

## Book and Media Reviews

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*The Contemporary Pacific*, Volume 30, Number 1, 215–260  
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Māui and Moana. Still image from the feature animated film *Moana*, © Disney 2016. Reproduced with permission.

*Moana*. Computer-animated feature film, 107 minutes, color, 2016. In English, translated into numerous languages. Written by Jared Bush; directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. Original story. Produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios, distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. 3D Blu-ray, US\$34.95.

Few films have stimulated as much passion and difference of opinion as Disney's *Moana*, which opened to global audiences in 2016. In the Pacific context in particular, vibrant and vigorous debates about the merits of the film and Islander participation in its making proliferated in academic circles, in homes and classrooms, and on social media outlets like Facebook. *Moana* made waves across the Pacific—big ones. Although the churning waters have gradually subsided over the several months since the film's release, there nevertheless remains much to discuss. *Moana*

opened up a valuable opportunity for people in the Pacific to wrestle with a complex set of concerns that are not often discussed in such public and candid ways and from so many perspectives. This forum attempts to maintain the momentum of those discussions in order to enable us to continue thinking through the film in ways that are reflexive, balanced, and open-minded. Although the four reviews included here represent but a small sample of the much larger discourse surrounding *Moana*, I hope they offer readers not grand answers so much as rich and varied insights that can help generate deeper questions and continuing conversations.

MĀRATA KETEKIRI TAMAIRA  
*TCP Book and Media Reviews Editor*

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When I go to see a movie, as soon as the lights go out, I pray silently: "Please, please, tell me a great story!" I anticipate the unfolding of a story so

compelling, so powerful, so resonant with my hopes and dreams that, for the duration of the movie, the rest of the world does not exist. When my wishes come true, I am a happy man. But what is a great story? For me, it is a tale that takes me on an emotional journey that feels like life, real or imagined. The more honest and authentic the representation of life, the more the story of the movie will resonate with me. When this happens, my faith in the transformative power of story is restored. I leave the cinema feeling I have been empowered in some way and that, because of the story I have just experienced, I have learned something important about myself or about our common humanity.

A compelling and resonant story on screen depends on many different factors, most of which are not obvious to the average filmgoer. Most of us judge a film by what we see on screen, with little or no attention paid to the various forces at play during preproduction, production, and postproduction. This review of Disney's *Moana*, however, takes into account some of the factors at play during the process of making this film that influenced the final product on screen. For example, filmmaking is a business that is often at the mercy of the dictates of the marketplace: sales agents, funders or investors, and exhibitors and distributors jostle each other for attention. The happy marriage of art (in the form of a fictional story that speaks to our common humanity) and commerce (meaning it is a financial success) is therefore an elusive goal that is not always attainable, in independent as well as mainstream cinema. Compro-

mises, or concessions, depending on your point of view, are often made in order to suit the dictates of the marketplace at the expense of cultural authenticity.

Set in the Pacific about two thousand years ago, *Moana* is Disney's latest effort to tell a story rooted in an indigenous culture—in this case, Polynesian. Disney took into account previous academic criticisms of its stereotypical portrayals of indigenous peoples in earlier movies (such as *Pocahontas* and *Lilo & Stitch*) and sent directors Ron Clements and John Musker to Fiji, Sāmoa, French Polynesia (Tahiti), and New Zealand to undertake research. Disney also created an “Oceanic Story Trust” consisting of scholarly and cultural consultants knowledgeable about the Pacific. In addition, Disney consulted with other knowledgeable individuals on various aspects of Polynesian cultures, including consultations with the master navigator Nainoa Thompson on Polynesian voyaging traditions and practices. The use of Polynesian actors to voice most of the speaking or singing roles in *Moana*, as well as meticulous attention to details about the landscape, vegetation, and ocean, made *Moana* the first major film by a Hollywood studio that largely looks and feels Polynesian. Due to these efforts, *Moana* is the most accurate representation of Polynesia by a major Hollywood studio to date, from the first moving images about Hawai'i in 1898 up to this time of writing in 2017.

But in spite of Disney's best intentions, capitalism's impulses to produce blockbuster movies (read: “huge profits” at the box office) resulted

in several objectionable creative decisions that aptly illustrate what can happen when cultural authenticity collides with the dictates of the marketplace. Well-known stereotypes, proven tropes, and decisions based on box-office appeal rather than cultural accuracy influenced the narrative, rendering the final story sold to the public culturally authentic for the most part, but glaringly inaccurate, if not offensive, in certain areas.

The final version of *Moana* that ended up in movie theaters around the world is worth seeing, several times if possible. A dazzling feast for the eyes created by the latest technological advances in animation and visual effects, *Moana* succeeds as an unprecedented cinematic achievement for Disney. It is remarkable to view and experience what money and talent can produce. The film's focus on the Pacific's most impressive historical achievement—voyaging on double-hulled canoes and populating the Pacific Islands long before European steamships arrived—helps to debunk any mistaken beliefs that Pacific Islanders only accidentally discovered new lands rather than set out purposefully to discover them.

Targeted primarily for younger audiences, *Moana* is the story of a determined teenage girl (supposedly sixteen, but she often behaves more like a preteen) called Moana (Auli'i Cravalho) who disobeys her father, Chief Tui of Motunui (Temuera Morrison), and journeys far beyond the reef in order to restore the heart of the fictional Te Fiti that had been stolen by Māui (Dwayne Johnson), an ancestor much revered by modern-day Polynesians. Obstacles stand in

Moana's way, each one more challenging than the one before. On finding Māui (a task her deceased grandmother had encouraged her to undertake), Moana pleads with him to assist her in her mission. Māui is reluctant at first but succumbs to her persistence and agrees to teach her the navigational art of wayfinding. Working collaboratively, they kill the fictional fiery monster Te Kā. As Te Kā's outer shell disintegrates, the goddess Te Fiti is freed and the land, shaped in the form of a beautiful long-haired Polynesian woman, wakes up from her prostrate position to welcome Moana and Māui. More importantly, flowers bloom again. While Māui retreats to obscurity, Moana returns to her home island of Motunui to discover that the blight that had infected the nuts of the coconut trees has been cured and the abundance of the land restored. Moana succeeds her father to become the island's chief, and the Islanders begin voyaging with ever greater frequency till double-hulled canoes traverse the Pacific Ocean like SUVs on a busy freeway in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

The word "moana" means "ocean" in several Polynesian languages. This is a fitting title for a movie in which the ocean is personified, especially in the way it is animated to become a friendly and supportive ally for Moana. The land on which Te Kā reigned is also personified in the form of a woman, the goddess Te Fiti. The Polynesian worldview of the land and the ocean as life forces in their own right is on full display in *Moana*. Among the most thrilling aspects of the film are the use of tattoos (even though they are too modern to be accurate for the period) to suggest that

Māui is an embodiment of Polynesian culture; the portrayal of belief in sea creatures such as the stingray as family totems; the careful attention paid to the costumes (except for Māui's); the physical features of the inhabitants of Motunui and their uses of the land and natural resources; and, most important, the voyaging feats of Polynesians on their double-hulled canoes. Clearly, Disney was having fun with its imagination in creating a minor villain in the form of the crab Tamatoa. Entertaining as this might be for mainstream movie-going audiences raised on popular culture, this particular embellishment, as well as the coconut warriors called Kakamora, detracts from Disney's expressed desire to tell a story that is culturally authentic for Polynesia. Additionally, it would have been more culturally appropriate for Māui and Moana to encounter Moana's grandmother (instead of Tamatoa) in the underworld beneath the sea (called Pulutu or Purotu), which many Polynesian societies considered the abode of the dead.

As soon as Disney posted trailers of their *Moana* on the Internet, some Pacific Islanders started criticizing the film's premise. These critics did not address the complicated, negotiated process of filmmaking that shaped the final theatrical movie but rather expressed concerns over stereotyping, misrepresentation, cultural theft and appropriation, cultural authenticity, and exploitation of indigenous cultures. Once the film was actually released, many others (mainly non-academics) lauded Disney's efforts to tell a story for global audiences using a Polynesian girl as the protagonist.

Many found this empowering, a validation of Polynesia as a region worthy of having its own "princess." Judging from the vast majority of accounts on the Internet as well as personal experiences of parents and relatives of Pacific children, *Moana* is a big hit with pubescent and teenage girls, especially the music. Opetai'a Foa'i's Te Vaka and Igelese Ete's Pasifika Voices provided Polynesian songs and other musical elements that complemented the compositional talents of Foa'i, Lin-Manuel Miranda, and Mark Mancina. The big musical numbers propel the action forward even as they stir the audience's emotions. When I arrived in Fiji for Christmas and discovered that my eight-year-old granddaughter had memorized the lyrics of "How Far I'll Go" and loves nothing more than singing this song throughout the day, I was reminded of the power of movies to touch people's hearts and minds. Another family teenager, when asked what she liked the most about Disney's movie, replied, "When Moana sails beyond the reef!"

The depiction of Māui, on the other hand, aroused scorn on the part of many commentators. Some labeled Māui's size as "obese," "buffoonish," or "ugly," as well as "inaccurate" or "inauthentic." When Disney came out with a Māui costume for Halloween during the year of its release (2016), the complaints from Pacific Islanders (and others too) that sizzled on the Internet forced Disney to pull it from stores. If there had been young Polynesian boys planning to dress up as their favorite hero, the Māui option was no longer available. Instead, they had to choose a white hero, such as

Superman or Batman. But rather than developing into a public discussion of whether it is better to have some kind of representation or none at all, the controversy over the Māui costume quickly and predictably succumbed to the weight of knee-jerk identity politics.

The portrayal of Moana as a young girl who aspires to be a voyager as well as the next chief of her people is also problematic. As many viewers have expressed in social and other media such as broadcast television and newspapers, *Moana* encourages young girls and women to pursue their dreams and venture “beyond the reef,” even when their fathers warn them to stay closer to home. On her deathbed, Moana’s grandmother pleads with Moana to “go!” This command to a teenage girl challenges patriarchy’s enduring presence in Polynesia—in the past, but also in the present. Did Disney not adequately research ancient Polynesia two thousand years ago? Had Disney not heard or seen the film *Whale Rider*, adapted from a novel by Māori writer Witi Ihimaera, in which the grandfather of a young Māori girl called Paikea refuses to support his granddaughter’s desires to be the next chief? Like Paikea, Moana has no male sibling before her (Paikea’s male twin dies at birth), but unlike Paikea, Moana encounters no prejudice against her being the next chief because of her gender. In Disney’s version of Polynesia, gender has no importance when selecting a chief.

Also, as depicted in this film, ancient Polynesians were not sexual beings. By taking away any hint of sexuality throughout the film, Polynesians are portrayed as less than fully

human. This is not what one would find in the fictional films featuring preteens or teenagers made by Polynesians, such as in Taika Waititi’s *Two Cars, One Night* and *Boy*; Tusi Tamasese’s *The Orator*; and my own feature film *The Land Has Eyes*. A puritanical version of ancient Polynesians as asexual beings is inaccurate, regardless of whether a film is intended for children.

Disney claims to have done thorough research into Polynesian history and culture, and yet it portrays Māui as asexual. *Moana* is, of course, a movie made for children. This is all the more reason that Māui as a character should not have been in a Disney movie, as there is no other character in our oral literature whose male organs are as celebrated and revered by Polynesian males (or as feared by early missionaries who brought Christianity to Polynesia). It is not just Māui’s brute strength and his shape-shifting tendencies; it is his abilities to procreate and regenerate humankind that makes him so vital as an ancestor. And yet, in spite of advice from the Oceanic Story Trust to steer clear of appropriating Māui as a character, let alone in a film made for kids, Disney chose otherwise. Why? Māui is the only character in Disney’s *Moana* who is deeply rooted in Pacific oral literature, which is all the more reason Disney should have either steered clear of appropriating the name or gone to great lengths to portray this ancestor for Pacific Islanders with the utmost care and respect. There is nothing wrong with drawing from this character’s brute strength and shape-shifting abilities, but why use exactly the same name? How about calling this char-

acter Pulu, for example, or another name of no historical significance? Perhaps Disney insisted on using Māui because the name Māui suggests (in a misleading way) that their narrative is accurate and rooted in an authentic historical past. In addition, although it was Disney's prerogative to cherry-pick what to listen to and what to ignore from members of its Oceanic Story Trust, the hostile responses Disney received from many Pacific Islanders affirmed the value of not just having cultural consultants but of actually listening to their advice. Sadly, so much of the backlash from academics and scholars of Pacific history and culture could easily have been avoided, had Disney confined their narrative to the realm of fictional characters. It is possible to portray a revered ancestor accurately and with dignity on screen and still not hurt the box office. But this would require great sensitivity and close collaboration with cultural experts beyond the superficial (size, hair, tattoos). Had Disney's portrayal of Māui been handled with the kind of sensitivity they would have given a Jesus or Mohammad character, they might have done better at the box office.

The Hollywood movie trope of the asexual Polynesian male and the "available" Polynesian female has been around since the beginning of the twentieth century. In these fictional narratives, a Caucasian male ventures into "Paradise" (Hawai'i, Tahiti, Sāmoa, for example) and falls in love with the chief's daughter, who is always a virgin. The irony here is that Polynesia, at the same time, is often portrayed as a hotbed of unbridled sexuality, as in Margaret

Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*. The myth of the dusky maiden waiting for the white man to take away her virginity suggests that the Polynesian males around her are asexual. In fact, in almost all these Hollywood movies, the males are portrayed as part of the flora and fauna, seen but not heard, innocent and naive, and, being devoid of a phallus, are therefore incapable of continuing their race. They are eunuchs, in other words, much like the coconut trees without nuts that grace Waikikī Beach, the infected coconuts on the trees of Disney's Motunui, or the Polynesian wooden carvings whose penises were chopped off by the early missionaries.

Disney perpetuates this trope in *Moana*. A beautiful maiden, yet again, is a chief's daughter. And yes, she is a virgin. Who or what is she waiting for? Is she waiting for the white male who is yet to arrive? Why isn't there even a glance in her direction by the boys or men as she walks past? In ancient Polynesia, she could have been married at the age of sixteen. Instead, Disney's *Moana* suggests not only that the Polynesian males have no sexual desire or interest in the most beautiful and interesting girl/woman on the island, but also that she is waiting (in Paradise?) for the white man (or traveler from outside) to arrive. *Moana*, as a medium through which viewers project their secret desires, is extremely successfully at this subliminal level: the girls and women identify and applaud her defiance of patriarchy, while white (or nonwhite) males outside Polynesia searching for a holiday destination are seduced by the beauty of the "dusky maiden," as well as the sand, the sea, and the sky. When Hawaiian

Airlines, to extend this collusion of interests, paints Moana and Māui on the shiny, sleek sides of their airplanes and sells *Moana* merchandise (blankets, children's storybooks, etc) as they fly in thousands of travelers, male and female, to the islands of Polynesia—where they can also go to stores and buy snacks or similar goods with Māui and Moana painted on the packaging—capitalism and tourism become collaborators in feeding the insatiable appetite to “consume” the native: orally, visually, and sexually. The dusky maiden Moana remains unattached, and therefore available, for male and female tourists or visitors venturing into Paradise.

There is some truth to the argument that Disney's *Moana* is a fantasy, and even though Disney sent a creative team to carry out research on several islands, the film's narrative should not be expected to provide a realistic portrayal of Polynesia's past (or present). Contrary to the thinking of those for whom fantasy is nothing more than pure entertainment, inaccurate representations, even in fantasy, can be “dangerous” in the following ways, as history tells us: Depictions of indigenous peoples as simple and without agency or ambition can support arguments for their annihilation or the appropriation of their lands. Portrayals of people as uncivilized or cannibalistic can help justify actions to steer them to the light, the light being Christianity. On the other hand, there are other inaccuracies, such as Māui tweeting on his paddle, that provide harmless comic relief and nothing more. These are deliberate tropes to entertain a contemporary audience (rather than misrepresenta-

tions) that are justifiable in a work of fantasy.

Disney's story in *Moana* is an inspiring one that has roots in ancient Polynesia but is not stuck in the past. It is a testament to the power of the imagination to take historical and cultural elements from Oceania, elements that have always been available to Pacific Islanders, to construct a narrative that takes storytelling “out of the lagoon and beyond the reef.” Like Moana's father, many scholars and academics from the Pacific are critical of Disney's audacity to do the equivalent of what Moana does in their carefully constructed fictional story. The youthful Moana knows relatively little about her historical and cultural past and yet she dares to venture into the great unknown in order to “save her people.” In Disney's foray into Polynesian history and culture, the contributions of members of its Oceanic Story Trust as well as other cultural consultants enabled it to make some remarkably accurate and authentic cinematic representations.

When I first saw *Moana*, one of the things I found most remarkable is Disney's magnificent personification of the land in the form of the goddess Te Fiti. To see the land arise from its slumber then morph into the shape of a larger-than-life long-haired Polynesian woman, a colorful wreath of flowers and leaves around her head, her slender arms and upper body all the way down to her waist covered in green foliage, is to see Polynesian beliefs about the land being female validated in cinematic language in a way I had never seen on screen before. A second thrilling moment (which occurs at the micro-level and



may therefore be easy to miss) occurs soon after Moana has accomplished what she sets out to do, which is to destroy the fiery Te Kā and restore the heart of Te Fiti. Māui stands before Moana, then shape-shifts into a hawk as he has done before. But unlike all the previous times, Māui the hawk flies away from Moana in a manner informed by ancient Polynesian protocols of respect. As the hawk lifts off the ground and slowly withdraws backward, it remains facing Moana, its wings flapping like two hands clapping. Finally the hawk turns its back to Moana and flies away into the distance, seemingly awed and humbled by Moana's unprecedented success.

Similarly, I am awed by how much Disney managed to get right in *Moana*, in ways big and small. Like Māui, I withdraw backward as I applaud Disney and its creative team for imagining and imaging a fictional world about ancient Polynesia that is culturally authentic for the most part. Disney's *Moana* transcends the geographical confines of a single island or country located within Oceania. In fact, the name Māui can be found in the mythology not only of Polynesia but of Micronesia and Melanesia as well. In this sense, Disney appropriately invokes Epeli Hau'ofa's "sea of islands" and the ocean that connects the islands to each other. But inevitably, by focusing on Polynesia as a cultural region, *Moana* unintentionally masks the contributions of Micronesia and Melanesia to double-hulled canoe voyaging several thousand years ago, as well as to the revival of canoe voyaging in recent years using the wind, stars, seas and swells, birds, fish, and other

non-instrument ways in what we call wayfinding today.

Were the members of Disney's "Oceanic Story Trust" merely pawns in Disney's profit-making agenda? I believe there was a sincere desire by Disney to tell a story about Polynesia that is informed by Polynesian world-views, values, and aesthetics. This desire coincides with the desires of Pacific Islanders for cultural authenticity. But what does "cultural authenticity" actually mean? In representations that are based on historical facts, cultural authenticity becomes a lightning rod for all kinds of colliding perspectives that are difficult to mediate successfully. For example, should one be culturally authentic to the past or to the present? Because cultures evolve and change, cultural authenticity has to realign with time and place. Wearing loincloths or penis sheaths while shopping at Neiman Marcus are therefore inappropriate, even though they may still be authentic in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. The comfort level of the audience also has to be taken into account. Most of us have been too missionized to be comfortable having dinner with anyone who is hardly wearing anything. Similarly, Māui's sexual conquests and prowess would be inauthentic in an animated film for children. The solution then is to create a fictional character, using the power of the imagination.

Albert Einstein, the German-born theoretical physicist who developed the theory of relativity, wrote: "Imagination is more important than knowledge." He is right, because imagination builds on knowledge but transcends the knowable. Imagination unshackles the mind to create

stories that encircle and embrace the universe within its generous reach. Seen from this perspective, Disney's *Moana* reminds me of the transformative power of story: stories that build on accurate knowledge of history, culture, and human nature can create fictional worlds that reflect or resemble reality and exist beyond critical reproach. When such fictional worlds are dreamed into existence, for the duration of the story's unfolding, I am able to suspend my disbelief. This is what story has done for me: it fired my imagination as a young boy listening to my father telling me my island's so-called myths and legends. By identifying with the heroes of these stories, including stories of Māui's incredible feats and adventures, I found sustenance and hope in a future beyond poverty.

Most children who live in urban centers or the city no longer have access to the stories of their ancestors and depend on our modern mythmakers such as Disney to provide them with children's stories. For a change, Disney has chosen to tell a fictional story rooted in ancient Polynesia and has gone to great lengths to be accurate and authentic. However, by appropriating the name Māui, an ancestor of the Polynesians, Disney blurred the line between fiction and nonfiction. Nonetheless, *Moana* is a story of great imagination and beauty. I saw *Moana* seven times, once in 3D, and each time not only did I enjoy the storytelling, but I saw details I had missed before. Polynesia as a cultural region has been "animated" in the most powerful medium in the world for storytelling. I am confident that children, the intended audience of this

film, will see *Moana* and be inspired, even empowered, to "venture beyond the reef," when the time and the opportunity is right for them.

My hope is that one day a Polynesian girl will grow up to be a visionary filmmaker with access to resources that would make it possible for her to tell a story that is more accurate, more authentic, even more entertaining, than Disney's *Moana*. She might look back to the first time she saw Disney's *Moana* and acknowledge the experience as a defining moment that fired her imagination and motivated her to become a filmmaker. Maybe part of her motivation would be to represent Polynesia and Polynesians on screen with more integrity and cultural authenticity. Until that happens, let us join the children in their song. Yes, let the children sing! "See the line where the sky meets the sea, it calls me / And no one knows, how far it goes / If the wind in my sail on the sea stays behind me / One day I'll know, if I go, there's just no telling how far I'll go!"

VILSONI HERENIKO

*University of Hawai'i–Mānoa*

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Let me begin at home, or more accurately, *with* home: Fiji/Viti (fisi, fiti, whiti in various Polynesian tongues). Some years ago, while living in San Francisco, this Fijian-Tongan queer woman first heard whisper (over the Fijian feminist coconut wireless) of Robert Nicole's dissertation work, which later became his book *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji* (2010). In one chapter, Nicole (a Fijian-Swedish historian and literary scholar) traces in the

colonial archive the everyday resistances of Fijian women to colonial and indigenous patriarchal control of their bodies, movement, sexuality, and labor, including their refusal to marry and their choice to divorce, to leave homes, husbands, and villages, as well as their widespread (and driven-underground) practices of indigenous methods to control fertility and child-bearing, including abortion. While Nicole takes pains to ensure that we do not read these everyday resistances as organized or even anachronistically as “feminist,” I imagine my response alongside that of other Fijian women reading these pages about our women ancestors: neimami uto/yalo (our hearts/spirits) pushing hard at the limits of our rib cages.

Which takes me to another time: when flying home as an undergraduate one summer, I sat beside a sweet, elderly, palagi (white) couple from the United States, who expressed surprise at my choice to pursue women’s studies. How, they asked, does a Fijian woman become a feminist? I answer: my mother, my aunties, my bubu (grandmother) and her sisters, my great-grandmother—I recognize/know mana through them.

*Moana*, Disney Empire’s latest animation film, is a coming-of-age-via-voyaging story (a literary wayfinding), the story of a Polynesian girl named for the ocean, whose courage and love, together with the help of the ocean, the demigod Māui, the spirit of her Grandma Tala, and so many voyager ancestors, saves her people, her island home, Motunui—life itself—from certain extinction. Once upon a time past and Polynesian, people have forgotten the art of seafaring, have forgotten

who they are. This, Grandma Tala (the village crazy lady and storyteller) repeats, is because Māui has stolen the heart of Te Fiti (the island/goddess from whom all life comes), thereby giving life to the lava goddess, Te Kā, whose fury has made voyaging dangerous. A savior is awaited, Grandma Tala narrates, who will find the heart of Te Fiti and restore life. So begin Moana’s adventures to find and persuade Māui to undo his wrong, rescue his hook from Tamatoa, escape the Kakamora (named for Solomon Islands legend-beings whom Disney “interprets” as coconut-clad pirate villains), “defeat” Te Kā, and deliver Te Fiti her heart.

While the feminist storyline (not written nor directed by native women—certainly none of the women or men on the Oceanic Story Trust is credited with this narrative power) is Disney-formulaic, it is still powerful. Moana defies custom, tabu (taboo), the normative, and follows her “crazy” bubu, mimicking the unruly water to cross the forbidden line (so to queer speak) and sail beyond the reef. While she might seem to tow the individualist line, Moana (unlike Disney’s Ariel [*The Little Mermaid*], who abandons the ocean/her people) chooses not just to follow her passion but also to serve her people and the ocean, which she loves. It is this loloma/aloha for the ocean, for Grandma Tala, and for her people that inscribes mana (wahine) within this otherwise formulaic Disney tale. It is her father’s rigidity that forces Moana to journey alone instead of with him or with peers; nonetheless, she is accompanied at every step by her ancestors. Further, it is no small thing that over

the duration of this quest she becomes a master navigator, trained by none other than Māui.

One of many reasons feminism is disdained by indigenous and nonindigenous alike is because it can function as queer bait. As one drop in a queer ocean of Islanders (who watched the film), I am sure I am not the only one to “side (eye)” the potentially queer subtext in this Disney narrative. The tension Moana feels between the village/her father’s/patriarchal tabu, her desires to be “the perfect daughter,” to roll with the role given her, to be happy “right where [she is],” and the drive to follow her own path form the first third of the film, such that she is moved to sing in despair, “I’ll be satisfied if I play along / But the voice inside sings a different song / What is wrong with me? . . . What’s beyond that line? / Will I cross that line?” (“How Far I’ll Go,” by Lin-Manuel Miranda). Moana’s yearning, despite her father’s rule of law and the “normativity” of life within the reef, is to break free of these binds. Her father’s response (as with her first meeting the ocean) is to take her back to the village and teach her that her greatness/destiny is synonymous with learning “where you’re meant to be,” coincident with a scene of village men using ‘ō‘ō (digging sticks) to turn the ‘āina/vanua (land), and Miranda’s unfortunate “consider the coconut” lyrics (another most phallic of Pacific signs). The village/the land here, as opposed to the ocean, is heteronormative and heterosexually bound (a binary and valuation imposed by Disney where indigenous terms such as ‘āina/vanua markedly understand these as inseparable and where hetero/queer binaries

are nonsensical). Alternately, Grandma Tala tells Moana, “But once you know what you like, well, there you are.”

It turns out our voyaging ancestors (closeted in caves by fear of what lies beyond the reef) are as queer as we are; “Do you really think our ancestors stayed within the reef?” Grandma Tala asks. Indeed, we know the way.

When baby Moana meets the ocean (foreshadowing the film’s end), there is no doubt that it has chosen her.

Perhaps in response to her kindness to its creatures (she saves an “innocent” baby turtle from “predatory” birds), or in recognition of her genealogy (she is chiefly and comes from voyagers), or because she is its namesake (often connoting kinship), the ocean gifts her with queen conch shells—symbolic here of female voice and leadership, as well as female sexuality, fertility, genealogy—parting so that Moana can collect them from a trail of spiral formations in the seafloor that mimic the koru shape of Te Fiti’s heart. The ocean rises and begins to spiral too, looking down on her like Te Kā/Te Fiti in the dramatic ending scene, seeming to come in close to hongihoni (press noses and foreheads in greeting) and anointing her maternally.

The affective power of this scene is visceral, especially with the overlaid vocals of Vai Mahina of Te Vaka. On the soundtrack, she sings “An Innocent Warrior,” a rewrite of Opetai Foa’i’s original track, “Loimata e Maligi,” which is a memorial song for nineteen girls aged fourteen to seventeen and their caretaker who died in a dormitory fire on Vaitupu Island in Tuvalu in 2000. Despite the change in lyrics for Disney, the mourning in the original song, for girls who were

their nation's future (much as Moana is visioned as Motunui and Oceania's future), remains. Although Disney pulls out all its stops with large-eyed, baby-doll Moana, the ocean her own marine aquarium, what is also communicated (and I would argue is most felt by its Pacific audience—in truth, we have grown up learning and feeling deep love for vanua/‘āina in response to songs about home) in the weaving of the palimpsest of song, Mahina's voice, and the water's maternal embrace and play with Moana, is Oceania's love for its daughters and our own loloma/aloha for our island/ocean homes.

We must mourn too the reason so many young women died needlessly in that fire in Tuvalu: an insistence on segregating the girls from the boys at Motufoua (the one public secondary school serving all Tuvalu's islands) and preventing adolescent (hetero)sexual encounters and teen pregnancy by putting bars on windows and locking students indoors. We can trace these attempts to control and police native women's bodies and sexuality to the London Missionary Society, which first established the school in Tuvalu in 1905, and to its contemporary progeny in the Church of Tuvalu. In the film there are echoes of this fear of (and attempts to control) women's sexuality in Chief Tui's efforts to protect Moana and Motunui from the ocean (Te Kā/Te Fiti—female power, sexuality, life). You might, if you were a queer feminist Islander, read in this an implicitly feminist and decolonial message critiquing colonial and native Christian patriarchal heteronormativity (for this we can thank Te Vaka).

One can read in *Moana* a clear

argument about the importance of women's leadership in stewarding Oceania (or, perhaps more appropriately, aloha 'āina). This is not at all a stretch, considering the roles of (extra)ordinary women throughout Oceania, such as those in the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement, or Gabriela Ngirmang and Otil A Beluad, women of Palau in defense of a nuclear-free constitution and nation; leading women like Darlene Keju and Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner in the Marshall Islands and Micronesia, or, in Fiji/Melanesia, Teresia Teaiwa, Amelia Rokotuivuna, my sister's aunty Suliana Siwatibau, or Vanuatu's Grace Mera Molisa; or the many female (and many queer) voyagers on our oceans today, to point to just a handful of powerful (ordinary) women of Oceania. Critically, at the film's end, when Moana adds to the stone pillar of her chiefly ancestors, she places there the ocean's gift of a queen conch shell. Her chieftom is unmistakably female and more ephemeral than stone, though echoing the power of Moana Nui. Fictive Moana has many mana-full ancestors; I hope her fans find them through their love of Moana (the character, the film, Moana Nui) and in themselves.

Some have asked where Māui's divine female counterpart is in this narrative. There is clear mirroring/twinning here: Moana is the ocean's namesake, and the ocean mirrors the land in Te Fiti/Te Kā. Māui does meet his match here, and she is Moana: Te Kā/Te Fiti/Moana Nui Akea/a Kiwa, even Hine-nui-te-pō (Māori goddess of death); after all, Māui attempts to steal life itself from the goddess, the result being death. Pele can also be

read in the power of the two most powerful gods in the narrative: Te Fiti/Te Kā (from the lava, life). Sadly, Disney's imposition of uncomplicated binaries of hetero/queer, land/ocean, Te Fiti (beauty, life, feminine)/Te Kā (the grotesque, death, non-feminine) reinscribe colonial and heteropatriarchal understandings and undermine the possibilities of mana wahine and of Oceania in *Moana*.

It is decidedly not okay that Disney appropriates and commodifies our stories, our gods, our mana; and certainly, as scholar-activists like Tina Ngata have made clear, it is abhorrent that this appropriation made plastic will only add to the great garbage patches clogging the oceans—our oceans—that support life. There is a lot to be critical of here, including the lack of Pacific and female representation in the film's crew of writers and directors, its Polycentricism, and the messianic narrative that would single out one chiefly Polynesian girl from her community as its savior, even if *Moana* doesn't do it alone. Disney's work, ultimately, is not a call for humanity to responsibly steward our oceans; we understand it as a capitalist dream machine. The loloma/aloha we feel in response to this story is in echo to our own reflections and reflections of our beloved Oceania. For more, we must look to our own work.

Counter to those of us who would label as "sell-outs" the many artists, scholars, and practitioners who consulted or otherwise worked on this film, as well as the audiences who love it, like many Oceanians (including those in pro- and anti-*Moana* camps), I believe in the transformative power of stories. As much as this story is

problematic and not our own, it is undeniably fashioned by Oceania, and for that we can thank those of us who participated in its making. When I consider this putative economy of "selling out," of scarcity, I think of my own bubu, Ro Litiana Qolouvaki Mataitini, and her unbounded practice of generosity and loloma (not exceptional, but part of our Oceanic genealogy). Yes, we must protect indigenous rights to story, to tradition, to place. Yes, we must heed Epeli Hau'ofa's call to steward our (an expansive, generous pronoun) Oceania. And, I recognize too in our people's desire to share our stories and traditions with pride this generosity and love for vanua (culture, mana, as well as land, ocean, and all living beings): a decolonial economy of abundance in the face of capitalism/Death. The power and mana of our stories, like the water/*Moana*, like our people, cannot be contained by Disney formula or magic—it will not be bound by reef or binaries; it spills over, runs beneath, soaks through. And we people of Oceania—whether or not literate in Disney and the hegemony it stands in for—are astute readers of signs and fluent tellers and navigators of story. We do know where we come from, and we will find our way.

TAGI QOLOUVAKI  
*Hawai'i Community College*

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"No one goes beyond the reef. It's dangerous!" This is one of Chief Tui's several outbursts throughout Disney's *Moana*, in his repeated attempts to prevent his daughter, the movie's namesake, from setting sail. The chief

is voicing Disney's imagined reason for the thousand-year period during which Polynesians allegedly paused in their seafaring expeditions. Although the idea that Polynesians ever feared the ocean is difficult to accept, Disney's *Moana* makes up for this infraction in other ways. Most important, the film portrays Māui not as myth but as a real figure who teaches the art of seafaring to the people of the Pacific.

The movie opens with Grandma Tala telling a group of toddlers the dramatic story of the origins of the people of Motunui Island. The account begins with Te Fiti, a goddess who is herself the first island and whose heart has the power to create life. Over time, others begin to crave such power and attempt to steal her heart, but it is the demigod Māui who accomplishes the theft. His action awakens Te Kā, the lava monster, whose chaos reverberates throughout the ocean, spreading death and destruction from island to island. From this point on, seafarers set out but do not come back, and the villagers of Motunui soon decide to cease all deep-sea voyaging expeditions, generating a ban that ends up lasting a thousand years. A very young Moana is the only toddler in the group who is not terrified by this tale, and she is riveted as Grandma Tala reveals that a chosen one will someday find Māui and take him to Te Fiti to restore the heart to the island and save them all. We then find out that the ocean has chosen Moana for this important task.

Pacific societies pass on histories through storytelling, making the scene in which Grandma Tala relays Motunui's origin story to the children

an appropriate opening for *Moana*. However, Polynesians also embed specialized knowledge within those histories; they are entertainment, libraries, and curriculum all rolled into one. This is where the film *Moana* makes a successful voyage: it presents to us a Māui who is legend but also real, and who is not only a hero who accomplishes isolated feats of epic proportions but also our teacher in the art of wayfinding. When foreigners first came to the Pacific Islands and recorded our histories, they relegated Māui to the realm of fable. Each story focused on an isolated but supernatural feat, like snaring the sun or fishing up islands, all performed by a magical being whom Western scholars assume never really existed. Authors like Elsdon Best or W E Westervelt presented a combined general theme that Māui was a kind of Hercules, strong but reckless and egotistical, who provided for the needs of humans. What does not emerge through these foreign versions is Māui's role as teacher of all skills that relate to seafaring and navigation, along with his continuing presence in the Pacific world. Yet, somehow, Disney's writers and producers saw past the published rhetoric and resurrected Māui's true purpose.

Māui may be the main character in Western narratives about him, but in this movie he shares the spotlight with Moana, who becomes student, hero, and leader. This relationship brings to the fore Māui's role as teacher. Moana starts her journey with the intent of seeking out Māui. This is the same voyage that any prospective navigator makes in that Māui represents the practical skill set a wayfinder needs

to learn on his or her journey from amateur to master, and it is depicted in the film segment where he teaches Moana how to sail. Over the course of the expedition, Moana learns from her mentor and becomes a skilled wayfinder in her own right. Then, although Māui was expected to be the one to return the heart to Te Fiti, Moana ends up accomplishing this heroic feat. In short, Moana *becomes* Māui. She is transformed into the next master navigator for her people. In this same way, Māui still exists as mentor for all apprentice navigators past and present.

The relationship between Moana and her mother, Sina, also reinforces the connection with Māui for Polynesians. Sina, variously pronounced as Hina (or Hine) in many Polynesian languages, appears in nearly all Māui histories, variously as his mother, sister, or ancestor. She is a goddess in Polynesia, and it is often because of her parentage that he is a demigod. In some versions, Māui only receives his supernatural powers after following his mother into the underworld and participating in a special ceremony. However, in Disney's origin story, Māui had human parents who threw him into the sea when he was born. The gods rescued the infant, imbued him with immortality, and gave him a fishhook with supernatural powers. Although the movie producers chose to go with an origin story that disconnects Māui's lineage from his supernatural gifts, they still paid homage to Sina/Hina's traditional role by making her Moana's mother. Many Polynesians recognize Sina/Hina as the moon, an important figure in celestial navigation, which makes her an

integral part of the Māui story and the wayfinding body of knowledge.

Film animation allows us to venture into the world of magic, where animals can talk and objects have personalities. While this is characteristic of Disney films, the choice to portray Te Fiti, Te Kā, and the ocean as characters in the movie is in alignment with Pacific beliefs. Like Māui, they are treated not as myth but as actual living beings. Our land gods are female, just like Te Fiti and Te Kā, and any seafarer will tell you that the ocean speaks to them. Also true to Polynesian culture is when Grandma Tala dies and transforms into a manta ray, allowing her to still remain present in Moana's life. In Hawai'i, deceased ancestors become 'aumakua—animals or other natural elements (such as sharks, owls, or even smoke) who continue to protect family members. Perhaps audiences across the world will dismiss all of these depictions as typical Disney fantasy, but for Pacific peoples, these extra layers make the characters in this film recognizable.

While the film's resurrection of Māui's true role in Polynesian society is significant, there are inconsistencies in the storyline that must be addressed. Most prominent is the idea, noted earlier, that Polynesians ever feared the ocean. Moananuiākea, the vast body of water that binds together peoples of many islands, receives some recognition when Māui declares, "The Ocean used to love when I pulled up islands, 'cause your ancestors would sail her seas and find them. All those new lands, new villages . . . it was the water that connected them." Epeli Hau'ofa articulated the Pacific mindset best by calling this expan-



sive landscape “our sea of islands,” as opposed to the Western view of isolated “islands in a far sea.” Therefore, inventing fear of the ocean as the reason for a thousand-year pause in Polynesian seafaring only supports the Western, fear-based idea. There are also some instances when both Māui and Moana speak disrespectfully to and about the ocean, walking a very precarious line in terms of Polynesian propriety, especially for seafarers. After asking the ocean for help during a storm, Moana ends up shipwrecked on an island, unharmed. Out of frustration, she kicks at the water in anger and screams, “What? I said help me! And wrecking my boat? Not helping!” She adds, insultingly, “Fish pee in you all day!” Yet once she realizes she has been delivered directly to Māui, she neglects to apologize to the ocean for her outburst. In another instance, Māui calls the ocean “straight-up kookie-dukes.” In Polynesian tradition, each of these would have been more than enough cause for the ocean to never help either of them again and might even incite the ocean’s anger.

Another inconsistency is that, in the movie, Māui’s bird form is a hawk; since this demigod represents all things involved with seafaring, this has to be Disney taking fictional license, as the hawk is a forest-based bird. English versions of Māui legends indicate that he turned into a pigeon, which also stays close to land. It is far more likely that Māui’s bird form is a tern or a noddy, both of which are used by navigators to find their way while at sea. In another instance, logic must be temporarily suspended when one realizes that Moana’s village is

supposed to have existed in its current location for a thousand years, but its population had not yet grown too big to be supported by a single lagoon. But perhaps the most ironic inconsistency is the fact that Chief Tui named his daughter Moana, yet he continually insists on keeping her away from the ocean. According to Polynesian naming practices, such a name almost guaranteed that she would end up at sea.

Overall, the illustrations try to homogenize all Polynesian cultures, which opens the movie up to other criticisms (which I will leave to my very capable colleagues). There are distinct differences among Island nations in language, music, dance, dress, tattooing, and practices revolving around food, to name a few. Despite this, *Moana* provides Polynesians with heroes and history that they can identify with. Māui is describing the skill of wayfinding when he states that it is about “knowing where you are by knowing where you’ve been,” but this also refers to Polynesian pedagogy and the entire storehouse of Polynesian knowledge. We know how to move forward by always looking back to the actions of those who came before us. *Moana* helps us do that by resurrecting Māui as the figure of a real body of knowledge that is still being pursued today. It is one leg of our voyage back from the Western label of “myth,” bringing us that much closer to “history.”

J ULUWEHI HOPKINS  
*University of Hawai‘i–  
 West O‘ahu*

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Sitting in a packed movie theater in Honolulu, Hawai'i, on 23 November 2016, I eagerly anticipated the first moments of a film that I had been waiting many years to see: Walt Disney Studios' *Moana*. Set in the Pacific Islands two thousand years ago, the animated feature film tells the story of Moana, a teenage girl who sets sail on a dangerous voyage to save her people. As someone actively researching *Moana*, I had learned a great deal about the film and its music before attending the premiere. Watching trailers and listening to the soundtrack, which Disney released just prior to the film's debut, I had heard many familiar voices, sounds, and songs, but it wasn't until I saw them partnered with the visuals that I realized how tightly the filmmakers had woven them into the story world. Despite the care taken in creating the music, however, it has become apparent to me that this care does not always extend as far beyond the editing floor as it should. In this review, I briefly describe my initial impressions of the music after seeing both the film's premiere and the sing-along edition in theaters. For those who have not yet seen *Moana*, please note that this piece does contain spoilers.

The musical world of *Moana* emerged out of a collaboration among three composers: Opetia Foa'i, Lin-Manuel Miranda, and Mark Mancina. Together, they combined new compositions with existing songs by Foa'i's South Pacific fusion group, Te Vaka, including "Loimata E Maligi," from *Nukukehe* (2002); "Papa E," from *Te Vaka* (1997); and "Logo te Pate," from *Havili* (2011). Rather than a mere recycling of material, this com-

bination of new and old allowed the music team to weave Pacific Island memories into the film, adding depth for viewers familiar with the original songs. One striking example of this is the reworking of "Loimata E Maligi" into the new pieces "An Innocent Warrior" and "Know Who You Are" (their shared melody is later reprised orchestrally in "Toe Feiloa'i"). While I had known prior to the premiere that the team had incorporated this song, originally written to lament the death of eighteen young girls and their supervisor in a dormitory fire in Tuvalu in 2000, it wasn't until I saw the new songs' roles in the film that I began to see the layers of meaning that this revisiting allows. During "An Innocent Warrior," the ocean, a character in the story, chooses Moana, a baby girl with her whole life ahead of her, to carry out the difficult and dangerous task of restoring the heart of the goddess Te Fiti. When the music returns in "Know Who You Are," Moana carries out this task, realizing the truth and bravely facing the deadly fires of Te Kā to return what had been stolen. It is a very moving scene on its own, but to me, given the original song's background, it seems almost as if Moana knows the girls' story and draws her strength from their memory.

The incorporation of such memories in the music of *Moana*, along with the prominence of Pacific Island instruments, rhythms, and languages, can be credited to Foa'i's influence. Drums, for instance, populate the film both visually and aurally. Sometimes they are apparent in the action on screen, with characters visibly interacting with them to produce sound, as in the cave on the island of Motunui,

during the attack of the Kakamora, and in Tamatoa's lair under the sea. Other times, the action and music imply performers just out of view, as when Motunui villagers practice dancing. The rest of the time, drum rhythms and timbres contribute to songs and score without any apparent source on or off the screen. More important than the instruments, however, are the Pacific Island voices singing Pacific Island languages. Past and present members of Te Vaka, as well as the University of the South Pacific's Pasifika Voices choir, directed by Igelese Ete, lent their remarkable voices to the film, making possible one breathtaking piece after another. Because music in Pacific Island cultures is largely logogenic (word-born), privileging song texts over everything else, these performances—by musicians whose dedication to communities in the region began long before *Moana* was even an idea and will continue long after its current popularity fades—could be considered the single most important component of the film's music.

With the film created and released, however, a major question that remains is how far Disney will go to privilege these words in subsequent repackagings of the film and its music. I found an early answer in the film's sing-along edition, which I saw on 28 January 2017 at Consolidated Theaters at Ward in Honolulu, Hawai'i. I was beyond excited to get to see Pacific Island languages receive the sing-along treatment, which often involves an icon that bounces across onscreen text as it's sung. But as soon as the movie began, my heart dropped. "Tulou Tagaloa" had no accompany-

ing icon or text. I reassured myself that the sing-along treatment was probably just reserved for the songs that are sung by particular characters in the film or that have been the most heavily marketed. When "We Know the Way" began a few songs later, however, I felt indignant. The Samoan and Tokelauan parts, which are sung by characters onscreen (the voyagers), were not included in the sing-along, while the English parts, which have no origin in the scene, were. Even though I already knew the words, I was upset to see what appeared to be a blatant othering of Pacific languages. Curious, I later checked both the subtitles and the closed captioning on the DVD and digital versions of the film, and they are no better, with "(SINGING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)" plastered across the bottom of the screen instead of the song text. Given everything Pacific Islanders have put into this film—*about* the Pacific Islands and *set in* the Pacific Islands—Disney should have done more to privilege their actual words here instead of writing them off as "foreign." In the Honolulu movie theater, however, some of my fellow audience members chose to sing along anyway, eventually joining in for every part of "Know Who You Are," bouncing icon or no.

I have restricted my discussion here to just a few of my surface impressions of the music of *Moana*, but there are many, many more layers to consider and critique. To those thinking about seeing the film, I definitely encourage you to do so (though if you rely on closed captioning, you will unfortunately need to supply your own texts for some of the songs, even if you know the languages). The musicians

who took part in the film did a beautiful job, and their work alone makes the experience worth it. Depending on your background and experiences, you may find layers of meaning embedded within the film that move you to tears, but you may also find issues that move you to action. I have found plenty of both. While there is much to celebrate, there is still a long way to go.

CANDICE ELANNA STEINER  
*University of Hawai'i–Mānoa*

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*Making the Modern Primitive: Cultural Tourism in the Trobriand Islands*, by Michelle MacCarthy. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8248-5560-4, x+270 pages, map, figures, notes, glossary, references, index. Cloth, US\$68.00.

Can we ever leave Kiriwina? *Making the Modern Primitive: Cultural Tourism in the Trobriand Islands* returns us there once again. Not for a new study of intertribal exchange, or to return to the ambiguities of the father in matriliney, or to research chiefs, or to develop a new concept of reciprocity, or to reanalyze Trobriand magic, or to appreciate the island as the birthplace of anthropological methods, or to come to grips with how the place took on a special significance among Bronislaw Malinowski's descendants. No. Michelle MacCarthy's new ethnography, based on fieldwork in 2009–2010, returns us to Kiriwina for another purpose, which is to probe the discrepant meanings of "cultural tourism" from three points of view: hosts, guests, and anthropologists.

Foreigners visit the island in steady but hardly overwhelming numbers, arriving in thrice-weekly planes from Port Moresby or, less often, by yacht or cruise ship. They come, MacCarthy avers, in search of a glimpse of "the primitive" living their true and real life. They come in search of "authentic" experience, which they more or less conceive in static, precapitalist, pre-Christian terms as well as in *National Geographic* clichés—eg, the "islands of love." As such, they take photos carefully framed so as to avoid including evidence of culture change, and they complain when they are asked to pay their subjects for the right to do so. Tourists make their way off the beaten track for a chance to see a moral way of life, or lifestyle, which they fear is disappearing in the face of global capitalism and missionary Christianity. They desperately want to see "the real thing," so much so that they even disparage each other in a kind of touristic hierarchy of value. Independent travelers view themselves as superior to those in groups, and both see themselves as superior to tourists on the big cruise ships. What is more, they feel angst about how they themselves subvert Trobriand culture by commodifying it.

For their part, MacCarthy suggests, the Kiriwinians see the dimdim (foreigners) as a more or less homogeneous kin group from abroad who bear material resources, and, in that sense, they treat them like intertribal trading partners with whom they want to initiate and sustain long-term reciprocal exchange relations. In short, they would like to see tourists as kula men and women. But, of course, this is a wish that cannot be fulfilled. Villag-