An analysis of Samoan reaction to
*The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*’s Fāgogo defining
Samoan identity.

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Abstract

The Orator (O Le Tulafale) was promoted as the first Samoan language film shot in Samoa with a Samoan cast and crew. Written and directed by Samoan filmmaker Tusi Tamasese, the film succeeded at several of the movie industry’s prestigious festivals. The Orator (O Le Tulafale) is about an outcast family of a dwarf (Saili), his wife and her teenage daughter. As the main protagonist, Saili battles to overcome his fears to become a chief to save his family and land. The film’s themes are courage, love, honour, as well as hypocrisy, violence, and discrimination. A backlash by Samoans was predicted; however, the opposite occurred. This raised the following questions: first, what is it about the film causing this reaction? It is a 106-minute film shot in Samoa about Samoans and the Samoan culture. Despite promotional claims about the film, there have been Samoan-produced films in Samoa. Secondly, to what are Samoans really responding? Is it 1) just to the film because it is about Samoa, or 2) are they responding to themselves, and how they reacted during the act of watching the film? This implies levels of reactions in the act of watching, and examining the dominant level of response is important. To explore this, the Samoan story telling technique of Fāgogo was used to analyse the film’s narration and narrative techniques. R. Allen’s (1993, 1997) concept of projected illusion was employed to discuss the relationship between Samoans and the film developed during the act of watching. An examination of the term Samoan and a description of the framework of Fa’a Samoa (Samoan culture) were provided. Also included were discussions of memory and its impact on Samoan cultural identity. The analysis indicated that The Orator (O Le Tulafale) acted as a memory prompt through which Samoans recalled memories confirming and defining cultural bonds. These memories constituted the essence of being Samoan. These memories were awakened, and shared as oral histories as fāgogo. The receivers appeared to interpret the shared memories to create their own memories and stories to suit their contexts, according to Facebook postings. An interpretation is that the organic sharing of memories as fāgogo created a global definition of Samoan that Samoans internationally claimed.

Key Words: Culture, Film, Identity, Memory, Samoan.
Acknowledgements

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To my husband Peter who watched The Orator (O Le Tulafale) with me, and who experienced the fāgogo effect resulting from this film. Thank you for your patience, for staying up at nights with me to keep me company with your stories and jokes, and for making the endless cups of coffee.

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# Glossary of Samoan Terms

The alphabetical order of this glossary follows the Samoan alphabet order: a, e, i, o, u, f, g, l, m, n, p, s, t, v, h, k, r.

The use of the macron and glottal stop as well as word spelling follow that suggested in G.B. Milner’s Samoan dictionary (1966/2012). The exceptions are when these words are used in quotations, which do not necessarily use diacritics or have spelling variations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agaga</td>
<td>Spirit/soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>`Āiga</td>
<td>Family (immediate/extended)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aitu</td>
<td>Ghost/spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alofa</td>
<td>love/compassion/care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atua</td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>`ava</td>
<td>Also known as kava. `Ava is a drink made from water and the ground root of the piper methysticum plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>`ava ceremony</td>
<td>A complex ceremonial ritual. In brief, the <code>ava drink is prepared, during a chief council, in a tanoa (carved short legged </code>ava bowl) by the taupou (a young woman chosen as the village virgin, usually a matai’s daughter). After the <code>ava is mixed, the tautu</code>ava or cup bearer (a young man from the aumaga or group of young men in the village, usually matai candidates) presents the cup of `ava to the chiefs to drink. This elaborate ceremony marks important events such as the bestowal of a title.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fa`aaloalo</td>
<td>Mutual respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fa`a matai</td>
<td>Way of the chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fa`a Samoa</td>
<td>Way of Samoa (Samoan culture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fa`asino</td>
<td>To point towards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fa`asinomaga</td>
<td>Identity, your place in <code>āiga, nu</code>u (village), and society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fāgogo</td>
<td>Story telling/story. Literal translation is stories of the night.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faitala</td>
<td>Gossip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanua</td>
<td>Refers to the land and its content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanua tapu</td>
<td>Refers to the sacredness of the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feagaiga</td>
<td>Covenant between brothers and sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe`au</td>
<td>Message (Other meanings are errand, business, affair, commission thing to be done.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fefiloi</td>
<td>Mix/Blend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fono</td>
<td>Meeting, committee, council (for example council/meeting of chiefs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘ie toga
Finely hand woven/platted ceremonial mat made from strips of pandanus leaves

Ifo
Bow down, restrain, give in, surrender

Ifoga
A ceremony where an offender and his relatives seek forgiveness from the injured party.

Lāuga
Oratory Speech

Le’opaō¹
Strong voice, loud voice

Leo
Voice

Leo mālie
Harmony

Loto mālie
Satisfaction (of the soul)

Maga
To divide into two

Mama
Food for young children

Mamalu
Dignity, majesty

Mana
Dignity/Honour/Pride/Prestige

Matai
Titled head of a Samoan extended family (chief)

Mātou
We (exclusive)

Nu’u
Village

Pālagi (also papālagi)
White man, European, foreign, (Western)

Pa’ō
Noise

Poto¹
Smart or intelligent

Pule
Authority

Sa’ili¹
To search

Su’i
Sew/weave

Su’ifefiloi
Hand-weaving technique

Tagaloalagi
Abbreviated to Tagaloa: Founding ancestor of Samoa and Samoans. Also Known as God of Creation in Polynesian legends

Tama’āiga
Clans with Paramount Chiefs

Tama’ita’i
Female heirs and carriers of family inheritance

¹ The correct spelling of sa’ili, le’opaō, poto, va’aiga are indicated here. They function as nouns, verbs, or adjectives. In The Orator (O Le Tulafale), these words are character names. When naming the characters, I chose to follow the spelling style used in the film cast credits, official public relations material and official website, namely Saili, Leopao, Poto and Vaiga. When using these words for purposes other than naming the characters, for instance to explain their meaning, I use the correct spelling.
Tapu  
Sacred/forbidden

Tātou  
We (inclusive)

Tautua  
In general terms, this word means service. In the context of the matai system, Milner’s Samoan dictionary (1966/2012) noted that untitled men and dependents serve their chief. As a noun, tautua means servant. Authority is achieved through service, namely, the way to become a matai is to faithfully serve a matai.

Tausi  
Wife of an Orator

To’amalie  
Confidence in the knowledge and understanding of one’s place in the fa’asinomaga

Tofì  
Designation/apportion

Tulafale  
Orator Chief (Speaking Chief)

Tusitala  
Storyteller

Vā  
Space

Va’aiga¹  
View, sight, What was seen

Vā Tapuia  
Sacred space. Tupua Tamasese in his 2007 speech, Bio-ethics and the Samoan Indigenous Reference at the UNESCO Bio-ethics Conference in Samoa explained, “Vā tapuia, includes the term tapu. The term literally refers to the sacred (tapi-ia) relationship (vā) between man and all things, animate and inanimate”

Vānimonimo  
Sky. The prefix vā is used before certain word bases to refer to the distance or position of two people, places, or things in relation to each other, or to their relationships. In this paper, this word can refer to the expanse above the earth or to sky.

Phrases

‘O ai a’u?  
Who am I?

Pala ma’a ae le pala upu  
Stones rot but not words

Tupu’e lagona ma le mafaufau  
Enjoy an enriched imagined and spiritual world
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

It all began late September 2012 with a group email I received from New Zealand promoting limited screenings of a Samoan language film. According to the email, *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* was to be shown at the Rialto in Dunedin, and that the film had successfully participated in the prestigious 2011 Venice Film Festival. Up until I received the email, I had not heard or seen any information about this film. The email sparked my curiosity, and it prompted a search to know more about *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*.

*The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* screened at the 68th Venice International Film Festival held from 6 August to 10 September 2011. The festival is one of the oldest and most important events in the film industry. Other prestigious festivals include Cannes, Berlin, Edinburgh, Toronto, and Sundance. At Venice, *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* received a special mention and won two awards (New Zealand Film Commission, 2012, p. 7). Later, the film successfully screened at other prestigious festivals such as Sundance (New Zealand Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2011b). Furthermore, the film became New Zealand’s first ever submission for selection for The American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ 2012 Award for Best Foreign Film (New Zealand Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2011a).

*The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* was written and directed by Tusi Tamasese2 who was born in Samoa, and then moved to New Zealand when 18 years old. Tamasese is a descendant of the high chief-based clan of Tupua Tamasese, which So’o (2000) explained is one of Samoa’s four tama’āiga or paramount chiefs. *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* was promoted as the first Samoan language film

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2 Hereafter referred to as Tamasese. This is to avoid confusion with his relative Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi, also mentioned in this paper.
The story of *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* takes place in a small village in Samoa, and revolves around a dwarf called Saili. He is a poor taro farmer living with his wife Vaaiga and her teenage daughter Litia. At first, Saili is a vulnerable man living a shadow of a life filled with ridicule from other villagers and underestimation by the village’s head *matai* (chief). Saili is the son of a *matai*, but, due to his diminutive size, he feels inadequate in receiving and bearing the responsibility of a title. His lack of self-worth jeopardises his family and his land as exemplified by an on-going conflict with other villagers farming his land. Saili’s wife Vaaiga comes from a wealthy and influential family, but she was banished from her home village. Seventeen years ago, Vaaiga fell pregnant as a single woman, and her family cast her out. Since then, her family had been living in shame because of her. One day, her brother Poto unexpectedly visited her to convince her to leave Saili and return to her village. Poto believes his dead parents have reached beyond their graves and cursed him. He thinks Vaaiga is the reason for the curse and that only way of lifting it from him is for her to return to her home village. Vaaiga’s daughter Litia is 17 years old and is still in school. Litia is having an affair with a local married man and she becomes pregnant. As individuals, and as a family, Saili, Vaaiga, and Litia are outcast and have no social standing in their village. Various opposing forces within and outside the village threaten this family. To protect his family and land, Saili must overcome his fears, his disability, and the prejudices of others to become a *tulafale* (orator chief).
1.2 Critical Response to Film

Critical reviews of the film were overall positive. For example in *Variety*, Felperin (2011) described *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* as a film providing cultural insight into the Samoan way of life from the perspective of one belonging to the culture. Felperin explained that *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* balanced cultural insights with storytelling, which produced a story with universal appeal to make the exotic comprehensible.

Lehmann (2011) for *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote that Tamasese’s film was a “blueprint for a Samoan style [of filmmaking]…there is clearly much symbolism at play, adding to the aura of folktale” (para. 8). Along the same themes, *Onfilm* reviewer Helen Martin (2011) praised the film for its “authenticity [which] gives it an almost documentary feel” (para. 4). In the *West Australian* newspaper, Banks (2012) gave this film relevance to an Australian audience by comparing the Samoan and Aborigine cultures for similarities such as their “sense of isolation, rituals peculiar to the place and the slowness of life itself” (para. 6). He wrote that Samoan communities like Aboriginal communities are “riven by family tensions and tribal rivalries” (Banks, 2012, para. 7).

Generally, reviews by European, American, Australian, and New Zealand writers (for mainly European, American, Australian, and New Zealand readers) followed the same themes illustrated by the reviews above. In one way or another, reviews of *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* placed the Samoan culture within Western cultural and social contexts. This allowed outsiders to the Samoan culture to comprehend the more exotic and/or unknown aspects of the culture (Felperin, 2011). This begged the question: do reviews written by Samoans working in the media differ. *The

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3 *Variety* is a renown American weekly entertainment trade magazine founded in 1905.
4 *The Hollywood Reporter* is an American daily magazine. First published in 1930, this magazine caters to the entertainment trade and consumer audiences.
5 *Onfilm* is New Zealand’s screen-production industry magazine.
Samoan Observer, a publication in Samoa, reviewed the film’s premier screening in Samoa’s capital city, Apia. In The Samoan Observer, Luamanu’s (2011) article O Le Tulafale wows Samoan audience was less about the qualities of the movie, and more a review of the bilateral relationship between New Zealand and Samoa. Through quotations from dignitaries attending the premier, Luamanu’s article illustrated a bilateral relationship between equals. Yet, the economic and political reality is that of New Zealand as benefactor and Samoa as the beneficiary.

Samoan journalist Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson (2011) tackled the film’s portrayal of violence and discrimination head-on in her review for The New Zealand Herald. She wrote that it was “the best Samoan film ever made...The Orator makes no pretence, it doesn’t make the Samoan culture look beautiful and admirable” (para. 10-11). Lagipoiva Jackson explained that the film accurately depicted the realities of life in Samoa. Life was beautiful and laidback, but it was also ugly, violent, discriminatory, and hypocritical. She wrote that she found it painful at times to watch the film because it had gathered “all the sad truths about the Samoan culture” (para. 8). For Lagipoiva Jackson, The Orator (O Le Tulafale) was not an intrinsic study but a reality check.

From a different perspective, reviews by Pacific Island academics in one way or another emphasised the holistic effect the film had on Samoans. Henderson (2012) regarded the film as a cultural space permitting and facilitating multi-layered, cross-cultural and cross-generational conversations. Kihleng and Teaiwa (2012) wrote of the pride of Samoans as a pride that questions and confirms identity and representation. McFarland-Tautau and Galumalemana Hunkin (2012) praised the film for using the Samoan language, which was essential in representing both the ideal and real world of Samoa.

Nevertheless, what did Samoans in general think? The best way of gauging the opinions of Samoans was through social media of which the most prolific at the time of writing this paper was
Facebook. The producers of *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* created a Facebook page in February 2011, and Samoans worldwide were praising the Samoan language film before it was officially released for public viewing. Facebook comments ranged from pride in being Samoan and of the Samoan culture to accounts of memories of Samoa. There were postings expressing longing to return home as well as longing to reunite with lost friends and relatives. Other comments described the need for young Samoans to watch the film to learn about the Samoan culture. In addition, Samoans formed links with other Samoans living in different countries.

It was in this context that I watched *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*. My reaction was ambivalent; I was not sure if I liked or disliked the movie. The film’s official website (theoratorfilm.co.nz) described *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* as being about “courage, forgiveness, and love”. Yet to show these themes, the film openly portrayed brutal and unjust aspects of *Fa’a Samoa* (Samoan culture) through events of hypocrisy, violence, and cowardness. This was a bold move for Tamasese considering that he comes from a prestigious Samoan clan.

Writing about the premier screening in Apia, *The New Zealand Herald’s* online edition predicted that “the [Samoan] audience will be somewhat more fearsome than the world’s critics, who saw it (and were enthusiastic) at its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival” (New Zealand Herald, 2011, para. 1). Lagipoiva Jackson (2011) wrote, “Samoans will be the first to deny the accuracy of the film” (para. 17). In expanding this she explained, “What was portrayed [in the film] are things that happen in the Samoan culture that are not necessarily talked about” (para. 21). Part of the film’s aim was to draw out “the violence, the hatred, the slanted hierarchy and ultimately the discriminating nature of our people” (Lagipoiva Jackson, 2011, para. 11).

Tamasese, it appeared, also expected some backlash. At his film’s press conference in Venice, Tamasese said, “we are not all perfect and those flaws might bring up criticism” (Tamasese, 2011).
At the time of writing this paper, the film’s official Facebook page counted over 9,000 comments from Samoans all over the world. In the Facebook discussion threads there was an absence of complaints of the film’s no-holds-barred portrayal of Samoans, particularly since this was what the world saw.

1.3 Research Issue

An obvious question is why the absence of backlash from the Samoan global community? However, this is of secondary importance. In order to understand this absence, an examination of the relationship between Samoans and The Orator O Le Tulafale is necessary. A brief review of comments on the film’s Facebook page revealed a phenomenal positive reaction from Samoans across the world. Posted comments were stories of elderly Samoans who had never been to a movie theatre suddenly feeling the need to see the film, Samoans watching the film as ‘āiga (family), Samoans telling stories of past lives and experiences in Samoa while watching the film, and Samoans discussing the values of Fa’a Samoa (Samoan culture). There is more happening than Samoans watching the film purely on the basis that it is a film about Samoa.

After watching the The Orator (O Le Tulafale), I felt that the more pertinent questions were first, what is it about the film causing this global Samoan reaction? It is a 106-minute film shot in Samoa about Samoans and the Samoan culture. Despite producers’ claims of the film being the first Samoan language film shot in Samoa and having a Samoan cast and crew, there have been films locally produced in Samoa before The Orator (O Le Tulafale). Second, what are Samoans really responding to is it 1) just to the film because it is about Samoa?, or 2) are they responding to themselves and how they reacted during the act of watching the film? This may seem as if I was “splitting hairs” and that there is no difference between these two points. A criticism could be that I am focusing on a single point and not two. Nevertheless, the implication is that there are levels of reaction while watching a film. The first point implies reactions from the mere act of watching.
This is a primary response. The second implies an organic after effect. It looks at the spectator him/herself. The focus is on actions generated by a spectator’s response originating from the act of watching; in other words, secondary reactions resulting from primary reactions.

1.4 Research Aim

The aim is to explore and analyse how The Orator (O Le Tulafale) foments the above-mentioned reactions of Samoan spectators. This goes beyond superficial views of the film as being either a good or bad form of entertainment containing either a good or a bad story. The reactions of Samoans included discussions: on the essence of being Samoan (Samoanness), of Fa’a Samoa, of what the film can teach young Samoans, and of cultural identity and pride. It appears that the common facilitator for such discussions were the memories prompted during the act of watching the film and then told as stories.

To analyse this issue, I employ 1) the Samoan oral story telling technique of Fāgogo to understand the film’s narration and narrative techniques, and 2) R. Allen’s (1993, 1997) concept of projected illusion to discuss critically the relationship Samoans developed with the film while watching it.

1.5 Research significance

This will be one of the first papers to analyse The Orator (O Le Tulafale). Many feature films of Samoans focused on the cultural identity of Samoan immigrants. This created a space for Samoans for self-representation and expression, and the Samoan culture became a location of resistance and cultural affirmation. However, this space was placed within the context of Samoans as ethnic minorities in countries with dominant Pålägi (white/European, foreign, western) cultures. The
difference with *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* is that this is a film about Samoans and the Samoan culture in Samoa as opposed to Samoans and their culture in destination immigrant countries.

### 1.6 Research Limitation

References to Facebook comments from Samoans in this paper imply that this research will analyse and examine the Samoan culture and identity within a transcultural context as well as the impact of social media on cultural identity formation. These areas demand in-depth and broad analysis, and they are beyond the limited scope of this paper.

My research is only the first stage. The approach I have taken, which I consider an important step, is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* and its relationship with Samoan communities. The phenomenal Samoan response to the film, as illustrated on the film’s Facebook page, sparked my interest. It is this perspective that frames this initial research.
Chapter 2 ‘O tātou o le Samoa /We are Samoan

2.1 Introduction

The term Samoan has different meanings to different people. To illustrate this, I have called this chapter O tātou o le Samoa (We are Samoan) which without any immediate context is an ambiguous phrase. In the Samoan language, the first person plural pronoun “we” can be exclusive (mātou) because it excludes the person being addressed, or it can be inclusive (tātou) as it involves all parties. Deciding the inclusivity or exclusivity of “we” depends on how the term Samoan is defined in a particular situation. An implication is that defining the term Samoan is a fluid, contextual act. On one hand, a definition can be denotative. On the other hand, the term Samoan is often loaded with arbitrary connotative meanings. For example, are being full-blooded and/or fluently speaking the Samoan language criteria for being Samoan? Other examples could be does one have to be born in Samoa to be called Samoan, can one be called “un-Samoan” or “not Samoan enough”, or can one be called Samoan because he/she is of Samoan descent and therefore “feels” Samoan? Answers to these types of questions reveal and affect the relationship a person has with the Samoan culture.

This chapter discusses how the term Samoan is used in this paper. It also provides an overview of the values of Fa’a Samoa. The concept of cultural memory and its role on identity formation are also discussed. Lastly, the Samoan story telling technique of fāgogo is explained, as it is the main method of analysis of The Orator (O Le Tulafale).

2.2 Definition of Samoan

Gray (2001) explained that people claim membership with an ethnic group based on identification with a group or on a sense of belonging to that group. Mulitao-Lauta (as cited in Gray, 2001, p. 6)
identified three groups of Pacific Islanders living in New Zealand. By specifying the general group of Pacific Islanders to Samoans, the first group are those who were born and raised in Samoa but moved to New Zealand as adults. Second are those who were born in Samoa but raised from childhood in New Zealand. Third are those who were born and raised in New Zealand. By replacing the term New Zealand with the phrase “destination immigration countries”, the three groups can be applied to Samoans living in other parts of the world. In addition to these groups is an implied fourth group: Samoans born and raised in Samoa.

Gray (2001) noted that many Samoans born and raised in destination immigration countries may not have visited Samoa, and they may have limited or no knowledge of the Samoan language. Anae (1998, p. 170) observed that for island-born Samoans speaking the Samoan language was a major factor in being Samoan. For those living in destination immigration countries, language was not regarded as the most important criteria. Many felt the language could be learnt.

Discussion on the role of language in ethnic identity is complex and cannot be extensively discussed within the scope of this paper. My point on this issue is that I interpret the learn-the-language-later approach as a means of helping Samoans in destination immigration countries deal with the problem of exclusivity resulting from language deficiency. Samoans outside Samoa create new criteria for being Samoan, which are inclusive and suitable to their contexts. As an example, Samoans in Australia, New Zealand, United States, and European Union countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden wrote many comments on The Orator (O Le Tulafale) Facebook page. Many wrote of their pride in being Samoan. This was despite their being unable to speak the Samoan language or having limited or no knowledge of the Samoan culture.

To feel Samoan is fa’asinomaga (identity). Fa’asino means to point towards. Maga means to divide into two. An example is a road dividing into a fork (Milner, 1966/2012, p. 120).
**Fa’asinomaga** literally means direction and/or right path. In the context of identity, former prime minister of Samoa and paramount chief Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi\(^6\) (2011) explained that *fa’asinomaga* is applied to general inheritance or designation. He added that a complementary factor with *fa’asinomaga* is *tofi*, which is “to apportion by cutting or breaking something into specific parts” (2011, p. 7). Searching for identity and belonging brings a seeker to cultural identity. Seekers are “apportioned a part of that inheritance that they can claim their own” (Tupua Tamasese, 2011, p. 8). The concepts of *tofi* and *fa’asinomaga* can only be felt in the hearts, minds, and souls of those who call themselves Samoans.

Samoans living in destination immigration countries fall into one of the three groups mentioned above. Regardless of the group they belong to, a common element Samoans share with each other and with island-born Samoans is that all belong to an ‘āiga. The ‘āiga for overseas Samoans “provide[s] the social basis for the occupation of urban space and symbolic resources for cultural regeneration” (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009, p. 63) as well as generate a “matrix of relationships that extend across national boundaries” (Macpherson & Macpherson, 2009, p. 86). Stewart-Withers (2011) claimed that to be Samoan is to understand *Fa’a Samoa*, but one needed to begin with the family. ‘Āiga is vital in teaching *Fa’a Samoa*. “All members of the family have a special place and an important part to play within the family” (Stewart–Withers, 2011, p. 50). In an ‘āiga, *fāgogo* (oral storytelling) is one of the means by which cultural heritage such as knowledge, ancestry, and a sense of the motherland of Samoa are taught.

Gray (2001) wrote that there are factors influencing a person’s choice of identity and, in particular, the ways Samoans define the term Samoan. These factors include a Samoan’s experience of various lifestyles, values, and education. I would add here that variations of these factors add

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\(^6\) Hereafter referred to as Tupua Tamasese. This is to avoid confusion with his relative Tusi Tamasese, referred to as Tamasese.
modern elements to the way ‘āiga teaches cultural heritage and how Fa’ā Samoa is lived. These factors usher in new influences that create new experiences within Fa’ā Samoa maintaining it as a living vibrant and enriched culture.

In one way or another, The Orator (O Le Tulafale) touched those who identified with and called themselves Samoans regardless of their social, economic, educational, and living contexts. Because the film originates from Samoa and focuses on Fa’ā Samoa in Samoa, the bond between Samoans living outside Samoa and the homeland of Samoa is amplified. In the film, the way the Samoan language is spoken, the interaction of the characters, the ideal and not-so-ideal way of living Fa’ā Samoa become lessons on being Samoan. This notion is discussed later in the paper, but it is worth mentioning how Samoans in Samoa become authoritative archetypes for Samoans who are one or two generational steps removed from the culture.

2.3 Fa’a Samoa: The Samoan culture

They were Samoan…None of them were commoners: they were all descendants of nobles…And because of this there was equality…Everybody was a somebody…The acquisition of titles whether real or imaginary, was an endless battle, a dynamic force in village life. (Wendt, A, 1973, p. 179)

The quotation from Wendt’s novel Sons for the Return Home (1973) broadly described the framework of Fa’a Samoa. He alluded to the culture’s physical symbols such as titles, chiefhood, and genealogy/ancestry. The primary aim of Tamasese was to make a Samoan film. During his film’s press conference at the 68th Venice Film Festival, Tamasese stated, “we had to see life in Samoa in the way that the culture sees it” (Tamasese, 2011). An interpretation of this is that one of the film’s characters is Fa’a Samoa.
2.3.1 The Invisible (The Values of Fa’a Samoa)

UNESCO’s (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defined intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills which are passed from one generation to the next through oral histories, performing arts, rituals, and craftsmanship. Fa’a Samoa comprises tangible and intangible elements as identified in the UNESCO convention. For these elements, Mulitao-Lauta (as cited in Stewart-Withers, 2011) used the terms visible and invisible, which carry the same meanings defined by UNESCO. Mulitao-Lauta’s terms are used in this paper.

Taule’alo (2005) explained that all elements of life in Samoa operate within the cultural framework of Fa’a Samoa (p. 60). Purcell-Sjölund (2012) wrote, “it is the framework in which family ties and relationships are expressed” (p. 2). Huffer and So’o (2005) noted that the values of Fa’a Samoa which guide social and kinship relationships are: recognition of authority or pule, the importance of giving and earning respect (fa’aaloalo), and dignity (mamalu) ensuring proper conduct in one’s interaction with others (p. 312). Stewart-Withers (2011) noted these aspects involve a person’s feelings, attitudes, knowledge, and spirituality (p. 49).

Fa’a Samoa teaches people to serve others. Tupua Tamasese (2009) explained that Fa’a Samoa is based on the principle of alofa (love/compassion). Relationships or acts not based on alofa are not of the Samoan culture. Alofa is the measuring tool determining whether a deed, word, or thought promotes peace, harmony and balance between relationships (Tupua Tuamasese, 2009, pp. 70 – 79). Alofa also fortifies the mana or dignity/honour and tapu (sacred, taboo) of Samoan people. Anae (1998) explained that alofa is one of many important values that underpin the Samoan culture (p. 163). Purcell-Sjölund (2012) wrote that the values of mana and tapu are essential in human relationships and these relationships are often described in oratory (p. 3). Tupua Tamasese (2007) added that tapu has a dualistic meaning and application as:
Tapu is taboo because it is sacred; it has a sacred essence. Tapu is the sacred essence which underpins man’s relations with all things; with the gods, the cosmos, environment, other men and self. (Exploring Tabu section, para. 1)

*Tapu* permeates all aspects of Samoan life such as land (*fenua*), village (*nu‘u*), and *matai*. *Tapu* and *mana* depend upon each other; one cannot be practised without the other. To understand *tapu* is to understand the dignity or *mana* of that *tapu*. To respect a *tapu* object or person is to show *mana* in the act of showing respect.

Anae (1998) explained that the relationship among values such as respect and love are maintained through understanding *Vā Tapuia* or sacred space (p. 163). This understanding also maintains the relationship between *mana* and *tapu*. According to Tupua Tamasese (2007), *Vā Tapuia* is a “sacred essence, a life force beyond human reckoning” (Exploring Tabu section, para. 6). This is a force linking the living to the dead, as well as to the physical and metaphysical environments. Tupua Tamasese (2007) explained that it is not a life force limited to heartbeats and breath: it includes genealogy. In other words, “the *va tapuia*, the sacred relations between all things extends in the Samoan indigenous reference to all things living or dead, where a genealogical relationship can be traced” (Tupua Tamasese, 2007, Exploring Tabu section, para. 4). Wendt (1999) defined *Vā* as “…space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together…the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships and the contexts change” (p. 402). Understanding *Vā Tapuia* requires the adoption of a holistic worldview leading to peace, harmony, and balance for those living *Fa’a Samoa*. The holistic worldview for Pacific peoples extends beyond the physical landmass of their islands and includes the:

…surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of
powerful gods and named stars and constellations…Their world was anything but tiny. (Hau’ofa, 1994, p. 152)

Vā Tapuia gives people a sense of place in such a large worldview. In addition, it provides a historical, cultural and genealogical context for Samoans in which to learn, interpret and practise their culture. Vā Tapuia is the means by which Samoans traverse both the physical and metaphysical. Peteru and Percival (2010) described the Samoan cosmological perspective as “highly philosophical” (p. 7). To imagine the Samoan cosmology is to grasp the philosophical nature of Fa’a Samoa. Examples of this are literal or nuanced references to the Samoan cosmology in oratory, proverbs, and stories. Navigating through these references takes “linguistic skills, customary knowledge and a steady hand” (ibid). Tupua Tamasese (2003) illustrated his method of navigating through the philosophy of Fa’a Samoa by asserting himself in the Samoan cosmology by stating:

I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share a “tofi” (an inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging. (p. 51)

2.3.2 The Visible (The Protocols of Fa’a Samoa)

As mentioned above, Fa’a Samoa comprises the invisible and visible components. This section focuses on visible manifestations of the invisible sacred values of Fa’a Samoa.

Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996) wrote that Fa’a Samoa is a system of chief-based rule working to guarantee the rights of members of an ‘āiga equal access to resources such as land. Because Fa’a
Samoa is governed by the fa’a matai (way of the chief), it is a system founded on the “division of power, status, labour, and expectations” (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996, p. 4). These expectations include rank and precedence. Understanding one’s place in an āiga, and, in a wider sense the Samoan cosmology, is to learn the protocols of Fa’a Samoa. These protocols are the tangible aspects of Fa’a Samoa. They are written and unwritten and all of them must be learnt. Stewart-Withers (2011) added that these protocols are the formal and conventional rules of the customs and practices of Samoa. (p. 49)

The obvious tangible elements of Fa’a Samoa are the structural institutions of fa’a matai such as the matai and the village fono (council of matai) governing a village. A matai is the trustee of an āiga’s land, and is the one who carries the honour and values of the āiga. As a trustee, the matai has an obligation to serve the āiga just as the āiga has an obligation to serve its matai. The fono and matai are guided by protocols and values; in other words the fa’a matai. Other structural institutions of Fa’a Samoa include the āiga, church, and rituals related to death, house-building, marriage as well as chants, dances, and songs (Stewart-Withers, 2011 & Tupua Tamasese, 2005).

2.4 Cultural Memory

The Orator (O le Tulafale) is cinematic art form, but it is also a site where “we see ourselves in our mind’s eye, sharing in this narrative [the film narrative]” (Mackey, 2010, p. 311). A result of this process is to recall memories. The act of remembering fulfils the “urge to reclaim, to look back” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 10). As manifestations of this urge, memories create an imaginary link to traditional roots. Memories become crossroads of the individual and culture as they are “[p]ersonal collections of mediated contents [and they] can be regarded as cultural acts and products of remembering” (Van Dijck, 2004, p. 262). Through such acts, a person can make sense of the world, the environment, and those around him/her.
This section discusses first the concept of intergroup memory and second intragroup memory. The focus here is on the latter because of its intertextuality, and its juxtaposition of collective memory and personal memory.

**2.4.1 Intergroup Memory**

Mageo (2001) categorised memory into intergroup and intragroup memories. Intergroup memory forms “histories that canonize a single descent line or a definite version…these are the grand chronicles recounted by authorities and all who aspire to authority” (p. 12). Examples are official commemorations, and grand epics of heroic figures. Intergroup memory bases itself on factual authenticity, and therefore emphasises the status quo of cultures and identity. Stories based on this type of memory become emblems of legitimating traditions to cement “hierarchical registry of rights, privileges, claims, and so on” (Mageo, 2001, p. 18).

Stories based on intergroup memory concern themselves with similarities of members within a cultural group. These similarities are used to establish cultural boundaries to separate members from non-members. Hylland Erikson (2002) stated that the contrast of being inside or outside a culture illustrates culture as invention and the tenuous relationship between culture as fact and as ideology. In the context of memory, Hylland Erikson (2002) claimed that identity was ambiguous and based on negotiable history and cultural context. Cultural identity and belonging are fluid. An interpretation here is that identity lies in the constant shifting and negotiation of cultural boundaries to include or exclude members in a group based on perceived cultural similarities to further that group’s political, social, and economic advantage. Intergroup memory confirms as well as negates identity. Examples of this are stories based on intergroup memory. These stories are, to a degree, fluid in nature as it depends on who is telling the story, where the story is told, and why it is told. The key factor is the authority of the storyteller.
Accuracy in telling a story based on intergroup memory is an element determining membership in a group. For example, there are many blogs and forum sites on the Samoan culture. One such example is a forum called Talofa Lava (http://42976.activeboard.com). There are many postings sharing information such as heroic epics, legends, myths, and so on. However, there are also many arguments concerning a person’s accuracy of these posted histories/stories. It appeared that inaccuracy compromised a storyteller’s authority and cultural membership. An example is a discussion thread\(^7\) on the legend of the creation of Samoa. Many versions of this legend were posted on the forum and each person who posted his/her version claimed a level of authority and knowledge of this legend. There were variations in the different versions, but these variations were superficial. The core elements of the legend remained the same. For those who considered themselves authorities on this legend, the versions were used to judge whether the writer was worthy enough to call himself/herself Samoan. For instance, if a version compromised Samoan pride and cultural values, then a writer’s version was deemed different, and the writer accused of misunderstanding or of not having enough knowledge of the Samoan culture and history. As mentioned above, the aim of intergroup memory is to maintain a culture’s status quo, and hierarchy.

**2.4.2 Intragroup Memory**

Intragroup memory is intertextual recollection as “when people hear a story or story fragment, they also hear echoes of other stories” (Mageo, 2001, p. 12). “Poetry, dance and other arts are technologies of intragroup memory” (Mageo, 2001, p. 13).

Each time intragroup memory is repeated as oral story it takes on symbolic meanings for the listener. Intragroup memory becomes “complex metaphors for elements of shared experience” (Mageo, 2001, p. 13). In this context, intragroup memory is told on two levels. On the first level,

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intragroup memory is told as simple remembrances; they are past occasions once lived. On the second level, remembrances become locations for reliving these past occasions. Unlike intergroup memory, which focuses on cultural similarity, intragroup memory focuses on difference. Mageo (2001) explained that intragroup memory is based on the necessity of cultural meaning in the past and how these meanings are corrupted or invalidated in the present. It is a type of memory which provokes cultural self-questioning, evaluation and retrospection of “all human experience before it has been subdued by this form of remembering” (p. 14).

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, intragroup memory is intertextual. Mageo (2001) stated that this type of memory “juxtaposes the echoes of collective memories with those of personal memories” (p. 15). The storytelling technique of ōāgogo is an example of this. Kristeva (1980) claimed that a narrative evolves from an already existent discourse. She wrote that a text was a “permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text” (p. 36). G. Allen (2000) explained that Kristeva’s point was that a text or narration was not created as being original. The text was formed from pre-existent texts (p. 35). Rodriguez and Fortier (2007) emphasised that “people carry a memory and that the memory itself is also a carrier” (p. 7). Therefore, intragroup memory as intertextual narrative assists people in (re)claiming, (re)creating, and (re)forming their identity. Intragroup memories, as carriers, contain echoes of recognisable codes permitting the listener to recreate his/her own memories. Sharing oral stories based on intragroup memory is organic and experienced through the positioning of collective memories alongside personal memories. The transition from memory to narrative is what Van Dijck (2004) called the act of memory or remembering (p. 263 – 263). This is not a spontaneous act but one that needs a prompt.

The act of memory is a chain of activities “inscribing or recording, interpreting, narrating, recalling etc – that may involve a number of memory products – pictures, albums, videos, and so on” (Van Dijck, 2004, p. 263). For Samoans watching the film *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*, the film
becomes a memory product that prompts the act of memory. The Samoan spectator interprets the film’s narration, and through that interpretation recalls similar experiences and then (re)tells and (re)lives those experiences. The film’s Facebook page has a number of comments describing people in the act of remembering while watching the movie. For example Albert William Scott (2011) commented “so my Nana was doing her own side commentaries while The Orator (O Le Tulafale) was on like [sic] we were watching at home....................lol #SoMuchLove”. Keone Johnny Ah Yek⁸ (2012) wrote, “Childhood remembered! The movie was filmed on the beautiful island of Upolu and Savai’i, Samoa (…)” and Liva Vaotuua (2011) posted “Such a beautiful Movie…The only negative feedback I have is that if you’re going to take relatives to this movie, ensure they’re not the type that loves running their own commentary(…)” ⁹

Van Dijck (2004) claimed that the act of remembering is an activity inscribed in time and often fostered by an urgency to save a sense of the present as the future’s past (p. 264). An interpretation here is that memory links the past to the present and to the future. Nevertheless, as an activity taking place in the present, the past is continuously modified and revised, even as it continues to shape the future.

As narratives, memories, whether they are intragroup or intergroup, become historical and cultural transit sites. Mageo (2001) explained as historical sites, memory schemas help movement between the past and present as well as link the past and present. Secondly, memory schemas are cultural sites in which negotiation and incorporation of cultural contacts are created. J. Turner and S. Falgout (2002) wrote that through the articulation of cultural memory,

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⁸ The quotations from The Orator (O Le Tulafale) were accessed 27 March 2012. Since then, Facebook introduced a number of updates including the layout of Facebook pages. Consequently, many comments, in particular comments uploaded by mobile phones, disappeared from the film’s Facebook page. One of those affected is Keone Johnny Ah Yek’s comment. His original posting was a mobile phone upload. When I first retrieved his comment in March 2012, it was available. When I accessed the film’s Facebook page again in June 2013, his comment disappeared.

⁹ Facebook quotations illustrate spoken language conventions. For example, the ellipsis (series of dots) indicates an omission of a word(s)/phrases from the original text quoted in written texts. In spoken communication, the ellipsis usually means “etc” or ”and so on”. Therefore (…) is used to indicate that the quotation has been truncated.
people, events, or locations become transformed into “cultural archetypes” (p. 109). Žižek (1989) stated that we readily identify with an image, or a cultural archetype similar to ourselves and which we would like to be. Examples are actors, and heroes. Rushdie (1991) explained that these archetypes are imagined, and that they form a sense of identification. Comments on the film’s Facebook page described the compassion and bravery of the main actor Saili. These qualities could then be transferred onto real people remembered for demonstrating attributes similar to those portrayed by the film’s character. For example, Sone Leiu (2011) wrote, “(...)Many lessons could be learned from this movie. Was hoping someone I saw it with today would get the main message behind the movie because it relates to him a lot and he is in a similar situation to Saili (...)

This research was prompted by the positive reactions of Samoans worldwide to The Orator (O Le Tulafale). Therefore, in this context memory, particularly intragroup memory is part of this global community. On the film’s Facebook page, the film’s co-producer Nathaniel Lees (2011) commented, “One of the most important JOYS of this story is that we as a global aiga, can share and touch each other through it”.

Clifford (1994) explained that the connection with a former home must be strong enough to avoid “erasure through the normalizing process of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing” (p. 310). This is the tension between the need of community members to maintain the longevity of memories of lives lived, of longing and separation, and of living in new and foreign countries (Clifford, 1994).

The use of personal or intragroup memory of Fa’a Samoa helps Samoans build links to Samoa. Intragroup memory is also essential in building links with the past and present situations for
Samoans. For Samoans outside of Samoa, their use of intragroup memory transcends past and present, helps strengthen an inclusive cultural identity based on similarities, and extends opportunities for Samoans living in foreign countries to be part of the Fa’a Samoa experience.

On the film’s Facebook page, Caroline Stowers (2011) noted “(...) Love the in depth insight into Samoan culture and heritage, it’s a great eye opener for not only non-Samoans but Samoans born abroad outside of the motherland.” In watching The Orator (O Le Tulafale), Samoans, through their recollections, create what Rushdie (1991) called an imaginary community. Their identity is forged and/or confirmed by the act of watching archetypes of Fa’a Samoa. Samoan spectators identify with the character they would like to be, and because the articulation of memory is performative, they become that imaginary ideal in the present. The other aspect is that Fa’a Samoa itself becomes an ideological archetype.

“Memory is a collective myth” (Rønning, 2009, p. 149) in that they are no longer personal. They become inheritances and are passed on through storytelling. As story narratives, the details of the memories are distorted (Rønning, 2009). The distortion occurs with each retelling because of the interpretation of each storyteller. People choose what to remember, when to remember, and how to narrate that memory. As narrative, memory is, for targeted audiences, a means of passing on knowledge, morals, and values as well as people’s experiences of the world to the next generation. Basically “narratives have trans-subjective truth value, however fuzzily defined it might be” (Rodriguez & Fortier, 2007, p. 26). According to Hinchman & Hinchman (as cited in Mageo, 2001), memory is a means by which a culture deals with the organisation and integration of its own understanding of reality. The memory becomes part of the collective cultural psyche.
2.5 Samoan Storytelling Framework of *Fāgogo*

*These talks occurred always in the bedroom. Our space, Where we spoke our language. Shared our thoughts. But mostly Tausi talking and me nodding. Like some new-found ritual we alone shared... Language binds us together. Language and memories...Memories. Secrets. Secrets that we alone know.*

(Figiel, S. 2003, pp. 142 & 165)

Samoan writer Sia Figiel used the oral tradition of *fāgogo* (storytelling/story) to weave the stories of women from two families and spanning two generations in Samoa, United States, and New Zealand in her novel *They Who Do Not Grieve* (2003). In this story Tausi prepares her physical space to tell [her]stories of her family to her granddaughter Alofa. Both are unhappy immigrants living in New Zealand, and Tausi’s *fāgogo* is a means by which both can escape their foreign and miserable confines and temporarily leave the biology of [their] bodies” (Figiel, 2003, p. 143) to fly along secret paths to freedom and happiness.

The Samoan culture has a strong oral tradition of passing on memory narratives, whether they are intergroup or intragroup memories. The aim is to teach and maintain traditions through *fāgogo*. In Figiel’s novel, Tausi always instructed Alofa to turn out the lights before telling a story. It is in the dark that Alofa “sees” birds of either dark or bright colours flying out of Tausi’s mouth. The birds symbolise the memories shared by Tausi. Purcell-Sjölund (2012) explained that *fāgogo* are “stories are handed down by word-of-mouth from one generation to the next, and they describe family origin, events, identity, and status or place within the aiga, village, or districts” (p. 4). Kolone Collins (2010) noted that *fāgogo* teaches the listener attitudes and behaviour that are acceptable and unacceptable in Samoan communities” (p.19).

According to Mallon (2002) *fāgogo* is comparable to a theatrical performance. *Fāgogo* is a space where the skill of the narrator can bring a story to life (p. 163). Tupua Tamasese (2003) explained
that *fāgogo* is a ritual of spiritual, emotional, physical, mental and cultural nurturance. Through listening, a person is brought to a state of knowing and belonging. In her dissertation on the pedagogy of Samoan children, Kolone-Collins (2010) stated that *fāgogo* builds identity and indigenous knowledge. She wrote that *fāgogo* includes many aspects such as:

- *loto mālie* or satisfied soul
- *leo mālie* or harmony (only achieved if the listener is attentive to the story’s message),
- *tapu’e lagona ma le mafaufau* (the rewarding of an enriched imagined and spiritual world)
- *to’amatilie* or confidence (the stage where the listener reaches a point of knowing).

(Kolone-Collins, 2010, pp. 78 – 79 & 83 - 83)

Because Kolone-Collins applied *fāgogo* to pedagogy, these aspects were viewed as learning outcomes. In the context of this paper, I interpret these aspects as transformative stages of both the teller and listener. During the first transformation of *loto mālie*, the storyteller becomes synchronised psychologically and emotionally with the story as it takes on a life of its own. If *fāgogo* is a type of performance then like all good live performances, the storyteller, as performer, does not act or just perform a story. The storyteller becomes the story. Renowned acting teachers Strasberg, Meisner, Lewis and Adler\(^\text{10}\) developed variations of the method system of acting. The aim is for the actor to immerse him/herself into a character’s psyche, emotions, and world in order to lose oneself in the moment. Acting is “living truthfully under the imaginary circumstances” (Meisner, 1987, p. 178). The transformative power of satisfaction occurs when a performer enters a space where he/she is one with the object being performed. In this space, the storyteller, as performer, becomes synchronised with the psyche of the spectator. In *fāgogo*, the effect and depth of satisfaction is dependent on the level of reciprocation between the listener and the skill of the storyteller.

\(^{10}\) Lee Strasberg, Stellar Adler, Sanford Meisner and Robert Lewis are American actors, acting teachers and directors associated with Method Acting. Method Acting is a technique where actors enact a character’s mental and emotional state by recalling emotions and experiences from the actor’s own life. This emotional recall (act of memory) helps the actor personally identify with the character. The actor will eventually reach a point where he/she becomes immersed into the character’s psyche: the actor becomes the character.
An aim of *fāgogo* is to teach the concepts and protocols of *Fa`a Samoa*. Understanding these concepts leads to the second transformation of *leō mālie*. *Fa`a Samoa* is the framework in which family ties and relationships are expressed within *Vā Tapuia*. In *Fāgogo*, the relationship among the storyteller, the listener, and the story becomes a location in which to live *Vā Tapuia*. In Figiel’s (2003) novel *Where We Once Belong*, Alofa’s action of turning off the lights ensured that the space between the storyteller and listener was kept. This space became a location for learning and revelation. The *fāgogo* became Alofa’s preparation to receive the mantel of Tausi’s stories, which were protected through their retelling. The *fāgogo* linked Alofa and Tausi, but at the same time, it separated them emphasising the relationships of elder and younger, teacher and pupil, giver and receiver. Tupua Tamasese (2003) compared *fāgogo* to *mama* (food for young children) because it weans and provides nurturance in the form of sharing. *Fāgogo* “is an image of intimacy, of sharing, of love, of connection and communication. It imparts mana and shares the feau (i.e. a message) between generations” (p. 59).

The third transformative stage *tapu`e lagona ma le mafaufau* alludes to the vast world Samoans occupy. It is a world of an increasing spiral of renewed cycles. It is not a world limited to moving forwards, but a world in which past, present, and future can occupy the same space at the same point in time. It is a world that encompasses visible and invisible surfaces and where ancestors and the living meet and separate.

The last level *to`amalie* is where understanding becomes knowledge. It is reminiscent of Descartes philosophical statement “I think therefore I am”\(^{11}\) in that one becomes knowledge. To understand a culture is to live that culture and lastly be that culture.

\(^{11}\) Originally written in French, Rene Descartes’ “Je pense, donc je suis” is found in part IV of his Discourse on Method published in 1637.
For fāgogo to be successful, Kolone-Collins (2010) stated that the agaga (spirit) is awakened during storytelling (p. 18). With the agaga, a story becomes a type of intragroup memory as the stories and recollections allow echoes of other stories to be heard (Mageo, 2001). Agaga could be reaction to the way the story is told, or the spirit of the story itself. Agaga could also be a spirit that tells the story by possessing the narrator and using the narrator as a medium. Fāgogo is more than memorisation and oral repetition; it transforms oral accounts into living history. Tupua Tamasese (2005) explained that tapu is sacred knowledge and is passed down from one generation to the next within an ʻāiga. Not only is that knowledge tapu, but the act of passing on knowledge is tapu as “such knowledges are under the special guardianship of a god – Atua or aitu or spirit” (Tamasese, 2005, p. 64).

How is fāgogo structured? Contemporary Samoan writer Jacinta Galea’i (2005) explained that a narrative technique used in fāgogo is su’ifefiloi. Various strands are hand woven together to form a complete product by this technique. “[Su’ifefiloi is a combination of the words, su’i, meaning to sew or to weave and fefiloi, a descriptive word that means mixed” (Galea’i, 2005, para. 6). Silipa (2008) wrote that the “threading [of a] story can be likened to…lalaga (fine mat weaving), which signifies continuity and change” (p. 6). In the terms of a story’s narrative structure, Galea’i (2005) wrote that su’ifefiloi could be used to subvert writing conventions such as plot, setting, and character. As an example, Figiel used su’ifefiloi to emphasise the multiplicity of the lives and stories being told. Stories are histories through which different perspectives are simultaneously taught. As a historical narrative, fāgogo does not necessarily concern itself with linear progression.
Chapter 3 The Fāgogo of The Orator (O Le Tulafale)

today
the tale i tell
is my own
and theirs and yours
a way of seeking
some more
of Samoa
of my sacred self

(Marsh. S. T., 1999, p. 337)

3.1 Introduction

The quotation above is the second stanza from naming myself by Samoan poet and academic Selina Tusitala Marsh. In this poem, Marsh explained that her mother’s maiden name Tusitala (storyteller) is a name filled with “meaning and nonmeaning” (p. 338). Tusitala as a name and general noun launched Marsh’s examination of her sense of self, and her existence. The method Marsh chose was poetry, which she regarded as a modern form of the Samoan oral storytelling. As a film, The Orator (O Le Tulafale) is a tusitala filled with meaning and nonmeaning. The film is meaning in that it opens itself to seekers wanting to learn more about Samoa and about themselves as Samoans. The film is nonmeaning in that there are many cultural signs containing meaning, but if neglected or not followed, these signs become nonmeaning and invisible to those who understand what they are but choose to ignore them.

This chapter focuses its attention on the film. First the su’ifefilo (story strands) of the film are identified and described. Second, The Orator (O Le Tulafale) is analysed through the process and structure of fāgogo, in particular the outcomes suggested by Kolone-Collins (2010). As part of this stage, identifying the various film narrative techniques used in The Orator (O Le Tulafale) is necessary. The film is examined by analysing the story of Fa’a Samoa through its invisible and visible elements such as Vā Tapuia, ifoga (forgiveness ceremony), and fa’a matai exemplified by
Poto as matai and Saili who becomes the titled tulafale (orator) Leopao. Third, the film’s characters of Saili, Poto, Litia, and Vaaiga are analysed.

### 3.2 Su’ifefiloi (The Story Strands)

_The Orator (O Le Tulafale)_ consists of the story strands of Saili, Vaaiga, Litia, and Vaaiga’s brother, Poto. In addition, there are the story strands of Saili’s parents, and of Vaaiga and Poto’s parents. The parents’ stories belong to the ancestors, and their stories reach beyond their graves.

Through the actions of the living characters and symbols of past lives, the parents’ stories resonate throughout the film. Another story strand in this film is _Fa’a Samoa_. In some cases in the film, the way _Fa’a Samoa_ is lived by Samoans, for example matai, contradicts the values of _Fa’a Samoa_. These contradictions are the means through which the culture teaches itself to film spectators.

All of these story strands begin as parallel stories. As these stories develop, they intersect with each other, prompt and expel each other, as well as complement and contradict each other. These are typical mat weaving techniques. In creating an ‘ie toga (fine mat), pandanus strands are first prepared by separating and stripping them for spines. The strands are then cross-positioned forming intersection points. At these points, the weaver pushes the strands against each other and then pulls them toward each other. The strands are worked to complement and contradict each other to form the ‘ie toga pattern.

The hand-weaving technique of _su’ifefiloi_ is illustrated by Vaiga weaving an ‘ie toga in preparation for her funeral. The ‘ie toga will be used in a gift exchange ceremony during her funeral. Shots of her weaving are pivotal, as they are visual checkpoints of how the film’s story strands intersect. Her activity is a location where the story strands interweave to become a whole narrative.
In the first 18 minutes of the film, the stories of Saili and Poto are introduced. At this stage, Vaaiga is preparing pandanus strands for her mat. Around 10 minutes later, the spectator gains more insight into Litia’s story, which is quickly followed by a shot of Vaaiga beginning the hand weaving process. Around 38 minutes in the film is a shot of Vaaiga surrounded by her ‘ie toga as a work in progress. Not long after this shot, Poto and his entourage visit Vaaiga to persuade her to return to her home village. When Litia confesses to having an affair with a married man, Vaaiga is seen applying the finishing touches to her mat. When Vaaiga dies Litia completes the ‘ie toga.

Vaaiga’s weaving symbolises the story of Fa’a Samoa. Through the activities of her family, the film spectator witnesses breaches in cultural protocol and the rectification of those breaches. For instance, through Poto and Saili’s stories, the spectator hears echoes of the stories of their parents. These echoes are examples of intragroup memories (Mageo, 2001) demonstrating the boundary-less world of Samoans. As those within the culture, Poto and Saili should have known how to honour their parents, but they failed. The agaga of their deceased parents plague Poto and Saili. The graves of Saili’s parents, shots of his father’s matai symbols, and Poto’s physical illness are signs of their parents’ stories of disappointment and the need to repair cultural breaches.

The completion of Vaaiga’s ‘ie toga comes at a point of chaos and turbulence in the lives of the members of her family. Vaaiga is the storyteller (as she weaves together the story strands) as well as a story. The ‘ie toga symbolises the story of her life as well as the lives of her family (both living and dead). The ‘ie toga symbolises the story of the film.
3.3 The Fāgogo of Fa’a Samoa

“Fa’a Samoa speaks through a feau or message.”
(Paramount chief, former Prime minister and deputy Prime minister of Samoa Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese T’aisi Efi, 2003, p. 52)

In the film’s fāgogo narrative, the characters are introduced to the film spectators as being at a point of turmoil or unrest. According to Todorov (1977), this is a point of disequilibrium. This is in contradiction to the classical narrative structure where, according to Todorov, a story begins at an expository stage of equilibrium, peace or normalcy.

3.3.1 Example of the Invisible Elements of Fa’a Samoa

3.3.1.1 Vā Tapuia

The beginning of The Orator (O Le Tulafale) lacks contextual information to orientate the spectator to the different characters and their surroundings. The opening gambit is a shot of mountains covered in rain clouds. There are close-up camera shots of a corner of a house, taro plant leaf, and other plants. The diegetic sound is thunder and rain. Lacking in the first few minutes of the film are typical wide camera shots to give the spectator a sense of the setting. Like raindrops in the opening shots, these mid to extreme close-up camera shots drip-feed information to the spectator. Visual cues to the type of environment are plants indicating an exotic, tropical setting, which could be anywhere. Following the rainstorm is the emerging sun illustrated by close-up camera shots of drying plants, scuttling insects, and the diegetic sounds of cicadas and birds. The opening sequences slowly reveal the environment’s beauty, but in the context of the Samoan culture, I also argue that they show glimpses of the Samoan cosmology from the extreme grandeur to the extreme minutiae and from the physical to the metaphysical. Hau’ofa (1994) stated:

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12 According to Tzvetan Todorov (1977), a narrative goes through a transformative process. He proposed that narrative begins at a state of equilibrium/plenitude. This is a state of normalcy, peace, calmness and satisfaction. This state is then disrupted by an opposing force or event throwing the narrative into a state of disequilibrium. A state of normalcy can only be restored by a force or action, such as a mission, search, or quest, to work against the disruptive opposing force. The result is restoration to a new state of equilibrium and plenitude. This new equilibrium is not the same as the first state of equilibrium. The new equilibrium is shaped by the experience of battling against opposing forces. Todorov’s narrative is a circular process as opposed to the normal linear structure of the traditional dramatic arc (exposition→rising tension→climax→falling tension→resolution). Todorov claimed that the characters or situations of a narrative are transformed through the process of and progress through disruption.
if we look at the myths, legends, oral traditions, and the cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania, it becomes evident that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions. (p. 152)

The story of Fa’a Samoa is located in this context. The world that Samoans inhabit, as suggested by Hau’ofa, illustrates the ways in which Vā Tapuia operate. Understanding the proportions of the Samoan world is to glimpse “the space that is context, giving meaning to things” (Wendt, 1999, p. 402). With a combination of long camera shots of mountains to extreme close-up camera shots of plants (see Screen Shots A and B), the in-out movements of the camera’s point-of-view portray the vānimono13 of the Vā Tapuia. There is a sense of space appearing and disappearing (Wendt, 1999, p. 403), or space expanding and contracting.

Screen Shot A  Long Shot of Mountain Range  Screen Shot B  Extreme Close-up of Taro Leaf

After the opening shots of the environment are sequence shots of two graves and the sound of distant off-screen male voices. The voices orientate the viewer to the location (Samoa) and culture of the film (Fa’a Samoa). The voices also move the expansive holistic worldview to the reality in which Fa’a Samoa is practised. There are visual codes referencing Fa’a Samoa and to which a Samoan should recognise and relate. Screen Shot 1 is the first visual cue for the spectator. In this screen shot, the graves are isolated. The Samoan spectator is left to ponder and interpret the meaning of the graves’ isolation.

13 See glossary of Samoan terms for explanation of how this term is used in this paper
Tupua Tamasese (2003) explained that Samoans who understand and live Fa’a Samoa have an ongoing dialogue and relationship with the dead. Speaking to the dead is part of the spiritual self and provides guidance and meaning to life. To understand the psyche of Samoans is to to “eavesdrop on the dialogue between [the] ancestors and [one’s] soul” (Tupua Tamasese, 2003, p. 51). The film’s beginning invites the spectator to “eavesdrop” on the dialogue between the dead and living, but the dialogue the spectator hears are the laughter and the insults of the off-screen voices of the living.

Screen Shot 2: Saili is introduced to the spectator. At the same time of his introduction, the banter from the off-screen characters drip-feeds information regarding the story behind the graves. This banter is the beginning of the fāgogo of Fa’a Samoa as well as how Saili breached cultural protocols.

The spectator is introduced to a nameless dwarf clearing snails off the two graves (see Screen Shot 2). The off-screen voices call this person shithead and they communicate threats of violence. These off-screen voices are taro planters farming around the two graves of the parents of this dwarf.
The spectator is introduced to the dwarf’s size rather to him as a person. Acting cues such as him clearing snails off the isolated graves, audio cues provided by the banter of the off-screen male voices, and visual cues of the graves assist the viewer in formulating an intertextual interpretation of this shot sequence. Kristeva (1980) proposed that a narrative is formed from an already existent discourse or pre-existent texts. Those who understand Fa’a Samoa would know that there has been a breach in the culture’s protocols regarding deceased family members. Tamasese said that in the Samoan culture the graves of loved ones are buried in front of the family homestead. He said, “…when you bury a loved one like that, it seems like a challenge. You’re challenging death and saying it cannot break the bond with the living” (New Zealand Herald, 2011, para. 17-18). The composition of elements in Screen Shots 1 and 2 reveal discord in Vā Tapuia. In addition, the spectator recognises the status of the nameless dwarf as a non-title holder and he is unable to claim his family land, leaving it open for public use.

Taule’alo (2001) stated that the fanua tapu or sacred land “acknowledges the va tapuia between man and the land” (p. 98). In the Samoan culture, identity is linked to family land, and ownership is passed down from generation to generation. “Genealogy links the individual to the land and knowledge of lineage is the blood arteries of Samoan society” (Taule’alo, 2001, p. 98). Stories and memories told as oral histories through fāgogo are essential in linking people to ancestors as they “carry with them wealth of titles and land” (ibid). Without our ancestors, we are nothing (Taule’alo, 2001). Therefore, it is of no coincidence that the viewer is introduced to a nameless dwarf whose only title given to him is shit head. However, this is not the beginning of the dwarf’s story. It is the beginning of the story of Fa’a Samoa. Regarding the film’s narrative, the culture and its sacred values are introduced to the spectator as being in a state of disequilibrium. Examples of the fāgogo of Fa’a Samoa in the film are ifoga (forgiveness ceremony) outside Saili’s home, Poto stealing Vaaiga’s body, the exchange ceremony during Vaaiga’s funeral at her home village, and the oratory exchange between Poto and Saili/Leopao.
3.3.2 Examples of the Tangible Elements of Fa’a Samoa

3.3.2.1 Ifoga

Ifo means to “Bow (down)…Control, restrain…Give in, surrender…” (Milner, 1966/2012, pp. 82 – 83). Ifoga demands the sacrifice of self and pride to execute humility. Macpherson and Macpherson (2005) explained, “one group submits to a ritual and public humiliation” (p. 109) to seek forgiveness from the one who was wronged. Through this process, the values of harmony, peace, and balance are restored preventing “escalation of socially and economically disruptive inter-group conflicts” (Macpherson & Macpherson, 2005, p. 109). Tuala-Warren (2002) wrote that an ifoga may have been triggered by an individual action, but the actual ceremony involves the ‘āiga and nu’u. As illustrated in Screen Shots 3 and 4 below, ifoga involves the offender being covered with an ‘ie toga and surrounded by his ‘āiga, and ‘āiga’s matai. The ifoga is a public ceremony, and it will last as long as it takes a person to forgive. In explaining the process, Tuala-Warren (2002) stated that the matai of the family decides whether to conduct an ifoga and who should perform the ifoga. This decision is not an easy one, and the consequences of conducting or not conducting an ifoga are carefully weighed. “There will be some matai in the ‘aiga who will say that they would rather die than bow to another ‘aiga” (Tuala-Warren, 2002, p. 19).

The ifoga party travels to the offended ‘āiga at dawn. They are seated on the ground, and the offender is covered with an ‘ie toga. According to Tuala-Warren (2002), the reason for the timing is safety. The receiving party is sleeping at the time of the ifoga party’s arrival. The main purpose of ifoga is to prevent retribution from the victim’s ‘āiga. Ifoga maintains the Vā Tapuia between the victim(s) and the offender(s) and between their respective ‘āiga. This ensures that connections between ‘āiga are maintained. Once an ifoga is accepted, either party must never mention the incident prompting the ceremony. Harmony, balance, and peace within Fa’a Samoa are the desired results.
In the film, an ifoga party sits outside Saili’s house. The offenders are the men who attacked Saili as he was working as a security guard outside the village’s convenience store. To undertake an ifoga is a grave matter and one not taken lightly. However, the dialogue of the ifoga party undermines the visual demonstration of humility. When Litia discovered the ifoga party, one of the women in the party yelled to Saili’s family that the men under the ‘ie toga were stupid and remorseful. They shamed the family and ‘āiga, and they should be left to suffer. Nevertheless, these were hollow words because the ifoga party became impatient. When night fell, one of men seeking forgiveness expressed a hope in the ifoga ending soon. The men waited another day. Finally, one of the women accompanying the ifoga party called to Vaaiga and asked if forgiveness had found its way into Vaaiga’s house. The woman reprimanded Vaaiga for her inability to forgive, contradicting the purpose of Christ’s crucifixion. The woman became tired of waiting and went to fetch the village pastor. From the attitude of the ifoga party, the assumption was that Saili would quickly forgive the offenders. However, the longer the ifoga lasted, the worse the Vā between the two ‘āiga, and, more importantly, between Vaaiga and Saili.

The men had been sitting outside Saili’s house for two nights and three days. Screen Shots 5-7 show the men on the third day of the ifoga. Saili uses the forgiveness ceremony for revenge rather than for restoring the Vā Tapuia between the ‘āiga. In the sequence of events, indicated by Screen Shots 5 to 7, the loudest sounds are the laboured breathing of the offenders and Saili’s machete cutting grass outside his house. The men are suffering and Saili adds to their suffering by inching
his blade closer to them to scare them. Finally, one of the men admits to Saili that he did not want to die. The initial attitude of the *ifoga* party and the unwillingness of Saili to forgive damage the sacredness of *vā*. For instance, Vaaiga became angry with Saili for not forgiving them, and she died with that feeling. In the last moments of her life, she told Saili not to touch her and to forgive the men. Their sitting outside was bringing shame upon her household. Saili had disappointed Vaaiga because he did not fulfil her last request. It was a moment too late when Saili finally lifted the ‘*ie toga* off the three offenders.

3.3.2.2 The *Matai*

The physical embodiment of the values of *Fa’a Samoa* is *fa’a matai*. *Fa’a matai* is the framework governing the conduct of *matai* to care for their ‘*āiga* with all the dignity, honour, and wisdom necessary. In his film, Tamasese wanted to challenge the stereotypical image of *matai*. At his film’s press conference at the 2011 Venice Film Festival, Tamasese explained that his impression of *matai* was based on their imposing physical stature and impressive style of speaking. However, in his film, he presented an alternative interpretation of “large in stature” (see Screen Shots 8 & 9). Tamasese said his aim was to “strip that away and see what was underneath” (New Zealand Herald, 2011, para. 21).
Internal characteristics for a matai are more important than the outward appearance of a matai, and this was a truism Poto did not understand or ignored. Poto, as matai, committed serious breaches in Fa’a Samoa. Examples are dishonouring his parents to the point where he becomes cursed, stealing Vaiga’s body from her home, dishonouring the connection between Saili and the family of Vaiga, and trying to sever the relationship between Saili and Litia. Further examples are his defiance towards his fono by bribing it to lift the ban against Vaiga, arrogance when receiving matai paying their respects at Vaiga’s funeral, and disdain to Saili who stood before him as a tulafale (orator). In Fa’a Samoa, Poto is an example of disrespecting of the values of Fa’a matai.

Grattan (1948/1985) wrote that a matai’s obligations are to care for the family and the family’s land for the use of members. In return, the family members serve their matai as the head of the ‘āiga. The ‘āiga looks to the matai for guidance and assistance when needed. In choosing matai “…questions of blood connections and descent, service to the family and previous holders of the title, and personal suitability [are] all…taken into consideration” (Grattan, 1948/1985, p. 13.) The reputation of the matai reflects the respect and esteem given to a family by the home village, and district. A matai is:

the trustee of the good name of the family and the fountain-head to which all ceremonial recognition of the status of his family is due. He is responsible for the proper maintenance of the dignity of his family and the adequate performance of their social obligations…if the conduct of the matai in any way falls short of the standard expected, the displeasure of the
community and the shame associated therewith will be shared by the family (Grattan, 1948/1985, p. 12)

Around 44 minutes into the film, Saili asked the village matai, Tagaloa, for a title. This was Saili’s first attempt. Tagaloa explained that a matai must be able to reveal his weaknesses and soul without shame so that he could ask for anything. This took courage and showing courage was how one received a title. A chief title was not for decoration. Tagaloa’s film presence is shown as either a voice giving advice to visitors or through shots of him sitting at the head of a fono. Tagaloa is the archetype of a wise, fair matai. He is an archetype with whom the spectator could compare and judge the ways Poto exercised his matai obligations as well as measure Saili’s transformation to becoming matai.

In Samoan mythology, Tagaloalagi (abbreviated to Tagaloa) is commonly referred to as the Polynesian god of creation. Tagaloa is the founder of Samoa and of Samoans, and he possesses the knowledge and the keys to the Samoan cosmology and Samoan culture (Turner, G., 1884/2006, p. 8). In the film, the village’s head matai, Tagaloa, refused a young man a title because the man uncrossed his legs during a fono indicating disrespect. The young man was unwilling to bear the physical discomfort of crossing his legs during the fono, and, based on that, Tagaloa concluded that the matai candidate would be unwilling to bear the larger obligations and discomfort of holding a title. Tagaloa holds the key to Saili’s entrance into the Samoan cosmology and knowledge. Tagaloa would fulfil Saili’s wants, but only if Saili was ready to bear the consequences and burden of being matai.

Poto became an example of how matai should not behave. Poto is large in stature but only physically. In contrast, Saili developed as being the larger man because his actions reflected the values of Fa’a Samoa.
In his lāuga (oratory speech) Poto corrected Saili for assuming that he had a connection with Vaaiga. He reminded Saili that he had no connection with Vaaiga as it ended when she died. At the same time, he acknowledged Vaaiga’s daughter by inviting her to come and live with her blood family. Poto elaborated to Saili that the connection between Vaaiga and her family was broken 17 years ago, but it was restored with her return (this was only made possible because Poto stole Vaaiga’s dead body from Saili’s house). Poto thanked Saili for looking after Vaaiga, and he gave Saili a box of corned beef and a fine mat.

In Saili’s own lāuga, Poto was reminded of the meaning of Vā Tapuia. Saili illustrated his understanding of Vā Tapuia by telling his own fāgogo of his life with Vaaiga. He told Poto that he saw death come to Vaaiga. Saili explained that he and Vaaiga shared fāgogo with each other and that they shared their company with death in their daily activities whether it was sitting at home drinking Samoan cocoa rice or sitting together listening to evening prayers (see Screen Shot 10). Poto’s shame was stealing Vaaiga’s body to force her return to her family. Saili’s shame was leaving her alone in the company of death, which finally took her. He told Poto to bury her in the earth where she would fall victim to the creatures of the earth. Saili explained to Poto that Vaaiga was buried in the space of his heart where she would always be protected. After Saili’s lāuga, Vaaiga’s ‘ie toga was presented to her family with the hope that she would be forgiven.

**Screen Shot 10  Evening Prayers**

Evidence that Saili lived the principles he described in his lāuga are throughout the film. However, up until this moment, Saili was unaware of his having or practising the principles of fa’a matai.
These values included understanding *Vā Tapuia*. Space and silence are important communication tools between Saili and Vaaiga. In an interview with the New Zealand Herald (2011), Tamasese explained that in Samoa “if people are sitting, there is a silent conversation going on…It’s always a conversation even when people are not talking” (para. 14). The relationship of Saili and Vaaiga was not physically intimate, but it was still intimate. The *Vā Tapuia* between them indicated a metaphysical intimacy.

Screen Shots 10 (above) and 11 (that follows) depict two shot compositions commonly used to show the private moments of Saili and Vaaiga. In Screen Shot 10, Vaaiga and Saili sit beside each other during village evening prayers. It is an example of balanced composition. The distance between them is equal. They are both in the foreground of the shot. They are turned away from each other at almost the same angle. They are sitting on whitewashed rocks placing them at close proximity to the ground. Their heads are at the same eye line as the line of houses in the background. From top to bottom and left to right of the shot, Saili and Vaaiga are symmetrical with the surrounding environment indicating that they are part of the environment.

Another typical composition is the mid to close-up rack camera shot indicated in Screen Shot 11 below.

**Screen Shot 11 Close-up Rack Shot of Vaaiga and Saili**
In this type of shot, the point-of-view is an observer’s perspective. Vaiga is usually positioned in the foreground and Saili behind her. The depth of field is shallow indicating closeness. In this type of shot, and from an observer’s point-of-view, an interpretation is that Saili is in the position of watching over Vaiga while she goes about her daily activities such as weaving and sleeping.

The scenes between Saili and Vaiga are intimate moments of harmony and balance. These are the values within the framework of Fa’a Samoa. Screen Shots 10 and 11 both show that Saili and Vaiga’s relationship is metaphysical and expressed through space and silence. In their private moments, the spectator catches glimpses of Vā Tapuia as “the Unity-that-is-All” (Wendt, 1999, p. 402). Tamasese’s aim was to create a type of metaphysical communication between the film, the characters and spectator. He wanted to show that “the postures and the minute movements are full of meaning” (New Zealand Herald, 2011, para. 15).

The film tells the story of Fa’a Samoa. The examples presented so far show the ways in which Fa’a Samoa is interpreted and lived. The fāgogo of Fa’a Samoa communicates the sacredness of Vā and the necessary values for maintaining that sacredness. Throughout the film, the spectator comes to know Fa’a Samoa and the way the culture should be lived. This is the fe’au (message) of Fa’a Samoa.

3.4 The Fāgogo of Saili (search or find)

The verb sa’ili means to search or find. In the film, Saili’s story begins around 10 minutes into the film. At this point of the film, Vaiga is bathing in a large pond reserved for women, and Saili is sitting on its bank. Vaiga asked Saili about his plans for his land, and she reproached him for burying his parents in the bush. She advised him that the only step towards saving his family and reclaiming his land was to become a chief, but Saili asked “o ai a’u?” (Who am I?). Vaiga replied that a mouth and a heart were the only qualifications a chief needed.
The story of Saili is about his internal struggle to overcome the limitations of his size and the fear of losing Vaiga. In his struggle, he had to find himself and understand his sacredness as a Samoan within the sacredness of space. At the start of Saili’s story, the question he asked Vaiga revealed his sense about himself - he was nobody. Everything Saili did was along the margins or in the liminal spaces separating the insiders from the outsiders. For example, as an outsider Saili watched a *fono* session at a distance. At a distance, he listened to the village *matai*, Tagaloa, giving counsel. At a distance, Saili listened to the oral repartee of *matai* arguing over the body of a loved one. In the film, Saili was slapped, beaten, and ridiculed. As an extreme sign of his sense of lowliness, Saili buried his parents away from their family home. Their graves are located in the taro plantations on his family’s land. His father was *matai*, and Saili hoped that by burying his father out in the bush, others would respect his father’s title and leave his family’s land alone. The only people who paid any respect to Saili were other little people, children, who greeted him as he passed them by. For most of the film, Saili was both watching and observing events from a distance or hiding.

Saili’s place in the Samoan universe was, to begin with, miniscule. At the start of the film, his attitude demonstrated what Hau’ofa (1994) described a smallness of a state of mind. Saili’s outlook on life and his place in *Fa’a Samoa* was deterministic as he defined himself by his physical size. Hau’ofa (1994) warned that such a perspective leaves people and their surroundings at the mercy and attitudes of others. Saili’s self-belittlement and the belittlement he received from others placed him in a state of “moral paralysis, [and] apathy” (Hau’ofa, 1994, p. 152). By thinking and feeling small, Saili limited himself to a small fraction of the physical world, and he was unable to maintain the *Vā Tapuia* within the metaphysical or spiritual landscapes of the Samoan cosmology. An example is Screen Shot 12 below where he is hiding underneath the taro plants, which are larger and taller than he is.
Vaaiga responded to Saili’s question by reminding him that being matai was not about physical size, but about the size of one’s heart and oratory skill. By regarding the film as a fāgogo, the spectator would see the transformation of Saili as he went through the stages of “knowing” that he was Leopao the Tulafale to “becoming” Leopao the Tulafale. Interesting to note is that le’opaō means strong voice. Saili needed to reach a point where he could live up his matai title. This is reminiscent of Vaaiga’s advice to Saili that the only qualifications a chief needed was a big heart and the skill to speak. Physical stature had nothing to do with being a chief. Like his physical stature, Saili’s actions of strength and courage were not large, but, like his inner stature, his actions grew on a cumulative level. This progress eventually disturbed Saili’s usual and accepted status of disequilibrium with himself and his environment.

Initially Saili had no identity apart from those imposed on him, for example shithead, shit eater, and other labels given to him by other members of his village. Saili had to undertake a quest or mission (Todorov, 1997) to stop the suffering that he and his family had been living with for so long. Hereniko (1999) wrote that cultural identity formation is “a journey in which we never arrive…” (p. 138). Saili’s journey and the way he conducted that journey is his fāgogo.

To start this journey, the agaga of Saili’s fāgogo had to be awakened. Forty minutes into the film, Poto and his family paid a second visit to Vaagia and left. Litia did not return home at night and
Vaaiga went to look for her. The rumours of Litia having an affair with a married man are confirmed. At this point, Saili is sitting on the floor of his home waiting for Vaaiga and hoping that she did not follow Poto to her own village. Eventually Vaaiga arrived home explaining she had been looking for Litia, much to Saili’s relief. Knowing that Vaaiga did not leave him became the turning point for Saili. It was at this moment that his spirit woke to bring him out of his apathy.

Throughout the film are events showing the transformation of Saili from nobody to somebody with a mouth and heart. As an example, Saili asked Tagaloa twice for a title. This is significant as Saili showed that he was not going to give up, and that he was developing strength in speaking up for himself. As a reminder, Tagaloa in Samoan mythology is the Polynesian god of creation. Like the mythical god Tagaloa, the film’s matai, Tagaloa, held the keys to the Samoan cosmology for Saili. Other acts of Saili’s transformation included confronting the taro farmers planting on his land and the man having an affair with Litia, as well as out-classing Poto’s oratory skills. With each transformative act, Saili gradually received loto mālie.

Towards the end of the film, he experienced leo mālie and to’amalie to know the true qualities of a matai and to know that he is matai. Eventually Saili was able to experience tupu’e lagona ma le mafaufau. A new world perspective was opened to Saili. In comparison to his hiding underneath taro leaves (see Screen Shot 12), the film’s end reveals the arrival and participation of Saili into the Samoan cosmology. Following is Series 1 illustrating a new and more enriching stage of equilibrium for Saili.
Series 1  Tranformation of Saili

*Loto Mālie:* Vaiga is taken home. The shot here is symmetrical indicating balance. This is the first step towards a new balance in the life of this family.

*Leo Mālie:* Mana and Tapu have been restored to Saili and his family. The Vā Tapuia is repaired between the living and the dead. In this moment, the past, present and future occupy one space.

*Tapu‘e lagona ma le mafaufau:* The ability to live Vā Tapuia develops the satisfaction of knowledge gained from experience. The loss of time means being part of time. Saili’s family has entered and is living the Samoan worldview according to Fa’a Samoa

This shot is from within the house looking out. This is the *agaga* of Saili’s story. This was also the space of Vaiga. It was in this room that she wove her mat and by doing so weaved the stories of the family members together. This is not the end of Saili’s story, but only the beginning. The peace and balance he feels gives him to‘amalie – living knowledge gained from the restored connections with his deceased parents, his wife, and those living around him.

The transformative stages of Saili are seen in Series 1, but these stages are also individually discernible throughout Saili’s journey. One key moment propelling Saili’s transformation was when he asked Tagaloa a second time for a title in order to retrieve his wife’s body from Poto’s family. Saili thought Tagaloa would reject his request, but after some discussion, and perhaps feeling some compassion for Saili, Tagaloa called for the ‘ava bowl and for someone to prepare the ‘ava drink. The ‘ava ceremony was a sign that Saili would finally receive a title. After the ‘ava ceremony, Saili gained satisfaction knowing that he was on the way to achieving his goal.
Receiving a *matai* was the beginning of Saili’s journey of knowledge towards his “becoming” *matai*. It was after his receiving a title that Saili felt worthy enough to use his father’s symbols of chief hood. With the authority and blessings of Tagaloa, Saili travelled to Poto’s village to reclaim the body of his wife. However, Saili did not “become” *matai*; he only “knew” he was *matai*. His transformation from “knowing” to “becoming” occurred during his oratory speech to Poto.

### 3.5 The *Fāgogo* of Poto (to be smart or intelligent)

Poto’s first visit to Vaaiga is the starting point of his story. Poto’s name means to be smart or intelligent. The first impression of Poto is that of stature and authority. Poto’s story is his fear of being revealed as one who dishonoured his title, his family, and ancestors. At his first meeting with Vaaiga, Poto explained that while visiting their parents’ grave he felt a finger scratch him on his leg. He interpreted this as a sign of his parents cursing him. Vaaiga told him that he alone had to carry that burden. Poto’s visit to Vaaiga showed his cowardness. He was unable to carry that burden, and he needed Vaaiga to appease the spirits of their deceased parents.

Poto is not the type of chief who would willingly expose his soul and weaknesses. In an earlier conversation with Saili, Tagaloa explained that this was a characteristic signifying a true *matai*. An example of Poto’s weakness was his oratory exchange with Saili/Leopao. In another instance, rather than admit to committing a transgression against his village *fono*, Poto resorted to bribing the village chief to lift the banishment against his sister, so that he could bury her in the family homestead. A further example was his stealing Vaaiga’s body. This occurred while Litia was mourning her mother and while Saili was digging his wife’s grave outside their home, fulfilling her request. Poto’s theft of Vaaiga’s body defiled the *tapu* of her body. Through this act, Poto turned Vaaiga’s body into a tool by which he could restore his *mana as matai*. This was a selfish act, and it disrespected the very values he should have adhered to as a *matai*. While alive, Vaaiga
recognised her brother for what he was: greedy, insecure and scared. Saili was intimidated by Poto because of the symbols of his matai and large physical size.

Poto’s transformation from going-through-the-motions-of-being-matai to knowing the true meaning of matai was subtle. Close-up camera shots of Poto revealed his internal struggle. Poto is a weak character because he succumbed to outside influences (for example his mean, greedy wife and material wealth) at the expense of the true values of Fa’a Samoa and fa’a matai. Despite Poto’s wealth and power, his story began at a state of disequilibrium as he was introduced as a cursed man. Poto’s world was small because of the smallness and meanness of his nature. The world he knew was limited to the physical plane of the Samoan cosmology. The result was his failure in understanding the Vā or the connections he spoke of so eloquently in his oratory speeches to various matai and to Saili/Leopao. He lost his mana at the moment of his being cursed, and this led him to commit actions prompting people to question his integrity as matai. The consequence of this loss was his inability to stand as an orator equal to Saili/Leapao who quickly exposed Poto’s weak soul.

The question is did Poto experience the stages of transformation in the same way as Saili? I argue here that the answer is no. The transformation he experienced was one of shame, which eventually belittled him. A point that could be made is that the first step of Poto’s “becoming” was allowing Saili to take Vaiga’s body home. This could be interpreted as a sign of Poto admitting his shame and guilt. The ending of Poto’s fāgogo is ambiguous, but in terms of the overall narrative structure of the film, Poto became a prototype of how not to behave as matai. A matai should have mana, tapu, and the personal characteristics to lead his ‘āiga with correctness and authority.
3.6 The *Fāgogo* of Litia

Litia’s story begins quite late in the film. Her story strand begins at around 28 minutes when she and her friends are watching the village men playing rugby. In watching the men, they saw Saili and Vaaiga walking pass the rugby field. One of Litia’s friends mocked Saili. Litia felt ashamed of him, and she denied that he was her father. Earlier in the film, the same moment was presented from a different perspective. Saili and Vaaiga were walking alongside the rugby field and towards the village. This was after Vaaiga finished bathing in the women-only pond and where Saili asked Vaaiga “Who am I?”. Litia’s *fāgogo* story is a coming of age story and it is significant that her story began after Saili posed his question to Vaaiga. Like Saili, Litia is searching for a sense of herself, but for different reasons.

Litia is a teenager in love with a married man, and she falls pregnant to this man. Litia became a mirror image of Vaaiga as she repeated the same mistake Vaaiga committed 17 years earlier. Through Litia, the hypocrisy and violence resulting from a misinterpretation and abuse of *Fa’a Samoa* are shown. For instance, the wife of Litia’s lover, along with her friends, chased Litia home and they threatened to assault her. Litia became a victim of *faitala* (gossip).

*Faitala* is dangerous, and it undermines *Vā Tapuia* and the values of *Fa’a Samoa*. Based on the rumours about Litia, she was treated as an outcast. She lived under the constant threat of physical attacks and public shame. Fearing the consequences, Litia denied the rumours and hid her pregnancy by binding her stomach to disguise her growing waistline. The motto of the film is *pala ma’a ae le pala upu* (stones rot but not words). This motto is associated with Saili as indicated by the film’s poster (see Appendix A). However, this motto also applies to Vaaiga who has lived with and suffered from *faitala* and to Litia who comes to understand the danger of *faitala*. Gossip permitted women like the wife of Litia’s lover and Poto’s wife to be verbally and physically abusive under the pretence of upholding *Fa’a Samoa*. In a *fāgogo* moment with Litia, Vaaiga
taught Litia that gossip remained for a long time and as long as gossip remained so did shame. The only way to deal with gossip was to avoid situations creating it.

Litia’s worldview as a teenager was governed by what her friends thought and by outward appearances. At one point of the film, Poto had just left Vaaiga and Litia was preparing the strands for Vaaiga’s mat. Litia asked if she could live with Poto and his family because they drove nice cars. The fe‘au of Litia’s fāgogo is about understanding the true meaning of ‘āiga and the deceptiveness of physical appearances. Saili may not be her biological father and he is small, but towards the end she came to understand what it was to have an ‘āiga, and the meaning of ‘āiga. Finally, Litia became part of a true ‘āiga.

3.7 The Fāgogo of Vaaiga (What Was Seen)

As a noun, Va’aiga means view or sight. Va’aiga can also be interpreted to mean what was seen. In the film, Vaaiga was the one chosen to weave together the stories of the other characters. This is symbolised by her weaving an ‘ie toga. Her role was to unify the various story strands of the film into a single fāgogo. Therefore, the film revealed to the spectator what she sees and what she has seen.

Vaaiga’s own story is told through the strands of the others’ stories. Through Poto, the spectator learnt that she disgraced her family and as a result was banished. Through Saili, it was understood that she came to his village as an outcast and married him who was also an outcast. It is also through Saili that the spectator saw her inner strength, which she used to advise Saili to become matai. In her marriage to Saili, the spectator saw her suffer from a deadly illness. Finally, through Litia, the reason for Vaaiga’s fall from grace was revealed. Vaaiga’s story comes second hand to the spectator because part of her role is to show the spectator how the others’ stories connect with each other.
Courage, respect and honour are values which Vaaiga lived. For example, her constant reminders to Saili to do something about his parents and land, her rebuke to the women who wanted to assault Litia, and her fāgogo of her past to Litia are linked by these values. Courage, respect, and honour were Vaaiga’s last remaining possessions. Part of Vaaiga’s story is how she adhered to these values to keep the Vā Tapuia between herself, Saili and Litia, as well as between herself and her blood family. Vaaiga’s story is in her ‘ie toga. It is a story of seeking forgiveness. Her ‘ie toga symbolised the unity of the members of her family. All things had come to a complete circle.

3.7.1 Vaaiga as Tausi (wife of an orator)

In her study of single mothers in Fa’a Samoa, Stewart-Withers (2011) wrote that single mothers are regarded as having a negative effect on family status. As a result, they are severely punished. Vaaiga is an example of this as she was disowned by her family and then banished from her home village. According to Stewart-Withers (2011), a women’s sexuality was prized as it represented the pride of an ‘āiga, and therefore, it was controlled and protected. Vaaiga’s banishment from her family as a young pregnant woman was harsh, but Vaaiga was the daughter of a wealthy and influential family. Her brother Poto holds a title once held by his father. But tama’ita’i (female heirs and carriers of family inheritance) are female heirs to matai titles, and they “have rights equal to male heirs concerning access to and use of the family or customary lands held in trust by the matai” (Shon, 1998, p. 7). As a matai’s daughter, Vaaiga would have been a privileged member of the family and in her village, but she lost that right and privilege by becoming pregnant as a single woman.

In addition, Vaaiga shared a relationship based on feagaiga with her brother Poto. Stewart-Withers (2011) explained that feagaiga is a type of covenant distinguishing the role between sisters and brothers. Sisters hold and exercise sacred power, and the brothers hold and exercise secular power. Shon (1998) added that women oversee the honour and moral values of a family.
Fairbairn-Dunlop (as cited in Stewart-Withers, 2011) noted that *feagaiga* between brother and sister is a balancing act between moral and political powers. Stewart-Withers (2011) wrote, “…while a brother may have the authority to make a decision he also needs his sister’s approval – indeed, she may have the last say” (p. 51). This includes overseeing finances, conflict resolution, and the bestowal of titles. In *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*, *feagaiga* explains Poto’s need for Vaaiga to return to her home village. Her return would have fixed the imbalance in their brother-sister relationship. Poto was cursed because he broke his covenant with his sister who should have been protected.

According to *Fa’a Samoa*, Vaaiga would have been raised with the knowledge of her privileged position. According to Shon’s (1998) and Stewart-Wither’s (2011) explanations as well as other noted academics, for example Fairbairn-Dunlop (1998), on the role of women in Samoan society, Vaaiga would have had considerable influence in her village’s decision making processes. However, she disgraced her family and the obligations of her position.

An argument here is that throughout the film Vaaiga was consistent in showing dignity and honour as *tausi* (wife of a *tulafale* orator). An example of this is the way she greeted Poto and his delegation during his first and second visit to her. Vaaiga sat opposite the delegation to speak on her own behalf and on the behalf of her husband (who was eavesdropping while sitting underneath the leaves of taro plants growing outside his house). Another example is Vaaiga’s counsel and gentle reprimand to her husband concerning his duty to his parents, to her, to her daughter, and to the land that he should have claimed as his inheritance. This was in contrast to Poto’s own wife who was crude and cruel in her behaviour towards Vaaiga and then later to Saili as the orator Leopao.
Vaaiga’s behaviour and demeanour contrasted that of Saili. Saili needed to learn to become matai. Receiving a title was not enough. He had to go through a personal journey of discovery. There was no such journey for Vaaiga: Vaaiga was tausi. However, the difficulty she faced was Saili who needed to be convinced of his potential. She was aware of what Fa’a Samoa and Vā Tapuia could offer. As long as Saili was enslaved to a state of a smallness of mind, she would be trapped in the small marginal world they occupied. As mentioned earlier, a common camera shot of Vaaiga and Saili together was a rack shot placing Vaaiga in the foreground and Saili in the background. One interpretation is of Saili watching over her. Another interpretation of this shot is that it communicates Vaaiga’s role as the family’s decision maker and leader. She should be positioned before her husband until he gained leadership skills. Vaaiga’s quiet determination revealed that she was not a victim. Vaaiga was ostracised by her blood family because of pregnancy. As an outcast, she married an outcast. Despite her life circumstance and history, Vaaiga’s role as: a weaver of stories, the location of the story strands intersecting, the moral compass and decision maker, and tausi (yet to be fulfilled) indicate that she is a positive archetypal role for women in Fa’a Samoa.
Chapter 4 The Relationship between the Samoan Viewer and The Orator (O Le Tulafale)

4.1 Introduction

After analysing the way the film tells its story through the stories of its characters and film techniques, this chapter takes the analysis further by discussing the Samoan film spectator and his/her relationship with the film. The section begins with an explanation of R. Allen’s (1993, 1997) concept of projected illusion. This concept employs a psychological approach that is useful in explaining the phenomena of Samoans telling their own fāgogo while watching the film. This concept is applied to the Samoan spectator by focussing on aspects of the film and briefly referring to various Facebook comments posted by Samoans worldwide.

4.2 Projected Illusion

“…the experience of illusion, suitably differentiated and correctly construed, is central to our experience of the cinema.”

(Allen, R., 1993, p. 21)

4.2.1 “See In” vs. “See As”

Most people when they choose to see a film are medium aware. They begin by watching a film knowing that it is a composite of representational images. Hopkins (2008) explained that on one level, cinema encourages medium awareness because spectators “see-in” when watching moving images to fulfil the need to understand what they represent. For example when looking at a painting, viewers are more likely to “see-in”. To “see-in” is to stand in front of the painting and view it from an outside or observatory perspective. The viewer is aware of the canvas surface on which the image is painted, and he/she can see the brush stokes that create the representational image. The viewer can see where the representational image begins and ends because of the
painting’s frame containing the image. There is an awareness of the painting as an art form and as a representation of the object being depicted. Hopkins (2008) noted that:

Seeing in is a visual experience…involving simultaneous awareness of two kinds of things. When seeing in pictures we are in some sense aware of those things. But we are also aware of the surface before us. Indeed, the first awareness is dependent on the second (p. 150).

R. Allen (1993) expanded on this spectator point-of-view by postulating that spectators not only “see-in”, but they can also “see-as”. In setting the basis for his concept of “seeing as”, R. Allen first explained that when looking at an object, the spectator’s perception of that object may change even though the object remains the same. He partially based his concept of “seeing-as” upon the works of Wittgenstein.

According to R. Allen (1997), Wittgenstein noted that when viewing an object, the spectator focuses on certain aspects of the object. However, when the spectator focuses on different aspects of the object, the spectator’s thoughts or perceptions about that object change. An example of this is a well-known picture of the head of a female person (see Appendix B). The picture could be of an elderly woman or a young woman. This depended on the aspect a viewer initially focused on when looking at the picture. When a viewer first glances at the picture, he/she may see an elderly woman. A change of focus on a different aspect of the picture would lead to a different way of viewing that picture. The viewer would see a young woman. This change of perspective would mean that the viewer would no longer see the elderly woman. The viewer cannot simultaneously be aware of both the elderly and young women. In seeing one, the viewer loses sense of the other.

R. Allen (1993) develop this notion further by applying it film. He claimed that to “see-as” is to watch the film’s images as a “fully realized, though fictional, world that has all the presentness or
immediacy of our own” (p. 40). This entailed being drawn into the events of the film and to see it from within. This is the heart of the concept of projected illusion. Explaining this further, Bardsley (1998) wrote that to experience projected illusion is to mentally leave the theatre and enter the world of the film. By doing so, the spectators would live the same events experienced by the film’s characters. This sensation, according to Allen, is to “see-as” when watching a film. Film spectators cannot simultaneously be medium aware (in other words “see-in” as indicated by Hopkins) while at the same time view the film as a fully realised world. Film spectators either “see-in” or “see-as” when watching movies. To choose one perspective is to lose sense or awareness of the other perspective.

The language of film refers to the technical aspects of film such as camera angles, diegetic and non-diegetic sound, depth of space, and so on. These aspects can emphasise the film’s medium and force the spectator to see it only as a representational image (“see-in”). However, in other cases, techniques can be used to encourage the experience of projective illusion. This is to be drawn into the world of the film and to watch it from within (“see-as”). This is achieved by the spectator adopting a particular “perceptual point of view of the camera” (Bardsley, 1998, p. 4).

Projected illusion is a virtual reality experienced in the real world. Spectators who “see-as” when watching a film become part of the film’s temporal and spatial dimensions. They watch the fiction of the film unfold before them “as if it was created in the moment of projection” (Allen, R., 1993, p. 43). This phenomenon occurs in the film’s spatial present, but it is experienced in the spectator’s temporal or quotidian present. Projective illusion is an:

onscreen/offscreen continuum [which] is, as it were, peeled away or severed from its moorings in this world. It is a continuum that is entirely coextensive with this world, but it has been detached from this world by the fact that it is no longer perceived by the spectator
as a reproduction of this world but as an original world of its own making (Allen. R., 1993, p. 41)

As an example, film viewers caught up in the world of the film are often surprised at the quick passing of real time. This sensation is usually experienced once the film is finished and when leaving the theatre. During the act of watching, all sense of real time is lost due to the fact the viewer had experienced and “lived” the time-period projected in the movie. On the film’s Facebook page, Maria Graham (2012) experienced this when she wrote, “2011 movie of the year…loved the visuals, sound and the stories within the stories. didn’t [sic] even realise i [sic] was reading subtitles or that there were others in the theatre. awesome!! [sic]”

4.2.2 Character-Centred and Spectator-Centred forms of Projective Illusion

R. Allen (1993) wrote that there are two types of projective illusion: character-centred, and spectator-centred.

Character-centred projective illusion occurs when the spectator empathises with and/or becomes one of the characters. “[W]e actually find ourselves in the mental state of the characters with whom we identify” (Allen, R., 1993, p. 43). The point-of-view of the camera is the character’s point-of-view, which in turn becomes the spectator’s point-of-view. Spectators see and experience events as the character sees and experiences the events. Such identification allows the spectator to suspend judgement on that character.

Spectator-centred projective illusion is evident when the spectator becomes part of the projected world by responding emotionally and mentally to the events being watched. A common camera point-of-view is that of an observer. Spectators become eyewitnesses; they feel as if they were there. Examples of camera shots that heighten and promote spectator-centred projective illusion
are extreme or unusual shots such as the high crane shot or the tilted camera shot (also known as the Dutch angle camera shot). They are often used to present chaos or imbalance in a character’s life or surroundings.

Spectator-centred projective illusion focuses on the film elements of a shot. To explain this R. Allen (1993) stated that unlike still images, moving images do not have a surface. The only surface is the screen on which an image is projected. Moving images are not painted or photographed; they are caught on camera. The movement of a projected image adds to the illusion of that image being surfaceless. Unlike the framing of a still image, the framing of a shot in film is deceptive as there are no visible boundaries. This is because the image can move in and out of a frame, and the frame itself will follow and emulate the movement of the image thereby creating a sense of presence. This is further heightened by recorded sound which spectators experience from all directions and which alerts the spectator to both on-screen and off-screen events. An example of this in *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* is the opening scene where Saili arrives at the taro plantation and tends to his parents’ graves. At the same time, he is aware of the threat of approaching taro farmers planting on his family’s land. This threat is illustrated by off-screen male voices. The voices have a perceptual reality as they are heard by the spectator from behind or from the side due to surround sound.

In *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*, spectator-centred projective illusion tends to dominate the beginning of the film. Saili is introduced to the spectator as a nameless dwarf. This emphasises the physical attributes of Saili and de-emphasises his mental attributes. This is purely an appeal to the spectator’s senses. In addition, the film elements of the shots at the beginning “are not anthropocentrically organized” (Allen, R., 1993, p. 45). This refers to the natural way people physically see the world, which is normally at the eye-level of normal sized person. In *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*, rather than see an event from the expected eye-level, the perceptual point-of-view
of the camera is from an observatory perspective but at a lower-than-normal level. This emphasises the dwarfism of Saili.

4.3 Projected Illusion in *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*

The film seemed to create a phenomenon in which Samoans the world over connected with an aspect of the film. Henderson (2012) called this phenomenon the “Orator effect”. The film was a space that “…facilitated the types of conversations that we need[ed] to have in the Pacific but often do not voice” (p. 434). The implication here is that the film became a juncture where the young could openly discuss with the elderly, where commoners and titled met as equals, where the wise could impart knowledge to the novice, and vice versa. On the film’s Facebook page, Tim Mika (2011) wrote “i [sic] took my dad two wks [sic] ago and love it i [sic] took my mum today and it was even better, [sic] good to see a lot of our elderly at a full cinema!” Margaret Kamilo (2011) posted, “(…) it was touching to see all families there with their elders to watch the movie”. On a slightly different but related theme, Finera Wassafas Sovite (2012) noted, “this movie gives out an important lesson to Samoan people and that’s why I like it…aha”. As part of a conversation, Timote Salogo Tuivaiti (2012) posted “E LE LAVA LE FAASOA. I just need to get it [the film] in any kind of way to show Samoans in America so they can learn sumding bout da [sic] culture OK. …….I’m sure the directors r [sic] fine wit [sic] them. That’s part of wat there [sic] goal was. Is [sic] not all about PROFIT, its [sic] mostly bout [sic] MESSAGE”.

Many Facebook posts described how people told their own stories while watching the film indicating how *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* became a type of intragroup memory. The film was based on Tamasese’s own experiences and memories of *Fa’a Samoa*, and spectators watching the film remembered similar events and experiences prompted during the act of watching. As intragroup memory, the film became a cultural product that resonated and encouraged similar memories. Those who watched the movie “heard” echoes of their own and others’ stories, and
they claimed connections to the film’s location, the Samoan culture, or to someone in the village of film, and so on. R. Allen would equate this as film spectators “seeing-as” when watching The Orator (O Le Tulafale). The idealised and representative world of Fa’a Samoa and of the Samoan village in the film became a “…fully realized, though fictional, world that has all the preceptual presentness or immediacy of our own” (Allen, R., 1993, p. 40).

Focusing on the concept of an onscreen & offscreen continuum, The Orator (O Le Tulafale) contains techniques that encourage the spectator to “see-as” when watching it. Some of these techniques include the use of distant voices from off-screen characters, and extreme camera close-ups to reveal the inner and mental state of characters. Other techniques are mid- to wide-angled camera shots of daily village life as transitions, editing techniques to slow down the film’s pace to create a village sense of time, low-key traditional music, the use of the Samoan language in the film, and placing the spectator at the point-of-view of Saili, Vaiga, Poto and Litia. An example how these techniques can encourage the perspective of “seeing-as” is the film’s use of diegetic sound and music. The film’s music producer Tim Prebble (2011) wrote on Facebook (as part of a conversation) that music, diegetic and non-diegetic sounds should be a means of “gently supporting emotion, rather than dominating…”. The diegetic sounds of thunder, rain, birds, and cicadas dominated the film’s beginning. Prebble (2011) commented that the use of these sounds “beautifully transported [the spectator] into the natural sonic world of Samoa”. Sound could immerse the spectator into the natural world of the film. Sound helped create an imagined reality.

A disturbing moment in the film is when Saili is digging Vaiga’s grave and it begins to rain (see Screen Shot 13). In this scene, the point-of-view moved from Saili’s point-of-view to an observer’s perspective. There are extreme close-ups of Saili’s feet struggling to grip the mud and of his hands clawing at the sides of the grave. The spectator saw the panic and fear in his face. Because of the close and tight point-of-view of the camera at Saili’s eye level, the spectator
witnessed and experienced the mental stress and panic of Saili. All this time, the spectator directly experienced the rain, thunder, and wind through surround sound.

**Screen Shot 13 Saili trying to escape**

Through cinematic techniques, the film taps into the psyche of the spectator who then experiences the film as a projected illusion during the act of watching. Through such an experience, the spectator connects to the film. Through cinematic techniques, the concepts of Fa’a Samoa and Vā Tapuia reach beyond the film screen and extend to the spectators in the cinema. A result is their reliving, through memories, life events similar to those portrayed in the film. This reaction to the film is the act of remembering/act of memory (Van Dijck, 2004). The action/response to this reaction is to retell these memories as stories/oral histories (fāgogo). This does not begin and end in the theatre. By expressing their own fāgogo and experiences of the film, for example through Facebook, Samoan spectators connect to other Samoans. Since most of the stories and discussion focus on the qualities or essence of being Samoan, this organic sharing of ideas defines a global and fluid Samoan identity.

Most spectators experienced a character–centred projective illusion as many identified themselves with Saili. For many who saw the film and posted comments on the film’s Facebook page, the main point of identification was Saili’s oratory speech to Poto. Many commented on Saili’s courage in overcoming the various obstacles he faced in the film. J. Turner and S. Falgout (2002) noted that through the articulation of cultural memory, people, events, or locations become
transformed into “cultural archetypes” (p. 109). Žižek (1989) wrote that we readily identified with an image, or, in this context, a cultural archetype similar to ourselves and which we would like to be. For the Samoan spectator, Saili became an archetype. The identification with Saili was strengthened through Poto who was the negative archetype. Just as Saili represented the ideals of *Fa’a Samoa* and of Samoa, Poto represented the backside of *Fa’a Samoa*. These archetypes are imagined, and they form a sense of identification. Comments on the film’s Facebook page described the compassion and bravery of the main actor Saili. These qualities were then applied to real people who demonstrated similar characteristics or to events/contexts portraying the character’s values. Saili was an archetype teaching the morals of an idealised *Fa’a Samoa* and an idealised nation of Samoa in the real world. These idealised versions are personally defined as they are based on the spectator’s own experiences. They become imagined versions.

Powrie (2005) noted that audience identification with a protagonist will “increase [the] feeling of being ‘over there’ in a different space-time, identifying ourselves with the ‘ideal ego’ ” (p. 349). He explained that this sense of “being over there” results in a dislocation of time and space, and heightens a sense of loss and anxiety. In watching *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*, spectators identified and adopted the point-of-view of Saili. Through this identification, the spectator became dislocated from the present physical space of the theatre and the real time (106 minutes) spent watching the film. Spectator identification with Saili enabled the spectator to relive past events similar to those in the film. Eventually this leads to a sense of loss and anxiety fomenting a longing caused by the inability to recreate the ideal in the present reality.

*The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* also offered opportunities for the spectator to experience a spectator-centred projective illusion. Many responded to the events they watched. Some Facebook comments related to the rugby coach giving his team a pep talk. In this event, the rugby coach explained the three Ds: determination, defence, and “dackle”. This was a moment of humour in the
film, and it acted as a tension reliever. Facebook comments related experiences similar to this. This is an example of where the spectator adopted the point-of-view of the rugby players and responded to the “brown humour” or locally situated and culturally specific humour of this event. The event involved not taking the coach seriously. Yet, it was an event most spectators experienced while watching the film and by remembering similar events with similar jokes and humour. Another example is Poto stealing Vaaiga’s body (see Series 2)

**Series 2 Poto Steals Vaaiga’s Body**

Series 2 shows Poto arriving to mourn his sister. When he arrived, he saw Litia watching over her mother. At this stage, Poto is desperate. He had to lift the curse off him, so he decided to steal Vaaiga’s body. Litia told him to leave her mother alone, and she threw herself on top of her mother’s body to protect it. Poto pushed Litia off her mother and he dragged Vaaiga’s body out of the house.

This scene is disturbing to watch. The point-of-view of the camera an observatory one and is mostly watched through the frame of the front door of Saili’s house. The doorframe isolated and emphasised the action. It also removed the option of looking away to watch other action taking place at the same time, forcing spectators to witness this event. To emphasise the ugliness of this act, the last few moments were from Litia’s point-of-view. The spectator was on the ground with Litia, and, through her eyes, the spectator saw Poto drag Vaiga out of the house. In the last few moments, the spectator was an emotional participant, and so experienced the mental and emotional anguish of Litia. The change from spectator-centred to character-centred projective illusion in this
scene heightened this scene’s disturbing aspects and, in the context of Fa’a Samoa, the level of seriousness in the breaches of Vā Tapuia, mana, tapu, and feagaiga between Poto and Vaaiga. In response to this scene, comments from Samoans focused on the honour of Fa’a Samoa, on how it should be lived, and on the meaning of matai. Nove Vailaau (2011) commented that the movie “conveys what a true Tulafale (orator) should be. A true orator is measured Not [sic] by the looks, nor by personal stature, nor by designs on the skin, nor by the fame of title bestowed or the bestowal event, but by the nature of true tautua with love, kindness, and humility”.

Another strong point of emotion for the film’s spectators was the oratory scene between Poto and Saili. Mid-camera shots from Poto to Saili emulated the concept of “turn taking” in speaking. The tight close-up camera shots of Poto’s and Saili’s faces emphasised Poto’s shame, and Saili’s love and honour for his wife. The formal context of fa’a matai, compounded by the symbols of matai and the skill and strength of oratory, showed Fa’a Samoa as a harmed character. This was where the film illustrated the authentic and inauthentic practices of the Samoan culture.

Through projected illusion, people remember what they want and when they want. They also choose how to retell that memory. Memory as narrative is a way of passing on knowledge, morals, and values as well as people’s experiences of the world to the next generation. Memory narratives in the form of fāgogo permit cultures to organise and integrate their understanding into their realities.
Chapter 5 Conclusion

I was prompted to research *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* because of the lack of negative reaction of Samoans to the film that openly portrayed the negative sides of the Samoan culture. Based on the thousands of comments on the film’s Facebook page, the overwhelming response was positive. This was puzzling to me. As a former journalist who worked in New Zealand as a Pacific affairs and regional reporter, I have been victim of criticism from the Samoan community over stories I have written. An example was an incident where an elderly Samoan woman publicly scolded me. This occurred during an academic panel discussion on media in the Pacific. Two Pacific journalists, a media analyst and I were invited to be on the panel. This elderly Samoan woman reminded me of my duty as a Samoan and to the Samoan community. According to her, my stories were not helping the Samoan communities shed the negative images associated with them. Some of my former colleagues have suffered similar criticism from various sections of the New Zealand-Samoan community for stories they have written. In researching the issue, I decided that the first step was to analyse how the film fomented the overwhelming positive reaction from Samoans worldwide. The next step was determining and examining to what Samoans was reacting. Were Samoans responding to the film just because it is about Samoa, or were they responding to themselves as well as how they reacted during the act of watching it? Naturally, there were direct or first-level responses to *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* for instance judging the film according to its storyline, camera shots, location, and so on. Nevertheless, it seems that the film also prompted a second-level response: reactions stemming from responses resulting from the act of watching.

I analysed the film’s narrative techniques and narration through the concepts of fāgogo and R. Allen’s (1993, 1997) concept of projected illusion. My analysis indicated that *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* acted as a “memory prompt” from which Samoans evoked memories confirming and defining cultural bonds. These were examples of intragroup memory (Mageo, 2001) and were
awakened and told as oral histories during the act of watching the film. These memories, as oral stories, constituted the essence of being Samoan (Samoanness). These memories were prompted by archetypes of this essence, as portrayed in the film.

These prompted memories were shared as fāgogo orally or through social media to other Samoans in Samoa or in destination immigrant countries. Those who read or listened to these memories appeared to interpret them to create their own memories and stories in their contexts. As Samoans retell and relive their fāgogo of people they have known and places they have lived, they open up the Samoan cosmology in which the past, present, and future are experienced in one small moment during the act of oral storytelling. The organic sharing of experiences and memories, for instance online, creates a global definition of Samoanness which Samoans the world over can claim. At the same time, the concept of Samoanness and cultural identity is essentialist in that it is firmly based on Fa’a Samoa emanating from the homeland of Samoa. Samoa and Fa’a Samoa in Samoa appeared to be touchstones upon which Samoans could use as reference points for their own sense of Fa’a Samoa and Samoanness in their own contexts.

Most of the ideas generated for this research were inspired by comments posted on the film’s official Facebook page The Orator (O Le Tulafale). Based on their knowledge of the film and its success, many Samoans were stating their pride in being Samoan and in the Samoan culture. There were many who said that they had not seen the film and they were desperate to know when it would be shown in their part of the world. Yet, despite not having seen the film, these people were praising it anyway. Their praises were based on comments posted by others who had seen the film. Based on this second-hand information, people who had not seen the movie were stating their pride in Samoa, being Samoan and of the Samoan culture.
The other interesting aspect about *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* and the Samoan community was that the film fostered a global community in which Samoans reached out to others and made connections. This begs for investigation into a transcultural Samoan identity and the impact that popular media, such as film and music, and social media, like Twitter and Facebook, have on the formation, cultivation and definition of Samoan cultural identity. However, due to the limited scope of this paper, I made the decision to analyse elements of the film and to discuss the relationship Samoans have with the film.

My research only touches the surface of this effect (Henderson (2012) called this the Orator effect), and more investigation is required to explore, within the framework of transculturalism and/or diaspora, the dialogue of and among Samoans the world. From my cursive study, social and popular media are spaces that are both physical and non-physical. These spaces are physical in that they are surrounded by boundaries whether they are national or natural. For instance, *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)* was filmed in a geographically defined area. People watched the film in theatres or homes in their suburbs, cities, and countries. People chatted to each other through Facebook from within their own geographical areas, and in their own time zones.

Popular and social media are also boundaryless, and non-physical. In social media, communication and connections takes place in real time, but it also transcends time. A person can be both present and non-present. When one reads a comment posted on Facebook, it brings the person who posted the comment into the reader’s real time. This is despite the fact that the writer may have posted the comment hours or minutes before the reader viewed the comment. Social media is a space where the only time sense experienced is the present.
With moving images, if a film spectator is immersed in the movie he/she watches (“see-as”) then that person becomes lost in: the time projected in the film, the location of the film, and the events of the film. For the Samoan spectator watching *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*, he/she is transported into the projected reality of the film and they forget the sensation of physically sitting in a theatre watching a 106-minute film. Like social media, the film spectator is both “here” and “there” at the same time.

An important issue deriving from this is the concept of a fluid and contextual definition of Samoan identity. The film does portray an essentialist view of *Fa’a Samoa*, in particular the values of the Samoan culture, and how those values should be lived. Nevertheless, the main character Saili also hints at a more progressive and inclusive Samoan identity. For instance, a dwarf becomes an effective and powerful *tulafale*. There are discussions within the Samoan community on Facebook about Samoan identity and definition of Samoanness and many of those discussions centre on how the film teaches different aspects of *Fa’a Samoa* and the importance for Samoans living outside Samoa watch the movie to learn about the culture. At the same time, there are allusions in the comments about belonging to two cultures along with how the film could possibly help with this dilemma. The implication is that many Samoans are negotiating their Samoanness in the communities they live in around the world.

However, such issues could not be discussed at length in this paper. This paper is only the beginning and more research is required to explore all of the possibilities mentioned above. Along with the issue of a global and transcultural Samoan identity is whether other indigenous films create the same phenomenal effects similar to *The Orator (O Le Tulafale)*.
References


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DOI:10.1093/screen/46.3.341


**Films, Videos, DVDs**


**Social Media References: The Orator (O Le Tulafale) Facebook.**


Appendix A

Film Poster for The Orator (O Le Tulafale)

Source: The Orator (O Le Tulafale) Facebook page.
Appendix B

Young or Elderly Woman Optical Illusion Picture