“PACIFIC VOICES” THROUGH FILM:
FILM AS A VEHICLE IN UNITING ORAL AND WRITTEN TRADITIONS
IN POLYNESIA

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By

Michelle M. Tupou
I would like to acknowledge the many people who were able to make the writing of this thesis possible. It is my hope to empower others with the knowledge I have gained in my research. Much energy has been gained in knowing that we all have the ability to tell the stories that we feel deep in our na'au. Thank you to all the Pacific Island Filmmakers in Aotearoa who made me realize the possibilities within me; Barry Barclay, Justine Simei-Barton, Stephen Stehlin, Lisa Taouma and Stan Wolfgramm, their films and words are an inspiration not only to me but to all future filmmakers. Thank you also to my thesis committee; Geoffrey White, Karen Peacock, Jon Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio, and Caroline Sinavaiana. Mahalo to my ‘ohana, and most of all, Malo Aupito to my husband Misa Tupou, who always kept my heart smiling. Mahalo nui ‘ia ‘oukou
ABSTRACT

Film is a powerful tool in bridging oral and written traditions, as well as in the process of forming our own cultural identity. With this tool we Pacific Islanders are able to express ourselves through film, image, storytelling, through a linking of oral tradition and Western film technology. This thesis investigates the role that oral tradition plays in telling our stories through film and the role that film plays in reproducing oral traditions. Filmmaking is a medium well suited to share those stories in an non-oral society. Aotearoa has successfully made that link within its indigenous filmmaking community. While in Aotearoa, I was fortunate to interview several of these groundbreaking filmmakers (see interviews in Appendix). It is through film that we are finally able to put a familiar face to those previously created celluloid images on screen. Perhaps with indigenous Pacific Island filmmakers controlling the image, it will be a more acceptable face for us as Polynesians.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: STORYTELLING AND JOURNEY TAKING

Shhhhhh! The story has to do with a female American cultural anthropologist who was doing research in a rural village in some remote place significant to anthropologists somewhere. Anyway, every morning, the cultural anthropologist went out to study the work habits, the farming and the social organization of the native peoples. Her husband, who was an aspiring writer, would take his typewriter, pens, pencils and papers, and sit at a small clearing in the village pulling his beard, rubbing his chin, waiting for inspiration for his work. During the course of his work, he would continuously be distracted by people coming over to touch his hair, and whispering among themselves in groups gathered around him. He made his annoyance at such distractions known, until one day an elder visited him at the small clearing where he worked.

The elder asked the writer what he was doing. “Writing a story,” the writer responded. The elder’s immediate response was: “But you don’t write stories, you tell stories.” “In any case,” the elder continued, “is this work inspired by the spirits?” A bit startled by the question the aspiring writer said: “No.” “Well,” said the elder, “what is the story about anyway?” The American responded: “It is about the man who lost his shadow.” “Ahh,” said the old man, “the spirits were responsible. They took the man’s shadow away because he was a witch.”

One day soon after, the writer and his wife were invited to see a noted woman diviner along with the villagers. In a very quiet, solemn atmosphere, the woman diviner put down white powder, red cloth, some black pebbles and small statues, and started to mumble. Then she began to speak, healing people who were sick, reveling the causes of illness, who
is bewitching whom, advising others on matters pertaining to the village, and discussing impending crises, which might develop if left unattended.

That night, around a campfire, the writer asked how the woman was able to do all that he had seen that day. An old woman explained that when she puts the white powder, red cloth, black pebbles and statuettes in front of her, they invited the spirits. Initially she mumbles until she is able to clear the voices of the spirits. Then, she is able to start speaking to them. “You see,” the old lady explained, “we are people of oral tradition.” The diviner listens to the voices of the spirits who tell her what to say. She is simply a transmitter of the voices, not an inventor of the voices. Startled, the writer explained to the old woman that, “it sounds a bit like what a writer does. “We hear voices too.” “Yes,” said his wife, suddenly excited, “voices try to tell him their stories. And that’s what he writes down. When he gets on his typewriter, with his paper, pens and pencils laid all around, he too is waiting for voices—they are what he uses to draw the voices to him.” “So, you too are like us,” the old lady responded, “you also listen to voices.”

The next day, the writer was back at the small clearing with his typewriter. This time, he was not being bothered by anyone, but noticed that many people were standing nearby looking at him. Now they were able to see the spirits. “Don’t interrupt him,” they exclaimed, “he is listening to voices. If he’s interrupted, the spirits will leave and their stories will not be told. Shhhh!” (Gabriel 1993:211)

Maori filmmaker Merata Mita in an interview (Mita 1997), speaks about “how strong the power of image {is}, the power of picture is in Polynesian people, people that come from an oral tradition.” Polynesians in urban locations are being taught in schools
through the use of pencil and paper, through a literary or written tradition. With islanders coming from an oral tradition and with storytelling as a prime mode of education, this Western style education can be difficult. Storytelling through the art of filmmaking for many islanders may be a much easier concept to grasp. Thus, film becomes a useful tool in bridging a gap between oral and written traditions, as well as a bridge in the process of seeking out one’s cultural identity.

It is this seeking out of cultural identity that created a purpose and a direction for my passion toward film and literature created by indigenous people of the Pacific, specifically Polynesians. As a native Hawaiian woman born and raised in urban Honolulu, I have been taught through a Western medium, primarily through written texts. I was raised in a very Western home and I came from a bi-racial and bi-cultural identity, being both Polynesian and Caucasian. This identity revealed a need within me to seek out a connection to those like me. There were stories and voices that I felt needed to be heard. With a deep love of Pacific Island arts, creativity, drama and storytelling I found that film was a medium in which I could tell my stories.

This thesis is being written on the eve of the landing of the traditional sailing canoe *Hokule'a* in Rapa Nui. This voyage represents the final leg of the “voyage of re-discovery” for the Polynesian peoples. The *Hokule'a* has completed the Polynesian triangle, finally connecting Hawai'i, Aotearoa/New Zealand and now Rapa Nui in its voyages. As it did in the early 1970’s, this voyage has represented for many Hawaiians a kind of cultural reawakening, as we enter the new millennium, a renewed pride in being Hawaiian, of being Polynesian, a pride that is taking place throughout Polynesia. Like this final leg of the *Hokule'a*, this thesis represents one of the legs in my personal journey
of re-discovery as a Hawaiian woman, as a Polynesian, as a storyteller. It was this leg of my journey that landed me in Aotearoa/New Zealand in July of 1998 and which concludes in the writing of this thesis. This journey was a kind of “reunion” with myself, my people and with my cultural identity....

A Reunion

It’s been a long time...
A broken cherished connection
An identity renewed and explained
A reunion
It’s in a name...
And identity with renewed understanding
A reunion
It’s a genealogy to the Gods...
A connection
A sameness
A wholeness
A reunion
A Family reunion...
After centuries
and centuries
and centuries
apart
(Tupou 1996)

As a Hawaiian woman I had to ask myself why I was going to Aotearoa to look at Polynesian created films, Hawai‘i had many stories to tell and many battles to fight through film, and they for the most part had been done by filmmakers such as Puhipau and Joan Lander, Eddie Kamae and David Kalama to name a few. Hawaiians in my opinion had perfected documentary style formats, but it was stories told through drama that most interested me. There is a need for expression for Polynesians and much of that need is being fulfilled by Polynesian written, directed and produced stories through film. In my view, documentaries relate information in a very Western format; they state the facts and the statistics and do it in a very academic “blow-by-blow” account. Dramatic
filmmaking is more fluid and incorporates the flexibility and ambiance of storytelling more conducive to Polynesian oral traditions.

It was films such as Barry Barclay’s “Ngati” and “Te Rua” and Merata Mita’s “Mauri” that were my inspiration, and I soon found that films such as those were in Aotearoa. Aotearoa was currently the “hot spot” when it came to discovering indigenous dramatic filmmaking. The industry in Aotearoa had been in existence since the early 1970’s with filmmaking pioneers such as Barclay and Mita leading the way. Thus, I chose Aotearoa as the place I needed to go.

Journey Taking

During my eight-month stay in Aotearoa I was literally dropped into the middle of that which I came to discover, indigenous dramatic filmmaking. I arrived in Aotearoa in July 1998 having nothing in my back pocket but the phone number of Justine Simei-Barton. Justine was the director and producer of the second series of Tala Pasifika (discussed in depth in Chapter 6) and directed one of the six 10-minute shorts in the first series as well. I was soon hired by Tala Pasifika Productions to work as the Researcher and Documenter of this second series. My job consisted of researching the time period of the films. This job meant that I would be working very closely with the script, identifying the look and music of the time period. This would consist of researching the 1970’s in Auckland, New Zealand. This contact with Justine enabled me to be involved in basically every stage of the production; auditions, wardrobe and set creation, location scouting and rehearsals. This experience was excellent and I discovered quite a bit about storytelling through film to say the least. This production was very unique, as it was the
first of its kind, the first entirely written, produced, directed and almost entirely cast, thirty-minute productions for television ever done. There were two of these being produced while I was there, “The Overstayer” and “Matou Uma,” which I will expand on later.

In this thesis, I hope to shed some light on the possibilities that will be created by looking at Pacific Islands cultural identity through indigenous film and literary arts. With the tool of filmmaking, we have the opportunity to express ourselves through image, storytelling, through uniting oral tradition and Western film technology. Through the use of film, our artistic and cultural reawakening is perpetuated. I will look at the role that oral tradition plays in the telling of stories through the medium of film. Throughout this thesis I will be looking at the variations between oral and written traditions and how it leads to the telling of stories and to filmmaking.

Chapter Preview

I have used a collage of quotes and film dialogue to make my statements throughout this thesis. This technique weaves together ideas and images creating a style that feels closer to a storytelling genre for me. The style came as something that felt more comfortable and in the process I was able to create a kind of woven mat of issues and representations, which the reader will find easier to reflect upon.

After the introductory chapter, the second chapter examines the creating and telling of stories and histories of Polynesia. It begins with general statements concerning the writing of history, and looks at the question: From what perspectives are histories
created? The chapter lays the foundation for looking at the impact that films have had over Pacific Island peoples.

The third chapter addresses the history of oral tradition in Polynesia. For many Polynesians the transference of knowledge is a very important part of what makes them Polynesian. Most importantly, how and to whom knowledge is given is discussed, making this chapter vital in the understanding of storytelling and film as a medium. It speaks of orality as a practical notion and defines the techniques involved. One section offers a frame in which oral versus written traditions are explored. The chapter concludes by looking at how we can combine film with our abilities and knowledge of oral traditions.

The fourth chapter makes a necessary jump to looking at the view of the “other.” Storytelling in the Pacific has long been controlled by outsiders; the time has come to change that. Our identity has been defined by others and film is a tool that Pacific Islanders can use to change that. The chapter also looks at the Pacific as a location for filmmaking and how film has used the Pacific to perpetuate myths about Polynesian others. Specifically, the chapter looks at several films in which for reasons such as internalized colonialism, stereotypes are perpetuated. It also focuses on Hollywood films, comparing them to indigenous created images on screen.

The fifth chapter brings the two previous chapters together by looking at the use of film as a tool in the process of (de)colonization. Is a search for cultural identity a source of motivation for indigenous filmmakers? Much of the Pacific is (de)colonizing through the arts, with film and literature being a medium in which to do that. The chapter
looks at the issue of film being used as a tool to “talk back” to the colonizer. It concludes by looking at the diasporas that are taking place outside of Pacific Island homelands.

Chapter six addresses one of the central questions of the thesis. What stories do we tell once we get a hold of the camera? This is just the beginning of possibly giving a voice to those whose stories have constantly been told by those who could not have known them completely. What are we doing as Polynesians to gain control over this Western medium of film? What are we doing to have our voices heard and how are we doing it? And finally, how well are we doing all of this in the contemporary world of indigenous filmmaking, primarily in Aotearoa?

The last chapter, chapter seven, concludes the thesis on the note of empowerment. It ties the thesis together by discussing the future vision I have for Pacific Voices in film and the role that film will play in the transmitting of stories that need to be told by the voices that should be telling them. The chapter ends raising issues currently at the forefront of indigenous dramatic filmmaking in the Polynesia.

The appendices contain three parts based on the interviews conducted in Aotearoa. Appendix A addresses the methodology that I used in conducting the interviews. I was very fortunate as each interviewee generously shared time and knowledge of storytelling and film as an appropriate medium for Polynesian oral traditions. During my time in Aotearoa, I became good friends with those that I interviewed, therefore the interviews were conducted very casually. The section concludes with issues such as what I would do differently given the chance. Appendix B provides the list of questions used in the interviews addressing issues of cultural identity, empowerment, image creating, storytelling and oral traditions. Appendix C concludes
with transcripts from the interviews with six Maori, Samoan, Tongan and European writers, directors, producers and scholars including Barry Barclay, Justine Simei-Barton, Lisa Taouma, Stephen Stehlin, Stan Wolfgramm and Roger Horrocks. I use the interviews as basically a reference point for those interested, including very little of the actual interviews in the body of my text.

This thesis builds towards a broader understanding of film as a medium for storytelling for Polynesians. It asks whether filmmaking is an effective medium for an oral society? Hopefully, this thesis will help answer some of the questions that it raises. For Polynesians, orality, literacy and filmmaking have historically seemed to flow one into the other, with each one building on the next. Will this progression encourage or discourage us as Polynesians to tell our stories? Will this tool enable or disable us to speak back to those who have colonized us? Hopefully, I will have added to the knowledge on Polynesian filmmaking in Polynesia, adding to the voices out there in a way that will empower.
CHAPTER 2

"WHO CREATES OUR ‘TELLING: THE TELLING AND CREATING OF HISTORIES’"

The “telling” of the story is left up to the “teller.” This “telling of truth,” is “not telling it as one actually [sees] it but as one sees fit to tell it” (Gabriel 1993:219).

As Albert Wendt so eloquently puts it, “Shakespeare’s genes may not be around but his plays and characters are; Jim Davidson’s Samson (sic. Samoan?) history and his views of Pacific history are still with us; Margaret Mead’s Samoa continues to stereotype us Samoans and cause senseless wars between egotistical non-Samoan academics” (Wendt 1987:81). Wendt’s statement captures and illustrates the power that storytelling, novel writing and filmmaking has over history writing or the creating and telling of history and stories.

How one sees the world is determined by perspective. The teller of history plays a vital role in the development of that world and how one grows up seeing it. Much has been said and written about the creation of history. For most, credibility is based on the perspectives of the writer. “The ‘telling of history,’ whether it be oral or written, is not and never has been neutral. It is always the reflection of the priorities of the narrators and their perceptions of their world” (Binney 1987 April:28).

Written words have had great influence and impact on the creation of history. History in most cases is being perpetuated using the written word. Film, like the written word has great impact and can play a large part in the “creation” of the world of island peoples. “A written history is a re-creation of the past, so it is about the present, the time the historian wrote that history” (Wendt 1987:84). History is basically produced from the
perspective of those who write it. I was told once that if you took ten people and had them stand around the rim of a volcano, each with a camera, every single one of them would take a different picture, each one of them would see a different story to a volcano’s eruption, each one would “tell a different truth.”

_Perspective of a Volcano’s Eruption_  

_Writing of History_  

Francis X. Hezel who is a historian and Jesuit Priest in Micronesia speaks about the role that historians take in the writing of history in the written form; he claims that “if the medium that we use can be said to be at least partially determinative of its contents, then the very fact that we write rather than compose chants, for instance imposes on our work serious limitations” (Hezel 1988 July:103). For most Oceanic peoples, orality is very much a part of traditional society. Traditionally, islanders use dance, song, and dramatic skits and sometimes all three at a time to represent their histories (White 1991). As writers of history, it is important to note the performative genre that islanders use in presenting their history and to which audiences. “Pacific Islanders do control their own history, dramatizing themes that are meaningful to them in art forms of their own choosing (although rarely written forms)” (Hezel 1988 July:103).

A majority of anthropological work is based completely on facts that can be seen there is little work that is taken by word of mouth as fact. Making use of oral history is much “closer to a more balanced treatment of islanders” (Hezel 1988 July:104) and their history. A good example of work that has used the oral tradition of the peoples as part of the writing of history is Greg Dening’s _Islands and Beaches_ (Dening 1980). Dening used
orality in his work in *Islands and Beaches*, making him somewhat of a pioneer in validating orality in the Pacific writing of histories.

With Oceanic people coming from an oral tradition in which stories were passed down from generation to generation, the telling of stories is vital to the very foundation of daily life. Historically, Polynesians inherited the past, the past that ancestors handed down, via stories, legends and myths. Orality for Polynesians is similar to non-Polynesian written history, although it is written in the mind not on paper. "In this sense, the great oral cultures have, paradoxically, developed the principle of *writing in the psyche* to a much greater extent than cultures which separate orality and literacy" (Spivak 1992:20).

Writing history in one’s mind is a skill perfected by many oral cultures. The power of those histories is great, as they gain *mana* within the minds of those who carry these histories within their psyche. For oral cultures stories are passed from generation to generation and are written and (re)written as they are handed down, in contrast to stories of literate cultures that are more likely set or unchanging.

*Impact of Film*

Geoff White makes the statement that "narratives are a mode of self-representation" and stories about the past are a "universal vehicle for self-definition," (White 1991:5) each of these statements makes a definite claim that for many islanders, storytelling creates identity and knowledge. Film for much of the Pacific has served as a source of knowledge as well. In a song written in Lamotrek, an island in Micronesia, the
islanders talk of the movies they saw and the song illustrates the impact those films made on them:

"The interpreters call the people together and show the people Japanese movies. The people feel happy that they have seen the movies, and that they have seen different kinds of modern things in the movies" {translated to English} (Lindstrom and White 1993:187).

Films were also used as a way to learn English as well as other knowledge from outside the Pacific. Tongan poet Konai Helu Thaman tells us that “an English teacher once implored me to read more in order to improve my English marks. But I decided that the only way to improve my English was to see more films, a solution that neither my English teacher nor my mother approved of” (Thaman 1997:2). The power of film, to this day, is greater than anticipated.

For the audiences who watch these films, “the experience of seeing {a} film becomes...a continuation and, indeed, an excavation, of the archeology of one’s culture, of one’s cultural memory” (Gabriel 1993:214). “A historian, like a novelist (or filmmaker), is a custodian and creator of memories; both are mythographers and mythmakers; both explore all our possibilities: the novelist through supposedly ‘imaginary’ people and situation, the historian through people who supposedly existed” (Wendt 1987:80).

Thus, the impact that films on the Pacific has made over the creation of “self” for much of the Pacific is great. Film creates the history previously perpetuated through oral tradition as it was for thousands and thousands of years prior to any kind of
Western/European contact. Film in the Pacific is a power not even oral histories can combat, making film a power to reckon with.

Traditionally, for island people of the Pacific oral traditions have been the dominant means for transmitting stories and histories. However, like the writing of history, perspective plays a large role in the transmission. The practices of oral traditions and the telling of stories create a history from the view of the teller. There can be danger in this creation and (re)creation of histories and stories. It is important to understand the responsibility on the part of the oralist to the creation of “self” for Pacific Islanders. However, much of the oral traditions for Polynesians has been and is to this day very much a part of the culture of the people; it is what makes us Polynesian in some cases.

As we have a greater understanding in the medium of transmission, the perspective of the “teller” as well as the actual stories themselves, we will realize that each is vital in the perpetuation of history for island peoples. Each of these factors adds to the impact film has in the telling and creating of history. The history of film in the Pacific tells us that its impact has been great. Not only has filmmaking in the past given us and idea of who we are as Polynesians, it has given us the ability to tell our stories. If we are going to be able to understand orality and filmmaking we must look at why it is that dramatic filmmaking is a better suited medium for an oral society than the written word.
"WHO CREATES OUR KNOWLEDGE: MOUTH TO EAR, BODY TO BODY, HAND TO HAND”

In oral cultures of Oceania, stories were “patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand. In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. It destroys, brings into life, nurtures,” (Minh-ha 1989:121)

thus is the power of orality.

Orality and its History

“Human society first formed itself with the aid of oral speech, becoming literate very late in its history, and at first only in certain groups. Homo sapiens has been in existence for between 30,000 and 50,000 years. The earliest script dates from only 6,000 years ago.” (Ong 1982:2) According to Ong, the written word has existed for 6,000 years, out of 50,000 years that is 44,000 years of orality. This evidence illustrates the undeniable strength of oral abilities as a race. Orality for some cultures has been sustained throughout the period of literary developments. In other societies orality has been transformed to a literary tradition. I argue that for some cultures, orality, literacy and filmmaking has been a slow steady transmission, which eventually began to flow from one into another.

Polynesians are one such culture that began and continue to hold on to an oral based society. Much of the creation of knowledge for Polynesians comes from oral tradition. Polynesians “traditionally” transferred their histories, myths, genealogies and legends orally through recitation of chants, proverbs, speeches and song. “If we look at the...oral traditions, and the cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania, it becomes evident
that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions” (Hau'ofa 1994:52). Much power was conferred on the oratory of Polynesia.

“Oceania is one of the richest storehouses of oral traditions in the world” (Wendt 1980:xvi). It is these stories that are finding new avenues of transmission through both oral and visual means, through film. It is through film that we are able to pass down histories to the next generation, through stories that were traditionally transferred solely through oratory.

There was a time when orality would have been enough of a form of record keeping, however due to the changes in means of recording history, we have lost some of our oral abilities and must record through a written means. Literacy for many in the Pacific became a supplement to orality and we have used it to our advantage. There is in fact a relatively high rate of literacy in the Pacific today and a greater use of film, television and video technology than other areas. For the much of the Pacific, once islanders “acquired knowledge of reading and writing...people with a knowledge of tradition were writing down, or occasionally dictating, mythic narratives, recent histories, accounts of cultural practices and the words of songs of all kinds” (Orbell 1995:17). The skill of literacy made a huge impact on the history of the Pacific, like orality, interpretation and perspective of the recorders or tellers played a large role in the creation of knowledge.

“I took a big breath, filling my lungs with sea & air & land & people. With past & present & future...I lifted my voice to sing & heard & felt the others join me” (Cairns 1990).
Transfer and Transmission of Knowledge

Barry Barclay speaks of making “the camera a listener” (Barclay 1990: 17). For Polynesians, ideally, “you are taught to be a listener; you sit at the feet and open your ears. You have no ‘right to know.’ The knowledge is gifted to you at appropriate times and in appropriate places. Those who do not have the patience and humility to undergo this way of learning are unlikely to ever gain much of real depth” (Barclay 1990: 18). This of course brings up the question of the “right to know,” who has it and who deserves to know these stories which at one time may have been reserved for those who held the right genealogy or mana to know.

Barry Barclay said in an interview (Sept 1998) that for the Maori “you have no right to know anything” versus the Pakeha version “you can improve on the knowledge you already have.” Tongan Filmmaker, Stan Wolframmm elaborates on this idea in a recent interview (Jan 1999): “I think Pacific Islanders are observers, we observe, I think that’s from childhood, were always taught to watch, to see. Where as it’s different for Palangi, it’s the questions that are asked, ‘questions, questions, questions, questions,’ where ours is just sit down and watch. So we are, we have a lot more input visually and actually observe, and listen, and listen and watch. The way is to be taken under someone’s wing, and to be taken and shown, and be part of an action. Not to sit in the corner and grab a book and read about it. It’s a doing thing,” and a social thing.

There are traditions and customs that accompany this practice of transmission of knowledge. For most in Polynesia, knowledge is a privilege and even today is passed on with much degree of honor and in some cases ritual. Traditionally, stories and histories were passed along through a genealogical lineage. For much of the Polynesian peoples
the recitation of *mo’o ku’auhau* (Hawaiian), *whakapapa* (Maori), *talagagafa* (Samoan) and *hohoko* (Tongan) or genealogical lineage is the backbone of our histories. Logically with this importance placed on genealogy it is the family that plays a pivotal role in this transmission of stories, family history and knowledge. It is the “*whanau* (family) which gives identity to the individual and the *tipuna*, the ancestors, are the source, in turn, of its *mana*. History is told in these terms” (Binney 1987 April:18).

The ability to be considered an orator came with much knowledge and prestige. “To a race given to public speaking at every possible occasion, it was natural that the gift of oratory was highly developed” (Hiroa 1926:185). “No one of any rank or prestige could maintain his position without having a thorough knowledge of tribal history” (Hiroa 1926:185). Knowledge of family genealogy for Hawaiians as well as other Polynesians was mandatory. In Hawai‘i even to this day, when a person is greeted by a new acquaintance, he would recite where his family comes from, he gives his genealogy. For Polynesian peoples, a genealogical connection to the past gives them their identity; their genealogy gives them a connection to their *kupuna* or *tipuna* (ancestors).

For the pre-European Polynesian, history or knowledge was given, endorsed and transferred orally. Stories were passed down via a “long and many-stranded chain of tellers and receivers operating in time and space” (Metge 1998:5). In the case of the Maori, “oral history was transmitted from generation to generation in proper courses of study by priests and teachers who had themselves graduated in the *Whare Wanganga* or sacred Houses of Learning” (Hiroa 1926:183). Much of Polynesia had similar houses of learning based on the strong tradition of formalized oratory. Much of it was so that “when etiquette demanded that they should speak at public functions, they should not
bring shame upon themselves or their family by exposing their ignorance" (Hiroa 1926:185), a tradition that continues even today.

“In the oral form of telling history, the narrative belongs to the narrator,” (Binney 1987 April:24) and/or narrator’s family, lineage, etc. How an orator decides to convey his message and what is chosen to convey, determines the oration and its importance to his audience. If an orator “feels that certain details should be amended to make the point clearer; another perhaps emphasizes a different part of the story to reveal its true meaning” (Linnekin 1990:161).

Culture is not fixed it is forever changing, it cannot be captured and set in stone it is fluid. Jocelyn Linnekin states that “culture is not like a rock, which ostensibly can pass through many hands and remain unchanged, but is rather like a story that is tailored and embellished in the process of transmission” (Linnekin 1990:161). For example, the native American Indians;

...there is a custom where in Healing ceremonies an elaborate sand painting is done, with meticulous detail and a great deal of meditation invested in it. This elaborate sand painting is then erased when it is finished, and a healing ceremony proceeds. The painting is a living history in the form of prayer. In this instance, we are being reminded that History does not live in the object, but lives in the culture. That the object has to be destroyed in order to be remembered is part of that culture. The sand painting cannot be objectified and cannot be preserved, like the marble and bronze monuments of Western history. To live, it must be ruined; it must become a memory. The central idea here is that what has been erased, made invisible, ruined, is also history. Any attempt to restore it or preserve it is paradoxically an attempt to erase history. (Gabriel 1993:214)
“History is the remembered tightrope that stretches across the abyss of all that we have forgotten” (Wendt 1987)

Memorization

Memorization seems to be the key to orality in Oceania. Memory is what links the past to the present, making the skill of memorizing valuable for Polynesians. Without the skill of retaining knowledge much of the stories, myths, chants and songs would be lost. In order to help in the memorization process, storytellers or orators “{drew} heavily on a pool of conventional images and dramatic devices, such as repetitive dialogues and direct speech...different tellers highlighted different episodes and actors and added their own individual touches” (Metge 1998:5).

Luomala speaks of the following “one-hundred-and-one-line poem that a Tongan sailor and poet chanted as a gift to a friend who was also a poet. The poem was highly appreciated, as being of greater value than a material gift, and the friend showed his delight in it by responding ‘Thanks for the...’ and reciting the entire poem back to its composer” (Luomala 1987:43).

*If I give a mat it will rot,*  
*If I give cloth it will be torn,*  
*The poem is bad, yet take it,*  
*That it be to thee boat and house,*  
*For though art skilled in its taking,*  
*And ever have I joyed*  
*When the ignorant of heart have conned a poem*  
*In companionship with the wise*  
*(Luomala 1987:43)*
Things were so rigid within the subject of oratory for Polynesians, that upon the unfortunate case of "a lapse of memory," there would be an impending fear of punishment, disaster and even death brought down upon the orator, "thus did the keepers of the ancient traditions safeguard the purity of the unwritten text" (Hiroa 1926:187).

Walter Ong (1982) explains that in oral societies formalization of information makes it much easier to memorize and recall, a practice that much of Polynesia incorporates in much of its oratory practices. In Samoa, there are talking chiefs whose whole life is based on the memorizing and reciting of oratory. Oratory is still used today in births, deaths, arrival of visitors, kava ceremonies and many other ceremonies. Geoffrey White (1991) adds that when memorization is enacted in the collective as a group or perhaps even ritualized, past events become history and they are locked into socially produced narratives.

For Hawaiians, stories were transmitted for centuries "by word of mouth and by means of hula...we had no written language before the missionaries introduced an alphabet. {We} relied, instead, on {our} excellent memories, which were aided by rigorous cultivation of the ability to perform word-perfect recitations" (Barrow 1978:xviii). In Hawaii, chants ‘belonged’ to the person, or the family of the person to whom they were dedicated and composed. It was and is common knowledge that others were not allowed to use them, except in honoring of the owner (Puku'i 1949).

In the Maori case, Hiroa states that in 1926, there had been "over a thousand songs recorded, {with} not one-half of the labour {being} completed" (Hiroa 1926:183). The recitation of oral tradition has been impressive, much has been gained and preserved through this tradition. Hiroa (1926:183) cites an example in which genealogies were
recited, where the orator was able to show "the descent of all family groups and all living persons of {one} clan... The genealogy demanded the accurate recital, in correct order, of over 1,400 names, {relating} to one tribe only, and containing over 1,200 pages." The skills of memorization perfected in Polynesia are great; much should be said of its impressive nature.

*Practice of Orality*

Orality for much of the Pacific has served Oceanic peoples in many practical ways, for example, "knowledge of history of land tenure legitimates present-day claims to land; narratives of origin and migration explain and provide a 'charter' for how and where people live today; genealogies justify current social structures and hierarchies; stories of past enmities or alliances, justify contemporary social relations; and so on" (Lindstrom and White 1993:186). For the purpose of history, oratory played and plays a large part in the histories of Oceanic cultures.

In addition to oratory speeches, songs are very valid and useful tools in recording histories. "Songs function to authenticate claims about the past. And these claims function to maintain identity and rights in the present" (Lindstrom and White 1993:186). In the instance of song, the fact that "songs whose aesthetics and content are moving are sung over and over again" (Lindstrom and White 1993:186), it is this repetitive nature that enables the histories of Polynesians to be perpetuated.

*According to Te Rangi Hiroa (P.H. Buck), a Maori scholar in the early 1900’s, "civilized man has become more and more accustomed to learning through the eye and*
less and less through the ear. The eye of civilized man depends on the notes and books. The ear of uncivilized man has to depend on memorizing” (Hiroa 1926:181).

Oral versus Written Traditions

For the Western thinking world, “culture is geared to literate structures of communication ... Most scholars are used to dealing with documents, with texts and with facts, not with interactions, performances and improvisations” (Ostendorf 1982:7). In the West, “we who write down our histories in books transmit our chosen perceptions to readers rather than to listeners” (Binney 1987 April:16).

“Literacy puts a high premium on the message” with oral cultures placing a high premium on “the performer for his ability to create a mood” (Ostendorf 1982:27). “Oral cultures are functional, tactile, auditory and direct” (Ostendorf 1982:26). Orality stresses the performance and in most cases becomes impromptu. In contrast, “literate cultures will depend more on visual aids” (Ostendorf 1982:26) and the piece being presented remains basically unchanged from text to performance.

Homi Bhabha tells us that “before whites came to Australia Aboriginal narrative was entirely oral – told to each generation, rather than written down or processed on a keyboard” (Webb 1996:197). Ostendorf talks about black oral traditions and suggests that “large parts...were invisible to the white dominant culture because oral items could not be ‘received’ on the traditional cultural channel of print without losing their appeal and artistry” (Ostendorf 1982:9). Ostendorf (1982:7) also feels that, “literate cultures are constitutionally unable to fully understand oral traditions.”
“Literate society,” writes Ben Sidran in *Black Talk*, “often turns a deaf ear to the implications of an oral culture. When it does listen, the custodians of literate culture tend to misinterpret the forms of oral cultures since they would automatically measure them against the norms set by literacy” (Ostendorf 1982:26). “Though words are grounded in oral speech, writing tyrannically locks them into a visual field forever” (Ong 1982:12). When looking at the oral and written histories of Polynesians, there is no doubt that there is a huge difference between the two.

In a chart compiled from the article entitled “Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films” in the publication *Questions of Third World Cinema*, (Gabriel 1982) Teshome Gabriel diagrams a comparison of oral and written traditions looking specifically at the conception, performance and characteristics of both mediums.
FIGURE 3.1. COMPARISON OF ORAL AND WRITTEN TRADITIONS
(These are not absolutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORAL ART FORM</th>
<th>PRINT ART FORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conception</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Deeper meaning of art as held by cultural groups or community.</td>
<td>➤ Deeper meaning held as sold property of author or artist, or in recent times the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ In order to interpret texts one needs to belong and/or understand cultural nuances.</td>
<td>➤ Interpretation is seen as either directed by the author/artist or open to multiple readings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ The artist conforms to the group.</td>
<td>➤ The artist is non-conformist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Art is an occasion for collective engagement.</td>
<td>➤ Art is ‘entertainment’ or escape from routine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Art is defined in terms of context</td>
<td>➤ Art is defined in terms of aesthetic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➤ Performed in a diversity of spaces.</td>
<td>➤ Performed in designated spaces, e.g. theatres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Expects viewer/listener participation.</td>
<td>➤ Discourages viewer/reader participation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➤ Cyclical narratives linked thematically.</td>
<td>➤ Linear narratives with beginnings, middles and ends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Multiple centers and plot lines.</td>
<td>➤ A singular or main plot line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Individual linked to social fabric.</td>
<td>➤ Individual perceived of as standing alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Change emanates from the community.</td>
<td>➤ Change is instigated by the individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ A tradition of cultural symbols and linguistic formulae.</td>
<td>➤ A tradition of detail and graphic description.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Time assumed to be a subjective phenomenon. The culture of ancestors links past, present and future.</td>
<td>➤ Time assumed to be an objective phenomenon, dominant and ubiquitous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Intellectual knowledge gained by experience. A slow process</td>
<td>➤ Intellectual knowledge depends on accumulation of information by experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➤ Earth is not a hostile environment</td>
<td>➤ Earth is a hostile world and has to be subdued.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are some views that believe that oral culture "is the assumption that words, uttered under appropriate circumstances have the power to bring into being the events or states they stand for, to embody rather than represent reality" (Ashcroft, Griffeths et al. 1989:81). Hawaiians have a saying "I ka 'olelo no ke ola, I ka 'olelo no ka make," translated "Life is in speech, death is in speech," meaning words can heal; words can destroy (Puku'i 1983:129). For many Polynesians orality carries not only knowledge but much power. It can be said that in some cases this leads to a sense that "language possesses power over truth and reality" (Ashcroft, Griffeths et al. 1989:81). Like the written word, orality, knowledge and interpretation play a large role in the constructing and (re)constructing of histories of the Pacific.

**Orality and Literature**

Many Pacific Island writers "continue to draw their strength and inspiration from our oral traditions; some reuse or reinvent our ancient mythologies to map the present, some use the techniques of oral storytelling and recitation and oratory." (Wendt 1995:6) Rotuman scholar Vilsoni Hereniko asked Albert Wendt if he found it easy to make the transition from the oral medium to writing and Wendt replied, "It wasn't difficult, because when I'm writing a story or a poem, it has to be correct orally in my head. I have to sound it aloud. And if it sounds right, then I know I've more or less completed the story of the poem. Even when I write long novels, each section of the novel must sound orally correct. Everything is oral to me, and also very visual" (Hereniko 1993 Summer:52). Much of Pacific literature uses orality as a common feature, where many author's works are meant to be chanted, sung and/or performed. In other words, if oral
cultures are to become more of a culture of written literature then we need to incorporate tools appropriate to their dramatic and ritualistic nature (Ostendorf 1982:8).

Many writers are using this orality as a foundation for their writings. The use of traditional forms has been used in poetry, short stories and novels. Maori writer Witi Ihimaera wrote *Tangi* (Ihimaera 1973), “a novel ‘about’ his father’s death and the subsequent *tangi* or Maori funeral, is in fact a sustained lament incorporating all the traditional oral features of repetition, eulogy, and oratory. The lament transposed into novel form achieves remarkable power as a profound celebration of Maori culture, community, and family life” (Ashcroft, Griffeths et al. 1989: 183). The novel uses a circular structure incorporating a format closer to orality than literacy.

Another Maori writer, Patricia Grace uses rhythms of Maori speech in her novels and short stories. It is these rhythms that she takes from her childhood when she would listen to the stories of the elders. Not only does this illustrate the capabilities of the tradition of oratory, it also illustrates the adaptability of orality to contemporary literature and to filmmaking.

“In the mere 150 years since Christian missionaries introduced writing into a culture several thousand years old, Samoa has been force-fed the fruits of the entire history of Western technological development. From the oral tradition to computers, from outrigger canoes to 747s, the sheer volume and speed of change is itself phenomenal” (Sinavaiana 1992:208).
Film as a medium of storytelling

Barry Barclay explained to me in an interview done in 1998, that Maori carvers in the 1930’s and 40’s who traveled around from marae to marae were the storytellers of that era. They were fed by the people to carve the iwi (tribe) stories on the walls of the meetinghouse. The meeting houses were filled with images, carvings and photos which told of their tribal histories, celebrations and their ancestor guardians. He continues to say that as a filmmaker, you are part of the tradition; you are a carver as well, telling stories through the medium of film. Both carvings and film last for generations and both take the liberty to record images from the perspective of the carver and the filmmaker.

Film becomes the tool by which traditional oral peoples of the Pacific can bridge the gap toward the Western literary ideology. Like literature, there are various ways that film has utilized oral traditions of Pacific peoples. Barry Barclay explained that on the set of a film he shot in Europe, that “no paper, absolutely no paper {would be used} Because what is paper? Paper insults the oral tradition. It is relatively recently that organizations have had any sympathy for the oral tradition, even organizations like UNESCO. Our attitude through the making of the film has been: ‘No, we are not going to write you a script. We are not going to write you a script...on principle’” (Barclay 1984:14). In this case, oral tradition was a very powerful tool in creating appropriate expressions of the native people and their culture through film.

Tangata Whenua (1974)

We are the ones that should control our own images, something Barclay was able to do in the 1974 New Zealand six 50-minute documentaries entitled Tangata Whenua.
This documentary was monumental in another way as it was the first time that Maori voices were heard on television. It was important in my eyes as it was the first time that a Maori filmmaker was able to put those voices on camera. It was archival material as well. "Instead of the white man talking about the natives, Barclay's *Tangata Whenua* series showed the natives talking about their own lives" (Barclay 1988:4).

Michael King the program's initiator, researcher, writer and producer, speaks about how *Tangata Whenua* had its origin in his experience as a newspaper journalist and author. He found himself often in "emotionally-charged situations. But {he} found it difficult to represent these situations (karanga, tangi, oratory, singing, argument) in words alone. So {he} became aware that film was potentially the most arresting, affecting and practical way of transporting other people to them" (King 1977:41).

It is a "combining {of} footage with oral histories and fictional reenactments" (McGann 1994:8) a difficult feat but one that feels natural and comfortable for many indigenous filmmakers and audiences. Using film as a storytelling medium is a logical shift from orality to wordality or verbality. It makes the journey from one medium to another with the advent of modern technology. This new medium enables the stories to be told not only from a verbal or oral position but from a more visual art as well. Stories are being told through film reaching a much larger audience than a completely oral society would have been able to reach.

*Tangata Whenua* gives the audience the opportunity to 'listen' to a Maori elder speaking in Maori, she is telling a story. This story's significance is tremendous for those who can understand the language; this film preserves not only the story she tells but the language and history of the place she stands in. *Herepo's Place*, is part of the *Tangata*
The Whenua series entitled *The Spirit and the Times will Teach*, in it we have an example of oratory, a connecting of land and people, a paying of respect and giving tribute to our ancestors through oratory. Through her *karanga*, *kuia* Herepo Rongo speaks to her deceased children, she connects to them through the tradition of oratory, and she acts like a medium between the old spirits and the new, through her *karanga*. Its hard not to see how connected Herepo is to her ancestors through oratory. All of it captured on film as a record of our ancestors, our *Kupuna* and *Kuia*:

Film Excerpt Dialogue – “*Tangata Whenua*” (1974)

Dialogue –

Narrator: *Herepo’s children were born here but most didn’t reach adulthood, twelve of them died here and were left behind when she moved.*

Herepo’s Daughter: *She’s buried most of them up on that hill under the pine tree there, tupunas, her children most of them here. So most of her life is here.*

Narrator: *The old lady began to karanga, to call out to her dead children and talk to them.*

Herepo: *(Does a karanga)*

Maori man: *(Gives a blessing)*

Narrator: *(Translates)* *Rest in peace our ancestors our elders who have passed on to the great beyond. Rest on these your ancestral lands at Patikirau, here is our kuia paying tribute and respect to you from these rippling waters.*

Maori man: *(Continues giving a blessing)*

*(Barclay 1974)*

When talking about the *Tangata Whenua* series (Barclay 1974), Michael King explained that “he never wanted to be associated with a process like it again. {He} never
again wanted to interfere so violently in the intimacy of people’s lives, nor play God by advising them what bits of them should be represented and what shouldn’t” (King 1977:46). He further explains that he was glad that they did it. “First, because we established precedents that should open the door to continuous Maori programme making: we showed Maori situations to be informative and entertaining; at best, they can be as emotionally charged as anything seen on television; thanks to voice over translation, Maori language need not be a barrier to communication with a mass audience. Secondly, the series initiated community television of a kind—the participants rather than the film makers chose the outlines and emphases of programmes, a precedent for more interesting television and for a more diverse representation of community feeling and opinion” (King 1977:47).

*Te Rua* (1991)

In Barry Barclay’s film *Te Rua* (1991), he gives us another example of the use oratory in film, “the old Maori woman is controlling the story through her story” (Barclay 1998). In the film, “the Turkish woman sings of her ancestors while the Maori man sings to his ancestors” (Barclay 1998). This very powerful scene uses the incredible connection that many indigenous peoples have with their ancestors and incorporates that strength into the film sequence.

**Film Excerpt Dialogue – “*Te Rua*” (1991)**

Dialogue –

German man: *I haven’t had the chance to visit your country Mr.Waka, (mispronounced) and I suppose I never will, but I’m familiar with Maori carving, I’ve written about it.*
(They enter the area where the Maori carvings are held within the German museum)

German man: *Well, I leave you now, stay as long as you wish...bye.*

Maori Songmaker (Mr. Waka): (begins chanting in Maori)

*The deep soul is coming*

*From the heart of the forest*

*The hearts strength throbs with the Forest God.*

*Stand, stretch forth, hold fast.*

*It's the ritual of Mother Earth.*

Turkish woman: (joins him in singing)

*The frog is singing in the pool*

*Built in the time of Jehani*

*Even my grandchildren sing*

*As they play with their dolls*

*But my grandmother's throat*

*is filled with dust.*

*The plump frog can sing*

*To his love of one night*

*but who will sing*

*for the mother of my mother?*

(Barclay 1991)

As we've seen there is a very close connection between oratory and literary and filmatic works created by Polynesians. It's very clear that oratory places a large role in creation of the foundation for the development of these works. The passing on of knowledge has traditionally been from mouth to ear, body to body and hand to hand. Much of this has changed as Polynesians seem to be modernizing madly. With the introduction of literacy
and filmmaking to Polynesian society stories are being told through a new medium reaching an audience outside Polynesian communities.
CHAPTER 4

"WHO CREATES OUR FRAME OF SEEING: THE ‘OTHER’S’ VIEW"

Albert Wendt has written a poem entitled "The Wall" “Walls frame our seeing,
Walls don’t happen,
We grow them.”
(Wendt 1995:324):

Up until the 1960’s, literature in the Pacific was mostly written in English by “Western” writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron. Much of this literature ranged from the “hilariously romantic through the pseudo-scholarly to the infuriatingly racist; from the ‘noble savage’ literary school through Margaret Mead and all her comings of age, Somerset Maugham’s puritan missionaries, drunks, and saintly whores and James Michener’s rascals and golden people, to the stereotyped childlike pagan who needs to be steered to the light” (Wendt 1976:11).

With colonization, Western writers, historians, anthropologists, and others have taken it upon themselves to tell our stories for us through literature and film. This knowledge leads us to jump in head first into the films that have been made with others telling our stories for us. What gives them the right to take our stories and then construct our stories for us? They tell our stories to an audience that may not have the right to have this knowledge. In fact, after decades and decades of colonialism, one may find it hard to differentiate between one’s own image and those images of Polynesians created by the colonizers. As Edward Said explains, “colonial discourse can actually create the reality that it appears to describe” (Simei-Barton 1997:74).
Outsiders have written most of Pacific History, and most of it is “based on records written and kept by papalagi {European/Western} explorers/missionaries/clerks/etc. So we can say that that history is a papalagi history of themselves and their activities in our region; it is an embodiment of their memories/perceptions/and interpretations of the Pacific” (Wendt 1987:86). Maori scholar Hiroa states, it seems to me that when writing of one’s histories, “there is no comparison between the inaccurate writings of a globe-trotting European and the ancient traditions of a cultured barbarian” (Hiroa 1926:182). A glaring example of what we as native peoples need to be on guard against is the following quote by Elsdon Best from W. Tyrone Power who lived in New Zealand for many years.

“The Maoris have no history, no songs or ballads, and scarcely even the semblance of a tradition to roughly shadow out the past...No Druids or priests have kept alive oral tradition; and there is barely an individual in New Zealand whose antiquarian lore ascends beyond his own times. Their solitary tradition is that they are descended from Maui, who, with a canoe load of companions, came from ‘somewhere’ and settled here. From these uncertain data, thee is a sad hiatus in Maori chronology, the next fact rewarding one’s researches being the arrival of Captain Cook in the island” (Hiroa 1926:182).

This is amazing in light of the volumes and volumes of songs, myths, chants, legends and genealogies produced in Maori oral tradition. How can an “outsider” come in and say that the Maori have no history or tradition? Stereotypes as well as the “insider/outsider” issue (Hereniko and Wilson 1999) is raised, perpetuated and magnified through literature such as this.
"Hei Tiki" (1928)

The film Hei Tiki is one such image where the "other" has created his version of us as Polynesians. "In 1928 Alexander Markey arrived in Aotearoa with his film crew from the United States, where he was under contract to Universal Studios, to make the film Hei Tiki, a romantic drama of the Maori people. It appears that Markey had arrived on these shores with already entrenched ideas about racial superiority, and what his audience's expectation of the romantic South Seas should be, ideas he immediately put into practice" (Mita 1994:11). It seems that with Markey's predetermined story he makes a decision to portray Polynesians as "fuzzy haired," "golden haired," and "sons of the wild bush" claiming that "no living white man has seen {us} before," Markey perpetuates the "classic discoverer type" still evident in lots of pop-orientalism today. Not only does Markey tell the story of the Maori people, but while filming he physically took a great many taonga or cherished tribal artifacts from Maori who participated in the film and a great deal of unpaid labor from many Maori extras. Although this film was created over 70 years ago, the film remains a part of Maori film history. Its audience 70 years ago I'm sure was of a European mindset and had little knowledge of indigenous Polynesians of the Pacific of the time. It did, however take much from the Maori people and left with them a great legacy of film phobia, unable to trust outside filmmakers for quite awhile. You decide if it matters who tells our stories:

Film Excerpt Dialogue – "Hei Tiki" (1928)
Markey: It was my privilege to live for 13 years among the most the extraordinary natives on earth, on the north island of New Zealand. Where assisted by my co-worker Zoe Varney, whom the Maoris call Te Ra,
the sun and a small gallant crew of New Zealanders this record of an ancient people was created. I found the Maoris fascinating, their isle of ghosts enchanting, their friendship exhilarating and I am keen to share with you the pleasure of my experience with them. Forget your cares and problems for a brief interview and join me on a voyage to the isle of ghosts. You will feast your eyes upon a sight that no living white man has ever seen before.

We leave the miracle city of the modern age behind us and sail down the Caribbean Sea through the Panama Canal. Past the languid shores of Central America and Mexico on to the golden city of the pacific coast 3,000 miles from New York then over the placid surface of the vast Pacific to exotic Hawaii. On past the mirad islands of the South Seas miniature paradises of tranquility to the strange fuzzy haired people of the Fiji islands.

On still further in the direction of the South Pole, until we come to Aotearoa, the long white cloud at the bottom of the world. We have reached Beautiful New Zealand in the extreme South Pacific nearly 9,000 miles from New York. The isle of ghosts, so named by the Maoris because it was dotted with thousands of sacred hidden burial caves of their bold ancestors and the carved treasures of the past.

It was here after many intimate months with the Maori tribes that they finally consented to relive a legendary love romance of their buried past. It was here that this motion picture Hei Tiki came into being. There are no actors in this picture, no make up, no painted scenery, not a studio shot, every scene was taken among the natives in their own habitat. So far as I know this is the first genuine major native drama of yesterday relived
on the screen entirely by natives without the benefit of actors or studio facility.

It was here we found the remnants of a vanishing race of native noblemen and women, a star ward people of Maoriland. It was here that our lives were enriched by the friendship of Terangi the proud chieftain and Mara the lovely golden hearted Maori native. No studio star but a blue-blooded native descendant of a long line of noble ancestors and Manui the magnificent son of the wild bush (Steven and Maynard 1984).

Films such as Hei Tiki show “white images” of the indigenous other. The “cultural imperialism” over our stories that has taken place has to change.

The Pacific as a location

Historically, the Pacific has been used as a backdrop for films made in and about us as Polynesians. We have not only been defined by the “other,” our islands have been defined by them as well. It is this “creating or telling of history” that many filmmakers in the Pacific have been producing since the late 1800’s. “Filmmakers became interested in the Pacific Islands shortly after the birth of cinema itself. As early as 1898 films were shot in Hawaii and the Torres Strait Islands to Australia’s north, the former by cameramen employed by Thomas Edison, the latter by the Cambridge scholar Alfred Haddon” (Douglas and Aoki 1994:3). “As a venue or a subject, Hawaii‘i has remained popular with filmmakers ever since. Historian and statistician Robert C. Schmitt (Schmitt 1988) recorded details of no fewer than 120 feature -length films made in or about Hawaii‘i up to 1959. These consisted of almost every conceivable movie subject
from travelogues to World War II adventures and from crime melodramas to musicals and knock-about comedies” (Douglas and Aoki 1994:3). Hawai’i served American filmmakers not only as itself but also as Tahiti, Samoa, Vanuatu, and even as the Solomon Islands. Not only did Hawai’i serve as a convenient geographic location it offered “a sanitized version of the Pacific as a whole” (Douglas and Aoki 1994:3).

Defined by the “Other”

Some comes the question, should Hollywood films made about the Pacific “be taken more seriously, not for their dramatic content or their fidelity to realism, but because they helped to shape outsiders’ perceptions of the Pacific Islands for many years” (Douglas 1998:51)? Are they creations of who we are as Polynesians? Should they be considered “history?” Like their “palangi” histories of us, much can be said about the constant filtering of history for Pacific Islanders.

Hollywood filmmakers have been making choices for us by deciding which actors are cast in the roles of Pacific Islanders. Some feel that “to object to {these Hollywood films} simply on the grounds that most didn’t feature real Islanders is as silly as objecting to gangster movies for not starring real criminals” (Douglas 1998:51). It is however through these portrayals that our histories are interpreted and set in stone forever. Not only do these films misinform, they create images that last. It’s important to realize the variations in Pacific Island versus Western filmmakers perspectives in filmmaking. This “editing” has lead Pacific Islanders to ultimately pay the price at the expense of many Polynesian stories. So who tells the “authentic” story we want to have told? What stories get told if we leave it up to the “other” to tell them?
"Captain James Cook" (1988)

There were some problems in the depiction of Polynesians in an eight-part television series {1988} entitled Captain James Cook. The program was produced in preparation for the Australian bicentenary by Ray Alchin. The series was well received and included a large number of good points. Although the “British society of the time was accurately {portrayed},” (Charlot 1988:85) the Pacific Islanders were portrayed appallingly. “What a shock then when these well-established eighteenth-century personages landed on Tahiti and walked into a Waikiki Polynesian review...the happy, childlike natives even performed the hoary tourist teases for a stiff Cook” (Charlot 1988:85). What were the filmmakers doing here? “The credits provide the answer: the consultant on native culture was none other than Tavana {Polynesian Review entrepreneur}...of Waikiki, now inventing tattoos and ceremonies in Papeete” (Charlot 1988:85). Besides the Polynesian Review there was the problems with the language being incorrect, slipping back and forth between Tahitian and gibberish. The canoes were Tahitian, the skirts were from the Gilbert Islands and the temple was an airport curio shack complete with tikis lined up looking as though they were for sale. Even Cook’s death scene was inappropriate with Hawaiian warriors doing a haka from Aotearoa using spears and clubs from Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. It would seem that “the native props for this important series seemed to be just the stuff Tavana had around for his show” (Charlot 1988:86).

Maori too have been portrayed negatively for many years. “A common thread of Maori experiences is that we’ve all been defined, in one way or another, by outsiders. The strangers’ voices were either strident with denigration of no-good ‘horis’—the
women to be had 'on the mat' for booze, a blanket, some trinkets—or else romantic with various versions of the noble savage" (Rika-Heke 1996:151). With this as an obvious example of Western/European filmmaker's portrayal of us as islanders, it seems that the time has come to begin storytelling ourselves, this is evidence enough.

Some of these issues are addressed in a diagram, which compares Hollywood films and films created, by "Third World" or Indigenous filmmakers. This diagram was created based on Teshome Gabriel's article entitled "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films" in the publication *Questions of Third World Cinema* (Gabriel 1982).
FIGURE 4.1. COMPARISON OF FILMIC CONVENTIONS

(These are not absolutes)

CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD FILM

Narrative

➢ Psychologically defined individual as casual agents.
➢ Spatial and temporal continuity.
➢ Single linear plot.
➢ Marked by closure.
➢ Omniscient narration.

Lighting

➢ A lighting formula: high contrast and low key.

Camera

➢ Angles governed by eye-level perspective that approximates our natural position in world.
➢ Distance depends on emotional content of a scene, e.g. a close-up for more emotion.
➢ Point of view. Actors generally avoid looking directly at camera. Camera often assumes point of view of characters.
➢ Movement mostly from a fixed perspective. Camera moves to stay with the individual and follow character development.
➢ Length of takes depend on narrative pace.

Set Design

➢ Studio sets that enhance fictional reality

Acting

➢ Professional actors, stars as icons.

Editing

➢ Editing for dramatic and narrative purposes. Tends to be seamless
➢ Hides the signs of production.

THIRD WORLD CINEMA

Narrative

➢ Characters may not be fully-rounded and have a symbolic value.
➢ No unity of space and time.
➢ Multiple plot lines.
➢ Open.
➢ Narration may be self-reflexive.

Lighting

➢ “Natural” lighting effects.

Camera

➢ Deliberate choice of high/low angles selected for associations.
➢ Convention of distance no used.
➢ Not uncommon to see a look directed at the camera. Camera may assume a more collective “choral” point of view.
➢ Perspective not fixed. Other techniques such as hand-held camera promote involvement and identification.
➢ Long takes.

Set Design

➢ On location shooting that enhances documentary reality

Acting

➢ Mostly non-actors in “real life” roles.

Editing

➢ Editing for meaning effects.
➢ Exhibits the signs of production.
Patricia Grace tells us that “if films do not reinforce values, actions, customs, culture and identity, then they are dangerous... If there are no films that tell us about ourselves but only tell us about others, then they are saying “you do not exist” and that is dangerous... However, if there are films that are about you and they are untrue, that is very dangerous... If there are films about you but they are negative and insensitive so that they are saying “you are not good,” that is dangerous.” (Pihama 1994:239)

Authenticity of the “teller”

In the absence of a Pacific tradition of literary criticism, critics have had to impose a Eurocentric yardstick, which to Wendt and many others feel does not always seem appropriate (Hereniko and Hanlon 1993:55). “One needs an adequate understanding not only of English literary traditions but also Pacific cultures and languages. What appears to exist at this time is a small group of ‘experts’ who set themselves up as gatekeepers of ‘literature’ and, through their reviews and writing make or break those who write” (Thaman 1997:7), this is unfortunate. Thaman believes that we in the Pacific ought to devise our own ways and means of judging and evaluating the worthwhileness of Pacific writing, a body of literature that is culturally rooted, meaningful and relevant for our particular contexts (Thaman 1997:6). In order to write about Polynesians, one must understand Pacific cultures, in order to understand Pacific literature and film.

In Samoa there is the role of the talking chief or tulafale and in Rotuma there is the Mafua. This title is bestowed on someone who is considered knowledgeable of traditional culture and customs. This title is not given to just anyone and Hereniko points out, just as “the role of the critic should be reserved only for those who know Pacific
cultures and peoples well and have a broad knowledge of the literature” (Hereniko and Wilson 1999).

There is overwhelming evidence that for too long “the image of ‘us’ has been ‘theirs” (Rika-Heke 1996:149). The question is “should the ethnologist learn filmmaking or should the filmmaker learn ethnology” (Mead 1971:34)? Do the filmmaker and the filmee (person being filmed) have to share the same culture? Can Pacific Islanders make films about themselves better than outsiders?

In contrast, of course we have those like Martin Blythe who seem to rationalize the voice of the “other,” “it hardly matters if such self-expression is ‘authentic’ the first problem must be to have it expressed in the first place” (Blythe 1988:431). In other words, it doesn’t matter what or whose story is told, as long as it’s told. In film it is very important that one realizes the difference in who is telling the story in order for one as an audience member to take away what the filmmaker intends. It all comes down to a matter of “…respect{ing} the other; giv{ing} the other respect for being Other” (Webb 1996:189). Understanding that the “other” is the “other,” an outside force imposing ideas and values on Pacific Island stories is very important. Knowing the perspective of the filmmaker is vital to the viewing of the film. We have established that people outside the culture cannot tell our stories from our perspective. That has been illustrated throughout this thesis. There is very little that can be done to provide that Pacific Island perspective to Western filmmakers, it is something that can’t be taken or learned.

In her poem “Reality” from the collection, You, the choice of my Parents, Konai Helu Thaman illustrates this view very well. Even the most dire attempt to education one’s self in either the Western or Island traditions, an “outsider” still does not have the
ability to walk in either world with confidence. There is still much to learn about in both of the cultures he is trying to walk in. It is my interpretation that the student in this poem believes he/she is complete within the Western world with his newly found Western education.

Reality
I am a big boy now I have left school;
But I am a fool still
A poor fool
With books and blackboards
Casting dark shadows
On me
I look for a little opening
Of light
I hear people laughing

What are you going to do now
With your education and all?
There is the market place
Where the people
Sell their wares
Women chasing flies
From day-old pies.
I cannot do that I have a certificate
I passed with honors
English, Maths, History and Geography
I learnt them all.
The laughter gets louder
I see my teacher
Sitting on a sterile rock
Near the beach
Selling green coconuts
What do I do now?
An old man close-by whispers,
"Come fishing with me today
for you have a lot to learn yet"
(Thaman 1974:13)

It would seem possible for Western filmmakers to make films on Pacific Islanders "if they took the time to get to know their subjects, their culture, and their history and if they approached them with respect" (Brown 1994:9). However, they would never be able to present our image the way we would.

Internalized Colonization

There are of course problems with this view based solely on the colonized history of the Pacific. We must keep in mind the internalized colonization that has taken place within Pacific Islanders. Because of this it can be argued that Pacific Island filmmakers too cannot portray ourselves without some degree of stereotyping.

In the Tala Pasifika series done in Aotearoa in the early 1990's, (discussed in depth in Chapter 6 and the Appendix) Samoan director, Justine Simei-Barton explains that in the making of the New Zealand series Tala Pasifika, "the assumption that authenticity would be guaranteed simply by ensuring that Pacific Island people were in control of the process began to look shaky as individual writers attempted to express their own sense of cultural identity" (Simei-Barton 1997:74). In the Tala Pasifika series, each
of the episodes’ filmmakers portrayed islanders in their own way, through their own stories, in some cases perpetuating stereotypes as well as ideas and issues imposed by the colonial powers in the Pacific. Scripts were written by Pacific Islanders attending a script writing workshop, “the scripts offered, contained images and stereotypes that were identical to the images of Polynesia constructed by European culture” (Simei-Barton 1997:74). Thus, illustrating that not all Pacific Island created images on film are better than Non-Pacific Island created images.

It turns out that because of the depth of internalization, these stereotypes and imposed ideas are being carried through even in the hands of Pacific Island filmmakers. Many Pacific Island films in some cases reveal some of the issues and ideas imposed by the colonial powers in the Pacific illustrating how deeply colonialism has sunk into the very beings of Pacific Island people. Their films, like the published poetry by other Polynesians, communicate messages that are diverse, contemporary and instructive of Pacific societies that are “modernizing madly.” “What you give out, might be the expectation of what Europeans want to see. And you become that type of Pacific Islander and in that situation, you’re actually a lot worse off because then they will point to you and say well a Pacific Islander did this” (Simei-Barton 1999). This however, creates an entirely whole new ball game in regards to image creating in the Pacific, because it takes into account the issue of internalized colonization taking place in the Pacific.

With the Colonial dominance in the Pacific it has been hard for some Polynesians to find their own cultures. With this loss of identity and the severe internalized colonialism, there has been in some cases a need to reconstruct our identities as Pacific Islanders. The point is however that these are our stories to tell. Although there may be
some degree of internal colonization within us as island peoples, we are bring those
issues to the table. Our voices are our voices, “outsider’s” voices are “outsider’s” voices
each group has their own stories to tell each with their own perspectives. We are being
given a new way to talk back and mistakes may happen along the way but they are ours
to make.

The authenticity of the “teller” and creator of film in the Pacific has done much to
create the myth of the fantasies of the “South Pacific” and the “Dusky Maiden.” What
message are we sending to those of us who have our own stories to tell? Many
Polynesians are speaking out against those who have colonized us and we are using film
and the arts to express ourselves. Many are beginning the (de)colonizing process with
film and literature being the mediums to make that happen.
CHAPTER 5

"WHO CREATES OUR VOICES: (DE)COLONIZATION"

"The emphasis on film is central because it, more than any other media experience, determines how other groups will respond to us...The deeply ideological nature of imagery determines not only how other people think about us but how we think about ourselves" (Hooks 1992).

Cultural Identity

For many Polynesians, identity is a large part of what we use as motivation for this resurgence of expression. Cultural Identity for many Polynesians can be defined as that which defines them as Pacific Islanders. It is their genealogy, heritage, customs, traditions and who they are in relation to other Pacific Islanders. As Stuart Hall expresses it, identities are the “names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Ginsburg 1994:260). “The oral histories, imaginative literature, and the visual and performing arts of the Pacific Islands indicate significant moments in the evolution of cultural identities.” (Hereniko 1994:407). Like culture, our identity culturally or our cultural identity is forever changing.

In an interview done with Maori filmmaker Merata Mita (1997), she makes that claim that “we as Polynesians need to know who we are and where we come from, unless we know that we have no where to go.” “Cultural identity in the Pacific has been seen as essentially a geographic identity, one that ‘flows from memories and values attached to places” (Bonnemaison 1985:30). When your identity is instilled in you, your identity is so secure; your ancestors are behind you guiding the way for you. Many urban Polynesians are not being given that sense of cultural identity, somehow they have been
denied that right, whether it be because of the lack of cultural importance from their families or the lack of cultural community, it is not clear. However, it is a fact that much of today's Polynesians are searching for their cultural identity, something they can grasp on to and call their own. Without a sense of identity many turn to alternative identities that go against the foundations of many Pacific Island traditions and values.

(De)-Colonizing the Mind

This leads to a phenomenon that is taking place throughout the Pacific as well as the rest of the world, that of the quest to (de)colonize. Many Polynesians began the process of decolonization in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s in the Pacific. The cultural identity that the colonizer had created for us was a large part of what we were battling against, we needed to speak out with our own voices and film and literature enabled that voice. There have always been those who have dictated “who we are” within this greater colonized world which they have created for us.

Because of forces such as colonization and urbanization being imposed on the native peoples, many have had to adjust to by modifying and/or changing their own cultures to fit better into the outside forces being imposed. Not only does it occur within colonized societies but within individuals themselves. Many people find it hard to even find their own cultures within themselves leading to the internal quest for culture, the quest that begins inside one’s own heart and soul and quest for cultural identity.

Much of these Pacific Island quests and indigenous thoughts and ideas are now finding new expression in the medium of Pacific Island Film and Filmmaking. Expression through the arts was the main premise of most island voices and film became
the medium in which to do it. It seems that the latest interest in Pacific Film comes from the perspective of the indigenous Pacific Islanders. Islanders are beginning their own process of internal decolonization, and with this process come the Pacific voices that need to be heard. Self-expression is at the heart of much of contemporary Pacific island indigenous film. There is a clear need for islanders to search for and represent their own cultural identity, a notion illustrated in the large increase in the past ten or so years of indigenous made film.

Not only do the mediums of film and literature express the ideas of many Polynesians, they also address the issues in the quest for identity and the journey that comes with it. Issues of Westernization, colonization, modernization, cultural norms, adoption, domestic abuse, education and (re)education, are addressed in several Pacific Island created films as well as in much of what has been printed and published in today’s Pacific Island literature.

“If we revitalize our oral story-telling and use this as the basis to create our own literature, we will not only regain ourselves and our identity, but we will add greatly to the nation’s literary achievements and culture. That is the most valuable message gleaned from the indigenous literature in our colonized society” (Mita 1992:314).

Expression through the arts

There is an increase of expression through the arts that Wendt calls an “artistic renaissance” (Wendt 1977:20). It is this renaissance that is decidedly “enriching our cultures further, reinforcing our identities, self-respect and pride, and taking us through a genuine decolonization, acting also as a unifying force in our region” (Wendt 1977:20).
It is this resurgence that has created a wave of expression for Polynesians. Basically through the arts, Polynesian society is able to comment to itself about itself (Sinavaiana 1992:199). “The ability of indigenous peoples to enjoy and control the use of their knowledge is essential to their survival. Their ‘arts,’ songs, poetry and literature are expressions of their identities and provide the required information for sustaining, developing and, if necessary, maintaining indigenous societies in all their aspects” (United-Nations 1993). Pacific Island culture has put Polynesians more pre-disposed to express themselves through the arts, Langton uses the Aborigines as one such example. For Aborigines, “visual arts were more elaborate than the material culture used in the daily domestic life such as for hunting, gathering and preparing food, shelter and apparel” (Langton 1993:9).

Polynesians are able to see the need of having their voices heard. Without their own creative writing, their battles, frustrations, and passions would not be heard. Tongan writer Konai Helu Thaman captures the need to be heard in an excerpt from the poem Heilala:

"Heilala" (an excerpt)

for we cannot let illiteracy
again keep us apart
mortgage our identity
or even sell our pride
we don't not want to suffer pain
privately at the end
for we know deep inside
we've only ourselves to blame

(Thaman 1997)
Whether it be seeing a film or "reading imaginative literature" both are "ways of breaking geographical and cultural barriers and participating in the larger universe and understanding the human condition" (Subramani 1994 Sept:1). Hawaiian writer, Haunani-Kay Trask reminds us that we write "to reunify us (Hawaiians/ourselves) with the rest of the Pacific" (Trask 1997). As Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, a native Cook islander, has written: "denigrated, inhibited and withdrawn during the colonial era, the Pacific people are again beginning to take confidence and express themselves in traditional forms of expression that remain part of a valued heritage, as well as in new forms and styles reflecting the changes within the continuity of the unique world of our island cultures...The canoe is afloat...the volume and quality increase all the time" (Wendt 1980:xiii).

Wendt explains that both film and literature "examines (and laments), often angrily, the effects of colonialism. It argues for the speeding up of decolonization; the development of cultural and national and individual identity based firmly on our own ways, values, and visions" (Wendt, 1980:xvi). In some cases film expresses feelings of anger against the "foreigners," colonialism, Christianity, and the rejections of Western values. Some of the Pacific Island film and literature that we see coming out of the Pacific emerge out of a need to express the desire to make "political changes in the system, all a part of the struggle for independence from colonial rule" (Hereniko 1993:55). Basically film can be seen as "a people struggling to express themselves in an alien context" (Webb 1996:197). Much of the creative writing that has been written in the past as well as contemporary writing, voices issues that have changed very little. Past
and present writing, speaks of rebellion against those in power, issues related to independence or a search for a common identity.

The concept of cultural identity as it is manifested in the works of indigenous Film and Filmmaking has been tremendous. The flow of creativity has expanded enormously in the Pacific over the years in the form of visual works of art, poetry, story writing, plays, and possibly the most powerful, filmmaking as a form of self-expression. This self-expression has become a joining of tradition and contemporary forms of expression, a celebration of Pacific identity through a construction and deconstruction of the cultural "self." As in all human societies, creativity has always been present, as well as the ability to respond creatively to the environment, both, which are a large part of Pacific Island culture. Pacific Island expression through the arts acts not only as a unifying force but serves to reinforce cultural identity, as well as increase Pacific awareness.

Film as a tool to (de)colonize

Film like much of the arts, "deals with the material of life, what is happening and what is important, it mirrors the concerns of the society, and the content has changed as society has changed" (Carroll 1996:1). Epeli Hau'ofa gives us a perfect example of how literature can be used as a tool just as the camera/film can. In much of his writing Hau'ofa speaks of everything from organized religion, government officials, politicians, corruption, waste and ridicules them and their role in present day cultures. Hau'ofa speaks of religion and education and how it destroys original wisdom, a theme that can be equated to the role film and literature has in giving voice to Pacific Island peoples. In
Hau’ofa’s *Tales of the Tikongs*, Hau’ofa illustrates how the Tikongs in his story have been over influenced by the outside world and through his literature he is able to speak out against those forces. Like the Tikongs, other Polynesians have been over influenced as well. Film is able to give islanders a voice against those forces and by having islanders make those movies we are able to make sure that original wisdom or island cultures are preserved in the process.

“Aboriginal writing suggests that there is a way (several ways) of twisting, rewriting, even demolishing the self-fascinated and self-justifying stories of the invader culture” (Webb 1996:190). Polynesians have important stories to tell that are able to give a perspective non-Polynesians can never give. Albert Wendt tells us in an interview in 1993, that “Pacific Islanders should write their own histories, their own versions of their history. Histories written by outsiders, no matter how fair they’ve been, are still views of foreigners, still views of other people about us. In many ways, those histories have imposed on us views of ourselves that have added to our colonization. We should write our own histories in order to be free of those histories written about us, those images created by other people about us, not only in history books, but in fictions they’ve written about us” (Hereniko and Hanlon 1993:117).

*“Talking Back” to the Colonizer*

Pacific Island artists are borrowing Western art forms and materials and adapting them to explore their own visions and peoples. Albert Wendt makes this statement about literature, “we have been given the tools to write in English and now we are using indigenized literature to write back to those who colonized us, for our own purposes this
time” (Wendt 1998) the same can be applied to film, it is time for us to make that same statement through film.

“Ceremony” (an excerpt)

I will tell you something about stories,

{he said}

They aren’t just entertainment

Don’t be fooled.

They are all we have, you see,

all we have to fight off

illness and death.

You don’t have anything

if you don’t have stories

Their evil is mighty

but they can’t stand up to our stories.

So they try to destroy the stories

let the stories be confused or forgotten

They would like that

They would be happy

Because we would be defenseless then.

He rubbed his belly.

I keep them here

{he said}

Here, put your hand on it

See, it is moving

There is life here

for the people.

(excerpt taken from “Ceremony”(Silko 1986:2)
Like Pacific Island film, Pacific Island literature has opened the door for many Pacific Island filmmakers. It has empowered those whose voices need to be heard, but there were and are as always those obstacles before us. As Samoan writer Sia Figiel expressed at a reading of her work (1997), artists such as Albert Wendt “wrote all the anti-colonialism type writing, always fighting, fighting, fighting.” She continues on to suggest that the writers in the 1970’s “opened the door for the younger generations of current contemporary writers, who through their writing are empowering the Pacific Island cultures” (Figiel 1997). The same trend has occurred within Pacific Island filmmaking. Basically, Pacific Island film took its cue from Pacific Island Indigenous literature and the avenues it opened as a mode of expression. With many documentaries having been made it was time to make films by us, for us it was time to have our voices and stories heard through dramatic films.

Physical and Metaphysical Diaspora

With many indigenous films being created out of the need to express and understand cultural identity, it seems there is somewhat of a diasporic pattern occurring in the flow of indigenous created films. A majority of this diaspora is taking place in Aotearoa, which has 200,000 Polynesian people (Stehlin 1999) the largest number outside Pacific Island homelands. There seems to be two types of Diaspora taking place in the Pacific: Physical Diaspora and Metaphysical Diaspora.

A majority of islanders on the periphery of their own homelands are creating much of the Pacific Island indigenous arts including films. Is this physical Diaspora a component in the increase in film? Is it a case of islanders just trying to “belong,” to
explain themselves to the “other” within these urban communities? What about islanders that are the first generation raised in these urban centers, who retain strong ties to their families in their homelands, yet they themselves do not have that spiritual connection to their culture. Could it be that they feel completely separated emotionally from their own indigenous culture? Is their question of identity stronger than those who have moved from their homelands as adults, or is it just a case of “missing their ‘aina (land)?”

A second type of Diaspora is that of the Metaphysical Diaspora, those islanders who are in their own homeland and are feeling a sense of Diaspora as well? Those who are feeling a sense of exile in one’s own homeland. Could the making of film be stimulated by this feeling of internal Diaspora? Could it be that film enables the indigenous person to see themselves in film giving them the means to redefine themselves not only within but also to their own people? Is their motivation the same as those who are away from their homeland?

Thus the question remains, is there a connection between these two Diasporas and Pacific Island film? Why are we seeing an increase in the number of indigenous films being made? Are Samoan, Maori and Tongan filmmakers in Aotearoa in the process of seeking out their cultural identity? Is identity only an issue in urban areas and only in over-colonized nations?

Film as “self-expression”

The beauty of indigenous film made by indigenous filmmakers, is that not only is indigenous writing and film a form of self-expression, but an important venue for creating national consciousness and cultural pride. Cultural identity in the Pacific has
long been decided by the "outsider," but with the emergence of indigenous arts, islanders are no longer content to allow representation of themselves in print and film to be decided by the "foreigner." Indigenous art for many has become an avenue to restore a realistic representation of cultural identity, through art. Speaking back through film and literature is partly derived from Pacific Island history, politics and personal questions of cultural identity. Many Polynesians have protested in various ways, some through apathy, some through physical means and some through their creative writing and some through filmmaking.

In Maori filmmaker Merata Mita’s opinion (1994:47), “Maori films are driven by identity, resolution and survival.” With this in mind, what is the role the camera has taken in defining the identities of the native person. “Maori are involved in a critical struggle that is related to our images and the ways in which we are presented and represented by the dominant voice” (Pihama 1994:240). Polynesians are in a battle to defend their own voice against those whose voices have been heard through film for too long. The time has come to begin “a process, which involves decolonizing the screen, demystifying the process and indigensing the image” (Pihama 1994:241). There is a struggle going on that challenges the images previously made of us as Polynesians. “The struggle for the control of images parallels our struggles for resource, for support, for acknowledgement of work produced, for the freedom to produce those films which cater for the needs of Maori {Polynesian} people generally” (Pihama 1994:241). Film is an incredible tool to use to destroy the “negative constructions that have so long dominated {and} to assert our own definitions in the creation of our own identity” (Pihama 1994:242).
“Cultural imperialists and cultural navigators both have to negotiate new positions in terms of construction of identity and this is a major challenge for the late twentieth century. There is a need to give the camera to indigenous filmmakers to film their own societies, as one method of deconstructing the hierarchical relationship between western filmmakers and their subjects and to "talk back" to the continuing power and influence of the colonial exercise” (Mather 1998 October:15). For many authors and filmmakers, film and literature have become avenues to restore a realistic representation of their cultural identity. With colonization, and the conversion to a written language and eventual opportunities in film, the process of decolonization was begun, changing many indigenous people's images of themselves.
CHAPTER 6

"WHO CREATES OUR IMAGES: HOLDING OUR OWN IMAGES IN OUR OWN HANDS"

"The key issue is how to ensure that the indigenous people in any country have access to the media so that they can 'formulate their own image identities.' People outside those communities can play a supportive part but they should never seek to limit the results" (Horrocks and Horrocks 1991:121).

Film as a Medium

What messages do Polynesian filmmakers have when using a medium that not only encourages the oral but the visual as well? The medium of film provides a voice that can be heard not only by Polynesians but by people everywhere. In particular, film can reach the colonizers. By speaking back through film, Polynesians are taking control of a medium that in the past was used exclusively by outsiders. We are now gaining the means and the skills to access the use of Western film technology to make our messages known.

There is a transformation that has and is slowly taking place in filmic representations of Pacific Island Indigenous peoples, through a contemporary blending of traditional oratory and modern filmmaking. With the tool of film, islanders are becoming "cultural navigators," being given the opportunity to navigate themselves within the Western medium film technology. Because of its oral nature, it seems to me that the concept of film is the most logical medium through which Polynesian filmmakers as "cultural custodians" of oral history can tell indigenous stories to a wider audience. In some cases enabling stories that could have been lost to be told once again.
"It is clear that as early as 1930, the screen was already colonized and had itself become a powerful colonizing influence, as Western perspectives and stereotypes were imposed on indigenous peoples" (Mita 1994:42). There was however a large part of the population that didn’t believe film was a logical medium for an oral society.

"So far we have not managed to center the film and video arts within the Maori art mainstream, and from time to time I have had Pakeha people kindly explain to me why. They say that painting/writing/music are closer to the craft skills and spirituality of a tribal people who are used to making up instant poetry in their oratory, or who have developed fantastic visual skills by daubing outlines of wild animals in cave walls. Video and film, they imply, are new media to which it might take some time for an oral culture to adapt. It reminds me of the days when many New Zealanders were proud to boast that Maori men made amazing bulldozer drivers, failing to appreciate that the same men, given equal education and employment opportunities, might also be able to run a computer" (Barclay 1990:30).

Ironically, film has been a tool we are using to tell stories and this tool is enabling us to combat images previously made of us. Films such as Merata Mita’s Patu, Albert Wendt’s book-made-into-film Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree, and Puhipau and Joan Lander’s documentary Act of War present a Pacific perspective on history and Pacific politics that eclipses the romantic images on celluloid that pervade South Seas cinema from the 1890’s to the 1990’s” (Hereniko 1994:423).

Many films/theatre created today by contemporary Pacific writers include the stereotypes that islanders have tried so hard to escape from. Hone Kouka has was asked
at a production of his play *Waiora* (1999) if he felt that the father roles in *Waiora* and in the film *Once Were Warriors*, both seemed to be the stereotypically emotionally and physically abusive Maori men. His response was that in his play *Waiora* he hoped that the audience could feel the *aroha* between the father and his *whanau*. He felt that there was a lack of hope in the film *Once Were Warriors*.

“Over the years the camera becomes like a friend, something you learn to take with pride into places of great power and the humblest of villages. Yet which of us is not anxious walking with a friend into a new world” (Barclay 1990:9)? “For 90 minutes or so, we have the capability of indigenising the screen in any part of the world our films are shown. This represents power and is one reason we make films which are uniquely and distinctly Maori” (Mita 1994:54). “Sadly, such people...are never going to gain any insight into Maori ways” (Barclay 1990:18). “All too often it struts like a young person who wants to get to the main point immediately” (Barclay 1990:18). “But the camera can act with dignity at a *hui*” (Barclay 1990:18).

“*Malinowski (1922) wrote many years ago that: ‘The final goal, of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight...is, briefly, to grasp the natives’ point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world’* (Worth and Adair 1972:12).

**Purpose**

“Adair explained that he wanted to teach some Navajo to make movies...When Adair finished, Sam {a leading medicine man and elder} thought for a while and then...asked a lengthy question which was interpreted as, ‘Will making movies do sheep any harm?’ Worth was happy to explain that as far as he knew, there was no chance that
making movies would harm the sheep. Sam thought this over and then asked, ‘Will making movies do the sheep good?’ Worth was forced to reply that as far as he knew making movies wouldn’t do the sheep any good. Sam thought this over, then, looking around at us he said ‘Then why make movies?’” (Worth and Adair 1972:4). There is a definite variation in the purpose of film and filmmaking for Pacific Island peoples and Western filmmakers the concept is varied.

Maori filmmaker Sharon Hawke (1998) brought up the point at a conference in Aotearoa, she states that “our access to making true life stories for {a} visual medium is akin to our way of telling our story—and the audience sometimes finds it hard to listen.” Indigenous filmmakers make films as they tell stories, there is a fluidity and in most cases style is just as important as content. “One anecdote illustrates the process. A cameraman focused on the high valley cliffs and paused for the light mist and rain to clear from the trees in order to get a sunny view. {Hawaiian filmmaker} Eddie Kamae ordered him to roll his film immediately. He wanted to capture the wetness of the uplands, an image of fertility in Hawaiian thinking and song. As a result, the viewer sees what the Hawaiian sees and enters into a new way of feeling” (Charlot 1988:87).

“Te Urawera” (1987)

In 1987, Barclay was asked to do a documentary about the Urawera valley, entitled “Te Urawera.” He chose to have it told by those who know it best, the indigenous people of the valley, presenting it from a very Maori perspective. The series let the people that it spoke of speak for themselves. He chose to indigenize the screen with this opportunity. “We elected to tell the contemporary story of the park through their
eyes. After all, they knew each stream and byway, and could call every twig by its correct indigenous name. No outside experts would be brought in and Tuhoe could talk about their homeland in their own way, and—when they chose—in their own language” (Barclay 1992:117). It impressed me deeply as it was the only series that really seemed to consciously present information the way Polynesians would transmit knowledge. It spoke to the elders first knowing that the younger generations would not speak until the elders had. Barry told me that he allowed the elders to talk as much or as little as they wanted and tried to collect that footage in the most non-intrusive way possible, sometimes by even shooting with a very long long lens from quite a distance away. There were stories included that would most likely not be included had it been done by a Pakeha or European director. Barclay included the children of the village singing at the end....

Film Excerpt Dialogue – “Te Urawera”

Tuhoe children sing:

Who is there?
You’re voice, you’re life,
Return to me, my voice.

Come and get me
Where shall I find you?

In all the kohanga, and in the clouds
Return, return.

The time has come.

Greetings to my teacher to my place of learning
You who slept, are now waking
You who were dead, and now live
You who were lost, have been found again
Turn to me and embrace me  
The two of us, united forever  
(Barclay and Harraway 1987)

This song really captured the emotions of the valley, it was a very Polynesian gesture to both open and close the film with a song. I appreciated all of these very Pacific gestures and thus I think this film was much stronger because of them.

Barry Barclay had an equally moving experience when he was able to give back to those communities he filmed. It was Barclay’s hope that there would be a way that “the images that have been given to me can be held up by the people themselves, on their own lands. .....of marrying together the archival skills of the majority culture with Maori knowledge of what spirit shines from the held image” (Barclay 1990:98). He feels that “images are taonga (treasure) given by our people. If we cannot take those taonga back to them, we are cheats of the most common kind” (Barclay 1999:410).

“Handing over tapes across one by one to each elder became some of the most special moments I have ever had in film-making. Part of it was knowing I was keeping the trust (“that fella didn’t turn out to be a liar after all”) and part of it was seeing the pride in those old people’s eyes. .....holding their own image in their own hands” (Barclay 1990:93).

Native Point of View

In an interview done last year, Barry Barclay (1998) spoke of “spiritual guardianship of stories, ‘ownership’ or ‘cultural property,’ an ‘invisible copyright’ of our own stories, they are absolutely ‘cultural treasures’ and they must be kept that way for
future generations. Barclay talks about the phenomenon of film and the differences in how its value does and doesn’t change over time. For a Pakeha film, “the film’s principal period of glory is at the beginning of its life, at its premieres, during its main run, perhaps during a second run” (Barclay 1999:409). In the case of an indigenous created film, “the early life of the image-document might be rather modest, but the document increases in vigor and relevance as each decade goes by” (Barclay 1999:410). This phenomenon can be likened to oral traditions of myths and legends.

For Barclay this has happened in his own lifetime, his work has transformed from “something important into what Maori call taonga” (Barclay 1999:410). Barclay tells us that the word taonga is “different from the kind of treasure...in the Pakeha world: the family heirloom, the historic document, the archived transcript, the restored artwork. Taonga is a growing thing, increasing in vitality as the decades pass” (Barclay 1999:410), not unlike the stories in our Polynesian oral tradition.

By enabling native peoples to see themselves in film; the role of filmmaker gives them the means to redefine themselves. Merata Mita ran a video training course for young people while teaching in Auckland. She brought a camera into a classroom of predominately Maori students who were already designated as failures in an education system that did not acknowledge or accommodate Maori culture. She found that the kids responded very well to the medium of film and found that their orality helped to bring out their talents in the creating of stories, film gave them a voice in a world where they had none. It has been rationalized that “if a member of the culture being studied could be trained to use the medium so that with his hand on the camera and editing equipment he
could choose what interested him, we would come closer to capturing *his* vision of *his* world" (Worth and Adair 1972:12).

Film is also able to give islanders a voice against “outside forces” and by having islanders make those movies we are able to make sure that original wisdom or island cultures are preserved in the process. It is time for us to provide a “space to develop {our} own mythology within the world of contemporary communications” (Barclay 1992:129). With this space we would be able to not only give voice to those who have had none, we would gain insight into indigenous perspectives, values and aesthetics, making this space provided invaluable.

In a struggle for self-determination, islanders are now realizing that film is potentially their most powerful weapon; the documentary film is likely to be the most exploited medium for political purposes in the twenty-first century” (Hereniko 1994:423). Documentaries such as “Bastion Point: Day 507” & “Patu!” by Merata Mita, “Act of War” by Puhipau and “Then there were none” by Elizabeth Lindsey to name just a few. This is a task we have done wholeheartedly, documentary film has served Pacific Island issues well, but there are other stories to tell, stories that can be told through indigenous dramatic filmmaking. As I stated previously in the introduction, documentaries move more within a Western style format with drama having a more fluid Polynesian feel. Barry Barclay expands upon this describing documentary as containing “clean ‘facts,’ a range of ‘views,’ a ‘clarity’ of perspective, ‘balance,’ ‘accurate’ reporting” (Barclay 1992). In contrast indigenous dramatic films contain an ideology closer to storytelling hopefully giving voice to anyone who has a story to tell, creating their own mythology.
Voices from the Margins

It is a constant "struggle to gain voice, struggle to be heard from the margins, to have our stories heard, to have our descriptions of ourselves validated, to have access to the domain within which we can control and define those images which are held up as reflections of our realities" (Pihama 1994:241). Mita tells us that "what the screen communicates is absorbed in a sitting and so carries on the oral tradition with a heightened visual aspect. Better yet, if what is being shown is a Maori film, the audience is free to relate to the symbols, imagery, characters and point of view on a very personal level" (Mita 1994:39). We as indigenous filmmakers need to contextualize ourselves as indigenous people on the screen.

We need a place in which the "descriptions of ourselves {can be} validated, a place from which we can control the re-presentation that are offered internationally as our realities" (Pihama 1994:240). Patricia Grace speaks of how literature "contributes to the setting and affirmation of social, ethical values and identity...they enrich, embellish our lives, firing out thoughts and imaginations and our dreams" (Pihama 1994:239), similar statements can be made in relations to film and filmmaking. "Pacific Island Film provides positive, self-affirming messages about ourselves and our world" (Pihama 1994:239).

Control of the Image and the Camera

"Imagine as a whole culture not to be able to talk about your own land in your own way. Imagine if you were born in London or Copenhagen, and the only—and I mean only—images of yourself were scripted and shot by people from Algeria or Tamil Nada
and transmitted simply to capture good ratings amongst their own viewers”
(Barclay 1992:123.)

Barry Barclay describes the current state of the general film industry in Aotearoa.
“It has been good for getting people started. Its an independent, high-quality industry, relatively easily-accessed; non-unionized; no longer dominated by outsiders (British, Australians); quite rich in equipment; supportive of beginners” (Barclay 1999). It does have funding bodies such as “Creative New Zealand, which is the art council and they can provide small grants, there is the New Zealand Film Commission which really works the professional end of production and there’s New Zealand On Air, which funds television” (Horrocks 1999). Unfortunately, like most monies these days it “often it comes with strings attached. We will give you money to make your film if you make it for our program, and here are seventy-five requirements for our program” (Horrocks 1999). The funding process in Aotearoa is different than in the United States. In order for a television program to receive funds you must have a television time slot for your program to air. Unlike funding in the United States where monies may be granted to make the film and after making them, you are faced with the dilemma of how to get the films seen. All of these factors a play large part in the making and telling of stories for Pacific Islanders filmmakers.

The New Zealand filmmaking industry has empowered native filmmakers to express themselves, giving urban Polynesian youth role models and voices of their own. We must be very aware of how we represent and how we are represented in film, because “film is a creation of myth” (Baker 1997) and it is one that lasts forever. Maori
Filmmaker Leonie Pihama explains a sentiment Patricia Grace made about literature which can be applied to film; "if {films} do not reinforce values, actions, customs, culture and identity, then they are dangerous...If there are no {films} that tell us about ourselves but only tell us about others, then they are saying 'you do not exist' and that is dangerous. However, if there are {films} that are about you and they are untrue, that is very dangerous. If there are {films} about you but they are negative and insensitive so that they are saying 'you are not good,' that is dangerous" (Pihama 1994:239).

Filmmaker Barry Barclay asks, "how do indigenous people use the camera once we come to have some control over it?" "Perhaps it is on our own shoulders to redefine the rules," (Barclay 1988:1) Here are several examples of what we do when we get control of the camera:

*Dot's Death (1999)*

A recently completed short film entitled *Dot's Death* was written, produced and directed by Tongan filmmaker Stan Wolgramm (1999). It captures a deeply Polynesian culture through the ceremonies involved in a Tongan funeral. The script alone is incredibly moving and very impressive. There was much dedication on Stan's part, in the collection of production monies. Stan had proposed this film to various funding agencies in Aotearoa and was asked by some of them to change certain elements of the film's "Tonganess," something Stan refused to do and thus he continued on with his hunt for funding. In the end Stan was able to raise enough money to produce the film without any changes to the original script. What makes this film so beautiful is the fact that it incorporates issues of cultural identity, inter-racial marriage, bigotry and the Polynesian
family values and traditions. It is a wonderful mix of inter-relatedness between the Tongan and Palangi cultures.

The story is of a Palangi woman (Theresa) who marries a Tongan man (Willie – played by Stan Wolfgramm) and because of the inter-racial relationship, her mother (Dot) and father disown her. After the death of Theresa’s father, Willie secretly keeps in touch with Dot over the years, sending her photos of their daughter (Luana) without his wife Theresa knowing. Years go by and Dot becomes seriously ill and although Theresa refuses to see her mother, Willie goes to see her at the hospital. Soon afterward, Willie brings Dot home to stay with them in their home.

Film Excerpt Dialogue – “Dot’s Death” (1999)

(Dot lies in a bed rolled out from beneath Luana's. Willie sits besides her cross legged on the floor in a lavalava. Dot is ill. She coughs up blood.

Willie takes her bloodied tissues from her.)

Dot: Doesn’t my condition make you uncomfortable?
Willie: No. In Tonga for us life, death it’s the same.
(Things that come naturally for Willie are a little nerve racking for Dot.)

Willie: Relax.
(He massages Dot’s legs. Slowly she eases to Willie’s comfort with natural things.)

Dot: My kind are afraid of death. We separate it from life, from living.

Willie: How?

Dot: By ignoring it, by making it insignificant.

Willie: But doesn’t that make life insignificant? I remember in Tonga a great man was dying. So all the people, his family came together and began his funeral with him and they mourned for days, weeks. They cried and sang and feasted with him. Everything came out and everyone moved
forward together because his death was a time for reflection. A time for healing. A time to be strong. To love and be loved. Family. Together.

In life and death.

Dot: Does Theresa understand this?
Willie: She understands love.

Dot: Willie promise me you will bury me like that. Like a Tongan, for Theresa’s and my sake.
Willie: Dot...
Dot: Promise me.
(Willie is bemused)

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Soon after Dot’s death, Willie agrees to give her a Tongan funeral:
(They enter and sit on the floor at Dot’s feet. The wife places a tapa cloth on the floor before Aunty. In Tongan, Aunty conveys to all how this woman is related to the family. The couple pay their respects to Dot and Theresa. The old woman has her hand on Dot’s leg as she talks. The old woman kisses Dot. A young couple and two kids appear at the doorway. The Palangi husband is dressed in a tupenu. They give an envelope and are announced. The woman speaks and cries. Her and her husband kiss Dot. As the woman hugs Theresa, Theresa confronts her.)

Theresa: You never met her.
Young Tongan Woman: I just did. She’s family.
(Wolfgramm 1999)

O Tamaiti (1996)

The film short done by Samoan filmmaker, Sima Urale in 1996 entitled O Tamaiti (Urale) won “Best Short Film” in the Venice Film Festival. What makes this film unique
is the fact that it is completely done in the Samoan language with minimal subtitles. It portrays a Samoan Family from a child’s perspective showing only one adult face, that of a Palangi man. Ironically, the one face that is shown is a white face, and through facial expression proclaims authority over one of the young Samoan children. There has been much conversation about the various issues raised in the film. Issues such as the role of the church, responsibilities on children and even issues of birth control within Polynesian families. The opening scene takes place at the hospital while another child is born into the family. The following scene illustrates the over responsibilities placed on the oldest child in the family (Tino) of raising the younger children:

Film Excerpt Dialogue – “O Tamaiti” (1996)

At the Hospital: *Tino gets a Coke and then shares it with his brothers and sister. A new baby is born and his father tells the kids to come see the new baby in the family.*

At home: *Tino has to get the kids off to school.*

After school: *Tino waits for his brother to walk him home. On the way home, Tino thinks that he has lost his brother, only to find his brother just playing around. His sister looses control of a grocery cart in the grocery store and it is abruptly stopped by a Pakeha man.*

(Urale 1996)

“Any film or video about indigenous people without indigenous people in crucial creative roles (such as director, cameraperson, and editor) could never avoid exploitation and inaccuracy” (Brown 1994:9).
Tala Pasifika: First series (Six 10-minute film shorts) (1994)

The first Tala Pasifika series produced by He Taonga Films, translates as “Pacific Voices.” The entire series of six ten minute shorts were written by Polynesians who were first time screen writers, of these Brown Sugar and Tala o le Talaga (Talk of the Town) were directed by Samoan directors, with Hibiscus, and Day in the Life being directed by Maori directors, Cats Crying directed by a Cook Islander and Malama which was directed by a European or Palagi director. The Tala Pasifika film shorts are instructive of what is happening in urban Pacific Island communities, they address issues brought out as a consequence of “modernizing madly.” The importance of money, success, education, image as well as adoption are at the heart of the issues illustrated in the Tala Pasifika series. Pacific Island audiences not only can relate to the stories, they enable and empower future filmmakers to have their voices heard.

I was able to contact one of the people instrumental in the series development, Justine Simei-Barton as well as Stephen Stehlin and Lisa Taouma who each played a vital role and whom I was able to interview {see Appendix C} while in Aotearoa. Lisa Taouma told me her goal was to “write stories about marginalized parts of Pacific Island cultures that weren’t considered commercially viable” (Taouma 1999). She was able to address some those issues in the writing of her two film shorts Brown Sugar and Tala o le Talaga. She points out how empowering it was to finally give Pacific Islanders images that were their own, “the same hair, the same body, figure, shape...{to actually see} those sorts of images on a foreign medium that’s always been very ‘otherizing’” (Taouma 1999).
The series was continued filming beginning in 1998 with two more films that were part of the second series of Tala Pasifika. This time they were produced by the newly developed Tala Pasifika Productions run by Justine and Paul Simei-Barton. They produced two-30 minute dramas entitled “The Overstayer” and “Matou Uma.” I was fortunate to work on the first film as a researcher and documenter, which put me in the incredible position to learn quite a bit about filmmaking on the set of such a path breaking production. This second series was the first half-hour drama for television within the Pacific to be entirely created by Pacific Islanders on prime-time (this is the goal for the two dramas, yet to be aired on primetime as of the publishing of this thesis). Most Pacific Island programs are put into a non-prime time slot, usually Sunday mornings ironically when a majority of Pacific Islanders are at church.

The philosophy behind both of the Tala Pasifika series was to develop a Pacific Island talent management right through to the crew. The set was run in a very family oriented fashion, very much a team effort. Working together as a community comes from Polynesia, “working as a team and treating everybody on an equal basis” (Simei-Barton 1999).

The Pacific Island community was involved in the both the projects and “I think that has really helped to ground Pacific Island filmmakers who are involved in the process” (Simei-Barton 1999). “Talking to your own people and talking I think to the people who are not involved in the industry really grounds you...{it is} so Pacific Island because the community has been very much a part of it” (Simei-Barton 1999). There were elders that were on the set, and because of it there was much more respect paid to
everyone there. If you got one of your elders there, it’s leadership, you turn around and you say to Europeans, “don’t talk like that on set, cause you know, you have to show some respect” (Simei-Barton 1999).

The first series of Talas were finished in 1994 and aired in 1995. “It was screened on Tagata Pasifika and that’s not prime time slot. But for these ones {the second Talas} we want to go for prime time” (Simei-Barton 1999). There was quite a bit of pressure put on this second project to get that prime time slot. “We’ve got to work our butts off to prove a point, that we are equal to or better than the non-, the European stuff or Prime Time television” (Simei-Barton 1999). The Talas “broke ground, that’s what they’ve done and they’ve provided opportunity, as a base for which to work” (Stehlin 1999). “We were not trying to make grand works of art we were trying to make Pacific Island stories in a medium that never sees them” (Stehlin 1999).

“We go to the cinema to see ourselves. We read the books that reveal ourselves” (Mita 1992:312). “Used responsibly, film can be a humanizing force in an increasingly material world, and can sometimes act as a catalyst for change. Identity at any meaningful level cannot be manufactured or manipulated; it is as much genetic as formative experience. No matter what destructive processes we have gone through and are going through, eventually the taniwha stirs in all of us and we can only be who we are” (Mita 1994:54).
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: EMPOWERMENT

"Every culture has a right and a responsibility to present its own culture to its own people. That responsibility is so fundamental it cannot be left in the hands of outsiders, nor be usurped by them. Furthermore, any culture living closely with another ought to have regular opportunities to express itself to that the other culture in ways that are true to its values and needs" (Taken from a manifesto from the New Zealand lobby group Te Manu) (Barclay 1988:1).

This thesis opened with a poem and it closes with a poem as well.

Empowerment
The pua blossoms
with the feeling of the sun

My soul dances
with a feeling of a song

Traditions can be perpetuated
With a feeling of love

Stories can be heard
with a feeling anticipation

Films can be made
with a feeling of Empowerment
(Tupou 1999)

In looking forward at my vision for Pacific Voices in film with in Polynesia, I hope that the transforming nature of film is able to be continued at this very rapid pace. While in Aotearoa I was able to see what is possible in producing dramas of Polynesian stories. I found that in most cases the process of filmmaking is the same on both Western and Pacific Island film sets, with the stories being different. Polynesians have different
perspectives and stories to bring to the table. Although we are “pretty much babies in the industry…we can still hold our own and we have something to offer” (Simei-Barton 1999). I think the one thing that is so vital in this crusade to be a part of the actual image making process is to take heed in the message Justine Simei-Barton so eloquently gives us: “you’re not important, the product is important, the work is important, the people are important, who you represent is important, the story is important” (Simei-Barton 1999). If we can remember that it is the story that is the most important, we can further the perpetuation of our myths, stories and legends through this medium of technology called film.

We must also remember that it is not important if our films are considered “right” or “wrong,” the point is that we have the opportunity to make the same mistakes that generations of Pakeha/Palangi/Haole filmmakers have made for centuries. The point is we have that opportunity now and we need to make sure that we take advantage of it. “We don’t want more Hollywood, it’s precisely the difference, the difference in rhythm, the difference the way the film is shot, the difference in the ways the crews operate” (Horrocks 1999).

I hope that we as Hawaiians are able to bring the medium of drama in film to Hawai’i. There are so many differences from the documentary mode. It is indigenous dramatic filmmaking that will enable us to tell stories from our own mouths and of our own people. I hope that we can follow in the footsteps of the Polynesians in Aotearoa and bring the method of workshopping here to Hawai’i. By taking Pacific Island writers and developing scripts with them through the various stages we will be able to ensure that stories are told through genuinely island lenses or whatever lenses we as islanders have
on. Let us use that technique to create a more Polynesian way of presenting our own stories through film. If we can just create a space for us to write and create, we will be able to pass down stories through film to our mo'opuna. Whether they be traditional or contemporary they are all “our voices,” each very much worth being shared.

There are of course two sides to this coin called filmmaking; one side can empower the other side can (dis)empower drawing us into the same world that we are trying to empower ourselves away from. There are many temptations that film and filmmaking can provide luring us into some of the various “perks” offered by this Western film technology. We must be aware that there is nothing innate about the medium of film. There is the potential for the medium to be an alienating force as well. I am not suggesting that we use film as a “babysitter” for our young people or for its use as a substitute for the one-on-one contact that is achieved through our traditional storytelling. What I am suggesting is that we take this medium that we are fortunate to have in our procession and use it to reach audiences that until recently have not heard our voices as Polynesians.

It is my hope that those who enter this film realm, remain true to “the story” that they hope to tell. I hope that even with all the seductions and debates that this field holds, that they think of the future generations that will hold on to this piece of art as their “telling of history,” their “own story” and as their “oral tradition.”
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS METHODOLOGY

“Eating with people ... is the major way of cementing relationships (a very Polynesian way as well). It gives hosts confidence and makes them far happier about discussing more consequential things, later...If you are ‘of the people’ you have to be ‘with the people’, very much in the plural and very often” (King 1977).

The process of interviewing came relatively easy for me once I had done major work in establishing relationships with several Polynesian filmmakers in Aotearoa. The work began even before I left Hawai’i through countless email. Basically a majority of them knew I was coming even before I arrived. Like I said in the introduction I arrived in Aotearoa in July 1998 and had little more in my pocket than a phone number or two. I was on exchange from the University of Hawai’i to the University of Auckland. At the University of Auckland, I was fortunate enough to have Roger Horrocks as my advisor, an academic scholar highly regarded within the Pacific Island indigenous filmmaking industry, his help was invaluable in contacting various filmmakers. My first order of business besides my enrollment in academic papers at the University, was to contact these filmmakers.

Who are these filmmakers?

Within the indigenous filmmaking industry in Aotearoa, throughout the Pacific there are few Polynesian filmmakers. If one were to compile a short list, it would consist of people such as Merata Mita (Maori), Barry Barclay (Maori), Lee Tamahori (Maori),
Puhipau (Hawaiian), Eddie Kamae (Hawaiian), David Kalama (Hawaiian) and Sima Urale (Samoan) to name just a few.

The six people I chose to interview were based solely on the fact that they were the group of people that I became friends with during my stay in Aotearoa. Please note that in choosing the filmmakers that I did, I have only touched the surface of Polynesians involved in the indigenous filmmaking industry in Aotearoa. There are countless others who have made significant contributions in telling stories through film. This is only the beginning of the telling of our stories, I am just glad that I had the opportunity to meet some of those who are leading the way.

The Interviewees

One of the first people I met was Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay. Barry is of Maori descent, is a director, script-writer and most currently a novel writer. Of his works, *Te Rua, Ngati* and the television series *Tangata Whenua* are probably the most well known. Throughout his career Barry has worked to develop new approaches to filmmaking incorporating “community values” and his hope to convey ‘minority’ points of view. He is one of the pioneers that is helping pave the way for future indigenous filmmakers. I was introduced to him by Glynnis Paraha another Maori filmmaker and scholar at the University of Auckland over a cup of tea. Within the first few minutes of our conversation Barry had invited me to come and stay with him at Michael King’s home where he was house-sitting on the Corromandel peninsula, an offer Glynnis made sure I took up. A few weeks later in September 1998, I drove two hours away to see Barry and once there was immediately picking tuatua on the beach and discussing
colonialism and issues of cultural identity. As we walked along the beach I spoke of how I didn’t feel confident in expressing my views about Maori film and filmmaking as I was Hawaiian not Maori...his response was something I will never forget, “We are all a colonized people...” That evening we stayed up late watching Te Rua and Ngati and discussing issues related to the films. Barry and I stayed in touch over the months following eventually hooking up in January 1999 to conduct a more formal interview complete with written questions and a video camera.

As you’ll find when reading Barry’s interview, his attitude toward filmmaking is direct and powerful, he knows what he wants and the messages he wants to convey through his films. Barry and I were able to create a friendship that inspired me not only academically but as an indigenous person with a voice that deserves to be heard. Thank you Barry for instilling a confidence in me that I will always treasure.

Roger Horrocks, Ph.D. who is of European descent, is a professor as well as the director of the Centre for Film, Television and Media Studies at the University of Auckland. Roger was my academic advisor while on exchange at the University from July 1998 to January 1999. As I said earlier, I found very quickly upon my arrival that Roger was highly regarded within the Pacific Island filmmaking community in New Zealand. He serves on the board of Creative New Zealand and New Zealand on Air and does so very well from all accounts. Roger and I became friends and I found his support with my thesis outstanding.

Justine Simei-Barton who is of Samoan descent, has worked many years as the founder and producer of Pacific Theatre, a cultural theatre group. The company aims to “bring the vitality of Pacific Island performance traditions into a contemporary theatrical
context" (Simei-Barton 1997). She worked as script development coordinator and as director of one of the first Tala Pasifika series film shorts, “Brown Sugar.” My relationship with Justine was that of friend, family and co-worker while I was in New Zealand. It was because of Justine that I was able to work on the second set of Tala Pasifika series as researcher and documenter of the filmmaking process. I must of course also credit Justine with introducing me to my husband Misa Tupou at a Fale Aitu performance. Justine and her husband Paul were filming the performances of a well-known Samoan Fale Aitu comedian from Samoa and “The Brownies,” a young Samoan comedy duo. That night I did the sound for the event and my husband Misa worked the door...and the rest is history.

Stephen Stehlin who is of Samoan descent is the Producer of the weekly magazine show Tagata Pasifika television show. Stephen and I came in contact with each other quite a bit during my stay in New Zealand. The Pacific Island film and television community is very small and thus it was very common to keep “bumping into each other.” Stephen was very helpful in acquainting me with the beginnings of the first Tala Pasifika film shorts and how they all came into being.

Lisa Taouma who is of Samoan descent, “is bi-lingual and moves confidently in both academic circles and in the traditional Samoan milieu” (Simei-Barton 1997). She is currently a reporter for the weekly Tagata Pasifika television show. She was also one of the writers for the first Tala Pasifika series. Lisa wrote the film short “Brown Sugar” and “Talk of the Town: Tala O le Taulaga.” She also has recently completed her thesis in Art History which focused on the way visual representation of Pacific women can be
seen as a site for the construction of the non-European other,” (Simei-Barton 1997) and tackles the issues surrounding the image of the “dusky maiden.”

Stan Wolfgramm who is of Tongan descent, has worked as an actor, writer, director and producer of Pacific Island films. He has most recently completed his film short entitled “Dot’s Death,” a short film about interracial relationships as well as the Tongan traditions incorporated in the event of a death in the family.

There were several people such as Merata Mita and Sima Urale that I would have loved to have spent time with and possibly interviewed while there. Sima was down in Wellington (at the South end of the North island) and ironically Merata was in Hawai‘i, thus I was not able to spend as much time with two of the women who’s words and films inspire me greatly.

The interviews that I did, covered a very wide range of knowledge and experience. Barry Barclay was able to speak from the perspective of a Maori filmmaker in the early days of filmmaking in Aotearoa as well as the current issues of film footage archives and Maori rights in representation. Roger Horrocks spoke from a European and Academic frame. Justine Simei-Barton brought Samoan issues to the table, speaking on issues of identity and empowerment through taking control of the production side of the industry. Both Stephen Stehlin and Lisa Taouma were able to talk about the origin of the Tala Pasifika series and their roles within those projects, with Stan Wolfgramm bringing the Tongan perspective to the table.

"Interrogative interviewing too is out for old people. You have to nominate the subject and then let the interviewee talk without interruption, whaikorero-style. It’s slow but
its worth it. Given time to think at their own pace, people are more likely to come up with verbal gems. Or, if you want short answers, set up a group conversation making clear what you want. If it is not clear, be reconciled to a little shooting and a lot of editing” (King 1977:42).

Interview Style

My style of interviewing was as I’ve said before very comfortable and relaxed. I basically had written down a handful of questions (see Appendix B) and then handed it to my subjects prior to rolling the videotape. I set up a camera and had I known better would have used a microphone that was attached to the lapel of my subjects, in the interviews I did, I used the microphone on the camera. The quality of sound was probably the one thing that made transcribing the interviews the most difficult, the sound was muted and very fuzzy. In the cases of Barry Barclay, Roger Horrocks and Justine Simei-Barton, I knew each of them very well. For the interviews with Stephen Stehlin, Lisa Taouma and Stan Wolfgramm, I had only met them once before hand. Therefore, each interview ran a little different. Each interviewee basically just used the questions as a guideline for their “talking,” using the list basically as a reference with me guiding them along based on the questions. Overall, I would change nothing but the microphone.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Cultural Identity/Empowerment

1. “For 90 minutes or so, we have the capability of indigenizing the screen in any part of the world our films are shown. This represents power and is one reason we make films which are uniquely and distinctly Maori” (Mita 1992:54). Do you agree?

2. What do you think of the term “indigenizing the image?”

3. Do you agree or disagree that the New Zealand filmmaking industry has empowered native filmmakers to express themselves, giving urban Polynesian youth role models and voices of their own?

4. What do you think the role Pacific Island film plays in shaping and strengthening a coherent sense of Cultural Identity in Pacific Islanders?

Storytelling/Oral Traditions

1. What do you think of film as a replacement for oral tradition for Pacific Islands?

2. Do you think storytelling through the medium of film is an easier concept to grasp for islanders?

3. What are the advantages of using Pacific Island film as both a “vehicle” and as an educational tool, for islanders?

4. Is a visual medium more appropriate?
Created Images

1. "The scripts offered, contained images and stereotypes that were identical to the images of Polynesia constructed by European culture" (Simei-Barton 1997:74). Do you think Pacific Island created images (stereotypes) on film are better or worse than Non-Pacific Island created images?

2. "No matter what you do, film is a creation of myth (Tuti-Baker 1998)." Do you agree or disagree?

3. Indigenous created films are still looked at from a Western ideology, as is Pacific Island Literature and Theatre, do you think this creates a problematic situation for Native filmmakers/artists?

Tala Pasifika {given only to those who were involved in the projects}

1. What is the significance of the two Tala Pasifika series?

2. Why did you get involved?

3. Why do you think that New Zealand is so far ahead of the rest of the Pacific in filmmaking?
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS OF FILMMAKERS IN AOTEAROA

Interview with Barry Barclay

Interviewed January 1999, Auckland, New Zealand

The Interview:

Michelle: Do you think storytelling through the medium of film is an easier concept to grasp for islanders?

Barry: I personally come to the view that it’s a question of purpose. The intention of what the film is—is it for your own people or for the world in general? Because I think if you do it for your own people, which is incredibly hard to do, to get the circumstances where you can do that, then the stereotyping and non-stereotyping will fall into place. We’re all victims of stereotyping—it’s natural, you can call it stereotyping, but you can also call it received culture. I’m just reading a book about Caravaggio, “M” it’s called, which is about the first modern painter who looked at reality and painted reality in defiance of the church. So we have inherited that tradition, to actually make films of reality—its received pieces of information. But I think if people are genuinely given the room to make films of their own people about things that are vital to them, they will use that received information more true to that purpose.

I just had a case of this—we are going to the Waitangi Tribunal with a case—in the process of that, the Maori lawyer said to a group of us Maori that there is a need and probably also money from the association of lawyers, to make four half-hour videos on the nature of the Waitangi Tribunal. He said the Maori group had booked Maori lawyers and put this up because they were running into terrible problems when they meet Maori going into a claim—there’s nothing to show them that sort of relates. I came back here {Auckland} and scratched my head who could do it, I approached two or three Maori
who could do it, and myself, I just sort of shelved it and let it be. Then I find out two
days ago that a Pakeha is doing it, with a very experienced producer and he is doing it on
the nature of the tribunal from a Pakeha perspective, you know, general New Zealand
perspective. That may be good at that level. He’s grabbed Hone Kouka, a playwright to
get the Maori ingredient, Hone is not an experienced documentary writer, but he’s a very
talented writer, I like him very dearly—whether he can or not is a moot point, but he’s a
celebrity Maori who puts the right stamp on this producer’s work. Now I’ve been forced
to analyze—why I did this, why didn’t I jump in, why someone else.

M: Why didn’t you? What did you come up with in analyzing yourself?

B: I think instinctively now, given that brief, coming from the pool of all New Zealand’s
lawyers put into this pool, and each year they make a grant to somebody indigent, poor
people, to do something—but it’s coming from the establishment. And our experiences
will be forced to present it for the general New Zealand audience who will be asked to do
certain things, and have it in a certain framework to appeal to everybody. And it’s not
appealing, it’s not going to be of any use really, to our people—I’m going through the
claim process. I wish I knew then what I know now, I had known at the beginning.

So then comes the political problem, could Maori, the Maori lawyers, demand that Maori
people be put in charge of making, doing that exercise—they’d probably fail. Or, am I
going to suggest they come back in a year’s time, and say, “No, you have the general
one”—we desperately need this kind of talk. Now if you’re doing the general one, as a
Maori, you will be involved in certain stereotypes and certain attitudes that will be
expected of you, and you will naturally do it because you are not forced into anything
different. But this blood and guts stuff, which is to get through to your own people the
pros, advantages and disadvantages, the huge disadvantages of going through this
process, and how to handle it, and the kind of little things that go on in the background
and underneath with your own people, and so on, and so on, and so on. We’re not going
to put that in a general film.
So, in terms of stereotyping, for me, that is vivid, just on my mind at the moment, because, one way will be a stereotyping, formal way, and I sense that most Maori can't be bothered with that any more. On the other hand, I see Maori doing things which they're given--they've got to make sure the program's finished to their standard. But it's their program. We see the *Rangitira* series and I think that has it and I'd be very loathed to try and say *this* is a stereotype, and *that* is not—I think you can in some programs, but we don't know what it means, not really, to make films for your own people—it's rare. And because we're very bloody minded about it, but until that happens, until that jump is made, then I don't think you construct images any other way, than in the general process. Have I answered your question?

*M*: So, you're saying that the stereotypes, what we do *is*, and has to be stereotypes?

*Is that what you're saying? Because we don't know any other way?*

*B*: No, it depends on what purpose the material is for. I believe if I'm asked to do a general New Zealand film for New Zealanders in particular, I will have to make it look like a general New Zealand film.

*M*: *But if you're making a general Maori film*.......

*B*: If I'm making it for Maori, then, I don't feel encumbered and I feel I can. Oh sure, I can pull in a few tricks I know, or techniques I know—everyone does, it's the very nature of editing, and so on—you'd be crazy to through all that out. But to actually dig deep and search within your own imagery...I'll give you an example. You need the freedom and there are—I don't know if you've noticed, there are six programs announced by TVNZ and New Zealand On Air. All are director led documentaries, put out by senior documentary filmmakers—that's a revolution, by the way. It probably came out of the Maori fight on quota.

*M*: They've announced they're looking for people to make documentaries?
B: Six.

*M: Six documentaries*

B: This is one television channel, but then we’ll come with another six from another channel. They are calling for submissions from senior directors that are director led.

*M: Any why is that different than normal?*

B: Because normally, it’s ideas led—well not really ideas, but it’s that little—it’s tricksey little titles—it’s very titles-led.

*M: Yeah, I saw that announcement, or that call.*

B: But that’s the first time I know of in twenty years, the first time I’ve sensed it since the early 70’s. Now in that framework, any director can then work with their own imagery if they really get the program. And I want to do one on my own people, *Ngati Apa*, and it’s quite a pain for me, because I’m investigating our own past, how we lost our land, how my own family probably did all the, how my mother found that particular block of land. Now and also the person that blonked himself, like Hitler, on top of our land, that person was very much beloved by the general historians of New Zealand. I believe he was a conniving goose stepping honky, who was kicked out of *Tainui* and came and shot his way into other people’s territory. Now for me, I’ll attack the stereotypes. I’ll call it bloody mindedness, I want to assert that *Ngati Apa* was never completely destroyed. We are still there, we can still see the past. (laughing)

*M: Funny how history makes it look like, nope it’s all over.*

B: Well the white man’s story, the one that is playing against our general New Zealanders. Great men, great warriors when in fact he was no greater or no worse, or maybe even poorer than several others from his generation. Who won the war in *Tainui,*
early on in the Maori war and so on and so on. But, I know in making it I'm making something different, I'm not making film for general New Zealanders to understand. I want to appeal to Maori about what's at stake here because I see the Ngati Toa and Ngati Rakau, who are the two tribes that moved in. I see them in a sense foreigners now, I see them isolated, the mountain they call to is back there. So I want to suggest in the film, the imagery I want to call on, is the loneliness of the invaders who came down almost two hundred years ago and now their descendents, even though they've lost the land they've killed a lot of people and left bereft. That it's call to Maori to look at how to deal with that, does one spit on them, or is one compassionate hold the hand, in fact the hand is being held, in the Ngati Apa. I can demonstrate that by the imagery of the meeting house, that my uncle built. That is Ngati Rakau and Ngati Apa, the two tribes, common meeting house outside the land which was kept for Ngati Apa. So I'm drawing on imagery that no other New Zealand filmmaker that I know of except Maori ones would even think to draw upon. The root argument is not their argument, I mean it's because of the colonialists, he'll also add to other people's land, but also in spirit and someone sitting on other people's land and not give two pennies for it. I personally think that if you are given the freedom to do that and you feel confident to tell that story, rather than one that will appeal to the wider New Zealand, forget that, I mean it's going to antagonize so many people. One the first round it would but if I were thinking of doing the Land Wars type approach, sale of the land the two major land sales that have happened in my area. I'd do it quite differently, I'd do it like the belich types and I'd be putting on certain stereotypes, certain really known formulas, front man standing here doing this. That won't appeal to Maori. In that way, who as a Maori would I put up front? I can't, which uncle of Ngati Apa is going to get up there and call Te Rapahau a butcher, they won't so I've got to search around for other kind of things.

M: So do you think having the ideology that you have do you think that you would be able to do it within the framework of television?

B: Yes.

M: What makes you think that they would go for that perspective?
B: Well, they want director lead things.

M: So by having that as a director lead thing, they are asking for that?

B: Well, it gives the director more room. Also, there is an inbuilt thing on Maori quota now within the series. So if they want Maori in it and they want it director lead and they want genuinely Maori.

M: They have to...

B: But we're going to have to negotiate obviously. That's going to be very tricky. For example, I didn't want to lay out a script in the beginning, I want to know about the money before I even approached the different authorities that I needed to approach, to get their permission. To do that other kind of research that is necessary, so that has involves me in a whole different process in terms of approaching the investor keeping investors happy and still making sure that we have an intelligent project which can be grasped by enough of the audience. If you're absolutely bloody minded about it, that the heart of the program is really about the call of the land, long term, not just what you've got right at the moment but way over the history. *Te Rapahau* is just one invader, then came the *Tau iwi* and then came others. But the *Ngati Apa* are still there and can still speak for that land, poor as they are. It's not a thing that bothers New Zealanders of course.

Have I answered your question there? If you are forced into a certain context and this can happen not only to neighbors but most especially to neighbors. You'll be forced into what can be considered a good program, what's considered watchable television, what's considered ratable enough, what's considered general, all of that is death for indigenous people. They cannot, even before they write their first sentence of their script or write their first question down they have to look at stereotypes. Generalized imagery searching out imagery of their own people.

M: Sometimes stereotypes are forced onto you by the rules and regulations by the people who are running the show.
B: Yeah, but you can buy into it.

M: Yeah, that answers the question. It's basically saying that a lot of it comes from the audience.

B: I believe for indigenous people, you've got to decide who you are talking to, so you find out. First and foremost and then there is a different debate going on in your own mind and your own people about how you put it together.

M: So who was the audience for the Tangata Whenua series?

B: I'd say New Zealanders in general. With a sub-text for Maori, which Maori would pick up on very strongly.

M: So you were able to do both.

B: Well, yes but I know that had we done it just for Maori then it would be much more aggressive on certain issues.

M: So you have to pick and choose what you'd include and not include depending on your audience, is what you're saying?

B: Well, it will determine your imagery. Cause I believe image making is a way of creating a world which people will buy. Its persuasive, it's memorable you enter a general consciousness. The Tangata Whenua series, I was were very active with an activist group called Nga Tama Toa. We were very young and very stroppy. To say very gently that in the program it may not be such a good idea to be teaching Maori about cultures of England or of Abel Tasman doing this or that. It doesn't say that we need Maori education. If it were for Maori, then, but it was probably too early for this to have been thought out. If I was doing it now, I'd want to do it absolutely full on and ruthless thing for Maori about really where is Maori education? Kura Kaupapa and so on, I think I'd be very romantic about it. I know in Tolaga bay, where “Ngati” was filmed, partly, that there are three infant schools, the Kohanga and then you move up to the general language school, bi-lingual or fully Maori. I think at last check we had about three years
ago, was thirty in the Kohanga but only three or four go into the Kura Kaupapa now that’s not being said. Many others that you can bring up, that’s the negative ones, the very positive ones too. So if it’s for Maori and its Maori based I would through that up and I would explore it in depth. I wont do that in the general New Zealand programming these days, people use it as an excuse for hitting this or that on the head.

M: *It's such a hard position to be in...*

B: Yes, it’s all in negotiations within a situation of being surrounded by another culture they also hold the purse strings to education. They hear that Kura Kaupapa is not happening, they’re liable to cut them off, close down Kura Kaupapa within six months. Because there for image making can be said to be very false, top of your paper {i.e.; interview questions} says that we are very successful in New Zealand. Often when you’re looking at it though it may not be as successful as it could be.

M: *Regardless of it being successful of not, its happening here and its not happening at home in Hawai‘i, I don’t know which is better.*

B: Well, we’ve got a number of things going. We’ve got quite a large population base, we’ve got a small industry in general but a flexible one, you can get behind the camera and get trained pretty easily its not quite as rigid as Australia or America. A great number of things, and the country is relatively wealthy. Although, I do believe the reasons to look at are very “simple” forms of filmmaking for ourselves. We moan about not really being able to say the kind of things I’m talking about, but I wonder if we couldn’t actually make our own videos by ourselves and also explore alternatives outside the system.

M: *I think we’d have a much better chance here than we would at home. It just doesn’t seem like we are able to do anything in Hawai‘i {meaning indigenous dramatic film}.*
B: Well, I’m talking about real grassroots stuff, I’m talking about one of those digital cameras. Which are completely adequate.

*M: That’s what I’m doing. I’ve collected about 9 hours of footage on the set of the “The Overstayer.”*

B: It may not be broadcast quality, that’s well and fine. But I’ve just got worked up about the “work for the dole” scheme which seems to be failing. But had it not, I was all geared up for the first time in my life to grab friends and beg borrow cameras and so on and actually start making a feature length documentary.

*M: On what?*

B: A thing called the “work for the dole,” there’s no dole in New Zealand anymore and that’s unprecedented. It’s been happening in small patches around the world, but nowhere has the whole country. I believe this is very fascist, and I’m fascinated by the process where the country could bring itself to do this. But I haven’t done that in the Maori scene and I wonder if we place too much on reliance on making good films. The talk is very simple, but some people are doing that, have you discovered that? Have you heard of Sharon over at Ta Moko Productions?

*M: Yes, they’re doing their own thing. But then we get to the question of well who sees it? Do you wait around till you get the “right time slot?” For example, the Tala Pasifika series that I’m working on, they waited two years to try and get the funding and most of the reason was they needed to prove that they had a time slot. You have to get a time slot in order to get funding and in order to get that time slot you have to prove that there is an audience. It just seems that you go through that whole battle to try and get it on television. Then you have people like Sharon Hawke, Leonie Pihama and Glynnis Paraha (Ta Moko Productions) that are out there “doing it” whether it’s seen or not seen, I don’t know what’s better.*
B: Well, like the case with "the work for the dole," you're going to need a special occasion to arise. They (Ta Moko Productions) did one on a thing called the "Fiscal Envelope," have you heard about that one? Where government said, over land conversations that we will give you this much money with a cap on it, which came to be nicknamed "the fiscal envelope," you can't take more out than the governments put in the envelope, so sorry about the natural rights about the conversation issue, you only get this much. They were part of the movement that killed off the concept and they did a series of interviews here in Auckland and dropped it in the letterboxes of key journalists. The fact of having the image there of very well informed Maori talking bluntly, not being battered by some ignorant interviewer on mainstream television. What are the implications? I mean, it may have been good, the "fiscal envelope," may have been okay, in fact what's being done is a kind of balancing trick, no one says no more fiscal envelope, but in face it's used more as a guide. Yeah, I remember hearing about it down in Wellington where a Maori journalist suddenly woke up one morning and there's a tape in the letterbox. So there are moments in fact where imagery can be used in quite a different way and I'm not sure we are very far ahead of that, ahead in that way. Like Aborigines from Australia.

M: They've done a lot as well, we've done stuff at home but we haven't...maybe we've done more than I realize we've done but it's just not in the feature film format.

B: Another judgment you make, which is why I personally fight for the proper budget and the proper space, which after all we've got a right to it. Were part of the overall population, we've put in our 15% of the money, its automatic that we get some. Because there is a huge value in fighting for the mainstream, position on the mainstream. You hear it coming from a Maori, that they know the name and they say "oh! he associated with so and so and no I don't trust him" or "Oh! he's coming from..."'

M: Yeah, we have that with Hawaiians as well, if the right person says its then it's okay.
B: Well, you've got to have somebody there. See ten years ago we didn't have anybody there. Another view that I had about stereotyping is that Maori, indigenous people, talk their own talk, it is by nature antagonistic to their own culture. So, just because being happy Maoris suggests that something's gone wrong to an invader. I've seen quite straightforward stories, unsettling to Pakeha audiences. It reminds them in my view, of they're not being the Tangata Whenua of the land, and it's said very bluntly these days, why are they here? I can't find any reason or a very shallow reason that they seem to be here. If they don't sort of try to build their roots then they'll do it. So, it seems to me that if you endorse your pride on the land, by that admission you are upsetting or may upset especially an older generation who feel they do quite well on the land, thank you very much. Pakeha they've failed at certain things and there are good things that they've put their faith in but there are also very bad things and we can see evidence of them. Give someone an acre that you can put on the market and get a dollar for yourself. The real nature of Pakeha life has become very evident in the last ten or fifteen years. So, the very nature of our imagery, indigenous imagery is antagonistic so you're forced to negotiate, you're forced not to offend that's fine, you choose your path. You go into certain contexts, you go to someone's house you know what I mean? By the mere fact that you decided to go there and with dignity and song you will condition your speech, obviously it's your choice.

M: It's not clear cut.

B: Well, to me it is clear-cut. I personally think you feel inside a huge difference when were making something first and foremost for Maori.

M: When I say it's not clear cut, for a lot of people it's not clear cut.

B: But I think it may be for younger people. They don't think any other way. I think that I've come through twenty-five years where it was very daring to put Maori on the screen at all. But we see them and now we can weigh out, oh this is rubbish and this is
good and we can have more of this. And the younger generation has grown up with that. There’s people now that are twenty they’ve had a fair dose of that but they can see. Yeah, they don’t even use the word *Pakeha* which I’ve now said that I won’t use anymore, *Tau Iwi* they say *Tau Iwi* and I personally have come to just say Non-Maori. I wrote a book where the “other” was always *Pakeha*, its shifted.

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*M:* *The film “Once Were Warriors,”* was changed from the book where there was no happy ending in the book and in the film they had somewhat of a happy ending, they changed it for the viewing audience. I wonder if it is because of the viewing of the Western ideology.

*B:* It was deliberately re-doctored for the mass audience.

*M:* *Once again changing the image for the audience.*

*B:* But then again it’s a pretty, well I don’t like either the book or the film. I’ve got to say the books got quite a voice and the voice changed to where it’s very uneasy. Alan Duff captures that well. I think that it’s fascinating what does get cut out and mind you, its general.

I’ve read both the “English Patient” and seen the film. The way things have changed not only, its quite unnecessary I would have thought. So it’s in no means just in Maori stuff you’re talking about, its mainstream Western cinema. It’s not even, well its mainstream America really, its not even French or Polish, but its American. In the “English Patient” the boy which was major, in fact its his book, but very minor in the film. The relationship between the girl and the boy was never sexual, they were naked in bed but they didn’t actually make love or even go down that track. It was an amazing brother and sister thing, it was a very special thing, you don’t even see it in a book very often. But
you know what they did, they had one big hug and then the next thing you see is them coming out the next morning. I don’t believe they had to do that, I can go through a dozen or twenty or so like that. But in “Once Were Warriors,” it was necessary, which rather tells you where “Warriors” is coming from. A romantic film, “Warriors.” I know that it sounds ridiculous to say.

M: Yeah!

B: But everybody gets her thing, what I call the Marae in the Sky, i.e.; Pie in the Sky. Quite unrealistic and quite cruel, rural areas are just not like that, you just cannot take four or five kids out into the countryside and expect a happy life in poor indigenous communities. So it’s romantic, in it’s certain attitudes.

M: So do you think that an indigenous created film should be critiqued or looked at from a Western ideology? Do you see any way that that can be solved, should we set up our own framework for critiquing?

B: Yes! I think if Maori are given freedom we’ll do it, naturally. I mean there will be someone who will deliberately set out to exploit the situation whether it be violence or sexuality. They’re either about bare-breasts or they got Maori as warrior, full stop or the comic Maori, the funny boy. It’s obvious everywhere else, the French are making films generally they’ll make it with their own French people. People will not lie, occasionally they’ll try the international thing. They might take on the trappings of that sort of thing but I don’t think there is any problem once Maori are confident once they’re given those kinds of freedom to do that sort of thing.

So it’s political, you know taking the actions of the Waitangi Tribunal. We should have had, since “Once Were Warriors,” four or five features made it was fair share of the common purse. Okay, one of two might be stereotypical made by chance operations by a couple of rip off adventurous Maori but not all of them would be like that some of the
best people around wouldn’t dream of doing that you can see their work, Don Selwyn, Merata Mita and so on. Then there is a whole younger group who are even stauncher. It’s just a natural thing but I come from a time scale where the idea of Maori making film as Maori for Maori is just a dream. In fact it was so much a dream that you didn’t even formulate it. One had to do two or three things, suddenly you realized what you were doing by instinct, for me anyway. Nobody else was doing it in film, that I knew of. So it’s kind of a pretty big circle where as I say with that lawyer situation no one wants to touch it because it’s telling the “honky” or general public, doing corporate videos. Meantime you know that Maori needs those images to be able to handle the only court they’ve got.

M: So how do you think that’ll turn out?

B: I don’t know, the Maori lawyers might kick up a fuss. I don’t think they’ll get rid of the producer who’s been appointed. In a way, it’s not good form to do that. I think the lawyers should pick another one a general one will have a value. Do you see the issue? When I go to Hawai’i and see something going to the Sundance festival it’s great, we all like to put our good clothes on. But then again if its not making your own people sit up and think about things, what have you achieved? Nothing. I also think that people have the right to be recorded by their own people in various ways. In song, in poetry, writing it is a natural human thing and if it’s not happening then it’s belittling of those people. So if the resources, few as they are, come for writing poetry or publishing or making films and videos come to us as indigenous people, they can expect something from that. Not to be shown necessarily at Cannes Film Festival, I believe both can be done, we did it with “Ngati.” It’s very much owned by Ngati Purou and it’s seen as their film. But it won some awards abroad too and it’s accessible to other people.

M: Few filmmakers have been able to achieve that on both sides.
B: Well you need the right sort of project, frankly I don’t really care about doing that. Well, it’s inevitable that a story will come along and everyone will have a joy in doing it.

M: True. Sima Urale did that. Have you seen O Tamaiti?

B: Well, yes and no, I think that is a really good example. As a Maori, I am not confident that, I know and understand what the films about. But to know it in depth and to know the political impact the icon force that the film will have on the community, I can’t judge, I think its major. The combination of fertility and the church and the establishment and the damage to the young ones, there’s a whole area, one as a male and two being from that culture, I wouldn’t...Yes, I think it’s a wonderful example of something that on the surface is understandable to people of many cultures but there is something to that, for her own people that is a major statement.

M: The fact that she uses sub-titles and refused to have English used.

B: Oh yes that, but to actually challenge that concept of--keep producing children under the blessing of our Holy church. Very difficult for an artist to do that. The fact that it’s coming from their own flesh and blood and being said so delicately. Did you see “Velvet Dreams?”

M: Yes.

B: I think only a Samoan could have made that. It’s sort of affectionate, it places it somewhere, that part of our past, it was kind of silly but funny, sort of wonderful touch. You can’t imitate that, I don’t think that an outsider can do that, you have to have your finger right on the pulse, and probably be Samoan. You’ve got a stake in it and if you get it wrong, your own people...it’s a statement to your own people. Yes, she’s special, she’s magic. She is a great example of someone who, and Merata is another one to me. I get the sense that there is no other thought that they wouldn’t be making it for
Maori/Samoan. It would be silly to think that they were making it for the general audience, they’re making it for Maoris or for Samoans.

But the thing about stereotyping, I wonder, although I cant speak for the Pacific, but for here it may have slid out of debate because there has been enough done on Maori.

*M:* What about the medium of film as a form of storytelling? What are the roles of film?

B: Well, I think for Maori it’s the same for anybody else, it’s a way to see your own people of doing things in a certain context, its pretty universal I think. There is an area which fascinates me, is how closely tied especially drama is, how *whakapapa* is orientated with our religious. How in drama is closely associated with rituals and general religious context is something to explore.

*M:* It is so closely associated with oral tradition. To me filmmaking and oral tradition is so similar a medium, it’s the same thing but using Western technology. With film being a medium to tell our stories.

B: Different things come to the forefront. Western logic can dominate certain types of documentaries, its got to be cut and dry and come to the point. When you talk in a meeting house, the whole concept of *hui*, there’s another kind of talk. In general, things are kept open, you don’t close off your own talk, so it flows from person to person and in the so called mish-mash, they get a whole flow in context. So it’s more of the people more of the time. It may go on two or three generations, the debate. Like when I do the one on the *Ngati Apa*, I’m not going to top it off. In a sense, this happened in the present, this happened in the past, this happened and so on. That is not the Western principle in general, often in Western documentaries its much more emphatic about things...

*M:* This is the way it is on this date. It’s a continuity kind of feeling.
B: Yes, you’re only part along the discourse.

M: Maybe that’s why I feel a connection between the whakapapa, the genealogy, the never ending kind of storytelling. Like in the film “Te Urawera,” and how it ends with the children singing and in the song, the voice and the people, it just seems continuous. At the same time, it captures that period in time in that valley. I don’t know why I draw that connection to oral tradition and film.

B: There are certain things at play here {referring to Te Urawera}, one, I’m an outsider in that area so I’m not going to ever access them and what they’re up to, I’m a servant to who they are. No good documentary filmmaker would do that, say who they are. We’re just an instrument, to give them the opportunity to bring their own thing to life. I liken it to carvings, images stand for a long time, as long as the people want it the carving stands, but when it falls out of use it will disappear. So there’s a sense that its part of the flow and it is into the future, that thing about the gradient thing, Te Urawera will be more important for those people in twenty years time than it is now and as you’re making it you know that. So you are not hassled by the immediate, that it has got to be there and so on and so on. But there is also a way of capturing deeper things that you feel and things you want to pass on way beyond that. I don’t think you feel that when you’re doing a Pakeha film it’s much more here and now and then it goes into a vault that is only referred to by specialists once and awhile. But I feel, I’m just saying what I feel, that the Te Urawera will keep coming back to them and back and getting more and more important as the next generation comes and so on.

M: Is it because we see it as indigenous people? We see the importance of our genealogy? That the Pakeha see it less? They don’t see the whole history as important, they see their families at that immediate time as important, they don’t see the whole picture as important. It seems that the indigenous people see everything as important....

B: ...and on-going.
M: Its all connected, the land and the people and everything, its all connected as opposed to individualistic.

B: In a Western thinking it’s more ‘that happened then.’

M: Less connectedness.

B: I sometimes ponder, if I could go into the tribal archives and have images of Te Rapahau and the others selling the land explaining why they’re doing it. It’s really important for me to know, just reading it, I mean all the written stuff is biased its got it leaning one way or the other. Written by people who are easily justified why they bought the land for two pennies and sold it three months later for two pounds and so on.

M: I think it’s the recording of knowledge, it’s the “by who?” dilemma. It seems in academia we are very much caught up in “who is saying what?,” if it’s an indigenous person versus and non-indigenous person. Credibility only comes from an indigenous person if it’s about their own people as opposed to a non-indigenous person talking about someone else’s people.

B: You mean from a Western academic point of view? Well yeah. I think a deeper thing is that whether you like it or not you’re part of the tribe and if I do something with Ngati Apa, I’ll be going to Ngati Apa in three months and raking over the coals, saying to my own tribe now’s the time to try and say something to try and express something about us. I know that it will be around in one hundred years time and it’s not being done by some Pakcha it’s being done by a Ngati Apa on this lineage. I’m very careful and even more passionate on both. Responsibility is large but also being able to capture it is a wonderful thing. But I’ve got no doubts I’ve walked into it, where as a non-Urawera, I’m an outsider coming in. But when curiosity jumps when you’re Ngati Apa making its about Ngati Apa. No one has really done that, we’re the first ones to take a camera in there and really ask about our history and our land how do we put it, everyone will be bending and
really straining to capture the mood and the times. First, I think all we can do is really think about how we think about it now.

There’s the Frasier house, the Frasiers’ they’ve got so much land, they’ve got a few acres, they’ve about the length of the cemetery, I think about half a mile from where our one is and they have a little hill. The Frasiers have got a kind of Southern United States type mansion, white with the hedge around and here are their ancestors are buried, two hundred or three hundred descendants are buried. I happen to go there on a day when a man who was going to be buried there was cleaning the thing. Was cleaning his grave and putting up where he’d be buried. Now as Ngati Apa, I’m not going to, but personally I’m not going shoot all over him. We do have a common thing somehow, but how do we come to grips with it? So do we express it now? I think that’s the thing about documentary making anyway. But it’s an obligation to being part of the clan. So I know that will reflect on my family in a hundred years time. My individual family, my sons, my children, grandchildren if it’s, to a greater or lesser extent and why do it. Ngati Apa don’t need their history shown to all non-Maori other New Zealanders and beyond.

M: Whom are you doing it for? Why are you doing it?

B: Oh well I’ve got to think about that {pause}. Because suddenly I’ve got a golden opportunity to use film to story tell about our own life for a change. Without other people telling us what Te Rapahau was and what Ngati Raukau was but in...

M: Cause it’s your history.

B: It’s our life; it touches on people daily, it touches on everything that is said in other places about Ngati Apa.

M: Well, colonialism, it speaks to colonialism.
B: Well yeah, it touches colonialism, including colonialism within our own people. But how do we see it? The documentary I want to do is, is my own, is part of the generation I’ve come through. From myself being a New Zealand child of a Maori mother, to being declared Ngati Apa. Moving from the framework of Pakeha and Maori to Maori and non-Maori and the crown.

B: I cannot help but feeling, I’m sure the whakapapa is a huge player in indigenous storytelling. That sense of being part of a continuum that the story will resurface at each screening. Those images will keep having a force and greater and greater. The carving is much in a way, it grows in mana, it grows in strength.

M: In the telling of the story over and over...

B: Every screening is a new thing, for the people who are related, either immediately or more or less immediately, not all necessarily.

M: The feeling that you feel when you see a Hawaiian on screen portrayed correctly, although I have a hard time thinking of one that has {laughing}. It’s that feeling of connectedness to the image on the screen.

B: Well, I’ve often sort of wondered why this happens in indigenous filmmaking. I think it’s because of the whole genealogy, the practical and the worldviews seeing this as fundamental. There is that sort of connectiveness I feel that the Russians must have felt on one of their battleships, or the Americans must have felt with “The Civil War.” I watched that film in Los Angeles, you know the documentary series? I loved it, but I thought it’s a good place to see it cause I felt like an outsider, I thought this must be different for Americans, they would feel connected to this, this is their own sort of history. So I think that all people experience this, but I just know that it is very strong for
indigenous community because of the *whakapapa* and that connection to oral tradition. The only way I'm going to know what's happening in the *Ngati Apa* is to talk to the old people, really what the value and what perspective is put on. I could find out what happened to upper house, upper house a big two-story place, but to know how the tribe has kept perspective of what happened and for what reasons is theirs.

*M:* I wonder how I'm going to make that distinction between what is important as an indigenous person and indigenous filmmaking as opposed to non-indigenous.

*B:* For one, it is being observed, you've observed it happening. As I say in the speech, don't ask us to explain it. But we're the first indigenous people starting to notice this, I think, the *Tangata Whenua* series I've seen what's happened, its much more valuable to today than it was then. I've been involved with things twenty-five years ago, which aren't, as valuable, to anybody. They're curios, they've been very good films but they're not *Tangata Whenua*, but they just don't figure into the national life, the personal lives of anybody anymore in the way this material does. We can fumble around and the first thing we can be justified in saying, this happened and it has huge implications, what's more I think instinctively we felt it. So the way filmed storytelling has been done on film at its best, is being aware of that. It's hard to put words on it but it's been done that way, knowing that this not a quick comment on somebody to prove a point. But this is a statement from a whole line of people you know which has got all sorts of reverberations around it making a simple statement. Therefore it has a need to look after it well and present it a certain way and not just for the one-hour slot you've got in two months time but for a long time.
The following was sent to me by Barry Barclay after the interview in response to some of the questions raised at the interview: (Barclay 1999)

The Nature of the Industry here:
The general film industry in this country has been good for getting people started. Its an independent, high-quality industry, relatively easily-accessed; non-unionized; no longer dominated by outsiders (British, Australians); quite rich in equipment; supportive of beginners.

Demographics
The Maori population is quite large in itself- nearly half a million now; its probably over the “critical mass” of people needed for a creative base – writers, musicians, visual artists, technicians etc. (Hard to build a truly indigenous industry on a population base of (say) 100,00 people perhaps – although it can, will, and must be done.)

The Maori population as a percentage of majority culture is also quite large – 10% when I began 25 years ago; 15% now’ predicted to be 30% in twenty years time. So lobbying on the basis of population percentages has worked sometimes: in getting de facto quota in place for funding, airtime, training opportunities. There’s a plausible human rights argument too: Maori put 15% of funds in; Maori should get 15% of funds out. Maori are also too numerous to be entirely ignored. If there are not seen on the screen, sooner or later, officials are forced to admit that there’s something wrong. Once Maori were “somewhere else,” both physically and notionally. Not any longer.

Political Considerations
Progress in the Maori film/TV field (as in more or less any field affecting Maori) has been brought about by determined political action by Maori (rarely from the largesse of non-Maori).
The sovereignty movement and uncompromising sovereignty movement ideologies have been the political base from which it has been possible to push.

Maori have insisted on being treated as indigenous (*Tangata Whenua*), not simply as one among a number of “minorities.” This, I believe, has been crucial.

**On Shifting Sands**
The achievement is relative. Maori should have made (say) fifteen feature films by now, instead of just the four they have.

The achievement is still at the largesse of the wider community; still vulnerable to ideological shifts (witness the Film Commission).

**In General**
I have a saying about the film scene for Maori: “anything that has been achieved, has been achieved at the point of a gun.” (metaphorically) Nothing major has ever been freely given.

And I have been made humble when abroad and with other indigenous people, people whose youngsters might have life expectancies of forty years and who really do stand to get shot by real, (not metaphorical) bullets. By comparison, Maori live in tranquil circumstances and so I do not think it behooves any Maori to start talking about being ahead of any other indigenous group. It’s all-relative.
Interview with Roger Horrocks

Interviewed on January 19, 1999, University of Auckland, New Zealand

The Interview:

Michelle: Why do you think that New Zealand is so far ahead of the rest of the Pacific, or why do you or don’t you feel that we {New Zealand} are so far ahead of the rest of the Pacific in filmmaking?

Roger: I think the creative energy that we can see at the moment in filmmaking in New Zealand, has to be seen in context. The context is, the much bigger thing happening, the whole cultural renaissance that is happening here and you can see it in music, with a lot of Pacific Island groups doing popular music, you can see it in fashion, we can see it in literature, we’ve seen a couple of very excellent novelists, we can also see it in live theatre, so film is really part of a whole upsurge in Pacific Island related local art activity.

M: Okay, can you explain the role that funding bodies take in filmmaking in New Zealand, especially for Pacific Island filmmaking?

R: Unfortunately, film is quite an expensive medium and there is never enough money. There simply is never enough money in New Zealand and obviously that impacts on Pacific Island filmmakers. It has had an impact on many New Zealand filmmakers. What we do have is “Creative New Zealand,” which is the art council and they can provide small grants, there is the “New Zealand Film Commission” which really works the professional end of production and there’s “New Zealand On Air,” which funds television. But, making film is always the same for everybody; it’s a terrible terrible struggle to be able to raise the money on your film.

M: I have a quote here from Justine {Simei-Barton,} she said “The scripts {Tala Pasifika Series} offered, contained images and stereotypes that were identical to the images of
Polynesia constructed by European culture” (Simei-Barton 1997:74). Do you think Pacific Island created images or stereotypes on film are better or worse than Non-Pacific Island created images?

R: I’ll answer that question slightly indirectly.

M: Okay

R: The really important thing for funding bodies is not to operate from a preconceived idea of what a Samoan film or a Tongan film or any other kind of film should be. What funding bodies should try and do is give people in that community a chance to work out their own solutions. To give as many Samoans as many Tongans as many Niueans a chance to make films, and then it will evolve gradually, what a Samoan film will be will come naturally out of the act of producing films. So basically, the more the merrier, the more experiments the better and it needs to be something that will gradually evolve.

{Pause}
You may have two comments on the same topic.

M: {Same Question}

R: Obviously, in the case of Pacific Island filmmakers, they have to work with the terrible crushing weight of a Palangi {European} tradition, which has already filled the airwaves and filled the screen with many stereotypes, all the kind of Hollywood stereotypes and all the Polynesianist stereotypes. So, we wait with enormous interest to see what emerges when young Samoan filmmakers, young Tongan filmmakers and many other groups get a chance to make their own. Now what will come out of this who knows, the important thing is that there are many experiments. Now the greatest difficulty I think in the funding area is that many of the funding opportunities are places like television which have terribly terribly severe requirements about what makes a commercial project, that is going to be accessible to the widest possible audience. Now
how do you do something different? Because surely what we want from Pacific Island film is something different. We don’t want more Hollywood, it’s precisely the difference, the difference in rhythm, the difference the way the film is shot, the difference in the ways the crews operate. Something that truly comes out of the community and out of the culture has to be different. But the terrible struggle that goes on all the time is you then have to deal with broadcasters who basically want more projects that are kind of like the McDonald’s. It’s like one more hamburger coming off the production line, it’s like every other hamburger cause that’s what you’re used to. They are putting up thousands of these visual, audio-visual hamburgers. And so, it’s a fight, it’s a struggle, but you know there is a lot happening and there are some really interesting results coming.

M: I don’t know if you’ve already answered this, indigenous created films are still looked at from a Western ideology, as is Pacific Island Literature and Theatre, do you think this creates a problematic situation for Native filmmakers/artists?

R: I think it’s very important to keep the production of film separate in one’s mind from the screening and broadcasting. Cause there really are two struggles, one struggle is the get the money, to get them funding, to be able to make films. But the other struggle is get them screened, and that’s just as much a difficulty, because you know television broadcasters, people who own cinemas say no no this is a foreign product, this is an alien product and you know your audience wont understand it. And that’s the struggle that carries on. In the case of television it’s the struggle for primetime, it’s the reason Pacific Island work is pushed to the most remote areas of the schedule and it’s a struggle that has to continue.

M: What do you think of the term “indigenizing the image?”

R: Indigenizing the image... {pause}. I think anybody who’s grown up in a small country, relatively small country like New Zealand, which is an ex-colony, is very aware of the implications of the phrase like “indigenizing the image.” Of course, even as a
Palangi {European}, growing up in this society, I have seen cinemas where 99% of the films came from Hollywood. I have watched television where 80% of what was screened on television came from either England or the United States. And I also know what a struggle it’s been to create something you can call a New Zealand film. Now what their idea is around, there are a lot of other very important ideas that come up and strike you. Of course, a Maori vision of New Zealand is going to be very different from a Pakeha {European} vision of New Zealand. Now within New Zealand there is also of course a very strong Pacific Island community, Asian community and many other minority groups. So, clearly there are a number of very important political issues to do with indigenous rights, minority rights and people who work in the area of audio-visual production have just got to face them. We have not faced them enough, certainly the industry has not faced them enough and that is really the challenge for the day.

M: (pause)

R: Can I have another crack at that one?

M: Yeah.

R: I think the issue of “indigenizing the image,” is something that comes up in many forms, at different levels. For example, I’ve grown up in New Zealand and I’ve grown up in a society that’s back in the 1940’s and 50’s when the radio announcers spoke in English accents cause its believed that the BBC is the only good broadcaster in the world. And I’ve grown up looking at movies thinking that anyone that acts in a movie has got to speak with an American accent cause every movie came from Hollywood. So that’s one level I think, I’m very aware of what it means to make a film where people speak in a way that my family speaks in a way that my neighbors speak. Because obviously we’ve got to go further than that, there’s also issues involving indigenous groups from each of the countries and so the politics operate at every level and I think its something that all
film productions, all television productions has got to take far more seriously then they have. Now, who is speaking for us and who controls the right to speak?

M: *What do you think the role Pacific Island film plays in shaping and strengthening a coherent sense of Cultural Identity in Pacific Islanders?*

R: Okay, I think we have to start with the realization of just how powerful film is as a medium. Now I know myself growing up how crucial it was beyond the world of my family, there were movies every Saturday afternoon I went to the movies and that is how I learned and awful lot about the world. Its how you learn buzz words, phrases, its how you learn how to relate to people, its how you learn what to wear, what’s trendy what’s not trendy, you know all those things I think are tremendously powered by films. And films have such a power for good or evil, they either implant stereotypes or they can just create such a sense of liberation, that the absolute adrenaline and excitement you see in a film, it opens up the world for you. And I think the great thing that’s happening is a really significant relationship that’s developing between filmmaking and Pacific Island communities in New Zealand. Young people from those communities are making the films; the films are not being made for them by outsiders they are actually coming out of those communities. There’s a kind of feedback group is created, that a kind of synergy is created, cultural is being built, there’s a dialogue going on. You’re not simply having somebody from Los Angeles or from Hollywood coming down and telling you. Now a community can look at the movies, they can laugh, they can argue they might hate the films, they might love them but it’s a kind of dialogue, it’s a living culture, it’s an active culture and it’s very creative.

M: *What do you think of film as a storytelling tool?*

R: Every culture loves stories and stories are how you tell the tale of the tribe. History is just a story, but there is a misunderstanding that all stories are the same, actually I think storytelling is very culture specific and I think the pleasure of other groups telling stories
is they not only tell different stories they tell those stories differently. That is so important cause the world is actually being taken over by a very formulaic, Hollywood notion of three-act structure. All you got to do is buy one of these books by one of these Hollywood gurus and a very formulaic, very specific way of telling stories is dictated. It may work perfectly well for Hollywood. But it is so crucial that you also have stories that breathe differently, that take their time differently, that wander differently that walk their way through a journey in a whole different culture.

M: What about using Pacific Island film as an educational tool?

R: I think exposure to Pacific Island film is tremendously valuable for all of us. Obviously valuable for the communities that they come out of, but also are of tremendous importance. Because if we take New Zealand as an example, New Zealand is going through a huge rethink of what the nation is, you know are we British anymore? Once upon a time we thought we were British, now were not. Are we American? Are we all going to become yet another American clone? Are we part of Australia? Are we bi-cultural? Or are we part of the South Pacific? And the notion of being part of the South Pacific is very important and a very powerful notion. And its wonderful that New Zealand film and New Zealand Literature increasingly is having that Pacific dimension. Its very important that any nation, any group of people, constantly asks themselves the question ‘who are we?’ and make sure that there are voices that being heard which are so easily drowned out by the usual kind of national discourse.

{Adding to his previous answer}

Something very dramatic is happening in New Zealand in the last decade. Once upon a time we thought we were British, we were a British colony, life was very simple, we had a queen, we had a British constitution, everything was very straightforward. And then suddenly Britain stopped buying our dairy products and we felt like we were cut a drift. And suddenly all these new voices were heard. Some voices said; ‘we are really a country that is a Maori country,’ ‘we are Aotearoa, not a British version of New
Zealand.’ We also had voices saying; ‘you are part of the South Pacific.’ And these are very exciting new ways of thinking about who we are and we have to situate ourselves differently. I think many of New Zealand’s best artists; filmmakers, musicians and theatre people are working on this. The arts are being defined, some really good thinking going on about the issue as New Zealand as a Pacific nation, New Zealand as a bi-cultural nation and so on. Film has a crucial part to play in it.

M: Can you talk a little bit about the role of Maori in Television, what’s happening right now?

R: I think the next few years will see a great deal of activity by Maori film and television makers. It’s very hard to predict what is going to come from that because there are clearly very different versions, very different views of what Maori material should be. There is the traditional view that says that it should be in the Maori language, it should be totally Te reo, Maori language. But there is another view that says that there are many Maori living in the cities who have become a new kind of culture, which has Maori elements mixed in with urban elements and elements...everything from Jamaica, from other indigenous peoples, from the United States, from African-American culture. Those are also voices that should be heard. So there is a great firming going on, a great melting pot. You can hear it in the music and wonderfully we are now starting to see it on the screen.

M: Any closing remarks?

R: If you get filmmakers together they’ll have lots of interesting things to talk about but inevitably by the end of the evening, the conversation will get around to money. Because film is such an expensive medium, you can’t get away from that fact. That is the tension, because on the one hand film is such a natural medium for young people its so great to see young people getting their hands on a camera and other film equipment and making films. Film are so important to you growing up as soon as you go out into the world, films help you to figure out who you are and what the world is like and what you want to
be. So its so crucial that young people get a chance to make films and at the same time films cost tens, hundreds, tens of hundreds of thousands of dollars. That money has got to come from somewhere and particularly in Pacific Islands, particularly in a small country like New Zealand there are not many puddles of money. Those puddles tend to collect rather unevenly, there’s a little puddle here, there’s a little puddle there, but often it comes with strings attached. We will give you money to make your film if you make it for our program, and here are seventy-five requirements for our program. So that is the perennial inevitable struggle, the miracle is that films do get made and some young people do get a chance to make them and we just got to keep fighting for that right.
Interview with Justine Simei-Barton

Interviewed – January 18, 1999, Auckland, New Zealand

The Interview:

Michelle: What is the significance of the Talas being done?

Justine: The reason behind the Talas being done, the way the Talas were born was, it was just because there were no sort of constructive images of Pacific Islanders on screen and New Zealand has the one of the largest Polynesian populations in the world.

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M: I’m going to read your quote, “The scripts offered, contained images and stereotypes that were identical to the images of Polynesia constructed by European culture” (Simei-Barton 1997:74). And this is my question, do you think Pacific Island created images on film are better or worse than Non-Pacific Island created images? Are the images created by Pacific Islanders of Pacific Islanders are better than non-Pacific Islanders?

J: No, not necessarily, sometimes it can be worse.

M: Why, In what way can it be worse, I mean if we’re talking about our own selves, shouldn’t it be correct?

J: No, I think that it’s a myth, that if you are a Pacific Islander telling your own Pacific Island story, that it is most definitely going to be a lot better than a non-Pacific Islander telling that same story and the reasoning for that is it depends on how colonized one is.

M: So the level of colonization dictates how Pacific Islander you are, how much Pacific Islander you are?
J: Yeah, its that whole thing of internalized colonization and sometimes it goes so far deep that you as the Pacific Islander are totally unaware that you have been so colonized. And the images that you might portray as Pacific Islanders are images that have been already bestowed on you by Europeans. So therefore what you give out, might be the expectation of what Europeans want to see. And you become that type of Pacific Islander and in that situation, you’re actually a lot worse off because then they will point to you and say well a Pacific Islander did this.

M: So what is your solution?

J: Yeah, I don’t have sort of any answers, and I think the answers come with the individuals and I think that it’s a process of decolonization. I don’t know how Pacific Islanders, are able to sort of come to terms with the whole concept of decolonization if you don’t realize you’ve been colonized. And its so very deep that you begin to fight with one another and then you get the debate of “you’re not Pacific Islander, or I’m more Pacific Islander than you are.” You know and you get that whole thing of “well do you speak an indigenous language, well I do.” That makes you less of a Samoan cause you don’t speak Samoan, you know and that’s the force of the colonization being brought on individuals and so how does one deal with that, when you’re totally unaware, that you are. In that respect, I think that the Talas, both the Tala series, have been really significant in that, the portrayal of Pacific Islanders. Quite a lot of the Pacific Island community were involved in the both the projects and I think that has really helped to ground Pacific Island filmmakers who are involved in the process. Because it is so easy to go, you know, the other way and say, well no that’s not how they do it in the industry, you know we have to do it like this or they will never accept it. But if you turn to the community and say, like “The Overstayer,” you know “we’re making a film about the overstayer and we need, you know A, B, C.” Sometimes the community may look at you and say; “do you know how sensitive that subject is?” And you say “well, yeah I do, and that is why we want to make it” and then they will sit down and talk to you about it.
And, I think that it's those things, that sort of talking to your own people and talking, I think to the people who are not involved in the industry really grounds you. And so the connection with the Pacific Island *Talas*, why it is so Pacific Island is because the community has been very much a part of it. And just having elders involved and saying “you want to come in to audition?,” “why don’t you come down to the office and see what we do” and that’s helped a lot and also going into productions with that. You know, because within New Zealand within the industry there is a lot of, I know it’s a small thing but, there is a lot of swearing, and there is a lot of disrespect. I mean the guys they just, they, you know, they swear at a woman or treat people quite badly and there is quite a lot of tension.

*M:* You mean on the film set?

J: Yeah, yeah and they you go out on location and you’re shooting and that whole “shut up” or “what the hell do you think you’re doing, this is not the way we do it.” But you know if you got one of your elders there, and you know, it’s just leadership, and you turn around and you say to Europeans, “don’t talk like that on set, cause you know, you have to show some respect,” and they have to think about the environment that they work in, you know, just take it somewhere else, that’s not how we operate, you’re now stepping into our world and this is us.

*M:* Very empowering

J: Yeah, yeah it is very very empowering, so these two half hour dramas, its been an organic process. Its been very empowering for us, because we can say you know just can do it and we can do it on a professional level. And everybody is treated well very human like, there is no shouting and there is, well yeah people still swear, but they’re aware of their behavior. And they also are aware of the whole you know, brother and sister relationship and treating women with a little bit more respect and you know even if it’s something like making a cup of coffee or making tea, its that everybody is pretty much
on an equal basis so it's not like the runner goes and makes the production manager a cup of tea, you're the production manager, you got hands too, you go make a cup of tea for...

*M: More equality on the set*

J: Yeah, yeah, and it's great because then whole process is a team effort and that comes from Polynesia, you know that, working together as a community, working as a team and treating everybody on an equal basis and I mean we all have our specific jobs to do but by the same token the whole thing runs more smoothly if everybody pitches in.

*M: That's true, it was felt on the set, that it was pretty much equal all the way around, there weren't egos.*

J: Well yeah the egos were somewhat balanced out. For us it's been an empowering thing, for the non-Pacific Islanders it's been a real cultural learning experience that they have really enjoyed. So, it's a new way of working and for me as a director and producer that is the most exciting thing, is that this whole new way of working and non-Pacific Island colleagues because they have the experience, we're pretty much babies in the industry but we can still hold our own and we have something to offer.

*M: Yeah, interesting process, very interesting.*

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*M: Barry and I were talking about why it is that Pacific Island filmmaking, and I am including Maori in this, have, when they make a film it's more of a "journey," a "family," it's more connected to our aiga or family and it's not about making money it's about telling a story as opposed to a Western view of filmmaking which is more "what can I make, how can I get it up on the screen make it huge and make tons of money and blow up things," why is it at such far ends?
J: Is it? {laughing}

M: I'm wondering why that is, that they are two different types of storytelling. Do you agree with that or do you think they are the same? Or is it just the fact that we haven't gotten to blowing up things but if we could we would?

J: Yeah, yeah, well I mean I'd like to think that if, I mean, I hope that it's a journey we don't go down. I don't know, there's not enough of us, not that it's a cop out, but there is not enough of us Pacific Islanders and Maori people and indigenous people in the industry to really make that comparison.

M: Well, the Maori, even when they were making Ngati and Te Rua and the huge Maori films, still told family stories and talked about their connection to their land and to their ancestors...

J: Yeah.

M: ...it was still that kind of story versus...

J: Yes, but Europeans do as well.

M: True, although I can't think of any, films that connect to the land and to...

J: Well there is a lot of Italian films.

M: Well yeah, I guess there are, I just haven't seen them, which can easily happen when you're researching something, the Pacific Island way is the only way.
J: Yeah, I think that is a real danger, yeah it’s that thing of...yeah I think it’s a real trap
because it’s like you box yourself into a corner and I mean there are many paths to take
and I mean that sort of comparison just says for some of us that might want to go down
that road. It’s like well, you can’t and if you do, you are selling out and I think that is
really unfair because it’s very early days and well, we’re all different.

M: I’ve also heard Merata Mita, I think that said that “we should be allowed as
indigenous filmmakers to make the same mistakes that Western filmmakers made.”

J: Yes, absolutely, yeah I totally agree. We should be allowed to make our own mistakes
and if we make the same mistakes that they made then so what. When we get boxed into
a corner, that’s dangerous for everybody.

M: Do you think that Pacific Island filmmaking has empowered native filmmakers?

J: Yeah, it really has and not just filmmakers, I mean like in this Tala, we used friends
and friends of friends and people that never ever worked in the industry before and who
had very low I mean low low low esteem, like our props woman Anna, who had never
done this type of work before and suddenly she was head of props department and she
just rose to the occasion and it was so empowering for her and really encouraging to other
people to see.

M: And Misa.

J: Yeah, right and Misa is the other one I mean he was running around doing {everything}, and it’s really great to see, you know, wow these people, these Pacific
Islanders who have just not had the opportunity before to really rise to the occasion. I
think we all know the status of filmmaking, is really high. And just to have our own
people who have not experienced this type of work before get into a whole new world
that is usually closed to us, and rise to the occasion and do it on a professional level, with hardly any money...

M: That's empowering.

J: Yeah.

M: What a wonderful position for you to be in.

J: Oh it’s great, it’s one of the things I’m really proud of, it’s this whole organic process. Just watching people grow and watching them bring their families on set, “you can be the extra,” or “can you help me with the catering,” or “we need a security guard,” or “you need another A.D?” It’s very family oriented.

M: I think that’s what empowered me the most, through this whole process. Being able to do that.....

J: It’s that team spirit and yet it’s family oriented.

M: It feels more comfortable.

J: I’ve always seen filmmaking as a collaborative process. You know it’s like I say, D.O.P. (Director of Photography) has a specific job, Director has a specific job, but, everybody has a specific job, but unless they can learn to work together on an equal basis. Sometimes it’s just not worth it yourself to go through that stress and pain and having to go home hating yourself because you had to cut somebody off at the knees just because that’s the way directors work, you know in the industry.

M: You don’t have to follow those norms.
J: Yeah, no one has to follow those norms.

M: A lot of people do.

J: Yeah, the modern world that we live in is already stressful enough.

M: I agree, although it is still stressful, this process.

J: Yeah, but it’s stressful in a different way. Well, the stress to me is that because it’s a pilot series, we’ve got to work our butts off to prove a point, that we are equal to or better than the non-, the European stuff or Prime Time television. And, that’s stressful, but it’s a stress that is worth going through, it’s a stress that is also shared amongst the production crew and the community. If it’s shared, everybody understands this is an important project we need to work together, it’s not so bad.

M: It’s something your heart and soul can be happy doing, makes it worth it...

J: Yeah, yeah.

M: ...it’s not just a job.

J: No, when it becomes just another job, then it’s time to get out.

M: That’s why I was surprised on the set when I asked actors what their motivation was on the set, I got answers like “pay bills, money” but I guess I was asking the wrong people cause at that point they are there for the money. At the same time they are being paid less than they would, so their passion has to be there somewhere...cause the money was not that great...
J: {Laughing} Well, there are reputations to sustain as well within the industry that you know if another producer finds out that you only worked for half your normal rate for another production, then they’ll offer you that same amount even when their budget is a lot higher.

*M:* What about the oral tradition, storytelling, film being a replacement for oral tradition? Or do you think film is an easier concept to grasp for islanders? Because of their storytelling background and it being a visual medium? Is a visual medium a more appropriate substitution?

J: Well, film is both.

*M:* Well, as opposed to the written word. Going off into a corner and reading a book versus watching a film. I guess the question is, do you think islanders are more...

J: Comfortable with film.

*M:* Yeah, than the written.

J: I think that everyone is more comfortable with film. It’s the age that we live in and it’s not necessarily a good thing.

*M:* Yeah I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing, but in a way for Hawaiians, we’re loosing our elders which means we are loosing our stories, which for the next generation, my generation, film is a tool that enables the connection between the two.

J: Yeah, oh absolutely.

*M:* And this is a way of recording it, and capturing it on tape, we don’t hold on to stories the way our elders hold on to stories.
J: No, that’s right and everybody has to move with the times. But that’s not to say that Pacific Islanders are a lot more visual. I just think that it’s the world in which we live in, it’s a competitive thing, they have the power of film, we need it to empower ourselves and get us up there.

M: So you see it as more of a tool for equality.

J: Yeah, I don’t see it in terms of we are a lot more visual. No, I see it as a tool of equality and I think that comes through in the way in which we work on set.

M: So the Talas are a way to, their purpose for you, in your opinion, is more of an equality as opposed to an insight into the culture?

J: No, it’s both, the insight gives us a lot more equality and empowerment, so I think it’s all those things, that. But I’m just saying, I don’t believe any ethnic group is any more visual than, because that’s a new thing, film, television that whole visual medium, it’s new. It’s just that indigenous people haven’t had, it’s not accessible to us, that’s the difference.

M: And when the next form of medium comes along, whether it be computers on the Internet, we’ll go to that mode.

J: Yeah, it’s accessibility. It’s who has the power to access the resources and I think that’s always been the question.

M: So what’s next after the Talas?

J: Well, I don’t know I just sort of take things a step at a time.

M: So, is the plan to do the other four (Talas)?

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J: That is the plan. There are the other four scripts that have been developed and we’re just hoping that everybody is going to be so overwhelmed that, its never a guarantee, I mean they may rate through the roof, that gives you no guarantee that the others will get off the ground.

M: So it’s pretty much ground zero for the money thing?

J: Yeah pretty much cause it’s up to the networks and even if they love it, it still doesn’t necessarily mean that we’ll get the air time. That’s what I mean about accessibility.

M: Do we have a time slot for the Talas?

J: Well, we’re hoping, we’re going for prime time, we’re fighting for prime time. And we have just got to wait until the second episode has been cut and then we, well go back to the networks and renegotiate.

M: So is the first one finished? (“The Overstayer”)

J: Yeah the first one’s finished it’s been edited it’s just got the credits to do now.

M: So when do I get to see a copy?

J: That’s just it, we’re not allowed to show anybody the copies until it’s been screened.

M: So basically it’s just a waiting game? Yeah that is frustrating, it could just sit there forever.

J: Yeah it could do, but we’re hoping that it wont.
M: How long did it take before the first Talas were shown? It aired in 1995, I don’t know when they were finished.

J: 1994, it didn’t take long actually it’s I think it must have been about four months. But that is just because we had it screened on Tagata Pasifika and that’s not prime time slot. But for these ones {the second Talas} we want to go for prime time.

M: If you can’t get prime time will you show it on Tagata Pasifika?

J: Oh we’ll do that anyway. But we can’t show it on TP {Tagata Pasifika} until we negotiate a prime time slot.

M: Could be awhile.

J: Yeah, it’s interesting cause at the end of the shoot Paul was saying well you know no matter what happens from this point on the films are already successful. The fact that you’ve already done it, shot it, canned it, edited it, got your crew together, got the community in, that it is already successful {laughing}. “Are you just saying that cause you don’t want me to go to the networks. No, no, no, I’m serious.” {she acts out her conversation with Paul her husband}

M: No, it’s done, and it was successfully done and a lot of people were very proud of it.

J: …and we’re very proud of it and walked away feeling like “yeah! we did it,” and that speaks volumes.

M: Wow.

J: Yeah, I never really thought of it like that no you’re absolutely right.
M: Yeah it is, it’s about the people, that have been empowered by it...That’s what I was asking Stan, “so what is your motivation, I mean, is it to have your name up in lights or what is the motivation? And his motivation was more personal, to give insight into it and I think that’s interesting, that it’s not about the name up in lights. It hasn’t been for fame cause that’s not what you get. Even like Sima {Urale}, her saying that she didn’t get paid anything hardly for “O Tamaiti.” It wasn’t about that, it was about getting it out there, and she saw, the people that helped her, the people who were on her crew and cast as doing her a favor and I think that’s a different way of looking at filmmaking.

J: Yeah.

M: But I guess that’s how it is when you are first, when you’re babies, when you’re starting out, that its more of a...

J: They’re doing you a favor.

M: It’s more about getting it done than it is about the actual product.

J: Yeah, it’s an interesting process, it’s an interesting journey that that I’ve sort of discovered. Because when I started out directing it was, it umm....{pause}. Well, I’m not sure I believe that {laughing}.

M: What?

J: I think it’s a natural progression that people learn about themselves while the production is happening. You know if I’m to be sort of totally honest, when I started out directing, I mean it was about getting your name out there and being paid. I mean that’s why people work, cause you got to get out there and you got to bring an income in. I mean you don’t want to leave this earth without leaving something behind.
M: {jokingly} OK, confession time, that is what I want, I want my name up in lights.

J: No, absolutely that’s what I mean when I say, well I’m not sure I believe this {laughing}. Come on people...wake up! {laughing}.

M: It’s interesting though, I think that might be their original motivation but then the more you do it, the more you see power of film?

J: Yeah, yeah no that’s what I’m saying, I mean its like when you start out, when I started out, yeah, it was about getting your name up and having a reputation and bringing in a good income and you know doing something that people will say “Wow.” Yeah, but along the way it has become an organic process where by, you are not important here. You know its like if you want people to respect you, you have to let go your ego.

M: Yeah, and I think that’s what Sima {Urale} was saying, that it wasn’t about her it was about getting, well for her it was the product, the film made, and the message that it relayed. That’s interesting.

J: Yeah, but you don’t know that when you start out, when you first start out. But you learn that very quickly.

M: I wonder if all filmmakers learn that, if all directors come to that conclusion that its not about them, I highly doubt everybody does, there’s still people that still think that its all about them.

J: Yeah, I think, well, no that’s true.

M: Its true in every field.
J: Yeah, its true in every field. Yeah, for indigenous people, I think, the process, that process, is something that you learn very quickly. That you’re not important, the product is important, the work is important, the people are important, who you represent is important, the story is important. You’re a little thing here, this project is bigger than you are…and you learn that very quickly about Pacific Islanders because you’re from a migrant culture and because you look at your parents and you know how hard they’ve worked and things become a lot clearer to you. When you’re working with people, well, when I started out and working with people who totally abused you or abused each other and abused the work that you did, and you just think “ah.”

M: Yeah, maybe the industry is not what you thought it was going to be.

J: Yeah, if you can break that barrier and get through it and then tell your story the way you want to tell it and how it should be told. But its breaking through that barrier and getting to a point and standing back and realizing either I can turn into one of these people or I can just jump back and take a look at the bigger picture.

M: I think its regrounding yourself and not getting caught up in the whole thing. It takes a strong person, someone who knows what they want to be able to do that.

J: No, I’m not sure whether it takes a strong person to realize that. I think its just, I think its just a matter of individual self happiness and whether you want to continue to work in an environment that can be so ugly. And when you go home you take that baggage and transfer it onto your family. Just sort of realizing that’s not how I want to live my life, even though my name might be up in lights and I might get a lot more money. Its just a personal choice I don’t think it’s whether you’re strong person or...

M: Hmmm, true. Well, I think we’ve answered all the questions.
Interview with Stephen Stehlin

Interviewed – January 19, 1999, TVNZ, Auckland, New Zealand

The Interview:

Stephen: {reading list of questions...} What are the significance of the two Tala Pasifika series? Well...

Michelle: Well, okay, the Talas...

S: Yes, the Talas...

M: Tell me more about the Talas...

S: The Talas, let me tell you about how they began...

M: Okay.

S: They began here, in the cafeteria, cafeteria is now offices, but it was a brief conversation with an activist by the name of Pomau Papa’ili, do you know Pomau?

M: I’ve heard of him or her.

S: and his sister Mona, who was on the predecessor to this program {Tagata Pasifika}

M: She did “Tagata, Tangata.”

S: She did “Tagata, Tangata.” And before that she did “See, Hear.” We were discussing the development of the program actually from a studio based chat show on “how to fit into New Zealand society,” which was kind of what “See, Hear” was five-minutes a day
and was a very colonial kind of attitude. And the thing frustrating me at the time was that we never saw ourselves on the big screen and if we did it was, well not on the big screen, but in terms of a dramatic expression, we were incidentals or we were "colorful" and it was never our story. It was somebody else's and even if the characters were central it was something like, it didn't quite get there. So we decided that why don't we try and make some short films. A major problem, that is that none of us had ever made a short film and we didn't know where there were any writers, which was really weird because we come from such a storytelling culture. There were a huge number of them so we got ourselves into a little group of people whose skills we could call upon. And we also made some submissions to Creative New Zealand to give us some seed money and from that we were able to, publicize and get ideas, we weren't asking for a script we were just asking for ideas. From that we had a group of people and we decided this could be really interesting, these stories are important and they could work and they'll be different from what is normally seen. So that really was, and then you'll notice in the first series that they're all angry. I think that one of the findings of the first six Talas is that is their youthfulness. And they are Pacific Island and New Zealand stories, but the thing that really struck me was they were kind of critical and angry not just about the society in which they were trying to live but also against their parents. And here you'll see that all the way through as a way of what they cant actually do in person, but they can do given filmatic freedom within a thing like a film. That was the first one and the second one was a development of that, had very little to do with it, and Justine or somebody garnered the skills necessary and provided the opportunities to our communities.

M: Oh, okay. So you pretty much... {Pause}

S: Well, I never want to take any ownership of it really because it was only an idea and it was only marshaling all the people who could make it happen together. And you know without some people's input it would have been very stymied, Don Selwyn helped us enormously and gave us some credibility to the funding agencies and negotiated and
navigated through those kinds of funding issues was a very big learning experience for all of us.

*M:* Yes, definitely, the funding process and the pre-production.

*S:* Yeah, at least its there and you know in terms of PIC {Pacific Islanders in Communication} for example, I was astounded to hear not only do you have to raise it before they had a commitment to screen. They have got to convince private individuals to part with their money to make the film that they might be able to sell it to the network. That, I’m not sure, I think I prefer it this way at least a commitment or an idea from one of the broadcasters before you go ahead and spend money and that sort of stuff.

*M:* I don’t know about the other one, there was a comment made by Justine {Simei-Barton} when she talking about the scripts that were brought forward on the first Talas and I think her quote says “the scripts offered, contained images and stereotypes that were identical to the images of Polynesia constructed by European culture” (Simei-Barton 1997:74). Do you think Pacific Island created images (stereotypes) on film are better or worse than Non-Pacific Island created images?

*S:* No, I don’t think you should put a value judgment like that on it all, I think that some people will obviously want to try to please what they perceive to be a filmmakers or a producers desires that’s for sure. I don’t think that statement is really true at all, there were some very clear Pacific stories that were identifiable if you changed their names to Palangi names they would feel Pacific Island. That’s rather a grand statement, I prefer to think of it...that a lot of the stories that come from young Polynesians, they have a taste of both worlds, none of them have had script training or writing training at all. We were only looking for ideas and that’s how it started, that’s how anything starts I guess is with an idea, a simple story and it lets go from there and its very true that we use Palangi scriptwriters and tutors and all those sort of people we had to. We were in a position of a of we don’t know, we don’t know the way we need to know the way and you know once
we, I still have every confidence that those stories were uniquely Pacific Island stories "Malama," "The Cat’s Crying," "Hibiscus," okay some of them I guess you could say were derivative but you know I think that they were a start. I think its like that question there, "what did the Talas achieve?" they’ve broken ground, that’s what they’ve done and they’ve provided opportunity, as a base for which to work. The filmmakers, the New Zealand filmmakers, the New Zealand film industry isn’t that old really, and in the 70’s there was a plethora of film that were funded through tax breaks and things like that and it grounded people, it gave people an opportunity, people like Merata Mita, people like Geoff Murphy, all those people, Sam Hillsbury, they had a start. We were not trying to make grand works of art we were trying to make Pacific Island stories in a medium that never sees them.

M: So back to the filmmaking, why do you or don’t you think that New Zealand is so far ahead in Pacific Island filmmaking as opposed to other places?

S: Oh, I think we should be, we have over 200,000 people here, Pacific Island people here. We have in our education system, language nests; Samoan, Cook Island, Tongan and we are deeply conscience of that, there is a duty for some of the smaller cultures; Niue, Tokelau, more of those people in New Zealand then there are in the home country, so I think that there should be no surprises there, that you know often touted that Auckland is the biggest Polynesian city in the world well get used to it lets see something of it rather than just in the brochures. Lets see it on the national television, you don’t at the moment its still relegated to non-prime time because its kind of risky. Cause it deals with a smaller group than the dominate group.

M: It's still so much farther ahead than Hawai‘i or other places that have Pacific Islanders.

S: Sure we have a lot of Pacific Islanders here 6% of the population and the ties between New Zealand and the Pacific goes back a long long way. Hawaii is kind of, you know
that Hawaiians and Maori have such a lot in common they are a very colonized people. You know when you talk to Haunani-Kay Trask, {and she says} “Oh I come to New Zealand to get energized and to find strength” and I think oh my goodness, you need strength from us? But yeah, it’s a big a battle.

\textit{M: That’s true, I mean I feel that going back home to Hawaii that I’m energized to make changes there.}

\textit{S: What’s possible…}

\textit{M: Yeah, what’s possible, like this documentary, or the footage that I have, is very empowering, for filmmakers back home.}

\textit{S: But you have much harder road to hoe. At least we have funding agencies like the Public funding agencies we have networks that, but I’m not saying it’s easy but they are they actually want to put on New Zealand product and where as you have American product they just situated it and just trying to get a Hawaiian identity, I don’t envy you at all.}

\textit{M: That’s what I was telling Sima (Urale ) that it’s depressing to go home and start at ground zero when here we’re so much further along.}

\textit{S: You got to start somewhere, It’s like the first Talas, hey lots of people had their ideas on it and you know what you know already that within your group of people that you know you have the skills or you have the potential skills you just need to know how to do it, and have the opportunity to do it.}

\textit{M: And we will, I think it’s totally achievable, I mean obviously if you guys can do it, we can do it. It’s going to take us longer but oh well.}
S: Oh I wouldn’t be so self depreciated, there’s some pretty nice stuff coming out of Hawai’i, “Then there were none,” we cried...

M: Yeah, that was nice, but I want to do drama.

S: Drama. Well that’s right and you’re in exactly the same position that we were in a few years ago. I’m not saying that Tagata Pasifika makes documentaries, were a cheap magazine television show. But, there is a documentary tradition within New Zealand television. I think that we do some of them quite well, and they have done Pacific Island documentaries from time to time. There have been a few.

M: But the dramas are just a totally different ball game.

S: But the drama is actually crafted.

M: There is creativity involve, there is actual storytelling.

S: Where is the control, total control? They actually say something.

M: It’s exciting. Well I guess the with Talas, everybody involved had the same, ideology.

S: …vision. Well I knew that they were. That this is something new. It’s not run of the mill kind of thing. And on top of that, they were not incidentals. Not somebody else’s story. I don’t agree with what Justine said.

M: Do you agree that New Zealand filmmaking industry has empowered native filmmakers?

S: Not directly, but I believe that they certainly, you know its just a question of scale. It isn’t the same problem with the New Zealand filmmaking as it is with the Talas although
they’re a much more advanced stage than us. But you know there are not many writers, there are not many really crash hot directors there’s lots of ideas and people wanting to do it. That’s very healthy and it’s really good, you just have to find ways to make it happen. So at least there is a way of expressing yourselves in this medium, as you said before it just stories.

*M:* Speaking of stories, what about film as a replacement for or a linking of the oral tradition for Pacific Islanders and Western technology?

*S:* Oh, I have no doubt it’s been totally embraced. You certainly have to go out into the community there to see the weddings and things being done. It’s different, but that is exactly what it is. Certainly in Samoan terms, it is the speech, what we get here {Tagata Pasifika} is “You put on a speech, you put on such and such, on the weekend {Tagata Pasifika}?” “Can we have the uncut?” They don’t want it cut, they don’t want it tailored. So I think that’s already taking place, there are there are different ways of expressing I think that. To give you another example that we did, a documentary, half hour special if you like, on the steps to self government for Tokelau. Then we sent them copies afterwards, we actually accompanied the United Nations inspection team there. Do you know that they played that documentary everytime they had a meeting, every half hour before they’d play it. Its getting old now, must be five years old and they’re still playing it.

*M:* It’s turned into a replacement of the oral/historical...

*S:* It’s an addition, just an enhancement of what...

*M:* ...record keeping.

*S:* Well I think that what its done for them is captured a moment in time, and their aspirations and maybe helps them focus I’m not sure maybe I’m reading too much into it. Maybe they just want to see themselves on T.V. I don’t know.
M: It's interesting that it's being used...

S: It's the three islands of Tokelau and the government council meets once a month.

M: So film is kind of...

S: Well it's a focus, I guess. Although that was a documentary.

M: What do you think of the term "indiginizing the image?"

S: Well, I'm not really sure what that means, except claiming ownership over something that is a story.

M: "For 90 minutes or so, we have the capability of indigenising the screen in any part of the world our films are shown" (Mita 1992:54). Do you agree?

S: Well that's true, that's right you're under no illusions, you're entering somebody else's world from it. It's a very nice tidy way of saying it I guess.  

M: She also states that "this represents power and is one reason we make films which are uniquely and distinctly Maori" (Mita 1992:54).

S: She can apply to Hawaii she, she can apply to any group seeking to express themselves in this medium. It's just a medium actually.

M: Anything else you want to talk about the Talas?

S: No, I'm just really pleased to see them develop it's a shame that it's taken so long in between each lot. What would have been nice to train up a stock of people but most importantly the writers. To spur them on, so that they continue to craft what they do, to
up skill their craft and hone their skills in storytelling. That is about my only regret, and that the two Talas that have been done are two of six. The other six, some of the others were pretty amazing, like really amazing.

*M: Do you think that they'll eventually be done.*

*S: I’m not sure depends on how these ones go.*
Interview with Lisa Taouma

Interviewed – January 19, 1999, TVNZ, Auckland, New Zealand

The Interview:

Lisa: The idea behind the founding of the Talas is the idea that we need to take control over our actual image making process. We’ve had Pacific Island actors playing out these roles in mainstream productions, but the idea of creating our own storyline images and being a part of the whole process. Merata Mita talks about de-mythsizing the whole film idea, because always in the past, these images have been a really a sort of “otherizing” medium. So the basic premise for starting the Talas was that the writing of our stories would provide the chrysalis for the whole project of creating our own images and experiences. This then produced the Pacific Island directors and all the Pacific Island crew members. It was kind of like a domino effect and the whole chain was going to be creating all this work in our communities in this sort of new field previously that hadn’t been explored. In the first series, I did two short films “Brown Sugar” and “Tala O le Taulaga” which is sort of “Tales of the City,” kind of thing, two completely different storylines. Well basically what I wanted to do is write stories about marginalized parts of Pacific Island culture that weren’t considered commercially viable. Like stories of Pacific Island woman. My big problem with the way that Pacific Islanders were being depicted in mainstream culture were that they always tended to be very immigrant stories. They always tend to be references to the first wave of Pacific Island images immigrants that came over in the early days. The very sort of, you know the “happy immigrant,” the “hard-done-by immigrant.” All the images still actually do stem from that sort of thing. There’s this whole idea of “arriving” in the new country and expecting the “milk and honey” or having the big trauma of the loss of the homeland. It’s very much the same vein that Maori film went through, come to terms with the land and that whole sort of thing. To me that whole scenario was just so irrelevant to the reality of our lifestyles here. Most of us are third or fourth generation Pacific Islanders- much like the Asian community, and are totally integrated into this culture now. New Zealand to us is after all
just another big Pacific Island. So the stories that I wanted to tell were really the marginalized group within that big picture. I totally wanted to steer away from that cliché immigrant scenario.

I wanted to do one story about young Pacific Island woman, because we’ve never really had a Pacific Island womankind of thing. If we have it’s usually been the “mama” kind of idea and the “Skitz” thing, the happy go lucky “mama,” or the sultry South Seas maiden. The really urban based, South Auckland scene is eons away from the “dusky maiden” kind of image of the islands. That’s what most Western constructs tend to, and what most people actually think of when they think of Pacific Island images, the sensuous Pacific Island Wahine. So I wanted to write a story about these girls, in the city and just the hardcore kind of lifestyle. What their kind of interests and realities were. It was quite a frivolous kind of story. But I also dealt with this whole “Jungle Fever” syndrome, which I myself am a product of I have to say. It sort of came out of this whole thing, my parents who came here in the 1960’s who met here in the 60’s. There was this whole wave of Pacific Island men who came from the islands on scholarship, heaps and heaps of them. They all came to New Zealand and they were all sort of the great hopes of their villages. Most of them came here, most of them were successful, went through the academic institutions and most of them married white women. There is a whole generation of them; it was a sign of their success of whatever. Also the whole idea, back then they were all trying to “fit in” very much. As a sort of comment on my whole parent’s generation, how all Pacific Island men who were academic or of that era, all married white women and bred the half-castes kids and all that. Now there is sort of a different thing, there is a much bigger focus on, yeah its different now, there tends to be a more brown-brown thing, the whole focus has changed. I also love “Jungle Fever” the Spike Lee movie and I wanted to put some of that in it, so “Brown Sugar” turned out to be just a light wee thing.

The other one “Tala O le Taulaga,” again I wanted to look at the marginalized Pacific Island culture and the huge “fafafine” culture that we’ve got. But with a lot of
documentaries that have been done on the Pacific we’ve had the faafine represented as an interesting anthropological exotic part of culture, I wanted to get away from that. The reality is that away from the islands it’s a really urban scene here for most of the queens. Its quite a hardcore lifestyle, its not particularly glam. “Tala O le Taulaga” was kind of a narrative sort of story “day in the life” sort of situation, the trials and tribulations of this young Samoan faafine what she went through. It was the loose biography of ‘Cindy’ the most famous faafine in Samoa. Also it shows the idea of Pacific Islanders in performance as well, looking at how that is a really big part of our culture. Those were the two ideas behind that and again it’s just the whole idea of telling stories that haven’t been told before.

In terms of identity, once you see those images on screen is amazing, because you realize what a novelty it is for our community to recognize something as their own. The best feedback I’ve ever had from any of the Talas was when my sister who has a dance group and I was one of the “background dancers.” All these high schools came in to see the show and all these girls from Auckland, we had a question and answer session at the end and they didn’t say anything about the dancers, they just said “We really love Brown Sugar!” I thought that was awesome cause it was just totally the kind of audience, I wanted to appeal to – to make it their story…. That’s the whole thing you want to access the audience like that. I think the amazing thing about the ‘Talas’ is that Pacific Islanders finally have these images that were their own, the same hair, the same body, figure, shape. Actually seeing those sorts of images in what has been a very foreign medium that’s always been very “otherizing” is really empowering for us I think. It’s like saying yeah we’re a part of this society and here we are.

Michelle: How involved were in terms of the direction of your stories?

L: I had none in “Brown Sugar” at all, my role was primarily as a writer. I had a big problem with the second one because I was really worried when they got a director from Australia that I hadn’t had any contact with, Lani Tupu. I was really worried because of
the faafine community and I really wanted someone to be completely acclimatized to that community because I didn’t want it to come off as being a “drag queen.” So I tried to get really involved with that cause I wanted to the director to kind of meet some real faafines and hang out with them just to get the nuances right. It’s like a community within a community. So I had a problem with that, I was being quite pushy cause I really wanted the director to come and I hadn’t met Lani. So I turned up at the production meeting and they said what are you doing here? I actually really wanted a faafine to be a cultural advisor on it and just talk to them about different things like you know the way you act and whatever. The actor that played it was Henry was Cook Island and I wanted the Samoan nuances right. There is a very separate role between writer and director. But Lani did a fantastic job at the end – he had some great ideas too.

M: Who made the decision about the “talking to the mirror thing” in Tala o T42aulaga?

L: That was my idea in the script. I wanted it to be a “torch song trilogy.” I loved the visual stuff they came up with. It’s interesting what Justine Simei-Barton said about stereotypes {“The scripts offered, contained images and stereotypes that were identical to the images of Polynesia constructed by European culture (Simei-Barton 1997:74).”}. I think there is a really neo-colonial mindset in the islands its what we’ve all grown up with. I always talk about how we are totally hung up on this very white ideal of beauty. In all our beauty competitions, it’s always the half-caste girls that get through, it’s always this white ideal, its what we’ve been taught. From colonial eras there’s this whole attitude that white is right. It comes through in a lot of our commercial industries like the tourist industry, the beauty industry and comes through in film as well in filmic representations. Images we’ve created ourselves really play into that mindset a lot of times. Its really hard, one of the models I interviewed, Rosanna Raymond who runs “Pacific Sisters” who they tried to retrain the big models, ‘no big is beautiful, its okay.’ But you try to tell a size 22 who models herself on size 12, its just really hard. It’s interesting it relates to other stereotypes that are perpetuated within that colonial mindset, the oonga-boonga kind of thing. Like “Skitz” is an interesting example because there’s a fine line between
parody and critiquing something and being compliant of that image. I think it’s just hard to keep those ethnic boundaries and even in “Velvet Dreams,” Sima’s thing, which I’m writing an article on. It’s hard to put those sort of things out there and try to be objective and not keep perpetuating those sorts of images.

*M: You don’t realize how colonized you are cause its so incredibly hard to get out of that. It’s so deeply ingrained.*

*L: I think we’re slowly getting there – the more autonomy we have over things like our visual representation – which is hugely influential, then the more we’ll start feeling comfortable with seeing ourselves the way we really are.*
The Interview Excerpt:

Michelle: I found that interesting cause its not about the buck, for Pacific Islander filmmaking it seems, it seems its more about either record keeping or the telling of the story or talking about your own family or doing some kind of “journey” through filmmaking. Its not about “I want to be at the top,” so your motivation for getting it into mainstream is what?

Stan: You know it’s insight, it really is insight. But for me, you know, initially as a storyteller, I really see my job or what I do, is to really give people insight, is to make the world a bigger place for them, for them to see the world in a different way. To therefore have a different understanding maybe, or their greater understanding of the world and of people of the world.

M: So insight into our own culture.

S: Insight into what Pacific Islanders are for everyone for Pacific Islanders and for Pakehas and for everyone. To give people an insight and but also my own personal thing is you have to get something out of it for you as well at the end of the day. It’s the same thing for me, for me it gives me insight into who I am, what I am, where I come from, therefore gives me value in who I am and what I am.

M: Yeah, so there is the journey? A journey through filmmaking...

S: Yeah, it’s a journey for me. Its a journey for my audience, it’s a journey for all of us, a journey that my family will go and be a part of as well. Just makes the place more at peace, {smiling}, all of it... a better understanding and more at peace.
M: Let's all join hands and sing we are the world....{laughing}. I think we've kind of covered...{pause}. Do you have opinions about using film as an educational tool and that the medium of film is a better medium then say the written word for Pacific Islanders? Merata Mita actually talked about how she felt that film was a better medium for teaching Pacific Islanders than the written word, do you have any opinion about that?

S: Well, I think on the education of Pacific Islanders, I think Pacific Islanders, they're observers, we observe, I think that's from childhood, were always taught to watch, to see. Where as it's different for Palangi, it's the questions that are asked, “questions, questions, questions, questions,” where ours is just sit down and watch, just watch. So we are, we have a lot more input visually and actually observe, and listen, and listen and watch.

M: More of, at least in the Hawaiian and Maori, more memorization of chants and verses listening in that sense, but at the same time, hands-on learning.

S: It is, it’s the hands-on learning—it’s the seeing, it’s the hearing, in being a part—whatever involves you more. It’s as they say, the visual is where you get most of your learning stimulus—is visually. Pacific Islanders are like that, more so than actually having to sit down and read, which

M: Definitely not a Polynesian way

S: No, it’s not a Polynesian way, it’s just a cultural way. The way is to be taken under someone’s wing, and to be taken and shown, and become part of an action. Not to sit in the corner and grab a book and read about it. It’s a doing thing.

M: Has there been anybody that you've looked up to—a Pacific Island filmmaker,? Any person that has motivated you?
S: I wouldn’t say it’s any filmmaker—I’d say it’s many people, filmmakers, non-filmmakers, it’s everything really, it’s what you see as a Pacific Islander that motivates you to want to do what you do. You know, you see and see what kids go through, you see what their family goes through, you see what your friends go through, and you go through things yourself—and you go, “Gee, this needs to be shared, or this needs to be—others need to hear about it. So that’s what motivates you to do what you do. And if I was a writer, I probably wouldn’t be making a film, I would be writing more, and doing it that way. This is the medium that I work in, and I know I can tell stories this way—this is the way I get my motivation—it’s really from seeing what’s going on. I think there’s something more to that—if you’re out there … and you actually see someone going through things. You go to a funeral and you see it and you hear it and you feel it, wow that’s enough motivation. That’s where I get my motivation from.

M: I think we’ve answered all the questions.
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