

Migrating Genders

Westernisation, Migration, and Samoan Fa'afafine

Johanna Schmidt

MIGRATING GENDERS

Anthropology and Cultural History in Asia and the Indo-Pacific

Series Editors:

Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern
University of Pittsburgh, USA

This series offers a fresh perspective on Asian and Indo-Pacific Anthropology. Acknowledging the increasing impact of transnational flows of ideas and practices across borders, the series widens the established geographical remit of Asian studies to consider the entire Indo-Pacific region. In addition to focused ethnographic studies, the series incorporates thematic work on issues of cross-regional impact, including globalization, the spread of terrorism, and alternative medical practices.

The series further aims to be innovative in its disciplinary breadth, linking anthropological theory with studies in cultural history and religious studies, thus reflecting the current creative interactions between anthropology and historical scholarship that are enriching the study of Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. While the series covers classic themes within the anthropology of the region such as ritual, political and economic issues will also be tackled. Studies of adaptation, change and conflict in small-scale situations enmeshed in wider currents of change will have a significant place in this range of foci.

We publish scholarly texts, both single-authored and collaborative as well as collections of thematically organized essays. The series aims to reach a core audience of anthropologists and Asian Studies specialists, but also to be accessible to a broader multidisciplinary readership.

Recent titles in the series

Aboriginal Family and the State
The Conditions of History

Sally Babidge

ISBN 978 0 7546 7935 6

Islamic Spectrum in Java

Timothy Daniels

ISBN 978 0 7546 7626 3

Collective Creativity
Art and Society in the South Pacific

Katherine Giuffre

ISBN 978 0 7546 7664 5

Migrating Genders

Westernisation, Migration, and Samoan Fa'afafine

JOHANNA SCHMIDT
University of Auckland, New Zealand

First published 2010 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © 2010 Johanna Schmidt

Johanna Schmidt has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Schmidt, Johanna.

Migrating genders : westernisation, migration, and Samoan fa'afafine. -- (Anthropology and cultural history in Asia and the Indo-Pacific)

1. Transgender people--Samoa. 2. Samoans--Foreign influences. 3. Transgender people--Samoa--Public opinion. 4. Public opinion--Western countries. 5. Samoa--Social conditions.

I. Title II. Series

306.7'68'099614--dc22

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schmidt, Johanna.

Migrating genders : westernisation, migration, and Samoan Fa'afafine / by Johanna Schmidt.

p. cm. -- (Anthropology and cultural history in Asia and the Indo-Pacific)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4094-0273-2 (hardback) 1. Transgender people--Samoa. 2. Transgender people--New Zealand. 3. Gender identity--Samoa. 4. Gender identity--New Zealand. 5. Sex role--Samoa. 6. Sex role--New Zealand. I. Title.

HQ77.95.S36S45 2010

306.76'8099614--dc22

2010006266

ISBN 9781409402732 (hbk)

ISBN 9781315595276 (ebk)

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Series Editors' Preface</i>	
<i>Between Places and Genders</i>	
<i>Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xiii</i>
1 Introduction	1
2 (Re)Defining Fa'afafine: The Discursive Construction of Samoan Transgenderism	23
3 Ideals of Gender: Men, Women and Fa'afafine in Fa'aSamoa	57
4 Paradise Lost? Social Change and Fa'afafine in Samoa	75
5 'You hardly see any grown men doing that sort of thing over here': Fa'afafine Migrants' Initial Experiences of Aotearoa/New Zealand	99
6 Reconciling Femininity with Pālagi Identities: Gay Fa'afafine Men and Passing Fa'afafine Women	121
7 Maintaining Ambiguity: (Re)Claiming Fa'afafine Identities in Aotearoa/New Zealand	157
8 Conclusion	185
<i>References</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>Appendix I Glossary</i>	<i>209</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>213</i>

This page has been left blank intentionally

List of Figures

2.1	Cindy's cabaret show in Apia, Samoa	36
4.1	A contestant performing a siva in a fa'afafine beauty pageant in Apia, Samoa.	92
6.1	Fa'afafine in Aotearoa/New Zealand, c.2000	131
6.2	Fa'afafine in Aotearoa/New Zealand, c.2005	139
7.1	Fa'afafine performer at Auckland's Pasifika Festival, c.2004	175

This page has been left blank intentionally

Series Editors' Preface

Between Places and Genders

Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart¹

Johanna Schmidt's study of Samoan fa'afafine, both in Samoa itself and in Aotearoa/New Zealand, carefully delimits its complex topic by concentrating on the specifics of fa'afafine identities and concerns. The study also negotiates in detail the difficult questions of definitions relating to sex and gender in the context of differing expressions of sexual activity and orientation. Notably, the author stresses the importance of the ordinary rather than the exoticised aspects of life, and argues that the processes whereby fa'afafine attempt to establish their identities are not only interesting in themselves but also reveal much about how sex/gender identities are generally created. Notable also is the use the author makes of an open-ended, narrative and life-history oriented approach, in which her exploration of the topic mirrors that of the fa'afafine themselves in circumstances of historical change. Dr. Schmidt argues overall that the temporal shift in Samoan society from a more socio-centric to a more 'western' individualistic definition of personhood, coupled with the geographical shift from Samoa to New Zealand, has redefined the parameters of life for fa'afafine (as it must have also for other Samoans in general).

Here we may comment that this distinction between 'western' and 'other' definitions of personhood is of limited analytical use. As Dr. Schmidt herself notes

1 Dr. Pamela J. Stewart (Strathern) and Prof. Andrew Strathern are a husband and wife research team in the Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh, and are, respectively, Visiting Research Fellow and Visiting Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Durham, England. They are also Research Associates in the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and have been Visiting Research Fellows at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, during parts of 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. They have published over 38 books and over 200 articles on their research in the Pacific, Asia (mainly Taiwan), and Europe (primarily Scotland and Ireland). Their most recent co-authored books include *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Rumors, and Gossip* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); and *Kinship in Action: Self and Group* (in press with Prentice Hall). Their recent co-edited books include *Exchange and Sacrifice* (Carolina Academic Press, 2008) and *Religious and Ritual Change: Cosmologies and Histories* (Carolina Academic Press, 2009). Their most recent research and writing is on the topics of Cosmological Landscapes, farming and conservation practices, minority languages and identities, Religious Conversion, Ritual Studies, and Political Peace-making (their webpage is www.pitt.edu/~strather).

at one point, any such distinction must be nuanced rather than absolute. For other Pacific Island cases we ourselves have commented extensively on this issue (see, for example Stewart and Strathern 2000a, 2000b; Strathern and Stewart 1998, 2005, 2009). Pacific Island cultures are many and varied. They all have within them areas of flexibility that go with their putative contextuality and their relational character. Arguably, fa'afafine have in the past as well as now expressed their individuality along with other aspects of personhood. Perhaps the characterisation of fa'afafine as occupying a liminal status also expresses the pluripotentiality of their lives, which becomes more circumscribed in the New Zealand context through stereotyping, commodification, and new forms of embodied practice. Interestingly, in Samoa, domestic duties defined gender early on, while in New Zealand dress and sexual behavior have come to be dominant. Schmidt comments also on the 'heterosexualisation' process, whereby categories of identification start from a single, supposedly naturalised, grounding of sexual activity. We suggest that this process is surely mirrored in Samoa by its grounding there in heterosexually based reproduction (rather than just sexuality).

Something of a paradox seems to apply here. While it is the case that the naturalisation of heterosexuality as a normative category itself results in the cultural creation of other categories under rubrics such as homosexuality, transexuality, etc., it is also the case that the strategic use of these other categories as normative sources of counter-discourse now belongs also to those fa'afafine who adopt these new rubrics as defining their own identities in contrast to the label of heterosexuality, (even though the fa'afafine tend to regard their own sexual activities as in a sense heterosexual, because they emulate a feminine role-set). In the Samoan diasporic context some fa'afafine fit themselves more into these new categories to assist their economic and social adaptation, thereby losing precisely the cultural specificity of the fa'afafine category which Schmidt highlights in the earlier chapters of her study. Moreover, in Auckland the theatrical element of fa'afafine conduct becomes more emphasised, taking away from the original point which Schmidt makes that these people lead in the main 'ordinary' lives which should not be 'exoticised' by outside observers. What, then, is ordinary life if self-exoticisation has become a significant part of it?

This volume by Dr. Schmidt marks the sixteenth volume in the Ashgate Series on Anthropology and Cultural History in Asia and the Indo-Pacific, which we have been co-editing for over six years now. Dr. Schmidt's study makes a novel and thoughtful contribution to the growing corpus of work on the contemporary lives of Pacific Islanders in circumstances of migration and 'globalisation'. We are pleased to have sponsored scholarly studies on such a depth and range of topics as have appeared in the Series over the years, each volume accompanied by a Series Editors' Preface contextualising the work at least partly in terms of our own research interests and contributions (something we do for all the Series which we co-edit also). The countries and regions that have been discussed in these volumes include, for example, Australia, India, Indonesia, the Pacific region, Taiwan, Nepal,

and China. The topics have included politics, religion, history, ritual, aesthetics, and economics: in effect, the whole gamut of social and cultural activities.

PJS and AJS
Cromie Burn Research Unit, and
Oatspur Research Group,
University of Pittsburgh
August 2009

References

- Stewart, Pamela J. and Andrew J. Strathern (2000a) Introduction: Narratives Speak. In, *Identity Work: Constructing Pacific Lives*. Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern (eds.) ASAO (Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania) Monograph Series No. 18. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp 1-26.
- Stewart, Pamela J. and Andrew J. Strathern (2000b) Fragmented Selfhood: Contradiction, Anomaly and Violence in Female Life-Histories. In, *Identity Work: Constructing Pacific Lives*. Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern (eds.) ASAO (Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania) Monograph Series No. 18. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 44-57.
- Strathern, Andrew J. and Pamela J. Stewart (1998) Seeking Personhood: Anthropological Accounts and Local Concepts in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea. *Oceania* 68 (3): 170-188.
- Strathern, Andrew J. and Pamela J. Stewart (2005) Introduction. In, *Expressive Genres and Historical Change: Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Taiwan*, edited by Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern. For, Anthropology and Cultural History in Asia and the Indo-Pacific Series, London, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, pp. 1-39.
- Strathern, Andrew and Pamela J. Stewart (2009) Introduction: A Complexity of Contexts, a Multiplicity of Changes. In, *Religious and Ritual Change: Cosmologies and Histories*. For, Ritual Studies Monograph Series, Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, pp. 3-68.

This book is dedicated to all the fa'afafine in Samoa and Aotearoa/New Zealand who so generously shared their lives and stories with me.

Alofa tele.

Acknowledgements

The people I interviewed for this book shared their lives with me with unreserved generosity. Over the time it took to complete this research I was consistently challenged and supported, and the constant encouragement I received from those who took part in this project both surprised and humbled me. I cannot name you, but you know who you are. I cannot adequately express how much your kindness to this inexperienced pālagi researcher meant to me – I only hope you all are aware how integral your good will is to the shape and content of this book.

Dr. Douglass St Christian provided an extremely generous and helpful review of the manuscript of this book – receiving this meant all the more because of the great respect I have for his own work in this area. The supervisors of my doctoral research (on which this book is based), Professor Cluny Macpherson and Dr. Vivienne Elizabeth, were constant sources of reassurance and critique, both of which I needed badly. I also acknowledge the help of Professor Niko Besnier in shaping the initial phases of the research. Dr Reeve Dolgoy demonstrated unexpected generosity in providing me with his work in the area, which has been a crucial foundation to my own research. And I must thank Ashgate for their great patience and persistence in ensuring that this manuscript saw the light of day.

I also acknowledge my colleagues and friends in the Department of Sociology at The University of Auckland, who I worked with in one capacity or another for a number of years. I would not have reached this point without their support. Thanks, too, to the various students I have taught over the years, whose questioning has kept me on my toes and contributed to my own theorising in often surprising ways.

Financial support for the research on which this book is based was received from the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology in the form of a Bright Future (Top Achiever Doctoral) Scholarship. This support made the process of undertaking this project considerably easier than it would have been otherwise, and also gave me the opportunity to attend various conferences at which my work was rigorously critiqued. I would also like to thank the organisers of the conferences I have attended (particularly the Sociological Association of Aotearoa (New Zealand)), and the editors of the journals in which I have published, for allowing me the opportunity to present my work in public contexts.

There are numerous people that assisted me in my fieldwork, and I will undoubtedly miss naming some. In Samoa, I would like to acknowledge the help of Maria Kerslake and her family for making my time there easier, and for facilitating things for me in so many ways. Maureen, Nick, Zoe and Tom Sier were not quite the ‘surrogate family’ a good ethnographer is meant to adopt, but I would

not have managed in Samoa without them. The staff of The National University of Samoa provided institutional support and frequent opportunities to socialise that were much valued. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Helen Tanielu provided me with excellent advice regarding life in Samoa, and her father with beautiful translations of the participant documentation. Various people in both Samoa and Aotearoa/New Zealand assisted with making contact with participants – again, confidentiality prevents me naming them all, but without them, the interviews would not have happened.

Conversations with Sailau Sua’ali’i, Lanuola Asiaiga, and Ieti Lima about the intricacies of Samoan culture provided me with a confidence in my own analyses that would have otherwise been lacking. The continued support of, and interest in, my work from various other people has been greatly appreciated. Again, I am likely to forget many who have provided this encouragement over the years, but I would like to acknowledge Chris Brickell, Rhonda Shaw, Lee Wallace, Susan Crozier, Chamsy el-Ojeili and Sharyn Graham Davies.

I am grateful also to the photographer Sean Coyle, and multimedia and performance artist Shigeyuki Kihara, for providing me with the photograph on the cover of the book. ‘My Samoan Girl’ is from a series of self portraiture photographic images entitled ‘Fa’a fafine: In a manner of a Woman’ (2005), conceptualised and created by artist Shigeyuki Kihara, who is herself fa’afafine. This series explores the situations and experiences of fa’afafine in ‘traditional’ and contemporary Samoan culture and society, drawing on the genre of 19th-century European photographers posing non-European peoples in their studios in particular settings that referenced their ‘otherness’ to the European viewer. In this particular image, questions are raised about the ways in which Samoan fa’afafine have been and continue to be presented as exotic and erotic by those who create images for the western gaze. So many of the themes and concepts underpinning the content of this book are visually illustrated in this image, and I am extremely honoured to have use of it for the book cover.

And, of course, I thank my husband, Hitendra Patel, who has been unwaveringly supportive, and has contributed to the outcome of this project by providing me with a quality of life that I would not have had without him. My friends and family have been crucial to the maintenance of my sanity and good humour throughout the research and writing process. And finally, there is Eli, who never helps with my work, but makes me a better person.

Johanna Schmidt
2009

Chapter 1

Introduction

... we can do it very analytically and say that, you know, you've got so much of X chromosomes and so much of Y chromosomes, but to me that's a lot of hogwash. What you need to do is ask them basically, who they feel they personally are, and most of them will say female, aha? Well that's because that's the influence, the greater influence upon them and there's always the notion that, that they were born that way.¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 The quotes that open this chapter are some of the responses given when I asked fa'afafine participants what they thought I should know about fa'afafine. Here and throughout the book, interview excerpts are largely presented without editing, and in italics. The grammatical errors that generally occur in spoken speech, and those that result from the fact that English is a second language for many participants, have not been corrected.

The Samoan word 'fa'afafine' literally translates as 'in the manner of' or 'like' – 'fa'a' – a woman or women – 'fafine'. Fa'afafine are biological Samoan 'males' whose gendered behaviours are feminine. Although this can be understood as a 'traditional' identity, the ways in which fa'afafine express their femininity varies in both aspect and degree, and has shifted across time and space. Fa'afafine (and other transgendered populations) are both exceptional, in that they challenge normative western understandings about relationships between sex and gender, and at the same time ordinary and unremarkable, in that they do this through the same processes everyone uses in constructing and performing gender. In this book, I illustrate the ways in which fa'afafine embody and perform gender, utilise various strategies to realise their desires and responsibilities, and experience themselves as agents enmeshed in social situations which both enable and constrain their decisions, actions and subjectivities. As I will demonstrate, these are processes that have been rendered all the more visible by the need to adapt to the changing social and cultural contexts that have resulted from globalisation and migration. This book is thus, as one level, a record of the narratives of various fa'afafine at a particular historical moment, but is also, at another level, a story of the processes by which all subjectivities are constructed, maintained and changed, while being simultaneously constrained and enabled by specific discursive contexts.

Many of the ethnographic texts about non-western transgenderism start with narratives designed to present the apparent 'strangeness' of those with whom the author has worked. Don Kulick opens his book with a description of watching one of the Brazilian travesti prostitutes with whom he lived styling her hair and putting on make-up in preparation for her night's work (1998: 1-5). Mark Johnson's study of Filipino transgenderism is introduced with a detailed description of the 'Super Gay Model (of the World)' competition (1997: 1-11). Annick Prieur's ethnography of a 'group of Mexican transvestites, queens and machos' begins with a narrative of her first night 'in the field', where she is not sure if the people she meets are women, men, or transsexual (1998: ix-xiii).

While these introductory narratives draw the reader into the world to be discussed, and create the aura of unfamiliarity that is so integral to ethnographic work, in my own work I attempt to avoid this trope of 'strangeness'. One of the tensions that runs through this book stems from my attempts to explain how a population that seems so 'other' to western understandings is indeed unique to the Samoan cultural context, and yet simultaneously brings into relief the processes by which all gender is achieved and ascribed (Namaste 2000: 32, Phibbs 2001: 123, Shapiro 1991: 252-53). However, like many transgendered populations (and, in fact, virtually all people, whether transgendered or not), most fa'afafine experience their particular gendered identities as beyond their control (Phibbs 2001: 155), and simply wish to 'get on with their lives' without being constantly aware of their anomalously embodied genders (Gagné et al. 1997: 502). Thus, I chose not to open this book with a vignette that suggests how 'incomprehensible' fa'afafine may first appear to an outsider. Rather, I have attempted to convey, in the words of fa'afafine themselves, their desire to be seen as they understand

themselves, and I have sought to realise this desire throughout this book. This has necessitated avoiding the suggestion that fa'afafine are a rhetorical device, or the instantiation of any 'theoretical moments' (Namaste 2000: 14-15). As Jay Prosser (1998: 49) observes in a critique of Judith Butler's analysis of the transsexual Venus Xtravaganza (1993b: 121-40), a participant in the documentary *Paris is Burning*, many of the very moments of transgendered individuals' lives which 'say' the most about gender are also those moments which have caused them the most pain. Prosser's critique of Butler's text is a timely caution that those writing in this area must be ever mindful that the lives and experiences that so readily become 'theoretical moments' for the researcher also belong to real people.

Yet I also draw on Butler's observation that 'it is the exception, the strange, that gives us the clue to how the mundane and taken-for-granted world of sexual meanings is constituted' (1990a: 110). Rosalind Morris similarly notes that it is seemingly ambiguous genders that more readily reveal the constructed 'nature' of the body and the performative constitution of gender itself (1995: 570). That which is marginal exposes the 'limits and regulatory aims' of dominant hegemonic discourses (Butler 1990a: 17). Fa'afafine who migrate to western contexts (such as Aotearoa/New Zealand) and continue to identify as fa'afafine implicitly disrupt hegemonic western frameworks of sex/gender, choosing to adopt and adapt aspects of western cultures in their enactments of femininity, while simultaneously demanding to be understood as fa'afafine (rather than 'men' or 'women'). Both the existence of the 'traditional' fa'afafine identity, and the manner in which fa'afafine utilise western signifiers of gender, open up the potential for questioning what it means to be 'male' or 'female', 'man' or 'woman', masculine or feminine.

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

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

While, as I will explain, the use of the term 'homosexual' is not (entirely) appropriate in relation to Samoan fa'afafine, Altman's distinction between rupture and continuity in relation to non-normative, non-western genders and sexualities initially appears relevant in thinking about contemporary fa'afafine. However, rather than occupy one position or the other, I suggest that fa'afafine in both Samoa and Aotearoa/New Zealand tread a path *between* rupture and continuity, maintaining and enacting identities that incorporate aspects of non-Samoan cultures and discourses, while remaining distinctly Samoan. The lives of contemporary fa'afafine may thus be better understood with reference to

Margaret Jolly's suggestion that Pacific peoples are 'accepting of both indigenous and exogenous elements as constituting their culture' (1992: 53), rather than the 'traditional/modern' binary suggested by Altman's rupture/continuity model.

Although I have attempted to avoid using fa'afafine as instantiations of theoretical paradigms, it cannot be denied that the manner in which fa'afafine identities in Samoa have been inflected by non-Samoan (and predominantly western) discursive frameworks and material culture suggests that these identities, and thus all identities, are mutable processes, rather than static entities. For the participants in this research who migrated to Aotearoa/New Zealand, their decisions regarding which aspects of their subjectivities would be enacted at any one time illustrates how identities are continually negotiated, and that different priorities and goals will impact on how gender is performed in any situation. That these individuals continued to identify as fa'afafine, and in most instances understood that this was not the same as identifying as women, as transsexuals, or as gay men, demonstrates how entrenched gender can be. Yet there were aspects of their enactment of 'fa'afafine-ness' that many participants experienced as available for change, in terms of embodiment, sexual orientation and gender identities. As I will suggest, this exemplifies how the genders that are learnt through socialisation are not 'rules' which must be (or even can be) rigidly adhered to (Nayak and Kehily 2006: 469), but are rather 'schedules' which guide action (Brickell 2005).

Models of Transgenderism

While fa'afafine are uniquely Samoan, discourses of western transgenderism are those which are most commonly mobilised (including by fa'afafine themselves) when discussing fa'afafine identities and experiences. In order to contextualise the following chapters, here I briefly summarise some of its key points of the rapidly expanding field of transgender research and theory.

From 'Hermaphroditic Souls' to 'Gender Radicals'

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

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

In the 1950s, sexologists developed the concept of the transsexual – the person who was biologically one sex, but felt themselves to be the 'opposite' gender. In the process of diagnosing transsexuals, and in the related area of medically 'correcting' the intersexed, the concept of 'gender identity' was developed as a means of differentiating between a patient's sense of themselves as a man or a woman, and their physiological maleness or femaleness (Bullough 2000, Germon 1998: 4, Hausman 1995: 108). After unsuccessful attempts to alleviate the 'discomfort' of transsexuals with psychotherapy (Bockting 1997: 49), it was (and still is) held that, once developed, gender identity is virtually unchangeable (Kessler 1990). In the words of sexologist Harry Benjamin, '[s]ince it is evident [...] that the mind of a transsexual cannot be adjusted to the body, it is logical and justifiable to attempt the opposite, to adjust the body to the mind' (cited in Hausman 1995: 125). Medical technologies that were developed to 'correct' the ambiguous genital configuration of intersexed individuals, and to 'enhance' the femininity of women, were utilised to change the 'sex' of transsexuals.² Initially, eligibility for medical intervention required that the candidate meet strict criteria. For male-to-female transsexuals, these included a high degree of femininity and the desire for sexual relations with men. More recently, the (hetero)sexist assumptions underlying these criteria have been challenged, and a male who presented requesting or requiring access to feminising medical technologies without being completely or ideally

2 Genital reconstruction surgery is more common and more 'successful' for male-to-female transsexuals than female-to-male transsexuals. This is a combination of the (probably related) facts that fewer females present who state that they feel that they are 'men', and that the surgical procedures are less developed in terms of replicating male biology. Sexologists state that this is a matter of pragmatics, summed up in what clinician Richard Green refers to as the 'surgical quip': 'it's easier to build a hole than a pole' (2000) – the mechanics of creating a 'functioning' penis (i.e. one that can achieve an erection and is capable of vaginal penetration) are somewhat more complex than those of creating a 'functioning' vagina (i.e. one that is capable of accommodating an erect penis). However, it has been suggested that there is a range of ideological and political reasons for the lag in the development of the technologies for constructing male genitals, including men's greater propensity for taking risks and psychoanalytically based theories about mother-dominance (Shapiro 1991). It has also been noted that there are heterosexist assumptions inherent in assessing a 'functioning' penis or vagina, the success of which is judged almost solely by the ability to engage in heterosexual penetrative intercourse (Hausman 1995, Califia 1997, see also Kessler 1990, in relation to the criteria for the construction of 'appropriate' genitals for intersexed infants).

'feminine' would not (necessarily) be disqualified from receiving access to these technologies (Bockting 1997: 51, Ekins and King 1999: 597, Green 2000).

The increasing fluidity of sexual and gendered identities in contemporary western contexts is marked by the emergence of new forms of incongruence between 'sex' and 'gender', which are now discussed under the umbrella term of 'transgender'. While this is a debated term, in much the same way as the terminology of 'homosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian' and 'queer' is contested (Epstein 1994), the concept of 'transgender' can be loosely understood to include anyone whose sense of themselves as gendered is at odds with what would be normatively expected from someone with their particularly 'sexed' body. While 'transsexuals' can be included under this term, many post-operative transsexuals themselves resist such categorisation, stating that they are now simply the sex that they always should have been (Elliot and Roen 1998: 238, Gagné et al. 1997: 502). However, others continue to call themselves 'transsexual', signalling the fact that they were not born with female bodies³ by referring to themselves as 'constructed women' or 'transsexual women'.

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

'Other' Enactments of Ambiguous Genders

The history of the categorisations and enactments of various sexualities and genders in the west is paralleled by western attempts to categorise the (apparently) alien genders and sexualities of many non-western societies according to western 'scientific' understandings. I trace the historical impact of dominant ideologies on interactions between western and non-western cultures in the Pacific in Chapter 2, and much of this book is an analysis of precisely such interactions in a specifically Pacific context. Here I briefly illustrate the diversity of populations who do not

3 As I explain later in this introduction, when I use the term 'transsexual', I refer to male-to-female transsexuals, unless otherwise indicated.

identify as ‘masculine men’ or ‘feminine women’ in various non-western cultural contexts.⁴

North American First Nation peoples evidenced a range of transgendered behaviours which varied considerably between tribes, and which have been generally subsumed under the term ‘berdache’ or, more recently, ‘two spirit’. Tribal differences have been almost totally lost as a result of near annihilation of First Nation cultures and the incursion of moral codes of Christianity. Many contemporary instantiations of berdache identities appear to have developed as a result of First Nation people who identified as gay understanding their ‘homosexuality’ as a continuation of indigenous practices (Brown 1997, Lang 1996, Whitehead 1981, Williams 1992/1986). In India, hijra exist as a culturally unique identity, although one that has shifted somewhat over the centuries, as all Indian genders have altered in response to social change. Ideally intersexed, most hijra are actually castrated, and occupy a social position that ambivalently encompasses religious roles and prostitution (Cohen 1995, Nanda 1990, 1995). In South-East Asia, a range of transgendered identities exist, many of which are now considerably inflected by western influence.⁵ Similarly, in South America, indigenous instantiations of transgenderism have been altered by the influx of external material cultures and conceptual discourses, although they remain specific to their own cultural context.⁶

While much of the literature in this area takes into account the impact of western influences, this is almost exclusively limited to the indigenous location. In spite of the fact that globalisation involves significant migratory flows, at the time of writing only Heather Worth (2000, 2001, 2002) has discussed transgendered migrants, focusing on Pacific transgendered sex workers in Auckland. However, as I will show, relocation to a new cultural field opens up a novel range of possibilities for Samoan-born fa’afafine, while simultaneously shutting down other potentialities, thus demonstrating the entirely situated nature of sex/gender. The lives of transgendered migrants are not, as some would suggest, ‘inauthentic’, but are rather marked by adaptability and resilience, by complexity – and by ordinariness.

4 More extensive overviews of this diversity can be found in Serena Nanda’s *Gender diversity: Cross-cultural variations* (2000), and in volumes edited by Gilbert Herdt (1994d), Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E. Weiringa (1999) and Sabrina Ramet (1996).

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

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

Methodological Approaches

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

The Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this project started in mid-2000, with an initial three months spent in Samoa, during which I interviewed fa'afafine participants, spoke with other Samoans about fa'afafine, observed various fa'afafine performances and gained a general feel for everyday life in Samoa. The substantive balance of the fieldwork was conducted across 2001 and 2002 in Aotearoa/New Zealand, in Auckland and Wellington, and was comprised primarily of interviews with migrant fa'afafine, supplemented with attendance at various social events and performances and research with secondary sources.

As a pālāgi conducting work in Samoa, and as a 'natural' female conducting work with members of a transgendered population, I was constantly aware of my tenuous position while in 'the field'. The implications of this stem from both my status as an 'outsider', and from the issues of power that are implicit in any research. I continually returned to the question of power, attempting to ensure that my research was ethical not only in the mundane sense of gaining informed consent and protecting confidentiality, but also at more fundamental levels of doing justice to the material provided by those who took part in this research, seeking to represent these participants not only in the semiotic, but also in the more political, sense.

The experiences fa'afafine have had with researchers and journalists have not always been positive, and there is now a strong awareness within fa'afafine communities of the potential for exploitation or misrepresentation. This was particularly an issue with those who acted as 'gatekeepers', and it was necessary that I prove the worthiness of my research and my sensitivity to their concerns before they would put me in touch with further participants. The endemic wariness (and weariness) of fa'afafine in dealing with journalists and researchers meant that many potential participants chose not to be part of my research, and those who did meet with me often spoke negatively of previous experiences with researchers, or of dissatisfaction with journalists and film makers who got their material and disappeared without sending back copies of their final work. This reticence was especially evident with fa'afafine working in the sex industry in Aotearoa/New Zealand. While fa'afafine are over-represented in the sex industry,⁷ only one

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

participant in this research discussed having engaged in sex work. In spite of my best efforts to gain access to the sex worker community, gatekeepers continually either refrained from helping me, or reported back that none of 'the girls' wished to speak with me. However, because fa'afafine sex workers are so visible, particularly in Auckland, I continued to feel a need to address their situation. I have thus made some suggestions as to the motivations and experiences of this aspect of the lives of some migrant fa'afafine in Chapter 7, largely drawn from the literature and 'second hand' data. However, the voices of fa'afafine sex workers themselves are notably scarce in this book.

As well as more general issues of power and representation, doing research about and with fa'afafine in Samoa came with its own set of specific considerations. While I knew that fa'afafine were somewhat marginalised, I had initially expected that the entrenched nature of fa'afafine in Samoan culture indicated a level of acceptance, or at least tolerance, that would allow for relatively easy discussion. However, a series of chance conversations with Samoans revealed that, when talking about fa'afafine *as* fa'afafine, they were usually discussed in negative terms, although individual fa'afafine may be praised for activities that benefit the family and community. As I discuss in Chapter 4, this apparently contradictory attitude towards fa'afafine was entirely in keeping with the Samoan understanding of the self as contextual, and such conversations thus broadened my understanding of the complexities of Samoan attitudes towards fa'afafine.

It was also in exchanges with non-fa'afafine Samoans in Samoa that I underwent the harshest criticisms regarding my legitimacy as a researcher in relation to this particular topic. I was challenged on this point throughout the research, although interestingly less by Samoans in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and barely at all by fa'afafine participants. I soon realised that Samoan academics were the group most likely to find pālagi researchers problematic, an inevitable consequence of both the 'Mead legacy' I describe in the following chapter, and more contemporary postcolonial critiques of cross-cultural research. However, while postcolonial politics would suggest that it is the 'natives' themselves who are in the best position to conduct research on their own cultures, Niko Besnier notes that critics of apparently exploitative outsider research are often 'themselves in positions of intellectual and material hegemony over the 'truly' disenfranchised members of these societies' (2000: 31). This was certainly the case in Samoa, where most challenges to my 'right' to conduct research were raised by older, university-educated, materially comfortable individuals who were well-placed within local hierarchies, and who would have wielded considerably more power than I did when conducting research with other Samoans. The middle-class status of these intellectuals also meant that, as I will explain, they had an investment in presenting a particular image of Samoa, and they often dismissed the possibility that fa'afafine were an appropriate area of interest for anyone.

Encounters such as these raised a fundamental question about who I was 'representing' in this project, in a particularly political sense. Besnier raises this problem in relation to his work on Nukulaelae, a small Pacific atoll, where he