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MIGRATING GENDERS

WESTERNISATION, MIGRATION, AND SAMOAN FA'AFINE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation of how fa'afafine identities are constructed, maintained, and changed in the contexts of contemporary Samoa and New Zealand. Fa'afafine are biological Samoan males who, to varying degrees, enact feminised gender identities. In existent representations, fa'afafine tend to be interpreted through western conceptualisations of sex/gender/sexuality, or using models of 'primitivism', which locate them as instantiations of expressions of gender or sexuality that are more 'natural' than those of the 'civilised' west.

'Traditionally', all gender in Samoa is primarily marked through labour, although the influx of western material and discursive culture has led to a shift in emphasis on sexuality in expressions of Samoan gender. These shifts have inevitably affected how fa'afafine identities are enacted, experienced, and understood. These influences are even more marked for fa'afafine who migrate to New Zealand, who appear to go through a number of 'stages' in first assimilating into western sex/gender discourses, and then asserting their unique identities as fa'afafine. However, the paths followed by individual migrants vary according to the dominant ideologies of the time. The processes by which migrant fa'afafine locate physical and social spaces in which they can enact feminine identities are outlined, which usually initially involve identifying as either 'gay man' or 'woman'. In order to identify explicitly as 'fa'afafine' in a New Zealand context, participants must understand themselves as somewhat ambiguously gendered.

Data collection has been primarily through in-depth interviews, supplemented by observation, to enable analysis of how fa'afafine themselves understand their identities and lived experiences. The particular problems outlining these processes in the light of the exigencies of cross-cultural research are discussed in the methodology chapter. The theoretical approaches underlying the thesis as a whole incorporate the perspectives of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Judith Butler in understanding gender as performative and open to slippage in response to the availability of particular discourses, yet also sedimented over time in a manner which configures the body in ways which are not easily altered.

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PART I



SETTING THE SCENE

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

... I think people should know how fa'afafine was first brought up, when they were brought up in Samoan, and also people should know about their feelings and how they live as who they decided to live as.¹

... if you can look at fa'afafine and their own role in their families, and then from there, you could say that's the culture. That's how I understand it, especially with my own upbringing.

They are very much ... they are very much involved in family activities, and not only that, but they are also the right hand of most families in the country.

... there is a myth that the translation of the word 'fa'afafine' is 'boys who were brought up as girls' within Samoan culture, and that makes a fault, kind of for fa'afafine to come forward and to be considered as a third gender, but I think the reason why people say that [...] fa'afafines are born boys being brought up as girls, is I think that ... you know, that sort of severe crudeness about this whole theory, marks sort of like an unusual acceptance within Samoan society. Because, you know, the idea of raising a boy into a girl is very crude – I mean, I find it's really crude ...

... because some people, they, I think they don't really understand the kind of people that we are. Only our family, that, they know us. But some of the people, they just don't really understand us. They think, some of them, they think that we are sick people or something like that, you know, it's a disease, but I can tell me, my view, you know, I don't have a disease in me or anything like that. I was born like this. Right from when I was young, I was like this. When I grow up I, I just ... my brain, I think my brain works as a woman's brain, you know, not a man's.

... what you need to know is that they are normal people like you and I. They do have a very intricate sort of background, and that needs to be properly addressed. Because they, I think that they are sort of faced with this conflict of identities. [...] we can do it very analytically and say that, you know, you've got so much of X chromosomes and so much of Y chromosomes, but to me that's a lot of hogwash. What you need to do is ask them basically, who they feel they personally are, and most of them will say female, aba? Well that's because that's the influence, the greater influence upon them and there's always the notion that, that they were born that way.

¹ Interview excerpts are largely presented without editing. The grammatical errors that generally occur in spoken speech, and those that result from the fact that English is a second language for many participants, have not been corrected.

Well, the fa'afafines in Samoa, you know, they are not all deviant, nor are they pushed aside as they would have been in the outside world. [...] They have their role carved out for them in the Samoan culture and family and they are aware about that role and so they commit themselves to it. [...] They're just human beings, accepted for what they are ...

[...] the myth [is] that [...]fa'afafine is only the drag queens and the dancing girls and that, you know and the ones that stands on the street, but I mean, for me, I've always been a fa'afafine all my life, you know, and I've been dressed up, but I've never been in drag, you know ...

Well, I think they're all different, wherever they are, whatever country, each fa'afafine is an individual that will have their own definition of what 'fa'afafine' means to them.

I don't now. I never think about that. [Laughter.] True. I never think about it. I just go in my own business and everything I want to do, and I never think about other people, what they think about me or anything.

Well, they're not ... I guess the name is just a label really, but ... they're just people as anybody else.

The Samoan word 'fa'afafine' literally translates as 'in the manner of' or 'like' – 'fa'a' – a woman or women – fafine. Fa'afafine are biological Samoan 'males' whose gendered behaviours are, to varying degrees and in various ways, feminine. While they base their identities in the history of Samoan culture, at the beginning of the 21st century, contemporary fa'afafine live in times and spaces of global flows marked by migrations, diasporas, and the ever-expanding reach of various media. Both individual identities and wider cultures are fashioned in increasingly shifting contexts, resulting in accommodations and tensions, constraints and opportunities as customary indigenous practices co-exist with new discourses and environments. Samoans and Samoan culture is no exception to these processes, and thus contemporary fa'afafine are 'like women' in new and varied ways.

Dennis Altman suggests that in contemporary non-western 'gay' subcultures there are two perspectives – rupture or continuity. He writes that:

for some there is a strong desire to trace a continuity between pre-colonial forms of homosexual desire and its contemporary emergence, even when the latter might draw on the language of (West) Hollywood rather than indigenous culture. [...] For others, there is a perception that contemporary middle-class self-proclaimed gay men and lesbians in, say, New Delhi, Lima or Jakarta have less in common with "traditional" homosexuality than they do with their counterparts in western countries (2001, 88).

While, as I will explain, the use of the term 'homosexual' is not (entirely) appropriate in relation to Samoan fa'afafine, Altman's distinction between rupture and continuity in relation to non-normative

genders and sexualities is useful. However, rather than occupy one position or the other, I suggest that fa'afafine in both Samoa and New Zealand tread a path *between* rupture and continuity, maintaining and enacting identities that incorporate aspects of western cultures and discourses, while remaining distinctly Samoan. The lives of contemporary fa'afafine may thus be better understood with reference to Margaret Jolly's suggestion that Pacific peoples are "accepting of both indigenous and exogenous elements as constituting *their* culture" (1992, 53), rather than the 'traditional/modern' binary suggested by Altman's rupture/continuity model. Yet fa'afafine remain unique to the Samoan cultural context. While the world is becoming more integrated, "this paradoxically is not leading to an easily comprehensible totality, but to an increasing diversity of connections among phenomena once thought disparate and worlds apart" (Marcus 1992, 321). As these previously disparate worlds collide, once accepted discourses and ideologies are challenged. One of the discursive fields consistently troubled by these challenges is gender. Western models of feminism have forever altered many indigenous enactments of gender – and simultaneously, non-western women have resisted 'liberation' by western feminism. Indigenous women have insisted on the right to be 'women' according to their own beliefs and politics, and it has become untenable to propose that there is an essential universal 'female-ness'.

If different models of being a 'woman' reveal that there is no universality to gender, those genders which exist outside norms also trouble dominant paradigms. Judith Butler suggests that "it is the exception, the strange, that gives us the clue to how the mundane and taken-for-granted world of sexual meanings is constituted" (1990a, 110). Rosalind Morris similarly notes that it is seemingly ambiguous genders that more readily reveal the constructed 'nature' of the body and the performative constitution of gender itself (1995, 570). That which is marginal exposes the 'limits and regulatory aims' of dominant hegemonic discourses (Butler 1990a, 17). In the Pacific, one source of disruption of these discourses are the fa'afafine who resist complete assimilation into western frameworks of sex/gender, demanding to be understood as fa'afafine while simultaneously choosing to adopt and adapt aspects of western cultures in their enactments of femininity. Both the existence of the 'traditional' fa'afafine identity, and the manner in which fa'afafine utilise western signifiers of gender, open up the potential for questioning what it means to be 'male' or 'female', 'man' or 'woman', masculine or feminine.

As a means of bringing these processes into relief, many of the ethnographic texts about non-western transgenderism start with narratives designed to present the apparent 'strangeness' of those with whom the author has worked. Don Kulick opens his book with a description of watching one of the Brazilian

travesti prostitutes with whom he lived styling her hair and putting on make-up in preparation for her night's work (1998, 1-5). Mark Johnson's study of Filipino transgenderism is introduced with a detailed description of the 'Super Gay Model (of the World)' competition (1997, 1-11). Annick Prieur's ethnography of a 'group of Mexican transvestites, queens, and machos' begins with a narrative of her first night 'in the field', where she is not sure if the people she meets are women, men, or transsexuals (1998, ix-xiii).

Yet while the 'exceptional' nature of fa'afafine and other non-western transgendered populations brings into relief the processes by which genders are constructed and performed, these are processes that are undertaken by everyone, and thus fa'afafine are, in another sense, ordinary and unremarkable. This thesis is intended to illustrate that the ways in which fa'afafine embody and perform gender, utilise various strategies to realise their desires and responsibilities, and experience themselves as agents enmeshed in social situations which both enable and constrain their decisions, actions, and subjectivities. The experiences of the fa'afafine who contributed to this research are simultaneously unique in their specifics and general in their existence. Mostly, fa'afafine themselves do not experience their lives as an inherent challenge to the gender binary. The liminally gendered may occupy a position from which to reflect on and critique the relationships between embodied sex and social gender (Phibbs 2001, 145). However, many of those who are transgendered experience this as beyond their control (Phibbs 2001, 155), and simply desire to 'get on with their lives' without being constantly aware of their anomalously embodied genders (Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997, 502).

One of the tensions that runs through this thesis stems from my attempts to explain how a population that seems so 'other' to western understandings is indeed unique to the Samoan cultural context, and yet simultaneously brings into relief the processes by which all gender is achieved and ascribed (Shapiro 1991, 252-253; Namaste 2000, 32; Phibbs 2001, 123). While the ethnographic introductions discussed above draw the reader into the world to be discussed, and create the aura of unfamiliarity that is so integral to ethnographic work, it is this very 'strangeness' that I am trying to avoid in my own work. Thus, I have chosen not to open my thesis with a vignette that suggests how 'incomprehensible' I first found fa'afafine (and, in fact, I never found fa'afafine particularly perplexing). Rather, I have attempted to convey, in the words of the participants themselves, their desire to be seen as they understood themselves, and I have sought to realise this desire throughout this thesis. This has necessitated avoiding the suggestion that fa'afafine are a rhetorical device, or the instantiation of any 'theoretical

moments' (Namaste 2000, 14-15). Following Jay Prosser's (1998, 49) critique of Judith Butler's analysis of the transsexual Venus Xtravaganza (1993b, 121-140), a participant in the documentary *Paris is burning*, I recognise that many of the very moments of the lives of the participants in this study which 'say' the most are also those moments which have caused them the most pain.² Prosser's critique of Butler's text, a work that is regarded as so seminal in the field of poststructuralist gender theory, is a timely caution that those writing in this area must be ever mindful that the lives and experiences that so readily become 'theoretical moments' belong to real people.

Although I have consciously avoided 'using' fa'afafine as instantiations of theoretical paradigms, it cannot be denied that the manner in which fa'afafine identities in Samoa have been inflected by western discursive frameworks and material culture suggests that these identities, and thus all identities, are mutable processes, rather than static entities. For the participants in this research who migrated to New Zealand, their decisions regarding which aspects of their identities would be enacted at any one time illustrates how identities are negotiated processes, and that different priorities and goals will impact on how gender is performed in any situation. That these participants continued to identify as fa'afafine, and in most instances understood that this was not the same as identifying as women, as transsexuals, or as gay men, demonstrates how entrenched gender can be. Yet there were aspects of their enactment of 'fa'afafine-ness' that many participants experienced as available for change, in terms of embodiment, sexual orientation, and gender identities. As I will suggest, this exemplifies how the genders that are learnt through socialisation are not 'rules' which must be rigidly adhered to, but are rather 'dispositions' which guide action.

Fa'afafine in both contemporary Samoa and New Zealand live at the intersection of Samoan and western understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality. Neither of these are discrete fields, and in both locations they inform each other in varied and unstable ways. Samoan discourses of sex, gender, and sexuality are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, with a particular emphasis on how fa'afafine construct and

² Prosser suggests that Butler celebrates the 'theoretically transgressive' status of the body of Venus Xtravaganza, a poor, Latin-American, pre-operative, transsexual sex worker who was killed by one of her clients. Although not stated in *Paris is burning*, the implication is that Venus' death is in some way linked to her transsexual status. "Even in her death, because of her transsexual incoherence between penis and passing-as-a-woman, Venus holds out for Butler the promise of queer subversion, precisely as her transsexual trajectory is incomplete. In her desire to complete this trajectory (to acquire a vagina), however, Venus would cancel out this potential and succumb to the embrace of hegemonic naturalization. In other words, what awards Venus the status of potential resignifier of the symbolic in Butler's scheme is the fact that Venus doesn't get to complete her narrative trajectory and realize her desires, because she still has a penis at her death" (Prosser 1998, 49).

are constructed through these discourses. Contemporary western understandings in these areas are the subject of a large, complex, and ever-expanding literature, which I do not summarise here, but which is drawn on where relevant throughout the thesis. However, as discourses of transgenderism are those which are most commonly mobilised in relation to fa'afafine, it is pertinent to provide a brief overview of the development of these discourses.

Models of transgenderism

From 'hermaphroditic souls' to 'gender radicals'

As will be illustrated throughout this thesis, western comprehensions of those who experience their gender as other than that indicated by their biological 'sex' are regularly conflated with issues of sexual orientation, behaviour, and desire. The interrelation between gender and sexuality dates back to the initial discursive construction of the homosexual as a distinct category of person, when what had previously been considered discrete (albeit immoral) acts such as sodomy were taken to indicate "a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul" (Foucault 1981, 43).³ Stefan Hirschauer traces how the surgical procedures undertaken on transsexual patients were initially developed in the 19th century, when 'misdirected' sexual preferences were attributed to the 'gender deviant' having the wrong body (1998, 14):

At the end of the 19th century this wrongness received a theoretical meaning when a biological etiology and symptomatology for so-called 'homosexuals' was developed. Finally, since the 1920s the wrongness took on a pragmatic meaning with the development of genital surgery. Now the body can be experienced as 'wrong' because it can be corrected (Hirschauer 1997).

In the 1950s, sexologists developed the concept of the transsexual – the person who was biologically of one sex, but felt themselves to be of the 'opposite' gender. In the process of diagnosing transsexuals and in the related area of medically 'correcting' the intersexed, the concept of 'gender identity' was developed as a means of differentiating between patients' senses of themselves as men or women, and their physiological maleness or femaleness (Hausman 1995, 108; Germon 1998, 4; Bullough 2000). After unsuccessful attempts to alleviate the 'discomfort' of transsexuals with psychotherapy (Bockting 1997, 49), it was (and still is) held that, once developed, gender identity is virtually unchangeable (Kessler 1990). In the words of sexologist Harry Benjamin, "[s]ince it is evident [...] that the mind of a

³ Presumed links between gender presentation and sexual orientation remain in place today, such that falling 'between' the binary genders will almost often result in assumptions of homosexuality (Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997, 479).

transsexual cannot be adjusted to the body, it is logical and justifiable to attempt the opposite, to adjust the body to the mind” (cited in Hausman 1995, 125). Medical technologies that were developed to ‘correct’ the ambiguous genital configuration of intersexed individuals, and to ‘enhance’ the femininity of women, were utilised to change the ‘sex’ of transsexuals.⁴ Initially, eligibility for medical intervention required that the candidate meet strict criteria. For male-to-female transsexuals, these included a high degree of femininity and the desire for sexual relations with men. More recently, the heterosexist assumptions underlying these criteria have been challenged, and a male who presented requesting or requiring access to feminising medical technologies without being completely or ideally ‘feminine’ would not (necessarily) be disqualified them from receiving access to these technologies (Bockting 1997, 51; Ekins and King 1999, 597; Green 2000).

The increasing fluidity of sexual and gendered identities in the contemporary western context is marked by the emergence of new forms of incongruence between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, which are now discussed under the umbrella term of ‘transgender’. While this is a debated term, in much the same way as the terminology of ‘homosexual’, ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ and ‘queer’ is contested (Epstein 1994), the concept of ‘transgender’ can be loosely understood to include anyone whose sense of themselves as gendered is at odds with what would be normatively expected from someone with their particularly ‘sexed’ body. While ‘transsexuals’ can be included under this term, many post-operative transsexuals themselves resist such categorisation, stating that they are now simply the sex that they always should have been (Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997, 502; Elliot and Roen 1998, 238). However, others continue to present as ‘transsexual’, signalling the fact that they were not born with female bodies by referring to themselves as ‘constructed women’ or ‘transsexual women’.

⁴ In the literature, it is consistently noted that genital reconstruction surgery is more common and more ‘successful’ for male-to-female transsexuals than female-to-male transsexuals. This is a combination of the (probably related) facts that fewer females present who state that they feel that they are ‘men’, and that the surgical procedures are less developed in terms of replicating male biology. Sexologists state that this is a matter of pragmatics, summed up in what clinician Richard Green refers to as the ‘surgical quip’: ‘it’s easier to build a hole than a pole’ (2000). This refers to the fact that the mechanics of creating a ‘functioning’ penis (i.e. one that can achieve an erection and is capable of vaginal penetration) are somewhat more complex than those of creating a ‘functioning’ vagina (i.e. one that is capable of accommodating an erect penis). However, it has been suggested that there is a range of ideological and political reasons for the lag in the development of the technologies for constructing male genitals. The ‘extreme’ position on this debate is occupied by Janice Raymond, who suggests that female-to-male transsexuals are ‘tokens’ “who can be used to promote the universalist argument that transsexualism is a supposed “human” problem, not uniquely restricted to men” (1994, 27). Judith Shapiro cites a range of explanations for the lesser number of female-to-male transsexuals, including the greater difficulty and cost of constructing masculine genitals, men’s greater propensity for taking risks, and psychoanalytically based theories about mother-dominance (1991, 269). It has also been noted that there are heterosexist assumptions inherent in assessing a ‘functioning’ penis or vagina, the success of which is judged almost solely by the ability to engage in heterosexual penetrative intercourse (Hausman 1995, 69; Califa 1997, 60; see also Kessler 1990, 20 in relation to the criteria for the construction of ‘appropriate’ genitals for intersexed infants).

While the inclusion of transsexuals under the term ‘transgender’ is somewhat problematic, others more readily fall into this category, and these individuals might be thought of as ‘gender radicals’. Examples would include those who have altered their bodies so as to divest themselves of some of the signifiers of sex that they were born with, but have chosen not to adopt any or all of the signifiers of the ‘other’ sex. Other manifestations of ‘transgenderism’ include those who would have been diagnosed ‘intersexed’ at birth, and may or may not have had surgical intervention, but now allow their bodies to simultaneously hold signifiers of both ‘male’ and ‘female’ sexes. Others shift between identification as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, and may or may not have bodies that physically signify this living ‘between’ or ‘across’ genders.⁵ While the individuals in western societies who could be defined as ‘transgender’ are an extremely small group, their very existence suggests that not only are the rigid binaries of ‘male/man/masculine’ and ‘female/woman/feminine’ open to challenge, but that in the contemporary era, social spaces are beginning to exist in which this challenge can be made.

‘Other’ enactments of ambiguous genders

The history of the categorisations and enactments of various sexualities and genders in the west is paralleled by western attempts to understand the (apparently) ‘alien’ genders and sexualities of many non-western societies. I trace the historical impact of dominant ideologies on interactions between western and non-western cultures in the Pacific in Chapter 2, and much of this thesis is an analysis of precisely such interactions. Here I simply wish to signal the diversity of populations who do not identify as ‘masculine men’ or ‘feminine women’ across time and space. More extensive overviews of this diversity can be found in Serena Nanda’s *Gender diversity: Cross-cultural variations* (2000), and in volumes edited by Gilbert Herdt (1994d), Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E. Weiringa (1999), and Sabrina Ramet (1996).⁶

North American First Nation peoples evidenced a range of transgendered behaviours which varied considerably between tribes, but have been generally subsumed under the term ‘berdache’. Tribal

⁵ Authors who discuss transgendered people as those who choose to resist the demands of the binary gender system and/or the hegemonically prescribed correlation between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ include Sandy Stone (1991), Dave King (1996), Walter O. Bockting (1997), Pat Califia (1997), Richard Ekins and David King (1997; 1999) Patricia Gagné, Richard Tewksbury and Deanna McGaughey (1997, 481-484), Stefan Hirschauer (1997), Patricia Elliot and Katrina Roen (1998, 237), Patricia Gagné and Richard Tewksbury (1998), Mary Brown Parlee (1998, 128-129), Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna (2000), and K.L. Broad (2002, 244-245).

⁶ This extremely brief overview refers only to literature on populations outside the Pacific. The Pacific literature is addressed extensively in the following chapter.

differences have been almost totally lost as a result of near annihilation of First Nation cultures, and the incursion of moral codes of Christianity. Many contemporary instantiations of berdache identities appear to have developed as a result of First Nation people who identified as ‘gay’ understanding their ‘homosexuality’ as a continuation of indigenous practices (Whitehead 1981; Williams 1992/1986; Lang 1996; Brown 1997). In India, the hijra exist as a culturally unique identity, although one that has shifted somewhat over the centuries, as all Indian genders have altered in response to social change. ‘Ideally’ intersexed, most hijra are castrated ‘males’, and occupy a social position that ambivalently encompasses religious roles and prostitution (Cohen 1995; Nanda 1990, 1995). In South-East Asia, a range of transgendered identities exist, many of which are now considerably inflected by western influence.⁷ Similarly, in South America, indigenous instantiations of transgenderism have been altered by the influx of western material culture and conceptual discourses, although they remain specific to their own cultural context.⁸ While much of the literature in this area takes into account the impact of western influences, this is almost exclusively limited to the indigenous location. In spite of the fact that globalisation involves significant migratory flows, the only author I could locate that discusses transgendered migrants was Heather Worth (2000, 2001, 2002), who talks about Pacific transgendered sex workers in Auckland.

Methodological approaches

As a pālāgi conducting work in Samoa, and as a heterosexual female conducting work with members of a transgendered population, my position as a researcher in this project was significantly problematic.⁹ However, careful consideration of the complex and politically charged debates in this area has led to my development of a position from which I feel that I am able to write about fa’afafine in contemporary Samoa and New Zealand, and to say something that has both meaning for those who have worked with me, and integrity in terms of the theoretical analyses.

⁷ Mark Johnson’s work in the Southern Philippines looks specifically at the issue of cultural change in relation to indigenous practices of transgenderism (1997). A collection of articles edited by Peter Jackson and Gerard Sullivan (1999), as well as individual articles by Jackson (1997, 1999) and Rosalind Morris (1994) examine the relationships between western models of (homo)sexuality and indigenous (trans)gender practices in Thailand.

⁸ See Annick Prieur’s work (1997) in relation to Mexico, Don Kulick (1996, 1998) and Andrea Cornwall (1994) on the Brazilian travesti, and Roger Lancaster (1998) for a review of a range of articles on Latin American transgenderism.

⁹ Methodological issues and the epistemological concerns that relate to the methodologies utilised in this research are discussed in depth in Chapter 3.

Although I had intended that this research be fundamentally based on ‘non-participant observation’, which was to be supplemented by interviews with fa’afafine and non-fa’afafine Samoans, the intended methods were amended very early in the research process. A combination of circumstance, cultural considerations, and my own personal approach to data collection made reliance on non-participant observation untenable. While there are aspects of this thesis that are informed by my on-going observations of Samoan life, interactions between fa’afafine and other Samoans in Samoa, and fa’afafine social events in New Zealand, the main mode of data collection has been interviews conducted in both Samoa and New Zealand. My plans to interview non-fa’afafine Samoans also had to be amended, as the sensitivity of the research topic meant that conducting interviews with ‘significant others’ in the lives of fa’afafine was inherently problematic (Dolgoy 2000, 26). Statements regarding cultural perceptions of fa’afafine are thus based on the relatively unstructured observations that I was able to make while in Samoa, careful attention to how Samoans in both Samoa and New Zealand talk about fa’afafine in conversations, and the analysis of both popular Samoan media (including internet chat sites) and the existent literature, some of which is written by academics who spent much longer living among Samoans than myself (e.g. Mageo 1992, 1996, 1998; Shore 1981; Dolgoy 2000; (Drozdow)-St Christian 1994, 2002¹⁰).

In total, I interviewed 15 fa’afafine participants in both Samoa and New Zealand. While the data may be somewhat lacking in breadth as a result of the small size of the group interviewed, there is significant depth – follow-up interviews were conducted with five of these participants, and further in-depth interviews with two. Email contact was also maintained with some, which allowed for further elaboration of specific aspects of the data. All interviews were conducted in English, tape-recorded, and transcribed. The research was fully explained to potential participants in preliminary meetings, phone calls, and/or emails. All participants were provided with an information sheet and asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix A). These documents were offered in both English and Samoan, although all participants took the English version. The option of having consents recorded, rather than providing them in written form, was provided, but all participants were happy to sign the form. Transcripts were returned to participants for approval. In two cases, requests were made not to refer to very specific details. In the case of particularly sensitive material, further approval was sought in

¹⁰ Throughout this thesis there are references to both Douglass St Christian (1994) and Douglass Drozdow-St Christian (2002). These authors are the same person, the earlier reference being to a doctoral thesis and the latter to a published book. When both works or the author himself are referred to, I have used the configuration of the author’s name as it appears here.

relation to its final form in the thesis. No names have been used for those who participated in the study, although some fa'afafine are named in relation to their appearance in public contexts. As I explain in Chapter 3, the small size of the Samoan community has meant that even the utilisation of pseudonyms is not possible, as the ability to link together particular narratives may render certain participants identifiable. However, the use of photographs in the thesis does compromise the anonymity of participants. All participants were made aware of this in the information sheet and in discussion. Every attempt has been made to use photographs that were provided by participants in ways that do not link those in the photos to specific narratives, or at least not to those narratives which are particularly sensitive.

A further, and somewhat unanticipated, source of data has been the various texts that relate to fa'afafine and other Pacific transgendered populations. Although the academic material was always going to be a source of secondary material, over the course of the research I developed an interest in how fa'afafine are represented, and thus the first substantive chapter in this thesis is a deconstruction of both 'popular' and academic images of fa'afafine. This analysis is considered relevant not only because these texts cohere to create an image of fa'afafine on which pālagi base their understandings, but also because the understandings so created in turn inform interactions between pālagi and fa'afafine, which inevitably impact on the life experiences and available identities of fa'afafine.

Limitations and delimitations

Some of the limitations imposed on the data gathered for this research have already been mentioned, in that interviews were not conducted with 'significant others' in the lives of fa'afafine, and the intended model of 'non-participant observation' was, to a large extent, abandoned. In addition to this, as I note in Chapter 3, the group of participants I worked with in this research were somewhat homogeneous. In Samoa, all lived in or very near Apia (the capital), spoke good English, and had travelled to either Australia or New Zealand. In New Zealand, all were relatively well educated (having at least completed high school), spoke English and were employed. For reasons which I explain in Chapter 3, in spite of the considerable visibility of fa'afafine sex workers in New Zealand's main centres, I interviewed no fa'afafine explicitly in relation to working in the sex industry. With one exception, all had been living in New Zealand for some time when I interviewed them. The exception is a participant who was interviewed in Samoa and then again in New Zealand. However, she had lived in New Zealand before,

and thus the life of the migrant was not new to her. Although I had hoped to follow the journey of a fa'afafine migrating from Samoa to New Zealand, the opportunity for this did not arise.

Other limitations were imposed on the research from the outset. Although there are examples of transgenderism throughout the Pacific,¹¹ I have limited this thesis to consideration of Samoan fa'afafine. Because the focus of the thesis is on the impact of shifting cultural contexts on non-normatively gendered Samoans, it was necessary to work only with fa'afafine who had been raised in Samoa before moving to New Zealand. While I was not entirely consistent in this,¹² I did avoid interviewing fa'afafine who were born and raised solely in New Zealand.¹³ As part of the 'snowballing' technique, participants not only asked about putting me in touch with New Zealand-born fa'afafine, but also suggested that others who identified as 'fa'afafine', but who were not Samoan, would have been willing to speak with me. I was tempted to include the experiences of those raised on other Pacific islands, but I was aware that the cultural differences between these islands would have made it difficult to extrapolate from what I knew about Samoan culture to the contexts in which these non-Samoan 'fa'afafine' had been raised. However, I was consistently intrigued by the range of people who identified as 'fa'afafine' and, as I suggest in the conclusion of this thesis, the contemporary fluidity of this term, and the personal and political motivations for its extensive and increasing utilisation warrant further research.

Although there are reports of 'fa'atama', or women who are 'like men' in Samoa and other Pacific locales (Besnier 1994, 228),¹⁴ I focused solely on fa'afafine, and saw little evidence of fa'atama while in Samoa. I also do not discuss the growing population of men in Samoa and on other Pacific islands who identify as 'gay' and quite explicitly reject identification as 'fa'afafine'. While in Samoa, I did meet one

¹¹ See Robert Levy (1971) on Tahiti, Kerry James (1994), Niko Besnier (1994, 1997, 2002, 2003) and Evelyn Heinemann (2000) on Tonga, Kalissa Alexeyeff (2000) on the Cook Islands, Paul Miles (2000) on Tonga and Hawai'i, and Andrew Matzner (2001) on Hawai'i.

¹² A community advocate interviewed in Samoa was New Zealand-born and raised, and one of the New Zealand participants had spent a significant part of her early childhood in New Zealand before being sent to live with her grandparents in Samoa. Another participant spent her early childhood in another country, although she had holidayed regularly in Samoa, and was still a child when her family moved there permanently.

¹³ This is not to suggest that the experiences of New Zealand-born fa'afafine are not sociologically relevant. The decision was rather motivated by the need to maintain some consistency to the data gathered for this research. The phenomena of New Zealand-born Samoans identifying as fa'afafine is of significant interest, given that they have presumably been socialised in more pālagi contexts.

¹⁴ Although Besnier suggests that fa'atama do exist, Serge Tcherkezoff was unable to find any evidence of an indigenous understanding of, or word for, the female equivalent of fa'afafine, and suggests that the imported term 'tomboy' is used to refer to 'lesbians' (1993, 82).

person in a social context whom I assumed was fa'afafine, although I did not outrightly ask him about this.¹⁵ I later discovered that this 'fa'afafine' quite vehemently rejected this identity, stating that he 'did not want to be a woman', and that he was a gay man. The time is ripe to investigate the emergence of 'gay' identities in Samoa, but again this was not feasible within the boundaries of this research.

Possibly the most significant limitation of this research is that I have not sought, and did not wish to discover, the 'cause' of transgenderism. Much of the discourse that surrounds fa'afafine seeks to explain 'why' they exist. As I discuss in Chapter 2, a common popular conception is that fa'afafine are males who are raised as girls by parents who have no daughters, although this has been shown to be erroneous. While functionalist explanations such as those proposed by Bradd Shore (1981) or Jeanette Mageo (1992, 1996, 1998) do not cite a reason for certain people being fa'afafine, they do attempt to explain why fa'afafine exist in the Samoan cultural context. In relation to Tongan fakafafine, Evelyn Heinemann (2000) offers a complex psychoanalytic explanation for their femininity. Penelope Schoeffel (1979, 113-114) similarly draws on psychoanalytic theory to explain the existence of fa'afafine, although her primary reliance on the work of Nancy Chodorow does allow Schoeffel more room to take the specifics of cultural context into account. Ray Zucker and Ray Blanchard (2003) suggest a correlation between Tongan fakafafine and birth order, a theory that is developed in relation to fa'afafine (Poasa, Blanchard and Zucker 2004) in a complex formula that relates not only to birth order, but also to the proportion of older brothers and sisters.

This brief summary of the various explanations offered for the existence of fa'afafine proves little apart from the difficulties that exist in attributing any particular cause to the transgenderism of fa'afafine. These authors undoubtedly feel that they are investigating this issue in the name of scientific knowledge, but none seem to pause to consider the political implications of their work. As I suggest in the following chapter, to imply that the very existence of fa'afafine is in need of explanation in ways that 'men' and 'women' are not is to position fa'afafine as somehow 'unnatural'. Once fa'afafine are thus signalled as 'abnormal' and a 'cause' for their existence is offered, it would not be a large step to then suggest that they could be 'cured' or prevented. As with debates about the 'cause' of homosexuality, the possibility of isolating a cause of transgenderism is a double-edged sword – while locating biological explanations for non-normative sexualities or gender may serve to validate them as 'natural' (Green 2000), history does not prove that this would ultimately be beneficial for the

¹⁵ See Chapter 3 for a further discussion of the difficulties of approaching probable fa'afafine in Samoa.

transgendered. In a discussion of sexological attempts to locate the ‘cause’ of transgenderism, Pat Califia notes that, if such a cause were located, many working in the medical establishment, and many others, “would have absolutely no ethical problem with genetically engineering transsexuals out of existence” (1997, 81). This somewhat hypothetical suggestion can be supported by the manner in which those who are ‘naturally’ born intersexed are cast as ‘mistakes of nature’ (Ingraham 1994, 214) and surgically modified so as to better resemble ‘real’ males or females. To be ‘naturally’ outside normative genders or sexualities is no guarantee of acceptance (Epstein 1990, 116; Kessler 1990).

Definitions of terms

As I suggested above, the use of terminology in the areas of transgendered identities and marginal sexualities is considerably fraught. However, in order to facilitate reading, I should be clear about how I have used particular terms, especially as the critique of the ‘inappropriate’ use of language is a substantive part of my work. Poststructuralist theorising has problematised the boundaries between biological ‘sex’ and cultural ‘gender’, proposing that the assumed foundational ‘nature’ of sex is itself a discursive construction. In recognition of this, I have chosen to use the term to ‘sex/gender’, rather than just one word or the other. If I am specifically referring to the biological or the social aspects of sex and gender, I have endeavoured to signal this. When I use the terms ‘male’ or ‘female’, this should be taken to indicate the *biological* signifiers that are generally accepted to indicate one sex/gender or the other. ‘Girl’ and ‘woman’, and ‘boy’ and ‘man’ are used to indicate the gendered products of *socialisation* processes, most generally where these subjectivities correlate with normatively ‘sexed’ bodies, unless indicated otherwise. ‘Masculine’ and ‘feminine’ refer to the behaviours, attitudes, and activities attributed to ‘men’ and ‘women’ respectively in the particular cultural context. In all cases, the use of ‘scare quotes’ is intended to signal the problematic nature of the divisions on which these terms are based, and the fact that the very meaning of these terms is contingent on historical and social location.

Sexual identities are, as much as possible, also rendered specific to their historical and cultural locations. ‘Heterosexual’ refers to sexual relations between a male man and a female woman, and ‘homosexual’ refers to sexual relations between two male men, or two female women, or men or women who identify as such. Generally, the terms ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’ are used to signal specifically western understandings of these acts and identities. In some contexts, I suggest that sexual relations between fa’afafine and masculine men are modelled on heterosexuality, while in other contexts the parties identify as homosexual. However, these contexts are clearly signalled, and the very nature and

understandings of these sexual acts are usually the subject of the discussion.¹⁶ In the Samoan context, the terms ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’ are used sparingly, and in ‘scare quotes’, in order to signal that these are not concepts which are part of indigenous paradigms of sexuality. ‘Gay’ refers to men who engage in homosexual acts and identify as gay; similarly ‘lesbian’ refers to women who engage in homosexual acts and identify as lesbian. Again, these terms are limited to pālagi unless expressly adopted by non-western individuals or populations. ‘Queer’ is also restricted to pālagi contexts unless otherwise indicated, and is used in the contemporary sense of including all those who enact non-normative sexualities (Epstein 1994).

When I use the term ‘transgender’ in western contexts, this is:

an umbrella term used to refer to all individuals who live outside of normative sex/gender relations – that is, individuals whose gendered self presentation (evidenced through dress, mannerisms, and even physiology) does not correspond to the behaviors habitually associated with the members of their biological sex (Namaste 2000, 1).¹⁷

Unless otherwise mentioned, all terms related to transgendered identities or activities refer to male-to-female. ‘Transvestite’ is used to refer to men who dress as women, usually temporarily, but have no desire to actually be women. ‘Transsexual’ refers to “people who experience conflict between their gender assignment, made at birth on the basis of anatomical appearance, and their sense of gender identity” (Shapiro 1991, 250), a definition which stresses ‘anatomically based gender assignment’ rather than ‘sex’. However, in order to distinguish between transsexuals and other transgendered populations, I follow Bernice Hausman (1995) in adding the criteria that transsexuals either wish to, intend to, or have utilised feminising medical technologies, including genital reconstruction surgery to make their bodies as ‘female’ as possible. ‘Feminising medical technologies’ indicates the range of medical options available that ‘feminise’ otherwise ‘male’ bodies, and includes hormones, genital reconstruction surgery, breast implants, removal of Adam’s apples, electrolysis, and other forms of plastic surgery. ‘Genital reconstruction surgery’ is explicitly restricted to the surgical process by which male genitals are transformed into female genitals (or vice versa). I use this term in preference to the more common ‘gender reassignment surgery’, as I believe that the reassignment of gender is something which is socially, not surgically, achieved.

¹⁶ See Devor (1993b) for a full discussion of the sexual identities of transgendered people.

¹⁷ See Richard Ekins and David King (1999) for a full discussion of the various ‘modes’ of transgenderism.

While I recognise that the term ‘transgender’ is a western concept, I have also used this term to refer to non-western individuals and populations whose gendered identities do not correlate with that which would normatively be expected from someone of their biological ‘sex’. I have avoided using the more precise sexological terms of ‘homosexual’, ‘transvestite’ and ‘transsexual’ in relation to non-western sexualities and genders, unless people identify as such themselves. As much as possible, I have used the indigenous term that is relevant to the particular population or individual. Throughout this thesis, I have frequently chosen to use Samoan terms rather than English translations. While Weston feels that “the use of ‘foreign’ names constructs the subject of inquiry as always and already Other” (1993b, 348), I feel that it is important to retain the Samoan terminology where the relevant concepts are indeed ‘alien’ to western cultures. Aware of the problematics of translation (which I address in the following chapter), I have left these terms untranslated in the text, but a glossary appears at the end of thesis in which I explain both the meaning and the contexts of the terms more fully than would be feasible within the text. Non-English words are not italicised (unless in quotes where italics were used in the original). Issues relating to the problematics of translation and the utilisation of ‘foreign’ words are discussed more fully in Chapters 2 and 3.

It is worth noting that Samoan pronouns are not gender-specific. Thus, writing about fa’afafine in English often necessitates gendering them in a manner that a Samoan speaker would not (Smith 1999, 46). Throughout this thesis, I refer to participants in accordance with the gender they presented as at our meetings. Gender presentation tended to be relatively consistent across the interviews and other immediate research contexts for those participants I met with and/or interviewed more than once. In some instances, I also met participants in social or performance contexts, where they often presented a ‘heightened’ femininity. In only one instance was this more feminine presentation manifested by a participant who I had read as ‘masculine’ in the interview context. However, this is not to say that the participants who I constantly read as either ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ did not also manifest themselves as otherwise gendered in other contexts. The gendered pronouns I use in relation to participants should thus be read as specific to the contexts of this research and my interactions with these participants.¹⁸

¹⁸ There was only one case where I felt it was necessary to ask a participant which gender they preferred to be known as and felt comfortable enough to do so. They replied: “If you’re basically referring to the feminine core of me being a drag queen, ‘she’ would be alright. Yeah, ‘she’ would be OK”. However, I found this particularly problematic, as my own impression of this person was as a man. While this says as much about my own criteria for assessing individual gender (in this instance, significant facial hair, a noticeably flat chest, and lack of any specific signifiers of femininity such as clothing or particularly styled hair made it difficult to perceive of this individual as ‘woman’), it has remained almost impossible for me to think about this person using feminine pronouns. In this case, I have made a particularly concerted effort to use gender-

Where shifts in gendered presentations have occurred across a participant's lifetime, I have tended to continue to refer to them in relation to their gender presentation at the time of the research. In some cases I am discussing fa'afafine individuals who I have not met, and may have no indications as to their preferred gender presentation. In these instances, I have opted to use the generic 'they' in the singular sense. While I recognise that this is stylistically clumsy, I find it more 'natural' than other methods such as 's/he' or 'she/he'.

Organisation of remainder of thesis

As mentioned above, the first substantive chapter of this thesis is a consideration of academic and popular representations of fa'afafine. This chapter is situated at the beginning of the thesis in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the basis from which the balance of the thesis works. The history of Samoa is marked by the impact of western textual representations, and the experiences of fa'afafine are particularly inflected by the words and images that precede them. As I explain in this chapter, the significance of representations of fa'afafine in relation to this thesis is two-fold. Firstly, fa'afafine are themselves concerned with how they are represented to the non-Samoan world, a concern that is echoed (although held for different reasons) by many non-fa'afafine Samoans. Secondly, my own analysis is, to some extent, a response to the assumptions and ideologies that are implicit in much of the existent work on non-western, Pacific, and Samoan transgendered populations. The literature in this area is marked by the continued and often inappropriate utilisation of western terms and concepts, whereas in my own work, I have attempted to work with both Samoan and western discourses in a manner that echoes how contemporary fa'afafine in both Samoa and New Zealand draw on both the 'traditional' and the 'modern' in the construction and maintenance of fa'afafine identities.

I discuss many of the epistemological issues that haunt cross-cultural research such as this in depth in the methodology chapter. Many of the decisions I have made regarding the writing of this thesis are rendered explicit in this introduction, in the methodology chapter, and often throughout the text itself. As I explain in Chapter 3, my intention with this strategy is to make the processes by which this research was undertaken transparent, and to some extent to provide an insight into the lessons that I learnt throughout this process. The extent of this explication is specific to the thesis genre, and is not a strategy that I would employ in other contexts.

neutral language. This does raise some interesting questions about doing research with transgendered participants which should be discussed as the literature grows.

This introduction and Chapters 2 and 3 provide the ‘context’ from which to read the balance of the thesis, which is divided into further parts. Part II, which focuses on the Samoan context, contains two chapters. The first of these presents the ‘ideals’ of gender in ‘traditional’ Samoan culture, while simultaneously recognising that both the concept of ‘ideals’ and that of ‘tradition’ are themselves problematic. However, as I note at the outset of this chapter, it is necessary to outline how men, women, and fa’afafine are situated in the discourses of Samoan culture in order to understand how western influences have impacted on these genders. Following this chapter, Chapter 5 briefly postulates how western discourses and material culture have influenced enactments of masculinity and femininity in Samoa, before turning to a more sustained discussion of how fa’afafine live and are understood in Samoa at the time the research was conducted there. These two chapters provide the starting point of the ‘journey’ undertaken by migrant fa’afafine, around which the balance of the thesis is loosely constructed.

In Part III, I trace how fa’afafine who migrate to New Zealand make particular decisions regarding their performances of gender in the contexts of social and political shifts in western societies. At the convergence of these decisions and contexts, fa’afafine have continued to understand themselves *as* fa’afafine, although the ways in which this identity is enacted and understood have varied across time and space. In Chapter 6, I explain how when participants first arrived in New Zealand, they generally reconfigured themselves as ‘masculine (heterosexual) men’ in order to meet both the demands of the binary gender system of New Zealand and the needs of their families. While this may, at first glance, appear to be a ‘denial’ of their ‘true’ genders, and thus analogous to the ‘distress’ experienced by transsexuals who are unable to be the gender that they feel themselves to be, the participants did not remember these periods of their lives as marked by ‘distress’. As Samoan subjectivities are fundamentally grounded in family and community relations, the significance of these relations in the construction of Samoan subjectivities is somewhat more important than whether one can or cannot express one’s femininity.

However, it is evident that there was some feeling of ‘denial’ during this period of many participants’ lives, and in Chapter 7 I suggest that once family obligations were no longer so immediate, participants sought locations in which some degree of effeminacy was acceptable. Yet to say that participants ‘sought’ such locations suggests a degree of active looking that was not necessarily present, and in many instances it was chance encounters that led participants to the pālagi contexts in which they could be

‘feminine men’. In most cases, these environments were part of the gay communities of the time, and thus the emergence of these social spaces was a fundamental part of the location of such contexts. Over time, gay subcultures in New Zealand have changed significantly, and this has had an inevitable influence on how fa’afafine relate to the discourses and cultures of the various gay communities in New Zealand over the last 40 years.

Leulu Felise Va’a (2001) traces the wider shifts of western social politics in terms of how these have influenced migrant Samoans enactments of Samoan culture. Following this model, I suggest in both Chapters 7 and 8 that the emergence of gay rights, the spread of discourses of multiculturalism, and apparent increases in the fluidity of sexual identities have had a significant impact on how fa’afafine live as fa’afafine in New Zealand. In Chapter 8, I discuss how fa’afafine are increasingly able to enact gendered identities that are apparently at odds with their embodied sex, and that there is less and less need for them to do this in ways that conform with western understandings of women, or of effeminate men. In some instances, such as the sex industry, and (less explicitly) in contemporary gay communities, the ambiguity of the sex/gender of fa’afafine has a value on which fa’afafine sometimes trade, and which is sometimes exploited. However, it is also the space provided by gay communities to embody gendered and sexual difference that has allowed many migrant fa’afafine to represent themselves to the wider world *as* fa’afafine.

Concluding this research has been extremely problematic, primarily because the processes which I discuss are still very much in process as I write. Thus, as I suggest in Chapter 8, this project captures only a moment in time, a moment that will already be history by the time this work is read. Recent developments in the communities of migrant fa’afafine and Pacific transgendered populations are only briefly alluded to, and no substantive analysis of these developments is offered as part of this research. Without wishing to make somewhat trite statements about conclusions being ‘new beginnings’, I do wish to signal that, while I offer some theoretical analyses of the data presented in this thesis, I do so in recognition that the analyses presented here can only ever be partial, not only in the sense of coming from a particular position, but also because it is beyond the scope of this project to capture the fullness of the shifts this population is currently experiencing.

While the partial nature of this work does mean it is somewhat limited, my location in the history of research relating to fa’afafine is also serendipitous. This project draws on all that work which has been

undertaken in the area of Pacific transgenderism to date, but particularly builds on the historical Samoan research of Reevan Dolgoy (2000). In his thesis, Dolgoy traces the emergence of the contemporary model of Samoan fa'afafine, presenting the history of Samoa's fa'afafine community from the 1960s through to the mid-1980s. My own work picks up this 'story' with an examination of the impact of the increasing salience of western models of gender and sexuality on fa'afafine in Samoa, and the movement of fa'afafine from Samoa to New Zealand.¹⁹ At the time this research was undertaken, fa'afafine community workers and cultural producers were becoming both increasingly visible and increasingly vocal in New Zealand and other locales throughout the world. The visibility of these individuals and the emergence of groups such as the Pasifika Divas (discussed in Chapter 8) suggests something of a paradigm shift. Pacific transgendered populations are seeking control of their own representations, utilising the technologies of western cultures, and becoming more conscious of drawing on their Pacific heritages in constructing their identities as unique and 'special'. Building on the research of Reevan Dolgoy and others working in the area, this thesis both describes the historical developments that have led to this point, and provides a theoretical explanation of these developments. The story of the 'millennium fa'afafine', still unfolding as I complete this research, remains to be told.

¹⁹ Although the migratory flow of Samoans to New Zealand itself gained full momentum in the 1960s, it was some time before a substantive and visible fa'afafine population existed in New Zealand.

CHAPTER 2

(RE)DEFINING FA'AFAFINE

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF SAMOAN TRANSGENDERISM

The basic error of the translator is that he [sic] preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue.

Panniwtiz cited in Asad 1986, 157

Since the time of first contact with Europeans, the manner in which Samoans have been represented in western discourses has been of consequence to their lived experiences. Images of the South Seas islands and their inhabitants that were regularly sent back to Europe informed decisions that were made regarding future interactions. This was part of a long history of processes of 'Orientalising' non-western others, and assessing indigenous cultural beliefs and practices according to the dominant western ideologies of the time. These understandings have always been, and continue to be, fundamental to all processes of European expansion. One strategy of the Orientalising process is to render non-western cultures and peoples as exotic, inherently 'other' to the west, and as erotic, marked by a sensuality that is assumed to be lost to the more 'civilised' west. In the case of Samoa, this strategy was rendered particularly explicit with the publication of Margaret Mead's *Coming of age in Samoa* (1943/1928). As Simone Durutalo writes, the myths that have emanated from the images created in and around Mead's work "have become so pervasive and institutionalized that the theoretical practice of studying these island societies cannot escape being engulfed by them" (1992, 207). This project, in discussing Samoan gender and sexuality, thus focuses on areas that have proved particularly vexatious for Samoans. In recognition of this, I have chosen to start this thesis with a consideration of the texts that precede this one.

Representations of fa'afafine have been an integral part of my research from the outset, starting with an event that occurred before I had even conducted my first interview. I first arrived in Samoa in 2000 to

commence my initial period of fieldwork. A couple of weeks after my arrival, I delivered a seminar at the National University. This seminar made only a brief reference to my own research, which was still very much in its formative stages, and I expected this very preliminary overview to be met with little reaction from this group of academics. However, the response of various audience members suggested that there is a real fear among many Samoans that material such as mine would give the outside world the impression that Samoa is a 'gay paradise', a perception the predominantly Christian Samoan community very much wish to avoid. I was initially surprised at this reaction, but it was subsequently made clearer in discussions with various individual academics. It transpired that a documentary about fa'afafine (*Paradise bent: Boys will be girls in Samoa*) had screened on SBS television in Australia just prior to my arrival in Samoa.¹ My Samoan audience was fully aware that, for the majority of the world's population, texts such as this are likely to be the entirety of their experience of Samoan culture, and my research seemed to simply add to an 'unhealthy' preoccupation with what is, after all, a relatively small proportion of the Samoan population.²

This event opens up a number of issues that will be discussed throughout this thesis, including common understandings that fa'afafine are accepted, and even celebrated in Samoa, and Samoan understandings about the linkages between fa'afafine and western gay identities. These issues were always part of my intended research. However, this incident also introduced a new aspect to the project, sparking an interest in the history of representations of Samoa in western discourses, and the relationship between this history and contemporary understandings about, and experiences of, fa'afafine. The controversy surrounding Margaret Mead's work has left Samoans extremely wary of pālagi researchers, especially those who evidence any interest in sexuality. In the experience of Samoans, the result of such research is usually a compounding of the processes of exoticising and eroticising the Pacific Islands that started with the voyages of Captain Cook (Jolly 1997), continued with erotic Orientalist depictions of Samoan women (Taouma 1998), and were revived and reified by Mead (Durutalo 1992). The residue of what I have come to think of as the 'Mead legacy' thus underpins many Samoan concerns regarding representations of Samoa, especially those related to gender and sexuality.

¹ SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) is a government funded radio and television broadcaster whose principal function is to "reflect Australia's multicultural society" (SBS n.d.). The documentary itself is discussed later in this chapter.

² My response to this concern at a methodological level is discussed in the following chapter.

The above vignette is indicative of the apprehensions of the general Samoan population that I continually encountered throughout my research. However, fa'afafine approached the issue of representation with somewhat different concerns. While they wanted their stories told, they have become increasingly wary (and weary) of the journalists, researchers, and documentary makers who frequently misrepresent their words and lives.³ Misgivings about how I would depict fa'afafine were continually raised by potential participants in both Samoa and New Zealand, the recurring apprehension being that I would replicate the sensationalism and prurience that they felt typified so much of the earlier material about fa'afafine. These concerns were summarised in a Christmas card I received from a New Zealand participant at the end of 2002, part of which read:

I want you to know that you are one of the very few non-Pacific Islander people I enjoying working with when it comes to fa'afafine [who] as you know have been exploited and romanticized too many times. I am grateful that you are here to help put "shit" right once and for all!

I am uneasy about reproducing such potentially self-congratulatory material, but I have chosen to include these words as they point to the experiences of, and very real dissatisfactions felt by, many members of the community regarding how they are depicted. Because of these concerns, my work has become, to a significant extent, a response to and critique of representations of fa'afafine that are already in existence.

The discussion which follows situates modes used to represent fa'afafine within the wider history of discourses of the 'Pacific other'. The intersection of the investigations of anthropology with the metanarratives of evolutionary development has led to a frequent understanding of apparent social and cultural 'aberrations' – such as fa'afafine – as being a 'function' of the society as a whole (Vance 1991, 878). Functionalist explanations tend to be located within evolutionary paradigms, in which 'primitive' societies such as Samoa are assumed to resemble the (pre)history of western societies. These paradigms are especially salient in relation to sexuality. Theorising informed by Freudian discourses often suggests that members of non-western societies embody a 'primal' sexuality that is more 'instinctive' and closer to humanity's 'natural' state. This is opposed to the sexuality of the moral-bound cosmopolitan European, which is assumed to be less 'real' by virtue of conformity to social 'rules' that constrain humanity's 'natural instincts' (Torgovnick 1990, 8). This primitivist approach easily accommodates a romanticising of the indigenous 'other' as more accepting and encouraging of erotic diversity than the

³ The impact of this on my own research, especially in the recruitment of participants, is discussed in the following chapter.

'intolerant' west (Besnier 1994, 316-317). Such implied cross-cultural comparisons rest on an unstated assumption that non-western erotic diversities can be equated with the sexual categories that exist in western societies. In the case of fa'afafine, this tends to be realised in the relatively unproblematic and essentialist translation of 'fa'afafine' as 'homosexual'. Such translation assumes that fa'afafine are always already 'about' sexuality, and that their femininity is simply a manifestation of their homosexuality (Herdt 1994b, 47-49). Other modes of translation move away from assumptions about sexuality in favour of using the paradigms of various discourses of transgenderism. However, the result is still an image of fa'afafine that is refracted through a western discursive lens. These processes of translation are often underpinned by an implication that, while 'primitive' societies are more 'natural' and somehow more 'real', western scientific discourses are able to provide a better *understanding* of these sexualities. Thus, translation of indigenous terms and concepts into the scientific or medical terminology of English (or another European language) often assumes that the translation is more revealing of the 'reality' of the identities or actions being named than the terms of the original language. Only a handful of western authors seem willing to allow the complexity of fa'afafine lives and experiences trouble their own paradigms of sex, gender, and sexuality.

The following discussion critiques both popular and academic representations of fa'afafine and other Pacific transgendered populations. I have chosen to include both these genres for a number of reasons: both impact on understandings of, and experiences of, fa'afafine and other Samoans; both contribute to how fa'afafine are understood outside Samoa; and the academic and popular forms inform each other, such that delineation is not always clear.⁴ In order to illustrate the concerns that frame this chapter and underwrite this entire project, I turn first to a relatively detailed analysis of *Paradise bent*, the documentary referred to earlier.

⁴ Some texts are notably absent from this discussion. *Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa*, a New Zealand documentary produced in 1995, is discussed in Chapter 8. The 1995 Samoan-authored play *A frigate bird sings*, which features a central fa'afafine character, is briefly mentioned in Chapter 8 but not discussed at length, as I have not seen the play performed. While I have the script (Kightley and Fane, 1995), this does not provide an adequate impression of how the play was actually consumed by the audiences, and thus I have chosen to refrain from analysing the text. The 2003 *Tangata Pasifika* documentary special, *Nothing to declare: Fa'afafine in transit* appeared too late to be included in this analysis, but is part of the emergent discourses which I briefly discuss at the end of the thesis.

Bending paradise

Even before the event mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, Heather Croall's 1999 documentary *Paradise bent: Boys will be girls in Samoa* was a significant presence in my peripheral vision. I initially watched it only weeks before leaving New Zealand for Samoa, and was reassured by the ease with which Croall seemed to have found participants and the apparent willingness with which they told their stories. Since then, *Paradise bent* has screened at numerous film festivals (predominantly gay and lesbian, but also those with an anthropological focus) and on television in a number of countries. The extent to which this documentary has circulated, and the contexts in which it is often viewed, suggests that there is a very real basis to Samoan concerns about the impact that images of their culture and society have in the wider world.⁵ When pālāgi outside New Zealand learn of the topic of my own work, they often mention *Paradise bent* as an 'informative' and 'educational' portrayal of fa'afafine. This documentary is thus not only a source of concern for Samoans, but also a primary (and often the only) source of 'knowledge' about fa'afafine for pālāgi living outside New Zealand.

In her director's statement, Heather Croall reveals the position from which she embarked in making *Paradise bent*. As the following extract indicates, Croall clearly sought to present fa'afafine as an exotic 'other'. However, the inevitable incursion of western culture into the lives of her subjects virtually destroyed this vision:

I first went to Samoa in 1995 to make some education documentaries for UNICEF. This is when I met most of the fa'afafines [sic] who appear in PARADISE BENT. My UNICEF work covered quite depressing territory; youth suicide and AIDS in Samoa. So my friendships with Cindy and the other fa'afafines took me to a more fun side of the island (their sense of humour is infectious and I hope that comes across in the documentary). Cindy and the others were dutifully domestic by day – looking after the children and the elderly – but by night they let loose with their flamboyant and flirtatious cabaret shows. I wanted to make a documentary to tell the story of the fa'afafines, I was especially fascinated that after all the anthropological works on Samoa (from people like Mead and Freeman) that fa'afafines had never been mentioned. The fa'afafine culture was changing rapidly and with the elements of the western drag scene taking over, I wondered if the fa'afafine tradition could survive. I took about 3 years to raise the money for the documentary, and when I got back to Samoa in 1998, situations for a lot of the of the fa'afafines had changed from when I was last there. For one, my main character Cindy had

⁵ For some, the very existence of these concerns seems to be a source of entertainment. In his travel article on Samoa in the English *Gay Times*, Paul Miles suggests that Samoan tourism promoters attempt to downplay (or, in his words, 'ignore') the fa'afafine aspect of Samoan culture, both because they are unsure of the reactions of visitors, and because they believe that, as the marketing officer for the Visitors Bureau says, "Promoting fa'afafine does not do justice to Samoa" (2001, 127). In spite of this concern, Miles sees fa'afafine as a perfectly acceptable focus for his article, and his juxtaposition of this statement with descriptions of publicly enjoyed fa'afafine entertainment seems designed to present 'official' perspectives as conservative and 'stuffy'.

moved in with her western boyfriend and so all the traditional Samoan ways had disappeared from her life and been replaced with a salmon pink kitchen and a dishwasher. My heart sank a little as I thought of the way I had presented the story to the TV networks who had funded the film. Within a few days, our presence turned Cindy's life upside down and so her story took a very different path. We were faced with pulling out and not filming Cindy's story but she wanted the story told rather than hidden. Legal problems meant that we were editing for about a year but eventually we managed to include Cindy's story in the film. I hope the film raises some questions and gives a few answers and lives with you for a while after the viewing. (Heather Croall, 'Director's statement for festival brochure', pers. comm.).



Image 1: Publicity poster for *Paradise Bent*

This poster illustrates Cindy's centrality to the film, and the overall focus on particular forms of fa'afafine femininity.

Beautifully shot, with highly saturated colours and carefully framed images, *Paradise bent* tracks Croall's return to Samoa. Her presence is signalled in the personal voice-over, although she does not appear on screen. The documentary has a definite chronological structure, and presents a number of 'stories' as though they occur simultaneously. These narratives include the actual making of the documentary; a day in the life of a group of fa'afafine who play a game of netball and then go to a nightclub; and the story of Cindy, Apia's most famous fa'afafine who runs a weekly nightclub revue show. As the above statement suggests, Croall had always intended that the film centre around Cindy, and the documentary focuses on Cindy's relationship with a pālagi male employee of the Australian High Commission. Dramatic impetus is provided by the fact that, during the filming, the High Commission asks Cindy to move out of her partner's house, which he occupied as part of his employment, and which is located in the Commission's compound.

In her documentary, Croall employs a narrative and visual structure that allows her to 'domesticate' fa'afafine, which she accomplishes by centring her film on Cindy's struggle to have her relationship recognised as legitimate by the High Commission. Yet Cindy is also presented as 'other' by grounding

her sexuality in the indigenous culture. This link between the 'primitive sexuality' of Samoa and fa'afafine is especially explicit in the scene captioned 'the fire song of pre-contact Samoa'. The 'fire song' is (re)enacted as an almost ritualistic process in which men drum while half naked women dance around a fire at night, and two fa'afafine (wearing coconut shell bras, grass skirts and elaborate head-dresses) appear carrying torches. The voice-over, already known to be that of another fa'afafine participant, explains how in pre-contact Samoa, fa'afafine acted as go-betweens between the culturally separated young men and women. The combination of aural and visual images suggests that fa'afafine were integral to ritualistic practices of a sexualised nature. While there were pre-contact celebratory performances, the pōula, that did contain a significantly sexual aspect, I have neither read nor been told of fa'afafine performing any particular function at these events. In fact, closer examination reveals that the shots of the fa'afafine have been lifted from footage of Cindy's cabaret show, rather than being part of the 'fire song' (re)enactment. The manner in which Croall has constructed this dream-like scene – shot in soft focus and slow motion – suggests a romantic and nostalgic vision of the place of fa'afafine in pre-contact Samoan culture. This vision echoes the disappointment with which she initially encountered Cindy's newly domesticated life, and suggests a desire to locate fa'afafine in a particularly erotic context.⁶

The counterpoint to this nostalgia is the simultaneous mobilisation of postcolonial and queer politics in the narrative of Cindy, a differently gendered indigenous person, fighting the purportedly colonialist and homophobic forces of the High Commission. However, by also framing Cindy's story as one of 'universal human values', such as the fight for respect and the search for love, Croall is able to present this transgendered Samoan as 'just like us after all' (assuming 'us' is a pālagi audience). Ironically, this is primarily achieved by showing Cindy in her domestic environment, the salmon pink kitchen that Croall had originally despaired of, as it seemed to signify Cindy's distancing from her 'genuine' Samoan-based identity. Yet it is here that viewers see Cindy's pleasure in having reached the middle class lifestyle to which 'we all' aspire, and it is the threat of this being taken from Cindy that allows the narrative to be constructed in a manner which would provoke the sympathy of most pālagi viewers.

⁶ I am not arguing here that documentary or any other mode of representation should always attempt to be a 'realistic record'. Talal Asad argues that in many contexts media such as dance, theatre, or music may be a better 'translation' of a way of life than ethnography (1986, 159), which is echoed by Elizabeth Edwards' suggestion that 'expressive' photography may capture an atmosphere or feeling better than the literal visual documentation usually used by photographers in visual anthropology (1997). However, in the case of *Paradise bent*, which is in an otherwise 'realistic' style, if Croall chose to use a more 'expressive' style for this scene, it should be signalled as such. Placed in the film as it is, the viewer only has the option of reading this scene as Croall's attempt to *accurately* reconstruct 'the fire song of pre-contact Samoa'.

Throughout the course of the documentary other fa'afafine are presented in a variety of more 'authentic' Samoan contexts – family farms, brightly decorated fale, colourful churches and, in a scene that seems almost parodic, washing clothes at the foot of a waterfall in a lush, tropical rainforest. By contrasting these images of 'cultural authenticity' with those of 'glammed-up' fa'afafine in bars, Cindy's rendition of Tina Turner, and the suburban dream of the Australian High Commission house, Croall is able to have it both ways. Cindy is the 'thoroughly modern Miss', struggling to juggle career and relationship while maintaining her figure and dealing with institutionalised prejudice (here manifested as 'homo/transphobia' rather than 'sexism'). The distance between Cindy's life and those of the more 'culturally grounded' fa'afafine is thrown into stark relief by the fact that when Cindy is forced to leave the High Commission house she does not return to her family's fale and plantation, but rather takes up residence in the tiny backstage dressing room at the club at which she performs. This juxtaposition of Cindy's modern tragedy with the apparently more relaxed lives of those fa'afafine who are found in 'traditional' contexts is reinforced by interviews and voice-overs that tell of the social integration, acceptance and even reverence that fa'afafine are implied to have enjoyed historically. The convergence of these narratives results in a tacit lament that these more 'natural' ways have been lost to the spread of Western civilisation (Torgovnick 1990; Pulotu-Endemann and Peteru 2001, 127).

Moments in a history of contact with the 'other'

As my analysis of Croall's documentary suggests, many of the texts relating to fa'afafine, and certainly much of the amassed discourse as a whole, utilise a complex and apparently paradoxical understanding of fa'afafine as always 'other' to, and yet also the same as, pālāgi. This apparently contradictory understanding appears to have been reached as the result of a long history of western textual representations of Pacific sexuality. The chronicle of European contact with Polynesian peoples and the resultant eroticised image of the exotic 'dusky maiden' are well rehearsed in the relevant literature, and I will not reiterate this history. The point made here is a broader one, which is in a sense about translation. One of the premises of translation is that "it does not happen in a vacuum, but in a continuum; it is not an isolated act, it is part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer" (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999, 2). André Lefevere suggests that one of the most significant aspects of the process of translation is the 'conceptual and textual grids' of those involved, grids which are formed as part of the socialisation process (1999, 76).⁷ As Lefevere indicates, this is more apparent in translation between

⁷ While Lefevere suggests only the conceptual and textual grids of the writer and translator impact on the text, I would suggest that the 'grids' the reader brings to a text also have a significant impact on the text's meaning.

western and non-western cultures (1999, 76-77). In these processes, “Western cultures ‘translated’ (and ‘translate’) non-Western cultures into Western categories to be able to understand them and, therefore, come to terms with them” (Lefevere 1999, 77).

Moving out from the specifics of translation to all models of cross-cultural contact, Lee Wallace’s analysis of the records of early European-Pacific contact (2003) demonstrates that it is crucial to take specific historical periods and relevant ideologies into account in order to fully understand how these contacts have influenced current understandings of Pacific sexualities and genders. In brief, Wallace argues that the moral and epistemological discourses that were ascendant at the moment of contact between Europeans and particular populations of non-western peoples have had (and continue to have) direct and immediate implications for the understandings and treatment of those non-western peoples, especially those who were (and are) not immediately comprehensible using normative western sex/gender frameworks. She illustrates this through a comparison of the historical European reactions to North American people who might now be understood as berdache, and later encounters with mahu and other transgendered peoples of the Pacific. Records from 16th century encounters show that those Native Americans interpreted as ‘sodomites’ were labelled abominable and unceremoniously slaughtered by the Spanish (Wallace 2003, 24-25). 150 years later, William Bligh recorded his careful and ‘scientific’ examination of the body and habits of a Tahitian mahu in the journals of his Pacific journeys (Wallace 2003, 13-14). Although Bligh does refer to how Tahitian men might “have their beastly pleasures gratified between his [the mahu’s] thighs” and is notably interested in the possibility of mahu engaging in sodomy (Wallace 2003, 14), his general tone appears to strive towards an objectivity that is patently absent in the Spanish treatment of the berdache a century and a half earlier. Wallace states that the change in attitude can be clearly attributed to the intervening rise of Enlightenment thinking, and shifts in mechanisms of power and knowledge identified by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1981). As Foucault outlines, a central characteristic of sovereign (and religiously ordained) power is the right over life and death (1981, 135). However, during the 18th and 19th centuries, this control of populations through violence and the threat of death shifted to become a control exercised through ‘bio-power’ over the bodies of the population (1981, 143), a power that rests on knowledge and endless processes of categorisation (1981, 144).

The contrast between these two models is exemplified in the manner in which, fired by religious fervour, the Spanish had few qualms about assessing those ‘heathens’ they met according to strict

moral codes and dispensing with those who were judged irredeemable sinners. By the time William Bligh, James Cook, Joseph Banks and other Europeans ventured into the Pacific, they were enmeshed in a vastly different means of understanding the 'new and different', according to which they were exhorted to explain and categorise, rather than simply judge (Wallace 2003, 25). Instead of classifying the behaviours they encountered into a simple binary of vice and virtue (Bleys 1995, 145), these 18th century European explorers sought to "incorporate a knowledge of Pacific sexual behaviour into a systematized form of rational understanding" (Wallace 2003, 116-117).

Evolutionary paradigms were strongly implicit in the discourses through which Pacific sexualities were first understood by the western imagination, paradigms which were applied to social as well as biological difference and change (Bleys 1995, 160; Sahlins 1999). According to social evolutionism, 'simple' societies such as those of the Pacific islands are representative of the (pre)historical social structures of Europe. For those working from a sociological perspective, these 'primitive' societies could be examined in order to establish which social categories were fundamental to the structure of a society, and which were the more cultural aspects of this life-world (Smith 1999, 50). From this foundation, later commentators such as Freud were able to seek the 'truth' about humanity in these 'primitive' societies (Torgovnick 1990, 7-8). It is here that I would suggest that the 'other/same' paradox is germinated. While these 'primordial peoples' are seen as comparable to the ancestors of modern Europeans, and can thus be held as representative of humanity's essential sexuality, it is also important that they are maintained as fundamentally different from those modern Europeans so as to provide a primitive (barbaric, simple, natural) 'other' to the civilised (humane, complex, cultured) societies of the west that have evolved away from such polymorphous sexuality (Bleys 1995, 155).

Form follows function

Primitivist or evolutionary perspectives have become considerably more nuanced in recent decades, especially in academic writing where it has become less acceptable to refer to any populations as 'uncivilised' or 'prehistoric'. Yet (usually) European researchers and authors continue to imply that non-western societies are somehow simpler than their own (where 'complex' is implicitly analogous to 'more evolved'). This 'primitivist' assumption is especially apparent in literature that offers functionalist explanations for any aspect of a culture that cannot be understood according to (normative) western paradigms, and is generally embedded in an anthropological approach that sees non-western or pre-modern societies as 'homogeneous wholes' which are 'uniformly expressed' (Goldberg 1993, 12; Herdt

1994c, 149; Ortner 1995, 174). In discussions of non-normative sexual or gender expressions, apparent homosexuality, transgenderism, or other ostensible anomalies are usually examined as an 'appendix', something other or additional to 'real' sex/gender and/or (hetero)sexuality. In this model, the 'anomalous' sexuality/gender is presented as existing almost solely in terms of the purpose it serves within normative (hetero)gender frameworks (Vance 1991, 878). Within the literature on Pacific transgenderism, two authors, Bradd Shore and Jeanette Mageo, adopt particularly functionalist approaches in their discussions of fa'afafine. In both instances, fa'afafine are presented as offering an example of inappropriate gender for normatively gendered Samoans, although the specifics vary.

Apparently inspired by Robert Levy's 1971 definition of Tahitian mahu as a negative role model for Tahitian men, Bradd Shore presents fa'afafine as an example of what Samoan men should *not* be (1981, 209-210). In a complex argument, he discusses Samoan gender in relation to the parallels between the masculine/feminine and culture/nature binaries (1981, 193), which he links to the Samoan concepts of aga and āmio. "*Aga* refers to social norms, proper behaviour, linked to social roles and appropriate contexts. *Amio* describes the actual behavior of individuals as it emerges from personal drive and urges" (1981, 195). Shore states that, according to Samoan understandings, every person contains aspects of both the dignified, social and 'masculine' aga, and the aggressive, personal, and 'feminine' āmio (1981, 207). However, in a practical sense, this potential gender ambiguity is subject to social control so that masculinity and femininity are appropriately enacted by men and women respectively (Shore 1981, 209). While the restraint implicit in aga is overwhelmingly expected of women, it is also understood that the behaviour of these women, especially unmarried sisters, is subject to male control (Shore 1981, 200). Once married, the woman is then to some extent 'released' to her more 'natural' role of reproduction (Shore 1981, 201). Female identity is thus centred around the 'natural' process of reproduction and how this is controlled (Shore 1981, 203), so that female sexuality moves from being an expression of āmio (natural and a personal drive) to aga (controlled for the benefit of the family) (Shore 1981, 204). Because the social roles of males in relation to sexuality are not so clearly defined as those of females (virginal sister or reproductive wife) (Shore 1981, 205), it is suggested that men are expected to adhere to more immediately concrete signifiers of gender, such as dress, speech styles and labour (Shore 1981, 209). Fa'afafine are introduced into Shore's discussion as men who in some sense fail to uphold appropriately masculine behaviour, most typically by showing too much interest in aspects of femininity (Shore 1981, 209). Fa'afafine are thus presented as 'symbols' of what is *not* acceptable within Samoan gender frameworks for men. As Drozdow-St Christian observes, for Shore

fa'afafine are “failed males or imitation females, inherently male but disappointing simulations of something other, something not quite healthy” (2002, 30).

Jeanette Mageo (1992; 1996; 1998) similarly presents fa'afafine as a ‘function’ within Samoan sex/gender paradigms. For Mageo, “[t]he highly parodic displays of female sexuality in public contexts that many (but not all) fa'afafine engage in demonstrate how the ideal virginal young woman should *not* behave” (Besnier 1994, 308). She suggests that fa'afafine identities are based in humour, evolving out of the context of *ula* (Mageo 1992, 451), a form of teasing that is often sexual in nature (Mageo 1992, 445) and may involve boys mimicking femininity (Mageo 1992, 451):

... the *fa'afafine* is the boy that jokes as most Samoan boys do, but does so consistently rather than intermittently and acquires accompanying paraphernalia. One Samoan drag queen I interviewed alleged that he was heterosexual, had a girlfriend and affected a girlish style and entered drag queen contests for fun. He even made a pass at me during the interview. This unserious affectation of the *fa'afafine* role is atypical, but underscores the fact that the role itself is conceived of as a jest (Mageo 1992, 452).

This argument is further developed in Mageo's 1996 article, in which she considers fa'afafine almost solely in terms of performance. Having set up cross-dressing acts in *faleaitu* (a form of humorous and parodic theatre) as the foundation for the cultural salience of fa'afafine (an argument I will discuss in full shortly), she goes on to discuss public performances by fa'afafine in both traditional *faleaitu* and the more contemporary beauty pageants, suggesting that the pageants especially comment on Samoan femininity. “By marking “herself” as like an ideal Christian-colonial girl – and then behaving scandalously – the transvestite makes a caricature and a joke about girls’ Christian-colonial role” (Mageo 1996, 601-602). In spite of the fact that fa'afafine are part of almost all aspects of Samoan life, Mageo discusses them almost exclusively in terms of public performances, and also focuses on a small part of the fa'afafine population, neglecting to mention those who do not support her argument. This results in an analysis that emphasises sexual humour, both eroticising and trivialising fa'afafine lives, while glossing over most other aspects of their lives and social relations. Mageo's perception of fa'afafine identities as predominantly humorous is exemplified in a comment she makes about the ambivalence many fa'afafine have towards gender reassignment surgery. As I will discuss in later chapters, my conversations with various fa'afafine suggest that many actively chose not to utilise any of the increasingly available feminising medical technologies, while others who do may specifically opt against genital reconstruction surgery. Although the reasons for these decisions were varied and

complex, Mageo dismisses the choice most fa'afafine make not to undertake genital reconstruction surgery with the statement that “[a] sex-change operation is, after all, no joke” (1992, 453).

While Mageo presents fa'afafine as a parody of femininity that Samoan women should not aspire to, she disputes that hers is a functionalist argument, stating rather that “social change encourages certain persons to take novel roles, and societies capitalize on these penchants in order to deal with social change” (1992, 456). However, the picture she presents of fa'afafine conceives of them “solely in terms of what the fa'afafine means to Samoan males and females” (St Christian 1994, 185), and there is no real discussion of why fa'afafine themselves would take on these ‘novel roles’. The fact that authors such as Shore and Mageo feel it necessary to provide a ‘reason’ for the existence of fa'afafine, while the social categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’ remain unquestioned (even when worthy of description), suggests that fa'afafine are seen as ‘alien’ to western understandings.⁸ In the literature which discusses non-western genders, when those who are readily understood as ‘men’ or ‘women’ behave differently from ‘men’ or ‘women’ in the west, authors rarely seek a causal explanation for the genders, only for the behavioural difference. The heterosexual dimorphism embodied in the social categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’ is assumed to be a logical, unquestionable, and natural consequence of the reproductive imperative (Adam 1985, 19). The differences in how this is manifested across cultures are seen as different responses, at a social level, to the sexed division that is founded at a more fundamental and ‘natural’ level (West and Zimmerman 1991, 15). However, in functionalist discussions of fa'afafine, it is the gendered identity *itself* that must be allocated a ‘purpose’ within the culture, as they cannot be readily explained with reference to the biological reproductive imperative that is commonly assumed to motivate manifestations of masculinity and femininity (Carrier 1980, 103). Thus, fa'afafine become part of the *social* reproductive system, ensuring that men and/or women are constantly reminded of the position they should occupy within the gender binary.

The ‘myth’ that fa'afafine are boys who are raised as girls similarly accords them a function within the social reproductive system. This explanation, sometimes referred to as a traditional custom that is dying out (and thus implicitly related to the ‘authentic’ pre-contact Samoa) appears in a number of places in the mainstream media (see Haworth n.d.; Radio Australia n.d.; Danielsson et al 1978; Keith-Read 2002). In this explanation, fa'afafine are neatly incorporated into the 'aiga system within which children are

⁸ Dolgoy takes a different slant on this understanding, suggesting that the absence of explanations for fa'afafine's existence in the local myths of Samoan cosmology suggests that they were not considered unusual in pre-contact Samoa (2000, 161-162) – it is only those working from a western position who feel the need to explain their existence.

reproduced and socialised, and through which labour is organised. It is this system of production and reproduction that allows the family to function as a materially productive and economic unit.⁹ While Poasa, Blanchard and Zucker explicitly state that their data refutes this functionalist explanation for fa'afafine, in that most of their 'subjects' had older sisters, they refer to other suggestions that fa'afafine are treated like girls by 'doting' mother and grandmothers (2004, 19). It is not explicitly stated that this causes young boys to be fa'afafine, but the implication is certainly there – the possibility that they are treated like girls *because* they are fa'afafine is not entertained.

Ultimately, the tidy explanations for the existence of fa'afafine, whether the negative role models offered by Shore or Mageo, or the supposed need for a gendered labour balance, mean that fa'afafine can be kept at a distance, safely confined within the parameters of a bounded, homogenous and 'primitive' Samoan society. Thus, they do not trouble the 'natural' order of western sex/gender frameworks or force pālagi commentators to question the apparent rationale of their own ideologies and discourses. They are distanced from more 'civilised' western societies by virtue of the fact that it is 'culturally necessary' to manifest such 'aberrant' persons in order to maintain the society's sex/gender framework. The transgendered person themselves is rendered alien through a process that dehumanises them, turning them into a cultural symbol and a social function. In explanations such as Mageo's, fa'afafine are presented primarily in the context of humour. Ignoring the more serious aspects of their lives, Mageo trivialises fa'afafine (Dolgoy 2000, 6). Along with Shore, she reduces fa'afafine to mere functions, "something deployed in the service of other, more real, sexes" (Drozdzow-St Christian 2002, 30), and appendices to normative sex/gender expressions, thereby stripping them of any real agency. Given the negative implications proposed by these authors for those who identify as fa'afafine, one is left to wonder how fa'afafine themselves understand their lives and identities, but their voices are notably absent from these texts.¹⁰

⁹ It should be noted that in more recent media this explanation is being challenged: Fraser (2002) questions whether this ever happened, even 'traditionally', while Percy (2002) details how her understanding that boys are 'made' fa'afafine when a family has no girls is proved wrong by the fa'afafine she meets in Samoa, who all come from large families with both brothers and sisters, and state that they were born fa'afafine. However, the mere fact that these authors feel it necessary to counter this myth attests to its prevalence, and it appears that this simple equation has an appeal to the popular imagination that makes it difficult to eradicate, as is evidenced by its almost inevitable recitation by people outside Samoa upon learning of my research topic.

¹⁰ In two different discussions of fa'afafine, Mageo does include material from an interview with a Samoan who cross-dresses in performance, which I quoted from earlier. However, Mageo writes that this 'Samoan drag queen' states quite clearly that his 'girlish style' and entry in the drag queen competitions is all in fun, and the fact that he has a girlfriend, and even 'made a pass' at Mageo, is offered as 'proof' of the unserious nature of this femininity (Mageo 1998, 210). It is

Conversely, Penelope Schoeffel (1979) discusses fa'afafine in a manner that allows some understanding of why they might adopt this identity, rather than implying that they exist to solve some 'problem' within a primitive and simplistic cultural structure. Using Nancy Chodorow's thesis of socialisation and gendering, Schoeffel explains how in Samoan culture, women and femininity are a constant presence in the lives of young children, while the world of men is generally distant from this domestic environment. Thus, young girls have an immediate and tangible femininity on which to model their gender, while for boys, masculinity is somewhat more abstract (1979, 113-114):

The greater difficulty of defining and confidently acquiring a male gender identity in childhood explains the noteworthy incidence of both male transsexuality and the prevalence of expressive "feminine" gestures and behaviour in a high proportion of Samoan youths, who are still at the stage of a more generalised "personal" and diffused identification with people, and who have not yet fully arrived at a clearly defined "positional" identification with masculinity (Schoeffel 1979, 117).

As I explained in the introduction, I am wary of any attempt to explain the 'cause' of transgendered identities. However, Schoeffel's theories regarding fa'afafine identities are worthy of some attention because she situates this 'explanation' in a wider discussion of the construction and maintenance of *all* gender in Samoa, rather than singling fa'afafine out as in 'need' of explanation, while the normative gendered identities of masculine heterosexual males and feminine heterosexual females are seen as givens.

Sex and the primitive 'girl'

Understandings of fa'afafine as somehow representative of a primitive past are grounded not only in perceptions of Samoa as a 'simple society' in which fa'afafine fulfil an almost preordained role, but also, and perhaps more transparently, in work on fa'afafine that relates to their sexuality. It is particularly in the area of sexuality that the apparent paradox of positioning Pacific peoples as representative of a western past, but also inherently 'other' to the western present, is most prevalent. Understandings of non-western cultures as sites of 'untamed' human sexuality developed from sexological theorists such as Freud, who suggested that civilisation necessarily repressed the 'protean biological drives' of human sexuality (Porter 1990, 177; Torgovnick 1990, 228). As part of these evolutionary discourses, the western gaze was turned to pre-Christian times as an era of 'natural pleasure', and was then easily redirected to those lands "beyond the holy circle of Christendom" (Porter 1990, 188), which were held

unclear from Mageo's writing whether this individual thought of himself, or was seen by others, as fa'afafine. However, his assertions that his femininity was 'all in fun' is not typical of the fa'afafine I spoke with in Samoa, and I would hesitate to read this lone interview as evidence that "the role itself is conceived of as jest" (Mageo 1998, 210).

to express living examples of humanity's 'natural sexual urges'. Images of these lands then contribute to Orientalist discourses in which the 'primitive' becomes a rhetorical device through which to 'see' or comment on something else, usually an aspect of western culture. Thus, the 'dusky maiden' of the south seas has become iconic of a 'primal' sexuality that is allowed to run rampant because of the inability of 'primitive' Pacific peoples to control their 'base urges'. While this 'primitive sexuality' was thus seen as evidence of a lack of social evolution, it was also held to exemplify a closer alignment with nature and a 'real passion' that has been lost by the (over)civilised cosmopolitan European (Torgovnick 1990, 8). "The posited authenticity of a past (savage, tribal, peasant) serves to denounce an inauthentic present (the uprooted, évolués, acculturated)" (Fabian, cited in Sturge 1997, 27). The image of the 'primitive sexuality' of these 'strange and distant' cultures has, over time, built into a discourse that simultaneously exoticises and eroticises the peoples of the Pacific, a discourse that is now so prevalent as to be available for critique in the contemporary popular press (e.g. Vine 2001). Despite this, authors writing in popular media continue to fall back on these stock images, such as one recent description of all Samoans (whether men, women or fa'afafine) as "like tropical flowers: big, bright and meaty, with a humid, amorphous sexuality" (Fraser 2002, 74). Such similes echo common depictions of the Pacific woman as "bearer of fruits of the earth", heightening her affinity with the natural and the 'fertile' soil of which she is emblematic" (Taouma 1998, 7), and replicate the trope which aligns the 'primitive' eroticism of Pacific peoples with the 'uncontrolled' environment.

How this erotic/exotic discourse is played out in relation to fa'afafine depends significantly on the author of the text; but few of those working in the mainstream media seem able to resist the temptation of linking fa'afafine with the 'humid, amorphous sexuality' that is assumed to suffuse Samoan life. Thus, in a description of the entertainment provided at a beach resort, one travel writer suggests, "there is something mysteriously exotic about Western Samoa, a place where things are not always as they seem. The beautiful and feminine leading "lady" among the dancers was following the traditional role of fa'afafine – a boy who from an early age adopts the role of a girl" (Colvin 1996). This image of the 'beautiful and feminine' fa'afafine dancer in the 'mysteriously exotic Samoa' is assimilated with relative ease into the myth of 'dusky maiden', mysterious but perpetually available for pālagi men's sexual gratification.

While the erotic fa'afafine is thus seen as available for consumption by the white heterosexual male, this 'consumption' is carefully negotiated so that an erotically charged atmosphere can be maintained while

the sexuality of the male authors remains beyond reproach. These more 'risqué' narratives are especially evident in more recent writing. One author describes Cindy's cabaret show, closing his article with a description of his meeting with the star. "At the end of the night Samoa's most famous fa'afafine came down into the audience while miming to Whitney Houston. There is a photograph of Cindy sitting on my lap. I look a very happy boy" (Nowra 2001). In another travel piece, the male author tells of meeting one of Apia's more renowned fa'afafine. "I first met Princess Tiger in the chill of MacDonald's (I needed a milkshake). He/she approached me in her skyblue one-piece and pumps, chatted me up, and invited me to the Cindy Show, Apia's Thursday night drag revue" (David 2000). As with so many of the male pālagi travellers I met in Samoa, both these writers seem to find it necessary to mention having attracted some sort of sexual attention from fa'afafine while in Samoa. While both the tourists I met and these travel writers make it clear that they never acted on this sexual possibility,¹¹ the image of flirtatious fa'afafine can be placed on a continuum that exists in the history of western representations of a 'natural, available and exotic' Pacific femininity.

However, other authors see connections between fa'afafine enactments of sexuality and the image of the 'dusky maiden' as, in some contexts, an intentional comment on this image, rather than a reiteration of its ideologies of availability. In another travel piece, Cindy's show is interpreted as parodying pālagi expectations and representations of Polynesians (Perrottet n.d.). This echoes the more theoretically driven analysis of the Samoan Lisa Taouma, in which she interprets the cabaret shows performed by Cindy as explicitly drawing on the concept of the 'dusky maiden':



Image 2: Cindy performing in Samoa

This is one of many outfits Cindy wears while performing, suggesting that coconut shell bra, grass skirt and elaborate head-dress is just another 'costume'.

¹¹ These stories thus construct the narrator as both masculine enough to attract the attention of fa'afafine, yet reaffirm the storyteller's heterosexuality by reassuring their audience that they would never engage in sexual relations with fa'afafine who are, after all, 'really' men.

The parody lies in the fact that they are aggressive in their presentation rather than passive, that coyness is deliberately employed and pointed to as a device, and that the ultimate ploy is to lure the Western male 'gazer' into believing this 'doubleness' of meaning (1998, 128).

From this perspective, fa'afafine can be seen as having been incorporated into a more general ambivalence within the Pacific towards the objectification of the islands and their people. While many Pacific people are concerned about the fact that they are so often eroticised in western imagery, their societies are often also economically dependent on the tourists that these images attract (Jolly 1997, 121). Thus, the people living on the islands both benefit from, and often contribute to, their own eroticisation:

The careful styling of many fa'afafine into the stereotyped '*dusky maiden*' image employs all the coy sexual references, and 'accommodating' inviting attitudes that the image has historically signified, and points to the constructed nature of this cliché. In the same ways that Mead's adolescent subjects used the Samoan practise of 'taufa'ase'e' to lead her on an elaborate hoax, the taufa'ase'e used by fa'afafine in their iconography is a knowing device by which an image overused in the selling of 'paradise' is 'turned around' again for the same audience (Taouma 1998, 132).

Here it is suggested that some fa'afafine subvert and exploit the very eroticisation and exocitisation they are so frequently subjected to, echoing the manner in which indigenous peoples the world over often take advantage of discourses of exoticism (Torgovnick 1990, 38). Taouma does present a rather partial image of fa'afafine as cynically 'knowing' in their very active construction of specific self-presentations, with little discussion of fa'afafine outside the performance context. However, this analysis is entirely appropriate if read not as a description of the lives of fa'afafine themselves, but rather as a deconstruction of the images of fa'afafine that are sold to pālagi tourists. For the tourists on package holidays and staying in the air-conditioned comfort of Apia's hotels, attending Cindy's show or meeting fa'afafine in some performance of 'traditional' island culture is likely to be the closest they get to the 'feminine men' of Samoa. In these 'managed' encounters between the western traveller and the exotic/erotic Pacific person, most tourists believe their experience to be 'culturally enriching', unaware of the fact that they have been sold a very specific image and shown only what they expect to see (Sua'ali'i 2000, 97) – expectations that are fed by centuries of the eroticisation of the Pacific. Thus, images of the exotic/erotic 'dusky maiden' and the fa'afafine must be read with an awareness of who created them and whose purposes they serve.

Romancing the primitive

When fa'afafine are cast as representatives of a simple, natural sexuality or gender, these representations often have a romantic sheen, visually represented with the slow motion and soft focus utilised by Heather Croall in her image of Samoa's 'pre-contact fire song'. This vision is evident in work in which it is assumed that preindustrial societies are more accepting and even accommodating of 'erotic diversity and gender variation' than the west (Besnier 1994, 316-317). At its extreme, this approach implies that the western observer 'knows best' "and we're telling "them" that their cultures are being tragically and irreversibly polluted by our own, "stronger" culture (placing the "sympathetic" ethnographer as saviour)" (Fran Martin in Altman 1996b). As I will explain in Chapters 4 and 5, I understand contemporary attitudes towards fa'afafine to be the result of a complex intersection of histories, discourses, identities and relationships. However, in many texts, a relatively simple and direct comparison is made between assumed (pre-contact) Samoan acceptance of fa'afafine and (Christian influenced) western homophobia. This tendency is, unsurprisingly, most explicitly evident in texts that have a political agenda, such as transgender or gay publications. In this literature, an easy correlation is drawn between fa'afafine (and other similar Pacific identities), and the transgendered/homosexual population of the contemporary west in a bid to prove the universality of these identities. This perception again rests on a primitivist foundation, in that it is often implied that, because these societies are closer to nature (Porter 1990, 177; Torgovnick 1990, 228), apparent instances of homosexuality/transgenderism in these societies must be an expression of *innate* human sexualities/genders.

In the transgender support magazine *Cross-talk*, Roberta Perkins (n.d.) describes the Tahitian phenomenon of there being only one mahu in each village, who is replaced on death, and asks, "[s]ince, as we know the desire to change gender is spontaneous and not an orderly event, how did such precision occur on cue?" (20). This question implicitly assumes a congruence between Tahitian and western transgenderism in positing both as resulting from 'a spontaneous desire to change sex'. It appears that Perkins has written her article almost solely based on her interpretation of ethnographic texts. Making direct correlations between Pacific transgendered people and the population she is part of, complex research is simplified as evidence of the universality, and often acceptance, of 'transsexualism' (Garber 1993, 351). Perkins then goes on to suggest that Polynesians are the 'victims' of colonising missionaries:

The mahu tradition continues today on Tahiti, Samoa, Tonga and the other islands, but due to the intrusions of white missionaries to Polynesia in the 19th century, it is much modified from its pre-European development. Mahus no longer have the respect of their communities and many have migrated to such cities as Papeete, Fagatongo, Nukualofa, Auckland and Honolulu, where transgender subcultures similar to those in Australian cities have formed. But the Western cultural influence in these cities has resulted in the derogatory image of “drag queen” and the kind of persecutions that we transgendered in Australia are familiar with. As a consequence, some mahus have returned to their traditional communities where, in spite of a predominance of judgmental Christian dogma, at least the extremes of Western oppression do not exist (20, 37).

This paragraph contains significant acknowledgement of the complexity of the identities of transgendered Pacific people in a global context. However, Perkins quite explicitly places the ‘accepting traditional native cultures’ in opposition with the ‘homo/transphobic forces of western religious colonisation’. In a complex (or confused) manoeuvre, Perkins thus suggests that indigenous models of transgenderism have been ‘contaminated’ by western models, yet also implies a degree of continuity between the indigenous and western models. This latter move draws on the primitivist paradigm, and allows the readers of *Crosstalk* to locate their own gender variance as originating in practices that are both ancient and ‘natural’ (Towle and Morgan 2002, 477-478).

More recently, in the Australian magazine *Bent*, a brief overview is offered of the ‘tribal sexualities’ of North American Navajo, Samoans, and Hindu Indians (Maxwell 2003). In this publication aimed at ‘gay, bi and straight bent readers’, the emphasis is on cultural acceptance. Fa’afafine are described as ‘socially respected members of the community’ and the drag pageants are offered as a marker of this respect (rather than, as I will discuss in a Chapter 5, an attempt on the part of fa’afafine to regain some level of social approval). Maxwell concludes his article with the assertion that, “[t]o many communities homosexuality is a sacred and meaningful expression of the divine within a physical world” (2003), and his final description of sitting at a Navajo fire ‘physically and spiritually melting into the environment’ draws an obvious correlation between these accepting communities and an alignment with natural forces.¹² As authors in the gay and transgender media position fa’afafine as continuous with their own

¹² The ‘mythical’ nature of romantic assumptions of Pacific celebration of sexual/gender diversity is ultimately brought into stark relief by Besnier’s noting of a ‘reverse Orientalism’ among the Tongan leiti, who imagine western countries as places where they would be accepted (1997, 13), and where they would be easily able to enter into the long-term marriage-like relationships with men that are denied them in Tonga (1997, 20).

identities, they are able to assume that fa'afafine enact a 'truer' version of transgenderism or same-sex desire that is universal, but repressed in western societies.¹³

This paradigm of the 'venerable past' of indigenous societies being 'corrupted' by western influence is even more evident in texts that discuss prostitution among transgendered Pacific people. Again, this is linked to the incommensurability of 'traditional' identities and 'modern' concepts, an example of the 'despondency theory' outlined and critiqued by Marshall Sahlins (1999). Echoing the understanding that western civilisation necessarily represses the 'natural' sexualities that can be seen in less 'evolved' societies (Porter 1990, 177; Torgovnick 1990, 228), despondency theory suggests that indigenous peoples inevitably lost their cultural coherence and innocence once subjected to western domination (Sahlins 1999, iii). This discursive construction is evident in comments such as "the rising tide of Western type homosexual prostitution is rapidly engulfing the native style mahu transvestites" (Danielsson et al 1978, 11), or in articles where transgendered prostitution is linked to the 'defilement' of 'traditional' practices by westernisation (MacFarlane 1983, 11). Cities are referred to as 'alien environments' in which 'alternative lifestyles' such as 'trans-sexual prostitution' are easily adopted by those who have little education, or as a modern-day 'Sodom and Gomorra' [sic] where naive migrant mahu are so 'bewildered' by European customs that prostitution is their only means of surviving (Danielsson et al 1978, 11). In these descriptions, urban centres are symbols of western immorality and decadence, where traditionally 'simple' transgendered persons are forced into flamboyant displays of a sexualised femininity that is assumed to render them inauthentic. "Unfortunately, nowadays the Westernisation of Polynesian sexual customs has meant that institutions such as the *mahu* are disappearing and being replaced by the Polynesian equivalent of the trans-sexual prostitute" (Macfarlane 1983, 11). Such descriptions represent the other side of evolutionary discourses – still primitivist, these explanations view contemporary western sexuality as degenerate, evidence of western society's decadence (Bleys 1995, 155). This is a perspective that can be traced back to conceptualisations of the 'noble savage', an image that "linked the natural world to an idea of innocence and purity, and the developed world to corruption and decay" (Smith 1999, 49).

¹³ Kate Sturge analyses Marjorie Shostak's famous ethnography of the !Kung woman 'Nisa' as a search for 'a more true or essential vision of gender relations', which rests on an assumption of continuity between the genders of Shostak and Nisa, with Nisa an instantiation of a less 'contaminated' version of womanhood (Sturge 1997, 27). The same assumptions appear to motivate authors such as Perkins and Maxwell, who seem to seek the 'truth' of their transgenderism/homosexuality in non-western cultures.

While these descriptions suggest that in 'traditional' contexts fa'afafine were unreservedly accepted, other authors are more restrained in their articulation of this apparent acceptance. Douglass St Christian notes that fa'afafine take part in all aspects of family and village life (1994, 193-194), but is careful to state that "to paint the *fa'afafine* as an always positive member of the community ignores the very real tension in the *fa'afafine's* position as a butt of jokes, as a disposable sexual outlet and as an object of occasional violence and brutality" (1994, 184). Reevan Dolgoy expands on this, outlining the manner in which the 'acceptance' of fa'afafine is conditional, contextual, and variable. He suggests that "the *fa'afafine's* usefulness in the area of feminine tasks counts for much of their accommodation. Yet another perspective suggests that as long as one works diligently for the family, gendered or erotic expressions outside the home are not an issue *as long as they are not perceived to dishonour the family*" (Dolgoy 2000, 149; emphasis added). The sanction against dishonouring the family applies to all Samoans, and Dolgoy's analysis in this area is cognisant of the fact that the constraints applied to fa'afafine behaviour are not usually specific to this group. In a similar vein, Niko Besnier observes that the social prestige that may accrue to gender-liminals in Pacific societies is seldom a direct result of their liminal status, but rather only obliquely related to it. For example, while gender liminals may earn money in work that showcases their 'feminine' skills, it is the income that they earn (rather than their particular skills) that is a source of familial/social acceptance (1994, 318). In later work, Besnier outlines how strategies such as linguistic code-switching and the holding of beauty pageants are used by Tongan fakaleiti as a means of both recuperating a socially stigmatised identity (2003, 289), and as implying that fakaleiti are 'beyond' the need of Tongan approval because of their association with (glamorous) transnational discourses (2002, 548, 558; 2003, 296).

In spite of apparent (although conditional) tolerance, Dolgoy states that many people are critical of fa'afafine (2000, 149-150). "In the past some fa'afafine were sometimes thought of as "hopeless" children in their families, the implication being that some would not aggrandize the family through paid work, marriage, or titular status and therefore would be held back to serve the family in other ways" (Dolgoy 2000, 150). In more recent times, Dolgoy suggests that the impact and adoption of western discourses has added to potential for marginalisation, especially among parents:

The array of competing ideologies with which Samoan parents may now have to contend cannot be easy with respect to their effeminate sons, in a Samoa that is rapidly transforming and which reproduces competing ideological themes and many forms of the *fa'afafine* persona (Dolgoy 2000, 152-153).

Drozdown-St Christian also notes the negative impact of HIV/AIDS in Samoa on perceptions of fa'afafine (2002, 200). As a general rule authors such as Dolgoy, Besnier, and (Drozdown-)St Christian take care to locate both acceptance and marginalisation of fa'afafine in Samoa in the context of fa'aSamoa and the expectation of *all* Samoans that emanate from its enactment. Thus Samoan praise and criticism of fa'afafine is seen not to be related to their identities per se, but rather to individual and context-bound behaviours (although it should be noted that Samoans will generalise from these specifics).

As these analyses suggest, life for fa'afafine in contemporary Samoa and the wider world is complex, *possibly* more complex than in pre-contact eras. The opportunity to truly understand these complexities is lost for those authors who mourn the demise of an 'authentic' cultural form that has supposedly been sacrificed to the global spread of capitalism. However, populations such as fa'afafine and cultures such as Samoa are, for others, dynamic processes rather than static forms. Dolgoy's entire thesis (2000) is an analysis of the impact of westernisation and the new social and cultural forms that have emerged in contemporary Samoa, while also acknowledging aspects of continuity with 'traditional' Samoan life. He states that:

There are probably few *fa'afafine*, these days, who entirely live the quiet life of a traditional domestic *fa'afafine*. *Fa'afafine*, including many in the villages, are increasingly linked to new western aspirations, occupations and personae, and the new forms of *fa'afafine* organization and activity found in the Apia area and more recently on one of the outer islands (2000, 140).

However, he observes that even in fairly urban villages, many fa'afafine continue to serve their 'aiga traditionally. These roles give them a source of pride, and they are as accountable as any other member of the family and society (Dolgoy 2000, 140-141). For others, education or employment that are more western are also articulated as service to 'aiga and community, and provide a sense of cultural and social belonging and worth (Dolgoy 2000, 142). Drozdown-St Christian notes that in contemporary times, 'finer and finer distinctions' are being made between groups of fa'afafine by Samoans, listing "street *fa'afafine*, the business *fa'afafine*, the back village traditional *fa'afafine*, the homosexual man", as well as the drag fa'afafine (2002, 33). While the more romantic and primitivist perspectives outlined earlier might suggest that many of these instantiations of 'fa'afafine-ness' are 'corruptions' of the indigenous identity, Drozdown-St Christian does not attribute 'authenticity' to any particular group. All are simply examples of what it means to be fa'afafine in contemporary Samoa.

Niko Besnier also acknowledges the impact of westernisation on Tongan culture and fakaleiti identities, suggesting that “*leiti* identity is by definition in a state of constant diachronic flux, in part because of *leiti*'s uncompromising embracing of sociocultural change and innovation from overseas” (1997, 11). In fact, he suggests that fakaleiti in some sense ‘represent’ the west, in that:

what they imitate, if they imitate anything, is not the average village woman ... Rather, *leiti* conjure the Tongan representation of the Western colonial ‘lady’, i.e., a woman with highly elaborated sensitivities to dirt, the sun, natives, and hard work, capricious and vain and in constant need of cosmetics, and whose desires are insatiable. ... Thus *leiti* identity is associated not simply with modernity and the West, but also with a rejection of tokens of ‘traditional’ Tongan life (1997, 19).

According to Besnier, *leiti* are not so much corrupted *by* western discourses as much as they are a specific product *of* the interaction between those discourses and the more ‘traditional’ culture of Tonga. The positioning of contemporary *leiti* at the intersection of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ discourses in Tonga informs Besnier’s work on linguistic code-switching (Besnier 2002; 2003). *Leiti* utilisation of western discourses of glamour and feminine beauty are evident in the adoption of beauty pageants (2002; 2003), although Besnier notes that this is a particularly mediated and conditional version of the western model (2002, 548).

Kerry James writes of how fakaleiti identities emerged from the more ‘traditionally’ grounded fakafāfine, observing that the more sexualised fakaleiti are often the target of male violence, and have been cast in the Tongan popular imagination as perpetrators of AIDS in Tonga (1994, 58). Thus, she indicates some of the complexities of the contemporary situation in Tonga, where ‘traditional’ identities and discourses intersect with more recent understandings and enactments of sex/gender that are, to varying degrees, influenced by globalised discourses in localised ways. Matzner (2001) also acknowledges the complexity of contemporary globalised contexts, although in a different manner, when he notes that Hawaiian transgendered people are consciously identifying as *mahu* as a means of connecting with a more ‘accepting’ indigenous past. However, he is careful to phrase this historical ‘acceptance’ of non-normative genders or sexualities as being a perception of those who now identify as *mahu*, rather than ‘fact’ (2001).

Heather Worth (2000; 2001; 2002) locates her study of gender liminal Maori and Pacific sex workers solely in the environs of New Zealand’s urban and lower socio-economic South Auckland area and, as she suggests, this seems to redress some of the lack of attention paid to globalisation by other authors in this area:

Being *fa'afafine* in Auckland at the cusp of the new millennium not only articulates with global social and cultural processes and the politics of sex, gender and sexual orientation, but also with the Pacific Island diaspora to New Zealand, the effects of HIV and the emphasis it has placed on sex and safety amongst marginalised groups, and the effect of black American youth culture and drag personae such as Ru Paul, as well as an increasingly globalised gay culture (Worth 2001).

While Worth thus avoids 'primitivising' fa'afafine by discussing them in a specifically non-Samoan context, her focus leads to a different sort of 'isolation', one that largely fails to consider the cultural foundations of her participants' identities. Given this, there is still an underlying feeling that the ills these fa'afafine suffer are the result of their cultural alienation. When Worth states that, "the participants in this study showed remarkable resilience, resistance, fortitude and courage in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds. They display a human resilience, agency and ability to carry on and carve out a life in the face of structural, economic and social disadvantage" (2000, 15), she is no doubt right. Yet Worth's tone implies a certain romanticising of these transgendered sex workers' 'resistance' to their social 'disadvantage', a disadvantage which appears to be understood as a consequence of their location in a western urban centre. The implication is that fa'afafine who are more grounded in their cultural heritage must fare better.

Essentially speaking ...

To suggest that fa'afafine are representative of a more natural and 'primitive' sexuality that has been lost to western societies as a consequence of the centuries of 'civilisation' that has occurred in the west implies an universalisation of 'essential' sexual expression and orientations. Assuming a 'sameness' of sexual desire across cultures frequently leads to gay and lesbian communities in the west 'claiming' non-western transgendered populations. Thus, little question is ever raised as to the appropriateness of screening *Paradise bent* in numerous gay and lesbian film festivals, where it is generally received approvingly. Festival programmes include descriptions of *Paradise bent* as 'enlightening and uplifting' in its 'applauding of one culture's respectful integration of individuals occupying a distinctive gender niche'; and as 'offering a ground-breaking glimpse as what life could be like if our culture allowed for a more all-encompassing view of sex and gender'. At the 24th San Francisco international lesbian and gay film festival, the programme entry for *Paradise Bent* read: "Look anywhere in the world, repressive societies included, and you'll most likely find a drag queen in some obscure corner lip-synching to Barbara or Judy. In Samoa, you don't have look very hard". Such comments draw an explicit parallel between fa'afafine and the gay drag queens of 'every other' society. The ease with which this parallel is

drawn originates in the fact that gay men in the west are popularly understood in effeminate terms. Hence, effeminate men in non-western societies are unproblematically aligned with homosexuality in a process that echoes the more theoretically substantive model of 'transgenderal homosexuality' that I will discuss shortly.

Fa'afafine are also aligned with western gay men on the basis that they are both males who are sexually oriented towards other males. Even if gay and fa'afafine identities are acknowledged as specific to their respective cultures, it is assumed that these are simply different means of expressing a universal homosexuality, based on physical acts that are presumed to be the same across cultures and historical periods. The distinction between identity and act is made by Tracey McIntosh, who suggests that the term 'homosexual' might be applied to non-western or pre-contact contexts if one is discussing specific activities rather than 'an exclusive homosexual identity' (1999, 3). Indeed, the separation of homosexual behaviour and homosexual identity (the former considered universal, the latter culturally/historically specific) is one of the important developments of Foucauldian inspired studies of sexuality (Vance 1991, 877). However, I would suggest that the term 'homosexual' now comes laden with such political, conceptual, and ideological connotations that it is no longer possible to 'innocently' use it to refer to sexual acts between two people with penises, and it is preferable to use terms that better signal the specifics of each cultural context. As Rosalind Morris suggests, it makes little sense to label a relationship or encounter 'same sex' "when the partners involved are considered by themselves and their societies to be different" (1995, 580).

Yet 'popular' authors continue to interpret effeminate men in non-western societies as analogous to the gay men of the west, and most commentators cannot see two 'male' bodies engaged in sexual acts as anything other than 'homosexual'. When Samoa appears in the European gay media, the focus tends to be on fa'afafine, with the apparent assumption that there is some similarity between these 'effeminate men' and the audiences of the texts in question. This is implied in the subheading of a travel piece in the English *Gay Times*: "Paul Miles reports from Samoa, the tiny country in the South Pacific where homosexuality is illegal, but the cross-dressing *fa'afafine* culture thrives" (Miles 2001, 126). The correlation is even more explicit in Miles' subsequent observation that, "[d]espite the acceptance of *fa'afafine*, sodomy and "indecent acts" between men are illegal" (Miles 2001, 128). This comment is offered as ironic evidence of the homophobia of the law in the face of the cultural acceptance of those who 'so obviously' engage in the very same acts that are outlawed. In spite of the fact that Miles seems

to locate the continuity between fa'afafine and his gay male readers in the apparent sameness of their sexual activities, his descriptions of fa'afafine remain relatively lacking in sexual possibility, except when commenting on the attitudes of Samoan men towards fa'afafine. Fa'afafine are almost exclusively presented as 'drag queens', discussed virtually only in the context of Cindy's show and a beauty pageant, both events that are represented as a relatively unproblematic comparison with the gay drag revues of the west. Although the erotic focus of this article is the oiled and tattooed masculine Samoan men who are the objects of Miles' desire, the entire article is suffused with an aura of 'easy sensuality', with undertones of the 'free sexuality' so often associated with Samoa as a whole. This ambience combines with the rhetoric of the social acceptance of fa'afafine to create an impression of Samoa as typified by a liberal attitude that is implicitly offered as an alternative to western righteousness and homophobia (Besnier 1994, 316).

Within more academic literature, the claiming of fa'afafine as 'really' homosexual is more clearly descended from Enlightenment-inspired attempts to 'understand' and classify the cultures and peoples that seem so different from those of the west.¹⁴ Part of this project, as it exists today, is the understanding that western discourses, specifically the discourses of sexology, will always provide the 'truth' of the 'other' if applied assiduously enough. Again, there are assumptions of cultural evolution implicit in these perspectives. While homosexuality is taken to be universal, it is accepted that the models of western science are best equipped for accessing the 'truth' of the related acts and identities. These texts purport to represent Pacific sexuality, but the resultant images of fa'afafine are in fact founded in a very western understanding that sexual orientation is one of the most significant means of dividing people into classes (Whitehead 1981, 97). I will explain in Chapters 4 and 5 how Samoan understandings of the relationship between sexuality and self has shifted over recent decades, and how this has impacted on presentations and understandings of fa'afafine identities. For present purposes, my discussion now moves towards how fa'afafine are understood in many western texts according to perceptions that (sexual) identities are based on fundamentally essential orientations. Although these

¹⁴ While this model of scientific objectivity is the 'ideal', there is a strand of the academic literature that suggests that a motivating factor in such rigorous research can, and even should, be the refutation of homophobic discourses by 'proving' the universality, and hence 'naturalness', of homosexuality (e.g. Dynes and Donaldson 1992, xv). As Pat Califia notes, this has often led to gay anthropologists and historians claiming transgendered populations and people as 'really' homosexual (1997, 121). For example, gay anthropologist Walter Williams tells of the excitement with which he first learnt that sexual relations are arbitrary, and it was during this first introduction to anthropology that he resolved that he would one day "do research and publish on what Bullough called "sex positive societies"" (1993, 115). This narrative is presented as the precursor to his contemporary research on North American Indian berdache, a population he cites as evidence of the society's acceptance of homosexuality (1993, 116), but which many would claim as transgendered (e.g. Califia 1997, 120-162).

orientations are seen as being manifested differently across cultural contexts, the underlying assumption is that these various manifestations can ultimately be explained and understood according to a set of universal sexual imperatives. As Richard Parker and Delia Easton suggest, the assumed universality of sexuality across societies has remained largely unquestioned, even though relativism is now accepted as marking almost all other cultural domains (1998, 2).

Gilbert Herdt notes that it is common for scholars to “regard homosexuality as the true or real or hidden cause of instances of third sex or gender” (1994b, 47). This perspective results from authors “relying on imported cultural schemas that bend and distort same- and opposite-sex practices in such traditions or see in such practices the essential biological desires of supposedly identical Western forms” (Herdt 1994b, 49). The tendency to read transgenderism as ‘really’ homosexuality reaches full realisation in work that divides non-western ‘homosexuality’ into transgenerational, transgenderal (or gender-differentiated), and egalitarian forms (Adam 1985; Dynes and Donaldson 1992, xi-xii; Drucker 1996, 76-77; Rind 1998, 399). While this pluralising of ‘homosexuality’ “represented a breakthrough for Western societies that had consistently reduced homosexuality to a matter of personal preference or individual orientation” (Weston 1993b, 343), it is still problematic in that “all these classificatory schemes assume “homosexuality” as a universal category with readily identifiable variants” (Weston 1993b, 344). The definition of ‘transgenderal homosexuality’ is based on the assumption that sexuality causes gender expression, i.e. that transgendered individuals (and, in many cases, their partners) are always already homosexual (or bisexual, in the case of partners), but that in order for such sexuality to be rendered socially acceptable, it must appear to be heterosexual. Thus, one party must adopt the position of ‘woman’, while the other remains in the position of ‘man’ (Morris 1995, 580).

While this vaguely functional ‘explanation’ of transgenderism may, at first glance, seem to be relatively feasible, its tenuous nature is revealed when one attempts to apply such theory to contemporary western transgenderism and transsexualism. Although in the past transsexuals were often virtually accused of, or ‘explained’ as, being homosexuals who could not admit to, or were not even aware of, their sexuality, such a suggestion would not be tenable in today’s climate of gender politics. Male-to-female transsexuals can now identify as lesbian without throwing into doubt the suitability of their gender reassignment. However, in much of the anthropological literature and other writing which discusses non-western transgenderism, the same advances in theorising are not recognised. Non-

western male-to-female transgendered people continue to be simultaneously labelled as feminine in their gendered expressions and as homosexual in their relations with masculine men.

To refer to transgendered/masculine male sexual encounters as 'homosexual' also elides the meaning of the encounter within its cultural context. For example, Wayne Dynes and Stephen Donaldson suggest that early anthropologists often overlooked homosexuality in various cultures for a number of reasons. These cultures include those where, according to Dynes and Donaldson, homosexuality was 'gender differentiated'. In these situations, anthropologists may well not have been aware of 'homosexuality' because members of those societies would probably "answer questions about sex between males in the negative" (Dynes and Donaldson 1992, ix). However, Dynes and Donaldson overlook their own (cultural) assumptions about what homosexuality – and even 'sex between males' – is, suggesting that it is the 'natives' who are mistaken in not mentioning sex between transgender and masculine males when asked about 'homosexuality'. While it is true that these earlier anthropologists would have been unlikely to look for identities or behaviours that were distant from their own conceptual frameworks (Sturge 1997, 24), Dynes and Donaldson replace this lacuna in the area of sexuality and gender with an imposition of their own meanings upon particular sexual acts.

Andrew Peteru demonstrates this elision of the meaning of sexual acts in his study of the sexuality of young Samoan men (1997). In this work, Peteru describes sexual encounters between his young masculine male informants and fa'afafine as 'homosexual experiences' (1997, 93-94), but he also describes instances where both partners were masculine males as 'homosexual encounters' (pers. comm.). This may be explicable by taking the public health aspects of Peteru's work into account, in that the health implications for males who have sex with other males have no respect for the nuances of gendered identities. However, I would suggest that the successful implementation of public health programmes is dependent on understanding the meanings as well as the mechanics of these acts, as programmes targeting 'homosexual' acts or 'men who have sex with men' run the risk of not recruiting fa'afafine. As Parker and Easton point out, an understanding of the organization of local sexual communities (1998, 8) and the local meanings of sexual acts (1998, 4) are a central part of understanding and preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS. In spite of this, Peteru joins Dynes and Donaldson (1992), and many other authors in working in this field, who seem either unwilling or unable to conceptualise two 'male' bodies engaged in sexual activity as anything other than 'homosexual', a conceptual constraint that is common throughout the literature.

Poasa, Blanchard and Zucker (2004) also present an argument that suggests that fa'afafine fall under the rubric of 'transgenderal homosexuality'. In applying the same birth order equation to fa'afafine's families as have been used with 'homosexual transsexuals', a clear correlation is made. While no explicit causal relationship is offered, Poasa, Blanchard and Zucker's use of the term 'homosexual transsexual' to refer to male-to-female transsexuals who are sexuality oriented towards men (2004, 14) draws a clear link between sexual orientation and gender identity. This link is reinforced by mention of the fact that similar birth order equations have been found for 'homosexual men' (2004, 14). The possibility of sexual orientation towards men emerging from (rather than causing) femininely gendered identities is not considered.

Reevan Dolgoy is, as I have suggested, somewhat more sensitive to the specificities of the cultural context in which fa'afafine exist than many authors. Rather than positing sexual relations with masculine men as fundamental to fa'afafine identities, he suggests that these practices are a relatively recent aspect of fa'afafine behaviour. "According to some older informants, homoerotics was never a condition of their identity, and some Samoans account for their erotics, attributionally, as an imported Western construct" (Dolgoy 2000, 130-131). Admittedly, Dolgoy's use of the term 'homoerotics' is suggestive of a continued application of western concepts to non-western practices and understandings. While this language implies a focus on a particular *practice*, rather than the notions of identity that are inevitably associated with the use of the term 'homosexuality', there is still a suggestion of 'erotics' between people who are fundamentally the same – 'homo' – a meaning that is not usually present for either fa'afafine or their Samoan masculine male sexual partners. Yet Dolgoy also provides one of the most nuanced discussions of relationships between fa'afafine identities and the concept of being 'gay'. He notes that while some fa'afafine can see similarities between themselves and the lifestyles of gay men overseas, there is also a feeling that those fa'afafine who migrate and begin to identify as gay must sacrifice an important part of their Samoan identities to do so (2000, 169).

Niko Besnier pays close attention to the situated meanings of sexual encounters between fa'afafine and masculine men, arguing that for the majority of the men who take part in these encounters, fa'afafine are assumed to be 'substitute women', rather than either 'men' or object choices in their own right (1994, 301-303). He states that it therefore makes no sense within Samoan understandings to conceptualise of either these encounters or those who engage in them as 'homosexual', a strong argument for the understanding that sexual orientation does not cause one to be specifically

(trans)gendered. This lack of correlation between Pacific transgenderism and western models of homosexuality is reinforced by Besnier's description of the abhorrence with which Tongan leiti regard sexually founded gay and lesbian identities (2002, 554), and he positions leiti as evidence against Dennis Altman's theorising that globalisation leads to non-western transgendered identities being realigned with western models of homosexuality (2002, 559). Besnier also suggests that sexual orientation towards masculine men has not always been central to the identities of gender liminal Pacific peoples, and, at least in the island contexts, may still not be particularly consequential:

In "traditional" Polynesian contexts, partaking in homosexual activities is neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion for gender-liminal status. Engaging in same-sex erotic behavior does not brand one as a *fakaleiti* in Tonga, a *pinapenaaine* in Tuvalu, or a *fa'afafine* in Samoa. ... Nor does one's identification as a *fakaleiti* presuppose a history of or identified "preference" for homosexual encounters. Indeed, *fakaleiti* status in Tonga, as in Samoa and perhaps in Tahiti, can be "assigned" early in life, much before the awakenings of sexual desires of any type. The evidence thus suggests the following important point: sexual relations with men are seen as an optional *consequence* of gender liminality, rather than its determiner, prerequisite or primary attribute (Besnier 1994, 300).

In spite of this, Besnier also translates these encounters as 'homosexual'. As with Peteru, Dolgoy, and many other authors working in their field, morphology seems to take precedence over indigenous meanings in their understandings of sexuality, and western terminology is implied to provide the 'true' meaning of acts between Samoans.

An eloquent distinction between practice, meaning and identity can be found in Douglass St Christian's explanation of why sex between fa'afafine and masculine men cannot be thought of as 'homosexual' (1994, 184):

The *fa'afafine* are genetically male in that they have penises. They use their penis in exactly the same way formal males do in heterosexual intercourse, urination, and in rules about modesty and exposure. However, the *fa'afafine* are not male and their penises are not male sex organs. They are *fa'afafine* organs. That is, sex organs, but not ones which define the *fa'afafine* as male" (St Christian 1994, 124).

This discussion of fa'afafine genitals is an innovative move away from assumptions that penises must always signify 'male' or 'masculinity'. St Christian's rejection of western sex/gender paradigms is explicit in his statement that in Samoa "role maps onto physical aspects of the body distinctive orders of meaning and experience not encompassed by the scientific classification of human bodies as male and female" (1994, 124). This theme of quite different conceptual frameworks informing Samoan and pālagi understandings of embodiment is present throughout the work of (Drozdow-)St Christian, who

suggests that westernisation has a specific impact on enactments and understandings of fa'afafine identities. He states that:

... transvestism as an aspect of fa'afafine engenderment is more recent, is a different order of code switching which has accompanied the intrusion of an emergent repressive biological gender absolutism. That is, fa'afafine does not mean looking like a woman but acting in the manner a woman is anticipated to act in a closely circumscribed range of contexts – and like a male in other contexts... The looking like, the attention to body surfaces as a natural artefact being disguised ... is a more recent intervention in gender performance (Drozdown-St Christian 2002, 32).

For Drozdow-St Christian, it is the relatively recent 'fixing' of sex and gender that has led to an increasing salience of concepts such as 'homosexuality' in Samoa (2002, 149; 151; 200), a possibility that I will discuss further in Chapters 4 and 5.

The effects of western models of (homo)sexuality on the practice of contemporary fa'afafine identities (especially in New Zealand) is the focus of Lee Wallace's critique of the 1995 New Zealand documentary *Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa* (1999; 2003, 138-158).¹⁵ The later version of this paper is situated in the context of a larger text that examines the history of sexual exchange between the Pacific and the west (2003). While Wallace explicitly states that she is not arguing for a sameness between homosexuals and fa'afafine, she nevertheless critiques *Queens of Samoa* for its failure to recognise the manner in which these two identities resonate with one another (2003, 139). As Wallace points out, the makers of the documentary avoid the question of fa'afafine uses of homosexual discourses (2003, 139). This is in spite of the fact that contemporary fa'afafine, especially in New Zealand, almost inevitably construct and maintain their identities in relation to western models of homosexuality, often drawing on elements of gay culture in enactments of their identities, and frequently identifying as gay men as well as fa'afafine. Wallace argues compellingly that the documentary makers avoid issues of (homo)sexuality in part because these matters were inconvenient for a text intended for prime time television (1999, 27). She suggests that the resultant focus on family relations and the repeated assurances of participants that "they are to be understood through a gender inversion model of human behaviour" (1999, 29) serves to elide potential queer meanings, and rather "recuperates the most conservative understandings of family and heterosexuality" (1999, 27). As well as avoiding discussion of sexuality, Wallace suggests that the documentary also evades consideration of the sexuality of the

¹⁵ As mentioned earlier, the documentary itself is discussed in more depth in Chapter 8.

partners of fa'afafine (1999, 35). Her implication here is that this too would raise the spectre of homosexuality.

In the chapters that follow, I will explore in greater depth the impact western discourses of homosexuality have had on how fa'afafine are understood and how they understand themselves. As Wallace asserts, the identities of fa'afafine and the homosexual are not mutually exclusive, nor are the distinctions between them stable (1999, 34). Yet I am not convinced that fa'afafine sexuality is as central to their identities as Wallace seems to think. In my experience, and especially for older and less westernised fa'afafine (many of whom were interviewed in *Queens of Samoa*), family *is* their main priority, and continued inability to bear children – a significant aspect of the 'definition' of a Samoan woman – *is* a central factor in the decision of many fa'afafine not to go through the pain and trauma of genital reconstruction surgery. Inability to bear children is of such consequence that Tamasailau Sua'ali'i suggests that "fa'afafine are a distinct third gender category not because they have a different sexual status, but because they cannot, as biological males, have children" (2001, 170). Yet Wallace seems to remain convinced that sexuality is the 'key' to fa'afafine identities. In the revised version of her analysis of *Queens of Samoa* (2003, 138-159), she suggests that the incommensurability of fa'afafine identities with western sexual identities is not due to the fact that fa'afafine identities are not fundamentally about sex, but rather because neither the western nor the Samoan discourses are detailed enough in their sexual definitions:

If I now insist on the salience of the categories of homosexuality, transvestism, and transsexuality to *fa'afafine*, this is also to insist on the salience of *fa'afafine* to those categories, from which it nevertheless remains distinct. This double insistence might force a new understanding of each category, whether Polynesian or European, and suggest finer calibrations of difference than can be accommodated on a sexual grid defined by the strict axes of the homosexual-heterosexual distinction (2003, 140).

Even authors who debate the applicability of the term 'homosexual' to fa'afafine may do so not from a position of acknowledging its inability to linguistically map onto Samoan sexual practices, but rather as a means of disputing the actual occurrence of sex between masculine men and fa'afafine. Thus, Kerry James suggests that assuming (homo)sexuality on the basis of cross-gendered behaviour is presumptive:

It is now unfashionable to say that homosexuality could have never existed in a society, especially when speaking of effeminate men (...). But, equally, how can one claim that homosexuality must have existed where there is no evidence of it? ... it is clear that homosexuality was not part of the "ideal type" of a *fakafafine* in Tongan culture as, indeed, it might not have been among the Samoan *fa'afafine* in the past, especially in rural areas ... If individual *fakafafine* had desired sexual contact with masculine men, the sheer social

unacceptability of such acts and the negative controls exerted appear to have effectively prevented them from expressing such erotic desires (1994, 45-46).

In more recent times, James aligns fakafafine 'homosexuality' with western contexts such as the urban area of Tonga or overseas, where anonymity is more possible (1994, 47).

Yet it would be misleading to exclude sexuality as a characterising feature of fa'afafine identities and experiences (Besnier 1994, 301), especially in present-day Samoa, for reasons I will discuss in later chapters. While sexual orientation is not always, and has not always been, consequential to identification as fa'afafine (Dolgoy 2000, 103-131), for many contemporary fa'afafine, sexual attraction to men *is* a fundamental aspect of being fa'afafine. Dolgoy reports that, for some of his fa'afafine participants, "it is because they prefer men, and not women, for erotics that they feel that they are women or are like women, or that they must be feminine. Thus, erotic preference is in part a marker of gender identity for them" (2000, 139). Besnier also recognises that the definition of fa'afafine by other Samoans may include the fact that they are potential sexual partners for masculine men. However, rather than relate this solely to sexuality, Besnier takes care to locate this understanding within kinship structures. "The gender-liminal individual is viewed as potential sexual "fair game" in a much broader sense than women are, in that no brother-sister relationship shield him [sic] from the all-out sexual advances of nonliminal men" (Besnier 1994, 300-301).

While Besnier and Dolgoy thus draw attention to the significance of sexuality to fa'afafine identities, these discussions always take place in the context of wider analyses of fa'afafine lives and identities, rather than as a causal factor in their 'fa'afafine-ness'. Furthermore, significant cultural context is also provided. Both Dolgoy (2000, 184) and Besnier (1994, 300-301) discuss the link between the unavailability of young women as potential sexual partners and sexual relations between fa'afafine and masculine men. Besnier also notes that, in Tonga, while masculine men 'repay' women for sexual favours with gifts or outings, there is no such exchange when masculine men have sex with fakaleiti. Indeed, the situation is often reversed, with leiti spending considerable money on their partners (1997, 15-16). This not only counters common western perceptions of transgendered Pacific people as prostitutes (Besnier 1997, 16), but also allows the reader to situate fa'afafine sexual activity in the wider context of the flow of gifts that constitute an important part of the indigenous economies of Polynesia.

Yet work such as this is relatively rare in the literature and even rarer when the more immediate and often more powerful popular media are taken into account. Thus, a continual preoccupation with sexual acts and the 'meaning' of particular genitals allows for an easy discovery of fa'afafine (homo)sexuality, when sexual activity may actually be relatively incidental to the lives, identities and understandings of the people involved. In light of this, it is not surprising that indigenous politicised or missionised populations may seek to 'deny' the sexuality of their transgendered populations (Altman 2001, 90), especially in societies such as Samoa, where so much outside interest has focused on the sexual aspects of their culture.

The trans Empire

The use of western sexological concepts to 'understand' fa'afafine is not limited to the utilisation of homosexuality. The categories of transgenderism (predominantly 'transsexual' and 'transvestite') are also commonly applied to fa'afafine. As with the defining of fa'afafine as 'homosexual' in the gay literature, translation using these sexological categories is unsurprisingly apparent in transgender communities. For example, Roberta Perkins (n.d.) compares the tarnishing of the reputations of 'authentic' mahu by urban Pacific drag queens with the manner in which the image of 'real' transsexuals in the west is negatively affected by the drag queens of Sydney's Kings Cross. In making this comparison, Perkins unproblematically correlates 'authentic' mahu with 'real' transsexuals. She also suggests that the urban Pacific 'drag queens' are not 'authentic' mahu, implying that there is no need to reflect on how discourses of transgenderism may have impacted on mahu lives and identities. Rather, there is an assumption that 'real' mahu always already *are* transsexual, and it is only the influence of the west and the resultant lack of traditional respect that has led to blatantly sexualised and derogatory cross-dressing.

In the academic arena, the use of terminologies from the discourse of gender dysphoria tends to imply a more direct translation than the often contingent utilisation of the concept of homosexuality. Both Mageo (1996, 591) and Shore (1981, 209-210) are careful to explain why sex between masculine men and fa'afafine cannot be understood using western models of 'homosexuality'. However, they continue to 'translate' fa'afafine as transvestite, suggesting an equivalence between western and Samoan terms and identities (Asad 1986, 155). Underlying this 'translation' are assumptions that a biological male wearing women's clothing has the same meaning in Samoa as it does in the west (Weston 1993b, 347), and that binary sex is a biological given rather than a cultural construct (Weston 1993b, 346; Morris

1995, 567-569). “To call someone a ‘transvestite’ involves making a series of prior assumptions about them. These cluster around the notion that there is some original ‘sex’ or ‘gender’ to which they ‘really’ belong: transvestites *cross*-dress, they do not just dress” (Cornwall 1994, 112). Thus to call biological males who wear feminine clothes ‘transvestites’ assumes that they are wearing clothes that ‘should’ only be worn by females. Yet significant research has shown that the sexual dimorphism underlying this assumption and taken for granted by many western authors is a relatively recent paradigm, even in the context of western history (Laqueur 1990; Herdt 1994b, 22-23). My own project is founded on such theorising, demonstrating how the existence of fa'afafine troubles the supposedly natural order of ‘man’ and ‘woman’. For now, I wish to point to how assumptions that this order *is* natural underlie the definition of fa'afafine as ‘transvestite’, and the assumption that a term that has emerged from western sexological discourses is applicable in a Samoan context. This again implies that the ‘truth’ of fa'afafine identities can be located using western medicalising discourses of sexology, an understanding that also informs Kris Poasa’s presentation of the fa'afafine who is the subject of her case study as ‘really’ transsexual. She bases this ‘diagnosis’ on the fact that the fa'afafine respondent “has had a persistent dissatisfaction with her anatomical sex and wishes to be rid of her male genitals” (1992, 50). This is used in later work as evidence that fa'afafine closely resemble “their Western transgendered counterparts” (Poasa, Blanchard and Zucker 2004, 16), with no regard for the influence that discourses of feminising medical procedures and related identities have had on how fa'afafine understand themselves as feminine. In fact, Poasa quite explicitly states that: “The Western classification of a fa'afafine has not been clearly established. It is suspected that the population consists of a variety of sexual or gender classifications including transsexuals, gynemimetics and effeminate homosexuals” (1992, 39-40). This statement suggests not only that the translation of ‘fa'afafine’ into the relevant western sexological categories is possible but also, echoing the imperatives of Enlightenment thinking, that it is desirable. This suggestion is repeated in later work, in which Poasa, Blanchard and Zucker attempt to explain the incidence of fa'afafine in Samoa with a birth order equation that has been developed from research on western ‘homosexual transsexuals’ (2004).

Conversely, while Dolgoy discusses aspects of fa'afafine’s lives and self-perceptions that might allow fa'afafine to be represented as ‘transsexual’, he is sensitive to the specifics of cultural context. He notes that some fa'afafine talk of being ‘women trapped in men’s bodies’, and that a few have contemplated or had genital reconstruction surgery, while others have had hormone treatment or breast implants (2000, 137). These statements and actions would seem to imply that at least these individual fa'afafine

might be understood as transsexuals, but Dolgoy then states that “A sex change operation, however, is not always perceived as changing one’s status from *fa’afafine* to woman (...). It does not make one a sister nor a *tama’ita’i* (a lady). It is felt by some that one will always be a *fa’afafine*” (Dolgoy 2000, 138). This suggests that, even though some fa’afafine do seem to conform to the ‘symptoms’ of transsexualism, being fa’afafine does not signify a transition from man to woman, or a woman who used to be a man, the states that tend to define male-to-female transsexualism. Dolgoy is aware of the fact that, within Samoan understandings, one cannot ‘become’ a woman through the construction of a vagina or the growth of breasts. Rather, in Dolgoy’s work fa’afafine hold complex understandings of themselves as ‘already’ women (albeit within male bodies) and simultaneously never able to be women. It is, in some sense, this paradox that defines them as fa’afafine, rather than transsexual.¹⁶ A similar sensitivity to context and detailed analysis mitigates Penelope Schoeffel’s use of the term ‘transsexual’ in relation to fa’afafine (1979). It is obvious from her text that Schoeffel does not use ‘transsexual’ to indicate those who become or even want to become women, and given the time in which she was writing, and the fact that her thesis was focused on women in Samoa, not fa’afafine, it is maybe understandable that she should have fallen back on such terminology.

Definitions of fa’afafine as ‘really’ transvestites or transsexuals are significantly influenced by whom the authors choose to focus on. As Peteru states, the conflation of fa’afafine with transvestite and transsexual “may be due to the fact that the ‘drag queens’ (homosexual males who cross-dress) are visible and active in the community” (1997, 46). Pālāgi commentators simply focus on the most visible and obviously ‘different’ members of the fa’afafine community, generally those who are the most overtly ‘transvestic’ and sexual (James 1994, 52). This tendency is especially evident in the work of Mageo. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Mageo locates the role of fa’afafine in humorous ula (Mageo 1992, 445). In the pre-contact era, ula as entertainment was encompassed in the pōula, dances which involved the unmarried boys of a visiting village and the unmarried girls of the host village. Pōula are reported as having been highly sexual, with the young women being considerably more outrageous than the young men (Mageo 1992, 446-447). However, with the introduction of Christian morality, such public flaunting of sexuality on the part of young women became socially constrained (Mageo 1992, 447-449). Mageo suggests that this “has left Samoans at a loss in circumstances calling

¹⁶ While this analysis does reflect my own interpretation, it should also be read in light of my earlier suggestion that Dolgoy’s definition of fa’afafine sexual encounters with men as ‘homoeoteric’ implies an understanding on Dolgoy’s part of fa’afafine as ultimately ‘male’.

for entertainment. ... *Fa'afafine* fill this gap in modern Samoan social structure [sic] and appropriate girls' former responsibilities, thus defining themselves as stand-ins for bygone *auauluma* girls" (Mageo 1992, 454).

In a later argument, Mageo develops this theme by suggesting that faleaitu used to include female performers, but, over time, their roles were taken by males, "whose lack of modesty was less distressing to Samoan-Christian sensibilities" (Mageo 1996, 594). Mageo suggests that the men performing women's roles in faleaitu were somehow understood as fa'afafine. "Because of the *fa'afafine's* new place in the limelight, "she" became a key figure in social thought and social humour, and this theatrical ascendancy helped to create a place for real male transvestites in everyday social life" (Mageo 1996, 592). By using the figure of cross-dressing faleaitu performer interchangeably with 'fa'afafine', Mageo assumes that the public performance of femininity in a humorous context by otherwise masculine males must be related to fa'afafine, in spite of the fact that fa'afafine 'cross-dressing', and the cross-dressing that occurs in faleaitu, appear to have evolved in different contexts (Dolgoy 2000, 11).¹⁷ The questionable nature of Mageo's argument can be demonstrated by comparing cross-dressing in faleaitu with similar western contexts, such as pantomime. Although these performances are not intrinsically related to, nor precursors for, other western forms of transgenderism, the logic of Mageo's argument would suggest that because both pantomime and transvestism feature men who wear women's clothes, the two must be causally linked. Beyond the flawed logic of this argument, further consideration also reveals that, in order to support it, Mageo must have looked only to those fa'afafine who *do* 'cross-dress' and engage in humorous (public) performance, a group that does not encompass all fa'afafine in Samoa.

Meanwhile, back in the 'real' Samoa ...

The relatively short history of the western representation of fa'afafine and other transgendered Pacific peoples has been fundamentally marked by its origins in the Enlightenment project, which instilled in European explorers and researchers an imperative to understand, categorise and rationalise, but only according to their own terms of reference. As modern European science was held to be the pinnacle of

¹⁷ It may well be that people in the audiences of faleaitu refer to cross-dressed male performers as 'fa'afafine', which is a term commonly applied to masculine men who 'falter' in their enactments of masculinity. However, this does not mean that those using the term understand the man in question to be fa'afafine, nor that their behaviour is understood in the same terms as the behaviour of 'real' fa'afafine. The relationship between this use of the term 'fa'afafine' and actual fa'afafine seems to work in a similar fashion to the contemporary usage of terminology associated with homosexuality when applied to straight men whose behaviour is (momentarily) less than masculine.

human achievement (Sahlins 1999, ii), the noble savages and dusky maidens – and effeminate sodomites – of the Pacific served as reminders of what the civilised societies had, for better or for worse, left behind. This evolutionary metanarrative, recalibrated over the two centuries since Bligh's examination of the Tahitian mahu, has led to fa'afafine being variously defined as a 'mere function' in Samoa's homogenous whole, as a link to humanity's 'true' sexuality, as evidence that this 'true' sexuality includes queer identities, and as proof of the existence of a simpler and more accepting time.

It is only relatively recently that ways of thinking and talking about Pacific transgendered people have developed that do not necessitate focusing solely on the implications of their existence for western understandings about sexuality. This is generally achieved by placing them in wider social contexts that allow for discussion of their identities in relation to areas such as gender, and even apparently unrelated social forces such as economics. By paying attention to the motivations of fa'afafine themselves, these analyses move away from functionalist models, in which transgenderism generally becomes a 'symbol' for the rest of the society.

This more recent approach is demonstrated in the work of Kerry James, who relates the femininity of Tongan fakafāfine almost solely to their preference for women's work in an era when most labour was of the 'traditional' sort and strongly gendered (1994, 43). James observes that "work established the female component of a *fakafefine's* identity as his anatomy did the male. The combination of the two dimensions gave rise to his special designation as a *tanagata fakafefine*" (James 1994, 47). Recognition of the specificity of fakafāfine's status outside the arena of sexuality is articulated in terms of their ability to move between, through and around social boundaries by virtue of being able to connect the 'feminine' sphere of village-oriented craft production and the 'masculine' sphere of commerce, which was focused in Tonga's capital. The fact that fakafāfine cross the borders between the village and the capital has led to them becoming unusually 'urban' for feminine Tongans (James 1994, 49). This is then linked to the emergence of fakaleiti in the 1950s, feminine Tongan males who moved into the more western occupations of clerical work and teaching, which were predominantly undertaken in the urban area (1994, 50). Tonga's capital, Nuku'alofa, is commonly thought of as the 'breeding ground' for fakaleiti, who do not feel the same constraints to act like a woman according to 'proper' Tongan standards as felt by fakafāfine (James 1994, 49). While this does imply a sexualising of transgendered identities, James suggests that in Tonga:

male effeminacy is not associated with a lack of sexual restraint and decorum, as has been

suggested recently for Western Polynesia (...). Instead, it is masculine men in Tonga who are stereotyped as sexually predatory, fathering numbers of children in and out of wedlock and conducting numerous premarital or extramarital affairs. Partly by their sexual rectitude, many effeminates who are not practicing homosexuals also show that they are not masculine men (1994, 50-51).

James' use of language also indicates the increased complexity of transgenderism in the Pacific that has resulted from the influx of western terms and concepts. Her application of the terminology of western transgenderism reflects the language used by fakaleiti themselves, rather than sexological definitions. For example, when James uses a term such as 'drag', this is to refer to those fakaleiti who adopt western-style women's clothing, and who themselves draw on the discourses of the western drag queen (1994, 40). James also discusses the men in Tonga who obviously model themselves on western gay images, with highly masculinised self-presentations (James 1994, 56). "But in Tonga confusion reigns at present over categories and meanings ... Most Tongans refer to these males simply as *fakaleiti*, although they see themselves differently from *fakaleiti* and try to place themselves socially as gay men" (James 1994, 56).

In Samoa, Drozdow-St Christian also notes the complex interplay between Samoan enactments of fa'afafine identities, the importation of western concepts and identities, and Samoan reactions to this 'cross-fertilisation'. Noting that homosexual identities are being adopted by some (but not all) fa'afafine, and by some masculine men, he also observes that in recent years there have been reports of violence against fa'afafine by young masculine Samoan men, violence which is explicitly framed by homophobic verbal abuse (2002, 151). The implications of this are discussed in Chapter 5, but Drozdow-St Christian's analysis of the adoption of homosexual identities and the homophobic attacks is clearly presented so as to suggest that this is not simply the utilisation of new language for a stable cultural form, but that these events are indicative of conceptual shifts for both fa'afafine and other Samoans.

The trouble with translation

In spite of my critiques of literature which utilises western terminology to name fa'afafine in Samoa, I have to admit that I have heard fa'afafine categorising themselves along with 'the gays, the transvestites, the closets, the drags' overseas. However, in most cases this is more evidence of a 'popular' understanding of these terms, rather than an appreciation of the subtle theoretical differences between them. In addition, in the interview context, respondents are more likely to think of themselves in

uncommonly experienced ways. For example, while Worth offers quotes in which participants 'vacillate' between categories as evidence of slippage and complexity (2002, 122), she fails to account for the fact that she is, to some extent, requiring that her participants label themselves in a manner that they would not in everyday life. Participants may also use terms they believe the interviewer will better understand as a form of courtesy (Dolgoy 2000, 167). However, when presumably informed academics use western terms in the context of Samoan culture, this attributes a certain 'real meaning' to the former as a translation of the latter, and in the case of fa'afafine can suggest a discursive sexual pathologising (Pulotu-Endemann and Peteru 2001, 131). As Bernice Hausman notes, "[i]f we consistently read back through the categories of the contemporary period, we are bound to miss the specificity of what it means for historically dissimilar subjects to represent (in a variety of modes) the "other sex"" (1995, 13), an observation that could easily be applied across cultures as well as historical periods. Kath Weston suggests that one response to this problem is to "leave key cultural categories untranslated, allowing meaning to emerge from the text" (1993b, 347-348), although it is also necessary to recognise the risk that such a tactic will render these categories forever alien to the western reader, "always and already Other" (Weston 1993b, 348).

Ultimately, by utilising western sexological discourses to 'understand' fa'afafine, a full comprehension of fa'afafine lives or experiences is limited. These processes of translation exemplify Talal Asad's critique of social anthropology in which it is assumed "that translating other cultures is essentially a matter of matching written sentences in two languages, such that the second set of sentences becomes the "real meaning" of the first" (1986, 155), a process in which non-western concepts are justified according to western common sense or values rather than explained according to the social life of the peoples concerned (Asad 1986, 150). Asad suggests that "the good translator does not immediately assume that unusual difficulty in conveying the sense of an alien discourse denotes a fault in the latter, but instead critically examines the normal state of his or her *own* language (1986, 157). However, the inevitable power dynamics of European contact has meant that non-western discourses are more commonly 'forced' to adapt to western understandings, rather than the reverse (Asad 1986, 158).

By utilising the terminology of western sexology in attempts to reach the 'real' meaning of what it is to be fa'afafine, many authors fail to realise their analytical goals. Ironically, by attempting to include fa'afafine within western discourses, they are ultimately excluded because the authors refuse (or are unable) to reconfigure these discourses to accommodate fa'afafine. Even those who explicitly move

away from forcing fa'afafine into western categories run the risk of unconsciously using them to comment *on* these categories. There is a tendency among authors in the transgender literature, especially those who work from a poststructuralist perspective, to 'look through' the transgendered so that they become signifiers of something else, rather than 'looking at' them in their own right (Garber 1993, 9). For example, Heather Worth suggests that the manner in which her respondents are fluid in their self-descriptions "enunciates the difficulty of figuring out the complications of sex and gender in late modernity" (2001), an analysis which echoes Butler's use of transgenderism as a textual and rhetorical device (Namaste 2000, 14-15). This approach in part stems from the selective 'data' used by cultural studies authors, their representations of transgenderism often drawn from the overtly visible instantiations, such as drag performers, while those who pass as women remain absent from much of this theorising (Califia 1997, 112). Worth herself notes that, among her participants, "*excessive* femininity was present. Many of the girls wore glamorous clothes to their interviews. As well, a number of the girls did drag shows" (2002, 119, emphasis added). This is not a description that could be applied to the fa'afafine I interviewed in New Zealand, and I can only assume that it is the result of Worth's focus on sex workers. This reference to a very selective group of the fa'afafine population thus allows Worth to represent them as an embodiment of a particular (western) theoretical moment:

Their curious ability to eschew gender and sexual identity as stable hegemonic categories; their refusal to disallow multiple genders and sexual identities at the same time and in the same body is theoretically very important, because they are a powerful, empirical critique of the very categories which scholars have held as central to the feminist enterprise for many years now (Worth 2001).

While my own work does, admittedly, echo Worth's desire to destabilise normative western assumptions about sex/gender and sexuality, I seek to do so through the participants' understandings of their own lives, which they do not generally see as 'curious' or as marked by 'refusal'.

This thesis is significantly informed by a sustained consideration of the ideologies underlying the existent 'fa'afafine discourse', and by what fa'afafine themselves say about this discourse. In the following chapter, I will outline some of the processes I have utilised in my own research in order to address some of the concerns raised in this chapter regarding issues of representations and translation. These processes have resulted in the balancing act that underpins this thesis, in which a refusal to suggest that fa'afafine can easily be encompassed within the boundaries of western discourses of sex, gender, or sexuality, is held in continual tension with a belief that fa'afafine are not intrinsically alien or unknowable outside the Samoan cultural context.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

EPISTEMOLOGY AND PRACTICE

... I'm talking to you now, but there's fa'afafine living out there in the villages who are just going through their daily chores and they don't need to be interviewed by anyone to actually live their lives.

Fa'afafine participant in Samoa

Given the concerns regarding the ways fa'afafine have been represented outlined in the previous chapter, it was clear from the outset that this project was going to be methodologically problematic. As I critiqued the work of others, uncovering instances of primitivism, essentialism, ethnocentrism, homo/trans-phobia, eroticism, exoticism and romanticism absences of cultural context, and as the research itself progressed, I became increasingly aware of my own place in, and contribution to, these discourses, and of my responsibilities to address the weaknesses I identified in the work of others, while also building on the valuable insights that have been generated to date. This required paying close attention to the various ways in which fa'afafine themselves understand their lives and experiences, and locating these understandings in the changing cultural contexts in which these fa'afafine live. At the same time, it has been necessary that I both make sense of and 'interpret' these identities and experiences in ways that remain sensitive to their cultural specificities, while simultaneously not presenting these participants, or fa'afafine in general, as 'other' to non-fa'afafine, or non-Samoan, readers.

Working at the point of tension created by these epistemological requirements has been facilitated by my constant awareness of the tenuous position I occupy in relation to this research. The implications of this stem from both my status as an 'outsider', and from the issues of power that are implicit in any research. I have continually returned to the question of power, attempting to ensure that my research

has been ethical not only in the mundane sense of gaining informed consent and protecting confidentiality, but also at more fundamental levels of doing justice to the material provided by those who have taken part in this research, and representing these participants not only in the semiotic, but also in the more political, sense.

As I detail in this chapter, the material presented in this thesis is offered not as an ‘accurate’ representation of the lives of migrant fa’afafine in New Zealand, but rather as an analysis of the particular stories I have been told and events I have witnessed, informed by distinct theoretical approaches and presented in a manner which (I hope) renders these specificities transparent. As one means of realising this goal of transparency, I have sought to render the processes by which I have reached particular conclusions explicit. This chapter is in one sense a distillation of a particular narrative that I have attempted to weave into the entirety of this thesis: the story of how I researched and wrote the thesis itself. Although I started with a plan, there is a sense in which such plans are only ever what one would have done if the actual research had never happened. In the following pages, I set out how the research process allowed aspects of the plan to be realised, while necessitating that other aspects be changed or abandoned altogether.

I start with a relatively descriptive account of what happened during the data collection processes. Decisions made during this process were necessarily informed by epistemological concerns, which are increasingly foregrounded as the chapter develops. This discussion focuses on the dynamics of the interviews themselves, in which concerns regarding power relations, and the ongoing debates regarding insider/outsider status that are taking place in the social science literature, were most apparent. I then outline the ‘methods’ I used to analyse the data. This process has been particularly difficult to articulate as, in spite of my best laid plans to approach the data analysis in a methodical and disciplined manner, the reality has been considerably more intuitive and chaotic than I had originally intended. Yet I believe that the material that has emerged from my constant ‘massaging’ of the data to see what shape it might take, rather than using it to develop more rigid codes and themes, has ultimately yielded a more satisfactory – if harder to manage – result.

The plan

Although some of the finer points of my research questions have changed in the years that have elapsed since drafting my original proposal, it is instructive to briefly look back to those early plans in order to understand how this project was ‘germinated’. My initial intention was, and fundamentally remained, to gain some understanding of how fa’afafine born and raised in Samoa retain fa’afafine identities when they migrate to New Zealand. How does a gendered identity that seems so specific to the context of Samoan society and culture continue to be enacted outside that context, and what do the experiences of migrant fa’afafine say about the gender frameworks that exist in New Zealand society and culture?

The processes by which I initially intended to explore these questions seemed fairly straightforward. I planned to first go to Samoa for approximately six months, time that would allow me to gain some understanding of Samoan culture and how fa’afafine lived in Samoa. Whilst there, I would seek to discover how fa’afafine understood ‘the west’ from a distance, how they utilised western and Samoan objects and discourses in the enactment of fa’afafine identities, and what their motivations for and expectations of migration were. I would then return to New Zealand and conduct similar fieldwork there, talking with migrant fa’afafine about how their expectations of life in New Zealand compared with their experiences.

I intended to centre my data collection on non-participant observation, hoping to spend time with various fa’afafine in a range of contexts in order to observe how they interacted with others, how they expressed themselves as fa’afafine, and how others understood them. I anticipated supplementing this observational data with interviews, both with fa’afafine and with others who were part of their lives – family, friends, employers, customers, institutional representatives. These interviews would both allow for some understanding of how various social actors understood the interactions I witnessed, and provide ‘self-report’ data relating to the life histories of fa’afafine participants, the social history of fa’afafine identities, and other aspects that could not be observed, such as sexual practices. My initial proposal states that I intended to carry out between 30 and 60 interviews, with a minimum of 20, ‘as is usual for qualitative research of this nature’, and that recruitment would cease ‘when data collection reached saturation point’.

The data was to be analysed in the standard ‘coding/theming’ way, going through the interview and observational material in detail, identifying the particular things talked about or seen, and then grouping these ‘codes’ into broad thematic topics with which to structure my analysis. I intended to reconstruct this data into a relatively linear ‘narrative’, in which fa’afafine raised in Samoa migrated to New Zealand with particular perceptions of ‘the west’, and underwent various, but presumably shared, experiences while there that either fulfilled or failed to realise their expectations.

Samoa

The fact that part of my research was intended to investigate the impact of globalisation on fa’afafine in Samoa meant that I would inevitably conduct fieldwork there at some point. The New Zealand aspects of the research also necessitated gaining an appreciation of the motivations for, and effects of, migration on fa’afafine. This required having some understanding of the pre-migration experiences of those with whom I spoke in New Zealand, and of the cultural context in which their subjectivities were first formulated. It thus made sense to start the fieldwork in Samoa. Preparation for this involved reading a range of literature on Samoan culture and society, especially that which dealt with gender and sexuality in the Samoan context. Given the fact that, as I will explain, I never achieved the level of immersion in Samoan culture that I had hoped for, this literature has remained a primary source of information about Samoan social relations, and how these have changed over time and across space. I also spent a year attending Samoan language courses in New Zealand. While I emerged with only a minimal ability to converse in Samoan, these courses gave me an invaluable introduction to cultural protocols, and provided insights into the way the world and society was conceptualised within Samoan culture. For example, learning of the existence of two quite distinctive lexicons enabled me to appreciate the fundamental nature of respect, hierarchy and the observance of cultural protocol in fa’aSamoa or ‘the Samoan way’.

While the awareness of considerations such as this gave me a foundation on which to build my observations while in Samoa, my time there was considerably more difficult than I had anticipated. Some of the problems I encountered seemed less related to the fieldwork than others, but ultimately all influenced the research – at times, in unexpectedly beneficial ways. Although I did as much preparation as seemed possible at the time, I arrived in Samoa knowing no one, with few contacts, and with only a scant knowledge of the language and little more of the culture. I was constantly aware of my ignorance

of cultural protocols. My ambiguous social standing as a ‘researcher’ and as a lone woman, and my own social reticence, contributed to a constant feeling of isolation.

In order to facilitate my ‘cultural immersion’, I had hoped to find a family to live with in Samoa. However, unlike New Zealand, the daily newspapers in Samoa do not feature columns of advertisements from those looking for boarders. Because my initial point of contact in Samoa was someone who occupied a relatively privileged position, the likelihood of meeting families who might be looking to offer such board was slim, and as I do not find it easy to ask strangers for help, any chances of finding accommodation with families that may have arisen may well have gone unnoticed. This inevitably impacted on the research, as the observational factor hinged to a considerable degree on immersion in Samoan culture, and to an even greater degree on forming the kinds of relationships with participants that would allow me to become an ‘accepted outsider’ in their communities.

Because communal living in multi-generational family households is the norm in Samoa, self-contained rental accommodation is scarce. A small cottage was eventually located for me by a contact. This living situation allowed me the independence I prefer, which contributed significantly to my level of personal comfort while in Samoa. However, as I have mentioned, living alone did result in a lack of ‘cultural immersion’, and made it virtually impossible to become incorporated into the networks of social relations that are an integral part of Samoan society. The fact that these networks are the means by which most activities are enabled contributed significantly to the problems I encountered in finding participants.

In my research proposal, I casually referred to ‘the fa’afafine community’, as though such a group exists in some ‘real’ sense, with monthly meetings, websites, and newsletters. The reality is that, while there are fa’afafine communities in Samoa, they are much looser than this, and there is no real established forum in which one might advertise for participants in social research. Although fa’afafine are highly visible in Samoa, this does not mean that one can simply approach someone who *appears* to be fa’afafine and ask them to participate in research. Even other Samoans would often be unsure whether certain people were or were not fa’afafine. I thus became adept at approaching people on the basis that someone had suggested that ‘they might be able to help me with my research’, rather than directly asking them for interviews.

Eventually I made contact with key members of the fa'afafine community, who acted both as contacts and as gatekeepers, often in the strictest sense. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the experiences fa'afafine have had with researchers and reporters have not always been positive and, especially in Samoa, there is now a strong awareness of the potential for exploitation or misrepresentation. These gatekeepers thus understandably required that I prove the worthiness of my research and my sensitivity to their concerns before they would put me in touch with further participants. From these initial points of contact, I relied on word-of-mouth to find further potential participants.¹ The endemic wariness (and weariness) of Samoan fa'afafine in dealing with journalists and researchers meant that many refused, and those who did meet with me often spoke negatively of previous experiences with researchers, or of dissatisfaction with journalists and film makers who got their material and disappeared without sending back copies of their final work. I was thus constantly reminded of the need to be aware of my own approach, and to be sensitive to the fact that participants are not just 'data sources'.

I had intended that interviews with fa'afafine would be supplemented by interviews with family members and other Samoans regarding the place of fa'afafine in Samoan society. While I knew that fa'afafine were somewhat marginalised, I had expected that the entrenched nature of fa'afafine Samoan culture indicated a level of acceptance, or at least tolerance, that would allow for relatively easy discussion. However, a series of chance conversations with Samoans revealed that, when talking about fa'afafine *as* fa'afafine, they were usually discussed in negative terms. For example, one Samoan I was introduced to in a social context and later met by chance while in the street in Apia spoke disparagingly of the 'drag' fa'afafine who frequented the local bars and blamed fa'afafine for the presence of HIV/AIDS in Samoa. When I voiced my confusion at his attitude in light of the fact that a valued member of his soccer team was fa'afafine, he seemed somewhat bemused and avoided responding to my comment. As I discuss in Chapter 5, this apparently contradictory attitude towards fa'afafine was entirely in keeping with the Samoan understanding of the self as contextual, and such encounters thus broadened my understanding of the complexities of Samoan attitudes towards fa'afafine. Similarly, the apparently negative reactions of academics to my work, outlined in the previous chapter, instigated my investigation into representations of fa'afafine.

¹ This process is also referred to in methods texts as 'snowballing', as though it is some kind of methodical means of locating participants, rather than the result of goodwill and good luck.

While these encounters formed valuable components of the project, I ultimately decided not to undertake actual interviews with non-fa'afafine Samoans, as it seemed likely that many Samoans would use such interviews as a forum to voice less-than-positive perceptions of fa'afafine. Not only would I have found it difficult to question them about any apparent hypocrisy in such attitudes, but I would have also found it difficult to include explicitly negative material in my work. I chose to rely instead on various informal conversations as a (possibly more 'accurate') indication of everyday Samoan attitudes towards fa'afafine. Plans to interview family members of fa'afafine were shelved, as most fa'afafine participants took care that interviews occurred away from their family homes, suggesting that they were reluctant for the research to enter the family realm.² Representatives of institutions who may have been able to provide insight into more 'official' discourses relating to fa'afafine proved consistently unavailable. The fact that few, if any, institutional records are kept in relation to fa'afafine made it impossible to access any form of quantitative data.

While many of the outcomes of this fieldwork period were the result of factors that were beyond my control, others stemmed from my own decisions. The choice I made not to interview non-fa'afafine Samoans because of the likelihood of emerging with overtly negative data brought to light a more fundamental question about who I am 'representing' in this project, in both a textual and a more political sense. Niko Besnier raises this problem in relation to his work on Nukulaelae, a small Pacific atoll, where he too is interested in the lives of people who are marginalised within a very small population. Besnier states that in his research, "[a]t least two sets of voices emerge: the official version of reality, ratified and articulated by the powers-that-be ... and the unsanctioned version of reality, illustrated by the painful experiences of marginalized individuals ... whose dissenting voices I have come to know gradually but intimately over years of fieldwork" (2000, 24). There is an analogous division of discourses in Samoa, where 'traditional' social hierarchies are replicated in a state political system that is modelled on western styles of government (Macpherson 2004, 166). The privileging of the 'versions of reality' articulated by the class who hold political power is reinforced by the fact that Samoa's economy is enormously reliant on tourism. Thus the image that is presented to the outside world is of considerable importance, and any aspect of Samoan society that might be interpreted as 'negative' is frequently absent from the 'official' version of Samoa, especially that marketed to other countries. As I discussed in the previous chapter, I was left in no doubt that 'mainstream' Samoans do

² Evelyn Heinemann also notes problems in attempts to interview non-fakafafine Tongans about fakafafine (2000, 167).

not wish to project an image of Samoa as ‘gay paradise’ or a land of sexual libertarianism. At times, this ‘official’ image is at odds with that produced by the fa’afafine community, causing a tension in terms of whose interests I was obliged to protect. Ultimately, I have chosen the representation of fa’afafine interests as my priority. However, I hope to also make the concerns of ‘middle’ Samoa regarding fa’afafine sexuality and impression management understandable, without entering into a debate about whether or not these concerns are justified.

It was in discussions with non-fa’afafine Samoans in Samoa that I underwent the harshest criticisms regarding my legitimacy as a researcher in relation to this particular topic. I have been challenged on this point throughout the research, although interestingly less by Samoans in New Zealand, and barely at all by fa’afafine participants. I soon realised that Samoan academics were the group most likely to find pālagi researchers problematic, an inevitable consequence of the ‘Mead legacy’ I described in the previous chapter, and of more contemporary postcolonial critiques of cross-cultural research. However, while postcolonial politics would suggest that it is the ‘natives’ themselves who are in the best position to conduct research on their own cultures, Besnier notes that critics of apparently ‘exploitative’ outsider research are often “themselves in positions of intellectual and material hegemony over the ‘truly’ disenfranchised members of these societies” (2000, 31). This was certainly the case in Samoa, where most attacks on my ‘right’ to conduct Samoan research were made by older, university-educated, materially comfortable individuals who were well-placed within local hierarchies, and who would have wielded considerably more power than I did with many of the fa’afafine with whom I spoke. These intellectuals were also invariably part of the middle class who, as I have suggested, have an interest in presenting a particular image of Samoa, and they often dismissed the possibility that fa’afafine were an ‘appropriate’ area of interest for anyone. I discuss my own position as a researcher later in this chapter. At this point, I simply wish to signal some of the complexities of the apparently straightforward problematising of my ‘right’ to be conducting research in Samoa.

The problems I encountered with observations, interviewing non-fa’afafine Samoans, and locating fa’afafine participants meant that my time in Samoa was not as occupied with the fieldwork as I had anticipated. As Christmas approached, potential participants were increasingly likely to be occupied with family concerns, and the possibilities of gathering much in the way of further data diminished. I returned to New Zealand after only three months, rather than the planned six months. While I intended to conduct further fieldwork in Samoa at a later date, better prepared and more confident,

various unrelated commitments and the need to remain in New Zealand to gain the most benefit from hard-won contacts there meant that this never eventuated.

My diaries from Samoa are marked by a sense of despair of ever being able to conduct adequate research while there, which at the time I believed resulted from my lack of assertiveness. In retrospect, and after musing on the experiences of other pālagi researchers I met while in Samoa, I realised that this ‘character flaw’ may well have also been an advantage. The Samoan infrastructure and culture has its own rhythms and reasonings that tend not to readily bend to western expectations. While I saw various pālagi journalists and other researchers frustrated with the apparently arbitrary bus and ferry timetables, or the fact that hardly anyone is accessible by phone, or the regular non-appearance of Samoans they had arranged to meet, my own reluctance to impose on others often served me well in the Samoan context. I knew that if family concerns came up between arranging an interview and its scheduled time, it was unreasonable to expect the person to meet me. I also knew that non-appearance was often a means of refusal without having to outrightly say ‘no’. Most importantly, I saw that allowing oneself to be constantly frustrated with what pālagi might perceive as inefficiency and unreliability usually exacerbated problems and often alienated potential contacts. Thus, my time in Samoa was not only an important (if somewhat incomplete) grounding in both Samoan culture and everyday life in Samoa, but was also a period of invaluable learning about myself as a researcher. My underlying fear of social rejection has frequently hampered the ethnographic aspect of my research, but I discovered an ability to sit back and observe before acting that proved extremely useful. I also realised that my concern with getting things ‘right’ was appreciated by Samoans in relation to my attempts to observe social protocol. While I left Samoa far from being the perfect fieldworker, I did develop a greater trust in my own ‘instincts’ and judgements in conducting work in sensitive areas.

New Zealand

The research period in New Zealand was inevitably a completely different experience than the time spent in Samoa. As I live in a predominantly pālagi suburb in Auckland, I was not immersed in Samoan culture. I was able to compensate for this in a small way by regularly attending Samoan and other Pacific cultural events such as theatre performances, festivals and markets. Sometimes these events include fa’afafine participants, but mostly they simply provided ongoing opportunities to re-acquaint myself with Samoan culture. Furthermore, day-to-day life in Auckland is marked by constant contact with Samoan people, and my familiarity with Samoa always provided an easy conversation point.

Ensuing interactions often enhanced my understanding of Samoan culture and, more specifically, the experiences of Samoan people living in New Zealand. While I lost the sense of ‘strangeness’ that heightened my observations in Samoa, there were some definite benefits to being in New Zealand: I was more at ease in my ‘home environment’; the infrastructure meant simple matters such as locating and contacting people was easier; and I did not experience the same feeling of ‘dead time’ as I had in Samoa, where I had quickly exhausted the relevant secondary resources that were available.

Although pragmatic aspects such as access to telephones and reliable transport made conducting research in New Zealand easier in some respects, I experienced many of the same problems that I had in Samoa. Making contact with gatekeepers in the fa’afafine community was a time-consuming process, as was gaining their trust. The lack of regular access to social events meant a continued reliance on interview data rather than observation, and suspicion of researchers meant some potential participants were again reluctant to talk with me. This reticence was especially evident with fa’afafine working in the sex industry in New Zealand. While fa’afafine are over-represented in the sex industry,³ only one participant in this research discussed having engaged in sex work. In spite of my best efforts to gain access to the sex worker community, gatekeepers continually either refrained from helping me, or reported back that none of ‘the girls’ wished to speak with me. Because fa’afafine sex workers are so visible, there was a need to address their situations in my research. I have thus made some suggestions as to the motivations and experiences of this aspect of the lives of some migrant fa’afafine in Chapter 8, largely drawn from the literature and ‘second hand’ data. However, the voices of fa’afafine sex workers themselves are notably scarce in this research.

The refusal of fa’afafine sex workers and numerous other potential participants in both Samoa and New Zealand to take part in this research were recurring events that left me questioning issues of power in relation to this particular project. There is a considerable literature that seems to assume that most ethnographic work – and especially that conducted by western researchers with those of non-western cultures – can only ever be understood as ‘studying down’, and my own research would seem to fit into this category. I do possess a certain amount of cultural capital in both New Zealand and Samoa, both societies that value institutional education, money, heterosexuality and, in some contexts, whiteness. However, I found it continually difficult to mobilise this capital to my advantage. The most

³ In a nationwide New Zealand study of ‘men who have sex with men’, approximately 22% of those who identified as fa’afafine, transgender or queen had been paid money for sex in the six months prior to being interviewed, compared with 5% of the study’s entire sample (Worth 2001, 16).

omnipresent manifestation of this difficulty was the ability of potential (or even existent) participants to say 'no'. While those who refused to be part of the research did so with apparent reluctance, I believe that this reluctance was usually the result of a reticence to appear unhelpful and a culturally instilled desire to avoid causing offence, rather than any feeling of disempowerment arising from my relative status. I have no reason to believe that my 'power' allowed me to interview anyone who did not want to be interviewed. If anything I did influenced participants' decisions to be interviewed, it was more likely to have been my continual deferring to their knowledge and my need for their help. Even when one participant requested money from me (although not explicitly as payment for an interview), I did not feel in any position of economic power, but rather suffered extreme anxiety as to how to manage this situation without causing offence or creating an impression that I was paying for interviews. This is not to suggest that relationships of power did not pervade the research process, inasmuch as all social interactions involve negotiations and questions of power. Furthermore, I do not wish to dismiss or minimise the various advantages that I have in relation to many of those with whom I have worked. However, I do want to take this opportunity to trouble the perhaps easy assumption that I have held the balance of power in this process of conducting this research, and to suggest that relations of power in research are always complex and shifting.

The data

Although I did not achieve even the minimum number of interviews I had hoped for, this was compensated for by the depth of the material attained. While in Samoa, I interviewed six fa'afafine participants, including one New Zealand-raised community advocate, and a follow-up interview was conducted with one of these participants. In New Zealand, I interviewed eight Samoan-raised migrant fa'afafine and one New Zealand-raised fa'afafine community advocate. In four cases, I conducted follow-up interviews, and in two of these instances further focused interviews. I also conducted a second interview with a participant initially interviewed in Samoa who had subsequently migrated to New Zealand. In total, I interviewed fifteen participants and conducted 23 interviews. All interviews were approximately one hour long. They were taped and then transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews and transcripts returned to participants for approval. There were only two instances where participants requested that I not use very specific details from interview transcripts.

As a result of my heavy reliance on snowballing as a means of locating participants, there is a significant homogeneity in the groups I interviewed. This was especially so in Samoa, where virtually all

participants lived in or very near Apia, spoke fluent English, were well-educated, and had at least travelled, and often lived, outside Samoa. Similar homogeneities exist in respect of the New Zealand-interviewed participants, where commonalities include age of migration (almost all arrived in New Zealand in their late teens or early twenties), education (all have at least completed high school), and familiarity with the English language. In both Samoa and New Zealand, recruitment necessarily extended only to those who identified as fa'afafine at the time of the research. This meant that people who had once identified as fa'afafine, but no longer did so, were not included (although I understand that, at the time of writing, one Samoan participant is now presenting as a masculine heterosexual man). Because of these homogeneities, it is unlikely that either the Samoan and New Zealand groups are representative of the fa'afafine population as a whole. As a result, the findings of this research should not be considered generalisable.

While my data never attained the (non-participant) observational quality I had hoped for, there have been some opportunities for glimpses into the 'everyday lives' of some participants. When arranging interviews, I would allow participants to choose the location. As a result, I conducted interviews in a range of situations in both Samoa and New Zealand, including participants' homes, cafes, offices, nightclub dressing rooms, workplaces, and family shops. These locales often revealed something more about the participant beyond the interview data. The chance to visit participants in their homes gave me an insight into their living situations,⁴ while interviews and other meetings held in more public places allowed for observations of how members of the public and participants interacted. In New Zealand, participants have invited me to various social events. At times these invitations related specifically to my role as a 'researcher', such as when I was asked to drag shows. At other times, I was invited to events such as birthday celebrations as a friend. Writing about these latter occasions as 'data' gives them a certain cold quality that misrepresents the specific experiences, but I cannot deny that these events have contributed to my understandings of the lives of migrant fa'afafine. In spite of the friendships I have developed with some participants, I never really became an 'accepted outsider' in fa'afafine communities as I had hoped, especially in Samoa.

The interviews themselves were semi-structured and informal. I had a list of topics that I hoped to talk about, but I left the conversations as open as possible. While the topics I listed were generally well-

⁴ As I mentioned earlier, participants seemed reluctant to invite me to their family homes, and this only occurred once during the research, in Samoa. All other invitations to participants' homes occurred only when they lived alone, or with other fa'afafine.

covered, one area remained difficult, that of sexuality. In Samoa, discussions about sexuality take place rarely (Tupuola 1996, 60), and usually in specific contexts: for example, among adult married women. Aware of this, I was hesitant to raise issues explicitly relating to sexuality in interviews conducted in Samoa for fear of creating uncomfortable situations. In New Zealand, discussions of sexuality did occur more often, although usually only in follow-up interviews, when some rapport had been established. My initial reluctance to raise potentially sensitive issues did, again, have some benefits, as I was informed by some participants that previous researchers had asked sexually explicit questions, and that this had caused offence. My caution in this regard often increased the level of respect and trust in my relationships with participants, such that some eventually did feel comfortable talking about their sexual experiences with me. At the same time, the conversations about researchers who seemed preoccupied with the sexual activities of fa'afafine revealed that these participants felt quite strongly that being fa'afafine is not 'about' sex or sexuality, and that researchers should not focus on these areas.

I chose an open-ended approach to the interviews for a number of reasons that ranged from wanting to maximise the comfort of participants, to a desire to allow them to reveal things that they felt important or relevant. This was facilitated by advice given to me by a fa'afafine community advocate in Samoa, who suggested that I open interviews by asking participants what they thought I should know about fa'afafine. Asking this question at the outset of interviews allowed participants to have some element of control over the interview, and set the tone for the rest of the conversation. The open-ended approach I adopted undoubtedly elicited what was, for me, the 'best' data, but there were unexpected consequences that illustrate the shifting nature of power within the various relationships established through this research. While I sought to leave interviews as open as possible, my aim was to record individual participants' personal stories. However, in some cases, participants would answer questions in the most general terms, and no amount of attempting to re-focus interviews could elicit much in the way of personal information or narratives. These participants tended to be those who acted as community advocates or educators with quite particular agendas (Stewart and Strathern 2000, 4) and who appeared accustomed to adopting a particular persona in contexts of talking about fa'afafine with 'outsiders'. I initially found these difficulties in eliciting personal information frustrating, and felt that my research questions were 'hijacked' by politically motivated participants. However, I now realise that such revelations of public, rather than private, selves are ultimately the prerogative of the participant (Stewart and Strathern 2000, 6), and that these interviews provide valuable data about

the political concerns of fa'afafine communities, concerns which are inevitably interwoven with personal experiences and the shifting social and cultural contexts in which these participants live.

Allowing interviews to remain more 'open' also meant that there was more space for the interactions between the participant and myself. While this approach was motivated by what Dorinne Kondo has identified as a more 'humanistic' approach that is "less dogged pursuit of purely referential information, more solicitous attention to relationship with informants" (1986, 83), ultimately the interactive aspects of the interviews also became an additional source of data. This was especially relevant in relation to the gendered nature of particular conversations, which could only result from my interactions with participants as a woman of a particular age and disposition. Conversations would often turn to matters of intimate relationships, and we would talk about 'men' in a manner that assumed shared experiences. This sharing of stories seemed to 'normalise' participants' experiences, and allowed for a degree of comfort and ease on their part in talking about often sensitive issues. Furthermore, the specifics of my gender in interactions with various fa'afafine participants provided particular insights into how those participants saw themselves in gendered terms. Discussions with participants about men frequently had an inclusive aspect that suggested that participants aligned themselves with me as a 'feminine' person, an important clue as to whether they thought of themselves as 'women' or not.⁵

These interactions were also significant in respect of the 'dilemma' of my position in relation to this research. As I have made clear, in terms of ethnicity, class, gender/sexuality and/or education, I am easily placed in a position of 'outsider' in relation to those who are the subject of this research. At an immediate level, this might appear to be an advantage, in that, as I have suggested, I have little vested

⁵ Such a strategy does have certain political implications, which should be acknowledged. In encounters between medical professionals and potential 'transsexuals', the gendered nature of the interaction can be used to assess the 'true' gender of those seeking gender reassignment surgery. "If a male psychiatrist, for example, sits casually and talks with a patient about women (as an absent gender), everyone understands that the patient is a man. If the same psychiatrist starts to flirt and use more polite forms of greeting and choice of words (especially in connection with sexual matters), everyone understands that the patient is a woman. Psychiatrists interactively realize the patient's gender together with their own and vice versa" (Hirschauer 1998, 17). A more immediately relevant example of the use of gendered interaction to assess the 'true' gender of an individual is found in the work of Jeanette Mageo. In one article, she refers to the fact that an interview participant 'made a pass' at her as a contribution to the amassed evidence that his identification as fa'afafine was 'an unserious affectation' (1992, 452).

While I am also suggesting that gender is constructed interactively throughout my own interviews, unlike Mageo or psychiatrists assessing candidates for gender reassignment surgery, I am not using these interactions to assess the 'true' gender of the participants. Rather, these interactions contribute to an understanding of how participants understand themselves as gendered and, less significantly, how I understand them as gendered which, as I have suggested, may not correlate with their own understandings. (Obviously there are also implications for how I and participants understand my gender, but these are not immediately relevant to the research at hand.)

interest in particular presentations of Samoan society. Thus, my status as an ‘outsider’ to Samoan society was somewhat resolved by my decision that I was representing not Samoan society as a whole, but a specific and marginalised group within that society.⁶

However, I remained troubled by my (apparently extreme) difference from the participants themselves – even though this difference rarely seemed to trouble the fa’afafine with whom I worked. Addressing the generally assumed advantages of being an ‘insider researcher’ such as access and shared understandings, Robert Labaree states that these assertions tend to be made without acknowledgement of the fact that researchers are usually insiders *and* outsiders, and that their definition as such is often beyond their control. As Labaree points out, “the boundaries of insiderness are situational and defined by the perception of those being researched” (2002, 101). This is echoed in Kondo’s explanation of how, as a Japanese woman raised in the United States, she had to be (re)incorporated into the Japanese society she was studying. This led to her prioritising the ‘Japanese’ aspects of her identity over other aspects. Significantly, this process was abetted and encouraged by her Japanese informants, who sought to facilitate her attempts at appropriate Japanese behaviour because she *appeared* to be Japanese, and thus caused them discomfort when she failed to behave like a Japanese person (1986, 79). This illustrates how research participants may seek ways of including researchers as ‘insiders’ on various levels so as to ease social interactions for all parties, not just the researcher.

Understanding ‘insiderness’ as a process of achievement that is constantly negotiated with research participants, is subject to shifts, and is dependent on specific circumstances of positionality (Labaree 2002) has enabled me to make sense of the fact that, in so many of my actual interviews, my concerns about being an outsider dissipated. While there are many aspects in which I differed from these participants, the interviews (as with most conversations) were marked by moves on the part of both myself and the participants to find points of commonality on which we could build mutual understanding. As I have indicated, relationships with men were an area in which I shared experiences with many participants. In other instances, we might have talked about clothes, or about social pressure

⁶ Kondo suggests that being an insider in the Japanese society in which she conducted research at times constrained her work because of her awareness of, and reluctance to breach, Japanese codes of etiquette (1986, 84). However, as I have suggested, I found that, especially while in Samoa, awareness that there *are* certain ‘codes of conduct’ but not being entirely sure what these were often caused a particular paralysis, which I suspect I would not have experienced had I had a sound working knowledge of culturally appropriate behaviours.

to confirm to feminine ideals.⁷ Walter Williams suggests that academics who are themselves outside the boundaries of normative gender/sexuality are in a better position to conduct research with similarly marginalised groups (1987, 138). However, in this instance my identity as a sexually active heterosexual woman actually allowed a specific rapport that may not have been available to a gay man, who Williams would probably give preference to on the basis of ‘sexual marginalisation’. There were obviously other areas in which I and various fa’afafine participants could also find points of commonality, such as family relationships, career choices, or experiences of Auckland’s night life, but the discussions with the more feminine participants around issues relating to sexual relations and gender were most often where participants and I worked together to include each other in a group that might be defined as ‘sexually active feminine people attracted to (or at times frustrated with) masculine men’.

I should be clear, however, that neither my gender nor any other aspect of my identity allowed me any greater access to the ‘truth’ of participants’ lives. A pālagi man, a gay person, a Samoan student, another fa’afafine researcher, an older person, or a more conservative woman may well have ended up with different stories, or the same stories told in different ways, which would have been ‘a’ truth too – the truth of what the participants wished to reveal and communicate to that particular person. While this suggests that a categorical truth is virtually impossible to access, in a way this was not really a concern. Although I wanted to record the ‘facts’ of participants’ lives, my primary concern was to understand how those I spoke with *felt* about these facts. This meant that attaining a level of ease, rapport and relaxation in the interview context was an important factor, and one I believe was generally well realised for the reasons outlined above.

In presenting the interview data, I have attempted to include the surrounding context of the conversations, and my own questions, comments, and responses, as much as possible. I have a number of reasons for doing this, but primarily my goal has been to render transparent the impact I had on producing the form and content of the participants’ talk (Rapley 2001, 304-305), rather than simply presenting the words of the participants as an unproblematic ‘window’ to (their understandings of) their experiences (Rapley 2001, 306). As Timothy Rapley (2001) suggests, even where interviews are ‘hijacked’, the interviewer’s questions and comments still set some parameters around what is to be discussed and how the discussion should take place, even if this is simply defining the topic of interest.

⁷ In some instances, the thoroughness of this process was such that I had to consciously remind myself that these shared experiences would not include menstruation or the use of contraception during sexual relations with men.

In many cases, the interviewer's shaping of the interview can also take the form of validating a participant's understanding of an event. Participants may request this validation, or interviewers may want, or feel obliged, to provide it, especially in relation to sensitive topics (Sinding and Aronson 2003). Including any validating comments that might frame interview excerpts is thus one means of making explicit how the interviewer may influence how a participant talks about events or understandings.

Another aspect of the interactional nature of the interviews that I feel is particularly significant is the laughter that punctuates so much of the interview data. I have worried that including this laughter may trivialise the interviews, making the data seem 'frivolous'. However, I have come to realise that participants' laughter is an important part of the recognition of the irony of certain situations, the paradoxes their lives often created and, at times, the simple good humour of the interviews. The inclusion of laughter allows for an understanding of how participants describe their lives in interaction with me, and moves the interview data away from simply being a recitation of the experience of those lives (Frith and Kitzinger 1998, 305; Cunliffe 2002, 130).

As well as recognising the significance of my role as a researcher in relation to the data, it is also important to acknowledge wider specifics that have affected the data collected, and to recognise that this thesis can only ever be temporally, culturally, and geographically specific. This research has been conducted at a particular historical juncture of a number of processes which include, but are not limited to: the personal histories of both myself and those with whom I have spoken; the development of various political movements that relate to gender, ethnicity, and sexuality; the history of the relationship between Samoa and New Zealand; and theorising relating to transgenderism in particular and identity in general. These factors are all, to varying degrees, also inflected by the location of this research at a particular moment in the history of Samoa's incorporation into various global flows. The manner in which virtually all societies in contemporary times are, to some extent, incorporated into the world system has necessitated a considerable reconsideration of how ethnographies are conducted. The concept of static, bounded cultures and integrated individuals as 'knowable' objects of study has always been more of an ideal than a reality. However, in contemporary times the 'subject' of social research, whether culture, identity, or individual, has become increasingly (or is acknowledged as) amorphous, fluid, and unstable (Clifford 1988, 23). 'The field' can no longer be easily thought of as a particular locale or people, and requires that the social researcher engage in what Marcus (1995) terms 'multi-sited

ethnography' which recognises the inherent links between local life-worlds and global macrosystems (Marcus 1995, 96).

For this research, the requirements of 'multi-sited' ethnography have necessitated moving beyond what are conventionally considered to be 'fields' and into areas such as 'mediascapes' (Appadurai 1991), not only in relation to what the texts contained therein 'say' about fa'afafine, but also to understand the relationship between such texts, the continued construction of fa'afafine identities, and contemporary understandings of those identities. This required attention to, for example, the dialogue between Samoan fa'afafine and western discourses of gay rights. Many of these discourses were initially formulated by people who may well have had little idea where Samoa is, but which are today consumed by fa'afafine in Samoa as a result of global media flows. Simultaneously, representations of fa'afafine are incorporated into contemporary western media, inflecting understandings of what it means to enact non-normative genders or sexualities. The manner in which these discourses and the lived experiences of participants continually intersect is a fundamental concern of this research. Such considerations are especially important in light of Arjun Appadurai's influential observation that in an era marked by complex flows of concepts, images and discourses, imagination takes on an increasingly important role in the construction of biography. Processes of globalisation mean that around the world people "no longer see their lives as mere outcomes of the givenness of things, but often as the ironic compromise between what they could imagine and what social life will permit" (Appadurai 1991, 199). Thus, when one participant speaks of the problems fa'afafine have in living with their lovers in Samoan family homes, it is not only this 'fact' that is significant, but also the manner in which he compares this situation to the greater family acceptance of gay couples he has seen on American television.

Secondary sources such as documentaries, magazine articles, and newspaper articles about fa'afafine, and the relevant academic literature, also comprised a significant source of information. The previous chapter examines these texts as data in and of themselves, and the impact of western media on the lives and understandings of fa'afafine is a consideration of the empirical aspect of the project. However, and somewhat in spite of my extensive deconstruction, these texts were also a point of triangulation with my own primary data. While existent literature was never held as a greater authority than the interview data, it frequently supported the analyses made by participants, and suggested a wider context in which to place their narratives. In relation to the Samoan context, I was especially reliant on the work of Penelope Schoeffel (1979) and Reevan Dolgoy (2000), whose research provided an important historical

foundation on which to build my own narrative of change and continuity. In thinking through the New Zealand context, I have particularly drawn on Tamasailau Sua'ali'i's work on gender and sexuality amongst migrant fa'afafine (2000; 2001), and Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann's various writings (1993; 1996; 2002; Pulotu-Endemann and Peteru, 2001), which have the additional value of having been written from the perspective of a migrant fa'afafine.

The analysis

There has been much written on the difficulties of representing people whose lives sociologists and anthropologists research, and cultures other than those of the authors. These issues have been especially salient throughout this research, as literature written from a postcolonial perspective and critiquing centuries of representations (and exploitations) of non-western 'others' by western researchers has continued to proliferate. The previous chapter, in which I outlined the manner in which researchers have perpetually used western terms and concepts to 'understand' fa'afafine, as though the conceptual frameworks of Samoan culture were not adequate for the task, was fundamentally informed by this postcolonial literature. Having presented this analysis, the challenge I have faced in writing the following chapters has been avoiding the replication of these processes.

One solution to the problems of representation seemed to be offered in work such as Leon Pettiway's presentation of the lives of "five African-American, drug-using, street-walking hustlers who are gay men but dress and view themselves as women" (1996, xii). In Pettiway's book, the narratives are presented in the first person, and each chapter is composed of one participant's interview text, edited 'only' to remove the author's questions and comments, and to enhance readability (Pettiway 1996, xxiii). In keeping with his desire to empower a distinctly marginalised group and validate their experiences, Pettiway avoids offering an interpretation of their lives (Pettiway 1996, xiv-xv), an approach intended to position his participants as "powerful actors in control of their own destiny" (1996, xxxviii).⁸

Pettiway's text does seem to present the narratives of his participants in a manner that prevents him from privileging certain meanings over others. However, his approach is not unproblematic. Most

⁸ It is worth noting that, in spite of his desire to act as a 'conduit' for the narratives of his five participants, and the fact that, barring the introduction, the book is composed entirely of the words of those participants, nowhere does Pettiway suggest that he returned either interview transcripts or completed narratives to the participants for their approval, and he is named as the sole author of the book. I cannot help but wonder who was finally 'empowered' by the production of this text.

immediately apparent is the fact that this mode of exposition disables the reader's ability to assess the influence Pettway's questions may have had on the form and content of the participants' talk (Rapley 2001, 304-305). Conversely, my own decisions regarding my presentation of interview data are the result of a desire to render my own role in shaping this data transparent. In a broader sense, Pettway's attempt to avoid interpretation also seems to me to avoid the very purpose of social research. By presenting the narratives 'as is', without analysis or contextual background, it is difficult to comprehend the structural factors that create the conditions in which these women exercise their agency. If the reader is to truly "enter the dialogue of interpretation and meaning" (Pettway 1996, xv), these structural factors must be acknowledged. As Viviane Namaste notes in relation to Pettway's work, because the participants are removed from the social conditions in which they live, he provides little basis for possible change (Namaste 2000, 30-31).

While Pettway's goals are admirable, it seem to me that at some point, social researchers must recognise that they do have a level of expertise in a particular kind of analysis, and that this does have some validity. I am not suggesting that I am in any better position than most to talk about fa'afafine, and I am certainly not in a better position than any fa'afafine person is, but I *am* able to say certain things about fa'afafine, to talk about fa'afafine experiences and beliefs in particular ways. To recognise that my interpretation can only ever be partial, and is specific to the particulars of this research is not the same as saying that my analysis has no value. As with so much of this project, my barometer of the validity of my writing has been the responses of those with whom I have worked, who have expressed faith in my ability to represent, understand, and draw some particular kinds of meaning from the things they tell me. I did not realise the extent of this faith until one of the people I have spoken with extensively as part of this research went overseas where she spoke at various seminars about fa'afafine identity. Upon her return, she mentioned that she had taken copies of one of my conference papers for people who, as she put it, wanted a bit more 'depth'. While this participant was obviously in a far better position than me to talk about the experience of living as a fa'afafine, what this (and similar) events suggest is that sociological analysis of this experience can produce a particular interpretation that relates this 'living' to wider structural factors that may not be available to the participant themselves. However, it is crucial that the sociologist is mindful that this is *an* interpretation, *a* 'truth' of these lives that cannot (or should not) take priority over the understandings that participants themselves bring to their lived experiences.

The recognition of the interplay between individual lives and wider social forces that is the basis of the ‘sociological imagination’ can be articulated as an interweaving of different narratives, an approach that resonates with my own understanding of this data. Thus, it is possible to conceptualise the identities of these fa’afafine selves as constructed and understood not only through the narratives that they have given me, but also in relation to the social and cultural narratives within which the telling and the experiences are embedded. Theories of narrativity suggest that “all of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*” (Somers 1994, 606). When recounting life experiences, “people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way integrate these happenings within one or more narratives” (Somers and Gibson 1994, 38). The relationships identified by Somers and Gibson between individual lives and wider social narratives suggests that these narratives are, in a sense, analogous, or at least integrally linked to social ideologies and their discourses. Thinking about these structures as ‘stories’ allows for an understanding of the way in which they shift over time. Furthermore, recognising that individuals attempt to align their individual life (hi)stories with these wider social narratives provides a means of conceptualising (part of) the structure/agency relation (Somers 1994, 614; Mason-Schrock 1996, 177). A narrative approach thus allows for an appreciation of how the plural identifications enacted by any one individual throughout their lifetime – or even in one day – come together, in a ‘consistency of self’ (Sökefeld 1999, 425) that is attained by incorporating experienced events into an emplotted narrative (Somers 1994, 616-617) that makes sense at that particular moment in an individual’s lifetime (Mason-Schrock 1996, 177).

Attention to the temporal nature of narratives also necessitates a recognition that life (hi)stories are invariably told according to how the narrators currently understand themselves. This understanding is relatively well-developed in relation to the narratives of queer and transgendered people, in which events in a person’s early life are often (re)interpreted in later life as ‘evidence’ of their ‘true’ sexual orientation or gender identity (Lewin 1991, 787; Mason-Schrock 1996; Hirschauer 1998, 17; Phibbs 2001, 22). While this strategy is maybe more explicit in these narratives than most, once this strategy is understood, it can be seen to apply to anyone’s self-narratives and rememberings in relation to their current self-conceptions (Shapiro 1991, 251). The data gained from the interviews, and from more informal observations, is thus not only specific to a particular historical and cultural instant, and to the dynamics of my interactions with participants, but also to those particular moments in the trajectory of

the participants' lives, both in terms of how they understood and represented themselves at those particular moments, and how those understandings and representations impacted on the remembering and telling of their life (hi)stories.

Reading interview data as narratives is somewhat antithetical to the 'coding and theming' methods of analysis I had originally intended to adopt. In fact, the coding approach was abandoned as I realised it would result in decimating the interviews in a manner that I was not prepared to undertake. As one colleague noted, the coding and theming method tends to provide analysis but not understanding. While I have thus relinquished coding and theming in favour of a more narrative approach, the specifics of this particular research have problematised a complete utilisation of this approach. A full narrative analysis would have considered how various aspects of the participants' stories cohered in their overall sense of their selves (Jones 1985, 62), which would have ideally meant linking together the various aspects of each individual's story. However, because the Samoan population is relatively small, and fa'afafine are an even smaller sub-population, telling individual stories in their entirety would inevitably compromise the anonymity of participants. It was necessary to find a balance between being attentive to the links between the parts of an individual's narrative/s and the need to maintain participant confidentiality. Furthermore, while the writing up of entire narratives does provide a more 'holistic' picture of the data, there is, as I have already suggested, a danger that sociological analysis becomes sacrificed out of a desire not to do 'violence' to these narratives. While I have not undertaken detailed coding of the data, constant re-reading of the transcripts has led to the emergence of certain themes, concerns that are common among participants, even if their experiences in relation to these concerns differ. I have thus chosen to use these themes as the basis for my analysis, while remaining sensitive to the specificities of the data.

The writing

Ultimately, these methodological issues and debates become realised and are solidified in the act of writing the thesis. I hope that it is clear throughout this thesis that it was a very particular experience that led to the construction of this text. Dorrine Kondo writes that "knowledge is not purely cognitive. It is also the product of our emotional sensibilities and affinities. ... A more honest appraisal of the anthropological enterprise would take these other elements – so often treated as illegitimate, unscholarly, "soft" – as an integral part of the process of understanding" (1986, 85). I have constructed this thesis in a manner intended to make my learning process explicit, and sought to imbue my writing

with the 'life and experience' of the research. In relation to this, and to the writing in general, there are some quite specific choices that I have made that I wish to explain and clarify. As with the factual 'nuts and bolts' of the actual research process, a description of the decisions made during the writing process is necessarily mechanistic. However, as the gaining of a doctorate is a learning process, it seems to me to be useful to take up a mode of exposition that makes these decisions explicit in a manner that I would not adopt in other genres of writing.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, attempts to 'define' fa'afafine using western terms are inherently problematic. In fact, there is constant debate in the literature regarding the appropriate terminology to use when referring to anyone who does not conform to the normative sex/gender alignment of male/man/masculine or female/woman/feminine. For example, David Valentine points out that members of the 'drag ball' scene in the United States identify themselves in ways which disregard the taxonomic vigour that academics currently attempt to apply to their identities (2002, 235-237), and that belie the fluidity of these identifications in everyday life. In cross-cultural research, Andrew Matzner indicates that some of the Hawai'ians he interviewed were "comfortable using the term 'transgender' to label themselves, while others prefer 'queen' or 'mahu'" (2001). Although he had used 'transgender' as an 'umbrella term' in the past, he no longer felt comfortable doing so, and in his 2001 article explicitly chose to use the terms 'differently gendered', 'gender variant', or 'marginalised genders'. "Although clumsy, these terms draw attention to the problematic nature of using a descriptive term not necessarily favoured by participants in one's research" (Matzner 2001). Niko Besnier, also working in the Pacific context, has coined the term 'gender liminal', borrowing the concept of 'liminality' from Victor Turner in order to suggest a 'betwixt and between' locus, an outsider status, and social inferiority (1994, 287).

I do not face the dilemma of Matzner, as all my participants readily identified as fa'afafine at the time of the research, and I find Besnier's emphasis on social marginality not consistently appropriate to my own work. In most contexts, I am simply able to refer to participants as 'fa'afafine', in keeping with my utilisation of Samoan words to refer to specifically Samoan concepts. In broader contexts I have chosen to use the term 'transgender' as a means of indicating those who are outside the social norms of the expected relationship between physical 'sex' and cultural 'gender'. This would include (but is not limited to) transsexuals, transvestites, intersexed people, drag queens, and those from other non-western cultures who exhibit gendered behaviour at odds with that generally associated with their physical sex. However, I write this list in full appreciation that this is an area in which conceptual

boundaries are both blurry and constantly shifting, and I therefore use the term ‘transgender’ in recognition of its amorphous nature.

In keeping with understandings of the impossibility of ‘objective’ social research, and recognition that attempts to write such ‘objective’ research tend to render both researcher and researched invisible (Pettitway 1996, xvi), I have attempted to write this thesis in a manner which makes the data collection and analysis processes as transparent as possible, making my presence *explicit*. While methodological and epistemological questions about research are increasingly being raised in social research, they are generally relegated to appendices or texts that are separate from research itself (Kornblum 1996, 3). By presenting the process as part of the research itself, I hope to render the relationship between process and outcome more manifest. Furthermore, while I support my conclusions with data and theory, and I believe that they are to some extent representative of the experiences of the fa’afafine I have spoken with, I also hope to render these conclusions open to dispute and refutation as part of the ongoing conversations that comprise academia. Thus this work is something of a realisation of the tension implicit in Graham Watson’s observation that while the generalising accounts that ethnographers produce, “although flawed, are good enough to be getting on with” (1991, 77), both the writer and the reader should also always proceed on the understanding that whenever anything is stated as a ‘fact’, this is generally “merely shorthand for temporarily stable reifications” of “reality construction procedures” (1991, 86). Writing is thus a necessary solidification of a moment in what all parties (should) understand as a constant process of the mutual production of consensual realities.

Many of the issues raised in this chapter have yet to be resolved. For example, while I suggest that it seems unlikely that Leon Pettitway’s work (1996) would have contributed to the empowerment of his participants in any direct or meaningful way, I could equally be criticised for emerging from this research with a doctorate that is likely to advance my own career, but seems of little benefit to those who contributed to this work. Current literature in the area of ethnographic research suggests that research should be a two-way process in which learning occurs on the part of the researcher and the researched (Hutheesing 1993, 94), and that participants should be involved as much as possible in the analysis (Clunliffe 2002). These are ideals worth striving for, and I have provided various participants with conference papers and articles emanating from this research, while also discussing embryonic analyses with various community members as part of the process of ‘feeling out’ certain thoughts and ideas. However, I am somewhat wary of Otome Hutheesing’s statement that ideally the ‘social

awareness' of *both* researcher and researched should be enhanced as a result of research (1993). While there are certainly instances where participants have been keenly interested in my findings, I would suggest that there is a certain danger in assuming that participants *want* their 'social awareness' enhanced, and that the researcher is necessarily in a position to do this. Ultimately, almost all social research, especially that conducted in purely academic contexts, holds little, if any, apparent benefit for those who take part in it. Yet people continue to contribute to such research, and in the case of those I have worked with, many have done so more than once. As active agents given every opportunity to refuse, it can only be assumed that they have their own reasons for contributing to this project.

I am, of course, deeply indebted to those who contributed their time and parts of their stories to this research, and the result will, in some sense, never entirely 'belong' to me. I also have a great hope that this research is of some value, or at least interest, to the fa'afafine community in both New Zealand and Samoa. Ultimately, though, I think a PhD cannot, and should not, be a collaborative product, and the only person who can and should be held accountable for the discussions presented here is myself. This chapter is written with the intention of making explicit and taking responsibility for the pragmatic, epistemological, analytical, and methodological decisions made in the process of this research. While I have not resolved all of the questions raised in this chapter, the ongoing debates in this area suggest that many of them are beyond resolution, at least in any immediate sense. Yet good social research is dependent upon attention to issues of power in the research relationship, responsibilities regarding representation, and a level of transparency in the research process. I hope that making my own understandings of, and approaches to, these issues explicit from the outset will enable the reader to better see how they are implicit in the discussion that follows.

PART II



TRADITION, CHANGE AND GENDER IN SAMOA

CHAPTER 4

IDEALS OF GENDER MEN, WOMEN, AND FA'AFAFINE IN FA'ASAMOA

In the previous chapter, I suggested that it is necessary to have some understanding of the contexts in which fa'afafine live in contemporary Samoa in order to appreciate the shifts and continuities they experience when migrating to New Zealand. Similarly, analysis of the lives and experiences of fa'afafine in contemporary Samoa is given depth by situating these lives and experiences in relation to the history and cultural ideologies that inform the current shape of Samoan society. This chapter thus provides a basis for subsequent analyses of the genders and subjectivities of fa'afafine, and of how I understand discourses around, and enactments of, masculinity, femininity, and fa'afafine identities have shifted in contemporary Samoa.

While much of the discussion in this chapter is informed by observations and conversations from my own fieldwork, it is predominantly based on existent literature. I synthesise the material that currently exists on the history, ideals, and norms of gender and sexuality in Samoa, while also noting points where practices may depart from these norms. I undertake this discussion mindful of recent debates that I referred to in the preceding two chapters about the ability of academics and other commentators to represent the cultures of those other to themselves. These representations are especially problematic when dealing with pre-contact periods or notions of 'traditional' cultures.¹ Yet in order to provide some context for the discussions in the following chapter regarding contemporary enactments of fa'afafine identities in Samoa in recent years, it is necessary to first outline how masculinity and femininity are constructed according to 'traditional' Samoan ideals, and how fa'afafine have been (and are) understood in relation to these normative genders. I thus conduct the following discussion mindful

¹ See Jolly (1992) for a full discussion of rhetoric and politics regarding the use and study of 'traditional' cultures in the Pacific.

of the fact that I am drawing upon a heavily reified version of Samoan culture, and of gender and sexuality within that culture. In spite of Samoa's relatively small population, there is considerable variation across its islands in terms of both ideals and practices (Drozdzow-St Christian 2002, 44; Cluny Macpherson, pers. comm.). Furthermore, as with all social norms, the lived experience of men, women, and fa'afafine does not consistently conform to these ideals. Although in places I draw on lived experiences to support or illustrate certain points, as a rule the identities I present in this chapter are conceptual norms, a set of attributes that various commentators (Samoan and pālagi) have agreed are somewhat typical, although not universal. These norms and ideals might thus be thought of as cultural resources which social actors draw on, to varying degrees and in varying ways, in the 'doing' of gender, and which are subsequently iterated and reiterated in this performative act.

I first outline the idealised constructions of 'men' and 'women' in the Samoan context, explaining how these genders are formulated within Samoan understandings of the self as inextricably woven into the family and community. As Samoan children grow into boys and girls, and men and women, their genders and sexualities are mediated through reproductive processes that both express, and contribute to, the needs of 'aiga and village. This results in a particular emphasis on how girls and women behave as sexual subjects. These norms, ideals, understandings, and ideologies are then discussed in terms of how they are expressed and challenged in the lives of fa'afafine. The subjectivities of fa'afafine draw on both masculine and feminine repertoires, and they are not consistently understood as, nor do they consistently understand themselves as, either men or women. This affects all aspects of their lives, and is not limited to their sexualities, which have been the focus of so much of the existent literature. However, sexuality is an aspect of the lives of fa'afafine, and is thus considered in this chapter. Discussion of fa'afafine sexuality is also a necessary foundation for the following chapter, in which I outline how western understandings of relationships between gender and sexuality have affected constructions of gender among Samoans in general, and fa'afafine in particular.

Men and women in fa'aSamoa

Sociocentrism and gender

It is generally agreed among authors working in the Pacific that Samoan identities are predominantly sociocentric and relational, and occur as a series of contextual, situational and collectivist arrangements, in contrast to the more internal, egocentric, and individualistic self of the west (Shore 1982, 136, 195;

Howard 1990, 262; Besnier 1994, 312-313; Mageo 1998; Dolgoy 2000, 127-128).² Within this paradigm, the Samoan sense of self is founded more on location within kinship and social structures, rather than the essential individuality that tends to be assumed in the realisation of subjectivity in western contexts (Sua'ali'i 2001, 161). The difference between the two understandings is exemplified in the manner in which Samoans are expected to achieve for the collective good of 'aiga or community, rather than personal gain, such that a Samoan thought to be working for their own gratification may be referred to as 'fia Papālagi', or emulating pālagi (Ngan-Woo 1985, 9-10).

Understandings of the self as either sociocentric or egocentric have a bearing on how physical 'sex' and cultural 'gender' are related to each other in these respective cultural contexts. In Samoa, the presence of particular genitalia at birth, and the 'sex' which these are considered evidence of, are an important aspect of gender identity, but do not seem to be as essentially constitutive of gender as they are assumed to be in hegemonic western understandings of sex/gender (Shore 1981, 208). Drozdow-St Christian suggests that, in Samoa, penises and vaginas are not 'male' and 'female' per se, but are rather 'instruments for engendering action' (2002, 32). This suggests that the significance of genitals comes to the fore as markers of gender in sexual activity, although the role of genitals in initial decisions about a child's socialisation must be recognised. Reevean Dolgoy suggests that to be born 'male' or 'female' does result in certain expectations regarding destinies and life courses. "These expectations illuminate social roles and that part of the village polity to which one may be expected to be assigned" (2000, 72). It is then the performance of these social roles that 'makes' one a man or a woman, rather than the presence of particular anatomical characteristics. While the role within the community and 'aiga that one is assigned on the basis of 'sex' is inevitably itself gendered (for example, labour), it is the enacting of this role that leads to the individual him or herself being gendered. Drozdow-St Christian explains how the sociocentric nature of Samoan subjectivity affects how gender is constructed:

Mode of attention in Samoa is located in the field of action and not in interior states and so [western] conventions of recognizing gender [are] disrupted, inappropriate, too limited. ... For Samoans, attention derives from the intersubjective connection, that is, from action in the social field itself. [Samoans] rarely presume, pre-limit gender – few names mark gender, Samoan has no gender specific pronouns. Difference is generated from action rather than being imposed on action as limiting frame. ... Because gender is present in its exercise, emerging in action rather than residing in the individual as a fixed quality, it is not possible to say that a Samoan has gender except when doing it (2002, 31-32).

² See Spiro (1993) for a review of the literature that compares the independent, individualistic self of western paradigms with the interdependent, relational self that is found in many non-western contexts.

In contemporary western contexts, relationships between sex, gender, and social roles are generally held to follow a sequence in which one aspect is understood as, to some extent, causative of the subsequent aspect. This causal chain would generally be articulated as 'sex → gender → social role'. In Samoa, the normative causal chain might be articulated as 'sex → community/'aiga role → gender'. In both cases, states that are often understood and articulated as sequential may be simultaneous in practice. Both sequences may also be followed imperfectly or non-normatively by individuals or specific groups. If this happens, the system itself is rarely questioned (West and Zimmerman 1991, 33). The 'failure' is instead deemed to be of the individual, or the specific social network within which the person is embedded.

In the Samoan equation, the insertion of 'aiga/community between sex and gender reveals the prioritising of social relations over individual self in Samoan culture. As Candace West and Don Zimmerman suggest, while subjects in the west may be able to don or shed various social identities, they are always men or women (1991, 25-26) – a foundational identity that is (at least ideologically) fundamentally linked to the *individual* body. However, in Samoan understandings, the primary markers of identity – family (and village) – are integrally *relational*. This difference takes on a particular significance when considering western understandings of Samoan gender and sexuality, or when discussing the impact of western ideologies on Samoan understandings. These paradigms inevitably influence how sex and gender are understood in the respective social contexts. Whereas one must be one gender or the other in order to be recognised as a 'person' within western understandings (Butler 1990a, 17), in the Samoan context, 'aiga (and to a lesser extent village) membership is more fundamental to one's personhood than gender (Sua'ali'i 2001, 171).

Gendering and sexuality

Gender differentiation does not appear to be particularly relevant early in life in Samoa. Most Samoan names are ungendered (Shore 1982, 144; Mageo 1992, 451; Drozdow-St Christian 2002, 31), and boys and girls dress much the same outside school, often all have short hair, do much the same chores, and play the same games (Schoeffel 1979, 107). However, between the ages of ten and twelve, boys and girls are socially separated, and begin to be referred to as tama (boy) or teine (girl) or fa'afafine, rather than the gender neutral 'tamaitiiti' (small person) (Drozdow-St Christian 2002, 87). It is at this point that labour becomes more firmly differentiated (Schoeffel 1979, 106) in a delineation that is an important part of the gendering process (Poasa 1992, 43; Mageo 1998; Sua'ali'i 2001, 161). It is initially

through gendered labour that girls are largely confined to the household, while boys are encouraged to venture further afield (Schoeffel 1979, 106; Shore 1982, 99). This difference in spheres of movement is both a consequence of, and reinforced by, the fact that *ideally* women engage in 'light' and 'clean' labour in and around the home and the village, whereas men undertake the 'heavy' and 'dirty' work in the plantations and fish outside the reef (Shore 1982, 225-226; Holmes 1987, 80), although in practice these roles are not rigid, especially in families where there may be a shortage of labour.³

Reproduction and creating families is articulated by Drozdow-St Christian as a 'master process' that is a couple's primary social responsibility (2002, 80). The importance of this process is fundamental to understandings of the relationships between gender and sexuality in Samoa. The fact that these relationships are predominantly mediated through reproduction inevitably privileges sexual relations between males and females (Sua'ali'i 2001, 164). Although it is acknowledged that young Samoan men frequently engage in sexual acts with each other, these acts are generally considered to be a form of play that only occur because young women are not readily available (Mead 1943/1928, 61; Mageo 1992, 449-450; James 1994, 54; Peteru 1997, 215). Furthermore, two masculine youths having sex are careful not to mimic the positions or actions that occur in sex between males and females (St Christian 1994, 182), and thus neither adopts the 'passive' or 'feminine' role that might put their masculinity into question. Those involved will almost inevitably, and unproblematically, go on to have sexual relations with young women and eventually marry (Keene 1978, 105). Drozdow-St Christian attributes the social disapproval of sexual acts between adult men to imported religious ideologies (2002, 151). However, as Paul Shankman makes clear (2004), since first contact Samoans have played an active part in the importation of western discursive and material culture, and the concept of non-Samoan ideologies being 'forced' into Samoan culture is not supported by the historical evidence. In general, the discursive concepts that have taken hold in Samoa are those that have been homologous with Samoan worldviews. In the case of the stigmatising of sexual acts between men, Christian principles may well have been reinforced by indigenous understandings, in that these acts are not (re)productive, when adult men 'should' be contributing children to the strength of the 'aiga and village. This would go some way to explaining Drozdow-St Christian's observation that these restrictions do not apply to boys (2002, 151) – if sex between men were condemned on the basis of religious injunction, the sanction would apply to all males, but if the restriction were more the result of the fact that the acts are not reproductive, it would logically only apply to adult males.

³ See Schoeffel (1979) for an extensive discussion of masculine and feminine labour.

It appears that in the past, sexual acts between young masculine men may have been recognised as a particular category. Jeanette Mageo refers to 'an old Samoan word' that is no longer used – tauātāne – which referred to sex between men, and could also denote other acts such as fighting or dancing when these only involved (masculine) males. She states that “[u]nlike our term *homosexual*, *tauātāne* never denoted a type of person” (1996, 591), confirming that in Samoan paradigms, a sexual act may be marked, but it is not consequential for the identity of those who perform the act (Foucault 1981, 42-43). It seems unlikely that many masculine Samoan men have ever engaged in sexual acts solely and consistently with other men, given that, as I will explain shortly, marriage marks the transition to adulthood for men (Shore 1981, 204-205), and heading a socially recognised family unit is a virtual prerequisite for a man to attain any real social status or political power (Ortner 1981, 388). This would suggest that the incursion of Christianity cannot solely explain the social disapproval of sexual acts between adult men. However, it may well be that the decline in usage of the term 'tauātāne' to refer to these acts is a result of its potential translation as 'homosexual' or 'sodomy', terms which have moral implications that do not appear to have been associated with the original concept of tauātāne.

While pre-marital sexual activity has few implications for young Samoan men, young women experience considerable social pressure to remain virgins until marriage (Tupuola 1996, 62). Prior to the ceremony being banned by missionaries, young women's virginity was publicly tested as part of the wedding ceremony (Mead 1943/1928, 83; Freeman 1984, 228-233; Shankman 2004, 379).⁴ The chastity of adolescent females is protected by their brothers as part of the feagaiga relationship, or 'covenant', between brother and sister (Tupuola 1996, 62; Sua'ali'i 2001, 165). Feminine chastity is culturally embodied and idealised in the figure of the tāupou, a high-ranking unmarried girl who performs certain ceremonial and social tasks. Although it is tacitly recognised that sexual activity among young people does occur (Shore 1981, 197), it is not overtly acknowledged. This apparent 'blinkering' on the part of Samoan society may be better understood as the difference between the behaviour of individual young people and the social expectations that high-ranking adult Samoans (those who produce the 'official' discourses) are likely to articulate (Schoeffel and Meleiseā 1983, 59). The social narrative of adolescent chastity is reinforced by the fact that adolescent men and women are separated in most social contexts,

⁴ It has been suggested that girls of a lesser rank than tāupou only had their virginity publicly tested if they stated they *were* virgins, implying that in these cases, proving that a girl was not a virgin was more problematic for a family in terms of public humiliation than in relation to her actual chasteness (Mead 1943/1928, 83). While there is some contention over the veracity of this suggestion (Freeman 1984, 250-253), if it were the case, it would correlate with the privileging and foregrounding of the collective over the individual – the point is not so much whether or not the girl actually *is* a virgin, but rather whether her (possible) sexual activity will impact on her family's honour.

and thus there is little visible evidence of contact (Ortner 1981, 382). However, the separation of adolescent men and women is less easily policed in the relatively westernised urban context than in the more 'traditional' villages. This contributes to the complex tensions that exist between Samoan ideals and western discourses that I will discuss in the following chapter.

The significance of sexual activity for females is evidenced in the fact that the transition from 'girl' to 'woman' is signalled by reproduction rather than marriage. Adulthood for males is related more to marrying and heading a family unit, and the attendant social responsibilities (Shore 1981, 204-205). To call an older bachelor 'tamāloa' (man) suggests the appropriateness of entrusting him with social responsibilities (although with implications of sexual activeness), whereas to call an older unmarried female 'fafine' (woman) primarily implies that she is sexually active (Shore 1981, 205; see also Schoeffel 1979, 34; 1995, 89). According to this model, then, for women identity clusters around issues of sexual activity and its control, while men's identities are expressed more through symbolic displays of gender, manifested in contexts such as clothing (Shore 1981, 211-212). This is demonstrated in Bradd Shore's observation that "[t]he male fear of losing control of his gender display, of being called a *fa'afafine*, is analogous to the female's fear of being caught in a sexual liaison by a brother" (1981, 211). Thus, failure for a female is to be a 'whore'; failure for a male is to be unmasculine, or feminine (Shore 1981, 211). Within this paradigm, more slippage is 'allowed' in terms of how women do gender. If there is a shortage of men to work in family plantations, women will often undertake this labour without provoking comment. However, if adolescent males do work which is normatively considered feminine, they may be teased, often by implying that they are *fa'afafine*. Julie Park et al (2000) have adapted Shore's analysis of the relationships between men, women, gender and sexuality into a table that demonstrates how this is played out.

	sexuality	gender
males	little attention	much attention
females	much attention	little attention

While the control that family, especially brothers, exert over a young woman's chastity (a control the young woman herself is also expected to exercise) tends to be articulated as a concern regarding female sexuality, it may be better understood as emerging from the social requirement that female reproductive

capacity is 'properly allocated' (Shore 1981, 201). This necessitates that women's reproduction should occur only in the context of a socially sanctioned marriage that can also benefit the woman's 'aiga politically and economically. The unmarried girl who stays with her family continues to contribute to 'aiga strength and reputation, while controlled reproduction also results in marriages and children that can advance the political and economic interests of the 'aiga (Ortner 1981, 368-372).

Cautions from the Mead-Freeman debate

Once the concerns about female sexuality are understood as related primarily to reproductive capacity, some of the debates around Margaret Mead's work in Samoa seem clearer. The fundamentals of Mead's work in Samoa are relatively well-known: she went to Samoa expecting to find evidence of adolescent promiscuity, and thus readily accepted information given to her by two young Samoan women that they, and most other unmarried adolescent females, spent their nights 'with the boys'. Ostensibly on the basis of this data, Mead then presented Samoan adolescence as a time of 'free love' prior to marriage, which young women would often delay for some years in the interests of enjoying their sexual freedom. Some decades later, as part of an on-going project on the part of Derek Freeman to counter Mead's representation of Samoan culture, one of these informants retracted her statements, saying that she and her friend were embarrassed by Mead's line of socially inappropriate questioning and thus answered with what they assumed would be taken as obvious untruths as a means of teasing Mead (Gardner 1993).

Mead's suggestions of high levels of sexual activity among unmarried Samoan youth do appear to be misplaced. As I have outlined, the chastity of adolescent women is guarded by their brothers. Although adolescent sexual liaisons do occur, this in no way creates the contexts of sexual libertarianism suggested by Mead. Mead states that, at the time she was in Samoa, 'romantic fidelity' (which I assume she means to include sexual fidelity) was measured "in terms of days or weeks at the most" (1943/1928, 127), and "the freedom with which [sex] may be indulged is limited by just one consideration, social status" (1943/1928, 162). It is possible, and even probable, that attitudes and behaviours might have changed in the decades since Mead's visit. However, it is unlikely that there would have been a complete turnaround from readily acknowledge sexual libertarianism to regularly enforced expectations of chastity since Mead's research. The possibility of such a paradigm shift is especially low in the light of observations regarding the slow pace at which Samoan culture tends to change (Holmes 1987).

While Freeman's refutations of Mead's work do seem to have some foundation, there are aspects of his approach that warrant attention, both because they reveal his own culturally bound assumptions, and because a more detailed consideration of this debate sheds some light on my subsequent discussions of fa'afafine sexuality. The bulk of Freeman's argument hinges on the value of female virginity, which he repeatedly offers as evidence that Mead's assertion of promiscuity must be wrong. At one point, he offers statistics regarding the age of first-time mothers in Samoa between 1924 and 1947 as proof of the lack of (hetero)sexual activity among young Samoans. Of those first-time mothers whose ages could be verified, only 12% had conceived before 17.5 years of age, and the youngest had conceived at 16 years 3 months (1984, 239). However, Freeman's conclusion that an absence of pregnancy among young women in a culture that does not practice contraception 'must' indicate a lack of (hetero)sexual activity reveals his ethnocentric assumption that (hetero)sexual activity 'must' involve intercourse. It is possible that at the time of Mead's visit young Samoan girls were 'sexually active', just not in the manner which Freeman obviously assumed the phrase to mean. However, over the decades between Mead's and Freeman's fieldwork periods, western discourses became increasingly interwoven with Samoan ideologies:

In the cultural traditions introduced to Samoa through foreign intervention, the act of intercourse was an important signifier of masculinity. To the extent that Samoan men adopted that ideology and aspired to a Western model of masculine identity, the sexual practices of youth were likewise altered (Grant 1995, 680).

Where heterosexual intercourse was once most likely to have been limited to contexts in which reproduction was desired and appropriate, with the influx of American sailors, and the incursion of western discourses into Samoa by various other means, young Samoan men would have come to understand intercourse as fundamental to sexual activity, and a marker of masculinity. Thus, by the time Freeman arrived in Samoa both he and most Samoans were likely to have had a similar understanding that 'sex' inevitably entailed intercourse.

I do not wish to move into arguments about female promiscuity in Samoa, past or present, and I am of the opinion that the *ideal* of female chastity (even if not universally practiced) is fundamental to Samoan discourses of gender and sexuality. This brief digression into the history of the 'Mead legacy' is offered more as a means of showing how a troubling of the 'promiscuous/virginal' dichotomy that has been unproblematically accepted as the terms of the debate can suggest previously unconsidered conclusions. I do not mean to imply that these conclusions are 'true' – the waters of this debate are so murky that there seems little chance now of ever locating a 'truth' – but they do suggest that the boundaries

between 'promiscuous' and 'virgin' may be flexible. This discussion also serves to build on the analyses in Chapter 2, illustrating how *all* assumptions must be examined in cross-cultural research, and highlighting the need to recognise the place of all contributors to research in relation to history, culture, and their own self-narratives. Freeman demonstrates this approach in relation to Mead, stating that he collected all available information about her 'personality' and 'values' in order to assess how these might have impacted on her research (2000, 609). However, he clearly fails to take such concerns into account with his own work.⁵

The gendering of fa'afafine in Samoa

As with their transgendered counterparts on other Polynesian islands, fa'afafine are usually identified as such in childhood by virtue of their propensity for undertaking the more feminine tasks around the house (Poasa 1992, 43; Besnier 1994, 296). These preferences become more noticeable when they reach the age at which most boys start working further away from the house, for example, on the family's plantation. The following description of early life at home in Samoa was typical of most of my participants:

When I was young, I know I was like this. I do all the girl's work when I was young. I do the washing, and my sister's just mucking around, cleaning the house, but my job at home is cooking, washing, ironing – everything.

While a preference for 'women's work' is the most cited marker of the femininity of fa'afafine, fa'afafine themselves experience this femininity as somewhat more innate. This innate femininity is interwoven with socialisation processes in complex ways, a realisation I first came to while watching fa'afafine dance the Samoan siva at a pageant in Samoa. This dance is particularly significant in demonstrating the embodiment of femininity in Samoa, as it represents all that is considered 'proper' for Samoan girls – restraint, dignity and control. While watching fa'afafine pageant contestants siva, I was struck by the differences in their levels of skill: for some, the graceful and elegant moves necessary to correctly execute the siva came easily, what might be thought of as 'naturally', while for others, the dance was clumsy and poorly executed. I assumed that, for some, embodying femininity in Samoa has included being taught to siva by various female relatives from an early age, as most Samoan girls are. This was confirmed in a later interview in New Zealand with a participant who is well known for her

⁵ Freeman suggests that Mead's apparent desire to please Franz Boas, her supervisor and mentor, severely impaired her 'objectivity' (2000, 611). However, he fails to observe that his own specific objective of disproving Mead (Holmes 1983, 11) may have compromised his own 'scientific detachment'.

skills in the siva. In the interview, we talked about her early childhood living with her grandmother in a rural Samoan village:

So how old were you when you first, when you or your family first realised that you were ... not quite a boy? [*Laughter.*]

I didn't know anything, 'til I, I think when I was five, when I was five, that's when I was with my grandmother. ... I was feminine though. You know, I did these sort of, funny things that my grandmother didn't like. But she just let me do it. And, it's just because that I do the boy's work and inside it's so different. When I was five years old, that's when I, I started to learn that there's a difference in me. I think, when I was five years old.

And so how, how was that? How did, how was that difference? Was it just, like, just to do with the work you were doing around the house, or ...?

Um ... most of the housework, and at that time I wasn't dressed as a woman. I was still just wearing a lāvalava with a half-naked body. And I was still doing women's work. And I remember when I was ten years old, we had the gathering of schools in Savai'i – we had all primary schools from all villages. And I think my teacher saw me acting, like, different from other kids. Like, I was still feminine, but I can do ladies' things, like dancing and things like that. And then she put to perform a tāupou siva, when I was ten years old. And that was ... that was my mother. She always said to me, I think the reason I'm really good at the Samoan siva is just because it was my grandmother. When I was young, she always take me to these things, and if there's a siva in the village, she always make me as a girl to dance for the family. Because in Samoa, if they have those sort of gatherings, like, they have a dance night, they always have one person from each family to do a traditional siva. So I think ... I think I thank my grandmother, because I think she was the strong, strong supporter when I was young. I think that it was her that I learned that this is where I go, and this is what I should do, and ... I should stay as who I decided to be. Yeah. I think it was all her, her work.

For this participant, the siva was performed repeatedly from an early age until the correct carriage and demeanour became 'second nature', as it also appeared to be for some whom I watched dance at the pageant. Conversely, those who had apparently only ever attempted to siva in recent and limited contexts such as the pageants belied the apparent ease with which the others execute the dance. This results in the appearance of mimicking of gestures in a performance that could be correlated with a comparison between novice drag queens and the 'natural' femininity enacted by 'real' women.⁶ The siva can thus be seen as an exemplar of the unconscious performance of gender – not unconscious in the psychoanalytic sense, but rather in the sense of being 'absent minded' (Jackson and Scott 2001, 18).

⁶ I am aware that far from all 'women' embody the mode of femininity I refer to here. I make this comparison as a means of distinguishing between a femininity that is entrenched in the body and a femininity that is consciously and explicitly 'performed'.

The level of embodiment of femininity suggested by those fa'afafine who dance the siva 'unconsciously' clearly resonates with Judith Butler's notion of gender as created in its iteration and reiteration, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In both cases, repetition of action to the point of sedimentation is a key part of their theorising of embodiment. Butler defines gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, or a natural sort of being" (1990a, 33). For Bourdieu, action is based on the agent's history of experiences, which produces a habitus that "is an active residue or sediment of [the agent's] past experiences which function within their present, shaping their perception, thought and action, and thereby shaping social practice in a regular way" (Crossley 2001, 93). Inasmuch as Butler's concept of reiterated gender creates an apparently 'natural' state, so the internalised habitus proposed by Bourdieu produces unreflective actions that allow historically motivated behaviour to appear to be autonomous, performed without any apparent reference to external considerations (Bourdieu 1990, 56). Once internalised, the discursive or cultural origins of these (gendered) behaviours are lost or forgotten (Phibbs 2001, 106). As Foucault suggests, the very power of discourses such as gender resides in the manner in which they disguise their cultural (or 'unnatural') origins (Parlee 1998, 122). Almost all participants spoke of their 'fa'afafine-ness' as innate, an innateness that is embodied by those who dance the siva gracefully and 'naturally'. The extent to which fa'afafine demonstrate that their femininity is 'natural', not 'drag', has a direct impact on the extent to which they can 'legitimately' lay claim to that femininity.

Appeals to the 'natural' physical body as legitimating femininity is, for some participants, most explicit in relation to labour. One explained how it seemed more logical to do domestic work for physical reasons:

When I was growing up, I was part of the family, you know. There was no point in my growing up that I was ... being, you know, sort of left out of the family. I had a role like every other, you know, like every other child in the family. ... Probably because I wasn't very strong, you know, that we were assigned to a softer role, you know, a role that maybe we could do the softer chores. When I was growing up I also thought that maybe, because of my physique or I was weaker [indecipherable].

The manner in which the biological and the social inform each other is significant in relation to labour. A number of participants suggested that having a male physiology has very particular consequences:

... but if you look at a lot of the fa'afafines, you know ... you know, they are women, but, you know, they have biologically male bodies – big bones, tall, doing both gender duties over in Samoa, carrying coconuts, and you know, looking after the babies, so over the course of years of time they would have developed male characteristics with their appearance – muscles and weight and bone structure and what-not. But you know,

they are still effeminate and the family accepts them [...], but I think when you're over here in New Zealand, because you look, you know, you are a faggot basically, when you're here ...

I will discuss the significance of the meaning of particular bodies in New Zealand in later chapters. In the Samoan context, this quote demonstrates how fa'afafine bodies exist at the nexus of the social and the biological. Even though they tend to prefer feminine labour, because fa'afafine 'start out' with 'male' bodies, the musculature that results from physical labour sits on their bodies in particular – i.e. 'masculine' – ways. Furthermore, because of the immutable 'maleness' of their bodies, they are more likely to perform men's as well as women's work. As Suzanne Phibbs notes, while social theorising often elides the (corpo)reality of the body (2001, 11), it is imperative that theoretical attention be paid to "how bodies impact on the discursive positioning of subjects" (Phibbs 2001, 88). However, the *meanings* of these bodies are only ever social. Thus, for fa'afafine, having male bodies in Samoa does not preclude them from being understood as feminine in many contexts. Families do not seem to equate this early preference for feminine labour with an eventual (homo)sexual orientation (Besnier 1994, 300; Tcherkezoff 1993, 82). Thus:

[f]a'afafine does not mean *homosexual* in that it makes no direct claim about the erotic preferences of the individual ... The focus in Samoan interests is on the gender classification of an individual, the symbolic and sartorial aspects of gender attribution in terms of the more general codes of Male and Female (Shore 1981, 209).

That there is no causal link in Samoan understandings between the gender resulting from fa'afafine's early labour preferences and a particular sexual orientation is in contrast to western ideologies that sexual orientation is one of the most significant means of dividing people into classes (Whitehead 1981, 94). According to normative western understandings, heterosexuality "is assumed to be the natural attraction of opposites, somehow outside of social production" (Ingraham 1994, 209). The oppositional nature of heterosexuality turns on the presumed dichotomous difference of biological sex – structural arrangements such as gender are understood to be a (social) response to this foundational (natural) sex/ual difference (West and Zimmerman 1991, 15). Any apparent effeminacy enacted by gay men is thus popularly assumed to be a 'natural' result of their homosexuality. The causal chain in western paradigms could be articulated as 'orientation towards masculine men → femininity'.⁷ This equation then sets the foundation for the model of 'transgenderal homosexuality' (discussed in Chapter 2), in

⁷ This is not how I understand the relationship between sex and gender, which have been shown as mutually constitutive of each other. However, the dominant discourses of contemporary western societies would hold that sexuality is, as Chrys Ingraham suggests, innate and pre-cultural (1994, 209), and intrinsically linked to biological sex, while gender is the social expression of these 'natural' states.

which it is assumed that homosexuality is “the true or hidden cause of instances of third sex or gender” (Herdt 1994b, 47).

In the case of fa'afafine, the concept of ‘transgenderal homosexuality’, with the implications discussed in Chapter 2, is not applicable. Rather, it seems more likely that *if* fa'afafine engage in sexual activity with masculine men, this is a result and reinforcement of an already existent feminine gender, a suggestion that I will present in more depth in the following chapter. Here I wish to emphasise that ‘traditionally’ the femininity of fa'afafine has been, and generally still is, constructed in terms of labour preferences.⁸ Thus in Samoa the ‘causal chain’ for fa'afafine sexuality is more ‘femininity → (possible) sexual orientation towards masculine men’, rather than the sequence that is assumed in relation to homosexuality in the west.

Why fa'afafine are not ‘men’

In normative western sex/gender frameworks, the primacy of biology means that the presence of ‘male’ genitalia will almost inevitably determine how a person is ‘sexed’ and thus how they ‘should’ be gendered. The intractability of this equation is such that in most social contexts in western societies, it is readily assumed that the gender a person enacts is an ‘accurate’ representation of their sex, and if they contravene such accepted representations, they may be held accountable for this discrepancy (West and Zimmerman 1991, 22-23). Thus, if one is male, one may engage in a wide range of behaviours and still be considered a man. However, some acts, such as sexual relations with another man, or wearing women’s clothes, may result in a male being seen as a ‘deviant’ (homosexual or transvestite) man. Although ‘deviant’ men are held accountable for their deviance from the norms of masculinity, they are still understood as men. The only circumstances that readily come to mind in which a male may no longer be considered a ‘man’ is if they are a (post-operative) transsexual. The fact that this almost always involves the reconfiguration of genitals indicates how primary this indicator of sex is to gender.

⁸ This understanding of ‘traditional’ enactments of fa'afafine identities in fact only extends as far back as European contact, as recorded information and understandings about pre-contact fa'afafine tends to be inconsistent (Sua'ali'i 2001, 169). Therefore, what is now considered to be a marker of the femininity of fa'afafine identities would extend to cooking, although in pre-contact Samoa cooking, especially that which involved the umu, was largely the preserve of men, and even today it is only the ‘light’ cooking that is done inside using stoves and pans that tends to be done by the women. (See Schoeffel (1979) for a full discussion of the gendered division of labour in Samoa, and how this has changed as a result of colonisation.) In referring to ‘traditional’ fa'afafine gender identities, I mean to indicate those which relate more to feminine labour, rather than the sexualised enactments which I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter.

Conversely, in Samoa significant movement away from activities and behaviours considered appropriately masculine will render a male a contender for fa'afafine status.⁹ If males are identified as fa'afafine, they are not thought of as 'men' in most contexts¹⁰. While this does suggest that social behaviour and relations are prioritised over physiology in determining gender, it must be remembered that fa'afafine are defined by their feminine behaviour *and* their male bodies. Yet it is apparent that the gendered performance enacted by male bodies need only wander a little way from the ideals of masculinity for these bodies to be understood as not being those of 'men'. Drozdow-St Christian suggests that fa'afafine demonstrate a strategy of embodiment in which "the apparent substance of the body is elided by its enactment, becoming some other body, whatever the apparent similarities between males and *fa'afafine* physically" (2002, 155). The difference between western and Samoan models can be seen in the case cited by Penelope Schoeffel of a young male who was considered fa'afafine in Samoa because of a refusal to engage in sexual predatoriness, and a preference for female company. When this person migrated to New Zealand, sexual predatoriness and friendships with other men were also considered markers of masculinity. However, as the normative relations between biological sex and gender are differently structured in New Zealand, this person was understood to be a 'man' and he eventually married (Schoeffel 1979, 205-206). Schoeffel states that in New Zealand, he "found that it was easier to assume a male role ... than it had been in Samoa" (1979, 206).¹¹

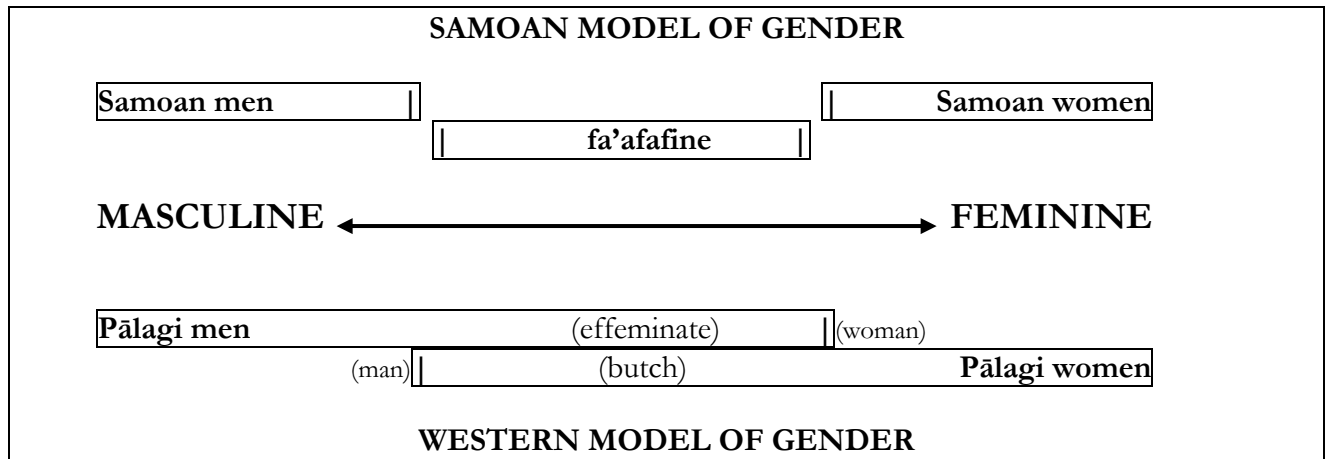
I have constructed the below diagram as a means of illustrating the difference between the 'boundaries' of gender in western and Samoan contexts. While this diagram is necessarily schematic, and suggests a rigidity to the enactment of gender that is not necessarily present in practice, I hope that it will demonstrate how I understand instances of gender 'deviance' are conceptualised in both cultures. According to Samoan models, those who fall between the appropriate levels of masculinity and femininity are considered feminine, whereas according to western models, 'men' and 'women' have to

⁹ The fact that gender ambiguity is more socially permissible for females may explain the relative absence or invisibility of 'fa'atama' – women who are 'like men' (Shore 1981, 210), in that there is a wider range of behaviours available to females that do not preclude them from being socially understood as 'women'.

¹⁰ The ways in which fa'afafine are understood as 'men' or 'not men', 'males' and 'feminine' in various contexts is considerably more complex than suggested by this statement. However, for the purposes of this particular argument, it is enough to note that being 'male' does not inevitably result in being considered a 'man'.

¹¹ There are many reasons why such an identity shift might occur in New Zealand, some of which I will discuss in following chapters. Schoeffel's implication is that this individual found the roles of Samoan masculinity too constraining, but was able to meet the requirements of a more flexible, non-Samoan model of masculinity.

move a considerable way into the realm of 'feminine' or 'masculine' respectively before they are no longer considered 'men' or 'women'.



While transgenderism in non-western cultures may be cited in feminist and queer literature as evidence of a liberal attitude towards gender (Besnier 1994, 316-317), the presence of fa'afafine in Samoa is more likely to imply a greater rigidity to the boundaries of gender. This is not to engage in a restatement of Bradd Shore's suggestion that fa'afafine exist solely to perform the 'function' of providing a negative role model for masculine men (1981). However, Besnier notes that, in Tonga, young boys may be called 'little fakaleiti' when they fail to fulfil masculine responsibilities appropriately (1994, 310), and I have heard of similar events in Samoa. Thus, in that 'fa'afafine' may be used as a term to encourage particular behaviours from boys (and men), there is a sense in which fa'afafine may be 'employed' to assist in policing the boundaries of appropriate masculinity for non-fa'afafine males.

Why fa'afafine are not 'women'

While failure to be appropriately masculine, or the enactment of femininity, means that some males are not commonly thought of as 'men', neither are they 'women', but are rather *'like women'*. It is primarily the inability of fa'afafine to bear children, and thus contribute to the genealogical lines that are the basis of economic and political stability in Samoa, which prevents them from being seen as 'real' women.

The centrality of the reproductive social role to gender is such that some fa'afafine suggest that even if they were to undertake the surgery that would provide them with a vagina – which would render them 'women' according to many western discourses¹² – they would still not be 'real' women because they

¹² While post-operative male-to-female transsexuals can 'officially' become women in some places, in other countries or states they remain officially men. Some theorists, such as Janice Raymond (1994), argue that possession of a vagina does

would not be able to bear children.¹³ I will discuss the significance of this in relation to the availability of feminising medical technologies in later chapters. At this point, it is mentioned to illustrate the centrality of reproduction to the identities of both men and women in Samoan understandings. This is also the reason relationships between masculine men and fa'afafine do not have the legitimacy or longevity of relationships between masculine men and 'real' women:

I always say to the young queens that whenever they have a relationship with a Samoan, they must go with their eyes open. It won't last. There's always one day that that guy will go and marry a woman and have children, because it's tradition in Samoa that every family, every man in the family should have children. So I always advise the young ones, it's alright to have a relationship with a Samoan guy, but make sure your eyes are open. One day he'll end up leaving you and go and marry a woman and have children.

It is important to note here that the role of reproductive capacity in defining gender is not only given significance by external discourses. While the Samoan definition of 'woman-ness' is as ideological as any other, it is fa'afafine themselves who acknowledge the impossibility of ever attaining this state, and it is precisely this reason that many give for their decisions not to undertake genital reconstruction surgery.

The differences between fa'afafine's and transsexuals' understandings of the relationships between their genders and various aspects of their bodies opens up a fundamental point in relation to corporeality, in that while the physical matter itself cannot be altered in respect of these aspects, the meaning of 'a vagina' or 'a uterus' is socially constructed. As Judith Butler's theorising makes clear, neither vaginas nor uteruses have a gender in and of themselves, nor do they cause a gender in those who have them outside of the social realm. Thus, while some fa'afafine appear to perform a 'sex' they do not 'really' have, as far as Butler is concerned, everyone engages in such performances (1990a). Yet in the reality in which pālagi women and transsexuals live, to be a woman necessitates having a vagina, and in the reality in which most Samoan women and fa'afafine live, to be a woman necessitates bearing children (or at least having that capacity). The fact that these signifiers of 'woman' have a meaning which is

not, and cannot, make a male a woman. Some transsexuals, such as Kate Bornstein (1994), refer to themselves using terms such as 'constructed woman', differentiating themselves from women who are born female. The understanding of male-to-female transsexuals as 'women' is thus complex and often problematic. However, most transsexuals do understand themselves as women once they have achieved the appropriate morphology and are able to pass as women in all social interactions.

¹³ It should be noted that this is not a universally or consistently held belief among the fa'afafine population, such that one participant in New Zealand was able to say to me, in the context of a discussion about gender reassignment surgery that I will refer to in more detail in a following chapter, "I believe that if I still have my thing [penis], I am still a woman". I will discuss the significance of this statement in relation to embodiment and gender. In relation to the above analysis, what is interesting about this statement is that the participant asserts that she is a woman.

culturally constructed does not prevent this meaning from being 'real' at particular times and places. "Social reality is of a different kind from that of the natural world, but it is social reality in spite of its arbitrariness and dependence on continued reiteration in performance" (Lovell 2000, 15).

Thus, the borders of the category 'woman' are just as strictly maintained as those of the category 'man', although through recourse to different markers. In keeping with the general paradigms of gender in Samoa that I outlined earlier, the exclusion of fa'afafine from the category 'woman' stems more from issues of reproduction, rather than from the failures to perform appropriate labour, accept 'masculine' social responsibilities, or enact a certain gendered embodiment that preclude fa'afafine from being 'men'. While this exclusion from 'womanhood' does result from biological considerations, it is not be understood as stemming *directly* from fa'afafine's lack of female reproductive organs, but rather from the fact that they cannot fulfil the social role of perpetuating the family lineage through bearing children.

Ironically, for some masculine men the inability of fa'afafine to reproduce may be part of their attraction as sexual partners, as there is no need for either party to be concerned about potential pregnancy. Furthermore, because fa'afafine lack female reproductive capacities, they are not conceptually implicated in the feagaiga relationship that exists between brother and sister. Thus, masculine men having sex with fa'afafine are unlikely to fear retribution from the fa'afafine's brothers (Sua'ali'i 2001, 170). Yet, as with many cultural concepts, in practice the exemption from the feagaiga relationship may be less than absolute. As with all family members, anyone who physically harms a fa'afafine may expect retaliation from the fa'afafine's family. Brothers will also often attempt to constrain the sexual activities of their fa'afafine siblings because, as I will discuss in the following chapter, overt sexuality on the part of fa'afafine can cause their families embarrassment. For brothers, this embarrassment is analogous to, although not exactly the same as, the shame caused by a sister's sexual indiscretion.

One participant suggested that, at least in contemporary Samoa, fa'afafine may also be willing to engage in acts such as fellatio which Samoan wives may be less prepared to perform, which is another possible factor in the attraction of Samoan men to fa'afafine. While most authors suggest that fa'afafine are merely seen as 'substitute' women in terms of sexual considerations, there has been little (if any) exploration of the possibility that, at least for some Samoan men, fa'afafine may well be a sexual object

choice. Unfortunately, as I was unable to interview the sexual partners of fa'afafine, I could not explore this possibility.

Fa'afafine sexuality

The issue of fa'afafine sexuality in 'traditional' contexts is an area in which understandings are complex and at times contradictory. As I discussed earlier, young men and women are usually physically separated. However, because fa'afafine are not 'men', they are not perceived of as a sexual threat to women. Thus, brothers and parents allow platonic friendships between their sisters/daughters and fa'afafine (Sua'ali'i 2001, 169-170). Samoan women have suggested to me that undressing in front of a fa'afafine would be perfectly acceptable, and some fa'afafine may sleep in the same bed as sisters or female friends (Dolgoy 2000, 146-147), something masculine brothers or other men would never do. Thus, while fa'afafine are understood to be 'males', they are less constrained than masculine youths in their interactions with females. The social separation of young unmarried men and women means that, for most adolescent boys, interactions with females outside their own families would be significantly limited. However, because fa'afafine are technically not female, and are not protected by the feagaiga relationship, they are not socially separated from masculine youths. Fa'afafine may thus be understood as 'feminine people' who could be considered appropriate sexual partners by masculine males, with the additional benefits that, as I have noted, any sexual activity with them would hold no chance of causing pregnancy, and little risk of fraternal retaliation (Sua'ali'i 2001, 170). Sex with fa'afafine may be seen by young men as 'learning to be with a woman' (St. Christian 1994, 183; Borch 1998, 14-15; Gittens 2000, 24).

Understandings of fa'afafine as sexually available 'feminine people', in spite of their male physiology, are possible not only because fa'afafine are socially feminine, but also because, for Samoans, it is the nature of the sex act, rather than the object, which is central to how sexuality is understood (Altman 1996a, 81-82). Provided the man uses his penis in insertive sexual acts and continues to demonstrate masculine social behaviour, his 'manliness' is unquestioned (Shore 1981, 210). Conversely, when engaging in sex with a masculine man, fa'afafine ideally adopt the feminine position as the partner who is 'penetrated'. Even though almost all fa'afafine have penises, in Samoa "[t]he sexing function of the genitals ... is derived from what is done with bodies as a whole, rather than from any innate sexual quality of the genitals alone" (St Christian 1994, 97). The manner in which the fa'afafine body is enacted during sex with masculine men causes it to become something other than 'male' (St Christian

1994, 183); hence, the sex act is not considered to be between two men, or tuātāne. Sex between a man and fa'afafine is therefore not a threat to the man's masculinity. It is less easy to state that sex between fa'afafine and masculine men is considered 'heterosexual', as neither 'heterosexual' nor 'homosexual', as understood in western discourses, is part of 'traditional' Samoan discourses. However, it is clear that, for a masculine man, sex with a fa'afafine is sex with someone not like himself, in spite of the fact that they are both 'males'. The difference between Samoan and pālagi understandings of sexual acts between two 'male' bodies was explained by one of my participants:

So with lots of these people that are in high positions, I think most of them have been with a fa'afafine before, you know. It's like the life in New Zealand, that once you go with a queen or something like that, you always end up to be a gay person or something like that, but the Samoan guys, they don't ... you know, they started off young with the fa'afafine and then they always end up getting married and have families.

It has been implied that feminine sexual activity is fundamental to fa'afafine identities. This suggestion is based on the fact that they are fa'afafine, rather than fa'ateine. To be fa'afafine is held to imply similarity to sexually active women (fafine), rather than the parallel with (ideally) virginal girls (teine) that is suggested by the term 'fa'ateine' (Schoeffel 1979, 203-204). However, it seems unlikely that such a link with sexual activity would be made in early childhood, when many fa'afafine are identified as such. A more plausible explanation may be that these transgendered people are not known as 'fa'ateine' because they are not in need of protection of their chastity and reproductive capacity in the same manner as unmarried girls (Besnier 1994, 301; Sua'ali'i 2001, 170). The social freedom that fa'afafine enjoy (in spite of being feminine and yet not married) is in turn an indication that they are not regarded as 'real' females. Because they are excluded from the category 'woman' (both teine and fafine), fa'afafine can behave in ways that women in Samoa generally do not (Tcherkezoff 1993, 82). Ironically, this 'unladylike' behaviour is often used as an explanation for why fa'afafine cannot be considered 'real' women.

Either/or, neither/both

Fa'afafine thus seem to conform to aspects of the 'gender liminality' that Besnier attributes to them (1994, 287), in that they occupy a position that is somewhat 'betwixt and between' normative genders in Samoa. In their everyday lives, they often recognise, and even exploit, this position. For example, it is generally acknowledged that families value the abilities of fa'afafine to do both masculine and feminine labour. Although fa'afafine themselves may often prefer the latter, one older informant tells of how,

when growing up in Samoa, she often stretched the boundaries of the labour she considered (or acknowledged as) appropriate to her gender:

... sometimes when my, when, you know, my father's wife want me to stay home and help the girls doing the cooking and things like that, so I have to stay, but when she don't ask me to do anything, so I have to go with the boys and pick the wood, so I can have a swim with them and play with them. [...]

[...] So, when the girls got plenty of work, I'm always with them [the boys] but I always prefer to do the girls' work, because ... once they [the boys] do the umu, I don't like to go and do the umu. You know, the boys will do that, and when we come back with the wood and that, I just go and have a shower and then I come and get changed, and then the boys' doing the cooking, and, you know ... the, you know, boiling the taro, bananas, and things like that, but I ... I just don't go and help them. You know, I only go to get the wood because I want to go and swim ...

This participant moved between gender labour roles according to family needs, but was also able to use this situation to her advantage. As she was not actually female, she was not confined to the domestic environs in the same manner as her sisters, and could enjoy the freedom her brothers had to go swimming while out collecting firewood. Yet, because she was not seen as particularly masculine, she was not necessarily expected to help with the 'dirty' work of preparing the umu.

In spite of the fact that fa'afafine mostly prefer to be seen as 'feminine', it has been reported, both by participants in this research and in the literature, that in the past fa'afafine often married women and had children (Besnier 1994, 315-316; St Christian 1994, 182-183; Dolgoy 2000, 135). For reasons that I will discuss in the following chapter, contemporary understandings that 'femininity' implies exclusive sexual orientation towards, and relations with, masculine men means that fa'afafine are now unlikely to marry women. However, the fact that this is reported to have happened in times less inflected by western understandings allows further insight into 'traditional' constructions of fa'afafine subjectivity. As I have suggested, non-reproductive sexual 'play' is not considered entirely appropriate for young men who are past adolescence, when it is expected they would marry and begin to take on a range of social and political responsibilities and attendant privileges (Shore 1981, 204-205). In order to gain the same political power, fa'afafine would also have needed to demonstrate their acceptance of social responsibility by marrying and having children (Besnier 1994, 316). As the attributes associated with the public exercising of political power are generally considered masculine (Shore 1981, 207), if fa'afafine wish to access this power it would be necessary for them to enact masculinity.

There are somewhat conflicting reports regarding fa'afafine and marriage. Douglass St Christian (1994, 182-183) and Reevan Dolgoy (2000, 135) suggest that fa'afafine who married would 'abandon the

category' of fa'afafine and become 'formally male'. However, while I was in Samoa, older women told me of fa'afafine who had married and yet remained fa'afafine. The common jest among these women was that fa'afafine were excellent husbands because they did all the housework. Although I was unable to locate any married fa'afafine, in either Samoa or New Zealand (primarily because, as I explain in the following chapter, fewer fa'afafine consider marriage a viable option in contemporary times), it is possible to construct a feasible (although somewhat conjectural) explanation for these apparently contradictory accounts. This explanation emerges from the location of the Samoan self within relational contexts, rather than individual subjectivity. This means that Samoan identities are multi-faceted and contextual:

... the Samoan concept of an identity consists of an identification of particular parts of an individual, and a relative weighting of these parts. Fundamental to any assessment of a person's makeup is an evaluation of the particular behavioral and social contexts in which the assessment is being made (Shore 1982, 141).

Thus, an individual could enact both masculinity and femininity almost simultaneously, but in different contexts, without either enactment being 'false'. A married fa'afafine could be understood as masculine in contexts in which political or social power was at stake, such as the village council, and thus be able to make some claim to this power. However, in the domestic context, the same fa'afafine could undertake domestic labour, and thus retain a feminine aspect. This proposed 'gender division' is somewhat supported by the fact that St Christian and Dolgoy, who argue for fa'afafine relinquishing their fa'afafine identities upon marriage, are pālagi males, and are thus likely to have observed such people predominantly in public contexts. However, the older Samoan women who spoke of married fa'afafine continuing to perform feminine labour are more likely to have had regular access to the domestic realm.

Shifts from traditional ideals

Various discussions throughout this chapter illustrate that Samoan subjectivities and identities are better conceptualised as being achieved and understood in relational contexts, rather than according to the essential individualism of western paradigms. Thus, gender in Samoa can be understood to inhere in the person by virtue of their enactments of certain roles that are embedded in social contexts, rather than being an identity an individual adopts or is socialised into by virtue of particular genital configurations in their own bodies. This is not to suggest a mutually exclusive opposition between Samoan and western subjectivities. There are ways in which Samoans behave as, and think of others as, 'individual people', while the relational and context dependent aspects of western subjectivity are well

rehearsed in contemporary theoretical literature. Rather, the differences are more a matter of emphasis on sociocentrism or egocentrism in the formation and understandings of subjectivities. Similarly, I do not wish to suggest that in Samoa it *only* women who are implicated in appropriate sexual behaviour, while masculinity is *only* assessed on the basis of gendered behaviour. Again, it is a matter of emphasis.

However, having an appreciation of the ideals of gender in Samoa and the manner in which Samoan subjectivities are understood to be constructed allows for some understanding of how fa'afafine identities exist and are enacted within a Samoan cultural context. If gender is understood as relational and contextual, rather than as a consequence of a pre-cultural sex or sexuality, it is possible for an individual to be male and yet not a man, and simultaneously be like a woman but not be a woman. However, the fluidity that has apparently marked fa'afafine identities in the past is becoming less feasible in contemporary Samoa. As the gender labour roles described in this chapter shift in response to new social and economic structures, and as sexual relations take a more central place in defining gender, the femininity echoed by fa'afafine is inevitably affected. While the 'traditional' ideals and practices outlined in this chapter continue to inform the construction, maintenance, and understanding of fa'afafine identities in both Samoa and New Zealand, these enactments and perceptions are becoming increasingly inflected by western models of sex/gender and sexuality, such that fa'afafine identities are, at the time of writing, a site of considerable flux. The next chapter sets out how, in contemporary Samoa, the relational model of gender described in this chapter is increasingly problematised, as masculinity and femininity are becoming understood as individual attributes that rest on the body in particular, and increasingly sexualised, ways.

CHAPTER 5

PARADISE LOST? SOCIAL CHANGE AND FA'AFAFINE IN SAMOA

But you see, the thing that's interesting is that, when they're out, out and about, they flaunt it. They flaunt it. But when they come back home, they do exactly what I do. So in a way they're still trying to keep that balance, I find. And I think once, when I see the queens basically going out for it, and not giving a shit about their family, and becoming capitalist minded and becoming independent, I think that's a sign of Samoa saying that it's becoming western.

Fa'afafine participant

As I have suggested in previous chapters, in contemporary Samoa, Samoans tend to regard fa'afafine with marked ambivalence. This ambivalence arises from both moral concerns regarding fa'afafine and from apparent contention over 'what' fa'afafine 'really are', a question that seems to have arisen only recently. The struggle to 'define' fa'afafine, and moral concerns regarding fa'afafine, can both be understood as largely emerging from the meeting of indigenous and western discourses in contemporary Samoa. In this chapter, I will detail how the influence of western discourses that construct a fundamental relationship between gender and sexuality has shifted Samoan understandings of what it means to be 'man', 'woman', or, more significantly, 'fa'afafine'. Yet, as I will demonstrate, these understandings are held in conjunction with longer standing conceptions of subjectivity as multi-faceted and contextual. Criteria for assessing the social worth of a person remain embedded in the prioritising of the collective good, although increasingly these criteria are inflected with western models of individual achievement. As I will explain, the existence of fa'afafine at the nexus of these (and other) discourses, and the range of enacted fa'afafine identities that emerge from this synthesis, results in the ambivalence with which they are regarded in contemporary Samoa.

This is not to suggest that ambivalence towards *fa'afafine* is new, nor that *fa'afafine* were unconditionally accepted in pre-contact times. As western history demonstrates, the existence of particular subjectivities within a society does not prove their acceptance. The following discussion should thus not be taken to imply the existence of a homogenous pre-contact culture in which every category of person was accepted as serving a function, or that misunderstanding and dissent only occurred with the arrival of colonial powers and the adoption of western moralities and paradigms. Rather, my intention is to present a discussion of how *fa'afafine* exist in contemporary Samoa and how various discourses, including (but not limited to) western models of sex/gender and sexuality, indigenous paradigms of subjectivity, and present-day constructions of the history of Samoan culture contribute to constructions, understandings, and enactments of '*fa'afafine-ness*'. To do so, I first turn to a consideration of normative masculinity and femininity in contemporary Samoa so as to illustrate how these genders have shifted in order to accommodate western-inflected understandings and expressions.

Normative genders in contemporary Samoa

The shifting ground of Samoan subjectivity

The sociocentric and contextually gendered identities outlined in the previous chapter are, to a large degree, founded in the Samoan village or *nu'u*, which is second only to *'aiga* in the definition of a person (Ngan-Woo 1985, 9; Liu 1991, 40; Sua'ali'i 2001). The small size of the Samoan village means that everyone not only knows everyone else, but also is consistently aware of the activities of other villagers, and the life of the individual is inextricably woven into the life of the *nu'u* (Shore 1982, 98-99). Social control is largely based on external constraints rather than internalised morals, and the very notion of socially acceptable behaviour is closely related to visibility. This situation both results in, and is facilitated by, the open architecture that once typified Samoan homes, which is still evident in many buildings outside urban areas (Shore 1982, 148, 179-181; St Christian 1994, 74).

In the last few decades there has been an increasing tendency for Samoans, especially younger Samoans, to relocate from their natal villages to Apia or overseas in search of education and employment (Galuvao 1987, 111-115; Shankman 1993). As *'aiga* are dispersed, village communities are fracturing, and social structures are changing shape. At the same time, the ideological foundations of Samoan culture are becoming inflected by western models of capitalist economics and related discourses. This is especially prevalent in and around the urban centre of Apia, where the ability to earn

individual incomes has made people less likely to pool resources with their extended families, and economic wealth has become a dominant yardstick of success (O'Meara 1993, 136-138). Changes in economic structures have subsequently affected the role of labour in Samoan gender frameworks. Although urban and migrant Samoans continue to predominantly base their sense of 'self' on meeting their family obligations, cash contributions to the family are significantly less gendered than the specifically feminine or masculine labour that, under indigenous models, comprised their contribution to the family economy. This is not to suggest that the wage labour undertaken outside village contexts is not itself gendered. In contemporary urban Samoa, the femininity of fa'afafine is often partially constructed through their particular occupations, and the wage labour undertaken by men and women in Samoa is also gendered. My point here is that these gendering activities occur outside the communal context of 'aiga and village, and contributions to the family economy now increasingly take the form of 'gender neutral' cash that is earned from individual activity.

Furthermore, urbanisation, industrialisation and western media bring with them related ideologies such as 'personal freedom' and individual achievement that privilege self over family (Altman 1996a, 86), especially the extended family of Samoa. As Arjun Appadurai suggests, the globalisation of culture via mass media is just as, if not more, important as the globalisation of economic structures in creating social change (1991). The concepts offered by these media do not replace those of indigenous cultures, but rather add to and inflect discourses that are already in place. In eras when the spread of information and ideas was slow and rarely pervasive, the possibilities open to any individual were relatively limited, constrained both geographically and discursively. In contemporary times, it is commonplace to regularly encounter both images and people from all corners of the globe, and the range of lives considered possible by any individual has increased dramatically (Appadurai 1991, 198). Even if immediate material constraints mean that most of these 'possible lives' are not really feasible, the mere fact that mass media enables residents of a small, geographically isolated Pacific nation to see the lives lived in other places and at other times increases the possibility of feeling dissatisfied with their own circumstances (Appadurai 1991, 198). Yet the potential for dissatisfaction should not be overstated – the opportunity to glimpse into the worlds of others can also result in affirmation of the 'rightness' of one's own way of life. Thus, in Samoa, while there is a desire for the material goods offered by western consumerism, western societies are often perceived to be in moral decline, a decline which may be articulated as evidence of the superiority of fa'aSamoa and/or Samoan Christian practices.

Even western economic systems are not inevitably seen as superior to Samoan models of economic exchange. Drozdow-St Christian notes that as smaller family groups are less able to entirely produce their own food, daily diets are supplemented with purchases from markets or shops. Families may even buy produce that they themselves grow in abundance, reserving the crops from their own land for *fa'alavelave* (2002, 59). This suggests that goods that have been part of the cash economy have less symbolic value than those that are created more 'traditionally'. There are many other examples that suggest that western systems, goods, morals, or ideologies are not necessarily privileged over those which originate in Samoan culture. These all indicate that the incursion of western models into Samoa is not a simple replacement of one set of discursive practices with another but is rather, as I will suggest in the following discussion, a process of complex and continual negotiation that allows for both continuity and change.

Tensions of gender

As the goods and cultural products available in Samoa increasingly include those manufactured in other economies and other societies, there are subtle shifts in how material culture is used to enact gender. These shifts are both enabled by, and reinforce, the manner in which Samoan ideologies and discourses accommodate western concepts. Thus, western notions that sex/gender is the most significant division between people, and should be signified overtly, is influencing how Samoans understand and enact gender – an impact that is realised both discursively and materially.

One area in which the availability of western products has inflected enactments of gender is in the clothing worn by Samoans. While ceremonial dress and performance may be gendered, the everyday wear of most Samoans, men and women, is a *lāvalava* and t-shirt. Although the men's *lāvalava* is worn a little shorter than the women's and tied differently, the attire is not otherwise marked for gender. The distinctions that do exist are, as I suggested in the previous chapter, even less apparent among young children. However, the introduction of western educational institutions led to a much earlier sartorial delineation between genders among young children through school uniforms (Dolgoy 2000, 86). The use of *pālagi* style clothing for special occasions has also intersected with Samoa's place in the global market to further extend contexts in which young children may be gendered through clothing. In 1979, Schoeffel wrote that high quality or elaborate *pālagi* clothes were rare in Samoan villages, usually sent by relatives living overseas and saved for special occasions. Because of the scarcity of these *pālagi* clothes, when occasions arose in which they were worn, children would often be dressed in what fitted

best regardless of whether it was ‘appropriate’ to their sex/gender (1979, 107). Some 25 years later, the plethora of cheap imported clothes available in Samoa means that pālagi clothes are no longer such a rarity or luxury. In contemporary times, families may be more inclined to dress only girls in the extravagantly frilled dresses and only boys in the miniature white tuxedos that fill the shops and the market stalls of Samoa prior to White Sunday.¹

Gender differentiation through sartorial means is noticeable not only in the manner in which young children are dressed, but also in the clothing increasingly adopted by adolescents. During the time I spent in Apia, I was struck by how younger Samoan women were beginning to wear short skirts and skimpy tops, while many young men favoured a hip-hop style. In both cases, appearance was heavily influenced by the availability of western clothes, and appeared to be significantly modelled on images seen in film and television. The influence of black American popular culture was especially noticeable in both the dress and music consumed by these adolescents, although this was predominantly mainstream versions of hip-hop culture, which lacks the political content and overt violence of much of the underground versions. However, this ‘sanitised’ model of black popular culture is replete with commodified images of sexualised femininity and aggressive masculinity, projected through the clothing, dance, and language that typifies American hip-hop music videos. The gendering of bodies in these texts rests heavily on ideals of sexual attraction that are uncritically founded on an explicit *heterosexuality*. While historically and culturally specific, these images can also be read as yet another instantiation of fundamental western understandings that, while gender is socially constructed, it emerges out of a ‘real’ heterosexuality that is “taken for granted, *naturally occurring*, and unquestioned” (Ingraham 1994, 204; emphasis added). This increased emphasis on (hetero)sexuality in Samoa was even more marked in the nightclubs I visited, where young Samoans emulate the dance moves seen in the afore-mentioned videos with a sexual explicitness I saw in *no* other context while there. However, the incursion of these modes of dress are still mediated by Samoan culture. While imported hip hop videos abound with images of bikini-clad women, on the beaches of Samoa I only ever saw young women swimming in lāvalava or t-shirts and board shorts, and public displays of sexual attraction or affection between young men and women remained invisible during the daylight hours.

¹ White Sunday is a day in October annually devoted to children in which children are bought special clothes, sing at church, and are treated to a feast held in their honour.

These western enactments of gender not only emphasise sexuality, but also rest on the body in ways that suggest a significant move towards concepts of ‘individual expression’ rather than the relative conformity that typifies the more relational nature of ‘traditional’ Samoan gender and identity. For example, villages chiefs may forbid women from dressing in mini-skirts, trousers, or shorts, not only because they are seen as undignified, but also because the adoption of such pālāgi customs is seen as a direct assertion of personal rights over the interests and morals of the collective, and as a challenge to the authority of the chiefs (Shore, 1982: 109).² Inasmuch as striving for personal reward rather than collective good may mark one as ‘fia Papālāgi’ (Ngan-Woo 1985, 9-10), so to draw attention to oneself (by either being ‘different’ and/or by calling attention to one’s body) outside of certain clearly defined contexts is also considered very unSamoan.³

These models should not, however, be read as absolute, and I do not mean to imply that Samoan gender frameworks have completely changed from one model to another as the result of westernisation. Rather, what I am suggesting is that through changes in the political economy, and the influence of western discourses, there has been a gradual shift in emphasis in the enactment of gender from being relational and expressed through labour contributions to ‘aiga, village, or other collectives, towards being something more ‘internal’ and expressed through individually embodied sexuality. At the time of writing, there are considerable tensions between these two paradigms, especially for younger Samoans who have come of age in an era when both models have contributed to their own subjectivities. This conflict between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’ may be played out on a daily basis for those who travel between their village, where moral and behavioural norms are likely to be clearly regulated by chiefs with a mandate from the village population, and Apia, where there is little, if any, central control over norms and behaviours (Cluny Macpherson, pers. comm.). Consequential for all Samoans, these tensions and (often subtle) shifts in emphasis have particularly affected understandings and enactments of fa’afafine identities in contemporary Samoa.

² While Samoan modesty may be a legacy of missionary morality, today overt sexuality or bodily exposure, especially for women, is considered very unSamoan.

³ Emphasis on collectivity is exemplified in the manner in which those engaged in group activities, especially women, will create matching outfits. While in Samoa, a palāgi friend of mine presented a conference paper with her Samoan research associate, who insisted that they buy fabric to have matching pule tasi made for their presentation.

Processes of globalisation and transformations of fa'afafine life worlds

Embodying femininity

For fa'afafine, as for Samoan women, the social and cultural changes that have taken place in Samoa similarly mean that the feminine labour role within the family is no longer always predominant as a gender marker. Outside the family context, the growing wage labour market increases the possibility of working in 'gender neutral' jobs, and fa'afafine are often employed as teachers, sales people, or hospitality workers (Miles 2000, 47). Some specifically feminine occupations were also quickly adopted by fa'afafine, who are now renowned 'seamstresses'. In Apia, the increasing reliance of young Samoan women on more sexualised western signifiers such as clothing and make-up to represent femininity is echoed by fa'afafine (Mageo 1996, 602).⁴ One informant stated that before western contact, fa'afafine were simply 'feminine boys', but exposure to western movies taught them that clothing, make-up, and appearance in general could be used as more definitive signifiers of gender.⁵ The use of gender-specific western cultural forms is also apparent in the adoption of pālāgi names by fa'afafine. As most Samoan names are genderless (Shore 1982, 144; Mageo 1992, 451), fa'afafine who want specifically feminine Christian names regularly use European names. Often, these fa'afafine will choose a name that is associated with a famous, glamorous, and hyper-feminine woman, such as a super-model or pop diva (Borch 1998, 13).⁶

The use of western signifiers of gender that sit on, or shape, the body so it appears more like a female's replicates newly emergent understandings of the relationship between sex, sexuality, and gender that, as I outlined above, have had a significant impact on understandings of masculinity and femininity in contemporary Samoa. However, for fa'afafine, this shift in understandings has had particular effects. Drozdow-St Christian observes that, according to 'traditional' Samoan understandings, "*fa'afafine* does not mean looking like a woman but acting in the manner a woman is anticipated to act in a closely circumscribed range of contexts – and like a male in other contexts" (2002, 32).⁷ He refers to the relatively recent adoption of drag by fa'afafine as "an attention to bodily surfaces as a natural artefact

⁴ See Dolgoy (2000) for a comprehensive analysis of the historical shifts in fa'afafine self-presentation.

⁵ See James (1994, 44-45) for a similar observation regarding Tongan fakaleiti.

⁶ In Besnier's analysis of the fakaleiti beauty pageants in Tonga, his emphasis is on the English or exotic nature of the stage names of the contestants, his argument being that they are explicitly *not Tongan* (2002, 548-549). While the western names adopted by many Samoan fa'afafine are not Samoan, I would suggest it is their gender specificity, rather than their 'non-localness', that motivates these choices.

⁷ Like me, Drozdow-St Christian suspects that this is why early European explorers and commentators failed to mention fa'afafine.

being disguised” (2002, 32), a description which resonates with one Samoan participant’s comments regarding fa’afafine adoption of western signifiers of gender:

... well, before the palagis came here and, you know, fa’afafines were very accepted. To them, they were just a boy who was feminine, until the European influence came in, and then fa’afafines become too good looking to be true.

And you think that’s because ...

And that shocked them, everybody. To them, they think it was gone overboard, or it’s not right, because, you know, fa’afafine sometimes look more like women, than, you know ... It’s like a man meeting a fa’afafine, and don’t know about it [indecipherable] and then they find out later, and they say, ‘No, that can’t be true.’ That’s ... that’s what it was like, but now it’s like, ‘Well, OK..’. Everyone knows, you know, it doesn’t matter how good looking a fa’afafine is, they can pick it up.

Such comments might seem to suggest that western material signifiers of femininity allow fa’afafine to ‘better realise’ their ‘true genders’, in much the same way as access to feminine clothing allows western transsexuals to more fully embody their ‘real selves’. However, wearing women’s clothing has subtly different meanings for transsexuals and for fa’afafine. As Butler explains, the gender that is created through acts such as the clothing one wears is, in western contexts, understood to express “a substantial core which might well be understood as the spiritual or psychological correlate of biological sex” (1990b, 279). For western transsexuals, wearing women’s clothes is an expression of their understanding that they *are* women. Fa’afafine, on the other hand, neither claim to be, nor are understood as, women. This is explained by a lawyer from the Samoan Attorney-General’s office, in an article published in one of Samoa’s newspapers in 2002. ““A person who is fa’afafine is not impersonating a woman. He [sic] represents the fa’afafine. ... The fa’afafine is not dressing to deceive others,” [the lawyer] said. “Rather, he is dressing for himself. He is not intending to deceive anyone”” (Jackson 2002).

While femininity is signified through the wearing of feminine clothes and make-up, these are not understood as integral to the femininity of fa’afafine, such that most of the older, and some of the younger, generations feel that they are still fa’afafine even if not wearing women’s clothes. These signifiers of femininity are thus available for negotiation in relation to other aspects of the participants’ lives. For one respondent in Samoa who presented as relatively masculine (although somewhat ‘camp’), religion is prioritised ahead of signifying femininity through clothing:

I’ve got myself reborn in this new Christian religion, and they demand that I let go of my gay life, and all my feminine clothes, all my gay past has been [indecipherable]. All my shoes and my long dresses [indecipherable]. Even my tiara, my tiara that I had when I won the pageant and my sash, it’s all gone.

As I will discuss in more detail in following chapters, statements such as this demonstrate that a feminine appearance is not fundamental to identification as fa'afafine. However, in Samoa and New Zealand, fa'afafine are increasingly choosing to utilise the feminising resources that have become available to them, in much the same way as young Samoan women draw on these discourses and objects to construct and represent a more sexualised model of femininity.

From the domestic to the sexual

As the markers of gender shift in emphasis from the labour contributed to the collective to a more sexually oriented individual embodiment, there are inevitable consequences for the relationships between gender and sexuality. Chrys Ingraham theorises that, within western paradigms, gender is assumed to be the cultural consequence of a 'naturally occurring' heterosexuality, in which the oppositional relationship of femininity and masculinity mirrors the biological opposition of female and male (1994, 204). Thus, gender is, to some extent, assumed to be founded on who one does, or would, have sex with.⁸ As this understanding of the consequential nature of (hetero)sexuality gains ground in Samoa, enactments of gender are coming notably more sexualised. While, as I have suggested, this is played out in how bodies are presented, for masculine Samoan men and feminine Samoan women this heterosexualisation of gender has had little immediate effect on their sexual relations.

However, for fa'afafine, the sexual acts they engage in, and the gender and sexuality of their partners, has become increasingly central to their femininity. This is demonstrated by the manner in which fa'afafine draw on western discourses of sexual orientation. Concepts such as 'gay' and 'straight' have, until recently, not been relevant in Samoa. As I explained in the previous chapter, while there have been words for describing sexual acts between two men, there is no Samoan term for 'a homosexual' (Shore 1981, 209; Mageo 1996). However, as western understandings of relationships between sexuality and gender have taken hold in Samoa, concepts of homosexuality – sexual attraction between men – are being increasingly used. It is thus consequential to the perception of fa'afafine as feminine that the sex they engage in with masculine men *not* be seen as 'homosexual'. Fa'afafine now reinforce their femininity with regular assertions that they are only attracted to, and receive sexual attention from, *straight* masculine men, as it is imperative to their sense of themselves as feminine that their sexual relationships with masculine men be understood as *heterosexual*.

⁸ The fundamental nature of the link between sexual orientation and gender within western paradigms is exemplified in the manner in which the 'true' gender of one of the first people to receive genital reconstruction surgery was, in part, assessed on the basis of the heterosexuality of her boyfriend (Hausman 1995, 6).

The perception that sexual orientation and gender are constitutive of each other has similarly affected the potentiality of sexual relations between fa'afafine and women. As I have mentioned, there are accounts of fa'afafine having married women and fathered children as a means of fulfilling their social role as 'adults'. Douglass Drozdow-St Christian suggests that 'for the most part', fa'afafine marry and father children in their late twenties or early thirties although, drawing on fieldwork conducted in Samoa in the early 1990s, he notes that the numbers of fa'afafine marrying have been decreasing (2002, 155).⁹ Almost ten years later, I found no indication that fa'afafine today consider marriage to a woman a viable option. I asked one relatively feminine participant in her 30s if she saw herself as a woman, or fa'afafine, or both. In response, she quite vehemently asserted her self-perception as a woman, offering me proof of this:

Every time someone says to me 'Why don't you look at a woman?', you know, 'and maybe it will change your whole perspective about being fa'afafine', you know what I always ... I never say any word, you know, I just let anyone that talks to me, because I understand that everyone has their own way of things and all that, and I, coming back home I always say to myself, 'My God, it will be a sin for me,' you know, 'I will be a sinner if I try to establish a relationship with a woman.' Because, you know, my feelings is a hundred per cent – OK? So it's like a woman who is forced to have a relationship with another woman – OK? I mean, I will cry. It will cripple me psychologically – OK? It will damage, you know, everything that I've done. To me it would be, you know, an embarrassing experience, you know, to have a woman in my life. So I will say that yes, I am a woman, OK?

For this participant, to be 'one hundred percent' feminine included an exclusive sexual orientation towards men. When I asked another participant in Samoa in his 40s, who did not present as overly feminine, whether he would like to have children, he replied:

I don't think it's a question of 'like'. I thought, if you felt, you know, I mean, for me, if I was going to have children it means that I have to, you know, marry a girl, and that's not natural to me.

The use of the term 'natural' by this participant is significant, as it indicates an understanding of an innate sexual orientation that is implied as inextricably linked to a sense of being feminine or fa'afafine. With these new models of sexuality comes the understanding that to be feminine means being opposed to 'masculine' in sexual contexts. Being seen as sexually attractive by masculine men enables fa'afafine to construct themselves as feminine. One older feminine participant remembered meeting her first boyfriend in Samoa, when they performed in a band together:

⁹ Drozdow-St Christian actually states that "in recent years more and more fa'afafine are sustaining their fa'afafine gender into middle age and beyond" (2002, 155). As he also correlates marriage and fathering children with a discarding of fa'afafine identification (2002, 155), it is safe to assume that when he cites contemporary instances of individuals remaining fa'afafine past their twenties, this also means those individuals had not married women or fathered children.

We just sort of, you know ... every night we have practicing and things like that. After the practicing we're just sort of walking on the street, and he start talking to me and all that, and I was, 'Oh', you know, the way he was talking to me, I feel like I'm a real girl and that sort of thing ...

Another younger, more masculine participant also talked about having boyfriends while growing up in Samoa:

Well, I did have a couple of guys that I was basically seeing, but that was nothing like what I experience here. Because when I said 'seeing', we go under the trees and we talk. I do, it makes me feel like a woman. It makes me feel like a girl, that this guy's talking to me about all sorts of things, you know, we just hold hands and that, kissing, but I didn't know anything about sex.

Sexuality and social control

As enactments and understandings of 'fa'afafine-ness' increasingly involve a more overtly embodied femininity that includes expressions of a sexuality that is oriented only towards masculine men, it seems that fa'afafine may become subject to more of the social controls that have 'traditionally' been exerted only in respect of women. One younger informant tells of his teenage years in Samoa, where his brothers would monitor his movements almost as much as they did with their sisters:

... I felt I was an embarrassment to my brothers, because every time they go and play rugby, there are boys that talk about me – 'Hello, where's your younger brother?' They didn't just come out and say what they want to do, but it really embarrass them and they come home and start taking it out on me. And there was a time that my older brothers [indecipherable] it was, basically, I felt like I was a girl and that they were protecting me from outside.

There are two potential readings of this memory. For this participant to say that he felt that his older brothers were 'protecting' him as they would a girl invokes the feagaiga relationship that exists between brothers and sisters in relation to the adolescent girl's virginity. However, the participant also suggests that his brothers were 'embarrassed' by the sexual attention he seemed to attract from their friends, a reaction that does not seem to correlate with the feagaiga, according to which brothers would be more likely to manifest anger at potential threats to their sister's virtue. That his brothers were rather 'embarrassed' raises the possibility that their understandings of this sexual attention were inflected by western readings of such attractions as 'homosexual'. There is no further evidence in the interviews with this participant to support either reading, and it is entirely feasible that the participant's brothers were (re)acting according to both paradigms simultaneously.¹⁰

¹⁰ It is, of course, not insignificant that this participant chose to emphasise the potential feagaiga reading, which would reinforce an understanding that he was always already feminine. However, this observation must also take into

At the same time as sexual relations with men increase in significance in relation to fa'afafine's enactments of femininity, other shifts in Samoan social structures and the material lives of Samoans make it easier for such relations to occur. While families value the ability of fa'afafine to do both men's and women's work, they do not generally approve of overt expressions of sexuality on the part of fa'afafine. This can become a significant issue, as Samoans frequently continue to live with their 'aiga well into adulthood. Sexual behaviour and expressions of sexuality are further constrained for fa'afafine in the wider village context, where actions are constantly monitored. One participant, who currently works as a teacher in the village where she lives, had a number of short-term boyfriends when she lived in New Zealand. However, in the village context she feels a responsibility to maintain Samoan morals:

I can get any guy I like any time, but to me, you know, that would be another disadvantage of myself of being fa'afafine if I pursue a relationships with a guy, especially, you know, working in an environment like this. I want to be a good role model to the students. I want to be a good role model to my church.¹¹

Relocation to more westernised urban areas can, for fa'afafine, result in opportunities to enact a more sexualised femininity and engage in sexual relations with masculine men more extensively or openly. This can be enabled by simple changes such as access to rental accommodation. Even opportunities to contribute financially to the family may shift dynamics. One participant felt confident enough to bring her boyfriends into the family home once she was earning her own money, suggesting that the financial independence afforded by wage labour can also create tensions between 'traditional' morals and contemporary fa'afafine sexualities. The relative anonymity afforded by the urban context also means fa'afafine experience less need to downplay sexual expressions of femininity (Dolgoy 2000, 183). Thus, in the westernised locale of Apia, fa'afafine are more able to enact the particularly sexualised version of femininity that emerges from western discourses.

account that this participant never attempted to embody femininity in Samoa, gladly adopted a masculine heterosexuality on first arrival in New Zealand, and now presents as masculine and identifies as a gay man as well as fa'afafine.

¹¹ A similar situation applies in Tonga, where James refers to an older fakafafine of high status who mostly lives overseas. "I was told that they had sexual relations with men, "but only in Sydney so he doesn't disgrace his family here"" (1994, 47).

Adapting to the new sex/gender

Because rural fa'afafine enact their femininity through labour (and in Samoa, even domestic labour is relatively physical), they often develop a somewhat muscular physique. Urban fa'afafine, whose expressions of femininity are based more on embodied sexuality, may make derogatory remarks about their rural counterparts being more physically 'masculine' (Borch 1998, 37).



Image 3: Cindy's cabaret show

Cindy and her dancers present a more western and more sexualised version of femininity. As one of Samoa's most successful fa'afafine, Cindy is a significant role model for many younger fa'afafine growing up in Samoa.

However, the labour that village fa'afafine undertake renders them more feminine in the Samoan sense because they serve their families rather than 'run wild'. The lives of these fa'afafine thus more closely resemble the lives of most Samoan women, while the femininity of urban fa'afafine is based more on a western-influenced presentation of the self. One participant observed that while increased sexualisation and independence indicate increasing confidence among the fa'afafine population, they are also drawn further away from 'traditional' Samoan ideologies, which contributes to some of the forms of marginalisation that fa'afafine experience in contemporary Samoa:

So what do you think that, sort of, migration and level of westernisation that has happened in Samoa and does seem to have increased dramatically in the last sort of twenty years or so, I mean, what's your perception of how that would have changed life for fa'afafine in Samoa in general?

With fa'afafine, initially it's kept them sort of at bay, yet because it is so mobile, people are coming back, so it has changed, because there's a yearning for being like them out there, being, you know, so you're not so Samoan but more western, which the whole sort of drag kind of, you know, learning to cash in on, like Cindy's show – you know, she's sort of been out and around and she's coming back, so with her visibility and that strength, it's sort of changed people's ideas of fa'afafine, and young fa'afafine wanting to be like that, as opposed to the more traditional role of fa'afafine where you are sort of ... So, you know, the globalisation has meant that it's ... broadened their horizon in what they sort of expect and see out of life and what they want to achieve, whereas before it was really narrow – it was only there. Yet there's that sort of thing happening, like, all over the world, with sort of like small developing countries, it's that kind of like, 'I want to be a star', the whole western influence.

And do you think that's influenced the lack of acceptance of fa'afafine in Samoa, that sort of move into that drag queen ...?

Yeah, well, it's sort of ... for traditional people, and for older people who see it, they have seen the shift, and because often it's such a focus, like that media do sort of zone in on it, and it is so visual, and it's drawing attention to yourself, which isn't a very traditional Pacific thing to do, is not to draw attention to yourself. All of a sudden you've got people who sort of are dressing just that little bit more out there, which means that people, you know, you're attracting attention, and that's almost a big no-no, so yeah, of course, it has changed, the people's perception, because all of a sudden you're drawing attention to yourself unnecessarily, as it were, and that's not a good thing, so therefore that means that if they're doing that, they're not good people.

Right, yeah, or good Samoans.

So, whilst it's good for the actual person, it's because they actually feel validated, because everyone's looking at them, for whatever reason, so whether or not it's good or bad, it's like, 'Look at me, I'm a star' kind of thing ... so they feel good about it, and yet the others ... and the mockery comes with it, and the phobic comments, and that's part and parcel, but you just learn to shoulder them.

While urban fa'afafine thus enact a less 'Samoan' model of femininity, many fa'afafine talk about westernised contexts in ways that suggest that there is now more opportunity for them to realise an always existent sexuality. It would indeed be easy to argue that previously repressed fa'afafine sexualities have now been liberated as a result of the anonymity of urban contexts, the independence offered by wage labour, and the introduction of western discourses of personal freedom and individual rights. However, rather than think of fa'afafine sexuality as having been 'liberated', I suggest that fa'afafine sexuality has been constructed differently over the years, and that it is only now that Samoan understandings of gender have incorporated the possibility that sexuality is fundamentally constitutive of identity (Foucault 1981) – especially (but not exclusively) fa'afafine identities.

As Samoan social structures continue to shift in response to western economic and cultural models, new contexts emerge which may require further changes in identification for fa'afafine. Because creating families is a social imperative for Samoans, it is fairly inevitable that Samoan men will eventually leave their fa'afafine 'wives', who are distinguished by their inability to fulfil this central role (Mageo 1992, 453; Dolgoy 2000, 185). For previous generations, this 'abandonment' may not have been especially problematic. Fa'afafine would always have a place within the 'aiga and, as I suggested in the previous chapter, it seems that marrying and having children themselves was more of a possibility for previous generations of fa'afafine. However, as I have discussed, it is increasingly unlikely that contemporary fa'afafine will consider marriage a viable option, and as younger generations of Samoans move away from their village homes in increasing numbers, fa'afafine cannot necessarily rely on their nieces or nephews to care for them in their old age (Dolgoy 2000, 192).

As a possible consequence of these changes, some fa'afafine seem to be adjusting their criteria for potential partners in ways that may problematise their representations of themselves as 'heterosexually feminine'. One participant in Samoa who identified as feminine, and had a relatively ambiguously gendered presentation, expressed a possible preference for a gay pālagi man, pragmatically expecting that there would be greater chances of such a relationship being more long-term. This was explicitly articulated in terms of pālagi men being more independent of their families, and implicitly related to the fact that someone who identified as gay 'would be more likely to endure the difficulties of a relationship with a 'queen''. This was echoed by another participant in Samoa, who was quite adamant that there was more chance of commitment from a bisexual – especially a pālagi bisexual – man. That these fa'afafine were so concerned about having emotionally founded relationships that would endure the test of time appears to have contributed to a shift of potential partners to include gay- or bi-identified men, even though this would have seemed to compromise their sense of themselves as feminine, in that such partners would be likely to be attracted to them precisely because they are 'men' (or at least male).¹²

Understanding fa'afafine through new discourses

The manner in which western discourses have worked their way through Samoan understandings of gender and sexuality has impacted not only on how fa'afafine enact their identities, but also on how Samoans understand these identities. As I have discussed, many Samoans fear that as a result of vaguely sensationalist representations of fa'afafine, Samoa will become mythologised as a 'gay paradise', suggesting that Samoans have begun to adopt more western understandings of fa'afafine as homosexual. This understanding is reinforced by the fact that the 'new generation' of sexualised fa'afafine increasingly resemble models of homosexuality that Samoans are encountering from overseas. Significant exposure to these notions of homosexuality also coincided with HIV/AIDS awareness. A combination of the global moral panic that accompanied the spread of HIV/AIDS and, at a local level, a strong conservative Christian sensibility, has led to marked disapproval of anyone in

¹² Although the attraction of pālagi men may also be related to economic security, as Besnier suggests in relation to Tongan fakaleiti (2002, 553), this was not mentioned by any participants in this research. Further, the articulated preference for gay or bisexual men on the part of these participants is somewhat at odds with the desire Tongan fakaleiti have to *marry* pālagi men (Besnier 2002, 553).

Samoa who might be understood as ‘homosexual’ – the obvious target being fa’afafine (Drozdown-St Christian 2002, 151, 200).¹³

I became aware of the way in which Samoans are beginning to incorporate western discourses into their understandings of fa’afafine identities when I encountered problems in Samoa with translation, which included not only direct linguistic incompatibilities, but extended to difficulties with conceptual distinctions as well. During my time in Samoa, I was often asked why I was doing my research *here*, as opposed to anywhere else, to which I would respond that fa’afafine are unique to Samoa. This answer was frequently met with the confident assertion that there are fa’afafine all over the world, and thus there was no reason for me to focus on Samoa. Even some fa’afafine would talk about ‘the fa’afafines abroad’ and, when asked for clarification, would say ‘the gays, the transvestites, the closets, the drags’. While the word ‘fa’afafine’ literally translates as ‘in the manner of a woman’, one of the more common working definitions is ‘effeminate man’. Fa’afafine are thus often conflated with the ‘effeminate men’ who do indeed exist in most societies. The often subtle differences between these gendered and sexual identities simply are not important for most people, Samoan or not – even, apparently, if they are fa’afafine.¹⁴

As well as the incursion of western discourses into Samoa, attitudes towards fa’afafine are also influenced by western discourses *about* Samoa. While the apparent concerns regarding the erotic/exotic understandings of Samoa discussed in Chapter 2 do seem contradicted by the perpetuation of the ‘dusky maiden’ imagery in tourist literature and performances, this evocative image is part of a highly managed discourse. As the ‘dusky maiden’ exists in this discourse, she is always contained in an area defined as ‘culture’, with clearly delineated boundaries, from which pālagi tourists may observe but rarely participate on anything other than the most superficial level. The ‘dusky maiden’ is thus an alluring image, but not one that is intended to imply that young Samoan women are actually sexually

¹³ There is a distinct absence in this thesis of consideration of the existence of gay-identified Samoans in contemporary Samoa. This is in part because there was not a particularly large population of gay Samoans in Samoa at the time of this research (Dolgoy 2000, 167), and in part because the focus of my research on fa’afafine did not lead me to explore the issue of gay identities in depth while in Samoa. However, I did come across indications that some Samoans are beginning to reject identification as fa’afafine in favour of being ‘gay’, even in Samoa (see also Drozdown-St Christian 2002, 151), a phenomenon that warrants further investigation.

¹⁴ I often encountered the same difficulty when discussing my research with pālagi outside Samoa, where people frequently unproblematically correlated fa’afafine with gay men or transvestites – they are, after all, males who have sex with other males, or males who wear feminine clothing respectively, and my theoretically nuanced distinctions were likely to have been seen as quibbling over semantics.

available in any real sense. Any potentially erotic charge that might be evoked by the invitation offered through this image is reinscribed as part of the rhetoric of the ‘friendly smiling islander’, which is similarly used to market Samoa to the world.

However, the ‘management’ that is exercised in relation to the sexualised images of Samoan women is often not possible in the case of fa’afafine, many of whom ‘run wild’, flaunt their sexuality, and attract the attention and curiosity of outsiders and tourists. Travel writers are beginning to focus on fa’afafine as an ‘attraction’ in Samoa (e.g. Percy 2002). In the case of travel articles about Samoa in gay publications (e.g. Miles 2001), it appears that Samoan fears of pālagi fascination with fa’afafine resulting in Samoa becoming part of the gay tourist circuit are not unfounded. These writers, who usually visit Samoa only fleetingly, focus mainly on the more visible ‘drag queen’ element in Apia, while the less overt fa’afafine in their lāvalava and t-shirts blend unnoticed into the general population. Overlooking the continued significance of labour in most fa’afafine’s enactments of femininity, and often neglecting to mention the less flamboyant fa’afafine one regularly sees in the streets, shops and markets of Apia, the middle aged school teachers, or the family members who care for their aging parents in the villages, the authors of tourist, documentary and magazine texts (and often even academic works) tend to recognise only those enacting a western-inflected sexualised femininity as fa’afafine.¹⁵ This preoccupation with the sexuality of fa’afafine on the part of both tourists and researchers then feeds back into Samoan fears that Samoans will continue to be represented as an over-sexed population.



“ Some of the playful charme of Samoa ”

Image 4: Postcard acquired while in Samoa
The text on the back reads ‘Faafafine – a lovely form of life in paradise’. This postcard illustrates the model of fa’afafine femininity tends to be the most visible for pālagi tourists in Samoa.

¹⁵ See Chapter 2 for a full discussion of the discourses of gender and sexuality contained in these various texts.

Globalisation and marginalisation of fa'afafine in Samoa

As I have suggested, Samoans in general have little problem with the gender of fa'afafine being expressed through feminine labour. Fa'afafine are a part of everyday life in Apia. They work in travel agents, they serve in bars, and they shop in the local supermarkets without attracting undue attention. However, in spite of this apparent social tolerance, the reactions of many Samoans to my research ranged from mild concern to overt disgust. I first encountered the full force of this ambivalence in Samoa in an incident that I mentioned in Chapter 3. I unexpectedly met up with a Samoan acquaintance in a street in Apia, who asked me how my research was progressing. He then took the ensuing conversation as a chance to articulate his opinion that fa'afafine were revolting, deviant, and the cause of AIDS in Samoa, yet only weeks earlier he had been at my home with his soccer team, one of whom was fa'afafine, treating her like 'one of the boys'. Having outlined how shifts in gender construction have influenced how both fa'afafine and other Samoans understand what it means to be fa'afafine, I can now make some moves towards explaining the apparent paradox contained within this event, and in Samoans' ambivalence towards fa'afafine in general.

This paradox emerges from the convergence of a range of discourses that exist simultaneously in contemporary Samoa. The fa'afafine who offer the service (either labour or money) to family and society that is expected from all Samoans (Sua'ali'i 2001, 177) without drawing attention to themselves go relatively unremarked. Thus, the fa'afafine soccer player who sliced bread and dished up corned beef at the after-match function fulfilled the expectations of a 'good Samoan' – in this instance, a particularly feminine good Samoan. While fa'afafine's feminine labour continues to be appreciated (and even expected) in many contexts, it is the more recent emphasis on sexuality, especially what is understood as 'deviant' sexuality, which renders them problematic for most Samoans. Although brothers may exert pressure on a fa'afafine sibling to alter her sexual habits, they are unlikely to attempt to force her to conform to masculine gender roles in terms of labour (Poasa 1992, 49). A participant I interviewed stated that at the boys' school she attended in Samoa, fa'afafine were punished for wearing make-up, while also being expected to keep the staff room clean. This apparently contradictory acceptance of some enactments of femininity but not others makes more sense when it is remembered that the self in Samoa is understood as relational, contextual, and multi-faceted, and that Samoans assess a particular aspect or action of a person in relation to the relevant context (Shore 1982, 137-146, 181-182). Thus, a sibling will always be part of the family, or a good travel agent will always be patronised, while an overtly promiscuous or sexual fa'afafine will be condemned – even if they are the same person.

Contemporary Samoan attitudes towards recent instantiations of fa'afafine sexuality should not, however, be seen as solely related to the importation of western homophobia or the historical eroticisation of Samoa. They can also be traced back to the Samoan prioritising of conformity to social expectations over self-gratification (Shore 1981, 195-195), and the assumption that public controls are needed to contain 'private passions and desires' (Shore 1982, 118, 156-158). Sexuality is strongly associated with the aggressive and selfish aspects of people, and is contrasted with socially controlled and 'cultured' acceptable actions (Shore 1982, 228-229). Thus, any display of sexuality in a public context will incur social disapproval. This is especially so for women; while "the male is encouraged tacitly to sexual activity and impulse expression, women gain their prestige from control, from what they manage *not* to do sexually" (Shore 1982, 232). Thus, Samoan disapproval of the newly sexualised, western influenced, femininity of fa'afafine may be seen to emerge from an already existent cultural tendency to devalue the expression of sexuality by women (i.e. feminine sexuality) outside of very specific and limited contexts.¹⁶

(Re)locating fa'afafine within fa'aSamoa

In spite of the incursion of western discourses and artefacts into Samoa in recent years, fa'afafine continue to exist as a unique identity, largely because the 'cultural reality' within which they exist is changing, but has not been dismantled (Herdt 1994a, 490). Globalisation has taken hold in Samoa relatively slowly, due to the nation's geographical isolation and the scarcity of economically valuable resources. This has meant that not only has Samoan culture not been as thoroughly fragmented as those of other indigenous peoples, but also that Samoans have had the opportunity of seeing that maintenance of cultural continuity can provide a solid base for identity formation. Furthermore, as leadership in Samoa is the preserve of the older and more conservative members of the society, change tends to be carefully considered and cautiously undertaken (Holmes 1987). Yet the monitored importation of new ideas and material goods is welcomed, as Samoan cosmology constructs Samoa as a forward-looking and progressive society (St. Christian 1994, 46). As Paul Shankman (2004) indicates, Samoans have been open to adopting pālagi ideologies and cultures, and even entering into relationships with pālagi, since the time of first contact, but this is a process in which Samoans have had their own motivations which are not always apparent to pālagi.

¹⁶ It may be that there is also a cultural predisposition towards associating fa'afafine with 'immoral' sexuality, in that fa'afafine are inherently unable to bear children, and many Samoans relate female (feminine) barrenness to promiscuity (Mead 1943/1928, 78; Holmes 1987, 81).

In a process that both mirrors wider social hybridisation of western and Samoan cultures and concepts, yet is also specific to their situations, fa'afafine are retaining distinctly Samoan identities while also developing a more political voice. Even as contemporary Samoans frequently seek to 'disown' fa'afafine, fa'afafine themselves draw on aspects of 'traditional' fa'aSamoa as a solid foundation on which to construct themselves as sexual and gendered persons. In contemporary urban contexts and overseas, many fa'afafine continue to gain a sense of purpose and pride from the traditional service that they provide for their 'aiga and the fact that they are "as accountable as any other member of the family and society" (Dolgoy 2000, 141). Fa'afafine, especially those who have been educated elsewhere, specifically state that being fa'afafine and Samoan gives their lives the 'structured stability' that they perceive as lacking among gay men they compare themselves with overseas (Dolgoy 2000, 171).

While fa'afafine consistently draw on their understanding that they have a place within 'traditional' Samoan culture, they do not perceive globalisation as the instigator of their marginalisation and do not tend to romanticise pre-contact times as somehow better for fa'afafine (although some do indicate the coming of the missionaries as the foundation of many of the contemporary negative perceptions of fa'afafine). Rather, they suggest that other Samoans simply need to be educated, to practice Christian acceptance, and to realise that fa'afafine are an integral part of fa'aSamoa. There is also little suggestion among fa'afafine communities that the utilisation of western concepts and artefacts in enactments of fa'afafine identities has rendered these identities 'inauthentic'.¹⁷ The 'tradition' which fa'afafine call on to construct and represent their identities as uniquely Samoan is not "an inert object, an inheritance passively passed from one generation to the next, but is ... a symbolic constitution of the past in the present" (Jolly 1992, 59; see also Linnekin 1990, 161). The manner in which fa'afafine use and enact culture is thus a process: a habitus constructed in its iteration and reiteration, which is not so much a set of rules, but rather a range of dispositions (Bourdieu 1977, 72-73). Understanding culture in this way allows the 'authenticity' of fa'afafine to rest not in the rigid repetition of 'traditional' practices, but

¹⁷ There is a particularly notable caveat to this statement, which is related to the issue of feminising medical technologies. While Dolgoy suggests that gender reassignment surgery does not necessarily change one's status from fa'afafine to woman (2000, 138), there are indications of controversy over the participation of 'off-shore' fa'afafine who are on hormones in Samoan 'drag pageants'. The 2001 Tutti Frutti pageant featured a category in which contestants were bare-chested in order to reveal that they were 'totally male', followed by a category in which contestants presented themselves as 'the total woman' (pers. comm.), suggesting that juxtaposition of both masculinity and femininity within the same body is integral to fa'afafine identities. Besnier also mentions that Tongan fakaleiti are scornful of pageant contestants who come from overseas and have obviously utilised feminising medical technologies (2002, 553). However, it is unclear from his discussion whether this reaction is because this 'enhanced' femininity is inauthentic, or because it gives these non-local contestants an unfair advantage in the context of the pageant.

rather in their *dispositions* towards acting and reacting in particular ways in relation to both familiar and new contexts.

Redeeming fa'afafine at the beauty pageant

The fa'afafine version of the western institution of the beauty pageant provides an example of this synthesis of western and Samoan ideologies, and of the cultural and political. The apolitical pure spectacle of the western pageant has been adopted and adapted by fa'afafine not only as a forum to publicly display their feminine identities and skills, but also as a means of redeeming their reputations and claiming a location within Samoan society and culture. Fa'afafine pageants are now held two or three times a year in Samoa, and are well attended by local Samoans. The social status of the pageants is both reinforced and evidenced by the fact that they are sponsored by local businesses, assisted by volunteers from the highly respected Peace Corps, and patronised by those with high political and



Image 5: Pageant contestant dances the siva

This performance showcases the skill of contestants at the siva, a dance traditionally undertaken by the village tāupou, and epitomising Samoan ideals of femininity.

cultural status. These pageants afford considerable entertainment for Samoan audiences, and thus provide an opportunity for fa'afafine to participate in the public performance that is an integral part of Samoan life and identity (Keene 1978, 61). The annual Teuila Festival, a showcase for all aspects of Samoan culture, often features a fa'afafine pageant, indicating that fa'afafine are increasingly recognised as a tourist draw card. The fact that news coverage of the various shows put on by fa'afafine also invariably reports on the amount of tourists in the audiences suggests that Samoans are becoming increasingly aware of the economic benefits of these pageants (Jackson 2002; Tavita 2002); although the concept of fa'afafine as a tourist attraction is not universally welcomed.

While thus providing a form of entertainment for both locals and tourists, the pageants also act as a means of rehabilitating fa'afafine's social standing by virtue of the fact that proceeds are frequently donated to Mapuifagalele (the local rest home) or other charities. The fact that the rest home is often chosen as the recipient of this support is in keeping with the ideologies of fa'aSamoa that espouse

caring for the elderly (Dolgoy 2000, 287).¹⁸ That pageant organisers and participants return a large part of their profits to the Samoan community is also a realisation of fa'aSamoa. It is through generosity that Samoans gain the 'social credit' that accords them prestige (Keene 1978, 150–151), which is exemplified in the fact that a good matai is assessed by their ability to gather *and* redistribute material goods (Ortner 1981, 364). The manner in which fa'afafine draw on these indigenous ideologies to both perform their 'Samoanness' and to further their own cause demonstrates how 'culture', whether based on 'invented traditions' or not, becomes not only the habitus of unconscious actions, but can also be more explicitly political (Appadurai 1996, 44).

While the ideals of the pageants – displays of feminine skills designed to entertain audiences and raise funds for redistribution – are in keeping with the ideologies of fa'aSamoa, it must be recognised that these ideals are often at odds with the reality. To some extent, the pageants represent a microcosm of the paradoxes, contradictions, opportunities, and tensions of contemporary fa'afafine subjectivities.

Providing an opportunity to publicly display femininity in both the directly imported category of 'evening wear', and the traditionally-inspired category of the siva, the pageants are a realisation of the manner in which contemporary fa'afafine identities exist at the juncture of Samoan and western gender discourses.¹⁹ However, on the night, actual performances often come to pieces.

Contestants whose dancing or modelling lack skill may attempt to garner audience favour with humorous behaviour that is frequently, and often quite explicitly, sexual. These raunchy 'slapstick' performances echo the 'off colour' humour that is



Image 6: Pageant contestant in evening wear
The 'evening wear' category shows the influence of western beauty pageants on the Samoan fa'afafine model.

¹⁸ It is notable that this ideology is 'traditionally' realised by caring for the elderly with the 'aiga. The development of institutional care is still quite new in Samoa, and the need for a rest home is another indication of how the 'aiga system has shifted in recent times.

¹⁹ The inclusion of the traditional siva is in marked contrast with the Tongan pageants discussed by Besnier, in which 'traditional' performance is rarely included in the actual competition, and usually only in parody (2002, 549). This is in keeping with Besnier's suggestion that fakaleiti use their pageants to mark themselves as 'non-local' (although with some ambivalence in terms of the use of language) (2002; 2003), whereas for Samoan fa'afafine, the pageants seem to draw more explicitly on *both* indigenous and imported discourses.

often part of Samoan entertainment, and such behaviour may be seen as acceptable from fa'afafine because they are, after all, not girls. However, this use of risqué humour also serves to reinforce stereotypes of fa'afafine being 'crude', or something of a joke, echoing Besnier's observation that Tongan fakaleiti pageants often allow a space for audiences to ridicule participants (2002, 539). For Samoan fa'afafine, the utilisation of lewd humour in a public context results in them once again failing to measure up to the standards that might allow them to be recognised as akin to (the ideal of) Samoan women.

The potential for reading the pageants in various ways was illustrated by the comments of two Samoan fa'afafine. One stated that:

... beauty pageants in Samoa is quite a popular thing, it's become a good pastime to go and see the fa'afafines, because it's a lot of fun, to them they find that it's quite funny to see, and the fa'afafine are quite ... they're real comedians.

This interpretation emphasises the social value of the comedic and entertainment aspects of the pageants. However, the other participant suggested that:

this is something that people go to so that they can laugh at the fa'afafines that are in it, you know, I will say that they are abusing their identity as fa'afafine. They allow people to say things about them. You know, they allow themselves to expose themselves half nakedly, in front of all the people. Where is respect? That is the culture, Samoan culture – respect for others, respect the culture, respect Christian religions here in Samoa. That is not respect, and that is one other reason why it created so much fuss about fa'afafine in Samoa.

The manner in which the pageants are used to construct a public and (contingently) acceptable social space for fa'afafine is part of a wider incipient development of a form of 'identity politics' among Samoan fa'afafine. This 'gentle social movement' (Dolgoy, 2000) echoes western queer politics in that it also emerged from attempts to counter social marginalisation. It is largely the Samoan association of fa'afafine with the HIV/AIDS pandemic that has led to a greater politicisation of fa'afafine social groups (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2000; Drozdow-St Christian 2002, 200). The public forum offered by the beauty pageants allows a platform for more outspoken fa'afafine to protest the continued belief that fa'afafine are the major HIV/AIDS carriers in Samoa (Cluny Macpherson, pers. comm.), and if not donated to Mapuifagalele, a share of a pageant's proceeds is likely to be contributed to local HIV/AIDS prevention groups.

The adoption of western models of identity politics is also implied in the manner in which some fa'afafine have taken on the word 'mala' as a more vernacular term to refer to themselves, a word that

originates from the Samoan word for ‘cursed’ (Pulotu-Endemann 1993, 32; Dolgoy 2000, 164-165). Fa’afafine appropriation of this term, and redefinition of it in a more positive light so as to have connotations of “a gentle disaster waiting to happen” (Dolgoy 2000, 165), has obvious correlations with the reclamation of terms such as ‘queer’ or ‘nigger’, with similar implications of a politicised resignifying of derogatory terms.

However, as with the use of all western concepts, this adoption of identity politics is occurring in a specifically Samoan way. More than one informant stated that the formation of subcultures such as those they saw in the exclusively gay clubs of New Zealand created an artificial, exclusionary environment, suggesting that for fa’afafine, social isolation, even of a voluntary nature, is not desirable.²⁰ Fa’afafine seek to assert their identities as *part* of wider Samoan society, maintaining understandings of the Samoan self as relational and sociocentric. Furthermore, an overtly confrontational political movement would be significantly unSamoan, whereas the manner in which fa’afafine manoeuvre themselves into positions where they are likely to gain recognition from others, rather than overtly demanding it, echoes wider political cultures and cultural politics in Samoa (Shore 1982). In spite of suggestions that a flourishing and political gay or lesbian community in Third World nations is evidence of the ‘liberation’ of same-sex sexualities (e.g. Drucker 1996), I would suggest that such a community of fa’afafine in Samoa would be antithetical to the very ‘Samoan-ness’ on which fa’afafine identities are founded. Dolgoy’s historical research (2000) suggests that the situation of contemporary fa’afafine rests on the formation and continuation of specifically fa’afafine groups, who provided protection and mentoring for those young fa’afafine who found themselves disconnected from their families. While this suggests the formation of a ‘subculture’, Dolgoy is clear that the socialisation that took place in these communities very much reinforced the values of fa’aSamoa, and that these groups actively sought to be part of Samoan society from their inception (2000, 310). As one participant explained, even though the rhetoric of individual rights has entered Samoa through various media, it has only been adopted inasmuch as it was commensurate with existent Samoan practices and ideologies:

Do you have a boyfriend at the moment?

No.

²⁰ Besnier notes that Tongan fakaleiti scorn western gay identities because of their foregrounding of sexuality (2002, 554). This may contribute to fa’afafine problematising of western gay subcultures, and would certainly make it difficult for such subcultures to form in contemporary Samoa.

No ... and you've had one in the past ...?

Well, you know, I haven't had any sort of serious connections with anyone. I think it's part of our lives as fa'afafines in Samoa, where – I mean I've seen movies from America where fa'afafines [i.e. gay men] in America have sort of put their foot down and said 'Well, you can have your boyfriend' – like, to a sister – 'you can bring your boyfriend home, and he can bring his girlfriend, and why can't I bring my boyfriend into our home and be accepted?' I think it's, it's an issue that I'm interested in, but I think in Samoa there are things that don't need to be put up front like that. If people accept it, maybe silent, but I don't think it'll work here. I can't explain that. Maybe it's Western culture, where even families can be very independent – they're very linked here. I don't think it will ever happen here.

Narrating tradition

In this chapter, I have argued that contemporary Samoan fa'afafine draw on a range of discourses – those of 'traditional' Samoan culture, those of Christian and contemporary Samoan society, and those increasingly available from non-Samoan sources, in constructing and maintaining their identities. As Arjun Appadurai suggests, until recently it was possible to argue “that traditions provided a relatively finite set of 'possible' lives, and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices”, but today “more persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of possible lives offered by the mass media in all their forms” (1991, 198). That fa'afafine in Samoa are only interpellated by some of these images, identities, concepts, and discourses is a result of their particular experiences and understandings. As 'effeminate men', fa'afafine relate to other males who act in feminine ways, such as the drag queens of popular film, the gay couples of American dramas, and the transsexuals of medical discourses. These images and identities become resources on which fa'afafine draw, along with dancing the siva, caring for their grandparents, and weaving mats, in the constructions and enactments of their subjectivities.

Jocelyn Linnekin states that “culture is not like a rock, which ostensibly can pass through many hands and remain unchanged, but is rather like a story that is tailored and embellished in the process of transmission” (1990, 161). Culture can be understood as the ground in which identity is germinated, and which is, in turn, reinscribed through the enactment of identities. This reinscription occurs in the stories we tell of our lives in order to make sense of them for ourselves and for others (Somers and Gibson 1994, 38), stories which are always shaped by the structures of wider social narratives or cultural stories. However, the constant 're-telling' of culture allows for 'embellishment', and presumably also omissions, different emphases, and all the other 'slippages' related to the transmission of narratives. This echoes Pierre Bourdieu's idea of habitus – which might be thought of as the

embodiment of culture – being sedimented through repetition (1990, 17), but also open to change by virtue of the fact that this sedimentation results not in rules, but rather in dispositions (1977, 72-73). Culture, as a (at times imperfectly) retold story similarly instils *dispositions* towards certain actions, rather than the *rules* that are often suggested in works that reify cultural ideals. Thus, in Samoa, the introduction of western concepts and artefacts are accommodated within fa’afafine lives according to a set of pre-existing cultural dispositions, and woven into the continually retold social narrative of Samoan culture in ways that change some aspects, but also allow it to be understood as a ‘retelling’ of the same story.

However, it is apparent that in some cases the contradictions between possible aspects of what might be considered a fa’afafine identity cannot be sustained. Thus, in contemporary Samoa, for a fa’afafine to marry and have children would severely problematise their ‘fa’afafine-ness’ in ways that might not have been the case fifty years ago. Yet both the married fa’afafine of former generations, and the contemporary fa’afafine who sees marriage as a contradiction of her femininity are, within their respective historical contexts, ‘authentic’. That those who identify as fa’afafine today construct themselves as continuous with, and yet different from, the fa’afafine of Samoa’s history illustrates Linnekin’s assertion that “tradition is the contemporary interpretation of the past, rather than something passively received” (1990, 152).

The influx of new conceptual frameworks and modes of gendering has added new layers of complexity to perceptions and understandings of fa’afafine in contemporary Samoa. The western-influenced sexualisation of fa’afafine enactments of femininity appears to have become linked to a more Samoan disapproval of public displays of feminine sexuality, leading to cross-culturally reinforced disapproval of fa’afafine as people who, at times blatantly, express a feminine sexuality. However, fa’afafine are also clearly understood to be male, and the often overt sexual orientation towards men that they now express is condemned both Biblically and through a more recently imported association with HIV/AIDS. Somewhat paradoxically, the contemporary marginalisation of fa’afafine emerges from the fact that they are feminine *and* the fact that they are male.

What I am thus suggesting is that the ambivalence shown towards fa’afafine in contemporary Samoa is far more than just a misplaced homophobia originating in missionary values targeted at a traditionally accepted group. The lived experiences of, and Samoan attitudes to, contemporary fa’afafine can be seen

as a complex reaction to a complicated set of circumstances. These include, but are not limited to: the impact of globalisation on the Samoan political economy; shifts in how Samoan gender in general is enacted; considerable changes in the construction and expression of fa'afafine identities; and the globalisation of sexual discourses, together with the continued existence of 'traditional' (although modified) attitudes about gender and sexuality, understandings of the self, and perceptions of the centrality of fa'aSamoa in everyday actions. In this chapter, I have set out how these various factors impact on the lives and identities of those fa'afafine who live in Samoa. The act of migration introduces a new set of considerations into the processes of constructing and enacting fa'afafine identities. In the following chapters I will discuss how the identities which are germinated in the complex and shifting ground of Samoan culture and society adapt to life in the new, but no more stable, discursive and ideological environment of New Zealand.

PART III

FA'AFINE IN NEW ZEALAND

CHAPTER 6

“YOU HARDLY SEE ANY GROWN UP MEN DOING THAT SORT OF THING OVER HERE”

FA’AFAFINE MIGRANTS’ INITIAL EXPERIENCES OF NEW ZEALAND

If the incursion of western discourses and shifts in Samoan understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality has led to new forms of ambivalence and layers of complexity for fa’afafine in Samoa, tensions appear to be even greater – and also considerably different – for those who migrate. Although fa’afafine are not unproblematically accepted in Samoa, there remains a level of cultural comprehension of their gender that is lost for those fa’afafine who leave the islands. Shifting from Samoa to New Zealand is, in very literal terms, a movement from one cultural ‘field’ to another in which a lack of shared culture may render fa’afafine’s practices unintelligible to others (Bourdieu 1990, 58). Admittedly, the same might be said of any expression of gender, or any other aspect of subjectivity, that is constructed in one cultural context and then shifted to another. For normatively gendered Samoans who migrate to New Zealand and enact their masculinity or femininity in non-Samoan contexts, areas of potential misunderstanding include the fact that it is taboo for opposite gendered siblings or cousins to discuss aspects of sexuality in each others’ presence, which may be problematic if they attend classes on reproduction together (Ngan-Woo 1985, 18). There are a myriad of other areas of cross-cultural differences in enactments of gender, but this example serves to illustrate how biology classes that are taken for granted because of western gender norms can be uncomfortable for Samoan students. However, the fact that normatively gendered Samoan men and women understand themselves and can be understood as largely analogous to pālagi men and women provides a basis for cross-cultural comprehension – it is more a matter of *how* these genders are enacted rather than *what* they are that is potentially problematic.

For fa’afafine, this is not the case. Almost all fa’afafine know before they migrate, or soon after arriving in New Zealand, that there is minimal cultural space for males who do not understand themselves as

‘men’, yet do not necessarily want to be ‘women’. Various strategies have been developed to deal with this. As I suggested in the previous chapter, fa’afafine’s status as ‘effeminate men’ can result in a disposition towards identifying with ‘effeminate men’ in other societies. In New Zealand, this can include both transgendered and gay male populations. The relatively recent foregrounding of sexuality as a constituent aspect of identity, and shifts to an almost exclusive sexual orientation towards masculine men, also provides a foundation for fa’afafine to locate themselves in a homologous relationship with males who are sexually oriented towards males, especially as this is also a marginalised sexuality in most societies. For those fa’afafine who adopt the more marginal identities associated with ‘effeminate men’ in the west, there is some basis for pālagi to ‘comprehend’ them as sexual/gendered beings, even if this comprehension may be inflected with disapproval. The availability of feminising medical technologies results in a new set of resources on which fa’afafine may draw to enact femininity, and for some opens up the possibility that they can alter their bodies so as to pass as women in most social contexts. While some fa’afafine who migrate may come to understand themselves as gay men, transvestites, drag queens, transsexuals, or even ‘women’, for others such identifications may not be taken up, or may be held simultaneously with a continued (or rediscovered, or even newly found) understanding of themselves as fa’afafine. This necessarily entails enacting feminine behaviours with a male body, and those who maintain or adopt identification as fa’afafine often do not pass as any immediately recognisable sexuality or gender within western paradigms.

In this section of the thesis, I discuss these various processes in detail. While the strategies utilised by fa’afafine to maintain femininity have involved both adoption and rejection of various western sexualities and/or genders, the stories of migration told by the participants in this research were marked by initial attempts to conform to western expectations of a hetero-normative correlation between sex, gender, and sexuality. In this chapter, I first ground the experiences of migrant fa’afafine in the wider story of the Samoan diaspora, with a particular focus on how fa’aSamoa has been maintained in, and adapted to, the New Zealand context. As I explain, fa’afafine’s motivations for migration echo those of all Samoans, although the movement from one cultural field to another entails processes of adjustment that are unique to fa’afafine. Almost all participants, especially those who migrated during or after adolescence, to varying degrees ‘reinvented’ themselves as masculine heterosexual men. This was almost inevitably undertaken with the encouragement, or even at the instigation, of family. Both participants and families generally understood this ‘masculinisation’ as necessary for survival in a society that tends to recognise only binarily opposed and biologically

founded genders. While in most cases, participants who now identified and/or expressed themselves as fa'afafine remembered this initial enactment of hetero-masculinity as a 'denial' of their fa'afafine-ness, this should not, as I will explain, be understood as analogous to the 'distress' of being 'a woman trapped in a man's body' that is articulated in so many transsexual narratives. Rather, the manner in which participants spoke of these early years in New Zealand suggests an ability to prioritise various facets of their subjectivities in response to the requirements of particular situations. These acts of prioritisation reveal that the 'truth' of fa'afafine subjectivities does not reside in sex/gender to the extent that it is understood to do so in western subjectivities.

Samoan migration

Inasmuch as the changes that fa'afafine identities have undergone in Samoa can only be fully understood in relation to wider structural and ideological shifts in Samoan society itself, so the movement of fa'afafine to New Zealand is inextricably linked to the larger migratory flows of Samoans throughout the Pacific. Samoans and other Pacific Islanders have a high migration rate and a significantly 'transnational citizenship' (Macpherson and Macpherson 1999, 277). As many, if not more people of Pacific Island ethnicities live in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States as on the islands themselves (Bedford 1997, 46-47; see Kallen 1982 specifically in relation to Samoa). The primary motivation for migration tends to be economic (Kearney 1986), and in the case of Samoans, this economic motivation originated during World War II, when large numbers of American military were stationed in Samoa and introduced the island society to the concept of a cash economy (Va'a 2001, 18). In the post-war period, this economy could not be maintained within the islands, and throughout the 1950's, '60's and '70's steadily increasing numbers of Samoans migrated in search of wage labour (Macpherson 2004, 167). Particularly close economic, cultural and kinship links are maintained between Samoan migrants and those who remain in the islands (Bedford 1997, 40). Current theorising proposes that communities can no longer be thought of as bounded 'cultural groups' and that it is increasingly difficult to conceive of cultures as tied to specific geographic locations (Kearney 1995, 557). Both these comments are certainly true of the Samoan community (Kallen 1982, 24-25; Macpherson 1997, 95-96), although I would suggest that the *idea* of a geographic origin or 'home' remains important (Hall 1990, 231).¹

¹ See Va'a (2001) for a comprehensive review of the Samoan migration literature.

Historically, New Zealand has been a popular destination for Pacific Island migrants (Kallen 1982, 114), such that the populations of migrants from some Pacific islands now living in Auckland can be the largest concentrations of those ethnicities anywhere in the world (Spoonley 2001, 86). Migration between Samoa and New Zealand has a particularly long and complex history based on political and economic ties between the nations (Kallen 1982, 53; Macpherson 1997, 80). The 'pull' factors for coming to New Zealand are commonly cited as being occupational opportunities, higher wages, and a perception of better education (Kallen 1982, 106; Macpherson 2004, 167), while less commonly articulated motivations include the fact that migrants have a greater control over their incomes than Samoans who live among their 'aiga in Samoa. Those who migrate are usually assisted by their families in both Samoa and New Zealand with airfares, accommodation, finding jobs, and other aspects of life, and there is an expectation that, once working, migrants will in turn contribute to the family, both in New Zealand and in Samoa. There is thus a tendency for families to select reliable and culturally conservative members for migration, as they are more likely to continue to meet these social and kinship obligations (Macpherson 1997, 88-90; 2002, 80). As those already in New Zealand usually house and find work for new migrants (Kallen 1982, 112-113), and because migrants usually seek cheap accommodation and unskilled employment, Samoans are inclined to be concentrated in particular urban areas such as South Auckland, and with large-scale employers such as manufacturing plants.

During the 1950s-1970s, geographical and occupational concentrations of Samoan migrants led to the formation and maintenance of strong social and cultural enclaves in New Zealand. As candidates for migration were generally culturally conservative, the reproduction of Samoan institutions in New Zealand and the application of Samoan practices and principles to new situations tended to closely follow the ideological norms of 'traditional' fa'aSamoa (Macpherson 1997, 84-86; 2004, 168-170). In the enclave context, there was a very conscious maintenance of Samoan culture by migrants, such that fa'aSamoa was represented as unmodified by the new environments, with migrants often seemingly unaware of the gradual changes to cultural practices that are inevitably wrought by migration (Va'a 2001, 16-17). These enclaves were constantly regenerated, both numerically and culturally, by the fact that kinship was added to economic motivations as an additional migratory 'pull' factor (Kallen 1982, 112). The majority of new migrants lived with 'aiga in New Zealand, and quickly became part of already established networks of family. New migrants also received considerable support with finances, accommodation, and employment sponsorship, and were thus incorporated into a web of obligations to the Samoan community in New Zealand (Kallen 1982, 112-113), while also retaining obligations to

those in Samoa who had raised and supported them (Macpherson 2004, 168). Kinship was seen as the most appropriate basis for organising the needs of migrants in relation to accommodation and employment (Macpherson 2002, 72; 2004, 169), while 'aiga and cultural enclaves also provided security for new migrants unfamiliar with pālagi culture (Macpherson and Macpherson 1999, 286). The requirements of immigration criteria for sponsorship were usually met by older, already established kin, more often than not the heads of the households in which new migrants then lived, reinforcing already existent cultural hierarchies and satisfying the perceived need for the supervision of young migrants (Macpherson 2002, 81-84).

However, while fa'aSamoa was maintained among Samoan enclaves, the personal freedom and new lifestyle available in New Zealand were also important aspects of life for Samoans living in New Zealand (Kallen 1982, 115-118). Day-to-day life in New Zealand provided the 'seeds of discontent' with conservative Samoan culture. This was especially so for younger Samoans, who were more likely to work and thus come in contact with non-Samoans, and who were also more likely to consume the media that are 'windows' to new concepts and options (Macpherson 1999, 54). Attempts to maintain the fa'aSamoa also led to internal community conflict "in part motivated by the migrants' need to improvise rules and norms in keeping with their new social and physical circumstances" (Va'a 2001, 19). Furthermore, while migrants tended to be the more conservative family members, the fact that they now had independent incomes and legally protected individual rights meant they were freer to pursue alternative lifestyles than they had been in Samoa, where they were dependent on 'aiga for access to land and residences, and were thus obliged to comply with social and cultural norms (Cluny Macpherson, pers. comm.).

The more 'organic' shifts in migrant Samoan enclaves that occurred as an inevitable result of a new cultural environment have been more recently inflected by changes to New Zealand's immigration policy, which has affected patterns of Samoan migration. Now only 1100 Samoan migrants can enter New Zealand each year without meeting the criteria established for all immigrants to New Zealand. The two other modes of entry for Samoans are those utilised by most other immigrants: family reunification (which usually only applies to elderly Samoans); or the 'points' system, under which immigrants must demonstrate ability to contribute to New Zealand economically and/or vocationally. Economic restructuring has led to a declining demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour, meaning that sufficient points are generally only accrued by highly skilled or entrepreneurial immigrants. Few

Samoans born and educated in Samoa are likely to fall into these categories (Cluny Macpherson, pers. comm.). While these structural changes, and other factors such as the increasing proportion of New Zealand-born Samoans, are leading to significant changes in the make-up of Samoan communities in New Zealand (Macpherson 2004), most of the participants in this study migrated during the 1960's-1980's, and thus the model outlined above remains the most relevant in relation to their experiences.

Leaving paradise? Fa'afafine motivations for migration

In his introduction to a collection of narratives from gay and lesbian migrants in the United Kingdom, Bob Cant suggests that these migrants “have often fled their families and their communities of origin because there was no place for them there. If migration is experienced as freedom, the family and its values are perceived as a prison” (1997, 6). Similarly, Suzanne Phibbs observes that many transgendered Australians migrate to the urban centre of Sydney “because they are unable or unwilling to live in their chosen gender in the place where they grew up” (2001, 224). These gay, lesbian, and transgendered migrants remember their communities of origin as constraining their ‘true selves’ (Cant 1997, 9), which can presumably be more freely expressed in cosmopolitan centres such as London or Sydney. The marginal sexualities or genders of these migrants are thus significant ‘push’ factors in their decisions to migrate – or, more exactly, the homo/transphobia of family and community (rather than sexuality/gender itself), ‘pushes’ these migrants.

In contrast, there is little evidence in my research that *marginalisation* as a result of being fa'afafine contributed in any significant way to participants' decisions to migrate. Participants interviewed in New Zealand did not see their migration as an ‘escape’, while those interviewed in Samoa who had visited New Zealand or Australia frequently asserted that life was better for them in Samoa. In one case, this was attributed to more general differences between the two societies. When discussing a visit to New Zealand, this participant suggested that he found people there ‘*very pālagi*’, which he contrasted with the relaxed and friendly attitudes of Samoans. Even when I queried him as to whether his identification as fa'afafine might make life more difficult for him in New Zealand, he brought the discussion back to more general considerations:

So do you think it would be different for you as fa'afafine in New Zealand than it would be here? Do you think it would be ... I don't know – did you find it more difficult to relate to people in New Zealand, I guess, because we don't have fa'afafine culture in New Zealand?

Well, I don't know ... as I said, it was very different. The people itself were very [indecipherable] up to themselves, they were very ... let's put it this way – they were very independent. But then, I guess it's just

because it's them, you know, it's their nature of doing things, and in the South Pacific we are different as well.

Others articulated their decisions to remain in, or return to, Samoa more explicitly in terms of understanding fa'afafine as part of Samoan society. For one participant, the difference between Samoan and western perceptions of fa'afafine was so significant as to form the basis of her answer to the question with which I opened the interview:

... you know what I'm doing here, you know that I'm looking at ... that I want to know more about fa'afafine in Samoa, so you just tell me what you think I need to know about fa'afafine in Samoa, you know, about your life, about how they fit into Samoa culture ...

Well, the fa'afafines in Samoa actually, you know, they are not at all deviant, nor are they pushed aside as they would have been in the outside world. The queens in Samoa, the fa'afafines are basically accepted as [indecipherable] in their families. They have their role carved out for them in the Samoan culture and family and they are aware of that role and so they commit themselves to it. They normally fulfil the role of [indecipherable] to the fullest to satisfy the family and the community that they stay in. [...] They're just human beings, accepted for what they are, not like [indecipherable] that I've seen or read about in metropolitan areas, whereby the gays have been segregated deviants, criticised, ridiculed.

It is not just the tolerance in Samoa that is important to this participant, but also the fact that fa'afafine are able to see themselves as part of the community, in contrast to the marginalised 'queens' and 'gays' in western societies. This prioritising of the relational aspect of life in Samoa echoes the previous quote, in which New Zealand society is critiqued because of the 'independence' of pālagi. The above participant did express some desire to migrate now that her parents had died, and suggested that she would take her brother with her. However, Australia was rejected as a possible destination during our conversation in preference for Pago Pago (in American Samoa) or Hawai'i, partly because these locations already had significant populations of Samoan 'queens'.

For most of the participants in this research, motivations for migration echoed those of the wider Samoan community. Commonly cited reasons for migration include better employment prospects, helping family already resident in New Zealand, and completing education in schools that were considered better than those in Samoa.² One participant spoke of her family's desire for her to achieve educationally quite explicitly in relation to Samoan social status:

And then, because my father is a bit of an academic – he's quite intelligent, he basically wanted to see a reflection on him, of himself on the kids, because my father's like a civil engineer, he's done varsity for, like, how many years, you know. So because he was, like, education-wise quite successful, he wanted to see that

² While none mentioned supporting dependent relatives in Samoa as a reason for their migration, many had, and still were, providing material assistance to 'aiga who remained in Samoa, or had brought family members out to New Zealand.

reflection on his children, really. And a lot of business people in Samoa that have kids, they have high standards on their children, particularly in education. That's why they fly their kids over here to be educated.

As with all Samoan migrants, decisions to migrate were rarely made alone, but usually involved the family, who often exerted considerable influence in this process. For most of these participants, it was actually family who instigated their migration – as I have already suggested, participants themselves rarely had any particular desire to leave Samoa. Although being fa'afafine did not motivate participants themselves to migrate, the fact that they were fa'afafine often contributed to the family's decision that they should move to New Zealand. For one participant, this decision was significantly influenced by her femininity:

My father wants me to leave Samoa. As I said to you, you know, he said to me that I'm very weak, I can't do, you know, men's work ... so he think that he's going to send me here because he feels sorry that when he ... closer to his retirement, he don't want me to go with him to the village.

Ah, right ... yeah.

So I think his idea is to send me over here to my sister's over here so I can have a better lifestyle and things like that. He doesn't want me to work the men's job, and, you know, digging and planting and cutting trees and things like that. He knows it's not mine.

Another participant was brought back to New Zealand by a visiting uncle because in Samoa she was partying with other fa'afafine rather than helping her mother. Although not explicitly stated, there was an implication in this explanation that she might disgrace the family. Another was sent to New Zealand to help his sister with her baby, a choice that again seems to have been in part motivated by the fact that he did not work on the plantation, and was also something of an embarrassment to his brothers in his home village.

However, these decisions should not be read as evidence that families are necessarily ashamed of their fa'afafine kin. Rather, the decisions are made on the basis that these fa'afafine are not seen as contributing to the collective good of the 'aiga in Samoa. While this may be *related* to their being fa'afafine (for example, 'physical weakness' may prevent them from working on family plantations), this should not be confused with 'fa'afafine-ness' being the *direct* cause of migration. Only one participant explained her departure from Samoa as resulting from a decision she made solely by herself, and as motivated by family rejection. She spoke of how she returned to Samoa after having problems at the college she was sent to in Hawai'i:

So I left Hawai'i, went back to Samoa, and my parents, my grandmother was furious. And what I got from that, was like, 'You failure', you know, 'What a waste – of time, what a waste of life', whatever. And I got that quite regularly, though, because I was always ... adamant to fulfil what I wanted to fulfil. And I think I deliberately, too, sometimes, just to fuck them off. It was like, hey, or to prove a point. It was like, 'This is my life, not your fucking life.' You know, and ... because I could see the bigger picture in my career, where I was going. They couldn't. I couldn't sort of understand where they were coming from with some of those remarks. Anyway, then when I got back, she said, 'Well, you can just sit here and run the business, because I'm not paying for your fare.' And I was devastated, because I didn't want to live in Samoa. It just didn't have the facilities that I needed. And then I heard through the grapevine that there was a pageant happening, the prize was a trip to New Zealand, and I thought, 'Fuck, I'm going to get that bitch. I'm going to get it.' So I got a sponsor, entered, and won the ticket. And then my grandmother, that night, she was just, like, so proud of me. I was actually quite sick of it, because I just thought, 'Hypocrite', like, 'Fuck off'.

The different experience of this participant in terms of her family relations and her reasons for leaving Samoa may in part have originated in the fact that she spent her early childhood in New Zealand. She suggested that as a result of this early socialisation, she never fully came to terms with the ideologies of fa'aSamoa, especially the cultural requirements to obey elders and subsume individual desires to the collective good and wishes of the 'aiga. This narrative seems to resonate with the stories of gay and lesbian migrants collected by Bob Cant, in that neither home nor family seemed to have a place for this participant (Cant 1997, 6). However, even the disappointment of this participant's family was not *directly* related to her being fa'afafine, but rather to her apparent educational failures and lack of any obvious career path. In fact, when she showed success at 'being fa'afafine' by winning the pageant, her family were proud of her.

Endeavours at conformity

On arrival in New Zealand fa'afafine face the same problems of adjustment to a new culture as other migrant Samoans. However, they are also in a unique position of expressing an embodied gender that is anomalous within western understandings. In the same manner that non-western gay migrants often face the double marginalisation of homophobia and xenophobia (Manalansan 2000, 184-185), so fa'afafine encounter not only the racism experienced by normatively gendered Samoans, but also homophobia and/or hostility because of their gender ambiguity. One participant who came to New Zealand at the age of 13 to attend school explains how there was a definite difference in how she was treated and presented herself in pālagi and Samoan contexts:

And when I left school out here I went to New Zealand and enrolled in a school in New Zealand and that's how I became so isolated in my own identity as a fa'afafine, because at the time I think the people in New Zealand was not aware that fa'afafine is something that you can openly exercise, you know, in society like Samoa. So during that time I kept everything to myself, from that younger age in New Zealand, but in

my own church as well as in my own Samoan community at the time I was – you know, they accepted me for who I am because they understand that fa’afafine do exist in Samoa.

The means by which participants dealt with the fact that being fa’afafine was not something they could ‘openly exercise’ in New Zealand was dependent on a number of factors which included, but were not limited to, how they expressed themselves as fa’afafine in Samoa; their age and which ‘generation’ of fa’afafine they subsequently belonged to; whether their early years were spent in Samoa or overseas; various aspects of their relationships with their families; and the historical period in which they arrived in New Zealand. As I suggested in earlier discussions, there have been considerable shifts in terms of how fa’afafine in Samoan enact and embody femininity, and the adoption of women’s clothes, make-up and similar signifiers of femininity is relatively recent (Drozdown-St Christian 2002, 32). This shift makes it possible to loosely divide fa’afafine into generations, and fa’afafine themselves frequently speak of ‘the older ones’ or ‘the new ones coming through’. There is a shared understanding of the present fa’afafine population comprising at least two, and possibly up to four, ‘generations’.

Of the fourteen participants interviewed for this research, ten had spent significant portions of their childhoods in Samoa and then spent the majority of their adolescent-adult years in New Zealand. Of these ten, four were born before 1960 (ranging from 44-56 years old at the time of interviewing), while the other six were born after 1967 (aged 28-33 at the time of interviewing). Between these two cohorts, the most notable distinction was appearance. For the older fa’afafine (with one exception), enacting femininity through appearance did not seem to be a priority. Three of the four were relatively masculine, and of these three only one has ever ‘cross-dressed’ (and even then, only briefly and in specific contexts). One even entered male body building competitions. Of the younger cohort, all but one embodied femininity and had done so most of their lives, some passing as women in New Zealand. At least two of this group were taking feminising hormones, and three had adopted exclusively feminine pālagi names. While neither group were homogeneous (each group contained an exception, and even among those who were ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ respectively, the manner in which these genders were expressed varied considerably), this distinction provides a basis for understanding some of the differences in the experiences of migrant fa’afafine to be discussed in this, and following, chapters.

Modifying masculinity

For those who had never ‘cross-dressed’ while in Samoa (three of the older cohort, and one of the younger), initial adjustment to life in New Zealand was not significantly problematic in terms of their expression of gender. One who arrived in New Zealand while still very young recalled being told by his parents not to ‘flap his hands’ or laugh in a particular way “because in New Zealand that’s not what people do”, but other than this, his behaviour was not restricted in any memorable way. Another, who had already been relatively masculine in Samoa, arrived in New Zealand in his late teens. The physical changes that occurred at this time accentuated his masculine aspects, leading to a newfound approval from his brothers, for whom having a fa’afafine sibling had been somewhat difficult:

I rang home once – about three months since I came here, and I rang home and they didn’t even recognise me. Then my brothers, I talked to them on the phone, and they went, ‘Please’, they were saying, ‘My God, you sound like a man!’ [Indecipherable.] Well, after hanging up the phone, I was thinking, ‘What do they mean, I sound like a man?’, and everywhere I go from there, nobody labelled me. Nobody say, ‘Oh, he’s fa’afafine’. And it was really different, and I was quite happy then that I was not recognised as fa’afafine.

For these participants, finding employment in New Zealand did not seem particularly difficult, and three of the four explicitly articulated this as resulting from the fact that they did not dress in ‘drag’. Three took up relatively gender-neutral jobs when first employed in New Zealand, while the fourth, who used migration as a chance to shed the fa’afafine identity that had been problematic for him in Samoa, entered a particularly male-dominated trade.

While these participants experienced little pressure from either family or society in relation to their (already quite masculine) appearances, it seems that embodying a more masculine gender created certain expectations regarding sexuality and reproduction. Although only two of these four referred to pressure from their families to marry, this was not mentioned at all by the more feminine participants. One of the masculine participants linked this pressure to his family’s concerns regarding HIV/AIDS. It appears that his family assumed that if he did not ‘settle down’ with a woman, he would inevitably become sexually involved with men. He told me this in the initial context of mentioning that he had endeavoured to ‘date’ women in New Zealand:

So why did you try to do that in the first place?

Well, there was always pressure from my family and that sort of, they’re all saying, ‘Well, it would be nice to have ...’ Like, my mum sort of never say, but she said, ‘Oh, so well are you going to settle down?’ But she wouldn’t sort of say whether it’s a girl or, you know, but she’s saying things like, and like, my brother and sisters, like at the time when I came here, in the early ’80s, the time of AIDS and you know and everybody started talking about AIDS, so they’re all sort of worried, so I thought, ‘OK.’ But it didn’t last,

you know. I mean, I only had one date and it scared the hell out of me! [Laughter.]

This suggests that attempts to enact normative heterosexuality can be informed by a number of considerations, including, but not limited to, a desire to allay family fears regarding HIV/AIDS (and, presumably, related assumptions about (homo)sexual activities), and (subtle) pressure to conform to Samoan expectations that (masculine) men should marry women and have children. The other participant spoke of having sexual relations with women in New Zealand more explicitly as an attempt to conform to western models of hetero-masculinity:

Since I came here, I went out with women, but not for the fact that I really like it. It was just the fact that I was trying to find a life for myself. ... I basically, I went out with a girl just to prove a point to a couple of guys that I was with. I had pākeha friends, there were about six of us hanging out together, four of them have boyfriends and two of us don't ...

Boyfriends or girlfriends?

I mean girlfriends. And every time we would go out, they always bring their girlfriends along, and me and [—], we would bring nobody. So, um ... I had to bring someone just for the sake of, you know, I don't want them to think I'm weird or different. But the whole time I had a crush on my friend, rather than the girl I brought along.

For this participant, feelings that he 'should' be desiring women, or at least should be seen as normatively heterosexual, were reinforced by constant queries from family as to when he was going to marry. Thus, these (attempted) enactments of normative heterosexuality can be seen as occurring at a convergence of western and Samoan ideologies, the former including the assumption that 'masculinity' both stems from and results in a sexual orientation towards women, and the latter resting on the reproductive imperative, inflected by more recent understandings about 'homosexuality'.

Girls to men?

For some members of the more feminine group, fitting into the New Zealand gender order required them to make changes that were primarily related to their appearances. In these cases, modifications of gender were generally undertaken with the 'encouragement' of family. One participant, who first lived in a small industrial New Zealand town, described this:

Actually, when we first came here, you hardly see any ... you know, when I come to [small New Zealand town], because that's where my sister used to live, and I came with very thin eyebrows and very long fingernails, and then she advised me to cut the nails out and don't paint [indecipherable], grow my eyebrows and stuff. I just feel like going back to Samoa. You hardly see any grown up men doing that sort of thing over here.

The mother of another particularly feminine participant attempted to masculinise her appearance prior to her leaving Samoa:

Because I actually had quite long hair, but my mother cut it off. I think the reason why she cut it off was, I think she understood how the western world conducted ... themselves, especially people around me, so I think she sort of cut of my hair off – it was really short ... But I understood her view, because, you know, she didn't want me to go through the hard life, so I think she must have thought it was much more safe for me to look more masculine.

Nick Crossley suggests that “[a]gents create and mould their bodies in accordance with the fields in which they are involved and the demands of those specific fields” (2001, 107). Early attempts by these participants to masculinise their appearances exemplify with particular resonance how bodies may also be *re*created according to the demands of new fields, although, as I will explain, there are some aspects of socialised embodiment that are so entrenched as to be experienced as beyond change. Conversely, there are certain aspects of the immediate embodiment of gender that are, and are experienced as, amenable to change, such as hair, make-up, and nails.



Image 7: Masculinising femininity

On the right is a participant who was feminine in Samoa, and now identifies as, and passes as, a woman. This photo was taken when she first arrived in New Zealand, and illustrates her initial attempts at masculinity.

As I have suggested, none of these more ‘feminine’ participants mentioned either attempting to instigate sexual relations with women, nor any pressure to marry, in spite of attempts to pass as ‘men’. A number of factors seem to come into play in the absence of expectations of normative heterosexuality among this group. Many of these participants migrated while quite young, usually to attend school, and thus would not necessarily be expected to pursue relationships at this point in their lives within either Samoan or western social paradigms. Furthermore, although all attempted to

masculinise themselves, many were still somewhat effeminate and may well have been read as 'gay' by pālagi, who would thus consider them unlikely candidates for heterosexual relations. Families of these participants were generally fully aware that they had identified as fa'afafine in Samoa, and although they were encouraged to masculinise in New Zealand, their residual effeminacy would have facilitated a continued perception by family members that they were 'not quite men'. This possibility is supported by the fact that many participants reported being allocated more childcare and domestic duties than more masculine Samoan men might have been expected to undertake. This continued perception of non-masculinity would have lessened the likelihood of families pushing these migrants to marry. Ultimately, unmarried (but masculine) fa'afafine might be of more value to the family. One masculine participant, who is employed in a well-paying job and remains living with his parents, quite explicitly stated that the fact that he is not married means he has more money to contribute to his natal family.

Denying the 'true self'?

All those participants who felt the need to enact (hetero)masculinity on first arrival in New Zealand remembered this period as a time of denial. The masculine participant who maintained heterosexual relations with women for some years spoke of this period explicitly in terms of 'pushing himself into a closet'. One of the feminine participants who spent her first few years in New Zealand attempting to pass as a 'masculine man', and socialising with other young men, similarly qualified this period with the statement: "I'm just pretending, you know, but I still think it's not me". Another suggested that it was only when she moved away from her family in New Zealand that she could take the steps towards feminising her appearance, a feminisation that allowed her to feel 'comfortable'.

However, respect for the wishes of elders and the status of the family, and often a simple desire to fit in to the new environment, meant participants initially attempted to maintain a masculine embodiment. The pressure to adhere to family guidelines in terms of appropriate behaviour and appearance was experienced simultaneously with a need to conform to New Zealand sex/gender discourses in order to gain the employment necessary to contribute to the family financially, and/or a desire to avoid embarrassing the family socially. Although not personally articulated by any participants in this research, it was suggested by a community advocate in New Zealand that if newly arrived fa'afafine do not conform to dominant expectations in terms of gendered appearance, and are thus unable to gain employment, they are likely to be delegated childcare and domestic responsibilities. While the performance of such domestic duties is commonly the primary means fa'afafine enact femininity in

Samoa, in the New Zealand context to be allocated such duties has quite different consequences. The more isolated households of New Zealand society mean that those engaged in such labour are virtually contained in the domestic environment, while the fact that they are not earning money also restricts their movements in New Zealand's cash-oriented society, and diminishes their leverage within the household. Social isolation may be exacerbated by the fact that feminine fa'afafine who do not pass as women may feel uncomfortable outside Samoan contexts. There is thus significant motivation for fa'afafine to enact masculinity on arrival in New Zealand.³

Migrant fa'afafine and 'distress'

For migrant fa'afafine, the initial period of living in New Zealand is often a time of having to enact plural, at times contradictory, and frequently 'false' gender behaviours. For the majority of the participants in this research, enactments of masculinity (and in some cases normative heterosexuality) were remembered as causing tensions 'internally' and/or in relationships with others because of the need for participants to deny their 'fa'afafine-ness'. Many of these narratives of initial 'masculinisation' thus seem to resonate with common understandings of western transsexuals as 'distressed'. The 'distress of transsexualism' model is based on the argument that apparent incongruity between an individual's embodiment and their personal sense of themselves as sexed/gendered causes distress (Finn and Dell 1999, 469, 471). These individuals are generally incorporated into the medical system as 'victims' of environmental and/or biological factors, rather than as active agents (Finn and Dell 1999, 466). This model is thus dependent on transsexuals articulating narratives of a lifetime of feeling 'wrong' in their enactments of masculinity (Walworth 1997, 353). In the case of male-to-female transsexuals, any early childhood event that could be construed as evidencing feminine tendencies is remembered as 'proof' that the person is 'really' a girl/woman, while masculine identities are recalled as 'false', a 'charade' they were forced to play out because of their biological sex. These narratives of the distress caused by the necessity of falsifying gender are commonly distilled into the phrase 'a woman trapped in a man's body', which is the standard lay definition of 'transsexual'.⁴

³ Paradoxically, the greater social freedom allowed by such masculinisation may increase the likelihood of meeting other fa'afafine migrants, or even discovering other environments in New Zealand in which male expressions of effeminacy are tolerated, accepted, or even encouraged. These possibilities and their impacts will be discussed in the following chapters.

⁴ The prevalent 'public narrative' of the "the ideal transsexual who always knew that they were of the other gender" (Phibbs 2001, 22) has particular significance when incorporated into medical discourses. Those seeking access to genital reconstruction surgery or other means of medically feminising their bodies are often required to reiterate their own version of the 'distress' narrative in order to be given the diagnosis of 'transsexual' that is usually necessary to access the full range

This distress model of transsexualism provides a useful lens through which to interpret the experiences of migrant fa'afafine and understand how they perceive these experiences. As I have suggested, some participants recalled periods of (attempted) conformity to western expectations of congruence between 'sex' and 'gender' as masquerade, a denial of their 'true selves'. The narratives articulated by these participants are similar to the distress stories of transsexuals, who learn to disguise their 'innate' femininity in their attempts to enact 'appropriate' masculine identities, thereby causing the distress that defines these individuals as transsexual. Yes this 'denial of the feminine self' is experienced in significantly different ways by transsexuals and fa'afafine. While some of the stories I was told resonate with these 'distress' paradigms, other narratives reveal that not all those who masculinised on their arrival necessarily experienced this as problematic. Many participants initially presented themselves as boys or men without much apparent sense of compromise. They articulated the same problems of adjustment that all Samoans are likely to experience, such as working out how to catch buses, getting used to the climate, or being unfamiliar with the new range of food. Yet these participants also understood themselves as having *always* been fa'afafine, even when not explicitly enacting 'fa'afafine-ness'.⁵ The variability with which these initial periods of (hetero)masculinisation were remembered suggests that to be fa'afafine without any means of expressing femininity does not *necessarily* result in distress. This is in significant contrast to the transsexual discourse, in which to be a 'woman' without having an appropriately 'feminine' body is hugely problematic.

The contrast between fa'afafine and transsexual experiences of periods of 'enforced' (hetero)masculinity largely results from the fact that most migrant fa'afafine continue to primarily locate themselves within the Samoan paradigms discussed in previous chapters, according to which subjectivity is significantly contextual, and sex/gender/sexuality is not seen as constitutive of self to the same degree, or in the same manner, as in western discourses. The prioritising of family and

of feminising medical technologies. This discourse is thus commonly presented in the literature as self-fulfilling – all transsexuals are understood by the medical establishment to experience this distress because all those who seek diagnosis as 'transsexual' know it is necessary to articulate this 'distress' as one of their 'symptoms' (Shapiro 1991, 251; Stone 1991, 291; Hausman 1995, 143; Billings and Urban 1996, 109; Green cited in Califia 1997, 68; Walworth 1997, 353; Hirschauer 1998, 16; Prosser 1998, 9; Namaste 2000, 192).

⁵ This does resonate with the tendency that I discussed in Chapter 3 in transsexual narratives – or indeed all 'narratives of self' – to (re)construct one's personal history so as to correlate with one's current identification (Mason-Schrock 1996). The key difference is that, while fa'afafine participants articulated themselves as having always been fa'afafine, they did not necessarily recall times of 'non-fa'afafine-ness' as causing distress. Conversely, transsexuals who articulate themselves as having *always* been feminine/women/transsexual conceptualise their histories of masculinity as inappropriate, which the medical establishment may expect them to manifest in the form of a 'disgust' for their masculine genitalia (Walworth 1997, 353).

community relations in the construction and representation of Samoan subjectivities is illustrated by the fact that, after migration, virtually all participants continued to locate their sense of their selves firmly within kinship structures, and maintained family obligations in ways that demonstrated the centrality of these actions to their sense of who they are. Therefore, in a social context where expression of an 'out' fa'afafine identity might have negatively impacted on family reputations, or on efforts to gain and keep the employment necessary to provide for families, participants often chose to background the fa'afafine aspects of their subjectivities in order to better fulfil the social obligations that arose from their locations in kinship structures. For example, a member of the older generation of migrant fa'afafine told of how he first dressed in 'drag' in New Zealand after being persuaded to do so by his fa'afafine friends. However, shortly after his mother arrived from Samoa, she told him he had 'better stop' cross-dressing, even though she accepted him as fa'afafine. He immediately ceased, and has not dressed in women's clothes since then. Another participant spoke of how she experienced an overwhelming desire to return home during her first weeks in New Zealand, a desire that was quite clearly related to her family's insistence that she masculinise her appearance, and to the fact that she lacked the companionship of other fa'afafine in the small New Zealand town in which she initially lived:

The day I arrived, I can't stop crying, but ... my sister keep talking to me and I know that my father wants my sister to look after me because he knows that I'm not the person to do the plantation or anything like that. So when I came over here I was so heartbroken that I missed my friends in the island and everything that I used to do over there. When I came over here, it's completely changed. I don't have any fa'afafine to talk to or go to, go around with and things like that. So ... I feel like going back home, but I never talk to them! I never told them I want to go back home. I just cry and cry, and they keep telling me that it's all right, that after one, two months I will be all right and that. But I think, to me ... because I'm going to miss the lifestyle that I was in in Samoa, looking at what would be ahead of me, is I'm going to be different. You know, when she [the participant's sister] told me that I had to cut my nails and ... let the eyebrows grow and cut the hair short. I think it's those things that I miss the most from Samoa. ... But I never told them, you know, 'I want to go back', or 'Pay my fare for me to go back'. I just cry and feel like going back, but I can't say anything to them.

At first glance, this participant's inability to return to Samoa might be understood as the result of her lack of financial resources. However, there is a further consideration underlying this economic constraint, in that her decision to remain in New Zealand was also motivated by family considerations and aspects of Samoan culture. In spite of the fact that living in small-town New Zealand necessitated backgrounding the fa'afafine aspects of her subjectivity, to have ignored her father's wishes that she stay in New Zealand, and shown lack of appreciation for her family's assistance, would have significantly problematised her place within her family.

Because social relations are privileged over gender in the construction of Samoan subjectivities, I find it difficult to read these narratives of masculinisation as complete denials of the participants' 'real' selves. Rather, I suggest that these times in their lives might be better understood as periods of emphasis of other aspects of multi-faceted identities. The narratives of all participants reveal a strong sense of agency in choosing to accept the apparent constraints of family interests, and thus maintaining a core aspect of fa'aSamoa. Meeting family obligations, enacting religious convictions, or maintaining aspects of fa'aSamoa were as, if not more, integral to these participants' sense of their 'true selves' as their femininity. This is in significant contrast to transsexuals, who inevitably feel that their bodies are at insurmountable and unliveable odds with their 'true selves' (Mason-Schrock 1996, 179), the implication being that gender is *fundamental* to this 'true self'.

The differing levels of significance of the role of gender identity in the construction and expression of the 'true self' can be illustrated by another comparison between the narratives of transsexuals and migrant fa'afafine. For most transsexuals, gender reassignment has such a profound effect on who they are that they effectively become different people after genital reconstruction surgery, and it is not uncommon in the literature to read of the transitioning stage of transsexualism as involving 'killing off' the 'male identity' (Ekins 1997, 95). Becoming a 'woman' can necessitate a range of changes, including new names, new jobs, revised histories, and geographic relocation, in order to facilitate the commencement of a 'new life' (Califia 1997, 59).⁶ While Kate Bornstein's observation that "[t]ranssexuality is the only condition for which the therapy is to lie" about one's past (1994, 62) is somewhat accurate, it should also be noted that the published narratives of transsexuals suggest that they actually *experience* the transition as being from one person to another as well as from one gender to another.⁷

⁶ Pat Califia quotes the transsexual Jan Morris as stating in her 1974 autobiography that she 'became her own sister' and that after transitioning, the personality and even the memory of 'James' progressively faded (1997, 35). Gender reassignment surgeries are the only procedures that are seen to create a 'new person'. Even when the same surgeries, such as hysterectomies (which are usually undertaken by female-to-male transsexuals) or breast augmentation, are performed on non-transsexual people, they are not seen as fundamentally changing the patient's self. That genital reconstruction is the most significant of the gender reassignment surgeries, and also the only one that is only undertaken by those transitioning from one gender to another, suggests an integral link between genitals, gender, and subjectivity in western discourses.

⁷ Somewhat paradoxically, it is also crucial to these narratives that the transsexual is transitioning to be the person they always already were or should have been, and it is the need to deny this 'already existent' sex/gender that causes the pre-operative distress.

Conversely, while the participants in this research may have articulated their arrival in New Zealand as necessitating the denial of the *fa'afafine* aspects of their identities, there is no sense of rupture of their 'selves' between these masculine/heterosexual periods and the more feminine/homosexual identities they enacted at the time of this research. What thus emerges from these narratives of contextually based enactments of identities, which may involve backgrounding *fa'afafine* aspects without the apparent distress of western transsexuals, is that for these individuals gender may not be the foundational aspect of subjectivity that it is in *pālagi* discourses (Butler 1990a, 139-140; West and Zimmerman 1991, 18; Butler 1993a, 2, 8).

Leaving the family to feminise

In the following two chapters I discuss the processes by which participants located or found themselves in contexts where they felt comfortable foregrounding their femininity. Of consequence to this chapter is that doing so seemed to necessitate a certain distancing from the family contexts in which almost all participants first lived on arrival in New Zealand. This is in spite of the fact that it would seem likely that migrants would have more opportunities to enact 'fa'afafine-ness' in Samoan contexts. Indeed, some participants were recognised as *fa'afafine* by Samoan workmates in their first jobs, and even when family members encouraged *fa'afafine* to masculinise, there seemed to be a residual expectation that they will continue to undertake feminine domestic labour. However, families and the wider Samoan community do largely encourage *fa'afafine* migrants to enact normative western hetero-masculinity. As I have explained, a number of factors contribute to this, which include, but are not limited to, the need for migrants to gain employment so as to contribute to the 'aiga financially; a desire for Samoan migrants to be seen as 'good New Zealanders'; a wish to avoid potential embarrassment for the family; and a Samoan cultural imperative that all family members marry and produce children. While all participants maintained close family relationships, remaining in the immediate family household would have continued to necessitate downplaying their 'fa'afafine-ness'. Thus, for the *fa'afafine* in this research, enacting femininity in New Zealand almost always required a certain distancing from family contexts.

This is not to suggest that a choice must be made between family and some 'need' for migrants to express their 'true' identities. Rather, participants would undertake this 'distancing' only when they felt their families no longer needed them. Furthermore, this does not imply that these participants no longer constructed their subjectivities in relation to their 'aiga. Even though links to the wider Samoan

community context seemed to be relatively weak among these participants, most remained firmly embedded within their 'aiga. One participant regularly had her brother staying with her when I visited her, another sent money and food back home to her mother in Samoa, and another had a system of rewarding his many nieces and nephews when they did well at school. Thus, the 'distance' that I talk about may be understood as more physical than psychological. This physical distance seems to allow for a clearer differentiation between the 'family' and 'fa'afafine' aspects of an individual's life, which is especially important when the latter involve the 'gay scene'. One participant spoke quite explicitly in these terms. The following fragment of our conversation started with me asking whether he had always lived with his family in New Zealand, as I knew he had originally lived with his sister when he arrived, and now lived with his parents:

I got the impression when we were talking that you haven't always lived with your family while you've been in New Zealand. Is that right?

No.

Ah, OK. Can you tell me about when ...?

I lived with my sister the first time I came here, and when I found out that ... [indecipherable]. I want to come out, I had to move out of home. I can't do it when I'm living with my family, because ... I want to have it all and I want to experience the whole lot, instead of having two different lives. So I moved out of home, and then when they found out is when I moved back in. But, um ... I've been here, what? – about fifteen years. I think I've lived with my family for probably about ten, and the five I was out [indecipherable] family.

OK, and you were living by yourself then?

I was living with boyfriends, friends.

And that was quite different, not living with your family?

Well ... yes, because I can't take anybody home.

Right, and you still can't I guess.

No. That's respect for my family, is not taking anybody home. If I do, I'll be very careful what I do, and it won't make me comfortable as well. So when I'm out, I'm basically living with someone, a boyfriend or lover. When there's no lover, I move back home.

In other parts of the interviews, this participant was quite adamant that a migrant's first responsibility is to their family, and spoke negatively of those fa'afafine in New Zealand who do nothing to help their families. For him, to be in a relationship (with a gay pālagi man) while living with his family would have caused conflict between his 'feminine' sexuality and his respect for his family. Another participant had

initially lived with her sister and helped with the children. It was only once the older children had started working and the family no longer needed her wages that she felt that she should be able to leave the town they lived in to move to Auckland, where she had found fa'afafine friends from Samoa. While both these cases suggest a tension between meeting family obligations and expressing fa'afafine identities, these participants talk about these tensions more as an inconvenience than a significant constraint.

Other participants who utilised feminising medical technologies such as hormones only took up this option once they no longer lived in the family context. For one of the younger participants, her fulfilment of family expectations before commencing hormone treatment was remembered as more of an obligation than for many other participants:

... and I finished, like I graduated, got my big paper that says 'diploma' across it, and went to Samoa with breasts, and my family spinned, it was like 'What is that?' Well, they're actually quite OK about it, but they don't even want to bring it up. But I told them I graduated, so it's like, 'There, that's what you wanted.' You know, it's like ... it's almost as if they wanted me to graduate so they can tell everybody how well their son's doing, you know. Or frame it and put it on the wall or something.

The need to gain distance from family appears to be greater in New Zealand – in Samoa it is commonly accepted that fa'afafine remain with their families, and this is one of the reasons they may be valued as children. The difference between Samoa and New Zealand was articulated by a participant interviewed in Auckland:

... you know, a lot of the fa'afafines that I know in New Zealand, they live amongst themselves and not with their families, and I think the reason that that's happened is because of this whole Anglo-Saxon environment of capitalist thinking and independence, I think, that encourages them to go out and explore. And what happens is that when they move in here, I think they feel trapped ... they feel that they're trapped within their own families.

Right, OK ... in New Zealand?

In New Zealand. But you see the word 'trapped' doesn't come into Samoa, because they only feel trapped when they're here. And I think it's because they see all these different things, and they're meeting different races of people and different views, different things, and then ... I think what they feel at the end of the day, they feel extremely different from everybody else. I don't know ... they just want to be independent or something. But you know, a lot of them do go back and forth and visit their families and stuff. But they all sort of tend to go back and do their own thing.

This explanation suggests that migrant fa'afafine share the tendencies of other migrant Samoans to question fa'aSamoa as a result of exposure to new concepts, people, and ideologies (Macpherson 1999, 54). It is also probable that other migrant Samoans embody gender differently in different contexts, in

much the same manner that the sexualised gender displays I witnessed in Apia's nightclubs are unlikely to have been performed in the back villages. However, what is unique to fa'afafine is the fact that they will switch from being relatively masculine in the family context to expressing varying degrees of femininity in other contexts.

Being true to one's 'self'

The majority of the participants in this research who migrated to New Zealand felt a need to 'masculinise' or 'heterosexualise' their embodied gender to some extent. Among those who had not left Samoa for any significant period, this perceived 'requirement' to masculinise if they relocated to a western society appeared to contribute to their decisions not to migrate. The physical changes undertaken by migrant participants tend to reflect how they wished to be identified, and suggest a 'layer' of subjectivity that is also available for modification according to context – what might be thought of as the 'public persona'. Thus, the manner in which many participants sought to masculinise their bodies on first arrival in New Zealand was the manifestation of their desire to be seen as 'men', which almost inevitably resulted from a perceived need to fit into New Zealand's binary sex/gender system, or to conform to the wishes of family that they do so. For many participants, it was this public persona that was most often articulated as being 'masquerade'. While it seems that many participants experienced this masculinity and/or heterosexuality as their 'true selves' at the time, in retrospect and in the light of their current identification as fa'afafine, gay men, women, and/or feminine, this period was often articulated as a time of constraint, a period of denying or 'closeting' their 'true selves'. However, as I have suggested, this period was rarely remembered with the same 'distress' articulated by western transsexuals prior to gender transition. I attribute this lack of 'distress' to the more 'multi-faceted' nature of Samoan subjectivity, which allows for the foregrounding of specific aspects of one's self and the backgrounding of others in particular contexts without a sense of compromise. While these participants had somewhat essentialist understandings of themselves as fa'afafine, in that this identity continued to be part of their subjectivity even when backgrounded, it was apparent that they were able to prioritise other aspects of their selves when appropriate. They thus exercised a significant degree of agency in negotiating the demands of the various relational fields in New Zealand (Jenkins 1992; Swartz 1997). It was not only the gender frameworks of Samoan and New Zealand cultures that shaped these negotiations. Ideologies such as maintaining family honour and respect for others remained strong motivating factors for these migrants, while more pragmatic concerns such as access to material and other social resources were also integral to decision-making processes.

For these participants, their initial period in New Zealand can be understood as involving a degree of assimilation into normative western understandings and ideologies of gender. The assimilation model of adjustment to a new culture generally involves the imposition of cultural values by the host society as a means of reducing, or at least containing, the ethnic diversity which is thought to threaten the coherence of the host state and society (Cluny Macpherson, pers. comm.). However, this conceptual ideal is inevitably more complex in practice. In this research, the replacement of participants' own cultural practices and ideologies with those of the host society (Va'a 2001, 19-22) was mediated by both family and community, and was also actively undertaken by participants. This process might thus be more accurately understood as a combination of assimilation and acculturation (Cluny Macpherson, pers. comm.).

Yet all of those interviewed in New Zealand now identified as fa'afafine, and asserted this identity in many, if not all, of the contexts in which they lived. As I have discussed, earlier periods of 'denying' their fa'afafine-ness were not necessarily remembered as causing distress, but it is apparent that at some point these participants found themselves in contexts in which (re)asserting themselves as fa'afafine was considered possible. I should be clear that I am not suggesting that this is inevitable – it is highly likely that there are Samoan migrants in New Zealand who identified as fa'afafine in Samoa, masculinised on arrival in New Zealand, and remained (heterosexual) masculine men for the rest of their lives. As I noted in Chapter 3, because such individuals would no longer identify as fa'afafine, they would not have been potential recruits for my sample. Furthermore, the focus of this project is on how individuals *do* identify as fa'afafine in the contexts of westernisation and migration. In the following two chapters, I will discuss the various strategies utilised by participants in their 'reclamation' of their fa'afafine identities and their enactments of these identities in an alien culture.

Drawing on the work of Leulu Va'a (2001) on Samoan migrants in Australia, I have divided these strategies into two main categories. The first of these is based on relatively early models of migrant adjustment, in which it was assumed that it was desirable for migrants to be absorbed into the host society (Va'a 2001, 19-22). This process usually involved varying degrees of both assimilation and acculturation. In the following chapter, I suggest that one of the means participants used to enact femininity was to assimilate into contexts where femininity was understood as appropriate according to western paradigms. Broadly speaking, this involved identifying as and/or passing as either gay men or women. The second strategy, discussed in Chapter 8, was enabled by something of a paradigm shift in

western perceptions of migrants, in which pluralism and multiculturalism are valued over conformity (Va'a 2001, 22-28). This has created social spaces in which it is possible to enact explicitly fa'afafine identities.

I discuss the 'assimilationist' strategy first, because this was, to some extent, utilised before the more 'pluralist' model (in keeping with the dominant ideologies of the time). However, this sequencing is somewhat arbitrary in terms of individual narratives. For many participants, especially the younger ones, there was no real order to their utilisation of these strategies. Some individuals adopted only one or the other, while others utilised both simultaneously, or drew on one or the other at different times in their lives, or in different contexts. However, as 'ideals' and 'models', they do provide a useful means of understanding the processes by which migrant fa'afafine can be fa'afafine outside the context of Samoan culture.

CHAPTER 7

RECONCILING FEMININITY WITH PALAGI IDENTITIES

GAY FA'AFAFINE MEN AND PASSING FA'AFAFINE WOMEN

While all the participants interviewed in New Zealand experienced initial periods of masculinisation and/or normative heterosexuality, they eventually located, or found themselves in, contexts where they felt able to foreground their femininity, however this may have been expressed. This chapter sets out one of the two main processes by which I understand this to have occurred; that of reconciling a sense of the self as feminine with the ways in which such femininity might be understood and expressed in a western society. This reconciliation can be compared with the more general model of migration in which migrants replace their own cultural practices and ideologies with those of the host society, thus becoming 'absorbed' into that society (Va'a 2001, 19-22). This process of absorption occurs in two primary ways. The 'assimilation' model implies the imposition of cultural values by the host society as a means of reducing ethnic diversity (Cluny Macpherson, pers. comm.). However, the experiences of the migrant fa'afafine with whom I spoke demonstrate that the assimilation model is at one end of a continuum of processes of absorption. At the other end is the 'acculturation' model, according to which migrants are more active in choosing to abandon aspects of their cultures and/or ideologies in favour of those of the host society (Cluny Macpherson, pers comm.). This second model is more likely to reflect the interests of migrants themselves, and is more relevant to the participants in this study. The stories articulated in the previous chapter suggest that these fa'afafine understand themselves to have exercised considerable agency in processes of masculinisation, having chosen to prioritise their identities as family members over those of fa'afafine or feminine people. This understanding of active decision-making on their part is replicated in their stories of locating models of 'appropriate' femininity.

There are two central strategies through which participants reconciled their sense of themselves as feminine with the modes of expressing femininity that are available in western contexts. In the first,

they affiliated themselves with other ‘effeminate men’. This generally entailed identifying with gay men, and in some (but not all) cases, identifying *as* gay men. The second strategy involved utilising a selection of the various cosmetic, sartorial, and medical resources that are available in New Zealand in order to feminise themselves to the point of passing as women.

While this division between ‘effeminate men’ and ‘passing women’ facilitates theoretical analysis, these are again ‘ideal’ categories that are not necessarily completely distinct in practice. Some individuals identified as gay men and as women at different periods of their lives, or even simultaneously. Others did not necessarily identify as either, but rather just passed as one or the other in various contexts. Thus, these models are not absolute – the groups are not homogeneous, and the boundaries between them should not be understood as impermeable. In all cases, the mere fact of being included in this research means that all those discussed have always or eventually understood themselves as fa’afafine – again, more often than not, in conjunction with identifying (or being identified) as gay men and/or women.

What is particularly significant about these strategies is the fact that although the identities of ‘gay man’ or ‘transsexual woman’ are not in common usage in Samoa, the participants who passed as gay men or women felt this to be an appropriate and truthful enactment of their ‘fa’afafine-ness’. The fluidity with which these participants understood themselves as feminine, and as fa’afafine, suggests that, as they move from one cultural ‘field’ to another (Bourdieu 1977; 1990) and adjust the performances of their identities (Butler 1990a, 1990b) according to the requirements of that field, gender is an active ‘doing’ rather than a passive ‘being’ (West and Zimmerman 1991; Finn and Dell 1999, 471-472).

While the experiences of migrant fa’afafine demonstrate that gender is a process, and one that is open to shifts in direction, the fact that all these participants abandoned normative hetero-masculinity and gravitated towards environments where they could understand and express themselves as ‘feminine’ suggests that this femininity remained a constant part of their selves, even if backgrounded at certain times and in certain contexts. This ‘entrenched femininity’ appears to lie under the more ‘cosmetic’ layers of embodiment that were experienced as available for adjustment according to the demands of a particular field. Almost all participants who masculinised themselves on first arrival stated that their sense of themselves as feminine persisted and usually manifested itself in some way:

You know, they cut my hair short and cut the nail, but the way I walk and the way I talk, it's never changed.

The experiences of these fa'afafine suggest that underlying their malleable 'public persona' is a layer of physicality that can be thought of as 'habitus', ways of being that have become so sedimented as to seem immutable (Butler 1990a, 33). One small but clear example of this level of habitus can be observed in the description I provided in Chapter 4 of fa'afafine dancing the siva. As I explained, for fa'afafine who are raised as feminine in Samoa, the graceful and elegant moves necessary to correctly execute the siva come easily, what might be thought of as 'naturally', while for those whose socialisation had more of a masculine emphasis, the dance is clumsy and poorly executed.

However, while gender is sedimented through constant repetition, because it must always be reiterated, it is also always open to slippage – repetition is rarely perfect replication (Butler 1993a, 10). This slippage contributes to the way in which the meanings, embodiments, and enactments of identities that are understood as 'fa'afafine' shift on both individual and social levels in response to a range of imperatives, and is rendered possible by the fact that habitus is not a set of rigid rules, but rather a range of internalised dispositions (Bourdieu 1977, 72-73). There is thus capacity for social actors to react to novel situations, and to understand themselves as active agents in the construction and representation of their own identities, although the level of agency that they exercise in any given situation varies according to power dynamics and the availability of both material and cultural resources at that moment.

Gay fa'afafine men

In the discussion of the literature relating to fa'afafine in Chapter 2, I suggested that discourses of homosexuality are not a particularly appropriate or useful means of 'understanding' Samoan fa'afafine. As I explained, categorical schemes in the anthropological literature often divide apparent occurrences of 'same sex' sexuality into categories of egalitarian, transgenerational, and transgenderal (Dynes and Donaldson 1992, xi-xii; Drucker 1996, 76-77; Rind 1998, 399). The 'transgenderal homosexuality' model implies that males who adopt the signifiers of femininity do so in order to render an always already existent and essential homosexuality more socially acceptable by casting it as something akin to heterosexuality. However, I suggest that, for fa'afafine, sexual orientation towards masculine men is better understood as a result of their femininity, rather than its cause. Interpretation as 'homosexual' is not appropriate, and to utilise paradigms of homosexuality to discuss such populations further confuses an already complex situation.

However, in the current era it is also apparent that discourses of homosexuality are increasingly adopted by populations in non-western cultures and adapted for various ends. For example, Peter Jackson suggests that a western-type 'gay' identity has allowed masculine Thai men to express a sexual orientation towards other men within a paradigm of masculinity and in opposition to the feminine transgendered kathoey (1997a, 180). In Brazil, transgendered travesti describe themselves as 'homosexual' but their masculine partners as 'heterosexual' (Kulick 1998, 125). In the Philippines, the terms 'bakla' (effeminate men) and 'gay' (a recent western import) are, to some extent, used interchangeably, although the terminology of homosexuality has drawn greater attention to the sexual activity of bakla, which was previously not considered a particularly consequential aspect of their identities (Tan 1995, 88). In Mexico, a 'gay' community is developing, but within this community there is something of a division down the lines of masculinity and femininity, which emerges from the active and passive sexual preferences that are fundamental to the definition of Mexican masculinity (Almaguer 1991, 85-86).

The manner in which discourses of homosexuality have been incorporated into Samoan understandings is similarly more complex than a simple division between feminine fa'afafine and masculine gay men. One participant interviewed in Samoa, but who had lived extensively in New Zealand and Australia, made the following observation regarding gay men in Samoa:

And I have a theory, too, for those people that comes into Samoa, because, as I say to you, closet, and I explain to you the kinds of people that they are coming here as gays, Samoa doesn't know that they're gays. They came out as straight people, and Samoans accept them for who they are. That's how Samoan people are, so narrow-minded about it, because they didn't know the differences. They thought people that are called gays will act like fa'afafine, that will look ... like this, like fa'afafine, but gays will just look like a normal heterosexual guy. And if you look at the clubs, you will see that a lot of palagi guys around with other Samoan guys, and that person, someone that Samoan people think that they're a normal straight person, but no – it's a gay.

When this participant spoke of gay men who pass as 'straight' when in Samoa, she did not mean closeted gay men, but rather gay men who are masculine. Similarly, when fa'afafine say they are only attracted to 'straight men' or 'masculine men', they are not necessarily opposing such men with gay men, but rather with other fa'afafine. Western discourses of homosexuality have thus become inflected with local understandings, such that in Samoa 'gay' has not always, or even usually, been used to indicate masculine men who are attracted to other masculine men, a gendered orientation that was rare in Samoan understandings at the time of this research. Rather, 'gay' has become aligned with 'effeminate men', or with males who are attracted to masculine men – i.e. fa'afafine. This blurring of

categories that tend to be more conceptually distinct in western contexts means that migrant fa'afafine's initial interactions with more 'decisive' models of homosexuality in New Zealand can have unexpected consequences.

Migrant fa'afafine and the embryonic 'gay scene'

Of the four members of the 'older generation' interviewed, three had lived in Auckland, and these three all mentioned having socialised at the Great Northern Hotel in the years just before and after 1970. The Great Northern occupies a position of considerable significance as one of the earliest contexts in which these participants felt able to enact femininity in a (relatively) pālagi context. Well-known as one of Auckland's early 'gay bars' (Gummer 2002), the Great Northern was described by one of the older participants:

The Great Northern had a bistro bar that was known to gays as 'The Lily Pond', and it was for men only – no drags were allowed, but semi-drag, i.e. make-up, etc, was! This bar was featured when some of the women, mainly lesbian feminists, entered it as a protest and it was televised. (We were warned by the women beforehand however!) [...] it was a hive for picking up men.¹

The narrative of another participant speaks of the importance of the Great Northern in terms of providing a context in which she could begin to embody femininity. Having spent some years living as a masculine man with her family in a small town, this participant began making trips to Auckland to spend time with family there. On one of these trips, a younger relative said that he knew where she could find all her fa'afafine friends from Samoa. Telling the family they were going to a movie, he took her to the Great Northern Hotel, by that time already a popular meeting place for migrant fa'afafine. This moment of reunion with other fa'afafine had a significant impact on this participant's life course, widening her social network beyond her family, the conservative Samoan enclaves in which they were embedded, and the small town in which she lived. Over a period of time she gradually distanced herself from the family context, and relocated to Auckland, where she took up residence with other fa'afafine, and began enacting femininity on a full-time basis.

¹ The feminist protest was not about the bar being 'gay'. Rather, the protest was directed at 'men only' bars in general, which were still relatively prevalent in New Zealand at this time. The Great Northern was unwittingly picked by these protestors as an example (Gummer 2002).

The discovery of a fa'afafine cohort and subsequent expression of femininity is a recurring theme throughout the interviews, although the specifics vary. In the case of those who frequented the Great Northern, the development of a loose fa'afafine community occurred in the wider context of an equally nascent overtly gay community, and the vestiges of the devolution of 'men only' bars in New Zealand.

While bars and pubs were beginning to admit female customers, the Great Northern continued to only allow

entry to men, a situation that the gay patrons were likely to have supported. However, this did have implications for those fa'afafine patrons who wished to feminise their appearances, as one participant explained:

So with the bar over there, you're not allowed women to go there, only the men. And sometimes, when we go over there with full make-up, we're not allowed to go inside [laughter], even though they know we are not women. I'm sorry, you've got to go and clean a little bit down [indecipherable] before you're allowed to go in'. So we have to, you know, just do our eyebrows and no lipstick or anything like that, to get in.

As I have already suggested, most fa'afafine of this generation never really did 'cross-dress'. One participant from this generation remembers wearing sheer fabrics, but still in clothes that would be identified as 'men's'. It appears likely that these fa'afafine would have been easily read as 'gay men' by pālagi. Another participant recalls being questioned by police more than once while walking home from the Great Northern, a consequence of being assessed as 'gay man' at a time when homosexuality was illegal in New Zealand.

As I noted in earlier chapters, fa'afafine in Samoa are now relatively specific in asserting the desired sexual orientation of their partners, with a preference for heterosexual masculine men. As I will discuss later in this chapter, this is in keeping with the stated preferences of other male-to-female transgendered populations (Schifter and Madrigal 1997, 207; Kulick 1998, 124). The implication of this



Image 8: The Great Northern Hotel

Migrant fa'afafine photographed at the Great Northern Hotel, illustrating the 'effeminate masculinity' that was performed in this context.

preference is that the ability to maintain relationships with heterosexual men is another means of reinforcing the transgendered person's femininity, while sexual relations with homosexual men suggest that the transgendered person is seen as a man. However, during the time under discussion, such considerations were only developing in fa'afafine discourses. The three participants who talked of the Great Northern all mentioned meeting men there with whom they formed relatively long-term relationships. In all cases, the participants stated that these men were older, pālagi, and identified as gay, yet they were also happy to have relationships with people who saw themselves as feminine. Conversely, for the fa'afafine who frequented the Great Northern, the other pālagi patrons were simply 'masculine men'. As these men were thus not understood as 'fa'afafine', they were potential sexual partners. One participant described the sexual politics of the Great Northern:

In those days, you know, once we walk inside the [indecipherable] and they liked the brown skin. There's hardly any fa'afafine there at that time. Every time we walk over there, you can choose and pick which one you want. Because we sit aside over there and everyone's looking at you and when they see you go to the toilets, there's always someone follows you to the toilet and talks to you in the toilet.

This suggests a scenario in which gay pālagi men and migrant fa'afafine engaged in potentially sexual relations in a manner that allowed them to maintain their understandings of themselves as 'gay men' and 'feminine' respectively. Fa'afafine masculinised their appearances to a significant extent, and the signs of femininity that they did display could easily be read as the effeminacy that is so often associated with gay men. Thus, these 'effeminate Samoan men' would be seen as appropriate, and possibly even slightly exotic, sexual partners for pālagi men who were sexually oriented towards other men. However, the fa'afafine at the Great Northern also segregated themselves from the pālagi men, and were able to feminise their appearances to a greater degree than was commonly acceptable in Samoan contexts in New Zealand at that time. These fa'afafine could thus consider themselves marked as 'not men', a perception reinforced by the fact that they were attracted to and considered attractive by these masculine (albeit gay) men. These sexual relations could be compared with the 'butch-femme' model in lesbian relations, in which the masculinity of one partner reinforces the femininity of the other and vice-versa (Rubin 1992, 469-471). In this instance, the masculinity of the pālagi men reinforces the femininity of the fa'afafine, while the maleness of the fa'afafine reinforces the 'gayness' of the pālagi men.²

² In Samoan culture, the fact that fa'afafine are commonly understood to occupy the 'passive' position of 'insertee', while the masculine man adopts the 'active' position of 'inserter' allows the parties to a fa'afafine-male sexual act to see themselves as feminine and masculine respectively (McIntosh 1999, 11). Some knowledge of the specifics of sexual acts

Migrant fa'afafine and the contemporary 'gay scene'

The first encounters of members of the younger cohort with gay communities in New Zealand were with somewhat different subcultures. Increasingly split into ever more specific factions, these subcultures tended to be more 'out' and were often considerably more explicit about their transgressive sexual practices or embodiments of gender. One of the older participants mentioned above was, at the time of this research, in her 50s and passed as a woman. When I visited her in her suburban home, full of family photos and knick-knacks, the environment of a devoted great aunt, I found it virtually impossible to imagine her socialising in the contemporary politicised and sexually explicit gay scene. Even those older participants who remained relatively masculine and identified as gay men presented a version of homosexuality that could be described as 'restrained' and 'dignified' compared to the radical and confrontational face presented by various subgroups of the queer generation that is in ascendancy at the time of writing.

The significance of this subcultural shift was evident in one participant's description of her first entry into gay bars in Wellington in the early 1990s. The public models of homosexuality prevalent at that time included open expressions of a sexuality that was alien to Samoan culture:

It was im-possible. That was a shock. And still now, when I go to gay bars and see all these gay bikies and stuff, it just absolutely frightens me. While to me – I'm much more relaxed with gay men who are effeminate ... or transvestites or transsexuals that are effeminate. You know, like women ... effeminate behaviour I can associate with. But any gay man who is butch and masculine, I just ... I mean, I do talk to them, but sometimes it just really mixes me up up here. [Indicates head.]

In Chapter 4, I explained that while adolescent masculine boys may engage in same-sex sexual 'play' in Samoa, this is not considered socially significant (Mageo 1992, 449-450), and is not something that would continue in adulthood or after marriage (Bleys 1995, 67). Thus, for this Samoan-raised participant, the sight of two adult masculine men kissing or being affectionate towards each other came as a shock.³ Ironically, this participant had, earlier in her life, represented herself as gay as a form of 'camouflage' for her femininity. Yet the 'gayness' she performed was particularly effeminate and asexual. Her experiences enacting this 'gentle' form of homosexuality did little to prepare her for the 'raw' and masculine version she encountered in the gay bars of 1990s Wellington. However, as with

undertaken between these gay pālāgi men and migrant fa'afafine would provide further depth to the argument I am making here.

³ Besnier notes that "most Tonga leiti express unmitigated scorn for what they interpret as the foregrounding of sexuality in Western gay identity [...] and are scandalized at the thought of nonfeminine-acting men having sex together" (2002, 553). This narrative demonstrates that Samoan-raised fa'afafine have similar feelings.

those participants from the older cohort who found themselves able to be ‘effeminate men’ in the context of Auckland’s early gay community, this participant was aware that presenting as a ‘gay boy’ would allow for a certain latitude in terms of gender performance. Although her mother had cut her hair in an attempt to masculinise her appearance before she left Samoa, she knew that she still would not be ‘read’ as a straight masculine male:

Because by then, when I came over here to New Zealand, I was as effeminate as anything. I was put into a boys’ boarding school. [Laughter.] ... But, you know, the thing is, I didn’t come across the word ‘transsexual’ or ‘transgender’, right, until I was older, but at the fourth form, the only term that I thought I was ... that I could affiliate to was the word ‘homosexual’ and ‘gay’, because it was much more visible than any of the other sexualities or gender orientation at that time.

The experiences of this participant provide a particularly explicit example of how identities can only ever be taken up if they are discursively available (Wilton 1996, 109-110; Gagné and Tewksbury 1998, 86; Phibbs 2001, 129; Valentine 2002, 230-231). If she was to enact any femininity in this particular context while remaining ‘culturally intelligible’, the identity of ‘gay boy’ was virtually the only one available. Simultaneously, when the pālagi youths she boarded with encountered this ‘male’ who failed to conform to expectations of adolescent masculinity, discourses of (homo)sexuality were the only ones readily available through which to understand such behaviour:

Because I was in a predominantly white school, I mean, it’s like talking a foreign language to them, which they won’t even understand. So I almost have to fit into a category that they understood, so I ... so I sort of ... sort of fitted in, no matter how prejudicial it was.

But you still got teased and hassled about that.

Oh yes, I did, but during my schooling I still actually managed to look androgynous.

So you wouldn’t have, you never thought of trying to pass as a straight boy?

Never.

Never, no. Was that because you didn’t think you could of, or because you didn’t want to?

Well, the thing is that I actually sort of ... I actually pressed the boundaries of what a gay man is, and I’ve slotted in my androgyny as a comfort zone, and then sort of pushed it. Yeah. ... And then what happened is that I start growing my hair, sort of perm it, colour it, wore school socks up to my thighs. ... [Laughter.] I mean, people call it, you know, camp, faggoty, [...], and I knew that there are effeminate gay men out there, but my effeminacy that I actually add into my identity was more to cater for my transsexual side, rather than just being camp.

Although this effeminacy led to incidences of bullying, for this participant the temporary adoption of a ‘gay’ identity appeared to be the only way of enacting those levels of femininity that she experienced as immutable, and that were certainly beyond alteration by her mother.

Another participant experienced the 1990s gay scene as ‘liberating’, precisely because it allowed him to be fa’afafine while enacting a relatively masculine presentation. He had never been overly feminine in Samoa, and had adopted a completely masculine and heterosexual identity when first living in New Zealand. He explained how he had initially thought of homosexuality as related to a feminine embodiment:

Someone actually asked me if I’m gay, and I said ‘What’s that?’ So I didn’t know what the word means, until, when I was twenty-two, I found out from someone at the church I used to go to, because I asked, I said ‘What is ‘gay’?’, and they looked at me funny and they said ‘Don’t you know what ‘gay’ means?’, and I said ‘No’, and they said ‘Oh, it’s um ... it’s people like ‘that?’’ [indicates ‘limp wrist’], you know, they do the hand thing. So I clicked, and I said ‘Ah, so that means drag queens?’, because there was a lot of them back home. So I said ‘Oh, that was fine.’ But then I realised I will never be gay, because I’m not like that. I don’t dress up in women’s clothes. I don’t act feminine any more, and so I thought ‘Oh no, that’s not me’.

However, his first encounter with pālagi men who identified as gay changed his understanding of how gender could be embodied by males who were attracted to other males. This story started with a girlfriend offering to take him out one night:

... she said to me, ‘Look, I’ll take you to this club’. And I said ‘What club?’ And she said ‘It’s the Staircase’.⁴ And I said ‘Oh, I’ve never heard of the Staircase’. And then she come out and said ‘Oh, it’s a club for people like that’. [Indicates limp wrist.] And I said ‘Oh, really. Well that’ll be cool.’ So I thought they’re all drag queens. So I went along, and I walked into the Staircase, and there was more men than drag queens. And I said ‘I thought you said ...’, and she said ‘Oh, they all are’. And I said ‘What, all these men?’, and she said ‘Yeah, they’re gay’. So I thought ‘Oh, my gosh, so I am ...’. But the same night I walked in with her and I walked out with a guy. [Laughter.] I think she made a big mistake taking me there! [Laughter.] That was quite funny, because I was dancing, and I walk out and this guy said to me, ‘You’re very hot’. So I said, ‘Yeah, I know, it’s quite hot in here, isn’t it?’, and he laughed and he said it to me twice, and I said, ‘I know it’s hot!’ But then he pinched me, you know, pinched my backside, and I went up to [my girlfriend], and I said, ‘Oh, that guy pinched me’, and then she looked at me and said, ‘Oh, he likes you’. I start to ... you know, my feelings start to come out, so I liked it, sort of – ‘This is what I want’.

In the first quote from this participant, to be ‘gay’ is understood as related solely (or at least predominantly) to physically embodied and particularly gendered ways of being. However, the second quote indicates an introduction to, and emerging comprehension of, western discourses of (homo)sexuality, in that to be ‘gay’ is seen as related to sexual practices, and not contingent on specifically gendered behaviour. While talking with me, this participant quite explicitly stated that the distinctions of pālagi categorisations of gender and sexuality are enabling. In Samoan culture, there is

⁴ The Staircase is a well-known gay bar in Auckland that has existed in various locales for over twenty years. The iconic status of the Staircase is indicated by the fact that whenever I present this narrative to local audiences they invariably laugh at this point.

little space for men such as him, who do not see themselves as feminine, yet are not sexually attracted to women. In Auckland, he was able to find an identity that fitted with his personal perception of his sexuality and embodiment. His articulation of this process is a particularly salient example of how knowledge, discourses, and identity are fluid and shift in relation to each other.

Gay fa'afafine men today

There were some participants who had represented themselves or were understood as gay men, but who, at the time of this research, enacted femininity to such an extent that such an understanding would not be possible. However, others continue to identify as gay men.

For the participant quoted above, adopting an identification as a gay man was his first incarnation as an 'effeminate man' after having



Image 9: Gay fa'afafine men

Having never been particularly feminine, these two migrant fa'afafine embody versions of the effeminacy that is available in contemporary gay discourses.

arrived in New Zealand and spending some years enacting hetero-masculinity. Once he 'discovered' western models of homosexuality, he identified with these immediately, precisely because being 'gay' allowed him to continue with a relatively masculine embodiment while being sexually oriented towards masculine men. (Re)claiming identification as fa'afafine was somewhat more difficult:

It's like, if someone ask me, then I have no problem saying 'Yes, I am'. ... But you know what, I'm quite comfortable to say who I am, but before I was denying it. Because the word 'fa'afafine' was the worst word I have ever ... I hate it! I hate being called by that word. And I was very uncomfortable even talking about it. Like, when I had a conversation with someone, I don't like using that word, because I felt ... there's something with that word that I was really ... that I don't like.

Is that just in relation to you, or in general?

I think it's in relation to me. Because when my mum found out that I was sleeping with a man, I had to go over home and sat there in front of her and explain myself, why I was living with a man. So when I said to Mum, 'I'm fa'afa...' – I didn't really want to use that word, but there was no other word to describe myself, apart from that, so I ... as much as I hated to come out like that, I had to say it to make her realise that I'm serious.

So if you'd said you were gay, she wouldn't have understood?

If I'd said I was gay, I'm comfortable with that, but the world 'fa'afafine', it was ... I felt it was a very harsh word, it was a very difficult word to come out of my mouth, but now I'm fine, I mean, I'm OK about it. If someone calls me fa'afafine, I have no problem. If someone asks me if I was like that, I would say, 'Yes, I am'. But before, it was like that word kills me.

For those who identified as gay men, life in New Zealand could be less problematic than for those fa'afafine who 'cross-dressed', but did not pass as women. As one participant explained, the fact that he never really presented as overly feminine, even in Samoa, made life in New Zealand somewhat easier:

So do you think it was easier for you in New Zealand, like, some of the older fa'afafine that I've spoken to have said that when they first came here, and these were people who cross-dressed back in Samoa, and when they came here they tried to dress as men and act like men, and it was a lot more difficult for them to do that. Do you think maybe it was easier for you because you didn't have that ...?

I think it was, yeah ... yeah, [indecipherable], it was a lot easier, because, I mean I only have to sort to say that I'm – and I mean sometimes I don't have to disclose, but, you know, like with all the jobs that I've been, at the interview I always say, 'Look, I'm gay. Have you got a problem with me before you hire me?' And I've never come across an employer that has sort of said they have a problem with that.

Other masculine participants articulated similar sentiments, and one even felt that identifying as a gay man had increased his chance of being employed as an airline steward.

Masculine participants also experienced fewer problems with maintaining relationships with men than the more feminine participants. All the more masculine participants were, or had been, in long term relationships, and there was a feeling in the way they talked that such relationships were an entirely reasonable expectation on their part. Their relationships were almost exclusively with gay pālagi men. In the one case where I specifically asked a participant about the ethnicity of his partners, he



Image 10: Embodying masculinity

For this gay-identified masculine participant, being fa'afafine presents no barriers to gaining employment in New Zealand

explicitly articulated an attraction for pālagi men. This was also mentioned by relatively masculine fa'afafine interviewed in Samoa. Although I have not explored this issue in any great depth, it seems that if a masculine Samoan man were attracted to a gay-identified, relatively masculine, fa'afafine, it is likely that the Samoan man would also identify as 'gay'. As I have already mentioned, there is considerable slippage between 'gay' and 'fa'afafine', and it is extremely likely that a gay *Samoa*n man would also be read as, or even identify as, fa'afafine. Thus, sexual relations between two gay Samoan men, where one or both also identifies as fa'afafine, could also be read as sexual relations between two fa'afafine. However, sexual relations between fa'afafine remain a strict taboo in fa'afafine communities in both Samoa and New Zealand, and were articulated by more than one participant as resembling incest.

Only one participant actually mentioned that he would prefer a Samoan partner:

Because to me, if the right Samoan man came along, that would have been nice, because to me it would be easier for him to adapt to my culture and everything that I do and understand why I do things for my family, because that was one of the barriers with most of the people that, the pālagi men that I go with, because they try to understand why I do things, and I say, 'Well, this was the way I was brought up, this is my culture, you've got to accept that. You know, to me, when you're with me, you're with my family, and, you know, for you, you were brought up to be independent. I was brought up to be interdependent, so, you know, there's always got to be family around me. Whether it's going to be my family or my fa'afafine family'.

Like those fa'afafine who found sexual partners among the masculine pālagi men of early gay bars such as the Lily Pond, the self-identified 'gay fa'afafine men' of contemporary times similarly articulate a desire for *masculine* gay men. As one masculine participant who simultaneously identifies as fa'afafine and as a gay man explained:

Yeah, OK, I'm attracted to straight-acting men, it doesn't mean that they're either straight or gay, but not feminine. Because to me, if I want to go with a feminine, if I want to go with a drag queen, you know, why would I go with a drag queen – I might as well go with a woman.

Conflicts between Samoan and pālagi identities

While some aspects of these gay-identified participants' lives in New Zealand may thus be made easier by virtue of identifying as, and being understood as, gay men, there are areas of this identity that may have been difficult to reconcile with their senses of themselves as also fa'afafine, and as Samoan. The very fact of being part of gay communities can be problematic. One participant interviewed in Samoa suggested that the manner in which gay men in Australian cities gather around particular centres made it easier to marginalise them, and worried that this would happen in Samoa if fa'afafine populations

became too concentrated in urban centres. Another Samoan participant who had lived in New Zealand for some years talked about one of Auckland's gay clubs:

Yeah, Staircase ... I kind of didn't like it, because I'd probably be much more comfortable in places where there were mixed people, because I thought that that was not a real, you know, place, situation. I mean, you can't actually bring that atmosphere and environment in the Staircase and put them onto a public street [indecipherable]. That's why I didn't like it. But I had a lot of friends who went there, and they enjoyed it.

This aversion to the ghettoisation of people because of their sexuality or their sex/gender identity, whether voluntary or not, in part relates to the discomfort all Samoans feel about foregrounding sexuality (Besnier 2002, 554). It is also a manifestation of the Samoan understanding that the self is integrally related to social context. While belonging to groups and communities defined by sexual identities may give pālāgi gay men and lesbian women a stronger sense of themselves and a greater level of support, most fa'afafine continued to construct their subjectivities in the contexts of their family relationships and their place within the wider Samoan community.

Furthermore, steps by gay communities to include fa'afafine, presumably under the more inclusive rubric of 'gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered', can be problematic. While fa'afafine and gay communities in New Zealand share certain political interests, some participants suggested that affiliations with gay communities should be carefully moderated and negotiated. One regarded fa'afafine inclusion in gay community projects with a particular degree of cynicism:

It's like, I think the community over here, in order to be politically correct, it's like America, you know, you have shows there, and in order to be politically correct and inclusive they have one blackie and ten whites, and that's enough to be politically correct, and that's enough to be called so-called inclusive. It's a similar thing with this, is that on an annual basis there aren't any events for fa'afafine. Furthermore, there isn't even a fa'afafine representative on the board of trustees at the Hero thing. So if they were genuinely inclusive they would have sorted that out first, and so it's almost like, 'OK, we'll throw up a Pasifika float and fill it up with fa'afafines on the parade, and then we're politically correct. We're being inclusive. So when fa'afafine complain about it, they can't, because we've included them'.

This implies a degree of 'tokenism' in the 'multi-culturalism' which queer groups such as the Hero Trust appear to embrace, suggesting that this multi-culturalism is more symbolic than structural. I will consider this distinction more extensively in the following chapter. In the context of the present discussion, this observation does indicate that fa'afafine's identification as 'gay men' is complex and has implications that extend beyond the immediate and personal.

Some gay fa'afafine men also acknowledged that while presenting as gay men may facilitate day-to-day life in New Zealand, were they to return to Samoa, they would find it difficult to be understood as fa'afafine precisely because of their masculine presentation. One participant talked of how his family knows he is gay but finds it easier to accept and understand the identities of his fa'afafine cousins because they 'cross-dress'. Another told of how, when he returned to Samoa on holiday, people from his village attempted to 'fix him up' with girls from the village because his masculine presentation meant that they saw him as a potential husband for these young women.

Yet these participants were quite clear that they identified as gay men *and* fa'afafine. While fa'afafine in Samoa may reject the 'gay' identity, for these participants identification as fa'afafine and as gay man were held simultaneously. For more than one participant, this was enabled by the inclusiveness of the term 'fa'afafine'. In the following interview fragment, I had just established that the participant identified as both a gay man and fa'afafine:

But you don't see them as being exclusive, that you can use both of these identities or both of those ...

No.

Right.

But then again, in the Samoan language, there's only one word for all of us, whether you're lesbian or drag queens or straight gay boy, there's only one word to describe. When we came here, it's all divided into different categories – there's transsexual, there's drag queens, there's gay men, there's [indecipherable], there's transvestites – it's all separate. So now when I say to the girls, I was talking to them this morning, and [indecipherable], 'Oh, gay people like you'. And they would just jump and say 'We're not gay'. And they don't like to be called gay. It's interesting.

For some who identified as gay men, the fact that they were also fa'afafine was an important part of their ethnicity. One participant felt that having a primary identification as fa'afafine indicated a stronger link to the Samoan culture in which he was raised. He was concerned that the cultural base of the fa'afafine identity was becoming lost to those born in New Zealand:

It's just sort of like sometimes [indecipherable] listening to some of the New Zealand-born fa'afafine, I think they more identify with being gay than being a fa'afafine, but it's usually us that were brought up in Samoa that are a lot more comfortable with being fa'afafine, and that's another area that's quite interesting ... yeah, it's great being there in New Zealand and I still feel comfortable calling myself a fa'afafine.

Dennis Altman suggests that in the meetings of 'traditional' non-western transgenderism and the recent emergence of 'gay' identities occurring around the globe, "the new gay groups reject a common identity with more traditional identities, and define themselves as contesting sexual rather than gender norms"

(Altman 1997, 422). While there may be a population of gay Samoan men who define themselves in opposition to fa'afafine, with many of the participants in this research, it was clear that simultaneously holding identities as 'gay man' and 'fa'afafine' was neither contradictory nor undesirable. These participants mobilised many of the trappings of a politicised sexual identity as gay men, while also drawing on the cultural, ethnic, and traditional resources of fa'afafine identities.

As Lee Wallace states in her revised reading of the New Zealand documentary *Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa*, while fa'afafine are not homosexuals (or transvestites or transsexuals), any contemporary consideration of fa'afafine, especially of those living in the New Zealand context, must take the related historical development of these various identities into account, in that each has inevitably affected the others (2003, 139). 'Fa'afafine' and western identities such as gay, transvestite, or transsexual cannot avoid interpellating each other (Wallace 2003, 140), and as this chapter has demonstrated, the identities 'gay' and 'fa'afafine' can, in fact, mutually exist within the same body, the same subjectivity. Yet the experiences of some participants also suggested that in some cases 'fa'afafine' and 'woman' can similarly co-exist, indicating that the interweaving that Wallace identifies between Samoan and western identities is not necessarily only about sexuality, but is as much, or even more, about gender. While some participants in this study identified as 'homosexual men', I would suggest that this is not *necessarily* because they, at least initially, identified similarities between themselves and gay men on the basis of sexual orientation. Rather, this correlation appears to have usually occurred because the gay communities provided these migrant fa'afafine with a space in which they could enact a certain degree of effeminacy. However, for other participants, the effeminacy that was acceptable or appropriate for a 'gay man' did not gel with their own sense of themselves as feminine.

Fa'afafine women

For participants who wished to acculturate to New Zealand society, yet did not enact masculinity, the only other option within the binary gender framework was to pass as women. These fa'afafine were absorbed into western paradigms not as men with a non-normative sexuality, but as women. Because they have retained their penises, and do not have vaginas, if they engaged in penetrative sex as 'women', the sexual acts themselves would have been non-normative. However, they did not articulate this as particularly problematic if they were able to pass as women in everyday social situations.⁵ For some of these participants, an initial period of attempting to enact hetero-normative masculinity was followed

⁵ The context of sexual relations is discussed in later in this chapter.

by a period of attempting to find a place in gay communities. However, affiliation with the gay scene in New Zealand was usually only temporary. For these feminine participants, any masculinity, whether associated with hetero- or homosexuality, was experienced as an inaccurate enactment of what they felt to be their ‘true’ gender, and their gendered presentation became increasingly feminine.

Gay communities do offer a mode of femininity (rather than effeminacy) in the form of drag. While some fa’afafine do perform in gay drag shows, this is rarely an adequate context in which to solely express femininity, as it is for most pālagi drag queens. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, for feminine fa’afafine, femininity is experienced as immutable. While femininity was an aspect of their subjectivities which could be muted or expressed in a range of different ways, it was felt to always be present, even when ‘denied’. The femininity of these participants had been repeated to the point of ‘styling’ the body so as to produce the appearance of, and be experienced as, occurring ‘naturally’ (Butler 1990a, 35). However, the fact that this femininity was ‘constructed’ does not detract from its ‘realness’. The repetition of the performance of gender, while producing an ‘appearance’ of a particular sort of body, does inevitably result in some form of ‘reality’. As Pierre Bourdieu observes, “[w]hat is ‘learned by the body’ is not something that one *has*, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one *is*” (1990, 73, emphases added). The ‘reality’ of the gender demonstrated in these fa’afafine’s enactments of femininity in the context of everyday life means that this femininity is not analogous with drag. While Judith Butler suggests that “the transvestite’s gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations” (1990b, 278), the issue of intentionality creates a considerable difference between transvestites or drag queens and those who experience their femininity as innate. The transvestite ‘knows’ that she is male, and only temporarily adopts a feminine embodiment. Conversely, feminine fa’afafine know that they are feminine. The difference between the femininity of fa’afafine and the feminisation of drag was succinctly explained to me by one participant who, while not always understanding herself as, or passing as, a woman, was nevertheless predominantly feminine in her gender. This exchange evolved out of a question I asked about whether migrant fa’afafine performed in drag shows in gay venues in New Zealand:

I think fa’afafine who come from Samoa sort of tend to have their own identity – you know what I mean, and they stick with each other, because the gay scene drag queen type of queen is really, really different from what fa’afafine look like or act like or are.

Right. So what do you think the difference is?

Well, drag queens are more outrageous looking, whereas fa’afafine are more feminine, you know, and toned down a bit more.

So more like ...

So when it comes to shows, if you look at [that fa'afafine performer] as well, when she does her shows, it's not what a full on drag queen does, big wigs, big outfits and outrageous stuff – it's a bit more funkier, a bit more modern. I think of fa'afafine as a bit more ... 'island girl' type thing, and that's what they know in Samoa. I mean, we never had, we never saw those drag queen images until the early seventies, during the war, when the frigates used to come over, and they identified fa'afafine as queens [indecipherable] was the first time we ever heard that term, and we thought, 'Oh, what's that?' Then when we saw what the westernised version of fa'afafine was drag queens, then they thought, 'Oh, OK, we must be drag queens then'. But they are actually different.

Right, right. Because there's also that thing of, like, most drag queens don't obviously dress like that all the time, you know, pālagi drag queens, whereas fa'afafine dress as women all the time.

Yeah, it's an ongoing femininity for me – it's not a 'job'. Because being a drag queen nowadays can be more of an occupation for a lot of gay men.

Right, yeah. So how do you see – because a lot of the performances you do are like, in... like the Hero show and things like that – so how do you see your performances fitting into that?

Well, I work – ha, 'I work' – I wear wigs, but the wigs I have are more funkier than the typical drag queens, you know, they've got like five wigs on top of each other, you know, who's got the biggest and the tallest – I mean, that's not my style. I'm also more toned down and more feminine, as opposed to outrageous and confrontational looking.

So would you see your point of reference as being pālagi drag queens or more of the more female artists, like ... or a combination, or neither, or ...

A combination of my masculinity and my femininity. I see myself as a fa'afafine singer-songwriter, because what that does is actually throws me in a pool of my own [indecipherable] there's only two fa'afafines who actually sing, professionally, and yet our genres are totally different from each other, so we're both in our own whatever, but as far as my image is concerned, how I portray that is ... is bigger than my femininity during the day, my everyday femininity, but in comparison to the typical drag queen, it is very toned down, and very feminine and womanly.

I mean, that's like saying that most female artists, performers glam up when they go on stage at night, I mean, they wouldn't go on wearing the t-shirt and jeans that they wear during the day.

Yeah, it's just an enhanced look of what they look like during the day.

Yeah, but nobody calls – well, I suppose sometimes, people are called drag queens, even if they are actually women, but yeah ...

Some drag queens, you don't recognise them – there's this very huge distinction when they are in drag and when they aren't in drag, but with fa'afafine, there isn't much of a distinction – it's an enhancement.

In this interview, the participant and I worked through to an understanding that the femininity of female artists, fa'afafine singers, and drag artists, is all performed. The distinction is that for the drag artist who is a 'man' when not in drag, this femininity is *only* performance – it is always intentional and intentionally temporary. Conversely, for both female and most fa'afafine artists, the femininity enacted on stage is an 'enhancement', an extension of a gender that has already long been in existence, created through its iteration and reiteration (Lloyd 1999, 201-202).

These more feminine fa'afafine experienced dissatisfaction not only with the normative hetero-masculinity they generally embodied during the initial period of life in New Zealand, but also with the non-normative alternative embodiments of femininity that were available for effeminate men in New Zealand, such as 'gay men' or 'drag queens'. For these participants, the solution was to reconfigure their bodies so they could be understood as women. That they could make these decisions was the result of their location at the convergence of a number of historical and cultural developments. These participants were primarily of the younger cohort, who grew up in Samoa during the shifts outlined in Chapter 4. They had thus always embodied their femininity in ways that were not so common among the older generation. They had also arrived in New Zealand at a time when the possibility of medically feminising 'male' bodies was not only a conceptual possibility, but increasingly easy and affordable. In the following discussion, I will outline how discourses of transgenderism, the availability of relevant technologies, and the resultant ability to pass as a woman in most (although not all) contexts inevitably had a significant effect on all other aspect of these participants' lives.



Image 11: Fa'afafine performer
This performer at Auckland's Pasifika Festival illustrates the 'natural' femininity discussed in the above interview segment.

Discovering feminising technologies

For more feminine participants, one of the more obvious differences between Samoa and New Zealand was the greater availability of means of feminising their appearance and body. Of the modes of feminisation that have become available to fa'afafine as a result of globalisation, the most accessible are also those that might be thought of as the most cosmetic, such as make-up, clothing, and hairstyles. As I noted in Chapter 5, the influx of western images and ideals of femininity into Samoa has introduced the possibility that cosmetic modifications can be used as more definitive and immediate signifiers of gender than the female labour and subtle sartorial differences that have been afforded by 'traditional' Samoan culture. These cosmetic means of feminising are also temporary, and act on aspects of embodiment that are generally understood as available for alteration. They have thus been quite widely adopted by fa'afafine, even those who are relatively masculine, although the contexts in which these cosmetic modifications have been used varies between individuals. Greater availability of such feminising products in New Zealand may in part explain why the feminine participants interviewed there seemed so much more feminine than did those in Samoa. While these aspects of embodiment were generally seen as appropriate for modification,⁶ it is also significant that these are, largely, modifications which can be temporary. Use of these mutable markers of femininity is thus consistent with a sense among fa'afafine that gender is fluid.

However, for fa'afafine living in New Zealand, the possibilities for embodying femininity extend beyond just cosmetics and clothes. Coming to New Zealand, especially in recent decades, has meant encountering the potential for utilising feminising medical technologies. A wide range of attitudes about, and frequent ambivalence towards, feminising medical technologies was common among participants in this research. Pat Califia suggests that non-western transgendered populations would only too readily take up hormone treatment and genital reconstruction surgery were they available (1997, 49). However, it seems that fa'afafine do not embrace this technology unreservedly, and their use of medical means of feminising their bodies is conditional and prioritised in relation to many other aspects of their lives.

⁶ It should be noted that the use of these superficial modifiers is not only considered as more appropriate by fa'afafine. Among 'real' women, the use of cosmetics, hairstyles, and other temporary physical modifiers are generally considered more 'acceptable' than more permanent modifications such as cosmetic surgery.



Image 12: Embodying femininity

The fa'afafine in the foreground (seen here in a gay pride parade) employs a range of cosmetic and medical feminising technologies, and passes as a woman in virtually all contexts in New Zealand.

I suggested in the previous chapter that those participants who enacted femininity in New Zealand usually did so when they were in situations where this feminisation could be distanced from their roles as family members. For those who chose to live as women, the apparent need for a degree of separation from family contexts before feminising was particularly marked. As I have already noted, this was not a denial of their family-based identities, but rather a feeling that such feminising could only be undertaken in contexts where it would not compromise participants' senses of their positions within kinship structures. Even for those who wished to utilise feminising medical

technologies, family were often part of the decision-making process. For one participant in her fifties who lived alone, and presented and passed as a woman, her sense of her place within her family still influenced her decision regarding genital reconstruction surgery:

Because I already talked to my father, I went to my father [indecipherable] and when I talked with him, I asked him, and he said OK, as long as I don't do anything that will disgrace the name of the family. [Indecipherable] I think it's best for me [indecipherable]. But my sister is the only one that stops me. My older sister, the one that was looking after me when my mother died.

[...]

She accept it, you know, she accept me for ... but I think that's one thing she don't want to accept. Because she say for a long time that if God make you like that, you should stay like that. Don't change what God made.

While those fa'afafine who had utilised feminising medical technologies spoke of being able to do so only once they had obtained a degree of distance from family contexts, this is not to suggest that this 'distancing' was undertaken specifically in order to allow the use of these technologies. Of the three participants resident in New Zealand who passed as women, this process of full feminisation was

initially instigated by meeting, and eventually living with, other fa'afafine⁷ and being encouraged to emphasise their femininity. In at least two cases, this extended to encouragement to take up the feminising medical technologies that friends were already using. One participant explained how this happened, in response to my query about whether it was difficult to gain access to hormone treatment:

I got introduced to hormones through my flatmates when I was staying with them, the queens, the girls, the Samoan girls. They were already on hormones, and they took their tops off and showed me how big their tits were, and it was like, 'Oh my God, I want those!' [Laughter.] Because it was just like, their skin was so amazing and it looked so convincing, and then they had, like, no facial hair and they were hairless, and they were so feminine and stuff ... and then ... because I don't want a sex change, but I still want to look feminine, but I hated all these, like, beard and all these muscles and stuff, I just didn't really sort of see myself as that. And a lot of other transsexuals encouraged me to take it, because they said, 'Well, you know, you're petite already, so you'll pass, and, you know, get on it'. So I did.

As this narrative clearly illustrates, peer group 'education' and reinforcement are important components of the decisions made by fa'afafine who choose to utilise feminising medical technologies. Unlike most western transsexuals, who commonly articulate a feeling of having always felt that they should have been women, this participant's narrative operates more from a sense of particular body parts 'suited' her better than others. Yet while she understood that she was not a 'woman', the manner in which she spoke of these indicators of femininity – large breasts, smooth skin, petite frame – is significant. In spite of not feeling the need to conform to western ideals of 'female-ness', she still aspired to a particularly western version of *femininity*.

The beauty myth

There are a number of aspects to the processes by which the fa'afafine 'women' that I interviewed were absorbed into western models of femininity. At levels that might be considered 'deeper', such as the correlation between 'sex' and 'gender' or sexual orientation, there was significant complexity, which I will discuss shortly. What struck me more immediately was the concerns of some participants regarding apparently superficial aspects of their gendered enactments, which were related to conformity to (western) ideals of feminine 'beauty'. For those who presented as relatively masculine, their inability to pass as a woman was often mentioned as contributing to their decisions not to 'cross-dress'. While this was rarely, if ever, cited as a *fundamental* reason for presenting as masculine, it was notable in various

⁷ As I have already suggested, locating a fa'afafine cohort is generally what motivated participants to relocate out of family contexts. The fact that participants rarely moved away from family to live alone may be because, during their early years in New Zealand, they would still have been operating within the Samoan paradigms that favour communal living. Thus, in spite of feeling that they had fulfilled most of their duties towards their 'aiga, it would have been somewhat difficult for these young migrants to live alone. The significance of the location of fa'afafine cohorts is indicated by the fact that participants rarely discussed friendships in New Zealand except for their friendships with other fa'afafine.

passing comments. What these comments tended to reveal is that these participants felt that not only were they unable to pass as women, but that they were also unable to be *attractive* when dressed as women. For example, one participant talked about what makes him feminine:

I mean, for God's sake [indecipherable], the thinking to me is more important, and the looks, well you're trying to feminise yourself – well, some of us can't, we're six foot, big brutes, we look terrible – and I look terrible in drag, I have to tell you, because I've already done that and I look terrible in drag.

In an interview with another participant, we were discussing a brief period in his life when he 'cross-dressed':

So even when you were dressing in drag, that would just be when you were going out at night?

Yeah, it was just at night time. Once it's day light, oh no, I can't go anywhere with a dress on! [Laughter.] It was just at night.

In this segment, laughter replaces the assertion of the previous participant that he 'looks terrible in drag'. Most western transsexuals will present as women regardless of how 'attractive' they are, and many will go to considerable lengths to conform to ideals of femininity. However, for these participants, the fact that they 'looked terrible in drag' was remedied by simply presenting as men. It should, however, be noted that the necessity to pass as an *appropriately* feminine woman was more of an issue in New Zealand than in Samoa. One participant explained how, in Samoa, the physique that results from the physical labour undertaken in the villages only problematises fa'afafine's sense of themselves as feminine once in New Zealand:

... but if you look at a lot of the fa'afafines, you know, ... they are women, but they have biologically male bodies – big boned, tall, doing both gender duties over in Samoa, carrying coconuts, and looking after the babies, so over the course of years of time they would have developed male characteristics with their appearances – muscles and weight and bone structure and what-not. But they are still effeminate and the family accepts them and [...], but I think when you're over here in New Zealand, because you look, you know, you are a faggot, basically, when you're here ...

In New Zealand, to have an obviously male body while enacting femininity thus has different meanings than in Samoa. For those migrant fa'afafine who did want to be understood as women, enactment of femininity shifted emphasis to focus on the body, and then on the *ideal* body. While post-structuralist theorising has often cast gender as so conceptual as to float free from the body (Phibbs 2001, 51), the specifics of individual bodies do have a significant impact on the choices social actors make. As Lois McNay points out, the unique status of the body as the threshold of the subject's lived experience of the world, means that the body is an object that is integral to subjectivity (1999, 98). Thus, no social actor can be separated from their body. Bodies are not just discursive products, but tangibly impact on

the formation of subjectivities. Bodies are thus forces which contribute to the construction of gender, and are the primary means through which gendered identities are enacted (Phibbs 2001, 88).

While the correlation between physical size and gender is a social construct, for fa'afafine living in New Zealand it is a social construct that is consequential to their capacity to feel, and be understood as, feminine.⁸ The shifts experienced by the migrant fa'afafine in this research in how their bodies were understood illustrate how, through being inscribed with social values (Phibbs 2001, 130), the body becomes 'physical capital'. According to Nick Crossley, physical capital resides in things like skin colour or genitals that have the effect of "opening (or shutting) doors and shaping both life trajectories and, in this way, habits" (2001, 6). As with all capital, the value of these physical signifiers is specific to the field in which the social actor is located. In the Samoan context, having a large and well-muscled body does not necessarily prevent one from being seen as feminine. In western societies, however, if one wishes to be understood as feminine, and especially if one wants this femininity to appear to be that of a 'woman', a small, less muscled body is more advantageous. In the social field of western sexual politics, particular genital configurations also hold more value in relation to femininity. Some more feminine fa'afafine have thus begun to wonder if it would be useful to have a vagina. One participant who passes as a woman explains how she had, at times, wished she possessed a vagina, which she saw as having a greater value than a penis in particular sexual relations:

There were times when I thought, 'Oh, I wish I had a vagina'. Because, you know, it's ... I don't know ... guys take you seriously more.

Sometimes, yeah! [*Laughter.*]

I don't know, I don't know ... sometimes I think, 'If I had a vagina, maybe they would enjoy having sex with me and [indecipherable] ... [...] It's hard to explain.

Yeah, yeah, I know what you mean. I mean, it's like, nothing's ...

It's like some guys ... I've had guys that had a thing for me and stuff, but I think it would have been easier on their side to make further steps on making the move when I had a vagina, you know? But because I have a penis, that confuses them. That really confuses them. Unless they're bi-curious, or they have fetishes for transsexuals, which are really rare, out there, are so rare!

⁸ Even at this level, it is not entirely the case that these aspects of embodiment are, or always will be, totally fixed. If medical technology cannot yet change a person's height or implant 'feminine' reproductive organs into a male body, it is entirely feasible that this will be possible in the future. Obviously, there was a time when causing breasts to grow or constructing a vagina would have been impossible, yet these are now options that are available to fa'afafine, even if not always taken up. However, it is (still) not within the capacity of the medical profession to alter the physical attributes discussed in this section, and thus at this particular historical moment they are, for the individuals discussed, beyond change.

The general social pressure to conform to physical ideals of femininity was also played out in relation to issues such as weight or breast size. One participant who was a performer spoke of needing to go to the gym in preparation for her upcoming public performances, while another spoke of how she had only recently started socialising again after losing a lot of weight. Here the enactment of ideals of physical femininity was clearly related to particular public contexts, contexts in which there is an emphasis on appearance, especially for women. Another participant who spent some time training as a fashion designer described how her desire for a more feminine body had a very specific manifestation:

... I would get Vogue magazines, I would draw them. ... I had about like, sixteen, seventeen books filled with sketches, and I actually did those in determination to prove to the polytechnic that I could do it, but I think that's when I actually developed my interest in fashion. And I think that's when a lot of my ... construct of women's identity also came from fashion as well, too. ... There were times when I thought, like, 'Oh my God, I don't have the waist, I don't have the legs, I don't have the shoes, I don't have the breasts, I don't have [indecipherable]', you know ...

But then, neither do half the women in the world, so ...

But it's quite interesting that I actually went through that sort of frustration similar to what girls sort of face [indecipherable]. But I mean, it's only now that I'm much more of a well aware, educated person that I know that everybody is different, that it's all hype, basically ...

Adoption of the 'beauty myth' indicates a complex interplay of acculturation and assimilation in terms of these participants' enactments of femininity. As I will discuss, fa'afafine exhibit explicit agency in their use of feminising medical technologies, often choosing not to conform to the expected correlation of body and gender. These choices continued to be informed by the ideologies retained from a range of Samoan discourses which include: respect for family; the God-given nature of the body; the centrality of reproductive capacities to gender; and an understanding that 'femininity' and 'female-ness' are not necessarily correlated. While the grounding of participants' subjectivities in Samoan socialisation appears to have allowed a resistance to western expectations of the relationship between 'sex' and gender, the western ideals of 'appropriate' feminine appearance that are adopted by most women played a considerable part in how these fa'afafine presented and understood themselves as feminine.

'Women' but not 'female'

As I have suggested, while most participants seem to have at least partially adopted western-based ideologies regarding ideals of feminine beauty, their choices regarding the use of feminising medical technologies were more complex, and often more consciously thought out. However, the manner in which medical technologies were utilised can also, in some cases, be understood as an 'extension' of the use of more cosmetic signifiers of femininity. A range of opinions were expressed on the topic of

genital reconstruction surgery, not only from the participants who passed as women, but also from those who were ambivalently gendered or were masculine. One raised religion as influencing her decision to take hormones, but not to undergo genital reconstruction surgery:

... sorry, this is a slightly personal question *[laughter]* ... have you gone through with it, the whole way?

No.

Ah, OK. Do you think that you ever would?

Um ... to me, because I was brought up as a religious person, you know. To me ... I don't think I can go through with the whole thing. It's just because I don't mind to have boobs and everything, you know, and look like a woman. I will still keep my, um, my thing, because ... I was born with that. God gave me that, and I don't want to do anything against him.

Right.

Boobs is tough enough for him. [Laughter.]

Another felt that surgery did not make fa'afafine bodies into women's bodies, and having a surgically constructed vagina would not prevent them encountering prejudice:

And I find that ... because I've got friends that have had sex changes, in the '80s and in the '70s, have said, 'Yeah', after the sex change ... I said, 'OK, is there any difference in how you're treated from society, now that you've got a vagina and breasts?' And they go, 'No, not really'. Because when they actually meet men, they still have to admit to the guy that they were a man. And they still get treated based on that. And I, you know, when you think about it, it's just like, well, what did you fucking expect? And where did that expectation come from? It came from that whole society thing, by saying, 'You will be accepted if you become a woman, physically'.

Some feminine participants suggested that hormonal technology was all that they needed, as their main concern was to pass as women in public situations. In western contexts, pālagi are so accustomed to accepting that individuals 'accurately' represent their 'sex' through their gendered behaviour that they tend to be attributed with 'cultural genitals' – the genitals that are assumed to exist by virtue of particular performances of gender (Kessler and McKenna 1978, 163; Gagné and Tewksbury 1998, 99; Hird 2002, 588). As with the utilisation of feminine clothes, make-up, and hairstyles, feminising medical technologies are also used to promote the perception of the individual as feminine in public contexts. This did result in the apparent paradox observed by Heather Worth, who noted that the transgendered Pacific sex workers she interviewed often “spoke in seemingly contradictory ways about their sex and gender” (2000, 15), and understood themselves as women/feminine while also stating that they are ‘really’ male. However, this ‘contradiction’ is comprehensible if the complexity of cultural context is

taken into account. As I discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the Samoan sense of self is more sociocentric and relational than egocentric and individualistic. Thus, for many fa'afafine who passed as women, their own knowledge of their masculine genitalia was somewhat irrelevant if they were understood as 'women' by others. The fact that gender is not understood to originate solely in a particularly genital configuration, and the fact that the sense of self is explicitly located in social relations within Samoan paradigms means that, for feminine fa'afafine, being socially perceived as 'woman' was privileged over embodiment in terms of how they understood themselves as women.

For these participants, gender was 'diffused' throughout the body, rather than being exclusively defined by genitalia. This understanding emerges not only from the relational nature of gender, but also results from the fact that in Samoa, gender "is derived from what is done with the body as a whole, rather than from some innate sexing quality of the genitals alone" (Drozdow-St Christian 2002, 78). One participant thus spoke of her hormonally induced breasts and the fact that she dressed as a woman full-time as indicators of 'full' feminisation:

... now I'm in a situation that I've got everything. I don't need to go through a sex change or anything. I believe that if I still have my thing [penis], I'm still a woman.

Full femininity is thus not 'essentialised' to the possession of a vagina. Another participant related her 'womanliness' to a state of mind as much as a specific body, and in the same statement also drew attention to the significance of relationships with others and the perceptions of others in creating the impression of being a woman:

But I mean now, because I've become very comfortable, I think, because I've seen other Samoan transsexuals, pre- or post-op ... because I always thought that sex change was the only way to be, for me to be, if I wanted to be a girl, but ... I mean from what I know, is a woman is not what she wears, it's what she knows. That's what I think. And then ... I've also seen other transsexuals who were on hormonal therapy, who didn't have a vagina, and they still have relationships with men, you know? And their relationship, from what I've seen, is a heterosexual one, it's like, it's a guy cuddling a girl. That's what it looks like to me. So, um ... and because I was fortunate enough to see different variation of lifestyle, I was basically able to sort of use those examples and see where I sort of fit in, really.

Attitudes towards, and uses of, feminising medical technologies suggest that fa'afafine understand their embodiment in complex ways. When these technologies are used by pālagi 'males', it is generally because they are transsexual, and for theorists such as Hausman (1995), it is the very use of (or desire to use) these technologies that defines these 'men' as transsexual. To a large extent, the very definition of transsexualism rests on the desire to have the body of the 'other sex', so as to accurately reflect one's sense of oneself as a woman. In order to gain access to medical technologies, particularly genital

reconstruction surgery, it is generally necessary for transsexuals to provide narratives of lifelong dysphoria and discomfort. Thus, access to feminising medical technologies is typically bound up with the construction and articulation of the rhetoric of distress (Finn and Dell 1999), a situation that has been thoroughly explored and critiqued in the relevant literature.⁹

However, the manner in which fa'afafine 'males' utilise these technologies is at considerable variance with western understandings of the transsexual as 'a woman trapped in a man's body'. One of the central differences is the lack of a sense of 'desperation' in how fa'afafine talk about their initial uses of these technologies. One participant in New Zealand did express concern that members of her family blocked her desire for genital reconstruction, especially as those same family members introduced her as a male relative. However, hers was the only narrative that was marked by any form of 'distress'. For other participants in New Zealand, hormones seemed to simply be another means of enacting a feminine identity that they may or may not choose to take up, while genital reconstruction surgery, with its permanent and extensive implications, was not commonly considered. That few participants, including those who used feminising medical technologies, found the masculine aspects of their body a source of 'distress' (Finn and Dell, 1999) suggests that fa'afafine understand themselves as 'women' in particularly complex and situational ways, especially in relation to embodiment. For those who wanted to do so, it appeared that simply passing as a woman in most social contexts was sufficient for them to fully realise their femininity. Thus, while the feminising medical technologies that are available to migrant fa'afafine may initially appear to be an 'opportunity' to be 'complete' women, it seems that for most migrant fa'afafine, hormone therapy and genital reconstruction surgery are more often added to an ever-changing pool of available resources on which they may – or may not – draw in their enactment of feminine identities.

Sexual relations and fa'afafine women

While many participants in New Zealand passed as, and in certain contexts considered themselves to be women, this could cause problems for them in intimate encounters. One participant suggested that even in Samoa, where fa'afafine do not tend to pass as women, they learn 'tricks' in order to better mimic female bodies when engaging in sexual acts with Samoan men. While this statement may be read as indicating a desire to 'pass' as women in these sexual contexts, in fact all Samoans, including the

⁹ See, for example, Hausman 1995, 143; Billings and Urban 1996, 109; Califia 1997, 68; Walworth 1997, 353; Hirschauer 1998, 16.

sexual partners of fa'afafine, are fully aware that feminine fa'afafine still have 'masculine' genitalia. In Samoa, to present as feminine is not necessarily read as indicating the possession of female genitals. In New Zealand, where feminine fa'afafine are more likely to pass as women, the situation can be somewhat different. If participants who passed as women attracted the sexual attention of heterosexual pālagi men, it was probable that these men would have been unaware that these women had penises. If an encounter appeared to be becoming intimate, at some point the fa'afafine would have to reveal that they were not quite the women their suitors may have thought they were:

If I met a guy in a club and ... he's interested in me, I just tell him straight away the first time, you know. Because I don't want any trouble, you know. Even if they don't ... even if it's hard for them to tell that I was a man, I still tell them. Because ... I just tell them, if they want it that's me – if they don't, well too bad.

So what kind of reactions do you get when you tell guys that? Are they usually OK about that, or ...?

Um ... some of them are, but some of them, they took it really hard the first night. Then they even ring me up the next day – some of them need to understand. Because at the club, if a guy meets me at the club and he's not into transsexuals, and I told them the way I am and what I am, he always ring me in the morning, he say to me 'Oh, this is interesting, and I need to know more about it.' So we just talk ... and, you know, chat about it, and if he wants to see me again, fine. If he doesn't want to see me again, that's fine with me. At least I've been honest telling them that's the way I am.

While this level of honesty usually avoided adverse reactions, and even violence, from pālagi men, most of these men were unlikely to have pursued sexual relations with this fa'afafine woman once her embodiment was revealed. If sex did occur, it is probably that the nature of the attraction would have shifted for the man from being 'straightforwardly' heterosexual. As the above quote suggests, the pālagi sexual partners of fa'afafine are usually 'into transsexuals'. In such a context, it may be difficult for a fa'afafine to use such an interaction to contribute to the maintenance of her sense of herself as a 'woman' (Prosser 1998, 122-123). One participant reached an apparent resolution of this potential problem by widening her range of possible partners to include bisexual men:

I don't mind a bisexual man, because at least he has relationships with women and he wants to have a relationship with us transsexuals. So that sort of men I'm into.

For this participant, the sexual orientation of her partner was clearly significant in terms of her own sense of herself as a 'woman'. She had previously thought that she had an ideal match with a pālagi man who had a history of relationships with male-to-female transgendered people. However, after some time she discovered that he was a 'cross-dresser' and terminated the relationship. While the fact that he

was attracted to her as transgendered was compatible with her sense of herself as womanly, she required that he maintained a certain level of masculinity as ‘other’ to her femininity.

In research with transgendered populations in South American contexts, the heterosexuality of sexual partners appears to reinforce the femininity of transgendered people. Jacobo Schifter and Johnny Madrigal report that over 90% of the transvestite sex workers they interviewed in Costa Rica felt that it was preferable to have male heterosexual lovers (1997, 207). In his study of Brazilian travesti, Don Kulick states that the fundamental criteria travesti have for their boyfriends is that they be ‘men’. “And one of the defining attributes of being a *homem*, being a man, in the gender system that travestis invoke is that a male classified as a man will not be interested in another male’s penis” – even if that penis belongs to his travesti girlfriend (Kulick 1998, 124). In western contexts, for ‘traditional’ transsexuals, being accepted by sexual partners as their preferred gender is often a significant confirmation of that gender, such that the sexual orientation of sexual partners can be an important indication of the ‘success’ of a transsexual person’s gender reassignment (Devor 1993b, 309, 313; Hausman 1995, 6; Califia 1997, 47, 196; Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997, 482; Gagné and Tewksbury 1998, 98-99). Some feminine fa’afafine similarly need to believe that their sexual partners are attracted to them because of their femininity. However, the above story suggests that this does not mean that masculine sexual partners have to be *heterosexual*. The increasing prevalence of a range of sexual identities and practices means that the sexuality of participants’ sexual partners was not necessarily as straightforward as ‘heterosexual’. In the following chapter, I will discuss further the potential for the sexual partners of fa’afafine to be attracted to the sex/gender *ambivalence* that fa’afafine may embody, rather than their just masculinity or their femininity.

In the same way that these fa’afafine women often sought conformity to western ideals of femininity in relation to their appearances, they also, in some cases, talked about (hetero)sexual relations in terms which suggested the adoption of western ideals of relations between couples. It has been suggested that affection in Samoan culture is rather diffuse, and while family bonds are strong, close relationships between two people tend to be relatively rare (Ortner 1981, 390; Mageo 1998, 56). The concept of ‘romantic love’, at least as an attainable and desirable ideal for all people, is relatively specific to modern western society (Endleman 1989), and Dennis Keene writes that Samoan culture does not share the ‘western folk tradition’ of each person having ‘one ideal mate’ somewhere in the world (1978, 116). However, with the introduction of western discourses of romance, Samoans in general and fa’afafine in

particular are changing their expectations of relationships. One participant spoke of how she saw a relationship she had had in Samoa as 'heterosexual'. She based her understanding of how to behave in that context from watching other people, and also from western media, and later talked about her understanding of romance in similar terms:

And I find that western men are, not only are they clever, but they're quite sort of romantic, more romantic. But maybe because my perception of romance is through watching western movies. ... But it's quite funny, because with a lot of fa'afafine friends that I have, we all watch romance movies and we're like, 'Oh, when's that going to happen to me?' It's like, 'What do you think your wedding dress is going to be?' I mean, it's sort of a joke, but you know we're really ... we're really seriously talking about this topic. [Laughter.]

Shifts in her own capabilities and desires in terms of intimate relations were articulated as the result of her hormone treatment, and thus related to her increasing femininity:

My taste is ... like, when I came on hormones I want to get more emotionally involved with somebody now, and when I started dating this guy in Samoa, when I was 25 and he was 24 [long pause] yeah, he was 24, after that, it just really changed from how I see men and how I like to be treated really. ... And because your dick doesn't work now ... because, before it's like I wanted to get involved with somebody because the sex was the first thing, you know, it's like getting them in bed was a big achievement, because I was fully wanted, but now, it's like I want to be wanted because of me. Because now, you know, I can't have sex as well as I used to, because I do totally different things now from what I used to before, so now I sort of seek other avenues of fulfilment, and that's like the emotional attachment.

While the desire for an emotionally fulfilling relationship seemed relatively attainable, most migrant fa'afafine knew that their dreams of elaborate weddings would only ever be fantasies. However, even these imaginings influence how fa'afafine see themselves and represent themselves to others. It appears that these conversations were particular to New Zealand, where fa'afafine were more exposed to the discourses of romance that are embedded in so much western popular culture:

And some times they want to talk about their relationships with men, and what their wedding day's going to be like, and what their future husband's going to be like. It's like, these conversation never turn up in Samoa, but only turns up when I'm here.

Yeah. And so do any of the girls ...

Like, the idea of partners, marriage, children. Um, boyfriends, relationships, romance novels, romance movies ... yeah, like everything is based around boys. ... I think it's because there's more opportunity here for them to actually find partners, that conversations like these actually pop up, but when I'm in Samoa, nothing like that ever pops up. It's like, the thing they talk is like, 'Oh my God, my uncle is such a bitch to me'. You know, it's only that.

So why do you think that there's more opportunity here for them to find ...

Well, I think because of Caucasian men being more tolerant ... with transsexuals. But they're not basically, the girls are not basically treated as a substitute, really.

This last statement suggests that these discourses of romance also interplay with the desired ethnicity of partners. If any ethnicity was mentioned as a preference for these feminine participants, it was also pālagi, but in these instances this preference was explicitly linked to an understanding that pālagi men were more affectionate and more inclined to treat them like women – or ‘ladies’:

You know, Samoan boys ... are OK to me, ah? But ever since I've been with a pālagi boy, I find that they are very ... gentle people, especially men, you know. They don't rush things, they don't ... do things like Samoan boys do. Samoan boys do, they'll just want to do the thing and that's it. But when I've been with pālagi boys, they just like, treating me as a woman, you know, just cuddling, kissing and do things like [indecipherable]. I think that's, that's why I turn up to like pālagi men.

As Tamasailau Sua'ali'i has noted, in traditional Samoan gender structures, masculine sexuality is associated with virility (2001, 164), and physical and sexual prowess and aggression are significant components of Samoan masculinity (2001, 165). For fa'afafine in a Samoan context, this enactment of masculinity by their partners complements their own understanding of sexuality as a context in which masculinity and femininity are reinforced through adopting 'active' and 'passive' roles. However, while many Samoan men who migrate to New Zealand retain a certain level of sexual aggression (Park et al 2002, 52), it seems that fa'afafine adopt discourses that suggest that sexual partners should provide emotional intimacy as well as, or even rather than, an aggressive masculinity against which to define their femininity. While pālagi masculinity is also defined as (sexually) aggressive, these fa'afafine experience pālagi men as more amendable to working within the discourse of hetero-romance.

Embodying femininity and fa'aSamoa

While the availability of medical technologies that allow fa'afafine to more completely feminise their bodies may allow them to 'pass' as women in western contexts, this inevitably impacts on their identities in relation to Samoan frameworks. In the same way that those who present as masculine are not so easily recognised as fa'afafine by Samoans (especially in Samoa), so those who modify their bodies to be more feminine find that this also impacts on how they are understood in Samoan communities.

As I have already discussed, the place of participants within their families could significantly influence their decisions to utilise feminising medical technologies. However, this 'flow of influence' was multi-directional, in that the utilisation of these technologies similarly caused shifts in family dynamics. These shifts were particularly salient for one participant, who returned to Samoa twice after migrating. The second trip was some four years after she had begun taking hormones, and had undergone extensive

physical changes. She began describing this trip by reciting the words of her mother, who had failed to recognise her at the airport:

'Oh! I saw you with your trolley inside there, but I didn't recognise it was you. I thought it was another woman from New Zealand. It's just because that I came to pick up my boy, but now I'm picking up my daughter!' [Laughter.]

She then went on to talk about being back in her family home in the village.

And you felt comfortable being back there?

Oh yes. It was funny, like, when I was thinking back, in those days, when I was brought up with my younger brother, my mum always put us together in the same bed [laughter], like, the two brothers sleeping together, which is OK. Then, that year, in 19[--], when I went there, she won't let me sleep where my brother is sleeping.

Oh, OK. So that changed, so you became like a sister?

Yeah, I think that's what they were thinking. And it was funny, because I have to sleep with my dad and my mum. My step-father and my mother. So what they did, they put me in the middle of them. [Laughter.]

Ah, OK, that's really interesting.

And I think my brother was a bit angry because when he saw that, it was sort of, that my parents is spoiling me, but I'm old enough to be spoilt ... and yeah, but my brother took it really well. Because he's younger than me.

Ah, OK, yeah. So when you were younger, you would sleep with your brother, even though your family knew that you were fa'afafine? That was OK? But it was once you started looking more like a girl, that made the difference?

Mmm. It was 19[--] when I came back home, and they started to do things in a different way. Like, they were starting to treat me as a woman.

Ah, OK, yeah.

But back when I was in Samoa, before I came to New Zealand, they still treat me as a woman, but the main side is that I'm a man. You know, I used to sleep with my brother when I was young, and when I came back in 19[--], it was different, it's a different way.

So, before you left, even though they would treat you like a woman, but still not like your brother's sister?

Mmm.

This narrative is testimony to the complexity with which fa'afafine are understood as 'like women' in Samoa. That this participant was 'treated like a woman' before she migrated – except that she shared a bed with her brother – suggests that she was understood as 'feminine' in most social contexts, but not

as a biological woman in relation to her brother. However, when she began to manifest more physical signs of femininity, she was increasingly understood as ‘female’ and thus susceptible to the social norms that govern any potentially sexual relations between opposite-sexed Samoans.

Direct manipulation of the body to express femininity can also affect wider social relations within Samoan culture. This became evident for older migrants who may have seized the opportunity to be more physically feminine in their youths, but were now finding that this had implications for aspects of their identities as older Samoans. As I suggested in Chapter 4, if fa’afafine in Samoa wish to make claim to certain kinds of social and political power, it may be necessary to project a more ‘masculine’ image in certain contexts. However, this is not necessarily because masculinity is inherently associated with these particular positions. Although some contexts, such as the village fono, do favour a more masculine mode of behaviour, the acceptance of certain social roles is also linked to the responsibilities that attend the heading of a family unit. Thus the fa’afafine who wish to adopt these roles would improve their chances by marrying a woman and reproducing.

Similarly, it appears that the effects of hormone treatment are somewhat antithetical to the adoption of a matai title. While this was not directly relevant to the participants in this research, as the only matai participant was relatively masculine, it had affected other members of the older generation, as one participant explained in an exchange that followed on from a discussion of younger fa’afafine taking hormones:

I never do that.

You never thought about doing that?

No. Some of them down here, they all did, and then they went back to dressing up as men, so they stopped doing it, and they all [indecipherable]. [Laughter.] True! But some of them, they can’t even get rid of it. They’re too embarrassed to wear anything tight now. You know, they’re all getting dressed as men, but their tits are still there. They can’t even get rid of it. Like, another one up in [--], [...] he used to have ... he’s got a matai title now, so he had to enter hospital to have an operation to cut it all off.

Oh, OK.

He used to wear the really tight thing with the breasts there. So I think he had to go private to have it cut off – it was getting too big. He stopped taking those tablets ...

... but they don’t go away.

Yeah, they wouldn’t go away. Just like the other ones down there, so they wear loose clothing, or wear really tight t-shirts to push it over.

It may be tempting to read this need to (re)masculinise in order to become matai as evidence of Samoa's patriarchy. However, women can, and increasingly do, gain matai titles. As Penelope Schoeffel noted in the late 1970s, the numbers of female matai grew with the introduction of western institutions such as education, or professional careers, which are relatively gender neutral. This enabled women to succeed in areas that allowed them to accrue the respect (and responsibilities) appropriate to matai (Schoeffel 1979, 515). Inasmuch as women are able to attain this respect, and are not considered ineligible to be matai by virtue of their gender per se, so fa'afafine are also potential matai candidates. However, as with all Samoans, matai status is recognition of services provided to the community (Pulotu-Endemann and Peteru 2001, 131), and also necessitates a certain amount of 'social respectability' (Besnier 1994, 316). I would suggest that the fa'afafine who bear breasts are considered ineligible for matai status not because they are seen as either women or fa'afafine, but rather because the manifestation of breasts on a body known to be male, and the behaviours usually associated with such embodiments, are considered undignified by the (generally conservative) Samoans who are instrumental in conferring matai titles. For younger fa'afafine who pass as a more 'respectable' version of women, the situation may be somewhat different – it remains to be seen what happens when this generation reaches the age at which the requisite social status and responsibility become possible.

Assimilation

Migrant fa'afafine arrive in New Zealand embodying a certain habitus – “a set of deeply internalized master dispositions that generate action” (Swartz 1997, 101). For the participants in this research, part of this habitus was the inflected sex/gender of 'effeminate men', with all the potential historical implications outlined in Chapters 4 and 5. On arrival in New Zealand, their desire and ability to enact this sedimented identity was informed by a number of factors. Their habitus also included identification as 'Samoan' and 'family member', which inevitably affected the decisions they made regarding the embodiment of their femininity. They were further constrained and enabled by the various discursive and social fields within which they were located. As Nick Crossley suggests, actors within a field will only realise their habitus inasmuch as they can afford to, an equation that is not only economic but also relates to various forms of cultural and physical capital (2001, 96-98). However, even when all these factors are taken into account, actions are not inevitable, as habitus is not a set of rules that predetermine behaviour (Bourdieu 1977, 2). As agents, actors engage in strategies, undertaken to gain the best possible advantage that field, capital, and predisposition will allow (Swartz 1997, 67). So in a society in which the normative sex/gender binary is so rigid as to problematise understandings of the

ambivalence embodied by fa'afafine, some fa'afafine utilise the medical technologies that were initially developed to 'cure' (or regulate) other instances of sex/gender anomalies to more fully realise themselves as 'feminine'. Others identify existent cultures of 'effeminate men', in which sexual relations may compromise their sense of themselves as 'not men', but in which they are able to enact femininity without needing to pass as 'women'.

While 'fa'afafine' cannot be reduced to either 'gay' or 'transsexual', it could be anticipated that migrant fa'afafine would gravitate towards these identities, or at least to the communities and behaviours associated with them. Bourdieu points out that "the model of the near circular relationship of near-perfect reproduction [of subjectivity] is completely valid only when the conditions of production of the *habitus* and the conditions of its functioning are identical or homothetic" (1990, 63). In the lived world, this is rarely, if ever the case, and migration across cultures produces one of the most fundamental paradigm shifts a social actor is likely to experience. However, migrant fa'afafine are able to react to this shift because habitus is not unmotivated conformity to rules, but rather the internalisation of dispositions towards behaving in particular ways. Thus, there is some capacity for actors to react to novel situations – while their reactions may be predictable, they are not pre-ordained (Bourdieu 1977, 72-73).

The specific processes of assimilation and acculturation experienced by participants can thus be understood as the outcomes of their cultural, physical, and economic capital, the constraints and opportunities associated with the various fields within which they found themselves, and the manner in which their habitus disposed them towards mobilising this capital and strategising in order to be able to function within these particular fields. In the cases of the participants discussed in this chapter, this involved a certain level of 'absorption' into identities as gay men or women. However, as I have repeatedly noted, these participants continued to identify as fa'afafine. For other participants who I now go on to discuss, identification as a 'man' or 'woman' was, to varying degrees, resisted in favour of (almost) exclusive identification as fa'afafine. In the following chapter, I turn to consider how participants could live in a society that normatively functions with a binary sex/gender system while prioritising the gender ambivalence that is necessarily part of identifying as 'fa'afafine'.

CHAPTER 8

MAINTAINING AMBIGUITY (RE)CLAIMING FA'AFAFINE IDENTITIES IN NEW ZEALAND

To be fa'afafine necessarily entails understanding one's sex/gender as marked by ambiguity. As the previous chapter suggests, some migrant fa'afafine are able to enact this ambiguity in ways which are still comprehensible within western understandings, by either presenting themselves as effeminate men, or passing as women in most social contexts. However, for others this level of assimilation is either not possible or not desired. As I noted at the beginning of Chapter 6, the perceived constraints of adapting to western expectations of correlation between 'sex' and 'gender' is a disincentive for migration for some fa'afafine in Samoa. One participant, who returned to Samoa after many years of living overseas, would not have passed as a woman, yet has never thought of herself as a gay man, and would have been unlikely to be perceived as such in western contexts.¹ This participant explained the unease she felt in embodying gendered ambiguity outside Samoa:

You know, one of the most difficult things about being a fa'afafine in New Zealand is that I can't exercise the things that I want to do, that you see me do, you know, in my work in Samoa, or the things that you see me do in society here in Samoa. I can't exercise those things in a society like New Zealand or Australia. I can't go into work in New Zealand, you know, in a lāvalava like what you're wearing now [indicates my long skirt], you know, or my hair coming down, or have a pony[tail], you know, a pony[tail] at the back – you know, I can't do that. I can't put on my foundation and go to work in New Zealand or Australia, it's not allowed. My understanding about being a fa'afafine, my understanding about being a person to work in a place like New Zealand or Australia is if you're a fa'afafine and if you feel that you are a woman, you have to be – it's either a woman or a man. So if you feel like that you want to pursue becoming a woman, then go for it and make sure you turn out to be a woman, and you look exactly like a woman when you go to work, and that people won't say things about you. If you're a man,

¹ There were participants in both Samoa and New Zealand who I would describe in such terms. While I (and acquaintances who also met them) unproblematically utilised feminine pronouns when talking to or about these participants, they were fully aware that they did not pass as women. Yet they did not represent themselves as, and I did not think of them as, gay men. I can only explain this as resulting from the fact that they seemed *feminine* rather than *effeminate*. I am aware that this is a somewhat inadequate and less than theoretically informed explanation of these distinctions. However, if social interaction is the space in which gender is 'done', then my reading of the gendered expressions of these participants can also, in some sense, be considered part of the 'data'.

you know, if you go half-dressed as a woman or a man to work, that is unacceptable, you know, working [indecipherable]. So what I'm saying is, it's good, it's good and it's also embarrassing sometimes, you know, in pālagi, in western society.

This statement summarises the difference between Samoan and western societies in terms of the possibilities of embodying gender ambiguity. Yet other migrant fa'afafine understood themselves as ambiguously gendered, and in some cases explicitly enacted this ambiguity, while remaining in New Zealand. As I suggested in the previous chapter, the personal experiences of participants and their understandings and enactments of themselves as feminine, or as fa'afafine, were inevitably informed by wider social contexts. The possibility of living *as* fa'afafine in New Zealand was, to some extent, enabled by particular social shifts. Leulu Va'a notes that the 1970s were marked by a discursive move from accepting migrants on the basis of how well they assimilated into the host society to a greater tolerance of difference (2001, 22-28), which has led to the (rhetoric of) multiculturalism that is evident in many western societies at the beginning of the 21st century. Va'a lists the three 'classic' lobby groups in 'identity politics' – feminist, gay, and ethnic (2001, 28) – as instrumental in shifts which saw “a greater tolerance towards migrants, including tolerance of their right to be different, to retain and practice their ethnic cultures” (2001, 28). While second-wave feminism has had a foundational influence on all 'rights' movements which have followed, it is the movements based around ethnicity and sexuality that have more directly created the contexts in which fa'afafine can 'be' fa'afafine in New Zealand.

In this chapter, I will outline what is actually a far less linear chronological 'development' than I suggest here. For the sake of clarity, however, I frame these processes as a 'progression', while acknowledging that this is reification and idealisation of processes that are, in practice, somewhat more random. This is not to imply that lived experiences and actual social change are not marked by 'cause and effect', but rather to suggest that the events and experiences defined as 'cause' and as 'effect' are often simultaneously experienced. Articulating such a causal relationship in analytical hindsight suggests significantly more clarity than often actually exists.

This chapter traces the processes by which migrant fa'afafine who understood themselves as different from (gay) men and (passing) women have become acknowledged, understood, celebrated, and desired by pālagi in New Zealand. This does not necessarily entail incorporation into normative, or even non-normative but culturally comprehensible genders and/or sexualities. However, in some instances 'fa'afafine' (as a concept as much as actual individuals) have been incorporated into western institutions

such as the gay community as a result of the ascendance of particular political agendas, or into systems of exchange such as the sex industry as ‘commodities’. This utilisation of fa’afafine’s gendered ambiguity in order to serve particular pālagi purposes has only been challenged to any significant extent in very recent years, as fa’afafine become cultural producers as well as cultural products, political agents as well as political causes.

Either/or – neither/both

To be fa’afafine is to necessarily imply two things – that one has a ‘male’ body but engages in some behaviours that would be considered feminine, and that one is Samoan. Thus, to identify as fa’afafine is to make a statement about one’s identity in relation to both gender and ethnicity. As one community advocate explained, the two are inextricably intertwined in the state of being fa’afafine:

Like, to use the pālagi terminology, a definition, but a definition that encompasses the whole spectrum of fa’afafine, that is not just about drag, it’s not just about, you know, this, but it really encompasses the whole thing. Because as you know, the term means, it’s just ‘like a woman’, OK. But as I have defined it, it’s just ‘like a woman’, but then I’ve gone on [indecipherable] but the fa’afafine must be a Samoan, because the term ‘fa’afafine’ is Samoan ... so it’s a person, a Samoan person who’s physically male with the spirit of a woman. And to me ... and maybe that some day to come other people will define it much broader, but for me, covers all the other orientations within that concept of ‘fa’afafine’, like if you are, to use pālagi terminology again, whether you’re a drag queen, a transvestite, or what – a transsexual, gay, bisexual – it’s within that confinement.

Another community advocate interviewed in Samoa stated that if fa’afafine are to succeed overseas, they must develop a strong sense of identity before leaving Samoa, which should include both their ‘sexual heritage’ and their ‘cultural heritage’. He suggested that New Zealand-born fa’afafine were in danger of losing their ‘Samoan-ness’, becoming assimilated into New Zealand society, and only being able to identify as a ‘gay person’.

The centrality of ethnicity to those who identify as fa’afafine is also articulated in one of the few published accounts of Pacific sexuality with a fa’afafine author:

Fa’afafine firstly denotes a Samoan and then a sexuality which must be seen in that cultural context. This latter fact has in many instances been misunderstood by Pālagi, including homosexuals, who have mis-classified fa’afafine as queers, faggots and poofers in a negative cultural context. Likewise, the labelling of fa’afafine as transvestites, homosexuals or transsexuals is to attach medical connotations that label them as sick (Pulotu-Endemann and Peteru 2001, 130-131).

Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann and Carmel Peteru, the Samoan authors of this article, go on to describe a fa’afafine fono held in Auckland in 1996:

It was apparent from the fono that the most significant factor for being a fa'afafine was a strong cultural identification as a Samoan, and secondly, a unique form of sexuality. It was made clear that separating the fa'afafine from its origins in a particular cultural setting was to accept a Papalagi paradigm and could not benefit fa'afafine. Some older fa'afafine argued that acknowledging the cultural context of this form of sexuality could counter the tendency of younger fa'afafine to adopt the Papalagi paradigm and definitions which usually separated the two and subsumed fa'afafine sexuality under a single term, usually transvestite or transsexual (Pulotu-Endemann and Peteru 2002, 132).

This argument was realised in the lives of the participants in this study, whose sense of themselves as fa'afafine, and the appropriateness of identifying as such, originated in the formation of their subjectivities in the field of Samoan culture. While fa'afafine are to some extent marginalised in Samoa, it is nevertheless a context in which they can observe others acting similarly to themselves, reinforcing the 'rightness' of their own actions (Bourdieu 1977, 167). Furthermore, in many contexts the wider society provides the reward of recognising these actions as appropriate. Thus, Samoan society provided a cultural context in which these participants' performances of particularly gendered identities could become sedimented to the point of immutability.

However, to embody or enact sex/gender ambiguity is not an easy option in New Zealand, and it may, on first arrival, seem impossible for many migrant fa'afafine. This was especially so for the participants in this research who arrived in the 1960s, when any form of non-normative gender or sexuality was so marginal as to be virtually invisible. At various times, and in various places, migrant fa'afafine have resolved the lack of cultural space for gender ambiguity in New Zealand in various ways, depending on the resources available to them, the cultural and social discourses within which they act, and the desired outcomes of their actions. Through these various processes, all those discussed in the previous two chapters retained or regained a sense of themselves as fa'afafine. Those who were part of the younger generation had, in some cases, never fully assimilated into the binary sex/gender system of New Zealand. In some instances, this was not entirely by choice. Because the achievement of gender is a social and interactive process, the act of passing as either a woman or a masculine man requires not only performing that gender, but also having that performance accepted by others (West and Zimmerman 1991; Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997, 495; Hird 2002, 578). Harold Garfinkel's work in relation to his treatment of his apparently intersexed patient Agnes (1967, 116-186) attests to the centrality of interaction in the construction and maintenance of the social actor's preferred gender, a process that is made explicit in the act of transsexual passing.

The embodied gender of fa'afafine is often ambiguous not because they perceive themselves as ambiguously gendered, but because, as with many other transgendered people, this is how their bodies are read by others. In spite of the significant mutability of bodies, there are aspects of corporeality which cannot, or cannot easily, be changed. As I have already suggested, many masculine fa'afafine cited the fact that they 'look terrible in drag' as contributing to their decisions not to wear feminine clothing. In less immediately obvious ways, particular forms of physicality for some participants led to circumstances which laid the groundwork for adopting a more 'feminine' (or at least less 'masculine') course in life which was commensurate with their identification as fa'afafine. For example, some participants mentioned that perceived physical weakness excused them from 'masculine' plantation labour, meaning they were maybe more readily accepted performing 'feminine' domestic labour. Conversely, because fa'afafine have 'male' bodies, any physical labour that they are involved in will result in their musculature developing in particular – i.e. 'masculine' - ways. As was suggested in the previous chapter, the meaning of these particularly muscled bodies varies according to cultural context. While they may still be understood as 'masculine' in Samoa, they do not compromise the capacity of other Samoans to understand these bodies as being those of fa'afafine. However, in New Zealand the apparently contradictory manifestation of masculine bodies and feminine behaviours is more problematic, as there is less capacity in pālagi discourses to comprehend a person who does not appear to be a 'man', yet cannot be categorised as 'female' either (Gagné and Tewksbury 1998, 82).

Recognising difference

While fa'afafine have faced difficulties in presenting themselves as ambiguously gendered outside Samoa, at the time of writing there seems to be an increasing visibility of fa'afafine who are 'out' in New Zealand. As I suggested in the opening of this chapter, this growing visibility is occurring in a wider social context of a liberal acceptance of 'difference'. The destigmatisation of gay and lesbian identities has contributed significantly to the creation of cultural spaces in which non-normative sexualities and genders can be enacted. This can result in fa'afafine being 'lumped in' with other queer identities. However, there is also increasing recognition that to be fa'afafine is a subjectivity that is specific to Samoan culture, rather than simply an 'exotic' manifestation of domestic homosexuality. While it seems that something of watershed in terms of this recognition occurred with the screening of the documentary *Fa'afafine: Queens of Samoa* on New Zealand television in 1995, this documentary did not materialise in a discursive or cultural void. Its making attests to a history of the emergence and acceptance of a range of 'queer' identities in the west, and an increasing interest in the sexual and

gendered differences of non-western ‘others’. *Queens of Samoa* represents a distillation of these liberal discourses in relation to both sexual and ethnic politics into an accessible format that was distributed in a widely available medium. When I mentioned my research to pālagi New Zealanders, *Queens of Samoa* was almost inevitably cited as the source of most of their impressions of fa’afafine. This suggests that this documentary was something of an iconic text in terms of capturing a particular moment in understandings of fa’afafine in New Zealand, and in turn contributing to the continued construction of those understandings.

Fa’afafine: *Queens of Samoa* – text and subtexts

Fa’afafine: Queens of Samoa occupies one broadcast hour, during which time interview excerpts and ‘slice of life’ footage is presented from both New Zealand and Samoa. From the outset, the documentary makes it clear that fa’afafine are specifically Samoan. The first images are of fa’afafine in a Samoan village in lāvalava and t-shirts, rehearsing for a fa’afafine beauty pageant routine, while young children look on. Over these images the voice-over states: “Fa’afafine – it means to be like a woman, and western labels like transvestite, transsexual, or gay just don’t fit”. The documentary structure is grouped around particular themes, which are addressed by various fa’afafine and a range of other Samoans, including academics, family members, and church representatives. There is some ‘hierarchy’ to these participants, in that the words of Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann, a fa’afafine community advocate and matai, or Fanafi Le Tagaloa, a highly respected Samoan academic, are regularly used to give ‘authority’ to the narratives of other participants (Wallace 2003, 146-147). However, Susan Nemeo (producer) and Caroline Harker (director) use much less omniscient (and obviously pālagi) voice-over than Heather Croall does in *Paradise Bent*. Thus, the ‘voice of authority’ in *Queens of Samoa* is most likely to be Samoan, and often fa’afafine. Although there are Samoans, fa’afafine and otherwise, in *Paradise Bent* who present a different narrative from that privileged by Croall, the focus on Cindy and those surrounding her leaves little space for these voices to be heard. Conversely, in *Queens of Samoa*, excerpts from two different interviews that virtually contradict one another may be juxtaposed, with no interpretation from an external source, suggesting complexity and heterogeneity in terms of both beliefs and practices.

Although *Queens of Samoa* is a less sensationalist representation of fa’afafine than *Paradise Bent*, it does still bear the mark of the ideological assumptions of its creators – in this instance, a particularly liberal perspective that would be expected of a documentary on a ‘differently gendered’ marginalised group of

Polynesians made in New Zealand in the mid-1990s and destined for mainstream television. As Lee Wallace (1995; 2003) suggests, this liberal aspect has resulted in a particular version of cultural relativism underwriting the documentary, resulting in a text that replicates the frequently articulated western concerns with ‘authenticity’ that I critiqued in Chapter 2. This is played out in an implicit subtext which seeks to conceptually isolate fa’afafine identities and behaviours from any non-Samoan influence or inflection. As part of this subtext, the difficulties faced by fa’afafine in New Zealand and Samoa are represented as the result – and the fault – of colonialism (Wallace 1995, 141):

The privileged narrative [*Queens of Samoa*] tells remains first of all the tragedy of contact, with its corroding of the traditional Samoan way. This foundational tragedy then dovetails, in the twentieth century, with the tragedy of migration and the scattering of the Samoan population across the metropolitan centers of the Pacific Rim. Because of that scattering, the documentary goes on to demonstrate, *fa’afafine* are exposed like other Polynesian migrants to the violence of racism and, further, to the indignity of an inappropriate – because misdirected – homophobic discrimination (Wallace 2003, 153).

While I find aspects of Wallace’s reading of *Queens of Samoa* problematic, her analysis does insightfully reveal how the makers of *Queens of Samoa* constantly work to distance fa’afafine from homosexuality (Wallace 2003, 139-140). Thus, the gaze of the documentary is averted from any evidence that fa’afafine in New Zealand may, for various reasons, gravitate towards gay communities, gay pālagi sexual partners, or identification as gay.

Sanitising the lives of the fa’afafine population by removing any element of sexuality, and representing fa’afafine as dignified victims of forces beyond their control, *Queens of Samoa* echoes the romanticism that I located in *Paradise Bent*. In both texts, it is assumed that western commentators are in the best position to inform indigenous others of how their culture is being ‘irreversibly polluted’ by the ‘stronger’ western cultures (Fran Martin, in Altman 1996b). However, *Queens of Samoa* differs from *Paradise Bent* in that it does not illustrate this romanticism with (re)constructed erotic/exotic (pre-contact) practices, and it has not, to the best of my knowledge, had a negative impact on either Samoan or pālagi attitudes towards fa’afafine.² In fact, one of the participants in this research who had appeared

² One participant in this research did suggest that it was an interview with a fa’afafine in *Queens of Samoa* that spread the myth of boys being raised as fa’afafine in families where there are no girls. In defense of the documentary makers, it should be noted that this interview segment is immediately followed by both another fa’afafine and Fanafi Le Tagaloa disputing this theory. However, those pālagi New Zealanders I have talked with who reiterate this myth do often state *Queens of Samoa* as their source. This again indicates the ease with which people tend to adopt the ‘neatest’ explanation for unusual phenomena, even in the face of other, equally compelling, evidence to the contrary.

in *Queens of Samoa* told of the overwhelmingly positive reactions of co-workers after the documentary screened on television:

When they saw that programme, the manager and the wife were overseas, but their daughter taped the programme so when they came back from America, their daughter gave them the tape and said, 'There was one of your workers on there'. So they watched the tape and then the next morning they came to the factory, they walk straight to the back where I sit and they shake my hand, you know, they cuddled me and they say 'Congratulations. It's really nice'. And then the woman said to me, 'You know, I think that programme opened lots of eyes of those people in New Zealand. There are some people in New Zealand, they don't even know any idea of different peoples in this world and they don't know what it's like in other people's lives'.

This story indicates how *Queens of Samoa* reflected the prevalent ideologies of its historical moment in that it was not only suggested that this text would 'open the eyes' of New Zealanders, but also implied that their eyes *should* be opened.

Queens of Samoa represents a particular form of liberalism that promotes multi-culturalism and the tolerance of 'difference' (Va'a 2001, 28), and is an example of politics that have disseminated through various parts of New Zealand society. It is in this gradually changing social field that migrant fa'afafine are increasingly able to find social spaces in which ambivalence or effeminacy is accepted. One participant in this research spoke of feeling safe at the tertiary institution she had attended, which had a policy of not discriminating against students. Another had taught in a liberal school where she felt comfortable wearing make-up while not fully passing as a woman. Some younger participants were largely self-employed in arts, design and fashion industries, where they had significant control over their working relationships and were more likely to interact with liberal members of the pālagi population. As earlier migrants often recognised gay communities as virtually the only social location in which they could be 'effeminate men' outside Samoan contexts, so contemporary fa'afafine have identified new spaces in which it is 'safe' to embody gendered ambiguity.

Celebrating diversity

While liberal social politics have opened up an increasing range of 'safe' social sites for migrant fa'afafine, the 1990s also marked a new relationship between fa'afafine and New Zealand's gay communities. Again, this was part of wider political shifts, in this instance the expansion of gay politics to include all those who are 'queer' (Epstein 1994), and the incorporation of the imperatives of multi-culturalism. Auckland's annual gay pride Hero Festival is emblematic of both the increasing divergence of New Zealand's gay community, and the wider social acceptance of related 'lifestyles'. While liberal social politics provided cultural space for queer identities, the high visibility and frequently sexual

content of the festival's parade means that it has remained hotly contested, especially as it requires the financial support of an often conservative local government. In the years that fiscal worries and council ambivalence are overcome, and the Parade is held, it regularly features a fa'afafine float, which signifies the diversity of Auckland's population and demonstrates that 'queerness' is a cross-cultural phenomenon. A community advocate in Auckland spoke of the importance of the fa'afafine presence in the Parade in terms of raising awareness:

[...] because it's important for other young fa'afafine, or people in general, because a lot of people actually watch that parade either on the street or on TV that wouldn't necessarily come into contact with it, so in terms of visibility and letting other people know that these things exist, it's a really good, it's a good form, you know, someone who's sitting in a small rural town in New Zealand who might be there with their family, you know, can see that, 'OK, I'm not a freak, there's other people up there like me'.

Another participant, who was frequently instrumental in organising the Hero Parade fa'afafine float, also signalled its significance for members of the existent fa'afafine community:

But it's something that we really need to sort of, in our community, Samoan fa'afafine, we can get other Samoan communities to get involved ... [indecipherable] to be proud of who we are, but, you know, it's to promote our own culture and our own country, where we come from.

However, other participants did not feel that a high fa'afafine visibility in gay pride events was as altruistic as it initially appeared. One suggested that the inclusion of fa'afafine in the Parade was an extension of a multi-culturalism that was more rhetoric than practice. Echoing observations that the drag queens in Sydney are often used as the 'poster girls' for the city's annual gay Mardi Gras without being acknowledged at the political level (Phibbs 2001, 230), it was implied that the fa'afafine presence was in part motivated by the desire to suggest cross-cultural 'political correctness' in the Parade. This interview fragment started with a response to my question about how easy it is for fa'afafine to be accepted into the gay community:

Oh, another thing, because you know how, like, um ... you know, there's this, there's also like, New Zealand being like not only an Anglo Saxon country, but there's a strong presence of tangata whenua in New Zealand, that the Pacific Islanders tend to sort of affiliate to as well, as being indigenous people. So that sort of idea transcends to every single community, and ... and I think in the gay community, being predominantly white, but because the idea of tangata whenua has been instilled within New Zealand, and the Treaty and that [...]. So, um ... so I think the community feels that they can ride on the boat with the tangata whenua. Do you get what I mean? I know it sounds like a really, like, you know, [indecipherable], but you know, being, as Samoans also being the indigenous peoples as well.³

³ 'Tangata whenua' is a Maori term that translates as 'people of the land', and refers to the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. 'The Treaty' refers to the Treaty of Waitangi, signed between Maori and British in 1840.

Another participant, whose comments on the Hero Parade were quoted in the previous chapter, was cynical about the fact that fa'afafine were included in the Parade, but were absent from the board of the Hero Trust. The manner in which she spoke of this suggested that the multi-cultural inclusiveness of the gay community in Auckland is symbolic, while any real political power remains in the hands of pālagi. The parade easily lends itself to this kind of 'symbolic representation', as fa'afafine must present their float so as to compete with the increasingly extravagant content of the parade as a whole. In this context, all aspects of New Zealand's queer community become a spectacle, an 'exotic other' (Phibbs 2001, 221).



Image 13: Fa'afafine in gay pride parade
Various signifiers of the 'exotic' are present in this image of a fa'afafine participant at Wellington's Devotion Parade.

While some participants suggested that the only value fa'afafine have for the gay community is as spectacle, it is apparent that the gay media also provides a forum in which fa'afafine can represent themselves in a more reflective context. In the 1993 edition of the Hero Magazine, which is published in conjunction with the festival, Karl Pulotu-Endemann presented preliminary material from research on 'Samoan gay men and their environment', emphasising the inclusiveness of the term 'fa'afafine' as encompassing not only those who 'cross-dress' but gay men as well (1993, 32). The 1996 Hero Magazine included a further piece by Pulotu-Endemann, in which he stressed the uniqueness of the fa'afafine identity, and suggested that "inadvertently the Gay movement has done some harm by trying to redefine fa'afafine into pālagi or Western thinking. For instance, defining fa'afafine as transvestites is not only wrong but culturally offensive" (1996, 19). In an interview published in a 2002 edition of Auckland 'queer paper' *Express*, Pulotu-Endemann (2002) articulated more fully how he has come to understand the use of pālagi definitions in relation to fa'afafine as problematic. He suggested that this tended to associate fa'afafine with a femininity that is seen negatively in western ideologies, whereas to be 'like a woman' has connotations that are more positive in Samoan understandings. "Even the gay

community hooks into this with the downgrading of ‘queens’ or effeminacy and the elevation of ‘straight-acting’ behaviour” (2002, 8). This series of articles demonstrates the development of a critique of western representations from a fa’afafine perspective. While Pulotu-Endemann has also published in academic texts (with Peteru, 2001), the gay media has provided a forum for these arguments to reach a potentially wider audience, an audience that is more likely to encounter fa’afafine in their everyday lives.

The appearance of fa’afafine in the Hero Parade may be a gesture that is more symbolic than political, allowing Auckland’s gay community to add a bit of ethnic ‘spice’ (hooks 1992, 21) to a culture that has become increasingly mainstream. However, the media that emerges from the gay community also provides a space for voicing political concerns that may not be welcome in other forums, such as the Samoan media. While the gay community may thus co-opt fa’afafine as an image that supports their rhetoric of diversity, it is also apparent that the same community is in a position to provide resources that fa’afafine can utilise to their own advantage. As the gay community is also a context in which migrant fa’afafine are often located, it is particularly significant that their political and cultural concerns are voiced through this media, as it is likely to have an actual effect in terms of how fa’afafine are understood, and thus how they are able to express themselves *as* fa’afafine.

Commodifying ambivalence

While almost all participants utilised either gay communities or gay identities as a means of enacting femininity with male bodies at some point in their lives, this is not the only context in which gendered ambiguity is accepted, and even valued. The sex industry is another location in which many fa’afafine find they do not have to conform to normative western expectations regarding correlations between gender and embodiment. This has resulted in many of the ‘obvious’ fa’afafine who do not pass as either women or gay men being located in the sex industry. Politics within the industry mean that fa’afafine sex workers also often work on the street, rather than in massage parlours or escort agencies, where a better command of English, a more comprehensive socialisation in pālagi ‘etiquette’, and the ability to maintain ‘business-like’ relationships with non-Samoan employers, clients and colleagues may be required.⁴

⁴ See Jan Jordan’s work for a discussion of how New Zealand’s sex industry is divided on class and ethnicity lines between Maori and Pākeha women (1992, 183), a division which is bound to also impact on Pacific sex workers.

The visibility of fa'afafine sex workers in urban areas in New Zealand has created a popular belief among pālagi that the vast majority of migrant fa'afafine work in the sex industry. I did not ask participants directly about their own involvement in the sex industry, although many participants gave an impression of never having engaged in overtly paid sex. Some did, however, hint at events or relationships that were at the margins of what might be defined as 'prostitution'. One participant specifically spoke of the difficulties of defining 'prostitution' in a Samoan context, where the concept of trading sex for cash may not be straightforward. Andrew Peteru notes that some of his young male Samoan participants had been given cigarettes "as if in return for a sexual encounter" (1997, 94), or had received "money or a gift in return for sex" (1995, 133), in spite of not having specifically sought to exchange sex for material gain (1995, 133). This suggests that these events may well have been understood as part of the continual and reciprocal flow of gifts that is part of the Samoan economy, and it is only when isolated from this wider social context that they seem to resemble an exchange which might be conceptualised as 'prostitution'. Even in western contexts, the boundaries of what is considered 'prostitution' are less than clear (Jordan 1992, 181; Phoenix 1995, 66; Kesler 2002, 221). Given the problematic nature of this area, in the following discussion 'sex work' or 'prostitution' refers only to those instances in which sexual services are clearly being sold in exchange for money.⁵

While the proportion of migrant fa'afafine who engaged in sex work is undoubtedly lower than that assumed by the 'popular imagination' in New Zealand, it was generally agreed amongst those participants who discussed prostitution that a significant minority of migrant fa'afafine either come to New Zealand with the purpose of taking up sex work or eventually gravitate towards the sex industry. This was generally articulated as resulting from difficulties with finding more 'mainstream' employment, and the dominant implication was that if barriers to such 'mainstream' employment did not exist, far fewer fa'afafine would be sex workers. The difficulties mentioned included language and shortages of relevant skills,⁶ but the over-riding barrier was almost invariably linked to gender incongruence.

⁵ A reasonable expansion of this limited working definition would be "a business transaction understood as such by the parties involved and in the nature of a short term contract in which one or more people pay an agreed price to one or more of the people for helping them to attain sexual gratification by various methods" (Bennett and Perkins, cited in Phoenix 1995, 66).

⁶ D.F. MacFarlane echoes this in providing possible explanations for the extreme over-representation of Maori among transsexual prostitutes in New Zealand, suggesting that "their lower standard of education provides them with fewer employment opportunities" (1985, 307). (Interestingly, MacFarlane does not suggest that gender issues might contribute to this shortage of employment opportunities.)

However, lack of other employment options is just one aspect of the over-representation of fa'afafine among New Zealand's street level sex workers.⁷ Don Kulick notes that in Brazil:

prostitution provides travestis with one of the few arenas open to them in Brazilian society for receiving compliments and accolades. Prostitution makes individual travestis feel sexy and attractive, it is one of the only contexts they have in which they can experience themselves as tantalizing objects of desire and develop a sense of personal worth, self-confidence, and self-esteem (1998, 136).

This resonates with explanations offered by participants in this research for the relatively high incidence of casual sex and prostitution among fa'afafine in New Zealand. One spoke of this in relation to 'promiscuity' and 'prostitution' in Samoa:

You know, if a child isn't loved at home, they just go look for it somewhere else. And I say that to people, you know, say, 'You better love them there or they'll go find somebody else to do it, and it might not be the right person'. And I think that's a really big reason why, you know, because one night stands are a sort of term of love or affection or intimacy, you do quite a few just to prolong it. [Laughter.] So it's like twenty a day or something, for an eight minute feeling. That's my theory on it [indecipherable].

And do you think that relates to why fa'afafine in New Zealand move into sex work as well? Because of that ... I mean, somebody else has suggested to me it's a feeling of being needed, you know, again even if just for an hour or something.

Possibly, for that person. There's many possibilities as to why people do it, you know. Rebellion, because they're doing it ... because you look at the occupations when you go to an interview, what do you have to do – you've got to put on a facade, you've got to dress up to the hilt, but as what. If you're a boy, you dress up in a suit, if you're a woman, you dress up in a dress [indecipherable], and if you're a fa'afafine, what do you do? They don't, most companies or organisations aren't open to that prospect, so what do fa'afafines really do for a living? You've got to eat and pay your rent here, in this society, so we go hook ourselves, or start your own business.

Another participant, who had regular contact with the fa'afafine sex workers, also talked about financial motivations, and extrapolated on the theme of needing love to include the 'self-esteem' and 'desirability' mentioned by Kulick:

Do you think, I mean, what are your thoughts about why so many of the girls come over here and end up working in the sex work industries?

I think for them it's the glamour side of it, because they're getting to dress up and they're earning money, and I think, because if they go and work at Macdonalds, they don't get as much money, and it's a socialisation thing, you know, they're socialising with the other queens there and ... sometimes I feel, too,

⁷ As I discussed earlier, Heather Worth cites a study which shows that the percentage of fa'afafine who are paid for sex is significantly higher than those who are paid for sex among the more generic group of 'men who have sex with men' (Worth 2000, 16). The study cited by Worth specifically recruited 'men who have sex with men', meaning that not all fa'afafine would have considered themselves potential participants. Thus, the figures should not be read as necessarily representative of the fa'afafine population, although they can be taken as indicating a likely over-representation of fa'afafine in the sex industry.

that part of it feeling needed as they are, as drag queens, because they can't go to work as drag queens, so this is the only way that they get accepted. You know, people sort of wanting them for who they are and the way they dress up, and so the persona that they have, they think, 'Oh yeah, I'm a drag queen, I'm a fa'afafine drag queen, you know, people want me for who I am and what I dress as'.

The sex industry is one of the few contexts in which fa'afafine can express a 'glamorous' femininity which may, to some extent, compensate for their masculine bodies (MacFarlane 1984, 301), and where ambiguity is accepted, and even validated. This range of motivations was echoed by another participant:

... because they feel isolated by society because they do not fit in anywhere, but the only place that they can fit in is through the eyes of a man who looks at them as a woman. And the money's easy – well, I won't say that – the money's not easy, but the money is good [...] but the money is there. It's not taxed, [...]. Have a drive through [-] Street. That's where they all are. And a lot of their presentation ... has a very dominatrix approach of a character of a woman who is super confident and super [clicks her fingers a few times], you know, that sort of dominatrix sort of character [indecipherable]. And they would stand there bare-breasted as well, too, and stuff. So, you know, 'Well, I might like stand like a woman, because of my Adam's apple and you know, I might not be short enough for a woman, but I do have the ... [demonstrates 'breasts'] the figure and what-not'.

In this explanation, the femininity that is reinforced through sex work is of a very specific type, one that allows fa'afafine sex workers to (symbolically) exercise a degree of power. The issue of power in relation to sex work is particularly fraught. While some feminists suggest that prostitution is the ultimate realisation of patriarchal power structures (Pateman, cited in Kesler 2002, 228), many sex workers argue that it is actually they, not their clients, who hold the power in their transactions (Jordan 1992, 186). Jan Jordan also argues that sex work can afford women a degree of independence they would not have in other jobs (1992, 181), and both Keri Kesler (2002) and Jo Phoenix (1995) observe that power relations vary across the industry. The above quote suggests that the public display that is part of working on the street may allow fa'afafine sex workers to perform a particularly assertive model of sexual femininity. A combination of economic independence and access to space in which to enact this version of 'feminine power' may be especially attractive for migrant fa'afafine, who not only lack economic power, but are also constrained in the family context. One community advocate explains how many migrant fa'afafine find family life in New Zealand significantly more restrictive than in Samoa:

... because predominantly the ones that are working on the street, or 80 per cent, are from Samoa, or they are from the Islands, because they come here and they don't have any qualifications, and they can't handle living with the family all the time. [...] because they just end up being the Cinderella constantly, you know, and the only way out is to just leave, and once you go, you know, they close the door on you, which is terrible. They don't actually get their own freedom to do what they want – they're there to do something, so that's part of the marginalisation of the whole fa'afafine thing – 'Oh, no, she can come, and she can look after the kids ...', and the parents might be out working all the time, so you know, they've got a fa'afafine

here who can just do everything. So they go, and so then the network that they end up hanging out with are other Pacific Island sex workers. So, when you've got to sort of try and get money to pay your own rent, eat your own food, that's the only sort of way ...

While living with family in New Zealand can provide a safe and supportive environment for migrant fa'afafine, it can also result in a form of domestic entrapment. Heather Worth also found that many transgendered Pacific sex workers leave home early because of intolerance or sexual abuse (2000, 19). Distanced from 'aiga and community, many fa'afafine thus lack the community networks that enable other Samoans to find 'legitimate' employment or support them if not working. The sense of community among fa'afafine sex workers is particularly strong, providing a sense of family that replaces the 'aiga from which these fa'afafine feel increasingly alienated:

Well, you know ... they've got a really strong network within themselves, and I guess that that's the family thing that they cling to, you know. And there's a whole longing and yearning for their own family and stuff, but because it's been turned away ... I guess they cling to their whole, like, family system, and I just see them ... they're laughing and doing the whole family thing with their group of sex workers that are round, and they do look after each other in that sense.

Worth suggests that this bond provides the 'care, friendship, comfort and love' that results in transgendered Pacific sex workers in New Zealand maintaining a sense of their own self worth and a level of security. This has enabled them in the creation of safer working environments than those reported among transgendered sex workers in other countries (Worth 2000, 22).

The sex industry thus provides one of the few contexts in which migrant fa'afafine who lack employable skills can not only earn relatively good money, but also where their sex/gender anomaly is overlooked or accepted, and where they can enact a 'hyper-femininity' that may counter the overt masculinity of some aspects of their bodies. However, the embodiment of femininity by fa'afafine sex workers can be problematised by clients who seek them out precisely because of their sexed/gendered 'difference'. Difficulties can range from the simple conflict over whether they are 'women' or 'she-males', to assumptions about the sexual activities engaged in by fa'afafine. A fa'afafine who has worked for escort agencies explained how some clients assumed that her ambiguously embodied gender indicated a proclivity for 'marginal' sexual behaviours:

So do they ever want you to do stuff that you just don't want to do?

Of course, of course. All the toilet games and all that role playing. And just because they think we're freaks, they think that we do all these other freaky things, you know? Just because, to them we're total freaks and a total fetish, they think that we all do all those other things, like in pornos and stuff. Like sleep with another trannie, and that just is so not on, you know? It's like, they get all these ideas from porn movies, it's like fucking another woman, or, like toilet games, and bondage and all that stuff, and role

playing, and the rest of it. And they think that just because we're freaky that we do all other freaky things, but a lot of us are really conservative girls. Honestly, we are. I mean, OK, we might stand in a g-string [...], but all we want to be looked at as a man and woman, and we're the women, really. And a lot of time we just want to please them, you know?

While the sex industry may provide a location in which migrant fa'afafine who do not pass as women can have their femininity reinforced, the possibility of drawing on the sexual ambiguity that they embody as a marketing tool cannot be overlooked. Escort agencies will advertise the transgendered status of any employee who fits this description, and may thus employ fa'afafine when 'real' female migrant Samoans may not so readily find employment at this high end sector of the industry. At street level, fa'afafine work from the locations allocated to the transgendered. This does avoid much potential violence, in that most clients will know that those working in these areas are not 'real' women. However, many clients specifically seek out these transgendered 'women' (Phibbs 2001, 59), and thus there is a readily identified market for fa'afafine sex workers.

Ambivalent attractions

Outside of the context of the sex industry, the possibility that sexual partners of feminine fa'afafine may be attracted to them because they present an embodiment somewhere between masculine and feminine was never explicitly raised in interviews. One participant's description of a previous partner suggested that he had a particular orientation towards transgendered people, but she defined him as bisexual. Another participant mentioned that Samoan men often specifically seek out fa'afafine as sexual partners. However, this was not explained as indicating that they are a preferred object choice for these men, but was rather attributed to the fact that fa'afafine are known to often agree to sexual acts that Samoan women are less likely to perform.

Like everyone, fa'afafine enter into sexual and/or romantic relations for a range of reasons (Sprecher 1998), which may not always be about sexuality, and may not always be predictable, either in terms of motivation or outcome. In terms of self identification and sexuality, the sexuality and gender of partners played an important role for many participants, although this varied throughout the group. As I have already noted, cross-cultural research suggests that there is a predominant tendency among transgendered people to express a preference for heterosexual male partners, whose sexuality and gender both reinforce the transgendered person's sense of themselves as feminine. This paradigm is somewhat translatable to fa'afafine in Samoa, but in New Zealand, it is difficult to find heterosexual pālagi men who would be prepared to construct sexual relations with fa'afafine as 'heterosexual' on the

basis of the femininity of their fa'afafine partners. Although participants continued to maintain a preference for 'straight-acting' masculine men, understandings of their sexual relations varied, and may not have been immediately recognisable as similar to the apparently 'heterosexual' nature of relations between fa'afafine and masculine men in Samoa. Older participants discussed in Chapter 7 who met their partners at Auckland's Great Northern Hotel seemed somewhat vague about the homosexuality of these partners, an uncertainty that may have been exacerbated by the fact that gay men in this era were less likely to have been overt about their sexuality. This was particularly so for the more feminine member of this cohort:

And so, so the pālagi guy you met there, do you think he would have seen himself as gay?
Or is he ...

I'd say he was gay. I think most of the pālagi guys who go over there in those days are gay. But in those days they really restricted themselves from the public, you know, so ...

Younger participants conducting sexual relations in contemporary contexts were more specific about the preferred sexual orientation of their partners. One, who presented as a woman, quite explicitly stated that she could only have relationships with straight or bisexual men, because it was important that she could understand her partner as being attracted to her as a woman. Another participant who expresses herself as feminine, but frequently did not or chose not to pass as a woman articulated her own sexual preference as masculine men, either gay or straight, although in the context of relationships, she believed that gay men are the best partners:

Well, for me personally, I'm attracted to masculine men, men who have their masculine in their forefront.

So is it important whether they identify as gay, or as straight, or as ...?

In a relationship? Got to be gay. And as open about it as I am. But in terms of what I want in a one-night stand – it doesn't bother me if they're gay or straight, but they've got to be masculine.

Right. So why would you prefer, why would you want to have a straight, a gay man in a relationship?

It's more realistic.

Right.

Because his expectations of our relationship in a society that's so fucking homophobic is, it's like he's ready for it, whereas a straight man will come into my world, he has no fucking idea, and it just won't work, because then I become the one up against all of this, and I can't [indecipherable] it. I never do. And it's always fallen apart, and my conclusion to that is that it's unrealistic. He's got to be comfortable with his homosexuality. And I've had my last boyfriend has never experienced a queen before, but wanted a relationship, and I said, 'Well, do you know what you're getting yourself into?' And he goes, 'What do you

mean?’ ‘OK, if we walk down the street and somebody yells out ‘Fucking homosexuals’, how are you going to cope with it?’ And he goes, ‘Fuck them’. ‘OK, honey, that’s what happens to me every day. Can you cope with that? I can’. That’s the different attitude. That sort of treatment can fuck people up, and because I’ve had so much more practice, it’s my life, and it would definitely fuck him up, unless he is confident that he is gay and that’s who is, and his attitude is ‘No one’s going to tell me otherwise. I love her because of who she is, and I’m a fucking homosexual, and I don’t give a fuck.’

The apparent paradox of expecting a male partner to be able to simultaneously say ‘I love *her*’ and ‘I’m a *homosexual*’ went unnoticed, yet it is this statement that encapsulates the complexity of sexual and emotional relationships in New Zealand for fa’afafine who present as women but maintain aspects of male embodiment. For this participant, masculinity in a partner provided an important counterpoint to her femininity. However, the fact that she preferred a gay man because of a likely higher tolerance for social pressure suggests again that, while reinforcement of femininity is a consideration for fa’afafine in their relationships, it is not the only aspect they feel they must take into account.

(Re)Gaining control of the fa’afafine image

The context of contemporary New Zealand provides increasing opportunities for fa’afafine to enact their femininity while being ‘out’ about their masculine embodiments. While this can be problematic in the contexts of intimate relations, the increasing recognition and enactment of fluid sexualities and genders means that it is possible for fa’afafine to locate people who will enter into relationships with them *as* fa’afafine. The sex industry, although a somewhat marginal realm, can allow fa’afafine to enact a femininity that in other contexts may seem at odds with their embodiment. Similarly, gay communities provide another locale in which gendered ambiguity is more acceptable, and this context especially provides a foundation from which fa’afafine can move into more ‘mainstream’ society in New Zealand. However, increased visibility also brings concerns over how the concept and image of ‘fa’afafine’ is used. As fa’afafine are increasingly in the public eye, the gaze that is turned on them frequently replicates the exotic/erotic paradigm that typifies the representation of fa’afafine in Samoa. This was exemplified in an article published in the *Sunday Star Times* at the height of a controversy regarding the ‘bastardised’ corporate logos that were incorporated in art works created by Samoan artist Shigeyuki Kihara and exhibited at Te Papa, New Zealand’s national museum (Potter 2001). Although the art works themselves make no reference to fa’afafine, and only tangentially to sex, sexuality, or gender, the author felt Kihara’s ‘difference’ was an important part of the story:

Raise Kihara’s sexuality – she has been described in the Evening Post Flair fashion magazine as “fa’afafine”, the tradition in Samoan culture of boys brought up as girls – and she replies: “I don’t want you to mention that at all. There’s too much controversy

surrounding that topic and I'd rather be seen as an artist. Print that and I'll sue you for sexual harassment. I want to be known as a humanitarian, rather than anything else, that would be great" (Potter 2001).

Since creating the works discussed in this article, Kihara has used her art as a vehicle through which to explore, among other issues, those relating to 'fa'afafine-ness'. While at the time of writing she was more public about being fa'afafine, this has been on her own terms and for her own reasons. However, the fact that her identity as fa'afafine could become the subject of public discussion even when not relevant to her work suggests that social acceptance can easily turn to an unwanted fascination with sexuality.

During the period in which this research was undertaken, I witnessed something of a fa'afafine 'renaissance' in New Zealand, with various artists, designers, and performers creating and controlling their own images and cultural products. Over this time, a fa'afafine performance group formed and appeared as 'Pasifika Divas' at the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Queensland in September 2002, and as 'Island Divas' at the In Transit art and cultural festival in Berlin in May and June 2003. This group was partly financed by the state funding body Creative New Zealand, indicating a level of social acceptance for the project and its members in New Zealand, especially among cultural institutions. Lindah E., chanteuse and designer, was awarded a substantial grant to launch her clothing label Dencium Compri at the prestigious 2003 L'Oreal Fashion Week. On the day I first drafted this section, a nearly full-page interview appeared with Shigeyuki Kihara in the New Zealand Herald, following her receipt of a Creative New Zealand award as an emerging Pacific artist (Watt 2003). Evidence of fa'afafine achievements in more 'mainstream' areas of New

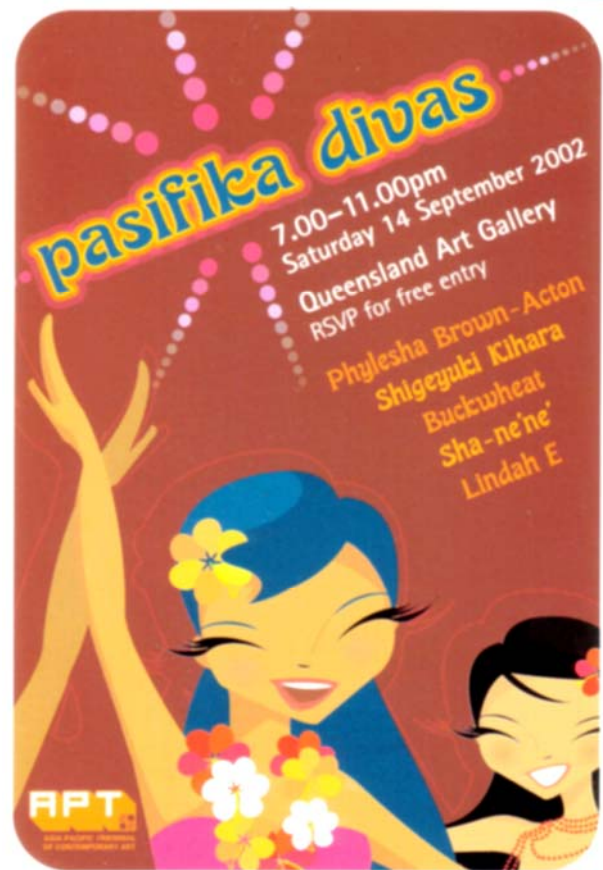


Image 14: Pasifika Divas flyer

The cartoon images suggest an ironic reclaiming of the 'exotic erotic' imagery that has typified representations of Samoan women and fa'afafine.

Zealand society include the awarding of an Order of New Zealand Merit to Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann in 2001 for his services to public health. The ascendance of fa'afafine and other Pacific transgendered cultural producers and public figures has continued as I have completed this project.

The sudden burst of cultural production that has occurred while I have been writing is suggestive of a new aspect to fa'afafine experience in New Zealand, one that is firmly grounded in the lives of these people as New Zealand residents. This paradigm shift has involved cross-pollinations of fa'afafine culture with both pālagi discourses, and the concerns and experiences of other pālagi, Maori, and Pacific transgendered populations. Although these cultural phenomena and new experiences lie beyond the immediate parameters of this research, they suggest that fertile ground remains for further research and collaborative projects with both those who have contributed to this project, and the expanding community of 'Pacific divas' in New Zealand.

Fa'afafine activism

Recent experiences of fa'afafine in New Zealand suggest an increasing degree of politicisation, especially among those of the younger generation. These 'political fa'afafine' might be compared with a similarly 'radical' model of transgenderism identified by Mark Finn and Pippa Dell (1999, 463). In the work of Finn and Dell, the conventional distress model of transsexualism that emerges from medical discourses (discussed more fully in Chapter 6) is contrasted with the often self-authored texts of transgenderism, in which both gendered identities and the embodiment of these identities are understood as available for active choice.⁸ This model of transgenderism contains a challenge that may be implicit or explicit, personal or political, but in all cases, leads to the supposedly intractable causal link between embodiment of 'sex' and social 'gender' being problematised (Finn and Dell 1999, 472). The active claiming of transgendered subjectivity is opposed to the 'ideal' transsexual's desire to simply 'be' the woman they believe themselves to be. For transsexual individuals, the 'cure' for their 'condition' or their 'distress' is the rectification of the perceived anomaly between body and gender so as to conform to normative social expectations. Representing themselves as having always *been* female is, for many, an integral part of this process of normalising their feminine selves.⁹

⁸ Examples of such transgender literature include work written by Sandy Stone (1991), Kate Bornstein (1994), Leslie Feinberg (1996), and Pat Califia (1997).

⁹ This is not to suggest that transgenderists occupy any moral or political high ground, or that transsexuals lack insight into the social foundation of their 'problem' (Finn and Dell 1999, 465-466). The politics and experiences of

If participants in this research experienced any distress in relation to their gender, this seemed to be resolved by locating contexts in which they could enact the ambivalently gendered identities of ‘women’, ‘feminine males’, or ‘effeminate men’. While this may have involved some changes to the body, or to self-perceptions of gender, these shifts were rarely of the same order or magnitude as those undertaken by transsexuals. Most of the fa’afafine I spoke with demonstrated a marked refusal to understand their transgendered state as ‘wrong’. This was illustrated in one discussion with a feminine participant in New Zealand, where we talked about her encounters with various pālagi institutions:

So all your documentation, like your passport and all that sort of crap, I suppose that’s got ‘male’ on it, has it?

Mmm.

Does that cause problems at all?

No. It does on the phone, because they can’t see you, so the assumption is, because of my voice they think I’m a woman, and then when they look at the sex and see it’s male, it’s like ‘Are you his wife?’

I’ve never heard that one before!

It’s like, ‘Are you Mrs ___?’, and I go, ‘No – I’m a queen.’

Oh, OK, you just tell them?

Yeab, I just tell them.

And what kind of reactions to you get from them?

It’s like they get embarrassed, they say, ‘Oh, sorry!’, and I say, ‘No, no problem. I get it all the time’.

For pālagi transsexuals, encounters with institutional procedures often present one of the final hurdles to their complete passing as a woman. While many transsexuals find ways of dealing with these situations that allow them to maintain their social presentation as having always been female, these events inevitably disrupt their own senses of themselves as ‘real’ women, and are constant reminders of the lack of fit between their own self-perceptions of their sex/gender subjectivity and that of mainstream society. However, this participant chose not to accept the potential ‘cover’ offered by a clerk who assumed that she was the customer’s wife, and gained control of the situation by ‘owning’ her transgenderism and forcing the clerk to confront his own assumptions. She thus not only retained her gender ambivalence, but also reversed the embarrassment often caused by such situations. Another

transgenderism are complex and heterogeneous, but for many transsexuals, a political position is simply not useful or relevant (Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997, 502; Elliot and Roen 1998, 238).

participant stated that he had never conformed to social norms of masculinity, in spite of other people's suggestions that he 'tone down' his flamboyance or 'de-feminise' his actions. He felt that being 'out there' was a better defence than attempting to conform, as the latter option gave other people power in terms of whether or not they accepted him. As long as he actively chose nonconformity, he was not dependent on other people's recognition of his gender performance for it to be 'successful'.

Both these strategies demonstrate an awareness of the power dynamics that operate in any social interaction, and suggest that recognition of these dynamics has allowed these fa'afafine to turn these interactions to their own advantage. The ready embodiment of both masculine and feminine attributes suggest the enactment of a politicised transgendered subjectivity (Stone 1991; Califia 1997; Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997; Finn and Dell, 1999). This is in significant contrast to the 'transitional' or 'incompletely embodied' distressed state that defines the pre-operative transsexual who seeks to realise the correlation between physical sex/gender and subjectivity that is expected in the hegemonic gender binary of contemporary western societies. One participant spoke of how the manner in which she sometimes chose to reveal the lack of congruence between her embodied and enacted genders was, to some extent, a strategy designed for particular effect:

[...] a lot of the times that I come forward in public and actually, like, come out as a transgender in public, on television or whatever, the only people that I'm looking to intimidate are men. Those are ... because I absolutely hate men, hate men. Deep down inside ... I love them, but I absolutely hate guys. I hate men. I really do, I hate guys. And because of all those consequences of what I've been through with guys, I've learned how to be afraid of them, and hate them at the same time. So I'm very picky on the guys that I go out with, because of those consequences. And a lot of the times, like when I come out in public as a transgender, a lot of the times I know that not only am I doing this for myself, but I know that what I do will stir up a lot of people, and the people I wouldn't mind stirring up are the men. Because I don't really care about the women, because I mean, I'm one of them. I don't really give a shit if another bitch doesn't like me, because we're both bitches anyway. We're both girls, so it doesn't matter. But like ... like, yeah, ... oh, call me a man-bater.

While this statement echoes the 'shock tactics' that political transgenderists might draw on, to suggest that it was representative or indicative of fa'afafine attitudes would be misleading. For the most part, any challenges participants posed to the gender binary were, as far as they were concerned, purely incidental, and their 'outness' rarely had an overtly political purpose. Yet the fact that these fa'afafine resolutely maintained identities that are incongruent with pālagi understandings of the relationships between sex and gender inevitably contests hegemonic discourses. By enacting feminine subjectivities and retaining masculine bodies without experiencing 'distress', they countered the understanding that apparent incongruities between sex and gender should be pathologised, and demonstrated that

‘differently’ sexed/gendered subjectivities are not only possible in a conceptual sense, but actually exist. In this, they demonstrate the ‘everyday theorising’ that Mary Brown Parlee suggests members of the transgendered community engage in “‘simply’ by articulating and making visible identities rendered unspeakable and invisible with the binary grids of ‘official’ psychological discourses” (1998, 131), or the ‘sociological competence’ that Suzanne Phibbs attributes to transgendered populations as result of the reflexivity they necessarily develop regarding the ‘doing’ of gender (2001, 47). That most participants in this research challenged hegemonic western sex/gender discourses without being intentionally confrontational is consistent with Samoan methods of social management that are based on fundamental principles of not causing offence and respecting others. Under this model, overtly aggressive politics would be beyond the comprehension or acceptance of the Samoan community, principles which informed the actions and politics of these migrant fa’afafine, and means that their ‘gender activism’ is generally less radical than that of pālagi transgenderists.

Between genders, between cultures

While the confrontational activism of many western radical lobby groups for non-normative sexualities or genders would be antithetical to Samoan ways of being, for some fa’afafine, especially those of the younger generation, understandings and enactments of fa’aSamoa are increasingly inflected by competing interests and knowledges. While Samoan enclaves in New Zealand, especially those of first-generation migrants, have been reported to often be ‘more Samoan than Samoa’ (Macpherson 2002, 71), this was not the case with the fa’afafine with whom I spoke, most of whom were well incorporated into various pālagi ‘subcultures’, such as gay communities, culture industries, or public sectors. As I have suggested, moving in ‘liberal’ circles allowed participants to represent themselves as fa’afafine without significant discrimination, even to the point where their gender status was celebrated. In these environments, it has been possible to develop relatively ‘avant garde’ projects such as Pasifika Divas. These projects often involve a more pālagi-inflected model of politics and subcultural development, which is partly enabled by the fact that those involved continue to be removed from the more conservative Samoan community in New Zealand.

On a more individual level, participants spoke of how they may have primarily socialised with other Samoans when first arriving in New Zealand, but that they now moved between various groups. This ‘social transience’ was more marked among the younger generation, and was explained by one

participant as emerging from a range of needs that resulted from being Samoan, carving out a niche in New Zealand, and being transgendered:

Because, you know, we do the mainstream thing, we do the gay thing, and then we have our own subculture. Because you know, with gay people, gay people have two scenes. They have the straight scene, which is the mainstream, and they have their own gay scene, but with all the fa'afa's, it's like, you know, the straight scene, which is the mainstream, there's the gay scene, and there's the Samoan scene, and then there's the fa'afafine scene, so there's these different facets of scenes that one place cannot fulfil.

So do you find that you have to keep quite clear lines between different aspects of your life?

Yes I do. I actually have to get a dose from everything. ... I mean, I find that the fact that I've been bicultural all my life, that I feel that I have to, sometimes I get sick of hanging out with gay people so much, and sometimes I like doing my straight people thing, you know, I like going to straight places and just sort of mingling in different crowds, really. And sometimes when I feel like I'm losing my Samoan-ness, or if I'm losing my Samoan language, I go to Samoan people, you know, and then when I want to take it further, I go to where the girls are.

Although movement between social groups could be read as indicating a lack of a sense of belonging to any one group, this participant linked her 'social transience' to her identification with contemporary western subcultures while also wishing to maintain a connection with her 'Samoan-ness'. Niko Besnier suggests that fa'afafine often act as 'cultural go-betweens' "by becoming bicultural more readily and thoroughly than the rest of the community" (1996, 44). While the role of 'cultural broker' was certainly evident with some participants, especially the community advocates in both Samoa and New Zealand, most who articulated this 'social transience' spoke of it in terms of meeting their own needs, rather than fulfilling a wider social role:

... throughout my life I've always had diverse friends, my friends were all [indecipherable] of life, so in terms of like, friends, or communities, I was in all of them really. See, and a lot of fa'afafine come from the islands and they hang out in Samoan clubs, because it's home, and that's all they know how to cope with, because in Samoa that's all [indecipherable].

And I guess if they move out of that environment, too, they encounter all the ...

... the other stuff.

Yeah, the homophobia and prejudice ... so now do you spend much time in the sort of gay scene in Auckland now, or ...?

Um ... yes and no. I've still got my foot in both doors. I get involved with communities that are genuinely accepting, because different people empower [indecipherable], so it may not be inclusive today, but somebody else might come in who is inclusive, so it's constantly changing, these communities, so me being in both doors is quite versatile, so it's sort of, 'OK, is the gay scene more inclusive? If not, fuck them - I'll [indecipherable].

‘Social transience’ is thus, in part, a strategy which allowed participants to ensure their needs were met, both in terms of locating beneficial contexts, and avoiding social locations in which they might not have been accepted. Moving between groups and across cultures seemed to allow some participants to adopt more critical perspectives on both Samoan and pālagi societies. One participant was quite explicit in her view on how fa’aSamoa can be manipulated:

You know, the whole ‘respect your elders’ thing. I don’t disagree with it at all. I disagree when people actually manipulate or take advantage of people and they use that as their excuse. I’m like, ‘Fuck off’. And I think maybe ... you know, anyone could sexually abuse with that concept, you know. Elders take advantage of children and what have you, and the children say nothing, because in their minds, they’re respecting their elders and they’re not going to question anyone who’s older than them. So naturally they’re vulnerable and prone to being abused sexually or physically or mentally.

Another participant felt that much of Samoan culture was irrelevant in New Zealand. As he identified as a gay man, his socialising frequently occurred in contexts that were ‘gay’ – and thus pālagi – rather than the Samoan community. As I have discussed, the participants who identified as gay were also more likely to have pālagi partners, and thus a greater familiarity with pālagi ways of life. This participant was quite cognisant of the fact that this had led to him having a more critical position on Samoan culture:

So ... in New Zealand, apart from your family, do you have much contact with the Samoan community in New Zealand?

I will say that about ten to twenty per cent ... I have nothing against the culture. There’s a little bit about the culture that I still don’t understand about, you know, and I still think it’s wrong, but it’s hard, because it’s the way we’re brought up. I’m talking about the fa’alavelave stuff, I’m talking about money. I do feel that ... my experience from here makes me ... hanging out with pākeha guys and seeing pākeha families, and it makes me realise that my own people are so poor because they’re giving out so much, unnecessary stuff. There’s no need for it really. Church things, youth things, family things, bigger things, you know – like, if someone gets married, even though they realise that they can’t afford it, they go out of their way to make it happen, and I realise it’s only luxury, it’s only ... it’s more like a display. It’s a competition. It’s all that. So Mum and Dad wanted to go to a church and be in the community, like have a [indecipherable], you know, like have a name in the church, but if you do have a name in the church you have to have lots and lots of money to go ... so I was very against it. It’s something we did back home, and now we’re here and I said to them, ‘Why do we have to do that?’ And they said, ‘Oh, we have to, you know, because it’s part of the culture’. And I said, ‘Well, put it this way – you know [indecipherable], but try to think from my point of view, is that it all have to do with money’. I said, ‘OK, you look at the minister. The minister’s job is to preach, and he’s not preaching to get money. You know, there is a reason why he’s there’. I mean, I look at the moment – I mean, even though he’s getting his allowance from whatever church he’s from, the congregation are putting in money every Sunday, and I think that’s totally wrong, you know? I mean, we are a poor family, forking out a hundred dollars every month to the church, and what are we supposed to eat during the week? ... I’m very [indecipherable] and I’m a Christian, and basically I haven’t been to church for about ten years, and they really didn’t like me not being at church, but I said, ‘OK, it’s my life and I think I’m more understanding than you’s are’. ... I mean, I’m

not trying to cut myself out of the Samoan community. I prefer not to live my life like that. All I want is my life, I want to be happy, I want to be close to my family and the people I love, my friends, but I'm not ... I'm not going to waste my time working hard and the whole lot going to somebody else.

Although this participant was explicitly critical of certain aspects of fa'aSamoa, he remained strongly committed to his family. When in relationships with other men, he generally lived with these partners, and he stated that bringing boyfriends into the family home would be disrespectful. When he was single, he lived with his family. Although his sexuality was never discussed in family contexts, his family were aware that he was fa'afafine. In the past, occasional reference had been made to the possibility of him marrying, but he put a stop to this by pointing out that if he did marry, he would no longer be able to contribute to the family financially. This echoes the common observation made in Samoa that fa'afafine children can be an advantage because they never marry, remaining in the family home and caring for older family members. This participant thus maintained one of the core aspects of fa'aSamoa in continuing to care for and respect his family, and he suggested that many of the problems encountered by migrant fa'afafine stem from a lack of concern for family:

I mean, I look at these fa'afafines that you meet here, they came from the island – their family sent them over here to be with their family. As soon as they get here, they move out and they basically go and live together as a group of fa'afafine. To me, I don't want to be like that, because I came here to support my family. I didn't come here, you know, just to go around and do nothing.

Most participants echoed this ideology of family commitment. Almost all spoke of remaining close to family, and many also provided financial assistance, although often on a somewhat sporadic basis.

While family relationships remained strong, these tended to be only with more immediate family. Links with the wider community in villages of origin were never mentioned, and no participant spoke of making any financial contribution to village projects. Return trips to Samoa seemed to be infrequent. Many participants spoke of not wanting to return to Samoa because their immediate family had also migrated to New Zealand. This suggests that the wider community links that many migrant Samoans have maintained (Macpherson 2004, 169) were not often preserved by these fa'afafine. While this severing of Samoan links was fairly consistent across these participants, it must be remembered that the group I have interviewed are not necessarily representative of all migrant fa'afafine. Generally articulate, fluent in English, and well educated, as well as being disposed towards contributing to academic research, this group of fa'afafine were likely to form a 'new life' in New Zealand, be more easily incorporated into pālagi circles and cultural institutions, and become relatively independent of community and 'aiga networks. The fact that the participants in this study – especially those of the

younger generation – did not maintain many links with Samoa, and were often critical of aspects of fa'aSamoa is, in one respect, typical of most younger Samoans, especially those who have lived in New Zealand for much of their lives (Macpherson 2004, 176-178). Yet, the fact that these participants continued to identify as fa'afafine meant that they also maintained a link to the culture that provided the basis for an identity that is unique in western societies. While this identity was germinated in the context of lives lived in Samoa, it also appears that if fa'afafine in New Zealand were to retain gendered ambiguity, it was necessary to develop a degree of distance from Samoan 'aiga and enclaves. As I explained in Chapter 6, although these enclaves maintain fa'aSamoa, they tend to be conservative, and responsibilities to family often require conformity to hetero-masculinity in order to meet the needs of 'aiga in a New Zealand context.

Members of the older generation were able to foreground their femininity in contexts where they could be effeminate (albeit 'gay') men, or by utilising the medical technologies available in order to feminise their bodies to the point that they could pass as women. In more contemporary times, the sex industry has provided a context in which ambiguous sexes/genders could be turned to economic advantage, although it was apparent that this was an option that could also lead to extreme marginalisation within the Samoan community and virtual estrangement from family. However, as wider social changes have resulted in more inclusive multicultural politics and a more liberal attitude towards diverse expressions of identities, discourses in queer communities have led to a proliferation of models of gender and sexuality beyond the standards of 'gay men' and 'lesbian women'. This has provided a context in which fa'afafine can be 'male' and simultaneously 'feminine' in a range of ways that often reflect the heterogeneity of the fa'afafine population itself. While the embodiment of neither male nor female and both masculine and feminine in New Zealand only became possible in the liberal political context at the turn of millennium, this is not to suggest that fa'afafine have found 'freedom' in pālagi society. In a sense, it is rather that pālagi society has 'caught up' with Samoan culture, in that the constraints placed on migrant fa'afafine by Samoan enclaves and 'aiga in New Zealand were the result of the (correctly) perceived need to conform in order to succeed. The experiences of these migrant fa'afafine thus illustrate that western societies "have no social place for a person who is neither a woman nor a man" (Lorber, cited in Gagné and Tewksbury 1998, 82). More recent shifts in understandings of the transgendered suggest that this previous lack of social acceptance does not indicate a lack in those individuals, but rather in the discourses of western societies (Califia 1997, 70; Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997, 491; Namaste 2000, 174-183). However, the sexual and gendered subcultures of

contemporary western cultures have offered an increasing range of possibilities, some of which participants in this research have chosen to take up. At the time of writing, it remained to be seen how aspects of both western and Samoan cultures would continue to be drawn on in order to realise the identities of those Samoan males to live ‘in the manner of a woman’.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

... there is no such thing as the “free” play of signification in a material world, bodies are not passively inscribed by signs; they are inscribed by people who select items of material culture from a restricted range of options and arrange them according to imaginations that are shaped by historical development (Weston 1993a, 13-14).

At the beginning of the 21st century, fa’afafine identities exist in spaces of tension between tradition and modernity, between Samoan cultural discourses of family, respect and social status, and western ideologies of sexual liberation, individual freedom, and the right to emotionally fulfilling relationships. In Samoa, shifts in Samoan understandings of gender and sexuality have meant that contemporary fa’afafine utilise aspects of both Samoan and western cultures and discourses, often in explicitly strategic manoeuvres designed to realise their own goals. In New Zealand, migrant fa’afafine negotiate between the demands of the Samoan community, the hegemonic structures of western gender frameworks, and their own sense of themselves as family members, as Samoan, as feminine, and as social actors attempting to meet their own various needs. While the details of these practices are, at the micro level, unique to these individual participants, to contemporary fa’afafine, to Samoans, to transgendered people, to cross-cultural migrants, or to other specific categories of persons, the processes themselves are widespread. In this conclusion, I outline some of the over-arching processes which frame these micro-practices, processes by which all subjectivities, all genders, are constructed and maintained.

Because gender is commonly assumed to rest on the foundation of ‘sex’ and to be a cultural expression of the natural, the pre-social, the innate (Lloyd 1999, 196), many of these practices encompass the body. As Lois McNay suggests, the body is an important focus for any study of identity:

As the point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological, the body is a dynamic mutable frontier. The body is the threshold through which the subject’s lived experience of the world is incorporated and realized, and, as such, is neither pure object

nor pure subject. It is not pure object since it is the place of one's engagement with the world. Nor is it pure subject in that there is always a material residue that resists incorporation into dominant system schema (1999, 98).

The body is thus both a force which constructs gendered identities, and a realisation of those genders. Tamsin Wilton notes that the 'difference' of those marked as 'other' – here she cites women, black people, and gay people – is a difference that emerges from the body, or from what is done with the body (1996, 103). It is thus at the level of the body that difference is most apparent, especially in terms of sex/gender. However, this is not to say that it is only 'difference' that is embodied. Moving towards an understanding of how fa'afafine identities are performed through, create, and are created by particular bodies allows for all bodies to be comprehended as both the foundation and realisation of subjectivities. Studies of gendered difference "can be treated as framed examples of the performativity that underlies the entire logic of binary sexuality" (Morris 1995, 580).

The ways in which the participants in this research spoke about their lives suggests that the enactment of sex/gender is something of a 'layered' achievement that takes place with varying degrees of consciousness, and which is constrained and enabled by considerations that are both cultural and corporeal. This achievement is a complex interplay between a social actor's sense of themselves as gendered, the discursive context in which they act, and the specifics of their body (Phibbs 2001, 145). The various experiences and understandings of these fa'afafine also reveal that the body is not infinitely malleable, and that it is *experienced* as being even less malleable than it 'actually' is. However, there are 'surface' or 'superficial' layers that are understood as being readily available for relatively easy change.¹ These are the 'layers' that are commonly modified by almost all people in their performances of gender, and includes those aspects of embodiment that are readily thought of as 'superficial', such as hair, make-up, and clothes. The 'obvious' availability of these 'superficial' aspects of embodiment for modification is demonstrated by the fact that it was these aspects that those participants who migrated to New Zealand altered so as to be more 'masculine'. Their ability to make these changes (both in terms of being able, and being willing, to do so) enabled them to live in New Zealand during the initial period following migration in a manner which did not require them to compromise their senses of themselves as family members or as Samoans. That fa'afafine in Samoa and New Zealand are both

¹ While in this discussion I have separated out these 'layers', these divisions are somewhat theoretical. In the everyday lives of the fa'afafine I spoke with, the boundaries between these layers are by no means clear, nor are they 'stacked' neatly on top of each other. Rather, they constantly interrelate with each other and with other aspects of the individual's life.

willing and able to discard these signifiers of femininity when circumstances demand suggests that they are not *formative* of gender, but are rather understood as means of symbolising a pre-existent femininity. For example, in Samoa, if religious principles demanded it, gowns and tiaras were discarded. On arrival in New Zealand, hair was cut short, nails trimmed, plucked eyebrows grown out, and only ‘masculine’ clothing worn. However, a sense of femininity remained, and while these superficial aspects were understood as available for change, the adoption of many of the symbols of masculinity was understood as ‘false’.

At the boundary of the aspects of the body which are understood as amenable to change are those which actually alter the shape *of*, rather than sit *on*, the body. These processes include manipulating weight or muscle tone, but most explicitly involve a range of feminising medical technologies. Within western paradigms, these technologies are, in some quarters, understood to turn ‘male’ bodies into ‘female’ bodies. While the attitudes of fa’afafine towards these technologies are complex and not uniform, the manner in which most participants spoke about them suggested that they were categorised along with other means of embodying femininity that have come from the west. Rather than allow them to become the women they had ‘always been’, these technologies were added to the pool of resources that individual participants may – or may not – have chosen to utilise in their enactments of femininity. However, there was a general consensus that these technologies could not ‘make’ participants women any more than they were already. The point of difference between Samoan and pālāgi understandings of the effects of these technologies seems to stem from the different social significance attached to aspects of embodiment such as the ability to bear children which are, as I will discuss shortly, not mutable in either an experienced or an ‘actual’ sense.

The second layer of embodiment is that which is described by both Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and Judith Butler’s theory of the reiterative performativity of gender. Both these approaches allow sex/gender to be understood as an aspect of subjectivity which is socialised, but which is repeated so often that it becomes ‘congealed’ or sedimented to the point that it is *experienced* as immutable. While Bourdieu’s work offers various ‘definitions’ of habitus, these definitions have common themes, in that they:

all evoke the idea of a set of deeply internalized master dispositions that generate action. They point to a theory of action that is practical rather than discursive, pre-reflective rather than conscious, embodied as well as cognitive, durable though adaptive, reproductive though generative and inventive, and the product of particular social conditions though

transposable to others (Swartz 1997, 101).

As Lois McNay notes, the repeated nature of habitus results in “a layer of embodied experience that is not immediately amenable to self-fashioning” (1999, 102). This was illustrated in the way that all participants spoke of their femininity as immutable, although there was a marked heterogeneity in terms of exactly *what* was ‘fixed’ as markers of femininity. References by participants to having ‘been born this way’ demonstrate that, once fixed, habitus is experienced as ‘natural’ (Bourdieu 1990, 72, 136, 140-141), an understanding that resonates with Butler’s definition of gender as “set of repeated acts within a highly rigid framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, or a natural sort of being” (1990a, 33). Once gender is sedimented through repetition, the social actor then ‘becomes’ the gender which they enact, embody, cite, and re-cite: “it is not in a single act of constitution or invention that the subject is brought into being, but through recitation and repetition” (Lloyd 1999, 197). Sex/gender is thus (re)iterated to the point of being unconscious,² resulting in a level of embodiment that can be separated from the ‘superficial’ layers discussed previously. However, cross-cultural research tends to focus on these more alterable aspects of embodied subjectivities, leading to a trend to “overestimate the extent to which individuals living in post-traditional orders are able to reshape identity. This overemphasis on the mutable nature of identity is partly the result of a tendency to understand gender identity as a form of symbolic identification rather than as a deeply entrenched form of embodied existence” (McNay 1999, 113). A participant quoted earlier spoke of these two layers, the ‘superficial’ and the ‘entrenched’, in a particularly succinct fashion when telling of how she was encouraged by her family to masculinise on first arrival in New Zealand:

You know, they cut my hair short and cut the nails, but the way I walk and the way I talk, it's never changed.

While habitus is virtually always experienced as immutable, those who transition gender demonstrate that gender is *not* innate, but is rather a series of sedimented practices that can be un/re-learned. Transsexuals speak of how they have to learn how to sit like a woman, walk like a woman, talk like a woman, hold things like a woman ... until these practices are as much ‘second nature’ as the markers of masculinity they once embodied. However, for the vast majority of people, most fa’afafine included, the motivation for un/re-learning these aspects of gender either does not exist, or is not strong enough to provoke action.

² While some authors speak of the ‘unconscious’ enactment of identity that emerges from this entrenched embodiment in the psychoanalytic sense, it is more relevant to this theorising to articulate this ‘unconscious’ enactment as ‘absent-minded’ (Jackson and Scott 2001, 18).

The third layer is that which is (virtually) concrete, and not socialised. As all life in Samoa is marked by a high level of physical labour for younger people, migrant fa'afafine are likely to have developed muscles while growing up in Samoa in ways that problematise attempts to be accepted as 'women', or even as 'feminine', in New Zealand. As I have observed, such 'concrete' aspects of embodiment seemed to have some impact on the choices participants made regarding whether they would attempt to pass as women or not. The ability to bear children was frequently mentioned as an insurmountable barrier to being 'real' women, and it is here that the differences in the *social* meanings of unalterable aspects of the body are most apparent. While pālagi transsexuals and many others in western societies understand that the manifestation of the external physiological signifiers of 'female-ness' are a significant and necessary aspect of what makes 'women' women, for Samoans, reproductive capacity is more central to definitions of 'woman'. Bodily and embodied performances, while open to resignification, cannot be made to mean *anything*, as historical and cultural associations will always both enable and limit potential meaning (Lloyd 1999, 200).

These historical and cultural associations are predominantly realised through, and understood in, interaction. Sociological theorising has long held that the self is only ever created in interaction.³ Harold Garfinkel's work on Agnes (1967), who was initially thought to be intersexed,⁴ demonstrated explicitly how gender is created relationally. It is through the dual processes of appropriately performing, and being accepted as, a gender that one *is* that gender. The concept of 'passing', a core component of the transsexual's transition from one gender to the other, demonstrates how being accepted as one gender or the other is an integral part of *being* that gender (Gagné, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997, 501). In relation to sexuality, Ken Plummer similarly notes that "[h]omosexuality cannot be understood as an individualistic phenomenon: rather it needs to be seen as an interactive phenomenon, and constantly linked to the reactions of society's members" (1996, 66). Thus, identities depend not only on interaction for their existence, but are shaped and altered in processes of action and *reaction*.

³ See Longmore (1998) and Plummer (1982; 1996) in relation to the use of theories of symbolic interactionism specifically in studies of sexuality.

⁴ After Garfinkel had completed his original study of Agnes' transition to completely embodied femininity, which included genital reconstruction surgery, it was revealed that she had manifested the original feminine aspects of her body that had led to her diagnosis as intersexed by taking her mother's estrogen tablets (Kessler and McKenna 1978, 116).

For participants who migrated to New Zealand, conflict occurred between those aspects of their femininity that they experienced as immutable – the ‘habitus’ of being fa’afafine – and the levels of femininity that would be accepted from ‘males’ in interactions with pālagi. In western contexts, at least until recently, the boundaries between the sexes have been consistently and rigorously policed:

Our society prohibits wilful or random movements from one sex status to the other. It insists that such transfers be accompanied by the well-known controls that accompany masquerading, play-acting, party behavior, convention behavior, spying, and the like. Such changes are treated by both those making the changes as well as those observing them in others as limited both by the clock as well as by occasions and practical circumstances (Garfinkel 1967, 125).

In New Zealand, there were few available social spaces in which those with ‘male’ bodies could enact femininity on a permanent and explicit basis without desiring to be a ‘woman’. As Butler suggests, in western contexts, it is necessary to present oneself as one gender or the other in order to be socially recognised as a person (1990a, 17) – conclusive enactment of a (and preferably the ‘appropriate’) gender is such a fundamental expectation that those who fail to do so may not always be considered culturally intelligible or fully ‘human’ (Butler 1990a, 2, 8).

Yet this is not to suggest that these western contexts are only constraining for the femininity of fa’afafine. Access to cosmetics, feminising medical technologies, or gay identities, enabled participants to enact femininity in ways that would not have been available in indigenous contexts. As I explained in Chapters 4 and 5, as western understandings of the relationships between gender and sexuality become embedded in Samoan ways of thinking, the sexual relations that are considered ‘appropriate’ for fa’afafine are beginning to exclude women, and thus a spectrum of the kinship structure – that of fathering children – has become closed to them. However, as some possible life courses become less available, access to new resources enable fa’afafine to more thoroughly embody femininity in other ways. The lives of fa’afafine thus demonstrate how identities are constructed with regard to the ‘technologies’ that are available at any given time, the ideologies of what is culturally appropriate, the discursive limits of what is culturally comprehensible, and the capacities and limitations of the body. There is an integral relationship between ideologies and (what counts as) knowledge, and available identities and possible ways of expressing those identities. All aspects of this relationship are mutually constitutive – the culture that creates identities/subjectivities is, in turn, created by those who enact these identities/subjectivities.

The possibilities for enacting particular subjectivities, and for having these subjectivities comprehended, is dependent on the availability of discursive spaces. In this research, shifts in western understandings of sex/gender influenced the possibilities that were understood as being available by participants. In the 1960s and 70s, paradigms which espoused the assimilation of cultural difference meant that participants who lived in New Zealand at this time felt it necessary to enact masculinities that could be seen as congruent with their 'male' bodies, even if these masculinities were, at times, expressed using the discourses of male homosexuality. As rhetorics of cultural relativism and acceptance of diversity came into ascendance, fa'afafine began to be comprehended as an identity that was unique to Samoa, and which should not be expected to conform to hetero-normative concepts of gender.

These examples of the links between ideologies and identities demonstrate that experiences and self-narratives, while fluid and shifting, are not open to *any* enactment, *any* interpretation. Rather, they "depend on access to texts circulating in the wider culture" (Wilton 1996, 110), and are "interpreted, theorized and mediated through the meanings that are culturally available" (Jackson and Scott 2001, 9). Knowledge, both in the wider sense and in relation to available subjectivities, only ever functions in relation to particular discourses (Davies and Harré 1990, 45), a concept that is thoroughly illustrated in Thomas Laqueur's history of the various ways the human body has been 'sexed' in western thought (1990). Not only is 'choice' of identities limited by what is discursively possible or culturally comprehensible, but also by the various forms of capital held by specific social actors. These forms of capital can be economic, social, or physical, and their value will shift as social actors move between or across social fields.

Discursive contexts and hegemonic ideologies are thus significant forces that constrain and enable the possibilities of particular identities. However, these possibilities are not only shaped by 'external' influences. Habitus provokes individual and specific reactions to these discourses and ideologies, as social actors negotiate between the demands and opportunities of various social fields and their sense of themselves as particular kinds of people (Jenkins 1992, 80; Swartz 1997, 291). The habitus developed in Samoan contexts predisposed participants towards particular reactions to various situations, but the fact that habitus entails *dispositions* rather than *rules* also allowed them some room for adapting to the specific imperatives of the groups with which they aligned themselves, or the social fields within which they found themselves (Robbins 2000, 29-30), and within which they engaged in various strategies to preserve or improve their positions (Jenkins 1992, 85). As Bourdieu suggests, the sedimented but

constantly reiterated nature of habitus means that an individual's history will make their actions predictable but not pre-ordained (1977, 72-73). Furthermore, "the model of the near circular relationship of near-perfect reproduction [...] is completely valid only when conditions of production of the *habitus* and the conditions of its functioning are identical or homothetic" (Bourdieu 1990, 63). New conditions will always result in novel action, although this action will inevitably be informed by historically acquired dispositions.

For the participants in this research, the influence of disposition can be seen in their tendency to identify with/as the models of 'male effeminacy' that were available in New Zealand. Many chose to identify as 'gay men' at some point after migrating to New Zealand. For some, this was the most viable realisation of their femininity in contexts such as boys' boarding schools, while for others it was an identification that allowed for a fuller embodiment of gender and sexuality within the relatively masculine contexts of gay urban communities. Other participants used western discourses of transgenderism to describe themselves as 'drag queens', an identity which most pālagi could comprehend and which allowed certain participants to express themselves as feminine without passing as women. Others utilised various medical technologies that allowed them to pass as women in most social contexts, while not feeling the need to fully feminise their bodies. This range of responses to the constraints and opportunities offered by life in New Zealand demonstrates that growing up as fa'afafine in Samoa does not result in uniform reactions to life experiences. While all participants were disposed towards locating contexts in which they could express themselves as feminine, circumstance, power relations, corporeality, discursive practices, and desired outcomes meant that the means by which these 'spaces' were located varied significantly.

While the manner in which these individuals have experienced and understood the 'lack of fit' between their fa'afafine identities and the expectations of the new social field of New Zealand society provides a particular perspective on, and example of, how the field functions as a whole, especially in relation to discourses of sex, gender, and sexuality (McNay 1999, 110-111; Worth 2001, 1), these processes have consequences beyond the theoretical. This was illustrated in the manner in which one community advocate spoke of how he targets the safer sex programmes he runs:

Oh, in terms of your work, and targeting safe sex campaigns, do you see that for fa'afafine that don't identify as gay, how do you go about sort of targeting campaigns towards them?

Well, it's not even that, it's the same thing – you're giving them information, so it's not necessarily MSM⁵ information that's like ... because often it sort of stretches to just like generic stuff, it's a full spectrum for everyone, so when you're presenting, you present things so that people don't have to identify things, but they can end up taking away the information that they need to. There are certain areas that I will target, like I will go and have lunch with all the [fa'afafine] girls on the street, and I just get them to bring their network people, and I'll just present all the information, give them all the stuff, so it's in a non-threatening, non-identifying way really. You know, often with gay Pacific Island men, non-identifying – same thing. Because a lot of people won't identify, so that's OK if you won't identify, I just have to make sure you have the right things, so if you ever come into the situation, you're sweet.

This suggests that an understanding of the fluidity, contextuality, and complexity of the subjectivities of those who identify as 'fa'afafine' is important for more than just what it reveals about sex/gender. Yet the theorising that emerges from projects such as this does have a place, as these theoretical understandings are part of the wider discourses in which more immediate practices, such as the implementation of safer sex programmes, are located.

The Samoan-authored play *A frigate bird sings* (Kightley and Fane, 1995) offers a particularly complex representation of the lives of a migrant Samoan family, one of whom is fa'afafine. In his review of the play, Niko Besnier offers an analysis of its depiction of migrant fa'afafine that is worth quoting at length:

Most remarkable about A FRIGATE BIRD SINGS is the way the play steers away from explaining the tension it depicts in terms of over-simplified and under-theorised notions like 'tradition' and 'modernity', 'acceptance' and 'rejection'. What the play narrates is considerably more complex, subtle and powerful. While the tensions between village life in Samoa and urban existence in New Zealand do play a role in shaping people's life trajectories (not just those of fa'afafine), they are not determinative of those trajectories. Most remarkably, A FRIGATE BIRD SINGS avoids romanticising the life of fa'afafine, and thus avoids the common pitfall that popular Western conceptualisations of Polynesian societies fall into, by insisting that those societies are more 'accepting' of gender 'diversity' than Western post-industrial societies. Such characterisations, which also become a common feature of the nostalgic second-generation migrant discourse, are fraught with problematic assumptions about the relationships among gender, the individual and society across cultures (1996, 44-45).

The narratives of the participants in this research reveal the same tensions, and the same resourceful agency exercised through, with, around, and in spite of various cultural resources and demands. Although the demands of the thesis format – and my own stylistic propensities – preclude the eloquence and drama of *A frigate bird sings*, I hope to have similarly communicated the complexity of the lives of contemporary fa'afafine in both Samoa and New Zealand.

⁵ 'MSM' is a term for 'men who have sex with men'.

APPENDIX A



ETHICS DOCUMENTS



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INFORMATION SHEET English version

'TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS'

Research for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Johanna Mary Schmidt
Department of Sociology
University of Auckland
New Zealand

As you already know, my name is Jo Schmidt, and I am a student at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. I am enrolled for a PhD in the Department of Sociology at the University. My research is related to fa'afafine in Samoa and in Auckland, and I am especially interested in the lives of fa'afafine and the experiences of those who move from Samoa to Auckland. The results of this research will give both Samoans and Papalagi a better understanding of fa'afafine, and I hope that this will be of benefit to fa'afafine in both Samoa and New Zealand.

You are invited to participate in my research. I would like to interview you about your life, your opinions about things, and your activities. This will probably take between one and two hours. If you think you are spending too long talking to me, we can stop whenever you want to. Hopefully we would be able to come back to the interview at another time that would be convenient for you. I will be tape recording the interview/s and will use what you tell me in my research. I would also like you to sign a form which says you are happy for me to use the information you give me, but if you would prefer, we can record you say that you are happy for me to use this information.

If you agree to be interviewed now, you can still decide later (even after the interview) that you don't want me to use your information, but this has to be before 30 April 2003. If you do not know where I am, you can write to me at the address below. You can also stop the interview whenever you want to, and if you don't want to answer particular questions that I ask you, that is OK.

I would like to do the interview/s with you without using a translator. This means we would have to speak in English most of the time, although I do speak a little Samoan. However, if you want we can use a translator. If you know of anyone that you would prefer to use a translator, you can tell me who that is and I will talk to them about being our translator. If you don't know anyone, I will find someone.

I will make sure that only me and my supervisors at the University (and maybe a translator) ever hear the tapes of the interview/s, and when I am writing about what you tell me, I won't use your real name. However, because there aren't very many fa'afafine in Samoa or in Auckland, you need to be aware that someone might read my work and be able to tell who you are from the information you give me.

I am hoping to take some photographs of fa'afafine to go with my writing. If you let me take photographs of you, I would like you to tell me how you want to look. Taking the photographs should take between one and two hours. When I get the photographs developed, I will let you decide which one/s you like best, and I will only use those ones. I will also give you copies of the photographs if you want them. I won't use your name, and the photograph won't be linked to anything you tell me that I write. However, if you agree to let me take your photograph, you must remember that anyone who sees them will know who you are.

If you have any questions about any of this, you can contact me at my address and phone number below. It is very important to me that you let me know if you are worried about anything you have told me.

My New Zealand address is : P.O. Box 1869
Auckland
New Zealand
Ph : 09 638 6070

My supervisor is Associate-Professor Cluny Macpherson at the University of Auckland. He can be contacted at : Department of Sociology
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland
Ph : 09 373 7599 extension 8618

The head of my department is Professor Maureen Baker. She can be contacted at : Department of Sociology
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland
Ph : 09 373 7599 extension 8610

This project also has the approval of the University of Auckland's Human Subjects Ethics Committee. If you have questions or you want to tell them anything, they can be contacted at : The University of Auckland Research Office
Office of the Vice Chancellor
Private Bag 92019
Auckland
New Zealand
Ph : 09 373 7599 extension 7830

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee

On 9 August 2000 for a period of three years, from 9 August 2000.

Reference 2000/226



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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This consent form will be held for a period of six years.

Title of study: **Transnational Identity Negotiations.**

Researcher: **Johanna Schmidt**

I have been given an explanation of this study. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I have had them answered. I understand that I may withdraw myself, any information traceable to me, and any photographs taken of me at any time without giving reasons up until two months after taking part in the interview or having my photograph taken.

I agree to be interviewed.

Y / N

(Please circle one.)

I agree to the interview being audio taped and I understand that I can have the recording turned off at any time.

Y / N

(Please circle one.)

I agree to have my photograph taken.

Y / N

(Please circle one.)

SIGNATURE :

NAME :

DATE :

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics
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FAAMATALAGA E UIGA I LE SU'ESU'EGA I le Gagana Samoa

'FILIGA O LOU TULAGA ALOAIA I LE VA O MALO' (Samoa ma Niu Sila)
Su'esu'ega mo le Faailoga
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Johanna Mary Schmidt
Iunivesite o Aukilani
Niu Sila

O lo'u igoa o Jo Schmidt, o lo'o o'u aoga i le Iunivesite o Aukilani. O la'u su'esu'ega o lo'o fai mo le faailoga o le PhD, e uiga lea i fa'afafine i Samoa ma Aukilani. E faapitua lava la'u su'esu'ega i olaga o fa'afafine aemaise o latou e o mai mai Samoa ma nonofo i Aukilani. O i'uga ma faamatalaga o lenei su'esu'ega e taua ina ia malamalama atili ai, e le gata i tagata papalagi ae faapea fo'i tagata Samoa i fa'afafine. E faamoemoe foi o le a aoga mo fa'afafine i Samoa ma Niu Sila.

E talosaga atu i le ava lava mo sou avanoa e te auai ai i lenei su'esu'ega. E fia faia se ta talanoaga e uiga i lou soifuaga. Afai e te manatu ua umi tele le talanoaga, e mafai lava ona taofi i soo se taimi, ma toe faaaauu i se isi taimi e te finagalo ai. E fia pu'eina lenei talanoaga i le laau pu'e leo, ma e fia faaaoga i lenei su'esu'ega, lenei talanoaga. Ou te manaomia lau ioega e faatagaina ai lo'u faaogaina o ni faamatalaga, i le saina o le pepa ua saunia po'o le pu'eina foi o lau ioega i le laau pu'e leo.

Afai e te malie mai e fai se ta talanoaga, e mafai lava ona e filifili (tusa lava pe ua uma se talanoaga) e te le mana'o e faaaoga ni faamatalaga ao le'i o'o i le aso e pei ona ta malilie i ai. E mafai ona e tusi mai i lo'u tuatusi oi lalo, pe a i ai se mea e te fia malamalama ai. Soo se taimi lava e te finagalo ai e faauma se talanoaga, pe e te le fiafia fo'i e tali ni fesili 'ou te tuuina atu, o le a le afaina lea.

Ou te faamoemoe e fai la talanoaga e le faaaogaina se isi e faaliliuina faaSamoa. O le a tele lava ina faaaoga le faapalagi. Ou te mafai ona faaSamoa ae le lelei tele la'u faaSamoa. Afai e te mana'o i se isi e faaliliuina la ta talanoaga, e mafai ona e ta'u mai se tagata ou te feso'ota'i i ai. Afai e te le iloa se isi, e mafai ona ou su'e mai se faaliliuupu.

O le a le ta'ua lou suafa i a'u tusitusiga e faatatau i ni a ta talanoaga. O le a na'o lo'u faiaoga i le Iunivesite, poo ni faaliliuupu, ma a'u, e iloa ni faamatalaga o le a pueina i le laau pu'e leo. Ona e le toatele ni fa'afafine i Samoa poo Aukilani fo'i, e tatau ona fa'aailoa atu, e mafai ona faitau ni isi i a'u tusitusiga ma ona maitauina po'o oe o lo'o faatatau i ai nisi o nei tusitusiga.

O lo'o o'u faamoemoe e pu'e ni ata o fa'afafine e faaaoga i la'u tusitusiga. Afai e te finagalo ai, o ni ata e pu'e ma faaaoga, o le a filifili lava e 'oe. O ata e le faaaogaina i la'u tusitusiga o le a tuuina atu uma ia te oe pe a e mana'o ai. O le a le ta'ua lava lou suafa pe faafeso'ota'i fo'i se faamatalaga e te tu'uina mai i sou ata.

A i ai ni fesili e te fia malamalama ai. Faamolemole faafeso'ota'i mai a'u ma tagata i tuatusi o lo'o ta'ua i lalo.

Johanna Schmidt
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Ph: (09) 3737599 Extension 8610

O lenei su'esu'ega ua faamaonia e le komiti o le va fealoaloai o Tagata, e mafai ona fesootai pe'a i ai ni au fesili:

The University of Auckland Research Office
Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Private Bag 92019
Auckland
New Zealand
Ph: (09) 3737599 Extension: 7830

Ua fa'amaonia e le Komiti o le va fealoaloa'i o Tagata.

I le aso 9.8.00 mo le vai taimi o le tolu tausaga, mai le aso 9.8.00. i le aso.

Reference: 2000/226



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O LE IOEGA/MALIEGA E AUA I LE SU'ESU'EGA

E ono tausaga e taulia ai

Mataupu: **Filifiliga o lou Tulaga Aloaia i le va o Malo (Samoa ma Niu Sila)**

Tagata e faia le Su'esu'ega: **Johanna Schmidt**

Ua ou malamalama i le faamatalaga ma le mafuaaga o lenei suesuega. Ua faamalieina foi a'u e tusa ma fesili sa ou fia malamalama ai. Ua ou iloa lelei fo'i e mafai ona ou tu'ua, pe aveese mai ni faamatalaga po'o ni ata ua ou tuuina atu mo lenei su'esu'ega e aunoa ma se mafuaaga, i totonu o le lua masina talu ai ona amata le su'esu'ega.

Ua ou malie ou te a'afia i lenei su'esu'ega:

IOE _____ LEAI _____

(faasa'o)

Ua ou ioe e pu'e le talanoaga i le laau pu'e leo, ma ua ou malamalama, e mafai ona tape le laau i so'o se taimi:

IOE _____ LEAI _____

(faasa'o)

Ua ou ioe e pu'e lo'u ata:

IOE _____ LEAI _____

(faasa'o)

IGOA (Signature): _____

IGOA: _____

I LE ASO: _____

Ua fa'amaonia e le Komiti o le va fealoaloa'i o Tagata.

I le aso 9.8.00 mo le vai taimi o le tolu tausaga, mai le aso 9.8.00. i le aso.
Reference: 2000/226

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GLOSSARY

The following definitions are based on a Samoan-English dictionary (Milner 1993/1966), information garnered from various other publications, my own understandings (based on conversations and observations made throughout this project), and the input of Samoan academics with an extensive knowledge of the nuances of the language. These definitions are intended to be more than simply ‘translations’. It is hoped that they convey the connotations of these words as they are used in this thesis and in the words of the participants in this research.

In Samoan, nouns do not have a suffix added to indicate the plural (as an ‘s’ is added to most English nouns). Rather, the singular or plural status of a noun is indicated by the articles and demonstratives that are used in relation to the word, and by variations of the noun itself in some cases (Hunkin 1997/1992). Although the Samoan words used in this thesis are not accompanied by the necessary modifiers to indicate plurality, I have chosen to leave them in their original form, and hope that it will emerge from the context whether the noun is singular or plural. The exception to this rule is when others quoted have used an ‘s’ to pluralise Samoan nouns.

The word ‘Samoa’ (and its derivations) should technically have a macron over the first ‘a’ (Sāmoa). However, this macron is not found in common usage, and I have elected not to use it.

While I am indebted to those who assisted in compiling this glossary, I take full responsibility for the final version of these definitions.

’aiga: Milner provides a range of meanings for ‘aiga’: immediate family, extended family, lineage, and kin (1993/1966, 11). While the English word ‘family’ also has all these meanings, it commonly refers only to immediate family. For Samoans, the use of the word ‘aiga’ comes with more than one, if not all, of these associations.

aga: Milner translates ‘aga’ as ‘conduct, ways, behaviour’ (1993/1966, 7). The usage of the term in the thesis is derived from Shore’s work, in which ‘aga’ is defined as “social norms, proper behavior, linked to social roles and appropriate contexts” (1981, 195). He notes that most of the compound terms that are derived from the word ‘aga’ “suggest social virtue” (1981, 195).

āmio: Milner’s translation of ‘āmio’ is similar to ‘aga’ – conduct, behaviour, habits, manner, ways. However, Shore’s usage refers to “the actual behavior of individuals as it emerges from personal drives and urges” (1981, 195). For Shore, ‘āmio’ is marked by self-gratification, as opposed to the conformity to the expectations of others that typifies ‘aga’ (1981, 195).

fa'alavelave: Milner's translation of this term is "anything which interferes with normal life and calls for special activity" (1993/1966, 103). While this aspect of 'special occasion' is central to the concept of fa'alavelave, so too is the web of responsibilities and reciprocities in which fa'alavelave are enmeshed. Ngan-Woo speaks of fa'alavelave in relation to "community related obligations and commitments that families experience, and to occasions when the family requires support in order to maintain its strength" (1985, 10). Fa'alavelave include significant life events such as births, weddings, funerals, and conferring matai titles, in which the family at the centre of the event receives and redistributes numerous gifts such as fine mats, food and money. The term also includes community events for which funds must be raised, such as the building of churches or schools. Fa'alavelave are thus a significant part of the Samoan economy, as they are one of the means by which material wealth circulates through the society.

fa'aSamoa: Loosely translates as 'the Samoan way'. While it might be understood as 'Samoan culture', in the lives of Samoans, fa'aSamoa has an extremely active presence, and is often referred to as a mean of assessing certain actions, behaviours, or decisions. Things are thus not so much referred to in terms of whether they are part of fa'aSamoa, in the way that objects or behaviours might be 'part' of Italian or French culture, but rather whether they reflect the ideologies of fa'aSamoa.

fafine: Literally 'woman', although with implication of being married, or in a marital-type relationship, and hence sexually active.

fale: Technically any building, although generally used to refer to Samoan-style buildings with pillars supporting a tatched roof, and tatched blinds that can be lowered to form walls. Few of these traditional 'fale Samoa' remain. Replacements tend to be more western-style, closed in, permanent buildings, referred to as 'fale pālagi'. A family dwelling consists of a number of fale, with those designated for cooking and washing towards the 'back' of the property, the 'front' of which 'traditionally' faces the malae (central area) around which the nu'u (village) is arranged.

faleaitu: Literally translates as 'house of spirits'. Parodic theatre in which actors may take on the personas of well-known political figures or stereotypes of particular kinds of people.

feagaiga: Literally translates as 'covenant', and can be used to indicate various relationships that might be defined in this way, such as that between a pastor and their village. However, it is most commonly used to indicate the relationship between a brother and sister (which would include opposite gender cousins). This relationship involves certain taboos around discussions of topics such as sex in each others presence, an active protection on the part of the brother of the unmarried sister's sexuality, and a range of reciprocated rights and obligations between brother and sister.

fono: In a general sense, a meeting, although most often used to specifically refer to a council meeting of a village's matai.

lāvalava: Garment resembling a sarong – a long piece of fabric tied around the waist. Worn at ankle length for women, knee length for men.

matai: The 'chief' or 'head' of an 'aiga. Matai titles are specific to 'aiga and are passed through generations in a process of selection, rather than automatic inheritance. Matai are generally men, but there are steadily increasing numbers of female matai.

nu'u: Village, 'traditionally' composed of households arranged around the central public area, or malae, so that family properties back into the bush, which is thus marked as uninhabited or 'uncivilised'. This arrangement has been modified as roads bisect the village areas, and houses tend to be arranged along the road.

pālagi (formal – papālagi): Literally 'burster through the sky', a term which is said to relate to the appearance of the first European ships. Technically could be applied to any non-Samoan person, but in practice refers to those of European descent. Similar to 'pākeha' in New Zealand.

pōula: 'Night dance', a gathering of singing and dancing which occurred after the more formal ceremonies that accompanied a group visiting another village. Attributed with a highly sexual content, and commonly held to be one of the means by which visiting unmarried young men could meet the unmarried young women of the host village. The pōula was prohibited by missionaries, and effectively eliminated when Christian values took hold in Samoa.

pule tasi: Woman's outfit of a long lāvalava and short-sleeved tunic of matching fabric. Women engaged in group activities will often wear matching pule tasi.

siva: Literally 'dance', performed by women. The 'ideal' is the siva performed by the tāupou in which she is goaded by men who dance in a clown-like fashion around her, but whom she ignores in the graceful execution of her movements.

tama: Literally 'boy'.

tama'ita'i: Literally 'woman', although may also refer to an elderly woman, a 'lady' or princess, or the village tāupou.

tamaitiiti: Literally translates as 'small person', a gender neutral term for 'child' (in the sense of 'not adult', rather than 'offspring').

tamāloa: Translated by Milner as 'married man' (1993/1966, 239), but can be applied to unmarried older men who are considered worthy of being entrusted with responsibilities (although such a person is more likely to be referred to as toeaina).

taufa'ase'e: This term in its entirety is not found in Milner. In Lisa Taouma's usage, it suggests a Samoan custom of telling someone what they want to hear (1998, 27). This would concur with the translation of 'fa'ase'e' as 'deceive by flattery' (Milner 1993/1966, 205).

tāupou: Popularly translated as 'the village virgin', although encompasses a wide of range responsibilities. Generally the daughter of a high-ranking matai who performs particular functions such as mixing the ava (a drink derived from the root of the Piper methisticum) at ceremonial functions. The tāupou is held to be the embodiment of Samoan femininity, so she must maintain a certain public morality and be highly proficient at skills such as the siva.

teine: Literally 'girl', with implications of lack of sexual experience or activity. However, married women may be referred to as 'teine' in their natal villages, where their primary relation is that of daughter/sister, rather than wife/mother.

ula: "make fun of, make a joke of, laugh at, be facetious" (Milner 1993/1966, 297).

umu: Above-ground oven made of heated stones in which vegetables and meat are cooked. Preparing and tending the umu is the work of men.