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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)

Introduction

Samoaan *Fa'afafine* are biologically males who express feminine gender identities. The Samoan word *fa'afafine* literally translates as 'like' or 'in the manner' of *-fa'a* - 'a woman' - *-fafine*, but there is no easy translation for the word as a whole. While some dress as women, not all do; while many have sex with masculine men, their role in this act is usually perceived as strictly 'feminine' and thus they do not easily fit into the category of 'homosexual'; while some undergo body modifying practices to more resemble women, neither those who do nor the group as a whole can be readily defined as 'transsexual'.

Information outside Samoa about the islands often includes mention of *fa'afafine*, and tends generally to stress their social acceptance. For example, the Lonely Planet guide for Samoa suggests that *fa'afafine* are 'very much an integral part of the fabric of Samoan society' (Talbot and Swaney, 1998: 29), while on the Radio Australia website section 'Charting the Pacific', it is asserted that they were 'traditionally' raised as *fa'afafine* if a family was short of female labour, but may now 'choose' to be *fa'afafine* and are supported in that choice (Radio Australia, n.d.). In the promotional material for the widely distributed Australian documentary *Paradise Bent: Boys will be Girls in Samoa* (produced in 2000) the director Heather Croall states that *fa'afafine* 'are accepted as part of Samoan culture' (Croall, n.d.).

Current Sociology, May/July 2003, Vol. 51(3/4): 417-432 SAGE Publications
(London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi) www.sagepublications.com
[0011-3921(200305/07)51:3/4;417-432;032656]

I myself first saw *Paradise Bent* on video just prior to leaving for Samoa in 2000 as part of my PhD research investigating the impact of globalization and migration on fa'afafine identities.¹ Although I understood that fa'afafine were a somewhat marginalized population, I was somewhat reassured by Croall's depiction of their easy lives and approachable natures, as I myself had not yet met any fa'afafine, and I left feeling confident about undertaking research in Samoa.

A couple of weeks after my arrival, I delivered a seminar at the National University. The topic was fairly general, but I ended with a short summary of my own research, expecting interest, and maybe some debate about the politics of *palagi* (Europeans) researching Samoan topics. These reactions were evident, but, unexpectedly in such an academic environment, other responses to my work made it clear that there is a real fear that research such as mine will give the outside world the impression that Samoa is a 'gay paradise'. Initially surprised at this concern, it was explained to me as resulting from events such as the then recent screening of *Paradise Bent* on Australia's SBS television channel. My Samoan audience was fully aware that for many viewers, documentaries such as this may well be the entirety of their experience of Samoan culture. Research such as mine seemed to simply add to what they see as an 'unhealthy' preoccupation with what is, after all, a relatively small proportion of the Samoan population. It transpired during my fieldwork that this reaction was not an isolated incident. While often not so publicly voiced, this social ambivalence regarding fa'afafine is evident throughout Samoa.

I have come to appreciate this paradox of apparent cultural acceptance and very real social marginalization of fa'afafine as a consequence of a combination of 'traditional' Samoan culture and the impact of globalization on indigenous constructions, representations and understandings of gender and sexuality. At the time of writing, I am still actively engaged in this research, and this article represents my current understanding of this paradox and how it is related to the wider framework of Samoan culture and the changes it has undergone.

The Local Life-World of Samoan Fa'afafine

In order to provide a basis for the following discussion, I first briefly outline the processes by which gender was/is constructed in the 'traditional' Samoan context, before discussing recent shifts in this area. These shifts originate in the fact 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; Besnier, 1993: 312–13; Mageo, 1998; Dolgoy, 2000:

127–8). Membership of and service to *aiga* (extended family) and community are central components of Samoan subjectivity, and in the village context, gendering is largely achieved through particular labour contributions to *aiga* and village (Schoeffel, 1979; Shore, 1981; Poasa, 1992: 43; Mageo, 1998; Sua'ali'i, 2001: 161). Women labour in and around the home and the village, whereas men work in the plantations and fish outside the reef (Shore, 1982: 225–6; Holmes, 1987: 80).²

Fa'afafine are identified at an early age by virtue of their propensity for feminine tasks (Poasa, 1992: 43; Besnier, 1993: 296). The following description of early life at home in Samoa is entirely typical of most of my respondents.

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.

Families do not seem to equate this early preference for feminine labour with an eventual (homo)sexual orientation, and 'sexual relations with men are seen as an optional *consequence* of [being fa'afafine], rather than its determiner, prerequisite, or primary attribute' (Besnier, 1993: 300). I discuss shortly how the 'optional' nature of fa'afafine sexuality is currently in apparent flux. What I wish to emphasize here is that 'traditionally' fa'afafine have been and generally still are initially identified in terms of labour preferences.

The issue of fa'afafine sexuality in the 'traditional' context is an area in which understandings are complex and at times contradictory. One of the more common arguments is that fa'afafine operated as 'go betweens' for the socially separated young men and women. As an adjunct to this role, it is suggested that they were (and still are) for most boys the first significant point of contact with a feminine person outside their own families, and sex with fa'afafine is seen as 'learning to be with a woman' (St Christian, 1994: 183).

Yet, it is also apparent that fa'afafine would often marry women and have children. Some authors suggest that those who married would 'abandon the category' of fa'afafine and become 'formally male' (St Christian, 1994: 182–3; Dolgoy, 2000: 135). However, I have also heard stories of fa'afafine who married women yet remained fa'afafine. I suspect that these apparently contradictory assertions are related to the looseness and contextual basis of the concept of 'identity' in Samoa. A person who was consistently seen as fa'afafine, and who then married and adopted one of the positions of status which are generally only open to married men, may have simply shifted their gendered expressions in many public contexts, such as the village *fono* (council), to a more masculine enactment. They may have thus appeared to have 'relinquished' their fa'afafine identities, while at the same time continuing to undertake feminine labour in private domestic contexts.³ However, regardless of whether those who married remained fa'afafine or not, it is

apparent that in the past to be fa'afafine did not preclude the possibility of marriage and reproduction, an aspect of potential fa'afafine life-experience that appears to have changed somewhat in recent decades. In order to illustrate how globalization has impacted on this and other aspects of fa'afafine identities and experiences, I first outline how Samoan gender frameworks as a whole have reacted to Samoa's increasing westernization.

Processes of Globalization and Transformations of *Fa'afafine* Life-Worlds

The introduction of capitalism to Samoa contributed to an increasing individuation of the traditionally group-oriented indigenous society, as the ability to earn individual incomes made people less likely to pool resources with their extended families, and economic wealth became a dominant yardstick of success (O'Meara, 1993: 136–8). Furthermore, industrialization and western media bring with them capitalist ideologies such as 'personal freedom', discourses which privilege individual over family (Altman, 1996: 86), especially the extended family of Samoa. Changes in economic structures have subsequently impacted on the role of labour in Samoan gender frameworks. As Samoans increasingly shift to the capital of Apia or overseas in search of paid employment (Galuvao, 1987: 111–15; Shankman, 1993), the work that they do is itself likely to be gendered, but the money which they now contribute to the family is largely ungendered. Thus, within the family context, the product of labour is rendered gender neutral.

As labour is becoming less significant in relation to identity in general and gender specifically, the increasing influence of western culture also seems to have led to an emphasis on appearance and bodily expression as a primary marker of gender, as demonstrated in aspects such as clothing. The everyday wear of most Samoans, men and women, is a *lavalava* (sarong) and t-shirt (although the men's lavalava is worn a little shorter than the women's). However, in Apia, the younger Samoan women are beginning to wear short skirts and skimpy tops, while the young men favour a more hip hop 'baggy' style. This gender differentiation and the related increased emphasis on sexuality are even more marked in the nightclubs, where the dance floors come to resemble black American popular music videos with a sexual explicitness I saw in *no* other context in Samoa.

Such enactments of gender not only emphasize 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. So, for example, village chiefs forbid women dressing in mini-skirts, trousers, or shorts not only because they are seen as undignified, but also because the adoption of

such palagi customs is seen as a direct assertion of personal rights over *fa'aSamoa* ('the Samoan way', or Samoan culture) (Shore, 1982: 109).

Of course, these models are not absolute – what I am rather suggesting is that through changes in the political economy and the influence of western discourses, there has been a shift in emphasis in the enactment of gender from being relational and expressed through labour contributions to aiga, village, or other collectives, to being something more 'internal' and expressed through individually embodied sexuality.

For *fa'afafine*, as for Samoan women, these social and cultural changes similarly mean that the feminine labour role within the family is no longer as predominant as a gender marker. To be feminine is no longer primarily based on the labour one performs, but is more centred on who one has (or would have) sex with – i.e. men. As I have mentioned, there is evidence that historically *fa'afafine* may once have married women, but during my research I have seen no indication that the *fa'afafine* of today consider such marriage a viable option. I asked one respondent in Samoa in his forties, who does not present himself as overly feminine, whether he would like to have children, to which he responded:

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.

Another relatively feminine respondent in her thirties offered me proof of her self-perception of herself as a woman.

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 its 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, um, yes, I am a woman, OK?

These respondents articulate the centrality of sexuality in the gendering of *fa'afafine* identities in contemporary Samoa, a centrality that then impacts on other aspects of *fa'afafine* identities such as self-presentation. In Apia, the increasing use by young Samoan women of more sexualized western signifiers of 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.

The use of western cultural forms is also apparent in the adoption of palagi names by fa'afafine. Most Samoan names are genderless (Shore, 1982: 144; Mageo, 1992: 451), and many fa'afafine will take on European feminine Christian names, often choosing a name that is associated with a famous and glamorous woman, such as a supermodel or pop diva. Thus both name and clothing become signifiers of hyper-feminine, highly sexualized western gender constructs.

Westernization has also had an impact on contemporary fa'afafine sexuality in relation to social control. 'Traditionally', social control in Samoa is largely based on external constraints rather than internalized morals, a system which functions best in family and village environments, where there are no strangers and life is very public (Shore, 1982: 148, 179–81; St Christian, 1994: 74). Samoans who move to larger urban environments are less constrained by the continual presence of and monitoring by significant others that typify social control in the villages (Keene, 1978: 86–9). Thus urban fa'afafine who are encouraged by western discourses to express a particularly sexualized femininity experience less need to downplay this sexuality, which is, as I later explain, relatively unacceptable according to more 'traditional' Samoan perspectives.

The relative anonymity afforded by Apia also allows fa'afafine to more openly pursue the sexual relationships that, according to western discourses, construct and reinforce their femininity. Families often value the ability of fa'afafine to do both men's and women's work while generally objecting to the increasingly overt expressions of sexuality. This can be a considerable problem in a culture where adults frequently remain living with their aiga, even after marriage. Simple changes such as access to rental or job-related accommodation means that fa'afafine and their partners may no longer be constrained by family attitudes towards their sexual practices.

Contemporary *Fa'afafine* Sexualities

It is tempting to argue that 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, there has been a liberation of fa'afafine sexualities that, until recently, were somewhat repressed, and indeed such an understanding is implicit in many fa'afafine discourses. However, rather than think of it as having been 'liberated', I suggest a more Foucauldian perspective (Foucault, 1981), that fa'afafine sexuality has been constructed differently over the years, and it is only now that Samoan understandings of gender have become woven together with western discourses that sexuality is seen as fundamentally constitutive of identity – especially (but not exclusively) fa'afafine identities.

The continual shifts wrought by these processes can be seen in terms of

how fa'afafine uses of western discourses of homosexuality are currently in flux. Concepts of 'gay' and 'straight' have never really been relevant in Samoa, and there is no Samoan term for 'homosexual' (Mageo, 1996: 591; Shore, 1981: 209). It is generally acknowledged that young Samoan men frequently engage in sexual acts with each other, but only in the absence of available young women (Mead, 1943: 61; Mageo, 1992: 449–50; James, 1994: 54; Peteru, 1997: 215), and such 'play' is not condoned, or even really acknowledged, between adult men (St Christian, 1994: 170). Two masculine youths having sex are also careful not to mimic heterosexual positioning or actions (St Christian, 1994: 182), and thus neither adopts the 'passive' or feminine role that would put their masculinity into question. That such acts have little relation to an 'identity' is demonstrated by the fact that those involved will almost inevitably and unproblematically go on to have sexual relations with young women and eventually marry (Keene, 1978: 105).

The fact that for Samoans it is the nature of the sex act rather than the object which is the key factor (Altman, 1996: 81–2) is central to understanding sexual relations between fa'afafine and masculine men. Fa'afafine 'construct themselves as something akin to heterosexual, that is, women seeking intercourse with men' (Mageo, 1996: 616). In this process, they relatively unproblematically adopt the 'passive' feminine position, and thus sex between a man and fa'afafine is not a threat to the man's 'heterosexuality' (Shore, 1981: 210). Even though most fa'afafine have penises, in Samoa 'The 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). Thus the manner in which the fa'afafine body is enacted during sex causes it to become something other than 'male' (St Christian, 1994: 183). It is this perception of fa'afafine sexuality as feminine that leads to the current dominant understandings of sex between masculine men and fa'afafine as distinctly not homosexual. Such assertions of heterosexuality have become increasingly important as western discourses of homosexuality enter Samoan understandings of sexuality, and consequently fa'afafine also reinforce their femininity with the fact that they are only attracted to and receive sexual attention from *straight* masculine men.

The difference between Samoan and palagi understandings of sexual acts between two 'male' bodies was explained by one of my respondents.

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.

The fact that Samoan men tend not to stay in long-term relationships with fa'afafine is recognized by all parties as a consequence of fa'afafine

inability to bear children (Mageo, 1992: 453; Dolgoy, 2000: 185). Creating families is a central social imperative for all Samoans (Holmes, 1987: 81; St Christian, 1994: 99; Sua'ali'i, 2001: 170), and 'un(re)productive' sexual activity is seen as somewhat antisocial (St Christian, 1994: 100). Thus, it is fairly inevitable that Samoan men will eventually leave their fa'afafine 'wives'. As one respondent said,

Don't ever fall so gracefully, you know, so crazy on a guy, especially a non-gay or a non-bisexual guy, because that person will always go back and look for someone who will give them kids.

It appears that the inevitability of this abandonment is leading to further shifts in fa'afafine sexualities, which I believe is to some extent linked to changes in expectations regarding relationships, which again must be briefly contextualized. Private actions and desire receive little recognition with Samoan cultural institutions (Shore, 1982: 185), and the public nature of Samoan life is not particularly conducive to insular relationships. As children, Samoans learn to trust a group of people, but perceive interpersonal relationships as undependable (Ortner, 1981: 390; Holmes, 1987; Mageo, 1998: 56). Even marriage is more pragmatic than emotive, and it has been suggested that Samoan culture does not share the 'western folk tradition' of each person having one 'ideal mate' somewhere in the world (Keene, 1978: 116). Yet as a result of western media, fa'afafine are now increasingly exposed to the idea that life-long committed relationships are virtually a right – a concept they may find all the more attractive given that the increasing dissipation of extended families means they cannot necessarily rely on their nieces or nephews to care for them in old age. As a possible consequence of this, some fa'afafine seem to be adjusting their criteria for potential partners, and more than one respondent in Samoa expressed a possible preference for a gay or bisexual palagi man, because palagi men are more independent of their families, and because someone who identifies as gay is more likely to endure the difficulties of a relationship with a queen.

'Authenticity' and Contemporary Fa'afafine

Given that contemporary fa'afafine identities are now so firmly enmeshed with western discourses of gender and sexuality, questions may be asked as to the 'authenticity' of these identities. Can it really be suggested that the high-heel-wearing beauty pageant contestants who frequent Apia's bars, flouting Samoan sexual mores, can still be considered fa'afafine, or have they become brown drag queens? Again, discussion of this issue requires contextualization in relation to contemporary Samoan culture and society as a whole.

As a result of globalization and subsequent economic and cultural changes, Samoans are now a highly diasporic population. In contemporary times, it is unfeasible to think of either migrant or source communities as separate entities, when they are strongly linked by communication and travel (Macpherson, 1997: 95–6). Macpherson suggests that ‘What is forming at the intersections of all this movement is some meta Samoan society and culture which draws freely on what passes for Samoan culture and practice in various localities. From this inventory of knowledge communities “draw down” those elements which are needed at different times to make conduct and practices seem intelligible and reasonable’ (Macpherson, 1997: 96). Such a model also applies to what it means to be a fa’afafine Samoan, but it is apparent that aspects are also contributed to the ‘meta fa’afafine’ inventory from the ‘imagined lives’ that fa’afafine encounter in western media and, for various reasons, identify with (Appadurai, 1991: 198). To be fa’afafine entails what Bourdieu (1977: 72–3) referred to as a disposition towards relating 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 constructions and enactments of their subjectivities. 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 problematize their ‘fa’afafine-ness’ in ways that might not have been the case 50 years ago. Yet both the married fa’afafine of former generations and the contemporary fa’afafine who sees marriage as a contradiction to her sense of herself as feminine are, within their respective historical contexts, ‘authentic’.

In a process that mirrors both wider social hybridization of western and Samoan culture and concepts, yet which is also specific to their situations, fa’afafine are retaining distinct identities while also developing a more political voice. Even as contemporary Samoans seek to ‘disown’ fa’afafine, many fa’afafine themselves draw on aspects of ‘traditional’ fa’aSamoa as a solid foundation on which to base themselves as sexual and gendered people. This can be seen in the adaptation of the western institution of the beauty pageant, which has been utilized by fa’afafine not only as a way of publicly displaying their feminine identities and skills, but also as a means of redeeming their reputations and claiming a location within Samoan society and culture. Not only do the pageants afford considerable entertainment for the audiences and thus provide a forum for the public performance which is an integral part of Samoan life and identity (Keene, 1978: 61), but the proceeds are also donated to the local rest home. This is in keeping with the ideology of fa’aSamoa that emphasizes distribution over accumulation of wealth

(Ortner, 1981: 364), and the fact that it is through generosity that Samoans gain the 'social credit' that accords them prestige (Keene, 1978: 150–1).

The pageants also represent part of a wider incipient development of a form of 'identity politics' among Samoan fa'afafine. While this 'gentle social movement' (Dolgoy, 2000) echoes western queer politics in its attempts to counter social marginalization, this adaptation of identity politics is also occurring in a specifically Samoan way. More than one informant suggested that the formation of subcultures such as those they saw in the exclusive 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. It is important that fa'afafine 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 not be particularly Samoan, whereas the manner in which fa'afafine manoeuvre themselves into positions where they are likely to gain recognition from others, rather than demand it themselves, echoes the wider context of political culture 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), such a community in Samoa would be antithetical to the very 'Samoan-ness' on which fa'afafine identities are founded.

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 Samoans are confronted by the 'new breed' of sexualized fa'afafine, they see more and more similarities with models of homosexuality they are increasingly encountering from overseas. Significant exposure to these notions of homosexuality has also coincided with HIV/AIDS awareness and the accompanying moral panic and this, coupled with a strong conservative Christian morality, has led to marked disapproval of anything that might be interpreted as homosexuality – the obvious target in Samoa being fa'afafine.⁵

As well as the incursion of western discourses into Samoa, attitudes towards fa'afafine are also influenced by western discourses *about* Samoa. In the experience of Samoans, discussion of sexuality in Samoan culture is usually a compounding of the process of making exotic and erotic the Pacific Islands that started with the voyages of Captain Cook (Jolly, 1997), continued with erotic Orientalist depictions of Samoan women (Taouma, 1998), and was

firmly entrenched in the popular western imagination by Margaret Mead (Durutalo, 1992). Samoans are wary of anything that might perpetuate this exotic/erotic discourse, although it must also be recognized that in the case of the 'marketing' of Samoa, these discourses are often drawn on in a very 'managed' fashion, resulting in a perpetuation of the 'dusky maiden' imagery in Samoan tourist literature and performances. However, such 'management' is often not possible in the case of the fa'afafine who 'run wild' and flaunt their sexuality, and it is inevitably these more flamboyant presentations that the palagi tourists pick on, as the less overt fa'afafine in their lavalava and t-shirts blend into the general Apia population. Outside Samoa, travel writers are beginning to focus on fa'afafine as an 'attraction' in Samoa (e.g. Percy, 2002), and in the case of travel articles about Samoa appearing in gay publications (e.g. Miles, 2001), it appears that the fears of palagi fascination with fa'afafine resulting in Samoa becoming part of the gay tourist circuit are not unfounded. While in Samoa, I met a significant number of palagi men who, upon learning of my research interest, inevitably regaled me with raunchy stories of scantily clad fa'afafine attempting to pick them up in Apia's bars and clubs. For the average tourist or travel writer who visits Samoa for a week or two, these urban 'drag queens' are likely to be the only fa'afafine they meet – or notice – usually without realizing that their experiences provide an insight into a very small proportion of the fa'afafine population in a very specific context.

Academic literature on fa'afafine also tends to focus on sexuality (e.g. Shore, 1981; Mageo, 1992, 1996; Peteru, 1997), following western ideologies that sexual orientation is one of the most significant means of dividing people into classes (Whitehead, 1981: 94), and that the gendering of behaviour follows on from this classification. Again, this perspective tends to recognize only those who are overtly sexual as fa'afafine – or, alternatively, ascribes 'homosexuality' to fa'afafine who may be sexually inactive (McIntosh, 1999: 11). This preoccupation with sexuality of fa'afafine on the part of both tourists and researchers then feeds back in Samoan fears that Samoans will continue to be represented as an oversexed population.

Globalization and Marginalization of Fa'afafine in Samoa

Having detailed how shifts in gender construction and the globalization of western discourses have impacted on enactments and understandings of fa'afafine identities, I now return to the paradox I detailed at the outset of this article in order to bring together these threads and explain how fa'afafine in Samoa are both accepted *and* marginalized.

Fa'afafine are a part of everyday life in Samoa – they work in travel agencies, they serve in bars, and they shop in the local supermarkets without

attracting undue attention. While blending into Samoan society without drawing attention to themselves, and offering the service to family and community that is expected from all Samoans, these fa'afafine go relatively unremarked. It is the more recent emphasis on sexuality, especially what is understood as 'deviant' sexuality, which most Samoans object to. For example, the brothers of some fa'afafine may exert pressure on them to alter their sexual habits, while making no attempt to make them conform to masculine gender roles in terms of labour (Poasa, 1992: 49). Such apparent hypocrisy makes more sense when it is remembered that the self in Samoa is understood as relational, contextual and multifaceted, and that Samoans assess a particular aspect or action of a person only in relation to the relevant context (Shore, 1982: 137–46, 181–2). Thus, a brother will always be part of the family, or a good travel agent will be patronized, while an overtly promiscuous fa'afafine will be condemned – even if they are the same person.

Contemporary Samoan attitudes towards fa'afafine sexuality partially originate in the Samoan valuing of conformity to social expectations over self-gratification (Shore, 1981: 195–6; Shore, 1982: 118, 156–8). Sexuality is strongly associated with the aggressive and selfish aspects of people that are contrasted with socially controlled and 'cultured' actions (Shore, 1982: 228–9), and any public display of sexuality will incur social disapproval. This is especially so for women, who gain their prestige from their embodiment of control (Shore, 1982: 232), and whose status tends to be relatively low in terms of their sexual and reproductive roles (Ortner, 1981: 394–5). Thus Samoan disapproval of the newly sexualized, western-influenced femininity of fa'afafine may be seen to emerge from an already existent cultural tendency to devalue sexuality in general and women as *sexual* beings in particular.

The situation in Samoa is thus far more complex than a simply misplaced homophobia originating in missionary values targeted at a traditionally accepted group. The lived experience of, and Samoan attitudes to, contemporary fa'afafine can be seen as a complex reaction to a complicated set of circumstances, which include the impact of globalization 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 globalization of sexual discourses, together with the continued existence of 'traditional' (although modified) attitudes about gender and sexuality and understandings of the self. For increasingly sexual and feminine fa'afafine who are, however, actually 'men', an already existent cultural devaluing of feminine sexuality has intersected with the relatively recent disapproval of homosexuality, so that fa'afafine are in some sense damned as women *and* as men.

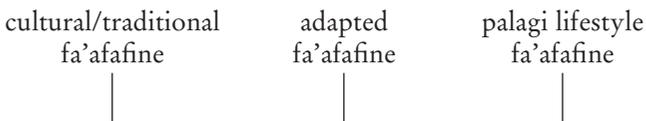
Conclusion

Fa'afafine identities in Samoa currently hang in the balance between *tradition* and *modernization*, between Samoan cultural discourses of family, respect and social status, and western discourses of the liberation of sexuality, individual freedom and the right to emotionally fulfilling relationships. Altman suggests that in 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. (Altman, 2001: 88)

Fa'afafine in Samoa seem to walk a fine line between rupture and continuity, often identifying as gay and fa'afafine simultaneously as a means of adopting and adapting to aspects of globalized western cultures while maintaining and enacting identities through processes that are distinctly Samoan. These processes support Marcus's observation that while the globe 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).

Much as the quote with which I opened this article eloquently illustrated the tension between traditional culture and global forces for fa'afafine in Samoa, it was another participant who concisely and cogently summarized the shifting and flexible nature of contemporary fa'afafine identities, generously providing me with a diagram and comment that fittingly concludes my discussion.



To say that all fa'afafine are the same would deny the continuum or spectrum that exists. I believe we exist along this continuum during certain times of our lives – it's dynamic most of our lives and then when we find our niche in this continuum we then claim that niche for that time.

Notes

Parts of this article, and its original informing concepts, initially appeared in 'Redefining *Fa'afafine*: Western Discourses and the Construction of Transgenderism in

Samoa', published in *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* (available at: www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue6/schmidt.html). I would like to thank the editors for their permission to use this material, and their support with my inaugural publication from this research. An initial version of this article was presented at the XVth World Congress of the International Sociological Association in Brisbane, Australia, 2002, and I would like to thank the organizers of that conference and the RC 09 session for the chance to participate. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the New Zealand Foundation for Research, Science, and Technology, whose generous Bright Future Scholarship supports me during the PhD process. I also take this opportunity to thank the people in Samoa and New Zealand whose assistance during my fieldwork, and contribution in the form of interviews for, and extensive discussion of, my research made this article possible. Among these people, I wish to acknowledge my endlessly supportive supervisors and my department, my long-suffering boyfriend, and, most important, my extremely generous fa'afafine friends.

- 1 'Samoa' refers to Independent Samoa, formerly known as Western Samoa. Migration to New Zealand is largely from Independent Samoa due to historical, political and cultural links. Because of its close ties to the United States, American Samoa has had a significantly different experience of westernization and pattern of migration, and thus is not considered within the parameters of my research project.
- 2 See Schoeffel (1979) for an extensive discussion of masculine and feminine labour.
- 3 This might also explain why many of the stories of fa'afafine husbands were related to me by older women, who may have been more likely to observe such individuals in their domestic environments.
- 4 See Dolgoy (2000) for a comprehensive analysis of the historical shift in fa'afafine self-presentation.
- 5 There is a distinct absence in this article of considering the existence of gay-identified Samoans in Samoa, and the impact of globalized discourses of homosexuality on 'traditional' identities within Samoa (Altman, 1996). This can be explained in part because there is no particularly salient population of gay Samoans in Samoa (Dolgoy, 2000: 167), and in part because the focus of my research on fa'afafine did not lead me to explore in depth the issue of gay identities while in Samoa.

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