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Cultural Embodiment, Acceptance and Rejection: an analysis of Fa'afafine gender expression in Christian Samoa

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Cultural Embodiment, acceptance and rejection

An analysis of Fa'afafine gender expression in
Christian Samoa

Master thesis Veerle de Boer





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Thesis abstract

The Fa'afafine, which roughly translates to 'in the spirit of a woman', are a group of feminine expressing, gender non-conforming people living on Western Samoa. If anything is known about Fa'afafine, it is often the idealized image of them living openly in an accepting society. While Fa'afafine are often regarded as a point of cultural pride, further research reveals that their acceptance is met with resistance from the strong Christian influence in Samoa. While earlier studies have tended to interpret Fa'afafine gender expression in relation to sex and sexual relationships, this study applies Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to explore Fa'afafine gender expression beyond the confines of sexuality. The research argues that Fa'afafine gender expression is both a fluid gender expression and an embodiment of Samoan cultural norms. For Fa'afafine this means that they have gained societal acceptance by contributing to Samoan society through their embodiment of Samoan culture. However this has not extended to the acceptance of their desire for relationships, which is heavily opposed by the Christian church. This thesis is a companion to the audio-visual component of the research, my ethnographic film called *Caregiving Fa'a Samoa* (De Boer, 2025) and sets out to deepen the main topics of the film. The film centres on the connection between Fa'afafine and the Samoan ideal of reciprocity, a focus that this thesis expands upon in greater depth. It is argued that Fa'afafine have come to embody the Samoan idea of reciprocity to such an extent that being Fa'afafine comes with the responsibility to live up to the ideal. The Christian church's resistance to Fa'afafine having public relationships is analysed through the theory of incommensurability. It is argued that the conceptual framework of Samoan Fa'afafine cannot be translated to the Western, Christian understanding of homosexuality. Therefore, the two understandings coexist but do not interact, which ensures that Fa'afafine acceptance within Christian churches has not improved as much as their acceptance in other aspects of Samoan society. Lastly, not being able to openly express their desires have led Fa'afafine to develop a coded language, which is analysed through theories around code and style switching. The thesis concludes that Fa'afafine gender is intrinsically linked to the Samoan culture, but since that culture is in some ways incommensurable with Christian religion, there exists an absence of public relationships in Fa'afafine lives. In this absence, Fa'afafine have developed unique

in-group behaviours, which further contribute to the uniqueness of Fa'afafine gender expression.

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I also want to thank Alex Su'a especially. As president of SFA (Samoan Fa'afafine organisation), Alex graciously welcomed me and participated in the research. In addition to this, Alex invited me to join the SFA retreat, an enormously valuable experience during which much of the fieldwork was done. A special thanks to Ice, the president of the Fa'afatama community, who broadened my perspectives and made me realise what future steps should be taken should this topic be revisited. All my other interlocutors deserve my deepest thanks as well. Ella, whose Ballroom workshops were truly wonderful. Natu, who I got to spend pleasant evenings with at their place. Manu and Kelly who were also at Natu's house when I was there and made the time there pass too quickly. Mekky and Polivia who I had very open conversations with. Jojo and Jhay wow, who are good friends of each other and made me feel like a friend too. Larisa and Sharon, who I was allowed to follow and film during their work. All the other Fa'afafine at the SFA retreat and at the ballroom workshops who I did not specifically interview but gave me the permission to be with them and allow me to do my fieldwork with them.

Another thanks goes out to Josephine, my host in Samoa. Not only was she an amazing woman, who I felt a true connection to, she also helped me in my research by contacting Alex for me and giving me additional reading material. Her husband, niece, mother, and friend were all similarly welcoming and I cannot thank them enough.

I want to thank Federico de Musso for supervising me during this process and helping me develop my project into something more. Nina Belzen, Lou Boshart and Karen Irina were both a great joy and a wonderfully insightful help during this process. All three of them together with Federico made the supervisory groups special and I extend this thanks to them. Lastly I want to thank my friends and family for helping me during this process. My dad for encouraging me during the hardest parts. My girlfriend Alisa for standing by me every single

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All of you,

Fa'afetai Lava!

Thank you so much!

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I was nervous when I journeyed to Samoa. I was traveling all around the world to follow a passion, because I felt a desire to finally do something I had been thinking of and had been imagining for years. What an exciting thing to experience! Getting to meet Fa'afafine, a community of feminine expressing, gender non-conforming people and a group of people whose existence helped me come to terms with who I was as a transwoman, made me excited and anxious. My fear of heights combined with a total flight time of around twenty hours does little to calm the nerves, especially when your luggage does not show up at the airport after all that.

However, I did not have to worry for long. Turns out that the people I met in Samoa were all very welcoming and helpful. Josie, my host, called the airport and I was driven back there to collect my luggage the next day. During our car-ride she asked me about my research and when she learned I wanted to talk to Fa'afafine she gave me a phone number. Josie and Alex were friends who knew each other through work. Only a few days later, I was sitting in Alex's office, discussing the ways in which this research could be best performed. Alex immediately came with new contacts, one of which was Gustav, who came with even more contacts and the snowball never stopped rolling. Even during my last week in Samoa I was still meeting new people interested in talking to me.

During my time there, all the Fa'afafine were immediately welcoming. It did take some more time spent together before the Fa'afafine started trusting me and revealing that behind a strong exterior a lot of struggle and pain was also being kept. It makes their strength in the face of significant struggle all the more encouraging.

1. Introduction, Gender enlightened and gender repressed

During the first week of my stay in Samoa, I was in a car with Theresa, one of the people who worked at the B&B I was staying in. She was aware of my research and had been trying to help me get in contact with some of her Fa'afafine acquaintances. Fa'afafine is broadly translated as 'in the spirit of a woman'. She spoke highly of the work the Fa'afafine were doing on the island. That particular night, however, whilst we were driving, she suddenly said to me: "Look, that is another 'Mala'". I did not yet know what a 'Mala' meant and when I asked Theresa she was cautious about explaining the meaning. "It's a bad word", she said, eventually going on to explain that it translated to something like 'diseased'. Later on, I learned from Manu, one of my Fa'afafine interlocutors, that the literal translation of 'Mala' is 'cursed'. This interaction shows the two sides of how Fa'afafine are viewed.

Professor of Comparative and Plural Laws Sue Farran describes the state of Fa'afafine acceptance in Samoa as 'Gender enlightened and gender repressed' (Farran, 2010, p. 13). During my stay in Samoa, this depiction of Fa'afafine acceptance was most clearly reflected during my fieldwork in Samoa. My research into Fa'afafine set out to investigate this claim further, as well as certain other claims that describe the conditions of Fa'afafine gender acceptance in a state of two worlds (Kanemasu & Liki, 2021). The argument that Farran makes is that while Fa'afafine find a certain acceptance and celebration within Samoan society, they also experience repression, mainly coming from Christian norms that have been introduced by colonization (Farran, 2010, p. 23). The way Fa'afafine gender expression can embody this paradoxical state of acceptance and repression is the main focus of my research. The primary output of this research is an Ethnographic Film. Judith Butler's theory of gender as an embodied performance that is historically situated was the starting point for analysing Fa'afafine gender expression (Butler, 1988). To be able to properly investigate this topic this research question was developed:

How do cultural identity and religion influence the gender identity/expression of Fa'afafine on Western Samoa?

The film, which is titled *Caregiving Fa'a Samoa* (de Boer, 2025) is in many ways an extension of Farran's claim and adds to it by arguing that, on the one hand, Fa'afafine have gained a position of social acceptance and even renown in Samoa by living up to and embodying the ideal of Samoan reciprocity, but on the other hand still face stigma coming from the Christian church. This stigma is most apparent when it comes to the aspect of having relationships, being able to openly express these relationships and to be able to maintain them.

One of the main driving forces behind this argumentation in *Caregiving Fa'a Samoa* was to have a qualitative research wherein the Fa'afafine agency is taken into consideration, wherein the aspects and subjects that they find important are highlighted. This is partly why the choice was made to avoid analysing Fa'afafine gender in terms of sex and sexuality, mainly because plenty of research already exists that does so like the research by Petterson and by Wallace (Petterson et al., 2020; Wallace, 2018). But also because some of this research gives the impression that Fa'afafine are primarily interesting as sexual objects to analyse other subjects through (Petterson et al., 2020). Petterson's research on what having sex with Fa'afafine means for the sexuality of the men that sleep with them is interesting, but I have not seen the reverse research analysing the sexuality of Fa'afafine in a similar vein. Moreover, other research makes claims about Fa'afafine that I found difficult to corroborate with my interlocutors, leading me to question whether the Fa'afafine themselves were adequately considered in that research. Vasey and VanderLaan argue that Fa'afafine are often the youngest brother in a household without daughters and that they are therefore an asset to the household as they can do the daughters' chores (Vasey & VanderLaan, 2007, p. 1441). Of the fifteen Fa'afafine interlocutors I engaged with during my fieldwork, only one was the youngest sibling. Even more so, some were the oldest sibling, some grew up in a household with several daughters and some grew up in households where several other siblings were also Fa'afafine. Most importantly, however, none of my interlocutors ever expressed any indication that the Fa'afafine identity was something that they felt was forced upon them. It was something they felt themselves from early on and acted upon even when some of my interlocutors met resistance.

It is important to stress this because narratives of gender non-conforming identities existing because of outside forces imposing upon children is all too common. While I do not question Vasey and Vanderlaan's intentions, articles in national news outlets directly about

Fa'afafine identities being forced upon children have been written already (*Fa'afafine*, 2013). These articles feed into the myth that claims that transgender- and gender non-conforming identities are not genuine identities, but sexual perversions or childhood delusions. This myth's main purpose is the defunding of gender affirming care (Shrier, 2021). Research that centers Fa'afafine sexuality, but does not center Fa'afafine experiences, also feeds into the myth of Samoa and Polynesia being characterised as sexually liberated societies. This characterisation has been a pervasive myth for a long time, even in anthropological research like that of Mead (Mead, 1928) and Malinowski (Malinowski, 2013), and feeds into stereotypes that justify ownership and colonization (Arvin, 2019, p. 3). Neither of these two myths benefit Fa'afafine in any way, nor is it focused on their lives, desires, concerns and prides.

In the end my interlocutors did talk about sex and sexuality and in some aspects it played a significant role for them. This was a possibility that this research has always taken into consideration, since gender and sex are often closely tied (Nancy, 2021, p. 44). But the ways in which my Fa'afafine interlocutors talked about this subject I had not seen written about in research. Their expression of desires for public partnerships without judgement were not present in many of the existing research papers about Fa'afafine. This shows the importance of centering their perspectives. It helps give voice to an underrepresented social group whilst also expanding the knowledge about that social group. In *Caregiving Fa'a Samoa*, my Fa'afafine interlocutors discuss topics like their desires and also other elements surrounding their identity such as their expression. It is made clear in the film that many of them live their lives according to the Samoan principle of reciprocity. Therefore, the denial of their sexuality and desires for public partnerships because of Christian norms causes them a great deal of frustration. The aim of this thesis is to explain the methodology of the film and deepen the argument of the film by discussing elements and topics that could not find their way into the film for practical or ethical reasons. The topics discussed include an in-depth examination of how Fa'afafine embody Samoan reciprocity; an analysis of the disconnect between Christian views of Fa'afafine and their cultural identity; and a discussion of how their desire for open sexual expression has contributed to the creation of a distinct in-group language. The aim of both the film and the article is to deepen the understanding of who Fa'afafine are as human subjects, attempting to debunk myths about their existence in order further their striving for a more emancipated identity within Samoa

2. To film or not to film: the methodological considerations of an ethnographic film

For this research, a qualitative approach was used that focused on participant observation, semi-structured interviews and conversational interviews. The research was conducted with the method of grounded theory wherein snowball sampling was used to find the right interlocutors to achieve theoretical saturation (Bryman, 2016, p. 381). In the end, snowball sampling led to this research including fifteen interlocutors, fourteen of whom were Fa'afafine and one Fa'afatama, which broadly translates to 'in the spirit of a man'. It should also be noted that sometimes Fa'afatama are included in the discussion as well. They and the Fa'afafine are closely linked identities that work together on many fronts. I did only have one interlocutor who was Fa'afatama, and thus this research cannot say confidently that all aspects related to Fa'afafine also apply to Fa'afatama. Aside from the one Fa'afatama interlocutor, I did meet some Fa'afatama during my stay and had some insightful conversations with them off the record. When Fa'afatama are mentioned in this article it is only when the aspects that are being discussed apply to both Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama, just as when they are not being mentioned it should be understood that the current discussion only applies to Fa'afafine.

For the choice to conduct this research with an ethnographic film as the intended output, I want to highlight the cross-cutting sequence at the end of the film (00:31:01-00:32:40) to explain the chosen medium. The last longshot of the two Fa'afafine performing in a dance battle on the last day of the workshops is cross-cut with images of the Fa'afafine at the closing show of the workshops. The short, snappy cuts of all the workshop participants in their performance outfits with their make-up perfected and the professional lights of the red carpet show is meant to represent their identity in a confident and prideful manner. The participants expressed that the workshops gave them the freedom and confidence to show themselves in such a manner. In their article "Feminist Sensory Ethnography Embodied Filmmaking as a Politic of Necessity", anthropologists Guzman and Hong explain the necessity to move away from classical observational methods in ethnographic filmmaking, which reinforces colonial legacies because it maintains a power imbalance between filmmaker and filmed. The filmmaker is the absent observer in the filmic

structure, while the interlocutors are the present subjects. Within this structure, the filmmaker hides their own involvement in the knowledge production and centres their own experience of the interlocutors as objective facts. However, when shifting towards ethnographic films that focus more on care, collaboration and subjectivity, the power imbalance is being addressed (Guzman & Hong, 2022). The interlocutors are able to represent their subjective world more with a more affective manner whilst the filmmaker is not hiding their hand in the process of the production. This is what the cross-cutting helps to highlight. The internal, subjective feeling is highlighted visually, and therefore with more affect, rather than having these internal feelings being expressed in text or voice over via an interview excerpt. Moreover, the artificiality of the crosscutting shows the hand of the maker of the film and therefore the role the maker has in organising the footage is not obscured.

In addition to techniques such as cross-cutting, group interviews are also present in certain portions of the film. Combined with voice-overs by the interlocutors themselves, these two elements provide the film with a sense of collaboration and narrative intimacy to ensure that the viewing audience is not looking at the interlocutors as passive objects. The goal of the structure of the film is not to tell a general narrative story but to create an argumentation that is created through 'databased representation' ('Transcultural Montage', 2013, p. 223). In 'databased representation', linearity and hierarchy are deemphasised in order for the analysis of the data that is shown within the film to gain more prominence ('Transcultural Montage', 2013, p. 224). Some narrative elements are still present in the film, such as opening the film with a musical sequence and ending the film with a musical sequence. Generally, the film moves non-linearly from one piece of visual data to another in order to create an argument.

Although the ethnographic film as a research method brought many advantages, there were also many other considerations that a filmic approach created. Upon starting the fieldwork, there was an awareness that the camera is always an intrusive object in the research and that the conditioning of the subjects to the camera would influence them in how they appear in front of it (Snowdon, 2017, p. 3). This is not to say there is a right or a wrong way to film or introduce the camera, but rather that the manner of introduction always influences the participants (Snowdon, 2017, p. 4,5). The reason to be aware of this intrusive element of the camera was a certain fear that the participants would have issues

with appearing in front of the camera. With the Fa'afafine being a minority group, there was the expectation that maybe being filmed could make them shy away from certain topics or representations, fearing potential problems from appearing in a way that would be frowned upon by others. Therefore, I would introduce the idea of filming to my participants gently, first having a few meetings without the camera and gauging their comfort level with the idea of being filmed. In reality the idea of the camera's conditioning as expressed by Snowdon was almost completely the opposite of what I expected. My participants had a general willingness to appear in front of the camera. They were excited by the idea of participating to the point that it was sometimes me that had to take a step back and consider if I should be filming or not. Moreover, non-interlocutors also felt excited to appear in front of the camera, with the result that some plans for filming certain events had to be disregarded or adjusted on the fly because the surrounding people would willingly walk into the shot to be filmed or ask for their picture to be taken whilst I was filming something else. One stand out moment was when I was filming at a church service where all the children in attendance could not get enough of the camera, and were constantly attempting to be included in the shots. In the end, I took photographs of almost everybody and sent them to my interlocutor who is from the village and part of the (church) community. This excitement for the camera meant that I had to always maintain a level head whilst filming, because I had to be the one to keep in mind certain ethical dilemmas. Of course I could always decide not to include shots in the edit, but I still wanted to ensure I avoided filming subjects who may be negatively impacted to avoid the possibility of including them entirely. For example, one of the Fa'afafine who I was introduced to was fairly young and came from an abusive household. The other Fa'afafine seemed to sometimes laugh at her occupation as a sex worker. She appeared genuinely excited to be filmed, but I was unable to have a meaningful conversation with her to address certain discomforts. As a result, I felt that filming her carried the potential to cause her harm. This made me decide to try and exclude her from filming entirely, in order to protect her, even though she was a willing and enthusiastic participant.

The comfort with the camera also influenced the filming style. At first, the idea was to make a 30 minute documentary following the observational style of cinema, as explained by Bill Nichols (B. Nichols, 2017). The observational style is also understood as the fly-on-the-wall method, meaning that the maker only or mostly uses diegetic sound, is absent from

the film and that there is largely no editing interference with the chronology. Whilst this is still sometimes present in certain sequences of the film, it became apparent in the field that following a fly-on-the-wall method was not going to work. My participants would talk to me standing behind the camera almost throughout the entire fieldwork period. They would pose, smile and wave, even when I tried to keep my distance by zooming in from across the space. I adjusted the filming practice quickly, embracing that there would be more interaction with the camera. It did mean that my presence was felt more in the filming, something I wanted to avoid out of fear that I would make the film too much about me. However, the final result was often interesting in its own right, having on-camera conversations sparked by questions my participants had for me and me being able to come up with spontaneous questions for them because of that. For instance, one of my participants asked me about certain medical treatments I have had as a transwoman, which sparked a conversation about what kind of medical treatments they would want and are available to them, in the process revealing the wide range of feelings Fa'aafine have about medical transition. In a sense, my interlocutors willingness to engage with me and appear in front of the camera actually helped the final product feel more collaborative in the way Guzman and Hong advocate for, since their interaction with me both emphasised the relationality between filmmaker and subject and added additional informational depth (Guzman & Hong, 2022).

This does not mean that the approach was not still observational. It was however not observational in the way Bill Nichols described it. Instead, my way of filming is more embodied and so follows more in the tradition of a cinema vérité style in which there is an awareness that the camera makes the filmed reflect on themselves differently than when they are not (Postma, 2021, p. 116). With the camera sometimes appearing and the interactions and dialogue I have with my participants, the observational style is more relational and present, rather than absent and omniscient ('Transcultural Montage', 2013, p. 227). Even at certain points where I felt it was appropriate to maintain my distance more during the filming, the chosen editing style of those scenes makes them feel as if the audience is still present in the space. The ballroom workshops I attended felt like a moment that was specifically designed to function as a safe space for free expression given to young Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama. I stayed more in the background to not take up room in the dance studio. I did however use my zoom to make my camera feel very close to the action of

the scene, giving the scene a more intimate feeling. Moreover, whilst editing the sequence, I am relying on crosscutting and jumps in chronology to give the scene more of an emotional presence that is true to the feelings shared by the Fa'afafine within that space. This way of editing the scene was inspired by Metje Postma reflecting on her scene *of Men and Mares*. "Making a film about the way of life of people requires the logic by which they live and connect these practices and not the logic of these practices themselves" (Postma & Crawford, 2006, p. 350). Postma makes the case that it is not the ins and outs of the mechanics of certain practices that is important, but the moments and events that your participants describe meaning to. Accordingly, the editing in this film intentionally departs from the conventions of Nichols' observational mode - particularly its avoidance of spatial and temporal intervention - when doing so more accurately conveys the emotional and expressive realities of the interlocutors.

3. The ideal of reciprocity within Fa'afafine community

3.1 Social acceptance through labour

Setting out on my research, I was well aware that I should be expecting to find not just the standard embodied performance of gender to be a determining factor, but that I should also be aware of the modes of expression that have not been addressed yet by Judith Butler] (Butler, 1988). Modes such as non-expressive modes(Awinpoka Akurugu, 2021), affective modes (Salih, 2017) or other modes that have not been researched in detail before. My first encounter with these other modes of gender expression was as soon as I got picked up from the airport by my host Josie, who asked me about my research and immediately started sharing useful information. According to Josie, Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama were an admirable group of people. Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama were on the frontline when it came to any kind of social movement, always advocating for other people's rights. In addition to this, Josie told me that they were considered hard workers and always gave back to their communities. For example, she told me that her friend Alex, the president of SFA who became one of my interlocutors, was a human rights lawyer and was always willing to help.

Upon meeting and interviewing Alex, it was made clear to me, however, that while Fa'afafine were always willing to help, that help was not necessarily a complete act of generosity. 'Reciprocity' or the Samoan term 'Feosia'i', Alex told me, is one of the main pillars of 'Fa'a Samoa', meaning 'the Samoan way of life' (00:14:48-00:15:29). This 'reciprocity' is referenced on multiple occasions in the film. One notable example is when Mekky and Polivia are decorating the church and Mekky talks about why they do this kind of labour:

"The other purpose of this, you know. This is how all of the Fa'afafine in Samoa earn money, for decorations of an occasion. This is a source of income for us, another source of income. This is one thing that some people, some of the society respect us, because of this kind of job. Even if we are not going to go to church every Sunday, but this is one of our contributions to the church, is to decorate." - Mekky (00:12:02-00:12:57)

The work Mekky and Polivia are doing is done by a request of a friend, who is well aware that Fa'afafine are known to be the best at this kind of labour in Samoa. When looking at reciprocity in labour practices, there is generally a distinction between what is called exchange labour and feast labour, in which the difference is what kind of reciprocity is expected (Provinse, 1937, p. 87). Research in South American reciprocal farm labour has shown that exchange labour is generally a more formal process where reciprocity is expected: the farmer asking for help is expected to provide food and drinks, and one day of work on his farm is expected to be returned with one day of work on the other's farm. Feast labour is generally less expectant of direct reciprocity, although it does tend to give one good social standing if they are often willing to help out (Erasmus, 1956, p. 445). This is similar to the act of gifting done in Oaxaca in Mexico, where the gifting of small objects or fruits is done somewhat randomly without an expectation of something in return. It is more an indication that one wants to continue a social relationship, so if the gift is reciprocated, it strengthens the social bond between the two parties (Beals, 1970, p. 232).

The above mentioned example of the decorative work the Fa'afafine do for the church is part of a reciprocity network wherein different expectations are at play. Mekky and Polivia expect direct payment, thus their labour is best qualified as exchange labour, as the friend knows that payment is expected and has to provide that part of the exchange or the labour is not happening. Mekky and Polivia, however, do the work to provide their village community with a gift, for which no direct reciprocity is expected, but it does help their social standing within the village. In addition to the previously mentioned authors' conclusions on reciprocal labour, for Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama there is a direct pathway to social acceptance through their labour and Samoa's understanding of reciprocity. As Natu states in the film:

"It's her (Sharon) contribution that the family were very appreciative of her. That she was bestowed a high chief (Matai) title in the family...So if you have this high title you get to be a decision maker in the village...For example, it's this circle of Matai that she's sitting in that do those village rules, policies... Sometimes they make decisions to ban- to ban out the Fa'afafine growing hair (long)... So the advantage of her being in this circle is to break that barrier back in the village." - Natu (00:16:36-00:17:40)

The reciprocity inherent in Samoan culture means that the work Fa'afafine do for their communities leads directly to them gaining positions of power that can influence the social freedom of Fa'afafine.

What should also be pointed out is that being Fa'afafine is intrinsically linked to the work they do. Samoan people who are not Fa'afafine that I have spoken to like Josie see Fa'afafine as possessing this inherent quality to help out. The labour Fa'afafine do is seen by someone like Josie as something they are especially capable of. Mekky and Polivia's friend who asked for their help was the one made responsible for decorating the church. She has the belief that Fa'afafine are more capable than others of that job and thus she asked her Fa'afafine friends to help her, indicating that the gender of Fa'afafine embodies a particular skill when it comes to labour of reciprocity. Research done on Palestinian women has argued that inherent to their gender expression is the bodily affect that they carry with them through the suffering they have endured. This 'affect' cannot be repressed by nationalistic framing, because it has no linguistic expression, and therefore cannot be narratively de-legitimised (Salih, 2017, p. 756). Or in other words, the pain visible in the Palestinian women's bodies through their gender expression is undeniable, which makes de-legitimising that pain through narrative argument impossible. Similarly to how Palestinian women's gender is irrevocably linked to their 'affect', Fa'afafine gender expression has been irrevocably linked to the Samoan ideal of reciprocity by their dedication to communally focused labour. It is a weight that the identity of Fa'afafine carries. Because the contribution to their communities is undeniable, the reciprocity they have earned is also undeniably deserved. This means that through embodying reciprocity in their gender expression, Fa'afafine have been able to improve their own social emancipation as well.

3.2 Limitations of the embodiment of societal values

The increase in social emancipation through reciprocity has ensured that Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama have gained a social status that I would describe as a conditional acceptance. While there are localised differences in the amount of openness and freedom with which they can express, they can generally operate their lives without too many direct

restrictions. However, on two main fronts this is not the case. General public relationships or even open expression of sexual attraction are, first, not generally accepted, and while some Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama have romantic partners, they cannot express their romantic relationships openly without backlash, mainly from the churches. This causes enormous frustration, because Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama are huge contributors to the churches, in labour as well as in financial means. But unlike their village communities, this is not reciprocated according to what is believed to be the Fa'a Samoan way. This frustration will be analysed further and expanded upon in the next chapter *Fa'afafine and incommensurability: A gift in disguise or a curse from god*. It is important to keep in mind however that the frustration that my participants held towards the church's lack of acceptance towards their desire for public relationships was because of how it seemed to go against their ideal of reciprocity.

The second way Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama expression is limited is also related to the ideal of reciprocity, but this time it is linked to the cultural meaning of their tattoos. When I was conducting my fieldwork in Samoa, I was quickly told that a Fa'afafine had recently gotten a 'Malu' tattoo. Which is a Samoan tattoo specifically designated for women (Mallon, 2002). Even before any Fa'afafine told me about it, I heard this story from someone working at a bar I visited often, and she told me how much she disapproved of it. I had expected my Fa'afafine interlocutors to be more accepting of it, but not a single one of my interlocutors was approving of this Fa'afafine getting the Malu. At that point I did not yet fully grasp the Samoan context of reciprocity and how it is not just something that exists in the moment but is also described as a dialogue between the living and the dead, between you and all those that came before you (Sua'ali'i-Sauni et al., 2018, p. 80). The Malu is not just a tattoo. Its design signifies a direct connection to one's female ancestors and holds great spiritual power in the eyes of Samoans. Receiving a Malu is part of the Samoan ideal of reciprocity because it places one as a direct part of a larger lineage and is a sign of upholding those same values in your generation (Ellis, 2006, p. 693). I did speak to the Fa'afafine who got the Malu tattoo and whilst she gave me permission to use her interview in this research, I will keep her name anonymous. She told me that the Malu was a sign that she was completely a woman. She had always dreamed of getting one ever since she was young and she is happy she now has it. It did cost her socially, as she feels rejected by the other Fa'afafine.

Interestingly, she then stated that she does not even identify as Fa'afafine anymore, but as a woman:

(Without) the (Malu) tattoo I feel the same as another Fa'afafine. When I (am) wearing a tattoo people are against me because the tattoo is not right to (wear for) a Fa'afafine... My rights and my business, my human rights, I accept the Malu.....
Because I am feeling (like) a woman - anonymous

Samoan Fa'afafine seem to embody the ideal of reciprocity in their gender expression to such an extent that they denounce other Fa'afafine who do not hold up the ideal, with the consequence that the one individual I met who went against the ideal stopped identifying as Fa'afafine. It showcases how intrinsically linked a person or a group's gender can be with a societal ideal. Being Fa'afafine means being a champion of 'Feosia'i', otherwise the gendered identity of Fa'afafine is not complete.

To summarise, the Fa'afafine identity has come to encompass the Samoan ideal of reciprocity. Their gender is intrinsically linked to this reciprocity, and because of the constant labour they perform for their communities they are widely known throughout Samoa as being especially gifted when it comes to certain forms of labour. However, this embodiment of reciprocity has not led to the Christian church returning this reciprocity by accepting the Fa'afafine desire for public relationships, which causes frustration within the Fa'afafine community. Moreover, the Fa'afafine gender embodies reciprocity to such an extent that Fa'afafine who do not live up to the ideal are sometimes excluded by the other Fa'afafine.

4. Fa'afafine and incommensurability: A gift in disguise or a curse from god

4.1 Incommensurability and social minorities

In this chapter, I will return to a topic present throughout *Caregiving Fa'a Samoa*. Namely, that the presence of Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama is at the same time described as a gift as well as a curse. This simple juxtaposition of two opposing descriptions of what Fa'afafine is and means to the community at large points to the seemingly paradoxical acceptance of Fa'afafine in Samoa. It is suggestive of the way Fa'afafine can and do express their identity openly yet do not have the luxury of extending that openness to their relationships, or the way that the reciprocal nature of Samoan society allows Fa'afafine to gain more influence within their village communities, but does not allow for more influence within the churches despite similar acts of generosity towards them. The opening quote of Farran rings true, that Fa'afafine exists at once as widely accepted and largely repressed (Farran, 2010, p. 13). According to existing theory and the information shared by my interlocutors, the main factor that holds Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama acceptance back is the Christian church. My interlocutors are, however, not atheists. It was common for my interlocutors to refer to God when talking about their identity, like Ice in the film saying:

“I am the gift from God... we are the gift from the man there” -Ice (00:27:13-00:27:55)

Their efforts are aimed at being included into the space of the church, rather than to create an opposition to it. Other gender and sexual minority communities have successfully incorporated their identities into their religious communities through, for example, new inclusive interpretations of the religious text (Gorsline, 1999, p. 114), or the creation of positive 'Countermythologies' that highlight queer identities within their theology (Golomski, 2020, p. 157). For example, the story of Mary seeing Jesus at the cross and Jesus saying to Mary 'Woman behold your son', which the Queer pastor David reinterprets as 'Everyone can be woman' as a reaffirming of transgender identities (Golomski, 2020, p. 161). However, whilst Fa'afafine have gained acceptance through the encompassing of Fa'a

Samoan reciprocity, the Samoan church still seems resistant to any desired inclusion. In doing so any 'Countermythologies' that Fa'afafine create are created outside of the spaces of the church and have no real way of finding their way into that space. To better understand this, I will apply the concept of incommensurability to what I have just described.

Incommensurability has been explained as 'a state in which two phenomena (or worlds) cannot be compared by a third without producing serious distortion' (Povinelli, 2001, p. 320). This understanding of incommensurability is used by Povinelli to discuss how fundamental conflicts of worldview can or cannot coexist besides one another. Explaining how in incommensurability, a social minority and a 'liberal governmentality' are made commensurable through a process of apologetic self-correction on the part of the 'liberal governmentality'. This governmentality justifies its lack of understanding towards the social minority as the liberal process towards progress. If the social minority wants access to that process they need to make themselves commensurable, the burden of making oneself understood onto the minority (Povinelli, 2001, p. 328). The implication is that the social minority is responsible for solving the incommensurability. If they do not do this, then the 'liberal self-correction' does not occur and the minority stays repressed and on the margins of society. Anthropologist Tom Boellstorff extended Povinelli's understanding of incommensurability to a situation wherein the two worlds remain at odds. In his research the worlds of being gay and being Muslim in Indonesia never find any reconciliation yet both remain in existence. According to Boellstorff, this incommensurability remains in inexistence because there is no public gay Muslim, nor is there any public debate about what homosexuality means to a Muslim world (Boellstorff, 2005, p. 576). The languages of *gay* and Islam are not being translated into each other according to Boellstorff. But the worlds do inhabit a shared space alongside each other similar to how a foreign film is dubbed over in an obvious way that does not match what the lips are saying. This could be seen as a failure but as Boellstorff points out: 'this "failure" is presupposed by viewers. Similarly, the simultaneous habitation of the categories *gay* and Muslim is self-consciously incomplete' (Boellstorff, 2005, pp. 582, 583). In other words, letting the categories of *gay* and Muslim cohabituate without trying to figure out how is what ensures that both can exist alongside each other without direct conflict.

The habitation of two incommensurable worlds is reminiscent of the way the

Polynesian identity is sometimes described as paradoxical (Arvin, 2019, p. 4). What can be described as the Polynesian identity has become a mix of values that are hard to detangle because of Western colonisation and the rapid conversion and adaptation of Christian values and gender norms (Meleisea, 1987, pp. 53, 67). This entanglement of values did not happen by accident, as Western colonisers found the Polynesian islands to be close to nature and idyllic (Beller & Leerssen, 2007, p. 219). Therefore, there was a push to claim relatedness to the people in order to justify the West's dominion over the islands (Arvin, 2019, p. 2). Now, Samoa has gained independence, and there is growing pride in reclaiming the Samoan way, or Fa'a Samoa (Meleisea, 1987, p. 153). Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama in some ways are part of that pride. However, the strict gender roles that came with the Christianisation of Samoa ensure that there is an incommensurability between these two worlds. Incommensurability, as discussed above, is useful for understanding how Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama explain their own gender identity within a broader context, but also for how there is an expression of frustration towards the Christian church and a desire for more acceptance within the space of the church. The Fa'afafine that I met are mostly religious themselves and desire access into the space of the church to be able to create their own 'countermythology'. However, if the church keeps their incommensurable worlds alive, this access does not exist and the opportunity for religious 'countermythologies' is denied to the Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama.

4.2 Fa'afafine identity and the Christian church

During my fieldwork, Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama did not understand their identity in any incommensurable way. It was broadly universal that the meaning of Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama was understood as 'in the spirit of a woman' and 'in the spirit of a man', alongside a cultural obligation towards their communities. As Alex Su'a says:

"We don't identify as such (transgender), because Fa'afafine comes with a cultural identity that attaches cultural obligations, duties and responsibilities..... It's almost like an unspoken choice. It's like a choice you didn't make but at the same time a

choice you made. For example when you decide to let go of having a husband, let go of having a partner but you really need to be the custodian of your families inheritance.” -Alex (00:02:33-00:03:05) (00:07:05-00:07:41)

This is generally how the Fa'afafine identity is understood by all interlocutors. Where the incommensurability comes in is during discussions placing the Fa'afafine and Fa'atama within the broader context of Western LGBT+ identities. Samoa and Fa'afafine are aware and in conversation with this different understanding of non-heteronormative identities but instead of squaring the differences up against each other, my interlocutors accepted that there might be overlap and/or incongruities and just let them exist. An especially interesting example of this is Ella, who has lived for large stretches of her youth in both Australia and Samoa and has grown up and accepted both of these different understandings surrounding her gender identity.

“...In Australia I identify just as a woman, to be specific a woman of trans experience, right? But in the Samoan context I identify as a Fa'afafine. So to a lot of people when they hear that they would be confused by that and I- and I used to be confused on how to explain that. But I've realised it's not my job to explain it or to justify it for people's gratification or understanding. For me, as long as I know how it works for me, that's how I move.” -Ella

Similarly to how 'gay' Muslim Indonesians let their identities have a cohabitation together without overlapping, Ella explains that she is not concerned with explaining the nuances surrounding her two understandings of her gender identity (Boellstorff, 2005, p. 582). The difference, however, is that Boellstorff explains that for 'gay' Muslim Indonesians, their two 'opposing' identities can cohabit because there is no public debate surrounding homosexuality and therefore there is no need to publicly square the two identities together (Boellstorff, 2005, p. 576), whilst for Ella and many other Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama LGBT+ is not an unspoken identity. Both understandings of gender identity are part of the public debate in Samoa, and while all interlocutors do define themselves according to one way, some of them do acknowledge that if they were born outside of Samoa they might have identified themselves differently. The caveat to this discussion is that it is incomprehensible to identify as transgender or gay or any other Western identity because that would ignore

the previously mentioned cultural meaning that Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama also encompasses. Ella explains that as soon as she started embracing her Samoan identity as a Fa'afafine and being crowned miss SFA (Samoan Fa'afafine association) she realised that she had to contribute to her community back in Samoa, otherwise she would not be taking her responsibility as a Fa'afafine seriously:

“To be Miss Fa'afafine has always been a dream. It's like one of the biggest honours... It's a legacy that has survived and thrived for years and years and years and to be reigning (Miss Fa'afafine) has literally been a dream come true... There is definitely a responsibility and a duty to serve and that is something that I have always wanted to do.” - Ella

Incommensurability is not a problem in relation to Fa'afafine being aware of a different understanding of gender expression and that somehow confusing their own relation to their identity. Incommensurability does, however, become problematic in relation to the Christian church. When I asked my interlocutors about the problems facing Fa'afafine, the main concern seemed to be the lack of acceptance for their relationships. Most Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama will face rejection or hate from the community if they and their partner decide they want their relationship to be public. Jojo told me a story at a bar where she recounted how she fell in love with a man on Savaii, the bigger island of Samoa. The man loved her back but when they wanted to move forward and be more public with their love, their parents rejected it, which eventually led to the man backing out of the relationship. The rejection was, interestingly enough, on the basis of it being a 'same-sex' and a 'homosexual' relationship. This seemed to be recurring. In the film, Ice talks about his difficult relationship to the church. The pastor often preaches hate and according to Ice, the words the pastor uses are 'gay marriage' and 'same-sex', not Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama. This is the refrain from my interlocutors. Their identity as Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama is not under attack from the church, the church is preaching against them having open relationships and using language based in a Western understanding of gender and sexual identity.

Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama have encountered this problem in the past before. When Samoa was part of the New Zealand government, a law that banned 'crossdressing' was used to try and suppress Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama identities from being able to freely

express themselves. This law was overturned in 2013 (McMullin & Kihara, 2018, p. 5). It serves as a textbook example of how incommensurability can function as a cudgel against a minority group. Povinelli argued that the 'modern liberal governmentalities' expect the minority group to make themselves linguistically understandable before they are welcomed into the process of liberal self-correction. She adds: 'By the time the legislative branch catches up, the law has already sentenced a generation to death' (Povinelli, 2001, p. 327). In this case, the 'liberal self-correction' came once Samoa became an independent state and the Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama were embraced as part of Fa'a Samoa. But in the period before independence, their identity was repressed through language that was incommensurable with their own self-conception. What is happening with the churches is similar. The desire of the Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama for free and open relationships is being challenged, but it is challenged based on a language that is incommensurable with theirs. Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama are expected to make themselves commensurable to the churches whilst they continue to struggle for public relationships. The frustration that is often expressed by the interlocutors towards the Christian church is exasperated by the fact that the Christian church seems to willingly misunderstand the identity of the interlocutors, by using a language and an understanding of sexual and gendered identity that is incommensurable with Fa'a Samoa to which the Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama feel connected.

It should be of note that, depending on the church, and especially the denomination of the church, there are differences in the relationship between churches and Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama. When looking at a denomination that outright banned Fa'afafine from entering the church - like the Mormon church - it is usually also the case that most Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama do not prescribe to that denomination's teachings. However, the largest denomination, the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa or *Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano*, which is a Samoan protestant denomination, still struggles with accepting open relationships for Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama. The one church communion I attended was of this congregation and my interlocutor who welcomed me, Gustav, who has a romantic partner, could largely not attend the communion because it was against the church's wishes that she would show up with her partner. Ice is also a member of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa and his frustrations at the church were represented in the film. While it seems that the churches are not uniform in their levels of acceptance towards

Fa'afafine and Fa'atama, even the most accepting of denominations cause frustration for my interlocutors.

4.3 Incommensurability within the Fa'afafine identity.

Incommensurability can also have the reverse effect. One Fa'afafine I met at the end of my stay in Samoa, and who will remain anonymous, confided in me that they do not just feel attraction towards men but also sometimes feel attraction towards women or other Fa'afafine. However, within the understanding of a Fa'afafine, it is assumed that their sexual identity is one that is attracted to men. This Fa'afafine struggled to find a way to express that they have this desire, and had difficulty admitting to their other Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama friends that this was the case:

'You know lesbian girls are a girl with another girl right? But when we see a Fa'afafine with a girl, it's kind of like we're not open minded about it. It's just because we are so grounded with how we feel' - anonymous.

This indicates that within the cultural understanding of Fa'afafine there are still individuals that feel excluded. However, what I also noticed is that the Fa'afafine of SFA, especially the younger generation, are attempting to overcome the incommensurability, similarly to how Ella embraced it, by urging SFA to champion gay marriage as one of their main goals to focus on in the next year. Similarly, the ballroom workshops given by Ella where a safe space for Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama expression, but Ella made it a consistent point to emphasise that other sexual and gender identities that did not feel comfortable with the Fa'afafine or Fa'afatama label were also welcome to participate. In embracing the incommensurability of the Christian church that is withholding them from open acceptance of their relationships, the Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama try to forge a part forward regardless, potentially including those who feel outside of the definition of Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama.

Fa'afafine and the Christian church conceptualise the existence of Fa'afafine in two different ways: Fa'afafine define themselves according to Fa'a Samoan ideals, and the Christian church defines them according to biblical homosexuality. The difference in the two

conceptualisations causes incommensurability, and so the emancipation of Fa'afafine stagnates. Within Fa'afafine circles there can also be incommensurability, as not every sexual- or gender non-conforming identity on Samoa fits into the definition of Fa'afafine or Fa'afatama. However, the younger generation has shown signs of overcoming this challenge of incommensurability by embracing the idea that there exist identities outside of their own and at the same time championing the rights of those identities as well.

5. Fa'afafine, language and attraction

5.1 The Fa'afafine dialect, mimicry and menace

I was aware that Butler's theory of gender performativity was an important base to work off but that her theory of gender performativity needed to be expanded by looking at the cases Butler did not take into consideration. One of the main points of expansion was the research on Daagaba women in Ghana and how their gender identity is defined by non-expressive modes as much as expressive modes (Awinpoka Akurugu, 2021, p. 59). What makes one a woman rather than a girl for the Daagaba was defined by marital status (Awinpoka Akurugu, 2021, p. 51). Butler's work had mostly focused on the historically situated bodily acts and gestures that constituted a gendered performance, not the interplay of other non-expressive factors (Butler, 1988, p. 522). In the case of Fa'afafine and Fa'atama, a lot of their gender identity and expression is expressive. However, for the Fa'afafine there was also a largely linguistic element that was part of their gender identity that bordered on the edge of expressive and non-expressive.

I was in a car with Manu, Natu and Kelly on the way to Natu's house. I was going to interview them there about the work they do at My Girls Club, a sister organisation of SFA. Our conversation was interrupted when a man on the side of the road walked by. He sparked a very vocal reaction in my companions who started to make appreciative sounds about him and his appearance. I do not have a grasp of the Samoan language and therefore in the beginning, I was merely interpreting what was being said by the intonation of their talk. It was not too difficult to decipher as the Samoan was accompanied by more universal catcalling sounds, such as making humming sounds in the way one would go when tasting something delicious. Eventually they did start talking to me in English about the man and they asked me questions about if I found the man attractive as well. I did not feel the most comfortable talking about my attractions, it is not something I do even back home, but there was a moment when I was trying to divert the conversation when Kelly said 'you have got to try a Samoan man before you go home', followed by a descriptive word of said man that I did not understand. I asked them if the descriptive word was a Samoan word and they answered by elaborately saying 'sort of'. Manu went on to explain to me that Fa'afafine have their own coded language that they use and that is shared widely between Fa'afafine,

but is not generally known by Samoans. I will call it the Fa'afafine Samoan dialect for the purpose of this thesis.

Manu went on to explain that the reason for coding their language in this Fa'afafine Samoan dialect is not used for general day to day activities, but particularly used for Fa'afafine to be able to talk about men they find attractive without getting unwanted ears listening in. This Fa'afafine specific Samoan dialect is unfortunately not something that can be properly analysed in a linguistic sense, as I lack the expertise. It is, however, possible to look at the function that it serves. It has often been analysed that social minorities will employ linguistic strategies that frustrate the dominant culture. For example, 'Spanglish' is the word that people of Latin descent who are bilingual call their mixing of the Spanish and English language, often used in Latin Hip-Hop music. It is argued that whether intentional or just coincidental to the way they speak, this use of language is a form of protest against the dominant 'English' culture, because this language is not easily classifiable as either English or Spanish. The practitioners of Spanglish see their Latin heritage as often disrespected and classified as lesser, so by avoiding classification the linguistic part of their identity cannot be signified as lower (Castillo-Garsow & Nichols, 2016, p. 24). Homi Bhabha's theory of the mimicry man is often brought up in these discussions. It is posed that the demand for mimicry by the colonial hegemonic powers is often one of 'double articulation' (Bhabha, 1984, p. 126). That is to say that the demand of mimicry is only a mimicry of the other, to be 'almost' like the coloniser, since if they were completely like the coloniser there would be no more other and the coloniser would lose its perceived justification of power over the other. However, since the demand of mimicry is always caught in its own ambivalence, in this state of 'almost but not the same' (Bhabha, 1984, p. 127), there is opportunity for the other to use mimicry in a way that becomes a threat to the colonial power.

For mimicry to work according to Homi Bhabha the colonial power has to maintain a spread of 'inappropriate subjects' in order for the mimicry to be both 'similar' and 'menacing' (Bhabha, 1984, p. 127). But as we can see with the example of the proliferation of 'Spanglish' hip-hop music, the colonised subject can choose to intentionally play up the 'menace' of the mimicry as a protest against the dominant culture trying to claim the subject as their own. This is not exactly what we see with the Fa'afafine and their Samoan dialect as previously described above. Instead, the dialect is most often used internally by Fa'afafine to avoid confrontation, not externally to welcome it.

Yet sometimes Fa'afafine do use their dialect as an overt strategy. On a different night during the SFA retreat, when a group of six Fa'afafine were standing next to the road of the restaurant on a smoke break, they did loudly and openly flirt in a mocking manner when a group of men passed by. They even acted in a manner that was purposely vulgar, showing their tongues and butts. This aggressive flirting can be classified as 'impoliteness strategy', which has been studied as the exaggeration of rude behaviour, using vulgar and extreme language to scare of the out-group and reinforce solidarity within the in-group (Delis, 2022, p. 213). Bhaba's conception of 'menace' can be seen as encompassing an impoliteness strategy and can be applied to this anecdote as it seems that when Fa'afafine feel safe enough in their group to do so they will exaggerate the negative stereotypes surrounding their identity to mock the out-group and to strengthen their social bonds. The intention was not to honestly 'flirt' with the men in the car passing by, the intention was to show their pride in their identity and the fearlessness in claiming what that identity means (an attraction to men). However the general use of the dialect, as stated, is generally to avoid this kind of confrontation when Fa'afafine do not feel comfortable in expressing identity and desire that directly.

5.2 How Fa'afafine express themselves: Codeswitching and Styleswitching

In this sense, the Fa'afafine dialect falls more in line with the second way that mimicry can fail, which is when the resemblance lacks any menace and thus the distinction between the dominant group and the out-group becomes too blurry to separate. This is more akin to 'codeswitching', which was explained by psychologist Howard Giles as a way of switching language and accents to fit in with different social groups and settings (Giles et al., 1980). His work has been expanded upon by many, and a useful example here is the way codeswitching is often used to explain the way social groups fit in with a dominant cultural language that would otherwise classify their language use as impolite or rude. This is often the case for African Americans in the US, as their use of 'black English' is often perceived as

impolite. In this case, codeswitching to general American English is a useful strategy for formal settings (Koch et al., 2001, p. 29). In this example of codeswitching, the language is changed to fit the identity of the audience listening (Gaither et al., 2015a, p. 2). The African American is mimicking the language use of the dominant social group, so that the resemblance cannot be differentiated and thus the strategic failure of mimicry is overcome.

It should be pointed out that what is happening in the example of African Americans who code switch from black English to general American English can also be style switching, which is just changing tone and intonation, not the literal words. Black English can be both, it can be seen as just a switch from a more impolite to a more polite style, but black English also contains its own vocabulary that is not generally known by the dominant 'white' American culture (Gaither et al., 2015b, p. 2). The Fa'afafine of Samoa also codeswitch and styleswitch and the purpose is often similar to the example of the African American code switch, although there are significant differences as well. The functional similarity, however, is that when a Fa'afafine is not within a safe social group, they can switch their linguistic tendencies to mimic resemblance to the dominant social group. I have personally noticed this difference myself, even when my interlocutors spoke to me. A funny shared joke between interlocutors is told in Samoan, I ask what is going on and I get a much more polite retelling of the joke or anecdote in a language in which their dialect cannot be correctly translated and that makes the joke or anecdote less amusing, a clear example of the codeswitching of Fa'afafine. This is also present in *Caregiving Fa'a Samoa* where Manu, Natu and Kelly are having a great time laughing at something that I do not understand and when they translate it for me the interaction is not quite as funny (00:21:40-00:22:34). I have also seen my interlocutor Larisa, who at work would almost never joke and would keep a polite front to all customers and colleagues, style switch when outside of work with me and especially with her Fa'afafine friends to a much more jovial and gossipy tone. The use of the dialect however is used in a way that is almost inbetween resemblance and menace. The purpose of it is to safely use their specific form of code whilst in the presence of a possibly disapproving out-group. It is a menace masquerading as resemblance and therefore safe to be used inside of otherwise possibly unsafe spaces.

In the absence of a space wherein desires can be openly expressed, Fa'afafine have developed linguistic strategies to create their own. Fa'afafine use style- and codeswitching to be able to navigate different social circles. At work and with family Fa'afafine generally

use language to be more polite and accommodating. When Fa'afafine are with other Fa'afafine that they trust, they styleswitch to a ruder, more abrasive style that is strategically employed as a weapon against the dominant group that does not accept their desires. When Fa'afafine are together, but are in a space that does not feel safe to use their more abrasive language in, they codeswitch to their own Fa'afafine dialect. Having developed a 'Samoan Fa'afafine dialect' they can talk to other Fa'afafine about, for example, attractions they feel whilst in the presence of people who potentially disapprove of those attractions. This way they can still express their desires in relative openness whilst subverting the dominant social group which wants to repress their expression of desire.

6. Conclusion

By deliberately focusing on aspects outside of sex and sexual attraction when considering Fa'afafine gender expression, this research has uncovered aspects of that gender expression that I have not seen discussed elsewhere. That said, sex and sexuality did, at times, play a role in my research. But, the angles this research uncovered to analyse Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama sex and sexuality were new. The gender of Fa'afafine according to this research is defined by the embodiment of the cultural value of reciprocity that is so deeply rooted that it has brought with it the expectation of Fa'afafine to live up to that cultural value. Moreover, whilst both Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama desire the acceptance to have public relationships, they have developed unique gendered aspects because of that desire. The 'Fa'afafine Samoan dialect' that is used is one that has sprouted from an absence and a desire: an absence of being able to openly voice their attraction and a desire to do so anyways. It has made Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama resilient as a social group against forces pushing back against their emancipation. Whilst they still face significant hurdles within Samoan society coming from the values of the Christian church, whose conception of Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama is incommensurable with their own, this research points to Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama being able to use the cultural acceptance they already have to improve their own emancipation.

This research is in no way conclusive or complete. Future research into this field should focus on specifically researching Fa'afatama as there are no doubt large differences between Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama, although their social movements have combined to a certain extent. Moreover, if the aspect of the Fa'afafine Samoan dialect is going to be researched in more detail, a research wherein the researcher has mastery of the Samoan language has to be conducted. Furthermore, any in-depth study of the Fa'afafine Samoan dialect requires a researcher with proficiency in the Samoan language. As of now, this aspect of Fa'afafine gender identity rests on the explanation of my interlocutors and while that has led to an interesting insight into the formation of another element of Fa'afafine gender expression, any analysis of this element remains at a surface level. It would be interesting to see follow-up research delve into much more detail on this subject.

My time in Samoa was also merely two months. During this time, I met fifteen interlocutors, who all had valuable things to share, but because of the short time and the large number of interlocutors, I could not divide my time properly to let all the interlocutors completely tell their own story. Future research on Samoan Fa'afafine should have a longer fieldwork period, especially if the research wants to include a large quantity of participants. Moreover, because Fa'afafine are in a position where their own social status is in rapid development, a longer research could chronicle this development and analyse how changes in their social status have affected their practices.

I set out to look at Fa'afafine as their own subjects, in order to give agency to a social group which is often denied this exact agency. In doing so, I have had the pleasure of being in the presence of a dynamic social group. A group of gender non-conforming people whose place within Samoan society has seen significant improvement over recent years, but is still nowhere near its end point. Fa'afafine are dedicated to bettering their society through the principles of Fa'a Samoa. Their work has made significant improvements to their communities and has therefore also improved the social standing of Fa'afafine. But as the embodiment of reciprocity, the Fa'afafine have not paused their work to enjoy the improvements they have made. Their next challenge is to push for Samoan society to embrace their public relationships. In this thesis, I have argued that currently Fa'afafine have developed strategies to deal with the lack of public relationships. However, the embracing of Fa'afafine as their own dynamic subjects means that their social practices and strategies might change very quickly. For that reason, it is of great importance to keep an eye on the development of Fa'afafine and to let their voices be the ones telling their own stories.

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