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Fa‘atama: Indigenous Tomboys of Sāmoa

Mandy Treagus
University of Adelaide, Australia
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8482-2938

Dion Enari
Auckland University of Technology, Aotearoa/New Zealand
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3239-699X

Abstract

This paper acknowledges that queerness has always existed in the tropics, especially in Sāmoa. In traditional Sāmoan life, there has always been more than two genders. While much attention has been given to fa‘afafine, we seek to raise the visibility of another queer group, fa’atama (formally fa‘atane) or tomboys—Sāmoans assigned female at birth (AFAB), who either identify as masculine, are attracted to females, or both. Not only is this group marginalised on the world stage, but also within Sāmoan and Pacific culture, which has suppressed their lives and identities. In the context of a very specific historical and cultural milieu, we examine three recent representations—in poetry, fiction, and film—of queer AFAB Sāmoans in order to privilege their stories.

Keywords: Sāmoa, Indigenous queer, tomboy, fa‘atama, fa‘atane, trans*, queer tropics, queer Pacific

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Introduction: Queer Pacific

One of the features of contemporary life in the Pacific and its diaspora has been the rise in visibility of people expressing their non-dominant gender and sexuality. This cohort has been increasingly seen both within Indigenous spaces and in the globalised international community. We will use the Western term "queer" as shorthand to describe them as a group, as some Sāmoans already do. Famous queer Pacific identities include Yuki Kihara (interdisciplinary artist), Cindy of Sāmoa (Entertainer) and Brita Filter (RuPaul's Drag Race contestant). The collection *Sāmoan Queer Lives* (2018) draws attention to the lives of *fa'afafine* (queer assigned male at birth [AMAB]) in particular (McMullin & Kihara, 2018). At the same time there has been a rise in vocal opposition to queer visibility, as evidenced by two notable pieces of legislation passed in Sāmoa. Sodomy was banned under the Crimes Act of Sāmoa in 2013 (Human Dignity Trust, 2024) and following this in 2017, the country officially became a Christian state as opposed to secular, as had been the case previously (Wyeth, 2017). These changes occurred largely through the influence of contemporary extreme evangelical and Pentecostal churches, whose reach is usually via tele-evangelists. Poet and artist Dan Taulapapa McMullin, who identifies as fa'afafine, has noted that because of this trend, "Whereas the older churches in Sāmoa have reconciled Sāmoan traditions with Eurocentric monotheism, the new fundamentalists are seeking to reinstate Eurocentrism in Sāmoa, and elsewhere, by attacking traditional indigenous queer cultures" (McMullin, 2011, pp. 129-130). The legislation of 2013 had one positive outcome though: it decriminalised female "impersonation," making the lives of fa'afafine easier by removing the threat of criminal proceedings (Human Dignity Trust, 2024).

Though fa'afafine may have found a place in the Christian denominations that first came to Sāmoa, that acceptance, limited as it might have been, is currently under even more threat from the recent arrival of these hard-line denominations. Even under those original missionaries, Sāmoans were made to adapt to Euro-American expectations around gender and sexuality. Speaking of wider Indigenous tactics for dealing with these expectations, Brendan Hokowhitu has noted that "hetero-patriarchal subjectivities that have been falsely imbibed as 'traditional' have undoubtedly been strategic but have also served to exclude Indigenous subjectivities" (2016, p. 86). This means that gender roles that were part of traditional Sāmoan life were modified under the new colonial regimes; even if they persisted in some form, they were suppressed in favour of heteronormative models that were part of the Christian ethos. Despite the difficulty of ascertaining exactly the gender/sexual order of pre-colonial Sāmoa, it is frighteningly easy to see the impositions of fundamentalist Christianity on present-day lives. While fa'afafine have become more visible in the past two decades, this was not the case with *fa'atama* or tomboys. Our aim in this paper is

to note representations that defy this trend, pointing to an emerging acknowledgement of such identities in Sāmoan life. That these representations exist indicates the range of the gender order in Sāmoa and its increasing visibility. The first is a poem by the aforementioned McMullin, which appeared in their collection *Coconut Milk* as "Fa'a Fafine Poem Number Twenty-Two," one of twenty-four "Fa'a Fafine" poems (McMullin, 2013, p. 64). The second is a short story by Jenny Bennet-Tuionetoa titled "Matalasi," which was the Pacific winner of the 2018 Commonwealth Short Story Prize (Bennet-Tuionetoa, 2018). The third is a short documentary film, *The Rogers*, directed and produced by Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson under the auspices of well-known online Aotearoa New Zealand-based Pacific film platform *Coconet TV* (2020). We address these against a background of minimal critical attention. Almost all of the scarce critical attention to queer Sāmoan identities has been focussed on fa'afafine, and while this is useful in terms of queer Sāmoan lives and broader Indigenous Pacific identities, it does not address the specificity of tomboys.

As authors—a *pālagi* (non-Pacific Islander) settler living in Australia and a Sāmoan living in diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand—we do not have lived experience of life as fa'atama or Sāmoan tomboys; rather we write in queer solidarity, coming alongside these representations of tomboy life in the interests of noticing lives that have until now been largely suppressed. We also acknowledge the research of Pacific queer academics and the advocacy they do within queer scholarship (Ravulo, 2023, 2021; Thomsen, 2022; Thomsen & Brown Acton, 2021; Thomsen & Iosefa Williams, 2021) This article seeks not only to draw attention to the under-represented group of fa'atama from the islands of Sāmoa, American Sāmoa, and their diasporas—but also seeks to ask what synergies might be found with theories of gender and sexuality generated primarily in the West. Given the often-devastating effects of the enforced application of dominant Euro-American understandings of gender and sexuality in the Pacific over the past two hundred years and more, can studies with a Tropical Pacific perspective find any commonalities with contemporary scholarship, understandings, and practices? We acknowledge that Pacific peoples are not isolated from the global, and the interplay between tradition and other influences is part of the dynamic movement of all cultures. The cultural products we analyse here demonstrate versions of "Indigenous cosmopolitanism" that mark the current globalised order (Forte, 2010); there is no such thing as a contemporary Pacific that is isolated from these broader cultures and trends. This means that for Indigenous peoples sexual and gender identifications and their expressions draw on both local and wider sources; nothing is set apart, even though in many instances the local might predominate. Given this, we will analyse the intersection between Sāmoan notions of gender and the broad umbrella of queer theory, especially in relation to tomboys, or fa'atama. Tomboys are those who were assigned female at birth (AFAB), and are either sexually attracted to women, do not identify with the female role, or actively identify with the male role.

Tropicality and the Pacific

During the time of European imperial expansion and well into the twentieth century, the tropics were seen from the Euro-American north as places aligned with inferior values in the dualities that dominated Western thinking. In the hierarchies of these binaries, if European, masculine, rational, and the mind occupied superior positions, then tropical, female, emotional and the body occupied inferior positions. Similarly, the peoples who lived in the tropics were assumed to embody these "inferior" traits. In the early encounters between Westerners and peoples who dwelt in tropical regions, "the tropics represented a more primitive world than the northern temperate zone, a domain of largely untamed nature that served, by contrast, to demonstrate the moral and material 'superiority' of northern climates, races and civilisations" (Arnold, 2000, p. 6). Assumed to be places of excess, dominated by the body, the tropical zones also provided some sense of allure for Europeans, caught as they often were in the strictures that Christianity and the Enlightenment had brought to thinking about the body. An example of the dual pulls of fascination and revulsion can be found in the 1897 account of John B. Stair, early missionary to Sāmoa from 1838 to 1845. He recorded that *poula*, the night dances, featured a closing "saturnalia, of which a description is inadmissible here" (Stair, 1983, p. 134). Other sources tell us that the night finished with the "public display and deliberate flaunting of the genitals," followed by couples—of non-specified gender—running off into the darkness (Tui Atua, 2014, p. 27). Perhaps fa'atama tomboys were amongst them. Though Stair could not bring himself to describe the activities, he clearly attended on multiple occasions, indicating the fascination such sexualised activities held for him.

In the period of imperial expansion, previously unknown tropical environments were feminised, sexualising their discovery and exploration by the West: "Tropical environments suggest lushness, fecundity, fullness, and exotic as well as erotic excess, qualities that are commonly—at least in the popular imagination—coded as female" (Wilke, 2015, p. 173). But with the rise of sexology in the nineteenth century, another dualism developed that dominated Euro-American life throughout the twentieth century. This was the heterosexual/homosexual binary. If homosexuality was the inferior, yet defining pole of heterosexuality, then similarly, the tropical regions, aligned as they were with the other elements on the dualistic binary, were always somewhat queer in the European imaginary. Deemed to be places of bodily excess in opposition to the presumed restraint of the West, the tropics were always already dangerously profligate, full of unchecked appetite, self-indulgence, and unspeakable practices—such as those that so allured Stair yet could not be revealed to his readers. That the climate had a role in facilitating such lack of restraint was taken as a given in the colonial period. Not only were white men considered unable to work in the tropics

(Anderson, 2003, p. 29), they were also considered at risk of falling into dangerously excessive behaviours, often popularly summarised as "going native." Using the term queer to describe identities and activities in the tropics, in this case Sāmoa, is to import a term that has no exact equivalent there. The term queer has had its own journey of "affirmative resignification" in the West (Butler, 1993, p. 223), with its relatively recent reclamation as a term of pride and possibility. It was only in the early 1990s that queer was taken up as a "cover term for a new sexual politics," having previously been a term of abuse for male homosexuals (Treagus, 2000, p. 219). But queer also remains a Western concept, a non-essentialist term encompassing a range of identities but not necessarily those of Indigenous peoples, who have had their own identifications and roles, even if some have been suppressed since the contact period. What is now considered queer has always been part of life in the tropics, though this is often not recognised. As Manuela L Picq and Josi Tikuna assert, "Sexual diversity has historically been the norm, not the exception, among Indigenous peoples," yet "Indigenous experiences are rarely perceived as a locus of sexual diversity. This is partly because Indigenous peoples are imagined as remnants of the past, whereas sexual diversity is associated with political modernity" (2019, p. 1). In Sāmoa, the tropical zone we consider here, non-heterosexual identities and behaviours have always been part of life, though their functions and levels of acceptance have been impacted by colonisation.

This discussion of tomboys occurs within a framework of changed gender roles since colonisation. Colonial legacy also resulted in the mischaracterisation of Pacific women in the eyes of the international community. Since first contact with European explorers, popular culture has perpetuated the image of Pacific women as "exotic hula girls" whose sole purpose is to exist for the sexual gratification of Western men (Lemusuifeauaali'i & Enari, 2021). Although Pacific women are visible in society, their narratives and perceptions are often ignored and erased by stereotypes imposed by the tourism, music, and movie industries (Enari & Fa'alafi, 2021). Actual Pacific women and their esteemed position in Pacific societies have been overshadowed by ill-informed narratives of the "dusky maiden" and "virgin native," available for Euro-American male sexual gratification. Colonial perceptions about Pacific women, which degrade and dehumanise them, and are formed without the contribution of the women themselves, are still present. Eurocentrism is also seen in constrained understandings of gender roles and sexuality. Through such paradigms, in dominant understandings, gender has become a binary of male and female and sexuality confined to narrow forms of heteronormativity.

Fa'atama Tomboys

The only critical work on tomboys to date has been by Serge Tcherkézoff, an anthropologist who spent the 1980s and 1990s doing fieldwork in Sāmoa. This fieldwork informs his more recent work on sexual minorities across both Sāmoas and their diasporas. Tcherkézoff prefers to use the term tomboy, as he claims it is the only one commonly used in Sāmoa (2014, p. 117), though this is changing within Sāmoa and the diaspora, as our three examples indicate. Tcherkézoff contests the use of the term fa'afafine for queer AMAB Sāmoans, seeing it as overly sexualised with its connotations of a sexually active adult female (2014, p. 117); we continue to use fa'afafine as the term primarily employed by contemporary Sāmoans (Treagus & Seys, 2017, p. 88), also noting that it appears in George Pratt's dictionary, first published in 1862, as the Sāmoan translation of effeminate: "Effeminate…amio fa'afafine" (Pratt 1984, p. 364). It clearly had nineteenth-century currency. As Picq and Tikuna contend, "Ancestral tongues prove it" (2019, p. 1). Tcherkézoff claims that while it is unclear when the English word tomboy came into use in Sāmoa, "today the term has a precise meaning: a girl or woman who acts like a man in contexts where 'strength' (*mālosi*) is particularly central to the definition of manhood" (2014, p. 117). He also suggests that nowadays it also implies "sexual attraction to girls" (2014, p. 117). This is sometimes enhanced with the Sāmoan rendering of lesbian, "lisipia" (Tcherkézoff, 2014, p.118). For the purpose of this paper, we will use the term tomboy interspersed with fa'atama, as these are the most commonly used terms both in the Sāmoas and their diaspora.

Tcherkézoff's chapter on tomboys appears in the volume *Gender on the Edge*, edited by Niko Besnier and Kalissa Alexeyeff, which represents the most significant contribution to contemporary scholarship on gender and sexuality, to the "non-heteronormative," across the Pacific (2014, p. 1). Besnier and Alexeyeff suggest that though categories like tomboy "are often asserted to be completely different from transgender or gay categories in the West," they do "share commonalities...with those of postindustrial urban societies" (2014, pp. 7-8). Similarly, just as in the West, the terms used to describe and self-describe non-heteronormative identities are "temporally and contextually unstable" (2014, p. 8), as can be seen in the uncertainty over terms expressed here.

What identities, behaviours, and orientations might fall under the identity tomboy? While less commonly used in English in the immediate present, the term has been recorded since the seventeenth century to describe "A girl or young woman who acts or dresses in what is considered to be a boyish way, *esp.* one who likes rough or energetic activities conventionally more associated with boys" (OED). This is close to the way it is used in Sāmoa, where a tomboy has marked links with masculinity, though the identity goes beyond childhood, where it is generally contained in English, and into

adulthood. Tcherkézoff outlines the ways in which masculinity is constructed around notions of mālosi (strength): "the ideal type of boyhood and young manhood is so sharply defined by 'strength,' particularly as it is visually inscribed in the body's muscularity" (2014, p. 118). Unlike developing males though, the tomboy "gains no prestige, only mockery, for her ability to perform heavy physical tasks" (Tcherkézoff, 2014, p. 123). This lack of affirmation makes life extremely difficult for tomboys, and Tcherkézoff goes so far as to suggest that "Parents never provide any affective compensation for girls' *tomboy* behaviour and on the contrary only deplore it. Yet one finds *tomboy* girls in a not insubstantial number of Sāmoan families" (Tcherkézoff, 2014, p. 122). This total rejection is now changing, as we will show in relation to the short film *The Rogers*.

In outlining family responses to non-heteronormative identities and behaviours, Tcherkézoff contrasts the levels of acceptance usually given to tomboys with that given to fa'afafine. While fathers and male relatives tend to reject any child who fails to perform their gender and sexuality according to dominant expectations, fa'afafine generally have the acceptance of mothers and sisters, and along with that, clear roles and functions both within the immediate family, 'āiga (wider family), and village (2014, pp. 124-125). This is very different for tomboys. Rejected by both male and female family members, the tomboy finds no acceptable place and role; the category of tomboy "is composed of despised individuals or couples" (Tcherkézoff, 2014, p. 125). Until recently, this has also been a category which has been suppressed and had little or no public acknowledgement other than condemnation. The three representations we discuss here buck this trend and point toward an emerging visibility for tomboys in Sāmoa. That these have all appeared within the past decade indicates a definite shift in representational possibilities.

Fa'atama Poetry

Dan Taulapapa McMullin's poem "Fa'a Fafine Poem Number Twenty-Two" appeared in their collection *Coconut Milk* as one of twenty-four "Fa'a Fafine" poems (McMullin, 2013, p. 64). The book was published by the University of Arizona Press, outside of Sāmoa, though McMullin's work is widely known across the Pacific, with their visual art appearing in exhibitions in Sydney, Auckland, and Honolulu as well as in the continental US (McMullin, 2020). Their poetry is perhaps less known, and this collection is unashamedly queer, perhaps inviting sympathetic audiences only.

Though the collection as a whole concentrates on fa'afafine experiences, stories, and identifications, it contains one poem on tomboys, though they are not named as such (Treagus, 2021, pp. 460-461). One of the tactics apparent in the collection is to draw attention to the role Christianity has had on identities and choices within Sāmoan life.

The poem begins by noting the presence of newer forms of evangelical Christianity, "Teaching the people of Sāmoa Christianity through the Graceland/ Broadcasting Network" (2013, p. 64). There is a clear chronology and correlation made in the poem, as the story to be recounted—"there was a case of two young women on the island who were/ lovers"—occurs *after* this Network has come to the island of Savai'i. The women are discovered. One is beaten badly and then hangs herself. The other takes the poison paraquat and also dies. This tragedy is suppressed through family and village shame: "the issue was buried with/ the young women" (McMullin, 2013, p. 64). The insecticide paraquat is extremely toxic, and just one teaspoon can kill. Many young Sāmoan women have used it to commit suicide over several decades (PAN, 2003, p. 2), and thereby suffered slow lingering deaths. The place the story is known and remembered is amongst similar people, marginalised but finding community with each other: "among faatane shooting pool in Apia bars/ you hear/ of this couple" (McMullin, 2013, p. 64). There is an alternative tradition being formed here, one in which queer lives are remembered and even memorialised as an armoury against the rejection of family, *'āiga*, and village. It is only possible in the small city of Apia, which is still large enough to have the kind of bars where tomboys might gather. McMullin's use of faatane here rather than tomboy can be read as an indigenising move, claiming this older term, recorded by Pratt, even if it is not in current common usage. The entry of "Fa'atane, to be masculine, of a woman," shows that despite the social approbation, tomboys were always part of Sāmoan life, with this entry, like that for fa'afafine, being recorded in the nineteenth century (Pratt, 1984, p. 137). More recently, an alternative informal term, fa'atama, meaning "in the manner of a boy," has become prevalent along with tomboy.

Fa'atama Fiction

Jenny Bennet-Tuionetoa's short story "Matalasi" is less defiant, but equally tragic. Bennet-Tuionetoa recalls that the story was inspired by a dream, from which she awoke crying (Ah-Ki, 2018). She has said in an interview that it is the story of "an individual who is forced to choose between his identity and survival" (Ah-Ki, 2018). The story, written in English, is concerned with the use of pronouns in a way that Sāmoan, which has no gendered pronouns, cannot be; it is through the use of gendered pronouns that the central drama of the story plays out. The protagonist is gendered "he" by the narrator, and the reader is unsure about his relationship to the wedding preparations going on outside the room to which he has retreated. This is all depicted in the first paragraph, which also captures the particular Sāmoan environment: dogs, children, wider family and the importance of the wedding to the 'āiga. Enough Sāmoan language is used to create two reading audiences, one bilingual in English and Sāmoan, the other monolingual in English, perhaps suggesting that the ideal reader is the bilingual one who is able to understand the nuances in both

languages (though unlike many contemporary Pacific texts, the story has a glossary which makes it more accessible). The tension about who the bride could be is only broken when Matalasi looks at himself in the mirror, and what he sees there—"He hated what he saw in them"—reveals the fact that he himself is "A beautiful bride" (Bennet-Tuionetoa, 2018). But this bride is "A stranger that from today onwards, he would have to pretend to be" (Bennet-Tuionetoa, 2018). At several points in the story, the compulsion to marry is made clear. Matalasi hears his sister's voice telling him "to stop being selfish and stupid. To think of the 'āiga. Of the shame" (Bennet-Tuionetoa, 2018). Group shame is the driver of this marriage, but the cost is Matalasi's loss of himself.

The story contains a brief account of the protagonist's adolescence, his rejection of femininity and his attraction to women. We read of his expectation as a small child that he would be "cut" like the other boys when he turned seven. At the age of eleven he is beaten by his father for climbing a coconut tree, the preserve of males: "'Girls do not climb coconut trees,' he said, tossing the belt over his shoulder. 'It spoils the nuts'" (Bennet-Tuionetoa, 2018). Restrictions only increase with age:

> He had to stop playing with the boys; stop whistling while he weeded the garden; stop tying his lavalava with a knot at the front; stop being Tito's shadow; stop volunteering to climb the breadfruit trees. Stop. Stop. Stop. (Bennet-Tuionetoa, 2018)

Enculturation as a growing girl is a restrictive process; for a trans* boy it is endlessly painful, but even worse than this are the changes brought about by biology:

> But the worst day of all was two weeks after his thirteenth birthday. He woke up before dawn with a strange pain in his tummy and an uncomfortable, sticky warmth between his legs. He lifted his sleeping sheet and gagged as the sickening smell of blood filled his nostrils. Still refusing to believe it, he reached down slowly, eyes closed, to run his fingers along his inner thigh. They came away wet and red. Hot tears welled up and ran freely down his cheeks.
>
> "No," he whispered. "Please God!" (Bennet-Tuionetoa, 2018)

It is this rejection of the female body which speaks most strongly to the trans* experience, above and beyond the social and emotional pressures of family and society being brought to bear on a young woman.

The wedding has been arranged, and the husband has

> swooped down from heaven to rescue them all from the rumours that were spreading like a disease across the village. Rumours that threatened to bring the ever-dreaded shame to the ʻāiga. Rumours that their youngest daughter had been seen in the nightclubs of Apia, embracing a Pālagi woman. Rumours that Matalasi was one of those unnatural, depraved creatures they called faʻafātama (Bennet-Tuionetoa, 2018).

The use of faʻafātama (formal for "like a boy") here indicates the attempts being made within Sāmoa and the diaspora to find a Sāmoan term of equivalence for the now commonly used faʻafafine ("like a woman"). While this is to be welcomed as a move toward recognition, and hopefully acceptance, it is still the case that the term often used by those assigned female at birth who identify differently in terms of gender and/or sexuality is tomboy.

The final image of the story is of the words of the marriage service "weaving themselves together into a thick, strong rope," producing a death: "Matalasi felt the noose tighten around his neck" (Bennet-Tuionetoa, 2018). The trans*man has been executed in the symbolic ritual of the wedding. Matalasi now has to live the "pretend" life of the bride with all that will follow, but it is clear that this public declaration of heteronormative conformity has not only shut down the possibility of another kind of life, but it has foreclosed the public shaming of the ʻāiga. The hope of the story can be found in the narrator's continuing trans* recognition, especially in their ongoing use of "he," which is at its most poignant in the very last sentence.

Faʻatama Film

The last cultural product that we take to indicate greater recognition for tomboys is seen in *The Rogers of Sāmoa* (2020). Not only is this the clearest assertion of visibility of all three representations, but tomboys themselves talk about what life is like for them and how they negotiate their identifications within Sāmoa. Directed, filmed, and produced by Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson, the short film was funded by the US Corporation for Public Broadcasting and distributed under the auspices of *Coconet TV*, a widely-watched Pasifika short documentary online network. The film begins with the statement "Transgender women have long been visible throughout the Pacific Islands," inserted into footage showing a group of faʻafafine learning a traditional women's dance. The intertitle title goes on to state: "In Sāmoa, they are known as faʻafafine and enjoy wide acceptance." The camera then turns from the dancing group to their observers, tomboys, and is followed by the statement: "That acceptance is not the case for Sāmoa's transgender men, the faʻatama." These statements, as well as acknowledging the differing status of faʻafafine and tomboys, also raises questions

about whether either can be equated with transgender in Western terms. That is not the concern of the short film though; it is primarily aimed at raising both acceptance and status of tomboys in Sāmoa. We see a number of fa‘atama doing a task culturally seen as one done by young males: preparing the *umu*, the traditional meal cooked in an underground oven. It is a task considered to require mālosi (strength), that inherently male trait discussed earlier. Tomboys cut wood, gather banana leaves to cover food, move volcanic stones to absorb heat from the fire, and skin plantains and breadfruit. One of them, while singing and scraping coconut to make coconut cream, states with a cheeky smile: “this kind of job is especially for mens [*sic*], or for boys, but we actually can do it because we are transmen.” This same tomboy claims the word fa‘atama, stating “fa‘atama means female to male.” Another tells how he realised he was a tomboy at the age of fourteen, and was then ejected from the family after being beaten, only to become homeless for three years, and finding refuge of sorts in a derelict building while feeling suicidal.

The Rogers is the name of a group of transmen established by the former President of the Fa‘afafine Association, To‘oto‘oali‘i Roger Stanley, whose given name was Roger: “Mama Roger,” as one of the tomboys, Ice, calls her in the film. The film narrative is concerned with the group of fa‘atama preparing to perform a dance at the Sāmoa Fa‘afafine Pageant. Ice tells the group, “Don’t let anyone spoil this, the first time the Rogers perform as men in public.” He goes on, “Stand in the front with honour, it’s for Roger.” This invitation to perform with honour is a powerful counter to the familial shame Tcherkézoff observed in the families of tomboys, and also marks a significant moment of inviting public recognition. Many Sāmoans would attend fa‘afafine events for fun and entertainment; few would have seen a group of tomboys, let alone consider them an acceptable form of public display. Ice finishes with the admonition “no packing,” perhaps indicating that the possibility of public acceptance has its limits. A definite sign of change is when the tomboys join in the Catholic service held before the Fa‘afafine Pageant. Dress codes in their villages had prevented previous church attendance, but in this service, they attend dressed as men. Since Christian religion is of enormous importance in the social fabric of Sāmoa, church participation is critical to any level of societal integration.

Not all tomboys meet with familial rejection though. Ice’s girlfriend Maliana recalls how when she told her brother that she was in love with Ice, he was supportive, though she expected a violent reaction. Ice himself received support from his grandfather who said he should do all of the men’s jobs if he wanted to be a man. This was a test to see if he could survive in this role, otherwise he would have to go back to wearing girl’s clothes. Ice recalls that he responded, “Don’t say ‘if I want to be’—no—I am, because I feel like a man.” When his grandfather died, his grandmother passed on his grandfather’s underwear to him, an acknowledgement of who he is. Though Ice and

Maliana laugh over this, it was clearly significant to them. The film ends with the Rogers' successful performance of a dance at the Pageant, with the intertitle telling the viewer that Ice and Maliana were married in New Zealand.

Though some of the participants in the Rogers group identify as trans*, others are satisfied with the term tomboy, which may imply same-sex attraction without suggesting identification with the male role. The question of whether tomboys are trans* or lesbian or queer is blurry, and marks the point at which western colonial discourses come up against a changing traditional society.

Conclusion: Queer Tropics

While it is hard to find archival evidence that tomboys were visible in pre-contact Sāmoan society, this does not mean that individuals wanting to identify as other than their assigned gender and sexual roles did not exist. Pratt's dictionary entry is enough to confirm that they did; the fact that a Christian missionary saw enough to record this word can be taken to indicate their visibility. As McMullin has explained, "What queer history we have that survived is in pieces, a few silent images, part of a rare story, or a crucial word here and there" (2022, p. 29). These three cultural representations raise the visibility of tomboys in contemporary Sāmoan life, even while in some quarters there is more resistance to their existence. Both of these factors—the oppressive resistance and the increased visibility—indicate that there is currently a contested zone around gender and sexuality for queer Sāmoans assigned female at birth. What is their situation within the culture, given the traditional views of gendered roles? Sāmoan tomboys move between gender spaces, but are never fully female or male. Although they are accepted to do the hard male chores, they are not fully accepted into all things male. One of the markers of this is that they cannot be given a chiefly title in villages where these are only given to males. (Some villages do assign titles to females.) This is significant because it is a sign of fully coming of age. Tomboys are also not fully classified as female as they do not bear children and are not occupied doing female tasks such as weaving. They are in between in the gender order.

Going back to one of the questions raised earlier this article: where are the points of crossover coming out of the West in theorising Pacific non-heterosexualities, especially with those AFAB living queer lives? We acknowledge Susan Stryker's warning that "the conflation of many types of gender variance into the single shorthand term 'transgender,' particularly when this collapses into a single gender of personhood crosses the boundaries that divide the west from the rest of the world, holds both peril and promise" (Stryker, 2006, p. 14). Narrow understandings of transgender cannot account for the variance in the West or indeed in the Pacific. Conceptions must be broader, and give agency to those to whom they apply. We suggest that the most

productive link is through the use of certain formations of trans*, specifically those of Jack Halberstam in his book *Trans**:

> I have selected the term "trans*" for this book precisely to open up the term to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance…. The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be, and perhaps most importantly, it makes trans* people the authors of their own categorization (Halberstam, 2018, p. 4).

This open understanding of trans*, especially its insistence on its subjects being "the authors of their own categorization," is comparable with the term tomboy. Some tomboys call themselves transmen, others acknowledge their attraction to women, others express some variants on these: either way, tomboys do not conform to heteronormative compulsions; instead they are increasingly finding their own way of being despite a broad range of discouragements. In doing so, their rising visibility points to the ways that the tropics have always already been queer.

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Mandy Treagus is of Welsh, Scottish and Cornish descent, and lives on the unceded lands of the Peramangk people in South Australia. She is Adjunct Associate Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide, where she has taught literature, culture, and visual studies, with interests in critical race and whiteness, gender and sexuality. She researches Pacific, Victorian, and Australian literature and culture and her publications include *Empire Girls: The Colonial Heroine Comes of Age*, and the co-edited collections *Changing the Victorian Subject* and *Anglo-American Imperialism and the Pacific: Discourses of Encounter*.

Dion Enari is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Sport and Recreation, Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at Auckland University of Technology. He holds a PhD on Samoan culture from Bond University, Australia, and a Lefaoali'i (high talking Chief) title from Lepa, Samoa. His research interests include Sport Management, Sport for Development, Mental Health, Pacific Languages, Indigenous Studies, and Trans-nationalism.