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A Voyage Through Queer Oceania: Reclaiming Queer Indigeneity in Sāmoa and Hawai'i

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Publication Date

2024-03-01

Undergraduate

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

A VOYAGE THROUGH QUEER OCEANIA:
RECLAIMING QUEER INDIGENEITY IN SĀMOA AND HAWAII

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY
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LOS ANGELES, CA
MARCH 2024

ABSTRACT

“A VOYAGE THROUGH QUEER OCEANIA:
RECLAIMING QUEER INDIGENEITY IN SĀMOA AND HAWAI’I”

BY MALIA LEFAOSEU

This thesis addresses how the entanglements of colonization and occupation have altered the ability for Queer Pasifika peoples to embody Indigenous expressions of gender and sexuality. By tracing how colonial powers erase Queerness in Oceania, these histories and stories are decolonized and reclaimed as places of refuge for the Queer Pacific. Moreover, by acknowledging how Pasifika Queer ancestors resisted erasure and defended Queer Pasifika futurity, alternative ways of Indigenous being are offered. Firstly, I discuss the Sāmoan Queer and their representations, paying special attention to Fa’afafine and how reclaiming their place in Sāmoan culture, as cultural practitioners and care-takers, is an important recovery of the connections, care, and alofa that composes Tagata Sāmoa. The second section of this thesis discusses the Hawaiian Queer and their representations, from Mahū to Femme Lesbians, arguing that reclaiming sovereignty over Hawaiian stories, bodies, and eroticism directly correlates to reclaiming sovereignty of the land. In closing, I propose an epistemological framework of analyzing how “serving Indrigenous realness” reveals how expressions of third genders or sexualities outside the Western binary are materialized in the modern world, addressing how globalization, the effects of past or current colonization, and the LGBTQ+ movement entangles with Queer Indigenous being. The discursive analysis taking place is rooted in and supported by Queer Indigenous Theory and aims to recover and celebrate the place of the Queer in Sāmoa and Hawai’i, and subsequently across Oceania.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I acknowledge my occupation on Turtle Island and that the land on which I've received my collegiate education and have worked on this thesis upon are the stolen ancestral lands of the Tongva people. I wish to honor their ongoing work to preserve, protect, and reclaim this land and its waters. May Indigenous peoples from sea to sea continue to gather in solidarity to take back our lands, cultures, and languages.

This thesis would not have been possible without my brilliant advisor, Dr. Elizabeth DeLoughrey. Thank you professor for your constant inspiration, guidance, and reassurance. Your ongoing efforts to bring Pasifika voices and representation into higher education has changed the course of my life and does not go unnoticed. The opportunity to work alongside you has been an honor and joy.

Most ardently, my life and all that I do is owed to my family, the beautiful village that I belong to and that belongs to me, the village that stands behind me and propels me forward:

To all of the ancestors whose faces I may not know, but whose continued prayers I feel surround me everyday, thank you for your guidance and direction. To my grandparents, watching me from beyond the rainbow, thank you for raising me with love and kindness in my heart, and strength and resilience in my spirit. "I ulu no ka lālā i ke kumu." Thank you for being the trunk I continue to grow from.

To my parents, thank you for being constant pillars of love, support, and encouragement for all of the days I've existed. Dad, your hard-work and sacrifice for our family has afforded me every opportunity that has gotten me here. The way that you hold our family together is something I will continue to cherish and carry with me. Mom, thank you for giving me the space to grow into a strong, opinionated, and persistent woman- I know it has not always been easy. I could not be here without your unwavering support and encouragement. I find home in your love and in your arms. You are my tether and I will continue to fly back to you in every life. Thank you both for always trusting the vision I have for my life and doing anything you could to help me achieve it. You both deserve the world, so thank you for supporting me along my journey of chasing it down for us.

To my siblings, Rj, Niko and Deanna, and Nathan, thank you for your constant support. Rj, thank you for always reminding me what it means to be Kanaka. Niko, thank you for being my fiercest protector and the loudest fan standing in my bleachers. Deanna, thank you for being the sister I have always wanted.

Nathan, thank you for being my safest space and making me laugh till my cheeks hurt. You are my closest friend and have shaped my life in innumerable ways. Of the many things I'm eternally grateful our parents gifted me in this lifetime, you four are my favorite. It's us always, in all ways.

Kaimana Poha- my 'opihi boy, being your Auntie is one the biggest joys of my life. To all of my nieces and nephews, whose existence reminds me why this work is so important, you inspire me every day. Your mana will change the world.

To my aunty's, thank you for always showering me with love and care. Aunty Maria, you have been my shepard of knowledge since I was a little girl in awe of you, your capacity for Aloha , and your ability to spread it wherever you go. You are all I've ever hoped to be. Aunty Esther, Agnes, Tilo, and Michelle, thank you for keeping my belly full of yummy food at every Tonai, and for showing me what it means to be a strong woman- what it means to be a strong Samoan woman.

My beautiful sisters, our bond is life-sustaining. The way our laughs, our joy, our love for one another, fills up a room is nothing short of magic. Our sisterhood has been an open space of healing and rapture, celebration and joy. To my big sisters, thank you for being my blueprint to womanhood. Kiona and Aggie, my left and right hand, thank you for loving every version of me, thank you for dreaming with me. Being girls together, growing into women together, has been the most beautiful dance of life. To my baby sister Keira, thank you for keeping us all young, I am so proud of you and your strength, always.

To my brothers and all of my uncles, thank you for the constant laughs, and reminders to make the most out of the life we are given and the time we have together. Keilan, you deserve a category of your own and then some! Thank you for being you and sharing your soul with me. Since we were kiddos, you have held the most special place in mine.

And to my angel, who made the mo'olelo of my life so sweet: Grandma Casella, thank you for breathing life into every one of my dreams. To be loved by you is to have eternal refuge. You showed me every day how treating anyone who crosses our path with aloha has the power to change the world. I miss you fiercely, but in between the lines of every book I pick up to read, in between every line I write, I find you and the memories I clutch onto of us reading our days away together. I patiently await the day I get to run back into your arms beyond the rainbow, and until then live in your legacy of aloha and wear the love you adorned my life with "through the summers and the winters."

My angel, This is all for you.

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Glossary of Terms

`Aiga. The Sāmoan word for family, a group connected in kinship.

Aikāne. Beloved and intimate Hawaiian relationships between same-sex beings, or between Mahū and biological identities of men and women.

**`Āina.** This refers to the physical land that composes Hawai`i. To aloha `āina is an important cultural concept in which love and care are extended to the land that sustains all Hawaiian life.

Alofa. The Sāmoan word for love.

Aloha. The Hawaiian word for love, with numerous translations, can also translate to saying Hello and Goodbye.

**Fa`afafine.** Fa`afafine translates to “in the likeness of a woman” and refers to those born into the biological body of a male that expresses and embraces femininity. This expression isn’t confined to strict gender boundaries, but runs parallel most to the Western understanding of Queer or non-binary peoples.

Fa`asāmoa. Refers to the traditional Sāmoan customs and lifestyle.

Fale. The Sāmoan word for a home. A Fale is oval or circularly shaped, with no walls and a dome top that is supported by wooden beams. Aside from the Western connotation of home, Fale's hold significant cultural importance as meeting spaces.

Kanaka Maoli. Kanaka Maoli are the Indigenous people of Hawai`i, also referred to as kanaka.

Kupuna. A Hawaiian ancestor or honored elder.

Malaia. The Sāmoan word for a curse. Fa`afafine and other sexually Queer individuals in Sāmoa are often referred to as Mala's, referencing Malaia.

Mana. Pasifika term referring to one's life source, power, or essence of being. This can be applied to people, stories, or traditions.

Mahū. The gendered identity of Mahū in Hawai`i describes individuals who occupy a blend of female and male characteristics physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. This expression isn't specific to either male or females, but has been recorded to apply more to biologically born men.

Mo`olelo. This is the Hawaiian word for a story. These stories create the fabric of Hawaiian culture and reflect the Hawaiian physical and spiritual realm.

Moana. Eastern Pacific term for the Ocean.

`Ōlelo Hawai`i. The Hawaiian language.

Pasifika/ Oceania. Pasifika refers to the people, cultures, and languages of Pacific groups, while Oceania is the collective name for the various islands in the Pacific Ocean. Commonly referred to as Polynesians, a colonially derived name referring to the many islands, Micronesians, referring to smaller islands, and Melanesian, referring to Indigenous peoples with darker skin, embracing the term Pasifika works against this colonially divided Oceania to re establish a united front.

Tagata Sāmoa. This translates into English as Samoan people, referring to those Indigenous to the Sāmoan islands.

Tusi Paia. The translation of the Holy Bible in Sāmoan.

Vā/Wā. Albert Wendt describes this as a “space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change” (“Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body”).

Statement of Positionality

Talofa lava and Aloha! Fa'afetai tele lava and mahalo nui loa for spending any amount of time engaging with my Honors thesis. Before I begin, I believe it's important to recognize who and where I am and how this informs my research. I am both Kanaka Maoli and Tagata Samoa living in the Diaspora. Born and raised on Turtle Island, in a comfortable middle class family, I acknowledge that I don't face the same insecurities that many Pasifika peoples on Island do. Rising sea levels aren't as immediate of a threat, I have never faced nuclear destruction of my homelands, nor have I been economically priced out of my home. I am a cis-heterosexual woman and have the privilege of embodying my gender expression and sexual orientation without persecution. I have never faced the turmoil of the treatment that Queer individuals that I speak of in my thesis face regularly, and wish to use my privilege to advocate for their freedom of expression and love. Additionally, I acknowledge that while using the extent of Indigenous language that I have access to, there is an innate level of misunderstanding in my readings by not speaking 'Ōlelo Hawai'i nor Sāmoan fluently. This project has brought the deep insecurities I've always had of not being Pasifika enough, being too American, to the surface. At times, I have been paralyzed by imposter syndrome, suffocating on the notion that I'm not qualified to be speaking on beautiful Oceania. Although this is my reality, I understand that this is a manifestation of neocolonial racism and the demands of assimilation into Western culture. While my family that immigrated to the United States, affording me the luxury of being in this position, were forced into assimilation for survival, I stand strong in the privilege of re-grounding myself in my Indigenous roots. My voice is one of the diaspora, one that has been entangled with settler colonialism and white supremacy, fighting for Indigeneity, and this is where I speak from. There is nothing I am more passionate about than the people and cultures of the Moana, and in every place of privilege I occupy I aim to be of service to her and this has guided and fueled my research.



Introduction

Sāmoa and Hawai`i compose equal parts of my identity, and of my heart. My ancestors voyaged across Oceania, from one island to another, sharing forms of art, healing, and language with each other. Through space and time, and toiled within colonization and its manifold destructive consequences, I am now voyaging through Oceania within this thesis to share important forms of decolonization that are critical to guarantee the survival and futurity of our beautiful Moana and its peoples. I resonate deeply with Albert Wendt when he writes, “I belong to Oceania... I am rooted in a fertile portion of it- and it nourishes my spirit, helps to define me, and feeds my imagination” (“Towards a New Oceania” 49). In choosing to talk about Sāmoa and Hawai`i specifically, I am following where my spirit has consistently led my imagination, rooted in the cultures I’ve been raised within. My research works through Epeli Hau’ofa’s framework, laid out in his essay “Our Sea of Islands.” He argues that rather than subscribing to the colonial notion that our Moana is composed of “islands in the sea,” denoting small land masses spread in great lengths from one another, Oceania reclaims its identity as “our sea of islands,” that connotes a connection between each island and the Moana that binds us to one another (153). Through this framework, Hau’ofa designates reclaiming Indigenous ideologies and ways of being and connection building as an important methodology to refute the consistent colonial effort to confine and conquer Oceania. One of the most glaring examples of colonial efforts that sever Oceanic relationships is the restriction of gender and sexual expressions and the subsequent enforcement of a Western binary through religious missionaries. By confining the ways that Pasifika peoples are able to connect to one another, these powers diminish the capacity to

organize or mobilize movements against their control. However, by reclaiming the place of the Queer in Oceania, we recover this ability and the connections that colonial powers continuously try to erase. Pasifika work to reclaim Queer indigeneity recovers Indigenous concepts of relation and Oceanic capacities for care through alofa and aloha, to rebuild the connective relationships that bolster this decolonial work. Ancestors who have resisted erasure through the colonization and globalization of our islands, provide important models of resistance that perpetuate these integral tenets of Oceanic cultures. Looking at a variety of mediums, from children's books to photography, poetry, and archival work, the efforts of Pasifika peoples to recover the place of the Queer in Oceania, through important cultural frameworks, such as the Sāmoan Vā and the Hawaiian Wā, designates recovering the gendered or sexual place in the middle as a critical offering of alternative Oceanic ways of being. These cultural methodologies are an important model for how we may uplift our communities and engage in our responsibilities as ancestors of the future of Oceania by guaranteeing our cultural survival and futurity.



I. “A Sei is a Sei is a Sei”: Queer Sāmoana

“Imagine a world without flowers. Fa`afafine are our flowers. Be a pretty dull world without them”

-Coach Ace, Next Goal Wins

The effects of colonialism in the islands of the Pacific reverberate, from one shore to another, perpetuating Western dominance in an attempt to diminish Pasifika culture, power, and unity. From the onset of missionary contact in the heart of the Pacific, Sāmoa, colonial powers

have demonized Tagata Sāmoa and their traditions to eradicate Indigenous customs in order to enforce Western ideals. One of the most ardent differences in culture that missionaries on the Island took note of were those of gender and sexual expression. As Sāmoans freely expressed sexuality and embraced four genders (Tane, Fafine, Fa`afafine, and Fa`atama) rather than the male-female binary of the West, missionary work banned these Indigenous traditions, as they didn't serve a white Cis-Heteropatriarchal agenda ("Beyond Gender"). Working to decolonize perceptions of this enforced gender and sexual binary, contemporary authors and artists, like Dan Taulapapa McMullin and Yuki Kihara, work to indigenize and recover the place of the Queer¹ in Sāmoa. McMullin's poetry collection "Coconut Milk" and anthology *The Healer's Wound: A Queer Theirstory of Polynesia*, Kihara's photography exhibition "Paradise Camp," and their joint book *Samoan Queer Lives*, reclaim the Queer in Sāmoa as integral parts of cultural survival and futurity. A piece of Siapo print connects each piece of writing that composes this first section, these various works that span across various mediums, and the decolonial work that they engage in, together, creating a larger tapestry of meaning that expresses alternative ways of Indigenous being. By decolonizing Christian ideals, indigenizing archival work, and utilizing the refusal to adhere to contemporary gender and sexual spectrums in order to reclaim Queer indigeneity, their work refutes the colonial effort to continue to confine and conquer Tagata Sāmoa.



From the Mouth of Jesus: Religious Imposition and Resistance

¹ While not a term created with the complexities of gender and sexual existence in Sāmoa in mind, I use Queer as an umbrella term for someone who is not heterosexual or cisgendered.

Although Christian colonists attempted to limit sexual and gender expression on the island by enforcing the dictations of the Bible, their translatory omission of Fa`afafine as a gender group in the Bible ultimately permitted Fa`afafine to survive past this attempt of erasure. Fa`afafine ancestors utilizing the limitations of the Bible in order to survive situates decolonizing Christian ideals as integral to guaranteeing the futurity of these gender expressions. It also demonstrates how religious short-comings must be seized and utilized as weapons of protection and defense. In the translation of Leviticus 18:22, that states, “Thou shalt not lie down with mankind, as with womankind; it is an abomination,” the Sāmoan Tusi Paia² omits any mention of Fa`afafine (Tusi Paia, Lev, 18:22). The English verse doesn’t call for the third gendered to be included in the translation, revealing how a religious text created within a gender binary is unequipped with the ideological knowledge and language to bind a boundless expression of Indigenous gender and sexuality. Being erased from such a critical text is telling of christian ignorance and dismissal of Indigenous gender forms, but more ardently points to the ways in which Fa`afafine in Sāmoa have persisted and resisted colonial erasure. This is commented upon in McMullin’s poem “Fa`afafine Poem Number Ten,” when they write, “Thus it is written that a tane³ cannot sleep with a tane / but it is not written that a tane cannot sleep with a fa`afafine” (52). These lines appear as an open couplet following two quatrains that share the biblical translation. McMullin’s use of the open couplet places an emphasized focus on the deeper historical meaning of the dissonance between English doctrines and the gender expressions of Sāmoa. Moreover, their cheeky tone communicates the playful nature that Queer Tagata Sāmoa

² Sāmoan Holy Bible

³ Man

may approach these instances of irony with. This instance of colonial dismissal acts as a religious loophole for Fa`afafine to hold on to their identity and sexuality among an attempt of eradication. Communicating this through the form of their poem, by indenting the second line of the couplet further than the first, they further draw the audience's attention to Fa`afafine resilience in holding onto a sovereign expression of sexuality. Although pushed to the margins of Sāmoan society through this religious colonial dogma, this was an important act of preservation for the Fa`afafine way of life. In their section of Kihara's *Camp Paradise* titled "Fa`afafine Theirstory," McMullin continues, "Fa`afafine cultural survival in Sāmoa is a testament to Fa`afafine skills of negotiation within the Fa`asāmoa or Sāmoan way of life and communal Polynesian practices of alofa or compassion" (40). Fa`afafine exist in the liminal, in which an accepting cultural space is converted into a condemned colonial one. While facing religious, legal, and social repercussions for their sexual and gendered identity, McMullin demonstrates how the collective resilience of Fa`afafine ancestors paved a path that must continue to be tended to in order to fully recover the place of Fa'afafine in Sāmoa⁴.

The power of language continues to be of importance, as christianity's demonization of Fa`afafine is utilized as an act of continued and sustained oppression. In tracing the origins of Fa`afafine being referred to as malas, or curses, one can recognize how Christian banishment of the gender liminal is perpetually reinforced through language and slurs. McMullin includes anthropological excerpts in their book *The Healer's Wound*, including one that states, "Those who still adhere to their ancient religion are called Devils" (McMullin). Just as the West places

⁴ Homosexual marriage is currently illegal and punishable by jail time, although hardly enforced, based on religious beliefs of homosexuality as Sodomy.

gender on a strict binary, they place behavior on a similar binary of good and bad through representations of God and the Devil. By inferring that those who don't abandon their Indigenous ways of life are devils, they assert that any instance of nonconforming is evil and thus othered. This is reflected in a conversation in the book about the name mala in which Samuelu and Aleki, who are Fa'afafine, share that, "Generally when there's a fa'afafine in the family those days and it is still apparent now, if there's a mala in the family, it's a curse you know, it's like a curse...That's how people look at the malas. You have been cursed and that's why you are that way" (30). From the casting of non-conforming Sāmoans as devils, to referring to the gender Queer as curses, these terms are utilized to attempt to continue to oppress and derogate those that aren't easily colonized.

Even so, McMullin demonstrates how reclaiming these slurs can be an important instance of agency and empowerment that resists colonial oppression and offers new representations of being. As time has passed, the term mala has been embraced by Fa'afafine who reappropriate the slur to words like "malalicious" as a means to communicate empowerment to one another (McMullin). In expressing their agency and reclaiming the term as their own, Fa'afafine re-shape oppressive systems, denying the church the power to dictate their identity. In an article titled "Emerging Voices: The Exorcism of Language: Reclaiming Derogatory Terms and Their Limits," author Gregory Coles discusses a similar reclamation of the term Queer in Western society: "Such a shift robs homophobes of the capacity to derogate by means of 'queerness.' The terministic rescreening of 'queer' transforms the discourse of homosexual difference from a site of disdain into a site of honor" (434). Coles thinks through language as screens of perception, in which both the sender and receiver must agree to the material reality of a given name or slur. Most importantly, this theory demonstrates how a re-appropriation of such a term is an instance

of a power shift. Mala, like the original use of the term Queer, is intended to inflict religious shame and designate those who exist in the gender and sexually liminal as an other. However, through its up-cycled transformation into malalicious, it becomes “a site of honor.” Taking back your power in such a manner is also reflected in Taulapapa McMullin’s poem “F`a Fafine Poem Number Twenty.” They write, “A name is like a sei, the power flower on one’s ear / Maybe someone gives it to you but they are the ones who see it / A sei by another name is a sei / is a sei is / a sei” (62). Conjoining the delicacy of a flower with the strength and power of reclaiming one’s agency, they argue that what others see in you or project onto you are their own preoccupations that could and will never encompass who you truly are. These lines are also a canonical revision of Juliet’s quote in *Romeo and Juliet*, in which she inquires, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose / by any other word would smell as sweet” (2.2.46-47). McMullin takes Shakespeare’s imagery of a rose as representation that, as Romeo is looked down upon for being a Montague, a name doesn’t define a person, and applies this argumentation to the many names Fa`afafine have come to be called. The homophone between “sei” and the word say, also comments on the various forms of naming that have been applied to fa`afafine. McMullin communicates to Fa`afafine that in however their identities are twisted or distorted, and whatever names they come to be called at any moment in the cultural climate, what always remains is the beautiful root of their existence as important cultural pillars who compose a significant space within Tagata Sāmoa.

McMullin’s poetry further delineates how such demeaning of Indigenous gender expressions through religion works to bifurcate an individual from their cultural identity as an act of assimilation into the ‘dominant’ colonial culture. Moreover, they subvert the typical uses of religious imagery in their poetry to demonstrate how these beliefs may be decolonized and

further Indigenized. In one poem, McMullin describes a father who, “[denies] our culture like a good christian,” communicating an absolute adoption of christian values in place of cultural ones (24). When this father catches the speaker of the poem with another boy, McMullin writes that the boy is punished and was suddenly “dancing naked about the bathtub in a shower of leather whacks” (47). Demonstrating how religious dogma is passed from one generation to the next, the father’s punishment that is inflicted upon his son is another abusive consequence of the demonization of homosexuality. In “Fa`a Fafine Poem Number Five” McMullin writes, “When no one was looking standing on my toes I kissed the painting of Jesus beautiful English face / I kissed him on his red lips again and again, with his rosy-white movie star skin and black Irish hair / His kisses forgave me” (47). The use of enjambment guides readers from one line to the next within the same sentence, building speed in the rhythm of the poem to reflect the building tension, as he does this “when no one was looking.” Without stating the speakers’ physical state, enjambling the lines and quickening the speed of the poem mirrors the rising heart rate that occurs when doing something with such a high risk, placing readers in the act with the speaker. As religious paraphernalia, like pictures of Jesus, are often used to pray to, by kissing this symbol of christianity, McMullin ultimately subverts its power. The bodily association that exists between lips and the production of words and rhetoric, connotes the religious doctrines that are enforced upon Fa`afafine. By kissing Jesus, he physically silences religious rhetoric with the homosexuality that they demonize, through an expression of alofa. By speaking of his “red lips” and “rosy-white movie star skin” the speaker sexualizes Jesus’s body in the manner colonizers in Sāmoa would Tagata Sāmoa, as McMullin documents in *The Healer’s Wound*. This reclaims bodies as sites of pleasure and sexuality as a natural expression of self, decolonizing the colonial dehumanization of the Queer erotic and indigenizing their right to sexual expression. Finally, by

gaining forgiveness from this kiss with Jesus and not from his father, he diminishes the power that christianity holds over accepting his gender or sexual identity. This is also evident in McMullin's dictation of the lower-case c christian. He takes back his autonomy from the mouth of Jesus. With this poem unpacked, McMullin illustrates the agency one has in limiting the power religion can have over their autonomy, urging readers through this process of decolonizing such beliefs. By reclaiming the erotic as a powerful mode of being, the disembodiment of christianity is refuted.

Featured in Kihara and McMullin's collection *Samoan Queer Lives*, playwright Kiana Rivera's play "Puzzy" surveys the harmful effects of Queer religious guilt, centering the use of humor as another powerful act of resistance. Main character Mele is a Sāmoan, lesbian, Jehovah's Witness, struggling with the religious and social ramifications of coming out to her family and community. Demonstrating how the religious rhetoric of a colonial binary that dictates sexual variance as evil can be internalized and breed self-hatred, Mele is plagued with inner demons that are personified as three entities in the play. The three inner demons interrogate her sexual identity, asking if she's a "Dyke," "Trans," a "Pussy Lover," or a "Pussy Muncher" (137). Generations after those who followed pre-christian cultural ways were discerned as demons, the reverberation of such harmful colonial tactics are seen in Rivera's choice to personify Mele's struggle with sexual expression and identity as these three (the number itself carrying significant religious connotations) antagonizing entities. Before a suicide attempt, she calls out for help, feeling as if there are no other options: "Jehovah, Yahweh, Great Spirit, Whoever you are. I'm begging you... please take my life or take this burden away from me. I can't help who I am, who you've created me to be. I can't go on living this lie...Please...help me" (137). Whereas pre-christian Sāmoan culture embraced fluidity in sexuality, colonially

enforced heteronormativity leaves Queer Sāmoans to feel as though this expression is a “burden.” By asking for her life to be taken, Mele demonstrates how one's sexuality can't easily be separated from who they are, as sexuality is a critical expression of self. Thus, the sinister nature of religious pedagogy, spewed and framed as the only ‘truth’ is revealed. Simultaneously, Rivera interjects shining moments of humor, including a breakup scene between Mele and Persis, a woman who decides she prefers heterosexual relationships, as abrupt tone-shifts in the play:

MELE: I hope you fucking get cancer of the twat

PERSIS: Excuse me?

MELE: I said I hope you guys are really happy together like that. (126)

Even while depicting the suicidal ideation that may occur when faced with such heavy religious guilt, Rivera creates the space for Mele to exist in her entirety. She isn't consumed by her trauma, but continues to make room for humor alongside the tribulations of life. Mele's character, a Sāmoan lesbian navigating the modern dating arena, is an important present day example of what Queer Sāmoan resilience looks like. The quick tone shifts, from heart-breaking to humorous, express the possibilities of joy that always exist on the other-side of adversity as an offering of hope. Without diminishing the struggles of such an identity, Rivera declares humor and joy as critical tenants in decolonizing sex and alofa.

From being rendered invisible in the Bible and forced into the liminal, to composing a book of autobiographical narrative telling Fa'afafine and Sāmoan Queer stories, both Kihara and McMullin actively work against Queer erasure in Sāmoa and the Sāmoan diaspora. *Samoan Queer Lives*, a collection of 14 Queer Sāmoan biographical narratives, stands in opposition to colonial eradication by displaying not only how queerness has survived past colonization, but

continues to thrive in our communities. In choosing an interview-based structure, they platform members of the community to share their stories while engaging in the traditional oratory practice of passing knowledge through story-telling by holding and creating this space for each participant. Kihara's *Paradise Camp* collection, in which she reworks paintings Paul Gauguin created of Pasifika peoples by replacing these figures with Fa'afafine, not only includes, but centers the voice, lives, and importance of Fa'afafine. In her photograph "Si'ou alofa Maria: Hail Mary (After Gauguin)," she reworks Gauguin's painting *Ia Orana Maria (Hail Mary)* and places a Fa'afafine as the Virgin Mary in her photo. In the original painting, an angel points out Mary and Jesus to two Tahitians, reflecting the influence of christianity in the South Pacific by turning "a Christian subject into a tropical dream" (MacDonald 102). Camping this notion of a "tropical dream," Kihara shows the reality of life as a Fa'afafine by honoring the origins of Sāmoan culture through christian imagery, subverting the apparent power dynamic between the two. Rather than the angel in the original painting, Kihara depicts Jesus's three disciples, who are shown submitting to Jesus and the Virgin Mary. While the Virgin Mary is often depicted as meek, submissive, and nonsexual, with down turned eyes, the Fa'afafine in place of the Virgin Mary contrastingly looks directly at the viewer, furthermore asserting this power. Decolonizing the belief that holy women have to be submissive and nonsexual, placing a fa'afafine in The Virgin Mary's place also argues that integral figures of any community have the capacity to be their full selves and will be just as impactful. All in traditional Sāmoan clothing, Kihara urges the coexistence of traditional practices, like a fluid gender and sexual spectrum, with the teachings of christianity. As 98% of Sāmoa is christian, Kihara reflects the importance of christianity to the Island after years of colonization and further globalization, and encourages Indigenizing these beliefs in a manner that doesn't negate the importance of christianity to many Tagata Sāmoa. The

existence and celebration of Fa`afafine and the sexually queer doesn't have to be mutually exclusive to christianity, although that has been communicated by religious colonizers for millennia. Kihara conversely urges viewers that they don't need to abandon christianity, but must decolonize the beliefs within christianity that work to segregate Tagata Sāmoa.



`Aiga and Queer Kinship

The religious banishment of Fa`afafine also impaired familial systems in Sāmoa, who shunned their Fa`afafine family members away from their villages and communities. One etymological understanding of the name Sāmoa breaks down Sā to mean the tribe of, and moa as family, placing family at the center of what it means to be Sāmoan (Finney 301). What Kihara



Fig. 1 "Si'ou alofa Maria: Hail Mary (After Gauguin)" (Kihara)

coins as "fa`afaphobia," the prejudice that Fa`afafine face, forced the third gendered into an exodus away from their families and villages. By denying not only the validity of their gendered identity, but also disconnecting them from their families, colonial powers evidently work to erase fa`afafine existence and importance to traditional

Sāmoan culture by attempting to strip this expression of their Indigenous identity. This trauma is seen in both the play and the biographical narratives at hand. In *Puzzy*, Mele harbors immense

guilt for how coming out would make her devout Jehovah's Witness Grandmother feel:

MELE: I'm...I'm gay

GRANDMA recoils.

G.LOLA: A gay. But that's not right, Mele! That's not right in Jehovah's eyes. This is why you MUST COME BACK to the TRUTH, Mele! This is unnatural!

MELE: I've always been afraid of killing you with my truth but... I can't lie anymore.

G.LOLA: I'm not dead. (*pause*) But I am disappointed... Grandma is tired. Maybe you should go.

MELE: I love you Grandma.

GRANDMA LOLA *doesn't say anything*. (139)

The detrimental effects of religious colonization impacts Grandma Lola and Mele's loving relationship, as the love given from the Grandmother to the granddaughter becomes conditionally based upon the adoption of doctrines of religion. The news of her granddaughter being gay physically results in horror and disgust, seen as she "recoils" and refers to Mele's sexuality as "unnatural." Unlike the narrative structures seen thus far, the play, as a genre, relies heavily on dialogue and body language between characters to communicate their experiences. This meditation on dialogue, and stage directions that communicate body language, like Grandma Lola recoiling, bring the story to life viscerally for viewers. The silence that Mele is confronted with after she tells her Grandma that she loves her is denotative of the religious retributions for those that engage in 'sinful' relationships. Watching and experiencing this silence places the audience directly in Mele's experience. By placing the audience in Mele's shoes and allowing them to sit in these feelings of abandonment, more understanding and empathy for how Queer Sāmoans face religious shame and family estrangement is garnered. The

religious doctrines of Grandma Lola's beliefs stand as a blockade between developing an understanding of Mele's sexuality, and are evidently responsible for these previously loving family members' estrangement. Similarly, Fa'afafine Shevon Matai reflects on her father's perception of her gender identity, writing, "I understand how it was miserable for Dad to have two sons and...one is fa'afafine and being fa'afafine, your line stopped with you... you don't have sexual intercourse with a girl. Your line actually dies with you; it doesn't go anywhere" (83). Her father's hesitancy to approve of her gender and sexual identity because it doesn't allow for reproduction and further building of family lineages is connotative of an adoption of a Western nuclear familial structure that emphasizes sexual reproduction over connection⁵. These elder family members, as manifestations of the effects of years of colonization, become enforcers of colonial standards upon their future generations. Thus, one is able to see how colonial ideologies attack the roots of Indigenous identity, affecting something as central as 'Aiga to Tagata Sāmoa.

As a politic of survival, these members create their own spaces of Queer kinship and homes in an act of resistance and resilience. Matai goes on to describe how Fa'afafine found community with one another by creating alternative family structures as a remedy to the rejection

⁵ Although the connection between kinship and reproduction is not solely a Western structure, her Father turns a blind eye to the integral role Fa'afafine embody in caring for elders and non-biological children of the village by insisting that the family name must be continued through her sperm. Fa'afafine spread genealogy through these acts of care, not only through reproduction. This reflects an adopted value of the nuclear family system that is of the West and not Indigenous to Sāmoan culture.

commonly inflicted by their original families: “In my village in Pago Pago... They are houses full of fa`afafines...in normal life of the houses there is a Mama and an Auntie Mama, all these terms. The Mama would be the older fa`afafine and Auntie Mama would be the aunties but little bit more than an aunty” (75-76). By creating houses of community, support, and love, banished Fa`afafine continue to practice the cultural customs of alofa and `Aiga that stand at the center of the Fa`asāmoa way of life. These chosen families, that take on the roles of mother and aunty, act as spaces of cultural conservation, in which the Fa`afafine lifestyle is preserved and safeguarded against religious and colonial imposition. As fale’s full of fa`afafine that were rejected from their own families share community and celebration together, they create belonging. This structure of kinship and the importance of home is also commented on by Tuilagi Seiuli Ailani Allan Alo Va’ai who writes, “the fale is free. The fale doesn’t have wings, walls; it’s a place for shelter... It’s open. It’s for people to look at and come watch. It’s shared. I believe all things that are happening to us, all the social things, is for us to come together as a community” (17). Through the imagery of a traditional Fale, Va’ai emphasizes and urges Sāmoan Fa`afafine to continue to express their gender freely and to live and celebrate their lives openly. The kin-making that Fa`afafine practice through their fale’s act to resist erasure and most importantly demonstrate the manifold possibilities of community building that are critical in working back towards a pre-christian gender spectrum. Just as the fale has no walls to confine and segregate that specific cultural space, both Matai and Va’ai speak against the creation and adoption of such boundaries that separate a collective Tagata Sāmoa.

The creation of such houses as harbors of safety and a means of kin-making for Queer communities is similarly seen in America within ballroom and house LGBTQ+ subculture, demonstrating the cross-cultural necessity for community and belonging in the face of enforced

heteronormative hegemony. Across the U.S., drag balls are held by various houses that are also run by mothers, typically being Trans women with ballroom experience to guide newcomers, who take in black and brown LGBTQ+ youth to adopt their house's name in place of their given surname and compete for this alternative family. Black Queer Theorist, Marlon Bailey, in an interview titled, “The Growth (And New Contexts) Of LGBTQ Ball Culture,” discusses the practice of kin-making taking place in this U.S. subculture that Matai also details in Pago Pago: “Houses are the central kinship structure in the community. And houses function as families. ... The kinship system is the unit of safety, of affirmation, of nurturing...their house is the only family they know and have that is inclusive, that affirms them” (8:24). If the love and support of a Queer person's biological family is contingent upon their adherence to a Western or religious gender binary, these communities provide a place to create and sustain community, belonging, and safety, while maintaining one's authenticity. The existence of this practice in both communities is not a coincidence, but a uniform defense tactic against colonial systems that seek to erase the existence of black and brown Queer peoples. Fa'afafine fales in Sāmoa and Ball Houses in America work in synchrony to protect and sustain the lives and artistic expression of Queer black and brown individuals.

These borderless Queer connections are numerous, as chronicled by Pasifika community navigator Phylesha Brown-Acton, as she emphasizes the impact of Fa'afafine fale's in shielding Indigenous Oceania third gendered ways of life across the Moana. As a Fakafifine, a Niuean third gender, Brown-Acton utilizes ancient techniques of way-finding as a means to navigate life within the twenty-first century. She describes the benefits of being included in such a community, while similarly using imagery of the Sāmoan fale:

The Fono Fale... A representation of family connection by kin, relationships and

genealogy which connects them to titles, land, sea and gods. I felt connected to these women and they would become my support system and my second family...my fa`afafine sisters who provided me with courage and an understanding of my identity—an identity I had been searching for. (10-11)

Acton receives the nurturing that Marlon Bailey designates as a direct benefit of such safe spaces, that in turn validates an understanding of her identity and encourages an embodiment of it. Resistance strengthened in numbers, this instance of cross-Oceanic influence provides a glimpse of how such an embodiment additionally re-connects Pasifika communities to one another in “our sea of islands.” The fale’s as places of Fa`afafine sisterhood work to decolonize religious gender beliefs and sustain a third-gendered way of life as a means to navigate through the colonial tensions of gender and sexual identity across the Moana.

In addition to creating and further providing a safe space for the Queer, the mirroring of family dynamics in these houses bolsters the decentralization of the nuclear family to argue the success of the Indigenous Sāmoan family structure. A family structure that acknowledges the importance of an entire community, rather than focusing solely on nuclear parents, has been in place in Sāmoa for centuries, recorded in 1844 by English missionary George Turner. In his notes he recorded that a village family consisted of a “combined group of sons, daughters, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces... number[ing up to] fifty individuals” (173). Centering a connection and responsibility of care rooted in shared land rather than one of formal blood bonds, `aiga as a kin system provides a larger, open community of care than the Western focused nuclear family. The fa`afafine fales work in line with this extended kin structure, demonstrating how nonbiological relations are crucial to Queer identity and belonging. Moving forward in space and time, U.S gender studies scholar Judith Butler promotes such a social structure to be

adopted in modern Western society: “A number of kinship relations exist and persist that do not conform to the nuclear family model and that draw on biological and nonbiological relations... Kinship is neither a fully autonomous sphere, proclaimed to be distinct from community and friendship- or the regulations of the state- through some definitional fiat” (Butler 15). Butler argues that a family structure without blood connections is equally “valid” as a nuclear system, resisting an existence as an “autonomous sphere.” Just as gender cannot be placed in neat, organizable boxes, the communities one builds belonging within can’t be held to rigid formalizations, as seen in the ballroom houses and Fa`afafine fale’s. These spaces are a critical instance of Fa`afafine decolonizing the adoption of Western ideals that are a disservice to Tagata Sāmoa and safe-keeping Indigenous methodologies and values. These methods prove to not only be healing in the re-adoption of such systems for Sāmoans themselves, but for various communities facing similar oppression across the globe.

By reclaiming the importance of the roles Fa`afafine play within traditional kin systems, they are re-established as an important thread to the fabric of Sāmoan culture and community. Differentiating Fa`afafine from the Western conception of Transgenderism or being Non-binary, the identity of Fa`afafine is marked with the responsibility of caring for children and the elderly. Unlike the West, being Fa`afafine isn’t an individual identity marker, but rather a role that designates one’s responsibility to the village and is most often a title bestowed on an individual from the village itself. Being Fa`afafine isn’t only an individual expression of self, but importantly comes with this marker of responsibility of care within the community. Displaying this relationship, Kihara situates Fa`afafine as indispensable pieces of `Aiga:

children raised in families with Fa`afafine are nurtured in an enhanced way...without their own off-spring, [they] pass on their genes indirectly by helping raise children within

their own family gene pool both socially and economically... Additionally, Fa`afafine are tasked with caregiving for the elderly, considered pillars of the structure who pass on ancestral knowledge to the future generation. Thus, Fa`afafine play an integral part in keeping and maintaining the Vā or relationships within the family ecosystem. (66)

Rather than centering the Christian ideal of heterosexual reproduction, Fa`afafine pass on their genes through formal care and sharing and sustaining cultural traditions within new generations. Fa`afafine embrace a cultural kinship responsibility that both tends to the generations that have come before them, and nurtures the ones that come after them. In this manner, Fa`afafine tend to the past and the future in present time. To banish Fa`afafine is to banish this deep capacity of alofa, and as integral aspects of the Sāmoan family ecosystem, the repercussions of banishing Fa`afafine reverberate upon each generation as a disservice to all. Depicting this responsibility, Kihara's photograph "Fa`afafine with children (After Gauguin)," that reworks Paul Gauguin's *Polynesian Woman with Children*, depicts Fa`afafine midwife Tiara Tu'ulua with the children she helped deliver and later adopted. As described by the collection, "Tiara is a mother and motherly, caring and careful... She is both posed and gazing at the camera directly with the gravitas and sanctity of assured motherhood. Yet, on the children's birth certificate, Tiara... is described as the father" (King and Kihara). Tiara negates the biological essentialism that argues one must have a womb, and grow a baby in that womb, in order to nurture a child's life. As a midwife, they engage in a sacred practice of life-bearing and continue to sustain their lives in her role as a mother to the two children pictured. By replacing the original Polynesian woman in Gauguin's painting with a Fa`afafine mother, Kihara comments on the fluidity that should remain present in how and who engages in the care of children. While the birth certificate as a governmental formality enforcing the title of "father" is telling of the persistent obstacles

Fa'afafine face in being rejected within family systems, or in being seen as “illegitimate,” the impact of Fa'afafine alofa and care is abundant.

While religious impositions have worked to damage the Sāmoan family system in such ways, by opening and sustaining our fale's as safe spaces for Queer 'Aiga and re-embracing



Fig. 2 “Fa'afafine with children (After Gauguin)” (Kihara)

Fa'afafine as structural aspects of the family structure, this poignant form of colonization is stripped of its power. As grandparents, parents, siblings, nieces or nephews, or children to Fa'afafine, we Tagata Sāmoa need their love as much as they need ours. Being that family is central to Sāmoan Indigenous identity, healing the family system in such a way is integral to healing our people and island of the many wounds colonization has left behind.



The “VĀRCHIVE”: Queering the Sāmoan Archive

By indigenizing and queering archival work, both McMullin and Kihara reclaim the white Cis-Hetero patriarchal gaze on Tagata Sāmoa to continue this work of decolonization and advocating for Queer expressions of being. McMullin's book *The Healer's Wound: A Queer Theirstory of Polynesia* utilizes collage forms to discuss the wound that colonialism has inflicted upon Queer Pasifika. In their book, text is often placed on top of other text in different fonts and

sizes, creating layers of paragraphs written in various directions and languages across each page. They include quotes from English, German, and French anthropological field notes on top of Sāmoan text, making the Sāmoan text extremely difficult to read, requiring a degree of deciphering to be able to do so. Through this design choice, McMullin mirrors how colonial voices work to bury those of the Indigenous and emphasizes the work that we must continue to do in uncovering them. With text placed in different orientations across the page, having readers read from right to left, McMullin disorients the typical Western book format as he urges readers to disorient themselves from such colonial beliefs. They place homophobic passages in German or French upside down, flipping this dogma literally on its head. As readers have to physically turn the book in various degrees to read excerpts, they mirror the ways that readers must shift their perspective on gender expression and encourage them to practice doing so. They demonstrate how one must tactfully and physically move through and past these overpowering colonial messages, in order to get to the root and truth of pre-colonial gender expressions of Sāmoa in order to reclaim them. While addressing the tangible pain that has been inflicted upon Fa'afafine, they also propose the ways in which third gendered peoples can heal this wound.

Another critical aspect to the book is McMullin's use of the visual, as the photos and drawings that are spread across the text communicate Fa'afafine existence within a context of colonial history and decolonial futurity, using the Oceanic conception of time as circular and temporally expansive. McMullin colorizes various historic photographs of unnamed Fa'afafine, bringing their stories and their gendered identities to life in the present. Rather than the Western view of time as linear, in the Oceanic conception of circularity in time, these ancestors live beside us daily. By transforming the photos from black and white to fully colored, McMullin uplifts their stories to exist, with reverence, in the present. By virtue of both the nonlinear

structure of the book and this collapse of linear history, McMullin engages in Indigenous methodology that sustains the integrity of Sāmoan ancestral past and Indigenous future. In doing so they transform the meaning of the colonial portraits, from anonymous Sāmoan historical subjects, into respected Fa`afafine ancestors to find hope and resilience within. They also include photos that refer to the colonial history of Sāmoa, such as a teapot and tea cup, referencing the German occupation of Sāmoa. In an illustration of whales' heads breaking the ocean's surface, they conjoin phallic imagery with more than human `Aiga of the Moana while discussing Fa`afafine that communicates fluid gender expressions natural place in Sāmoan culture. As they insert photos of Fa`afafine joyously leaping across pages that also define the pedagogical ideals that work to confine them (such as Sodomy), they depict the boundlessness of Queer sexuality and identity. McMullin engages in their role as Fa`afafine to tend to the elder generations by caring for the ancestors depicted in these colonial photos, uses the visual to reclaim the Queer in the history of Sāmoa, and brings Fa`afafine stories to the surface of cultural consideration.

In addition to their book, McMullin continues this notion of queering archives by re-analyzing historic Sāmoan photos taken by Western powers, working in tandem with Fa`afafine ancestors who defied their erasure, and calling attention to their existence and their stories. An image of an `alia fighting ship taken by Alfred James Tattersall draws viewer's attention to both the historic battleship and the many men who are pictured on the boat. While the Sāmoans on the boat don't individually call forth any specific attention, McMullin's analysis of this photo gives recognition to what appears as invisible, a Fa`afafine child. He writes, "There is a young Fa`afafine standing in the waterline, invisible and in plain sight, like the maiden taupou who led in battles. Here, the Fa`afafine stands not on the ship with the men, but between the worlds where we always were" (41). The barely visible Fa`afafine is given full recognition because of

McMullin's cultural understanding of the pre-colonial gender spectrum and expression.

Recognizing this Fa'afafine as being in the liminal space between the ship and the men, as they exist in the liminal space between male and female, McMullin is able to queer what archival resources Sāmoans have access to in a continuation of the Fa'afafine refusal of erasure. In support of this methodology, Shevon Matai states that, "[Fa'afafine] lives are lived on the surface, and they belong to be lived on the surface of life... I believe that you don't have to look too far to understand who we are because it's right there, you just have to have the right eye" (85-86). While historic images and recordings of Sāmoa don't name or acknowledge Fa'afafine outwardly, by Indigenizing one's perspective of the gender spectrum to be able to Queer archival materials and adopting this "eye," we may continue to reclaim what colonial powers attempted to erase. Rather than viewing Fa'afafine as being hidden or concealed in any way, both McMullin and Matai reinstate that to the Indigenized eye, they have and will continue to exist openly and in plain sight.

Similarly, Kihara's work in *Paradise Camp* addresses the problematic depictions of Pasifika communities created in the art work of Paul Gauguin by replacing his painted figures with Fa'afafine in her photos, as discussed. By reclaiming the gaze of Gauguin, and Queering and Indigenizing his archive of work, Kihara centers a Fa'afafine worldview that is most often marginalized. In her photograph "Paul Gauguin with a hat (After Gauguin)," Kihara transforms herself into Gauguin physically, and poses in a headshot wearing a European suit as well as a Sāmoan straw hat against a Siapo⁶ background. By inserting the hat and the Siapo background,

⁶ Siapo is fine cloth made from the bark of a Mulberry tree that is dyed and decorated with clay and various natural ingredients, adorned with traditional symbolism and imagery. Traditionally

she clearly communicates that the artistic work and values of Sāmoa stand behind her, fueling her work. Art Historian Bernard Smith traces various artists' visual liberties in portraying Oceania among the first instances of contact in “European Vision and the South Pacific.” He writes that one artist in particular skewed his eye-witness account in the art he produced of it to “present Polynesians as cultivated Europeans” to “entertain his friends in England” (Smith 69, 79). The manner in which Oceania was first visualized through 18th century paintings, that Smith discusses, is an important idiom for how colonizers distort Oceanic being to fit their desired narratives of savagery or cultivation. Whether this is in perpetuation of christianity or for mere entertainment, the lives and histories of those in Oceania become distorted through these visualizations that are ultimately adopted and sustained as accurate depictions since they are legitimized solely for being created and recorded by white men. The work of Gauguin is thus seen in the same manner, producing the same harmful and inaccurate caricatures of Oceania. Through library visitation records and Vārcival work it is unveiled that Gauguin took images of Pasifika peoples and landscapes from various islands and asserted that they were all people and places of Tahiti (*Paradise Camp*). As these paintings have become canonical in Oceanic history and beloved by many, Gauguin’s white male gaze and artistic liberties significantly (re)shape the history of the Pacific. By placing herself in his role, and queering his archive of images in the

used as clothing, Siapo is now used for a multitude of reasons, from functional use as floor mats to a cultural currency as it is gifted at weddings or funerals, and is one of the largest artistic expressions in Sāmoa. As mentioned, I use an image of a small piece of a Siapo print in between each section of writing, demonstrating how they are each tied together to create a larger tapestry of meaning.

Pacific, Kihara becomes the historian and reclaims the power that is specifically derived from a visual artistic medium. In the same cheeky tone that McMullin adopts when he calls out the bible's inaptitude of limiting Fa'afafine sexual expression, Kihara looks at Gauguin and the legacy of artists before him that created these problematic depictions and questions "who is looking at who" (Kihara 27).

Her collection not only includes these re-worked photographs, but also her personal archive of various Queer Pasifika remembrances. Ranging from New Zealand AIDS Posters depicting Fa'afafine and photos of

Fa'afafine pageants, to colonial pamphlets and news clippings, she coins this work as her "VĀRCHIVE." Sāmoan writer Albert Wendt describes Vā as a "space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the



Fig. 3 "Paul Gauguin with a hat (After Gauguin)" (Kihara)

contexts change" ("Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body"). Kihara utilizes this as a methodology that organizes the structure of her archival work. The history that both her and McMullin document engages in this context shift, in which meaning is constantly evolving. By setting forth the work that evolves archival work into sharing and celebrating the history of Fa'afafine rather than allowing it to remain hidden, Kihara Indiginizes and further diminishes the colonial gaze

enforced upon Sāmoa. In an article titled “Archival Queer” by Charles E. Morris III, he urges the gender-fluid to “produce rhetorical histories of archives that will warrant and arm our queer scholarship, pedagogy, and activism...the archival queer must understand that the archive’s promise...is inextricably linked to *queer movement*: traversal of time and space, mobilization and circularization of meanings that trouble sexual normalcy and its discriminations” (147-148). Just as McMullin demonstrates the circularity of time in his archival work, Kihara engages in Morris’s notion of mobilizing queer movement, both backward and forward. The Vā being a space between, reflects Fa’afafine existence between Tane and Fafine. Occupying this gendered space between, like Wendt asserts regarding the Vā, is not a dislocation or a lack of location. Rather, this space, thus Fa’afafine, act as a connective tissue that binds our culture together. Similarly, the designs that adorn Siapo and the *space between* the designs, work in unison to create deeply symbolic meaning to the tapa cloth. Kihara and McMullin’s work in the Sāmoan “Vārchive” are guided by this light, in which they offer possibilities of being within the space between as integral to the larger Siapo of Sāmoan culture.

Kihara’s photographs hone in on the fact that without acknowledging the ancestors from which we come, we can not successfully move forward. Utilizing rainbow imagery as a reference to the Sāmoan view of rainbows as a medium to connect to past ancestors, her work creates this necessary connection. Her image “Fonofono o le nuanua: Patches of the Rainbow” reworks Gauguin's painting titled *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going* and depicts various members of the Aleipata F’afafine Association, each dressed in a color of the rainbow, spread across natural Sāmoan flora and fauna. Calling into question Gauguin’s use of “we” in his painting's title, Kihara centers her community to advocate for Fa’afafine acceptance and celebration. The questions that the title of the painting ask are critical questions Tagata

Sāmoa must ask that call forth the circularity of time that McMullin includes in their work. The fa`afafine wear bright clothing that contrasts to the natural background they stand in front of, conversely, Kihara's placement of the Fa`afafine amongst nature reinforces their natural place in Sāmoa. In an interview about her collection, she points out that, "Even though others might see the rainbow as a reference to the gay pride movement...in a Sāmoan context, the rainbow symbolises a portal into the spiritual world" (67). Using rainbow imagery to integrate christian ideals with Sāmoan culture, Kihara expresses how both may be celebrated concurrently. She argues that embracing Sāmoan Indigenous culture doesn't make you a bad christian, and that bifurcating these two aspects of one's identity is a way for colonial powers to manipulate one into abandoning their culture. As Wendt describes the Pasifika use of rainbows to describe "the richness and variety of our literatures," it too describes the richness and variety of Sāmoan gender and sexual expression that Kihara reclaims (Nua Nua 1). The rainbow reaches out to Queer ancestors, who continue to shed prisms of light on the path forward for Fa`afafine of today and tomorrow. By reworking Fa`afafine into Gauguin's paintings, Kihara reclaims the power of his white-cisgendered gaze to refute the positioning of Fa`afafine in the margins of Sāmoan culture, moving them into the communal center of Sāmoana.



Fig. 4 "Fonofono o le nuanua: Patches of the Rainbow" (Kihara)



Nua Nua: Prisms of Connection From the Diaspora and Beyond

Even within global movements towards embracing the gender Queer, Fa`afafine continue to defy Western categorization, reinstating their gender and sexual expression as specifically Indigenous to Sāmoan culture. While the LGBTQ+ movement of the West works to improve the conditions for such marginalized communities across the globe, being a product of the West limits its capacities to understand the nuances of what being gender liminal in the cultural and historical climate of Sāmoa and the Sāmoan diaspora means. Rivera's play, "Puzzy," demonstrates this tension for Sāmoans within the diaspora when main character Mele is attacked by her inner demons that question her identity. Her demons interrogate her and ask, "Are you gay, What are you bi or bicurious? Lesbian? Queer," to which Mele responds, "I don't know! I'm neither! I'm either! I'm all of them. I'm none of them...I'm me" (114). Referencing the condemnation of Tagata Sāmoa who defy the Western gender and sexual binary, these demons haunt her not only with religious guilt, but with the pressure to conform alongside a now widened Western gender and sexuality spectrum. Just as missionaries enforced their strict gender binary on Sāmoan ancestors of the past, Fa`afafine and the sexually Queer of Sāmoa are pushed to adhere to the new gender categories of the West contemporarily. Mele's assertion of being neither, either, all and none, comments on the boundlessness her sexuality encompasses. Although more inclusive than a gender binary, Rivera communicates that such firm categorizations of identity and sexuality reverses the intention of inclusion by generating a sense of sexual dysphoria.

Kihara mirrors Rivera's refusal to be defined by Western terms that limit their gender and

sexual expression to center her identity as explicitly Fa`afafine and refute Western confinement.

In her photographs from a 2005 exhibition titled *Fa`afafine: In the Manner of a Woman* Kihara poses while sitting on a couch in three identical photos in which she is topless. The only difference in the three separate photos is that in one she wears a grass skirt, in the second she no longer has the skirt on and tucks her penis behind her legs to conceal it and convey the appearance of a vagina, and in the third she reveals her penis. Discussing the photos, artist Coco



Fig. 5 “Fa`afafine: In the Manner of a Woman Triptych 1,2,3” (Coyle)

Fusco writes, “Kihara’s use of the tripartite format disrupts the ethnographic impetus to impose a singular type on the subject.... Her identity cannot be extracted from any one of the images: she inhabits all of them simultaneously” (Kihara, 54). Kihara’s photos continue to demonstrate the uncategorical nature Indigenous gender expression by depicting herself as both male and female, neither, or either that parallels Mele’s answer to her inner demons. Western missionaries’ lack of conceptual understanding of the Fa`afafine presents itself again in the centering of an LGBTQ spectrum on the Sāmoan Queer that doesn’t fully apply to their identity. Similarly, in their section of *Samoan Queer Lives*, Resitara Apa asserts that, “Whatever country I go to I say I’m a fa`afafine...we are known through our cultural terms... We are not drag queens or female impersonators trying to impersonate somebody, no. We are who we are” (25). Rivera, Kihara, and Apa’s voices, strengthened in uniformity, assert that their identities can not be confined to

Western ideals, neither past nor present. They are not one or the other, rather everything at once.

Although these Western conceptions of gender and sexuality fail to represent the gender and sexual expressions of pre-Christian Sāmoa, a deeper dive into the term Queer existing as an open and intersectional concept of being, reveals a point of connection between the two. Just as fa'afafine recoin mala as a statement of empowerment, the term Queer has shifted in the West from being a derogatory slur meaning strange or odd, to reference the manifold open possibilities of gender presentation and sexuality. Queer theorist Eve Sedgwick writes that, “one of the things that “queer” can refer to [is] the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (7). Sedgwick’s viewpoint of what being Queer encompasses is one that centers inclusivity and makes room for various cultural considerations as “constituent elements” that form a person’s sexuality and gender expression. Carrying this theory forward in a manner that serves Tagata Sāmoa, the “gaps” and “overlaps” Sedgwick discusses can be applied to the physical and cultural distance

Figure 6

between Sāmoa and its peoples living in the Diaspora. While the context of some cultural customs ebb and flow depending on what specific ways one’s family have migrated for survival, our identity as Tagata Sāmoa exists as a sole point of connectedness to the values our ancestors have passed down. In many ways, Queer theory legitimizes for the West what has historically existed in the Pacific and in numerable other Indigenous cultures. Yet, Sedgwick touches on how Indigenous forms of gender and sexual identity can push the conversation surrounding what being Queer means forward:

...recent work around “queer” spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be

subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality crisscross with these and other identity-constituting, identity fracturing discourses...[queer artists and intellectuals] are using the leverage of “queer” to do a new kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state. Thereby, the gravity...of the term “queer” itself deepens and shifts. (8)

In analyzing how Queer Sāmoans have been historically impacted by colonialism and continue to be impacted by neocolonialism, the “intricacies of language, skin, migration, [and] state” rise to the surface. She addresses the ways that privileges of skin and state have undoubtedly affected gender and sexual expression across the globe. Additionally, Sedgwick continues to importantly include “race, ethnicity [and] postcolonial nationality” in the determination of one's Queerness. Rather than harping on the specifics of a person's individualistic sexuality or gender, Queerness thought as an open concept that considers how race and ethnicity inform an identity such as a fa'afafine, and the ways that postcolonial nationality impact the Queer Diaspora, provides an inclusive landscape for what direction to move in. By choosing Queerness as a place for Oceania and the West to connect and move forward, the reclaimed history of Queer Tagata Sāmoa is perpetuated to create and fortify an open community across many seas. While decolonizing and indigenizing one's beliefs is of paramount importance, so too is learning the methodologies of the Colonial West in order to acknowledge and challenge the shortcomings of their beliefs forced onto our Islands. While queer theory legitimizes the Oceanic gender and sexual expression for the West, in tying these conversations together, our cultural customs and beliefs urge movement forward in a way that benefits us all.

A majority of the scope of this portion of this thesis has focused on the lives and stories of beautiful fa'afafine. I want to acknowledge that there is a limitation in the materials I've had

access to in being able to discuss the equally important stories of Fa`atama<sup>7</sup>. While a continued effort in recovering the place and importance of Fa`afafine in Sāmoa is of utmost importance, what my research has revealed to me is the equally important need for scholarship focusing on reclaiming the place of Fa`atama. What historic cultural place and importance did Fa`atama hold, how were Fa`atama impacted by christian enforced ideals, what specific tribulations under the current gender climate in Sāmoa do Fa`atama face, is the lack of resources and material available regarding their stories a reflection of a deeper gender discussion that must be had? As the Sāmoa Fa`afafine Association widens their horizons to include Fa`atama, so too must our scholarship.



Conclusion

There is a communal Sāmoan net-casting practice, in which each individual participating must be synchronized in movement, timing, and communication with the rest of the group for it to be successful. If one individual is off, the entirety of the catch is placed in jeopardy. This is sometimes practiced not only to catch fish, but to foster a greater sense of collaboration amongst

⁷ Meaning “in the manner of a man,” referring to biological women that embody a male spirit.

For further information, the youtube channel coconet has a video titled “The Rogers” that discusses the first organized community of Fa`atama that was spearheaded by the organizers of the Sāmoa Fa`afafine Association. Additionally, in *Samoan Queer Lives* Jean Melesaine, a butch lesbian in the U.S. diaspora, shares the story of her gender and sexual expression, but doesn’t specifically address the identity of Fa`atama’s in Sāmoa (pp. 87-101).

the community at large. While no individual is more important than the other, each member's efforts are equally needed to be successful. The traditional proverb “O le tele o sulu e maua ai figota⁸” additionally speaks to communal collaboration being a critical aspect to Sāmoan culture. The Sāmoan people of today are managing various sets of nets, nets of globalism and colonialism, that threaten to entangle any one individual's life that further weighs the collective community down with them. Engaging with this traditional practice, the success and embracement of every member of the community is fundamental to survive in and past the modern world. If Queer Tagata Sāmoa continue to be displaced, undervalued, and erased through the adoption of Western beliefs, in due course so will the rest of Sāmoa. Colonization knows no boundaries of evil and decimation, thus a secure front is vital. Dan Taulapapa McMullin and Yuki Kihara's work to decolonize the adoption of Western and christian ideologies, Queer and Indigenize Western archives of Sāmoan history, and celebrate the Sāmoan Queer and Fa'afafine as cultural keepers, pushes Tagata Sāmoa towards strengthening such a coalition. From utilizing their omission in the Tusi Paia as a tool of survival, to refuting the labels of Western gender and sexuality movements, Queer Tagata Sāmoa have long resisted colonial minimization and confinement in working to decolonize christian ideals of Indigenous gender and sexuality expression. Tagata Sāmoa may model their own journey of decolonization and indigeneity after these beloved ancestors. In reclaiming, celebrating, and safe-keeping the place of Queer Tagata Sāmoa, a resistance towards the continued attempts to confine and conquer the heart of the Pacific is fortified.

⁸ “Through collaboration, the most difficult challenges can be overcome.”



II. Lehua of Aloha: Queer Hawai`i Nei

“Resistance is not just an act of defiance; it is an act of survival. It is a refusal to be erased, to be forgotten”

-Haunani-Kay Trask

Taking this voyage of Queer Oceania to the shores of Hawai`i Nei,<sup>9</sup> instances of imposed force and the continued occupation of Hawaiian ancestral lands has materialized in years of colonial abuse and cultural decimation. Because of the continued efforts of Kanaka Maoli resistance, a cultural revitalization has taken place in Hawai`i, reclaiming `Ōlelo Hawai`i, cultural practices and rituals, and most importantly for this thesis, mo`olelo. Through reclaiming mo`olelo, Indigenous ways of life have been recovered and reclaimed, including those of gender and sexual expressions. While Sāmoans embrace Fa`afafine and Fa`atama, in Hawai`i the gendered identity of Mahū describes individuals who occupy a blend of female and male characteristics physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. Within traditional mo`olelo, Kanaka are also able to trace the ways that sexuality was freely expressed, with no regard to gender or sexuality based identities. The Hawaiian sovereignty movement, which focuses on decolonizing Hawaiian lands, importantly entails the work of decolonizing Indigenous bodies and minds, ridding our communities of colonially imposed dogma. By tracking the Queer erasure

⁹ I use both Hawai`i and Hawai`i Nei, translating to Beloved Hawai`i to refer to the Hawaiian islands.

U.S. colonists imposed through translated mo`olelo, and the consistent resistance Kupuna engaged in to protect these mo`olelo to ensure their survival, Queer Hawai`i Nei is reclaimed as an integral piece of lau hala to the Ulana<sup>10</sup> of Kanaka existence. By decolonizing Queer mo`olelo, reclaiming a Queer sovereign erotic, and serving “Indragenous” realness, the work of Kanaka maoli across disciplines and in various mediums reclaim Queer indigeneity, recover Kanaka connectivity, and refute the colonial effort to continue to confine and conquer Kanaka Maoli.



Story Sovereignty: Decolonizing Queer Kanaka Cosmology

Kapaemahu:

The sacred mo`olelo of the Healer Stones of Kapaemahu tells the story of four Tahitian Mahū that arrived on present day Waikīkī in the 15th century to gift their abilities in healing and science to the Hawaiian people, designating the perpetual place of Mahū as powerful healers across Oceania. In 2022 revered Mahū leader and kumu, Hinalaimoana Wong-Kalu partnered with authors Dean Haner and Joe Wilson, and illustrator Daniel Sousa, to create a picture book sharing the mana of this story in current times, titled *Kapaemahu*. Continuing to express the importance of reclaiming visually artistic representations of Oceanic history, as Kihara and McMullin do in their work, *Kapaemahu* reclaims Queer mo`olelo through a Queer Indigenous lens. In describing the gender of the four Mahū it is written that, “The visitors were tall and deep

¹⁰ Ulana are woven mats that are made from pieces of lau hala, or pandanus leaves, that Hawai`i is specifically known for across Oceania.

in voice yet gentle and soft spoken. They were not male; they were not female. They were Mahu- a mixture of both in mind, heart, and spirit” (Wong-Kalu et al.). Not only does the verbal



Fig. 6 “Four Mahū healers arrive in Hawai‘i greeting Kanaka Maoli” (Sousa)

description of the Mahū blend of masculine traits (tall and deep in voice) and feminine traits (gentle and soft spoken) describe the physical manifestations of occupying a space between male and female, but by describing this essence as one of the “mind, heart, and spirit” the physical and spiritual are combined to create a holistic

understanding of Mahū as gender liminal. Through the medium of an illustrated book, the illustrations of the four Mahū as significantly larger than the men and women greeting them onto the island, visually communicates the grandeur of the knowledge of healing and science that they possess and are willing to share. The book goes on to share the details of their healing abilities and their subsequent influence in Hawai‘i, sharing that “Kapuni possessed great spiritual power. Kinohi was all-seeing. Kahaloa could heal from afar. And Kapaemahu healed by laying on hands...



Fig.7 “Four Mahū healers embed their mana into the healing stones” (Sousa)

the healers [transferred] their powers into [four] stones...Then, knowing that their healing

powers were safe in the stones, the mahu vanished” (Wong-Kalu et al.). The *Kapaemahu* mo`olelo possesses the mana of the important kuleana<sup>11</sup> that Mahū are tasked with as vehicles of healing. Moreover, it depicts the reverence with which Kanaka men and women must meet Mahū with in order to sustain a reciprocal relationship. This mo`olelo of care, that has been passed down upon generations, is further made impactful through the use of red, orange, and yellow tones, contrasted against dark illustrations of individuals of the story, echoing the artistic styles Kanaka engaged with on Kapa cloth¹². The four stones stand today in Waikīkī, but have experienced a tumultuous history as the sovereign nation of Hawai`i was colonized, in land, language and culture, by the U.S.

Through the brutal process of the U.S. occupation and further colonization of Hawai`i, the sacred mo`olelo of the Healer Stones of Kapaemahu and the four stones themselves were buried and disgraced, reflecting the impending erasure of Mahū in an occupied Hawaiian nation-state. The picture book telling the mo`olelo was modeled after the first written form of the story by Hawaiian military official James Alapuna Harbottle Boyd that was published in the *Hawaiian Almanac and Annual* by Thomas George Thrum, a Hawaiian antiquarian, under the title “The

¹¹ Responsibility

¹² Kapa cloth is similar to the Samoan Tapa cloth. The same printing of various designs in dark ink was applied to bark cloth to depict mo`olelo. Once again I use a piece of designed Kapa cloth to separate each section of writing, commenting on the interconnectedness of each idea. The triangle symbol can represent connections between the land, sea and sky, and I put forth the idea that this symbol can be a helpful visual tool to think through the interconnectedness between male, female, and Mahū.

Four Wizard Stones of Ka-Pae-Mahu” in 1905. In his written manuscript, Boyd shares details of the healers that designate their identity as Mahū: “their tall stature... [and] The attractiveness of their fine physique and kindly demeanor was overshadowed by their low, soft speech which endeared them to all... They were unsexed by nature, and their habits coincided with their feminine appearance. although manly in stature and general bearing” (140). Although the name Mahū is not used by Boyd, his description of their feminine appearance coupled with a manly stature communicates their identities as such. While the terminology of “unsexed” communicates the lack of a gender being present, his later dictation of “the hermaphrodite sex of the wizards” contradicts this description by implying that the healers were both man and woman (Boyd 141). On either end of the spectrum, Boyd’s problematic gender diction contradicts the veneration for this quality that his writing conveys, stating that it is because of these qualities that they were welcomed by Kanaka. Thrum’s decision to change the mo’olelo title to “The Four Wizard Stones of Ka-Pae-Mahu” is connotative of further colonial changes that would be thwarted upon the traditional story. From being respected as healers to being referred to as wizards, the mo’olelo is mythologized through a white gaze to delegitimize Kanaka cultural history. The struggle for agency between a Kanaka cultural practitioner and settler colonist in sharing this mo’olelo would prove to be troubling throughout the 21st century.

The erasure of Mahū from the mo’olelo is a direct correlation to the erasure of Mahū within the occupied nation-state. With the new demands of a militarized Hawai’i, the stones were buried under a bowling alley built to entertain U.S. soldiers in 1941, as reflected in a newspaper clipping titled “Wizard Stones To Go, so Waikiki Can Bowl” (Wong-Kalu 24:24). Once they were uncovered in 1963 by Mayor Blaisdell, Hawaiian scholar Mary Abigail Kawena’ulaokalanihi’iakaikapoliopole Naleihuaapele Wiggin Pukui demanded their

preservation. Tracking the gradual erasure of Mahū from the mo'olelo, in a newspaper clipping titled "Legendary 'Wizard Stones' Are Restored At Waikiki" it's written that the "[wizards] were tall, handsome, kindly, and soft spoken¹³". This colonial re-telling of the Hawaiian legend continues to refer to the healers as wizards and completely erases their existence as Mahū. Describing the healers as "handsome" and categorizing them as "wizards" draws forth an idea that they are cisgendered men. While it is only through their identities as Mahū they are bestowed healing powers, this re-telling centers male power to perpetuate patriarchal ideals. Propagandized as a favor the mayor did on behalf of Kanaka, the stones were used as towel holders for beach goers for many years. In 1997 a cultural movement to reclaim the cultural history of Waikīkī called for the rocks to be moved, fenced off, and designated as an ahu¹⁴ for the "wizards." Under the dedicated care of Hawaiian Kupuna and healer Henry Auwae, the stones innate mana was safeguarded from further destruction. Even so, the plaque inscription named the stones as "The Stones of Life" and claims the story is one about "Four powerful Tahitian healers." Now, the colonial re-telling of the mo'olelo removes the image of wizards, but centers an idea about life that is not true to the legend, and further omits any mention or idea

¹³ Although I couldn't find the original sources of either the newspaper clipping titled, "Wizard Stones To Go, so Waikiki Can Bowl" or "Legendary 'Wizard Stones' Are Restored At Waikiki," they can be found in the archive compiled through the Kapaemahu website, that is linked by QR code on the current plaque: <https://kapaemahu.info/>

¹⁴ Altar

of gender¹⁵. Author of *O Au No Keia*, a book I will later discuss, Andrew Matzner, highlights that although the plaque argues to “preserve and honor Hawai`i’s unique heritage for generations to come” the Department of Parks and Recreation simultaneously “[obscures] the significant role transgenderism plays in the stones’ history by leaving out key information from their legend...the plaque’s revised version of the Wizard Stones story illustrates how the cultural history and value of transgenderism can so easily be lost” (279). Using the digging up of the stones and the resurrection of the mo`olelo over time as a model for the work Matzner does in recovering the voice of Mahū, I would like to build on this notion to recover the resistant efforts of Kanaka throughout these tumultuous times in order to protect the mo`olelo, the stones, and their mana.

Parallel to how Fa`afafine in Sāmoa utilized their omission in the Tusi Paia as a means of survival, the erasure of certain aspects to the mo`olelo of the Healer Stones of Kapaemahu were necessary in order to keep the mana of the mo`olelo and the stones alive for future generations. Both Mary Pukui and Henry Auwae are renowned Kupuna that dedicated their lives to the survival of Hawaiian culture. So, why would they be involved in projects that rename and retell such an important mo`olelo? According to a Waikīkī elder, “Everybody knew they [the healers]

¹⁵ A settler colonist coined as “The Lady in Red” that has no Hawaiian ancestry also changed the mo`olelo by masquerading as a clairvoyant that was dedicated to Madame Pele, goddess of volcanoes and fires. She asserted in news clippings and in travel brochures a bastardization of the healer’s genders through this guise of clairvoyance: “Kapaemahu, a healer and male; Kahaloa, a beneficent female; Kapuni, an evil male; and Kinohi, a female who brings blessings to homes” (Hamer and Wong-Kalu, 272).

were mahu, but you could never say that. They would have destroyed the stones! That's why we kept it so hush-hush" (Hamer and Wong-Kalu, 276). Pukui herself discerned that the stones were "a row of mahu" and Auwae bestowed the kuleana of creating mele¹⁶ and pule¹⁷ for the stones on some Kanaka and other Kanaka the kuleana of safe-keeping the true mo`olelo during the 1997 move (Hamer and Wong-Kalu, 273). Their efforts are clearly towards cultural conservation. The constant re-telling of the mo`olelo through agents of colonial power (Thrum, Mayor Blaisdell, and Parks and Recreation¹⁸) is telling of the constant erasure of Hawaiian culture the U.S. engages in to disempower Kanaka Maoli. More ardently, the success of Kupuna like Kupui, Auwae, and the unnamed Waikīkī elder to draw upon traditional mo`olelo methodology and continue to pass down the true mo`olelo orally throughout the community to avoid permanent erasure, speaks to the important resilience that has pushed forward Kanaka cultural revitalization. Through each resurrection, these Kupuna corrected the mo`olelo as much as the colonial powers at hand would publicly allow them to, bringing the most accurate form of it to existence today.

Engaging in "ea o mo`olelo," or story sovereignty, Hinaimoana Wong-Kalu completes these efforts by retelling the mo`olelo in the form of an illustrated book, a documentary, an

¹⁶ Hawaiian chants, songs or poems.

¹⁷ Hawaiian prayer, incantation, and blessing

¹⁸ It's important to note here that not all Kanaka were unified in these ideals. Kanaka George Kanahele argued that Kapaemahu broke down linguistically as "to set aside homosexual desire," attempting to retell a story antithetical to the original. Possible motivations for this are his own Mormon beliefs, or his desire to support visitor industry in Hawai'i (Hamer and Wong-Kalu, 274).

animated short film, an academic publication, and even a museum exhibition, spreading the mana of the true mo`olelo through an avenue of knowledge making that reaches every generation. Each method of sharing the story holds its own important cultural transmission. In their academic publication, titled “Kapaemahu: Toward Story Sovereignty of a Hawaiian Tradition of Healing and Gender Diversity” Wong-Kalu partners with author Dean Hamer to coin the term *ea o mo`olelo* “which proposes that stories have an intrinsic right to their own unique contents, style, and purpose” in an effort to broaden the scholarship of mo`olelo (255). By breaching the academic arena, they position Indigenous knowledge making as equally important to that of the West. With the goal of reclaiming this mo`olelo’s sovereignty in mind, the choice for the animated short titled “Kapaemahu” to be narrated by Wong-Kalu in *Olelo Ni`ihau* importantly recovers its original “contents” and “style” through language. This stylistic choice places the viewer as close as they can be to the traditional oral telling of the story. They explain that “The language of the island of Ni`ihau is the only form of Hawaiian that has been continuously spoken since before Western contact, and it is closest to the language of Tahiti that would have been spoken by the healers...[giving] viewers the opportunity to hear the mo`olelo in a form that may be closer to the way it was originally transmitted” (Boyd et al.,279). Refuting the erasure of ‘Olelo Hawai`i, the animated short instills the value of keeping the language alive and well.

In keeping it as close to the original telling of the mo`olelo they reclaim its style and thus its sovereignty. In *The Healer Stones of Kapaemahu Documentary*, important insights from Kanaka are brought into the conversation, like Kupuna and healer Tuti Kanahale who expounded upon the importance of Kapaemahu: “He showed that being Hawaiian, being Polynesian, means unifying the male and female. There were always duties on the female side and on the male side,

but Kapaemahu showed that by bringing the two sides together as one the power to heal could truly be harnessed” (48:18-48:46). In addition to the other forms of the telling of the mo`olelo, the documentary displays how to responsibly analyze the story to make meaning in our current cultural political climate. The picture book is an important instance of Wong-Kulu fulfilling the kuleana she has as Mahū to care for the future generations of Kanaka. Written in ‘Ōlelo Ni`ihau with English translations, Wong-Kulu continues to share not only the mo`olelo of Kanaka ancestors, but their language as well. Passing down the oral tradition of sharing mo`olelo, the picture book acts as a medium for children to receive this mo`olelo from their Kupuna as did Kanaka for generations, keeping the mana alive. In doing so her efforts successfully perpetuate our cultural customs upon the next generation of Kanaka Maoli¹⁹.

Just as McMullin and Kihara diligently work through their Vārchives to reclaim Queer Sāmoan history, the work of Kanaka Maoli to reclaim sovereignty over Queer Hawaiian history through mo`olelo is an important model of resistance through the parallel theoretical frame of ‘Wa.” The current form of the plaque of the four stones, with the guidance of Wong-Kalu, reads, “Please respect this cultural site of reverence. There are many stories of these four healers from Tahiti, known for duality of male and female spirit and their wondrous works of healing.” Calling forth the story's theme of reciprocity between men, women, and Māhu, the continued efforts of Kupuna like Pukui and Auwae, paved the way for Wong-Kalu to fulfill the kuleana

¹⁹ Nuances regarding access to this mana and these mo`olelo, especially considering the large exodus of Kanaka from the `āina, rise to the surface of this argument. While not in the scope of this thesis, I go on to argue that this is an integral dispute that must be addressed in Oceanic scholarship.

bestowed upon her as Māhu in keeping the mo`olelo alive. Just as the four healers did, Wong-Kalu spreads healing to Queer Pasifika peoples that exist outside the Western gender binary, and to all Kanaka in Hawai`i or in the diaspora, through sharing this important mo`olelo. I would like to echo how she finishes the story: “Life, life, life... Long life to the story of Kapaemahu” (Wong-Kalu et al.).

Instances of Aikāne:

The bountiful depiction of aikāne in Hawaiian mo`olelo not only establishes the practice of sharing aloha with same-sex companions as a critical expression of connection, but also traces how aloha refutes heteropatriarchal sexual binaries and categorizations of Queerness. The aloha between Hi`iaka and her aikāne Hōpoe, that is seen in *Ka Mo`olelo Hi`iakaikapoliopole*, has been cast aside by re-tellers of the mo`olelo that focus on the once loving, but turned tumultuous relationship between Hi`iaka and her sister Pele²⁰. However, by analyzing what these emotionally and physically intimate same-sex relationships reveal about the power of aloha, the mo`olelo becomes a place for Queer Kanaka to come home to. Dr. Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio’s book, *Remembering Our Intimacies Mo`olelo, Aloha `Āina, and Ea*, thoroughly unpacks the mo`olelo, paying special attention to pilina, intimacy, and `āina²¹. Describing the

²⁰ Hi`iaka is the goddess of hula, mele, and medicine. Her older sister, Pele, is the goddess of volcanoes and fire and is revered as the creator of the Hawaiian islands.

²¹ “Connection, intimacy, and land” In a politic of refusal, Osorio chooses not to translate the mo`olelo into English, as the language itself perpetuates a rigidity of Western heteropatriarchal values that can not responsibly convey the fluidity of Hawaiian `ike (knowledge). Rather, she practices what she coins as “rigorous paraphrasing,” in which she doesn’t assert a singular

development of Hi`iaka and Hōpoe’s companionship, Osorio illustrates how an abundance of aloha between two aikāne in turn creates something larger than their individual selves: “Hiiaka discovers that the origin of Nanahuki’s name was her love of gathering lehua²² at Hopoe. Upon learning this...Hiiaka proclaims that Nanahuki will now forever be known as Hopoe – that she and the lehua grove at Hopoe will be one and the same. At this moment, Hopoe herself becomes the lehua that Hiiaka carries with her and draws inspiration from...” (77). Naming is a sacred methodology for Hawaiians, so Hi`iaka’s loving proclamation to change her aikāne’s name from Nanahuki to Hōpoe indicates the sacred nature of their connection. Moreover, if `āina is the paramount form of mana and aloha, by designating Hōpoe as the lehua grove itself, she gifts her the truest essence of these qualities. In this scene of the mo`olelo, Hi`iaka takes Hōpoe’s love of gathering lehua, and generates her aloha to create a grove of them for her. In this manner, Hi`iaka creates a refuge for Hōpoe and creates `āina itself. Their abundance of aloha ultimately creates something bigger than themselves. In the same vein, the mo`olelo of their aloha creates a place of refuge for Queer Kanaka to come home to. Once again considering the dissonance between Pasifika Indigenous expressions of gender and sexuality and the Western LGBTQ+, Osorio highlights that “Hi`iaka cannot be affixed to a straight or queer identity, [but] that certainly doesn’t mean that she cannot be seen and cherished as an affirmative example and place of refuge for contemporary queer Kanaka today” (89). Hi`iaka’s expressions of love,

translation as the mo`olelo’s sole meaning, but rather offers the mana that she draws from it (Osorio 33). The rigorous paraphrases she provides are drawn from her research in the archive of the mo`olelo published in ‘Ōlelo Hawai`i newspapers, and are what I quote and analyze.

²² Lehua are red flowers that are endemic to Hawai`i.

regardless of her companion's gender, doesn't connote an individualistic identity, but rather a collective value of aloha. Even so, as the mo'olelo moves and shifts through space and time, it offers reassurance to contemporary Kanaka who exist beyond the confines of the Western gender and sexual binary that is enforced upon them. Hi'iaka wasn't Queer, she was Hawaiian, and thus held no limitations on who she shared her boundless aloha with. This is an important place where these identities may be reconciled and reclaimed.

English translators erasing the sexual and intimate nature of Hi'iaka and Hōpoe's shared aloha from the mo'olelo reflects the imposed restrictions of how and to whom aloha would be permitted to be expressed in the occupied nation-state of Hawai'i. Hi'iaka's "beloved" becomes reduced to a "friend," since through the colonial gaze, two women could only exist as such. In 1915 Nathaniel Bright Emerson translated the various stories of Pele in a book titled *Pele and Hiiaka A Myth From Hawaii*. In the chapter that covers Hi'iaka and Hōpoe he translates the mo'olelo to read, "Hiiaka went to stay with her friend Hopoe, a person whose charm of character had fascinated the imagination of the susceptible girl...her inspiring mentor in those sister arts, song, poesy and the dance" (Emerson). This translation asserts a Western heteronormative order onto the two wāhine²³ by diminishing their connection to one of a "susceptible girl" and "her inspiring mentor." A deeply erotic and emotional aloha is what binds the two wāhine together as aikāne, but since this doesn't abide by the rules of heteronormative christian ideals, it is more "civilized" to assert that their admiration for one another comes from their relationship as student and teacher, bastardizing their true expression of aloha. In the next year, W.D Westervelt wrote *Hawaiian Legends of Volcanoes* and continues this act of colonizing Hawaiian mo'olelo when he

²³ Women

writes, “Hopoe taught Hiiaka how to make leis...from the most fragrant and splendid flowers. Together they went out into the white-capped waves bathing and swimming and seeking the fish of the coral caves” (88-89). The beautiful gifting of the lehua grove from one lover to the other is omitted and is only discussed in the context of making leis together. While this will prove to be an instance of intimacy in the Hawaiian mo`olelo, these translations erase the practice of aikāne entirely. The book titles assert that this mo`olelo is “myth” and “legend,” but still refuses to allow this history to exist even in a “fictional” work of a “barbarous” people. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes that this “crushing [of] bodies, minds, and spirits is accumulative, diminishing, and restrictive. It also eliminates. It eliminates queer bodies from Indigenous spaces. It eliminates Indigenous bodies as political orders. Their Indigenous worlds get destroyed” (*As We Have Always Done*, 128). By diminishing the manifold possibilities of sharing aloha between Kanaka, they attempt to enforce the adherence to a heterosexual binary and sever Indigenous connective practices. In continuation of Simpson’s argumentation, every Indigenous person has a hand in creation, and thus it continues to be the kuleana of contemporary Kanaka to rebuild the Queer world's colonial powers continuously try to banish.

By providing visibility to erotic aspects of the mo`olelo through responsible rigorous paraphrasing, Osorio frees Kanaka from oppressive cis-hetero patriarchal limiting agendas that aim to continue diminishing the mana of Hawai`i and its peoples. Describing how Kupuna like Joseph Poepoe conveyed the eroticism and pleasure that takes place between Hi`iaka and Hōpoe without explicitly discussing the wāhine’s bodies, Osorio expounds, “Hiiaka is described as plucking and stringing a lei lehua [and] the verbs “ako” (pluck) and “kui” (pierce/penetrate) are for obvious reasons often used to describe both lei making and sex. And because the lehua is of

course a kinolau²⁴ of Hopoe, when Hiiaka strings her lei lehua, we are meant to understand that Hiiaka and Hopoe are being intimate” (108). While at face value Boyd and Westervelt’s translations accurately depict the pair making leis together, for Kanaka reading this in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, a connection with `āina translates to a deeper connection with one another. Compared to the immediate sexualization of wāhine bodies by colonial powers, Poepoe expresses the sexuality of the two wāhine without blatantly objectifying them. Sex isn’t taboo, nor is it a spectacle for men to derive pleasure from. Rather, it is an important expression of human connection. As their lei of love is woven together through the ‘ōlelo equipped and the `āina that they create and share, Osorio embraces the mana of the mo`olelo of Hi`iaka and Hōpoe to weave a lei of reclamation and resistance that Queer Kanaka can adorn themselves with today. Like Wong-Kalu, Dr. Jamaica Osorio reclaims the mo`olelo’s sovereignty to “un-queer” the existence and practice of boundless aloha.

Returning to Dan Taulapapa McMullin’s *The Healer’s Wound: A Queer Theirstory of Polynesia*, aikāne becomes an important figure of tracing Queer history in the Wārchives of Hawai‘i. Compiling documentation of aikāne, they include excerpts from voyage notes taken by colonial powers when they encountered Indigenous Hawaiian culture and customs. One excerpt reads, “Another sett of Servants of whom [Kariopoo] has a great many are called Ikany²⁵ and are of superior Rank to Erawe-rawe. Of this Class are Parea and Cani-coah and their business is to commit the sin of Onan upon the old King” (McMullin). The unfiltered reporting of sexual activity between aikāne before settler colonialism in contrast to the erasure of such practices in mo`olelo once Hawai‘i became a nation-state controlled by these powers is telling of the gradual

²⁴ Form. Many mo`olelo consist of beings that have the ability to occupy various forms.

²⁵ Aikāne

process of colonization. Committing “the sin of Onan” refers to the Old Testament biblical figure of Onan who was punished for masturbating, and conveys the open sexual practices that have existed between kanē in pre-christian Hawai`i (Saad 62). While readers of other aikāne mo`olelo understand the deep intimacy that exists in these relationships, in this Western context, only the sexual relations between the men are made notable. McMullin doesn’t name the source of this transcript, taking power from the colonial gaze back. As so many Queer Pasifika peoples remain nameless in anthropological documents such as these, McMullin casts this author as a name-less figure outside their existence as a settler colonist. As I’ve described in previous sections, McMullin as a visual artist fills many pages of the book with beautiful illustrations, photographs, and various directional texts. This text, in contrast, is placed against a plain white background with the only accompanying image on the page being a wood figurine of a man planked on his hands and feet looking upwards with an open mouth, appearing to be in a sexually suggestive position. The figure brings the sexual relationship between kane²⁶ we read about in the lines of the text to life visually. On the page to the left of this figure, a line of text defining aikāne, lays horizontally across the page, stopping as if it were to enter the figure's open mouth, continuing to allude to the kane’s sexual relationship. The simplicity of this page in contrast to some of the other colorful page lay-outs in the book mirrors the simplicity of the existence of same-sex relationships in Hawai`i. McMullin’s depiction of aikāne echoes Osorio’s, arguing that by highlighting visibility of aikāne relationships, Kanaka can map the manifold ways aloha has been used as a methodology of community and connection and can continue to be used as a method of decolonizing Queer expressions of love.

²⁶ Men

Just as Wong-Kalu did with *Kapaemahu*, Hawai`i-based filmmakers Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson and animator Daniel Sousathe, created the animated film *Aikāne* to explore the intimacy between two aikāne who defy binary forms through their devotion to one another and their existence as human and more-than-human forms. With no dialogue, the visual story-telling captures the abundance of aloha between the two kane. They fiercely protect, heal, and nourish one another from the harm of colonization, both in human and octopus form. Rather than the colonial documentation that McMullin shares, this depiction of a same-sex kane relationship demonstrates intimacy beyond the physical. Just as Hi`iaka's aloha sprouted a lehua grove, the kane's deep commitment of love and care for one another manifests in their continued efforts to protect one another.

The intimacy between the two evidently grows deeper each time their aikāne expresses his aloha for the other through these acts of selflessness and care, demonstrating the aloha that becomes necessary in the face of colonial violence. Tying together themes of colonial violence, land, ocean, and sovereignty, Jonathan Osorio writes, “This is why we must end the military occupation of Hawaii, not just because military use poisons our lands and waters, but also because the mission of the armed forces so fundamentally opposes our values of inclusion and aloha aina. It defends a very particular definition of a people, and we Kanaka Maoli are focused on a much larger society than the American nation” (Osorio²⁷). The colonial entities present in the animated short wage war against the village, and even capture and abuse one of the lovers in the cabin of their ships. This violence echoes the military occupation of Hawai`i and the various

²⁷ For more work discussing the occupation and militarization of Hawai`i look to the work of Dr. Lilikalā Kame'eleihiwa, J Kēhaulani Kauanui, and Haunani-Kay Trask.

forms of violence Osorio describes it enforces. The resolution of the animated film revolves around the aikāne's ability to embody a more than human form and sink the colonial ship. Osorio's assertion and the animated short communicate that Hawaiian expressions of connection, such as aikāne relationships, focus on sustaining "a much larger society than the American nation." In the end of the short film, the two dive into the ocean together, encircling each other's human forms (Hamer et al., 12:30). This circling nature mimics the reciprocity of human connection that Osorio designates as a Hawaiian value of inclusion. Also commenting on the circularity of time, as these mo'olelo and models of connection were practiced by Kupuna, the short brings its healing mana to the present for contemporary Kanaka to receive. Within this circling of the aikāne we see the existence of Queer Kanaka in the Hawaiian past, present, and future. Just as Osorio highlights in the Hi'iaka and Hōpoe mo'olelo, a rootedness in the aina becomes a rootedness to one another. If our aloha knows no bounds, no gender nor sexuality, the capacity for its healing powers is immeasurable. Aikāne mo'olelo breathes life into the Queer Kanaka aloha that lives today, reinstating Queer aloha as an important expression of connection.



Decolonizing the Wāhine Body and Reclaiming a Queer Sovereign Erotic

As an extension of the land, female bodies have been used as a tool of oppression to be conquered, owned, controlled, and used to fortify the creation of the nation-state. By reclaiming the erotic as a source of power, a praxis is forged to regain sovereignty over one's Queer body

and in turn work towards a decolonized lāhui.²⁸ No'u Revilla's collection of poetry titled *Ask the Brindled* confronts the exploitation of Kanaka wāhine's bodies and access to desire by colonial violence, specifically through the lens of being a Queer femme. Her poem "Don't have sex with gods" is a politic of refusal to allow religious dogma to obstruct her expression of sexuality. She starts the poem by reflecting on the relationship between female bodies and land in the process of religious colonization writing, "they hand me Bibles, / build church pews between my legs" (20). Revilla hones in on the compounded effects of missionaries imposing christianity in Hawai'i. Just as they exploited the `āina to build their churches, the heteronormative binaries that they enforce are an assault on the Indigenous body, conveyed through the imagery of church pews between the speakers' legs. Dan Taulapapa McMullin's poem "Fa'a Fafine Poem Number Eleven" reflects a similar relationship between missionaries and the people of Sāmoa: "everyone sang Samoan pese hymns / exchanging puns of the body for verses / ...with christianity, curses are directed to the other's body" (53). McMullin conveys the notion that human connection (puns of the body) between Sāmoans was replaced by what is imposed through the bible. They assert that it is not Fa'afafine that are the malas, but rather the true curse is the infringement upon Sāmoan bodies to receive and celebrate pleasure with one another. Across the Pacific, Revilla communicates this same notion. Female bodies are needed by christianity, as mothers, to physically gestate and birth the nation-state and children who will perpetuate it and to sustain the nuclear family system. Thus, a woman's sexuality is only a vehicle for colonized reproduction, and must always be heterosexual. As Christ Finley highlights in "Decolonizing the Queer Native Body (and Recovering the Native-Bull Dyke) Bringing Sexy Back and Out of Native Studies"

²⁸ Lāhui can translate to nation, people, or nationality.

Closet,” “Without heteronormative ideas about sexuality and gender relationships, heteropatriarchy, and therefore colonialism, would fall apart” (34). By understanding the way that women as wombs are used as a colonist tool, by refuting biological heterosexual relationships, the Queer femme empowers the collapse of the occupied state.

Revilla continues this reclamation of the female erotic by rooting her sexuality to Kanaka cosmology and `āina. She continues, “I use my rosary as rope / the way Maui hauled the sun, / the way Maui hauled the islands” (20). Revilla asserts that christianity, symbolized through the rosary, can be used as a tool to reclaim Hawaiian identity. Refuting the idea that a singular God created the world and proposed the colonial efforts argued through Manifest Destiny, by highlighting the mo`olelo of Maui, she merges Hawaiian cosmology with christian ideation. Aligning herself with Hawaiian cosmology and its `ike,²⁹ she ends the poem by sharing, “we’ve always had sex with gods” (20). Hawaiian cosmology accepts all expressions of aloha, in this case, specifically sexual ones. So, by reclaiming this cosmology, she reclaims sex as a sacred practice. Revilla continues to highlight the relationship between ones body, `āina, and sexuality when she writes, “If `āina is that which feeds, / if aloha `āina is love and lover of land, / then she who feeds is she who fucks. / `Āina will fuck back” (20). If we live and are sustained through land, then we love through land as well. Dr. Osorio asserts that Hi`iaka and Hōpoe’s connection, “enact all the possibilities of pleasure between our bodies [demonstrating how] `āina grounds that pleasure to be shared and treasured between us” (91). From Hi`iaka and Hōpoe to Revilla and her lover, aloha is utilized, not in a way that promotes meekness and docility, but as a tool

²⁹ Perceptions, or knowledge

for resistance and aloha `āina<sup>30</sup>. Just as aikāne relationships demonstrate how aloha has no bounds, Revilla demonstrates the multitude of ways that aloha can be expressed. From Hawaiian cosmology to the Hawaiian reverence for `āina, aloha has been a consistent methodology for Kanaka. Thus, the lines between body and land, and care and sex, blur, in order to refute a Christian sexual binary and embrace the Queer Indigenous erotic.

Similarly, her poem “So sacred, so queer” communicates the Queer erotic through language of creation and `āina that rejects the Christian belief that a heteronormative relationship is necessary to create life. One poem stanza reads, “so sacred / a ceremony / when she plants / my fingers / **in dirt** / she / makes / us feel / like / creation / so queer” (34). Conveying her and her lover's connection through a ceremony of creation, the imagery of fingers penetrating into dirt connects their expression of eroticism to the `āina. Just as Hi`iaka and Hōpoe’s physical expressions of aloha are depicted through the creation of a lehua grove and consequent lei-making, Revilla expresses her and her lover’s experiences through a sacred creation ceremony. Her poem continues, “**so queer** / fingering / creation / mai ka pō / mai burials / protect / dirt / from / shame / **we keep** / the water / **coming** / so sacred / so queer / so queer / **so sacred**” (34). Once again conjoining the erotic imagery of fingering with imagery of creation through burials and creation, Revilla cements the notion that Queer love is both a sacred expression of aloha and connection, and rooted in the perpetuation of the `āina. While christianity asserts that heteronormative cisgendered relationships are necessary for procreation, and the length to which sex may be exercised by a woman is to get pregnant, Revilla offers the contrasting Hawaiian belief that Queer relationships create a form of life themselves. Although not in the form of a

³⁰ Aloha `āina is a love of the land or of the country

physical biological child, the love between Queer Kanaka creates the essence of life and births its own mana. As demonstrated in *Puzzy* with Mele's internal demons, christianity and its many denominations inflict immense shame for expressions of female sexuality, especially those that are Queer. Thinking through the equation of Queer relationships and 'āina, Revilla's protest to "protect / dirt / from / shame" comments on how reclaiming Queer relationships and their erotic expressions protects Queer Kanaka from feeling the colonial legacy of this shame. These relationships, like the dirt, should be protected from shame, and like the water, should be allowed the space to continue to flow into existence.

Simultaneously, the visual form of the poem focuses on the erotic as a critical expression of Queerness that works to reclaim sovereignty over the Wāhine body. With certain words in each stanza placed in bold, if readers extract the bolded words, another stanza is built that continues to argue the sacredness of eroticism in Queer relationships. The extracted lines read, **"So sacred / so queer / so queer / so sacred / to grope / origin stories / in dirt / we keep / coming / so sacred"** (34). Hi'iaka and Hōpoe's sexual experiences together created waves in the ocean, and Revilla "grope" these origin stories to bask in the sacred nature of Queer pleasure. As Daniel Heath Justice argues that "To ignore sex and embodied pleasure in the cause of Indigenous liberation is to ignore one of our greatest resources... Every orgasm can be an act of decolonization," Revilla's defiant insistence that her and her lover "keep / coming" reclaims sovereignty over her Queer body and its capacities for the erotic ("RE-generation," xxi). The visual presentation of the concrete poem continues this reclamation of the erotic as an act of Indigenous liberation. The poem stanzas build in length from left to right, beginning from two lines and ending at 17 and open into a sideways "v." Like the wa and the artwork that adorns kapa cloth, the open spaces in between the text and the page are utilized to produce new

meaning, by creating the visual image of a pair of legs opening. This is read as another example of how an embodiment of the space between, that the wa conceptualizes, creates deeper meaning. Moreover, the building line length from the left to right mimics the building of a climax reached, once again asserting that Queer erotic orgasms are an act of resistance itself. By equating the end of the poem with an orgasm, Revilla asserts her poem is a creation that is brought to life from Queer love. Ultimately, Revilla's poems explore how the pleasure shared between Queer Kanaka create and sustain life, decolonizes the female body, and reclaims the Queer erotic as a source of power to embody in the path towards sovereignty. As Audre Lorde writes that, "The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge," by reclaiming

so sacred so queer	so queer my afterbirth planted so sacred	so sacred I learn to grope for her in dirt our fingernails before and after so queer	so queer I learn to bury origin stories that do not want me in her hands I learn return is so sacred	so sacred a ceremony when she plants my fingers in dirt she makes us feel like creation so queer	so queer fingering creation mai ka pō mai burials protect dirt from shame we keep the water coming so sacred so queer so queer so sacred
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Figure 8: "Revilla's poem, "So sacred, so queer" (Revilla)

the erotic as a power source wāhine
take control of their deepest capacities
of power and knowledge to reclaim
sovereignty of self and nation (24).
Indigenizing the concept of women
used as wombs to birth the colonial
new world, Revilla demonstrates how

wāhine's erotic selves birth myriad possibilities of sovereignty.



Serving "Indragenous" Realness

From Hula to Drag, the act of performance for Mahū has been a significant space to express and further claim cultural belonging. A collection of Mahū voices in `Ōahu, the book titled *O Au No Keia*, translating to "This is Me," includes a Mahū figure in each chapter that

shares their perspective or experience of being Mahū in Hawaiʻi. Similarly to *Samoan Queer Lives*, author Andrew Matzner collects the voices of Mahū in contemporary Hawaiʻi as an act of restoration. Featured in the book is Wong-Kalu, who designates Mahū as integral cultural practitioners of Hawaiian culture through hula: “In order to truly understand the meaning of *hula*, you have to be in both worlds. In order to interpret the poetry. In order to understand or even to receive some of these things...[Mahū] have the sensitivity for caring and the soft side that is more associated with *wahine*. Yet they have enough aggressiveness and enough strength - the backbone side” (225). Just as the god/dess of Hula, Laka, is a mixed gendered being, they express how being Mahū allows for an encompassed understanding of Hula, as an art of poetry, that isn’t as successfully understood by men or women. She asserts that by being in “both worlds” Mahū have a balanced energy that may be channeled through Hula. Similarly, the children’s book *Hoʻonani Hula Warrior* follows the story of a young Mahū, who, born as a wāhine, discovers this power when they lead their school’s kane hula. Facing backlash from family members and confusion from the other kanes, Hoʻonani is designated the kane’s leader because of their strength and steadiness, conveying the innate prowess Mahū possess for the art form. After leading the hula, the book closes, “Hoʻonani had found her place. Not as a wahine, not as a kane, but as a hula warrior” (Gale). From the moʻolelo of the Hula god/dess Laka, to Wong-Kalu’s interview, and the moʻolelo of Hoʻonani intended for contemporary keiki³¹, what becomes abundantly clear is that occupying a place in the middle isn’t abnormal or “queer,” but rather an important cultural locality for Kanaka. Not as a gendered or sexual identity, but as holding a specific responsibility to the reproduction and perpetuation of Hawaiian culture, the

³¹ Children

importance of Mahū is enlightened. Moreover, the importance of cultural practices and performances, like Hula, as spaces for Mahū to claim and express this purpose is elucidated.

Just as many aspects of Hawaiian culture have been commodified to present the island as a tropical oasis for tourists, the cultural importance of Hula has unfortunately been sexualized and commodified to please the white male gaze. Thus, by refuting the performance of hula, and serving “indragenous” realness, Mahū Drag Queens actively refuse the bastardization of this cultural custom, finding new ways to express themselves as Mahū. In *Defiant Indigeneity The Politics of Hawaiian Performance* Stephanie Nohelani Teves coins the term Indigenous realness as “a performance of indigeneity that builds upon popular cultural perception, yet at the same time prioritizes Indigenous knowledge and belonging rather than the obliterating force of colonialism that seeks to erase the diverse expressions of indigeneity that both challenge and authorize indigeneity itself” (90). She pays particular attention to how aloha is or isn’t expressed as a cultural identity, and argues that Drag Queen Cocoa Chandelier’s refusal to meet the colonial expectation to perform “Hawaiianess” is as an “evasive mode of performance that prioritizes Hawaiian forms of belonging and recognition, which get interrogated and affirmed in performance space” (84). Conjoining Yuki Kihara’s term “Indragenous,” that is used when discussing the popular Drag pageants for fa’afafine in Sāmoa, with Reve’s “Indigenous realness,” I argue that serving “Indragenous” realness becomes an epistemological basis for understanding how occupying a gendered place in the middle is materialized in the modern world. It addresses how globalization, the effects of past or current colonization, and the LGBTQ+ movement’s progress entangles with the Indigenous expressions of third genders or sexual variance. Not all Mahū identify with or express themselves through Drag, however the presence of Drag throughout Oceania is undeniable, thus a critical aspect to the lives of Queer

Oceania. Serving “indrigenous” realness isn’t a blanket ideology to project onto every Mahū, but rather a useful framework to discuss instances of the ways that U.S. culture has entangled itself into Oceanic expressions of self through colonization. Thinking through serving “Indrigenous” realness reveals various ways that the Western LGBTQ+ movement has impacted the expression of Mahū in Hawai‘i.

An important instance of this tension is revealed through the notion of realness itself. Once again moving to the ballroom scene, realness is an important ideology and standard for Queer people to utilize in conveying their chosen gender expression. Oftentimes the categories of Drag balls are measured based on how the Queen is able to sell the realness of her image. Most importantly, realness in the world is a means to protect themselves from trans or queerphobic abuse. If a Queer person can pass as a cisgendered man or woman, they avoid the statistically higher abuse experiences by the Queer community. Marlon Bailey describes realness as an analytical concept emergent from ballroom culture that considers the tensions of intersectional identities:

Realness requires adherence to certain performances, self-presentations, and embodiments that are believed to capture the authenticity of particular gender and sexual identities. These criteria are established and function within a schema of race, class, gender, and sexual identities. Racialized, classed, gendered and sexualized performances, self-presentations, and embodiments, to a large extent. Give realness its discursive power in both the ballroom scene as well as in society at large. (Bailey)

Realness, in the U.S., is an important consideration of how race, class, and gender and sexual identities impact the power of realness both in the ballroom scene and within quotidian life. The desire for realness to be used as a means to protect oneself from trans or queerphobic abuse

speaks to the way that those who don't fit into heteropatriarchal identities are mistreated in American society.

These repercussions of Queerness migrate from the U.S. to Hawai'i through the militarization, exploitation, and touristification of the 'āina. Because of the militarization of the island, an increased number of U.S. military men on the islands resulted in an increase in the demands and dangers of sex work. In her chapter of *O Au No Keia*, Kauai writes, "I went to Wahiawa, where it was about being as presentable as you can be, You've got to look as womanly as you can because the military men up there don't like the fag, don't like the stigma. But, if you look real enough, they'll take that blowjob...So it's all about deceiving. You had to play that role to get your money" (94). Kauai's experience of being Mahū and engaging in sex work that services U.S. military men uncover how the larger socio-political climate of the nation-state affects how she expresses and embodies her liminal gender. Because the same men on the continental U.S. who Queer Americans must pass to protect themselves from, now occupy Hawai'i Nei, Mahū must adopt the survival techniques of the LGBTQ+. Haunani-Kay Trask contends that the stated militarization, commodification, and tourification of Hawai'i is ultimately a prostitution itself of Hawaiian culture:

Hawai'i itself is the female object of degraded and victimized sexual value. Our 'aina, or lands, are not any longer the source of food and shelter but the source of money...Just as the pimp regulates prices and guards the commodity of the prostitute, so the state bargains with Developers for access to Hawaiian land and culture... Hawaiians, meanwhile, have little choice in all this. We can fill up the unemployment lines, enter the military, work in the tourist industry, or leave Hawaii. Increasingly, Hawaiians are leaving, not by choice but out of economic necessity. (144-145)

Revilla's work thinks of the female body as an extension of 'aina, and similarly Trask positions the 'aina as a woman being prostituted by a pimp. She touches on the pervasiveness of U.S. occupation by demonstrating how the commodification and tourification of Hawai'i acts as a blockade between Kanaka Maoli, their ancestral lands, and their Indigenous expressions of being. The economic necessity that Trask discusses reveals how sex work is an avenue for Mahū to make money in whatever way they can to afford living in 'paradise.' Just as the land has been utilized as a capitalistic tool, the lives of Mahū become steeped in the commodification of their bodies. Moreover, the percentage of Mahū that engage in sex work within areas that are known to be full of military patronage, reveals how the militarization of Hawai'i has affected all aspects of Hawaiian culture, specifically in this case, the commodification of sex.³² Trask's analogy of Hawai'i's occupation as prostitution, reveals how sex work itself is a colonial byproduct. U.S. Occupation has necessitated avenues of income like sex work through the commodification of the land, and furthermore supplied the patronages of such work through the militarization of the land. Ergo, Mahū become caught in the cog wheel of the colonial empire.

An additional expression of serving "Indragenous" realness for contemporary Māhu is the choice to physically and biologically embody one's gender expression by transitioning with the use of hormones. In Paige's section of the book, she describes a conversation between herself and an elder Mahū in which she tells her Kupuna, "I wanted to be like you, but I just didn't know how. How do you get yourselves looking so real," to which they responded, "*Hormones, Mary, Hormones*" (143). The conversation regarding hormones, for both Fa'afafine and Mahū, is

³² For further reading, Cynthia Enlowe's *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* surveys how women's lives become militarized.

another avenue of analyzing one's ability to serve “Indragenous” realness. This insistence for realness, often isn't a source of validation for oneself, but rather a way to meet the marks of a Western binary gendered system. Many of the Mahū and Fa`afafine featured in Matzner and McMullin and Kihara's books discuss their families' knowledge of their gender identity from a young age. Since these roles are bestowed upon those that exist in the middle by the community that they are bestowed the responsibility to be of service to, there isn't a necessity to pass as 'real.' These communities don't insist on the performance of either gender, rather, their gender expression is identified through their inner essence and mana. The ideal of passing and realness, reasserts the notion that there is a problematic way to present one's gender. Seeking Western validation, through the use of hormones or various means to pass as real, reflects the imposition of Western ideologies regarding gender and sexuality on Oceania's Queer³³. The American Queer face constant consequences for not adhering to the Western binary, necessitating the labor of passing to be legible as a viable person in society. However, the familial based identity and acknowledgment of Mahū or Fa`afafine circumvents these efforts. Mahū have been real since they arrived on the shores of Waikīkī with the Healing stones, and continue to be real in contemporary Hawai`i. The imposition of passing as real is then understood as a consequence thwarted upon Mahū for not complying to a Western gender binary.

Serving “Indragenous” realness locates the tensions between Kanaka `ike of gender and

³³ I'm not interested in analyzing the ethos of Mahū or Fa`afafine taking Hormones to transition, rather analyzing how these embodiments of gender migrate from the West to Oceania. I approach how, Mahū, Fa`afafine, or any gender liminal person, embodies their gender with the utmost respect.

sexuality and the heteropatriarchal dogma of the West to consider decolonial ways to move forward. Drag and drag pageants are an important avenue to express an individual's gendered identity, especially for those that exist somewhere in the middle. The validity of Queer Hawaiians realness has been erased through the process of colonization from Hawaiian cosmology, but by reclaiming sovereignty over Queer mo`olelo, erotic bodies, and performance, we may reclaim Queer Kanaka and refute the Western insistence of legitimacy. Teves writes that Cocoa Chandelier's Drag identity, "challenges the so- called annihilating force of colonization, situating her (and the community she represents) as part of a proud Hawaiian genealogy that remains and did not exist in the shadows" (94). By bringing these expressions into the light and refusing to be cast in the shadows, this work may continue to create safe spaces where the only validity of Mahū "realness" needed will be their existence.



‘A‘ole i pau

Hawaiians' belief in the circularity of time offers an important view-point to engage with traditional mo`olelo. For Hawaiians, the past is physically in front of you because you can visually see and learn from the history of your Kupuna. Accordingly, the future is physically behind a person, since you could never know what will happen in the time that has not yet occurred (Buyers). This doesn't separate the past, present, and future, but rather grounds how one moves forward through what has happened before them. Queer mo`olelo are important instances of Hawaiian ideologies of aloha as a methodology to create and sustain connection between Kanaka. However, it is not enough to think of Queer identities and sexualities as existing in or from the past. Recovering these stories to provide a place of refuge for

contemporary Queer Kanaka, and the ways that serving “Indrigenous” realness can provide a framework to continue the decolonial work for Queer Kanaka of the future, refutes the colonial notion that these expressions of being are remnants of the past.

Imagining what Indigenous futures we, as ancestors, must work towards for future generations calls attention to what directions Queer Oceanic scholarship must move towards. What does it mean for there to be an ongoing entanglement between the LGBTQ+ movement of the West and manifestations of these expressions in Hawai`i? The term Queer itself continuously falls short of capturing the gender and sexual expressions of Hawai`i, leaving room for the necessity of new language. So, what cultural and linguistic direction can we go to fill in this dissonance?

In closing, the Sāmoan net casting practice designates each individual member as integral to the success of the community and by utilizing this ideology, revealing across the Moana the importance of developing a cohesive coalition between Kanaka in Hawai`i and in the Diaspora. While many Kanaka Maoli live in the diaspora and this number continues to grow, what responsible mediums of translation are available to allow traditional mo`olelo's true mana to be accessible to those who have been displaced, or through the process of colonization, have found homes in various corners of the world? The research I have engaged in has been rooted in the `ike of a few family members that have held onto Hawaiian traditions to pass down and through the research privileges that I've had access to from attending a prestigious institution. These intersections of privilege are important to analyze in order to pave the way for accessibility of this mana across the Diaspora. Reclaiming sovereignty over Hawai`i Nei is directly tied to the creation of such connections. It is tied to reclaiming sovereignty over Kanaka Maoli, as humans, who have boundless possibilities to express and receive aloha. To aloha `aina, is to tend to the

relationships between Kanaka that live in the wounds of colonialism. To reclaim our Queer and our erotic, is to reclaim the essence of Hawai'i Nei. Our capacities for aloha will always trump colonial capacities for violence, and doing this work will ensure that our future generations live in the rapture of this aloha and not in the torment of colonial violence.



Conclusion

The resilient efforts of Tagata Sāmoa and Kanaka Maoli ancestors to refute Queer erasure has laid the groundwork for contemporary Pasifika peoples to further build upon. By reclaiming our islands as safe homes for the gender and sexually liminal of Oceania, we reclaim our ability to move forward as a cohesive and unified community. Queer Oceania, as healers, cultural keepers, and caretakers, are only able to share these gifts with the rest of the Moana if we continue to fight for their rightful position in our villages. By continuing to discuss the ways that colonial powers attempted this erasure, from the bible to translation methods, Indigenous peoples' knowledge of the colonizer's tools will continue to propel us forward in dismantling them. Through the active efforts towards decolonizing colonially and religiously inflicted dogma, we work in our ancestors' path to continue to protect our land, our seas, our cultures, and our people. I was raised to always leave things better than how I found them, and it is with this foundation that I hope we continue to move our people forward and heal the various wounds colonialism has inflicted upon us. I look forward to moving this scholarship further along its voyage across Oceania, taking into account how each beautiful island in “our sea of islands” expresses gender and sexuality in the formation of creating connection. From Aoteraora and

Tahiti's specific manifestations of Mahū, to Tonga's fakaleiti, I hope that we continue to spread this specific instance of decolonization and reclamation across the beautiful Moana. Closing with the words of Epeli Hau'ofa as he watched Pele create new land, "Oceania is vast. Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us...we must wake to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us...we must not allow anyone to belittle us again" (39). Oceania is as boundless as her peoples' expression of gender and sexuality. May we continue to rise from our depths and break the pedagogies that try to confine us.



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