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Queer Pacific mobilities: Translocal bodies in the poetry of Dan Taulapapa McMullin

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ABSTRACT

In the poetry of Dan Taulapapa McMullin, the queer body is the decolonial weapon of choice. McMullin identifies as *fa'afafine*, and is an artist, poet, and film-maker from the Sāmoa Islands who now lives in the USA. In these poems, bodies are located in diverse places but are connected to their Sāmoan origins through story, practice, and memory. This article argues that McMullin's depiction of a variety of genders, identities, and sexualities, linked with pre-Christian life, refutes the dominance of post-missionary reticence about the body as a source of celebration and belonging for Sāmoans. In poetic narratives, McMullin presents their protagonists in a range of roles: creating, caring, dancing, and being sexual amongst them. In foregrounding the body as both a tool of insurrection and a means of negotiating place, McMullin uses story as a fresh form of poetics while demonstrating the continuance of tradition in the diasporic present.

KEYWORDS

Dan Taulapapa McMullin; *fa'afafine*; poetry; queer; Sāmoa; Pacific; translocal

In the poetry of Dan Taulapapa McMullin, the queer body is the decolonial weapon of choice. To be *fa'afafine*, of Sāmoan descent, across multiple lands linked by the Pacific Ocean, is to realize what Gerald Vizenor (1999), writing in the field of Native American studies, has called indigenous “survivance”: the continuity and adaptation of vibrant cultural life in the present. McMullin is an artist, poet, and film-maker from the Sāmoa Islands who now lives in the USA. Their poetry, seen in *Coconut Milk* (McMullin 2013) and collected in a range of other sources, is notable for its foregrounding of the body as both a tool of insurrection and a means of negotiating place. In these poems, bodies are located in diverse places but are connected to their Sāmoan origins through story, practice, and memory. The depiction of a variety of genders, identities, and sexualities, linked with pre-Christian life, refutes the apparent contemporary dominance of post-missionary reticence about the body as a source of celebration and belonging for Sāmoans. Indeed, sexual pleasure is celebrated by McMullin with wit and exuberance. While McMullin's visual art has received some critical attention, to date their poetry has not. In considering these poems, attention will be given to both their cultural and historical settings, as these are not well known outside the Pacific.

To explore these connections between locality, tradition, and the sexual body, I begin with the poem “Pray”,¹ as it exemplifies McMullin’s practice. The first stanza reads:

Pray for both Tuna and Fata the orators say
 Talo lua Tuna ma Fata
 Play with both Tuna and Fata my boyfriend said
 Taalo lua Tuna ma Fata
 (McMullin 2013, 42)

The use of both Sāmoan and English is striking, and a non-Sāmoan reader might feel alienated by it, but readers are in fact being offered the same effect, as the English is simply repeated in Sāmoan, while maintaining similar wordplay. The estrangement caused by the lack of immediate access to meaning displaces a non-Sāmoan reader, but not from meaning (though readers cannot be sure) or even wordplay. (Destabilizing readerly access in a collection with no glossary is of course a decentring tactic.) In English, “pray” and “play” are interchangeable through the substitution of one letter; similarly, in Sāmoan, “talo/pray” becomes “taalo/play” with the addition of one letter. The poem goes on to recount a story that enacts this substitution. It begins, as much of Sāmoan life does, with the orators, whose importance cannot be overestimated. No formal event is complete without oration, and orators, *Tulāfale*, tell and retell histories and stories, negotiating relationships between families and clans, generally with great knowledge, subtlety, and skill. The story that the orators tell in this instance is well known in Sāmoan history; it predates European contact, as it recounts Sāmoa’s break from the Tongan Empire.²

In the closely linked triangle of Sāmoa, Tonga, and Fiji, power shifted, chiefly lines intermarried, and interaction between these island groups, especially via the great double-hulled sailing canoes of all three nations, was constant (Salesa 2014, 31–52; Gunson 1990). The Tongan Empire was dominant and expansive from around 1200 to 1500 CE, meaning that parts of Sāmoa were subject to the Tu’i Tonga, the title of the dominant chiefly Tongan line of the time. Tuna and Fata resisted this external dominance, and finally saw off the Tongan rulers (though the exact time this occurred is contested). The Tu’i Tonga, Tala’aifei’i, standing on a rock off the shore on his way back to Tonga, praised their efforts, calling out “Mālietoa, Mālietau (brave warrior, bravely fought)” (Henry 1958, 21; Gunson 1990, 177), resulting in the title Mālietoa becoming a pre-eminent one in Sāmoa, unbroken until contact (Turner 1884, 254) and into the present.

The orators pray for Tuna and Fata because they fell down with exhaustion fighting over who should have this title, and their brother Savea, standing on their backs, spoke these words of prayer – “Talo lua Tuna ma Fata” – for their recovery. He then received the title in their stead as he was the last man standing (though other accounts give the first Mālietoa title to Ulumasui for his fighting prowess in the battle [Brunt 2018]). The area in the island of Savai’i where this occurred was named Lele’ale’a, after the Tu’i Tonga’s mooring stick from which Tuna and Fata made a war club (Turner 1884, 252) (though some sources link these events to the island of Upolu [Brunt 2018]). Every place associated with this story has a name connected with these events. For instance, “the rock on which the King of Tonga stood to give his parting message was named Tulatala and the words [he said] are still used by the Sāmoan orators” (Tuvale [1918] 2006, n.p.). I provide both a long explanation and an incomplete account of the first four lines of this poem; I have not begun to discuss the poetry other than the heritage it refers to, but what this account does indicate is the mutually embedded nature of place and

story. There is no story without place, and no place without story. Yet in such traditions, originally and mostly still oral, there is also no authoritative source, but rather a range of sources, and a range of interpretations, made by orators, storytellers, and poets alike (Treagus 2008, 187); the poet is part of this tradition in recounting their own version.

The speaker of this poem, in what might be considered their oration, prefaces the account of time with their boyfriend with wordplay that both places this tale within the tradition, and also expands that tradition. Muaiava and Suaalii-Sauni (2012) tell us that “Sāmoan leaders reveled in doublespeak, riddles, and metaphors” (441); this practice pervades these poems. I will call the speaker Dan, for simplicity, as does the speaker of the poems, for though I do not equate this voice with that of McMullin, the speaker names themselves, when they recount in another poem that a female friend tells their mother that “Dan / has the mind / of a woman” (McMullin 2013, 9). While rhetoric has a role in every Sāmoan occasion, so too does prayer, yet here to “pray” shifts to “play”. Since the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1830 in the form of missionaries from Tahiti, the Cook Islands, Tonga, and England, Sāmoan life, *fa’asāmoa*, has been overlaid with, and undermined by, Christianity. It is something of a commonplace in Pacific studies to note that Christianity has been indigenized at the same time as it has colonized, but much of the sexual acceptance and celebration of traditional life has been reversed by its presence. McMullin asserts that “Christianity was obsessively concerned with questions of the body, its display, its erasure, its punishment, its ownership, its legalization, its mythology, and that, out of this, the Samoan body came to hide its agendas, including but not limited to *fa’afafine*” (2011, 124–125). Part of the project of these poems is to turn pray to play, in a reassertion of Sāmoan tradition and survivance, enacting the shift from bodily suppression to bodily celebration. This is not a move that secularizes the body; it rather reorientates it to the wholeness of Sāmoan epistemology, in which the spiritual is also realized in the body. Muaiava and Suaalii-Sauni note that Sāmoans “have a love of rhetoric, history, family, and place. Similarly, Sāmoans are fascinated by the play between the physical and metaphysical, the sacred and profane, the bidden and forbidden” (Muaiava and Suaalii-Sauni 2012, 440). The poem goes on to identify the form of play at hand, as suggested by the innuendo of “Play with both Tuna and Fata”. There is an initial depiction of a young man who embodies ideals of manliness – he “works the family plantation / Captains rugby for the village team” – but this is modified, when the speaker calls him “my pe’u” (one who sleeps with *fa’afafine*) (McMullin, personal communication, August 7, 2019). He is also “my manamea”, sweetheart of the speaker, the repetition of “my” asserting deep intimacy. The initial description of heterosexual masculinity is here undercut by Dan’s sexual and romantic claims on him and the revelations about his own identity. As I shall go on to discuss, terms like “heterosexual”, “homosexual”, “lesbian”, and “transgender” have been produced by Euro-American discourses which stand at odds with Sāmoan sexualities, though there is definitely a contravention of heteronormativity occurring here. The lover brings *ula*, weed, and we hear the first reference to the old blues song, “Tain’t Nobody’s Business if I Do” (Grainger and Robbins 1922), with its lines “If I should take a notion to Jump into the ocean / Ain’t nobody’s business if I do”. The song – now a standard, first published in 1922 (Herzhaft 1992, 436) – begins with the assumption that because others will be critical whatever the speaker does, she (it was first recorded by Anna Meyers, the first of many African American women to sing it) might as well do as she pleases: “There ain’t nothin’ I can

do nor nothin' I can say, that folks don't criticize me / But I'm gonna do just as I want to anyway, and don't care if they all despise me" (Grainger and Robbins 1922); this especially applies to sexual and romantic choices, though also to jumping into the ocean or giving away all her money. The sassy yet subaltern position of the African American woman under Jim Crow is here adopted by the fa'afafine under Christianity. For the speaker in the poem, it "ain't nobody's business" if they are "[s]tretched out in my panties", evoking not just the female singers of the song, but also their obvious erection. "Dan" is playing with gender and sex, with tradition and place. The young man brings *ufi* and *talo* (yams and taro), "[f]resh baked from the farm in coconut milk" with "vodka our 'ava" (kava).. *Ufi* and *talo* are traditional and important Polynesian crops, both starchy, but made rich and creamy by the addition of coconut milk. A man's capacity to grow *ufi* and *talo* is a sign of his adult capacity to feed not only his family, but to provide for those to whom he has cultural obligations. But these crops, especially yams, are also phallic in appearance; in the context of the poem, when combined with coconut milk, they are doubly so. This is a transformed tradition, prayer becoming bodily and sexual play. Once again quoting "Ain't Nobody's Business", the speaker ends with an assertion of the pleasure of tradition, even if it must be kept quiet in post-missionized Sāmoa: "Ufi and talo in coconut milk / Ain't nobody's business/but my own". This is a publicly suppressed pleasure, "play" not "pray", harking back to both former times, and famous *pouli* (night dances) into the lived present. Coconut milk comes to signify sexual play, doubly the stuff of life, essential for living well and wholly. At the same time, the fact that the poem begins with oratory and includes 'ava and food, means that it replicates formal occasions where these elements are essential. The very structure of the poem goes some way towards insinuating that Dan and their boyfriend's private party has the same validity as other, more officially sanctioned feasts.

Most of the poems in *Coconut Milk* are in numbered sequences, though "Pray" stands alone. The Fa'a Fafine sequence of 24 poems, the final of 4 sequences, follows it. As McMullin (2018, 7) points out, one of the few 19th-century references to the term is in London Missionary Society missionary George Pratt's dictionary, in which he gives "amio fa'afafine" as the translation of the English term "effeminate" (Pratt 1984, 364), meaning "to conduct oneself in the way of a woman" (McMullin 2018, 7). This is slightly clearer than Pratt's translation of "fa'afafine" in the Samoan to English section: "belonging to women, as some kinds of work" and "a hermaphrodite" (Pratt 1984, 113). An inclusive descriptor, it has been used by those assigned male at birth who perform gender and sexuality in ways that are more aligned with female roles and duties, sometimes being considered and passing as female. *Fa'afafine* are an integral part of the Sāmoan islands and their diasporic communities, although many now suffer persecution and discrimination due to the long-term effects of colonization and Christianity, as noted by Sāmoan artist Yuki Kihara (2011, n.p.). *Fa'afafine* identities do not neatly align with those known elsewhere as "gay" or "trans", though some *fa'afafine* may also identify with these terms. Similarly, the term "fa'atane" was translated as "to be masculine, of a woman" (Pratt 1984, 137). There is no clear equivalent for these concepts and identities in English, and the discussion here does not represent any attempt to be definitive; it only gestures towards contextualizing these gender identifications. *Fa'afafine* and *fa'atane/fa'afatama* have connections with identities in other Polynesian societies, such as *fakaleiti* or *leiti* (Tonga), *mahu* (Tahiti and Hawai'i), *takatāpui* (Māori), and *akava'ine* (Cook Islands) among others, and also with two spirit identities in Native American societies (Treagus and Seys 2017, 88). In his recent

introduction to the volume of *fa'afafine* memoirs, *Sāmoan Queer Lives*, McMullin discusses the etymology of Sāmoan terms for gender, indicating that in all traditional “categories of personhood [...] there was a shift, one that attempted to erase fa'afafine, tauātāne, fa'atane, and, in that attempt, changed how we saw ourselves” (2018, 11). This extended to policings of what might be termed heteronormative masculinity and femininity, best exemplified by the reversal required by missionaries, that men's traditional long hair be cut short, and women's traditional short hair be grown long (McMullin 2011, 126).

Understandings of gender shifted with arrival of the London Missionary Society and their deliberate interventions into the gender order. Brendan Hokowhitu (2016) suggests that while for Indigenous peoples the adaptation, or apparent adoption, of Eurocentric modes of gender and sexuality might have assisted in negotiating the “violent torrent of colonization” (87), the time for such strategies is past: “hetero-patriarchal subjectivities that have been falsely imbibed as ‘traditional’ have undoubtedly been strategic but have also served to exclude Indigenous subjectivities” (86). The Fa'a Fafine Poem sequence reasserts such subjectivities, in part, by simply recounting the fact of these queer lives. Asserting the validity of such lives is once again a pressing issue, as there is a renewed push to further exclude pre-contact understandings of gender across Polynesia, mostly under the influence of extreme evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Whereas *fa'afafine* might have recognized roles, even leadership ones, within the denominations that originally colonized Sāmoa, the push by newer churches, especially via tele-evangelists, to impose binary understanding of gender and sexuality is having a strong impact across the Pacific. As McMullin has noted, “[w]hereas the older churches in Sāmoa have reconciled Sāmoan traditions with Eurocentric monotheism, the new fundamentalists are seeking to reinstate Eurocentrism in Sāmoa, and elsewhere, by attacking traditional indigenous queer cultures” (2011, 129–130). Because what is considered *fa'aSāmoa*, the Sāmoan way, is now deeply equated with post-missionary values and church cultures, there are renewed calls for the persecution of those with non-binary gender identifications, despite their importance in pre-missionized life.³

In several poems, the speaker indicates that certain older women are comfortable enough with their sexual identity and behaviour to tease them about it, showing the survivance of culture in the face of Euro-American pressure. After all, nothing can be entirely secret in a village, even “a village far from my relations” (McMullin 2013, 51). “Growing up in an assimilated Sāmoan American Republican born again fundamentalist/family” and meeting their “first male lover in Sāmoa”, the speaker tells us how at a birthday party for a one-year-old, a significant event in Polynesia,

an old woman did a little dance
waving a banana slowly in my face
the rest laughed and I breathed
The homophobia of my old family
fading
into blue
(“Fa'a Fafine Poem Number Nine”; McMullin 2013, 51)

Similarly,

our landlady
who was a lo'omatua
an old woman
wagging her long forefinger under my nose

said to me
 “You’re loose
 like an old woman”
 (McMullin 2013, 49)

There is room in the tradition for “Dan”, even at the same time as their pleasures and existence are suppressed.

McMullin asserts that there is little commentary on *fa’afafine* in the 19th century, because *fa’afafine* were simply not seen, though definitions were recorded in the earliest dictionaries (such as that of Pratt). “Our history as *fa’afafine* is in our way of seeing” they suggest, citing first a photograph by John Davis (who operated as a photographer on and off in Sāmoa from 1873 until his death in 1903 [Early Canterbury Photography 2015]), showing a Sāmoan man with traditional long hair tied up in a side knot. Unlike the majority of colonial portraits, the unnamed man from Tutuila (in what is now American Sāmoa) is not holding a weapon (though he may be holding a fan, an item that often accompanies the portraits of islander women in the Pacific). Only an edited postcard remains of the original, so it is not possible to say. The man can be read as *fa’afafine*, for as Shevon Matai says, “you don’t have to look too far to understand who we are because it’s right there[;] you just have to have the right eye” (McMullin 2018, 5). In a more obvious representation, McMullin notes an 1891 watercolour by the American artist John La Farge, the title of which, “Chiefs and Chiefesses Passing on Their Way to a Great Conference. Evening. Sāmoa”, captures the manner of the passers-by, with their exaggerated feminine gestures. The title belies the content, though, for on examination it is clear that there are no “chiefesses”, only *fa’afafine*. They were seen as women, or possibly not read as anything other than undifferentiated “primitive natives” (McMullin 2018, 7). Almost as if to illustrate this tendency to “read” *fa’afafine* as women, the speaker records an instance when they do so themselves. He assumes that their friend’s mother, Fa’amanu, is a woman when they stay with her on the Manu’a group (now in American Sāmoa). Finding out later that their friend was raised by a *fa’afafine*, “Dan” notes, “Fa’amanu wanted me to learn how to weave fine mats, a woman’s art [but] I didn’t return in time to revisit my elder/or learn the perfection of her art but/Her walk is my walk/too” (McMullin 2018, 54).

The bodily experience of time and place is told in the main through story in these poems, and such stories produce identifications that expand what it means to be an Indigenous subject in the contemporary world. As Couze Venn (2006) suggests, “[s]elf is not a fact or an event, it is not reducible to the facticity of things-in-themselves. The identity of a person, or a group of people, takes the form of stories told” (108). McMullin states that “[t]he naming of *fa’afafine* accompanies the event of the person” (2011, 115). Story is paramount here if queer Sāmoans are to be seen to exist, both to themselves and others, making the rendering of what might otherwise be regarded as a minor, or insignificant, imperative. While much of the tone of these poems is experiential and celebratory, “Fa’a Fafine Poem Number Twenty-Two” tells the tale of two young women who committed suicide when they were beaten for their relationship, in part because of the arrival of imported Christian television. While the reality of this relationship is still suppressed by their community in Savai’i, the island on which the two women lived – “the issue was buried with/the young women” (McMullin 2013, 64) – their tragedy has become part of the story of place that is repeated by other *fa’atane*, this time on the

neighbouring island of Upolu, in the capital Apia, where there is almost enough room for the kind of anonymous bars that often provide space for queer lives. The herbicide Paraquat, the poison taken by one of the suiciding girls in the poem, is extremely toxic; one teaspoon of it can kill, and it became the poison of choice for young Sāmoan women over several decades (Pestizid Aktions-Netzwerk 2003, 2), with many young people in Sāmoa suffering slow, painful, and lingering deaths. The poem brings this story to the surface, acting not only as an assertion of the fact that these two queer girls lived, but also as an act of mourning for them. The repressed nature of the girls' story, repeated only by a particular group as part of their weaponry of survival, their tradition of story, is not unlike the "culture of whispers surrounding [...] Sāmoan indigenous religion" and its associated practices, which, according to Tui Atua (2014), former Sāmoan prime minister and head of state, is only "whispered in fear and with guilt" (11).

An overriding culture of shame about pre-Christian beliefs and suppressed traditions is, according to the great theorist of Oceania, Epeli Hau'ofa, the result of the "wholesale condemnation by Christian missionaries of Oceanic cultures as savage, lascivious and barbaric", which divided history "into two parts: the era of darkness, associated with savagery and barbarism, and the era of light and civilisation ushered in by Christianity" (Tui Atua 2014, 28). This especially relates to formerly publicly acknowledged sexual practices such as the *poula*, the night dances, which become for McMullin a source of both pleasure and resistance. As Tui Atua tells us, "[i]n *poula*, the beauty and sexuality of the body was flaunted in dance such as the *sa'ē*", which featured the "public display and deliberate flaunting of the genitals" and where "anyone [...] who wanted" could join in (2014, 27).

McMullin asserts the contemporary reality of the *poula* in "Fa'a Fafine Poem Number Seventeen": "I had a husband M in Apia who came home after work/throwing off his clothes/putting on just an 'ie lavalava/so aulelei', so handsome (2013, 59). Together, they perform a sexualized dance in the form of *siva nofo*, a sitting dance, which has different movements for the *taupou* (the ceremonial village virgin and daughter of the chief) and the *manaia* (the chief's son but also carrying the meanings "attractive, beautiful, smart" [Allardice 1989, 40]). While performing the *siva nofo*, the husband, M, is "caressing his exposed / erection" in an extended foreplay that finally ends with them both on the bed "under our fairy net" (McMullin 2013, 59). While the actions in this poem queer the dance tradition, they also reaffirm the earlier practice of the *poula* as a *public* celebration:

One day my neighbour told me she and her girlfriend would
 sit at the farthest reach of her orchid garden
in the dark
 smoke a number, sip their wine, and watch
 my beautiful young husband through our lanai screens
 dancing naked by candlelight

He told me then he always knew
when they were watching

This was our village
 Po
 Ula

(2013, 59)

While 19th-century dictionaries might define *poula* as an “indecent night dance”, this is from the perspective of the original writers of Sāmoan dictionaries: missionaries. *Poula* literally means “night of the shrimp”, the “*ula*”, and was so named because of the association of the shrimp with energetic movement, a presumed sexual activity (Tui Atua 2014, 27). As Tui Atua writes, shrimp “were believed to be prolific breeders and so assumed to be very sexual” (27).

Early on during the contact period, several observers record their reactions to the *poula*. In fact, the words of McMullin’s (2013, 58) “Fa’a Fafine Poem Number Sixteen” are almost entirely taken from one of these accounts by the Anglican missionary John B. Stair ([1897] 1983), who makes it clear he saw *poula* on more than one occasion while resident in Sāmoa from 1838 to 1845 (13). Unfortunately, Stair’s account is incomplete. He tells us of “antics and buffoonery which formed a prelude to the closing saturnalia, of which a description is inadmissible here, but which was always received with shouts of laughter and approval from the onlookers” (134). One might wonder why the good missionary went more than once if he indeed considered the event to be a “saturnalia”. Contemporary dance theorist Dianna Georgina (2017) describes the finale, as

[the] performance ended around midnight with the spirit frenzy, ‘*ale’aleaitu* (loosely translated as “the *aitu* are coming!”) before which everyone but the young people departed. They would “tear the eye off the spirit”, shedding their clothes. The ‘*ale’aleaitu* provided an occasion for elopement, as couples ran off together into the night (53).

The introduction of “*aitu*”, spirits, to the dance and display lends a broader spiritual element though ‘*aitu* were seen as demonic by early missionaries. Stair records that they are a class of gods often associated with place, though some are mobile; while ‘*aitu* were and still are feared, they are not associated exclusively with evil, “some being considered playful and mischievous, other [sic] vindictive; whilst some again were reputed to be of a mild and inoffensive temper” ([1897] 1983, 210–241). However, the frenzy was alarming to foreign spectators, with British Consul William Churchward ([1887] 1987, 230) recording that the dancers “appear at last more like a lot of demons let loose from below” during the final dance. Sāmoan playwright Victoria Kneubuhl (1987) notes that this element is important in traditional Sāmoan life: “*Aitu* embody the chaotic side of Sāmoan existence”:

Even while the *aitu* are associated with chaos, wilderness, danger, and darkness, Sāmoan society utilizes this chaotic world as a restorative power in civilized village life. Elements of this chaotic world are called on to restore health and to permit the release of social tension. (167)

Within this logic, if the *poula* is understood as an essential element in healthy community life, McMullin’s recall of it into the present is a necessary tactic of survivance: “When chaos is acknowledged, order is maintained”, Kneubuhl (1987, 167) reiterates. While these practices have been suppressed, elements of the function of chaos have been maintained and developed in comedic theatre, *fale aitu*, which continues in Sāmoa today. *Fale aitu* troupes often feature a main performer, *fa’aluma*, who, in being seen to be occupied by the *aitu*, is thereby licensed to exhibit a range of comments, gestures, and actions that would otherwise be inadmissible (Kneubuhl 1987, 171). Rather in the manner of Bakhtinian carnival, expressions such as *fale aitu* and *poula* allow that which is not part of the everyday to emerge in riotous life. The speaker’s “husband M in Apia” lets the *aitu* arise for the speaker, their neighbours, and himself in a bodily expression that is

both sacred and profane. Brendan Hokowhitu's notion of the strategic practice of "body-logic" is a concept that is illuminating when applied to McMullin's poetic concerns. Body-logic is

where the body is conceptualized as a material producer of thought as well as a holistic notion that fleshes out the interplay between physiology and history. Body-logic is an insurrection of knowledge, a movement beyond colonial capture, the colonizer/colonized binary, and encumbering "Indigenous" ontologies, and toward post-indigeneity. (Hokowhitu 2016, 100)

Bodily expressions including *poula* are examples of those "Indigenous bodily practices that evade taxonomic capture" (Hokowhitu 2016, 100); there is a "body-logic" to them that is inherently decolonizing, as it refuses the biopolitics of colonization (91). While the production of "Indigenous" identities is still somewhat implicated in "the Western metaphysical production with ontology" (89), post-Indigenous studies raises "the specter of knowledge unintelligible to Western rationalism" (93); "body-logic" refers "to those critical bodily practices that unravel dominant taxonomies, which continue to superimpose and subjugate Indigenous knowledges" (99). These practices must speak through the body.

The names of the three poetry series that precede the Fa'a Fafine sequence, "Sa Moana", (sacred ocean), "Turtle Island" (the Iroquois word for North America), and "Laguna Beach", all relate specifically to location, but a *fa'afafine* story runs through them all. Indeed, sexuality is a way of locating, its own form of "body-logic". In "Sa Moana Poem Number One", the speaker outlines a gender awakening that occurs not in the sacred ocean, but in California:

When I was a small boy in San Pedro California
lying around on the bed in the afternoon with my young Mom Lupelele
looking at movie star magazines I thought Liz and Marilyn

were almost as beautiful as my Mom
and my favourite activity in the world was to listen to her dress for work or something special
the smell of lipstick, nylons, and perfume coming around the door

When she was ready
She would ask me to zip up the back of her dress
The journey of my life began there
(McMullin 2013, 5)

The name of this poem, and its place at the beginning of the Sa Moana sequence, indicates that this awakening is linked to the *moana*/ocean, not only having its origins in Sāmoa, but evoking the sacred in a celebration of the breadth of sexuality that includes *poula*. Despite the apparent locatedness of these sequences, they are always connected with place in multiple ways. Following Hau'ofa's insistence that "wherever we are in Oceania [...] the sea is our pathway to each other and to everyone else" (2008, 58), the Sa Moana is always present, whether the speaker is in San Pedro, Pago Pago, Apia, or Sydney. This is not only an insistent notion, but also a reassuring one, connecting the diaspora and those in Oceania, whatever their origins.

The transition that the young "Dan" makes in moving from American Sāmoa to the USA reminds us that "to inhabit the translocal is not necessarily to be in a safe place", as Dorothy Driver (2017) points out in (relation to Zoë Wicomb):

When we moved from the United States Territory of American Sāmoa
to the United States of America, I, a small fa'afafine child
should act like an American boy because we are not in Sāmoa anymore
("Fa'a Fafine Poem Number Five"; McMullin 2013, 47).

This is enforced after a sexual encounter with an older boy is discovered and the speaker is beaten by their father and cast out of the house. Later, this conflict is lived out by many:

Among the fa'afafine immigrants in the United States
as children girls in Sāmoa
as adults Gay American men, giving you
this, the surface
("Fa'a Fafine Poem Number Five" 2013, 47).

Part of identity is suppressed but still present, and the same danger, and necessary surface identity, are pursued as a means of connection.

Links with female associated arts and the female line is an ongoing aspect of the speaker's *fa'afafine* identification, and it is strongly associated with the home village on Tutuila, American Sāmoa. Here, not only are the young child's gender and sexuality formed, but also their art:

I first knew the art of painting by the smell of 'o'a
juice of the blood tree bright orange
in white lacquered tin bowls nailed to the bark
filled with colour and the scent of 'o'a
down the path to greatgrandma and grandma's fale
Fa'asapa and Sisipeni

("Fa'a Fafine Poem Number Two"; McMullin 2013, 44)

Painting is learnt by observing the makers of *siapo* (tapa) through the intricate processes of gathering dyes, stencilling patterns using "her 'upeti board", with "brushed on sogā / to keep the bark cloth from sticking" ("Fa'a Fafine Poem Number Two"; McMullin 2013, 44). The bodily sensation of tapa making, and its "pungent" "fresh o'a and sogā", fuel the speaker's visual work in oils in the present, but it is the day spent in the company of female artists in the village that remains: "there is a day that never ends / a small child and / two old women" (44). Making *siapo* is a long labour, a work in which every element is created from the natural world in drawn-out methodical processes. The old woman Fa'asapa models the artist's life, its work and physicality, in ways that stay with the speaker. The poignancy of "a day that never ends" is not just about the preciousness and security of being in a circle of affection and safety with their grandmother and great-grandmother, though the poem leaves us strongly with that sense; it also speaks of the work of the artist's life, a work that is never complete, connecting with other times that remain in the present, wherever that present is. The day never ends as it also exists in the now.

Rather than indicating bifurcated identity, the translocal is a state in which the subject is present to multiple locations at any one time, as "Dan" is in so many of these poems. It produces the subject as alive to more than one temporality, in both the living swirl of memory, and in the immediacy of the present. For Oceanians, being present to multiplicities of time through translocal identities may also involve a collapse of time through notions of the *vā*. *Tā/vā* – specific notions of time/space that infuse Tongan and Sāmoan understandings of reality – are an Indigenous Oceanic conceptualization that is inherently

translocal. Albert L. Refiti (2017, 267) describes the Sāmoan understanding of *vā* as an “exposition of affects and effects in the system of actions and behaviours that orders and produces subjects/objects in a Sāmoan social-cultural schema”. Because *vā* is relational, it is never empty; the distance between Pago Pago, Apia, Laguna Beach, Texas, Alaska – some of the locations referred to in McMullin’s poetry – is filled, especially under the Sāmoan dictum to “Teu le *vā*”, take care of the relational space. The *vā* encompasses links to land and sea, to tradition and to *kaiga*/family, and to sacred Sāmoa itself. In these poems, to be translocal is the condition of existence, and such translocality is more than geographic and temporal. It also traverses a range of vectors of power, including colonizations, genders, nations, sexualities that form the subjectivity of the speaker “Dan”. Just as the *poula* provides for the establishment of equilibrium through the unleashing of forces associated with *aitu*, so the expression of translocality through the sexual body of the speaker allows for an opportunity to *teu le vā*, “to order, stabilize, ogle and cajole the *vā*” as Refiti (2017, 273) puts it. As exciting as recent theoretical work by Oceanic scholars on *Tā/Vā* – Indigenous Moana theory – has been, it has tended to concentrate on circles of traditional male power, either the *kava* circle in Tonga, or the circle of chiefly *matai* in Sāmoa (Ka’ili, Mahina, and Addo, 2017). McMullin’s vision is greatly expanded, and much more inclusive. The stories of women, drag queens, *fa’afafine*, *fa’atane* are crucial, not marginal; indeed, McMullin is not much interested in formal centres of power, preferring to explore the *vā* surrounding those seen but not always recognized or acknowledged.

These translocations, and the condition of living in the translocal, are an inherent aspect of Indigenous cosmopolitans. Peter Brunt (2016) notes the ways in which such cosmopolitanism contravenes dominant notions of the “native”:

Yet travel and cosmopolitanism are not usually associated with the concept of indigeneity, with its strong connotation of attachment to place. The native was supposed to stay put, while the cosmopolitan travelled the world. Modernism reinscribed this myth because while its admiration for “primitive art” was central to its own identity, it saw it as the opposite of the modern. (n.p.)

These poems show that place can travel with bodies, and that Indigeneity is not lost when existing in relation to other places and cultures. In fact, Polynesians have always been mobile, a knowledge that is part of traditional ceremony and story as well as everyday life, and made even more apparent in the Polynesian-wide diaspora of the past half-century.

In “Fa’a Fafine Poem Number Twenty-Four”, the speaker gives an account of the Sydney Gay Games Opening Ceremony, for which “[t]he young *fa’afafine* dressed me up as the *lo’omotua*, pushing me ahead / a fine mat around my chest and / some feathers knocking against my forehead” (McMullin 2013, 66). The *lo’omotua*, the older woman, is wearing a *tuiga* (traditional head decoration worn by both sexes) and is in drag, but it is more truly the dress of an older *fa’afafine*, showing inherent sass, power, and courage:

When I walked on the field there was a Sāmoan cameraman waving
I waved back
On the giant screen amid the cheering crowds
an older *fa’afafine* in close-up was nodding quaintly
Oh Gawd, I thought, she’s
Me

Fuck it, I said, and did a
catwalk stroll

in a big loop across the great field
 One by one the younger fa'afafine followed in heels or on their toes
beautifully
 (2013, 66–67).

Vitolia Mo'a (2014) writes that "Sāmoans today refer to our pre-European-Christian times as *aso o le pogisā o le atunu'u* (shrouded in darkness and sin). This is a convenient mantra against the challenge of re-discovering a wholesome identity and of healing a disturbed psyche" (45). Dismissing pre-Christian beliefs out of hand means not doing the work of restoring and inhabiting the life-giving *fa'aSamoa* of this earlier era. McMullin's tales of bodily enactment go some way towards recovery, in which sexuality is not only a joyous part of everyday life, but also linked with the celebration and acknowledgement of place. While this might involve living as a gay man in a queer art town in upstate New York, it also extends to living as a *fa'afafine* in a small village in Manu'a or the city of Apia in Upolu. Not either, but all. McMullin's poetry demonstrates the assertion made in a Facebook post by the all-woman Australian/Pacific cabaret group Hot Brown Honey (2019): "We are the latest models of our ancestry."

Notes

1. Text for Footnote 1 The reading of this poem includes a small amount of material previously published by the author in a review of *Coconut Milk* (Treagus 2015).
2. Text for Footnote 1 Gunson (1990, 187) suggests that this should not be understood in European terms, but rather in Polynesian ones, as the extension of chiefly systems rather than outright rule.
3. Text for Footnote 1 As indications of this, in 2013 the Crimes Act of Samoa was modified to ban sodomy (International Labour Organization 2013) and in 2017 the country moved from being officially secular to become an officially Christian state (Wyeth 2017).

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