

Sluts and Superwomen: The Politics of Gender Liminality in Urban Tonga*

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In urban Tonga, certain men identify themselves and are identified by others as taking on some attributes of womanhood on a regular basis. This process, however, yields a heterogeneous category of persons, who are variously positioned in the socio-economic structure and moral order. At one extreme, some transgendered men are highly productive individuals in the market economy, while, at the other extreme, others are principally preoccupied by their sexual conquests amongst non-transgendered men, which brands them as unproductive consumers because of the economics of casual sex relations. The stereotypes of mainstream society focus more readily on the second pattern than on the first. Stereotypical representations also align transgendered men with modernity and the West, and this association places the target of these stereotypes in a potentially vulnerable position, both symbolically and otherwise. This analysis explores the ethnographic diversity of transgendered identities within a single society, the complex interweaving of symbolic and material forces in defining these identities, and the power of stereotyping in the lives of those who are the target of the process.

Almost two decades ago, Unni Wikan and several other anthropologists engaged in a spirited debate about the interpretation of ethnographic material from Oman on the *xanith*, a category of 'men who become women' by adopting some of the attributes of the opposite gender and working as prostitutes. In the paper that triggered the debate, Wikan (1977) analysed the category in essentially symbolic terms, arguing that *xanith* constitute a third gender that mediates between women and men in Omani society, and evaluated its implications for the Omani construction of the person and its place in the local moral order. Various scholars subsequently took Wikan to task for ignoring, among other factors, comparative materials from other parts of the world, the internal heterogeneity of Omani society,

and, of greater concern here, the *xanith*'s position in socio-economic structures. This last critical strand was taken up by Shepherd (1978a, 1978b), who argued that Wikan's own data demonstrate that the *xanith* are not defined in terms of gender, but of economic and social power: the *xanith* is 'like a woman' because he is socially powerless and economically dependent on wealthier men.

As the last contributor to this debate (Carrier 1980) pointed out, the quality of the exchange was seriously marred by unexamined confluences of categories and labels (e.g., 'transsexualism' vs. 'homosexuality', 'behaviour' vs. 'identity') and unwarranted cross-cultural comparisons. More importantly, the terms of the debate clearly reflect the priorities of a time when the major tensions in anthropological theory pitched ideational against material approaches. With the benefit of hindsight, the weaknesses resulting from such theoretical dichotomising stand out clearly. For example, by contrasting idealism and materialism, the participants in the debate deflected attention away from the relationships between symbols and the flow of resources. Preoccupied with demonstrating the importance of symbolic aspects of the definition of the *xanith*, Wikan did not consider that competing indigenous models of Omani culture could coexist, that representations of the *xanith* could be multiple and layered, and that there could be different ways of being a *xanith*. The proponents of a materialist approach, in contrast, ignored the possibility that the *xanith* category could in fact be a phenomenon of both power and gender, as well as sex. Finally, we learn very little from a debate of this kind about the agents themselves, about what it feels like to be a *xanith* in Oman; *xanith* are reduced to either a jumble of symbols or pawns in a political economic game.

In the last twenty years, we have learned enough about roles and identities, and sex, gender, and the erotic to help us avoid some of the pitfalls into which Wikan and her critics fell. Ethnographic and sociological analyses of such phenomena as the *hijras* of India (Hall 1996; Hall & O'Donovan 1996; Nanda 1990; Yorke 1990) and some of the multiple manifestations of 'transgenderism' in complex societies (e.g., Bolin 1988; Bullough & Bullough 1993; King 1993; Livingston 1990; MacKenzie 1994; Shapiro 1991), ethnohistorical accounts of Native American berdaches or 'two-spirit people' (e.g., Whitehead 1981; Roscoe 1991), to name a few, provide much food for thought on the sociocultural constitution of sexual and gender-based minorities and identities.¹ Yet, surprisingly, recent works on these questions still routinely fail to give serious attention to the interface of the material

and the symbolic, to problems of agency and structure, and to the relationships among gender, sex, erotics, and power. This stands in sharp contrast with feminist anthropology, where some of these issues reign as central concerns (di Leonardo 1991). As a result, much remains to be done in understanding how members of sexual and gender-based minorities conceptualise themselves as social entities, how they are constructed by society, and how they give meaning to sex and gender as sociocultural constructs.

Beyond anthropology and the social sciences, questions of sex and gender crossing have come to command serious attention in 'hybrid' disciplines such as critical theory, cultural studies, and queer studies, all of which are principally grounded in literary criticism, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. The *grande dame* of gender bending in these circles is feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1990, 1993). Butler's ultimate goal is to demonstrate the weaknesses of traditional feminists' essentialist assumption that gender identity is and must be established before political action becomes possible. Instead, for Butler, gender identity is constituted through political action, and is thus a dynamic process rather than a static and pre-ordained notion.

Gender parodies, as they are encountered in drag performances for example, are of particular analytic importance for Butler, who sees such parodies as a mocking mimicry of 'the very notion of an original... To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect ... postures as an imitation' (1990: 138). In other words, drag is not an imitation (or, worse, a misogynist imitation, as some early feminist critics have maintained) of a discretely pre-defined gender identity, because such an identity is a fiction that the hegemonic, heterosexual, and patriarchal order creates and uses as a regulatory mechanism for human experience. Rather, drag can be a powerful subversive act, because it exposes the fictional nature of gender and its alleged grounding in sex, and is one example of the proliferation of sex and gender configurations, of the more or less wilful fragmentation of sex and gender identities. Only when such fragmentation takes place, Butler maintains, can gender hegemony be successfully subverted.²

While Butler exerts considerable influence in the newer disciplines like queer studies (e.g., Champagne 1995 and Hausman 1995, who position themselves variously vis-à-vis Butler, and papers in Bristow & Wilson 1993; Burston & Richardson 1995; Warner 1994), her work has yet to receive the attention it deserves in the anthropology of gender and sex (with a few notable exceptions, see Morris 1995). At the same time, Butler's arguments have kept safely at bay any ethnographic and sociological evidence, even

as they advance powerful claims about the nature of identity and social action (Weston 1993). While my goal here is not to establish a bridge between postmodern and more traditional ethnographic approaches to sex and gender, a sub-text of this paper is an exploration of how anthropology can benefit from some aspects of Butler's critique of under-examined assumptions about identity. At the same time, the materials I present here contain the seed of an anthropological critique of Butler's call for a post-modernist understanding of identity.

This paper is based on ethnographic materials from Tonga, an island nation-state in the South Pacific. One finds in Tongan society a sexual and gender-based minority that bears similarities to Omani *xanith*, in that its gender identity and erotic make-up go against the grain of local mainstream patterns. However, like others of its type, this category is multifarious in the extreme. Lacking a centre and exhibiting porous boundaries, it defies generalisation and presents a challenge for ethnographic description. Underlying this paper are two main issues of descriptive and theoretical import. First, how do we come to grips with such a category, and how does the recognition of the porous nature of its boundaries affect our understanding of the received order, of the straight-and-narrow path? Second, how do the multiple but coexisting representations of such a category inform the life trajectories and self-understandings of the individuals themselves?

Tonga and *Leiti*

The ethnographic context of this paper is Tonga, an island nation of 110,000 inhabitants with a fast-growing urban area, Nuku'alofa, currently with 30,000 inhabitants. Tonga is an elaborately stratified and centralised society headed by a sacralised king. At the local level, chiefs of various stature hold both economic and political power over commoners (Marcus 1980). Christianity, introduced in the mid-1800s, is firmly implanted in both the structure of society, which it legitimates, and the lives of ordinary people. However, multiple denominations and interdenominational mobility somewhat mitigate the oppressive potential of the church. In the last decade or two, Tonga has witnessed extremely rapid social change, much of which is associated with the formation of sizeable Tongan migrant communities in American Samoa, New Zealand, Australia, Hawaii, and the American Mainland (Cowling 1990; Gailey 1992). The transnational links resulting from these migrations have facilitated the emergence of a new entrepreneurial middle-class based in Tonga and sustained from overseas

(Benguigui 1989; Marcus 1993). This new middle class has somewhat undermined a social hierarchy that had remained largely uncontested since its emergence in its current form in the mid-nineteenth century. The subsistence economy in which most of the population engaged barely two decades ago is now in serious competition with the production of export crops (pumpkin, vanilla, coffee, etc.) in rural areas and outer islands. In town, capitalism reigns, and most town-dwellers cling to low-paying employment in the service industries, including a fledgling tourism industry, the bureaucracy, and small-scale cottage industries.

As part of the very fabric of Tongan society, one finds a category of persons who are biologically male but are widely recognised as woman-like, and are usually referred to as *fakaleiti*. The term (which has an invariant plural form) consists of a prefix *faka-*, which in this context translates as 'in the fashion of', and the root *leiti*, borrowed from English 'lady'; the latter is attested only in this word, and is never used to denote a woman. How long the term has been in use in Tonga is unknown, although since it obviously presumes some degree of familiarity with English and Western society, it must be a nineteenth-century or, more likely, a twentieth-century neologism.³ However, gender-liminal men themselves dislike the term *fakaleiti*, preferring instead the shorter *leiti*. This preference is of some import, and will be explained later. In the following, I use either *fakaleiti* and *leiti* depending on the context, keeping an eye on the subtle voice shifts that word choice can entail.

Defining a *leiti* is no simple task, as the category is heterogeneous. However, a number of tendencies can be identified, which I have elaborated upon elsewhere (Besnier 1994) and thus will only summarise here. *Fakaleiti* frequently engage in work activities normally associated with women: in rural contexts, mat weaving, tapa-cloth beating, and keeping house; in capitalist contexts, they are employed in sweat shops, offices, the hotel industry, in the entertainment of tourists, and primary education. Many engage in some transvestism to various degrees, and have sex with 'straight' men (never with each other), taking a 'female' role, i.e., as recipient rather than inserter. (I use the term 'straight' throughout this paper to refer to men who are not self- and other-identified as *fakaleiti* on a routine basis; it corresponds to the 'default' local definition of a man.) Like women, *fakaleiti* are stereotypically associated with domestic social spheres, socialising in the home rather than away, for example, and generally choose their friends among women, in contrast to 'straight' men who seek the company of

other men. Tongans routinely recognise a man as a *fakaleiti* if his demeanour exhibits certain qualities stereotypically identified as feminine, such as a swishy gait, an animated face, a highly emotional comportment, a fast speaking tempo, and a tendency to be verbose, in contrast to the stereotypically masculine impassiveness and *sang froid* that mainstream Tongan men cultivate. However, while it contrasts with that of 'straight' men, the *fakaleiti*'s demeanour is not mimetic of the average Tongan middle-age village woman; what it is patterned on will be discussed below. *Fakaleiti* are a named category for mainstream Tongans, who describe them in unproblematic terms: 'men who are like women', or '50-50s' (i.e., 50% woman, 50% man).⁴

The Heterogeneity of *Leiti* Identity

In practice, *fakaleiti* identity is considerably more complex, fluid, and difficult to pinpoint than this checklist makes it out to be. In particular, this list is made up of possible features, none of which are necessary or sufficient conditions under which someone is identified as a *fakaleiti*. Furthermore, not all features are equally important; indeed, the relative importance of particular traits differs according to who is being asked and when, in that non-*fakaleiti* Tongans may focus on certain features in one context and others in a different context. These features may differ from those that older *leiti* may bring up in their self-definition, which in turn may differ from the features that younger *leiti* may invoke. *Fakaleiti* identity is thus internally heterogeneous, and its manifestations in social practice are diverse: some *fakaleiti* foreground certain features of *fakaleiti* identity in their social comportment, while others foreground other characteristics. *Fakaleiti* are found in both rural and urban contexts, as well as all social strata, and social class and the urban-rural contrast play an important, if ill-understood, role in the overall picture. Individual life trajectories are no less important, in that a person can shed some characteristics in the course of his life, although one's identification as a *fakaleiti* cannot be shed completely. For example, a young *fakaleiti* can have sex with 'straight' men in his twenties, and enter into a heterosexual marriage a bit later. In these respects, the similarities between Tongan *fakaleiti* and Omani *xanith* are striking (Wikan 1977:308-309).

Furthermore, the list of identity features presented earlier does not distinguish between stereotypes and social action. While the two categories are not independent of each other, identifying the interaction of stereotyping and self-definition is important, particularly in the case of sexual and gender-

based minorities, and is a central goal of this paper. Lastly, *leiti* identity is by definition in a state of constant diachronic flux, in part because of *leiti*'s uncompromising embracing of sociocultural change and innovation from overseas. The transnational nature of Tongan society brings *leiti* in contact with gay and lesbian overseas Tongans, whose important brokering role between gay and lesbian communities in New Zealand, Hawaii, and California on the one hand and *leiti* in Tonga on the other remains to be investigated.

The practice of being a *fakaleiti* can generate varied experiences and different positioning vis-à-vis mainstream society. Fluidity, permeability, and multi-layering are thus fundamental aspects of what it means to be a *fakaleiti*. Yet ethnographers who have studied comparable phenomena have too often swept comparable patterns of heterogeneity under the rug, taking mainstream society's unproblematic characterisation of the category at face value and elevating it to the status of 'tradition' (e.g., James 1994).

I shall attempt to avoid these pitfalls by providing a solid ethnographic basis to my analysis, the absence of which is often the source of previous anthropologists' oversimplifications. During my field research, I spent a great deal of time with two *leiti*. The first, whom I shall call Sione, is a matronly *fakaleiti* in his early 30s, who wears androgynous clothing on a quotidian basis, with a white cardigan perennially draped over his shoulders. The last child of a family of five girls and three boys, he lives with several of his siblings in a large house in the outskirts of Nuku'alofa, while the rest of his family lives on the outer island from which the family originates. Until recently, Sione was the sole employee of a very successful sewing business owned by an overseas Tongan and housed in a makeshift house in the back of main-street stores in Nuku'alofa, next to a sail-maker and a barber who operates under a large shady tree. These businesses, whose existence and location are not indicated by any sign, are typical of the small-time entrepreneurial ventures one finds on dirt streets of South Pacific towns. More recently, Sione has gone independent, and is struggling with his own business, juggling between being swamped with orders and overwhelmed by family demands on his time and resources.

By all accounts, Sione is an extraordinary worker, an overachiever who keeps a 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. (and often 12 midnight) work schedule. His work and opinions are held in high esteem by all, and he is constantly turning down orders, from teenagers who come to him to have their inseam adorned with fashionable patches, to Tongan royalty's ladies-in-waiting. His tiny workshop is patronised by numerous women seeking his opinion about

what to wear with what, and men of all ages dropping off clothes to be mended or yardage to be turned into clothing. Sione's sewing world is very serious business in a culture where appearances, neatness, and cleanliness are very important, and his self-assured command of his specialty is met with no snickering. In short, Sione is a major pillar of Tongan *haute couture*, and emerges as a superwoman, performing work stereotypically associated with women, namely sewing clothes, but, by all accounts, better than most women.⁵ Work is a central aspect of Sione's life, and in fact leaves room for very little else, including sex and romance. Sione once had a boyfriend with a good job, who told him he 'liked' him, but Sione dropped him when he was seen having sex with another well-known *fakaleiti* in a hotel room. Sione's age and increasing obesity probably make him increasingly less attractive to 'straight' men. However, in his own words, he finds solace and satisfaction by being an overachiever. Like all Tongans, he depicts life as a single person as a sad one; but unlike most Tongans, Sione states that work can make the life of a single person perfectly tolerable.

In contrast to Sione, Vili is Ms. Glamour. In his mid-20s, Vili cross-dresses frequently, particularly at beauty pageants. The winner of one of the early Miss Galaxy *fakaleiti* beauty pageants, held since 1993 with increasing pomp and seriousness at the best hotel in the country, Vili continues to demand centre-stage at beauty pageants, making many *fakaleiti*'s eyes roll and many tongues wag. He walks glamorously down the runway with a huge smile fixed across his features, dressed in a skimpy black dress or an imaginative skin-tight dress. He is a close friend of Sione, who not only creates most of his outfits but also 'looks after' him in motherly fashion, although this does not prevent them from having periodic falling-outs and gossiping rather pointedly about one another. However, Sione feels protective of Vili, who, according to bystanders' opinions, would be 'pitiable' (*faka'ofa*) without him.

Vili was also employed until not too long ago, in the tourist industry. (He was recently fired for engaging in blatant black-marketing activities.) However, even when he was employed, work had nowhere the same importance in his life as it does in Sione's. Indeed, Vili has much better things to do. Glamorous, conceited about his appearance, quite feminine, Vili is extremely popular with 'straight' men. He has many good-looking boyfriends, including members of prominent sports teams. Sex and activities that lead to sex in Tongan eyes, such as dressing to the hilt and going disco dancing, have an enormous importance in Vili's life. He constantly gets embroiled

in arguments with young women, during which has been known to blurt out to them that their boyfriends prefer him to them, prompting some young women to file lawsuits for defamation.

However, when I was first getting to know Vili, he explained to me at great length that he did not hop into bed with every man that proposed to do so, that he 'gets to know' his men before he becomes intimate with them, and that he was not a slut (*fokisi*). He also presented himself as sexually very naïve, and had me talk about sexual matters (I was on a self-appointed part-time mission to spread the word about safe-sex practices), even though at first he had declared that he did not want to talk about things that were *kovi*, 'bad' (using the term that Tongans use in 'proper' contexts to refer to matters of sex). This stance contrasts sharply with the approach that 'straight' Tongan men generally adopt when first encountering a younger male foreigner like me: in the default scenario, the latter make sex the first topic of conversation, presuming it to be a universal meeting ground through which inter-cultural differences and the awkwardness of unfamiliarity can be transcended. In contrast, during our initial encounter, Vili was clearly anxious to project the image of an innocent virginal being, which, as I learned subsequently from seeing him in action and listening to gossip, was a rather distorted self-depiction. What is clear is that, right from the start, he was attempting to wrap me around his little finger, for reasons which I shall explain below.

Competent in English, considerably more self-assertive than Sione, Vili is absolutely set on migrating to the USA or New Zealand. So are many Tongans, but *fakaleiti* like Vili are at the forefront of the trend. Vili's desires are fuelled by a romanticisation of the West, which he imagines to be considerably more 'accepting' of sexual diversity than Tonga, as well as a place where he could obtain sex-reassignment surgery, which would make him a 'real' woman able to attract a man for life. This sort of reasoning, which is common amongst Tongan *leiti*, illustrates what could be termed 'reverse orientalism', the equivalent of what Carrier (1992:198) terms 'ethno-occidentalism, essentialist renderings of the West by members of alien societies'. The idealisation of the West embedded in this reverse orientalism is both poignant, in that it is incognizant of the forces that marginalise gendered and sexual minorities in the West, and ironic, in that it is the mirror image of the romantic orientalisation of the 'indigenous world' that informs much lesbian, gay, and transgendered writings and popular thinking. For example, a recent article asserts authoritatively in a transgendering magazine that

'in traditional Polynesian societies, male-to-female transgenderists [sic] ... were widely accepted' (Perkins 1995:19; see Besnier 1994:308–309 for further examples). The proverbial grass is indeed greener on the other side of the ocean.

Two Extremes

Sione and Vili occupy opposite poles in the range of possible identities subsumed under the label *fakaleiti*, both in terms of personal identity and, more importantly, in terms of how they place themselves in the political economic context of Tongan society. Sione emerges as a superwoman: he produces resources for himself and his family by working in a woman-dominated occupation, but is said to do so better than ordinary women. His work generates not just resources, but a highly desirable and prestigious type of resource, namely money, in the context of a monetised economy in which opportunities to earn a salary are few and far between. Thus Sione is particularly appreciated by his family and the object of general admiration. His company is very desirable, and his tiny sewing shop is constantly crowded by both women and men who come to socialise: employees of downtown shops on their lunch-hour, taxi drivers between jobs, young studs killing time, and so on; my own presence there for hours on end was seen as quite natural.

While Vili also earns a salary (on and off), his money disappears as quickly as it comes in: he lives the high life with his many boyfriends, whom he has to keep supplied in liquor, food, car rides, and expensive entertainments. Liquor plays a particularly important role in this picture, not just because young Tongan men are enthusiastic binge drinkers, like their age-mates in the rest of the Pacific (e.g., Marshall 1979), but also because being drunk in Tongan society allows one to escape responsibility for one's sexual comportment, a pattern evident in many other societies of the world.

The spending pressures that Vili is under can be understood by contrasting the dynamics of sex with women and sex with *fakaleiti* from the perspective of young 'straight' men.⁶ Tongan society stereotypically expects men to be promiscuous, particularly when young and unmarried, while prescribing that unmarried women remain virginal. Similar expectations are very common cross-culturally, and strike a familiar chord in Western contexts (e.g., Holland & Eisenhart 1990; Lancaster 1992:235–278; Moffatt 1989:181–245; Parker 1991:30–66; Sanday 1990). This state of affairs has deep roots in the Tongan social order, and articulates with many other aspects of Tongan society and culture. In this traditional order, which is nec-

essarily oversimplified here, a woman's virginity is guarded by her brothers and male cousins, with whom she is in an avoidance taboo, but by whom her reputation, and therefore that of her family, are protected and her welfare looked after. The contemporary social reality, particularly in town, is that virginity is only of concern in the case of high-ranking women (and this remark is again an oversimplification as high-ranking Tongans are also commonly very Westernised in sexual and other matters). For most women, sexual favours are commodities which must be repaid, through gifts, outings, etc. Thus heterosexual sex is conceptualised as an exchange (cf. Yelvington 1996:320 on Trinidad), and is a potentially onerous activity for both women and men, although the commodity being expended is different for each gender group: men expend material resources, while women expend sexual favours, which can decrease their potential for upward mobility on the marriage market (see Ortner 1981). Prestige also enters the picture, with men gaining prestige from sex while women lose it. A man gains particular prestige in the eyes of his peers (and of society at large, although in a more complex manner) when he successfully coaxes as many women as possible into providing sexual favours, but gets away with giving as little as possible in return (cf. Yelvington 1996:317). Affective bonds do figure in premarital relations, but they are downplayed compared to the Maussian aspects of the transaction, although they are elaborated in bracketed contexts such as mournful love songs (*hiva kalala*), which are sung principally by younger men.

For a 'straight' man, sex with a *fakaleiti* is second-best, in that it potentially implies that he is unable to convince 'real' women to provide him sexual favours. But it is thus an activity that he can engage in playfully and in a detached manner, particularly if he already has a solid reputation as a Don Juan in his dealings with women. Sexual relations between a 'straight' man and a *fakaleiti* are usually construed as taking place at the expense of the latter's reputation and self-respect, because the object of penetration is by nature demasculinised and thus loses prestige, as it does in many other societies (cf. Lancaster 1992; Faubion 1993). While they approach the matter casually, 'straight' men must nevertheless ensure that their families, particularly their parents and sisters, do not get wind of it. This explains why many women and older men believe that *leiti* are only patronised sexually by foreign tourists, a belief that is congruent with stereotypical associations I will describe later. This conviction is not undermined by the fact that Tonga hosts far too few tourists, and even fewer who are in the market for

sex with a *fakaleiti*, to provide the steady supply of sexual partners that many *fakaleiti* clearly enjoy. In reality, some young (and not-so-young) 'straight' men patronise *leiti* assiduously and in preference to women, but this scenario remains unrecognised in the 'cover story' of Tongan culture. We are here dealing with multiple and contradictory discourses involving both stereotypes and social practice, the boundary between which is often murky in all societies (Herzfeld 1992), particularly when sex, gender, and erotics are involved, as many feminist anthropologists have demonstrated (e.g., Ginsburg & Rapp 1995; Ginsburg & Tsing 1990; Martin 1987; Ortner 1991; Weston 1991).

It is not just prestige and self-respect that are transacted in sex between 'straight' men and *fakaleiti*, but also tangible resources. In contrast to premartial sex with women, sex with a *fakaleiti* does not have to be repaid. Quite the opposite: it is incumbent on *fakaleiti* to make sex attractive to 'straight' men by backing it up with liquor, entertainment, and other forms of high prestige commodities and activities.⁷ This situation diverges radically from that of the Omani *xanith* and the urban Indian *hijra*, who are commonly depicted as prostitutes (Wikan 1977; Nanda 1990), but bears striking similarities to more recent ethnographic materials on various gender minorities, including Brazilian *travestis* (Kulick forthcoming) and Filipino *bantut* (Johnson 1996). Contrary to the common anthropological and popular association of transgenderism with prostitution, a sexually active *leiti* like Vili has to spend a lot of money to 'take care of all his boyfriends' needs' (a recurrent phrase in conversations with *leiti* which, significantly, is always uttered in English). As a result, he is constantly in debt in many quarters, and has delinquent accounts in many stores. Most importantly, his income never reaches the hands of his family. In contrast to Sione's, Vili's identity is associated not with production, but with consumption, and sexual and material exploitation by others.⁸

The resulting picture is strikingly at odds with a widely held stereotype in mainstream Tongan society, to the effect that *fakaleiti* are predators, sexually and otherwise: *fakaleiti* are still men, after all, despite their feminine affectations, and like other men they are exploitative. As an otherwise well-informed Tongan scholar assured me, when young 'straight' men are having a drinking party, the *fakaleiti* wait outside in the dark until the lights are turned off, and then pounce on the poor hapless youths. These characterisations are antithetical to my observations: when *leiti* are in public, they are constantly harassed by 'straight' men in various states of inebriation, and seen as sexual fair game (Besnier 1994:300-301). The default interactional

footing that 'straight' men establish with *fakaleiti* is a barrage of systematic and relentless sexual banter and taunting, which ranges from sexual propositioning to threats of exposing the *fakaleiti*'s 'deceitful' femininity as a fraudulent hoax.⁹ These interactional patterns do not prevent everyone from enjoying the ribaldry of flirting in many contexts (cf. Yelvington 1996). Nor do they preclude the matter-of-fact way in which most of Sione's friends interact with him on a day-to-day basis; but the latter pattern is more marked than bantering, a point to which I will return presently. Of course, *leiti* themselves are no shrinking violets either and often take on a ludic role reminiscent of camp performances in the West, assuming the part of outrageously promiscuous creatures, particularly for the benefit of select audiences of *leiti* and women friends (Besnier 1994:307-308).

However, if anyone is the predator in the relationship between *leiti* and 'straight' men, it is latter. Despite the fact that, like all stereotypes, the reversal of predator-prey roles grossly distorts social practice, it is of consequence. In particular, it highlights the centrality of predator-prey relationships in the politics of sex in Tonga. It also explains why the themes around which the stereotypes are organised can never be neutral for those who are the target of these stereotypes.

Stereotyping and Resistance

Stereotypical representations of *fakaleiti* identity in mainstream Tongan society provide several points of further interest. Whenever I have broached the topic of *fakaleiti* with non-*fakaleiti* Tongans, one observation has invariably come up, to the effect that parents of children who were beginning to be identified as *fakaleiti* reacted with fear for their child's future: their child would not grow up satisfied with working the manioc patch in the bush and contributing to the subsistence of the family like an ordinary son (a picture that is of course more and more remote from reality, particularly in urban environments, since fewer and fewer urban Tongans depend for their livelihood on the manioc patch). Instead, the child would grow up needing money for lipstick, perfumes, clothes, and cover charges at discos.

Two important themes can be extracted from these observations. First, they demonstrate that, for mainstream Tongans, *fakaleiti* identity is associated primarily with the consumption of resources, and thus the stereotype of a *fakaleiti* is exemplified by Vili, rather than Sione. What underlies mainstream Tongans' depiction of the situation is the fact that *fakaleiti* deploy resources not so much for lipstick and cover charges as for sexual gratifica-

tion.¹⁰ Vili's and Sione's life-courses occupy different positions vis-à-vis the default stereotypical representation of *fakaleiti* in the 'cover story' of Tongan society, and this difference is constructed in many ways, big and small. For example, people often adopt an 'I-told-you-so' tone when gossiping about Vili's conduct (and there is plenty to gossip about), whereas Sione's achievements are often described with wonder and surprise. Even though this surprise may be conventionalised, the fact that it exists is nevertheless telling. Second, the resources being expended in the stereotypical representation of *fakaleiti* are not 'traditional' Tongan resources (e.g., food), but Western-style resources, particularly money. This is particularly worrisome for the same reason that Sione's hyperproductivity is attractive: money is scarce and increasingly essential for survival.

The stereotypical association of *fakaleiti* with an orientation to modernity and the West touches on an important aspect of their identity. Indeed, this orientation goes a great deal further than the nature of the resources they expend for sexual gratification. It is nowhere as conspicuous as in the Miss Galaxy beauty contests, which for many Tongans is the one setting in which *fakaleiti* identity comes into full bloom, and thus where stereotypes get reinforced in a particularly effective fashion. As mentioned earlier, the contest, which only *fakaleiti* can enter, is held at the most exclusive hotel in town, an enclave of foreign identities and practices, from which many ordinary Tongans are excluded because they lack the required shoes (sandals are not allowed). The pageant, which presents numerous fascinating similarities to beauty contests staged by *bantut* in the Philippines (Johnson 1996), is conducted principally in English, despite many contestants' limited competence in that language, before an audience largely composed of expatriate residents, well-to-do Tongans, and bewildered tourists; Tongans of more modest means are selected out by the prohibitive cover charge (T\$10 for each of two nights). In 1995, the contest was co-emceed by a young American Peace Corps volunteer. In the style of Miss Universe pageants, which they strive to imitate (cf. Johnson 1996:90–91), the contests focus on contestants' physical attributes, but also special talents and plans for the future (even though many competitors are much more concerned by where their next meal will be coming from than by developing special talents and long-term career plans). It is through such associations that *leiti*'s orientation to modernity and the West become reinforced, both in their self-representation and their representation by others.¹¹

Furthermore, it is particularly significant that *leiti* call themselves '*leiti*'

i.e., 'ladies': what they imitate, if they imitate anything, is not the average village woman, whose sturdy demeanour, developed over years of child-bearing, tapa-beating, and manioc-ingesting, is anything but delicate and swishy. (The parallel with the West, where 'no gay drag queen in her right mind would dress as a 'typical' woman', as Champagne 1995:120 puts it, is instructive.) Rather, *leiti* conjure the Tongan representation of the Western colonial 'lady', i.e., a woman with highly elaborated sensitivities to dirt, the sun, natives, and hard work, capricious and vain and in constant need of cosmetics, and whose desires are insatiable. (A taste for gin and young handsome 'native' men also helps complete the picture.)¹² Thus, for example, during one of my first meetings with Vili which I had scheduled on the terrace of a waterfront Nuku'alofa café, Vili was extremely bothered by the wind (in part because it messed up his hair), in contrast to other Tongans, who enjoy fresh cool breezes. In a more dramatic vein, *fakaleiti* commonly express repulsion towards symbols of Tonganness, particularly male Tonganness, such as kava-drinking. One *leiti* friend told me of being forced to drink kava that had been prepared for him by friends in honour of his arrival after a long absence, and of his drinking 'a little bit in a little cup'. This is the way foreigners, particularly foreign women, are expected to take their kava. Thus *leiti* identity is associated not simply with modernity and the West, but also with a rejection of tokens of 'traditional' Tongan life.

I mentioned earlier that *leiti* prefer the term '*leiti*' over '*fakaleiti*' when referring to themselves. I was offered a variety of reasons for this preference, the most interesting of which is the fact that the prefix *faka-* in Tongan (which is polysemic and extremely common) sounds too much like the English word 'fuck'. I have never encountered a comparable concern for the possibility of interlingual embarrassment (cf. Haas 1957) in any other segment of Tongan society. That it should be of concern to *leiti* is significant for several reasons. First, it bears witness to *leiti*'s heightened consciousness about their relationship with an English-speaking modernity as it is represented, for example, by tourists and yachties that are converging on Tonga in greater numbers every year, and perhaps more importantly by Western countries such as New Zealand and the United States that host Tonga's transnational enclaves. Second, the fact that the Tongan word *fakaleiti* sounds too much like an English word that connotes unrestrained and vulgar sexuality touches on a particularly sensitive issue for many *leiti* while mainstream Tongan society foregrounds promiscuity in its stereotypical image of *fakaleiti* identity, many *leiti* often try to distance themselves from

this stereotype, which generally places them at a disadvantage in the moral order (cf. Johnson 1996:102 on similar concerns among Filipino *bantut*).

As usual, language (not just labels) is a powerful index of identity, and *leitī* distinguish themselves from most other Tongans in Tonga by code-switching into English at the drop of a hat. While many Tongans only use English, the colonial language, when they absolutely have to, because they feel 'embarrassed' (*mā*) by their lack of fluency in the language and they fear being disparaged as turncoats, *leitī* have no compunction in speaking English even to one another. Their conversations sometimes stall, because of different degrees of competence in English, which often map onto the class structure, middle-class Tongans being much more likely to be fluent in English than poorer Tongans. Indeed, Vili insisted on speaking English with me at first, despite my competence in Tongan and in contrast to most Tongans, who in my experience have generally taken great delight in speaking Tongan to me, although they often confine themselves to oversimplified foreigner talk ('Peace Corps Tongan') even in the face of second-language competence. Vili's insistence on speaking English initially (he later relaxed a little) says a great deal about his desired presentation of self and the footing which he was anxious to establish with me.

Modernity and the West are not just attractive symbols for *leitī*, but also represent a solution to their own uneasy position with respect to one of society's fundamental institutions, namely marriage. In Tonga as in other societies, marriage is viewed as the ultimate legitimising event in the life course of the social person, and it is one from which *leitī* are resolutely excluded as long as they remain *leitī*. 'Straight' men have sex with them, but these affairs ultimately remain little more than sexual adventures, despite the emotional attachments for *leitī* that 'straight' men can develop, but of course never talk about.

Many *leitī* think that, in the West, they can form a long-term, marriage-like relationship with a man, a prospect which they unanimously see as an attractive solution to their exclusion from marriage in Tonga. Western men are not just potential marriage partners, but they are also particularly desirable ones, since they can provide financial security. This is particularly important to *leitī* who see themselves as particularly vulnerable when resources such as money (and liquor, rental cars, etc.) and feminine youthfulness run out and, with them, the attention of 'straight' Tongan men.¹³ By seeking Western sexual partners, a *leitī* can resist being stereotypically associated with consumption and lack of production, and thus thumb his nose at society's

negative stereotypes. This potential was not lost on Vili, who would never hesitate to ask me for small sums of money, not just for him but also for his siblings, to buy ice-cream for his little brother for instance. This practice is not uncommon in relations between Tongans and the foreigners with whom they become acquainted. However, it infuriated Sione, for reasons that were not clear to me at first. Soon enough, the full meaning of these small favours became clearer to me, as I began to get wind that Vili was using them as evidence that I was his new overseas boyfriend, who would take him to live abroad and 'take care of all his needs', to quote the well-worn English phrase *leitī* use in this context. Vili was thus exploiting my presence and attention to contest stereotypes: he too could enter in a relationship with a seemingly wealthy foreigner. At long last, the flow of resources would be reversed to conform to the heterosexual pattern. He was after all able to exchange sexual favours for high-prestige resources, i.e., money and tokens of modernity, resources that would ultimately demonstrate his potential usefulness to his family (hence the importance of taking gifts from me back to his siblings).

Again, *fakaleitī*'s associations with consumption and modernity are stereotypes, and thus, like all stereotypes, are fragmentary and distorted. Nevertheless, they both inform and are confirmed by how *leitī* such as Vili position themselves in society and, in particular, in the flow of both symbolic and tangible resources. The fact that not all *fakaleitī* conform to them and that some resist them does not affect the stereotypes in any significant way. The stereotypical association of *fakaleitī* with the West has other implications, to which space only allow me to allude here, such as the perception of AIDS as a foreign scourge on the one hand and, on the other hand, a disease that is hitting *fakaleitī* first (this association is confirmed by several, but not all, of the first AIDS cases in Tonga). The underexamined symbolic linkages that these stereotypes support open the door for a loathing and marginalisation of *leitī* which to date have remained largely subjacent (cf. Gevisser 1995 and McNeil 1995 on Zimbabwe). They also locate *leitī* at the centre of Tongans' (particularly men's) increasingly uneasy relations with the West, in which sexuality plays a decisive if complex role (as suggested in Morton 1995). Indeed, while some Tongan migrants have done well economically in industrialised societies, many have to face rampant racism and exploitation as they have joined the underclass in New Zealand and the United States. In addition, many are illegal immigrants in those countries, and thus live with the constant fear of deportation. This

situation has given rise to a growing resentment of the West in some sectors of Tongan society, particularly poor young men, who are often caught between Tongan society's economic expectations of them and the structural constraints to which they are subjected. There is thus a certain pathos in *leiti's* embracing of the West and modernity, in that ultimately it aligns them with symbols of postcolonial power and oppression that are the target of 'straight' men's increasing hostility (cf. Bowman 1988 on Palestine), even though *leiti* are as excluded from this power as their 'straight' compatriots.

Conclusion

This paper was not designed to describe Tongan *leiti* as a social category, in part because this has been accomplished elsewhere (Besnier 1994). My project here was to locate *leiti* at the convergence of a complex socio-economic and symbolic system involving the flow of material resources, sex, prestige, and stereotypical representations. I propose that attempts to understand *leiti* as bundles of symbols, and to identify what they 'do' for the culture, as has been done in the past with comparable phenomena, is perhaps not the most fruitful approach, or is at least very limited. Indeed, persons who distinguish themselves by challenging received norms of gender and sex are generally favourite targets of stereotyping, and define themselves in part through this stereotyping; it is thus an anthropological imperative to come to grips with the multiplicity of discourses bearing on such persons and groups. Anthropologists must recognise that these discourses do not simply coexist, but do so in conflictual and hierarchical ways, in that society lends greater credence and legitimacy to certain representations of reality than to others. Furthermore, as in other comparable situations, these discourses interact with one another in a fashion that often defies structural generalisation.

In contrast to many other anthropologists who have studied comparable phenomena (e.g., James 1994 on Tonga), I have avoided labelling one 'type' of *fakaleiti* as 'traditional' and the other as 'imported', 'foreign', or 'modern'. Indeed, the characterisation of non-mainstream sexualities as 'foreign' is common enough across the world to arouse suspicion; for example, the Azande 'blame' their 'sexual inversions' on the Arabs (Evans-Pritchard 1970: 1429). While typologies pitching 'traditional' against 'imported' practices may reflect local mainstream ideologies, treating them uncritically as analytic constructs only serves to confound the issues, in addition to introducing all the problems associated with the unreflective use of categories like 'traditional'.

Generalisation is a thorny problem of dealing with matters of sex, as human beings have the uncanny potential for seemingly boundless creativity in this respect (Tuzin 1991:868). While I have tried to make sense of the politics of sexual relations between Tongan *leiti* and their patrons, real or imagined, I have left many questions unanswered or simply unasked. For example, what can one make of 'straight' Tongan men who patronise *fakaleiti* regularly or exclusively? How does one deal with reversals of inserter-recipient roles in sex between 'straight' men and *leiti*, which the latter claim are common occurrences (cf. Faubion 1993:282 on a similar situation in Greece)? As an ethnographer, how do I accommodate the teenage *leiti* who persistently cruises other *leiti*, to their great annoyance (they call him a *sosa* 'dyke')? Where does the new generation of gay men that is arising in overseas Tongan communities place itself in this situation when they return to Tonga? The recognition that Tonga's boundaries have burst open forces us to cease viewing overseas Tongans as anomalies or simply 'acculturated'. What are the consequences of the parallels that Tongans make between the stereotypical correlations they draw between *fakaleiti* and things foreign, correlations which the spectre of AIDS, associated with both, will only aggravate? In turn, how do the opportunism and predatory nature that characterise Tongan men's relations with *leiti* resemble in many ways Tonga's relations with the outside world, qualities that have become part and parcel of the stereotype of Tonga as a nation in the Pacific Islands? Clearly, while I hope to have made some headway in understanding the complexities of the ethnographic materials at hand, much remains to be explored.

In the introduction to this essay, I outlined certain aspects of Butler's (1990, 1993) critique of feminist views of gender identity and its relationship to political action. From an ethnographic standpoint, Butler's ideas are vulnerable to the sort of criticism that social scientists working in the modernist vein commonly level at postmodernism (e.g., Fox-Genovese 1993; Knauff 1994; Mascia-Lees *et al.* 1989): Who are the persons whose identity Butler describes as constantly constituted through social and political action, and how do they make sense of their own experience? How does the postmodern reconceptualisation of identity as subversively fragmented and decentred help us understand the very real structures of inequality through which society pigeonholes everyone, and then proceeds to marginalise those that happen to fall into the 'wrong' pigeonhole? Is this fluid identity of any use in fending off punches, deflecting harassment, and escaping sexual and

economic exploitation? And does it have substance outside of the socio-economically privileged academic imagination?

While of limited service in grappling with the very real problems faced by *leitī* in contemporary urban Tonga, Butler's critique of primordialist views of identity does pose some thought-provoking questions (Weston 1993). In particular, it suggests that the anthropological obsession with identity may be forcing us to ask the wrong questions about what it means to be a *leitī*. Thus this paper moves away from questions of identity, which I showed early on to be fraught with problems, choosing instead to focus on a variety of processes, including the social, material, and cultural relationships, hierarchies, representations, and transactions through which *leitī* identity is constructed. I maintain, and hope to have demonstrated, that *leitī* identity is to be found, for example, at the convergence of stereotypical representations (different aspects of which may be mutually contradictory), resistance to these representations, and of the material consequences of both these stereotypes and this resistance. The difficulties one encounters in attempting to define *leitī* identity independently of these processes stem from the fact that different individuals position themselves variously vis-à-vis these processes, a fact that can be easily captured by shifting one's focus from identities to the socio-cultural processes that shape these identities.

Notes

* Initial fieldwork was conducted in Tonga in 1977–79, and additional fieldwork among *leitī* in 1994 and 1995. The last field research was supported in part by a grant from the Social Science Faculty Research Fund, Yale University. Earlier forms of this paper were presented in colloquia and seminars at Amherst College, the University of Chicago, Harvard University, Yale University, and the American Anthropological Association and the New Zealand Association of Social Anthropologists. I am grateful to Deborah Gewertz, Tamar Gordon, Simon Harrison, Dave Knight, Jeannette Mageo, Barbara McGrath, Sue Phillips, Bruce Rigsby, Myrna Tonkinson, and Robert Tonkinson for their comments on various versions, and to Barbara Bock for the supply of false eyelashes, without which my research would have been considerably less fruitful.

1. I use these designators as vaguely as possible, being fully aware of the danger of reifying the crosscultural evidence into what Herdt (1991) has aptly termed an 'it-entity', i.e., an internally coherent category whose various manifestations across societies and cultures may present some variation but share a common essence.
2. Hausman (1995:177–182) provides an excellent critical summary of Butler's often dense writings.
3. James (1994:43–47) claims that older Tongan informants draw a sharp contrast between two different gender-liminal categories, one termed *fakaleitī* and the

other *fakafefine* 'in the fashion of a woman'. The second term, which is not a borrowing, would represent an allegedly more 'traditional' (and 'acceptable') form of identity and behaviour. However, it is telling that the distinction that James reports is wedded to a lexical distinction: what is clearly at stake is a reified reconstruction of history on the part of the ethnographer's informants, of a type that is very common throughout Polynesia, according to which the past was considerably more moral and ordered than the present. In the context of such reifications, categories that are indexically constructed in praxis are forced into a symbolic straightjacket, hence the lexical basis of the distinction. Without denying that socio-historical change has affected dramatically the configuration of gender and sex in Tongan society, extreme caution should be exerted in interpreting historical records, oral and otherwise, when these concern such morally charged topics.

4. Three remarks of an epistemological nature are in order. First, *leitī* identity raises very important developmental questions, on which I still have no illuminating data. Second, repeating remarks made elsewhere (Besnier 1994:288), I have nothing to say, even after additional field research, about the reverse phenomenon of Tongan women who emulate men in dress, demeanour, and behaviour. 'Mannish women' (*fefine fakatangata*) are much fewer and more invisible than *leitī*, keeping in tune with patterns found in other societies (Blackwood 1986). Third, *leitī* and their counterparts in other Polynesian societies have traditionally been surrounded by a deafening silence in anthropology (Besnier 1994:294–295), and as a result it is very difficult to locate the category in a historical context. However, there has been an upsurge of interest in the phenomenon in very recent years from various quarters, including the social sciences (e.g., on various parts of Polynesia, Mageo 1992; Murray 1992; Poasa 1992; Robertson 1989; Watts 1992), but also gay, lesbian, and transgendered activism (e.g., Perkins 1995), and, last but not least, journalism, fiction writing, and theatre (e.g., Crockett 1995; Cranna 1989; Kightley & Fane 1996; cf. Besnier 1996). The reasons for this upsurge are complex and beyond the scope of this paper. It is nevertheless suggestive to note that Tonga and the rest of Polynesia, traditionally quintessential 'exotic' locales, are becoming so modernized that many aspects of life there are no longer distinguishable from Western urban life; however, *fakaleitī* remain one last bastion of exoticism (Barbara McGrath, personal communication), particularly with the help of a little orientalism. Whatever may be the case, the rollercoaster effect in Westerners' interests in the question highlights the importance of keeping a critical self-reflexive stance in studying *leitī* and comparable groups.
5. This characterisation, which is echoed elsewhere in the world in reference to comparable categories (e.g., Whitehead 1981 on the North American berdache), is of course in dire need of a good dose of feminist criticism. However, its widespread endorsement across all segments of Tongan society cannot be ignored.
6. While gender in Tongan society and culture has been the focus of some ethnographic scrutiny (Douaire-Marsaudon 1996; Philips 1994a, 1994b; Rogers 1977; Taumoe-folau 1990), particularly from a historical perspective (e.g., Ellem 1987; Herda 1987; and the highly problematic Gailey 1987), little has been written about sexual relations (with the exceptions of Morton 1995; Teilhet-Fisk 1996). I collected the material presented here while spending my late teens in a rural Tongan

village in the late 1970s. Despite the privileged entry into the world of adolescents that my young age allowed me, I fully realize that my assertions need further refining and updating.

7. In his pioneering work on bodies and spirits in Tahiti, Levy (1973:130-41) reports that some Tahitian men find sexual relations with *māhū*, the equivalent of the Tongan *fakaleiti*, more pressure-free and pleasurable than sex with women. Levy goes on to explain this finding in purely psychological terms, showing that the basic androgyny of Tahitian culture places pressure on men to distinguish themselves as men, particularly in high pressure contexts like heterosexual relations. Levy's depiction of Tahiti as androgynous and the logic underlying his reasoning are both suspect (see Besnier 1994:304-308 for further discussion). More to the point, it is telling that Levy pays no attention to the social (in contrast to the symbolic and the psychological) throughout his work. Many 'straight' Tongan men would probably also admit to finding sex with *fakaleiti* relaxing, but the reasons for this perception must be sought in the socio-economic circumstances of these sexual relations, rather than in their psycho-cultural definition.
8. There is a fascinating parallel between this situation and Holland and Eisenhart's (1990) description of the political economy of sex, gender, and prestige on two university campuses in the American South. There, women who are viewed as lacking in attractiveness (through their lack of physical beauty, money, glamour, etc.) must compensate for it by doing more 'work' to attract desirable men than attractive women. Such work may include rendering small services, being generous with sexual favours, and putting up with humiliation. The commonality between *leiti* and unattractive American women students is that both are socially defined as low in prestige as potential sexual partners, and both must expend nonsexual services and resources to compensate for this lack of overt prestige.
9. *Fakaleiti* are constantly teased and criticized for being men passing fraudulently as women. 'These are not my sisters, they are my brothers', declares a member of the band at one of the *leiti* beauty pageants. And, like the Mohave *alyha* described by Devereux (1937), many respond by doing everything they can to 'prove' that they are 'real' women (*fāfine mo'oni*), often with a playful twinkle in their eyes. The stereotype of *fakaleiti* as sexual predators is related to their stereotypical representation as deceitful: they act like women to deceive 'straight' men into having sex with them. In other words, they are wolves in sheep's clothes hiding in the herd. An interesting contrast is provided by Furth's (1988) material on cross-gendering in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century China, where men's motivation for crossing gender lines was to better seduce women, not men. One also finds similar themes in the Western literary and performative canon (Garber 1992:66-92).
10. Another frequent metaphor in mainstream Tongans' talk about *fakaleiti* is their parents' worries about the prospect of their child being exploited by 'straight' men for sex and material resources, a worry which is not without foundation. This remark contradicts the stereotypical depiction of *fakaleiti* as sexual predators. However, stereotypes in general have a strong tendency to be inconsistent, and this situation is no exception. The predator image is useful in absolving 'straight' men of responsibility in the sex market, while the image of the exploited *fakaleiti*

- can acquire particular salience when one is thinking about one's own children.
11. As Teilhet-Fisk (1996) demonstrates, tensions between 'tradition' and 'modernity', and the local and the global, are also prominent in the Miss Heilala pageant for 'real' women, which is held at about the same time as the Miss Galaxy contest. The Miss Heilala pageant is overtly embedded in the cycle of international competitions culminating in the Miss Universe pageant (Teilhet-Fisk 1996:186), and is probably the most direct source of inspiration for the organization of Miss Galaxy, as Tonga did not have television until very recently, and thus *leiti* were unable to watch Miss Universe pageants, unlike their *bantut* counterparts in the Philippines (Johnson 1996:94).
12. The revilement throughout the history of colonialism of this familiar reification has been the subject of useful critical scrutiny by feminist social scientists (e.g., Stoler 1989:636-641; also, more implicitly, Jayawardena 1995).
13. There is one salient precedent of a publicly open relationship between a *leiti* and an American, who returned from the US and set up a business a few years ago. Unfortunately, this experiment ended in tragedy, as the *leiti* became one of Tonga's first AIDS cases and his lover broke up with him. This is a tragic precedent for more than one reason. Indeed, it fuels what is widely and firmly believed in Tonga, namely the fact that AIDS is divine retribution for transgressions of selected Biblical injunctions, as well as a foreign threat. There is little or no alternative discourse for thinking about AIDS in Tonga, since education is under the tight control of the churches and the Christian government.

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