

## THE SAMOAN SIDE: HOW SIA FIGIEL DEBUNKS ORIENTALISM IN *WHERE WE ONCE BELONGED*

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### ABSTRACT

*The result of the first (and the subsequent) contact between the West and the East is an Oriental documentation, colonial establishment and notional subject-making of the East by the supposedly civilised and advanced West. Like all Orients, the Pacific has been much represented and made subjects of theoretical discourses, characterised as bare-breasted and sexually available women, murderous and lecherous men, idly tropical islands inhabited by primitive people with little or no culture. Samoa has, specifically, been a subject of anthropological discourse for many decades, following the Mead-Freeman controversy. Margaret Mead concludes that in Samoa, the transition from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood was one of relative ease and that sexuality is so free that women usually defer marriage to enjoy casual sex. Derek Freeman questions Mead's findings, gives contrary views and unified the whole Samoan Islands as one and same. However, some Samoan (and non-Samoan) academics, writers and researchers debunk such Oriental representations. This paper analyses Sia Figiel's explication of Samoa in *Where We Once Belonged* as a response to these Western anthropological studies and assertions on Samoan sexuality, coming-of-age, and the unification of Samoan Islands and overgeneralisations of Samoans' dispositions. It argues that such claims are not so accurate but rather, made up of exaggerated instances and furnished imaginations for foregrounding Orientalism. It highlights scenes or instances that reveal how Figiel manifests her rebukes by drawing upon Edward Said's *Orientalism* which offers a model for analysing the exotic and romantic imaginations and formations*

*the West have attached to East, and it concludes that Figiel debunks Orientalism of Samoa in her work by presenting the Samoan side of the debate.*

**Keywords:** Sia Figiel, *Where We Once Belonged*, Samoan literature, Orientalism, Mead-Freeman controversy

## INTRODUCTION

As writer Albert Wendt has said, there are three sides to the debate – Mead’s, Freeman’s, and the Samoan side.

– Lisa Uperesa

In the foundational book *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said refers to Orientalism as a concept born and bred academically by European anthropologists, historians, sociologists or philologists. He also refers to it as an imaginative style of thought based on distinctions made between “the Orient” and “the Occident” by European writers who made this difference as a subject of political, theoretical and literary discourse. Said describes Orientalism as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1978: 3). Although Said did not invent the term “Orientalism”; it has been in use by specialists of Middle East as well as East Asia and the Indian subcontinent, Said dismantles the Oriental myth as well as established “Orientalism” as a discourse.

According to Said, “the Orient,” also known as the “Far East,” is considered unchanging, primitive and backward as an antithesis to the scientifically developed and progressive “Occident,” the West. The Orientals are defined to be always coward and lazy and represented as exotic, mysterious, immoral, remote, and inaccessible and bizarre, whereas the West is paradoxically familiar, sensible and rational. Said argues that racism is a product of Orientalism, in that, it creates several stereotypes for “the other” races; such as, the Arabs are violent murderers, the Indians are snake charmers, the Blacks are savage brutes, and Chinese are inscrutable. He further argues that the Occident Westerners feminised the East in their perceptions and discourse, that their men are insufficiently manly (effeminate), and their women are nothing but sex objects, promiscuous and exotic.

Said speaks of Orientalism as a Western fantasy and analyses how it constructs a binary opposition between the West and the East. He argues that

the false image generated from preconceived archetypes rather than reality and fact was dominantly manufactured by the Western writers, poets, imperial administrators, travellers and researchers. This image accounts of the East, as the uncivilised and exotic “other,” in contrast to the civilised and rational West which therefore projects the East as the marginalised other. For Said, this long tradition had served and still serves as a constitutional justification for European and American imperial and colonial ambitions. He, however, highlights how the colonised “other” is by default, placed at the periphery as a result of differences in race and region. Said’s *Orientalism* simply questions a form of misrepresentation of the non-Western world, “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” this epigraph of Said from Karl Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* summarises his whole idea of Orientalism (Marx 1898).

It is no doubt that the Europeans and Americans struggled for colonial occupation of Samoa at the time of its discovery, first by a Dutch, Jacob Roggeveen in 1722, and later by American, German and British traders in the later eighteenth century. Samoa has been subjected to colonial rule by various European as well as American colonists. The London Missionary Society began its colonial activities in the 1830s after establishing a trade contact. The Germans, Americans and British all claimed and protected their business enterprise which later became their colonies respectively. In 1900, British forfeited its colony for the Germans with the agreement that it would take over all German territories in Africa. New Zealand took over from the Germans in 1914 and colonised the Samoans till their independence in 1962. The American colony is never free till date and is now known as American Samoa.

However, the concept of Orientalism is highly relevant to the Anglo-American management of not only Samoa but the Pacific in general. Most of Said’s key arguments are applicable to postcolonial studies of the Pacific, given that the travel narratives, photographs, historical documentation and research of the Westerners about the Pacific being a place of “beautiful and uncharted island abundantly resourced with tropical fruits and fresh water and inhabited by primitive peoples noted for their physical beauty and their sexual freedoms” (O’Dwyer 2001: 17) forms the dominant and signifying image of the Samoans. It is noted therefore, that orientalism sets-in right from the discovery of the Pacific, from “The naming of the islands, [to] the arbitrary lines that divide the Pacific into three regions so descriptively named as the Many, Little and Black islands [all] show that westerners perceived the rich, diverse and vibrant culture they came across as fundamentally inferior” (Anda

2015). Hence, Occidental documentation and description of the Samoans date as far back to the European explorers guised as voyagers in the likes of Tasman 1643, Jacob Roggeveen 1722, Carl Friedrich Behrens, Augustin Kramer 1870 and host of others (Tcherkézoff 2008).

Margaret Mead, the author of *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive People for Western Societies* (1928) is an American anthropologist whose legendary book is a product of research she conducted in 1925–1926. The basis of her research was to observe the problems faced by adolescents in growing through adolescence to adulthood (especially females), a problematic phenomenon in modern Western society; specifically America, to which she carried out an anthropological research. She studied the culture, household and sexuality of the Samoans using fifty Samoan females (mainly adolescent girls), within the age group of nine to twenty years in the Island of Ta'u. She spent only nine months collecting her ethnographic data, leading her to the principal conclusion that, in Samoa, the transition from childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood was one of relative ease.

The foundation of Mead's argument is that throughout her observation period, none of her subjects appeared to exhibit the symptoms of adolescent "storm and stress," a psychological illness which was supposedly affecting the American youth at that time (early twentieth century) and was believed to be of biological origin. For Mead, young Samoan women usually deferred marriage for many years as they enjoy the pleasure of casual sex before they eventually choose a husband. She attributed the absence of adolescent difficulties in Samoa to two main reasons; the similar nature of Samoan culture, which has limited but well-defined inclinations; and the ostensible casual nature of Samoan culture (Côté 1992: 500). This conclusion presents a romanticised theory of the Samoan life and culture and was criticised and discredited by some other anthropologists for modulating evidence conflicting to her main argument and by Samoans who found her representation of their lives and culture and especially their adolescent sexuality highly offensive. Albert Wendt rejects her representation of Samoa which he sees as attention-grabbing and superficially stereotyped. Mead's writing "bears the hallmarks of orientalist discourse" (Keown 2004: 22).

From the title itself, Mead's book confirms itself an orientalist one, with the use of the word "primitives," her assertion of the Samoans is that of the substandard "other," parallel to America (who is expected to take models from an inferior species), the primitive and backward Samoa as opposed to the civilised and complex America. She chose to conduct her research on the Ta'u Island which is considered the most rugged and remote in the whole of Samoan

archipelago and after that, generalises her findings. “For some Samoans, the problem with Mead was not only what she wrote about their private lives but that she wrote them without their knowledge or approval” (Shankman 2009: 136).

The most heated of Mead’s criticisms and debates is the Mead-Freeman controversy which sprung after the publication of Derek Freeman’s book, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (1983), in which he challenged all of her major findings. Freeman, a New Zealand anthropologist who lived in Samoa, conducted his research on the Upolu Island in Western Samoa which is relatively bigger and more populated than the Ta’u Island of American Samoa. He vehemently criticised Mead’s conclusion, especially for her take on the ease of Samoan coming of age. The same Oriental observation seen in Mead’s work is however perceived in Freeman’s work. While putting forward his arguments (which discredits Mead’s work and also faced commendations and criticisms), he describes Samoans as brutal criminals mostly good in rape, assault, manslaughter and troubled with psychological turbulence. He further claims that life on that small and remote Ta’u Island is no different from life on the larger Samoan islands, therefore, his data collection and result from Upolu Island is enough to define the Samoans just as Ta’u, not minding the time, geographical or historical differences. Côté explains that:

Much of his [Freeman] position rests on the tenuous assumption that Ta’u in 1925 would not have been significantly different in terms of day-to-day life from Western Samoa in the 1960s, and that all of the islands in the Samoan archipelago have been plagued with high rates of crime and [d]elinquency for some time. As argued above, such a contention is problematic given the historical, geographical, and political differences among the Samoan islands (Côté 1992: 517).

Furthermore, both Mead and Freeman seem to have proven Said right for using their case studies; which is just a fraction or a handful of Samoans, to judge the whole of Samoans whose beliefs and roles were presented to be explicit and unvarying throughout the community which was afterwards generalised to the whole island as well without distinguishing the varying cultures of the Orients. Samoan postcolonial writers (like Albert Wendt, Figiel and Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard) therefore debunk that Anglo-American attitude of unifying the whole Pacific cultures into one, like Said maintained that through their representations; the Occident claim that the Orients’ societies and cultures are essentially analogous in nature. “Not only are they [the Pacific societies]

ethnically dissimilar, but also have almost completely different cultural norms, practices, political structures and traditions” (Anda 2015).

In a series compilation of essays on “Decolonizing Anthropology,” Lisa Uperesa opines that, both Mead and Freeman have assumed authority in their assertive depictions of the Samoans, and calls for a refusal to this hierarchy; in which the indigenous people only remain “native informants” in service to the theory and analysis of them and/or their culture by a different people at a different place, through engaging indigenous epistemologies as part of the conversations (2016).

The Mead-Freeman controversy can therefore be seen as a reflexive demonstration of Said’s notion of the Oriental representation of “the Orient” by “the Occident,” even though Samoans are not the subject of Said’s depiction of the Orient, they are archetypal of the Orient, as they definitely fall under the realm of a constructed image of “the others” for politico-economic galvanisation or developing theoretical discourse. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident” (Said 1978: 2–3). This paper would identify scenes and occurrences in the novel *Where We Once Belonged* that explain how Sia Figiel debunks these anthropological Orientalism of the Samoans.

## ONE ISLAND FOR ALL? THE QUESTION OF ORIENTALISM IN SAMOA

Ta’u Island, to start with, is only 17.11 square miles while the Samoan Island as a whole is about 1,170 square miles (American Samoa n.d.). Mead conducted her research on three of the four villages of Ta’u Island which at the time of her study had just about six hundred inhabitants. How could the disposition of these people be used to account for the whole people of Samoan Island with about two hundred and fifty thousand people? Ta’u Island does not even constitute two percent of the Samoan island. In the same vein, Upolu is 434 square miles having more than a hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants, the most populated of the Samoan Islands (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2017). Despite its size and population, it is arguable that Freeman’s deduction about the Samoans could be inaccurate, as his subjects are not from all parts of Samoa but Upolu.

Figiel very skillfully portrays a social difference—between the fictional village of Malaefou and the city of Apia—in lifestyle and mentality which insinuates a massive dissimilarity among the Samoans in contrast to what has

been propounded of them. Alofa, the teenage protagonist and narrator of the novel, wears her only jean trousers and a shirt once weekly while going to Apia, but ordinarily, she wears a *lavalava* which is common at home. With the eagerness and enthusiasm to go to Apia, she dresses in her best, combs her hair and looks not only neat but also English, as the more English she seems, the more socially fit she would be in Apia. Now, this signals a difference between the two places; where she lives and where she is heading to, the city of Apia, the centre, a place loved by all for very diverse individualistic reasons.

Apia is the capital of Western Samoa, “there is no consensus as to what centre of Apia is. Everyone has their own version, their own definition, which varies in degree from one person to another” (Figiel 1996: 65). Figiel goes further to give different perspectives of Apia according to individual points of view. It is apparent here that a place cannot have a particular definition, how it is seen, is what it is. Figiel shows that ordinary Apia cannot have a single description, talk more about Samoa as a whole. In like manner, Alofa’s inability to comprehend her teacher’s spoken English was resolved by her classmate from Malifa village, despite the fact that Alofa was one of the three girls admitted into Samoan High School from Malaefou; she is incompetent compared to the girl from Malifa. This designates a difference between the two villages by the quality of education or rather, reception and exposure to the English language which is assumed to be higher in Malifa. Alofa herself acknowledges that no one in her family or village speaks English except the village’s pastor or English teacher. Thus, for the girl from Malifa to easily understand the article on Samoa and Mead-Freeman controversy (despite the pace at which the teacher spoke), then she must have a good command of English which can be traced back to her primary school and consequentially, her village.

Similarly, another distinction made is on the level of discipline and tolerance between two different villages; Vaiala and Malaefou. Tu’s grandmother is from Vaiala and is disowned and forgotten for losing her virginity to a *meauli*—a black person—whereas, in Malaefou, Lili’s pregnancy was only treated with disdain. “The family, greatly shamed, wiped Tu’s grandmother (whose name is still unknown because no one would talk about her) completely out of their memories... vowing never to remember her, killing her off, even when she was still living” (72). On the other hand, Lili’s pregnancy provoked rumours whirling around in the village among the women. Alofa’s parents would only caution her not to befriend Lili, and no parent would like to see Lili associate with their children. There wasn’t any strict punishment or isolation for being pregnant. Pregnancy is much worse than losing virginity,

but the societal response to the crimes varies, this peculiarity speaks volumes about the notable difference among the Samoan villages.

In the same vein, Figiel distinguishingly portrays the place and people of Savai'i from that of Malaefou. Pisa, the lady from Savai'i, Alofa's mother who eloped with Filiga faces demeaning and denouncing treatment (on the very first day of her arrival) from Tausi, the grandmother, the mother-in-law and the oldest in Filiga's *aiga* (family) and their *fale* (house). The baby Pisa holds is cared for but not Pisa herself, because, the baby is considered innocent and as their blood, the daughter of Filiga, making her automatically a grand-daughter to Tausi. While Pisa is sitting outside waiting for Filiga's arrival to enter into the *fale*, Tausi requests her to take the baby in, which to her surprise is wrapped in a newspaper. "How dare you wrap my grandchild in newspaper? How dare you? Do you think you are still in Savai'i?" (102). Tausi asks, referring to Savai'i with inferiority and belittlement, just as if to say it is in Savai'i where such mistakes or idiosyncrasies are condoned and tolerated. Unlike Malaefou, where people would ask questions, where every little thing matters, where scandals are treated with dismay and spread very fast and wide, where people behave cautiously to save their reputation. Of course, Malaefou is not Savai'i, what people would say matters more than the actual reality of life and this is why Tausi asks Pisa: "What do you think everyone is going to talk about? That the Filiga *aiga* cannot afford cotton? That the Filiga *aiga* is poor?" (102). Because she is in Malaefou, she cares more about the use of newspaper—not about the child's condition in the newspaper—because of what people would say. Of course, Malaefou is not the same with Apia, neither is it identical with Savai'i and Vaiala, in the same way, the villages of Samoa are. Ta'u and Upolu are similar to the other Samoan islands but not the same.

### **IS COMING OF AGE REALLY OF RELATIVE EASE IN SAMOA?**

Due to the closely-knit type of family system in Samoa, every member of the *aiga* (family or relatives) is responsible for correcting and shaping the affairs of the other, especially for the younger ones, the adolescent. All family members and kin in some cases live in one house, the *fale*, which is home to not only their physical selves but also their souls which are rooted therein. Therefore, a close-watch at every child's moves, behaviours and engagements is very simply done. In the Samoan tradition, it is the responsibility of every mother to bring up her child in the most responsible way; otherwise, the society would blame her for any misconduct the child does. So, love is shown to a child not through freedom but through taming; proper discipline is love, the most



significant form of love a child can get from his/her parent is of morality. As Figiel details: “To beat a child is to give her respect, to teach her how to behave, to teach her to be humble, to listen, to obey, to love her. A parent did not love his children when he let them roam around like animals, doing whatever they pleased without consequence” (222).

Anything that brings pride to the family is, on the one hand, encouraged by the parents, and on the other hand, anything that causes shame is highly discouraged and shun away. Right from a tender age, fear of sinning and crime is instilled in children to drive them far away from doing it. Even while the girls are alone, with a cigarette at their disposal, they feel scared for the crime they are yet to be caught committing, because they “would either get slapped on the mouth four times or... beaten up if [they] were caught by an adult” (60). Despite doing anything unwanted stealthily, they are soaked in fear for the consequence which they all know how it would go. Could this be referred to as ease? The fear here (of being caught) is associated with two penalties: that of getting beaten up or of being talked about; which highlights the role of gossip in the Samoan societies. The power wielded by village gossips is as exerting and controlling as that of a disciplinarian, so the fear of being gossiped about and the shame and ordeal in one becoming the topic of the village’s trending gossip is traumatising. In *Where We Once Belonged*, “Figiel shows that the fear of being talked about by others, to be shamed, is very powerful” (Cowling 2009). All the girls make their mischiefs with extreme concealment, talk in whispers, live a two-way life; behave differently before the adults or parents and differently amidst their peers. The whole novel can be summarised as an adolescent’s struggle with coming of age.

Also, the society unanimously praises a good child or deters a defaulter; morality is nurtured on every child by every member of the community. Just like in the case of Makaoleafi (Afi) known as the “the goodest girl in the whole of Malaefou” (Figiel 1996: 2), she is an epitome of who and what a good child should be, and is popularly known to all children of Malaefou, being sighted for reference always. Not that she is a saint, she is just a “snake in disguise,” a smart one, whose immoral behaviours have never been seen, known or even heard of by any adult in Malaefou. Unlike Alofa and other girls who consider themselves “in-between” because they can never attain the type of Afi’s position in the society; not even in the eyes of their parents. They can never be that “good” all because they laugh excessively, which insinuates that they are “wantonly calling out to men” (4). It is quite obvious that for Afi to be completely spotless before the villagers she has to live a double life, she has to make all her mischiefs before no eyes or ears that could cause any

damage to her reputation. Could this be the type of life described as free and easy to pass through? Alofa is punished for being winked at “are you wearing makeup?” (211), her brother would ask. Adolescents especially girls would not be allowed to stay longer than necessary away from home, or to mingle with friends of their preference (who are considered not-so-good by the society) or to go out when they want and worst of all, to be seen with an opposite sex hanging around. The Samoans indeed see morality as prestigious.

### **(MIS)REPRESENTATION OF SEXUALITY IN SAMOA**

The Samoan society not only shuns premarital sexual affair but also eschews it and whatever would lead to it, but the Samoans, like the “Orientals,” were described to be promiscuous, treacherous, lusty, their women always available, and youths freely enjoying sex. Aside the observations of them documented in some travelogues, the most ground-breaking representation of the Samoans lies in Mead’s book. Despite the criticism, arguments and counter-arguments surrounding the Mead-Freeman controversy, Mead’s book is, arguably, the most widely read in the field of anthropology; one can imagine how much destruction (for the Samoans) it has disseminated.

Mead did not only claim that “coming of age” in 1920s Samoa was accomplished with relative ease, but also that there is sexual freedom in Samoa; unrestrained sexuality, which is distinctively different from the Americans’ way. In that, she exaggeratingly reveals their sexuality and promiscuity which answers to the occidental claims of the Orientals. However, in Figiel’s Malaefou; an archetype of Samoa, sexuality is highly restrained. No one dares opening up about sex publicly. The society spurns it and stigmatises anyone caught in-the-act like “Makaaiku, the village pervert” or Iousa, Lili’s father (Figiel 1996: 12), stigmatised and dissociated with, for their unwanted behaviour. No parent wants to see their child close to Makaaiku, not even adults befriending him are seen as responsible, and this is the height of which illegitimate sexuality is wholly seen as invalid in Samoa. Lili’s pregnancy rumours became widespread and treated with disparagement and aloofness; women make it a topic of discussion during the whole period of the scandal.

She had an appointment at Motootua. Some said it was Iosua II. Others said she did not know. She was expelled from school. This was all the whispering heard in every household before the eye of the water was finally cleared... The baby was never carried to term, and since then, parents warn their children of associating with Lili because “She [is] a bad girl as far as the women of Malaefou were concerned” (59).

Fornication and adultery-related rumours spread rapidly, far and wide because it is a big deal to them. It is an immoral act, and therefore regarded as an abnormal behaviour in the society. “Fa’amaoni, the pastor’s daughter, was caught drunk (naked, too) under the ulu [in the]... morning and the whole of Malaefou knew about it” (26). For the same reason, Pele, the wife of Iosua (who is responsible for Fa’amaoni’s naked state) “left Malaefou with the kids” (27), because she can’t stand the shame, for “they [people of Malaefou] knew, too, about why Fa’amaoni was naked” (27) and this is total shame, immorality of the highest order not done by her, but by her husband, which will definitely be associated with her. Similarly, Lili also made herself a topic of discussion in the society by being a dear and servitude housemaid to Mr. Brown (the white man), thus spiking many rumours about her all over Malaefou. The society being scornful of Lili and Mr Brown’s relationship shows their temperament for any reason whatsoever that could accommodate a premarital sexual affair “everyone in the village was talking about her (Lili) and Mr. Brown. They were saying that the word *keigefaigaluega* (house girl) was only a front for what Lili really does for Mr. Brown” (10). Everyone in the village became suspicious of her, thus, mothers would warn their daughters over and over again to stay away from her, as she is considered a bad influence on them.

The punishment for being caught-in-the-act is high, disciplinarily harsh because sexual crimes are considered unforgivable. The idea of a village disciplinarian (Filiga) is to put youngsters to order; he punishes them in a way that they would never want to repeat the same crime. Afi’s mother sent her to Filiga to be punished for a crime she did not commit, for letting a dirty magazine find its way into her schoolbag. She got the beating of her life and a complementary head shave for allowing herself this time to be caught with an erotic magazine she never knew anything about. Despite being the village’s epitome of a good child, that didn’t stop her from getting disciplined by Filiga, “She has a black eye and a shaved head” (15) just for the mere crime of keeping a dirty magazine. Alofa’s offence, on the other hand, is a bigger one, being caught red-handed; the daughter of the village disciplinarian gets a brutal punishment for engaging in a sexual affair. Who says sexuality is utterly free in Samoa?

Before my hair was cut, before my hair was shaved, I was slapped in the face. Then a belt hit me across the face, too... around the waist, around my legs, around my face again. Fist blew in my eyes and mouth and cheeks, and blood flew out onto the cement floor. No tears. Blood flying everywhere, but no tears (220).

Being the daughter of the village disciplinarian, Alofa gets a punishment much more horrific than anyone else. Her hair was shaved continuously for a month; Filiga humiliated her in every possible way he could, because she is him, and she is her mother, history repeats itself perfectly well. However, Filiga could not face the shame of his daughter taking after him; doing the same thing she caught him doing with Mrs Samasoni under the bridge, to affirm himself as a true father, he did not spare Alofa despite the guilt.

Although, the act of shunning illegitimate sexuality in Samoa does not mean that it never happens, after all, there are black sheep in every community. Lili's pregnancy went unpunished due to the immoral nature of her parent; Fili's pregnancy was aborted quickly by her "clever mother." Filiga (the village disciplinarian) was seen in the act with Mrs Samasoni, Lealofi, Alofa's partner in the crime; the son of the village pastor was not punished and Fa'amaoni the daughter of the village pastor that did it with Iousa was also not brought to terms. These are cases brought to light by Figiel to show that Samoans are not saints, neither are they as promiscuous as characterised. Morality is instilled in children by parents who care about it, it is however deducted here that only the females are brought under strict punishment for immorality (in most cases); and that also, if their parents are well mannered and upright, the boys are often allowed to go unpunished; their virginity doesn't matter as much as that of girls, especially daughters of important personalities in the society. It is quite true that the virginity of such girls is farfetched, but not as interpreted by the Orientalists that the enclosing of girls of higher class (daughters of Chiefs) makes them the only exception to Samoan freedom of sexuality. Figiel describes with triviality that, "no one really cared about the father of Lili's lizard (miscarried fetus) because Lili was not the daughter of the *faiifeau* (pastor) or a chief, or of someone with steady employment" (59). This is to say, the position of a person in the society is expected to reflect on his daughter. However, Tcherkézoff's tentative interpretation to this Samoan practice is worth considering, that these girls stay indoors to avoid sunburn to remain whiter than the low class or ordinary girls. Tcherkézoff writes:

Socially, avoidance of the sun was a sign of superior rank. The sun's rays blind other people, obliging them to keep their eyes down and bow their heads. Dark skin denotes someone who is working outside and thus is exposed to the sunlight (fishing, tilling the garden, preparing the food), while fair skin denotes the person of chiefly rank who stays inside and is served food by others (Tcherkézoff 2008: 18).

Contrary to this, Côté’s overview of the Mead-Freeman controversy inclines on the same argument of Mead and her supporters, that Samoan sexuality only became regulated after the advent of the missionary activity in Samoa; that pre-Christian Samoa knows no boundaries to sex except for the daughters of chiefs whose virginity is heavily protected. Côté sees Christianity as the cure for Samoan sexuality, as he venerates:

From these many accounts [by the missionaries who constantly referred to Samoan “promiscuity”], there can be little doubt that sexual behaviour in Samoa before it was Christianized was more casual for virtually everyone, including young females. The denial of this by Freeman and some contemporary Samoans can be understood regarding the concerted efforts of missionaries and the local pastors to create, and then maintain, a hegemony of Victorian sexual values and practices (Côté 2013: 82).

Figiel’s response to this assertion is priceless. That Christianity, a Western religion, brought sanity and sexual purity to Samoans and that, local pastors are responsible for the eradication of free and premarital sex in Samoans is such an active Orientalist imagination. In her write-back, her portrayal of *palagi* (Whites) and Christianity in Samoa sums up everything; it discloses the truth and presents the Samoan side of the story. The faith, the church and expected devotees are immersed in challenges and scandals, Fa’amaoni the pastor’s daughter was caught drunk and naked in the church arena. Lealofi, the pastor’s son was similarly caught doing it with Alofa in the bush; in fact, he is known for his bad moral behaviours which threaten the institution of religion in Samoa. The village women would lament, “How could they teach our children about behaving, when they can’t even train their own son to be human” (212).

Thus, it is evident that Figiel denies the acclaimed role played by the church in creating and maintaining appropriate sexual values in Samoa. To further discredit the collocation of Samoans with sexuality, which still prevails as Samoans’ stereotypical image, she reveals the white man’s sexual tendencies to equate that of Samoans. Heinrich Spinoza, like other colonisers in all parts of the world, settled for the native women, Spinoza is “a true lover of Samoa—Deutsche Samoa—who loved its women as much as he loved the weather” (53). The colonisers (who are men in most cases), sexually covet the native women which shows their lust and lecherousness, Mister Spinoza's details reads: “impregnating his wife sixteen times (plus three other women from the yacht club, plus two house-girls),” this is the unheard story of the

Occident. Figiel implies that sex is a human attribute, not only peculiar to the Samoans (or the brown man), but also to other races. Apart from the White man's sexuality which prevails in the characters of Mr. Brown and Heinrich Spinoza, Tu's grandmother's sexual affair with a Black person (of all things!) points at the all-inclusiveness of human sexuality.

Furthermore, to further debunk the Western Oriental stereotypes on the Samoans, Figiel alludes to the famous oriental anthropological discourse about the Samoans, Mead-Freeman controversy, in a trifling manner, it is noteworthy to look into this to better understand how Figiel's submission speaks for the Samoan Side.

Mead was a *palagi* [white] woman who wrote a book on Samoan girls doing "it" a lot... and they were loving and loved "it" too. Freeman was a *palagi* man who said that Mead, the *palagi* woman, was wrong about the Samoan girls doing "it" a lot... and that Samoans are jealous, hateful, murderous people who do not know how to do "it" (210).

Speaking for the Samoans, Figiel addresses their concerns with regards to this Orientalist (re)presentation of them. The most important question that every misrepresented Orient would wish to ask is "how do you know," like Lili asked "how did the palagi woman know that we do 'it' a lot?" If she is wrong, then "how does he know that... people like Lili do not do 'it' a lot?" A question that insinuates rejection of such claims, not demanding an answer but calling for a reconsideration. Whether their assertions are right or wrong, how did they know? Could a research on Ta'u and Upolu provide an answer for the whole of Samoans? Is it justifiable to draw such assertive conclusions on people and a place where one does not belong?

## CONCLUSION

Figiel subscribes to Said's observation of the impenetrable barrier that stands between the West and the East. Said expounds in his argument, that "[Western] perceptions of the East are not generated by reality, but by a biased, dogmatic philosophy" (Anda 2015). Mead and Freeman's research and conclusions on Samoan coming of age are examples of the Western depiction of the East, which is done through inaccurate and often tendentious writings, literary texts, research or theories that tries to prove that Western societies are primarily and fundamentally dissimilar to those of the Orient. As the colonists concluded that the Pacific had no history or culture, the recurring stereotypes are of the

bare-breasted, sexually available women and idyllic Tropical Island. Figel's work defiles the stereotypes through which Anglo-Americans came to know and understand the Samoans. Throughout the narration, there isn't any scene or instance of hatred, violence, murder, rape or any of such crimes described by Freeman about the Samoans. Women are not downright sexually available; there are restrictions in the societies, sex is not done casually to defer marriage, yes the virginity of chief's daughters is farfetched but not altogether protected with might as told by the Western explorers, travel writers, Mead and her supporters.

Sexual values in Samoa have always been maintained by the societal mores and norms, long before Christianity. The gossips and exhilaration in spreading of scandalous rumours is evidence of an inherent despise for illegitimate sexuality. Coming of age is not at all easy, handling house chores for girls and fishing or making productive use of time is the society's expectations from adolescents, their morality and uprightness is of a core value than academic performance. For Orientalism to perish there is a need to decolonise and de-orientalise fiction, history and anthropology.

## NOTES

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