WHITE SHADOWS IN THE DARKNESS: REPRESENTATIONS OF POLYNESIAN WOMEN IN EARLY CINEMA

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This article considers representations of Polynesian women in two early Hollywood films: *Moana* (1926) and *Tabu* (1931). It ponders the tensions not just between the cinematic visions of Robert Flaherty and F. W. Murnau, but between ethnographic recuperations and romantic celebrations of Polynesian women, in the light of de Lauretis's contentions (in *Technologies of Gender,* 1987) that gendered identities are neither fixed nor immutable, but shifting and fluid effects.

Moana (1926) and *Tabu* (1931) are both films associated with the name of Robert Flaherty, though in different ways. *Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age* carries a clear Flaherty signature and, like *Nanook of the North,* has been celebrated and criticized as part of the tradition of the "documentary" or ethnographic film.[1] *Tabu* has been typified, rather, as an example of the genre of Hollywood romances of the South Seas, a tempestuous if poignant love story. Although Flaherty worked on both these films, only *Moana* bears his directorial signature.[2] *Tabu* is attributed to the German director F. W. Murnau.[3] As he had during the filming of the earlier *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1929),[4] with William Van Dyke II, Flaherty fell out with his collaborators and, indeed, the Hollywood studio system. In 1929, on the eve of departure for Tahiti, he quipped that going through Hollywood was like "sailing over a sewer in a glass-bottomed boat" (Winston 1984–1985:59).[5] But the tensions between Flaherty and Murnau were not just over art and money, or even between the approaches of documentary and fiction film, realism and expressionism. The juxtaposition of *Moana* and *Tabu* also suggests a slippage between genres, a slippage that is especially acute in representa-

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tions of women—between the sliding motions of ethnographic recuperation and romantic celebration.

Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age

Critical discussion of *Moana* often proceeds by comparison with Flaherty's earlier film *Nanook of the North,* made with the Inuit in 1920–1921. Both the arctic climate and the arduous history of its making evoked the struggle of "man" [*sic*] with nature. Grierson and others suggest that the studio wanted another *Nanook* but that Flaherty found Samoa too idyllic, too benign for such a saga (Grierson 1972:127). He and his family (his wife Frances, their three children, his brother David, and an Irish nursemaid) spent about eighteen months on the island of Savai'i in Western Samoa, and from his extensive footage (over 240,000 feet) he constructed another struggle—the struggle to achieve manhood itself. The central character, Moana, has in the final sequences of the film to endure the pain of acquiring a tattoo, in order to "become a man" and thus to secure the "survival of his race" (quoted from intertitles of *Moana*).

But Ta'avale, the actor who played Moana, would not have been tattooed if it were not for Flaherty's film and the high fee he was paid (Calder-Marshall 1963:113–114). Even though tattooing was little practiced in this era, Flaherty insisted on recording the rite (with some local resistance, presumably from devout Wesleyans).[6] Many Samoan men of the period, including many of the actors in the film, do not bear tattoos. Although *Moana* is part of the documentary canon,[7] its ethnographic intent is clearly romantic and recuperative. The subtitle betrays this—Flaherty was knowingly reconstructing a golden age, a Samoan idyll where nature was bountiful, work was pleasure, relations between men and women were harmonious and secure, and the old gods prevailed rather than Jehovah.[8]

The opening intertitles establish both the romantic and the ethnographic credentials. First, a quote from Robert Louis Stevenson: "The first love, the first sunrise, the first South Sea island, are memories apart." Then, Flaherty's acknowledgment of his indigenous interpreter, Fialelei, granddaughter of Seumanutafa, of the island of Savai'i, "where the people still retain the spirit and nobility of their great race." She is also described as "intimate friend and counsellor of Robert Louis Stevenson."

The initial shot tracks from the tip of a high tree, covered in vines to its base, in the midst of a taro garden, the gardeners seemingly lost among the large glistening leaves. The women are dressed in tapa ponchos *(tiputa),* the men though bare-breasted are also wearing beautiful *tapa lavalava,* which look like rather inappropriate garden attire.[9] Here we meet the central char-

acters, the beautiful young man Moana, harvesting the taro ("their bread"); his younger brother Pe'a; his elder brother Leupenga; the beautiful Fa'angase, "the highest maiden of the village," collecting leaves and bananas; and Moana's mother, Tu'ungaita, collecting paper mulberry boughs. They are not only well dressed in *siapo* (tapa), they are all laughing exuberantly while they work. The differences between men's and women's labor is emphasized —women carry leaves, bananas, and firewood on their backs; men bear tubers and coconuts in woven leaf baskets attached to poles and shoulder their loads with more puff and ostentation.

Later scenes establish that it is men and boys who assume the dangerous, risky work—be it pursuing and ensnaring a wild pig ("the jungle's one dangerous animal," "the tusks can kill"), climbing high palms to dislodge coconuts, smoking out coconut crabs (Figure 1), or fishing and catching turtles in turbulent seas. Although the sea at Safune village is calm and abundant, fringed by a coral reef, the tempestuous potential of the ocean is evoked in shots of heavy waves and blowholes that spume into the camera lens. It is men who brave the ocean vigorously in their outriggers (Figure 2), and in one stunning if dangerous sequence, they succumb and have to swim to shore. (This was shot with a long lens, with Flaherty at a safe distance).[10]

The work of women, by contrast, is represented as subdued and interior.[11] We see the smoke rising from Mother Tu'ungaita's cookhouse, and we see her soaking the mulberry strips, beating them with a mallet, carefully pulling apart the fragile white tissue, and patching pieces onto the frayed holes in the fabric. Her supple, consummate hands work lovingly over the cloth. The candlenut seeds are crushed and the dye is made, and she instructs her younger assistant in carefully marking the tapa. Their faces are suffused with joy and satisfaction. And although the intertitle "Mother Tu'ungaita makes a dress" slyly alludes to missionary sewing classes, we are assured that this is none other than the costume of the country, "the *lavalava*" (although elsewhere men are to be seen sailing outriggers in store-bought cloth).

Women are also portrayed at work in the gardens and the seashore, collecting reeds and shells. There is a shot of a bare-breasted Fa'angase holding a giant clam, followed by a playful teasing sequence between her and Moana. We had earlier seen Moana languorously dribbling water, "pure, cool, and sparkling" from a bush vine into her throat.[12] In this sequence Fa'angase is draped over an outrigger, eagerly munching tiny live fish. We are told "she couldn't bear to eat raw oysters, but silver fishes—yum!! wiggle and all" (quoted from intertitles).[13] As she munches she teases Moana, her sinuous toes and his plaintive fingers moving in and out of the water like darting little fishes. The erotic play between the young lovers continues in a later sequence where she massages Moana with perfumed coconut oil and deco-

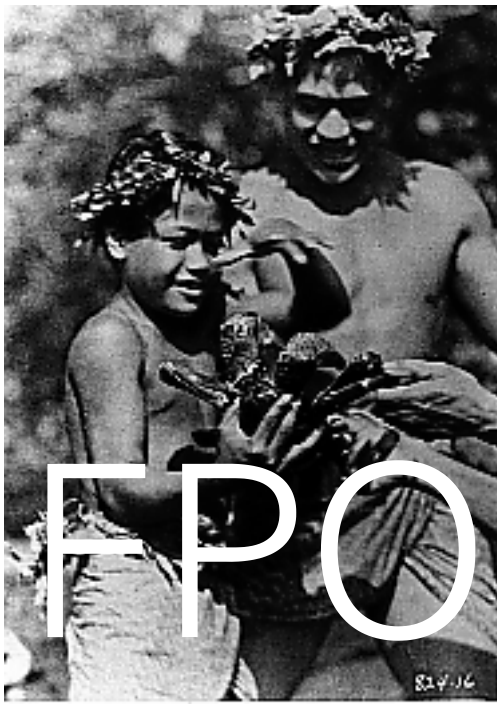
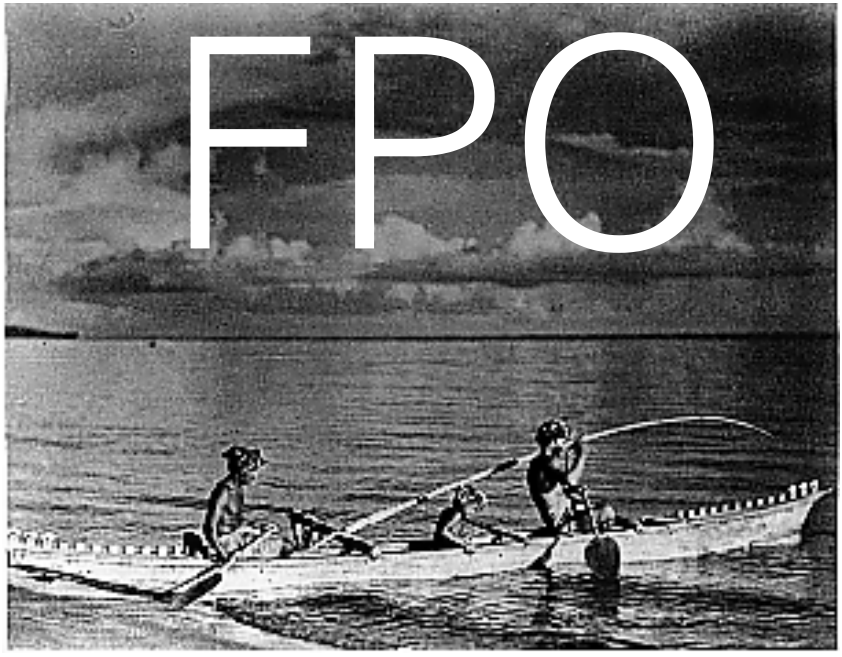


FIGURE 1 (LEFT). **The adventure of male work: Moana and his younger brother catch coconut crabs by smoking them out. Film still from *Moana*.** (Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive, New York)

FIGURE 2 (BELOW). **Moana (right) and his two brothers, Pe'a (center) and Leupenga (left), in a Samoan outrigger canoe. Film still from *Moana*.** (Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive, New York)



rates him with flowers and anklet shells in what we are told is "an age-old rite of the Siva." This culminates in a dance described as "Pride of beauty . . . Pride of strength. The art, the worship, the courtship of the race" (quoted from intertitles). The camera angle, either by accident or by design,[14] first has only Moana in frame. Fa'angase is visible only as a deep shadow or as enticing dancing fingers at the edge of the frame. Only in the last moments do we witness the mutuality of the ancient arts of dancing, the eroticism between them rendered more intense by the knowledge that she is a sacred virgin *(taupou)* and that in order to "win" her, he must submit to more than a massage.[15] But in constructing a fantasy of heterosexual romance, Flaherty has substituted the girlfriend, the lover, for the sister. It was Samoan practice for the sister to massage her brother with coconut oil and to dance the Siva with him.

In a rather clumsy narrative device, another intertitle informs us that all we have witnessed so far has been preparation for what Moana must suffer. "There is an ordeal which every Polynesian must pass in order to win the right to call himself a man" (a declamation that not only eschews women from the category "Polynesian" but ignores the patterns of female tattooing in some parts of Polynesia; see Gell 1993:88ff. for a consideration of sex differences as part of the regional variations in Pacific tattooing).[16] Fa'angase lays the mats for Moana, and the work of the tattooist, the *tufunga,* starts. In some stunning shots at medium range, the camera closely witnesses the work of the bone needle and the penetration of dye on Moana's skin. Dark wedges of black emerge on his back, the canonical abstract patterns of Samoan tattoos advance over his flank. Moana winces, his mother and father and his beloved look on with great compassion. At one point the pain is too intense; he pauses and Fa'angase gently rubs his back and fans the inflamed skin. Again this would have been done by the sister, not a sweetheart, who should always act with circumspection, never touching or showing signs of attraction in public (Schoeffel, pers. com., 12 November 1997).

For three weeks the tattooist continues.[17] Whereas the male *tufunga*'s art is seen as dignified and sacralized, the old woman who prepares the dye for him, also a highly sacred and dignified *tufunga,* is cast as a witch:[18] "Light your oven, witchwoman, Tufunga needs more dye. . . . Work your charms and spells, witchwoman, and keep the devils out" (quoted from intertitles). Meanwhile, other men, many of whom are noticeably not wearing tattoos, dance to give Moana courage. Finally, his thighs are covered with deep ridges and stripes, and "the hardest of all to bear," the knee, is done. He is proclaimed to have a strong heart, to be *malosi*—his manhood is won. Flaherty makes his own proclamation to his imagined Euro-American audience: "Through this pattern of the flesh, to you perhaps no more than cruel, useless ornament,

the Samoan wins the dignity, the character, the fiber which keep his race alive. The deepest wisdom of the race has said that manhood should be won through pain" (quoted from intertitles).

The film races to its climax. Fa'angase, as the sacred virgin, must prepare the kava that is offered to the chief, who in turn offers "a libation to the gods." She is then adorned with her plumed headdress (a prerogative of persons of the highest rank) and dances with Moana in a public ceremony, though in fairly restrained fashion. Moana has won "prestige for his village, honor for his family, the maiden of his desire." Again this constructs a heterosexual romance of a dance that would have been performed by the *taupou* not with a lover, but with a brother. Finally, the camera lingers on Moana's younger brother, Pe'a. He has fallen asleep, and his watchful mother covers him with a soft, caressing tapa, its superb patterns like an afterimage of the marked tissues of Moana's skin.

Moana recreates an idealized ancient Samoa rather than the Samoa of Flaherty's two-year sojourn of 1923–1924. The fabulation of this golden age is most obviously effected through his saga of eternal manhood, the fiber of Samoan masculinity, dehistoricized, which alone secures the "survival of the race." Rotha and others have criticized Flaherty's propensity in this and other films to focus on a "past or dying generation" and to create male heroes who are "waxwork figures acting the lives of their grandfathers" (Rotha 1972: 235). But in this ethnographic recuperation women are also crucial. Not only are we told that Flaherty's key interpreter was the chiefly woman Fialelei, but other images of women—as maiden, as mother, and as witch—fix and frame the tattooing rite. The crucial Samoan female role of sister is, however, elided (cf. Tcherkezoff 1993).

Margaret Mead apparently complained about Flaherty's depiction of the Samoan family, but in his representation of the maiden Flaherty comes closer to Mead than to Derek Freeman.[19] Grierson tells us that Hollywood asked for "dark-skinned bathing belles" but "got a quiet, dignified young heroine with a flower in her ear, who danced superbly, but could not possibly be confused with whoopee" (1972:128). He claims that, in desperation, the studio first issued the film with the subtitle "The Love Life of a South Seas Siren" and gave it a prologue of "jangling guitars and shimmering chorus girls" (ibid.). But in his reinscription of the myth of the ethnographic artist fighting the salacious commercialism of the studio, Grierson perhaps overstates the case. Fa'angase is no doubt seemly and dignified, but though a virgin, she is sexualized. Her nubile breasts are regularly bared to Flaherty's camera, and she is often seen in erotic play with Moana—the dribbling water, the wiggling fish, the oiled caress, and the exquisite eroticism of dancing fingers and feet. Their love is blessed not just by the gods but by

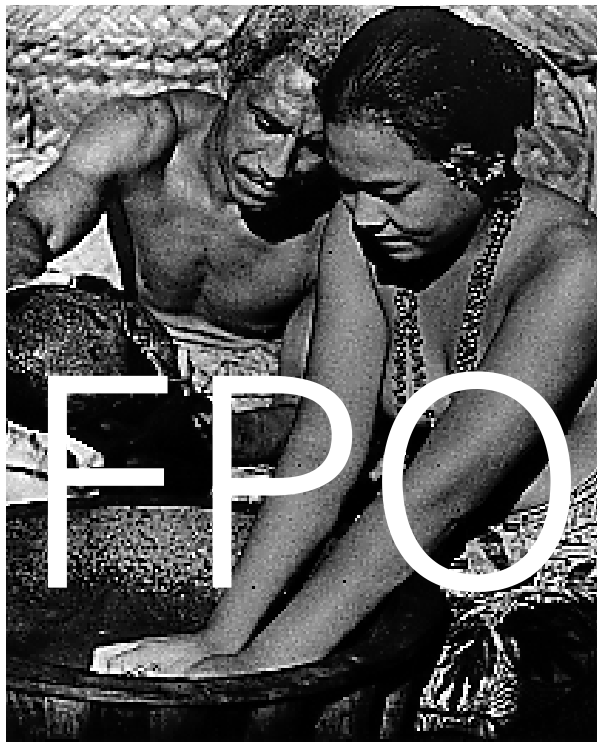


FIGURE 3. **Making coconut cream for *palusami* (fish in breadfruit leaves with coconut). Film still from *Moana*.** (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive, New York)

parental approval. Mother Tu'ungaita lovingly instructs her future daughter-in-law in the art of making tapa and drapes the beautiful creation around her, while Moana's father plays the drums to which they dance.

Moana's mother is the epitome of nurture and compassion. From her imagined "cookhouse" comes steaming taro and breadfruit, the delicious *palusami* (fish in breadfruit leaves) (Figure 3). Cups of coconut-cream custard emerge from Fa'angase's supple, wringing hands. Although father and brothers are shown hard at work, preparing breadfruit and taro and the hot stones of the earth oven, the routine culinary work of Samoan men tends to be elided as emanating from Mother Tu'ungaita's cookhouse. And unlike the father, who is only rarely filmed, her maternal relation to Moana and Pe'a is captured constantly. She sits watchful and concerned as Moana's tattooing

progresses. She is forever on the lookout for the frisky young Pe'a, from the opening sequence where she searches for him beneath the gigantic taro leaves to the final moments where she covers him with tapa.

But perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Flaherty's depiction of women in *Moana* is his depiction of the woman who manufactures the dye. This female specialty, like the manufacture of the sacred turmeric and other medicines, was no doubt a spiritually charged and dangerous role. But, whereas the male *tufunga* is represented as a noble and sacred artist, she is portrayed as his maidservant engaged in magic and, even worse, as a witch. There are whiffs of the witch's cauldron, and, in one of the few allusions to the pervasive Christianity of Samoa at that time, she is seen both to cast out devils and as the source of satanic practice. I return to this paradox below.

Tabu: A South Seas Romance

Whereas *Moana* is part of the canon of what Grierson dubbed "the documentary," *Tabu,* shot in Tahiti in 1929 and released in 1931, is one of the earliest of a long genealogy of South Seas romances. *Moana* conveys the quotidian texture of Samoan life—the glossy brilliance of taro leaves, the steaming cups of coconut cream, the weave of mats and walls, the soft caress of tapa—and creates a slight narrative from this. *Tabu*'s brilliance is rather in its suspenseful plot and its expressionist style. The cinematography evokes the play of light and dark; the plot, the struggle of good against evil, in a way reminiscent of Murnau's earlier horror classic *Nosferatu* (1921–1922). One version of the credits tells us that it was "directed by F. W. Murnau" and "told by Flaherty"—an enigmatic co-signature that cloaks the deep differences that emerged between them over directorial styles and inclinations toward genre. Moreover, whereas *Moana* was, in its first incarnation at least, a silent film,[20] *Tabu* has a powerful musical score, an extraordinary mélange of Wagner, Tahitian melodies, and fragments of what I can only call Hollywood Chinese ditties. The film was released in 1931, a week after Murnau's death, to wide critical acclaim. It did better at the box office than *Moana,* although still not a stunning success, according to Reyes "being too downbeat for the Depression years" (1995:201).

Despite its blatantly fictional plot, Murnau is not averse to a little ethnographic authentication himself. We are assured by the credits that "only native-born South Sea Islanders appear in this picture—with a few half-castes and Chinese." This assurance is presumably to allay doubts about Reri, the light-skinned heroine, who might very well have been mistaken for a Latino actress like Dolores Del Rio, who plays the doomed virgin in Van Dyke's 1929 version of *Bird of Paradise,* or Raquel Torres, the heroine of Murnau's

earlier *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1928). We are also assured that, although we are about to enter a "land of enchantment," the island of Bora Bora, where the film was made, is still miraculously "untouched by the hand of civilization."

Tabu also tells a story of two young lovers, Matahi and Reri, but whereas the love of Moana and Fa'angase is blessed, theirs is blighted by the fact that her virginity must rather be consecrated to the gods. The opening sequences of Matahi and his mates fishing in heavy seas with spears in the Tahitian style are reminiscent of Flaherty's ethnographic shots of fishing in Samoan waters, and Reyes believes they were Flaherty's creation (1995:200). But we are summarily moved from this authenticating moment up the mountain. As the young men wash and cavort in a waterfall, a tiara of flowers falls from a grotto above. Here, in a canonically Hollywood Polynesian idyll, are several beautiful young women, draped in sarongs and splashing about in the water. Emerging from underneath a stand of gigantic taro leaves is the most beautiful of all—Reri. As her glistening face and body are revealed (still fully draped), Matahi peeks from behind, and the sound track trills with flutes evoking bird calls. The other women struggle in jealous squabbles over the men (one gets a black eye), and Matahi engages in rough play with Reri, pushing her down a waterfall. She is at first disconsolate, but after he lovingly wipes her off, she seems to like the look of him.

The idyll is broken by the sharp sound of a conch, or rather a man imitating a conch. A ship with big white sails has arrived, and a plethora of canoes are launched. As they get closer, we see the name on the hull, *Moana,* Papeete! The long hand of civilization has touched even Bora Bora, it seems, although the ship is primarily a conduit for indigenous relations. Though manned by white men, *Moana* has a seriously indigenous set of passengers —Hitu, the priest from Fanuma, with several aged virgins, all of whom wear a uniform of cotton drapery with identical patterns. He bears an edict from his chief, conferring on Bora Bora "the highest honor known to our islands." The capitalized words written on the unfolding parchment appear first in Tahitian and then in an Old Testament register of English, their portent transparent in translation.

> The virgin sacred to our gods has passed away and I decree that from your island has come her successor, one I have chosen for her beauty, for her virtue, for her royal blood. She who is named RERI.
>
> No law of the gods is more to be feared than that which guards the sacred virgin. Man must not touch her or cast upon her the eye of desire. For in her honor rests the honor of us all. Sacred is Reri from this time forth. She is Tabu, to break this Tabu means death.

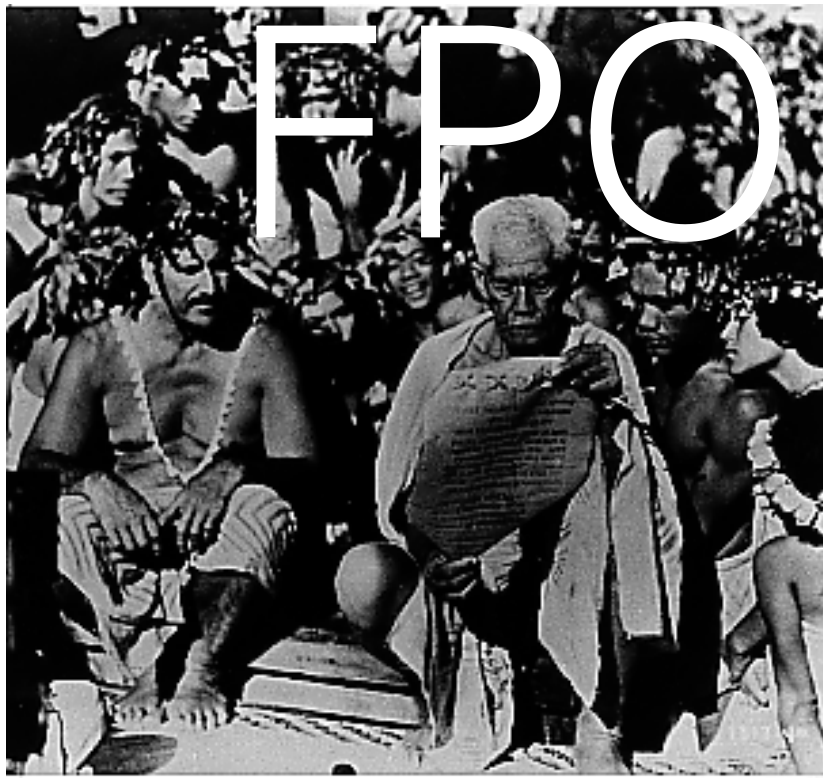


FIGURE 4. **Hitu, the priest, reads the edict declaring Reri's dedication to the gods as a virgin. Film still from *Tabu*.** (Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive, New York)

But Matahi, arriving late to the ship and thus blissfully unaware of this edict, is still casting "the eye of desire" upon her and throws a beautiful fresh tiara onto her head. It is summarily removed by one of Hitu's attendants, the crushed flowers on the deck portending lost love. The floral motif recurs in the next scene. A group of young women are tumbling in a sea of flowers, threading them into tiaras, leis, and headdresses in preparation for the dance to celebrate Reri's consecration. She is not celebrating—she sobs relentlessly on her mother's knee, refusing to go with the aged virgins. Hitu appears quietly and sits by the door with a portentous, still patience. A small boy tries to rouse the mourning Matahi, enticing him to get into his grass skirt and ready for the dance.

Reri at last consents to don the cloak of the sacred virgin, and the path is

FIGURE 5. **Reri's dancing—bare-breasted rather than draped—intensifies and outrages Hitu. Film still from *Tabu*.** (Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive, New York)

swept and children bundled off for the invasive procession of chiefs, priests, and virgins. Kava is poured, slit gongs are beaten, and a mass of men and women dance, both in swirling grass skirts, the men bare-breasted, the women draped but wearing superb floral headdresses. The beskirted Matahi arrives at last but cannot bring himself to respectfully place a tiara on Hitu's head. Reri joins the dance in her vestal robes, but Matahi pushes himself forward and close to her: the dance reaches an erotic intensity that Hitu cannot tolerate (Figure 5). He throws his tiara to the ground. It is finished. Canoes are laden for the return journey, and a farewell lament is sung.

But in the deep of night, with the full moon searing through the palms, Matahi approaches the boat, his head disguised among a cluster of coconuts bobbing on the sea. In a brilliant series of nocturnal shots, we see flares sprout from the ship and slit gongs being beaten to announce that Reri has been "stolen." At this point the French colonial policeman writes to his superior, informing him that he will stay until it is clear what the islanders are going to do. The "guilty lovers" meanwhile are adrift on the vast ocean,

braving storms and burning skies, dying of thirst, and seeking some "island of the pearl trade where the white man rules and the old gods are forgotten."

They are rescued on the edge of such a place—ruled it seems not by the white man, but by the Chinese. In a graphic sequence set around a Chinese restaurant, Murnau evokes the freedom and the decadence of the multiracial pearling ports. Here there is easy credit for food and grog. Here champagne, not kava, flows into coconut shells and tin pannikins, and even Reri has a shy sip. Here the dancing is even more erotic and close than Bora Bora style. We see both waltz and whoopee: we see bare feet of different hues, women dancing with women, men with men, and a white woman's feet in stiletto shoes very close to the dark bare feet of a man. A white man in trousers and cowboy hat plays accordion and does a hula, his belt gesticulating wildly.

But, although Matahi is a born diver and earns well from the pearl trade, he does not know "what money means," and we witness an appalling sequence of bills in Chinese script adorned with his awkward mark "M." In an even worse augury, a ship slips into the harbor—none other than *Moana* from Papeete! Matahi and Reri are pursued by the French policeman, acting under orders to arrest the couple, who threaten conflict between the islands, and in anticipation of the reward of 500 francs. When Matahi offers his pearls for their freedom, the policeman tears up his orders but laughs menacingly, knowing that Hitu and the "avenging power of the Tabu" are not so readily compromised.

The power of tabu is summoned in the next sequence, where the deadly consequences of breaking ancestral law are exposed. A diver, in pursuit of pearls, defies the tabu on an oyster bed. His rope tumbles out dangerously, the outrigger is upturned, and he disappears into the miasmic jaws of a huge white shark. The colonial officer plants a sign over his watery grave announcing "TABU."

Then, in a stunning nocturnal sequence, we witness Matahi and Reri sleeping together but fitfully waking in turns, their minds moving toward different resolutions. The moonlight falls through the moving palms, the play of light and shadow falls on the weave of the hut and their faces, its restless movement evoking the tension between their divergent plans. Hitu appears to Reri at the door and is poised to hit Matahi with his spear. Reri protects him, but Hitu leaves a threatening message: she must return with him in three days or death will ensue. She buries his message, but in a flash-forward her intention is revealed: she will buy two tickets for Papeete (whether the second is for Matahi or for Hitu is unclear).

As she sleeps, Matahi steals off to search for pearls at the tabu site. The sea is full of menace (sprouting a series of patently fake shark fins), but he

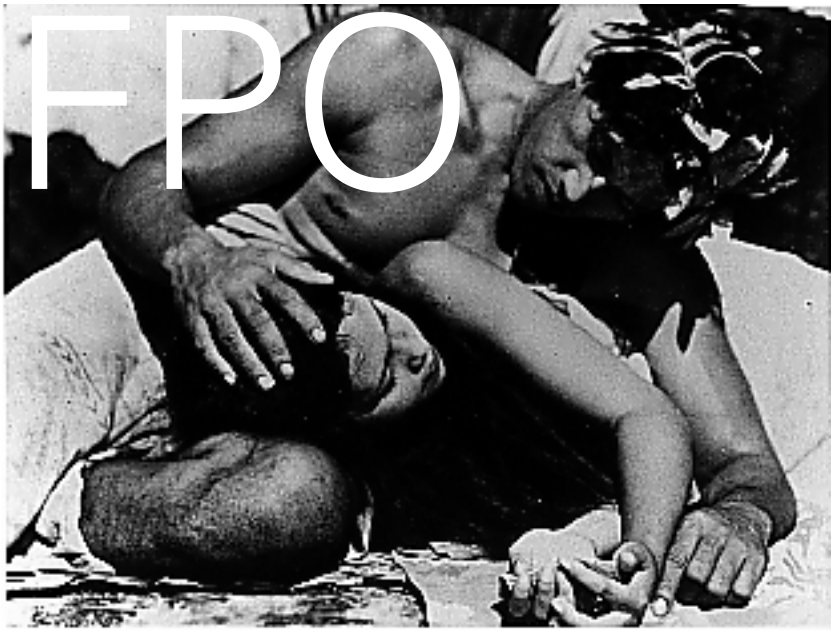


FIGURE 6. **Matahi, unable to sleep, cradles Reri as their tragic fate looms closer. Film still from *Tabu*.** (Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art/ Film Stills Archive, New York)

succeeds in finding not only a pearl, but a black pearl (beautiful and forbidden like Reri). Yet, despite his dreams of his bills being torn up, it is not enough to cancel the mountain of debts he has to the Chinese traders. A montage sequence, akin to early Eisenstein, evokes the tragic relation of Chinese rapacity and Tahitian innocence. The fare to Papeete cannot be found, and Reri thus decides to take another journey with Hitu.

With heaving sobs, framed by the restless play of moonlight on thatch walls, she writes her letter of farewell. This letter is in the same strange style of inscription as the chiefly edict—capitalized words of portent on parchment. "The Tabu is upon us," she declares. Matahi discovers that she is gone. When he reads the note, he discards the black pearl in the sand; it lies next to a frail frangipani, fallen from Reri's hair.

She takes her fated journey with Hitu—his face mournful, but as resolved as his rudder and his silent sailing ship cresting the waves. Matahi pursues them; swimming valiantly through the surf, he manages to gain on them and even grabs hold of the anchor rope. But Hitu takes his knife and,

with a decisive cut, leaves him stranded, his strength failing, his strokes slowing, his body now lost and drifting in the ocean.

This is clearly a sob story and one that relies on a tactic of identification with the young lovers rather different than in *Moana*. But although a romance rather than a documentary, it acquires a certain ethnographic authority from its being shot on location in Tahiti and from its representation of Polynesian notions and practices of *tapu,* chiefly and priestly power, and, of course, erotic dancing. It has none of the texture of daily life that characterizes Flaherty's work. Both works make scant use of local language, but the divergent uses are interesting. Flaherty translates snippets of Samoan conversation that emerge in the cinematic action—"good hunting," "good eating." Murnau uses Tahitian only in the powerful edicts emanating from the chief (and in Reri's farewell letter, inscribed in similar style). This contrast between everyday conversation and codified, literate edicts of chiefs corresponds with divergent representations of indigenous culture, of chiefly and priestly power, and of women vis-à-vis that power.

Flaherty constructs the power of elders and chiefs as benign and necessary for the survival of Samoans. Both the pain Moana suffers and the institution of the *taupou,* which Fa'angase embodies, are depicted as noble and essential to the "race." The relations between men and women, of both the younger and older generations, are depicted as a finely tuned harmony of respect and sensual ease. Women, though not tattooed, are seen as valued and respected members of their "race." The only discordant note is that witch-woman—a figure who appears only briefly in two short shots in the tattooing sequence. Her irruption in the narrative, replete with a pot, shells, and perhaps skulls, evokes another competing trope—of dark heathenism and cannibalistic portent—in a film that in every other way constructs Samoa as South Pacific idyll: a site of beauty and abundance, sensuality, and sanctity. Flaherty's ethnographic recuperation of Samoa in this vein relies on gendered narrative structures and romantic tropes with a far longer genealogy than Hollywood cinema (see Jolly 1997).

In *Tabu,* in contrast, the power of chiefs and priests is seen as invasive and capricious. Although Hitu is portrayed as patient and dignified, his dignity is seen to rely ultimately on the power of death. Both Matahi and Reri are portrayed as subject to such tyranny, but it is Reri who must be consecrated for life. Although *Tabu* is critical of the insularity and the oppressiveness of indigenous power, it is no hymn to civilization either. The French colonial authorities are shown not just as complicit with indigenous chiefs, but also as corrupt, not averse to the odd pearl in payment for ignoring an order. The freedom of the ports, the dancing of the diaspora, is tinged with

decadence and exploitation—all the more rapacious in its racist representation of Chinese traders rather than whites. The destructive force of money as much as coercive tradition dooms Matahi—he desecrates tradition in pursuit of forbidden pearls to pay all those credit slips in Chinese.

But *Tabu* does not (as *Bird of Paradise* does) portray the woman as mere doomed victim. Dolores Del Rio, due to be sacrificed to the volcano, can only be rescued by the power of the white man. Reri, by contrast, might be seen to rescue herself. Although like Matahi she longs for their love, she also ultimately acknowledges that it is hopeless. It is she, not her male lover, who has internalized the indigenous values of sacred power—it is to her rather than Matahi that Hitu appears as man and specter. Although she eludes Hitu and defends Matahi from him with her own body, she ultimately decides to go with him. The lover's note, written in the same style of inscription as the chiefly edicts, evokes her ultimate collusive acceptance of such power.

Reri is the only female character of consequence in *Tabu.* Her girlfriends in the grotto, her weeping disconsolate mother, the chorus of aged virgins are all mere backdrop to the lovers' doomed romance. But the tensions in the representation of her subject position between tradition and modernity, between Pacific pasts and the "long white hand of civilization," are perhaps worthy of comparison with the maiden, the mother, and the witch of *Moana.*

Romancing the Real

I now want to situate these two films in some of the broader debates about the "documentary" and ethnographic film (see, for example, Barnouw 1974; MacDougall 1994; Weinberger 1994). Flaherty's corpus is often adduced in such debates, although as is clear from the history and proceedings of the Flaherty Seminar, set up in 1955 to commemorate and perpetuate his work,[21] it is a myth of Flaherty that is drawn upon (Barnouw and Zimmerman 1995; Ruby 1980:432). His widow, Frances Hubbard Flaherty, intimately involved in his cinematic projects from the start, although not sufficiently credited, has written extensively about how they filmed and has also been involved in promoting film in his "spirit" (Nordström 1995; David MacDougall, pers. com., November 1997).[22] There is some irony in this, since, whereas Flaherty is famous for his statement that it may be necessary to "distort reality to capture its true spirit" and Frances herself acknowledges the large degree of reconstructive fantasy in *Moana,* for instance, she has, in revisioning his corpus since his death, stressed rather "filming without preconception," a style closer to the direct cinema of Wiseman and other directors of 1960–1970s America.

Contemporary theories of documentary and ethnographic film are far more likely to admit that there can be no direct cinema, just as there can be no direct ethnography—a mere mimesis, a representation by replication. All visual and written texts are selective, mediated, and reconstituted. Thus, even the documentary films of Wiseman that appear to retell the quotidian horror stories of American institutions in the 1960s and 1970s—in schools, prisons, and asylums—are not just "what the camera saw." The camera's eye was set, its focal length chosen, its point of view selected, its sound recording set for a certain range. Wiseman's films may have been unscripted, but they were tightly, if brilliantly, edited. Moreover, even these films are stories, using narrative structures with which audiences are familiar. I do not mean to deny that documentaries and fiction films are different genres. They tell truths in different ways and they establish identifications of different kinds.

The same might be said of the ethnographic films of David and Judith MacDougall and other canonical works of the new visual anthropology. They allow stories to emerge out of images and situations rather than scripting them in advance, they use local sound and conversation (and subtitles) rather than an authoritative master narrative, they admit their own presence and, indeed, invite the subjects of the film to take the camera and film them. But such films are still partial truths, still selective stories. They are still making truth claims even if the claims are acknowledged, even if the relation of filmmaker, filmed, and audience is imagined as more egalitarian and interactive (but see Moore 1994).

It is hard to imagine Flaherty interacting with the Samoans as equal interlocutors rather than as exotic others. Although he spent about eighteen months in Samoa, his command of Samoan was slight (witness its minuscule use in intertitles). Moreover, although his work was strong on cinematography and weak on editing, this bias was not put to the service of "telling it from the native viewpoint," let alone "letting the native speak" (contra Ruby 1980).[23] Both Flaherty and the period conduced to his assuming the posture of the "white master." Even in sickness, prone, being carried on a stretcher by Samoans when he was suffering from a mysterious illness (most likely due to drinking water poisoned by his photographic chemicals), there is, as Winston alleges, a "whiff of the imperialist" about him (1984–1985:58).[24]

Moreover, differences between the epoch of his making and our viewing these films bear on the very distinction between the documentary and the fiction film. It is too easy to write a history of these early silent films as teleology, anticipating later cinematic and sociopolitical developments and the particular burden the distinction between documentary and feature film later assumed. This distinction became not only that rather spurious one between telling facts and telling fictions, but one between independent artists

marginalized by, and perhaps resistant to, the film industry and those filmmakers who were canonized and who created the routine hegemonic myths of Hollywood, of an American cultural imperium. There is, then, a tendency on the part of many film historians to rewrite the history of these early silent films in accord with the self-justificatory myths of a later epoch. Such fraught political adjudications and burdensome distinctions bear directly on the way in which we view *Moana* and *Tabu.* They especially bear on the way in which Flaherty is typically represented in alternative hagiographies as saint or charlatan. In the dominant story Flaherty has been mythologized as the "seminal father" of the documentary, fighting the evil studio and its pliant pawns, such as Van Dyke (see Ruby 1980:437). Such distinctions and dichotomies occlude the intimate practical relationships between making documentaries and fiction films in this period. They also occlude the way ethnographic and romantic fictions of the Pacific slid into each other.[25] This slippage between genres becomes a fault line around the figure of woman. And if, as is so often suggested, Flaherty is the "seminal father" of the documentary, this was not a frozen donation for the future. Let us rather view gender as a fluid effect both in the making and the viewing of these films.

Gender as Shifting and Fluid Effects?

Teresa de Lauretis has in a series of brilliant works devoted to cinema and feminism propounded the idea that gender identities are never fixed and immutable, but are fluid and shifting effects of representations (e.g., 1987). She espouses this view in general, apropos "social realities" as much as those chimeras born of the darkness, the movies. She opposes not just biological essentialisms but social or psychological essentialisms that she finds in many kinds of feminist theory, influenced by a psychoanalysis or philosophy that clings to a notion of sexual difference. She despairs of the dismal narratives of sexual difference according to Freud, Lacan, and Derrida, which even in their feminist recuperations imprison women in "the master's house." She is aware of what the lack of a stable figure of "woman" might do to the unity of the feminist movement, but proclaims rather the aptness of "women," of fluid and shifting subject positions, of shifting and situational identities formed by gender, race, and class. De Lauretis is an exciting and influential theorist of contemporary feminism and cinema, but how might she be relevant to a study of these films where Polynesian women seem to assume frozen and immutable postures? Can we reinvest gender in these films with fluidity and change? Can we reinterpret them so that gender becomes a fluid and shifting effect in the original telling and in our contemporary view-

ing (cf. Connor and Asch 1995)?[26] I will attempt to do this by focusing on the slippage between ethnography and romance.

Moana is as much a romance as ethnography, and *Tabu* arguably deploys ethnographic values at the core of its narrative structure. Both films depict Polynesian cultures in relation to the "white shadows" of encroaching outside influence. *Moana* represents Samoan culture as out of time, as eternally enduring not just because of the stoicism of male endurance, but because women are lovingly attached to ancient traditions—even the seemingly savage, painful rites of tattooing—as mothers and as lovers. Fa'angase is not just a beautiful virgin but a young woman of joyous sensuality whose love embraces not just her man, but *fa'a Samoa,* the Samoan way. This representation occludes not just the more violent and repressive elements of Samoan culture (see Freeman 1983), but also the way in which *fa'a Samoa* had already been transformed by the effects of German traders and missionaries. It is only the figure of the witch who disturbs the benign glassy surface of this romance of Samoa. Her fleeting, unexplained presence, her grotesque caricature, is not just a product of Flaherty's Euro-American masculinist imaginary of a "witch." She is a disturbing element, an excess, not just portending a dangerous disturbance to the sublime complementarity of male and female in Samoa, but, through her depiction as "satanic," covertly alluding to the presence of Christianity through its evil opposite. The darker forces of Samoan tradition are thus rendered both feminine and devilish (cf. McClintock 1995:245 on Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*).

Tabu, by contrast, invokes the darkness of Polynesian tradition in the very practice of devoting virgins to the gods. The priest is a dignified but dark, almost malignant figure, surrounded by a bevy of beautiful women who must sacrifice being either lovers or mothers in order to appease the rapacity of the gods. The chiefly and priestly hierarchy is seen to oppose not just love and sensuality but also a woman's power to choose. And yet, as I argue above, Reri is no cipher, no doomed victim, but one who in choosing to follow Hitu is pursuing not just destiny but the palpable power of tabu. The attractions of modernity—money, mobility, freedom—are summoned up only to be exposed as corrupting illusions.

Taken together, then, these two films may be seen to portray not so much frozen and immutable "woman," but fluid and shifting subjects, especially in their orientation to the tensions between the indigenous and the foreign. In both these films, women's subjectivity is privileged in narratives about the power of Polynesian tradition in its confrontation with the "long hand of civilization." They are silent, black-and-white films, dated not just by their cinematic techniques but by the racist and imperialist attitudes of their era. They are both pervaded by an erotics of the exotic that has typified European

visions of the eastern Pacific from the Cook voyages to Hollywood cinema (see Jolly 1997). But how far have Western scholars and filmmakers moved beyond such frames? In contemporary theorizing there is a persisting tendency to freeze the fluidity of the subject positions of Polynesian women in terms of binaries such as us/them, indigenous/foreign, and tradition/modernity as they navigate the ever more turbulent waters of the Pacific in this era of globalization.

NOTES

I am grateful to participants in the panel organized by Max Quanchi at the Pacific History Association meetings in Hilo, 1996, for insightful discussion. I am also grateful to David MacDougall, Chris Gregory, Gary Kildea, and Caroline Vercoe for comments and criticisms not all of which I could deal with fully. I thank Richard Eves for drawing the recent book by Fatimah Tobing Rony to my attention and Penelope Schoeffel for sharing her deep knowledge of Samoa with me and thus saving me from several ethnographic gaffes. I especially thank Asenati Liki whom I met in Honolulu for her comments and conversations, and the chance to view an interview she did about her responses to *Moana.* These made me look and think again. Thanks as always to Annegret Schemberg for her research assistance and meticulous copyediting and to Ann Howarth for word-processing corrections. Finally, many thanks to the Museum of Modern Art for permission to use all the accompanying photographs.

1. Winston, who is critical rather than celebratory, sees a tension between the view of Flaherty as "the father of the documentary, the prime 'poet' of the cinema, a genius and a prophet" and criticism of his famous propensity for "reconstruction of a most extreme kind" (1984–1985:58; see also Winston 1995). He opines that "carping about reconstruction and selectivity seems to imply nothing but a jejune view as to the definition of the documentary," given the recognition that all documentaries are selective (ibid.). He attacks partisans of Flaherty who avoid such criticism by saying that his works are not documentaries at all. He criticizes Rotha's biography of Flaherty (1983), although elsewhere Rotha is equally critical of Flaherty's sentimentalist recuperative tendencies. Winston believes that Flaherty's influence cast a pall over the entire documentary tradition and that he was an imperialist who in Samoa cultivated the idea of himself as Big White Chief and enacted on the body of Ta'avale (Moana) the revival of the "dead ceremony of tattooing" (1984–1985:59). I am not concerned either to attack or to defend Flaherty, a constant habit in the literature (see Ruby 1980), but rather to analyze the tensions between realism and romance in his work in relation to women and to reflect on the seepages between genres, especially in the early Hollywood period.

2. According to Barsam, he was an M.G.M. staff director, known for his efficiency and versatility (1988:47). Barsam also notes that what is credited to Flaherty depends on the print: on some copies his name does not appear at all. He may have contributed to only about twelve shots and to have made some contributions to screenplay and casting (ibid.: 127).

3. The credits state: "Directed by F. W. Murnau and Told by Robert Flaherty." The film was released in 1931, a week after Murnau's sudden death in a road accident.

4. This film inspired the title of this article. I had originally planned to discuss this film too, but could not get access to a copy in Australia.

5. This quote is often reproduced, though in slightly different form. See Barsam 1988: 52, 128.

6. Penelope Schoeffel confirms that, in this period, tattooing had been abandoned by the majority of Samoans, who were Wesleyans, and was practiced only by the minority Catholics (pers. com., 12 November 1997). Tattooing was later revised both in Samoa itself and by Samoans living overseas. See Thomas 1996: chap. 4.

7. It has been claimed that it was the first film to be described in this way. Witness Grierson's "*Moana,* being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth, has documentary value" (1972:27–28). Grierson later suggested that he had meant to compare it thus with the French *documentaire*—a travel or expedition film—and not to imply that *Moana* was a documentary in the sense of a film with a clear sociopolitical statement in line with Rotha's views (Barsam 1988:42–43; cf. Rotha 1972). Winston, however, challenges Grierson's claim for *Moana*'s status as the original documentary on the basis of this "Franglais" word (1995). Grierson, he notes, said after all that its documentary value was "secondary to its value as a soft breath from a sunlit island." Moreover, Winston notes earlier documentary films by E. S. Curtis and indeed earlier uses of the concept in the work of Boleslaw Matuszewski in a tract in French in 1898. Winston suggests that Matuszewski was elided from the conventional cinematic genealogies because "he was a Pole writing in French" and because he had no clear connection to Grierson (1995:8). Winston is patently very critical of the entire Griersonian tradition, which, he alleges, despite its claim to represent workers for the first time, was in fact a propagandist project of intellectuals serving British government interests that were both conservative and imperial (1995).

8. Frances Flaherty later declared that their intention was to reproduce the style of *Nanook* and "to present the drama of Samoan life as it unrolled naturally before us, as far as possible untouched by the hand of the missionary and the government" (Griffith 1953: 54). Caroline Vercoe has also commented on this aspect of *Moana,* noting how the elision of foreign influence frames Samoa in a way that conforms to a view of Samoa as the opposite of the West, and thus "we see a prevalence of laughing happy types, within the unspoilt, idyllic setting" (1996:3). She also perceives the same us/them antithesis in Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), based on fieldwork in Eastern Samoa in 1925.

9. Apparently Flaherty negotiated with the chief of Safune village that the cast wear only *siapo* (bark cloth), that young women go topless, and that there be no sign of missionary-inspired dress (Vercoe 1996:3). There is in fact some store-bought cloth on view, and paradoxically the tapa poncho style was introduced by missionaries, probably Tahitians following an indigenous style there. Everyday wear was the *titi,* a skirt of cordyline leaves, until about the 1890s, after which time calico became common. Tapa was ceremonial or festive attire for those people of intermediate rank (Penelope Schoeffel, pers. com., 12 November 1997).

10. Many dimensions of Flaherty's cinematography in *Moana* have been much discussed. His extensive use of long-focus lenses is one—he notes that, whereas in *Nanook* he used them mainly for distance work with animals, in *Moana* he found them especially useful for portraiture and intimate scenes, since when he was shooting at a distance, people were

less self-conscious. An added benefit was the "roundness, a stereoscopic quality which gave to the picture a startling reality and beauty" (Flaherty 1971:97). Second, his use of color panchromatic film has been celebrated as crucial to the extraordinary richness of the images. But although some have claimed this as an innovative accident, it was in fact an intentional and then routine part of filming with a Prizmacolor camera (Barsam 1988:40). Third, the startling lack of continuity in the film suggests rather less virtuosity. Moana, for example, is to be seen in the very first sequences of the film with his tattoo, long before the rite occurs in the cinematic narrative. And in a shot of Pe'a climbing the tree for coconuts, Flaherty failed to tilt the camera in time, and he climbs out of the frame. The subsequent shots of him amidst the efflorescence of the palm and the nuts are clearly taken on a different, shorter tree.

11. This is in fact accurate to a point. Men's work was seen to be that of bush and sea and women's work of the village. Unlike women in most of Melanesia, Samoan women were not expected to do arduous outdoor work such as carrying heavy loads. But the notion of a woman's "cookhouse" is Euro-American fantasy. Cooking is rather the work of young men (Penelope Schoeffel, pers. com., 12 November 1997).

12. Barsam suggests that this was his mother (1988:33), but to my eyes it is Fa'angase.

13. This aversion to shellfish is apparently common for Samoans (Penelope Schoeffel, pers. com., 12 November 1997).

14. Barsam suggests that the framing was intentional to avoid undue eroticism (1988:35). Gary Kildea suggested that it might well have been the unintended result of the positioning of the camera (pers. com., June 1996). In either case, my sense is that the play of shadows and fingers out of frame increases rather than decreases the erotic intensity of the dance.

15. The role of *taupou* was in fact declining from the 1920s. Although it was customary for young men to have sex after a tattoo was completed, this would not have been with a *taupou* (Penelope Schoeffel, pers. com., 12 November 1997).

16. In fact circumcision was the rite that established a boy as a man, while tattooing was the sign of warriorhood (see Fell 1993:44ff.)—which is part of the rationale for its being banned by Wesleyan missionaries, if not Catholics. I cannot detail Gell's complete argument here, but it should be noted that women were also tattooed in Samoa with the lozenge-shaped *malu* behind the knee and/or a lacy pattern on the thighs and hands, a process that was far less painful than the deep geometric wedges of the male *pe'a* design (Penelope Schoeffel, pers. com., 12 November 1997).

17. This, too, is a cinematic fiction; it took six weeks in fact.

18. The making of dyes and turmeric (a sacred substance) and of certain medicines and cosmetics was the speciality of some women (Penelope Schoeffel, pers. com., 12 November 1997).

19. I do not want to do more here than allude to the controversy that erupted when Derek Freeman (1983) attacked Margaret Mead's work (particularly 1928) as fabulation.

20. *Moana* was rereleased with a musical soundtrack created by Flaherty's daughter Monica, who was three years old while they were in Samoa. She returned to Safune with

Leacock and there recorded naturalistic sounds of laughter, conversation, singing, and dancing. Leacock believes the latter sequences are immensely improved by sound and defends Monica, as he does her father, against claims of inauthenticity. These are not, as was alleged by some, Hawaiian songs, but old Samoan songs and as such "heavily influenced by the missionaries of the period. . . . There is no trace of any 'more authentic' music anywhere" (Leacock 1984–1985:5; cf. Flaherty Frassetto 1995).

21. Frances Hubbard Flaherty was heavily involved in the Flaherty seminars from their inception, along with other intimates and devotees like his editor Helen Van Dongen and Richard Leacock (see Zimmerman 1995). Whereas the programs at first were dominated by viewing and reviewing *Moana, Nanook, Man of Aran,* and *Louisiana Story,* over the past forty years the seminar has embraced some of the best films in the documentary tradition and has been beset, as have other film conferences, about the changed nature not just of the category of documentary or ethnographic film, but of questions such as who films whom, with what rights, and with what identity stakes.

22. Frances Hubbard Flaherty was a talented still photographer, and took over 1,500 photographs while on the island of Savaiʻi. These were important not just as still screen tests for actors but were a crucial part of preparation for filming. According to Nordström, her still photographs "profoundly influenced the shape of *Moana*" (1995:33) and indeed she wrote and directed the film in association with her husband, although she is not so named in the credits. Many of her images and words were later published under his name rather than hers (ibid.). Nordström also notes how the romantic images of the Flahertys may have influenced the young anthropologist Margaret Mead, who worked in Samoa soon after. She not only adorned her fieldwork house with Flaherty photographs, but used them in "picture tests" to elicit Samoan interpretations. In a later letter Mead acknowledged their influence on her and noted that the Samoan diorama she designed for the American Museum of Natural History in New York was based on a scene from *Moana* (Ruby 1980:446).

23. Ruby is at pains to present Flaherty not just as an early, if amateur, anthropologist but as a filmmaker who told it from the native viewpoint and who invited his subjects into collaboration. "He was a pioneer in participatory and reflexive cinema" (Ruby 1980:445). Ruby asserts this on the basis of his making of *Nanook of the North,* where Inuit were asked to view footage in the field, to comment and to criticize, and to collaborate with him in how they wanted to be represented. Ruby also claims that contemporary Inuit are proud of the way the film portrays their ancestors, with "strength and dignity" (ibid.:453). If Flaherty did engage in such collaborations in Samoa, I have found no evidence for it so far. Contemporary Samoans seem rather more critical of *Moana* both in terms of the accuracy of its ethnography and the romantic character of its representation (see Vercoe 1996 and notes 25 and 26 below).

24. His relations with his Samoan hosts were very bad at points. He spurned the beautiful maidens of his host village of Safune in favor of the *taupou* of the neighboring village of Sasina, their ancient enemies. She also proved unsuitable, and thus the young woman who plays Faʻangase was his third choice. Moreover, a later fracas involved his Samoan laboratory technicians, Samuelo and Imo, who killed a visiting youth who propositioned a missionary's daughter. In the ensuing struggle Flaherty had to bolt himself inside his bungalow and stand guard over his 240,000 feet of film, since filming was almost complete. Flaherty left, but in the wake of these events, Samuelo and Imo were imprisoned.

Flaherty's relations with local Europeans were also very bad. He had a very tense relationship with the German trader Felix David, a faltering depressive, who probably felt even more depressed with the arrival of this American millionaire. After Samuelo and Imo were imprisoned, countercharges were laid against the Resident Commissioner and Felix David for being homosexuals. The former committed suicide and the latter was exiled (Winston 1995). In his book Winston not only repeats all these scandalous details of local relations but emphasizes Flaherty's close links with capitalist exploitation, mining, and American expansion in Canada and the South Seas. Thus from the start, he alleges, documentary/realist film was tainted with imperialist values.

25. This point has also been made by Rony (1996) in a recent book that includes both documentary and feature films in a critical discussion of race and ethnographic spectacle. She also discusses both *Moana* and *Tabu*. Unfortunately, her book became available too late to integrate further discussion into the text of this article, but there are important affinities between our arguments. She stresses how both films, like other "racial films" of the 1920s and 1930s, constructed "primitive" others, although living as survivals of something long since dead. As well as this "taxidermic" impulse, she detects a sense of both loss and redemption, of holding onto the dying other and thus assuaging the remorse of colonial guilt (ibid.:131). In *Moana* she finds such redemption implicit, noting rather what I have stressed, the sense of a "lost Golden Age, a garden of Eden implicitly set in opposition to the troubled world of 'civilization' " (ibid.:132). She also notes how the opening shots, tilting from the tops of high palm trees, invite the viewer to fall back into Paradise, where Christianity and colonialism are absent, but earthly salvation is still possible (ibid.: 139–141). Whereas *Moana* emphasizes material culture and gesture in an observational mode, she sees *Tabu* as an allegory of desire and loss, with the actions of Reri and Matahi having a "choreographed, or preternaturally determined, air" (ibid.:151). She also notes how central writing is in depicting the coercions of law—in the decree of Reri's fate, the letters and ledgers of colonial officials, and the fraudulent bills of the Chinese merchants. But writing is also the way in which Reri communicates her desire to submit to her sacrificial fate. Rony's summation of the character of Reri in representing the figure of Polynesian woman is quite close to my own, although she stresses her victimhood: "Yet although Reri is portrayed as a figure with subjectivity and emotions, she is still an allegorical figure of a bipolar universe. She is ultimately the innocent human victim of both the rigid, despotic laws of authentic Bora-Bora and of the mercenary greed of French colonialism" (ibid.:152).

26. After I had completed the final draft of this article, I was given a wonderful commentary by Asenati Liki, a doctoral scholar in geography at University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, presently doing fieldwork with Melanesian Samoans (descendants of indentured laborers who came to work on plantations). She told me that for her the film was more about representations of Samoan identity, about "race" and ethnicity than about gender, which I perhaps unduly privileged. I was also fortunate to watch a video interview with her, where she made a number of critical comments on the film. I will try to briefly distill these here, but cannot replicate either the detail or the nuance of her comments. In this interview Liki agreed that the way Flaherty represented the relation of "man" and "nature" as separate and opposed rather than as interconnected was very Eurocentric, as was the way in which he constructed the individuated loneliness of Moana's painful ordeal. Tattooing should never be done alone, one should always have a partner to "carry the pain together," she said. She also noted that the film omits the tattooing of women—a light patterning at the back of the knees that is done using a different technique and is not called by the same word as the male tattoo. In the representation of work in the gardens and in the

house Liki noted that there was a tendency to project a European ideal of a nuclear family, whereas a typical Samoan family is much larger and extended. In making tapa, for instance, it is rarely as represented in the film, just two women together, like a mother and a daughter, but typically a large women's group. Moreover, she noted, as I do above, how romantic and idealized is the representation of work. "What woman would cook wearing a flower?" she pondered. And who would dress up like that to go to the taro gardens? "Are they going to a dance afterwards?" She found the representation of the lovers utterly un-Samoan. She claimed that if lovers tried to dance in such an erotic way together they would be chased outside by their parents: lovers usually engage in very secretive affairs, meeting only at night. For her, such romantic aspects of the film tended to perpetuate nostalgic images of Samoa, the stuff of touristic dreams. She concluded the interview by reflecting on the way in which it would take generations to "decolonize our minds." European images of the Pacific, like European education, tended to project a confined view of small, isolated islands rather than the vast expanse of the ocean that connected people. She drew inspiration from the sense of this "largest ocean" connecting all Pacific peoples and from the celebrations of inclusive Oceanic identities in the recent writings of Epeli Hau'ofa (1993, 1998).

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