

Article

The Tension between Cultural Commodification and Oceanic Relationality: Pacific Cultural Representation and the Imagination of Oceanic Community in Disney's *Moana* Films

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Abstract: Disney's *Moana* films incorporate Pacific voyaging traditions, mythologies, and music into globally circulated commercial animation. This article compares *Moana* (2016) and *Moana 2* (2024) through Epeli Hau'ofa's "sea of islands," cultural appropriation critique, and the blue humanities. It conducts comparative textual analysis across character development, visual symbols, audiovisual organization, water animation, wayfinding practices, island space, and transmedia circulation; production-company and institutional sources are used only to verify consultation, language versions, and product categories. The analysis shows that ancestral memory, embodied voyaging, and inter-island connection give Pacific materials a relational form, while heroic conventions and mythic compression standardize cultural difference for commercial storytelling. Personified water, canoes, bodily markings, the fishhook, and route-restoration plots also provide recognizable narrative and visual resources for transmedia extension. Available public sources, however, do not establish contributors' ownership rights, remuneration terms, or benefit-sharing arrangements. Although the sequel expands inter-island space, it displaces colonial borders, capital flows, and unequal climate responsibility into a mythic conflict. The article argues that animation design can communicate regional cultures through coordinated visual symbols, narrative structures, and transmedia continuity, but cultural visibility cannot substitute for source specificity, knowledge ownership, or equitable consultation.

Keywords: Cultural Commodification; Oceanic Relationality; Sea of Islands; Wayfinding; Indigenous Media Politics

1. Introduction

Blue humanities no longer treats the ocean merely as a setting. It asks how water movement, voyaging practices, spatial distance, and material conditions participate in the production of meaning. From a Global South perspective, the inquiry also concerns who has the authority to name the ocean, organize routes, and explain relations among islands. Disney's *Moana* and *Moana 2* (Clements et al., 2016; Derrick et al., 2024) offer a consequential case. Both films use the globally circulating form of commercial animation to foreground the revival of Pacific voyaging, ancestral memory, and human-ocean relations, while retaining a bright, polished, and readily consumable island aesthetic.

Hollywood has often arranged the Pacific as a "paradise" of blue water, white sand, and welcoming inhabitants, leaving colonial expansion, militarization, migration, and ecological

crisis outside the frame. Hall (1997) argues that images do not transparently reproduce a pre-existing culture; meaning arises through the selection of signs and their narrative organization. Evaluating the films' representation of the Pacific therefore requires more than checking whether clothing, patterns, or canoe structures are "accurate." It also requires asking who selects cultural materials, how they are rewritten, and for whom they create value. Young (2008) distinguishes the appropriation of objects, content, styles, motifs, and subjects or voices, and discusses the associated ethical problems in terms of harm, misrepresentation, restricted opportunities, and profound offense.

Pacific scholarship provides the primary scale for interpreting these power relations. Tamaira and Fonoti (2018) document the negotiated space created by the participation of the Oceanic Story Trust in the first film. Yoshinaga (2019) examines how Indigenous cultural labor is absorbed into commercial screenwriting, while Armstrong (2018) traces the changes that occur when Pacific sound enters the Disney song system. Together, these studies show that the correction of cultural details does not by itself establish equality in production authority, intellectual property, or the distribution of revenue.

The blue humanities supplies formal terms for close audiovisual analysis. Mentz (2009) outlined an early agenda for blue cultural studies, and Blum (2010, p. 670) emphasized the material conditions of the sea and practices conducted on it. Later monographs and film studies extended the approach across regions and media (Chew, 2022; Mentz, 2023; Smith & Mentz, 2020). General blue-humanities theory, however, cannot substitute for Pacific knowledge. Hau 'ofa's (1994, pp. 152–153) "sea of islands" redraws the region through voyaging, kinship, exchange, and historical connection, restoring the "small islands" fragmented by colonial cartography to an interconnected lived world. This article therefore uses the "sea of islands" as its main spatial framework, the blue humanities to analyze water and voyaging forms, and cultural appropriation critique to examine their power relations.

Existing commentary often judges the films along a line between "cultural respect" and "cultural appropriation," but pays less attention to the way oceanic relationality enters the process of commodification. Three concepts need to be separated. Cultural appropriation, as used here, concerns the ethical and power problems that arise when cultural materials are used across groups. Genre standardization describes the absorption of cultural difference into established heroic narratives and animation-production conventions. Cultural commodification refers to the conversion of cultural signs into recognizable, reproducible, and tradable products. The first concept identifies an ethical relation, the second a textual and production form, and the third a mode of product circulation; using them interchangeably would blur distinct evidentiary questions.

The article asks three questions. First, how are Pacific mythology, music, characters, and voyaging knowledge organized into stable Disney genre signs, and which cultural specificities are retained or smoothed over? Second, how do the ocean, voyaging practices, and ancestral memory produce relational space, and how is this space constrained by an individual-hero narrative? Third, how does inter-island connection shape an imagined oceanic community, and where does that imaginary acknowledge—or repeat the erasure of—cultural difference, colonial borders, and unequal responsibility?

The corpus is limited to the animated features released in 2016 and 2024. Although the live-action *Moana* was released in 2026, it is excluded because its medium and production materials differ from those of the animated films (The Walt Disney Company, 2026). The study uses comparative textual analysis of character action, composition, sound, water animation, wayfinding, island space, and transmedia circulation. Table 1 records the core scenes, the formal evidence on which the analysis rests, and the limits of each interpretation. Formal details are not used to infer directorial intention, and timecodes are not estimated because legitimate release

versions may differ. The central claim is that voyaging, ancestral memory, and inter-island connection give Pacific materials a relational form, while heroic growth, mythic compression, and transmedia replication stabilize those materials as commercial narrative resources. The precise distribution of authority, ownership, and benefit remains beyond what the film texts and available public sources can establish.

Table 1. Formal Evidence and Interpretive Boundaries of Core Scenes

Film/scene	Visible and audible form	Supported textual claim	Alternative interpretation and evidentiary limit
2016 Child Moana encounters the sea	Water approaches and carries her; her movement and gaze respond to its motion.	The ocean receives character-like action, and the relation is initiated through water movement.	The scene can also be read as a fairy-tale companion or sign of destiny. The plot action is confirmed.
2016 Ancestral fleet revealed	Drumming initiates images of ancestral voyaging; editing links Moana’ s face, moving sails, and the ancestral group.	Identity is discovered through objects, sound, and intergenerational memory.	The sequence still serves the protagonist’ s self-recognition. Scene order is confirmed.
2016 Failed reef crossing and wayfinding training	Wind and waves affect the canoe; observation, sail handling, and repeated correction restore direction.	Wayfinding is represented as continuous coordination among body, vessel, and environment.	The montage also performs a skill-upgrading function. The film cannot represent wayfinding in full.
2016 Te Kā/Te Fiti	Moana stops attacking, recognizes Te Kā’ s identity, and returns the heart; the opposing figure is transformed.	The mode of conflict changes from conquest to recognition and return.	A villain reversal and fairy-tale reconciliation are also plausible. A complete ecological ethics cannot be inferred.
2016 Final departure	Motunui’ s people launch canoes and move together across open water.	Island identity is extended through collective voyaging.	The sequence remains centered on Moana’ s leadership. Reception effects are unknown.
2024 Formation of the crew	A canoe builder, keeper of histories, and cultivator join the voyage and contribute different forms of knowledge.	Multiple bodies of knowledge enter a common task, partly loosening the individual-hero structure.	The plot remains protagonist-centered. The contribution of each body of knowledge can only be assessed textually.
2024 Broken routes, Motufetu, and arriving fleets	Storms, vortexes, and cloud walls block passage; after Motufetu rises, fleets arrive from different directions.	Route control creates isolation; restored passage gives oceanic community a visible spatial form.	Nalo condenses structural power into a mythic villain, and the rapid reunion obscures political differences.

Note. Timecodes are omitted because legitimate release versions may differ. Formal claims are limited to confirmed scene order, character action, and major audiovisual relations; they do not infer authorial intention or audience effects. Source: compiled by the author from *Moana* and *Moana 2* (Clements et al., 2016; Derrick et al., 2024).

2. Cultural Appropriation and the Tensions of Representation: The Pacific in Commercial Aesthetics

This section begins with the consultation process and then turns to the film texts, asking how Pacific knowledge is absorbed, standardized, and extended into transmedia products.

2.1. Cultural Consultation and the “Pan-Polynesian” Style

Scholarship published alongside the first film uses the name Oceanic Story Trust for the group of Pacific cultural consultants involved in production negotiations (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2018,

pp. 298–299). The Walt Disney Company’s material on the sequel uses Oceanic Cultural Trust and traces the group to the preparation of the first film (The Walt Disney Company, 2024). Available sources do not show whether the two names refer to the same legal entity or whether a formal renaming occurred, so this article follows the terminology of each source. Public materials identify clothing, dwellings, Maui’s appearance, and canoe forms among the matters discussed with consultants (The Walt Disney Company, 2024). These records establish that cultural and voyaging knowledge entered the design process; they do not establish that consultants possessed veto power over the production as a whole. Applying Yoshinaga’s (2019) account of structural asymmetry to decision rights, copyright, or benefit sharing would require contracts and ownership records specific to these films.

The company also states that consultants’ knowledge later informed apparel, books, games, toys, and theme-park projects (The Walt Disney Company, 2024). This evidence connects screen images to a transmedia commodity chain, but available public sources are insufficient to determine knowledge contributors’ ownership rights, terms of remuneration, or benefit-sharing arrangements in relation to those products. Raheja’s (2010) concept of visual sovereignty offers a useful methodological distinction: cultural visibility, invited participation, and control over self-representation are not equivalent. The concept emerges from the study of Native North American cinema; it is used here to distinguish participation, control, and ownership, not to collapse distinct colonial histories.

The visual organization of the films shows how consulted knowledge is further transformed. Maui’s bodily markings, village architecture, woven materials, paddles, and double-hulled voyaging canoes retain recognizable Pacific sources. The two-dimensional Mini Maui, by contrast, converts tattoo imagery into a comic device that comments on the character’s actions. Materials drawn from distinct traditions are concentrated in the fictional island of Motunui and rearranged through a unified system of color, character design, and objects. The term pan-Polynesianization describes this attenuation of differences among sources; it is not used as a general name for Pacific cultures. Individual details retain traces of particular traditions, while the ensemble becomes a repeatable style. This gap constitutes genre standardization at the textual level and prepares a stable image system for later transmedia replication.

2.2. Moana’s Subject Position: Knowledge Inheritance and Community Action

Moana’s capacity to act arises from two intersecting narrative lines: succession to community leadership and inheritance of voyaging knowledge. Romantic attachment is not made a prerequisite for her development, and her ability to navigate is not presented as a civilizing gift from an outside man. She is a future leader who resumes a disrupted body of knowledge. Her voyage responds to an island-wide crisis, linking individual choice to the community’s survival. Because she observes the environment, judges direction, and initiates action, the conventional position of the “exotic princess” as a static object of display is weakened.

The ancestral-fleet sequence gives this subject position an audiovisual form. Moana enters the cave and strikes a drum; images of ancestral voyaging unfold with the sound. Editing links her face, the movement of sailing canoes, and the ancestral community, so that identity is discovered through objects, sound, and intergenerational memory. Fleets shown across the open sea represent islanders as people who navigate and create connections. The scene revises visual conventions of the “isolated island” and the “static population.” What it demonstrates is the film’s organization of historical memory, not the restoration of actual voyaging traditions.

The heroic structure of commercial adventure soon narrows this collective history. Summons, boundary crossing, mentor training, and self-recognition after crisis form Moana’s individual arc. A disrupted voyaging history returns to the present primarily through her mission, and collective memory becomes the motive force of the protagonist’s self-realization. Community

knowledge gains visibility, but the decisive work of cultural continuity is concentrated in an exceptional individual.

2.3. *Reworking Maui's Myths: Ancestor, Demigod, and Comic Hero*

The screen version of Maui combines mythic feats that include fishing up islands, raising the sky, slowing the sun, and shape-shifting. He is recast as a large-bodied comic hero who boasts and craves recognition. This composite does not correspond to a single version of Maui traditions across island groups. The magical fishhook condenses supernatural capacity into a conspicuous narrative prop; Mini Maui provides comic commentary; and an abandonment story supplies a modern psychological motive. Mythic materials dispersed through local genealogies are thus incorporated into a continuous individual growth line.

The question is not only whether the character is faithful to a particular version, but also which relations are preserved and which are replaced by individual psychology. Comic treatment suits the rhythm of a children's adventure, while the trauma narrative makes motivation immediately legible. Mythic relations embedded in local genealogies are correspondingly reduced to standardized characterization. The film can demonstrate selection, compression, and genre standardization, but it cannot establish ownership of the source cultures or the distribution of associated revenue.

2.4. *Music's Double Coding: Locally Grounded Sound and Global Genre*

The music uses non-English words, choral timbres, and drum rhythms, while placing them within the structure of Disney songs. The film's credits confirm the participation of Pacific musician Opetia Foa 'i (Clements et al., 2016). In the ancestral-fleet sequence, voice, rhythm, and voyaging action occupy the same scene. Music is therefore more than regional decoration; it performs the narrative work of recalling collective voyaging memory. This conclusion follows from the relation between sound and image and does not establish decision-making authority, copyright, or revenue arrangements.

Armstrong (2018) argues that Pacific musical material is reorganized by Western musical structures when it enters the Disney song system. "Musical double coding," as used here, refers to the way locally grounded creators and sounds become audible while their duration, emotional movement, and narrative placement remain organized by the familiar grammar of Disney music. Pacific sound gains a recognizable position and is simultaneously adapted to a globally legible commercial form.

This audiovisual pattern can support an interpretation of collective memory, but cannot by itself prove that an oceanic community has been formed. Community requires scene-level evidence of inter-island action, knowledge exchange, and negotiation across difference, which is examined in Section 4. At this stage, the films show that locally grounded sound becomes a narrative resource and that relational expression acquires a reproducible genre form.

3. Forms and Limits of the Relational Ocean: Oceanic Agency, Wayfinding, and Ecological Repair

This section examines water movement, wayfinding training, and the repair plot. It begins with visible and audible form while preserving competing interpretations grounded in fairy-tale narrative and heroic development.

3.1. *From Setting to Agent: The Ocean's Actions*

A Pacific conception of space establishes the problem. Hau 'ofa (1994) understands the ocean as a lived space made through voyaging, kinship, and historical connection. The blue humanities, in turn, provides formal terms for identifying water movement and practices at sea. Mentz (2009) develops blue cultural studies, Blum (2010, p. 670) stresses the ocean's material

conditions, and Chew (2022) applies an oceanic approach to the ecological politics of *Moana*. The theoretical order matters: general blue-humanities concepts help describe film form, while Pacific scholarship determines the historical and spatial questions into which those forms enter.

When the child Moana encounters seawater, the water is animated as a unit capable of responding to her. It approaches and carries her, and its movement alters her position and direction. “Oceanic agency” describes this character-like form; it does not imply directorial intention, nor does it claim that the actual ocean possesses legal or ethical subjecthood.

The water’s response can open a human–ocean relation, but it can also operate as a sign of destiny, a fairy-tale companion, or a device of plot direction. Because the ocean’s actions closely follow the protagonist’s task, complex ecological processes are compressed into character behavior. Oceanic agency is therefore a textual proposition that must be tested through the coordination of character response, sound, and water movement; it cannot be extended directly into claims about nonhuman ethics or audience effects.

3.2. *The Reef and Wayfinding: Relearning Spatial Boundaries*

Motunui’s reef defines a geographic limit and restricts the community’s movement. Moana’s first attempt to cross it fails. The boundary initially appears through her unbalanced body and an uncontrollable canoe; explicit directional judgment develops later through training. The sequence can be read as pre-reflective environmental perception becoming articulable knowledge. That interpretation depends on whether character action, the condition of the vessel, and changes in wind and waves form a continuous pattern of response. The waves should not simply be personified as an oceanic “refusal.”

When Maui teaches Moana to navigate, ability emerges from observing environmental signs, handling the vessel, and repeatedly correcting direction. Character, canoe, wind, and waves must be continuously coordinated, so voyaging knowledge appears as embodied practice. The training montage simultaneously performs the skill-upgrading function of a heroic growth narrative. The film can represent knowledge as action, but it cannot encompass the full constitution of Pacific wayfinding.

Directional judgment supports an interpretation of embodied perception only when it is realized through successive responses in shot and editing. The environment corrects action, and knowledge takes relational form through that correction. Intergenerational transmission, local responsibility, and community ownership of knowledge exceed this formal evidence and require accounts by Pacific scholars and voyaging practitioners.

3.3. *Te Kā/Te Fiti: Recognizing and Restoring a Damaged Relation*

The Te Kā/Te Fiti sequence changes the object of conflict. Moana stops attacking, recognizes the adversary’s identity, and returns the heart. This order of action supports an interpretation centered on the repair of a damaged relation. A villain reversal and fairy-tale reconciliation remain equally plausible generic accounts. The analysis therefore concerns the change in the mode of conflict and does not expand one ending into a complete ecological ethics.

The removal of the heart, the withering of islands, and the community’s crisis are placed within one causal chain, which is resolved when the heart is returned. Possession, damage, and return establish the basic structure of an ecological allegory. Moana’s refusal to complete the task through greater force partially revises the logic of conquest. Yet rights of nature, responsibility for extraction, and the cost of restoration do not enter the narrative. Relational repair cannot substitute for actual ecological governance.

The allegory’s timescale is especially restrictive. Nourishment and renewed life are concentrated in a feminized land figure; once the heart is restored, the ecosystem rapidly recovers. Long-term damage, restorative labor, and the allocation of responsibility disappear. Te Kā/Te Fiti

provides a textual model of recognition and return, but heroic narrative and mythic restoration limit its political explanatory force.

4. Forming an Oceanic Community: A Sea of Islands and Inter-Island Relations

“Oceanic community” refers here to spatial relations made through routes, the transmission of knowledge, negotiation across difference, and relations of responsibility. It does not denote a unified Pacific identity. Hau ‘ofa’ s “sea of islands” supplies a scale for comparing the two films and for testing the point at which an imagined community returns to a colonial smoothing of cultural differences.

4.1. *Hau‘ofa and the Renaming of Pacific Space*

Hau ‘ofa’ s critique of “islands in a far sea” addresses the way colonial knowledge determines regional scale. Colonial administration measures Pacific island states by land area, population, and resources, making them appear small, isolated, and dependent on outside centers. Hau ‘ofa (1994, pp. 152–153) begins instead with voyaging, kinship, and migration and redefines the ocean as the space through which Pacific peoples extend life and history. The “sea of islands” changes who has the authority to describe the region: Pacific peoples are not only positioned on someone else’ s map; they organize routes and interpret the histories those routes connect.

The ancestral-fleet sequence in the first film can be read alongside this argument. The canoes in the cave do not remain cultural relics arranged for observation. Once the drum summons images of ancestral voyages, the vessels again become practical media carrying bodies, knowledge, and collective memory. At the film’ s end, the people of Motunui sail again. Island identity unfolds through voyaging, and the sea beyond the reef returns to the community’ s lived space.

The comparison has a clear limit. The film gathers voyaging traditions from different sources into a common Motunui origin and concentrates revival in Moana’ s action. Hau ‘ofa’ s regional relations presuppose differences of language, history, and political circumstance. If only the lyrical image of an ocean connecting islands remains, community can still become a frictionless pan-cultural imaginary.

4.2. *Moana 2: Route Control and Inter-Island Connection*

Moana 2 represents a crisis of community as the control of routes. Nalo’ s storms, vortexes, and wall of cloud sever passage among islands, turning the ocean from a space of exchange into a mechanism of isolation. Distance among islands acquires political force. Vessels, voyaging knowledge, and the openness of passages together determine who can move and who can enter regional relations.

Moana leads a canoe builder, a keeper of histories, and a cultivator on the voyage. Different forms of knowledge enter a common task, modestly loosening the individual-hero structure. After Motufetu rises, fleets from several peoples arrive from different directions. Community takes spatial form through restored routes and cooperation among bodies of knowledge. It depends on action rather than on an abstract declaration of unity.

A contrary interpretation must remain available. Nalo concentrates route control in the supernatural power of one villain, while colonial borders, militarization, and capital flows recede from the image. When Motufetu rises, different peoples assemble quickly, as though connection had merely returned to a natural state. The film does not ask who controls the routes, who bears the costs of mobility, or how speaking positions differ after multiple island groups enter the community. Spatial connection is visible, but its political structure remains thin.

4.3. Cross-Language Circulation and Limited Cultural Return

The Hawaiian-language version offers a verifiable case of cultural return. A University of Hawai'i report states that the version was produced through collaboration between the university and Disney. Local language specialists translated the film; theatre and music practitioners participated in performance and recording; and the project was intended for educational use in schools. The report also notes earlier Tahitian and te reo Māori versions (University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu, 2017). After entering the Pacific, the Disney text was therefore recoded by local institutions and language workers.

The collaboration complicates a model of one-way extraction, but the counterexample has limits. Language adaptation creates space for Pacific participants to reinterpret the film; it does not automatically alter the copyright or distribution structure of the original. The existence of a version also cannot establish that young viewers developed cultural identification or that a language achieved sustained revitalization. Current evidence supports production participation and an intended educational use. Whether communicative power changed requires distribution, ownership, and reception research.

4.4. Climate Justice and the Boundaries of Responsibility

Ecological criticism makes differences of responsibility within the imagined community more visible. The first film places plant decay, declining fish stocks, and island crisis in the causal chain that follows the theft of the heart; the natural world rapidly recovers after its return. Nixon's (2011) "slow violence" is a reminder that actual ecological damage often accumulates and is delayed, with responsibility dispersed across long-term economic and political structures. Mythic repair renders damage visible but compresses the time, labor, and resources required for ecological recovery.

The sequel's anomalous storms, broken routes, and inter-island movement can be read in relation to the climate crisis. Nalo's supernatural power nevertheless converts structural risk into an external cause that can be removed. Actual responsibility is not so neatly organized. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (n.d.) reports that small island developing states collectively produce less than 1% of global greenhouse-gas emissions while standing on the front line of climate-change impacts. The statistic does not show that the film directly represents climate politics. It identifies what ecological universalism leaves out.

A shared ocean does not entail equal responsibility. If oceanic community is to carry political meaning, it must recognize differences in emissions responsibility, historical debt, and adaptation costs, while preserving Pacific islanders' agency in ecological decision-making. The *Moana* films offer a visual model of inter-island relation, but they do not yet develop that relation into a community of responsibility grounded in climate justice.

5. Comparing Blue Imaginaries and Their Limits

This section synthesizes the preceding analyses. It asks what the blue humanities makes visible beyond general ecological criticism and examines how narratives of connection can obscure colonial relations and unequal responsibility.

5.1. The Boundary between Blue Humanities and General Ecocriticism

General ecocriticism addresses environmental damage, the logic of conquest, and the outcome of repair. The blue humanities also follows the way water movement, voyaging practices, distance, and connectivity alter character action. The child Moana's encounter with water displays water as action; the failed reef crossing and wayfinding training show environmental constraint and embodied knowledge; and the sequel's broken routes turn spatial connection itself into a crisis. These scenes support claims about narrative function within the evidentiary limits listed in Table 1.

Oceanic agency is only an analytical point of entry. The first film folds water, vessels, wind, and waves into the protagonist's growth, while the sequel further addresses passage, distance, and the restoration of connection. Hau 'ofa's "sea of islands" places these forms back within a Pacific history of voyaging and regional relation. When differences of language, history, and politics among island groups disappear within images of connection, a relational form can still serve cultural smoothing.

5.2. "Blue" Cannot Whitewash Colonial Relations

The blue humanities cannot be separated from colonial critique. Ferwerda (2024) returns "blue" to the history of imperial navigation, resource extraction, and colonial relations. Oceanic connection has no predetermined political value. Migration and inter-island exchange require routes, but military, commercial, and colonial institutions use the same space. Mobility begins an analysis; it cannot by itself demonstrate freedom, equality, or anticolonial politics.

Oceanic relationality in the two films does not stand outside commodification. Water movement, voyaging knowledge, and inter-island connection give cultural materials a relational form; heroic development and mythic compression organize those forms into stable characters and narrative patterns. Company materials show that related images circulate through books, apparel, games, toys, and theme-park attractions (The Walt Disney Company, 2024), connecting genre standardization to transmedia commodification. The existence of products does not establish final decision-making authority, ownership of knowledge, or the distribution of revenue. More narrowly, the films' voyaging practices, water-based actions, and inter-island connections provide highly recognizable narrative and visual resources for transmedia extension.

5.3. Limitations and Further Questions

Table 1 records the core scenes, formal facts, and alternative interpretations used in the article. Because legally distributed editions may differ in opening credits, closing credits, and subtitles, the analysis does not estimate timecodes or use minor differences in shot length or sound channels as quantitative evidence. Pacific scholarship on wayfinding, differences among island groups, and the inter-island politics of the sequel remains limited. Public production sources can verify participation and product extension, but not consultants' authority, copyright revenue, or the return of commodity value to communities. Audience effects likewise require empirical research.

These limitations narrow the conclusions and prevent evidence from different levels from being combined. Film texts can show how cultural materials are standardized, and public records can trace some participation and transmedia extension. Without contracts, ownership records, and reception evidence, media sovereignty and the distribution of benefits cannot be determined. The article's contribution is to explain how commercial narrative absorbs and constrains oceanic relationality, not to deliver a complete ethical verdict on Disney.

6. Conclusions

Neither "appropriation" nor "tribute" alone adequately describes the *Moana* series, because either term would omit the coexistence of negotiation and inequality in production. Scholarship and company records confirm the participation of consultants, Pacific performers, and musicians and document some design consultations (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2018; The Walt Disney Company, 2024). The films display the selection, compression, and genre standardization of cultural materials, while public sources trace characters and stories into transmedia products. Final decisions, copyright revenue, and the distribution of production power belong to a different evidentiary level; current sources do not answer those questions.

The claim for oceanic relationality rests on specific sequences. The child Moana's encounter with water gives the ocean character-like action; the reef and wayfinding training

embed environmental judgment in bodily practice; the Te Kā/Te Fiti sequence changes the mode of conflict; and the sequel expands a single-island crisis into broken inter-island connection. Each sequence also permits generic alternatives, including fairy-tale companionship, skill acquisition, and villain reversal. The conclusions are therefore limited to visible and audible narrative functions and do not presume directorial intentions or audience effects.

These relational forms do not remain unchanged when they enter commercial narrative. Ancestral memory is organized through heroic growth, local myth is compressed into standardized characters and props, and inter-island connection becomes an extensible adventure structure. From an animation-design perspective, personified water, bodily markings, the fishhook, the heart, voyaging canoes, and route-restoration plots form recognizable units of image and action. Character development and narrative structure make these units legible, while transmedia design maintains visual continuity across products and media. The films' voyaging practices, water-based actions, and inter-island connections thus provide highly recognizable narrative and visual resources for transmedia extension.

This finding has a specific value for design research. Global animation can communicate regional cultures by coordinating visual symbols, narrative structures, and transmedia design rather than treating cultural motifs as detachable decoration. Yet formal coordination must not erase differences among sources, and cultural visibility cannot substitute for ownership of knowledge, conditions of consultation, or equitable participation. Animation design can organize access to regional cultural materials; it cannot by itself resolve the power relations under which those materials circulate.

The idea of an oceanic community must remain similarly bounded. Restored routes and multi-community fleets show that community has acquired a spatial form; they do not establish that Pacific peoples possess a unified identity. If linguistic difference, colonial history, and unequal climate responsibility are flattened, connection may still serve commercial universalism. The political measure of community ultimately depends on whether Pacific communities can participate in story production, determine the ownership of knowledge, and exercise agency in ecological decisions. The films raise these relational questions; they do not answer them on behalf of the communities concerned.

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