

## **Week 8 Lectures in PAC 212/312**

### **Books**

*Whispers and Vanities: Samoan Indigenous Knowledge and Religion*, edited by Tamasailau M Suaalii-Sauni, Mauaiaivao Albert Wendt, Vitolia Mo'a, Naomi Fuamatu, Upolu Luma Va'ai, Reina Whaitiri, Stephen L Filipo (2014)

*The Relational Self: Decolonising Personhood in the Pacific*. Edited by Upolu Lumā Vaa & Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (2017)

### **Samoan Poetry**

In Pacific situations, there is no specific time and space dedicated to just poetry as a genre. It appears as part of other genres. It appears in songs, in speeches, in the telling of folk-tales, and tales of origin. So in studying Samoan and Tongan poetry and other Pacific poetry, we need to pull them out from their embeddedness in other kinds of discourses and events.

In that case, we need to understand Samoan poetry as aspects of the wholistic culture of Samoans. Looking at Samoan poetry means looking at situations in which verse is used. So at the outset, let us understand poetry as a particular use of language to convey messages but in which words are specially arranged to give enjoyment to the hearing and to enjoyment and appreciation of the meaning being conveyed. As such, there are strategies or techniques or devices that are employed by the poet (or composer or orator etc.) to deliver a piece of poetry effectively with those goals in mind.

### **Some poetic techniques**

Simile. A comparison of two unlike things using like or as.

Metaphor. A comparison of two unlike things without using like or as.

Personification. An inanimate object is given human like characteristics.

Hyperbole. A great exaggeration.

Rhyme

Rhythm

### **Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, former Head of State**

In his chapter in *Whispers and Vanities*, he talks about the whispered telling of indigenous knowledge – whispering in a loving admiring sort of way (talatu'umumususu) and whispering in a way that shows guilt or contempt or shame about what is being conveyed (tala taumusumususu). Samoans need to move beyond their guilt and shame, and begin to speak of their ancient religious beliefs without fear of reprimand.

Whispering excludes some people, but this would be appropriate in family situations where knowledge is related to family things such as genealogies, place names, historical figures, ceremonial rites, honorifics, and even everyday practices. This is talatu'umumususu.

Sometimes it gives rise to envy and ill-feeling and leads to tala taumusumususu. Christianity brought beliefs to Samoa that made some indigenous beliefs and practices unacceptable today. But, says Tupua, "the Samoan indigenous religion is not to be ashamed of... it is core to our identity as Samoans. Without it the traditional foundations of Samoan culture become untenable and easily replaced." (p. 15)

## The sexual and reproductive body

Samoan traditions say that the reproductive and sexual organs are for procreation and therefore the sex act was believed to be a sacred act. Chiefly classes arranged marriages only between offspring within their circle. There was a kind of sex education in ancient times to teach about sexuality. Teachers were close family members, and they promoted the idea that sex was to be respected and also enjoyed and celebrated. Sacred events such as *tini* (marriage poetry), *‘auala* (funeral rituals), and *pōula* (night of sexual dances) involved public display and deliberate flaunting of the genitals. In *pōula* the sexuality and beauty of the body was flaunted in the *sa‘e* (sexual dance). Sexuality was ultimately a gift from Tagaloa and the life-giving power of women is an aspect of divinity shared with Tagaloa.

The *sa‘e* dance involved the participation and meeting of men (in the *‘aumaga*) and women (in the *‘aualuma*) and it was hoped that sexual intercourse would result from the dance. The words and movements of the *sa‘e* were designed to provoke a sexual reaction. Sexuality should be celebrated publicly. In a *sa‘e*, the young virginal women appear first, then older women follow. The women expose themselves and chant and shout sexually explicit phrases to provoke the males, who join in the dance last, and they also proceed to expose themselves. The indigenous perspective was that sexual organs were not for sinful pleasure but gifts from Tagaloa.

### *Tini* – words of the *sa‘e* dance:

Tatala lou ‘ie ma lafo i falē	Take your clothes off and throw them inside the house
‘Ae ta telefua le sa‘ē	And dance naked to the beat of the sa‘e
Le esi pula itu tasi e	When the papaya is opened to one side
Le esi lea suamalie	Then you can tell which is sweetest

### *Salani tini* – traditional marriage chants make use of sexual metaphors.

The wording is being revived today, but this line has been left out because it is too explicit:

Mimisā pua’i, mimisā pua’i	Sacred sperm spew out, sacred sperm spew out
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The marriage chant acknowledges the role of the god – Palapu – the god of love in Salani in bringing together the bride and groom. Through metaphor it acknowledges the importance of sex, procreation and politics in ancient marriage.

Le ali’i e, le pulou ‘ena	Hail the man with the brown cap
Vi’i ou puipui o sega	Hail your guardians, the parakeets
‘Ae tu’u mai nai ou fega	Pass me your lips
O ‘oli lava o le vao i Pinega	The ‘oli from the forest in Pinega
O ‘oli na e te ‘oli ai	This is the ‘oli flower you will wear
Mua...	Let us celebrate this first
Palapu e, ua logosula	Palapu our god of love has been apprised by our chant
Ua ita le tago i le oli pula	Angered he does not reach out for the ripe ‘oli
A ua ita sii le fafaga a ‘oli ula	But he takes the whole bunch of red ‘oli

Mua...	Let us celebrate this first
Asa pae! Asa pae!	Walk the path that is strewn with 'oli
Le ala i le mafa e!	The paths in the mafa*
Le ala i le mafa e!	The paths in the mafa*
Mua...	Let us celebrate this first
Soli i tai! Soli i uta!	Tread seaward and tread inland
Fa'i o Ā'ana lona mausa	You may have thought that the best were in Ā'ana
'Ae leai o 'oli lava o le vao i Auga	But no, they are 'oli from the forest of Auga
Fuiopisia ma Fuilo'ua	The waterfalls of Fuiopisia and Fuilo'ua
Ua aufula le vao Atua	Are the main sources of water for the forests of Atua
Mua...	Let us celebrate this first
Palapu e, faatu lou i'i	Palapu e, get your prick up
Ua lata mai lou mata i aitu!	Soon you will have a commanding view!
Mua...	Let us celebrate this first
Fuatino le tausala	Fuatino the belle
Tupua le manaia	Tupua the beau
Mua...	Let us celebrate this first

\*Translated by Richard Moyle as The way into the vagina, then followed by the omitted lines  
Mimisā – Sacred sperm...

Purpose of *tini* – help the bride and groom to relax and arouse them and set the mood for their marriage ceremony. Celebrates the coming together of two people and their families.

### **The Salelesi 'Auala – funeral ritual of Salelesi**

If the deceased is male,

Talofa i lena ate tele	Pity that that great penis
O le pala i le 'ele'ele	Will now rot in the ground

If female,

Ma'imaui lena pali tele	The great vagina will be wasted
Ua palavale i le 'ele'ele	Rotting uselessly in the ground

The *va'a* funeral ritual (boat formation) honours the sex act – human life continues despite death. The performers move solemnly into boat formation, chanting:

Ina soso atu ia	I urge you to approach
I lalo o le 'aute o loo i ai le	Under the hibiscus tree where there is
toeaina male lo'omatua	the old man and old woman

The moving boat represents the journey through life. Then the boat hits a coral formation, metaphor for the penis. This is the metaphor for a man wanting to make a new life. The paddler at the end of the boat cries out:

Taliu, taliu, ua to'a i le tu  
Ua mama le va'a

Bailer, bailer, we struck a hard coral rock  
The boat is leaking

At that point the boat becomes the vagina. The performer playing the bailer makes bailing actions using a coconut shell. His actions include urinating into the shell and sprinkling it over his fellow performers. The urine represents sperm, which is thrown over the people to show we are all issues of sperm. The end of the dance is when the performers move to the paramount chief and flash him to mean – no matter how highly ranked you are, we all share the same origins and destiny. The dance is a celebration of human power and divinity.

### **This is thought to be an 'ava song**

E le fuia, le fuia, e tagisia  
Lou vaelau  
E iloga le fafine fietau  
'O sa'esa'e le vae taumatua  
Sapini i lalo o le 'apai  
E melomelo fa'aulatai  
Sega e, sega lave ane!

Starling, starling, we pine for the  
nimbleness of your leg  
You can tell a horny woman by  
The way she shakes her right leg  
Thrash her under her crevice  
It is red like a lobster  
Woman, woman, do your thing!

Tui Atua says this song needs to be remembered and told with playfulness and mischievousness of the occasion of pōula. He says in their original Samoan context, the chants are a celebration of what makes us human.

### **Misatauveve Dr Melani Anae, Senior Lecturer in Pacific Studies**

Let us look at Melani Anae's explanation of Samoan *Tini* (marriage poetry). In her chapter in the book *Relational Self*, she claims that ancient pre-Christian *Tini* "reveal an entitled female identity" (p. 204 Vaai & Nabobo-Baba 2017). They empower young Samoan women as the carriers of life. She hopes that this new understanding may attract intervention support and resources for Samoan women who are victims of incest, rape and domestic violence." (ibid)

### **Samoan scripts of sexual personhood**

According to Samoan indigenous traditions, the reproductive and sexual organs of the human body underline human divinity and spirituality. They are instruments for procreation and symbolise the power to make new life. Sex in this equation was the vehicle for procreation and as such was a sacred act. (Tui Atua, 2014, 26)

Moyle says the wording of ancient songs can provide in-depth explanations for sexual behaviour in Samoan society in the past, especially formalised joking about sexuality while groups of men and of women sexual dances (*sa'e*). He gives two songs from the 1800s which "portray important factors leading to the shaping of sexuality scripts for present-day Samoans." (Anae 209).

Tau laga'ali tau laga'ali  
Tago i le pali 'ua māfasifasi  
Tau moso'oi, tau moso'oi  
Tago i le fū 'ua taufetotoi

Gather langa'ali leaves, gather langa'ali leaves  
Reach for the vagina, it is agape  
Gather moso'oi leaves, gather moso'oi leaves  
Reach for the vagina, it is bleeding

Tui ma sogisogi	Stick your finger in and smell it
Fa'apea 'o se mea manogi	As though it were something fragrant
'Ā le mea pipilo	The farting thing
E tū e tala ane o lou pū ti'o	Lies next to the asshole

Laga'ali (Latin name Aglaia sp.) moso'oi (Latin name Cananga sp.) Both have fragrant leaves that disguise the odour of the menstrual flow.

Sulita 'ua 'e ita	Sulita, you are angry
'Ua pa'ū lou ma'i masina	Your clot of menstrual blood has fallen
'Ua ou tago atu	I reached out
Se'i a'e lamulamu	Snatched it up and chewed it
'O a'u nei 'o Pili	I am Pili
Le tagata 'ai mea nanamu	The one who eats strong-smelling things

'Āfai e te fia fa'alogu	If you want to hear
I le gāsēsē o le pona tolo	The noise of the sugarcane node
Na'ona e fa'aloloa	Just lie back, girl,
Pei 'oe funa e te 'ai suāmoa	As though you were eating boiled chicken

E amuia 'oe le seasea	You penis are lucky
E te oso so'o i le pū o le mea	You are always diving into the thing's hole

'Ā 'o si ali'i 'o laso	But the testicles
E luelue atu i le ufamea	Dangle at the bumhole
Auē le fia fai e	Oh, the desire to do it
'Ua tagitagi mai le fuāmiti e	The balls are aching
E su'e 'o se maisi e	They will look for the vagina
E momono ai le fuāmiti e	Which will plug up the testicles

Tama'ita'i e	Lady
Ioe	Yes
Fa'asavali le pe'a o laofie	The flying fox is airing himself after the rain
Ioe	Yes

Anae tells about songs of subtle humour and derision that are used to save face in a situation of rejection of a man by a woman. Aumaga travel in search of potential spouses, and when a woman rejects a suitor, the male is angry and bitter and feel immensely shamed and humiliated. Anae reports Tui Atua as saying it is a problem if NZ Samoans cannot handle this shame by using this cultural way of responding but instead may resort to violence.

Ina sauia oe le maula	O come forth you girlie
Sau ia le mauala	Come forth you girlie
Ina fili mai gata'ula	Choose from the gata 'ula (red snake – Asau aumaga)
Ai se'i taatia ia lou 'ai 'aiaga gafulula	And leave your outrageous flirty ways

Se'i fai atu of si a'u tala	I will tell you a story
As fili maia o sou gafa	While you assess genealogy
Si'aula, e ta te 'ata	Girlie I chuckle that you are so choosey
I si ou 'ai' aiaga	

A o ou vae ea e lilipi lalapa ISA!  
Isa le pua'a 'ailalafa

Yet your legs are so spindly – CURSE  
CURSE! The pig is ringed with ringworm!

This last part of the poem makes the girl look bad but this is the song's payback for her rejecting the male.

Anae rebuts ideas like Margaret Mead's assertion that Samoans in the past were sexually free and tended to be promiscuous. Instead, men and women engaged in sexual activity for procreation and genealogical links. It was purposeful and culturally appropriate, and Samoans sang with humour making fun of themselves but knowing full well that sex was part of a bigger plan to make future generations. Women's sex organs were life-making and sacred likened to sacred beings of the spiritual world. They were not bound by Western, Christian ties of monogamy. The legend of Nafanua depicts the sexual personhood of Samoan women as sacred and powerful. *Sa'e* and *pōula* (sexual dances) illustrate that women are the carriers of life, of genealogy and familial status.

Anae draws a comparison between the green coconut and women. The green coconut symbolises the sexual personhood of Samoan women. The virginal maiden, young and tender and firmly attached to her mother, father, 'āiga (extended family) just like the green coconut which attaches to the tree when it is still green. The brown coconut symbolises the partner/wife. She has matured, ripened and detached herself to live away from her 'āiga to live life as carrier of life.

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