

[Access, Emojis, Intonation, Oratory and Ugly-laughs  
On Lomiga Tasi: Folasaga Lona Lua ... Ata Tifaga](#)

*If you took a random snapshot of growing up in our Rānui home, you were likely to hear the Samoan radio blasting payday loan ads and le igi-laden jams for the oldies. You would see my granddad comparing his New International Version bible to his Samoan copy, learning English bit by bit, and often asking me to translate meanings and pronunciations. And my nana would be napping on the couch, preparing for another long day of overtime hours and workplace gossip. Every night before dinner, they sang hymns in Samoan while I hummed along and my brothers sat in boredom and hunger, chicken soup scents wafting through the lounge where we all knelt. My mum and nana would spill the hottest tea in Samoan, the only recognizable words being people's names and the occasional le'ai. It never felt out of place. It was like walking on either side of the road with them, unable to hear, but feeling safe in their short-distance-presence as we head towards the same destination.*

*Lomiga Tasi: Folasaga Lona Lua (Issue One: Second Introduction)* is an online, interactive publication created by Leitu Bonnici that simplifies the learning of gagana Samoa and fa'a Samoa through a scrolling webpage of hyperlink-blue texts, drawings, auditory prompts, and YouTube videos. This was my admission into the work of Bonnici, and I could immediately relate to that impulse to connect to the cultural inheritances afforded to my mum and grandparents that had skipped my generation due to their migration to Aotearoa, and the subsequent assimilation into that English-speaking, settler colonial framework. The sounding out of phrases and letters reminds me of all the times I have tried and failed at rounding my mouth in the correct way and not the Maoli or Palagi way that is embedded in my intonation. The emoji dividers between each numbered section remind me of texts with my nana and aunties in Samoa who send me God's blessings along with a compliment about how pretty I look in recent photographs: usually an entire line of flowers, hearts, and kissy faces. And the use of keyboard media as a way finding device, alongside boxes of a curated selection of emojis are reminiscent of Vaimaila Urale's patterned works and Louise Afoa's wallpaper series.

It is a high level recount of the most integral parts of being Samoan, which my nana has described as being "really good for all those not born in Samoa" after I had her read through the lomiga. The sentiment of her feedback perhaps articulates the purpose of this publication. It is for those of us who struggle with that disconnection within ourselves. Much like the multiplicity of Samoan words, those of us who identify as being of the Samoan diaspora are treading a myriad of worlds that are sometimes unable to cater to our cultural needs. And it is resources like this that offer solutions to the lack of access into the cornerstone that is our ancestral language and way of being.

*Lomiga Tasi: Folasaga Lona Lua ... Ata Tifaga (Issue One: Second Introduction ... Film)* is the physical extension of *Lomiga Tasi: Folasaga Lona Lua*, featuring a myriad of playful moving images across the RM Gallery walls. On the north wall is a Zoom talanoa facilitated by the artist, surrounded by the neon symbols and line drawings present throughout the original publication. Meanwhile the eastern wall houses a triptych of siva Samoa sequences and the vivid greens of Samoa's flora, which are interspersed with the italicized glowing font – ascribed to Bonnici's visual language – that swirls and swells like a current. The bright primary colours that dominate the space speak on a

pedagogical design intention, much like the accents of a classroom. Each symbol represents a thing that is recognisable by a Samoan eye, much like the sound of le igi, coded and drawn up on a Miro board. The overall projection maps the corners and crevices of the gallery space, highlighting the architecture and using it to the artist's advantage. Through the oratorical sensibility of the Zoom conversations between likeminded Samoans, and the clever use of digital media, there is a breakdown of the dichotomy between traditional Samoan-ness – being the habitual rigidity of fa'asamoa – and technology. It shows a necessary fluidity in traditional cultures, particularly in cases like ours where there needs to be a space for contemporary, malaga-driven Samoan epistemologies to emerge and be made available. Teu le va (the active maintenance of the relational space between all things) can happen through an online interface, as demonstrated through these creative collaborative iterations.

Being away from an ancestral homeland is isolating enough, but having no grasp of the language is even more so when surrounded by people and places that do not allow for that yearning to be satiated. By closing those oceanic distances via Zoom talanoa with others of the Samoan diaspora, those geographic siloes that we exist in become non-existent because we have these app avenues that allow us to connect over the metaphorical moana that is the world wide web. Having prompts – as provided by Bonnici in these Zoom calls – not only allows for an entry point into the language for any competency level, but also facilitates the afakasi experience through comedic pessimism and typical Samoan humour, ugly laughs and all. Sameness and collectivity are what we strive for socially as Samoans, and these video recordings demonstrate how that can be achieved through casual, funny, quirky and accommodative language learning.

*Dinnertime lotu is a lot shorter these days when I visit. Samoan hymns have been replaced with short, repetitive "holy holy Lord" songs learned from church. The TV alternates between my nana's YouTube videos on the royal family versus Meghan Markle drama, and my granddad's rugby. I rarely hear the familiar sounds of 1593am. I sometimes feel sad about the gradual change at home but I know it's not about me. It is my responsibility to learn the things I feel are missing. My granddad no longer needs me to translate his weekly church newsletter because he has learnt English at his own pace, a perseverance that I should apply to my understanding of gagana Samoa. My friends try to fill me in on their shady comments in Samoan with sly gestures and eye movements, so at least I still have that going for me. It no longer feels like we are walking on opposite sides of the road. We've come to a cul-de-sac, converging. I think I'll relish in the nostalgia at this meeting place, and decide where to go from here.*