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**Stitching to the back-bone:
A Cook Islands literary tivaivai.**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in English Literature
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Abstract

This thesis produces a survey of Anglophone Cook Islands literature and from it, recognises some key Cook Islands literary aesthetics. The rationale for this thesis rests on the considerable contributions Cook Islands writers have made to the wider Pacific literary field during the formative years of Pacific literature (1960s and 1970s) and acknowledges the key role scholars and writers such as Majorie Tuainekore Crocombe, Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, Kauraka Kauraka and Makiuti Tongia, played in this early literary production. These figures provided an important space for Cook Islands writers to come, the result of which has created an impressive and compelling body of Cook Islands writing – one that, until this thesis, had not been fully surveyed in detail.

In undertaking this mapping exercise, the Cook Islands art of quilting/tivaivai has been employed as a conceptual framework for the thesis. Key critical works by noteworthy Pacific writers, theorists and scholars have been consulted and referred to throughout this research, while attempting to adopt a Cook Islands world-view in the close-reading of these texts. To synthesize the key features of a Cook Islands literary aesthetic, this thesis gives critical treatment to four of the earliest Cook Islands poets who have not been given thorough critical treatment in any other piece of scholarship to date. They are: Makitui Tongia, Kauraka Kauraka, Va'ine Iro-Nui Rasmussen and Jean Tekura'i'imoana Mason.

The thesis concludes by reflecting on the main facets of what is a communal Cook Islands literary aesthetic. It reflects on examples drawn from the analyses and historiography of the field. Finally, a brief discussion of the current state of the conceptual tivaivai – the Cook Islands literary field – is given, with some comment on the possible future for Cook Islands literature.

Dedication

For Richard John Powell and Teupoko Enea, my grandparents.

With infinite love.

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Chapter One – Cutting Paper Patterns: An Introduction

This thesis is a continuation of research I began in my Honours dissertation. In that thesis I explored the work of three Cook Islands Maori writers with strong connections to Aotearoa, New Zealand, either because they had lived or been brought up there. My focus was largely prompted by my own personal history as a first-generation New Zealand-born Cook Islander who up until that point had engaged very little with Cook Islands scholarship, history or culture. As an undergraduate English student, the courses I had taken most pleasure in were those exploring Pacific literature, and while I enjoyed engaging with writing from all around the Pacific it wasn't long before I began to look for writing from my own cultural background. The exploration of the Cook Islands literary field comes from a deep personal sense of curiosity that, during my undergraduate years, questioned where Cook Islands Maori writing fit in the wider field of Pacific writing in English. I began to question where *I* fit as a Pacific person within mainstream New Zealand, and where I fit as a Cook Islands Maori person within the wider Pacific region. With this impetus, an interrogation of the Cook Islands literary corpus felt like a natural progression in my work.

My Honours research revealed a number of key observations. First, in comparison to other Polynesian national literatures the corpus of Cook Islands Maori literature was marginally smaller in volume and had a significantly smaller profile. One exception was the work of Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, and even he was more readily associated with the New Zealand literary canon. Second, there was little critical and scholarly literature on Cook Islands Maori writing that currently existed in English. Third, there were no practicing Cook Islands Maori literary scholars in New Zealand or the Cook Islands, and so far as I was able to ascertain, there never had been. The poet, Makiuti Tongia, had lectured in a variety of different subjects (Victoria University of Wellington) with a particular penchant for Cook Islands Maori ethnography, but had no University based literary qualifications. This critical silence was paralysing for my younger self and I struggled to begin the writing process when the instinct to cover a wide scope and fill an obvious scholarly gap was limited by the requirements of a 10,000-word essay.

The project also prompted a number of questions and by extension this thesis. Two of these were: why had no critical work been done to date? And why, compared to other

Polynesian national literatures, were there so few writers, particularly younger generation contemporary writers, among Cook Islands communities? Significant Cook Islands figures had been integral to First Wave Pacific literature and among those were incredibly compelling and respected writers. But it seemed odd to me that even though Campbell and artists/editors such as Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe and Makiuti Tongia had made these contributions, there were very few recent publications by other Cook Islands Maori writers. Miria George, of Cook Islands and New Zealand Maori descent, had the most recent publication, her play *and what remains* (2006). The play gave treatment to the issue of multicultural relations in New Zealand, placing the mortality of te ao Maori at the centre of the story. This play, however, did not directly engage with George's Cook Islands Maori background. Before George, Audrey Brown's *Threads of Tivaevae: Kaleidoscope of Kolours* (2002) (with graphic design and illustrations by Veronica Vaevae, also a Cook Islander) was the next most recent. This left a gap of almost a decade between Brown's publication and my Honours research in 2011.

I continue the discussion I began in my Honours dissertation by acknowledging the apparent critical gap associated with Cook Islands literature within the wider Pacific literary field. In this thesis I speak into the silence that captured me while writing my Honours dissertation in 2011. In that dissertation I aligned my own history – my own story – with the narrative of the essay. This allowed me to articulate a reading of the texts with a critical lens that was anchored in a (personal) sense of cultural identity. It was also a way of tracing layers of history within these texts by putting my story and experience alongside the experiences detailed by this group of writers. As with all Pacific cultures, our literary work and the stories being told in our poetry, our novels and our short stories, are not written in a void. They are texts that have been produced within important historical, social and political contexts. My Honours dissertation focused on the layers of connection between New Zealand and the Cook Islands, which allowed me to explore and observe my own national and personal allegiances, and to find them mirrored and interrogated in the texts of the three writers whose work I analysed. This empowered me, inspired me – and in some ways saddened me. It also encouraged me to amplify some of the discussions I was only able to briefly touch on in 10,000 words.

This thesis will widen the scope of my Honours dissertation by looking to Cook Islands writing outside of Aotearoa, New Zealand. It will suggest and develop what I argue to

be a Cook Islands literary aesthetic. The second chapter, “Koikoi: a survey of Cook Islands literature”, traces the history of Cook Islands writing in English up to the present day. I outline the prominent writers and texts that contribute to this layer of history while pulling together the postcolonial and diasporic meta-narratives of Cook Islands people, writing, and history. This chapter tracks the genealogy of our current and recent writers, and contextualises the ‘scholarly silence’ I allege. The third chapter, “Tuitui: ‘Each stitch joins the tivaevae pattern to the backbone’”, analyses four significant Cook Islands poets and material from their first (and in some cases, only) solo collections. They include: Makiuti Tongia’s 1977 collection *Korero*; Kauraka Kauraka’s first collection *Return to Havaiki: Fokihanga Havaiki* (1980); Va’ine Rasmussen’s *Maiata* (1991) and Jean Tekura’i’imoana Mason’s *Tattoo = Tatau* (2001). I focus on poetry in this thesis because of the limitations of word count and my attempt to give an acceptably thorough analysis to more than one writer. Furthermore, this follows my desire to make critical “noise” around the *field* rather than focusing on one writer, gender, genre or theme. The rationale behind the selection of these specific four poets rests on the reasoning that this thesis should start at the beginning, recognising the implications of a genealogical aesthetic (Marsh 2004). Cook Islands writers have been responsible for a number of firsts in the Pacific literary field (this will be explored further in Chapter 2) and while these contributions are important, I focus on these four poets first because they have not yet been given thorough and careful literary treatment. The main corpus of Cook Islands writing in English began during the 1970s and the four writers I treat here were a part of this pioneer movement in various capacities. I have discerned this by considering the date of their earliest publications, their involvement with key writing organisations during the 1970s and 80s, the volume of their published work in comparison to other Cook Islands writers from this period and their enduring profile among the Pacific literary community.

1.1 Methodology: From Fibre to Fabric

The methodology for this thesis is influenced by the tivaivai methodology that Teremoana Maua-Hodges constructed in 2000. The methodology was specifically designed for the discipline of education where Maua-Hodges employs the metaphorical tivaivai as a “holistic model which [can] be used to guide multiple components of...research in culturally responsive ways” (Te Ava 56). Tivaivai is the practice of quilt-making, now widely associated with Cook Islands women. It is believed that quilt-making and needlework were taught to Cook Islands women by the wives of missionaries during the early 1800s. Over time Cook Islands women have staked a claim on the art by creating a widely recognized Cook Islands feminine aesthetic with the quilt-making craft (Herda 2002). The quilts “...are used as decorations and, more importantly, presented as gifts at important occasions such as weddings, funerals, pakoti’anga rauru (boy’s haircutting ceremonies), receptions for church ministers and, among New Zealand Cook Islanders, 21st birthday parties, gifts to VIPs and dearly loved people in the family and the community” (“Tivaevae ta’orei”). These examples indicate the breadth of important cultural and social value these quilts have among Cook Islanders. The craft also offers some valuable metaphorical parallels with this project.

The focus that Maua-Hodges’ methodology has on the education sector is problematic within a literary context. However with no other Cook Islands literary scholarship on which to model this thesis, I have chosen to expand and adapt Maua-Hodges’ methodology. In the first instance, I acknowledge the discourse surrounding the orthographic debate concerning the appropriate spelling of the craft. Maua-Hodges’ uses the spelling “ae” (tivaevae) however, the alternative spelling “tivaivai” has also been advocated by some. The tension between the two spellings “tivaevae” and “tivaivai” is explored by Küchler and Eimke in their 2009 publication *Tivaivai: The Social Fabric of the Cook Islands* where they acknowledge that though the meaning of “vae” and “vai” are both appropriate for the craft (the former meaning “to patch, to mend” and the latter meaning “to wrap up, to enclose”), phonetically “tivaivai” makes the most sense¹ (42). Küchler and Eimke also put forward the argument that because of the quilts function as ceremonial “cover[ings]” or “wrapping cloths” it is more closely associated with the meaning of “vai” (42). I have used the “tivaivai” spelling of the craft in this thesis.

¹ Jonassen writes in his introduction to *Kama’atu* (2005) that most vowels in Cook Islands Maori are pronounced short. “As in English a short vowel has a different meaning from a long one eg. cat/cart” (11). The Cook Islands Maori language utilises the macron in its written form to denote the long vowel sound. In the word “tivaivai”, the “i” is pronounced as the double “e” in the English word “see”.

The education scholar Aue Te Ava has advocated and employed the use of Maua-Hodges' methodology in a number of his projects, in particular his PhD thesis, “*'Mou Piriia Te Korero 'Ā To 'Ui Tūpuna, Akaoraoraia': Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for Cook Island Secondary Schools Physical Education*” (2011). In it he articulates the use of the *tivaivai* “as a research model [that] centres Cook Islands people's understanding of values” by examining the importance of culturally relevant research methodologies that consider the lived experience and reality of the indigenous peoples concerned. For New Zealand Maori this is “language integration; knowledge and culture concerns on the one hand with economic, political and social (e.g. education, health and justice)[sic]” (Te Ava 70). These same intentions, Te Ava writes, “are envisaged in the framing of [his] research in the Cook Islands” (70). The nature of this project requires a methodology that is aware of a Cook Islands cultural worldview. Such a viewpoint is imperative to effectively interpreting the literary aesthetics I discover and expose in this thesis. I believe the *tivaivai* methodology does this appropriately within a literary context where language integration is experimented with in the writing of Anglophone literature; cultural knowledge and concerns are key themes within this body of writing and economic, political and social concerns are felt as pressures *on* the field as well as *within* the texts themselves.

Te Ava goes on to extrapolate three main aspects of Maua-Hodges' wider methodology: *koikoi*, *tuitui*, and *akairianga*. I have arranged the structure and contents of this thesis around these three main aspects. In effect, this dissertation conceptualizes the quilt-making craft in order to produce a metaphorical *tivaivai* that represents the disparate parts of this hereto unmapped literary field. It describes metaphorical parallels with specific parts of the *tivaivai* and uses the process of *tivaivai* production and the social and cultural function of the *tivaivai* to refine some of the arguments made in this thesis. He writes of the first aspect that,

Koikoi refers to the gathering of the patterns needed for the making of the [*tivaivai*]. They are picked and readied for discussion before being sewn together. *Koikoi* process requires knowledge and experience in planning, gathering the appropriate materials at the right time and at the right place and ensuring that the pattern tells a story of Cook Islands history (Te Ava 71).

In this research the patterns represent the writers and texts that are a part of this field. These conceptual patterns differ in texture, colour and composition, reflecting the literary diversity of those that are a part of this field, the many different ideological and physical spaces from

which they speak, the various literary styles they employ – in essence their individualism. In “2.2: Genealogy and the Quilt” I “pick” and “ready” the texts and writers for discussion. I acknowledge the salient writers whose work (which may or may not have been written in English) is noteworthy in regards to this project. This process is bolstered by my knowledge and experience as a postgraduate literary student who has read widely and considered deeply the most robust forms of approach to, and examination of, the texts of this field. As I noted with the work of Davis’ and Frisbie, there are reasons why I have given more considered treatment to particular texts. Subsection 2.1 gives further justification for this while simultaneously acknowledging, as widely as possible, all the writers and texts that make up this field and this metaphorical *tivaivai*.

Te Ava describes *tuitui* as,

...the sewing or stitching of the pattern on the blank canvas. *Tuitui* refers to the actual making of the [*tivaivai*]. This process requires special knowledge and skills of different types of ‘patterns’...A further momentous aspect of the [*tivaivai*] model is making connections. When Cook Islanders come together during *tuitui* to make the [*tivaivai*], they make connections with each other (71).

Lynnsay Rongokea outlines four different methods of *tivaivai*-making in her book, *The Art of Tivaevae: Traditional Cook Islands Quilting* (2001), three of which are pertinent to this thesis: *manu*, *tataura* and the *tuitui tataura* (Rongokea 2001). All three of these styles utilize the backing-cloth on which patterns and embroidery are attached. This backing cloth represents the postcolonial and diasporic layers of history I explore in “2.2 Laying the backing-cloth: a postcolonial and diasporic fabric”. These underpinning narratives will permeate the discussions within this thesis, informing and contextualizing claims and arguments I propose throughout.

In Chapter 3 I engage in this process of sewing and stitching where my skills as a Masters student become the needle that affixes my analysis to the backing cloth. Simultaneously I am both the formal scholar and the informal reader. My analysis in chapter three suggests ways of reading for both of these positions. As the formal scholar I acknowledge the existing scholarship, and add to it by signalling the apparent gaps and attempting to fill them with my conclusions about literary aesthetics apparent within and across the field. The existing scholarship is examined at the beginning of “2. Koikoi: A survey of Cook Islands writing in English” where I provide a survey of the current critical

work giving specific treatment to Cook Islands literature, as well as indicating where wider Pacific literary scholarship has recognised and included Cook Islands literary work.

In the four subsections of Chapter 3 I explore the connections (and sometimes disconnections) between the content and literary technique of each poet in this chapter, referring them, where relevant, to the salient writers I name in Chapter 2. By doing so I assert that whether or not these writers consciously write into the political space of identity, they still write to and about one another, simultaneously discussing and asking questions of issues that others in the field are also considering. In effect, I pull the writers – the patterns of writers and writing – into community with one another.

To put this into cultural context, a Cook Islands cultural worldview fosters connection through the emphasis on extended family (though it is becoming more familiar to see the conventional nucleus family structure in the diasporic Cook Islands communities) (Ama 119). Extended family is largely maintained by the connections woven between all living generations and a continual maintenance of remembered genealogy. Among this *papa'anga*² are complex layers of history including adopted children, in-laws and children outside marital unions. Those who are familiar with their island, village and/or familial history are able to recount genealogical history going back to the eponymous ancestor(s). It is this process of remembering that allows Cook Islanders to understand their relation to one another. As an example, part of this remembering process is the ritualistic importance of naming. Jon Jonassen writes that,

Names play a major role in the traditional life of the Maori people of the Cook Islands. It has a dynamic, ever-present symbolism that constantly reminds those who are living of responsibilities to their ancestors and descendants. It has emotional, physical and spiritual connotations. Emotional feelings that reveal sacrifices made by those who have passed on...Physical undertones that challenge those at present who have inherited the names to be successful in life. And spiritual connotations: that link the past into the future, recognizing that a name crosses the boundaries of life and death.

Names create a link to ancestors, friends, family members, titles and land. It enhances events and relationships between the past, present and future. (2002:7)

With these cultural references in mind, I *name* the disparate patterns on my tivaivai and trace the connections that the poets in Chapter 3 have with one another, but also the

² Cook Islands Maori word meaning “genealogy”.

connections they have with the other writers in the Cook Islands and wider Pacific literary field. The “emotional feelings that reveal sacrifices” Jonassen speaks of are acknowledged with my exploration of, and emphasis on, the important pioneering contributions Cook Islanders made to establishing the Pacific literary field in the postcolonial explosion of self-determination that swept through the Pacific during the 1970s. This emphasis is an important one to make for two reasons: first, because I don’t believe it exists to a satisfactory degree in the existing scholarship, and second, it is an important pillar justifying this thesis.

Following the chronology, I go on to examine which writers, seminal texts and organisations followed these pioneering efforts. The period between the 1970s and the early 2000s saw a number of important writing organisations appearing to foster writing within the region by indigenous peoples. Such organisations attempted to engage indigenous writers in subverting the Western representations of the Pacific in 19th century South Seas literature: to rewrite, respond to, and interrogate these ideas of the Pacific person. Cook Islands writers followed this ideology, particularly those who produced work under the mentorship of the early Pacific literary figures in the 1970s. They were also contributing to a growing pool of writing – both creative and otherwise – where Cook Islanders were finally writing about themselves.

The patterns I find during this tracing exercise, and the subsequent stitching of each discovery to the backing cloth, is at the spiritual centre of the tracing and naming process as I relate these writers, texts and histories to one another, effectively “link[ing] the past into the future”. The links to “ancestors, friends, family members, titles and land”, in a more figurative sense, reach out to the edges of this field’s history and pull them *around* a central point of “now”³. While I put emphasis on the alleged “postcolonial” period of Cook Islands writing, I touch on the early 19th century and writing produced by early Cook Islanders of this period. I also claim and tie into the backing cloth the “friends” of the Cook Islands literary field - figures that have supported writers and, by extension, the field during the 19th century and onward. Significant periphery figures will be referred to throughout the narrative of the thesis, where their activity and connection to the field seem pertinent to the discussion. These

³ The term “now-time” is taken from New Zealand Māori author, Patricia Grace’s novel *Potiki* where her character Tokowaru-i-te-Marama describes the understanding of temporality within te ao Māori (Grace 39). Elizabeth DeLoughrey critically explores the use of this kind of temporal narrative in her article “The Spiral Temporality of Patricia Grace’s *Potiki*” (1999) and its relevance to the Cook Islands context is exemplified in the quote from Jonassen in the introduction of this thesis (2002:7). Indeed, this concept may be applied across Pacific literature and other global indigenous literatures, as Marsh refers to the recurring “Pacific adage” within these literatures, “We face the future with our backs”, in her PhD thesis (2004:9).

figures represent their own patterns on the tivaivai, influenced by more global aesthetics and their experience outside the conceptual and physical home islands, and the Pacific. Finally, I explore the movement and production of Cook Islands writing both inside and outside the home islands.

The final aspect and chapter of this thesis *akairianga* is described by Te Ava as, ...the evaluating and offering of the [*tivaivai*] to the community or to individuals as a gift. In the Cook Islands culture, the [*tivaivai*] represents the symbolical token of two Cook Islands values, *aroa* (love) and *tu akangateitei* (respect). Once the [*tivaivai*] is completed, it is blessed for special occasions such as deaths, birthdays, and birth of a child, anniversaries and graduations. The completion of the thesis could be aligned with the offering of [in Te Ava's case] the participants, schools and community. (72)

The conclusion of this thesis brings together the historiography of Chapter 2 and the close analysis in chapter three by attaching the information in both chapters to one another. Chapter 4 takes a look at the “whole” that this process has created and observes the nuances and aesthetic of my metaphorical tivaivai. This chapter synthesizes the findings of the literary analysis in the third chapter and suggests some bold trends and prominent literary aesthetics and characteristics of this field. I will substantiate this by connecting relevant characteristics (theme, form, style, tone) across a number of works and/or discussing in more detail pertinent issues and themes that arise in the poetry of the four writers. It has been my hypothesis since the beginning of this project that these issues and themes, through further discussion, will relate back to some of the more noteworthy instances in the historiography of this field and its associated people, in particular the two narratives on which this thesis focuses – the postcolonial and the diasporic.

Finally, the thesis will also highlight the need for others to add to the tivaivai and briefly discuss where this tivaivai sits within the Pacific literary field and its associated body of scholarship. I have tried to map as much of the field as possible as an answer to the deafening critical silence, reflecting a lack of previous academic attention. The impetus of this thesis rests on the conviction that there are valuable observations and acknowledgements of Cook Islands writing that deserve their place in Pacific literary scholarship and furthermore, that existing Cook Islands writing is compelling and worthy of serious critical treatment.

1.2 A note on terminology

Many of the terms and theoretical frameworks I utilise and explore have been taken from the wider Pacific critical literature and therefore tend to use terminology from Polynesian cultures other than the Cook Islands. The most obvious example of this within the thesis is use of the term *afakasi* which is a Samoan term referring to those of mixed-race or those who are “half-caste” (as the transliteration implies). The term now gestures to a popular discourse taking place within contemporary and diasporic creative and critical writing in this field. While I could have easily used a Cook Islands Maori equivalent, the associations prompted by the word *afakasi* are more readily connected to the diaspora discourse within Pacific Studies and the work of related proponents in other scholarly disciplines.

For footnoted translations of Cook Islands Maori words and phrases I have consulted Buse *et al.*’s *Cook Islands Maori Dictionary* (1995); Crocombe *et al.*’s *Akono’anga Maori = Cook Islands Culture* (2003); and the online *Cook Islands Maori Dictionary* (<http://www.cook-islands-maori-dictionary.org/>). I have also utilised the glossaries and other supplementary information provided in the poetry collections and anthologies included within this thesis.

Many Cook Islands Maori words, terms and phrases within the narrative of this thesis have been italicised. This attempts to make the reader aware of my best efforts to use those terms and phrases within the most appropriate academic and cultural context possible. They are accompanied by footnotes that provide definitions, descriptions and contextual information from the sources above, and others in the bibliography, where indicated. Any failure to do so correctly and appropriately is entirely the fault of the author.

Chapter Two - Koikoi: A survey of Cook Islands writing in English

2.1 Stitching in Time

When I began this project the lack of critical writing giving specific treatment to Cook Islands Maori literature prompted me to look to the scholarship treating the national literatures of our Pacific neighbours in order to reflect on ways of reading and close analysis for this particular field. This lack of Cook Islands-specific criticism encouraged me to consider the scope of the critical gap in the Pacific literary field pertaining to Cook Islands writing, noting where our writing was mentioned and referred to, what these references concerned and what the scholarship lacked because further treatment of Cook Islands literature was omitted.

There have been a small number of seminal critical works by leading Pacific literary scholars. Perhaps the first of its kind is Subramani's *From Myth to Fabulation* (1992) which Sina Va'ai, observes as his "landmark critique of Pacific writing[,] the first comprehensive and critical survey of the creative writing from Islanders, indigenous and migrant, in the countries of the region served by the University of the South Pacific [USP]" (1999:37). The significance of USP's role in the region and the Pacific literary field will be explored later in this chapter. Subramani's publication does its best in its capacity to cover the breadth of the writing produced in the region at this time. While he received some criticism (Schoeffel & Meleisea 1985:124-7) the ground breaking nature of his work must be noted and for the purposes of this project at least, he crucially acknowledges the early work of Florence (Johnny) Frisbie and Tom and Lydia Davis' work: *Doctor to the Islands* (1955) and *Makutu* (1960) (Subramani 14-17).

Subramani celebrates the "considerable literary merit" of Frisbie's *Miss Ulysses from Puka-Puka* (1948) and pronounces Tom and Lydia Davis' *Makutu* "an important landmark in South Pacific literary history". This thesis further argues for the recognition of the Davis' "first" South Pacific novel despite Subramani highlighting the relative lack of enthusiasm and the book's smaller profile. This was made more conspicuous by the comparative critical

success of Albert Wendt's⁴ work in the 1970s (Subramani 14-17). Subramani proffers two reasons for this: "first, it was published when the habit of reading fiction was still not acquired; and second, the novel has much in common with the familiar South Sea fiction by European authors" (14). Subramani's reasoning is sound and these reasons have been quoted by some First Wave writers and advocates as their incentive for pushing the Pacific literary movement in the 70s. The issue I raise is that he leaves his analysis at this.

While the Davis' and Frisbie's work do emulate some of the major literary characteristics of Western South Seas literature of the late 18th and 19th centuries (a *papa'a*⁵ protagonist, colonial terminology commonly found in the aforementioned genre), it also demonstrates the appropriation of the Western novel in order to articulate a Cook Islands story. The Davis' *Makutu* is the story of Dr. Roger Barnaby who takes up the medical officer position on the fictional island of Fenua Lei. Subramani's evidence for the Davis' common connection with South Sea fiction focuses on Barnaby's status as an English doctor specifically (14) and while it may seem an inappropriate choice for the protagonist of a South Pacific novel (where at least half is written by a "native South Sea Islander" [Frisbie in Subramani 1985:14]) the social and cultural positioning of Barnaby's character within the story seems more in line with the assumed social and cultural positioning of indigenous peoples during the 1960s in the Pacific.

Barnaby's character becomes frustrated with the other main character, Miss Linel Frobisher (arguably, the antagonist of the novel, exacerbated by her blatant cultural superiority) who experiences the cultural confusion of "the outsider". In some ways, the Davis' complicate the usual binary by foregrounding the relationship dynamic between Dr. Barnaby and Miss Frobisher instead, presenting two characters that struggle to agree or compromise on the legitimacy of the natives' cultural practices, legitimacy that Dr. Barnaby supports, understanding and agreeing with their indigenous precedent. Miss Frobisher however is not only unable but also unwilling to understand that local culture. The Davis' explore the complexities of Barnaby's responsibility for Miss Frobisher who implores him to see reason: surely he must understand the erroneous nature of the natives. Dr Barnaby spends

⁴ Albert Wendt is a Samoan poet, novelist, short-story writer, playwright and Professor Emeritus. His writing and critical thought is referred to throughout this thesis in recognition of his academic authority and the prominent role he had in the establishment of the Pacific literary field. Marsh and Teaiwa recently edited a special tribute issue for *The Contemporary Pacific*, "Albert Wendt's Critical Creative Legacy in Oceania" (2010) and a full-length study of his work was written by Paul Sharad (*Albert Wendt and Pacific Literature: Circling the Void*) in 2003. Many others have written on his work and life as indicated in the citation list of these two publications.

⁵ Cook Islands Maori word meaning "European" or "foreigner".

much of the book negotiating his allegiance to his own Western culture – one that he has been conditioned to see as “correct” – and his integration and adaptation into his new “native” community.

This character development and exploration alone justifies a more in-depth reading of the text. One that doesn’t just declare the novel unfortunately insufficient in centering itself as an indigenous Pacific text, as Wendt’s work does; *Sons for the Return Home*⁶ (1973) as a case in point (Subramani 14). I argue that the novel is in fact a critical text in exploring issues of colonial vs native misunderstanding and the complexities of cultural encounter not only within the binary of colonizer and colonized but also among the finer nuances and tensions within expatriate communities where individuals originate from contrasting Western societies as Miss Frobisher (an American) and Dr. Barnaby (an Englishman) do. This was demonstrably common during the 1960s, among the second generation of European settlers beginning to question their ideas of home and origin as many felt a sense of belonging to nations like New Zealand and Australia despite the tensions between their forebears and the indigenous peoples. Settlers were also taking up positions among the Pacific islands, representing the crown as resident agents, commissioners and later, governor generals. Through these roles they were required to make connections with local indigenous peoples, forming relationships with varying degrees of intimacy and familiarity.

Johnny Frisbie’s father, Robert Dean Frisbie, wrote a short essay in 1946 called “South Sea Authors”. It considered the relative lack of literature that existed within and about the South Pacific. He went on to observe, in particular, the expected formula of South Seas literature up until this point. The literature that had been produced by European writers, Frisbie argued, had two contrary features that were equally effective in attracting the attention of the “civilised”, assumedly European, reader. First, “that of lushness, sensuality, and security” and the “second, that of disease, hardship and danger” (6). Ironically, some of these features are apparent in the Davis’ novel but following Frisbie’s article, where he quite explicitly bemoans the absence of any indigenous writing within the region, these features were overlooked. As Subramani exemplifies, the Davis’ work has been often read on these

⁶ *Sons for the Return Home* (1973) was Wendt’s first novel based on his autobiographical experience as a student at Victoria University of Wellington. It was an instant bestseller and was one of two of his novels to be made into a feature-length film. *Sons* was released in 1979.

terms, however the timeliness of their writing alongside Johnny (Florence) Frisbie's work⁷ went some way to answering Robert Frisbie's 1946 plea for more writing from within the region.

As well as this noteworthy mention of three important early Cook Islands writers and their texts, Subramani also provides commentary on publishing in the region during this time and the prominent role the South Pacific Creative Arts Society (SPCAS) played in nurturing Pacific writers (Subramani 1985:20-25). SPCAS will be expanded on later in this chapter with specific reference to the role Cook Islands Maori teacher, scholar and writer Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe had in its creation.

Subramani explores ways of reading Pacific poetry where he applies Pio Manoa's dialectical model to the work of a number of prominent poets from various different island nations during the 1970s and early 80s. Subramani writes that Manoa:

identife[s] three stages of reactions to the socio-historical reality. The first stage has produced poetry which is marked by its tendentiousness. This is poetry of public statement: simple, song-like poetry, where the conflict is between the colonial and the colonized.

The second phase, according to Manoa, is 'represented by the attitude that two cultures – the foreign and the native – are mixing in such a way that the *native* is gradually weakened. The dominant feeling is not one of hostility, as in the first phase, but rather of loss... The third phase is more complex: 'Here, basically, there is the realisation that the modern way is alluring, and also that it is here to stay. The cultures have mixed to such an extent that there is no hope of ever going back to ancestral ways; the realistic attitude would not be of forging a new way of life, of creating a new organism...- from both the old and the new' (Subramani 1985:49-50)

The dialectical model, a construct of three different phases, is pertinent to this thesis because of the period in which the four main writers of Chapter 3 began writing and the issues that they grapple with in their work. Subramani refers, in particular, to the work of Makiuti Tongia (58) whom he writes, belongs to the first two phases of the model. This claim is useful in as far as highlighting facets of Tongia's work that most directly represented the polemics of (de)colonisation (a recurring theme of early Pacific literature) however to leave any analysis at "simple, song-like poetry" is increasingly unproductive.

⁷ Johnny (Florence) Frisbie published her diary-travelogue *Miss Ulysses from Puka Puka* in 1948 and the biography *The Frisbie's of the South Seas* in 1959. Johnny Frisbie is the daughter of *papa'a* trader Robert Dean Frisbie and Cook Islands Maori mother, Ngatokorua Frisbie.

Subramani's seminal work refers to Cook Islands literature in a periphery sense and as above, gives only brief consideration of these texts and their authors in terms of literary analysis. Following the revised edition of *Myth to Fabulation* in 1992, Paul Sharrad's *Readings in Pacific Literature* (1993) compiled popular essays on Pacific literature, in particular Albert Wendt's *Towards a New Oceania* (1976; Sharrad 1993:9). The essay is an essential reading for any Pacific literature student as Wendt "canvasses the reasons why it is important to promote the idea that there is a solid body of writing from the Pacific worthy of literary study" (Sharrad 3). Wendt implores the reader to begin interrogating and responding to the state of a new Pacific independence, an appeal that in some ways indicates the belated nature of this thesis.

Sina Va'ai's book *Literary Representations in Western Polynesia: Colonialism and Indigeneity* was published in 1999 and explored the genesis of the national literatures from Samoa, Tonga and Fiji in particular, considering the way in which the writers from these islands had begun writing back to and *rewriting* representations of themselves. Considering the time of postcolonial transition that Va'ai's book focuses on, the work was a timely response to Wendt's essay. By 1999 Subramani and Va'ai's work were pillars for the 'are/whare/fale⁸ of Pacific literature with Rob Wilson and Vilsoni Hereniko's anthology of critical essays appearing in 1999, to complement Sharrad's edited 1993 collection. Wendt had also compiled the first Anglophone pan-Pacific creative anthology during this time in 1980. His second anthology, *Nuanua* was published in 1995 and show-cased (by that time) established and promising writers from across the region. However, despite these important contributions to the field and the cursory mention of integral Cook Islands literary figures, a determining work giving treatment to specific national literatures of Eastern Polynesia (let alone Cook Islands literature) was still noticeably absent by the mid-1990s.

Any collective effort to promote literature from Eastern Polynesian, as a region, is complicated by the colonisation French Polynesia; the sparse distance between American-colonised Hawaii and the Chilean Rapanui; and the English-speaking Cook Islands. New Zealand, despite its physical presence within the loosely defined borders of "Eastern Polynesia", politically aligns itself more with the widely English-speaking ex-British colonies

⁸ Words meaning "house" in the languages, Cook Islands Maori, New Zealand Maori and Samoan respectively.

of Western Polynesia. Any collaborative effort to push literature from this part of Polynesia has been made difficult by language, and therefore literary, diversity. Indigenous literature from French Polynesia has found some footing with the appearance of the first Mā'ohi novel by Chantal Spitz in 1991, *L'Ile de rêves écrasés*⁹ and with the publication of the first French Polynesian anthology translated into English from French, *Vārua Tupu* (2005)¹⁰ (Marsh 1999:166-178; Mateata-Allain 2008).

In 2007, three critical works pertinent to the body of postcolonial South Pacific literatures appeared by Catherine Innes, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Michelle Keown. Innes' *The Cambridge Introduction to postcolonial literatures in English*, while an important guide to the postcolonial literary field, does not directly address any specific Pacific context except for the literatures of Australia with some brief and periphery mentions of writing in New Zealand. The text signals a critical gap in wider postcolonial literary scholarship giving treatment to the Pacific context and though she acknowledges the existence of Pacific writing, the omission of more in-depth discussion in some ways undermines the efforts of Wendt's *Towards a New Oceania* while simultaneously contextualizing the postcolonial space that this thesis speaks into. Pacific writing was, however, given more consideration in Keown's publication of the same year.

Keown's *Pacific Islands Writing: The Postcolonial Literatures of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Oceania* (2007) in some ways represented another revised and updated survey of Pacific literature, similar to that of Subramani's work in 1985. This book was particularly significant considering the global weight such work had coming out of an influential and respected literary institution like Oxford University. The book is a prominent brand from outside the region and more importantly, the colonial/imperial centre. Its production is implicitly, and importantly, indicative of the affirmation that – Yes, Pacific literature *is* a field! Keown traced the trajectory of Pacific postcolonial writing beyond Wilson and Hereniko's collection of essays in 1999 and attempted to map the shifts in the field beyond 2000. Noticeable mentions of Cook Islands writers include Makiuti Tongia's involvement with SPCAS and Audrey Brown's poetics.

⁹ This novel was translated into English in 2007 with its English title, *Island of Shattered Dreams* (2007).

¹⁰ Marsh recommends Robert Nicole's work *The word, the pen, and the pistol: literature and power in Tahiti* (2001) for an understanding of the colonial and postcolonial contexts of Tahitian literature (Marsh 1999).

Keown's 2005 publication devoted an entire chapter to Cook Islands writer Alistair Te Ariki Campbell entitled, "Alistair Te Ariki Campbell: Mental Illness & Postcoloniality" (Keown 2005:84-101). In it she analysed his novel *The Frigate Bird* (1989), examining the way Campbell explored "the mind-body dialectic, representing the afflicted body as manifestation of psychosocial problems associated with minority identities". She also considered "the novel's exploration of psychosis and ego-fragmentation with reference to postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories on specular identification and ego-construction". It concluded with examination of how Campbell's "psycho-corporeal vision" (86) connected to similar treatments within the work of New Zealand Maori writers.

Keown's treatment of Campbell may seem unsurprising considering the substantial profile Campbell had built during his lifetime, one that means he is considered one of the leading Pacific poets of the First Wave. By the time of Keown's publication in 2005, Campbell's work and name were already well established in the Cook Islands literary scene but more perceptibly, the New Zealand literary canon where he is included and considered one of New Zealand's most accomplished. It is important that Keown gives a Cook Islander such a sizeable treatment in her 2005 publication, particularly in terms of Campbell's identity politics. Campbell's later work was hugely influenced by the much-quoted "Polynesian strain" and was an exemplary case of exploring half-caste/afa'kasi and insider/outsider literary representation within postcolonial Pacific literature. Keown's emphasis on Campbell's mental illness has been a central pivot to his writing and she was not the first to consider Campbell's "mind-body dialectic" (86).

Indeed, she is one of a number of critics and scholars who have attempted to survey the most noteworthy influences on Campbell's writing. In *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* (1998) Nelson Wattie wrote that,

The Polynesian and the European strains in Campbell's personality and work are inseparable. Although his early poetry makes little mention of Polynesia, in its romantic and musical tone and its intense attachment to landscape it is hard not to detect something of those origins, while his later work, more directly Polynesian, nonetheless has the form and tone provided by an education in English and classical poetry" (Robinson & Wattie 1998)

Campbell's poetics were considered in terms of these "strains" by Robert Sullivan in his 2006 Masters thesis. Sullivan's analysis highlights the need to be aware of Campbell's biography and the influence this has on the aesthetic characteristics of his poetry. Sullivan argues for

four distinct “modes of voice” across Campbell’s oeuvre: “the Polynesian voice, the Romantic/Western voice, the personal and the historical” (Sullivan 110). These “voices” that Sullivan explores give an important indication of how we might read Campbell’s work, and connects with Keown’s claims about the tangible presence the state of his mental health had in his writing.

Suzanne Nola’s “‘A Journey From Despair’: Alistair Te Ariki Campbell’s ‘The Dark Lord of Savaiki’” published in the journal *Ka Mate Ka Ora* (2005:67-92) aligned Campbell’s biography (using evidence from his autobiography *Island to Island* (1984)), with his poetry collection *The Dark Lord of Savaiki* (1980). The pieces were written after Campbell’s “pilgrimage to Penrhyn” (Nola 67; Campbell 1984:16, 29) and their form reflects the nostalgic tone of the collection. Nola acknowledges that “death and loss are dominant themes in the sequence” but also that “there is a sense of joy too as [Campbell’s] links with Tongareva are re-established” (Nola 68). The essay references a number of interviews and publications and along with the bibliography of Sullivan’s thesis, gives a substantial survey of all work – interviews, critical work and reviews – pertaining to Campbell’s life and oeuvre.

The texts mentioned so far barely brush the surface of the Cook Islands literary field and Campbell, in many respects, sits somewhere in-between the Pacific literary tradition and the New Zealand literary canon. His representative allegiance to either the Cook Islands or New Zealand is also implicitly judged by his early migration to New Zealand at the age of seven. The inertia of his “Polynesian strain” up until the late 70s gave a limited indication of any noticeable Polynesian or Cook Islands literary aesthetic in his writing (Sullivan 2006). After migrating to Dunedin, New Zealand in 1932, he did not return to live in the Cook Islands again though he visited a number of times later in life. While Cook Islanders are happy to claim him as their own there is no doubt that his work sits somewhat apart from the other Cook Islands writers who have, from the outset, clearly written and claimed their agency from an ideological space closer to the conceptual home islands/cultural centre. While Campbell clearly outdoes others in the field in terms of publication, Cook Islanders have been featured in many of the pan-Pacific anthologies, and their own, since the 1970s.

For the remainder of this thesis I do not explicitly focus on Campbell in any further depth except to connect him to the tivaivai in “2.3 Genealogy and the Quilt”. While Alistair

Te Ariki Campbell's writing is truly impressive, I believe that there will be no shortage of scholars and students – *papa'a* and Cook Islands Maori – who will give treatment to him in the future. Important to this thesis is having been able to make *visible* the *invisible* - to stitch, and make sharper, the faint patterns of the less discussed writers on this metaphorical tivaivai. As Keown, Nola and Sullivan show there are many who have already done so in regards to Campbell.

Wendt's *Nuanua* (1995) and *Lali* (1980), and the major anthologies of the contemporary period post-2000 *Whetu Moana* (2003) and *Mauri Ola* (2010) which Wendt edited with Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan, all included Cook Islands writers. All four anthologies reveal a burgeoning writing community where Cook Islands writers often featured alongside each other in these collections. Fourteen different Cook Islands writers were featured across these anthologies, with major writers like Campbell, Jean Mason, Vaine Rasmussen and Audrey Brown making repeated appearances throughout. These same names were also seen together in many of the collections edited and printed in the home islands.

Finally, there has been a relatively small number of articles reviewing the drama and published poetry collections of Cook Islands writers. While briefly moving away from my focus on poetry, this body of critical review for drama is a necessary part of the conceptual tivaivai's aesthetic *papa'anga* (genealogy). Indeed, many Cook Islands playwrights have also penned poetry and short fiction and their literary style helps shape my arguments in the coming chapters. Furthermore, I feel some urgency to address certain comments made by professional reviewers with recent Cook Islands productions, not least of all because there is an obvious absence of any Cook Islands critical voice speaking next to theirs.

As one of our most diverse writers, Campbell also produced drama for radio and the stage. His play *When the Bough Breaks* (1970) was read in 2012 at the University of Auckland as part of "James Wenley's Masters in Drama thesis project [which] hope[d] to rediscover...classic New Zealand plays and see how they [stood] up for today's audiences" ("Rediscover our theatrical past"). Miria George's play *and what remains* (2007) has been treated by a number of different theatre reviewers including John Smythe for *theatreview.org.nz* and David O'Donnell who wrote the foreword for the final publication. Her plays *He Reo Aroha* (2009) (co-written with Jamie McGaskill) and *and what remains* were both produced and performed by students at Victoria University of Wellington in July

of 2012, while her production *Sunset Road* (2012) was performed at Wellington's Circa Theatre from 20 June to the 7 July.

Reviews of George's work have sometimes been contentious (Smythe 2006). Her 2007 play, *and what remains*, in particular raised questions around the conceivability of her plot. It also engaged with the sensitive issues underpinning the fabric of relations in the bicultural relationship of "Pakeha and Maori" and the relationship between Maori and the multitude of other cultures now living in New Zealand. This play did not overtly address George's Cook Islands Maori background though in some ways she explored what it might mean to be a Pacific person in Aotearoa, New Zealand with specific cultural and national allegiances. George's recent *Sunset Road* (2012), however, does.

To give some context to the play, an understanding of historical context is needed. After the Second World War, the constitutional arrangement between the Crown and the Cook Islands (1901), and then the subsequent annexation to New Zealand (1965), allowed and encouraged the migration of Cook Islanders in pursuit of employment within New Zealand's industrial and manufacturing sectors. The dispersal of Cook Islanders throughout New Zealand has predominantly hinged on the provision of employment opportunities within these particular sectors. Towns which saw the growth of significant Cook Islands communities were Napier, Hastings, Tokoroa, Rotorua and Whakatāne, "as they offered work in fruit and vegetable canning factories and timber mills" (Walrond 2012). These communities now include second and third generations of the first wave of migrants. Therefore, their identity and experience has been inherently affected by these post-Second World War industry and employment pull-factors and in her 2012 play, George explored this experience.

Sunset Road is the story of a Cook Islands family living in Rotorua during 1975 and the aspirations of the father to return to his home island: Atiu, Cook Islands. The play is a first in exploring the stakes of Cook Islanders moving to New Zealand during this period of mass Pacific migration. Notably, the play seems belated considering the long-standing relationship between both countries. It does, I argue, fill an important space next to the migration stories explored by Oscar Kightley (*Dawn Raids* 1997, *Fresh of the Boat* 1995) and others.

George's play was reviewed by Uther Dean for *Radio New Zealand's* "Arts on Sunday" and by Elspeth Sandys for the *New Zealand Listener*. The two reviews have a polarity alongside one another where much of the praise Dean gave to the play was in turn, criticized by Sandys. Dean gave praise, saying that despite the uncomfortable nature of some of the movement sequences, the "good more than outweigh the bad" and of the ensemble "An hour and forty minutes with no break, it feels like there's a big build to it and they all handle it really well" (Dean 2012). Conversely, the "overlong" plot seems to be Sandys' foremost issue with the play. In her review published in the *Listener*, Sandys wrote that George's play was "slow-moving, frequently repetitive, [and] at times [an] emotionally indulgent examination of a family in crisis" (Sandys 2012).

Dean's review, though largely positive, is weakened by his inability to quote many of the names and references in the play correctly ("Little Wing" becomes "Little Bird", "Areora" becomes "Areroa" and Luka's alter-ego becomes "King" not "Captain"). His reference to what he tentatively names a tannery before being corrected by the radio host – "the mill" – also suggests Dean's superficial knowledge of the social context of the time. The mill's historical significance to the Cook Islands diaspora is one of the fundamental aspects to this play and had Dean known anything of that history, he would have assumed that with George writing a Cook Islands play, set in Rotorua during 1975, the *timber mill* would have been an assumed – and vital – feature.

Sandys argues that while all the ingredients are present for "a better play", George's work is "confusing", "where motivation is often unclear, and the backstory is revealed in clumsy oratorical interruptions to an otherwise realistic drama" (Sandys 2012). What is unclear in Sandys' analysis is what she means by "motivation". If she refers to motivation behind the pivotal secret kept by the father, then I argue Sandys misses some of the crucial cultural context that underpins this play, in particular the Cook Islands cultural concept of *tamaiti angai*¹¹. Further, the "oratorical interruptions" that Sandys refers to also assumes that this play follows a linear Western plot line that is one dimensional in its status as a "realistic

¹¹ *Tamaiti 'āngai* is defined in the Cook Islands Maori online dictionary as an "adopted child". Ama elaborates slightly in *Akono 'anga Maori*, writing that: "Many families also include an adopted child (known as a feeding child or tamaiti angai) who is usually a close relative" (119). These definitions are perhaps simplistic in describing the inclusion and normative nature of children being bought up by other extended family members and are situation and family-specific in context. These relationships and arrangements are not always explicitly acknowledged as the child grows older and is often only addressed when a child or other family individual voices an enquiry about the child's birth parents. There is no consistent definition of the term, only that adoption of children among extended family networks is not unusual among Cook Islands families. The nuances of that relationship and the open-ness with which it is talked about, differs from family to family.

drama”. As any Pacific and Maori scholar will know, indigenous plays often employ the use of forms of “magic realism” in order to address the inherent interconnected cultural concepts of past, present and future and culturally explicit ideas of family and connections to *kainga/ipukarea*.¹² These “oratorical interruptions” express the notion of all time as a “now-time”³.

This use of meta-theatrical devices within George’s play is evident across various pieces of indigenous Pacific theatre, as is seen in Balme and Cartensen’s comparative paper “Home Fires: Creating a Pacific Theatre in the Diaspora” (2001). Balme and Cartensen looked closely at the diasporic voice in the work of Maori playwright Hone Kouka; the play *Tatau – Rites of Passage*; and the style and technique of “the spiritual father of Pacific theatre”, John Kneubuhl, in his play *Think of a Garden* (1990). Crucially, the authors argued that Kneubuhl opened “...a space for different interpretations which oscillate between Samoan cultural tradition and a psychologically motivated projection or dream figure” (39). Indeed, this style of dramatic composition (the inclusion of an essentially “dead” figure within the narrative of a realist and linear storyline) is shown to be present in drama in not only a Samoan play, but also a Maori one, and a production constructed by two pan-Pacific theatre groups. The point of commonality is in their respective diasporic and cultural settings.

Sandys does, however, praise the “recreation of time and place” (a feature of the play that Dean was decidedly unimpressed with), the “pleasing” choreography of Ta’i Patai’s *ura* and the work of the crew: Toni De Goldi (set design), Ulli Brieze (lighting) and Karnan Saba (sound design). I am compelled to note the missing Cook Islands “voice” among the reviews. Reviews, of course, are a practice of published informed opinion and in honouring the complexity of cultural context that underpins this story it is unfortunate that a Cook Islands voice was unable to speak *next to* these ones.

.....

While it is encouraging to see George’s recent reviews and an ongoing treatment of Campbell’s work, it is obvious that wider Pacific scholarship has given little comprehensive literary analysis to Cook Islands writing as a field in and of itself. Keown’s work is one of the recent pieces of literature surveying the entire field of Pacific literature and arguably, she

¹² Cook Islands Maori, “kainga” refers to the literal home where one/family dwells. “Ipukarea” refers to the more figurative and conceptual cultural or ancestral home of an individual/family/tribe.

spreads herself a bit thinly across the region. She employs the use of Brown's poem to illustrate a point about postmodernism in Pacific poetry and mentions Crocombe and Tongia as part of her narrative on SPCAS, but for all intents and purposes, this is the only mention of Cook Islands literature.

These critical pieces also make conspicuous an absence of a work inclusive of, and giving treatment to, the literature coming from Eastern Polynesia or as Arvidson puts it, "Sub-Marginal Polynesia: Austral, Gambier and the Cook Islands" (Arvidson 1993:21). This definition of "land clusters" (21) is useful in as far as drawing basic cultural and artistic similarities among a group of peoples as Va'ai and others do in their treatment of national literatures produced within Western Polynesia. The volume of work produced about the work from Samoa, Fiji and Tonga are notable and understandably so with the likes of Va'ai, Subramani, Epeli Hau'ofa and Albert Wendt adding to, and theoretically engaging with, the literary work being produced within this region – the region of their cultural background.

What is conspicuous across these texts is a lack of any sustained critical treatment or a substantial acknowledgment of the work and writers in this field. This thesis attempts to fill some of these gaps by first building up the postcolonial and diasporic context of this field.

2.2 Laying the backing cloth: a postcolonial and diasporic fabric

By tracing the postcolonial and diasporic narratives underpinning the history of Cook Islands culture, people and this field, it is fundamental that I establish parameters of definition and the relevance of such narratives to this thesis. Ashcroft *et al.* offer the definition for “postcolonial” (one word) and the hyphenated “post-colonial” as a field of study that,

...deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. [O]riginally used by historians after the Second World War in terms such as the post-colonial state, ‘post-colonial’¹³ had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. (Ashcroft *et al.* 186).

The tension between the hyphenated and non-hyphenated terms is explored in-depth by Ashcroft *et al.* (2000:186-92) however Innes gives a succinct clarification where “postcolonial” in essence refers to the consequences of colonialism from the time of first impact – culturally, politically and economically. The hyphenated “post-colonial” refers to the chronological status of nation and people *after* a nation has been officially recognised as independent and is no longer governed as a colony” (Innes 239).

In this thesis I adopt Wendt’s more fluid interpretation of the term “postcolonial” which utilizes both meanings under the singular unhyphenated term. Wendt writes in his introduction to *Nuanua* that, “For me the *post* in post-colonial does not just mean *after*; it also means *around, through, out of, alongside and against* [sic]” (Wendt 1995:3). Like Keown in her *Pacific Islands Writing* I adopt the term in a “conceptual (rather than strictly historical)” sense (Keown 2007:24). Wendt and Keown both align the Pacific texts with global postcolonial literary traditions, noting that Pacific texts and literatures “are often polemical works, positioned in opposition to imperialist and (neo)colonialist ideologies and agendas” (Keown 2007:25). This focus on opposition is a literary characteristic I examine in Chapter 3 and one that simultaneously touches on the motivation for, and discussion within, Cook Islands writing.

The postcolonial historiography of Cook Islands people is in part manifest in the Cook Islands diaspora. Ashcroft *et al.* described “diaspora” as, “[T]he voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions” (68). In his seminal paper

¹³ There is emphasis in the original text to denote an important term within the field of postcolonial studies, (Ashcroft *et al.* 2000:186).

“Diasporas” (1994), James Clifford extends this definition and the definition of Khachig Tölölian (“Diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational movement”) (303), writing that:

Diasporas usually presuppose longer distances and separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. Diasporas also connect multiple communities of a dispersed population...[D]ispersed peoples, once separated from homelands by vast oceans and political barriers, increasingly find themselves in border relations with the old country thanks to a to-and-fro made possible by modern technologies of transport, communication, and labor migration. (304)

This definition appropriately highlights some of pertinent aspects within the Cook Islands historiography relating to its, now prominent, diaspora¹⁴. Thus it is significant to this thesis not least of all because over half of Cook Islands people now live away from the home islands with very little probability of returning to take permanent residence. To begin tracing the historiography of these two narratives however, a cursory understanding of how this nation came to be is necessary.

The Cook Islands is a collective of fifteen islands in the Eastern Polynesian region of the Pacific and is divided into the northern and southern groups¹⁵. To begin speaking about them as this established nation, their history *as* a nation begins (perhaps ironically) with the first sighting of Pukapuka by English Captain James Cook in 1764¹⁶. Other European explorers undertook haphazard landings until the arrival of missionaries in 1821. The Cook Islands maintained relative independence until the colonization of nearby Tahiti and the Society Islands in 1843. The *ariki*¹⁷ of Rarotonga at that time, nervous with the nearby developments, went on to request protection from the British as they anticipated attack by the French. After a letter of petition in 1865, the then Queen of Rarotonga, Makea Takau approached the British government for protectorate status in 1888. The British, though they granted that status, were reluctant to take on this responsibility in perpetuity and after some pressure from representatives in New Zealand; the Cook Islands became a New Zealand

¹⁴ The Cook Islands diaspora and its genesis are expanded on later in this chapter.

¹⁵ The northern group of the Cook Islands includes Pukapuka, Nassau, Manihiki, Rakahanga, Suvarrow and Tongareva (Penrhyn). The southern group is made up of the largest island and capital, Rarotonga; the group named Ngaputoru, Atiu, Mitiaro, Mauke and smaller island administrated by Atiu named Takutea. Mangaia, Aitutaki, Palmerston and Manuae make up the rest of the Cook Islands.

¹⁶ The first sighting was in fact by the Spanish explorer Alvaro de Mendana in 1595 but he did not attempt to land or name the fifteen islands as a group. It was Cook who was largely influential in the naming of the nation now known as the Cook Islands after he sighted and landed on many of the Southern islands between 1773 and 1779. (“What is in our past?” 2009). Later, anthropological observations have connected Pukapuka and other northern islands with Western Polynesia, Samoa in particular. Linguistically, some of the northern group are demonstrably different to the linguistic genealogy of the Southern islands.

¹⁷ Cook Islands Maori word referred to the high chief of a particular village or district.

colony in 1901. The colonial period continued until, following a region-wide trend in decolonisation, the Cook Islands became self-governing in 1965.

This relationship with New Zealand permeates much of the social, political and cultural discourse surrounding Cook Islands people. As with any colonial project, the affect that the colonial period had, and continues to have on the Cook Islands, is far-reaching. Cook Islanders are in effect constitutionally and legally, New Zealand citizens, despite the nation's relative independence. This aspect of the Cook Island-New Zealand relationship in some ways gestures to the complexities of self- and cultural identity among Cook Islands communities in the home islands and in the diaspora. That Cook Islanders apply for, and carry, New Zealand passports, no matter whether they are born in the home islands or the diaspora, speaks to a history of connection *and* disconnection between place and people. This long and complex relationship includes, but is not limited to, the social and economic factors caused by substantial depopulation in the home islands; cultural mortality, Cook Islands language in particular; the question of future economic dependency on New Zealand and other world powers (China, for example); the increasing transnational nature of Cook Islands people and the implications this has for cultural identity and preservation.

Because of these on-going affects, the close analysis in Chapter 3 will at times necessarily refer, consider and be informed by this particular relationship. The greater part of the global Cook Islands population is found in New Zealand, where the Cook Islands diaspora as of the 2006 New Zealand Census, numbered at approximately 58,000. Cook Islands people were and continue to be “the second largest Pacific ethnic group in New Zealand” (“Cook Islands Maori people” 2012). This is significantly larger than those in the home islands which numbered 17,791 in 2011 (APMEN 2012). There is now a noteworthy Cook Islands diaspora in Australia, in large part supplemented by historical (constitutional, political and economic) ties with New Zealand and thus by extension, the Cook Islands (Hakaoro 303-14). There has also been anecdotal evidence of diasporic Cook Islands communities in places like Hong Kong, French Polynesia and the United States though further research is required for any robust inclusions about these diasporic communities within scholarship.

My foregrounding of diasporic discourse has two core reasons. The first is that my own experience within the diaspora informs my reading and approach to these Cook Islands

texts. As a Cook Islands person my engagement with Cook Islands cultural practise and my wider considerations of Cook Islands people is significantly influenced by a purview that speaks from a national space *outside* the home islands. Stuart Hall articulates this as a particular “position of *enunciation*” (222). This positioning “outside” describes my physical and in some ways ideological distance from the mythic “cultural centre” of the home islands and therefore underpins some of the connections and disconnections that I speak about in this thesis. Because of my “position of *enunciation*”, my analysis speaks into a particular critical space that is inclusive of other “diasporic” voices. This critical space overlaps, but does not entirely overlay, those spaces that are more inclusive of those scholarly voices that have had an experience from within the home islands. In these latter critical spaces, my voice is rendered silent – indeed, in some ways my voice is denied entry. This thesis does not allow for further considered treatment of the complexities that exist within layers of cultural- and self-identity however my pronounced position as a Cook Islander *of* a Cook Islands diaspora is helpful in clarifying the scholarly gap that I attempt to fill (one, that by nature, leaves the critical space at the cultural centre silent) and also the nuances of my analysis in Chapter 3. It is also a necessary declaration of self- positioning as advocated by Hereniko and Schwarz’s “talking chief”¹⁸ model of literary criticism (Hereniko & Schwarz c1999:55-64).

The second is that because of the postcolonial narrative, many of these writers and texts negotiate and interrogate their own positioning and the positioning of others within the field. For many Cook Islands Anglophone writers, their education, their writing production and the publication and dissemination of their texts has primarily taken place within diasporic national and international spaces¹⁹. This has necessarily meant that even if they do not speak from the space where I stand – namely, the diasporic space – they must necessarily continue to be aware of it, to consider the impact – implicit and explicit – that the postcolonial diasporic space has on their production of writing.

The following chronological account of the publication of texts, the formation and on-going influence of writing institutions and the influence of prominent figures within the field are influenced by some of the experiences afforded from within the diaspora as well as the

¹⁸ Hereniko and Schwarz’s model advocated an approach to criticism where critics appropriated the indigenous role of “tulafale” or “talking-chief”. Within an indigenous context, such a role allows the critic/talking chief to criticise the writer in a “loving and constructive manner – when necessary” (1999:58). Sina Vaai called this “the indigenising of literary theory” (2005:10).

¹⁹ Pacific writers were able to access publishing avenues within the institutions they were associated with in their temporary locations away from home – universities and writing institutions like SPCAS. Funding was also provided by international organisations like the Commonwealth Youth Program (Rasmussen 1991) and the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund (Jonassen 1992).

wider onset of postcolonialism. Many of the texts consider the state of Cook Islands people and culture, as well as individual circumstance, within facets of the diasporic and postcolonial contexts. These narratives also contextualise the formation of key institutions, and the careers and writing trajectories of prominent figures within the field. Because one of the primary objectives of this thesis is to begin acknowledging the patterns and most importantly, retracing and making visible those patterns which have been obscured by critical neglect – I believe that this chronological account is an integral starting point for the thesis, and further critical work treating the field. Such an exercise acknowledges who has come before, who has already begun speaking on particular issues, and offers points of comparison for which students and scholars can trace change within the writing of perception and approach.

Of most importance is the influence that postcolonial and diasporic histories have had on the content of Cook Islands literature and particular salient literary characteristics that lend themselves to the dominant patterns on the conceptual Cook Islands literary tivaivai.

2.3 Genealogy and the Quilt

In this subsection, I begin “stitching” prominent aspects of the metaphorical patterns (writers and their texts) to the postcolonial and diasporic backing cloth. As with the action of weaving- dips and rises, zig zags and curves – the narrative of this section follows a general chronological direction while at some points, necessarily gesturing widely along temporal and geographical lines. The passage quoted from Jon Jonassen in Chapter 1.2 highlights the importance of *papa’anga* and in this subsection I continue the cartographic exploration of this genealogy by affixing a wide survey of Cook Islands literature to the conceptual and metaphorical backing cloth.

In the edited publication *Akono’anga Maori: Cook Islands Culture* (2003), Marjorie Crocombe’s contribution on Cook Islands writing, “Tata²⁰: Literary expression” (2003:87-92) divided the history of Cook Islands literature into three distinct phases, characterised by distinct political and constitutional eras. These are the pre-colonial period, the colonial period (see: 2.3.1) and the “post-colonial surge” (see: 2.3.2). The production of these texts within particular eras suggests contexts in which these texts were/are being produced and therefore gestures to layers of meaning and symbolism within the texts themselves. It also gives a succinct way of understanding major trends in the frequency of publication and writing production during particular historical phases.

I do want to note that prior to these three main phases, oral histories²¹ were the primary means of record and story-telling. The critical literature on oral traditions within the Pacific, and specifically the Cook Islands, is a growing body and helpfully suggests ongoing foci within Cook Islands writing by considering what themes, form, style and tone are being used within these oral works. For example, the traditional *pe’e* which is (perhaps narrowly) defined as a traditional chant, suggests particular Cook Islands aesthetics at work within poetic forms. Of the early oral tradition, Anna-Leena Siikala writes that,

²⁰ Buse *et al.* define “tātā” as a verb, to “Write, carve or engrave sthg, write to sbdy” (1995:463).

²¹ Carlos Nogueira is Portuguese literary scholar, specialising in Portuguese literature. He defines “oral tradition” in the journal *Oral Tradition* (2003) defining it as a tradition that, “congregates knowledge, memories, values, and symbols generally configured in linguistic objects of non-literary or aesthetic-literary nature, objects with or without consignment in written testimonies, accomplished vocally and recognizable collectively and during consecutive generations in an anatomy built by the laws of traditionality (anonymity, persistence, variation)” (Nogueira 164).

The korero is a kind of metadiscourse in which the content is mediated by using different strategies: genealogies mark the vertical line of descent, tua tai'to narratives the horizontal chain of events, and pe'es, recited or sung poems, the memorable moments of action and emotion (Siikala & Siikala 90)

In simple terms, orally preserved histories were the most efficient way of recording histories in the absence of writing. These early forms of record and story-telling therefore may suggest ways of reading later written texts. This will be explored further in Chapter 3 with specific reference to Kauraka and indirectly, Tongia, Rasmussen and Mason.

2.3.1 The Colonial Period

Anglophone and Cook Islands Maori writing began with the arrival of missionaries and the commencement of conversion among the islands community. The first Missionaries arrived in the Cook Islands in 1821 and effective conversion required literacy education among the local indigenous peoples. Missionaries identified “native agents” who they felt had the character and intellect to effectively teach God’s word to their indigenous counterparts. Two “native” converts who produced a significant and thorough historical record of writing during this time are Cook Islands Maori missionaries, Ta’unga and Maretu. Writing in the early and late 1800s respectively, Marjorie Crocombe provided extensive translation, annotation and editing on the manuscripts of these writers. Ta’unga and Maretu’s writings were largely in the Rarotongan language of the time and were compiled by Crocombe and husband Ron in the 1960s and 1970s respectively. Together they published *The Works of Ta’unga: Records of a Polynesian Traveller in the South Seas 1833-1896* in 1968. The book was the translation of Ta’unga’s 33 manuscripts, linked together with the avoidance (as much as possible) of overlapping material. A smaller novella-esque narrative was produced in 1976 called *If I Live: the life of Ta’unga*. Marjorie Crocombe’s *Cannibals and Converts* (1983) was another translated, annotated and edited account of missionary Maretu’s dealings with the London Missionary Society. It was written by him towards the end of his life and so is largely reflective – an important point to remember when one approaches the credibility of his retrospective narratives.

The importance of Ta’unga and Maretu’s writing, and the work of Ron, and especially Marjorie Crocombe, is multifaceted. First, the acknowledgement and record of Ta’unga and Maretu’s works indicates the breadth of the Cook Islands writing tradition. While the work of the postcolonial writers is the best known and most readily accessible, it is important that we

remember the long history of story-telling and writing that has occurred. It gestures towards more complex narratives of writing and story-telling production and contributes to the aesthetic of this metaphorical tivaivai as I place Ta'unga and Maretu's "patterns" onto the backing cloth. Second, H.E. Maude highlights the importance that a publication like *The Works of Ta'unga* contributes to ethnological, historical and anthropological disciplines as "it gives a picture of the central and western Pacific at a time of immense cultural change" (xi). Such a contribution highlights and underpins the importance of Cook Islands literary excavations – prompting the importance of further work in this area.

Also being produced at this time were family books - tomes of familial/genealogical history - which despite not being produced in any frequency in the present day, are still (in principle) a crucial part of Cook Islands culture. Genealogy is a multilayered and interconnected aspect of the Cook Islands world-view and is a necessary part to any discussions of Cook Islands identity. It therefore seems hardly surprising that these books were one of the earliest forms of writing production from Cook Islands writers.

Following this early period, Crocombe observes a relative silence in literary production until the post-independence period in 1965. Notably, however, four prominent Cook Islands writers appeared at the end of the colonial period. In 1950, Cook Islands-Papa'a writer Alistair Te Ariki Campbell published his first poetry collection – and the first Anglophone poetry collection by a Cook Islands writer – in 1950, called *Mine Eyes Dazzle*. Campbell's oeuvre stretches from his first poetry collection in 1950 to his last collection (in collaboration with his late wife and fellow poet Meg Anderson), *This is Love, Isn't It?* in 2008. For over fifty years of writing, Campbell dominates the Cook Island literary scene with the sheer volume of his publications.

Also writing at the end of the colonial period, Tom and Lydia Davis produced their two major publications, the non-fiction account *Doctor to the Islands* (1954) and their novel *Makutu* (1960). Johnny Frisbie's *Miss Ulysses of Puka-Puka* (1949) and her autobiography *The Frisbie's of the South Seas* (1959), along with the work of Tom and Lydia Davis, is some of the earliest in the region and marked the beginning of not only the Anglophone Cook Islands literary tradition but of Anglophone Pacific literature. Robert Dean Frisbie's 1946 essay clearly points to the absence of any indigenous South Pacific literature prior to his article. In that article he openly criticises the material written by the European authors of the

19th century writing that, “Only a few geniuses among the South Sea authors have succeeded in marrying facts and readableness” (6) and concludes, imploring indigenous writers to add to this thin, Euro-centric body of writing: “But perhaps you are searching for a book of poetry about these islands. Correct me if I am wrong in believing it does not exist. Poets, spread your wings!” Robert Dean Frisbie would be pleased to see that writing activity among the Pacific, and the Cook Islands community, would grow in the following thirty years, beginning with the education and experience of early Pacific literary pioneers during the 1960s.

2.3.2 The First Wave

Throughout the critical literature, the First Wave of Pacific writing is largely associated with the University of the South Pacific and the South Pacific Creative Arts Society. Marjorie Crocombe was influential in the inception of these organisations and Subramani and Keown have both highlighted the connection her advocacy had with her education at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) during the 1960s (Subramani 25; Keown 2007:109). While at UPNG, Crocombe participated in a creative writing course taught by Ulli and Georgina Beier. Beier’s involvement in the establishment of the Nigerian and Papua New Guinean literary tradition is noteworthy as Albert Wendt and Crocombe (1980:140) have both acknowledged the influence he, and the prominent writers from other African and Caribbean literatures of the time, had on their writing and the growth of Pacific literature at the time.

These acknowledgements are echoed by Chris Tiffin who believed that the creation of the Pacific literary tradition was due to three catalytic events: the growth of creative writing in the region under Ulli Beier at the UPNG during the 1960s, the creation of the SPCAS under Marjorie Crocombe and other pioneer Pacific scholars at the USP during the 1970s, and Albert Wendt’s education and experience in New Zealand which went on to have lasting effect in his teaching and his creative and academic writings (Va’ai 1999:24). Wendt’s experience as a participant in the scholarship schemes of the 1960s²² was one also had by many of the literary institutional founders during the 1970s. These scholarships enabled the mobility of students and scholars across the region to learn and educate with a collective

²² Scholarships for students from Pacific nations were initiatives begun by colonial powers in the Pacific during the 1960s and 1970s. These schemes are in part responsible for a class of educated elite in the Pacific who, during the 1980s, began to return to their home islands, educated and highly qualified for the purposes of building their nations towards independence. Many of the top Pacific literary scholars were educated under these schemes and the scholarships are, arguably, one of the most significant drivers for the beginning of the Pacific literary tradition. (see: Sina Vaai 1999; Subramani 1985)

institutional strength and underpinned many new ideas of self-determination and decolonisation that was a central motivator of Pacific literary work.

When the USP was created, the indigenous Pacific scholars who recognised the need for more literary support (Crocombe in particular) in the region approached the then head of English to discuss ways of meeting this need. They were promptly told to go “form [themselves] a writers club” (Va’ai 1999:26). In retrospect, such a suggestion seems to be a product of the context of the time – namely, that so closely following independence, most central political institutions (institutions of learning included) were largely concerned with planning for the future economic and political, stability and productivity of newly independent Pacific nations, rendering creative writing of little priority. Crocombe and her contemporaries, however, held a rigid belief in an awakening literary movement within the region. When they found little support through the University, Crocombe and others²³ created two private institutions: The South Pacific Social Sciences Association (SPSSA) which focused on social, political and economic publication and its journal *Pacific Perspective* and the most influential literary organisation in the Pacific, the South Pacific Creative Arts Society (SPCAS).

SPCAS was created in 1972 and the organisation “dealt with poetry, short stories, drama and other kinds of creative writing as well as with music, painting, dance, etc.” (Crocombe 1980:140). It was set up by members from a wide representation of Pacific nations (140). This representation placed SPCAS in prime position to begin a communal regional effort for promoting and supporting literary production. SPCAS became a hub of critical and creative literary exchange for writers and scholars – a place where a strategic approach to building and reinforcing the field could take place. In the first instance, Crocombe identified the need for “organisation, encouragement and outlets for writers to publish their work” (140). Publication was found first through a section named *Mana* in the journal *Pacific Islands Monthly* and later, through the organisations independently published journal of the same name (*Mana*)²⁴. In an article reflecting on the development of SPCAS in 1980, Crocombe commented:

²³ Those who were influential in the creation of SPCAS include “Ken Arvidson, Satendra Nandan, Albert Wendt and many others” (DeLoughrey 129).

²⁴ SCPAS published with the *Pacific Islands Monthly* in a section called *Mana* from 1973. After three years the arrangement with *PIM* was terminated and the organisation was able to afford its own independent publication – the *Mana Journal* - in 1976 (Crocombe 1980:141).

[Since] the publication of writings by Pacific Islanders through SPCAS, a great deal of interest has been focused on the development of writing in the South Pacific in overseas journals of literature. A large proportion of all creative writings in the Pacific in the 1970s was[sic] first published by SPCAS (Crocombe 1980:141)

SPCAS is mentioned across the seminal critical literature, acknowledged for its influence and support during the early stages of national literatures and the regional “South Pacific/Pacific Literary” tradition. This acknowledgement is measured by the breadth of publication it helped facilitate through the publishing arm of the organisation – Mana Publications²⁵ - and the number of noteworthy writers and scholars associated with it that went on to write influential works of fiction, poetry and critical thought. These works have had a variety of successes within the region and outside it. The influence of SPCAS, Crocombe and other key figures involved is also clarified by imagining a historical narrative where Crocombe and her colleagues had not begun SPCAS – what would the field have become? Indeed, would it have begun at all?

Imagining an absence of any Pacific writing during the 1970s seems impossible now when the genesis of Pacific literature is so deeply rooted in the reaction and response of the indigenous Pacific to the colonial narrative. Any imagined absence of indigenous self-determination with Pacific literature now seems absurd. And yet it also reveals the importance of SPCAS and the deep significance of Crocombe and her fellow contemporaries in working so tirelessly (the editor of *PIM* described Crocombe as “indefatigable”, 1980:140) during this early stage. It is made doubly important for this thesis as I acknowledge the enormous contribution Marjorie Crocombe (a Cook Islander, no less!) has given to the wider Pacific field and this field that I have begun researching.

Alongside Crocombe, of course, were many others who were integral founders and contributors to the organisation, its journals and Pacific literature at large. They included Albert Wendt, Ken Arvidson, Satendra Nandan, Subramani and pertinent to this thesis, Cook Islanders Makiuti Tongia and Kauraka Kauraka. As well as being accomplished writers, Crocombe, Tongia and Kauraka have been utilised for their skills as editors and their linguistic expertise. Tongia, who was another recipient of the post-independence scholarship schemes, leant his editing skills to the student magazine *Unispac* and the *MANA Journal*

²⁵ The publishing arm of SPCAS, Mana Publications, was established in 1974 (Lynch & Mugler 1999).

while studying at the USP in Fiji. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he then went on to publish his first collection of poetry called *Korero* in 1977. Pieces from this collection have been proclaimed by Subramani, Keown and Wendt, archetypal examples of early Pacific post-independence poetry and have been used in education textbooks (Crocombe 1981:12), quoted in discussions of regional postcolonial discourse (Hereniko c1999:146) and included in anthologies across the region (Wendt 1980:16-8; 1995:57-59).

Kauraka Kauraka published his first poetry collection in 1985, entitled *Return to Havaiki: Fokihanga Havaiki*. It was followed by three other poetry collections *Dreams of the rainbow = Moemoea a te anuanua* (1987), *Manakonako = Reflections* (1992) and his posthumous *Taku Akatauirā: My Dawning Star* in 1999. He also published a collection of legends, *Legends from the Atolls* (1984) and *Tales from Manihiki* (1982), most stories from his own island of Manihiki. Perhaps one of the most impressive qualities of Kauraka's oeuvre is his provision of writing in both his native Maori and the more widely read, English. The only other to have provided this dynamic to their work is Mike Tavioni, whose poetry collection *Speak Your Truth* (2002) included two versions of texts in English and the Rarotongan dialect of Cook Islands Maori. Other Cook Islands poets have included varying amounts of Cook Islands words and phrases throughout their work, heavily supplemented with glossaries and footnote references (this is seen in the work of the three writers in Chapter 3). Kauraka, however, skilfully writes in both languages – an extraordinary characteristic of his literary style. His work is also given further attention in the following chapter.

Tongia and Kauraka's works have trail-blazing status within the field. By the late 1980s, Crocombe, Tongia and Kauraka had all published their own collections and undertaken editorial work for Cook Islands material. Campbell was continuing to publish in New Zealand and connections had begun to form between him and his Cook Islands contemporaries. It was by the mid-1980s that Cook Islanders had finally begun to publish with the support of one another through networking and collective involvement in key organisations. One of the principal organisations, specifically catering to the first generation of Cook Islands writers, was the Ta'unga Creative Writers and Artists Association.

2.3.3 Ta'unga & the anthologies: into the 1990s

By the end of the 1980s, recipients of the 1960s scholarship schemes had finished their tertiary education and were returning to their respective home islands as a new class that scholars and commentators retrospectively named “the educated elite”²⁶. Most had gained their qualifications and experience from the University of the South Pacific (and its regional centres) and the writers had, as members, writers and/or editors, been a part of SPCAS. On their return to the Cook Islands, a gap in the provision of local support for literature seemed obvious. Crocombe’s article in *Akono’anga* (2003:81-6) outlines a number of different organisations that appeared during this time, including: poet Michael Tavioni’s Akatikitiki Arts Inc.; Te Pua Neinei created by author Lynnsay Rongokea Francis²⁷; Tango Tupuna and the Kau Ta’unga Society which was set up by Kauraka Kauraka.

One of the organisations that seemed to have some endurance (though there were intermittent periods of inactivity) was the Ta’unga Creative Writers and Artists Association which was set up by “Vereara Maeva, Vaine Rasmussen and others” (86). In a personal communication with Rasmussen this year, she recalled the inception of the organisation. On her return from university, Rasmussen and colleague Tere Tarapu²⁸ were sent to a children’s story-writing workshop in Samoa. After the workshop she returned to Rarotonga and a meeting was held with the other founders (she specifically mentions Marjorie Crocombe and Makiuti Tongia). At its conclusion a non-profit organisation was formed (Rasmussen, pers comm. 2012). There has been little mention of other Cook Islands literary organisations across the wider critical literature however Ta’unga has been referred to numerous times. Apart from cursory mention, however, finding any detailed historical account of the organisation in print has been difficult.

Their comparative visibility may also be due to the collections published by the organisation and, the size and quality of publication penned by members of the organisation and published by other means. While numerous local organisations in the home islands had

²⁶ Subramani briefly explores the genesis of a group he names the “emerging elite” that appeared predominantly at the USP during the 1970s. This is covered in his “Chapter Two: Literature and the Emerging Elites”. He asserted that the “*Unispac* group led by Ata Ma’ai’i, Vanessa Griffen and Raymond Pillai; Jo Nacola’s drama club; the writers’ association called by John Collins and Ron White...Ken Arvidson’s literary society [and; the] South Pacific Creative Arts Society” made up this group” (18). They were important for their pioneering organisations, publications and in some cases, their overlap/networking with other governing and political elites.

²⁷ Francis is perhaps best known for her book on tivaivai, *The art of tivaevae: traditional Cook Islands quilting* (2001). It featured interviews and a series of high-resolution photographs displaying the work of accomplished quilt-makers throughout the Cook Islands.

²⁸ Tarapu published four Maori poems in *Mana* and his first poetry collection, *Matapo O Te Ngakau* was published in 1994. He attended teachers college with Tongia and Aituan cultural expert and writer, Paiere Mokoroa (Crocombe 2003:89).

appeared for writers in the 1970s and 80s, few of them managed to publish regularly and endure. There have, however, been a number of successful Cook Islands anthologies and collections with involvement from Ta'unga members. One of the first of its kind, *Purua* was published in 1980 and edited by Tongia. The collection featured poetry in English and Maori and was published by Purua and the Teachers College. It is perhaps one of the earliest (if not *the* earliest) example of a Cook Islands anthology, published in the home islands. Complimentary to *Purua*, Wendt's *Lali: A Pacific Anthology* (1980) also featured poetry by Tongia²⁹ (16-18), two short stories by Marjorie Crocombe³⁰ (3-15) and poem by little known Cook Islands poet, Ta Makirere³¹ (19) in the same year.

In 1984 Ta'unga as an organisation published *Ta'unga '84* (1984), an anthology of poetry and short stories, in English and Cook Islands Maori. The serial was to be the association's annual publication with work from its members and other pertinent news for the organisation. This unfortunately never came to fruition. The *Ta'unga '84* issue did, however, feature members Bobby Turua, Florence Syme-Buchanan, Kauraka, Mona Matepi, Anne Caffrey and others. These five writers in particular are mentioned for their appearance in other Cook Islands anthologies. In particular, the Tongia edited *Tipani: Poems of the Cook Islands* (1991) which was jointly published by Ta'unga, Akatikitiki, the Tauranga Vananga (Ministry of Cultural Development in the Cook Islands) and the Cook Islands USP Extension Centre. Such an associated effort to produce the collection in some ways reflects the community between Cook Islands institutions of learning and literature at that time. It also suggests key motivating figures at a certain period of time (1970s-80s), across certain networks that were able to make such a collective publication materialise. In his parting words on the final page of the collection, Tongia writes,

These poems give deeper insights into vital aspects of the dynamic search for a new identity and culture in the Cook Islands than volumes of scientific treatises. Anyone interested in understanding these islands today will want a copy. (1991:62)

His words seem appropriate at a time of considerable political and social change in the Cook Islands and the region. Following some of the broad sentiments expressed in poetry being produced through SPCAS in Fiji (Subramani 13-30), pieces in the *Tipani* collection

²⁹ "Beware of Dog" (16); "I'm Not Evil" (17); "Spirit of the Land" (18) (Wendt 1980).

³⁰ "The Healer" (3); "Bush Beer" (11) (ibid.)

³¹ "Suva Sun" (ibid.)

addressed the colonial/native binary which had until this point lacked commentary from indigenous Cook Islanders through Anglophone poetry. Syme-Buchanan's opening line to her poem and the collection: "Here we are, our mongrel selves" (1) in some ways sets the tone for the rest of the anthology – a collection of work addressing identity, self, the understanding of the colonial past and a(n) (at the time) shifting postcolonial present. Scattered throughout are illustrations by established Cook Islands (Atiu) artist and teacher Ian George. The contrasting symmetry of the cover picture³² may also indicate the state of political and cultural transition happening in the Cook Islands at the time and certainly, what many of the poems in the collection addressed.

Between the mid-1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, Kauraka published his poetry collection *Dreams of the Rainbow* (1987) and his collection of legends in Maori, *E au tuatua Ta'ito no Manihiki*. Alistair Te Ariki Campbell also began his trilogy of novels with *The Frigate Bird* in 1989 and the second book, *Sidewinder* in 1991. In the same year Rasmussen published her first poetry collection *Maiata* (1991), earning her status as the first Cook Islands woman writer to publish a collection of poetry. *Maiata* is a poignant collection of pieces that resonate with Pacific and Cook Islands imagery, symbolism and metaphor, from an "insider" perspective. In the opening poem she immediately connects with the reader as she addresses the figurative second person: "Take me". In each stanza the reader is enveloped in a particular time and place, as the poet provides a description that has a sense of intimate and nostalgic, affection:

Take me
To your island feast
And to the sound of the pau
We will make love
in the moon's delight

Take me
To your fishing trips
And together we'll
watch the a'ai
bite our feet

Take me

³² In the cover picture of the Tipani collection, George has drawn three humanoid totems that are tattooed differently on one half of their respective faces. One figure faces forward in the foreground, while the other two are smaller, situated in the background, and are in profile looking to the left and to the right. There is a sense of sameness (particularly in his use of clean, curved black lines and intricate geometric patterning) with difference as symmetry is contrasted against the individualistic touches of patterning on each face. This seems to appropriately reflect Tongia's sentiments about searching for a new identity and culture – one that is at the same time new but rooted in Cook Islands traditions.

To your taro harvest
And in the mud
we'll grasp for
the last root

(Rasmussen 1991:1)

Rasmussen's poetics are discussed further in the following chapter and will address in particular her use of symbolism, imagery and Cook Islands iconography.

In 1992, Tom Davis published his historical novel, *Vaka: Saga of a Polynesian Canoe*. Like his novel *Makutu*, this work of historical fiction failed to gain the same degree of attention that other later Pacific novels had acquired by this time – Wendt's 1973 novel *Sons for the Return Home*, and the work of New Zealand Maori writers Witi Ihimaera (*Tangi* 1974, *The Matriarch* 1986), Patricia Grace (*Potiki*, 1986) and Keri Hulme (*The Bone People* 1983) as cases in point. Elizabeth DeLoughrey echoes some of the sentiments Subramani had in regards to *Makutu*, as she argues in her book *Routes and Roots* (2007):

The Davises' first novel, *Makutu*, was accused of drawing too heavily from romantic South Seas fiction..., and we can extend that claim to *Vaka*'s inscription of the maritime adventure... Consequently, *Vaka* does less to decolonize history than to construct regional identity by literalizing the etymology of "diaspora", producing the voyaging canoe as a vessel of what Leed calls the "spermatic journey" across space and time (DeLoughrey 139)

Paul Sharrad, whom DeLoughrey also quotes, conceded that Davis' novel "[read] like an interminable school history text" (DeLoughrey 137) but her use of the text in her book does highlight the importance of the "vaka" as a major trope within Pacific postcolonial literature. Davis' novel is a comprehensively researched attempt to "chart Polynesian settlement of Oceania" (134) and DeLoughrey's analysis is apt. However, as I stitch this pattern to the backing cloth, a long thread attaches the novel to various points of relevance within the Cook Islands literary field and thus, the novel becomes one of significance within this context. It (importantly) adds to a relatively short list of Cook Islands novels³³, though even then it is somewhat removed by its condition as historical fiction. *Vaka* voyaging as a significant cultural practice within the Cook Islands is also acknowledged with the novel, as well as

³³ Apart from the Davis' *Makutu* (1960), and Campbell's fiction (see: bibliography), there has been no other novels written by Cook Islanders that I have been able to determine.

prompting this thesis to acknowledge the way the *vaka/pahi*³⁴ has been used to translate, articulate and discuss Cook Islands stories of diaspora and identity in a number of Cook Islands texts³⁵.

In the same year, Jon Jonassen published another collection of legends and ghost stories, *The ghost at Tokoatarava and other stories of the Cook Islands* (1992). Though this thesis does not overtly focus on children's literature, some exemplary children's writers should be noted, among them; Johnny Frisbie, Mona Matepi (also featured in Wendt's *Nuanua* her short-story "Grandmother and the Mat", p. 60) and Tai'a Scheel who published their stories through the Ministry of Education and its publishing arm, Learning Media (Matepi 2000, 1999a, 1999b; Frisbie 1994, 1991; Scheel 1998). Tongia has been integral in encouraging teachers to write (Crocombe 2003:86; *Purua*) and as noted, Jonassen and Kauraka have been pivotal compilers of traditional myth and legend through collection; editing, translating and re-telling during the 1980s (see the bibliography for a list of titles).

Also published in 1992 was Marjorie Crocombe's anthology *Te Rau Maire*. The anthology compiled work from indigenous Pacific writers and celebrated the 6th Festival of Pacific Arts, held in Rarotonga in 1992 (Crocombe *et al.* iv). It featured the few prominent Cook Islands-based writers of the First Wave: Tongia, Kauraka, Jonassen, Rasmussen and to a lesser extent, Nanette Woonton and Takiora Ingram. Many had been included in *Purua*, *Tipani* and went on to be included in Wendt's *Nuanua* (1995). One important aspect of this collection is the inclusion of island nations that even Wendt's contemporary anthologies failed to include as the anthology also involved Belau, Guam, Nauru, Norfolk, Marshall Islands and the Northern Marianas reflecting the occasion and the wide-reaching networks at the disposal of Crocombe *et al.*'s experience.

³⁴ Both of these words refer to the large traditional double-hulled ocean-going vessels that were widely believed to have transported indigenous Pacific peoples, enabling widespread settlement throughout the region.

³⁵ Karl Kiterangi's play *Between the Islands* has the vaka voyaging tradition as a central device within his play. The vaka is also used by a number of writers to convey their meditations on diaspora, and historical and familial genealogy (see: Powell 2011).

2.3.4 The 2000s & Beyond

A survey of writing from 2000 onwards shows a decline in the frequency of publication and a more pronounced presence of writing by those identifying as Cook Islands Maori within the New Zealand diaspora. In 2000, Jean Tekura Mason and Vaine Rasmussen edited the *Mana: Cook Islands Special* edition. The anthology featured writing in English and Maori; writers of Cook Islands background who were born in the home islands and in the diaspora and those who were not of a Cook Islands background but who had lived and experienced the home islands. Such a collection – one by Cook Islanders - had not been seen since Crocombe *et al.* had published the pan-Pacific *Te Rau Maire* in 1992. This almost decade gap showed some similarities in subject matter and poetic across the texts in these respective collections. Contrast was seen as a result of the criteria used for inclusion in *Mana: Cook Islands*, thus showing a far wider age range, a larger pool of contributors and an increasing prominence of diasporic pressures and experience within the texts themselves.

Rasmussen and Mason wrote in their introduction that the edition hoped to,
...capture not just the lifestyle of Cook Islanders at present but over time. [It] also reflects the experience of Cook Islanders as an emigrant, as well as an indigenous people, and the experience of Cook Islanders who grew up in New Zealand visiting their home for the first time (iv).

Their approach to the journal on the cusp of a new millennium reflected a shift in the diversity of Cook Islands identity and renewed a concern with how Cook Islands artists and writers were portraying this in their work. As in the Cook Islands work of *Te Rau Maire*, many of the pieces in *Mana* reflected on God (Christian faith), appreciation of the environment and place in the home islands, family, nostalgia and wider urgent political and economic issues pertaining to the Cook Islands. Rob Wilson, who reviewed the collection in *The Contemporary Pacific*, wrote that the publication:

...offer[ed] testimony to a mixed heritage of cultures, languages, and open directions. The dominant tone of this eclectic anthology is lyrical and humorous, more given to fusion and acceptance than to rage or exclusion, more tied to chant and song than to decolonizing critique or polemic (Wilson 2002: 511).

Wilson's comments offer some insight into the difference between the material in this collection and the earlier Cook Islands anthologies. In terms of tone toward the prevalent

treatment of the colonial project by Pacific writers during the 1970s and onward, the collection presented pieces that were as Wilson puts it, “more given to fusion...than to rage” (511). In contrast to Tongia’s “To God” (1977:1) or “Burning Hell” (2), Samantha Aue’s poem “Talents of My Heart” celebrates people and place, imploring the reader to: “Look around you / And see the creations of our / Almighty God”.

After her editorial work on the *Mana* edition, Jean Tekura Mason published her first poetry collection *Tatau = Tattoo* (2001), becoming only the second Cook Islands woman poet to produce such a publication. Like Rasmussen’s *Maiata* and *Te Ava-Ora* (1999), many of the pieces in Mason’s collection were personal reflections of her experience of the home islands and meditations on shifting cultural identity and practises. As Sullivan noted the relevance of Campbell’s biography in reading his work, Mason’s emphasis on the island of Ma’uke, and her British and Cook Islands Maori background, within her work seem to be a significant part of her individual poetics. These recurring aesthetics within her work are appropriately connected to the backing-cloth as identity politics have become increasingly popular in contemporary Pacific discourse.

In 2002, Audrey Brown published her solo collection *Threads of Tivaevae: Kaleidoscope of Kolours*, collaborating with Cook Islands visual artist Veronica Vaevae, who provided artwork throughout. As mentioned, Keown (2007:201) commented on the postmodern style of Brown’s work, a characteristic that Wilson called, “textual experiment” (511). I argue that Brown’s work is demonstrably part of a contemporary generation of writers and writing still being added to and therefore I have not included her in the analysis chapter of this thesis. The postmodern poetics of her poetry clearly depart from some of the similarities and connections I make between the four early writers in the following chapter. Keown and Subramani have both noted the postmodern characteristic of Brown’s poetry as Keown quotes Brown’s “o’er dose on the self-indulgence of self-importance” in order to illustrate the success that Brown has had with her “postmodernist experimentation with political commentary” (Keown 2007:201). Brown’s status as one of a very small number of contemporary Cook Islands poets and her poetics will be considered later in Chapter Four.

Michael Tavioni, an accomplished artist, carver, tattooist and cultural commentator published his first poetry collection *Speak Your Truth* in 2002. His work focused on issues of cultural identity and diaspora. Tavioni is a compelling example of the multiple ways in which

Cook Islands people express their cultural identity through various forms of artistic expression. Tavioni's well-known carvings are iconic to the Cook Islands tourism aesthetic and his poetry speaks frankly about the contemporary pressures on the Cook Islands identity. In the late 1980s, Tavioni penned a document – “Sink or Swim” (2003) - that provided suggestions for Cook Islanders who were continuing to look to migration as a natural course for socio-economic stability. Tavioni has a forthcoming poetry collection awaiting publication.

The major pan-Pacific *Whetu Moana* collections of the post-2000 era showcased the work of Michael Greig. His biography vaguely gestures to his affiliations with the Northern Cook Islands group, though he has resided in Nelson, New Zealand for some time (68-70). As Kauraka does, Griegg incorporates the Northern Manihikian dialect of Cook Islands Maori in his poetry and his pieces featured in *Whetu Moana* are redolent of the Cook Islands literary aesthetic. As will be shown in the following chapter, his focus on Maui as a legendary figure and also a central figure in his identity as a “Northern Cook Islander” echoes and reinforces the claims I make about Maui's role in cultural tradition and identity within Kauraka's poetics. Griegg's multicultural background is also gestured to in *Mauri Ola* (2010) where his poem “Tango” juxtaposed the foreign form of dance against the similar emancipation afforded within the Peruvian context. As the poetic voice addresses his uncle, “Why do you dance Tango, Uncle? It is not culturally appropriate, not PC for PIs” the following stanzas elucidate the importance of acknowledging similar histories and similar pursuits for memorialisation and the historical “truths” that this memorialisation might reveal.

Courtney Meredith was also featured in *Mauri Ola* with her two poems “No Motorbikes, No Golf” (130) and “Cloth saints” (132). A student of Selina Tusitala Marsh's Stage 3 Pacific Literature course at the University of Auckland, Meredith is now acknowledged as part of a new contemporary generation of young Pacific poets, a cohort that is currently growing within the Auckland Pacific community. Meredith is of mixed Samoan and Cook Islands descent (Wendt *et al.* 2010:130; Reeves 2011) and published her first solo collection *Brown Girls in Bright Red Lipstick* (2012) earlier this year. She also has a forthcoming collection *Silvertip* which will be published as part of Landfall's Frankfurt edition (“About << Courtney Sina Meredith”).

Presently more renown for her status as a playwright, Miria George began as a poet. During her time at the International Institution of Modern Letters in Wellington New Zealand, George released her first poetry collection *The Wet Season* in 2005. The collection was funded by Creative New Zealand and printed by Waiteata Press. The small printing press had also published Alistair Te Ariki Campbell's work. George's pieces in this collection were short and complex, reminiscent of the contemporary style apparent in Courtney Meredith's poetry. George's collection will be commented on further in the concluding Chapter Four.

The post-2000 era also saw an upsurge in the writing being produced by diasporic Cook Islanders in New Zealand, particularly in drama and theatre. Karl Kiterangi, of Atiuan descent and an ex-student of Toi Whakaari, wrote *Between the Islands* in 2000. The play was performed by the theatre group The Cook Islands All-Stars and was performed as part of the Wellington Fringe Festival in 2000. Sadly, there were no other following productions from the group, but the play reflected on the vaka voyaging tradition and the engagement of the protagonist, Ta'i, with his Cook Islands culture as he travels to Rarotonga for the first time, from his "diasporic" home in the Porirua, Wellington. Kite-Rangi elaborates on the vaka trope that DeLoughrey expands on in her *Roots and Routes* and in doing so, considers the importance of the vaka tradition as a way of accessing cultural identity and traditions. The play uses some of the dramatic techniques utilised by Miria George in her *Sunset Road* and others previously mentioned in relation to John Kneubuhl's dramaturgy (see: 2.1 Stitching in Time).

In my correspondence with Audrey Brown earlier this year I was fortunate to receive the unpublished manuscript of her forthcoming second collection of poetry entitled *Passages In Between I(s)lands* (2012). The forthcoming and existing current publications of the writers within this section signal a perpetuation of publication across the field, particularly with the contemporary poets of the 2000s. While this is encouraging, the efforts of Tavioni with his *Voices Along the Wayside* (2010) and the mentoring, teaching and facilitating being fostered by others suggest that the intent for more Cook Islands stories to be told through creative writing exists. Brown's unpublished collection³⁶, while in some ways being produced in isolation, is importantly a collection that this field will absorb into its growing genealogical aesthetic. The backing-cloth with which these contemporary writers are sewn also reflects the

³⁶ Brown is currently seeking publishers for her work, *passages in between i(s)lands* (N.d)

changing socio-economic realities of Cook Islands people and these texts and writers – through the process of production and the content *within* them – also reflect this.

Chapter Three – Tuitui’anga: “Each stitch joins the Tivaevae Pattern to the Back-Bone”³⁷

3.1 Four Cook Islands Writers

This chapter closely reads the texts of four Cook Islands writers: Makiuti Tongia, Kauraka Kauraka, Vaine Iro-Nui Rasmussen and Jean Tekura’i’imoana Mason. As briefly expanded on earlier, the justification for the treatment of these four writers rests on the considerable contributions these four writers have made to the field. It is also reinforced by their status as the four earliest Cook Islands writers, excluding Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, to publish their own individual poetry collections, beginning with Makiuti Tongia in 1977. The order by which I treat their work is chronological from earliest first publication (Tongia), to the most recent (Mason). Though Kauraka has published multiple collections, I focus on his first collection *Return to Havaiki: Fokihanga ki Havaiki* (1985), as I have done with the others. It also appropriately fills the temporal gap between Tongia’s *Korero* and Rasmussen’s first collection *Maiata* (1991). Admittedly, there is a large temporal gap between Mason’s *Maiata* (1991) and Mason’s *Tatau = Tattoo* (2001). I believe this reflects my observation of the tapering frequency by which Cook Islands writers were publishing individual work during the 1990s. It also acknowledges the fact that apart from Kauraka, no other Cook Islander published any individual poetry collection until after 2000.

My analysis of their work uses a postcolonial and diasporic lens to extract some pertinent issues and literary techniques within these texts. It is the hypothesis of this thesis that these two narratives underpin, and have a measurable and perceptible presence, within the work of these writers. Thus, the interrogation concerns itself not with whether or not these narratives are present, but *how* they are apparent within the writers’ respective oeuvres. My analysis necessarily emphasises particular parts of each writers’ poetics, conscious of their nuanced emphasis on facets of the Cook Islands world-view and approaches to their individual production of creative writing.

In subsection 1.2, I cited Pio Manoa’s dialectical model which Subramani attributed as a characteristic of Tongia’s poetry. All four of these poets belong to this same period of “socio-historical reality” and I maintain Manoa’s argument in his generalising of a first and

³⁷ Taken from the first stanza of Va’ine Rasmussen’s poem, “In the Tivaevae” (1991:32).

second phase of poetic reaction within and across First Wave Pacific poetry (Subramani 49). The writing of these four poets possesses a frustration with the effect of colonialism on their perception of culture and their lived experience at the time of writing these texts. Va'ai's PhD thesis and subsequent book *Literary Representations in Western Polynesia: Colonialism and Indigeneity* (1999) also explores the early response and rewriting approach of the first wave Pacific writers from Western Polynesia and I extend this observation to include the four writers within this chapter. In 1993, Hereniko wrote in his article "Pacific Islands Literature" that,

[because] of the colonial experience, the writing in English, by many of the early Pacific writers was a weapon used against colonial oppression, injustices in social and political systems (local or imposed), corruption, social and cultural change threatening the quality of life in the islands, and personal and national attempts to attain self-determination..." (Hereniko 1993:48).

Certainly, many of the issues that Hereniko mentions here are addressed by the four writers in this chapter. Their writing considers deeply the politics of nation and region; the surrounding naturalistic environment and its sustainability as well as the deep spiritual and cultural meaning that environment has for their sense of self and culture; memory, remembering, family; and the impact colonisation, post-colonialism, neo-colonialism and globalisation have played in their lives and those of their loved ones. These texts are polemical, resigned and filled with anger. They are melancholic, reflective and sad meditations on the past, present and possible futures of Cook Islands people and culture. They are also celebratory, appreciative and redolent of the Cook Islands physical and ideological space. r

Ways of reading these texts are necessarily conscious of the oral and cultural traditions preceding them. When reading these texts one must also be aware of the different island affiliations that each writer has. These affiliations reflect relation and genealogy and, I argue, also prompt some of the stylistic characteristics seen in the work of these four writers. Anna-Leena and Jukka Siikala's book *Return to Culture: Oral Tradition and Society in the Southern Cook Islands* (2005) considers the significance of oral tradition and its two strands, *tua ta'ito* and *papa'anga* in the cultural livelihood of Cook Islands people, with a particular emphasis on oral traditions of islands in the Southern Group and more specifically, Ma'uke. In the following sections I refer to Siikala & Siikala's treatment of *tua ta'ito* and *papa'anga* as the two primary ways in which *kōrero* is passed on to subsequent generations and the

relevance this has in the Anglophone poetry of the following writers. Kauraka, an accomplished anthropologist, has also made connections between the traditional story-telling structures from his island of Manihiki, admitting to using these same traditional structures in the composition of his own poetry (Kauraka 1985:v).

My analysis is also conscious of the connection that these writers make between pre-colonial and pre-Christian ideas of Cook Islands cultural identity. By nature, these texts grapple with the changing Cook Islands identity that has been inherently affected by postcolonial and diasporic phenomena. This includes the effects of missionisation, colonisation, migration, global politics and economy, and other related issues and ideas. In an effort to map and understand these influences on the Cook Islands cultural identity, these writers have reached into the past and carefully considered the effects of colonial history and how Cook Islands people engage (or indeed, do *not* engage with it) in the postcolonial present of their writing. Their writing is a snapshot of a time that is entangled with the postcolonial and diasporic issues of that present. *How* they engage with these examinations, however, is what contributes to the individual aesthetics of their “patterns” that I sew to the backing-cloth.

3.2 Makiuti Tongia

Makiuti Tongia has often been cited by those Pacific literary scholars addressing the polemics of the Pacific art renaissance and the wider political and ideological motivators behind that movement (Hereniko c1999; Wendt 1993). The beginnings of the Pacific literary tradition had a number of key figures at the centre of its creation, and as I acknowledged in the previous chapter, in varying capacities, Tongia was a prominent figure in that narrative. He was born in Rarotonga in 1953 and received his secondary education in the Cook Islands. Following this early period, the biography given in *Akono'anga Maori* states that Tongia received his tertiary education at:

...the University of the South Pacific in Fiji (BA in social sciences), Ohio University and Western Kentucky University (MA in ethnology). He studied for an MA (business studies) with Massey University. He has done short courses in Australia, India and Malaysia (Crocombe et al, 346).

If Tongia's exceptional ability as a creative and critical thinker is not evident from his qualifications, then his career as an anthropologist, scholar, curator, politician, editor and poet should give a strong indication of his critical and creative contributions to Cook Islands people and the field.

His inclusion in this chapter of my thesis rests on these extensive achievements and further, the depth and arresting quality of his poetry. In 1977 (with a reprint in 1991), Tongia published his first solo poetry collection, *Korero*, through the SPCAS-owned, Mana Publications. While Alistair Te Ariki Campbell had published a number of poetry collections in New Zealand before 1977, Tongia's was the first Cook Islander published in the Cook Islands (this is in contrast to Campbell who lived and primarily wrote, in New Zealand). This status alone justifies the treatment of his work here and by the roles he has played in the history of the Cook Islands and wider Pacific literary tradition.

By the time *Korero* was published, Pacific scholars and students began to look retrospectively at the period immediately following independence and a number of philosophical and scholarly trends became apparent. Foremost, were the ideological shifts that mirrored changes experienced by other major postcolonial art movements – those in India and Africa, as cases in point. In this way, the writing of Pacific people and the

ideologies underpinning them were particularly anti-European and anti-colonial in their constitution. Tongia, as an early scholar and poet following this period of independence, was among the first wave to consider the trajectory of the Pacific once the shackles (or at least many of the formal constitutional ones) of colonialism had been shed.

Because of the early nature of Tongia's work, it seems unsurprising that many scholars engaging in the retrospective exercise of analysis during the late 1980s and early 1990s thought to quote his poetry. As the group of educated and critical thinkers developed within indigenous Pacific communities, so too did the depth of scholarly enquiry from within those indigenous intellectual groups. Albert Wendt's seminal essay "Towards a New Oceania" (1976) importantly cites Tongia's poem "Beware of Dog", an allegorical reading of the Fiji coup, as an example that illustrates what Wendt called a,

...revolt against the hypocritical/exploitative aspects of our traditional/commercial/and religious hierarchies, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and the degrading values being imposed from outside and by some elements in our societies" (19).

Similarly, Vilsoni Hereniko quoted Tongia's work in his article "Representations of Colonial Identities" (c1999) which explored the expression of cultural identity in Pacific literature and art. As he considered how this was (re)presented in the writing of the First Wave generation, he synthesized some key tropes, metaphors and themes that were employed and examined by them. He, like Wendt, identified an overwhelming anti-colonial and anti-European sentiment being expressed in this early writing, and as an exemplar, quoted Tongia's "Missionary", a poem reflecting on the compromised "Maori identity" with the onset of missionisation (6). He wrote that most of the writers from this period:

...straddled two worlds: that of the rural villages in which they grew up and the urban world in which the colonizers values and customs reigned supreme. Marginalized from their own societies and feeling their loss and alienation acutely, their literary attempts were suffused with anger and rejections of Christianity and Western values (146).

Indeed, many of the observations Hereniko makes about these early writers are apparent in Tongia's work. There is a distinct sense within this collection that there are dual worlds also being explored. Cultural identity and the straddling of two worlds are demonstrably apparent in his poem "Outcast" where the diasporic experience of the poetic

consciousness clashes with the home-islands context, and the urban world is described devouring the traditional setting of Tongia's home island in "Ora" and "Broken". Discontent with Christian and Western values, is palpable in a number of these texts (explored further in this chapter).

When Hereniko cited Tongia's poem "Missionary" in his article "Representations", it followed ni-Vanutau poet, Albert Leomala's well-known poem "Kros" (146). Leomala's piece clearly rallied against what the poetic voice perceived to be the dominating and destructive nature of Christianity on his indigenous cultural identity, where he wrote in one stanza:

Cross I hate you
You are killing me
You are destroying
My traditions
I hate you Cross

There is a clear binary present in this text, a clear position of "I" and "you", the representative cross of Christianity. Clearly, this reflects the characteristic binarism of First Wave poetry produced during the 1980s as written by Wendt, Hereniko, Va'ai and others. As shown above, Tongia has also been alluded to within this framework of binarism, however my analysis argues for more subtle nuances within his poetry, nuances that also consider the spectrum of complicity and the grey area between the "I" and the "you", the "them" and the "us", so often referred to when discussing the tension between the colonial project and the indigenous oppressed.

Within *Korero* Tongia's engagement with the narrative of missionisation and the consequences wrought on Cook Islands culture is an investigative and reflective exercise. Much as Sina Va'ai observed the need "...that Islanders felt to address the legacy and impact of colonialism" (24), Tongia, I argue, attempts a similar exercise. Va'ai's focus on "colonialism" looks at the wider narrative and in this section I consider the part that missionisation has played in that narrative, within the Cook Islands context. The re-indigenising of history was a conscious endeavour by the leading scholars of the First Wave (in literature and otherwise) as their visionary approach to their scholarship considered re-indigenised ways of engaging with the future of the region. This approach importantly acknowledged the need to look backward under the auspices of what Marsh called the "old Pacific adage": facing the future with their backs (Marsh 2007; Va'ai 1999). Tongia enacts

this, as the negative and positive effects of Western influence on contemporary Cook Islands culture are explored in a number of his texts. It is evident in some of these pieces that this inquiry has been encouraged by the postcolonial era, where in realising the fragility of the Cook Islands identity, Tongia and his Cook Islands contemporaries have looked into the past for solutions and ways to reason the current circumstances of culture and identity (see: Rasmussen, 3.4).

In particular, I discuss Tongia's interrogation of the psychological colonisation engendered by missionisation during first contact. In contrast to Leomala's clearly binaristic "Kros", I argue for a more nuanced treatment within Tongia's work. His texts subtly query the narrative of missionisation in the experience of his ancestors and consider deeply the fundamental changes that this agenda wrought on cultural identity and the preservation of cultural ritual and tradition. His contrast of biblical and Christian symbols against Cook Islands imagery and iconography, in their marked difference, gesture to the tensions between the continuity of ancient cultural practises and the widespread adoption of Christianity by his ancestors and contemporary Cook Islands society. Importantly, his texts illuminate the complexity of reconciling the two within the postcolonial present.

In the second half of this sub-chapter, I look at national identity (as opposed to cultural identity) within this collection. Much of the socio-political history embedded within the backing-cloth is aware of the changing Cook Islands cultural identity, underpinned by the sometimes blurred understanding of the conceptual borderlines between the Cook Islands as a nation and the Cook Islands as an extension and/or domain of New Zealand. The neo-colonial effects of New Zealand administration have had subtle and obvious effects on the maintenance of Cook Islands identity. For some, these distorted borderlines and the diasporic movement that this conceptual boundary has allowed (in some ways encouraged), has made it difficult to understand and/or assert allegiance to their nation(s) and even their Pacific neighbours – neighbours whom are relations in blood, as well as relations of parallel, and in some cases connecting, colonial narratives.

These two sub-sections are connected by the importance of *korero* as a cultural tradition but also as a key literary device that is interlinked with the now familiar cultural concept of *papa'anga* within this thesis. Tongia's title poem "Korero" aptly signifies the wider theme of the collection, and suggests within his poem of the same name (13), how and

why the poet has engaged with these tributaries of history. Tongia defines “Korero” as, “history, tradition, culture” (13). Siikala & Siikala expand on this, writing that:

The oral tradition known as *kōrero*, “history”, represents the speech of ancestors, the knowledge inherited from the authoritative past. The *kōrero* can be characterized as mythic historical knowledge and it contains both cosmological and historical information. With the typical Polynesian emphasis on cultural continuity, *kōrero* is metadiscursively defined mainly as discourse about origins. The founder-focused ideology highlights naturally the importance of genealogy but is never sufficient without further qualifications (61).

Siikala & Siikala’s more expansive definition suggests more than just a linear narrative of history. Granted their intended purpose for this definition is focused on their examination of the Southern Cook Islands oral traditions, however, it continues to serve this reading of written literature as well and importantly highlights the significant connection between traditional oral narratives and Cook Islands creative writing. Inclusion of tradition and culture within Tongia’s definition and the “authoritative” nature of the past are crucial points to be aware of as I discuss the broad themes of missionisation and national identity in the following sub-sections. Both are a product of, and catalyst for, the body of knowledge known as *korero*.

3.2.1: Submission, slavery and a “swampy coast for the *namu*”

As eluded to briefly in 2.3.1, the arrival of missionaries in the Cook Islands during the early 1800s had far-reaching effects on Cook Islands culture. Te’atamira Makirere authored the chapter “‘Irinaki’anga: Changing Beliefs and Practices” in Crocombe et al.’s *Akonoanga Maori* where he wrote a first person prose chapter on the change from ancient beliefs and practises to the arrival of missionaries; in particular the London Missionary Society, in 1821. Interestingly, Makirere devotes most of the chapter to ancient beliefs, contrasted against a relatively short reflection on “The missionaries” (117). There is a tone of ambivalence in the chapter as he writes, “The missionaries were perhaps too hasty in destroying everything native. They should have taken the time to study the people and their culture more closely.” And continues on, perhaps ironically, “I would probably have acted as they did: I would have been fully clothed whereas they were not” (Makirere 117). This two-sided perspective attempts to provide understanding of the missionary agenda from a “native” perspective, while splitting allegiance between the importance of ancient cultural traditions as fundamental parts of the Cook Islands identity and the well-meaning missionary, as purveyors of Christian enlightenment. Tongia engages with this ambivalence in the following texts that I treat in this subsection.

Korero - the cultural concept as outlined above by Siikala & Siikala and Tongia himself - suggests that history, remembering, and *papa’anga* are inseparable denominators of understanding cultural identity within the present continuous: an unbroken process of cultural fluidity, adaptation and change, informed by the past. Within Tongia’s writing, however, there is a distinct sense that missionisation in some ways attempts to upset this cultural idea – an attempt at erasure of the cultural tradition that existed before the arrival of missionaries. Makirere mentions Reverend John Williams who, he writes,

...said there were some good things about native customs and habits. Our people were all heathen, needing salvation, and salvation to him meant not only giving up idols and heathen obscenities, but also adopting western clothing and copying, as far as possible, the customs of [the] respectable bourgeois tradesman (117).

This abrasive attitude, alleged or true, remains a key historical narrative, interwoven within the backing-cloth of this writing.

In Tongia's title poem "Korero" (13), the collective "we" reflects on the effect of colonisation and missionisation:

In quiet submission
we slaved.
In the past we helped the
administrators'[sic] destroy
the *korero* of our fathers.
Today we labour unceasingly
to hold the new *korero*,
carved from the years of
slavery and awakening.

In using the words "In quiet submission / we slaved", the reader becomes aware of an alternative perspective to the explicit binary presented in Leomala's "Kros". These two lines suggest an absence of resistance to the "administrators" of later lines and this subtext exacerbates the appalling vision of the second line as the collective "we" are made, and act as, slaves. Alongside the imagery of physical incapacitation evoked by the word "slave", there is also a distinct sense of mental submission here as well. Frantz Fanon, a French Algerian psychiatrist and revolutionary writer and thinker in the field of postcolonial studies, wrote that:

Colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it (Fanon 210).

The recurring discussion and presence of missionisation within this collection teases out the popular binary. In these opening lines, Tongia's suggestion of complicity by the collective "we" suggests the possibility of a more complex relationship between indigenous peoples and missionaries. To illustrate what this alleged complexity might comprise, the third and fourth line observes, "In the past we *helped* the / administrators' destroy [my emphasis]". This more nuanced reflection on history gestures to Fanon's words above, and aptly leads into the last half of the poem where Tongia acknowledges the labour of a current generation to hold on to new, re-indigenised understandings of history. This echoes the ambivalent tone of Makirere's chapter, an acknowledgement of oppression through missionisation but also the recognition of past complicity.

In the first poem of the collection, “To God” (1), Fanon’s commentary on the colonisation of indigenous history are paralleled in the powerful imagery of a metaphorical fire.

The *tamanu* timbers fell victim
to the fire’s fury, as the temple
 burned like a scout’s bonfire
While the Christian fire burned down
the last temple of the pagan gods
he shouted:
 ‘From ash to ash
 God, deliver this evil
 away from your land!’
Then he cast his *mana* over
my ancestors and they knelt and
worshipped him.

The metaphorical fire that this poem opens with acts as a dual catalyst for the text and the entire collection. The “fire’s fury” prompts a sense of devastation within the poem but also a sense of exigency amongst the wider collection. It is not hard to read a binary into this imagery, as the “Christian fire” burns down the temple of “pagan gods” – the plurality of gods and idols, clearly averse to the singular God of Christianity. The *tamanu* timbers with which this temple is built suggests the deep significance the wood has as a canvas for the cultural history etched into its body by traditional carvers. This allegory for the destruction wrought by missionisation is striking in its representation here. As the fire destroys a place of pre-colonial spiritual worship, it simultaneously destroys the physical record of traditional cultural history. Considering Fanon’s words, the fire not only consumes the physical temple, but with it, the pride and *mana* with which the ancestors practiced their implied pagan rites. With this metaphorical fire, the practise of pre-colonial ancient beliefs is, “distorted, disfigured and destroyed”. Compounding the “perverted logic” that Fanon expounds, the shouted dialogue of an unidentified “he” draws the reader’s attention to the word “evil”. The submission of “Korero” is realised here as an outsider invokes God, and indigenous right to land is rendered inconsequential when it is declared that the land is in fact God’s land.

As the poem reaches its end, the candidness of the final three lines in its own way emphasises the strength of colonial dominance held within its dialogue. Echoing the imagery of “slaves” in “Korero”, the persona’s ancestors kneel in the presence of this new dominant religion. To emphasise the significance of this submission, Tongia

attributes an indigenous understanding of authority – *mana* – to the foreign other. This bestowal, coupled with the image of the kneeling ancestor, becomes highly symbolic and emotive within the Cook Islands context. Buse *et al.* define (perhaps simplistically) *mana* as to “(Have) authority (legal, moral, religious) and the powers, rights and prestige which this confers” (219). These qualities, included within the meaning of the word *mana*, speak to a highly respected and sacred social status within the Cook Islands world-view³⁸. Therefore, Tongia’s bestowal of *mana* on the unidentified “he” in this poem is highly ironic considering the damage wrought by the arrival of these outsiders (the metaphorical fire). It has literally destroyed the “ancient beliefs” (as Makirere calls it) and cultural practice – the temple and the recorded history – of Cook Islands people.

The significance of slavery within this text also importantly alludes to the history of blackbirding in the Pacific. In the Cook Islands this had particular significance for Tongareva and Pukapuka (Northern Group) when in 1862, the ship *Adelante* collected 263 recruits from Tongareva. They were taken to Peru to become household servants and plantation workers. This form of kidnapping was motivated by the need to fill a labour shortage in Peru, ironically echoing the same motivations behind the mass Pacific migrations to New Zealand in the 1970s (Maude 1968). This incursion, along with missionisation and administrative colonialism, all provide tangible examples of literal slavery within the backing-cloth.

In marked contrast to the last vestiges of pre-colonial beliefs presented in “To God”, Tongia’s “Burning in Hell” (2) is a first person consciousness of a new Christian identity. In this poem, Tongia relates the change of “Chief Taratoa’s son” to a “chiefly son/ of Jehovah”.

I am no more Chief Taratoa’s son,
no more the torch of his pagan *mana*.
Those ancient and highly esteemed
tribal honours of my ancestors are
stripped off me.

³⁸ To have *mana* indicates an individual or group who have proven that they possess the aforementioned values in Buse *et al.*’s definition. Those with *mana* are afforded great respect within Cook Islands communities and are often deferred to within instances of decision-making or areas in which they are considered an expert (*tumu korero*). *Mana* is often acquired through great service to others.

The descriptors used by Tongia underscore the importance of his status as son to a Chief. The dominance of the missionary is implied with his ability to “strip” from Taratoa’s son, the “ancient and highly esteemed / tribal honours” afforded by cultural *mana*. Moreover, in its own way, the technical parallelism apparent in the text reinforces the idea of replacement, the indigene “stripped” and replaced with a person of Christian values. This is highly ironic considering the notion of Christianity as the great equaliser – a faith that propounds the equality of all men under the eyes of God and inherently rejects hierarchy, rendering the importance of Chieftanship inconsequential. This is heightened by the historical truths of missionaries who operated within a cultural framework that rendered the natives as inferior. Finally, intertextuality is apparent and context is reinforced by the placement of these two poems beside one another (pp. 1-2), “Burning in Hell” following “To God”.

Converse to the objective tone of the latter, a more subjective tone pervades the final stanza of “Burning”:

Now I am the torchbearer
 of my Christian saviour.
 He will carry me on his white
 chariot to heaven
 And crown me a chiefly son
 of Jehovah.
 Then my *mana* would be great
 unlike those of my ancestors’
 burning in hell.

The abrupt acceptance of a new belief system in Chief Taratoa’s son is revealing in that with his tribal honours stripped from him, with seeming ease, he adopts Christianity. This brusque compliance is revealing in itself, as the abruptness of this transition suggests the strength (physical and psychological as in the case of slavery) of the missionary rhetoric. Indeed, the arrogance of this agenda is made apparent through the binary-driven character of that rhetoric: the ancient beliefs are labelled “evil” and the ancestors of the first person are pronounced of little *mana*. His acceptance seems to be a result of a colonised history, though there is a subtle sarcasm in the persona’s tone. The last three lines have a sense of a parroted expression, as if the person is repeating the words of someone else or indeed, mimicking the expectations of his new Christian identity. This creates a space where the undertones of ambivalence – conflict and complicity – exemplify the complexity of the missionary narrative that I argue for.

The complex internal negotiations of this Cook Islands identity/persona are also shown in the first stanza of this poem. In a pre-colonial time in which the embedded indigenous belief of tribal honours are prioritised, the missionary psychologically convinces the indigene of his ancestors' wrongness – of their evilness. Elsewhere, critiques of indigenous literature have linked the idea of “goodness” with psychological colonisation, as implied by Fanon's quote above and exemplified in the work of Maori writer, Patricia Grace (see especially *Baby No Eyes*, 1998), an important figure of the Maori renaissance during the 1970s (Visser 2012:203).

This propounded belief in “evil” is further conveyed in Tongia's “Missionary”. The metaphor of the *namu* – the mosquito (6) – and its feeding behaviour is paralleled with missionisation and its proponents. As the mosquito sucks blood from its victims, the reader is reminded of the life-force and vitality that blood represents. In the same way, Tongia's comparison with the missionary agenda suggests their “mission” as life- and livelihood-taking. In this poem Tongia considers the complex effect of conversion in initiating a new spiritual and religious way of life, normalising Christianity above the pagan beliefs of the pre-Christian period. The extent of the effect conversion has had is indicated in another potent reference to the psychology of this religious agenda:

Native minds were reborn
 in woollen suits while
 a new *ta'unga*³⁹ leached their
 crops in the good name
 of the Book
 Today I think of my Maori identity
 And wonder if I should stay in this
 Christian land.

The “woollen suits”, an obvious reference to the standard attire of Western men, is alienated against an inferred setting of the tropical Cook Islands environment. This also resonates with the description of the “civilised” given by Makirere above (117). This stark imagery exacerbates the callousness of the following lines where the implied expropriation of crops both literal and figurative (the seeds of traditional knowledge and cultural practise), reinforce the tension between the Christian schema and the compliant Cook Islander. This compliance is further represented in the employment of an Cook Islands Maori word to denote the priest, “*ta'unga*”. This use of an indigenous word suggests a hybrid identity or perhaps more

³⁹ Tongia gives the definition as “priest” (6) though the online *Cook Islands Maori Dictionary* provide other senses including “cleric”, “doctor”, “An expert, skilled craftsman, one with special lore or skill”.

appropriately, the acceptance of the Church. In the final lines, there is a sense that with this examination of colonised histories, there is an awakening in the poetic voice. The binary tensions begin to prompt considerations of how the flexible Cook Islands identity will fare in the wake of perpetual Christian, and in some ways, implicitly Western interests.

Tongia's interrogation of these narratives has a dual purpose. By retelling this historical narrative within the postcolonial context he was writing into during the 1970s, these creative and poetic engagements would have been a first in Cook Islands creative writing. Therefore, the narratives within these poems would have been relevant and urgent and in some ways they continue to be so now. While seemingly brazen, the alarming imagery evoked by the kneeling and slavery of ancestors within a postcolonial context means that the poem speaks for itself. Yes – this is a version of a historical narrative where missionisation/colonisation has caused a metaphorical incapacitation of cultural tradition and indigenous norms. However, in its emotive undertones, it is also one layer of a history that implies a myriad of other contributing factors, besides the opposing binary forces.

As in the colonised mind of the singular consciousness in “Burning in Hell”, Tongia deliberately provides another contrasting voice to the missionary narrative. He seeks out the indigenous voice of one who might provide answers to the disturbingly uncomplicated shift from “son of Taratoa” to “son of Jehovah”. In his “I’m Not Evil” (12) an unnamed identity is the singular consciousness within this poem. There is the distinction that this consciousness stems from the pre-colonial pagan faith of “To God”, a “beast” that has been “banished” under the thumb of missionisation.

Now that windows are opened
Into the rivers of myths,
 people tell of me
 in the past before
 my Christian banishment.

I was their ally.
Today cobweb minds work late
in the night to instill fear into
their children.
The hills and valleys echo my
Presence.

 And young minds live the story
of me, a beast!

In this stanza, the new generation are stigmatized with the same missionary rhetoric about the ancestors, “instill[ing] fear into / their children”. The idea of evilness is perpetuated: “...young minds live the story / of me, a beast !” while the representative consciousness of cultural tradition pleads with the reader,

‘I’m here, it’s all right,
I’m not evil....’
But no one listens,
Each one of them hurries
To the safety of their *kainga*⁴⁰

This personification of a voice that speaks for the “myth” of a pre-Christian belief system makes real a history before the arrival of missionaries – it gives it life by giving it voice. Layered against the binary, is the presence of spiritual actors (Gods and “ghosts”), independent of Cook Islands people in the present continuous, a representation and personification of *korero* and *papa’anga*, a narrative history that speaks for itself. By acknowledging and incorporating this voice within the poem, Tongia illustrates the cultural loss that has been sustained with missionisation and also reasserts the validity of an indigenous history in contrast to a Western one, by literally give voice to it in the consciousness of this poem. New Zealand Māori writer, Witi Ihimaera, wrote that:

‘Westerners’ often make a distinction between ‘fictitious’ myth and ‘factual’ history, in Māori and other Indigenous Pacific texts, myth is invoked as a means by which to assert land and other cultural rights through descent from the deities who created and still protect the natural world (Ihimaera 1991:53-4).

Ihimaera speaks specifically about the New Zealand Māori context however many have argued for the cultural and genealogical connections between Māori and the wider Pacific, as well as more specifically, New Zealand Māori connection with Cook Islands Maori people. Within the oral and literary tradition, this is exemplified in inter-textual evidence of recurring mythological figures like the Polynesian demi-god Māui, creation stories involving the pulling of land up from the sea, and other recurring deities and idols apparent in both (and wider Polynesian) cultures. Makirere gives the example of Tangaroa in his article (111). The mythic deities mentioned by Ihimaera are seen within the poem by way of their echoed presence in the “hills and valleys”, a constant presence entrenched in, around and through particular *enua*. By adapting Ihimaera’s view of ‘factual myth’ to the Cook Islands context of these pieces, Tongia subtly presents an alternative to a religious purview

⁴⁰ “home” (12)

that believes these pre-Christian beliefs “as evil” and re-contextualises them so that they are centred as ‘factual myth’ – a re-indigenised historical narrative.

With this analysis in mind, other texts in this collection show a consideration of how these different historical narratives of culture and tradition have influenced the fluidity of cultural identity within the postcolonial present that Tongia wrote. As I argued in the introduction, Tongia’s “Lost Soul” (8) suggests that the collection is a process of investigation, as the poetic voice determines:

We blame the *Papa’a*
The Christians and the British,
but our ignorance of their
customs confused us.

In this first stanza, the confusion portrayed in “To God” and the abrupt adoption of Jehovah in “Burning in Hell” is directly confronted. My earlier recognition of the tacit complicity that is being interrogated comes to the fore with this poem. Absent is the “wonder[ing]” of “Missionary”. Instead, Tongia decisively claims “...our ignorance of their /customs confused us”. And with his final stanza it becomes obvious that while this is a revelation, it has also cemented his belief in a “lost” and drifting state of Cook Islands people approaching and during the Independence era.

Mirroring the sentiment in “Lost Soul”, Tongia employs rich imagery to metaphorically show the decadence of pre-colonial Cook Islands culture in his poem “Broken” (Appendix 2). The inferred tropical backdrop to the “woollen suits” of “Missionary” is replaced with a forgotten *are-karioi*⁴¹ that is overgrown with weeds, while “[t]he chants of priests / hang on the breadfruit trees” (14). There is a sense that these physical structures are embedded in the Cook Islands cultural space as Tongia names the house in Cook Islands Maori and its function as an “ancient House” implies its cultural importance. The *are* is left without maintenance or use and the breadfruit trees, endemic in the Pacific islands and its warm climate, are figuratively expropriated by *papa’a* priests as hanging places for their Christian agenda, as if not only people but the very flora and fauna of these islands, are converted. The specific use of the breadfruit tree here further alludes to the Christian ‘bread of life’, emphasising missionary argument for Christianity as essential sustenance for the soul

⁴¹ Ancient House of Entertainment (14)

of man, without which Cook Islands people will die. Tongia's description of "[d]isfigured gods" again contrasts against the implied singular God of Christianity.

With their "auction" (l. 4), the contemporary reader is reminded that Tangaroa (the principle *atua* of the Cook Islands) is now one of the most well-known cultural symbols amongst the Cook Islands tourism industry aesthetic, a symbol that is sold, and used to sell, the Cook Islands as a tourist destination after, itself, going through a process of colonisation and a re-writing of its significance and representation⁴².

In his skilful description and usage of these symbols to explore their comparative past and contemporary relevance, Tongia *re-appropriates* them. He employs this symbolism as a way of reaching back through his understanding of history and pulling their relevance around a centre point of "now". The "beast" is present, whether Cook Islands people are aware of it or not and likewise; the *are*, Tangaroa and the breadfruit trees have been re-contextualised and reclaimed where in the past they were banished and dispelled by colonising forces. The breadfruit trees, used to hang "The chants of priests" (14), are contrasted against affectionately remembered lines in "I Remember" (7). The lyricism of remembering is emphasised by the indentation of each remembered descriptive line. This offsets the priestly chants of "Broken" as brothers are described:

swimming in the wind
and hanging their laughter
on guava trees,

Where one version of the colonial era *papa'anga* foregrounds "breadfruit trees" and priestly chants, a different version – a more personal one, though one that is no less relevant – speaks of a different tree and not religious chant, but affectionately remembered laughter. The blunt tone of "To God" is absent here, instead the poem ends emotively with:

This morning I imagined
Their laughing echoing in my mind
And cried for a quiet corner
to relive the past things we did.

⁴² A well-known example of Tangaroa's changing function in the Cook Islands resonates with the two lines from Tongia's poem: "The disfigured gods / are assembled for auction". In 1995, the art exhibition *Bottled Ocean* featured Rarotongan-Papa's artist Ani O'Neill. In it, she displayed a series of corduroy and embroidery dolls made in the likeness of Tangaroa. Nicholas Thomas writes that: "...Tangaroa dolls confronted the viewer standing before the big Perspex window in Wellington[.] Tangaroa was once a principle deity and perhaps retains spiritual importance for some Cook Islanders in the modern Christian nation. But he is familiar primarily as a national icon – appearing on coins, for instance – and as the number one Cook Islands tourist object. While the carvings in museum collections have frequently been emasculated, as they say, the big cock is restored in contemporary imagery and gives the figure the appeal of a risqué souvenir, a mildly erotic piece of airport art (337).

These versions of history and the obvious sadness in this last stanza gesture to the hinge point in the title-poem “Korero” that was quoted at the beginning of this section. The first half of the poem clearly looks backward to the significance of history, how it is told and by whom. Missionisation has had a heavy hand in these retellings within Cook Islands history and it is a recurring theme amongst Pacific literature as discussed by Wendt (1993) and Hereniko (c1999). That Tongia considers the effect of this agenda on the postcolonial present clearly draws him into community with a wider Pacific literary aesthetic taking place during the early years of the tradition. It also makes clear that a lack of further critical treatment has been to the detriment of a more nuanced and detailed understanding of Tongia’s work. His interrogation of the missionary narrative is a potent example of the re-indigenising literary characteristic investigated by Va’ai (1999). It also exemplifies the importance of *korero* – of history and its versions, indigenous and otherwise – within the Cook Islands world-view and this literary tivaivai. As will be shown in the writing of the other poets in this chapter, *korero* and *papa’anga* are integral parts to the Cook Islands literary aesthetic.

3.2.2 White, black and hungry dogs: Nationhood and regional proximities

Alongside the popular binary that characterised the First Wave, the emotive tone in response to political and economic change within the region was also indicative of early Pacific literature. These changes were region-wide phenomena that entailed major changes to the constitutional and governmental foundations of Pacific nations, inherently affecting the way that Hau'ofa's "sea of islands" began to connect and relate to one another. The second half of Tongia's title-poem "Korero" abruptly changes to the present tense, marking the hinge point of the poem.

Today we labour unceasingly
to hold the new *korero*,
carved from the years of
slavery and awakening.

This "new *korero*" and the idea of "awakening" at the end of the poem suggests that through the rewriting and re-indigenising of history these new (re)understandings - this "new *korero*" – becomes an "awakening" that implicates self-determination. The Independence era is characterised by this awakening of indigenous thought amongst many Pacific nations, particularly key individuals within the groups of Pacific intelligentsia and political elites. This last stanza alludes to these wider metanarratives and for the purposes of this sub-section gesture to the complexities of national identity, alongside that of cultural identity. Certainly, national identity and the regional solidarity amongst our "sea of islands" seem to be a recurring theme throughout Cook Islands writing and the wider Pacific tradition and Tongia's poetry is no exception.

By the time this collection was published in 1977, the Cook Islands had been self-governing for 12 years and many other nations within the Pacific had gained Independence. A global economic depression had been set in motion by the world oil crisis and mass Pacific-migration to New Zealand was well underway. This was a period of significant and rapid change for the Cook Islands. In the poem "There Is a Flag", the Cook Islands position within the region during this time is candidly questioned in its capacity as an allegedly self-governing independent nation. The poetic voice in "There Is a Flag" clearly interrogates that nation's position, framing and reframing its proximity (geographical and political) to its island neighbours. The significance of this interrogation rests on the broader regional narratives acting as external pressures on cultural identity discourse and other related issues

within Cook Islands creative writing. In Tongia's case, the symbols and metaphors he uses to represent nation and regional neighbours allude to the degree of influence these external pressures have had on the "poet" and the "Cook Islander".

The Cook Islands flag, on which this poem centres, is a contested symbol that has undergone a number of changes since being introduced by the British administration in 1856. Three changes to the flag were made before self-governance in 1965, all heavily influenced by the Cook Islands relationship with Britain. The two most recent flags, perhaps unsurprisingly, were also highly politicized symbols. A green and gold flag with fifteen stars arranged in a circle was used in 1974. Numa writes of its origins "...as a result of a competition organised by Premier of the day, Albert Henry" (53). His rejection of the suggested white coloured stars on a blue background in favour of his political party colours (green and gold) give some indication of the tension over this flag. Likewise, the most recent flag⁴³ was originally a light blue colour that reflected the colours of then government (Democratic Party) but was later changed to the current royal blue. On it are the fifteen stars of Davis' flag, representing the fifteen Cook Islands and equality symbolised by the circle. In the top left-hand corner there is a union jack symbolising the Cook Islands long relationship with Britain and its on-going position as part of the Commonwealth (Numa 53).

It is not clear whether the history of the flag is an intended allusion or not, however the historical background provided by Numa does illuminate that contested history and thus, the associated connotations the flag has as a symbol of the Cook Islands. It is both a product of political agendas and a symbol that assumes a homogenous understanding of nationhood by the various individual islands. The perspective offered in this poem interrogates the flag as a symbol of national identity with the poetic voice asking,

There is a flag
 with fifteen stars.
What for, my friend?
Is it to display
 our naivete?
Or to show
 our island might
 to a sea of nations
 much more powerful?

⁴³ See: Appendix 1

A sarcastic tone pervades these opening lines, shown in the light-hearted address to a “friend” on matters that clearly hold more gravity than a casual conversation amongst peers. Instead, there is a sense here that within a narrative that so obviously critiques political agenda, “friend” becomes a politicised figure. He is both civic representative (a role that transcends the boundaries of person-to-person friendship) and more importantly, power-wielding decision-maker. In asking these questions, the connotations of “naivete” and the irony of “island might” against the enormity of a “sea of nations”, emphasises the stakes of representation – of people, nation, intention and history – that is signified by the flag. The flag’s contested genesis underpins the tense exchange between the poetic voice and the “friend”, giving the stanza a passively irate and subtly critical tone.

I extend this allegorical reading to include Tongia’s text “Voices in a Meeting” (5). In this piece the poetic consciousness observes the interpersonal politics at work amongst those with decision-making power at a figurative meeting. These actors or “voices” as they are represented in the poem are observed through the sensory perception (hearing) of the poetic voice. Even more striking is the description of voices (sound) “pointing”, a physical gesture that denotes provocation or accusation and also suggests the animated disposition of the subject.

I hear voices at round tables,
I hear their wings beating
on cushioned seats and
polished floors in this
large hall.
I hear voices pointing
at one another.

Again, there is irony present in this stanza. Where these voices gather, a meeting of negotiation and discussion is implied. The round shape of the table, much like the circular arrangement of stars on the Cook Islands flag, represents equality. However, that key etiquette (equality) of this conceptual space is destabilised as the meeting participants beat their figurative wings, attempting to bypass the *akono’anga* of the round table and vying for hierarchy in the space *above* the table. Their continual “beating” on the seats and floor, however, suggest an inability to change, develop or indeed “ascend” above the hierarchy, further suggesting that conceit or the pursuit of superiority benefits no one. The description of this space resonates with an aesthetic of privilege (“cushioned seats”, “polished floors”,

“large hall”) further undermining the equality represented by the round table. The frustration of this piece is expressed in the final line: “But no one listens / because everyone is talking”. The equality represented with the “round tables” is further weakened by the lack of reciprocity in these lines, a chorus of talking with no effort to reciprocate with understanding and negotiation.

It is not difficult for the reader to feel that these two texts are alluding to the political manoeuvrings taking place during the Independence period. In the first stanza, the phrase “sea of nations” resonates with the contemporary and draws connection with Hau’ofa’s “Sea of Islands” imaginary (1993). Hau’ofa argues for an indigenous construction of the Pacific region by inverting the Western idea of the Pacific as ‘islands in a far sea’ and rather, imagining them as a ‘sea of islands’, an indigenous appropriation of the sea as a connecting, rather than separating body. These opposed notions seem to be the point of contention in “There Is a Flag”. National identity and the conceptual and literal borderlines drawn by Western (dominant) frames of thought have dictated measures of proximity between the Cook Islands as a nation and its regional neighbours (sea of islands) right through the postcolonial period. It seems unsurprising then that during such a heightened period of constitutional liberation in the region, tensions of national identity and regional proximities might show themselves in Tongia’s poetry.

As the Cook Islands is framed and reframed through the posed questions in the first stanza of “There Is a Flag”, Cook Islands independence and the value of it are subject to further enquiry in the second and third (final) stanza.

Our flag rides fair
 on the wind of the islands
 but will she withstand
the cruel tsunami winds
 of nuclear nations?

There is a flag
 with fifteen stars,
What for, my friend?
Is it to ride the wind
 that politicians cough?
Or just to remind others
 we want to be left alone?

Here, an awareness of Pacific neighbours is shown. The reference to the “...tsunami winds / of nuclear nations” clearly allude to the nuclear testing which took place in French Polynesia (Mururoa) in the mid-1960s (“Nuclear Testing in the Pacific”). As the closest nation to the testing area, Cook Islanders became worried about security concerns (“Vaka ki Moruroa”), ironically echoing the paranoia of Queen Makea during initial protectorate status in 1888. The stanza highlights the grave vulnerability of the Cook Islands during this time, and reinforces the sceptical tone of the poetic voice in the opening lines. The Cook Islands have had a somewhat precarious (formal) constitutional position in the Pacific as their outright independence has been somewhat shrouded under their status as New Zealand citizens, despite the power to self-govern. In practical terms, the power to act and even defend themselves in the face of far more powerful political nations, particularly those dominant nations at the margins, has put them at the whim of those larger powers. There is a distinct sense of frustration with this in the lines: “Is it to ride the wind / that politicians cough?” (10) In other ways, the genealogical ties between French Polynesia (the Tahitian islands in particular) and the Cook Islands is well known and yet, with the British and French colonial projects in these respective nations, new kinds of proximity have been measured between the two nations. This reflects some of the brief conclusions made in section 2.1 referring to the linguistic diversity of colonial languages and the institutional difficulties this has presented.

“There Is a Flag” is not the last poem in this collection to incorporate highly emotive symbolism in order to talk about the politics of region, as evidenced in Tongia’s “Beware of Dog” (11). Tongia’s biography tells us that he spent a significant period of time in Fiji during his education at the University of the South Pacific and in 2003 Hereniko cited Tongia’s “Beware” poem in an article considering theoretical approach to the study of the Fiji Coup in Pacific Studies. Hereniko used the poem to metaphorically show the fragility of Rabuka and Speight’s leadership in Fiji. Having gained their strength from proclaiming their roles as “the voice of the people”, Hereniko asserted the need for Rabuka and Speight to beware the consequences of ignoring the marginalized people of Fiji (2003:86). He used Tongia’s poem to illustrate this:

As I walk this rich suburb
 full of white and black chiefs
I hear the barking of a dog
I listen to its calls
 knowing I am that dog

picking what it can
from the overflowing rubbish tins

I say to you chiefs
bury the scraps you can't eat
So no hungry dog will come to eat
at your locked gate

Chiefs beware of hungry
dogs !

The title of the poem clearly references the signage commonly possessed by dog owners who want to caution visitors or passers-by about dangerous dogs on their property. This has interesting parallels with the use of dogs to represent Fijian people and the cautionary voice of the persona in this poem who the reader also assumes is a Pacific person. Certainly, the volatile political situation in Fiji during the 1970s was rife with civic unrest and the title of the poem suggests frustration with the restrictions at work within Fiji during this time. There is an energy that teeters on the edge of explosiveness with the lines, “bury the scraps you can't eat / So no hungry dog will come to eat / at your locked gate”, an ominous warning to the chiefs of government and the military. This cautionary tone, delivered in three lines, effectively conveys a tense-ness that fittingly resonates with the imagined political climate of the time by the reader. Moreover, it illustrates the poet's understanding of the social, political and cultural stakes under these circumstances as the conscious choice to construct this extended metaphor – dogs within gates – is a powerful use of imagery.

Interestingly, the metaphor of the dog is a recurring symbol in Tongia's work. His poems, “Bobby – Dare” (4) and “Why?” (22), both use the dog as a way of describing parts of the human condition within the socio-political context of the time (illustrated above with “Beware of Dog”). The dog has connotations of the vicious and the benign; the dangerous and the faithful. Within the postcolonial context the dog also symbolises imported and foreign ways with its status as an introduced species within the region. As the personae of these texts align themselves with the symbol of the dog, my argument for Tongia's poetic transcending the simplistic binary is further exemplified. The persona's identification with the dog suggests a indigenisation of the foreign, a claiming of Western ways, so that educated indigene is now political consciousness. This awareness does not tolerate the power hierarchy of chiefs who depend on customary obseisance, while simultaneously practising selected “foreign” political practises in order to achieve their own goals.

The recurring presence of regional politics within this collection is not surprising considering the repeated and punctuated effect those politics have had on Pacific nations during the postcolonial period. Tongia clearly exemplifies this in “Beware of Dog” and “There Is a Flag”. This may also owe something to Tongia’s mobility across the region as indicated in his biography at the beginning of this sub-chapter. At the beginning of this thesis I argued that diaspora and by association, mobility and migration, have played a role in all Cook Islanders lives, even those who were raised in the home islands. In Tongia’s work this becomes evident in his treatment of regional politics. Though it is not always advisable to base the close reading of creative work on the biography of its author, the interwoven nature of the Cook Islands poet and their experience is hard to ignore. Moreover, I argue that a foundational part of the Cook Islands literary aesthetic is the subtle and explicit presence of individual experience within the text. This was propounded by Sullivan (2006) in regards to Alistair Te Ariki Campbell. Awareness of Campbell’s biography while reading his work, Sullivan advocates, is beneficial to a more thorough comprehension of his writing.

With the parallel of the personal/individual and metanarrative within this close-reading, it almost seems anticipated that regional politics and national identity be recurring themes within Tongia’s oeuvre. Much of this subject matter is a part of his experience as a scholar, as a writer and as a Cook Islander, whether these roles/positions are distinctly separate or simultaneously one. These parts of the self – these roles/positions – are also negotiated in “Outcast” (17) and “Ora” (25). There is a distinct sense within these pieces of cultural loss and there is a palpable tone of disappointment as the poetic “I” of these poems, surveys tangible loss of cultural tradition. “Ora” in particular seems aptly placed at the end of the collection, a poignant reminder of what’s at stake with the on-going discourse around regional politics. In the final lines of “Ora” the modernity of the jet plane clashes with the traditional and decaying paddles of the vaka⁴⁴,

Look at the jet planes,
 At the decayed paddles,
 The deposed *umu*⁴⁵;
 Do they not speak of time?

⁴⁴ sea-going vessel (25)

⁴⁵ earth oven (ibid.)

And as the jet plane reminds the reader of the globalisation of proximity and the varying proximities of transnational communities to the cultural centre, the poetic voice of “Outcast” laments:

Grandfather was one of
 your children
 by birth and tradition
 a brother to all of you,
yet you ill-treat me,
 you cast me out
simply for living two generations
 in a foreign land.

Is it a sin to return
 to the *Avaiki*⁴⁶ of my fathers?

This last line aptly connects with Kauraka’s work in the next chapter where I speak on his use of the mythical Avaiki/Havaiki as a symbolic representation of home and cultural fortitude. This indicates how the patterns of the conceptual patterns of this thesis relate to one another – a communal identification with key Cook Islands symbols and traditions. Of course, in other ways these writers are colleagues, peers and friends in a more personal sense and within their respective oeuvres we read echoes of these connections repeatedly (see: Rasmussen 3.4.1; Mason 2001:49). As Tongia is one of the earliest and accomplished of the Cook Islands literary tivaivai, he creates a robust pattern on the backing-cloth. The analysis of his work reveals the importance of looking backward in order to meaningfully move forward (the old Pacific adage) and proves some of the theoretical arguments put forward by Pacific scholars like Wendt, Subramani, Hereniko and Va’ai. Perhaps one of the most important facets of Tongia’s work is his ability to problematise the binary so oft cited in describing early Pacific literature, where his poetic style acknowledges the “grey area” of the colonial narrative. He critically engages with the binary, tracing the ways in which *both* cultures shaped colonisation. In 3.2.2 I have signalled the recurring nature of political themes and thus, poetic ruminations on the conceptual and literal borderlines for Cook Islands people. This will be acknowledged again, as I situate the other writers in this chapter in relation to Tongia’s patterns.

⁴⁶ legendary home of the Polynesians (Tongia 1977:17)

3.3 Kauraka Kauraka

**The Flyingfox has faced
the dark side of the moon
and knows the gift of loneliness
He has steered the sea's secrets
to Aotearoa Fiji Hawaii Samoa
and gathered the spells of the albino atua
He has turned his blood into earth
and planted mischievous aitu in it
He is the wisdom of upsidedownness
and the light that is Pouliuli**

(Wendt 1999:10)

Kauraka Kauraka was born in Rarotonga in 1951 with primary affiliations to the island of Manihiki⁴⁷. Much of the biographical information available details his significant contributions to Cook Islands culture through his work as an “anthropologist, poet, photographer, musician and composer of song and traditional chant” (Crocombe 2003:88). The affection and respect with which Kauraka is referred to in the critical and creative literature is noticeable⁴⁸ and this praise speaks to the important role he has played in developing, critiquing and recording the cultural history of his people and the region. The epigraph that heads this chapter; Crocombe’s biography; and the various others who have written about Kauraka (Trask 1987:xi; Unterecker 1987:xiv; Simpson 1987:xv; Mason 2001:49; Crocombe 2003:81, 87; Crocombe *et al.* 2003; Wendt 1999:10) give a strong indication of the influence he has had on the Cook Islands, and wider Pacific, literary field. Therefore, including him in this thesis was presumed from the outset. Apart from Campbell’s impressive oeuvre, with four collections, Kauraka is the most published poet in English from the Cook Islands. That accomplishment alone warrants close analysis of his work here.

⁴⁷ Kauraka was “[b]orn in the capital of the Cook Islands, Rarotonga, of a mother who is a descendant of Tefaingaitu Ariki of Manihiki and a father who is part Manihiki, part Mangaian and part Chinese, Kauraka has spent much of his in travel – to New Zealand for seven years of high school and college, back to Rarotonga, then to Japan as a professional singer and musician for the Betela Dance Troupe, then on a scholarship to study at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji and another to the University of Papua New Guinea where he continued his BA studies” (Unterecker xiii).

⁴⁸ *Akono 'anga Maori: Cook Islands Culture* (Crocombe *et al.* 2003) was dedicated to Kauraka, “a great authority on Cook Islands culture”. Though Cook Islands scholarship in general is comparatively small compared to scholarship from Western Polynesia, the editors of this book are all well-known accomplished thinkers and published writers on Cook Islands culture in various disciplines. The book itself is, to my knowledge, the only one of its kind and to have such a work dedicated to Kauraka adds significant credence to their commendation of Kauraka as a prominent intellectual who has served Cook Islands people and culture.

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of his work is his extensive, bilingual composition. Kauraka wrote in Manihiki-Maori⁴⁹ and English in all of his poetry collections providing two different linguistic versions of each text. Cook Islands poet and artist Mike Tavioni has a similar style where he provides two versions of a poetic text, though his primary Cook Islands Maori dialect is Rarotongan (Tavioni 2002). Michael Griegg, a diasporic Cook Islands writer from Nelson, New Zealand has also written using a Northern Cook Islands dialect though his bilingual usage is not as extensive due to the comparatively smaller volume of writing he has published (Griegg 2003:69; 2010:72). I bring attention to the bilingual facet of Kauraka's work here and also acknowledge my inability to include a close-reading of his work in Manihiki-Maori. Where relevant I refer to the significance of these parallel Manihiki-Maori texts but for the most part, treat his English texts independent of these others.

Crocombe and Unterecker have both acknowledged the pioneering work Kauraka accomplished with/using traditional Cook Islands poetic forms. Kauraka's collection *Taku Akatauirā: My Dawning Star* (1999) is a primary example, where he experimented and exemplified the praise-poem genre or *tateni*. In the introduction of this last collection, Kauraka detailed the traditional content within these praise-poems and went on briefly to mention other traditional poetry forms – the 'tangi' (lament); the 'nakunaku' (complaint) and the 'amu' (tease) poem. The introduction also noted the anticipation of further collections that would focus separately on each of these traditional poetry forms. With his untimely death in 1997, Kauraka was never able to produce these collections and the field, its students and its readers are sadly disadvantaged for it. In this collection Kauraka does, however, declare that the form of each piece within it is based on the traditional "standard" form in Manihikian poetry where the texts are "...on a single theme and are story-like" (Kauraka 1985:v).

Certainly, "stories" in mythological terms are a central part of Kauraka's poetics. Each section in this collection is thematically named and with multiple readings it becomes obvious that many of the issues, symbols, literary devices, style and form employed are interconnected and discernibly associated with a wider Cook Islands cultural world-view. In the introduction to Kauraka's second collection, *Dreams of the Rainbow* (1987), Unterecker made five distinct observations about Kauraka's poetics. In particular, Unterecker observed

⁴⁹ Manihiki-Maori is a distinct dialect and differs from the widely spoken Rarotongan-Maori many are familiar with (Hiroa 11-2).

the interwoven nature of the natural and supernatural facets of Kauraka's poetry; the convincing treatment of the "ancient" or pre-colonial Pacific; the skilful reflection on contemporary cultural forces that have shaped his life; and Kauraka's uncompromising attitude towards the "destructive artificiality of our time" (xiii-xiv). These same observations can be made about his first collection and are arresting additions to the aesthetic of Kauraka's patterns as I attach his work to the conceptual backing-cloth. My analysis will reinforce Unterecker's remarks and reinforce the connection of community that I envision between Kauraka, Tongia and the wider field.

Prompting and informing this analysis is a critical paper by Kauraka published in the appendix of *Akono'anga Maori*, called "Towards the Definition of a Maori" (1998). The connection between this title and the title of Wendt's seminal "Towards a New Oceania" (1976) is obvious and in similar fashion to Wendt, Kauraka implores the Cook Islands reader to reclaim their cultural pride and realise the worth of their status as indigenous people. The article is a short philosophical piece detailing his opinions about the state and philosophical development of the Cook Islands identity within the postcolonial circumstances of the time. He discusses the need for self-determination within the Cook Islands, the need for his people to assert responsibility and have the confidence to participate and represent themselves in global politics and economy. The poetry in this collection all speak to the claims in this article, through the modes of poetic expression outlined by Unterecker above as well as the two broad themes that I address in the following discussion.

The first of these two broad themes focuses on Kauraka's use of mythology as a way of accessing cultural identity. My analysis touches briefly on the theoretical work done by Siikala & Siikala though I hesitate to focus too heavily on their ideas because of their stated concentration on oral traditions (inclusive of mythologies) from the *Southern* Cook Islands. Their distinction does however go some way to reinforcing my earlier argument for the requisite awareness of island-affiliation when reading Cook Islands texts. The following analysis will reinforce the argument that the presence of mythological and oral narratives shows a specific connection to Manihiki reflecting Kauraka's own specific *papa'anga*. The figure of Maui, the pan-Polynesian demi-god, is prominent in this reading as I tie him into the aesthetic of Kauraka's pattern, and also trace the thread of connection to wider Polynesian cosmological narratives.

The second theme considers how the mythological location of Havaiki is used to represent the spiritual home of Polynesian peoples and principally Manihiki within this collection. The title “Return to Havaiki” references the spiritual return of the body to Havaiki after death. In Kauraka’s collection, Havaiki acts as the figurative centre point for which all of the thematic headings intersect in turn becoming the junction of all the interconnected parts of the Cook Islands/Manihikian world-view that is collectively represented under each sub-heading: Tradition, Identity, Roots, Character, Culture, Love, Family and Nature. I read closely his chapter “Roots” and consider how ‘home’ becomes synonymous with identity through the use of the mythological location of Havaiki and how this place is found through the poetic recount of cosmology and its associated literary characters and settings.

3.3.1 *Hey Maui-Potiki! What are you doing?*⁵⁰: Maui & Mythology

In a long list of significant contributions, Kauraka's retellings and his laborious work in compiling collections of traditional Manihikian narratives is compelling and valuable, particularly when this thesis is aware of the comparative publishing silence that is currently evident. Kauraka has had a number of traditional narrative collections published (*Tales of Manihiki* 1982; *Legends from the Atolls* 1984; *Manihiki Traditional Narratives: No Fakahiti o Manihiki* 1988; *Oral Traditions* 1989) and his preponderance with these traditional stories is demonstrably apparent in *Return to Havaiki*'s poems. When one considers the self-determination that Kauraka argues for in "Towards a New Definition", the revisiting and active preservation of traditional mythology seems like a logical step in the re-indigenising of literature in the region. Indeed, as cultural dance has become one of the most identifiable features of the Cook Islands cultural aesthetic, these traditional narratives also have recognisable literary qualities that become easily associated with Cook Islands culture – perhaps most important of all, through the heroes of specific personal and wider familial *papa'anga*.

Reflecting this enthusiasm for mythology and storytelling, mythology or *tua ta'ito* are a central part of Kauraka's poetry. Rather than the re-indigenising treatment that Tongia gives colonial history in the previous sub-chapter, Kauraka foregrounds the indigenous narratives of his ancestors despite their mythical overtones. This echoes the argument put forward by Ihimaera in regards to mythology and history being one and the same for indigenous Maori⁵¹. I argue that Kauraka's foregrounding of mythological history also implies the same purview within Cook Islands culture. Jonassen wrote in the preface to his *Cook Islands Legends*:

Myths stories and legends which once guided the lives of young Cook Islanders, reveal a panorama of history, place names and genealogical identity. The mystique of the tales fascinated many young people who gathered around their elders to hear them illuminate the past (1981:3)

Jonassen's passage suggests valuable motivating factors behind the recurring presence of mythological narratives in Kauraka's work. The notion that these narratives effectively help the Cook Islands individual (in Jonassen's case, "young people") to understand self and

⁵⁰ From the first line of Kauraka's "Maui-Potiki" (9).

⁵¹ Keown quotes Ihimaera who argued that, "...while 'Westerners' often make a distinction between 'fictitious' myth and 'factual' history, in Māori culture myth *is* history, and in Māori and other Indigenous Pacific texts, myth is invoked as a means by which to assert land and other cultural rights through descent from the deities who created and still protect the natural world" (Ihimaera in Keown 2007:183).

cultural identity (“guid[ing] the lives of young Cook Islanders”), highlights the idea of story-telling as an exercise that is more than just “retelling” for entertainments sake. Rather, story-telling situates, develops and sustains cultural identity. This is exemplified in Kauraka’s “Tradition” section, where all three pieces reflect the story-like narrative that he proclaims in his introduction (v). The figures within these poems are heroes of legend and in the cultural process of *papa’anga*, are points at which living generations trace back to the root – to their eponymous ancestors.

Siikala & Siikala have done extensive critical work on the oral traditions of the Southern Cook Islands and argued for distinctions between *papa’anga* as “strictly replicable genealogies” and *tua ta’ito*, or “old narratives”, as “telling of the deeds of ancestors who form the genealogy” (66). Their chapter on mythic-historical discourse is illuminating in that they reason the overlapping nature of *papa’anga* and *tua ta’ito* and why they both necessarily compliment each other. Their discussion draws on the work of a number of Polynesian folklore researchers (Chadwick, Charlot and Schrempp), and importantly stresses the purpose of such narratives to the comprehension and construction of Cook Islands genealogies by living generations. Schrempp writes on New Zealand Maori folklore, asserting that:

...the genealogical and prose cosmogonies bear the following complementary relation: they recount the same process, the former from the standpoint of demonstrating continuity, the latter from the perspective of recognising and emphasising discontinuity (Schrempp in Siikala & Siikala 66)

Siikala & Siikala’s inclusion of Schrempps comments vis-à-vis the New Zealand Māori context implies a cultural relevance in the Cook Islands context, no doubt through genealogical ties between Cook Islands- and New Zealand- Māori and given the lack of scholarly literature for anglophone versions of these narratives, this consideration of Schrempp seems understandable. It is also a useful comparison to draw between other postcolonial national literatures within the region.

In Kauraka’s opening poem, this overlapping of *papa’anga* and *tua ta’ito* is exemplified. In “The High Chief Faingaitu” (4), Tupou-ma-te-tika is described, redolent of the “tribal honours” of the ancestors in Tongia’s “Burning in Hell” (2). The honorifics acknowledged in the text, reinforce the sense of legendary *mana* that the chief commands.

Indeed, his ability to commune with “the gods” on the behalf of his assumed village or people, “they”, gives an indication of his hierarchical status amongst his people:

Tupou-ma-te-tika the *Faingaitu*
High Chief of Manihiki
Lord of the land and of the sea
Ruler of *Heahiro*⁵² and *Mokopuai*⁵³
beckons their god on their behalf.

Kauraka’s connection to this legendary figure is acknowledged in the biography at the beginning of this section. Through the retelling of this story-like narrative within a poetic form, Kauraka retraces his own personal *papa’anga*. Cook Islands *akono’anga* acknowledges the retracing of *papa’anga* as an important facet of formal protocol and that Kauraka does so here at the beginning of his collection, makes some sense following this rationale. As the chapter title suggests, these stories are about “Tradition” (1) but they are also “tradition” itself. *Temu* is the first Chief in the line of Faingaitu, assumedly cemented by the epic feat relayed in this poem. The *mana* credited to *Temu* reflects the value of his actions to the people, and as Tongia’s “Burning in Hell” acknowledges with the “tribal honours” afforded to Chief Taratoa’s son, *Temu*’s *mana* is also inherited by his forebears. As families are often described as “roots” – as “trees” – Wendt describes culture in this same way suggesting a dual framing of the same idea, “forever growing new branches, foliage, and roots. Our cultures, contrary to the simplistic interpretation of our romantics, were changing even in pre-palagi times through inter-island contact and the endeavours of exceptional individuals and groups...” (Wendt 1993:12). In this mythological and legendary retelling, genealogical history is also held within the shifting roots of this story.

Of course, the idea of cultural tradition is not a static ideological site, to be accessed as a stationary repository of all things that Cook Islanders may consider they “are”, or more recently, what they might consider they need to “rediscover”. The retracing exercise gives an understanding of development, of change. It engages in the essential “usage [which] determines authenticity” (Wendt 1993:13). The inherent Cook Islands protocol at work within this retracing, as well as the essential story of Kauraka’s ancestors that is being told as part of a patchwork of non-linear history, are both fundamental functions and productions of mythology. Ihimaera’s assertion for ‘factual myth’ resonates with Kauraka’s use of story-like, mythological narratives within these opening poems and the rest of the collection.

⁵² “A tribe, consisting of seven sections, under the rule of the Faingatu[sic]” (5)

⁵³ “A tribe consisting of four sections, under the leadership of the Faingaitu” (ibid.)

Considering Kauraka's focus on "...people of Manihiki both young and old" (v) and the implied need to make some movement towards cultural preservation, these poems ask questions as well as provide answers. What can history and *papa'anga* tell us about *why* particular contemporary traditional practises are important? What spiritual and philosophical precedents inform the current idea of Cook Islands people and their place in the world?

The remaining six stanzas describe how the Chief (Temu-matua⁵⁴) saves his people from disease by gathering "*tau-tahi*"⁵⁵ coconut" and "*pukara*"⁵⁶ and offering it to the wooden idol "*Hikahara*"⁵⁷. The story-like tone of this poem is evident in its epic narrative. A "hero" (Temu-matua), blessed by the gods (Rikiriki), undertakes a journey (the collection of food) in order to make an offering to the god Hikahara, to save his people from disease:

paddled to *Tuko* to offer it to *Hikahara*.
The disease vanished, people were saved.

Temu-matua had turned away the wrath of the gods,
diverted them from their usual ways.
People saw that he had *mana*
over the land and over the sea.
A high chief anointed [sic] high priest.

These genealogical heroes in the overlap of replicable *papa'anga* and the more abstract, *tua ta'ito*, are placed next to the figure of Maui in this collection. Maui's story has shown demonstrable spread through the Pacific, as he appears in various forms amongst different Polynesian mythopoeic traditions. Keown notes his presence in New Zealand Maori and Samoan traditions (2007:178) and he has piqued the fascination of many contemporary Pacific writers, including Albert Wendt, Robert Sullivan and Alistair Te Ariki Campbell. Keown further acknowledges the use of Maui within the work of salient Maori writers who use the stories of Maui "by which to reconcile Māori oral traditions with contemporary literary narrative techniques" (2007:178). Maui's relevance within Kauraka's oeuvre is directly attributed to his role in Manihikian cosmology, which is particularly reknown in the Cook Islands (Mason & Williams 2003:41; Kauraka 1988:7-15). In this process of looking backward and echoing the reconciliatory intentions of New Zealand Māori writers, it is fitting

⁵⁴ An ancestor of Kauraka's and the first holder of the Faingaitu title in Manihiki.

⁵⁵ "A coconut that grows singly on one flower stalk" (6).

⁵⁶ "An edible tuber (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*)" (ibid.)

⁵⁷ "A wooden idol worshipped by the people of Tukao village" (5).

that Maui appears as a figure within Kauraka's poetry, especially considering the overtones of Kauraka's "Towards a New Definition" essay.

The legend of Maui-Potiki within Manihikian cosmology (in Kauraka's retelling, "Maui-the-youngest") tells of how the islands of Rakahanga and Manihiki were created. While fishing with his brothers Maui-the-Youngest pulls the land to the surface of the ocean "from beneath Havaiki", with the help of his grandmother. In a later episode, Maui is chased by Hiku of Rarotonga. In his escape, he runs across this land and as he jumps into the sky, the force of his jump splits the land in two and Rakahanga and Manihiki are created (Kauraka 1988:7-15). In these traditional narratives, it is Maui's role in the creation of the Manihiki *enua* that makes him important to *papa'anga* through his prominence in the body of *tua ta'ito* from these northern islands. His feats are the genesis for all living generations and Kauraka's acknowledgement of him in this section compliments foundations laid by "The High Chief of Faingaitu".

These deducations are illustrated in Kauraka's "Maui-Potiki":

Hey *Maui-Potiki*! What are you doing?
I'm weaving me a basket.
What is your basket for?
I'm flying to *Manuhiki*

To climb for some coconuts,
to uproot some *puraka*⁵⁸
To dive for some clam shells,
To trap some *titihi*⁵⁹
And take them to the sun to be roasted
For the feast of the king of the sky

It is too simplistic to produce a reading where the point of a poem *about* Maui in this section is simply to recognise his role as a central figure in Manihikian cosmogony. Rather, in considering my previous arguments for the relevance and importance of *Temu* within a particular cultural, personal and familial *papa'anga*, Maui too is an integral figure that imparts a particular set of cultural truths. The basket, a symbol of dual importance that represents the container of figurative knowledge and physical food gestures to the implications of Maui's role as a champion of subverting hierarchy (beating his grandfather and tricking his grandmother when he pulls the land to the surface) and therein, securing important cultural and sacred knowledge. As knowledge feeds the mind and spirit, so too

⁵⁸ "An edible tuber (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*)" (9)

⁵⁹ "The 'Moorish idol' or butterfly fish (*Zanclus canescens*), which is most abundant in August" (ibid.)

does it physically feed the body. Considering Kauraka's plea for self-determination, this subversion of hierarchy may parallel with the assertions that Kauraka makes in his critical piece.

Despite the almost decade temporal gap between *Return* and *Taku*, there is certainly a sense of Kauraka's claim for a literal and figurative meaning in the style of his characteristic "Manihikian" poetry. He also wrote that a few of the poems in the collection had "...complex meaning." (v). While he does not identify the specific poems he refers to here, the dual nature of the metaphorical and the literal, and the complex meaning underpinning this story of Maui, is apparent. The final lines of the poem allude to the narrative where Maui visits his grandmother in the land "beneath Havaiki". On his arrival, his grandmother asks him to visit his grandfather to procure fire so that they might cook a meal together. His grandfather Tangaroa-with-the-tattooed-face gives him a stick of fire to take back to his grandmother. Tangaroa's status as a principle god who provides Maui with the means to create fire to "roast" the food he shares with his grandmother has tangible connection with these latter lines (Kauraka 1988).

The popularity of Maui's episodic feats rests on the ability of the Cook Islands audience to relate to his character. Maui is sly, brave, intelligent and daring. He is a mythological representation of the human condition, a point that Kauraka seems to make with repeated reference to Maui throughout a number of texts. This reckoning is what has enchanted the imaginations of Wendt, Sullivan and many others. For Kauraka, his inclusion of Maui is buffered by this reading. The role Maui has within the genesis of Manihikian (and other Northern island) mythopoeic tradition, overlaps with the replicable genealogies of the *papa'anga* in that his characterisation reflects core principles that Kauraka argues for at the centre of Manihikian, and by association, wider Cook Islands Maori, cultural tradition. Maui's traits reflect a genealogy of cunning and perseverance, abilities that, it is implied, living generations possess within them.

This seems prevalent as the figure of Maui is acknowledged and gestured to throughout Kauraka's work after the initial "Tradition" section of the collection. In his call to diasporic children ("Children of Manuhiki, Arise" 13) to remember the "Houses of our traditions" he implores them to revisit the tales of Maui (Fish-of-Maui-Potiki – Manihiki and Rakahanga). Numerous figures in the pantheon of Manihikian *atua* – the relations of Maui -

are invoked in some way or another within these texts in order to illustrate the direct influence these “ancients” have on the contemporary generation.

*Hina-i-te-papa*⁶⁰ plaited your loin-cloth
*Tapairu*⁶¹ made your body ointment
Tangaroa carved your war spear

Like the basket of knowledge; the loin-cloth, body ointment and war spear represent instruments of cultural integrity and physically represent remembered *papa’anga*.

Adorn yourself with the cloak of love
Take our traditions to oil your body
Your war spear the writing pen
Thrust it deep into the hearts of knowledge
To find wisdom.

The “cloak of love” recognises the fundamental nature of the family and loved ones to the Manihikian and wider Cook Islands identity. Likewise, the oil of tradition represents the enriching qualities of cultural custom. It also draws attention to the significance of the individuals conscious application of these traditions to the figurative body/person. The spear is a recurring symbol in Kauraka’s work, as both a weapon of violence but also a symbol of empowerment to the current generation. These intangible parts of cultural knowledge manifest in these bodily adornments, a metaphorical construction of the sentiments expressed in his “Towards the definition of a Maori” essay.

Maui’s episodic feats and the recount of heroes in “The High Chief of Faingaitu” are brief examples of how Kauraka articulates his ideas of Manihikian, Cook Islands and cultural identity. The structure and style of these pieces possess key facets of the Cook Islands cultural framework, including the interwoven nature of recounting *papa’anga* and situating the self, through the telling of *tua ta’ito*.

⁶⁰ “i.e. ‘woman of the rock’ or ‘woman of the foundation’, lives in Havaiki and is the grandmother of Maui-Potiki” (15)

⁶¹ The original mother of the Manihiki people: a favourite girls name. Tapairu is the sister of Hiku of Rarotonga, who was bought to Rakahanga (Foturangaranga) with her husband to populate the island. (ibid.)

3.3.2. Return to Havaiki

Right across the Pacific, Havaiki, in its various linguistic formations (Hawaiki, Havaii, Avaiki etc.), represents the spiritual home of many cultures in the Pacific. Kauraka's simple definition for Havaiki as the, "Ancestral home of the Polynesian" perhaps obscures the importance of Havaiki as a central motif in this collection. An illustration at the beginning of the chapter "Roots" shows a man with wings, flying to a distant island (20). The reader's vantage point is from behind the man so that they do not see his face. This facelessness encourages the reader to insert themselves into the first person consciousness, as the flying man/reader speeds towards the island. This perspective in the image suggests the universal identification different Pacific peoples have with this spiritual and mythical location.

Like Tongia's "There Is a Flag" (Tongia 1977:10), Kauraka's title poem "Return to Havaiki" (22) begins with the recognisable imagery of French nuclear testing. The "great sky mushroom" clearly alludes to the well-known image of the nuclear bomb and it is explicitly referred to as the poetic voice recalls the,

Nagging voices of my ancestors
More soothing than nuclear explosions.

The striking imagery and context of the nuclear testing reinforces the importance this issue had for Cook Islanders (cf. p.). The strength of France as a political player in the Pacific was not lost on Tongia when his sarcastic tone permeated the lines, asking if the flag was "...to show / our island might / to a sea of nations / much more powerful" (10). This same frankness is apparent in Kauraka's opening lines as he uses sensory perception to emphasise the offensive presence of nuclear explosions.

Fragrance of poisoned air
More potent than decaying corpses
Blooming of the great sky mushroom
More dramatic than fresh gardenias.
Nagging voices of my ancestors
More soothing than nuclear explosions.

The enormity of the political might behind these nuclear bombs is subtly alluded to with the stark comparisons that are drawn with each coupled line. The use of the word "fragrance" becomes almost offensive when the description is given of the fragrance as worse than that of a decaying corpse. This imagery of death transcends the functional metaphor and emphasises the severity of nuclear action. The "sky mushroom" contrasted against "fresh gardenias" also

suggests the ideological gap between the indigenous person and the might of French political interests, the dramatic imagery of the “sky mushroom” in some ways, diminishing, through proximity, the beauty and inherent indigenous culture represented by the “fresh gardenia”.

The dramatic imagery of this first stanza creates a setting where the indigenous cultural spirit becomes secondary. As Kauraka does in many parts of his oeuvre, this hinge one third of the way through the poem looks to indigenous self-determination. It is perhaps appropriate then that cultural resilience to these nuclear actions is represented through the symbolism of the second-stanza.

My club and spear are ready
My precious pandanus mat is ready
My strings of dried clam and coconuts are ready
My chant is ready for the mat of peace
My pandanus garland is ready
Enter the *ngoio* bird, my spirit is ready

As Kauraka invoked the symbolic adornment of cultural empowerment in “May Your Head Stay Upright” (14), the poetic consciousness begins the conscious inventory of metaphorical tools and symbols in answer to nuclear action. These cultural symbols represent the various parts of past and present facets of cultural tradition and thus, self-determination. The club and spear as offensive weaponry invoke the spirit of action, the pandanus mat as a symbol of home and hearth also resonate with connotations of a communal space where loved ones and family gather. The clam and coconuts suggest the importance of physical sustenance and the pandanus garland gestures to the hospitality and peace at the centre of Cook Islands tradition. The *ngoio* bird, or the black noddy tern, is also symbolic of the indigenous, reasoned by its status as a marine bird endemic to the Cook Islands. The strong symbols of this stanza markedly contrast against the despondent imagery of the nuclear regime in the first stanza. This second stanza responds to the enormity of nuclear activity by reminding the reader of the tools which resist this averse foreign activity.

In the last stanza, Havaiki stands as the spiritual space where this resistance is centred. The response of the poetic consciousness is to look inward to the cultural centre, one that the poem focuses on Havaiki.

Return I must to *Havaiki-Nui*, my paradise
Where the beautiful eternal flowers bloom
Where the greatest house of pleasure stands
Where the spring of life bubbles endlessly

Oh, perhaps they are waiting anxiously
To welcome me when I fly there soon.

The rich symbolism of the second stanza in some ways anticipates the concluding focus on Havaiki as a figurative space that supports this resistance to the might of external political force. There is a sense that Havaiki transcends these moments of physical and political invasion by colonial force, "...beautiful eternal flowers bloom". As the poetic voice claims, "Return I must to *Havaiki-Nui*, my paradise", the reader becomes aware of a cultural determination that bypasses the realities of political might outside its national borders. By looking inward to the spiritual fortitude afforded by the symbolic and spiritual centre of Havaiki, resilience is found. This seems particularly relevant as the "spring of life" contrasts heavily against the comparison of "decaying corpses" in the first stanza.

Havaiki as a symbol of cultural and spiritual fortitude and its importance to the Cook Islands consciousness is further alluded to in the closing lines. The unnamed "they" assumedly refers to those who have passed, or specifically *tupuna*. This awareness of ancestors personifies them as abstract figures that in their own way provide a margin of resistance despite their physical absence. As the imagery of the flowers and spring reverberate with a sense of the eternal, of the fixedness within Cook Islands tradition, so too are past and living generations included within this cultural framework. This call for access, or return, to Havaiki exemplifies the resilience of the poetic voice and a collective people.

As the nuclear explosions of French testing encroach on the national borders of the poetic voice in "Return to Havaiki", in "Journey to the City" (24) the positioning of the poetic voice *outside* national borders and *inside* the diasporic space, reiterates the relevance of Havaiki to the Cook Islands identity. In this poem, Havaiki's importance is reiterated by illustrating the disorientating nature of the Western setting and comparing it to the many associations that Havaiki has with ideas of home. The relevance of the backing-cloth is acknowledged again by the opening lines as the poetic voice reflects on the stakes of migration - the compromises and the disappointments.

Ambitious journey to the Great City
A search for a better life
Ah! Such a beautiful place and such riches!
But ignorance blinded me from detecting
the many snares of city living.
I had no real friends to pull me out.

My soul became tangled in the concrete jungle!

I ate food scraps
From rubbish tins of strangers!
Only the warmth of alcohol comforted my frozen body.
Through a dream I received grace from above.
A lottery number, the key to end my plight
To return my soul to its original abode.

Oh! I must return to *Havaiki*!
Where there is wealth I had despised
Where true friends await my return
Where my soul shall be at home once more.

The description of the “concrete jungle” is a familiar metaphor for the urban and commercial sprawl of the “Western city” and within this text, it is an appropriate description that illustrates the displacement of the poetic consciousness. The clash of cultural world-views at work within this first stanza is shown in the uncomfortable tone, “the many snares of city living, / I had no real friends to pull me out / My soul became tangled”. The reader is reminded of the symbolic clams and coconuts used in “Return to Havaiki” and how uncomfortably these symbols sit next to the imagery of “food scraps” and “rubbish tins of strangers” in the second stanza. The compromise of the soul in order to access the “riches” of the “concrete jungle” is heavy with connotations of evil. These two opening stanzas, as in the previous text, build to a desperate tone two thirds of the way through the text.

As the final stanza looks again to *Havaiki*, “return” also becomes symbolic of a re-indigenised perspective, elaborating on the non-linear nature of the Cook Islands cultural frame. Alongside the physical return to home, return also suggests a sense of returning to foregrounding the positive values of Cook Islands cultural tradition. The wealth which had been originally pursued in migrating to the “concrete jungle” is re-perceived through a lens that is framed by the cultural framework that Havaiki symbolises. The yearning tone of the poetic voice to return to “home”, becomes synonymous with the spiritual metaphor of Havaiki, “I must return to *Havaiki*!...where my soul shall be at home once more.” It becomes resting place for both soul and physical person.

These conclusions seem particularly relevant when the final text in the chapter, “I Will Return” continues the theme of returning, the movement *back to* home.

I will return to *Manuhiki*

place of my origin
and my ancestors
I must sail the double canoe
across the Pacific ocean
to my homeland.

I am just a house-keeper for worms of the land
I am a floating coconut husk in this land.

When I arrive at the passage of *Ava-nui*⁶²
I'm sure to smell sweet fragrance of the *hinano*⁶³.
I will return to *Manuhiki*
the perfect resting place of my soul.

This variation on the theme of return to the homeland compliments the two previous poems in that my claim for the synonymous nature of Havaiki and home, become cemented as *Manuhiki* adds yet another layer of specificity to this idea of “homeland” and “resting place”. The similar imagery and tone used in this poem follows the three stanza structure of the two previous pieces and the recurring use of fragrance, reinforces the use of sensory perception to situate memory and familiarity. This is shown in the contrast of Cook Islands imagery against the Western imagery of the city in “Journey”. The return is facilitated by the traditional “double canoe”.

Adding to the context of this return, the poetic voice declares his role as a “house-keeper”, a “floating coconut husk” suggesting the transient nature of his position within Western society. The coconut or *niu* is a popular Pacific literary symbol of migration and sustenance, and its use here reflects this traditional trope. This lack of fixedness reinforces the yearning of the poetic voice to return home, along with the imagined and anticipated arrival of the persona in the final stanza. The conviction of the final line, “the perfect resting place of my soul” cements the longing tone. This is also apparent in the use of the traditional name “*Manuhiki*” as opposed to the contemporary spelling of the island, “Manihiki”. Kauraka writes in his introduction that,

Havaiki is the unidentified ancestral home of the Polynesians. The island is known today as Manihiki, but the original form is Manuhiki, which is still used as honorific, or to represent the idealised Manihiki society. (Kauraka 1985:v)

These synonyms for home have been exemplified in these three poems and more importantly, also gesture to representations of the overlapping *papa'anga* and *tua ta'ito*

⁶² Described by Kauraka as, “The main sea passage at Tauhunu, Manihiki” (26)

⁶³ “The pandanus flower” (ibid).

argued for in the previous subchapter 3.3.1. The synonymity of these three honorifics or names refer, as Kauraka claims, to the same island - the literal (Manihiki), the idealised (Manuhiki) and the mythic (Havaiki). The “literal Manihiki”, in its contemporary form suggests the physical island as it now stands and the fluidity and change within the present continuous. As the transnational nature of Cook Islands people has increased, so too has the significance of the physical home-island for those with connections to Manihikian *papa’anga*. Most importantly, these figurative and literal versions of this location are all equally valid to the poetic consciousness. Through these poems Kauraka has shown that home is found both as a physical location and an internal place of indigenous centeredness. Havaiki becomes home in many senses and its location becomes accessible through physical, intellectual and spiritual return. These implications reflect access to representations of the cultural centre – the physical home islands where many return and the intellectual and spiritual construct of the Cook Islands world view.

3.4 Va'ine Rasmussen

Vaine Rasmussen was born in Rarotonga in 1961 where she received her secondary schooling before studying for a BA in management at the University of the South Pacific. At the conclusion of her undergraduate studies, Rasmussen returned to the Cook Islands where, after gaining work experience in the Cook Islands public sector, she returned to study and gained an MSc in Economics from the University of Bradford. In the biography given for Rasmussen in *Akono'anga Maori*, she is noted for her valuable contributions to a variety of regional and Cook Islands economic institutions. For the most part, her full-time occupation has been her work as an economist and in this capacity, Rasmussen has often published under her married name, Wichman. For the purposes of her creative writing however, she has continued to use her maiden name (Crocombe *et al.* 2003:348). Rasmussen's varied roles amongst important political and economic Cook Islands institutions are as similarly diverse as the occupations of Kauraka and Tongia. This reflects the wide awareness and engagement these writers have had with their communities and their consciousness of the national and regional contexts in which their varied roles have existed.

Of most importance to this thesis is Rasmussen's first poetry collection *Maiata* which she published in 1991 with help and funding from the Commonwealth Youth Program at the South Pacific Regional Centre in Suva, Fiji. This publication was the first poetry collection in English by a Cook Islands female poet. With this status alone, the rationale for close analysis in this chapter is persuasive. In 1999, Rasmussen published her second collection *Te Ava-Ora*, and in Chapter 2 I acknowledged her inclusion within a number of important regional anthologies following the inception of the Ta'unga Creative Writers and Artists Association during the 1980s. Her recent creative publications have included poetry that appeared in Wendt *et al.*'s *Whetu Moana* anthologies (2003; 2010) and in a recent move into writing drama, Rasmussen has dedicated a play to Ron Crocombe in his forthcoming festschrift⁶⁴ (ed. Marjorie Crocombe). It is important to acknowledge Rasmussen's important advocacy of writing through her involvement with Ta'unga and her editing accomplishments with *Ta'unga '84* and the 2000 *Mana* Edition, where she co-edited with Jean Mason. In these many diverse roles and achievements, Rasmussen is a vivid pattern in the aesthetic of this Cook Islands literary tivaivai.

⁶⁴ Much of the information related to Ron Crocombe's festschrift has been anecdotal. When Ron Crocombe passed away in 2009, an academic conference was held in Rarotonga in 2010. The conference papers presented were to be published in a book, in memory of Crocombe. There is no expected publication date that I have been able to ascertain ("Ron Crocombe conference Rarotonga 2010").

The biography given at the rear of Rasmussen's *Maiata* is indicative of the many broad themes that this chapter – indeed, this thesis – deals with and thus, *Maiata*, connects to the tivaivai at various points across the backing-cloth. As I argued for with Tongia and his re-examination of the past, Rasmussen's biography notes the depiction of, “struggles, compromises, and concerns of Pacific Islanders” and importantly, that her writing “...looks to the past for some of the answers to the future” (34), another variation on the recurring and eternal Pacific adage of facing the future with our backs (Marsh 2004). Rasmussen's skilful use of symbolism throughout her work is acknowledged again, as the title for the collection, “Maiata” is used as a metaphor for the struggle of young people specifically (34). Interestingly, this seems to reiterate the sentiments put forward by Jonassen and Kauraka - a recurring concern for living and forthcoming generations. “Maiata” or the “dawn” as the translation is given in the collection (4) has its connotations of in-between-ness, of transition and of change. As the backing-cloth attests to, “Maiata” also acts as a parallel metaphor for the postcolonial era and how the poet, her loved ones and Cook Islanders at large have attempted to deal with social transition of their own. Her specific concern for young people also extends this reading to include the responsibility of new generations to sustain Cook Islands culture in the face of these larger social changes.

Dividing the collections within this chapter into manageable portions – portions that have manifested into broad themes for analysis – has been difficult. Perhaps the most difficult of all has been Rasmussen's collection. Her poetics are incredibly rich and as with the interconnectedness of Kauraka's thematic chapters and the texts within them, the dips and turns of tone and Rasmussen's usage of Cook Islands symbolism and iconography is multilayered. Each poem provides a myriad of vivid readings that prompt literary associations, intertextuality and allusion. Because of this richness, I have specifically emphasised keys parts of her aesthetic that I believe bond with the other patterns on this conceptual tivaivai. The first broad theme I consider is the nostalgic tone that permeates much of this collection. While nostalgia is seen in Tongia (“I Remember” and “Ora” being powerful examples) and Kauraka's work (the return to home), the marked difference between theirs and Rasmussen's writing, is her distinctly feminine characteristic. Through a number of her tribute pieces, and the recurring appearance of sons and children, there is a deliberate sense of the poetic voice embodying the personae of the “mother”. This is emphasised with Rasmussen's repeated employment of floral and faunal symbolism throughout the collection.

This usage parallels the Cook Islands feminine aesthetic argued for with the visual feminine aesthetic in the tivaivai art (Herda 2002). Ta'i George's series of poems in *Our Place in the Sun* (1998) also uses these floral motifs as I argued for in my Honours dissertation (Powell 2011) and that will be referred to throughout my analysis.

As well as this prevalent nostalgic tone, the trope of the sea is also demonstrably present throughout the collection. The way in which floral and faunal symbols create access points to memory through the sensory perception of the poetic consciousness is complimented with the presence of the sea. As it has done throughout Pacific literature, the Sea appears as a genealogical trope. It is a central point at which one finds another junction of Cook Islands cultural identity and world-view. DeLoughrey's critical work on the sea as a representation of the genealogical body, and the work of Hau'ofa, gives potent context for the role of the Sea in this collection, and I argue for its significant role in pulling together the texts within this collection. The Sea, I argue, is both repository and vantage point.

3.4.1 Take me / Tomorrow / Take me Away: Nostalgia & Tribute

When I emailed Jean Mason in March of 2012 and informally asked her what prevalent literary characteristics she might associate with the Cook Islands literary field, she replied:

Maori Ciers seem obsessed by the deaths of their parents, regrets, or their growing children; their bad marriage; their family; their grandparents; their writing tends to have sad, wistful, even tragic overtones (Mason, pers. comm. 2012).

Mason's authority as an editor of Cook Islands creative writing holds some weight for this thesis. Moreover, because of the lack of critical work done to date, verifying these conclusions against established literary research is somewhat difficult. The evidence within the work of Rasmussen, Tongia and Kauraka, however, go some way to substantiating these claims. Her rationale for these observations suggests a consideration of the growing nature of transnational Cook Islands family structures due to diasporic movement. Certainly, in my own experience, distance from the home-islands and the separation of family members for long periods of time have fractured some familial relationships; relationships that at one point would have been interdependent within the island context. As Cook Islands poets began writing in the Independence era, these concerns with family connection and the emotional strain of distance would have, understandably, made it into creative expression.

Nostalgia is not subtle within Rasmussen's *Maiata*. Her emphasis on family members and the divergent nostalgic tones that underpin these figures is palpable. Though I was not able to immediately identify why, I was struck by the clearly nostalgic and yearning tone of the first three poems on first opening this collection. Multiple readings of these first three poems, however, reveal a mode of inter-textuality that may not seem immediately apparent. Likewise, with my reading of George's work in my Honours dissertation (Powell 2012), there is a sense that these poems come into sharper relief with their proximity to one another and indeed, the other texts in the collection.

The first poem, "Take Me" (1) seems intentionally situated on the page preceding, "Take Me Away" (2), a short piece entitled "Tomorrow" (2) separating the two. In "Take

Me”, three stanzas relate an intimacy with the unnamed second person as the poetic voice implores,

Take me
To your island feast
And to the sound of the pau⁶⁵
We will make love
in the moon’s delight

Take me
To your fishing trips
And together we’ll
watch the a’ai⁶⁶
bite our feet

Take me
To your taro harvest
And in the mud
we’ll grasp for
the last root

The reader is struck with Rasmussen’s inclusion of elements within a setting that is clearly redolent of an island context, “island feast” and the “pau”. The yearning here is observable and with the repetition of “Take me” at the beginning of each stanza, the beseeching tone belies the familiar intimacy between the first and second person figure and furthermore, incites an emotive crescendo with each iteration. This is reinforced as the poetic voice declares that upon their meeting they will “make love / in the moon’s delight”. Similarly, “Take Me Away” on the following page, uses the same repetition at the beginning of each stanza. The slight deviation in the final stanzas of “Take Me Away” signals a margin drawn around these three poems, rationalising my reading of them alongside one another. This is buffered by the placement of poems, similar in length to “Tomorrow”, having entire pages of their own later in the collection (“Tiare Maori” 8; “The Sea” 12).

Take me away
from this white
world I’m living in

Take me back
to my father’s
grave,

⁶⁵ “bass sounding drum”

⁶⁶ “tuna fish” (1)

To the simpleness
of darkness and undergrowth,

away from a dream
I can no longer
fulfill.

This nostalgic reflection is tangible in the yearning tone of the poetic voice to return, to travel back to a physical place (“Take me back”) that holds obvious emotional importance – the “father’s / grave”. This longing for “simpleness / of darkness and undergrowth” resonates with a sense of safety and a place where the persona intends to find security. The intimacy within these three poems is emphasised with the use of the first person and the directness with which that poetic consciousness addresses the unspecified second persons in the text.

“Tomorrow”, in its abruptness ties “Take Me” And “Take Me Away” together by illustrating the self-reflexive poetic consciousness. In the first poem, we are exposed to the yearning of lovers and in the last we read a voice that looks to the comforts of home and family, specifically the figure of “father”. These morose nostalgic reflections are punctuated by the inherent premonitory nature of the short lines with the first stanza as follows:

TOMORROW
Is knowing
that the child you bore
inherits
your mistakes.

As “Take Me” and “Take Me Away” both look back to the places and people that the poetic consciousness associates with safety and affection, there is a sense that these nostalgic reminiscences are motivated by trials and tribulations, perhaps even mistakes, made by the poetic voice. The bleak outlook of “Tomorrow” compliments this tone but also acts as a text that adds context to the poems on either side of it. This “inheritance” of nostalgia – the yearning to be with a loved one and the safety found in the comforts of home and parents - are two powerful notions that the parent anticipates for the child. My earlier hypothesis for the presence of a mother personae in Rasmussen’s work has its first manifestation here.

The mother persona appears in a number of pieces including, “Through the Child’s Eye” (20) and “Advise to my Son” (33). The figure of “son” becomes a recurring character within this collection and to compliment him and extend my argument for the prominence of nostalgia I note the conspicuous perspective of the poetic “I”, the first person, throughout

Maiata. This consistent use makes it difficult for the reader to not refer to the biography of Rasmussen in their reading of each text, especially with her reference to specific figures in a number of texts. These tribute pieces (as far as I am able to ascertain from titles and the context of each poem) include: “To Koringo” (3); “Papa” (6); “Mother” (14); “To Reka” (17) and “Lost Pearl (For Peiseka)” (18).

These poems are an important part of Rasmussen’s aesthetic as they elaborate on the mother persona, the nostalgic tone and also exemplify how Rasmussen employs floral and faunal motifs in order to access these nostalgic reminiscences. In Tongia’s work, I gestured briefly to his use of recognisable Cook Islands flora and fauna worked into his poems, to show an island-specific setting and also build extended metaphors for the onset of postcolonial social changes (“Ora” and “Broken” as cases in point). In Rasmussen’s work there is a similar premise. I would also extend this to include Cook Islands-specific floral and faunal motifs as a characteristic part of the Cook Islands feminine aesthetic in all forms of artistic and creative expression. In a compelling example, tivaivai practitioners (always women) (Herda 2002) often apply floral and faunal motifs in their patterning and design. Phyllis Herda, a scholar of Women Studies and Anthropology writes that,

Although not an indigenous textile technology, [tivaivai] are now firmly established part of a feminine Cook Islands aesthetic... Through their creation, display and gifting, [tivaivai] embody notions of the Cook Islands feminine self, as well as the relation of that self to kin, place, history and modernity... The motifs used in [tivaivai] manu are usually highly stylised, symmetrical and botanical in origin – flowers being the most common motif. (Herda 139-40)

This is seen throughout feminine artistic expression from the Cook Islands. The “pareu” or sarong/lavalava are often printed fabrics with floral and faunal patterns and are typically gifted by women, and worn by both genders, throughout the home-islands and diasporic Cook Islands communities. The reasoning for these recurring botanical and faunal motifs has a strong association with place. Many stunning plant species are endemic to the islands, in large part because of the climate. A metaphorical interpretation of this endemic characteristic parallels with the fundamental nature of the 15 Cook Islands as the resting place of Cook Islands people and culture – connection to land and physical location. While some transplantation of cultural norms takes place when Cook Islands people migrate to diasporic spaces, some parts of the Cook Islands culture can never be removed from the *enua* or the home islands. As the Tiare Maori is unable to grow in New Zealand, so too are Cook Islands

people unable to completely move culture, people and place in their entirety, to new national spaces.

Rasmussen's poem "Tiare Maori" (8) expands on this further:

virgin white petals
offset in a deep green bed,
nurtured in pagan soil
enhanced by the fragrant[sic]
of peace

While the description of "tiare maori" is simply given as "flower of the gardenia family" in the footnotes, the poem suggests more than this mere significance. The flower is the national flower of the Cook Islands ("Miracle Plant") and with this status, Rasmussen's imagery gestures to more detailed associations with Cook Islands people and culture. The "virgin white petals" of this national symbol prompt the reader to consider what this description suggests about the Cook Islands as a nation. The "green bed", with its connotations of lush natural vegetation inspires imagined island landscapes and the "pagan soil" in which these flora are nurtured in, give the reader impressions of pre-colonial "pagan" settings, perhaps like those described by Tongia in "To God" and "Ora". The use of the word the specific word "pagan" (a missionary "buzz word", if you will) is also implicitly indicative of a poetic consciousness that reflects on the history of her people through a missionary lens. In this sense, the tone may be quite reclamatory, with undertones that suggest pride connected to the persona's indigenous status.

Rasmussen effectively uses the framework of sensory perception to lend to her poetic reading of the flower. The tiare maori as a national symbol, clearly associated with the Cook Islands, is a powerful motif to draw on. The fragrance and visual aesthetic of the flower are what this poem is constructed around. Considering Herda's words and the "Tiare Maori" exemplified outlined above, Rasmussen's recurring use of this symbolism to convey poetic considerations of nostalgia must in part relate to these strong genealogical aesthetics. Indeed, this is seen elsewhere in the collection as well.

For example, the tribute piece "To Koringo" is shaped around the frangipani and the rose.

A fragrant of frangipani
Tickles the sweet face of fate
That destines each one

To glory or pain,
An everlasting dwelling
That cannot be changed.

A rose blooms
Amidst the cracks and jars of life
And deadens the purpose of the scene,
To excel its power in full sight
A mere decorating thing.

In this poem, there is emphasis on different parts of the sensory pallet. The frangipani's fragrance is described against the rose's visual aesthetic, its "bloom". There is obviously a very personal tone to this tribute piece that employs the smell of the frangipani, "An everlasting dwelling / That cannot be changed" and the visual splendor of the rose that "deadens the purpose of the scene" to access the memory of the figure "Koringo". The contrast is striking in that their respective meanings and connotations within the Cook Islands context are vastly different. Where the Tiare Maori has associations with nationhood, femininity and self-determination the foreign nature of the rose suggests only that it is not from the islands. It cannot speak to the cultural nuances inherent in Cook Islands culture, becoming "A mere decorating thing" (3).

In "Temptation", the short poem effectively uses the guava fruit as a metaphor for a somewhat sensual representation of enticement.

A big ripe guava
bursting with seeds,
dying to be
implanted,
To grow.

And in the title-poem "Maiata"⁶⁷, Rasmussen's extended metaphorical piece encompasses gripping imagery, setting and the reappearance of the floral symbolism. As Mason does with her chapter "Te Po" (discussed in 3.5), Rasmussen invokes "Po"⁶⁸ as a site at which the feminine persona becomes changed, emphasised in this case by the metaphor of the "dawn" as a period of transition from night to day. Converse to the connotations of safety associated with "darkness" in "Take Me Away", the more conventional negative connotations of

⁶⁷ See: Appendix for full reproduction of "Maiata"

⁶⁸ "oh, night (darkness)" (4)

darkness seem invoked here. This is indicated in the first stanza where the poetic consciousness declares,

E po, you have taken the maiden
Lonely a woman lies
Weak and in pain.

Each stanza goes on to subtly gesture to the first sexual experiences of the poetic voice. This is subtly present in the swing between literal and metaphorical descriptions. The change from “virginity” to “womanhood” is metaphorically represented in the symbolic use of two contrasting flowers,

You took the white gardenia
and gave me a red hibiscus
as an introduction to
an experience
still a mystery.

However, a literal reflection in the final lines of the fourth stanza recall,

You parted my thighs
and I gave in
with trust in you.

Again, the intimacy that Rasmussen conveys through the effective construction of setting and the skilful use of floral and faunal symbols is noteworthy. The effect of these iconographic floral symbols are significant first because they continue to appear, acting as a catalyst for, and encouraging further, the tone of nostalgia that is so evident throughout this collection. Second, Rasmussen’s skilful use of these symbols is shown in the way she crafts their poetic construction. Her effective usage of these symbols is shown in her understanding of their ability to assault the senses with striking visual aesthetics (their beauty) and the nuances of fragrance (their unique scent), both deliver sensory “shocks” to prompt memory. As well as the tivaivai and pareu examples given above, the iconic ‘*ei katu*⁶⁹ of Cook Islands women is also another compelling example of how important floral symbols are to the Cook Islands feminine aesthetic. With this in mind, Rasmussen’s pattern(s) on the conceptual tivaivai is significant, a prime example of how and why these floral and faunal symbols are used.

⁶⁹ Cook Islands Maori word describing the iconic head garland worn by Cook Islands women, particularly at ceremonies and gatherings of importance (church services, 21st celebrations, vaine tini gatherings).

3.4.2 The Sea

Within the Pacific literary tradition, the Sea is one of the foremost literary tropes, comparable to the symbol of the coconut or *niu* as a representation of resilience, sustenance and migration, or the significance of *enua*⁷⁰ as an extension of the self, a connection forged through genealogical relation and the literal caring and maintenance of the land. Scholar of comparative literatures from the Caribbean and the Pacific, Elizabeth DeLoughrey employed the methodology of tidalectics in her critical work, *Routes and Roots* (2007). DeLoughrey wrote that the methodology was a way of reading island literatures that,

“...brings together the rooted discourse of terrestrial belonging with the fluidity of transoceanic migration, foregrounding the process of diaspora and highlighting the complex relationship between national and regional identities” (96).

Similarly, Barbadian scholar and poet Kamau Brathwaite characterised this methodology as one that looked to “the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic motion, rather than linear” (“Literatures of the Archipelagoes”). Considering this methodology in a purely conceptual sense, this definition of tidalectics helps give some further context to the way that Rasmussen’s use of the sea as a literary device. The Sea as a subject and a key feature of poetic setting within this collection, is demonstrable. DeLoughrey’s conceptualisation of the sea as one that “brings together” and highlights “the complex relationship between...identities” is apparent in a number of Rasmussen’s texts and likewise, Brathwaite’s emphasis on cyclic, as opposed to linear motion appropriately ties into the spiral temporality of the Cook Islands world-view and the looking backwards of the old Pacific adage. Finally, complimentary to the tidalectic methodology, is Hau’ofa’s “Sea of Islands” imaginary.

The Sea as trope encompasses much of the region’s historiography and provides a metaphorical representation of some of the contemporary social and economic phenomena that have occurred within the region and the Cook Islands specifically. DeLoughrey’s expansion on the Vaka Pasifika as a conceptualised indigenous vessel for movement and self-determination alludes to the deep significance of the sea – of Moana Nui a Iva, the Pacific Ocean – as a body that has liberated the Pacific indigene in the establishment of their own subjective regionalism. This stems from the familiarity of the Sea to the Pacific indigene

⁷⁰ A Cook Islands word meaning “land”

harking back to pre-colonial, pre-Christian and pre-European contact. As Rasmussen writes to the Sea, “Your timeless beat / remains the same.” (12).

On the cover of *Maiata*, an island is depicted viewed from the sea. This suggests a number of things if we are to be informed by the conceptual readings offered in DeLoughrey and Brathwaite’s methodological framework and Hau’ofa’s imaginary. The Sea in the foreground suggests approach and also offers a particular vantage point from which to gain a perspective of this island (Appendix 4). I argue that the Sea, throughout the collection, acts as a genealogical body, much as the land does throughout Pacific literature. In Tongia’s work, I argued for the ancestors’ history literally etched into the wood of the burning pagan temple. Likewise, the connection with “land” – which in essence refers to not only the soil, but the environment at large – must necessarily include the Sea. It is obvious in this collection that the Sea is a constant, almost omniscient, presence throughout.

The epigraph at the beginning of this section is from Rasmussen’s poem, “The Sea”. The poem reads as an ode, as its continuous presence is acknowledged, “You never cease to roll / you[sic] boneless body / on my shore” (12). My assertion for the Sea as a body that possesses traits of genealogy is supported here. It becomes clearer still that this “body” is ceaseless as the Sea recurs subtly and obviously, as both setting and subject. In the similarly titled poems “Lost Pearl (For Peiseka)” (18) and “Lost Pearl” (19), the Sea is invoked as an extended metaphor for the search of the poetic consciousness in both of these poems. In “Lost Pearl (For Peiseka)” “the past”, metaphorically represented as the ocean, holds this elusive information,

I dove into the past
And sank in your ocean,
A blood set sun on a
Tearful horizon.
Tossing on a restless seabed
In the mud, sand and slime
My body anointed
In its search to find.

Calm in your perfection
My being you eased.
A piercing cry heralds
The presence of absence.
Drums soothe
The serene mourning,
Give me a sign

In a world of no hope.

The description of the horizon as “tearful” carries connotations of wide, almost eternal, sadness. The “blood set sun” suggests the disappearance of vitality or life, as it seeps into the sadness of the horizon. This sadness is also reinforced with the reference to the “calm...perfection” of the second person figure and the “absence” and “mourning” described in the following lines. Alongside the lamentation of “mourning” is the awareness of the associations that its synonym – morning – suggests. As with the metaphorical Maiata/dawn, there is the sense that the final three lines look for the healing that the dawn – the morning and a new beginning – represent. These specific descriptors support my argument for the text as an “ode” or perhaps more appropriately, a tribute as suggested in the parenthetical reference of the title, “To Peiseka”.

With the poetic consciousness confined to the shore in the following lines, it is on this figurative beach that the consciousness is forced to find what knowledge it can, “Tossing on a restless seabed”. Brathwaite’s reference to the ebb and flow of the tide as a cyclical pattern resonates with the description of the “seabed” as “restless”. This restlessness and its continuing cyclical nature are also alluded to with the association of the tide. The ongoing arrival and departure of the tide on the shoreline suggests that genealogy is constantly revisited, continually consulted and added to. The spiritual tone of the body’s anointment in the closing lines of the first stanza, reinforce association with figurative links to the past, as the body of the poetic consciousness dives into ocean and seabed debris – debris of past knowledge and memories – of genealogy. Finally, in the closing stanza my argument for the Sea as a representation of a genealogical body has some relevance here,

Conquering pain
In the tradition of my ancestors
I held my breath,
Dived and sought,
Sifting the past for that sign
But still the waters
Betrayed my search.

The line, “In the tradition of my ancestors” reverberates with the maxim of the Pacific adage. As the poetic voice “dives” in search for answers, “sifting the past”, the reader becomes aware of the body of water as a vast repository of knowledge - in this case, the past of the mourned figure.

Similarly, in “Lost Pearl”, the canoe is used as the vessel with which the poetic consciousness accesses, and travels, these waters. This is a version of DeLoughrey’s “Vaka Pasifika”, as the relevance of traditional navigation by the heavens is invoked, “By four winds, / Guided by eternal stars”. As the poetic voice speaks to the Sea itself and notes the stars reflected in the depths of the ocean, a clear connection to the poem on the following page, “Through the Child’s Eye” becomes apparent. In “Lost Pearl”, the canoe,

...is steered
By four winds,
Guided by eternal stars
That sink in your depths
The one almighty holds
My paddle
And steers my heart
Through the unknown night

In “Through the Child’s Eye” (20), a mother and her son sit on the shore in Puaikura and as the mother says,

...’Son, see the stars in the sky,’
He replied,
‘No, man, they’re in the lagoon’

Here, the dialogue between mother and son suggests the reflection of the stars in the waters of the lagoon. Perspective and vantage point are alluded to with the differing perceptions of mother and son, layered against the literal reflection of sky, within the Sea. My argument for reading the Sea as a vantage point in the cover picture is encouraged here. While one kind of vantage point is exemplified with the perspective of the cover picture, the imagery suggested by this dialogue suggests a metaphor that represents reflection (literally and figuratively with the sky and the sea) as well as the diverse understandings of mother and child, the old and the young, the male and the female.

The connection between sky and Sea also gesture to the arrivals and departures these physical and figurative spaces have allowed. In one sense, the vaka’s passage of diasporic and migratory symbolism rests on the sea and the stars clearly allude to the celestial navigational techniques of traditional vaka voyaging. However, the sky also prompts the reader to consider the modes of travel used to facilitate modern trajectories of diaspora and migration, particularly within the Cook Islands context.

The Sea, as a genealogical body appears again in a number of poems (“A Sailor’s Life” 5; “Papa” 6; “Everybody’s Going, I’m Staying” 7; “The Conch and the Coconut” 9; “Abandoned” 10; “Brown and White Cowrie” 13; “Rarotonga” 16; “In the Tivaevae” 32) and a tone of mourning and loss become associated with it (perhaps unsurprisingly considering my arguments in the previous section). In “The Ocean’s Grief” (21) (with the title alone giving a clear indication), the ocean seemingly becomes a divisive body, rather than a connecting one. In foregrounding the conceptual reading of the Sea as a body of memories and history, what separates is not distance but something else entirely – knowledge, memory, *papa’anga* and so on.

Ocean separates the heart
That could have loved
The lips that could have kissed

In “My Friend – The Pain” (23), the Sea personifies the anguish of the poetic voice,

Our thought waves never clash
One crashes on the reef
And the other fades in the ocean.

Here again, the ocean is used as a divisive entity and yet there is a clear sense of sameness in its ability to separate. The ocean, in absorbing the “thought waves”, manifests one-ness as each wave is absorbed into the larger body. In this present tense, the Sea obscures intimate connection however as the “pain” is represented with the separate locations of the two crashing waves, their ultimate absorption into the larger body, figuratively adds to the pain of memory, contributing to the vast repository of memory that the wider trope of the Sea represents.

We degrade each others achievements
and emphasise discrepancies

And yet,
when I fell in that pit
She was there
with arms outreaching,
Cuddling me to her bosom

In this final half of the text, there is an abrupt change to a realist tone, as seen in “Maiata”, adding to a distinct feature of Rasmussen’s poetics. I also argue the reconciliatory manner of the final stanza enhances my conclusions above. The “pain” of the title is the personified third person “she”. This is rationalised by the pain seemingly caused by the inability of the “waves” in the first stanza to clash, an extended metaphor for the inability of

the first and second figures to find accord. Therefore, as “she” (the pain and the second figure) appears “with arms outreaching, / Cuddling me to her bosom” the reader recognises a meeting of the two figures. Not a “clash” but rather, a harmonious reunion. To extend my conception of the Sea’s role in this poem, I assert that this imagery is paralleled with the waves of the first paragraph, showing reconciliation by an imagined realisation of waves as from, and returning to, the same larger body (the Sea).

Because the Sea is by nature non-linear, describing its function within Rasmussen’s work has the potential to become somewhat convoluted. These examples illustrate the diverse conceptual and cultural ideas that the Sea is able to represent. Rasmussen utilises the Sea as a representation of memory, of past and of genealogy. What this means is that its presence within these poems as settings and personifications allow the reader to understand the significance of the Sea and its representations to the poetic consciousness, in turn enabling the nostalgic and emotive tones to effectively permeate the reader’s understanding of the text. The power of the Sea as a literary device is obvious in this analysis and to Rasmussen’s credit, she seems to use its poignant potential almost unconsciously. Like the floral symbolism of the previous sub-chapter, the Sea is felt in almost all of these texts though I have given only brief examples here.

3.5 Jean Tekura'i'imoana Mason

Jean Tekura'i'imoana Mason was born in Rarotonga. Her biography in *Akono'anga Maori* follows that Mason was born to:

...an English father (now deceased) and a Cook Islander mother from the island of Ma'uke, where Jean lived for several years...[She was e]ducated in Ma'uke, Rarotonga and New Zealand, including Hotel School and Canterbury University, she worked for seven years as an internal auditor and then manager of hotels in Auckland and Wellington, before returning to the Cook Islands to live.

The biography went on to note her (at the time) current job as a Research Officer of the Cook Islands Parliament. Mason now works as the manager of the Cook Islands Library and Museum in Avarua, Rarotonga (Mason 2010). Her contributions to the Cook Islands literary field include her (only) poetry collection being treated here, *Tatau:Tattoo* (2001) and her editorial and critical work noted in Chapter 2. However, this thesis must also crucially acknowledge her continued advocacy of Cook Islands literature and creative writing in her capacity as Manager of the Cook Islands Library and Museum. She has been an active part of collecting and perserving what Cook Islands publications are currently available and with these efforts, she has effectively become a crucial part of maintaining the Cook Islands literary field. This has included the administrative surveillance of borrowed Cook Islands material and continuing to have this material available in the Cook Islands section of the Library & Museum, with whatever administrative and resource that might entail. Mason's growing profile as a kind of guardian of published Cook Islands material is apparent in her own research work as is shown in her published efforts on the work of Cook Islands tattooing ("Tatau: Polynesian Tattoos"; Mason 2003:59-66), Kalissa Alexeyeff's lengthy reference to Mason in her article "Love Food: Exchange and Sustenance in the Cook Islands Diaspora" (2004) and her other contributions to *Akono'anga Maori* (2003:23-44; 59-66; 187-210; 233-246) and *Barefoot Dreams: Cook Islands* (2001).

There is a also a distinct sense within her collection that the thoroughly researched contextual notes provided at the foot of many texts within *Tatau* are the detailed research efforts of the poet. This literary aesthetic of Mason's work reflects the poet's universal interests and builds crucial context around some of the texts within the collection. It seems hardly surprising then, that Mason's biography gives a similarly diverse background to the three other poets in this chapter. Indeed, Mason's biography parallels with the meta-narratives

of the backing-cloth and personal narratives of the other poets on this conceptual tivaivai. As exemplified in the other individual biographies, Mason has necessarily had some experience with, and as a part of, the diasporic Cook Islands community (New Zealand). As these diasporic spaces made appearances in the work of Tongia, Kauraka and Rasmussen, so too does this space appear in Mason's work. Mason's "Turakina Street" featured in Wendt *et al.*'s *Mauri Ola* illustrates this point. Written from the perspective of Ma'uke woman who lived on Turakina Street, Auckland (Mason 2010:124), Mason's use of plastic packing strips as a symbol of diasporic adaptation is a powerful metaphor for the Cook Islands-New Zealand experience. In the first stanza she writes:

I give you
 these baskets and 'ei
 made by my hands
 in the old style
 from plastic packing strips
 my way of keeping alive those ties
 to home
 in this land not my own
 there are no pandanus leaves here
 but there are jobs for me and all my brothers and sisters
 we will send you what we can
 when we can

Alongside this awareness of diasporic experience within her poetry there is also a clear sense of Mason's connection to the island-Pacific and specifically the island of her maternal roots – Ma'uke. In the biography on the last page of the collection, there is written, "It is for Ma'uke Jean writes with particular fondness" (2001:115). In the following analysis I consider the presence of Ma'uke throughout her work and how this island is represented in Mason's poetic constructions of setting, imagery and symbolism. Most importantly, I focus on how Ma'uke as a geographical setting – as a physical location – is able to exemplify another Cook Islands version of the genealogical body, much like Kauraka does with his retelling of mythologies from the island of Manihiki and Rasmussen does through the presence of the Sea.

The second section investigates the premise that, "Jean Tekura Mason's poetry reflects her life as a person living in two worlds – Polynesian and European" (2001). Robert Sullivan argued, and provided evidence for, distinct "strains" within Alistair Te Ariki Campbell's oeuvre. Likewise, I extrapolate poems from the collection that I believe reflect this distinct aesthetic – the dual nature of tension and cohesion – between the parts of

Mason's cultural background, the *papa'a* through her British father, and the Ma'uokean through her mother. Marsh and others have argued for a particular *afakasi* aesthetic within contemporary Pacific literature, particularly in Samoan literature being produced by those of mixed racial backgrounds. Conversely, the absence of a widely-used, or even colloquial, term suggests that the Cook Islands world-view as it currently stands does not recognise these identities as distinctly separate, nor does it acknowledge the cultural background of parents as analogous to denominators of a "whole" identity. Despite this, however, I still believe that Mason explores her connection to both of these cultural backgrounds in a number of her texts, though it may not be as explicit as the contemporary *afakasi* aesthetic being explored in the poetic work of those like Marsh (2003:133; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c), Grace Taylor (2010:61-70), Darren Kamali (2010:53-60; 2011) and other diasporic Pacific voices. Considering my argument for Mason as one of the later poets of the first generation, this makes some sense as *afakasi* literary aesthetics have only recently come into critical literary discourse. Nevertheless, I hope to discuss this aspect of Mason's writing in 3.5.2.

3.5.1 Ma'uke

Ma'uke is part of the Ngaputoru group⁷¹ in the Southern Cook Islands and within Mason's collection her genealogical connection to this island is noticeable. The biography at the back of the collection notes that, "Jean's growing years were spent variously on Rarotonga with occasional lengthy periods spent in Ma'uke and New Zealand" (115). As is seen in the work of the other writers in this chapter, their personal and genealogical connections to their respective islands are important to the orientation and understanding of personal identity and in Mason's collection, this is observable. Like Manihiki for Kauraka, and the repeated reference to parts of the Rarotongan landscape in the work of Tongia and Rasmussen, Ma'uke becomes a personified character and a setting for many of the texts within Mason's collection.

In taking stock of Mason's individual poetics, the reader notes her use of code-switching, supplemented by extensive glossaries at the foot of each text. I hesitate to attribute this entirely to the publisher (Mana Publications) as Tongia's *Korero* was also published by *Mana* and did not have the same volume of glossary and contextual information. Granted, the temporal gap between these two collections is significant and thus, one must consider the changing readership and the shifting demand and/or the appropriateness of these contextual additions. This characteristic of Mason's poetic does however seem conspicuous when Kauraka separated his use of English and Manihiki-Maori into two distinctly separate texts and Rasmussen provided translations as intermittently as Tongia. The benefit of this supplementary information does allow for the reader to have a deeper cultural and historical understanding of the texts, particularly those related to Ma'uke. In some ways, with this information, understanding is led by the poet, rather than alluded or gestured to and some may argue that the creative interpretation of these pieces may be somewhat stilted as the information confines rather than liberates audience interpretation. For the impartial reader, however, this information casts Ma'uke in sharper relief against the noise of cultural reference, symbolism and complex *papa'anga*.

This seems to be the case in Mason's "The Guardian" (9). The text centres on the personification of a lizard, the "*moko ngarara*" who acts as the guardian to the "*i'i*"⁷² tree.

⁷¹ Ngaputoru consists of the three southern islands: Atiu, Mitiaro and Ma'uke.

⁷² "*i'i* – *Inocarpus fagifer*, island chestnut" (9)

The *moko ngarara*
 on the forest floor
 at *Rakuipo*
 is a guardian
 of the *i'i* tree
 where in its hollow
Taratoa once took refuge
 and lived to fight another day,
 my fear departs
 with the flicker of sunlight
 through the leaves
 as the *moko ngarara* scurries
 to tell the *tupuna*
 that I am friend not foe.

The setting here is signalled with the geographical marker of *Rakuipo* marae. Indeed, the contextual information given at the foot of the poem acknowledges the marae's location on the island of Ma'uke. The mention of the figure *Taratoa* also indicates a particular *papa'anga* associated with this place. It is not clear whether this is the same *Taratoa* spoken about in Tongia's "Burning in Hell", however the information given at the foot of the poem gives some context to his relevance in the narrative of this text. On *Taratoa*, it is written,

...warrior of great prowess according to legend. He was a mercenary hired by chiefs of Tahiti, Aitutaki and other islands of Poynesia to assist them in battles against their enemies (9)

His presence within this poem underscores the relevance of the marae as space of shelter for the foreign *manu'iri*⁷³, "*Taratoa* once took refuge / and lived to fight another day,". Moreover, *Taratoa*'s mention in this poem situates the relevance of the marae, within a wider context of Ma'ukean *papa'anga*. By the poetic voice seeking access to this physical site through *tupuna*, via the *moko*, there is a distinct sense that the poetic voice is privileged with this access by relational connection to *Taratoa* and/or Ma'uke as an island, and a genealogical body. In some ways, the positioning of the poetic voice is paralleled against the position of *Taratoa*. He is sheltered as a foreigner during a time of need and likewise, the *moko* and the *tupuna* allow access for the poetic voice as a consequence of some unnamed connection with either place or heroic person. It is unclear whether or not the poetic voice is also looking for shelter as *Taratoa* was, however these two visitors who, at very different times seek access to this site, are granted it by the intermediary of the lizard.

⁷³ Cook Islands Maori word meaning "guest".

The lizard, personified as a conscious being who communicates with the spirits of the ancestors, the “tupuna” represents both cultural protocol and the interconnectedness of past (tupuna), the present tense, the land and the surrounding natural environment of which the *moko* is a part. The communication happening between these personified representations of the Ma’ukean world reflect the cultural world-view at work within this text. The poetic voice accesses a physical site, and but also a pathway by which to communicate with past ancestors, through communing with the guardian lizard. By acknowledging these disparate parts of the setting within this text, the Ma’ukean world is brought into sharp relief. The reader is encompassed in the relevance of each character within the text: the lizard, Taratoa, the tupuna and the poetic voice.

Though this is not the last time that Ma’uke appears in this collection, a characteristic of Mason’s poetic means that the *way* in which it appears in the other texts are diverse. Like Kauraka, part of Mason’s poetic is the way in which she also incorporates story-like narratives into her poetry. The blurb noted Mason’s “reflective” tone in the collection and also the, “At times incisive, and descriptive” and “introspective and perceptive” (back cover 2001) style within it. Converse to Kauraka’s poetic retellings of traditional narratives, Mason’s retellings are contemporary and distinctly personal. The tone of the poetic voice, with its distinct first-person perspective, makes it difficult to separate poetic consciousness from the poet herself. However, once this is achieved, it becomes obvious that many of these narratives, while through the perspective of the poetic “I”, are imaginaries constructed by the poet and informed by memories, insights and perceptions of incidents, place and people.

In an example, “The Chosen One” (18) is accompanied by notes from the poet where she writes:

This poem is about the investiture of a Ma’ukean ariki (chief), Marae Turaki, whose title is Tau Ariki. The investiture ceremony is complete once the new chief chews (and swallows) the upper lip of a partially cooked pig (assuring her/his ability to speak on behalf of the people). He then severs the head of the pig with one blow from a large knife.

The consciousness within the poem surveys the setting of this ceremony and within it specific aspects of imagery and symbolism are employed.

A gentle breeze picks up
fluffs of kapok
showing all those

who have assembled

The white sand *paepae* shines
brilliantly in the afternoon
a sliver of light falls upon you
in the shade of the tree

In these two stanza, facets of the environment are characterised to show an almost conscious response to the ceremony that is taking place amongst it. The breeze responds by “showing all those / who have assembled” and likewise, the sacred space of the *paepae* “shines” almost as a blessing on the ceremony. My argument for the interconnectedness of environment, tradition and individual in “The Guardian” seems equally pertinent here. This acceptance of the chief by not only the assembled guests but nature itself resonates with the spiritual connotations of the pre-Christian period.

The *karakia* uttered without pause
the red feathers of your *marokura*
glisten in the sunlight
as you embrace the tools of your office
spear, paddle, and mat

This tone is prevalent in these lines as sacred words are invoked as part of the ceremony, “The *karakia* uttered without pause”. The connection to the Ma’ukean and wider Cook Islands context is represented by the longstanding ritual significance within Cook Islands ceremonial tradition of the *marokura*⁷⁴ and the symbols of the “spear, paddle and mat”. Like Kauraka’s use of traditional ornaments to symbolise tools of empowerment and self-determination in “May Your Head Stay Upright” (Kauraka 1985:14), the spear, the paddle and mat hold obvious symbolic value of their own, justifying their inclusion in the ceremony. The relevance of these tools to the Ma’ukean context may be read within a wide metaphorical framework. The spear - a weapon that is both violent in its capacity as a war weapon and also a provider of sustenance as a tool for fishing, appropriately represents the chief’s ability to protect and provide for his people. Similarly, the paddle has associations with gathering seafood but also symbolises relations between islands, migration and the mobility to access the great genealogical body of the ocean. Finally, the mat acts as a symbol both for the home and hearth of Ma’uke and the innovation and intellect required to construct it. From endemic materials, is made functional mats for the livelihood of the chief’s people.

⁷⁴ The definition given by the poet describes the *marokura* as a, “special girdle which was ornamented with highly prized red feathers (traditionally obtained from a red lorikeet now extinct in the Cook Islands), worn by an *ariki* (chief) at her or his investiture. Red was the sacred colour of ancient times.

This reading of these cultural symbols within the third stanza, are vindicated in the last two:

The pig's upper lip is chewed
and swallowed without hesitation
the blade cuts cleanly
murmurs of approval

The omens are good
for a long and peaceful sign
approbation by your kin
blessed by the gods

The description of the pig's upper lip is static in its retelling and yet, in a wider context, it has also relayed an important part of the Ma'ukean cultural protocol during the investiture ceremony. "Ma'uke" as a represented consciousness through the description of setting and the environment, is tangible especially considering the previous text "The Guardian". Its breeze, the physical space of the *paepae*, even the sacrifice of the pig, as a symbolic representation of the people, all have important roles to play within this story-like narrative. These symbolic representations of approving omens are made more powerful by the obvious familiarity that the poetic consciousness has with ceremonial protocol. The code-switching utilised by Mason for these cultural references and symbols, reinforce this reading.

These poetic characteristics are further seen in the Ma'ukean setting described in Mason's "Ma'ukean Childhood" (32). With its nostalgic tones, the text recalls affectionate childhood memories of Ma'uke. Utilising the code-switching poetic again, the names by which facets of the setting and imagery are described are given specificity. This centres the poem within the Ma'ukean *enua*.

Where rock-daises stalked
the thicket like tigers
burning brightly in the grass;

where a swim in the water
of cool chasm-pools
was heaven after a hot day's play;

where *ni'oi* leaves
and the ubiquitous *kikau*
was a jew's harp in our mouths and hands;

where the sweet scent of *mata'oi*
intoxicated all our senses

in the bright afternoons;

where we scaped our knees and hearts
in the *makatea* chasing *mene'une* in the flowers
of the crawling pumpkin vine;

where our chins and memories were indelibly
stained by cashew-apples on our way home
from 'Araro;

where time-worn limestone trails
behind grandfather's house
were aglow with spectral fishermen
dragging their *paiere* down to the sea at night.

Where my child with the blue eyes
sparkling like jewels on the ocean
plays on the shining sand
where once I played.

The intimacy with which Mason describes the detail of this setting is striking and will remind the reader of the similar intimacy apparent in Rasmussen's detailed descriptions of the island environment. This tribute piece is strongly nostalgic in tone as the each reflective stanza recalls powerful instances within the memory of the poetic consciousness. Mason's opening lines may seem familiar with her reference to William Blake's canonical text, "The Tiger" (1794). Interestingly, the popularity of this text within Western literary curriculums gestures to the significance of Blake's text within these nostalgic childhood moments, an allusion to the presence or significance of this poem even within the island context. Mason's reworking of Blake's recognisable lines demonstrates a conscious indigenising of the text, claiming the text within an island, and therefore more relatable, context.

The reiteration of "where" at the beginning of each stanza situates each memory in time (memory) and place (*enua*/Ma'uke). There is a sense that this setting is so familiar to the poetic consciousness that the physical objects literally etch themselves into the memory of the persona, particularly as the *ni'oi* leaves and *kikau* are described inside the mouths and hands of the poetic voice and her companion. Similarly, the description of physical interaction with the remembered environment works in the same way as Rasmussen's use of floral symbolism. The arresting visual and sensory qualities of this environment are the real

markers of memory here, “where we scraped our knees and hearts / in the *makatea*⁷⁵ chasing *mene’une*⁷⁶ in the flowers”.

Also important to note is the incorporation of *tupuna* within this text. In the closing stanza, two rhetorical questions are posed to the poetic self and to the reader:

...will the land of my *tupuna* consume her
Like it does me?
...how can I forget it even in my dreams?

The length and exhaustive detail given in this poem reinforces the affection the persona has for the island of Ma’uke. The use of the word “consume” to describe the importance of Ma’uke to the persona, implies the essential and fundamental nature of this land to the poetic self. Like Kauraka’s reverant tone in the texts where he speaks of physical and spiritual return to Havaiki, the importance of Ma’uke rests in its ability to physically nourish the poetic body and soul.

There is also a genealogy of significance written into the island of Ma’uke within this text. In the seventh stanza, “spectral fishermen” are described dragging their vessels down to the water. The use of “spectre” holds connotations of spirits of ghosts and in this way, the reader assumes that these are representations of *tupuna*, holding to the assumption that this text exists within a Cook Islands cultural framework. In the eighth stanza, the child of the poetic voice is shown interacting with the ocean. These two representations of past and future generations resonate again with an awareness of those who have come before and those who will (or have) come after. While the title suggests that the persona is reminiscing about a particular time in their life, the presence of Ma’uke’s environmental features accentuates the emotive tone of these reminiscences, showing the importance of Ma’uke as a setting but also a key part of Mason’s poetic, not least of all because it is a nuanced feature of the wider Cook Islands literary aesthetic – a feature to which I argue Mason is indelibly associated.

⁷⁵ Cook Islands Maori word describing the “raised formation of dead coral around the coast of an island”

⁷⁶ Cook Islands word referring to “tiny magical people: fairies (appropriated from the Hawaiian word *menehune*)” (Mason 2001:33).

3.5.2 What's in a Name? (39)

Making claims about poetic characteristics that spring from two (let alone many different) distinct cultural backgrounds is somewhat difficult when blood quantum is difficult to measure with any real accuracy. There has been little critical work acknowledging or exploring this distinct *afakasi* or diasporic aesthetic in the work of Pacific poets. Robert Sullivan's thesis examining Alistair Te Ariki Campbell's oeuvre did argue for the "strains" of his writing pertaining to his cultural background and his experience but did not place any credence on conclusions drawn from blood quantum. Younger, more contemporary poets, now write about the experience of the Pacific person who exists within diasporic communities, which also exist within a plethora of diverse communities, making up national spaces like New Zealand, Australia and the United States. A major part of this narrative is the additional dynamic of those Pacific people who are themselves, from many different cultural backgrounds, resulting in many diverse identities.

As mentioned earlier, contemporary poets like Marsh, Grace Taylor, Darren Kamali and Karlo Mila (to name a few), have within their work reflections, discussions and examinations of *afakasi* discourse. As brief examples, Karlo Mila's poems "Where are you from?" (Mila 2008:12) and "Five poems on not being a real Tongan" (13) both frame and reframe her position as a Pacific person of mixed descent – half "palagi" and half "Tongan" – ruminating on the self-perception and the perception of others, framed by particular prejudices, assumptions and, in some cases, misinformation. In the last of the "Five poems", "A historical perspective" (13) she writes in the last two lines, "Blood / reigns supreme" (13). This idea of blood quantum as a way to determine the "right" of access to claiming cultural authenticity is a positioning issue that I have had to acknowledge at the beginning of this thesis, but not because of my own "questionable blood". If I am to judge my identity by blood, then I am 100% Cook Islands Maori going back three generations on my maternal and paternal sides. However, my socialisation has in some ways decided my claim to cultural authenticity *for me*. This is implicitly judged by my understanding of Cook Islands Maori language, the protocols and expectations of the Cook Islands person within particular cultural contexts, familiarity with my own *papa'anga* and so on.

Conversely, in this reading of Mason's work I consider how she constructs the "mixed-blood" personae within her work and what tensions she explores because of this. The

purpose of this exercise is not to align Mason's biography with certain texts in the collection, but rather to acknowledge an important and growing discourse within Pacific literary studies and scholarship generally and to show where the Cook Islands literary field might also contribute to these new critical conversations of mixed-blood and diasporic identity.

Interestingly, the blurb on the rear of Mason's collection notes how her work, "...reflects her life as a person living in two worlds – Polynesian and European" (Back cover: 2001). This relatively vague statement is one I'd attribute to almost all Cook Islanders, whether or not they are of European lineage. By this I mean that the realities for our diasporic population mean that Cook Islanders necessarily live in a world where they are obligated to pursue European ways of living, and of being, as the demands of global economy make this essential. Moreover, the constitutional realities of an identity that is represented and considered by many, as *part of* a New Zealand identity (citizenship) also make this so and finally, it is also influenced by the many relationships Cook Islanders (as seen with Cook Islands poets and academics) and Cook Islands institutions have with the international community. The poets in this chapter have all written pieces that reflect on this particular dynamic of Cook Islands culture and people in the contemporary global context and likewise, Mason's "New Migrations" chapter considers these postcolonial pressures and the associated identity politics of the "mixed-blooded" individual. Granted, there are other poems within the wider collection that consider this as well, creating a series of poems that frame issues of mixed blood negatively *and* positively.

The contrast between these two identities is exemplified in Mason's "Blessed" (24).

It rained for three weeks
before your big day
Papa'a customs says it's bad luck

Maori custom says the opposite
rain symbolizes
a great occasion
affirmation by your ancestors
annointment of the land
showering joy and prosperity
on her people
and your new life together.

The last stanza adds some weight to my earlier conclusions about the investiture of the Ma'uokean chief, as the symbolism of the rain is explained, the reader becomes aware of the

consciousness that exists within nature and the culturally accepted connection made between nature and the voice of past *tupuna*. It simultaneously illustrates contrast (and the reasoning for it) between *papa'a* and Maori cultural norms. Most striking in this contrast is the brevity of the first stanza – an obvious lack of explanation for the *papa'a* superstition, implying that the rain's symbolic relevance within *papa'a* cultural norms lacks interconnected links with any spiritual or cultural rationale. This contrast suggests a fundamental difference between these two cultures. Although the tone of the closing lines do not seem to criticise the *papa'a* belief, nonetheless it is obvious that there is some invocation of Maori culture in order to reframe the way the ceremony (assumedly a wedding) is approached.

This tension of difference is also exemplified in Mason's "What's In a Name" (39).

If there was something deficient in my upbringing
It was you,
The barb of your ignorance
Is my earliest memory

I am the *mataiapo* not dedicated to your side
bearing the name of my white family
which makes me a foreigner to you,
you punish me for a crime I didn't commit,
is it any wonder when you summon me
to your deathbed
I will not come?

Some may argue that the poem is not, in fact, about mixed-bloodedness. The "crime" referred to by the poetic consciousness could be in reference in any number of instances outside the construct of the poem, however, the title: "What's In a Name?" highlights the central (literally and figuratively) issue: "I am the *mataiapo* not dedicated to your side / bearing the name of my white family". The poetic voice poses the question: "What's In a Name?" and we find this answered in the third line of the final stanza. A name is what makes the poetic voice a "foreigner".

The hurt and anguished tone of this poem is shown in the lines: "The barb of your ignorance / is my earliest memory". Whoever this poem addresses, there seems to be issues of ignorance in the subtext, a deep-seated misunderstanding and/or prejudice between the poetic voice and the subject. Because the issue of a name (and the varying associations and meanings that come with it) is central to this text, the reader is prompted to think of the tensions between *papa'a* in the foreign sense (so not necessarily English but other) and,

assumedly, the Cook Islands Maori. The poem presents the damaging nature that cultural ignorance has on the family unit.

In a wider context, it also gestures to some of the broader tensions at work across the literary tivaivai, particularly when miscegenation and diasporic living are simultaneously undermining *and* enforcing the importance of blood quantum. The theoretical discussion of authenticity and agency was only very briefly discussed at the beginning of Chapter 2 and as mentioned earlier, in a tangential way the discussion of Alistair Te Ariki Campbell's poetics have been informed by the two distinct cultural backgrounds of his parents. These cultural backgrounds are complimentary but Campbell's skill as a writer also stems from his education, his experience and his early memories of the home-islands. The presence of his identity politics was manifestly complex. For example, scholars have noted the prominence of a Romantic literary style in his early work, converse to the "Polynesian strain" of his later writing. They also acknowledge the prominence of his experience within New Zealand, the recurrence of Te Rauparaha as an example of his strong identification with place and indigenous New Zealand Māori (Nola 70; Campbell 1980). What this shows is that while Campbell's dual cultural background directly influenced the commencement of his experience in the Cook Islands and New Zealand, it is understandably the experiences themselves that have directly influenced him.

Correspondingly, Mason's ruminations on mixed-bloodedness also stem from particular experiences. This is evidenced in the tone of the poetic voice, the relationship between the figures in the texts, the story-like narratives and the realist tone used when describing the setting within particular texts, "It rained for three days / before your big day". Like Campbell, the stories she tells within her poetry are from experience rather than directly attributed to blood quantum. Indeed, this foregrounding of *experience* versus the supremacy of blood is shown in Mason's awareness of the mixed-bloodedness in the poem "Something Better" (88).

Converse to the anti-European narrative often expounded in literature of the First Wave, Mason's poem "Something Better" (88) has a positive and almost celebratory, tone. This reflects the two sided-ness of "Blessed" and is a text that negotiates the meta-narrative of colonisation against those who were a product of this narrative – children of European and Cook Islands parents.

My child,
in your veins flows the blood of adventurers
who came from cold countries to the far north,
from lands you may choose to roam yourself some day.

My child,
for whatever reason they came to these islands
know that they were looking for something better
and they found it
in you.

A parenthetical note makes a dedication: “(For all the European ancestors of Cook Islanders)” (88). Rather than dwell on the colonial narrative, there is a noticable move away from the familiar accustory tones used to describe European contact. By foregrounding the perspective of European ancestors as “adventurers” and most importantly, establishing the familial connection between the child and these European ancestors, access to another part of the individuals replicable genealogy is granted, “...lands you may choose to roam yourself one day”. This validates the connection, the poetic voice implying the need to acknowledge these connections despite the anti-colonial and anti-European representatins given primacy in the other meta-narratives that weave through the historiography of Cook Islands people after European contact.

The use of the possessive “My child”, characterises the poetic consciousness as one who is parent, or perhaps even more appropriately, one of the ancestors or *tupuna*. The inherent validation granted by the *tupuna*’s voice in this context implies an understanding of mixed-blooded identity as one that is interwoven with the Cook Islands identity. The affection with which the poetic voice refers to this child is palpable as the final lines declare that these European adventurers “for whatever reason came to these islands” and in doing so, found something precious (“something better”) in these offspring, whatever their initial intentions may have been. The mixed-blooded individual is celebrated here.

The poems within this section add another layer to the postcolonial and diasporic discussions of Tongia, Kauraka and Rasmussen. While all of these poets consider the fluidity of the Cook Islands identity within the diasporic and postcolonial context, Mason explicitly and inclusively treats the *papa’a* strain as one that complicates but also necessarily compliments those who are of a mixed cultural background. Contemporary Cook Islands writers are increasingly considering their experience within the diaspora and how the diverse

cultural backgrounds of their parents and *tupuna* must necessarily be included in conversations and articulations about themselves. This is seen in the work of Miria George, who also identifies with the diversity of her familial *papa'anga*, evidenced in her plays *He Reo Aroha* (2011) and *and what remains* (2007). Similarly, Audrey Brown's inclusion of her Samoan background is also demonstrably apparent in poems like, "searching 4 a kaleidoscope of colours" (2002:7) and "o'er dose on the self indulgence of self importance" (30). This dynamic of the Cook Islands literary aesthetic will no doubt become a more prominent pattern on this literary tivaivai as Cook Islands writers continue to publish.

Chapter Four – Akairianga

There have been two important objectives of this thesis: to begin mapping Anglophone Cook Islands literature; to synthesize some key literary characteristics of the field. In order to achieve the second objective, this thesis has drawn from a wide variety of sources and attempted to make informed judgments about a communal Cook Islands literary aesthetic. The following section makes some conclusions about what I perceive to be salient and telling facets of this aesthetic. I do this by reflecting on the analyses in the previous chapter and observing some literary connections between, as well as outside, this group of four poets.

Section 4.2 takes a snapshot of the current conceptual *tivaivai* of the field and notes where the next stitches are attaching new patterns to the backing-cloth. It will also give some brief consideration to the national literary bodies of others in the Pacific in order to suggest some productive ways forward for Cook Islands literature. This will consider Cook Islands writing within and alongside the wider Pacific literary field.

Finally, 4.3 will present the literary *tivaivai* that has been created by acknowledging those who have contributed to it and considers what the thesis

4.1 “My mother sews her love / into each stitch / That joins the *tivaevae* pattern / to the backbone”: a communal Cook Islands literary aesthetic.

The title to this sub-section is taken from Va’ine Rasmussen’s poem, “In the *Tivaevae*” (1991:32). It is one of my favourites. These lines particularly have always struck me for the ways in which they allude to the importance of those who have gone before and the experiences those *tupuna* weave into the fabric of the present, especially in terms of culture. This representation of *papa’anga* within the quilt has acted as a framework for this thesis. By its fundamental nature, it also acknowledges the central role of *papa’anga* as a way of seeking and asserting the Cook Islands identity in the work of Cook Islands writers. “My mother sews her love / into each stitch” – indeed.

This thesis has attempted, in keeping with the genealogical aesthetic of *tupuna* (those who have gone before), to “stitch to the back-bone”. Chapter 2 examined the disparate parts

of the conceptual tivaivai and found that Cook Islanders have been writing for a long time, prominently in the 1970s and even further back to the missionary writings of Ta'unga and Maretu. The patterns – the writers and the *tua ta'ito*/the stories - stretch even further back to our eponymous ancestors, to creation. The genealogical exploration of Chapter 2 serves the purpose of establishing the academic conversation and opening it up for analysis, criticism and importantly, encouraging the additions this thesis was unable to investigate further. Importantly, it also represents the significance of such an exercise within the Cook Islands world-view. Without this retracing, the analysis of Chapter 3 would be of little relevance. This tivaivai would simply be a pile of patterns, fabric and thread, lying on the figurative floor – no “fingers” or intentions to draw them together and make them whole, to arrange each pattern and situate them against all others.

As I began “stitching to the back-bone” in Chapter 3, the relevance of *papa'anga* not only manifested in the exercise of analysis but also became layers of investigation and creative expression within the work of all four writers: Tongia's nuanced engagement with the missionary narrative; Kauraka's emotive articulations of Manihiki/Manuhiki/Havaiki; the ever-present Sea in Rasmussen's work and; the relevance of personal *papa'anga* within yet more layers of communal *papa'anga* in Mason's work. All of these examples show the recurring relevance of genealogy. This is not an uncommon “theme” within Pacific literatures generally but each distinct Pacific culture has their own nuanced ways of enacting this cultural practise. In the Cook Islands case, the distinct visual aesthetics and symbolism, the layers of diasporic and postcolonial *papa'anga* and connection to the affiliated island of each poet and writer are what distinguish the Cook Islands incorporation of *papa'anga* from others.

As the representations of the Pacific within European South Seas literature of the 19th century emphasised the region's beauty (with all its primitive inhabitants), the arresting aesthetic of the home-islands has its own significance for the Cook Islands writer. The importance of the physical islands is central to the Cook Islands literary aesthetic as relation is drawn and redrawn back to these physical, cultural and spiritual spaces. Chapter 3 shows the significance of specific affiliated home islands, and how they exist within the complexities of Western borderlines created through colonisation. In attempting to reconcile traditional ideas of place and colonial cartography, there is a noticable attempt to negotiate and engage with these different layers within the postcolonial present. This, of course, is a product of diasporic spread and the postcolonial realities which require the Cook Islands

person and writer, to consider carefully the importance of cultural practise and island affiliation.

Within literature, these considerations are represented through recurring symbols, metaphors and tropes that have been influenced by the encroachment of Western systems and a continued connection to cultural tradition and *tupuna* - the concrete jungle and Havaiki; the pagan temple and the Church; the *papa'a* child with a *mataiapo* title; a sea, reflecting stars. The literary representations within the work of Chapter 3 connect with each other in more ways than one, as they speak to, reflect and uniquely articulate the prominence of diaspora and the politics of postcolonialism with the Cook Islands context. Naturally, these symbols reflect both the natural beauty of the home-islands and parts of the Western world.

A prominent part of this literary aesthetic is the presence of New Zealand and its representation of the two major metanarratives of the backing-cloth. Many settings within Campbell's work have been constructed on the relevance of New Zealand to his personal *papa'anga*. This is also seen in the work of Tongia, Tavioni, Brown, Ta'i George, Miria George and many others. The New Zealand connection feels like an inevitable allusion. As more Cook Islands writers are discovered, perhaps other diasporic national spaces will also find their place within the literary aesthetic of this field. However, this recurring setting and allusion within the work of Cook Islands importantly engages with the metanarrative *papa'anga* of diaspora and postcolonialism, and naturally becomes a distinct part of the Cook Islands literary aesthetic.

This connection with a more dominant marginal nation also gestures to the way Cook Islands writers articulate their association with other nations in the region. A prominent example has been the French nuclear testing alluded to in the work of Tongia and Kauraka. This recurring concern rests, again, on the layers of *papa'anga* associated with the British and French colonial project, as well as the much longer *papa'anga* of relational connection Cook Islanders have had with their extended families in French Polynesia. The nuclear testing issue within these texts are about the moral issues of weapons of mass destruction, but it is also about what these literal and symbolic bombs mean for the Cook Islands identity. It is about physical proximity and familial proximity. This occurs throughout the field, as Cook Islands writers write about their transnational experiences right across the region. Of course,

despite diasporic movement and postcolonialism highlighting our contemporary movement, Cook Islanders have always been travellers.

4.2 Possible Futures

It is true that Cook Islands literature lacks the same profile as some of the more prolific national literatures of the Pacific. New Zealand Māori literature for example has an established number of poets and novelists who publish regularly with Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace and Keri Hulme now canonical in this sense. Their credibility is emphasised by a significant volume of published material, national and international acknowledgement of their work (Hulme's Booker Prize 1985, the most compelling example) and an accompanying critical mass (Whaitiri's *Te Pua* journals, Te Punga Somerville 2012). Likewise, Samoan literature has benefited from the tireless efforts of Albert Wendt and his Samoan contemporaries (Va'ai 1999; Marsh 2004; and the SPAN Journals) who in teaching and writing, have continued to keep the momentum of publishing and grass-roots creative writing flowing.

It is difficult to say what the Cook Islands case lacks. Like these other "success" stories of Pacific national literatures, we have our own share of accomplished writers and scholars. Admittedly, our only writer comparable to the New Zealand Māori writers, on the terms outlined above, is Alistair Te Ariki Campbell and as elaborated earlier, he sits somewhat apart from the other Cook Islands writers on this conceptual tivaivai. The prominence of the postcolonial and diasporic narratives also gesture to other potential reasonings: for example, the Cook Islands have not had the same access to institutional support as Samoa or New Zealand, nor has it had the same access to resources for publishing, mentoring and the like. This is not to take away from the valuable contributions made by the four poets of Chapter 3 or the likes of Marjorie and Ron Crocombe. Indeed, Chapter 2 shows that their efforts, even with their base in Fiji, were pivotal to the very genesis of the Pacific literary tradition as it stands today.

The most recent publications have been produced by three female writers in the diasporic space: Miria George, Audrey Brown-Pereira and Courteney Meredith. George is the only Cook Islands writer whose fulltime occupation is writing, directing and producing for her company Tawata Productions in New Zealand, while Brown-Pereira writes and publishes

from the United States and Samoa and Meredith, also from New Zealand. Other poets based in the home-islands have also indicated they would look to publish another collection though yet there are no new publications to date (Tavioni, Mason).

What does the future of Cook Islands writing look like? During the writing of this thesis I have met regularly with a friend, a Cook Islander, who also majored in English Literature for his undergraduate degree. We speak at length about being “the only ones” – the only Cook Islanders – in the English department. As the year and the project have gone on, we have learnt to not only focus on the lack of “noise” but to consider what the silence has given space to. Indeed, this silence in many ways is perpetuated by our initial attitude. Importantly, it gave way to another more pertinent question: despite not hearing any critical noise here in the diasporic space, does that mean there is still no “noise” being made elsewhere, across the Ocean, in the home-islands?

A research visit to Rarotonga in June of 2012 led to many informal conversations with Cook Islands writers. The fire for cultural preservation and celebration within Anglophone literature was still burning and despite the lack of recent published work, critical conversations about writing were still taking place, face to face, within the island community. Writing workshops and creative writing groups were still happening, though perhaps quietly and inconsistently. Without robust resource and the ability, or wish, to write fulltime the Cook Islands has been unable to produce any writer matching the calibre of Albert Wendt, the Maori literary heavyweights, or indeed Alistair Te Ariki Campbell. Interestingly, these influential writers and thinkers have all benefited from the New Zealand tertiary system as well as other creative opportunities offered within the diasporic space, while those producing writing in the home-islands have had to rely on connection to the University of the South Pacific and other regional funding bodies.

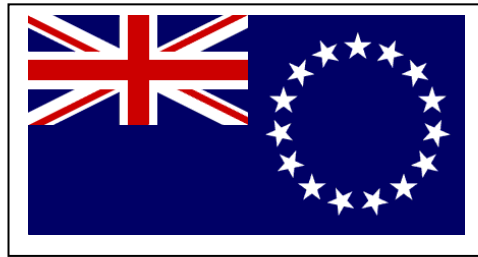
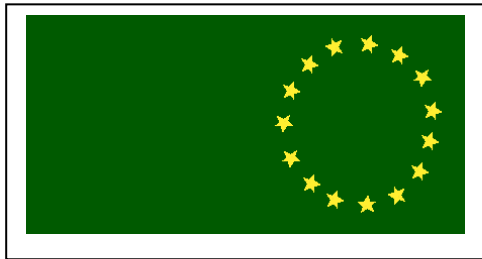
I hesitate to rely too heavily on economics, institutional association and resource as the shaping forces behind the Cook Islands literary field as some onus must fall on the pool of creativity and passion that exists collectively amongst all Cook Islands writers. However the “noise” and the relative silence that I have argued for throughout this thesis rests on my ability as a diasporic Cook Islander to access the writing and stories of my own people. Without the ability of writers to access those avenues, disparate patterns remain unattached to this literary tivaivai. It is my hope that this thesis and the work of Brown-Pereira, George,

Meredith and others might prompt writers to continue producing work and pursuing ways that their material might be published.

Moreover, it is my hope that this thesis has highlighted the quality of Cook Islands poetry and the important contributions Cook Islands writing adds to the conversations surrounding Pacific literature. It is important to emphasise that at the end of this thesis, the tivaivai is not finished. As I acknowledged in the introduction, there are some important Cook Islands writers who I was unable to give closer treatment to here, but who are important points of investigation that require their own restoration work on this tivaivai. It is also important that the works of our contemporary writers are also engaged with creatively *and* critically. It is my hope that this thesis serves as a springboard for further research into the field, hopefully one day at the level of Doctoral studies. It is my hope, and that of all the Cook Islands writers, and all those who have edited, studied and supported Cook Islands literature, that more patterns be sewn into this dynamic, textured and exquisite literary tivaivai.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Cook Islands Flag



(Cahoon, 2013)

Appendix 2: “Broken” (Tongia 1977: 14)

The forgotten *are-karioi*
is buried in weeds
The disfigured gods
are assembled for auction.
The chants of the priests
Hang on breadfruit trees,
Saluting the seasons
Of the missionary.
I bargain hard for my values
knowing the spine of *Maori* life
has been broken.

Appendix 3: “Maiata” (Rasmussen 1991:4)

E po, you have taken the maiden
Lonely woman lies
Weak and in pain

Satiated, you rose from our tapa nest
We kissed briefly.
Then the first rays of truth
permeated my mind.

You took the white gardenia
and gave me a red hibiscus
as an introduction to
an experience
still a mystery.

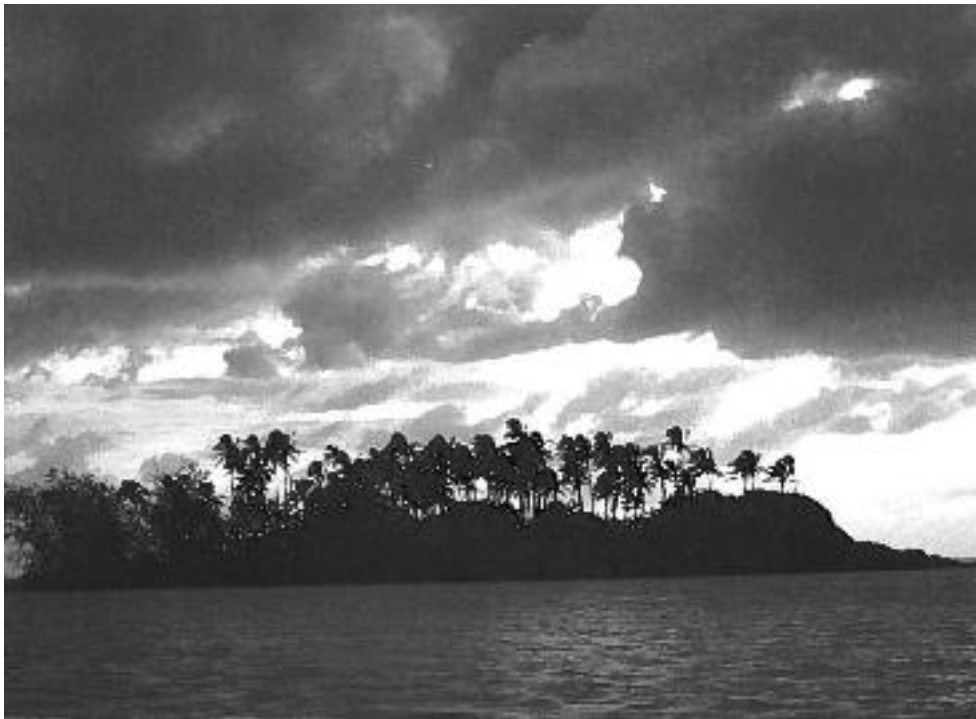
Recollecting now
those strange waves that
bathed our bodies

and the final surrender
to the wind's message.
You parted my thighs
and I gave in
with trust in you.

Now as the first rays of morning
confirm the separation
and the birds serenade a new beginning,
I rise to wash the stains;
only a dull ache remains.

Appendix 4: Cover picture - *Maiata*

(Rasmussen 1991: Cover)



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