



Zones of ambiguity and identity politics in Samoa

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Here I illustrate a deconstructive practice through which indigenes actively resist colonial identity politics. By creating 'zones of ambiguity' in the performing arts, indigenes think through colonial images of gender and race. Bhabha's 'zones of ambivalence' characterize contradictions in colonists' approach to the colonized and self-contradictory identities that colonists force 'mimic men' to assume. Zones of ambiguity, in contrast, characterize indigenes' approach to the hybrid identities that colonists' ambivalence visits upon them: indigenes purposefully design these zones to transform stereotypic projections and to comment on colonial experience. I explore these ideas through two evening performances in Samoa described in two 1930s travelogues that allude to key figures in Samoan (post)colonial history – the ceremonial virgin (*tāupōu*) and the male transvestite (*fa'afafine*).

Zones of ambiguity are performing art venues in which indigenes render images of gender and race that circulate in colonial and postcolonial cultures within ironic quotation marks that serve to question these images. Questioning implies agency – an ability to re-inscribe that is written all over the Samoan performances on which this article focuses. These performances are collective enterprises so the agency they evince is not individual agency, modelled on the Western unitary self, but an interrelational creativity undertaken in a self-consciously historical context.

For students of colonialism, the phrase 'zones of ambiguity' inevitably evokes Bhabha's 'zones of ambivalence'. This evocation is intentional: Bhabha is my inspiration. But for this reason it is important to be clear about differences between his ideas and mine. For Bhabha (1994), colonialism is fraught with ambivalence; colonists want indigenes to be like them (it would make them easier to deal with), but not too like them, as that would have implications for entitlements: they cannot escape the emotional contradictions in their colonial stance. These contradictions create a 'zone of ambivalence' within which indigenous 'mimic men' are obliged to reproduce colonial images, which they inevitably do in imperfect form; the imperfection is taken by colonists as a marker of inferiority – that the indigenes are 'almost the same but not white' (1994: 89). Inasmuch as colonial ambivalence grants indigenes neither genuine similarity to nor difference from colonists, it predicates flawed identities that have a hybrid character and border on mockery (1994: 88, 111-12). This last point has inspired

many anthropologists, who often view mimicry as a form of resistance to Western cultural hegemony (Ferguson 2002: 54).¹

Bhabha's zones of ambivalence, then, spawn self-contradictory identities that colonists force mimic men to assume. In contrast, indigenes purposefully create zones of ambiguity to comment upon the flawed hybrid identities that colonists' ambivalence visits upon them. Briggs argues that racism, particularly the (post)colonial variety, 'limit[s] the ability of dominated communities to play with signifiers and to circulate their signs' (1996: 462). Sexism has the same effect. Through zones of ambiguity, however, producers and artists, along with their audiences, cast cultural meanings back into a conceptual play in which the fictive and constructed nature of gendered and raced identities becomes visible and hence subject to revision. Indeed, in colonial places where cultural disruption has not overwhelmed local cultures, I suggest, indigenes have been busy rewriting colonial identities all along, and transcriptions of performing arts in earlier periods can give us clues to histories of resistance.

The primary instances on which I focus are described in two 1930s travelogues on Samoa. Lepowsky (2003) argues the travelogue is a neglected genre in ethnohistorical studies; the transparency of the subject position in this form of writing makes it uniquely valuable when considered alongside other genres. In the travelogues from which I excerpt, the writers' subject position is more than transparent: it is a parodic focus of the performances that they record.

Comic performance art has long had political purposes in Samoa. In *Leaves of the banyan tree* (1979), for example, the Samoan novelist Albert Wendt depicts two rival chiefs who compete for village power and influence. One of them hires a composer who sings humorous songs about his rival. The comic performances I survey are also political, if less directly so. They address intercultural relations – the collision of Western and Samoan models of gender and racial difference – but they also address changes in intracultural relations between boys and girls, men and women, elites and commoners, generated by this collision. These performances allude to two key Samoan figures that symbolize these changing relations – the ceremonial virgin (*tāupōu*) and the male transvestite (*fa'afafine*). Their transformation within these frames casts Samoan identities into dazzling conceptual play.

Samoa sex/gender history is a major focus of my work (1992; 1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1998; 2001; 2002a) and of Shankman's as well (1996; 2001; 2004). Here I develop aspects of this history that form a necessary background to the two performances that I review. Along the way, I also offer an analytic strategy for writing ethnohistories. Rather than presenting a linear history, I move backwards and forwards in time, juxtaposing historical images and events that need to be grasped in light of one another. Although I feature indigenous writing in this history, many of my sources are missionary and colonial reports in which there is no sure way to discern the line between Western biases and Samoan behaviours. Sometimes, however, a figure emerges from the pieces of such reports, pieces that, puzzled together, intimate not so much lines as relations.

Performing colonial gender (and race) identity

Visiting Samoa in the 1930s, a young Australian teacher and painter, Aletta Lewis, wrote the first travelogue from which I excerpt. That decade was the heart of the colonial era in the islands. The westerly islands, once a German colony, had become a New Zealand protectorate under the League of Nations after World War I, and the American Navy

ruled the easterly islands. An indigenous revolt against colonial authority – the Mau – had flared up and simmered down to not-so-quiescent embers in both places (Field 1984).

Lewis painted subjects ranging from landscapes to Polynesian beauties. By her own avowal, she was an ardent student of Samoan culture. In Manu'a, her chiefly patrons made her a *tāupōu* (Lewis 1938: 120). One of her principal obligations as *tāupōu* was to dance. The dance that she recorded at greatest length took place, predictably, when members of her village went on a travelling party (*malaga*) and were hosted by another Manu'an village. Many evening entertainments in Samoa are exchanges between a hosting and visiting group. Just before Lewis's dance as *tāupōu*, a representative of the hosting village dances.

A little hunchback tied two half-coco-nut shells on his chest with the black handkerchief which is a girl's brassiere, and danced in the manner of a *taupo* ... [He] brought the house down. He kept his chin in the air and his mouth pursed up in delicious parody of a *taupo*'s haughty mien. His coco-nut shell breasts were horribly realistic. They even had pointed nipples, thrusting against the decorous brassiere; and when in the agitation of the dance they showed a tendency to slide down towards his belly, he replaced them with a most charming affectation of propriety. Grotesque as it was, his dancing was not ungraceful ... It was an exquisite blend of beauty and, not the beast, but the clown. The men who danced with my rival *taupo* played up to her most artfully. If they had not done their most exaggerated burlesques (they were burlesquing a burlesque of a *taupo*!) the gracefulness of the hunchback would not have been so evident (1938: 206-7).

Then Lewis and her Samoan companions scurry off to another house to dress her for her dance. There follows a brief argument in which Lewis insists on wearing her shirt. Lewis's Samoan friends want her to wear a 'decorous brassiere', like the hunchback: an oblong piece of silk wrapped around her breasts and tied in the back. She is afraid that it will fall off because she is relatively flat-chested. Finally, in compromise, her Samoan friends tie the brassiere around her breasts over her shirt, remarking with disapproval, 'You no real *taupo*'. Lewis dances with grace and abandon, much to the delight of her audience. The silk brassiere ends up around her waist.

On one side we have a white Australian *tāupōu* and on the other a Samoan transvestite *tāupōu*. I do not mean to claim that the hunchback is actually a transvestite: affectations of transvestism have long been among Samoan male comics' most reliable jokes (Shore 1977: 318-33). I only mean that by dressing and dancing the part of a *tāupōu*, the hunchback also plays the part of a transvestite.

These two faux *tāupōu* (one presumably also a faux transvestite) appear as logical counterparts, indeed as mirror images, of one another, and, I believe, summarize many aspects of colonial gender and racial identities in Samoa. In different senses, neither is a 'real' *tāupōu*, but the audience seems to like their performances all the better for this difference. Here the Western observer not only gazes – Lewis, remember, is a painter – but is also the object of the gaze on the part of her Samoan companions, who costume her and judge her appearance, as well as on the part of her audience. And, of course, we encounter Lewis's companions and audience within the circuit of her retrospective gaze, a travelogue.

Bhabha's mimic men – McClintock (1995: 62-3) points out that in his account they seem to be only men – play the role of cultural intermediaries in colonial regimes as teachers, soldiers, bureaucrats, and so forth. In Lewis's travelogue, the colonist is a mimic woman who is herself a cultural intermediary: the scene is a postcard sent to all

those ‘back home’ who have disparaging views of Samoans. Lewis writes as an apologist for a culture she believes is misunderstood and that she genuinely admires. Her portrait partakes of stereotypic idealizations, but it also goes beyond them. In Bhabha’s zones of ambivalence, an indigenous male who is made to mimic colonists reproduces himself as ‘almost the same but not white’. Through Lewis, these Samoans reproduce ambiguous but highly recognizable images of a high-ranking Samoan girl that appear almost the same but not brown and not even female.

I impute agency to Samoans here, for while Lewis dances, she does so at the invitation of her titled friends; they have engineered this scene. *Vis-à-vis* the white visitor, furthermore, they have chosen a ‘mimic man’ to represent them – one whose deformity might be read as a metaphor for a flawed identity and thus as a comment upon those mimic men Bhabha rightly perceives to inhabit the colonial world.

For Bhabha, mimic men portray a ‘not quite/not white’ identity (1994) – his phrase for the imperfection of the colonial copies – but, in a comedic sense, the hunchback’s copying is perfect. His not-quite quality is not a deficiency, but makes for a surplus of humour. It is Lewis’s copying that, while admirable, is imperfect. Lewis is asked to play the part of the Polynesian beauty she came to paint, but will not take off her shirt so that she better resembles the original, flawing her reproduction. Her *tāupōu* identity, moreover, is not an imposition but a gift, gratefully accepted; but what does it signify? Why do a white *tāupōu* and a transvestite *tāupōu* seem reasonable to this Samoan audience? My answer is that they aptly represent colonial identity images framed in ironic quotation marks. To see what I mean, we must turn to the *tāupōu* as a historical figure: only by ascertaining what these copies copy can we answer these questions and grasp the ambiguity – contradictory and self-contesting meanings – that these Samoans have set in play.

The *tāupōu*

What was the role of the *tāupōu* in pre-Christian Samoa? Let us consider the principal event of her career – union with a high-status partner as described by Kipeni Su’apa’ia, an indigenous mid-twentieth-century writer.

[T]he leading talking chief² among the visitors orders his people to join him in chanting at the top of their voices Tigi (marriage shout). ... Tigi are ... the exclamations of tribute to both the bride and the bridegroom ... their heritage, titles and rights are carefully cited. Tigis are not allowed to be given in the marriage of ... commoners. The last nights of the Village Maid in her village are spent in feasting and riotous dancing (1962: 56).

Recitation of the Tigis *only* at high-status marriages represents a way that distinguished Samoan families attempted to preserve a degree of separation from their social inferiors. In a relatively isolated island setting, everyone is likely to be kindred to everyone else if people trace lineage back sufficiently far; there are, one might say, fewer than ‘six degrees’ of genealogical separation between them. How do you forge class-stratification when everyone can trace ancestry to nobles? By forbidding commoners to do so.

In Samoa, class-stratification was never a *fait accompli*.³ Some families were more illustrious than others, but this difference was in constant jeopardy because of the lack of dramatic distinction that Samoans made between legitimate and illegitimate children. Colonization in Samoa began with the advent of Christian missionaries *circa*

1830. Pritchard, who arrived in the company of a missionary in 1839, says that one 'rendezvous' at a man's house makes the child legitimate (1866: 134). Here the location is significant because it evokes an indigenous model for male/female unions – the *āvaga*. An *āvaga*, says Schultz, the first Western expert on Samoan jurisprudence, 'consists only in this: that the girl leaves the house of her parents and goes to her chosen one' (n.d. [1911]: 22). Acquiring wives was tantamount to getting women to follow you home. So, two legendary brothers who enter into a wife-getting contest stroll through their village to see who will end up with the longest trail of women behind them (Moyle 1981: 122-3). While high-status unions were arranged, the girl dressed in an especially delicate mat known as an 'Ie Āvaga, literally 'the *āvaga* mat'; these occasions, too, were conceived as a kind of *āvaga* (Schultz n.d. [1911]; Su'apa'ia 1962: 54).

Pre-Christian Samoans did not ritualize marriage in the Westerner sense (sexual union followed by long-term co-residence), because their interest was not in the couple *per se* but in offspring. In the case of high-status girls, they ritualized virginity via a defloration ceremony that established chastity before impregnation and hence the child's paternal genealogy (Pritchard 1866: 139; Tuiteleapaga 1980: 69; Turner 1986 [1861]: 93). Indeed, Su'apa'ia says, '[f]or many generations it was customary for the wife of the chief to live no more than a few months with her husband' (1962: 55) – that is, until she became pregnant. Then '[s]he was honorably released and returned home to clear the way for another' (1962: 55). For lower-status girls, festivities recognizing a union typically occurred only after the birth of a child (Hjarnø 1979/1980: 107; Turner 1984 [1884]: 95-6).⁴

Emphasis on offspring derived from the genealogical character of status and power in old Samoa. Samoan political history is an endless genealogical argument about title claims, claims legitimized by genealogies (Mageo 1998: 112-14, 413-16; 2002*b*). The *tāupōu* held an official village position because the village's status depended on that of its major resident titles. Her offspring with a chief had an exalted genealogy along paternal and maternal lines that would eventually legitimate a claim to his deceased father's title. But extended families, too, claimed titles and status through genealogical arguments, and this genealogic drove the practice of *āvaga* at all social levels. The revel that Aletta Lewis describes traces back to a historical antecedent that derives from this genealogic as well – the *Pōula* or Joking Night.

Joking Nights and *āvaga*

Remember Su'apa'ia says that '[t]he last nights of the Village Maid in her village are spent in feasting and riotous dancing'; these were Joking Nights, which villages most commonly held when a travelling party visited (Churchward 1887: 141; Stair 1897: 235; Turner 1984 [1884]: 90; Tuiteleapaga 1980: 70, 102). Just as in Lewis's account, Joking Nights were choreographic exchanges. They had two segments. The first consisted of dignified and synchronized group dances, led by the *tāupōu*, and closed with a solo danced by each group's highest chief. Alternatively, the *tāupōu* of one group and chiefly boy (*mānaia*) of the other danced the solo (Krämer 1995 [1902]: 366-81). The second segment consisted of increasingly wild comic performances that involved absurd acrobatics and lascivious dancing, often ending in *āvaga* between visitors and hosts (Krämer 1995 [1902]: 366-81; Pritchard 1866: 78; Stair 1897: 133-34; Tuiteleapaga 1980: 68-9; J. Williams 1984 [1830-2]: 247-8).⁵

A *mānaia* typically accompanied travelling parties and attended Joking Nights. The *mānaia* contracted formal unions only with high-ranking virgins, but on Joking Nights

he entered into informal unions. Indeed, Pritchard (1866: 135) says that the *mānaia*'s retinue strove 'to get as many wives for him as possible on the journey', and Schultz (n.d. [1911]: 29-30) that it was the *mānaia*'s duty 'to contract as many marriages as possible'.⁶ Here 'wife' is a synonym for lover and 'marriage' for intercourse in the sense that unions initiated during a *malaga* did not necessarily involve co-residence. The offspring of a lower-status girl and a *mānaia* lacked the maternal genealogy to inherit his father's titles. None the less, the infant was a *gafata i luma*, 'a genealogic step forward', who over generational time could augment family status (Hjarnø 1979/1980: 91-3).

Samoans tend to boast about their families' status. They do so via two primary arguments: first, they are related to high titles, meaning that their genealogy is exalted; second, they come from a big family. An extended family's prowess relies upon its numbers: all able-bodied members serve as their chief's militia. The nineteenth-century missionary George Turner (1984 [1884]: 173) says that Samoans occasionally gave family titles to a stranger 'merely for the sake of drawing him in, to increase the numerical strength of the family'. In old Samoa, this meant that it was in the interests of high-status families to acknowledge children begotten on a *malaga*. The girl, her child, and some of her relatives might come to reside on the boy's family estate, multiplying his chief's retainers. If the girl had a son who was clever and serviceable, he might receive a minor title in his father's family; if he married well, his child would have a respectable genealogy along paternal and maternal lines.

Schoeffel disputes the idea that girls could improve their family's prospects by bearing a high-status male's child, asserting that maternal rank alone determined status (1999: 128). As evidence, she offers the case of Salamasina, the first paramount of the Samoan islands west of Manu'a, who had a child by a man of indefinite social status. Many of Samoa's highest-status families trace their lineage to this child. History, particularly in an oral society, is inevitably interpretative. Salamasina's story, however, establishes only that having one high-status parent elevates a child's status and that of his/her associated families, not that this parent must be female. Salamasina's paramount title was 'The Four-Sided' because her genealogy traced back through maternal and paternal lines to all four *pāpā*, the sacrosanct district titles of the westerly Samoan islands (Henry 1983 [1979]: 64-84; Krämer 1949 [1923]; Mageo 2002b). Salamasina was the ultimate *tama'aiga*, literally 'child of many families', meaning that her lineages connected through multiple genealogical avenues to many ranking families. This term still refers to those who appropriately hold the highest titles in Samoa (Hjarnø 1979/1980: 96-8; Su'apa'ia 1962: 55).

Knowing something about the *tāupōu* in old Samoa and her place in social structure are prerequisite to understanding a performance that features this figure. But it still does not answer why a white *tāupōu* and a transvestite *tāupōu* should be anything more than strangely incongruous to this Samoan audience. They do make sense, they are 'good to think', I believe, because they are also copies of the *tāupōu* as a colonial identity image. To see how, we must inquire into the historical transformation of the *tāupōu* during colonial times.

Colonial *tāupōu* identity and shifting gender roles

While missionaries disapproved of the serial chiefly unions and deflorations that were central to the pre-Christian institution of the *tāupōu*, she was none the less a figure that could be used to represent premarital virginity, which missionaries preached. By

sanctioning only church weddings and monogamy, while recommending universal premarital virginity for girls, missionaries undermined the traditional ascent of families through their daughters' offspring. In the same gesture, they implied (in Samoan terms) that all girls were like *tāupōu* – a democratization of status flattering to many Samoans.⁷ Evidence for the virginal *tāupōu*'s enshrinement as an identity icon for every girl can be found in (1) the dance, (2) weddings, and (3) beauty ideals.

The dance

As Samoans became universally Christian during the nineteenth century, mission teachers tried to end Joking Nights (Nightingale 1835: 89). Samoan ministers insisted that people be allowed to continue dignified dancing (Moyle 1988: 205-6) – the cultural model for which was the first segment of Joking Nights in which the *tāupōu* sometimes danced the final solo (*taualuga*). During colonial times, people came to consider the *taualuga* as the *tāupōu*'s special dance (Mead 1961 [1928]: 110-22; Milner 1979 [1966]: 248; Shore 1982: 257-62). By the 1920s, on many occasions girls generally danced in a solo fashion like the *tāupōu* (Mead 1961 [1928]: 118). Today, dancing a *taualuga* is a competitive event at beauty pageants. In contemporary dance companies, girls often dance *taualuga*-like numbers in union; one girl may be asked to dance a final *taualuga*, taking the *tāupōu* role, simply because she is lovely or shines in practice sessions (Georgina 2007: 108).

Weddings

Remember that before missionization, high-status girls' defloration involved ritual fanfare before cohabitation where the singing of genealogical chants trumpeted the status significance of the occasion. By institutionalizing church weddings for all girls, missionaries created a new site for status warfare. In traditional villages, higher-status families may forbid lower-status girls' weddings to be as grand as their own (Schoeffel 1979: 141-2). Where traditional controls are more lax, girls' extended families, whatever their actual status, stage lavish weddings involving the exchange of an escalating number of ceremonial mats. The virginal bride, like the *tāupōu*, emblemizes her group's status, but via a display of Western wealth: she may have three or more expensive wedding dresses, changing gowns repeatedly over the course of the day.

Beauty

Rather than aspiring to status by bearing 'a genealogical step forward', girls aspired to be virtual *tāupōu*: to personify a *tāupōu* identity. Thus, in old Samoa, chiefs' virginal daughters were called *O Tausala* (Stair 1897: 115); by the 1970s, *tausala* had become the 'conceptual ideal of the adolescent girl' (Schoeffel 1979: 139). In American Samoa, 'Miss Tausala' is now the title of the girl who wins the local beauty pageant, a competition open to all unmarried females. Indeed, a Westernized version of Polynesian beauty – one that evoked the *tāupōu* image but that came with new standards for girls – probably supplanted older beauty ideals.

Throughout pre-contact Polynesia, red was the sacral colour. The sacred Polynesian chief had red skin (Luomala 1986: 139-40). Visiting Samoa in the 1830s, the missionary John Williams says that ranking women powdered themselves with turmeric, making their skin look red:

The dress of the Chief woman who was tall & well made consisted of a red shaggy mat round the loins ... Her body was oiled with scented oil which made it shine most brightly in the sun. She was then tinged off with an orange coloured rouge prepared from the turmeric (1984 [1830-2]: 147).

Luomala tells the story of Sina and Tigilau – the star-crossed lovers of Polynesian mythology. In one of the more famous tales, blossoms sing to Sina of a handsome *mānaia* living far away. She jumps into the sea, swimming a day and a night to reach him. ‘Her skin’, Luomala says, ‘reddened by the sun and the salt water, is more beautiful than ever’ (1986: 109).

The word ‘Sina’, however, means shining white like moonlight; the moon is *māsina*. In Polynesian mythology, Sina is the goddess in the moon (Luomala 1986: 9, 30, 107–8). High talking chief Mata’afa Tu’i tells us, ‘Sina ... by poetic convention, represents ... all the *tāupōu* ... in Samoa’ (1987: 38–9). *Tāupōu* were called Sina because they were kept indoors in order that their skin would remain fair (Krämer 1994 [1902]: 34). Fair skin in the Sina image coded those status differences that exalted families wished to turn into class differences. Today, however, one never hears red skin extolled. Did ‘shining white’ skin take on colonial tones?

Ideally, in old Samoa, high-status people also had fair, reddish hair (Krämer 1994 [1902]: 334, 660). To achieve this effect, many plastered their hair with lime, bleaching it reddish brown (J. Williams 1984 [1830–2]: 172). In colonial Samoa, reddish hair became, as Fanon put it, ‘dusted over by colonial culture’ (1963: 47): when speaking English, Samoans came to call it ‘blond’.

Pre-Christian girls of rank wore their hair in the *gita* style, which consisted of a ‘braid worn at the left temple’ or ‘braids hanging at both temples onto their chests’; the rest of the head was shaved (Krämer 1995 [1902]: 325). After missionary complaints (J. Williams 1984 [1830–2]: 231) and the flooding of Victorian culture into Samoa in the mid-nineteenth century, girls began growing their hair long, as in the Western image of the South Seas Beauty. For colonists, long, wavy hair was a racial feature that distinguished Polynesian girls from Melanesian girls with kinky hair; it symbolized their noble savage sexual attractiveness. A 1960s traveller, George Irwin, tells us:

It is with her abundant black and wavy hair that the Samoan girl delights to express her charms. Each has her favourite styles and is adept at transforming the profusion of blackness which emerges from the bathing pool at evening into an elaborate and becoming coiffure shining with flower-perfumed oil (1965: 54–5).

In pre-Christian Samoa, people wore skirts of matting, tapa, or leaves but nothing on their chests; women were less reluctant than men to shed their skirts (J. Williams 1984 [1830–2]: 167, 232, 247–8). Missionaries wanted girls to cover their breasts, which they at first resisted, advising Tahitian mission teachers’ wives to go about scantily clad so as to attract ‘*mānaia*’, chiefs’ sons (J. Williams 1984 [1830–2]: 117). A century later, Irwin says Samoan girls were ‘more conservative in their dress than European girls. ... No Samoan girl wears shorts or a bathing costume. If she did, everybody would know she was a bad girl like those who come ashore half naked from passing ships’ (1965: 55). ‘Passing ships’, I suspect, is a trope for those travelling colonial males – first whalers and adventurers, then World War II military boys, and later tour boat passengers – who tempted Samoan girls in ways that undermined their Christian *tāupōu* image.⁸

Layering gender identity

If *tāupōu* identities for girls were ‘almost white’ hybrids, they were also camouflage. To see how, let us return to the dance. While the *tāupōu*’s closing solo was called *taualuga*,

this term also referred to a duet. The *tāupōu*'s part was dignified, but around her danced a wild, often bawdy, choreographically jesting male. This comic part, called 'ai'aiuli, resembled that of the hosting men in Lewis's account (Shore 1982: 257-83). By treating the *taualuga* as the virginal *tāupōu*'s special dance and naming this duet after her part, Samoans secreted the censured segment of Joking Nights under the wing of that figure that best represented missionary morality.

How did Samoans explain the continuation of ribald joking to missionaries? The historical data will not tell, although the contemporary name for dancing, *siva*, offers a clue. In the second decade after contact, *siva* referred only to singing (Moyle 1988: 232). Were Samoans disingenuously implying they were going to a songfest? Even today, sexier joking/dancing never occurs in English and seldom when foreigners are present. Yet, a field-seasoned missionary would have suspected such a ruse. Probably mission and colonial authorities had to accept the compromise: they could put the *tāupōu* to their own ideological purposes, but Samoans featured her within a comic/risqué frame. Most often colonialism was a compromise between indigenes and colonials, one distilled in hybrids like the *tāupōu*.

Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a double set of sex/gender morals existed for girls similar to the official and sub-textual elements of the *taualuga*. On the one hand, girls were supposed to be premarital virgins who had church weddings and who did not have 'babies of the night', meaning babies born of an *āvaga*. On the other, girls were still to forward family status through unions with a high-status male and the children who descended from them. Talking chief Tuiteleapaga, who grew up in the early decades of the twentieth century, tells us:

[P]olygamy ... still exists in Samoa ... although practiced clandestinely. The chiefs, desiring to have allies among other chiefs or talking chiefs of equal or higher rank, still have intrigues with daughters or sisters of their equal. On the other hand, lesser chiefs or untitled persons, wishing to have connections with, or bring in royal blood to their families, would not mind their daughter having affairs de coeur with the high and paramount chiefs. One addition to this desire to have blood connections with royalty is the aspiration of the parents and the womenfolk to win the hands of those people – chiefs or not – with good positions in the government or of good financial standing. Some such intrigues, even done overtly, remain in the bundle unopened, as we say in referring to this ancient art (1980: 72).

Just as the *tāupōu*'s *taualuga* disguised the complexity of Samoan dancing, her virginity disguised the historically layered quality of rules for female sexual conduct. She embodied mission morals for unmarried girls, wearing the face of the pre-Christian village virgin. Yet, inasmuch as this face covered 'an unopened bundle', it had purposes of resistance that counterpointed foreign impositions. Complicating gendered mores yet further, girls used mission values to resist indigenous restrictions on their sexuality. English evangelicals throughout the nineteenth century advocated 'free choice' marriage (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 179, 219-21, 323-4, 327). While Mead in the 1920s is the first to document this advocacy in Samoa (1961 [1928]: 101), it was evident by the late nineteenth century. Lauili Willis (1889), for example, a Samoan girl born in 1865, insisted that her talking-chief father agree to her choice in a mate, whom she soon left for a British trader. The trader took her in his 'passing ship' back to England, where she wrote a memoir. By the 1930s, *tāupōu* so often eloped for a few days or months that people considered abandoning the institution altogether (Keesing 1937).

Gender ambivalence

Samoa girls' gender identities came to mirror not just colonialists' ambivalence about them (that they should be like whites but not quite), but also disjunctions between indigenous and colonial values – between *āvaga* and church weddings, between marrying for family advancement and marrying for love. In turn, these disjunctions reflected Samoan ambivalence about colonial identity impositions and were probably responsible for a spirit possession epidemic, mainly among girls, from *circa* 1950 to *circa* 1970 (Mageo 1994; 1996b; 1998: 164–90). States of spirit possession often symbolically bridge otherwise opposing aspects of identity (Mageo 1991; 1996b). The most famous possessing spirits during colonial times in Samoa were *tāupōu* who had been abducted by other spirits and who contained both sides of girls' contradictory identities in their own persons. On the one hand, they were prototypical pre-Christian *tāupōu*: they were beautiful girls from illustrious families. Like legendary chiefs, spirit girls glowed red and often had fair reddish hair; they could become scarlet-headed parakeets, whose red feathers once made fine mats sacred (Krämer 1949 [1923]: 16A–17; Mead 1929: 269). Counterpointing Christian-colonial *tāupōu*, however, spirit girls followed young men home at night: they practised *āvaga*. During possession, a spirit girl might complain about her victims' relations with a foreign military man or a boy on a tour boat in whom she herself was interested (Mageo 1991).

Boys, too, were likely to suffer ambivalence because of colonial shifts in gender identity. Girls' status elevation as *tāupōu*-like effected a relative lowering of boys' status evident in changing village topography. Proximity to the *malae* – the open space at the village centre – indexes the importance of a building and its inhabitants (Shore 1982: 49). In old Samoa 'young men mostly slept ... in a *faletele* or "great house"' situated on the *malae* that belonged to the village organization of untitled young men (Stair 1897: 109–10). Villages also had an organization of sisters and daughters with a great house on the *malae* in which members slept. By the 1960s, however, sisters had migrated to their extended family's *faletele* (where elders might guard their girls' *tāupōu*-like virginity), while brothers migrated to *fale'o* – huts situated at the back of the compound. Their habitation indicated 'their symbolic and functional status in the family' (Shore 1977: 424; 1982: 234), betraying a dramatic descent. Samoa is a socially orientated society where people identify deeply with their status and role (Mageo 1995; 1998). A decline in this cultural capital, therefore, was likely to have a psychological impact on boys.

Declining status also had practical consequences. Samoans expect the amount of physical labour people perform to correlate inversely with their status. Most young people have little status and work more, but as elders came to regard girls as *tāupōu*-like, they tended to keep them inside like the archetypal *tāupōu* in order that they, too, would remain virginal, fair, and shining. There, girls rested a lot between chores (Schoeffel 1979: 176–7). Meanwhile, boys, the primary planters, had to draw ever more out of depleted soil as Samoans became increasingly dependent on foreign goods purchased with surplus production; O'Meara (1990) argues that this situation was partially responsible for a suicide epidemic among boys that began in the 1960s.

A legend I collected in the 1980s reflects boys' correlative animosity towards girls. Two parents on their deathbed tell their several sons to take care of their daughter. The sons work to support her while she does nothing but sit inside and look pretty. Eventually the brothers kill her, turn into pigeons, and fly away. This story is remarkably at odds with the covenant (*feagaiga*) predicated between brother and sister: each is to respect the other; boys, moreover, are obligated to protect their sisters (Shore 1982:

228-56). Like many folktales, this story represents a warning: be wary that you do not spoil your girls while asking too much of your boys! But warnings about extreme cases become circulating stories only when they reflect widespread if subtle emotions – emotions one can detect circulating around the figure of the *tāupōu* and specifically around Lewis's hunchback *tāupōu*.

I mentioned earlier that during the twentieth century affecting transvestism was the fallback joke of Samoan comedy. Often the lead male performer dressed as a *tāupōu*, like Lewis's clown (Sinavaiana 1992a: 197). While this clown dances the *taualuga*, his retinue dances the male comic part called *'ai'aiuli*. *'Ai'aiuli* means 'to humble oneself so as to draw attention to another' (Milner [1979] 1966: 10). Lewis captures this meaning when she tells us that the men's 'exaggerated burlesques' made the clown's gracefulness more evident (cf. Shore 1982: 257-9). Here she echoes the standard Samoan explanation: this dance elevates the *tāupōu* by contrast. Yet, it mockingly frames her as well.

Male gender ambivalence probably contributed to a tendency towards real transvestitism documented later in the twentieth century (Mageo 1992; 1996a; Shore 1977: 318-33). In several eastern Polynesian cultures, there is evidence in a range of sources that transvestites played major social roles in pre-contact times (Levy 1971: 12-13; 1973: 130-1; W.L. Williams 1986: 255-6). In Samoa, transvestites were background figures mentioned only as 'hermaphrodites' by the nineteenth-century missionary lexicographer George Pratt (1977 [1862/1911]: 86). During my eight-year residence in the 1980s, the number of transvestites burgeoned. By Samoan transvestites' own report, their numbers continue to increase (Croall 1999). Did the seeds of these historical developments germinate earlier? Is there evidence of them in Lewis's 1930s dance performance?

A link between girls, status, and transvestism is evident in language. When George Pratt asked Samoans the word for virgin, they told him *tāupōu*. In Milner's mid-twentieth-century dictionary, virgin is glossed as 'girl'. In contemporary Samoa, male transvestites are called 'girls', *teine*, whatever their age or sexual practices. When speaking English, they frequently refer to themselves as 'queens', as if they relish, and mock, the aristocratic title (Croall 1999). Samoans often translate their indigenous titles into English aristocratic parlance: a high-chief title may be rendered as 'king'; a ceremonial virgin is called 'village princess'. I do not mean that boys became transvestites to improve their status; rather, transvestite identities evince ambivalence about how sex roles-as-statuses register in the (post)colonial Samoan world.⁹

From ambivalence into ambiguity

Returning to Lewis's travelogue – through similitude and reversal the white Australian *tāupōu*, together with the hunchback transvestite *tāupōu*, index all the other *tāupōu* images with which their audience is familiar: the pre-colonial *tāupōu*, the colonial *tāupōu* made the apex of the dance, ordinary girls dancing in a *tāupōu* style, the 'dazzling white' *tāupōu*, glowing-red spirit *tāupōu*, the transvestite *tāupōu*, and the list goes on. In turn, many of these images represent ambivalence, both the ambivalence of colonists about gender and race and the ambivalence of Samoans about the difference between colonial and local values. But the performance in which Lewis participates does more than chorus ambivalence; it transforms ambivalence into ambiguities that belie fixed identities and colonial impositions along with them. It is time to examine how this is done. Here I build upon Gregory Bateson's work on play.

On regarding monkeys at a zoo, Bateson notes their gestures resemble fighting but actually signify 'not fighting': although they nip one another, they do not bite (1972:

179). One signifies play, then, by a likeness (nips mime bites) *plus* a contradiction. The contradiction arises through *subtracting* an element from the original: there is no actual bite. But ‘play’, in my view, may also be signified by an *additional* contradicting mark. When dogs play ‘fighting’, for example, they often wag their tails, an additional sign that ordinarily conveys happiness and affection.

Contradicting marks may signify play, but they add up to ambiguity: an image appears double; it appears to be itself and not itself. Zones of ambiguity exploit the doubling inherent in play but take signification through likeness-plus-contradiction to a higher level of abstraction. Rather than copying real behavioural responses like dog anger and dog joy, in zones of ambiguity people copy cultural figures that are also current identity images. These copies, however, have a ‘not quite’ quality that makes them risible and that suggests an interpretation. For illustration, let us look back to Lewis’s scene.

Lewis’s rival *tāupōu* is replete with contradicting marks, both subtractive and additional. Like a real *tāupōu*, the hunchback’s dancing is exceedingly graceful but, additionally, he keeps his chin high and his mouth pursed, gently mocking the *tāupōu*’s characteristically haughty mien, which signifies her exalted status – that status which girls generally had come to affect. Subtractively, the hunchback is ugly, counterpointing and thus commenting on the *tāupōu*’s ‘almost white’ beauty, which Lewis’s *tāupōu* imitation also underlines. Additionally, his half-coconut shell breasts are ‘horribly realistic’ with their ‘pointed nipples, thrusting against the decorous brassiere’, which is also like Lewis’s brassiere, caricaturing that body part missionaries took as symbolic of female sexuality and urged Samoan girls to cover. Subtractively, this clown has no breasts (nothing to hide), but he does so anyway. In this too, he resembles Lewis (she is flat-chested), but not quite. Does this resemblance joke about boys’ gender envy or possibly about the apparent asexuality of white women? Perhaps Lewis unwittingly accents this meaning by wearing her prim shirt. Here, a cacophony of contradictions makes for not-quite-copies that are side-splittingly funny and redundantly ambiguous.

In a zone of ambiguity, two cultural identity figures appear alike that people simultaneously perceive to be different. One asks: which is it? Lewis’s audience is inspired to think about one of the signature figures of their culture – the *tāupōu* – as white and as not female. And there is a sense in which the colonial *tāupōu* is dusted with whiteness and the identity she represents is not really a Samoan female gender identity. Psychologists tell us that people, beset by the need to take a course of action or a position, are apt to resolve ambiguity by a reductive judgement that distorts a situation’s true complexity (Aronson 1984). But colonial contradictions and ambivalence fuel zones of ambiguity, such that their authors seek to keep all manner of heterogeneity in play.

In the visual arts, negative space is between objects. In zones of ambiguity, negative space appears as *negative figures*: figures that both reproduce and belie an original. And so the performers in Lewis’s tableau reproduce images that their audience reads as *tāupōu* and at the same time as ‘not *tāupōu*’, because the one is white and wears a shirt and the other is male and wears coconut-shell breasts. Such figures intercede between the apparently incompatible either/ors of culture (white versus indigenous, male versus female), re-presenting a lack, a missing bridge, as visible and ironic.

Performing colonial race (and gender) identity

The hunchback *tāupōu* caricatures not only ‘the *tāupōu*’ in the abstract but also the *tāupōu* on the scene – namely Lewis, the white visitor. Such caricatures were common

in colonial times. Consider, for example, an American who also visited Manu'a during the 1930s, Donald Sloan. While Lewis was an amateur painter, Sloan was an amateur photographer. Sloan's hosts stage a festival night in his honour featuring a *faleaitu*. *Faleaitu* is a form of male comedy theatre that came out of the demise of Joking Nights and was popular during the late imperial, colonial, and early postcolonial periods (Mageo 1998: 202-3). The comedienne, Sloan's hosts tell him, have licence to 'mock and make fun of whomever they please'. But, Sloan says,

I was ill prepared to see a huge hulk of a man come prancing out into the center of the room wearing my best white suit, my sun helmet and a pair of my tennis shoes – on the wrong feet ... His face was smeared with white lime, and he was grinning from ear to ear in mock majesty as he strutted out before us, trailing a long heavy rope over his shoulder. Reaching the center of the room, he turned and began to pull and tug on the rope as if it were anchored to a tree. At last he dragged into view a small, protesting boy who had the other end of the rope tied around his neck. Cradled in the boy's arms was a huge basket which the clown took from him and tore open. After peering intently inside for a moment he gave a joyful shout and pulled from it a black box which had been cleverly fixed up to look like my camera. With great ado he pushed and twisted at imaginary knobs and gadgets on it to satisfy himself that it was ready for the first shot. He then tripped daintily over to where I sat and contorted himself into every position imaginable, getting from the crowd a twitter of ill-concealed giggles, before he pressed the trigger of a big bamboo clapper, fastened on one side, that was supposed to be the shutter release. It went off with a bang like a firecracker, and the clown fell down backwards as if he had been bowled over by the kick of a double-barreled shotgun. The crowd roared with laughter, and I joined in too, laughing till my sides ached ... [H]e kept the crowd in a gale of laughter as he cavorted around the crowded room, catching whatever shadows took his fancy (1940: 67-8).

Sloan's clown is emphatically white: not only is he in white-face, he has borrowed Sloan's white suit and (presumably) white tennis shoes, making him representative of his race. What are perceived to be Sloan's attempts to objectify Samoans with his camera are turned back upon Sloan himself, who becomes the object of the gaze multiplied by two: his personal idiosyncrasies are imitated on stage and he is imitated as a photographer. The camera, a vehicle of the gaze, has a remarkable trigger and goes off with a bang that resembles a double-barrelled shotgun. Here the gaze and the gun are the symbols of the white male visitor. Whites sold Samoans guns practically from the time of their arrival. In the nineteenth century, guns were one of the most lucrative trade items and made inter-village warfare more deadly (Gilson 1970: 246-90).

But is gender also in-play here, a hint dropped by the clown's effeminate prancing and dainty tripping in contrast to his 'huge hulk' body? In twentieth-century Samoan comedy, actors often made transvestite jokes through incongruous juxtapositions of male and female qualities: a short-sleeved dress out of which emerged prominently tattooed, muscular biceps, for example (Sinavaiana 1992b: 102). And what of the leash with which Sloan's double pulls around his 'protesting' Samoan assistant?

Bhabha says mimicry is 'a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them' (1994: 89). Sloan's clown, just as Lewis's, makes art at this crossroads: the hilarity comes, as Freud has it in 'Jokes and their relation to the unconscious' (1960 [1905]), from speaking of what everyone knows but for the sake of civility leaves unsaid. There is a liminal discourse radically against colonial rules but within the protective quotation marks provided by comic communication in images.

This clown's zone of ambiguity represents and comments on a number of discrepant subject locations: a colonial photographer who gazes (Sloan), a subordinate Samoan

who is leashed around the neck (the assistant), a Samoan imperfectly imitating colonial ways (Sloan's clown also stands in for indigenous 'mimic men'), and a Samoan artist who gazes back at a colonial sojourner. It is heteroglossic in the fullest sense of Bakhtin's term (1986). Within the zone, all these subject locations are what they are but they are also re-presentations *and* jokes about gazing colonial intruders, subordinate Samoans treated like children or pets, and mimicking white culture. Lewis's and Sloan's doubles portray colonial ambivalence in order to transcend it, while making foreigners into friends and turning the power-struggle between Western and Samoan cultures implicit in the gaze and the gun, at least temporarily, into play.

As to the flawed identity that Bhabha says colonial peoples are obliged to mirror back – once again this double's imitation is in no way flawed. It focuses on a white person's flaws (or at any rate his risible characteristics) and is imposed on him, yet this clown's artfulness makes what might otherwise have been an imposition into a gift. For Bhabha, mimicry allows the colonized neither genuine identity nor difference (1994: 86). Sloan's mimic, by donning white identity in a context where his audience well understands that he is anything but white, creates a zone where verisimilitude only underlines his identity as a masterful Samoan artist and his difference from the white man whom he caricatures, along with that of his audience. He makes both before our very eyes. I do not mean that Bhabha is wrong! The colonial threat to local identities is precisely as he says, but in cases where disease or martial or economic destruction did not overwhelm local cultures, this threat inspired a remedy: deconstructing these identities through performing art.

Cousins of this kind of caricature thrive in contemporary Samoa. American Samoan hotel dance performances, for example, usually involve a Polynesian dance tour that ends with a Tahitian *tamure*. The female part in the *tamure* involves the rapid and skilful circulation of the pelvis. Doing this dance, girls become the image of the Polynesian South Seas postcard: idealized, sexualized others for a Western male. As a finale, girls go into the audience, pick male tourists, and invite them to dance. Often no one has performed the male's part on stage, which entails bending the legs and moving the knees together inwards and outwards. Both male and female parts take considerable practice. These white Western males, gently coerced into dancing, try ineptly to mimic their partners' movements, unbeknownst to themselves taking the female part. This South Seas postcard then becomes a flawed identity imposed by colonial others on Westerners.

Here again the gaze is reversed: rather than the South Seas Beauty being gazed at and compared to the South Seas fantasy, the white male is gazed at and compared, to good effect, to the South Seas fantasy. These colonial visitors do not project a zone of ambivalence or impose identities on colonized others. Rather, indigenes finesse ambiguous performances from them, infecting outsiders with ambivalence: these men appear to like being invited into a South Seas fantasy by a pretty girl, but also appear inhibited and embarrassed. Feeling impelled to imitate colonial culture, as Bhabha shows, feeling these imitations awkward, it makes sense that Samoans would enjoy seeing colonial others in the same predicament. For the audience, the girls who invite white men to *tamure* displace Samoan ambivalence about the colonial gaze onto colonial representatives and thereby transform it into funny and rich ambiguity. There is another level here as well. The Tahitian *tamure* is sexy. The Samoan segment of the dance tour concludes with the *tāupōu*'s demure *taualuga*. By copying the Western image of the South Seas Beauty as Tahitian and juxtaposing this image to the *tāupōu*,

Samoans are making the point that tourists and those for whom they stand (or dance) have got their cultural geography wrong. The 'Polynesian Revue' is a way for Samoans to assert both identity and difference.

Zones of ambiguity and historical agency

What, then, do Lewis's and Sloan's doubles show us about the zones of ambiguity in a general sense? In zones of ambiguity, performing artists along with their sponsors, producers, and supporting audience take advantage of the possibility that any figure in the zone can be framed as a contradicting figure – for example, the white visitor as a mimic woman or the male indigene as a *tāupōu*. Humorous misrepresentation highlights each figure's vulnerability to interpretation. The meta-messages are deconstructive: one can take no member of the set at face value. This recognition makes the fictive and conventional nature of these figures and the identities they signify hilariously transparent. If colonial authorities were, as Stoler argues (1995), intent on drawing race and gender lines, Lewis's and Sloan's mimics show that Samoans were adept at bending them.

Through a mammalian play-acting in bodies, monkeys' nips mime something concrete in the world (namely bites), but in zones of ambiguity people mime an identity. These mimes appear as meta-copies, like Lewis's 'transvestite' *tāupōu* and Sloan's 'white' photographer. Through such meta-copies Samoans make deconstructive social commentaries – even as the white men asked to dance at a Polynesian revue naïvely comment on other similar images to which they ineluctably refer. All of these are instances of collective agency – staged by Samoan producers and artisans, relying upon the understandings of Samoan audiences, eliciting participation by Western travellers. Many of these 'agents', moreover, act in deference to others (be they chiefly sponsors or pretty girls) rather than pursuant to their own agenda, and, to one degree or another, may not fully comprehend all the messages they convey.

Zones of ambiguity display what Taussig calls 'mimetic excess', in which borders destabilize and mimesis becomes a form of self (and other) awareness (1993: 252). This is why performances like those depicted here offer practitioners an 'opportunity to live subjectively as neither subject nor object of history but as both, at one and the same time' (Taussig 1993: 255). Such performances change cultural identities only gradually and collectively through the ways participants subsequently regard (post)colonial images. Gradual collective change, however, does not diminish the power these performances have to change local identities, and this agency leaves its trace, not so much between the lines, as among the images of colonial texts.

Zones of ambiguity move towards a particular arrangement of data. That arrangement is an ironic interplay in which identity images cast reflections upon one another. This intellectual environment is the fruition of that style of mind Lévi-Strauss (1966) called *bricolage*. As in a kaleidoscope, elements implode in novel combinations. This article, moreover, mimics this analytical strategy by juxtaposing a set of historical images. It testifies that the images that litter the texts of colonists, missionaries, and travellers, when subjected to this strategy, have an uncanny power for telling tales against the grain.

NOTES

¹ For Ferguson (2002), imitation of white culture is an implicit plea for universalizing the standard of human rights which upper- and middle-class white Westerners have heretofore enjoyed.

² The talking chief, also called 'high talking chief', is the high chief's actuary, although their relative powers differ from one village to another. Here by actuary I mean he who actuates the chief's business. (See further Mageo 1998: 110-15; Shore 1982: 241-9.)

³ On this relative lack of stratification compared to other Polynesian chiefdoms, see Hjarnø (1979/1980); Mageo (1998: 114; 2002b); Thomas (1996: 40-1).

⁴ In Polynesia, Sahlins holds, 'the ordinary people hardly marry at all, ritually speaking, as opposed to a living together ... whose duration and outcome are uncertain until children are born and acknowledged' (1985: 49). Freeman says that a Samoan man of rank made 'quite certain of his absolute priority of access to the woman who was to become his wife' (1983: 232). But all men were not men of rank, so via Freeman's own statement there is no reason to assume all girls were held to the same standard.

⁵ In dispute of missionary evidence and the ethnographic work of Krämer and Schultz, Freeman (1983: 227-8) holds that pre-Christian girls were chaste before marriage. Again, marriage in the Christian sense was not an indigenous category. Missionaries were aware that *āvaga* did not signify marriage and, therefore, imported a term from Raratonga for church weddings (Schultz n.d. [1911]: 22). In support of his claim, Freeman quotes the naval sojourner Wilkes to the effect that 'there was no indiscriminate intercourse' in Samoa (1983: 227). According to the historian R.P. Gilson, Wilkes was one of a number of early visitors who 'misjudged what they saw or accepted uncritically what they were told' (1970: 186). Freeman's other early source was a Rarotongan mission teacher, Ta'unga, who states that 'fornication' in Manu'a was 'not habitual', hardly a claim for premarital chastity among women (Freeman 1983: 227). (See further Mageo 1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1998; Shankman 1996.)

⁶ All males counted it as a point of honour to 'marry' frequently on *malaga* (Tuiteleleapaga 1980: 63).

⁷ For a Tongan parallel, see Marcus (1989).

⁸ World War II probably resulted in more emphatically Christian *tāupōu*-like standards for girls. I have argued elsewhere (1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1998: 141-90) that girls' 'mating to produce a status-step-forward' strategy was then still in play but only produced an epidemic of children everyone considered illegitimate (called 'lost marines' or 'half marines' [Martin 1961]) and that humiliated girls and their families.

⁹ Some may object to calling American Samoa, an American territory, 'postcolonial'. Through the first half of the twentieth century, the Navy ran American Samoa. Now American Samoans elect their own governor and legislature and retain locally collected tax dollars. The Department of the Interior exercises a limited degree of oversight over US grant funds given to Samoan governmental agencies and ensures that legislators do not make laws in violation of the US constitution.

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Zones d'ambiguïté et politique identitaire aux Samoa

Résumé

L'auteur illustre ici une pratique déconstructive par laquelle les autochtones résistent activement aux politiques identitaires coloniales. En créant des « zones d'ambiguïté » dans les arts du spectacle, les autochtones détournent les images coloniales du genre et de la race. Les « zones d'ambivalence » de Bhabha caractérisent les contradictions dans l'approche par le colonisateur des colonisés et les identités entrant en contradiction avec elles-mêmes qu'il impose aux « mimic men ». En revanche, les zones d'ambiguïté caractérisent l'approche par les autochtones des identités hybrides que l'ambivalence des colons leur renvoie : ils conçoivent délibérément ces zones de manière à transformer les projections stéréotypées et à commenter l'expérience coloniale. L'auteur explore ces idées par l'intermédiaire de deux spectacles donnés en soirée aux Samoa, décrites par des voyageurs-conférenciers dans les années 1930 et faisant référence à des personnages clés de l'histoire (post)coloniale des Samoa : la vierge cérémonielle (*tāupōu*) et le travesti masculin (*fā'afafine*).

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