

LIFE, THE CROCODILE, THE PISIKOA AND THE WIND: REPRESENTATIONS OF TEACHING IN THE WRITINGS OF THREE PACIFIC AUTHORS

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ABSTRACT *In the course of research involving the experiences of teachers of Pacific ancestry in New Zealand public schools, I became interested in the ways in which teachers were represented in Pacific thinking. Published works give relatively easy access to at least some of the patterns of thought evoked by the term teacher. In this paper I shall look at the kinds of teacher and teaching shown by Ruparuke Petaia, Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel. These authors, all confidently Samoan, portray some of the complexities of learning and teaching from within Samoan sensibilities. "Life", "the Crocodile", "the Pisikoa" and "the Wind" are all the names of teachers in this literature. My discussion of Kidnapped by Petaia (1974), Ola by Wendt (1991) and Where we once belonged by Figiel (1996) is not chronologically ordered so much as thematically arranged. The three themes are: decolonisation of education, the European teacher of Pasifika students and the Samoan teacher of Samoan students. Petaia presents a decolonising stance: the teacher as instrument of colonisation or enslavement. This perception is followed through by a discussion of Figiel's character, Siniva, who likewise rejects European knowledge as a form of darkness, and a brief reference to this idea by Wendt. Both Wendt and Figiel portray European teachers as arrogant in their assumptions about the universal nature of their knowledge, and as comic figures of enlightenment colonisation, somehow cut off from embodied human experience. Wendt sees the Samoan teacher as ineffectual, an instrument of a kind of hopeless enlightenment, frustrated by regulations and village traditions, while Figiel sees her as a real presence in village life but a tragic figure of local ignorance.*

KEYWORDS

Pacific literature, Representation, Teachers, Samoa

Tony Brown and I, and five teachers of Pacific background, recently conducted research into the experiences of Pasifika teachers in New Zealand. Our focus was on the difficulties of fitting into the New Zealand education system, which we assumed, not unreasonably, to be European dominated, with Māori as the next most influential group as far as the fortunes of teachers of Pacific background were concerned. To my surprise now, as I reflect on the research in hindsight, the question we did not ask was: How do Pasifika people themselves 'see' their teachers? Later discussion suggests that there may be some real issues to be

investigated in the area of Pacific parents' perception of Pacific teachers of their children.

In pursuing this question I turned to Pacific literature for suggestions. In this paper I shall focus on some ideas from three writers who are poets and novelists: Ruparuke Petaia, Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel, and use the work written by educationists only where they might add something to the understanding of the ideas in the literature. I have quoted extensively from the entire poem *Kidnapped* by Ruparuke Petaia, from *Ola* by Albert Wendt and from *Where we once belonged* by Sia Figiel. All three writers are Samoan, so perhaps my project could be more usefully thought of as an investigation into Samoan discourses concerning teachers.

I draw here, methodologically, on the work of Michel Foucault (1997), in relation to the study of 'discourse' as an evidential element of the 'micro-practices' of governmentality. I am attempting to use the writings of members of a distinct minority group writing in English, as the emanation of a form of "subjugated knowledge", a knowledge about the experience of learning and teaching which is not immediately available to mainstream thought (Foucault, 1997, p. 7). I have also drawn on the work of Kath Weiler and Sue Middleton (1999) in reflecting on the nature of narrative and its relation both to 'truth' and to the desires of the researcher.

Why should novelists and poets have anything useful to say about the perception of Pasifika teachers by Pasifika people? Their opinions could be entirely idiosyncratic. I acknowledge this possibility but regard the writings as elements of discourse, as expressions of an epistemology which is encapsulated in language and culture, bigger than an individual, inescapable by individuals and yet mediated by each one in a way which is different from the expression by anyone else, even within the same cultural group.

I propose to discuss these writers' work more or less in chronological order, not because that is of particular value, but it does seem to me that there is an evolution of thought through the three which perhaps amounts to a kind of dialectic, and the chronological process enables that to be clearly laid out.

Petaia's (1974) poem *Kidnapped* has been immensely useful to educators and writers trying to communicate to European teachers some flavour of colonialism, and the strength of resistance to it, in education. It is the protest of an angry post-colonial.

One day I was
kidnapped by a band
of Western philosophers
armed with glossy-pictured
textbooks and registered reputations
'Holder of BA
and MA degrees' (ll. 6-12)

Here one might hear Frantz Fanon (1967), the noted French African psychiatrist whose seminal work, *Black faces white masks*, virtually founds the field of post-colonial literature. The parents of the student/narrator imprison their child for years, in the belief that the certificate of educational achievement/freedom at the

end counts for something. Yet this voice is very different to that of the European-educated Fanon: Fanon would not have been as indifferent to the picture of Che Guavara on the wall as to the pictures of Churchill and Hitler.

I was held
In a classroom
Guarded by Churchill and Garibaldi
Pinned up on one wall
And
Hitler and Mao dictating
From the other
Guevara pointed a revolution
At my brains
From his guerilla warfare (ll. 13-22)

Fanon is the highly educated man to whom being interpellated as a 'black man' in France came as something of a shock (Fanon 1997, p. 109). For Petaia, that is not the shock: The shock is in the total incomprehension of the meanings of the materials of Western education. The teacher, presumably palagi and presumably revolutionary enough, at least at one time, to want to put a picture of Che on the walls, is unable to communicate his or her revolutionary intentions and is reduced to (failing to) impart a very dull, meaningless form of knowledge, of which the sole end is the certificate.

On my release
fifteen years after
I was handed
(among loud applause
from fellow victims)
a piece of paper
to decorate my walls
certifying my release. (ll. 36-43)

Left or right, evil or virtuous forms of European tradition have no meaning in this teacher's classroom, as far as the students are concerned. The teachers are all alien, all useless; all a complicated con job perpetrated on parents through their children. Western knowledge here is entirely without use or value or, rather, it has negative value: it is about assimilating the child to European cultural values.

Mama and Papa grew
poorer and poorer
and my kidnappers grew
richer and richer
I grew whiter and whiter. (ll. 30-35)

Western forms of knowledge are contrasted with the warmth and love of the parents but warmth and love are not enough to protect the child from Education, since that love itself compels the parents to subject the child to such insult.

Each three-month term
they sent threats to my Mama and Papa
Mama and Papa loved
their son and
paid ransom fees
each time (ll. 23-28)

Petaia's wholesale rejection of Western values and philosophy is echoed by Sia Figiel's character, Siniva. Siniva is a highly successful scholar, who has investigated European philosophy and returned to her village, preferring the cosmology of pre-European, pre-Christian Samoan thought to the imperatives of post-mediaeval, eighteenth-century Kantian thought.

She ... went around reminding the aualuma of Tagaloa'alagi and the cosmos of ancient Samoa, and the old religion, too, which taught respect for trees, for birds, for fish, and the moon. ... 'Jesus Christ is not Samoan, do you understand? Cathedrals and churches are graves, cemeteries.' (p. 191)

She declares, playing on the generally accepted term 'The Enlightenment' for the revolution in thinking epitomised by Kant, that the 'Lightness' (Enlightenment) is not lightness at all, but Darkness, and that it is the traditional gods and values of Samoa which represent Lightness. In the adoption of palagi foods, possessions and practices, Samoans abandon Lightness and embrace Darkness (Figiel, 1996, p. 203).

Such a position, although cogently argued, is so unpopular with the village that Siniva's own family cut her off, deny her connection with them and force her into isolation and, eventually, suicide.

She burned the M.A. in front of her mother's teeth, who upon witnessing this diagnosed ma'i aiku – ghost sickness. Taulaitu, faipele, and taulasea were called from all over Samoa to find out who the angry ghost was, and to exorcise it from Siniva so that she could use her palagi knowledge to secure a job in the government or private sector. (p. 191)

There is no way forward through a return to the past. Siniva is not the centre of the story as Petaia's graduating student is: she is a vestige of a way of thinking from the recent past, a 'hippy', and her message and personage are tangential to the village story, if not to Figiel's analysis. Siniva is right, says Figiel (1996) with her authorial voice:

Palagis were confused when they heard such words – most of them were shocked, shocked that someone recognised them doing what they usually did: Peeping-Tomming for a past, an illusion long dead, long buried museums of their own making. They were ashamed and looked down, buying ulapule or coconut earrings from an old woman out of guilt. (p. 192)

Albert Wendt's picture is different again, although he too recognises the point Siniva makes, and dies for. Ola's father, reciting the ancient cosmological genealogy, acknowledges:

... 'the time of Darkness before the light. One hundred and fifty years of Christianity has erased that Genesis. Most of my generation and our children and their children don't know a single line from it ... Before I came here I considered our ancient religion and beliefs as superstition, as Darkness ... to think that we gave up thousands of years of knowledge about ourselves, our world, our planet. To give up a whole way of seeing,' he murmured. 'The loss, the loss, it is immense. It is the size of God's wisdom ...' (Wendt, 1991, p. 215)

Wendt does not make the simple connection between parents/ Samoa/ love/warmth/ that Petaia does. He has a very critical view of traditional Samoa, of the social and political structures of Samoan village life, and one is never in any doubt that, even though he regards Samoa with some warmth, he is attracted by the individualism of Western thought. He does not write much about teachers and teaching. Perhaps these are too liminal, too much on the border between Samoa and the West to be of much interest.

In the novel *Ola*, Wendt's heroine Ola is a student and a teacher. Her life story shows us, in passing, an intimate picture of a palagi teacher at her New Zealand boarding school and some vignettes of her own life as a teacher. As a child, Ola goes to a school called Leifi'ifi. Both Wendt and Figiel divide primary schools according to who attends them. Wendt's Leifi'ifi is for palagi and afakasi, not Samoan students. Figiel says of the village school she depicts: "... no papalagis went there ... and no afakasis went there ... and not a single rich Samoan went there either" (p. 175). To get Ola in, her father registers her under her mother's maiden name, the name of her American grandfather. This ploy, which Ola describes as "astute", calls to mind Elizabeth McKinley's findings (McKinley, 2003) about the name changing which seems to be routine, even mandatory, in the lives of Māori women who engage successfully in education and science. Changing her surname to a European one gets Ola into this élite school and her academic future seems to be fairly secure from then on.

As part of this academic progression, Ola spends her secondary school years in a New Zealand boarding school, where she encounters a severe, prim, overconfident schoolmistress, Miss Susan Sharon Willersey, whom the girls call 'the Crocodile'.

The most unkind story attributed her nickname to her appearance: Miss Willersey looked and behaved like a crocodile – she was long, long-teethed, long-eared, long-fingered, long-arsed, long-everythinged. Others argued she had skin like crocodile hide, and that her behaviour was slippery, always suspicious, decisively cruel and sadistic and unforgiving, like a crocodile's. (Wendt, 1991, p. 171)

Miss Crocodile is not beyond taking an interest in Samoan language. In fact she uses her knowledge, incorrectly, to criticise Ola's name. Ola's full name is Ola

mai i le oti, which means born from death, as her mother died before Ola was born by caesarean section. Miss Crocodile, however, thinks the word “ola” is the verb “live”, not the noun “life” (which is the translation used to name her in the school setting), and is censorious about it. Her status as teacher and her absurd confidence in her own parsing of the word mean that Ola is unable to correct or enlighten her about the word.

‘What does Ola mean, exactly?’

‘Life, Miss Willersey.’

‘But Ola is not a noun, is it?’ she asked. Utterly confused, leaking every which way and thoroughly shit-scared, I just shook my head. ‘Ola doesn’t mean Life; it is a verb, it means ‘to live’, ‘to grow’, doesn’t it?’ I nodded furiously. ‘Don’t you even know your own language, young lady?’ I bowed my head (in shame); my trembling hands were clutching the desktop. (pp. 172-173)

There is resonance here with the research of Marshall and Peters (1987), who found that Māori children do not necessarily prefer teachers who have an acquaintance with te reo me ōna tikanga.

The Crocodile is high-handed and demanding but is finally shown as human as she weeps for her mother’s death. She seems not to have other relationships: The girls try to imagine her variously entertaining men and women in her study but are unable quite to convince themselves. The Crocodile is a determinedly sex-less palagi teacher, unattractive to the last degree, except in her grief for her mother, and even that is to be a secret between her and Ola, although no reason is given why and it seems unlikely that such a reason for grief would bring her into bad repute in her school. The Crocodile is effectively disembodied, apart from this historical connection known only in mourning to the person who gave her birth.

Ola is Samoan, but very Westernised. Teaching does not seem to interest her much. It seems to be more of a plot device than a significant aspect of her life or personality but there is one incident which seems to me to be interesting. Ola is teaching a Samoan high school class. Her topic is the Shakespearean play, *Hamlet*. Her attitudes are interesting: she does not particularly like the play itself and teaches it only because it is the play set for the university entrance examination.

Just imagine: *Hamlet* in the sweltering tropics in a language foreign to students who know little of Europe and castles in Denmark! So I decided I’d just try and teach them enough about the play to get them through the exam. (p. 246)

The lesson appears to be progressing in an orderly and uninspired way. Ola is daydreaming – her “usual escape from the boredom of teaching!” – when a student who is a village boy starts to speak. He has memorised large chunks of the play. He is unable to say why; he is unable to explain the play, or his interest, or his motivation for learning so much of it. For a while, he *is* Hamlet. Ola is amused but does not know what this phenomenon might imply. She cannot do anything with

this interest. She and her colleagues and evidently the boy's family regard his identification with Hamlet as insane and dangerous.

Mamafa told me that Iosua had been sent by his parents to live with relatives in New Zealand and attend school there. That salved my conscience: I didn't even check the truth of Mamafa's information – I didn't want to face the possibility that Iosua was insane and in a hospital. I wanted to live with a sane Iosua, a diligent student, in a prosperous New Zealand. (p. 253)

Years later she meets him in New Zealand at a railway station. He is a factory foreman, and the pair refer, obliquely, to a period when he had some kind of mental illness, and Ola moves off as soon as she can.

What are we to understand by this? There is no suggestion that Wendt finds his heroine to be a useless teacher. It seems that there is no structure for a student with such an interest to pursue it. His performance is regarded as simply rote learning: It does not say anything about aptitude or ability or potential (Ola characterises him as 'thick') but is, rather, just a kind of cultural phenomenon, the ability to learn large chunks of text by heart, which itself has no future. The boy has manifested a skill that the missionaries valued, which is part of traditional Samoa, and the modern teacher is surprised but has no value for such a skill. She herself seems to use her education, or the income which derives from it, mostly for keeping herself in booze and cigarettes, a conscious rebellion against the collective values of old Samoa.

These two teachers, then, are contrasted in more ways than one: the Crocodile is the antithesis to Life in her bodilessness, her lack of connectedness, her puritanical and confined existence. The Crocodile's obsessively private grief for her dead mother contrasts with Life's strong, socially inclusive relationship with her (living) father; her barrenness with Life's son, her lovers and husbands; her restricted boarding-house life with Life's affluence; her plainness with Life's beauty, and so on. One would have to say, however, that in terms of being a good teacher there is not a lot to choose between them.

Sia Figiel's (1996) novel *Where we once belonged* is a portrayal of a trio of young girls, Alofa, Moa and Lili, growing up in Samoa, a conscious riposte to Margaret Mead (Mead, 1943) perhaps, in that it shows, despite their closeness, a wide variety of sexual and social experience among these three girls. The novel reads as painfully honest. It gives a sense of having been drawn from closely observed village life. It is a well-thought account which manages to escape both the romantic anti-colonialism of Petaia and the often harsh antagonism Wendt shows to fa'a Samoa.

Figiel's pubescent heroines have two teachers. One is a "pisikoa", a young American woman with a spotty complexion, who is serving in the Peace Corps. The other is a woman who belongs to their own village, who herself went through the same school and, unlike others from the village who were successful in their education, returned to the village school to teach.

The descriptions of these two women are even-handedly savage. There is no romanticism about the kind of education offered by the Samoan teacher or the American teacher. Both are, in their own ways, quite inadequate. But the nature of

their inadequacy is interestingly different. The Peace Corps teacher serves to highlight, to place the Samoan teacher into high relief.

The Pisikoa is thin, pale, spotty, red-nosed, prone to blushing with embarrassment and weeping. She finds her charges frustrating, mostly because she has no clues about the governing principles of fa'a Samoa. Miss Cunningham "spoke only English and didn't understand us" (Figiel, 1996, p. 169). She sets essay topics like "What I saw on my way to school":

I didn't know then why I didn't choose [this essay topic]. I knew only that it was hard to witness something – anything – alone. You were always with someone. I didn't go to school alone. I went to school with Moa and five, maybe even ten, other girls at the same time. We all woke up when the sun woke up ... rolled our sleeping mats ... washed our faces ... kae le paepae put on our school uniforms...ran to the store to buy bread ... made tea ... drank tea ... carried our books on our right hands while a large piece of buttered bread (with jam if it was pay day) was attached to our left. We all took the same road to school ... rode the same bus ... snuck out of the back of the bus to avoid paying bus fare...teased the old fool, Siniva, ... teased Siniva's dogs ... threw stones into the Vaipuga ... played a game of hairpins ... before we entered the gates of Falelua Primary School.

Nothing was witnessed alone. Nothing was witnessed in the 'I' form – nothing but penises and ghosts.

'I' does not exist, Miss Cunningham. 'I' is 'we' ... always ... (pp. 136-137)

This 'we' is the 'we' of the title, *Where we once belonged*. By the end of her childhood, Alofa can talk about 'I' but her village, and Samoa, are where *we* once belonged. There is some element of mourning happening here in the use of the past tense, which might support Petaia's nostalgia for a pre-European way of thought but the 'once' puts it firmly away in the irretrievable basket.

The Pisikoa has good intentions to spare but she is somehow unhealthy. She is too easily upset by her students; she does not have the respect for herself which would enable her to survive their obstinacies and ignorance.

Afi ... was transferred to our class because she had pulled Miss Cunningham's hair (before she pushed her into a lemon tree for telling her that she was the boldest girl in Falelua). (p. 166)

Miss Cunningham herself does not obey the iron laws of fa'a Samoa:

Boys made us girls have Miss Cunningham come over to our desk and explain something. While Miss Cunningham bent down to explain it, her pink nipples would be in clear view for everyone to see. Everyone knew Miss Cunningham never wore bras. After several explanations Miss Cunningham gave up and the boys would then say:

'Thank you, Miss Cunningham.'

'We understand, Miss Cunningham.' (p. 169)

Miss Cunningham brings with her a different philosophy of teaching, indeed a different philosophy of life itself, to missionarised Samoa:

Sometimes some of the boys got bored, real bored. They were tired of Miss Cunningham telling them at drawing that whatever they did was right.

'There are no wrong answers in Art,' said Miss Cunningham.

'You should express whatever you're feeling at the time you paint or draw or scribble,' she told us. The boys and all of us girls were confused with this philosophy. How could something not be wrong, we asked ourselves? Our right-wrong world was questioned then for the first time, and we tried as hard as we could to justify our own beliefs. In doing this, we came to the conclusion that it was Miss Cunningham who was making mistakes, not us ... Is it because the glasses she wore made her see trees as purple and not green? Is it because the glasses she wore prevented her from seeing colours? Or worse still, did she really think we were *that* dumb and did not deserve the truth? Or that we did not even deserve love? After all, love meant guidelines and rules and punishment. Miss Cunningham's Art meant no guidelines, no rules, and especially no punishment. (pp. 170-171)

This is in strong contradistinction to Mrs Samasoni, who is a local woman and has no doubts at all about what is right and what is wrong:

When Lisi came to school one day with painted fingernails, she was made to stand in front of the class with a razor. She was supposed to scratch off the paint with the razor, but she cut her fingers accidentally [sic]. She cried-cried and the blood ran out of her flesh onto the white in her shirt. And Mrs Samasoni told her that that's what happened to cheeky Samoan girls who wanted to be afakasis. 'You are Samoan,' she hissed. 'And you should act like a Samoan girl.' (p. 167)

Mrs Samasoni might have erupted from the pages of Tatufo, Booth and Wilson (1997), who identified a number of reasons why students leave school early in Tonga: the first three reasons are "neglect of the 'kau 'atamai kovi' (ones with bad brain)"; "beating students as the major form of discipline"; and "teaching was not understood by students" or, as the students preferred to see it expressed, "inability to teach to the student levels" (pp. 62-63).

There is an elemental quality about Mrs Samasoni, whose nickname is "the Wind". "We called her a bad wind ... who blew and blew, around you until you were sometimes suffocated" (p. 166). Her physical appearance is established in terms which evoke a sharp, animal physicality but also somehow invoke the characteristics of gods in her appetite for human suffering:

Mrs Samasoni was tall and thin and had long arms and big eyes. Dog teeth lived in her mouth, next to a sea-urchin tongue. We the students of Standard Four C agreed that she looked like an underfed cow. She was the hungriest cow in the whole of Falelua Primary School. She drank children-tears, ate boy-humiliation, and devoured a girl's pain. (p. 167)

Savage but not noble, and certainly not liberal or indulgent, Mrs Samasoni is aggressive, unfair and, by all the lights of current thinking, unethical, in her treatment of students – and their parents – but she still has something which her community admires. She cares. She cares to the point of cruelty and her caring is often pedagogically misdirected but she cares. Particularly – a nice ironical touch here in view of the increasing focus in New Zealand and similar political entities on competition and performativity – she cares about winning competitions. Any competition, be it the English Poetry Recital competition, or the Independence Day parade. Mrs Samasoni's requirement for the English Poetry Recital competition is the complete, uncomprehending, rote memory recital of *The Daffodils* by William Wordsworth. This phenomenon throws light on the student in Ola's class who could recite from *Hamlet* at length but seemingly without comprehension. In Alofa's case, the incomprehension was apparently complete. When asked what daffodils are, she defines them, not unreasonably, as "dancers" (Figiel, 1996, p. 173). When she went to High School, where instruction was in English, she still did not know the language. But Sila Samasoni does not regard comprehension as a significant indicator of either student learning or of good teaching: The key to success, as it is understood in Malaefou, is *performance* and *winning*.

Where Mrs Samasoni, Sila, the Wind, differs most from Miss Cunningham, most from the model of the ideal Western teacher as argued by Jones (1990), for instance, to be a missionary figure civilising the urban poor or demonstrating the ideal Christian family, is in the embodied relationship between her body, actions and emotions. Mrs Samasoni is a very long way from the Cartesian split between body and mind. For most of the story this is clear from her free use of the hibiscus branches and other forms of physical torture of the children whenever she is angered but it is most evident in her expression of sexuality. In this regard she is a complete contrast with Miss Cunningham who is not aware even that the boys are looking at her nipples.

The Wind has an affair with Alofa's father, Filiga, and although Alofa experiences this as distressing, and feels she loses her relationship with her father as a result, Mrs Samasoni advances Alofa's career by getting her into a good secondary school. Whether she does this out of contrition, fear of exposure or genuine interest is not clear. The narrator, Alofa, does not know or speculate so the reader does not know either. But the event unlocks Alofa's future. The affair is not very hidden: nothing in a Samoan village is hidden for long. So not only does Alofa actually see her father and Mrs Samasoni sexually engaged but five years later her mother recognises her husband's face in the son born nine and a half months later to Mrs Samasoni. Alofa's mother's response, understandably enough, is to call Mrs Samasoni an 'animal' and to launch into an immediate physical attack. The Wind's

son, conceived in a rainstorm, is called "Rain". Alofa's mother also has a child, a daughter, born at the same time, whose name is Eleele (earth, or blood), equally elemental but perhaps somewhat more respectable.

This is not an admiring picture of a Samoan village school teacher. The point is made as Mrs Samasoni is introduced that it is only because she is in some sense a failure, inadequate, that she teaches at a school so devoid of prestige and resources as Falelua Primary School. At the same time, however, she is a Samson, in her own way, with her strengths and her weaknesses, and she is still united with village life, admired by the parents, who know no better because their own teachers were also punitive. Indeed, it may be that it is the expectations of these parents which fuel the Wind's tempests but, in the greater scheme of things, the world outside the village, which Alofa Filiga does come to know, Mrs Samasoni is obviously a failure. However, Mrs Samasoni, who teaches *The Daffodils* without meaning, remains part of her community, unlike Siniva, the philosopher-hippy who could undoubtedly analyse the entire poem and discourse critically on the Romantic movement and its relation to Enlightenment. There is no question here, in a Samoan story, as to which of the two is the more successful teacher. Siniva, educated and ostracised, is an ineffective communicator but Mrs Samasoni, limited in scope, communicates only too well.

It would be dangerous and absurd to read too much into these stories in terms of the position of teachers in Samoan society. Petaia, Wendt and Figiel are too sophisticated as authors to be caught out simply in the depiction of stereotypes but there do seem to be some consistent themes. Palagi teachers are obviously ill equipped for dealing with Samoan ways of thinking or saying or behaving but Samoan teachers are not pictured much more kindly. Although experts in fa'a Samoa, whether practised or not, they are not seen to be very skilled in the knowledge appropriate to schools; the knowledge which students are supposed to get in schools, precisely that kind of knowledge which Petaia regards as colonial and useless, and they are not seen as competent in pedagogy or methods of effective teaching either. They are, however, much more closely associated with the life of the people themselves, interact with them as human beings, as caring, loving, sexual beings. To understand these expectations might enable Samoan and palagi teachers to traverse the territory more safely, both by rejecting the limitations of such characterisations and by recognising that these may be the expectations they have to work with, at least in their initial engagement with Samoan students and parents.

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