Research 'side-spaces' and the criticality of Auckland, New Zealand, as a site for developing a queer Pacific scholarly agenda

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Abstract

Social science research focused on the specific needs of Pacific Rainbow+ communities is relatively scant both in New Zealand and abroad. In this article, I explore the generative possibilities of Auckland, New Zealand, as site for the intentional development and growth of a queer Pacific scholarly agenda. I argue that Auckland in general, and its university in particular, are sites of ongoing Māori resistance to settler-colonialism, provides research 'side-spaces' that create opportunities for a queer Pacific scholarly agenda. I show why it is currently not safe for queer Pacific scholars based in Pacific countries to practise the type of queer Pacific research agenda I call for in Auckland. I also highlight the inherent contradictions, tensions and possibilities for queer Pacific research in Auckland, New Zealand. New Zealand-based Pacific queer scholars are urged to occupy these research side-spaces before they, too, become Pākehā and colonial sites of knowledge production.

Keywords Pacific; Queer; LGBTQIA+; MVPFAFF+; Health and wellbeing; Gender and sexuality; Auckland

Introduction

On 1 May 2021, the Manalagi Project, New Zealand's[1] first Pacific Rainbow lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual+ (LGBTQIA+) and māhū, vakasalewalewa, palopa, fa'afafine, akavaine, fakaleiti/leiti, fakafifine+ (MVPFAFF+) health and wellbeing project, completed its final community consultation session in Auckland (Godfrey, 2021). As Manalagi's principal investigator, it was a proud moment for me as we reached the first significant milestone for a project that grew out of deliberate and considered community partnership. The consultation process had involved 11 nationwide talanoa

[1] I use 'New Zealand' to denote the settler-colonial context invoked in this article and use 'Aotearoa' in other contexts which are designed to honour Māori contexts in my writing and the literature and authors I reference in the article.

sessions/community consultations, all of which had been well attended. The large crowd in attendance that day at the University of Auckland's South Auckland Campus | Te Papa Ako o Tai Tonga in Manukau exchanged hugs and kisses on the cheek to acknowledge the momentousness of the occasion. Manalagi is the first Health Research Council-funded, Rainbow Pacific-led health and wellbeing research project specifically for Pacific Rainbow+ peoples in New Zealand. It has been widely celebrated and promoted as critical in creating intentional space by many within both Rainbow and Pacific communities (Godfrey, 2021; Thomsen 2020a, 2021a).

On the morning of 1 May 2021, news also broke that the badly beaten and mutilated body of Polikalepo Kefu—the president of Tonga Leitis Association—was found on a beach in the Kingdom of Tonga (Wakefield, 2021). 'Poli', as he was known all around the Pacific region, was a much beloved activist and servant of his country, people and community (Ma'ia'i, 2021a). His violent and untimely death resulted in an international outpouring of grief and demands for better protection for LGBTQIA+ and other gender-sex diverse people in Pacific countries (Ma'ia'i, 2021b). At the beginning of the Manalagi talanoa on 1 May, we observed a moment's silence for Poli, as we were shockingly reminded of the conflicting realities, tensions and dangers inherent to existing as Pacific/Pasifika *and* queer in the imagined postcolonial moment. We were also reminded of the privilege we have as Pacific queer scholars to have national and institutional support for our work in New Zealand.

This cruel juxtaposition of Pacific queer realities represents the multiple intersectional complexities that this article intentionally addresses. I present here a purposefully tense and unresolved argument. This argument draws on an intersectionality-inspired critique that invokes the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and other Black[2] feminist scholars who argue that instances, contexts and realities where marginalities intersect can become hidden in a single-axis identitarian societal analysis. In this context, it is the singular-identity-driven Pacific and queer research agenda I reconsider. I

[2] I deliberately choose to capitalise the 'B' in 'Black' and 'Brown' to centre our scholars and communities in this article.

argue that our intersectional reality and attempts to address the shortcomings in our current research landscape makes Auckland, New Zealand, a critical site and city for the realisation and articulation of a Pacific queer scholarly agenda. This site has been made possible through the work of Māori and non-Pākehā[3] scholars who challenge our settler context by critiquing the foundational whiteness and monocultural knowledge systems that can suffocate other knowledges within our universities (Ahmed, 2012; Kidman & Chu, 2017; Osei-Kofi et al., 2010; Thaman, 1993; Thomsen et al., 2021). In doing so, I build on my own work (Thomsen, 2018, 2020b, 2021b) and follow scholars such as Jasbir Puar (2007, 2013, 2016) and Martin Manalansan (2003) who have articulated in various guises the way white-over-colour ascendancy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) pervades hierarchies of queerness. I also explore how these knowledge systems dictate which queer bodies are valued, discarded or condemned to death through queer necropolitics (Puar, 2007).

In this article, I use the term 'queer' to denote gender/sexuality divergence, not as an ordinal identity. This is because I take the position that there is no fixed, embodied queer inner subjectivity (Thomsen, 2020b). Queer subjecthood is only rendered visible by examining the surfaces and external conditions that make certain subjectivities viable. In my case, the uncomfortable foundational whiteness of New Zealand's universities makes my queer Pacific scholarship viable. In essence, then, this article explores the way the foundational whiteness of universities in Anglo-settler colonies like New Zealand opens up what I term 'side-spaces' or research opportunities that create visibility for queer Pacific scholars. This opportunity appears precisely because of Māori and other non-Pālāgi scholars calls for greater equity and resourcing, which has opened the door for Pacific queer scholars like me to build intentionally Pacific *and* queer research programmes.

[3] I use the terms 'white', 'whiteness', 'Pākehā' and 'Pālāgi' interchangeably in this paper to denote a non-Indigenous white person or worldview, in also acknowledging the multiple ways the peoples of the Pacific, specifically Sāmoans and Māori, refer to colonisers and their settler descendants.

In many countries across the Pacific, homosexuality is still a punishable offence (Idris, 2021). Poli's murder is another reminder of the potentiality of violence that impregnates the social atmosphere of many of our home islands and within sections of our Pacific communities in New Zealand. Thus, well-resourced settler research and learning institutions like the University of Auckland, where the Manalagi Project is based, become places of temporary scholarly shelter whilst our home nations, cultures and communities continue to work through complex issues of lingering colonial constructs around gender and sexuality that are markedly non-Indigenous in their origins and operations.

I chose the word 'temporary' in the previous sentence deliberately, as I believe that our home countries, communities and cultures will amplify their own queer scholarly voices to speak back to, and become positioned within a growing global queer canon. My yearning for our voices to one day come together in the social science research space stems from an optimistic reading of the potentiality of Indigenous ways of thinking, theorising and knowing which also acknowledges the critique of power inherent to homonationalism and queer necropolitics.

In making these claims, I strongly acknowledge the site that I have selected to build my scholarly programme is constructed on lands I have no claim to. I am a queer, liminal-gay, New Zealand-born Sāmoan and fa'afafine scholar raised in South Auckland by a solo mother during the 1980s and 1990s. My mother, lured here through the false promise of prosperity in a 'land of milk and honey', was drawn to a city where wealth had been created from the invisibilised dispossession of, and structural violence thrusted on, Māori (Anderson et al., 2012; Bell, 2020; Bell et al., 2017). The structural violence of the settler state against Māori, combined with the instrumental importation of Pacific labour to prop up the Pākehā-controlled New Zealand economy worked to sever my people's gafa (genealogical connection) to Māori (Anae, 2020; Mallon et al., 2012). As such, we have been imbricated in New Zealand's systems and institutions separately from how our ancestors were connected to the people and communities of pre-colonial Aotearoa (Te Punga Somerville, 2012). Acknowledging this complexity compels me and all Pacific

peoples who live on this whenua to be ardent supporters and enablers of tino rangatiratanga as Pacific research programmes develop.

As a Sāmoan, I also acknowledge the considered critique offered by people like Luka Leleiga Lim-Bunnin (2020), which applies to my work. In this very attempt to illuminate Pacific queer perspectives as a social science research potentiality as a queer Pacific person, my use of the term ''Pacific' is Polynesian-centric and my use of 'queer' is Eurocentric. Thus, this article is a form of epistemic violence in and of itself. The framing of my argument is inadequate to capture all the diversities and realities in the region, and the contexts of the identities that I embody and attempt to represent in academia.

As a queer Sāmoan scholar writing from the proverbial wrong side of the tracks—within a university—the Pacific part of my argument is under-represented and so, too, is the queer part. I now find myself in a permanent position for the first time in my emerging research career. This positionality enables and precipitates a need to write myself into an academy that often ignores the fact that I exist. It is also this experience that pushes me to offer this call to action: *If queer Pacific scholars do not make use of these research side-spaces, they will remain open to Pākehā scholars to claim as research terrain of their own.* My Sāmoan heart and feelings of responsibility to my community compel me to refer to this situation as problematic. For it is the 'novel' which fixates many Pālāgi scholars of gender (Ikeda, 2014). This can lead to our queer Pacific worlds being re-presented in spectacularised white ways that are incapable of reflecting the complexity and innovations inherent to our social agility in navigating the quotidian realities of our everyday existence.

Pacific peoples in Auckland and New Zealand as a whole

To contextualise this article, I find it necessary to briefly review the contemporary history of Pacific peoples and communities in Auckland and New Zealand. Pacific peoples now account for roughly 15.5% of Auckland's population, with the majority located in the suburban southern areas of Māngere-Ōtāhuhu, Ōtara-Papatoetoe and Manurewa (Auckland Council,

2020).[4] Although Pacific peoples are kin to Māori, who are also Pacific and whose genealogical connections span generations and centuries of cross-Pacific and inter-Polynesian contact (Te Punga Somerville, 2012), the large Pacific diasporic communities in places like Auckland are a direct result of the interventions of the settler-colonial state (Thomsen et al., in press).

Following the post-World War II boom, New Zealand experienced a labour shortage. During the 1950s and 1960s, in order to fill this gap, migrants from Pacific nations holding pre-existing relationships with New Zealand (Sāmoa, Tonga, Fiji, Tuvalu) and the realm countries (Niue, Cook Islands, Tokelau) were encouraged to take up jobs many Pākehā were reluctant to do (Salesa, 2017). The predominantly Polynesian character of this migration wave has resulted in the term 'Pacific' being uncritically used interchangeably with 'Polynesian' in New Zealand. When these migrants arrived, they worked in factories and other employment that often involved manual labour (Mallon et al., 2012).

As a production hub for New Zealand's burgeoning post-war economy, Auckland became the natural destination for many Pacific peoples to settle and create communities (Salesa, 2017). Other locations that formed large Pacific diasporic enclaves included Tokoroa in the South Waikato (fuelled by forestry) and Porirua near Wellington; South Island locations like Christchurch, Dunedin, and Invercargill saw smaller Pacific communities develop (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Makisi, 2003). Auckland, however, became the home for most Pacific peoples, with over two-thirds of New Zealand's current Pacific population being resident there and over 93% of New Zealand's Pacific peoples currently living in the North Island (Pasefika Proud, 2016).

Following the oil shocks of the 1970s, the sharp contraction in the New Zealand economy was keenly felt by the manufacturing sector (Salesa, 2017). The discourse quickly shifted from one that framed Pacific peoples as cheap, instrumental labour to one that saw them as a drain on New Zealand's

[4] Much has been written by many scholars on the history and patterns of Pacific peoples' migration to New Zealand over the past century. My retelling of this story is merely meant to provide necessary context for the arguments of this article. It is not designed to be a definitive recollection and articulation of our communities' history.

resources and even as stealing jobs from New Zealanders (Anae, 2020). This scapegoating reached its peak with the shameful 'Dawn Raids' carried out from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s that racially targeted Pacific peoples for deportation despite the majority of overstayers being people from European countries (Fepulea'i, 2005).

The Dawn Raids galvanised Pacific peoples, especially in the Auckland area, around movements protesting the institutional racism inherent to the treatment of Pacific communities (Anae, 2020). The Polynesian Panthers, formed and based in Grey Lynn and Ponsonby (inner Auckland suburbs), took their cue from the Black Panther Party in the United States, and became prominent for their creative and provocative protest actions (Anae, 2020; Mallon et al., 2012; Salesa, 2017). The Pan-Pacific make-up of their group was typical of wider developments in Pacific communities across Auckland and the rest of New Zealand. It was during this time that the 'Pasifika' identity, separate from an identity tied to an ethnic and Pacific Island homeland, began to crystallise. As such, I argue 'Pasifika' is a unique identity, in that it was and is formed specifically in New Zealand and is made sense of primarily in a diasporic context (see also Lopesi, 2018). Other organisations that were central to the development of this Pan-Pacific Pasifika identity included the Pacific Women's Organisation and the Pacific Island Presbyterian Church, also known as PIC Newton (Mallon et al., 2012).

Auckland, however, is a city with deep and concretised roots in settler-colonialism, a process that is ongoing. The city is built on an isthmus that once supported thriving Māori iwi and hapū groups whose interests were swallowed by the forces of colonialism. Watching the decimation of their culture, language and ways of being by settler-colonialism, they, like the rest of Aotearoa's iwi and hapū, were relegated to second-class Indigenous citizens in their own land (Anaru, 2012; Mikaere, 2011).

I believe that the systems under which all New Zealanders—Māori, Pākehā, tauiwi and Pacific—live are distinctly colonial and that the shining pillar of this colonial system is the university (Barber & Naepi, 2020; Leenen-Young et al., 2021; Thomsen et al., 2021a). I advance that these colonial, predominantly Pākehā systems of sorting and categorising rigid boundaries

in knowledge production have become the predominant way in which identities—both heteronormative and queer—have come to be recognised and contested.

Furthermore, queer Pacific bodies, experiences and contributions do not exist meaningfully in Pacific Studies literature or the Pacific history narrative in New Zealand (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2021; Thomsen et al., 2021b). This discursive erasure is commensurate with many international examples of Asian queer men and women in places like Europe and the United States, where intersectional queer bodies and subjects find themselves erased in settler societies whose singular, rigid boundaries around identity precipitate violence through erasure (Thomsen, 2018, 2020, 2021b). In a Pacific context, taking an intersectional approach is critical, as our queer Pacific experiences disappear into the emerging Pacific/Pasifika scholarly metanarrative that is designed to resist the settler context in which we live (Mallon et al., 2012).

The successful development of our own Pacific episteme lies in the crossovers our work develops with the queering agenda of scholarship from Eurocentric institutions, despite our desires to reject colonial systems of knowledge. This is where what I call a 'side-space', or research opportunity, emerges, which I believe is critical for the development of a queer Pacific scholarly social science research agenda in New Zealand. Whichever way we wish to deal with this contradictory situation, it is vital this space is *still* explored for the generative scholastic possibilities in social science research. Especially as the ability for our kinfolk, families and communities within our home nations to carry out similar work is challenged by stigma and laced with state-sanctioned dangers and violence, which will be discussed in more detail further on in the article.

Queerness and gender liminality in the Pacific

Pacific peoples and Māori have our own Indigenous ways of framing forms of queerness that are capable of integrating all people into wider familial, social and cultural frameworks (Brown-Acton, 2014; Kerekere, 2017; Thomsen, 2017; Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2021). In a speech to the Asia Pacific

Outgames Conference in 2011, Phylesha Brown-Acton, on behalf of over 50 Pacific activists present at the conference, delivered a reminder that terms such as LGBTQIA+ are Eurocentric. Brown-Acton (2011) pointed out that in the Pacific we have our own ways of referring to our experiences of queerness that are culturally distinct and not analogous with 'Western' gender/sexuality labels. This keynote address is now widely cited as the genesis moment for the Pacific-specific abbreviation MVPFAFF+ (Brown-Acton, 2011).

Throughout the Pacific, gender-liminal bodies and expressions exist in various guises. In the Sāmoan context, studied exhaustively yet poorly by Western scholars, faʻafafine play important roles in Sāmoan society, families, organisations and religious institutions (McMullin & Kihara, 2018). In the Māori context, takatāpui individuals were celebrated prior to colonisation and seen as important individuals fulfilling many roles within Māori communities (Kerekere, 2017). In Hawai'i, māhū were once celebrated members of Hawaiian society whose acknowledged presence dates to before colonisation. They were exalted as wisdom keepers, with their role in hula practice being particularly prominent. Carol Robertson (1989) describes māhū as being part of wider ancient Polynesian principles of spiritual duality and integration. Likewise, the Sambian people in Papua New Guinea use the term kwolu-aatmwol or 'male thing transforming into female thing' to denote a form of gender diversity ('Reclaiming Our Rainbow Cultural Identities', 2016). It is also important to note here that in Papua New Guinea gay men are often approached by heterosexual men for sexual encounters, and this is not considered a homosexual tryst; being 'gay' is more tied to feminine roles in wider society (Sokhin, n.d.). In the Fijian context, although early colonial records make no mention of transgender or non-heteronormative gender identities, it is acknowledged that 'transgender' Fijians played a recognised role in pre-colonial Fijian society (Presterudstuen, 2014).

An important part of this interpretation of queer identities is practices of fluidity that move between Indigenous gender norms. In recent years, the Tok Pisin term 'Palopa' was coined by gay and transgender Papua New Guineans of Port Moresby ('Reclaiming Our Rainbow Cultural Identities',

2016). This term is much like others in the Pacific that denote a gender liminality like 'fa'afafine' in Sāmoan, 'fakaleiti/leiti' in Tongan and 'māhū' in Tahitian and Hawaiian.

The way 'Western' scholars have tended to study queerness in Pacific peoples displays an opposition between what I consider quotidian innovations and the spectacularisation of gender and sexuality transgressions. In Samoa for example, fa'afafine are able to innovate in the everyday as part of family, social and even religious contexts. However, as noted above, the 'novel' fixates many Pālāgi scholars of gender. As Ikeda (2014) argues, this preoccupation with the spectacular leaves little motivation to study the ordinary, particularly practices of survival and belonging across societies and historical times.

Moreover, there has been a tendency for Western scholars to frame gender liminality in the Pacific in incoherent ways. For example, Janet Mageo (1992) calls fa'afafine transvestites, a framing that Schmidt (2010), Lim-Bunnin (2020), McMullin and Kihara (2018) and I reject ardently (Thomsen, 2018). This assumption embeds and presumes gender performance within a heteronormative frame tied to the binary and transgressions through cross-dressing. It ignores the complex, socially generated, negotiated nature of fa'afafine life, roles and cultural identity in Sāmoa.

Tied to Orientalist (Said, 1978) framings of the Pacific as an exotic, tropical Other, this 'distinguished' tradition dates to Margaret Mead and even further back to first contact and the accounts of men like Magellan, Cook and Bougainville,[5] who instrumentalised our points of difference and particularities. This tradition often set up Pacific societies as utopian, communitarian, and tropical alternatives to the excesses and failures of capitalist societies. In the Queer Studies context, this pursuit of Indigenous particularities is often performed as an illumination of Western shortcomings in understanding the pliability and possibilities of gender roles beyond a binary. Such an 'illumination' can encourage colonial slippages, ignoring the fact that instrumentalisation is still ongoing when Pacific peoples themselves

[5] I purposefully choose to name but not cite these significant European figures as a way to reject their Eurocentric and problematic ways of framing our people, cultures and histories.

are not penning these spectacularised narratives, or when Pacific eyes are not the intended audience.

This highlights a generative tension between our Pacific Indigenous cultural frameworks, which orbit around the relational self (Vaʻai & Kiki, 2017), and decidedly disruptive queer scholarship and theory that takes aim at the binary nature of gender norms of the West. The relational basis inherent to Pacific cultures means liminality in gender is negotiated and folded into context, including various forms of family-making. Gender liminality in the Pacific, then, becomes a gendered social and cultural innovation, not a static identity framework. Phylesha Brown-Acton refers to these as 'nuances' in understanding gender performance in the Pacific, which is tied to our genealogies and connections (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2021). I refer to them as 'gender innovations' and refer to us as 'gender-agile'. In that divergence there is not transgression; rather, there is evidence of the nimble agility our cultural frameworks possess that allow gender innovators to exist in our quotidian.

Acknowledging that complex quotidian innovation exists in many of our cultural frameworks across the Pacific is essential if we are to develop research approaches that move us beyond exoticisation and Othering and toward a social research paradigm that is about thriving communities. For if the focus is only on the hypervisible or the deliberately downtrodden, the wholeness of experience and the integrated totality of our relational selves becomes lost to the performative desires of a colonial imagination, one that is embedded in a sociohistorically devised power hierarchy whereby we are studied by Pālāgi eyes for Pālāgi eyes, and are unable to be agents of change.

The dark side of the rainbow

There is a colonial hangover that sanctions state discrimination against non-normative genders and sexualities in many Pacific countries. Colonial administrations across the Pacific set up laws that criminalised homosexuality (Idris, 2021). Whilst many of these Euro-American societies (e.g., the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands) have seen powerful critiques of heteronormativity, many of their former territories

in the Pacific continue to be impacted by these laws, which often contradict Indigenous everyday social relations and realities.

For example, Sāmoa's colonial-era penal code meant that Sāmoans inherited a law at independence that made it illegal for "men to impersonate women" (Farran & Su'a, 2005). This law was an attempt by the colonial New Zealand administration to regulate and erase fa'afafine. After intense lobbying by the Samoa Fa'afafine Association (SFA), this law was not officially dropped until 2013. On the issue of same-sex marriage, the patron of the SFA, the long-serving former prime minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, called it a "Sodom and Gomorrah practice" and vowed it would never be legal as long as his party governed Sāmoa ('Tuilaepa Says No to Same Sex Marriage in Samoa', 2017, para. 2). The SFA (2015) have stated that fa'afafine are free to marry their partners in countries overseas like Australia, New Zealand and the United States, and that their union can be recognised in Sāmoa. This was called a necessary compromise by the association to ensure that Sāmoa's progression towards marriage equality followed a cautious and steady path.

In 2016, when speaking about the possibility of marriage equality, Fiji's prime minister Frank Bainimarama stated that all LGBTQ+ Fijians should move to Iceland and get married there if that was their desire (D'Angelo, 2016). In 2018, Jone Kata, the leader of the opposition Social Democratic Liberal Party of Fiji, posted a statement that suggested all members of the LGBTQ+ community in Fiji should be sent to four isolated islands, in hopes of making them extinct (Waqairadovu, 2018).

This climate of fear and threats of violence is not just limited to discriminatory statements by politicians. In 2018, on the International Day Against Transphobia, trans woman Akuila Salavuki was found murdered, lying in a pool of blood on the Suva foreshore (Fox, 2018). Furthermore, a community-based study conducted by Bavinton et al. (2011) highlighted the lack of safety for trans women in Fiji. Unsurprisingly, many of the study participants had experienced some form of stigma and discrimination. About two-thirds felt unsafe and uncomfortable expressing their sexuality or gender; 57% reported experiencing verbal abuse, and a third had been physically hurt

in the previous six months; 40% of participants reported having been forced to have sex against their will at some point in their life (Bavinton et al., 2011).

In Sāmoa, according to the National Public Inquiry into Family Violence undertaken by the Samoa Office of the Ombudsman/National Human Rights Institution (2018), 86% of respondents, predominantly women, reported experiencing physical violence. In relation to fa'afafine, the SFA highlighted in the report that young boys who show feminine traits at a young age are often subjected to severe violence at the hands of their own families and that this is not reported due to intimidation of the victims, fear of reprisals and being disowned, lack of effective redress, and a belief that no crime has been committed (Samoa Office of the Ombudsman/National Human Rights Institution, 2018). The report also identified fa'afafine as an at-risk marginalised group likely to be exposed to violence at higher rates that non-fa'afafine. Despite Sāmoa carrying a reputation for being accepting of fa'afafine, members of the fa'afafine community still report instances of harmful social discrimination. One recent case that shocked the country was the death by suicide of fa'afafine woman Janine Tuivaiki. The *Samoa Observer*, Samoa's premier daily newspaper, published a photo of her dead body on the front page and misgendered her throughout their report (Walters, 2016).

In many ways, Poli's hugely felt and tragic death is the latest manifestation of how legislative condemnation of homosexuality and public condemnation can lead to permissive attitudes towards violence against queer, MVPFAFF+ bodies (Thomsen, 2017). Without any specific legal protections for LGBTQIA+ MVPFAFF+ people in our islands, there continues to be a culture of deferral around the specific needs of our communities. Not only does this mean our communities continue to experience legal and wider societal discrimination; the continual relegation of our communities to roles of service and living under the guise of integration makes developing local research resources and the formation of a locally developed scholarly agenda an onerous task.

Organisations such as Haus of Khameleon in Fiji, Tonga Leitis Association in Tonga and the SFA in Sāmoa are beginning the task of bringing

our communities' needs onto the political agenda in our home nations by carrying out research and advocacy of their own, often resourced by international organisations and foreign donors through networks such as the Pacific Sexual Diversity Network (Moala, 2014) and the Asia Pacific Transgender Network (Our Mission & Vision – Asia Pacific Transgender Network, n.d.). This mobilisation sets an example for us as Pacific scholars with New Zealand-specific resources to do the same here.

Homonationalism, queer necropolitics, and a new site for queer Pacific research

The concept of homonationalism was first articulated by Jasbir Puar (2007, 2013, 2016) to describe how the use of terms such as 'acceptance' and 'tolerance' for gay and lesbian subjects became a type of barometer for the legitimacy of, and capacity for, national sovereignty. In other words, Puar's homonationalism interrogates how the question of whether you treat your homosexuals well becomes a way to adjudicate the morality and right to govern of particular state formations. Puar extends homonationalism into the space of queer necropolitics articulated by Mbembe (2008, 2019). Puar's work draws on Mbembe's (2008, 2019) concept of the 'walking dead'—an articulation of how different bodies are condemned to death or exposed to varying degrees of life and death by the operation of manifold forms of power across historical contexts and time. In doing so, Puar explains that the homosexual Other is white, whilst the racial Other is straight. This means that queer people of colour have no space in living, nationalist discourses, condemning them to social, political or literal death.

At its core, the innovation I borrow from homonationalism and queer necropolitics is a racialised one. A racialised marginal positionality in the queer scholarly episteme, I believe, precipitates a queer critique that makes known the role of racial and Orientalist epistemologies in producing Otherness in queer scholarship. In borrowing from queer necropolitics, I question the operation of power that allows white queer voices to dominate the little terrain that exists in Pacific Studies for queer Pacific scholars. This is not to disparage the incredibly important work non-Indigenous, non-Pacific

scholars have done in generating discussions that we have not been driving ourselves, only to point out that when Euro-American, or white settler scholars do the work, the epistemologies and ontological basis of their analyses cannot be Indigenously Pacific. Therefore, they are not likely to critique epistemological racism in theories of queerness.

Furthermore, when read through a queer necropolitics lens, queer realities in the Pacific demonstrate the inherent danger that queer Pacific scholars face when pushing for greater prominence in research epistemes. State sanctioning of homophobic laws, supported by queer-exclusionary religious institutions, allows for threats of violence to be made permissible. This is facilitated by outdated legislation connected to our colonial subjugation. In this contest of the immense challenges that exist for our queer and motivated kin in our homelands, places like Auckland, and the University of Auckland in particular, become important sites for the development of a queer Pacific social science scholarly agenda. New Zealand tertiary institutions are much better resourced than those in our homelands, and are also more likely in my opinion to be open to the possibilities of a queer Pacific scholarly agenda because of the multiple benefits this can bring to an institution through diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

The Manalagi Project (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2021; Thomsen et al., 2021b), which is hosted at the University of Auckland, is a prime example of how these research side-spaces made available through this unique-to-Auckland context can become a reality. The project's full title is Manalagi: Aotearoa Pacific Rainbow/Queer/LGBTIQA+ MVPFAFF Health and Wellbeing Project, and the acknowledgement for the need of the project is tied to developments in health and Rainbow+ research that recognise the missing link between the two mutually formative experiences. Precisely because Pacific communities in New Zealand have historically been marginalised and continue to experience poorer health outcomes than non-Pacific and non-Māori, and precisely because Rainbow+ New Zealanders have poorer health outcomes than cis heteronormative New Zealanders, this project, which is rooted in intersectionality, the emergence of this project is both empirically and theoretically important.

Adopting intersectionality as the basis for a research project in New Zealand on Pacific Rainbow+ communities is only possible because of the way this theory has travelled beyond the context it was first articulated in. Black feminist scholars led by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) theorised intersectionality to illuminate the way overlapping marginalisations create intersecting forms of discrimination that erase those who sit in the margins. Rather controversially, the theory has now become mainstream (Carbado et al., 2013), and intersectionality has found its way into many social science disciplines, subjecting it to the whims of those with power and the ability to distribute resources and space. As such, the wide usage of the theory (sometimes devoid of any Black feminist context) by white feminist scholars and the queer of colour critique has helped to create allies here in New Zealand and at the University of Auckland, along with side-spaces for Pacific queer scholars such as myself to make requests for space and resourcing.

The Manalagi Project was successful in applying for funding from the Health Research Council of New Zealand (Thomsen & Brown-Acton, 2021; Thomsen et al., 2021b). Our intersectional strategy focused on developing subsequent justifications and publications that drew eyes to the need for greater attention for an under-represented, under-served ethnic/racial and gender/sexually diverse minoritised populations. In other words, we were successful because we leaned into intersecting experiences of marginalisation as critical justification for research funding. In deploying this intersectional strategy, the project made use of the temporal criticality in identifying the intersectional gap that exists in research in our country and seizing the moment of a rising interest in intersectional forms of representation.

Crucially, it is important to acknowledge that the moment in which Manalagi as an idea, project plan and application formed occurred simultaneously with the very public murder of Black and Muslim bodies. The Black Lives Matter protests that swept Auckland and the country following the 2020 murder of George Floyd in the United States (Owen & Chumko, 2020) and the very real and horrific consequences of the 2019 Christchurch terror attacks enacted against New Zealand's Muslim community were visceral realities of the time the Manalagi Project was generated. They are

realities that tie the project contextually in some way to the literal death of Black and Brown bodies. Poli's murder is another example of the queer necropolitical disposability of our bodies, even in moments of success and heightened representation.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Auckland, New Zealand, is an important site for the development of a Pacific queer scholarly agenda. This is because of the intersectional possibilities that have been generated by Māori and other non-Pākehā scholars whose assertive critiques have forced reflexive questions onto our colonial institutions. My argument and place as a Sāmoan queer scholar in the academy are only possible because of their work. This article's conclusions draw on the possibilities of DEI aspirations inherent to universities' responses to calls for more space to be made for marginal perspectives, ontologies, and ways of knowing in the academy. Specifically, by deploying intersectionality this article has advanced the notion that these are temporal research side-spaces which must be occupied and used by Pacific queer scholars in New Zealand, considering the dangers that exist for many of our colleagues in our homelands. Further, if we do not drive the research agenda, Pākehā scholars will. We must occupy these side-spaces before they, too, become laden with unreflexive and colonial Pālagi research agendas.

Drawing on a generative reading of homonationalism and necropolitics, one can conclude that whiteness, both as a locus of power in the queer community and the crux of colonialism, forms the basis of New Zealand's knowledge-producing institutions. In simple terms, universities in our country are based on foundational whiteness (Kidman & Chu, 2017). This means that scholars capable of aptly negotiating this environment can create footholds for queer Pacific scholarship by positioning our critiques in closer, uncomfortable, proximity to the whiteness of our institutions while affirming at the same time the need for Pacific scholars to drive research in these spaces.

These spaces of overwhelming whiteness have attracted an army of well-intentioned interventionists in the New Zealand settler colony dedicated to

diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives (Naepi et al., 2017). DEI initiatives have often been critiqued as a type of diversity-washing and window dressing designed to disguise much larger structural inequities, often allowing for meaningless inclusion to take place, resulting in our silencing (Ahmed, 2012). The efforts of many queer scholars and activists—Indigenous, Pacific, and non-Indigenous/non-Pacific—in New Zealand have borne significant fruit as a result of targeting the colonial and heterosexist inners of the university.

Lim-Bunnin (2020) insightfully warns us that initiatives such as these can graft minorities onto white supremacy. Although this critique importantly makes known the inherent dangers and unreflexive ills of the practice, I have moved beyond this critique in this article to suggest that a productive opportunity or side-space can emerge from this context. One such side-space is the Manalagi Project, which is being run by Pacific queer scholars at the University of Auckland—a temporary space for our work to be housed in whilst queer scholarship developed by our kin on our whenua/fenua/fanua/fonua of our Oceanic homes begins to find its way here. Despite white, colonial universities now allowing us intellectual and research space, it is Indigenous hearts, bodies, trauma and power that have truly opened research side-spaces in New Zealand for us today.

Still, making use of such a space may seem incongruent with emancipatory politics. I accept this as a valid critique; however, I also feel that in the context of the quotidian, it is *still* important to occupy this space for queer survival. In doing so, I accept that queer realities are full of contradictions tied to our liminal existence in both our diasporic and native communities, in which our selves are integrally intertwined. As Roderick Ferguson (2004, 2018) compels us to ask as part of the queer of colour critique, what is queer when the queer is removed from one's many other identities?

Crucially, with such an entrenched Pacific diasporic community here in Aotearoa, an audience exists in both Pacific and non-Pacific contexts, which allows our scholarship to speak to multiple sites and communities. These is none more important among these than our Māori kin, on whose land we develop our interventions under their continued grace. Therefore, my

final, unresolved, thought is concerned with how we ensure the development of a queer Pacific scholarly research agenda in this country, on this land, through colonial side-spaces, can be used to support the mana whenua of Tāmaki Makaurau and Aotearoa. This would, I hope, facilitate our duty as kin to Māori to pursue an alignment with, and support of, tino rangatiratanga. Thus, all research interventions we design that centre Pacific ways of knowing and being as queer Pacific scholars must honour, and be practised in support of, our genealogical connections.

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