

'And every word a lie': Samoan gender-divergent communities, language and epistemic violence

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Abstract

In many constructions of what constitutes 'the Samoan community', the experiences and perspectives of fa'a'afa, fa'a(fa)tama, fa'afafine, trans folks and non-binary as well as further 'gender-divergent' people are often elided, conflated, glossed over or absent. One way of describing these occurrences is as forms of epistemic violence. The primary claim of this article is that language is a major site of epistemic violence against Samoan gender-divergent communities, specifically via usages of the terms 'third gender' and 'LGBTQIA+', as well as through binarism, enforced absence, slurs and segregation. These occurrences are relevant to discussions of violence, particularly those rooted in colonial structures of gender. The significance of the article's assertions can be found in Indigenous sovereignty movements, the aims of which will never be achieved until colonial-derived violence within Indigenous societies is recognised, dismantled and remedied.

NB: The following article contains discussions of physical, verbal, epistemic, binarist, straight-gender cisheteroperisexist, anti-sex worker, ableist, shadeist and racist violences.

Keywords:

fa'atama, Samoan, gender-divergent, Indigeneity, gendersexuality, language, epistemic violence

Introduction and definitions

I borrowed heads of corpses
To do my reading by
I found my name on every page
And every word a lie
– Elise Cowen (2014, p. 34)

The evils of colonialism are often located as lying in the lines that were drawn between coloniser and indigene. However, one of the greatest violences of colonial operations is that, within Indigenous communities, they separated us from ourselves. Colonial violence targets both Indigenous and colonised populations: these distinctions are made because not all people who have been or are colonised are Indigenous, or identify as such (Abrol, 2019). Although this is the case, the specifics of this violence deviate depending on a number of co-held communal affiliations. Numerous crucial examples of this can be found in the oppression of Pacific Indigenous people who have darker skin, and/or whose ancestors had darker skin, who are disabled, and whose bodies, desires, expressions and relationships do not conform to colonial gendersexuality dichotomies.

'Gendersexuality' is a word I use to refer to gender, sex and sexuality simultaneously, whilst noting the interconnections and differences between them. This is done particularly

in reference to how people are grouped in Samoan, and various further Pacific, Indigenous communities; fa'afafine, for example, can self-identify as such through their genders, bodily sexes, sexualities or a combination of these. Further terminology that will be used includes gender-divergent, straight-gender, cisheteroperisex, cisheteroperisexist, and binarist. Because of the shortcomings of LGBTQIA+ frameworks, as will be discussed in later sections, I use the term 'gender-divergent' to describe people whose gendersexualities exist outside of hegemonic classifications of what is normative: 'straight-gender', conversely, describes people whose gendersexualities exist within hegemonic classifications of what is normative. 'Straight', of course, is more often used to describe sexualities and orientations, and sexuality terminology is often presented on dominant platforms as being necessarily separate from gender terminology. The usage of the descriptor 'straight' references wider Black and Indigenous ongoing histories of blurring categories of gender and sexuality through language – such as the uses of 'gay' in ball culture and Hanuabada – and signifying subversion with the assumption that these categories are not discrete (Sokhin & Kalyakin, 2014; Garcia, 2018).

There are further terms, definitions and structures that inform the contexts with which this article is concerned. 'Cisheteroperisex' is a contraction that expands out to 'cisgender', 'heterosexual', 'heteroromantic', 'heteroaesthetic', and 'perisex', and thus describes people whose bodies, genders and sex assignments at birth are all aligned; who are sexually, romantically and aesthetically attracted to people of different genders than themselves, often following the binary female-male model; and who are not intersex, meaning that their bodies are either straightforwardly female or straightforwardly male. Because of the ableism embedded in terms such as 'transphobia', and the elitism that can be reinforced through usages of terms such as 'transmisia', I use 'cisheteroperisexism' to refer to the oppressive structure that targets gendersexuality-divergent people, and that affords unearned privileges to cisgender, heterosexual, heteroromantic, heteroaesthetic and perisex people (Brown, 2020). 'Binarism' refers to the belief that there are only two genders – cisgender perisex male and cisgender perisex female, often incorporating heterosexist tenets for good measure – and the structures that uphold and enforce this ideology. Binarism and cisheteroperisexism are therefore intrinsically linked, but I will use the term binarism to specifically emphasise oppression through dyadic structures.

This article focuses specifically on the epistemic violence directed at Samoan gender-divergent people through knowledge systems and language. I will be drawing from the work of two scholars in order to explain the dimensions of epistemic violence as a general concept and practice: Kristie Dotson, who is a Black American philosophy professor at Michigan State University, and whose work primarily focuses on epistemology, feminism and race, with epistemic violence as a component of these forms of scholarship (2014); and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Awa Indigenous studies groundbreaker, educator and activist. Her book *Decolonizing methodologies* (2012) and further works, although not explicitly featuring the phrase 'epistemic violence', nonetheless describe the intricacies of this phenomenon.

Epistemic violence is the intentional usage of knowledge and knowledge networks by human beings to harm other human beings: three subtypes of epistemic violence are Othering, silencing and knowledge prevention (Dotson, 2011, 2014; Smith, 2012, p. 22; Lim Schweitzer Anapu Bernard Cowley Bunnin, 2019, p. 9). Othering makes distinctions between one body – plural or singular – and another on the basis of relative inferiority and superiority, and is enshrined through structural and institutional discrimination. Silencing, as defined by Dotson, 'occurs when an audience fails to identify a speaker as a knower', which results in the failure of privileged audiences and commentators to recognise knowledge articulated by and associated with Othered speakers (2011, p. 242). Knowledge prevention takes various forms. Dotson

describes it primarily in terms of knowledge sources being insufficient by way of omitting and warping information (2014, p. 129). Smith discusses how hegemonic narratives are amplified, and how the imaginations of oppressed people are restrained by colonial paradigms of knowledge (2012, p. 31).

Even – perhaps especially – in discussions of epistemic violence, epistemic violence still occurs. Academic language and platforms exclude many audiences, divided along lines of socioeconomic status, educational access and many further groupings. Because of this, the usage of this medium, an academic peer-reviewed journal article, is a form of epistemic violence. Similarly, the usage of the phrase ‘epistemic violence’ in and of itself is also an instance of epistemic violence, because having the knowledge and cultural capital to understand and use this phrase is not equally available to all.

I write this article as a tauivi London-born, upper-middle class, non-black, light-skinned, fa‘atama, totolasi (literally, ‘many bloods’: multiethnic), queer, transgender, assigned female at birth (AFAB), perisex, neurodivergent (having a brain that diverges from what is medically, legally and socioculturally presented as normal: exists under the wider umbrella term of disability), sighted, hearing, ambulatory person who has lived in Aotearoa/New Zealand for the past nine years. As such, I am able to engage with some of the complexities of Samoan gender-divergent life, but by no means all, and this article is therefore definitely not comprehensive. Because of my experiential background, and the educations given to me by my family, friends and educational institutions in language and knowledge systems, I am focusing on the epistemic violences perpetuated against Samoan gender-divergent people through language.

The research for this article is largely based in Aotearoa/New Zealand, however there are connections to Western Samoa and American Samoa, Australia, Turtle Island and further areas. In the rest of the article, I will elaborate on a small number of ways in which language is employed to enact epistemic violence. In the next section, usages of the term ‘third gender’ and binarist configurations are examined. The third section discusses applications of the ‘LGBTQIA+’ framework, specifically in terms of its disadvantages. The fourth covers academic categorisations of Samoan gender-divergent people and the fifth provides details of how we are rendered lesser through enforced absence, slurs and segregation. The sixth and final section supplies some further reflections on Indigenous gendersexuality-divergent communities in sovereignty and social justice movements.

A final word before I continue. Language can be understood as a shared matrix of communication in which speakers can convey meanings to each other through mutually understood signs and structures: this exists in visual, auditory and textured forms, which are also subject to change and context (Sins Invalid, 2019, p. 142). Because usages of language rely on often complex reciprocal systems, some further clarifications are necessary. Samoan gender-divergent people have Samoan gafa (genealogy) and have gender identities that are marginalised in the colonial straight-gender cisheteroperisexist binarist paradigms – paradigms that have become established as the desirable, obligatory and rewarded norm. Some Samoan gender-divergent people use terms such as fa‘a‘afa, transgender, takatāpui, Two Spirit and boi, and some do not, recognising that ‘Samoan’ does not mean monoethnic or monolithic. A further reason why the term ‘gender-divergent’ has been devised is because of the inadequacies of both anglophone and Pacific Indigenous acronyms of gendersexuality-divergent terms. For the purposes of this article, the aforementioned definitions will be used, acknowledging that all have flaws that impede various forms of deeper discussion.

'Third gender' and binarism

Samoaan gender-divergent people, as with many Indigenous gendersexuality-divergent communities, have been subject to anthropological classification as so-called 'third gender' groups. The origins of the term 'third gender', often used interchangeably with the term 'third sex', are difficult to trace, and the phrase most likely has several points of genesis. In relation to Pacific Indigenous societies, applications of 'third gender' are located as originating in academic scholarship, particularly anthropological texts, which are focused on disproving western notions of gender binarism (Martin & Voorhies, 1975, p. 92). With reference to Samoa more specifically, the term has been used by scholars such as Jeannette Mageo to describe the most prominent of the supposed 'third gender' Samoaan communities, that of fa'afafine (1992, p. 443).

Some of the problematics of the term 'third gender' are discussed by Tulia Thompson in her PhD thesis, namely the way in which it reinforces inequalities of power between Indigenous and colonial societies, scholars and epistemologies (2014, p. 23). Because of its inherent normalisation of western colonial binary gendersexuality categories as the standard by which Indigenous paradigms are both measured and constrained through imposed comparison, 'third gender' is thus a device of hegemonic codification and flattening, as opposed to an instrument intended to support and return power to Indigenous gender-divergent people (Towle & Morgan, 2002, p. 668). Earlier commentary by white straight-gender academics – the consequences and connotations of which have not dissipated – reveals insufficient distinction between the lives of Indigenous gender-divergent people and the language used by white anthropologists to identify us. Belying the veneer of critical engagement, a fascination with falsely-labelled novel knowledge is revealed, and the potential of knowledge exchange is foreclosed in favour of knowledge extraction (Herdt, 1996).

There are scholars who have attempted to defend the usage of this term, stating that it is not intended to be taken literally, citing it as 'a way of breaking with sex and gender bipolarities' (Lugones, 2007, p. 201). Many straight-gender and/or white scholars thus ignore that severing connections in this way, and indeed that there is a definitive structure with which to break, is a distinctly colonial and straight-gender problem: unlike those who are white colonial and/or straight-gender, Indigenous gender-divergent people already understand from our lived experiences (another form of knowledge that is often disregarded as being credible) that the colonial dichotomous gendersex system is a falsehood (Lim-Cowley, 2017, p. 43). Although people of all gendersexualities are harmed by said system, and thus we collectively require its dismantlement, the differential power afforded to straight-gender and gender-divergent people through this dyad creates differential investments in its continuity: the nature of the break is not the same.

Furthermore, that the terms 'first gender' and 'second gender' are generally not used to refer to straight-gender people is additional evidence of the supposed abnormality that 'third gender' emphasises. Through the use of ordinals, hierarchies are apparent, and ordinals often serve to strengthen pre-existing inequalities. As stated by Mauro Cabral, an Argentinian intersex trans activist who, amongst other works, contributed to a report about the legal rights of trans communities, '[p]eople tend to identify a third sex with freedom from the gender binary, but that is not necessarily the case. If only trans [and/or intersex and/or more widely gendersexuality-divergent] people can access that third category, or if they are compulsively assigned to a third sex, then the gender binary gets stronger, not weaker' (quoted in Open Society Foundations, 2014, p. 21).

Although 'third gender' frameworks are frequently used to implement binarist violence, this is one of many further manifestations of binarism in its entirety. Countless conversations

and public addresses, including those in Pacific Indigenous climate activist contexts, employ constructions such as ‘he or she’, or ‘brothers and sisters’ (see also Menon, 2017). Despite ‘they’ and ‘siblings’ being viable alternatives for both phrases respectively, these are generally unused. My analysis is not so reductive as to suggest that anyone who does not use ‘he, him’ or ‘she, her’ pronouns will be conclusively excluded from any binarist phrasing or documentation. But the use of binarist configurations implies a ‘correct’ populace, replete with further expected normativities such as ‘naturally’ conforming to or working to acquire the accoutrements of straight-gender identity. Because the languaging is strongly aligned with ‘correct’ communities, the ‘incorrect’ populace is in contrast less likely to be considered through and in this phrasing. When decisions are being made by people in positions of authority, often straight-gender, who are far more likely to have the power to arbitrate these boundaries, gender-divergent people are far *less* likely to be considered as people who should benefit from and through binarist policies, laws and procedures (Samoa Faafafine Association Inc., 2016, p. 1).

Another binarist construction is ‘men and women’, which is significant in terms of its role in determining who is permitted to engage in which kinds of work, performance and expression, but is particularly important in terms of its consequences in prisons. An article published by Mette Hansen-Reid (2011) about this, although it has many problematic elements, is one of the few pieces of academic research that engages with fa‘afafine experiences in prison (2011). She identifies two major impacts of fa‘afafine being categorised as men instead of women, a result of the colonial racism and anti-trans violence inherent in New Zealand prisons. The first is that fa‘afafine are placed in male prisons, and can often be in environments where they experience frequent and overt discrimination (Hansen-Reid, 2011, p. 5). Secondly, the support that can be present amongst Samoan straight-gender heteroperisex male-presenting prisoners and staff is generally unavailable to fa‘afafine prisoners (Hansen-Reid, 2011, p. 7). As such, contrary to notions that language use is a field of abstractions that have few repercussions in people’s lived experiences, the ways in which terms are applied to communities and bodyminds (people as embedded bodies and minds, with roots in crip discourse) have profound consequences for access to resources, safety, wellbeing and life outcomes.

Language maps itself onto bodies, and can impose itself as limits on what we can and cannot be as people. Feminism 2020 was an event held to platform trans-exclusionary radical ‘feminism’ and related doctrine, and was organised by Speak Up For Women, a New Zealand-based organisation who have ‘a shared concern about the impact of transgender politics’ (O’Brien, 2019; Speak Up For Women, n.d.). As demonstrated by this event, and similar proceedings, debates about who is a ‘real’ woman, as well as who is a ‘real’ man, continue to the detriment of gender-divergent people’s lives. A significant aspect of this is how white supremacy and binarism support each other as oppressive structures in Oceania and the diaspora (Thiruselvam, 2019, p. 63). The following has been stated by Ani O’Brien, a member of Speak Up For Women, in an article about Feminism 2020:

Since the beginning of our collective consciousness we have known what ‘male’ and ‘female’ are and how our biological realities shape our experiences in life.

It is ridiculous to expect that we suddenly have more than two sexes and can in fact swap in and out of our sex just by self-identification. (O’Brien, 2019)

In the first sentence, the sign of ‘all’ expressed via the possessive pronoun ‘our’ is used to declare that western, supposedly modern knowledges are the only ways in which to understand and perceive the world, consigning all further knowledges, histories, languages and cultures to irrelevance and valuelessness. This is further emphasised through the idea that gender divergence and gender fluidity are ‘new’ and ‘sudden’ movements, and not ones that have

deep histories in Pacific Indigenous societies. In this way, the promotion of binarism is an act of epistemic violence on Indigenous knowledges, particularly Indigenous gender-divergent communities, and is thus one of the many facets of white supremacy and racism in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Tamapeau & Hartendorp, 2016). Although there are notable distances between this kind of rhetoric and the glossing over of trans experiences in generalisations, these practices nonetheless belong to the same structure. For example, when the terms ‘woman’ and ‘female’ are conflated, this strengthens the idea that only straight-gender people are ‘correct’ and/or ‘real’, which compounds the discriminations against gender-divergent people through notions that we are lesser, incorrect and, sometimes, imaginary.

Academic categorisation

Of the various institutions and arrangements through which Samoan gender-divergent people are deleteriously categorised, academia is a major site of epistemic violence. A persistent issue with academic institutions is their refusal to recognise marginalised knowledge that is created and owned outside of academic confines *as* knowledge, and thus when it appears in the academy, its presence is heavily negotiated, often to the detriment of its marginalised communities of origin. This has significant reverberations through the discourse surrounding Indigenous gender-divergent communities, especially in terms of comprehending the consequences of various linguistic configurations, and carrying this knowledge through in writing, speech and further exchanges of ideas (Prescod-Weinstein, n.d.). Ongoing conversations about who creates and amplifies commentary about Indigenous gender-divergent people should not be reduced to essentialism, and instead must engage with the reality that the straight-gender writers who use ‘third gender’ and similar colonial academic constructs as descriptors will never be subject to the forms of abuse and harm that gender-divergent people encounter – violence that is in part supported by declarations of our abnormality.

Both Indigenous and non-indigenous straight-gender academics, generally speaking, are more likely to be considered qualified to give ‘impartial’ and ‘informed’ information about our communities than we are, which is a further form of epistemic violence. This directly impacts whose communications are more likely to be treated as authoritative, despite distances from and diminished stakes in the lived results of these kinds of linguistic ventures for the communities who are being discussed. The aforementioned state of affairs also plays into notions of false objectivity, which has historically been used to preserve hegemonies and concentrations of power for violent ends. Moreover, these are arguably not experiences or considerations that factor into the majority of academic analysis or reflexive praxis in any significant way. Academia is overwhelmingly straight-gender for a number of reasons, including access to hegemonic education, microaggressions, the connections between gender divergence and reduced economic opportunities, and institutional discrimination. Something that is sometimes overlooked is that knowledge, as well as being found through media of exchange in variously removed forms, is also experiential, and can be intensely personal. Thus, the epistemic violence levelled through language against Samoan gender-divergent people is also violence against memories, sensory and bodily experiences, kinships and many further manifestations of being.

The ways in which we are grouped via language have pronounced effects in terms of access to resources, the aspects of our lives that are able to be acknowledged and talked through, and the specifics of which structures require dismantlement, as well as the particular methods of achieving disassembly. The definitions that are given for us essentialise and place confinements on Samoan gender-divergent people. For example, it is a commonly repeated trope in academic

publications, which are used by further organisations such as health services, that fa‘afafine ‘are biological males’ (Schmidt, 2016, p. 288), despite fa‘afafine who deny these falsely absolute statements because they are intersex, or whose relatives are fa‘afafine and intersex, such as Shevon Solipo Kaio Matai (Taulapapa McMullin & Kihara, 2018, p. 83). Two authors who express the complexity of placing limits on these definitions are Ashleigh Feu‘u and Robert Sakaguchi: the former is a fa‘afafine scholar who published a Master of Arts thesis at Victoria University of Wellington comparing Samoan fa‘afafine with Māori whakawāhine (2013), and the latter wrote a paper, with the direction of Penelope Schoeffel and Jackie Fa‘asisila, as part of an international study project about fa‘atama (2015). These two texts are among the few academic sources to discuss these matters. Feu‘u affirms fa‘afafine as ‘fluid’ (2013, p. iii), and Sakaguchi discusses fa‘atama as ‘a spectrum of identity and personal preferences to gender which cannot be narrowed or applicable to an entire community’ (2015, p. 18). Placing incorrect confines on who and what we are, and narrowing us down to a quantifiable existence that fits neatly into artificial parameters, forecloses on the potentialities that we hold. It also limits our capacities to articulate our experiences, including experiences of violence, the articulations of which can be used to dismantle violent structures. Thus, inaccurate and unfoundedly rigid definitions and statements support and perpetuate epistemic violence.

In the ‘Pacific’ (a term that is used with wariness and weariness), the usage of ‘third gender’ has been historically linked with societies classified as Polynesian, such as Tahiti, Samoa, Tonga, and Hawai‘i, sometimes Niue and Tuvalu (Polynesian, although often ignored in Aotearoa/New Zealand contexts), with occasional reference to Fiji and Kiribati (both of which are often understood as being ‘Polynesian-liminal’ for various reasons relating to language, culture and race). The term ‘third gender’ tends to be used far more sparsely in relation to societies classified as Melanesian and Micronesian (Herdt, 1996, p. 24; Sell, 2001, p. 20; Weedon, 2019). Polynesian hegemony within the Pacific is fairly ubiquitous, and has been written about in further detail by people such as Maile Arvin (2019), an Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian) scholar and historian. It is also to be noted that ‘Micronesian’, ‘Melanesian’, and ‘Polynesian’ are complex terms, and have all been used to perpetuate racial hierarchies within the Pacific; they are used here to denote these demarcations of colonial treatment and power, whilst acknowledging that their continued usage also in part fuels the continuation of these oppressions.

Indigenous ‘third gender’ people are differentiated from Indigenous straight-gender people via western colonial paradigms in relation to sexual and romantic partners and practice, and further gender(ed) expressions, including labour undertaken. As with Indigenous people generally, we have been exoticised and hypersexualised, but I argue that in the case of Indigenous gender-divergent people, this is exacerbated through intensified fixations on sexual difference. Because the ‘(indigenous) third-gender’ configuration is a derivative of the western colonial, and persistently anthropological imagination, aesthetic standards of beauty and worth are also embedded in its usage.

There has not yet been widespread dedicated academic research – and perhaps, in many ways, that is a blessing – focusing on Melanesian and Micronesian gender-divergent communities. Thus, discussions of why ‘third gender’ is so much more commonly applied to Polynesians than Melanesians and Micronesians – which I believe cannot be reduced to frequency of research in the regions overall – are mostly ignored in academia, often populated largely by non-Melanesian, non-Micronesian, white and Polynesian scholars. However, I would contend that a major factor influencing the phenomenon of primary linkage between Polynesia and applications of ‘third gender’ is the body of judgements about physical, sexual and aesthetic attractiveness that positions whiteness as the pinnacle of desirability (Talen,

2020). Thus, the phrase ‘third gender’ can also indicate the anti-black racism that has percolated through Pacific Indigenous societies and academic treatments thereof. One of the ramifications and manifestations of anti-blackness and grafting to white supremacy is that the practices and knowledges of Polynesians are emphasized; meanwhile, the practices and knowledges of the majority of Melanesians and Micronesians, and in particular Melanesian and Micronesian gender-divergent people, are actively erased (Rainbow Papua New Guinea, 2018; Thompson, 2014, p. 23). Anti-blackness and white supremacy in Pacific contexts have further consequences. It is yet to be acknowledged within Pacific Indigenous gender divergence-focused scholarship that Indigenous gender-divergent people who are *totolasi* do exist (including African American and Samoan, Papua New Guinean and Samoan, and many further genealogies), and that the mobility, migrations and relationships of Indigenous people globally mean that our nations and families could never be cleanly disentangled, or treated as mutually exclusive in any veracious analysis (Aipopo, 2020).

Another issue in the field of language and epistemic violence is academic white and/or straight-gender preoccupation with the terminology Indigenous gender-divergent people use to describe ourselves; this is seemingly motivated by external fascination, without the necessary competence for achieving these ends, as opposed to a genuine desire to advance communal wellbeing and rights (Tcherkézoff, 2014, p. 132). Most of the scholars who have written about Samoan gender-divergent communities have not made any significant contributions to ensuring that Samoan gender-divergent people can become scholars, authors and publishers of the research that concerns us directly. This preserves inequalities of power, access and platforms through which to communicate identifications of violence and discussions about structures of oppression, as well as strategies and implementations of dismantlement.

LGBTQIA+

There are multiple issues with the use of LGBTQIA+ frameworks to describe and conceptualise all Samoan gender-divergent people. To be clear, I am not arguing with Samoan gender-divergent people’s use of these terms to describe ourselves, but instead with the idea that this is applicable to all of us. In the following sections, I will describe why the term ‘transgender’, the transgender-cisgender system, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion are flawed, as well as describing some of the politics that interact with language.

‘Trans-’ means ‘on or to the other side of; across; beyond’ (Merriam Webster, n.d.), in contrast with ‘cis-’ which means ‘on this side’ (Merriam Webster, n.d.). ‘Transgender’ describes ‘people whose gender and/or expression does not match their birth assignment’ (The Trans Language Primer, n.d.). One of the reasons why this is an issue is that many Samoan gender-divergent people do not experience their genders as being in conflict with their bodily or assigned sex, with the discord instead lying between their gender expressions and societal, cultural, familial and further expectations. The transgender-cisgender dichotomy, and the use of the term *cisheteroperisex* as the mutually exclusive opposite of gender-divergent can be further problematised in the following example. Many Samoan gender-divergent people are not intersex, experience their genders and sexes as being consonant, and are attracted to people of a different gendersex than their own. It is thus entirely possible to be both *cisheteroperisex* and gender-divergent, and therefore the framework of gendersexuality provided by LGBTQIA+ structures is often inept.

The majority of LGBTQIA+ terms refer solely to gender, sex, sexuality and orientation identities separately, and not in combinations, or in ways that acknowledge that these identities

can be co-constitutive: ‘lesbian’, for example, most commonly refers to cisgender gay and/or queer women, and when applied to transgender gay and/or queer women, does not inherently allow for a discussion of how gender identity and orientation can be linked. Due to this, and the overwhelming anglophone presence within LGBTQIA+, requirements of conformity to this model perpetuate inequalities that privilege anglophone-centrism and gender-sex dichotomies. There are numerous Indigenous terms that have historically existed outside of LGBTQIA+ frameworks which acknowledge gender-sex-orientation links; as a side note, their recent cumbersome inclusions, such as ‘LGBTQITakatāpui+’, into this framework, and resultant elisions, could warrant further analysis (University of Auckland, n.d.). The word ‘fa’atama’, for example, can be used to reference gendersexuality identities that are interconnecting. That is, the genders, sexes and sexualities of some gender-divergent people are understood by us as inseparable: masculinities that are predicated upon rather than in conflict with femaleness; or maleness, masculinities and attractions to men that are all interwoven, all of which are able to be communicated through the word ‘fa’atama’ in ways that terms such as ‘transmasculine’ and ‘gay’ do not always allow without additional specification (Sakaguchi, 2015, p. 10). Although there are people who belong to more than one ‘letter community’ in those that are signified by LGBTQIA+ (such as bisexual transgender men), languaging still implies and requires that these are distinct identities. LGBTQIA+ frameworks nonetheless continue to be used by white and/or straight-gender commentators, who may insist that ‘[t]here is nothing inherently problematic with using the term “trans-gender” or “gender liminal,” for example’ (Alexeyeff & Besnier, 2014, p. 7), which is a further form of epistemic violence.

To declare this and, in doing so, deny the issues inherent in wholesale applications of contested terms is to smother the numerous critiques that Pacific Indigenous gender-divergent people have made of these usages (Feu’u, 2013, p. 74). Perhaps the most important way in which LGBTQIA+ frameworks co-opt and overwrite the identities and articulations of Samoan gender-divergent people is in their tendency to emphasise and privilege gendersexuality identities over familial, ethnic, national, racial and geographical belonging: this can also contribute to the Othering of Pacific Indigenous gender-divergent people within Pacific Indigenous societies via claims that our identities are colonial impositions (Taulapapa McMullin & Kihara, 2018). In her Master’s thesis, Ashleigh Feu’u makes the point that although many LGBTQIA+ terms are used to describe fa’afafine – a practice that also occurs with fa’atama and fa’a’afa – these are often not preferred, and to use them is to fail to recognise the kinships, collectives and relational selves involved in Samoan gender-divergent contexts (Feu’u, 2013, p. 70; also Hamer & Wilson, 2020). As a general point, it is beneficial practice not to refer to Indigenous gendersexuality-divergent people with language that we would not apply to ourselves because it reinforces hegemonic violence, misrepresents our communities, and for further reasons. In a similar vein, terms such as fa’atama should not be used to describe Samoan lesbians, trans men, or further gender-divergent people if these terms are not used by individuals to describe themselves: ‘fa’afafine’ and ‘gay man’, for example, are not at all the same identity in every, or even the majority of, situations. Impositions on the affiliations and languaging of Samoan gender-divergent people is a practice that has also been identified by Pausa Kaio Thompson, a Samoan American theologian who wrote a report about fa’afafine in Samoan theological contexts (2017; see also ‘Pausa Kaio Thompson’, n.d.). He writes that ‘there needs to be more attention to the details of how we – non-fa’afafine Samoans – have chosen to define fa’afafine on our own terms while neglecting to consider their own preferences for being embraced’ (Thompson, 2017, p. 23). This is therefore one of the few instances in which someone who is both Christian and a straight-gender scholar has acknowledged the power differentials embedded in language usage and interactions between fa’afafine and Samoan straight-gender communities. In this assertion, the placing of ‘fa’afafine’

can be used to represent Samoan gender-divergent communities, such as fa‘atama and Samoan non-binary trans communities, more widely. Additionally, the conflation of Samoan gender divergence in its entirety with only particular kinds of fa‘afafine communities – that is to say, the idea that the limits of Samoan gender divergence end at a narrow range of fa‘afafine identity – is also an area for further consideration.

The inclusion of terms such as fa‘afafine into LGBTQIA+ frameworks can falsely imply that all of these terms exist in the same or similar cultural contexts and paradigms. However, assimilation into these models is sometimes made necessary in particular contexts, such as applying for funding, public reports and international human rights (Samoa Faafafine Association Inc., 2016, p. 1). There are some instances in which an absolute rejection of associations with being gay can in some ways strengthen heterosexist discrimination because of the emphasis on Samoan gender-divergent people (particularly fa‘afafine) as solely straight, and serves to limit the ways and extent to which Samoan gender-divergent people can express attractions that are not ‘straight’ (Turnbull, 2019). In white-dominated gender-divergent spaces, especially those that are upper and middle class, the language and terminology expected from those within the space is increasingly rigid, specific and esoteric. If this etiquette is not adhered to, Indigenous and working class gender-divergent people are often perceived as incorrect or questionable by the communities that are presumed to be in control of these spaces, and ‘Gender Divergence Proper’ more generally (Feu‘u, 2013, p. 68).

Absence, slurs and segregation

Language provides numerous ways in which gender-divergent communities can be made absent as acts of violence – degraded and made separate from our straight-gender counterparts. *The Kweenz of Kelston* is a documentary by Todd Karehana, a Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui, Te Arawa, Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Ruapani ki Waikaremoana gay film maker and writer, about a group of Pasifika gendersexuality-divergent secondary students at a boys’ school in Auckland (Dann, 2018; Karehana, 2014; Karehana, n.d.). At the beginning of the film, Alexis, one of the Kweenz, recalls words used as insults to them: ‘Faggot ... You gay cunt ... Um, just normal, like swearing words’ (Karehana, 2014). Although Alexis’s use of ‘normal’ here appears to be describing which words are standard to use in terms of swears and insults, the adjective could also be an insight into the way in which anti-gender-divergent violence has been normalised. Further terms that have been used to demean Samoan gender-divergent people and Pasifika gender-divergent people more widely include ‘mala’, ‘tranny’, and ‘poofter’, although these are by no means exhaustive. Importantly, what comprises language is not only the words that are used, but the contexts and ways in which they are utilised, as well as how these are informed by ingrained dynamics of power. All three of the words quoted by Alexis are frequently used to reinforce the notions that femininity, femaleness and gendersexuality divergence are inferior, and femininity and femaleness in people perceived as males are wrong: similarly, masculinity and maleness in people perceived as females are also often coded as wrong. However, because of cisheteroperisexism, parsing the connections between sex, gender expression and perceptions, as well as the reasons for AFAB (assigned female at birth) people embodying masculinity, can become more complicated. There is also the additional violence of denying that this is violence at all (Coco Solid, 2017).

To a certain extent, prejudice that is reinforced due to little-to-no social contact is easier to understand because of the way in which these segregations are institutionally and societally orchestrated. However, it is almost unheard of for a Samoan person to not know at least a few fa‘afafine, and similarly for wider gender-divergent communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand,

and some further places, to not have at least some idea, however skewed, about who and what fa'afafine are. Thus, this is not an ignorance about Samoan gender-divergent people existing, but a purposeful erasure. The question then becomes an inquiry into what it is that the people who erase mentions of us from public discussion and publications are trying *not* to perceive, communicate, consider or scrutinise (Roy, 2019).

Gender-based violence in the Pacific is an area of research to which many scholars, Indigenous and non-indigenous, have contributed. Yet this has often been hegemonised to focus only on non-disabled, straight-gender, presumed-heterosexual female girls and women (Underhill-Sem, 2010). Gender-based violence, however, is something that many communities – who are not represented in the previous terms – encounter, and straight-gender commentators who discuss gender-based violence often elide distinctions between sex-based, gender-based, and sexuality-based violence (Samoa Faafafine Association Inc., 2016; Fu, 2015, p. 51). Definitions of womanhood in Pacific Indigenous communities by straight-gender activists, artists and scholars often reinforce the essentialness of being female, reproductive abilities, able-bodiedness, neuronormativity, conventions of beauty, and the symbolic land-purity-innocence-nationalist-anti-immigrant connotations thereof, as well as being against any form of sex work. In some circumstances, this is extended into the enactment of the belief that women who are not female should not partake in 'women's' activities, roles or spaces because of the crucial necessity of being able to carry and give birth to children. A major flaw in this claim is demonstrated through the inclusion into women's spaces of straight-gender, female, heterosexual, otherwise-non-disabled women who can't carry children for reasons other than being past menopause, thus revealing that the exclusion occurs not because of the reproductive capacities of bodies, but rather the connotations and symbolic meanings that people attach to bodies (Wright & Lim-Bunnin, 2020, p. 2).

In part because of fixations on the bodies and physical activities of Samoan gender-divergent people, further homogenisations through descriptions of labour and linguistic omission display us as solely non-disabled, and particularly as solely able-bodied (Schmidt, 2016, p. 290). Another outcome of the aforementioned physical fixations is that neurodivergence within Samoan gender-divergent communities is almost entirely disregarded in mainstream discourse about Samoan gender divergence. As both deviate from hegemonic prescribed norms, links between gendersexuality divergence and disability can also be found in white anthropological 'third gender'-focused scholarship, in which gender-divergent expression is sometimes interpreted as a form of mental illness, thus revealing something of the labyrinthine systems through which difference is pathologised (Martin & Voorhies, 1975, p. 96). That Indigenous gendersexuality divergence-focused scholarship and Indigenous disability-focused scholarship are routinely kept separate is a phenomenon that has far-reaching consequences, not least in terms of how gendersexuality-divergent and neurodivergent identities can be co-constitutive (see Brown, 2016).

A further circumstance that could be keeping the aforementioned division in place is the heterosexual hegemony within Samoan gender-divergent communities, both in terms of the way in which we are labelled by straight-gender organisations, and in terms of who in Samoan gender-divergent communities are provided with access to amplified platforms – two factors that appear to reinforce each other (Samoa Faafafine Association Inc., 2016, p. 5). I posit that, because of this, and because of able (non-disabled) hegemonies, the ways in which we are medicalised and the ways in which we require extrication from these structures have not been examined as critically as is necessary (Hillary, 2014). Refusals of our inherent diversity by white and/or straight-gender commentators, and upon occasion by Samoan gender-divergent, non-disabled and/or heterosexual commentators, impedes addressing the heterosexist and ableist

violence directed at Samoaan gender-divergent people, as well as anti-intersex and anti-disabled discrimination in various institutions and environments more widely (Wall & Pagonis, 2020).

Because the terms *fa'afafine*, *fa'atama* and *fa'a'afa* are not well-known, sometimes even within Samoaan societies, we face persistent requests or requirements that we define ourselves, make ourselves intelligible or render ourselves in hegemonic and often Othering terminology – such as LGBTQIA+ – to straight-gender and white audiences, often in situations that are not to our advantage. It is neither a neutral nor a benign act to coerce from us the epistemic labour of explaining 'what' we are in environments in which we are already marginalised, and in which our wellbeing is not valued, for the purpose of the epistemic gains of communities that already hold more power than us. This is often accompanied by requests to explain, or blank ignorance at the ways in which we are oppressed. Simply witnessing the ordinariness of how spaces are constructed and usages of language by privileged groups would serve as profuse evidence. However, the normalisation of white and/or straight-gender violence through the epistemes that circulate among the aforementioned hegemonic communities often prevents comprehension. One of the ways in which this is challenged by Samoaan gender-divergent people is to present ourselves without explanations or linguistic changes: in short, to reveal the redundancy of the question by refusing to voice the answer (Taulapapa McMullin & Kihara, 2018, p. 35; Harney & Moten, 2013).

Further thoughts

In many contexts, articulations of the experiences and perspectives of Samoaan gender-divergent communities are foreclosed, with an array of adverse outcomes. Because of this, the final section is left open for further contemplation, discussion, critique and timespace, particularly for and from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour), disabled, Deaf, intersex, poor, undocumented, precarious, enslaved gender-divergent people. Epistemic violence is perpetuated against Samoaan gender-divergent people via impositions and demands of linguistic establishments such as 'third gender' and 'LGBTQIA+', as well as diverse methods of enforcing absence, binarism, segregation and hegemonic categorisation.

There are numerous further areas of work, and these are not limited to the ones mentioned in this article. Curses are a formidable method of enacting multiple violences through language, and could be an area for further study. Although this article is concerned with language in several forms, the overriding assumption that language is solely the domain of hearing people has been communicated through a lack of seeking and explicitly engaging with the experiences and perspectives that Samoaan Deaf gender-divergent people have of language and epistemic violence. In discussions of language, there are often biases against Deaf commentators, including within written texts, which are recurrently and falsely believed by hearing people to be neutral ground (Monts-Tréviska et al., 2019). There are very few publications about Samoaan Sign Language and American Samoaan Sign Language, and Deaf Samoaans' usage of sign languages generally, let alone sources by Deaf Samoaan gender-divergent people about the intricacies of discussing gender divergence in sign languages. Further areas of work include engagements with disabled, Black, specifically Melanesian, Micronesian, intersex, poor, precarious, undocumented, and enslaved Samoaan gender-divergent people in order to ensure the wellbeing of the community in its entirety – and not just those of us who are Samoaan gender-divergent and multiply privileged – as well as the wellbeing of communities that are kin via these connections.

In terms of dismantling hegemonies by focusing on them directly, a neglected topic of study is how Christian monoethnic, monoracial, and *totolasi* light-skinned Polynesian identity – as well as being hearing and non-disabled, being upper or middle class, having legal citizenship, not living in precarity or enslavement, and being a fluent English speaker with a normative accent – all act as buffers against further kinds of violence against Samoan gender-divergent communities, and what the effects of investments in these structures of power are for communities who do not have these attributes. *Tauivi* Samoan gender-divergent communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand are *tangata tiriti*. However, I have not analysed the consequences of this in depth. Similarly, there are several instances where I could have foregrounded *takatāpuitanga*, but have not. I thus offer my apologies for all of these named insufficiencies that are present in this article, and for the ones that I have not specified out of ignorance.

The deliberations comprising this article are deeply influenced by the Black Lives Matter and Pacific climate justice movements, and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as implementations of *tino rangatiratanga* and West Papuan self-determination advocacy in Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly the discussions and events of the first half of 2020. Conversations with Samoan gender-divergent people are a foundation from which the article's considerations have been drawn, and have profoundly influenced the analyses that I have been able to articulate. Underpinning this work is a sentiment that has been expressed many times, perhaps most significantly by Fannie Lou Hamer: 'until I am free you are not free either', acknowledging the interconnections of oppressions and the necessity of their total collective dismantlement (2013). A major characteristic of all of the aforementioned justice and freedom movements is the preponderance of conversations and commentary about gendersexuality and disability amongst certain communities. Ignorance about and prejudice against Indigenous gender-divergent people in protest, land protection, sovereignty and solidarity movements is not just to the detriment of all of the people that the movements are intended to serve.

I know so many Samoan and further Indigenous gender-divergent people who want to participate in and support these movements, but who are unable or reluctant to because of inaccessibility, anti-black racism, gendersexuality divergence-based violence and further issues. The strength of these movements comes from, amongst a plethora of sources, the proportion of people involved and their relationships to each other, and praxis rooted in comprehensive analyses of how various oppressive structures interact and support each other. When Indigenous gender-divergent people, who often have substantial networks that can be activated for the former and have considerable knowledge of the latter, are excluded from movements, campaigns and land protections, their effectiveness is crucially weakened, an act that is fortified by the undermining of 'all BIPOC' claims by BIPOC multiply privileged actors. It is not enough to address only the most extreme forms of spectral violence as disconnected 'one-off' incidents, nor to have processes of engagement solely for the end products of continued, entrenched oppressions (Pickering-Martin, 2019). Indigenous gender-divergent wellbeing, like so many marginalised communities' wellbeing, is not a niche area. Indigenous sovereignty will be impossible and perhaps most particularly, unimaginable, until colonial violences against all Indigenous people are understood as necessary to demolish, and are actively being dismantled. By all of us. *Malo*.

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