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

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## Chapter 3: The Politics of Contemporary Dance

Club Raro, Rarotonga, Saturday night. The M.C., Danny Mataroa:

*Kia Orana* and welcome. First, I want to welcome our ambassadors from overseas. How many are you from Canada?  
[a few members of the audience wave and cheer]

How many from Sweden?  
[a few Swedish flags are waved]

How about New Zealand? Ah, there is a few of you, welcome home! Keep your hands up I want to see who you are!

And of course to our local families *kia orana kotou katoatoa i te aroa mata o te Atua*.  
(greetings to you all in the love of God)

The rest of the audience, don't worry – we were just talking about you!

I argued, in the final section of Chapter Two, that Cook Islands postcolonial governments have drawn upon the 'performing arts' for nation-making projects. Albert Henry's Cook Islands Party envisioned the revival of 'traditions' as a way of breaking with the colonial past and fashioning an independent nation. The Democratic Party under Tom Davies encouraged economic rationalism, one aspect of which was the promotion of tourism. Dance performances became a central component of the promotion and display of the Cook Islands tourist industry. When the Cook Islands Party was returned in 1989, government sponsorship of cultural production resumed (Sissons 1999). Despite their different approaches, these three governments promoted aspects of Cook Islands 'culture', particularly the performing arts, in nationalistic discourse and in economic policies.

In part, this chapter considers local responses to tourism in relation to the performing arts. The ways 'traditions' and 'culture' are promoted through the tourist industry is the subject of much debate on Rarotonga. The debate is primarily divided along generational lines: younger Rarotongans (20-40 year olds), who are involved in the performing arts, generally view tourism as one way of reviving aspects of Cook Islands 'culture' while older Rarotongans (40-70 year olds), frequently argue that tourism is cultural

“bastardisation”. Like much anthropological scholarship on tourism, older Rarotongans argue that contemporary dance practice has become a tourist spectacle divorced from meaningful local practice; tourism effects a form of prostitution (Kahn 2000; Desmond 1999; Linnekin 1997; Trask 1993; Buck 1993) and aestheticisation where “culture has become art, ritual has become theatre, and practice has become performance” (Acciaioli 1985: 153, see also Hitchcock, King and Parwell 1993).<sup>32</sup> The first section of this chapter examines debates about tourism and the performing arts on Rarotonga. I argue that these debates are permeated by a discourse of cultural loss or decline which is seen to be a result of bastardisation and commodification. I also examine how younger Rarotongans involved in the performing arts negotiate these criticisms in an attempt to assert the authenticity and meaningfulness of their dance practice.

Tourism is not the only factor shaping debates about contemporary performing arts. Interpretations of the impact of tourism are informed by ideas about globalisation, the place of the Cook Islands in the region (particularly with reference to Tahiti), and local religious and gender ideologies. The second section of this chapter considers the role of religious discourse in dance practice. The promotion of ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ within the tourist industry is seen by certain religious denominations as immoral and “heathen”. In the third section, I aim to link debates surrounding the dance practice to broader ideas about the economic and social effects of globalisation. I discuss how ideas about ‘tradition’ and cultural innovation feed into debates about cultural ownership and loss. I conclude with a consideration of Cook Islands expressive culture as a “structure of feeling” (Appadurai 1996: 181) which shapes local responses to global cultural flows.

## **Tourism and Dance**

From the 1980s, tourism has been the Cook Islands main industry. Rarotonga is the primary destination for tourists. On Rarotonga, tourism related industries employ over 60 per cent of the workforce (NZODA 1997). Other islands in the southern Cooks group

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<sup>32</sup> I am aware that there is growing anthropological interest in more nuanced understanding of tourism (for example Allon 2002; Taylor 2000; Tilley 1997). Kristina Jamieson’s (2002) work on tourism in the Cook Islands insightfully presents the complexities of both tourists’ and locals’ experiences of tourism and ‘culture’.



(particularly Aitutaki) have burgeoning tourist industries and some of the northern islands contribute to tourism through the production of arts and crafts such as pearls, woven baskets and hats.

The Cook Islands are primarily packaged as a ‘natural’ destination: a tropical paradise with lagoons, beaches and volcanic mountains to trek. The majority of structured activities provided for tourists on Rarotonga involve the display of Cook Islands ‘culture’, particularly aspects of the performing arts. At the airport in Rarotonga arriving tourists are greeted by locals playing island songs. There is a Cultural Village where tourists can experience aspects of Cook Islands ‘culture’ such as weaving, carving, Maori medicine, dancing and local food. Many hotels and bars around the island present “Island Nights” which includes a dance performance.

Most hotels and some restaurants on Rarotonga, hold an Island Night once or twice a week. An Island Night includes a buffet of island food, a band which plays island music and a dance performance which lasts about an hour. During 1997, there were three main venues for Island Nights – the Rarotongan Hotel, the Edgewater Hotel and Club Raro. Each had two Island Nights a week. Five professional dance groups on Rarotonga performed at these venues.<sup>33</sup> The groups were considered professional because they performed regularly. Professional groups also perform at tourist weddings (usually organised by hotels), at government functions and tourism promotion trips overseas. Most of the groups also took part in what are considered to be community events which include dance group competitions, solo dance competitions and occasionally village fund raising projects. Orama, the dance group I worked with, performed two shows: Friday night at Club Raro and Saturday night at the Edgewater Hotel. Other hotels around the island had smaller dance shows. These were usually put on by employees of the hotels who would perform a few dance numbers and songs. In addition, “community dance

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<sup>33</sup> The only other island to have regularly performing dance groups is Aitutaki. In 1997, there were six groups which performed on a rotational basis between the four main venues (two hotels and two bars). On the other two islands I visited, Ma’uke and Tongareva, there were no dance groups that performed regularly. A group had just been set up on Ma’uke when I arrived and they performed intermittently to a predominantly local audience.

groups” would also perform at hotels and nightclubs. These groups tend to be established for overseas travel (to perform for and visit Cook Islanders abroad) and for annual dance competitions held as part of the Constitution Celebrations (where they compete with professional groups).

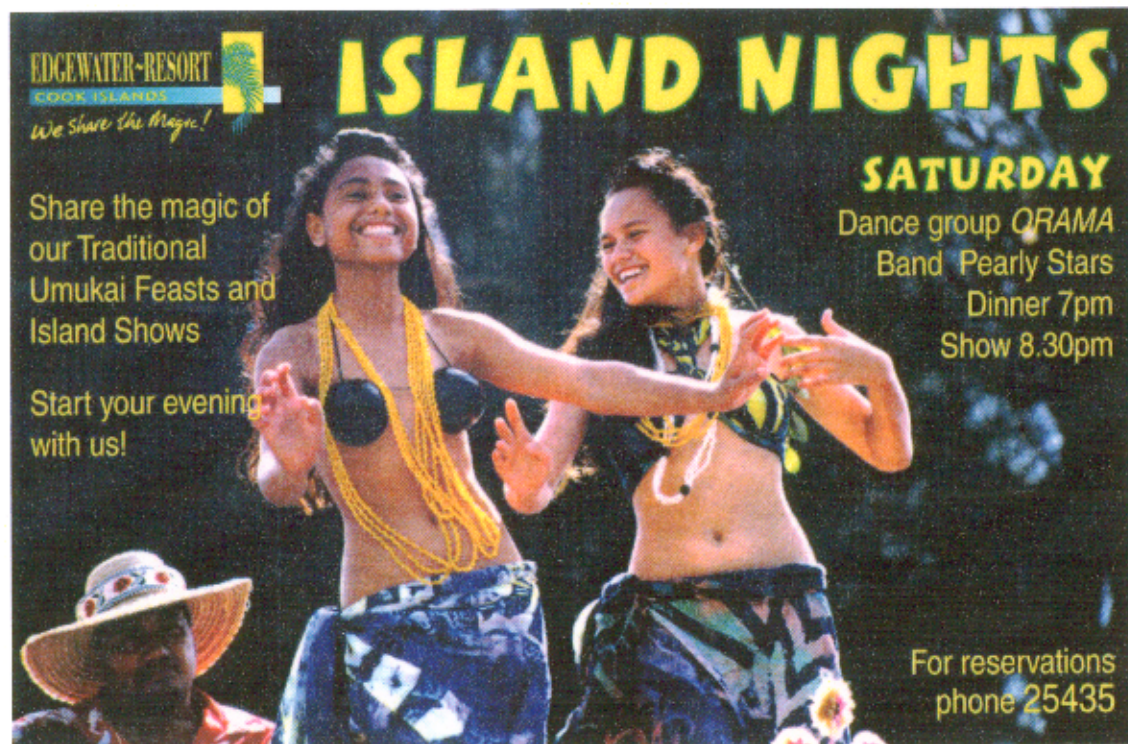


Figure 15: Island Nights Poster

At Club Raro, diners sit in an outdoor dining area in front of an elevated stage. The roof covering the dining area and stage is made out of woven palm fronds; each table has bowls of tropical flowers and candles. The diners are largely tourists; couples on their honeymoon and groups of backpackers. There are usually a few tables of local residents who attend island nights for work functions and family events. Local residents, who want to watch the show, but not pay for dinner, stand outside the covered area in the dark. After the meal the dance performance begins with an introduction from the M.C.:

Ladies and Gentleman, tonight you are going to be entertained by the top dance team in the Cook Islands. They call themselves the Orama dance troupe. Orama means vision. Seven years ago they had a vision and that vision was to keep Cook Islands culture alive through song, dance and drumming.

Individually the dancers don't get paid, but the money Club Raro pays Orama goes into a bank account and at the end of a year or two there is enough money for the whole group of 38 members to travel the world. This team had been to Hawai'i, the States, Australia, New Zealand and even as far as Dubai in the Middle East, promoting the Cook Islands in culture and tourism.

So you see dancing is not only a hobby they enjoy but it gets them to travel the world. Their dream at the end of the year is to visit the swap meet in Hawai'i, Flemington Market in Sydney and of course the flea market in Otara [Auckland]. Ladies and Gentleman meet and greet the Orama dance team!!

Most dance groups perform a range of “items” from the major dance genres. *Kaparima*, which are also called “action songs”, are performed to guitar and ukulele accompaniment. Action songs are usually performed by females; they are slow paced songs which tend to have love as their subject matter (love of a person, an aspect of nature such as a flower or an island). The graceful movements of dancer's hands, arms and hips accentuate the poetry of song lyrics. The second genre is called *ura pa'u* – drum dance. A drum dance is composed around a series of beats played on a variety of hollow wooden, skin drums and kerosene tin drums (see Jonassen 1991). Both men and women dance this genre, sometimes together and sometimes separately. The distinguishing features of *ura pa'u* are the fast hip swaying movements of female dancers and scissor-like legs of male dancers. The other two major genres, *pe'e* (chant) and *ute* (topical song), are generally not performed at tourist shows, or they are performed only in a truncated form. For instance, a male dancer will tend to begin a dance performance by blowing a conch shell and reciting a short *pe'e* which serves to introduce the dance group and welcome the audience (this is then translated by the M.C. or a dance group member). The reason dance group leaders give for not performing these genres is that tourists do not understand them; both forms rely on an ability to understand Maori, both are slower than *kaparima* and *ura pa'u*, and are considered less visually appealing to a foreign audience.<sup>34</sup>

## Watch DVD: Dance Genres

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<sup>34</sup> The Appendix provides a more comprehensive overview of the major dance genres in relation to the footage shown here.

Orama tourist performances generally begin with an introductory *pe'e* performed by a male dancer. This is followed by an 'abstract' combined drum dance, then an action song performed by female dancers. The male dancers then perform a drum dance about canoeing. This is then followed by a number or two performed by young children in the group (tourists love taking photographs of these numbers). A female dancer then performs a solo action song and short drum dance. The next number, 'coconut husking', requires male members of the audience to come up on stage and compete against male dancers to husk a coconut as quickly as possible. There will usually be another action song and then combined drum dance (based on themes such as hurricanes and fishing) to end the show.

### *The Dancing Audience*

The penultimate number of a tourist dance performance is the *ura piani*, an impromptu dance genre where a male and female dancer are called up by the M.C. to dance together. *Ura piani* means harmonica dance. According to Jonassen (n.d.) the harmonica, which was introduced to the Cook Islands in the 1950s, was previously used to accompany the dance. Today this dance style is performed to drum beats and vocal calls. At tourist shows, the house lights are raised and the M.C. announces to the audience, "This is the part of the show where you show us what you have learnt". All the dancers go into the audience and pick a partner of the opposite sex. Once onstage, the dancers and their partners are seated in a circle. The M.C. then humorously instructs the tourists: "Gentlemen just knock your knees together, ladies just make like a washing machine and go like mad".

The M.C. calls up two or three dancers and their partners at a time. He asks the tourists their name and nationality and then their marital status. The last question leads to a series of stock questions which play on Cook Islanders' perceptions of tourists. Tourists are generally viewed as desperate to meet, and have sex with, beautiful locals. Locals on the other hand consider *papa'a* as far less attractive than Polynesians and are seen to be only interested in tourists for their money. The following jokes made by the M.C. impute sexual desires onto the tourists and stress the dancers' unavailability. To a female tourist,

the M.C. may say: “You’re single, but your partner is a married man”; to a male tourist: “You like? She’s a single girl, but see all those drummers behind you? They are all the brothers, and she is the only sister in the family”.

One of Danny Mataroa’s favourite jokes, when M.C.ing the *ura piani*, is directed at both the local and tourist audience. He asks a female tourist: “Are you single?”. When she replies that she is, Danny gestures to her male partner and says:

He's a single boy, *Mata oro ki runga i te maunga angai i te puaka, tapeka i te oro enua kare pai ana onga keke.*

(Mata went up to the mountain to feed the pigs and didn't have a bath before the show and he stinks).

[The local audience laughs]

But he is in prison, they have only let him out for the night!

[Locals and tourists laugh.]

This joke is about the unsuitability of Mata, the local male dancer. Its success (for a local audience) relies on both the non-translation and mis-translation of the Maori comment. The Maori comment is seen as extremely funny to locals because it is normal practice to wash after performing manual labour. Remarks are continually made about other people’s uncleanliness; to go out in public without washing is seen as a serious transgression and a sign of lowly status. People who do this are called “bush ladies” or “dirty taro” (that is, men who work in taro plantations). Men that look dirty are considered highly unattractive to females. So the idea that a tourist woman may find a dirty male appealing is absurd; a respectable Cook Islands woman would not even consider dancing with him. This unsuitability is then presented to the English speaking audience by suggesting that the dancer is a prisoner. Danny’s comments are partly a conspiratorial joke (Cannell 1995: 232). He sends up the local male dancer for the local and tourist audience. That the tourists, in particular the female he is dancing with, cannot ‘see’ the inappropriateness of dancing/having sex with the male dancer, provides the local audience with immense amusement.

After the introductions, the M.C. instructs the partners to dance. Many tourists are embarrassed and often they copy the dance style of their partner and are therefore dancing in the style of the opposite sex. This unintentional mimicry proves extremely

amusing to locals. Other tourists enthusiastically attempt to dance but make mistakes which violate gendered dance norms, particularly female norms. For instance, a female tourist may be wearing a short summer dress. As she moves her hips frenetically she reveals her underwear and her thighs, an act which would be immodest for local women.

Local male dancers (and some female dancers) also perform a sexualised style of dancing that they would rarely do in local contexts. A dancer may pick three or four partners instead of one or may choose as a partner an elderly tourist. A dancer may move in an overtly sexual manner, particularly by dancing very close to their tourist partner. If this happened to a local female, she would dance away from the man or turn her back to him. As the tourists do not know how to escape this compromising position, they often stay rooted uncomfortably to the spot.

While the couples are dancing, the M.C. sings what is called a *patautau*<sup>35</sup> – a rhyming call that is timed to drum beats. He sings in Maori: “Look at the *papa'a* girl who can’t shake her hips” or if a tourist is Japanese he may add, “Mitsubishi, Honda, Kawasaki” into the call. The interactions that occur during the *ura piani* are one example of how contemporary Rarotongans negotiate tourism and tourists. As I suggested in the previous chapter, performing for, and with, visitors has been a tool for moderating cross-cultural interactions. The M.C and members of a dance group play with ideas about Polynesians as sexually attractive and available; dancers are ‘offered’ to tourists and are then made unobtainable. The *ura piani*, I contend, dances the ambivalence many Rarotongans have towards tourism; it expresses the sentiment, ‘we want (need) you and we don’t want you’ that pervades the ideas and practices of many who are involved in the tourist industry. The *ura piani* is also a vehicle for locals to negotiate interchanges with tourists on their own terms. Dancing with tourists demonstrates the ease and grace of local dancers and highlights tourists’ ineptitude.

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<sup>35</sup> *Patautau* is performed during the fast beat of a dance song in all dance contexts. There are many versions of the standard *patautau*, the most common lines are: “Rarotongan girl you think you are a really good dancer”, “Rarotongan girl only costs a dollar”, and more absurdist lines such as “drive your motor car to Penrhyn island”. These are ‘called’ in Maori.

Watch DVD: *Ura Piani: Tourists and Dance*

### *The Impact of Tourism on Dance*

The most common criticism levelled at professional dance groups is that they commodify dance. This needs some explanation. The Rarotongan economy is cash based; money is needed to purchase commodities and pay electricity and phone bills. Alongside commodity capitalism, ideal notions of community and accompanying forms of exchange and transaction operate. So while Rarotongans may desire personal wealth, economic acquisitiveness takes place within a social system which promotes generosity and community orientation.

Given this tension, what dance groups *do* with money is a cause for concern. On numerous occasions, older people, especially those who had belonged to youth groups, unequivocally told me that “dance is about raising funds”. During the youth group era dance was used as a vehicle for fundraising money and goods for community projects, such as building materials for village public buildings or money for village sports teams to travel to regional competitions. Professional dance groups, so critics suggest, do not put back into the community but, rather, use the money they earn through tourism for personal gain. A man in his 50s put it this way:

Dancing is not just for dancing. People dance for their village, school, church and island. I hope you learn something from M---’s dance group. I don’t know whether they have anything in their heads *they are making the money for themselves*. [My emphasis]

The point this man was making was that dance should not be an individual enterprise but a communal endeavour enabling the maintenance of particular groups. Making money for yourself is viewed as the antithesis of community life. Interestingly, community dance groups are also subject to the same criticism. A middle-aged resident of the village of Tupapa compared her past involvement in the Tupapa Maraerenga youth group with the contemporary situation:

We built the Tupapa Hall in 1974 so we spent the years before raising funds for the hall. We had a dance group to do that. After that we went on a trip to Hawai’i. You could say that



Tupapa youth group is still going. Now they are fundraising to go to Australia. But basically they go overseas now. They don't help out in the village. Village committees have declined I guess.

Here community dance groups, like professional dance groups, are seen to be only concerned with "making money for themselves" rather than contributing to village projects.

Dancing, like many other practices, should ideally facilitate communal life. Members of the older generation use contemporary dance practices as a way of commenting on what they perceive to be a decline in community values and as increased penetration of capitalistic individualism. Indeed, many dance groups have been formed as get rich quick schemes. A number of dancers in Orama had belonged to other groups and expected to be paid, or were promised a trip overseas, only to be told at the end of the year that all their money had "gone".<sup>36</sup> Other stories involve tales of group leaders disappearing overseas with the group's money. One family is believed to have dance group money invested all over the world. In 1997, to avoid disputes about money, Orama established an Executive Committee and made their financial records available to all members. Members of the Committee came from senior members of the group and included: a President/Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, Girls Leader, Boys Leader, Band Leader, Costume Person, Kids Leader and Attendance Keeper.

As well as attempting financial transparency, the leaders of Orama were keen to counter other claims about money. They did this primarily by stressing their involvement in community projects, for instance assisting in village fundraising, participation in community events such as annual dance competitions and their role in educating young people about their 'culture'. They also explicitly argued that running a dance group is not

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<sup>36</sup> Money or other goods that are "stolen" are not spoken about as such but as "lost", "missing" or "gone". Also, there is no word in Maori for borrow or lend. Stories of "missing money" abound in the Cooks Islands. People approach stories of missing money with resignation – "what can we do?". Certainly, if money is taken by family there is nothing that can be done. I know one case of a man who was entrusted with \$1000 by someone in New Zealand to give to their relatives in the Cook Islands. He failed to deliver it. These people now avoid talking to each other, yet there is no talk of pressing charges or of confronting the person. Many families have stories about other family members taking earnings from the family store or village funds and yet these people continue to live with and be involved in family and community activities.



about making money. When I asked Orama co-leader, Georgina (Gina) Keenan-Williams, if making money was an important incentive for joining a dance group she structured her response to my question around notions of pleasure:

You can't say we are doing it for the money, well not really, we are still doing it because we love it. When those drums go somehow you start getting all jittery and your blood starts pounding and somehow something within you is like, 'Yeah'! You just want to dance, you come alive.

So it isn't so much for the money. It is necessary obviously to survive but running a group is time consuming and some people wouldn't be doing it unless they get something out of it, a bit of money or whatever. Because they have so many options now – sports, jobs, and second jobs – you have to have a second job now to earn a decent living.

From my experience of working with Orama it would be difficult to say that money was the main reason for running or participating in a dance group. The time spent on organisation and preparation seemed to far outweigh financial reward. From 1996 to 1998 there were about 30-40 members in Orama (this included dancers and band members). In 1997, Orama performed two hotel shows a week for which they received \$400 a show. Other paid performances included government shows (these were usually for visiting government ministers) and tourist weddings and tourist boat shows. Additional sales were made from the Orama CD and video. Wages were paid at the end of the year as a "Christmas Bonus". Adult wages ranged from \$190 - \$600 for adult members and children received between \$30 and \$100. Wages were scaled according to attendance at shows and practice; absentees were fined \$2 for missing practice and \$5 for missing a show or working bee. Although making money may not be the primary reason for belonging to a dance group, the "Christmas Bonus" was certainly useful. For many members the bonus was the only way they could afford to buy presents and food for their family at this time.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> About half of Orama members had full-time paid employment and part-time jobs. A number worked in tourist related industries; at Air New Zealand or Air Rarotonga, retail shops, or at the airport as security, baggage handlers or refuellers. Others were employed in banks and offshore banking firms. A few members were primary school teachers. A number of these augmented their income by working part-time at hotels, bars, selling *ei* at the airport or as tour guides. Many of the male members undertook itinerant manual labour, particularly in the building industry. Some of them were also members of string bands that played at bars and nightclubs around the island. Older women and women with children also undertook itinerant work that could be done at home, such as babysitting or *ei* making for official ceremonies.

For many members of Orama, belonging to the group was an important aspect of their week. Dancing was a hobby they enjoyed immensely. One female dancer, who was born in Manihiki and spent most of her teenage years there, expressed it this way:

My auntie used to send us the Dancer of the Year tapes from Rarotonga. That was when Gina was competing. I would copy the movements and choreography for the dance competitions on Manihiki. And I would win of course! I used to think Gina was so beautiful, and look! Here I am dancing in her group; sometimes I can't believe it.

For this girl, dancing was an avenue for achieving some prestige and status. She said that when she first came to Rarotonga “I was nothing, I didn't have a job, no-one knew me like at home”. Through dancing “people know me”, she explained. On Rarotonga dancers, particularly dancers who have won dance and beauty competitions, are ‘known’ by the general public; they have a minor celebrity status like talented rugby or netball players, and members of the Rarotongan elite (which includes ‘pure’ Rarotongans especially those who have chiefly titles, and those of the new elite such as government ministers or successful business operators, some of whom are outer islanders). Like other ‘known’ people, dancers’ public comportment is commented upon and surveyed in terms of their group membership. One young dancer who had been seen kissing a boy at a nightclub was chastised by an older woman in the group: “You are with the Orama, you have a reputation to maintain. I didn't want people looking and saying, ‘Oh look, Orama girls are sluts’”.

For some young dancers, dancing in tourist contexts extends the possibility of fame beyond the island and the Pacific region. Belonging to a dance group offers the opportunity to travel to, and dance in, other places in the world. The amount some young people had travelled would often surprise me. For example, a fifteen year old girl who had won the Intermediate Dancer of the Year competition had been on tourist promotional trips to New Zealand (twice), Samoa, New York, Berlin and Dubai in the previous two years. For this girl, fame sometimes assumed fantastic proportions: “Say if I was in Europe. Well, this person could come up to me and say ‘hey I have a picture of you in my home’. They would know me even though *they* lived so far away”.

Young men were not as forthcoming about their reasons for joining Orama as young women: “It is something to do”, and “it stops me drinking all the time”, were the typically nonchalant responses. These comments however point to another, more mundane, reason why people join dance groups. As well as a vehicle for achieving status, being known and enabling travel, dance groups also enable a form of liberation from the “poverty of ordinary life” (Lewis 1992: 2). For many young dancers performing was simply something to do.

In a similar way, belonging to Orama was also a form of liberation for older women in the group. Many of these women stayed at home during the day, performing housework and looking after their grandchildren. Making costumes and playing and singing in Orama was a hobby which gave them the opportunity to socialise with other women. Many of the older women would stay after the show and drink together or go together to a nightclub and listen to a band. Unlike other women in their age group, who may be criticised for going out drinking (“they should be at home with their children” or “she is drinking away her husband’s money”) their nightlife was a legitimate extension of their dance group participation.

A number of these women encouraged their husbands to participate in the dance group as musicians and singers. The older men that joined Orama were often drummers, guitarists and singers who were recognised as accomplished musicians in their own right. A number belonged to string bands (bands who play popular island music, see Chapter Six) that perform at tourists venues and local nightclubs and bars. Some of the male drummers were hired to play at government functions, major rugby matches, and to tour on promotional events with the Cook Islands Tourist Authority.

The point of this section has been to outline debates about the commodification of Cook Islands dance. The older generation of dancers view contemporary dance practice as a vehicle for personal acquisition in contrast to their dance practice which facilitated community projects. I have attempted to complicate this distinction by outlining the multiple reasons people I spoke to gave for joining dance groups. While money may

certainly be an incentive for dancing, performers also see dancing as providing *other* opportunities and experiences, such as, travel, prestige, a form of socialising and just something to do. I now turn to a second criticism of tourism which involves notions of ‘tradition’ and cultural ‘prostitution’.

### *Prostitution or Cultural Revival?*

The second major criticism of dance groups relates to the impact that performing in tourist contexts has on dance practice. Again, opposing views about tourism’s impact are broadly generational. Dance leaders tend to view tourism as having some positive benefits. Gina Keenan-Williams, for instance, argues that:

Tourism gives us an excuse to dance. It actually helps to maintain and to revive art forms. Now we dance more often. In the past it was only once or twice a year.

Dancing for tourists and around the hotels has definitely lifted the standards over the years. There is a certain professionalism; costumes have to be nice, slim figures and nice shape, long hair for the girls to a certain extent and the movements have become more refined.

For Gina and many of her generation, tourism is seen to reinvigorate dance practice. It means there is both more dancing and dancing of a higher, more refined, standard. Her comments also show an awareness of what appeals to tourists; pretty girls and costumes that look ‘traditional’. Unlike many other dance groups who dye grass skirts bright colours and use plastic or raffia, Gina uses natural fibres and colours when she designs costumes. Rather than invalidating contemporary dance practice, performing for tourists is considered to bolster aspects of ‘traditional’ expressive culture (Murray 2000: 353).

In contrast, the older generation of dancers, choreographers and composers tend to see the younger generation as having changed dance practice in negative ways. Many believe tourism is implicated in this change. Comments to this effect revolve around the change to dance forms; the way they are ‘sold’ to appeal to tourists. The following statement made by an older dancer and youth group organiser is typical. She often calls contemporary dancing “cabaret style”:

What the young people are doing now is very exciting. But they are more or less dancing to entice the tourists by the colours and the vigorous movement of the hips and the arms. It is a lot of posing.

The use of the word “entice” is no doubt intentional – a common criticism of younger dancers’ costumes and dance styles is that they are being too sexual and as a result non-Cook Islands. The increasing sexualisation of Cook Islands dance is seen to be a result of tourism and also as an outcome of the influence of Tahiti, the Cook Islands Pacific neighbour:

Dancing is becoming Tahitian style. Everything is fast and flashy, the costumes and all the lighting at shows. Our dancing is supposed to be graceful.

Tahitian style, according to these critics, tends to centre on the sensuality of female dancers that have the ‘right look’: tall, thin and light skinned. This overt sensuality is also attributed to the influence of Tahitian trends in dancing and costuming. The female dancers perform slow gyrating hip movements, then frenetically fast movements in skimpy *pareu* (island print material worn like a sarong) and large elaborate head-dresses. These Tahitian styles are contrasted with the simplicity and gracefulness of Cook Islands dancing and costuming.

The point I want to stress here is that ‘the West’ (embodied in the *papa’a* tourist) is not the only significant ‘other’ in Cook Islanders’ evaluation of their dance practice. Tahitian dance is often used as a counterpoint to Cook Islands dance. Both of their dance and music forms have many similarities and the two groups have a history of artistic exchange which continues today (Moulin 1996; Lawrence 1993). For instance, Cook Islands music is very popular in Tahiti, and vice versa. Many Cook Islands dancers and choreographers have worked in Tahiti and many Cook Islanders have relatives there, travelling to Tahiti for family and community events.<sup>38</sup> Precisely because of these similarities and connections, Cook Islanders are keen to point out key differences between the Tahitian and Cook Islands performing arts.

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<sup>38</sup> According to Rarotongans I knew who had Tahitian relatives, Tahitians tend to think the Cook Islands is “boring”; it is considered too small and lacking in activities. Tahitians visit the Cook Islands primarily for dental work and to buy large quantities of tinned corned beef. Both are considerably cheaper in the Cooks Islands than in Tahiti.

The above comments also suggest that the process of defining what constitutes Cook Islands dancing centres on aspects of female dance practice. During the course of fieldwork I asked numerous people about if and how dancing has changed over the years. Almost without fail, people mentioned two things: “the grass skirt should not be below the belly button” and “hip movement should be side to side not round and round”. These two responses seemed at first frustratingly trivial but the frequency with which I heard them made me think otherwise. What is most interesting about the belly button and hip comments is that they refer exclusively to the dance styles and costuming of women. Male dance styles and costumes are very rarely commented upon.

To use Yuval-Davies’ (1997: 23) term, I suggest that women act as “symbolic border guards” in debates about dance and dance practice in the Cook Islands. As such, female dance practice is subject to moral surveillance that male practice is not. In the process of defining the borders of femininity, Tahitian-ness is constructed as posing a threat to virtuous Cook Islands femininity<sup>39</sup>. Most young dancers wear their grass skirt or *pareu* in a way that reveals their navel. Older people consider that costumes are being tied lower and lower, following the “Tahitian style”, to appear more attractive. Proponents of the lower tie argue that it improves technical virtuosity. Dance skirts that are tied on the hips emphasise hip sways more than costumes that are tied at the waist. Side to side hip movements are said to characterise Cook Islands female dance style but young women are seen to be experimenting with other hip movements, particularly Tahitian ‘circular hips’. Attempts have been made to ban these moves from dance competitions because they are considered inauthentic. This inauthenticity is often expressed in moral terms – circular hips are seen as “dirty” and too sexual, unlike the graceful poise of the side to side sway of Cook Islands hips.

The circular hip movements are often called “the washing machine” style of dance. The reader will recall earlier in this chapter that during the *ura piani* performed at hotel

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<sup>39</sup> Not only do Cook Islanders tend to compare themselves to Tahiti in music and dance but also in more general issues of style. Many Cook Islands women think Tahitian women have more earning capacity and hence wear nicer clothes, eat better food, and are generally more beautiful.

shows female tourists are told by the M.C. to “make like a washing machine”. Comments such as this, I believe, align Tahiti and *papa’a* together. By “making like a washing machine” tourists are aligned with Tahiti as immoral others who serve to threaten the practice of Cook Islands dance and ‘culture’ more generally.

In the final section of this chapter I return to an examination of how Tahiti and *papa’a* are figured in ideas about tradition and modernity. Notions about Tahiti and *papa’a* circulate as signs of modernity that are both admired and derided in debates around what constitutes Cook Islands-ness. The following section explores another important influence on Cook Islands dancing and ‘culture’, namely the profound influence and pervasiveness of religious ideology.

## **Dance and Religion**

Religious belief and practice pervades many aspects of everyday life in the Cook Islands. Regardless of denomination, or an individual’s degree of religious belief or involvement, each community event begins and ends with a prayer. Even small activities, such as a staff meeting at the Ministry of Cultural Development, a dance practice or a fishing trip begin and end with prayer. The majority of Cook Islanders (around 70 per cent) belong to the Cook Islands Christian Church. Around 20 per cent of the population belongs to Seventh Day Adventist and Catholic congregations. Evangelical churches are becoming increasingly popular, particularly Assembly of God and the Apostolic Revival Fellowship. There are also Baha’i, and the Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) followers, particularly on Rarotonga. Religious denominations have different views on dance and music, so I will deal with the major churches in turn. The one area which all denominations have in common (but to varying degrees) is the belief that ‘traditions’ are expressions of a ‘heathen’ past. This view lends itself to gendered moral valuations of contemporary dance practice.

### ***The Cook Islands Christian Church***

The most established religion in the islands is the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC - the descendant of LMS Protestantism). Most prominent Cook Islanders belong to this

denomination including prime ministers, government ministers and chiefs. On Rarotonga, the three districts are divided into *ekalesia* (congregations) and these are further divided along village and sub-village lines for the performance of church activities such as singing and preparing food. The CICC is the only religious denomination that does not allow instruments or dancing inside churches. However, many members of the CICC are active composers, choreographers, musicians and dancers outside of church events and the two activities – religious practice and engagement in ‘traditional’ cultural forms – are not generally considered problematic.

However, the belief that Cook Islanders were *etene* (savages or heathens) before the missionaries arrived is widespread among members of the CICC congregations. What is less clear is how people interpret the category *etene*. October 26 is Gospel Day, a day which celebrates the arrival of the LMS on Aitutaki. Each year *Nuku* (gathering) celebrations are held to commemorate the arrival of Christianity. During the time I was on Rarotonga, *Nuku* consisted of each village performing a story from the Bible through song, dance and drama. Until the 1980s, *Nuku* celebrations on Rarotonga also involved a re-enactment of the LMS arrival to their village or island. I was told that this component of *Nuku* was banned by the CICC because it was thought people seemed to be enjoying dressing up and acting as *etene* far too much (see Figure 16).

The CICC holds *uapou* (Bible meetings, religious gatherings) at church halls on a regular basis. A central feature of these meetings is inter-district or inter-village singing ‘competitions’. The style of singing performed is called *imene tuki* (literally, song with beat) which, according to ethnomusicologists, is a distinctly Cook Islands version of hymn singing (Moyle 1991: 59). The songs are composed by Cook Islanders and usually have Maori lyrics based on religious themes. *Imene Tuki* features distinctive four part harmonies. The female soprano melody involves high pitched ‘screaming’ (young Cook Islanders refer to it as Cook Islands heavy metal) and a male bass line of rhythmic grunting.



expresses religious awe is permissible, such as swaying and clapping and ‘Western’ church music and instruments are allowed. People that belong to these evangelical groups tend to see ‘traditional’ expressive forms as a synecdoche of the moral turpitude of pre-Christian life. Not dancing, then, is pivotal to these practitioners’ identity as pious and also, just as importantly, their identity as *modern* (as opposed to ‘pagan’ or ‘traditional’) Cook Islanders.

However, a number of employees of the Ministry of Cultural Development belonged to one of the above denominations. The Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Cultural Development belonged to the Apostolic Church. She mentioned the dilemma she felt about her oppositional positions one day:

I try not to impose my spiritual belief on people because you should keep your spiritual life separate. I mean, culture is okay up to a point. It’s okay as long as they don’t practice paganism. You know the Bible says that tradition is wrong.

On another occasion, the pastor of the Secretary’s Apostolic church unveiled a sculpture on the Ministry grounds. It was an abstract piece with “ancestral images” created by a visiting New Zealand Maori male artist and sponsored by the New Zealand High Commission. The pastor dealt with his difficulties with the work by overt denial of the sculpture’s link to traditional practices – “this is not an idol, I am sorry to use that word”. The artist, who was present, responded in his speech by saying, “just referring to what the pastor said, this is not an idol but part of a philosophy that our ancestors taught us”. In this exchange the pastor was keen to distance himself from ‘traditional’ practices that he considered idolatrous and therefore in conflict with his Christian beliefs. The artist assisted the pastor by presenting a view of ‘tradition’ as heritage and ancestry rather than a continuing cultural practice.

The separation of religious practice from work in the performing arts is common. In Orama dance group, a few younger female dancers belonged to the AOG church. One commented to me, “I know dancing is a sin, but ...”. Many older performers and choreographers abandon the arts when they become more heavily involved in religious groups but will compose songs, or provide advice on request from younger performers.

They are also involved in church composition and singing. Others combine involvement in religious groups and the performing arts. For instance, during the period of my fieldwork the Minister of Education and Culture was a Seventh Day Adventist. In both formal interviews and informal meetings, Minister Puna would bring up his religious belief and how this impacted on his beliefs about 'culture'. On one occasion he said:

You know I am a Seventh Day Adventist Cook Islander. I want to make that clear and make sure you understand my position. I would never join a dance group, but if the situation called for me to dance, if I was challenged I would dance. My brother on the other hand, you know he is the principal of Aitutaki secondary school [and an SDA], would never dance. He really sees it as heathen.

### *The National Day of Prayer*

During the Constitution Celebration on Rarotonga, a Thanksgiving and National Day of Prayer service is held. In 1997, this event was a combined prayer service with representatives from all the major churches. The event was held at the National Auditorium. The audience was made up of church groups, and various other groups; a number of Rarotongan dance groups came, a Tahitian dance group who were guest artists at the festival of dance also attended. The dancers in Orama were encouraged to attend to pray for a good performance in the festival of dance.

The majority of groups wore uniforms. Orama members were told to wear their uniform which was brown and white screen printed material – a shirt for men and a long dress for women. The Tahitian group also had their uniform; the men had green *pareu* shirts, black pants and red *ei*, and the women wore matching green vests, white shirts, black skirts and *rito*<sup>40</sup> hats. The majority of church groups had uniforms of island print. Aside from presenting a colourful display, uniforms are extremely common as a form of group identification. Any group that is attending an intra-island special event, or travelling to other islands and overseas, wear matching uniforms.

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<sup>40</sup> *Rito* objects are made from the heart leaves of coconut palms. They are primarily produced by people in the northern groups.

As the audience entered the auditorium in their various groups, the Nikao village CICC brass band played up-beat songs like *Pack Up Your Troubles* and *When the Saints Come Marching In*. In response, members of the audience ‘danced’ their way in. Some of the Nikao band got up and waved their hands in time to their music, a reaction, it seemed, to the entering audience’s ‘dancing’. Other seated members of the audience stood up, ‘danced’ and waved back. I was seated next to an older woman from Orama and I commented on the fact that the band seemed to be having so much fun. She responded, “That is because they are all *Sakus*”. *Saku*, in some contexts, is a derogatory name for people from Tongareva. The Nikao *ekalesia* (church group) is predominantly made up of Tongarevans residing either permanently or temporarily in Rarotonga. In this case, the *Saku* comment was not made disparagingly, but almost wistfully. She continued, “If the outer islands were here the whole place would be up and dancing by now”.<sup>41</sup>

In 1997, only a few groups performed on stage after the prayer service. Avarua CICC youth group did a play about a young woman alcoholic who found salvation and joined the church. The LDS and Apostolic choirs sang, both in their evangelistic ‘praise the Lord’ style. Nikao *ekalesia* performed last and were the hit of the show. As part of their performance, they sang an *imene tuki*. The lyrics praised their *oro metua*’s (minister’s) dancing style, and expressed the wish that they could all dance as well as he did. This seemed a highly unusual subject, given the CICC rules about church dancing. To add to my surprise, the Nikao *oro metua* came out from behind the group on stage and began to dance to the song, in a style I had never seen at church but many times at discos or at dance performances. The audience shrieked with laughter, and women from his congregation joined him at the top of the stage and danced with him in what seemed to be non-church style. The audience’s response confirmed the novelty of the performance. They laughed and clapped; some stood up and danced along.

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<sup>41</sup> When outer islands have attended the Constitution Celebrations, their delegations at this prayer service perform in an *imene tuki* and choir competition. These two categories were added to, and judged alongside, the dance genres performed at the festival of dance.

This event was certainly idiosyncratic. I have never seen other church ministers dancing in this way. As I stated earlier, at religious gatherings outside the church, singers will use hand movements but lower body movement (hips and legs) are frowned upon. Afterwards, I asked the woman I was sitting with about the difference between church and other styles of dancing:

It's not what you do but what you don't do. You don't do rude or explicit dancing – round hips or dance down or do fast hips. Basically you don't show off. People do swing their hips and boys do the legs *but it's different because it's part of a Christian event*. When the Nikao *oro metua* is dancing, his legs are going and his arms going everywhere, it is like he is poking his tongue at that dancing. [My emphasis]

In other words, the *oro metua's* dancing is perceived as a satirisation of disco dancing. He was able to 'get away' with dancing, a form which transgresses church rules, because of his exaggerated portrayal of 'local' dance styles.

In this examination of religious beliefs about dancing I have demonstrated the pervasiveness of religious ideology and practice in the Cook Islands. I have shown how some people find no contradiction in combining religious beliefs and engagement in 'traditional' practices. Others view the intersection of 'tradition' and religion as a site of tension and personal discord. This section has also illustrated that the line between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional', dancing and non-dancing is malleable and contested. The following section looks at a related debate in the performing arts concerning the codification of 'traditional' expressive forms.

### **'Modern' Dance**

Unlike every other year, the 1997 Constitution Celebrations on Rarotonga did not have any outer islands' delegations. Because of the dire economic situation, the government could not justify assisting groups to attend. Celebrations were to be held on each island. Actually very few islands participated. The mayor of Tongareva told me subsequently: "What was there to celebrate? This government has sold us away". On Rarotonga, the celebrations were held in an attenuated form. The main event, the festival of dance, was a (supposedly) non-competitive dance performance featuring four Rarotongan dance

groups: Karioi, Tupapa Maraerenga, Orama and Te Manava Nui. Each group performed “items” in the four dance genres: *ura pa’u*, *kaparima*, *ute* and *pe’e*.

Before each item the M.C. read program notes, provided by the dance group, explaining the theme of their performance. About Karioi’s drum dance he said:

This segment challenges all of us with the following questions:  
Our special and unique culture, is it alive and kicking or is it dying and being overwhelmed by cultural commercialisation?  
Are we enjoying it, the way it was before the advent of modernisation?  
Is the financial reward the ultimate weapon to destroy our forefathers, our parents, ours and our children’s, great grand children’s and many many generations to come’s heritage?  
We hope not!

While there was no evidence of these questions in the choreography itself, the text voices some of the central concerns present in discussions of Cook Islands ‘culture’. These include: the impact of commercialisation and commodification of ‘culture’; cultural loss and ownership; and the importance of recovering ‘traditional’ modes of cultural expression. The text also raises the question of ‘enjoyment’ and the centrality of this sentiment to dance practice.

In this final section, I first look at debates around notions of tradition and cultural ownership. I examine the way Cook Islands ‘tradition’ has been defined post-independence. I then examine debates about cultural ‘borrowing’ and innovation. This is called “copycatting” in local parlance. Finally, I tackle the role of dance in producing and effecting pleasurable sentiments. Loss of enjoyment, as a result of commercialisation, is one of the most prominent criticisms of contemporary Cook Islands dance practice.

### ***Dance and Tradition***

Much academic scholarship in the region has suggested that with the formation of independent nation-states throughout much of the Pacific there has been a revival of ‘tradition’ and an increasing importance placed on forms understood to be precolonial (Linnekin 1990: 152; Lindstrom and White 1995; Jolly and Thomas 1992; Linnekin and Poyer 1990; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982). Artistic production and the refashioning of

cultural institutions are often singled out as areas around which these questions of identity and tradition are articulated (Lockwood 1993: 9; Devalle 1989: 65). The 'arts', it is argued, are used by people of the Pacific as a strategic resource to display their traditions and historical past, in order to consolidate their political and cultural identities in the present. The performing arts, in particular, are one vehicle through which Pacific Islanders assert and negotiate who they are at the local, national, regional and global levels (Stevenson 1992: 117; Nero 1992).

On Rarotonga, what is seen to constitute tradition is the subject of heated debate, primarily between contemporary dance group leaders and members of the older generation who organised dance and youth groups. Both younger and older performers claim that their dance forms were more traditional and, as such, more authentically Cook Islands. The older generation view contemporary dance practice and costuming variously as posing, overtly sexual and lacking in substance. Younger dancers and choreographers see the older generation as influenced by missionary and colonial ideas about dance. In contrast, the younger generation see themselves as attempting to recreate traditions from the precolonial period. Gina Keenan-Williams, for instance, often read publications about the Cook Islands precolonial past, particularly Te Ariki Taraare's work in *the Journal of the Polynesian Society* and Te Rangi Hiroa's books. In an interview Gina discussed the influence of missionaries on the dance practice of the older generation:

Back then they danced in regimental lines, the men wore black trousers and the women were all covered in white *mu'umu'u*. We have more creative freedom and we use natural fibres and shells for costumes, not plastic or fake flowers. What they [older people] say is traditional, isn't really. Like how they say the outer islanders are more traditional, but they have dance actions like a salute, which isn't at all traditional. It comes from visiting ships and the saluting they learnt from them.

In this exposition, the older generation is presented as influenced by missionaries who controlled and confined local movement and adornment. The younger generation has the freedom to return to genuinely traditional dance styles and costuming. Other choreographers have also called dancing in lines, "Boys Brigade" style. It is viewed as an extension of physical drills introduced as part of the curriculum in colonial schools. As well as restricting movement, missionaries covered bodies with 'Western' style clothes



Figure 16: Etene 'woman' at the 2000 Constitution Celebrations float parade

In *imene tuki* style of singing, the *tuki* (the beat performed by bass vocals) replicates percussive rhythms performed in other non-religious contexts. When these songs are performed at *uapou*, the performers move; they sway, raise their arms and move them in ways that accentuate the *tuki* rhythm. This style of movement was occasionally defined as “Christian dancing” but in general it is not considered dancing as such. Its difference to ‘traditional’ dancing is considered to be the fact that the lower half of the body does not move. Further, it is similar to the types of ‘dancing’ done by *ariki* and government ministers and other local dignitaries. This style is characterised by restraint. There were, however, striking formal similarities between local dancing, church non-dancing and high-status dancing which suggests to me continuities between the movement forms.

### ***Other Religious Denominations***

Evangelical religious groups (Assembly of God and Apostolic) and Seventh Day Adventists in the Cook Islands prohibit any form of ‘traditional’ expression such as island dancing or island music and ‘pagan’ cosmological beliefs. Movement which

(see figure 17). The older generation also covered the ‘traditional’ body with ‘fake’ costumes and material. Many contemporary dance groups on Rarotonga purge ‘outside’ influences from their costumes; raffia grass skirts are replaced with *kiri’au* (dried lemon hibiscus fibre) ones and plastic flowers with fresh, bright un-naturally coloured costumes have been superseded by *pareu* in natural looking colours and designs. Clearly ‘non-traditional’ dance movements, such as the sailors’ salute and martial arts movements (discussed below), have also been removed from choreography and replaced with movements that refer to ‘traditional’ matters – fishing, weaving, coconut husking as so on. “The fashion”, as Gina astutely remarked, “is now ethnic”.



**Figure 17: Missionary Style Dancing**

On the outer islands this ‘traditionalisation’ has not occurred to the same extent. Costumes are often made of synthetic materials (they last longer and require less effort than natural ones). Non-traditional looking movements are still popular on the outer islands I visited. A number of dance groups on Aitutaki perform pan-Pacific dance



numbers such as Fijian and Tahitian songs, New Zealand Maori *haka* and Samoan dances.

At the same time, outer islanders are continually represented as far more traditional and in possession of more ‘culture’ than Rarotongan residents. On one trip to Aitutaki with a young Rarotongan woman, we went to a number of dance shows. I felt these were not as polished as those performed on Rarotonga. She saw it differently: “You compare Aitutakian dancing to groups on Raro. One is phoney. The others [that is, the Aitutakians] are really enjoying themselves”. This led to a general comment about the lack of ‘culture’ in general on Rarotonga, which included statements such as “there is no culture on Raro, it is just a fruit salad”. This referred to the fact that many younger composers and choreographers draw upon outer island drum beats and music and that there is no distinctly Rarotongan dance style. She added:

On the outer islands they still speak their language. The girls know how to weave mats and baskets. I can’t do that. All we know how to do is put on the lipstick.

Once again it is sexualised femininity – in this case signified by wearing lipstick – that is used in contrast to proper and ‘traditional’ Cook Islands femininity. It is not only Rarotongans that perceive a dearth of traditions on Rarotonga. Some individuals I met in the outer islands felt that Rarotongans were taking advantage of their ‘culture’. By using their dance and music styles, and by selling goods, such as shell necklaces, baskets and hats that are produced on the outer islands, Rarotongans are often portrayed as making huge profits from the hard work of outer islanders.

It is the concern about ridding Cook Islands dance of missionary influences that preoccupies many younger Rarotongan composers and choreographers. They see their dance practice as more traditional and an attempt to return to its “original spirit”, as Maki Karati, a younger composer and dancer told me:

What we are doing is actually more close to that original spirit. I think a lot of our dancing has changed. Our traditions have been changed by the missionaries. I really feel that a lot of old ones [dances] are not right. In these modern times the dancing has changed because we are ready to dance again. I don’t believe that ladies never danced the sexy way in the old days. They *were* dancing like that in the 1940s.

Here ‘sexy’ dancing is located as traditional and importantly, a continuing dance style that missionaries unsuccessfully tried to prohibit. Therefore, Maki is suggesting, the sexy dancing done is not foreign, or a consequence of tourism, but as a return to the “original spirit”; a dance practice free from the moral restrictions imposed throughout the islands’ missionary and colonial history.

### *Something Different*

Culture is a movement not a condition; a voyage not a harbour – Geoffrey Henry at 1992 Pacific Arts Festival. (G. Henry 1993: 6)

The importance placed on the maintenance of cultural heritage in the Pacific has led to what Karen Stevenson (1992) has identified as the trend towards institutionalisation of culture – the creation of arts schools, museums and festivals which aim to classify and standardise aspects of ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ national culture. In the Cook Islands the older generation of performers consists primarily of Rarotongans that were involved in the performing arts during Albert Henry’s time in office. Many were heavily involved with Albert Henry’s attempts to promote ‘traditions’ in the service of Cook Islands nationalism. In the late 1990s, members of the older generation suggest the younger generation should be preserving the dances revived during the 1960s because these are ‘traditional’. As outlined above, the members of the younger generation question the authenticity of these dances.

The younger generation of performers also argue that they should be able to “refine” and rework older numbers to produce what is commonly called “something different”. For their part, the older generation criticise these innovations and stress the need to maintain ‘traditional’ forms that they rediscovered. One issue that particularly interests me here is that songs and dances of the older generation were also “something different” when they were first performed but are now considered traditional. As I noted in the previous chapter, CINAT was formed in 1969 by Henry’s government with Beth Dean and Victor Carell as creative consultants. The older generation view CINAT as the pinnacle of performing arts achievement. The group’s focus on ‘traditional’ performance is used as a

benchmark against which contemporary dance practice is evaluated. While CINAT certainly played an important role in promoting Cook Islands 'traditions', the group also introduced many new performance styles and techniques. Ota Joseph, who was the male dance leader from the group's inception, said to me that Dean and Carell:

Came at the right time. Beth taught us how to *make theatre*. She would say to me 'what is this action?'. I would tell her that it is a bird and she would say 'do it like this' [he adopted a more balletic pose] and she would say: 'It would look better to the audience like that'. [My emphasis]

Making theatre involved learning to perform *to* an audience, especially, learning what 'works' for nonlocal audiences. It also involved strenuous rehearsal to ensure technical precision. This was one aspect many dancers found unusual. Mamia once said to me:

Before CINAT you would just practice for a couple of hours then perform. But Beth would make us do warm-up exercises and weeks and weeks of practice.

Another female dancer reiterated this point:

We did warm-up exercises. But we danced not with the heart. Beth did teach us discipline and I am grateful for that.

These comments suggest a profound ambivalence about the impact CINAT had on dance practice. Many of those involved in CINAT are extremely proud of the group and its achievements. Under Dean's instructions performers learnt theatricality, discipline and professionalism which enabled them to travel and perform at places like the Sydney Opera House. But it is also seen as removing "the heart" from dancing, a point I will return to in the final section of this chapter.

The Constitution Celebrations festival of dance is another example of the institutionalisation of the performing arts. The official aim of the festival of dance is national celebration and unity. It also foregrounds issues of tradition and authenticity, innovation and creativity. In the festival of dance guidelines for allotment of points, competitors are judged on presentation, technique, quality, taste, music and costume. The criteria for the category 'taste' are as follows:

In the choices of items; for choreographic direction, individuality or imagination; for authenticity in ancient chants or song or Cook Islands dance; for creative new productions

based in ancient Polynesian themes or else those derived from present day events of contemporary daily life or novelty of idea. Décor, costumes and properties should blend with themes and action. The aesthetic principle of simplicity is important in order to retain the highest standard possible. Natural fibres and dyes are important whenever traditional Pacific material is presented. (in Lawrence 1993: 196)

Throughout the festival's history, these guidelines have been open to considerable interpretation. Festival organiser's have tended to stress authenticity and ancient-ness while participants have leaned towards novelty and the portrayal of contemporary events.

The performance of topical events has occurred from the inception of the festival of dance. In 1975 Avarua school performed a drum dance about the arrival of the first DC8 aeroplane and the Knighthood of the Premier by Queen Elizabeth. The 1983 delegation from Mangaia performed an *ute* about the island's new pineapple processing factory. A year later, Mangaia's action song was based around the Pacific Mini Games to be held the following year. Some of their dancers wore tracksuits and presented gold, silver and bronze medals to the Prime Minister. The dancing portrayed events like boxing, discus, shot put and basketball (*CIN* 3/8/84). At the twenty-first Constitution Celebrations in 1986, Atiu Island wore costumes bearing the number 21 and danced to a song composed around the twenty-first celebrations. In the same year Tupapa village presented an *ute* which the newspaper reported as having a "very localised setting, logs for seats, rugby socks and an electric guitar for accompaniment proved [to be] a rather humorous opening *ute* in the second half of the show" (*CIN* 11/8/86). In 1987 the Aitutaki team presented a drum dance that was about the impact of Cyclone Sally that year.

Novelty has also been central to festival of dance performances. In 1968 the Takamoa Theological College performed a drum dance with costumes of red, white and blue. Small union jacks decorated their backs and they waved flags. In 1969 Pukapuka performed dressed as sailors. In 1978, Aitutaki did a drum dance based around Kung Fu; the male dancers wore white shirts, baggy pants and bandanas around their heads. In the mid 1980s Michael Jackson style 'moon walking' was added to male choreography (he also has a drumbeat composed in his honour). Disco moves were also introduced. The newspaper reported at the 1991 festival: "disco Rakahanga style which won great applause from the audience" (*CIN* 7/8/91).

The participants and audience members obvious enjoyment of both novelty and the portrayal of contemporary events contrasts with the importance placed on 'tradition' by agents of legitimation, such as government ministers, festival organisers, the national newspaper and other interested parties. One newspaper report went to great lengths to interpret innovation as tradition, stating that Mangaia "put considerable effort into being *traditional in a different way* with their *kiri'au* costumes dyed crimson, green, blue and red" (CIN 3/8/84, my emphasis). During her time on Rarotonga, Beth Dean was a judge at the festival of dance (1968, 1969-1970). She wrote a number of newspaper articles deploring the use of non-traditional instruments, costumes and dance themes. She implored people to hold on to their "traditions" and "stand up for the classics" (CIN 11/8/69). She warned Cook Islanders against the evils of "night-club numbers" and the "infiltration" of nudity (Dean 1969: 8) and "abhorred" the use of the kerosene drum and guitars as instruments.

In his closing speech for the 1973 Constitution Celebrations, Sir Albert Henry reiterated some of Dean's concerns:

Although the standard of entertainment shown on this stage the last few nights showed a high quality, I was very disappointed to see that some of them were *bastardisation by modernisation*. From our first celebration, it was a rule, that if you use kerosene tin to play the drum you lose points. If you play a guitar in a Cook Islands action song you lose points. If you have *papa'a kakau* [European clothes] in the legend you lose points. These are rules by which we must retain the true identity of our culture, of our dances and our songs. (CIA 76/09, my emphasis)

These ideas about authenticity and tradition as that which contains no trace of 'Western' influence were, and still are, considered alien to some performers, particularly those from the outer islands. For instance, in 1976, a feature about a group from Tongareva appeared in the *Cook Islands News* entitled "What a Pity":

What a pity that the dance group which presented the floor show at the Rarotongan Hotel last Saturday night did so in Western clothes. The men wore neckties with white shirts and long black trousers while the women wore ... long bright green dresses. Their grass skirts (men and women) were worn over that ... When tourists come to the islands they want to see how islanders 'do their own thing' and that means costumes and all ... But perhaps it should be borne in mind especially by visitors to Rarotonga that the group that performed did wear a similar dress throughout our own Constitution Celebrations and that the group belongs to a very religious community. And apparently this is the first year they have come to the bright

lights of Rarotonga and they were reported to be surprised at the sight of other groups with women performers wearing grass skirts below the navel. (CIN 15/8/76)

The paradox here is obvious – for this group of performers from Tongareva ‘doing their own thing’ was performing in ‘Western’ clothes. This ‘tradition’ began during missionary times and had been continued for over 100 years. When I visited Tongareva, young girls on the island told me they still perform with T-shirts covering their upper body because they get teased by the audience if they do not. I also spoke to some members who belonged to the 1976 dance group and they spoke about the dilemma performing at the Constitution Celebrations presented for them:

They said to us no *tini* [kerosene drum] but we said ‘it’s our tradition’. It was very hard because they told us we had to wear no tops. We said ‘We can’t. We are dancing with our sisters’. The mothers wouldn’t let their daughters go on stage and we said ‘we don’t care if we lose points for that’. It’s *tapu*. I wouldn’t like to see my sister dressed like that. We respect brother and sister here.

Since the late 1980s participants, particularly those from the outer islands, rarely stage overtly novel (that is, ‘Western’) performances. Value is still placed on novelty of ideas but innovation tends to take place under the rubric of ‘tradition’. At the 1997 festival of dance, Tupapa Maraerenga’s drum dance incorporated aspects of Cook Islands waltzing style. When I asked the choreographer Merle Puaikura about her inspiration, she replied: “it was something different, like the waltzing the oldies do in the outer islands”.

Despite the appreciation novel performances draw from the audience, they do not ‘win’ the dance competition. Leaders of Constitution Celebration dance groups I spoke to on the outer islands said their strategy became to “copy” the performances of the group that won the competition the previous year. Many of them stated that as it seemed Rarotongan or southern group islands always won the competition, they copied their styles. On Rarotonga the situation is the inverse. The outer islands are seen to have the best dances and music (Rarotonga has ‘lost’ theirs) and Rarotongan dance groups are often criticised for “copycatting” northern group styles, especially their drum beats and songs.

## *Copycatting*

During 1997 on Rarotonga, northern group drum beats and the use of the kerosene tin drum (a distinctly northern group instrument) was popular with all the dance groups on the island. Dance group leaders cited their northern group 'heritage' to legitimate the use of northern group influences, while some older generation critics said they were just copying the north because there was no 'culture' on Rarotonga (at the same time they argued that the kerosene drum was not traditional). Cultural producers on Rarotonga were also criticised for "copycatting" Tahitian performance styles. In contrast, on the outer islands I visited, copycatting was not a particularly important issue among performers. Their concern seemed to be with Rarotongans copying their songs and drumbeats "without asking". At the same time, outer islanders appeared to actively copy new dance trends. On Tongareva I was told by a female dance leader that for their Christmas dance competition they get "whoever is new on the island" to choreograph items because these are people who have different and new ideas which are considered important to a dance number's success. I watched a video recording of this competition and one group's action song featured costumes with head-dresses that were large and elaborate, and to me appeared far more inspired by Tahitian than Cook Islands costuming styles. When I asked the choreographer she said: "Yes! Aren't they beautiful. I was in Tahiti a few years ago, and I got the tourist books, so we just looked at them and copied the costumes".

I argue that ideas about copycatting or borrowing are linked to concerns about cultural ownership and control. As this chapter as a whole has argued, debate about the performing arts on Rarotonga is underwritten by a discourse of cultural loss or decline as a result of bastardisation and commercialisation. Some younger choreographers and composers attempted to present more dynamic views of tradition and culture such as: "Cook Islands dance has to develop. Its got to change all the time like any living culture". At the same time they were well aware of the dominant discourse was about cultural lack and inauthenticity.

I understand the dominance of ideas about loss on Rarotonga (and the relative lack of concern on other islands) as symptomatic of anxiety about the island's intra-national and inter-national identity. As a number of scholars of globalisation and nationalism argue, global unification and the reassertion of cultural difference are interrelated trends. As national boundaries become insignificant – economically, culturally and politically – there is a tendency to reassert national autonomy and distinctiveness around ethnic, religious and cultural identities (Clifford 1997, 1994; Appadurai 1996; Friedman 1994; Foster 1991).

Following Jane Moulin's (1996: 138) analysis of cultural borrowing in the Pacific, I argue the Cook Islands has a long history of cultural borrowing and exchange with islands of the Pacific. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Society and Cook Islands in particular have strong links of affiliation which have been accompanied by a history of artistic exchange. Cook Islands missionaries also exported dances and music to Papua New Guinea. Some of the Cook Islands most popular composers are copying Tahitian tunes and creating Maori lyrics for them. But borrowing, at least on Rarotonga, has now become an issue of "copycatting" as issues of cultural ownership and codification of 'traditions' have become central. For example the origin of a number of dance genres and styles, drum beats and chants is being contested with both the Society and the Cook Islands claiming ownership (Lawrence 1992, 1993). One of the Ministry of Cultural Development's projects is to develop copyright law and licensing with international collecting agencies (SPACEM, a French Polynesian agency is used by individual artists) for all forms of cultural production to ensure ownership and performance royalties.

Concern about "copycatting" also included the influence of *papa'a* lifestyle, particularly as a consequence of tourism. Toward the end of my fieldwork I was asked to give a talk titled 'Change and Continuity in Cook Islands Dance' to students at the Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre.<sup>42</sup> The week before a talk was given by Dorice Reid, a

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<sup>42</sup> The Centre was established in 1994 with funding from UNESCO and the World Tourism Organisation. Courses offered cover a range of service industry areas such as: administration, housekeeping, food and beverage services, food production and business management.



*mata'iapo* who was the president of the *Koutu Nui* (the council of sub-chiefs). Her topic was the 'Impact of Tourism on Culture' and I went to see what would be presented. Dorice began her talk by discussing her long involvement with the tourist industry. She runs a guesthouse call the Little Polynesian and she had been an airhostess on Air New Zealand and has been involved in marketing at the Tourist Authority. She then posed a series of questions to the students (many of who were dressed in American 'home-boy' style; baggy shorts, dyed hair, pierced noses and ears). "What is tourism to you?". The students replied unequivocally, "Money". She then asked, "What is culture?". The students responses to this question was more varied: "our heritage", "stuff our ancestors did", "traditions". Dorice then summarised her views on culture and tourism:

Culture is what makes us unique, our generosity, welcoming nature, warm hosts, vibrating dance and pulsating music. Tourism is like an animal, the more you feed it the bigger it gets, and we need to know when to say 'no, that is far enough', you don't let them come all the way in.

While Dorice had some positive things to say about tourism, primarily that it provided islanders with an income, she was particularly negative about the impact of tourism on culture. The thrust of her argument was that young people were "copycatting the *papa'a* way" and as a result "bastardising our language",<sup>43</sup> fighting over land ownership (to build tourist hotels) and making people more individualistic and selfish with money.

At my talk the next week I attempted to challenge essentialised notions of culture by talking about more dynamic ideas of cultural change, incorporation and tradition. I singled out what I saw as distinctively 'Cook Islands' about expressive practices that many young people were involved in, such as playing in bands and dancing at nightclubs (see Chapter Six). I used these practices as examples of how global cultural forms can be localised. The talk was not received particularly enthusiastically. In contrast to the pacey and spirited response to Dorice's talk, the atmosphere was decidedly lack-lustre. While this contrast may be partly attributable to Dorice's superior oratory skills and her local

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<sup>43</sup> There is a strenuous debate in newspapers and amongst the general public about the decline in Maori Language. Most Rarotongans are to some degree bi-lingual. Children under 20 years of age tend to speak English most of the time and it is the language of instruction at secondary school. The situation on the outer islands is different, most schools teach in the local language and young people speak less English.

status, the experience also served to reiterate to me that ideas about cultural decline and loss dominated even young people's conceptions.

## Dancing from the Heart

Dancing is an expression of the heart. If you do a love song you do it with the feeling of the love. You never dance from outside of your heart. But if you dance from your heart, deep down, that is what dancing is. It is your feeling, your heart's feeling, your emotions, everything. It is the whole of your body – Gina Keenan-Williams

I began this chapter with a discussion of the *ura piani*, an interactive dance genre which involves participation from audience members. It is a dance genre performed at tourist venues (as outlined) and also at shows performed for other visitors (such as the many NGO conferences held among Pacific nations involving visiting government officials from within the region).<sup>44</sup> I argued that the *ura piani* is one way of negotiating interactions with tourists and other 'outsiders'. It is a form which in part asserts local expertise and tourist incompetence. To conclude, I examine how the *ura piani* style of dancing – based on interaction performers and audience – is utilised in other dance contexts in the Cook Islands. Following Schieffelin's (1976) insights into ceremonial exchange among the Kaluli, I argue that Cook Islands dancing fundamentally centres around reciprocal exchange of deeply felt and moving sentiments.

One of the most common critiques of contemporary dance practice is that it has lost its "spirit". This spirit is expressed with the heart. It has to do with the display of emotional sincerity. Throughout this chapter, dancers have referred to the way dancing makes them

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<sup>44</sup> Visitors, especially those in the Cook Islands on official business, must dance if summoned by performers. Not dancing is akin to refusing the host's goodwill. This was illustrated most clearly at the South Pacific Forum held on Rarotonga in 1997. At a dinner and show (performed by Orama) put on for Pacific and Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers, dancers were instructed by the leaders before hand to get VIPs from the audience to dance the *ura piani*. The young female dancer who asked Australia's Prime Minister, John Howard, to dance was curtly refused, despite her continual pleading (she found this extremely embarrassing). The headlines of the newspaper the next day – "Howard Won't Dance" – referred to his rudeness at the dance show, and also his unwillingness to sign an agreement amongst Pacific nations to cut down the production of Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

feel. Earlier I quoted Gina Keenan-Williams saying that she did not dance for money but because hearing drums made her “jittery” and “come alive”. The reader will recall comparisons being made between outer islands performers who “really enjoy themselves” and Rarotongan dancers who are “phoney” and “posers”. The point of dancing it would seem is to elicit some kind of emotional response, usually *mataora*, enjoyment, pleasure – in the performer and, as I will suggest in this final section, in the audience.

As discussed in the tourism and dance section of this chapter, the “spirit” of dancing is located not only in the heart of performers, but in the relationship between dancing and community life, emotions, exchange and economics. To quote Ota Joseph:

Groups today are commercialised by which I mean they are getting paid. You can't compare that to the outer islands, and youth groups, who still retain the spirit.

For older performers, the “spirit” of dancing has become commodified; sold to outsiders for individual gain. The distinction being made in the above comment is not about money *per se* but about the ways in which money is utilised. Like professional dance groups today, youth and outer islands groups *did* dance for money but the money (ideally at least) is used to contribute to community projects: building village halls, purchasing rugby players uniforms and so on.

One further related issue in debates about tourism and dancing has to do with the impact different audiences have on the affective experience of performing. Mamia explained this in terms of her ambivalence of performing for tourists:

For tourists you are just dancing for them. They don't understand what you are dancing about, what you are singing about and they don't appreciate. They just watch and when you finish they clap. Whereas when you are dancing for a national event, you are dancing for your own people. Well this is only my opinion – you feel pride in dancing for people who really know and feel how you are feeling. Saying that, they [locals] criticise you as much as they can. They are the best critics around Kalissa, you can never satisfy them. There are some *papa'a* who appreciate it, well the hand movements. And of course they are the ones that pay us.

Mamia's commentary suggest the “feeling” dancing can produce is determined by the audience. Tourists do not understand what one feels when dancing, their lack of

embodied knowledge of Cook Islands dance means they can not “feel how you are feeling”. In contrast, for local audiences watching a dance performance is a deeply engaged activity. They are active interpreters, critics and as I will shortly illustrate, respondents (Brenneis 1991: 365).

Mamia’s observations reveal what I consider to be a crucial component of Cook Islands dancing. Performing for tourists and “making theatre” suspends the interactive audience-performer relationship present in other local dance contexts. Unlike theatre or art which is built on a division between performers/artists and audience/spectators, Cook Islands dance performances aim at a co-construction of performance by ‘audience’ and ‘performers’. The participatory role of audiences has been noted by a number of performance scholars (Schechner 1976, 1985, 2002; Turner 1986). In many cultural contexts performances that elicit participation are considered successful (Schieffelin 1976, 1985; Geertz 1973). In the Cook Islands context, audience participation is a sign that performers have danced from the heart and have produced *tamataora*; they have produced pleasure, enjoyment and created happiness.

### *The Performing Audience*

Every ‘local’ performance event I attended in the Cook Islands featured a style of applause that was markedly different from applause at ‘Western’ performances. Instead of waiting for a song or dance to end before clapping or shouting out, Cook Islands audience applaud throughout a performance. They usually start as soon as a performer begins, then cheering, whistling, laughing and clapping loudly after the first verse of a song and throughout the chorus. This acts like a conversational exchange – the audience clap, the dancer smiles; the audience cheers, the dancer laughs.

This interactive applause is enhanced by another form of audience participation. I call this the ‘performing audience’. At many events involving music and dance, members of the audience stand up and dance along with performers, or move up to performers, and dance facing them for a while. At rugby matches trys are celebrated by drummers (who are hired by teams) playing a short series of beats. Supporters get up out of their seats

and dance. At *uapou*, when *imene tuki* are sung, people from opposing teams will get up and dance – sometimes in appreciation, sometimes to ‘tease’ the performing team. This affective contrast, between dancing in appreciation and dancing to tease, depends on the context of the performance and the individual dancing. The clearest explanation I received of ‘teasing’ dancing was when I visited Tongareva. I was watching the video of their Christmas celebrations which consisted of a dance competition between two villages. While one village danced the other variously jeered, applauded and danced with them. At various stages throughout the performance, a number of older women, and some younger men from the audience, walked up to the performers and danced ‘jokingly’. This consisted of the older women dancing like men, and making suggestive movements, and the boys dancing like girls. A man watching the video with me explained: “we do that to make them angry, and to make them laugh, so they don’t do their actions properly. Then we will win the competition”.

One other way in which ‘audiences’ actively participate in dance performances is by giving money to performers as they dance. At many dance events I attended (except tourist shows), a large plastic bowl was placed centre top stage. As the dancers perform, members of the audience danced up to the stage, and danced facing the performers waving notes in their extended hands. They then place their money in the bowl and return to their seats. This occurred most often when it was known that the group was fundraising but it also occurred when professional groups were performing in local contexts. At the 1997 festival of dance, throughout the evening, Orama received \$380 from the contribution bowl. As well as small currency, there was one 100 dollar note and two 50 dollar notes.

In these contexts, the point of dancing (as either ‘performer’ or ‘audience’) is to elicit emotional states, primarily *mataora*, but in competitive contexts anger and annoyance through teasing. Dances of appreciation are also expressed through money or more precisely ‘dancing money’ as the two are inseparable. I understand this inseparability, following Niko Besnier, as an “economy of affect” (1995: 99) the reciprocal exchange of

affect and economic resources.<sup>45</sup> In the Cook Islands this is an economy which involves music, dancing and commodities. This economy is often expressed as a spontaneous emotional occurrence. As one person said to me, “if the song gets in your heart, you can’t hide your money”.



Figure 18: Dancing Money

The desire to dance – and the destination of the money – however expresses pre-existing relationships between people and groups. Most often those who dance money are relatives of performers or hold a prominent position in the performers’ village. At the 1997 primary schools festival of dance for instance, some parents danced up on to the stage and tucked money directly into their child’s costume. The Queens’ Representative’s wife danced and gave money when the school her great granddaughter attended performed. Chiefs of the village in which a school is located also danced and donated money.

Conversational dancing, exemplified in the instances outlined above, creates one form of Cook Islands sociality. This style of dancing mediates and elicits forms of social interchange. It forms an interactive economy which generates emotions and gifts, such as money, that are traced onto, and serve to regenerate pre-existing lines of connection and affiliations – familial relationships, status relationships and identification with particular villages and islands. That tourists do not respond to, or feel, the economy of dance in the same ways as locals do is, I believe, the most serious critique Cook Islanders (of both the old and new generations) make about the relationship between dance and tourism.

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<sup>45</sup> I discuss Besnier’s work and the inseparability of dancing and money in more detail in Chapter Seven.

However this critique does not necessarily entail that dancing in tourist contexts is a “form without sentiment” (Tilley 1997: 81). Performers see tourist dancing as providing *other* opportunities and experiences: such as money, travel, prestige and simply something to do.

In this chapter I have aimed to portray the significance of dance on Rarotonga and the debates surrounding its practice. The contemporary dance scene and the ambivalent relationship between the tourist industry and cultural production have been my starting point. While tourism is central to the Rarotongan performing arts, debates about the industry inflect local concerns about gender relationships, national identity, religious beliefs and ideas about local community.

This chapter has examined the way contemporary dance practice is caught up in a dialogue about appropriate forms of Cook Islands-ness. I have argued that dancing and the discussion surrounding it engages in debate about the meanings of Cook Islands modernity which is fundamentally shaped by ideas about the Cook Islands past. I illustrated the dimensions of these debates in a number of contexts. First, I looked at the way in which the tourist industry is seen to impact upon dance practice on Rarotonga. Second, I demonstrated the ways in which assessments of tourism are linked to wider concerns about cultural homogenisation, Westernisation and commodification. Third, I examined the way Christian ideas about propriety and moral stature shape contestations about Cook Islands ‘tradition’ and the impact of ‘outside’ cultural forms. Finally, I melded the sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory, threads of discussions about dance with a consideration of the “structure of feeling” (Appadurai 1996: 181) that globalisation and its impacts produces in Cook Islanders.

Throughout the chapter I argued that: “the differential values and meanings attached to modernity” (Elliston 1997: 481) are transversed by generational differences. As cultural producers from older and younger generations both assert the authenticity of their expressive cultural practices, notions of modernity and tradition become a zone of intense contestation (Appadurai 1991: 22; Murray 2000: 353). These inter-generational

debates are also highly gendered. Femininity, and female dance practice, is a potent conduit for the construction of discourses about cultural authenticity and legitimacy.

Over the course of the next four chapters, I explore in more detail the gendered nature of dance practices of members of the younger generation to extend my analysis of the ways femininity is employed as a vehicle for expressing ideas about Cook Islands traditions and Cook Islands modernity. I also examine further dimensions of the interactive sociality produced and displayed in Cook Islands dancing.



## Chapter 4: Dancing Femininity

You know how Mary won Miss Cook Islands? Well she is very special to us, very special to the Cook Islands. To me, she is what a woman should be.

Mary is different from you and me. But she isn't *akava'ine* [above herself] you know. She is in all the advertising, in bikini and that, but if you see her at the beach she wears shorts. She doesn't drink, she hasn't even had sex, well, I have never seen her with someone, or heard about anything.

Both these quotes refer to a young woman Mary, (a pseudonym), whom many Rarotongans consider to be a 'role model'. The first comment was made by a middle aged male drummer as we were watching Mary performing a solo at a hotel dance performance. His comments referred, in a slightly prurient way, to her physical beauty and went beyond it to locate her importance to 'us', meaning both the dance group and the Cook Islands as a whole. His comments echo academic arguments about the role of femininity in nationalist discourse as representative of values groups deem to be important (Yuval-Davies 1997; Cohen et al. 1996; Heng and Devan 1992). As well as being physically attractive and an excellent dancer, Mary is seen to embody other ideal aspects of Rarotongan femininity: "she is what a woman should be".

This final point is taken up in more detail in the second comment which was made by a woman who lived in the same village as Mary. While they were not friends, she admired aspects of Mary's behaviour, especially the fact that Mary did not drink and was thought to be a virgin. Mary, this woman suggested, was either extremely clever at hiding her participation in these activities or was unusually virtuous. The woman also commented that Mary went to church, not all the time, but often enough. She was involved in youth activities for her village; she played netball and other sports. According to this woman, the most impressive aspect of Mary's behaviour was her modesty. Even though she was well known for her achievements in dance and beauty competitions, locally and within the region, she did not act *akava'ine* – 'above herself' or 'show off' (literally, behave like a woman). Mary did not openly display her beauty in everyday contexts. She wore shorts

at the beach, as revealing one's thighs is considered unladylike and highly sexual. And she acted with a reserve that is a quintessential feature of ideal Rarotongan femininity.<sup>46</sup>

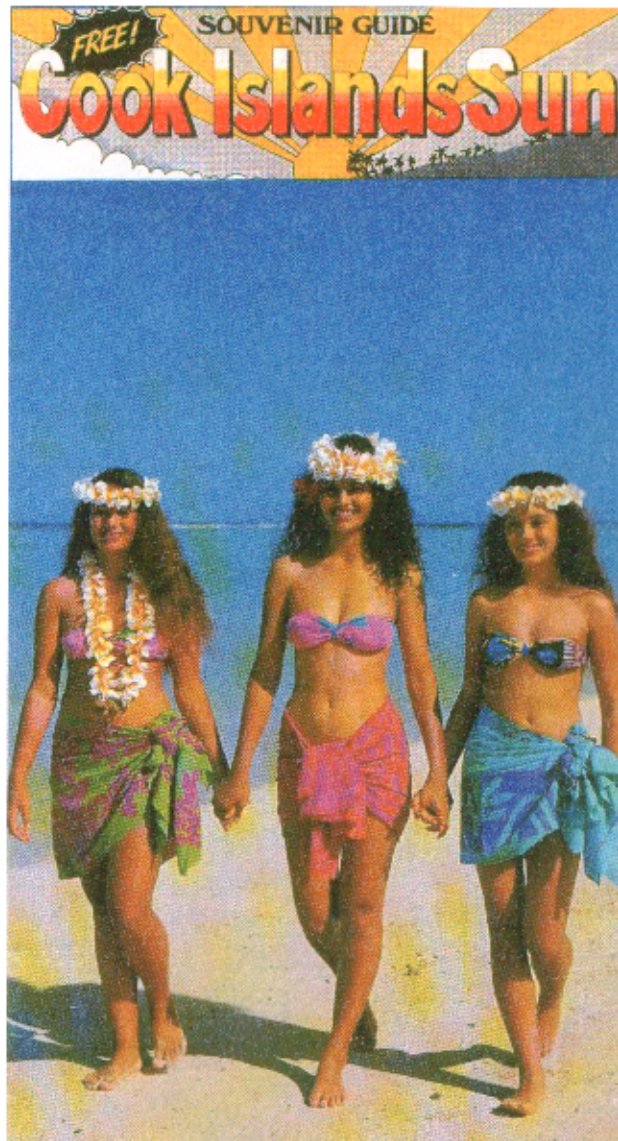


Figure 19: Bikini Tourism

<sup>46</sup> "Yes we have no bikinis: pick up any tourism brochure and it will tell you that bikinis are not acceptable for wearing around in public. But, sometime, check out those great Tourism Cook Islands posters with charming, bike-riding, bikini-wearing, gals. Mixed Messages or what?!" (Coconut Wireless, *Cook Islands News* 10 Aug 1997). In 'Bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans' Teresia Teaiwa (1994) argues that bikini wearing tourists symbolise tourists disregard of Pacific Islanders' experience. The article also presents an intriguing analysis of connections between Bikini atoll and the bikini to demonstrate the colonial and military roots of this bathing suit.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between dancing and notions of femininity on Rarotonga. I focus on the performative presentation of femininity through dance and, particularly, the Miss Cook Islands beauty pageant. Throughout I argue that these competitions display the contradictions inherent in performing femininity. On the one hand, women who join these competitions have the potential to become individual paragons of Rarotongan femininity. At the same time, they are required to maintain their modest, self-effacing characteristics which represent 'group' values – be it the values of a village, island or nation.

My analysis draws on recent discussion of beauty pageants to argue that Miss Cook Islands is a multivalent site in which notions about Cook Islands femininity and its connections to modernity and tradition, local and global are displayed and negotiated (Besnier 2002; Teilhet-Fisk 1996; Cohen et. al. 1996; Cannell 1995; Wilk 1995).<sup>47</sup> Rarotongans' evaluations of femininity on display are, I argue, an assessment of female moral comportment in conjunction with ideas about community, kinship, family and sexuality. This argument is also the unifying argument of the edited collection *Beauty Queens on a Global Stage: Gender, Contests and Power* (Cohen et al. 1996). In the introduction to this collection it is argued that beauty contests: "showcase values, concepts and behaviour that exist at the center of a group's sense of itself and exhibit values of morality, gender and place" (Cohen et al. 1996: 2).

The tensions around performing femininity in the Miss Cook Islands pageant intersect with debates over the meaning of Cook Island-ness in the postcolonial era. In particular, the politics of global cultural flows (Appadurai 1996: 30). In order to illustrate the historical specificity of Miss Cook Islands I first explore, in broad terms, the normative ideals of femininity to show how they are utilised and contested by Cook Islands women. I then place these ideals in historical context in order to examine the complex

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<sup>47</sup> The debates surrounding Miss Cook Islands primarily occur on Rarotonga which is why I discuss Rarotongan femininity in this chapter not Cook Islands femininity. Miss Cook Islands is held on Rarotonga and most contestants reside on Rarotonga (although they may represent an outer island in the competition). Nevertheless, my discussion of Rarotongan femininity has broad applicability to the outer islands.

relationship between 'local' and 'outside' forces in the construction of present day Cook Islands femininity and notions of beauty. I argue that the form public presentation of femininity takes reveals important aspects of the gendered impact of colonial and postcolonial forces. I end with an in-depth analysis of the 1998 Miss Cook Islands to demonstrate how young women are able to negotiate hegemonic norms in order to achieve social status and recognition.

Not all women negotiate the contradictions of femininity as successfully as Mary. Other women are seen to dance to excess, an evaluation which reflects on other aspects of Rarotongan femininity. For example, a woman whose younger sister had joined a dance group complained to me:

She goes to dance practice and she knows how to make the girls look nice and nice the *pareu* [that is, make nice costumes]. But she doesn't even know how to tie her own *pareu*. What do you think Kalissa? She should clean her house and cook her food before she goes dancing.

This young woman was seen as negligent in her housework and food preparation for her household (which consisted of her father, three brothers and her two children). The claim that she "doesn't even know how to tie her own *pareu*" alludes to this lack of domesticity, to matters of personal grooming and to moral comportment. A *pareu* that is not properly tied will fall off, revealing the thigh. This, in turn, indicates immodesty or lack of sexual control.

This link between excessive performance and lack of domesticity is central to negative evaluations of femininity. On another occasion I was at a party where people were taking turns to play the ukulele and guitar. One middle-aged woman was playing and singing particularly well and was constantly thinking of new songs to play throughout the long night. She was, I thought, being extremely entertaining and keeping the party going. However, late in the night her male cousin turned to me and said: "You know our cousin, she can dance and she knows all the songs. That's all she is good for. Have you seen her house? It's a pigsty". Both these women are considered *akava'ine*, a term which, I will argue in the following section, refers to a surplus of individuality at the expense of group life. The importance of communal orientation is often expressed in terms of the moral

implications of domesticity. The following section explores the links made between everyday personal aesthetics and expressive forms such as dance. I show that dance is linked to moral discourses about ideal femininity figured through gendered comportment, demeanour and adornment.<sup>48</sup>

## **Femininity, Beauty and Morality**

Studies of contemporary femininity in Polynesia emphasise the importance of reserve and control in the prescriptions of ideal femininity (Teilhet-Fisk 1996; Mageo 1994; Levy 1973). Bradd Shore argues that the norm for chaste and dignified Samoan femininity, “lies in her control over her body, in what she does *not* do” (Shore 1982: 234-5). In everyday life, her movements are restricted; she is reserved in public, and she does not laugh or talk too much. The Samoan feminine ideal, according to Shore, is expressed through the *taupou* (village ‘princess’ or virgin):

The *taupou* is a kind of summarizing symbol ... a symbol of the grace, control and negative activity seen as appropriate for females ... It is upon the *taupou* that the respectful focus of the village is placed. The *taupou* is also normally one of the important figures held in reserve during dance parties ... she dances the final *taualuga*, her focal and graceful *siva* style of dance. (Shore 1982: 232)

*Siva* danced by high status females and *ali'i* (Samoan *ariki*) is characterised by grace, slowness, and inhibition (Shore 1982: 260). The dance performed by *taupou* is an expressive example and symbol of appropriate femininity defined in terms of control and reserve.

In what follows, I analyse Rarotongan femininity in terms similar to those proposed by Shore. I map out, in general terms, ideal notions of femininity on Rarotonga, particularly the way moral prescriptions are expressed in physical display and movement. There are a number of adjectives used to describe characteristics of ideal femininity. The most common are *tu maru* (gentle, smooth) and *ngakau au* (peaceful-hearted). Both terms are used to indicate physical and emotional grace, poise, reserve and modesty. My analysis

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<sup>48</sup> Following Terence Turner: “It is true of any culture that its overt semiotic forms of bodiliness, from fashion in clothing to ideas of physical health and beauty, afford profound insights into its fundamental categories of subjectivity and personal identity, as well as its system of social values” (Turner 1995: 148).

centres on two words which are used to evaluate and prescribe female action and comportment. These words are *akama* (shy, shame) and *akava'ine* (show off).

### *Akama*

A popular song, which many Rarotongans I knew found humorous, was about a girl who had danced with a boy at a nightclub in town. After she returned home, the boy visited her (*tomo are*, literally breaking into the house). In the morning she heard the roosters crowing and she was *akama* because the boy was still in her bed. She tried to wake him up to get him to go home, but could not.

The song requires some explanation. Many young people are visited by their boyfriend or girlfriend (or someone they have just met) in the night. Usually (but not exclusively) it is men that visit women. On a small island, it makes more sense to visit under the cover of darkness than leaving a nightclub with a member of the opposite sex. The latter course of action would mean people would inevitably know what you were up to and with whom. One of the rules of visiting is that it is necessary that the visitor be gone before daylight. This is out of respect for parents (if the visitee lives in the parental home), but also so neighbours do not know about a person's sexual interactions. In other words, it is an attempt to limit gossip and retain some privacy in personal affairs. To be seen early in the morning in a village or near a house that is not your own is very shameful and causes great speculation. Indeed, a number of people I knew liked to take walks early (between five and six a.m.) on Saturday and Sunday mornings specifically to see who was coming home, and from where they were coming.

This above mentioned song encapsulates the most extreme meaning of shyness or "shame", which is the English term used for *akama*. It is one way both men and women articulate feelings of going against the norm, particularly norms governing sexual propriety, or more precisely being *caught* going against the norm. While men may feel shame about being seen leaving a women's house, their actions are evaluated quite differently from women's. To a certain extent, visiting is expected of men; it is a sign of

their sexual prowess. Women engaging in the same behaviour are subject to far more intense gossip and negative evaluations of their character.

*Akama* also encompasses a number of other states and practices. Ideal femininity is expressed through the notion of being dignified and graceful. This commonly finds expression through a shy and reticent demeanour in public arenas and in cross-sex interaction. In this case *akama* or shame is valued positively, or, more precisely, acting shame is highly valued. Shame controls public interactions between sexes. Both men and women are rarely 'open' during verbal interactions with the opposite sex and women, in particular, are expected to be demure, avoiding eye-contact or interaction which is too direct or too friendly. These rules of public comportment generally only apply to interactions with people one does not 'know' (that is, is not a relation or close friend) or interactions between younger and older people, or people of different status (for instance a young female with a male church minister or female chief).

Many female dancers say they are "shame" to perform alone in dance competitions, but they are comfortable dancing in a group. Organisers of the Dancer of the Year competitions, for instance, said to me that they find it difficult to enlist enough female contestants, particularly in the intermediate and senior sections, because they are shame. Male dancers are also hard to come by, but this is because "they can't be bothered". Organisers of competitions often approach female dancers directly and cajole them into joining. I asked one dancer if she thought women didn't join because they felt shame in losing a dance competition. She replied:

The shame bit comes in when you stand up to do it, not when you lose. If it was a big shame to lose, the same people wouldn't join year after year.

My understanding of shame is that it is a culturally coded reaction to involvement in situations that draw attention to a person's individuality. In a society where communal orientation and community-based action is highly valued, singling yourself out involves a certain amount of frisson (Cannell 1995: 230). Shame is something that you feel when you do something that draws attention to yourself as an individual as opposed to being engaged in group action, or acting as a representative of a group. While this point runs

the risk of essentialising, it is clear that group activity is extremely popular with many Cook Islanders. People dislike being alone; they find travelling and working in large groups a pleasurable experience. A Rarotongan man once commented on the new ‘work for the dole’ (unemployment benefits) scheme that had been introduced in New Zealand (where many Cook Islands live and are unemployed). He said “islanders will love that, put them all together, say working on a road, and they will be happy”. *Tere pati* (the subject of Chapter Seven) always travel in matching uniforms. In fact most groups, including dance groups, sports teams and workplaces (no matter how small) wear uniforms. This fondness for sartorial conformity is, I think, an expression of group unity and identity and acts as a kind of public camouflage.

To be forthright – in effect, shameless – is referred to in a number of ways by Rarotongans. The most common descriptors are *pana’akari* and *panamarama* (crazy and moonstruck).<sup>49</sup> *Pana’akari* and *panamarama* are used to connote abnormal or mentally ill behaviour. They can also mean outgoing and unreserved (which can have both positive and negative connotations). A woman once commented to me that a particular girl was, “*pana’akari*, you know she doesn’t care what people think of her, she does her own thing”. This was seen as a somewhat positive characteristic. On another occasion, a woman used *pana’akari* to describe the same girl and followed it with a comment which approximately translates as “she thinks she is really good”.

Tellingly, when I asked women for the opposite of *pana’akari* they would either say *tu maru* or *ngakau ’au*. Both terms refer to specifically female characteristics and highly valued dispositions; gentle hearted, peaceful, kind or soft. These words were also used to describe dance qualities such as grace and refinement, and the charm and pleasure that emanates from the shining face of a dancing female.

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<sup>49</sup> There are, of course, other words – *tuketuke* (different), and *akaparau* or *ngakau parau* (proud) – which are used in both positive and negative senses. Other words for ‘crazy’ include *auouo* and *neneva*. These can also be used as terms of endearment.



A number of Polynesian scholars have noted the association of the words shame and clean (Shore 1982: 178; Levy 1973: 336). The Rarotongan word for clean (*ma*) would also seem to be related to shame (*akama*, literally to make clean). I have never spoken to anyone who has made the connection between the two words but it is possible to say that people explicitly connect being clean and being proud (and therefore not ashamed). As I have already noted, personal grooming and domesticity are central to normative Rarotongan femininity. Women are expected to keep their house and gardens spotless and both male and female notions of propriety are based around ideas about cleanliness and tidiness. Many people shower twice a day, in the morning and after work. Comments are made about those who do not – it is viewed as “disgusting” not to shower regularly. Status distinctions are described in terms of cleanliness; clean males are considered wealthy and attractive, males that are *repo taro* (dirty taro) are poor, engage in manual labour and are considered unattractive.

Terence Turner (1993: 30), in his analysis of Kayapo bodily adornment, argues that associations are made between cleanliness and sociality. To be dirty, he argues, is considered as actively antisocial. Rarotongans I knew also made similar associations. Recall this chapter’s introductory comments made about women who were considered to dance or perform in excess. One was described in terms of her immodest dress (she could not tie her *pareu*) which reflected on her ability to feed her family or clean her house. The other woman was characterised as unsocialised and animal-like; her house was described as a pigsty. Further, the regime of cleanliness I was subjected to during fieldwork speaks to the links made between cleanliness and sociality. Mama Kan, in particular, insisted I ironed my clothes, combed my hair and wore it in a neat style. This was to make me “look nice” and to ensure I did not bring “shame” on her by appearing poorly or immodestly groomed.

I have tended to interpret many Rarotongan women’s obsession with having spotless houses and gardens, and immaculate grooming as a product of missionaries’ obsession with the “cult of true womanhood” (Grimshaw 1989). As argued in Chapter Two, missionary images of local women were primarily defined in terms of images of

sexuality. Physical appearance and behaviours (especially dancing) expressed the sins of uncontrolled appetite and vanity. The regimens of hygiene, modesty in dress, restraint in decoration and ornamentation, as well as restrictions on bodily movements, were established as public delineations between heathen and Christian realms.



A VILLAGE IN PUKAPUKA, UNDER HEATHENISM

**Figure 20: 'Heathen' Village (from Gill 1876)**

Many older Rarotongan women expressed similar views. Cleanliness was a product of their colonial and missionary past which gave them access to tools of civilised behaviour. These women very much located their domestic practice within a discourse of precolonial heathen slovenliness and missionary cleansing. However there were other, particularly younger women, who did not agree with this line of reasoning. They would say things like “we have always been a clean race”. One woman I knew went as far as saying that cleanliness was a traditional (that is, precolonial) attribute of Rarotongan women:

You know we are very fussy about being clean. People talk about *papa'a* being messy and not clean. Some people say it was the *papa'a* missionaries who taught us but I don't think so. There is a debate about this, whether we were clean before or after missionaries. I read bits of John Williams [the LMS missionary] book. He was the first to come here and he described the houses and the gardens and how clean everything was: no weeds, leaves picked up off the lawns, no dirt in the house.

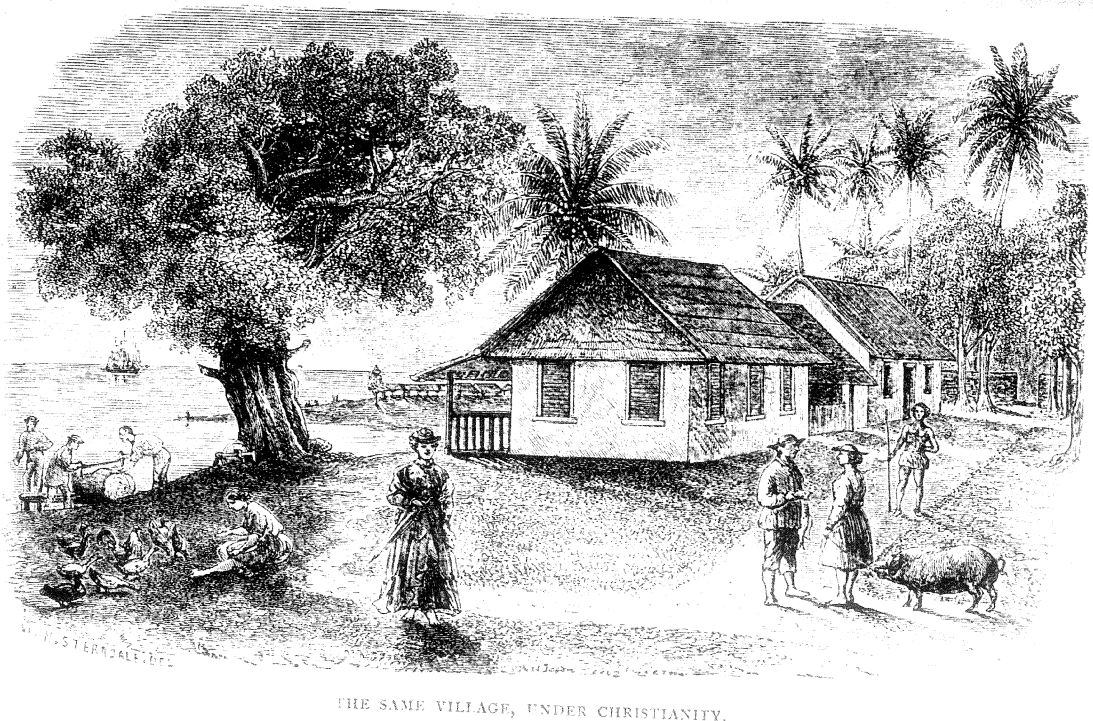


Figure 21: 'Christian' Village (from Gill 1876)

What interests me in this debate concerning domestic cleanliness is not whether Rarotongans were clean before or after missionaries (as notions of cleanliness and dirt are undoubtedly historically specific), but how domestic virtue as a 'tradition' is located back in time, in a precolonial past. That is, while older women viewed domesticity unproblematically as a product of 'proper' Western education, some younger women have questioned this and view this important feminine virtue as a product of 'tradition'. This move is identical to ones made about other aspects of feminine comportment. As I discussed in the previous chapter, contemporary female dance practice (like domesticity) is reclaimed by members of the younger generation as a product of a precolonial past. I suggest these inter-generational contestations about femininity reflect broader political

orientations of postcolonial Cook Islanders have to do with cultural ownership of ‘tradition’ and ultimately of their ‘modern’ future.

This discussion of the politics of domesticity clearly demonstrates the way in which signs of femininity are used to negotiate the morality of ‘traditions’. Signs of appropriate femininity in the Cook Islands are products of historically specific social practices, not expressions of an ahistorical essence. Similarly, ‘tradition’ is a historically specific and negotiated concept. I now turn to a brief examination of the negative image of femininity which is most commonly described by the term *akava’ine*.

### *Akava’ine*

I first became interested in the word *akava’ine* while watching the Miss Tiare (Miss Flower) junior beauty and talent competition in 1996. The person I was sitting with commented that one contestant from an outer island was beautiful, and a good dancer but she was too *akava’ine*. I then spent considerable time asking about and noting the contexts in which this word was used. In general *akava’ine* means someone who has an inflated opinion of herself. It refers to women who single themselves out on purpose and in ways that may disrupt group-ness – be it a dance group, a social gathering or a familial function.

I heard the above mentioned Miss Tiare described as *akava’ine* throughout the pageant. This was explained to me in a number of ways – “she is dancing beyond her years” (that is, dancing in a sexual manner). “She is a show off”; “she thinks she’s hot”. On other occasions, the word was used to describe women who did not heed advice. Mothers, especially, would tell their daughters they were *akava’ine* if they did not perform their housework properly. The word is also used to describe disruptive people. For instance, a woman who deliberately provoked an argument with me was called *akava’ine* by her cousin in the aftermath. *Akava’ine* in this sense meant that she had disrupted an occasion and made the evening unpleasant.

Only occasionally did I hear the male version of the word, *akatane*, used. It was generally used to describe males that did not listen to requests or instructions from older people. For instance, a young male was called *akatane* for not following a dance teacher's choreography, and for his lack of effort and commitment to a dance group as a whole. To some degree, *akatane* is a positive characteristic for males in that it can mean they show leadership qualities. It lacks the purely negative evaluation that the term *akava'ine* has for females.

The differences between the terms *akava'ine* and *akatane* has, in part, to do with the way the ideal roles of females and males are conceptualised in Rarotonga. A female's display of individuality has the potential to put shame on her family, as daughters are seen as representatives of their family's moral image.<sup>50</sup> Young females are expected to restrain personal desires out of respect for their family. This restraint, in part, entails the management of desire and control of female sexuality.

In presenting a brief overview of the central components of normative femininity, I have drawn from academic work on femininity in the Pacific, particularly the work of Bradd Shore, which provides useful concepts for understanding the hegemonic norms surrounding femininity. At the same time, I am struck by a nagging question which arises when thinking about individualised displays of femininity such as Miss Tiare and Miss Cook Islands. The question is: if women are required to be demure and reserved why would they undertake behaviour that singles them out? There would seem to be an inherent contradiction between everyday reserve, emphasising female self-effacement and conformity, and performing on stage alone, which stresses individual expression and particularity. In a related sense if, as Shore and others have argued, ideal femininity is viewed as a symbolic representation of group values – be it a family, village, island or nation – how do *actual* women overcome the prescription of reserve and shyness to adequately perform as representatives of a group?

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<sup>50</sup> As Mageo (1994: 218) notes of Samoan girls, their “deportment reflects so emphatically on their family”

These questions are motivated in part by perspectival differences between my own research and other work on femininity in Polynesia. Shore, for instance, is concerned to map out general social norms that shape Samoan persons whereas my concern is to detail how these norms get played out, that is how they are negotiated by *specific* people in specific events and contexts. In the next two sections I seek to animate this discussion of normative characteristics of Rarotongan femininity in relation to female competitive displays. The following section locates performative displays in a broader social and historical context and the final section examines the dynamics of Miss Cook Islands 1998.

## **Femininity, Competition and Status**

On Rarotonga, there are three major competitions which involve the competitive display of aspects of femininity. These are Miss Tiare, Miss Cook Islands and the Dancer of the Year, all of which display ideal notions of femininity through dance, song, dress and comportment. Each event is held at the National Auditorium and all attract large crowds, passionate debate, and require intense involvement from those participating. Winning individuals go on to represent the nation in events that range from tourist promotion overseas to regional and international beauty pageants. There are other competitive events on Rarotonga, such as talent quests and song quests. These, however, are smaller in scale and do not attract public attention to the degree that the three mentioned above do. Aside from the Dancer of the Year, which features solo male competitors, there were no contests during my fieldwork which involved the individualised display of masculine physicality.<sup>51</sup> Competition between men occurs within group contexts, rugby matches, oratory and chant forms in official contexts, and in ‘unofficial’ fights at parties and nightclubs.

A number of anthropologists have commented upon the popularity of competitive events throughout Cook Islands history (Siikala 1991; Borofsky 1987; Beaglehole 1957; Hiroa 1932a, 1932b, 1944). On Rarotonga, group events often involve competition. Church

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<sup>51</sup> I did hear about bodybuilding competitions being held in the 1980s.

groups compete in formal and informal singing competitions while youth church groups have competitive sports days. Inter-village rugby and netball competitions are held each Saturday. Feasts held for village events are also framed in terms of competition with different groups striving to provide the most food. Some events involve the announcement of a winner and awarding of prizes; many do not. The latter are considered unofficial competitions, in that a winner is not announced but a particular group will consider themselves to have won and tease or jokingly boast about it to others. Winning status is often judged on the amount of money received from a performance or amount of laughter, dancing and applause a group were able to extract from the audience. Competitions are considered to “make people try harder” (*akamaroiroi*), and incite them to display their village, family or themselves in the best light, through physical or aesthetic prowess and the provision of food and money. Individuals speak of “challenging” other individuals and groups, both to perform and to reward performances.

### *Beauty Queens and Real Queens: the impact of Christianity*

The history of present day female dance and beauty competitions is complex. As I noted in Chapter Two, there is evidence to suggest that ‘beauty pageants’, which involved the display of skill at dancing among high status women, were held at *Are Karioi*. In precolonial settings, dancing, physical beauty (represented by fair skin and fatness) and possibly styles of adornment, acted as signs of status and as practices which could enhance prestige. Competitive dance and beauty pageants were also undertaken in the colonial era and post-independence. For example, the first Miss Cook Islands was held in 1960. From at least 1966 “Island Queens” were associated with different youth group organisations and the Constitution Celebrations. In 1966 the *Cook Islands News* reported that on August 1<sup>st</sup> a Grand Carnival Opening dance was held in Avarua, attended by 600 - 700 people: “the various Queen Committees ran food and drink stalls, raffles, spinning wheels and other money raising activities” (*CIN* 2/8/66). Each island, or group of islands, was represented by a queen: Rarotonga’s Queen was the Blue Queen; Aitutaki the Red Queen; Mangaia the Gold Queen; the northern group had the Silver Queen and Green Queen represented Ngaputoru (Atiu, Ma’uke, and Mitiaro).

The major difference between the precolonial ‘pageants’ and colonial pageants are the women who participate in them. While high ranking women and *ariki* may have danced in precolonial times, in colonial settings women with status, *ariki* in particular, did not. Today, chiefly women and men, and those who occupy important positions in religious institutions and in government, are expected to dance with restraint in public life. In what follows, I attribute this shift in the perception of dancing to missionary influence and to the continuing salience of Christian discourse. It is a discourse that impacts upon the dance practices of both men and women, however men have more leeway in this regard. If men do dance in ways inappropriate to their status, it is most likely to be regarded as risqué “clowning” behaviour. For a high status woman, similar behaviour would invariably be seen as moral laxity.

The equation of dance with unladylike behaviour was made to me by many older Rarotongan women. Older women from chiefly families that I interviewed all said that they were never allowed to dance in public because their position as figureheads required them to be dignified and controlled. Karika *ariki* was 78 years old when I spoke to her. She talked about dance as part of a larger missionary regime:

You had to be very careful about drinking before because of the police. So the boys would go and drink their orange beer in the bush or in the plantations. Or, you had to get permission from the doctor if you wanted scotch. And you had to be home at nine at night because that was prayer time and so dad would always know who was missing. So I don’t know how to dance. I never danced. We were never allowed to go to dances but sometimes we would sneak out. Sometimes I would practice in the bush but no, I don’t dance. Now I am *ariki*, the people entertain me.

The last comment made by Karika *ariki* highlights the role contemporary chiefs play in public entertainments. They are not expected to entertain but to *be* entertained. Their movements are limited to controlled actions; their raised arms and hands display their acknowledgement of those that entertain them.

One younger female *ariki* is often criticised for her behaviour in public. She is frequently described as *akava’ine* particularly because she is seen dancing and drinking at bars in town. One woman explained her behaviour thus:



She is supposed to be a role model, yet you see her out drinking just like everyone else. Her problem is, well, we don't have a word for individuality in Maori, but her problem is she shouldn't show her individuality. She is supposed to be a queen.

Young women who are not chiefs but who may one day inherit a chiefly title, or young women from high status families, now do consider dancing as an important accomplishment. As I will outline shortly, displays of femininity, such as those undertaken in the Miss Cook Islands pageant, provide young women with alternative forms of status, recognition and, potentially, the title 'role model'.

### *Femininity and Modernity*

As well as being subject to Christian ideology, dance and ideas of respectable femininity have recent historical salience and appear to be linked to ideas of identity within a nation that is 'embracing modernity' and engaging with the construction of community through events that celebrate local achievements and perform charitable or public services. They extend the values that surround 'ideal women' into the realm of citizenship and community-based actions – especially raising funds for specific communal ends. Respectable femininity – if we take 'Island Queens' as an example – is a representative role: they fundraise for important community projects, and they become emblems for their village, nation and island.

The Miss Cook Islands pageant and 'Island Queens' obviously draw upon 'global' notions of beauty pageants. They also incorporate 'local' ideas about femininity. 'Local' is best conceptualised here as a notion informed by the interplay between competing perspectives – colonial, postcolonial, Western, global and regional factors. Here, I draw upon analyses of the production of locality to make sense of Rarotongans notions of 'local' and 'nonlocal' (Besnier 2002; Iwabuchi 2002; Appadurai 1996; Miller 1995; Friedman 1994). I make two points. First, Rarotongans adopt localisation strategies to integrate and transform global flows. As Morley and Robins argue:

Whilst globalization may be the prevailing force of our times, this does not mean that localism is without significance ... Globalization is, in fact, also associated with new dynamics of *re-localization*. It is about the achievement of a new global-local nexus, about new and intricate relations between global space and local space. (in Iwabuchi 2002: 43, emphasis in original)

The second point is the incorporation of global flows is also a process of “global localization” (Iwabuchi 2002: 47; Besnier 2002). The production of locality is oriented towards regional and global identities at the same time as it articulates ‘local’ identities and agendas. In what follows, I suggest that Rarotongans ideas about locality, like notions of ‘tradition’, are a zone of contestation (Appadurai 1991: 22). In other words, the boundary between local and nonlocal is subject to intense debate. I do this through examining how the identities of “local” and “half caste” are conceptualised by Rarotongans.

One particularly vehement form of assessment among those who participate in dance and beauty competitions is that “half castes” are favoured by judges. “Half caste” is a commonly used term to describe individuals who have some degree of *papa’a* (European) heritage. They usually are seen to embody the status of their colonial forebears. They tend to be relatively wealthier than non “half caste” families; they have more land, economic and cultural capital (both ‘Western’ and ‘local’ as I explain shortly). “Half caste” individuals who are “fair” skinned are also considered more physically attractive than “dark” skinned people.<sup>52</sup> When I first embarked on fieldwork I could not see the gradations of colour that people used to describe and assess an individual’s attractiveness. It was only after I had mentioned to a number of people, “he/she is good looking”, and they responded: “No! He/she is too black”, that I realised small increments of colour had particular evaluative power.

The performing arts is seen to be dominated by “half castes”. A number of people also expressed the view that, “it is the half castes ones that are doing the culture” while “locals” were too busy doing menial work, or they were “shy” because of their lack of (‘Western’) education and poor English speaking skills. What is intriguing about ‘Western’ cultural and economic capital is that it is also seen to *translate* into ‘local’

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<sup>52</sup> Very few Cook Islanders tan themselves in the sun, preferring to go to the beach when the sun is going down. However there are a few Rarotongan women that are ‘reclaiming’ their darker skin colour, and sunbaking to enhance it. One of these women commented to me, as she oiled her body with reef oil, “hey sister, black is beautiful!”.

cultural and economic capital; “half castes” are “doing the culture”, they are involved in the tourist industry and in the performing arts.

There is also some ambivalence about the prominent role “half castes” play in both economics and ‘culture’. One older man who had a key role in the performing arts said to me on numerous occasions, “too many half castes are winning the Dancer of the Year”. He had also made this comment in front of particular dancers whom he considered “half castes”. One woman I knew particularly well was keen to counter criticisms by displaying to him her knowledge of “local” matters, her ability to speak Maori, the interviews she conducted with older people in an attempt to revive ‘traditions’ that they spoke of, and her pivotal role in community events.

The same man that complained about “half castes” would often speak to me about his ambivalent feelings towards Europeans. After telling me for a while about how selfish and greedy *papa’a* were, he said:

But *papa’a* make the islands grow. Look at Penrhyn you have the Woontons, the Rasmussens, on Manihiki the Williams and Ellis families. They make things happen.

This association of *papa’a* with achievement, status and wealth is common. All the families mentioned above have a European ancestor who came to the Cook Islands at least four generations ago (as well as having indigenous Cook Islands ancestry). However, despite the fact that the majority of these families’ ancestors are Cook Islanders, and the European ancestors have been in the Cooks for a long time, they are still considered by other Cook Islands families to be *papa’a* (although not in the same sense used to describe Westerners or tourists). This is primarily because they run successful businesses, and a number of their family members are tertiary educated and/or hold positions in government. They embody, through their wealth and education, the *papa’a* status of their European ancestors.

The distinction between “local” and *papa’a* is also displayed through bodily adornment and styles of consumption. Many young people choose to wear European clothing, speak

primarily English and speak about the desire to go to New Zealand to get the latest “sounds” (music) and fashions.<sup>53</sup> A stylish young woman wears *papa’a* clothes during the day. This is usually a skirt and top or a dress that covered shoulders and knees; she would rarely wear shorts to town. Young men often wear shorts and a T-shirt during the day. Dresses or male shirts made from local *pareu* material are worn by the young only at formal events. However those who work in the tourist industry may be required to wear *pareu* material dresses to work. Regardless of dress style, young women (and sometimes young men) will often wear a single flower behind their ears and on more formal occasions an *ei katu* (flower head wreath).

Unlike many of the older generation of Rarotongans, I do not think that the adoption of *papa’a* styles of dress, the English language, and music necessarily reflects the desire to imitate or access ‘Western’ expressive and material culture, but rather it is a way of shaping status distinction *within* the Rarotongan community. By aligning themselves with signs of prestige and cosmopolitanism they are making statements about their local status. This point has been made in terms of cross-cultural activities other communities engage in. For example Kathy Peiss’ (1996) and Kobena Mercer’s (1990) studies of the use of whitening products and hair straightening techniques by African American women to create specifically black styles. Richard Dyer in his book *White*, makes the point in reverse when discussing white people’s desire to tan. This act he says does not suggest a “desire or readiness to be racially black – a tanned white body is always indubitably just that” (Dyer 1997: 162).

My understanding of the link made between *papa’a* assets and status is that it accurately reflects the historical attribution of economic and cultural power to colonists and ‘Western’ institutions. This examination of the interrelationship of local-global in terms femininity and *papa’a* status is one example of the local and historical specificity of global flows. As Iwabuchi argues:

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<sup>53</sup> Here I mean people in their teens and early twenties. Those in their late twenties and their thirties and those heavily involved in the ‘arts’ adopt more ‘traditional’ dress styles and speak primarily in Maori.

We should not assume that such flows totally replace the old power relations, as the current cultural flows are always already overdetermined by the power relations and geopolitics embedded in the history of imperialism and colonialism. (Iwabuchi 2002: 48)

At the same time, I suggest the *papa'a* status presents old power relations of colonialism in new global ways to articulate notions about local standing and sophistication. Further, the tensions that exist between local and *papa'a* overlap with debates between notions of 'tradition' and 'modern'. The following case study, Miss Cook Islands, illustrates these connections.

My consideration of Miss Cook Islands also considers how this beauty pageant represents ideal notions of propriety, civility and nation. This representative role, I suggest, necessitates that the participants negotiate contradictory moral prescriptions which define Rarotongan femininity. This means a negotiation between the demand to be *akama* and to display and individualise themselves which potentially leads to attributions of *akava'ine*. I pay particular attention to the ways in which individuation is melded with other values that serve to represent group-ness. This case study shows that the role model ideal – a self-effacing, group orientated, modest young woman – is not the only form of femininity that is triumphant in performative contexts.

## Miss Cook Islands 1998

Recent academic writing about cross cultural displays of beauty suggest than beauty is more than a particular set of culturally desirable physical attributes; it is also “an aesthetic performance – a series of gestures and ways of dressing which have to be learned and practised and, not simply physically inherited ” (Cannell 1995: 249; Cohen et al. 1996). Contemporary Rarotongan femininity is performed in everyday dress and comportment, and culminates in aesthetic performances – namely dance. Rarotongan evaluation of the female form is also an evaluation of female moral comportment which is linked to ideas about the local and the global, tradition and modern. In the Miss Cook Islands pageant, beauty encompasses physical attributes and qualities that are seen to represent the community at large: respectability, talent and commitment to Cook Islands “values”.

In 1998, five contestants entered Miss Cook Islands.<sup>54</sup> I knew three of the five contestants well; Liana Scott and Tina Vogel (both from Orama dance troupe), and Marcia Tetevano from the *Cook Islands News*. The other two contestants were Maryanne Upoko from Atiu, and Arikirangi Chantel Nicolas, a Rarotongan. Each contestant represented a sponsor – Miss Tipani (Frangipani) Tours, Miss Air New Zealand, Miss Little Polynesia, Miss Cook Islands News, and Miss Polynesian Duty Free. Aside from *Cook Islands News*, all the other sponsors were tourist related businesses – a tour company, airline, resort, and duty free shop respectively.

The categories of performance in Miss Cook Islands are swimwear, talent and evening wear. Contestants are judged in a number of categories: Miss Photogenic, Miss Congeniality, Miss Personality, Miss Deportment, Miss Tourism Award, Miss Talent Award, Second Runner Up, First Runner Up and finally Miss Cook Islands.

The judges for the 1998 competition were all members of the Rarotongan business community. Madeline Sword, a woman in her 30s, was introduced by the M.C. as the “head of marketing and sales for Telecom Cook Islands, a dancer, netballer and squash player”. The first Miss Cook Islands 1960, June Baudinet, was announced next as “a leading Cook Islands business woman, involved in fashion, tourism and pearls, a renowned sports woman and the President of the tennis association ... her heart and roots are in the Cook Islands”. The final judge was Alan Hironymous, a white New Zealander who was the manager of Westpac bank and president of the Cook Islands branch of Rotary, who “enjoys fishing and golf”.

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<sup>54</sup> Miss Cook Islands began in 1960 and is usually held every two years. In general, Miss Cook Islands contestants have also taken part in other competitions earlier their lives, most commonly dance or song competitions or the junior beauty pageant, Miss Tiare. In 1998 the winner’s prize included entry into the Miss Universe competition, and the first runner up entered Miss South Pacific (this competition began in 1986).

## *The Nerves*

In the weeks before the 1998 Miss Cook Islands the *Cook Islands News* ran feature articles on each of the five contestants. Four out of the five emphasised their reluctance to join the competitions, citing nerves – “the swimwear section really put me off” – and, of course, shyness. Tina Vogel was asked to take part in Miss Cook Islands and initially said no:

“But then I spoke to two powerful ladies. Dorice [Reid, a *mata’iapo*, business woman, see Chapter 3] and Jeanine [Peyroux, Reid’s sister], and I had one on each side of me”, she laughs. “They were feeding me all the good things that would happen, so I decided”. (*CIN* 12/9/98)

Another contestant, Arikirangi Chantel Nicolas, said: “I was challenged by my sister Annie. She joined one year, and she dared me to enter – that’s what made me join” (*CIN* 12/9/98).

Each of the four framed their individual reluctance to join within a discourse of community and family pressure, particularly the obligation to fulfil requests from those older and more powerful. As I suggested earlier in the chapter, “shame” is felt and expressed when individuals engage in activities which put them in public view (see Teilhet-Fisk 1996: 188 for a discussion of this process in Tongan beauty pageants).

The fifth contestant, Marcia Tetevano, framed her response in opposite terms:

I joined Miss Cook Islands as a sort of joke. It was not a serious experience for me, nor did I care about winning. The freebies were a great incentive, as was the personal test, could I get up on stage or not? (*CIN* 12/9/98)

Although attractive, Marcia did not have the “look” or the demeanour of a proper Cook Islands young lady. Her feature interview is worth quoting at length as it contrasts markedly with the interviews of the other contestants:

Forget the shyness – it was the lure of prizes and sponsored hairdressing, clothing, shoes and make-up...that attracted the youngest contestant in the Pageant. “The freebies were really attractive...and I look different. I’m blond, which is fake. I’ve got tattoos, which is really unusual compared to the traditional sort of types that usually enter. I thought ‘why not give it a go and see if somebody different can win’?”

To date, the Miss Cook Islands News contestant has had to come to grips with her special gift for 'wobbling' in high heels. She's also been dubbed the 'free spirit' of the Pageant, and she's well aware that her humour and wit have helped to liven the sometimes daunting practice sessions. (CIN 12/9/98)

Marcia's difference and humour continued through to the night of the pageant. The M.C. for the occasion opened the swimwear category by saying: "Everyone is nervous, worried and shaking backstage. I ask you for your support because all the girls are very shy". This was confirmed as each contestant made their first appearance in bikini, *pareu* and high heels. After walking the catwalk each was asked how they were feeling, to which they responded "okay", "very nervous", "nervous", "not too bad". In contrast, Marcia exclaimed: "I feel like a million dollars, please tell me I look it!". This comment was greeted with warm laughter by the audience.

### *The Event*

Miss Cook Islands 1998, like most large events, was held at the National Auditorium. It began with a prayer, then the M.C. welcomed dignitaries in order: the Queen's Representative and his wife, the Prime Minister and his wife, the Patron of Miss Cook Islands, Pa Te Ariki Upokotini Marie (chief of Takitumu district and head of *Ui Ariki*, council of chiefs on Rarotonga). The pageant takes place primarily in English, however, Maori greetings and phrases are used by participants and the M.C. The songs played throughout the evening are also Maori songs.

As others have suggested, women who partake in beauty pageants are identified as signs of various institutions, family, businesses, community and nation (Stoeltje 1996: 14). The Miss Cook Islands is no different. After the M.C.'s opening remarks the president of the Miss Cook Islands Committee was called upon to make a speech in which she said "the girls will treat you to an evening of dance, song, talent at its best. They will endeavour to portray to you their individual qualities and their Cook Islands spirit".

Throughout the pageant, the contestants were identified and located in a number of ways; as representatives of their sponsor, as girls from particular islands and villages. During the swimwear section, each walked the catwalk to a song which they had chosen. The



contestant from Atiu paraded to an Atiuan song; Marcia, who was born in Aitutaki, had chosen a song about Aitutaki; Tina Vogel, chose a song about her village on Rarotonga. Over the songs, the M.C. introduced each contestant as “Miss Tipani Tours”, “Miss Little Polynesian” and so on. He then read out their age, island of birth, their occupation, hobbies and ambitions. As each contestant joined the M.C. at centre stage, he asked them to say a few words about their sponsor. For four of the contestants this took a similar format, which included a brief history of the institution and the way their sponsor assists the Cook Islands tourist industry. Marcia in contrast said:

When Alex Sword, the editor of the *Cook Islands News* joined the drag Queen competition earlier this year,<sup>55</sup> he didn't get anywhere because he was new to the ball game. Well, when it came to Miss Cook Islands I said 'Al – step aside let a real woman handle this'.

She also thanked her mother, quoted Sir Winston Churchill and, as she took her final turn down the catwalk, she showed the audience her tattooed shoulder and wiggled her bottom provocatively at the Prime Minister.

As part of the evening wear section, the M.C. asked each contestant a question about one of their hobbies, and how it related to an aspect of Cook Islands culture. Tina Vogel was asked:

Let's talk about canoeing. This is a traditional sport that has been revived. Do you think that there are enough Cook Islands women taking part in this traditional sport and how would you encourage other young women to take part in this sport?

Unfortunately, Tina struggled with the question, eventually saying “well, it is different, it is on the water”. Maryanne Upoko was asked about her interest in fishing, and Marcia was asked to explain her hobby, “modern dance”, and how it related to Cook Islands dance, to which she replied: “That's easy. I can answer that in one sentence. Modern dancing is what you do at TJ's [a nightclub which mainly plays 'Western' music] on a Friday night”. She was greeted by a roar of applause.

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<sup>55</sup> I discuss this Drag Queen Competition in the next chapter.

## *The Talent*

The talent section was presented by the M.C., and is considered by audiences, to be the “highlight of the event”. Contestants are judged on their “ability to command and capture the attention of the audience”. Each are given three yards of material to make their costume. Extra embellishments and all props must be made from local materials. The aim of the talent section, it would seem, is to squeeze as much ‘culture’ as possible into the five minutes allotted to each of the contestants.

While Marcia read one of her own poems, the other four contestants sang and/or danced and played musical instruments. Each performance had a theme which extended from the song and choreography to the costume, props and set pieces. Maryanne’s performance, the M.C. said, “was a tribute to her beloved island, Atiu” where the *tavake* (tropic bird) is common. Her costume was decorated with *tavake* feathers, and she danced with a live *tavake*. She also played local instruments – the conch and drum. Rangi’s talent was based around the *kikau* (coconut frond) hat: she wove a hat on stage, and danced to an old favourite, *Pare Ukarau*, a song which was also about hats. Liana danced to a number of songs around the theme of *arapo* (phases of the moon) which is used to guide fishing and planting. In her rendition, the full moon tempted her out to dance on the beach.

Tina Vogel’s performance was, judging from audience response, the most well received in the talent section. What appealed, it would seem, was the range of dance and related skills that she displayed. She walked on to the stage performing her own chant which was about listening to the words of the elders. She then picked up a ukulele and played a small section of the song *Never on a Sunday*, which the audience adored. This was followed by an *ute* (song) which the M.C. had said previously was, “taught to her by her grandmother” and finally she performed a drum dance entitled: “Little Polynesian Love Dance”, which included some distinctly Tahitian moves, again, appreciated by the audience.

### *The Results*

After the evening wear component of the competition, each contestant lined up on stage. The outgoing Miss Cook Islands 1995-1998 (who was living in Tahiti and unable to attend), had recorded her farewell speech, which was played and accompanied by slides from her reign. The prizes for each category were then announced first in the following order. Liana won Miss Photogenic and then Miss Department. Marcia won Miss Congeniality, an award which was judged by the other contestants, and Miss Personality. Tina Vogel won the tourism award which was judged on, “overall personal presentation, her ability for social interaction and to communicate clearly, knowledge of tourism in the question asked in the pre-judging rounds” and finally she also won the talent section. Then the place-getters were announced: a visibly shocked Marcia was second runner up, first runner up was Liana Scott. After a drum roll, Miss Cook Islands 1998 was awarded to Tina Vogel. Balloons fell from the ceiling, Tina took a ‘walk of honour’ along the catwalk. The evening ended with a prayer, and then audience members – family, friends, the Prime Minister and other dignitaries – climbed up onto the stage to congratulate the contestants, as children clambered over each other to collect the balloons.

### *The Aftermath*

Winning the Miss Cook Islands beauty pageant, like winning other Cook Islands competitions, means a number of things. First, titleholders become ‘known’. Like celebrities anywhere, Rarotongans discuss them, comment on seeing them in town, or at the beach, and they are asked to perform as “guest artists” at various functions. Second, winning means travel to other beauty pageants, to regional and international competitions and on tourist promotion. In all forms of competition, winning is a form of personal embellishment and bolsters the reputation of associated institutions, be it family, village, island, sponsors or dance group.

Where Miss Cook Islands differs from other competitions is in its explicitly *moral* judgement of female “beauty” which is then put at the service of national symbolism. If Miss Cook Islands 1998 was about display of “the Cook Islands spirit”, as the president

of the pageant suggested, it comes as no surprise that Tina Vogel's performance was judged as the ideal representative of this spirit. She displayed her cultural capital in many forms: each time she spoke onstage she would begin with a long and respectful greeting in Maori which included all the dignitaries in correct order, and the audience as a whole. This contrasted markedly with the other contestants who just said: "*Kia Orana katoatoa*" (greetings everyone). Tina also won the tourism award because of her knowledge and understanding of the tourist industry which displayed her suitability as a representative of 'culture' beyond national borders.

Tina's talent section, which many say won her the competition, displayed her representative status in many ways. She chanted her own *pe'e*, which displayed knowledge of Maori language. It was also "something different" as females do not normally chant. The content of the chant spoke of young people's need to listen to their elders and undertake a journey of discovery of their culture. She then played a Western tune *Never on a Sunday* on the ukulele, which was a hit in Rarotonga in the 1960s and is now a Rarotongan "classic" and sentimental favourite. Her respect for her culture and elders was again displayed when she sang an *ute* which, we were told, was taught to her by her grandmother. Her final dance named after her sponsor "The Little Polynesian Love Dance", served as a fitting conclusion. It was fast, controlled, skilfully executed and slightly provocative. When she was announced as Miss Cook Islands 1998, she wore a classical long white gown, with a scalloped bodice, and was crowned with an *ei katu* made from gardenia. She looked perfect.

According to rumour, things were far from perfect for Marcia as she prepared for her evening wear section. Her dress which had been designed by a young male Cook Islander (who had studied fashion in New Zealand) was not ready. Pieces of her dress – a white and silver geometric creation – were safety-pinned together and she was noticeably uncomfortable on stage. Unlike Tina, whose performance and demeanour reflected her representative status as ideal Cook Islands woman, Marcia's performance revolved around flaunting aspects of her individuality. After the competition, she wrote an article 'Inside Story on Miss Cook Islands' in the *Cook Islands News* (17/9/1998).

Just after midnight last Saturday I sat on the back of a motorbike, speeding down the road from Trader Jacks singing 'I've got PERSONALITY!'

She went on to say that her personal philosophy throughout the event was:

It is about being yourself, enjoying yourself, individuality, personality and I believe the freedom to say 'Hey this is me. Take me as I am or piss off!'

I gained a lot from joining the pageant. I think nobody was more surprised that I actually got a placing. The whole night I just mucked around and enjoyed myself and taking the piss out of the whole thing ... I don't think the pageant changed me – hey, I still smoke, drink and party. (CIN 17/9/98)<sup>56</sup>

I have highlighted the different styles of femininity on display in Miss Cook Islands 1998 for two main reasons. First, and most obviously, to illustrate what Rarotongans consider to be ideal femininity. Marcia's performance served as a contrast to the ideal, through her stance of "taking the piss" of the whole event. However my intention was not to use her performance solely as a contrast or deviation from ideal or normal femininity. The audience, judges and other contestants loved Marcia's performance: she won third prize, Miss Personality and Miss Congeniality. This brings me to my second point. While ideal femininity centres around shyness, dignity, sexual control and grace, there are other styles of femininity which are also appreciated and, I suspect, admired. Having personality, humour and "not caring what people think" is a potentially successful alternative femininity that exists on Rarotonga.

Marcia's performance expresses the delight in parody and bold, extroverted self-presentation. While it is usually men and older women that perform in humorously risqué ways (see the following chapter), Marcia succeeded in harnessing appreciation for her 'managed transgression'. And yet, while public opinion may allow for ambiguity it accords greatest value to normative femininity. Put another way, while Marcia may get placed, she could never win Miss Cook Islands. For instance, Miss Cook Islands 2000,

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<sup>56</sup> In her writing she also purposefully attempts to dispel myths of natural beauty:

My pink lipstick was still smudged along the back of my arm where I had removed it ... to replace it with my preferred brown. My eyes had panda rings where I had rubbed off the heavy eyeliner and shadow and my feet had the most wicked toe jams and blisters ever. The audience never sees the bleeding blisters, the last minute safety pins, the sweaty armpits ... nor do they see the endless hours of rehearsals – learning to walk in high heels, adjusting to

Maire Browne, crashed her car into another vehicle causing damage to both and injuring some people. She was charged with causing a motor accident while under the influence of alcohol (CIN 11/4/01). A few months before she was due to go to Miss Universe, a debate raged in the *Cook Islands News*, letters to the editor section, about her suitability to represent the Cook Islands in the event. Those against her going suggested that she had failed to be a role model for the young women and people of the Cook Islands as a whole. A letter from Gina Keenan Williams, said:

We Cook Islanders rise well to the occasion where anything nationalistic is involved and Maire Browne's representation in this instance is no exception to the rule. She is a beautiful young lady with a lot of potential to do well and the judges on crowning night endorsed that by awarding her the right to win both titles [Miss South Pacific, Miss Universe]. We, the public, should accept that. Unfortunately it seems that Maire has reneged on her part to give back to the public the dignity and respect that comes with holding such a prestigious title ... Her behaviour in public places has been questioned, as have other aspects of her lifestyle. They are traits typical of teenagers in this day and age but they are unacceptable because of the title she now holds. (CIN 18/4/01)

Some said she was young and had just made a mistake. Others quoted the Bible:

Dear Editor,

With regards to the letter written by Pastor Tina Kauvai dated April 10, we resent her remarks portraying the reigning Miss Cook Islands, Maire Browne, as a failure as a role model for the young women and the people of our country. We quote Romans 6: 37 - "Judge not and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven." Okay, we may all know what Maire gets up to and we all may know her faults and downfalls, but what we all either see or know are her efforts to maintain her dignity to be a good role model ... There is something worse than falling down - it is staying down. The reigning Miss Cook Islands has been a great example, striving to endure trials, correct the wrong she committed, stand on her own two feet and endeavour to succeed - thus being an excellent role model for us all. Why can't we for once stop being so judgmental and thank God Maire is to be the ambassador for our country. (CIN 11/4/01)

A group of friends wrote a letter attempting to show up the hypocrisy of the judging system:

If we care to remember the night of the pageant, Maire, by her own admission, told the public how they (herself included), the staff of the Westpac Banking Corporation, have a good time after work on a Friday night. If having a good time was a problem, why then, didn't those who chose to complain do so on the night when she won both titles? (CIN 23/5/01)

Finally, on the 28 April, 2001 it was reported that Maire Brown had resigned:

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the heavy make-up or getting your parts waxed (ouch!) ... We appear on stage just chilling in time to the music. (CIN 17/9/98)

After two meetings with members of the pageant association last Thursday and Friday. Her resignation comes after weeks of intense scrutiny over criticism of her social life ... Browne was supposed to leave on Friday for Miss Universe but eventually decided not to go ahead. *Cook Islands News* understands that the Miss Cook Islands Pageant Association has decided not to send any of the contestants to Miss Universe. (CIN 28/5/01)

## Dance as a problem for women?

This title of this concluding section comes from Jane Cowan's (1990) *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece* where she argues that dance, particularly solo or lead dancing, is both a pleasure and problem for young women in Sohos. Her argument is about the issue of surveillance around female sexuality. What appeals to me about Cowan's (1990) work is her analysis of feminine excess, or in her terms, what constitutes "too much" in terms of dancing. A woman she interviewed explained:

She should dance with confidence, she shouldn't be shy or embarrassed ... You want to make an impression, to show something, to differentiate yourself a little. But not too much. If she does, they will say she's "crazy", that she is dancing in a "frenzied" way. (Cowan 1990: 200)

The notion of "too much" goes part way to explaining the question raised earlier in this chapter. That is, how do women who participate in competitions such as Miss Cook Islands, navigate the prescription of female reserve (*akama*) and censure for acting above oneself (*akava'ine*)?

Throughout this chapter I have argued that dance is a valued aspect of contemporary Rarotongan femininity. However, by dancing, Rarotongan women need to negotiate the potentially contradictory aspects of femininity – being *akama* and *akava'ine*. To be a good dancer is to overcome shyness and dance with assurance and poise. However, distinguishing oneself too much can be interpreted as being above oneself, a show off. Put another way, dance can present a problem for women as it involves navigating between personal expression versus the sanction to conform and to represent aspects of Rarotongan group life. Obviously, personal desires need not always conflict with groupness; it is possible to dance for both personal status and as a representative of a group. My point is that while the two may not necessarily conflict, individuals are quite aware that they are constantly negotiating between their personal desires and the demands of

groups to which they may claim membership. They are also highly aware of the pitfalls that a disregard for group life can present.

It would seem that Maire Browne danced “too much”; she enjoyed going to clubs on the weekend, enjoyed a drink, and a good time. She failed to negotiate the line between too much and just right. As I have argued throughout this chapter, dance is linked to other forms of physical and moral comportment. Dancing “too much” rather than dancing to reflect ideal femininity and beauty can signify the opposite – female lack and excess.

This chapter has examined the corporeal nature of gendered identity politics. I have suggested that dance is a key vehicle for the display and negotiation of Cook Islands ideals of feminine beauty. In line with a recent analysis of the mediational nature of dance I argue that it:

...provides a forum for the interplay between group affiliation and distinction, identity formation and regulation, locality association and sentiment as well as offering a performative site for the mediation of (often competing) moral, political and ethical codes of action in local, national and global contexts. (Henry et al. 2000: 259)

The Miss Cook Islands pageant is also one example of local “regurgitation” (Miller 1995: 11) of a global institution. In it, the display of feminine beauty that pageants throughout the world perform, is imbricated with local notions of femininity – the display of feminine virtues and skills such as speaking Maori and the ability to dance, sing, weave and so on. Fundamentally, young women who participate in the pageant are valued for their *representative* role; they represent the nation, their family and their village. They also *present* the Cook Islands as paragons of feminine virtue.

At the same time that an event such as Miss Cook Islands is a process of local appropriation, it is also an instance of the globalisation of locality. Like Wilk (1995: 111) in his study of beauty pageants in Belize, I suggest the opposition between global homogeneity and local appropriation is a false dichotomy. He suggests that: “in the process of absorbing the beauty pageant into a local context, Belizeans have also been absorbed into global *contest*” (Wilk 1995: 111). Engagement with global flows creates complex entanglements which cannot be simply seen at either local or global but a



dynamic combination of the two. In this chapter, and the following, I argue that displays of femininity are both “ambitiously cosmopolitan” (Besnier 2002: 548) and oriented outwards, at the same time as they are inwardly oriented and replete with local aspirations. In the next chapter I examine the ways in which femininity becomes a signifier of other issues and concerns in cross-dressing and cross-dancing performances. I suggest that performing femininity in these instances is concerned not only with femininity but also with relationships between the sexes, Cook Islanders’ concepts of sexuality and the tensions between personal desires and public conventions.