



**Carla da Conceição  
Henriques Ferreira**

**Esculpido no Corpo:  
as obras de Sia Figiel e Albert Wendt**

**Sculpted on the Body:  
the fiction of Sia Figiel and Albert Wendt**



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**resumo**

O presente trabalho propõe-se a examinar a forma como o corpo é visto e representado na literatura de dois autores contemporâneos da ilha de Samoa, nomeadamente Sia Figiel e Albert Wendt, tendo em conta o contexto do pós-colonialismo.

**abstract**

This Dissertation aims at analysing the way the body is seen and represented in the literature of two Samoan contemporary writers, namely Sia Figiel and Albert Wendt by taking into account the context of postcolonialism.

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# **EmBodying Identity**



What is it that circumscribes this site called “the body”? How is this delimitation made, and who makes it? Which body qualifies as “the body”? What establishes the “the”, the existential status of this body? Does the existent body in its anonymous universality have a gender, an unspoken one? What shape does this

body have, and how is it to be known? Where did “the body” come from?

Judith Butler, “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions”

What are the philosophical consequences of human beings’ embodiedness? What role does the body play in our experience of the world? What effect has the sort of body we have made to our experience of the world and of other people, and to their experience of us?

Mike Proudfoot, *The Philosophy of the Body*

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John Locke argued that what makes something a body is its possession of primary qualities, that is, solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number. Of all these qualities, solidity is the most important because it is on account of their solidity that material objects fill space or to be more exact, it is solidity that permits a body to exclude other bodies from its space. A body occupies thus a space which it cannot share, a corporeal space, as well as a common space that it must share with other bodies. In his “Treatise on Man”, René Descartes reduces the concept of the human body to something which is “extended in time and space” and which is thereby “measurable” (quoted in Welton 1999: 2). Furthermore, he suggests that any preferences, wills or moods occurring within the human body have their origin in the mechanical interactions of organs and fluids, which can only be truly explained and understood with a basis in the rigorous sciences such as chemistry and biology. The body is thus, for Descartes, nothing more than a mere object.

Quassim Cassam quotes W. Jocke’s *Material Objects*, where it is argued that individuals are aware of solid objects because they “can move” their “limbs and body and know that such movements are being resisted” (Cassam 2003: 12), that is, they are conscious of exerting mechanical force and of being subject to that same force. One is thus aware of the manifestation of a primary quality that, at the same time, provides one with a sense of one’s own body. The body is thus

an object but one that can see and feel other objects as well as be touched and seen by other objects, which raises the question of whether it is possible to continue referring to the human body as a mere object.

When discussing the objective state of the body one has obligatorily to deal with the concepts of *Körper* and *Leib*, with the former being the outer shell and the latter the body as it is lived by each individual. There is obviously here a distinction between a body that is exclusively physical and a body that is sensitive and in communion with its environment. In order for the *Leib* to exist, the *Körper* receives certain features at a neurophysiological level that become the basis for the *Leib*, and that characterize the way in which the body is lived as well as the way in which it engages with its environment. According to Edmund Husserl, the first to discuss this opposition, things in nature are of and for perception and it is the individual's moving and perceiving body that allows for things to be perceptually situated and to have a relation to other things.

This discussion leads one to address the moment in which the *Leib* recognises itself as *Leib*. When the body touches a different body, be it lifeless or not, it becomes aware that the other body is touching it back. When this happens, the body is perceiving and at the same time feeling. While touching, the body does not recognise itself as an object, given that the object is what is touched, but as the non-object doing the touching. In "Merleau-Ponty on the Body", Sean Dorrance Kelly quotes the philosopher as he explains the duplicity of the act:

If I can, with my left hand, feel my right hand as it touches an object, the right hand as an object is not the right hand as it touches: the first is a system of bones, muscles and flesh brought down at a point of space, the second shoots through space like a rocket to reveal the external object in its place. (Kelly 2003: 76).

In contrast, when the body touches itself, then the one touching is the object touched and the object touched, in turn, senses itself as the one being touched. However, and according to this same philosopher, the body cannot strictly be an object among other objects because the body is what sees and feels other objects, that is, objects exist because the body exists. It is thus the body that allows for the space of perceived things to exist and it is the materiality of these things that demand that the body be a lived body and not a mere physical body. Mind and body are thus intrinsically connected in the process of being in

the world. A body without a conscience is indeed nothing more than a mere object and a conscious without a body has no way of materializing itself. Consequently, it is not possible to fully accept the Cartesian dualistic view in which the mind has more weight because the body is what situates the boundaries for the self and creates the exact site where identity is created. By being the only tangible manifestation of the individual, the body offers a source of security as well as some fixity in the creation of the identity.

Bodies are permanently exposed to being visualised but are unable to visualise themselves totally. What science declares as constituting the interior of the body is beyond self observation and, furthermore, it is impossible to make a connection between the internal organs and the individual whom they assist. As Liam Hudson states, “none of us would recognise the people we love if they appeared before us without their skins. None could distinguish the heart of someone he loved from the heart of someone he abhorred” (Hudson 1982: 10). Furthermore, if an individual looks at his or her body, s/he can only see what is below the shoulders and in case that observation is made by means of a mirror, then either the back or the side remain out of sight. However, because one sees an individual initially as a body, one tends to form an image of an identity based on the information that is passed on by the body. Visible differences such as sex and gender, skin colour and forms of disability signify thus identity. Consequently, the exploration of difference has to be seen as fundamental to the definition of identity. Furthermore, by defining difference, the individual is exercising power over the other side, which is devalued, and represented as “other”. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that this procedure also operates in reverse, which means that individuals must be aware that they too can be devalued in the representation others make of themselves.

Joanne Entwistle argues that “the body is both an intimate and social object” given that in the first case it serves as a metaphor for identity and in the latter it suffers the pressures of the social forces that surround it and that aim at “coordinating, managing” and “imposing ways of being on the body that come to constitute the common sense of our everyday embodiment” (Entwistle 2002: 137). The way in which the body is lived is permanently shaped by social practices that constrain it and which oblige one, as a consequence, to view the experience of embodiment as always mediated by the culture the body inhabits. Joanne

Entwistle quotes Mary Douglas with respect to the relationship between the physical body and the social body:

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other (quoted in Entwistle 2002: 138).

The body is the site where identity is constructed but this identity is directed so as to follow specific definitions about how to be in that body. The body is thus both the property of the individual as well as of the social world, the link between the interior and the exterior, the personal and the social. As Kath Woodward argues, “identity involves the interrelationship between the personal and the social; between what I feel inside and what is known about me from the outside” (Woodard 2002: 16).

It is common to assume that the first biological certainty individuals have about their identity lies in their sex. Bodies can be regarded as sexualised in different ways. First of all, and in a biological sense, bodies are regarded as sexed when they are classified at birth as male or as female. These bodies will, gradually, show a specific gendered behaviour, which will lead one to classify them according to their masculinity or femininity. They will also engage in certain sexual practices, be they heterosexual or homosexual, which will lead one to classify them according to their sexuality. All cultures have a series of attributes, expectations and practices that are associated with the sexed body, which means that to be assigned to a specific gender provides a label for our identity. In this light, transvestism and transsexualism can be the indicators of insecurity or even of a wish to undermine the fixity of identity. Transvestism also raises another issue, which is that of the dichotomy between sex and gender, describing the biological, embodied sex as the determiner of femininity or masculinity and gender as a cultural category. The hierarchical relationship between the two has often been discussed but the conclusion appears to be that sex as a biological classification is privileged. It is, however, possible to claim that sex and gender are too closely interconnected and argue that the differences between one and the other reside in their social, political and economic circumstances. Judith

Butler claims that gender is not the consequence of sex but that it is through the repeated performance of gender that one becomes gendered. Again transvestism plays an important role because one is presented with a biological male assuming a gender that is not his and revealing the aspects of femininity that have been regularised by the social world. As the author argues in *Gender Trouble*,

as much as drag creates a unified picture of 'woman' (...), it also reveals the distinctiveness of those aspects of gender experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regularity fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency... (quoted in Woodward 2002: 112).

Another important aspect of identity, ethnicity, can be characterized by physical features such as skin colour or facial traits as well as by the wearing of clothes specific to a certain culture. There are those who think that to use the term ethnicity instead of that of race is to erase the history of appropriation and violence that has characterized the construction of the racialized body in search of a neutral ground. However, while race tends to give more importance to physical features, ethnicity also involves social practices, rituals and traditions. Nonetheless, both terms indicate the process by which the body comes to be seen, known and lived as having something which indicates its difference. In fact, much of the discussion that has taken place about race/ethnicity has at its core the issue of "otherness". In *Primate Visions*, Donna Haraway argues that whiteness is commonly unseen and that this is what bestows it with its superior status. Skin colour is a visible sign of difference and if one takes into account that difference is fundamental to the construction of identity, black skin is enough for an individual to be regarded as other. However, although some individuals regard this difference as natural and as constituting an element that defines one's race, there is no objective criteria according to which one can differentiate human beings into separate races. Race has to be seen, therefore, as a social construction.

An element of fundamental importance in the construction of races is the Great Chain of Being, a system that defines the hierarchical nature, function, and organization of the universe, popular from the Renaissance to the 19th century. At its top intellectuals put naturally the white individual and the gaps between

the human and animal world were filled by individuals from other cultures who, according to their difference from Europeans, were regarded as still in various evolutionary stages. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the major debates in science were whether or not the different races constituted one species or not and in order to find evidence for their arguments, scientists examined the bodies of individuals from colonized countries, namely their skulls, which eventually constituted the element that differentiated the races. The skull is the place where the brain dwells and differences in the shape and size of the brain were connected to differences in intelligence and social behaviour. Given that the skulls of black individuals were seen as closer to those of apes, these individuals were seen as less evolved than the white individual. As Sara Ahmed argues in "Racialized Bodies", "rather than *finding* evidence of racial difference, science was actually *constructing* or even inventing the very idea of race itself as bodily ideal and bodily hierarchy" (Ahmed 2002: 50). Charles Darwin contributed furthermore to this differentiation by regarding the increasing occupation of territories outside Europe by white people as a consequence of their suitability to dominate and the subjection of the native populations as their lack of suitability to dominate. According to the natural process of selection, only the fittest survive, which means that the latter would eventually be eliminated. Colonialism is thus seen not simply as a struggle for supremacy but also as the consequence of nature. Furthermore, the type of body is what differentiates the two races, the white and the black, which are positioned in different points of the evolutionary scale.

It is also necessary to deal with the connotations that the colours black and white encompass in western cultures. Well before colonialism, the word black was already associated with a variety of negative aesthetic and moral values: to be black was to be dirty, ugly, evil, nocturnal, devilish. To be white was to be clean, beautiful, illuminated, lively, and pure. Individuals with black skin were therefore judged as being inferior in both aesthetic and moral terms as a consequence of the pre-existing cultural values conventionally associated with the colour black and, by extension, with black skin. Consequently, colonialism can also be seen as a mission, a moral mission, according to which those with white skin clean/civilize the dirty/primitive other who has black skin. Subsequently, if it were possible to bestow white skin with an identity, it would be one that would



have to encompass in addition to this, the desire for its own supremacy, the inevitable subjection of the non-white. Yet, one must also take into account the universal establishment of hierarchies within human groups which is not simply based on colour of one's skin.

Given the historical alignment of the white body against the black body, the weight of history imposes itself on the social encounter of both. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon writes about how he, an individual with black skin, was refused subjectivity by those with power and forced to regard himself as an object at their mercy:

unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematisation. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. (Fanon, 1967: 112).

Frantz Fanon describes thus how he is denied the right of constructing his own identity because the white man does it for him and, furthermore, is forced to accept the categorization that is attributed to him by the white man as well as the sense of inferiority that comes with it. The individual man with black skin is thus imprisoned by a way of seeing him that denies him the right to construct his own identity.

One should now analyse the way in which the female body, particularly the female black body is regarded. Feminine bodies have been historically characterised as weaker than male bodies. As argued before, Western intellectual thought has historically bestowed the thinking individual with disembodiment by dismissing the body and by attributing the soul a higher weight. Plato was one of the many intellectuals who accepted this dualistic approach. Yet, he also argues that there is a connection between the woman and the body, which would not be damaging given that the soul is what really matters, but that in fact is, given all the references that are made to the weaknesses of the female body. In religious texts there are several warnings against the weaknesses of the flesh and it is the female body that is repeatedly associated with them: in Christian religion the sins of Eve are the sins of the female body. To emphasise this difference even more, in

the history of colonialism it has been common to attribute feminine qualities to the both the dominated lands and cultures when in comparison to the robust male colonizer. Consequently, the woman occupies an inferior position in this mind/body hierarchical relationship.

Nevertheless, the feminine body also has positive connotations. The female body and its ability to create other bodies has been repeatedly used as a symbol for the nation. This representation is also one that connects with sexuality given that the metaphor of the woman threatened by violation is also widely used. Feminist critics have called attention to the fact that the use of nationalist representations reinforces the image of the passive female who depends upon the male to defend her honour and ignore thus any contribution the woman may give. Furthermore, they argue that the representation of the woman is one that serves patriarchal, sexual and ethnic interests. In the analysis that Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis make of the position of women within nationalist discourses, they state that women are mostly bestowed with the duty of producing children, usually within the boundaries of the same ethnic group, to whom they will transmit their culture. However, although they agree with the arguments posted by feminist critics, they also claim that women are not mere symbols for the nation, they are also active participants in the life of their nation.

If the female body is historically regarded as inferior, consequently, and by taking into account what has been previously argued about black bodies, the female black body must be twice as inferior. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, craniology dedicated some attention to the skulls of women and the fact that their brains were smaller led scientists to consider them as definitely less evolved. Still, although white women were regarded as inferior, Victorian society regulated carefully the way they inhabited their bodies and imposed concepts such as chastity and modesty on them. Consequently, although they inhabited female bodies, they also belonged to the superior race and were able to transcend the bestiality of the body. Precisely the same way the black body was bestowed with dirtiness and irrationality, the black female body was bestowed with the opposite of the white female body: primitivism, excess, sexuality. The case of Sarah Bartmann, otherwise known as the Hottentot Venus, is a perfect example of this. She was brought to Europe and exhibited to public audiences in Paris and London as an exotic item and after her death her body was dissected and her buttocks

and genitalia became items in a museum display. The female black body was from the beginning an object in the gaze of the white spectator and the reduction to body parts that was made of her even emphasizes even more that objectivism. Naturally, the observer is the white male, the rational and neutral gatherer of knowledge. Consequently, female black bodies suffer indeed from the weight of being regarded both as inferior to male bodies but as well as from being inferior to other female bodies.

If the white male is the norm according to which all other bodies are positioned, then one should also discuss the way in which it is built and what allows it to occupy such a superior position. The idealized male body that George Moss describes in *The Image of Men*, and which he constructs from a number of ideas which he traces back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is the site of self-discipline and restraint and one that is capable of concentrating its energies so that any obstacle can be surmounted. It is also a body that recalls the ancient Greek ideal of male beauty in the way that all values are encompassed within an athletic body. In order for such a body to be accomplished, all differences between the male body and the female body have to be emphasized and controlled because in male bodies they are signs of weakness. In fact, one can partly define such a body by analysing all that is regarded as not belonging to the ideal male body. By bestowing all bodies with the opposite of what authentic masculinity is supposed to be, the white male body is subordinating them as well as defining the way they are. The fact that the white male body is the one that constructs the definition proves in addition that it is the one with the power. Hence, all other bodies must be inferior.

Although the social world maintains a set of expectations about the body, the body that one inhabits offers, naturally, a number of limitations to the identity one may like to claim. The way a body is inhabited has to take into account, among other factors, the health, autonomy and the energy of the body. Hence, limits imposed on the physical performance of a body or a physical disability may be restrictive in certain spheres and may lead to one being regarded as “other”. As Carol Thomas argues

disability seems to be all about real bodies that are physically, sensory or intellectually different in undesirable ways. What could remind us more forcibly of

the real nature of bodies if not a missing leg or the inability to make the sounds that we call speech? (Thomas 2002: 64).

Kath Woodward quotes Erving Goffman's *Stigma* in which the author argues that an individual in possession of a "trait that can obtrude itself upon attention" possesses in fact "a stigma" (Woodward 2002: 124). It is common for disabled people, particularly in Western cultures, to be encouraged to disguise their disability by using prosthetic devices and overcompensation techniques in order to dissociate themselves from stigmatisation. Kath Woodward argues that to escape stigmatisation, an individual in possession of an imperfect or inadequate body may wish to present him or herself but without a body. If one takes into account that it has always been possible for one to be present without being physically there by introducing oneself by letter or in modern times by telephone, then this is possible. Nowadays, cyberspace too offers the possibility of escaping from the boundaries of the body, particularly one that is marked by race, gender or disability, and existing in a disembodied place. Although it is a *real* body that inputs the information, social information that is present in face-to-face encounters, such as style of dress or conduct, is absent. Individuals present themselves by creating or reconstructing the identities they decide upon. At the same time, cyberspace is gendered and assumptions are immediately made when one chooses to speak as a man or as a woman and the information one introduces to create a spatial context is related to the "real" world. But the only time that this disembodiment could be called into question would be if identities wished to cross over into the "real" world.

In *Body Modification*, Mike Featherstone quotes the French artist Orlan who argues that the body, as it is, "is obsolete. It is no longer adequate for the current situation" (Featherstone 2000: 8). What is meant here is that technology has evolved in such a way that it has been necessary to find strategies for the human body to accompany the increasing demands. Scientific advances have permitted the use of technological devices to enhance body functions that range from the use of spectacles to increase vision to the building of technological systems around the body in order to increase its speed and flexibility. These devices can be built within the body so as to replace or even enhance the functioning of inner organs or be employed as an outside assistance. The horizons of what a body can be are thus modified making it obligatory for today's society to deal with the

concept of the cyborg, the human-machine hybrid that, according to Donna Haraway, is the product of the breakdown in the distinction between human beings and machines that has occurred in the twentieth century. Haraway's cyborg is ahistorical and originates from an optimistic conceptualisation of the relationship between humans and animals and aims at eliminating the fear of machines, on which humans depend in a myriad of ways. However, one may argue that if all bodies are social, even those which are the product of science, then the cyborg body must also be regarded as such. And if the cyborg body is social, it must oblige us to a discourse of gender, race and ethnicity. By taking these facts into account it is not possible to say that the cyborg body is ahistorical because it obviously has to be the product of discourses within contemporary societies.

By accepting that the appearance, size and shape of a body can be altered, one is regarding the body as an entity in the process of becoming, a project to be accomplished, and which is no longer bound by inherited models of what is socially accepted. The body can thus also be used to challenge a culture that is regarded as being, in some form, oppressive. The artist Orlan has undergone plastic surgery precisely in order to make such a statement. After having read about how a pre-Columbian Mexican culture found the squint and deformations of the body beautiful and in order to question Western cultural and contemporaneous notions of beauty and ugliness, Orlan performed a number of operations in which the structure of her face was altered by placing implants in her cheeks and forehead. The public was thus given access to her exterior unmodified body as well as to the whole process of alteration which required the exposure of the inner flesh and the shed of blood. Orlan's physical transformation also gives rise to one important question concerning the body: how can one clearly define a body, if it is possible to add and subtract from the flesh and from the bone that constitute it?

The authors of *Narrative Prosthesis* argue that "all bodies are deficient in that materiality proves variable, vulnerable, and inscribable". Furthermore, there isn't such a thing as a normal body given that "the norm is an idealized quantitative and qualitative measure that is divorced from (rather than derived from) the observation of bodies, which are inevitably variable" and moreover "fails to consider the contingencies of bodies functioning within specific social and historical contexts" (Mitchell, Snyder 2000: 7). Therefore, the body that one

may aspire or made wished to aspire to is nothing more than an artificial body. Still, one has to bear in mind that there are moments in the journey of the body in which awareness of one's physicality is heightened and in which one is forced to renegotiate one's position within a world that seems antagonistic. The desire to possess a body that corresponds to the norm, however deficient or artificial it may be, may thus be seen as a way of avoiding such moments of tension.

Although there isn't such a thing as a normal body, the fact is that individuals suffer from growing pressures to display a certain bodily image. There are bodies, however, that cannot comply with this image, which leads to the important discussion of the effect the sort of body one has in one's experience of the world and of other individuals as well as to their experience of one's own body and of one's identity.



# **The Post-Colonial Body**







What is the Post-Colonial Body? It is a body “becoming”, defining itself, clearing a space for itself among and alongside other bodies.

Albert Wendt, “Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body”

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Island societies have always been regarded as fascinating places. The Greeks wrote of Atlantis, the seat of an ancient and advanced civilization. The British wrote of Avalon, the holy island where King Arthur is buried. The Portuguese writer Luis de Camões, in *Os Lusíadas* (1572), *The Lusiads* in the English translation, wrote about an “island of love”, in which naked nymphs bathe with the explorer Vasco da Gama. Daniel Defoe wrote about the ordeals of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a young Englishman who suffers shipwreck and is cast ashore on a deserted island. Jonathan Swift wrote about *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726),

in which the hero recounts his adventures in Lilliput, the land of tiny people, in Brobdingnag, the land of giants, in Laputa, the land of scientists, sorcerers, and immortals and in Houyhnhnmland, the land of horses and Yahoos.

The idyllic description of many of these islands and the possibility that is always given to the adventurer to lead a modest but happy life, has led to the Pacific being regarded as an environment of perfection and wonder. James Cook is quoted as saying that the people in the Pacific “live in a tranquillity which is not disturbed by the inequality of condition: the earth and the sea of their accord furnishes them with all the things necessary for life” (Fisher 2002: 109). Europeans of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century were particularly fascinated by these people whose lives were unspoiled by civilization and the concept of the pure and free human being was taken up by the founders of the Enlightenment. Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, believed that society had perverted the natural human being.

However, the idea of the “Noble Savage in a tropical Eden” (Wendt 1996: 641) was not shared by everybody. When French explorer Jean-François Galaup de La Pérouse reached Samoa in 1787, his ship *Astrolabe* was attacked and the commander and several members of the crew were murdered. He is quoted as saying that “the almost noble savage, living in anarchy, is a being more malicious than the wolves and the tigers in the forest” (Fisher 2002: 110). As Europeans started to settle in the Pacific, they became better acquainted with the Islanders themselves and their ways and the general impression about the natives was that, when at war, they were fearless and brutal, and when at peace, affectionate and generous. The twentieth century has witnessed a combination of both perspectives into a more realistic one, which is still sometimes nonetheless shadowed by the Gauguinian images of natives in grass skirts, dancing on beaches surrounded by a blue ocean. The result of all this, however, is that the Pacific remains often regarded as what one wants it to be and not in terms of directly observed realities.

The Navigator’s archipelago, as the Isles of Samoa were first called, was first encountered by Europeans in 1722 but it was not until 1830, with the arrival of missionaries, that detailed information about the Samoans and their ways began to be recorded. From that moment on, other missionaries (George Pratt, Thomas Powell), explorers (Charles Wilkes), and writers (Robert Louis Stevenson)

extensively documented Samoan traditions and institutions. In 1899, when Samoa was divided into Western Samoa, which was to be kept under the protection of the Germans and Eastern Samoa, which was to be kept under the protection of the Americans, official reports complemented further the already existing information.

Margaret Mead and her *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) is probably one of the best-known accounts of Samoa and its inhabitants. Derek Freeman quotes this anthropological study, which was rooted in research done by Margaret Mead between August 1925 and June 1926, and in which she describes Samoa as

a place where no one plays for very high stakes, no one pays very heavy prices, no one suffers for his convictions, or fights to the death for special ends. Disagreements between parents and child are settled by the child's moving across the street, between a man and his village by the man's removal to the next village, between a husband and his wife's seducer by a few fine mats. Neither poverty nor great disasters threaten the people to make them hold their lives dearly and tremble for continued existence. No implacable gods, swift to anger and strong to punish, disturb the even tenor of their days. (...) No one is hurried in life or punished harshly for slowness of development. Instead the gifted, the precocious, are held back, until the slowest among them have caught the pace. And in personal relations, caring is as slight. Love and hate, jealousy and revenge, sorrow and bereavement, are all matters of weeks (Freeman 1983: 83/84).

In the late 1920s there was no serious questioning of these assertions. Society was undergoing a change of customs and morals and the message in Margaret Mead's book was that western societies had much to learn from Polynesian cultures. This idea was conveyed in the subtitle of her book: *a psychological study of primitive youth for Western civilization*. Moreover, among the intellectual circles, there was discussion of the Soviet collectivist regime and of the benefits it brought to human nature, especially children. The relations between sexes, both within marriage and outside it, were also being discussed, and virginity and infidelity were being put aside as old taboos. The nature-nurture controversy was also at its height and Margaret Mead's study seemed to have solved the dilemma. As the author clearly exemplified, it was the environment in which a child was brought up rather than her or his genetic

inheritance that determined reactions. The transition to adulthood was therefore easier in Samoan society given that in Western societies a series of complexities made the process more complicated. The conclusion that was drawn from Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* was that by radically transforming the Western social system, it would be possible for individuals to escape the pressures that came with being repressed and, then, be truly joyous.

From 1928 on, Margaret Mead's study was quoted by anthropologists and philosophers, all of whom accepted her arguments without questioning. In fact, Margaret Mead's arguments had become so well established that it was complicated to refute them. For instance, the anthropologist Lowell D. Holmes went to Samoa in 1954 to gather information for his doctoral thesis and reported that Samoans are zealous in the observance of Christianity, that the main cause for divorce is adultery, that a woman caught committing adultery is usually subjected to violence, that competitive behaviour with the aim of being praised is regarded by Samoans as a tradition to be kept and that rape is a very common crime in American Samoa. However, in spite of having gathered ethnographic evidence that is not in compliance with Margaret Mead's conclusions, Holmes does not refute her ideas but rather comments on how reliable *Coming of Age in Samoa* is.

Nonetheless, Margaret Mead's study began to be questioned when, in the late 1960s, other ethnographers presented the world with information that went directly against the facts that are presented there. As a response, Margaret Mead wrote "Reflections on Later Theoretical Work on the Samoans" (1969), in which she admits to the existence of unexplainable idiosyncrasies between her work and others. In 1972 and 1973, anthropologist Eleanor Gerber carried out some research in American Samoa and returned with evidence that Samoans are very strict as far as the education of children is concerned and that they are strong believers in chastity. Furthermore, Samoans known to Gerber who had read *Coming of Age in Samoa* also rejected most of the claims Margaret Mead makes there. Still, Eleanor Gerber dismisses all this information and interprets the facts by taking into account that Samoans may have become stricter since the time of Margaret Mead's research and that her image of the free-loving native may have been correct.

In *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (1983), Derek Freeman states that “the main conclusions of *Coming of Age in Samoa* are, in reality, the figments of an anthropological myth which is deeply at variance with the facts of Samoan ethnography and history” (Freeman 1983: 109). First and foremost, he refutes any of the conclusions drawn by Mead as far as the traditional system of rank is concerned. In the 1920s it was forbidden for any woman to participate in the assemblies in which decisions concerning economic, political, ceremonial, and religious life were made. Furthermore, there had been a hurricane in January 1926 and few ceremonies had taken place since the natives were occupied with reconstructing what had been destroyed in the tempest. Margaret Mead could not have had, then, the opportunity of analysing how a ceremony was designed, and would have had to rely on the information which was passed on to her by others.

The system of rank is of fundamental importance for Samoan society and it is also one of the ways of seeing how Samoan society is deeply rooted in Christianity, which, incidentally, was introduced by the Western colonisers. Society is regarded as a hierarchy with Jehovah at its top and the chiefs are his direct representatives on earth. Those with a superior rank exercise authority over those who are below them in the social order and expect respectful obedience in return. Children are taught to obey all family members and remain obedient to those who have more authority throughout adulthood. As Derek Freeman concludes, “such are the rigours of the Samoan rank system and so intense is the emotional ambivalence generated by omnipresent authority”, that Samoans are often “in fearful trembling and shaking” (Freeman 1983: 130). This being so, one must deduce that Samoans must be dutiful abiders of customs and morals.

Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* is today often regarded as the result of an inexperienced study made by an untrained researcher eager to show results. Still, there are those who accuse the authoress of “defective critical sense” and of having given a “negative contribution to scientific ethnography”, which led to the foundation of “Romantic Primitivism” that serves as an inspirer of “much New Age garbage” (Tallis 2002: 17). In fact, in his letter to the editor, Raymond Tallis argues that “a more scrupulous scholar (...) would not have

made an international reputation so easily” (Tallis 2002: 17). In “Towards a New Oceania”, the prominent Samoan writer Albert Wendt claims that the Pacific

islands were and still are a goldmine for romantic novelists and film makers, bar-room journalists and semi-literate tourists, sociologists and Ph.D. students, remittance men and sailing evangelists, UNO ‘experts’, and colonial administrators and their well-groomed spouses. Much of this literature ranges from the hilariously romantic through the pseudo-scholarly to the infuriatingly racist; from the ‘noble savage’ literary school through Margaret Mead and all her comings of age, Somerset Maugham’s puritan missionaries/drunks/saintly whores and James Michener’s rascals and golden people, to the stereotyped childlike pagan who needs to be steered to the Light. The Oceania found in this literature is largely papalagi fictions, more revealing of papalagi fantasies and hang-ups, dreams and nightmares, prejudices and ways of viewing our crippled cosmos than of our actual islands (Wendt 1996: 650).

The author does not reject this literature but rather contests that “writers must write with aroha/aloha/alofa/loloma [love, respect], respecting the people they are writing about” given that they too, “like all other human beings, live through the pores of their flesh and mind and bone”, “suffer, laugh, cry, copulate, and die” and, most important, “may view the Void differently” (Wendt 1996: 650). The Void Albert Wendt refers to is, in the first instance, the existential emptiness that lies behind everything. This conscience of nothingness brings with it anguish and the individual is forced to ask the question of how s/he shall fill this void between herself or himself and the world. Samoans face the dilemma of being trapped between the traditions of the time before colonialism and the doubts, questions and torment that arise from belonging to a subjugated culture. They are conscious of the present as well as of the present sense of the future for which they are responsible. And although the present may seem unbearable, it is impossible to return to a time before colonialism. The individual is thus faced with the necessity of making a choice towards the future that may result either in him or her adopting a social role that has been devised by others or in choosing to recreate himself and the world s/he inhabits. In conclusion, anguish becomes the proof that one is indeed free. To choose is to recognise that there is such a thing as futurity and that one has a responsibility for the shaping of that period.

Although the subjects of colonial literature face constant pressures so as to behave according to the Western pre-established ideas of what it is to be a Samoan or a Maori or a New Guinean, they too are entitled to interpret and experience their culture the best way they see fit. And it is not because they pose a view that contests the dominant mode that they are failing to preserve it. Rather, they are accepting the novelties imposed by colonialism as well as recognizing the consequences it has had in their culture and negotiating new ways of viewing that give voice to the silenced ones. Albert Wendt explains that in the last few decades, there has been an emergence of South Pacific literature, and that what links himself and the new writers together is the expression of “revolt against the hypocritical/exploitative aspects” of “traditional/commercial/and religious hierarchies, colonialism and neo-colonialism” as well as against the “degrading values” that are imposed “from outside” but also by “some elements” in Pacific societies (Wendt 1996: 651).

While Albert Wendt claims that he leaves to the sociologists the “detached/objective analysis” of Samoans and their culture, the fact is that it is this same culture that “nourishes” (Wendt 1996: 641) his being, and therefore his writing. In “Toward a New Tourism: Albert Wendt and Becoming Attractions”, Robert Chi discusses Albert Wendt as an autoethnographic writer (Chi 1997: 84/85) in the sense that he describes colonized people in terms that bond with the colonizer’s and using their language, but distancing himself from ethnographic writers because he is himself a colonized person. This distance is of importance since ethnographic texts are the means by which Europeans represent other communities (usually subjugated ones) and autoethnographic texts are the means by which those communities represent themselves to the eyes of the coloniser. This description of Albert Wendt as an autoethnographic writer gains even more relevance when one reads chapter 33 of *Sons for the Return Home* (1973). In this chapter, the protagonist of the book, who has lived all his life in New Zealand, migrates to Samoa and after a while living there forms an opinion about “his people” and their culture, although he finds it difficult “to refer to them as his people because he was now more papalagi than Samoan” (Wendt 1987: 177). He deconstructs his parents’ stories, “cutting down through the glittering surface of the myths to the bone”, because he feels forced “to be honest with himself” and “to be honest even with paradise” (Wendt 1987: 175). This

chapter is a clear reference to Margaret Mead and her study in the sense that Albert Wendt presents the reader with a character who is occupying the role of an ethnographer (besides that of the coloniser), who is himself analysing a culture that he doesn't know yet but of which he has theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, the information that is presented in this chapter goes directly against the information gathered by Margaret Mead in *Coming of Age in Samoa*:

His people (...) measured life in proportion to their physical beauty, gauging a man's courage by what they so aptly called his 'gut-content'. (...) Their tempers would explode and they would send one another to hospital with stone or machete or fist wounds. Then deep remorse, and all was forgiven. (...) Murder was usually to right an insult to one's family. (...) Loyalty to the family came before everything else (...) The acquisition of titles, whether real or imaginary, was an endless battle (...) One of the most vital features of village life (...) was the power of the pastors and the church and the religiosity of the people (Wendt 1987: 177/180).

Robert Chi also conceives Wendt as a "touristic" writer (Chi 1997: 86) meaning that his narratives have as a central concept the fact that there are people observing. As an example, in *Pouliuli* (1977) much of the narrative takes place in the open space of various fale and observers are permanently present. Their occupants are performing actions visibly though their intentions might be mostly unknown. Albert Wendt's many descriptions of Samoan traditions further enhance Robert Chi's conceptualisation of him as a "touristic" writer as he is clearly considering a larger variety of readers than the people he describes. Robert Chi even states that he might not have many readers among the English-educated people of Oceania and that Wendt's works might be principally directed at western readers. Another element which might contribute to consider him in this light is the fact that all his books have a glossary at the end with the English equivalents of Samoan words.

In contrast, the books of Sia Figiel, another prominent Samoan writer, do not possess such a glossary, which may create difficulties for a foreign reader. However, the reader is not left at a total loss since the meaning of the words and expressions can always be deduced by the context in which they are presented. In *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures*, Ismail S. Talib uses Peter Young's terms to describe the ways in which this sort of clarification is presented to the reader.



According to Peter Young, there is an *overt cushioning* when the explanation for the item appears in the text and a *covert cushioning* when the context in which the term is presented clarifies it (Talib 2002: 128). When no clarification is presented there is, obviously, no cushioning at all. Sia Figiel's use of the covert cushioning leads the reader to address the question of why a glossary is avoided. One can always presume that the use of foreign words for the western reader is an invitation for locals to read the book, but when there isn't such a great readership, as implied before, then the writer can be economically compromising herself.

In "A distinct voice, uncovering others", Selina Tusitala Marsh argues that Sia Figiel's particular style of writing "is heavily influenced by oral traditions" and that Figiel regards herself more as a composer of stories than as a writer (Marsh 1997: 5). Selina Marsh goes on to say that Sia Figiel uses the "speakerly 'k'" dialect as opposed to the formalised "'t' dialect" in order to "reflect accurately daily reality in Samoa and maintain relevance for a younger generation of Samoans" (Marsh 1997: 5) and that her use of "Pacified" English words" does "resonate with humorous identification throughout the Pacific Islands community" (Marsh 1997: 5). Moreover, Aorewa McLeod claims that although Sia Figiel's writing makes McLeod aware of her "marginality as a palagi reader", Figiel's "skill" is such that she remains "fascinated and intrigued" (McLeod 1997: 1) by what she writes. One is thus led to conclude that Sia Figiel's covert cushioning is indeed an invitation for a Samoan readership as well as a means by which interested Western readers may learn more about Samoan society and customs.

There is, however, another reason why the author should use covert cushioning. In *The Empire Writes Back*, it is argued that by using untranslated words a writer is both registering "a sense of cultural distinctiveness" as well as forcing "the reader into an active engagement with the horizons of the culture in which these terms have meaning" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1989: 65). Furthermore, the use of untranslated words in English-language contexts sometimes aims at conferring a meaning that cannot be apprehended in translation but only through its repeated contextual use. Ultimately, by choosing to leave words and expressions untranslated, the writer is assuming a political stand because translating the words would mean that she or he would be bestowing the language of the receptor with a higher status than her or his own.

One should now address the issue of how Samoans regard themselves. In “Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body”, Albert Wendt states that “all Samoans are well-built” (Wendt 1996: 6), which leads the less familiar Western reader to create a mental image of tall, muscled Samoans. Indeed, one can find characters who are in compliance with this description in Albert Wendt’s books. For instance, the protagonist of *Sons for the Return Home* seems to fit this image given that he is a fine rugby player as well as a boxing champion. His success among women further reinforces this idea. When the protagonist meets a Maori at a bar, he compares him to his brother because they are “built the same way...: slightly short of six feet, thick, heavily muscled” (Wendt 1987: 110). Furthermore, when he travels to Samoa, he observes that Samoan men are “physically the most beautiful he had seen”, and compares them to “figures in Greek sculpture” (Wendt 1987: 177), appearing thus to endorse the European stereotype of the Polynesian body. This image of a well-built body seems to gain even more strength when Albert Wendt introduces the palagi factory worker, who looks like “an over-grown baby” (Wendt 1987: 55) and his wife who looks like “a skeleton” (Wendt 1987: 57). Albert Wendt isn’t, however, bestowing Samoans with physical attractiveness and the palagi with ugliness as if in praise of his own people and disapproval of others. The author usually avoids building plots in which coloniser and colonised play such opposing roles and prefers presenting the reader with a wider analysis of colonialism. This theory is additionally proven wrong by the protagonist’s girlfriend, a palagi girl, who looks like “a model out of a fashion magazine” (Wendt 1987: 3). And, as one continues analysing Albert Wendt’s work, further characters appear to contradict such a theory. In *Pouliuli*, the Samoan politician Malaga is described as “a soft ball of fat” (Wendt 1980: 126) and in “Pint-size Devil on a Thoroughbred”, one of the short stories in *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree and other stories* (1974), the con artist Pili is “a little over five feet in height and built like a jockey” (Wendt 1999: 35). Still, if all Samoans are well-built, then it is necessary to pose the question of why Albert Wendt constructs plots around characters who are physically ugly or even disabled.

The question that the reader may now wish to formulate is whether the use of physical imperfection may indicate some kind of immorality on the part of the characters, which will, naturally, mean that the well-built body has to represent honesty and abiding with approved ethical values. The answer appears to be

simple in the case of Malaga and Pili: Malaga is an “unscrupulous, dishonest rogue” (Wendt 1980: 128) and Pili is “completely suited to the role of robbing, cuckolding and beating” (Wendt 1999: 35). However, the answer is not simple in the case of the *papalagi* factory worker. Although there is no direct evidence, the sexual behaviour of his wife as well as the events on the beach lead the reader to suspect that he might be sexually impotent. He is thus in possession of a body that is commonly regarded as unattractive and that may be dysfunctional. Still, if there is any sort of immorality here it would be on the part of his wife and not on the part of the factory worker, who remains mainly a victim both of his wife and of his co-workers. Thus, physical imperfection would have to be viewed here as an inability to cope with the selfishness or cruelty of others. It becomes now obvious that Albert Wendt uses the body as a metaphor for the social issues that he wishes to analyse.

In this same book, the girl’s ex-boyfriend embodies the Western archetypal concept of beauty: he is “tall and muscular, deeply tanned by the sun, with short cropped blond hair and cold blue eyes” (Wendt 1987: 123). He is physically attractive and appears to be socially successful. However, he looks at the protagonist in “contempt” (Wendt 1987: 123) and refuses to provide him with an identity because of his black skin. He teases the protagonist by referring to Islanders as “coconuts” and to himself and other white men as “we fellows” (Wendt 1987: 124), setting thus a clear boundary between him and the protagonist. As Kath Woodward argues, “sameness is featured by the use of ‘we’ and ‘us’ and ‘our’ pronouns which draw in those with whom the identity is shared and exclude those who are characterized as ‘other’” (Woodward 2002: ix). Furthermore, he teases the protagonist by saying that the girl is going out with an islander because “coconuts are supposed to be big where we fellows should be big” (Wendt 1987: 124), reinforcing thus the stereotype of virility imposed upon the black body. The protagonist interprets these comments as “familiar” and “ridiculous” and regards the boyfriend’s comments as an attempt to “prove his masculinity in public” for “fear of his own inadequacies as a male”. However, the protagonist also identifies sexual desire with the desire to dominate and concludes that

the whole history of the pakeha had been cursed with this fear, and the Maoris and other minority groups had to pay for it. All pakeha women who went out with

Polynesians and blacks were considered nymphomaniacs after the supersized whang. Conversely, all pakeha men who took out Polynesian women were after the expert fuck (Wendt 1987: 125).

The personality of the ex-boyfriend seems thus to contradict the message of honesty that one believed Albert Wendt wanted to suggest with the use of attractive bodies. However, Albert Wendt solves this problem by introducing an episode in which the protagonist beats the ex-boyfriend “methodically” in the face and genitals in the bar wanting to “break him as a man” so that no other woman can “find him a suitable lover” (Wendt 1987: 166). The ex-boyfriend is now in possession of a body that passes the correct message. In fact, the violence that the word “methodically” implies leads the reader to imagine the previously attractive body of the ex-boyfriend as scarred and as dysfunctional as well as to pose the question of whether the agency of this character may suffer any sort of limitation from this moment on.

In *Understanding Identity*, Kath Woodward discusses the fact that individuals in possession of a trait that marks a difference from others are in possession of a stigma and quotes Erving Goffman’s *Stigma. Notes on the management of spoiled identity* where it is argued that if an individual “who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention”, he or she may encounter rejection because “he possesses a stigma, an undesired differentness” (Woodward 2002: 124). Even though bodies are the property of individuals, it is the culture that these bodies inhabit that creates and defines the rules of what is, or isn’t, acceptable and significant for those bodies. Kath Woodward also argues that “just as the slim, athletic body may be used to signify success and an attractive identity, the impaired body may be represented as an indicator of failed identity” (Woodward 2002: 124). Stigmatised bodies, or bodies with a visible physical disability, are often regarded negatively and it is precisely this tension between the individual and the society that gives rise to restrictions on the agency of the body.

This issue is of crucial importance in Albert Wendt’s works, as he presents the reader with several characters who are in possession of bodies that are commonly regarded either as imperfect or as dysfunctional by others. In *Pouliuli*, Laamatua Lemigao, the “illegitimate son of Talanoa, a wayward and ugly daughter

of the Aiga Laamatua” (Wendt 1980: 19), is called “Crooked-leg” (Wendt 1980: 20) by others because he has a club-foot. He states that he has had to fight a “lone battle for survival” (Wendt 1980: 77) in a place where individuals are “intolerant of any kind of deformity” (Wendt 1980: 76). In *Flying-fox in a Freedom Tree and other stories*, Tagata is a dwarf and is called flying fox, the bird that “has no nest with other birds because they laugh at him and treat him different because he is not what a bird should be” (Wendt 1999: 137). Captain Full is very “ugly and small” (Wendt 1999: 25) and, furthermore, has a limp. These elements may lead one to bestow him with physical fragility as well as to regard him as unable to succeed socially. The issue of whether these characters are indeed able to succeed in defining their identities within the community becomes even more meaningful if one takes into account that these communities are also trying to define themselves after having been “infiltrated and denigrated by Western imperialist forces” that left them “reduced to spiritual wastelands” (Keown 2002: 50).

The issue of finding one’s place within the community is also extensively dealt with in Sia Figiel’s novels. In *where we once belonged* (1996), Sia Figiel tells the story of the world as it is seen through the eyes of thirteen-year-old Alofa - precisely as in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Sia Figiel’s inspiration for this novel - and of her journey towards the self within a community that is all-seeing and all-knowing. The beautiful Maureen Pearl is here represented by Makaoleafi, “the epitomy of a Malaefou young lady” (Figiel 1998: 2). This façade earns Makaoleafi the respect of the villagers who, unaware of her wrongdoings, compliment her. Similarly, in *The Bluest Eye*, Maureen is complimented on her physical beauty, which is nothing more than a façade as well. Alofa, on the other hand, is “an in-between” (Figiel 1998: 115), which means that she is neither a “completely good” nor a “completely bad” (Figiel 1998: 4) girl and that she can (and does) fail to respond to what the community asks for her. This issue is of particular relevance when Alofa starts relating with her aunt Siniva, “once the most beautiful woman in Malaefou”, with “eyes the colour of lava” and “hair the length of a river”. Siniva “had a large brain, too” (Figiel 1998: 185) and was the first to win a scholarship to study in New Zealand. The community expected Siniva to return with an overseas education and experience that would elevate the

status of her aiga as well as to attain previously out of reach working opportunities. However, Siniva returns changed:

she was fat, wore an afro, wore no bra... and you could easily see her nipples through the Jimmy Hendrix T-shirt she was wearing. Sandles. Peace earrings. Yin-Yang rings. And a cap with a picture of a burning American flag and 'Get out of Vietnam' scribbled under it (Figiel 1998: 185).

Alofa compares Siniva to a "hippie" and the villagers compare her to "a real bum" (Figiel 1998: 18). Beautiful and intelligent Siniva had been in possession of all that was necessary to succeed. However, to the eyes of her community, she does not succeed and the changes that have occurred in her body are to the reader a clear indicator of the difficulties that Siniva will encounter in her new life in Samoa.

Besides subverting Samoan standards of decorum by indecently exposing her body, Siniva also starts attacking religious beliefs in favour of the ancient Samoan beliefs as well as the materiality the community is now based on. As Selina Marsh puts it, "Siniva is now armed with the knowledge of colonialism and its legacy of cultural and material imperialism" (Marsh 1997: 4) and that is what renders her unable to fit in. This "attachment to traditional culture" shown by Siniva can be regarded, as Alberto Melucci puts it, as an "attempt to resist the dissolution of identity as an essence" (Melucci 1997: 65). In addition, Gayatri Spivak regards seeking for one's own roots as something that can be deployed at particular moments as a response to the crisis of being marginalized. Siniva fights specific changes that have occurred within the community and that she recognises as having been caused by colonialism in favour of the way things were in the past. In her struggle to find a place for her "I" among the "We" that is her community, Siniva comments that "Suicide (...) is the only way" (Figiel 1998: 234) individuals have left to face the disillusionment towards what Samoa and Samoans have become after colonialism.

Suicide is an issue that is insistently dealt with by Sia Figiel. In *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (1996), the writer presents the reader with a group of girls who are telling the stories of how they got their scars when one of them refers to suicide as "the worst scar ever" (Figiel 1996: 53). By eliminating the vehicle through which one experiences life, one is indeed creating a scar that is different from the loss of a member or from a serious burn. But while these can be

exposed to the eyes of oneself and others and the events that surround them told, suicide is a scar that one cannot carry and that furthermore disappears from the visual field once the body is dealt with. This argument is used by one of the girls to dismiss suicide as a scar, given that it isn't "stuff that's here on land" (Figiel 1996: 52). However, suicide is a scar, a psychological scar. The cloth that is the community is in possession of a scar that is represented by the recognisance of the abrupt disappearance of a body as well as of the mind it used to shelter and individuals are faced with having to deal with the issues that led to that event.

Alberto Melucci claims that human beings are "migrant animals in the labyrinths of the world metropolises" (Melucci 1997: 61). Even though change is desired and looked for, it challenges established rules and brings with it insecurity, fear and loss. Although the individual gains experience in each metropolis, the reality is that that experience cannot be transposed to the metropolis that follows because each one has a culture, a language and a set of rules to which one must adapt. One is thus left with the obligation to choose, which may lead to success or to failure, but that is, nonetheless, an unavoidable obligation. "Even non-choice constitutes a choice because it means rejecting an opportunity, which is also a choice" (Melucci 1997: 63). Young Siniva left Samoa with an experience that had to be remodelled to what she encountered in New Zealand and the older Siniva faces the fact of having to go through the same remodelling process again. The protagonist of *Sons for the Return Home* is faced with a similar experience when he migrates to Samoa with his family. After having lived all his life in New Zealand, he discovers himself unable to adapt. First, "he had returned unprepared for the flies and mosquitoes"; "Then there were all the different sounds which he couldn't adjust to" (Wendt 1987: 175); "During the day he couldn't escape the noise and smell of people"; "then there were the great silences which fell at evening" (Wendt 1987: 176). Additionally, he felt physically threatened because of the "rudimentary standards of sanitation and hygiene in the village", which meant that "very papalagi Samoans like himself got ill from eating the food" (Wendt 1987: 177). One is thus led to ask the question of whether these characters are willing to remodel their previous experiences.

Siniva seems unwilling to readapt to Samoan culture, particularly to the changes that have occurred within it. She regards suicide as the only choice for a free being, a choice that is motivated by reason, and her argument is that Samoans are increasingly losing themselves to the choices that they themselves are making:

Suicide - it is the only way. For isn't that what we're all slowly doing anyway? Each time a child cries for Coca-Cola instead of coconut-juice the waves close into our lungs. Each time we choose one car, two cars, three cars over canoes and our own feet, the waves close in further. Further and further each time we open supa-keli... pisupo... elegi instead of fishing nets... raising pigs... growing taro... plantations... taamu... breadfruit. Each time we prefer apples to mangoes... pears to mangoes... strawberries to mangoes. Each time we prefer tin and louvres to thatched roofs. Each time we order fast-fast food we hurry the waves into our lungs. We suffocate ourselves - suffocate our babies and our reefs with plastic diaper... formula milk... baby powder... bottled baby-food and a nuclear bomb, too, once in a while. Drowning our children with each mushroom cloud, Lobe Boat... Fantasy Island... Rambo... video game... polyester shoes, socks - everything polyester (Figiel 1998: 234).

Alofa herself is not beautiful, but rather "cheeky and ugly" (Figiel 1998: 115) and pretends not to be smart for fear of what happens to smart women. As Alofa increasingly learns that things are not as she initially projected and accepted as being, her coordinates of personal identity weaken and she is forced to pose the question "Who am I?". However, her answer seems to be "I" does not exist", "I" is always "we" (Figiel 1998: 135). Still, as an in-between, Alofa has the ability to escape Siniva's existentialistic fate by negotiating strategies of selfhood, both individually and communally, in search of an answer that becomes henceforth even more relevant. Symbolically, Alofa represents the border, that space full of contradiction and ambivalence that both separates and joins two worlds, the world before colonialism and the world after. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha argues that the border is that place from where it is possible to contemplate one moving beyond a barrier towards something that is neither a new horizon nor a stepping away from the past. In fact, it is the "moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and



exclusion” (quoted in McLeod 2000: 217). It is in this transitory state that Alofa bonds with the protagonist of *Sons for the Return Home*, who is himself an agent of change, and who, symbolically, ends his quest in an airplane that is taking him back to New Zealand and that he feels is “fixed forever in a placid timeless sea” (Wendt 1987: 216) between past and future.

The issue of the body as “a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves” (Butler 1999: 307) is extensively dealt with in Sia Figiel’s *they who do not grieve*. The author presents the reader with the characters Lalolagi and Tausi who decide to have a tattoo done so as to “seal their friendship with the permanency of starfish on their thighs” (Figiel 2001: 229). Tausi finishes the tattoo before Lalolagi, who cannot have hers finished because of a betrayal on the part of her best friend. Both girls are in love with the same married man and when he chooses Lalolagi, Tausi in revenge, tells his wife about the affair he is having, which leads to Lalolagi undergoing public punishment. This idea of the woman being punished for wishing to enjoy her sexuality had already been dealt with in Figiel’s previous novels. In *where we once belonged*, Makaoleafi, the “goodest girl” (Figiel 1998: 1) in the village, is caught with a pornographic magazine in her rucksack and is brutally beaten and when Alofa is caught performing fellatio with a village boy her punishment is identical. Not only are both girls forced to go to school with the unhealed sores on their bodies but also their hair is shaven off repeatedly to attract public attention as well as to humiliate them further. On the other hand, there is apparently no punishment for the man who wants to enjoy his sexuality however immoral it may be, as is the case of Alofa’s father.

The body is that part of the individual that is visible, which means that a number of ideas can be conveyed just by viewing it. Bodies that portray such marks as Makaoleafi’s or Lalolagi’s are stating that an ordinance has been violated within a Samoan community and that the marks are the punishment designed for that violation. An idea of disadvantage will be associated with those bodies and the social space will transform itself into a pedagogical setting. However, Alphonso Lingis argues that “bodies that are forcibly subjected produce power in their turn” given that they “devise their evasions, resistances, ambushes, ruses, and mockeries” (Lingis 1999: 286). Tausi and Lalolagi refuse to mention the events surrounding the making of the tattoos as well as the disfigurement as if

attempting to suppress them. If one takes into account that these are the subjects of both colonial subjugation as well as of masculine subjugation, the issue of keeping silence gains even more relevance. The reader may be thus led to pose the questions of whether these women can break the silence and, in case they can and do, of whether they will be heard and, most importantly, understood.

Sia Figiel acknowledges the fact that some elements in her novels are responses to Margaret Mead's claims in *Coming of Age in Samoa* given that both in *Where we once belonged* and in *they who do not grieve* there are references to Mead and her book. In *Where we once belonged*, Alofa and her schoolmates are shown an article from *Time* magazine that is called "Mead-Freeman Controversy". Naturally, none of the girls understands the title or the contents of the article, which has to be explained to them by the teacher. However, Alofa's knowledge of English is insufficient and she still has to ask one of her schoolmates to explain it to her, which she does in a way that seems to render the discussion as trivial:

Mead was a palagi woman who wrote a book on Samoan girls doing "it" a lot... and they were loving and loved "it" too. Freeman was a palagi man who said that Mead, the palagi woman, was wrong about Samoan girls doing "it" a lot... and that Samoans are jealous, hateful, murderous people who do not know how to do "it" (Figiel 1998: 204).

In *they who do not grieve*, Sia Figiel presents the reader with Cath and her friend Shelly, two young women who attend university during the 1960s and who hear about "that book" (Figiel 2001: 21) from a professor. Shelly's first reaction is of astonishment for being compared to "a bunch of fucking primitives who probably swing from tree to tree eating nothing but bananas and maggots all day long" (Figiel 2001: 21). However, after having read "that book", the girls start dreaming about "that island" (Figiel 2001: 22) and the "free-loving non-jealous men and women" (Figiel 2001: 23) who inhabit it. In fact, the book becomes so important that Cath fantasizes about being in a demonstration and shouting "Let's go back to the basics, man!" (Figiel 2001: 24) holding a copy of *Coming of Age in Samoa* in her hand. It is also implied in the novel that the idyllic reality that is portrayed in the book is what leads to both girls moving to the Pacific islands years later.

Oppression and silence are what tie Apa, the painter, to Lalolagi and Tausi. After a conversation with his emigrant co-workers, all of whom had been several times humiliated by the white man both in their own countries and in this new country, Apa paints *Men and Women without Memory*, in which he depicts a number of black bodies without heads. This series of paintings launches him towards fame and Apa becomes known as the “angry voice of the Islander proletariat” (Figiel 2001: 192). Apa becomes thus the voice of those who have been subjugated by colonialism and who have migrated to the coloniser’s world only to continue being subjugated. Homi Bhabha claims that the colonized individual is constructed by means of a disabling master discourse but that there are means through which s/he may recover a voice. Apa’s paintings may thus be a means through which the silence of minorities such as immigrants can be broken and their voices represented. Likewise, one may regard the writings of Albert Wendt as a way of giving voice to colonised communities and those of Sia Figiel as a way of breaking the silence of the women who are subjected to a patriarchal dominion.

In both Sia Figiel and Albert Wendt’s work, the individual is permanently under the community’s careful and curious surveillance. It is also under the community’s ubiquitous and often disapproving eyes that the individual must find the strategies that will permit him or her to construct a space for the “I”. However, if one takes into account the fact that the pillars of the colonised cultures are themselves frail, one must dwell on the question of which strategies there are for the survival of individuals such as Siniva or Laamatua who stand alone within the community which they either reject or that rejects them but which does not cease from pressuring them with its omnipresent eyes. The points of support that exist for characters such as these become even more relevant if one considers the idiosyncrasies with which the community treats its members. In addition, Samoa has a very high suicide rate, which leads to the conclusion that many Samoans feel themselves unable to find a place for themselves within the community.

Sarah Doetschman compares Albert Wendt’s *Pouliuli* with Russell Soaba’s *Maiba*. At one point, she argues that in both novels

the characters who are least socially assimilated survive the disasters most unscathed. If Wendt and Soaba are holding up these outsider characters as models

for the villagers, what hope can there be for the future of these societies? How does one teach or pass on the experience of being outcast from the community? (Doetschman 1998: 86).

Given that the answer to this last question seems to be that one does not, the necessity of dealing with the first question becomes henceforth more relevant. However, in order to discuss the issues raised here, one will also have to deal with the body as a key marker of identity.





# **The Body of the Other**





For to view him [Socrates] from the outside and judge by his external appearance, no one would have given a shred of an onion for him, so ugly was his body and so absurd his appearance, with his pointed nose, his bovine expression, and his idiotic face.

*Gargantua and Pantagruel*, François Rabelais (16<sup>th</sup> century)

## **Laamatua**

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Malaelua, a fictitious village in Western Samoa, is the canvas on which Wendt portrays the characters of *Pouliuli*, a novel that contains in its title the Samoan word for *darkness*. Following the hint, the novel is Kafkaesque at its beginning as it describes the awakening of the respected seventy-six year old Faleasa Osovae to a world which suddenly causes him to feel an uncontrollable urge to vomit. His past, “everything he had been, had become, had achieved” (Wendt 1980: 1) suddenly becomes empty of meaning and Osovae decides to simulate madness in order to free himself from the constraints of society and thus to exploit its structure and its members. However, as the narrative evolves it becomes obvious that the rebellion is doomed to fail and Osovae’s efforts can only be regarded as tragic.

Wendt draws the picture of a time in which the phases before and after the arrival of white people overlap and interweave. *Pouliuli* moves forward and backward as Wendt narrates the growing up of two children in an initially almost



isolated village, the first contact with white people and their civilization, the destabilizing of traditional values, and ends seventy-six years later in the same village which is no longer isolated from the rest of the world and whose members possess an active influence in the colonial government.

Faleasa Osovae, “the only legitimate son of Faaleasa Vaatele”, was “a healthy screaming child” who was born “at night in the middle of a violent but short-lived thunderstorm”, a fact which is interpreted as “a most favourable omen for his future”. According to all Faleasa would then be “as strong and as violently courageous as thunder” (Wendt 1980: 19). Laamatua, on the other hand, is described as the “illegitimate son of Talanoa, a wayward and ugly daughter of the Aiga Laamatua”, who “whimpered club-footedly into the glaring, painful light of midday” (Wendt 1980: 19). Such is the distress of his family that he immediately earns the birth name of Lemigao, the one “Without Manners” (Wendt 1980: 20). The physical description of both Osovae and Laamatua can be understood as a reference to the Greek god Ares and his brother Hephaestus, with the latter being the only lame god in Greek mythology. In the poem “in heavenly realms of hellas dwelt” (cummings 1998: 66), e. e. cummings describes these gods as

two very different sons of zeus:  
one, handsome strong and born to dare  
-a fighter to his eyelashes-  
the other, cunning ugly lame;

The manner in which the description of the conception and birth of both Osovae and Laamatua is developed leads the reader to evoke the body as a symbol for ethical values which diverge according to the way that same body is physically presented. Folk tales from the whole world have presented the reader with characters who are physically disturbing in their ugliness and who act in a wicked way as well as with characters who are physically beautiful and who act in a kind way. In “Endymion” (Keats 1996: 55), John Keats writes that

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep

A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

The concept of beauty as a positive thing is developed even further in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, where he argues that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” (Keats 1996: 214), an idea which is complemented in *The Sense of Beauty* by George Santayana, who declares that “beauty” is “the expression of the ideal, the symbol of divine perfection, and the sensible manifestation of the good” (Santayana 1955: 11). In fact, this philosopher argues that the presence of beauty “is the sense of the presence of something good” and “(in the case of ugliness) of its absence” (Santayana 1955: 31). Following these definitions, one can only conclude that the presence of ugliness implies the presence of evil.

Throughout history, bodies that are regarded as imperfect by others have always caused contradictory feelings. In primitive societies, those with impaired bodies were mostly eliminated because individuals couldn’t either survive on their own or because the deficiency was considered to be a menace to society. Blind individuals were often feared given that a malign spirit was said to possess them; at other times, they were worshipped because their blindness was a form in which to communicate with the gods. In Thebes, laws even permitted the elimination of individuals with impaired bodies at birth. This cultural stigmatization can also be seen in literary and historical texts which mostly present disabled characters negatively. As David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder state in *Narrative Prosthesis. Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, many are the disabled characters who appear in literature. However, “the meagre nature of these disabled characters’ lives” has been insistently portrayed “as inevitably leading them towards bitterness and anger” which causes them to be regarded as “objects of suspicion” by others. They are ultimately “extolled or defeated according to their ability to adjust to or overcome their tragic situation” (Mitchell, Snyder 2000: 19).

Laamatua’s ugly club-foot originates a relationship: the child Osovae teases Laamatua about his deficiency and when the latter hits him in response, Osovae begins to cry. Laamatua, in a protective brotherly attitude, and which does not match the negativity associated with his physical appearance, helps Osovae up, brushes the dust from his body and scolds him softly. The distance between

them has thus been narrowed and the children walk away arm in arm setting the path for a new friendship.

Lemigao Laamatua as a child is “squat”, “pockmarked with countless sores”, “heavily muscled but spare” and “always hungry” (Wendt 1980: 21). As an adult, in spite of being someone who “never backed down in a fight” and who “had earned his grandparents’ grudging respect” (Wendt 1980: 77), Laamatua remains physically “too ugly to win any woman” (Wendt 1980: 75). Quoting George Santayana, “the eye is attracted to the mere appearance of things” and “man” cannot “select his dwelling, his clothes, or his companions without reference to their effect on his aesthetic senses” (Santayana 1955: 3). What is being implied here is that Laamatua’s body makes it impossible for someone to feel love for him given that it fails to correspond to the norm. As argued by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, “cripples stand for that which is definitionally undesirable, for they are locked into a predicament of eternal, unchanging, and absolute deviancy” (Mitchell, Snyder 2000: 82-83). Furthermore, Carol Thomas argues that, “cultural reactions to bodies that have something permanently ‘wrong’ with them range from disgust and abhorrence to heartfelt pity” (Thomas 2002: 64). Feelings such as these are described in Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) concerning Quasimodo, Notre Dame’s deaf hunchbacked bell ringer. However, the reader is informed that Laamatua, unlike Quasimodo, is indeed a “heartless seducer” (Wendt 1980: 75) and that he actually marries. If Laamatua can seduce, then it is only logical to conclude that he can be loved, which means that love will have to be viewed as a means through which elements that cause discomfort (such as the club-foot) must be regarded as irrelevant because a mental quality is added to the merely physical. As William Ian Miller argues in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, love involves “a notable and non-trivial suspension of some, if not all, rules of disgust” and given that “disgust rules mark the boundaries of self”, “the relaxing of them marks privilege, intimacy, duty, and caring” (Miller 1997: xi).

After discovering the facts about Laamatua’s love life, Malaeluans are forced to “reassess their standards of male attractiveness to women” and to accept that “deformities” can be “attractive and even beautiful to some women” (Wendt 1980: 76). They even start referring to Laamatua as “the handsome cripple” (Wendt 1980: 77). Still, the fact is that the villagers have been “intolerant

of any kind of deformity” (Wendt 1980: 76) until this episode, leading to the conclusion that Laamatua can only be regarded as an outsider in this society. As Kath Woodward argues, “people experiencing some sort of disability have been categorized as ‘other’ by those who are not disabled” (Woodward 2002: 125). This idea obtains further reinforcement when Laamatua talks about “his lone battle for survival in a hostile Malaelua” (Wendt 1980: 77), which is not difficult to accept given that, according to the protagonist of *Sons for the Return Home*, Samoans live

primarily through the flesh, priding themselves on the flexibility of their muscles, glorifying physical courage and unmaimed flesh. That was why (...) the main targets for their jokes and ridicule were people and animals with physical or mental defects: hunchbacks, the blind, albinos, the mentally handicapped, the limbless, the crippled, the mute and deaf, the insane (Wendt 1987: 178)

However, Laamatua’s behaviour throughout the novel is not to disguise his club-foot or even pretend it does not exist but rather to recognise his difference and the fact that it is immediately visible to all. In fact, he usually refers to his club-foot as his “burden” (Wendt 1980: 21). He is also aware that this difference can attract the stares as well as the rejection of others and even learns to use his deficiency into his advantage. After having killed and eaten a pig that didn’t belong to them, Laamatua and Osovae are forced to go through a tautoga, a ceremony taken with the aim of obtaining a confession. Laamatua enters the fale where the ceremony is going to take place “walking with a more pronounced limp, rocking like a boat in rough seas” (Wendt 1980: 26) and then sits down and massages his club-foot, attracting thus the attention of the matai, as well as their pity.

It is also because of this episode that the reader becomes aware that Laamatua does not accept Christianity without questioning it. When he lies at the tautoga trying to avoid punishment, he is defying those who, as his friend Osovae, believe in an unforgiving god who will punish them for all their sins. He states that “If I am lying may our Almighty God strike me dead or punish me in whatever manner He considers fit...” (Wendt 1980: 27) and because nothing happens, he concludes that “God is a God of love” (Wendt 1980: 27). Still, the reader is aware that Laamatua believes he has won the challenge and that he is

beginning to suspect that perhaps the sole person responsible for his actions is himself and that this God of love is perhaps a God that does not exist. In fact, for the rest of the narrative, Laamatua acts with pride, self-confidence and desire to dominate, elements that bring him closer to the Nietzschean portrait of the *übermensch*. On the contrary, Laamatua's friend Osovae will be an "exemplary Christian" his whole life and only when he is old does he realise that "his whole existence as a Christian had meant nothing deeper than the necessity of being a Christian because it was expected of a good leader" (Wendt 1980: 136).

Laamatua fights to reclaim his identity by refusing the concept of "normality" which is imposed on him by his community. As Sarah Doetschman puts it, "instead of conforming himself to the standards of society, he forces society to accept his standards" (Doetschman 1998: 86) and he does that by refusing the role imposed on him of being physically, economically and socially inferior and by creating a role for himself. When criticised by the other Malaeluans for not having children, Laamatua comments that he wouldn't "have children just to prove his virility to a herd of stupidly vain people" (Wendt 1980: 77). Naturally, this answer must be interpreted taking into account that Laamatua is again being ostracized for something which he cannot control, as happens with his physical deficiency, and is not pleased by it. He is again the "other", the opposite of what is "normal". His choice of words also implies that the Malaeluans are a group - "a herd" - to which he doesn't belong and which he himself refuses given that they follow a number of principles which suffocate the individual. In order to survive within it, one has therefore to follow Laamatua's example and transcend all the doctrines imposed by the "herd" so that one can emerge not as a subjugated but rather as master. In fact, Laamatua's alleged sterility may also be interpreted as his being unable to identify with his particular culture. Obviously, it is also necessary to keep in mind that his "otherness" is further represented through the fact that he is the colonized, the mastered subject of white civilization. Laamatua is thus an outsider in different contexts.

Still, although occupying the position of an outsider, Laamatua's character is successful given that he does not try to achieve any great goals (besides the education of his adopted son, in which he fails) but rather lives events as they unfold before him. As Sarah Doetschmann puts it, Laamatua lives life "in a reactive way" (Doetschmann 1998: 85). This approach to life leads one to

interpret Laamatua as one of Camus's absurd men, the conqueror, given that he understands that "l'action est en elle-même inutile. Il n'y a qu'une action utile, celle qui referait l'homme et la terre" (Camus 1971: 118). On the contrary, Laamatua's friend Osovae tries to manipulate events so as to achieve great goals and eventually fails in all his efforts. Indeed, one of the conclusions that one can draw from the analysis of this novel is that to take an active approach to life, is to be doomed to failure.

Since Laamatua has no role model to follow and is forced to create his own role, perhaps he is also better equipped to deal with European colonization and the changes it brings about. Sarah Doetschman argues that "those born into outsider positions learn at a very early age to evaluate their surroundings in a complex, analytic way" (Doetschman 1998: 86) given that they have to adjust to what is demanded from them. This process is similar to that of colonised cultures, which are forced to accept the coloniser's ways: "the colonized groups become much more sensitive to this procedure of reevaluating truths and assumptions, and do so much more quickly than do the colonizing groups" (Doetschmann 1998: 86). Thus, outsider figures have more opportunities of adjusting to and surviving the new environment than those who are not, given that the latter need models to guide them. However, the question remains of whether all outsider figures do indeed survive unscathed the identity crisis colonialism brings with it.

## **Tagata**

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*Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree and other stories* is, as the title indicates, a collection of short stories, with a longer tale that gives the book its title and which will be dealt with at this point. Although the sections of "Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree" are written in various styles, "English-style, Vaipe-style. My style" (Wendt 1999: 106) as Albert Wendt himself puts it, and deal with different subjects, they all complement each other so as to create the course of a man's life. Again, the issue of the conflict between living according to the traditional Samoan values and embracing the values of a westernised society is critically dealt with by Albert Wendt.

Tagata, which in Samoan means *man* or *person*, is a dwarf who, in “Flying Fox in the Freedom Tree”, befriends Pepe, the main character. The irony of the name must be addressed given that, being a dwarf, Tagata will never grow tall enough to be a man as conceptualised by society. However, Tagata describes himself as “a small man with a big man inside, the flying-fox with an eagle in the gut” (Wendt 1999: 141). Jacqueline Bardolph states that the flying-fox is thought to be “the representation of man in his duality, both crawling on the ground and flying” (Bardolph 1984: 2). Tagata encompasses then within him several elements: he is the man who crawls both because of his height and because he has to accept the intrusion of colonialism; he is the man who flies an imagined flight away from the increasing deterioration of Samoan traditional society; he is the man who loves life and tries to live it to the fullest but who feels himself trapped within a frail body.

Tagata inhabits the Vaipe, an area which “smells like a dead horse” and that takes its name from the “black stream” (Wendt 1999: 108) that flows through it. In fact, in English, Vaipe means *dead water*. That is also where his parents have their market, which “smells of rotting food and people and is loud all the time with people’s conversations and buying and cheating” (Wendt 1999: 120). The area encompasses then within it visual darkness that is increased by the fetid odour and the loudness. As William Ian Miller points out, “it is sight that processes ugliness” (Miller 1997: 81): “the visual has its own aesthetic and consequent moral standard” (Miller 1997: 82). One cannot avoid but thinking that such an unattractive place cannot represent positivism. Furthermore, fetid smells are, in the western tradition, “associated with the dark, the dank, the primitive and the bestial” (Miller 1997: 75) and, historically speaking, bad smells have always been regarded as carriers of disease. Hearing is also dealt with here, given that certain sounds, such as those of people cheating, may lead to discomfort. In addition, Jacqueline Bardolph argues that “the Vaipe voice is the voice of the uneducated” (Bardolph 1984, 3), to be exact, the voice of those who can’t speak either English or Samoan but rather a mixture of both. Albert Wendt’s characters who inhabit the Vaipe communicate in a language which does not follow the conventions of correct English and that appears to obey the rules of what Ismail Talib describes as pidgin: there is an “avoidance or omission” of verb tense, auxiliary verbs, number concord and the grammar is simplified (Talib 2002:

124/125). Wendt simply calls it “Vaipe-style” (Wendt 1999: 106). Naturally, the use of this idiom serves to give the novel a colourful tone but this certainly isn’t the only aim. “Vaipe Style” can be interpreted as a degradation of the English language which is symbolic in the sense that nothing is pure anymore. The stream that runs through the Vaipe is no longer clean but black with excrement, the community that inhabits the area is no longer traditional but Europeanised and the language spoken is neither Samoan nor English.

One shouldn’t, however, forget that the whole story is told in different styles: “English-style, Vaipe-style. My style” (Wendt 1999: 106). One can easily identify the first two styles as belonging respectively to the coloniser and to the colonised but “My style” demands for a specific identity. According to Jacqueline Bardolph, “My style” is “the result of the dialectic tension between English-style and Vaipe-style” and identifies “intellectual anger (...), virile pride, the isolation and responsibility of the elite and the warm communal spirit of the Vaipe people” (Bardolph 1984: 5). It is also a style that defines itself as the novel progresses and that ultimately emerges in its conclusion, with the narrator finding a voice that distances himself from the body. This distance, that is found through language, is introduced with the narrator’s proposal to tell about Pepe’s “(my) life” (Wendt 1999: 105) and grows together with him: “I nod the head” (Wendt 1999: 107) when he moves to Apia; “I introduce the self” (Wendt 1999: 112) in the first school day; “I shake the head” (Wendt 1999: 124) in prison; “I hear the self” in court (Wendt 1999: 130); “Is it alive?” “This body?” (Wendt 1999: 143), Pepe asks when in hospital dying with tuberculosis. The body becomes thus a mere object in which the self is entrapped.

“My style” is thus the product of an identity at crisis. Pepe introduces “Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree” stating that it is a “novel about the self” (Wendt 1999: 106) or, in other words, a novella in which he tells about how he found his self. The schoolmistress refuses him an identity but he is able to earn it back through his rebellion. In court he states defiantly before an English judge that his “name is Pepesa, son of Sapepe and the gods of Sapepe” (Wendt 1999: 129) and now it is he who refuses the judge brought by the coloniser an identity:

I look up the face. It is pale behind glass, and the mouth is thin, the eyes are deep under the forehead and they show nothing (...). The head is with a wig. The rest is black like wet river stone. It is a face you can see everywhere but you do not take



much notice of it because it is the face of everybody you do not really remember (Wendt 1999: 128)

The face is a part of the body of crucial importance. As Liam Hudson argues, the face “expresses not only individuality and intelligence, but also intention” (Hudson 1982: 12). The face of the judge fails in transmitting all these elements and, furthermore, it is described as if it were the face of a lifeless body for the reason that it is colourless. The eyes reinforce further this connection with lifelessness given that they too are void of meaning. To add even further to this idea, the face is adorned with false hair and is surrounded by the blackness of the judge’s robe. Quoting Liam Hudson again, “the face serves (...) not just as a gateway to the mind but as a metaphor for it” (Hudson 1982: 12). In this light, a face that transmits nothingness can only represent a meaningless individual. As Pepe states in the last sentence, such a face belongs to all the individuals that do not really exist given that one does not really become aware of them. To look at such a face is the same as to look at an inanimate object that does not interest one. The refusal to bestow on the judge an identity is further reinforced by Pepe’s continuous reference to him as “Black-dress” and “It” (Wendt 1999: 129).

When Pepe is first taken from the fictitious village Sapepe to the Vaipe, a certain amount of disgust arises from this surrounding environment, both because visually there is a clash with the idyllic place he inhabited before and because of the information his senses gather. The darkness, staleness and loudness of the area doesn’t, however, seem to affect him when later in life he starts his “journey into the Vaipe neighbourhood, into what churchgoers call the dark world of sin and allthings that they believe is against religion and good living” (Wendt 1999: 119). One can thus conclude that other inhabitants of Apia also regard the area with a certain amount of moral negativity that is obviously associated to the sort of activities that can be accessed there but which cannot altogether be separated from the information gathered by their senses. However, this negativity does not seem to affect Pepe, who soon gets “used to it” (Wendt 1999: 120) or Tagata, who is always laughing. The reader can’t, nonetheless, help but feel the uneasiness that so much negativity causes and wonder whether the characters are as protected from it as they appear to be.

Tagata is not regarded by his community as an outsider in the same sense as Laamatua. The first is regarded as an outsider for a number of reasons (being

born an illegitimate child to a poor aiga, not being entitled to a heritage, having a physical deficiency) while the latter has mostly against himself his physical deficiency, which is to a certain extent, excusable since it is an “accident” that has its origin in the fact that “parents make-fire too much” (Wendt 1999: 141). Still, even though Tagata is economically well-off, his physical deficiency is enough to cause him to be regarded as an outsider. As is argued in *Narrative Prosthesis*, “people with disabilities can be reduced to the physical evidence of their bodily differences” (Mitchell, Snyder 2000: 123). Being a dwarf, Tagata cannot disguise his difference in any way and is immediately categorized as “other” by the ones that do not carry disabilities. His nickname, the flying fox, the bat, indicates precisely that. Although the bat has wings like all other birds, it lacks the feathers that are also a characteristic of all birds and, furthermore, in its place it has fur. A bat is therefore a bird that “has no nest with other birds because they laugh at him and treat him different because he is not what a bird should be” (Wendt 1999: 137).

Symbolically, the bat can also be seen as a creature that joins in itself elements of two worlds, that of animals and that of birds. Similarly, a colonised culture presents itself with both elements that belong originally to that same culture as well as with others that belong to that of the coloniser. This same symbolism may be found in the name of the creator of these characters, Albert Wendt, who in spite of being born in Samoa, inherited his name from a German ancestor. Additionally, he moved to New Zealand, where he completed his studies and only much later did he move back to Samoa. Albert Wendt is thus too a creature of two worlds.

From an existentialist point of view, Tagata is indeed an outsider or rather a stranger, not only because of the body he inhabits, but also because he eventually starts regarding life as empty of meaning and the world as an antagonistic place in spite of all the artifices woven to give meaning to existence. Tagata’s character can then be interpreted in the light of one of Camus’s absurd men, one that favours the present moment, but only until the moment in which he suffers from a moment of lucidity that brings the recognition of the meaninglessness of his efforts. This moment of lucidity happens when Tagata visits the lava fields in Savaii:

...And then It is there. You feel you are right in at last. Get me? Like you are there where the peace lies, where all the dirty little places and lies and monuments we make to our selves mean nothing because lava can be nothing else but lava. You get me? (...) The lava spreads for miles right into the sea. Nothing else. Just black silence (...) But in some places you see small plants growing through the cracks in the lava, like funny stories breaking through your stony mind. Get me? I felt like I have been searching for that all my miserable life. Boy, it made me see things so clear for once. That being a dwarf or a giant or a saint does not mean anything. (...) That we are all equal is silence, in the nothing, in lava. I did not want to leave the lava fields, but... but then you cannot stay there forever because you will die of thirst and hunger if you stay. There is no water, no food, just lava. All is lava (Wendt 1999: 132)

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus writes that

l'hostilité primitive du monde, à travers les millénaires, remonte vers nous. Pour une seconde, nous ne la comprenons plus puisque pendant des siècles nous n'avons compris en lui que les figures et les dessins que préalablement nous y mettions, puisque désormais les forces nous manquent pour user de cet artifice" (Camus 1971: 28/29).

The lava fields, in which life cannot subsist, are a perfect symbol for the hostile world which people can only perceive in this light briefly, in which suddenly the absurdity of life becomes obvious. Albert Camus goes on to say that "l'aspect mécanique" of people's gestures "rend stupid" everything that surrounds them (Camus 1971: 29) because they are as pointless as Sisyphus's rolling the stone up the mountain. In fact, the only certainty one can have is that death will come, which means that all the artifices one uses to give meaning to the life one is pursuing are therefore ridiculous. Tagata realises that it is not important if one is born European, Samoan or physically impaired because the reality is that all people face nothingness. Still quoting Camus, Tagata understands "l'absence de toute raison profonde de vivre, le caractère insensé de cette agitation quotidienne et l'inutilité de la souffrance" (Camus 1971: 18) and realises that he has to make a choice.

In spite of Sarah Doetschman's argument that those who have always occupied outsider positions are better prepared to adjust to and to survive new

environments, Tagata is unable to cope with the changes that European colonisation has brought with it. As Camus argues,

un monde qu'on peut expliquer même avec de mauvaises raisons est un monde familier. Mais au contraire, dans un univers soudain privé d'illusions et de lumières, l'homme se sent un étranger" (Camus 1971: 18)

Although Samoa's colonisation only really began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which means that the contact with the Europeans came rather late, the fact is that from the moment a culture is permeated by another one, changes occur that, even though the colonising power retreats, render impossible a return to a period similar to the one before colonisation. Individuals are thus left to having to define their role within a community which is not itself clearly defined. There isn't a stable anchor to the criteria and values of the individual's choices anymore, other than that which one is able to create altogether. Tagata's disillusionment with and resignation towards the way white values have infiltrated Samoan society are clear in the letter he writes to Pepe before committing suicide:

Laugh, Pepesa, because there is nothing else to do. The papalagi and his world has turned us, and people like your rich but unhappy father and all the modern Samoans, into cartoons of themselves, funny crying ridiculous shadows on the picture screen. Nevermind, we tried to be true to our selves. (Wendt 1999: 141)

Before suffering from depression, Tagata refuses any contact with religion. However, after having participated in the burning of the Protestant Church Hall, which in a deeply Christian society can only be regarded as the worst of offences, and watched Pepe being tried for it, Tagata takes up the London Missionary Society's religion. This also happens after his visit to the Lava fields and can thus be interpreted as Tagata's search for meaning in life. Still, he reaches the same conclusion as Osoavae, in *Pouliuli*: although he looks in Christianity for a means to "dispel his fears of the meaningless of life", the fact is that he doesn't find it because it shows nothing but "one pattern of meaning" to the Void and "there were many others" (Wendt 1980: 136). Tagata ultimately dismisses Christianity claiming that "It is all a lie!" and that he is "sick of religion" (Wendt 1999: 139). He chooses suicide because life has become too heavy a burden for him to carry.

In his suicide note, he writes that “because life is ridiculous it has to end the most ridiculous way, in suicide like Christ” (Wendt 1999: 141), implying thus that Christ cannot have been more than a mere mortal who sacrificed himself aimlessly for a God who does not exist.

Tagata chooses the solution many young people in Samoa choose today and which affects Samoa as a whole. “I am the free man who got the right to dispose of himself” (Wendt 1999: 141) Tagata says of himself, disregarding thus Camus’s argument that to choose suicide is to admit that one has been defeated in the battle to find meaning in life. Tagata simply accepts as his the Nietzschean concept that human beings are responsible for themselves, which means that not only are they responsible for their thoughts and actions, but also for their lives and deaths.

### **Captain Full the Second**

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“Captain Full – the Strongest Man Alive who got Allthing Strong Man got”, another of the short stories contained in *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree and other stories*, is entirely told in “Vaipe-style”. In *The Language of Postcolonial Literature*, Ismail S. Talib quotes Jacqueline Bardolph’s essay “Albert Wendt: A New Writer from Samoa”, in which she argues that in Albert Wendt’s

best works one can hear echoes of the oral rhythm of traditional texts, and of the spoken voice generally. He is not just transcribing patterns of speech, but achieves an effective stylisation of oral characteristics for the written medium. (Talib 2002: 75)

Being the “voice of the uneducated” (Bardolph 1984: 3), Vaipe-style encompasses both Samoan words as well as expressions that are transliterations of the Samoan tongue such as “firewood disease” instead of the word “syphilis”. Words and expressions are then brought together by a disarticulated English language so as to create what seems to be a whole new language. According to Jacqueline Bardolph, “this strange idiom” is “not a transcription of popular speech” but rather a “stylised recreation of a pidgin” (Bardolph 1984: 4). Additionally, she

discusses the reasons why Albert Wendt would attribute to the narrator of the story such an idiom and explains it by saying that it represents

the vitality of the Vaiepe world and its main value, virility. In using this language, Wendt attempts to go to the sources of oral culture where the art of speaking well and of telling stories is considered as a manly achievement. (Bardolph 1984: 4)

“Vaiepe-style”, dynamic and free, is then used by Albert Wendt with the aim of creating a contrast between the world of the coloniser and the world of the colonised. “English-style” is throughout the book permanently associated either with a lack of virility or even with sterility: in “The Coming of the Whiteman” Peilua, who is now impotent because of betrayal on the part of a white woman, says of himself “I am white” (Wendt 1999: 83) and in “Flying-fox in a Freedom Tree” the doctor who treats Pepe is “woman-scared” and Mrs Brown, Tagata’s *afakasi* teacher, is “not in the group of female that Sapepe people call, “Fleshmeat for the gods” (Wendt 1999: 112). With its origins in the oral culture, “Vaiepe-style” contrasts then with the unadorned “English-style” and appears to be a more realistic way to describe Samoan life. Additionally, by bestowing on the Vaiepe people their own idiom, Albert Wendt is undermining any sort of control over language on the part of the coloniser. As discussed in *The Empire Writes Back*, “the imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalises all ‘variants’ as impurities” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1989: 7). By imposing a variant, Albert Wendt is questioning not only the coloniser’s authority but as well his “conceptions of “truth”, “order”, and “reality”” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1989: 7). And by doing that the writer is building a path to present his own conception of truth, order and reality.

Captain Full, who has come to the Vaiepe to buy “chinaman shop and make it his barber business”, is “most ugly man like small dog want weewee bad”, has “one leg shortshort than other leg of him” and walks “like sick sick man got bad disease” (Wendt 1999: 22). Captain Full has an assistant, a teenager who is indeed the story-teller, and who introduces him to Fanua, a “real big woman got allthing in right place and go willing at right time for right dollar value” (Wendt 1999: 24). When told by the assistant that Captain Full would like to see her, Fanua’s reaction is of amusement: “Him? But he so ugly and small. He never able to make me laugh!” (Wendt 1999: 25), she says. Fanua’s comment is based merely on her

observation of Captain Full's body and leads one to address the issue of the fabrication of the other. Fanua's mind has formed an image of what Captain Full is and given that one sees the other person primarily as a body, it is easy to regard certain attributes attached to the other as ontological features. Furthermore, it illustrates how disabilities provide "the means by which one becomes *interpretable* to an outside perspective" (Mitchell, Snyder 2000: 136) as well as the way in which disabilities represent "all-consuming affairs", becoming "the sum of one's personality" and "cancelling out all other attributes of one's multifaceted humanity" (Mitchell, Snyder 2000: 123).

Yet, Fanua is convinced to visit Captain Full when she is told that he is "a real hot stick" and that she would "die in bed with he" (Wendt 1999: 25). Naturally, the main reason why Fanua accepts to have sexual intercourse with Captain Full is money but the curiosity that arises from hearing about his virility also has some weight in her acceptance. The next day, she goes to the barber shop, "all dressup", "really a dream" and Captain Full behaves like "little boy lost" (Wendt 1999: 25) in front of her. It is Fanua who, initially, takes the active role and directs events, although, after sexual intercourse, she becomes the one who behaves like "she go for to meet her Maker" (Wendt 1999: 26) each time she visits him. Still, the development of events leads the reader to suspect that Fanua only has for Captain Full a feeling which Margareta Bertilsson calls "general love" (Bertilsson 2001: 305) and which is distinguished from "absolute love" (Bertilsson 2001: 306) because while the latter requires individuals to "complement one another" and "relate to one another on a highly differentiated basis" (Bertilsson 2001: 306), the former is based mainly on sexuality. On the other hand, Captain Full is indeed "in love with Fanua" (Wendt 1999: 32), which leads the reader to regard him even further as in a disadvantaged position, in which by being ugly and impaired he already is.

The reader finds out about all the details of this relationship through the words of Captain Full the Second, Captain Full's assistant. Captain Full the Second introduces himself as a "saintman church-going strong" who "prays for all people who gone join angel-choir" as well as "for those alive still who need help bad cause they losing soul fast to devil" (Wendt 1999: 21). He then states that he is going to tell the story of Captain Full, his "best friend" (Wendt 1999: 22), which he does intermingled with episodes of his own life. In one of these episodes, he

boasts of the way in which his friends watch him losing his virginity and he has “to make thing look” (Wendt 1999: 30) like he is conquering the girl and not the other way around. George Santayana wrote that “the attraction of sex could not become efficient unless the senses were first attracted. The eye must be fascinated and the ear charmed by the object” (Santayana 1955: 38). In the case of Captain Full, Fanua is obviously not visually attracted by him and this lack must be compensated by Captain Full’s “smooth talk” (Wendt 1999: 22/23) as well as by his virility. In the case of Captain Full the Second, this problem does not arise. He considers himself “handsome like Errol Flynn” (Wendt 1999: 29) and thinks that if he uses some of the lines Captain Full taught him, he won’t have many difficulties in conquering the girl and, in fact, he hasn’t. Moreover, he does not choose the “ugly bad” girl to whom he is not obviously attracted but rather the “not bad looker” (Wendt 1999: 29), whom he leaves immediately after the act and without remorse.

Although Captain Full the Second describes himself, initially, as “saintman church-going strong” (Wendt 1999: 21), later his discourse changes. Initially, there is the belief that God exists and that human beings must act according to His will but later the attitude is of denial towards the existence of this one and almighty God. Captain Full the Second watches his counterpart and Fanua having sexual intercourse and feeling the urge to masturbate, experiences great moral guilt. He reaches the end of this torment by concluding that he is a free man who “CAN DO ALLTHING” because “NO GUILT FEEL NOMORE” (Wendt 1999: 28). He later clearly claims for himself the category of a superior being by declaring himself the “STRONGEST MAN ALIVE” (Wendt 1999: 33). Captain Full the Second does not go to the point of saying that God does not exist but rather implies it in his identification with Nietzsche’s *übermensch*. Furthermore, if one takes into account Michelle Keown’s statement that “in Wendt’s novel (...) the “death of God” is also the death of indigenous tradition” (Keown 2002: 59), then one must conclude that one is indeed dealing with a non-existent God. Captain Full the Second is born in the Vaipe and doesn’t know who his mother is and his father is dead, having thus no family from which to obtain the value of tradition. By the end of the novel, he describes himself as “A MAN WHO BELIEVE IN PROGRESS” and wants to leave the Vaipe and “live up on side of mountain in big European



house” (Wendt 1999: 33). Tradition has thus no meaning for Captain Full the Second and, consequently, neither does God.

As the narration develops the reader gains the impression that the storyteller is indeed a manipulator disguised behind the mask that he considers to be the most suitable for the moment. If one takes into account Camus’s typology of absurd men, Captain Full the Second must then be regarded as the actor who assumes the roles that are necessary so as to achieve his goals. He pretends to be the abiding Christian and even donates money to the church although he doesn’t believe in an almighty God. He boasts to his friends that he is no longer a virgin but, at the moment in which he is going to make love for the first time, he lets the girl direct him but pretends to be the one leading events. He also pretends to be Captain Full’s friend but takes over his shop while he is ill and doesn’t offer him any kind of comfort when he cries in suffering. In fact, his inability to show pity leads one immediately to identify him with Nietzsche’s *übermensch*. According to Nietzsche’s description, this being must be one who cannot feel pity because pity is nothing more than a morbid fascination with failure and, moreover, a great weakener of the will. Furthermore, Nietzsche writes in *The Antichrist* that to feel pity is to contradict the law of evolution which is, itself, based on selection (Nietzsche 2000: 21). This identification with the *übermensch* becomes evident when Captain Full the Second states that “only strong people have the right to live” (Wendt 1999: 32). If he is stronger than the barber, then he must be the one to succeed and not the latter. Captain Full the Second’s portrayal of Captain Full is indeed so perfect that all people start calling him Captain Full the Second. But his aim isn’t simply to become Captain Full but rather a more perfect version of him, since he is both physically better well-built as well as psychologically stronger.

According to Jacqueline Bardolph, “the Vaipe voice is the language of idealized virility” although “its heroes are ultimately presented as defeated” (1984:4). Captain Full is indeed presented in such terms, initially only physically but later also psychologically. However, the one who as we have seen turns into him is always presented as the conqueror, the ultimate saviour of the people of the Vaipe. Captain Full the Second’s final plan is to “buy the swamp suck out the water and turn it to good land for to build new part of town” (Wendt 1999: 33) because he tenaciously maintains his faith in his own superiority over others as

well as in his power to determine the lives of these weaker beings. Captain Full is thus choosing to recreate himself and the world he inhabits not led by simple desire but rather by a will to dominate the world. If one takes into account Nietzsche's argument that the Church is responsible for spreading the feeling of pity as well as for elevating it to the status of a virtue, then it is possible to understand why Captain Full the Second has moved away from it. To remain an abiding Christian would mean to abdicate the will to dominate, and to abdicate that would mean that to continue living as a slave and not a master.

### **The Body of the Other**

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Postcolonial subjects inhabit a world without certainties and behind the ruins of their inheritance the abyss is always visible. In such a condition, human life becomes problematic. It is then required to re-construct one's world view so that one can obtain the determination necessary to succeed. The inability to achieve this will cause one to enter a spiritual desert in which nothing has meaning or value. Although Laamatua, Tagata and Captain Full the Second regard life in today's society as materialistic, maintaining itself through hypocrisy, corruption and lies, and existing apart from the harmony of nature, they present distinct responses to the crisis caused by colonialism and that is also what sets them apart.

Pepe and Tagata inhabit a world in which they "wear jeans like the cowboy", "smoke the American cigarettes, drink the yankee coca-cola, and talk smooth like the gangsters of Chicago" (Wendt 1999: 120). For their generation, the process of westernisation has been completed and traditional life is meaningless. However, Tagata, unable to find the will that will make him succeed, starts looking upon life as an ironical and meaningless experience and, unable to cope, ends up by committing suicide. Laamatua rejects all that is established and creates his own role, which he imposes on others and which actually influences the villagers, who, for example, have to "reassess their standards of male attractiveness to women" (Wendt 1980: 76). He watches the westernisation of the village, the increasing crisis of values, and learns to use this new mixed world to his advantage. However, one reaches the end of the novella without seeing any

fundamental changes: Faleasa fails in his plan to make his son Moaula the new head of the aiga and of Malaelua and is, in fact, replaced by Elefane, who would have inherited the position if Faleasa hadn't plotted for it to be otherwise. For Captain Full the Second traditional values have no importance and community obligations aren't disregarded but mostly looked upon as meaningless. He recreates himself and attempts to liberate the members of his community that he regards as being enslaved to the convictions of the majority and plans on leading them towards progress.

Still, one is left with the issue of whether the involvement of these characters has introduced any suggestions with respect to how to surpass the identity crisis colonised cultures are struggling with. According to Sarah Doetschmann, Albert Wendt writes according to the apocalyptic tradition, not

presenting a plan for the future but rather suggesting the interpretive skills people should possess and use to understand, evaluate, and discuss their past and present, thereby communally and patiently moving into the future. In doing so, one should to choose any ideas, traditions, and stories that seem beneficial, regardless of *how* they came to be known (Doetschman 1998: 88)

Within a chaotic postcolonial world in which customs have been altered and their meaning questioned and the borders of right and wrong made subjective, the path for the individual who is trying to construct his or her own identity is opened. Clearly, if s/he wants to succeed, s/he must have the ability to analyse situations for benefits as well the virtue of waiting for the right moment to act. It is thus not important whether that individual is Laamatua, Captain Full the Second, or Albert Wendt himself but still their aim will be to negotiate their current condition in order to find a place for themselves and their communities in the future.





# Written on the Body



I don't know whether to look at him or to read him.

Lieutenant Elgart (Robert Mitchum) about Max Cady (Robert De Niro) in *Cape Fear*

A body as a substance susceptible to pain can be tortured, can be punished, can be disciplined, can be made delinquent.

Alphonso Lingis, "The Subjectification of the Body"

## Lalolagi

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In “Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body”, Albert Wendt discusses the concept of nakedness (in Samoan, *telenoa* when in the company of aristocratic people and *telefua* when in the company of equals). In the Pacific Islands, before the arrival of the Europeans, nakedness was not considered as such if one covered the area directly below the waist. And if one happened to be tattooed, in spite of not wearing any garments, then one would be regarded as being clothed with “the most desired and highest-status clothing anyone could wear” (Wendt 1996: 1). The arrival of the missionaries soon brought the idea that nakedness was sinful and before long natives were covering their bodies with cloth rather than with tattoos, which missionaries also aimed at eliminating given that it was “the mark of the savage” (Wendt 1996: 4). Actually, between approximately 1830 and 1970 tattooing almost disappeared from the Pacific islands.

Tattooing was an obligatory rite of passage for Samoan boys and was considered as necessary to strengthen young males and prepare them for war and for sexual life. A male who could not show a tattooed body might not engage in either. In fact, Marquesan women regarded having sex with a naked man, that is, an untattooed man, as shameful. The making of a tattoo, *tatau* in Samoan, is a ritual and it is normal for family members and friends to be present in order to comfort the individual being tattooed. It is also common for individuals to do it in pairs in honour of the Siamese twins Taema and Tilafaega, the goddesses of, respectively, tattooing and warfare and the first to bring tattooing from Fiji to Samoa. The area to be first tattooed is the lower part of the back, the *tua*, where designs of a protective nature are placed. The design of the back as a whole is called *pe’a*, flying fox, alluding to the motto of the group Tonumaipe’a, which is “salvation comes from the flying fox”. Other motifs such as bindings or beams are also used, suggesting thus that the aim of tattooing is to create a defensive screen over the body. This concept is further reinforced by the word *malu* which designates the female tattoo and which is also a verb that means *to protect* or *to shelter*. The last tattoo to be applied, *pute*, is on the navel (de Coppet, Iteanu:

1995: 43). The motifs chosen are “the starfish, the centipede, the canoe” (Figiel 2001: 228), elements that are found in nature and in Samoan culture, and which by being used allow for an interpretation of the body as a carrier of the social practices of this culture. The designs vary from island to island, however, and each one has its own identifiable designs. Polynesian tattoos were made using bone chisels previously dipped in a pigment that was introduced underneath the skin each time the tattooist punctured it by hitting the chisel with a small hammer. A tattoo on a male individual usually occupied more space than that of a female individual, which traditionally covered only a part of the body. The drawing of a tattoo, particularly the most elaborate ones, could stretch over long periods of time, years sometimes, and there were individuals who died of wound infection.

In *they who do not grieve*, Sia Figiel tells the story of two young women, “beautiful” Lalolagi and “so-so” (Figiel 2001: 154) Tausi, who decide to be tattooed in order “to seal their friendship with blood” (Figiel 2001: 154). But both Lalolagi and Tausi fall in love with the master tattooist, who loves only one: beautiful Lalolagi. Tausi, humiliated at the rejection, secretly tells the tattooist’s wife about the affair he is having with Lalolagi on the night before they are to be tattooed. The following day, both women go to the tattooist’s fale. Tausi is the first to be tattooed and Lalolagi is having her tattoo done when the wife of the tattooist enters the fale and interrupts the performance. The whole village watches Lalolagi being beaten up as well as the cutting off of one of her ears to mark her physically as an adulterous woman.

Lalolagi is thus maltreated both physically and psychologically. The villagers witness the event, some of them being women who could feel pity for one of their own, and yet all refuse to offer any kind of support. Furthermore, these people will be the ones who will give the ear that has been cut off to the dogs or to the pigs to be eaten as if it were a normal food scrap and not a part of an individual’s body. Lalolagi’s body will no longer be complete because a piece of it is missing, an ear, whose absence serves as a constant reminder of the event and which will contribute as well for Lalolagi to regard herself as possessing a beauty which is no longer innocent but stained with disfigurement. Additionally, the absence of an ear and the unfinished tattoo are visible marks that will be



recognised and interpreted by others who see them and will, thus, attract further humiliation. In fact, as argued by Alphonso Lingis, the markings on her body

will designate to others the identity of the ordinance violated, and associate the specific transgression with a representation of disadvantage. Punishment will turn the social space into a pedagogical tableau in which the public which judges and sentences also reads the logic of the civil code in the mortified figures of its transgressors (Lingis 1999: 289).

The ear that has been cut off has precisely the same aim as Makaoleafi's shaved head, which is to mark the body in a way that all other individuals recognise through the form of punishment the nature of the law violated. "Earless" so that "every girl-young woman-old woman sees her and knows that she is the whore that she is" (Figiel 1998: 35). These individuals are in a superior position to the ones punished but they are also aware that the same punishment can be designed for them in case they choose to violate the same law and that then they will be the ones to be humiliated. After the affair with the master tattooist, Lalolagi has only one more affair and that is with American actor Alisi, who is in Samoa to star in a film about "a sea captain who is lost in the Pacific Ocean and encounters free-loving Islanders, who sing and dance from morning till evening" (Figiel 2001: 218). Not being Samoan and not knowing Samoan culture, Alisi is unable to decipher the meaning of the unfinished tattoo and is, in fact, fascinated by it. However, Lalolagi pushes him constantly away from her marked thigh because "that thigh is ugly" (Figiel 2001: 226). Lalolagi's body becomes thus not only a means on which an order of events can be read but also a means through which social conventions are expressed:

the body and its functions and boundaries symbolically articulate the concerns of the particular group in which it is found and, indeed, become a symbol of the situation: the social imprints itself onto the body in such a way that the individual body symbolically expresses the situation (Entwistle 2002: 138).

The body can thus be transformed and made symbolical by a number of cultural constructions that are exterior to the body itself. Foucault presents the body as a blank surface in which events are inscribed and which history, "as that

creator of values and meanings” that requires “the subjection of the body in order to produce the speaking subject and its significations” (quoted in Butler 1999: 309), will ultimately transfigure and destroy. Franz Kafka’s “The Penal Colony” (1919) is a good example of history inscribing the body. Without the need for a trial and thus for a defence, convicts are submitted to a “remarkable piece of apparatus” (Kafka 1999: 140) which will inscribe on their bodies the sentence that has been passed on to them by an officer. The whole process lasts twelve hours and, in fact, after the sixth hour, “enlightenment comes to the most dull-witted (...) Nothing more happens than that the man begins to understand the inscription” (Kafka 1999: 150). There is thus “no point” (Kafka 1999: 145) in telling the convicts what their sentence is because, after being submitted to the machine, their bodies will ultimately acquire the ability to read what the needles are inscribing on them. Ironically, the officer that operates the machine eventually sentences himself to be submitted to it and to have the words “Be just” (Kafka 1999: 161) engraved on his body. Kafka’s machine is thus the mechanism of cultural construction that can be understood as history and that, when in operation, is inscribing the awaiting body that does indeed bleed under its pressure. One can interpret events in the Samoan village in the light of Kafka’s machine. The tattooist assumes the role of the machine and his wife the role of the officer who operates it. Without having the chance of a trial, Lalolagi is condemned and sentenced by the wife of the tattooist to having her body marked by an unfinished engraving, which will not lead her to death but which, by being unfinished, will supposedly lead her to enlightenment. The tattooist is manoeuvred so as to begin his task but not to end it so that this moment can be achieved.

One must now address the issue of Lalolagi’s crime. As far as sexuality is concerned, Derek Freeman quotes Margaret Mead and her anthropological study *Coming of Age in Samoa*, in which Samoan society is described as functioning “very smoothly” given that it is “based on the general assumption that sex is play, permissible in all hetero- and homosexual expression, with any sort of variation as an artistic addition” (Freeman 1983: 91). According to Mead, female adolescents start their love life two or three years after menarche, as “expected” (Freeman 1983: 92), and distribute their favours among “many youths, all adepts in amorous technique”, deferring “marriage through as many years of casual love

making as possible” (Freeman 1983: 92). A successful male lover will then be someone who can make the female “sexually contented”, feeling at the same time “contented in doing so” (Freeman 1983: 93). Consequently, “the idea of forceful rape or of any sexual act to which both participants do not give themselves freely is completely foreign to the Samoan mind” (Freeman 1983: 93). Adolescence in Samoa is, therefore, “the pleasantest time” (Freeman 1983: 94) because no conflicts or confusions disturb the adolescents’ minds. Samoan adult sex adjustment is also described as “one of the smoothest in the world” given that “no violent claims for fidelity” exist and adultery is “not regarded as very serious” (Freeman 1983: 92). Indeed, “disagreements” “between a husband and his wife’s seducer” are settled by simply exchanging “a few fine mats” (Freeman: 1983: 83).

Sia Figiel, however, presents the reader with Lalolagi, a husband seducer, and her punishment is harsher than that which Margaret Mead claims to be designed for the male seducer. Naturally, one must interpret these facts by taking into account the sexual freedom of women in Samoa. Although Margaret Mead describes Samoan female society as sexually free of constraints throughout adolescence and adulthood, when one reads the novels by Sia Figiel the opposite idea comes across. The most striking criticism appears in the form of the film *Aloha, Captain Harris* and its portraying of Samoa and Samoans. Ironically, the same Lalolagi who has been disfigured by the villagers appears as an extra in the film. Lalolagi, who after the affair with the tattooist is regarded by her peers as “damaged goods” (Figiel 2001: 224) and by her “utterly ashamed” mother as “a whoring pig” (Figiel 2001: 231), is disowned and banished to a nunnery and still has to face exclusion when she returns. However, Sia Figiel places this character in a film that portrays “free-loving Islanders” (Figiel 2001: 218).

The use of the word *seducer* must be discussed as well, given that it leads one to regard the seduced one as a victim and to consider his or her involvement not as active but as passive, as inflected by innocence. However, that is not the case with Lalolagi. If there is a seducer, it is certainly the tattooist who tells Lalolagi about a world in which nakedness is not sinful, tattooing is a sacred ceremony and the universe is larger than the holy book. In fact, the tattooist himself has a quality of holiness in him because he is a craftsman and the activity in which he is involved is sacred. As he puts it, a master tattooist is “God’s medium on earth” given that he writes “God’s truth” (Figiel 2001: 228) on the

bodies of individuals. The world presented to Lalolagi by the tattooist is the world in which Samoans inhabited before the arrival of the whites and their ways. It is impossible for Lalolagi not to be seduced by the contrast. If one considers the tattooist to be the real seducer, the active intervenient, then Lalolagi is the seduced, the passive intervenient, and should thus be pardoned. This isn't the case, however.

Still, the reader should not interpret the events surrounding Lalolagi as being solely the cause of her having been involved with a married man. Samoan girls are indeed expected not to experiment with their sexuality, whether by looking at a magazine with pornographic images or undergoing sexual intercourse, and refusal to abide to the customs can only attract punishment and exclusion. Tausi, for example, will have a daughter called Fue, abbreviation of Fuemaleto'oto'o, which means pride, "Tausi's pride" (Figiel 2001: 145). The girl is controlled by her mother who is constantly telling her how to behave like "a good girl":

Don't leave the house unaccompanied, pride. Don't hang your hair in the evenings, always comb it in a bun. Wrap it up like that, pride. Take three showers a day, pride. Don't even look at a boy, a man, a married man, pride (Figiel 2001: 145).

Under the artistic name Miss Jacint-ha, Polynesian Queen, Fue begins working as a dancer in one of the biggest hotels in Samoa. The name is suggested to her by her "friend" Jack the Beachcomber, an alcoholic American" whose main hobby is to paint "velvet nudes of Fue standing, sitting, or reclining on sofas, silk lavalavas, or mats on the floor" (Figiel, 2001: 143). Her brother Filiga, who has been informed by the villagers of her illicit activities, walks towards the hut in which his sister is posing nude planning to "beat the crap out of the palagi", "destroy his paintings", "burn down the shack" and "drag Fue back to the village and publicly humiliate her with all the strength he had" (Figiel 2001: 144). However, when he reaches the hut and sees Fue posing, he is unable to cope with the "shame" and walks back to the village with "tears in his eyes" (Figiel 2001: 144). He will only acknowledge the existence of his sister again twenty years later. The distance that separates Lalolagi and Fue in time only reinforces the idea of Samoa as a traditional society in which strict moral standards are passed from one generation to another. Fue is rebelling against this strict moral code and her

rebellion will culminate with her marrying a white man whom she doesn't love and moving to New Zealand.

## **Filiga**

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Apparently, in Sia Figiel's books only male characters are successful in portraying their sexuality, no matter how depraved it may be. In *where we once belonged*, the author presents the reader with incestuous Iosua, who rapes his daughter Lili. With the exception of Alofa and Moa, no one in the village cares to know the truth about Lili's pregnancy, which only contributes further to her image of a "bad girl" (Figiel 1998: 59). The girl is expelled from school and Iosua continues his normal life. Filiga, Alofa's father, also portrays behaviour that is not in compliance with what he preaches. Filiga's first wife committed suicide because she failed to perform her primary duty as a woman, that is, to bear children, and his second wife, with whom he has children, is suddenly sent back to her village without further discussion because, in the meantime, Filiga has chosen a third wife. At the same time, however, he is having an affair with Mrs Samasoni, Alofa's teacher, and is seen with her by his daughter. This course of action only demonstrates how women are significant to Filiga only as a means by which to satisfy his sexual needs. Nevertheless, he is the one who beats up Makaoleafi and shaves her hair, when the girl is discovered with a pornographic magazine. In fact, whenever children need punishment, it is to Filiga, "the disciplinarian" (Figiel 1998: 213) that the villagers send them. Filiga's character is indeed a confirmation of how "male-dominated, authoritarian and violent" (McLeod 1997: 1) this culture is.

Following these examples, one can conclude that Sia Figiel depicts a code of morality that is not the same for men or women. After having seen her father with her teacher, Alofa is free to behave the way she wants because Filiga refuses repeatedly to punish her. However, after she was caught naked with the village boy, Filiga violently beats Alofa. In her words,

before my hair was cut, before my hair was shaved, I was slapped in the face. Then a belt hit me across the face, too... around the waist, around my legs, around my

face again. Fists blew in my eyes and mouth and cheeks, and blood flew out onto the cement floor. (...) I refused to cry any longer (...). This angered Filiga more and more, and he shouted that he was going to kill me. (...) Iopu and Filisi and Saufoi tore him away from my body. He was sweating... (...) his eyes not meeting mine... (...) As if I was the punisher and he the punished... (...) By beating me he was beating himself. (...) Beating Mrs Samasoni. Beating the memory of that (...) day when I saw him naked - completely naked. And since then he was always naked in my eyes. (...) And he hated me for that (...) ...hated me for being like him (Figiel 1998: 215/216).

There is thus a relationship between sexuality, guilt and violence that is clearly seen in this passage. Although men are the seducers, it is always women who suffer the consequences that come mostly in the form of physical abuse. Even women who are supposedly innocent suffer abuse at the hands of men and, moreover, of other women. When Pisa moves into Filiga's fale, she is insulted by the second wife Logo and despite being taken in by the rest of the family, she is mocked, compared unfavourably to Logo and beaten repeatedly by Tausi, Filiga's mother. The fact that she gives birth to a baby girl is seen as a further punishment because "the curse of girls" is to "grow up to shame their "aiga" by continuing "the cycle of being seduced by middle-aged men" (Figiel 1998: 104). In order to break this cycle she decides to bring Alofa up "ugly. [She] was never to know that [she] was beautiful. [She] was made to look ugly, [she] was dressed ugly, made to feel ugly" (Figiel 1998: 149). However, it is Filiga who seduces Pisa and takes her to the fale and it is him who lies: "He told her he wasn't married, didn't have a wife, didn't have children. (...) He swore it" (Figiel 1998: 103). It is also Mrs Samasoni who is assaulted by Pisa when she discovers that she has a son by Filiga and, once again, Filiga escapes with immunity.

Ironically, Filiga appears side by side with Mr Brown, a white blank clerk, who totally subverts the concept of colonial desire. Mr Brown loves "a lot with his fingers and tongue, not his penis" (Figiel 1996: 109). "His penis was dead. It lay there wrinkled like a rain-worm... all curled up... afraid of the sun" (Figiel 1996: 111). Mr Brown fails thus to fulfil the role of the colonizer who has come to rape, penetrate and impregnate the colonized subject. Furthermore, he leaves Samoa and Lili but writes to her from Australia inviting her to join him. Not only is he unable to do harm but he eventually ends up by doing something that seems

positive, which is taking Lili away from a society that ostracizes her for not corresponding to the image of the good girl. One may, however, suspect that Mr Brown is a positive character only because of his dysfunction.

Another example of physical abuse performed by women appears in *they who do not grieve*. Malu is repeatedly insulted and beaten by her grandmother Lalolagi and is only able to interpret the abuse as originating in the shame that her grandmother felt due to her daughter's illicit sexual involvement with a boy from another village. However, later in the novel Malu discovers that her grandmother had also been illicitly involved with the tattooist and realises that she only beats her up because she is a constant reminder of her own sexual indiscretions. When Lalolagi throws a pot of coffee at Malu's face, disfiguring her for life, the event of Lalolagi's own disfigurement is repeating itself again. The pain and self-rejection that have originated from Lalolagi's disfigurement are indeed what cause her to beat her granddaughter who she regards as being her own reflection just like her daughter was before her. To take away her attractiveness is a means by which she can break the cycle as well as release the hate which has grown within her since the event:

You wanna pull out the thing that makes her laugh like that. You wanna deform her. Disfigure her. *DESTROY HER*. So that no one will ever look at her again. So that she will not even wanna look at herself. So that when she walks by mirrors she covers them with the very dress she's wearing. Or better yet, throws a stone at them (the mirrors, which means her own reflection). Smashing her own face to a million pieces... (Figiel 1998: 35)

Physical punishment is indeed a common instrument of instruction in Samoan society, particularly towards children who are taught to obey those in authority over them whatever their age. This issue is particularly visible in *The Girl in the Moon Circle*, in which there are several references to the *va*, that is, the space that must exist between people. Neither Filiga nor Lalolagi are ever accused of exaggerated beatings which leads the reader to infer that these characters cannot be seen as ultimate moralists inventing their own values. In fact, harsh physical punishment must be seen as a concept that has been shaped communally. The chapter "Real Love" included by Sia Figiel in *where we once belonged* further evidences this. Here she states through the voice of Alofa that

“being beaten up is alofa – love”. “Real love is when children are beaten up bad by their parents. (...) To beat a child is to give her respect, to teach her how to behave, to teach her to be humble, to listen, to obey, to love her” (Figiel 1998: 219).

## **Fa’afetai**

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Fa’afetai is another character who is also accepted without questioning. Although styles of female impersonation have long been a feature of all cultures, it is with some difficulty that societies tolerate, or even accept, cross-dressing as an everyday aspect. However, this Samoan community has no problem in accepting Sugar Shirley, as the transvestite is usually known:

Shirley was a fa’afafige and s/he liked to dress like a girl. She had constant fights with the women of the house because she would parade around Apia in some of their best clothes, wearing their lipstick, blue eyeshadows, high-heel shoes, perfume... anything female. (Figiel 1998: 52)

With the introduction of this character, Sia Figiel forces the reader to address the issue of language as a creator of gendered subjects. In *Genders*, David Glover and Cora Kaplan quote Monique Wittig’s claim that language has an overwhelming impact upon the body “stamping it and violently shaping it” (Glover, Kaplan 2000: xxix). According to this author, most individuals “cannot conceive of a culture (...) where heterosexuality would not order not only all human relationships but also its very production of concepts and all the processes which escape consciousness, as well” (Glover, Kaplan 2000: xxix/xxx). Language plays an important role in maintaining the imbalance of gender relations and in order to go beyond the barricades imposed by it, it is necessary to analyse the moment at which gender begins. The conclusion to which Monique Wittig arrives is that personal pronouns are the words that immediately position individuals in discourse as male or female and that it is the way those words operate that has to be disrupted.

By introducing Fa’afetai initially as a *he*, which is then transformed into a



*she* and a *s/he*, Sia Figiel attempts to present an identity that transcends the categories through which identity is traditionally conceived. By encompassing both the male and the female pronoun, Fa'afetai is an identity that cannot be restrained but is rather evolving. It is as if for the transvestite the dichotomy of the sexes can be abolished and there can be a return to a moment in which there is no differentiation between the male and the female. This can lead to a further interpretation of the role of the transvestite as someone who must take elements of two different worlds in order to recreate him/herself since s/he fits in in neither world. Similarly, colonised subjects must also gather elements of two worlds, the one prior colonisation and the one post colonisation, in order to recreate their identities.

A further reference to the controversy between Margaret Mead and Derek Freeman appears in the shape of two other characters. Ironically, one is a transvestite and the other is a transsexual. The twin brothers are named after “a palagi who interviewed them on sex, status, and domestic violence” (Figiel 1998: 68) and are called respectively Derek and Freeman, or rather Keleki, the closest approach the Samoan language has for Derek, and Pagoka-ua-faasaolokoiga, a literal translation of Freeman. Both characters are challenging the Western and Samoan norms of gender and sexuality through modifying certain aspects of their bodies as well as through the displaying of a sexuality that isn't habitually associated to the bodies they possess. Their mother refuses to talk to them, to Derek in particular “for mutilating God's image” and for leading “a life of sin in Apia with sailors and unhappily or happily married men” (Figiel 1998: 68). This accusation has, naturally, several inferences. Derek has undermined the image of God, according to which all individuals are made, and is now in possession of a female body, that is, of an inferior body. The female body has been considered by Plato as weaker than the male and he has even warned his readers that if they do not attend their souls they will end up behaving as if they were women. According to the Christian religion, the female body is associated to the sins of the flesh. The sins of Eve are the sins of the flesh and the sins of women. Derek is thus in possession of a body that cannot be approved of.

## **Tausi**

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It is important to understand that for Samoans acquiring a tattoo represents more than acquiring “beautiful decoration” given that the tattoos are regarded as “scripts/texts/testimonies to do with relationships, order, form” (Wendt 1996: 3). The story told by the drawings will be inherited by the children of the tattooed individual when he or she dies, along with “its reputation” (Wendt 1996: 3). Both the fact of acquiring the tattoo as well as the tattoo in itself will be forever linked to this particular event, to these particular individuals and to the early adulthood of both Tausi and Lalolagi. The tattoo is then a powerful mnemonic device that connects the tattooed individual with the past both because it is an invasive procedure and because it leaves, theoretically, irremovable marks. However, the relationship the two women have with the act in itself is different. Tausi feels the pain and the blood spilling from the wounds but she is joyful because she knows that she will succeed both in finishing her tattoo, which is being made by her friend’s lover, as well as in taking revenge on her. For Tausi, both the pain and the blood are thus positive. On the other hand, Lalolagi who is initially in a state of bliss, can only regard the pain and the blood as negative due to the humiliation and shame they bring with them.

Lalolagi states that “because of the unfinished tattoo” she has to “stay in the dark” (Figiel 2001: 230). This dark place has both a physical and a psychological representation: physically it is initially the nunnery and later the fale into which Lalolagi is pushed and which she cannot leave, and psychologically it is the silence into which she is also pushed and which she is incapable of breaking:

This is how it is whenever I try to speak. The words wither and die in my throat before they reach my mouth. Before they reach my mouth they are dead. Dead in my throat. Sometimes dying before they’re formulated into words. They die as thoughts. This is what it means to carry shame. Guilt (Figiel 2001: 230).

The silence with which one is dealing here is the same Gayatri Spivak discusses in “Subaltern Talk”. It is not being stated that Lalolagi is unable to talk but rather that she regards talking as useless given that she is unable to communicate effectively with the individuals who listen. Although she utters words, they are not understood given that they are interpreted through a group of procedures

that render communication impossible. Her silence is, therefore, not the result of muteness but of unintelligibility as far as others are concerned. Tausi suffers too from this silence. When she is old, she tells her granddaughter Alofa of the day in which she acquired the tattoo on her thighs and of how she is being “eaten alive by centipedes”. The reader learns now that “since the day they were born”, the drawings of the master tattooist have been “eating eating eating until there’s nothing but bones” (Figiel 2001: 152). The conclusion to be drawn from these statements is that after the whole event takes place, Tausi realises that betraying her friend was wrong but that given the strict code women had to abide to, it would not have been possible for her to act otherwise. Consequently, she repents in silence and only much later does she dare to share her secret with Alofa.

Although Lalolagi’s silence is imposed on her by others, Tausi’s silence is self-imposed. However, both silences are hostile for the silenced/silent ones. By not breaking the silence, Lalolagi and Tausi reinforce it. Ela, Lalolagi’s younger daughter, accuses her of teaching the “disease” (Figiel 2001: 97) of silence and Malu, her granddaughter, describes herself as “silent by nature” (Figiel 2001: 29). Pisa, Tausi’s daughter “never held a conversation” (Figiel 2001: 161) with her daughter Alofa, who herself doesn’t speak much. There is, thus, a retreat from words which can be interpreted in psychological and social terms. For both Lalolagi and Tausi, the memory of the event is traumatic and by not discussing it they search for oblivion. Silence should thus perform a healing function given that it is being used as a means to achieve forgetting. However, this aim cannot be reached because of the markings inflicted on it and that carry a social meaning. The body is thus socially involved in a field of power relations that “invest it, mark it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault 1999: 259) and that keep it subjected.

However, it is not possible to regard all the female characters that Sia Figiel creates as subaltern subjects unable to voice their resistance. There is rather a criticism of the concept of the Third World women that, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues, presumes that women exist as a “coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location” (quoted in McLeod 2000: 187/188). Sia Figiel’s women may be the victims of male violence and of the social structures but not all of them are robbed of their agency. Although some of these women are indeed helpless victims, there are

also characters who escape this destiny and rebel against the social establishment. Siniva in *where we once belonged* and Siala in *The Girl in the Moon Circle* both won scholarships to study in New Zealand and both return home to be ostracized by the villagers because of their challenging of local customs. In fact, their description is similar:

[Siniva] was fat, wore an afro, wore no bra... and you could easily see her nipples through the Jimmy Hendrix T-shirt (Figiel 1998: 185).

...Siala “the educated one” returned from New Zealand with no oso. Not even lollies. And no bra too. And you could easily see her nipples. Popping out of the Woodstock Experience t-shirt. And khaki shorts. Showing off all her vae pulepulea (Figiel 1996: 10).

The view of the outline of the nipples as well as of the legs are obviously offensive to the villagers for whom decorum is extremely important, a concept that has been inherited from the same Western missionaries who condemned nakedness. But the attack on their beliefs continues through the girls’ discourse as well as through their inadequate behaviour. Both Siniva and Siala repudiate Christianity as well as the materiality the Samoan culture is based on and foster a return to a time prior to colonialism. When Siala calls Samoana and her friends “image girls” (Figiel 1996: 10) she is not simply referring to the shallow attitude of wishing to maintain appearances at all costs. She is also stating that girls are not allowed subjectivity given they are encapsulated by a predominating discourse with which, furthermore, they agree because they are not aware of its existence. Siala discusses sexuality with the girls, a thing no adult would ever do, wishing to make the girls realise that there are further options that they can take instead of simply accepting what is imposed on them. Still, although Samoana realises that there is “a bit of truth” in what Siala says, she believes that parents want more than that. They also want “to instil (...) their values” (Figiel 1996: 11) in their children so that their culture may live on.

However, like Siniva, Siala is too lost within an existentialistic Void: “everything Siala did was like a machine. A machine in the sense that it was just done and then she moved on to the next and the next - scrutinizing everything - pessimistic about everything” (Figiel 1996: 11). One is lead to recall *The Myth of*

*Sisyphus* in which Albert Camus argues that although individuals constantly look for the meaning of existence, the fact is that their search is useless given that they inhabit a world that is itself meaningless. Siala, however, does not choose to commit suicide, which would be to admit defeat, but rather to continue experiencing life away from Malaefou.

## Apa

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Sia Figiel identifies the silence of subjection as not only endemic to women but also to other minority ethnic groups. The series painted by Samoan immigrant Apa and that lead him to fame, *Men and Women without Memory*, depicts “abstract figures in black without skulls. Without heads”, only “eyes. Noses. Mouths. Suspended on brown, sometimes black faces” in “a permanent state of sadness” (Figiel 2001: 192). The paintings are shown in a solo show that sells out the same night and critics start referring to Apa as the “angry voice of the Islander proletariat”, “Samoa’s answer to Ralph Hotere” (a Maori painter), and “Jean-Michel Basquiat” (Figiel 2001: 192). Apa enters the world of fame “silently”, wearing “oil-acrylic-stained jeans”, “a Beatles “Strawberry Fields Forever” T-shirt” (Figiel 2001: 192/193) and no shoes. No great changes occur in his life given that he continues working as a mailman in the morning and as a factory worker in the afternoons. However, those who grant him fame begin to regard Apa’s body and his habits as part of an exotic creative scenery in itself that must, accordingly, be explored. The habit of wearing no shoes is linked to a “primeval cry” (Figiel 2001: 199) and speculations are made about the scars on his face that are said to have resulted both from “a shark” that “tore at his face” (Figiel 2001: 199) and from a gang fight. Apa’s body, by being marked and stained, becomes a body of adoration:

You’re on billboards everywhere. Warrior-rugby machine guys. Excuse me, men! They adore you and your “bloody Islander” skin. You smell good to them. Look good to them. Sound good to them. Feel good to them. Probably taste good to them too (Figiel 2001: 193).

Apa paints the series after a conversation with Uncle John, a Papua New Guinean immigrant, in which he questions the silent acceptance of “white orders” (Figiel 2001: 191) that humiliate immigrants who obey them with their overalls “stained with sweat, stained with blood, stained with a history of submission” (Figiel 2001: 191). The main destinies for Western Samoan immigrants are New Zealand and Australia. In fact, Auckland hosts the largest concentration of Polynesians in the world. For Eastern Samoans, the main destiny is the USA, where they comprise the largest Pacific immigrant population. Economically, there is on the part of these countries’ “apparatuses and institutions” (Foucault 1999: 260) an investment in the immigrant’s body so as to keep it subjected and, thus, productive.

Subjection finds its materiality primarily in the individual’s body and only after in his or her property and political autonomy. As Foucault argues,

the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. This subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology; it can also be direct, physical, pitting force against force, bearing on material elements, and yet without involving violence; it may be calculated, organized, technically thought out; it may be subtle, make use neither of weapons nor of terror and yet remain of a physical order (Foucault 1999: 259).

Their silence originates then from a racist environment in which individuals are denied the right to have a face and, consequently, a voice: “there is no “becoming” in the silence of racism, because no proximity or commonality is acknowledged. Such a silence is the silence of tyranny, of absolute “I’-ness or ipseity” (Werbner 1997: 245). The figures painted by Apa are universal given that they are representative of all immigrants. The silent figures remind one of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, in which the body, the hands, the head and the mouth of a figure scream a silent and agonizing scream into the sky and into the earth. The noise is internal and not external and can only find its shape in the colours and gestures of the figure. Apa’s figures too suffer and their suffering is not heard but rather guessed in the dark colours of the painting.

Apa’s paintings also appear to have been inspired by Sia Figiel’s painting *Fa’anoanoa II*, with Fa’anoanoa being the Samoan word for melancholy, in which a face that lacks part of the forehead as well as the skull is depicted. In an

interview with Barbara Flug Colin it is suggested that this may be interpreted by taking into account the general habit of cataloguing individuals according to their external aspect and ignoring the self (Colin 2003: 1). Figiel states that she “cannot really interpret” her painting because “doing so kills it” (Colin 2003: 1), and allows thus for the risks of unintelligibility and misinterpretation. However, by attempting an interpretation the reader accepts some risks as well: waste of resources and disturbance.

In its simplest inferences, the absence of the skull may be read as recognition on the part of the individual of an inability to find meaning in his or her life, which happens to be the case with some of the immigrants Apa comes in contact with. The absence of the skull is therefore a symbol for the existentialistic Void in which individuals find themselves. This Void is then symbolised in the artificial opening that has been created in the body and that allows the eyes of others to see its empty interior.

By portraying faces with no more than eyes, noses and mouths, Apa can also be stating that his figures are being refused an identity. While they can be interpreted as representing everyone, given the absence of detail in the painting, they are, at the same time, no one, because they lack individual traits. In spite of having faces, they can be read as faceless, because they do not represent specific individuals. Additionally, by not having skulls, part of what bestows them with an identity, the brain, is also missing. If one considers the fact that Apa is in a white country, then probably his brown and black figures are indeed no one for a number of white people.

One further interpretation may still be presented. Foucault argues that “the surplus power exercised on the subjected body” has given rise to a duplication of the body, “a soul”, that is born “out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint” (Foucault 1999: 262). As the author argues,

it would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished – and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives (Foucault 1999: 262).

There are then two elements to consider: the physical body that is born and that will die and its double, the soul, which is an ideological concept that surrounds it and that continues existing after the body disappears. The soul grows from the knowledge that the body is indeed subjected and powerless in the fight against the political repression that targets it and it is this knowledge that “extends and reinforces the effects” of the power that subjects it which will constrain, consequently, the agency of the body. For this reason, Foucault argues, the soul becomes “the prison of the body” (Foucault 1999: 262). Apa’s paintings may thus be the representation of bodies wishing to free the soul in which they are encapsulated. However, in order for the concept of the soul to be understood, he has to place it inside the individual’s body, the place where the Christian soul dwells, in which he creates the artificial opening through which the soul will be released.

Apa has an affair with Alofa, who in the meantime has moved to New Zealand. When Apa asks her if he can paint her, she refuses immediately saying that she has “a bony neck”, “prunes for breasts” and “thick thighs” (Figiel 2001: 193) and people do not want to see her body. Apa’s answer is of anger: “Dammit, Alofa! Look at what they’ve made you feel?” (Figiel 2001: 193). Apa’s anger is directed towards the Western consumer culture that surrounds both him and Alofa and which obviously does not promote the type of body that the young woman possesses:

I go to the dairy to buy sugar and they hand me pamphlets on beauty creams, and it’s always a white, blonde-haired, skinny woman-girl-nymph smiling with whiter than white teeth. So then you’re walking back home with the sugar in your one hand and the pamphlet of this nymph in the other and a palagi man out of nowhere spits on the pavement and calls out, “Bloody Islanders”. (...) And if it’s not pamphlets and men on street pavements, it’s the television that condemns my already publicly condemned body. “Take this pill and it’ll burn the fat off your thighs. Take this pill and it’ll enlarge your breasts” (Figiel 2001: 193/194).

In consumer cultures such as the Western, it is normal to present the body as an object always prepared for transformation. Every day the body, particularly the female body, is attacked with the belief that, with a little effort, alterations can be made in order for it to adjust to the currently defined concepts of youth,



fitness and beauty. This is particularly noticeable in the increasing emphasis that is given to revealing the contours of the body, which was in the past carefully protected and concealed. The body is increasingly becoming a locus for personal choice and a wide range of products and services are offered to individuals in order for their bodies to display what is considered to be the *universal* and even the *natural* image. In *O Corpo que Somos*, Agostinho Ribeiro quotes William Ewing who claims that the body, particularly the female body, has become “um dos territórios colonizados pelo capitalismo” (Ribeiro 2003: 8) in the sense that the body acts as the consumer of the health and beauty that the body advertises and that the body sells. In other words, capitalism demands not only that the individual be hard-working but also that his or her body possesses a number of public characteristics which will confirm the desirability of the products offered.

This iconization of the white body is also patent in the dolls with which Pippi Brown plays in *The Girl in the Moon Circle*: “tiny little women. (...) With the big-big breasts. Small-small waists. Longer than long legs. And permanent smiles on their painted pink faces” (Figiel 1996: 116). The dolls are Pippi’s “prized possession” (Figiel 1996: 116) but both Samoana and Tupu refuse to play with them. Tupu explains to a confused Pippi that it is “just sick” to play “with stupid skinny big titted” dolls when there is “real flesh and blood and laughter and crying and snot and piss and shit babies to take care of at home” (Figiel 1996: 117) This episode appears to be inspired by Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, in which the child narrator Claudia MacTeer destroys the beautiful white dolls that she is given. By refusing the dolls, Samoana and Tausi are refusing the symbols of the colonial power that are being imposed on them. Additionally, they are raising the issue of the fantasised body in contrast with the real body. The concept of the body-beautiful with which Alofa is confronted is naturally the Western one, which she cannot, obviously, obtain and yet from whose influence she cannot escape. Hence, her low self-esteem which Apa fights by talking about the Polynesian ideal of woman. Alofa is also unable to grasp that the body being advertised in the Western society is not a real body but rather an idealized one. It is a body that most Western women cannot realize either, a fact that is confirmed by the great number of eating disorders which affect so many women in the West. This is an aspect that Sia Figiel addresses particularly in *they who do not grieve*, in which

she introduces Mrs Winterson and her friend Mrs Harcourt, one suffering from bulimia and the other from anorexia:

Mrs Winterson resembles a chess player each time she's at the table with food in front of her. She sits and stares at the food, then moves the food strategically from one section of the plate to the next (Figiel 2001: 77).

Mrs Winterson is "thin as a spoon, with a neck as long as a chicken's" (Figiel 2001: 77) but is always "looking for the perfect diet" so that she can "fit into something nice" for her husband (Figiel 2001: 79), a businessman who is frequently away on business. Naturally, her bulimia must also be analysed by taking into account her husband's repeated infidelities and is naturally a call for his attention. In the case of Mrs Harcourt, however, the pressure of the consumer society that demands a perfectly shaped body leads her to suffer from anorexia. When Malu walks into the bathroom and sees her forcing herself to vomit, she pushes the girl away and yells at her but does not tell Mrs Winterson about the event nor does she reprimand Malu for entering the bathroom without permission. She is obviously ashamed of her behaviour but is unable to stop it.

Sia Figiel addresses consumer culture through other angles as well. In *where we once belonged* she presents the reader with three girls who model themselves according to the actresses who star in *Charlie's Angels*. When Alofa goes to Apia, she dresses a "brightly yellow" T-shirt, her "only pair of jeans" and rubs "Sione's hair-grease" in her hair to make "the hair go straight", "like Jill's hair on *Charlie's Angels*" (Figiel 1996: 35). The girls are obviously borrowing Western concepts of beauty over Samoan and aspiring to the perfect body the three actresses from the series apparently possess. Still, the fact is that although the girls want to look Western, they are not. Quoting Homi Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man", the girls are "almost the same but not quite" (quoted in McLeod 2000: 55). And Siniva and Siala are the ones who are better aware of this, given that they too have adopted Western attitudes both in the way they dress as well as in the way they think but do not look Western nor are accepted as such. However, their behaviour also means that "culture is perpetually changing and that people adjust and adapt to the changes - and continue" (Figiel 1996: 128).

Sia Figiel does not aim at discussing the impact of Western beliefs upon her female characters but rather at presenting the options these women have. In an interview she has with Subrumani, the author explains her stand:

I have a lot of friends, for example, who are serious feminists and have the tendency of being exclusive in their view of the world. That is respectable because that is certainly a freedom and a right that is theirs and doesn't need to be justified. I have a rather inclusive view of things - one that takes into consideration the whole (Figiel 1996: 128).

### **Written on the Body**

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In spite of not using words, Apa manages to create a fluid political discourse that, by being built with an absence of words, breaks the silence. As Bernard Dauenhauer argues, "artistic discourse is bound by the requirement to overcome the tendency to blindness which commonplace discourse threatens to induce" given that it "must overcome the referential values of routine discourse in order to allow new expressions of the meaning of reality to be articulated" (Dauenhauer 1980: 47). In other words, it is necessary for the individual to escape the constraints of everyday discourse if s/he wishes to be noticed and his or her discourse heard.

Sia Figiel claims that her writing is "all about giving voice to a whole generation that is voiceless" (Marsh 1997: 4), given that Samoan literature was being written by Samoan males and Western males and females and there was simply no writing by female Samoan authors. Her aim is thus to give Samoan girls and women a voice given that they too were in silence: "women are Pacific Islands' greatest forgotten resource" (Fischer 2002: 275). In order to do this, Figiel decided to experiment with the art of *su'ifefeloi*, that is, of mixing flowers together in order to make a *lei*, a garland. Each chapter represents then a flower that is put side to side with other chapters/flowers until the novel/garland is complete. The lei is thus "a metaphor for her particular art of storytelling" (Marsh 1997: 5). Figiel uses her writing to contest Western representations of Samoa that are mostly idealistic by contrasting them with images of present Samoan society and builds characters who deal with issues that are normally regarded as taboo,

such as sexuality or domestic violence and abuse, to propose that breaking the silence can indeed be a solution.

Painting and writing are here art forms that must be regarded as conveying a political discourse, given that they aim both at transmitting the ideas of an entire community as well as at challenging any distorted western conceptualizations. Apa can thus be regarded as Sia Figiel's response to the paintings made by French artist Paul Gauguin and her writing as a response to Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Tattooing, as an art form, does not escape politics as well. As argued by Albert Wendt, a body with a Samoan tattoo

is a body coming out of the Pacific, not a body being imposed on the Pacific. It is a blend (...) in which influences from outside (even the English language) have been indigenised, absorbed, in the image of the local and national, and in turn have altered the national and local (Wendt 1996: 5).

Sia Figiel's aim is thus to contest convention in order to develop an artistic freedom that may allow post-colonial subjects to renegotiate the ambivalences and complexities of their condition of silenced subjects.



# Conclusion





The relation between a body and the language used to describe it is unstable, an alien alliance: materiality is not language, and language cannot be material, although each strives to conform to the other.

David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*

“The path of my departure was free”, and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

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Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* presents the coming to life of a creature that is the product of a scientist's imagination, a creature that is exclusively the product of science and that has, therefore, neither mother nor father. When refused acceptance and nurture by the creator Dr Frankenstein, the creature, physically ugly and inwardly good, rebels and becomes evil. Events take various turns for the worse and both Dr Frankenstein and the creature perish in the end. Mary Shelley presents the reader with a creature with a range of unsocialized characteristics who has the ability to learn, and who, in particular, learns about social inequality. The reader is compelled to feel compassion for such a creature when it is presented to a society that is incapable of accepting and integrating it. When the creature confronts the creator with the creative irresponsibility that

resulted in his physical imperfection and in his social segregation, he confronts him with his own journal entries in which everything is “minutely described” (Shelley 1999: 100):

Everything is related in them which bears reference to my accursed origin; the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which painted your own horrors and rendered mine indelible. I sickened as I read. “Hateful day when I received life!” I exclaimed in agony. “Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God, in pity, made men beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred” (Shelley 1999: 100).

It is possible to analyse this episode as symbolic in the history of literature of divergence given that it is a moment in which the ones who are constructed as deviant confront their creators to demand their responsibility. But the reading of *Frankenstein* leads to other conclusions as well. Although there are such concepts as a *created* body and a *natural* body, there is no easy distinction between them and it is not possible to say which body is the *real* body. If one takes into account Donna Haraway’s concept of the cyborg, the human-machine hybrid, this distinction becomes even more problematical. However, all bodies, even the ones created by science, are both *natural* and *social* given that the way in which the body is experienced from within is always shaped by the social world. The same structures that have failed the creature’s *created* body in its hour of need are the same structures that can fail or reward any other body *real* or not.

The body is central in the attempt to define one’s identity which means that the body is also part of a reflexive self-identity. It is because one sees the other initially as a body that one tends to form an image of his or her identity based on the information that is passed on by the body. Visible differences such as sex, skin colour and forms of disability signify thus identity. Consequently, identity is marked by difference and the ways in which individuals distinguish themselves from others. In fact, it would be difficult to define identity if it didn’t involve the exploration of difference. It is in this operation that power is



exercised and this, by itself, means that one of the sides must be devalued. It is important, however, to understand that individuals seek to negotiate their identity as different from the other but that they also have to deal with the issue of being represented by the other and that that might lead to them being regarded as “the other”.

Kath Woodward argues that “otherness” is created through aspects of visible difference” (Woodward 2002: 127), that is, besides being the site where identities are inscribed, the body is as well the site in relation to which difference is marked. This aspect is central to the issue of Postcolonial studies. When the ex-boyfriend talks to the protagonist at the party, he is clearly doing it from the superior position of the colonizer who regards the colonized as a lesser being. Alofa tells Apa that she does not want to be painted by him, because the black body is never celebrated by the white man but rather despised and humiliated. But otherness does not find its representations simply in the relationship between colonizer and colonized. Laamatua and Tagata are both in possession of impaired bodies and “whereas the “able” body has no definitional core (it poses as transparently “average” or “normal”), the disabled body surfaces as any body capable of being narrated as “outside the norm” (Mitchell, Snyder 2000: 49). Lalolagi and Fue dare to assume their sexuality, failing thus to demonstrate that they are respectful citizens, and are forced to assume the consequences of their acts. When the protagonist of *Sons for the Return Home* goes to Samoa and decides to stay at a hotel in Apia, the receptionist hardly acknowledges him until she sees his money and hears him speaking English: “Good English was proof that one was educated, sophisticated, civilised, totally removed from an “uneducated villager from the back” (Wendt 1987: 195). In other words, the ability to speak correct English means that one has acquired all those elements that the coloniser attributes to himself by bestowing on the colonized its opposite. It is necessary, nonetheless, to keep in mind Homi Bhabha’s argument that although the colonized is mimicking the colonizer, he doesn’t look like him nor is he accepted as such. Still, by behaving like the colonizer, the colonised is taking an active stand and is challenging the representations which attempt to fix and define him.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon claims that writers, artists and intellectuals have a vital role in the resistance to colonialism. He is of the opinion that the creation of a national culture moves through three phases, with the first

characterized by an attempt to copy the features of the literature of the colonising power. In the second phase, the writer discovers that he or she is not satisfied by simply copying the coloniser and instead turns to the cultural history of his or her people, becoming immersed in the past and ignoring the struggles of the present. Frantz Fanon calls this literature “just-before-the-battle” (quoted in McLeod 2000: 86). In the third phase, the “fighting phase” (quoted in McLeod 2000: 87), the writer becomes directly involved in the struggle against colonialism by attempting a reinterpretation of traditional culture in order to find solutions for the future.

If one takes into account Frantz Fanon’s theories, both Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel are in the third phase of creation of a distinct culture. Although Sia Figiel presents the reader with characters who propose that a return to the past is the solution for the disintegration traditional culture faces, she is aware that this is not a solution. Symbolically, Siniva ends up by committing suicide and Siala leaves the village rendering thus any suggestion they might have made ineffective. Albert Wendt finds inspiration for some of his characters in mythology, as is the case of Laamatua and Tagata, who are both linked to Maui, a god who performed several heroic feats. It is important to learn about one’s culture and history but it is also important to see that they have a role as a means by which one can find new paths towards the future. After a few days in Samoa, Albert Wendt’s protagonist realises that there can be no return to an idealised culture given that “no culture is ever static and can be preserved” (Wendt 1996: 644). The best for one to do is to go to the past in search for knowledge but to return again with the weapons to face the present and to plan the future.

The bodies that are constructed by these authors are firmly located within a context of Samoan values and cultural practices and are valuable sites of inscription and of symbolic representation. Not only are they used as a means by which to deconstruct the colonial stereotypic reproduction of the body but also as a form to represent contemporary globalizing culture and its multifaceted aspects. Therefore, bodies are shown as sexualized, racialized, appropriated, subjected, controlled and disciplined but also as robust, dominating, negotiating, and imposing their own views.



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