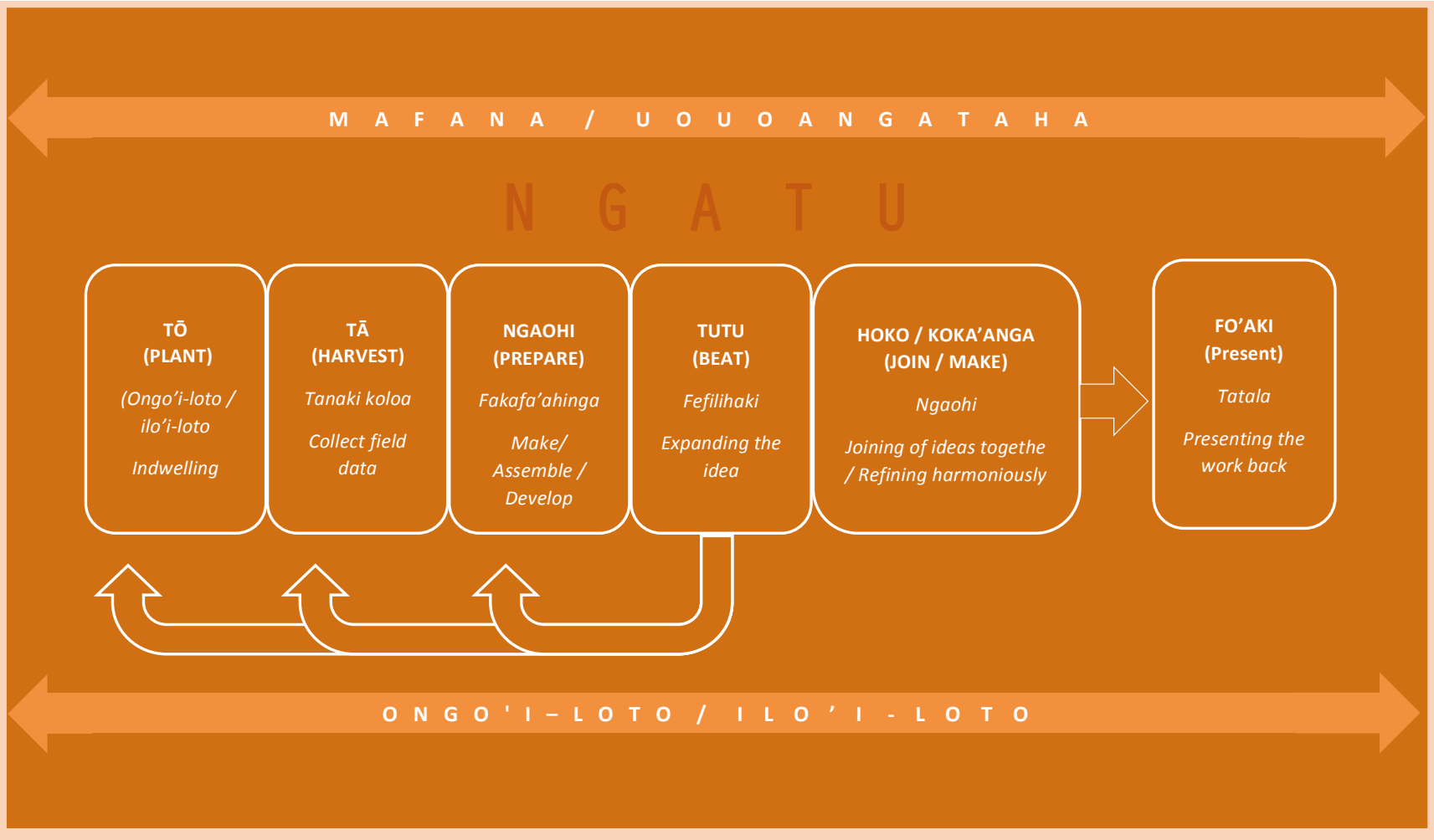
This first phase of the research enables me to turn within myself to find potentials. It starts from planting seeds so ideas grow in the heart and mind. This is described in Tongan as *ongo'i-loto* (feel-it –inside) and *ilo'i-loto* (know it in the mind).²⁷

RIGHT: *Figure 17. NGATU as a methodological process. Information graphic. (C. Faumuina Khakh, 2015).* Within the *Ngatu* process we see six seemingly discrete but in fact, integrated phases. The first phase, *tō -Plant* (indwelling/imagining), is concerned with an initial state of *ongo'i-loto* (indwelling). This is followed by a process of gathering new knowledge, processes, techniques and field data (*tā* - collect). Then artistic action is taken as this information is creatively synthesised or prepared into an initial form (*ngaohi* - (make/assemble/develop) that is be expanded on in *tutu*. This is the highly reflective “thinking” or design phase. This deep reflection leads to an uncovering or revelation of potential ways forward that are guided by both *māfana* and *uouoangataha*. Next I *hoko* or join the ideas up and through *koko'anga* I seek advice and critique from other people. With each stage, I experiment until the artifact embraces me with *mafana* and I sense an internal harmony between its orchestration (design) and the concept I am trying to communicate. Once all of phases are complete and the work is ready, it is time to *fo'aki* (present).

²⁷ Hufanga Okusitino Māhina, personal communication, April 24, 2015.
²⁸ For an explanation of this idea see Māhina, 2010, p. 169

Moustakas describes this state as indwelling and says it “refers to the process of turning inwardly to seek a deeper more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of the experience” (1990, p. 24). He suggests that such turning inwards “involves an attentive gaze at some facet of a phenomenon in order to understand its constituent qualities and its wholeness, and to expound the essences and details of the experiences” (ibid.). In this phase the question is drawn in to the researcher. For example, in writing the poetry from my grandmother’s voice, I asked myself, “What would it have been like to evacuate an erupting volcanic island as a young child?””

I asked layers of myself that were preconscious and contained residues of my ancestors’ knowing. The knowledge I was seeking could not emanate from my lived experience. But I am not discrete. As a Pacific Island woman I am not separated from layers of my ancestry. Knowing flows forward and backwards across time that is not divided by demarcations between the past, present and future.²⁸



Before attempting a first draft of the poem I dwelt with the idea, waiting and feeling until meanings and potentials began to surface. Although not identical, such approaches are not unknown in western methodologies. Douglass and Moustakas’ (1985) writing on heuristic inquiry discusses an initial research phase known as “immersion” that involves “vague and formless wanderings ... in the beginning, but a growing sense of meaning and direction emerges as the perceptions and understandings of the researcher grow and the parameters of the problems are recognized” (1985, p. 47).



Figure 18. Field photographs. (May, 2015). Images like these were used as both reference points for later work and as a mode of immersing myself in an image-led consideration of dissonance in an urban context.

4.3.2 TĀ (Harvest): Collecting Field Data

This second phase refers to collecting explicit knowledge and drawing on tacit knowing required to move the artistic practice forward. In *ngatu* making, this may be likened to harvesting the mulberry trees, which are ready to prepare for the artistic process. In this project I collected field data like photographic images that depicted Pacific young people in dissonant settings (Figure 18). Concurrently I researched very diverse bodies of knowledge, including the dawn raids of the 1970s that affected my parents and family members, the sounds



of instruments that might have been used in a Tongan village in the 1940s, drawing and printing techniques that might suggest dissonance, and historical approaches to Tongan and western poetic forms. I took the explicit knowledge I gathered and began to work with it using *māfana* and *uouoangataha* as guides towards effective composition. This phase may be likened to gathering useful elements for *ngatu* making that include raw materials, tools, and knowledge of processes that will be used in the artistic development of the project.



Figure 19. Diverse illustrative experiments conducted between September 2014 and January 2015. These involved watercolour painting, analogue drawing, digital drawing and integrating photographic elements.

4.3.3 NGAOHI (Prepare): Making/Assembling/Developing

The third phase is concerned with processing data, design and composition. In reference to *ngatu* making, this phase may be paralleled to soaking the *hiapo* bark in water to soften the raw material and then separating what is useful from what is not, then scraping the material with a shell to clean it. In this process I am always conscious of the Tongan principle of *anga fakatōkilalo* / *loto tō* and the Samoan concept of *fa’amaulalo* (humility and an openness to learning).

During the making, assembling and developing phase, I experiment with ways in which to combine collected knowledge into harmoniously composed artifacts. I normally spend a considerable amount of time in this phase as I experiment with texture, illustration techniques (Figure 19) materials, sound, rhythm *heliaki* (metaphor or hidden meaning), and poetic composition. In this process I experiment with possible approaches by considering data and potential relationships within it. Here again the tacit and explicit form part of a process of action and reflection. Schön (1995) discusses this situation when he says, “Our knowledge is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowledge is our action” (p. 28).

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4.3.4 TUTU (Beat): Expanding the ideas

At this stage the separated *feta’aki* (raw material) is beaten to spread the fibres and create the substrate that will form the basis of the new artifact. This fourth phase is not necessarily discrete (separated from the making, assembling and developing). However it can be differentiated because it opens the inquiry up to outside voices.

Here I draw into my process the expertise and critique of other parties. This feedback serves to deepen not only the kinds of artistic considerations I am undertaking but also the communicative potential of emerging artifacts. In terms of poetic composition, I shared early drafts of my work with established creative writers²⁹ and sought their critique. This enabled me to refine the emphasis of the work and edit out unnecessary details. In relation to illustration, I discussed my work with professional designers and illustrators.³⁰ This resulted in richer interrogations of the nature of cultural dissonance, a reconsideration of palettes, and a higher level of refinement in my illustration construction (Figure 20).



Figure 20: Illustrative experiment exploring the potentials of ngatu making. (April, 2015). As a consequence of critique and questioning I began to think about people within environments (what might be described as a form of contextual portraiture). I illustrated members of my immediate family in contexts that drew attention to the dissonance they encountered in everyday life. Interestingly, at this stage, I also began exploring the potentials of *ngatu* making, and the *kupesi* stencils used to rub the decorative patterns on to the bark cloth. These colours and textures had a direct impact on the palette I began using in my work.

²⁹ Toi Ora Art Trust, Jan Charman, and Welby Ings.

³⁰ Keith Crawford, Welby Ings, and Max White.

Discussions with illustrators also caused me to think about my drawing as a form of dissonance. I employed coffee staining (a form of water colour painting) and I mixed the images with textures generated by experimenting with 15th and 16th Century western engraving techniques and *ngatu* making. My intention was to explore dissonance by combining techniques that would not historically or culturally belong together (Figure 21).

However, in this phase I was selective about where and with whom I discussed my work. I was seeking highly informed feedback so what was said would provoke judicious rethinking and experimentation. This is why, throughout the process of the research, I have also showed iterations of my work to Pacific artists and scholars, including Andy Lelei’uso, Jay Williams, Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai and Jemaima Tiatia-Seath. In doing so I was presenting ideas that had been creatively beaten into *feta’aki*.³¹ In seeking feedback and advice I was involved in *koka’anga*.³²

4.3.5 KOKA’ANGA: Refining harmoniously

The fifth phase is concerned with *hoko* (joining) and *koka’anga* (refining harmoniously). Here I joined up my ideas with thinking that had been offered externally. These phases were therefore concerned with relationships between diverse media forms and thinking and how such things might be brought into a harmonious whole. This worked on two levels. The first was within the media forms themselves. For example, after a number of illustrations were complete, I displayed them side-by-side to reflect on how they worked harmoniously with each other. Here I relied on *māfana* and *uouongataha* to guide my considerations. Like Toluta’u, I embraced *māfana*:

... an idea that embraces and permeates the whole research process. It is the way that the creative practitioner seeks harmony within her work. It is the interior guide that enables her to feel the “rightness” of her emerging connections between ideas. (2015, p. 56)



Figure 21: Illustration experiment combining watercolour, *ngatu* design and textures generated from engraving experiments. (April, 2015).

³¹ Inner mulberry bark, which is “beaten and felted together to make sheets twelve to eighteen inches wide and several feet long” which have been dried and stored (Addo, 2013, p. 40).

³² Ngatu assembly (Addo, 2013, p. 39).



Like the *ngatu* making process, ideas and experimentation overlapped and were joined by beating out and connecting thinking. In this regard, Māhina speaks of, “making a *fuo-uho* (form-content) and *aonga* (function) transformation from chaos to order through sustained symmetry and harmony to produce beauty” (Māhina, Dudding, & Māhina-Tuai, 2010, p. 14).

In terms of my poetic compositions, I began comparing each generation of poetry to see if the collective works might function as a continuum. The Pentateuch that formed a conceptual framework for these required that each woman had a distinctive voice that reflected certain elements of her poetic heritage, but also suggested some transition and familial commonality. I wrote and rewrote, grouped and regrouped, edited, discarded poems, reincluded others, and read them both silently and aloud, until I could feel them approaching a harmonious flow.

4.3.6 FOAKI: Presenting back

Having arrived at a state of *uouongataha* with the project, it was important for me as a New Zealand born Pacific person to present back to the community. This gifting back constituted the final phase in the *Ngatu* methodology. Conceptually, it is tied into the Tongan concept of *Tatala* (opening up the world of wisdom),³³ to *Fetokoni’aki* (helping each other) and the Samoan principle of *Tautua* (helping each other/service).

I have realised from past experience as an educator in Auckland schools that many Pacific people do not receive the information they need to better their wellbeing. However, I have also witnessed, “the success of communities whose initiatives have followed the ways they know and understand” (Huffer & Qalo; cited in Mila-Schaaf and Hudson, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, drawing upon traditional Pacific knowledge and ways of seeing and being, I present back the artifact in a public setting, laying out my findings to the community to inform them in an engaging method that “acknowledges the relevance and applicability of indigenous cultural values in contemporary settings” (ibid.).

4.4 Advantages of the Methodology

Using *ngatu* making as a metaphoric framework for a methodology has both advantages and disadvantages for a research project such as this. The *Ngatu* methodology validates and enables both tacit and explicit knowledge. It also suggests that Pacific knowledges might be processed from Pacific epistemological frameworks. Thus, it presupposes that cultural knowledge may be most usefully generated from culturally conducive methodological approaches. Taufe’ulungaki (cited in Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009), says,

Obviously we cannot recreate our traditional Pacific communities in New Zealand but we can reclaim a sense of community through the identification of ‘core values’ that are consistent with the rebuilding and reconstruction of relationships that promote health and wellbeing for all our people. (2009, p. 14).

The *Ngatu* methodology also allows for constant artistic and personal reflection on practice. However, as with *ngatu* making, the process is not individualistic. Artifacts are brought into being because of the support of a community of practitioners. Thus, the methodology imports expert critique so I am able to achieve something beyond my own thinking. This is important because it addresses the problem of my individual frame of reference, telling me that something is working (or has reached its potential) when it may not have. This facility for feedback, underpinned by an attitude of *anga fakatokilalo / loto tō*, holds the researcher open to advice and comment. As a consequence she is able to constantly check the communicative quality of her work.

4.5 Disadvantages of the Methodology

Because the *Ngatu* methodology does not work from an established formula, it is easy to feel insecure when using it. In letting my practice and faith in the power of *ongo’i-loto* lead me, I have to sense my way forward. While *māfana* and

uouongataha may also serve as guides, it is easy to feel doubt and to worry that if, by not being constantly explicit, I am researching effectively. In this regard I am comforted somewhat by Kleining and Witt’s (2000) assertion that evidence of success in heuristic inquiries lies in the escalating richness of data and findings. I use this explicit indicator as evidence of my progress.

The thesis spans cultures and is subjective. This can pose questions of validity. I remind myself in the face of doubt that each person has their own voice and as an artist I must locate and work with this if I am to generate authentic contributions. The *Ngatu* methodology encourages the researcher to show iterations of her thinking to experts (including cultural experts), so feedback is pertinent but also affirming of the cultural and artistic complexities that the thesis is facing.

Another disadvantage with the *Ngatu* methodology is that it can be very time consuming. Much of the work generated in the thesis went through multiple drafts (both the practice and chapters in this exegesis). Because the methodology is demanding of time, resources and energy, it requires that the researcher is assiduous in strategising time and using feedback perceptively. For her work to progress, she has to develop very refined levels of self-reflection and critique on emerging outcomes so the creative work doesn’t stagnate in cycles of limited momentum.

³³ Dr. Linita Manu’atu, personal communication, June 7, 2015



4.6 Conclusion

This project is a practice-led, artistic inquiry. It employs a process of reflection in and on artistic practice. Significantly, the *Ngatu* methodology that underpins the research draws on certain indigenous principles, values and processes. It values both tacit and explicit knowledge and does not treat them as binary. It proposes the value not only of indigenous ways of knowing but also of indigenous ways of researching.

The methodology draws its metaphorical reference from Tongan women's processes of *ngatu* making. It is not an established methodology (in this form), but one I have tried to construct retrospectively as a way of explaining my methodological approach to artistic practice in this thesis. It uses the concepts of blending, reflecting and expert artistic and cultural input to create structurally aesthetically rich artifacts.

This is the first time the *Ngatu* methodology has been articulated in an artistic thesis and I accept that it will rely on further use and testing to clarify emphases and relationships within it. However, it is a truthful articulation of a process of thinking and refinement that has accompanied my creative inquiry and as such it gives voice to patterns and cultural ways of knowing and sensing that are often not made explicit in traditional Western methodologies.

Having now discussed the methodology underpinning the thesis, it is useful to consider influential ideas that have impacted on the design and development of the work.



chapter 5

critical commentary





This chapter offers a critical commentary on the artifacts in the exhibition and performance *Malanga*. In so doing it unpacks influential ideas that have impacted on the design and development of three related bodies of work:

- The prints and projected images
- The nature and evolution of the poetic works
- Creative renegotiations of oration.

5.1 Prints and projected images

The prints and projected images in this thesis are responses to the idea of positive cultural dissonance, which suggests that by combining seemingly contrasting ways of thinking, knowing and doing, one can produce positive, harmonious outcomes. This “betweenness” may be framed as a potentially positive and generative state. Artistically, positive dissonance employs the potentials of diverse media, often rooted in different cultural practices or disciplines to create new forms of print and projected imagery. In discussing these artifacts I will consider three ideas:

- Positive dissonance
- The influence of Tapa
- Graphic technique.

5.1.1 Positive dissonance

The six prints and projected images in *Malanga* may be seen as images that result from, and express dissonance. Grimes (2012) defines cultural dissonance as, “Elements of discord or lack of agreement within a culture” (p. 28). Bodley, (cited in Jervis, 2006, p. 4), suggests cultures are made up of at least three components: what people think, what they do, and the materials they produce. He suggests that culture is “shared, learned, symbolic, transmitted cross-generational, adaptive and integrated” (ibid.). Jervis (2006) in discussing the idea of culture as “adaptive,” explains how cultures and subcultures are formed through “modes of behavior, social institutions and technologies [that] all foster our adaptation to the particular niche of the ecological world we inhabit” (p. 4). She explains:

If you are part of an island culture, most likely your diet will consist of fish and the local technology will include boat making and the making of fishing gear. Culture is also integrated, that is, each aspect of a culture is consonant with every other. If not, there is cultural dissonance that risks a tearing apart.

For urban Pacific people, this is exactly the case. Displaced from our parents’ islands, the upbringing in our homes is often at odds with the lives we live in

Western society. We are forced to engage with this cultural dissonance. Anae (1998, p. 10) articulated this beautifully when she wrote:

*I am a Samoan – but not a Samoan
To my aiga in Samoa, I am a palagi [foreigner]
I am a New Zealander – but not a New Zealander
To New Zealanders, I am a bloody coconut, at worst,
A Pacific Islander, at best,
To my Samoan parents, I am their child.*

This short verse describes the unstable perceptions that may result in a sense of identity for some but simultaneously create confusion for others. For example, in response to Jervis’ (2006) statement, although in the islands we mostly ate fish and our local technology was primarily concerned with boat building and fishing, this is certainly not the case for urban Pacific people. In New Zealand our diet is mainly bought from the shelves of a supermarket, or the take away, or the local shops. The food variety is different. Our technologies are mechanical or digital. The handicrafts of our grandparents are largely stripped of their technological functionality and have become expressions of traditional culture. On any given day we navigate meaning and expression between languages. The values of our parents and peers are also often different.

The church, the sports team, the school ground, the street and the mall all represent spaces with conflicting values and varying modes of cultural expression.

As I was growing up, my father would often remind me of the Samoan proverb “*E lele le toloa, ae ma’au lava i le vai*” (The bird will fly away but will always return to its nest). I often think of these lines when I create my artwork. Although I live in an urban environment, by returning to my roots physically, spiritually or mentally to find myself, I receive both nourishment and meaning. In this process I am walking forward into the past and walking backward into the future, “where the seemingly fixed past and yet-to-take-place future are constantly mediated in the ever changing, conflicting present” (Poutaine, 2010, p. 16).

My living present (wherein I create images) is therefore a site of productive cultural dissonance. This is why, in my work, time coexists. Projected drawings sometimes contain elements of moving archival footage or old photographs. Clouds move, but at a different pace to land. The directional light of more than one day might shine on a single image, and these images merge and fuse in a continuum of subtle shifts and progressions (Figure 22).

Malanga engages with the classical concept of *fonua*³⁴ that can be defined as a Tongan practice where:

... past, present and future are temporally-formally, spatially-substantially, and functionally linked in continuous, circular ways... an eternal cyclical process of exchange, marking the supporting and opposing relationships between people and environment. (Māhina and Māhina-Tuai, 2012, p. 18)

Thus, positive dissonance involves the act of taking ideas or elements that are separate and connecting them, and highlighting the point of intersection. Māhina and Māhina-Tuai explain:

... all things in reality, that is nature, mind and society, stand in eternal relations of process, cycle and exchange, giving rise to conflict or order. By extension, order and conflict are logically of the same condition, in the sense that order itself is an expression of conflict ... By virtue of this logical condition, order is acquired when equal and opposite forces come into a common point of contact with another, that is, intersection by means of both connection and separation. (2012, p. 30)

³⁴ Tu’itahi (2007, p. 4) notes that in broad terms “*Fonua* means land and its people and their ongoing relationships ... it refers to the intricate web of ongoing relationships between the entire physical and social environment, and humanity.”



Figure 22a. Frame grab from my grandmother's poem Genesis. (June, 2015). Here we see her island of *Niua* as a painted form, but the sky is a fusion of moving cloud and later, volcanic eruption. In *Malanga*, while her poem is recited, part of the image remains constant while the heavens float then cover her home with ash.



Figure 22b. Frame grab from my grandmother's poem *Genesis*. (June, 2015).



Figure 22c. Frame grab from my grandmother's poem *Genesis*. (June, 2015).





Figure 23. Detail of a projected image incorporating ngatu. (June, 2015).

5.1.2 The influence of Tapa cloth

In both my prints and projected images I have drawn on the colour palette and sometimes subtle patterns found in Tapa cloth (known as “ngatu” in Tongan and “siapo” in Samoan). My mother always had ngatu in our house, ready for giving as gifts for birthdays, weddings or funerals. Like Palu, Johnson and Filemoni-Tofaeno (2003, p. 63), I understand that:

... the ultimate role of ngatu is to serve the family,
the community ... Its service is not only to the living but also to the dead,
not for the King alone but for the commoners and outcasts.

In my prints and projections we often see traces of ngatu patterns. They texture the shadows of dissonant worlds, present, but operating more as a reminder than a dominant element (Figure 23). However, the colour of tapa permeates all of the images. Its light browns (tata’i from the koka tree), darker hues (from the tongo tree)³⁵ and off-white substrate form my dominant palette. This is then subtly permeated with “Western colours”³⁶ that form a counterpoint and an additional reference to the dissonant.

5.1.3 Graphic technique

The prints and projections in Malanga are constructed by drawing upon traditional Western printmaking aesthetics,³⁷ watercolour painting and graphite

³⁵ Toluta’u, 2015, p. 98.
³⁶ By this I mean colours that have their origins outside of traditional Pacific Island print pigments.
³⁷ These include engraving, embossing, photography and digital reproduction.
³⁸ The material physically consists of thin layers of fibre that are combined into one surface.

drawing. These techniques are constructed into the final prints through a process comparable to ngatu making. By this I mean that conceptually and physically the work is layered (Figure 24). The images are assembled from components that are fused and digitally “stuck together” in the manner that reflects the construction of feta’aki.³⁸ A material physically consisting of thin layers of fibre that are combined into one surface.



Figure 24. Layers making up the prints and projected images. (June, 2015).



Each image utilises digital photography to capture the main subject and certain background elements. Digitally, I colour-manipulate these photographs and apply features that flatten details within them so they form a simple layer over which further printing and mark making will occur. These photographs form the first marks on the *feta’aki*. The grainy texture of the background (designed to replicate the surface of *ngatu*) is in fact spray painted aluminium (such that one might find in the context of urban graffiti). This has been photographed before being fused with the composite imagery. Often at this stage visuals are printed out on to paper. I then draw and paint over these prints, removing, adding to, and manipulating the existing imagery. Into the reconstituted drawing (which I then rescan), I layer textures from engravings I have also printed. Once a satisfactory dissonance has been reached I print the composite image on to textured stock³⁹ using inkjet processes. In certain instances this paper is embossed or debossed⁴⁰ so it alludes to certain Western relief print technologies.⁴¹

These prints become a new, urban form of *ngatu*. They suggest a print process that is not quite definable. There are allusions to engraving, drawing, painting and photography but nothing is absolute. Nothing of origin stands unaffected by additional layers. Like contemporary urban Pacific culture, the final state only exists because of an orchestration of dissonance.

³⁹ Normally 330 gsm, ILFORD gold cotton textured paper.
⁴⁰ Embossing and debossing are the processes of creating either raised or recessed relief images and designs on paper. An embossed pattern is raised against the background, while a debossed pattern is recessed into the surface of the substrate.
⁴¹ These include woodcut, metal cut, relief etching, engraving, and aquatint.

5.2 The nature and evolution of the poetic works

The images I have discussed do no operate in isolation. They are extensions of poetry in print and projection. In *Malanga* they are the silent accompaniment to five generations of poetic reflection. In discussing the nature of poetry in the work, I will consider two issues:

- Changes in poetic expression
- The Pentateuch as a structural and conceptual device.

However, before unpacking significant issues impacting on their form, it is useful to encounter the poems in print form (Figures 25-29). These poems navigate a trajectory from the island home of my grandmother on *Niua*, through my mother’s story, my own, my daughter’s and that of her yet to be born child. In so doing, the poems traverse changing Tongan approaches to poetry that embrace shifts in location, form and cultural values.



GENESIS [my grandmother - Vika Lasalosi]

Niua:
Tobacco smoke
Pandanus leaves
Tools made from old car parts.
I scrape away the outer layer
to make the flax supple
for weaving events
bound together
into my life.

I came from remoteness,
simplicity,
hard work,
I lived on “Hope Island.”
A blissful childhood.
Sea waves arrived with tin can letters
and left again with hopes and dreams.

‘Eua:
Then on that day, the sky turned to ash.
I clenched my mother’s *tupenu* tightly.
I was scared.
There were pigs grunting in the grounds
Woven Palm Leaf baskets packed
with our belongings.
We were leaving
in search of another Eden.
Passing the *fale lotu* and the fruit trees
to the *vaka*.
My foot mashed squashed avocadoes
into the ground.
Hope?

Futu:
Niua, I miss you
our childhood memories
the *matala’i siale* that grew plentiful.
Where we swung wildly
on the mango tree branches.
You gave us everything we needed
Before the thunderstorm of hail and fire
But we were young and innocent.
We hoped for more
and did not understand
I am sorry.

Left: *Figure 25.* Frame grab from my grandmother’s poem
Genesis. (June, 2015).

EXODUS [my mother - Vaiola Faumui]

Child

Avocado spread thickly on soft white bread
from the *Nuku’alofa* bakery.
I walk to school through dusty streets
in my clean, pressed, high school uniform.
My *ta’ovala* tight
around my waist
and new crisscrossed sandals
from the guy
whose hands I want to escape.
Touching,
disguised
as the selfless giver
The nuns are supposed to care
to protect
but they beckon to me
when he arrives
with new Western clothes.
I want to run,
away from this monster,
and the way he cares
for a child with no mother.

Teen

Unfamiliar relative from a distant land
with stories of opportunity and a better life.
I sit in this *fale koloa*
upon the gravel and dirt that is *’Eua* Island.
Emotional skeletons
Fear and hope of beginnings
in a new,
clean place.

Young Woman

Thank you Samoa
for my ticket to freedom
Your son was persistent
in requesting me from my auntie
with his humble and courteous visitations
armed with Tip Top boysenberry ice cream.
His proposal gifted me permanent residence
No overstayer, past my use by date
(To be ripped away in the early dawn by sudden police).
I belong somewhere

To a beloved matriarch
Who draws to her, many of my new found family
Their cars line half of Brandon road
and litter her front lawn when we have family gatherings.
The men kill the celebratory pig in the back yard
and cook it with the lu sipi in the umu.
No washboards and *taufale* here,
Auntie owns a Kelvinator wringer washer
and an Electrolux vacuum cleaner.

New Mother

I am a lioness from the kingdom of Tonga,
the only remaining monarchy in the Pacific.
Ko e ’Otua mo Tonga ko hoku tof’ia

I protect my young with my life
so their innocence is not touched by unclean hearts.
I give everything I did not have as a child.
My love in abundance
A better life.

Left: *Figure 26a*. Frame grab from my mother’s poem
Exodus. (June, 2015).





My three jobs are for you my children
so you have shoes that cover your feet.
Not the jandals I slip and slide upon
early in the morning as I mop
the floors of the 3 Guys supermarket
In the afternoon, I clean the school
where the rubbish bins are full
of lunches from discarding wealth,
So you may have enough to eat.
Our mother tongues which you spoke fluently
are put aside so you can progress
with remedial reading.

After I kiss you goodnight,
I will leave to tend to elderly people
forgotten in their beds.
A graveyard shift of neglected lives.
I bend and lift their bodies in sterile rooms
With skin like paper, they wait for death and families
who will visit ...
One day soon.
When you awake my children, I will have returned
to braid your hair and herald you spotless
into a bright new morning.

Left: *Figure 26b*. Frame grab from my mother’s poem
Exodus. (June, 2015).

Mature Woman
You have achieved more than I ever could.
I did not even finish High school.
Never again will you wear the hand me down,
the T-shirt that said “Gary” on the front
although your name is “Erika”.
You live what I once dreamed.
You clean no floors
Nor lift the foreign bodies of the dying.
Your hands don’t smell of disinfectant
and faint dreams of *heilala*.

Your mother tongue is a vague memory
of meaningful sounds.
fa’a ‘aloalo show respect
ma taumafai pea i le fa’asamoa.
Speak in Tongan!
Aue fakaofa
‘Ikai ke toe sai a mou lea faka fonua.
You are children of many worlds
Aua teke ngalo, do not forget your roots
When you seek refuge in the worlds of advertised TV.

Wife
My husband
Son of Samoa,
I wish for your presence once more.
Now that you’ve travelled back to your village
Your *ma’umaga* has long overgrown

I long for your guidance and company.
Our grandchildren are growing tall and strong,
If you were still here you would be so proud of them.
Ua amata fa’aa’oa’o le fa’asamoa a tamaiti
Mason gave a *lauga* at his school on Grandparents’ day
And Aysha asked me why Tongans wear mats around their waists.
E ese a tamiti i le nei taimi
Children of this generation ...
They are all mixed up like a sweet *‘otai*
with an island base of coconut cream,
introduced milk and watermelon.
Melding into a unique flavour
Each time.



LEVITICUS [my story - Cecelia Faumuina Khakh]

Downtown Bus Terminal

Lo'u tama ē
Se a le mea ua e tu'ulafoai mai ai au?
Now that you have left
I dream grey
Soot coloured
Exhaust fumes
On taxi lined city streets.
The books in my backpack
That I don't even read,
Are the weight of dreams
They are there in case,
I need to divert people's attention.
The bright canary bus
takes me nowhere.
Just a ride
Anywhere
... away from me

Left: *Figure 27a*. Frame grab from my poem
Leviticus. (June, 2015).

Mission Bay

These waves lap upon the shore,
of a man-made beach,
for it receives imported sand,
from the Pakiri coastline,
North of Warkworth.
Displaced.
Here.
The two of us.

Otara

Recognisable
yet unfamiliar.
We are alike
But not.
I comprehend the sounds you utter
But you are much surer than I.
Confident
Street smart

I reach out to embrace
but you turn your face away.
How are we so similar,
Yet so far apart?

New Lynn

On a random bus to nowhere
I never wish on anyone-
this feeling.
The voices
Inside
Relentless.
I want to answer back
To give my two cents worth of ...
nothing.
But it is not allowed
This *lē fa'a'aloalo*
This is disrespect.



Henderson
Tama ē
O lea ua ou malamalama

I waited
Quietly
Watching
The walking people
In an unknown land
You heard.
What could not be spoken.
Trust
I embrace your memory
Tightly
You,
You
... protect me.

Left: *Figure 27b*. Frame grab from my poem
Leviticus. (June, 2015).



NUMBERS [my daughter - Jasvinder Khakh]

HOME
I am one of billions on this planet
This world tells me
I need to be so many things that I am not.
But I *know* who I am.-
My father reminds me daily
I am *Jatt*, Punjabi hard!
A thunderbolt hurled from the heavens
into a family of mixed cultures.
My mother
tells me stories of when she was little.
How life was simple
but confused.
She reminds me, just be the best ME I can ...
Unique
Special

Baba ji tells me stories of Sikh ways
Bebe ji lets me help her make rotis at night.
Kui prays with me and for me
and although the *toeaina* is now gone
I like to look at pictures of him in our family photo album holding me.
We are connected
strong.
I am one of 4 grandchildren on my father's side
But of 14 on my mother's
I am ...
They were ...
I will ...
Walk backwards into the future
Absorbing and filtering
To be me
... and I take possession of this promised land

Left: *Figure 28*. Frame grab from my daughter's poem
Numbers. (June, 2015).



DEUTERONOMY [the unborn child]

Malanga

Time separates us
The wind whispers from the past
Into the future

Left: *Figure 29*. Frame grab from my unborn grandchild's poem
Deuteronomy. (June, 2015).



5.3 Traditional features of Tongan poetry

My mother’s family is Tongan and therefore I draw upon certain conventions of Tongan poetry to inform my practice, including pride of locality (Helu & Janman, 2012, p. 17), the role of the writer as social critic (Wood, 1998, p. 10), use of melancholic tone (Helu and Janman, 2012, p. 53; Wood, 1998, p. 9), poetry as *faiva* (performance) (Helu and Janman, p. 49; Shumway, 1977, p. 25; Wolfgramm, 1993, p. 171), *Faka’apa’apa* (respectfulness) and *māfana* (appreciation) (Wood, 1998, p. 17; Shumway, 1977, p. 29).

In my work we encounter certain distinctive features of Tongan poetry. Among them are:

- Pride of locality
- Melancholic tone
- *Heliaki* (metaphor)
- *Punake* (integration)
- Protean stylistic treatment.

5.3.1 Pride of Locality

The five poetic works are generational voices of one family who are separated by time but connected through bloodlines. Within them we see evidenced the Tongan concept of pride of locality. According to Helu and Janman (2012),

Tongan nature poetry never speaks of nature in a generalised way, nor does it consider it in the abstract. They say we encounter “always, a particular manifestation of nature, concretised nature, an actual island, a particular beach, a specific lagoon, and so forth” (pp. 16-17).

In the five poems we see each woman considered with “a sense of oneness with *her* locality” – *her* “localness” is specific. For example, in the poem *Genesis*, although my grandmother’s voice speaks about her homeland in metaphors, she also specifically names the island when she says:

Niua I miss you. (Genesis, v.3, line 1).

By extension, in *Exodus*: v.4, line 1, my mother states:

“I am a lioness from the Kingdom of Tonga.”

And in *Leviticus* all of the verse titles are named after specific Auckland locations: The Downtown Bus Terminal, Mission Bay, Otara, New Lynn and Henderson.

In my work, land is not anonymous because it is our connection to place that helps to create our identity, even if this identity is sometimes constructed through dissonance. We belong to Westmere, or Onehunga, or to Tonga Tapu, or to *Eua*. One’s family village is significant and is normally among the first things established in introductory conversations with others. Similarly one’s school allegiance is also significant, as is one’s church. These are not generic associations. Kanehele, cited in Craig, Taufu, Jackson and Yeo Han (2008, p. 13), explains:

You know who you are when you know where you are ... being without a place means being severed “from the most vital physical, psychological, social, and spiritual values of one’s existence.”

5.3.2 Melancholic tone

Traditional Tongan poetry is often profiled by a distinctively melancholic tone. Helu and Janman (2012, p. 53) state:

Some Tongan classical poets presented melancholy as a brooding, depressed and dull state; others saw it as a submissive universal sadness, and expressed it in a language of hopelessness and rejection which is in reality an assertion of power and joy.

Wood (1998), in commenting on Konai Helu Thaman’s collection of poems *You the Choice of my Parents*, notes that these poems are also melancholic. They mourn for the loss of customs and failures in communication and change. She says:

The tone can be melancholic in the sense that loss involves an understanding of the uniqueness and irreplaceability of time and place, but the psychic work of the poems can also be read as an attempt to symbolize the gains as well as the losses of cultural and historical change. (Wood, 1998 p. 9).

In *Malanga* we encounter a form of melancholic reminiscence. This is discernable in all of the poems except *Deuteronomy* (the future-oriented work). Thus, in the generational accountings we hear:

*Before the thunderstorm of hail and fire
We were young and innocent.
We grasped at hope,
and did not understand
I am sorry.
(Genesis, v.4, lines 7-11)*



*I long for your guidance and company.
Our grandchildren are growing tall and strong,
If you were still here you would be so proud of them.
Ua amata fa'aa'oa'o le fa'asamoa a tamaiti.
(Exodus, v.6, lines 7 - 9)
The books in my backpack
That I don't even read
Are the weight of dreams.
(Leviticus, v.1, lines 5-7)*

Like Konai Helu Thaman, in these wistful monologues, I am lamenting certain social situations; in these instances, exile, loss and depression. However, in these poems the melancholic tone is punctuated with biting insight. Issues that might be traditionally swept under the carpet are rendered in sharp detail.

Sexual abuse:

*From the guy whose hands I want to escape
Touching
Disguised as the selfless giver.
(Exodus, v.1, lines 8-10)*

Generational disassociation in Western families:

*I bend and lift their bodies in sterile rooms
With white skin like paper
They wait for death and families
who will visit ...
One day soon.
(Exodus, v.4, lines 25-29)*

Alienation and depression:

*The bright canary bus
Takes me nowhere
Just a ride
Anywhere
... away from me.”
(Leviticus, v.1, lines 11-15)*

Thus, the melancholic is not passive in these works. It is a counterpoint against which the hard realities of cultural dissonance are positioned. This is important because, in Pacific communities, the tradition of *fa'a'aloalo* (respectfulness to

elders) often precludes youth from raising issues to do with social wellness with their parents or elders. Tiatia-Seath (2003, p. 127) records in her research the following comment from a interviewee:

Kids can't communicate with their parents cos it's a cultural thing. I know that my parents in Samoa weren't allowed to talk to their parents and stuff like that, and that's sort of come down to us. I think it might help if our parents could recognise that problem. We need to break out of that, especially for future generations.

As a woman who has grown up in an urban environment with a strong but mixed Pacific heritage, I can relate to this, and I feel a responsibility as an artist to offer something to my community that may help us to think through the importance of finding our voices, both those of the older generation who have sacrificed much, and the present generation who may be struggling as I once did to find my place between worlds.

5.3.3 Heliaki
Kaeppler (cited in Wood, 1998) defines *heliaki* as “the most important aesthetic principle” that “pervades Tongan life.” She translates it as “indirectness,” “hidden meaning,” “allusiveness” and “round aboutness” (p. 18). Shumway (1977) suggests that *heliaki* is used to denote craft, explaining “Cliches are always a

danger within a fixed poetic convention. The better poets avoid this danger by clever *heliaki* which keeps the spectators guessing about the meaning of the work” (p.29). Helu and Janman (2012) note that *heliaki* allows for things to be said in more euphemistically elegant ways and they lament that:

Although change is inevitable in a shrinking world, it is regrettable that the beautiful element of restraint in poetic composition is being overlooked, and in my opinion not at all understood, by many of the younger generation of ‘poets’ writing in Tonga now. (pp. 51-52)

In my work I endeavour to reignite this use of metaphor and indirectness. Thus:

*ta'ovala tight around her waist
and crisscrossed sandals. (Exodus, v1, lines 5-6)*

This alludes to being bound to a situation the young girl cannot escape. Later, in lines 14 and 15, a combination of *heliaki* and irony are utilised when the same child states:

*I want to run away from this monster
and the way he cares,
for a girl with no mother.*



Metaphorical references are also drawn to the exit from Eden (Biblical book of *Genesis* 3:24) when my grandmother says:

*We were leaving
in search of another Eden.
Passing the fale lotu and the fruit trees
to the vaka. (Genesis, v.2, lines 7 - 10)*

Other allusions to incidents and emphases in the Pentateuch occur in my grandmother’s poem with a reference to the seventh plague of Egypt (The thunderstorm of hail and fire: *Exodus*. 9:13–35).

*You gave us everything we needed
before the thunderstorm of hail and fire.
But we were young and innocent.
We grasped at hope,
and did not understand.*

Similarly in the poem *Leviticus* we encounter the lines:

*I waited
quietly
watching
the walking people
in an unknown lands. (v.5, lines 3 - 7)*

This is an allusion to the fact that *Leviticus* deals with the Israelites walking journey into the unknown (see Figure 33). In addition, in the poem *Numbers*, my daughter says in closing:

... and I take possession of this promised land. (line 31)

The line refers to the land from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates river (Biblical *Exodus* 23:31) that was given by God to the Jews after Moses led their exodus out of Egypt, (Biblical *Deuteronomy* 1:8). The child of this current generation is saying that she will no longer be dispossessed.

5.3.4 *Punake*

Helu and Janman (2012) explain that Tongan poetry is performance. Wood (1998) suggests that poetry in Tongan society is intertwined with the composition of dance and music – a combination called *faiva*.⁴² Shumway (1977, p. 25) notes:

Tongan poetry was, and is, inextricably connected with music and dance. This unity of music, poetry and dance existed especially in the art of ancient Tonga. We cannot, however, regard this as a case of subordinating poetry to music, for the Tongan punake (poet) has a conception of his art quite different from that of his European counterpart.

My poems are composed within the concept of *punake*. As such they are designed to be read and/or performed and are accompanied by prerecorded, multilayered soundscapes. *Punake* is a distinct form of cultural expression traditionally associated with Tongan poetry and performance. It operates beyond the limitations of the written word. In *punake*, knowledge and expression are shared through a fusion of music, movement, image and oratory. A *punake* in the traditional Tongan sense is a master craftsman skilled in incorporating poetry, sound and movement to produce one performance.

He is a master artist who practices all three performance arts of faiva ta’anga (poetry), faiva hiva (music) and faiva haka (dance). This is in contrast to specialist practitioners, who are individually known as pulotu fa’u (a poet), pulotu hiva / fasi (a musician) and pulotu haka (a choreographer). A punake is therefore an artist who formally unifies all three performance art forms through composing poetry, putting it to music and then choreographing dance movements to create a single performance. (Creative New Zealand, 2013, p. 1)

In *Malanga* in a renegotiation of the conventions of *Punake*, I compose and perform the poems, compose the soundscapes that surround them, and illustrate the worlds that contextualise them.

5.3.5 *Protean stylistic approaches*

Finally it is useful to note certain stylistic shifts that occur across the poems. Firstly, Judeo-Christian references are less common as we move forward. Similarly, we increasingly encounter examples of vernacular speech (*Leviticus*, v.3, lines 7 - 9) and multilingual construction (*Numbers*, v.2, lines 1-6). This is because the largely monolingual world of my grandmother transitioned into the bilingual world of my mother and into the multilingual world of myself, my daughter and future generations. Thus, in *Numbers* we encounter Punjabi,

⁴² *Faiva* refers to Tongan performing arts that consist of sound, poetry and choreography. By being in tune with the “faiva” *performance*, the musician, choreographer and dancer endeavour to reach the pinnacle of a performance that Shumway (1977) describes as “*māfana* or warmth that informs the highest artistic moment in Tongan *faiva*, when all the elements of a performance come together into a gestalt of feeling known as ‘kuo tau e langi’ (the singing has hit the mark)” (p. 29, para.1). Wolfigramm (1993) refers to this climax as ‘*asi* (behold the presence of the unseen) and marks the success of a performance, whether it is a speech, a story recitation, a dance, or a song (p. 171, para. 2).



Tongan, Samoan and English languages because increasingly, Pacific youth draw from a word bank constituted from increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds:

*Baba ji*⁴³ tells me stories of Sikh ways
*Bebe ji*⁴⁴ lets me help her make roti's at night.
*Kui*⁴⁵ prays with me and for me
and although the *toeaina*⁴⁶ is now gone
I see pictures of him in our family photo album holding me,
we are connected ...
strong. (*Numbers*, lines 16-22)

The tone and forthrightness of the poems also change. My grandmother's voice in *Genesis* is nonconfrontational, respectful and slightly nostalgic. However, my mother's voice in *Exodus* draws us out of this state. In her poems we encounter a harsher light cast on experience. This emphasis on noneuphemised experience continues through *Leviticus* where I employ visually sharp images about both location and the self. By the time we reach *Numbers*, my daughter's voice begins to tell us who she is in relation to people rather than to land. The tone has become less fraught and more confident. There is less frustration and a higher level of self-actualisation and cultural assurance.

5.4 Pentateuch

In composing the monologues from five generations of my family, I was inspired by the Pentateuch⁴⁷ because it traces generations of transition. Although it is the central reference of the Judaic tradition, it is also significant because of the prominent role that the bible plays in Pacific people's lives today and in the past when Christianity first came to the Pacific. Mallon (2002) notes:

Spurred on by the initiatives of the church the Samoan translations of the New Testament and Bible introduced new imagery, cultures and histories that would transform the Samoan perceptions of the world forever. (p. 18).

However, the Pentateuch is also significant because in the Rabbinic tradition it is believed that Moses learned the five books while he lived for 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai, and both the oral and the written Pentateuch were transmitted in parallel with each other. Thus, the Pentateuch was *spoken* and *written*. However, it was a generational narrative delivered with a distinctive emphasis on the spoken word.⁴⁸

The Pentateuch contains “five books ... known as the books of the law because they contain the laws and instruction given by the Lord through

Moses to the people of Israel” (Keathley 2004). In Figure 30, he summarises these books thematically.

My use of the Pentateuch is not meant to be disrespectful. I am not questioning its significance and veracity in Pacific Island belief, but I draw on it as a way of talking about important social transitions. This is not a new device. For example, the *Stations of the Cross* in Christianity have been used for contemporary social commentary. Indicative of this is Esquivel's (1992) painting, *Via Crucis Latinamerico* that employed the Christian narrative to artistically reflect on a series of political issues facing South American populations including human

PENTATEUCH		
BOOK	OVERVIEW	THEMES
Genesis	Beginnings	Blessings and curses
Exodus	Redemption	Departure / deliverance
Leviticus	Holiness	Walk as holy people (11:45)
Numbers	Wandering	Numbering/counting of people
Deuteronomy	Review	Watch yourself, lest you forget

Figure. 30. A summary of general themes in each of the first five books in the Penateuch. (Table adapted from Keathley; 2004).

rights abuse, civil war, human suffering in the marginal barrios, and the landlessness of indigenous peoples.⁴⁹

5.4.1 Application and summary

In the poem *Genesis*, (from the Greek γένεσις, meaning “origin”), we hear my grandmother's voice. We understand how she grew up in an innocent childhood that suddenly changed when the volcanic island on which she lived, erupted and she and the other inhabitants were evacuated. In *Exodus* (from the Greek ἔξοδος, *exodos*, meaning “going out” or departure), we encounter my mother's voice. She tells us of her experiences at different milestones in her life such as being delivered from a life of abuse into a life of acceptance and hard work. *Leviticus* (walking as a people) is my story, growing up as a New Zealand born Pacific Islander. In this dissonant world I walked a tightrope, having to obey conflicting values. With the pressure to be perfect and to make my parents proud, I felt lost. *Numbers* (the accounting of people) is my daughter's voice. The poem is about her accounted place in the family; the security of belonging. Finally, *Deuteronomy* (from the Greek δευτερονόμιον, *Deuteronomion*, second law), is told from a future voice. This is the child yet to be born into a newer world where we might construct a better set of social conditions where connections to the past and confidence in the present work to reinforce and affirm identity.

⁴³ Grandfather in Punjabi

⁴⁴ Grandmother in Punjabi

⁴⁵ Grandmother in Tongan

⁴⁶ Grandfather or old man in Samoan

⁴⁷ In Christian scholarship these books are called the Pentateuch, but in the Judaic tradition they are normally called the Torah.

⁴⁸ At that time it was forbidden to write and publish the oral law, as any writing would be incomplete and subject to misinterpretation and abuse (Talmud, Gittin 60b).

⁴⁹ These images can be accessed from http://www.adolfoperezesquivel.org/?page_id=76

5.5 Creative renegotiations of Samoan oration

Although Tu’i (1987) notes, “Both chief and orator may orate, but untitled women and men cannot” (p. 1), I feel that there is a responsibility for me as a Pacific woman to voice the concerns that affect young Pacific people living in urban environments in order to bring about positive outcomes for future generations. Duranti (1994) mentions, “There are a few women in Samoa that hold an orator title, but although most oratorical contests are exclusively the domain of men, women do use oratory on a number of occasions, especially in women’s committees” (p. 174). Thus the woman orator is not an unknown phenomenon.

I see women’s voices as part of a dynamic of reciprocity. We contribute to deeper discussion perspectives from outside of the realm of men. Keesing and Keesing, (1956) note that this reciprocity is a core principle in oratory explaining, “Whatever is involved – goods, services, and participation – a careful balance of give-and-take, of rights and obligations, of ‘basic compensation’ is maintained” (1956, p. 86).

In Samoa and Tonga and here in New Zealand, youth who attend church are highly likely to practise speaking in front of audiences from a very young age for Samoan *Aso Tamaiti* (Children’s Day) or Tongan *Fakamē* (Children’s White

Sunday/May Celebration of Childrens’ Day). Here they recite and re-enact passages memorised from the Bible. (Macpherson, 2012, p. 3) explains:

White Sunday or Lotu Tamaiti is among the most important dates in the Samoan religious calendar. Held on the second Sunday in October, it is the one day in the year where children host the church service, which can include singing, drama, verse and rapping. The day recognises the high value Jesus Christ placed on children; everyone dresses in white to symbolise the purity of a child’s heart.

The ability to speak, sing, perform and present from a young age, is very important in Samoa. The proverb, “A knowledgeable Samoan in usage of the formal Samoan language skills in ‘*Lauga Samoa*’ is like music in the ears of *Mount Mata’utia of Salafai* (*Lauga Samoa*, para. 2)”, captures something of this significance.

During this thesis, I often wondered “*O ai o a’u?*” (Who am I? Who am I to submit this research?). This question insistently turns me back to my father’s position as an orator. Accordingly, I have chosen to structure my performance around Samoan oratory in honour of him. In doing so I seek to become the intersection of separation and connection for future generations of my family. Māhina & Potauaine (2012) state:

... all things in reality, that is , nature, mind and society, stand in eternal relations of process, cycle and exchange, giving rise to conflict or order. By extension, order and conflict are logically of the same condition, in the sense that order is itself an expression of conflict ... By virtue of this logical condition, order is acquired when equal and opposite forces come into a common point of contact with one another, that is, intersection by means of both connection and separation (p. 30).

5.5.1 Structure

Malanga may be understood as a composite oratorical work. By this I mean all elements are brought together into a performance that is presented as a public address that speaks to a specific issue. The work exceeds the parameters of a poetry reading or exhibition because it contains a spoken introduction and conclusion that integrates and serves to contextualise its other artistic elements.

Malanga is the Tongan word for a speech or speech making; the Samoan equivalent of this definition is *lauga*. The structure of a Samoan *lauga* is made up of several parts and each part has a function during the oration (Figure 31). Samoan oratory although recognisable to many urban Pacific people because of its use in formal family occasions, is an art form that many no longer fully understand or practice.

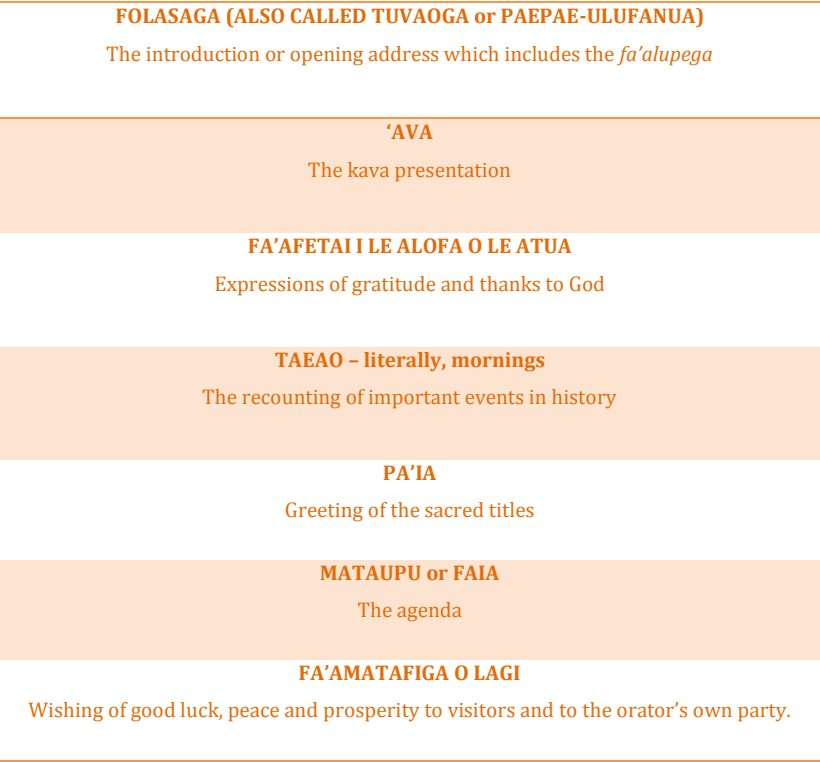


Figure 31. A structural guide/framework for traditional Samoan oration.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ As recorded in Mallon (2002, p. 33).



Oration has a deep history that runs through both Pacific cultures and the academy. It is within this dissonance that the project is situated. In both environments an oration may be considered as a formal public speech delivered on a special occasion. In the academy the orator may be an “official spokesman of a university” (Fowler and Fowler, 1969, p. 565), or the address may operate as “a formal academic exercise”.⁵¹ However, *Mālanga* breaks the classical and later academic conventions of Western oratory with their structure of exordium, narration, division, proof, refutation and peroration (Rhetorix, 2001, para. 7).⁵² This is because my work weaves together poetry performance, sound, and illustration to narrate five generational voices from the past into the future. Within this, I am positioned as the punake who orchestrates the performance.

Structurally I begin with a *Lauga o le feiloaiga* (welcome speech). The opening section is known as the *folasaga* that includes a *fa’alupega* (the naming of chiefly titles is a fundamental part of Samoan culture and custom, as it connects individuals and families to land and origins of their past). Within this I recite the chiefly titles of Samoa (*Paia o Samoa*). Here I also position the address by explaining the purpose of the presentation/performance. In this regard I concurrently reference the classical construct of the exordium (where I introduce myself, the cause, and the work).⁵³ However, unlike an exordium, my tone and expectation is not adversarial.

The following *taeao*, while traditionally concerned with a recounting of important historical events, is delivered through the voices of the women in my family. This is the Pentatuach (the poetic recountings of histories, experiences and perceptions). This carries greater proportional volume than it might in a traditional oration, but it permeates the *mataupu* (agenda) of the work, which explains rhetorically, the concept of cultural dissonance and the importance for our young men and women to find their voices through a diverse and potentially synergetic range of arts practices.⁵⁴ The oration concludes with a *fa’amatafigao lagi* (clearing of the skies) in which I wish the visitors and then my own party (family and academic supporters) well.

5.5.2 Style

Performing well may be conceived as a dramatic trajectory. Holmes (1969 p. 349) in his discussion of Samoan oratory notes:

The normal voice pattern in formal speaking is to start quietly and to increase in volume as the speech proceeds ... Phrases and sentences are often clipped, and special statements are frequently emphasised by raising the voice at the close of the thought.

The work has a strong sense of rhythm. Wood (1998) notes that European poetry traditionally privileges rhetoric over rhyme, while Tongan poetry places

equal importance on “rhyme, rhythm and melody” (p. 14). In *Malanga*, image, monologue, and contextual sound are composed as a rhythm that shifts as the oration moves from the formal, to the poetic, to the rhetorical. I chose to eschew rhyme in the work and to emphasise a mode of address that closely follows the natural rhythms of speech. This rhythm extends to the projected images behind the speaker, where illustrations morph into each other in response to the contexts being considered in the oration.

Malanga is not theatrical oration. There are no dramatic flourishes, pregnant pauses or shouts of emphasis. This is a woman’s oration about women’s stories. Accordingly, we encounter something where emphasis is placed subtly on words or at the end of a line as in certain traditional Samoan oratory. “Individual orators have their own bag of tricks for holding attention and highlighting special points” (Holmes, 1969, p. 349).

With regards to choreography, rather than a danced performance, I move subtly between pools of light, sometimes certain, sometimes reserved. Dance is the grace of contemplative movement; the lifting of a hand - a gesture of flight, the tilting of the head, a momentary pause before the body and voice move into renewed motion at the beginning of each poem. Accompanying this, sound operates as a melancholic complement. In *Malanga* it has been designed in a

minor key so it might function as a dissonant underscore.⁵⁵ To achieve this, I have mixed sounds of Tonga and Samoa with those of a discordant city.

5.6 CONCLUSION

So this exegesis closes. It is an unusual document because it both prefigures and accounts for a creative work. It treads on territories of the oratorical where traditionally Pacific women have been largely absent. It suggests that what has been seen as divisive and confusing may be the source of a creative way forward. Most significantly, it proposes the presence of women, not as an affront but as a need. It says that only by finding our voice if we feel voiceless, might we find richer lives, greater meaning and stronger cultural identity.

5.6.1 Further Research

The thesis offers a range of opportunities for further research and I am hoping to extend its thinking into a PhD in 2016. I will take the practical work to suicide prevention outreach programmes with which I am involved⁵⁶ and I hope to publish the book of poems and develop a larger exhibition of dissonant prints. On the 25th of August I will be presenting some of the creative and critical outcomes of this thesis at the AUT Postgraduate Research Symposium.

⁵¹ Collins English Dictionary <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/oration>

⁵² This form developed from Aristotlian oration with its sequence of ingratiation, stating of case, proof of case and conclusion.

⁵³ Quintilianus (IV, i 5) argues “the sole purpose of the exordium is to prepare our audience in such a way that they will be disposed to lend a ready ear to the rest of our speech.”

⁵⁴ It is in this section that a less poetic emphasis surfaces in my work. However, I still make use of “symbolism, allusions, metaphors and proverbial expressions ... holding attention and highlighting special points” (Mallon, 2002, p. 132).

⁵⁵ Underscore is thematic (containing strong melodies) or ambient in nature. It is often used as a substitute for ambience, providing a sonic background that promotes fantasy and elicits emotional response (Beauchamp, 2005).



Leading up to this thesis I have been involved in a number of community groups and during the development of the project I have continued that commitment. In the near future I see the disseminating of ideas developed through this research as a potentially useful offering to conferences about Pacific health, wellbeing and advancement.

5.6.2 Contribution To Knowledge

I am not a woman given to grand assumptions. This thesis is a body of work with a journey to make. It does not claim transferability or cultural transformation. The offering is humble. However, rather than working inside a safe synthesis of the established, I have endeavoured to reach into the uncharted. I have developed and trialed a methodology (*Ngatu*) that may be useful for other Pacific scholars working with creative practice who want to situate their consideration of methodology in a nonwestern paradigm. However, I see that the methodology has room to develop and it will only be refined by being applied and critiqued in other contexts.

The thesis, in providing a demonstration of the power of positive dissonance, may offer an artistic example of how young Pacific men and women might connect and find creative value in what might traditionally be seen as separate or incompatible. I hope that *Malanga* might demonstrate how Art can be integral

in understanding and expressing identity. Our contemporary voices need not be situated within a single culture, they may draw beauty from intersections between them. As creative people we might draw on diverse artistic talents to create new ways of expressing ourselves, new forms of *faiva* that move beyond traditional constraints. Our contemporary cultural syntheses might respect what has gone before but concurrently become confident, resonant voices that are not “cultural betrayals” but living examples of change and adaptation.

In terms of the academy I hope that the thesis might form an original addition to the voices of past Pacific scholars who have demonstrated the power, pride and substance of nonwestern epistemologies. It might also demonstrate the resonance of thinking that reaches beyond the didactic and the written word.

Finally, I hope that the thesis (both as an exegesis and a performance) might offer something to the people whose lives have so profoundly shaped it. I have designed it as an expression of the grace and beauty of their dissonant worlds. I have tried to present it as something accessible and respectful. Although for examination it is delivered in a public context, I have created it in such a way that it should not exclude people.

5.6.3 In closing ...

This work is a continuation of a journey I began as a little girl who drew pictures on her father’s journal. He taught me a long time ago that it was important to have a voice. However, it has taken me many years to find that voice. It is a voice that you hear speaking with analytical caution in this exegesis, and it is a voice that you will hear performatively in a creative work.

Perhaps every voice constructed with care and respect helps incrementally to enable the voices of others. My father was often told by his elders that his oratory was not eloquent enough, but still he persisted. His voice was heard. The spirit of this determination lives on in his children, and it shapes what I do and what I hope to pass on to future generations. By finding our truth, our voice inside, we become the intersection points that connect our past to the future, we join what might be separated and we turn our faces to a better horizon.

Cecelia Faumuina-Khakh, July 17, 2015.

⁵⁶ Affinity Services; The Consumer Leadership Team; The Lotofale, Suicide Prevention Collaboration with the South Seas Health Care Trust.





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