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**Into The Arms Of My Coloniser: Re-imagining Myself and The  
Other**

**An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts**

**At Massey University, Wellington  
New Zealand**

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## 1 Abstract

Postcolonialism is not a subject I have chosen to explore, rather, it is a reality that I have been born into. As a Samoan New Zealander I find myself automatically designated the position of 'other', and my image perpetually projected through the lens of the dominant culture. This exegesis seeks to explore various points of view (including my own) as a way of challenging those projections. My approach is autobiographical, examining Edouard Glissant's 'multiples' as they exist within me, and locating a video art space for those different voices to materialise.

*Into The Arms Of My Coloniser: Re-imagining Myself and The Other* is a study into disestablishing the binary that defines myself as in opposition to the dominant culture. Through video and performance I occupy the space described by Alison Jenkins and Kuni Jones as the "indigene-coloniser hyphen" (2008), a space that allows for cultural distinctions but also acknowledges the interwoven nature of the relationship between indigenous cultures and their colonisers.



## 2 Prologue: Myself as Other

A cold hall filled with Primary School children is where this work begins. The oil heaters were not working that day; so all of the children were slightly huddled together. This configuration of kids made it easier for conversation to begin, for idle minds to begin to wander. Two five year old boys sitting next to each other begin to talk. One child asks the other, "Why are you brown?" The other replies, "Dunno". They look out the window, at each other, then continue to look out the window – never to speak of it again.

The child begins to model itself on that image. In so doing, the child achieves a degree of autonomy. It is no longer lost within an "undifferentiated sea of sensations," but perceives itself for the first time as a separate being – as an "object in a world of objects" (Leach, 2004, p.122).

I am the other child in this story. Unaware of its significance at the time, this was the first instance where I became aware that I am brown skinned. This moment of realisation was profound because I could suddenly see colour for the first time. At this moment a mirror was lifted up, revealing to me my own reflection cast in a different light, the boy's eyes reflecting a somewhat skewed version of me. The image reflected back was something foreign, but strangely enough familiar, because it looked like me. What was given birth to in this school hall was myself as 'Other'.

In the 1980s when multiculturalism enjoyed a brief period of positive attention and autobiographical confessions were the order of the day, I remember voicing a good deal of skepticism about the "emotional striptease" that white audiences so often demanded. So why would I turn to this childhood memory now? I do so because that story represents my personal link to a very specific relationship between mind and body for colonised and enslaved peoples and their descendants (Fusco, 2001).

It is important to state that my practice is intuitive, and I clearly identify that my work is, at its heart, an autobiographical investigation. By using Coco Fusco's 2001 statement as a starting point for my methodology, I firmly situate my practice in the realm of postcolonial discourse. Like Fusco, I gain inspiration from my lived experience, including my childhood, and there are moments where my voice will change to reflect this.



Fig. 1

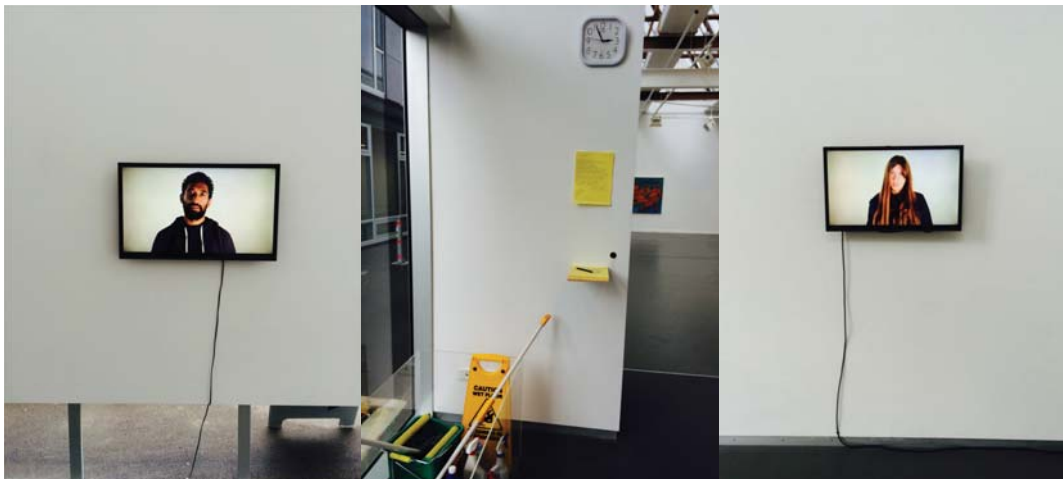


Fig 2

### 3 Introduction: The Contract and The Savage Returns To The Wild

*The Contract* (2015) was a performance-based work in The Engine Room, at Massey University's College of Creative Arts. I hired Lily Tunnicliffe, a part time cleaner, to work in the gallery during opening hours. In the video work accompanying the performance Lily and I made a contract together that defined the parameters of her work and compensation (hourly wage, breaks, systems of communication, etc.). I intentionally ignored the relationship between my Samoan-ness and Lily's Pākehā-ness to focus on how labour operated in a contemporary art environment. I wanted our races to be irrelevant in this context.

During a critique with my fellow MFA students, someone, I forget who, stated that they did not see collaboration in this work, only ambivalence. This uncertain-ness was a recurring theme in the questions asked about the work, which mainly focused on mine and Lily's relationship. Were we friends? Lovers? Enemies? I felt that the subtext of these questions was "what kind of relationship can a Samoan male and a Pākehā female have?" and almost, "what kind of relationship can a Samoan male and a Pākehā female have *without the pretext of employment?*" It was these questions, both spoken and unspoken, that led to my introduction to Jones and Jenkins' "indigene-coloniser hyphen". In my MFA project I set out to see if the space that so visibly connects/divides Lily and I could also be a rich performance/video space.

This exegesis will detail my search for a hyphen space through different stages of my practice and research. In chapter **4. *Tourist Looking Across: Positioning Myself and the Hyphen Within Postcolonial Discourse***, I position myself in the field of postcolonial discourse, exploring varying positions, including ideas about Multiculturalism, the Hyphen, Hybridity, Essentialism, and Creolization. In chapter **5. *In search of El Dorado and the Hyphen***, I discuss a body of work that I am presenting for examination, a collection of moving image works I refer to as *The Postcard Series*. I conclude with chapter **6. *Into The Arms Of My Coloniser***, which focuses on my homonymous work – the final project for my MFA and the one in which I feel I finally achieve my objective and arrive at the hyphen space.

If there is no church in the wild, if there is study rather than knowledge production, if there is a way of being together in brokenness, if there is an undercommons, then we must all find our way to it. And it will not be there where the wild things are, it will be a place where refuge is not necessary and you will find that you were already in it all along (Halbstrom, 2013, p. 12).

I have taken up this challenge laid down by transgender and queer theorist Judith Halbstrom, in response to Stefano Harvey and Fred Moten's text *The Undercommons: The Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013). Halbstrom's provocation is for anyone who is marginalised to return to the wild and to look for a 'church' of both commonality and difference, a space where at once the hyphen is present and it feels like home.

To do this I have looked at my video/performance practice, exploring framing, composition, performance, narrative, and all other methods of aesthetic enquiry. I have focused on generating a body of works which act as markers for the different positions that both the viewer and myself occupy, in my quest to reach the hyphen space.

## 4 Tourist Looking Across: Positioning Myself and the Hyphen Within Postcolonial Discourse.

### 4.1 Multiculturalism Gives Me The Fuzzies: Denouncing a spectrum of 'Hybridity' that goes from Cultural Nomadology to an Essentialist Model, and The Search For Anew

In the prologue ahead of this exegesis I describe my earliest memory of seeing myself as 'Other' and a feeling of being displaced by this knowledge. The other boy's confusion when he asked, "Why are you brown?" was not about why I was/am brown but rather, why I was not white like him. A yearning to conform or to be like him could [regrettably] be described as my goal for years to come.

Later on that day we had a kapa haka practice in which we learnt the school song in te reo Māori. Thinking about that kapa haka group, I have often wondered: "Who were we performing for?" On a practical level there are multiple answers to this question, such as: visiting schools; audiences at interschool competitions; parents, etc. I have also asked myself, "For what purpose?" Was it about the appearance of harmonious, problem-free, feel-good 'multiculturalism'? As my hands moved in-sync with the other students, It felt really good to be in uniform and to participate in a multicultural experience. Through multiculturalism I was no longer 'Other'. I was classmate, school friend, member of the community. I was a *citizen of the world*.

Hybridity has been a much abused term. It has been both trapped in the stigmatic associations of biological essentialism and elevated to promote a form of cultural nomadology. The challenge is to intervene in these extreme positions and present an alternative theoretical model (Papastergiadis, 2004, p. 3).

Unfortunately the sense of belonging I felt within the warm assimilationist embrace of 1990s multiculturalism had no real relationship to my actual experience as part of a diasporic community. In his 2004 essay *Hybridity and Ambivalence: Places and Flows in Contemporary Art and Culture*, Australian-Greek cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis argues for a third space when thinking about contemporary art and cultural identity. This third space could be one where hybrid/diasporic artists can explore issues around pain, loss, belonging, and home without being told to define themselves. It could be a space that is (unapologetically) for expression. A space anew

## 4.2 The Essentialist Praxis: Biological/Social indifference



Fig. 3

In 2016 I was invited to direct the video component of a project called *Africa to Aotearoa: A Study of The Human Migration Story* (2016), which was part of a wider study being conducted by The Genographic Project, The Allan Wilson Centre, and The University of Otago. We travelled to different schools around the North Island and interviewed high school students about their whakapapa to create videos that would go into an exhibition timed to coincide with the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of James Cook’s arrival in New Zealand. Each student would talk about their genetic make-up and offer some insights into their what it means to be a “New Zealander”. I was very wary of the intentions behind the project and concerned that it would be used to illustrate harmonious diversity amongst the New Zealand population on a clearly contentious date.

When talking to the students, it was very clear that those from an indigenous background felt the most comfortable discussing their whakapapa. In contrast, Pākehā students and others with migrant heritage struggled with recollecting their family’s origins and also with the question of what it meant to be a New Zealander. This was framed as a deficit, which I found problematic. I am definitely not saying that people shouldn’t take pride of knowing where they are from; but I am critical of the idea that if you don’t know where you are from, you are in loss.

As Spivak contends “strategically one can look at essentialism not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something one must adopt to provide a critique of anything”. In other words, it is a subject position that places me in a relationship with the mainstream culture of Aotearoa/New Zealand that maintains the power to determine pedagogy for the masses (Jahnke, 2001).

In his 2001 essay on Māori art education, in which he argues for an essentialist praxis over a hybrid one, Robert Jahnke draws upon Spivak’s ideals around ‘strategic essentialism’. He states that one must “know who they are” to undertake a critical position within a tertiary arts environment, but that once they have this knowledge they are free to – like he has – choose a specific aspect of their cultural identity and make art from that perspective alone. Jahnke states that he is first and foremost Māori, and his status as an artist is secondary, almost inconsequential.

He is critical of the 1998 McDermott Miller report on the teaching of Māori art at tertiary art programmes, claiming that the report writers “failed to understand that alternative models can exist for art education delivery that are not premised exclusively on the priority of individualism and innovation” (Jahnke, 2001). This comment is made in response to criticism of institutions creating ‘stylistic cloning’. Jahnke’s perspective is that the schools that are teaching Māori art work from a philosophical base that “Māori art should be created for Māori” (Jahnke, 2001). This is the alternative model he is referring to.

Before critiquing Jahnke’s position, it must be noted that Māori society had experienced significant loss and disenfranchisement from their own language/culture due to colonisation. There is an ongoing need to preserve culture and language for future generations. This is where essentialism can be useful. Jahnke’s position is that, within the Māori world view, the community’s ambitions supercede individual aspirations. He sees the artist as an individual as a western construct. My concern is that we may lose sight of progression and individual development in this ‘preservation state’ where the focus is on the needs of the culture rather than the potential to make the most exciting art possible. What I can take from Jahnke is the importance of taking a ‘position’ and the way my ‘position’ can then ‘position’ the viewers/audiences in relation to my work.



Fig. 4

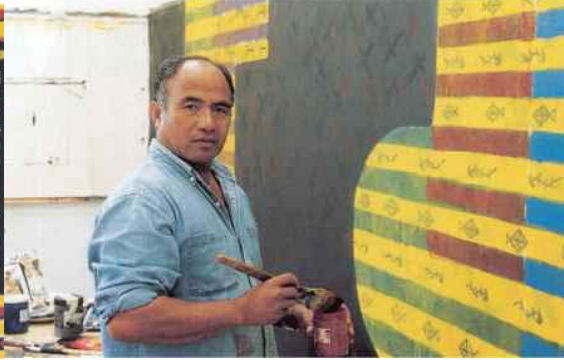


Fig. 5

To advocate that in order to be a true Samoan, for example, one must be fully-blooded Samoan and behave/think/dance/ talk/dress/and believe in a certain prescribed way...this is a prescription for cultural stagnation, an invitation for a culture to choke in it's own body odour, juices and excreta (Wendt, 1976, p.53).

Regarding my hesitation in embracing essentialism, I have found some insights in Albert Wendt's *Towards a New Oceania* (1976), and have applied these to the work of an artist whose work I see as an example of "cultural stagnation". Relying on 'cultural' signifiers and abstracted figures, artist Fatu Feu'u remains synonymous with an essentialist Pacific art practice. Feu'u's paintings reflect his Samoan worldview through representations of traditional stories and mythology from his home village of Faleluapo on the island of Upolo in Samoa.

When looking at the use of primarily Samoan symbology and metaphor in Feu'u's work in relation to the popularity of his paintings within the predominantly European art world, I have a sense of discomfort. This is complicated, but I see the situation as being reminiscent of the way similar European art audiences exoticised 'primitivism' in art in earlier colonial periods. That said, I feel his paintings came at a time of necessity, providing a platform for Pacific voices within the very 'European' backdrop of New Zealand art. Albert Wendt also discusses the need to look at "ghosts old and new" in order to "illuminate us to ourselves and to one another" (1976, p. 51), employing aitu (spirits) to combat the fearful chill of colonialism

### 4.3 Performing Hybridity and Crossing Borders



Fig. 7

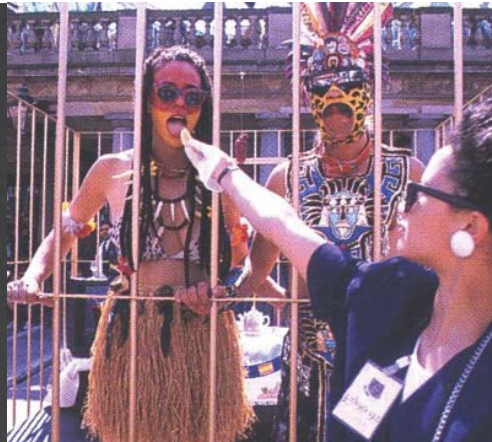


Fig. 8

We simply couldn't escape our marked bodies. Being a Mexican "alien" in Southern California meant to wake up every day and choose to remain so by consciously performing our Mexicanness...Our position vis-à-vis mainstream Californian culture was paradoxical to say the least. We were everywhere and nowhere (Gómez-Peña 2004, p. 7)

Guillermo Gómez-Peña is a performance artist exploring issues relating to his diasporic and hybrid identity. Gómez-Peña explores his alienation from both worlds (that of the USA and that of Mexico), never accepting either as home, and thus eventually finding refuge in the performance space.

Gómez-Peña explores the margins of his identity. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* (1992), is a performance and installation that looks at the 'Other' and how their existence is exoticised. The installation consists of a cage that is presented as containing a hidden race from off the Gulf of Mexico. Each performer in the cage (Gómez-Peña and collaborator Coco Fusco) wears stereotypical indigenous costumes, playing on indigenous tropes that exist in Western representations of Mexican peoples. Protesting for the indigenous rights of this newly discovered race, both Coco Fusco and Gómez-Peña managed to convince audiences to rally with them while also maintaining their colonial identity as separate/more advanced.

Gómez-Peña utilizes the structure of performance (performer on stage, audience viewing) purposefully to establish a clear line of separation. This 'alienation' seems to be a key focus in a number of Gómez-Peña's performances, in which he challenges the audience to "cross this boundary only if you inhabit all the past atrocities" (Gómez-Peña, 2004, p. 12). By positioning his audience as subject for critique, he creates a situation where people either step up to the challenge or completely reject any engagement.

This 'for' and 'against' approach does not interest me in terms of the response an audience has to my work, instead I attempt to position the audience so that I/we *don't* re-instate the binary, but instead, *enable them to see my worldview*. The situation in Mexico and the United States is very different from Samoa and New Zealand's relationship, but Gómez-Peña presents an interesting comment on 'crossing borders'.

A boundary is more like a membrane than a wall. In current cultural theory, "location" is imagined as an itinerary instead of a fixed point. Our understanding of a local context expands to encompass the historical, dynamic, often traumatic, movements of people, ideas, images, commodities and capital (Gómez-Peña, 2005, p. 21)

There are parallels between Gómez-Peña's views on migration and the effect I want to produce in my performance video work. Moving through boundaries which we are marginalized by can have a profound effect and is an important aspect of my viewer's journey. *Il movimiento* is a term Gómez-Peña defines as the freedom to move within these boundaries in search of Eldorado (a mythical land of prosperity and wealth), and in a performance art context he believes that only diasporic artists can access this space (2005, p 12). Once we understand the mental borders that restrict us from expression (racism, loss, pain), we can begin to embrace our 'configurations' – our various cultural make-ups. In this space displacement is no longer feared, but rather inhabited with curiosity.

#### **4.4 Looking within the Margins: Performing The Hyphen**

When looking into the margins and borders (Gómez-Peña), I begin to unearth a world of research pertaining to the discovery of the 'hyphen'. The hyphen being the space 'in between', the line that connects and divides. I suspect that this marginal space has many names and exists whenever a relationship is formed; from Lemi Ponafasio's interpretation of

Le Va to Gómez-Peña's Eldorado, I begin to connect these spaces and the different ways it functions.

In Aotearoa the hyphen becomes a platform for reparation and understanding for Māori and Pākehā. Replicating this in a Samoan-New Zealand context is not my intent, but I can use it as a point of reference to articulate what happens when two parties meet. The Western art world's fascination with minority cultures and traditions is not new. There are times when this fascination can manifest more problems than answers.



Fig 9.

As a white American woman, I have responded to this situation by conducting my doctoral research using a decolonizing epistemological pluralism... It is my belief that such an approach will decentre the settler and facilitate working across the Hyphen (Seifert, 2011, p. 7).

*He Rawe Tona Kakahu/She Wore A Becoming Dress: Performing the Hyphen* (2009) was a collaborative performance held at the New Zealand Film Archive. Miki Seifert has a background in Butoh (a Japanese form of dance that has become popular in Western contemporary dance) and worked with Māori writer Anahera Gildea to produce this performance. Each collaborator recorded their working relationship in detail and it was evident that it was a harmonious venture. Developing their methodology through adapting aspects of Te Ao Māori and Butoh, Gildea and Seifert wove together a narrative looking at the two different positions within the indigenous-coloniser binary in the hopes of decolonising the centre.

I will describe the performance (with commentary), which I felt undermined rather than supported their intentions.

Seifert stands centre stage with a Victorian-esque costume, while Gildea is behind a screen wearing a piupiu. After some time she sheds the piupiu and dons a similar Victorian-esque costume to Seifert. Eventually the costumes of both women evolve into something that resembles a Butoh aesthetic, covered in white paint.

*Note – at first I found the interaction between the two performers interesting due to the way their costumes changed as they came together.*

As the performance continues the two women begin to pulsate as if ‘possessed’ by animals or ghosts. Moments of engagement with the audience are sparse as they seem to be more engaged with what is happening with each other. They end up performing the same actions, dressed in the same costumes, wearing the same (white) make-up.

*Note – overall I did not see a cohesive performance that had the complexities and insightful understandings about collaboration that existed in the dissertation that followed it. The performance relied heavily on stereotypes and symbology about colonial oppression which both inhabited, but neither offered a point of difference from each other.*

Is the aim of collaboration to be the same? To assimilate? Surely not. I am critical of work that borrows aspects from another culture, but offers nothing new to the discourse. I believe the problem with this work lies within the research proposal quoted above, which contains the assumption that all indigenous people and all coloniser relationships are the same, and applies a neutrality to the indigene-coloniser hyphen. The hyphen is not a neutral space – if anything, far from it. In any place where two parties meet neither harmony nor discontent are guaranteed – only change. Although Seifert’s proposal belies her good intentions, the project in its entirety communicates a certain ‘white fragility’ which goes unquestioned.

#### 4.5 Emphasis on The Hyphen: The Oceanic Border

The hyphen, after all, joins us as well as separates. In addition, a united front in indigenous-coloniser research collaborations is at times pragmatically important, and “us” may name that collaboration. My point is that “us” cannot stand in place of the hyphen; it can only name an always conditional relationship-between (Jones and Jenkins, 2008, p. 475).

Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins explain the complex dynamics of an indigene-coloniser collaboration in *Rethinking Collaboration: Working the indigene-coloniser hyphen* (2008). They note that in any collaboration between two cultures, meaningful engagement is often replaced by a promise of unity and subsequently the dissolution of the hyphen becomes problematic. Seifert’s attempts to work with the hyphen ultimately led to the dissolution of the hyphen as the performers ignored the notable differences in each others’ perspectives. I see the hyphen as a space of endeavour and exploration – an island unto itself. A *terra nullius*. I must admit that I see commonalities in the issues that I have identified in Seifert and Gildea’s *Performing the Hyphen* with my 2015 work *The Contract*. In *The Contract* I tried to ignore the fact that I was brown and my collaborator was white, as if I was ‘colour-blind’. I realised, through that work, that I must not overlook the hyphen.

Although I cannot claim to be indigenous to Aotearoa, I can identify the coloniser and indigene binary in my own personal experiences, and this aligns with and informs my art practice. Where do I position myself in this discourse? On the hyphen? In the middle, aside, adrift? I feel as though I need to depart from the Māori–Pākehā binary and specifically re-centre the Samoan–coloniser binary, speaking from my own relationship with the ‘coloniser’.

An identity that is grounded in something as vast as the sea should exercise our minds and rekindle in us the spirit that sent our ancestors to explore the oceanic unknown and make it their home, our home (Hauofa, 1998, p. 393).

Epeli Hauofa reminds me that my border is the Pacific Ocean. It’s what separates me geographically from Samoa and this distance is at core of my research. The ocean is deep and, with its changing currents, the journey across will be unpredictable. What Hauofa suggests is that we rekindle the relationship our nomadic ancestors had with the ocean. The

hyphen exists within that ocean. In order to navigate it I must find a map, or, in this case, a method of enquiry. In *The Ocean in Us* (1998), Hauofa suggests considering the ocean as metaphor that can inform a methodology to deal with questions of identity. Like Gómez-Peña' quest for Eldorado, Hauofa longer to reach a 'homeland', a place of connection, a tūrangawaewae. As Ponifasio (2008) suggests:

Samoan dance is not so much just the correct execution of a movement, but more importantly your appropriate state of awareness to the multiple relationships. Awareness is valued over the artistic. Knowing dance is knowing how to sit, walk and talk – to understand your relationship with humans and all things. (p. 11).

Wendt describes Lemi Ponafasio as a *Taleaitu*, a conjurer of spirits, a shaman of Pacific theatre in New Zealand (Refiti, 2008, p. 13). Ponafasio's choreographic practice evokes the rituals and mystique of the Pacific through dance, gesture, lighting and costume. Significantly, Ponofasio works within the Va. For me, this space, Le Va could be – in part – my Eldorado, my homeland, my place of connection, my tūrangawaewae.

Both Wendt and Ponafasio describe the Va as the space in between us, a space of connection and separation. In Samoan culture it is impolite to refer to each other when describing grievances. When we are having a disagreement, my mother uses a term, "*e le lelei le va*", which translates to, "the space between us is no good". There is an important distinction between saying this and saying, "we are no good". The Va becomes a space to understand the world, to be accutely aware of your responsibilites to various relationships. Wendt identifies it as a place of artistic expression and possibility where spirits dwell and humans can access knowledge. This potential includes the possibility of departing from the constraints and formalist notions of essentialism to begin describing and engaging with the spaces in between.

#### **4.6 Searching through the Archipelego: Edouard Glissant and Creolization**

Hauofa also reitirates a concept found in writings from Edouard Glissant: the Archipelago. Arguing that all nations are islands and never live in isolation. Hauofa's observations are mainly concerned with trade and enterprise but I feel as though there are artistic merits in this methodology as well. If the Pacific Ocean is the border in which I cross, the Islands are

the different areas of enquiries in which I track my practice. As a Tulisi I move from one island to another seeking the Hyphen.

When (African slaves) were transported across the ocean, they didn't understand this river without a shore on both sides, so the middle passage was truly unknown: no shore to their right, no shore to their left, and nothing in front of them – the complete unknown (Glissant, 2009, p 59).

Glissant's description of the migration of African slaves across the Atlantic reminds me that diasporic artists were not always hybrid. The ocean acts as the catalyst for transformation and this upheaval allows no guarantee of returning. In contrast, a tulisi (tourist) knows his/her destination and can find comfort in the possibility of returning home. The tulisi never attempts assimilation, keeping the abyss at bay and remaining a safe distance from the shore. It is worth mentioning that my Samoan name is Tulisi.

There are different kinds of diasporic story. Glissant makes comparisons between the Jewish and African diaspora, summing that one of the key differences is: "(The Jews) always preserved their cultural instruments: The Torah, the Talmud, etc. The Africans had lost everything: not even a song" (Glissant, 2009, p 61). In this sense the Pacific diaspora can be likened to the Jewish diaspora. I also hold many cultural instruments in my artillery. These cultural instruments of mine are no longer only Samoan, I also have New Zealand/Māori attachments which inform my own configuration. Glissant calls this an effect of Creolisation which is different from what earlier writers described as the Creolite, a more static, 'essentialised' form of hybridisation.

That is why for a long time now I have developed the idea of creolisation, which is a permanent process that supersedes historical avatars. It's difficult to admit this because we're afraid of losing ourselves: If I change, then I'll lose myself. If I take something from the Other, then my own self will disappear. We must absolutely abandon this error (Glissant, 2009, p 61).

Creolisation encompasses the fluidity in which I begin to construct my own identity. Whilst retaining these attachments I hope not to induce the 'odours' that Wendt describes.

Glissant uses the term Creolisation to describe the ongoing impact of a group he has coined

'multiples'. Glissant uses 'multiples' to describe a person whose identity is not fixed, someone who can be many different selves at the same time and is able to inhabit other selves constantly, even simultaneously. As an identity, Glissant's multiples differs from the term multicultural in that a multicultural identity is an identity that is fixed and specific, tied to its genetic roots.

I use the term multiples as a way of navigating the various versions of myself that are represented in my work. Hauofa reinterprets Glissant's archipelago as the many islands of the Pacific. Travelling across this 'archipelago', the tide can quickly shift and a linear path is not always certain. Like the tides, it's not always clear which self I am referring to each time a new video/performance work is produced.

## 5 Postcard series: Searching for El Dorado and the Hyphen

### 5.1 A Postcard for my lil' Tulisi (Tourist): The Familiar and Unfamiliar

My Uncle Mase created a little 'man cave' in the basement of my house where he would hang out and drink beers and listen to old Samoan love songs. He had pictures of his family in Samoa and various images of Samoan life around him. When he was in his man cave, Uncle Mase rarely did anything but lay around reminiscing. Stereotypically, most man caves are testosterone-fuelled and feature weights, pictures of calendar girls scantily dressed, and the odd beer can. Uncle Mase's space was anything but that. It was more of a shrine of remembrance. He had dressed this space as a memory box, one that projected his ideals of home back at him. In some ways it was his coping mechanism to make what was unfamiliar, familiar.

It is as though we as human beings are dominated by the compulsion to return to the familiar, or, when there is nothing familiar to be found, to familiarize ourselves with the unfamiliar... "We Human Beings, then, seem to have the capacity to "grow into" our habitat, to familiarize ourselves with it, and eventually to find ourselves "at home (Leach, 2006, p. 5).

*Camouflage* (2006) is a study of narcissism and mimicry in relation to architecture and space, written by architectural theorist Neil Leach. Leach explains how humans naturally adapt to an unfamiliar habitat. He goes on to describe how people fill their spaces with signs and familiar objects that hold resonance with their pre-existing home/s. For example, furniture, photos on the wall, cultural ornamentation, and sometimes the recreation of familiar smells. Uncle Mase was filling his cave with images and sounds that evoked home as he imagined it – creating the stage on which he would perform longing.

What of my ideas of home? If I were to create my own man cave what would be on the walls? My parents would argue that since I am of Samoan descent my man cave/stage would be decorated with very similar images to those which Uncle Mase had on display, discounting the fact that images of people at the beach amongst palm trees sipping on coconut milk are as foreign to me as the (presumably white) photographer who captured those images.

Uncle Mase is an artist himself. He told me that one of his jobs at the Apia markets was to sell hand drawn postcards. Since he could not afford paints, he usually made these postcards with pens and felts, creating the most intricate drawings of Europeans lounging on a tropical beach at sunset. His depictions always placed the European tourist at the centre of the image with his island home as the backdrop. This differs from the tourist imagery of the late 1800s/early 1900s where the exoticised indigenous body was always on display. By placing the viewer (the Westerner) in the image, Mace elevates them from passive observer to an active agent in the tourist imaginary.

Uncle Mase made a postcard for me for my eighth birthday present. It was drawn with felt similar to the ones he described making back in Apia. There was a palm tree and seagulls in the sky flying towards an orangy–pink sunset. He said that he made it for me because I was '*Tatou Tulisi*', which in Samoan means *our tourist*, and is a play on my name. Maybe my parents were clairvoyants and could see what kind of person I would become – constantly travelling through different lands and people, sometimes aimlessly – or maybe its because they named me *Tulisi* I am like this.

## **5.2 Postcards and the Tourist Imaginary: Ethnographic Photography**

Tourists desired to see reenactments of primitizing behaviour, such as Fijian men climbing coconut palms or Samoan women displayed half nude... By offering a temporary withdrawal from the familiar decadence of the metropolis, these images alllowed the viewers to fantasize a position of control or to project a displacement of the other with the substitution of oneself (Hight and Sampson, 2002, p. 14).

Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson's observations about colonial photography align with the function of Uncle Mase's postcards. Postcards that were created for the colonial gaze have become the source of my own re-imaginings of 'home', however, like my experiences of 'multiculturalism', I remain unconvinced. I have come to the realisation that I also employ my own gaze – one that is from the perspective of both the coloniser and 'the savage'. These faux images of simulated landscapes are nothing more than backdrops for my own false re-imaginings. Through the camera I document and re-construct this re-imagining,

influenced by other artists who explore colonial paintings and photography in their practices.

Fig. 10



Fig. 11



In Shigeyuki Kihara's work *Fa'afafine: In a Manner of a Woman* (Figure 10), self portraits explore the exoticisation of Pacific people through the colonial gaze. Specifically referencing historical photographs taken by New Zealanders John Alfred Tattersall, Thomas Andrew, and the Burton Brothers (Figure 11), she connects her work with the dissemination of popular imaginaries throughout the west (Treagus, 2013). Kihara employs the gaze as a tool of critical analysis. Her identity as a transgender woman further disrupts the relationship between her work (in which she gradually exposes her trans body, revealing breasts and a penis), historical representations of Pacific Island women (including the "Dusky Maiden" stereotype), and the viewer's gaze. In *Study of A Samoan Savage* (2013) Kihara turns her attention to the body of the Samoan male. The man in her photographs stares back at the photographer, making an attempt to reclaim power from the 'gaze', thus challenging the power dynamic of "viewer/witness vs subject/object".

Kihara's observations about this 'popular' photography practice reveal a 'multi layered gaze'. The 'multigaze' commands authority over the commodified subject/object of desire, justifying the creation of the photographic study 'for scientific purposes'. I am critical as to whether she successfully challenges this power dynamic and is making a commentary on this relationship between viewer and subject, or if she is actually reinforcing the dynamic. Artists like Kihara are constantly fighting the stereotypes regarding brown bodies. Ironically, in order for this to be challenged, a brown body is still needed as a reference point. I find this paradox tricky to navigate as it begs the question, "Do I have to include Samoan performers in my work in order to challenge stereotypes?" "Can I deny the political nature

of omitting/including brown bodies from/in my work as a brown artist?” These questions were on my mind while I made the work *To A Beat* (2016).

*To A Beat* (Figure 12) is a video installation which shows a young Samoan girl repeating a marching sequence in a forest in an endless loop. The work is based on a dream I had of a marching girl wandering aimlessly in a forest. By using a ‘brown performer’ in this work it is implied that there is an autobiographical connection between them and myself. This is not the only way this work can be read as autobiographical – there is also the use of a nostalgic sepia filter (similar to Kihara’s *Fa’afafine*), a costume which suggests an artistic intervention, and a single performer in the centre of the frame. All these decisions shape the viewer’s reading as autobiographical. Ultimately, *To A Beat* places my ‘Samoanness’ at the centre of discussion. It is a somewhat literal piece whereby my views on colonial repression are on display and performed in a continuous loop.

The dark forest is a stage and the marching girl is a reference to my naïvety regarding postcolonial discourse, trying to make sense of what the wilderness offers for a person who is estranged to indigenous practices. Through my research practice I attempt to escape the loop that the marching girl cannot, looking to occupy more empowering position.



**Fig. 12**

In 2015 Greg Semu, an interdisciplinary Samoan artist, restaged Charles Goldie and Louis John Steele’s 1898 painting *The Arrival of the Maoris in New Zealand* (Fig. 14) in a photographic light box installation called *The Raft of the Tagata Pasifika* (Fig. 13). In his work

Semu placed healthy Cook Island models in positions that replicate those of the figures in the painting. The original painting was based upon the Théodore Géricault's 1819 work *The Raft of Medusa* (Fig. 15), and it perplexes me as to why Semu felt the need to make further iterations of the same subject.

*The Arrival of the Maoris in New Zealand* has frequently been criticised for demonstrating a colonial view of the Māori as a 'dying race', and suggesting that Māori discovered Aotearoa by chance – further justifying Pākehā dominant ideology that Māori were/are savages in need of saving. What then is the purpose behind *The Raft of the Tagata Pasifika*? In an interview Semu referred to the "beauty and suffering of this controversial portrayal of the arrival Māori people to Aotearoa" and explained that he wanted to introduce a "Pacific perspective" to this narrative, aiming to restore the imbalance of power reinforced by Goldie and Steele (Ryan, 2016). I am not convinced that this 'imbalance' is challenged by *The Raft of the Tagata Pasifika*, if anything, it is maintained through the artist's ego (an idea Jahnke has identified as the antithesis of Māori art). Semu adding a "Pacific perspective" to the work is like giving a 'Pacific flavour' to a narrative which is not his own. More problematic still is his use of the word 'Pasifika' to reframe the subject matter. This word originated in a New Zealand government department. It is contested, dated, Samoan-centric, and fails to acknowledge the diverse differences in perspectives and cultures of each island.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

Rather than retreat to the digital closet of isolated being, these multiple viewpoints can help triangulate the viewer in relation to herself, the watchers and the watched. The scholarship of modern visibility has often wanted to be constrain the unpredictable effects of the networked visual event into clear, geometric parameters, whether derived from art historical formalism, panoptic surveillance or Lacan's gaze theory... This is the transient, transnational, transgendered way of seeing that visual culture seeks to define, describe and deconstruct with the transverse look or glance – not a gaze, there have been enough gazes already. (Mirzoeff, 2002, p. 17-18)

Shigeyuki Kihara and Greg Semu operate as 'multiples', shifting and adjusting through every art work. Both also engage with 'the gaze'. What excites me about their individual art practices is their positioning of the viewer and the utilization of the gaze in relation to subjectivity. Nicholas Mirzoeff introduces 'the transverse glance', a term that describes a state when you are working from Glissant's multiple views. Similar to Glissant's Creolization, the transverse glance resists a fixed locale, and relies on its own trans (cultural/sexual/social) nature to disestablish the many gazes (colonial/male) that occupy contemporary visual culture. Utilising this transverse glance means I do not have to rely on the performer being Samoan in order to discuss issues relevant to the Samoan diaspora. I am aware that the viewer will always read my being Samoan as an aspect of the work, but I can turn that around by requiring them to look at my work through a transcultural lens.

### 5.3 The Romantic Picturesque: Staging The Exotic and Transverse Viewing

Transculture and its accompanying transyness seem closer to Edouard Glissant's formulation of the archipelago, a series of connected islands. The virtue of the archipelago is that a series of very different entities can be connected (Mirzoeff, 2002, p. 18).

*The Romantic Picturesque* (2016) is a series of two video works that began as a study of the exotic from my perspective as a Samoan New Zealander living in Wellington. Positioning Europeans as the new objects of desire, I set up scenes which I shot for five to six minutes. These scenes featured a group of men or women performing acts of leisure in nature. The group of men posed at a fictional riverside campsite. The women sunbathed at a different riverside location. All were directed to relax. The aim was to demonstrate the absurdity of the westernized relationship (including my own) to natural landscapes and explore the transverse glance as a creative tool in my work.

The case for connection implies there has been disconnection. Few Samoans today would want to live as their ancestors did in the world of sacred forests and forest spirits as in the ancient proverb, 'we want the forest, yet fear the spirits' (Park, 2006, p. 29).

My research into the tourism imaginary has changed how I relate to the land and informed how I might access certain indigenous frameworks and practices (ie, aitu, Wendt's ghosts etc.). There seems to be an understanding (westernized at least) that indigenous cultures, like Samoa, have an affinity to the environment, a myth fuelled by the advertisement of holiday getaways. I am trying to return to the wild on my own terms, even though I don't know what the wild looks like quite yet, because my perception is skewed by the dirth of imagined imagery.



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

The problem for tourists was the same for painters: how to organise what was, in reality, an arc curving in front of you... Condensed and framed, in the moment of capture, it's miniaturised picture was a private possession (Park, 2006, p116).

Geoff Park discusses an arc when viewing 'nature' through painting is similar to looking at it as a tourist – both are simulations of an imagined space. Park's arc is a reference to 'The Prosenium Arch' as well as the 'Claude Glass', a tool that European explorers used to see new land (Park, 2006, p 116). I interpret the arc being a video frame or a projection screen used to view this tourist imaginary.

When I began researching the tourist imaginary I only associated it with photographic/cinematic practices, however painting practices have provided much of the material I have responded to in my work. Each video piece I have made for my MFA has been constructed as if I were painting it, rather staging it like a film or photoshoot. When discussing camera style and composition I began looking at Romantic European/New Zealand painters – Caspar David Friedrich's oil painting *Moon rising over the Sea* (1822) and a work by an unknown artist titled *Königsstuhl* (1890) were two pieces I relied on heavily.



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

### Camera/Composition

Friedrich's paintings originated in the Romantic period in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, a period heavily criticized for its dissemination of the tourist imaginary, employing techniques that tried to capture the sublime beauty of exotic backdrops. These very techniques became the subject for me to subvert in my videos. Friedrich's painting features figures in the landscape

sitting idly while they take in the scenery. This grouping of people, with two in the midground and another pair in the back ground, informed that way I positioned my performers.

*Königsstuhl's* (1890) color palette also is something I was interested in using. Its luscious greenery and grey stones resembles some of the New Zealand landscapes I observed growing up in Nelson. The lighting in *Königsstuhl* (1890) creates the perspective that it is always sunny in New Zealand, a hangover of imperial optimism that existed in paintings of the Romantic period. Both paintings depict the landscape as vast and the perspective seems to be endless. The distance of the subject (the sea and the cliff) from the artist is important to note.

This distancing reminds me of the ethnographic photography practices that Shigeyuki Kihara is interested in subverting. It is not only people who are subjected to the colonial gaze in the Pacific, it has also been applied to the very environment that the 'exotic subject' occupies. Thinking about 'ethnographic practices', I decided that each video would be categorised by gender. When looking at each moving image 'postcard' you can't help but feel like you are observing a documentary-style study of disenfranchised urbanites making a feeble attempt to reconnect with nature.

The postcard (landscape orientated) is a medium that I decided to reference when shooting these scenes. Interested in the 'vibrations' that moving images offer, the direction given to the performers was to only move slightly. During the shoot the action would halt, reaffirming the connection to the postcard as a medium. After these brief pauses the performers would move once more – a mechanism to remind the audience that they are alive. The scenery becomes a backdrop for this subtle performance to occur. The polished, cinematic quality of both works is the result of a conscious decision to amplify the 'romance' of each scene. Shooting in 4K resolution was the only way to achieve the effect of a pseudo-paradise that the viewer could escape to.

When it came to casting these videos I didn't want to hire professional actors and models, and instead sought out people who looked like they really might have come from the city to see some scenery. In contrast to my rationale when making *To A Beat*, in *The Romantic Picturesque* I wanted to work with European performers who might be similar to the audiences I would be showing this video to (at university, to friends etc.), so that I could

establish some form of familiarity with my audience. Ironically, I struggled with the casting call for 'white' people as it seemed uncouth, or hypocritical. Eventually I was able to realise that in order for me to make commentary on my relationship with my coloniser, I must have them present in my work – a question that came up in my marching girl video. It was important to remember that I was critiquing 'white culture' rather than 'white people'.

### **Transverse Viewing**

These works force the viewer to see it from my perspective. The viewer is asked to re-position themselves from their own 'Claude Glass' to inhabit my point of view. In the process, the viewer is now aware that they are viewing themselves viewing (tongue twister I know). This is the very definition Mierzhoff's transverse viewing in full effect. No matter what background the viewer is from they now are asking "what does Chris see?", making them look through a transcultural lens.

I am not really that happy with the 'Mens' video, only because the camera needed to be further away, also some of the men were overexaggerating their performances. The video with the 'ladies' was successful as it does everything I want it to do and more! It was nuanced with little digs at colonialism, from the red kimono on my heroine (a reference to orientalism) to the smoking and sipping on gin and tonic – re-iterating the absurdity of leisure within landscapes. Albeit the success of the video work, I want to keep searching for another mode of making – another island. In terms if this was the Hyphen space I was looking for - I don't think its this place.

"I can use the camera to make a place or landscape; the camera to a greater extent projects rather than 'take in' or reproduces. The Camera, or, rather the eye, produces the impression of the place" (Eliasson, 2004, p16)

Olafur Eliason's description about being a photographer begs the question – what am I projecting onto the landscape? What is the impression left behind? So far I have not discussed any historical or site information and I wondered about the cultural aspects behind the river itself (was shot in Upper Hutt along the Hutt River). This was never an issue I wanted to discuss in my work, like a tour guide, I am merely pointing at the site and saying 'look how beautiful'. This distancing from any site specificity is important, the tourism

imaginary relies on the dissolution of the reality of that site – this includes the Tangata Whenua who may occupy the land. I see the landscape as a ‘set’ for these performances, stemming from my background in Art Direction. Realising that its not important for the landscape to be a physical space or real for that matter.

Another aspect is that the ‘documentary realism’ aesthetic has always been in my work. At this point in my research I wanted to turn the dial up on ‘the saturation’ levels. In the next chapter I will be discussing another series of works that begins to look at digital spaces as a possible hyphen space.

#### **5.4 Relax, Honey, Rinse: The Greenscreen Collage**

“I don’t see the picturesque as real,  
a friend of mine said when I told her that” (Park, G, 2006, p.150)

Authenticity of place or experience has never been key aspect in my research in terms of how I view these postcards. I am more interested in my artificial relationship with land and in this next project I explore digital landscapes using greenscreen effects and sourced landscapes from ‘Microsoft screensavers’. *Relax, Honey, Rinse (2016)* is a series of three video works that work in a triptych. Diverting from the aims of the *The Romantic Picturesque (2016)* I aim to produce postcards that begin to look at collage as new form of making.

“Since the period of early modernism, artists have thematised the processes of Juxtaposition, collage, montage, bricolage and displacement...there have been concerted efforts to grasp the expression of both mobility and attachment in art”

(Papastergiadis, 2004, p. 3)

The reason I have started to look at collage was the very act of collage has a rich history in Postcolonial art and expressing hybridity. I think stemming from the very act of re-constructing peoples whakapapa, especially when concerned with diasporic artists, repiecing lost histories. Papastergiadis states that collage can outline where you are going and where you have been, in an attempt to show mobility.



Fig. 20, 21, 22 (in sequence)

Lisa Reihana's *In Pursuit Of Venus [infected]* (2015), is a Panoramic video animation based upon Joseph Dufour's *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* (1804), which was a twenty panel scenic wallpaper, depicting tales of Captain Cook's voyage to the exotic Pacific. This large video installation re-stages these moments in Pacific history, and setting them in animated backdrop. The setting is highly stylized (digitally painted) and doesn't attempt to be realistic, the landscape is presented as unnatural, making the viewer aware that this is an imaginary. Reihana's re-imagining of these stories is constructed through layering of performances and placed compositionally amongst this faux landscape. There are times when the performances overlap and are performed simultaneously, this layering of performances and Faux backdrops become 'tools' for creating my very own collages.



Fig. 23

*Relax* - This particular video is inspired by my Uncle's birthday postcard. Something I had always wanted to re-create because I have no idea where its located. Only relying on my own recollection, this tourist imaginary depicts this pseudo-paradise that I had always wanted to be transported to.

*Honey* – Depicts a hetero-normative couple, duplicated, waltzing at a beautiful lake. Each duplicate is timed differently but ultimately they are the same and is a reference to the homogenized experience of this classical relationship.

*Rinse* – Can the digital landscape be a spiritual experience? This video was a depiction of a fake ritual one based on Mary Magdeleine's story in the bible of Jesus washing her feet. An attempt to cleanse the forest from evil spirits.

*Relax, Honey, Rinse (2016)* produces a rich depiction of three specific holiday destinations. The sunny paradise, the tranquil lake and the spiritual forest, all destinations that I have interjected with my performances. Each performance does not effect the landscape and visa-versa, which is in contrast with the *Romantic Picturesque (2016)* where the performers were in responding to their surroundings in real time. The juxtaposition of the background and the performers was my artistic intervention. My intention was not trying to trick the viewer into believing that image is real. Making a conscious decision not to smoothen the lines that seperated the two. In the hopes that the viewer can see that process of making this imaginary was as artificial as my relationship to 'nature'.

The absence of a specific sight creates a further seperation to any specific culture or location, let alone Samoa. That is where my videos differ from Reihana's *In Pursuit of Venus (2015)*, she specifically is referencing a Pacific landscape a site in which these events in history unfold. Where I was sourcing generic landscapes from screensaver online. The performances were based on memories from my childhood, where Reihana was recollecting events that has been outlined in history books. The generic background becomes problematic when trying to position my viewers when attempting to apply the transverse glance. My connection to New Zealand, Samoa, or anywhere has been severed and as a viewer this can confuse where they are viewing from. I have trouble navigating in this area, because I am unsure if I should still use some cultural reference within these videos. But if I do that, then am I performing my own culture? Or have I rendereed that connection obselete?This still needs some working around it, which will be probably after my Masters.

### **The Triptych**

Sasha Huber's research practice looks at decolonizing as a method of making. Responding to monuments and theories created from Swiss American geologist/biologist Louis Agassiz – famous for the term Polygenism (that all races are unequal). In her series *Louis Agassiz Down Under (2015)* exhibition she displayed *Agassiz: The Mixed Traces Series. Somatological Triptych of Sasha Huber I-IV (2015)*. A series of four photographs that were self –portraits within landscapes around the world. Huber's naked " body claims the space of the creolized subject", in reference to her Haitian and Swiss heritage (Cheddie, 2013). The Triptych becomes a way for me to present these works, emphasizing their relationship to one

another. Within these many scenes the viewer begins to sense my strained connection to nature, finding solace in the strange and surreal representations in my tourist imaginary.



Fig. 24

### The Hyphen A Digital Space

These greenscreen videos demonstrate the absurdity of ‘holiday destinations’ but the hyphen is still not present. Visiting these generic landscapes that don’t inhabit people, ideas, or family – is still limited to being a backdrop. Failing to illustrate cultural specifics of my own diasporic practice. Collaging has allowed me to think of a new way of exploring the Hyphen. Rather than trying to find the hyphen space – I need to construct it and make it my own, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

## 6 Into the Arms of My Coloniser: Constructing the Hyphen

*Sleeping with Your Coloniser: When Love Takes You Into The Arms Of The White Man* is an article from a lifestyle blog I found online. The article is centred around the author's Natalie Nichols experience around dating a white man. Her description of the guilt felt of loving her 'coloniser', as if it was something 'taboo' (Nichols, 2013). Seeking approval from family and the general African American community which she was very part of. Although this tale of woes was told through a 'Fifty Shades of Black' way, I find her desire for her 'coloniser' insightful material. This melodramatic account evokes the question about what's wrong with desiring 'whiteness' and is it really worthy of an article? Nichols felt so strong about this issue that the article describes moments when she would invite her caucasian partner to her family dinner. Where her father showed utter disdain for her chosen partner, to a point where he mocks Nichols and her Mother was close to disowning her. Ironically reminding me of a rather different conversation my Father and I had one morning about relationships and dating. He sat me down and asked if I was dating at the ripe old age of twelve (very inappropriately). Rolling my eyes I told him that I wasn't even thinking about it. He replied "You need to date a white girl, only because they have money". His advice was problematic in many ways, me being gay and also the fact it was completely inaccurate.

Another aspect the article highlights is the construction of a diasporic identity. I have encountered many views on this, from Robert Jahnke where he offers a solution by embracing an essentialist praxis and returning to whakapapa, to Nicholas Mierzhoff's call for transcultural engagement. There has been one area of exploration not ventured – the individual's desires. Throughout the various discourses around postcolonialism there is little mention that you can construct your own identity. It's always external forces – Geneological, geographical, historical, political – that inform your identity. Question then changing from Who am I? to Who I want to be? Maybe within Glissant's reading of identity - which multiples do I want to be? Desire is the drive behind my final series of works *Into The Arms of My Coloniser*, where I began to create my own hyphen space upon sand – referencing an autobiographical recount of peoples, songs, images and gestures. Each of the seven chapters conjures 'multiples' that exist within this one diasporic artist. The malleable nature of sand and its sense of infinite possibility, makes transformation effortless and a potent stage for performance. Rather than searching/reclaiming the Hyphen, I have decided to construct my own hyphen.

Chapter 1: Miss Aretha Franklin, “If you can’t be with the one you love,  
love the one you’re with”



Fig. 25

This beginning chapter is a reference to storytelling, specifically my Fathers stories. In *The Romantic Picturesque (2016)* one of the comments I received about the work “Are you trying to tell a story?” especially regarding the performance of my ‘red heroine’. At first I wasn’t quite sure how to respond, but as time past I realised that my practice is in fact autobiographical, so of course there is some element of storytelling involved. I do recognise the hesitation within a fine arts based practice, to be in danger of being too literal when dealing with narrative. Within this work, narrative is related to memory and restaged through performance, my intentions were to be direct about the content, whilst trying not to be linear. Predictability is not a word I would use to describe these works, rather uncanny – both familiar and unfamiliar. As if they were archetypes that have been inherent in me all this time.

“Love the one your with” this chapter opens up numerous things in terms of my outlook on desire. Be with, seems to be the underlying aim of this exploration for the Hyphen. I wanted to be in a space working with people I can relate to, who argue, who sing, who cry and laugh about the work. I am not seeking for some sort of utopian paradise – just some form of relatability in our brokenness. The crew, the cast, the volleyball court, are things I love and it makes sense to incorporate them in these works. Love the one your with also implies to embrace all the multiple versions of yourself and others.

The camera angle has been lifted to give a sense of ‘looking in’ positioning the viewer to glance at different versions of myself. The site lines for the majority of the performers was the camera lens. This was aimed at seducing the viewer to be immersed in this space. The viewer in previous postcard works, were given total authority on the subjects they were viewing, because the performers were not looking at the camera. Similar to Kihara’s attempt to avert the gaze and regain the viewed subjects power. This is more apparent in the next chapter.

Chapter II: We are often the subject of intrigue and ridicule by our friends, family and general bystanders who feel the need to remark as loudly as possible, “You wouldn’t never catch me dating and kissing no white man!”



Fig. 26

My father told me once about his experiences as a LMS (London Missionary Serviceman). He would travel the world with other LMS and preach the word of God. Travelling to places like Hawaii, Egypt, Fiji, Australia and China (Hong Kong). He was known to embellish certain stories but I didn't mind. One story I always loved was his time in China. He was based in Hong Kong for the majority of his two years there, but once in a while, he would travel to Beijing. Because China was a communist state where it was illegal to practice religion, they needed a reason to enter the country. My father and his fellowship, decided to form a fake island cover band. Undercover they would book gigs at local restaurants whilst simultaneously smuggle bibles into Beijing. This band consisted of flares, guitars, afro's and moustaches, to make matters worse my father was the lead singer (totally tone deaf). They would sing Samoan songs and because the majority of the audience were Chinese, it didn't matter if they couldn't sing or that the audience couldn't understand. People were just amazed at the difference of culture on display.

Chapter II introduces my own fake band made up of gospel singers. They are singing pop sensation Selena Quintanilla-Pérez's hit *Como La Flor* (1992), which was popular in Samoa, in particular with my family. It was a regular song played at my family's garage parties with the Uncles and Aunties, similar to the Chinese patrons in my Father's story, I don't think anyone understood what the song meant. The song is about estranged love the title meaning "like a flower". This performance is juxtaposed with an oiled up muscle man. The two compete to seduce the viewer and it doesn't matter from what standing point (sexually, racially, politically), it is hard to figure out who is doing the better job. Both are extensions of my newly reconfigured 'dusky maidens', but not passively giving into viewers desires, more accurately, toying with the viewer. The title of the chapter echoes this playful courtship.

Chapter III: Yet, as I began to seriously consider leaving the playing  
field to settle down with my brown sugar boo,  
I found it was the brothers who were missing something



Fig. 27

Within any Hollywood story there needs to be a love interest and they were the perfect match to be my protagonists. Chapter III introduces a hetero normative couple, both European and beautiful, the male performer wearing a suit, the female performer wearing a long gown. Everything in this chapter was based upon a snow globe I had seen of a couple dancing. The performances and costuming were aimed to produce this effect. The waltz was performed in *Honey* from my earlier triptych's and I have used it again in this imaginary. The couple are focused on each others movements, removing any connection to anything outside of this waltz, creating a fragile glass sphere. A sphere that I find hard to penetrate, but if challenged, exposes the fractures within this artificial 'snow globe'.

I was always wondering if I was missing out on something because this story of two white people, conquering all odds for the sake of their love, is an all too familiar story in mainstream media. I do find there is beauty behind their fragility and when they are ready to converse I am open to the idea. Until then, I will be over by the band, whos' sole purpose is to complete this picture perfect imaginary . The song is a classic Beatles track *Because* (1969), performed in an acapella style, similar to the previous chapter. The use of these songs brings an issue throughout the work about copyright laws. The answer is this work is illegal. I say that proudly because the songs in this work is based on a personal relationship to all of these songs listed. Until I am arrested, and jailed, I will probably continue plagiarising songs for my works. It's not like anyone asked me permission, when Pākehā decided to culturally appropriate Samoan tattoos on their arms (In all fairness, I find it very attractive when people rock Samoan designs on their bodies – that's besides the point).

Chapter IV: Then there was my mother who had admonished me on more than one occasion as a kid growing up to stop thinking that I could act like those "white folks"



Fig. 28

The child struggling to carry the this oversized white bunny demonstrates my somewhat comical interactions with 'white fragility'. At high school I played in the school volleyball team and we would have breakfast at my captain's house. Nick (not real name) who came from a family of doctors (eventually became a doctor himself) would 'support' our team and me in particular. Nick's parents asked me if I needed help with anything, I would politely say I was okay, they would eventually give money to Nick saying 'make sure Chris gets something to eat as well'. This continued for a long time even though I was working a part time job, earning my own money. Both my parents and I would laugh and say "at least they are trying to help you?". Being a minority in a largely Pākehā society has to have some benefits, I'm just worried that if they find out that I am not the charity case they hope to invest in, it may burst the bubble that we all lived in.

Chapter IV is the middle point and its fitting that I expose the hyphen space (by itself) in its entirety for the first time. It acts as the anchor to make sense of the other chapters, revealing an unchartered island. The moment the child leaves the frame, the yucca reveals itself. This yucca helps me compose the picture, by having it placed in every frame, I start to centre the performances around this one focal point. The aim was to make it seem like everything grew out of this little tree, but there are times when its presence is lost. That is why this chapter is vital for the viewers' reading of the of the overall work.

The Hyphen space is presented with no reference to water, culture, or time – the sand reminds us that its a transitional space – meaning change is ahead.

**Chapter V: It doesn't have to be a white guy; I am imploring you to cross cultural barriers and date an African man, a Mexican man, yes, even an Asian man!**



**Fig. 29**

Lulu was a character I made up when I was a kid (loosely based on my mother). I would dream about her swanning through life drinking gin and tonic and playing solitaire. Lulu was a beautiful singer, who would attend the RSA talent shows to earn money. Her repertoire mainly consisted of pop songs and musical films like *Grease (1978)* and *Sound of Music (1965)*, wearing an amazing sprakly cocktail dress with large hoop earrings. She had two children and an estranged husband – who is still a mystery to this day.

Chapter V is an ode to Lulu for all those times she comforted me in my dream state. I have called upon the whole ensemble (minus the Father and the child) to partake in the celebration of her stardom. Each performer was tasked to outshine the other performers, what resulted was a visual/musical feast. Muscle men were asked to out muscle each other, The singers were asked to out 'Mariah Carey' each other, the couple were asked to not take notice of anything around them. All aspects are at full throttle, your eyes constantly divert across the screen, unable to keep up. This chapter is the climatic moment and refuses to downplay its position as a catalyst for release. For all the pain, loss and misunderstandings of being marginalized and/or being the marginalizer – here is my fuck you, shut up and have fun. You're welcome.

Chapter VI: If you know in your heart that you are a passionate, loving woman who brings some strong credentials to the table, why not try reaching out to the other side?



Fig. 30

The passing on of cultural traditions and songs when you're a child is sometimes met with open ears. Unfortunately I was not open, in fact I was reluctant to the whole idea. I think it was probably because I was a brat. Fortunately my subconscious was working overdrive and now I have an appreciation for knowing these cultural 'ornaments' – specifically the songs. The song *Tele I'a O Le Sami* is a Samoan nursery rhyme which talks about how there is plenty in love and nature. My Father would be so smug to realise that I reference these songs and stories as an adult, his frustration with my refusal to assimilate, like other nice Samoan boys, has been a constant battle for him.

Chapter VI illustrates the triad of Father, Mother and child. This little trinity is my reservoir, a space to replenish my energy. This chapter doubles as a natural pause in the work, to release some of the hype from the previous chapter, and a poignant reflective moment in the piece. My aim was to remind the viewer the Father and child is still a key element in this story. The 'Dusky Maidens' extract a lot of the attention on screen, but the Father and child performances are flawless. Non pretentious and unassuming. This is due to the fact that they are not trained actors and there is no way of controlling their actions – nor would I want them to.

Chapter VII: So many of us are looking for love, yet if it ain't Boris, Idris or Will Smith,  
we are not interested



Fig. 31

Working to the frame compositionally with all these components at my disposal is probably one of the biggest learning curves for me. I rarely work with a script and now I seem to solely work from my intuition. This is in stark contrast with my experience working in the film industry as an Art Director. Throughout *Into The Arms Of My Coloniser* I have been surprised by the combinations of gestures, costumes, performers and props. Although I recycled and isolated certain components, each time it felt new. A methodology I will probably work with in the future.

Chapter VII Lulu is back and now she is conjuring spirits both old and new. The lighting has changed, more limited and angled to highlight the different bodies. The song *Dark Moon* from Daniel Rae Costello calls this work to an end. The dance is the moment of liberation, no longer facing the her eyes to the camera, and in acknowledgement of 'Le Masina' (the moon). Here she summons the last bits of her energy reaching for enlightenment. She has lost her voice, but continues to perform. The others are relaxing around her maintaining the image, she refuses to be contained. The viewer is immersed concluding by fading in to the black from where the hyphen was birthed.

## 7 Upon Arrival: Conclusion

For me, the arrival is the moment when all the components of humanity – not just the African ones – consent to the idea that it is possible to be one and multiple at the same time; that you can be yourself and the Other; that you can be same and different (Glissant, 2009, p. 59).

Glissant highlights an end point that I feel can never be reached. Through the act of trying to search for this arrival point, we have forgotten that it is not a destination, rather, an ongoing negotiation. Travelling through the ocean, to the various islands and perspectives, which people are positioned across from. Rather than projecting my own ideas onto each shore, I have started to engage with each of the voices, revealing that the Other I once viewed was me all along. I no longer consider the Other in opposition to me, rather an intrinsic part of my own make-up. Re-instating an observation I had made about Gómez-Peña's crossing borders: *once we understand the mental borders that restrict us from expression (racism, loss, pain), we can begin to embrace our 'configurations'*.

This understanding led to the body of work attempting to position myself and the viewer outside of the binaries we occupy, when we try to relate to each other. Constantly re-organising and negotiating different strategies to see the world from my point of view. I **have accepted my colonizer with open arms**, through my video works opening up a discussion about my disconnection. I offer my newly constructed hyphen space as a sharing space, for our multiples to converse.

Recalling Halbstrom's provocation to 'return to the wild', I feel it is appropriate to ask if we have arrived yet? Halbstrom's (and Moten and Harney's) call to the Undercommons is not a revolt against where we came from, rather a call to return 'home'. The wild belongs to the spirits and may we lay them to rest. Disconnection no longer drives the conversation, let us begin the healing process by at least creating the most human thing we can do for one another – to empathise and visualize the other.

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