

'That's My Stuff': Pasifika Literature and Pasifika Identity

By

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Abstract

Pasifika literature is an expanding, dynamic field which, like other Pasifika creative productions, is often seen as representative of exciting new directions, and reflective of a nascent generation of young Pasifika who are firmly established in New Zealand. This thesis considers the relationship between Pasifika literature and Pasifika identity, tracing some ways that Pasifika literature articulates, references, and mediates Pasifika identity through the creative work of two prominent New Zealand-born Pacific scholar-poets: Karlo Mila (Tongan, Palangi, Samoan) and Selina Tusitala Marsh (Samoan, Tuvaluan, French, English). Both these women are highly acclaimed, award winning poets and academics who are well respected in their respective Pacific communities. Reading their creative works firstly as examples of a mixed-race Pasifika literature and then as Pasifika feminist texts offers compelling insights into their worlds as young 'brown' women in New Zealand. Their work makes a significant contribution to Pacific literature and New Zealand literature, and offers many points of entry for exploring what it might mean to be a Pasifika person in Aotearoa today. This work is furthered in a final chapter, which gestures towards a new generation of Pasifika writers. By referencing some of the new writing being produced by young Pasifika, in particular the work of Grace Taylor and Courtney Sina Meredith, I illustrate how Mila and Marsh's writing has opened up necessary creative spaces for Pasifika voices to be heard and their senses of identity to be affirmed. Ultimately, the connections between Pasifika literature and Pasifika identities that have been explored in this thesis continue to be strengthened and developed by a new generation of young Pasifika writers, who continue to affirm identities that are fluid, open, and progressive.

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This is dedicated with huge awhis to my little girl, Hana. Here's to a future where you have a whole bookcase filled with your stuff.

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Introduction

See the girl

‘I’ve always had this dream’ Karlo Mila writes.

‘I’ve always had this dream. . . that one day some young Pacific girl would go into a library and get my poetry book out and read it, and think, “Oh that’s my stuff, I know her. I know how she feels, that’s my stuff”’ (Sperber 2005:68).

‘See the girl’ Selina Tusitala Marsh writes.

See the girl

never seeing herself

.....

never seeing her face

in the ‘literary mirror’

.....

see the girl

see the mirror

see me.¹

When I first encountered Mila, she was sitting flat, black, slanting slightly left, squashed between heavyweights of Indigenous, Pacific, and Māori literature. It was in my stage 3 tutorial, where the lecturer instructed us to find page 395 in our

¹ Excerpt from Selina Tusitala Marsh’s poem ‘girl’ (Marsh 2005)

course notes. Flicking past the Native American voices of Sherman Alexie and Joy Harjo; the Pacific voices of Haunani-Kay Trask and David Gegeo; Māori voices like Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Merata Mita, all calling boldly for attention, for understanding, for action. Page 395, Karlo Mila, in her black cracked type, talking about Paul Holmes and different flavours of chocolate².

No, not just flavours. *Colours*.

Sitting in that tutorial, I dimly sensed that the words were opening themselves up to me in a way that Chaucer's or Spencer's had never done. The day after, I was avidly reading her recently published first book of poetry *Dream Fish Floating* at the expense of an essay due the following day. Back then, I could not have known how much of an impact her work would have on me, but I felt already that here was a woman I *trusted*. I knew she was one hundred percent genuine, because she was saying stuff I knew about already. I knew what it was like being brown, but white, but brown. Suddenly, I held a kinship with a Tongan/Samoan/Palangi woman who didn't know I existed.

Or maybe she did.

'That's my stuff'.

Pasifika³ Girl Reading

I think my experience discovering this kind of poetry throws up many important questions. Why was I so impacted by a mixed Pasifika/Palangi woman's poetry? What made me instinctively feel that it was more accessible than any other poetry that had come my way? How did it allow me to open myself in turn? Is that, as a response to poetry, supposed to happen anyway? I was a Kiwi girl wrapping up

² The poem in question is Karlo Mila's 'Eating Dark Chocolate and watching Paul Holmes' Apology' (Mila 2005).

³ The descriptive term Pasifika—a term with increasing salience and frequency of usage in Aotearoa New Zealand, and a key term for this thesis—will be explored in detail in Chapter One.

three years of tertiary education, whose life experience widely differed from that of many young people growing up in Aotearoa, and, I felt, even more from the majority of the young Māori or Pasifika who were my contemporaries. How, then, this moment of recognition?

These are all questions that, once encountered, break into further queries about identity, and about belonging, branching to other moments of recognition that reflect different selves back at me. I looked into the literary mirror and in so doing, entered into a complex web of connectedness between reader and words. My particular set of experiences generated several different readings of the texts – inflected primarily by culture, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, and age. Stuart Hall refers to this as a process of encoding and decoding; a process by which a writer writes from their particular set of experiences, translating them into words which we, as readers, translate again into a new understanding (Hall 1973). The reader will never see in its entirety what the author had in mind, but this in itself is an essential part of the reading process. Recognising something meaningful within the text is what makes the reading of literature so compelling.

Māori scholar and poet Alice Te Punga Somerville explores this idea in an essay written upon the death of Hone Tuwhare, referencing her students' varied interpretations of the notable Māori poet's work:

One student wrote about the way Tuwhare describes the ownership of the beach in the 1982 poem and misrecognised it as being about the 2004 Seabed and Foreshore legislation. This anachronistic reading produced something more generative than wrong. The anachronism was only 'wrong' if we insisted on a singular linear historical reading of a text: if the text, like the Māori lecturer, is limited to being a reliable Native informant. This wasn't at all like the wrongness of mispronunciation about which I had written at another time: it was, instead, the small moment of literary bliss when a student recognises something in a poem beyond what the writer could have imagined: something meaningful, urgent, relevant and complex. (Te Punga Somerville 2008:n.p)

This is what I mean by the moment of reflection, of discovering new ways of understanding the world and themselves. What happened when I started reading Karlo Mila's work? Like the student reading Hone Tuwhare, I recognised something, despite coming to this literature knowing little of Pacific culture. What I started to understand from reading Pacific literature was that my experience of gaps and absences in knowledge was also a part of 'the Pacific experience' here in Aotearoa. I am a part Niuean, part Māori, part Palagi girl who has experienced marginalisation and disconnection from Niuean and Māori culture – what Pacific or Māori person hasn't experienced this in some way in New Zealand?

My own distance stemmed from a complicated blended family. I grew up in a large mixed/ split family, where there were clear delineations between those with a different father. I and my three brothers were brown. My remaining siblings were white. I was constantly fielding comments from people about how we didn't look like each other – were we related? Were we from New Zealand? Were we adopted? Or the supposedly more subtle 'where did you get your lovely dark eyes/ hair/ skin from?' Growing up, I never knew what to say.

My mother is a Pākehā woman with Māori ancestry; my father, a Niuean man, I had not seen since I was a pre-schooler. Growing up, my family constantly invoked negative stereotypes of Māori and Pacific people. Every young brown young man walking down the street was viewed with suspicion. Māori were assumed to be dole bludgers, lazy, and drug dealers. Pacific Islanders were always put down as unintelligent and abusive to their kids. I couldn't help wondering if other people made the same comments about me as I walked innocently to my piano lessons. I and my brothers were possibly meant to understand that we were excluded from the assumptions my parents felt they could make about Māori and Pacific Islanders, perhaps because we were fortunate enough to have been given the supposed 'polish' of European culture – classical music lessons, classical ballet lessons, high literacy, high academic achievement. But the shadow of those comments about other brown Pacific and Māori young people fell upon me regardless.

This brief background illustrates some ways I as a young girl became acutely aware of my multiple sites of non-belonging. Uncomfortable with the ways my brownness invited questions that highlighted otherness; unable to identify as white; feeling fraudulent being forced to identify as 'Niuean' when I knew nothing about it; being othered by my family as a girl and as an extrovert; feeling complexly both excluded and included in the denigrating racialized stereotypes; feeling brown, because it wasn't white. While my experience has several unique elements to it, the tensions produced by mis-information and racism is hardly unique to myself. Missing knowledge, battling stereotypes, being judged by colour, and feeling inferior are real issues facing Pasifika youth. Karlo Mila's poem 'Eating Dark Chocolate and watching Paul Holmes' Apology' storied what Te Punga Somerville called 'a compromised coming of age' (2012:147); Mila's recollection of encounters with racist assumptions and stereotypes produced a feeling of shared experience, and thus a point of entry to a culture that I felt very distant from. This led to some profound new understandings and knowledges that have enriched my life and opened it up in some incredible ways, including reconnecting me with my Niuean family and culture, enabling post-graduate study, and most significantly, gaining new insights as well as new friends.

This experience of literature, in particular Pacific literature, is not unique to myself. The complex *something* that happens in moments of engagement with Pasifika literature is, Mila and Marsh both suggest, transformative, both for the Pasifika reader and for the text. The latent potential in the seemingly innocuous act of reading is widely recognized as a dynamic of power and empowerment; certainly it is one deeply tied with the reclamation of power for post-colonial Pacific peoples (see Chapter One).

The transformative, empowering moment is the motivation of this thesis. My experiences complexly inform the direction and shape of this thesis. This is reflected in the way I either open or close each chapter with my own voice – a

story, a perspective, or a memory. This act of storying⁴ does several things: it disrupts the western expectation of a western academic thesis to be objective and largely clinical in analyses; it blurs the line between disciplines; it privileges my voice as a Pasifika; it foregrounds my experience which colours the way that I read Pasifika texts. In doing this, I follow a line of Pacific scholars who have worked to emancipate Pasifika knowledge production and critique from Western paradigms. In her discussion 'Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and wisdom in higher education', Konai Helu Thaman recalls a rejection of an article she had written for a book because 'there was too much of me in it; it was too different, too personal, and too Tongan' (2003:10). Throughout this thesis, my voice repeatedly intervenes in the type of objective analysis expected from an academic; while this may sit uncomfortably vis-à-vis western expectations, I am in fact following a long line of Pacific scholars, from Albert Wendt, to Thaman, to Vilsoni Hereniko, to Mila, to Marsh who have refused to diminish or conceal their voice and personal investments in their scholarship.

My story motivated a line of inquiry that has ended up as this project. This thesis engages the work of Karlo Mila and Selina Tusitala Marsh to consider the idea of an emergent Pasifika literature in Aotearoa, and explores the various connections such literature holds with a newly developing Pasifika identity in Aotearoa. This project is interested in tracing some ways that Pasifika literature articulates, references, and mediates Pasifika identities. To do this, I engage in exploratory analysis of the relationship between Pasifika literature and Pasifika identity. Chapter One is concerned with 'placing' the concept of Pasifika identity vis-à-vis literatures drawn from cultural studies, diaspora studies, Pacific studies, post-colonial studies, and literary studies. The approach introduced here includes consideration of an indigenous Polynesian epistemological way of understanding identities through the use of the concept of *vā*. *Vā* offers a conceptual space by which to think of the way Pasifika identities are 'constructed in the context of relationships with significant

⁴ While I independently arrived at this term, I have since become aware of its previous usage in a range of disciplines, where it similarly denotes acts of giving voice to alternative or subaltern subjectivities. See, for instance Brandt, et al 2001; Bromley 2010; Wellik and Kazemek 2008.

others' (Mila 2010:154). In this case, it has allowed for a contextual analysis of Pasifika as a diasporic community in Aotearoa, with complex connections to Pākehā/Papālagi, the dominant group that holds political and social power; to the indigenous Māori population; and between migrant and successive generations within and across the various ethnicities making up Pasifika. These are suggested as different worlds that Pasifika engage with. Drawing on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Mila theorized the concept of polycultural capital to understand the way the *vā* has been appropriated and claimed as a new, modern space by Pasifika (Mila-Schaaf 2010). These open, multiple conceptions of fluidity and movement become the markers of the Pasifika identity I am referring to.

The remainder of Chapter One specifically looks at the way Pasifika literature reveals, shapes, and is mediated by Pasifika identities. This is done by seeing the relationship between them as an act of *tauhi vā*, or 'caring for sociospatial relations' (Ka'ili 2005:89). Using the work of Tongan scholar Tevita O. Ka'ili, this section sets the ground work for the remainder of this thesis, which reads the work of Mila and Marsh as they story two relevant themes of being Pasifika: being mixed Pasifika, and being women.

The following three chapters then build on this work, affirming the relationship between literature and identity by analyzing two poets: Karlo Mila and Selina Tusitala Marsh.

Chapters Two and Three are concerned with the treatment of two themes in Pasifika literature. Chapter Two looks specifically at a 'mixed-race' literary framework introduced by Te Punga Somerville for the reading of Māori mixed-race texts, and suggests that it lends itself for adaptation for the reading of mixed-race Pasifika texts. The chapter uses the concept of 'the body' as a point from which to discuss and understand the ways 'different worlds' intersect for the multi-ethnic Pasifika person, and notes the way that Mila and Marsh choose to narrate their own bodies to reclaim themselves from dominant discourse and reassert their own self-dictated definitions.

Chapter Three tightens its focus on Mila and Marsh as Pasifika women writers. This chapter closely builds on the work of Marsh, who Teresia Teaiwa celebrates as ‘ushering in a new wave of feminist criticism’ (Teaiwa 2001a:347). Marsh has theorized a *mana tama’ita’i* framework for understanding gender politics in light of the cultural specificities of each island group. In response to this, I read both Mila and Marsh’s work as indicative of specificities here in Aotearoa, and suggest their work extends Marsh’s framework in ways specific for Aotearoa Pasifika women. I offer the term *mana tama’ita’i* Pasifika to characterize and analyse these specificities.

Finally, Chapter Four is intended as an epilogue of sorts. Where the main body of work has addressed the relationship between Pasifika literature and Pasifika identity through the work of Mila and Marsh, this chapter exists in acknowledgement of the important way that they explicitly intend their work to nurture young Pasifika identities. In this chapter, I explore the ways that Mila and Marsh’s work has created space for new bodies of work by young Pasifika writers. Courtney Sina Meredith and Grace Taylor are young, vibrant, insistent voices in Pasifika literatures. I follow some of the directions that they are pushing the boundaries of Pasifika literature toward. I look particularly at Grace Taylor’s treatment of being mixed, and Courtney Sina Meredith’s work not just as a cementing of the feminist framework *mana tama’ita’i* Pasifika, but a necessary and powerful extension of it as she breaks new ground as a lesbian Pasifika poet and playwright. This chapter is more concerned with gesturing towards the activity of new Pasifika writers as they build upon Mila and Marsh’s work, and encourages more critical engagement with these new works by future scholars of Pasifika literature.

Importantly, throughout these chapters there is an engagement with and adaptation of pre-colonial Pacific epistemological concepts. Teaiwa observes a trend of contemporary analysis of the Pacific from being ‘more to less Pacific, less European to more European, less modern to more modern, more exotic to more familiar’ (Teaiwa 2006:75); recent scholarship from Melani Anae (2010), David Welchman Gegeo (2001a), Sailiemanu Lilomaiaava-Doktor (2009), Tevita O. Ka’ili

‘Okusitino Mahina (2010), and Damon Salesa (2005) serve as an example of a new tide of scholarship that bucks this trend and draws their theoretical strength from Pacific epistemologies. Throughout this project, I have deliberately foregrounded the work of Pacific scholars who have turned to pre-existing Pacific theories or created new theories out of traditional Pacific knowledges informed by Western contexts. The *vā*, by now an increasingly popular and valuable theoretical paradigm for scholars in the Pacific (see Anae 2010; Ka’ili 2005; Lilomaiaava-Doktor 2009; Mahina 2010) has been employed by this thesis as a tool by which to firstly centre and then develop our understanding of New Zealand-based Pacific identities. A specifically Tongan-inflected extension of this idea – *tauhi vā* – privileges the dynamic meaning of the space that holds people in relation to other people or things, and promotes the nurturing and care of the space as important for relationships, whether they be relationships located in the immediate present, or future relationships in diverse locations. This theoretical position has underpinned the examination of the relationship between Pasifika literature and Pasifika identity, and enabled this thesis to remain firmly grounded in Pacific epistemologies.

Further to this theoretical underpinning, these chapters draw heavily upon recent Pacific scholarship by Karlo Mila, Alice Te Punga Somerville, and Selina Tusitala Marsh. Their theoretical frameworks pertaining to identity negotiation, mixed-race literature, and Pacific feminism are partially informed by western scholarship as reflective of the contexts in which they are formed, but ultimately maintain roots in and derive strength from fertile Pacific epistemologies and creative works. Subramani, in his discussion on ‘retheorizing the theory’ of Pacific knowledges, elaborate on the benefits of such an approach:

The usefulness of such a reorganization of knowledge for scholars and literary critics is obvious; they can draw their authority from these reinvented epistemologies. For literary critics in particular, it offers a way of shifting outside western critical paradigms and developing a language of critique. And for writers and artists in general, it establishes the conditions in which they can think anew and articulate differently. (2001:152)

This includes the strength of drawing from the past and reaching ‘beyond narrow ethnicities and national boundaries in order to draw from a wider range of sources’ (152). By accentuating ‘homegrown’ Pacific-centric scholarship in this work, I affirm Pacific knowledges as *tāonga* of our past and for our future, and contribute to the ‘critical mass’ needed to reclaim our knowledges (Gegeo 2001b:178).

In discussing the intersections of theory and the Pacific, Marsh asserts that ‘We must continue to create our own theories, indigenize concepts, discover and recover our own “medicinal branches”’ (Marsh 1999b:341). Her assertion, also articulated by Subramani (2001:151) that such theories grow out of the creative production of Pacific people has been construed in this thesis as an additional source of Pacific-centric theoretical engagement, and makes the analysis of the creative texts of Mila and Marsh itself an act of reclamation and theoretical production. Such decisions are strategic in light of this project’s development out of a western academic institution, and crucial in the ongoing decolonization of our people.

Some Notes and Acknowledgements

My use of these authors makes an explicit claim to their position and/or work as somehow representative of a wider trend. I acknowledge that this is problematic, but not without precedent. Both writers are hailed as leaders of their generation. Not only has their work been celebrated and praised by the Pacific community both here and abroad, but non-Pacific New Zealand has recognized their work, with both their debut volumes of poetry receiving the New Zealand Society of Authors Jessie Mackay Best First Book Award for Poetry, Mila in 2006, and Marsh in 2010.

Not only are Mila and Marsh creatively productive, but they are both academics who are active and visible in their respective fields. Karlo Mila gained her PhD in Sociology from Massey University in 2010, and has since been productively engaged in critical, cutting edge work in Pacific mental health with both the University of Otago and the University of Auckland medical research centres. Selina Tusitala Marsh, having received her doctorate in English from the University of Auckland in 2004, now teaches New Zealand and Pacific literature courses at that institution.

As Pasifika women scholar-poets of mixed ancestry, Mila and Marsh share obvious similarities. By focusing primarily on their work, this thesis runs the risk of suggesting that their particular experiences are more representative of Pasifika experiences than other kinds. Such concerns about representation are magnified given the context of Pasifika literature as a small emergent body of literature with comparatively little written about it. Although I acknowledge this as a risk, my choice for using both Mila and Marsh was prompted by my own personal connection with their work. As both poets have emphasised this as a crucial motivation for their writing and research, it seemed to me fitting that my thesis would concentrate particularly on their work. As Stuart Hall once wrote, 'the heart has its reasons' (1990:223); in this matter, I have followed mine.

Another reason why I felt comfortable using Mila and Marsh is because this thesis stresses the conception of identity as fluid, multiple, open ended, ongoing. This means that although my snapshot in this thesis privileges the way two writer-scholars engage with mixedness and being women, they are indicative of, rather than representative of, the multitudinous ways one may be Pacific. This is borne out in my final chapter, where I examine the way Mila and Marsh have opened space for new writers to articulate and story their identities. I note the new themes coming through new writing, and demonstrate the ways new literary production extends Mila and Marsh's contributions to the field.

Also, Mila and Marsh's work illustrates close connections and intertextuality with other Pasifika writers, both creatively and academically. For example, Selina Tusitala Marsh and Karlo Mila both explicitly engage and reference other Pacific literatures in their work, and both have belonged to the collaborative performance troupe that created 'Polynation', an international performance poetry collective, which also exhibited seven other male and female Pasifika poets (Marsh 2010a). Mila and Marsh's work has featured in Polynation poet Doug Poole's online journal *blackmail press*, and Marsh included Poole and other members of the 'polynation' crew in her anthology of new Pacific writing *Niu Voices* (2006).

Further notes must be made about terminology. I write with the premise that this project is produced out of a certain context – a university in Aotearoa, based in the Pacific region – and to reflect this, I have not italicized words derived from Māori or other Pacific languages. Also, in many cases, where they are popularly understood in New Zealand, particularly to the Māori and Pacific community but also more generally, I have not provided glosses. While I acknowledge this may be exclusionary for some readers, this thesis is firstly geared toward a Pacific, Pasifika and New Zealand-based readership (and acts as a contribution toward the small body of work that exists on Pasifika literature), and at its heart seeks to privilege a Pasifika viewpoint/ approach. In a world where post-colonialism still means our world is defined by the colonial moment, where the production of this thesis was only possible out of a western academic institution, where Pasifika face increased economic hardship and other indicators of deprivation because of systemic inequalities produced by our educational and social systems, creating ‘comfortable reading’ for interested but ‘outside’ readers remains secondary to my principal aim.

New Zealand and Aotearoa are two simultaneous spatial imaginaries – one is the nation-state of New Zealand, and the other is the indigenous name, whose use implies a political bias toward Māori as tangata whenua. Throughout this thesis, unless I am strategically and intentionally referring to one spatial imaginary as opposed to the other, I use both terms interchangeably.

During what appears to be a limited time period, Mila published under the hyphenated name Mila-Schaaf. Documents that she has published under this name are cited within the text as such; otherwise, in recognition that the bulk of her work is published under the name ‘Mila’, I remain consistent in my use of ‘Karlo Mila’ or ‘Mila’ when referring to her or her work.

Finally, use of macrons for Māori words are consistent throughout this thesis with the exception of direct quotes from other peoples’ work that do not feature macrons in their original form.

Chapter One

Theorizing Pasifika

A few years back I was in the Wellington City Library, perusing books and wondering where to curl up and read for an hour, when I struck up conversation with a young Pacific Islander who was looking for some research material for his play. I was very interested in his position as an aspiring Pacific playwright, and we started making chitchat about colonialism, systemic racism, and negative statistics. Before launching too far into such political territory, he checked with me, 'So, where are you from?' Having learned the hard way that answering 'Auckland' doesn't really cover all that the question is actually asking, I responded 'I'm part Niuean, part Māori, part Palagi.' 'Ah yes,' he replied, 'I'm PI too.'

At that time I was quite interested in the way that the question 'where are you from?' was actually asking about the several different 'places' I as a Pacific Island young woman might come from⁵. These might include what island I traced my genealogy back to, where I grew up, what experiences do I have – am I a new migrant? Was I born in New Zealand? All the ways I could be from somewhere asked 'who are you?' and signified a space that I could potentially share with the enquirer.

These days, I'm fascinated when I think about his easy response to my statement of mixedness / Islandness / New Zealand-bornness. 'I'm PI too' laid claim to an identity that transcended significant specifics like multiple ethnicities (he was a second generation 'full' Samoan). It took my response, and all the implications attendant with it – that I was from New Zealand, not a migrant, that I came from a mixed marriage/relationship, and spoke with a definite kiwi accent, absent of any Pacific Island lilt – and made that a *shared* experience. He was not half-caste, being 'full-

⁵ This similar to Gegeo's discussion on the many ways you be from somewhere, see Gegeo 2001a: 493-494.

blooded’⁶ Samoan, he had a definite accent, he was close to his extended ‘āiga in New Zealand and active in his community. We had very different experiences of being a Pacific person. But at that particular moment in time, we were both brown faces in Aotearoa, and for my new friend that was a space in which he could know me. He side-stepped my diffident offering of blood quantum, met me within a space that he recognized.

Tongan academic Tevita O. Ka’ili described an analogous experience in his article ‘Tauhi vā: Nurturing Tongan Sociospatial Ties in Maui and Beyond’ (Ka’ili 2005). He recounts meeting a Tongan woman at a market in Hawai’i, in which a similarly coded exchange took place. He introduced himself deliberately rehearsing geographical and genealogical connections to Tonga, thus establishing a space she could recognize and relate to, and then respond to. In this case, it opened doors and extended hospitality, not only for the duration of his stay in Hawai’i but across time and space, in different locations and even with different people as the effects of the meeting rippled outwards. Ka’ili terms this as a practice called tauhi vā, which he defines as ‘the Tongan value and practice of keeping good relations with kin and friends. It is also thought of as a commitment to sustain harmonious social relationships with kin and kin-like members’ (92). Tauhi – to care for, or to nurture – is describing a particular dynamic of the pan-Pacific word vā (or wā in Hawaiian and Māori), which is becoming an important theoretical concept in Pacific related scholarship (see Tamaira 2009).

My initial conversation with the young man might be thought of as performing a non-Tongan-specific form of tauhi vā. As I recounted my ethnic lines of descent (as opposed to, say, the suburb where I lived) we were able to establish a connection via our shared position as young Pacific people in Aotearoa. This served to ground the subsequent conversation we had, and enabled ensuing interactions, which were

⁶ I use this phrase acknowledging that there is much debate around the idea of what amount of blood you have to have to qualify as a ‘real’ Samoan. My use here merely alludes to the fact that whatever historical liaisons with other ethnicities were in his genealogy, they were subsumed into his label ‘Samoan’.

nurtured with the exchange of food and information, over a number of years. Although my discussion of tauhi vā is centred on Ka'ili's work, the concept is Pacific wide, whether it is in name (such as teu le vā, the Samoan rendering) or in idea, such as Hau'ofa's stance affirming the 'social centrality of the ancient practice of reciprocity, the core of all Oceanic cultures' (Hau'ofa 1993:12).

The idea of a vā and of the practice of tauhi vā, is a central theoretical concept in this thesis. This thesis seeks to consider the relationship between Pasifika identity and Pasifika literature. In this chapter I explore the idea of a Pasifika identity that is constituted relationally. This idea is extended to a consideration of an emergent Pasifika literature in relation to Pasifika identity, as something that simultaneously shapes and is shaped by Pasifika identity.

To do this, I will firstly discuss the development of identity through the work of Erik Erikson, before moving to consider the theorizing about identity that emerged from cultural studies scholars at the influential Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham. This highlights the way that although the CCCS created new spaces for theorizing identities that challenged hegemonic or oppressive conceptualizations of identity, even so, the spaces are bounded; I seek out the ways that Pacific academics have explored the boundaries and margins of identity theorizing. I draw particular attention to how the emergence of a New Zealand-specific Pacific identity has been theorized.

This leads me to explore the emergence of a new Pacific identity in Aotearoa, which this thesis refers to as Pasifika. My opening anecdote illustrates a *pan-Pacific* approach underpinned by a shared geographical location that was utilized by myself and my new friend. This chapter considers in what ways the points of relationality have shifted for Pasifika, and considers potential differences in the way Pasifika negotiate, nurture, and engage with the world around them. At this point I suggest there is a growing body of work that might be referred to as 'Pasifika literature', and note connections between the literature and the development of Pasifika identity.

I explore this by presenting two women who are both creative writers and theorists. Karlo Mila and Selina Tusitala Marsh try to nurture ties through their literature; they tautoko writers and trailblazers who have gone before, and they intentionally create space for those new formational identities that don't quite match up to expected performances of identity, whether determined by Western elements or Pacific communities in Aotearoa.

Ultimately, in examining Pasifika identities and Pasifika literature by focusing on their points of relationship with outside elements and each other, particularities of the Pasifika experience will be foregrounded. This provides a basis from which to move forward and see how Mila and Marsh articulate their experiences as Pasifika in their creative writings.

Situating identity theorizing in the Pacific

The concept of identity developed significantly in the early 20th Century, largely due to the work of a pupil of the Freudian school of psychology, Erik Erikson. Erikson was an early theorist in the field whose work has since informed analysis around the development of identity (Nunley 1998:360; Côté 1987:274). He postulated a series of eight⁷ developmental stages within a lifetime, with each culminating in a crisis to be negotiated and successfully resolved before progressing onto the next stage (Erikson 1950,1977). The prevalence of some of Erikson's key phrases, such as 'identity crisis', in popular discourse testifies to the extent his work has informed subsequent Western conceptualisation of identity.

The notion of an immutable static identity attracted the critique of what was to become known as the field of cultural studies. One prominent strand of cultural studies scholarship developed out of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), a centre established to create an interdisciplinary space to situate culture and cultural production in relation to power, thus overcoming the limits presented by formal disciplinary segregation (Giroux *et al.* 1986). As a school

⁷ Later to be nine stages with the addition of 'Old Age', as per his joint publication with his wife J.M Erikson: *The Life Cycle Completed* 1998

of thought, cultural studies enabled the critique of phenomena against the dynamic of power and politics, allowing for multiple critiques from many possible angles. The positioning of the subject would necessarily be unfixed, depending on what relationships were fore-grounded; the aim is not to identify a fixed position, but rather to expose the pressure that politics exert upon the subject and interrogate the nature of the relationships around the subject. Giroux *et al* explain:

Cultural Studies . . . should be built upon a different economy, one which sees that cultural objects are, in fact, disposed *relationally*. . . . Cultural Studies has the possibility of investigating culture as a set of activities which is lived and developed within asymmetrical relations of power.” (1986:478)

The problematics of an essentialised identity, of a predictable strata of crises, and a mature, ‘achieved’ identity as Erikson proposed, became focal points for eminent cultural theorist and second director of the CCCS Stuart Hall. In Hall’s work, identities are argued as being context-specific and nuanced by the ‘multiple histories’ that make up that context. Identities, far from being essentialised and static, should be thought of as ‘a “production”, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation’ (Hall 1990:222). He explains:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall 1990:225)

Cultural studies opened up a space away from the constraints of separate disciplines that particularly attracted minority and marginalized groups. Within cultural studies, several theoretical paradigms might be employed simultaneously or alternatively, offering much to groups that usually fall through the gaps or feel

their experience to be too disparate to be adequately encapsulated by one single discipline (Giroux *et al.* 1986). As a productive site of and for ‘marginal/minority discourses’ (During 2008:17), cultural studies became very influential on some Pacific scholars who were in their own process of figuring themselves and their positions. Cultural studies became a space where Pacific academics could follow the suggestion of Giroux *et al.* to utilize cultural studies’ ability to ‘engage historical contexts and social particularities’ in ways of their own choosing (1986:476). The influence of Stuart Hall and others associated with CCCS, such as Paul Gilroy, is obvious in the work of respected Pacific academics such as Vicente M. Diaz and Teresia K. Teaiwa. Both Diaz and Teaiwa – along with J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and several other scholars with Pacific research interests – were PhD students of James Clifford, whose own work has long been in conversation with Hall’s.

While acknowledging the influence of British cultural studies scholarship, it has been important for Pacific scholars to draw attention the specificities of its historical context and to critique the ways it does not always travel or translate easily to Pacific contexts. (Teaiwa 2005) Diaz and Kauanui argue that ‘cultural studies nevertheless reminds us that culture and identity are neither innocent nor pure. And neither is scholarship on culture and identity’ (Diaz and Kauanui 2001:324). As James Clifford reflects:

I’ve found that when importing Stuart Hall or Paul Gilroy, Avtar Brah or Doreen Massey into the Pacific I’ve been made sharply aware of the Caribbean, South Asian, and British histories that lie behind their ‘worldings’ . . . if Black Atlantic and South Asian diaspora theory is to travel well in the Pacific, there needs to be a significant adaptation to a different map and history (2001:483).

Clifford does not outright dismiss theories that grow out of different contexts, but rather cautions about their indiscriminate use, and advocates for these ideas to be adapted as appropriate. An opportunity to affirm the ‘specificities of our cultural and political histories’ (Diaz and Kauanui 2001:324) came with the conference ‘Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge’, held in February 2000 at the University

of California at Santa Cruz. This conference sought to capture a sense of Pacific indigeneity against the rubric of cultural studies, examining the edges and movements, and exposing the stakes of multi-directional shifts within a new century. While it was not the first instance of a critical engagement with cultural studies⁸, it marks a significant moment in the history of Pacific theorizing of identity. The conference (and the very valuable special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific* which derived from the conference [2001]) asked, 'What happens when the grounds of indigeneity (of Pacific Islander-ness) get too fixed or move too far?' (Diaz and Kauanui 2001:315) and opened up a discursive space for the rearticulating, reimagining, and recirculating of Pacific identities.

Diasporic identities in the Pacific

That space included a growing focus on the Pacific person and diaspora. When the grounds of Pacific Islander-ness move to alternative places where others are indigenous, with processes of naturalization and attendant concerns of neutralization or assimilation and intermarriage, the politics of power and place become even more complex. This is evidenced by the weighty body of work that engages with the concept of transnational communities as it particularly pertains to the Pacific (see Clifford 1994; Morton 2002; Gershon 2007; Spickard 2002; Teaiwa 2001a; Hereniko and Wilson 1999)

The term 'diaspora' carries connotations that would be useful to lay open here before discussing the notion of Pacific people in New Zealand as a diasporic people. It has been defined 'at its simplest, as the dispersal of a people from their homeland' (Butler 2001:189). Ien Ang describes diaspora as generally 'used to describe collectivities who feel not fully accepted by, and partly alienated from, the dominant culture of the "host society," where they do not feel (fully) at home' (2005:83). Significantly, Ang observes a shift in emphasis from understanding diasporic movement as characterised by trauma to understanding it as involving enrichment, empowerment, and expansion.

⁸ For a compelling genealogy of previous engagements, see Teaiwa's insightful bi-focussed article that came out of that conference 'L(o)osing the Edge' (2001).

Work on diasporic Pacific identities in Aotearoa offers examples of both those who emphasize displacement and rupture and those who highlight enrichment and opportunity. The Pacific diaspora to New Zealand generally finds its origins in the large-scale migrations from the islands that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s as economic expansion in New Zealand increased demand for workers. From the 1950s, the Pacific population in Aotearoa has gone through rapid changes, reflective of the exponential population growth and adaptations to life here. There emerged a number of key texts that sought to understand some of these changes and interrogate their impact on what it meant to be a Pacific person in this new context. One of the earliest works to do this was *Emerging Pluralism*, published by Auckland University's David Pitt and Cluny Macpherson in the 1970s. Whilst the focus of their research is exclusive to Samoan communities, it nevertheless indicates the way the Pacific community might adapt within the new geographical and social context of Aotearoa. Of particular interest are the early suggestions of significant differences between migrants and those born in New Zealand, which exhibited itself as a generational phenomena. The authors claim:

The desire to return home was also less strong among the young Samoans born in New Zealand, who by 1970 formed the majority of the community. Many of these younger people had never been to Samoa; others had visited it only on Christmas charter flights. Many of them did not speak Samoan, at least not fluently, and did not feel altogether easy in the intricate etiquette of fa'asamoa custom and ceremony. Many obviously did not have the intense feeling towards important elements in the Samoan ethos such as sharing and hospitality. (1974:16)

This work on the disconnect those born in New Zealand had from fa'a Samoa, the irrelevance of the idea of a homeland to return to, the loss of language, as well as the difficulty in finding a niche in bi-cultural New Zealand, foreshadowed what was to become significant identifying markers of the NZ-born generation. As the suggestions in *Emerging Pluralism* started to crystallize into consistent, widespread identity markers, the changing contours of Pacific communities attracted increasing academic attention (see for example Macpherson 1984, 2004; MacPherson,

Spoonley and Anae 2001; Fleras and Spoonley 1999; Anae 1997; Tupuola 1998; Tiatia 1998; Fairbairn-Dunlop and Makisi 1998.)

Samoan academic Melanie Anae popularized the phrase 'NZ-born' as a label to characterize Pacific people born in New Zealand, and the particular experiences that that implies. Anae's work on NZ-born identity for Samoans in New Zealand aligns closely with western ideas of identity development, most particularly in her formulations of 'secured identities' which echo Erikson's achieved identity status. She claims 'that secured identities can be reached by viewing the identity journey as a series of rites of passage – enforced rituals which challenge one's right to be 'a New Zealander', and on the other hand, one's right to be 'a Samoan' (Anae 1997:128). The theme running throughout her work is that the space NZ-borns inhabit is a space dense with crises – the successful negotiation of which will eventually lead to a secure identity, which seems only to be possible through the return to and re-practice of Samoan traditions.

Anae's articulations of the New Zealand-born experience appear to reflect what Ang suggests was the former emphasis on aspects of trauma in diasporic scholarship. This rupture was also the subject of Jemaima Tiatia's *Caught Between Cultures* (1998). The influential text—much-circulated and cited in scholarship on New Zealand's Pacific communities (see for instance Gershon 2007; Culbertson, Agee, and Makasiale 2007; Stevenson 2008) —was an explicit positioning of Pacific youth as stuck inbetween two opposing forces, describing them as living a 'shackled' existence (Tiatia 1998:13). Like Anae's work, *Caught Between Cultures* was also written out of a particular context at a particular time, when first generation Pacific people in New Zealand were coming of age and troubling prevailing notions of what it meant to be a Pacific person. Although Tiatia's work came out of specific circumstances –it was sponsored by the Christian Research Association and therefore focuses on the issues as they particularly pertain to church engagement – it transcended those circumstances and is oft-cited as representative of the majority of Pacific youth. As a consequence, the wide currency of this work seemed to cement NZ-borns in a perpetual state of

disempowerment, as 'outcast'(53), 'struggling'(32), 'outsider'(41), confronted by 'discontinuity'(39) and facing a 'dilemma'(46).

Although this prominent strand of theorizing the NZ-born Pacific identity seemed synonymous with a rhetoric of being 'caught between cultures,' and perhaps reflected the concepts prevalent at the time, there seemed, with the global formulations of the CCCS and their adaptation to the Pacific by Pacific scholars, an alternative thread also developed that more positively privileged the idea of fluidity and an openness attendant with diasporic experience. Anne-Marie Tupuola explicitly questioned the idea of an 'achieved identity' born of response to crisis in her article 'Pasifika Edgewalkers: complicating the achieved identity status in youth research' (Tupuola 2004). Building on her doctoral research, Tupuola's interest in diasporic and transnational youth identity privileged a model of continued negotiations, as opposed to Anae's quest for an 'arrival' in the identity journey via the practice of fa'a Samoa. What this meant was instead of identities having to resolve the disconnect between two disparate cultures, which leads to feelings of entrapment and hopelessness, identities were instead conceived as skirting the borders of both worlds. This idea, described as 'edgewalking', privileged the idea of shifting and active negotiation between the borders of the worlds Pacific young people are connected with, a conceptualisation that hooks into wider global discussions of postmodern and 'borderland' identities (see for example Anzaldúa 1987; Hall 1991). Reflecting on this in his discussion of Pacific cultures and identities as part of his PhD work, Jared Mackley-Crump notes, 'Those youth who are able to weave in between both the collective and personal, local and global cultures, have "holistic and integrative identities", where social and cultural identities are considered integral components of the personal identity' (2012:37).

Pasifika identities

Recent research by Karlo Mila has furthered the work on Pacific peoples in New Zealand in new and compelling ways. There is now a distinction between a first generation of NZ-born Pacific people who were negotiating their identities seemingly without precedent, and a second generation⁹ NZ-born Pacific population that are growing up into strong, articulate Pasifika. Mila asks, in what ways is this generation different from the one before? How *do* they figure out their identity? How are they negotiating their identities?

Mila's PhD work is an expansive engagement with second generation Pacific people's conception of their own identity and agency in a world where claims about them and their legitimacy come from competing quarters. Her research marks a new direction for the field, responding to several current concerns in the Pacific, including the use of a traditional Pacific epistemological premise to underpin her work and a carefully adapted western model to demonstrate a New Zealand-specific context.

In her thesis, the *vā* is used as a guiding and ethical framework (Mila-Schaaf 2010:30;65). The spaces in between are framed as a positive way to draw connections between people and to start exploring the specificities of identity formation of Pasifika in Aotearoa. For instance, Paul Sharrad's discussion of the *vā* frames it as a concept that both informs and is informed by hegemonic systems of thought (2003:247). Mila's deft use of both traditional and western theories feels appropriate and fitting given the subject matter at hand, and reflects a common approach by Pacific scholars toward the formulation of theoretical paradigms.

Both in the thesis and in subsequent publications (2010b; 2011; 2013) Mila interrogates Pasifika identities in terms of their relationship with important 'others' around them. In a New Zealand context, this has not only meant the relationship Pasifika held with a 'home' island and the 'host' culture, but also with first

⁹ Mila is careful to define the limits of her research to be literally focused on second generation Pasifika for a number of reasons, including the fact that the research subjects themselves identified specifically as second generation, not third or fourth (Mila-Shaaf 2010a:26; 2011:7)

generation New Zealand-borns and the indigenous people that the 'host' culture continues to marginalize.

This emphasis on knowing Pasifika identities as *relational* is one that I suggest signals a return to traditional epistemological ways of knowing in order to reclaim a sense of what it means to be a Pacific person today, regardless of location or time. To examine this idea more, I will turn to scholarship that utilizes the *vā* as a theoretical concept that privileges the importance of the space *between* things as something active, dynamic, and full of significance.

Much scholarship in the Pacific emphasises a Pacific understanding and formulating of identity as occurring along the personal relationships between the person and other people. Linnekin and Poyer's work *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific* (1990) has been particularly instrumental in reminding of the ways identities were constructed in the past. The editors suggest that these relationships had critical bearing on traditional conceptions of identity, stating that

For Pacific Islanders, much of what determines a person's behaviour, feelings, and self-perception is environmental, consisting in the physical and social relationships that nurture a growing child and form the context in which the adult acts. This concept of a person as a node of social relationships profoundly informs such critical Oceanic institutions as kinship, adoption, land rights, and title systems (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:7)

The authors point out that long before colonialism, non-ethnic lines such as 'kin, status, and territorial lines' were the markers that identities were worked out against (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:10)

Albert Wendt introduced a strong, Pacific-centric theoretical concept by which Pacific scholars could think about the formation of Pacific identities in contemporary times. Paul Sharard describes Wendt's work on the '*vā*':

With Hall, who sees identity as a *becoming* as well as a *being*, Wendt works towards a dynamic view of enacted identity in the 'ever-changing present' –

a figure that is both compatible with contemporary global theorising and derived from indigenous tradition (Sharrad 2003:247)

The vā was popularly associated with ‘gap, void, outer space, time immemorial, relational interface’. Wendt’s powerful reinterpretation of the space transformed the void into

an enabling dynamic which asserts local culture and relationship, and avoids sterile fixations of identity. It permits the play of postmodern indeterminacy while retaining a basis in genealogical connections. The va is both insistently local and disruptively global in so far as it salvages a pre-contact indigenous concept that is also informed by and informs concepts from more dominant knowledge systems (Sharrad 2003:247).

Wendt’s formulations of the vā lent it increasing malleability as scholars recognized its travelling currency for new identities in the Pacific. In her special issue ‘In the space between: Negotiating Culture, Place and Identity in the Pacific’, A. Marata Tamaira collects new scholarship concerned with the concept of the vā as it intersected or shaped their area of interest. Introducing the concept and the works, Tamaira describes the vā as ‘an intermediary site – a liminal zone marked not only by tension and transformation but also by confluences and connections’ (Tamaira 2009:1). Such an open-ended conceptualization is confirmed as she later describes the vā as ‘a negotiable space where people or things can shift in any number of directions; it is, in short, a space of dynamic potential’ (2009:18).

Ambivalent kinships

In contemporary analysis of Pacific identity production, the concept of relationships has become increasingly employed. Teaiwa and Mallon (2005) refer to the relational way Pasifika negotiate their identities, citing the particular nature of shared historical intersects due to New Zealand’s former role as a colonial administrator for many Pacific Islands. This is also something that is being increasingly reflected in scholarship, for example Anae’s discussion of teu le vā as a useful concept in Ministry of Education research (2010).

In Aotearoa, an important work on Pasifika identities reads these relationships as 'ambivalent kinships' (Teaiwa and Mallon 2005). These relationships were privileged as complex and somewhat uneasy. As they described:

Our central argument is that an array of 'ambivalent kinships' marks the Pacific migrant experience as distinct from other migrant experiences in New Zealand. These kinships include those traced between Pacific people and Māori, through commonalities of history and culture; between Pacific people and palagi, through shared histories of colonial and post-colonial exchange; between the nation of New Zealand and the nations of the Pacific Islands region, through shared geography and the vicissitudes of global economic arrangements. There is also the kinship relationship of Pacific people in New Zealand to their homelands. Across all these sets of kinship relations, gender and generation have their own particular expressions. (Teaiwa and Mallon 2005:207-208)

Kinship, as Teaiwa and Mallon use this phrase, is 'a metaphor of shared histories and cultures' (2005:225), which they identify sets Pacific people apart from other migrant groups. In their chapter, they identify existing kinships with Pākehā, Māori, and other Pacific people from different islands and different generations. The special history of New Zealand's colonial administration of different islands in the Pacific, and the geographical kinship due to New Zealand's position as itself an island in the Pacific, all suggest that Pacific people in New Zealand have relationships that are different from other migrants.

These kinships are emphasised as ambivalent, something mirrored in Mila's research (Mila-Schaaf 2010). Each kinship has boundaries that determine the nature of the relationship; it potentially emphasises differences as distancing, rather than inclusive. But ultimately such kinships are most helpful because of the very boundaries they may highlight. Those boundaries may highlight the 'edges', where 'the spaces between', the *vā*, might be seen.

Navigating the vā – Polycultural capital

Mila's PhD suggests a theoretical paradigm that foregrounds how those spaces are seen/operated in. She uses 'polycultural capital' to describe the way relationships are negotiated by Pasifika (Mila-Schaaf 2010:167-170). Mila takes Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as 'being associated with profit in social spaces' and develops from it the idea of polycultural capital, which refers to 'cross-cultural resources and intertextual skills associated with advantages in intercultural, relational spaces' (145).

This idea of using particular skills to match up with particular contexts has been noted by other scholars on diasporic Pacific communities. Helen Morton based her study on child and adolescent identity production of diasporic Tongans in Australia on the idea that somewhere between western and Tongan cultures, young individuals were 'creating their own culture' (Morton 1998:7). This idea, initially described by a Tongan woman about Tongan children in the lower socio-economic New Zealand region of South Auckland, was used to describe families 'where the parents were so busy struggling against poverty and other social problems that they did not actively teach their children *anga fakatonga*' (1998:7). However, Morton recognized that this particular set of circumstances was not the only place where young diasporic Tongans were negotiating between two different cultural axes, and that far from being a negative thing, was a positive reflection on the way Pacific identities are naturally fluid and flexible.

What Morton emphasises in her study is the way young Australian Tongans strategically choose how and when they identify. Whilst others' presumptions of a bounded, stable 'Tongan identity' still provoke questions of authenticity, diasporic Tongan youth have claimed their identities as one that incorporates both Tongan and Western identities (1998:23). Morton concludes 'these two conceptions of culture are not mutually exclusive and indeed that they are essential characteristics of the same phenomenon'(23).

Ilana Gershon picks up on the way Tongan diasporic youth navigate by these spaces using strategic identities employed according to context. She explains:

stressing one's identity as a Pacific Islander may be more advantageous politically than identifying as a member of any one group, as a result of a charged dialogue among bureaucrats, physicians, teachers, and others (2007:401)

Helen Morton notes the adoption of a pan-Pacific identity as a strategy amongst diasporic Tongans in Australia. In her article 'Creating their own Culture: Diasporic Tongans' she suggests that:

Even for young people who are knowledgeable about anga fakatonga and who identify as Tongan, a broader identification as Islanders can be appealing, insofar as it greatly expands the scope of their affective and symbolic ties (1998:22).

This idea is important when thinking about Pasifika identities in Aotearoa. The second generation of Pasifika are, according to Mila, also strategically utilizing a pan-Pacific identity.

The Politics of Naming

That I even seek a description or a definition of second and third generation Pacific people in Aotearoa is problematic. I acknowledge the several tensions created when something is categorized – the exclusions that occur alongside the inclusions, the exceptions to every rule, the 'blanketing' of the group under one umbrella thus enabling over-all assumptions to be made, or the political nature of the language you name in, or the history you privilege by the name you choose. This seems particularly true for the post-colonial Pacific (and indeed any indigenous people), who battle the heavy definitions imposed by imperialist agendas. The partitioning of Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia are an example of a naming that was imposed and produced prolonged after-effects; in this case the very fact that portions of the region were are thusly named has created partitions in the Pacific and world's imagination. It has begun to heal with a re-naming, and thus a reconfiguring and reuniting. The renaming/reframing of Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia as Oceania, following the expansive visions of Wendt (1976, 1982) and

Hau'ofa (1993), is an example of an instance where a change of terminology has enabled people to think along lines other than the divisions of colonialism. Other words that have been in vogue at one time or other also carry various levels of entrenched racism; 'half-caste' is a good example of a word that has fallen out of favour due to its negative connotations, ones that weren't felt by some to whom it applied (McIntosh 2001:144)

There are several ways in which Pasifika is a loaded term. Take, for example, the etymology of the word. It is a generalized re-rendering of *Pasefika*, the Samoan word for Pacific. This in itself is an example of the way Pacific history is heavily weighted toward Samoan history (Macpherson, Spoonley, and Anae 2001:15), which I will expand upon later in this chapter. The word Pacific is an anglicized version of *mar pacifico*, which was the name given by Spanish explorer Ferdinand Magellan. The obvious conclusion from that act is, like most acquisition and expansion projects from that time, 'new land' (or sea) was theirs to mark, to name, and to claim, regardless of any indigenous peoples, as the wealth of indigenous literature will attest. Furthermore, although *mar pacifico* is translated as 'peaceful sea' (and so named in comparison with the turbulent Atlantic), ultimately it is derived from the Latin *pacificus*, which is made up of *pax*, meaning peace, and *facere*, meaning to make. So the connotations of Pacific is 'to make peace'. The irony, of course, is that the name hides the physical and emotional violence that imperial enterprise inflicted upon the region.

The various grounds on which 'Pacific' might be contested were addressed by scholars such as Wendt, who argued for the adoption of alternative, self-appointed labels as acts of decolonization and resistance. He suggested 'Oceania' as a word that sidesteps the deeply marked history of the word 'Pacific' (1976). It too is a non-indigenous word, but Wendt argues that the process of resistance is not to deny that colonialism has happened, because to deny that would be to distance those Pacific peoples who are products of the colonial imprint due to intermarriage, migration, etc. It has gathered some currency amongst academics with Oceania used often in theses and journal articles. Another suggestion for a word to circumscribe 'Pacific' came from Ka'ili, who suggested 'Moanan' and 'Moana Nui'

which is actually an indigenous Māori word, coming from the Māori label for the Pacific region (Macpherson, Spoonley, and Anae 2001:3).

However, for now we might see the adoption of Pasifika as a part of the process of reclaiming. As McIntosh says, 'Identity is a site of struggle – a struggle not only for cultural integrity and autonomy but for economic and political standing and for access to resources, power and knowledge' (McIntosh 2001:153). The strength of its resistance comes from taking it in both hands and reworking it into a transformed thing. Its very currency in New Zealand seems to indicate that it fills a gap in discourse.

It appears Pasifika's currency in New Zealand is due to a combination of factors. Both governmental usage and an organic developing usage seems to have occurred, the combined effect cementing the word in popular discourse. It seems to refer to two different things. Firstly, Pasifika is a substitution for 'Pacific Islanders', or 'Pacific peoples'. Secondly, Pasifika denotes a particular subgroup within the category of Pacific peoples. The common thread between these two views is that they are both located in Aotearoa, and both act as pan-Pacific descriptors. As Gershon notes in her work on diasporic identities, 'government classifications and bureaucracies often encourage homogenous identities' (491). In response to this, I will trace the way government discourse has used Pasifika.

"Pacific Peoples" became and still is the official term adopted by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. Crucially it pluralised the 's' in an attempt to reflect the many distinct groups subsumed within the label. As Macpherson explains, the move from 'Islanders' to 'Peoples' was "no more than recognition that the majority of people of Pacific descent are no longer from the traditional island homelands, *and that their commonalities derive from culture rather than place of birth*" (Macpherson 2004:139, emphasis added).

Not every government department shifted to 'Pacific Peoples'. The Ministry of Education (MOE) was the most prominent government department to adopt 'Pasifika'. The first instance of Pasifika in New Zealand education vocabulary appeared around the early 1970s with the Anau Ako Pasifika project, and

subsequently with various projects within the MOE. But the official shift in policy formalizing Pasifika as the official word occurred in 2001, prompted by the slippage between Pacific Islands, New Zealand as a Pacific Island, and the ways in which people could identify as a Pacific person.

According to [notable Pasifika academic, Dr Tupeni Baba], 'Pasifika is a cultural term and refers to all who identify with it culturally. . . (and) has greater currency than say "Oceania", "Pasefika", "Moana" and other terms that could be used.' He goes on further to state that Pasifika 'is an inclusive definition that recognises and embraces the diversity that is associated with the term Pasifika and it includes the various practices, theories that emerge from research and from documentation of practices in recent works, which relate to Pasifika people, not only here in Aotearoa but also in the homelands'. ('Rationale', 2009-2012)

Pasefika, which is also suggested by Dr. Baba, does have some history in Aotearoa. The glossary for 'Language Enhancing the Achievement of Pasifika' (Ministry of Education 2009-2012) has them as equivalent definitions, and in some ways they are, as Pasifika is an attempt at a generic rendering of the word Pasefika, the Samoan word for Pacific. But the obvious drawbacks of this particular word is its Samoan origin, when there are already sensitivities about the ways New Zealand-specific Pacific research is overdetermined by Samoan contexts (Macpherson 2001:15). Indeed, there is some concern that Pasifika masks the dominance of the Samoan experience and the ways that this might bear upon knowledges as they are formed in Aotearoa. As an interviewee in Alan Perrot's insightful article on Pasifika states:

It's becoming a reality that whenever something is considered Pasifika, in reality it is Samoan, and by being seen as Pasifika, we are being seen as Samoan. So there is some antagonism, because we all hold different views, we all have different histories, we have different cultures, and we speak different languages (Perrott 2007).

Pasifika has been criticized for obliterating the differences and multiple experiences that 'Pacific peoples' sought to foreground. Not only does it mask the dominance of some experiences over others, but it lays itself open to the same misuse that 'Pacific Islander' was subject to, in ascribing a label for the sake of convenience.

There is a tension in the twin aims of Pasifika to, on the one hand, simply be a current, politically correct version of 'Pacific Islander', and on the other to refer to something specifically located in Aotearoa that is crucially different. This makes the word particularly contentious – in some contexts, it includes some Pacific people who don't actually identify with it, feeling that it erases or at least overshadows the identity that they hold. The Ministry of Education released a paper explaining their definition:

Pasifika is a collective term used to refer to people of Pacific heritage or ancestry who have migrated or been born here in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Pasifika include recent migrants or 1st, 2nd and subsequent generations of New Zealand-born Pasifika men, women and children of single or mixed heritages ('Pasifika in New Zealand': 2009-2012).

If it is used this way, anybody with Pacific blood, regardless of original context, becomes Pasifika once they reach NZ shores. In this sense, it simply replicates that lazy, or even racist homogenizing that 'Pacific Islander' was.

But it isn't a term that we can just leave behind. As Dr. Baba identified, it has started to represent a *culture*. Perhaps partly stimulated by its use by the Ministry of Education, whose focus by default is on the young, and perhaps by uses by Pacific media like Tagata Pasifika and high profile events like the Pasifika festival, and perhaps by the fact the Pacific demographic in Aotearoa is a relatively young one – the result is that the term has come to be associated with a new way of being a young Pacific person in Aotearoa that is different from the experience of new migrants, or of the first generation of New Zealand-born.

Over the identity theorizing of the 1970s to 1990s, there has been an increasing focus on the fractured, multiple experiences forming these identities. The rhetoric evoked lostness, difficulty, and confusion as the grounds of identity changed from what was seen as standard. This is a phenomenon that seems associated particularly with New Zealand-born Pacific people.

Thus development of the term shows a slipperiness in usage – simultaneously referring to a regionalised ethnicity (as a straight replacement for Pacific Islanders) and as an emerging cultural identity. These are not completely separate strands as one has affected the other, as Dr. Baba referred to when he cited Pasifika as a culture.

The Relationship Between Literature and Identity

Ka'ili's use of tauhi vā offers a way to think about kinship in a new light. This means what Ka'ili has described as a Tongan concept to link kinships and kin-like relationships might, in light of the new kinships Pasifika are forming with each other as well as holding with Palagi, Māori, and older generations of Pacific people, be thought of as a practice that Pasifika can perform widely and contextually. This means that Ka'ili's example of tauhi vā in the introduction of this chapter will be different to the performances that Pasifika engage in as the context and kinds of kinship are different.

I propose that literature might be thought of as performing tauhi vā for Pasifika identities. My suggestion for this stems from two things: the Pacific view of writing as a tool of decolonization and activism, and a comment that academic Teresia Teaiwa made with regard to Pacific Studies, which lends itself to adaptation to the related field of Pacific literature: 'it is an especially intimate field that people enter, often with highly personalized stakes' (Teaiwa 2006:352).

This is evident in much writing from scholars in New Zealand and the Pacific. Literature as a site of reclamation and activism has been argued by a variety of different academic and artists. As Marsh states, 'much of minority writing has a political agenda that aims to fulfill more than aesthetic purposes' (Marsh

1999:346). Wendt, as Teaiwa acknowledges, has ‘fostered a regional consciousness among writers that has been referred to as an “oceanic imaginary”’ (Teaiwa 2010:732). This imaginary is what Pacific writers are seen to collectively inhabit and produce, creating a deliberate, intentional movement, backed up by academics such as Hviding (2003:44), writer-scholars (Hereniko 2000:83), and in advocacy for critical theory to be formulated alongside Pacific literature (Winduo 2000; Thaman 2000:42).

For Selina Marsh, literature is an act of cultural production that is a highly necessary act. ‘The Body of Pacific Literature’, (2010) gently questions whether the tragedy of a young man’s suicide was prompted by cultural isolation—not seeing enough stories of fears, failures, triumphs, different ways of being, or seeing different strategies of survival¹⁰. Rallin argues the writing out of our stories creates these strategies:

the aim of literacy education should...raise social consciousness about the workings of power in a society that is hostile to them... Locating and narrativizing silences asserts knowledge outside the realm of dominant discourses and challenges hegemonic history. Storytelling and witnessing, thus, respond to Gloria Anzaldua’s call for “teorias [sic] that enable us to interpret what happens in the world” (Rallin 2000:134)

The concept of literature as a nurturing, reciprocal exchange may be seen in the introduction written by North American indigenous scholars Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm and Josie Douglas to *skins*, a book on indigenous writing:

Most [indigenous writers] believe our creative work has a function well beyond self-expression. It expresses the values and aesthetics of our people and connects us to them and to our ancestors and future generations. It is a form of activism that both maintains and affirms who we are and protests

¹⁰ This might sound like an extreme claim, but government data (Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs 2011) shows the rate of Pacific suicides to be twice the number of the national average for youth in New Zealand, a deeply concerning trend. This has been related to what it means to be Pacific in New Zealand in Tupuola’s research (1998, 2000). Te Awekotuku’s work also notes similar concerns for Māori women (Te Awekotuku 1991:46).

against colonization and assimilation. It is a form of sharing, of giving back, of reaffirming kinship, of connecting with the sacredness of creation.
(Akiwenzie-Damm and Douglas 2000:vi)

This passage uses the language of tauhi vā to describe the connection between literature as an activist endeavor and ‘our people’. Creative work is described as a reciprocal exchange, one that reaffirms kinships. Tauhi vā provides a useful theoretical framework by which to consider the relationship between literature and the development of Pacific peoples.

Specifically, this thesis seeks to understand the relationship between Pasifika literature and Pasifika identity through the writing of Selina Marsh and Karlo Mila as two Pasifika writer-scholars. As we have seen in this chapter, the nature of what it means to be Pasifika is a changing, malleable concept that is shaped by the social and cultural geography of New Zealand. Being Pasifika now would appear to be fluid and open ended, marked by increasing ‘polycultural capital’ as they evidence ever-increasing mobility. Mila and Marsh have demonstrated a particular interest in the needs of this generation. Mila and Marsh are both Pasifika themselves, and in exploring themes important and relevant to them, they have also storied recognizable spaces for younger Pasifika who are growing up.

Mila and Marsh have both articulated their motivation to nurture space for Pasifika young people to grow, and their creative writings deal with themes that are current for Pasifika identities. The following chapters look at the way Mila and Marsh treat what it means to be a multi-ethnic Pasifika, and what it means to be a Pasifika woman. The final chapter seeks to affirm the interconnectedness between two emergent Pasifika writers of a younger generation, Grace Taylor and Courtney Sina Meredith, who have been shaped and influenced by Mila and Marsh’s creative and academic work, illustrating the active, ongoing processes of Pasifika identity formation and literary production in Aotearoa.

Chapter Two

The Caramello Generation: Re-stor(y)ing the mixed body

As someone with a Niuean father and a Pākeha/Māori mother, I identify as a mixed Pasifika woman. I have something particular in mind when I say that I am ‘mixed’. I am saying that I have multiple lines of ethnic descent. I am saying that I am Niuean, Māori, and Pākeha. If I wanted to be more specific, it means that I am Niuean, Māori, French, and Irish. To me, describing myself using the word mixed is one way of holding multiplicities; a rendering of the fact that my brown body holds multiple ethnicities within it.

My mixed body has always been problematic – if not for myself, then certainly for others. Woven into my childhood are memories of complete strangers who would clumsily ask ‘what I was’, or just assume an ethnicity and cultural background for me that was completely inaccurate, based on their evaluations of phenotypic markers. I was rarely identified to be a Pacific girl, or Māori, in itself a confirmation of difference as I lived in what is often touted as the largest Polynesian city in the world.

In my teenage years, well meaning people would continue to ask, a shade more delicately, ‘So where do you get your lovely olive skin from?’ Aside from the embarrassment of having my light brown skin described as ‘olive’, as if brown was a distasteful colour to mention, I felt increasingly frustrated.

Because what I was *supposed* to say? People expected an easy answer to their enquiry. In asking ‘where are you from?’ they only wanted to hear one particular part of the answer – the bit that made me different, the bit that made me brown. As a child I had been told to identify myself as ‘half-caste’, but as I became aware of the pejorative overtones of that term I dropped it. Such an answer still did not satisfy my inquisitors, as it didn’t identify *what kind* of brown I was. And there was no other word I knew to use. As soon as I rehearsed the brown part – ‘I’m part

Niuean, part. . . ’ – I could see people lean back, satisfied, uninterested in any other ‘part’ I might be, as if hearing of my majority Pākehā descent line would disrupt the notion of difference they were nurturing in their heads. These questions, often put to me by people I barely knew, sometimes seemed motivated to fit me into a preconceived space already marked out for me. I also felt frustrated that something so arbitrary as my *skin colour* was a marker of difference, when my peculiar upbringing had offered plenty of other kinds of ‘difference’ for people to ponder upon (since they were all clearly so interested). I felt the implicit ‘normative whiteness’ that shaped their questions (and, indeed, allowed the personal questions to be put to me in the first place), but I did not know how to challenge those perceptions of difference.

And yet, sometimes my ambiguity worked in my favour. In a society that I knew only too well looked down on Pā and Māori communities, sometimes not being easily associated with that demographic was to my advantage.

It wasn’t until I read Karlo Mila’s ‘Eating Dark Chocolate and watching Paul Holmes’ Apology’ (2005:43-45) that I had another voice to speak to what I had experienced my entire life. The poem’s focus on colour and racism through the lens of a mixed Pasifika surprised me with its resonance. I was captured by Mila’s awareness of her ambiguity within her own environments. These lines in particular stayed with me:

I remember being
thankful I was pretty and fair / and had long hair / no one
called me Manu off Playschool or darkie / I was a milk
chocolate glass and a half / half caste / caramello enough
to be safe from bitter dark accusations (11-15)

In these lines, Mila colours her mixed Tongan/Samoan/Palangi hybridity as ‘caramello’. Caramello, a popular branded chocolate produced by Cadbury, is a block or bar of milk chocolate squares with a flowing golden caramel filling. Dipped into the poem as a way to describe her body and identity, caramello is an evocative and bittersweet metaphor for her more palatable hybridity within a

racially charged arena. Caramello is a fusion of two sweet components – milk chocolate (which contrasts with the dark chocolate earlier in the poem) and caramel. This bar, a hybrid in itself, highlights not only palatability (as dark chocolate is not as popular) but also signals how such palatability is associated with the lighter colours of milk chocolate and caramel. In the poem, Mila explicitly articulates her sense of difference vis-à-vis her mixedness. It is her mixed ethnicity that sets her apart from those being bullied in this stanza; it is through her hybridity that she experiences old racisms in new ways. To be a mixed Pasifika, the poem implies, is to experience things differently, in ways that are somehow specific to dual or multi-ethnic identities.

I was not the only one to appreciate Mila's voicing of mixedness. Albert Wendt embraced the metaphor of caramello, suggesting 'she's coined a marvellous new name for her generation... the Caramello Generation!' (Sperber 2005:67). His statement recognizes that being mixed meant a specific set of experiences, and that due to the high incidence of intermarriage between Pasifika and other ethnicities in New Zealand (Callister, Didham, and Potter 2005; Macpherson 1999:55) there is, indeed, a generation who are of mixed descent. Selina Tusitala Marsh, who is of multiple ethnic ancestries herself, faced the absence of a literature that represented this generation, explaining that her poem 'naming myself' stemmed from her afakasi self:

while there were many migrant theoretical voices with which I could peripherally identify, I still had not experienced the 'aaahhh' factor which comes from total and satisfactory identification at seeing the mirror image of oneself in larger society (Marsh 2001:138).

Certainly for me as a young caramello reader, the expression of a multi-ethnic identity is what caught my imagination when I first read Mila's 'Eating Dark Chocolate and watching Paul Holmes' Apology'. It was my own 'aaahhh' moment; I had a window into how being mixed meant certain responses from society or from family, and things slowly started making sense for me. Before that moment, the multiple strands of my ethnic identity were separated, like sinnet cord not yet

entwined together; now, observing the way Mila worked out her multiple ethnicities I could start plaiting my different strands together.

Tracing the portrayal of a caramello identity became one of the rich lines I could follow when reading Pasifika texts. What I came to find was that within Pasifika literature there was a consistent thread where authors were examining their mixed identities. Māori scholar and poet Alice Te Punga Somerville observes that there is no mixed-race category of literature for Māori writing (Te Punga Somerville 2002:200), a statement also true of Pasifika literature. This means that the strong thematic strand of being mixed Pasifika may sometimes be obscured by the overarching theme of 'being Pasifika'. Yet caramello poets have been busy infusing Pasifika literature with their own particular flavour for some time. This is evident in the works of multi-ethnic Pasifika writers Doug Poole, Karlo Mila, Selina Tusitala Marsh and Serie Barford, who have all written about their mixed worldings. Emerging poets Courtney Sina Meredith, Grace Taylor, Leilani Burgoyne, and many of the contributors to *Niu Voices* (2006) and other anthologies such as *Something Worth Reading?* (2010) identify their multiple ethnicities, and explicitly treat themes related to carrying multiple ethnicities in their work.

What much of this body of work reveals is just how high the stakes are for multi-ethnic Pasifika. I have opened with a personal story of what finding mixedness in literature has meant for me as a young Pasifika woman of multi-ethnic descent to illustrate the personal nature of this chapter's subject matter, and to foreshadow the way this chapter treats stories as an important way to work out the complex issues surrounding mixed identity formations.

Following Marsh's lead on the importance of seeing her own mixedness in literature, this chapter is concerned with the examination of mixedness in Pasifika writing by analysing Mila and Marsh's creative work as mixed-race texts. This requires the careful explication of the particular dynamics that form mixed Pasifika identities, and a sensitive approach to the nuanced possibilities of being a mixed Pasifika in Aotearoa.

I have been forced to confront the trickiness of terminology not only with my own experience as a Pasifika of multi-ethnic descent, but also in writing this chapter. My decision to use 'afakasi', 'caramello', 'mixed-race', 'multi-ethnic', and 'mixed' throughout this chapter is a gesture to the absence of a fixed, identifiable label and the ways these words, for better or for worse, fill in the gaps for those people of mixed descent. My usage is reflective of the inability of words to secure any real traction when trying to pin down a term for multi-ethnic mixedness¹¹.

To do this, this chapter firstly addresses the complexities of claiming a 'mixed Pasifika literature' by giving an overview of Pacific conceptualizations of mixedness. This is done by following two lines of inquiry: the shape and view of Eurocentric formulations of mixedness, and the shape and view of Pacific formulations of mixedness. My approach to this is exploratory rather than systematic; these two lines are not distinct but are at times intertwined and tangled together, making this endeavour one that benefits from a more flexible approach.

In tracing these lines, I include the voices of mixed Pasifika as an important part of this process. This is a response to the work of Selina Tusitala Marsh, who, in discussing teaching strategies for her Pacific students in her literature classes, argues for the importance of their voice in the production of knowledge, suggesting that such an approach nurtured 'the space between ourselves and text, among readers, and between readers and critics and the wider field (2010b:3). This section uses interviews in studies on Pasifika identities (Mila-Schaaf 2011) and mixed-Pasifika identities (Keddell 2006; 2009) and particularly considers the way Western and Pacific ideas of race impacts upon these identities.

¹¹ It must be noted that there is a danger that some of these words might be seen as interchangeable, when in actuality they each carry very specific histories. Mixed-race, for example, invokes the concept of race, and directly engages with it. Mixed ethnicity on the other hand figures within a fluid constellation of cultural, ancestral, political, and social conditions (Keddell 2009:223) without being tied to archaic categorization via physical characteristics. They are related, but distinct concepts, which requires careful usage.

From this point, I introduce a reading framework by which we might read Pasifika mixed texts. Based on Somerville's mixed-race reading framework for Māori material and adapted for Pasifika texts, it draws upon a Pacific epistemological model to enable mixed-race readings of the creative texts of Mila and Marsh.

The remainder of the chapter then engages with the themes of mixedness in three of Mila and Marsh's creative texts: the poems 'There are no words for us' (Mila 2008) and 'Eating Dark Chocolate and Watching Paul Holmes' Apology' (2005), and the short story 'Afakasi pours herself a cuppa coffee' (Marsh 2006). This chapter is particularly interested in the treatment of Western and Pacific conceptualizations of mixedness in Mila and Marsh's work and in tracing the way *re-storying* their experiences and bodies as mixed Pasifika, that is to say, re-writing their own selves over the hegemonic discursively produced Pasifika, also means *restoring* their selves.

Embodied worlds

In Chapter One, we considered the formation of a Pasifika identity through the lens of tauhi vā, a theoretical conceptualization that offered a Pacific epistemological approach to identity formation. It emphasized the way Pacific identities were seen as *relational*, and offered a useful way to think about Pasifika identities that highlighted their context in Aotearoa.

In this chapter, these intersections of identity, ethnicity, indigenous epistemologies, and Western knowledges are more clearly evidenced and embodied by the mixed Pasifika body. Where previously I interpreted Pasifika identity as moving freely between 'worlds', this chapter treats the mixed body as a single site in which these contentious and highly personal stakes are situated.

My choice to interrogate mixedness for Pasifika through the image of the body follows the work of Te Punga Somerville. In her contribution to Jonathan Brennan's thoughtfully-compiled book *Mixed Race Literature*, Somerville proposes a literary framework by which to read mixed-race Māori texts. Her framework finds its genesis in a Māori conceptualization of holistic well-being (Te Punga Somerville

2002:215). She cites the work of eminent Māori health scholar Mason Durie, who formulated Te Whare Tapu Whā, a paradigm developed to enable indigenous scholarship and engagement with Māori health. Durie's framework imagines four walls that support the whare of Māori wellbeing: tinana, hinengaro, whānau, and wairua, which Te Punga Somerville identifies have approximate equivalents in Western discourse: the body, self-identity, community, and spirituality (2002:215-217). In adapting and applying this paradigm to literature, Te Punga Somerville elucidates, 'Pertinent to both the Māori and Pākehā perspectives, its component parts are capable of raising a number of key issues regarding the topic, and also of revealing the tensions with which multiraciality imbues the texts' (2002:217).

These concepts carry equal prominence in Pacific discourse, most obviously exemplified by a comparable Pacific health model, Fonofale. Formulated by health worker Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann in response to the specific needs of Pacific people in New Zealand, Fonofale uses the structure of a fale to elaborate tenets of Pacific holistic health: Four posts – physical, mental, spiritual, other (sexuality, age, gender, socio-economic status) – stand on the foundation of the fale (family), and are protected by the roof (culture). The fale is cocooned by environment, time, and context, a crucial element when considering the particularity of the Pasifika experience (Pulotu-Endemann 2009).

In both these models, the body is an important part of the holistic structure. The body has been a critical site of contestation and power (Keddeh 2009:235; Lanser 2002; Hall 2007; Foucault 1982), with discussions of the body prevalent in wider discourse about race and post-colonialism (Boehmer 1993:1; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995:321).

Understandably, the body and representations of the body have been a central preoccupation of Pacific literature (Keown 2005; Wendt 1995). The idea of the mixed body as a site of power is a key theoretical concept underpinning this chapter. The two lines of interest coursing through this chapter – Western formulations of mixedness and Pacific formulations of mixedness – strongly reveal

the dynamics of power that are reflective of the real life intersects and impacts for multi-ethnic Pasifika.

Jonathan Brennan recognized the predicament of power and control for the mixed-race writer in Aotearoa as an oppressive one, suggesting 'writers find themselves attempting to write their way out from under a barrage of mistruth and misrepresentation, while negotiating dual identities and grievous cultural misunderstandings' (2002:14). Whilst in this passage Brennan is referring specifically to Māori/Pākehā mixed-race writers, it resonates as the experience also of mixed Pasifika writers in Aotearoa (see Mila 2009:3).

In order to read Mila and Marsh's creative texts as mixed-race literature, it is important to adequately preface the discussion by contextualizing Pasifika mixedness. In this, I follow Brennan's suggestion in his discussion on mixed-race writing from America when he contends that

Because it is crucial for literature scholars to engage the numerous mixed race American literature texts as hybrid literatures that reflect acts of cultural merging, it is essential for scholars to understand the prevailing issues in the field of mixed race studies to inform their critiques of this body of American literature (2002:17).

The same imperative applies for studying Pasifika mixed-race writing. This coming section explores the context of Pasifika mixed writing by focusing on the interplay between Western and Pacific approaches to the mixed Pacific body.

Western and Pacific Mixedness

A term that might be usefully examined in our discussion on Pasifika mixedness is 'half-caste'. Half-caste is a word that oversimplifies mixedness as the product of two discreet 'pure' entities that became mixed and muddled (and therefore, for some, needed cleansing out again as Paisley notes [1997:n.p] or for others were forever tainted [Roth 2005:36]). In Vicki Luker's book *Foreign Bodies* (2008), she details the journey of the term 'half-caste' from Roman origins, crossing through Portuguese linguistic usage to become the term used by the British East India

Company to refer to those of European and Indian parentage (2008:308).

Eventually, not coincidentally occurring under the same empire, half-caste became generally used to refer to people of mixed parentage in other British colonies (308).

It is important to note that in the English iteration this mixed parentage usually implies a white parent. This has informally become the case for Pasifika mixed-race individuals as the high intermarriage rates between Pasifika and Palagi lends support for this assumption. Here I affirm that although this chapter closely inspects a mixed-race Pasifika/Palagi configuration due to Mila and Marsh's Pasifika and Palangi/Palagi mixedness, many mixed Pasifika come from a wide variety of descent lines that includes other 'brown' ethnicities, not necessarily European.

As enunciative strategies, the focus on 'purity' and 'part-ness' has legitimized a blood quantum trope whereby biological essentialism (in this case, blood count) may be twisted to determine authenticity of indigeneity and elide certain rights that indigenous peoples are entitled to. An American example of this may be found in J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's powerful book *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity*, which launches a thorough critique of the theoretical underpinnings that justify ongoing injustices against Kānaka Māoli, in particular the way land entitlements are removed from Hawaiians who are determined by U.S. law to be less than 'fifty percent Hawaiian' (2008).

The loss of rightful heritage is not only physical, but cultural as well. Dealing with Western perceptions encoded in the word 'half-caste' is difficult for some Pasifika. One mixed Pasifika interviewed for Mila's scholarly research admitted, "I'm really aware of the kind of stigma attached to being half-caste" (Mila-Schaaf 2011:38). The stigma comes from a perceived lack of cultural knowledge, an assumption the interviewee has to work hard to disprove. Māori scholar Marata A. Tamaira describes her experience with 'half-caste', stating:

The pejorative term half-caste—on par with the terms mulatto and métis—was used to describe those of mixed descent. The label implied a certain inadequacy or deficit as far as our identities was concerned, and connoted a cultural limbo. The stigma of being labeled half-caste muddled peoples'

ability to self-identify and precipitated for many, including myself, a sense of cultural dysphoria (2009:n.p).

Tamaira has specifically articulated the discursive formation whereby 'half-caste' becomes a cultural malaise that disorients and disempowers. Cultural loss is as real (and as beneficial for colonizers) as loss of land, and both are compromised by continued reinforcing of Western conceptualizations of race.

Yet, for all the weight this word bears, it nevertheless continues to be used by some Pasifika to refer to themselves, or, at least, has offered mixed Pasifika in the past a useful handle by which to articulate themselves. This is perhaps born of necessity: as black mixed-race feminist scholar Naomi Zack argues with regard to US contexts, 'in order to speak usefully and relevantly on this topic it is necessary to use certain terms and terminologies' (Zack 1993:71). Those who use 'half-caste' may use it as a gloss, as they may themselves have three, four, or more ethnic lines woven tightly together, rather than a literal half-half ethnicity. It is also possible that those who use 'half-caste' to refer to themselves feel perhaps that for lack of a more meaningful label, this describes their difference that they value and want to accentuate (Zack 1993:71). An example of the differing investments in terminology was evident in the furore surrounding a 2011 Auckland police report describing a missing Samoan/Palagi woman as 'half caste' (Koubaridis 2011). After public calls pointing out the racist overtones of the phrase, the police issued an apology, acknowledging half-caste as an 'incorrect ethnic term'. This, in turn, drew comment from Innes Logan, the Samoan editor of the successful pan-Pacific New Zealand-based lifestyle magazine *Spasifik*, pointing out that taking issue with 'half-caste' is laughable to those who grew up identifying and still might identify as such (Logan 2011:6).

Using 'half-caste' might also be seen as an act of subversion, effected by taking the language and appropriating it in certain ways (Marsh 1999:169). This is further accomplished through the use of afakasi and other Pacific equivalents such as hafe kasi, hafe kati, hapa kasi. As transliterations of 'half-caste', these words could both be seen as a continuation of imperial might and an appropriation of a colonialist

agenda, therefore their usage is ambiguous and context specific. These words become additionally problematic themselves as they represent similar challenges to the naming of Pasifika discussed in Chapter One, as the Samoan transliteration is by far the most prevalent Pacific rendering, an effect of the dominant Samoan population in New Zealand. Thus the danger is that afakasi privileges a particularly Samoan expression/experience of mixedness.

Where 'half-caste' has a fairly linear history tracing back to imperial expansion, there are other problematic theoretical paradigms that have been formulated as a part of a global discourse around mixedness which are complex but no less contentious. Out of a swathe of scholarship, which includes Anzaldua's concept of 'Borderlanders' in her work *Borderlands/La Frontera :The New Mestiza* (1987), the work of Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak, Naomi Zack, Paul Gilroy, and Jayne O.

Ifekwunigwe, there is one term that is, by turns, embraced as a useful conceptual theory and rejected as an agent of continued discursive oppression by various Pacific academics. Hybridity, suggested in Homi Bhabha's work *The Location of Culture* (1994), conceptualizes the multi-ethnic individual as the combination of two discrete parts that might be understood to inhabit a 'third space' (Bhabha 1994).

Some scholarship recognizes the way this theory of hybridity could trouble binary notions and subvert oppressions of hegemonic cultures. Māori/Pākehā academic Paul Meredith finds hybridity a useful concept, describing it thus:

Bhabha has developed his concept of hybridity from literary and cultural theory to describe the construction of culture and identity within conditions of colonial antagonism and inequity.... For Bhabha, hybridity is the process by which the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonised (the *Other*) within a singular universal framework, but then fails producing something familiar but new (Meredith 1998:2).

For Meredith, this means that hybridity theory offers broad points where his multi-ethnic identity can be engaged with. Margaret Jolly notes that other Pacific scholars have found that Bhabha's work offers some useful points for Pacific scholars to theorize multi-ethnic identities, stating that theories of hybridity and

related French conceptions of *metissage* are 'much celebrated in some contemporary post-colonial theory as embodiments of transcultural connections and fertile intermingling' (Jolly 2007:100).

The hope with the concept of hybridity is that the paralysis of descriptors that 'lock in' blood quantum and biological lines that have been embedded in imperial policy as traps and exclusionary measures is bypassed by invoking a different space at once located both of and apart from that racialised discourse. Some Pacific academics utilize the concept as a way to talk about the diverse changes of the Pacific, including cultural change (Georgio 2001:1). Meredith advocates hybridity as a way to think about multiple ethnicities because it is a well-established theory and so its weaknesses are easier to circumnavigate (1998:3). Indigenous Fijian/Anglo Celtic Australian artist Torika Bolatagici explored renditions of mixedness and found hybridity theory's conceptualization of a 'liminal space that embraces "race" as "betwixt and between"' to be an empowering position (2004:78).

As a concept hybridity has been critiqued by some respected Pacific scholars, mostly on account of the assumptions that hybridity as a theory makes about pre-existing conditions (Hviding 2003:3). Albert Wendt in particular became an adamant voice on the subject, arguing against the way the hybridity scenario, despite arguments to the contrary, replicated the blood quantum trope that underpinned colonial representations of mixedness (1996:n.p). His objections explicitly highlight the seeming inextricability of Western conceptualizations of mixedness when formulating Pacific mixedness. The difficulty lies in the way that colonialist understandings and presumptions have infused through and shape theory that attempts (and implicitly fails) to remove itself from such influence.

New Pacific formations

The danger with theories that are impacted by or utilize essentialist conceptualizations of mixedness is that they allow the dominant group to marginalize others based on 'authenticity' (Keddell 2009:224; Brennan 2002:15). Keddell points out that tying theory to race, no matter how disguised, enables a 'levelling' process and maintains a discourse that works for Pākehā. She explains:

The dominant group also produces a discourse, influenced heavily by older ideas of 'race', that presumes the ongoing maintenance of cultural traditions based on descent. The notion of 'pure' authentic cultures can be used to depoliticize and limit the ways ethnic minorities can exercise power and participate in public life. The acceptance of ethnic minorities becomes premised on an unarticulated presumption that such groups will remain in their own spheres of community contacts, but actual power sharing of access to 'civil society' is limited (2009:224).

Jolly also recognized that 'contemporary Oceanic identifications are not just "haunted" by imperial EuroAmerican imaginaries of race, culture, and place but how such ghosts can be living presences, sacralised in law and revitalized by advanced global capitalism' (2007:99). She crucially identifies the way that such terminologies, with their embedded definitions, have been actively used to disempower and disrupt indigenous forms of identifying and knowing, in ways that benefit those in control of the discourse (see also Te Punga Somerville 2010). Jolly questions their use, suggesting that:

Past preoccupations with racial and cultural 'mixing' and with correctly classifying children born of mixed unions, surely reinscribes notions of somatic and cultural essence and legitimized hierarchical differences, rather than subverting them (2007:100).

This idea of legitimizing is treated by Linnekin, who in her discussion on Hawaiian ethnicity claims:

Similarly, ethnic designations such as Hawaiian, Chinese-Hawaiian, hapa-haole 'half white', Portuguese and haole are used to describe qualities of behaviour and relative social status as much as supposed national origin, and they form a gradient of social distance from Hawaiians (1990:155).

Both these passages recognize the power of terminologies to classify the half-caste in a way that can be worked for hegemonic advantage.

Mixedness: a Pacific framework

Kēhaulani Kauanui's detailed work on this issue has been an important contribution to understanding racial discourse in post-colonial societies. In her book *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity*, Kauanui contends that

The blood quantum rule operates through a reductive logic in both cultural and legal contexts and undermines expansive identity claims based on genealogy. While some assume genealogy as a proxy for race, I argue that blood quantum racial classification is used as a proxy for ancestry, with destructive political consequences for indigenous peoples (Kauanui 2008:3)

This passage conveys an important concept that I want to examine more closely. Kauanui's protest against a Western construction of identity advocates for an indigenous Hawaiian mode of identity formation: ways of belonging that are *genealogically* determined.

The idea of genealogy is utilized in Damon Salesa's conceptual redrawing of multi-ethnic lines in his article 'Samoa Half-Castes'. In his research on 19th-century Samoan half-castes, Salesa argues that in traditional conceptualizations of belonging, mixedness is an unremarkable norm present in society for centuries (2006:83). Where mixedness we have so far seen has been inherently tied to blood and biology, mixedness in Pacific epistemologies are figured *via genealogy* (83). What Salesa stresses in his work is that according to genealogical ways of understanding identity, as a Samoan you already have two halves – it is just that for some, both halves are Samoan (83). He explains:

it was through genealogy that one belonged to a family (*'aiga*); through a family that one belonged to a village (*nu'u*); and through villages and families that one gained rights, property, access, status. Tellingly, the organization of Samoan genealogies, through both mother's (*tama fafine*) and father's (*tama tane*) sides, meant that every child had two lines of descent. . . . every child was a kind of half-caste, even if both halves were

Samoan. Individuals would trace their genealogy back to different villages and would often feel those ties in very different, practical, ordinary ways. One's identities were plural, and this was expected. This was the nature of Samoan genealogy: it was multiple, historical, and responsive to context (2006:83).

Here Salesa is creatively suggesting that being mixed has been a part of what it has meant to be a Samoan, long before the beginnings of colonial expansion into the Pacific. Genealogy is the determiner for ways of belonging, and that inherently means multiple descent lines. Importantly, mixedness was a fluid concept, able to be influenced or changed by 'adoption, by the achievements of an individual or generation, or by other special events' (2006:83).

Salesa, I argue, has introduced an important critical idea that circumvents Eurocentric 'taxological' logic and reaches into the past to provide a positive, encompassing, embracing framework by which to think about mixedness in the Pacific in contemporary times. The fluidity, flexibility, and *Pacificness* of Salesa's formulation transcends the inflected (and infected) Pacific conceptualizations and allows Pasifika mixedness to the fore.

These tensions, connections, and confluences are all productive lines of inquiry when considering Pasifika mixed-race literature. The body of a mixed Pasifika is inscribed by discourses produced by European and EuroAmerican hegemonies and reproduced within New Zealand-based Pacific attitudes. However, I propose that it is not only Mila and Marsh's scholarly works that have been important contributions to furthering understandings and space for mixedness, but also that their creative texts significantly expand the notion of mixedness as fluid and open-ended and inherently Pacific.

Mila and Marsh Articulations: Re-stor(y)ing the mixed body

Karlo Mila's poem 'There are no words for us' (2008:14) appears in her second collection of poetry, *A Well Written Body*. It is an explicit treatment of the complicatedness of holding multiple identities from her Tongan/Samoan/Palangi positioning, calling specific attention to the difficult histories of the terminology and the wider implications of the existence of individuals of multi-ethnic descent. In this section, I explore the way that Mila's poem engages with the wider concepts of mixedness in relation to her Pasifika self. To do this, I approach this poem by focusing on the *body* of the poem and the variety of contexts in which it is physically situated to gain insights into the complexities of partness/wholeness of young multi-ethnic Pasifika, before closely analysing the text.

In highlighting the multiple layers of the text and image, and the importance of placement, I lay the foundation for a discussion about the Pacific epistemologies that underpin the poem. I suggest that the body of the text emphasises the disjuncture between traditional Pacific conceptualizations of literature and Eurocentric ideas about literature, which is supported by research by Teresia Teaiwa. From here, parallels might be made between the disjuncture between discourses for Pacific literature, and the discourses that lie behind mixedness for Pacific people – a discussion that makes use of innovative research by Damon Salesa (2006). This engagement with Pacific epistemological ways of knowing is then usefully employed helping to explore the articulations of mixedness by Mila and Marsh covered later this chapter.

A Well Written Body is a joint venture in which painter Delicio Sampero and poet Mila engaged in a collaborative, dialogic process whereby each person's artistic production was inspired by and developed in response to the other person's art work (Pellegrino 2008:n.p). The collaboration resulted in a large-scale painting by Sampero, in five adjoining segments and measuring over six meters long, and a collection of poetry by Mila. Both artists' works were then brought together in the form of a published book, wherein reproduced portions of Sampero's painting are interspersed with Mila's poetry. Thus, the book reveals the symbiotic nature and

process of the two different creative mediums, and also, I suggest, illustrates how hybridity is intrinsically woven throughout Mila's work.

If we read closer into the placement of the poem 'there are no words for us' in the book, we encounter the tensions of partness/wholeness. It shares the page with another poem and a painting. Whilst my focus here is to draw out some of the special connections between the image and my chosen poem, there are in fact significant connections between all three with each other. 'For my cousin', which is situated next to 'there are no words for us', is a poem reflecting on the death of Siaosi Melita Tongilava in light of the diaspora, highlighting connections and journeys between home on the island and home in New Zealand. It describes diasporic movement as 'always the dream of leaving / evolving into the dream of return' (8-9); an image that resonates with the painting's depiction of water and a horizon. These dynamics foreground concepts like fluidity, culture change, crossings, and journeys which brings added complexity to the 'there are no words for us' and the image.

Juxtaposing Mila's poem 'there are no words for us' against the image that shares the same page elicits a sense of the fragmented. The image is not one of Karlo or a human body. Instead, it is a picture fragment; there are lines half visible at the bottom of the picture that suggest more of the picture is there, just not visible to us as the viewer. Upstretched arms rise from the bottom corner, the remainder of the bodies unseen. A horizon and a kaleidoscope of black butterflies dance in the distance. It is also fragmented in the sense that the image spans two segments of the five that make up the painting, as the image as it appears on the page has an original that is actually split in half. The separating line can be seen in the reproduction of the image. And yet the picture in some ways is also complete, as it is intended to be (Christchurch City Library n.d.). But the image also exists as a small fragment of Sampero's painting. It will always be a part of a whole, and yet also a whole.

A significant way that the poem is fragmented is in its co-habitation with the image. 'There are no words for us' is the product of collaboration, and will always be a part

of the art work that inspired it. The poem's form, like the painting it is paired with, is also fragmented in different ways. Uneven stanzas are broken by the repeated refrain 'there is no language' (1, 6, 13, 19); sentence fragments leave incomplete traces. The very position of the poem in the 'Part One: Where are you from?' section offers another sense of being a part of something bigger, in this case as a section of poetry thematically grouped together as Mila's identity journey.

These layered parts and wholes might be seen as a physical representation of the way such amounts are troubled and subverted by the body of the mixed-race Pasifika. As previously discussed, the hegemonic culture often has a vested interest in maintaining discrete, scientific based renderings of race which attempts to cleanly divide and compartmentalize. The body of Mila's poem is breaking not only traditional forms but also encourages an open exploration of the multiplicities its form contains.

These ideas are also mirrored in the text itself. The poem holds in tension the tenets of Western scientific reifications of race and a more fluid, open sense of identity.

There is no language
half-castes, half-breeds,
mulatto, miscegenation
These words rest
with our lovely dead (1-5)

The first thing we might notice is that the title of the poem 'There are no words for us' and the first line 'There is no language' are both bald statements articulating an absence – perhaps even a bereftness. Naomi Zack, noted African American feminist scholar, argues in her major work *Race and Mixed Race*: 'If individuals cannot be identified, in the third person, as mixed-race, then it is impossible for them to have mixed-race identities in the first person' (1993:4). The import of Zack's message implies that the absence of a name is potentially the erasure of a legitimate identity for individuals of multi-ethnic descent. This is certainly an important consideration as a minority in a society which is knowingly or unknowingly racialised. But Mila's

gentle persistence throughout the poem on 'us' and storying experiences and feelings ('rapture and joy') encourages a more open reading, as I will discuss shortly.

We immediately discover that there *are* indeed words: 'half-castes, half-breeds, mulatto, miscegenation'. These are gestured to be from the past as the words 'rest / with our lovely dead'. Although the present tense of the first line suggests no current language exists, and that previous words are in the past, an average reader in New Zealand with no specialized knowledge is likely to recognize at least one word from that list, indicating that the words are not quite at rest (and which then perhaps begs the question: how 'at rest' are 'our lovely dead' anyway?). And it also prompts us to consider the nature of terminologies, if their removal necessarily means the disappearance of the attitudes or meanings behind them.

The listed words are all connected in some way to biological understandings of race. Their relationship with each other are indicated by alliteration and syntactic similarity – 'half-castes' with 'half-breeds', 'mulatto' with 'miscegenation'. 'Half' is emphasized on the physical page, an outward reminder of the premise of racial compromise and impurity that underscores these words.

Mila continues:

There is no language
genome, germ lines, genomics
that captures
the rupture and joy
of gene-pool crossings
a channel as wide
as humankind (6-12)

Once again, alliteration emphasises the way the words 'genome, germ lines, genomics' are connected with each other, being terms of the scientific field of genetic research. Significantly, where in the verse previously the words were all animal-associated, this time the words are most often associated with human

biology. These terms are fraught with meaning, as the old literature on mixed-race peoples not only used this biology to infer such peoples as lesser or inferior, but as we discussed earlier in contemporary times the reliance upon archaic expressions of identity embedded in legislation currently depowers some indigenous peoples from accessing valuable land.

Also, these are the words of science, and so for Mila are cool, clinical terms that cannot encapsulate 'the rupture and joy / of gene-pool crossings', a reference to the sex act necessary for multi-ethnic people to exist in the first place, and a very human act that often involves deep emotional connection. Here the 'gene-pool crossings' continues the genetics theme, and refers to an actual transfer of the genetic materials of both parents (and by extension, their grandparents, great-grandparents, etc.) At the same time, 'pool' is used flexibly, not only in its meaning as a combination of elements or resources (in this case, genes) in the same 'space', whether literal or otherwise, but 'pool' is also used as a water image, something carried on in the next lines with the use of the word 'channels'. Channel has a more general definition as a trench, or a conduit, and then a more specific definition as a river bed, or the straight between two seas. Another definition of channel is a pathway through which information is passed. Such a reading of the channel highlights not only the genetic information being passed on, but also gestures toward the other kinds of knowledges specific to being mixed that is being passed on. The final sentence is a hint toward Salesa's theoretical framework for mixed Pasifika: these channels, which the word implies are something bounded, is described as being 'as wide as human kind'. Salesa's theory argues for a much broader sense of being mixed as a normal state – and, in this sense, Mila is perhaps suggesting this Pacific epistemological understanding of mixedness applies to everyone.

Importantly, incorporating the element of water highlights a sense of identities as fluid, varied, and constantly in movement. This is a key understanding of identity theorizing (as seen in the preceeding chapter), and in its inclusion here, Mila may be making a further claim for Pasifika multi-ethnic identities as

In the next verse, Mila shifts from human biology to plant biology.

There is no language
cross-pollinate, hybrid
that cultivates
insight and pain
of embodied cultural exchange.

There is no language
for our sweet nashi offerings
the original forbidden fruit

widening the palate of the world. (13-21)

The poem continues with its juxtaposition of Western scientific conceptualizations of mixedness with the refrain 'there are no words for us'. The poem appears to play with these concepts somewhat, at once distancing from the Western concepts, as evidenced by the separations within the text between 'there are no words for us' and the verses, and yet using the same language to challenge and slip away from the biology that seeks to determine identity. This is evident in the juxtaposition between something emotive and non-clinical ('the rupture and joy'; 'insight and pain') with a scientific reference (of gene-pool crossings; of embodied cultural exchange'). By inverting scientific language to restore Western scientific modes of identifying and categorizing.

Mila's treatment of Western concepts is constantly set up against the refrain 'there are no words for us'. This does not just refer to the difficulty of naming that we have seen Pasifika try multiple strategies to overcome. It is also a statement of the limitations of language, which struggles to encapsulate the tricky, fluid nature of mixedness. Mila does not suggest a word. Instead she emphasises the expansive nature of identities according to a Pacific viewpoint.

Eating Dark Chocolate: re-stor(y)ing embodied difference

This discussion of the various historical theoretical positions and the impossibility of language to capture the expansive, natural state of mixedness leads us to consider a pre-colonial understanding of Pacificness that frames mixedness as an all-encompassing, dynamic state of being. This section now turns to the politics of being mixed in a society that continually invokes and permits the rhetoric of colour. By reading the body in Karlo Mila's 'Eating Dark Chocolate and watching Paul Holmes' Apology', we see the tension between an increasingly accepting mixedness against a racist society with a continual refrain of 'darkie stanzas', as they are described in the poem.

Mila's poem was printed in *The Listener* in 2003 as a response to a public gaffe by broadcaster Paul Holmes, who infamously called then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan a 'cheeky darkie' during his radio show on Newstalk ZB (Dominion Post 2003:A1). Holmes apologised, but his remark illuminated for some moments a dark underside to New Zealand as the subsequent furore revealed how the delicate tension between treaty partners is underscored by a simmering racism that threatens the façade of social equilibrium. It illustrated that power might be asserted by simply referencing skin colour, which had significant implications for certain ethnic minorities in a country that regards itself as inclusively multicultural (Zodgekar 2005:140) whilst still holding a bi-cultural commitment (Liu 2005:76; Sibley 2007:1224). The ongoing public debate continued to reveal sore spots in the national psyche, questioning the notions of race and colour difference. Eventually the polarized public moved on, but such rhetoric highlights the difficult and complex nature of race in New Zealand's post-colonial society.

Mila's poem brings race into focus through her bi-coloured lens. She builds up a chronology of 'darkie' moments, whereby upon the body is imprinted the indelible mark of difference; difference, that is, as determined by others, which in this poem and is both white NZ and her Pacific community. Mila draws attention to these differences through the transformative act of writing, utilizing the power of literature to work through and transform the experience of social erasure.

The poem is reproduced here to assist with the analysis that follows:

Eating Dark Chocolate While Watching Paul Holmes' Apology

i am sucking on a sante bar / sneaked / bought at pak'n'save
in a cigarette gold wrapper / i remember when you bought
them in dairies / they were stripped and served undressed /
edges worn from the friction / getting down with the
brown / chocolate dust was in the air

i am watching paul holmes apologise for calling kofi annan a
darkie / darkies takes me back to

6 years old / school grounds / see-saws / we won the
war / we won the war in 1944 / mean boys alternating
between catch and kissing and sticks and stones / darkie /
tania got called blackie / golliwog / i remember being
thankful i was pretty and fair / and had long hair / no one
called me manu off playschool or darkie / i was a milk
chocolate glass and a half / half caste / caramello enough to
be safe from bitter dark accusations

tonight paul holmes apologised for calling kofi annan a
darkie / takes me back to

10 years old / sitting on my dad's stomach / him flat on the
sofa / we're watching a week night movie / southern
drawls and white sheets / me crying hot wet tears over
black men with hurt in their eyes / what does lynching
mean maka? / my daddy / dark / my feet dangling off his
tummy / me milky brown chocolatey sweet / wanting
to grow up and be the prime minister / or a lawyer like
matlock / make everything all right for darkies everywhere

tonight paul holmes apologised for calling kofi annan a
darkie / takes me back

15 years old / barry /surf lifesaver / washboard abs /
the mattel man / automatic winking machine / ambivalent
crush / half hate / half fetish / blonde frosting in his fringe /
darkies / that's what he called us / hope you don't mind
darkies / he said / setting up his mate / flirting on the phone

tonight paul holmes apologised for calling kofi annan a
darkie / takes me back

17 years old / do you think they would ever let a boonga
be prime minister / corey p / dreadlocked bob Marley
wannabe / says to me / mocking laughter / he's drunk at
three / in highbury / but we never dreamed they'd let an
indian woman be mayor of Dunedin / so let's sukhi it to
them corey p / we were darkies anonymous then / making
fun of ourselves before anyone else could / revolution in
the bottom of a bong / cutting off our veins to spite our
lives /

tonight paul holmes apologised to the nation

i am 28 / aucklander / jokes about jaffas don't involve
maoris and minis / just another f-ing aucklander / the
p.i.'s here outnumber prejudice in wide open spaces /
skinheads low key / less closely shorn / too much rugby
league brawn / on the arms of coconuts / i've been told
i'm the cream rising to the top / the cream of the crop /
nesian queen / rank and file member of the chocolate
soldier movement / getting down with the brown /

tonight paul holmes apologised

sorry / he said / i've hurt my family / i may have hurt
yours /

yes / we scrapped in the car over it / there was yelling / by
the time we got to the end of the mangere motorway / i
was crying / who is this redneck with the big brown
shoulders sitting next me / anti pc / darker than me /
defending freedom of speech / but i don't want it to be all
right /

/ i don't want my kids to have stanzas of darkie memories /

sorry / paul holmes said / i could see that he meant it / i felt
sad for him / and happy / i signed the petition to say he
should get sacked / i am a manager in a govt department /
not matlock / not the pm / just a member of the chocolate
soldier movement / melting in the middle (2005:43-45)

Different stanzas for different ages/stages reflect a new racist trope to be confronted each time. As she recounts her experiences, each stanza/experience is separated by variations on a simple two line reference to the Holmes debacle:

tonight paul holmes apologised for calling kofi annan a
darkie / takes me back to (6-7,16-17,26-27,33-34,44,53)

The effect of this is to ground the experiences firmly in the present; that the master narrative of racism in Mila's life (in this poem) is still currently a dominant narrative in New Zealand. Her poem exposes a discourse of normative whiteness embedded in New Zealand's 'everyday' – where the racial othering experienced by Mila is replicated on prime time radio by a popular broadcaster so many years later.

Another noticeable feature of the poem is its use of all lower case letters. This kind of disruption of convention is not new for Pacific literature – poetry by John Pule and Tusiata Avia both feature poems of all lower cases and, in Avia's case, also uses

the forward slash to separate segments. In 'Eating Dark Chocolate' the effect of using all lower cases may be thought of as an equalizing strategy; in this poem, i, barry, maka, paul holmes, pi's, and bob marley are just a few of the words that would normally be capitalized. Regardless of ethnicity, culture, location, or positionality, they are all presented in the same standardized format – which, of course, is not 'standardized' for traditional poetic layout.

Mila's first stanza introduces themes of colour, consumption, sexuality, and tensions. She writes

i am sucking on a sante bar / sneaked /bought at pak 'n 'save
in a cigarette gold wrapper / i remember when you bought
them in dairies / they were stripped and served undressed /
edges worn from the friction / getting down with the
brown / chocolate dust was in the air (1-5)

In this stanza, Mila introduces the image of chocolate as a metaphor for colour. The santé bar is a locally produced chocolate bar, distinctive by its size and shape and dark colour, wrapped in foil; this contrasts with a Caramello bar, which is a much fatter, fuller, sweeter block made of milk chocolate, not dark chocolate. Mila's santé bar in the present (the one she is sucking) was bought in a large budget supermarket chain (Pak'n'save, which perhaps hints at the socio-economic status of Pacific peoples, compared to the 'fatter, fuller' wallets of many Palagi middle to upper class). In that moment of eating, Mila remembers the santé bars in her past as crowded into the same container at the local corner shop, no fancy dressing, no individually wrapped separation, bundled into a container where they would eventually come out looking somewhat the worse for wear. The gold wrapping both hides the colour of the chocolate and protects it from damage, a faint foreshadowing of Mila's 'six years old' stanza in which her colour also hides her, an idea we will come to shortly.

Reading the body against this poem offers a provocative initial reading of the first stanza that highlights sexual overtones in the verse. If we consider the chronological approach the poem takes, this seems an appropriate and important aspect to explore. It reads somewhat like a prologue, the sexual imagery invoking the necessary step for the existence of half-caste Pasifika (Mila-Schaaf 2010:16). Mila's use of the words 'stripped', 'undressed', 'friction', 'getting down with the brown' create an obvious innuendo which foregrounds the sexual element of the verse. A chocolate bar works as a metaphor for a brown body; which is complicated by the bi-colouring of a caramello bar. Chocolate is also an object of consumption (and indeed one is being consumed in the title), and we are reminded through the themes of various Pacific creative writers that Pacific peoples have been consumed by the encroaching Western culture, from sexual consumption (Smith 2008:84) to consumption of culture via militourism (T. Teaiwa 2001b) or consumption of land (K. Teaiwa 2001).

The chocolate bar is 'sneaked', but the author remembers a time when they were 'served, stripped and undressed'. This reminisce echoes back to the existence of half-caste offspring from early European contact. Early encounters scenarios, especially in Easter Polynesia, featured young adolescent girls offered, naked, to the visiting sailors, whose 'mouths were watering' as one ship's surgeon described it (Tcherkezoff 2008:71). The sailors were able to sate their sexual appetite, ostensibly in return for nails, but, as Tcherkezoff suggests, Pacific peoples may also have sought to create kinship ties that mixed offspring would represent (2008:85, 147). It was hoped that children birthed out of these unions with the new papālagi would embody the most positive traits of both, although what exactly those traits were will naturally differ from place to place, and from history to history.

The 'sneaked' chocolate bar can carry a more contemporary overtone of the illicit union between the poet's Tongan father and Palagi mother. In her poem 'For My Mother', Mila describes 'a middleclass girl, a Methodist girl', pregnant out of wedlock to her father the 'brown bread winner', clearly mismatched in more than just class. The sexual freedom Mila's mother exercised against the moral values upheld by her late white, Methodist, middleclass father (which, we might

extrapolate, are representative of society in general) troubles societal taboos: sexual intercourse outside of marriage in a Christian society, a mixed-race relationship in a time of dawn raids, educational difference (read: class difference) in a marriage¹². Of course, the ongoing proof of transgression of the 'interracial sexual taboo' is the existence of the mixed-race individual (Bolatagici 2004:77).

The process of unwrapping the *santé* bar from gold to brown (which carries obvious sexual connotations), recalls an evolution from light to dark, the colours mirroring the gold/brown in the caramello chocolate. Shifts in colour palette resonate with the 'real life' lighter to darker from one white parent/ genealogy to the shades of brown of many mixed Pasifika. Skin colour remains the most obvious 'sign' of mixedness for some Pasifika, although ironically it increases ambiguity of what *kind* of mixedness. Many caramello poets have figured themselves in various brown-shaded configurations, and have often conceived the shade of brown against another, lighter, shade. Mila has referred to herself as a potato 'brown on the outside, white on the inside' (2005:118), poets Grace Taylor and Leilani Burgoyne write about their white body and brown culture (Taylor 2010:62-64; Burgoyne 2006:171-172), and South Auckland Poets Collective poet Tarah Ki Ahau wrote of herself 'I am the lighter side of brown... I am a darker side of white' (Ki Ahau 2010:51).

We see in the stanza where Mila is 6-years-old stanza that the politics of colour difference revealed themselves to Mila early, and her burgeoning self-awareness heightens her sensitivity to the position of other against the dominant people group. In the same way, we might understand Mila's 6-year-old encounters with colour difference as marking that moment, when her world becomes defined by the presence of Palagi, who, in the school yard, already know the colour of safety, of normalcy, of power. Mila's half-caste body offers her a passport to safety. She is 'pretty and fair', her features are different from stereotyped PI features – 'had long hair' – which makes her invisible to the dominant group. Or, perhaps more

¹² Mila's father is illiterate (Wednesday afternoon 2005:129; Dudding 2003:n.p) and we might understand Mila's mother to have received a 'middleclass' education.

tellingly, she is automatically a part of the dominant group, an observer to the racist bullying, perhaps even complicit in it. If you are brown, you are noticeable. As one young Pasifika shrugged, “we had all the stuff I guess that brown kids in New Zealand get. We got called peanut brownie and coconut and nigger.” (Mila-Schaaf 2010:215). Brown, it is suggested, is the automatic signifier of difference due to its visibility against the white norm.

What is exposed in the poem is a way normative whiteness plays out in children’s arenas – in this case, physically spaced as the play area of the schoolyard (as denoted by ‘see saw’, space for children’s games of ‘catch and kissing’). One reading of this space is that it figures the brown other as a plaything, a disempowered subject of sport. The motif of ‘playthings’ is carried through this verse with games that involve or invoke the over-use of power, with ‘catch and kissing’ (a game where you catch someone and then kiss them), and typical school boy chant ‘we won the war in 1944’. The way ‘sticks and stones’ is tacked onto the end of a list of these play games makes it feel like it is a game in itself – as it was, to those throwing them. ‘Sticks and stones’ is a reference to a popular playground rhyme – ‘sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me’. The slippage between this quote and the reason for this poem’s existence is in the way this poem responds to name calling, and details a chronology of ‘darkie’ insults that are still raw. This is confirmed by the words immediately following this line: ‘darkie / tania got called blackie’. Mila mentions two more playthings – ‘gollywog’, and ‘manu off playschool’. In contrast to the games of power mentioned which were necessarily active games, the dark toys are the passive, inanimate playthings, one a well known caricature of black minstrels, the other a Māori-named, brown doll off well-loved children’s program *Play School*. Thus these insults are equating darkness with a lack of power, weakness, and passivity.

With the heavy emphasis on dark – ‘darkie’, ‘blackie’, ‘golliwog’ – Mila’s light colouring is depicted as ‘caramello’ and ‘milk-chocolate’. As mentioned earlier this chapter, the metaphor of caramello chocolate highlights a more palatable shade; it is no accident that Mila describes being ‘thankful I was pretty and fair’. This treatment of colour is continued throughout the rest of the poem.

Mila's text chronicles her varied engagements with racialized discourse in New Zealand. As a 6-year-old, she encountered the logic of colour in a society where white is privileged as normal. As a 10-year-old, she begins to make connections between her localized experiences and a global discourse that privileges white and 'others' black as she watched an old time movie that we might assume contains racist characterizations borne out to their typical conclusions (ie: lynching for the black man). At 15 years of age, she narrates dealing with an orientalist trope from a teenage crush. At 17 years, she is experimenting with elasticized political ideals (do you ever think they would let a boonga be prime minister (but we never dreamed they'd let an indian woman be mayor of dunedin [38-39])). These varying racial discourses have embedded themselves in New Zealand and reiterate themselves in diverse ways according to the particular histories of location and mutating around the dynamic social processes of the present (Hall 1996; Cowlishaw 1998; King 2007).

Reading the text for a re-storying of these catalogued moments provides insights into alternatives to entrenched discourses. An example of this is the interesting moment when Mila uses her skin colour to hide: 'I was a milk chocolate glass and a half / half caste / caramello enough to be safe from bitter dark accusations' (14-15). She is invisible, born with her mother's light skin which camouflages her, and therefore 'safe'. Pacific identity had been theorized as occupying a space on the margins (Tamaira 2009:n.p; Diaz 2001; Teresia 2001:343), and scholarship out of New Zealand emphasized liminality¹³ as a key aspect of the NZ born experience (Tiatia 1998; Tupuola 2004). The space theorized by many of these authors is unsafe, difficult, uncomfortable. If we read Mila's 6-year-old body in the playground it offers a more open ended understanding of the space that Pasifika occupy. We might read a crucial shift, in that the dangerous and unsettled space on the borders of two different worlds has now become the 'safe zone'. Mila's half-caste body has become a passport to safety – her two worlds overlapping to offer protection from

¹³ For a broader discussion of the concept of liminality, see the ground-breaking work of cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1987, 1969), who in turn drew from the important work of Arnold van Gennep around rites of passage (van Gennep 1960).

the outside. Those around her overlook her; being caramello has gifted her with safety against the playground racism that darker students have to face. For the dominant group who operate on severely limited signifiers, Mila ticks enough of their boxes to pass. I argue that this invisibility – once a liability – has been mobilized as a blind-spot in the other's eye. They cannot effectively control something they do not see.

The ambiguity of Mila's colouring is recounted variously as 'pretty and fair', 'milky brown chocolatey sweet', but also throughout she is also 'darkie'. Ambiguity has also been used as a literary device to obscure gazes in the stanza '15 years old'. While the text makes his exoticizing gaze obvious, Mila's device of separating words/phrases/concepts in the poem with forward slashes (/) sometimes has the effect of disconnecting the words (but also may function as a device to highlight 'the spaces inbetween' the forward slashes, a visual representation of the Pasifika identity within each va). In this verse it makes for intriguing reading as it allows room to question exactly *whose* is the 'ambivalent crush'. Indeed, the 'half hate /half fetish' might not be ascribed to only Barry in this verse, as we note Mila's youthful notice of his own body (washboard abs). Recalling to mind the racialized playground in '6 years old' in which the dominant group subjugates through play, we read in Mila's depiction of the young Barry as 'the mattel man' a humorous inversion of brown as plaything. Here he has been described as a generalized children's toy – an object, popular but also disposable (as many garage sales the world over will attest). The mattel man could be read as an archetypal anatomically incorrect Ken-doll type figure, with a chiselled plastic torso and lack of substance lower down, literally an un-manning¹⁴, which might be conceived as another inversion of the orientalisng discourse that ascribes to Pacific women a kind of ultra-femininity (with the extreme focus on bare breasts, swinging hips and sensuality). By figuring Barry as 'the mattel man' she not only stories him as the object of play, but also allows him to be imaged according to a white mythology that boxes American 'good looks' as square jawed, blonde haired, and white toothed, and yet symbolically with none of what hegemonic masculine discourse

¹⁴ According to certain discourses that subscribe to male genitalia as the embodiment of 'manhood'.

would deem as a critical representation or source of manhood (Wylie et al. 2007:1449.)

Mila is not yet done with teasing out the possibilities of the mixed Pasifika body. If safety is found in blending in – literally – then it too may be found in visibility of a particular kind. In ‘I am 28’ the brown bodies that have earlier been figured as vulnerable have been transformed – via location and ironically via play (sport) – into physically imposing forms that are now, if not the dominant people group, then certainly a numerically more commanding group as gestured by the sentence ‘the pi’s here outnumber prejudice in wide open spaces’. Mila makes sure to identify the location, Auckland, by which we understand instantly from its unofficial status as ‘the largest Polynesian city in the world’ (Marsh 1999:342) that the sheer numbers of Pacific/ brown people provide safety – a different sort of ‘blending in’. Sport is an area where Pacific people are highly visible and successful (Teaiwa & Mallon 2005:208), and attract acclaim from mainstream New Zealanders for their prowess on the field. ‘rugby league brawn / on the arms of coconuts’(48-49) is an ambivalent phrase, the coupling of ‘brawn’ with ‘coconut’, which is a derogatory term for Pacific Islanders, an ironic repeat of some occasional but regular sport comments about Pacific people’s lack of strategy on the field (read: lack of intelligence) hampering the overall success that their physical strength provides (Teaiwa & Mallon 2005; Tapaleao 2010; Paul 2012). In the poem, nothing is hampered except racism.

In the remainder of this verse, Mila then places her own body in a similar ambivalency:

I’ve been told

I’m the cream rising to the top / the cream of the crop /

nesian queen (49-51)

Once again the spectre of the colour of success rears its head. She treats it as a story (‘I’ve been told’) in which her undeniable upward mobility has been coloured as cream – not white per se, but certainly not brown. The richness of cream

echoing the increased wealth implied in upward mobility, which is also evoked by the present progressive aspect of 'rising'. In an interview with blogger Maryanne Pale, Mila recalls 'From a fairly early age, I was celebrated for being a high achieving "brown girl" from the wrong side of town, who was going to go 'somewhere' one day' (Pale 2012:n.p). The gradual lightening from that milk chocolate 'brown girl' to 'somewhere' (rising to the top) creates an ambiguous journey toward the upper echelons of successful New Zealanders, as indicated by her position at twenty-eight years of age as 'a manager in a govt department' (65).

This is resolved by subverting the separation of milk from cream, and instead stories herself as another product of milk: chocolate. Mila emphasises that she is a 'rank and file member of the chocolate soldier movement / getting down with the brown' (51-52). This is an important moment in the text as Mila insists on her belonging – resisting the separation implied by 'rising to the top' and the attendant expectations others place upon her because of her skin colour.

The transformation from racist slur into positive images that evoke success and power creates a narrative of empowerment for Pacific people. The dark, negative implications of Holmes' insult for 'brownies everywhere' have mobilized a greater sense of belonging and brother/sisterhood (she is a 'rank and file member of the chocolate soldier movement'). Mila's dual connections between the 'chocolate soliders' and 'the cream rising' are simultaneous worlds that she is learning to utilize – an example of polycultural capital being used in ways that seek the continued benefit and affirmation of 'darkies everywhere'.

So far the racist discursive formations have been obvious, and Mila's narration of her responses has been clear. There is a complication in the penultimate stanza, premonitioned by a change in the way Mila articulates the Paul Holmes connection between stanzas. Up until now there have only been slight variations on 'tonight paul holmes apologised for calling kofi annan a darkie / takes me back /'. This time the preceeding line reads 'sorry / he said / I've hurt my family / I may have hurt yours /' (45). There is an unnamed person next to Mila in a car, someone we might assume to be her partner from the mention of 'family' in the preceeding line and

the line following the stanza 'I don't want my kids to have stanzas of darkie memories'(62). Holmes has certainly hurt Mila's family as his comments do two things: cause conflict between her partner and herself, and normalize the rhetoric of racism¹⁵, which will continue the life-cycle of racism for her children to encounter in their turn.

The conflict with her partner occurs in a moving car, driving along a motorway in Auckland. Their placement is suggestive of some original similarity: they are side by side, in close proximity, and they each have a similar, forward facing view. And yet, in the confines of a car, they also have opposite points of view – if each person looked ahead, and then to the side at opposite right angles from each other, they end up looking in completely opposite directions whilst still remaining seated side by side. Mila and her partner are figuratively in this position, tied closely by love and commitment, yet ideologically divided. Her partner is described as a redneck, a derogatory term usually applied to white racists such as the skinheads mentioned in the previous stanza. His 'big brown shoulders' are an echo of 'rugby league brawn'. A key tension is articulated here as 'darker than me', in which we might read the complication of her half-caste body being read through racist tropes when he – potentially a greater target for racist assumptions based on colour from his skin colour – is not distraught. In fact, this passage exposes a moment of prejudice in the way she made an assumption about the universality of her experiences of racism, and how she assumed another brown body would see and process it in similar ways.

It is resolved through the double acts of signing a petition (enabled through her upward mobility, 'cream rising to the top') and storying her 'many memories of racist slurs growing up as a brown kid in New Zealand' (Mila 2010) as a responsive

¹⁵ This has happened in an explicit way. Andy Haden, a Rugby World Cup Ambassador and former All Black, used the phrase 'three darkies' when referring to an alleged racially discriminatory informal policy by Canterbury Rugby of capping only three Pacific Island players on their team at any one time. In the ensuing public outcry, both Prime Minister John Key and Sports Minister Murray McCully argued that Paul Holmes' 'darkie' comment was a precedent which, while unfortunate, entitled Haden to forgiveness and did not require him to give up his unpaid (but honourable) position (Watkins 2010)(Te Punga Somerville 2010).

strategy. In the end, Mila's response to racism has reached a readership of thousands, through multiple avenues and mediums, having been printed initially in *The Listener*, and subsequently in her awarding winning book which is taught as a part of some university English courses, and it also exists online, including the NZEPC website. Thus it remains an ongoing tool of resistance and an accessible insight into racism in New Zealand from a unique mixed Pasifika perspective.

'An Afakasi Ambiance' - ambivalent mixedness in 'Afakasi pours herself afa cuppa coffee'

Re-storying selves has long been an impetus of Selina Tusitala Marsh's critical work. It is a text included in *Niu Voices* that we turn our attention to now. 'Afakasi pours herself afa cuppa coffee' is a structurally mixed creative text narrating a mixed Samoan/ Scottish girl called Afa. She is a New Zealand-born working professional, a 'chromosomologist' specializing in hybrid genomes, a woman who is highly conscious of her brown female body alone in a field dominated by white men. We infer from the story that the counterpoint to her success as a professional (and as a 'brownie girlie') is her lack of connection with Pacific culture, revealed in the opening passages as Afa betrays her anxieties around her 'second hand knowledge' of Pacific culture. In the story Afa's relationship with writing is initially fraught, but in narrating herself with her own words we find an increased sense of self.

The story is a densely packed narrative of Pasifika mixedness in New Zealand. From the protagonist's name, Afa—Samoan for 'half' and indeed, half a name as she is also 'Afakasi' in the poetic part of the text—we have a prefiguring of the complex treatment of mixedness. Reading a body in this text makes for particularly meaningful analysis as Marsh works in ambiguous nuance in the story that, I argue, conceptualises and legitimises mixedness as an uncertain, fluid, and ambivalent state.

As with Mila's poem 'there are no words for us', our initial engagement with the text is to read its body as an example of 'hybrid literature that reflect acts of

cultural merging' (Brennan 2002:17). It is structurally unorthodox, an unsurprising feature in and of itself as the breaking away from traditional forms of Western writing has long been a form of resistance by indigenous writers, and utilized by Pacific writers in New Zealand (Millar 2002). The text reads as part short story and part poetry, already a foregrounding of hybridity as the text is not only comprised of two distinct literary forms, but those forms are 'mixed', paragraphs of prose intertwined with lines and stanzas of poem. I suggest a deeper significance to the use of these forms which might be read as the cultural merging Brennan discusses, which require a making of distinctions that I will have to undo later on. First, a possible mixed reading allows us to note the short story's position as a foremost genre of expression for New Zealand writers. Indeed, it has been seen as *the* primary literary format employed by New Zealand writers, the literary form most indicative of a 'New Zealand' literature (Wevers 1993). Whilst the notion of a 'New Zealand canon of literature' and what are particularly 'New Zealand' forms of writing is contestable and best left to other projects, the suggested commercial viability of the short story in New Zealand means that it has become a popular format for New Zealand writers to write in; thus its one-time association as a 'New Zealand' mode of expression still holds as a truism. It is significant that Marsh, as a *caramello* writer, is troubling the notion of the short story as a predictable literary form. She appropriates the form but also subverts it using disorientating shifts in subject and time, and shifts to poetry and back again to prose. In this, Marsh is making us think about the expectations we may have of the form of the short story; there is an analogous parallel between this and the way multi-ethnic Pasifika can function. They too disrupt expectations and challenge notions of simplistic ideas of race. Their very existence is encouraging a redefinition of mixedness, ethnicities, and identity.

Interspersed throughout this particular short story is a poem. Like the short story for 'New Zealand' writers, poetry has become a popular mode of expression for Pasifika writers, particularly women (Mila-Schaaf 2009). In the same way that economic viability has to some extent dictated the short story's popularity for New Zealand writers, it has been suggested that the appeal of the poetic form for

Pasifika may be related to political and cultural reasons (Te Punga Somerville 2010:257; Mila-Schaaf 2009). Worked into the form of Marsh's 'Afakasi' text is a hybridity between literary forms, which is also suggestive of a hybridity of cultures – a 'New Zealand' culture on the one hand, and a 'Pacific' culture on the other, each intertwined in a mixed body.

Having just made this association, I now deconstruct it to reveal the way the form of the creative text might be read for mixedness. If we read the text of 'Afakasi pours herself afa cuppa coffee' as symbolic of a mixed-race body, with Palagi and Pasifika each loosely represented by the short story and by poetry respectively, we cannot help but read these as mixed, fluid concepts as neither category is exclusive from either writing group: there are Pasifika writers who write short stories and other non-Pasifika New Zealand writers who write poetry, and many of them that write in both formats and others besides. To thoroughly collapse the binary, we may follow Trask's line of reckoning. As she states in her pithy article "Writing in Captivity", 'Like most Native people, I don't understand the world of creative writing as divided into prose and poetry' (1997:42). Marsh has written a text that can be glossed as a short story, or at least a hybrid short story/poem, but a Pasifika reading reveals the story does not conceive of itself as a hybrid at all. As noted earlier in this chapter, Salesa's work on the early Samoan half-castes shows that mixedness is not new to Pacific peoples. Afa, in the story, may not understand her mixed-race self as Pacific, but as we shall see, Marsh stories her as mixed Pacific none-the-less.

Additionally, each literary form is unconventional in ways revealing of fluidity. This is not only due to the obvious 'interruptions' by the alternate form, but each form exhibits diversions from traditional Western short story or poetic conventions. The body of prose does not follow a clear narrative line as it is disrupted by shifts in perspective, such as balancing a split perspective as a mother and a professional whilst in the hospital for her son on her graduation day (31), or even shifts in subject, for example, where the story focuses on Afa before focusing on Tina in the final two pages. However, what might be seen as disruptive or unconventional may in fact be a strategy on Marsh's part to affect an 'indigenizing' of the text. The

story's chronologically discontinuous structure, which starts at a moment in Afa's career, goes from present to future to past. The story's chronological beginning appears three quarters of the way through the story. It moves forward to Afa's childhood, at which point we come to the end of the physical story, but not the end of Afa's life story, which picks up chronologically at the beginning of the story and continues. While this form engenders a sense of ambiguity or discontinuity, it in fact quietly traces what has been conceived as an indigenous Pacific image: that of the spiral (Knudsen 2004; Marsh 1999:340).

A mixed reading of the text offers a resolution in keeping the collapsed state in tension with a sense of individual identity. This reading of the body of the text foregrounds hybridity, but it is a hybridity that is deeply marked by inconsistency and ambiguity, and is impossible to locate solidly in either 'camp'. This reading extends to the reading of Afa's brown body. As we see in the text, her half-caste body is read 'every which way', which troubles her own narration of it. Storying her self becomes a difficult task and we find ultimately it is through the quiet malleability of poetry that Afa can re-story her halfness on her own terms.

One final example of Pacificized hybridity lies in Marsh's use of language. The story is written in English. Her use of the dominant idiom reflects multiple considerations such as readability for those people, Pacific or not, who do not speak a Pacific language, commerciability, or personal language acquisition. But, just as the structure is Pacificized, so too is the language. Marsh's particular phrasings 'Bigger Dreams land'(32), code switching 'talofa and hello'(30), 'va, the spaces in between'(31), untranslated references 'falesā, loto, aufaipese, gagana'(32), and transliterations 'Afakasi'(29) are recognizant of Pacific 'sounds and cadences' as Trask terms it (1997:43). The effect of this is a challenging of the dominant use of English, and a reflection of the way that a particularly New Zealand flavoured English now contains recognizable, Pacific words ('talofa'). The addition of unexplained words near the end of the story widens that space of New Zealand English, offering the reader, who is already disorientated with the sudden changes in the text, a further chance to reflect on life as it is for Pacific people, and for the assumptions dominant groups make about language accessibility.

‘Afakasi pours herself afa cuppa coffee’ begins with a deceptively simple phrase: ‘That was it in a coconut shell’. The simplicity of the line belies the multiplicities contained in the word ‘coconut’. The image of a coconut is resonant as a metaphor suggesting multiple Pacific identities (Hereniko 1999:135, Marsh 2006: 217). Hereniko rehearses the ways coconut has been represented or misrepresented, such as its use as an insult, as a dubious term for migrants returning with European ‘airs’, as a referral to a useful, life-giving thing, or as a shared Pacific identity. The coconut has been understood as a symbol of ‘the cultural damage inflicted by the West upon Island cultures’ (Brook 2003:10), and also as a supplier of two products of export: copra, the dried meat of the coconut, and ‘the image of the tropical exotic which is pivotal to the tourism trade in the Pacific’(7). As Hereniko discusses with regard to Hawai’i, the coconut can serve as a metaphor of castration, with the potent images of coconut palms in tourist locales belying the fact of their impotence: for tourist safety, the trees’ ‘nuts’ are removed (Hereniko 1999). A further reading along this line is to see the ‘eunuch’ palms as a symbol of false virility, upright but impotent, providing the passive background image to the sway of sensual dusky maidens under the colonial gaze. The benign coconut trees are, then, ‘merely decorative, essential to complete the picture of...pleasure and personal happiness’ (Hereniko 1999:137) and the absence of the coconut symbolic of the way the indigenous inhabitants are rendered invisible or impotent. In another turn, Hereniko recounts the coconut’s appropriation by others as a provocative term ‘with connotations akin to “nigger”’ (137), a gesture toward a racist discourse that colours negative traits as brown. An additional reading to the coconut’s colour is that both the outside of the coconut and a Pacific person is brown, but the inside of a *fia palagi*, that is to say, wanting to be European or living a European lifestyle.

The coconut, half white, half brown – or more specifically, brown on the outside, white on the inside – prefigures the protagonist in the story, the Samoan/Scottish Afa. Afa, like the coconut, is brown on the outside, but her cultural capital is largely Euro-centric. The colour configuration is half literal, half figurative (her physical body is brown, and white is used to denote a *Palagi* set of knowledges), and

provides the first instancing of both colour and halves in this symbolically rich text. In the same way that the coconut has been imaged in various ways to suit particular agendas, so has Afa's body. Her body is always 'brown': she is a 'brown chromosomologist'(29), 'a brown'(30), a 'brownie girlie'(31), a 'lady whose brownness will stump most guesses' (32). Her brown body becomes the signifier, a body that, like the coconut, is reproduced within narratives that reify existing racist or negative discourses simply based on her colour. This is true not only for colonial representations of brown that Afa faces (evidenced in the text through media representation), but also for assumptions coming out from the Pacific community, in which Afa's body is complexly othered. I suggest that it is during the moment when Afa narrates for herself that she can reclaim her insistently mixed body from the opposing discourses, both of which she does not fit within. This narration is of choppy, ambivalent, storied tensions that are part of the half-caste story for many Pasifika. Compellingly, this section in which Afa stories herself so ambiguously is also a very Pacific one, echoing the dynamic tensions found embedded within the form of the text. In the same way the coconut holds multiple discourses in tension, so too does Afa.

In her scholarly work, Karlo Mila reports a strong movement from Pasifika participants of a Pacific leadership course for the acceptance of varied, marginal iterations of being Pacific as legitimate Pacific identifications (2011:38). However, multi-ethnic Pasifika described experiencing racism from the Pacific communities (38). Underpinning this racism would appear to be what Teaiwa suggests is the propensity for social changes in the Pacific to be 'analyzed as movement from being more Pacific to less Pacific, less European to more European' (2006:75), leading to litmus tests of authenticity and determiners of belonging (Mila-Schaaf 2011:34). Who gets to determine 'who is in or who is out' has been tied to cultural capital – if you hold more traditional knowledge, if you can tick boxes such as fluency of language, if you are older, you hold more capital that qualifies you to speak on the matter (Mila-Schaaf 2011:34)

This dynamic sets up a barrier for some Pasifika who feel that they are being watched (Mila 2011:38), or that identifying as belonging to a specific island group

requires meeting a certain level of cultural criteria (Keddell 2009:226). That is seen as a barrier is seen by some multi-ethnic Pasifika. As one multi-ethnic Pasifika states: 'you have to earn your stripes a lot more than you would do if you were full Samoan' (Mila-Schaaf 2011:38). While the criteria is largely dictated by the older generation, some multi-ethnic Pasifika feel the need to validate themselves even to NZ-born Pasifika who are their contemporaries (Keddell 2006:48).

The result is that many mixed Pasifika need to authenticate themselves against two differing rubrics. In Keddell's study on multi-ethnic Samoan/Pākeha¹⁶ Pasifika, one participant, referred to as A, articulated an identity that was 'mostly' Pākeha. He saw identifying as Pākeha as easier, 'knowing that any claim to a Samoan identity would be challenged' (Keddell 2006:52). However, A could not identify as Pākeha without being forced to justify himself, especially to Pākeha, as his brown skin suggested an ethnicity that was different from European, and thus a set of cultural markers were assigned to him that set him as different from Pākeha, regardless of A's ethnicity of 'mostly Pākeha'. A's position of being unable to identify as one or the other, despite having a dual heritage of both Pākeha and Samoan, is dictated not by A, or by his parents, but by the ethnic communities of his respective descent lines.

Afa is acutely aware of the ways her brown body is 'read' by the Pacific community. In preparing to speak the keynote address, she 'falters':

Frozen in the deep of their faces, their expectations, her projection of their expectations on how one does brown publicly... Would they see through her earnest machinations of endeavouring to carry off a seamless cultural performance? (30)

She has been invited by the Pacific community to give the keynote address to six hundred students at a Pasifika graduation. She is described as a 'lady whose brownness will stump most guesses', not termed as 'Pacific' or as 'Pasifika' or as any home island, but as brown. The only way we know she is afakasi (apart from

¹⁶ When referring to Keddell's research in which she uses the term 'Pakeha', I follow suit.

multiple clues in the text) is because her descent lines are rehearsed, although only through her mother's story, never directly Afa's story. Afa's mother is Samoan, and her father a 'mercantile Scotsman' (32).

Not only is this revealing of her distance from her culture, but it shows how the racist discourse that reduces people to colour has been absorbed, until now it is not only herself that is brown, but others around her, including Pacific elders. The narrative voice, from Afa's point of view, calls them 'older brownies', not as a knowing sign of disrespect; after all, she has just prepared an 'honorific and respectful' speech in order to impress them. We now have a mirror image of the Pacific community seeing a brown girl, and of Afa seeing a community of brownies.

This has not always been the case. In her childhood, Afa has been physically identified as different by her peers (tongues poked and fingers pinched at the otherness of Afa and her sister). Ironically, it is only when Afa's brownness is exposed by her success in an area where no other brown people are that she is no longer 'othered', but invited to cross the cultural barrier that requires some form of capital to be possessed. Paradoxically, Afa's only form of cultural capital, it would appear, is her brown body but she is plagued with the knowledge that it is not enough. This causes great anxiety, her heart is now 'treacherous' (30)— not only because it is betraying her public speaking skills, developed over years of professional travel, but it also anticipates the way she feels she cannot legitimately identify as Pasifika and yet she is delivering the keynote address to six hundred students.

What many young multi-ethnic Pasifika choose to do is to mobilize their polycultural capital to choose how to act in certain situation. Individuals use their knowledges to gain footage in either camp. Some multi-ethnic Pasifika have expressed that, 'I can play in both worlds' (Culbertson & Agee 2007:90), 'you can have the best of both cultures' (90), 'jumping from waka to waka' (91). Selina Tusitala Marsh described herself as 'tak[ing] in the best of both worlds' (Esplin 2006:n.p), although that is qualified by an admission that she doesn't have 'full' access to any group. Afa, however, does not have enough knowledge on both sides

to 'jump' with any mobility or freedom, as evidenced by the fact she only has 'her projections of their expectations of how one does brown publicly' as opposed to a more comfortable knowledge where she doesn't have to project but to 'be'.

People with multiple ethnicities and 'ambiguous' appearance are often subject to 'singular categorizations, intense scrutiny, or mis-categorization by others' Keddell 2009:227. A Pasifika girl expressed her experience of 'white' expectations, explaining:

I was this little darkie that was not only *not* under the norm for achievement academically, but was leading the class... and that's like I'm a freak because of it, and what's going on in this little girl's head and why is she not like how we expect these people to be. . . . (Keddell:2006:53)

A significant way that Afa responds to the way others read and narrate her body is to narrate her own story, using her own words. The second paragraph tells of the difficulty Afa has in doing this. In writing a speech for the Pasifika graduation, her thoughts 'cower' at the point just before articulation. Her own narrative is 'stalled', her blank white paper 'mocks her' (29), as does 'the brown edges of her newly inked words' (29), a mirror of the cultural heritages that she does not know how to perform or write for. Interestingly, it is not a lack of voice that stymies the articulation process, but by the multiple voices inside her. They are 'intangible' from long periods of being silenced, un-articulated, now 'refusing to sound above a whisper' (29). But they are there, in their multiplicity, all competing to be heard although quiet from disuse.

Afa's recourse is to 'borrow' words, 'an excerpt from a well-known oratorical speech' that will fulfil the requirements of Pacificness. Thus the speech becomes not an inspiration for the young graduates who have attained degrees in the face of lower achievement rates of Pasifika, nor an affirmation of internal Pacificness, but a kind of inversion where it is Afa who is being tested, who has to justify the fact that she has somehow attained a qualification in Pacificness despite not knowing what she 'should' know.

This passage is ambiguous in some of its rendering: ‘she had prepared’ could be read as either simply the past act of creating the speech or as an implication that she *had* prepared one, but may not use it. The implications of the second reading create ripples within the passage. By using her own words at the speech, she has potentially failed at the cultural marker others were expecting of her. But she has used her own tongue, ‘the only tongue she had ever known’, literally both her voice and also her first language, English, and thus empowered herself to use her own words to story herself. Language has been seen as a significant marker of authenticity, which Afa openly chooses to not operate along those already established markers. She chooses not to use the ‘borrowed words’, the story of someone else’s mouth, and instead uses her own. But tellingly, it is phrased as ‘swallowing’ the words, which gestures toward a kind of internalizing that echoes a process of imbibing cultural stories so they feed and nourish the body and soul, which is a very Pacific approach to the value of stories as we saw in the ‘Pasifika literature’ section of Chapter One.

Afa’s first attempt at speaking for herself segues into a poetic fragment, and then poetic prose, which I suggest is a significant moment in the story. There are several possible, simultaneous readings of this passage. One reading might suggest that Marsh stylistically borrows here from longer-established forms of Samoan orature, such as the storytelling practice of *fāgogo*, that themselves weave between narrative and poetry. Other scholars have even equated Pacific literature to a “written *fāgogo*” (Long 1999). Rather than focus on this aspect of continuity with existing Samoan oral practices, however, the two additional readings that I want to explore further are more interested in how this stylistic mixedness relates to the ethnic mixedness of Afa. Thus, a second reading would highlight the way poetry is a revealing, malleable literary form that enables articulations of truths to be made more softly, more ambiguously, which is more appropriate for the complexity of Afa’s *afakasi* identity. Additionally, a third reading of the text that may be made concurrently is that it demonstrates the truth of ‘enabling articulations’ through the way it mirrors a multi-ethnic identity in its form, rhythm, and words, which is what I will address first.

The start of the prose passage comes after the poetic couplet:

Afakasi pours herself afa cuppa coffee

contemplates her full day (30)

which in turn is in the space that Afa's speech could have occupied, had it not been deemed (by the narrator? Or by Afa? Or by the audience?) as unsuitable for the permanency of print. Perhaps we might see the poem as a replacement for the speech, a refined re-telling of self-narration. The subsequent prose passage is made up of sentence fragments, simple sentences, or just single words. Some sentences start in the assumed middle of the sentence ('And suggestions of' [30]; 'And the mixing of on a poetic palette' [30]. More complete in its incompleteness[31]). The effect, particularly coming after the poetic lines, is poetic, rather than stilted, the string of fragments and words creating waves of rhythm, as in the line, 'Nuances. And the creation of. Hinted moments. And suggestions of. Glimpses of colour. And the mixing of on a poetic palette.' Each fragment could run on from the previous one and the one after – each fragment a part of another, each one determined by the ones around it, offering renewed depths or different meanings, an embodied truth of the line 'More complete in its incompleteness'. This is a macro version of a larger effect in the story: the poem and paragraphs are spatially and rhythmically similar which prompts shifting interpretations. For example, the passage we are looking at begins with 'Afakasi pours herself afa cuppa coffee/ contemplates her full day'. There is the prose paragraph that we are looking at now, and then the two poetic lines are repeated. And then there is another paragraph, then five lines from the same poem (and so on in similar configurations.) Each poetic interlude is surrounded by prose; each prose passage is encased by poetry. The overlaps and connections feed into each passage and imbue it with meaning. We might see the first appearance of the two poetic lines as a replacement for the speech due to its position on the page, where the speech could have been. If we note the paragraph it precedes, we might imagine the significance of the poem to operate as a kind of cathartic response to the 'failure' of the speech. The lines take a life of their own depending on what paragraph is read alongside it,

and vice versa, literally an afakasi ambiance. The overall effect is a shifting, ambiguous, multi-faceted, prismatic of meaning.

The ability of this passage to mirror the nuances and shifts of a multi-ethnic identity is helped by its double subject of poetry/afakasi identity. Afa's approach to poetry is to embrace it as a 'safe' vehicle for storying ('less demanding. Less of a mirror held up to one's own face' 30). Poetry is described as a form that releases, which implies that other modes (such as the unrecorded speech) carry risks and certainties that Afa does not feel comfortable with. 'Anchors dig', it is claimed, 'Then wound. Then bleed. Then fester' (30). Afa has been chafing under the constraints of cultural definitions, knowing how other people's ideas of what makes for secure identities can bother, rub, hurt, stay. Poetry releases her, allowing her to be storied as poetic prose, fragmented and ambiguous.

This passage allows for a related reading: that of poetry reclaiming the body as a Pacific concept. The explicit invoking of the *vā*, already suggested as an important theoretical concept in Chapter One of this thesis, and the Pacific structural elements (evident in the 'waves' of textual meaning, and spiral structure) speak to a Pacificized foundation.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine the idea of mixedness for Pasifika through the creative and scholarly writing of Mila and Marsh. In engaging with this idea, two strong influences on the development of mixed Pasifika identities emerge – Western conceptualizations of race, and Pacific attitudes to mixedness that were underpinned by those Western understandings of race. Both challenge the authenticity of the mixed Pasifika. Damon Salesa's critical work on Samoan half-castes foregrounded a traditional Pacific approach to being mixed – an approach that steps away from any racialized, biological, or essentialist discourse to embrace the idea that all Samoans are mixed.

This point, freed as it is from Western constraints of biology, is one that informs mixedness as fluid, organic, and deeply Pacific. I position a mixed-Pasifika reading

framework as one that enables the reflection of those aspects. What a mixed-Pasifika reading of Mila and Marsh's texts shows is the empowering act of reclamation of their bodies from the heavy discourse around them through the act of writing. In 'There are no words for us', Mila emphasised the way other's definitions could not contain the multipleness and fluidity of being mixed, and in 'Eating Dark Chocolate and watching Paul Holmes' Apology', Mila highlights the discursive construction of the term darkie, but challenges the simplistic notions of colour that support the term. Marsh, in 'Afakasi pours herself afa cuppa coffee' intertwines two literary forms as an analogy for the mixed Pasifika. All three of these creative texts challenge hegemonic notions of race (and in Marsh's case, also a tendency in Pacific communities to expect authenticating features), and reclaim their mixedness for themselves. Their writing thus becomes an act of resistance but also an act of restorying, which begins to redefine their mixedness on their own terms.

Now a new generation of Pasifika have the space and the foundation to further strengthen their mixedness, in all its ambiguous, shifting, multiple wholeness.

Chapter Three

Mana Tama'ita'i Pasifika: *The girls write/right their own*

This chapter stems out of a specific constellation of events both within my own life and within the body of Pacific literature. I have already been open about the way Pacific texts opened up a reality of belonging, a way of connecting with my Pacific roots by helping me to recognize Pasifika routes, journeying from a time and place of little knowledge (see Introduction). That time is located within my conservative upbringing which was isolated, selective, and in many ways oppressive to me as a Pacific person, as a Māori, and as a female. Certain behaviours - obedience, demure demeanour, kitchen chores, nappy changing, and 'submission', were handed to me as my birthright as a girl. Submission was particularly tied to being a woman and, by extension, to being *womanly*. When I failed to be submissive (to my parents, to my church with its embedded patriarchy¹⁷, and even – bizarrely – as I was often admonished, to my as yet non-existent future husband), I was explicitly and implicitly failing as a woman. The impossible (for me) raft of feminine behaviours intersected with admonishments to cultivate a persona that reflected perceived Western 'polish'; that is to say, my speech was to sound different from that of a 'rough Māori', I was to wear 'nice' clothing (until my rebellion saw big hoodies galore). Thus encountering Pacific stories in my early twenties was a significant moment for me as a woman; it was not only a continued affirmation of the ways that my gendered upbringing was replicated in a myriad of ways in society around me, but it was also an introduction to the way that Pacific women are oppressed, and the way gender and ethnicity often intersect for Pasifika women in

¹⁷ My church at that time was a socially conservative church with a deeply held commitment to tradition. Women in this church were unable to hold any positions of power, apart from managing the crèche, producing the newsletter, and organizing the food for church working bees (roles which have obvious parallels to suitable 'women's work' from the 1950s. It is important to note that while churches have a patrilineal whakapapa that pre-1970s was heavily dominated by men, many contemporary churches now have many women in leadership.

New Zealand. I became interested in Karlo Mila's work not only because she enabled me to understand my Pasifika identity as a multi-ethnic PI, but she also mobilized an understanding of what it meant to be a Pasifika woman.

At the time I was reading Mila for my university course I also discovered Marsh, whose work 'Theory vs. Pacific Islands Writing: Toward a Tama'ita'i Criticism' (1999) was in the same ENGL 309 course notes volume as 'Eating Dark Chocolate and Watching Paul Holmes' Apology' (2005). Her work seeded in my mind as it argued for a theoretical paradigm that stemmed from fertile Pacific soils, helping me to read Pacific literature in a way that privileged Pacific, activist, and most importantly women's point of view. Through Karlo Mila and Selina Tusitala Marsh I learned of the Dusky Maiden stereotype, of sexuality, of tensions and connections between Pacific women and men, and of women poets in the Pacific who worked to story themselves as an act of resistance, reclamation, and power.

I was able to learn these things because Mila and Marsh are both women poets with a commitment to storying Pacific women. Their identities as women are grounded in a strong whakapapa of Pacific feminist thought, and, indeed, feminisms and womanisms from further afield. This chapter is about Mila and Marsh's poetry, about feminist theory, and about me. I started this chapter with my own positionality as a small gesture towards Marsh's adamant stance that we cannot theorize ourselves away (Marsh 1999:338). In sharing a bit of my story here, in performing the act of storying this small portion of my life in what is meant to be an academic text produced out of a Western institution (one with its own patriarchal whakapapa), I engage in what Marsh describes as a 'political act', blurring the boundary between theory and creativity, between objectivity and subjectivity, between multiple truths (1999:338).

Having started the chapter with my personal voice, my story continues in the voices and theorizing of Mila and Marsh. This chapter aims to place Mila and Marsh within the constellation of women, feminists, theories, and ideas that comprise a Pacific feminism. This is done through a focus on mana tama'ita'i, a Pacific feminist framework formulated by Marsh as a way to prioritize women's voices in the

Pacific. This framework, explored in detail in the first part of this chapter, is developed from black, white, and Pacific women's theorizing and creative work, and endeavours to indigenize and Pacificize wider women's theories towards a framework that is located in the Pacific and reflects uniquely 'Pacific' experiences. Having drawn these connections, I respond to Marsh's call for theorists and academics and artists and people from each island group to reach into their histories to finely tune their feminisms to reflect their specific environments and needs in the remainder of this chapter (1998:666; 2000:339).

It is from this point that the chapter refines its focus to one particular location in the Pacific – to Aotearoa. In response to Marsh's call to create specific and appropriate feminist theories, I seek to read Mila and Marsh's poetry to at once identify and respond to an adaptation of Marsh's formulated 'mana tama'ita'i' theoretical framework. This adaptation is one that sharpens the lens on the specificities of being a Pacific woman in Aotearoa. These specificities are particular to a women's experience of New Zealand, although of course they find overlaps and echoes elsewhere in the Pacific. This part of the chapter identifies several elements, including the fact it is located in a diasporic community and notes shifts in 'multiple jeopardies' (Marsh 1999:343; King 1988:45). This adaptation, which I label 'mana tama'ita'i Pasifika' enables the particular experiences of a Pasifika woman in New Zealand to be highlighted.

From here, having placed Mila and Marsh within a Pacific feminist theoretical framework, I explore aspects of being a Pacific woman in Aotearoa through a moment in Pasifika history which both reflects and prisms issues pertinent to Pasifika women. This moment, documented in the poetic responses of Mila and Marsh in *Niu Voices* (2006) and described in detail later this chapter, becomes an important site of engagement with colonial and patriarchal representations. In reading their work as a creation of mana tama'ita'i Pasifika I allow the theory to organically grow from its own context to enable readings that highlight the environment, issues, and 'stuff' that Pasifika women face today. The nature of women's representation in creative works, the replication of sexism within Pacific-produced art, culturally enforced silences of women, and the complexity of

sexuality are all engaged with, and invite a critical engagement from a Pasifika women's point of view.

Ultimately this chapter marks several New Zealand specificities that allows Marsh's theoretical framework to highlight and expose Pacific women's voices and perspectives. By analyzing Mila and Marsh's creative texts, we find complex connections between being Pasifika and being a Pasifika woman.

Mana Tama'ita'i: theorizing toward a Pacific feminism

Women in the Pacific have traditionally been powerful forces within their communities and worlds (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1998:vii; dé Ishtar 1994:13; Griffen 1989:9). Literature from Polynesia, in particular, highlights aspects of gender complementarity as integral to societies (Linnekin 1997:105-13). For example, in Aotearoa where men held (and still hold) specific tasks, women are often considered to hold equal or more power. This is usefully illustrated by Māori feminist scholar Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, who details the way older women have helped to shape the traditional men's role of kai korero, through their own role of corrective oversight. In the exercising of this moderating, critiquing role, the kuia 'were often regarded as the true keepers of tribal lore; as well as educating their daughters, they tutored their sons, and their husbands, and as they ensured that the recitations were exact, their knowledge had to be impeccable' (1991:101). Another example of traditional women's power – this time for young women – might be found in Samoa, where the taupou role for young, unwedded females was considered by some to be of as great importance as the revered chiefly matai role (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1998:7;). Indeed, the matai role itself was and is occasionally given to a woman (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1998:137) though the frequency of this varies between particular villages (Simanu-Klutzn 2011). A different example from Polynesia – that of the fahu relationship of Tonga which involves brothers paying deference to their sisters – illustrates a mutual or female-weighted gender dynamic that in the past has held much weight in Tongan society (Bleakley 2002:135; see also Roger 1977). The similar Samoan brother/sister tradition of feagaiga has been suggested by some scholars as a potentially positive model for relationships

between husbands and wives and other male-female relationships, although it must be noted that this is in its idealized form, where the principles of respect *should* underscore relationships between men and women. In 'real life', the physical abuse from husbands to wives that Tauasosi believes the application of the principles of feagaiga will halt is actually permitted by brothers to their sister upon perceived transgressions (Schoeffel 1978:69; Tauasosi 2010:108).

These examples also carry an additional layer, whereby the Samoan taupou role and the Tongan fahu role simultaneously feature exclusions of women based on hierarchical systems. The taupou role was usually reserved for unwed virgins from chiefly families (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1998:7) and the fahu role was previously for Tongan chiefly classes before its adoption by commoners post-colonization (Helu 1995:197). What is more, some of these roles may be held in conjunction with an alternative, seemingly incongruent status. In Samoa and in Tonga, a woman (an older sister) may take precedence not just over her brother, but her brother's family, including his wife. Her brother's wife may hold a very important position within her own birth family and village, but in the village of her husband she holds very little power or mana, and sometimes is afforded little respect (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1998:7; Thaman 2000:46-47). This difference can be marked within the language, as in Samoa where women from outside the village may be referred to using different terminologies than those who are from within the village. The dual roles that some Pacific women may inhabit show how traditional constructions of gender are highly nuanced and often contextually dependent.

Overall, such traditional frameworks have been irrevocably marked by the advent of colonialism, and this has caused shifts in what it means to be a Pacific woman today (Marsh 1998:668). Fairbairn-Dunlop explains that in pre-missionary times, the nature of marriage in Samoa was such that a chief was expected to be polygamous, and a wife was expected to return to her own village, to a position of esteem after conceiving a child. Post-missionary ethos has meant wives are expected to stay with their husbands in their husband's village, and so cement a fate as an 'outsider' and as the lowest ranking adult (1998:8-9).

Reflecting on the way colonialism has created gender issues that are systemic within present-day bureaucracy, Samoan nurse and public health academic Maria Talaitupu Kerslake observed 'But we still suffer from gender because the bureaucratic system is a manmade system. It was designed by men for men. It's definitely not a system for women. In order for us to succeed in it, we would have to change our values and become men, honorary men. We won't do that' (Wright, Ram, and Ward 2005:159). Such a view of bureaucracy and government was exhibited by many of the Pacific women who attended the Workshop on Women, Development, and Empowerment in Fiji in 1987. In her report on the Workshop, Vanessa Griffen explained that the Pacific women participants 'regarded positions in the legislature, or directorships in government as not long-term or secure sources of power for women' (1989:9). Te Awekotuku also relates colonialism to ongoing women's oppression, identifying the 'insidiously racist institutionalized efforts of the white power structure' (1991:46). Selina Tusitala Marsh addressed this in her doctoral studies, for which she researched Pacific women poets who, she says in an interview with Tess Redgrave, were 'saying the power structures we critique in this colonial system are reproduced in our cultures so we need to not only empower the nation but we need to see that as connected to the empowerment of women and children' (Redgrave 2009:10).

What Marsh quickly discovered was a need to redefine the term 'feminism' in relation to the Pacific. It had become a loaded term (Marsh 1999:666), as many indigenous women and women of colour perceived some white feminists as speaking for all women without recognizing the specificities of different women's existence (Moreton-Robinson 2002:xvii; Griffen 1989:1-18). First wave feminism spoke out of a positionality that was white and middle class, a Eurocentric positionality that was unarticulated. This is most obviously reflected in the way that the 'feminism' of white Western women remained unmarked by a qualifying adjective, whilst the feminisms of others was and is marked by descriptors (such as Black feminism, or Pacific feminism) (Jolly 2005:155). Marsh writes, 'Undefined, imposed definitions of feminism become transformed into their opposites – sources of disadvantage for women rather than tools of empowerment' (1998:760).

Women who are marginalized have divined the inability of such a term to encompass their experience or allow them true freedom to show their own particularities of experience. This prompted Alice Walker, African American woman theorist and writer, to engage in a strategy of renaming to deal with the appropriation of the term feminism. She coined 'womanist' as a word to enable black women's experiences to be foregrounded (Walker 1983:xi).

Like many black women, many Pacific women have long been specific about not wanting to be branded as a feminist. Margaret Jolly notes this trend (2005:139), as does Tupuola, who in her research on Pacific attitudes to sexual health interviewed a young Pacific woman who admitted, 'I think I was a little reluctant to talk about sex at first, I didn't want our ideas to be labelled feminist or radical' (2000:66). The interviewee's comment reveals how such labels are demonstrably counter-productive, inhibiting speech because of an equation of 'feminist' with something undesirable or perhaps easily dismissible. High-profile Pacific women writers Grace Mere Molisa, Haunani-Kay Trask, and Konai Helu Thaman have all rejected the feminist label at one stage, although as Jolly examines, this has not been without some complexity, as Trask and Molisa have at different times claimed and then rejected feminism, or rejected and then claimed it (Jolly 2005). Marsh describes Thaman's own ambivalent approach to Pacific feminism, emphatically rejecting the term at first but eventually warming up to a redefinition of the term (Marsh 1998:668).

These issues were heatedly debated at the 1987 Women, Development and Empowerment Workshop. Feminism was critiqued and interrogated as women examined the unmarked concept against the specifics of their widely varied experiences¹⁸. It was acknowledged in the report of the workshop by Vanessa Griffen that feminism's white context has caused it to be rejected by many, but that a global troubling of the definition by third world women had broadened the category and made it open to redefinitions (1989:7). Later efforts in the conference

¹⁸ Griffen's report evidenced not just differences between women from different islands, but also differences between women from the same island (1989:26)

at conceptualizing a Pacific feminism gave rise to a 'vision' that attempted to crystallize Pacific women's perspectives on family, education, religion, economy, environment, and politics; forming and contributing to what Griffen felt was 'the beginning of a feminist framework for Pacific Women's strategies and hopes' (1989:115).

That some Pacific women do not want to be labelled 'feminist' speaks to an urgent need – the need to be taken on their own terms, to voice their own specificities. Hereniko has cautioned more generally about the difficulty of transporting and translating Western theory to Pacific contexts, arguing

theory that is appropriate illuminates; when this happens, we are better informed and the quest for knowledge is advanced. However many scholars tend to use theories that have originated in the West to understand the unfamiliar. When this happens the local situation is subsumed under mainstream paradigms...' (2000:88).

Hereniko offers some insight into the way Western knowledges may obscure indigenous Pacific knowledges, a salient idea when considering a developing Pacific feminism that has been influenced by Western feminism and indeed other forms of feminism such as Womanism. Western feminist strategies, while useful in some ways, cannot fully meet the specific needs of the women in the Pacific region (Paisley2009:64). It means that Pacific women's power lies unrecognized by Eurocentric feminism. An example of this may be seen in the way that the notion of a *vā* (discussed in some length in Chapter One), and its relational complexities are in fact invisible to a Eurocentric vision (which does not comprehend such a space of interrelational meaning), and thus are easily obscured (Marsh 1998:675). Additionally, Western feminism may at times be redundant because it has difficulty comprehending the positions of women and men in a social structure that 'has reciprocal power relations in different forms' as one Pacific woman phrased the mutual, equal, complementary gender roles in Pacific society (Marsh 1998:675; see also Fairbairn-Dunlop 1998:72); nor can Western feminism highlight when the reciprocal power differential has shifted. Lacking as it does the sophistication

necessary to recognize their nuanced realities, it is understandable then that Pacific women treat Western feminism with such suspicion.

Marsh focuses on a redefining of feminism as a strategy to reclaim and decolonize the term. As Zohl dé Ishtar points out, 'Feminism, in its essence, comprehends the sacredness of life and aims towards the liberation of all people' (2004:237). Thaman also empties the term out from its Western baggage, describing a simply defined feminism as 'equality, or equal worth' (Wood 1997:7). She also underscores women's empowerment in the Pacific as a concept existing 'long before the movement came along' (Wood 1997:7). Marsh draws a conclusion that a literary feminism 'can simply be defined as the study and promotion of women-oriented works that are potentially empowering' (Marsh 1998:339).

Marsh realised the need for a new or renewed approach to the experiences of Pacific women (2005:n.p; Redgrave 2009:10) and acted upon this with her thesis on five early published Pacific women poets (Marsh 2004), and in her shorter scholarly work, including two articles: 'Migrating Feminisms: Maligned Overstayer or Model Citizen?' (1998) and 'Theory "versus" Pacific Islands Writing: Toward a Tama'ita'i Criticism in the Works of Three Pacific Islands Woman Poets', published a year later in the important seminal text *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, And Identity in the New Pacific* (1999). In these two articles, Marsh outlines an argument around feminist theorizing in the Pacific before proposing a theoretical framework developed to engage with the specificities of Pacific women. In particular, Marsh hoped to develop a feminist framework appropriate to apply to literary texts by Pacific women. This framework, which she called mana tama'ita'i, sought to work current conversations in the Pacific into an accessible Pacific woman-centric theory that could 'create or rediscover a new way of approaching poetry by Pacific Islands women and, by extension, the literature of the Pacific'(1999:338).

In the formulation of mana tam'ita'i, Marsh drew upon a concept from an already flourishing local feminism in Aotearoa – the concept of Mana Wahine. It seems pertinent to highlight that in her discussion on the appropriateness and appropriation of Western feminism, and her background in black feminism, she

comes full circle to find her biggest influence to be one sprung locally out of the Pacific. Also significant is how Mana Wahine is a more immediate expression of feminism for Marsh as it is centred in the land that is her home – Aotearoa.

Mana Wahine

Mana Wahine provides a model for Marsh's critical framework *mana tama'ita'i*. Mana Wahine was a Māori feminist framework that grew alongside the Māori renaissance, providing a broad platform by which Māori women could engage with issues pertinent their experiences.

Reflecting a wider Pacific concern about appropriating Western feminist theory, Māori women examined the way they could resolve the West/Indigenous tensions. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku comments upon this, arguing

It is often said that being Maori and feminist must be a contradiction; that feminism is some imported Pākehā idea about being female and being put down for being female, that it has no place in the Maori world, that it imposes a foreign way of seeing, and of being. I disagree, because feminism is what we make it; it's a matter of how we define it for ourselves, in terms of our own oppression as women. And no one can deny that in the last two centuries Maori women have lost, or been deprived of, economic, social, political, and spiritual power; and this loss, this erosion of power – or mana – or authority, invites a feminist analysis, or feminist view, of what has happened (Te Awekotuku 1991:10).

Te Awekotuku's claims are echoed by other Māori women scholars. Naomi Simmonds also acknowledges the fraught connection with feminism, stating that 'Given the history of Western/Pākehā feminism, finding workable links with 'Pākehā' feminists has perhaps been somewhat more of a struggle' (2011:17). But she also concludes, following the work of Donna Matakaere (1995), that 'simply dismissing the entirety of "Pākehā feminism" is not helpful and does not account for the interplay of both cultures in the formation of our subjectivities' (2011:19). Leonie Pihama sums up the productive tensions between Western feminism and

Māori women's theoretical framework when she states that 'Western feminism it is argues [*sic*] has limitations in its usefulness for Māori women. That does not mean that we need to reject the concept of feminism, which is fundamentally to place women's concerns as critical in our analysis' (Pihama 2001:306-307). These examples show an awareness of how a Western theoretical construct may offer points of connection or flexibility of adaptation that may be useful in the formation of indigenous theoretical paradigms.

As well as exorcising the *aitu* – or evil spirits, as Marsh (1998:668) phrases it – of Western-based feminism, Mana Wahine Māori addresses a difficult topic for Pacific people in the region – patriarchal oppression within the social structures of different island communities.

In Māori pre-colonial society, as with Pacific societies, a different, but equal set of roles were ascribed to women (Awatere 1995:36; Hoskins 2000:39). Te Awekotuku claims a fledgling, progressive shift from a matriarchal society to a patriarchal society was occurring when the advent of Christianity hastened the change in dynamics, being embraced most particularly amongst tribes 'who maintain the most rigidly misogynist traditions' (1991:60). Interestingly, Te Awekotuku describes the way an unnatural cultural stasis is utilized to ostensibly protect the culture from change, but also works to keep women in a subordinate position (1991:61). Jocelyn Linnekin discusses this same trend in the Pacific, noting 'What seems distinctively Western about the notions of culture that surface in modern Pacific politics, however, is their rigidity when compared with indigenous premises about identity' (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:14; see also Hoskins 2000:35).

Mana Wahine opened up a way to critique the uneven power balances woven within Māori society. It encouraged recognition of colonial ideologies with an emphasis on critiquing and deconstructing the way Māori women have 'internalised those ideologies' (Johnson and Pihama 1995:85). These ideologies have infected the gendered hierarchical structures of Māori society, as argued by Māori academic Leonie Pihama:

There are also Māori men that need to be challenged in their maintenance and reproduction of inequalities within their own whanau, hapu, iwi and communities. It is argued that although there is a focus on affirming Māori women, all Māori people will benefit from challenging colonial, patriarchal, supremacist thinking. Therefore, benefit also accrues to Māori men from the challenges made by Māori women to colonial ideologies. It is asserted that Māori men need to be active in their critique and analysis of all forms of oppression, and that includes not buying in to the colonisers offer of male bonding (2001:307).

Mana Wahine exposes those sexist structures that hide under the label of 'tradition', enabling a valuable critique of such movements of culture.

Mana Tama'ita'i – A Pacific Feminist Framework

Mana tama'ita'i is Marsh's appropriation of Mana Wahine, and serves as model on which to place some particularly Pacific stakes into theoretical ground. Her stated aim is to create a framework that may be suitably applied or adapted across the Pacific (Marsh 1998:674). Marsh upholds the connections between Māori and Pacific peoples, including similarity of experience under colonization and cultural confluences. One such similarity is the way Pacific cultures also exhibited and exhibit suspect 'traditional' stratifications that privileged men's power. Pacific men 'were complicit with colonial men in preserving or slightly altering "traditions" that served to doubly victimize women' (Marsh 1998:676). Karlo Mila (Mila-Schaaf 2010) also warned of the problematic nature of unchanging traditional categories (109). The insidiousness of internal oppression makes it hard to see under the colonial overlay or reclamation of tradition; furthermore, the flexible nature of memory, including collective memory, to remember or forget certain things in certain ways has had its own impact upon the recollection of Pacific traditions (Mageo 2001). So it has come about that some aspects of Pacific culture, like roles that affirm the dominance of men over women's sexuality, have continued inequalities that Marsh argues are 'mostly sanctioned by men, and mostly suffered by women' (Marsh 2000:147).

What both Māori and Pacific feminist frameworks have in common with each other, and also with some strands of African American feminism (such as that of Lorde 1979, 1984), is the way they affirm that women whakapapa to strong mythological or genealogical goddesses and women. Goddesses and strong women are valued in Mana Wahine as intrinsically a part of Māori women's genealogy and history (Evans 1994:53; Wood 2007; Keown 2007:182). Pacific women also upon the strength of their women in history (Keown 2007:180-181; Tamaira 2010:3-6). Of special note is the way Pacific goddesses constitute actual genealogically-connected ancestors, an approach to mythological deity which is significantly different from the way European mythologies are seen. This creates a lineage of great distinction and strength for Pacific women (Tamaira 2010:6). Tina Tauasosi underpins claims of women's importance in traditional Samoan society by drawing on mythological connections. She argues

Ancient customs and traditions espouse the virtues of women as special and different but complementary to that of men. The feagaiga covenant has its roots in the principle that women have the gift of producing and nurturing life, and as childbearers, women share divinity with the gods, the family gods (2010: 108-109).

It has also been noted in the introduction to *Narratives and Images of Pacific Island Women*, that 'Pacific Island women are spiritually grounded, at ease with deity and the natural world' (Wright, Ram and Ward 2005:12), a statement that gains extra meaning when imagining a familiarity that is also familial¹⁹.

The inspiration for Marsh's mana tama'ita'i framework has been Pacific women writers. Her focus on Konai Helu Thaman, Grace Mere Molisa, Jully Makini (née

¹⁹ In foregrounding Pacific women's connection with the natural world (and through this, to the supernatural world), there is some danger of skirting along essentialist and constructed ideas of the exotic other as being closer to nature/the land/made to nurture/ etc. What is more, different strands of alternative feminisms (Western, womanism, third world) may also claim strong affinity with these ideas, and may also find counter-arguments from within these ideologies against what is perceived as cultural constructs of gender.

Sipolo), Haunani-Kay Trask, and Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche for her PhD dissertation foregrounded their individual and collective contributions in crucial ways to a developing feminist discourse in the Pacific, and their work further informed Marsh's conceptual framework. Although not a subject of Marsh's PhD work, another outstanding literary figure in the Pacific who has helped shaped the look and tone of a Pacific feminism is Sia Figiel. Figiel's novel *Where We Once Belonged* (1996) and novella *Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996) were acclaimed stories that broke new territory with their honest and raw rendering of life for a young girl in Samoa. Not only does her work privilege a female perspective, but she has fearlessly broached sensitive or taboo topics in her work, critiquing oppressive family structures, colonial presence, and cultural behaviours that may sometimes avoid scrutiny due to tradition or social propriety. Figiel has been heralded as a voice of difference in Pacific literature, particularly in relation to the prolific output of Albert Wendt. Both Marsh and Michelle Keown acknowledge how Wendt has been a powerful and important figure, but they both indicate that because his work stems from his male subjectivity, it cannot speak strongly about women's experiences or perspectives (Marsh 1999:343; Keown 2005:38). This is where Keown notes Figiel's vital role in bringing a contemporary women's voice into the field of Pacific literature, stating that:

while she shares many of her compatriot Wendt's ideological preoccupations, her narrative technique and use of perspective are innovative and iconoclastic, expressing the concerns of young Samoan women with a depth of perception largely lacking in previous indigenous Pacific writing. (Keown 2005:60)

Her position as Samoa's first published female novelist and large creative output has inspired and nurtured other woman writers in the Pacific, as evidenced by references in such poetic works as 'For Sia Figiel' (Mila), 'Fast Talking PI' (Marsh); collaborations with other women poets, as with *Terenesia* (2000), Figiel's audio project with Teresia Teaiwa; and in personal relationships with other women writers, such as Tusiata Avia.

Mana Tama'ita'i Pasifika – A Pasifika Feminist Framework

Importantly the 'foremothering' of Mana Wahine helps to position the Māori experience as interconnected with the Pasifika experience. It also ingrains the fact of Māori indigeneity in Aotearoa and the way their experiences are important for Pasifika to know and to support. Margaret Jolly describes Māori as having been forced into the background for 'white settler action' (Jolly 2009:9), which is also an all too easy pitfall when focusing (as this chapter does) particularly on Pasifika intersections between external colonial oppression and more internal oppressions within their island groups. Marsh's use of Mana Wahine might be seen as an important gesture toward our Māori sisters and a kind of tautoko of their position as tangata whenua of Aotearoa.

However, in naming mana tama'ita'i, Marsh cannot help but replicate small oppressions herself. She admits the difficulty of naming for a pan-Pacific theory, and the problematic use of tama'ita'i as a Samoan word, albeit one that she later describes as a 'nonexclusive' label to refer to a woman (1999:338). The power dynamics amongst the diasporic community, in which there is a consciousness of the way Samoan definitions are interpreted as pan-Pacific definitions, means that the use of a Samoan word in a New Zealand context continues those uneven power differentials. But, Marsh points out, there is no pan-Pacific word for 'woman' in the region, which perhaps lends further weight to her arguments for more localized, island specific theoretical frameworks.

My response to her call for more specialized renditions of feminist theory is to read her and Mila's work as examples of a New Zealand-specific Pasifika feminism. By letting their work guide and inform the theory, I hope to reveal some of the overlaps and specificities of Pasifika women's experience. In this chapter, I label this as 'mana tama'ita'i Pasifika', to reflect the framework it extends and the New Zealand specific context it grows from. Whilst the word tama'ita'i still remains, it is as a gesture towards its whakapapa. And I hope, like Marsh, that by making its context and use transparent, it goes some way towards neutralizing the imbalances between island groups here in Aotearoa. I leave it up to other Pasifika scholars and

other Pasifika women to continue to refine and open up terminologies and theories.

What follows is an attempt to capture a New Zealand specific Pacific feminist theory through the works of Mila and Marsh, looking especially at their experiences and responses as Pasifika women.

‘we’re boys’ – *Sione’s Wedding* and representations of Pasifika women

In 2006, the film *Sione’s Wedding* opened in theatres in the Pacific and New Zealand. It was co-written by Oscar Kightley (Samoan) and James Griffin (Palagi), and primarily acted by the Naked Samoans, an all-male Pacific comedic troupe who were also the creative force behind the surprise hit primetime animated television series *bro’Town*. *Sione’s Wedding* broke New Zealand box office records, and won the Naked Samoans and director Chris Graham critical and popular acclaim. As Dominic Corry reviewed in the *New Zealand Herald*:

Sione's Wedding is an unabashedly mainstream and crowd-pleasing comedy set in Auckland's vibrant Samoan community, and all I can say is it's about bleedin' time. . . . There's nothing quite like the Polynesian sense of humour, and Sione's Wedding is an efficient vessel for presenting it to the masses . . . (Corry 2006)

It is the story of four irresponsible lads about town – Michael, Albert, Sefa, and Stanley – who are Pasifika thirty-somethings in biological age but behave like teenagers in maturity. Their irrepressible highjinks see them banned from the wedding of Michael’s younger brother, Sione; their exclusion from this eponymous wedding comes as a shock. The resolution negotiated between the Duckrockers (as their posse is called) and their minister is for the boys to get serious girlfriends to bring to the wedding. The younger brown women in the movie – patient, quiet Tanya who secretly pines after Albert, Sefa’s long-suffering partner Leilani, and newly arrived cousin from Samoa, Princess – are all drawn to some degree into the boys’ endless cycle of ineptitude. After continual mishaps and crossed wires, the boys eventually make it to the wedding – if not with girlfriends, then with some

lessons learned about themselves. Although even that might be stating the case a little too strongly; as the final scenes show, mischief is still the order of the day and self reflection from Michael reveals a questionable epiphany that he can embrace preferring white girls over Pacific girls, ultimately sending the message that self-discovery is more important than considering problematic behaviours in light of wider value systems.

Immediately upon the film's release, debates rose up on Samoan and other Pacific-focused blogs and forums discussing issues of authenticity of culture²⁰. Many from Samoa distinguished what they held to be an authentic 'Samoanness' from what was seen as a different, distanced, New Zealand-specific culture depicted in the movie. These discussions often had two foci – the irresponsible nature of 'the boys' in the movie compared with traditional Samoan ideas of male responsibility, and the portrayal of Princess as a sexually forward Samoan girl freshly arrived in New Zealand from Samoa.

While the voices of critique were being publically aired, private conversations were also occurring around the same topics. The poetic groupings '*Four Poems and Sione's Wedding*' by Mila and '*where the girls are*' by Marsh both reflect on such private conversations. Both sets of poems allude to a conversation with Rev. Mua Strickson-Pua (the MSP that Marsh's poem 'the best boys' is dedicated to and 'the rev' mentioned in the first line) on the theme of irresponsible boys – in this case, about the Naked Samoans themselves. Although it is plausible that Mila and Marsh are referencing a 'real life' conversation they had, my concern here is to note the way their poetic texts enable Mila and Marsh to protest the way women are portrayed in works such as *bro'Town* and *Sione's Wedding*, and the way they perceive an indifference in men's attitudes towards them. Mila and Marsh both write this indifference as a verbal response from *Sione's Wedding* co-writer Oscar

²⁰ The following links are an example of a forum <http://42976.activeboard.com/t6595283/siones-wedding-aids-meats-theory/> and a blog <http://fotuofsamoa.blogspot.co.nz/2006/05/siones-wedding-and-perceptions-of.html> through which people critically engaged with the issues of representation and culture.

Kightley (relayed via Strickson-Pua) that 'we're boys / tell the girls / to write their own' (Marsh) and 'Get the girls to write their own' (Mila).

One understanding of these passages in the poems is to read the boys' response as an inability to see, and a lack of desire to engage with, Pasifika women on a level meaningful to them. In an interview with *Spacific Magazine* editor Innes Logan, Kightley says 'we're making a film about people I know and things I know and understand' (Logan 2005:22). It is possible Kightley does not understand the importance of the way his Pacific sisters are represented on screen; we might also surmise from his statement that some of what he 'knows' and 'understands' about Pacific women comes from a place or perspective that Pacific women may not recognize or agree with, which is evident in Marsh and Mila's treatment of the response. But his lack of interest in engaging with the subject hints at the way some Pacific men have been comfortable continuing to wield power over Pacific women and shows how a behaviour noted in the wider Pacific – that of sexism from Pacific men toward Pacific women – is replicated here in Aotearoa. Teaiwa and Mallon write that the *Naked Samoans* and *bro'Town* (and here we might also include *Sione's Wedding*) 're-enforce male dominance in the fields of cultural and artistic representation of Pacific people in New Zealand' (2005:221).

The *Naked Samoans* appear to draw from a *fale aitu* performance tradition, which uses satire and humour to critique authority figures and engage with current social issues that would otherwise be exempt from public critique (Sinavaiana-Gabbard 1999; Hereniko 1999). Caroline Sinavaiana, writing on comic theatre in Samoa, describes *fale aitu* as 'the only public arena in Samoan society that traditionally allows for popular criticism of figures and institutions of authority' (1992:193). This formal comedic role is typically all male, although Sinavaiana explains that women may also clown but only in an informal context or in all-female company due to the sexual nature of the jokes²¹ (1992:215). The transferral of aspects of *fale aitu* to a New Zealand context appears to support Mallon and Teaiwa's claims of male

²¹ *Fale aitu* may informally be performed by women, but the traditional conventions of *fale aitu* still formally only includes men.

dominance in artistic representation of Pacific people. What is more, the tradition of male dominance may be seen to be doubly enacted when one considers the treatment of women in those representations.

An example of this might be found in *Sione's Wedding*. Whilst the crisis in the movie has been precipitated by the Duckrockers' bad behaviour in the past, the resolution is found not in their own redemption through real change but through the employment of a girlfriend to impose control on their behaviour. The boys are called out on their behaviour, but ultimately the way to redemption is not, as one would hope, a path that requires taking responsibility for actions and exercising maturity and self-control. Rather, women are used as corrective objects, 'on their arms' as accessories, useful, and also interchangeable (as testified by the swap scene outside the church just before Sione's wedding actually starts.) Somehow, in the short timeframe given, the boys are meant to have invested in a meaningful relationship; a subtext to this expectation is that women don't require over much investment and they are conveniences that may be utilized to achieve male oriented goals.

Mila and Marsh's poetic responses to the gender problematic stirred up by *Sione's Wedding* answer back in several ways. In an antidote to the double layered dominance of men, Mila and Marsh's responses work in a similar way with each other as they represent themselves in their work and also write as women, which is in itself a position of resistance as they respond in ways that make obvious their positions of mana, their existence as strong women, and their power. This is especially evident in their mode of expression – a very important and public anthology of Pacific writing. Significant too is their power over this anthology's existence; it is, after all, edited by Selina Tusitala Marsh. They are writing poetry, the form that has won them both acclaim within Aotearoa and abroad, and lifted their mana within the Pasifika community of New Zealand. Furthermore, its wider circulation amongst the public as a Pacific text available to use in schools and universities ensure the message of Pacific women has the potential to not only reach Kightley, but other Naked Samoans, Pacific men, young Pasifika, Palagi, Māori, indigenous peoples, girls, and countless others. Finally, they speak as

women, Pacific women, Pasifika women. In their talk back, they both look at the way embedded social traditions and expectations influence the stories and representations of women, something I explore further in the way Mila and Marsh engage with the representation of Pacific women.

Four Poems and Sione's Wedding – Karlo Mila

In this section I analyse Karlo Mila's 'Four Poems and Sione's Wedding' from *Niu Voices*. 'Four Poems and Sione's Wedding' is actually comprised of only three poems printed in the edited collection *Niu Voices* – 'The Best Boys', "'where are the girls?'"', and 'where the girls are'; an additional poem, 'Paper Mulberry Secrets' was initially intended as the fourth poem, but editorial happenstance saw it published separately in Mila's collection *A Well Written Body*²². I reunite the poems here in my analysis, while also reflecting on how the inadvertent omission leaves a space that might be openly interpreted, something I expand upon more fully later in this chapter.

'Four Poems and Sione's Wedding' holds the issues of women's representation and voice at heart, as Mila considers the nature of Pacific-produced artistic representations of Pacific women and the implications such representations hold for Pasifika girls. Mila has expressed concern over a wider set of stereotypes represented in mainstream media in New Zealand. In a paper presented to a symposium to commemorate Epeli Hau'ofa in 2009, Mila reflects on the repetitive images that have come to define Pacific people in the public imagination:

Growing up in Aotearoa, being born and bred here, I have become attuned to the 'small violence' of being imagined through mainstream New Zealand's eyes. I have become overly familiar with the narrow range of ways that Pacific peoples are imagined here over and over again using the same depleted stock of metaphors. It is such a slim and limited repertoire of images (rugby players, overstayers, street kids, hip-hop dancers – and you only have to look at the recent National Party government delegation to the

²² Personal communication with author 13/2/2013

Pacific to get a sense of how we are imagined). We are churchgoing. We are fat. We are fat women in colourful island dresses that make jokes about our private parts and unmentionables and avoid smear testing and laugh too loud. We are young men in hoodies with strong, muscular, dangerous bodies who fit Crimewatch profiles. We are good at sport and singing and on the rugby field [sic] we contribute speed and brawn and natural flair and talent rather than brain or discipline (2009:3).

Here Mila identifies problematic imaging being produced outside of Pacific communities, but, as we see in 'Four Weddings and Sione's Wedding', some of these images are replicated within Pacific creative works, which opens up some difficult, confronting questions. What are the implications of this? What does it mean when stereotypes are reproduced from within by Pacific men in high-profile media? What does it mean when women's stereotypes appear in creative works by Pacific women artists?

To draw out how Mila is exploring these issues, I analyse each poem in relation to *Sione's Wedding* and the wider gender inequalities seemingly embedded within Pacific cultures. The part *Sione's Wedding* plays in perpetuating these stereotypes, particularly ones that delimit women sexually, raise important questions for Mila. This might be seen in her poetic title, which echoes popular British movie *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994). The syntactically similar titles are further related through the presence of the word 'wedding', although in a prophetic moment the placement of the word 'wedding' in Mila's title overlays the word 'funeral'²³. There is some connection of theme between the two movies, as in both the focus is on young single males who are looking for love. Perhaps by invoking *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Mila is highlighting pop-culture's obsession with 'the bachelor' figure who is surrounded by women of limited character development, props to the action of the male protagonist.

²³ One may draw further connections along this vein of thought by including *Sione's 2* into the mix, as a movie dealing with a funeral and exhibiting an ambiguous treatment of women.

The Best Boys

The first poem in the poetic grouping is called 'The Best Boys', a reference to the Duckrockers' protest that they are entitled to attend *Sione's Wedding* because they are Sione's 'best boys'. Already the title sets up a gender division between 'boys' and 'girls', confirmed by the first line 'Get *the girls* to write their own' [emphasis added]. This division is seemingly affirmed by Oscar Kightley (as the first line of the poem is attributed to 'Oscar' who we may assume to be Kightley, the co-writer and an actor in *Sione's Wedding*). The first line reads as a nonchalant non-engagement with the question of women's representation in *Sione's Wedding*, a literary shrug. 'The Boys', it would seem, are not going to actively engage with the girls on this one.

Having contextualized her poems against the gender division that she sees Kightley as so easily affirming, Mila deftly uses her art to subtly undermine Kightley's brush off by not only writing her own, but also using her art to critique Kightley's work. Mila's treatment of gender division is evident in her use of language – simply 'the boys' on one hand, most easily read as a conflated Naked Samoans' crew and Duckrockers' crew. On the other hand, for females we have varied descriptors such as 'the girls', 'maidens', 'sisters', 'women'. The nuances of womanhood contained within the descriptors listed above contrasts not only with the one dimensional 'girls' that are represented on screen, but also with 'the boys', which now feels an ambiguous and reductive label.

'The Best Boys' is as much a critique of how the boys represent themselves as a critique about the way they represent women. In a cynical tone, Mila writes

Yeah, those boys know freedom
like flying foxes in the night
old-school styles / two-door waka
sailing streets / fishing with new nets
you know the drill . . .
Bat wings
dipping into K-Rd

caves
winging their way
across the divide
scoring a rugby blonde
and back again
for another try (5-17)

In this verse, the boys' sexual freedom comes under the spotlight. Their night time antics are styled as smooth and practiced, following the flight of the pe'a (flying fox), although in the movie the boys were never so smooth, with the exception of Michael, the quintessential ladies man about town. His character was explicit in his promiscuity, his preference for 'white women' opening up Mila's 'rugby blonde' to literal interpretations.

It seems pertinent to note here Mila's incorporation of fishing and rugby metaphors – two recreational pastimes that popular social discourse weights towards men. In touching upon other dominant modes of representation, this time largely produced by media *outside* of the Pasifika arena, we have a layer which illustrates the often simultaneous intersects between ethnicity and gender. If we critically examine Mila's use of associated terminologies ('waka', 'sailing', 'fishing with new nets'; 'scoring', 'rugby blonde', 'another try') we find a layer that highlights predacious attitudes towards Pasifika women. Describing the boys as 'sailing streets / fishing with new nets' we have imagery that reminds us of what is often styled as a man's relaxed recreational activity. It seems to recall the adage 'plenty of fish in the sea', referring to the abundance of romantic possibilities the world holds for individuals. In this case, it confirms a sense of girls as a renewable source of entertainment/sexual pleasure for the boys.

Mila's use of the phrase 'fishing with new nets' may not only be read as hunting for women, but could simultaneously be read as a reference to Witi Ihimaera's collection of short stories *'The New Net Goes Fishing'* (1977). This collection was hailed at the time as a step by Ihimaera away from rural/traditional representations

of Māori to examining urban interactions and the dichotomy between traditional and modern expressions of being Māori. This reference opens the text to enquire after the nature of traditional and modern modes of behaviour for Pasifika boys and Pasifika girls, the 'new' in this sentence signalling changes from something old. It also invites us to question the relationship between Māori expressions of traditional and urban, and Pasifika expressions of traditional and 'urbanesia', as Pasifika poet Courtney Sina Meredith so aptly phrased the urbanization of Pacific people in Aotearoa (Meredith 2012:265). It could also be seen as an extra thread in the kinship between Māori and Pasifika literatures, which Te Punga Somerville lays out in her insightful book *Once Were Pacific* (2012). What is more, it might be an additional thread in the kinship between Māori and Pasifika feminisms; as seen earlier this chapter, men are not necessarily seen by indigenous Pacific and Māori women as in opposition with them, which means articulating connections with males is not an inconsistent position for woman writers. It is also possible that Witi Ihimaera's work is perceived as sympathetic to women as he also writes from a position of difference whereby his homosexuality disrupts the notion of a social and media determined construct of quintessential masculinity.

The rugby metaphor in the poem hooks into what Mila has already identified as a dominant discourse for Pasifika sports people, which is produced by media who give most attention to Pasifika men who contribute valuable brawn to the All Blacks, New Zealand's national rugby team (Mila-Schaaf 2009:3). Due to the limits of this chapter I do not want to stray too far in unpacking the nature of socially constructed masculinities of brown male rugby players²⁴, but it is useful to see Mila's gesture towards the multiple layers of Pasifika male representation that all sideline women's visibility or voice. Her choice to describe the boys as 'winging' not only links to the pe'a, but also acts as a triple pun: winging as in the flight of the pe'a; a reference to the rugby position of 'wingers', who are generally the fastest on the field and often Pacific Island players; and thirdly, 'wing' man is often used to describe a mate who is company for a man looking to find a partner or 'hook up' for

²⁴ For this, see Hokowhitu 2004; Mallon and Teaiwa 2005; Grainger 2008.

the night. An additional rugby reference in the text relies upon colloquial knowledge to understand: the pun between the boys as rugby players and the slang term for men who may act flexibly in relations with women, called 'players', a term that might well have come from the familiar phrase 'playing the field.' Another rugby reference worked in there (and back again / for another try') both emphasises the desire to 'score' (slang term that alludes to the act of securing a sexual partner), but also amusingly 'try' may be read in light of some of the duckrocker's bumbling efforts as they continually try to get somewhere with the ladies, with limited success.

Mila's use of the word 'divide' in this verse feels somewhat portentous as there are several different readings that may be given to it. It is an odd, uncontained word that may be read as the centre divide in the street, literally Karangahape Road²⁵, whilst the bars and clubs along it are the 'caves' the boys wing across the street to frequent, although the double reading possible is that 'caves' are a euphemistic reference to women's sexual organs. In keeping with the rugby terminologies, divide may be seen as the space between the goal posts (which itself may be read as an innuendo), and also the division between the teams. Divide also appeared as a charged word in rugby when the article 'Pacific Divide' by *NZ Rugby World* editor Gregor Paul appeared, referencing the complex racializations occurring within the sport (Paul 2012). The idea of a divide between ethnicities is confirmed with the phrase 'rugby blondes', which is generally not a phrase used in conjunction with Pasifika girls. We might also read distance as the space between Pasifika genders and an incongruence between cultural expectation of appropriate behaviour and the behaviour they indulge in late at night.

The boys' behaviour and attitudes are described in ways that implies a constant practice ('you know the drill', 9; 'and back again / for another try', 16-17; 'milk shakes shaking all around', 23). This freedom is couched within fast food references:

²⁵ Karangahape Road is a central road in Auckland popularly known as K-Rd. It is notorious in the public imagination for being a red light district and fringe cultural centre.

lady luck lucking
mouths fire trucking
drive thru drives
double-double standards
burgers with fries

and milk shakes shaking all around
'damn right, it's better than yours' (18-24)

The use of fast food highlights the easy disposable nature of 'standards' and perhaps also of sexual conquests. The repeated 'double', which is a play on the 'double double cheese burger' served on the McDonald's menu, enables standards to stand in as something as easily dished up as anything McDonald's could supply. The milkshakes that are 'shaking all around' are a sexual euphemism popularized by the song 'Milkshake' (2003) by Kelis, which is popularly thought to refer to a woman's sexual energy or 'that thing that men are drawn to about women' (Lewis n.d). The quote from the song included in the poem ('damn right, it's better than yours') implies a competitiveness and an abundance of women attempting to attract all the boys to them. And this might be seen as an apt way to describe how the Duckrockers see the scene around them, as evidenced by Albert's insistence that Princess is attracted to him, or the way Michael assumes all women are 'shaking' for him.

So far the poem has been very heavily weighted towards placing the boys in the midst of their own fantasies of themselves. This is now juxtaposed against the church. Mila writes the boy's behaviours as being:

Followed religiously

by wooden pew penance

and prayer promises. (25-27)

The role of the church here is styled as a place of artifice, a system whereby the boys are absolved from the incongruities between what is seen as 'traditional' behaviours and the free, sexually charged movements of the boys about town. In

the movie, the church is represented as an authoritarian structure; a cultural bastion to work around. This view of the church is not peculiar to *Sione's Wedding* or the realm of fiction; Jemaima Tiatia's book *Caught Between Cultures* (1998) explored the way some young New Zealand-born Samoans saw the church as a cultural centre that operated according to an interpretation of fa'a-Samoa that they found incongruent with their desired lifestyle in New Zealand. The edict that forms the motivation for progressive action and sends the boys on their 'quest' (to find girlfriends) comes from the minister; his presence has more impact on the boys than the ineffectual remonstrations of mother or girlfriends.

It is possible that in the movie the church is somewhat under critique as the boy's antics resemble the fale aitu tradition noted earlier this chapter. As a performance mode, fale aitu is political and often a critique of authority; in Samoa and other parts of the Pacific region churches hold a prominent place of authority, thus opening them up to critique through clowning. In *Sione's Wedding*, the boy's relationship with the church appears largely subservient, but the movie itself asks the church to be complicit in the reducing of women to accessory status. The instruction to behave better is not a direct address of the boy's disrespectful attitudes to girls; it is a cultural saving face. Perhaps a possible reading of the treatment of church and women in the movie is that in the same way that the movie purports to get the boys to behave better to women by forcing them to be serious about them, the movie subverts that with its premise that you can form a meaningful relationship within the space of a month.

I have highlighted several issues that this first poem raises, including male sexual freedom, double standards in terms of female sexual freedom, and the connection between sexuality and the church. These find a counterpoint in the third poem 'Where the girls are', so I will be continuing these threads shortly. For now, like Mila, I will suspend these threads whilst we turn to the second poem.

Where are the girls?

'Where are the girls?' jumps straight into a blunt appraisal of typical roles that women are placed into in *Sione's Wedding*. Mila critiques 'the same old roly-poly

roles', a word play that holds multiple layers. As a phrase it evokes a recurrent situation, which in this case would mean the same set of images that she faces continually. 'Roly poly' also implies something of reduced sophistication. Roly poly may also refer to someone as overweight, a stereotype Mila recognizes as often invoked in relation to Pacific people in New Zealand (2009:3). There is an extra linguistic element where aurally 'roly' is an extension of 'role', and 'poly' is a popular shortened version of 'Polynesian', which, when used in New Zealand, can also act as a prefix to signify something related to the Pacific²⁶. Some of these roles include the 'dusky maiden in her little lavalava', a nod to the sight of Princess in her lavalava in *Sione's Wedding*. Remembering that Mila is responding to male representations of women, it is no accident that the lavalava is described as 'little', a nod toward the titillating image of the dusky maiden stereotype.

The little lavalava contrasts with 'the mum in her mumu'²⁷, highlighting what feels like a specifically Pacific cognate of what is popularly considered in African American criticism as the 'mammy archetype'²⁸, where the female body of women of colour is covered/ not drawn attention to (unless it be to note the ways her body provides maternal comfort). In positioning 'the mum' as a counter to the hyper-sexualised dusky maiden, Mila is highlighting the narrow categories brown women have to fill in this movie. In contrast to the little lavalava, a mu'umu'u represents something loose, comfortable, and functional (betraying its missionary origins) as opposed to something 'sexier' – tighter, shorter, more revealing. The similar words 'mum' and 'mumu' look almost like the same word, a momentary trickery that aptly mirrors the way the mammy archetype conflates the mother and the mu'umu'u into the same thing – that the dress is the mother in the sense that it identifies and defines her.

²⁶ For example 'Poly-cultural' (introduced in Mila-Schaaf 2010), or Polyfest, an annual Pasifika performance festival.

²⁷ Here 'mumu' is a short-hand for mu'umu'u, a loose dress worn in various Pacific islands.

²⁸ See Collins 2000 for an extensive treatment of the mammy archetype as well as other black women archetypes.

The mother is described in religious terms, a link back to the previous verse's critique of the role of church in perpetuating stereotypes. The effect of this highlights how the stereotype of the mother character in *Sione's Wedding* does not break new ground' the mother character does not disrupt representations, but rather performs to them. This is done in a way that models her as a:

modern-day Mary, her afro like a halo

hands clasped in prayer

for the sins of her sons (5-7)

Mila's words draw from popular imagery of the holy virgin Mary as an intercessor for humanity. Local examples of this pose may be found in statuettes in some Roman Catholic churches and in mass produced items, somewhat like Ana's 'made in Taiwan Jesus' in Figiel's *The Girl in the Moon Circle*. The implication might, like young Ana, be one of consternation over the ineffectuality of religion to spearhead any real change in attitudes toward young Pasifika women.

In the next verse, still in the casual tone employed for the first poem, Mila describes women as being constrained to 'either hula or hippping it / either on your arm or talking to your hand'. These limited options elicit a final sardonic 'I mean, come on, / it's called BRO-town mate'. The 'BRO' here is an inversion of the way *bro'Town* is usually written – with all lower cases for 'bro'. It has the effect of emphasising the male-centricity of the program, and, indeed the mention of it extends the conversation of women's representation to beyond the limits of *Sione's Wedding* into other sites of oppression or misrepresentation.

A final non-rhyming couplet presages the final two poems by stating simply 'The sisters are still in between lives / that haven't been written yet.' Importantly this is the first hint toward the silences that Mila expands in the next two poems. What is most compelling about this line is Mila's choice of the word 'sisters'. Earlier in this chapter we noted the way fahu or feagaiga relationships worked – as a mutual covenant between brother and sister whereby the brother's role is as a protector for his sister. The effect of Mila using 'sisters' can act as a reminder of the role the

males are meant to play in their sisters' lives – to respect, to serve, and to protect their sisters. In Aotearoa, where Pacific peoples hold strong kinship ties, and among Pasifika, whose pan-Island identities cement those ties even further, Mila makes the stakes very clear. The mainstream representations that they are already barraged with – that she so aptly described as 'small violence' – are being replicated by Pacific brothers, thereby making the girls further suffer, potentially placing the kinship ties under strain. There is kinship, but in the slippery world of fictive invention and representation the sisters don't even exist.

Where the girls are

The third poem follows the shift in tone in the last two lines of the previous poem to a more open, vulnerable position. In the analysis of the first poem, I noted three threads left momentarily suspended: male sexual freedom, female sexual freedom, and the connection between sexuality and the church. Here I resume these lines of inquiry, as this poem invites a discussion on the transgressive nature of Pasifika women's sexuality against the expectations of culture. For a greater depth of discussion I will also be referencing 'Virgin Loi', a poem of Mila's published in *Dream Fish Floating*.

'Where the girls are' builds upon the idea of writing as a mode of representation utilized by women. Where *Sione's Wedding* is a movie, a form designed for popular entertainment, Mila celebrates poetry as more 'serious' form, a different medium of voice that encourages a different kind of engagement with it. Mila writes

You'll find us in
the narrow lines
of poetry
where heliaki, hue
and alliterated affection
blurs all that sex

and sweat and shame

into art. (1-8)

The transformative nature of poetry becomes the conduit by which Pacific women work out their identities. Importantly, this poem addresses Pacific women's 'sexual freedoms' in a reflection of the boy's sexual freedoms detailed in the first poem. The irony is of course that these are not freedoms. In order to describe these sexualities in this poem, Mila moves to an alternative form of representation – painting – to talk about sexuality. Using painting as conceptual metaphor allows 'heliaki' (about which more will be said in a moment) and 'hue' to blur the lines of social propriety. This is illustrated in Mila's second stanza:

Water lily maidens

emitting frangipani perfume

like in some soft Monet

moaning gently like rain

pastel and palatable

to our aunties

who'd turn in their graves

like weeds

if we told the seedy truth. (9-16)

Here Mila uses the metaphor of painting – to safely bypass 'sweat and shame' by describing a scene akin to 'some soft Monet', where maidens radiate 'frangipani perfume' (a possible reference to *Frangipani Perfume* analysed later in this chapter). The alliteration of 'some' and 'soft' evoke gentleness. The colours are described as 'pastel and palatable', an line in which the repetitive hard sounds, particularly 'p' and 't' stand out from the previous four lines softly enunciated sounds. The proper, carefully spoken line represents the veneer of propriety that

onlookers might see on the surface, exemplified by the way that the same scene is described in evocative sounds (some soft Monet) but also in hard sounds, representing a different perspective of the same thing, in this case as seen by 'our aunties'.

By invoking heliaki, Mila is playing with the concept of multiple perspectives on representation. While in *Niu Voices* heliaki is glossed in an explanatory note as Tongan for metaphor (53), heliaki is somewhat more nuanced than this. Heliaki has been explained as an indirect way to approach a subject – as more than one person has described it: 'to say one thing and mean another' (Philips 2010:318; Kaeppler 2003:157). Thaman elaborates on this, describing heliaki as 'the use of natural features as symbolic referents of persons and/or personal traits, and various other cultural/social phenomena' (2000:46). Noting the connection between heliaki of poetry and heliaki of movement, anthropologist and dance ethnographer Adrienne Kaeppler expounds:

A basic principle on which Tongan evaluation depends is heliaki (indirectness). Heliaki is an aesthetic concept that can be translated as "not going straight" or "to say one thing but mean another" It is characterised by never going straight to the point but alluding to it indirectly and is realised through the unfolding of metaphors and allusions. Heliaki is poetically realised through the Tongan literary device of alluding to people and their genealogies with place names, flowers (such as heilala) and birds (such as tavake, the tropic bird), metaphorically making reference to the occasion and those honoured by it. Heliaki is realised in movement by alluding to words or concepts embedded in the poetry with movement motifs of the hands and arms. (Kaeppler 2003:157)

Both Thaman (2000:46) and Kaeppler (1993:497) point out that to properly read heliaki, you need to be familiar with the cultural context. Kaeppler refers to this as 'communicative competence' (2001:53). This phrase, adapted from linguistics, foregrounds a connection between word and physical moment that underpins much of Tongan forms of expression.

If we examine Mila's poem we find her both using and subverting heliaki. In the poem maidens are clearly sensual, sexually alive women, but by couching them in heliaki Mila is also able to show how at the same time those women can keep up appearances and remain seemingly congruent with traditional expectations. The subversion here is in the way Mila's heliaki, which is derived from 'natural features' like waterlily and extended with similar plant metaphors 'like weeds', 'seedy truth', is styled into a visual representation, notably one produced by a European male.

In the final section of the poem, we have another wordplay in which homonyms carry double meanings. The poem closes with:

It is all framed
ever so respectfully
lei-ed on a wall

never
laid
bare. (18-23)

'Framed' and 'lei-ed on a wall' confirms the painting metaphor, but by describing the painting as framed Mila not only invites literal interpretations of a framed picture but also a more open sense of images and realities of women as framed by the perceptions and discourses around them. Mila brazenly pairs up 'respectfully' with 'lei-ed', which could be referring to the picture frame draped with a lei in the style common in many Pasifika households, but, in a double reading, it could also be an innuendo word play where 'lei-ed' sounds like 'laid', a common expression for sex. With this reading of it, the word play is further enhanced with the additional 'laid' in the penultimate line. When the notion of respect is such a crucial part of many Pacific cultures, and necessary for the functioning of such gender relationships as fahu and feagaiga, the juxtaposition of 'respectfully' with 'lei-ed' emphasises some inconsistencies or lack of mutuality. Even the placement of the words – 'respectfully' in the line above, 'lei-ed' immediately following, but in the

line beneath, visually shows two sides of the same coin, or just how upright behaviour and licentious behaviour may be closer in proximity than some would like to think.

The measured final lines 'never / laid / bare' slows the rhythm which has the effect of emphasizing these final three words. The heliaki that Mila both explains and uses is employed exactly so nothing is 'laid bare', which also encourages a double reading of never being laid bare as a sexual reference and also that the truth about sexual behaviour is never in the open.

The shadow of this poem is the sexual taboo upon Pacific women's sexualities and sexual activities. The 'sex / and sweat and shame' is a bold articulation that gets quickly blurred and partially obscured by its transformation into poetry (and art, and, as I will argue shortly, *tapa*). The 'narrow lines' at the beginning of this poem might be read as a celebration and a protest of the spaces that women are forced to occupy should they desire to represent something unwanted or disallowed – in this case, sexual freedom for women. Women who have more liberal attitudes towards sex may be marginalized, forced into narrow categories because they don't fit into the mainstream traditional expectation that you will *appear* without blemish.

This has been researched by Pacific academic Anne-Marie Tupuola. Early in her academic life, she focused on Pasifika women's concerns around sexuality in her research early in her career. She found that for some, a *fa'a-Samoa* approach meant a notion of women's sexualities as communal, explaining

[The *aiga*] upheld significant disciplinary, nurturing, and protective responsibilities and established particular 'codes of conduct' to ensure that their virginal Samoan girls did not dishonour or mar their reputations. Some of these codes of conduct included the prohibition of dating, having male friends, choosing one's career, leading an individualistic lifestyle, and forming a self-identity (Tupuola 1998:52).

This paints a different picture from the one of guys cruising down Karangahape Road looking to score. The double-double standards have been felt by Pasifika women, including Mila herself. However, for herself, as a Pasifika girl, she must adhere to a completely different set of expectations in regards to sex.

By speaking the unspeakable, Mila disrupts the necessary silence that is required for certain traditions and behaviours to continue. Silence has long been a form of control over the Pacific. Colonial strategies of imposing silence effectively invisibilized Pacific women (dé Ishtar 1994:3; van Trigt 2000:14), sometimes explained as being 'for the greater cause of the nation' (Marsh 2000:147). As noted earlier this chapter, colonial strategies were often replicated in indigenous strategies to cement power for men, which is evident in the taboo around sex for young women.

And yet breaking the silence is not always possible, or desirable. The nature of silence in Pacific communities ties it inherently to what have come to be thought of as 'traditional' scaffolds, making it an honourable, necessary part of being essentially a Pacific person. Tupuola suggests that for Samoan Pasifika girls, to discuss taboo subjects is to violate 'Samoan principles of fa'aaloalo (respect) and ava (reverence)' (Tupuola 2000:62). To voice 'the anguish of silenced tongues' (Mila-Schaaf 2009:8) can seem akin to denying your culture.

Pasifika girls, both mixed like Mila or those identifying with a single island, face this same dilemma. New Zealand society, like other Western countries, holds complicated but predominantly liberal attitudes toward sex. The values of freedom of choice and personal sexuality are not always met, but they are still a goal enshrined in a Western sense of individual right and reflected in government education and health policy (Terry, Braun, and Farvid 2012). Tupuola notes that the Pasifika girls feel this predicament (1998:53). They are caught between cultural expectations and the taboo those expectations represent.

The enforced silences around sexuality are articulated by several Pasifika women. It would appear from some stories that clandestine dates and a lack of knowledge about sex and their own sexual power may eventually lead to an unplanned

pregnancy. Or, it could lead to an unhealthy perpetuation of silence (Tupuola 1998:56), and confirm their perception of the silencing as a necessary and important part of their culture, one they do not wish to violate (Tupuola 2000:62).

This makes Mila's poetry all the more powerful. A whole section, 'This is not a love poem' in *Dream Fish Floating*, and the Black Butterfly series in *A Well Written Body* is devoted to the taboo of sex – not simply the act, but passions, longings, one night stands, desire, rejection, illicit attractions, and her body, in intimate ways. It is a testament to the way these words have *needed* to be aired – words about the way she doesn't fit and cultural silences that she challenges – that they haven't inhibited her increasing position as an important and high profile member of the Tongan community. Writing with regard to the work of Pacific women poets, Marsh claims that 'arguably the greatest asset in such poetry lies in its role in exposing domestic dissatisfaction, overtly forcing public acknowledgements and covertly eliciting private identification' (Marsh 1999b:344). This might well be said of Mila's work (as well as of Marsh's own).

Paper Mulberry Secrets

In her final poem, Mila offers an alternative view of maintaining 'the thin veneer of appearances' (2009:9) in her poem 'Paper Mulberry Secrets'. This poem was published in *A Well Written Body*, and is being considered here as it was initially intended to be the fourth poem in that latter group of poems. In 'Paper Mulberry Secrets', the notions of silence and taboo are examined through use of heliaki. This means that the poem sustains an undercurrent of tensions as she uses an indigenous process involving natural materials to address themes of gender division and violence for Pacific women. The nature of heliaki means that whilst there is little explicating these themes to the reader on the surface of the text, consistently reading the poem using a variety of perspectives yields some small insights to the deeper issues that Mila is addressing.

What we might first notice about the poem is the way it jumps 'backwards' into an island context. Tapa production remains a prevalent occupation of many indigenous islanders, an important part of the cultural economy of some island

nations. Tonga in particular has a strong output of tapa cloth, as does Samoa, while other islands have smaller but important tapa traditions in their societies (see Neich and Pendergrast 1997). In choosing a very island based occupation, Mila juxtaposes the modern, Aotearoa specific gender issues that Sione's Wedding brings up with traditional, culturally embedded gender issues of traditional island cultures. By placing these things in close proximity, Mila highlights the comparisons between sexism within traditional spheres and more modern renditions of island culture. In part, she may be suggesting that the boys do not operate out of a cultural void; their attitudes come from specific places, including the island culture that seeks to distance itself from the anomalies of New Zealand-specific expressions of islandness. There may also be a hint, if we consider the parentheticals that are included in the title (where the real stories are), that new renditions of diasporic culture may find expression in some indigenous forms – in the poem it is tapa, but it is also in poetry itself.

The theme of appearances as but thin layers overlaying multitudinous complexities appears once again in this metaphor. In the poem previously it is a European painting; here it is the designs painted on tapa. Both are an allegory for the way the surface of things may seem to show a consistent view, but are able to be opened up.

The poem makes clear that this is women's work in the first verse. Mila writes:

Women sit
among each other
and beat heartwood
into the finest veils
of ngatu (1-5)

In Mila's poem tapa creation is a gendered endeavour as the creation of the tapa cloth is women's work. Although Mila mentions the Tongan equivalent by name – ngatu – in the poem's connection to Samoa (as it is used in a poem that responds to representation of Pasifika women by performance artists who are mostly Samoan) we might see an extra element. In Samoa, an extra gendered dimension in tapa

creation occurs as the outward representation – that is to say, the designs painted or rubbed onto the tapa – is produced by men (Neich and Pendergrast 1997:16). Mila describes the finished product (the product of women's industry within their defined roles) has the appearance of 'symmetry / and perfect painted order'. Yet that imposed order, the image or representation of design has in some circumstances been created by a male, something that prompts further questions about what male representation means for Pacific women. This could be why in the poem Mila focuses on the creation and folding/felting creation of the tapa as that is the women's role, and why she chooses to emphasise the delicate, intricate webs that make up the tapa lying underneath the decorative layer.

In the next verse, Mila utilizes *heliaki* to speak of women's voices. She writes

Stories stripped, sun-dried
soaked, scraped clean
bark beaten lean (6-8)

This is the only time in the whole poem (apart from the title) where Mila is explicit that 'stories' underpin the poem; for the rest of the poem, the metaphor of tapa making is consistent. There are odd moments throughout the poem that are clues for the reader that this poem holds the wider issues of representation closely. An example of this might be seen in coupled phrases such as the way 'paper promises' has a dull resonance of the 'prayer promises' of the boys, and the 'pages pasted / like hands clasped in prayer' mirrors 'hands clasped in prayer' of the mother in the second poem 'where are the girls'. The incorporation of previously used religious imagery in this poem not only serves to link the two poems together but also suggests a connection between the role of the church or religion and the silences of women. If we note the language and imagery used, there is a sense of control – 'promises' implies an expectation of commitment to something; 'clasped' carries overtones of secureness, linkedness, something shut, connecting or holding in. Also, the sentence just before describes the pages as 'pasted' together, the layers of tapa inextricably bound, now inseparable. The stories are unable to be separated from each other – 'you see, / you cannot peel this back / to the heart /

without breaking it.’ The stories are committed to staying hidden, compressed and silent, unable to be voiced (peeled back) or revealed (as the heart) without breaking cultural boundaries or norms and troubling the ‘perfect painted order’ of things.

This is powerful imagery of women – not least because of its subtle claims of the hiddenness and silences of women that do not allow them to be all that they perhaps are. Mila’s final stanza reveals that those words and stories cannot be ‘peeled back to the heart’; they cannot go deeply into the centre of some women without destroying something important or contravening something crucial to the functioning of her world. Heliaki has thus enabled an insightful critique of traditional cultural perpetuations of oppression.

where the girls are – Selina Tusitala Marsh

Having looked at Mila’s poetic exploration of women’s representation in creative works such as film, poetry, and tapa, I now turn to Selina Tusitala Marsh’s poetic grouping ‘where the girls are’ for a contrasting yet complementary treatment of the question of women’s representation. This poetic group appears to be formed out of a collaborative engagement with Mila, as is evidenced by the shared subject matter (*Sione’s Wedding*), and the fact that the same conversation by the same people is referenced in similarly-titled poems (Marsh’s ‘the best men: Part 1’ and Mila’s ‘The Best Boys’). The line ‘get the girls / to write their own’ is attributed by Marsh to ‘four naked samoans’ in ‘the best men: Part I’, and attributed to ‘Oscar’ in ‘the best boys’ by Mila. Further indications that Marsh’s work is closely connected with Mila’s may be seen in the dedication of her poetic grouping by Marsh to ‘KM’ (Karlo Mila) and ‘DT’ (Tusiata Avia, also known as Donna Tusiata Avia); this reference to the creative connections between these female poets also cements this as one for the girls. As with my analysis of Mila’s poems, I treat the conversation Marsh is describing as a useful point from which to engage with questions of women’s representation in *Sione’s Wedding*.

the best men: Part I

The first poem starts off with an undercurrent of confrontation as we hear of the conversation from Marsh's angle. In both Mila and Marsh's poetic groupings we have the 'talk to the hand' response of the boys, but here in 'the best men' we have an additional comment from Rev. Mua Strickson Pua who claims that 'it was PI feminists and fundamentalists / who had problems' with *Sione's Wedding*.

Alliteration works to associate feminists with fundamentalists, an inference that holds a slightly derogatory undertone as fundamentalists can sometimes be perceived as backwards, tradition-bound, narrow viewed people by those who see themselves as more progressive and liberal.

The dynamics of observation is a strong theme in this poem, and one that recurs in Marsh's poetry. Her 'talkback' section in *Fast Talking PI* is concerned with the way women are viewed by colonial artists and then the nature of viewing those paintings (and views) in contemporary times, in particular foregrounding the perspective of a modern Pacific woman. 'The Best Men' feels like a series of chronologically sequential vignettes – a device that leaves the reader in the position of viewer, complicit and participant in the dynamics of the poem.

This is particularly the case from the fifth stanza. Marsh writes:

the guests gathered
tickets in hand
lined up TAB stand-like
placing bets on whether
they'd pull it off
backing their favourite actors
dissing the fia shows
nosing ahead for that right seat (19-26)

Marsh watches patrons at a showing of the movie that she is attending as a scene at the races – a spectator sport – describing them as punters ‘placing bets’, clutching their tickets, ‘backing their favourite actors’. In the act of watching, Marsh subverts their presence as spectators as she describes them as ‘nosing ahead’ for their seat, as if it were they themselves that were being analysed for some different punter. As, of course, they are in this poem, as it is Marsh that is watching their performance.

Marsh calls the audience ‘guests’, inviting a reading of the moment as taking place at a special showing, perhaps a premiere. This complicates Marsh’s viewing, as guests might be from a particular social sphere, which she, by her very presence there, impliedly belongs to. In the next verse, she observes people watching (‘academics and / social workers were weary / of watching something so un-pc’, 27-29), which supports this idea, as Marsh is an academic whose work in Pacific literatures written in English is motivated and underpinned by social concern (as is evident in her 2010 essay ‘The Body of Pacific Literature’).

Perhaps in a moment of self-reflexivity, Marsh turns her text in such a way that we, the readers, are now ‘watching’ Marsh watch the movie, and through the movie watch beyond the movie to the browning of mainstream popular culture:

while Savage and
Nesian Mystik
lifted
me up
beyond the screen
and into a scene of
other brown towns
hue-ing mainstream

viewing peering down

seeing brown

and white

laughing

complaining

and talking

talking

talking (38-54)

The ambiguous text here – particularly with its ‘and white’ – renders a dual reading possible, it is not only Marsh who is ‘viewing’, but also the rest of the audience. Additionally, Marsh peering ‘down’, ‘seeing brown and white’ might gesture towards both the representations on a New Zealand screen of a New Zealand society with Palagi, and towards the audience, who we might assume to contain members of various different ethnicities. Not only this, but in peering at other ‘brown towns’ (a small play on *bro’Town* as another site of representation) ‘hue-ing mainstream’, Marsh emphasizes other genres where Pacific people are active, collaborations, snapshots of NZ culture that reflect the influences of their immediate society, including Palagi culture.

Marsh watches the audience afterwards – perhaps literally but also possibly watching their critique appear into the public space – and lists them as ‘laughing’, ‘complaining’, and ‘talking

talking

talking’

The placement of talking, as consecutive, over spaced, downward directional words visually images the talking as talking *down*. The following verse reinforces this as the critiques are subjective (they are talking ‘about what *they* liked / didn’t like’, 55-

56, emphasis added), and are positioned as qualified opinions ('what needed to be done right', 57).

The final verse zooms out, and we have a final vignette, a conclusion, even a kind of moral in the way it sounds like we've just heard a story ('and that was...'):

and that was
the real wedding
as kiwi audience
married Polynesian screen. (60-63)

The complexities of representation are captured as Marsh subsumes the themes and issues brought up by the movie in that snapshot of 'kiwi' and 'polynesia'. We are left to consider what these terms mean in the context of this poem – what Marsh is saying about these respective terminologies. What is a 'kiwi'? It is impliedly different from 'Polynesian'. But how is it different when the production of *Sione's Wedding* is a New Zealand production? What is the significance of Marsh using a word with colonial overtones?

The slippage between 'kiwi' with its New Zealand specificity and 'Polynesian' with its implied exotic definition (and its actuality as an imagined, imposed colonial construct) accentuates what Marsh perceives *Sione's Wedding* to be partly promoting. The buy-in of hyper-sexualised Pacific girls belongs to a mythology of colonial representation, begun with the exploratory era, furthered by Gsanguin's portraits, and continued in a myriad of different sites of cultural production today.

The reclaiming of these sites, which all contribute to the perpetuation of the Dusky Maiden stereotype, is evident in Marsh's next two poems which changes focus from men's representations of Pacific women to the way Pacific women have been storying themselves.

On Swimming in *Vula*: Part II

The second poem shifts from the multiply angled perspectives to immediate first hand imaging of the powerful Pacific theatrical work *Vula* by Nina Nawalowalo. *Vula* was inspired by Nawalowalo's visit to her father's village in Fiji, where she was taken by the relationship women held with each other and with the sea. Performed by four Pacific women²⁹ on a flooded stage, it is a work that evokes a lagoon from within the confines of the theatre space, creatively using props and lighting to conjure images such as fish and coconut trees. Although the play contains spoken word, it is all in Pacific languages and, as David O'Donnell notes, is set up to '[privilege] physical language rather than spoken dialogue' (O'Donnell 2004:33). The women's movements throughout are often carefully slow and measured, the small movements containing symbolic intent. At other times, rhythm is more particularly articulated, with alternating quick and slow pace. Women sway, swim, splash, move, and feel the water, and each other. Their whole bodies are immersed in the performance, from wading foot to hair tresses in waves. The water doubles their bodies and actions, creating what has been described as an 'active, corporeality heightened by almost every move being extended, dilated or reflected by the pool of water' (2004:35). The overall effect is a piece of great beauty and composure that elevates women from passive dusky maidens to women of strong, real presence.

Marsh's poem both describes *Vula* and extends it in certain ways. *Vula* was a theatrical creation that was politically motivated. Nina Nawalowalo's desire was to show women's agency in their own image production (O'Donnell 2004:33). Selina Tusitala Marsh is doing the same thing, writing against the representations that dominate Pacific imagery of women. To do this, Marsh focuses on an important, groundbreaking example of women's own representation. She paints the scene for us with carefully chosen words that evoke fluidity, liquid, wetness, the key theme of *Vula*. Throughout the poem there are 's' sounds and 'w' sounds in words, which

²⁹ Three women performed in *Vula*'s initial production at BATS Theatre in 2002, hence the first lines 'Four ladies / three last year'.

give a soft, fluid movement throughout the poem, and constant water imagery: 'water', 'washing', 'flushed with the kaga mea'³⁰ 'shimmering spray', 'watery rhythm', 'dipped wet curl licking tips of waves' are found throughout the poem.

One way that the poem extends what *Vula* is doing can be seen at the end of the first verse. Marsh writes

watching and washing

boy stereotypes

away

greasy mechanical constructions

flushed with the kaga mea (6-10)

Marsh articulates a specific association between women's representation with 'boy stereotypes'. Those stereotypes are described as 'greasy mechanical constructions', and Marsh imagines the women as washing and rinsing the distasteful representations away. Her language incorporates a wide linguistic difference between men and women. In contrast to the sibilant sounds associated with women, when talking about the boys Marsh uses hard edged sounds that do not flow smoothly or sit comfortably. The words she chooses to use immediately preceding and proceeding the reference to boy stereotypes ('washing', 'kaga mea') are associated with cleaning, emphasising the slick of boy representations as clinging, unwanted but felt by women. Additionally, the cleaning reference visually presents as a humanly intimate activity (as in washing of the body) and as 'women's work' (as in the washing of laundry), both of which are crucial elements in *Vula*. By using the words 'greasy', 'mechanical', and 'constructions' Marsh draws upon existing boy stereotypes and sets them up in oppositional tension with that of the girls.

³⁰ Washing water

The word imagery finds mirror images that imitate the reflective nature of the water and highlight the magic of the theatre production. Fish created by Pacific women's fans sail 'high beneath' the water, the phrase simultaneously referencing the dual realities happening both above the water and in the reflection.

Women's physicalities are a centrepiece of *Vula*, and the momentum created by changes in pace or tension created by sustained small movement are a significant aspect. In other places, Mila is more specific, connecting movement with the musicality of the Pacific 'beating out a sway / a cocooned watery rhythm / a siva Samoa' (23-25). Another important way that *Vula* works with women's bodies is through highlighting the connection between women's bodies and the water. Marsh hones in on this, working the imagery of movement and rhythm into her poem. Phrases like 'whip the air' (13), 'shimmering spray' (15) and 'soaring' (19) utilize the onomatopoeia to at once evoke the movement of water and the movement of water.

The closing few lines of Marsh's poem are a poignant reminder of the importance of Pacific women finding or creating their own mirrors both for themselves and for each other. In a reverse mirror of the opening, Marsh describes 'three ladies / maybe four next year' discussing women's presence in creative arts and real life. The quiet line 'maybe four next year' is a hopeful gesture towards the space that open for other Pacific women to join in the conversation, to find each other.

On Smelling Frangipani Perfume: Part III

In the same way that 'On Swimming in Vula' extends another Pacific woman artist's engagement with the politics of representation, so too does Marsh's third poem in her poetic grouping. 'On Smelling Frangipani Perfume' takes the play *Frangipani Perfume* by Makereti Urale as a base, drawing out the subtle nuances and playing with the themes and motifs that run throughout the work. *Frangipani Perfume* is the story of three sisters, Tivi, Naiki, and Pomu. They are young Samoan migrants in New Zealand, working as night shift cleaners to make ends meet and support their

ailing father. The play touches explicitly on important themes for Pacific women, one of the strongest being the play's engagement with dusky maiden stereotyping. The stage directions amply promote this, with the instructions for the opening scene reading thus:

We glimpse the most beautiful sensual image of Three Dusky Maidens asleep in another realm of dreams. . . . Their alluring eyes gaze at us dreamily as they glide silently and gracefully in a mysterious and fascinating ritual of feminine beautification. (1.1-5)

The sisters are artfully presented as dusky maidens, swaying and moving sensuously before a change in lighting reveals the full picture of three girls cleaning toilets. This juxtaposition between exotic, sensual South Seas maidens and the careworn girls cleaning a corporate building's toilets serves to highlight the incongruence of stereotypes that simply reduce a Pacific woman's experiences and complexity to the sway of her hips.

From the beginning, the play sets up binaries – notions that are constantly challenged, representations that are constantly subverted, oppositions that Marsh channels in her poem. As well as addressing the imaging of women which is highlighted by the juxtaposition between Dusky Maidens and toilet cleaners, other themes important in this work are women's sexualities (homosexuality and sex outside of marriage are addressed as well as a commentary on the violations inherent in Pacific women's representations by men), the tensions of upholding some aspects of culture in New Zealand, and the nature of indigenous knowledge for a diasporic identity. The play's movement comes from interactions between the girls, their disparities and their connections, ultimately resolving key tensions with the reclamation of indigenous knowledge – ideas that Marsh incorporates in her poem.

Marsh works with these themes, picking up on the crosscurrents with the issues in *Sione's Wedding*. Like 'On Swimming with Vula', Marsh's poem feels like the poetic version of the play. The first section of 'On Smelling Frangipani Perfume' describes an opening scene:

noses inclined

they waited for the Velvet Dream curtain to rise

to tam'ita'i skies (1-3)

The audience is waiting for what Marsh describes as the 'Velvet Dream' curtain, a clear reference to another work by a Pacific woman, Sina Urale. *Velvet Dreams* is a short film that also deals with representations of woman, examining the way one Palagi man idealizes and idolizes the idea of a Pacific beauty that he imagines is represented by the velvet painting he come across in a thrift shop. It's inclusion in Marsh's poem is significant not only because this is another woman's voice engaging in artistic projects, but also because Sina Urale is Makerita Urale's sister, and she acted the role of Tivi in BATS Theatre's 1997 production of *Frangipani Perfume*. The effect of this is to emphasise the theme of women's representation and celebrate the interconnectedness of Pasifika 'sisters'. As the 'Velvet Dream curtain' rises 'to tama'ita'i skies', the biological sisterhood of Sina and Makerita Urale is expanded to the wider 'sisters' of Pacific women artists, the fictional sisterhood of Tivi, Naiki, and Pomu, and to Pacific women in general, as the broadest reading of this picks up on Marsh's use of tama'ita'i in her Pacific feminist framework and her definition of tama'ita'i as a term for 'women' by recognizable by women from the Pacific. The description of velvet theatre curtains as 'Velvet Dream' curtains gives a sense of the veil of male representation of Pacific women being lifted.

Marsh addresses the representation of women in a section dedicated to it in *Fast Talking PI*. Her part II, 'talk back', sasses back to the exploration era beginnings of what would become known as 'The Dusky Maiden', an expansive storying, imaging, and imagining of Pacific Island women as young, nubile, alluring, available, and willing. In her book *The Pacific Muse*, Patty O'Brien traces origins and histories of early renditions of the Dusky Maiden (2006). She identifies the sustained production of the Dusky Maiden trope from the 1760s with colonial expeditions to Tahiti, but points out the existence of earlier renditions that existed from the moment of Magellan's 'discovery' of the region (2006:9). Visual representations

played a significant role in the perpetuation of this stereotype; the salacious tales of cabin fevered sailors were circulating widely, but it was the work of the ships' artists that gave such stories credibility. The tradition of such paintings, which as O'Brien notes carried overtones of Renaissance representations of women (2006:61), concealed the real violence occurring behind the scenes to Pacific peoples. John Webber's 'A Portrait of Poedua' is a well known example of a painting evidencing the Dusky Maiden ideal of a young, sexualized, mysterious girl. Her attitude in the painting is passive, her breasts are exposed, her beauty is available for anyone to see. And yet, as both Tamaira(2010) and O'Brien(2006) surmise, the painting is merely pretence of calm submission. 'A Portrait of Poedua' was painted whilst Poedua had been abducted and held captive for five days. The several violences in this situation – Poedua's abduction, the forceful grief by her people (Tamaira 2010:13), the subsequent plans for retaliation (O'Brien 2006:85) are belied by the representation of masculine desire.

In the late 1800s, the Dusky Maiden received new stimulation from Paul Gauguin. His work galvanized the Dusky Maiden trope to more explicit sensualities, to more animalistic primitivism. As Teresia Teaiwa notes, his work naturalized the Pacific body (1999:254) and further made it available for appropriations by colonial machinery, specifically the process she labels militourism (1999:255). His work further entrenched a view of the Dusky Maiden's sexuality, and complicated it by his depiction of young Pacific girls, rendering viewers complicit in voyeurism and acts of paedophilia.

These representations have built up to an exotic Pacific female mythology today, one that many Pasifika women have used their power to subvert, expose, and restory. Marsh's own 'talk back' chapter is a sharp retort to early European explorative era representations. Tamaira describes the work of three Pacific women visual artists who actively 're-present the Dusky Maiden' (Tamaira 2010). Sima Urale's mockumentary *Velvet Dreams* offers a subversive critique of the male obsession with Dusky Maidens (S. Urale 1996), and Makerita Urale's play *Frangipani Perfume* takes pains to bring aspects of some Pacific women's realities to the fore.

The boys in *Sione's Wedding* have deliberately invoked a Dusky Maiden of their own, an appropriation and perpetuation of a sexually available, free young woman with the character of Princess (played by a former Miss Samoa). A fresh arrival from Samoa, Albert's cousin Princess, turns up whilst the boys are scrambling to find girlfriends. She is precocious and beautiful, and predictably complicates things as she disrupts the Duckrockers' brotherly camaraderie; accompanying Albert to town, leading him to think they are together and his entry to the wedding is assured, and also seducing Michael in a critical scene in which she appears naked (although artfully positioned to protect her 'modesty'), alluring, and sexually free. She ticks all the boxes of the Dusky Maiden, without disturbing any sense of façade. In fact, her character's juxtaposition against Tanya and Leilani only heightens our acceptance of Princess' character, as Leilani is a care-worn long-term girlfriend and Tanya is clearly only available for one man, although she remains invisible to him for much of the movie. By comparison, Princess' character arc is far more engaging.

Princess' portrayal hit a nerve with audiences 'back home' in Samoa. The links were forged with a premiere in Apia, a very deliberate association between Samoa and New Zealand, and the movie was celebrated by many in Samoa. However, these links were under critique as the role of Princess catalyzed wider questions of the relationship between NZ born Samoans and those from the islands. Yet the responses of Samoans betrayed the same oppression that Mila speaks to in her poetry. In contesting the Naked Samoans' sexualized Dusky Maiden, the image of the 'good island girl' was instead invoked – a trading of one set of problematic values for another.

A further response shows that although Princess was hotly contested amongst Pacific Islanders, her imaging was uncritically consumed by some male critics. Kevin Thomas in his review for the *L.A. Times* effuses 'this gorgeous playgirl (portrayed by a former Miss Samoa, no less) zeroes in on Michael, her counterpart in spectacular looks and aggressive sexuality' (Thomas 2007:n.p). Princess' stereotype gets her excitedly referenced as a 'playgirl', complete with 'aggressive sexuality'. Taking into account these multiple objectifications and oppressions, it is no wonder the girls are forced to write their own.

Marsh's response to Dusky Maiden imaging calls those other critiques by Pasifika women into play, referencing Urale's *Velvet Dreams* and the play *Frangipani Perfume*, a move that cements a sisterhood amongst woman writers and emphasises some commonalities of experience. *Frangipani Perfume* powerfully strips away the obscuring representations by men and reveals the actuality of Pasifika women's existence in New Zealand. Just as a truthful painting of Poedua would have shown an angry, upset woman locked in a ship's cabin, *Frangipani Perfume* aims to show an urgent truth. It works to disrupt the Dusky Maiden trope by literally enlightening the audience's perspectives - the play begins with what appears to be three women lost in sensual dance before the lights are suddenly on and they are revealed to be three sisters 'on their knees, cleaning and scrubbing a filthy floor' (M. Urale 2004:4), a physical representation of Pacific women working hard 'at the bottom of the hierarchy in a white world' (O'Donnell 2004:iii). If we juxtapose this scene with Princess leaning against a bed waiting for Michael to come in, or with Kevin Thomas' hormonal impression of hot Pacific playgirls, we are left with incongruities that highlight the falseness (and unhelpfulness) of the boys' imaging of the girls.

The verse continues:

and for the dance of perfume vapours
wafting under studio lights
to settle on the bare shoulders
of three bent sisters
wiping the floor
with mops of hair
swirling black in their own galaxy
of porcelain white (4-9)

Marsh describes the girls in evocative terms, writing of ‘the dance of perfume vapours’, ‘wafting’, ‘bare shoulders’. The words ‘wiping the floor / with mops of hair’ feels beautiful in this poem, coming as it does after ‘On Swimming in Vula’ where hair was a feature in both the theatrical production and the poem³¹. But, like the carefully selected lighting that initially shows the three sisters as dusky maidens dancing sensually but shifts to reveal them scrubbing at toilets, Marsh’s ‘lighting’ shifts our perspective of dancing, sensuous girls to reveal:

porcelain, of the restroom variety

perfume, of the Janola persuasion

acidic to aching nostrils

armed with Toilet Ducks and pink rubber gloves (12-15)

Like the audience watching the play, our initial assumptions of the sisters are undermined by the reality: that the ‘porcelain’, often a word that the upper class would associate with fine china or expensive figurines, is for ablutions, and that the ‘perfume’ is actually the acrid smell of cleaning product and urine, which Naiki protests against, exclaiming ‘Oh, I hate this smell – piss and Janola, ugh!’ (2.62). The disconnect between appearances and realities are highlighted by Marsh’s adoption of ‘fancy’ terms that somewhat mask the crude realities – the words ‘variety’ and ‘persuasion’ effectively cushioning the already softened words ‘restroom’ used instead of a bald word like ‘toilet’, and ‘Janola’ instead of the harsher sounding ‘bleach’.

³¹ Jeanette Mageo discusses the relationship between hair and women’s sexualities; to further this line of inquiry see Mageo 1996.

The intersections between appearances and realities is continued in the next few lines:

the audience see
crushed frangipani petals
pungent and
browning
on porous skin
pungent and
browning of
porcelain (16-23)

‘The audience sees’ reminds us of the visual sight of frangipani petals flurrying in the play. They are described as ‘pungent and browning’, which is a necessary element to the creation of the perfume that thematically secures the play. A repetition of the words straight after is then used to describe the toilets the girls have to clean. The dichotomy between the process of perfume making and toilet cleaning are both represented by the same phrase – ‘pungent and browning’, although the key difference is the change from the words ‘porous skin’ to ‘porcelain’. The similar sounding words actually denote complete opposites to each other, another example of the wide chasm between representations and realities.

The above passage also couches a reference to colour, which is a strong theme in the play. Already we’ve had mention of mops of hair ‘swirling black’ in a ‘galaxy of porcelain white’; now we have ‘pink rubber gloves’, ‘browning’ mentioned twice, and ‘porcelain’ repeated again. In *Frangipani Perfume* white and brown are prevalent colours that come up time and time again – from the white of the amenities (1.79), to Naiki’s bitter iteration ‘I hate white!’ (2.80), to white weddings (4.5-6; white petals (2.122), angels (6.75;9.11), the white flesh of a coconut (18.18-19), a wedding dress that *isn’t* white (11.3). Whites use in the play is one that emphasises the binaries of Urale’s representation, as white is often either used in starkly realistic images such as toilets and hand basins, or in fantastical, fairy-taled

idealisations of 'Snow White' dresses, white angels, unblemished white frangipani petals. In contrast, brown is a colour that is closely associated with reality, as in its association with skid marks, as a colour of the 'big brown baskets'(18.15) that are used to collect Frangipani flowers, the brown copra (18.19), the petals as 'brown and wilted' (18.21). Another aspect of brown colouring is in the characters, who are Samoan, and by extension the actors playing the girls (who in the BATS theatre production were also Samoan). In a play that heavily uses the imagery of colour to subvert and challenge stereotyping, the 'fact of brownness' (to borrow Fanon's phrasing) for Pacific women to be representing Pacific women in a field where they are traditionally underrepresented feels like an important use of colour.

Marsh's reference to 'pink rubber gloves' (15) picks up on pink as another important colour in the play. It comes up largely in relation to Naiki, a lesbian who has not come out, who evinces an affinity with things pink, as in her dreams of 'pink shoes, pink dress, pink lippy' instead of a white wedding dress (11.5), and 'pink sunsets' (2.96), pink tutu (4:13), a girl in a pink dress that Naiki wants to ask to siva (14.12). Pink is the colour of lesbian difference, a subversion of the prevalent pretty girl gendered pink stereotyping, just as the idea of these girls as cleaners upsets the notion of exotic dusky maidens. Tivi, who in the play is the one most strongly associated with trying to keep the rules and uphold the importance of culture, graphically damns pink as the colour of Satan and pigs in hell (14), which suggests perhaps that in some people's ideas of 'traditional' Pacificness, there is no room for alternative sexualities for women.

The following lines describe the girls participating in a lengthy history of migrant experience. Marsh writes:

they worship at the
memorial of migrant shift workers
decades of sweepers swooners splashers (24-26)

Here, 'they' is ambiguous and multi-layered. One reading is that 'they' refers to the audience, whose role in the complexities of women's representation has already been questioned. Another reading of 'they' pictures the sisters as paying obeisance

to 'the memorial of migrant shift workers'. This idea is enhanced with Marsh's use of the words 'bend and bow', movements of worship and/or deference. The 'memorial' may both simultaneously refer to the physical items in the bathroom space that the girls 'bend and bow' over as they clean, but could also be referring to the long history of Pacific migrants working multiple cleaning jobs a night as they come over to New Zealand 'unskilled', but desiring to forward their children's education. This history and its complex ongoingness is evident the book *Making Our Place: Growing Up PI in New Zealand* (Fairbairn-Dunlop and Makisi: 2003) which has many anecdotes of how new migrants had to resort to such underpaid work.

The night motif is a strong one within the poem. The second half of the poem picks up a thread of the play which interrogates the notion of 'space' and 'skies' as a place of dreams for each person in the play, including the unseen father. Pomu explains that her father reminisces that:

at night, there are millions of stars and you can see them clearly, pulsating light that could be thousands of years old, galaxies and the Milky Way and the Southern Cross; and when the moon is full, you don't need a light.
(Pause) Dad wants to go home...' (2.57-60).

Pomu describes her best friend (Einstein) as living 'up there, in the stars and the Milky Way' (5.13). Tivi visions herself as an angel flying 'high into the sky' (9.12), whilst Naiki rejects a notion of 'heaven' (commonly associated with the space above earth; as in 'the heavens') and celebrates 'pink sunsets' (2.96).

These complex engagements with sky/space imagery is picked up and powerfully imaged by Marsh. From the first initial reference to 'tama'ita'i skies' (3), she affirms this as a *woman's* space. The imagery Marsh uses pulls from space, but also incorporates the cleaning motif, as Marsh describes 'a wet mop in the sky / suds of stars in its wake' (39-40). What is more, such space imagery as 'meteors streak a mile of sisterly connection' (42), associate the bond between the three sisters with the constancy of the stars.

The imagery of space and sky are closely connected to the idea of goddesses. Where in *Frangipani Perfume* heavenly beings were associated with a particular (contestable) understanding of God, but in this poem Marsh not only references a sisterhood of brown girls fighting against the misappropriation of their image, but also invokes another set of genealogical connections, that of Pacific goddesses. In the remaining passage we may see the intersects between the multiple themes of representation, space, goddesses.

mouths and starry eyes
a galaxy of blue collared hopes
a tempest of Caliban's making
a Southern Cross of sisters
pointing to a gravitating
parental centrifugal force
sucking in progeny stars
comet tails
spinning and swirling
like a wet mop in the sky
suds of stars in its wake
as dream bubbles burst (30-41)

This passage calls in vibrant imagery of space, reminiscent of the passage where Pomu relates her father's memories of the skies over Samoa:

Dad says at night, there are millions of stars and you can see them clearly, pulsating light that could be thousands of years old, galaxies and the Milky Way and the Southern Cross (2.67-69).

Marsh takes the palpable movement of this passage and distils it into a verse segment that is pulsing with energy. Present progressive forms of words alongside words full of action gives a sense of movement, words like 'gravitating', 'pointing', 'sucking', 'spinning and swirling' are woven with words like 'tempest', 'centrifugal force' 'comet tails'. The relationship between the heavenly sphere and character's dreams are picked up by Marsh, who describes the characters in 'a galaxy of blue collared hopes', a reference to the work that the girl's are bound to. By using 'blue collar' Marsh makes an explicit connection to class and the undeniable connections that class has with systemic inequalities – a very relevant, current conversation for Pacific people today. The girls are described as 'a Southern Cross of sisters', all three a part of the same constellation.

and meteors streak a mile of sisterly connection

affection of the deepest kind

where these celestial bodies

gravitate

in a singular galaxy

they bend and blow from floor to bucket

from good daughterhood to misunderstood

lover to eccentric astronomer

hair parted down her face

a wizened streak to the moon

a thousand black shooting comets from Sina

over her eyes

under her nose

tail spinning through her breath. (42 -55)

While it isn't until the final few lines that Marsh mentions Sina, but her wairua and essence is worked into the poem from the start. By her, I mean a pluralized her, because Sina is a ubiquitous goddess figure, with multitudinous reincarnations. Robert Craig, in his *Handbook of Polynesian Mythology* writes of 'hundreds of unique stories retold of this goddess' (Craig 2004:132), while Lupe has given her a more intimate description: 'There are many stories of a young woman named Sina in a variety of circumstances and roles. She is the universal Samoan maiden' (Lupe 2007:131). Such accounts allow a flexible reading of Sina in Marsh's poem.

A central theme of the goddess Sina is her affinity with the night, being a protector of travellers during the night (Craig 2004:132). This aspect has particular salience for the sisters in *Frangipani Perfume* as their work is done in the night, as the generations of 'migrant shift workers' have done before them. The night time world expands in the second half of the poem, no longer wrought within the confines of the theatre or bathroom of the girls' worlds, but rather, they are present within the expansiveness, the sheer space and power of the night time sky. Phrases such as 'a Southern Cross of sisters' and 'meteors streak a mile of sisterly connection' paint the girls within the cosmos, which also contains pulls and tensions – 'a gravitating parental centrifugal force' gesturing towards parental influence and in a wider sense the cultural norms that their parents encourage.

An aspect of each of the girls' personhoods are identified by Marsh– 'good daughterhood' (48; Tivi), 'misunderstood lover' (48; Naiki), and 'eccentric astronomer' (49; Pomu). These are tensions that strain the fabric of 'traditional' Samoan culture in particular ways. Tivi tries hard to be responsible as the eldest but is torn by her own desire for sex with Okisene. Naiki is a lesbian, and Pomu is a quirky, smart girl with Western education inflecting her understandings of life and culture. Marsh has deftly managed the diversity of the girls and their experiences between New Zealand culture and traditional culture, crafting with her poem an inclusive genealogy that privileges strength and power for women. Melded within Marsh's mythology, they are all Sina. Thus they are able to transcend the smallness of their world (in the play it is physically mostly the bathroom and church), and are granted a status that contrasts with their lower held rung on the social ladder. The

reality that Urale exposed in response to Dusky Maiden imaging has been empowered by Marsh's restorying with our birthright – our genealogy of goddesses.

Reflections on Mana Tama'ita'i Pasifika / Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at the development of Pacific feminist thought through the conceptualizing of a theoretical framework by Selina Tusitala Marsh. Mana tama'ita'i offered a broader mechanism by which regional and situational specificities might allow Pacific feminisms to be more finely attuned. In this chapter I have read work by Mila and Marsh to interrogate what some of those specificities look like for Pasifika women in Aotearoa. Some strong themes have come through their writing, most critically engaging with the politics of representation. This includes: both Mila and Marsh's strong interest in Pacific men's production of stereotyped, hyper-sexualised Pasifika girls; Mila's focus on the systemic oppressions that has found a home in island culture and the control of women's sexualities as a device of power; and Marsh's examining of Pacific production of stereotyped images being mainstreamed.

The strength in both authors' treatments of gender politics lies in their return to women's voices. In Mila's poem 'Paper Mulberry Secrets', she reveals the way women have been talking against their oppression and subverting the enforced control of topics. Through the real mechanism of tapa (during its creation and its decoration), women talk; through the metaphor of tapa, Mila talks. Mila's use of heliaki as a subversion of imposed silences shows how poetry offers ways to talk back and re-present women's selves to themselves. In Mila's final two poems 'On Swimming in Vula' and 'On Smelling Frangipani Perfume' draw the reader's attention to two significant Pasifika female produced works of art that introduce strong women's presence both within the discourse of mainstream Pasifika female figures in Pacific creative productions. In those sites of production, as the authors break new ground – Urale by being the first Pacific woman playwright published in New Zealand, and Nawalowalo by being on the cutting edge of Pacific theatre.

It is fitting, then, that 'Paper Mulberry Secrets' is both secret (in that it doesn't appear obviously a part of the poetic group 'Four Poems and Sione's Wedding'), and not secret, as it appears online and in *A Well Written Body*. It feels promising, that overlaying the reality of some indigenous Pacific women's experiences which are hard to see, is a space that is preceeded by Mila and Marsh, couched in a poetic collection of new Pacific writers. As writer-scholars dedicated to the expansion of Pacific literature and the development of young Pasifika writers, the existence of a space for their own fourth poems, responses, critiques, and engagements seems fitting indeed. The final chapter of this thesis engages with young writers and new directions for Pasifika literature.

The long complex histories that influence the representation of women have become the inheritance of Pasifika women today. Mana tama'ita'i Pasifika continues to engage with what are real realities for Pacific girls, their continued repression within traditional structures on one hand (Tupuola 1998:2000), and continual denigration and sexualisation on the other – as one Pasifika girl put it, they are victims of 'the jungle fever thing' (Mila-Shaaf 2010:184). Mila's and Marsh's work serves to counter those narratives with narratives that pull from women's real histories, ones that places women's realities to the fore (as in 'Paper Mulberry Secrets' and 'On Smelling Frangipani Perfume'), a narrative that finds strength from within their own lineage of strong women, heroines, and goddesses.

Before moving on to the final chapter of this thesis, I want to reflect on two things alongside each other: the significance of the empty space in *Niu Voices* where 'Paper Mulberry Secrets' should be, and Mila's line 'and three ladies / maybe four next year / talking about where the girls are' in 'On Swimming in Vula'. The unintentional ambiguity of the former and deliberate slippage in the latter opens a space that can be richly interpreted. For Mila's space, it is overlaid over another poem that reaches back into history to comment upon sexist structures that Pasifika women need to face. The Pacific epistemological framework of finding the future in the past makes the overlaid 'space' one for the future, where new poems might sit in its place, extending, questioning, and affirming mana tama'ita'i Pasifika.

In Mila's closing lines, she is leaving space for a fourth member to join in critiquing, watching, supporting Pacific women.

By way of newly interpreting this space, let us further consider the way that Mila and Marsh have consistently argued their feminist subjectivities. In the beginning of this thesis, I quoted both Mila and Marsh imagining *girls* coming across themselves in books, libraries, stories, and literary mirrors. They both have important sections of their debut collections dedicated to aspects of their womanhood – Mila on sexualities (thereby breaking taboos through poetry) in her section 'this is not a love poem' and Marsh in her 'talkback' section of her book which sharply critiques the colonial objectification and mythologizing of Pacific women. Their intertextual engagement with each other and wider Pasifika women artists speaks to the sisterhood that is becoming an undeniable force in Pasifika artistic cultural production. Thus, in considering this space in its feminist context, we note the way it has been preceded by powerful, strong, women. But not only preceded; their work has allowed the space to be transformed into a place where multiple other 'fourth poems' might exist. It might be seen as a legacy – the legacy of an opening, the gift from a generation that has done all these things precisely to enable young Pasifika to know themselves more deeply and truthfully than they could by watching and reading stereotypes. A space where new feminist self-representations might be added to Mila's poetic group, to subtly change the direction, to foreground different messages, to further poetry in exciting new ways, to represent a current generation of Pasifika sisters.

Chapter Four

Fast Talkers and Rushing Dolls

This final chapter explores some of the ways that Mila and Marsh's work generates multiple points of connection for a new generation of Pasifika writers. Throughout this thesis, we have seen the way their work has represented fluidity and multiplicity as key features of Pasifika identity; following the thematic strands of mixedness and feminism with regard to their work has offered particularly rich points of engagement. At this point we now turn our attention to the ways that new Pasifika voices are building on the work of Mila and Marsh and reflecting and extending the flux and change of being Pasifika. My approach to this is two-fold. I firstly want to look at an example of the way literature impacts young Pasifika identities through the poem 'Fast Talkin' PI' by Selina Tusitala Marsh. 'Fast Talkin' PI' feels somewhat like a flagship piece for this particular moment in Pasifika literary history, and part of its currency is its ability to speak to and elicit response from its listeners. This dynamic is explored in some of Marsh's reflections on the circulation of 'Fast Talkin' PI'. Having done this, the remainder of the chapter is dedicated to revealing how the creative works of two strong Pasifika women poets – Courtney Sina Meredith and Grace Taylor – build on the work Mila and Marsh have achieved in the field of Pasifika literature. I particularly look at the way themes of mixedness and feminism are treated, as well as noting some other significant directions in their literary creations. This chapter, which might be thought of as an epilogue of sorts, is intended as a gesture towards new directions in Pasifika literature. I am hopeful that in addition to illustrating a connection between Mila and Marsh's work and the rising generation of Pasifika writers, this chapter is seen as a small acknowledgement of the innovative work those young writers are producing and achieving; one that opens up a rich field of work for future scholars.

Tauhi Vā – Nurturing the space for new Pasifika stories

In Chapter One, I detailed various points of connection between Pasifika literature and Pasifika identities through the theoretical concept of tauhi vā. It has underpinned my exploration of multiple ethnicities and feminist activity in Mila and Marsh's work. In this chapter, I suggest that another way that Mila and Marsh have 'nurtured the space' has been in the way they have opened up new spaces for new writers to emerge.

Mila and Marsh have been intentional about the way they foster new Pasifika voices (see Teaiwa and Marsh 2010:239 for Marsh's comment on this) – this something we have noted throughout this thesis, and that may be seen through their activity and knowledge sharing. This is demonstrated through Marsh's role as editor of *Niu Voices* (2006), which combined more established authors such as Sia Figiel and Cherie Barford with newer writers and which has subsequently become a showcase of an emergent Pasifika literature (Dunsford n.d.). Mila's editorship and guidance on *Something Worth Reading?* (2010), an anthology produced by the South Auckland Poets Collective (SAPC), a group of young poets from South Auckland who are dedicated to using 'spoken word poetry as a tool for positive social change with a focus on young people' (SAPC blog n.d), similarly strengthened the grassroots movement of young Pasifika excelling in poetic performance and establishing spoken word as a strong strand in New Zealand and Pasifika literature and performance. We might also see intentional mentoring in Marsh's availability for school visits, which can have dynamic results (as discussed shortly in this chapter); or careful nurturing in the involved role that Mila took in facilitating and running a poetry workshop at the Absolute Rush Performing Arts Program in 2006 ('Poems from "An Absolute Rush"' n.d.). This program, for disenfranchised and disadvantaged youth, opened the power of creative words to convey their experiences, and gave them a voice through which to speak their realities.

An important aspect of the work that Mila and Marsh's poetry does may be seen in the way it has generated varied and ongoing responses from its listeners. One piece that is taking on a life of its own is Marsh's 'Fast Talkin' Pl'. The poem

demonstrates an ability to not only engage young Pasifika, but also to reach out to other demographics, ages, and cultural or ethnic identities.

'Fast Talkin' PI' is a definitive piece that unequivocally claims the fluid, open-ended, multiple ways one can be a Pacific person in New Zealand, both in reality and as they are imagined or represented in alternative discourses. This is set up from the beginning, where Marsh writes:

I'm a fast talkin' PI

I'm a power walkin' PI

I'm a demographic, hieroglyphic fact-sheetin' PI

I'm a theorising PI

I'm a strategising PI

I'm a published in a peer reviewed journal PI (1-6)

The poem rhythmically flows in three-line phrases, with the words PI punctuating the text and marking important beats within the phrase. The alliteration between the 'I' sounds in 'I'm a' and 'PI' create coherent ends in between which any number of syntactical or word variations might be inserted without disrupting the sense of rhythm and togetherness that the poem has. From a theorising PI, to a lotto queen PI, to a marae PI, cross-gendered, soul-blended, mascara'd PI, Marsh's poem encapsulates a sense of movement and a sense of openness that reflects the varied, diverse Pacific population in New Zealand today, as well as opening up space for the articulation of identities from non-Pacific people. This poem is influenced by the well-known feminist poem 'Fast-Speaking Woman' by Anne Waldman (1975), who in turn was inspired by the chants of a Mazatec shaman called Maria Sabina (Marsh 2011:30). This genealogy, narrated in Marsh's article "'I Come Going From Place To Place From The Origin": Notes Toward a Tradition of Fast Moving Poems' (2011),

demonstrates the flexibility and malleability of the text as it transforms from a text centred on women to a text about Pacific people.

The currency of Marsh's work is captured by this story of a college prize-giving in South Auckland where Marsh was a keynote speaker. After a lengthy ceremony, Marsh relates:

The hall had grown restless and murmurings about supper were beginning to rise. I put on the music track for 'Fast Talking PI' and launched into the first stanza. Shoulders straightened and a vibe rippled through the hall. There was no misunderstanding about acronyms here. Each line was met with laughter, calls, shout-outs, and an echo formed as people began repeating 'PI' at the end of each line. The volume increased so that I could no longer be heard. I had to stop after each stanza to let the response die down, and the poem took twice as long to get through. (2011:35-36)

This performance also illustrates the malleability of poetry to expand to fit Pasifika stories. In this case, Marsh found out what the house names of the college were, and inserted them into the poem. The response, Marsh describes, was intense:

Entire rows shouted their identification. The belly-busting screams along with the clapping, stomping and krump-like competitive gesturing, demonstrated the students' strength and allegiance to each other. (2011:36)

This flexibility helps to keep the poem contemporaneous, and therefore relevant to the Pacific community, across a wide spectrum of Island groups, sexualities, ages, and styles. As feminist and post-colonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-Ha observed, 'Each story is at once a fragment and a whole; a whole within a whole. And the story has always been changing, for things which do not shift and grow cannot continue to circulate' (Trinh 1989:132). This poem receives new life from its continual adaptations not only by Marsh in response to her context, but by others; this is something enabled by the performative nature of the poem. She explains that the beauty of the poem is in its ability to transform, 'travelling through communities,

across class, gender and cultural borders, and becoming a vehicle for other voices' (Marsh 2011:35). This transformation might be seen in the poem's adoption and adaptation by a group of young Somali refugees now living in Aotearoa:

Responses to the poem have gone beyond the Pacific. In April 2010 'Fast Talking PI' mutated into 'Fast Talking AS' (African Somalis). I worked with a group of Somali refugee youth who took the poem's rhythmic frame back to Africa and used it to speak about their Somali roots and their transplantation in Aotearoa. 'Fast Talking AS' is now part of 'The Mixing Room: Stories from Young Refugees in New Zealand,' an exhibition at Te Papa Tongarewa / The Museum of New Zealand with digital as well as physical outreach. The poem has been posted as text and audio files and will be viewed and heard by an estimated 1.4 million visitors each year over its three year exhibition life. A total of over 4 million visitors will hear the rhythms and incantations of 'Fast Talking PI' Somali-style. (Marsh 2011:38)

Compellingly, not only does the poem translate across to the world of diverse individual listeners but, Marsh suggests, the listener moves into the world of the poem, viewing 'themselves for the moment as honorary PIs, relating to the politics of the poem as well as its aesthetic' (Marsh 2011:38). Marsh's claim that the politics of the poem may speak to a group of African Somali refugees may be seen in the way her poem highlights aspects of class and socio-economic disparity. Lines such as 'I'm a take no lunch to school today but . . . anyway PI' (45) and 'I'm a freezing works PI' (87) speak to a lower socio-economic strata who face certain kinds of barriers in New Zealand society. It is possible that some people who are (or feel) marginalized and disempowered may feel a sense of kinship and/or empowerment by seeing these descriptions appear as discursive subjects in a fictive work.

This accessibility is opened further by its circulation on and through various different mediums. The poem, which already is presented in the book *Fast Talking PI* as both a printed text and a spoken performance chant on an included DVD, has found mobility via new modes of circulation, most obviously via the internet.

Reflecting on changes in the way knowledge is produced, Hereniko associates new kinds of knowledges with new circulatory routes. Summing up themes from a conference he attended, Hereniko writes:

To better understand the contemporary Pacific, we should look not only to academic research and writing, but also to the arts for the most exciting innovations and representations of the Pacific. Also, whereas academic papers are read by a relatively small and elite group, the best of the arts can reach masses of people, in the region and internationally. (Hereniko 2003:xi)

Here Hereniko is anticipating the way the arts, as a knowledge with as much critical integrity as scholarship, are more easily accessed because of their more populist appeal of creative arts over academia, which Hereniko notes is a more exclusive endeavour (although Mila and Marsh's ability to move easily between creative and academic publication and sometimes in crossing them over is an important way that they are troubling this binary). However, Hereniko's reference to 'the best' of the arts that can reach 'masses of people' speaks to an exclusivity and elitism – after all, what counts as the best is a highly subjective and political question, which depends on certain people, certain agendas, and access to funding. This point is important because emergent Pasifika literatures are drawing from traditions that privilege non-elite or non-exclusionary modes of accessibility and mobility.

This might be seen through the growing movement of spoken word amongst young Pasifika creative artists. Pasifika people's activity in the performing arts sector in New Zealand has always been strong, and poetry has often found its way into a performative format. This is evident in the way 'Fast Talkin' PI' has several incarnations not only as a printed text but as audio on a CD (Marsh 2009), on *YouTube*, as an often requested performance piece at gatherings that range from university conferences to rest homes for the elderly (Marsh 2011), as a key part of 'Polynation', a performance theatre collaboration (*blackmail press* 34; Marsh 2010a), and aired on the radio (Reid 2010).

Spoken word is a movement that originated in the United States and has since spread to metropolitan centres where it has been picked up as a vehicle of voice for

marginalized youth (Smith and Eleveld 2004). In contrast to Hereniko's comment on 'the best' of arts, spoken word may erase hierarchies by being an open, free space for non-judgemental performance; something demonstrated in the way it utilizes easily accessible modes of dissemination. This includes blogs, in spoken performances, and in *You Tube* uploads. In an increasingly connected world the internet presents a myriad of chances to promote creative works audio-visually.

The trajectory of spoken word in New Zealand has been propelled by an upcoming generation of Pasifika poets, who leverage the increasing use of technology to enable wider dissemination and access³². This has helped raise the profile of the SAPC as a growing presence in Pasifika literature, with numerous opportunities to perform and listen promoted in social media such as Facebook and on websites. SAPC co-founder Grace Taylor has been instrumental in establishing the grassroots production of poetry as a spoken word movement, consciously establishing very real transnational connections between the SAPC and spoken word communities in America³³. Although she is no longer an active member of SAPC, her own continuing interest in spoken word are evident in the formation of her new company Niu Navigations and in her establishment of spoken word movement Niu Voices, projects which continue the ethos of SAPC in utilizing spoken word as a tool of empowerment for Pacific youth.

Grace Taylor and fellow Pasifika poet, playwright, and musician Courtney Sina Meredith both harness the ability of performance to transcend borders in multiple ways, recognize the potential for literature and in particular spoken word to build a stronger people and inform developing cultural identities. The remainder of this chapter explores how Taylor and Meredith are establishing themselves as leaders of a new order of poets, furthering the field and creating ever more space for young

³² Past concerns about the exclusivity of the internet from Hereniko (2001) and Marsh(2005) are still valid; but statistics showing how young people use social media to disseminate information show that the number of New Zealand households with some kind of internet access is rapidly expanding http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/industry_sectors/information_technology_and_communications/HouseholdUseofICT_HOTP2012.aspx .

³³ <http://www.actioneducation.co.nz/programmes/27-spoken-word-poetry-workshops-and-programmes>

Pasifika to breathe. In particular I draw connections between the way Mila and Marsh, in their stated attempts to nurture future Pasifika identities and writers, have been instrumental in widening the spaces that Taylor and Meredith are now functioning in. To do this, I will firstly focus on the way Taylor treats mixedness. It is a theme that is prevalent in her work, and also is the subject of one of her most well known and popular poems 'Intertwined: Being Afakasi' (2010). This section will look at this poem in light of some of the concepts introduced in Chapter Two. The following section is interested in the complex ways that Meredith, as a bold new writer on the landscape of Pasifika literature, features new ways of writing the world for Pacific women. In this, I analyse her play 'Rushing Dolls' (2012) in light of the Pasifika feminism *mana tam'ita'i* Pasifika, which was discussed in Chapter Three. The way both creative works get their energy and new life from wider circulations and various modes of performance are also important aspects of this discussion. In highlighting connections between Mila and Marsh, I hope to indicate the important ways that Mila and Marsh have enabled such literary productions, but also to gesture toward the exciting new directions that Pasifika is headed toward.

Grace Taylor: Navigating Niu Stuff

Grace Taylor is a young but established voice in Pasifika literature. Her connections with literature are deeply tied with the development and furtherance of Pacific peoples in New Zealand. She is not only the co-founder of the South Auckland Poets Collective, but she is also a youth development worker; these two things that have guided her direction as a poet.

Taylor's momentum in her promotion of the spoken word to help shape the world for Pasifika youth is sustained by her own deep connection with poetry. Taylor's themes are closely connected with very contemporary expressions of the world around her, such as her poem against the encroachments of westernisation upon her cultural identity in 'Hype of Freedom' (Taylor 2011). One of her predominant themes is the exploration of what it means to be of multiple ethnicities. As a

Samoan/English self-identified afakasi, much of Taylor's creative work has centred on the divide between being Palagi and being Samoan.

Grace Taylor's work 'Intertwined: Being Afakasi' is one of her earliest works on the topic, which finds expansive treatment in her upcoming poetry collection 'Afakasi Speaks' (Ala Press, in press). Taylor's work belongs to an emergent body of poetry that stories the mixed Pasifika experience. These include poets such as Doug Poole with his Pouliuli series, Lani Wendt Young with her work *Afakasi Woman*, and SAPC poets Raymon Narayan and Tarah Ki Ahau, all creative new voices who have storied their mixed selves. Taylor created the blog 'afakasistory', a 'canvas for stories from the unique voices of inbetween . . .' (Taylor 2011). As Taylor is Samoan/Palagi her word tends to focus on renditions of mixedness that involve Palagi and PI. Yet, as I noted in Chapter Two, there are other combinations of mixedness that are being articulated by poets such as Tara Ki Ahau (Māori /Samoan/Pakeha) and Grace Talitua Keevers (Māori /Samoan). This is one area that would be enriched by further scholarship.

The popularity of 'Intertwined: Being Afakasi' is helped by its multiple sites of existence, such as in the blog 'afakasistory', the book *Something Worth Reading?*, in issue 22 of the online journal *blackmail press*, and in multiple spoken word performances, including those documented on *You Tube* – all evidence of the way circulatory routes of pieces such as 'Fast Talkin' PI' are being retrod by new works. Additionally, one of those modes, *You Tube*, evidences a tradition of spoken word pieces that are adaptable and serve as inspiration for new pieces. Just as 'Fast Talkin' PI' has been widely influential thanks in part to the adaptations of people to make the poem their own, so too has 'Intertwined: Being Afakasi' regerminated in the minds of other young poets. An example of this is a video on *You Tube* that was posted in response to Grace Taylor's poem, where a young Palagi girl performs a spoken word piece exploring her self-claimed afakasi identity (Seitz 2012).

The main theme of the poem, as suggested by the title, is the way mixedness is experienced. This is not only how it is experienced by her, but also how other

people 'experience' her mixedness. Taylor's language deeply internalizes the state of mixedness, with imagery of bloodlines in her opening verse:

English roses

Snow blooded lines

Samoan tattoo

coco blooded lines

intertwined (1-5)

This imagery is densely connected with the body, which continues to be a highly personal way to describe the dynamics of mixedness for Pasifika. Her two cultural heritages are styled as 'snow blooded' and 'coco blooded' lines, which evokes the idea of 'bloodlines' as literally veins coursing through her body, a reference to the biological ways her mixedness is understood by others. An alternative reading of 'lines' is possible with the mention of 'Samoan tattoo'. Albert Wendt, in his discussion 'Tatauing the body of Pacific Literature' (1999) drew strong connections with tatau (and malu) as a narrative, both because of the symbols used in the tatau, but also in the very presence of the markings, which story its bearer as a servant of the community. As tatau is a collective act, and one that means you belong to the people (Ellis 2008:193-195), to describe your Pacific descent as a Samoan tattoo is to signal existing, deeply historical kinds of belonging to the Samoan community. One may find this a particularly meaningful reference in light of Salesa's work on mixedness as a very normal way of understanding Samoan identities. The tatau does not just signal a connection to her 'Samoan side', but rather is a visible illustration of a state that she naturally shares with her Samoan community. A further possible reading of 'lines' is as a reference to the lines of poetry that Taylor is speaking through, a different kind of literature from tatau but also powerful. As she stories her afakasi body through poetry, we see a continuation of the process begun by Mila and Marsh of negotiating mixed identities through creative texts.

Like Afa in Marsh's 'Afakasi pours herself afa cuppa coffee', Taylor is conscious of the authenticating behaviours that are expected of her as a white girl who identifies strongly as both Palagi and Samoan. She feels this particularly in relation to her skin colour:

White skin

nurtured in a brown community

struggling to find unity

within me (9-12)

The idea of 'nurture' is set alongside of 'struggle', their close proximity demonstrating the tensions of these feelings as they potentially exist. Significantly, she articulates performing polycultural capital to manage things (Bouncing from one skin to the next / putting my culture on to fit in with the rest, 13-14); her polycultural capital is storied as interchangeable, perhaps as clothing, removeable, a cover, a camouflage, reminiscent of Mila's six year old self. The fact she uses the word 'skins' to indicate how she performs for different cultural environs indicates her sense of playing 'their game' so to speak; she is tied to other peoples' expectations of her skin and what it means for them, instead of her own definitions. The deep dissatisfaction Taylor holds with this situation finds expression in this poem as she begins to address how, in performing willingly, she has fallen into the trap of justifying herself through authenticating factors; in the way she feels she must 'be a little louder / talk a little browner'(40-41), or 'wanting mum around me / as if she were a ticket / to prove I'm from the Polynesian family' (53-55). Taylor's response is to reject arbitrary authenticating expectations *but also to stop performing them*. By removing the need to perform, to legitimize herself, she allows her truth to be enough for her, suggesting that this is an important step in understanding of mixedness. Such a position emphasises the need to let go of authenticating factors, a move that would make space for theories of mixedness like Salesa's to inform and nurture space for mixed Pasifika to continue to grow.

The remainder of the poem illustrates this by playing with the common symbols of representation. Rather than continuing to apportion her white skin as representing 'the white side', she mixes these coded things as a gesture to the impossibility of discrete definitions. This may be seen in the following passage:

My blessed island curves

in this white skin

My English words

wrapped in humour that is undeniably Polynesian (82-85)

This verse descriptively intertwines word and body and heart in a reflection of the title 'Intertwined: Being Afakasi'. Her 'blessed island curves', which remind us of another set of issues related to representation of Pacific women, are bounded by 'white skin', which would normally be read as European. Her language, as for many other Pasifika, is English, and yet the heart of those words and what they story are imbued with Pacificness - here described as 'humour that is undeniably Polynesian'.

By this act of self acceptance Taylor empowers herself to move beyond the performance to prove belonging in any particular group, and instead claims the name 'afakasi' proudly. In Mila's 'there are no words for us' we saw the limitations of language in expressing what it means to be mixed. Here Taylor has chosen a name that works for her as a Samoan/Palagi, a name that for her references a particular set of experiences, so that instead of shifting and changing between worlds, she can just 'be', regardless of the attitude or challenges of authenticity from others. As Taylor intends, 'Afa Kasi' represents a progressive sense of mixed identity as something that is ongoing, both present and future:

it's Afa Kasi

the name itself acknowledges

a journey

a struggle

a celebration

a life (87-92)

The word 'journey' echoes the theme of Mila's 'there are no words for us'. Mila's crisscrossing pathways along biological lines were ultimately expanded to global waterways (which itself carries overtones of Hau'ofa's vision of 'Our Sea of Islands'), including everyone in its conclusion of mixedness. Mila's description of 'rupture and joy (9)' is similarly picked up here in Taylor's description of afakasi as 'a celebration'. In both, the sense of positivity combats the often negative connotations mixed-race people were and are often associated with, and with the somewhat oppressive attitudes of others.

Taylor represents afakasi subjectivity as fluid and always in motion. Words like 'journey', 'struggle', and 'celebration' affirms a sense of movement, whether the movement is from tensions ('struggle'), or from the natural progression of our lives. The movement is to the future, where, the reader is left imagining, an increasing sense of empowerment and self-defined identities may start to redefine the colour of skin or the smallness of representation. Certainly, as we are looking toward a new generation of Pasifika poets, many of whom are mixed, we see the space for fluidity and multipleness expand in dynamic, positive ways.

In this next section, we look at another space that is widening in vital ways, the feminist dimension of Pasifika poetry. Our discussion of Mana tama'ita'i Pasifika explores new ground broken by Mila and Marsh as Pacific women writers; this section looks at writer Courtney Sina Meredith as a bold, new voice expanding space for Pasifika women.

Courtney Sina Meredith: Rushing Dolls

Courtney Sina Meredith is another strong voice emerging in contemporary Pasifika literature. Now in her mid-twenties, she has published one award-winning play, one collection of poetry with another forthcoming, was selected as writer in residence for the LiteraturRaum Beibtreu Berlin in 2011, and has exhibited her work at Mangere Arts Centre in 2012. Aside from being highly prolific in her creative productions, Meredith, like Grace Taylor, backs the strength of her writing with a consciousness that is passionately attuned to nurturing and enabling young Pasifika to grow and succeed. In the introduction to her play 'Rushing Dolls', Meredith describes the motivation behind her writing:

I wanted to create a little world, based on my life, that could hold the truths and hopes of the community to which I belong. I could not find myself or my peers online, on TV, in books, in history or in the backyard. There was nowhere in the world to run and see my people shine – my burgeoning order of ambitious young Pacific and Maori women, born restless, born to realise the dreams of our ancestors while honouring our own contemporary will (Meredith 2012:265).

This claim strongly echoes the laments of Mila and Marsh that I opened this thesis with. Meredith's experiences recall Mila's girl in the library, and Marsh's girl who looked vainly for her reflection in the literary mirror. But of interest to this chapter is the way the 'truths and hopes' of her people, so clearly not reflected in wider discourse or in popular representations about Pasifika, *are her experience*. The fact she has felt so keenly the 'truths' of her world, that they haven't been repressed or obscured by other peoples' expectations or boxes, speaks to an ever expanding space that Pasifika are moving in. Meredith's comment also illustrates that Mila's determined gesture of writing over 'someone else imposing their vision of the worlds over everything you do. Someone else telling your stories and dreaming words coming out of your mouth' (Mila-Schaaf 2009:10), is also the place that Meredith goes to, to create a place for her people to shine.

Meredith's compelling vision of her peers as a generation 'born restless', speaks of a sense of possibility that is far removed from the rhetoric of Pacific identities as being 'lost' or 'caught in-between'. This new generation, according to Meredith, seem to make sense of their world by internalising and realising the migrant generation's ambitions for their children, whilst taking a more assertive stance on what is important to them, or in what ways they want the future to look like for them. Rather than Pasifika negotiating what may sometimes feel like two different kinds of oppression (a Palagi society on the one hand and the sometimes onerous expectations of the Pacific community on the other), this statement suggests a future that incorporates ancient Pacific visions from the past which will further Pasifika horizons far beyond what their parents and grandparents may have imagined. This configuration of the way Pacific knowledge and identities are being produced – that the future comes from the past – may be seen in Meredith's work as evidence of a convincing and compelling trajectory into the Pasifika future.

Such themes and visions preface Meredith's play 'Rushing Dolls'. It centres on two young Pasifika women: Cleo Felise and Sia Felise, who are cousins, creative artists, and best friends. Cleo is described as a 'Charismatic, sophisticated, and striking' Samoan girl in her early-mid twenties (266), whilst Sia is about one year older, 'opinionated, dismissive', beautiful, and a talented multi-media artist (266).

The world of Cleo and Sia richly weaves these things together to create a startling, bold literary and performative text, that, like Meredith's poem 'Brown Girls in Bright Red Lipstick' (2012), suggests a new direction for Pasifika literature. Both 'Rushing Dolls' and 'Brown Girls in Bright Red Lipstick' (2012) weave strands about highly contemporary experiences of being brown in New Zealand, including what it means to be a Pasifika woman today. Several instances in the text specifically identify women as the path forward: additionally interwoven in the text is a strong mana tama'ita'i thread. Written in language that is forceful and confronting, yet highly engaging, Meredith's play richly builds upon the work of Mila and Marsh in reflecting mana tam'ita'i Pasifika values, but also boldly pushes the notion of Pasifika feminism right to the edge.

An example of this might be seen in Meredith's use of language, in contrast to Mila and Marsh, who generally avoid the use of swearwords. Mila's examples are fairly innocuous slang uses, such as 'buy me shit' for 'buy me stuff'. This point feels worth making, especially in light of both Mila and Marsh's critique of the boys' profanity in their poetic responses to *Sione's Wedding*. Their protests highlighted a dynamic in the movie where swearing emphasized gender difference (see Stapleton 2010:292); the boys were styled as hip, street-edged guys (where swearing backs this up), as opposed to the women characters, who were quiet, well behaved, and spoke 'properly'. The fact that Cleo and Sia roll swearwords off their tongues with complete familiarity shows they are comfortable with such expressions. As the girls claim themselves as 'of the people', the use of swearwords is a device that connects them with a broader demographic. As Stapleton notes, 'In most languages, swearing is strongly linked to the vernacular, thereby carrying connotations of "working class culture" and low socioeconomic groupings' (2010:291). As Cleo and Sia come from working class roots but are upwardly mobile themselves, their language not only ignores a social expectation that the higher class you become, the less you swear, but even more importantly asserts women as being as confident and colourful in their use of language as any male. The effect of this is to liberate Pasifika women from social expectations of class and gender, allowing them to mould who they are as women for themselves.

Not only are Cleo and Sia ignoring social conventions, but their profanity extends to the word 'cunt' (6.42), a highly taboo word in New Zealand society at this time. This stretching to the outer limits of inappropriateness serves as an example of the way Meredith's characters are indeed a new breed, dynamic and pushing boundaries to create a new world.

Another significant feature in Meredith's play is in her treatment of women as harbingers of their own destiny. The play is intended to represent the swelling ranks of 'ambitious young Pacific and Maori women' (Meredith 2012:265). And, indeed, there are several key ways that 'Rushing Dolls' works as a text that builds upon mana tama'ita'i Pasifika as a feminist literary framework. Where Mila sought to break silences in considered, careful ways, and where Marsh turned to Pacific

women's own representations of themselves as a counter to what was being produced by others; Meredith is brash and bold in the topics she broaches, and pulls no punches in dealing with the issues of representation by others, or patriarchal systems from within the Pacific. Following on from *Vula* and *Frangipani Perfume*, 'Rushing Dolls' is an unapologetically woman-centric play whose two characters are strong, bold, and female. Cleo and Sia, while exhibiting what might be understood as fairly typical attitudes to their mothers, hold their grandmother in extremely high regard, something mirrored by Meredith's dedication of her play to her own grandmother, calling her 'the original Rushing Doll', a reflection of the high respect elders are held in Pacific cultures, and also a symbolic representation of the 'dreams of our ancestors'.

A particularly rich example is found in Scene Five, when Cleo is pitching *World Class Inc.* to the deputy prime-minister of Samoa:

CLEO: Pacific and Maori women, within creative industries, those who are engaged with their dreams ... they're our Rushing Dolls –

SIA: (*Wiping sauce off her chin*) Which, good gentlemen, is us. (*Pointing to CLEO*) She's a poet, and I'm an artist – a multimedia artist.

CLEO: Here's how I see it. Every race has its documented pioneers and heroes – warriors, scientists, priests, rugby players, judges, music producers. It's a boys' club, and no offence, guys, but you're wonderful examples. What if all this time, there's been another group of trailblazers, a group that history ignores. Rushing Dolls. Young women who read the stars in their own reflection, who knew the source, everyday daughters, mothers, sisters, who lived out whole lives with this hot, restless blood. I'm living under its spell. (5.76-88)

Here Cleo, in pursuit of her own dream, claims that her dreams, and the dreams of Pacific women, are beneficial for the whole of the region. Cleo fearlessly identifies the way role models and respected people are often men. Her use of the word 'documented' alludes to the fact that these are select representations, and there

are others that have lost out because of the agenda of others, including the agenda that keeps men as the most popular role models. Cleo is arguing that in the systemic preference for men, women have been overlooked. The suggestion is that Cleo in fact holds the key to a different future for the whole region.

This passage also has faint echoes to 'On Smelling Frangipani Perfume.'

'Trailblazing' young women who 'read the stars in their own reflection' remind us of Marsh's description of mop strokes that 'streak a mile of sisterly connection' through the sky. The juxtaposition of the sisters' position as cleaners constrained within a cycle that affords them few opportunities for advancement contrasts with Cleo and Sia, who fight their way toward their futures, although this is only possible with a greater disconnection from family, as opposed to the sisters of *Frangipani Perfume* who were deeply (and complicatedly) committed to each other and to their ailing father. The reference to 'reflection' offers a further connection to *Vula*, where the importance of reflections suggests the easily disturbed nature of representations, as well as the nature of illusion.

Cleo and Sia illustrate a savvy awareness of the politics of representation for them as Pasifika women. This is demonstrated through the recurring image of dolls in the play. In Scene Two, the girls are attending a gallery opening and their attention is captured by an art exhibit, 'girl', with an artist statement that reads 'Girl, sixteen, pregnant, lives in south Auckland, has no prospects, likes to tag dairy walls' (2.13-14). The politics of representation are familiar enough to a contemporary reader to pick up instantly the stereotypes 'girl' invokes. The brown doll is styled as Māori (it has an 'itty, bitty moko' 2.23), but the wider politics of brown stereotypes are under discussion. The play acknowledges the nuances of such stereotypes, including the problematic fact Sia claims they are legitimized if they come from *someone who looks brown* (2.64), and foreshadows a later scene where Sia mentions Cleo's out of school fourteen year old pregnant sister (12.87-88). This comes out in Sia's criticism of Cleo for leaving the family behind, blaming her for the state of her sister. This positions Cleo in the feminist quandary of professional fulfilment 'versus' family life (usually thought of in western feminist scenarios as between a woman and her children (Lloyd and Few 2009); but in this rendering shows a wider

Pacific sense of family being invoked). The important point that families need support is juxtaposed with Cleo's clear-sighted ambition, a tension that is not resolved through the text. This leaves an important open-endedness to the discussion for future Pasifika women to continue.

Dolls also are intertextually connected with the work of Mila. Sia decries the artwork 'girl' as being 'like Manu without fucking Big Ted and Little Ted'. Once again Manu from playschool, used in 'Eating Dark Chocolate and Watching Paul Holmes' Apology, is styled as an example of an undesirable toy due to its dark colouring. An additional reason why 'doll' is a powerful image in the play is the fact that it has in the past been a slang term for 'woman'. This laconic usage has previously invoked a fifties mentality of women as their playthings, dependent and unautonomous.

Meredith appropriates the imagery and distilled lines that the word 'doll' invokes into one overarching symbol: a Rushing Doll. This term, a play on Russian dolls, develops the imagery of multiple selves of Pasifika in a dynamic way. Framing them as 'rushing' reclaims doll for women, disrupts the inactivity or unimportant nature of a doll and gives women instead a progressive form of a high energy word. In the same way that Russian dolls exist multiply in one form, so too do Pasifika. What is more, by keeping the doll imagery, Meredith is able to reclaim it, from slights of manu, from Barbie, from the taint of discursively produced images to one of her own making. She is a 'Rushing' doll, not only multiple but high in energy and movement, going places, dynamic.

Cleo and Sia's energy comes partly from the fast pace of the play. The dialogue between the two characters is quick, and the free flow of the conversation between the cousins, including the fast pace of topics that the girls switch back and forth between, and indicates a pace and energy that Cleo is constantly ascribing to young Pacific women. The movement of the play itself is quick, the scenes progress quickly through a narrative that is propelled by Cleo's urgent, compelling chase after her dreams.

A final important feature that breaks new ground for mana tama'ita'i Pasifika is Meredith's storying of diverse sexualities. No Pasifika creative writing has been as yet this open, this blatant, and this honest about women's alternative sexualities³⁴. A previous lesbian character – Naiki in *Frangipani Perfume* – is an important precursor to Meredith's Cleo, but Naiki's awakening sexuality is framed within her family dynamics, and therefore is in some ways constrained by that. In contrast, Cleo's bi-sexuality is bluntly treated. It is introduced through the conversation about 'girl' in Scene Two where it is identified that Cleo is two months into a relationship with a (Palagi) woman, and is referenced in Cleo's poem 'Brown girls in bright red lipstick'. This an independent poem, which is also the title of Meredith's poetry collection, and a poem within the play:

Brown girls in bright red lipstick
have you seen them
with their nice white girlfriends
reading Pablo Neruda
on fire, the crotch of suburbia (9.41-15)

The poem is full of sexually charged references, another example of the open treatment of sex and sexuality in the play. Furthermore, Meredith is deliberately intentional in this openness, as evidenced by Cleo in a scene addressing school leavers from a local college in South Auckland:

CLEO: We just had some gay pipe band. And before you give me evils, I can say 'gay' because I'm bi. You're old enough for the truth, mine and yours (10.12-13)

³⁴ Relatedly, the play *A Frigate Bird Sings* by Oscar Kightley and Dave Armstrong (2012) stories a fa'afafine, and is an example of an exploration of an alternative sexuality in Pacific literature. In the murky world of gender politics and sex essentialism, these various treatments of alternative sexualities support a widening space, whether for men, women, or those who identify outside of those categories.

This passage offers a simple acknowledgement from Cleo that such realities are no longer to be hidden as they grow into adulthood. In the reference to being 'old enough for the truth', Cleo could be indicating what she sees as a taboo of sexualities for children and young people. Certainly, if we remember the work of Anne-Marie Tupuola, it was not only the domain of the adult, but also of the married. By speaking sexuality to young, unmarried seventeen and eighteen year olds, Meredith breaks both these taboos. Such bluntness around sexualities also contrasts startlingly with Mila's carefully swathed words, half-hidden in the dance of heliaki. Rather, Cleo's claiming of the 'truth', one that belongs to both herself and to others, illustrates a Pacific sense of 'truth' as 'many truths, preferred truths, flexible truths, different versions of reality that existed for different purposes in Pacific cultures' (Mila-Schaaf 2009:5).

What Courtney Sina Meredith and Grace Taylor show in their creative productions is a highly conscious knowledge of the power of their own voices. Speaking new, many, flexible truths out of the truths that Mila and Marsh have spoken, they forward the progression of Pasifika literature in fascinating ways. Their use of performance poetry indicates a growing trend for the flight of poetry to find new forms and places of expression other than the printed word; although this by no means reduces the importance of the printed form for either of these poets, who are either published in print (Meredith) or pending publication (Taylor).

They might be seen as new beacons in Pasifika literature, continuing to break taboos and opening up conceptions of Pasifika identity even further. Taylor's focus on afakasi identity has become somewhat of a crusade, emphasising the *normality* of this state of being, a conception supported by Meredith's work³⁵. Meredith's treatment of sexualities, and the description of Pasifika women as a highly dynamic, progressive generation offers some insight into the group that Meredith describes as 'born restless'. These are made possible through their commitment to storying

³⁵ Mixedness is a strong strand in 'Rushing Dolls', and was treated alongside the discussion of 'girl' in Scene Two. In keeping the focus of this chapter upon Meredith's work as mana tama'ita'i Pasifika text, I have left this important strand to be explored by future scholars.

these aspects of themselves, and in doing so intentionally make space for more, increasingly fluid, diverse, boundary-edging stories to be told.

Conclusion

That's Our Stuff

Throughout their professional lives, Karlo Mila and Selina Tusitala Marsh have engaged in both critical scholarship and creative writing to develop and enhance the field of Pasifika literature and the world of Pasifika. To these related, overlapping ends, they have challenged norms and pushed boundaries in various arenas. As I have explored the connections between Pasifika literature and Pasifika identity through their work, one of the strongest threads that runs between these two points is the expansion of Pasifika identities as fluid, multiple, open-ended, and continuous.

Whilst it would be easy for some to frame this idea of the movement of Pasifika identity as somehow new and revolutionary, as evident in every chapter of this thesis there is, in fact, a wealth of Pacific-centric scholarship that is increasingly interested in pre-colonial conceptualisations of identity. A major theoretical concept in the Pacific, and one utilized in this thesis, is the idea of the *vā* as a space filled with meaning, a space of connection and relationship. The deployment of such scholarship against the idea of a 'modern' Pasifika identity has highlighted the way that multiple open-ended ways of being are consistent with how many Pacific peoples have conceived of themselves in the past. It enables the foregrounding of certain relationships that are key to Pasifika at this time in their history, and allows for a contextual analysis of Pasifika in a way that highlights the specificities of location and social fabric.

The concept of the *vā* has helped to frame the relationship that I have argued exists between Pasifika identity and Pasifika literature. Building on Ka'ili's work that emphasised the *vā* as a social space to be *nurtured*, this thesis suggest that Pasifika literature performs tauhi *vā* for other Pasifika identities and also for other Pasifika literary works to emerge. By nurturing and growing the connections between the two things, the *vā* between increases in size and dynamism, which in turn has flow on effects for future Pasifika literary productions and Pasifika identities.

One way this thesis illustrates these ideas is through the use of Mila and Marsh's academic and creative literature alongside each other. Their work has blurred western academic distinctions between art and scholarship, drawing it ever closer toward Pacific-centred scholarship (Teaiwa and Marsh 2010:238). This is a critical point, as this shift is a part of a wider Pacific movement towards decolonization – particularly in the area of education (see for instance Smith 1999:16; Thaman 2003; Hereniko 2000; Trask 1997). The formulation of theories alongside their creative productions strengthens both indigenous knowledge production and models the need for indigenous critical frameworks by which to critique and understand Pasifika creative arts and literature, as opposed to Western paradigms (see Thaman 2003). In troubling the boundaries between academic and creative distinctions, and in emphasizing the need for Pacific-centric critical scholarship by which to view the new forms, Mila and Marsh emphasise important epistemological concepts for future directions in Pasifika scholarship and creative production.

The space of Pasifika literature has been shaped by their ground breaking work. In an interview with Mila, Maryanne Pale asked 'What do you think sets Pacific writers apart from those of other ethnicities?' Mila replied:

That we are barely in print; that we are constantly fed a diet of other peoples' stories and experiences. . . . We must be the protagonists wrought by our own pens, not shadows in other people's stories. (Pale 2012)

Motivated by the paucity of Pasifika literature and the image of a girl not seeing herself in the library, or in the literary mirror, Mila and Marsh both have dedicated themselves to nurturing the development of Pasifika literatures and by extension, Pasifika identity. In this thesis, we have explored how they have done this through firstly looking at the way they have expanded space in the highly personal arena of mixedness. The caramello generation does not lack for outside opinions on their mixedness; both Palagi society and Pacific communities look for authenticating features in the mixed-race Pasifika. Mila and Marsh both address the expectations of others whilst seeking to understand mixedness without reference to these expectations. Both poets find resolutions in understanding mixedness as open,

fluid, and normal; a very Pacific-centric conceptualization of mixedness. By articulating this very important aspect of many Pasifika's experiences, Mila and Marsh have provided a space where they can eventually see themselves not as darkies, not as inauthentic brown people, but as mixed Pasifika, widening the palate of the world.

Mila and Marsh have also intentionally created space for Pasifika women to both write and read. Their role as Pacific feminists, as discussed in depth in Chapter Three, is most usefully thought of in terms of my suggested theoretical framework *mana tama'ita'i Pasifika*. This framework allows the consideration of some important, deeply personal points: the continuing issue of women's representations not only by European men, but also by Pacific men (and the attendant conversation about women's oppression by Pacific men); the formulation of alternative genealogies/ mythologies as a counter to the genealogy of the dusky maiden; and the compromised relationship between women's sexualities and the expectations of their Pacific communities. This is a brave new world being opened up, not least because it involves challenging some deeply held and integral Pacific 'traditions'. *Mana tama'ita'i Pasifika* offers the existence of other Pacific-centric, indigenous ways for women to be themselves; this alternative may assist in allowing women to transgress imposed conceptions of womanhood whilst keeping their Pasifika identities secure.

To see Mila and Marsh's works as *mana tama'ita'i Pasifika* texts is to privilege a sense of the multiple, fluid, open identities of Pasifika further opened up by being a woman. This means that characters such as Cleo from 'Rushing Dolls' is a startling new kind of girl, one who is not afraid to own her bi-sexuality, or take charge of her own destiny in visionary ways. As there are a number of young Pasifika women active in literary production, it feels like the articulations of sexualities by Mila and taking ownership of their own images and image production by Marsh has provided a strong, necessary platform from which Pasifika women can further their worlds and articulate with freedom.

These examples of the way Mila and Marsh have nurtured space for young Pasifika to know and write themselves demonstrate that the connections between Pasifika literature and Pasifika identities are complex, nuanced, and numerous. But what this thesis has revealed, over and over again, is just how powerful our stories can be. The power of literature is evident in Marsh's reflections about the young 'last chance' alternative education students that she performed 'Fast Talkin' PI' to:

They were familiar with the vernacular of free-styling, hip-hop, impromptu verbal battling, rap, and word slamming from American-inspired rap and hip-hop culture which is increasingly infused with local flavours and styles. These 'social reprobates' were sophisticated, critical listeners. A few months later they invited me back and responded in kind with their own distinctive version of the poem. Many of them were beginning to heal in this environment, and they were already writing poetry. I just showed them another kind of word sparring (Marsh 2011:37).

Marsh recognized that the young people she was talking to were already 'sophisticated, critical listeners', and further to this, were able to transform listeners into Fast Talkers. To recognize these 'social reprobates' for the knowledge and latent ability that they carried requires a removal of western ideas of 'education', and instead indicate the kinds of approaches needed in order to meaningfully deconstruct and reconstruct the knowledges that they already hold. This powerfully illustrates how the blurry lines between scholarship and art enable important connections with developing Pasifika identities: not only does it help to recognize different kinds of knowledge, but it shows how the way Mila and Marsh recognize, engage, and validate the ability of their multiple audiences including young Pasifika to be 'sophisticated critical listeners', an affirming, positive identity reinforcement.

Mila and Marsh have created space for a diverse range of identities to identify as 'Pasifika', regardless of sexual orientation or mixedness, or lack of authentic markers, or even lack of polycultural capital. Pasifika identities are expansive and encompassing, an inclusive, safe place for identities to be shaped and formed.

Furthermore, Mila and Marsh's literary works have transformed the landscape of Pacific literature, opening new ground for new kinds of literary works. Their popular published works are complemented by numerous performances and *You Tube* videos – suggesting that the printed word is not a validating 'bar' to authenticate writers as 'real'. It is actually in the act of storying, whether in a spoken word performance or privately scratched out on a piece of paper, that the life-cycle of Pasifika literature continues and an act of reclamation and empowerment has occurred.

Ultimately, the ability of Mila and Marsh's works to speak to identities, speak about them, to help construct them, and to contribute to them reflects the transformative power of storying ourselves. As we see the establishment of more and more Pasifika poets, the directions and diversity of Pasifika literature and Pasifika identity will be exciting new trajectories to follow.

It has been eight years since I was that third year student, waiting in my tutorial, flicking through the pages, seeing my stuff. Since that moment, Pasifika literature has shaped my life in different ways. One of the most important things it has given is my identity as a Pasifika woman. Having an identity secured deeply and wholeheartedly in the Pacific has not only impacted me and my worldview, but continues in the life of my daughter, born during the writing of this thesis. As 'mother' has become an additional strand of my multiplicitous identity, I am committed to cultivating my connections with Pasifika communities and with the wider Pacific even more closely, and nurturing my daughter's knowledge and pride in her own Pasifika heritage.

This is her stuff.

This sense of the future is discussed by a Pasifika man interviewed by Mila during her doctoral studies. Tama describes his sense of being Pasifika as something expansive, fluid, and progressive (Mila-Schaaf 2010:81). He also shares his wonder when thinking about future generations of Pasifika in Aotearoa:

You know, I look in my son's eyes, this may sound really corny – but I do I look in them and I think, '*Man*, your [sic] going to be *something different*'. And that's exciting. And I'd love to see them, sitting with your kids, or whatever, a group of them, in thirty years from now. And what are going to be some of their experiences? What's going to constitute being Pasifika growing up in the 21st century? And that, to me, is quite an exciting prospect' (82).

This thesis has, in some small way, captured a moment in time, a moment that is changing even as I write. As the work of Mila and Marsh and a growing movement of Pasifika creative writers and academics continues to light the way of an ever increasing number of artists and scholars, the promise of the future lies with multi-ethnic, rural, urban, GLBT, male, female, oldest, youngest, fair, caramello, dark, bilingual, multilingual, culturally hesitant, tataued, malued, happy-go-lucky, lipstick wearing, fast-talking Pasifika.

This is our stuff.

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