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DANCING FROM THE HEART: MOVEMENT, GENDER AND SOCIALITY IN THE COOK ISLANDS

Kalissa Anna Alexeyeff

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Appendix

Cook Islands Dance Genres

The DVD footage ‘Dance Genres’ is taken from a recording made by Cook Islands Television of the 1997 Constitution Celebrations held at the National Auditorium. The theme for the celebrations in 1997 was, “E moe e te moe e ara e te toa”. The phrase is a Cook Islands proverb and means, “let the sleepy sleep and the warriors awake”. It was chosen by the Ministry of Cultural Development in light of the economic crisis and was used to suggest the need for Cook Islanders to stop being lazy and work hard to improve their nation. The 1997 Constitution Celebrations lasted six days, from Friday August 1 until Wednesday August 6. The first day consisted of an official opening ceremony and float parade. On the Saturday, the Junior Tangi Kaara (drumming competition) and Cultural Dance Festival (primary schools) were held. Sunday was the National Day of Prayer and Sunday evening featured a combined church service. The official ceremony for Constitution Day was held on Monday, and on Tuesday, the Cultural Dance Festival which included performances from Rarotongan dance groups. Finally, the celebrations closed on Wednesday with a Cultural and Arts Exhibition Day and closing ceremony.

Four dance groups participated in the Cultural Dance Festival; Orama, Tupapa Maraeenga, Karioi and Te Manava Nui. Orama was the only dance group which performed ‘professionally’ (that is, for tourists) to participate. Te Manava Nui was a very recently formed professional group (which did not then have regular tourist shows). Tupapa Maraeenga and Karioi were ‘community’ groups (who, after the celebrations, received offers to perform occasionally at Island Nights). Because of the poor quality of footage, I was only able to edit sections from two groups performances, Tupapa Maraeenga and Orama. I detail their performances in the following discussion of the four major dance genres.
Ura Pa’u: Drum Dance

A drum dance is composed around a series of beats played on a variety of hollow wooden slit drums (pate, tokere, ka’ara) and skin drums (pa’u) (see Jonassen 1991). Sometimes a kerosene tin (tini) is used (this instrument is attributed to the northern group). Usually both men and women dance this genre – the distinguishing features are the fast hip swaying movements of female dancers and ‘scissor-like’ legs of male dancers. Some drum dances are composed around a general theme such as fishing, a hurricane or the coconut (how it is husked, grated, and its various uses; for food or as a hair conditioner). Sometimes males will dance with spears, torches or on boxes or stilts.

Drum dance costumes tend to be pareu kiri’au (‘grass skirt’ made from lemon hibiscus fibre). These are decorated with shells or dried seaweed (the dark green overskirt (titi) seen in the DVD footage). Head-dresses are also made from hibiscus, dried leaves and shells. On Rarotonga, and most of the southern group, women wear coconut bras. These became popular in the mid 1980s, perhaps as part of the process of ‘ethnification’ of cultural production. Before this time, bikini tops or bras made from kiri’au were worn. Women in many of the northern Cook Islands wear a pareu or T-shirt to cover their upper body.

The drum dance featured on the DVD was performed by Tupapa Maraerenga. The drum beats are taken from northern group styles and features the tini (the higher pitched drum sound). The movements were choreographed by Merle Puaikura (the dancer stage right) whose family comes from Manihiki. She told me she incorporated Manihikian female dance movements such as the ‘hopping’ and ‘leg flicking’ seen in the footage. She also adds aspects of waltz movements for “something different”.

Kaparima: Action Song

Until recently, kaparima were always referred to as “action songs”. The term kaparima was devised during the Constitution Celebrations in the 1980s as part of a process of
“Maorifying” words, particularly those to do with ‘culture’. At tourist shows, action songs are usually performed by females. At the Constitution Celebrations and other community events, male dancers may also perform. The footage is of Tupapa Maraerenga’s action song performed by females only.

Action songs tend to feature female dancers who perform to the accompaniment of guitar/ukulele and voice. They are slower paced than drum dances. The grace of a dancer’s hands and hip movements emphasise the poetry of the song’s lyrics. The song played in the footage includes the lyrics “we pray for all our people”, accompanied by hands clasped together in prayer. Costumes are usually ankle length pareu. Fresh flowers and leaves are used for neck and head ei.

**Pe’e: Chant**

There are many different types of pe’e. For example, incantations or prayers (karakia) which are performed when fishing, planting, weaving. These are said to make the activity successful. Other pe’e accompany legends and myths (see Hiroa 1944). Pe’e are also used when reciting aspects of a family’s genealogy. For instance, at Kura’s twenty-first birthday, Papa Tunui recited the pe’e for Kura’s name (see Chapter Seven and DVD footage of the event).

The most commonly performed pe’e today are called turou or welcoming chants. At most official occasions, an orator performs a chant that acknowledges and praises the chief who owns the land on which the event takes place. The orator will then ‘challenge’ the visitors and welcome them. At tourist performances, a chant is generally performed at the beginning of the show by a male dancer. It serves as an introduction for a dance group. These type of pe’e have no musical accompaniment except a series of drum beats to announce the chanter.
At the Constitution Celebrations, female dancers generally sit cross-legged in lines on the ground and perform corresponding actions. Males usually dance around them. One male is the mata ura (dance leader), who weaves in and out of the group chanting and dancing. Costumes are usually made from rauti leaves (Cordyline terminalis) or 'earthy' looking material.

The DVD footage is Orama’s pe’e which was based on the theme of the celebrations. These are the notes Gina Keenan Williams wrote for the M.C.’s announcement:

Sleep those who are weak. Awake those who are strong. Like the warrior in the land of the enemy, we need to be aware and keep “one eye open at all times”. To those that have both eyes shut, how long will you continue to do so? The sun has risen take heed, the vibrant colours of the sunset turns quickly to darkness.

The chant had been composed by the father of one of the male dancers. It was based on a Maori children’s rhyme similar in sentiment to “Rock-a-Bye Baby”.

**Ute: Commemorative Song**

*Ute* are songs that commemorate a person, event or incident. Lyrics are often humorous and bawdy relying on double entendre, which are supplemented with lewd or comical actions. *Ute* performed at official events like the Constitution Celebrations are more restrained and tend to praise individuals such as the Prime Minister or ariki.

Generally, *ute* are sung with no instrumental accompaniment. Male dancers/singers stand in a semi-circle around seated women. The group sways and wave their hands as they sing. Individuals may stand up and perform spontaneous dance movements. Men generally wear island shirts and black pants and women island print *mu’umu’u*. In Tupapa Maraeenga’s performance, featured on the DVD, their head wreaths are made of dyed cardboard egg cartons. The cups of the egg cartons are cut out and sewn together into a circular chain. Tupapa Maraeenga’s *ute* was based on a proverb which translated literally as: “Stand firm on your feet. Have a long neck like a duck to look around you. Look hard for Rongo, for the foundations of Avaiki”. This meaning was explained to me as a warning – only by learning from your ancestors will you know your foundations.
Bibliography


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294


Filmography


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