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**Movement of the People:
the Second Great Māori Migration, Rogernomics
and other influences behind my creative work “Exodus.”**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Creative Writing
in
Fiction

at Massey University, New Zealand.

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Kaupapa

Ko Hikurangi te maunga

Ko Waiapu te awa

Ko Ngāti Porou te iwi

Ko Jasmine Kaa taku ingoa

My thesis consists of 2 parts:

The first part is a critical essay that explores the key historical, political and creative influences that inspired the genesis and development of my creative work.

As the supporting document to my creative work, this essay provides a platform for me to wananga and engage with the ideas and insights that has gone into my creative process. My essay also gets to the heart of why my story spoke to me, and my intentions behind writing it. It also answers my research question: how has the social impact of neoliberalism, in particular Māori unemployment, been depicted in films made by Māori filmmakers?

The second part of my thesis is a creative work that takes the form of a television screenplay. *Te Aroha*, is the fourth episode of *Exodus*, a limited series that I am developing. The overall theme of *Exodus* is the intergenerational impact of government policies on one Māori whanau from 1961 to 2023. *Te Aroha*, is set in the mid-1990s and features a younger generation of the whānau. The main focus of the episode explores the social impact neo-liberal government policies of the 1990s had on whānau Māori, in particular sole parents on a benefit.

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Whiti Hereaka, who has both guided and persevered with me throughout this thesis journey.

We got there in the end!

This thesis is dedicated to Mum and Dad.

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Part One. He wānanga, he kōrero: Introduction to critical essay.

Hoki atu ki tōu maunga kia purea ai e koe ki ngā hau o Tāwhirimātea.

Return to your mountain to be cleansed by the winds of Tāwhirimātea.

I can trace the inspiration for my creative work back to the late 1950s when my great-grand parents, Reremoana (Kōtene) Kaa and Ngā Rōhi-ō-Mei Rāroa, moved with their children hundreds of kilometres away from their homeland of Ngāti Porou to the Waikato region in search of better employment and educational opportunities. Like many young whānau at the time, they joined the rural-urban Māori migration to the towns and cities. A major population shift, that accelerated after the Government's publication of the Hunn report in 1961 (Hunn, 1961; Meredith, n.d.). The Hunn report promoted the migration and assimilation of rural Māori into urban centres and Pākehā society, and what followed were a raft of public policy programmes that actively facilitated this process (Williams, 2019).

The inter-generational whānau of *Exodus*, the seven-episode limited television series I am in the early stages of developing, have predominantly lived away from their wā kainga. The characters of the series, much like the members of my own whānau, have established families and homes in the whenua of other Iwi. Both my fictional and real-life whānau have also had their lives shaped by the broader historical and political context of changing government policies.

Exodus follows three generations of a Māori whānau over six decades from 1961 to 2023. The unifying theme throughout the series is the social impact that successive government policies have had on the personal lives of Māori communities. My creative piece, *Episode Four: Te Aroha*, is a one hour screen play that marks the midway point of the limited series. The focus of the episode is the social impact neoliberal government policies had on whānau Māori during the 1990s. In particular, the social impact neo-liberal government policies had on sole parents on a benefit.

This critical essay explores the key influences that have inspired the genesis and development of my screenplay. As the supporting document to my creative work, this essay provides a platform for me to wānanga and engage with the ideas and insights that has gone into my creative process. I examine the wider historical, political and creative context and inspiration embedded within the

development of the script. This essay also expands on why this story spoke to me, and my intentions behind writing it.

There are six main parts to my essay:

- In this part, *He wānanga, he kōrero: Introduction to critical essay*, I lay out the kaupapa to be covered in this document.
- In part two, *I te timatanga: Genesis of project*, I discuss the creative process of how I came up with the idea for the limited series *Exodus* and provide summaries of each episode to provide greater context.
- In part three, *Follow the yellow brick road: The Second Great Māori Migration and Rogernomics*, I briefly examine the social impact that rural-urban migration and neo-liberalism had on Māori communities.
- In part four, *Whānau on film: Depicting the social impact of neoliberalism on whānau Māori*, I discuss the feature films, *Once Were Warriors* and *Boy*, and examine how the social impact of neoliberalism, in particular Māori unemployment is depicted in both films.
- In part five, *He kaupapa hirahira: The Principalities*, I focus on my 'why': why this story spoke to me, my intentions behind writing *Exodus* and the messages I would like the audience to take away with them. I also discuss my 'how': how I attempted to depict the social impact of neoliberalism in my creative work, and which influences discussed in this essay I wanted to draw upon.
- In the sixth and final part of my critical essay, *He korero whakakapi: There's no place like home*, I offer some brief concluding thoughts about the process of writing my thesis.

Part Two. I te timatanga: Genesis of Project.

Exodus, alright! Movement of Jah people...

We know where we're goin', uh!

We know where we're from

We're leavin' Babylon

We're goin' to our Fatherland.

“Exodus” from Bob Marley & The Wailers’ 1977 album, *Exodus*.

The whakapapa of my creative project has many lines of descent. One line begins many decades ago with the migration of my tipuna koroua and kuia with their young family from Rangitukia to the Waikato. Another line begins in the early 2000s when I was in my mid 20s and had followed my great-grand mother Ngarohi (also known as Rose or Rosie) back to Rangitukia to live with her. After my great-grandfather, Kōtene (also known as Gordon) had passed away, Ngarohi decided that she wanted to sell her house in Paeroa and go back ‘home.’

I had been brought up by my great-grandparents since I was a baby, and for the most part was raised in the Hauraki plains. However, ‘home’ wasn’t Paeroa, the small provincial town where I spent my childhood. ‘Home’ was Rangitukia, a six or seven hour drive away along winding coastal highways. This was the place where my tipuna would travel back to several times a year for tangi, unveilings, whanau reunions, land-meetings and the occasional happy celebration like a wedding or birthday. When they said we were going ‘home’ I knew they weren’t talking about the old ex-NZ Railways house we lived in, in Paeroa.

In his 2018 oral history of post-World War 2 Māori migrants to the cities, *Urban Māori: The Second Great Migration*, Brad Haami describes the concept of ‘home’ shared among the earlier generation of Māori who moved away to urban areas:

The notion of buying a house to secure a stable future in the city for themselves and their descendants was problematic for Māori. It required a long-term commitment to the city; that meant putting down roots, which many elders resisted. "This is not our home" was a common thought among first-generation migrants who always planned to return home to their tribal lands their true tūrangawaewae, the standing place where one gains the authority to belong (p.54).

After following my great-grand mother back to her tūrangawaewae, I became fascinated with the old homesteads — some occupied, most long ago deserted — I would see when traveling State Highway 35 from Rangitukia to Gisborne, or driving around the more isolated communities of the East Coast. I would imagine what these whare used to look like, before their iron sheet roofs began to rust and their walls shed their layers of paint. Before the kōti and tall grass grew in between the cracks of their broken floorboards and windows — who were the occupants of these houses and why had they left?

A Whakaata Māori television series called *Homesteads* (Smith, 2022) has explored the stories behind some older whānau homes, with two of the seven episodes set in Ngāti Porou. The series examines the cultural significant role these whare play for ‘those lucky enough to have a family homestead...the one constant that keeps them grounded and connected, a place they can call home’ (Te Imurangi Media, 2022). Director and producer of the series, Kimiora Kaire-Melbourne says her own whānau homestead in Ruatoki provided the inspiration behind the series, a home maintained by her Koro for the benefit of his uri. “We all enjoyed our time at the homestead and it was an essential part of our whānau where we gathered” (Dimitrof, 2022).

The old homesteads I first took notice of on those long drives to Gisborne became carved in my imagination over time, especially the abandoned ones. If marae are the tūrangawaewae of hapū and homesteads are the tūrangawaewae of whānau (Māori Television, 2022), could the descendants of the families who once lived in these homes ever return to renew and reclaim their sense of cultural identity and belonging?

The whakapapa of my creative project also finds its lineage from two other sources. In 2010, I proposed an historical narrative project for a community writers’ programme. The idea was to gather the oral histories of ahi kaa who had never moved away from home during the rural-urban migration of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and maintained a presence within Ngāti Porou. If they *had* left, then it would have only been for a relatively short period. I was interested at the time in how do you keep the cultural, social, economic and political functions of your isolated, rural community functioning when your main resource, the people, have emptied out to the towns and cities. I never undertook the historical project, however the concept never left me.

The second whakapapa source came from the deepening of my political awareness in recent years. After completing a post-graduate degree in policy studies, I went on to work as a policy analyst for a government agency. As a result, I became more aware of the human impact government policies, such as the Native Lands Act 1862, the Tohunga Suppression Act 1907 and the Foreshore

and Seabed Act 2004, had on Māori communities. I was especially interested in the neoliberal policies introduced by the Labour Government in the early 1980s, and the fraying of the welfare state in the 1990s (Child Poverty Action Group, 2017).

Drawing on those diverse whakapapa connections the kaupapa of *Exodus*, the intergenerational story of a Māori whānau, was born. At first it took the shape of a feature film while I was toying around with the idea in 2019, while I was a Creative Writing Diploma student at Whitireia Polytechnic. The opening scene of the film began in the present day, with a Māori family returning to their previously abandoned rural whānau homestead. It then quickly jumped back in time 60 years to 1961, when the whare was freshly painted, well-looked after and lived in.

I decided at that time that creating a story covering three distinct time periods and incorporating a murder-mystery proved too complex, so I developed another film script instead. I chose to park *Exodus* until I could come back to it at a later date and figure out how to execute it. I revived the *Exodus* concept in 2022 for this thesis project, as part of my Masters of Creative Writing at Massey University. The same issue around complexity confronted me, until I made the decision to dump the murder-mystery idea and turn the feature film into a limited television series. As it was an inter-generational story, the television episodic format also suited the idea better than a 90 minute movie. There is also a precedence in television for drama series such as *Roots* (Wolper, 1977) from the 1970s and more recently *The Crown* (Morgan, 2016-2023) that tells the story of a whānau over several generations.

The television series is called *Exodus* for several reasons. The whole series is about a Māori whānau leaving their tribal homeland for the city, and their eventual return decades later. Each episode also ends or begins with a member of the whānau migrating to another town, city, settlement or country. The title *Exodus* is also a reference to the *Book of Exodus*, the second book from the Bible. In the biblical narrative Moses leads the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt across the Red Sea to the Promised Land. *Exodus* is also a waiata by Bob Marley from the iconic album of the same name (Marley, 1977). In the song, Marley refers to korero from his Rastafarian faith which likens the African diaspora to the ancient Israelites, and the return of this diaspora to their homeland of Africa. He is also referencing his own exodus, as at the time he was living in England after leaving Jamaica after a failed assassination attempt on his life (London, 2021). The Jamaican musician continues to have a strong following within the Māori community, including the East Coast community.

For my creative project I have focused on one episode of the *Exodus* series, *Te Aroha*, which is set against the backdrop of the beneficiary cuts of the 1990s. A female mokopuna of the whānau, Te Aroha, is the main character. *Te Aroha* is intended to be the fourth episode of the series. A breakdown of the seven planned episodes is provided below.

Episode One: Set in 1961, the year the Hunn report was released by the government which encouraged Māori to move from rural areas into towns and cities. The Hemi whānau migrate from their rural community to Newtown in Wellington.

Episode Two: Set in 1975, the year of the Whina Cooper's Māori Land March and establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal. The Hemi whānau move from the inner city to the suburbs of Wellington, to Porirua where new sub-divisions are opening.

Episode Three: Set in 1985, the year after the Labour Party introduce their neoliberal economic policies and the mass redundancies begin. Some of the members of the wider Hemi whānau decide to move to the provinces.

Episode Four: Set in 1994, the year the film *Once Were Warriors* was released, and three years after the beneficiary cuts of the 1991 Budget. A member of the Hemi whānau decides to move to Australia.

Episode Five: Set in 2008, the year of the Global Financial crisis. The matriarch of the Hemi whānau moves to a rest home as the whānau are unable to care for her.

Episode Six: Set in 2015, it follows a day in the life of two members of the Hemi whānau. One is teaching English in Taiwan and the other is living in Australia.

Episode Seven: Set between 2019 the year before the Pandemic and 2023, the year of Cyclone Gabrielle. The patriarch of the Hemi whānau wants to return home to the whānau homestead.

Part Three. Follow the Yellow Brick Road: The Second Great Māori Migration and Rogernomics.

I open my eyes. Far away are the lights of Wellington, streaming with the rain down our window like glistening towers. And it looks so...so...beautiful. Just as I'd imagined it to be. Just as I pretended it would be. Emerald City.

- Isn't it neat, Mum?

She stares ahead. Her face is still.

"Yellow Brick Road" from *The New Net Goes Fishing* by Witi Ihimaera (1977).

Over the course of three short stories, "In Search of the Emerald City" (Ihimaera, 1972), "Yellow Brick Road" (Ihimaera, 1977), and "Return from Oz" (Ihimaera, 1977), Witi Ihimaera charts the migration of a Māori whānau leaving their rural community of Waituhi for the big smoke of Wellington, and their return 20 years later. In the first two stories the youngest child Matiu is the narrator, animatedly describing their journey in detail. During their farewells to whānau and friends, his Uncle Pita tries to encourage Matiu's father not to leave. "You're quitting too soon, Uncle says. Things are bound to look up" (Ihimaera, 1972, p.75). Matiu's father is resolute in his decision telling him that they have to "go where the money is" (Ihimaera, p.76), but would one day he would return: "As long as I'm buried back here, that's all I want" (Ihimaera, p.76).

Ihimaera was born in 1944 and raised in the real-life village of Waituhi on the East Coast. A fictional recreation of Waituhi has appeared in many of the author's novels and short stories. As a young boy and teenager, he would have seen many of his whānau leave the community and make the move to the cities, joining the exodus himself one day as a young adult seeking education and employment opportunities. In fact, Ihimaera has written extensively about these formative experiences in his two volume set of personal memoirs, *Māori Boy* (2014) and *Native Son* (2019).

In this section I discuss two time periods highlighted in my limited television series, *Exodus*: the Māori rural-urban migration of the 1960s and the introduction of neo-liberal policies in 1980s New Zealand. I will also briefly examine some of the social impacts these two historic events had on Māori communities. A definition that closely describes what I mean by the term social impact is 'the effect on people and communities that happens as a result of an action or inaction, an activity, project, programme or policy' (Good Finance, n.d.).

Māori rural-urban migration in the 1960s.

‘The Second Great Migration,’ is a term used by Haami (2018) to describe the monumental demographic shift the Māori population experienced between the end of World War Two and the early 2000s. In 1951 it was recorded that 71% of the Māori population lived in rural areas. However, by 2006 this number had decreased dramatically to 16%, with the majority of Māori living in urban towns and cities (Easton, 2018).

The pull of ‘work, money and pleasure’ (Meredith, n.d.) and the push away from unsustainable economies in their tribal homelands (Haami, 2018) are among the main reasons cited for the move to the cities. The publication of the Hunn report in 1961 also helped to accelerate the migration process by promoting widespread ideas about the assimilation and integration of Māori through urbanisation (Haami, 2018; Keenan, 2014).

The government facilitated urbanisation, through the Department of Māori Affairs urban relocation programme and housing programme. The State Advances Corporation contributed to this process through housing loans, although they ‘preferred to lend money to Māori who lived in the ‘Pākehā Way’, that is, as a nuclear family rather than an extended family.’ (Haami, 2018, p. 53). In addition, the Department of Māori Affairs operated the Māori Trade training programme from the late 1950s to the early 1980s where an estimated 20,000 young Māori adults (Haami, 2018) over this period were provided travel and accommodation in the cities where they would be taught employable skills in the trades industry.

A short documentary, *To Live in the City*, made in the late 1960s, (Everard, 1968) featured four young Māori from rural areas who had arrived in Wellington to attend one of the six-week pre-employment courses run by the Department of Māori Affairs where it was intended the rangatahi would help fill the country’s labour gap and become ‘carpenters, typist and factory labourers.’ (Everard, 1968). Two decades later a follow-up documentary was made in 1991 called, *To Live in the City - 24 Years On* (Lennane, 1991) to find out what had happened to the original programme’s subjects who were now in their 40s. Grace Warmington was a 16 year-old student from Waima near Kaikohe, when she came to live in Wellington. Among her reflections was that there wasn’t an expectation from the organisers of the course for the youth to seek higher learning. “I can’t remember one instance where they said to us that university could be an option, or polytechnic...further training was an option (Lennane, 1991).”

Phillip Waihi was 17 years old when he left Ruatoria for Wellington. In the programme he looks fondly back on his time on the pre-employment course as it opened his eyes up to opportunities he wouldn't get on the East Coast. "If I would have stayed home the only jobs I would have got were being a shepherd, shearing, scrub-cutting, shearing, more or less that was it. But with the course I saw a lot of things I can do." (Lennane, 1991).

The 'Second Great Migration' created various downstream social impacts that are still being experienced today. Cultural alienation was felt by the tamariki and mokopuna of Māori urban migrants due to being dislocated from their tribal origins which Ranginui Walker wrote about in 1979:

Urban transformation has exacted a high price from the city-born offspring of the migrants. Without grandparents and elders the traditional teachers and minders of children in the extended family arrangement, the urban family unit is culturally cut off and disorganised ... Without elders or grandparents to instruct them about things Maori, the city-born grow up in a world different from that of their migrant parents. They know they are stuck with minority of status as Maoris [sic], but they know little or nothing about Maori values and pride in their cultural heritage. (Walker 1979, p.38)

Economic issues caused by adapting to a cash economy, and being unable to meet financial commitments were worsened by having a lack of whānau support (Meredith, 2000). Gang membership was said to have exploded in the late 1960s when the numbers of urban-born Māori increased, with young, alienated Māori looking for a sense of community and whānau (Keenan, 2014).

Introduction of neoliberal policies in the 1980s.

Neoliberalism is an ideology that first took hold in New Zealand's political landscape with the Fourth Labour Government. The then Minister of Finance, Roger Douglas, was the lead champion of the neo-liberal reforms he introduced in 1984 which came to be known as 'Rogernomics' ("Rogernomics", n.d.). Before discussing the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and subsequent social impacts, I will first provide a definition of neoliberalism:

Neoliberalism promotes freedom of the individual and the notions of individual autonomy and responsibility with minimal state interference...Neoliberals believe that individuals are driven by their own self-interest. They do not support collectivism, believing instead that all structural institutions, including the state and the community, are made up of independent individuals." (Maidment & Beddoe, 2016, p51.).

Among the neoliberal reform policies introduced by Labour during the six years they were in power include the State-owned Enterprises Act 1986 which turned government departments into State-owned enterprises, in areas including transport, electricity and communications, to increase competition and improve the profitability of the public sector (Maidment & Beddoe, 2016). Many government departments were also downsized and restructured with many of their services outsourced to external organisations (NZ History, n.d.; Shaw, 2012).

The deregulation of the economy and minimisation of state intervention were core facets of these reforms. New Zealand political leaders were in step with the neoliberal ideology practiced by at the time by British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who popularised 'trickle-down economics,' (The Week, 2022) and American President Ronald Reagan who is quoted as saying. "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help" (Reagan foundation, n.d.).

The reforms created rolling waves of redundancies and contributed to mass job-losses and increased poverty, with Māori disproportionately impacted (Poata-Smith, 2013, p.151). Blue-collar industries such as manufacturing were affected by the removal of tariffs and subsidies, which had flow on effects to Māori and Pasifika workers who were highly represented in these areas. In less than four years the Māori unemployment rate doubled, from 13.5 per cent in March 1988 to a high of 27.3 per cent by March 1992 (Poata-Smith, 2013, p.151).

The feature documentary *Someone else's country* (Barry, 1996) portrays a compelling account of the neoliberal reforms introduced by the Labour Government. It was followed in 2002 by *In a Land of Plenty*, another documentary by the same director, Alister Barry. This film focuses on the negative social impacts of the Rogernomics policies started by Labour and continued for a further two terms by the National Government from 1990 onwards. It also shows how unemployment was used as a tool to keep inflation down, and how the socio-economic position working-class and vulnerable groups were made worse by these policies.

In *Someone else's country*, Māori affected by the reforms are interviewed in the film, including Margie McGuire who was made redundant from the Whakatu Freezing works near Hastings. She asks what is going to happen in a year's time when the redundancy payments are all gone, and there is no seasonal employment for the locals to rely on. Another wāhine Māori who is not named in the film, worries about the future work prospects of their young people:

"We don't like to sit back here and watch our children on the dole. And I think someone has to look into that...start now cos when our kids are 18, 19 what is there for them? Nothing. So I think someone better get their act together, because it's only going to get it worse. Unemployment...that's going to be with us forever, isn't it? If no one is going to do anything about it." (Barry, 1996, 30.15).

In a Land of Plenty (Barry, 2002) also examines the social impact of 'The Mother of All Budgets,' (Matthews, 2021; O'Connell Rapira, 2019) in which the then Minister of Finance, Ruth Richardson, made severe cuts to welfare-system to reduce the size of government and encourage self-reliance. Some of these impacts included homelessness, and high rates of rheumatic fever.

The young and unemployed were targeted by the welfare cuts which has been described as based on a moral rather than economic imperative (RNZ, 2017). For example, one of the punitive measures was to completely cut off the Domestic Purpose Benefit for women under 18 years old, which unfairly penalised teenage mothers. In comparison Pensioners benefits were not touched, although these benefits made up a significant portion of welfare benefits (RNZ, 2017).

The film also looks at the 1997 government public campaign that portrayed welfare recipients as a burden to the taxpayer and potential fraudsters. The campaign included a two-part television programme called *Time-Bomb* (Rymer, 1997), prime-time TV commercials and a glossy survey sent to every household in New Zealand. The aim of the campaign was for the government to curry public opinion, while the State made further cuts to the welfare system and made it harder for beneficiaries to receive income support, including sickness beneficiaries.

The social impact of neoliberal reform created new waves of mass Māori migration during the 1980s and 90s. When the documentary-makers of *To Live in the City-24 Years On* (Lennane, 1991) caught up with Phillip Waihi in the early 90s, he was now living in Brisbane, Australia raising a whānau of his own. He says his motivation for migrating was to improve his employment prospects:

The main decision in coming to Australia is because of the job situation in New Zealand...there wasn't much employment around and I was tired of working in the meat works and getting put off. So I had a brother here in Australia...and he said come over, and try Australia. (Lennane, 1991, Part 4, 7.00).

A 2007 report about Māori living in Australia published by Te Puni Kōkiri provided a summary of reasons why Māori migrated from New Zealand. The opportunity to find better jobs, make a fresh start or gain higher wages were among the top 'pull factors.' (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2007). Research conducted by Courtney Sullivan (2008) found similar findings:

Throughout the interviews the notion of seeking better opportunities occurred frequently. Tāne (adult, 50) believed that there wasn't really a lot to keep him in New Zealand and Wahine (adult, 51) supported this belief as she stated "...I just could see myself going nowhere..." (Courtney, 2008, p.20).

Listed among the 'push factors' in the 2007 Te Puni Kōkiri study were negative experiences in New Zealand arising from social dysfunction and perceived prejudice. Sullivan's research also refers to this belief from Māori she interviewed:

Another motivation that is not overly apparent throughout literature is the 'good name' that Māori have in Brisbane. In Australia Māori are seen "...as good, honest and hardworking people..." (Sullivan, 2008, p.20).

Return to Oz

In 1977, seven years before the introduction of New Zealand's neoliberal reforms, "Return to Oz," the last story in Ihimaera's short-story trilogy about the whānau from Waituhi moving to the bright lights of Wellington, was published. The young boy Matiu is now the father of his own son, Christopher, who narrates the story. Christopher is excited to be traveling to Waituhi, as his grandfather wants to return after being away for two decades. His tipuna says he wants to reconnect his whanau to their turangawaewae and is optimistic that Waituhi is the same place he left all those years ago:

- You know it will have changed, Dad. Waituhi, I mean. It won't be the same.

Nothing is ever the same.

- No, son. It will be the same. It has to be. (Ihimaera, 1977, p.347).

The story finishes before the whanau arrive in Waituhi, so it is left to the reader's imagination how much the community has changed and whether the grandfather feels like he can fit back in. In my mind the fictional version of Waituhi the grandfather returns to isn't a romanticised utopia of village life. Instead like many other rural provincial communities it faces the closure of local industries, high unemployment and cuts to essential health services. There is inter-generational poverty, housing issues and many whānau are packing up to leave.

In my imagination also, the 'Emerald City' isn't the city of Wellington that Ihimaera refers to in his short story (Ihimaera, 1972). Instead to me, the 'Emerald City' are the cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, in the real-life land of Oz.

Part Four. Whānau on Film: Depicting the social impact of neoliberalism on whānau Māori.

Jake Heke: "I bought seafood today - bloody everything! Just wanted to put a smile on her face. Think she'd let me? Not a chance. All I said was that I got laid off. Anybody would've thought I'd told her my prick had dropped off!"

Once Were Warriors (1994)

Boy: Hey Auntie, can I have a ice block please?

Aunty Gracey: No.

Boy: Aww... it's not fair!

Aunty Gracey: Get a job Man!

Boy: Aww... There's none left. You've got them all!

Boy (2010)

In this section I discuss the feature films, *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori, 1994) and *Boy* (Waititi, 2010) and examine how the social impact of neoliberalism, in particular Māori unemployment is depicted in both films. I chose to focus on these films because they were both written and directed by Māori creatives, feature members of a Māori whānau as the main characters and were either produced or set in the 1980s/1990s Neoliberal reform period.

Once Were Warriors

The film *Once Were Warriors* is an adaption of a novel of the same name by Māori writer, Alan Duff. The book was published in 1990 (Duff, 1990) and is set in Two Lakes, a fictionalised version of Rotorua where Duff was raised. The film adaptation came out in 1994, four years after the novel and tells the story of the Heke whānau who live in a State house next to a busy motorway in an unnamed city suburb (South Auckland provided many of the film's locations). Jake and Beth Heke are the parents of five children, with the eldest son Nig, preferring the whānau environment of a gang to his home-life, another son Boogie committing petty crimes and often coming to the attention of the police, and eldest daughter Grace, seeking comfort in her books and friendship with homeless teenager, Toot. A major focus of the film are the constant beatings that Jake inflicts on Beth, and the tragic consequences that occurs after one such attack.

Like the book, the film shows the challenges the Heke whānau face within their daily lives. However, the endings of the book and film version of *Once Were Warriors* are quite different. In the novel Jake is the prime suspect for the rape of his daughter Grace and his wife Beth has left him to reconnect with her culture by starting a kapa haka group. In the film version, Jake has viciously beaten Uncle Bully, the confirmed rapist of his daughter Grace, and Beth returns with the rest of her children to the safety of her own marae and whānau.

When *Once Were Warriors* was released thirty years ago in 1994 it was met with commercial and critical acclaim. The film at the time became the highest-grossing movie released in New Zealand beating the record held by a Hollywood Blockbuster, *Jurassic Park*. (Hunter, 2010). *Once Were Warriors* won multiple honours at the NZ Film Awards and international film festivals, with lead actors, Temuera Morrison, Rena Owen and Cliff Curtis going on to achieve accomplished acting careers both here in Aotearoa and overseas. However, the film almost never got made due to the main financier, the NZ Film Commission (the Commission) pulling development funding multiple times. Duff had been commissioned to write the script by the film's producer Robin Scholes who had brought the rights to the novel. But after reading Duff's adaptation the Commission stopped the

funding as they did not agree with the more brutal and desolate elements of his script which closely aligned with the novel (Martens, 2007).

In response, Scholes and the film's director, Lee Tamahori approached Māori playwright, Riwia Brown to create a new version of the script, focusing on the character of Beth rather than Jake (Martens, 2007). The change of focus sat well with the director, with Tamahori explaining he wasn't interested in telling Jake's story: "You couldn't have it be a story about a mindlessly violent thug. I was more fascinated by a story of a mother who makes efforts to rise above her circumstances and create a life for her children" (Dixon, 2014). In her adaptation, Brown made the film less bleak than both the book and Duff's scripts. In an essay about writing the screenplay Brown reflected, "Because of the hard-hitting and dark nature of the material it was essential to script an 'up' ending." (Brown, 2013).

Even after the script had been re-written to provide a more nuanced, female viewpoint, the Commission declined further funding as they were, 'nervous about whether a film on a violent domestic relationship would appeal to theatrical audiences' (Martens, 2007, p.35). It was only after the filmmakers gathered the support of Māori leaders to come and speak directly to the Commission on why it was important that the film be made, that financing continued (Martens, 2007, p.35). Scholes said that it was an impassioned speech about the timeliness of the project by Gisborne police commander Rana Waitai who 'had seen the side of life we wanted to portray' that finally swayed the Commission around' (Ward, 2013).

'The side of life' portrayed in almost every scene of *Once Were Warriors* features domestic and sexual violence, poverty, unemployment, welfare dependency, drug and alcohol abuse, youth crime, suicide, homelessness and gang affiliation. In 1994 when *Once Were Warriors* came out, one in seven women in New Zealand were living with violence, there were 1898 convictions for violent sexual offences and 12,253 calls made to child advocacy service Parentline (Neale, 2019). However, the story told by the filmmakers lacked important contextual information according to Leonie Pihama, a leading Kaupapa Māori educator and researcher. In an essay not long after the movie was released, Pihama identified the absence of any mention of colonisation:

Once Were Warriors as representation of Māori is particularly problematic because it is not located within historical realities of this land. The issues raised within the movie are not read in light of the wider context and experiences of colonisation and the impact of that upon Māori people...Without discussion of the impact of colonisation and the acts of violence perpetrated upon our tupuna, it is a movie that is unconnected to our historical experiences of oppression.

For those who know little about our people and our colonial experiences, the representation of Māori people is limited to a violent, abusive face, and the wider realities of our day-to-day experiences remain hidden. (Pihama, 1996, p.191).

The film also contains other omissions according to an Australian academic writing about *Once Were Warriors* (Gillard, 2005). Gillard says that because Māori are a minority population group in comparison to Pākehā he expected that there would have been references to inter-racial conflict, police brutality and injustices caused by the State. Instead, it appeared to Gillard that the issues faced by the Heke whānau occur in a vacuum with little relationship to external forces, and that the film ‘makes the point...that all of the many problems raised are within the Māori community.’ (Gillard, 2005).

A documentary fronted by Rena Owen called *Beth's World* (Royal, 1997) is also curiously silent about the role colonisation played in many of the issues dramatized in *Once Were Warriors*. *Beth's World* features interviews with victims of domestic and sexual violence and provides the opportunity for former abusers to tell their own stories. Intergenerational trauma and violence figures prominently in the lives of the programme's participants who all appear to have whakapapa Māori. Among the interviews are Māori men who have taken personal responsibility for their abusive actions, and ‘have to unlearn what their own parents taught them,’ (Royal, 2007) to stop the cycle of violence being passed down to their children and mokopuna. The documentary is silent about the role of neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s in causing harm to whānau.

‘Catastrophic’ is how the authors of a research paper (Barnett & Bagshaw, 2020) describe the impact ‘Rogernomics’ had on New Zealand families, which they experienced for many years afterwards:

... over 111,000 jobs lost between 1986 and 1996. The cuts to welfare benefits created extra financial pressures on families with children. Child poverty rose dramatically after the 1991 budget and persisted, with 28% of children in poverty, including 20% in severe poverty in 2015. (Barnett & Bagshaw, 2020, p.78).

Health risks caused by the reforms were felt disproportionately by Māori and Pasifika and exacerbated by the experience of cultural loss, colonisation and racism (Barnett & Bagshaw, 2020, p.78). The decline in social and economic determinants of health, such as income, housing, food

security, employment, stress and educational opportunities, was also linked to high mortality rates and increased morbidities such as obesity, mental health and health risk behaviours (Barnett & Bagshaw, 2020, p.78).

Once Were Warriors depicts the social and health impacts of neoliberalism or 'the side of life' the filmmakers wanted to portray, in a number of ways: Jake and his friends demonstrate hazardous drinking and gambling addiction problems; Toot experiences homelessness and drug abuse; Nig and Boogie engage in high risk behaviours such as criminal and gang activity; Grace commits suicide after she is raped; Beth experiences trauma and stress caused by the physical, mental and sexual abuse from Jake, and the pressures arising from income, housing and food insecurity.

The social impact of Māori unemployment is depicted in a key scene near the beginning of the film. Jake returns home with parcel of kaimoana to share with his whānau, which provides a rare happy moment. However, their happiness is short-lived after Beth enquires where he obtained the kaimoana from, which would have been a luxury item for the whānau to purchase, or difficult to obtain without connections to whānau who went out diving or fishing.

Beth: Where did all the seafood come from?

Jake: I got lucky. I got laid off.

Beth: What?!

Jake: Whoa, whoa, woman! Let me finish!

Beth: Jake Heke! You've got a family to feed! You've got bills to pay...

Jake: Look I've signed up for the dole. It's only \$17 bucks less a week than my wages.

Beth sighs.

Jake: Oh don't look like that, it's not the end of the world.

The scene ends with Beth expressing her worry about not being able to pay the rent on their State House, and Jake showing his anger towards her before storming out the door to go to the pub. There are also more subtle references throughout the movie of the limited engagement by Māori youth, in particular young males, in employment and education. Boogie, Toot and Nig are not going

to school or to a job and are instead spending their time engaging in high-risk activities like crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and gang-life.

Although the depiction of Māori unemployment is well-acted and scripted, it is missing some context in the film. To provide greater context there could have potentially been some historical reference to the mass redundancies that were occurring in the 1980s and 1990s. Also, there could have potentially been some reference to the lack of social support available to vulnerable young people to engage in education and employment, when they have to overcome serious social issues such as homelessness, trauma and abuse.

Boy

Fifteen years after the release of *Once Were Warriors* a different type of film that focuses on the lives of a Māori whanau living in low social-economic conditions made its debut, but with a more comedic approach to the subject material. *Boy* premiered in 2010 and was the second feature of the film's writer and director, Taika Waititi. It is set in the year 1984, in the small East Coast Māori community of Waihou Bay. The main character, Boy, is an imaginative 11 year-old who lives with his Nanny, alongside his 9 year-old brother Rocky and several cousins. The film follows the reunion of the brothers with their father Alamein who has just been released from prison.

After the success of his 1995 Oscar nominated short-film, *Two Cars, One Night* (2003), Waititi began to expand on the world of the short-film that same year, at the esteemed Sundance Institute Screenwriters Lab, where he workshopped the first draft of *Boy* as a feature film script (Grady, 2012). When *Boy* premiered in 2010, it quickly over-took from *Once Were Warriors*, *The World's Fastest Indian* and *Whale Rider*, as the top New Zealand film at the box office. It remained in this top position, until Waititi's fourth feature film, *Hunt for The Wilderpeople* (Hunter, 2015), took its place as the highest grossing New Zealand film ever (New Zealand Film Commission, 2016).

Although Waititi grew up in Waihou Bay in the 1980s, he says the story in the film isn't autobiographical. Rather he was interested in exploring the world of his childhood living in a small rural, coastal Māori community but also at the same time being exposed to international cultural references (Grady, 2012). The film Images of the music icon, Michael Jackson, makes several appearances in the film, as he is a role model for the lead character who copies Jackson's famous

moon-walking and breakdancing moves. In an interview Waititi reflected on how Jackson was an influence for himself as well when was a young boy:

He was one of our biggest heroes growing up, for myself and all my cousins who were my age...For a bunch of Maori kids living in the middle of nowhere to see this black guy make it huge, it was quite a big deal. There weren't too many role models when we were growing up in New Zealand. Bob Marley or whoever else was on TV - Benson." (Grady, 2012).

The film also contains many cultural references to 1980s New Zealand with scenes featuring the Māori comedian Billy T. James and the 'Good Night Kiwi' on television, and a soundtrack containing popular waiata from the era from Prince Tui Teke, Herbs and Pātea Māori club. 1980s New Zealand is an era that Waititi has expressed a fondness for, which he has likened to both a time of innocence and a coming-of-age decade:

We went through a lot of social and political changes. As Māori we were slowly beginning to find ourselves and become proud of our own culture again...it's really an important decade in New Zealand's history. (Kyliekp1, 2013, 3.55).

The dark side of 1980s New Zealand life was something that Waititi wasn't keen to explore too much in his film. Although he described his first draft as 'falling into a traditional New Zealand genre' where 'bad things happening to nice people, very heavy.'

I didn't want to make a film about child abuse, or child neglect, which was unwatchable. Also, my background is comedy—I couldn't ignore that, really. There were so many things I wanted to put in the story I found funny from growing up in those times. New Zealand was such a weird place in the 1980s. (Hubert, 2012).

Pihama has provided critical commentary on *Boy* and found that 'by the end of the movie I felt like I had sat through a rural based *Once Were Warriors*'. She explains further:

Yes, there were fewer gangs, less leather, less urban angst but everything else rang true to the negativity that 'Warriors' presented to the world 16 years ago. Clearly Waititi himself does not see the comparisons to Lee Tamahori's 1994 film..." (Pihama, 2012, p. 99).

The stereotypes and lack of historical context Pihama found present in *Once Were Warriors* were again noticed in her reading of *Boy*. Although *Boy* was marketed to audiences as a comedy, there were aspects of the film that jarred with Pihama, in particular the scenes of rural poverty, gang violence, alcohol and drug abuse and child neglect played for laughs. Pihama describes the film's opening montage where the audience find humour in the tamariki helping their Nanny to jump-start her car:

Pushing cars in that manner was something I remembered as a common occurrence of that time. But the fun of this scene disappeared as the Kuia drove away and left all the mokopuna to fend for themselves for a week. At that point the familiarity merged with all the negative stereotypes of our people that have been the basis for so many films in this country. And sadly that feeling never changed for the remainder of the film. Rather, I sat wondering why such a film even needed to be made. Earlier reflections of *Once Were Warriors* came flooding back. I had entered into the world of lame stereotypes yet again and felt an instant disappointment. (Pihama, 2012, p.99).

Waititi's romanticised, rose-tinted glasses view of 1980s New Zealand may be at odds with the reality many Māori experienced during this decade. The things he found 'funny from growing up in those times' may not register to whānau Māori who as children may have been tortured in a residential facility or psychiatric institution, where the 'peak of the abuse reported occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, with most survivors being abused between the ages of five and 17' (Cornish, 2020). The humorous depictions of the ex-convict character Alamein and his 'Crazy Horses' gang associates may not ring true to whānau Māori who have had loved ones go through the 'pipeline to prison' (Waretini-Karena, 2024) from CYFS care to prison and to gangs, with half the prison population since 1980s being made up of Māori inmates (Clayworth, 2012).

The portrayal of the social impact of Māori unemployment is also played for laughs in *Boy*. The opening montage where the lead character is describing his world contains two such references. Boy's friend Dynasty is seen in the middle of a maize field, tending marijuana plants before handing over the cuttings to her father. The voice over by Boy says:

Dynasty is the only kid around here with a job. She does after-school gardening work for her Dad. (Waititi, 2010, 2.43).

In reality, growing dope in the 1980s provided many rural Māori whānau with an economic opportunity when there were few options available due to neoliberal reforms. Only today with the introduction of the medical cannabis industry that former dope growers like Robin Thomson of Ruatoria now have the opportunity to do so legally. In an interview with the New York Times, Thompson said he had been growing marijuana since he was 14 years old and was imprisoned for 6 years for doing so (Graham-McLay, 2018).

Another montage in *Boy* which could be seen as a depiction of Māori unemployment when Boy introduces his Auntie Gracie taking on multiple roles within the community.

Boy: Aunty Gracie is my Mum's sister. She has lots of jobs: she's the tennis coach, the mail-man, the school bus driver, and she runs the local shop. (Waititi, 2010, 2.52)

The real-life version of Waihou Bay much like the fictional version, is a sparsely populated settlement where the rural-urban migration began in the 1960s and 1970s as Māori from the area went to the cities in search of work opportunities. This migration would have accelerated in the 1980s and 90s as the region's economy suffered. Keeping the social, civic and business functions of a community like Waihou Bay operating would fall on a small number of remaining whānau members like the Aunty Gracie of the film, as the population decreased each year.

Part Five. He Kaupapa Hirahira: ‘The Principalities’.

Ehara hoki ta tatou i te pakanga ki nga toto ki te kikokiko, engari ki nga rangatiratanga,
ki nga mana, ki nga ariki o te pouri o tenei ao, ki nga wairua kino o nga wahi i te rangi.

Ephesians Chapter 6 - Paipera Tapu 1868

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Ephesians 6:12, King James Version Bible

As a child of the 1980s, I resonated with many of the same cultural touchstones as the lead character in *Boy*: ‘buzzing out’ at the latest Michael Jackson music videos; laughing at Billy T. James’ comedic skits; being reminded that I’m up past my bedtime by ‘the Goodnight Kiwi.’ Amongst these fun pop-culture flashbacks are also memories of what happened when Labour came to power after the snap election of July 1984. When the reforms of ‘Rogernomics’ began to bite provincial New Zealand and society began to change: Aunties and Uncles made redundant from the public service jobs they had held for decades; the closure of the railway station across the road from where I lived; the rise of ‘Yuppie’ culture within an increasingly globalised, consumeristic New Zealand society.

It wasn’t until I was a first-year student at the University of Auckland student in the mid-1990s, attending Ranginui Walker’s *Introduction to Māori Society* class (RNZ, 2016) that my political awareness about what exactly happened to Māori communities during the 1980s and 90s began to expand. Walker’s seminal work, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou: Struggle Without End* (Walker, 1990), was our course text, and this book helped to grow my intellectual capability in order to unpack 150 years of colonisation. *Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou* also taught me how the tools of war and law had been applied by successive governments to dispossess whānau, hāpu and iwi from their whenua, rangatiratanga and mātauranga. Reading Walker’s book brought to light to me the power structures calling the shots within New Zealand society that had previously remained hidden.

In this fifth section of my critical essay, I get to the heart of my ‘why’: why this story spoke to me, my intentions behind writing *Exodus* and the messages I would like the audience to take away with

them. I also discuss my 'how': how I attempted to depict the social impact of neoliberalism on whānau Māori in my creative work, and which influences discussed in this essay I wanted to draw upon.

The Principalities

The intergenerational story of *Exodus* spoke to me for two main reasons. The first reason was it helped me to express an unsettling idea I've had for many years. This whakaaro is about whānau going about their day-to-day lives and never fully comprehending the influence government policies play behind the scenes. How some whānau members may think of themselves as dysfunctional and regret the decisions they've made, but never realise that actually they may not have had a choice due to discriminatory legislation. How some whānau members may have done the very best they could to provide for their families, but never realised they could have had better access to opportunities if public services and resources had been equitable.

When I told my cousin Hirini Kaa about the *Exodus* television series concept, he said it reminded him of a verse from the Bible that spoke about 'the principalities.' In Ephesians Chapter 6 the principalities are unseen, malevolent forces that cause conflict and destruction in people's lives. However, the human recipients are never aware of the existence of the higher powers.

In regard to my creative work, *Episode Four: Te Aroha*, the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 90s could be regarded as the principalities, especially the Welfare reforms that drastically slashed beneficiary incomes. In fact, Adam Smith, viewed as the founder of modern economics, used the metaphor of the 'invisible hand' to describe the unseen forces that move the free market economy (Majaski, 2024). The 'invisible hand' is a core tenant of neo-liberalism, promoting individual self-interest, competition and unregulated economies.

Every whānau has a story

The second reason why *Exodus* spoke to me was because of the intergenerational family at the centre of the narrative. Growing up within an extended, intergenerational whānau myself, I have lived experience and a personal connection to the story I am writing about. But *Exodus* isn't a story about my whānau. It's a story about all our Māori whanau. It's a story that others with whakapapa Māori can use to explore and examine their own lives, within the world of the fictional Hemi whānau.

In an interview about the impacts of colonisation, Indigenous rights advocate and Iwi Leader, Professor Margaret Mutu described the challenges faced by whānau from her own community in Te Taitokerau who were forced to move to the cities to survive:

“Every whānau has their own story to tell, but the overall effect of colonisation is the same... For us at Karikari Peninsular, it was ok until the government came in and wanted to use our lands for dairy farming... A lot of our whānau were driven off the land because of those farm development schemes ... the Department of Māori Affairs ran up huge debts against those farms ... and confiscated the land.” (quoted in Jensen, 2023).

She also says the outcome for many whānau Māori as a result of colonisation has been dire.

It pushes you down to the lowest possible social economic level...Nothing will spark off divisions, fights, poverty, marginalisation and deprivation than when you feel you are not worth anything. (quoted in Jensen, 2023).

Screenwriting With a Conscience

My intentions behind writing the television series *Exodus* are to, in my own small way, humbly contribute to the canon of scholarly and creative works by Māori academics, activists, artists and storytellers, that have helped awaken not only my own political consciousness but also the collective māramatanga of Māori people. Through *Exodus* I want to unpack major themes such as colonisation, capitalism and cultural alienation (Muru-Lanning, 2023) just like Ranginui Walker, Witi Ihimaera, Riwia Brown and Taika Waititi have done in their own creative mahi.

Marilyn Beker in *Screenwriting With a Conscience: Ethics for Screenwriters* (Beker, 2004) has provided a guide for screenwriters to explore how they can make a meaningful impact through their work. Beker asks screenwriters to incorporate ethical considerations into their storytelling and use their platform to address social issues, promote positive values and advocate for social change. Beker believes writers have a responsibility to ‘inform, inspire, and/or nurture the human race by at least striving to elevate its consciousness.’ She encourages writers to use their words to help rather than to harm:

Screenwriters certainly belong in the category of popular artists who examine, interpret, and even shape culture, so screenwriters should own up to that responsibility in some of the ways society expects journalists to do, by admitting their work has meaning and power; by accepting

that this work has an effect on society; by admitting that the messages at the core of that work come directly from the person who generated it. Screenwriters need to be message-conscious as well as eloquent, just as reporters should be. Screenwriters need to be honest with themselves and with audiences and, by virtue of their ability to make thoughts visual and "real," screenwriters should take responsibility for what they say and dedicate themselves to putting forth material that will not harm humanity. (p.20-21).

My intention is to help rather than harm as Beker advises. My intention is also to challenge, resist and transform. These are some of the kaupapa Angela Barnes lays out in *Kia Manawanui: Kaupapa Māori Film Theoretical Framework* (Barnes, 2011, p. 182-193). Barnes created the framework drawing from the critical analysis of Māori filmmakers, Kaupapa Māori theorists and practitioners, and to provide a way to progress and legitimise Kaupapa Māori film theory:

The development of Kaupapa Māori film theory calls for critical analyses of racism, colonisation and hegemonic representations of Māori... In cinematic environments a critical analysis of power operating through structures, policies and institutional practices is required in the hope of revealing and seeking Māori focused solutions... (p. 168 -170).

Through *Exodus*, I want to challenge colonial narratives that Māori are solely responsible for their own issues, and have my characters gradually become awakened to the wider political and social context in which they live. Almost 30 years ago, Pihama asked why films questioning the colonial narrative had not been made:

Where are the images that relate the narratives of what happened for Māori people? Where are the documentaries that challenge the theft and dislocation of Māori people from our lands? Why does this country continue to deny the actions of the colonial immigrant settlers who devastated the lives of our people? These crucial productions which ensure Māori have a voice in the recording of history must be made in order to provide the people with knowledge about the histories of this land that move beyond the sanitised versions delivered through our education system. (Pihama, 1996, p.191-192).

Key Messages

I have written *Exodus* primarily for a Māori audience rather than a non-Māori audience, as this fits with my kaupapa of raising awareness. The main key messages I would like Māori audiences to take away with them are grouped around awareness, empathy and challenge.

Awareness

Being aware of:

- the social impacts of colonisation, urbanisation, neo-liberalism and climate crisis.
- the social impacts of decisions made by politicians and bureaucrats trying to ‘save the tax-payers money.’
- the moral imperative influenced decision-making rather than economic decision-making that occurred during the ‘Mother of All Budgets.’

Empathy

Having aroha rather than judgement for:

- whānau doing their best to survive in circumstances not entirely of their own control
- vulnerable whānau thought of as a ‘waste’ of resources and the wasted potential of whānau impacted by policies that hurt rather than harm.

Challenge

Questioning and challenging:

- their current political context to identify policies and laws that may have had an impact on the well-being of their whānau.
- the ‘same old shit, just a different day’ political ideas and themes that political leaders have re-cycled throughout the decades.

Depicting the social impact of neoliberal policies on Māori whānau and drawing from key influences

Te Aroha, episode four, is representative of all the episodes of *Exodus*, in that the protagonist is a member of the Hemi whānau, and they will either migrate at the beginning or end of the episode. A government policy or initiative will also somehow influence or shape the outcome of a decision that the character will make.

For this episode, my main character is Te Aroha, a 24 year-old mokopuna within the Hemi whānau, who is bringing up a young daughter by herself. The Welfare Beneficiary cuts of 1991, and benefit sanctions policies that followed, play an antagonist type role in the background. Poor health, mental distress, child-abuse, poverty and unemployment are among the social impacts depicted. Drawing from my research into Māori migration and Rogernomics, Te Aroha experiences stigmatisation by society and Government Welfare policies for being a Solo Mother. Te Aroha's efforts to find sustainable, meaningful mahi is made difficult due to the circumstances she finds herself in. After experiencing a traumatic event, she makes the decision to migrate to Australia, in search of better employment opportunities.

Māori unemployment is depicted through showing Te Aroha's search for work in order to provide a better quality of life for her child, and the challenges she goes through being on a benefit. I want the audience to empathise with Te Aroha's plight and imagine what they would do in her situation. There is a point within the episode that Te Aroha realises discriminatory government policies are making her life much harder than it needs to be.

Drawing from my analysis of *Once Were Warriors* and *Boy*, there are some elements from these films that I want to apply to this particular episode and the *Exodus* series as a whole, and there are other elements I don't want to use. The main thing I want to apply from both films is putting Pākehā characters at the periphery of the story, and not at the centre. A Māori drama series from 1989, *E Tipu E Rea* employed the same approach noted playwright Maraea Rakuraku in her essay:

Why would their stories be at the centre of a Māori-driven narrative? As a Māori character says to a Pākehā character in *Roimata*, "just keep your Pākehā nose out of it." (Rakuraku, 2017).

Elements from *Once Were Warriors* and *Boy* that I don't want to apply to *Exodus* is telling a story about Māori trauma and using stereotypes about Māori that have been over-used in the past e.g., Māori as gang-members, abused, alienated from identity. Other elements that I don't want to apply

from these films is shying away from the broader political and social context my characters find themselves in. I want my stories to delve deeper into the root causes of issues they may have, and to also have them questioning what is happening around them.

Part 6. He korero whakakapi: “There’s no place like home.”

Dorothy: “Oh, but anyway, Toto, we’re home. Home! And this is my room, and you’re all here. And I’m not gonna leave here ever, ever again, because I love you all, and - oh, Auntie Em - there’s no place like home!”

The Wizard of Oz (1939).

Huata: Where are we going Mum?

Beth: We’re going home.

Once Were Warriors (1994).

In the final scenes of *The Wizard of Oz* and *Once Were Warriors* both Dorothy and Beth reflect upon their respective journeys, and the significance of ‘home.’ For Dorothy, her travels along the yellow brick road have given her a newfound appreciation of her home-life and family (Lowne, 2024). For Beth, her relationship with her husband Jake has given her the hard-won realisation she has the inner strength to overcome the challenges life may bring her: ‘If my spirit can survive living with you for eighteen years, then I can survive anything.’ For both characters ‘home’ is not only where the heart is, it’s also their touchstone, their ūkaipo.

In this final chapter, I reflect upon my own thesis journey, as I head towards the homestretch of finishing my thesis. Here are some of my concluding thoughts.

Setting out to write a television episode

I had some great ambitions when I set out to write the *Te Aroha* episode. I wanted it to be something unique, that could fill a gap within Māori dramas made for the screen and didn’t play into

stereotypes or tell another Māori trauma story. But to be able to execute this vision, I needed to improve my screen-writing skills, and also go back to the fundamentals of storytelling. This included applying various story act structures like *Save The Cat* Beat Sheet, the Story Circle, Eight Sequence structure and Freytag's (5-Point) Pyramid, to find what would suit my story best. I also needed to consider what would be the narrative arc of my lead character, their goals, what's at stake for them and why should the audience care.

As the episode is part of a series, I needed to also think through how the overarching story is told in seven parts, how new truths would be revealed in each episode, when would characters have to reoccur over the decades and how the *Te Aroha* episode aligned with the other stories. I also needed to think about potential visual motifs to show the changing times. Some motifs I considered were: different smoking devices such as cigarettes in the 1980s and vapes in the 2020s; different modes of transportation and travel; the transformation of New Zealand society from white monocultural to more diversified, multi-cultural society; the transformation in the way Māori are portrayed in the media.

Challenges when writing the screenplay

When writing the screenplay, I have at times questioned whether I should focus only on the inter-generational impact of rural-urban migration as the major theme, instead of the concept of the principalities. Am I trying to shoehorn a concept into a story vessel that is not the right fit? Perhaps the principalities idea should go into another project? Do I have too many thematic layers?

I have also questioned whether by writing about the impact of neoliberalism, that I have focused on it too much, potentially risking boring the audience by being too didactic. Am I too on the nose sometimes with the messages in my dialogue? Am I hitting the audience over the head with my theme? Am I using too much exposition or not enough?

New material introduced late in the game

After writing an initial version of the *Te Aroha* screenplay I realised I needed to do further research on the challenges faced by sole parents, if I was to make my main character more believable as a Solo Mum on the benefit. The earlier version of the *Te Aroha* character I had created, was far too caught up in her personal relationship issues with her ex-boyfriend. As a result, the structural issues created

by neoliberal policies I wanted to make more visible, weren't coming through. There also wasn't enough focus on the very real obstacles faced by sole parents to gain employment and provide for their children, such as: access to affordable, accessible and safe childcare; lack of education or career experience; job insecurity and vulnerable occupations; mental and physical health issues; stigmatisation and discrimination by Welfare Case Managers and employers.

To address my knowledge gaps, I found online articles written about these challenges. Among this information there were many articles about the Welfare to Work policies and benefit fraud sanctions experienced by real solo Mums. These policies were cut from the same cloth as the neoliberal policies I had researched earlier in my thesis development process.

It was also recommended to me that I watch the 2016 film, *I Daniel Blake*, by esteemed social issues director, Ken Loach. This film portrays the dehumanising and soul-crushing impact of benefit sanctions and welfare bureaucracy on an elderly working class man, and a young mother with children. I also came across a Netflix series about a young solo Mum who has to overcome restrictive welfare policies and insecure work in order to provide for her child. *Maid*, the TV show (2021, Robbie, M., Smith Metzler, M. & Wells, J.) was based on *Maid: Hard Work, Low Pay, and a Mother's Will to Survive*, the 2019 memoirs by Stephanie Land, who escaped an abusive relationship and subsisted on low wages working as a house cleaner, while also living in a homeless shelter.

It's a wrap

Throughout this essay I have identified the many individual strands I have weaved together to create a whāriki for my television series, *Exodus*: the migration of Māori to towns and cities across the world; the neoliberal policies that impact every facet of every-day life and deepen structural inequalities; the representation of whānau Māori in books, in films and on television that either imagine new realities or tell the same untruths.

These same strands also came together to create the first kete to place upon the whāriki: the episode, *Te Aroha*. As it is my first attempt at creating this kind of kete, *Te Aroha*, is not perfect. There are some gaps in the weaving of the story, and parts where it could easily start to unravel. But with further mahi and iterations, the story will improve and get stronger overtime.

My telling of this story will also improve in other ways as well. Through answering my research question, I explored how the social impact of neoliberalism, in particular Māori unemployment, has been depicted by films by two of our top Māori filmmakers. This question

encouraged me to examine how I apply appropriate political and historical context to my own stories and interrogate whether I am potentially playing into stereotypes or being superficial in my work.

To conclude, my thesis, *Movement of The People*, isn't just about the movement of Māori bodies to different spaces and places throughout time. It is also about the movement of a collective moemoeā. The dream and aspiration to one day return to your tūrangawaewae and feel that you have 'come home.'

He kakano ahau

I ruia mai i Rangiatea

And I can never be lost

I am a seed, born of greatness

Descended from a line of chiefs,

He kakano ahau.

He waiata nā Hohepa Tamehana.

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***Creative Work.* Episode 4: Te Aroha**

Exodus

Episode 4

"Te Aroha"

Written by

Jasmine Kaa

FADE IN:

EXT. RATA STREET, LOWER HUTT- EARLY MORNING

TEENAGERS in school uniforms stroll past a block of flats on their way to the nearest bus stop, as TE AROHA, 24, a petite young Māori woman with long, jet black hair, stands at the front doorway of one of the homes. She is watching out for someone. She looks pensive, deep in thought as she leans against the doorframe, taking a puff from a cigarette. In her other hand she takes a sip from a cup of coffee, trying not to spill the hot liquid onto her crisp white shirt and black knee-length skirt.

She takes a long drag of her smoke, as a black, boy racer type car pulls into her driveway. The driver, LEVI, 23, a tall, lanky Māori male, gets out of the car. She flicks the ash from her smoke and throws the butt inside a used coffee jar beside the door. She doesn't acknowledge him and instead turns and heads inside the house.

INT. TE AROHA'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM- EARLY MORNING

MAIA, 4, a cute little Māori girl with her hair twisted in braids, is sitting on the floor of the lounge by herself, watching cartoons on TV while she happily plays with her toys. On the couch behind her sits a neatly folded pile of towels and sheets, and a tiny child's backpack. As Levi walks into the room, Maia looks away from her cartoons, smiles and holds her hands up above her head toward him.

MAIA

Daddy!!!

Levi quickly picks up Maia and gives her multiple kisses.

LEVI

My girl! Missed you!

Te Aroha appears behind them, throwing down a large sports bag and a big black plastic rubbish bag with clothes spilling out, onto the floor.

TE AROHA

Here's the last of your shit.

Levi puts Maia back down on the floor, in front of the TV. He looks around the room, his face starting to appear annoyed.

LEVI

Hey, where's my speakers?
Where's my Nintendo?

TE AROHA

I sold them.

LEVI

You what?

TE AROHA

I've got bills and rent to pay,
a kid to feed. Your kid.

Levi's face changes to anger, and he seems to struggle to hold his emotions in.

LEVI

You're a real cunt Te Aroha!

TE AROHA

Takes one to know one Levi!

LEVI

And you wonder why I left!

TE AROHA

I threw you out!...Dick!

Te Aroha and Levi glare at each other, while Maia continues to watch her cartoons unaffected. She has heard it all before. Levi is the first to break their glare-off, and stoops down in front of Te Aroha, to gather up his clothes from the floor and stuff them back into the plastic rubbish bag.

LEVI

I'll send you some money for
Maia soon.

Te Aroha ignores him, and picks up Maia's backpack.

TE AROHA

You need to go. I'm already
gonna be late for work.

LEVI

I'll drop baby off at daycare.

TE AROHA

Ah, just go. Go home to your
dumb, stupid slut.

Levi looks at Te Aroha and realises that he's not going to get anything cordial out of her today. He picks up the two bags filled with his possessions, kisses his daughter on the forehead and walks towards the front door. Maia looks at her father as he leaves.

MAIA

See you later Dad!

EXT. TE AROHA'S FLAT, DRIVEWAY- EARLY MORNING

Levi is putting the bags in the boot of his car, as Te Aroha appears at the front door, now wearing a black blazer over her shirt, her handbag slung over one shoulder, and car keys jangling in one hand. Levi soon clocks she is standing there watching him.

LEVI

What else you got to say, aye?

Te Aroha doesn't reply, instead she takes her black shades out of the side pocket of her bag and looks straight in his direction. Levi mouths something to himself, inaudible to Te Aroha, before opening the driver's side car door and slamming it shut behind him. He revs up the car in the driveway before speeding off up the road.

Te Aroha takes her shades off for a few seconds. Her eyes are red and puffy. A tear falls down her cheek, before she quickly wipes it away with the back of her hand, puts her shades back on and goes inside the house.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: **TE AROHA. 1994.**

EXODUS FRONT TITLE SEQUENCE.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE, MAIN OFFICE FLOOR- MORNING

Sitting in rows of cubicles are white-collar workers, mainly Pakeha, staring at computer screens or talking on landline phones. Te Aroha is sitting in one corner of the room at a cubicle, surrounded by piles of paper and folders on her desk. As she taps away on her computer, a Kit Kat chocolate bar is suddenly flung on to her keyboard. She looks up and sees LANI, 20, a Pasifika woman with beautiful long wavy hair, standing beside her desk grinning.

LANI

Have a break, Sis.

Te Aroha stops typing, picks up the chocolate and grins back at LANI.

TE AROHA

Kit Kat, yum! Thanks Sis!

Lani pulls a chair over to sit at the desk, while Te Aroha snaps off a chocolate wafer and takes a bite.

LANI

(whispers)

Where's that silly palangi woman?

TE AROHA

(laughing)

Don't talk about my boss like that! I've got to keep on the good side of her if I want to keep this job.

LANI

When will you know if they're gonna make you permanent?

TE AROHA

Supposed to be tomorrow hopefully...Hey guess what?

LANI

Did your ex get the rest of his stuff?

TE AROHA

Yeah finally! Me and my baby can move on with our lives now.

LANI

I don't know why you just don't move in with your Mum and Dad? Be easier wouldn't it?

Te Aroha shuffles uncomfortably in her seat.

TE AROHA

Nah, that's not an option...We'll be okay. Especially if they keep me on, Lani.

Lani looks like she is about to reply to her friend, but stops herself. She has noticed SANDRA, 55, a Pakeha woman wearing a stiff navy pants-suit, standing at the entrance of the cubicle, holding a large binder stuffed with paper. She doesn't look impressed.

SANDRA

How are you going with those minutes Te Aroha [pronounced Tear-R-rah-ha]?

Lani immediately gets up off her chair and leaves, giving Sandra a forced fake smile as she passes her.

TE AROHA

Nearly done, Sandra.

SANDRA

Good. These invoices and payments for this quarter need to be prepared for accounts. I would like them done before you go home.

Sandra dumps the large binder on Te Aroha's desk in front of her.

TE AROHA

I don't think I can go through them all by 5?

SANDRA

You'll have to stay later then.

TE AROHA

My daughter...I need to pick her up by 5.30... 6 at the latest.

SANDRA

Your childcare issues are not my problem, Te Aroha, nor this organisations. You'll have to sort something out.

Te Aroha takes a deep breath as if she is going to say something. However, she is interrupted by JIM, 59, a balding Pakeha man who has appeared behind Sandra.

JIM

Morning ladies! Sorry to cut in.

SANDRA

What did you want Jim?

JIM

I was wondering if Te Aroha could help me. I was wanting a little Māori language translation done for the foreword of my report.

TE AROHA

Sorry Jim. I'm not a fluent speaker.

SANDRA

I thought most Māori could speak Te Reo [pronounced Tear-Rayo]?

Te Aroha fidgets with her hands and looks at the floor.

JIM

Not to worry! I will keep stalking the floors. Perhaps Mr Potaka [pronounced Poe-tack-a] on floor 5 could assist. Cheerio!

Jim walks away and Sandra turns to follow.

SANDRA

I'll come and check on you later
to see what you've done...You
can't have everything handed to
you on a plate you know...you
have to work for it.

Te Aroha opens the binder and sighs. She then closes the binder, gets up from her desk and walks over to the kitchen to pour herself a glass of water.

As she returns to her desk, she almost knocks into THOMAS, 36, a Pakeha man dressed in a tight polo shirt and navy pants. Thomas smiles and touches Te Aroha's arm as the water in the glass she is holding spills onto him.

TE AROHA

Shit sorry Thomas!

THOMAS

It's okay. It doesn't matter if
I get a little...wet...

Thomas smirks when he says this. Te Aroha nods her head, slightly grimacing at the same time.

THOMAS

How's your morning going anyway?

TE AROHA

Yeah, super...I better get back
to my desk now. You know, always
lots to do!

THOMAS

Hey. Are you going to join us
for our Friday drinkies
tomorrow?

TE AROHA

No, I don't think so. I have to
look after my daughter.

THOMAS

Oh dumb...Get a baby-sitter. I
thought you might want to have
some adult time...I heard you

were a free agent now.

Te Aroha stops and catches herself before she responds to him in an unprofessional manner.

TE AROHA

Sure, another time maybe.

Te Aroha clutches her glass and walks quickly away from him, before Thomas can utter another word.

INT. OFFICE, LUNCHROOM- AFTERNOON

Te Aroha is sitting with some of her co-workers, including Jim, having lunch and laughing while they enjoy friendly banter. Meera, 49, an Indian woman, takes a sip of her tea and smiles at Te Aroha.

MEERA

And what about you Te Aroha?
Will you be going away for
Easter?

TE AROHA

No. Not this year unfortunately
Meera. One day I'd love to take
my daughter to the Gold Coast
for a holiday. I've got a cousin
living over there, Maia's
namesake. She hasn't seen Maia
since she was a baby.

MEERA

Ooh. You could take Maia to the
theme parks. Our family did all
the parks when we were there
last year. Dream World, Sea
World, Movie World...

As Meera is speaking, Thomas enters the kitchen and makes a beeline over to the table.

THOMAS

The Goldie! I love the Goldie!
Surfers Paradise...

Thomas makes a 'shaka' sign with his right hand.

THOMAS

Hang loose!

Thomas pulls a chair over to the table and inserts himself in the gap between Te Aroha and Meera. He gives Te Aroha a creepy stare, as he slowly unwraps the plastic cling wrap from his white bread sandwich.

THOMAS

Hey Te Aroha!

TE AROHA

Yes Thomas.

All the women at the table begin to quickly finish their lunches. They seem prepared for their new arrival to say something inappropriate. They don't have to wait long.

THOMAS

Cook the man some eggs!

Te Aroha looks confused.

TE AROHA

What did you say!?

THOMAS

Cook the man some eggs!

You know...it's from that new Kiwi movie. It's got that Māori guy who used to be on Shortland Street.

JIM

Yes, I think I know the one. Once Were Warriors. Have you seen it, Te Aroha?

TE AROHA

No not yet.

JIM

It looks quite confronting, with the gangs, and the domestic violence. Do you think it rings true to life?

TE AROHA

Not sure what you mean Jim?

Jim notices that Te Aroha is now looking slightly annoyed.

JIM

Oh sorry! I didn't mean to cause offence. I just thought...you know...lots of Māori people are living that kind of lifestyle. Statistically speaking.

TE AROHA

Not everybody.

JIM

I wasn't meaning you. You're one of the bright Māori girls. Not like the ones living on the DPB. You have potential.

TE AROHA

I don't think...

Before Te Aroha has a chance to finish the rest of her sentence, Lani rushes into the kitchen.

LANI

Te Aroha, it's Maia's daycare.

Te Aroha rises quickly from her seat and follows Lani out of the kitchen area. The women at the table looked worried for her, but the men are non-plussed.

INT. OFFICE, RECEPTION AREA- AFTERNOON

Lani sits down at her seat at the reception counter, and motions for Te Aroha to sit down at the other chair behind the counter. Lani picks up the main phone.

LANI

Yes, sorry for the wait. Putting you through now.

Another phone sitting on the counter rings, and Te Aroha picks it up.

TE AROHA

Are you sure her inhaler isn't in her backpack? I'm certain I put it in there this morning.

Te Aroha twists the phone-cord anxiously, as she listens to the response from the caller on the other end of the line.

TE AROHA

Don't you have any spare inhalers ...Okay, yes, I know it's not your responsibility... Okay...I'll be there soon.

Te Aroha is visibly stressed when she puts down the phone and looks across at Lani.

TE AROHA

Shit! I've got to go. Maia's asthma is playing up. I hope I don't have to take her to A&E again.

LANI

Oh no Sis! Yes, you go take off now. I'll let the palangi woman know you have a family emergency.

TE AROHA

Thanks Sis!

INT. OFFICE, MAIN OFFICE FLOOR- MORNING

Te Aroha is hurriedly tidying her desk, and making sure she has grabbed her personal effects. As she is just about to leave, she is stopped in her tracks by Sandra.

SANDRA

Where do you think you're going, Miss?

TE AROHA

Sorry, I have go and pick up my daughter. She's not well.

SANDRA

This isn't a good look you know Te Aroha. I really need these invoices completed today. Can't someone else get her?

TE AROHA

There isn't anyone else. Look I will try and come in earlier tomorrow, and work all my breaks to make up the lost time.

SANDRA

You had to rush off the other week at short notice too for something else. It's starting to become a pattern.

TE AROHA

Sandra, I've only been here 12 weeks...I really appreciate the opportunity you've given me, and I promise I'm not going to do anything to stuff it up.

SANDRA

Well thank Jim for that, not me.

Te Aroha puts her blazer jacket on and swings her handbag over her shoulder. She can't be held up any longer and squeezes past Sandra towards the main reception.

TE AROHA

I really have to go now Sandra.
I'll talk to you tomorrow.

INT. OFFICE, RECEPTION AREA- AFTERNOON

Te Aroha rushes into the reception area, where Thomas is at the counter, signing some documents.

THOMAS

Oh, there you are! Changed your mind about drinkies yet?

TE AROHA

I told you I'm busy.

THOMAS

(whispering)

C'mon...I thought brown girls like to have fun?

TE AROHA

Fuck off Thomas.

THOMAS

What?

LANI

She said, "Fuck off Thomas!"

Lani comes around to the front of her desk and physically places herself in-between Thomas and Te Aroha. Te Aroha uses it as an opportunity to run-away from Thomas and rushes to the elevators.

LANI

(whispering to Thomas)

You need to get your scrawny white boy arse back to your own desk, before I kick it all the way there myself.

Thomas quickly gets the message and goes back to his desk. Te Aroha looks back at Lani and mouths the words, "Thank you," before the elevator doors slide open and she gets into the lift.

INT. FLAT, LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Te Aroha is sitting on the couch, with Maia lying next to her, propped up by some pillows. Te Aroha soothes Maia's forehead, as her daughter wheezes slightly.

When Te Aroha can see that Maia is almost asleep, she turns the television down with her remote, gently rises, and props some more pillows beside her daughter so she doesn't roll onto the floor. She then walks over to the kitchen and turns the kettle on.

Te Aroha sits down at the table with her freshly made cup of tea and starts going through her mail. She discards the advertising flyers and opens up a letter from her bank. The letter provides a record of the regular \$10 deposits she has made to an account called House Deposit Savings. Te Aroha is pleased with the current \$5000 balance.

She is curious when she opens the next letter, but this soon turns to surprise and anger as she reads it. Te Aroha walks quickly over to the phone hanging on the

kitchen wall. She dials a number and waits for someone to pick up.

TE AROHA

Hello, Peter?...It's Te Aroha
Hemi your tenant from Rata
street. I've just received a
letter from you...

Te Aroha twists the phone cord as anxiously as she had done at work earlier that day, as she hears the response.

TE AROHA

Okay. Yes, I understand. Your
son needs a place to live. But
so do me and my daughter... It's
really short notice Peter...

EXT. TE AROHA'S FLAT, DRIVEWAY- LATE AFTERNOON

Te Aroha is on her front doorstep smoking a cigarette, while becoming increasingly agitated. She is perched on a small stool, with cigarette butts and ash overflowing the coffee jar ash tray below her. The phone rings. Te Aroha tries to save her half-smoked cigarette by lightly stubbing it out on the front step.

INT. FLAT, KITCHEN- LATE AFTERNOON

Te Aroha rushes over to the ringing phone and picks it up.

TE AROHA

Hi. Hello.

INT. OFFICE, PRIVATE ROOM- LATE AFTERNOON

Jim is sitting at a table with a white board behind him, and a landline placed in front of him. He has the phone on speaker.

JIM

Hello there Te Aroha. It's Jim
Matthews calling. How is your
daughter feeling? I heard you
had to be called away to get
her.

INTERCUT- TE AROHA'S FLAT, KITCHEN/JIM'S OFFICE, PRIVATE ROOM.

TE AROHA

Yes, she's fine.

JIM

Sorry to call you at home, but I'm not at work tomorrow. I'm off to my golf tournament in Taupo [pronounced Tow-poh].

TE AROHA (V.O.)

That's okay. How can I help?

JIM

I thought it would be better form to let you know in person before I left... that unfortunately we won't be able to extend your contract with us.

Te Aroha automatically clenches both hands, digging her nails into her skin. She can't find the words to respond.

JIM

Are you there Te Aroha?

TE AROHA (V.O.)

Yes, I'm here Jim. What did I do wrong? I don't understand? I thought I had shown I was a good worker.

JIM

Yes, I think you have been wonderful. But the funding for the affirmative action programme we've been trialing has come to an end, and I wasn't able to find any more money to keep you on. I'm sorry.

TE AROHA

I'm not sure what to say next, ...I'm really surprised. Are there any other roles I could fill? I really need this work Jim.

JIM

There are. But you don't have the skills and experience.

TE AROHA

I've been working since I was 16 years old! I've worked in factories, shops, out in the fields. What more skills and experience do you want?

JIM

I'm talking about corporate skills and experience, Te Aroha. You haven't been to university or even polytech.

TE AROHA

I've had to support my daughter. She's been my first priority.

JIM

Look, I'm happy to write you a reference if you like. I'm sure there are other entry level roles you could find somewhere else.

TE AROHA

Is it Sandra? I don't think she likes me very much, Jim.

JIM

No, not at all. Sorry I really have to go now Te Aroha. I've got another meeting soon. Don't worry about coming in tomorrow. We will still pay you for the day's work. One of my HR team will be in touch about final payment.

TE AROHA (V.O.)

Okay... Thanks.

JIM

Goodbye Te Aroha. All the best.

Jim hangs up the phone, takes a deep breath and sighs.

JIM

How do you think that went?

Sitting across from him on the other side of the table we see Sandra.

SANDRA

Good.

INT. FLAT, KITCHEN- LATE AFTERNOON

Te Aroha is still holding onto the phone, but she is hunched over. Tears stream from her eyes as her breathing becomes more laboured.

Soon she stands straight up and dials a number on the phone.

TE AROHA

Lani, it's me. Can you come over after work please.

INT. FLAT, LOUNGE- LATE AFTERNOON

Maia has woken up from her sleep and is sitting on the floor showing LANI her new dolls.

LANI

Ooh, I like that one she's the prettiest!

MAIA

Nah, she's ugly Auntie Lani. I like this one better.

Te Aroha walks into the lounge from the kitchen.

TE AROHA

You hungry bub?

Maia nods her head.

TE AROHA

Fish and chips? Or Chinese?

MAIA

Fish and chips please!

TE AROHA

Okay. Come on Auntie Lani. We'll take my car. I need to put in some more petrol and get some smokes.

LANI

C'mon Miss Maia. Put your big jacket on, before Mum growls eh.

EXT. LOWER HUTT STREETS - EVENING

The roads are still busy with inner-city commuters driving back home home as Te Aroha's silver sedan travels towards the town centre.

INT. TE AROHA'S CAR- EVENING

Te Aroha checks the rear-view mirror to see if Maia is still strapped safely into her booster seat in the backseat. Lani is rifling through a CD case, trying to find a CD to play in the car's external CD player Te Aroha has plugged into the tape deck.

TE AROHA

Isn't it in there?

LANI

Nah. I liked those sounds on there too... Anyway, what do you think your gonna do next?

TE AROHA

Well, I'll have to start looking around for a new place to rent. I've only got a few weeks to move out.

LANI

You'll get your bond back though aye?

TE AROHA

Nah, we did it under the table.

The house belongs to Levi's boss from his old job.

LANI

I'd give you some money my friend, but I'm helping my brother and his missus out with paying off their H.P's. Not their kids' fault, aye, their parents are useless with money.

TE AROHA

It's okay. I've got this savings account that's in my name only - Levi couldn't touch it. It's just reached 5 grand. I've been putting aside \$10 a week since I found out I was pregnant with Maia. When I got extra cash I'd top it up.

LANI

That's awesome Sis. Were you saving up for something?

TE AROHA

It's for a deposit for a house. I want my daughter to grow up in her own home. If those arseholes at work had made me permanent, I was going to see if the bank would give me a house loan. There's some cheap ex-State houses being sold off by the government I heard.

Now I'll have to dip into my savings. I'll need a bond for a new place, and to tide us over until I can get a new job.

LANI

Why don't you just go on the benee? The government would give you a State House to rent for cheap. Saves you actually *buying* one.

TE AROHA

Nah, I want a house I own. Plus,
I don't want to go on the D.P.B.
and be like those loser solo
Mums with their loser men
hanging around, no thanks.

LANI

You're a hard lady, T.A.!

TE AROHA

And don't tell me to go live
with my olds again either. We've
been on the outs for ages. I'd
rather go live on the benefit.

Lani looks at Te Aroha, and tries to stifle a laugh,
while inserting a CD she has found into the CD player.
As she does so, the car starts to rattle. A yellow light
then appears on the car's dashboard controls, blinking
furiously. Smoke starts to rise from the car's bonnet and
the vehicle starts to lose power.

MAIA

Car's making funny noises Mum!

LANI

Oh shit! Why's it doing that?

TE AROHA

Fucked if I know? We're almost
at the garage too...Hopefully we
can make it there.

EXT. GARAGE STATION FORECOURT - EVENING

Te Aroha is standing beside a garage station attendant,
while they both warily peer underneath the bonnet of her
car. Steam is still rising from the engine and making
weird hissing noises. Lani and Maia return to the car
from inside the garage station, both holding small
packets of chips and cans of soft drink in each hand.

LANI

What's the matter with it?

GARAGE STATION ATTENDANT

It's buggered love! Blown engine.

TE AROHA

How much would it cost to fix?

GARAGE STATION ATTENDANT

You can't, it's completely stuffed. Cos it's an older model car, I wouldn't even bother replacing it with a new engine. Trade it in for a new one I reckon or sell it to a scrap yard.

TE AROHA

Shit. That's all I need at the moment.

LANI

My bro will be here soon to pick us up. He could come back in the morning too and tow the car to yours if you want.

GARAGE STATION ATTENDANT

You're lucky you weren't somewhere like the motorway on the Rimutakas when it blew. Especially with your kid in the back.

The garage station attendant heads back into the garage station. Te Aroha, Lani and Maia wait beside the car for Lani's brother to arrive.

TE AROHA

Thanks Sis. I owe you big time.

Te Aroha gives Lani a huge hug.

TE AROHA

Geez, no house, no job and now no car. What a day!

LANI

(laughing)

And you forgot - no man!

TE AROHA

(laughing)

Nah, that part's not important.
Long as my baby is safe that's
the main thing.

Te Aroha wraps her arms around the front of Maia's body,
while the little girl eats her chips.

LANI

You might have to suck it up
soon Sis! And don't be talking
shit about those loser Solo
Mums!

TE AROHA

Yeah maybe...

Te Aroha pulls her daughter closer to her and looks away
into the distance.

EXT. INCOME SUPPORT OFFICE, CAR PARK- MORNING

The carpark to the building the Lower Hutt NZ Income
Support Service shares with CYFS is full. Among the
vehicles is a small, green hatchback. Te Aroha has opened
the back passenger's side door and is unbuckling Maia
from her booster seat.

MAIA

We going to Mickey D's after
this aye Mum?

TE AROHA

Yes, baby. But you have to be a
good girl for me in there. No
running about. You got your
book?

MAIA

Yes, see!!!

Maia holds up a worn copy of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*,
and shows her mother.

Te Aroha takes Maia's hand, leading her through the car-park towards the main entrance to the office.

They pass a teenage Māori boy, 14, dressed in baggy coloured jeans and a basketball singlet, who is arguing with MERE THOMPSON, mid-50s, his foster care-giver. Mere has aged since we last saw her, but is still an elegant looking woman. Te Aroha catches some of their conversation as she walks by.

TEENAGE FOSTER KID

See Auntie. I told you weren't coming.

MERE THOMPSON

Don't worry boy. They said they might be a bit late.

TEENAGE BOY

Ah, they're full of shit, Auntie.

INT. INCOME SUPPORT OFFICE, WAITING ROOM - MORNING

Te Aroha and Maia have taken their seats in the Income Support Service waiting room. The waiting room is austere, with bland off-white walls, and rows of brown plastic chairs. The only pops of colour are posters tacked on the walls surrounding the room. One poster in bold red print says, **"Benefit Thieves. It's not if we catch you, it's when."** Another poster says, **"Dob in a Benefit Cheat. Call 0800 TIPOFF."**

One large banner running along one wall features a photo montage of families, young adults and elderly people from a range of different ethnicities. The images contrast with the majority of Income Support clients inside the waiting room: predominantly Māori or Pasifika women of various ages and older men, who are not smiling enthusiastically like the people on the banner.

The INCOME SUPPORT RECEPTIONIST, look up from her computer at the main counter and yells.

INCOME SUPPORT RECEPTIONIST

Hemi. Te Aroha Hemi. Go to Bay 3 please.

Te Aroha picks up her handbag and the clip-board she had previously been handed by the receptionist. She motions for Maia to follow her.

INT. INCOME SUPPORT OFFICE, DAVINA'S CUBICLE - MORNING

Te Aroha walks over to a sign that says, Bay 3, and finds a small desk. Behind it sits DAVINA HOWARD, 54, a blonde-haired Pakeha woman who wears a large name tag with DAVINA, printed on it. There isn't another plastic chair for Maia to sit on, so Te Aroha balances her daughter on her knees, still clutching her children's picture book.

DAVINA

May I have your forms please.

Te Aroha hands over the clip board with forms attached to Davina. Davina starts scanning through the pages. She doesn't acknowledge that Te Aroha and Maia are sitting across from her.

DAVINA

When was your last date of employment?

TE AROHA

About five weeks ago. I was working in an admin role, but my contract ended. I've tried to find other jobs since then, but they were only part-time.

DAVINA

What's wrong with part-time work? It's a job, isn't it?

Te Aroha looks slightly taken aback with Davina's comment.

TE AROHA

The pay isn't enough to cover our food and bills. It won't be enough for child-care either. I could barely cover it when I was working full-time.

DAVINA

I'm not sure if we can help. It sounds like you are more than capable of finding full-time work. If you're not fussy.

Te Aroha's face changes from surprise to annoyance.

TE AROHA

Excuse me...Davina, is it? I didn't want to come here. I've never been on the Dole or taken a benefit before. But I've almost used up all my savings.

DAVINA

Well, you should be more careful with your spending habits then, shouldn't you?

TE AROHA

Actually, my car blew up and I had to use the money to buy a new one, so we could pay our living expenses. We also have to move out of our place by the beginning of next week. That's why I'm here really. I can't find another place for us to go. No-one wants to rent to a single mother with no job.

DAVINA

Where is the father?

TE AROHA

Excuse me?

DAVINA

Where is the father? Of your daughter? I'm assuming you want to sign up for the Domestic Purposes Benefit.

TE AROHA

He's out of the picture. He's supposed to tell I.R.D to take money out of his wages to help pay for our daughter, Maia, but he hasn't yet.

DAVINA

If that's the case, I will register you on the Domestic Purposes Benefit. However, if we find out if he or anyone else is living with you, your benefit

will be sanctioned. We don't
treat benefit fraud lightly here
at Income Support.

An angry scowl immediately appears across Te Aroha's
face. She takes Maia off her knees and places her on the
carpet with her book. Maia flicks through the pages as Te
Aroha and Davina continue their conversation.

TE AROHA

(angrily)

I'm not some solo Mum who wants
to rip off the system lady!

DAVINA

(calmly)

I'm not saying you are. I'm just
making sure you are aware of
your responsibilities as one of
our clients. Would you also be
looking for assistance with
accommodation?

TE AROHA

(calmer voice)

Yes.

DAVINA

You'll have to fill out another
form for that.

Davina hands Te Aroha another piece of paper, and then
looks at her computer.

DAVINA

When you have finished
completing it, hand it back to
the receptionist and I will
process it. You'll also have to
give her your birth-certificate
or passport to photocopy.

Te Aroha stands up holding the clipboard with the new
registration form and grabs her handbag. Maia stands up
also.

DAVINA

If we grant you income support,
there is an expectation that you
must continue to look for work,
follow up on job leads we
provide and attend our job
seeker workshops.

TE AROHA

Thanks. I don't intend to stay
on the D.P.B for very long.

When Te Aroha turns to leave, Maia tugs at her mother's
legs.

MAIA

Puff, puff, Mum!

Te Aroha immediately goes into her handbag and passes
Maia her asthma pump. Maia inhales 2 or 3 times through
it.

DAVINA

(concerned)

Does she have asthma?

TE AROHA

(wary)

Yes.

DAVINA

Naww...Our houses can be a
little chilly. But nothing some
warm extra jumpers and a hot
water bottle can't fix.

Te Aroha's looks at Davina like she can't quite
comprehend the meaning behind that comment. She grabs
Maia's hand and leads her back to the waiting room area.

EXT. KOWHAI STREET - EARLY AFTERNOON

Young children play with a basketball in the middle of
the road, while young Mums push their babies in prams on
the footpath, and young Māori males behind the steering
wheels, drive in and out of driveways. Te Aroha's green
hatchback is parked in the driveway of a two-story old
wooden State House built in the 1970's. She is unpacking

the possessions from her car. Lani walks out of the house towards a van parked just behind Te Aroha's vehicle. She looks inside the van.

LANI

Yup. That's all from in here.

TE AROHA

Thank you, Sis! That will be our last trip!

LANI

No big deal, Sis! Lucky my bro didn't need to use his van today for work.

TE AROHA

When's he and the family moving up to Aucks?

LANI

End of this month.

TE AROHA

You'll miss them.

Lani grabs the striped plastic bag filled with blankets Te Aroha is holding from her friend.

LANI

(hesitantly)

Yeah...about that.

TE AROHA

(concerned)

What's the matter?

LANI

I'm going to go with them now.

Te Aroha takes a beat. She doesn't quite know what to say.

LANI

They're going to be having another baby and will need the support.

TE AROHA

Okay. Wow.

LANI

Plus, I chucked in my job. I was sick of working with all those palangis anyway. It was your old mate Thomas who finally drove me to it though.

TE AROHA

What did he do?

LANI

He got too lippy to me when I was trying to unjam the photocopier, so I slapped his lips!

TE AROHA

You didn't!

LANI

I did. Then I quit!

TE AROHA

You're such a crack up! I'll miss you!

LANI

You and baby should move up to Auckland!

TE AROHA

Nah, Levi would never let me take Maia away. Not that he's the greatest parent or anything.

LANI

So you'll stay here then?

TE AROHA

Yeah, until I get a full-time job that makes good money.

Then I'll find another place and go back to square one. Restart our home savings.

While Te Aroha and Lani are talking, NIKKI, 5, a Māori girl with freckles, and a little taller than Maia skips up the driveway and stops just in front of the two women.

NIKKI

Who are yous?

Te Aroha looks down at her pint-sized visitor.

TE AROHA

(laughing)

Who are you?

NIKKI

Nikki. This your house now?

TE AROHA

Yes it is. Where do you live
Nikki?

Nikki points to the the two-story house joined right next-door to Te Aroha's house.

NIKKI

Got any kids?

Before Te Aroha can answer, JO, 30, a Māori woman dressed in a hoodie, Adidas Sweatpants and striped Scuff shoes, walks up the driveway towards the group.

JO

Stop asking nosey questions Ow!

NIKKI

Shaddap Mum!

JO

Nah, you shaddap!

Jo turns towards Te Aroha.

JO

Sorry about my kid, Cuz. She's
just like me. Coming to suss
yous out. Wants to know who's in
the hood...I'm Jo.

TE AROHA

I'm Te Aroha. My friend Lani
just helped me move in.

Lani greets Jo with an upwards nod of head.

TE AROHA

I've got a little girl too. Her
name is Maia.

As if on cue, Maia comes out of the house, and runs and
hides behind her mother's legs when she sees their
visitors. Maia and Nikki watch each other with curiosity
as their mothers' talk.

JO

Kia ora Maia!

Maia doesn't answer. She hugs her mother's legs tighter.

JO

Just you two living here?

TE AROHA

Yep.

JO

Mainly all solo Mums on this
street. Like me!

You're lucky you've just got the
one...I've got five little
headaches to worry about!

As Jo talks, over the fence, Tama, 7, a young Māori boy
pops his head up.

TAMA

Mum! Harley won't give the
remote for my car back!!!

NIKKI

(yells)

Hika! Give him the smash Tam!

JO

(yells)

Hang on son. Mum's coming back now.

(quieter)

I better go. Come over for a cuppa anytime you want, Cuz. I just stay home most of the time.

Te Aroha, Lani and Maia watch Jo and Nikki walk back down the drive-way. As soon as they are out of ear-shot Lani leans over to Te Aroha.

LANI

Cuz!...Welcome to the neighbourhood!

BEGIN MONTAGE

Te Aroha gets her new home ready to live in:

Wiping down the skirting boards of the walls of her KITCHEN...scrubbing the sides of the bath-tub...vacuuming MAIA'S BEDROOM, as her daughter draws in her colouring book...cleaning up the small BACKYARD of rubbish...putting out framed photos to be placed on cabinets inside the LOUNGE...sitting on a chair on BACK PORCH next to the out-side LAUNDRY ROOM, holding the newspaper with one hand and reading through the job vacancy adverts, while holding a lit cigarette with the other.

Te Aroha attempts to find work:

Standing in her KITCHEN calling different numbers for Job Ads she has circled in the news-paper, and crossing them off after she has called them... noticing **Positions Available** sign on the window of a DEPARTMENT STORE and filling out an application form...going to the INCOME SUPPORT OFFICE and looking at the Job Ads on the Job Notice Board...sitting in a CV Writing workshop at the INCOME SUPPORT OFFICE; filling out a form and handing it to Income Support Worker DAVINA at her desk...nervously smoking beside her car in the INCOME SUPPORT CAR-PARK.

Te Aroha's attempts to keep her life running smoothly:

Pushing her trolley, with Maia sitting at the front, at the SUPERMARKET...grabbing cans of food straight into her trolley...putting groceries into a stocked KITCHEN

pantry...going through her bank statements at her kitchen table...pushing her trolley with Maia by her side through the SUPERMARKET aisles...looking at packets of food for the prices, and then putting them back...going through her bill statements at the kitchen table...anxiously watching the SUPERMARKET CHECK OUT OPERATOR scanning her groceries, while Maia demands a chocolate bar be added...going through her handbag at the kitchen table to find spare coins and cash...looking in her KITCHEN pantry and finding them almost bare...looking around for smoke butts in her ashtray on the BACKPORCH.

END MONTAGE

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, OUT-SIDE LAUNDRY ROOM

Te Aroha finishes putting a load of dirty laundry and laundry powder in her washing machine. She keeps pressing and turning different buttons and knobs – the machine won't turn on.

TE AROHA

(yelling)

Fuck! Fuck! That's all I fucking need!!!

MAIA (O.S.)

You okay, Mum!

TE AROHA

Yes, Mum's okay. Keep watching your programmes aye.

Te Aroha starts to pat down the jacket she is wearing and reaches into her jeans pockets.

TE AROHA

You seen my smokes baby?

MAIA

No Mum!

TE AROHA

Damn it, where are they?

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, KITCHEN

Te Aroha walks inside the kitchen frantically looking

around for her smokes. She hears a KNOCK at the FRONT DOOR.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, FRONT DOOR

Te Aroha opens the front door and sees Jo standing there dressed in a similar style of clothes to when Te Aroha had first met her.

JO

Morena! I was hanging the washing out and heard you over the fence. Thought you might need these?

Jo hands Te Aroha a pack of menthol cigarettes.

JO

They're menthol, not brown butt. I hope you don't mind.

TE AROHA

Thank you! I don't mind what kind they are. You don't need them?

JO

Nah, I don't smoke that shit. Only the Herb, from time to time. One of the kids' fathers left them when he came to visit.

TE AROHA

Do you wanna cuppa?

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, KITCHEN

Te Aroha puts 2 cups of coffee on the dining room table, one in front of Jo. She walks over to open the fridge.

TE AROHA

Yeh, my bloody washing machine's not working now. It's pretty old though, was second hand when I bought it.

Te Aroha opens the fridge door and takes out an empty milk bottle. Te Aroha looks embarrassed.

Jo acts like she doesn't notice Te Aroha's fridge has hardly any food in it.

TE AROHA

Sorry! We'll have to have it strong black.

JO

Ha! Just like the way I like my men! Hey what are you doing after this, Cuz. You wanna come shopping with me?

TE AROHA

Sorry. I'm a bit stretched at the moment.

Jo takes a sip of her coffee.

JO

Don't worry. You won't need to bring your wallet where we're going.

EXT. SALVATION ARMY FOOD BANK- MORNING

Te Aroha, Maia and Jo are standing in line with others outside the food bank. The workers are letting people in on a one in, one out basis. There are about 20 others also in line holding big shopping bags and backpacks.

JO

I come here at least once a week, sometimes twice if my three big boys have munched through everything in the cupboards...It's hard aye bringing them up by yourself.

TE AROHA

I've never been to a foodbank before.

JO

No need to be whakama about it. I've been on the benefit for 10 years and I know how to make kai stretch. But you don't get much on the bennee. Especially if you

got tamariki.

Te Aroha nods in agreement. A Pakeha woman, mid-30s, wearing mismatched clothing and no shoes, walks out of the food bank, carrying a large box of groceries. She is followed closely by two young boys also wearing no shoes, both around 9 or 10, carrying a box of kai each.

JO

I've seen all sorts here. Even people you would never think would come to a Food bank. Like this snooty bitch that I went to school with. She used to look down on me cos I didn't have the right shoes, the right fucking pens.

But then she must have fell on the bones of her arse, cos I saw her here, lining up right behind me. I rubbed her nose in it too.

The line moves up and Te Aroha, Maia and Jo get nearer to the door.

JO

Oh by the way. Watch out for the Narkers on our street. Don't tell other people too much of your business. Even me.

TE AROHA

What do you mean?

JO

You'll soon figure it out, Cuz. I don't think it's fair though. How else are we supposed to survive on what the government gives us?

The group are at the front of the line now, and Te Aroha can see who is letting people in and out of the foodbank. She does a double take – the person she can see is Meera, from her old job. Meera recognises her as well.

MEERA

Te Aroha!

Te Aroha is embarrassed. Maia looks curious – who is talking to her mother?

MEERA

It is you! This must be Maia.
Hello Maia!

Maia automatically hides behind her mothers legs.

TE AROHA

Hi Meera. What are you doing here?

MEERA

I work for the Salvation Army now. I left my other job- too much office politics. I usually work at HQ, but they were short staffed today so I helped out here.

(Pause)

How are you my dear? I didn't get a chance to say goodbye before you left.

TE AROHA

Yeah, I had to leave suddenly. But it's okay.

MEERA

Let me know if I can help in anyway?

TE AROHA

No we're fine. We just got caught short a little this week. That's why we're here.

After Te Aroha says this, Jo looks at her and rolls her eyes. She then pokes her head around the corner inside the hall, to see what the food-bank tables have to offer.

JO

So...what's on special today?

INT. JO'S CAR- MORNING

Jo is driving with the stereo playing music from the

radio. Maia is buckled into the back seat, with bags of groceries stacked around her. Te Aroha looks outside the window. She is very quiet.

JO

Thank God for the Sallies, eh?

TE AROHA

Yeah.

JO

Don't worry. I was embarrassed the first time too. Like I was a loser, who couldn't provide for her kids. But I soon got over it.

Jo reaches a set of traffic lights, and pumps on the brakes. As they wait for the lights to change, Te Aroha spots something on the other side of street that sparks her attention.

Next to the dairy and liquor store is a bright orange building. She reads the brash neon-sign on the front window:

CASH- MONEY-NOW!

As the traffic lights change from red to green, an idea starts to formulate in Te Aroha's mind.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, LOUNGE/KITCHEN- AFTERNOON

Te Aroha and Jo are sitting in the lounge drinking their coffee, while Maia, Nikki and Tama are at the kitchen table, enjoying a feast of KFC and Pizza Hutt, while guzzling coloured tumblers full of fizzy drink.

JO

Save some for Mum and Auntie Te Aroha, aye Nikki!

NIKKI

If you're not fast, you're last Mum!

JO

Turituri you!

MAIA

Mum, can we go outside and play
on the tramp again after this?

TAMA

Yeah Auntie! You should see me
do my flips!

TE AROHA

Let your kai settle down
first...

Maia, you should go to your room
and show the kids the other toys
I bought you.

NIKKI

Oh yeah! Tama wants to play with
Maia's Barbies. Aye, you poof!

Tama kicks his sister under the table, but Nikki is too
quick and pulls her leg away in time.

JO

Hey, that's enough of that you
two! Thank Auntie for the feed!

TAMA/NIKKI

Thanks Auntie!

The three children scamper off the table, towards Maia's
bedroom while Te Aroha and Jo head to the table to see
what kai is left.

JO

You've got a lot of flash new
gears! I saw the delivery guys
drop your washing machine off
yesterday.

Te Aroha takes a chip and dabs it in some leftover tomato
sauce.

TE AROHA

Yeah, finally. It was a hōhā
taking our clothes to the
laundry mat.

Jo looks around the kitchen and points at the fridge, and
several brand new looking small kitchen appliances next

to it, placed on the kitchen counter.

JO

Those new too?

TE AROHA

They were on sale...I've been
saving up for a while...

Jo then points to a large heater and television in the
lounge.

JO

...and those?

Te Aroha takes another chip and decides to dip it in the
leftover coleslaw.

TE AROHA

Yeah. I bought some heaters for
our rooms as well. This house is
so cold!

JO

Kapai...

Te Aroha picks up another chip, pauses for a moment, then
decides to put it down.

TE AROHA

Jo. Could you do me a favour
tomorrow please?

JO

What's up?

TE AROHA

Could you have Maia in the
morning? I've got to see my case
manager and I hate dragging her
along with me when I go in.

JO

Of course! No need to ask. I'll
have her anytime. My place is
like a marae to the kids around
here.

TE AROHA

Thank you!

JO

No worries Cuz...Hey did you know we are actually related? You said you were a Hemi from the Coast?

I was talking to my Mum, and she said we have whakapapa connections to the Hemis. I think she said she knows your grandparents too.

Te Aroha stares at Jo for a moment and looks as if she is about to say something. Instead, she pushes herself away from the table and stands up.

TE AROHA

Really...Hey Jo, I'm gonna go have a cig.

JO

You go ahead and have your kai paipa. I'll mop up the rest of the kai my kids left on their plates. Eyes too big for their heads!

Te Aroha walks towards the door to the back porch. Jo watches her for a second, before grabbing a slice of half-eaten pizza.

INT. INCOME SUPPORT OFFICE, DAVINA'S CUBICLE - MORNING

Te Aroha sits across from Davina, as her case manager reads through scans of paper, then at her computer. All the while acknowledging Te Aroha's existence, as little as possible.

DAVINA

It looks like you've been with us for 6 months now.

TE AROHA

That sounds about right.

DAVINA

And you still haven't been able to make any meaningful progress towards full-time employment.

TE AROHA

That's not true. I've tried but I'm either overqualified...

...or not qualified enough...

...or have to travel to the other side of the town and spend all my wages on petrol...

...or get offered shiftwork with crazy hours. I can't do that to my little girl.

DAVINA

You're not the only one you know who faces those kinds of challenges. They seem to make it work.

Te Aroha leans forward in her chair towards Davina, gripping the side of the desk.

TE AROHA

You don't...

Davina looks away from her computer at Te Aroha and cuts her off.

DAVINA

That's why our agency is piloting a new scheme for a small cohort of our more "hard to place" clients.

Davina hands Te Aroha a glossy pamphlet that says: **Pull Yourself Up By The Bootstraps**, on the front cover.

DAVINA

Starting from next week onwards, you will be employed by a commercial cleaning company we are working with to place people

like you into full-time employment.

You will receive a uniform and travel allowance. We also provide child-care subsidies. The hours are mainly 9 to 5, but there may be times when you will be called on to work after hours.

You will also receive their starting rate, with the opportunity for this to increase, depending on your work productivity. Any questions?

Te Aroha leans back in her chair, trying to take all this information in.

TE AROHA

And what if I say no? Not interested?

DAVINA

Then we will implement our benefit sanctions framework.

TE AROHA

And what does that mean?

DAVINA

No work, no pay, no benefit.

Davina reaches behind her desk to grab a stack of forms, and passes them over to Te Aroha.

DAVINA

Fill these out please, and then hand them to the receptionist.

Te Aroha gets up from her chair, not knowing quite what to say next. She remains silent and walks away.

DAVINA

You can't have everything handed to you on a plate. You have to work for it, you know.

Te Aroha immediately freezes as soon as Davina says this. The taste of cold sick begins to form in her mouth.

INT. SHOPPING MALL, MENS TOILETS- DAY

A row of eight toilet cubicles line one of the walls of the Men's toilets, with graffiti covering the door of one of them.

Inside the last stall, TE AROHA is bent over cleaning around the toilet bowl with a toilet brush. When she has finished, she flushes the toilet, and goes to wash her hands at the basin. When she looks in the mirror, she stares at herself for a few moments and straightens up her hair. She then notices some white marks on the front of her lime-green tunic that has CC Cleaning Co embroidered on the breast pocket, and tries to rub them away.

As she is rubbing them, HOANA, 57, an older Māori woman wearing the same uniform as Te Aroha, comes in. She is holding a cleaning caddy, with a variety of cleaning products in it.

HOANA

I'll give you a hand love?

TE AROHA

Thank you Hoana. I've done the toilets and urinals.

The two women set to work cleaning the basins and mirrors and wiping down the walls.

TE AROHA

How long have you been working in this job?

HOANA

About 9 years.

TE AROHA

That's a long time!

HOANA

Yeah, too long. I was working in a factory before that. But then we all got made redundant.

Just between you and me, I've

been saving up all my pingers to go over to Brisbane next year and live with my sister.

TE AROHA

I've got a cousin who lives near Brisbane. She's always telling me to go over for a holiday.

HOANA

You should go over there and work! Plenty of jobs in Aussie. I've got heaps of my relations driving trucks in the mines, doing construction work. Some of the nurses in our whānau are even working in the outback. Like the Flying Doctors!

TE AROHA

I've never thought of moving overseas before.

HOANA

Well maybe you should think about it. Before you get too old like me...The weather in Brizzy be good for my arthritis. Not cold like this miserable Poneke weather.

TE AROHA

The money's better over there too aye?

HOANA

Ae. Even the people stacking supermarket shelves get paid more than the shit wages they pay you here.

Lots of my rellies have flash cars, swimming pools...and they own their own homes. They would never get ahead here, like they do other there.

TE AROHA

Sounds amazing Hoana!

HOANA

And the White people over there respect the Māoris. They think we're hard workers. Not like the Pakehas over here, who think they're better than us. We're just a bunch of dumb hories to them.

Te Aroha's finishes cleaning the basin in front of her, then goes to grab a bucket and starts filling it up with a water tap beside the row of basins.

TE AROHA

I'd love to do something like that. But I've got the father of my daughter to think about.

Starting a whole new life in another country just seems too difficult for me at the moment.

As Te Aroha finishes filling up her bucket, STEVEN CLARK, 40, a ginger-haired Pakeha man wearing a lime-green hi-viz vest over a white turtle neck enters the bathroom.

STEVEN

C'mon ladies, chop-chop! We have to get a move on! We're already running late to get to the other site.

HOANA

I thought we were just here today?

STEVEN

Don't you read the schedules I give you Hoana?

HOANA

It didn't say anything.

STEVEN

Well, I updated it. Did you read the schedule Te Aroha?

TE AROHA

Not the updated one.

STEVEN

I've got you working some of our evening office shifts later this week.

TE AROHA

I told you Steven, I prefer not to work at night. My daughter is still very young.

STEVEN

Moana's sick for the rest of the week, and Wiki's got some kind of family emergency. She will be away the next 2 weeks.

TE AROHA

My shifts always seem to be changing now.

STEVEN

Well, that's the way it is, sorry about it, Te Aroha. If you don't like it, I can tell your case manager.

Anyway, time is money...I'll see you both at the front soon.

Steven turns around and leaves the bathroom. Hoana grabs the mop and points it towards the door like she's holding a gun.

HOANA

Silly ginger nutted wanker.

TE AROHA

You go Hoana. I'll finish up here.

As Hoana leaves, Te Aroha places the mop in the bucket and slowly wrings the water out. She then starts to mop the floors slowly, lost in her own thoughts.

INT. COMMERCIAL OFFICE, OPEN-PLAN DESK SPACE- NIGHT

Te Aroha is in her cleaner's uniform, vacuuming the floor of a large commercial office building. We also see her do her other duties, emptying bins, wiping down desks and dusting around shelving. She is by herself on this floor.

INT. COMMERCIAL OFFICE, RECEPTIONIST COUNTER- NIGHT

As she is polishing around the front receptionist counter, she puts down her cloth, picks up the phone and rings a number.

TE AROHA

Hi boy. Can you put your Mum on please...

Jo, how's Maia doing. Not being a hōhā I hope?

...Good, she always goes to bed early...

Thanks for having her again.
When I finish my double shift in the morning I will come pick her up...

...Hey Jo, I better go.

INT. COMMERCIAL OFFICE, KITCHEN- NIGHT

Te Aroha is washing dirty coffee cups and plates in the kitchen sink. As she picks up a tea-towel to clean a cup she hears some strange noises coming from the direction of the open-plan office. Te Aroha puts down the tea-towel and turns around.

TE AROHA

Hello, anyone there!?

INT. COMMERCIAL OFFICE, OPEN-PLAN DESK SPACE- NIGHT

Te Aroha walks into the open-plan area and sees the back of a man wearing a suit, leaning over one of the desks

looking for something.

THOMAS

Yes, it's just me sorry. I'll be two ticks. I've just come to grab some papers and then I'll be gone.

Te Aroha immediately freezes. She has recognised the voice.

The man turns around from the desk, and it confirms to Te Aroha she has been reunited with Thomas.

Thomas looks stunned when he clocks that Te Aroha is in front of him. This doesn't last for long though. A weird smile begins to appear on his face.

THOMAS

Well, well, well. Te Aroha. Nice to see you again.

Te Aroha is too frozen to reply. She clutches both hands and pushes her nails into the skin.

THOMAS

I work here now. Big promotion. Better perks...I've missed you though.

Te Aroha pushes the nails into her skin harder.

Thomas puts his papers back down on his desk, loosens his tie, and walks slowly towards Te Aroha.

THOMAS

I see you have a new job too?

Te Aroha starts to back away from Thomas, but his pace quickens.

THOMAS

Hey, we never did have that drink did we? ...I know where the big boss stashes the booze. No one's around...

Thomas is now almost face to face with Te Aroha. Her face is overcome with fear.

TE AROHA

I...don't...want...

THOMAS

What don't you want?

At that moment, the doors to the reception area open and MEI, 27, a small Asian woman, wearing the same uniform as Te Aroha walks in, pushing a trolley carrying cleaning products and a vacuum.

MEI

All finished on my floor now.
How long you going to be?

Te Aroha becomes unfrozen and steps back far away from Thomas.

TE AROHA

Not long... Can you help me
please, Mei?

(pauses)

Just some dishes.

MEI

Yes. Okay.

The two women head into the kitchen, leaving Thomas behind to return to his desk.

THOMAS

Maybe drinkies next time, Te
Aroha!

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, BACK PORCH- NIGHT

Te Aroha is on her back porch anxiously smoking a cigarette and having a coffee. She is in her cleaner's uniform, still shaken up from her encounter from Thomas.

She stares into her small back garden, with clothes still hanging on the washing line, and takes another deep, long puff of her smoke.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, KITCHEN- NIGHT

Te Aroha puts her coffee cup on the kitchen counter,

turns the kettle on again, and watches it boil. She suddenly looks up. She can hear knocking at the front-door: KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK. It is constant.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, FRONT DOOR- NIGHT

Te Aroha walks to the front door.

TE AROHA

Who's there?

LEVI

It's me!

Te Aroha shakes her head, frowns and unlocks the door. Levi is standing on the front doorstep with a can of DB in one hand.

LEVI

Lemme in please. I wanna see my baby.

Levi is slurring his words as he speaks and spilling the booze from his can onto the step.

TE AROHA

Piss off Levi, she's not here.

LEVI

Where is she? I want to see her.

TE AROHA

She's at the neighbours. I just got back home from work. My second shift begins again in a few hours. I need to get some sleep.

LEVI

Lemme in please. I'm wasted.

TE AROHA

How'd you get here?

LEVI

Flew!

Te Aroha pushes past him and sees that his car is parked

behind hers. She then grabs Levi by his arm and leads him into the lounge, slamming the door behind her.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, LOUNGE- NIGHT

Te Aroha pushes Levi down onto the couch.

TE AROHA

Don't move.

Levi tries to drink the rest of the can, before he realises that it's empty. He then lies down but making sure to keep his feet off the couch.

Te Aroha returns carrying a pillow and blanket. She throws them both on top of him.

TE AROHA

You stay there. I don't want you getting snapped drink driving.

Levi pulls the pillow under his head, and wriggles under the blanket.

LEVI

I knew you still love me...

TE AROHA

In your dreams! I'm only doing this so you don't lose your license and then lose your job. You hardly give me any money for Maia as it is.

Te Aroha turns around and heads towards the door to the hallway.

LEVI

Where you going?

TE AROHA

To my bed!

LEVI

Aren't I coming too?

TE AROHA

Why aren't you in what's her

face's bed?

LEVI

I don't want her. I want you.

TE AROHA

Stay on that sofa Levi!

Te Aroha leaves slamming the door of the lounge firmly shut.

EXT. KOWHAI STREET - EARLY MORNING

Te Aroha's neighbourhood is quiet, except for the sound of the rubbish men doing their rounds, emptying the household rubbish bins. It's still dark outside with the only lights coming from one streetlamp and the headlights of the rubbish truck on full-beam.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, LOUNGE- EARLY MORNING

Levi is asleep on the couch snoring but is soon awoken by Te Aroha shaking him.

TE AROHA

Wake up! Wake up!

LEVI

What! What!

TE AROHA

You need to move your car.
Where's your car keys? I need to
get out.

LEVI

It's early...I don't know.

Levi closes his eyes and rolls over. Te Aroha shakes him again.

TE AROHA

I need those keys! I'm going to
be late for work! I'm late
enough already.

Te Aroha puts her hands in the pockets of the jacket Levi is still wearing and finds them.

TE AROHA

I'll move it myself then. When I
get home, you better be gone
aye.

I mean it Levi.

Te Aroha rushes out of the lounge. The front-door slams shut. Levi rolls over again and goes back to sleep.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING, FOYER- MORNING

Te Aroha is straining to push a cleaning trolley slowly through the foyer of an office building. The trolley's rubbish bag is almost overflowing, each tray heavy with not only cleaning-products but also empty wine bottles- the remnants of an after-work drinking session. On the top of the trolley, Te Aroha has delicately balanced half a dozen plastic spray bottles she intends to refill before she goes home.

Her own physical tiredness and lack of sleep make it harder for her to manoeuvre the trolley. When the trolley hits the curve of a step leading up a flight of stairs, all the plastic bottles fall onto the floor.

Te Aroha is picking the bottles up when Steven appears at the glass front door and knocks. Te Aroha lets him in.

TE AROHA

I'm just about finished.

STEVEN

Good work. I won't dock your pay
then for being late this
morning.

TE AROHA

Yeah, sorry about that. My alarm
didn't go off.

STEVEN

I'm just double checking to see
if you're still going to cover
Wiki's evening shift next week
too?

TE AROHA

Is that the office on Boulcott street? I'd rather not go there anymore. Can someone else cover it?

STEVEN

Who? Tell me who Te Aroha? I'm short staffed enough as it is already.

TE AROHA

Well, I really don't want to work there. Give me someone else's shift to do.

STEVEN

I make up the schedule Te Aroha! Not you.

TE AROHA

Please Steven. Swap me with someone else.

STEVEN

I can't. The only option is the new girl from the 'Bootstrap' programme.

I've paired her with Hoana to learn the ropes. She's a solidly built girl, but a bit dim.

TE AROHA

Please Steven!

Te Aroha grips the handles of her trolley as she says this. Steven stares at her for a moment.

STEVEN

No.

Steven turns and goes toward the front door. Te Aroha watches him leave.

She then pulls over a chair and sits down, staring at the road outside the office's front-entrance.

She hangs her head down and presses both hands onto her knees. Tears swell in her eyes, her breathing gets heavier. To release the pressure, Te Aroha lets out a guttural scream.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Te Aroha dressed in a pair of sweatpants and striped rugby jersey is sitting at the kitchen table, opening her a handful of letters. The phone rings.

INTERCUT- TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, KITCHEN/INCOME SUPPORT OFFICE, DAVINA'S CUBICLE

TE AROHA

Hello.

DAVINA

It's Davina Howard from Income Support here. Can you please confirm this is Te Aroha Hemi?

TE AROHA

Yes, it is.

DAVINA

I am calling in regard to your Domestic Purposes Benefit. I've just been informed that you have resigned from your employment. Is that correct?

TE AROHA

Yes, that's right. I was meant to call you earlier. I just had to leave, it wasn't working out. I was being called away too often from my daughter at night anyway.

DAVINA

Since you haven't provided a satisfactory reason for your decision to resign, I'm going to have to reduce your benefit.

TE AROHA

But why?!

DAVINA

We placed you into full-time employment, and since you have breached the terms and conditions of the programme, we will be implementing our benefit sanctions process.

TE AROHA

That's not fair!

DAVINA

And furthermore, I've been informed there is reason to believe that you have the father of your child living with you.

TE AROHA

Who told you that? It's not true!

DAVINA

We had a phone call saying that a vehicle belonging to your daughter's father is seen at your home every-day.

TE AROHA

They're lying! He only stayed over once. He was drunk. I didn't want him to drink drive and kill himself. Or someone else.

DAVINA

That's not what my sources have told me.

I am going to put all of this in writing. You should expect a letter from me soon outlining the benefit fraud we believe you have committed, and the sanctions to your benefit which will be implemented.

Te Aroha immediately drops the phone and hangs up the call. She doesn't want to hear anymore.

Begin Montage.

- Te Aroha lies on the couch at night, wearing a pair of sweatpants and old, stained sweatshirt. The TV flickers in front of her face, and her eyes seem dead.

- Te Aroha makes herself a coffee, with a small pile of unopened letters beginning to grow on the kitchen table.

- Te Aroha sits on the back porch, smoking a cigarette, with strewn cigarette butts covering the front doorstep.

-Te Aroha lies on the couch during the day, watching TV with Maia playing on the carpet directly in front of her. The little girl is wearing mismatched clothes and her hair appears knotty and unbrushed.

- Te Aroha makes herself a coffee, with the pile of unopened letters covering the kitchen table. The sink is overflowing with dirty dishes.

End Montage.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, TE AROHA'S BEDROOM- MORNING

Te Aroha is lying asleep in bed with the curtains drawn. It looks like she hasn't cleaned her bedroom for a while. Next to her Maia is playing with her dolls. She stops and shakes her mother to wake her.

MAIA

Mum! Mum! I want my cornies.

Te Aroha pulls the blankets off her head, opens her eyes, and looks about.

TE AROHA

Is it morning time?

Maia nods her head.

TE AROHA

I'll get up soon aye?

Te Aroha pulls the blankets back over her eyes.

Maia gets off the bed with her dolls and leaves the room.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, KITCHEN/LOUNGE- DAY

The pile of unopened letters on the dining room table has now become a mountain, surrounded by a sea of dirty coffee cups, scatterings of cornflakes and plastic instant noodle wrappers. The kitchen sink cannot be seen anymore. It's completely covered in dirty plates and rubbish. Te Aroha walks into the kitchen completely unfazed and opens the fridge.

In the lounge, Maia is watching daytime television eating dried instant noodles. *The Rikki Lake Show* is on and today's guests are arguing about which woman stole someone's man.

TE AROHA

Did you drink all the milk?

Maia doesn't say anything and ignores her mother.

TE AROHA

Why did you drink all the milk
for? Didn't you save any for
Mum?

Maia continues watching the daytime talk show.

TE AROHA

You're being selfish, you know
that Maia. Very selfish!

Te Aroha starts to look around in the cupboards for something to eat. There is a knock at the door. Te Aroha ignores it, but the person keeps knocking.

TE AROHA

Who the fuck is this?

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, FRONT DOOR- DAY

Te Aroha opens the door, and standing there is Nikki.

NIKKI

Hi Auntie. Mum wants to know if
Maia can come over. We haven't
seen her in ages.

TE AROHA

Tell your Mum, thanks. But Maia
has to stay home.

Maia suddenly appears behind Te Aroha, and rushes in front of her to see her friend.

MAIA

Nikki!

NIKKI

Maia!

TE AROHA

Okay you can go now Nikki...

Te Aroha begins to shut the door on Nikki. Nikki tries to poke her head around the door as it closes.

TE AROHA

Maia! Get back in front of that TV! Actually, you can get in your room...and stay there!

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, BACK PORCH- EARLY EVENING

Te Aroha is sitting on a chair trying to roll a cigarette, but there isn't enough tobacco powder in the packet to make a decent one. She throws the packet down on the ground and gets off her chair.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, FRONT DOOR- EARLY EVENING

Te Aroha grabs her car keys and opens the door.

TE AROHA

(yelling)

I'm just going out to get some more smokes. Don't open the door to anyone okay?

EXT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, DRIVEWAY- EARLY EVENING

Te Aroha walks outside to her car. But she immediately stops and freezes. A tow-truck is parked behind her car and the TOW-TRUCK DRIVER, late 30s, Pakeha male is attaching a metal hook to her towbar.

TE AROHA

What the fuck are you doing?

TOW-TRUCK DRIVER

I'm repossessing your car Lady.

TE AROHA

You can't do that!

TOW-TRUCK DRIVER

The law says I can. You haven't been paying your debts.

TE AROHA

I need my car!

TOW-TRUCK DRIVER

Well, the loan company needs their money. But you don't have any.

Te Aroha watches helplessly as the tow-truck driver finishes hooking her car up to his truck. He hands her a business card from his jacket pocket.

TOW-TRUCK DRIVER

Here, give them a call in the morning to try and sort it out. I'm just the messenger.

The tow-truck driver gets in his vehicle and drives away, taking Te Aroha's green hatchback with him. Te Aroha is left standing in the driveway too stunned to speak.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, BEDROOM- LATE EVENING

Te Aroha is sitting in front of the TV zombied out. She sits there motionless, staring at the screen while an American sit-com plays.

Maia appears at the doorway to the lounge, holding her *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* book. She seems apprehensive about the reception she will get from her mother.

MAIA

Mum...I'm hungry.

Te Aroha doesn't respond and keeps watching the TV.

MAIA

Mum...I'm hungry. Did you hear

me Mum?

Te Aroha still doesn't respond.

MAIA

Mum...I'm...

Te Aroha quickly turns her head and looks straight at Maia. She grabs Maia's right wrist and yanks her daughter over towards her. Maia tries to hold on to her book, but she is scared.

TE AROHA

I don't care if you're hungry.
Here sit down and shut up.

Te Aroha pushes Maia on to the couch with a force that makes her daughter scream.

MAIA

Mum! You're hurting me!

TE AROHA

Here, give me that stupid book!

Te Aroha grabs the *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* off Maia and tears apart the pages. Maia sees what she is doing and starts to hyper-ventilate. Her breathing gets faster and faster, and soon she is having trouble breathing.

Te Aroha watches her child gasp for air, and then snaps out of her zombie-like state.

TE AROHA

Maia, baby! I'm so sorry.

Te Aroha races into the kitchen and rummages through the shelves and drawers trying to find one of Maia's asthma pumps. She soon finds one and gives it to Maia to help her to breathe.

MAIA

Breathe baby, breathe!

Maia's breathing isn't helped much by the asthma pump and Te Aroha begins to go into a deep panic. She runs to the telephone and dials 111. But there is no response.

MAIA

Shit, pick up, pick up!

She dials the number again. Nothing. But she soon realises that there is no dial tone and the phone has been disconnected.

Te Aroha grabs her house-keys and Maia's jacket and rushes over to Maia and picks her up off the couch.

INT. JO'S STATE HOUSE, FRONT DOOR- LATE EVENING

Te Aroha rushes quickly up to Jo's front-door step carrying Maia in her arms. She keeps banging loudly on the door until Jo opens it.

INT. ACCIDENT & EMERGENCY, WAITING ROOM- LATE EVENING

Jo is sitting in a far corner of the waiting room, reading an old copy of the Women's Weekly with Rachel Hunter on the cover. She looks up when Te Aroha comes over to her and sits down beside her.

JO

How is she?

TE AROHA

She will be alright the doctor said. She's on the Nebulizer now. But they want to keep her overnight.

JO

That's a relief. Our houses are like Eskimo igloos aye? My oldest boy has bad asthma too.

TE AROHA

It wasn't just the house Jo.

Te Aroha cries and Jo comforts her.

JO

Look, I went through the worst shit when the father of my first 3 kids left.

I didn't have any support nearby, and the Social Welfare weren't any help. They wanted to take them away at one part there.

I got through it. But it was
hard.

Te Aroha wipes away the tears from her eyes and blows her
nose on a tissue from her pocket.

JO

I better go home now. My kids
must be driving my sister crazy.
Lucky she was already down here
for a visit.

Jo stands up from her seat and takes her car keys from
the pocket of her hoodie jacket.

TE AROHA

Thank you for bringing us.

JO

Of course. We're whanau.

Jo hugs Te Aroha and then leaves. When she does Te Aroha
walks over to the main reception area.

TE AROHA

Can I use your phone please?

INT. ACCIDENT & EMERGENCY, OFFICE- LATE EVENING

Te Aroha dials a number on the phone and waits for
someone to answers.

TE AROHA

Hi Mum. It's me. Te Aroha.

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, DRIVE-WAY- MORNING

Pink and white balloons and paper-streamers decorate the
letterbox and drive-way of Te Aroha's house. Along the
fence line runs a large colourful banner saying:

Happy 5th Birthday Maia!!!

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, KITCHEN- MORNING

A huge oval pink frosted cake with Maia's name on top,
iced in the style of Barbie typeface, dominates the

centre of the dining room table. Maia, Nikki and Tama excitedly lean over the cake, as Te Aroha lights five pink candles. Watching from the other side of the table are Jo, Lani, Meera and Te Aroha's father, Natana, 57, and Te Aroha's mother, 55, Jackie.

TE AROHA

You make a wish after you blow them out baby.

MAIA

Is Dad nearly here?

TE AROHA

He's coming after lunch. He said to save him some cake.

MAIA

Okay Mum.

TE AROHA

So, on the count of Wha!: Tahi, Rua, Toru, Wha!

EVERYONE

Hari huritau kia koe.

Hari huritau kia koe.

Hari huritau kia Maia.

Hari huritau kia koe.

Hip hip hooray, hip hip hooray!

Hip hip hooray!

The 3 children take deep breaths and dramatically blow out the candles.

MAIA

I made a wish Mum!

NIKKI

So did I!

TAMA

And me too!

JO

Not your birthday Ow!

NIKKI

So what Mum!

Lani grabs a knife and places the knife in the middle of the cake.

LANI

Now, hold your little horses
everybody. Let me cut it first
please.

As Lani cuts the cake and Jo and Meera fuss around getting the hot sausage rolls and saveloys out onto the table. Te Aroha walks over to stand beside her parents.

JACKIE

Flash cake Aros [pronounced Ah-Laws).

TE AROHA

Yeah Lani bought it in Auckland.

JACKIE

It's really awesome she drove
down last night.

TE AROHA

She's such a good mate aye?

NATANA

When was the last time you saw
Levi?

TE AROHA

The other week when he took Maia
out for the afternoon.

JACKIE

Sounds like he's pulling his
weight more now.

TE AROHA

Yeah he's trying.

NATANA

Is he still pissed off that you called us first when Maia went to hospital, and not him?

TE AROHA

He should be over it now.

NATANA

Hey, shall we go take a quick 5-minute breather?

Natana looks at his daughter and mimes smoking a cigarette. Te Aroha nods in response.

TE AROHA

Good idea.

EXT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, BACKYARD- MORNING

Te Aroha and Natana are smoking around the back of the house, beside the outside shed.

NATANA

How have you found working at the Kohanga?

TE AROHA

I've really enjoyed it aye! I love being a Kaiāwhina and helping the Kaiako. It's not just the extra putea every week. Me and Maia have really enjoyed being a part of the Kohanga whanau.

Natana has a short puff on his smoke then stubs it out on the ground.

NATANA

Now Te Aroha. Have you thought further about letting us pay off the last of your debts?

TE AROHA

I have but it's okay now Dad. You and Mum have done enough. You've already given me your

car.

NATANA

It was just our little run-a-bout.

TE AROHA

I've got my debts under control now.

NATANA

We want to do this for our mokopuna...and I want to do this for you too.

Te Aroha quickly finishes her smoke and grabs her father by the arm.

TE AROHA

Dad it's okay. It's in the past now.

NATANA

It's not in the past for me though.

Natana looks away from Te Aroha towards the ground.

TE AROHA

You didn't mean to hit me.

Natana doesn't respond. He keeps looking at the ground.

TE AROHA

It was just the times, Dad. You were made redundant and...

I was just a 16-year-old brat, with no ears.

Natana looks up.

NATANA

I hurt Mum too.

TE AROHA

It must have been hard for you.

NATANA

No excuse.

Te Aroha embraces her father and holds him for a few moments before pulling away.

TE AROHA

There is something else though
that you and Mum could do for
us...

INT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, KITCHEN/LOUNGE- AFTERNOON

Te Aroha and Meera are washing the last of the birthday lunch dishes, while Lani and Jo are chilling out in the lounge.

LANI

You sure we can't help, Sis?

TE AROHA

You stay right there. Me and
Meera have it all under control.
Relax...you and Jo have done
enough birthday organising for
today.

JO

Can you hear any fighting out
the back yet Cuz?

TE AROHA

Nope, they're all okay, Cuz.
Thanks for the game you got
Maia. It's awesome.

JO

Kapai Cuz.

Meera looks around in the kitchen drawers.

MEERA

I'm looking for the Glad-Wrap.

TE AROHA

Over here, Meera.

Meera takes the Glad-Wrap from Te Aroha and starts

wrapping up the left-over kai.

TE AROHA

Thank you for coming to Maia's birthday.

MEERA

It was wonderful. I loved it!

TE AROHA

Also thank you so much again for helping me to sort out Income Support.

MEERA

I'm so glad that you contacted me! It was wrong what that Davina woman did. How were you supposed to take care of your daughter with no income?

TE AROHA

Yeah, it was pretty stressful. I wonder how many others she did it too as well? That stupid government department has stupid rules anyway. No wonder she could get away with it.

MEERA

Actually, I found out later through one of my colleagues that she accused several of her clients of committing fraud and didn't have any firm evidence.

TE AROHA

What a cow aye Meera! I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't spoken up for me and found out all the information Income Support tries to hide from people.

MEERA

I'm helping someone else at the moment too. They need to access financial aid they have every right to get. But it's tough

going dealing with that
department!

As Te Aroha and Meera are talking, Levi walks in to the kitchen.

LEVI

Sorry, the front door was open.
Where's the birthday girl?

EXT. TE AROHA'S STATE HOUSE, BACK-YARD- AFTERNOON

Levi is sitting on the edge of the trampoline. Maia is lying across his lap, tired from the events of her birthday.

Te Aroha sits on a chair opposite them, with a small plate of left over sausage rolls and chips balanced on her knees.

TE AROHA

Is she crashed out?

LEVI

I think so.

TE AROHA

Do you want me to take her
inside?

LEVI

No, she's fine for now. I'll do
it later.

Levi gently strokes Maia's hair.

LEVI

She's getting big aye?

TE AROHA

She'll be moving out of the
house soon.

LEVI

Don't say that! She'll always be
my baby.

TE AROHA

And she will be...Hey Levi...

Te Aroha puts down the plate of kai she has on her lap, onto the grass.

LEVI

What?

TE AROHA

I had a talk with my Mum and Dad this afternoon...

LEVI

And?...

TE AROHA

And... I want to move to Australia.

LEVI

You what?! Is Maia going too? Do I get a say in this?

TE AROHA

Yes, you do get a say. And no, she isn't coming to Aussie with me.

I've been talking to my cousin and I'm going to go live with her on the Gold Coast, until I can get set up. I'm thinking I might head across to W.A. and get a job doing admin work in the mines.

Levi becomes increasingly frustrated the more Te Aroha talks. He puts on his shades to hide some of the emotion he is feeling.

TE AROHA

I'm only looking to do a short stint. A year, maybe two at the most. I really want to build up

my putea, so I can come back and
buy a house for our daughter.
I'm not getting anywhere,
staying here. It's too hard to
save.

LEVI

What about Maia then?

TE AROHA

I've talked to my parents. They
have agreed to look after her
while I'm away.

LEVI

Why can't I look after her?

TE AROHA

You know why Levi. You can
hardly look after yourself full-
time, let alone a little girl.
When it all gets too much for
you, you'll end up dumping her
with your parents...and your
Dad's really sick. It won't be
fair on your Mum.

Levi doesn't say anything. He adjusts his shades and
looks away into the distance.

TE AROHA

Please. Think of our daughter.
She will be safe with my
parents, and you can see her
anytime you want over there.

Levi continues his silence for a few more moments, before
taking off his shades.

LEVI

I think you should take her with
you.

TE AROHA

You what?

LEVI

Take her to Ozzie with you.
You're right. The opportunities

are better over there, and she needs you more than she needs me.

TE AROHA

Are you sure? ...

(pause)

Why?

LEVI

I've been a real dick to you Te Aroha. The past year I've come to realise that.

I'm also sorry for mucking around on you with Steph. I don't know why I did it.

TE AROHA

It's okay. We were just young and dumb when we first got together. Then we had Maia. I get it.

As long as you're trying your best to be a good Dad, that's all I give a shit about.

Levi touches Maia's forehead, and then carefully slides off the edge of the trampoline so not to wake her.

LEVI

I'll take her inside now.

He carries Maia towards the back-porch.

TE AROHA

Levi.

LEVI

Yup?

TE AROHA

Thank you.

As Levi takes Maia instead the house, Te Aroha reaches inside her the pouch of her hoodie, and pulls out a packet of cigarettes.

She takes out a smoke, puts it in her mouth and goes to light it.

As she tries to flick her lighter, she pauses for a moment. She takes the smoke out of mouth and pushes it back into the packet.

She then walks over to the outside rubbish bin, throws the packet inside and shuts the lid.

INT. WELLINGTON AIRPORT, ENTRANCE TO INTERNATIONAL DEPARTURES- DAY.

Te Aroha and Maia are standing with outside the international terminal of Wellington airport embracing Te Aroha's parents, Natana and Jackie. They are watched by Jo and her children, Nikki and Tama. Levi is also there with the group, standing to one side.

TE AROHA

Don't cry Mum. We're not going away forever. We'll be back after I've made the big bucks.

JACKIE

That's what they all say! You might come back for Christmas, but the money will be too good! You won't want to leave.

TE AROHA

Don't say that Mum!

NATANA

Well the way this country is going with all the people they are laying off work, I reckon it won't be long until half of New Zealand be living on the Gold Coast soon.

It's now the turn of Jo and her tamariki, Nikki and Tama to say farewell.

TE AROHA

Mā te wā e hoa! We'll miss you and the kids!

JO

Geez, Cuz. I'll need to come to

the G.C. for a holiday soon...by
myself though I think!

TAMA

Ooh we're coming Mum!

NIKKI

Yeah, don't be a stink bum, Mum.
You can stay home!

TE AROHA

You're all welcome to come over!

JO

Well kids. We better start
saving up then aye!

Levi is the last person that Te Aroha and Maia approach.

TE AROHA

Don't forget she'll be back the
week of the first school
holidays.

LEVI

Yeah, yeah. You don't have to
remind me. It's written on every
wall in my house. I'll remember!

Levi pick Maia and gives her a big hug.

LEVI

Love you my darling! See you
soon!

He puts her back down on the ground and helps to adjust
her little backpack. He looks up at Te Aroha.

LEVI

All the best Te Aroha.

Levi bends down and gives Te Aroha an awkward peck on the
cheek.

TE AROHA

You should come visit us one
day.

LEVI

Yeah, we'll see what happens
aye?

After saying their goodbyes, Te Aroha and Maia walk over to the International Terminal entrance with their trolley suitcases, and stop and wave.

JO

(yells)

Cuz! Don't forget to stop off at
Duty Free and stock up!

Te Aroha grins and gives Jo two thumbs up. Maia also copies her.

And with that, Te Aroha and Maia pass through the security gates, over to the other side.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: **TE AROHA. 2005.**

CUT TO:

EXT. HANLEY PLACE- AFTERNOON

A group of teenagers, the girls dressed in cut-off jeans and tank-tops, and the boys wearing Rip-Curl and Quick Silver boardies and tees walk past a row of expensive looking homes, as Maia, 15, now a tall, gangly teen with hair down to her waist, stands at the front-doorway to one of the houses. She is watching out for someone. She drinks a can of Coke, and waves out to the group walking past.

A taxi pulls into the driveway of her home. Levi, 33, now older with flecks of grey in his hair, jumps out of the passenger side of the car.

Maia runs towards Levi and embraces him.

MAIA

Dad!

LEVI

My little Mozzie!

Levi pays the taxi-driver, and then grabs his luggage from the boot of the car.

MAIA

What do ya think of Brizzy so far?

LEVI

Hot!

Levi follows Maia up the paved footpath towards the front-door.

LEVI

I like your new house.

MAIA

Yeah. This one has a bigger pool.

INT. BRISBANE HOME, LIVING ROOM- AFTERNOON

Te Aroha, 35, sits on a large cream sofa wearing a long white cotton dress that compliments her bronzed tanned skin. She is flipping between channels, in front of a massive TV screen that takes up one corner of the room.

Levi appears in the doorway, carrying two black duffle bags. Te Aroha stands up when she sees him and smiles.

TE AROHA

G'day mate!

FADE TO BLACK.

END.