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Encountering Tūrangawaewae and
Whanaungatanga: Māori, Interconnection and a
Place to Stand in *Kairākau* and *Aroha Bridge*

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Abstract

The establishment of Māori Television, alongside the development of public funding agencies like NZ on Air, and the expansion of media consumption to include online spaces has meant that Māori media has become an increasingly significant presence in the lives of both Māori and non-Māori viewers. However, there remains relatively little research into the ways in which this media can facilitate understanding of te ao Māori. Combining elements of postcolonial theory and kaupapa Māori criticism, this thesis examines the ways in which the textual representations, production practices, and distribution methods of the webseries *Aroha Bridge* and the television series *Kairākau* shape an understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga. The thesis shows how the textual representations within the two series construct tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga in complementary but also contrasting ways, providing a place to stand and fostering connections that are, for example, dynamic and informed by tradition, and that value cultural hybridity and autonomy. Through analysis of the production and distribution contexts in which the series are situated, the thesis also highlights the economic, cultural, and technological factors that present opportunities or obstacles for the realisation of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga on and off screen. The thesis thus reveals the value of Māori media as a resource for learning about te ao Māori, the ways in which te ao Māori is evolving in the contemporary mediascape, and the structural factors upon which these developments are contingent.

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Introduction

The contemporary televisual terrain of Aotearoa New Zealand has become an increasingly inclusive territory for Māori, as evidenced by a rising number of on and off screen industry professionals. Despite this growth in presence and representation, there remains relatively little research into the ways in which this media can facilitate understanding of te ao Māori. Relevant existing research, particularly Jo Smith's canon of works including *Māori Television: The First Ten Years*, "Māori Television's Indigenous Insistence", "Postcolonial Māori Television?", and "Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou", written in collaboration with Sue Abel, suggest that in the revolutionary organisational structures and ideological objectives framing the production of Māori media lies the potential for Māori viewers to engage in processes of cultural renewal and language revitalisation. In "Kanohi ti ke Kanohi", Acushla Deanne O'Carroll asserts that the innovative modes of connection and communication promoted in online distribution platforms has created virtual arenas for engagement with Māori tikanga, which when read alongside Smith and Abel, reveals that interacting with Māori media in online spaces can facilitate new understanding of te ao Māori. However, Melanie Wall's "Stereotypical Constructions" and Awanui Te Huia's "Pākehā Learners" highlight that significant concerns remain regarding the perpetuation of reductive representations of Māori in the media of Aotearoa New Zealand and the role such representations may play in shaping perceptions of Māori in wider society – a legacy of colonial discourse that Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism* suggests may circulate within Indigenous communities themselves. This thesis will explore these debates further through the lens of two recent Māori media texts: the television series, *Kairākau*, and the webseries, *Aroha Bridge*. I will examine how the textual representations within these programmes, and their production and distribution contexts, might shape an

understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga. This exploration will shed light on how both *Kairākau* and *Aroha Bridge* are situated within postcolonial power relations in Aotearoa New Zealand. In these ways, my thesis will attempt to reconcile elements of a kaupapa Māori media approach with a more conventional postcolonial theory approach. As a naturalised Pākehā, I must acknowledge that my understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga will inevitably lack the cultural insight of Māori scholars working within media studies who possess a lived experience of these concepts. However, over the course of my research, I hope to produce insights that may be of relevance to Māori as well as Pākehā scholars. By adopting an approach that draws upon postcolonial theory while also recognising its limitations, I also hope to contribute to a partial decolonisation of the approaches employed within Media Studies here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Postcolonial theory has been useful in dismantling and discrediting the racist discourse that underpinned colonialism and continues to mark the contemporary mediascape of postcolonial nations (Shohat and Stam 15). It has also provided a way of thinking about the complexities of Indigenous self-representation in light of colonialism by foregrounding some of the continuing institutional, ideological, and societal challenges faced by Māori media (“Theorizing Indigenous Media” 102-3). However, in recent years, the effectiveness of postcolonial theory as a framework within which both Indigenous and Western scholars can confront the consequences of colonization has been called into question, and therefore its contemporary usage must be carefully navigated. In his essay “Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism”, Shaobo Xie notes that critics such as Linda Hutcheon, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhaba have all expressed scepticism at the possibility of an “uncontaminated” or “Indigenous” postcolonial theory as “postcolonialism designates a subversive discourse *within* the dominant Eurocentric culture rather than *outside* it” (7, italics mine). Thus, these critics argue that when issues rooted in non-Western identities and communities are examined

through postcolonial theory, the resulting discourse cannot escape the residues of Eurocentrism. In a more damning interpretation of postcolonialism, Ella Shohat argues that the suggestion of “pastness” implied by the term postcolonial inadvertently belies the persistence of “global hegemony” in forms other than colonial rule: a sentiment echoed and intensified in Arif Dirlik’s accusation that postcolonial scholars are complicit in obscuring “contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination” behind retrospective historical analysis (qtd. in Xie 8). As a result of these pitfalls, both Māori and non-Māori scholars operating within Western systems of power have utilised te ao Māori concepts and practices as tools to bypass or adapt a postcolonial theoretical framework when exploring Māori identities, communities, and interrelationships in contemporary academia – a kaupapa Māori approach to criticism. Despite the complex issues embedded within postcolonial theory, it remains a useful tool for considering how Indigenous people might “redefine, reformulate and reconstruct the colonized self” in the face of the ongoing, and often clandestine, neo-colonial processes that disempower ethnic minority communities (Sawant 130). In particular, postcolonial theory’s continued scrutiny of the ways in which Western literature, film, and media more generally, articulate minority ethnicity and culture is central to any understanding of how Māori media may constitute a reaction against Eurocentric misrepresentation. My thesis will thus combine consideration of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga with postcolonial theory, offering new insights into the textual representation, production, and distribution of Māori media.

These two Māori conceptual frameworks have taken on new significance in postcolonial Aotearoa New Zealand, where Māori communities are often considered diasporic and dislocated. In the face of social, cultural, and technological changes, Māori have had to enact innovative approaches to establishing position and connection within the

new media landscape. As such, the ways in which tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga are conceptualised has changed over time.

The etymology of the first concept, tūrangawaewae, has a complex history. Comprised of two words, tūranga, meaning standing place, and waewae, meaning feet, tūrangawaewae in its most basic form is usually translated as “a place to stand” (“Papatūānuku – the land”). It is a term often used to describe the places in which Māori feel most empowered and connected as individuals and as a community, denoting both an internal and external foundation promoting a sense of belonging and security. As such, tūrangawaewae is considered a cornerstone of Māori experiences of well-being, alongside “whenua (earth) . . . whanaungatanga (kinship), whānau (family), wairua (spirit), hinengaro (mind, heart), whatumanawa (feelings), and tinana (body)” (Panelli & Tipa 453). For many Māori, tūrangawaewae remains integral to the conceptualisation of their spiritual, cultural, and physical place in Aotearoa New Zealand society. In its traditional configuration, tūrangawaewae was applied almost exclusively to areas of Māori tribal land, but its meaning has not remained static. More recent emphasis has been placed on marae settings as *the* foothold, both physical and ideological, for Māori and non-Māori alike. However, John Rangihau remarks that the marae space that once encircled tūrangawaewae may be reconstituted in the form of the community hall and sub(urban) meeting places:

Along the Taupo-Atiamuri road at a place called Maroa, if you turn right and go for about three miles you will see a meeting house in the middle of nowhere with nothing around it, no people there. A very fine looking meeting house, and it is just standing there, the Marae for the people in that place, and yet absolutely deserted. I suspect that there will be a lot more of these in the future so that the concept of Tūrangawaewae will have to change, and it is changing. Previously they centred around land around their home areas and thus it progressed to the Marae. I think it will progress a bit further to that area in which he is living at the

moment. If you can get the ideas, as to a British person this is his home or castle or village, a very sacrosanct place of ground, and here he is master. I suspect that this is changing also for the Maori and that he has learned so well that he has become so individualised to the extent that he can also put this Tūrangawaewae and all that it means on his house (7).

These developments suggest that tūrangawaewae is being redefined in the postcolonial era by the movement of Māoridom from communal to individualised modes of existence. Rangihau perceives that in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, the shared meeting place of the marae is being gradually replaced by the individual homestead as a foothold for Māori as their community becomes increasingly mobile, both nationally and internationally. Alongside this definition of tūrangawaewae as steadily inclusive of non-marae spaces came the adoption of the concept into the Pākehā lexicon. In this context, tūrangawaewae describes the feeling of belonging and “intuitive rightness” that Pākehā derive from being in the natural surroundings of Aotearoa New Zealand (Calder 4). The application of tūrangawaewae to individual territories, in tandem with the adoption of the concept by non-Māori to describe an affinity with natural surroundings as a whole, has loosened the tie between tūrangawaewae and the tribal land it originally demarcated.

Although Rangihau and Calder’s versions of tūrangawaewae have altered traditional understanding in light of societal changes such as urbanisation and biculturalism, respectively, they rely on physical spaces to constitute the secure foundation at the heart of tūrangawaewae. However, Māori digital artist and photographer Tony Bridge suggests that “[t]ūrangawaewae has different levels of understanding”:

The meaning can be geographical, as in home place. . . The feeling may relate to the place where I work, to an organisation or institution . . . Tūrangawaewae may be found within a spiritual tradition or community of faith. . . Tūrangawaewae may be found in family or within a tribe or culture. . . Of course one’s profession is also an aspect of Tūrangawaewae. . .

Tūrangawaewae may be found in a combination of all of these. It is an intricately-woven rope of many threads. Its centre, however, lies at the heart, in the heart space. . . Tūrangawaewae begins and exists within our hearts (“Te Kete”).

For Bridge, tūrangawaewae is a dynamic concept that can apply to many arenas, physical and metaphysical, internal and external. The spiritual aspects of tūrangawaewae have been interwoven with theology, too. Dr. Lily George, Paul Gilberd, Anthea Napier, Reverend Dr. Paul Reynolds, and Reverend Jolyon White’s “Tūrangawaewae: Whānau Wellbeing for All” asserts that “theologically, Tūrangawaewae is about encountering God’s love through the shared human experience of home, identity and belonging in the world” (48).

Tūrangawaewae has thus been assimilated into geographical, theological, and spiritual frameworks of understanding. However, these models may not entirely account for the ways in which contemporary Māori experience tūrangawaewae, given that digital spaces have added a new dimension to interpretations of “a place to stand”. The footholds of empowerment available to Māori need to be considered within a new, post-digital framework in order to understanding how te ao Māori is adapting to the challenges presented by modern Aotearoa New Zealand. Indeed, Māori are increasingly accessing and communicating in online environments, permitting the formation of immaterial meeting places in virtual forums wherein Māori can engage in community building and knowledge gathering. Consequently, the places in which Māori are empowered to express Māori tikanga and explore te ao Māori are no longer exclusive to physical spaces and are in fact being integrated into the shared online forums through which Māori can articulate their position in a globalised world through the exchange and communication of cultural artefacts and ideologies. My approach to exploring viewer encounters with tūrangawaewae in digital spaces is heavily influenced by the extensive kaupapa Māori research of Acushla Deanne O’Carroll, who focuses on the ways in which social media and online forums have re-forged processes of Māori identity

formation, maintaining interconnections, and disseminating te ao Māori. Following O’Carroll’s example, my thesis will explore the ways in which a virtual and televisual understanding of tūrangawaewae can be shaped by the representation and embodiment of this concept in *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau*.

James Richie begins his etymology of the second concept, whanaungatanga, by deconstructing the word into its three basic elements: whānau, ngā and tanga. He explains that whānau is the te reo Māori word broadly denoting family; ngā is an element that extends the word out beyond the confines of the family; and tanga “makes it a process concept concerned with everything about relationships between kin” (67). When combined, whanaungatanga denotes the empowering interconnections between family and community members that are an integral component of the spiritual, economic and cultural health of Māori communities and the flourishing of te ao Māori. Richie contends that the processes of establishing and nurturing these interconnections are so intrinsic to Māori community building that it is can be considered the “basic cement that holds things Māori together” (66). Prior to colonisation, whanaungatanga was defined entirely by whakapapa – or genealogy – with the process of whānau living and working together an implicit pre-requisite to establishing, maintaining and strengthening healthy “whānau ties and responsibilities” (Durie 2). Whakapapa continues to fortify whanaungatanga as an organising principle, allowing whānau to be placed “in the whole context of relationships and therefore how [Māori] relate to each other and how [Māori] should work with each other, argue with each other, live with each other” (Walker “Whānau, Whakapapa”). However, the composition of Māori families has changed drastically in the wake of colonisation, so that ancestral connections are often not so easily uncovered. Factors such as divorce, de facto partnerships, reduced fertility rates, urbanisation, and an ageing population have all influenced the ways in which the contemporary familial unit is conceptualised, and therefore, the ways in which

whanaungatanga is applied (Durie 4-8). Although these developments have been cited as potential obstacles to the realisation of whanaungatanga, Richie argues that even in the face of mass migration and culture loss, whanaungatanga continues to both “affirm and transcend” tribal identity (68). He does not perceive a weakening of bond-making processes, despite the fact that individual Māori may have lost contact with whānau through geographical separation. Rather, he perceives a potential strengthening of community networks as they have begun “interweaving so many strands”: those with whānau connections, and those without. In formal settings such as hui and tangi, processes of whanaungatanga are embodied through the use of powhiri and mihi whakatau to define the parameters of whakapapa connections, shared purpose, and relation to the event (“Māori ki Te Whare”). In more informal settings, whanaungatanga is often expressed through closely-knit kinship networks at work and at home, a communal approach to child rearing, and an intensive community support network (Le Grice, Braun & Wetherell 88-9).

The Digital Age has ushered in a new era in which communication between, and knowledge of, Māori communities is available to Māori with access to the internet, potentially dispensing with the need for geographical and temporal proximity to hapū and iwi for cultural enrichment. This new “E-whanaungatanga” has fundamentally changed the ways in which Māori can engage in whanaungatanga, allowing interconnection to be considered not only within local and national contexts, but also on a global scale (Waitoa et al. 45). O’Carroll suggests that although whanaungatanga was once delineated as the establishment and maintenance of meaningful relationships between those with whakapapa connections, more recent definitions have “extended beyond the nucleus of whānau, hapū and iwi to include non-whakapapa links and relationships of people who are bonded together through shared purpose” (“Kanohi” 124-5). My thesis will discuss how the on screen representations of familial and community interconnection within *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* might shape

viewer understandings of whanaungatanga, as well as how their production and distribution contexts might manifest this concept.

Selection of primary texts

The reasons behind my selection of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* as the primary texts within my thesis are threefold. In terms of textual representation, I selected these texts as the superficial contrast provided by the contemporary setting of *Aroha Bridge* and pre-colonial setting of *Kairākau* raised interesting questions about the approaches they would take to articulating tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga – a useful starting point for comparison. In terms of production, I selected *Aroha Bridge* as it is part of the recent expansion of Māori media into the webseries format, and is one of only six Māori-centric webseries in receipt of funding from NZ on Air’s Digital Media Fund between 2012-17, the others being *Kaupapa on the Couch*, *Mahinga Kai*, *Anamata*, *Kete Kōrero* and *Only in Aotearoa* (“Wonders of Digital”). In contrast, *Kairākau* is the first major Māori martial arts television show aired on primetime broadcast, following in the footsteps of the critically and commercially successful film *The Dead Lands*. Finally, in terms of distribution, I selected the texts in order to interrogate the ways in which online and broadcast platforms effect virtual viewer engagement with, and understandings of, tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga.

Locating myself

My academic interest in the ways in which Māori media may shape understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga was galvanised by my experiences as an expatriate of the United Kingdom and an immigrant to Aotearoa New Zealand. Born in Wegberg military camp in Germany, I spent my formative years moving between various locations in the multicultural melting pots of the United Kingdom and continental Europe. As a result, my adolescent identity was defined by transience and ‘rootlessness’. When, in early adulthood, I

emigrated to Aotearoa New Zealand and first encountered the concepts of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga during my university education I was impressed by how these fundamental Māori principles could inform the construction of my identity as a New Zealander, allowing me to find my own “place to stand” and cultivate meaningful relationships in my chosen homeland. During my own process of identity building, television became a vital instrument through which I was able to begin recognising the narratives of nationhood, biculturalism and Māoridom that shaped my understanding of how I fit into the cultural landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand. Furthermore, I came to realise that exposure to Māori programming such as *Kairākau* and *Aroha Bridge* could broaden my limited understanding of how Māori manifest tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga on a televisual, virtual, and societal level, acting as a pedagogical tool to increase my knowledge of te ao Māori (“*Māori Television's Indigenous Insistence*” 107). Consequently, the construction of my thesis is not solely an academic exercise, but also a record of the pedagogical process through which I will come closer to understanding my own engagement with tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga.

Given my exploration of te ao Māori from a Pākehā perspective, my work will be underpinned by the principles outlined in James Ritchie’s *Becoming Bicultural* and Alex Barnes’ educational study “What can Pākehā learn?” As a Pākehā commentator specialising in Māori affairs and tribal development, Ritchie begins his chapter “Principles of Action: A Credo for Working in the Māori World” with a statement of recognition essential for any Pākehā scholar working to produce ethical material on te ao Māori: “[i]n the Māori World I am an outsider, a visitor, and always will be” (51). Throughout my thesis I will remain aware of my own status as a visitor to on and off screen Māori communities, and acknowledge that in the process of analysing how Māori media can shape viewer understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga my interpretation will invariably be informed by my

own life experience and ideological frameworks. For Barnes, the Pākehā educators interviewed for his study recognised three components vital for ethical Māori-focused research: “knowing yourself” (19), “being with the complex and unknown” (21), and “reflecting on the benefits” (23). I will always keep my intention to better understand viewer encounters with tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga at the forefront of my research and recognise that learning about these “complex and unknown” concepts will require me to acknowledge that my understanding will not necessarily coincide with the interpretations of Māori. Finally, I recognise that the potential benefits that might emerge from this research may be vast for me personally, allowing me to encounter tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga in ways that challenge and resist my intrinsic Pākehā frameworks of understanding, but may also benefit Māori and Pākehā scholars looking to the ways in which Māori media can preserve te ao Māori through re-shaping perceptions. The interpretive aspects of my project exclude it from the canon of kaupapa Māori research, which focuses on affirming the centrality of Māori self-definitions and self-valuations within research by decentralising Pākehā structures of knowledge around Māori: an impossible task in a thesis grounded in a Pākehā perspective (“Kaupapa Māori Research”). Rather, I envision my thesis as complimentary to kaupapa Māori research methodologies in its attempt to recognise how Māori media institutions, and producers, are able to influence viewer understanding of te ao Māori through innovative representation, production, and distribution practices.

Methodology

The following methods will be underpinned by the methodological frameworks structuring Jo Smith’s *Māori Television*: historical, tikanga, programming, audiences, and politics of culture (3). Throughout my thesis I will utilise these frameworks to guide my research as I acknowledge the methodological contexts that shape the production and reception of Māori media.

The central method in my examination of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* will be a comparative formal analysis. The ubiquitous nature of television in the 21st century has prompted profound critical interest in the images, narratives, and ideologies circulated within contemporary programming, inducing the formation of television theory and criticism as scholarly disciplines. Within these disciplines textual analysis is an essential “toolkit” for media researchers, allowing them to assess, compare and understand media texts to illuminate “the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are and of how they fit into the world in which they live” (McKee qtd. in Bainbridge 224). Textual analysis of media has applications that extend beyond the boundaries of traditional film and television. Webisodes are increasingly being considered a viable televisual alternative for producers who want to create material that does not align with mainstream principles, and is therefore of interest to viewers looking to examine the subversive representation of underrepresented groups such as “women, LGBTQIA individuals and people of colour” (Alice 58-9). In my thesis, this method will allow an in-depth formal exploration of techniques and devices including dialogue, cinematography, animation, costume, characterisation, chronology (analepsis and prolepsis), allusion, symbolism, metaphor, and analogy. This will illuminate the ways in which *Kairākau* and *Aroha Bridge* shape viewer understandings of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga, and in turn, how the historical, cultural, and political frameworks noted by Smith influence Māori programming on a formal level.

The primary method of textual analysis will be supported by an interrogation of the Political Economy of media production and distribution in Aotearoa New Zealand. The study of the Political Economy of media explores the interplay between technology, ownership, and control in relation to how these factors influence the production, distribution, and consumption of media texts (Miller 23). Wayne Hope and Merja Myllylahti assert that the

Political Economy of Aotearoa New Zealand's media is shaped by the increasing pressure of the financialisation of media ownership, a trend that "prioritises short-term returns over long-term viability of media institutions" (194). This drive for immediate fiscal reward shapes the production and distribution of the majority of mainstream media. Therefore, it is vital that my thesis considers the role of publically funded institutions such as NZ on Air and Māori Television within this environment, given that it is these institutions that provided the material means of production for *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* respectively. Also, consideration will be given to the historical development of Aotearoa New Zealand's media, and the impact this context has on indigenous programming. I will access *Kairākau* through Māori Television's online platform and *Aroha Bridge* through the NZ on Screen website and *Arohahbridge.com*.

The third method I will use is critical discourse analysis. Teun A. Van Dijk defines critical discourse analysis as an academic practice that studies the ways in which socio-cultural power relations and inequalities are perpetuated, legitimised, and resisted by text and talk within social and political contexts (466). I will draw from critical discourse analysis in a limited fashion in order to explore online social media conversations surrounding *Kairākau* and *Aroha Bridge* in the form of comments on the Facebook and YouTube platforms. These comments will allow me to gain insight into how viewers are responding to the primary texts, and what implications this may have for their understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga.

My final method will involve basic data collection from YouTube and Facebook. Gove N. Allen, Dan L. Burk and Gordon B. Davis posit that in contemporary academia, commercial internet resources have become a central site for the collection of research data (600). The purpose of data collection can vary widely, depending on desired research outcomes. Data can be used to collect background information surrounding online

engagement, examine the ways in which a website itself functions, provide information about theoretical approaches that may be modelled in internet resources, and permit analysis of public information. The collection of basic data within my thesis will be contained within the latter category, as I use the public metrics of comments, shares, reactions and views to assess the level of viewer engagement with Māori media on Facebook and YouTube, following the example of Smith's audience framework. The purpose of selecting Facebook and YouTube for the discourse and data analysis portion of this thesis is because they represent the two largest online platforms for the consumption of video, and therefore, should offer the most comprehensive insight into trends in virtual viewer engagement with Māori media ("Where are the Audiences?")

Chapter One: Literature Review

The works on tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga outlined in my definitions of the concepts introduce a kaupapa Māori perspective to my thesis, which, when combined with the long tradition of postcolonial theory, will illuminate the ways in which Māori media may be utilising te ao Māori concepts to forge new understanding of Māori communities and worldviews. My literature review will examine foundational postcolonial texts before moving the conversation forward to contemporary debates crystallising around Eurocentrism, hybridity, and biculturalism. Next, I will relocate the postcolonial corpus into a specifically Aotearoa New Zealand context, historicising the struggle for Māori rights within the film and television industry. I will then acknowledge some of the key representational, institutional, and cultural debates informing contemporary discussion of Māori and the media, paying particular attention to works that highlight the competing tensions framing te ao Māori, both on and off screen. Finally, I will synthesise a wide variety of material centring on the efficacy of the internet as a space of subversive political potential through works which focus on the impact that virtual spaces have had on media consumption and Māori tikanga.

Postcolonial theorists Edward Said and Frantz Fanon conduct retrospective analysis across several foundational works that urge the academic world to recognise and confront the ongoing ideological effects of Western colonial practices. Said's watershed work *Orientalism* navigates the complexities of the ideological warfare waged on the Indigenous people of colonised territories by the imperial regime. The focal point of Said's argument is that the perceived ideological divide between the West and the Orient solidified during the late Victorian era – and the stereotypical images of indigeneity circulated within this superficial

“ontological and epistemological distinction” – was an imperialist Manichean construction designed to politically, commercially, and ideologically endorse the colonial endeavour (2). This relegated non-Western identities and territories to the margins of ‘society’ within which the savage Other is defined by their inferiority to the Western citizen. In order to naturalise the image of Indigenous people as savages – an ideological imperative designed to justify colonial expansion as a mission of moral enlightenment – the popular media of the time, most prominently Western literature and cinema, systematically disseminated images of indigeneity devoid of the cultural complexity and interiority afforded to Europeans. In his recognition of the West’s manufacture of ‘The Native’, Said’s work echoes that of earlier postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon, whose influential texts “The North African Syndrome”, *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks* make explicit the delineation of colonised people with a dehumanised, lesser existence. Within the framework of Fanon’s theories, colonisation was a process of alienation and evacuation through which Indigenous people were reduced to “creatures starving for humanity” and “emptied of substance” by a colonial regime that imagined non-Western identities as little more than signifiers of Western superiority (qtd. in Majumdar 98). As such, postcolonialism – colonialism’s antithesis – is defined by Fanon as the ideological movement of Indigenous communities to reclaim their humanity from the spectre of the savage that continues to haunt page and screen. In their recognition of Western media as a key disseminator of colonial ideology, both Said and Fanon signal the need for Indigenous people to establish their own footholds within media production in order to address the imbalance of representation that has persisted into the present day.

Said and Fanon’s body of works are undoubtedly critical in communicating the issues that emerge at the intersection of culture, ethnicity, and the media. However, they are primarily retrospective works, whose purpose is to expose the false colonial narratives forced

upon Indigenous communities during the historical period of colonial expansion (1880s-1910s). The insights offered therein must therefore be updated in order to remain applicable to the new media artefacts produced and distributed within contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism* provides a more recent critical commentary on the interplay between Eurocentric discourse, Western systems of power, and Indigenous communities. Drawing upon more modern examples of racist news media, Shohat and Stam emphasise that Eurocentrism, the "discursive residue" of colonialism, is a lingering presence within media institutions (15). Shohat and Stam's work aligns with the work of Said and Fanon in many ways, as they expose the arbitrariness of the West/East divide, contending that "the two worlds interpenetrate in an unstable space of creolization and syncretism" (15). This process of cultural interchange becomes all the more conspicuous as modern globalisation renders the once distinct practices and belief systems of the West and East osmotic. Further, Shohat and Stam extend Fanon's claim in *Black Skin, White Masks* that colonised subjects don the 'masks' of their oppressors to avoid persecution, indicating that through the internalisation of Eurocentric ideologies and stereotypes "oppressed people can perpetuate the hegemonic system" (19). This suggests that the dissemination of cultural discourse should not be conceptualised as an exclusively vertical flow in which the privileged elite shape ideology 'from the top'. Rather, Eurocentric dialogue can circulate horizontally within marginalised and denigrated communities, rendering its constituents culpable in the perpetuation of culturally oppressive rhetoric. Given the potential for self-alienation noted by Shohat and Stam, it is critical that my thesis does not unthinkingly accept Māori media institutions as monoliths of cultural integrity for Māori. Rather, it will consider how the manifestations of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga therein may present alternate perspectives to viewers that have the potential to bypass or address issues of Eurocentrism at an institutional level.

The notion of hybridity interwoven throughout *Unthinking Eurocentrism* reaches its climax in the chapter “Multiculturalism in the Postmodern Age”. Here, Shohat and Stam acknowledge the numerous theoretical lenses that are frequently applied to postcolonial studies, with each critical vantage point proffering unique and often contradictory approaches to Indigenous mobilisation. For example, they assert that postcolonial identity theorists typically endorse Indigenous empowerment through individual self-representation, and thus, reject essential identity categorisations. Paradoxically, identity politics simultaneously demand affirmative action and unification based on group identification, disrupting interpretations of identity as individualised. Shohat and Stam’s proposed resolution to the inherent contradictions of such critical frameworks is to disregard tired questions of who speaks for who and why – the central concerns of identity and deconstructionist approaches to questions of culture – and ask instead, “[h]ow might we interweave our voices . . . what are the modes of collective speech?” (346). For Shohat and Stam, postcolonial scholarship must transcend issues of cultural appropriation and be repurposed as an apparatus within which the creation of new and inclusive voices within media can be investigated. Shohat and Stam’s centralisation of multicultural hybridity as a site of potential empowerment for indigeneity will inform my approach to Māori media. I will not discount *Aroha Bridge* or *Kairākau* as valuable pedagogical tools for learning about tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga based upon ideals of a ‘pure’ or ‘untouched’ form of Māoridom predating colonial occupation, an approach to measuring the worth of Indigenous media products that remains popular throughout the West (Pearson 21). Instead, I will examine how the televisual articulation and embodiment of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga may have evolved in the bicultural landscape of modern Aotearoa New Zealand, and how any evolution may shape viewer understanding of the ways in which modern Māori can find a place to stand, and cultivate and maintain interrelationships.

While the intersection of Māori ideology and programming is a newer field within the larger study surrounding postcolonialism and Māoridom in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is a rapidly developing area of interest for contemporary academics. Landmark works such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies* foreground the eurocentric focus of contemporary research practices, and the decentralising effect of indigenous perspectives in Aotearoa New Zealand's academia. In response to the Western perspective embedded in established research practices, many scholars have looked to the media as a potential space of creative growth and cultural preservation for Māori in a globalised and diversified Pacific. A growing body of postcolonial media studies utilises audience research to explore how progressive media can positively impact the lives of Māori. Vanessa Poihipi's "The impact of *Māori Television*" collected qualitative data on Māori responses to *Māori Television's* programming, and revealed through these responses how the channel promoted a diverse indigenous ideology and language, provided alternative perspectives on both national and international events, offered positive and normalised representations of Māori, built indigenous knowledge around tikanga, and established a sense of togetherness between Māori, whenua, and whanau (9-21). In addition Sue Abel has analysed the impact of Māori Television on Pākehā viewers, revealing that while Māori media has the potential to reshape Pākehā perspectives, the sense of being a "New Zealander" gained from Western viewing of *Māori Television* largely omits te ao Māori and tikanga. The responses of both Pākehā and Māori explored by Poihipi and Abel will inform my own thesis, as I consider hypothetical viewing positions provided by the texts of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* and audiences' comments about these series on social media.

Despite progress in the inclusion of Māori academics and audiences in contemporary media studies, it is important to recognise that throughout the development of Aotearoa New Zealand's mediascape, te ao Māori has often been resisted or excluded. Māori filmmaker

Barry Barclay's 1990 autoethnography *Our Own Image* exposes some of the obstacles to cultural preservation he encountered while working in Aotearoa New Zealand's television industry, tracing the systemic disadvantages that oppressed Māori filmmakers, producers, and technicians – disadvantages that haven't been completely overcome despite significant progress in facilitating wider inclusion. In his chapter "The Other Eye", Barclay discusses the scarcity of funding for Māori filmmakers during the mid to late 20th century, citing Pākehā controlled funding panels and the supposed expendability of Māori film and television projects during times of fiscal hardship as significant factors in inhibiting Māori video-making. Insufficient funding led to a climate of desperation for Māori directors and producers attempting to navigate a Western television industry from which they were alienated, prompting them to accept inferior technology and the demeaning position of 'recordist', in contrast to that of the Pākehā director, as the status quo. This state of affairs leads Barclay to muse that perhaps Aotearoa New Zealand was witnessing the formation of a new kind of "noble savage" who was armed with a camera instead of a spear, and whose projects are permissible provided they don't become a "difficult native" (27). For Barclay, one potential resolution exists to overcome the suppression of Māori in the media: Māori-controlled video production and editing sites. Here, Barclay's assertion refocuses Hans Magnus Enzensberger's arguments regarding the reformative qualities of new media into a postcolonial context. Enzensberger posits that the primary objective of any successful strategy for utilising the emancipatory qualities of new media must begin with the inculcation of marginalised individuals into the learning and production processes of the media itself (20). Like Enzensberger, Barclay recognises that controlling new media and its sites of production induces radical possibilities for minority groups in assimilating awareness of their worldview into mainstream consciousness.

Since the initial publication of *Our Own Image* in the early 1990s, the institutionalisation of Māori-controlled media cited by Barclay as one way that Māori may strive towards equilibrium with Pākehā in film and television has been realised in the form of Māori Television. Since the inception of Māori Television, Māori media has consistently been situated as a foundation of empowerment for Māori. For Brendan Hokowhitu, this empowerment emerges because when Māori control their own media, then the “filmic production [therein] will reflect the ‘patterns’ and ‘cognitive styles’ of Indigenous epistemic knowledge”: an imprint of te ao Māori onto *their* media (“Theorizing Indigenous Media” 102). More explicitly, filmmaker Merata Mita claimed that the ability of Māori to “control [their] own image” is the crux of modern resistance against the misrepresentation of Māori (qtd. in “Theorizing Indigenous Media” 101). According to Mita, it is only with this authority over image that Māori can be re-presented in alignment with their own self-perception. Conversely, Ian Stuart has suggested that in many cases the organisational structures and programming formats of Indigenous media institutions merely emulate that of mainstream Western media, as opposed to constituting innovative spaces for the expression of alternative worldviews (104). Stuart’s assertion aligns with that of a significant canon of postcolonial material that assumes that the utilisation of print and audiovisual media as a tool for Indigenous resistance is contentious, given the role these very tools have played in oppressing colonised communities. Hokowhitu complicates both of these positions by building upon Shohat and Stam’s hybrid theory. He argues that Indigenous televisual media is best conceptualised in terms of appropriation and hybridity, a chimera site that has the potential to allow “new Indigenous frames of resistance to arise” within the established genres, styles, and formats of mainstream Western media (105). My thesis will navigate and further complicate these discourses, acknowledging that the biculturalism of contemporary Aotearoa

New Zealand may influence how Māori media manifests tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga, which in turn impacts the way viewers understand these concepts.

Jo Smith's *Māori Television* explores some of the critical debates that have crystallised around Māori Television in the ten years following its establishment in 2004, and will be critical to my exploration of the production and distribution contexts of *Kairākau*. In her chapter "The Long Struggle for Māori Television", Smith traces the development of Māori Television, connecting its emergence to larger cultural movements towards the reinvigoration of te reo Māori and tikanga in the face of monolingual Pākehā media, which threatens to destabilise the integrity of Māori cultural practices and language in Aotearoa New Zealand. Smith reemphasises Te Ururoa Flavell's sentiment that Māori Television occupies a crucial position in the shaping of positionality, interconnections, and cultural dynamics in Aotearoa New Zealand as a broadcaster that permits non-Māori perspectives insight into a televisual microcosm of the values, beliefs, and ideology held by Māori. Moreover, as Piripi Walker suggests, Māori Television operates not only as a potential means to begin bridging the "cultural divide", but also serves a symbolic function:

It's there and it's both a practical presence in terms of the daily life of the country, but also a highly symbolic presence when you live in New Zealand or grow up in New Zealand. Now you grow up with Television New Zealand, but you know that there is the Māori channel – Māori are being Māori and looking good while they're doing it. And the Māori universe is marching along, talking excitedly about itself in a positive way, and the Māori universe's best values are on show daily, they're there, people can drink from the cup (qtd. in Smith 35).

Within my thesis I will acknowledge Māori Television as a symbolic anchor around which both Māori and non-Māori are permitted to gather and learn about the ways in which Māori form interrelationships and coordinate their position within contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand through media representation, production, and distribution.

In her chapter “Bringing Tikanga to Television”, Smith explores some of the institutional barriers to assimilating processes of tikanga into the organisational structures of Māori Television. Smith begins by exposing the difficulties that lie at the heart of Māori Television’s cultural mission to revitalise te reo and tikanga by emphasising how traditional formats of language reform and tikanga are “often incompatible with established media processes” (38). Māori Television has proven revolutionary in its approach to redefining established media processes in order to reflect the values of te ao Māori. Some examples of significant changes Smith notes are the move towards open door policies to encourage community engagement and feedback; the support of the Kaunihera Kaumātua (iwi elders) in making informed choices when integrating tikanga, kaupapa and kawa into workplace practice; and increasing the prevalence of te reo in the workplace (although as Smith notes many of these industry innovations are still developing). However, this radical reshaping of production practices is tempered by the competing tensions informing Māori Television’s mandate to revitalise te reo and tikanga while simultaneously producing television with sufficient mainstream appeal to be a commercially viable endeavour. Smith’s suggestion that the competing demands made of Māori Television may offer resistance to the institutionalisation of Māori tikanga in television production will be examined and refocused within my thesis, utilised instead to interrogate how these tensions influence understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga in a production context.

In his ambivalent commentary on Māori director Taika Waititi’s 2010 bildungsroman film *Boy*, Hokowhitu identifies with the desire of contemporary Māori filmmakers to represent the “Māori’s of modernity” (“Te Kapa” 110). By dispensing with images of Māori that give license to the idea that ethnic filmic authenticity exists solely within the boundaries of a fantastic pre-colonial idyll, Hokowhitu senses that directors such as Waititi are confounding the postcolonial theorists who identify a “classical” form of Māoridom as the

preeminent vehicle for “authentic” on screen empowerment (110). His argument aligns with that of Smith’s “Shaking the Frame” and Sarina Pearson’s “Persistent Primitivisms”, wherein they signal the need for popular and academic discourses on Māori film and television to escape the bounds of purist conceptions of Indigeneity if they hope to unpack the complexities of televisual expressions Māoridom. However, Hokowhitu suggests that even within the innovative and complex representations of Māori in films such as *Boy*, stereotypes and Eurocentric discourses continue to be inscribed onto Māori identities and practices. Given this potential danger, my thesis will consider in what ways the representation and embodiment of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga in *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau*’s various contexts may resist Western inscription through shaping viewer understanding of these concepts.

In order to contextualise the innovative approaches to cultural learning permitted by the production, distribution, and textual representation of Māori programming, digital media and its impact on the ways that connected populations consume and interact with televisual products must be acknowledged. Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s “Constituents of a Theory of the Media” discusses digital media as a potential site of significant empowerment if marginalised groups are able to appropriate control of such media from the dominant structures of power within Western society. Although Enzensberger suggests that direct control of media production is the only way to combat its manipulation by the ruling classes, he asserts that at its heart new media is an egalitarian structure with a widely recognised capacity to subvert current socio-political structures. He perceives the same opportunity in new media as Douglas Kellner, who comments that it permits marginalised groups to engage in political and cultural debate through the exchange of information (101). Enzensberger’s observation that new media and the internet in particular have the potential to facilitate interaction and debate among the diasporic constituents of marginalised groups is key, as it

foregrounds the possibilities of analysing the internet as a channel of distribution that can extend tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga outside of the confines of localised iwi, national, and international boundaries.

Certainly, Acushla Deanne O’Carroll recognises the creative spaces of the internet as an abundant cultural and political resource through which Māori are able to translate whanaungatanga into global virtual networks. In her essay “Virtual Whanaungatanga”, O’Carroll notes that increasingly diverse usage of the internet, and particularly social media networking sites, is forging alternative methods for Māori to establish and maintain community relationships and interconnection. While traditionally processes of whanaungatanga were inextricably associated with physical community and spatial proximity, the internet has collapsed these restrictive parameters, rendering the online framework for whanaungatanga fluid and informal. On social media platforms, share and comment functions are a central feature of user engagement and allow Māori to interact with, debate, and distribute online content. The ability to share content that has the potential for mutual cultural significance can render such artefacts ideological anchors around which community connections can form. My thesis will consider not only how online distribution methods may empower Māori media producers to create virtual footholds across multiple online platforms, but also how the creation of online fan communities on the Facebook pages of *Kairākau* and *Aroha Bridge* may present an opportunity for viewers to understand in what ways tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga are manifested virtually.

However, while Enzensberger and O’Carroll’s essays introduce some of the key concepts crystallising around new media as transformative mediums into my thesis, the optimism of “Constituents” and “Virtual Whanaungatanga” will be somewhat tempered by alternative perspectives that situate the cultural promise of new media as a fantasy. Indeed, for Patrick Crogan and Samuel Kinsley, the unparalleled capabilities of the internet to stream

information or content to users through a growing number of media devices and systems “sets our ability to attend to that information at a scarcity” (4). Herbert Simon encapsulates this pessimistic approach to new media:

[T]he wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of the recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention (qtd. in Crogan & Kinsley 4)

If any content or information made available to users of new media simply becomes one component of a larger canon of content bombarding users through the multiple media streams readily accessible through media devices, services, and systems, then the ramifications for *Aroha Bridge*, a webseries almost entirely dependent on online distribution, and its ability to shape an understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga could be profound. Within my thesis, I will utilise these alternative interpretations of the internet as a distribution channel to examine how *Kairākau*'s primary distribution through traditional broadcast could mean it represents a more significant televisual tūrangawaewae space given its access to a larger audience share.

Chapter Two: *Aroha Bridge*

Set in modern Aotearoa New Zealand, *Aroha Bridge* follows the lives of the Hook twins, Kowhai and Monty, as they struggle to navigate the difficult terrain of adulthood, the music industry and family dynamics while discovering what it means to be Māori today. *Aroha Bridge* is a progressive animated text defined by the nuances it captures in its depiction of bicultural hybridity in Māori communities and identities. Comprised of both Māori and Pākehā lineage, the central Hook family epitomises notions of cultural fluidity. They are the microcosmic lens through which the webseries' creator, Jessica Hansell, examines the issues arising from the attempt to articulate a fixed position for Māori within the cultural and ethnic milieu of the globalised Pacific. In this chapter I will examine *Aroha Bridge's* diverse representation of its central characters – Kowhai, Monty, Ira, Manu, Mum Hook, Uncle Noogy, Aunty Winny and Angeline – which suggest that contemporary tūrangawaewae has become fluid in order to accommodate the transient cultural parameters of modern Māori tikanga. At the same time, I will assert that this diversity of representation is rooted in an autonomous vision of Māoridom that visually and aurally celebrates 'Māoriness' as distinct from an all-encompassing New Zealander identity. In this way, I will argue that *Aroha Bridge* itself constitutes a tūrangawaewae space within which atypical representations of autonomous Māori and their culturally fluid communities inform viewer understanding of how Māori media might represent a foundation upon which Māori can stand and become empowered. In contrast, I will complicate *Aroha Bridge's* imagining of cultural dynamics by acknowledging that the webseries does not symbolically or narratively endorse a vision of Aotearoa New Zealand as a bicultural idyll, but instead interrogates issues of biculturalism via the complex interplay between Pākehā, Eurocentrism, te reo, Māori artefacts and images. In tandem with my discussion of tūrangawaewae, I will exhibit that articulation of whanaungatanga in *Aroha Bridge* is equally complex. I will suggest that in the breakdown of whanaungatanga between Kowhai, Monty and their cousin, Angeline, the viewer is exposed

to how one-dimensional perceptions of Māori, both internal and external, can instigate a breakdown of community bonds through alienating non-conforming members: a breakdown that can itself be reversed by re-forging meaningful interrelationships. I will continue by positing that whanaungatanga is situated as a key process in resisting the racialised projection of Māori in dominant media, permitting on screen Māori to foster a sense of unity in their stand against misrepresentation. Finally, I will posit that the increased societal emphasis on cultivating and maintaining personal success – a founding principle of capitalism and its accompanying narratives – is revealed to be a corrupting influence on the establishment of community interconnection through shared experience and values. My analysis will reveal that no absolute vision of tūrangawaewae or whanaungatanga emerges from the complexities of *Aroha Bridge*'s textual representation of Māoridom, and therein lies its potency as a cultural artefact framing postcolonial communities and identities. By representing and embodying tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga in innovative ways, *Aroha Bridge* signals to the viewer that contemporary applications and understandings of Māori conceptual frameworks are manifold and dynamic, transcending singular definition.

***Aroha Bridge* as a televisual foothold**

It is well documented within postcolonial scholarship that for colonised and diasporic communities, the divide between integration and assimilation is often obscured by the ideological structures imposed by the culture responsible for their displacement. In his study of the impacts of emigration for second generation Asian adolescents into Britain, Paul A. Singh Ghuman argues that members of an ethnic minority can experience significant upheaval of their cultural identity when trying to reconcile the cultural realities of their private lives with the policies of integration that structure many of the state funded institutions they encounter, particularly educational settings (24). Consequently, the public spheres within which ethnic minority individuals are empowered to engage in cultural

identity building are systemically encroached upon by the majority culture at an institutional level. Echoes of this widespread cultural annihilation are present throughout the history of colonial and postcolonial Aotearoa New Zealand, but are perhaps articulated most conspicuously in the settler's imagining of the colonial relationship, predicated upon the gradual and complete subsumption of te ao Māori with an imperial worldview. As Richard Hill suggests, "[i]n the official and settler metanarrative [the myth of] ethnic harmony prevailed" when William Hobson, the founding lieutenant-governor overseeing the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, declared a state of absolute cultural erasure to the gathered iwi chiefs: "He iwi tahi tatou/ we are now one people" (257-8). The attempt to absorb Māori culture not only shaped official policies and practices during the colonial era, but continues to permeate the popular consciousness of contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand as Māori symbolism is continually conflated with an all-encompassing New Zealander identity. Ron Palenski asserts that the symbolic dominance of the European settler involves the reconstitution of Māori symbols as a 'brand' that is used to imprint a sense of Kiwi difference onto the global stage:

Rather than flags and anthems – symbols which require the formal approval of the state if they are to have official status – other signs of national assertiveness and identity emerge organically and take on their own significance. New Zealand gradually acquired its own unique national 'branding' through this method. It was unique because it did not rely on imported symbols or on derivatives from Britain or elsewhere; New Zealand's unofficial symbols came from the country's flora and fauna and from Māori – symbols that were provably distinctive to New Zealand and could not possibly have been confused with anywhere else (105).

This equation of Māori symbolism with a brand image has significant repercussions for tūrangawaewae, as it reinforces the belief that "Māori culture sets Aotearoa apart from other nations: it makes us distinct" (Warren et al. 66). For many Māori, their symbols are "cultural

treasures that should not be used by non-Māori”, leading a portion of community members to “react adversely to the use of Māori imagery [in Western popular culture]”, as this incorporation illustrates a symbolic loss of cultural autonomy (McCabe 4). The emphasis on Māori culture and its attendant symbols as signifiers of difference for all New Zealanders has the potential to corrode Māori positionality, as it permits identities *outside* of Māoridom to attempt to gain a foothold *within* the symbolic registers of the community by re-presenting taonga Māori imagery as inclusive of ethnic denominations distinct from Māori. Clearly, the historical campaign to render te ao Māori ideologically and symbolically invisible was conducted through both official channels and the unofficial appropriation of Māori imagery.

While such legislative and representational disadvantages may have indicated that Māori were primed for complete cultural assimilation, resistance to integration through tūrangawaewae is evident in both the early stages of colonial occupation and the contemporary televisual landscape of Māori media. Throughout the process of colonization, Māori iwi and hapū “preferred to engage selectively with the new order,” maintaining strong communities rooted in their tūrangawaewae and “refusing to be absorbed by British settlers and their descendants” (Hill 258). As such, concepts such as tūrangawaewae have historically been employed as a tool of resistance against assimilation. Contemporary resistance has transitioned from the physical territories that once encircled tūrangawaewae, to the media spaces that have expanded its application to include televisual texts. In *Aroha Bridge*, for example, the cultural aesthetics and colloquial speech of the Hook family, both immediate and extended, engages in this translation of tūrangawaewae into the aesthetic register of media representation. By creating an on screen Māori community that is positioned as distinct from Pākehā culture, *Aroha Bridge* refuses to endorse the complete disassembly of cultural boundaries that would give Pākehā authority over the images and voices of Māori, and ultimately, corrupt televisual tūrangawaewae. Perhaps the most prominent aural technique

used within this process of on screen community building is the spoken cues that ground *Aroha Bridge* within the Māori community. For instance, characters utilise colloquial terminology as a part of their daily lexicon, especially in the expression of familial interconnection through terms such as “bro” and “cuzzie” and the webseries celebrates the combination of te reo and English that typifies “Māori English” (Maclagan et al. 664). Margaret Maclagan, Jeanette King, and Gail Gillon posit that these linguistic features are synonymous with cotemporary Māori speech, noting that “Maori words in sentences with English syntax are common [among Māori], as are kinship terms like bro (brother), sis (sister), or cuz (cousin)” (664). Visually, the depiction of Kowhai, Monty, Manu, Ira, Angeline, Aunty Winny and Uncle Noogy with (mostly) dark hair and skin indicative of Polynesian descent manifests the Māori whakapapa of these characters and delineates their origins within Aotearoa New Zealand’s Indigenous population. Both the visual and aural components of *Aroha Bridge* are clearly designed to position Māori as distinct and recognisable, and thus work against the historical representational erasure of Māoridom.

On screen community building is not the only arena within which *Aroha Bridge* seeks to reclaim Māori autonomy, as its exploration of Māori symbols and objects critiques the ongoing reduction of Māori culture to a commodity. S02E06 “Ira’s Antique Roadshow” critiques the culpability of both Māori and Pākehā in the processes of assimilation that threaten to loosen the foothold Māori have in their own cultural production. In the webisode Monty and Kowhai find what they believe is their father’s pounamu tiki while they are sorting through boxes of junk. Pounamu is of crucial importance for many Māori, and is often considered a spiritual, cultural and commercial taonga for modern iwi (Wheen 552). Oblivious to this cultural significance, Kowhai and Monty decide to try and sell it at the *Aroha Bridge* antique show, only to discover that it is in fact a plastic bottle opener that is a replica of a pounamu hei-tiki. What was once a material symbol of the spiritual, cultural, and

economic autonomy of Māori is reduced to a mere trinket to be sold to Pākehā for economic gain, Kiwiana kitsch completely divorced from its cultural context for Manu, Kowhai, Monty and the contemporary Māoridom that the Hook family embody. When viewed in isolation, Kowhai and Monty's desire to trade what transpires to be a kitsch object for the opportunity to leave Aroha Bridge can be dismissed as comedic happenstance, designed to amuse viewers by highlighting the aesthetic similarities between Kiwiana and Māori artefacts. However, this process of trade is mirrored in Uncle Noogy's willingness to sell a portion of Te Tiriti o Waitangi for an exorbitant fee despite his opposition to Pākehā intervention in matters of cultural significance for Māori. This act weakens his position as a bastion of integrity for Māoridom, and renders explicit the potential for Māori to divest their own autonomy. *Aroha Bridge's* textual emphasis on superficial engagement with Māori symbolism and the exchange of cultural objects for financial benefit – a process rooted in the practices of colonialism – foregrounds the threat to tūrangawaewae posed by notions of cultural integration.

Hybridising and enriching tūrangawaewae

While the combination of ethnic aesthetics, Māori English and the critique of symbolic and material appropriation of Māori imagery and artefacts *establish* a representational foothold for the Māori community of Aroha Bridge, the divergent identities within *enrich* viewer understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga. Through the diverse characters populating the central and extended Hook family, viewers are empowered to identify Māori with non-homogenous representations. Kowhai is the driven – but often ineffectual – daughter of Māori father, Manu, and Pākehā mother, Mum Hook, and Hook Ups fame-hungry but largely talentless lead vocalist. Her laid back, marijuana smoking twin brother Monty is alternately depicted as a moral idealist and childlike buffoon, a cartoonish amalgam of the political Māori and the directionless millennial. Manu is a hyper-masculine

Māori man experiencing a complete disassociation with his cultural heritage, juxtaposed with his Pākehā wife, Mum Hook, who identifies with, and desires to be included in, Māoridom. The extended family consists of supportive and family-orientated cousin Ira, sporty and competitive Aunty Winny, successful popstar cousin Angeline, and political activist Uncle Noogy. This range of Māori representation within *Aroha Bridge* shapes viewers understanding of Māori media as a tūrangawaewae space, as “[w]e learn about our identities . . . through the vast array of media that depict and construct our social world” (Kahu 13). Māori media may even reconfigure the ways in which viewers understand Māori to establish meaningful interconnections with their community. Morgan E. Ellithorpe and Amy Bleakley extrapolate on the transformative potential of television programmes for ethnic minority adolescents, suggesting that they are a formative influence on processes of identity construction (1427). Further, they situate the relationship between minority character and viewer as one with significant real-world implications, asserting that minority viewer identification with numerous “potential [identity] models” empowers them to experiment with the ways that they establish, maintain, and understand their own interconnections within their larger community by recognising “the many different ways that they could define themselves as a member of their relevant group”. The complex characterisations in *Aroha Bridge* and the ways in which this representational depth may permit Māori viewers to situate themselves in relation to the wider community projects a clear message: the position of Māori within the representational register of film and television is a foothold being revisited and reshaped.

While the ‘Māoriness’ and diverse characterisations of the Hook family provides viewers with the sense of a televisual foothold for Māori in *Aroha Bridge*, the position of contemporary Māori communities is not explored in terms of fixed cultural coordinates. Rather, modern Māoridom and the creative spaces of tūrangawaewae therein are

conceptualised as unstable and fluid spaces of cultural appropriation, exchange, and hybridity. For example, in S01E01 “Benny’s 21st”, the Hook twins Kowhai and Monty are delineated as characters who embody the hybridity prioritised by Shohat and Stam as the principle concern for the progression of indigeneity within postcolonial media. At the outset of the webisode, Kowhai and Monty attempt to recreate Jimi Hendrix lighting his guitar on fire in a rebellious display at the 1967 Monterey pop festival, an iconic cultural moment within popular Western music. In doing so, Kowhai and Monty seek to emulate an event from American culture in order to express their own identities as Aotearoa New Zealand artists, a mimicry that suggests that the central duo comprehend their musical identity in terms of hybridity and appropriation – a notion consistently reinforced throughout the webseries. Later in the same episode Kowhai laments Hook Ups failed performance at their family reunion, stating that this performance was “supposed to be [their] Woodstock”. In S01E06 “Aroha Bridge Factor”, Hook Ups compete in a singing competition with their song Phantom of the Hiphopera, Kowhai’s magnum opus, which is tellingly composed of both original and appropriated elements. The half mask and cape worn by Monty (the Phantom) and the opulent wig and hoop-style dress adorned by Kowhai (Christine) during their performance are typical of the Belle Époque style popular in the Paris opera circuit during the late 1800’s, and are recognisable elements from the original musical iterations of *The Phantom of the Opera*. However, the sparse trap beat and rap verse delivery of the original lyrics is heavily influenced by contemporary hip-hop. This performance is thus rendered a chimera site of appropriation and originality. In her exploration of Taika Waititi’s *Boy*, Jo Smith emphasises the potential cultural power that emerges from hybridisation as an expressive mode for te ao Māori, citing the Thriller/Poi-E mash-up scene as a critical moment for reshaping perceptions of Māori tikanga. For Smith, this scene constitutes “Waititi’s strategic re-articulation of . . . popular cultural events” that “provides a heuristic device

through which we might understand . . . contemporary Indigenous creative practices differently” (72). In the same way, Kowhai’s hip hop reimagining of *The Phantom of the Opera* signals to the viewer that creative practices of Māoridom have entered an “unstable space of creolisation” in which elements of Western and Māori culture have become transient, circulating throughout countless ethnic and cultural configurations (Shohat and Stam 15). Unlike earlier definitions of tūrangawaewae, the defining feature of tūrangawaewae in *Aroha Bridge* does not appear to be empowerment emanating from a fixed foundation. Rather, Kowhai and Monty’s articulation of their identity as creative artists is borne from their ability to fuse differing genres, styles, and cultures into their music and performance and thus shape a position for themselves that is constantly evolving, untethered from rigid cultural delineations.

Iconic popular culture moments and music are not the only cultural products represented by Kowhai. Throughout *Aroha Bridge*, the fashion worn by Kowhai suggests her position as a cultural chameleon and encapsulates the fluidity of modern Māoridom in terms of fashion, music, and culture in general, echoing Piers D. G. Britton’s sentiment that “costume design has come to be not merely an appurtenance of an actor's portrayal, but the embodiment of the television series itself” (345). Throughout *Aroha Bridge* the principle of cultural hybridity is articulated by many of Kowhai’s costumes, including a sober pairing of dark blazer and trousers for her telemarketing job in S01E02 “Real Job”, a statement dress hand-crafted from tape and tinfoil modelled on the distinctive fashion of Kim Gordon for her performance in S01E01 “Benny’s 21st”, and the Freddie Mercury inspired ensemble of yellow leather jacket, white t-shirt, and plain trousers with red detailing for Hook Ups grand reopening of the Aroha Bridge Dairy in S01E03 “Kiri the Krazy”. Clearly, Kowhai’s style cannot be isolated within one genre. Within the boundaries of creative expression, *Aroha*

Bridge indicates that Māori are able to establish an empowering foothold by expressing and celebrating the multiculturalism that has permeated globalised Aotearoa New Zealand.

Issues of biculturalism

While hybridity has proven to be a founding principle of the creative spaces that inform, and are represented within, *Aroha Bridge*, that is not to suggest that the issues arising from hybridity as an expressive mode are left unexamined. In fact, questions of who is permitted access to tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga, and te ao Māori more generally, is a key tension throughout the webseries. One prominent feature of hybridity that is subject to significant scrutiny is the use of te reo by Pākehā. While te reo use by characters such as Kowhai and Monty constitutes the construction of a hybrid lexicon that verbally demarcates their Māori heritage, interpretations become more complex when the relationship between Pākehā and te reo is considered. In S02E01 “Angeline in Concert”, Mum Hook attends a graduation ceremony for her te reo class. At the ceremony, the Pākehā officiator attempts to welcome the audience with the traditional Māori welcome “tēnā koutou”, but overtly mispronounces the greeting, instead saying “Ten O Car Tower”. Here, *Aroha Bridge* ironically emphasises the absurdity of having a Pākehā with limited knowledge of te reo officiate a ceremony celebrating graduates who have proven themselves proficient in Aotearoa New Zealand’s Indigenous language. This gentle irony criticising the ignorance of some Pākehā in approaching te reo and Māori culture is rendered acute when the officiator ends his greeting by saying “to all the whānau and Māori people here . . .” clearly defining himself as a Pākehā in opposition to the “Māori people” in attendance.

This ironic stance on Pākehā usage of te reo is complicated by Mum Hook, who is portrayed with a more positive, if somewhat superficial relationship, with te reo and Māori tikanga. On one hand, Mum Hook establishes an intimate connection with te reo, as she

believes it to be a powerful tool through which she can express her love of “knowledge, family, loyalty, duty and obligation to relatives” (S01E02 “Angeline in Concert”). In S02E03 “Radical Bro”, it becomes clear that for Mum Hook, learning te reo is a natural step for “someone who wants to be Māori”, becoming an expression of her whanaungatanga; that is, her interconnections within the Māori community through her husband and the paternal whakapapa of her children. It seems that within *Aroha Bridge*, familial affiliation with Māoridom is important for Pākehā to meaningfully engage with te ao Māori. On the other hand, Mum Hook is not immune from criticism in her encounters with te ao Māori. Her open and humorous declaration that she wants to belong to the Māori community might betray a superficial fetishism of Māoridom with origins in Orientalist modes of thought. Her desire to experience the exotic may be borne from the ignorance of those who are immune to the systemic injustices framing Māori lives. Perhaps, then, the relationship between Pākehā and te reo in *Aroha Bridge* should not be conceptualised as binary; rather, Pākehā users of te reo can populate a spectrum ranging from superficial to meaningful engagement with Māori language, their place on this spectrum dependant on proximity to Māoridom and intentionality. Nevertheless, through her genuine interest in becoming more interactive with Māori tikanga and te ao Māori, Mum Hook belongs to a minority Pākehā movement identified by I. Hyugens that is “seeking ways in which to critically participate in the ‘agenda of decolonization’”, using Māori language as a tool to aid in “the divesting of power by the colonial group” (qtd. In “Pākehā Learners” 734). In S02E01 “Angeline in Concert”, it seems that the acceptance into the Māori community that Mum Hook desires is achieved, as demonstrated by the waiata performed grudgingly by Manu and enthusiastically by Uncle Noogy at the moment of her matriculation. Rawinia Higgins and Arini Loader summarize the importance of waiata as a mode of expression for Māori:

Waiata serve many important functions and are used in a variety of contexts in Māori culture and society. A waiata may be used to support a *whaikōrero* (a formal speech) on the *marae* or sung as an expression of grief at the loss of a loved one. Waiata were used to assist with the education of children, to urge the people to take up a cause and to mourn in times of calamity and misfortune. Additionally, waiata document history, recalling the past through mentions of ancestors, events and places. Traditional waiata memorialise particular conflicts from the perspective of the composer and his or her people. Waiata are also called upon to settle historical debates or to illustrate or add weight to a contemporary or historical point (“Waiata Tawhito”)

Throughout their history, waiata have been employed as an expressive mode for Māori communities to document and articulate important historical, personal and/or communal events and situations. Therefore, the waiata performed by Uncle Noogy, and to a far lesser extent Manu, signals recognition on their behalf that Mum Hook’s journey into *te reo*, Māori *tikanga*, and *te ao Māori* is an event of significance for both their family and the Māori community of Aroha Bridge as a whole. Radical possibilities for processes of *tūrangawaewae* and *whanaungatanga* arise from the acceptance of Mum Hook into processes of Māori *tikanga* via language. Māori scholar Timoti Kāretu discusses how his embodied experience of *tūrangawaewae* is inextricable from the intimate relationship he maintains with *te reo*: “[f]or me, language is an intrinsic part of my *tūrangawaewae* . . . It is an essential element of all that I hold dear – the rites of passage of Māoridom will pale into insignificance and ignominy without it” (qtd. in “Kānohi” 159). For Kāretu, *te reo* is the keystone to his Māori identity, anchoring him within his *tūrangawaewae*. Mum Hook’s integration of *mātauranga Māori* into her world view through learning *te reo* might grant her access to the same foothold described by Kāretu, and in turn, provide her a greater insight into *te ao Māori*. It seems that central ideologies once absolutely exclusive to Māori are rendered malleable by their representation within *Aroha Bridge*, signalling the need to for viewers to consider whether *tūrangawaewae*

and whanaungatanga hold the potential for non-Māori to engage with tikanga and te ao Māori in new and meaningful ways.

Māori as one

The suggestion that Pākehā may have meaningful encounters with Māori tikanga does not indicate a decentralisation of tūrangawaewae or whanaungatanga within the Aroha Bridge community. In fact, at key junctures throughout the webseries, the familial and community interconnections vital to a unified Māoridom are situated as essential to the preservation of te ao Māori in the face of the reductive cultural narratives and stereotypes systemically disseminated by dominant media institutions. S02E02 “Plastic Māori” directly addresses the culture-based tensions that emerge from the divide between Māori self-perception and Eurocentric media narratives. In this webisode Hook Ups are coerced into an impromptu show for both their whānau and a Pākehā reporter who has accompanied Angeline to Aroha Bridge in order to do an extended interview with the superstar. Their performance is universally disliked among the gathered audience, with Manu and Ira referring to it as “crap” and “worse than usual”. The Pākehā reporter echoes and racializes the whānau’s sentiments, voicing her hope that Kowhai and Monty are gifted at sports because “for Māoris [they] sure can’t sing”. By obviously articulating an assumption entrenched in archetypal media depictions of Māori, the reporter perpetuates Eurocentric narratives that conspire to dictate the economic, professional, and creative spaces that Māori can occupy. The type of racist commentary based on stereotypes espoused by the reporter remains a real-world issue in Aotearoa New Zealand’s media outlets, prompting Melanie Wall to reiterate the ongoing issues that arise from the imposition of reductive media stereotypes onto Māori:

The power of the stereotype in perpetuating racialisation is derived from both its ambiguity and its ambivalence, resulting in contradictory representations of the Other which oscillate between mimicry and menace. Stereotypes facilitate ideological sovereignty over the Other,

acquiring their efficacy from demarcating boundaries through ‘race’ definition (identity closure through objectification and categorisation), producing ‘. . . a fixed reality which is at once Other yet entirely knowable and visible’ (Bhaba qtd. In Wall 40).

Far from a passive remark, the reporter’s statement upholds a historical precedent of Māori representation in which Māoridom is imagined as inferior. The reporter’s categorising attack on Hook Ups causes great offense to the whānau, with Angeline – usually Kowhai’s arch-rival – leaping to her cousin’s defence and applauding Hook Ups’ experimental creative choices. The reporter is mystified as to why her remarks have caused offense, her confusion highlighting the ignorance of the representatives of dominant media when it comes to matters of self-determination and representation for Māori. Uncle Noogy sermonises to the viewer on the subject of Māori and the media in his declaration that “how we Māori fight and debate our identity is up to us”. Uncle Noogy’s astute observation intervenes in contentious political debates that emerge at the intersection of biculturalism, Māori self-determination, and the media with a decisive perspective: the ways in which Māori choose to engage with tikanga and te ao Māori must be decided from within the community, and cannot be dictated by outside influences.

Uncle Noogy’s vision of the ideal autonomous position for Māori is seemingly at odds with the political organisation of contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, rendering his comment all the more potent . Dominic O’Sullivan writes:

Opportunities for self-determination for minority Indigenous groups within the democratic pluralist nation state are limited by the right of the state to govern on behalf of all citizens, by the requirements of the common good and by democracy's tendency to see the community as an homogenous whole . . . [m]inority Indigenous groups do not fit easily into that assumed whole and the extent to which they may be self-determining is an outcome of the power relationship they have with the state (160).

In light of this historical positioning of Māori as homogenous and dependant, Uncle Noogy's criticism of media extends beyond the screen and invites viewers to consider the rights of Māori to establish tūrangawaewae spaces in the media. The need for Māori autonomy is once again reinforced when the reporter is asked to leave, and Manu immediately restates his view that he hopes Kowhai and Monty can excel in sports because they lack musical ability: an assessment of Hook Ups' performance that evokes raucous laughter from the whānau. The purposeful contrast of reactions to the same Pākehā and Māori assessment of the performance challenges Shohat and Stam's assertion that "[r]ather than asking who can speak . . . we should ask about how to speak together, and more important, about how to move the plurilog forward" (346). While Shohat and Stam suggest that questioning the appropriation of Indigenous voices is indicative of a theoretical stagnation in postcolonial criticism that does little to move conversations of cultural preservation forward, it is the question of who is articulating Māori identities and tikanga that preoccupies the exploration of Māoridom in *Aroha Bridge*. This episode is built around a definitive ideological position on issues of Māori representation; that is, that the boundaries encircling Māori communities and identities must only be constructed by Māori themselves. Further, the closing ranks of the whānau in the face of outside criticism indicates the need for a unified Māori position to stand as a bastion against the false images and narratives projected by dominant media and evinces the centrality of whanaungatanga in the fortification of this cooperative position.

This positioning of Māoridom against dominant (Pākehā) media institutions exposes the reality of the 'us vs. them' binary perpetuated by ongoing neo-colonial processes. In *Aroha Bridge*, this narrative manifests in the juxtaposition of positive explorations of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga with negative representations of Pākehā. In S01E08 "Space Invasion", viewers are introduced to Hook Ups rival band The Rugged Sharks, pretentious Pākehā duo, Max and Vaughn. Their costuming – open red and white baseball

‘jock’ jacket for Max, and conservative vest jumper and tie for Vaughn – and snobby vocalisation delineates them as uptight and antagonistic foils to the laid back Māori protagonists. In S01E10 “Halloween”, these negative qualities take on a cultural edge when Monty and Kowhai attend a Halloween party hosted by The Rugged Sharks. When Hook Ups once again encounter The Rugged Sharks, *Aroha Bridge* borrows the visual and aural style of gothic horror films to frame The Rugged Sharks as evil. As the rival bands converse, lightning flashes throw The Rugged Sharks in and out of darkness as they cackle, constructing a *mise en scène* reminiscent of the monster’s awakening in *Frankenstein* and the birth of Dracula’s child in *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. In this scene, pastiche is used to humorously engage with the tropes of gothic cinema in order to explore the notion that Pākehā are ‘the evil enemy’ to Māoridom. Later during the party, The Rugged Sharks sniff cocaine in the toilet with female companions while criticising Kowhai and Monty, claiming that “Hook Ups will never make it . . . those Māoris are all wasters”. The suggestion of evilness induced by the earlier gothic elements is rendered acute, and linked directly to ethnicity. The on screen dynamic between Māori and Pākehā is not the only tactic criticising the potential binarism framing modern cultural relations in Aotearoa New Zealand. In S01E04 “Art to Art”, Pākehā encounters with Māoridom are superficial and sexualised. In this webisode, Kowhai and Monty encounter two cosmopolitan Pākehā women at the Aroha Bridge dairy who invite Hook Ups to perform at an art gallery exhibition, much to Kowhai’s awe-inspired delight. However, in order to gain entry into the privileged sphere of the Pākehā elite symbolised by these two women, Monty and Kowhai must consistently misrepresent themselves as artists. Kowhai injects their song ‘Spaghetti in a Can’ with false meaning, revising its conception from an under-the-influence ode to the culinary delights of tinned spaghetti, to a political piece about the existential torture of being a male feminist: a revision necessary to intrigue the apotheosised Pākehā. In fact, the Pākehā group encountered at the

art gallery represents many of the systemic obstacles that would inhibit the flourishing of te ao Māori, such as class privilege, primitivism, and fetishism. In particular, the fetishism of the exotic is addressed by Ira when he asks the assorted girls at the party if they “fancy fetishizing [his] ethnicity for a while”. Implicit in his offer is Ira’s acknowledgement that the fetishisation of his ethnicity is the price of Māori inclusion, and even then, that to be included is to be objectified and marked as Other. The fetishisation and sexualisation of Māoridom is foregrounded again in S01E07 “Triple Threat”, when Monty and Kowhai attend dance lessons as part of their attempt to emulate the success of one of Kowhai’s idols, Alaze Rhetoric, by becoming triple threats: actors, dancers and singers. Their dance instructor, Francine, has an overt sexual attraction to Māori men, displaying an instant interest in Monty despite his clear lack of dancing talent. Later, Monty and Kowhai enter the dairy to discover Francine leading her “petit chocolat” Ira to the storeroom for sex. The figures of Monty and Ira, irresistible to the Western female, critique the “white desire for . . . black physicality” that informs the construction of stereotypes such as Māori-as-athlete: a construction “connected to the stereotype of Black as the exotic sexual Other” (Wall 42). While the representation of Pākehā within *Aroha Bridge* is often negative, the satire levelled at this ethnic group must be contextualised as a representational approach antithetical to the politics of biculturalism pedalled by dominant media, in order to provide Māori with a televisual foothold in which they, not Pākehā, are empowered.

Whanaungatanga and the racialisation of family tensions

While popular orthodoxy often presents a relationship with traditional Māori tikanga as quintessential to Māori identities, *Aroha Bridge* foregrounds the ways in which the deployment of pre-colonial indigeneity as a marker of ‘authentic’ Māori identity works to negate whanaungatanga. In particular, the breakdown of whanaungatanga between Kowhai, Monty, and their successful cousin, popstar Angeline, embodies the tensions emanating from

conflicting perceptions of ‘Māoriness’ and the harmful effects this tension can have on Māori self-perception. In S02E02 “Plastic Māori”, Kowhai, Monty and Ira watch a television interview featuring her cousin Angeline at the dairy. The interview features many of the popular Eurocentric conceptions used to define what it means to be Māori and to have a ‘genuine’ encounter with te ao Māori – conceptions which are interrogated throughout *Aroha Bridge*. In the interview Angeline tells the camera that she is of Māori heritage, which means that “everything [she] does is about the olden days”. She then reiterates this attitude of intergenerational nostalgia, joking that she was born in the wrong era because she is Māori “and Māori all wish [that they could] return to the 1800s”, before concluding her interview by explaining that this desire to return to pre-colonial times is “a Māori thing. We just love living in the past”. In her self-professed desire to return to an ‘unadulterated’ form of pre-contact Māoridom, Angeline rearticulates the primitivist approach of some media industry professionals in assessing the quality of Māori media products. Jo Smith’s “Shaking the Frame” highlights one such example of popular primitivism, exposing the pressure placed on Māori directors to produce textual representations of Māori communities that align with a Pākehā prescribed image of Māoridom, utilising Peter Debruge’s review of Waititi’s *Boy* as evidence:

Peter Debruge’s *Variety* review for *Boy*, which bemoaned the film’s lack of an ‘arthouse-ready anthropological edge’ (2010), reveals the ongoing expectations placed upon Māori creatives to represent a particular notion of Indigeneity. According to Debruge, Waititi’s investment in 1980s global culture (pop icon Michael Jackson and American television series such as *Dallas* (1978-1991) empties out a more desirable (read authentically traditional) form of Indigenous cultural expression. . . [a] film with an ‘arthouse-ready anthropological edge’ is one that tells non-Māori something about Indigeneity in an aesthetically pleasing and easily consumable way (think Niki Caro’s 2002 *Whale Rider*). Debruge’s remarks assume a highly prescriptive notion of what an Indigenous filmmaker must provide, revealing a set of

expectations indebted to the Western tradition of anthropology—dedicated to teaching the West about ‘the rest’ —and a global market hungry for exotic forms of cultural difference (66).

Angeline communicates the same view underpinning Debruge’s critique: for contemporary Māori to be considered legitimate, creatively or otherwise, they must construct their identity as a reflection of the essence of pre-colonial Māoridom, and consequently, must aspire to recover the same language and tikanga that framed Māori communities prior to Western contact. Primitivism would have contemporary scholarship believe that tūrangawaewae spaces can only be described through the lens of retrospection. This is problematic, as tribal configurations of Māori identity and community may be incompatible with the experiences of many modern Māori who have long since been displaced from traditional formats of existence, leading Melanie Wall to assert that “the [stereotype of the] quintessential Māori identity has resulted in a cultural closure where the past is reified and romanticised, where the problems of the present are decontextualized, and where differences within Māori are erased” (43). This erasure of distinct identities within contemporary Māoridom not only homogenises, but potentially engenders the gradual disassociation of Māori individuals with processes of whanaungatanga. The interconnections with ancestors, whānau, and community that are a cornerstone of well-being for many Māori are obscured by the ‘quintessentialism’ that renders non-conforming Māori identities unrecognisable, ostracised, and fundamentally disconnected (Panelli & Tipa 453). This cultural corruption of whanaungatanga is best articulated by Ira following Angeline’s interview. After hearing Angeline discuss her connection with her culture he states, “I wish we were Māori”, prompting an incredulous response from Monty who proceeds to remind him that he is indeed Māori. However, Ira clarifies that he wishes he was a “proper Māori” like Angeline, having internalised the

essentialist interpretation of contemporary Māoridom as merely the temporally dislocated residue of an earlier, tribal community.

This perception of Māoridom and its harmful effects on whanaungatanga and tūrangawaewae is externalised once more within Angeline's critique of Kowhai and Monty for "not being Māori enough", disrupting meaningful interconnection with her cousins. After her interview Angeline brings a television crew to her hometown of Aroha Bridge so that they can do a profile piece allowing fans insight into her roots. While showing the reporter her hometown she encounters Kowhai, Monty, and Ira at the dairy. In the process of ridiculing their music while showing off to the reporter, Angeline implies that Hook Ups would be more successful if the band displayed a more intimate understanding of their Māori heritage. What was first only insinuated is explicitly stated when an affronted Kowhai asks Angeline what she means, to which Angeline reiterates Ira's own perception that he and the twins don't constitute "real" Māori. Her justification is that the look of the band is not Māori enough, and that Monty does not embody the masculine image of the Māori-as-warrior, a fantasy image of the Māori male ironically critiqued in the title of the game that Monty is playing during this scene – "Whānau Fantasy". Angeline's critical attitude is indicative of larger trends of "[i]nternalised racism" noted by Angela Moeweka Barnes when conducting a focus group discussion based on Māori responses to media stereotypes. Barnes discovered an emerging pattern in which Māori "internalis[ed] racist stereotypes", and found participants "believ[ed] them to be true and justifiable and then acted on that internalisation" (67). She continues that this internalisation concerns her "not only for the regularity in which they appear throughout the lives of these participants but also for the deep and nuanced articulation of the internal conflict to which they attest". Angeline's singular perception of Māoridom can be interpreted as the externalisation of the internalised conflict of many contemporary Māori that engenders negative "interpersonal tensions within whānau", and

which is born from stereotypes that are “an example of the classic ‘divide and rule’ tactic of the powerful that pits the oppressed against each other and distracts from constructive debates about identity” (68). The damage that such essentialist ideologies may have on Māoridom is explored within Kowhai and Monty’s response to Angeline’s criticism. Kowhai immediately begins questioning her own identity and the musical direction of Hook Ups, and decides that in order to emulate the level of success achieved by Angeline they need to “Māorify” Hook Ups and “really try and delete mum’s genes”. Kowhai begins to imagine that the dual strands of her bicultural heritage are incompatible, and that to be a ‘proper’ Māori requires the sacrifice of her Pākehā ancestry. In their attempt to “Māorify” Hook Ups, Kowhai and Monty interview Manu, Mum Hook, and Uncle Noogy in order to gather information on what aspects of Māori culture they would respond to in Hook Ups music. The variety of responses they receive undermines Angeline’s conception of a monolithic Māoridom. Mum Hook identifies fire, poi, and feathers as powerful Māori symbols, thus equating ‘Māoriness’ with elements of traditional Kapa Haka performance. Manu suggests that Hook Ups re-evaluate their musical direction as “real Māoris love country”, indicating that for Manu, American music plays an important role in Māori cultural identity. Uncle Noogy views music as a creative platform through which the zeitgeist of the Māori protest movement can be recaptured, proposing the integration of the sounds of flagpoles being cut down, shot at, or burnt as a way of lending an anti-establishment edge to their music. These myriad responses illuminate that what exactly it means to be Māori is open to individual interpretation. In Hook Ups’ final “Māorified” product, the viewer sees the ultimate amalgam of symbols that capture the nuance of contemporary Māoridom: feathers, guns, poi, the reggae symbol of the Jamaican flag, and a flagpole displaying the Aotearoa New Zealand flag. This potent symbolism visually reflects the differing associations that Māori maintain with their own culture, while the unholy cacophony that emerges from the combination of such a diverse

range of influences comically emphasises the futility of establishing an essential Māori identity. In these ways, *Aroha Bridge* suggests that tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga can no longer be understood in terms of fixed spatial, temporal, or symbolic coordinates. Rather, they need to be contextualised within the current hybridised space of Māoridom if they are to remain relevant concepts to a community that has largely diverged from tribal configurations of tikanga.

Stereotypes

Throughout *Aroha Bridge*, the destructive nature of stereotyping is criticised not only through the lens of the “quintessential Māori”, but through the systematic foregrounding of the exploitation of the Māori image by Pākehā media. By re-appropriating some of these stereotypes, *Aroha Bridge* itself risks becoming complicit in the same processes of racist image-making it seeks to expose and undo. In Monty, the figure of the “comic Other” and the “Māori as primitive natural athlete” is manifested, while Uncle Noogy typifies “Māori as radical political activist”, stereotypes that alternately imagine Māori as embodying a “child-like simplicity”, a “threatening savagery”, and a “social deviant” (42-3). While the deployment of these stereotypes within *Aroha Bridge* can be perceived as perpetuating disempowering representations of Māori communities, the complexity of characterisation throughout the webseries ensures that this inclusion of stereotypes is instead configured as a process of reclamation and only represents a small sample of the many roles that Māori can occupy. This approach to Māoridom allows *Aroha Bridge* to combat the burden of representation discussed in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*:

Since what Menmi calls the ‘mark of the plural’ projects colonized people as ‘all the same,’ any negative behaviour by any member of the oppressed community is instantly generalised as typical, as pointing to a perpetual backsliding toward some presumed negative essence.

Representations thus become allegorical; within hegemonic discourse every subaltern

performer/role is seen as synecdochically summing up a vast but putatively homogenous community. Representations of dominant groups, on the other hand, are seen not as allegorical but as ‘naturally’ diverse, examples of the ungeneralizable variety of life itself (Menmi qtd. In Shohat & Stam 183).

Multiple characters display contradictory characteristics in *Aroha Bridge*. Angeline is at once diva and supporter; Kowhai is selfish and compassionate; Monty is idler and activist; Manu is stoic and sensitive; and Noogy is steadfast and changeable. Rigid identities have no place in *Aroha Bridge*, as no single identity is sufficient in capturing the complexities of those in the community. The above configuration noted by Menmi, in which dominant groups are rich and varied and minority groups are homogenised, is thus undone. This deconstruction of homogenous representation empowers viewers of *Aroha Bridge* to identify the text as representative of a subversive televisual tūrangawaewae in which Māoridom is expressed in terms of conflicting, complimentary, and complex characterisation. As a result, the excavated husks of the quintessential, comic, activist and athletic Māori are represented simply as *potential* facets of Māori identity, and not as the *only* identities available to Māori.

Capitalism and celebrity culture

Throughout *Aroha Bridge*, the ostensible incompatibility of contemporary ideological and economic structures with whanaungatanga is consistently foregrounded. The capitalist principles and celebrity culture informing Aotearoa New Zealand society – facets of modern existence common across all developed Western nations – is framed as corrosive by the effect they have on Māori communities and the interconnections therein. In S01E02 “Real Job”, Kowhai and Monty lament the fact that they are financially destitute as they have no form of employment. Manu enters and recounts that in his day he was able to achieve financial stability because he was “playing the stock market by post” instead of “pretending you’re famous on bloody Twitface”, like Kowhai and Monty. He proceeds to offer them

employment with him if they can't manage to get a job themselves, to which Kowhai responds by stating that she doesn't want to do "grumpy, angry, fatherly, moustachy work". Work is an important component of nurturing community bonds, as evidenced in the following definition of whanaungatanga sourced from the Māori Dictionary website: "a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging" ("Whanaungatanga"). While Kowhai's reluctance to work with her father can be interpreted merely as embarrassment, it also indicates some of the changes induced by the move from tribal modes to western capitalism in Aotearoa New Zealand. Richard Scase posits that "socio-economic changes, particularly those associated with the restructuring of capitalist production on a global scale" have resulted in the decline of "traditional rural and urban industries and communities", leading to a situation in which "community and work settings . . . are more isolated and privatized" (49). This new configuration of work and community promotes new "aspirational assumptions" that emphasise "the importance of self-help, individual achievement and personal success with the consequence that traditional appeals to collectivism have been superseded by the ideals of individualism and personal aspiration" (49). Kowhai's aspiration for personal success outside of the whānau, a mode of thought moulded within tenets of capitalism, prompts her to eschew the opportunity to work with her father, and consequently, reject a central site of whanaungatanga. S01E06 "Aroha Bridge Factor" includes a moment of explicit criticism directed at celebrity culture's fetishisation of the breakdown of whanaungatanga and the attempt of dominant Pākehā media to reshape potential tūrangawaewae sites as disempowering. When Kowhai enters Hook Ups into the Aroha Bridge Factor singing competition, she is aware that in order to succeed they will need to "street up the story", something Kowhai claims to see dominant media do to Māori all the time. Kowhai recognises that the position of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand society is not always defined by those operating from within the community, but is subject to

relocation by those from the outside. While Māori may seek to plant their feet in places that have traditionally been empowering such as the creative arts and performance, dominant media can resituate these spaces as disempowering by altering the perception of Māori therein. This disempowerment is rendered clear when Kowhai and Monty take to the stage and recount their ludicrous ‘backstory’ fabricated by Kowhai – that she and Monty are orphans that were raised by drug addicted snakes in a swamp. The judges are initially impressed with Hook Ups performance and commend them for their creativity despite the absence of whanaungatanga in their early life. Similarly, the audience are moved by the hardships that Kowhai and Monty have endured. The farcical nature of the audition is heightened by the attendance of Manu, Mum Hook, and Ira – who holds up a large sign that reads “Go! My blood relations”. When the judges discover that Hook Ups ‘inspirational’ story is a lie, they immediately dismiss Hook Ups as contenders in the competition. The message is clear: Māoridom is only considered interesting when it adheres to the narratives circulating within dominant Pākehā media. In this instance, *Aroha Bridge* criticises the way in which dominant Pākehā media views the breakdown of whanaungatanga as a desirable obstacle for Māori to overcome in order to reach their full potential. While tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga undoubtedly persist into contemporary Māoridom, it is clear that the economic and ideological structures of Aotearoa New Zealand have had a significant impact on the ways in which these concepts are understood.

Conclusion

Aroha Bridge’s on screen engagement with tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga offers no singular understanding of these concepts, nor does it attempt to embed them within a homogenous vision of contemporary Māori communities. Instead, the sense of hybridity, unity, and cultural complexity that pervades the textual representation of Māori in *Aroha Bridge* exemplifies the sentiment that “to be Māori is to be part of a collective but

heterogeneous identity, one that is enduring but ever in a state of flux” (McIntosh qtd. in “Konohi” 222). *Aroha Bridge* shapes viewer understanding of tūrangawaewae in complex ways, articulating notions of a place to stand that are at once fixed and fluid. Tūrangawaewae is shown to be rooted in a unified and autonomous Māoridom that stands together against Western intervention in Māori representation, even as the cultural fluidity of the Hook family and the creative spaces Kowhai and Monty occupy imply that the internal and external foundations of empowerment for contemporary Māori cannot be contained within immovable cultural parameters. Simultaneously, *Aroha Bridge* suggests that the establishment of empowering spaces for Māori is subject to many obstacles, including Māori misrepresentation in the media, issues of biculturalism, appropriation of Māori imagery, and the imposition of essentialist expectations on to Māori media. Despite these representational and ideological barriers, *Aroha Bridge* can itself be understood as a televisual tūrangawaewae space, a potential foundation upon which Māori viewers can stand amongst a rich and complex on screen Māori community. Meanwhile, *Aroha Bridge’s* treatment of whanaungatanga shapes a similarly nuanced understanding. Processes of establishing and nurturing community interrelationships through language and cultural learning are suggested to open up the Māori community to identities who are ethnically distinct from Māori. However, *Aroha Bridge* reveals that the opening up of Māoridom to Western capitalist ideologies, commercialism and celebrity culture in particular, has in some ways corrupted whanaungatanga in their emphasis on personal success over community bonds. While the internalisation of essentialist interpretations of Māoridom are shown to disrupt meaningful connection between Māori with differing interpretations of what being Māori means, the restoration of whanaungatanga is shown to allow Māori to mobilise against outside interference and debate amongst themselves questions of identity and belonging. These myriad interpretations suggest that while whanaungatanga remains a cornerstone of Māori

culture, viewers must understand that the postcolonial modes of Aotearoa New Zealand have had a significant impact on the ways in which Māori engage with whanaungatanga. *Aroha Bridge* ultimately suggests that the intersection of tūrangawaewae, whanaungatanga, and hybridity forges a site of significant contestation in bicultural Aotearoa New Zealand, but one with the potential to presents new and empowering spaces for the expression of Māori identities.

Chapter Three: *Kairākau*

Kairākau is a Māori Television series that reconnects modern viewers with the lives of Māori tipuna, retelling and re-contextualising the tribal conflict narratives of pre-colonial history. Each episode brings the legendary male heroes of Māori history to life, portraying their incredible feats and martial arts prowess as individuals embodying the spirit of Tū Matauenga that defined an era of inter-iwi and hapū conflict. In this chapter, I will argue that *Kairākau*'s contemporary narrator, traditional weapon expert Tupoūtahi Winitana, erases the Western linear division between past and present, enabling viewers to enter, examine, and ultimately learn from the events of Māori history. However, I will contend that *Kairākau*'s construction of the past as a tūrangawaewae space is not without complications. The potential ramifications of *Kairākau*'s retrospective approach to understanding tūrangawaewae are significant, as postcolonial Māori viewers may no longer recognise the same spaces of empowerment experienced by their pre-colonial tipuna. Namely, I will suggest that the limited representation of gender roles, primary focus on homosocial narratives, and emphasis on tribal land as tūrangawaewae may embody a version of tūrangawaewae that excludes some viewers. Despite these potential limitations, I will also argue that *Kairākau*'s representational investment in the revitalisation of te reo, the reclamation of Māori history and spirituality, and the celebration of Māori autonomy shape an understanding of tūrangawaewae rooted in Māori agency over Māori history. Next, I will posit that *Kairākau*'s manifestation of a living history transmitted from generation to generation via cultural practices and artefacts extends consideration of whanaungatanga far beyond the bond-making processes connecting Māori in the present. Rather, on screen Māori, both contemporary and ancestral, are shown to maintain a living connection with one another through which they can exchange experiences, stories, and glimpse into each other's lives. In these ways, *Kairākau*

does not attempt to frame viewer experience of history as dormant and linear, but encourages contemporary viewers to understand kinship and community bonds as extending across spatial and temporal borders. Crucially, *Kairākau* encourages viewers to understand Māoridom in terms of an ever-evolving, interconnected community, and as such “offers up a pedagogical opportunity to learn to listen differently, to indigenous articulations” (“Postcolonial Māori Television” 728). Finally I will suggest that *Kairākau* undoubtedly positions pre-colonial Māoridom and the tikanga therein as empowering to on screen characters, however, the extent to which this positioning of the past as tūrangawaewae has the potential to enrich viewer understandings of contemporary tūrangawaewae is more uncertain. No such ambiguity crystallises around *Kairākau*’s engagement with whanaungatanga. Within the parameters of the show, whanaungatanga connects Māori communities of the past and present irrespective of spatio-temporal barriers, and thus has the potential to enrich viewer understanding of the ways in which Māori are empowered to interconnect.

Fighting the loss of language: te reo and cultural autonomy

Language revitalisation has long been cited as a key strategy of cultural preservation within Māori scholarship, and the intersection of Māori language and Hollywood visual styles in *Kairākau* ensures that it contributes to this mission of preservation. Broadcast mediums in particular have been identified as an invaluable resource in the ongoing movement towards a wider awareness and understanding of Māori language, practices, and ideologies – a fundamental imperative of Māori Television, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four. Within *Kairākau*, the central role that te reo plays in the exploration and conservation of Māori culture is clear. Throughout the series, te reo is the only spoken language of the characters, with English subtitles available for those viewers who are not proficient in understanding te reo. This exhibition of Māori language within the televisual realm may empower contemporary Māori viewers to find a linguistic autonomy

largely denied to them within the products of mainstream media, while non-Māori viewers are encouraged to recognise te reo as the foundation upon which tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga are built. Further, the series' mainstream martial arts appeal and stylistic approach to cinematography – most notably the use of slow motion within battle scenes heavily reminiscent of Hollywood blockbusters such as The Wachowski's *The Matrix* and Zack Snyder's *300* – targets viewers who may have no prior knowledge of te reo but are attracted to content. In this way, even viewers with limited or no contact with te reo are coaxed into deeper engagement with Māori culture and worldviews, and are thus given a place to stand from which they can begin to understand Māori identity and community.

Narratives of the past, empowering to the future?

While the stories of tipuna have long held significance for Māori, the pre-colonial setting and traditional tikanga used to explore the historical narratives of *Kairākau* could alienate contemporary Māori viewers who have experienced a disruption to the “epistemological systems” that structured Māori tikanga before colonial occupation and the introduction of Western ideologies into Aotearoa New Zealand (Paringatai 47). This potential disconnect between ancestral and contemporary Māori could be amplified by *Kairākau*'s depiction of several retrospectively controversial pre-colonial practices, an assertion supported later in Chapter Four by social media responses to the series by some self-identified Māori viewers. For example, in S01E02 “Te Matapihi-O-Rehua”, Tupoūtahi guides the viewer through a storyline fraught with familial tensions and conflict. Early in the episode, Tupoūtahi describes the role that strategically arranged marriages played in brokering peace between iwi and hapū. Arranged marriage was a gift from Rongo, the deity of peace, designed to structure tribal society and temper conflict. S01E05 “Haukeka” focuses on the eponymous protagonist's journey of revenge for the killing of his father. After his father is slain during battle, Haukeka and the viewer witness two Māori warriors butchering

him for consumption: an act made all the more gruesome by the pronounced sound of bones cracking and flesh tearing, as well as the close up shot of Tupoūtahi's repulsed reaction. Later that same episode, Haukeka summons one of his fallen enemies back from the afterlife and enslaves him to aid in his machinations. While arranged marriage, cannibalism, and necromancy were practices and beliefs recognisable within the pre-colonial Māori world, they have become largely obsolete within post-colonial Aotearoa New Zealand. On the one hand, *Kairākau* should be commended for addressing aspects of tribal Māoridom that may be controversial to a modern audience. On the other, the confrontation of taboo subject matters risks endorsing the reductive imperialist concepts of Māori as the 'savage' Other, potentially destabilising *Kairākau's* embodiment of tūrangawaewae. While early settler publications theorised that Māori occupied an elevated status in The Great Chain of Being when compared to the Indigenous people of Africa or the Orient, their supposed propensity for glorying in war and indulging in cannibalism excluded them from consideration as a 'noble savage' (Sorrenson 98). Instead, in the eyes of Western occupiers, these practices rendered Māori lesser entities in need of Western intervention: a vision of Māoridom that may be rearticulated in the 'bestial' figure of Haukeka. Furthermore, the inclusion of necromancy in the "Haukeka" narrative can be seen as adversely naturalising orientalist tropes, placing emphasis on the spiritual and mystic elements of Māori culture that were often used to reinforce the divide between 'civilised' Western culture and 'irrational' indigeneity. Such tropes can be seen in the cinematic representations of Indigenous cultural ideologies and practices in early 21st century Hollywood action/adventure films such as Raul Walsh's *The Thief of Baghdad* and Robert Stevenson's *King Solomon's Mines* (King 26). Variations of these orientalist tropes are also found in the representations of Māori in many Aotearoa New Zealand films. For example, in her critique of Jane Campion's *The Piano*, Lynda Dyson suggests that in their marginalisation and assigned 'unknowable' quality, Māori are often

deployed as the “nature” to European “culture”: a representational device used to legitimize Western superiority (268).

However, in light of developments within Māori filmmaking, such arguments overlook the fundamental position that nature and spirituality hold within te ao Māori, which do not necessarily inhibit *Kairākau* as an empowering foothold for contemporary Māori viewers. In fact, to argue otherwise risks “reduc[ing] a complex variety of portrayals to a limited set of reified formulae” by denying Māori media the ability to explore Māori relationships with nature and spirituality outside of a Western perspective (Shohat & Stam 199). Māori land care researchers Garth Harmsworth and Shaun Awatere explain the intimate real-world relationship between Māori and natural environments:

Indigenous Māori have an intricate, holistic and interconnected relationship with the natural world and its resources, with a rich knowledge base – mātauranga Māori – developed over thousands of years and dating back to life in Polynesia and trans-Pacific migrations. This ancestral traditional bond links indigenous Māori to ecosystems . . . For Māori, as with other indigenous cultures, there are clear links between healthy ecosystems . . . and people’s cultural and spiritual well-being (274).

Nature and spirituality have shaped Māori worldviews throughout their history, a fact that is often obscured, demonised, or romanticised in Western media, for example the romantic treatment of Māori culture in Niki Caro’s *Whale Rider*. However, the production context and intended audience of *Kairākau* might allow these elements of Māoridom to break free from these Eurocentric associations and permit contemporary viewers to critically reflect on ancestral history and the natural world from a Māori perspective. Sarina Pearson asserts that the structural development of postcolonial cinema and television has aided in “unthink[ing] the Savage slot”: a term utilised by Michel-Rolph Trouillot to describe the “structural repository integral to organising the project of global legitimation referred to as ‘the West’”

(22). When examined as part of this wider ideological movement within postcolonial cinema and television, *Kairākau* can be perceived as an embodiment of the postcolonial imperative to uproot Māori history from Western narrativisation and reclaim pre-colonial times as tūrangawaewae.

In S01E05 “Haukeka”, *Kairākau* offers a moment of self-reflection that explains why it explores narratives that represent the breadth and complexity of pre-contact Māori experiences, both outwardly positive and retrospectively controversial. This episode centres on the theme of ideological change and adaptability for Māoridom, closing with a didactic monologue from Tupoūtahi: “[i]n the time of our ancestors, it was a time of possession. It was a time of bravery. It was a time of offering. It was a time of arrogance. It was a time of punishment . . . [w]e as the grandchildren must learn these lessons to better ourselves”. In this declaration the viewer might detect how *Kairākau* itself imagines the pre-colonial era as tūrangawaewae. *Kairākau* suggests that its retrospection allows Māori viewers to revisit the events of the past in order to redefine what it means to be Māori in the present: a potent pedagogical resource for identity building that encourages viewers to acknowledge the past as a firm foundation from which Māori can shape the future. As such, when assessing how *Kairākau* embodies a televisual tūrangawaewae space it is important that positive representations of te ao Māori and tikanga in the media are not considered the sole source of empowerment for contemporary Māori audiences. According to Tupoūtahi, the selection of polarising narratives and the depiction of characters with questionable morals (by contemporary standards) are tools with which contemporary Māori can adapt, learn, and grow as a community. The contradicting interpretations of *Kairākau*'s subject matter raises the question: does *Kairākau* enrich viewer understanding of tūrangawaewae by reconfiguring the past as a platform from which Māori can view, debate, address, and connect with their own

history, or is it a space in which televisual tūrangawaewae is destabilised as Eurocentric tropes continue to inform Māori representation?

While no ready answer to this question is available to the viewers of *Kairākau*, the inter-iwi and hapū tensions at the core of each episode certainly contradict the postcolonial positioning of Māori as homogenous. Rather than conceptualising Māori communities as a unified entity standing against Western misrepresentation – a trend embodied by the tense relationship between the Pākehā reporter and Hook family in S02E02 of *Aroha Bridge* – *Kairākau*'s setting allows it to shift focus onto the nuanced interrelationships between, and within, the numerous Māori communities that occupied pre-contact North and South Islands. As a result, the on screen representation of whanaungatanga moves far beyond simplistic categorisations. Instead, the establishment and maintenance of kinship bonds is shown to be both a constructive and destructive process. The constructive aspects of whanaungatanga are best captured in S01E01 “Tonohopu”, an episode that focuses on the titular protagonist as he risks his life confronting enemies that far outnumber him in order to rescue his son, illuminating the precious nature of patrilineal ties. However, the representation of whanaungatanga in S01E02 “Te Matapihi-O-Rehua” is more complex. This episode focuses on the dynamic between Te Matapihi, his younger brother Te Whanoa, their grandfather and chief of Ngāti Whakaue, Pukaki, and the young ward entrusted to their iwi, Makoiroa of Tuwharetoa. After a day of playing on the lake, Te Matapihi confronts Makoiroa after he attacks his younger brother, Te Whanoa, for teasing him during a fireside conversation. In an attempt to diffuse the situation, Te Matapihi reminds Makoiroa that their whanaungatanga means there is an intimate and inseparable connection between the two: “[m]y blood is your blood”. Despite the depth of connection evident in this sentiment, the relationship between Te Matapihi, Te Whanoa, Pukaki and Makoiroa is shown to be fraught and discordant, and even leads to Te Matapihi's suicide after he is unable to bring himself to harm Makoiroa when he

returns to Ngāti Whakaue to seek revenge as an adult. *Kairakau*'s refusal to envision pre-contact Māoridom and the relationships therein as invariably positive acknowledges the essentialism that emerges from the attempt to depict minority cultures within such narrow parameters (Shohat & Stam 199). In this way, the Māori community of *Kairākau* can be considered more complex and less idealised than that of the unified Māoridom captured at key moments in *Aroha Bridge*. By revisiting the family and community structures of the past and exploring the ways in which these were maintained, or indeed disrupted, by the politics of warfare and inter-community conflict, *Kairākau* may challenge the notion that Māori must stand as one and assume a shared form of Māoridom.

Connection to the past: Tupōtahi Winitana and koru time

In order to update the stories at the core of *Kairākau*, the contemporary narrator, Tupōtahi Winitana, functions as a stable foothold granting viewers purchase in the transient territory of Māori koru time. The temporal stability offered by Tupōtahi allows Māori viewers to return to the stories of their tipuna, while his intervention into the narratives facilitates their establishment of whanaungatanga with past communities as they learn to navigate the interweaving strands of mātauranga Māori, te ao Māori, and Māori tikanga that frame pre-contact Māoridom. Tupōtahi's intervention takes many forms: his verbal explanation and contextualisation of events, his interaction with other on screen characters in order to clarify their motivations, and his didactic monologues emphasising connection to – and relevance of – events in ancestral history. Initially, it would seem that *Kairākau* frames Tupōtahi's role, and by extension that of the modern viewership he represents, as that of passive observer: a fact that he acknowledges in S01E07 while watching enemies engage in battle with the warrior Te-O-Tane, exclaiming, "I want to jump in there, but I can't! My job is to observe and let history replay itself!" However, this declaration of passivity is at odds with the physically, verbally, and spiritually interactive relationship Tupōtahi maintains with

his on screen ancestors. In S01E01 “Tonohopu”, Tupoūtahi provides water to the buried Kairākau who is being tortured by his captors. In S01E03 “Herea”, the titular hero helps rouse Tupoūtahi from unconsciousness after he is attacked by an unknown assailant, and takes him to be healed by his wife, Rangiaho. Later, in S01E06 “Takurua”, Tupoūtahi aids in removing Kui and Koro from the danger of invaders and actively contributes to Takarua’s defeat of his enemies. Clearly, the self-ascribed role of observer is too reductive to capture the active exchanges between narrator and tipuna, suggesting that the relationship between *viewer* and tipuna is equally complex.

Not all such interactions between narrator and character are solemn and serious, as lighter interactions reveal yet another facet of whanaungatanga in *Kairākau*. In S01E02 “Herea”, Tupoūtahi sits with Herea’s fighting instructor around a fire after a day of training in preparation for Herea’s upcoming battle. Tupoūtahi drinks tea from a metal thermos, much to the surprise of the instructor, who has never seen a flask before. After he enquires what Tupoūtahi is drinking, the narrator responds, a “cuppa”. The tutor tries the “cuppa”, and promptly spits it out, calling it poison. In S01E06 “Takarua”, the protagonist falls ill after raiding the muesli bars from Tupoūtahi’s pack and gorging himself. While on the surface these innocuous moments appear to simply lend lightness and humour to the ancestral connections that stretch through space and time, on closer inspection they reveal a key detail of the way *Kairākau* approaches whanaungatanga. That is, the process of building interconnections with tipuna does not depend on anchoring the connection in events that have cultural or spiritual impact. Instead, comedic moments like those found in S01E02 “Herea” and S01E06 “Takarua” reveal the co-existence of Māori, past and present, in everyday situations. This vision of an everyday living history reinforces the Māori conception of koru temporality:

Just like a spiral constantly repeats itself, the different levels of time spiral in and out of each other. Therefore, neither the past nor the ancestors may be relegated to a completed or ‘past’ point in time, but remain a constitutive part of the present and a powerful and enabling force in the future: ‘The individual is shaped by the ancestors; each man or woman in turn, is responsible for the shaping of the people to come’. As a result, all three temporal levels of past, present and future, as distinguished from a Western cultural perspective, are highly intertwined with each other. Like the different strands of a rope or the different elements of a spiral they must hence not be regarded separately, but as intersecting (Panny qtd. in Bingel et al. 59)

This understanding of koru temporality underpins *Kairākau*’s conception of whanaungatanga, allowing ancestral ways of living to “remain a constitutive part of the present,” and perhaps even the lives of contemporary Māori viewers.

Within the overlapping temporal planes of *Kairākau*, Tupōtahi is empowered to directly intervene in not only everyday events, but events of historical significance as well. In S01E08 “Te-O-Tane Part Two”, Tupōtahi engages in battle for the first time. Despite his suggestion earlier in the series that he is only exploring history as a passive observer, Tupōtahi contributes to Te-O-Tane’s war effort by fighting one of the enemies. This complete inversion of Tupōtahi’s role from self-professed passive observer to active participant has the potential to undermine simplistic interpretations of *Kairākau*’s engagement with history and the role that contemporary viewers play in this history. Mirroring the parallel times of past and present within koru temporality, Māori viewers are invited to encounter whanaungatanga as both observer *and* participant, while non-Māori viewers such as myself are empowered to reformat their understanding of Māori interconnections in light of Tupōtahi’s position as a bridge between tipuna and contemporary Māori.

A return to the land: physical tūrangawaewae, natural beings and unrecognisable landscapes

Throughout *Kairākau*, the connection of on screen Māori with tūrangawaewae spaces is manifested in the visual and narrative collapse of the distinction between Māori and nature: a facet of the show that is reinforced by Tupouāhahi's episodic refrain of "I am a native being, living naturally, in my natural world". While the displacement of the urbanised Māori from tribal lands in *Aroha Bridge* suggests that tūrangawaewae be considered within metaphysical and suburban spaces, *Kairākau* suggests that the interrelationship with whenua remains an essential apparatus of self-perception for Māori. Throughout the show, aerial and ground level panoramas of Aotearoa New Zealand's famed primordial lakes, mountains, and bush forests are accompanied by recurring shots of natural motifs such as flora and fauna, fire, water, sand, and soil. The prevalence of natural imagery in *Kairākau*'s visual register does not act simply as an appealing aesthetic. Rather, nature is portrayed as a fundamental feature of the ways that ancestral Māori lived. The connection between Māori and whenua is communicated by visual and aural techniques that envision a tūrangawaewae rooted in Aotearoa New Zealand's landscape. In S01E04 "Tuwharetoa", Manaia discusses the vital material role of natural resources in the daily survival of Māori, such as wood used for crafting weapons and as fuel for fire, verbalising the importance of the natural bounty his tūrangawaewae provides. In S01E02 "Te Matapihi-O-Rehua", the opening shots of the episode depict Māori adolescents playing on a waka. The camera frames the waka from beneath the surface of the water so that the viewer perceives the action through the lens of nature. S01E05 "Haukeka", meanwhile, opens with a shot of the lake water gently lapping at a sandy lakeshore, and slowly pans over the beach to Tupouāhahi's feet embedded in the sand, before moving upwards into a mid-shot of his face and chest: a visual which suggests that Māori are an extension of the land that they occupy. Not only do the on screen characters

openly acknowledge the critical role of natural resources in survival for pre-contact Māoridom, then, but the camerawork itself dismantles the distinction between Māori and whenua: two entities that *Kairākau* imagines as inextricable.

The representation of Māori as an extension of their tūrangawaewae becomes even more explicit when the relationship between the two is framed in terms of physical and spiritual interactivity on both a narrative and visual register. S01E03 “Herea” opens with Tupoūtahi speaking to the disembodied voice of his ancestor, Tukino. Tukino explains how seemingly one-dimensional articles of nature such as karamu branches have layers of spiritual significance for Māori. On a surface level, karamu is simply a leaf, but according to Māori lore, its metaphysical properties are sacred, functioning as a gateway for communion between the living and the dead. Karamu thus occupies a similar space to that of *Kairākau* itself: the passageway between the viewers of the present and the tipuna of the past. *Kairākau* interprets this connective quality of karamu literally, as Tupoūtahi directly addresses a branch of karamu when speaking to his ancestor, foregrounding its function as an intermediary between the spiritual and physical realms of Māoridom. In S01E04 “Tuwharetoa”, Manaia meditates by a pool of water, where he is disturbed by a hand emerging from beneath the surface. Later, it is implied that the water is a conduit through which Manaia was able to see a vision of the battles that his father was facing in another geographical location, as Tupoūtahi confirms that Manaia was alone by the pool. By depicting the intimate spiritual relationship between Māoridom and whenua, it can be suggested that *Kairākau* attempts to address some of the issues arising from the displacement of Māoridom from ancestral land and the consequent loss of physical tūrangawaewae:

In recent decades, health researchers and practitioners have come to realise that mass traumatic events, such as displacement and land loss from colonisation, generate chronic, as well as acute, collective psychological suffering for Indigenous peoples . . . this is partly

because Indigenous people view themselves as a part of the natural world, not apart from it . . . Thus, more than merely the loss of a material or economic resource, the loss of land is also an assault on the essence of Indigenous culture and ways of being. For Maori, culture and identity are fundamentally built on the reciprocal relationships formed with whānau [extended family] and whenua [land/place]. Thus, the loss of whenua during colonisation not only created intergenerational economic problems for Maori, but also compromised cultural and psychological wellbeing. Such consequences continue to be felt by Maori (Reid et al. 32).

The intergenerational trauma caused by the loss of the profound spiritual and material relationship between Māori and whenua may be somewhat alleviated within the televisual return of land to Māori dominion in *Kairākau*. It is not only in the presence of natural spirituality on screen that this restorative mission can be observed, but also in the ‘natural’ style of camerawork. Immediately after the introductory monologue in S01E05 “Haukeka”, the camera begins to wind its way across the forest floor before emerging from a frond of ferns whereupon it encounters the scene of a massacre. As the scene of devastation is revealed to the viewer, the camera movements become ‘natural’ and animalistic. The camera follows the action in erratic movements, first slithering along the forest floor, then stalking the Māori warriors who inspect their fallen foes, the camera moving from body to body, darting in and out of foliage. Clearly, the deep-rooted connection between Māori and land, well-established within the narrative and symbolic registers of *Kairākau*, is mirrored in the anthropomorphic qualities of its cinematography.

However, this representation of tribal land as tūrangawaewae is a site of potential tension. While the spaces in which Māori connect and nurture processes of whanaungatanga and tikanga are reconfigured into community halls, dairies, and home spaces in *Aroha Bridge*, the pre-colonial setting of *Kairākau* necessitates that tribal land, the Pa, and traditional whare are the exclusive locations of physical tūrangawaewae. However, these

physical community structures have long been decentralised as living spaces for contemporary Māori, and ancestral lands have undergone radical transformations as a result of colonial displacement and urban development. John Ryks, Andrew Waa, and Amber L. Pearson note that the geographical situation of Māori has undergone significant change since first contact with the Western world. Indeed, at the beginning of the 20th century around 85% of Māori lived in rural settings, a figure that has now inverted, with at least 85% of Māori having migrated to urban and suburban environs (28). Furthermore, Karyn Paringatai identifies that Māori identity in its traditional format was constructed around four parameters: belonging to a wider collection of whānau, hapū and iwi; connection to tūrangawaewae land; a practiced ability in te reo and Māori tikanga; and a knowledge of tribal mythology (49). When contemporary Māori fall outside of these parameters, Paringatai suggests that it may lead to a disassociation with their heritage (51). Given this context, questions remain over the relevance of *Kairākau*'s representation of tūrangawaewae for some viewers, despite strengthening understandings of iwi history and te reo.

Masculinity and Femininity

The spirit of Tū Matauenga that informs *Kairākau* invites complex interpretations when considered alongside how viewers might understand the series as a televisual tūrangawaewae for the men and women of Māoridom. Tū is the son of the first primordial gods Ranginui and Papatūānuku, and the god of war, hunting, fishing and cooking. Within *Kairākau*, the focus on battle and weaponry inspired by this mythology manifests in the prevalence of homosocial relationships within the narrative of each episode; the framing of masculinity in terms of warrior status and bodily prowess; and the decentralisation of female characters. *Kairākau*'s focus on the masculine realm of inter-iwi conflict reflects a historically accurate account of tribal warfare as an arena in which women were seldom included. However, it calls into question the extent to which the largely invisible womanhood

of *Kairākau* can be considered a useful tool for learning about televisual tūrangawaewae in relation to wahine. The ubiquitous nature of television within Westernised countries renders it a potent source of information surrounding culture and society, and although the narratives around culture and gender circulated therein are often fictional, they may represent an “unspoken reality” for many minority viewers (Rubie-Davies et al. 175). It follows that television must be scrutinised for ideological assumptions and implications that reinforce binary notions of gender and culture. When women are included within *Kairākau*, they are almost exclusively depicted within a domestic context in which they are the primary caregivers for tamariki, assume a passive advisory role for their husbands, and undertake the conventionally feminine pursuit of healing, typified by Rangiohau in S01E03 “Herea” and Kui in S01E06 “Takurua”. While it is possible that contemporary female viewers might find empowerment within these representations of vital elements of pre-colonial Māoridom, to be a wahine in *Kairākau* means to occupy an auxiliary role in Māori narratives. That is not to suggest that this show alone need bear the burden of representation for all Māori, as the wider canon of Māori film and programming contains female-centric texts. Rather, its limited gender portrayals underline the need to continue increasing the diversity of gender roles on screen. *Kairākau* itself is aware of the representational predicament that arises from the retrospective attempt to accurately capture gender roles that originate in inherently patriarchal social structures. In S01E02 “Te Matapihi-O-Rehua”, Te Matapihi, the new Kairākau of his iwi following the death of his grandfather, bathes with his men in a hot spring after battle. As they bathe, Te Whanoa, Te Matapihi’s younger brother, jokes with another member of the party that a woman’s role in their society should revolve around mending clothes and serving meals. Te Matapihi gently chastises this dismissive attitude towards women, warning his men to be careful what they say lest they be accused of being “abuser[s] of women”. In this light-hearted scene, *Kairākau* foregrounds some of the attitudes and expectations that governed

gender roles in pre-colonial Māoridom, and that retrospection may deem misogynist.

Paradoxically, however, the content of the show itself does little to depict women outside of these roles. Despite this acknowledgement, *Kairākau*'s prioritisation of male-driven warfare narratives may articulate televisual tūrangawaewae as largely exclusive of women, and endorse a version of history in which females are largely unseen and unheard.

There is one notable exception to the trend of domestic female characters within *Kairākau*: Rekareka, the warrior wahine. Rekareka's complex and conflicting relationship with her master and mentor, Te-O-Tane, enters her into a liminal space of representation in which she is simultaneously empowered and oppressed. When the viewer is first introduced to Rekareka in S02E07 "Te-O-Tane Part One", her subordinate, even servile, relationship with Te-O-Tane seems to relegate Rekareka's representation to the same sphere of domesticity that Kui and Rangiohau inhabit. Indeed, Rekareka initially undertakes similar tasks to the other women of *Kairākau*, cooking, serving, and taking care of the homestead. However, the relationship between Rekareka and Te-O-Tane develops a more sinister edge as the episode progresses, and the power dynamic between the two is revealed. In one instance Rekareka kneels, prostrate, before Te-O-Tane as she offers him sustenance in a physical display of her subordination, while in another she obediently follows orders issued by Te-O-Tane, despite his aggressive and demanding tone. Later in the episode, the source of the imbalance of power between them is clarified when Rekareka is revealed to be Te-O-Tane's slave. In one scene, Rekareka goes to the river to collect water for her master who has returned from battle. By the riverbank she is accosted by two warriors who restrain her while the leader of the marauding group, Takapuae, approaches her with an offer of freedom in exchange for the theft of Te-O-Tane's taiaha, which they believe to be the source of his warrior prowess. Initially, Rekareka rejects the proposal, insisting that while Takapuae's taiaha is great, Te-O-Tane's is far greater, suggesting that her servitude is at least partially

based on his position as a great warrior. While Rekareka eventually concedes to Takapuae's request, it seems she must exchange her sense of coerced loyalty and betray her master in order to gain her freedom, a sentiment best expressed in her profession to Takapuae that "my freedom feels like a stone, weighing me down". While it transpires that the betrayal is merely a ruse concocted by Rekareka and Te-O-Tane together to draw their enemies into battle, this revelation simply reinforces the negative power dynamic between master and slave, as Rekareka chooses to serve Te-O-Tane rather than accept freedom and autonomy as her "loyalty to [her master] means more to her than her love itself". At best, this apparent act of self-oppression can be interpreted as *Kairākau* merely reflecting the challenges facing wahine pre-colonization. At worst, it can be seen as naturalising "hegemonic masculinity" by framing its most prevalent female character as willingly subservient to masculine authority (Paechter 254-5). On initial inspection, it would appear that Rekareka – a character who must be either persecuted for her treachery or remain in bondage – does little to aid in the construction of an empowering televisual foundation for women within tribal femininity.

However, S01E08 "Te-O-Tane Part Two" complicates the interpretation of Rekareka as disempowered and disempowering. At the close of the previous episode, Tupōtahi is taken hostage by an unknown assailant, prompting Te-O-Tane and Rekareka to band together in order to search for him. Although they eventually find Tupōtahi bound and beaten in a thicket, this is not before Rekareka becomes embroiled in a ferocious battle with a male Māori warrior. Until this stage of the Te-O-Tane arc, *Kairākau* utilised the male warrior as the driving force behind the narrative action of each episode. However, in this pivotal battle sequence Rekareka fully embodies the spirit of Tū Matauenga prized within the show, and as such her role somewhat enters into equilibrium with the male protagonists of *Kairākau*. The viewer may no longer consider her solely as an emblem of subordinate femininity as she transforms into a disciple figure, learning the art of warfare from one of the greatest warriors

in Māori history – a transformation that alters her ostensible servility into respectful deference to her mentor. This new role of warrior wahine is manifested in her prodigious skill with a taiaha. She easily keeps pace with her male opponent and embraces the aggression of warfare, taking up the offensive several times and eventually besting her rival. The viewer is able to watch Rekareka progress from seemingly a oppressed servant, to a disciple, to a warrior in her own right. This is a significant departure from previous representations of women within *Kairākau*, and has significant implications for how the viewers themselves may understand the show as a tūrangawaewae space. As the episode progresses the positive implications of Rekareka’s transformation become clear. Te-O-Tane and his men head to battle. Rekareka expresses her desire to accompany Te-O-Tane so that she can protect him; however, Te-O-Tane forbids her from coming and charges Tupoūtahi with making sure that she does not stray into danger. Despite the instruction from her master to stay behind, Rekareka joins the fight and defeats several enemies. In the aftermath of battle it is discovered that Rekareka has died from a fatal wound. She not only defied the orders of her master, then, but ultimately decided her own destiny: the ultimate form of autonomy. In *Kairākau* the viewer might sense a tension between her embodiment of an empowering foothold for women, and the subservient facets of her character. In these ways, the potential for *Kairākau* to provide a space in which contemporary viewers can look to female-centric narratives to identify manifestations of tūrangawaewae is limited, but present.

It is not only femininity that is a site of contention within *Kairākau*, as masculinity, too, is subject to polemical interpretations. Warrior masculinity and its use in the stereotypical depiction of Māori within the media has a long history within the mediascape of Aotearoa New Zealand. In his critique of both the literary and cinematic iterations of *Once Were Warriors*, Jorun Bræck Ramstad claims that mainstream media’s adoption of Māori representation as “primitive” and “violent” was re-appropriated by activists during the 1970s,

who assimilated this image into the ethnopolitical struggle of the Māori movement (100).

However, he asserts that this adoption of “primitive” imagery was problematic, as

[t]he essentialist impetus [used] in the construction of Maoritanga caused many problems for those Māori who had adjusted to a policy of urbanisation and assimilation. In short, the urban, detribalised Maori became marginal within the tribal society to which they aspired, especially according to the criteria of ‘true’ and ‘right’ Maori belonging (100).

Given this precedent of alienation for contemporary Māori who did not conform to a tribal version of Māoridom, it is imperative that the centrality of the masculine warrior in *Kairākau* is examined within the context of its complex history of representation. There can be no question that the male warrior is the most common character archetype within *Kairākau*, with each episode focusing on a male protagonist who has achieved lasting recognition due to their battle prowess. While examples of the warrior figure can be seen throughout the series, it is taken to new heights within two episodes in particular: S01E06 “Takurua” and S01E07 “Te-O-Tane Part One”. Takurua is a stereotype of tribal masculinity and is completely defined by his brute strength, earning the admiration of Tupōtahi for easily dispatching an enemy with his bare hands. Te-O-Tane’s embodiment of warrior masculinity is even more overt.

Tupōtahi makes clear from the outset of the episode that Te-O-Tane is a character with superhuman attributes – “[of] massive build . . . and possess[ing] tremendous strength” – that allow the military prowess of his iwi, Ngati Kahungunu, to be indelibly carved into Māori history. During Tupōtahi’s introductory narration, the viewer is shown a scene in which Te-O-Tane’s physical superiority is extreme and undeniable: he impales a foe with his taiaha, lifting him clean off the ground and casting him aside with little effort. In isolation, these celebrations of physical prowess prized by pre-contact masculinity are not necessarily negative, especially given the historical importance of strength and physical ability in protecting and preserving hapū and iwi. However, these representations of masculinity are

problematic given their lack of diversity. Throughout *Kairākau*, success in warfare is the foremost attribute used to measure the worth of male Māori and the relevance of their narratives to Māori history, potentially limiting the ways in which viewers may understand *Kairākau* as a tūrangawaewae space for men. While these representations may have metaphorical value that transcend the time and place of their setting, they still position Māori masculinity within restrictive parameters.

The living histories of cultural artefacts: whanaungatanga across space and time

Throughout *Kairākau* tribal artefacts are portrayed as material manifestations of whanaungatanga: objects that encase and preserve the living history of Aotearoa New Zealand's first settlers. The vitality and connective quality of these taonga tuku iho is first seen in S01E04 "Tuwharetoa", when Manaia tracks his father through the forest after a sparring session. Tupoūtahi follows along behind Manaia, pestering him to take his father's mere pounamu, which mysteriously appears near the pool beside which Manaia was meditating. Manaia accidentally bats the mere pounamu out of Tupoūtahi's hand and catches it. When Manaia catches the mere pounamu, he sees a vision of his father engaged in battle reflected in the surface of the greenstone. Clearly, the mere pounamu provides a spiritual connection between father and son, and by extension, *Kairākau* may be suggesting that such artefacts can provide a way for contemporary Māori to reconnect to their tipuna. Māori art historian Ngarino Ellis perceives that the objects passed down from generation to generation from tipuna are not considered inanimate within te ao Māori; rather, "[t]aonga . . . are often considered as living beings, part of the whakapapa and history of the land and the communities with which they are associated" (443). This suggestion of a living history contained within tribal artefacts is rendered explicit by the cinematography of S01E07 "Te-O-Tane Part One". This episode is punctuated by sequences that are filmed with a camera mounted on the tinana (body) of the Te-O-Tane's taiaha. These close-up camera shots give

the viewer a detailed view of the decorated upoko (head) of the weapon, including the paua eyes of the tiki carving: humanistic features that suggest the inner spirit of the weapon. In several shots the viewer sees the upoko centred in the frame, beneath which the wandering feet of Te-O-Tane and the passing forest floor are alternately seen. This gives the visual impression that the taiaha itself is a living being, stalking and hunting through the forest. This anthropomorphic treatment of the taiaha is made apparent once more in a scene in which Te-O-Tane reaches his homestead and takes refreshment. The viewer is shown a shot of Te-O-Tane gulping water, immediately mirrored by a shot of the upoko being cleaned in a bowl of water: both Te-O-Tane and his taiaha are simultaneously rejuvenated by the water. *Kairākau* thus imbues Māori cultural artefacts with a vitality that renders them the living vessels of Māori tipuna, and suggests that through contact with these objects, both on and off screen Māori might be able to engage in processes of whanaungatanga across both time and space.

Cultural artefacts not only suggest a metaphysical whanaungatanga that transcends Eurocentric perceptions of linear history, but, alongside tribal art forms and modes of expression, proudly articulate a sense of ‘Māoriness’ that is completely independent from Western influence. While the symbolic registers of *Aroha Bridge* are interwoven with notions of Māoridom reliant on hybridity and cultural and ethnic fluidity, *Kairākau* celebrates and preserves the traditional art forms, dress, and story-telling modes that delineate Māori as culturally autonomous. In S01E01 “Tonohopu” the costuming of the characters, including their attire, hairstyles, adornments, and weapons, immediately distinguish warriors of rank. The chief Tamamutu and his second-in-command wear feathered kakahu and ornamental tooth necklaces, and bear Ta Moko on their buttocks and thighs, all of which signal their prestige and status within their iwi. In S01E02 “Te Matapihi-O-Rehua”, a waiata is performed by Pukaki and Te Whanoa to lament Te Matapihi’s suicide, an expressive mode that allows them to articulate and mourn their lost whanaungatanga. Oral storytelling plays a

prominent role in S01E02 “Herea”. Herea’s fighting instructor begins to re-forge the vital whanaungatanga connection between father and son by narrativising their relationship as one in which the father lives on within Herea. These traditional modes are not only explored in terms of their relevance to the tribal Māori community, but are also shown to be a vital connection allowing present-day Māori viewers to experience the tikanga passed down from their tipuna. At the beginning of each episode, Tupoūtahi introduces the narrative that will be explored using traditional oral storytelling. This trend continues in the main body of the episodes, as Tupoūtahi regularly interrupts the flow of the internal narrative in order to explain to the viewers the complex storylines unfolding on screen. In this way, oral storytelling is combined with contemporary cinematography to imagine traditional modes anew. At the close of S01E03 “Herea”, Tupoūtahi engages in a weapon display that highlights traditional battle drills, mirroring the practices of his tipuna. Perhaps it is best to consider *Kairākau* as a series that sets out to relocate tūrangawaewae spaces within traditional art forms that are experiencing a modern resurgence. Ta Moko, ceremonial capes, and kapa haka performance remain a potent form of expression for many modern Māori, and can perhaps provide a way for Māori to reconnect with the wider community, both past and present.

Conclusion

The narrative, representation, cinematography, costuming, setting, and props of *Kairākau* invite contrasting interpretations of the ways in which they might shape viewer understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga. *Kairākau*’s exclusive use of te reo, the inclusion of empowering traditional art forms and tikanga, and the reclamation of the intimate material and spiritual relationship between Māori and whenua carve out a televisual foothold for a culturally autonomous Māoridom, while the show’s content has the potential to render this space appealing to those viewers with limited knowledge of te reo. Further, the

cultural artefacts of pre-contact Māoridom are imbued with the vitality of a living history, becoming conduits through which contemporary Māori might establish whanaungatanga with tipuna. While processes of whanaungatanga are not always captured in such positive terms and are often portrayed as complex or even disharmonious, this very tension de-homogenises the retrospective vision of pre-colonial Māori communities. While *Kairākau's* enriching engagement with whanaungatanga has clear positive implications for contemporary viewers, the extent to which the televisual foothold offered by *Kairākau* can be considered tūrangawaewae is more ambiguous. Despite the inclusion of a contemporary narrator to contextualise the events of the past and aid modern Māori viewers in establishing whanaungatanga through koru time, *Kairākau's* emphasis on homosocial narratives, the obscurity of femininity, the lack of diverse gender representations, and the construction of tribal land as tūrangawaewae offer a vision of tūrangawaewae that is in many ways more restrictive than that of *Aroha Bridge*.

Chapter Four: Production and Distribution

Aroha Bridge and *Kairākau* are informed by innovative approaches to production and distribution. These approaches may shape viewer understandings of how tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga have been assimilated into the industrial contexts of Māori media. First, I will explore the production contexts of my chosen shows. Through her work as an artist and activist, *Aroha Bridge* creator Jessica Hansell has become a leading voice for Māori inclusion in the arts, particularly within Aotearoa New Zealand's mediascape. I will argue that by utilising both her influence as a Māori author and the subversive properties of animation, Hansell conspicuously constructs *Aroha Bridge* as a politicised televisual foothold that encourages viewers to engage in processes of decolonisation by thinking critically about ongoing issues of reductive Māori representation in the mainstream media of the Pacific and beyond. As such, I will suggest that *Aroha Bridge* embodies televisual tūrangawaewae. This televisual foundation of empowerment is supplemented by the webseries' use of application technology to reconfigures processes of whanaungatanga across mobile platforms, allowing fans to engage in the collaborative creative processes of Māori media. However, I will acknowledge that the ability of independent Māori media producers to create spaces of televisual tūrangawaewae is dictated by access to financial assistance from public funding agencies such as NZ on Air, which are subject to the fiscal pressures of the Political Economy of the media in Aotearoa New Zealand. This results in limited access for Māori media producers, as such funding is exclusive to projects with sufficient commercial appeal to ensure their adoption by distribution channels. I will then move on to the production context of *Kairākau*, explaining that the manifestation of off screen whanaungatanga and tūrangawaewae lies in not in its selection of medium, celebration of Māori auteurism, or creative deployment of mobile technology. Rather, Māori Television aligns media production

practices more closely with Māori worldviews by undertaking a mission to reorganise production processes on an institutional scale, using *Kairākau* as a vehicle to catalyse the introduction of Māori into the martial arts television genre, and reconceptualising authorship as communal. In these ways, I will contend that Māori Television shapes viewer understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga by exhibiting how these te ao Māori concepts transform established media practices, genres, and critical approaches to television in revolutionary ways. Next, I will reiterate that even studio-backed Māori media is subject to commercial concerns, leading some critics to suggest that Māori Television prioritises entertainment over cultural value, destabilising its position as a cultural foundation for Māori in the television industry.

Next, I will explore the distribution contexts of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau*. I will begin by examining how the growth of Māori media in online distribution platforms, prompted by the gradual transition of media consumption from traditional formats to online viewing, presents both obstacles and openings for Māori media producers (“Where are the Audiences?”). I will also argue that many distribution channels constitute tūrangawaewae spaces in which Māori can engage in whanaungatanga on a global scale through comment and share functions. However, I will indicate that the reach of, as well as the response to, Māori media online is limited and somewhat superficial given the cyclical nature and abundance of online media content, in conjunction with the dominance of mainstream or ‘popular’ media in prominent online platforms. This discussion will be supported by consideration of *Aroha Bridge*’s limited audience on YouTube, in opposition to the significant audience engagement with mainstream Aotearoa New Zealand media. This discussion of the YouTube platform will not be extended to *Kairākau* due to its exclusivity to the Māori Television on demand platform. I will then argue that traditional broadcast may offer a potential resolution to this lack of viewer engagement, as the superior audience reach

of broadcast channels attracts more viewers to seek out discussion forums focused on Māori media and its engagement with te ao Māori. This will be evidenced by a comparative exercise using basic data and discourse analysis sourced from *Facebook*, which will illuminate the differences in user engagement between the *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* pages. However, I will stress that the foothold of Māori media within linear television is tenuous when the viewer figures of Māori Television are compared with that of its mainstream counterparts. I will conclude by suggesting that while *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* are texts that embrace new modes of production as a means to enrich the canon of Māori television, the reach of, and response to, both the webseries and primetime television programme may be significantly impacted by their respective means of distribution.

The Political Economy of the media in Aotearoa New Zealand

To understand the ways in which tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga are manifested within the production and distribution contexts of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau*, I must first unpack the social, political, economic, historical, and cultural frameworks encircling Māori media in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the 1980s, Western media markets underwent an extensive process of deregulation and privatisation, prompted by the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant economic ideology of governments in the West (Rudd 33). Prior to mass deregulation, state mandates imposed restrictions on the quantity of media shares a single company could own – an attempt to neutralise the formation of capitalist monopolies – but in the new free market, multinational media conglomerates were able to consolidate their position within Aotearoa New Zealand’s mediascape (35). This shift in media ownership resulted in a national media concentration in which a small number of companies driven by commercial concerns controlled the production and distribution of televisual content. The near-elimination of direct state involvement in Aotearoa New Zealand’s media markets led critics to speculate that the once-popular public service

approach to programming was being supplanted by commercial content models designed to attract the largest possible audience share. Consequently, the diversity encapsulated by local and regional content was being gradually corroded. In order to address this imbalance in available content, NZ on Air was established as a government funded agency with the aim to facilitate the production of “specialised programmes for . . . specified minorities” (Dunleavy & Joyce 112-3). The need to provide the Māori minority with a voice in the media informed NZ on Air’s mandate of “[c]onnecting and reflecting our nation” through “invest[ing] in public media for many audiences. . . find[ing] and support[ing] great audio and visual content that holds a mirror up to New Zealand and our people” (“Connecting and reflecting”). While the implementation of NZ on Air as a resource for Māori programming doubtless bolstered the visibility of Māori content on Aotearoa New Zealand screens, its guiding principle when selecting content for funding problematizes its consideration as a space that allows viewers access to diverse Māori worldviews. NZ on Air is required to provide programming for “minorities in the community including ethnic minorities,” and to ensure the “availability of a balanced range of programmes,” but must balance these expected outcomes against “the potential size of the audience to benefit” when selecting projects to receive funding (qtd. in Dunleavy & Joyce 115).

For Rudd, these seemingly incompatible objectives renders the funding agency impotent as a potential source for the production of alternative media, asserting that “[t]he commercial imperative placed on NZOA means that programme content cannot be uncoupled from a programmes likely audience reach,” and therefore the foremost concern when selecting content must always be mainstream appeal (42). The projected audience share of a programme “determines a broadcaster’s interest in showing a programme with a substantial public interest content,” further destabilising the conceptualisation of NZ on Air as a pathway towards independent Māori producers crafting televisual tūrangawaewae (42). Although NZ

on Air can provide the fiscal means for Māori media production, it relies on partnerships with media outlets for online and terrestrial distribution. As a result, NZ on Air is unable to fund any project that would not be perceived as commercially viable by a potential distributor. In the case of *Aroha Bridge*, the show was selected for publication on The New Zealand Herald website, a subsidiary of the NZME group (an amalgam of three Aotearoa New Zealand media brands: APN NZ, The Radio Network and GrabOne). NZME is at its core a commercial enterprise, and the adoption of programming into their online platforms increases traffic to their various websites: viewers for the advertising space sold to NZME's clients. While NZ on Air provides the opportunity for Māori content to be produced, this can be seen as a “symbolic gesture” towards public service and Māori broadcasting, as its selection of content is an exclusive process that dismisses projects deemed non-commercial (42). Only Māori producers with commercial enough projects are therefore able to construct televisual tūrangawaewae spaces using the money provided by NZ on Air.

Alongside the market reforms of the 1980s came the continual lobbying of Māori politicians, lawyers, and activists for the establishment of a Māori Television channel. The historical struggle for Māori to gain access to media is rooted in the postcolonial desire to reclaim, nurture, and grow the taonga that is language, and in doing so, re-empower Māori to express their internal identities as both individuals and as a community (*Māori Television* 16). In the 1990s, ex-minister for communications Maurice Williamson requested that the Ministry of Commerce convene four hui to discuss te reo Māori broadcasting and its importance to the visibility of Māori language within Aotearoa New Zealand. Across the various assemblies, a shared perspective emerged amongst the participating Māori, best captured in William Tuuta's sentiment expressed at the Ngati Mutunga hui: “Our language is taonga. It is a priceless treasure upon which the whole fabric of our society has been centred” (qtd. in Williamson 4). Such sentiments led Williamson to report that “[p]articipants at the

hui agreed that te reo Māori is the cornerstone of mana Māori, and that its retention and use must be of paramount concern, first to Māori but also to all New Zealanders” (4). Clearly, for those Māori attending the hui, language is conceptualised as “the [preeminent] carrier of culture”, preserving te ao Māori and tikanga for future generations (Te Huia 237). Television and radio were situated as the essential channels through which the reinvigoration of te reo must be orchestrated. Api Mahuika of Te Whakaruruhau o Nga Reo Irirangi encapsulates the fundamental position of these mediums within the promotion of cultural awareness and the preservation of te reo, asserting that “[r]adio and television are the most powerful modern transmitters of culture and language, and the defining medium of the place of languages in society” (qtd. in Williamson 14).

Despite emphasis on the importance of te reo by Māori in this instance and many instances before, the process of growing te reo in Aotearoa New Zealand’s mediascape was dependent upon holding the Crown accountable for upholding the edicts of Te Tiriti o Waitangi that demand shared responsibility between Māori and the Crown in the preservation and propagation of te reo and te ao Māori (*Māori Television* 12). The fight for accountability reached a critical stage during the Labour-led neoliberal reforms of the 1980s. These reforms sought to reconfigure broadcast assets into lucrative “state-owned enterprises”, in response to which many Waitangi Tribunal claims and court proceedings were instigated to prevent the selling of channels with Māori interest content (16). The 1985 bid of Aotearoa Broadcasting Systems to secure a position as a Māori presence within the broadcast channels ultimately failed, diminishing the prospects of a Māori Television channel that showcases Māori language and culture. However, over the next twenty years, significant progress was made. In the wake of the 1987 Māori language act, Te Taura whiri i te Reo Māori (the Māori Language Commission) was established, followed later by the Māori content funding agency Te Māngai Pāho, as well as Maurice Williamson’s aforementioned 1991 landmark report *Māori*

Broadcasting: Principles for the Future, commissioned by the National government (17-9).

The institutionalisation of these agencies and the nature of Williamson's report constituted an official acknowledgement of the importance of te reo and te ao Māori in re-invigorating a marginalised Māoridom, leading to the trialling of the Aotearoa Television Network (ATN) in 1997: a venture that ultimately failed after thirteen weeks due to "insufficient planning and a paucity of government funding" (Dunleavy and Joyce qtd. in Smith 19).

The failure of ATN presented significant obstacles to the establishment of a Māori Television channel, with many critics suggesting that its collapse was symptomatic of the ostensible inability of Māori organisations to meet fiscal responsibilities. However, the efforts of the Māori Broadcasting Advisory Committee and Te Awhiorangi led to the inauguration of the Māori Television Establishment Board in 2000, which paved the way for the establishment of the Māori Television Service in 2004, funded by Te Māngai Paho (20-1). The annual state funding for Māori Television is approximately \$48 million, and thus the channel represents a significant investment on behalf of the state in disseminating Māori tikanga (1). The provision of these funds situates Māori Television as a significant site of empowerment for Māori in terms of on screen representation, industry employment, language learning, and cultural knowledge. In fact, the perception of language as a cultural transmitter expressed at Williamson's hui has clearly informed Māori Television's mission statement:

Te Reo Māori is a sacred taonga and its revitalisation has been a focus for successive Governments for at least two decades. As a consequence, it lies at the heart of the work and mission of Māori Television. Māori Television continues to play a vital role in contributing to the aims and goals of the Māori Language Strategy and the revitalisation of te reo Māori through our multi-channel platforms and programming. Our vision is that te reo Māori is valued, embraced and spoken by all (Te Heuheu qtd. in Pānui Whāinga 7).

However, Māori Television is subject to many competing tensions. Operating within a deregulated market means that Māori Television must contend with other channels for its portion of the audience share, and its programming must therefore sufficiently appeal to both Māori and non-Māori viewers in order to make it a commercially viable enterprise (38). This has led to accusations that Māori Television is falling short of its obligation to provide Māori with content showcasing te reo and tikanga, instead prioritising the entertainment facet of programming over its cultural value. This tension permeates the expectations of viewers themselves:

[O]n the cultural, language and programming side, there's obviously a whole range of expectations from different segments of viewers. Some have higher expectations in terms of language and culture, and at the other end of the spectrum some viewer segments see it as almost less relevant to them, and it's more about the entertainment to them . . . [s]o there is that natural tension that exists in terms of trying to meet a whole range of demands. (Mather qtd. in Smith 41).

While Māori Television emerged from the cultural imperative to revitalise te ao Māori, like NZ on Air, its position as a government funded enterprise renders it susceptible to commercial concerns that are at odds with the goals of language revitalisation and cultural renewal at the heart of Māori Television's ideology. The establishment of Māori Television as a nationwide broadcaster in 2004 was a monumental step in securing the presence of Māoridom within Aotearoa New Zealand's media, and has undoubtedly provided both Māori and non-Māori with a televisual space within which they are exposed to a variety of programmes showcasing Māori cultural identity and te reo. However, to consider Māori Television as a tūrangawaewae space for all Māori fails to account for those Māori who might feel that in meeting its obligation to the Crown, the station decentralises cultural content.

A brief history of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau*

The current iteration of *Aroha Bridge*, created by multicultural Aotearoa New Zealand artist and musician Jessica Hansell, aka. Coco Solid, arose from the satirical comic strip *Hook Ups*, published in The New Zealand Herald's now defunct music magazine, Volume ("Hook Ups brings life"). Featuring the same diverse cast of characters as the later animation, *Hook Ups* was designed to interrogate the attitudes surrounding ethnicity and culture in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. While publication of the *Hook Ups* comic strip ceased with the 2012 closure of Volume, it was revived as an animated webseries in 2013, with ten three minute webisodes published online in weekly instalments via the New Zealand Herald website. The revival of *Aroha Bridge* was financially feasible due to a funding grant of \$44,950 from NZ on Air for the first season ("Hook Ups brings life"). During an interview in which she acknowledged the contributions of those who made the animated webseries possible, Hansell herself reflected on the importance of NZ on Air's company philosophy in allowing her to narrate subversive Māori stories: "I'll always be grateful to Brenda Leeuwenberg for her support at NZ On Air and greenlighting something that we openly and bravely planned not to play safe" ("Build a Bridge"). The mandate of NZ on Air to showcase Māori content allows funding to be allocated to creators who wish to express explicitly politicised cultural material that may be dismissed as countercultural within more conservative mainstream media institutions. NZ on Air's funding allowed for the assembly and connection of diverse creative entities. The webseries was produced by independent studio Fumes Productions, directed by Simon Ward, and animated by Kenny Smith, Richard Pilkington, and Luke Rowell of animation studio Sky ranch ("Hook Ups"), and brought together the vocal talents of Hansell (Kowhai), Rizvan Tu'itahi (Monty), Scotty Cotter (Cousin Ira), Madeline Sami (Mum Hook) and Frankie Stevens (Manu) ("Local cartoon *Hook Ups*"). Promotion for the first season of the webseries was largely undertaken via an

extensive social media campaign, especially the consistent posting of new material on the *Aroha Bridge* Facebook page, alongside the creation of collectable bubblegum cards accompanying the release of each new webisode (“Hook Ups”). The webseries proved relatively popular, receiving over sixty thousand engagements across multiple viewing platforms during the initial ten week run, and in Māori language week of 2016 a second season was released, renamed *Aroha Bridge* (“Hook Ups”). Although *Aroha Bridge* was originally published on the New Zealand Herald website, by the time the second season was distributed it had experienced a proliferation across numerous online viewing platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, Arohahridge.com, NZ on Screen, The Wireless and TV Guide. Perhaps the most significant event in this cross-platform adoption was Māori Television’s inclusion of *Aroha Bridge* in both their broadcast schedule and the programming for their online on demand service. Unlike the other platforms, Māori Television is an established and respected Indigenous presence within the Aotearoa New Zealand television industry, and provides a dedicated viewership for both traditional broadcast and online material. As well as providing wider exposure for *Aroha Bridge*, the governing ideology of Māori Television is structured around notions of the preservation and dissemination of te ao Māori and te reo, assimilating the webseries into a canon of Māori media texts legitimised by their inclusion within the online programming and broadcast schedule of a revolutionary Māori institution.

Kairākau is a 2016 Māori Television show that debuted on March 16 in the primetime slot, with weekly instalments airing until the concluding chapter was broadcast on 11 May that same year. The show’s central premise is to depict the stories of Māori history that continue to inform the tikanga of contemporary Māoridom, with emphasis on the heroic narratives originating from the Te Arawa region of Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as stories from diverse North Island locations including Tauranga, Taupo, and Hawkes Bay (“TV show

featuring Rotorua”). The series was produced by independent Rotorua studio Velvet Stone Media, which is owned by producer Lara Northcroft. In choosing to partner with Lara Northcroft, Māori Television aligned itself with an individual primarily driven by a commitment to Māori development:

I like to base my kaupapa around four pou, which are whanaungatanga, to connect; Mātauranga, to educate and grow; rangatiratanga, leadership; and kaitiakitanga, support and sustainability. Those things mean to me a number of things. It’s not just in the screen industry. I am passionate about Maori in business . . . we are always trying to provide opportunities of networking for Maori business, for wahine Maori and anything they want to do – women leadership, and Rotorua in general, Rotorua business community and, within that, Rotorua Maori business community (Northcroft qtd. in Smith 61).

Northcroft’s dedication to bolstering the cultural and economic presence of Māori in Rotorua is apparent in the production of *Kairākau*, which was largely filmed on location in and around Rotorua between February and May 2015, employing around 30 local actors and 35 production crew members. By sourcing local talent to produce and star in the series, the production processes framing *Kairākau* can be seen to embody the principle of community-building that is a foundation of whanaungatanga: the establishment of interconnections between Māori actors, producers, production workers, artists, and visionaries working together to construct their shared vision of pre-colonial Māoridom. *Kairākau*’s production tapped into pre-existing kapa haka groups already active within the Māori arts scene due to their familiarity with Māori weaponry and performance. The show was choreographed by Kapa Haka expert Wetini Mitai-Ngatai, who crafted fight scenes revolving around the use of traditional weaponry such as taiaha, koikoi, patu, and mere in both hand-to-hand combat and group warfare. *Kairākau* consists of nine episodes, eight of which are narrative-based, while the final episode is a ‘Making of’ featuring interviews with the cast, crew, creators, and

contributors. The episodes were made available as part of Māori Television's broadcast schedule, as well as through their on demand service, which is the medium through which I viewed the series.

Authorship

By examining the history of each series, it becomes clear that authorship is a useful concept when approaching the manifestations of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga within the production contexts of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau*. Each text deploys a different approach to positioning Māori author/s in relation to marketing and the shaping of meaning for viewers. The centrality of the author in film and television criticism has long been contested territory, with the history of Media Studies alternately characterised by either an emphasis on, or the dismissal of, the elusive figure of the author inscribed onto media texts. The persistence of these conflicting interpretations of authorship in the media indicates that this concept remains problematic. Auteur theory originates in the work of the Cahiers du Cinéma critics, and was later expanded upon by American critic Andrew Sarris. Auteur theory is an approach to authorship that relies upon the “ascription of the director-as-author”, and places critical emphasis on the visual styles and techniques, especially mise-en-scene, of a particular filmmaker as a marker of artistic quality (Watson 97). The application of auteur theory to popular film emerged from the impulse to establish previously maligned Hollywood Cinema as an art form worthy of critical attention by installing the individual artist as a source of artistic legitimisation (96). In more recent years, questions surrounding the efficacy of understanding the auteur as *the* creative source of media texts have arisen. Particular scrutiny has been levelled at auteur theory's disregard for the “fundamentally collaborative processes of industrial filmmaking”, the way in which it overlooks the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that shape film texts, and its failure to account for the emergence of consumers as authors in their own right, famously captured in Roland Barthes

declaration of the 'Death of the Author' (94). Each of these concerns raises important questions about the extent to which director-as-author models of authorship should be used to interrogate media texts and their reception. While the study of the visual style of directors has decreased in popularity in recent film and television criticism, the individual artist remains a staple fixture in how contemporary media production is conceptualised. This is due in part to the fact that completely excising the director from the creative, technical, and ideological processes of televisual production risks overlooking the complex role directors often play in the commercial and cultural reception of media texts. In the case of Māori directors, creators, and producers, the danger of overlooking authorship as a framework for textual analysis is heightened, as the ability to author meaning is intertwined with questions of agency and voice for historically marginalised groups (103). Given the historical precedent of the symbolic annihilation of Māori within mainstream media, the exclusion of Māori filmmakers from a position of authorship could negate the ability of Māori to narrate their own stories on screen, and hinder the development of the television industry as a tūrangawaewae space. Further, the author is increasingly understood as an extra-textual commodity for the promotion of films and television, providing interviews and commentaries that encourage viewers to consume their media and shape audience understandings of texts (102). In the case of *Aroha Bridge*, it is clear that the numerous interviews given by creator/director Jessica Hansell construct a politicised lens through which the audience might understand the content of the webseries. Her authorship is therefore key to understanding the ways in which tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga are articulated on screen.

Throughout the interviews conducted prior to the release of season two of *Aroha Bridge*, Hansell explicitly envisions the show as a political response to the chronic under-representation and one-dimensionality of on screen Māoridom in Eurocentric media that she believes limits the viability of mainstream television as a tūrangawaewae space. In Hansell's

conversation with *The Wireless* reporter Laura Shipley, it is observed that the diverse cast of characters in *Aroha Bridge* “set out to bust some of the racial stereotypes that have developed in New Zealand”, supplanting over-simplified characterisations with the culturally fluid, dysfunctional, and complex characters that comprise the “micro society” of Aroha Bridge (“A View of the World”). Through her creation of *Aroha Bridge*, Hansell seeks to establish an empowering televisual space for Māori that exists outside of the representational boundaries erected by Eurocentrism. While the representational mission undertaken by Hansell manifests locally in *Aroha Bridge*, it is also conceptualised as part of the global movement towards decolonisation. When asked about the parallels she had noticed in the treatment of Aboriginal and Māori subjects in the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand art scene respectively, she responded:

The two struggles are inseparable; they may have different consequences and be of different scales but I think in terms of the Indigenous struggle on this side of the world, we are dealing with the same demon. When I go to create work—even if it's a comedic vehicle, a cartoon or a sitcom—I'm still speaking about a universal truth that is the cruel hijinks of imperialism (“Kiwi artist”).

In her aim to confront the “universal truth” about the effects of imperial domination on Indigenous cultures, Hansell envisions her works as a space in which Pacific indigene and those beyond are able to “[deal] with the same demon” through artistic intervention. Hansell thus constructs *Aroha Bridge* as a text that supports a national and global agenda of Indigenous resistance. Her conspicuous role as author in *Aroha Bridge*'s marketing reconstitutes Hansell as an emblem of the wider struggle for Māori rights: an individual representative of her culture. While this political edge seemingly renders *Aroha Bridge* an undeniable tūrangawaewae space for the articulation of postcolonial Māori identities, Hansell readily acknowledges that the role of author is a difficult one to navigate: “[being a visible

activist for Indigenous inclusion in the arts] is always a double-edged sword . . . you're kind of setting yourself up as the minority and the voice of reason. Often, when you participate in that kind of dialogue you other-ise yourself, so I always do it very carefully” (“Kiwi artist”). Hansell’s work articulates the complex identities that populate the contemporary Indigenous spectrum in an attempt to diversify media representation of minority racial, cultural, and ethnic groups. However, she is acutely aware that by inscribing polarising observations of Māori onto her texts and authoring on screen Māoridom on behalf of her community, she may herself become inadvertently culpable in processes of othering, and thus, destabilise *Aroha Bridge* as a foothold for empowerment.

On the other hand, the collaborative processes behind *Kairākau* question the usefulness of evaluating Māori authorship via the director-as-author model which lays at the heart of *Aroha Bridge*’s marketing. *Aroha Bridge* is the product of numerous collaborators, but Hansell’s interviews and the relative obscurity of other production members gives the authorial voice of *Aroha Bridge* to Hansell alone (“Hook Ups”). In contrast, the promotion of *Kairākau* emphasises multiple authorial voices within production. The authoring of meaning in *Kairākau* is undertaken communally in the S01E09 “Making of” episode. Therein, the principles of whanaungatanga itself are mirrored, with each new artist interviewed for the episode weaving another strand into the overarching narrative of authorial intent behind the series. As such, they forge connections between themselves as individual artists working collaboratively, and highlight their personal bonds with the ancestral stories captured on screen. Firstly, choreographer Wetini Mitai-Ngatai begins the episode by explaining the history of the term Kairākau and how it was exclusively applied to those individuals who had “reached the pinnacle of the art of war”. This explanation is continued by the narrator, Tupoūtahi Winitana, who discusses the role of a Kairākau as a type of mythological superhero with powers over life and death. Through the remainder of the episode layers of

meaning are added to the series through the narration of language expert Herea Winitana (Mātanga reo), actor Paora Sharples (Te-O-Tane), popular Māori affairs presenter and tribal narrative coordinator for the series Chris Winitana (Tupoūtahi's father) and Rangi Rangitukunoa (series director). Together, this multitude of authorial voices explains the historical, cultural, linguistic, and institutional contexts shaping the series and carries the narratives of the past from the pages of books and the grounds of the marae into the televisual realm. Instead of the singular Māori author being imagined as representative of the wider Māori community as in *Aroha Bridge's* marketing, diverse members of *Kairākau's* production community are empowered to author meaning for the audience by explaining their personal contributions to the series and what the narratives mean to them as Māori. That is not to suggest that all members of the production were assigned equal value in their authorship role. Those selected for interview occupied 'above-the-line' positions within production, including lead actors, the director, head of choreography and a Māori history expert – all of whom assert significant influence in the creative direction of the show. As such, their perspectives on the series were given precedence over crew members in 'below-the-line' positions such as lighting technicians or set designers. Further, during his interview Chris Winitana excludes some segments of wider Māoridom from inclusion in authoring the stories of tipuna, stating, "[i]t is time for Māori to tell their own stories. Don't let them be manipulated by Pākehā or Māori with Pākehā views". While *Kairākau's* relationship with authorship is far from all-inclusive, it is apparent that in expanding the parameters of authorship to include contributors outside of the director/creator mantle, the production context of *Kairākau* is structured around community-based storytelling that enriches viewer understandings of whanaungatanga.

The politics of animation

The subversive potential of animation is increasingly attracting Indigenous media producers who seek to highlight issues of social injustice in a Pacific context. While early in the history of animation it was considered a lesser art form, critics have long since recognised the inherent potential for radicalism and satire contained within moving cartoons (Filimon 86). Beginning with the writing of Sergei Eisenstein in the 1920s-30s, critics began to equate the “apparent freedom of the animated form with personal and ideological freedom” (Wells 22). This perspective equates the “extremely flexible creative environment” of animation with the unique opportunity “for remaking”, as therein “the form itself . . . and the content is allowed license . . . that would not be tolerated in most television and film genres” (Kraidy qtd. in Lustyik and Smith 334). As marginalised groups slowly gained access to the means of media production, the promise of the “personal and ideological freedom” embodied by animation led to a wider adoption of animation within the artistic practices of minority cultures to fight back against the symbolic annihilation of indigeneity in dominant media. The creative processes framing the construction of *Aroha Bridge* align with the underlying politics of a recent resistance movement in Aboriginal art that has seen the creation of new Indigenous aesthetics through the expansion of artistic practices to include the drawn moving image (Biddle 106). Similarly, Hansell blends the distinct visual style of the animation medium with uniquely Aotearoa New Zealand content to create a culturally specific product that is at once defined by difference from, and similarity to, adult animation, cartoons, and anime. Katalin Lustyik and Philippa Smith shift the discussion of animation into a Pacific context in their analysis of *bro'Town*. *bro'Town* debuted in 2004, paving the way for subversive Indigenous animation in Aotearoa New Zealand by exploring many of the same controversial topics that *Aroha Bridge* would later highlight, such as criminality and drug use in minority communities. Lustyik and Smith assert that:

bro 'Town, similar to *The Simpsons* and the more 'cult' animated programs such as *Ren and Stimpy* and *South Park*, has attempted to 'make an impact in society beyond the function of simple entertainment', taking advantage of the potential hidden in the animated satire form to represent and treat 'social issues and concerns in ways that violate the norms and traditions of the standard television genres' (Tueth, Alberti qtd. In Lustyik and Smith 342).

Clearly, animation in North America has an established history as an emancipatory medium that operates outside of the political, narratorial, and stylistic boundaries of normative television genres. These subversive elements of animation have appealed to Indigenous media producers in Pacific contexts, where they are utilised in texts such as *Aroha Bridge* and *bro 'Town* to challenge ongoing issues of colonialism

For Hansell, the subversive potential of animation lies in the flexible creative environment it permits. She explains why the artistic freedom granted by animation appealed to her as a Māori creator in an interview with *thespinoff.co.nz*:

With animation there is no roof. Everything is caricature and depiction rendering nothing real. By that rationale, anything you can conceptualise has an almost casual ability to exist. I think this is why I'm so engrossed in the medium, the level playing field of anything that crosses our minds. It's seen as some knock-off to live-action, but cartoons when I was young were my channel to the psychedelic, they provide more gratuitous displays of imagination for a child-mind (like mine) ("Build a Bridge").

For Hansell, animation is a medium of limitless possibilities for artistic and cultural expression, allowing her psyche – that of a multicultural Māori – and its attendant ideologies to be portrayed on screen in ways that are not possible within the rigid structure of more traditional televisual formats. She expands on the subversive potential of animation and its relationship with comedy in her *Vice i-D* interview, wherein she discusses how the inherent satire of animation made it the ideal medium to critique the treatment of Māori in the media:

When I began working in the format of animation and comedy it clicked that I could get away with tonnes more vicious observations, and they can be more brutal and confronting, if it's under the guise of comedy. People warm to it because you know, it's almost like they signed a contract that it is all in good fun. It's something that definitely gets the greatest cultural response – pop-culturally, socially, politically. That's the power of satire: you know you're consensually looking at yourself with a harder lens. You might get hurt at the end of it but that's your problem (“Kiwi artist”).

When viewed in light of Hansell’s comments, Māori animation may enrich viewer understandings of tūrangawaewae by highlighting how ethnic communities can use flexible mediums as a foundation from which issues of social injustice can be re-narrativised. In both textual representation and in medium, *Aroha Bridge* negotiates the tensions emerging from the politics of hybridity for Māori within animation – the delicate balance between asserting autonomy while simultaneously recognising traditionally non-Māori art forms as legitimate conduits for the projection of te ao Māori.

Martial arts and Māori

Kairākau undertakes a similar mission to form tūrangawaewae spaces for Māori within the televisual realm. However, instead of utilising ideologically malleable mediums to create empowering social satire, *Kairākau* reformats the martial arts genre to relocate te ao Māori and tikanga from the margins to the mainstream. Martial arts films have been a staple of the international film market since the mid-20th century; however, this subgenre reached optimum visibility during the 1970s to 1990s with the meteoric stardom of Bruce Lee catapulting Hong Kong action cinema into the global spotlight (Venkatasawmy 34). Although the popularity of the martial arts subgenre has declined somewhat since its peak in the mid to late 1990s, successful martial arts-based films (primarily Wuxia films) such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers* have continued to deliver at the

international box office well into the new millennium. Such trends in film consumption evidence the continued appeal of non-English language martial arts films to both Western and non-Western audiences. It is this commercial appeal, along with the possibility of breaking free from the prescribed “anthropological edge” demanded of Māori films, that has rendered the martial arts subgenre such a tantalising prospect to Māori filmmakers over the years (Debruge qtd. in “Shaking the Frame” 66). Barry Barclay comments on his vision for Māori in film:

I have a dream. I want to make a Māori kung fu movie. I think a proposal to make an exciting Māori kung fu would create hostility in almost every quarter, Māori and Pākehā, liberal and conservative – and that is exactly why one part of me wants to do it. Before the arrival of the musket, the Māori world had a rich tradition in the martial arts. For instance, the use of the taiaha . . . was every bit as scientific as the things Bruce Lee wielded . . . How good would it be if kids could go down to the video parlour and get out a film called *The Taiaha Kid*” (21).

Barclay continues by expressing how the politics of production are often detrimental to Māori filmmakers who want to explore Māoridom outside of culturally-driven arthouse pieces:

I fear the script of *The Taiaha Kid* might be too impious for some of the assessors. It would not be a worthy Māori film. It would not reflect real Māori values. The funny thing is that a good portion of the films the country had turned out in recent times do involve kung fu-type events . . . [p]erhaps these scenes reflect real Pākehā values, I don’t know. What I do know is that the producers and directors who put forward these projects and got them funded did not have to explain the cultural values underpinning the script.”

For Barclay, martial arts films represent more for Māori than a simple foray into previously unexplored genres. Rather, they represent a reclamation of *Mau Rakau*, the pre-colonial fighting style of Māori; access to the commercial mainstream; and most importantly, the

opportunity to move beyond the genre boundaries applied to the cinematic exploration of Māoridom.

Since Barclay's musings, the Māori martial arts film has emerged, albeit minimally, on the Aotearoa New Zealand cinemascap. The most notable example is Toa Fraser's 2014 film *The Dead Lands*, a feature length 'primeval quest' film that follows protagonist Hongi on a journey to avenge the deaths of his family members at the hands of a rival iwi. The film received overwhelmingly positive reviews from audiences, gaining an average approval rating of 8.3 out of 10, with 94% of audience members (largely consisting of Māori and Pacifica) who took part in the opening weekend survey identifying that they would recommend the film to friends and family ("Audience Research" 4). The film not only performed well in terms of audience satisfaction, but was also the highest grossing movie at the Aotearoa New Zealand box office during its opening weekend, with ticket sales totalling \$397,084 (3). During the collection of this audience research, it emerged that going to the cinema to view *The Dead Lands* could be categorised as a "whānau-focussed event" with couples making up 47% of the attendees, while 31% of those attending screenings accompanied by family members (14). Given these trends, it can be suggested that the broader appeal of martial arts films to the mainstream market attracted inter-generational whānau members, regardless of age or sex – the media age of attendees was 33.5 and the audience was a 50/50 divide between male and female. As such, it can be further argued that attendees engaged in processes of whanaungatanga by attending a cultural event with family and community members (4). It is clear that *The Dead Lands* left a significant cultural impact on its audience, with many viewers commenting that they viewed the film primarily to learn about their culture, language (the film is entirely in te reo), and tipuna, while performing well commercially. Due to the critical and commercial success of *The Dead Lands*, and the responsiveness of the audience to exploring tikanga and te ao Māori through new cinematic

genres, Wetini Mitai-Ngatai sought to emulate the martial arts sequences of *The Dead Lands* in the battle scenes that form the heart of each *Kairākau* episode (“Remarkable series *Kairākau*”). In this way, *Kairākau* utilises the foundation laid by *The Dead Lands* to solidify the position of Māori in martial arts television and to attract a larger demographic of the Māori viewership to its content.

A product of the age: *Aroha Bridge* in mobile spaces

Throughout the late 20th and early 21st century, digital technologies experienced unprecedented growth in Western society, prompting critics and industry professionals alike to designate this ongoing period of expansion The Digital Revolution. At the same time, there was a move towards technological atomisation, such as the creation of mobile technologies designed for use by the individual. Foremost among such technologies are the cell phone and tablets that ensure media content is readily accessible at all times, provided that internet access is available. These mobile technologies have fundamentally changed the way viewers both consume and engage with media products, prompting film and television producers to adapt their texts to the new shape of media in the mobile era. In particular, Māori media producers have looked to the ways in which technological developments present new opportunities for the application of te ao Māori practices and perspectives to digital structures and applications. Laurel Evelyn Dyson asserts that the “explosive” advent of mobile technologies and applications within Indigenous communities has the potential to alter some of the systemic disadvantages facing the preservation of minority cultures, as they can “address issues of geographical isolation, build an environment for cultural and language revitalisation, and furnish a means for social and economic renewal” (2). *Aroha Bridge* deploys app technology in precisely this capacity, encouraging fans to engage in processes of immaterial labour that compliment whanaungatanga and community-building. According to an article published on the New Zealand Music Commission website, the producers of *Aroha*

Bridge created an accompanying IOS application to compliment the webisodes, in which fans could collaborate with friends to create the music featured at the beginning of the next week's episode ("Local Cartoon Hook Ups"). While whanaungatanga was once perceived as the establishment and maintenance of meaningful relationships between those with whakapapa connections, more recent definitions have "extended beyond the nucleus of whānau, hapū and iwi to include non-whakapapa links and relationships of people who are bonded together through shared purpose" ("Kanohi" 124-5). The collaborative effort encouraged by the app allows the fan community of *Aroha Bridge* to connect through their shared desire to contribute to the artistry of the webseries, and thus, enriches understanding of whanaungatanga by demonstrating new ways in which Māori may foster connections in the mobile world. Further, the app positions viewers as media producers in their own right, and they are thus empowered to actively contribute towards the creation of Māori cultural products (Dyson 10). In these ways, advances in mobile technology have expanded *Aroha Bridge's* creative processes to include its viewership, allowing interconnection and the creation of a shared identity between members of the fandom, while simultaneously providing a mobile tūrangawaewae space by positioning participating individuals as autonomous media producers in their own right.

The reformation of production practices in Māori Television

While *Aroha Bridge* exploits the widespread adoption of mobile technologies to re-interpret whanaungatanga through app technology, Māori Television looks to revolutionise its production practices in order to better reflect the cultural ideologies and principles that shape Māori worldviews. In the time before Māori media channels, Barry Barclay comments that the established production practices within all mainstream media industries were corrupted by institutional racism, and were thus unfit to articulate the stories and histories of Māori communities (*Māori Television* 56). It is this foundation of Eurocentrism in

mainstream media production that prompted Māori Television to find new ways through which Māori tikanga could be assimilated into media practices within the fiscal and temporal constraints of television production. Ian Stuart cites Indigenous intervention in established media practices as essential for allowing non-Western worldviews to flourish in the media:

[E]xpecting Indigenous people to use the mass media systems in the same way as the European-derived cultures is to make assumptions of assimilation at best, or colonizing at worst. As Indigenous people adopt the mass media into their own culture, they should be allowed to do so on their own terms, according to their own needs and desires and in ways compatible with their own cultures. And to be free to explain that use, to theorize mass media, according to their own culturally based understandings of social functions (20).

While the development of production process conducive to tikanga is an ongoing process that still has significant obstacles to overcome, Jo Smith has identified key changes that Māori Television has adopted into production in order to avoid replicating the formulae already established in media institutions such as TVNZ and TV3. These include, but are not restricted to, gathering mātauranga from local iwi and hapū before production begins on a programme; engaging with the Māori community to gather feedback about a programme before it airs (58); increasing use of te reo in the workplace (60); and partnering with production companies that use a community-focused business model in the production of content (notably *Velvet Stone Media* and *Cinco Cine*). These changes represent a significant departure from established production practices, and at their root is a desire to facilitate whanaungatanga by closing the critical space between production and the wider Māori community. *Kairākau* emerges from an organisational structure that subverts Western production formats, allowing the show to be shaped in ways that would not be possible within Western media organisations. Consequently, the vision of Māori Television as a tūrangawaewae space is manifested not only within the representational register, but also

within the radical institutional changes that forge a Māori foothold within the processes of production themselves.

Māori media online: a place to stand and interconnection in virtual spaces

The proliferation of *Aroha Bridge* across a number of online platforms guarantees wider exposure in the virtual realm, which is a key concern for Māori producers seeking to reach the wider Māori community. The internet has long been cited as an emancipatory space for marginalised communities, with contemporary scholarship positing that in their most idealistic interpretation, virtual spaces present the opportunity for “Indigenous communities . . . [to] articulate claims, express their identities and aspirations, strategically mobilise, and solicit broader support” on a global scale (Soriano 33). Given the increasing availability of the internet to Indigenous communities, many commentators sense that the struggle for Indigenous representation has moved to the online realm, as evidenced in the case of *Aroha Bridge*. The sheer number of online platforms on which *Aroha Bridge* can be viewed – including the websites for NZ on Screen, Māori Television, The New Zealand Herald, alongside Facebook and YouTube, among others – provides viewers multiple access points to the webseries, ensuring that its content can be engaged with on numerous discussion boards across multiple viewing platforms. While some online platforms such as Māori Television and NZ on Screen are subject to geo-blocking, restricting the availability of online content to those located in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, others, such as Facebook, are not subject to such restrictions. This national and international availability is a vital appeal of online distribution for Māori programming. Such distribution platforms provide diasporic Māori viewers from around the country and the globe the opportunity to virtually congregate around a media product that deals with their experiences as contemporary indigene, and, in many cases, provides arenas in which Māori can engage in processes of communal and individual identity building through comment and share functions. According to the theory of

knowledge collaboration in online spaces, the internet facilitates “the acquisition, sharing, and generation of knowledge” (Faraj et al. qtd in Kim et al. 267). This renders virtual distribution sites critical for the ongoing preservation and transference of Māori culture amongst diasporic constituents and younger generations, as well as a prime case study for the ways that viewer understandings of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga may be shaped by methods of distribution.

Evidence of critical viewer engagement with Māori content, while very limited, is available on the *Aroha Bridge* Facebook page (started on March 22, 2013). As of 2 March 2018, the page has 4,986 likes and 4,953 followers. The media content distributed on the Facebook page, comprising of complete webisodes, behind the scenes footage, promotional material, and webisode clips, have accrued over 588,000 total views over 32 videos, with an average of 18,375 views per video. The page has published a total of 116 posts, including actions such as updating the page cover photo and display pictures. Over the course of content publication the page has accrued approximately 7,230 likes/reactions, 724 shares, 300 comments and 345 tags. While the engagement of fans with the material published on the page is relatively minimal in terms of measurable metrics, the fact that users are choosing to communicate about Māori media through the share, tag, and comment functions of Facebook illuminates the crucial role that social media may play in creating new processes of whanaungatanga and tūrangawaewae spaces for Māori. Further, it is clear that some fans on the page contributed to the critical lampooning of mainstream media’s treatment of Māori: a staple practice of *Aroha Bridge*. User Nola Cassidy tagged Taupo Whakamoe in the comments section of a post on 4 July, 2016 about S02E02 “Plastic Māori”, followed by the comment, “we’re bad at singing and sports we’re not Māori”, referencing the in-episode suggestion that these are the sole realms of excellence for Māori (a sentiment echoed by user Robert Papalii in a later post published on 30 July, 2016). In the same post, user Ford Ratahi-

Smith selected another quote from the episode to include in the comments: “we just love living in the past”. On a clip featuring the pretentious Pākehā ‘art connoisseurs’ from S01E04 “Art to Art”, posted on 19 May, 2016, the in-comment dialogue becomes racialised, with user Jerry Suave commenting “God bless white people”, followed by the laughing face emoji. The political nature of the comment section dialogue becomes even more apparent in two posts from 4 and 6 July. On the earlier post featuring the S02E03 episode “Radical Bro”, user Shaun Swain tagged Ileana Tameta and directly quoted from the episode, writing, “Racism is over; case closed” followed up by a later comment: “I love [Aroha Bridge] so much I want more of their radical Uncle”. User Cool-Simmy He Awa was equally responsive to Uncle Noogy’s embodiment of Māoridom on a post from 6 July, 2017 promoting the “Spirit of Te Wiki o te reo Māori” represented by Uncle Noogy’s voice actor, Matai Rangi Smith, commenting: “AHAHAAHAH!! KAAAAAAA PAAAI! Down to the cabbage as accent of that reporter ey! Perf truth bombs just peppered in / Uncle Noogy is my next life coach”. For these page visitors, Facebook facilitates the creation of a satirical dialogue about Eurocentric perceptions of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, while encouraging them to celebrate a webseries that articulates different versions of Māoridom. The exploration of Māoridom on the page is not restricted to engagement with *Aroha Bridge* specific content. A post from 17 October 2016 advertises the attendance of Jessica Hansell at the imagineNATIVE film and media arts festival, while an earlier post recommended watching Taika Waititi’s *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*. In both cases, the cross promotional posts provide fans of the page and the show to engage with other Māori interest events or media products, and thus expand their knowledge about the various narratives surrounding contemporary Māoridom. The fact that an increasing number of Māori are choosing to form connections with other viewers and Māori media producers by engaging in cultural debate online allows viewers, including

myself, to utilise social media as a lens through which they can enrich their understanding of post-digital tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga.

Māori Television has also accessed the subversive space of the internet as a platform for the publication of *Kairākau*; however, rather than the dispersed distribution method utilised by the *Aroha Bridge* team, the full first season of *Kairākau* is exclusively available for viewing on Māori Television on demand. While this could be seen to hamper the prevalence of *Kairākau* online by restricting viewer access, the series' Facebook page engagement figures reveal that the combined viewership of the broadcast and online platforms are utilising the page to engage in processes of whanaungatanga and tūrangawaewae on a scale that exceeds *Aroha Bridge*. As of 19 April 2018 the Facebook page (created on 23 February 2015) has 14,264 page likes and 14,193 followers. The media content distributed on the page, comprising of behind the scenes footage, promotional clips, and demonstrations has been viewed over 609,600 times over 18 videos, with an average of 33,866 viewers per video post. Since its establishment, the page has published a total of 76 posts between 23 February 2015 and 9 September 2016, including actions such as updating cover photos. Over the course of content publication the page has garnered approximately 24,508 likes/reactions, 12,504 shares, 2,327 comments and 1,131 tags. Further, the range of culturally relevant topics discussed in the page comments are more diverse than the sparse political commentary found on the *Aroha Bridge* page. The culturally relevant topics most widely discussed in the comments can be divided into four broad categories: connection with tipuna and the Māori community, historical debate, representational criticism, and cultural empowerment.

User Renae Maihi celebrated the connection the series fosters with tipuna, commenting that it is “pretty choice to see my tupuna brought back to life” (post from 24 February 2015), while user Tamehana Naera recognised the connection the series had with

her own ancestry, stating that it is “awesome to see these stories as portrayed back in the days in From Tunohopu decent on my dads side of our whānau” (post from 10 March 2016).

Meanwhile, Dave Cummins observes the ways in which *Kairākau* can foster interconnections both within and beyond the Māori community, writing that “there is a worldwide audience waiting to see and learn from this kind of inspiring material. People are awakening spiritually the world over and many will feel that connection with Māori culture. Films and programmes like this are important for many who never realise that connection” (post from 14 March 2016). The most apparent examples of engagement in historical debate appear in the comments section of a video post from 14 March 2016, in which Wetini Mitai-Ngatai explains the technique behind wielding a taiaha. In response to user Nick South Knighton’s criticism that the taiaha is “[n]ot a terribly sophisticated weapon”, user Awhitia Mamaku cited the historical victories of Māori over the British colonizers, despite their supposed inferior weaponry. In the same post, users Tame Stringer and Josh-Black-Morris debate the superiority of Māori in warfare in light of the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, with Stringer asserting that signing Te Tiriti was not a sign of failure, but that the Crown violated the terms laid out in the historical document. In reference to a post regarding S01E05 “Haukeka” and the mystical and cannibalistic imagery therein (published on 7 April 2016), user Arthur Tewake ponders the representation of Māori in the episode, asking “Fuk wer we savages?” while user Enzed Dubb was unsure what to make of the controversial subject matter in a follow up post published on 13 April 2016, writing that “this episode was the most savage of all so far . . . [o]ne thing I do wonder is, was waking up the dead a real thing back then? Man i know our ancient stories are not all black and white but dayum this episode got me thinking!” Clearly, the series left some Māori fans feeling culturally empowered and rooted in their heritage: Maraea Stone affirms that “[w]e are powerful, natives, never forget our history and traditions” (post from 25 March 2016), while Kane Hokianga states that “[the

series] so reminds me of how strong our tipuna were and still are in the mind tinana and wairua”. In terms of both metrics and culturally relevant conversation, it is clear that *Kairākau*’s Facebook page has stimulated a higher level of viewer engagement when compared to that of *Aroha Bridge*.

The constant cycle of content: Māori voices lost in the noise?

While the potential for Māori perspectives to cross cultural, ethnic and geographical borders online is undeniable, the reach and impact of independently produced Māori media such as *Aroha Bridge* may be determined by both the cyclical nature of online media content, as well as the initial absence of a supporting broadcast media organisation. Jodi Dean imagines the internet as an impotent democratic space: a fantasy of abundance and participation in which “facts and opinions, images and reactions circulate in a massive stream of content, losing their specificity and merging into a larger flow of data” (26). For Patrick Crogan and Samuel Kinsley, the continual emergence of new media technologies has lent an immediacy to the flow of media content that has set “our ability to attend to that information as a scarcity” (4). If, as these critics suggest, media content has reached a level of saturation that means internet users can no longer critically engage with the content that they encounter online, then *Aroha Bridge* – a webseries almost entirely contained within the virtual arena of the net – may lose its political potency and radical edge. The show itself recognises the disposable nature of media content in the age of virality and the difficulties faced when trying to carve a space for Māori media and politics online. In the metafictional S01E09 webisode “MeTube”, the Hook twins argue over what content will allow them to create a viral video and gain Hook Ups some online hype. Monty films a political piece about the legalisation of marijuana, but Kowhai recognises that “people with attention deficit problems won’t want to watch this. We need cheap thrills, toddlers on downers, kittens on uppers”. Kowhai unknowingly expresses a school of thought best captured by N. Katherine Hayles’ theory of

deep and hyper attention. Hayles suggests that contemporary cognitive modes have undergone a generational shift from deep to hyper modes of attention. The constant flow of information emanating from a variety of multimedia sources has led to an ever-increasing need for stimulation within children and teenagers, a trend that has correlated with the rising number of AD/HD diagnoses in developed nations (187). These critiques crystallise around the efficacy of the online realm and digital technologies as arenas in which meaningful cultural and political communication can be conducted. Applying these critical perspectives to the fact of *Aroha Bridge's* online isolation may suggest that as a media product, it is unable to become disentangled from the continual flow of content and information distributed online, and therefore, viewer engagement with the webseries will always be somewhat superficial.

Evidence of this can be seen in the limited interaction with the *Aroha Bridge* webisodes on the video streaming service YouTube (uploaded by the *Aroha Bridge* channel). Nine of the episodes from the first season received less than 5,000 views in the four years since publication, with S01E05 “Kiri the Krazy” gaining the largest view count of 5,181 views. The majority of the webisodes received fewer than 2,000 views (6 webisodes). The comment count for each episode varied between 0-3, with four episodes receiving no comments, three receiving one comment, one receiving two comments and three receiving three comments. Within these comments, only one referenced the political aspects of the show, with user onesian writing of S01E04 “Art to Art”, “sooo political lol”. When compared to the viewing figures of popular Aotearoa New Zealand specific YouTube clips with global appeal, the difference is stark. A video uploaded by the official X Factor New Zealand channel on 12 February, 2015 entitled “Amazing jam by Beau Monga - Sneak Peek audition from The X Factor NZ” has received in excess of 5.8 million views. Perhaps, then, the multitude of televisual content available for consumption on the largest online video sharing

platform means that Māori media with culturally specific content is relegated to a marginalised space when compared to its more popular counterparts. Further, it would appear that the potential of discussion forums to prompt communication and interconnection around indigeneity and politics remains unrealised on this platform. In terms of whanaungatanga, these factors may suggest that online processes of relationship building for Māori are not equally effective across all viewing platforms.

While the demand for online accessibility to televisual media has risen greatly in the wake of changing patterns of video consumption, broadcast television continues to lead televisual media in terms of audience reach, with more than eight out of ten New Zealanders watching TV programming on a daily basis (“TV Solutions”). According to the sales and advertising segment of the TVNZ website, as of 2014, Aotearoa New Zealanders spend an average of 186 billion minutes watching free to air television, versus 11 billion minutes watching online video content (“TV Solutions”), although online media consumption has more than doubled since 2014 (“Where are the Audiences?”). Amongst the stations producing broadcast media, Māori Television alone attracts 1.8 million unique viewers a month – a figure that has steadily increased at a rate of 14% per annum since the channel was established in 2004 (“Why advertise on Māori Television”). Sue Abel notes that alongside the year-on-year growth of viewer figures has come a greater diversity in the ethnic composition of Māori Television’s audience share, with an increasing proportion of non-Māori viewers tuning in to Māori programming (132). Such relatively large monthly viewing figures, alongside the ethnic diversity of Māori Television’s viewership, suggests that the channel may represent a significant foundation for Māori community-building that far exceeds the reach reflected in the viewing figures of online platforms. Indeed, on social media platforms such as Facebook, users must search for a particular page in order to access its content, while broadcast viewers of Māori Television may be indirectly exposed to *Kairākau*. This presents

an opportunity to engage with casual viewers who may not usually seek out programmes that deal directly with Māori subject matter. While the monthly viewer figures of Māori Television are large in comparison to the online views for *Aroha Bridge* across the Facebook and YouTube platforms, that is not to suggest that Māori Television occupies a dominant position in terms of audience share amongst the other broadcast channels available in Aotearoa New Zealand. Smith has observed that “[a]lthough Māori Television has been successful in providing an alternative narrative where Māori events and activities that are pertinent in the Māori community are celebrated, this station does not have the same reach as mainstream television” (qtd. in “Pākehā Learners” 736). Although Māori Television’s daily reach has increased from 1% in 2014 to 2% in 2016, it remains far below that of its largest four national competitors, with TV One garnering 40% of the market, followed by TV3 at 31%, TV2 at 22%, and Prime at 12% (“Where are the Audiences?”). In terms of audience exposure, the nature of broadcast television renders it a potent site of tūrangawaewae for Māori media, extending the reach of Māori content far beyond what is evidenced in the consumption of *Aroha Bridge* through Facebook and YouTube. Although Māori Television has given Māori a place to stand in broadcast television, the foothold remains minimal compared to that of the aforementioned stations.

Conclusion

The production contexts of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* create innovative spaces in which Māori artists, creators, and audiences are empowered to engage in Māori tikanga that may revolutionise viewer understandings of Māori media, tūrangawaewae, and whanaungatanga. The government funding of NZ on Air provides *Aroha Bridge* with the financial support that Māori filmmakers need to produce politicised and subversive media texts, and supplies the material means to aggregate the creative entities necessary in bringing their shared vision of contemporary Māoridom to fruition. Author Jessica Hansell takes full

advantage of the freedom permitted by NZ on Air's mandate to fund projects that capture both the breadth and complexity of Aotearoa New Zealand's cultural landscape. She crafts a webseries that explicitly addresses the ways in which Pacific indigene and those beyond continue to be reduced to character archetypes within the representational register of mainstream media. In order to contribute towards the global effort of decolonisation and render televisual programming a tūrangawaewae space for Māori, Hansell utilises the satirical potential of animation, a well-documented phenomenon in the North American canon of adult animation, to engage in a social commentary on cultural dynamics in Aotearoa New Zealand. Further, the increasing mobilisation of technology has allowed Māori creators to innovate news processes for interconnection, utilising the shared desire of the fandom to contribute to the webseries to create a collaborative environment of exchange in which participants are empowered as autonomous media producers. The production approach of *Kairākau* arose from Māori Television's mandate to preserve te reo, tikanga, and te ao Māori, a mission that is itself the continuation of the long political struggle for Māori rights. While Māori Television is primarily driven by the concerns of culture and language revitalisation, the fiscal obligations of the station have opened it up to accusations that its content prioritises entertainment over the dissemination of Māori mātauranga, potentially destabilising it as a place to stand for Māori in the media. However, Māori Television has begun to address Eurocentrism at an institutional level, reshaping production practices to fit within a framework of Māori tikanga. This reshaping extends to the way in which *Kairākau* reimagines authorship as a process of whanaungatanga through which artists connect, create, and contribute to the overarching narrative of the series, diverging from the director-as-author approach still prevalent within Western media criticism. However, *Kairākau* does not reject all forms of outside influence on its programming, and has embraced the emergent cinematic

genre of the Māori martial arts film, relocating Māori production from the margin to the mainstream.

The advent of the internet has brought with it both opportunities and challenges for Māori media producers. On one hand, the ‘limitless’ online audience, the potential for proliferation across numerous viewing platforms, and the ability of users to comment on, discuss, and debate Māori ideologies and knowledge are all facets of virtual distribution that may create an online foothold within which diasporic and isolated members can establish whanaungatanga and become part of a virtual Māori community. On the other hand, the constant cycle of media content available online, alongside the immediacy of this information and the variety of sources through which media can now be consumed, may have diminished meaningful engagement with Māori media, as Māori voices may be lost amidst the constant cacophony of online material. Broadcast television would seem to offer a more stable foothold for Māori in the media, attracting viewer numbers that are not replicated within online platforms: numbers that are in turn reflected in virtual engagement figures. However, Māori television in Aotearoa New Zealand remains in its early stages, and attracts a small audience share when compared to mainstream counterparts. While the production contexts of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* can undoubtedly be considered a foundation of empowerment for Māori creators, distribution channels are more complex in the ways that they have reshaped understandings of whanaungatanga and tūrangawaewae.

Conclusion

My analysis of the textual representations, production and distribution of *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* has revealed that Māori media is a dynamic space that articulates the richness and complexity of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga in a number of contrasting and complementary ways. *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* do not shape a homogenous understanding of tūrangawaewae or whanaungatanga. Rather, they construct an understanding of these conceptual frameworks as ever-evolving as they are shaped and re-shaped by the social, cultural, and technological developments that continue to define postcolonial Aotearoa New Zealand. Indeed, Māori communities and Māori tikanga have not remained static in an era characterised by biculturalism, globalisation, and digitalisation. My research suggests that Māori have taken innovative and contrasting approaches to nurturing interconnections and crafting empowering footholds in the media and beyond in order to preserve Māori tikanga for future generations. *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau*'s on and off screen engagement with tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga reveal some of the drastically different ways that Māori media can represent and embody Māori worldviews and practices, rendering such programming a critical resource for viewers seeking to understand the myriad ways te ao Māori manifests not only in the media, but in wider society.

Aroha Bridge manifests a complex postcolonial tūrangawaewae defined by its relationship with the cultural hybridity of a bicultural Aotearoa New Zealand, challenging the assumption that the return to a pre-colonial cultural essence is the sole foundation of empowerment for on screen Māori. Many viewers are conditioned by Western ideology to imagine Māori identities as homogenous. However, *Aroha Bridge* situates on screen Māoridom as an empowering foothold for atypical representations founded upon the cultural

fluidity that frames the lived experiences of many contemporary Māori. Despite *Aroha Bridge*'s emphasis on a hybridised Māoridom, the webseries is careful not to undermine the empowering possibilities of Māori unification, or ignore the significant issues that arise from biculturalism. By signalling the need for Māori to stand as one and mobilise against Western misrepresentation, and critiquing superficial Pākehā engagement with te reo, Māori images, and Māori worldviews, *Aroha Bridge* illuminates the importance of Māori media as a tūrangawaewae space for the reclamation and celebration of language, cultural production, and Māori tikanga. The many manifestations of tūrangawaewae in *Aroha Bridge* are at once fixed and fluid, moving between differing cultural coordinates while simultaneously remaining embedded within a unified Māoridom. Ultimately, *Aroha Bridge* itself embodies tūrangawaewae: a televisual foothold that has the potential to promote a sense of 'togetherness' and 'foundation' for Māori communities.

The treatment of whanaungatanga in *Aroha Bridge* similarly defies simplistic definition. The webseries underscores the ways in which whanaungatanga may become a more inclusive concept as the cultural parameters of contemporary Māoridom become increasingly indistinct. At the same time, the narrative acknowledges that the internalisation of Eurocentric media narratives and stereotypes might alienate Māori from community interconnection, signalling the need for Māori to reclaim whanaungatanga and mobilise against misrepresentation. Further, *Aroha Bridge* suggests that the capitalist ideologies informing the commercialism and celebrity culture of Aotearoa New Zealand present obstacles to whanaungatanga, as modes of existence begin to emphasise individual success over community interrelationships.

The production and distribution contexts of *Aroha Bridge* also draw attention to the ways in which televisual manifestations of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga are shaped by commercial, technological, and creative factors. The complex interplay between te ao

Māori, animation, mobile technology, authorship, funding, and online distribution have suggested that *Aroha Bridge*, and the ways in which it represents and embodies tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga, is subject to both opportunities and obstacles in the contemporary mediascape. The ability of NZ on Air to constitute a tūrangawaewae space for Māori media producers is ultimately dependent on the commercial viability of programming. Within these constraints, however, creator Jessica Hansell is able to gather a diverse team of creatives and craft a potent politicised animation confronting the representation of Māori in mainstream media, while actively encouraging whanaungatanga by facilitating creative cooperation between fans through mobile applications. However, the extent to which the predominantly online distribution of *Aroha Bridge* may encourage Māori to use virtual viewing platforms to translate processes of whanaungatanga into online communication is appears limited on the Facebook and YouTube platforms. While in its most idealistic interpretation the internet can be defined as a space of tūrangawaewae for Māori by facilitating distribution, connection, and communication, the sheer volume of content available online can marginalise its efficacy as a foothold for Māori.

In many ways, the on screen representations of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga in *Kairākau*, defined by its pre-colonial setting, narrative selection, cinematography, costume, and props, seem more straightforward than that of contemporary-era *Aroha Bridge*. In *Kairākau*, tūrangawaewae aligns with the more traditional understandings, as the exclusive use of te reo, the exhibition of traditional art forms and tikanga, and the emphasis on Māori as intimately interconnected with the land create a televisual tūrangawaewae in which Māori are empowered by cultural autonomy. This is partially in contrast to the postcolonial cultural fluidity celebrated within *Aroha Bridge*. However, *Kairākau*'s emphasis on martial arts introduces an element of hybridity informed by global popular culture, which in turn facilitates a range of Māori and non-Māori viewing positions. These viewing positions have

the potential to appeal to viewers with limited knowledge of traditional tikanga and te reo, creating a learning environment that balances entertainment with cultural knowledge-gathering, and positions *Kairākau* as tūrangawaewae for viewers with varying levels of engagement with te ao Māori. Despite the entertainment value added by the action-driven narratives, the understandings of tūrangawaewae offered by *Kairākau* may be limited to viewers who identify with traditional tikanga and the spirit of Tū Matauenga – much like the contemporary narrator, Tupōtahi. By constructing the warrior culture and martial arts of the past as tūrangawaewae, *Kairākau* endorses a vision of Māoridom that emphasises homosocial narratives and explores gender roles within fixed parameters. In doing so, contemporary viewers who have limited understanding of traditional Māori culture may experience a disconnection between the representations on screen and their encounters with modern Māoridom. It is therefore integral that viewers immerse themselves in Māori media and culture beyond the confines of this individual text, in order to better understand the many ways that tūrangawaewae may manifest across the canon of Māori programming.

Kairākau's articulation of whanaungatanga offers unique perspective of the complex ways in which Māori conceptualise kin interrelationships. Traditional artefacts and art forms are imbued with spiritual significance, embodying a living history that connects contemporary viewers with tipuna. As a result, whanaungatanga is not imagined as exclusive to those Māori occupying the present. Rather, whanaungatanga is imagined as extending through a spiral or koru temporality where the past, present, and future coexist, and Māori communities are built through time and space. While the interrelationships between on screen Māori are often depicted as fraught, this disharmony disrupts the retrospective imagining of pre-colonial Māori communities as embodying a type of 'pure', homogenous ideal: an understanding of whanaungatanga that undermines Eurocentric perceptions of pre-colonial Māori culture.

Kairākau emerges from an established foothold for Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand's mediascape: Māori Television, a channel that remains dedicated to the preservation of Māori culture and the revitalisation of te reo. As part of this mission, Māori Television has reconfigured production processes to align more closely with Māori tikanga. Within the context of *Kairākau*, new modes of authorship are created that are rooted in the values of whanaungatanga, echoing a communal voice. Further, *Kairākau* nurtures the development of the Māori martial arts genre, opening up the spaces of Māori media to a wider audience. Despite this significant progress, the extent to which Māori Television can be considered tūrangawaewae is uncertain, as the fiscal responsibilities of the station may allow entertainment value to take priority over cultural significance. Like *Aroha Bridge*, *Kairākau* is available for online viewing, but was also part of Māori Television's primetime broadcast schedule. As a result, the potential audience of *Kairākau* currently exceeds that of *Aroha Bridge*, indicating that broadcast mediums may constitute a greater arena for televisual tūrangawaewae than that of primarily online media. This is reflected in the greater audience engagement with *Kairākau* on Facebook, suggesting that *Kairākau*'s access to a traditional broadcast audience encourages viewer whanaungatanga in virtual spaces. However, in recent years there has been a shift in media consumption habits, with the amount of time spent watching online videos, on demand, and streaming services having more than doubled from an average of six minutes per New Zealander in 2014, to 40 minutes in 2016 ("Where are the Audiences?"). If this trend continues, we can expect that the audience numbers for online material will grow exponentially, and the gap between broadcast and online channel viewership will continue to close. Further, the foothold represented by Māori broadcast remains nominal when compared to its mainstream counterparts, attracting a minimal audience share in comparison.

My thesis has intervened in contemporary discussions emerging from the intersection of media and culture in Aotearoa New Zealand, ultimately revealing that Māori media is an invaluable resource for cultural learning. Undoubtedly, there remain commercial, cultural, virtual, and ideological barriers to Māori media that inhibit the range of understandings of te ao Māori presented to viewers. However, as my thesis has shown, despite significant obstacles, some Māori media producers employ innovative textual representation, production, and distribution practices to craft subversive and informative media texts. Moreover, the diverse approaches that *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* take to both articulate and embody their own vision of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga reveals that the preservation of te ao Māori in the media does not rely on shaping a shared and cohesive understanding of these concepts. Rather, Māori media producers should be empowered to construct televisual texts that explore individual interpretations of te ao Māori, conflicting and complex as they may be. As Uncle Noogy astutely observed, “how . . . Māori fight and debate [their] identity is up to [them]”, and *Aroha Bridge* and *Kairākau* make clear that the canon of Māori programming is a vital domain in which this debate is conducted (S02E02 “Plastic Māori”). Encountering the diverse representations and embodiments of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga therein, viewers may gain understanding of the continuing relevance of te ao Māori concepts, both in the media and beyond.

However, given the restrictions of this thesis there are areas of enquiry that would benefit from further research or alternative methodologies. In particular, my examination of viewer responses online was relatively narrow in terms of the online platforms used to conduct research and the selection of viewer contributions. Therefore, the wider conclusions that can be drawn around online viewer engagements with Māori media, and how this interaction might impact understanding of tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga, are limited and would benefit from further analysis. In particular, this research project would benefit

from a wider selection of online distribution platforms for study and viewer interviews. Alongside this further research, I suggest that a data scraping program for online data collection would have been valuable in negating the possibility of human error in the reported figures.

Māori face many challenges in a bicultural, postcolonial society in which their worldviews are often marginalised or trivialised. While media has historically been culpable in this marginalisation through the normalisation of Eurocentrism, in more recent years Indigenous people have looked to the media to re-forge perceptions of non-Western cultures. Māori media is at the forefront of global movements towards decolonisation, preserving vital elements of Māoridom for future generations through rich and diverse programming. As the presence of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand's mediascape continues to grow, both Māori and non-Māori alike will be empowered to better understand the worldviews that shape our home.

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