

FA'AFINE & MĀHŪ

Dan Taulapapa McMullin

This poem is a genealogy: ancestral, historical, spiritual, and embodied. It begins with my own lineage, though much of it may also belong to the genealogies of other Pacific readers. Its truths come through history, memory, story, and inheritance, forms of knowledge that cannot always be divided neatly into fact and metaphor. No single poem can contain the whole genealogy. This is one current within it. Me ka mahalo iā Jamaica a me Ākea.

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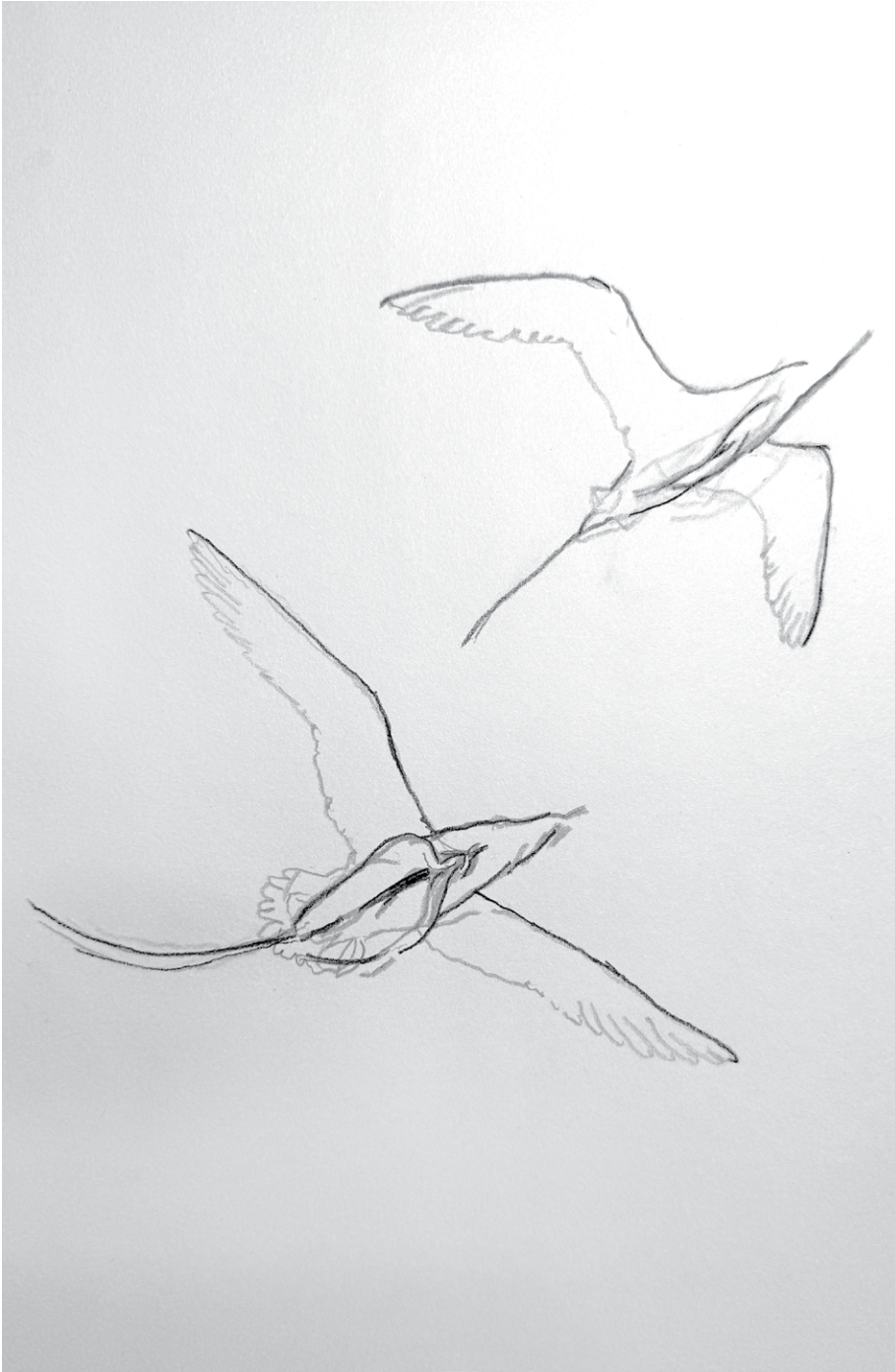
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Hālili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being Vol. 12 (2026)

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VASA / FA'AFINE / FAFINE

Vasa e,
the unbroken blue mirror
 we once
 entered
 in flight
returned to now
 as breath.
Alofa draws their ropes from the deeps,
 blood-wet strands,
 anchoring meaning.
The Va shimmers
 net of lineage,
reef of relationships,
 woven like tide.
Above: Tuli, child of Tanaloa,
 wings open in every direction,
 island to island,
 wind to memory.
Gathering morning dew:
 'o mata o le timu
 the many-eyed rain.
Tuli plucks two grubs from the sand
 limb by limb
and shapes
 Tāne
 and Fa'afafine,
first fishers,
 first lovers,
 first tide.
When Lo poisons Fa'afafine,
 Tuli remakes her:
 Fafine, breathing.
Tāne and her joining, becomes the mother of us all:
 'O Samoa 'atoa 'uma lava e.



‘O Mealele Kohe

ILLUSTRATION BY DAN TAULAPAPA MCMULLIN



Fafine Toalua
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MAFUI'E / TE'E

Inland, beneath the volcano's ribs,
 Mafui'e teaches:
 Pain warms. Steam rises.
 The rising speaks.
 Its voice is our oldest memory.
 To Māui Te'e
 sky-lifter,
 mast of worlds
 Mafui'e taught that distance
 is our poem.
 Vasa, deep purple mother,
 swallowing suns,
 ties island to island
 with the rope of Te'e.
 Islands rising
 from the moana its color,
 the sami its material,
 the Vasa its measure.
 Alofa its name, as distance
 alofa atu e.

SOLAR ANUS

Centuries loosen,
currents shift.
A wind arrives
from elsewhere
disease-bright,
metal-cold.
Papālaŋi, the pale ones,
papa, their cocks;
laŋi, the pale grey sky
grey dicks, pale peckerwoods.
The valleys fall to sickness.
Nearly all fall.
Grey priests come for the undead,
dragging a grey tide with them.
Auē... Auē e...

FA'ATANE / NAFANUA

Taemā & Tilafaiŋā
sisters once joined at the spine,
parted by salt and beam,
landing at Savai'i
carrying tā tatau from Viti.
Women cry out:
Puipuiŋa le ola o fafine!
Tilafaiŋā steps forward,
takes the mantle Fa'atane,
guardian,
and descends to the malae as
Nafanua,
goddess of buried ancestry,
lawmaker of peace.
The sisters' parting vow:
We will meet again through our children.
Talofa e.



‘O Maelele Ule

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MĀHŪ / ATUA TAITI

Across the Vasa, in Taiti:
 Māhū of the mountain,
 of sisters three,
Atua Vahine with smoke-colored hands.
Papālanj ships arrive,
 spitting disease.
They promise a milk-mouthed child:
 Iesu,
untouched by sweat or blood.
But Māhū lights the low fires.
Steam rises like a language
 unrolling from leaves.
Herbs hiss names.
The air turns green.
Her visions:
 insects beating mirror wings
 against the mountain spine.
Her curse to
 cannonballs of prayer,
 a god nailed on the white horizon.
 Auē, auē e.

IESU FEVER

Sweet Baby Iesu
 angels armored in gunmetal
 moves through the people
 in a fever.
 Bodies open,
 flowering in sickness,
 mouths bright as wounds.
 Survivors carry the Lotu Taiti
 to Samoa,
 tiputa laws clothe beauty
 and health with shame
 the priests taught well.
 We pray for deliverance
 from the peckerwoods of land theft,
 from the blackbirding ships come kidnapping.
 Salvation becomes
 the grammar of obedience.
 Inside us, a fe'e grows
 eight tentacles of
 settler hunger,
 missionary snarl.
 We learn to call ourselves monsters
 so we may enter
 a backdoor heaven.
 Yet the Vasa keeps us salty.
 Mafui'e. Fa'atane. Fa'afafine.
 In churches with white gloves,
 fans whisper:
 We remain.
 Samoa 'i Sasa'e / Samoa 'i Sisifo
 two lungs,
 one breath.
 Sā... e.

ALANEO / LONO

In Hawai'i, Māhū healers burn kōali,
blue smoke rising
 in scripture.
Twelve kahuna of Lono, the Alaneo
chant healing in silence.
But Iesu returns loudly
 on the prow of a gunboat.
The survivors sent to
 whaling decks,
 coffins of the new gospel.
Kāmuelā reaches Aunu'u,
 my mother's island,
and is renamed Sāmuela, our ancestor.
Hawai'i nei salts
 our Hāmoa blood.
Flags arrive on new storms:
 Siamani
 Maleke
 Peretānia
 Falani
each a flood sent by distant banquets
 each a rupture from our bodies.
 Auē, auē e.

MANU'A / FE'E

Tui Manu'a Elisala stands
 before American cannons,
island ringed in iron.
Tried twice
 on land and sea.
Forced to sign the Deed of Cession,
he swims beneath the white 'Aniva
 that night.
The fe'e grows inside him,
devouring
 the sovereignty of his noble heart.
The grey ones glance.
Our sovereignty moves
 as water moves
 through the many
 not the crown of flowers but the roots.
Fa'afafine the wide river.
Fa'atane the narrow.
'O le Atu 'atoa e.

SIAMANI / NIU SILA

Siamani comes,
 cutting borders with
 teacups and penknives.
 Samoa 'i Sasa'e, o rising sun.
 Samoa 'i Sisifo, o diving sun.
 A nation divided
 by tongues, bombs.
 Lace houses outlawing mixed blood.
 In whites-only balls.
 Flying foxes all shot
 from the sky.
 Papālanjī war fighting even Papālanjī;
 Siamani falls.
 Niu Sila takes its place,
 singing "God Save the King"
 on the bones
 of Mau Samoa
 the noble Tamasese.
 'O Mau e.

SĀMUELŪ / EXILE

From Tutuila he departs,
 a man between names.
 On the deck of a Maleke ship,
 fedora and notebooks
 small shields
 against the glare.
 His village fades
 lavender reef,
 memory polished by tide.
 Mau Samoa 'i Sasa'e
 folded into false rumor.
 'O Mau e.



Tane Toalua

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MAFUI'E RETURNS

Rainforests where Mafui'e once spoke
 flattened for war games;
 Maleke soldiers
 more numerous than flowers.
 When the guns die quietly,
 people follow
 their shadows
 to the empire that makes the only men.
 Yet Tuli returns
 each year,
 seeking Fa'afafine and Fa'atane
 bodies that refuse erasure.
 The name Mafui'e moves
 from Fa'afafine to Fa'afafine,
 from Fa'atane to Fa'atane.
 Descendants of descendants
 rekindle the ancient fire,
 steaming the foreign spells
 from our own bodies.
 We are still here,
 and say.
 Not I, but Mafui'e.
 Not that, but this.
 'O Samoa e.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan Taulapapa McMullin is non-binary fa'afafine from Samoa 'I Sasa'e (Eastern or American Samoa). Their current body of work in museum exhibitions is *Our Bodies Are Memories of Our Bodies: Siapo ma Solo* (to be published as a book in 2026), a growing collection of abstract works based on the tradition of Siapo tapa making in Lonolono abstractions, which Taulapapa learned as a child from their grandmother Sisipeni and great-grandmother Fa'asapa. It also includes poetry based on the tradition of Solo in which Taulapapa finds influence in the works of Tuiatua Tamasese and in their own family traditions of Solo of the Satuimanu'a. Taulapapa's 2022 work, *The Healer's Wound: A Queer Theirstory of Polynesia*, will be reissued in a third edition in 2028 with new research. Their past work was shown at the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Hawai'i Triennial. They live with their husband in Muh-huh-con-neok lands in upstate New York, where they are working on a novel, *Mafu*.

