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

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of

The Australian National University

August 2003
This thesis is the entirely original work of the author except where otherwise cited in the text.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisory panel. My supervisors: Nicholas Thomas, in the earlier stages of the thesis and Don Gardner, who kindly took on the job in the final stages. Thanks also to my advisors, Francesca Merlan and Lissant Bolton, who read drafts of chapters. This thesis would not have been completed without the encouragement and practical assistance of several people. So thank you, Mandy Thomas, Rose Lilley, Andrew Walker, Martha Macintyre and Ray Madden. I appreciate that these very busy people made time to assist me.

Many thanks to my family: Nan, Pop, Mum, Pete, Luke, Andrei, Eloise (and kids), Nick and Kate. And my friends: Ruth Hansen, Dianne Currier, Monica Zetlin, Astrid Scott, Jack Taylor and Steven Adlard. Thanks to all the staff and students in the anthropology program at the Australian National University especially Roberta James, Michael Ward and Stephen McNally. A special thanks to Ian Bryson for his help (and patience) with editing the DVD.

My greatest debt is to those in the Cook Islands who assisted with this project. I hope I can repay you one day. Thank you to the National Research Committee for permitting me to undertake research in the Cook Islands. Especially the chairman Temu Okatai and Tauepa Tutakiau for her continual support and interest in my project. Thank you to the Minister for Culture and Education, Ngereteina Puna and all the staff at the Ministry of Cultural Development especially Carmen Temata, Ota Joseph, Tepoave Raitia, Reu Urirau, Dwayne Murarai, Ake, Ake, Morris, Dennis and Ngatuaine Maui. I would also like to thank John, Ina and Tepaeru Herrmann for their interest and kindness. Also, the late Papa Mana Strickland and Papa Maeva Karati for Cook Islands Maori lessons.

The Orama dance group deserve particular thanks for putting up with me and so generously involving me in everything. Thank you especially to the Orama leaders
Sonny Williams and Gina Keenan-Williams and beautiful Tia Mai, Apii and Dan Turua, Mata Arnold (and Tim and kids).

For those in the outer islands who gave me accommodation and lots more. In Aitutaki all the Tunui’s especially Papa Tunui. In Mau’ke, No’o and Kamoe Aiturau and their girls, and all the Tararo’s. In Tongareva, Wilkie Rasmussen, and all his family, in particular Rara, Rama and Vic. Wilkie has been a continual support throughout the thesis writing process.

Finally to my friends in the Cooks, I can’t thank you enough: Ngatuaine Maui, Audrey Brown-Pereia, Teresa O’Connor, Mike Alexander, Vaea and Fletcher Melvin, Tuts, Liana Scott, Tina Vogel, Pam and Tepora Solomon and Alex Sword. And especially, Mamia Tunui Savage and Utivaru Hewett for giving me a home and taking me into your lives. I miss you very much.
Abstract

This thesis examines contemporary Cook Islands dancing and, more generally, expressive culture and their links to Cook Islands sociality. I argue that in the contemporary moment, dance plays a key role in negotiating modernity, mobility and regional identities. At the same time it is a deeply embodied and affective experience for many Cook Islanders.

Using participant observation, in-depth interviews, archival research and media material, this thesis aims to contribute to an understanding of how Cook Islands sociality is generated, performed and negotiated. The ethnographic material for this study involved spending extensive time with dancers, musicians and community leaders. It ranged from sites of cultural production in the Cook Islands and in the diaspora.

Contemporary dance practices are shaped by competing ideas about the Cook Islands past. Debates about precolonial traditions, missionisation and colonialism pervade discussions concerning contemporary dance and expressive culture. I argue that the attention paid to the politics of tradition reflects the competing moral, political, personal and economic agendas of postcolonial Cook Islanders.

Contemporary dance practices are also an important part of the production of ideas about Cook Islands modernity. The Cook Islands economy relies on tourism as its major source of income. Dance and dancers are foregrounded in the promotion of the tourist industry and in the entertainment of tourists. As well as formulating relationships between Cook Islanders and tourists, dance is central to the dynamic relationships between Cook Islands communities.

In addition, dance practice is a vehicle through which notions of gender are produced, circulated, affirmed and contested. Cook Islands femininity is often represented as the paragon of both traditional and moral (Christian) ideals. An exploration of the ways in which women negotiate these normative ideals through their dance practice and their gendered comportment is a central component of my ethnography.

This thesis explores dance through the lens of theorisation about performance, globalisation, gender and postcolonialism. It also relies on contemporary Pacific scholarship to argue about the centrality of active agency in cultural production. Cook Islands dancing is not simply a reflection of past and present gendered cultural politics. Throughout, I argue that the mediational power of expressive practices actively produces the modalities through which regional and local identities engage with broader global processes. Dance, I suggest, is a generative process which occupies the hearts, minds and bodies of many Cook Islanders.
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Glossary

akama  shyness

akauka  smooth, graceful hip movements

akava'ine  show off, act about oneself.

ariki  high chief

aro'a  love, affection, kindness, generosity, pity and sympathy

ei  wreath worn on the head or draped over the neck (ei katu). Usually made from flowers

ekalesia  the church, church community

imene  sing

imene tuki  style of Cook Islands Christian Church religious singing

marae  ceremonial place

mata'iapo  sub-district chief

mataora  entertainment, pleasure, fun

oro metua  church minister

papa'a  white person. Also ‘four layers’ referring to the layers of clothes worn my missionaries.

pareu  cotton material worn as a garment. Dance costume made from cotton pareu, hibiscus (pareu kiri'au), or green leaves (rauti)

patupatu  double time hip ‘flicks’ perform on one hip and then the other

pe'e  chant

kaparima  action song

kia orana  a form of greeting, good day
kopu
extended family

tangata

Koutu Nui
council of sub-chiefs

rangatira
junior chief

rekareka
happy, cheerful, delighted

tamataora
to entertain, to make joyful, to do those things or acts that will be a source of joy, pleasure.

ta’unga
an expert in traditional matters

tapere
sub-district

tarekareka
entertainment, sport, or dance. To cause pleasure or merriment

tere pati
travelling party

tiare
flower

titi
overskirt or girdle often made from rauti leaves. Worn over pareu

tivaevae
appliqué quilts and cushion covers

tumu korero
an expert in traditional knowledge

uapou
Bible meeting, religious gathering

Ui Ariki
Council of Chiefs

ura
dance (Rarotongan and Cook Islands Maori). Koni (Aitutakian), kosaki (Tongarevan)

ura kaikava
‘drinking style’ of dancing

ura pa’u
drum dance

ura piani
impromptu dance genre which involves dancing with a partner

ute
commemorative or topical song

vaka
district on Rarotonga, canoe
Orthography

Cook Islands Maori is the official language of the Cook Islands. It is based on the Rarotongan dialect. Each inhabited island of the Cooks group has its own dialect. Most people in the Cook Islands speak Cook Islands Maori, the dialect of their island of origin and English. The orthography used in this thesis is based on Rarotongan and is referred to as Maori.

The graphic representational system for Cook Islands Maori, like many Polynesian languages, is a site of contestation. Following Sissons (1999) and Elliston (1997), I preserve the glottal stops which lace the language and I do not include the differences Cook Islands Maori speakers articulate between long and short vowels. This orthographic system is the most commonly used in the Cook Islands.
Prologue

Mamia sat at the kitchen table with her ukulele. I sat opposite her with my laptop. It was around ten in the evening on a cool night during the Rarotongan winter. Mamia was trying to compose a song; it was her eldest sister Rose's 50th birthday in a few months, and Mamia wanted to write a song for the occasion. I was trying to record fieldnotes. Neither of us were particularly absorbed in our activity; we talked more than worked. Our conversation was interspersed with Mamia strumming occasional chords and singing fragments of melodies and the clicking of my keyboard. Rose lived in Auckland and Mamia would be there at the time of her birthday because Mamia was sitting her international netball umpire exams. At one point, Mamia suddenly stopped her casual playing and talking. I looked up and realised she was going to ‘perform’. She sat up straight, gazed into the distance and began to sing. I remember thinking how beautiful she looked; she was wearing a long maroon velveteen dressing gown, her dark hair offset by a single white flower behind her ear. She sang confidently, in a voice that stretched from deep and rich to sweetly high. The song’s melody was melancholy and the lyrics sorrowful:

Mama Kuramaeva
Koe tuku e mi’i nei
Topata roimata
Aue ra te manini e
No’ou e
Kura – ma – e – va

Mother Kuramaeva
It is you I yearn for
My tears are falling for you
Oh how my heart hurts
For only you
My dear mum Kuramaeva

After the song she began to tell me a little bit about her life. She had written the song about her mother, Kuramaeva, who died when Mamia was a teenager. After her mother’s death Mamia said she went koka (roaming about); she was wild, she did not listen to her elder siblings or her father, she stayed out all night and slept all day. If she was punished she still did not listen to them because she did not care. She was so sad. While she was close to a number of her sisters and her father, she felt from the point of her mother’s death that she was alone: "I had to look after myself". Mamia said the clearest image of her mother was that of her playing the piano in the village hall and the organ at church,
skills she had learnt at boarding school in New Zealand. Her mother was also a singer and composer, and Mamia was seen to have inherited her talents. Family members had also suggested that Mamia had inherited some of her personality traits. Both were reputed to be tough and straightforward: “With Mum, if something was wrong she would say it straight to your face, not go behind [your back]”.

Later I found out that Mamia’s song belonged to a popular tradition of lament songs. At the death of a family member, or in the case of other tragic events, a person might compose a song to express their sadness. Mamia had recorded the song in the 1970s on a cassette which included other original compositions and her favourite songs. In the 1990s another Rarotongan composer, Tepoave Raitia, used the song’s melody in the death scene of a musical he wrote and directed. He told me that Mamia’s song was part of a genre he calls "music of the dawn" (akatangi mamaïata, literally, play the dawn): "It is the sort of music you play when you have drunk all night. You get your guitar or your uke [ukulele] and play, the sun isn’t up yet and everyone is still asleep, it is still and quiet".

The evening was an unusual one. Mamia was not given to reflection about her past, particularly not difficult periods in her life. She had, however, composed a number of songs about sorrowful events. For instance, she wrote a song about a friend who died suddenly and her sister’s marriage break-up. Some evenings I could hear the sound of her playing the guitar or ukulele outside, alone in her garden, and the melodies were invariably melancholy. Despite the exceptional nature of the evening (or perhaps because of it), it is pivotal in my recollections of Mamia – the song, its sorrow, the night and the figure of Mamia in her dressing gown were captivating.

These solitary moments were also unusual because most of the time Mamia was an extremely social person. Her paid work and community roles meant that it was very rare for her to be home before ten p.m. on any given evening. Her paid employment was as sports development officer for the Cook Islands Sport and Olympic Association. In the time I knew her she was heavily involved in netball umpiring and would have meetings and competitions at least three nights a week. She was also constantly travelling to
various islands of the Cooks group to assist with local sport development. In addition, she made numerous trips to New Zealand for international umpire training and toured with the Cook Islands netball team to Commonwealth and South Pacific games.

Mamia's musical abilities meant that she was often asked to play the ukulele and sing at functions and informal parties. Whenever she went out to an evening function, she always travelled with her ukulele in the boot of the car. At a party where Mamia and some other women had been singing and playing for two hours, someone turned to me and said: "You know how at parties sometimes we can't think of songs to sing? Not if Mamia's here, she always knows what songs to sing, she can play the ukulele non-stop".

In her twenties and thirties Mamia danced in a number of dance groups, often travelling with them overseas to represent the Cook Islands in tourist promotion. She had won a number of dance competitions and was considered one of the most beautiful dancers of her generation. A number of people I spoke to about recent dance history and dancers would, without prompting, reminisce about Mamia's dancing and singing abilities. On separate occasions two middle-aged men became misty-eyed as they recalled her talents. Now in her forties, she mainly confined performing to informal occasions. Sometimes Mamia would perform a solo dance at a family event, a dance to honour a wedding couple for example, but more often she would dance spontaneously at parties and at nightclubs.

At a small party Mamia had at her house, her sister Apii and her husband Dan Turua (both accomplished musicians and singers) played guitar and ukulele while the next-door neighbour, Mama Kan, beat out drum rhythms with a spatula and plastic bowl. It was a hot night and we sat on the veranda, leaning against its pillars, enjoying the sea breeze and swaying with the music. They mainly played "island music" (local songs), particularly songs from Aitutaki, the home island of the women. The songs were sentimental and laid-back, songs about village life, school and love. Some were papa'a (white) songs from the 1950s and 1960s, like Over the Reef and Be Faithful, sung with alternating English and Maori lyrics. Late in the night Mamia and I got up to dance. We
danced in a joking style common at parties and at nightclubs. The style is called *ura viʻi viʻi*, literally dirty dancing. Its humorously suggestive movements are usually done between women; sometimes one woman will dance exaggerated versions of men's dancing. Our musicians laughed and made ribald comments. Mama Kan gave me instructions: "make your bum smooth, it is so stiff!". The music became faster and cumulative. We all watched Mamia whose hips were the epitome of *akauka*, effortless, graceful and fast. She was laughing as she danced, a cheeky gay laugh. She shone.

Figure 1: Mamia, 1980 Dancer of the Year
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Chapter 1: On the Beach – An Introduction

This thesis is an ethnography of contemporary Cook Islands expressive culture, in particular, Cook Islands dancing. I aim to illustrate the variety of ways expressive practices generate aspects of Cook Islands sociality. I demonstrate that dancing is shaped by competing ideas about the Cook Islands past and future. Furthermore, I suggest debates over the meaning of Cook Islands ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ are fundamentally gendered. Ideas about Cook Islands femininity, and female dance practices, are potent vectors through which notions of Cook Islands identity are expressed and explored. I also aim to show the way these ‘internal’ cultural politics, mediate and are informed by, regional and global cultural forces. I argue that through dancing, and the discourse surrounding it, people enter into dialogue about ways of being Cook Islanders. In the contemporary moment, dancing reflects and explores competing moral, political, personal and economic agendas of postcolonial Cook Islanders.

As the prologue will have made clear, expressive practices also play a vital role in the production of more intimate forms of sociality. I began with stories of Mamia performing to give a feel for the centrality of dance and the deeply affective nature of dancing and other expressive practices in the lives of many Cook Islanders. In many situations and contexts, Cook Islands sociality is assembled through performance practices, ranging from dancing and singing to informal jokes, lively conversation and amenable dispositions. My prologue is also a dedication. Mamia died of breast cancer in June 2002. Mamia played a highly influential role in my fieldwork. As well as being a significant source of information, she provided enormous practical support. She organised a place for me to live on Rarotonga (with her next door neighbour Mama Kan), assisted in arranging interviews and she gave me dance lessons. Among other things, Mamia’s death made me think about her life in ‘historical’ terms and it struck me that her biography followed the trajectory of ‘performing arts’ in the Cook Islands since independence. The parallel between the government policies towards the performing arts and Mamia’s life history is, to me at least, somewhat uncanny. After a brief overview of the history,
geography and political structures of the Cook Islands, I present these histories in tandem, as they serve to show the influence government policies have on the ground ("on the beach" Cook Islanders say) and the centrality of performing arts in many people's daily lives on Rarotonga. I then discuss my fieldwork methodology, theoretical orientation and organisation of this thesis.

**Overview of the Cook Islands**

![Figure 2: Oceania](image)

The Cook Islands are located in the South Pacific between Niue, Samoa and French Polynesia. Air New Zealand is the only airline that currently flies to the Cooks. The route is Auckland, Rarotonga, Papercë. To travel to neighbouring Pacific Islands, such as Samoa and Tonga, one needs to travel via Auckland.
Rarotonga has the only international airport (opened in 1974) in the Cook Islands. Shipping services between the Cook Islands are somewhat unreliable. All the inhabited islands (except Rakahanga and Palmerston) are serviced by Air Rarotonga, a locally owned airline.

![Figure 3: The Cook Islands](image)

The fifteen islands are divided into a northern group of seven coral atolls (Palmerston, Tongareva (Pennhyn), Rakahanga, Manihiki, Pukapuka, Nassau and Suarrow) and a southern group of eight islands comprised mostly of upraised coral or volcanic formations (Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Mangaia, Ma'uke, Mitiaro, Atiu, Manuae and Takutea). Manuae, Takutea, and Suarrow are uninhabited. The islands are dispersed over two million square kilometres of sea; their total landmass is 241 square kilometres. In 2000
the total population of the Cook Islands was 14,000, 87 per cent located in the southern group (Cook Islands News 18/4/01).

The Cook Islands is a colonial category rather than recognition of cultural affinities between these islands. On the basis of linguistic and archaeological research, it is assumed that the northern Cook Islands were settled from Samoa and the southern islands from the Society Islands. Prior to European invasion, there was little contact between the northern and southern groups, although certain islands within each group maintained political ties and trade links.

The first European sighting of the Cook Islands was by the Spanish explorer Alvaro de Mendana in 1595. Captain James Cook charted the southern islands in his expeditions of 1773 and 1777, naming them the Hervey Islands. The northern group were variously called Penrhyn and Manihiki Islands. It was not until the British made the Cook Islands a Protectorate in 1888 that the islands of the north and south were grouped together as the Cook Islands. They were then annexed to New Zealand in 1901 and in 1965 became self-governing in ‘free association’ with New Zealand. The associated state relationship means that Cook Islanders have local political autonomy, automatic entry to and dual citizenship with New Zealand. New Zealand provides aid, handles foreign affairs and defence in consultation with the Cook Islands government.

Rarotonga in the southern group is the administrative and political capital of the Cooks. It is 32 kilometres around and has a population of approximately 11,000. All the other islands are referred to as the ‘outer islands’. The Cook Islands main industry is tourism which is primarily centred on Rarotonga and Aitutaki. Almost 73,000 tourists visited the Cooks in 2000 (CIN 20/2/01). The other major industry is offshore banking. Approximately 5 per cent of the Cook Islands population comprises expatriates who predominantly work in this industry. The majority of Cook Islanders live abroad. 52,600 live in New Zealand and an estimated 15,000 in Australia (Statistics New Zealand 2002).
Rarotonga is divided into three districts (vaka): Takitumu, Te Au O Tonga (or Avarua, the name of the main town on Rarotonga) and Puaikura (or Arorangi). Each district has a paramount chief (ariki). Takitumu has two chiefs – Pa ariki in the north and Kainuku ariki in the south. Makea, Karika and Vakatini ariki represent Te Au O Tonga and Tinomana ariki represents Puaikura. The Ui Ariki (House of Ariki) forms the upper house of parliament. They have no legislative power but act as advisors to national and local government on land use, land ownership and ‘custom’ issues. The latter range from imposing rau (prohibitions on fishing in sections of the reef at certain times of the year), to expressing concerns about teenage drinking in a village. Each district on Rarotonga is divided into sub-districts (tapere), which dissect the island into pie shaped sections which extend from the tip in the mountainous interior into the lagoon that surrounds the island. Land in each sub-district is owned by a descent group (ngait) headed by a sub-district chief (mata’iapo) and a number of junior chiefs (rangatira) who represent extended family lines (kopu tangata). Mata’iapo and rangatira make up an advisory council called the Kouu Nui who also advise government on customary matters.
“Dancing was how I saw the world”

Mamia was born on the island of Aitutaki in the village of Ureia in 1953. She was the youngest of seven children; four sisters and three brothers (one of whom was adopted). Her mother was heavily involved in the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC); she played the organ and ran the Sunday school. Her father, Papa Tunui Tereu, worked as a seaman, tug captain and harbour master. He is a *tumu koreo* (expert in traditions) and *mata’iapo* (sub-chief) for Tamatoa *ariki* (chief) and was a choreographer, dancer and composer. He is also a CICC deacon and chairman of Ureia village committee. Mamia’s parents began what was possibly the first commercial dance group on Aitutaki in the 1950s. Aitutaki was a refuelling point on the ‘Coral Route’ of the Tasman Empire Airways Ltd (TEAL) service, which flew from Auckland, Fiji, Samoa and Aitutaki through to Tahiti during the 1950s (Hall, C. 1994). Papa Tunui was asked by the airline to provide passengers with an island meal and a dance performance while the plane refuelled. He became the leader for the Aitutaki Dance team, formed in 1964. He managed the team’s *tere pati*¹ (travelling parties) to Tahiti in 1964, where they performed at the Turai (Bastille Celebrations), Hawai’i in 1978, and Tahiti in 1980.

Mamia said she was not formally taught how to dance or play instruments. Her first recollection of dancing as a child was of a Sunday evening on Aitutaki:

You know you can’t do anything on a Sunday except go to church and sleep. Before, it was much stricter. When the sun set then everything came alive. Mum would put coconut oil in our hair and she would make us all dance to a song before we could go out on the road and play with other children. Sometimes other family members would come around and they would play music for hours. Sometimes if we danced they gave us money or sweets.

Aside from these informal Sunday night dances, organised dance performances only took place at a few official events that occurred throughout the year. Mamia said she danced at primary school on special occasions such as parent’s day and when important visitors such as government ministers and school inspectors, came to visit.

¹ The usual spelling of the phrase is *tere party*. I once saw a large cargo crate on Aitutaki with the words “Aitutaki *tere pati*” written with red paint; *pati* is a Maorification of the word party. I also adopt this spelling.
The Cook Islands became self-governing in 1965. Its first Premier (then Prime Minister) was the Aitutakian, Albert Henry. Henry, who had taken an interest in anthropology in this youth (Henry, G. 1997 pers. comm.), saw the revival of local traditions as a way of forging an independent nation state. His initiatives included the establishment of the *U'i Ariki* and a Cultural Division (including Anthropology and Archives). He also made ‘Maori culture’ a compulsory subject in schools, instituted a national ‘festival of dance’ as part of annual independence celebrations and created a government sponsored national dance team (Sissons 1995, 1997, 1999; Baddeley 1978).

Mamia attended Tereora College on Rarotonga from 1968 as education on Aitutaki, like most southern outer islands, only extended to junior high levels (forms two to three). According to William Coppell’s (1968: 465) doctorate of the same year, 25 per cent of outer islands’ students transferred to Tereora from Junior High Schools on Aitutaki, Atiu and Mangaia. At Tereora College Mamia joined the school dance team which was run by Turepu Turepu, an extremely influential composer and choreographer. The school group

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3 Geoffrey Henry is Albert Henry’s cousin who became the second Cook Islands Party Prime Minister in 1989.
participated in the annual dance competition held as part of the independence festival – the Constitution Celebrations. These celebrations began in 1966 and included participants from many outer islands whose transportation and accommodation were paid for by government. The competition between each island group was fierce but, according to Mamia, because of Turepu the Tereora team won every year – “we even beat the outer islanders”. The outer islands were considered to have more cultural capital than Rarotonga who were thought to have “lost their culture” during missionary and colonial periods.

Figure 6: Mamia at Dance Practice

“Dancing was how I saw the world”, Mamia remarked. She first went overseas with the Tereora dance team who performed in Tahiti to raise money for the college. She was asked to join the Cook Islands National Arts (CINAT), the government funded national performing arts group in 1969. With CINAT she performed at the opening of the Sydney Opera House in front of Queen Elizabeth II in 1973. She also toured with CINAT to Fiji, New Zealand and Australia while participating in the Festival of Pacific Arts.
From 1974 until 1978 Mamia was employed in the Cultural Division, Ministry of Social Services. She was one of only five employees. Her role was to record oral histories and coordinate cultural events. In this position she spent three months at Auckland University transcribing tapes from, and recording songs for the Cultural Division Archive. The Democratic Party under Tom Davis (1978-1988) abandoned support of the arts, closing the Cultural Division and among other actions, stopping funding to CINAT. Economic development, particularly the development of tourism and related service industries took precedence (Sissons 1999: 91). Mamia got a job as a tourist officer, welcoming visitors at the airport and then at the Bank of Nauru branch on Rarotonga. As CINAT had
disbanded, Mamia joined a newly formed dance group *Te Ivi Maori* (The Bones of the Ancestors) and travelled to Hawai‘i, America, Europe, France, Germany and Italy. These trips were primarily tourist promotion trips organised by Tourism Cook Islands. *Te Ivi Maori* also began the Dancer of the Year, a solo male and female dance competition that is now an integral component of the annual dance calendar. Mamia won the competition in 1980, 1981, and 1983. She then “retired” from dancing in 1985.³

When the Cook Islands Party returned to power in 1989, ‘culture’⁴ again became a funding priority. Mamia was employed as a cultural officer in the performing arts division of the newly formed Ministry of Cultural Development. She was involved in coordinating the Constitution Celebrations, in particular assisting secondary school students with their performances.

When I met Mamia in 1996 she had recently left the Ministry of Cultural Development. The government was in the process of restructuring the economy in line with structural adjustment policies implemented by the Asia Development Bank. Mamia had taken a “transition package” which included three months pay and retraining. After this time she was offered a job as sports development officer at the Cook Islands Sports and Olympic Association (CISOA). This job was a culmination of her long association with netball; she had been the secretary of the Cook Islands Netball Association for sixteen years and had represented the Cook Islands at various South Pacific Games tournaments in the 1970s and 1980s. She was also a qualified netball umpire and umpire examiner for the Cook Islands and the Oceania region. In this capacity she attended a number of sporting events while I knew her: the South Pacific games in Micronesia, the Commonwealth Games in Malaysia and the Olympic Games in Sydney.

³ Many dancers use the word retired to indicate that they will no longer dance competitively. Some do, however, make “comebacks”.

⁴ In this thesis I place the terms tradition and culture in inverted commas to indicate the problematic nature of these terms. The only occasions I do not do so is when I am quoting others or when I am engaged in critical discussion about the terms. Throughout, I argue against the view of culture as a ‘thing’, and for a view of culture as a processual series of practices. Likewise, I understand tradition to be a negotiated and contested term.
The very first day I met her she had just returned from a trip to New Zealand to introduce Cook Islands Tattslotto to Cook Islands communities over there. CISOA's funding came from Tattslotto and the new scheme Mamia was promoting was called 'Home Free'; each month, two Cook Islanders who lived in New Zealand would win free airline tickets home. On that day she said laughing: "culture is no longer where the money is, it is all going into sport, so I am following the trend!".

That Mamia performed jobs and undertook activities in a number of diverse fields is not particularly unusual. Many Cook Islanders can sing, dance, play musical instruments, compose songs and play sport. What we might consider specialised skills were regarded as everyday activities. Mamia just happened to excel at these activities due, I believe, to a particular mix of talent, confidence, determination and charisma. Doing things well did distinguish Mamia in the eyes of the Rarotongan community. She was often interviewed about cultural and netball activities in the local newspaper as a "well known personality" on the island. So, while her involvement in a number of disparate practices was unexceptional, her talent was considered exceptional.

Part of the reason performing arts are considered things 'you just do' is because of their everyday nature. Young children are constantly being bounced on the knees of adults to the rhythm of various drumbeats. The beat is also sung - "te, tete te te te". Most households I went into had a guitar or ukulele and the active creation of music and singing (rather than listening to music) was also widespread. At many parties I was urged to sing along but would excuse myself, explaining that I couldn't. Every time someone would say, "But everyone can sing". I would then explain how I was asked to leave the school choir at primary school and as a result never sang again. This story was received with incredulity: "papa'a are strict, here no-one is out, you just go up the back". This open policy operates not only at schools but also in professional dance groups. The main dance group I was involved with never refused a person who requested to join the group. If they were not particularly good dancers they may have to attend a number of rehearsals before joining performances and, would usually dance in the back rows.
To a certain extent it is possible to argue that performing arts in the Cook Islands are not categorised as "abstract, capitalised Art" (Williams 1976: 41) but as one set of skills amongst others. While there are Maori terms for dance (ura), singing (imene) and playing instruments (rutu, hit drums; akatangi, play string instruments), there is no overall term for 'performing arts' or for 'music' (Lawrence 1993: 76). Dance and music are referred to by their specific genres, for instance drum dance (ura pa'u) or religious songs (imene tuki) or more often by the term tarekareka which means to cause pleasure or fun (Savage 1980: 357). Tarekareka is the term used to refer to a number of entertainment forms (dance, sport, drama, and oratory) as well as jokes, amusing conversation or actions. That dance is linked to sport, joke telling and witty conversation by the umbrella term tarekareka suggests that a reified division between art, as Williams suggests, and mundane activity does not exist in the Cook Islands in the same way that is does in 'Western' capitalist societies.

This being said, the display of talent in the performing arts are categorised differently from talent on, for example, the netball court or rugby field. These categorisations are partly of local origin and partly a result of Cook Islanders' involvement in global culture. People who are considered to be particularly talented or have a gift are called ta'unga (expert in some aspect of Maori culture). The term has semi-mystical qualities, people have 'gifts' either from God, ancestors, or talent which is "in the family blood". I have heard this term used in reference to dancers, musicians, composers, singers and to costume makers. Ta'unga is usually reserved for older people. For instance, people called Mamia's father, Papa Tunui, a ta'unga. Mamia was not directly described as one, but it was recognised that she was "the next one", that is, the next ta'unga of the Tunui family. In this sense, those who excel in Maori culture are often imbued with sacred qualities. Some speak of having dreams or visions which inspire them. Mamia, however, was extremely pragmatic about her talents, never speaking of them as divine or mystical.

Mamia always struck me as very cosmopolitan. As a well-seasoned traveller she did not get particularly excited before a trip and would casually pack on the day of her departure. Her house was full of trinkets she had purchased or been given in other places: Samoan
mats, a mask from Papua New Guinea, flags, figurines and snow-domes. In 2000 she
sent me a postcard from Paris of the Arc de Triomphe which began: “Bonjour Kalissa!!
Am in Paris for an IOC world conference for WIS”. I think it was her easy use of
acronyms that took me a considerable time to work out (International Olympic
Committee, Women in Sport) as much as her urbane location that impressed me.

While I regarded Mamia’s travel as cosmopolitan it was not especially unusual for Cook
Islanders. Many travel regularly throughout the Pacific region, to New Zealand and
Australia on business, for sports events and other activities organised by NGOs for
training and skill development. Tourist promotion also requires travel abroad to Expos
in, for example, Japan, Germany and America. Travel on official business is also often
supplemented by what can be called ‘family trips’. As at least two thirds of the Cook
Islands population live abroad, relations are maintained through phone, letter and by
regular visits. During my year and a half fieldwork, Mamia attended a large family
reunion for her mother’s family, a wedding, her sister’s 50th birthday party, and a niece’s
twenty-first birthday in New Zealand. All her family (those living on Rarotonga and in
New Zealand) returned to Aitutaki each year for Christmas celebrations.

Despite her worldliness, Mamia was also considered a “local local”. “Local local” is a
term used to describe people who are proud of their home and their ‘culture’, as opposed
to locals who act like papa’a (white people). The latter would tend to speak primarily in
English, wear ‘Western’ style clothes, denigrate Maori culture and only go to particular
bars and restaurants on Rarotonga. Mamia went to “high class bars” and “local local”
bars but preferred having parties at home. She was fond of wearing mu’umu’u (island
print dresses) although she did wear ‘Western’ clothes. While Mamia spoke English
extremely well, as a “local local” she spoke Maori as often as possible, particularly to her
son who refused to speak it. She bemoaned the decline of teaching Maori culture,
particularly Maori language. She was also concerned about maintaining knowledge of
Aitutakian cultural forms and was preparing a manuscript of Aitutakian songs for
Aitutakian children to learn at school. Although she had not lived long-term on Aitutaki
since the mid-1970s, she professed a deep attachment to it as her “homeland”. She
returned there every few months (Aitutaki is only an hour away by plane) usually on official business and stayed extra days to see family (her father and one brother still lived there) and friends. Her dream was to return to Aitutaki permanently and support herself by building a small guesthouse for tourists.

Mamia’s life story and its entanglement with Cook Islands post-independence history reveals a number of themes that will be developed throughout the thesis. First, I have illustrated the centrality of dance and other expressive forms (including netball) in the life of one individual. Second, Mamia’s life history demonstrates the importance cultural production to government’s vision of a postcolonial nation state. Finally, this section has shown the forms of personal, social and geographical mobility dancing can produce. By dancing Mamia made a living, travelled throughout her country, and saw the world. Her songs and stories about her dancing and playing netball also circulate among Cook Islander communities at home and abroad. Expressive culture made Mamia a person of renown.

The Fieldwork

I have studied both classical and contemporary dance from the age of four. The opportunity to continue my interest in dance came about with an offer to undertake a Ph.D. at the Australian National University on some aspect of Pacific art. Like many of those unfamiliar with this region, I found dance from Eastern Polynesia immediately appealing; the ‘hula’ skirts, flower wreaths and graceful hands beckoned. To begin a discussion of my fieldwork I need to go back to 1996, to a party I attended in Melbourne. At around two o’clock in the morning at this party, most people had stopped dancing and were chatting in small groups. The only people still dancing was a woman who is now a popular actor/comedian and myself. Our dancing became increasingly silly. We found a record entitled Sounds for Latin Lovers and attempted the tango together. I told her I was about to leave for the Cook Islands to study dance. On hearing this, she found some Polynesian sounding drum music and we amused ourselves dancing to it.

Watch DVD: Magda and Me (part one)
I find this caricature of the anthropologist revealing at a number of levels. She is a middle class, frizzy haired, unattractive anthropologist. Her studious looking glasses barely mask her real desire to be being ravished by a warrior chief. Her whole field is sexualised; she has a Ph.D. from ‘S.M.U.T’. The backdrop for her research is a phallic volcano and the sensuality of "balmy nights" and "sapphire blue lagoons" surround her narrative. In this scene she gets to play out a fantasy she could never play at home, that of the scantily clad, desirable Polynesian princess.5

This representation is remarkably similar to the ways in which Cook Islanders viewed me and my research. People would often say to me, “you have just come here to get yourself a husband,” or, “you should learn the dance of love. The only way to really know the Cook Islands is to be with a Cook Islander”. Even in my last week of fieldwork, when I gave a two hour presentation on my ‘findings’ to a Cook Islands audience, the Deputy Prime Minister stood up at the end thanked me for my work and concluded by saying: “Well she hasn’t managed to get herself a boyfriend yet, maybe next time”. As crude as these caricatures of Western women seemed to me they nevertheless forced me to be mindful of where I came from. The point I took from these incidents is that knowledge acquisition is positional, situated and partial (Frankenberg and Mani 1993; di Leonardo 1991; Haraway 1988). That this analytical perspective is as relevant to the strategies Cook Islanders used to locate me (as both a gendered and sexualised researcher), as it is to my positionality as a Western researcher, provides a reflexive element that permeates this thesis.

I conducted fieldwork in the Cook Islands from November 1996 until May 1998. Due to the stringent economic reforms being introduced at this time, a number of cultural activities were postponed. 1997 was the only year the Constitution Celebrations were not held in their usual form. No outer islands’ groups participated and on Rarotonga the festival of dance component of the celebration included a competition between only four

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5 Jolly (1997) provides an insightful historical account of the sexualised representation of Polynesian women.
local dance groups. However, there was still plenty to observe. Dance and other cultural activities which serviced (and were serviced by) the tourist industry continued to take place. Rarotonga and Aitutaki, the two main tourist destinations, had a number of groups that performed weekly at hotels. Dancing also occurred in many other situations, ranging from annual celebrations such as Easter and Christmas festivals, rites of passage such as weddings, haircutting ceremonies\(^6\) and twenty-first birthdays, as well as formal and informal island, village and family functions.

It was, in retrospect, an extremely interesting time to be engaged in fieldwork. When I first arrived on Rarotonga many people would tell me that they were "in transition", this referred both to the Transition Project, which was funded by New Zealand Overseas Development Agency (NZODA) to alleviate the impact of mass redundancies, and to a general sense about the island as a whole. Quips were made such as "half the island is in transition and where are we going to?". For many the transition was literal; the crisis resulted in significant out-migration of those thought of as the most talented and educated Cook Islanders. In terms of the performing arts, the withdrawal of government funding was seen by many to pronounce the end of an era. Those involved in running private dance groups and 'event agencies' spoke of the benefits of privatisation; government sponsorship was considered "old hat" and unreliable. Others reminisced about days gone by when 'culture' was treated as an important national resource, expressing their dissatisfaction with a dismissive quip that now "we only have the dollar". This period of 'transition' was a time when contradictory beliefs and practices about artistic production were brought into relief.

In the initial stages of fieldwork, a number of people suggested that I should speak to Mamia about Cook Islands dance. When I first met her I expressed interest in learning to dance and she kindly offered to teach me. I was to come to her house for a lesson once a week. Many of these lessons ended up being held over at the neighbour's house where

\(^6\) Pakott'anga Rauru, a 'coming of age' ceremony for young men. Until approximately the age of thirteen, some young boys' hair is grown long. At the haircutting ceremony families are assigned a lock to cut and provide the child with a present of money. They are considered to be declining in importance.
Mama Kan lived. Mamia wanted to “keep her company” as she worked night-shift at Telecom Cook Islands and was home alone during the day. Mama Kan’s house was colonial style with a large surrounding veranda which was used as a lounge room. Mamia and I practised at one end of the veranda and Mama Kan sat on her couch watching us, commenting on my progress and laughing a lot. Mama Kan occasionally wrote poems. She wrote this one about my attempts to dance:

We have a friend called Kalissa
She’s here to study Cook Islands dance
She even learns how to dance
One step, two step side step, left and right
*Ki mua, ki muri, ki raro, ki ranga*7
*Akauka*, all the dance movements required
To become a good dancer

You know Kalissa she tries her best
To pass the test
At times she seems to just glide on air
Other times her butt seemed to be glued down
But she never give in that easily
For she is determined to be the best
When the dance competition comes around.

Watch DVD: Magda and Me (part two)

A few months after meeting Mamia she said, “I think you should come and live with us”. This meant living with her neighbour, Mama Kan. The house was in the ‘village’ (*tapere*) Takuvaine, Rarotonga, not far from the township of Avarua. Mamia’s house, where she lived with her husband Mike Savage and son Teina, was 25 metres away. Both houses were on Mike’s family land. Mama Kan and I lived in one half of the “old house”, cousins of Mike’s lived in the other half. The house had been built by Stephen Savage, the descendent of an American whaler and New Zealand Maori women who came to live on Rarotonga from 1894. He was an interpreter for the Islands Land Titles Court and he compiled the first Dictionary of Rarotongan Language (1980 [1962]). Mamia and Mike lived in the “new house”, which they built when they married.

7 In English this line is ‘To the front, to the back, up high, down low’. *Akauka* is the local term for the smooth side to side (with a slight curve) hip movement practised by women.
The network of people I came in contact with was very much influenced by Mamia and her family. Mamia’s sister Apii belonged to Orama dance troupe which became the central dance group in my research. This group was run by Sonny Williams and Georgina Keenan-Williams who were also extremely influential in my research. Mamia’s cousin, Carmen Temata, was the Secretary of the Ministry of Cultural Development. Carmen generously gave me an office at the Ministry. In return I did occasional work for them such as typing, research and ushering VIP guests (Queens Representative, Chiefs, Prime Minister, government ministers) to their seats at special events such as the Constitution Celebrations. Mamia’s uncle Ota Joseph (OJ) also worked at the Ministry of Cultural Development as a Special Projects Officer. OJ would spend a lot of time talking about cultural matters and Cook Islands history with me and the anthropologist at the Ministry, Ngatuaine Maui who was also OJ’s niece (on “his wife’s side”). Ngatuaine and I were the same age and spent much time together at work and we also regularly went to parties and out dancing at nightclubs.
Fieldwork and Femininity

It will become clear as the thesis progresses that grooming and domestic cleanliness are central to normative Cook Islands feminine virtue. I consider the historical shaping of domesticity, particularly by missionary ideology. I also demonstrate how evaluations of female dancers, their moral and physical comportment, often includes assessment of their domestic abilities and their ability to provide for kin. As an introduction to these issues I briefly describe my grooming in these areas.

At home, I was required to participate in everyday domestic chores. Cook Islanders consider cleanliness to be extremely important. Houses are swept daily, gardens are spotless, leaves that fall from mangos and other trees are raked at least every second day. I learnt these jobs, along with other more ‘exotic’ ones such as how to feed pigs, collect mangos and pick flowers daily (they are stored in the refrigerator until wreaths need to be made). Mama Kan was a particularly tidy person and she would survey my sweeping or raking, sometimes commenting: “You want a Ph.D., I wouldn’t even give you a Master’s in Housekeeping”. Mamia and Mama Kan also stressed the importance of personal grooming. They were shocked that I never ironed clothes and insisted I did so. My hair was also problematic as it was curly and I often wore it out. Most Cook Islander females wore their hair tied back in severe ponytails or buns. Mama Kan told me once that women at her work had commented on how messy my hair was, and she asked me to buy a comb and “make it nice”.

I mentioned once to a group of people at the Ministry of Cultural Development that at home in Australia we raked leaves rarely, perhaps a few times in autumn. The group laughed and commented on how messy papa’a are in general. Those that had been overseas commented on the state of people’s lawns in Auckland; how shameful it was that they did not keep them tidy. Then one of the group told a story that made a profound impression on me. It was about a woman who was thought to be “loose” and who was

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8 By all accounts, there is no prostitution in the Cook Islands. However, some women are considered to engage in sexual relations with members of the opposite sex for money, alcohol and other goods.
also renowned for having an extremely clean house and garden. At the annual tutaka, which is an island wide house and garden inspection run by the island council, the woman always received special mention in the newspaper as having the tidiest garden in her village. The storyteller then claimed she had even seen her and her children out in their garden during a cyclone, in pouring rain and strong winds, attempting to catch leaves before they fell to the ground. The audience laughed at the absurdity of the image but the vivid picture of a woman’s desperate fight against a cyclone to maintain her ‘clean’ reputation remained with me, forcefully directing my attention towards the moral implications of domesticity. The link between domestic cleanliness and respectable femininity remained a salient one throughout my fieldwork.

I learnt other aspects of ideal Cook Islands femininity, some of which conflicted with my role as researcher. For example, Mamia and Mama Kan would often say, not unkindly: “You know more people on this island than we do!” I would retort, “well that’s my job, I have to talk to lots of people”. The reason behind this comment had to do with the nature of social interaction on Rarotonga. Many people I knew socialised intimately with a small group of people, usually relatives and very close friends in the interest, I believe, of maintaining some privacy. In this small community, people’s activities are subject to intense surveillance and family in particular are “the only people who will remember you”; they are the only ones who will be loyal. A question that is asked every time you meet someone you know is, “where are you going?”. At first I would answer this question literally, explaining the details of where I was going, whom I was seeing and so on. Later I would be told that I had a big mouth and that I should: “stop telling everyone what you are doing. If people ask you, just say you aren’t doing anything; say you are going koka (wandering)”. This deliberate vagueness especially applied to journeys undertaken to other islands in the Cooks or overseas – “you don’t tell anyone, you just take off”.9

9 This is partly because the person leaving will be inundated with requests to take goods and gifts for family members on other islands and abroad. Interestingly, this injunction to be ‘secretive’ also applies if you are at a party. You don’t tell your host you are leaving. You say “I am just going to look at my bike”, “I am going to the toilet” or most commonly you just slip away. Being direct and letting your host know you are leaving is considered rude. It is tantamount to announcing that you are not enjoying the person’s company.
This concern with privacy is also expressed in gendered comportment. Mama Kan once told me that a woman at the market said I was a pana'akari. I was offended because I understood the word to mean ‘crazy’. However, Mama Kan explained that in this instance it meant that I talked to anyone. In one sense this was considered a good quality because “many papa’a on the island think they are better than us locals”. In another sense being pana’akari was the opposite of the way an ideal Cook Islands young woman would behave. While they were demure, graceful and poised, I was loud, forthright and ‘clownish’ (that is, attempting to dance, speak Maori and making a fool of myself on both counts). I mentioned this to a local girlfriend who kindly said, “well if you acted like a proper Rarotongan girl, all shy, it would have taken you ten years to get your research done!”.

**Participating in Dance**

On Rarotonga I ‘joined’ the Orama dance troupe. The group performed at two to three ‘Island Nights’ a week. These are held at hotels and include a buffet of island food, a band that plays island music and a dance performance which lasts around an hour. I participated in weekly rehearsal and shows and also attended hotel shows twice a week where I became promoted from spectator to babysitter (of dancer’s children) to operator of stage lights, a job that meant timing the lights with drum beats.\(^{10}\) I also participated in costume preparation, which involved making fresh components of costumes on the days of performance, such as flower wreaths (ei) and leafy girdles (rauti titi). Costume preparation usually involved two afternoons a week. About every three months costume workshops were held. The mama (elder women of the group) got together to revamp or make new costumes. This included weaving, sewing, screen-printing and tie-dying. On Sundays, members of the dance group modelled clothes for a local designer at a hotel (for which we received a free lunch). I was seen by other dance groups on the island to

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\(^{10}\) I occasionally danced with Orama but at “local” shows not tourist ones. The most amazing experience was dancing at the Constitution Celebrations in 1998. While local audiences found it most enjoyable and humorous watching papa’a dancing, dance group leaders realised that tourists wanted the ‘real thing’, not images of themselves. Senior members of Orama would say to me “once you get a tan you can dance, and when your hair grows long, maybe you could get a brown wig!”. 37
‘belong’ to Orama. As such I could not involve myself with other groups partly because of the (mostly friendly) rivalry that exists between dance groups on Rarotonga. I did, however, attend dance rehearsals and performances of all the other groups and conduct interviews with their leaders and key dancers.

Learning Cook Islands dance was a frustrating and often humiliating experience. As well as the private, though somewhat sporadic lessons, with Mamia, I also attended and participated at Orama rehearsals. During my first few weeks members of the group were polite and distant. After that time I was singled out for humorous insults by male dancers, one male dancer in particular. The first time this occurred we were rehearsing a dance called Raunakaatu. It is a drum dance about men fishing in which the female dancers are fish being lured and captured by the males. As the male dancers slowly enact pulling in fishing nets, one male cried out, “mmm nice Maori fish”. Then he feigned surprise, remarking “hey what’s that papa’a fish doing in the net, we will throw that back”. Male members of the group found this extremely amusing and female members chastised them. One grabbed my wrist and led me to a huddle of female dancers who were pointedly ignoring anything the male dancers said. This joke served as my entrée into a world of feminine solidarity. The female dancers became extremely generous and would include me in a number of outside activities including going to the beach, nightclubs and video nights.

Every April the Dancer of the Year competitions are held. This competition has senior, intermediate, junior divisions and “Golden Oldies” and “papa’a” sections. The latter two are the most popular with local audiences as they are often extremely humorous. The “oldies” are Cook Islanders over 40 years of age and while many female contestants are serious, the majority of male contestants aim to make the audience laugh. They perform chants with suggestive lyrics and accompany them with obscene movements. The papa’a competition usually comprises tourists who have had no training or practice. Their imitation of Cook Islands dancing is seen as hysterically funny to locals. This humour is added to by the mock seriousness of the event, including a professional Master of Ceremonies (M.C.) and a panel of judges.
In 1997 I joined the papa’a competition, an action taken seriously by members of the Orama dance group and, to a certain extent, by Mamia. She chose a recent song for me to dance to and she choreographed my movements. Gina and other members from Orama assisted with my technique and costumes saying, “you have to win, you are representing us”. I was surprised, and still am, at how important my performance was to members of the group. I was most relieved to win the competition, partly because it gave me exposure that was extremely useful for my research. My picture appeared on the front page of the newspaper with the title “Doctor of Dance”; when I went into the ANZ bank, the teller started humming “Kalissa’s song” as it had come to be known; at the airport people unknown to me would cry out “Kaliiissa” (mimicking the M.C. who had a distinctive pronunciation of my name). Footage of the papa’a competition was repeatedly shown on the television, particularly as a filler before the news. It was particularly useful because people who had declined interviews now rang and offered to participate in my study.

Watch DVD: Magda and Me (part three)

When I went to the island of Ma’uke, I got off the plane and a Catholic nun came rushing up to me: “You are a godsend! We are having a talent quest to fundraise for a church hall next week, so you can be our special guest!”. Interestingly my appearance was a dismal failure. I had spent the week learning a song about their island to dance to under the instruction of the females in the house I was staying. As I was now accustomed to performing for local audiences on Rarotonga I expected the Ma’uke audience to begin laughing as soon as I started performing, and was startled when I was greeted with an awkward silence. It was not until the man who was singing the song for me changed the song’s lyrics from “I cherish you Ma’uke” to “I cherish you Moana” (an old man in the audience) that everyone laughed and continued to do so. The family I stayed with told me later, “they didn’t know what to do, they had never seen a white person dancing before”.

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As well as learning the formal aspects of Cook Islands dancing, I also had to learn a great deal of contextual knowledge including how to dance, in what costume, in what style, with whom and when. This was particularly important when dancing with members of the opposite sex at nightclubs and bars and is examined in depth later in the thesis. As an outsider, Cook Islands nightclub dancing appeared extremely sexual to me. However, like any dance form, Cook Islands nightclub dancing has rules, an “ordered sensuality” (Cowan 1990: xii). Receiving instruction about these rules was often difficult. The reader will have seen on the DVD segment ‘Magda and Me (part two)’ which features Mamia and me practicing. I dance in nightclub style ‘seductively’ up to Mamia. She says “that’s the Tere’s bar style” (Tere’s bar is a nightclub in Avarua). I ask if it is okay to dance like that with men. To which Mama Kan replies ambiguously: “You’re enjoying yourself! But you better watch out or you might get carried away with it!”.

Methodology

As well as participant observation in various dance contexts, I conducted and recorded around 60 formal interviews with dancers, choreographers and musicians. I attempted to interview performers from different age groups as generational differences of opinion about dance and music are quite marked. I also interviewed people that had previously been dancers but now did not dance because of their religious beliefs. My formal interviews were based on questions about individual’s life histories. Interviewees tended to speak passionately and with endurance about dance. Many interviewees did not separate stories of their involvement in performing arts with other aspects of their lives. Dancing, singing or playing instruments were connected to other events and passions. In general terms, the two main passions were land claims and the concomitant issue of relationships with kin. Often these local issues would be linked to more global concerns about the influence of papa’a ways on the maintenance of identity, traditions, and performing arts genres.

\footnote{While land in the Cook Islands is inalienable, the New Zealand colonial administration introduced a land tenure act in 1915 which required all land to be registered through the Land Court. Succession claims (and contestations), confirmation of leases and applications for partition take up a considerable amount of time and money.}
I attended many different kinds of social events in which dance was a central activity. These ranged from life stage events such as weddings, haircutting ceremonies and twenty-first birthdays, to annual events like Christmas, New Year, Easter and independence celebrations which involved whole islands or village groups. There were many other functions that occurred throughout the eighteen-month period of my fieldwork. I also attended school functions, such as parents’ day (which included dance performances by individual children and by grades), beauty contests, talent quests, song contests, drag queen shows, community fundraisers and performances to celebrate the completion of a community project such as a new village hall or school building. On Rarotonga there was a performing arts event (not directly related to the tourist industry) approximately every two to three weeks. This clearly points to the centrality of performing arts in the lives of many of the 10,000 people who lived on the island during this time.

Church services also included ‘dancing’ but not according to the perceptions of religious leaders and their congregations. I mainly attended events held by the Cook Islands Christian Church called uapou, where village groups sang and ‘danced’ to religious songs. I also participated in our district performance on Nuku day, a day which celebrates the arrival of the gospel to the Cook Islands. Each year the three districts of Rarotonga put on a musical and dramatic interpretation of a Bible story. Our village’s production was Moses and the Mount. I played, along with other women in the village, the “heathens” who worshipped the golden cow.

Watch DVD: Nuku, Gospel Day

For part of my fieldwork I had access to a Hi8 video recorder which I used to record dance events. Some of these events I have edited and included in this thesis as a DVD. There were a number of reasons for the inclusion of the DVD. Firstly, as I am writing about moving bodies, I felt it made sense to include kinetic images, not just still photographs. Secondly, non-verbal interaction is notoriously difficult to fully describe and the visual images should assist in fleshing out these descriptions. Thirdly, a
recognition that visual and verbal communication/representation are different orders, that cannot necessarily be translated into one another (MacDougall 1999, 1998; Gilroy 1987) informs my inclusion of a DVD. While many anthropologists of dance and cultural expression liken it to a linguistic text (Lewis 1992; Geertz 1973),\(^\text{12}\) I argue that expressive forms can be extra-linguistic and non-cognitive realms of experience and knowing.

**Layered Mobility**

Although based on Rarotonga, I also travelled to a number of outer islands, as well as Tahiti and New Zealand. Often it was the travel undertaken by Cook Islanders I knew that necessitated my own travel. Mamia and Mama Kan were from Aitutaki. They maintained links with their home island through visits and gifts of food and goods which were reciprocated by family on Aitutaki. I made a number of trips to Aitutaki to observe dance events such as the *koni raoni* (discussed in Chapter Seven). I spent a month in Ma’uke and three weeks in Tongareva. These trips were invaluable as they allowed me to experience the to and fro movement between islands, between urban situations and village ones, that characterises the lifestyles of many Cook Islanders. These trips were also important because they provided comparative material with my main fieldwork on Rarotonga. Because people I spoke to about dance always classified dances into southern group and northern group styles (and then further categorised them into island differences), it made sense to visit an island from each group. In addition, people on Rarotonga constantly compared Rarotongan expressive practices with those of the outer

\(^\text{12}\) Geertz (1973) describes the famous cockfight as a literary text which is read and written by the participants in a culture (which is an ensemble of texts). Yet to get at the idea across that the cockfight is a text, Geertz relies not on metaphors of visuality – reading, writing, speaking and looking – but on affective metaphors of music and movement. The importance of the affective is relegated to a footnote:

*The use of the ... visual idiom for perception ... is more than usually misleading here ... Balinese follow the progress of the fight as much ... with their bodies as with their eyes, moving their limbs, heads, and trunks in gestural mimicry of the cocks' manoeuvres means that much of the individual's experience of the fight is kinaesthetic rather than visual. (Geertz 1973: 451)*

While Geertz concedes that the cockfight says something through "a vocabulary of sentiment" and is a "sentimental education", in the last instance he insists that we can not just interpret the "banal tautologies of affect" but the "use of emotion for cognitive ends" (Geertz 1973: 449).
islands. The outer islands (except Aitutaki) were simultaneously considered to be backward ("like Rarotonga was twenty years ago") and more culturally ‘authentic’. Rarotonga, in this comparison, was described as a “cultural fruit salad” which has lost a lot of traditional knowledge and practices.

There are many reasons for the mobility within the Cook Islands, including employment and maintenance of kin networks. This movement is characteristic of many diasporic Pacific Islander communities, particularly Tongan and Samoan communities. But in contrast to Tonga and Samoa, Cook Islanders do not appeal to forms of national categorisation. There is no equivalent to *fa’a Samoa* (the Samoan way) or ‘anga *fakatonga* (the Tongan way). When I asked people about this, they often explained that when speaking to *papa’a* or other non-Cook Islanders, they may talk about, “Cook Islands way of doing things”, but this term has little efficacy in local contexts. This was because identity tends to be centred primarily on kinship categories and then identification with particular islands. Of course nationalist discourses do exist in the Cook Islands but they do not have the same currency or potency as Samoan or Tongan ones. Mama Kan put this in a way that points to some rejection of notions of European ‘discovery’ and colonialism:

You have got more identity being an Aitutakian than a Cook Islander. A Cook Islander is only Captain Cook. Who wants to be a Captain Cook? I would rather be an Aitutakian than a Captain Cook. He goes on the bottle of Cooks Lager.

While this thesis is primarily about the people I knew on Rarotonga, it was not possible to write solely about Rarotonga or Rarotongans as very few people identified as such. Of course there were Rarotongan families but most people, even if they were born on Rarotonga, oriented themselves towards the “home” islands of their families.
Figure 9: Cook's Legacy
My fieldwork then was necessarily multi-sited (Marcus 1998). It followed the geographical movements of people I knew on Rarotonga to their home-islands and to communities abroad. As a number of the chapters in this thesis demonstrate, travel is inherent to Cook Islands sociality, defined through the maintenance of familial, village and island and other group (such as dance and sport) relationships. Producing a multi-sited ethnography, however, is a difficult task. Most of my writing is about events and people based on Rarotonga. However, it was impossible to limit my writing to Rarotonga or even to easily use the term ‘Rarotongans’. Key people on Rarotonga, such as Mamia and Mama Kan, define themselves as Aitutakians. Similarly, Orama co-leader Sonny Williams was born on Rarotonga but identifies strongly with his Manihikian “side” and he represents himself as a Manihikian.

Rather than attempting to represent (or create) a study about a geographically bounded group, this thesis aims to foreground the layered mobility of people’s lives and to give a sense of how expressive culture, dance in particular, travels through local, national and international milieu. The contemporary mobility of Cook Islanders is not a new phenomenon, a point made by Epeli Hau’ofa (1994, 1998) about the Pacific region as a whole. Migration, travel and exploration involving economic and cultural exchange were, and still are, central components of the region’s history (Hau’ofa 1994: 152-4). Following Hau’ofa, I also attempt to show how travel is central to Cook Islanders’ ideas about community and further, how global economic and political processes impact upon these communities. While my decision to pay attention to movement was primarily motivated by the layered mobility of the lifestyles of the Cook Islanders I was in contact with, it also reflects recent critical trends in anthropology, away from village-based representations of ethnographic wholes (see Fabian 1983).

My understanding of the layered mobility of contemporary Cook Islands expressive culture is also informed by writing on modernity, nationalism and globalisation (Iwabuchi 2002; Appadurai 2001, 1996; Miller 1995; Friedman 1994). My goal is to analyse the dynamics of the global-local nexus in order to understand expressive practices in relation to wider historical, social and political movements. The work of
Arjun Appadurai is particularly relevant in this regard. My investigation of Cook Islands expressive forms draws upon a number of strands of his work. I explore expressive culture as a series of practices which experiment with modernity (Appadurai 1996: 112). Like his analyses of global media and mass migration, I view Cook Islands dance as the "work of imagination" which is: "neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern" (Appadurai 1996: 4). I also draw upon Appadurai's insights about the way global cultural flows are indigenised (Appadurai 1996, 2001; see also Besnier 2002). Throughout this thesis I examine the dynamics of indigenising practises in particular the ways in which the categories 'local' and 'nonlocal', and related concepts such as 'tradition' and 'modern', are negotiated and defined by cultural producers in the Cook Islands. Again, I do not consider these categories as antithetical but as a zone of contestation where various sectors of the Cook Islands population struggle over their meaning and aim at legitimating their understandings of the terms 'local' and 'nonlocal'. A related theme presented in this thesis is that of locality production. Drawing from Appadurai, I examine locality, as "a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects" (Appadurai 1996: 182). Cook Islands dance, I suggest, is one example of localisation strategies Cook Islanders employ in the affective and material production of locality.

At the same time as global forces are actively incorporated into local repertories (Appadurai 1996: 7), the local is also annexed to the global. In other words the local is as oriented towards transnational, regional and global agendas as it is to local concerns (Iwabuchi 2002: 47; Besnier 2002). Engagement with global flows creates complex entanglements which cannot be simply seen as either local or global but as a dynamic combination of the two. I view Cook Islands locality as a notion informed by the interplay between competing perspectives – colonial, postcolonial, Western, global and regional factors.
Anthropology, Dance and Performance

In addition to exploring dance through theories of globalisation and modernity, I also utilise analyses of performance which examine the processual and mediatational nature of expressive forms (Henry et al. 2000; O’Hanlon 1989; Schieffelin 1982, 1985). I suggest that “dance is an intensely generative site in which cultural and social identities are being performed, contested and/or reformulated in postcolonial societies” (Henry et al. 2000: 259). Writing on performance that stresses the dynamic nature of cultural production provides the conceptual tools for an investigation of Cook Islands dance and its role in negotiating aspects of Cook Islands modernity. In the following overview of anthropological literature on dance and performance I first locate this thesis in terms of Pacific-based scholarship on dance and music. I then critically discuss the models used to conceptualise expressive forms in order to clarify my perspective on Cook Islands dance practices. The affective and gendered nature of expressive forms are the final subject of this review. I attempt to synthesise theoretical understanding of emotions, embodiment and gender to begin my analysis of the ways in which dance is a deeply meaningful practice for many Cook Islanders.

Within Pacific anthropology, the Cook Islands has received comparatively little attention. The north western atoll Pukapuka (which is linguistically and culturally closely aligned with Samoa) is the exception (Borofsky 1987; Salisbury 1984, 1983; Hecht 1976; Beckett 1964; Beaglehole and Beaglehole 1938). The majority of anthropological work on the Cook Islands has focused around three main areas: social change (Baddeley 1978; Beckett 1964; Beaglehole 1957); genealogy and kinship (Hecht 1976; Baltaxe 1975) and the narrative analysis of myth (Reilly 1991; Siikala 1990, 1991). These works provide some of the necessary background to a study of dance in Cook Islands society.

Aside from Jeffrey Sissons informative work (1995, 1997, 1999) which explores the link between Cook Islands dance and nationalism, there have been no anthropological studies of Cook Islands dance. However, a number of ethnomusicological and material culture analyses of Cook Islands music provide a potentially useful starting point (Lawrence
1993, 1992; Jonassen 1991; Little 1990; Laird 1982; Salisbury 1983; McLean 1980). As Cook Islands dance is a polyphonic form, involving poetic song texts, vocals, drums, string instruments, artefacts and costumes, I draw upon these studies throughout the thesis. Their focus, however, diverges from mine in that they tend to concentrate on the structural and formal features of the Cook Islands performing arts rather than on the social and contextual nature of these practices.

Within the Pacific region, most research centres on the structures and semiotic features of dance and music. In particular, the pioneering scholarship of Adrienne L. Kaeppler, who has undertaken work on a number of Pacific art forms, requires acknowledgement. Her writing on Tongan dance, music and poetry (1967, 1993), Tahitian dance and material culture (2001), and general methodological and theoretical essays on the anthropology of dance and the arts (1989, 1987, 1983, 1978) are all relevant. She describes her work as ethnoscientific structuralism which examines “the interrelationship between social structure and the arts” (1989: 220) and aims at uncovering the “deep structures” of the arts. In terms of dance, this involves coding the basic elements of dance primarily through notation of the dance movements. The meaning of the “deep structures” of dance are then used to explain structures that exist in the society at large (for work in a similar vein see Lawrence (ed.) 2001; Shennan 1981).

This thesis takes seriously Kaeppler’s (1978: 32) assertion that dance and other artistic production cannot be considered as reflections or appendages to other seemingly more significant areas of social life such as politics, economics and social organisation. However, while I attempt to foreground formal aspects of dance movements, choreography and local aesthetic evaluations, my view of social structures and the content of artistic forms diverges considerably from Kaeppler’s. I begin from the assumption that while dance may reveal aspects of social life, dance and social life are not fixed structures but are negotiated processual practices. My intention is not to map the significance of particular movements, genres or local classificatory schemes per se. Rather, I begin from the assumption that their significance changes according to the contexts in which they are performed. For this reason I do not consider notation or other
forms of structural analysis particularly relevant to this thesis.\textsuperscript{13} I aim to explore how expressive movements are generative rather than simply illustrative of other aspects of social life.

This thesis is more closely aligned with anthropological studies that examine dance and other expressive forms as practices and mediums of social action. There is a growing body of anthropological studies of expressive forms that emphasise the political significance of human movement (for an overview see Reed 1998; for the Pacific see Nero 1992). I view this trend as associated with three interconnected areas of scholarly interest: the processual nature of social life; the corporeal production of identities (bodily inscription and expression); and the dynamic interplay between human agency and societal constraints. Dance and movement more generally are increasingly viewed as significant mediums through which the dynamics of embodied practice can be investigated.\textsuperscript{14} My understanding of Cook Islands dance has also been shaped by recent feminist and postcolonial writing on identity politics and performance, in particular the works of Jane Cowan (1990), Lila Abu-Lughod (1986), Unni Wikan (1990) and Dorrine Kondo (1997). These authors focus on gendered and racialised bodies as sites of identity production and aesthetic practice. In other words, they are concerned with the \textit{dynamics} of self-presentation and social life.

\textbf{Dance and Identities}

In part this thesis draws upon a body of literature that investigates the ways in which dance forms are used to express and evoke social identities and unities. Because of its visual immediacy, dance is frequently adopted as a symbol to communicate what people feel about themselves and to demarcate identities (Spencer 1985; Blacking and Kealiinohomoku 1979; Hanna 1979; Royce 1977). Approaches to dance as a form of communication tend to stress the social functions of dance. Dance is variously seen as: a safety valve or emotional outlet for excess stress or excitement; an organ for social

\textsuperscript{13} Such as frame analysis (Cowan 1990) or Peircean semiotics (Lewis 1992).

\textsuperscript{14} However Reed (1998: 504) makes the valid point that although there is considerable interest in the anthropology of the body, “the study of moving bodies remains on the periphery”.

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control; an educational tool central to the transmission and maintenance of cultural sentiments and values. Dance is also viewed as playing a crucial role in the display and competition of group boundaries, the creation of a unified moral community, and the reaffirmation of social bonds (Spencer 1985: 3-38; Royce 1977). What is emphasised in these accounts is the role of dance in the maintenance of group life. What dance says about other institutions such as religion, politics, gender relations and ethnic identity also tends to be the focus of these studies.

Throughout the Cook Islands post-independence history, dance has been used as a politicised symbol to articulate local, national, regional and international aims. As I discuss in Chapter Two, 'culture' (dance and music particularly) has been an important aspect of nation-making. For instance, the first independent Cook Islands government established a Cultural Division to foster local arts and 'traditions' and annual dance competitions to celebrate independence. As well as fostering unity, Cook Islands dance has been utilised in nationalist discourses to demarcate difference. Displays of Cook Islands dance are involved in expressing difference at national and international levels.

While I have no argument with the idea that dance can serve to reinforce or demarcate particular identities, I aim to show throughout this thesis that these identities (and their performance) are often contested and that they are subject to multiple interpretations. One major criticism of communication models of expressive forms is that they assume that the meanings and identities disclosed are monolithic; they "are apt to be ascribed en bloc to a society as a whole, or at least to substantial sectors of it" (O'Hanlon 1989: 20). What is not taken into account is the possibility of variation in the perception of meaning between certain sectors of a group and, indeed, between individuals.

There is one further relevant criticism of models of expressive forms as communicative. In his writing on adornment and display among the Wahgi, Papua New Guinea, O'Hanlon (1989) argues that the notion that art is a conduit for communicating information rests on the premise that artistic practices express what is already known. The possibility that meanings are emergent rather than predetermined is not considered.
For O'Hanlon, it is precisely those things that are not known but are up for debate, clarification and evaluation that are worked through in performance and display (1989: 20-1). In a similar vein, Schieffelin (1985) also criticises meaning and communication-centred approaches to performance on the grounds that the performative aspects of "ritual":

Are effective less because they communicate meaning (though this is also important) than because, through performance, meanings are formulated in a social rather than cognitive space, and the participants are engaged with the symbols in the interactional creation of a performance reality, rather than merely being informed by them as knowers. (Schieffelin 1985: 707)

In other words performance is not only about conveying information but constructing a social situation or event. This emergent dimension of performance, which is constructed through the interaction of performers and participants, "stands beyond the text or structure of the performance itself (while at the same time embodying it)" (Schieffelin 1985: 722). Of importance in both O'Hanlon's and Schieffelin's accounts is the notion that contexts, ideas and relationships to which dance refers are negotiated and emergent aspects of any performance.

The underlying assumption of this thesis is that Cook Islands dance takes place in multidimensional performance spaces and that dance practice is tied up not only in signification but explication. The identities expressed through Cook Islands dancing are viewed as both relational and provisional. They depend on both historical and social contexts of performance and the ways in which that context is assembled within the performative event.

Schieffelin's account of performance also points to the embodied nature of knowing as opposed to (or as well as) cognitive knowledge. The issue of how to understand non-verbal forms of expression has vexed many dance scholars. I view dance as a non-verbal form, which at times is interrelated with verbal modes of communication. I analyse the talk that surrounds dance – the evaluations of dance performances and of dancers; the gossip, commentary and narratives it produces (Cowan 1990: 25). At the same time I allow for the possibility that not all non-verbal expressions can be translated into verbal
ones. In a number of case studies presented here the meanings of certain movements and gestures are extra-linguistic and non-cognitive bodily realms of experience. I suggest that, in certain instances, expressive forms are used to express things that cannot be spoken. This extra linguistic quality tends to occur when performers are expressing, thinking or feeling values that are not hegemonic, such as non-normative sexualities. Intimate emotions, such as personal grief and sorrow also find expression in dance, song, and music, when other forms of communication are not capable of serving this need.

**Dance and (E)motion**

When I asked Cook Islanders why they danced they would invariably say, "because it makes my happy" or, "the main thing about dancing is to express happiness". I used to think the connection people made between dance and happiness was an inane answer to my inane question and therefore not particularly relevant to understanding dance. I would answer statements about happiness with: "Yes but does it have a deeper meaning?" or, "What is it really about?". But people kept insisting that dancing was really about pleasurable emotions. As Cook Islanders consistently linked dance and happiness in various ways – "you must dance from the heart"; "dance with warm feeling" – I began to take this explanation seriously and my project became in part an attempt to understand the nature and status of happiness in general and address the ways in which "dance is a walk which is felt" (Jefferson 1986: 27).

I asked Mamia why she was considered by others to be a good dancer. She replied:

> Because I enjoy my dancing. I laugh right through, I sing, I put everything into my performance. People look at you when you are like that and think, 'she's happy'.

Mamia’s emphasis on enjoyment and the display of pleasure are central to many Cook Islanders’ definition of a good dancer. Dance group leaders are always encouraging their dancers to smile and laugh when they are performing. Dancers that do not look like they are enjoying themselves or who are concentrating too hard are not considered good dancers, regardless of their technical abilities. Conversely, dancers that are not particularly adept can ‘get away with it’ if they display enjoyment. When Mamia danced she was the embodiment of a good dancer; she had flawless technique, she sang, laughed
and her face glowed. I recognised this face as “stage face”; a face I had been taught when doing classical ballet. This “stage face” is smooth and radiant, involving a big smile and a glistening ethereal gaze raised above an audience.\(^{15}\)

After discussing the features of a good dancer, Mamia extended the connection between pleasurable states, dance and music to a general philosophy for living:

You see the point of life is to have fun, \textit{angaanga tamataora}. You know we have a free way of life over here; we enjoy ourselves and dance is part of that. It is very important in a stressful situation that you pick up a guitar and sing – then you will be happy. You don’t let the music sing to you [i.e. the radio]. You sing. When you hear the drums, it makes your blood move, you must dance – it is me coming out.

Mamia’s explanation was in English, except for one Maori phrase she used to supplement her thoughts. \textit{Angaanga tamataora} incorporates a larger complex of meaning than the English words “fun” or “enjoyment”. The literal translation is ‘to work pleasure’ or ‘to make pleasure’ and is close to the English expression ‘the good life’. The phrase also connects everyday life and aesthetics, as the word \textit{tamataora} is used to signify both expressive forms and pleasurable emotional states. In Maori, the most commonly used words for pleasurable emotions are \textit{mataora} and \textit{rekareka}. These terms cover a range of emotions including joy, festivity, merriment, delight and fun. They are usually applied to sociable practices like eating, drinking and celebrating. The causative prefix \textit{ta} is often employed to emphasise the ‘performative’ characteristics of these states, that is, the way pleasure is able to be \textit{induced}, particularly by expressive forms. For instance, \textit{tamataora} is defined in a Maori Language Dictionary as “to entertain, to make joyful; to do those

\[^{15}\text{While I spent time thinking about (and attempting to perfect) a Cook Islands "stage face" during fieldwork, I did not see it as having any particular ethnographic significance. It was simply an aesthetic component of Cook Islands dance that I wanted to learn. Its importance to understanding both performance and the aesthetics of everyday comportment in the Cook Islands only became clear when I read the work of Fenella Cannell (1995) and Unni Wikan (1990). Both see expressions like "stage face" as a way to understand people's creative responses to their life situations. Both authors give "stage face" historical and cultural specificity and provide ways of thinking through the relationships between expressive culture and everyday life that are explored in this thesis. In her analysis of performance in the Philippines, Fenella Cannell (1995: 230) begins with an image of women working in rice fields breaking into imitations of American pop music, joking at the incongruity between their work and American notions of glamour, wealth and beauty. Imitation and transformation of foreign forms serve to give performers a certain empowerment and social élan. Cannell's insights into the performance of global forms in local situations like rice paddies are taken up in later chapters of this thesis. More immediately, her assertion that something elusive such as a facial expression can be considered a social fact (Cannell 1995: 223) has had a large influence on this introduction and in shaping the prologue.}
things or acts that will be a source of joy, pleasure, etc., to others” (Savage 1980: 149). *Tarekareka*, as I mentioned earlier, also refers to both pleasurable states and to expressive forms such as dance, sport and drama.

Mamia’s formula for the good life is one where aesthetics inform everyday dispositions; music and dance both enhance and create life’s enjoyment. They are emotionally transformative practices and are recognised as such. Her definition gestures to the ‘music of the dawn’ as a way of managing personal difficulties and stressful situations. It is considered an effective way of playing out personal emotions of sadness, a way to soothe negative feeling. This solitary form is replaced by the sound of drums, a sound that heralds social events and celebrations and a sound which, in her poetic description, forces her to emerge, dancing.

The expression ‘coming out dancing’ is a neat condensation of values that are considered important to many Rarotongans. As in many small, kin-based communities, sociability and collective life are valued, while introspection, individual pursuits and solitary behaviour are variously considered rude, selfish and unhealthy. Sociality is seen as both natural and as obligatory and practices that are integrative are emphasised (Cowan 1990: 5; Turner 1993; Levy 1973). *Tamataora* and *tarekareka* explicitly link pleasurable feeling and expressive forms. Rather than an expression of a state internal to an individual, *mataora* or *rekareka* denotes a mode of social action or “affective comportment” (Besnier 1995: 104). Put another way, ‘happiness’ in its Cook Islands usage is not understood as a ‘thing’ but as an expressive process essential to sociality.

As Mamia suggests achieving ‘the good life’ takes work. *Tamataora*, the effort to make or cause happiness or pleasure, is important to stress given ‘western’ representation of Cook Islanders as happy dancing Polynesians. Unni Wikan (1990) makes this point clearly in her work on how emotions are managed in Bali. The struggle to keep one’s face bright and clear as part of the effort taken to manage turbulent emotions, is often mistaken as an essential characteristic.
What Westerners have perceived as an innate aesthetic mood, an ingrained disposition to be graceful and poised, I found instead to reflect a deliberate attitude, a willed response of 'not caring', 'forgetting' the bad that has come to pass. (Wikan 1990: xvi)

Like 'bright face', tamataora and tarekareka are a social duty, required to ensure amiable social interaction. They are also a survival strategy, a way of screening feelings from public surveillance.

While tamataora and tarekareka, the pleasurable, genial aspect of sociality, is highly valued, this does not mean that all interactions achieve this state. Many parties I attended in the Cook Islands, like the one described in the introduction, end with drunken arguments, accusations and sometimes physical fights. While this conflict was not considered ideal, it is commonplace, suggesting that sociability can be adversarial as well as convivial (Simmel 1971 in Farrer 2000). Parties which emphasise togetherness and pleasure are, in fact, prone to break down. I discuss these seemingly divergent aspects of nightclubbing and attending parties in Chapter Six.

There is a considerable body of scholarly literature in the Pacific which examines the performative states of happiness, such as humour, laughter, joking or clowning, and their association with expressive forms (Hereniko 1995; Macintyre 1992; Sinavaiana 1992; Huntsman and Hooper 1975). I draw from this work but at the same time I find it necessary to not only examine expressions of happiness through joking and laughter but to also attempt to understand happiness itself as an interactional mode. Academic studies of emotion (for an overview see Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Lutz and White 1986) tend to focus on negative emotional states such as pain (Seremetakis 1991), loss, grief and trauma (Wikan 1990; Abu-Lughod 1986; Rosaldo 1980), not on pleasurable ones. These states are put forward, often implicitly, as foundational and somehow more 'real' than positive emotions. Similarly, studies of the body tend to focus on the body in pain: deviant, tortured, criminalised and volatile. Balancing this trend, this thesis analyses states like happiness, joy and pleasure. I suggest that happy bodies and happy movements, rather than being transitory or epiphenomenal are important and worthy of analysis in and of themselves.
Like many of the studies emphasising the social constructedness of emotions, I view emotions as social as well as psychological categories which are "embodied, conceptual, moral, and ideational constructs that place the self in a dynamic relation to social structure" (Seremetakis 1991: 4). I am also interested in the ways in which emotions are communicated through bodily means. Here, Marcel Mauss’ work on body techniques is particularly useful as he attempts to think of emotions and bodies simultaneously. He argues that body techniques are a form of physical education and at the same time, an education in composure. In his reflection on initiation rites, he writes:

The great tests of stoicism … which constitute initiation for the majority of mankind, have as their aim to teach composure, resistance, seriousness, presence of mind, dignity. (Mauss 1979: 121)

This physical education in composure is a "retarding mechanism … a mechanism inhibiting disorderly movements". It is also, just as importantly, a form of "resistance to emotional seizure"(Mauss 1979: 122). If we interpret Mauss’ statements in Foucauldian terms, we can view the bodily inscription of power as both generative and restrictive. In other words, bodily techniques produce composure and resistance, disorder and order.

That embodied practices can be understood as the control of emotions is suggestive in terms of Cook Islands dance. The association Cook Islanders make between dance and happiness can be viewed as a physical injunction to be happy. I am in part concerned with the ways in which dancing in the Cook Islands may be prescriptive and, like Mauss, with the ways in which social forms are imposed on bodies. However, throughout this thesis I am also concerned with the dynamic ways in which Cook Islanders negotiate social restraint through bodily movement.

**Dance and Gender**

Dance is one arena where bodily ideas about gender are obviously reproduced. In Cook Islands dance, male and female movements often suggest ideals of masculinity and femininity. The men are warriors – they are usually strong and physically well built. They exaggeratedly dance the physicality of ‘traditional’ work; they fish, row canoes, and husk coconuts with their teeth. In contrast, the women dance the beauty of nature;
their hand movements suggest soft waves, their hips, clothed in grass skirts, allude to swaying palms. Their movements are graceful, demure and gentle. Throughout the thesis I examine how gender ideologies are expressed in the physical and emotional components of Cook Islands dance. Dance movements, techniques, choreography, costumes and singing all present ideas about normative femininity and masculinity.

There are also a number of Cook Islands dance performances which involve parodic gender reversals and mixing. These range from ‘Western’ style drag queen competitions, to fundraising performances of cross-dressing and dancing (male to female) for church groups, to the popular practice of females dancing like males at nightclubs. These displays, I argue, in part reinscribe normative and highly codified gendered movement (Murray 1999). They also can be an exploration of other non-normative movements and practices. Either way, Cook Islanders find these reversals hugely entertaining and humorous, suggesting there is certain pleasure to be derived from the representation of deviance from gendered norms and practices.

My understanding of gender is influenced by feminist work on the performative rather than essential qualities of gender. Judith Butler's (1994, 1990, 1988) inquiry into gender as a performative category has provided ways for me to think through the importance and centrality of movement to understanding gender. Throughout I focus on gendered “styles of the flesh” (Butler 1990: 33); acts, postures, techniques, and movements and their role in constituting gendered Cook Islanders.

In addition to examining how gender is performed, I am concerned with the interrelationalship between dance and everyday movement – the ways in which ideas about masculinity and femininity presented in dance are connected to a broader “cultural style” (Lewis 1992: 132). In the Cook Islands, everyday bodily comportment and action is highly gendered and difference from prescribed roles is noted. An incident which occurred during fieldwork highlights this surveillance of the minutiae of gendered movement. The main form of transportation in the Cook Islands is by motorbike. Men sit on their motorbikes casually hunched with their legs spread while women sit close to the
front of the motorbike, their backs rigid and their knees firmly together. An Australian archaeologist took a Cook Islands woman and me to the site he was excavating. He led the way on his motorbike and the Cook Islands woman drove the other bike with me on the back. On the way she exclaimed to me in disgust: “Look at how he is sitting on his bike, like a girl with his knees in like that. He should have them out”. I asked: “What for? You can ride your bike however you like”. She replied, “So he can show off how big his dingdong is!”.

The expression of certain emotions is also highly gendered. Public clowning, joking and parodic dancing is primarily a male preserve. Women, who are past child-rearing age, and not of high status, may clown but young women (and women of chiefly status) are constrained from doing so unless they are in all-female company. While the movements of both sexes are carefully surveyed in the Cook Islands, there is clear asymmetry in the evaluations of these movements. Females are subject to far more rigid moral surveillance than males in terms of both everyday movement and aesthetic performance. For instance, almost all of the debate about delimiting the ‘traditional’ from the ‘modern’ in dance is centred around female dance movements and female costumes, ‘traditional’ forms being seen as refined as opposed to sexually explicit ‘modern’ ones (see Chapter Three). This connection of female bodily presentation with issues of prestige, reputation and sexuality is central. Here Judith Cowan’s (1990) work on dance in northern Greece has been extremely useful. She argues that dance is often problematic for women in ways that it is not for men and this problem centres around the containment and expression of female sexuality. Women are placed in a contradictory position; they are encouraged to display their beauty, skill and sensuality in dance but they cannot dance “too much” (Cowan 1990: 200). They must not flaunt themselves or get carried away when they dance.

Dancing is a complex, polysemous and ambiguously generative practice which is:

... associated with control by others ... but also with freedom; suffering but also release; sociability but also competition; display but also exposure; sensuality but also the potential for loss of status; power but also vulnerability; expressions of individuality but also of social accountability. (Cowan 1990: 20)
The importance of Cowan's approach is that it treats dance as inseparable from the people who do it. Like Cowan, I am interested in how dancing bodies are actively involved in both celebrating and exploring sexual and gender inequality. Throughout this thesis I am concerned with the way cultural ideas and practices are embodied in dance and in the performativity of dancing bodies. Dance practices, I argue, are not straightforward reflections of prior social, political or personal relations, but rather, dancing is a site where these processes are elaborated, represented and debated.

**Thesis Overview**

As I stated earlier in the chapter, this thesis aims to show the ways in which dance, and expressive culture more generally, are central to Cook Islands sociality. My interest is in the dynamics of this sociality; the way in which dancing generates, performs, contests, and reinforces social and personal identities. In addition, expressive performances take place in specific contexts and they play out local, national and global concerns. These concerns at times compete in terms of various moral, political, personal and economic agendas of postcolonial Cook Islanders. It is this mediational aspect of Cook Islands expressive culture that is especially explored.

The following two chapters examine Cook Islands dance in a broad political, social and historical context. They provide a chronological overview of key issues and debates surrounding contemporary Cook Islands dance practices. Three related themes emerge. The first theme is the negotiation of Cook Islands modernity. Perceived 'traditions' such as dance are crucial to this negotiation in a postcolonial setting. The second theme is focused on the tensions that exist between religious notions of dance and the postcolonial governments' promotion of 'culture' in nation-making and in economic development. The final theme is the central role discourses about Cook Islands femininity – morality, respectability, containment – play in the evaluation of both 'traditions' and 'modernity'.

Chapter Two is concerned with the role of dance and other expressive forms in precolonial and colonial social life. Its aim is to show the historical processes that inform contemporary dance practice. The primary focus is on the way forms of entertainment,
tarekareka, have been transformed and renegotiated since European invasion. Chapter Three examines debates surrounding contemporary dance practice. Dance and talk about dancing are influenced by ideas about the pre-European and colonial Cook Islands past. Central to these debates is the issue of cultural ownership and loss which is expressed through notions of modernity and tradition.

The relationship between dance and Cook Islands femininity becomes the main focus of Chapters Four and Five. Both are concerned with the nature of gendered sociality. In Chapter Four I discuss the ways in which Cook Islands women perform their femininity – primarily through an analysis of the Miss Cook Islands beauty pageant. In this competition, the contradictions of performing femininity in the Cook Islands are apparent. On the one hand, women who perform have the potential to become paragons of Cook Islands femininity. At the same time they are required to maintain their modest, self-effacing characteristics. These contradictions forcefully illustrate the ways in which dance is a constant play between social constraint and social agency. In Chapter Five I analyse the ways in which femininity becomes a signifier of other issues and concerns in cross-dressing and dancing performances. I suggest that performing femininity in these instances is not only ‘about’ femininity but also revolves around issues of relationships between sexes, sexuality and tensions between personal desires and public conventions. Both Chapters Four and Five also outline the way ‘Western’ forms such as beauty pageants (drag and straight) are used by Cook Islanders as performative commentaries on various social tensions.

In Chapter Six, I consider how ‘Western’ nightclubs, music, and dance are transformed and incorporated into Rarotonga performative contexts. From this I move on to look at the dynamics of self-presentation in these more informal contexts and the role dancing plays in this. Chapter Seven returns to the place of expressive culture and its role in contemporary Cook Islands life. Within the Cook Islands diaspora, relationships between Cook Islanders at home and abroad are maintained and reproduced through frequent travel back and forth from home and communities abroad. Aesthetic exchange, and the
sentiments it produces and fosters, is a central component in the arrivals, departures and events associated with this movement.

In the Conclusion, I move beyond the Cook Islands nation-state to consider the role expressive culture plays in the "production of locality" (Appadurai 1996: 178-199) in Cook Islands communities abroad. Dance, I argue, is one of a number of creative techniques of locality employed in transnational and translocal Cook Islands communities. My final project in this chapter is to synthesize the ethnographic analyses of preceding chapters in order to demonstrate the productive relationship between Cook Islands expressive culture and Cook Islands social life.

In the contemporary moment, Cook Islands dance is a locus of contestation. It is located at an intersection of discourses about the nation, its heritage and gender politics. This thesis argues that through dancing, and the discourse surrounding it, people enter into a dialogue about ways of being Cook Islanders. As I will demonstrate dance is one important modality through which debates about the past and the present, notions of 'us' and 'them' and the categories of man and women are articulated.
Chapter 2: Are Karioi – The House of Entertainment

In 1992 the Sixth Festival of Pacific Arts was held on Rarotonga. In order to host this event, which included participants from the majority of the Pacific Island states, the Cook Islands government built a large complex, Te Puna Korero: The Sir Geoffrey Henry National Arts Centre, named in honour of the Prime Minister. The $12 million complex houses the National Library, National Museum and the Ministry of Cultural Development. The centrepiece is a 2,300 seat auditorium called the Are Karioi Nui (Big House of Entertainment). This name comes from legends about Are Karioi, houses of entertainment or amusements, that existed pre-European invasion; “the place where the lighter side of tribal life was taught and indulged in, such as games, dances, etc” (Savage 1980: 41).

The most well documented Are Karioi is on Aitutaki. According to oral history and archaeological research, the Aitutakian Are Karioi was built by the son of a man called Mareara around 1400 and then finished by Ra’ui a ta’unga (an expert). It covered an area of twenty five by nine metres. The structure was made from wooden posts (the interior ones carved with designs), the roof and walls from pandanus leaves and the floor was covered with white coral gravel (Bellwood 1978). The following story about the Are Karioi was told to me by Mamia’s father, Papa Tunui, in January 1997. It is a tragic love story and is the most popular of the Are Karioi stories:

The Are Karioi is the house of tarekereka. It is the first house of entertainment on the island [Aitutaki], maybe in the Cook Islands. It was famous, not only to us but to people from all over the islands [the Pacific]. It is like you young people and your disco. It is a place to meet and the young people to go there and have a good time. Dancing day and night, day and night. Go and come back, go home and come back.

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16 The Festival of Pacific Arts began in 1972 in Suva, Fiji. It has then been held every four years at various nations within the region.

17 As part of the 1996–1997 economic reforms, Cook Islands currency was replaced with New Zealand currency. When I mention monetary amounts in this thesis I am referring to New Zealand dollars.
There is this fella named Ikaroa and his wife is named Otau. He is from Tahiti. And he tells his wife, “I have heard of this place where everybody enjoys themselves. I am going to go around the islands and find it. When I find that place that is good for us I will come back and I will get you and we will go there”. So he travels around and he comes to Aitutaki. When he gets here he sees so many young people walking. He asks, “Where are you going to?”. The young people say, “we are going to the entertainment house”. Ikaroa asks, “Can I come with you?”, and the people say, “Okay come on”.

Ikaroa went into the Are Karioi and, you see, it is like young people today. When a new fella is coming from somewhere new they are all interested in him. They say “Ohh!!”. And they all are on that fella. He is dancing there day and night, all the girls dancing around him.

So his wife Otau stays in Tahiti one year and she begins to think that Ikaroa isn’t coming home. So she decided to go and look for her husband. She makes a canoe and paddles day and night, day and night. She lands here on Aitutaki, on the other side, on the east of the island. When she came close to the land she heard the sounds of the beats of the drum. So she pulled the canoe on the land. She walked, looking for where the music is coming from. She came up the hill and she saw the house and she saw her husband dancing with the ladies, the ladies circle around him.

Otau goes into the house and she tries to dance close to her husband. Her husband pushes her away. She tries again and again and for a third time. But it is like her husband doesn’t recognise her. Otau weeps. She left the house and went down to the beach. There is a coconut tree. It doesn’t grow straight but on an angle, a slant. She cried and climbed the tree. When she got to the top she sang a chant, a very sad song. She cried and she jumped down from the top, down the bottom. She killed herself.

So people are dancing and getting hot and they come out to get some fresh air. The sun was nearly up, and they go down to the beach. They see something lying on the beach and they came down there and looked. When they came they saw the body: “Hey! There is somebody down on the beach. It’s a lady. She has a black spot [a mole] on her back”. And the words are coming to the ear of Ikaroa, the man from Tahiti. He knows that his wife has got a spot on her neck. It is like he is out of a trance, he remembers his wife now. So he comes down the beach and he cried. He wept, he cried, he dug a hole and buried the body.

Stories about the Are Karioi on Aitutaki were told to me on many occasions as evidence of the importance of expressive entertainment forms in precolonial times. I have chosen this version primarily because of the connection Papa Tunui makes between the Are Karioi and contemporary entertainment forms. The Are Karioi, in Papa Tunui’s version is an olden day disco, or dance hall, a place for young people to meet and have a good time, the house of tarekareka.18 In later chapters I also attempt to make links between

18 The other story told about the origin of dancing and drumming is about a competition between Rarotonga and Raiatea, Tahiti. It is interesting because it points to the existence of competition and rivalry but also of mutual exchange between French Polynesia and the Cook Islands: “Many years ago, at a time when Raiatea was referred to as the Avaiki Runga and Rarotonga was Avaiki Raro, the very first ever dancing competition was initiated between the two islands which were close to each other. Every manner
past and present entertainment practices. Rather than viewing these links as an argument for the immutable continuity of ‘tradition’, I understand ‘tradition’ as the distinctive way change proceeds (Sahlins 1994: 380). In other words, I argue that contemporary Cook Islands dance practice can be seen as possessing both continuity with past practices, and as reflecting disjunctures produced by European rule. Further, the ways in which these changes were negotiated by Cook Islanders also reflects ‘tradition’ as a distinctive style of local response to outside forces.

In addition, Papa Tunui’s narration of the trials of Ikaroa and Otaua gives the Are Karioi a global dimension (Clifford 1994: 312). As Papa Tunui’s story suggests, the Are Karioi was famed throughout the Pacific. People from all over would visit the Are Karioi to exchange dance styles, songs and drumming techniques, thereby both initiating and cementing personal relationships. Like many Aitutakians (see for instance Jonassen 1994: 21; Tumu Korero 1974), Papa Tunui also insists that the Are Karioi was an institution which originated in Aitutaki and was replicated in other islands of the Cooks group and islands throughout the region.19

My goal in this chapter is to provide historical specificity to contemporary forms of expressive culture examined in the rest of the thesis. I aim to demonstrate that the ways in which Cook Islanders think about, talk about and practice dancing in the present is shaped by historical forces. As I will show, the Are Karioi, and other forms of entertainment were transformed throughout the course of Cook Islands missionary and colonial history. And from 1965, independent governments have sought to restore

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19 The Society Islands have a well-documented tradition of arioi, as a distinct class of men and women who performed plays, dance and athletic games (T. Henry 1928; Levy 1973). It does not appear, however, that a class of entertainers like the Tahitian arioi existed on Rarotonga. Rather, entertainment, performed by villagers and visitors, was undertaken at particular sites.
‘traditional’ forms. In 1974, the premier, Sir Albert Henry, held a workshop for all the 
tumu korero (holders of knowledge, usually male elders) and the first subject on the 
agenda was the meaning and contemporary relevance of the Are Karioi.

The first section of this chapter examines early texts which mention ‘pre-contact’ Cook 
Islands dancing and other expressive forms. The influence of missionary and colonial 
regimes is the subject of the second and third sections and in the fourth and final section I 
discuss the role dance, and ‘culture’ more generally, played in creating an independent 
nation-state. My central concern here is with the role dance may have played in shaping 
precolonial, colonial and postcolonial Cook Islands culture. The historical record of 
expressive practices is fragmentary. The two published general histories of the Cook 
Years of the Pooh-Bah, both concentrate on the political (narrowly defined) affairs of 
missionaries, colonialists and the local population. Gilson, for instance, views changes to 
housing arrangements, haircuts, the abolition of tattooing and prohibition of 
entertainment as “superficial changes” separate from “a number of important changes in 
the social structure” (Gilson 1980: 32). According to Gilson, these include missionary 
implementation of a new legal system, property laws and trade practices. The brief 
history presented here partially attempts to redress these kinds of claims. I suggest that 
expressive practices have important political, economic and ideological dimensions 
which are as much a part of the “social structure” as any other practice (Comaroff 1996: 
19).

My interpretation of historical expressive practices is primarily drawn from colonial 
records. I undertook archival research at the archives of Ministry of Cultural 
Development and the National Library of the Cook Islands. This primarily involved 
examining colonial government records from the 1890s until 1965. These included letters 
from Resident Agents on outer islands to the Resident Commissioner on Rarotonga and 
minutes of island councils meetings which occasionally contained information about 
dance performances being staged, particularly for official visitors to the island. I also 
examined newspapers for dance events and reports from the 1950s onwards. From the
1950s, newspapers reported arrivals and departures from the Cooks (particularly large 
tere pati who often travel for fundraising and dancing), often including photos of 
eminent arrivals. From the 1960s until the 1970s, newspapers contained many 
instructional articles on how to be a ‘civilised’ Cook Islander. These ranged from articles 
about personal grooming and hygiene, to those titled: ‘Why it is important to save money 
not spend it’. The Cook Islands News, which began in the 1950s, also provides an 
important pictorial and written record of the expressive culture.20

The chapter as a whole feeds into a broader theme of this thesis namely an exploration of 
the ways in which Cook Islanders consume and negotiate outside cultural flows 
(Appadurai 1996). Rather than view this processes as either appropriation, or rejection, 
of these outside forces I argue that interchanges between Cook Islanders and outsiders 
reveal “complex dialectics of identification” (Miller 1995: 4). In what follows, I 
emphasise the creative and productive nature of these interchanges and also to stress the 
power relationships which shape local agency. An additional factor I consider is the 
hierarchichal relationships embedded in Cook Islands pre-European social life which 
underline early interactions between Cook Islanders and missionary and colonial 
regimes. Chiefs, and others of high rank, were generally the main targets of missionary 
conversion and colonial control and at the same time those most able to access the new 
forms of power and prestige these regimes introduced.

Dance in Precolonial Settings

Unlike Papa Tunui, Te Rangi Hiroa (Sir Peter Buck), a New Zealand Maori 
antthropologist and colonial official, suggests that each village on Rarotonga and Aitutaki 
had an Are Karioi (or Are Kariei). This claim is supported by oral traditions that tell of 
other islands in the southern Cooks group having similar sites (Tumu Korero 1974). 
Hiroa says that:

They were usually built to the order of a high chief to add to his own prestige and for the 
entertainment of his unmarried daughters. In them, dancing, singing, and all indoor games

20 The Cook Islands News is produced on Rarotonga and has limited distribution to the southern group.
and amusements took place, and it was the ambition of all to excel in these entertainments.

(Hiroa 1927: 36)

That entertainments were held for wealthy unmarried women\(^{21}\) is supported in the work of William Wyatt Gill, an early London Missionary Society missionary. In what follows Gill describes a rite of female maturity. He does not mention *Are Karioi* ‘houses’ saying this rite takes place in the open air (presumably these structures had been destroyed by missionaries), he provides some insight into the aesthetics of femininity and masculinity during this period:

She is expected to make her debut by taking part in the next grand dance. The greatest requisites of a Polynesian beauty are to be fat and as fair as their dusky skins will permit. To insure this, favourite children in good families, whether boys or girls, were regularly fattened and imprisoned till nightfall, when a little gentle exercise was permitted. If refractory, the guardian would even whip the culprit for not eating more, calling out, “Shall I not be put to shame to see you so slim in the dance?”

These dances invariably took place in the open air, by torchlight. About a year was required for getting up one such entertainment. This long interval was needed, first, for the composing of songs in honour of the fair ones, and the rehearsal of the performers; secondly, for the growth of “taro,” &c., &c., to provide the grand feast necessary. The point of honour was to be the fairest and fattest of any young people present. I know of no more unpleasant sight than the cracking of the skin as the fattening process proceeds; yet this calls forth the admiration of the friends. (Gill 1979 [1892]: 5)

Both Gill’s and Hiroa’s interpretations of precolonial entertainment practices suggest that a certain amount of prestige was attached to holding festivities. This prestige attached firstly, to those who built entertainment houses, hosted feasts and provided entertainment. Secondly, those who participated in these events embodied this status; they were fair and fat, both signs of wealth and luxury, unlike people who engaged in manual outdoor work who were thin and dark. It also seems that personal prestige could be enhanced by excelling at singing, dancing and game playing. This connection between status and expressive practices is important throughout Cook Islands history.

**Entertaining Outsiders**

As mentioned above, the *Are Karioi* was one site where visitors were welcomed and entertained. Throughout the Cook Islands, receiving and welcoming guests was (and is)

\(^{21}\) Only Pukapuka, the most western island of the Cooks has a tradition of the ‘sacred maid’ which are similar to Samoan *taupou* (Hecht 1977).
expressed through formal ceremonies which involved speeches, the exchange of gifts, eating and entertainment. Valuable descriptions of both ceremonial ritual and more informal amusements in the Cook Islands are contained in E.H. Lamont’s *Wildlife Among The Pacific Islanders* (1994 [1867]). Lamont was a trader aboard the American ship *Chatham* when it was shipwrecked at Tongareva (Penrhyn) in 1853. He preceded the first missionaries, who arrived in 1854. His book is an account of his year of enforced stay on the island. Unlike many other commentators of this time, Lamont describes in great detail costumes and dance formations and speculates about the emotional content of events. His work is particularly enlightening when it deals with ceremonies involving receiving and incorporating of guests into host communities.

What follows is a ceremony, described by Lamont, which took place not long after the *Chatham* was shipwrecked. Lamont and his fellow sailors are taken to a *marae* (place of worship). On their arrival an *ariki* makes human effigies out of coconut leaves and performed a ritual to the gods. The sailors are then removed to be washed and redressed and they are convinced they are about to be sacrificed and eaten. Instead, they travel to a beach where a group of women dance for them. Lamont describes it as:

> A very absurd dance, though (unlike the other islands of the South Seas) there was nothing indecent in it. Raising one hand in the air and lowering the other towards the ground they waved them rapidly, at the same time ... rising on their toes, with their knees partially bent. Then, looking wildly sideways at each other, they commenced a quick-step, beating the ground as rapidly as they could hop from one foot to the other ... accompanying these gestures with a low guttural sound not unlike that made in calling chickens, This dance, called the "shukai" is performed on all public occasions, and much admired, though the fair dames sometimes require a little pressing to commence. (Lamont 1994: 124)

After this dance, the women sit cross-legged on the ground in two long rows and the men are arranged behind the women. They begin to sing a low melancholy chant:

> The women shook their heads in a mournful way, by no means reassuring, as they looked at us, and while their song continued tears fell from their eyes. Their voices, before low and plaintive, now rose to a piercing and unearthly yell, and the hands were clapped more quickly and violently, an act to which they were stimulated by sundry pokes behind the men’s spears. The men themselves also now joined in with their deep voices, and, strange to say, they too commenced crying. The women became so excited that they began to cut their arms with small clam shells, which, in the midst of all their distress, they had been leisurely sharpening on stones for the purpose. The more they cut the more they screamed, with the most discordant sounds, the men also joining in, and accompanying them in this outrageous proceeding. Before they ceased their legs, arms, and faces were streaming with blood, and,
as they wiped away the ever-flowing tears, now mingling with the red stream on the cheeks, their visages became perfectly horrific. (Lamont 1994: 125; see also Hiroa 1932b: 72-75)

This ceremony, says Lamont, was an adoption ceremony in which he and other members of the crew were incorporated into a family. Each was adopted into a different family and became their ‘children’. In his *Ethnology of Tongareva* (1932b: 72-73), Te Rangi Hiroa contextualises Lamont’s experience as a welcoming complex consisting of introductory and welcome speeches, community weeping (*pehu*) and dances (*kapa* and *saka* — Lamont’s “shukai”). Lamont’s vivid description points to the ways in which expressive forms such as singing, ritualised wailing and bodily scarification were used in ceremonies of incorporation and welcome.

Lamont describes another performance which points to the existence of a tradition of dramatic performances on Tongareva. One morning he and members of the crew were invited “in a mysterious manner” (1994: 317) to a meeting on the beach. “On our way we were joined by several groups, and as they were all talking about the ship, I supposed that some more of the wreck had been washed ashore”. When he arrived at the beach, he saw:

> A number of the natives occupied in erecting a platform which I was informed was intended to represent our ship, the wreck of which was to be enacted in several scenes. As I had never heard of any such entertainment amongst the natives, I awaited the performance with much interest. I even assisted them a little in rigging the vessel, as their ideas on this point were rather imperfect. (Lamont 1994: 317)

When the stage was prepared, a dozen Tongarevans began acting out a play to the large crowd. It began at ‘night’ with a woman approaching the beach with a piece of coconut husk in her hand — “with what object those who have resided on these islands will understand”, comments Lamont. He is referring to the ‘custom’ whereby young women signal their sexual availability by going to the beach at night with a husk in hand. Reaching the sea she sees a ship and runs back to the ‘village’ and wakes a group of men who, shouting and brandishing weapons, launch an attack on the ship:

> During the performance a number of boys frequently passed me on all-fours, making a noise something like that of dogs. On the return of the men these youths scampered off amongst the woods, pursued by men with their spears who, pretending alarm when the boys turned and shouted “Bow-wow!” fled in their turn. The actors themselves were so amused that they could scarcely play their parts, and on the conclusion of their performance they all sat down
I include this play as it demonstrates the role of expressive forms in retelling significant events and the existence of dramatic performances pre-European contact. These performances, called nuku in many of the Cook Islands, had as their themes local myths and legends and topical events (Lawrence 1993: 170; Hiroa 1932a: 198-203). These were transformed under missionisation into religious plays called nuku tapu (holy plays) and they quite possibly drew upon pre-missionary performance forms. Secular plays called nuku enua or nuku tupuna (plays of the land or plays of the ancestors) continue to be performed on Tongareva during Christmas celebrations and on Rarotonga during the Constitution Celebrations.

Figure 10: Nuku, Gospel Day (Courtesy of Dean Tremel)

Another important aspect revealed by Lamont’s account of the Chatham play is the ways in which parodic humour is utilised to represent a cross-cultural encounter. Both Sinavaiana (1992) and Hereniko (1995) suggest there is a long tradition of both comedic and dramatic performances in the Pacific Islands. Both also highlight the way comic satire is used to negotiate difference, in terms of local hierarchies and interactions with ‘outsiders’. In the Cook Islands, humour, I suggest, is a dominant emotional ‘style’ for

Gill ([1892] 1979: 8) also notes ‘semi-dramatic performances’ held on Mangaia.
dealing with outsiders, be they from other villages, islands or countries, which has continued throughout Cook Islands history. Certainly it is evident that dance and other expressive forms are used to formalise interactions, and to define and create relationships between insiders and outsiders. The DVD segment ‘A History of the Cook Islands visually presents this argument. I have edited together a number of films which present Cook Islands expressive history. In the final section of segment, I include footage of a rugby match which took place on Rarotonga in the early 1990s. The match is between a New Zealand team and a Cook Islands team. The New Zealand players perform a haka, to which a group of Pukapukan male dancers respond with mischievous ‘I’m not afraid of you’ movements. This incident was still discussed when I undertook fieldwork and according to rumour, the New Zealand team were extremely annoyed that their haka had been violated in such a way.

Watch DVD: A History of the Cook Islands

*Ceremonial Ritual*

Before European contact, religious rituals were associated with the marae (places of worship). In 1823, when members of the London Missionary Society arrived on Rarotonga, there was no island-wide political organisation; each vaka (district) was ruled by a hierarchy of chiefs: ariki, mata’iapo and rangatira (see page 20). Marae were associated with each ariki and a number of ceremonial occasions that took place at these locations. These are most clearly outlined in the writings of Te Ariki Taraare, recorded and translated in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* in the 1920s. He suggests that ceremonies, which included dancing and singing, were held to celebrate seasonal events. Annual festivals were held to praise the gods for the first fruits of the year, the season of plentiful flowers and the end of the hurricane season.

On Rarotonga, March was the time of plenty and:

... the people bedecked the emblems of the festival of fasting with garlands of flowers, and then built an immense “Kariei House” (in which to meet and sing and dance) and plenty of bruised bread-fruit and over-ripe bread-fruit was eaten by all the people ... After this the “Eva-tipa” was performed ... in the form of a drama showing the mode of attack and defence
in warfare ... Then the "Kapa-takau"... which was an exhibition of attack and guard in spear play, the whole thing being executed in time with drum beating and chanting of war songs. (Taraere 1920: 131)

The majority of festivals were held on feast days of the gods. The gods was represented by each ariki on the island. The ariki/gods and priests (ta'unga who may also have been chiefs or sub-chiefs) led a procession on to a marae and presented offerings which were cast in a fire (Taraere 1920: 132-3). The ariki were followed by people who had been selected to perform dance, drama and ancient songs. Common people also made tribute (atinga) to the gods through their ariki and mata'apo. Each household was expected to contribute a basket of food and present it to their chief and also take a portion to the chief’s marae.

Figure 11: Spear Dance n.d. (Courtesy of W. Coppell)

Historical accounts of pre-European social life suggest warring between vaka and raids for food and people were common (Gilson 1980: 15; Beaglehole 1957). As a consequence, most religious ceremonies tended to be held within each vaka. However Taraere gives an example of one festival which contradicts this view of segregation between districts and rampant warfare. According to his account, at least once a year
island-wide festivals were held involving dancing, eating, and gift giving. These practices probably established and affirmed cross-district relationships. In June:

The small people held festivals; they performed the "Eva-tipa" and other festivals, which were held at different localities until they had made a round of the island – going to this place and that, giving presents to friends and relations and receiving presents in return. This was called the "Angai-mokoto", the festival of feasting, rejoicing and goodwill. (Taraare 1920: 131)

In Chapter Seven I discuss a contemporary dance event, the koni raoni held each year on Aitutaki. This event, like the Angai-mokoto aims at uniting village groups and the island as a whole. The koni raoni follows the same movements around islands, gathering up family and village groups through flowers, gifts of food, money, dance and song.

From the limited material available, I have presented a brief overview of salient features of pre-European Cook Islands political, religious and social life. A number of themes have emerged. Dancing and other expressive forms were associated with religious rituals, ceremonies of welcome to outsiders, personal and collective status, competition and unification. These expressive practices and the sentiments they both displayed and evoked – pleasure, sensuality, grief and sorrow – were subject to punishment and suppression upon the arrival of the London Missionary Society.

The London Missionary Society 1823-1888

In 1821, John Williams of the London Missionary Society (LMS) landed on Aitutaki. He left two Society Islander converts, Papeiha and Rio, to proselytise and returned two years later with more Society Islanders landing them on Atiu, Ma’uke, Mitiaro and Rarotonga. The first European missionary, Charles Pitman, and his wife settled on Rarotonga in 1823, followed by Aaron Buzacott and his family in 1828. Rarotonga became the centre for LMS activity in the region. Takamoa Theological college, “the first training institution for native evangelists in the South Seas” (Buzacott and Sunderland 1985 [1866]: 133), was established in 1839. The pastors trained there then travelled to the northern Cook Islands, Samoa, New Hebrides and Papua New Guinea. By 1824 the southern Cook Islands were under missionary influence. The northern Cooks were converted later, primarily by Rarotongan teachers. In 1849, the LMS went to Manihiki
and Rakahanga, and they arrived on Pukapuka in 1857 (Beaglehole 1938: 5). Before the wreck of the Chatham Tongareva's inhabitants had been seen as dangerous cannibals; the island was called 'Danger Island'. It was not until Lamont and the other crewmembers were rescued and taken to Rarotonga that the LMS thought it was viable to send missionaries to Tongareva. Native missionaries were landed in 1855.

By 1864, each island of the Cooks group was considered by the LMS to be under Christian influence. This is attributed to three main factors. Firstly, the use of Society Islands and Cook Islands teachers is credited as accounting for local acceptance: “Only by means of native agents could so many islands in so few years have seen the glorious light of the gospel” (Buzacott and Sunderland 1985: 132). The second factor was that European LMS ministers learnt to speak local dialects and translated the Bible into Maori. The final reason for rapid conversion was the missions ‘top-down’ approach. From the beginning, missionaries focused their attention on political hierarchies that existed on the islands. They worked to convert ariki who would then impose Christianity upon their people.

Ariki were by no means powerless in their interactions with LMS missionaries. They provided missionaries with land, food and protection in return for access to European goods and a role in the burgeoning European trade markets that were developing in the region. In short, ariki power and status is said to have increased during the nineteenth century (Baltaxe 1975). Missionary laws were enforced by ariki (who became deacons) and their appointed policeman. The local police force on Rarotonga was substantial. By the end of the nineteenth century there was around one policeman to every ten inhabitants. This ratio was also similar on other islands (Beaglehole 1957: 57). The main form of punishment was fines and incentives to extract these fines were high as they were divided between the ariki of the area, the local judge and police and often the missionary representative (Lamont 1994: 84).
Missionary laws and morality

LMS missionaries set about introducing laws aimed at improving Cook Islanders’ moral comportment. These ‘blue laws’ were aimed at the transformation of Cook Islander social organisation, political and economic relations, and belief systems. These laws also extended into ‘private’ realms: locals houses, gardens, bodies, hair, dress, movements and sentiments.

Pre-missionary contact between the islands that now make up the Cooks group is evident both in oral histories and archaeological records (Bellwood 1979). Trade links with the Society Islands and Samoa were also maintained. These economic affiliations were accompanied by a history of artistic exchange (Moulin 1996; Lawrence 1993). In order to control and survey island populations, one of the first laws to be instituted by the LMS was the prohibition of inter-island travel. Intra-island movement was also curtailed – an eight p.m. curfew was implemented on all islands and attempts were made to centralise island populations. On Rarotonga centralisation was not successful. Papehia attempted to create a Christian settlement in the district of Avarua under Makea ariki. The settlement only lasted for three years, from 1824-1827, as alliances between converts from the three districts were tenuous.

From 1827 when English missionaries arrived, mission stations were established in each of the three districts. Ariki were asked by missionaries to allocate land near village chapels for their followers to live in. Indigenous places of worship, the marae, were destroyed and replaced by large limestone churches built by early converts. Inhabitants were required to abandon traditional lands and move into religious settlements on the coast (Gilson 1980: 21-3). The houses that were built in these villages also aimed at transforming local living arrangements. They were small, European-style houses built to house – and construct – a nuclear family, as the large extended family group houses were seen as “hoarding perversity” (Gilson 1980: 26). This transformation of houses and families were influenced by Europeans ideas about male and female roles and behaviours.
(Jolly and Macintyre 1989: 6; Ralston 1987). It is to these transformations in notions of gender that I now turn.

The promotion of certain types of gendered behaviour was part of the broader missionary project of conversion. This involved the reorganisation of patterns of work and leisure and the imposition of current European notions of the public and private spheres. The change in housing arrangements, for example, aimed at reorienting domestic relations towards nuclear family units and imported ideas about normative femininity and masculinity. Proper femininity was equated with domesticity; wives were encouraged to concentrate their material and emotional labour in the domestic domain in an attempt to intensify the conjugal bond and bonds of motherhood (Jolly 1991; Grimshaw 1989).

The durability and extent of kinship networks proved to be a problem for missionary efforts (Elliston 1997: 61; Ortner 1981: 368). As Ralston argues in regard to Polynesia in general, women’s kinship ties were:

Politically and economically more important and permanent than the marital tie, where long-term monogamous unions were neither the ideal nor the norm for adult sexual relations, and where the adoption of infants was widespread and encouraged, terms such as marriage, parenthood, husband, and wife embody ... significantly different meanings and role expectations from those inherent in standard Western contexts. (Ralston 1987: 118-119)

Cook Islands women of high rank wielded considerable power. They were involved in the political and economic machinations of their communities and were exempt from menial labour such as cleaning or cooking. Most women, regardless of status, shared child socialisation and food production and preparation with their kin.

Missionary ideas about the local women’s autonomy (especially their lack of domesticity and imputed sexual independence) as opposed to Christian piousness and propriety resulted in intensive efforts to promote the latter in local hearts and minds. These included lessons in domesticity with a particular emphasis on cooking, cleaning and sewing. Adoption practices, called “feeding children” (angai tamariki), were condemned. Purportedly lascivious ‘leisure’ activities were replaced with a Christian education – Bible-reading groups, church meetings, and classroom instruction. In the next section I
examine a number of the changes introduced, focussing on missionary laws which prohibited or restrained local forms of expressive culture, personal aesthetics and intimate relations.

*Missions and gendered comportment*

The Rarotongans improved much in every respect during our residence among them. The females were completely transformed in their appearance. (Williams 1838: 166)

One of the principal means of instituting Christian morality was through alteration of local self-presentation. Dress codes and personal adornment were viewed by missionaries as visible evidence of interior conversion and civilised Christian behaviour. Pre-European invasion, women and men of the southern Cooks wore items made out of worked bark cloth (*tapa*). Men wore *tapa* around their waists and women like a "petticoat" which covered their chests: "an unmarried girl wore her petticoat nearly to the knee; when married it was brought down just below the knee" (Gill 1979: 12; Hiroa 1927). Women’s native dress was replaced by ‘Mother Hubbards’ (now *mu’umu’u* – a national dress worn at formal occasions), long gowns reaching from neck to ankle. Trousers, shirts and coats were introduced for men. As well being introduced to European clothes, men's hair (previously worn long) was cut short in European style, and women's long hair came to be tied back in buns (Hiroa 1932b: 144).

Wearing flowers as an adornment and oil on the skin were banned, as "when they do, it is almost always found to be for the worst of purposes" (Rev Pitman 1833 in Beaglehole 1957: 37). Tattoos were also prohibited:

Pa [a Rarotongan *ariki*] told me that two men had their legs tattooed in the old style and he saw them tied to a tree and the marks holystoned out so that the skin was entirely torn away.

(Gudgeon in Scott 1991: 305)

Changes to personal adornment aimed at the embodiment of Christian morality. The LMS also aimed at establishing productive activity among locals and making the mission economically self-sufficient. John Williams, in 1833, brought spinning wheels, a warping machine and loom in order that Rarotongans could begin production of their own clothes. Mr. Buzacott reported that:
The chief's wife and daughter, and most of the respectable girls of the settlement were taught to spin and soon thirty spinning wheels were in motion all day long. (in Beaglehole 1957: 68)

This image of respectable women involved in morally and economically productive labour is countered in other accounts which suggest European clothing was used as ornamentation rather than a pious re-evaluation of 'nakedness' (Comaroff 1996; Grimshaw 1989). Reverend Eastman, for example, complained that in Manihiki female church members were wearing: "ultra-fashionable gowns or ball dresses which were considered unseemly" (Scott 1991: 185). John Williams details proudly an incident where a chief's wife tells him that she wanted to be become a Christian. His confident appraisal of her desire for conversion is undermined somewhat by his rendering of her claims:

When she compared herself with the Christian females, she was much ashamed, for they had bonnets, and beautiful white garments, while she was dressed in "Satan's clothes"; they could sing and read, while she was in ignorance. (in Hira 1993: 21).

Here it would appear that access to beautiful clothing, European literacy and forms of expressive culture were as much her objective as any repudiation of past beliefs and customs. Her comments suggest that access to European knowledge and power, or at the very least, the tools to negotiate European invasion, provided the impetus to convert to Christianity.

This last point intersects with anthropological studies of the role of objects and exchange relations (Otto and Thomas 1997; Howes 1996; Jolly 1992; Thomas, N. 1991) and writing about mimesis and appropriation during missionary and colonial contact (Comaroff 1996; Stoller 1995; Friedman 1994). Stoller's (1995) analysis of the ways in which images of colonial rulers were incorporated into West African plastic arts and forms of spirit possession is particularly relevant here. He views these instances of cultural appropriation as a form of mimesis (following Taussig 1993) which engenders a sense of comprehension, mastery and access to foreign power in order to reconstitute it for local uses (Stoller 1995: 195). In the Cook Islands, LMS missionaries attempts to assert their authority and local compliance through clothing, housing and social
organisation in general may have also been appropriated for local purposes. Objects of Christian ideology such as dresses, bonnets and no-less material things as hairstyles and floral adornment did not have singular meanings or effects as they became entangled with local relations and practices. The ways in which ariki used European markers of status to confirm and express their eminence is one such example.

Ariki political and economic power was consolidated during the early missionary years as the LMS relied on them to provide people to convert, land and construction workers for settlements. They amassed large amounts of capital from fines and the control of trade (particularly in food) with missionaries. In contrast to the modest dwellings missionary representatives lived in, ariki had grand ‘Western’ style ‘palaces’ to house themselves and their families (Gilson 1980: 33). By 1882, four of the five ariki on Rarotonga were women. Missionaries disparagingly noted that they were impressed that Britain's sovereign, Queen Victoria, was a female and desired to adopt the protocol of the English court. The excesses of local adoption of European material culture disturbed missionary teachers who were attempting to teach sobriety and austerity. According to Gilson:

The adoption of European models was pursued on all levels of society. Each district built its own schooner; horse-drawn carriages were de rigeur for all chiefs of importance; uniforms were adopted by some men; the female wardrobe was enlarged by parasols and as many colourful frocks as the owner could accumulate; and European foods, tinned meats in particular become very popular. It became fashionable to undertake extensive voyages to Tahiti and other islands. (Gilson 1980: 51)

Friedman’s (1994) discussion of “the political economy of elegance” among la sape in the Congo could equally apply to the extravagant and conspicuous consumption of Rarotongan ariki. European clothing, food and style of travel became the cultural cargo for high ranking Cook Islanders. As Friedman suggests, the symbolism of this cargo “legitimizes the materiality of power and wealth” (Friedman 1994: 165). I would go even further and suggest that control over expressive forms is one important arena in which power is materialised.

23 A number of scholars argue that European missionaries and traders ignored or minimised Polynesian women’s chiefly roles and their political power and influence in general (Ralston 1987; Gunson 1987).
Leisure and Entertainment

The role of dancing in Cook Islands social life is rarely mentioned in the missionary record. The work of William Wyatt Gill, an LMS missionary in the Cook Islands from 1852 until 1891, is a notable exception. His writings (1876, 1885, 1892, 1894) reflect a keen interest in “tribal” customs, myths and material culture. His work is invaluable because of these interests and because of the tension between his ethnographic leanings and religious ideology as the following description indicates:

Their great national amusement was the dance. In this singular performance the joints seem to be loose. I do not believe it possible for any European to move their limbs as a Polynesian loves to do. At a very early age mothers carefully oil the hands, &c., and then knead the tiny limbs, stretching and “cracking” each joint. Respecting the morality of their dances, the less said the better; but the “upaupa” dance introduced from Tahiti is obscene indeed. (Gill [1892] 1979: 13)

Gill’s comments draw attention to the centrality of dancing and the role of maternal nurture in the education of young bodies for expressive culture. His comments are also interesting as he defines the dance genre upaupa as being Tahitian in origin. This claim is a contentious one in contemporary debates over the origin of Cook Islands dancing and drumming. This debate will be discussed in the following chapter. Suffice to say here that there is evidence to suggest that at least the northern group islands, had a dance genre called hupaupea and that there are marked stylistic differences between Tahitian and northern group dancing and drumming associated with this genre (Lawrence 1992).

Aside from Gill’s occasional commentary on dance, there is very little recorded evidence of what occurred to local dance practices during the height of the missionary period. Dancing was banned along with related activities such as singing local music, local style drumming and drinking kava. These practices were considered to form a complex of lascivious behaviour which led to fornication and adultery. The majority of ‘blue laws’ were directed towards the repression of sexual excess. If people were caught in an
adulterous situation they were variously kept in stocks, fined and flogged. Women were further punished by having their long hair cut off (Beaglehole 1957: 62).^{24}

It would seem that entertainment practices did continue in inland regions, away from missionary ears and eyes. Certainly in the islands furthest away from Rarotonga, which had less missionary presence, expressive practices continued unabated. Beaglehole (1937: 320) mentions that on the island of Pukapuka, the end of hurricane season is celebrated by a month of dancing, singing and feasting. This was never banned by missionaries; however the forms changed to incorporate Biblical legends or approved incidents from traditional history.

The likely scenario is that missionaries attempted to replace ‘suspect’ expressive practices with Christian activities. It appears that Cook Islanders took to these with enthusiasm. As Aaron Buzacott says:

> The natives are devotedly fond of singing, and seem to have no sense of fatigue. Their urgent requests to be taught new tunes, often deprived our brethren of their rest. Mr. Buzacott says, “Fortunately Mr. Williams and I could take turns, and one rest while the other was teaching. With this exercise, my throat has sometimes been so sore, as to cause me to spit blood for several days”. (Buzacott and Sunderland 1985: 114)

Whether this devotion was Christian hymns or simply to singing *per se*, Buzacott’s comments reveal the active engagement of Cook Islanders in moulding Christianity to suit their own needs. They also suggest that local zeal for (Christian) expressive forms proved to be at times unmanageable for certain missionaries (as well as detrimental to their health).

**A New Zealand Colony, 1901-1965**

Foreign traders and planters did not settle in significant numbers until the 1860s and around this time missionary control began to decline (Siikala 1991: 7; Gilson 1980). From 1865, *ariki*, British and New Zealand traders residing on Rarotonga began

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^{24} This is significant given the value placed on hair in the Cook Islands and throughout the Pacific (see Mageo 1994; Loomis 1984). In the Cook Islands, hair was cut (and still is) with the death of a family member.
petitioning for Britain to make the Cook Islands a protectorate. Requests were consistently refused as the islands were seen to have little to offer in the way of natural resources and commerce. It was the rivalries between French and British interests in the Pacific that saw Britain reluctantly make the southern group of the Cook Islands a British protectorate in 1888. Both the northern and southern group became annexed to New Zealand in 1901.

The first Resident Commissioner, Fredrick Moss, aimed at fostering self-government. He was under instructions to recognise aristocracy government and help them maintain law and order (Gilson 1980: 64). Moss attempted to separate church and state power by establishing a local government on each island consisting of local representatives. The Rarotongan General Council was made up from the three districts and consisted of three aristocracy, a representative of each mata 'iapo in each sub-district, three district judges and one European representative. He also established a federal government of all the islands of the Cooks in 1891. Moss also encouraged self-government by creating a public service staffed by locals and by establishing public schools and hospitals. His initiatives were routinely sabotaged by the LMS, European settlers (both found the possibility of local autonomy alarming) and by lack of funding from the British and New Zealand governments.

Due to protests from European residents and aristocracy, Moss was eventually recalled to New Zealand. Major W.E. Gudgeon, his replacement, was Resident Commissioner on Rarotonga for eleven years (1898-1909). He radically altered local practices. Unlike Moss, he did not think self-government was achievable and concentrated on consolidating New Zealand trade interests. He set about centralising federal government on Rarotonga and aimed to crush chiefly authority. Gudgeon achieved this by disbanding the aristocracy council and replacing it with a Federal High Court, which was headed by a European chief justice (Gudgeon himself). He was also in charge of the police and public service. These actions ensured that attempts at self-government were quashed (Gilson 1980: 123).
After these two most influential Residential Commissioners, Moss and Gudgeon, the Resident Commissioners that followed implemented policies which were dependent largely on the state of trade with New Zealand. The 1920s to mid 1930s were prosperous in terms of trade and New Zealand’s Labour government increased spending on education and health both within the Cook Islands and by providing scholarships for Cook Islanders in New Zealand. From 1909 until 1934, the Cook Islands were administered by New Zealand’s Ministry of Native Affairs. During this period the *taihoa* (go slow) policy was implemented to bring about the gradual Europeanisation of Cook Islanders (Thompson 1994: 80). Formal, Western education was stressed as the primary means of assimilation. However, to ease the transition towards Europeanisation, local practices such as ‘native arts’ and Polynesian history were included in school curriculum (Gilson 1980: 174-5).

This brief summary of the colonial administration’s policies towards the Cook Islands serves as a backdrop to the following examination of the role of colonisation in shaping Cook Islands expressive culture. The material I present is primarily from archival sources, particularly correspondence between Resident Agents (the colonia l agents on each island) and the Resident Commissioner on Rarotonga. I also draw upon the life histories I recorded during fieldwork.

**Colonialism and Expressive Culture**

Throughout the colonial period it appears that it was the contexts in which expressive culture was performed, rather than the forms *per se*, which were problematic to colonial administrators. Indigenous dancing, singing and music that was performed in unofficial contexts – that is, for entertainment, which usually meant parties or dances involving alcohol – were considered unwholesome and detrimental to the civilising mission of the colonial regime. At the same time, local cultural practices were foregrounded and displayed throughout the islands on special official occasions, particularly those involving Commonwealth events and the arrival of visitors on the islands. Queen Victoria’s golden (1887) and diamond (1897) jubilees were celebrated on many of the islands with officially sanctioned dance and sport competitions. Similarly, in 1937 Viggo
Rasmussen, the Resident Agent on Tongareva, organised a large feast and dance competition between its two villages (Rasmussen 1937). In 1938, Rasmussen wrote a memorandum to the Resident Commissioner concerning the preparations for the visit of the Governor General, Viscount Galway, to Tongareva:

Drums are sounding through both Villages every afternoon, as the population is training up in the Chants and Dances for the reception of the Governor General and his Lady and all his company with him...We have prepared presents of mats and native hats and we are attempting to make a little collection of pipi pearls, that will be all we can do here on this poor island; but it is a small amount, when you compare what Rarotonga will be doing. So I am still certain that the Governor and his Lady will look with kindness to us for our little entertainment, and that they will realize that it is from the heart and that it will be a "red letter day" in our lives. (Rasmussen 1938, my emphasis)

In addition to the preparations of gifts, food and entertainment the islanders also spent considerable effort to beautify Tongareva for the event. Houses were cleaned, the best quilts and embroidery put on display, roads were swept and gardens tidied for the Governor General’s tour of the island.

New forms of entertainment were also sanctioned by the colonial administrators (but not by religious groups on the island), especially European forms. In the 1920s, world trade prices favoured primary produce growers in the Cook Islands and increased the flow of traders, money and capital, on Rarotonga in particular. Moving pictures arrived, and were played every night except Sunday. On Rarotonga there were fifteen cinemas on the island (compared to one now). According to Scott:

Overseas visitors were startled to see roving bands of cowboys in full costume (no Indians) riding through the palms, hitching scrub ponies to the trading store and walking stiff-legged to the counter. (Scott 1991: 176)

Older people today remember a truck circling the island, loaded with men playing Cook Islands drums and handing out flyers for forthcoming movies.26

25 For other examples of inter-village competitions through dance, sport and singing see Hiroa 1932a, 1932b, 1944; Beaglehole 1937, 1957; Beckett 1964.
26 According to Scott (1991: 309), the Cook Islands earned a place in the Guinness Book of records in the 1960s for having the largest cinema-going population in the world.
In his book *Doctor in Paradise* (1941), S.M. Lambert tells of his time administering in the Cook Islands:

In Rarotonga it was pleasing to see the young people, the boys in white trousers, the girls in simple frocks, throwing their souls into the dances of 1925 ... the Government had encouraged innocent dances, away from the temptations of bush beer and petting parties on the beach. (Lambert 1941: 267)

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 12: 'New' Dancing (from Scott 1991)**

Visiting Aitutaki, the ship on which Lambert arrived was greeted by a band playing American jazz, pre-war tunes from Broadway and British hymns. Lambert gave dancing lessons on each island he visited, ostensibly to reward those who helped with his medical research:

On Christmas Day, 1925, I gave a party for the natives who had helped me generously with my work. To foster competition and please myself with a pretty show, I offered a prize for the best *hura* dance among the girls. One of the prettiest creatures that ever shook a grass skirt was a light-coloured native named Ann Masters, winner from the start. After her lovely *hura* she put on European clothes, and looked as though she had just walked off Park Avenue. In my role as dancing master I taught her the foxtrot. We danced for two hours I imagine. (Lambert 1947: 279-280)
From the 1920s on Rarotonga, trade and politics were mainly conducted at the district, rather than island wide, level. Each district had its own fruit co-operative, packing and sanitation sheds and fruit committee (Gilson 1980: 134). These packing sheds were also used for dances. A number of older people stressed to me that the floor of the sheds were wooden and that the sound of feet stamping on the floor would make you go to the dance. I did not find this piece of information relevant until an old man said “the floor was like a drum, you just had to go and dance”. All sorts of dancing was done (waltz, foxtrot, one-step and local styles) and bands played papa’a music often with Maori words – “songs about here” as one woman succinctly put it.

Aside from organised dances, little was done to encourage other aspects of Maori culture. Schools were mainly organised by local pastors and little, if any, Maori history was taught. English was the language of instruction and children speaking Maori (or island dialects) in the schoolyard could be punished. People I spoke to reported that this practice still occurred in the 1970s.

*Jane Tararo – a case study*

Papa Maeva Karati, an old man on Rarotonga, gave me Maori lessons once a week at his home. He would often also talk to me about his past and his family. His aunt Jane Tararo ariki was born sometime in the 1900s and died in the 1980s. His mother now holds the title. Jane Tararo was ariki of ngati Aretoa, on the island of Ma’uke, from the 1930s until her death and she is the most well known composer on the island. Perhaps because of these conversations with Papa Maeva, Jane Tararo’s name seemed to continually arise as I read the Resident Agents’ correspondence. When I visited Ma’uke for a month in 1997 I spent a lot of my time asking people about her and the highlight of my trip was being taught, by an old woman, the dance to a famous song Tararo wrote called *Turama*.

Jane Tararo formed a dance group from members of her family and her village, Oiretumu in the 1930s. The group performed at gospel day celebrations (*nuku*), Christmas celebrations (including inter-village dance competitions) and staged performances for important visitors and fundraising occasions for village projects. They also undertook a
tere (travelling party) to Rarotonga in the 1950s to raise money for the village. I spoke to a number of older women about this dance group and most spoke about Jane’s “talent” with reverence and awe. One woman was more pragmatic: “Jane was a favourite girl; she didn’t have to do washing or cleaning, just sit around and eat. So all she could do was dance”. One of the most interesting things that came out of these conversations was the way in which dance practice was tied to broader notions of gendered comportment and behaviour. Another woman told me that Jane:

Taught young girls to dance just behind the big Tararo house. She would hit them with a stick – if boys didn’t dance properly or the girls didn’t sway properly. Even if we were not washed. You had to have a bath before you came to practice. Everything about you had to be nice and girls couldn’t have any underarm hair.

In the 1930s the Resident Agent for Ma’uke was Captain Vellenoweth. Most of his reports to the Resident Commissioner, Judge Ayson, were about trade, problems with stray pigs and excessive drinking on the island. In reference to the latter concern, Jane Tararo’s name is mentioned regularly and one gets the impression she would push the boundaries of colonial rule through her dance practice and associated activities.

On the 16th of August 1934, Captain Vellenoweth wrote to Judge Ayson:

Jane Tararo Ariki came to see me and asked permission to have a picnic, she states that she wished to go with her dancing party to catch fish and come home afterwards (this is often done). I gave her and her party permission to do so. (Vellenoweth 1934)

There are ensuing letters about the drunkenness of members of her party and public disturbances.

On the 27th April 1935, Captain Vellenoweth penned the following to Judge Ayson:

People started to hold dances inland at the houses of William Tararo and Tamapi, so far I have given them permission whenever asked for to dance on Thursday nights until 11 p.m. other nights they have danced as they wish until 9 p.m. I am finding of late that there are a lot of drunks attending these dances, and being inland it is hard for the police to catch them, where as if they dance at the beach it is more easy to check and catch the drunks …

I have the power to stop the dancing in these two houses after 9 p.m. but what I wish to know is can I stop the dancing in these two houses before 9 p.m.? Anyone is welcome in these two houses except the police, I have been sending the police as I consider a house open to anyone who come along is a public place. W. Tararo disputes this. (Vellenoweth 1935a)
On the 10th May 1935 there was another letter, frantic in tone:

Last night there was dancing at Tararo’s house and boys drunk. I had stopped all dancing until after the S.S. Waipahi sailed, when the Police called there last night and told them to stop their dancing as all the boys would be wanted fresh for working on the steamer, Jane Tararo Ariki refused to do so and told the Police I could not stop dancing before 9 p.m..
(Vellenoweth 1935b)

The ability of the Tararos to direct colonial laws to their own advantage is quite clear in this correspondence. Vellenoweth’s frustration at his inability to control the island’s population is also palpable (and made more difficult given that police were locals who were presumably caught up in indigenous rules and protocol).

Vellenoweth’s letters never explain what kind of dancing was done at these parties, so when I visited the island I asked a number of old people about the content of the dances. They said they had gramophones and played papa’a music and danced the waltz, foxtrot and one-step. A number mentioned that live music was played, “local songs” and European songs with Maori lyrics. To these songs they danced local style and also “Maori waltzing” which I was taught. Like European waltzing, it is a partnered dance but instead of a series of even 3/4 steps the movements are syncopated and faster. I also observed this style of waltzing on Rarotonga and in Tahiti. What is most interesting about these claims is that they clearly point to the ways in which European dance styles and music were adopted, imitated and transformed to suit local musical and movement aesthetics (Reed 1998: 508; Stoller 1995: 76; Friedman 1994).

Jane Tararo also had a habit of bypassing Captain Vellenoweth and writing directly to Judge Ayson. On April 30th 1936, she wrote a letter to Judge Ayson proposing that she organise a “visiting party”, consisting of 80 people, to travel to Tahiti in November of that year (Tararo 1936). She requested that Ayson organise the necessary passports. Ayson then wrote to Vellenoweth (n.d.): “80 seems a large number” was his reply. He was concerned that they would have insufficient funds for fares and “to keep themselves decently while in Tahiti”. In particular, he was anxious that they would be staying in “slum areas” of Tahiti – “If they propose to stay in a bad quarter then the question will
arise whether we should give passports".\footnote{Presumably Ayson is referring to the land in Papeete bought by a number of men from Ma’uke, Mitiaar and Atiu in the 1940s. These men bought the land with money they earned working in the French Polynesian island of Makatea mining phosphate (Gilson 1980: 192). Today this land is called Patutoa. It houses a Cook Islands hostel where many Cook Islanders stay when they visit Tahiti. I stayed there with the Orama dance troupe on our tour of Tahiti (see DVD ‘Orama Tere to Tahiti’ and Chapter Seven).} Vellenoweth responded on the 20\textsuperscript{th} of May 1936:

If Papeete is anything like it was when I was last there a few years ago they are much better out of it, for their own good and the good of the Cook Islands. I am afraid the Tararo crowd is a very hard drinking crowd. I think they would be better at Ma’uke. (Vellenoweth 1936)

There is no follow up correspondence in the archives and whether permission was granted to undertake the trip remains unknown.

I have undertaken this examination of Jane Tararo’s dance party as it illustrates a number of points. It shows firstly how many types of local movement were circumscribed under colonialism. Permission had to be gained to travel around the island, to other islands and overseas. Secondly, certain dance contexts were banned or heavily policed. In the colonial correspondence there is also a sense that the Tararo crowd, and Jane in particular, kept the Resident Agent ‘on his toes’. They appeared to have a good grasp of colonial laws and regulations and aimed to manipulate them to their advantage. Jane’s dance party seemed to both comply with, and undermine, the colonial administration on Ma’uke. They performed at official events and were active in village affairs and fundraising, thus assisting the colonial regime. At the same time, they flaunted their disregard for the colonial administration and attempted to adapt circumstances to suit their own purposes.

I will conclude this section with a story told to me by Jane Tararo’s great granddaughter. It is another example of humour and parody as a ‘dominant style’ in cross-cultural interactions. It is a story about a visit of a governor general to Ma’uke:

When ships would come in, all the villagers would come down to the wharf and have a competition amongst themselves about who can do the most lively and funny performance. When the Governor General left by boat one year he was so moved by the farewell he got. He didn’t know that while he was wiping the tears from his eyes the \textit{mama’s} were waving him goodbye and singing:

\footnote{Presumably Ayson is referring to the land in Papeete bought by a number of men from Ma’uke, Mitiaar and Atiu in the 1940s. These men bought the land with money they earned working in the French Polynesian island of Makatea mining phosphate (Gilson 1980: 192). Today this land is called Patutoa. It houses a Cook Islands hostel where many Cook Islanders stay when they visit Tahiti. I stayed there with the Orama dance troupe on our tour of Tahiti (see DVD ‘Orama Tere to Tahiti’ and Chapter Seven).}
Later Colonial Policy: the beginning of dance groups on Rarotonga

In 1956, a Ministry of Social Development was established by New Zealand's Minister for Island Territories. The Ministry's role was to promote economic development, as the Cook Islands were becoming an economic burden on New Zealand. Encouraging local agency and self-reliance was seen as the way out of long-term dependency. The Minister's announcement of this new initiative explained:

There is an urgent need to promote community life in the villages to provide opportunities for the training of leaders, and what is just as important, to awaken a sense of responsibility to exercise leadership. The aim of the Government is to create a spirit of self-help and self-reliance from the community upwards. (Cook Islands Archives [CIA n.d. file 11/14/3)

According to a policy directive of 1956, the Community Development Section of the Ministry was to target three main areas: youth education, housing and village councils. Of particular interest here are the views expressed about the "problem" of post-school youth (school leaving age was fifteen years at this time), who were seen as having few opportunities for "intellectual exercise and vocational training". Organisations already in existence were seen as inadequate:

The Boys' Brigade and Girl Guides offer a certain beneficial interest, but both these organisations provide only a small outlet for youthful energies ... The Church supplies an emotional outlet and Bible reading and discussion certainly has an intellectual value, but its doctrine is, in the eyes of the youth, far removed from reality. There are weekly cinema shows, but these provide no benefit whatsoever and their crudely sensational and sexual films have a damaging effect upon youthful minds. Dances are held occasionally and these in moderation have a wholesome effect. Games played in the daytime occupy a very important place in the young man's life – often so important as to distract him from other more useful occupations ... Extravagant feasts often occur, particularly under the aegis of the Church, but these no longer have any ritual value and merely encourage waste and add to poverty already dire. (CIA n.d. file 11/14/3)
The picture presented is of physically and sexually active youth, with little wholesome outlet for their energies. As the Church, Boys' Brigade and Girl Guides provided inadequate instruction, plans were made in 1956 to establish youth centres. A 1956 directive planned to establish separate centres for each sex. The idea of centres was to be explained at village meetings with “stress being laid upon the fact that the basic idea really stems from ancient tribal practices – the Are Vananga (House of Learning)” (CIA n.d. file 11/14/3). At young men's centres, members would receive instruction in English, book-keeping, civics, citizenship, general knowledge, health education, agriculture, tribal history and custom, crafts and woodwork. Presumably this list is in order of importance. In the young women's centres suggests the “accent should be placed on the following areas: Formal English, House Craft, Diet, Cooking, Mothercraft, Hygiene, Health, Dress Making, Crafts, Tribal History and Customs, Civics, Citizenship and General Knowledge” (CIA n.d. file 11/14/3). The building for the Young Women's Centre was to be a model house with a kitchen garden attached.

From 1959, a National Youth Council was established on Rarotonga. By the 1960s, there were youth groups on a number of outer islands and in each village on Rarotonga. These youth centres aimed at offering young men and women European forms of education and access to ‘modern’ skills. Many older women I spoke to would reflect fondly on Young Women’s Centres. One woman stressed the importance of these groups:

We learnt to be real ladies. We made jam, we learned how to serve food the papa’a way. So when we went overseas we knew exactly what fork to use at a papa’a dinner.

This woman – like many of her generation – is proud to have learnt skills that they saw as being both civilised and cosmopolitan. Her comments reflect the role colonial officials played in regulating the colonised through “character development”…through seemingly unimportant body habits and practices: posture, movement, dress, eating” (Stoller 1995: 72-73).
Youth centres also aimed at keeping young people on Rarotonga rather than migrating to work in New Zealand. Naomi Iro, one of the founders of Titikaveka village youth group in 1959, explained:

The purpose of it was to keep the young people in the village. Percy Henderson and others from Social Development would go around to villages and present who they are and explain how you set up a youth group. We would visit other youth clubs, have lectures, cooking activities, we would mix and learn from each other. And there were socials, so we invite another youth group, they would bring their families and have team games and treasure hunts, song competitions, debates, picnics and visit historical places, heaps of things.

She added that belonging to a youth group facilitated her composing career: “the youth group is how I started composing because there were no songs about our village ... I would take a song to the youth and everyone would help making the actions”.

This comment highlights a perplexing aspect of the role of youth groups. As well as providing youth with European skills, they also fostered aspects of ‘traditional culture’ such as local history and customs, singing and dancing. As Iro says, there were “no songs about our village”. As Rarotonga was the centre of missionary and colonial administrations, Rarotongan actions and behaviours were subject to greater surveillance than other islands in the Cooks group and had more exposure to European ideologies. One Rarotongan woman said to me: “Rarotongans were 'snobs' in those days, we would leave the dancing and drumming to the outer islanders [who resided on the island]”. Indigenous singing and dancing did not conform to ideas about Rarotongan modernity and progress. This woman said that as a result of becoming active in her village youth group she learned how to dance and sing.

Another woman elaborates this point:

I grew up thinking dance was a Manihikian thing. In the past if they needed a dance group to perform at Ngatipa [the Resident Commissioners house] they would go to Tutakimoa [the settlement where migrants from the northern group lived]. It was seen as a bit 'primitive' for Rarotongans to dance you know. My mother wanted good things for us and she would never let us girls dance, she thought it was unladylike.

\[28\] In 1951 an estimated 1,000 people left for New Zealand to work as labourers and domestic servants (Beaglehole 1957: 138).
I can offer two partial explanations for this reassessment of the value of performing arts on Rarotonga. The first is that from the late 1940s, independence movements were beginning to develop in the Cook Islands and throwing off the shackles of colonialism involved a revaluation of precolonial forms. This revival of ‘traditional’ expressive forms accompanied decolonisation in many Pacific Island nations (Jolly and Thomas 1992; Nero 1992). The other related explanation is that ‘traditional’ expressive forms came to play a central role in the burgeoning tourist industry on Rarotonga. A process I examine in the following section.

**Independence and Cultural Revival**

After World War II, decolonisation and self-government became central issues in Cook Islands politics. A number of indigenous trade unions were formed (in Aitutaki, Rarotonga and Auckland) which promoted workers’ rights and conditions, improved wages and transportation of produce. These demands drew upon nationalistic discourses of freedom and autonomy. From the early 1960s, in line with the United Nations ‘Declaration on the Granting on Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples’ (1960), New Zealand attempted to shed its colonies – Samoa, Niue and the Cook Islands. However these islands’ economic survival depended on preferential access to New Zealand markets and shipping. As a result, Cook Islands leaders negotiated with New Zealand for self-government in ‘free association’ which came into effect in 1965 (Denoon et al. 2000: 398). Cook Islanders were granted dual citizenship (which meant they could freely work in New Zealand) and New Zealand looked after both finance and foreign affairs.

The Cook Islands first Premier (then Prime Minister) was Albert Henry whose Cook Islands Party was in power from 1965-1978. Albert Henry’s government focussed much of its attention on the revival of cultural practices in an attempt to forge an independent nation-state. In a pamphlet titled *Rambling Thoughts of the Premier Hon. Albert. R. Henry* (1971), he reflects on his mission to unite the islands of the Cooks group:

> [Because of] the fragmentation of our people due to the scattered nature of the small islands on which many of them live in isolation from the centre [Rarotonga] ... very few visualise us
as a nation ... Because of this, our people on the Outer Islands are apt to consider themselves as of a separate identity, hence our second basic aim which is clearly defined in our Party's Manifesto: "To mould the scattered people of our new Nation into one united people".

The revival and preservation of our traditional customs and culture. This can also be a part of the "moulding together" aim. We know that this part of our way of life has been mutilated by previous Administration policies because they did not think it had any value. (Henry, A. 1971: 1-2)

To oversee the preservation of 'traditional culture', Henry established a House of Ariki to reinforce 'traditional' leadership. They acted as a consultative body to the Legislative Assembly on issues related to custom or welfare of Cook Islanders (Sissons 1994: 379, Baddeley 1978). In 1972 the Cook Islands Party established a Cultural Division (which included an anthropological division and archives) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs (formally the Ministry of Social Development). I briefly outline a further three of his initiatives - a conference held for traditional leaders, the Constitution Celebrations, the Cook Islands National Arts Theatre - and the beginnings of the tourism industry.

In 1974, Albert Henry held a workshop for tumu korero (holders of knowledge, male elders) from various islands to discuss matters of tradition and custom. The first item for discussion was the existence of four houses of knowledge in pre-European times that could be models for contemporary independent governance. These were the Are Karioi, Are Korero (house of knowledge), Are Ta'unga (house of experts) and Are Toi Korero (house of research). Initially, the Are Karioi was talked about. Each elder told stories of its existence in legend on their islands. At the end of the session Henry, presented his view on the relevance of the Are Karioi in the present:

So I am looking back to the beginning of the Are Karioi in ancient times and their meanings ... I am trying to compare the spirit of the Are Karioi in ancient times with the Are Karioi that we are seeing today. Today, two new Are Karioi have been born. One, is for entertainment, to be happy [matuaora], it has no meaning. You go to the Maruraiai [a dance hall on Rarotonga] pay 30 cents and you get drunk.

The second one is the Youth Clubs. The purpose of these are to gather young people together for entertainment [tamataora], entertainment with meaning. This is the purpose, to search for good entertainment through the spirit of Christianity. In youth clubs you can find stories of the past and that is when you know where you come from. [Tumu Korero 1974, my translation]
Entertainment with meaning, in Henry’s view, is the acquisition of local ‘traditional knowledge’ overlaid with healthy and moral entertainment (the product of Christian values). The conduit for this style of entertainment is the youth groups. In his work Jeffrey Sissons (1999) suggests that under Henry’s government “dancing youth” came to embody both the nation’s traditions and the nation’s future as a young, progressive and modern nation. Youth groups came to play a central part in facilitating entertainment. They performed at hotels and on tourist liners. They were utilised by government for state functions, providing dance performances for visiting dignitaries and welcoming and farewelling local government members at the airport. As well as official and tourist performances, youth groups also provided entertainment at socials held at packing sheds and theatres in town. The other two projects, which became central to Henry’s vision of a proud united nation-state, involved foregrounding expressive culture in particular music and dance. These projects were the Constitution Celebrations and the Cook Islands National Arts Theatre.

August 4 is Constitution Day, which marks the official declaration of Cook Islands independence. Each year a festival is held to celebrate and commemorate internal self-government. The celebrations began in 1966 at Taputapuatae, the grounds of Makea Ariki in Avarua, as a relatively small two day affair. By 1969 the celebrations were moved to a newly built Constitution Park and took place over a ten to fourteen day period. Outer islands’ tere pati were shipped at government expense to take part in a series of events that made up the celebrations. Since 1966 there have been four main components to the celebrations: an opening ceremony, which includes the lighting of the Constitution flame and is followed by a float parade; a multi-denominational church service; an official ceremony on the 4th of August; and sports and dance competitions (the festival of dance).29 The two latter components of the celebrations are considered the

29 Over the years a range of events have been added to and discarded from the Celebrations. The Constitution Ball took place in the 1960s-1980s. It was an invitation only event for government ministers and local and overseas dignitaries. The Ball included a dinner, entertainment from Rarotongan youth dance groups and guests took part in a waltzing competition. For the rest of the population, open air dances in packing sheds around Rarotonga were held. Other events included: Senior Citizens day, a Carnival and Agricultural Show. The ‘Star Song Quest’ and Beauty Contests were also popular events held during the 1970s. From 1987 a Constitution disco was organised which included a disco dancing competition. The
most popular, as they allow the various island groups to compete against each other. This sense of competition has somewhat undermined the government’s promotion of ‘unity’ and ‘togetherness’ (Sissons 1995). Former dance festival participants have said to me that the main aim of the dance festival is to perform inter-island cultural difference and for these to be judged and ranked. Intrigue, suspense, accusations of favouritism and vote-rigging are central themes in the history of the dance competition. Judges and government officials are all suspected to display bias towards their ‘home’ island. Attempts have been made to make the festival of dance a non-competitive event. However during the years when this has been implemented, attendance, and participation by outer islands groups, has dropped dramatically. The success of the Constitution Celebrations relies on the dance festival being competitive; the tension between unity and competitiveness appears to be what makes the celebrations ‘successful’.

In 1969, the Cook Islands Party established the government sponsored Cook Islands National Arts Theatre (CINAT). Albert Henry had met the Australian based dancer and choreographer Beth Dean and her husband Victor Carell on a boat travelling from New Zealand to Tahiti and asked them to help organise a national dance company. Both Dean and Carell had been extensively involved with indigenous dance, having previously undertaken dance research in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. Dean had choreographed the first Aboriginal Ballet, Corroboree and a ballet called G’day Digger! (based on WWII soldiers returning home from war). Later, Carell began the

1989 Celebrations marked the first (and last) annual “Truck Rodeo” and “Health and Fitness Evening” which featured displays of aerobics, martial arts, body building, boxing and weightlifting.

30 One of the most extreme examples of this occurred during the 1976 festival. An open letter from the Manihiki Tere Patti, published in the Cook Islands News (11/8/76), queried, amongst other things, the allotment of points to each dance category: “We do not understand why the ‘ute’ section had to be scored out of 600 points when the other sections (drum dance, action song and legend) were each scored out of 100 points”, The rules which had been devised in 1970 did allot 100 points to each item. These had been changed during the competition and were not announced publicly. This resulted in Ma’uke island winning overall first prize. Following a series of newspaper articles which detailed Manihiki as outright winners under the normal point system, Tupui Henry, Minister for Internal Affairs and Chairman of the Constitution Celebrations committee and the representative for Ma’uke in the Cook Islands Assembly, admitted that he asked judges to change the rules concerning allotment of points. He then, as newspaper reports say, “magnanimously” requested that the result be changed to a draw between Ma’uke and Manihiki (PIM 1976: 31). As a result of this fiasco the next two years of the festival were non-competitive.
South Pacific Festival of Arts in 1972 as well as organising a number of Australian arts events (Dean and Carell pers. comm., 1998, 1983).

CINAT aimed at representing the Cook Islands as a nation (Sissons 1995: 159, 1999). Legends, music, dances and the dancers themselves were chosen to represent each island of the group. CINAT toured Australia in 1970 for the bicentenary of Captain Cook’s exploration of the Pacific. They performed with an Aboriginal and a New Zealand Maori group under the title the 'Ballet of the South Pacific' at the Sydney Opera House. Organised by Dean and Carell, the 'Ballet of the South Pacific' was sponsored by the Australian, New Zealand and Cook Islands government (and by Cook Islanders’ fundraising efforts).

The Constitution Celebrations and CINAT, were to endeavours launched by the Henry government to encourage local customs and practices as the foundational unity of his people. At the same time Henry also encouraged economic development. In this regard the promotion of cultural ‘traditions’, aimed at fashioning an independent nation, complemented policy initiatives aimed at the creation of a tourist industry. ‘Culture’, nation and economy were thus inextricably connected.

From 1967, a Tourist Development Council was established through the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the following year the Council produced an Information Paper on Aspects of a Tourist Industry for the Cook Islands (1967). It begins with a discussion of whether the Cook Islands should develop a tourist industry. It offers the thoughts of Mr. R. Austin, Deputy General Manager of the New Zealand Tourism and Publicity Department:

The Pacific area has become the world’s greatest attraction for tourists. In Hawai’i, Fiji, Tahiti, the two Samoas, Norfolk Islands, New Caledonia, New Zealand and Australia, the tourist industry is now a big business and growing faster than any other industry. Can the Cook Islands afford to miss out on this lucrative source of income? (Tourist Development Council 1967: 1)

Unsurprisingly, the paper suggests that the Cook Islands should embrace tourism. It outlines the need for transport and access to islands (that is, airports) and the
development of tourist accommodation. The provision of ‘entertainment’ was also a crucial component in establishment of the industry:

An essential ingredient of a tourist industry is entertainment and this should prove no difficulty for the Cook Islands. Organised dance teams, feasts and dances will all play their part ... Visitors are, as a rule, interested in the traditions, culture and way of life of the people in the area they are visiting ... many read about the area before they visit it. The rehabilitation by tribal groups or Village Committees of old maraes and other historical areas, and the restoration of buildings etc., would add much to the interest of the visitor and help retain the local culture and history for our own young people (Tourist Development Council 1967: 4-5).

The Tourist Authority Act of 1968 and the subsequently formed Cook Islands Tourist Authority began promoting and marketing tourism. An international airport was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth on 29 January 1974. On the tarmac she was welcomed and entertained by dancing members of Rarotongan youth groups (Hall, C. 1994: 43).

![Figure 13: Ota Joseph at Airport Opening Ceremony](image)

**Commerce and Culture 1978 - 1998**

When the Democratic Party under Sir Tom Davis was elected in 1978, government funding of the arts largely ceased. From 1978 economic development, private enterprise and education were stressed by the Democrats. The Cultural Division and CINAT were
dismantled, government sponsorship of the Constitution Celebrations was reduced and funding to Youth Clubs was cut.

The decline in government funding to performing arts was to some degree offset by the burgeoning tourist industry which required dance groups to perform at hotels and on tourist boats. On Rarotonga, some village youth groups continued into the late 1980s, performing at hotels and village events (such as the openings of new village buildings). Others were transformed into family run dance troupes rather than village based enterprises and it is these groups that perform at tourist venues today. These groups, along with the Cook Islands Tourist Authority (part of the Ministry of Tourism and Transport), instituted a series of competitions that were held throughout the year. These included the Miss Cook Islands beauty pageant and the Dancer of the Year competitions. It was not until 1989 when the Cook Islands Party returned to power, under the leadership of Sir Geoffrey Henry, that cultural activities once again became a government priority.

Like his cousin Albert, Geoffrey Henry viewed the arts as a key component in Cook Islands nationalism. His government established a Ministry of Cultural Development, which included a performing arts section. This was formed in 1990 and had a budget of NZ 1.5 million. Its objectives are:

1. to preserve, perpetuate and enhance the Cook Islands Cultural Heritage in order to uphold tradition and develop an appreciation for this important national resource;
2. to encourage the growth and expansion of productive economic, social and educational activities as may enrich cultural art forms;
3. to present where appropriate the varied elements of ancient and contemporary Cook Islands art and cultural forms; and
4. to maintain the unique cultural identity of the people of the Cook Islands. (MOCD 1991: 6)

When Sir Geoffrey Henry opened the Sir Geoffrey Henry National Arts Centre, *Te Puna Korero*, in 1992, he saw the Centre as a boost for "cultural renaissance in the Cook Islands". He located this renaissance at the heart of national identity and self-esteem:

> We have already entered an era of economic growth but to proceed without also sustaining our cultural heritage would be like placing all paddles on one side of a canoe: we could never
stay on our course. Knowledge of and respect for the past gives us what we need for the
future. (MOCD 1992: 3)

The combined importance of economics and ‘culture’ to the future of the nation was one
of the ways in which the Prime Minister justified spending nearly $12 million on
building the Cultural Centre. At the official opening of the Centre he said, “We must be
prepared to spend in order that our natural artistic skills flourish and nurture the soul of
this country”. He declared the Centre to be a new “marae”, which would become the
“cultural heart of our Nation” (CIN 18/1/1992: 4).

Figure 14: National Arts Centre (Note Tiaerane Display)

This arts centre represents the biggest investment in arts funding to date. Geoffrey
Henry’s leanings towards government sponsorship of ‘culture’ have been criticised post-
1992. This is because the Cook Islands faced severe economic recession as a result of
excessive government spending, a large foreign debt and a decline in export industries,
principally agriculture. Stringent economic reforms were implemented in the latter half
of 1996 at the recommendation of the Asia Development Bank and New Zealand
Overseas Development Aid. International aid was suspended until the Cook Islands
adopted the structural adjustment program which included “down-sizing” the public service. Public service employee numbers were halved and those that remained were required to take a 15 per cent salary cut (NZODA 1997).

One of the areas to be cut back during the reforms was spending on ‘culture’. The Ministry of Cultural Development had its budget cut from $1.5 million in 1991 to $400,000 in 1997 and staff were reduced from 46 in 1991 to sixteen. 1997 was the first year the Constitution Celebrations were held without any outer islands delegation. Each island was to hold their own celebrations, and on Rarotonga there was a competition between only four dance groups. Other cultural events were “postponed”, due to budget cuts, including the Dancer of the Year competitions and the Miss Tiare (Miss Flower, a junior female beauty and talent competition) and Miss Cook Islands competitions. These, and other competitions, such as the Song Quest and Composers Contest, were tendered to newly created small private companies.

When I interviewed Geoffrey Henry in 1997, he explained to me his ideas on the importance of culture to Cook Islands nationalism. His comments are placed in terms of a historical and personal trajectory, which have come to publicly define who he is, and his vision for the nation:

In my education there was a wedge between myself as a young modern Cook Islander and myself as a native Cook Islander... Very quickly we turned into God-fearing dusky brown skinned Victorians, and then dusky skinned Kiwis and with getting a scholarship [to study in New Zealand] I was forced to choose ...

Culture is what we are rich in. That is what we built our nation on. I try to encourage the culture even though I may be criticised. You know we gained independence in ‘65 but we were barely independent. At that time we would denigrate all things Maori because of the missionaries. If it wasn't in the Bible we shouldn't have it. It would be called heathenism and paganism. There were generations of suppression ... and we changed it ... underlining it all was a recapturing of our pride and dignity, our self respect for things that belonged to you. But that cultural brainwashing – it is still here today.

31 Henry is referring to the repressive social norms of the Victorian era.
Henry identifies a number of issues that are examined in more depth in the following chapter. The tensions between notions of tradition, modernity and Christian morality, all assemble around contemporary Cook Islands dance practice and expressive culture more generally. Dance looms large in diagnoses of the state and the nature of contemporary Cook Islands ‘culture’.

In this chapter, I have presented a history of the Cook Islands embodied in movements and postures (Stoller 1995: 8). I have examined the ways Cook Islands expressive culture was reshaped throughout the course of Cook Islands history. Broadly, missionisation aimed to destroy expressive forms and colonial governments to control them. During these periods entertainment moved to isolated beaches and “the bush”, areas away from the ears and eyes of European administrators. Independence witnessed the revitalization of ‘traditional’ practices; they become central to the political and economic imagining of the Cook Islands nation state. In tracking these transformations, I have attempted to analyse the complexity of the interactions between Cook Islanders and outsiders. I have argued that expressive culture plays a significant role in the dynamics of these interactions. Following Friedman (1994: 165) I suggest that expressive forms are “not expressions but definitions of power”. I have also argued that the appropriation of outside cultural forms are a form of what Appadurai (1996: 112) has called experimentation with the “means of modernity”. At the same time they are experiments at harnessing and recirculating local expressions of power through new means. Expressive culture, I contend, is not superfluous to the real political and economic business of missionisation, colonialism and decolonisation but it possesses material, mediational and generative force (Henry et al. 2000: 256). The ways in which contemporary expressive practices embody colonial memories (Stoller 1995) and negotiate the postcolonial moment is the subject of the next chapter.
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DANCING FROM THE HEART:
MOVEMENT, GENDER AND
SOCIALITY IN THE COOK ISLANDS

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of

The Australian National University

August 2003
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 ora 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). 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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32 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. 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

33 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).

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.

Figure 15: Island Nights Poster
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.  

Watch DVD: Dance Genres

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34 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*\(^{35}\) – 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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\(^{35}\) *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.
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 Maraeenga 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”.\(^\text{36}\) 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

\(^{36}\) 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.37

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37 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 e i 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 e i 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”.

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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. 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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38 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. 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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39 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 Islands 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\textsuperscript{40} 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.

\textsuperscript{40} 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”.

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.

41 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, kasperma, 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.
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 *napou*, 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](image)

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. The week before a talk was given by Dorice Reid, a

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42 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”,43 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

43 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). 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

\[44\] 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 tries 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. 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”.

![Image of a woman dancing](image)

**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 Queen’s 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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\(^{15}\) 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.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Bikini Tourism}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{16} "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, somehow, check out those great tourism Cook Islands posters with charming, bike-riding, bikini-wearing gals. Mixed Messages or what?!!" (Coconut Wickers, \textit{Cook Islands News} 10 Aug 1997). In "Bikinis and other 'spacious oceans' Teresia Teaora (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). 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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47 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.\(^48\)

**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

\(^{48}\) 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). Pana’akari and panamarama are used to connote abnormal or mentally ill behaviour. They can also mean outgoing and unrestrained (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.

49 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.

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.\(^5\) 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?

\(^5\) 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.\(^{51}\) 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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\(^{51}\) 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 1st 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.52 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’

52 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. 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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53 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”.

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In 1998, five contestants entered Miss Cook Islands.\textsuperscript{54} I knew three of the five contestants well; Liana Scott and Tina Vogel (both from Orama dance troupe), and Marcia Teteiano from the \textit{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 \textit{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 Department, 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”.

\textsuperscript{54} 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 Atuan 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, 55 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.

55 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 Ukara, 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 Deportment. 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 peʻe, 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) 56

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,

56 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 nationalist 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:

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

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University
August 2003
Chapter 5: Dragging Drag – Performing Sex, Gender and Locality

Kia Orana day on Aitutaki is a day of entertainment collectively hosted by all government departments. For Kia Orana day in 1996, the whole island dressed up and turned out for an annual highlight. Older women were seated under the shade of the packing shed, wearing their best dresses and ei in their hair. Younger children intermittently sat at their feet and raced around with their friends. Youths sought out shade under trees and adopted poses of nonchalance, but there was an infectious air of languid excitement for the upcoming performances. This gradually wore off as the day got hotter and the crowd sat through long hours of song and dance – the mama from the Post Office’s action song; the Ministry of Marine Resources drum dance; the Ministry of Health’s string band, until, the Ministry of Outer Islands Development performers emerge. Twenty men in tie-dyed pareu covering their bodies. Slowly, to the sound of expectant drums, they teasingly removed their pareu exposing their torsos. The crowd shrieks. The men are in women’s dance costumes – coconut bras and leafy skirts. They were joined by twenty other men, bare chested in long black trousers, and together they began to dance ...

This chapter examines the performance of femininity in cross-dressing and dancing performances. I investigate the culturally specific ways cross-dressing and dancing connects with issues of gender, sex and sexuality through notions of ‘femininity’. I am also interested in how transgendered displays produce locality and engage with notions about nonlocality. I do this by examining two cross-dressing and dancing events. The first is the 1998 Drag Queen competition held on Rarotonga. This competition borrows elements from the Miss Cook Islands pageant, ‘Western’ drag competitions and ‘local’

57 Parts of this chapter have previously appeared in Alexeyeff (2000).
cross-dressing performances. My interest in this competition lies in the ways the different styles of femininity presented in the above contexts are assimilated into the Drag Queen competition. The second event is the Ministry of Outer Islands Development’s performance at Kia Orana day held on Aitutaki in 1996. I began this chapter with a preview of this performance as this style of ‘local’ cross-dressing and dancing frames the way ‘nonlocal’ styles of performing femininity are incorporated and displayed.

Throughout I argue that theoretical approaches that emphasise the performativity of gender, such as Judith Butler’s (1990), are useful because they allow for a more nuanced account of the gendered nature of social life. In terms of the two performances detailed here, it is the complex, sometimes contradictory, meanings of cross-dressing and dancing which make it so incredibly enjoyable to performers and spectators. However, while attention to performativity is useful to an understanding of Cook Islanders’ concepts of gender and sexual identity, I argue that approaches like Butler’s are embedded in a concept of a ‘Western’ subject. I intend to demonstrate that individual and atomic notions of personhood, and concomitantly ‘Western’ notions of sexuality and gender, are not entirely relevant to an understanding of the performance of gender in the Cook Islands context. While the comic currency of both cross-dressing performances rely on Cook Islands norms regarding gendered movement and performance, they also mobilise notions of gender that are not necessarily defined by sexuality. Just as importantly, these performances enact ideas about sexual practice that have less to do with gender but rather with Cook Islands norms pertaining to public and private behaviour and with notions about local and nonlocal identities.

1998 Drag Queen Competition

The 1998 Drag Queen Competition was held at TJ’s nightclub, in Avarua, on a Wednesday night. The venue was full an hour before the show was to begin. The audience consisted of friends and family of the contestants and young men and women who regularly went out. There were no tourists there. Older people in the audience who did not regularly go out were also in attendance. The composition of the audience
suggests that this was a popular and mainstream event which attracted people who normally do not go out to nightclubs.

An L-shaped catwalk draped with leafy foliage had been constructed to extend from the dance floor. Chalked onto a large blackboard behind the catwalk was “Drag Queen 1998”, and the names of the sponsors; Air New Zealand and The Printing Company. Three male judges sat on separate tables on the edge of the dance floor. They were introduced by the M.C., who was a female netball champion, as: a representative from Air New Zealand, a “television personality” (the local news reader), and the special events co-ordinator of Tourism Cook Islands. After a brief prayer conducted by the M.C., the competition began with the M.C. saying: “Let’s welcome the ladies with the extras”.

The night was arranged along the lines of the Cook Islands beauty pageant. The contestants participated in three sections, pareu (beachwear), talent and evening wear. The contestants were greeted with screams of appreciation and applause from the audience as they emerged for the pareu section of the competition. Each of the five contestants individually paraded around the dance floor and up and down the catwalk wearing pareu tied into skimpy versions of the styles of Cook Islands women and accessorised with local hats and flower ēi. The screams escalated as contestants undid their pareu to reveal swimsuits (and in one case, a g-string) or made erotic gestures involving their ‘breasts’ or grabbing their groin. These gestures were combined with bursts of Cook Islands female dancing; a subtle flick of the hip (patu) and short displays of fast hip movements.

The movements just described are one example of how the 1998 Drag Queen competition incorporated ‘local’ and ‘nonlocal’ (in this instance, ‘Western’) modes of cross-dressing. The ‘crotch grab’ for instance, may be traced to Michael Jackson’s infamous ‘crotch grab’ in the music videos from his album Thriller, and then Madonna’s

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58 However, as I have shown in other chapters and will elaborate on more fully later in the chapter, the ‘west’ is not the only ‘other’ referred to in performative genres. Other Polynesian countries, particularly Tahiti, serve as a reference point for dance styles, notions of beauty, glamour and fashion.
1989 video Express Yourself. In saying that these movements mimicked aspects of 'Western' genre's is not to say they were simply derivative. As I argued in Chapter Three, imitation or "copycatting" is a key component of Cook Islands performing arts. Innovation, the creation of "something different", in expressive genres is a central, if contested, aspect of artistic production. Imitation then can be seen as a process others have called, "domestication of the West" (Cannell 1995: 251), the incorporation and transformation of 'West' into 'local' forms. Concurrently, the integration of 'Western' cultural forms in this drag competition can be viewed as a "display of translocality" (Besnier 2002: 534). Many of the contestants actively oriented their display of 'local' drag practices towards cosmopolitanism by including obviously 'nonlocal' postures (Besnier 2002: 558). In other words 'locality' references, and is situated in, a broader 'global' context.

In the ensuing discussion of the 1998 Drag Queen competition, I am concerned with understanding the ways in which 'local' and 'nonlocal' styles are put together by contestants. Throughout the competition, references (through clothing, music, gestures, and movements) are made to 'nonlocal' drag shows and to 'local' styles of cross-dressing. The individual performances also draw upon and perform 'Western' and Cook Islands notions of feminine beauty, sexuality (both same and opposite sex) and gender roles.

The interaction between 'local' and 'nonlocal' styles in the 1998 Drag Queen Competition was not considered particularly successful. It was a competition that was regarded by many in the audience as generally un-entertaining and producing some distasteful performances. In local terms, "it was stink". This was an unusual response as all the other displays of 'local' style cross-dressing performances I observed were highly appreciated, even those which were not particularly polished or rehearsed. It was not that the audience did not grasp the displays of 'nonlocal' drag forms. Indeed, the most popular performer (and winner of the competition) was the one who most closely resembled a 'Western' drag performance. Rather, if my analysis is correct, it was those
contestants that attempted to meld ‘nonlocal’ and ‘local’ forms that produced the most lacklustre response from the audience.

I suggest that the failure of this competition has, in part, to do with some of the participants’ idiosyncratic interpretations of what ‘drag’ means but, it is also a result of a broader epistemological ‘category failure’ which occurred as some contestants attempted to amalgamate ‘nonlocal’ and ‘local’ forms of drag. This ‘category failure’, I argue, reveals the tensions between ‘nonlocal’ and ‘local’ understandings of sexual and gendered identities.59

*Dancing Queens*

In the *pareu* section some of the contestants paraded to iconic drag songs – *You Sexy Thing* (Hot Chocolate) and *I’m a Barbie Girl* (Aqua). Others chose local songs to accompany them. The M.C. introduced each of their contestants by their stage name – Claudia (presumably Schieffer), Lehaia (a made up name), Shania (Twain), Lady Posh (Posh Spice) and Cher. The M.C. then read out a brief description; Claudia, for example, was introduced thus:

Representing the beautiful village of Tupapa Maraeenga. She wants you to know she is both old enough and young enough. And she is still a virgin. Her hobby is dreaming. And her ambition is to be the best housekeeper on the island. Her rates are cheap; only three dollars an hour.

In the talent section of the competition the contestants also played with combinations of ‘Western’ drag shows and ‘local’ cross-dressing performances. Claudia, in keeping with her housekeeping ambitions, performed to the song *Dancing Queen* (ABBA) in tiny cut-off denim shorts, a shirt tied to reveal her slender belly and a scarf tied around her head. Her props were a bucket full of soapy water, a mop and broom. She scrubbed the floors, gyrated with the mop and the broom and rolled around the floor.

Similarly, Lehaia’s ambition was to be “a good caretaker”, and Cher (who had a prominent beer gut), the M.C. told us, was three months pregnant and joined the

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59 See Elliston (1999) for a similar argument with regards to same-sex practices in French Polynesia.
competition to find a nice single boy who would take care of mother and child. What interests me in this foregrounding of domesticity, was the way these contestants represented themselves in terms of their ability to perform female gender roles – motherhood and domesticity – not primarily in terms of their sexuality.

Shania, in particular, appeared throughout the competition as the embodiment of shy self-effacing Rarotongan femininity. Her eyes were downcast throughout the pareu section. Her pareu was tied in a modest style and she did not open it to reveal her bikini. Like the girls who join the Cook Islands Beauty Pageant, the M.C. introduced her by saying: “Shania was akama about joining in tonight, but her friends and family from the village of Takuvaine encouraged her. Her ambition is to do her best tonight for her village”. Shania was the only contestant in the talent section to perform a strictly Cook Islands female dance number. She danced to an old Cooks Islands song in a ‘straight’ female costume – coconut bra, pareu and titi (leafy overskirt). To an extent her shyness impeded her performance. The audience were largely silent except for a few bursts of supportive applause. The audience was however most appreciative when her titi fell off, in keeping with local delight in physical mishaps and accidents.

In contrast to the other four contestants, Lady Posh’s performance more closely resembled a ‘Western’ style of drag. The performer had spent most of his life in New Zealand and had studied fashion design. He had returned to Rarotonga like many of diasporic youth to spend time at “home”. In the pareu section of 1998 Drag Queen, Lady Posh was introduced in overtly sexual terms; “her measurements are 38, 21” (she massaged her ‘breasts’ and slid her hands down to her waist), “and 19” (she grabbed her penis), “but 30 at her full potential” (she slid her hands up and down her inner legs). Lady Posh presented herself in highly sexual terms, and as possessing the best physical attributes of both sexes.

It was her performance that produced the most sexualised responses from male members of the audience, comments such as: “hey sexy”, and “oooh baby”, and wolf whistles. A group of men, who had lived in Australia and New Zealand for a long time and had
returned to Rarotonga to be involved in the local rugby competition, seemed to be particularly vocal. At one stage the M.C. – in an attempt to curb their jeering – turned to them and said to one: “I would like to welcome the Secretary of the Rugby Association here tonight. I am so glad to see you are enjoying the show”.

For her talent piece, Lady Posh called for two male volunteers from the audience. After a slight hesitation a local boy and one of the rugby players came forward. They sat on chairs facing each other. Lady Posh stood in between them and began her lip-synched routine to Mountain High, River Deep (Tina Turner). In black platform shoes, leggings and top, set off by a 1960s style bouffant wig she danced (a combination of lap-dancing and Cook Islands dancing) and lip-synched between them. The local boy joined in the performance, feigning shock, admiration, and finally standing to join Lady Posh dancing Cook Islands female style. The other boy’s response was more sexual. He tried to grab her breasts, her bottom and undid his shirt to reveal his chest, when he stood up to join Lady Posh dancing he also stood and began to mimic copulating moves.

![Figure 22: 'Lady Posh'](image_url)
Judging from the audience response and the comments of the people I was sitting with (who were also friends of Lady Posh), the male participants in the act were regarded very differently. The local boy’s reactions were seen as an appropriate and a hilarious contribution to the performance. The other boy’s actions obviously produced some discomfort to Lady Posh and his sexualised movements were seen as bad taste. As we left the show the people I was with commented on how “overseas boys” had no idea how to handle themselves at home.

**Failure**

The other two contestants presented highly idiosyncratic performances which received a lukewarm response from the audience. In the *pareu* section, Lahaia wore a black one-piece bathing suit which revealed her pregnant stomach. She lay down on the dance floor sunbaking and oiled herself with coconut oil. Her talent section was an enactment of the birth of her child. In a black bra with fake enlarged nipples and a black *pareu*, Lahaia wheeled in a pram which had a sign on it: “International Year of the Child. Alcohol?? Healthy Mum gets Healthy Baby. Stop the Violence”. From under her *pareu* she gave birth to a puppy, cut off the ‘placenta’ with a saw and began to breast feed the pup.

Cher’s talent section was also unusual. She circled the audience in a black cape which covered her body and hair. Her face was covered with an oriental mask. The music was a soft classical piece, with a “shhh” noise included in it. Cher mimicked the “shhh” by having her index finger over her mouth. At first the audience was silent but as the music continued (it was a rather long piece), they also started yelling with increasing volume –“shhh”, “be quiet” and “take off the mask”. Finally the classical music gave way to a heavy metal number, Cher threw off the cape to reveal a pair of fake breasts, and black leggings, with a lacy white g-string over the top. She produced a skateboard with a tropical scene painted on it, attempted to skate and finished her number playing air-guitar to a section of heavy metal music.

What intrigues me about these two performances is their spectacular failure both in terms of ‘nonlocal’ drag shows and ‘local’ cross-dressing and performing standards. This
failure, as I suggested earlier, has nothing to do with lack of familiarity with ‘nonlocal’ genres but rather with the interaction between ‘local’ and ‘nonlocal’ genres which did not work. I have watched footage of the 1995 Drag Queen competition which was a huge success, partly, I suspect, because it conformed to more ‘local’ ideas of what cross-dressing should be about, that is, a display of men dancing and performing in local female style. As I indicated earlier, this has in part to do with the differences and tensions between ‘nonlocal’ and Cook Islands understanding of sexual and gender identity. To extend my analysis of this cleavage I need to discuss ‘local’ forms of cross-dressing and performing on Rarotonga.

Locating drag in the Cook Islands

What follows is a brief survey of drag in the Cook Islands. The use of ‘drag’ in this chapter is strategic. The expression ‘cross-dressing’ does not adequately represent the action of cross-dancing whereas the term drag emphasises performance that is, both dressing and performing in the manner of the opposite sex. This is important in the Cook Islands context as cross-dressing is strongly associated with performance and comedy. Secondly, cross-dressing is in some ways a limp term. It suggests somewhat superficial alteration of appearance whereas ‘drag’ captures the corporeality and sensuousness of cross-dressing practices.

A lot of Cook Islands humour is centred on drag. As well as using elements of ‘Western’ drag the 1998 Drag Queen drew on a long performative tradition on Rarotonga of cross-dressing and performing. I was not able to find out how long Drag Queen competitions have been run (many people said for the last ten or twenty years). During fieldwork I observed numerous instances of cross-performing, ranging from spontaneous individual displays to choreographed group performances like the Kia Orana Day performance I describe below. For example a group of teenage boys sit chatting on the wharf. One stands up and mimics the dance of a girl. His friends simultaneously laugh at him and hurl joking abuse. A woman at a nightclub dances with her girlfriends and dances up close to one of the girls, and imitates the dancing of a Cook Islands man. The girl dancing in the style of a woman provokes her friend by dancing closer, moving her hips
faster, coyly glancing at the ‘male’. The song ends and the dance finishes in cries of laughter.

More formal drag shows take place across a number of situations. As well as the Drag Queen competition (held about every two years), cross-dressing and performing are often part of the entertainment at larger events. During the 1998 Constitution Celebrations, Pukapuka island’s drum dance was performed solely by males from that island in women’s dance costumes. On Rarotonga, ‘drag shows’ are often incorporated into village or church based social events. The Easter sports day, organised by the Christian Youth Organisation, involves raucous boys-only netball games, girls-only rugby. The day usually ends with string band competitions featuring boys dressed and dancing like women. Back issues of the *Cook Islands News* have many references to cross-dressing and performing. For instance, during the 1967 Constitution Celebrations it was reported that:

> The sporting events began with men’s basketball. But the men didn’t want to play men! “We want to play the girls”, they chorused. So they got their wish! The Mangaian men dressed as the Titikaveka girls jumped in and, to the delight of the spectators, the melee began! The Mangaian ‘girls’ won the contest. *(CIN 8/8/67)*

Dressing up is extremely popular amongst Cook Islanders and, I would suggest, is a form of ‘drag’. I realise this inclusion is stretching ‘drag’ to its limits, but the ‘self-transformative’ (and group transformation) that dressing up involves operates on the same register as the metamorphosis drag performs.60 Uniforms made from ‘island print’ material are made for every organisation (dance groups, sports groups, church groups) and *tere pati*. Most events involve some form of group and individual adornment, ranging from flower *ei*, woven hats, to costumes for dance performances, school concerts and brass band groups. Both men and women participate in dressing up with equal enthusiasm and enjoyment (see Cannell 1995: 233).

For example, the 1997 *Nuku* day in which I participated (see Chapter One and *Nuku* DVD footage) contained elements of drag. Weeks of preparation go into composing new

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60 I mean something similar to Susan Sontag’s analysis of camp as a “sensibility (as distinct from an idea)...the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (Sontag 1961: 275).
songs and choreographing whole villages into a twenty-minute biblical drama. Haberdashery stores advertise on television: "If Jesus was alive he would buy his Nuku costumes at Tuki's. Tuki's for all your Nuku needs". Egyptian and Romanesque costumes are made from lengths of purple, gold or scarlet material and the island is transformed into something like the set of Cleopatra. At the 1997 Nuku, teenage boys acting as Roman soldiers come out looking suitably he-man in matching royal blue uniforms, tin foil arm bands and crowns. The crowd burst into laughter. I couldn't see the joke and asked the person next to me what was so funny. He replied: "It is because they are all wearing their sister's netball skirts, can't you see that!".

![Figure 23: Roman Soldiers in Netball Skirts (Courtesy of Dean Tremel)](image)

As the above examples show, cross-dressing and performing in the Cook Islands centres around imitating the dance styles, everyday comportment and adornment of the opposite sex. Women and men who may be classified as either 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual' dance and perform like the opposite sex. For instance, one of the participants in the 1998 Drag Queen competition was not 'gay' and had a girlfriend at the time of the show. He was however considered to be a taetae ('effeminate' male – a term I will explain in more detail below), partly because he was in his 40s, had not married or had any children, and
didn’t conform to ‘macho’ ideas of masculinity. He was softly spoken, “intellectual” and did not do physical labour.

It is considered to be funnier when men do drag. Men of all ages perform as women and this is done on a regular basis. Women however, only occasionally perform like men. Younger women will cross-dance at parties or nightclubs but rarely at village or church based events; doing so would be considered inappropriate and unladylike behaviour. On these occasions, however, older, married women may do so. This gender asymmetry is important. Public participation in drag is available to men of all ages but only to women past child-rearing age. Young women are much more closely aligned to biological sex and sexuality than young men. Young women’s reproductive capacity and the resultant moral surveillance constrain their participation in drag performance.

Cross-dressing and performing, I will argue, is so popular with Cook Islanders because of the meanings attached to gendered comportment and movement. In general terms, labour practices, styles of communication, mannerisms and gestures are highly gendered. These movements and practices are ‘seen’ to divide gender identity into two mutually exclusive categories – male and female. Because of the categorical distinctiveness of expressive practices, transgressions through cross-dressing are considered extremely humorous. Before turning to an examination of ‘local’ notions of cross-dressing, cross-dancing and the issues of gender and sexuality, I provide a brief overview of the relevant literature on cross-dressing and drag. I do this in order to clarify my interpretation of these terms in the Cook Islands.

**Approaches to Cross-dressing and Drag**

Cross-dressing performances are common throughout the Pacific (Besnier 1994; Ortner 1981). These performances have largely been grouped with other performances which invert dominant social ideas such as rank and status and have been studied through the concept of ‘clowning’ (Hereniko 1995; Mitchell 1992). While a number of these anthropological analyses have provided rich and detailed accounts of the variety of ways in which rituals of reversal are performed, they tend to emphasise the conservative
aspects of clowning. Shore (1981), for instance, argues that Samoan ‘transvestism’ is a restorative category. Men who dress as women function as a negative image for men—they are what men shouldn’t be. They signify undesirable, inappropriate masculinity which reinforces ideas about appropriate or ideal masculinity (see also Huntsman and Hooper 1975; Levy 1973).

Analyses of clowning intersect with broader theoretical debates about rituals of reversal. These rituals are considered moments of license or liminality; they are reflexive interpretative moments which reveal and clarify aspects of a social structure. As Murray (1998: 344) points out, opinions differ as to the effects of rituals of reversal. Some writers claim that these rituals are vehicles of cultural reproduction in that they parody and ridicule deviations from societal norms (Eco 1984; Geertz 1973). Other writers argue that rituals of licence can be an ‘as if’ type of performance which explore future possibilities by questioning social forms and their status or necessity (Gluckman 1965; Turner 1969).

More recently, the ambiguity rather than reproductive nature of cross-dressing or drag performances has been emphasised (Nanda 2000; Morris 1995; Besnier 1994). These analyses draw upon recent feminist scholarship, in particular the work of Judith Butler (1990), which suggests that by effecting a disjuncture between the anatomy of the performer and the gender being performed, drag parodies the idea of sexual difference. As such, drag is not an imitation of originary gender identity but a parody of the stability of gender categories, of discrete categories of masculinity and femininity. In Butler’s account, all gender is a form of drag produced through repetitive stylisation of the body:

... acts, gestures, enactments ... are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (Butler 1990: 136)

Butler argues that gender, as a corporeal style, is an effect rather than an origin of being; the enactment of gendered identity produces identity rather than expressing an encoded essence (see also Kondo 1997: 7). Butler’s notion of gender is useful because it
highlights the workings of both structure and agency, creativity and constraint in social life. In the following I suggest that cross-dressing (or any performance for that matter) cannot be reduced to a singular cohesive meaning which “renders a static, overly deterministic portrait of social relations, actions and motivations” (Murray 1998: 344).

However, while Butler’s work is indispensable, I suggest that it also reproduces notions of the ‘Western’ subject which given her (unacknowledged) focus on ‘Western’ gendered subjects is partly understandable. In Butler’s model, sexuality (here I mean desire, sexual practices and sexual orientation) is seen to define identity. While Butler eschews the idea of sexuality as biological essence, she argues that discourses of sexuality are constitutive of the person. Rather than disregard Butler’s work because of its Eurocentricity, her ideas about performativity can be understood as a product of particular cultural and historical assumptions. As Foucault (1978: 78) suggests, with the onset of capitalism in the West sex became an explanation for everything; “our bodies, our minds, our individuality, our history”.

In contrast, I argue that Cook Islands gender identity is articulated through the performance of gendered roles rather than focussed on sexual desires or practices. Sex and gender in the Cook Islands are enunciated primarily through gendered social roles (work, comportment and dress) and not through ideas about individual sexual desires. In other words, gender, as a series of practices, determines sex and sexuality rather than sexual identity being foundational to sexual orientation.

**Laelae**

*Laelae* is a category of feminised masculinity that is common throughout the Pacific (Elliston 1999; Mageo 1996, 1992; Besnier 1994; Shore 1981; Levy 1973). In many ways the category *laelae* is fundamentally different to categories such as homosexual or transvestite. The range of meanings attached to *laelae* – like the term drag – centres less on gender as an essential identity tied to sexual orientation and more on gender as series of performative practices.
Cook Islanders call people who behave like the opposite sex *tutuvaine* (like a woman) and *tututane* (like a man),\(^6\) the prefix *tu* denotes likeness. In this case it means likeness or resemblance of form, bearing, appearance or conduct to biological men and women. The colloquial term for men that act like women is *laelae* (there is no female equivalent for this word). *Laelae* is presumably a cognate of the Tahitian *raerae* (Levy 1973) and like *tutuvaine* the word encompasses gendered acts, postures and sexuality.\(^6\)

*Laelae* is an inherently performative category of persons. I examine three related notions performative in turn. First *laelae* define themselves through the work they perform; they primarily engage in women’s work. Second *laelae* are performative in the way they present themselves; their comportment, dress, mannerisms. Third *laelae* often distinguish themselves in performance genres; music, song and dance genres which are an extension of their elaborate self-performance.

Labour is highly gendered in the Cook Islands. In rural areas of Rarotonga (and the outer islands) men primarily engage in manual labour, planting and weeding taro, raising and killing pigs and fishing. Women’s work is centred around the home, cooking, cleaning, laundry and looking after their gardens, particularly flowers. In urban areas (the majority of Rarotonga) non-elite men work as labourers and non-elite women perform clerical jobs. Elites of both sexes, work in higher levels of the public service or professions.

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\(^6\) Like much work done on “liminal” persons, I focus here on liminal men rather than liminal women (Besnier 2002, 1994; Elliston 1999). There were women who displayed male attributes in the Cook Islands; they are called “tomboy” or “donut” but were less visible than *laelae*. Very few people speak about them and they do not “perform” in the same ways *laelae* do. On Rarotonga there was a small group of girls who self-identified as lesbians, these girls had spent some time in New Zealand and defined themselves in more in terms of ‘western’ gay identities which not only involved openness about sexuality but style of dress, demeanour and particular tastes in music. On other islands I meet women who lived together and performed masculine roles but their sexuality was never spoken about.

\(^6\) Levy (1973) makes a distinction between Tahitian *mahu* (the traditional form of transvestite) and *raerae* a term used to refer to “overt physical sexual behavior of either males of females ... somebody who does not perform a female’s village role and who dresses and acts like a man, but who indulges in exclusive or preferred sexual behavior with other men would be *raerae* but not *mahu*” (Levy 1973: 140). This distinction he admits is not clear cut. *Raerae*, Levy says, was also used as a “slang equivalent” for *mahu*. In a similar way it could be argued that *laelae* is slang for the older term *tutuvaine*, and given the close relationship between Tahiti and the Cook Islands, *laelae* was probably imported from Tahiti. Unlike *raerae*, it is not used to describe women and, as I go onto show in this chapter, is often not considered to primarily refer to sexual behaviour but mannerisms and deportment.
One way in which laelae are distinguished is by the nature of their labour contribution. As I have suggested, labour – like all practices and movement – is highly gendered. *Laelae* tend to prefer women’s work, in the domestic sphere they are considered to be extremely clean and are thought of as talented cooks. They are also seen to excel at women’s tasks such as sewing and weaving. In this sphere *laelae* are sometimes seen as “more womanly than women” (Besnier 1994: 297; Ortner and Whitehead 1981). On Rarotonga, *laelae* are regarded as excellent business people, shopkeepers, secretaries and organisers of artistic events.

In terms of self-presentation, many *laelae* dress and act like women. The womanly dress they wear ranges from *pareu* tied above the chest like women do (rather than around the waist as men), to *mu’umu’u* and from ‘Western’ evening dresses to female shorts and T-shirt. Most *laelae* I knew did not cross-dress permanently but always displayed a certain flair which marked them as *laelae* – if they dressed as men their clothes were often flamboyant. Many *laelae* I knew and saw around Rarotonga, were fond of wearing flowers behind their ear, which many men and women do, but whereas ‘straight’ men would wear a simple *poi* (ear flower) of a small usually plain white flower (*tiare maori*) *laelae* would choose more brightly coloured larger blooms.

In terms of comportment and mannerisms, *laelae* often walk, ride their motorbikes, gesture and speak like women. Importantly *laelae* tend to act out particular kinds of femininity; “the carnal dimensions of womanhood” (Mageo 1992: 454). They parody, and make visible, highly sexualised forms of femininity which the ideal ‘virginal’ girl is never supposed to display. And, it is young ‘virginal’ women that adore *laelae* company because they can exhibit what young women cannot, overt sexual desire and practice. *Laelae* are often considered excellent company by young women because of their mischievous natures and love of gossip. They are often considered to be “experts in transformation” (Cannell 1995: 242). They transform themselves through dress and make-up into women or flamboyant men. They sew intricate *tivaevae* which colourfully decorate their personal surrounds. Their gardens are full of flowers. They transform dull evenings into exciting ones through risqué conversation and wit, music and song. Again,
not all *laelae* display feminine characteristics and those that do will not always do so. Womanly comportment is more pronounced in some contexts, such as drinking with a group of friends, than at other times, such as at church and at family meetings.

These transformative qualities are seen to make *laelae* ‘naturally’ accomplished performers. Many *laelae* on Rarotonga were prominent composers, singers and dancers. They were also involved in the organisation of artistic events ranging from choreographing dance numbers, sewing and designing costumes to M.C. work. Across Polynesia, *laelae* (and their local equivalents) are associated with dancing and music (Besnier 1995: 292-3). Their association with performance genres ranges from ‘traditional’ contexts such as dances put on for fundraising to ‘contemporary’ contexts in particular bars and discos. Their performative style “blooms” (Besnier 1994: 311) in these contexts. On Rarotonga, where contribution to performative genres is highly regarded and respected, many *laelae* (living and dead) are regarded with awe for their artistic work.

**Laelae Sexuality**

Many people I knew made a distinction between *laelae* and ‘Western’ notions of homosexuality. Early on in fieldwork I asked a friend if a particular man was gay, assuming that gay and *laelae* meant the same thing. She replied with hostility, “Haven’t you seen his baby? He’s not gay. He’s a *laelae*”\(^\text{63}\). When I asked what the difference was she said that *laelae*, “just love the girls” (that is, they like socialising with women) whereas – “gays sleep with men”. Other people suggested that while *laelae* and gay were different things, the category *laelae* had undergone change: “In the old days *laelae* were really good at making *tivaevae* and they were *laelae* but not poofers”. A young man commented that he thought his *laelae* friend had become too influenced by ‘gay’ culture. He said: “he acts too much like a girl. If his dad found out he would be in big trouble. He didn’t used to be like that”.

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\(^{63}\) Many *laelae*, like non-*laelae*, ‘adopt’ children from relatives.
Laelae also make a distinction between their sexual preferences and ‘gay sex’. Laelae, by contrast to “gays”, like “real men not girls like us”. That non-laelae men are the objects of laelae attention represents a significant difference from ‘Western’ style gay identities. To engage in sexual relations with another laelae was considered ridiculous (Besnier1994: 300). Non-laelae men that have sex with laelae were not considered – or did not consider themselves publicly ‘homosexual’.

Laelae sexuality differs from gay identities in another significant aspect. As I will demonstrate shortly, laelae tends to suggest behavioural style – speech, deportment, dress – not necessarily sexuality. Laelae may or may not sleep with men although homosexuality can be an important part of their identity. As Besnier lucidly states:

... sexual relations with men are seen as an optional consequence of gender liminality, rather than its determiner, prerequisite or primary attribute ... Thus Polynesian gender liminality must be distinguished from lesbian and gay identity in Western societies, of which sexual orientation is the most important defining trait. (Besnier 1994: 300)

So while sexuality may not determine laelae identity, it can still be a central aspect of their sense of self. Similarly, Deborah Elliston (1999: 236) suggests “gender-coded” meanings attached to Tahitian mahu were foregrounded while their sexuality was backgrounded.

The de-emphasis of sexuality as a determinant of identity points to notions of personhood that differ from ‘Western’ atomistic version of the self. To quote Besnier again:

... as we know from Foucault and others, lesbian and gay identities arose in the West, particularly among the middle classes, in the context of recent historical evolutions in the notion of personhood as a holistic and atomistic entity, a trend closely tied to the elaboration of individualism as a foundational value of capitalism. (Besnier 1994: 300)

Besnier goes on to suggest that homosexuality in Polynesian societies must be contextualised through Polynesian notions of personhood. Gender liminality “rather than being grounded in the individual in an essentialist fashion, is more crucially a characteristic of the relationship between the individual and the social context” (Besnier 1994: 313).
Laelae, and their equivalents elsewhere in the Pacific, clearly point to a dislocation between sexual anatomy and gender identity. They also signal a disjuncture between sex orientation and sexual identity and the possibility that gender identity is not contingent on private sexual behaviour. A non-laelae male may engage in sex with another man but will not be categorised as a laelae. Laelae, in the main, do not sleep with other laelae but with non-laelae (Besnier 1994: 326; Mageo 1992). To reiterate, sexuality does not necessarily determine laelae status (although it can be central). They are primarily distinguished by the nature of their gendered practice, that is, the nature of their labour contribution and social comportment. This suggests that while gender identity is relatively fixed, sexual identity is fluid. It would be tempting to view this form of sexuality as the vague liberation of bodies and pleasures that Foucault has in mind at the end of History of Sexuality (1978). However, as Jeanette Mageo has noted being “spared the discontents of Western categorisations of sexuality does not mean ... sexuality escapes regulation by society” (1992: 450).

Laelae occupy a complex and contradictory position in the Cook Islands. They are regarded with a mixture of acceptance and contempt. They are valued by many women for being entertaining company. They are also objects of derision, especially among young men. The ambivalence surrounding laelae is, more often than not, to do with their private sexual behaviour rather than their public behaviour. For example, Mama Kan and Mamia had a number of very good friends and family members that were laelae. One day the three of us were discussing a particular friend and one of the women said: “I hate hearing his love life stories. I think a man and a man is wrong, like it says in the Bible”, the other also agreed that it was “disgusting”. Despite their distaste for the friend’s sexual proclivities they also greatly enjoyed his company. Further, status distinctions also influence the responses to particular laelae.

While both men and women love it when laelae perform, their sexual orientation is rarely spoken about, or if it is, it is often with disgust. People spend a lot of time talking about who is sleeping with whom if they are ‘heterosexual’ liaisons but not if they are ‘homosexual’. Young men who are caught having sex with other men will be beaten up
by their brothers or cousins or fathers. Although people will know if two men are sleeping together, as long as it is not publicly displayed then their sexuality is a non-issue. As Rose Lilley (1998: 226) has argued in another context, homosexual relationships are like an open secret.

I was once told, “lælæe sexuality is a non-issue, it is their way of life that people talk about, people always notice them and watch them, especially when they drink and dance or get violent”. The disavowal of lælæe sexuality contrasts dramatically with the hyper-visibility of lælæe in public life. Their private sexual behaviour is regarded by many as a “non-issue” while in public life (which sometimes involves performing sexuality in flagrant caricature), they are a spectacle. This separation between sexual orientation and gender identity into private and public ‘bits’ makes sense in terms of Cook Islands notions of personhood, in particular the relationship between the person and the social context.

Many scholars have noted that Polynesian personhood is malleable and multifaceted, made up of relatively autonomous aspects which can be foregrounded and backgrounded according to context (Elliston 1999; Besnier 1994: 312; Mageo 1992; Shore 1982). Besnier (1994: 318) contrasts this notion of personhood to Erving Goffman’s understanding of stigmatised individuals (and ‘stable’ notions of personhood) in North America, “whose persona may be “spoiled” in the eyes of society by a single trait (alcoholism, physical handicap, homosexuality, etc.)”.

While I consider malleability an aspect of personhood (regardless of cultural background), context appropriate behaviour is highly significant to Cook Islanders. Personhood is not understood as an “immutable” feature of a person but a relationship between persons and social contexts. This goes some way to explaining why the performance of lælæe sexuality is admired in certain

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64 Peter Jackson (1997) makes a similar point about homosexuality in Thailand. He says that there is “comparatively little pressure for integrating one’s public and private lives in Thailand” (Jackson 1997: 176). He goes on to say that in Western countries “having sex with a man has at times been a crime, admitting homosexual feelings has rarely been so. In contrast, in Thailand private sexual practice evades cultural and legal sanction, but publicly proclaiming one’s sexual preferences is regarded as highly inappropriate” (Jackson 1997: 178).
contexts and denigrated in others (such as the public revelation of laelae sexual interaction).

I think another, perhaps more useful, way to approach the ambivalent position of laelae is through an understanding of importance of related-ness (family) to Cook Islands sociality. I once commented to another woman that it was good how laelae are so accepted in the Cook Islands and was comparing this to the situation of gay men in Australia. My friend replied: “They aren’t accepted, we have to put up with them because they are family, we can’t do anything but ignore it”. While some people say it is “shameful” to have a laelae in the family given the importance placed on familial connection and obligation they would never be ostracised.65

This is why I do not use the term “gender liminal” as, unlike Besnier (1994: 287), I do not think laelae status is liminal. Drawing on Victor Turner’s work on liminality, Besnier argues that: “The three major characteristics of liminal events and persons that Turner identifies, namely, their “betwixt and between” locus, outsider status and social inferiority … [are] … relevant to Polynesian gender-liminal persons”. In contrast, I would argue that laelae may, in some instances, occupy liminal positions in Cook Islands society, but I would certainly not say all laelae begin as liminals and then find ways to supplement their status as Besnier argues. Given the importance of family, and the inalienability of kinship, in the Cook Islands (and I would suggest elsewhere in Polynesia) it is very difficult to be ‘outside’. In addition, social inferiority and superiority are largely ascribed by family position and status, or is at least as much ascribed as they are achieved.

With this understanding of the category laelae in mind, I want to now move to an examination of another cross-dressing performance in order to concretely illustrate the general themes I have outlined above. Two dilemmas are presented in the following section, both have to do with the relationship between laelae performances and comedy.

65 This familial resignation is expressed over other situations such as missing money (see Footnote 36).
The first concerns Besnier’s (1994: 292-293) claim that “gender liminals” are associated with anti-structural performances – clowning, satire and burlesque – in contemporary Polynesia. To a certain extent I would agree. Laelae are often associated with these kinds of performances, but there are also important differences between the types of performances they do in different contexts. When laelae men perform at formal events they are generally extremely serious and often very shy. As I illustrated in the 1998 Drag Queen competition, some contestants attempted to make their performance comical but most desired to display their skill and talent as dancers, singers and musicians. It is only in informal more intimate contexts that laelae truly ‘clown’ – such as, at parties held at people’s homes. As a result, I would argue that there is little that is “antistructural” or norm-breaking about their public performances. My second dilemma is this. While laelae are associated with performance and display, cross-dressing performances are seen as most comic and funny when non-laelae (or a combination of laelae and non-laelae) men do drag. To explore this problem in more detail, I now turn to a cross-dressing performance of this type; non-laelae men cross-dressing and performing as women.

**Kia Orana Day**

To return to the Kia Orana day on Aitutaki. After removing their pareu the Ministry of Outer Islands Development dancers moved into four lines facing the audience. The two outside lines were men and the inside two were men dressed as women. The latter knelt and sang a slow song about the genealogy of the island. Their hands danced the movements of the waves. The men’s baritone voices and their feminine movements were immediately funny. As they get more confident some men began to dance sexual puns to the song lyrics. The land being pushed out of the water is suggested by pushing up their coconut bras. The darkness at the beginning of time is danced as a circular hand movement which ends by covering the genitals. The land gives birth to its people and the men caress their imaginary pregnant stomachs. Then the drums take over and the lines of dancing men and women cross each other, each performing a series of elaborate hand, hip and leg movements. The drumming became faster and the dancing frantic, the straight lines collapsed as the women turn and dance with the men. The women moved towards the men, they got closer to each other, until the women’s hips were bumping the
men’s torsos. The women pulled the men to them and performed copulating moves. In a moment of perfect comic timing the two lines of women pull away in unison. The women faced each other and moved in, shaking their hips frenetically and repeat the grinding sex moves. Women straddle women, coconut bras went awry, some men forgot to dance as women and start dancing as men. It ended in a frenzy of drums, hips and laughter.

Watch DVD: Kia Orana day

This performance has attained legendary status in Cook Islands recent history. People remember it as one of the funniest performances they have seen and the national television station screens amateur video footage of the event as a filler before the news. One reason for the success of the Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance is that cross-dressing performances are common and valued as highly humorous in the Cook Islands. However the celebrated nature of the event is not simply its subject matter. Cook Islanders are discerning spectators of cross-dressing and what made this performance so humorous is the attention given to detail. The participants had spent many weeks in rehearsal; the dance moves, drumming and singing were complicated and required precise timing of movements from the performers for the performance to be comic. The attention paid to costume and timing and the perfection of movement captured in subtle detail the dance of Cook Islands women.

What strikes me most about this performance was how different it was from heterosexual male-to-female cross-dressing performances in Australia. As David Murray (2001) outlines, “gag drag” performances (heterosexual men, particularly ‘hyper’ masculine men such as sportsmen), are also extremely popular throughout Anglo-Australian history. The “gag” of these performances relies on the performer being utterly unconvincing as a women; a tight costume worn over a bulky athletic frame, bodily hair, masculine gait, so they look ‘wrong’ as women. In contrast the humour of the Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance results from it being a particularly polished performance of expressions of femininity.
In the following analysis of the Minister of Outer Islands Development's performance, I argue that through drag, the Ministry of Outer Islands Development group performs the gestures and movements which are pivotal to the construction of gendered selves. In doing so, the performance also reveals other important distinctions which govern Cook Island notions of personhood and sociality and which fundamentally constrain and produce the categorisation of sexuality and gender. These distinctions revolve around the tension between personal desires, private behaviour, community obligations and public appearance.

**Dancing as Women**

Inversion of gendered movement and display is extraordinarily funny to Cook Islanders precisely because the performance of gendered practices are central to their experience of being male or female. As I have argued throughout this chapter, gender in the Cook Islands is enunciated primarily through gendered social roles (work, comportment and dress) and not through ideas about individual sexual desires. The Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance is highly entertaining because it is men dressing as women and dancing like women. But this is not exactly why it is funny. The men are funny not only because they are dancing like women but also because they are dancing in ways in which Cook Islands women should never dance. They are doing what is called *ura vi i vi'i* – dirty dancing. This includes the obvious copulating movements, but there are also more subtle moves that make people laugh and which reveal the intricate schema of gendered movement.

When a Cook Islands woman dances she should never move the top part of her body, and she should never dance with her feet apart. The men dancing as women in the *Kia Orana* day performance purposefully do both these things. Dancers and choreographers would tell me *ad nauseam* that a dancer is good if she didn’t move her shoulders. At the time I thought this was technical information about formal characteristics of dance that would never be particularly useful. But I have come to realise that not moving your upper body or dancing with your feet apart is not just an issue of technique but rather of physical
expressions of femininity. Cook Islands women are incredibly poised – when they dance and even when they simply move. They hold themselves straight, their chins are slightly raised, their eyes down, and they appear at once proud and demure.

When the men turn to face each other and begin their exaggerated hip movements they are doing what is known as the ‘four square’. Cook Islanders say this is a Tahitian hip movement. When done by females, the ‘four square’ movement is considered as non-Cook Islands because it is seen as overtly sexual. Cook Island women are only supposed to swing their hips side to side which is not viewed as sexual but graceful. As opposed to the frenetic dances of Tahitian women, Cook Islands female dancers are seen as the epitome of graceful and controlled movement. The Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance brings into relief ideals of femininity. The performance is funny because it is displaying aspects of being a woman that are not usually displayed. As detailed in Chapter Four, young women are admired if they are ngakau au (peaceful hearted) and tu maru (possessing gentleness).

Dancing as Men

The Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance not only signals ideas about femininity but also masculinity. The performers are not only performing femininity in its opposite, they are also performing as laelae. As mentioned earlier, both ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’ men perform drag in the Cook Islands. The Ministry of Outer Islands Development drag show is no exception. In part, the performance is funny because the men are dancing what cannot be talked about – same-sex practices. This reading fits with the body of literature about the role of ‘transvestites’ in the Pacific which suggests that cross-dressing serves to reproduce established cultural norms through parodic deviations from the norm. In one sense the performance of feminised masculinity in such overt caricature may reaffirm and consolidate normative ideal masculinity, but I am not entirely convinced. As discussed previously, the performers are also satirising female sexuality. This display of ‘femaleness’ is a point often neglected in accounts of ‘transvestites’ in the Pacific (Mageo 1992). A consideration of ‘femaleness’ then would suggest that it is not so much that transvestites are negative models for men but rather
they are negative models for women, especially the idealised virginal young women. The failure of men to dance like women is in a sense a failure of men to be women, to embody femininity. The Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance is funny then because the performers are dancing feminised masculinity and because they are dancing carnal femininity both of which are never supposed to be displayed. In doing so they are effecting the failure of men who act womanly and the failure of women who act out their sexuality.

But this is only a partial explanation. The ‘feminine’ is not a negative space, a lack which functions to affirm masculine identity. Being a woman in the Cook Islands does not mean being a failed man. Neither does the feminised masculinity that laelae exhibit mean they are simply failed men or women. More profoundly, as I suggested earlier, it is virtually impossible for Cook Islanders to fail as a person. It is possible to fail at a practice (for example sewing, cooking, dancing, and fishing) but not as a person.

What I am suggesting is that there are two modes of being in the Cook Islands world. The first mode of being is performative. Personhood is what one does; the performance of actions, gestures and practices. Cook Islanders understand these acts are context dependent and situational, and personhood is defined as the relationship between personal and social contexts. The second mode of being concerns the experience of fixity of relationships. This form of personhood is expressed through ideas of belonging to kin, village and nation which are seen to be categorical. Before a man is a laelae, he is an uncle, a brother, a son. Before a woman is a potera (slut) she is a sister, a daughter, a cousin. The ties of relatedness, while they are often stretched and realigned (therefore performative), are also perceived as inescapable and concrete. In other words, while deviations from sexual norms are commented on and do affect social standing they are not always central to a person’s self-definition or others definition of self. To paraphrase Foucault – sexuality is a problematic of relations not a problematic of the flesh.
Dragging Drag

The two modes of being in the world point to an important distinction Cook Islanders make between private behaviour and social obligation. Cook Islanders recognise the inherent tension between an individuated and autonomous self and a collective, relational self (Battaglia 1995: 7). In this final section, I propose that what the Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance expresses about sexuality and gender must be seen in light of Cook Islands notions of personhood.

*Kia Orana* day as a whole is tied up with producing sociality. The Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance is not a negative space which points to failure of, or conflict in, Cook Islands gendered ideology. It is a performance which is more than simply a reminder of important gender dichotomies which serve to reinscribe normative gender roles and appropriate sexual behaviour. It is a generative performance, aimed at creating sociality. It is this productive potential of drag that Butler points to. She draws on Esther Newton’s analysis in *Mother Camp; Female Impersonators in America* which is worth quoting at length:

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[Drag] is a double inversion that says, ‘appearance is an illusion’. Drag says ... ‘my “outside” appearance is feminine, but my essence “inside” [the body] is masculine’. At the same time it symbolises the opposite inversion; ‘my appearance “outside” [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence “inside” [myself] is feminine’. (in Butler 1990: 137)
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Drag, as a double inversion, serves to demonstrate the fabrication of gender by rupturing the relationship between anatomical sex, sexual orientation and gender identity. Drag, Butler argues, can be subversive of gender through the active fashioning of femininity and by default, masculinity.

The Ministry of Outer Islands Development drag show similarly plays with ideas of anatomical sex and gender identity. The performers transgress the distinction between sex and gender by dancing as women – which figures their bodies as female but their inside male and the opposite, their bodies are male but they are performing femininity. They dance as transsexuals – male bodies with feminised interiors and feminised exteriors with male interiors. But the Ministry of Outer Islands Development show takes
the double inversion to another domain because the majority of men performing are not \textit{laelae}. They are parodying feminised masculinity, doing a performance of a performance. They are dragging drag. As such the distinction between inside and outside is skewed; essence and appearance are not doubly inverted but are part of the same performative economy. What is played out then, is not the distinction between inner essence and outside appearance, but rather the idea that appearance is essence or at least essential.

The Ministry of Outer Islands Development drag show then performs gender in ways different to ‘Western’ drag. Its appeal does not lie in displaying the contingency of the relationship between sex and gender, as in ‘Western’ drag, since this contingency is self-evident to Cook Islanders. The ontological integrity between inside (sexual anatomy, self) and outside (gender) is not assumed. Rather it is the outside, the performance of gendered practices, that are given ontological priority. The Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance begins from a very different premise than the one offered in Butler’s insights into ‘Western’ drag. Cook Islands drag is not based on unsettling the relationship between sexual identity and gender, rather it suggests gender is primarily determined by what a person does; the performance of gendered practices not sexual ones.

What I am suggesting is that the Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance inverts distinctions between inside and outside, an inversion that is not only tied to notions of gender. Or more precisely, it signals ideas about gender that are about things other than sex. I agree with Butler that drag can be a performance of inherent structural ambiguity, but, in this case, it is not simply ambiguity of gender. Rather than transgressing lines of gender, this performance transgresses lines between private and public: private sexuality and public gender role and the tension between self and sociality. It signals the inevitability of secrets being opened in small communities, and the fact that ‘open secrets’ necessitate the importance of self and social presentation. In sum, Cook Islands drag performs issues of sexuality and just as importantly issues about the reproduction of the social body.
This is not to say that the performance is necessarily subversive or transgressive. In fact, I would argue differently in that though it would be transgressive to talk about engaging in homosexual sex, it is not transgressive to dance it. In turn, flagrant displays of sexuality by women are alluded to in practices like dance but are seen as offensive in everyday public life. Similarly, performing the assumption that people must actively adopt gendered roles to effect sociality is not transgressive. It is not subversive to make fun of what Cook Islanders know is a necessary, but impossible, artifice: the distinction between social role and private self. It is after all a show, and like anywhere else people know that there is a difference between mundane everyday life and spectacular performances.

To reiterate, in line with Butler, I agree that drag is both generative and dissembling; drag embodies both subversive potential and reiterates normative gender identity. This double valency, I suggest is part of the fascination and comic appeal of drag. However, the theory of gender performativity, and its underlying ‘Western’ epistemological assumptions about the importance of sexuality in the construction of gender identity, is not entirely relevant in the Cook Islands context. For Cook Islanders, gender is embodied in performative social actions and gestures. That is, the performance of gendered roles and obligations. In this instance, the Ministry of Outer Islands Development dance the things that a society won’t talk about. They gesture to ideas of Cook Islands personhood that can’t be spoken of, ideas that are both ambiguous and embedded in social life. As an example of “how silences are culturally formed” (Appadurai 1991: 472), the Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance demonstrates that it is not only possible, but also very funny to dance what cannot be said.

In this chapter I have suggested that performing femininity through drag is concerned not only with femininity but also with relationships between sexes, sexuality and tensions between personal desires and public conventions. While the cross-dressing performances do display ambiguities in the categories of gender and sexuality, these are not the only tensions explored. I have argued that both the 1998 Drag Queen competition and the
Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance “seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (Appadurai 1996: 4). Unlike much work on globalisation in which: “Global-local interactions are predominantly studied in terms of how the Rest resists, imitates, or appropriates the West” (Iwabuchi 2002: 50), my analysis of global appropriation in this chapter has included not only the ‘West’ but also intra-regional cultural interaction.

The Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance incorporates ‘outside’ (Tahitian) notions of femininity and sexuality facilitated humorous exploration of other contradictions of social life. Contestants in the 1998 Drag Queen competition also made reference to ‘outside’ ideas about ‘Western’ homosexuality performed in drag shows. In contrast to the Ministry of Outer Islands Development performance, this amalgamation was not considered particularly entertaining. Rather than producing humorous ambiguity a number of contestants performances served to reveal a disjunctive cleavage between ‘nonlocal’ and ‘local’ understandings of sexual and gender identity.

The next chapter continues my analysis of gender and sexuality and its relationship to Cook Islands modernity and notions of tradition. I shift focus to the expressive practices undertaken at nightclubs and parties the gendered and performative nature of self-presentation in these intensely sociable contexts.
Chapter 6: “Outing” – Dancing After Dark

Morning tea at the Ministry of Cultural Development provided an opportunity for the staff to snack and chat. Monday was generally the most interesting for younger members of staff, because it meant catching up on the news and gossip of the weekend. In particular, what had occurred while “outing”, the term used to describe going to nightclubs, discos and bars. One Monday morning, early in my fieldwork, four younger members of staff (all in their twenties) and I were sitting outside, eating bread and drinking tea under the building’s eaves. About thirty metres in front of us was the Tupapa Centre, the hall of the village of Tupapa. On Saturday nights the Tupapa Centre has a live band and the five of us had gone there on the previous Saturday. Our conversation turned to a casual evaluation of the evening – “the band was too good!”; “I was so drunk!” It had been a good night according to the four of them – we had a good band to listen and sing along to, we had fun dancing together, a good laugh and plenty to drink. As it was the first time I had been out with locals in the evening, I was not sure of whether it had been a good night or not. Certainly much of the evening had been very different from the type of drinking, dancing and socialising I was familiar with. I was also conscious that I had been the only papa’a at the Tupapa Centre, attempting to ‘party’ in a way that was commensurable with activities of the other four.

A particular aspect of the conversation struck me. One of the girls turned to me and asked: “Do you cry when you are drunk?” I had to think about this as I had not directly associated drinking with crying before. I finally said, “I don’t really know, sometimes maybe”. Another girl interjected: “Oh I do. Once we had been drinking all night at the beach. I started crying and crying and walked off into the lagoon just crying and crying. Shame!”. Everyone laughed at this and it led to other stories of drinking and crying.

After a year of attendance at nightclubs, this snippet of conversation kept returning and becoming increasing significant to me. I saw many people cry when drunk and on a few
occasions surprised myself by doing so. I also saw people do and say things they would not have done or said in broad daylight. These included practices such as sexualised forms of dancing, loud and intense singing, and, more generally, expressions of emotional intensity – crying, raucous laughter and joking, verbal arguments and physical fights.

As with the analysis of cross-dressing and dancing in the previous chapter, I initially turned to literature on play, liminality and non-official practices in an attempt to make sense of the differences between everyday behaviour and outing. Much of the anthropological literature on rituals of reversal view displays of license as either conservative or as signs of resistance. A conservative view of outing practices would suggest that they act as temporary cathartic forms of liberation from hegemonic norms, that is as licensed or managed transgression (for an overview see Hereniko 1995; Mitchell 1992). Anthropological dance literature, in a similar vein, argues that dancing can be a practice of psychological release, a “safety valve” which allows for emotional release (Spencer 1985: 3; Royce 1977). By way of contrast, the licence-as-resistance approach broadly sees non-official practices as a means of resistance to dominant rules (Mbembe 1992: 4; Bakhtin 1968). These practices allow the “exploration of other ways of being, a process in which individuals play at being someone or something else” (Hereniko 1995: 157). Outing, from this perspective, may be viewed as practices which have the potential to challenge, or at least reveal, the contradictions and inequities of everyday life. The sparse literature on disco dancing presents an analogous view. Nightclubs and disco dancing are seen as enabling self-revelation, providing the chance to ‘let yourself go’ (Farrer 2000; Walsh 1993). In other words, they allow for the expression of individuality and freedom from societal constraints.

To an extent, outing practices do display elements that are both reiterative and resistant. The types of behaviour displayed when outing, such as excessive drinking, dancing and fighting, could be explained as managed transgression, psychological release, individual expression or subversive behaviour. However, I aim to show that outing practices do not simply reflect, react against or reveal modes of hegemonic sociality. I argue that outing
consists of a whole series of productive and generative practices which make, break, realign, affirm and negotiate ‘everyday’ identities and relationships.

My concern in this chapter is with the processual codes and styles of behaviour that are practiced by people who go outing. The types of dancing, drinking, communality and conflict that occur when outing are governed by rules that are different from those guiding daytime behaviour and outing behaviours are also not sanctioned by more conservative elements in the community. On Rarotonga, certain actions, if undertaken during the day, such as dancing seductively or in ways that draw attention to yourself, provoking arguments, crying, drunkenness, are not appropriate. During the night time they are allowed but only when expressed in appropriate and culturally sanctioned terms. At the same time, there is a related criterion of judgement which is applied to outing and everyday practices. Gossip (or the “coconut wireless” as it is referred to) is vehicle for circulating evaluations of people’s behaviour at nightclubs. As I will illustrate, people who go outing display a keen awareness of being observed by others. Outing, I argue, is simply a different (but related) mode of self-presentation and sociality from that presented during the daytime.

The main objective of outing is to have fun, mataora and rekareka. As mentioned in earlier chapters, these terms cover a range of emotional states including joy, merriment and delight. These terms are also applied to practices which create and enhance pleasurable emotions such as eating, drinking and enjoying music and dance. The causative prefix ta, is often employed to mataora and rekareka to emphasise the performative characteristics of these states, that is the way pleasure is able to be induced particularly by expressive forms. When outing, tamataora and tarekareka are about having fun and the intensified experiences of pleasure created through alcohol consumption, dancing and light hearted socialising with family and friends.

An issue that has puzzled me is that outing events which are associated with concentrated communal good feeling often lead to the reverse – conflict, tension and sadness. Here George Simmel’s (1971 in Farrer 2000: 248) idea that sociability can be adversarial as
well as pleasurable is instructive. On Rarotonga individuals partake in a whole repertoire of outing behaviour. At one end of the continuum there are practices which are intensely convivial – singing and dancing. At the other end, there are practices which are viewed as adversarial – talking and fighting. I suggest both sorts of practice are expressive styles considered appropriate (though not necessarily ideal) when outing.

A further goal of this chapter is to illustrate the ways in which ‘Western’ music and dance are both incorporated and transformed at nightclubs and parties on Rarotonga. I view this process as another example of localisation strategies adopted by Cook Islanders in relation to global cultural flows (Appadurai 1996). Not all Cook Islanders would agree with this interpretation. Island music which amalgamates aspects of ‘Western’, ‘Polynesian’ and ‘local’ music is a highly valued form to many younger Cook Islanders. However, some older Cook Islanders view island music as another instance of cultural loss – a bastardisation of ‘traditional’ music forms. As well as localising global expressive forms, nightclub dancing and music is positioned within a global frame. Both make reference to ‘nonlocal’ dancing and music, particularly black styles of the transnational black diaspora (Gilroy 1987: 153-222). Many young Rarotongans listen to reggae, hip-hop and Latin music and adopt related dance, clothing and hair styles.

In the following section I undertake a detailed description of the first time I attended the Tupapa Centre in order to evoke the mood of outing. I then move to a broader overview of outing on Rarotonga. First, I examine global-local interactions in island music and dance. Second, I discuss gendered styles of interaction particularly those that pertain to dancing. In the third section of this chapter, I return to notions of conflict and communion enacted during nights out. My goal in this section is to illustrate the role expressive culture plays in the creation and enhancement of a successful night out, and the way it is utilised to overcome potentially conflictual interactions. The chapter as a whole follows the trajectory of a night out, from ‘outing’ to parties that are held after nightclubs close. The final section ends with a consideration of a solitary expressive genre, ‘music of the dawn’ which is a style of music that may be played at the conclusion of an evening.
The Tupapa Centre

Vaine picked me up from my house at 9.30 p.m. Before going to the Tupapa Centre we drove through town on her motorbike. She made comments such as: “The Staircase is quiet tonight” or “My cousin is at TJ’s”. These conclusions were drawn from observing the motorbikes parked outside each nightclub. We stopped briefly outside Tere’s Bar to listen to the band that was playing there and Vaine hummed along to the song. While we were there a few other people rode up on their motorbikes to do the same thing. We then moved on to the Tupapa Centre, which is on the edge of town off the main road. Unlike nightclubs in town which have signs and prominent lighting, the Tupapa Centre seemed dark and quiet. When approaching the Centre, Vaine slowed down and turned her bike lights off. “Ah the others are here” she said, looking at a motorbike which she proceeded to park next to.

There was a two dollar cover charge to get in to the Centre. This money went to the band Sweet, Sour and Cream, who played there each Saturday. Other Ministry of Cultural Development workers were sitting at a long wooden table at the back of the hall with a few other people. They waved us over. Only two of the other three tables were occupied, one by some members of the Tupapa rugby team and the other by an old man and two younger men. “It’s early still”, said Vaine as we walked over to the table. Our co-workers leapt up to greet us, enthusing about out arrival. “We said 9.30. We thought you weren’t coming”. They sat us down, introduced me to their friends and urged us to start drinking.

One of our group, Natasha, poured me some beer in a small plastic cup, about a third of the way up the cup. I stared at it and at them, then drank it in one mouthful. The group then stared at me. “You should sip it”, said Vaine. There was nothing to sip, I thought to myself. I was hoping to get some more beer, but Natasha had already taken the cup off me and filled it in the same manner and passed it to Vaine. When she finished, she filled it again and passed it to the person next to Vaine. I watched the cup thirstily. Finally, I said to Vaine that I was going to buy a beer for myself. She told Natasha, and a discussion ensued in Maori which I could not hear or understand over the band. Finally,
Vaine said, “No, we are buying beer together”. We all put in money to buy a carton of long neck bottles of Cooks Lager. When the person who went to buy the carton at the bar returned, I was again surprised as she brought no extra plastic cups back. I thought perhaps we were just going to have a bottle each to drink from. Unfortunately, Natasha still had the one plastic cup and she again took up pouring miniscule amounts of beer into it and passing it around. In desperation, I explained that in Australia we fill up glasses right to the top, and we have our own glass. Natasha said testily: “Well you are here now. You drink like we do, all together and sip, sip”.

This practice, I found out later, is called “barmanning”. Barmanning consists of one person being the barman, that is pouring drinks for the rest of the people in the group. There is only one glass. The barman (or woman) fills the glass with beer and hands it to the person next to them. When this person finishes, the glass is handed back to the barman who refills the glass and passes it on to the next person in the circle and so on. Sometimes the same person stays in the role of barman all night and at other times the role is shared. There are certain skills that go along with the role. One must not pour too much or too little in the glass (usually a little less than half full); one must not complete a round of barmanning too quickly or too slowly. Drinkers in the circle will comment on the rhythm of the round and urge the barman, and the drinkers, to hurry up or slow down.

This style of drinking is compared by some Cook Islanders to the way kava was consumed in the “old times”. While kava is no longer drunk in the Cook Islands, its replacement, usually homebrew, is drunk in the same circular manner. Paiere Mokoroa, in his article ‘Tumu Nu: The Bush Beer School’ (1984) describes it as an “institution” where:

Men gather to sit and talk about many things, to exchange ideas and of course to drink home brew – in the same way that people in other countries do at pubs. (Mokoroa 1984: 74)

Tumu Nu refers to the hollowed coconut log which is used to store the homebrew. The log is placed in the centre of a circle of men and the tangata kapu (literally, man with cup – barman) serves the brew in a coconut cup around the circle. After three or four rounds of beer, the barman taps the Tumu Nu, which is a signal for an elder man to lead the
group in a hymn and the recitation and interpretation of a Bible verse. After this prayer service, the men entertain themselves drinking in the same way once more, singing and dancing (Mokoroa 1984: 79-80).

![Figure 24: Beer School (Painting by Tim Buchanan)](image)

Beer Schools, as they are most commonly known, exist throughout the Cook Islands and they are primarily frequented by men. I did not attend a beer school, but a female neighbour in Rarotonga ran one in her backyard. It was ‘open’ six evenings a week and I could often hear loud taped music coming from the house. She also cooked food for the men to eat after they had finished drinking. The men were charged for both the alcohol and the food.

Our barmanning at the Tupapa Centre resembled Beer Schools as it followed the same principles of controlled sharing and access to alcohol. Consuming individual drinks is unthinkable when barmanning is in operation, as it would rob the session of its conviviality. Barmanning also makes drinking a practice of “equal surrender” (Sansom 1980: 61). This evocative phrase comes from Basil Sansom’s (1980) ethnography of
'grogging' sessions among Aboriginal communities in Darwin. This style of communal drinking, he argues, makes:

... the grogging session a jointly experienced progression in which people 'go through' the stages of inebriation together and more or less in step so that co-drinkers remain 'all level'. (Sansom 1980: 61)

While barmanning differs in many respects from the grogging sessions described by Sansom, the principle of "equal surrender" is the same. Other studies of drinking practices in communally oriented societies, also stress sharing and egalitarianism (Gefou-Madianou 1992; Douglas 1987). In her discussion of "evening dances" in Greece, Judith Cowan (1990) suggests that shared drinking (and dancing and eating) emphasise as well as create collectivities: "the individual is obliged to subordinate his or her individual needs and pleasures for the group as a whole" (Cowan 1990: 135).

Barmanning tends to occur in more intimate spaces such as the Tupapa Centre and parties held at people's houses. It is one outing practice which enhances pleasurable togetherness by emphasising drinking together and also staying together. Members of a barmanning group rarely move outside of their circle to socialise with other people. Another pleasurable and obligatory practice of equal surrender is dancing together as a group.

**Dancing at the Centre**

*Sweet, Sour and Cream* played while we drank. The various groups of people at the Centre listened to the music intently. Some sang along. In our group no-one talked over the music. I tried to strike up discussions, thinking it was the right thing to do, and was politely ignored. Between sets, taped music was played and it was then that people started talking. Most of the conversation was about people at other tables. It revolved around mundane details of people's lives – a person who had returned from New Zealand recently; a man whose wife had just had a baby.

As it was early, no-one was dancing. Vaine told me that people would not start dancing until more people came in. Dancing when there were few people on the dance floor
would be a matter of "shame". During the second set, however, the old man who was sitting with the two younger men staggered onto the dance floor, clapping along to the band, stumbling and occasionally dancing. Everyone watched with interest and laughed with pleasure at his performance. He was soon joined by Bobby, whose name I knew as he had earlier sauntered up to our table demanding to know who I was. After Natasha had explained my presence, Bobby announced: "You are welcome at the Centre anytime" and then left us. "Gee", Natasha said, "You would think he owned this place". Vaine replied, "He's a her, not him" and another person added: "No! He's a shim". In unison, the group burst out laughing.

Bobby was a well-known laelae in Tupapa who represented the village in Drag Queen competitions and performed at other village events. For instance, he was displayed on the village float during the Constitution Celebrations (see figure 13). On this particular evening, Bobby was dressed in a red office-style skirt and a red fitted jacket with prominent shoulder pads, teamed with white cowboy boots. Bobby began to mockingly dance in the style of a Cook Islands woman. He moved closer to a drunken man, and suggestively moved his hips. The man feigned annoyance and tried to brush Bobby away. The whole place watched and laughed. Bobby kept dancing around the old man like a woman until the old man began to dance with him, in the Cook Islands male dance style. The audience applauded and yelled encouragement. After two songs the old man slumped back on his bench, drunkenly hunched and swaying. Bobby returned to his bench and lit a cigarette. He approached the man and offered him his cigarette. As the drunken man tried to grab it, Bobby danced back slightly and then forward. The man attempted to grab the cigarette again but Bobby turned and shook his bottom in his face and danced off. The old man appeared annoyed and slumped his head on the table. By then the band were also laughing and trying to sing, and Bobby seemed pleased with the attention he was receiving.

Eventually, members of our group and other people at the Centre began to dance. Their dancing style was a mixture of "island moves" and disco styles, particularly those influenced by Latin American and hip-hop performers. Our group danced together in a
circle and Vaine asked me: "Can't you move your hips? You have to dance sexy, like Lambada. Watch this!". Vaine began to dance with Natasha; they gyrated their hips together and laughed. Natasha began to exaggeratedly dance like a Cooks Islands girl, and Vaine as a boy.

It is illegal to sell alcohol on Sundays so all nightclubs shut at midnight on Saturdays. By 11.30 p.m. everyone at the Centre was dancing. The songs became faster and faster and then suddenly stopped. The last song of the evening was a slow one. Everyone on the dance floor paired off to waltz, Natasha with her uncle (the old man in the corner). Two girls danced together. A young looking boy I did not know asked me to dance. I was horrified, as I was unsure of the implications of accepting. I looked at Vaine who said, "Go, he is my cousin". As I waltzed awkwardly, the only words he spoke were: "Well, that's finished now. It's midnight. It's Sunday. I have church tomorrow".

After Midnight

After the Centre closes, our group took the remains of our carton of beer, and sat outside drinking. Another group, who members of our group referred to as the Pukapukan group (a number of them had Pukapukan heritage), sat near by. Both groups began to sing alternating songs. The Pukapukans, I was told, mainly sang songs about their island while the Rarotongan group sang songs written about Rarotonga. Both groups also sang some English songs. The most appreciated were Killing Me Softly (Roberta Flack) and Fire (The Pointer Sisters), both sung as slow Motown-like versions. There was little talk, only smiles of appreciation and comments such as, "our singing is too good". After a few hours, everyone drifted home. The details of our outing were retold to people in the course of the next week – "We had such a good night (mataora tikai); we danced and sang, and no-one caused any trouble (pekapeka)".

At the time I had absolutely no idea what this final comment – "no-one caused any trouble" – meant. However, I was soon to learn that trouble, which included physical and verbal fights and crying, was a common aspect of many "outings". A few weeks later I
sat in a bar at closing time watching (along with everybody else) two young men fighting. I was horrified and said so to the women I was with. They were unconcerned (but interested) in the fight. One woman commented: "As soon as the music stops the fighting starts". When I watched the fight this way, it appeared to me like a continuation of the dancing, a big muscular arm shooting through the air, another grabbing a waist, the bang of a head on the corrugated iron fence. I return to expressions of violence and trouble after I have discussed outing in more depth.

_Tupapa Centre Style_

Every village on Rarotonga has a village hall which is used for a variety of community events: sport and dance group functions, feasts for visitors from other villages or islands in the Cooks, or groups from overseas (mainly Cook Islanders from New Zealand, but also groups from other Pacific Island nations). The Tupapa Centre was built in 1974. It is a simple concrete hall with cooking facilities. During 1997-1998 the Tupapa Centre was used by the Tupapa dance group for rehearsals, by the Tupapa rugby and netball teams for functions. Housie (Bingo) was played there on Thursday nights. At various points throughout the year village related community groups would hold functions in the hall.

On Saturday evenings the Tupapa Centre was a nightclub. Unlike bars in town which attracted people from all over the island, the regular crowd at the Tupapa Centre were people from the village. Only if the Tupapa rugby team had won a game would there be an influx of people from other villages, all assuming that the village as a whole would be celebrating. On these occasions, the band would ask visitors who were known singers to come up and sing with them. They were introduced as "guest artists from the village of ...", or "the winner of the Song Quest in 1994". These impromptu performances were well received by the regulars (who occasionally complained about hearing the same songs week in and out).

Going to the Centre was considered different from going to bars in town. People I went there with would say it was a place to have a "quiet drink". 'Quiet' in this context did not refer to the noise level (which was loud) but to the casual and 'closed' atmosphere of the
place. The Centre was intimate. Everyone knew each other and many people were related. Going to the Centre was primarily about socialising with familiars. The casual style of the Centre was reflected in people's dress. Many regulars would turn up in everyday clothes such as shorts and T-shirts. Some older women wore pareu. Only Bobby used the Centre to display his wardrobe. Each Saturday Bobby would arrive with a different 'look'. One week he displayed the 'Western' casual look – jeans, T-shirt and red lipstick; the next week he might be wearing a local casual look – a pareu tied above his chest, in the female style, and ei. On special occasions, he would wear the red office outfit, or an electric blue and black evening dress. His outfits also seemed to reflect his mood and determine his style for the evening. On casual evenings Bobby would sit with a group of friends or relatives and only dance occasionally. The more elaborate the outfit and makeup, the more performative Bobby became. The electric blue and black dress would put Bobby in 'hostess' mode. He would do rounds of the various groups, stop to tell a saucy story and dance prominently in front of the band.

One middle aged woman sometimes challenged Bobby's eminence. This woman was sometimes referred to as a “bush lady”; she had little money, and undertook menial work for others such as labouring in their plantations or doing housework. Her husband had left her and her sons. She was also referred to as someone who “did her own thing”. She loved to dance and sing, usually in an outrageous manner. She only occasionally came to the Centre, but when she did we all knew the evening's entertainment would be good. Sometimes she would dance with Bobby; he would dance Cook Islands female style and she would dance like a Cook Islands male – a lascivious Cook Islands male. Her actions provoked laughter from the crowd because she danced like a man and used movements that were highly sexualised. At other times, when Bobby was not dancing or did not want to dance with her, she would dance by herself, and she would approach groups of young men singing loudly and teasingly gyrating her hips up and down their bodies. Most would oblige by dancing with her for a song or two.

I had never seen Bobby or “bush lady” at other bars in town, and once asked Bobby why. He simply said the Centre was “close to home”. I took this to mean that both Bobby and
“bush lady” felt the Centre was one place where they could enjoy themselves without scrutiny from people they did not know (this surveillance is discussed below). For them, this kind of outing was an intimate outing (or perhaps “inning”). Most people at the Centre were either neighbours or relatives. Elsewhere, bars were populated with people from other parts of the island who were not related. These people may well be recognisable and placeable but they were not considered familial intimates or village cohorts.

In the next section I move to an examination of outing at the bars and nightclubs in town. First, I provide a context for outing, the people who go out and the places to which they go. I then provide a description of outing style in order to demonstrate the salience of dance and music to outing.

**Outing**

On Rarotonga, drinking and entertainment go hand in hand. All venues serve alcohol and provide entertainment, such as a live band or dance show. The major outing locations on Rarotonga were in town along the main street of Avarua. In 1997-1998 there were eight nightclub/bar venues: Metua’s, Ronnie’s, Tere’s Bar, TJ’s, Trader Jacks, Staircase, Banana Court and Hideaway and two village Centres (the Tupapa Centre and Avatiu Clubhouse). Each of these venues had either a resident band and/or resident DJ. The larger venues also hosted special events: sections of the Dancer of the Year, the Talent Quest, Drag Queen competition and dance performances by local and outer island dance groups.

The outing population is mobile, in that individuals and groups move from one nightclub to another. It is common to go to two or three nightclubs in an evening. Outing involves a lot of cruising around before entering a nightclub. People travel into and through town on motorbikes (some in cars). They circle the venues, stopping – without getting off their bikes – to listen to a few songs outside, to see whose bikes are where and to have a chat to a relative or friend before deciding on which place to go into. Despite this mobility,
certain bars and nightclubs are identified with particular types of clientele. Trader Jacks is known as the "high class" bar. It is the only place expatriates, tourists and the stylish Rarotongan set frequented. People who are considered more "local" arrive at Trader Jacks late in the evening as it is often the last bar on the island to shut. TJ’s catered primarily for younger people. It was the only venue which did not have a live band and played rap and hip-hop music rather than island music. The clientele at other bars and nightclubs were considered local and they rarely attract tourists or expatriates. Tere's Bar was sometimes referred to as "outer islands bar"; Metua's and The Banana Court as places where "local, local's" go.

Trader Jacks sits at the water’s edge; a large outdoor deck overlooks the sea. In contrast, the majority of other bars were located in nondescript buildings and their interiors were spartan. Aside from Trader Jacks, most bars had a limited drinks menu. Most served beer (either Cooks Lager or Steinlager) and sometimes mixed drinks (brandy and rum), if the owners had enough money to buy the spirits, the mix or the ice. Metua’s, for example, is located in a large open air space surrounded by a wood and cyclone wire fence. Along one side of the fence are benches and chairs. The stage is located at the far end of the space. To the left of the entrance is a bar and undercover seating. The only decorative aspect in Metua’s are palm fronds attached to supporting pillars and tacked to the backdrop of the stage. Lighting at these types of bars is usually minimal and clientele tend to gravitate to the tables and chairs in the dark, at the back of the room.

The age range of the outing population is from approximately fifteen to 60 years old; the majority of participants are in their 20s and 30s. The older age groups tend to go out to perform in bands or to listen to friends or family who are performing. People of all ages who are heavily involved in church activities will rarely, if ever, go out (or rather, go into nightclubs which I explain shortly).

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66 The number of tourists who went to bars and nightclubs in town was very small. This could be due to the lack of transport (there are very few taxis and the bus service stops early) to take them back to accommodation which is usually out of town.
Like most social situations on Rarotonga, outing is sex-segregated. Couples rarely socialise together. Women who had partners told me that they could not enjoy themselves if they went out with their boyfriends. The point of going out is to have fun with friends of the same sex (for females this includes laelae). This fun, often involving bawdy humorous exchanges, would not be possible in mixed company. Expatriate papa'a couples who often went out together were considered strange. This cultural de-emphasis of emotional closeness (Abu-Lughod 1987: 223) between men and women extends to displays of physical intimacy. On the rare occasions that I observed couples out together, I never once saw couples holding hands or engaging in other displays of affection. Intimate kissing in public is considered the height of rudeness and is treated with disdain. The only time I saw a young couple kissing on the dance floor, a woman I was with threw her glass of orange juice over them saying they were disgusting. To my knowledge, she was not related to, or friends with either person. This lack of public intimacy starkly contrasts with what appears to be the highly sexual style of dancing practiced at nightclubs.

As I have indicated in earlier chapters, women, particularly young women, are the primary objects of moral surveillance on Rarotonga. Their demeanour and comportment are evaluated in much more rigid terms than that of young males and these evaluations usually pivot around female sexuality. In ideal terms, the ‘good girl’ never goes out, does not drink and stays home with her children or other family members. The ‘bad girl’ displays opposite characteristics. She drinks, goes out, and it is assumed that she has sex with multiple partners. While certain young women are seen to embody either ideal femininity or its opposite, the majority of young women attempt to occupy positions along the continuum of these two types.

Outing is one practice used to evaluate a young woman’s merit. As a context which involves drinking and interaction between the sexes, outing is a potential problem for young women in ways that it is not for young men. Drinking heavily is often seen to constitute young men’s identity. It is often portrayed as a stage most men go through. A lot of older men, who are now respectable church members, reminisce nostalgically
about their "drinking days" and the activities they engaged in. I have never heard an older woman speak about her youth in terms of drinking and related activities. However, for both young males and females, being seen to belong to a drinking crowd does not have positive implications, but females who drink are subject to additional judgements about sexual promiscuity. By contrast, disparaging comments about young men's sexual practices are rarely made.

Many young women I knew were well aware of gendered double standards for evaluating outing. For example, one girl who worked at the Ministry of Cultural Development only went out very occasionally. She was often teased by other younger members of staff, "you are like an old women – work, church, cook the tea, bed" – and they would encourage her to come out with them. She never did, saying that her husband did not like her going out. The reply she got from the others was invariably, "and there he is [her husband] drinking with the rugby team all the time. Out two, three nights a week. And you, what a waste!".

At the same time, young women applied these double standards to other women who went out. Many women had a deep suspicion of women who spoke to their boyfriends, and they would be encouraged in this suspicion by friends who might warn, "be careful she doesn’t steal your man". They were quick to suggest that other women were going out to "look for a man" while they, in contrast, were going out "just for fun". I was surprised when a woman I had known intimately for over a year, and had been out with many times, questioned me about my going out. She asked me why I went out. I replied, somewhat defensively: "For the same reasons you do. To have fun". "No", she said, "if you go out you are looking for a man". Looking for a man, as this exchange suggests, is the dominant reading of why women went to bars.

Those who see outing as fun usually did so with reference to the negative version of outing, that is outing as looking for a man. An older female friend of mine commented to me once: "It is good you go out with the Orana girls after a show. They just have a few drinks and dance together. They are good because they are just having fun". Another
group of girlfriends I had were more problematic in her opinion, partly because they drank openly and had no “shame”.

Display is the crucial element of the evaluation of young women’s behaviour. Many young women I knew resisted the categorisation of themselves as drinkers in a number of ways. They were more circumspect about displaying their drunkenness in public than males who often openly stagger around the streets from one bar to another. Young women by contrast attempted to appear ‘not drunk’ or hide their inebriation by travelling in large groups. Young women would also resist the equation of drinking and outing by replying to queries about their weekend, “yes, I went to listen to the band at Metua’s. I wasn’t drinking”.

Gossip, of the sort we undertook every Monday morning at the Ministry of Cultural Development, was a constant reminder to young women of the perils of outing. Many women I knew would periodically say that they were going to curb their going out because they were concerned about what other people thought. Other people included members of groups these women participated in such as church, sport, dance groups, and the village at large. A young woman, whom I went out with regularly, pointed this out to me one evening:

You know a lot of girls from my village have never been inside a bar. They play netball and go to church and that is it. I have to be careful that people in my village don’t think I am going out too much. You try to walk a straight line and they are just waiting for you to step out.

**Outing Style**

Once inside a bar or nightclub, four main activities are undertaken – dancing, drinking, joking and watching. Long, serious conversations are not embarked upon. Indeed, it would be impossible to have a conversation for any length of time because of the importance placed on listening to music, watching people, and dancing. Outing, I can say without reservation, is associated with expressive forms such as dancing, singing and
joking but most emphatically not with talking. As I will discuss later, talking is seen as problematic and potentially disruptive to a ‘good night out’.

When a live band is playing, the lack (as I apprehended it) of background chatter was startling. People listen carefully and, at times, sing along. As people know most of the songs being played and have at least a working knowledge of guitar playing, harmony and melody, their listening is musically informed – comments are made about the quality of the harmonising and the renditions of songs. These comments are made in hushed voices and the talk is scattered between songs or during a break in the band’s set.

As well as listening carefully to the live band, people I used to go out with would also carefully watch other people in the venue. Sighting a particular person may provoke the telling of a humorous tale:

See Mona over there? His sister Jackie is pregnant and they aren’t sure who the father is. It might be Teariki or Nga but they don’t know…

Imagine if it was Nga, he is so old! He would be tired before he pulled his pants down!

[Screams of laughter follow and re-enactments of Nga slowly, because of a bad back, pulling his pants down. When he finally gets his pants down he realises his erection is gone.]

Stories such as this one are told without the speaker or the listeners taking their eyes off the crowd. This kind of talk is indicative of the style of speech undertaken when outing – it is playful banter which is amusing and lively.

As I became a regular outing person, my eye for detail became more sophisticated and I too became greatly interested in watching and observing other people, even people I did not personally know but had heard about from others. Like my friends, I began to recognise particular people’s motorbikes parked outside a nightclub and would then be able to pass this information on. I began to ask the question everyone asked when meeting someone at a nightclub: “Who did you come with?”. I would monitor who sat with whom and how many dances a particular girl may have with a particular boy.
The most striking aspect of outing is the amount people dance. Almost everybody dances – and there are always just as many males as females on the dance floor and just as many teenagers as those in the 30s and 40s. A person who has gone out with their friends and does not dance is considered a spoil sport – “why do they bother coming if they are just going to sit there?”. Dancing with friends is considered part of being good company. The people who do not dance are usually too drunk to do so, but even these people will attempt to get to their feet if a song they like is played.

It is not usual for dancing to begin until quite late in the evening. This is when most people say they have had enough to drink not to feel “shame”. Of course there are extroverts who will dance early and on their own, but the majority of people will dance late and in groups. Part of the reason people feel shame is because the crowd, both those inside the venue and those looking in from outside the venue, is watching.

*Island Music and Dance*

At most nightclubs, a string band provides the music throughout the evening. During 1997 and 1998 there were at least eight string bands that played regularly at nightclubs and also at Island Nights and community functions. Most of these bands made cassette recordings of their songs, including original songs, covers of island songs (composed by Cook Islanders and other Pacific Islanders), and reworkings of *papa’a* songs. These cassettes were often produced locally in one of the three recording studios on Rarotonga. They were sold throughout the Cook Islands and in New Zealand and Tahiti. In addition to these string bands, Cook Islands string bands from New Zealand toured the Cook Islands and performed at nightclubs on Rarotonga.

String bands usually consist of two or more ukuleles, acoustic and electric guitars. Ethnomusicologists who have studied island music in the Cook Islands and the Pacific region suggest that the songs incorporate aspects of ‘Western’ popular music with ‘Polynesian’ features. “Most songs operate within the three chord framework of much Western popular music, but have some Polynesian aspects to their close-spaced, three-part vocal harmony, and extended harmonic phrases” (Goldsworthy 1996: 9, Thomas, A.
On Rarotonga, island music is subject to criticism in debates about tradition, such as those outlined in Chapter Three. During an interview with the Director of the University of the South Pacific (USP) Extension Centre on Rarotonga, I was shown a report, *Culture and Identity in Oceania: The Role of the University of the South Pacific* (Beier and Beier n.d.) which suggested, in part, the need for the USP to foster “traditional” arts and culture. Amongst other things, the report suggested that there was a “lack of music” on Rarotonga, which is later qualified as a lack of “traditional” music. The bars they say, “are swamped by American rock and pop” and “simplistic Hawai’ian string bands” (Beier and Beier n.d.: 53). Rather than viewing island music as “swamped” by ‘Western’ music styles and its associated dance culture, I think it is more instructive to examine the way ‘Western’ forms are given local accent and meanings. Island music, and the dancing that accompanies it, are highly valued and meaningful mediums to many Cook Islanders as this chapter, in part, aims to show.

At nightclubs, string bands play covers of Cook Islands songs which are currently popular and covers of old Cook Islands favourites. Most bands also include popular English songs and songs from other Pacific Islands, Tahiti in particular. Cook Islands songs tend to be sentimental love songs, songs of loss (death of a loved one, exile from one’s island home) and drinking songs (*imene kaikava*). The latter category of songs often contain sexual puns or humorous teasing, frequently heightened by members of the band improvising upon these lyrics to direct them at people who are at the nightclub. One very popular song during 1998 was *Tamaka Reebok* (Reebok shoes). It was about a man who had purchased a pair of Reebok trainers and was showing them off to everyone. The song makes fun of the owner of the shoes who thinks he is “too good” because he has purchased an expensive “flash” imported item.

Between sets, a DJ plays taped island music and songs that are popular at discos worldwide. In 1997 these included the songs *Macarena* (Los Del Rio), *You’re the One that I Want* (from *Grease. The Musical*), *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Boney M) and *Locomotion* (Kylie Minogue). Both taped and live music are classified in terms of rhythm as ‘slow’, ‘fast’ and ‘very fast, tamure’ songs. Dancing style varies accordingly.
Tamure is a Tahitian word for fast dancing undertaken between male and female dancers. On Rarotonga it is used loosely to refer to songs which have an accelerated rhythm and the ‘call’ or chant that accompanies these songs: “tamure, tamure, hey tamure mure ra!” During tamure numbers, dancers move in ‘local’ style. The main female movement is lateral hip swaying and the predominant male movement involves scissor-like leg actions. These songs also act as a climax and conclusion to a set of songs which range from slow, to fast, to very fast.

Fast songs are danced to in a mixture of ‘local’ style and ‘Western’ disco styles, particularly African American, Latino, and hip-hop versions. Males and females will often swap from ‘local’ styles to ‘nonlocal’ styles at different stages of a song. Slow songs are interspersed between fast songs and to these songs many people of all ages waltz. Again, the form of waltz is a combination of ‘Western’ and ‘local’ styles (and at times what is known as Tahitian waltzing which is faster than Cook Islands waltzing). Cook Islands waltzing involves the couple dancing not in the measured 3/4 rhythm of European waltzing but in a syncopated 6/8 waltz style, performed to a song in 4/4 time. When waltzing, individuals also may ‘break into’ sections of Cooks Islands dancing and then return to the waltz.

I first heard a distinction made between dancing at nightclubs and other forms of dance at an Orama dance practice. Sonny was instructing the male dancers to, “ura mataora [dance happy] like you do at the Banana Court”. To make his point he demonstrated the same form of male dancing as that done at a dance performance – lateral leg movements with strong hand gestures. However the style of dancing was quite different. He smiled cheekily and performed difficult movements with affected ease and casual indifference.

At a later stage Gina was assisting me with collating a list of terms for dance moves and styles. I asked her how she would categorise nightclub dancing. Her reply was illuminating:

Nightclub dancing is like dancing from the old days here, and what they are still doing in the outer islands. It’s fun dancing, ura mataora, ura akameamea (flirting dance), ura kaikava (drinking dance).
She got up and demonstrated a hip movement sequence that syncopated the side to side sway of ‘formal’ dance with double-time flicks (*patupatu, panapana*) on one side then the other, and a slight ‘hook’ or half-circle hip movement. The hand and arm actions were also more relaxed, less graceful and stronger.

Happy, flirting and drinking dancing refer to types of movements and their emotional style. They are styles of dance which are done in contexts like nightclubs, as well as in contexts which require humour and aim at effecting heightened enjoyment and fun such as *koni raoni* and other village competitions or major events (which I discuss in Chapter Seven). In this chapter I confine my analysis to nightclub dance but mention these other contexts to show the stylistic similarity across the different contexts in which dance is performed. This *ura mataora* dance style is used to evoke enjoyment, pleasure and teasing humour to flirtation. At nightclubs, these moves are put together in a number of different formations and it is to these formations that I now turn.

It is highly unusual for people at Rarotongan nightclubs to dance alone. Those who do are usually very drunk and they usually dance ‘towards’ or in ‘conversation’ with the band (so, in a sense, they are not dancing alone). Dancing is very much a partnered or group activity. Nightclub dancing is primarily about dancing with or at people. Dance formations also display the salience of gendered motility and the role dance plays in interactions with the opposite sex.

Women, but never men (except *laelae*), will often dance together in large groups at nightclubs. It is not uncommon for a female group to form a circle and each girl to do a solo dance in the centre for a time while the others clap along. Often the girl in the middle will do joking dancing; she may exaggeratedly dance like a Cook Islands man or female which will produce shrieks of laughter from the other girls. This mimicry of male and female dance forms is common. A couple of women will ‘compete’ with each other over who has the fastest hip movement. They will dance towards one another then one may turn and dance backwards towards the other girl and the other dance as ‘low’
(bending her knees to get close to the ground) as possible while still keeping up the fast hip action. The other girl will turn around and join her, dancing up and down. They circle each, other laughing and flaunting their skill.

It is also not uncommon to see a group of girls all dancing like Cook Islands men. At first I found this gender reversal disconcerting because it meant girls would dance up to me in male ways – ways I would code as sexual and therefore as having homosexual overtones (it also meant I not only had to learn to dance like a female but also like a male). This style of dancing is interactive. If a girl dances up to you in male style, you are expected to respond, either by ‘dancing back’ as a male or in an exaggerated female style. So, one girl would dance like a man and the other like a woman, and they would dance together in overtly sexual ways. The girl would gyrate her hips into the ‘boy’s’ crutch and gyrate them up and down. The ‘boy’ will follow the girl’s movements up and down, moving closer and surrounding her with ‘his’ arm and leg movements. At times, males will dance with groups of females. These men tend to be very close friends, cousins or laelae. Sometimes they dance in the style of a woman, often moving their hips and whole bodies frenetically – as if they are taking ‘fast hips’ to its extreme conclusion. A girl in the group will then accompany this dance by dancing like a male.

Reversals and mimicry are key features of dance styles performed at nightclubs. These reversals are enjoyed enormously – dancers (and spectators) find them uproariously funny. In part, as I argued in the previous chapter, the appeal of cross-dancing arises from its transgressive motility. Given that most movements and practices are marked by gender it is not surprising that reversal of gendered movement is seen as humorous. It is not simply the reversal that provides amusement. It is also that the reversal involves a performance of the opposite sexes dance style in sexual caricature and, just as importantly, a caricature of the interactions between the sexes.

The rowdy humour of single sex group dancing contrasts starkly with the silent serious style of dancing with a member of the opposite sex. Males often ask females to dance. The male leads the way onto the dance floor and the couple usually dance for a set – a
slow waltz, a fast song and a *tasure* song. He then accompanies her back to her friends. The process appears formal and quaint. The couple rarely speak to each other while dancing or moving to and from the dance floor, regardless of the relationship between the two.

Dancing with a member of the opposite sex involves the same dance movements, but without the humour (unless the couple are close platonic friends). The couple dance in response to each other’s movements. One partner, usually male, will dance towards a female. She will then dance backward or turn her back to him, appearing to deflect her partner. He will circle and she will retreat. At other times she will advance and he will turn away. Unlike same-sex dancing, the pleasure experienced by the dancers is hard to gauge. There is no laughter and no talk. Younger females are demure and younger males are shy. Both avert their eyes from their partner. Older couples may be less reserved, but the familiar case that characterises same-sex relations does not present itself. As I mentioned earlier, both men and women are deeply suspicious of interaction between the sexes. Thus, talking to a member of the opposite sex, particularly at nightclubs, is often read as a sign of an advance. Dancing with the same person on a number of occasions throughout a night can also be seen as a sexual advance, but much less so than talking.

The evening ends with a final slow waltz. Only then, if a man is interested in a woman will he speak. “Where do you stay?” is the question asked. It means both ‘where do you live?’ (which the man will probably know already), and it also means, ‘is it okay for me to come over?’. Alternatively, people decide to keep drinking, a practice commonly referred to as “after hours”. Here, dancing is replaced by singing as the dominant form of interaction.

*Dancing and Sex*

I have outlined the gendered dance formations in order to show the way interpersonal interaction is played out at nightclubs. So far I have argued that dancing and joking are the most striking features of a night out and talk is submerged under laughter and live music. The question that fascinates tourists, travel writers and, admittedly, myself is the
seemingly erotic nature of Cook Islands dancing. On two separate occasions older male tourists asked me lasciviously if young female dancers were virgins. Another male tourist/academic asked the same question, albeit in more intellectual terms: “What is the status of dancing and sex?” When I first attended nightclubs, I was concerned about male dance partner’s intentions, and was often surprised when they escorted me back to the group I was with and left it at that.

Like any dance form, Cook Islands nightclub dancing has clear rules, an “ordered sensuality” (Cowan 1990: xii) which may or may not lead to actual sexual liaisons. I asked many people about the rules of nightclub dancing (for my own safety as well as out of anthropological interest). At nightclubs you do not talk to the opposite sex, you dance with them. You do not talk when you dance. You may joke and dance with boys at nightclubs, but then you never acknowledge them during the day. This is because if you are seen talking to a male during the day, other “people will talk”.

An experience I had one evening formulated these rules very clearly in my mind. I had been at a nightclub and at about four a.m. a male dance partner of that night came around to our house, a few hours after I had come home and fallen asleep. Mama Kan heard him coming into the house and intercepted him. The next morning Mama Kan and Mamia joked about my first experience of tomo are (literally, breaking into the house). "Maybe I should have let him come to you. That thing of yours is getting cobwebs!". They also seriously queried me about how many dances I had with him. When I told them I had two and had mainly chatted to him, they then decided I had been leading him on.

At the same time as nightclub dancing orders sexual practice, the relationship between dance and sex is frequently talked about in same-sex company. Highlighting this relationship was considered extremely humorous. A group of girls were instructing me how to dance one night and began teasing me:

When you do the patupatu, imagine you are riding on top of someone, moving to the left and then the right. To do the fast beat really fast I think about Tony!!.
Many months later when I had mastered the fast beat to an extent, females I knew well would repeatedly say: “Who did you learn that from? You must have learnt it in Matavera”. A man, Tony, they suspected I was interested in came from this village. For a time, this comment became a favourite joke at my expense and it serves to illustrate how speculative gossip, sexual joking and dancing are combined to provide ribald entertainment.

What the above comments also suggest is that the ‘erotics’ of dancing are performed in exaggerated, parodic and self-conscious ways. A sexual style of dancing is primarily done with friends and certainly not with strangers. An erotic move will be immediately followed by a burst of laughter, which suggests ‘see – it is all fun, it is just a game’. It is more likely that older women will dance *ura kaikava*, as Gina suggested earlier in the chapter, rather than younger women who have more to lose in terms of sexual reputation. Young women who dance in this style are careful to frame this dancing as an ‘all female event’ and as ‘high mimicry’, moving between exaggerated forms of male and female dancing. Further, while women will dance together, mimic ‘erotic’ dancing and act out interactions between male and female dance styles, when dancing with a male partner these interactions are usually more stiff and formal.

Rarotongan nightclubs involve drinking, dancing and humorous exchanges which are sensual at a number of levels. Dancing at nightclubs with the opposite sex does sometimes lead to sexual relations as comments made during the ‘last waltz’ suggests. This does not mean that dancing is primarily about sex. It is also about styles of interaction between people. Outing is about enjoying yourself with friends. Again, the primary way this is done is through dancing, which is about being sexy and also about evoking a range of more subtle sensual styles: feeling attractive, flirting, having fun and being good company. Nightclub dancing is also about the display of virtuosity – who can dance the lowest, who has the fastest hips, who can dance most convincingly in the style of a man. Most of all it is about producing humour and corporeal sociality between friends.
The Coconut Wireless: Outing and Surveillance

At another Monday morning tea, a Ministry of Cultural Development staff member remarked: “I saw you at Metua’s on Saturday night. You were enjoying yourself”. I was surprised. This man was prominent in his village’s Christian youth group and did not go out or drink alcohol. I asked him what he was doing there and he said, “I was just watching from the outside”. Later that day I asked a female friend about this and she said that many people do it. Metua’s was especially good for people watching, as part of the fence was made from cyclone wire and therefore able to be seen through:

They watch from outside. Some come inside and sit around the back in the dark. They are youth club people who don’t drink but go out and watch. They report at their meetings ‘so and so was drunk on Saturday night’. I feel torn between having a good time and being in the youth group. Sometimes I feel bad because I am not a good example in the group but, I like outing.

I was shocked, and said to my friend I could not believe that they were spying. She was quick to correct me – “It isn’t spying, just watching”. From that point on I always noticed that people watched at nightclubs and also began to notice how people I went out with always knew who was watching as well. On another Saturday night at Metua’s, many months later, the same woman said to me, “People from my youth group are here”. I knew this meant that we were going to move further into the shadows at the back of the room.

This surveillance, which I found shocking and saw as spying, was treated by many as inevitable, and ‘natural’. What many people I knew found shocking was people behaving in ways that were not appropriate and getting caught. It was getting caught that was stupid and shocking, not the act itself (which does not mean that people did not feel guilt or remorse for actions that remained undiscovered, but that these emotions were amplified by public discovery). For example, in 1998 one major topic of conversation (and newspaper reports) was a story about how a government minister was caught having sex with a female delegate in Rarotonga for a conference. They were seen by people in a

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government car in a car park in town late one Saturday night and were reported to police. The opinion of most people I knew was that they were stupid to get caught. No moral judgements were made about the minister being married but rather, “Why didn’t they just go to a hotel, or up in the bush?” This case was often compared to the Clinton/Lewinsky saga which occurred at the same time. People could not understand the condemnation attached to President Clinton: “If they were publicly displaying themselves, well, that would be a scandal but in private, come on, it’s two consenting adults”.

**After Hours**

After the last waltz, the bar is closed and the lights are turned on. The nightclub crowd congregates outside. People from other nightclubs drive slowly on their motorbikes, observing who is where and looking for friends. At this time – just after 2 a.m. on Saturday morning and just after midnight on Sunday morning, the streets seem as busy as during the day – with the sounds of bikes revving, people laughing and calling out to others, “Where’s the after hours?” ‘After hours’ means a party at someone’s house. If no after hours can be found, people will cruise up and down the main street a few times and end up at the “pie-cart”, a string of take away food caravans, get a “feed”, usually a burger or chicken and chips, and watch the passing traffic.

Besides drinking, after hours parties are centred around live music. Drinkers sit outside, usually in a circle of makeshift benches and wooden crates. There is always a guitar or ukulele which travels among those in the circle. The emphasis at these parties is entirely on singing. In between songs the silence is profound to a person like myself who is used to drinking increasing the amount and volume of talk. A whole range of island music is played: bawdy drinking songs, sentimental favourites and popular hits. ‘Western’ and other Pacific nation songs are also sometimes heard. Only rarely do people get up and dance, but some will ‘mark out’ hand gestures as they sing.

This is the ideal form of after hours. As I noted at the beginning of the chapter, parties are evaluated by the amount of singing versus amount of trouble (pekapeka). The best parties are those which have a lot of singing and playing. “Trouble”, however, occurs
quite regularly. It will often start with talk – a person making comments about another person sitting in the circle. More often than not, the person who is causing the trouble will talk about an injustice done to them in the past. They may start indirectly, as in this instance of trouble between a brother and a sister:

- Look at him, he thinks he is great on the guitar.
- [A few minutes later]
  - Hey brother, you're too good on the guitar.
  - [A little later and more pointedly]
  - You have enough money to go drinking but when me, your only sister, asked you for money to pay my bills you had no time for me.

When the talk begins, it is either ignored or the talker is admonished with, "maniania!" (noisy) or "imene" (sing). If the talker persists, he or she is either escorted away or a verbal and/or physical argument erupts. The argument usually starts between the talker and the person to whom they were directing their comments. However partners may step into a fight between siblings (for instance, a boyfriend will hit his girlfriend to stop her from talking) or a brother may feel it is appropriate to chastise a sister fighting with her partner.

Trouble occurs across many relationships, most often between boyfriends and girlfriends (this is another reason why people say they prefer to go out without their partner). Arguments also occur amongst family members (particularly siblings) and less commonly between friends. It is also common that a girlfriend will "give a hiding" or "beating" to a girl that has been having sexual intercourse with her boyfriend. In the opposite scenario – when a girl has been unfaithful to her partner – she will be more likely to be the one to receive the beating. At parties, verbal and physical arguments typically involve some kind of denouncement of a relationship. The most common (and

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68 Talk is also considered bad because it can lead the speaker to melancholy. For example, at one after hours I attended I was sitting next to a man who told me this story: "My mother died. I can’t tell you how this breaks my heart". He began to cry and I felt very sorry for him, but the person next to me said: "Don't worry, he always tells this story and cries when he is drunk. His mother died eight years ago and he didn't even go to the funeral".

69 There is a domestic violence counselling service on Rarotonga. It is run by a long term papa'a female resident. Very few local women go there. While domestic violence is certainly not condoned it is not viewed as a ‘crime’. Physical violence is considered to be something both men and women engage in particularly when they are drunk.
effective) denouncement among family members is to declare: "You are not my brother (or sister)".

It took me a long while to apprehend that the harmonious singing party was an ideal. More often than not it was marred by some kind of conflict. At first, I tended to view trouble as an aberration but a number of things made me reconsider the status of trouble. The first and most obvious factor was the frequency with which fights or verbal arguments occurred. Of course not every party produced a fight, and there were people that would drink together and never fight. Yet even these people would explain their drinking partners in relation to trouble: "I drink up at Moe's house with Nga and them every Saturday. They are good to drink with because we just sing, there's no trouble".

The second factor that changed my opinion about fighting as deviance from party norms was the knowledge people had about fighting techniques. Females as well as males had detailed expertise. This struck me one evening after dance practice when a group of dancers and I were sitting around chatting before going home. One started telling the story of a fight that occurred between two girls on the previous Saturday night. The storyteller went into great detail about the fight itself, along the lines of "... and then Tara punched Rose and Rose grabbed Tara's hair and pulled her to the ground". This comment then led to discussion of the difficulties long hair can cause when fighting:

That's why if you think you are going to get into a fight you have to watch your hair – keep it tied up, or keep it away from them. Otherwise they can get it around your throat and strangle you.

The girl who imparted this advice had, to my knowledge, never been in a fight but she, like every other girl on Rarotonga, knew how to fight. Physical arguments were potentially part of the territory of interpersonal relationships and knowing how to fight is an important survival strategy.

The final factor that caused me to reconsider trouble as transgressive was the way it was discussed in the following days. Physical fights were not considered shocking but fascinating and amusing pieces of information. The fight discussed above occurred at a
party I attended and, during the next week, I was called upon to give my opinion of what happened. People were immensely interested in the details of the fight and discussions of motivation were lengthy. The inventory of the girls’ scratches, bruises and torn clothes were considered amusing. To everyone I spoke to the causes of the fight were common knowledge. One girl had gone out with a man three years ago and this man was now the other girl’s boyfriend (he was not at the party). It was assumed that the old girlfriend was provoking the new girlfriend, causing her to start a fight. “Good job” was the most common evaluation, which means the old girlfriend deserved what she got. The new girlfriend, it was decided, had no other option than to “stand up for herself” and the old girlfriend was “just jealous”. Jealousy is the most common cause of conflict according to most people I knew.

In sum, even though trouble was not considered ideal to a good night out, trouble was also considered inevitable and in some cases understandable and justifiable. Trouble was often a prominent feature of a night. Even if it did not occur there was always awareness that there was a potential for trouble to erupt. The prevalence of, or potential for trouble made me reconsider trouble not as a disruptive but rather as a central aspect of outing. Trouble and fun are two extremes of outing behaviour, practices and sentiments. Talking, fighting and crying are conceptualised as adversarial outing behaviour and singing and dancing as genial practices. Both I suggest are expressive styles that are considered appropriate to outing.

Singing versus Fighting

During drinking sessions, talk is seen as the main cause of trouble. Naturally, not all forms of talk are considered troublesome; joking and talk about happy subjects are welcome additions to a night out. Trouble talk, talk which is negative or goading, is the sort that has the potential to lead to physical and verbal brawls. Some people are more inclined to trouble talk than others. Those who consistently engage in troublesome talk are not considered good to drink with, they are called “crazy drunk” and should be avoided. It is acknowledged that all drinkers have the potential to get crazy drunk but
those who do so only sporadically are excused, the alcohol rather than the person being blamed for causing the craziness.

The idea that alcohol consumption may lead to crazy emotions such as anger and sadness, is commonly held. “It all comes out when they drink”, is often the accompanying commentary to a story about a drunken incident. This phrase is suggestive in that it points to the need to maintain composure and harmonious relations in public life in small communities. It also suggests that the expression of sadness, hostility or anger is to a certain extent appropriate in drinking contexts – it is one drinking style. However, saying that the expression of sentiments which cause conflict or sadness is acceptable is not the same as saying it is considered desirable behaviour. There is a certain amount of shame involved in starting trouble. People who cause fights or arguments may stop drinking for a while and will be more reserved in public contexts. I would also not want to conclude from the comment, “it all comes out when they drink”, that people are revealing sentiments that are more real or expressive of inner thoughts than public emotional comportment. Individuals who go outing do engage in behaviour they would not practice in other contexts but this behaviour is still shaped by social norms about context appropriate behaviour.

What fascinates me is the role music and singing plays in troublesome drinking situations. Both music and singing are seen as a salve to trouble. Singing stops talk, particularly trouble talk, and has the potential to “make happy” (tamaora). Songs sung at after hours are ones which express sentiments which range from tragic loss to deep attachment to places and people – emotions of happiness, pride, love, loss, betrayal, despair. In a sense, these songs set the tone for the expression of intimate sentiments. Through music these sentiments are expressed in unifying rather than disruptive ways.

The following example is the clearest articulation of music’s soothing properties that I encountered. After the Tupapa Centre had closed one Saturday, a group of eight females sat in a circle at the front of Mamia’s car. Mamia took her ukulele and a guitar out from the back and she and another woman began to play. The rest of the group sang. During a
lull in the singing, a heated discussion began between two women. Piti, the woman I was sitting next to, turned to me and said: "They should stop talking and start singing. They should just pick up the ukulele and sing". She then turned back to the circle and joined the other women in urging the women to "imene, imene", sing, sing.

Music of the Dawn

After hours ends when participants fall asleep on mats outside or leave alone or together. Some may go home and pick up their ukulele and play quietly sad, sentimental tunes; *akatangi mamaiata*, music of the dawn. As I mentioned in the prologue, this genre was described to me by Tepoave Raitia, a composer who worked at the Ministry of Cultural Development. We were discussing the musical he wrote and directed called *Katikatia: The Legend in Music*. It is based on a legend about an old woman, *Katikatia* (which means bite, bite) who lived in the mountains on Rarotonga. If children strayed from their villages she lures them into her cave and kills them. One day Ema, the favourite niece of Makea *ariki*, went missing. She was found by Makea’s warriors dead in *Katikatia’s* cave. They brought the body back for Makea and his wife to weep over.

For the lament song of Makea and his wife, Tepoave asked Mamia if he could use the song she wrote about her mother’s death (see the prologue). Mamia, who played Makea’s grieving wife, expressed her grief thus:

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Ema oh Ema
My beautiful girl
My grief will last for eternity
My tears are falling
With my sorrow
You are the beautiful flower
That I adore
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The song’s poignant melody amplifies the sadness expressed in the lyrics. The wife’s grief is immortal. To her Ema was as beautiful and precious as the sweet flowers that grow on Rarotonga.
During the course of a discussion, Tepoave and I were having about Katikatia, I remarked about how much I liked the above song. It was then he explained to me the concept of ‘music of the dawn’: 70

I used it in Katikatia because it is quiet, soft, and sad. It is the sort of music you play when you have drunk all night. You get your guitar or your uke and play. The sun isn’t up yet and everyone is still asleep. It is still and quiet.

I was struck by Tepoave’s lyrical portrayal of ‘music of the dawn’ and questioned him further by asking what this style of playing meant to him. He said, “you feel ...” he shrugged theatrically and exaggeratedly circled his hands perhaps to evoke the expanse of feeling ‘music of the dawn’ may cover. Tepoave’s inability to describe in words the feeling of ‘music of the dawn’ was uncharacteristic. He was typically an elegant communicator in both English and Maori. I pressed him, asking this style of playing made him feel sad or lonely and the phrase akatangi mamaiata suggests. “Both” he replied, “like maromaroa” a nebulous Cook Islands word which can mean many things from sadness, restlessness, ennui, boredom to loneliness. “But not just maromaroa ...”. We left it at that.

I began to pay more attention to people singing or playing to themselves. It appeared to be an elusive form. Sometimes at night I could hear Mamia outside playing sorrowful melodies on her ukulele from my bed. Also late at night I heard Mama Kan softly humming songs to herself. This occurred primarily around the time her father died and she was having difficulty sleeping. When Mamia and I had been “outing”, we would sometimes sit outside for a short time and Mamia would play a few songs. Songs that were slow and poignant. ‘Music of the dawn’ on these occasions appeared to me as a coda: a concluding expressive practice that sends one to sleep. I came to understand ‘music of the dawn’ as an expressive form which enables the expression of personal sentiments of sadness and longing.

70 Akatangi means play. Tangi (without the causative prefix aka) refers to weeping and crying. Mamaiata means early dawn.
I have concluded with a consideration of ‘music of the dawn’ because it demonstrates the “contrapuntal” (Abu-Lughod 1987: 241) ways Cook Islanders use music and dance. As a solitary performance, it represents one end of the spectrum of musical expression which contrasts with the intense sociality of outing practices outlined throughout this chapter. While some songs performed when outing evoke similar nostalgic sentiments, the contexts in which they are performed emphasise tamataora and tarekareka; enjoyment and pleasurable togetherness.

This is not to say that ‘music of the dawn’ expresses sentiments more real or spontaneous than those expressed in more public situations. On the contrary, I would suggest ‘music of the dawn’ is equally culturally shaped and structured. Tepoave’s utilisation of ‘music of the dawn’ in Katikatia helps to clarify this last point. Katikatia is among other things, a story that deals with the tragedy of loss of loved ones. It points to the universality of these sentiments and expresses them in culturally specific ways. The combination of an epic tale with a solitary song form recasts personal experiences of grief, “in a grandiose and culturally valued form” (Abu-Lughod 1987: 240). The point I am making here is similar to Abu-Lughod’s understanding of ways Bedouin women recite romantic poems from their legends and stories:

... love stories might set a tone and provide a model for interpreting or framing events in people’s romantic lives ... By drawing poems from these grand tales of passion to express their own sentiments, individuals, in defining their situation in a particular way both for themselves and for others, might be moulding their lives to the culturally shared imagery of old stories. (1987: 258)

Like Bedouin poetry, ‘music of the dawn’ also provides a poetic style of expressing turbulent sentiments. Like ‘trouble’ outlined earlier, ‘music of the dawn’ allows for the expression of extreme emotions which are considered inappropriate in every day social life. The expression of these emotions through music provides a vehicle for the definition of these sentiments in a culturally appropriate form. Like other forms of cultural expression outlined throughout this thesis, ‘music of the dawn’ mediates, and provides the tools for navigating sentiments, in this case the potentially alienating sentiments of sorrow and grief.
In this chapter, I have extended my analysis of gender and sexuality through an examination of the modes of interaction that take place at nightclubs and parties. I have also considered ways ‘Western’ forms of socialising are reworked in the context of dancing, singing and playing music in nightclubs and parties. I have shown the creative ways Cook Islanders appropriate ‘Western’ music, and ‘Western’ dance styles to produce local, highly valued and meaningful expressive forms. In the next chapter, I examine the role music and dance plays within the Cook Islands diaspora. It elaborates upon the theme that many Cook Islanders use expressive forms to evoke and perform sentiments of love and longing for their loved ones, their kin and their home islands. Aesthetic exchange, and the sentiments it produces and fosters, is a central component of the arrivals, departures and events associated with the movement of Cook Islanders abroad and on their return home. The following chapter also extends my analysis of the localisation strategies adopted by Cook Islanders through expressive cultural practices. In what follows, I demonstrate that expressive practices are also significant to the reproduction and maintenance of locality among diasporic Cook Islanders.
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DANCING FROM THE HEART:
MOVEMENT, GENDER AND
SOCIALITY IN THE COOK ISLANDS

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University
August 2003
Chapter 7: Dancing the Diaspora

In this thesis I have focussed on the performance of dance and music within the Cook Islands nation-state. I have stressed that these expressive forms have gendered, regional and global dimensions. I have also examined how locality is produced and re-produced through expressive forms in “new globalised ways” (Appadurai 1996: 9). In this final chapter, I focus in more depth on the position of Cook Islands dance and music in movements within and across national borders. This chapter spans a number of locations; Tongareva, Aitutaki, Rarotonga, Tahiti and New Zealand. In doing so, I attempt to understand the role expressive culture plays in the maintenance of affective ties across considerable geographic distance.

My primary objective is to illustrate the way expressive culture and affect are exchanged among Cook Islander communities in order to demonstrate that dance, music and song are crucial components in the maintenance of contemporary diasporic Cook Islander communities. In order to explore these connections I turn to Marcel Mauss’ (1988 [1954]) and Niko Besnier’s (1995) analyses of gift exchange as both these theorists discuss the role of emotions and aesthetics in gift-giving in ways that are relevant to Cook Islands styles of prestation. I present three case studies; a farewell ceremony on Tongareva, a Christmas celebration on Aitutaki and a twenty-first birthday party held in Auckland. The case studies provide the opportunity to explore gift exchange in the context of the dynamic movement of Cook Islanders within the nation and beyond.

Much of the literature on Pacific migration has focused on population movement away from remote, small islands to urban centres abroad. A trend associated with this transition is the flow of goods and money in the other direction, back to home islands. These ‘remittances’ are seen to place considerable burden on Islanders abroad (Appleyard and Stahl 1995; Connell 1990, 1987; Lomis 1990a, 1990b). In the final section of this chapter, I present a different reading of this flow of goods and money among Cook Islanders based on the contention that gift giving is premised on reciprocity.
of both objects and affect. I argue, following Epeli Hau'ofa's insights (1994, 1998), that attention to the affective as well as the material aspects of exchange presents a picture of the Cook Islands diaspora that is defined by interdependence, circularity and reciprocity rather than one-way exchange and dependence.

**My Precious One**

February 1998. On the atoll of Pokerekere, Tongareva, a ceremony was held for a CICC pastor who was leaving the island. The pastor was born and had spent his teenage years on Tongareva. He had spent some time in Sydney and then trained to become a pastor on Rarotonga. He was now a pastor for the CICC church in a village on Rarotonga. The pastor had returned to Tongareva to visit his family after an absence of three years.

The ceremony is called a *puroku* (presentation). It is held to farewell important visitors such as government ministers and religious leaders. During a *puroku*, gifts are presented to the persons leaving. These gifts are objects that are made on the island, *tivaevae* (for very important guests), mats, shell necklaces, brooms and hats. The gifts are presented to the accompaniment of group song and movement. They are wrapped around a departing person (as in the case of *tivaevae* and mats) or placed on a person’s head, around their neck or in their hand. When a *puroku*, an embodied display of gifts, is held for a Tongarevan, the physical wrapping of members of the community is to remind people of their home and family. It says, one person told me, “you belong to us”.71

The *puroku* for the pastor was held during the middle of a storm. Pokerekere is a tiny atoll (approximately 100m by 500m) with a population of only 200. Walking along the one main road to the church hall for the ceremony, it was possible to see the lagoon on one side and the sea on the other. The storm emphasised, at least for me, both the fragility and tenacity of the tiny community. Rain pelted down, washing away the road, palm trees bent in half looking as if they may destroy buildings, waves from both the sea

71 Both E.H. Lamont (1994) and Te Rangi Hiroa (1932b) mention similar ceremonies which were performed to welcome and farewell visitors. See Chapter Two.
and lagoon smashed against the edges of the atoll and then seeped through most houses and buildings. The floor of the church hall was wet as were all the people in attendance.

Unlike other gatherings I had been to on Pokerekere where people were jovial, the people in the hall seemed to avoid eye contact and spoke in sombre tones. Before the puroku, there was a feast to which all the local families from the CICC congregation had contributed. A long table was laid out with food, and the visitors to the island were asked to sit and eat. This included the pastor, me, and a group of five elderly Tongarevan men and women. Some of the old people were returning to New Zealand and others were going there for medical treatment. As we ate, the local residents stood around us and sang. They sang throughout the meal, songs that seemed incredibly sad and too loud. The atmosphere in the room was tense. An elderly woman who was eating started to cry and she stood up from her seat, raised her arms in the air and moved in time to the song. In response some of the singers also raised their arms and they cried. Other seated guests joined the old women standing and swaying and, even though I hardly knew any of the people, I found myself getting teary.

After the meal, the singing stopped and the table was cleaned and put away. A bench was placed at one end of the room and the pastor was urged to sit on it. The rest of the congregation, including those going overseas, gathered at the opposite end of the room. There was silence for a long time, which was finally broken by an elderly lady beginning to sing a song called Takakuravene (My Precious One), which is about a child being born and cherished by its people, its land and its ancestors:

Hanau mai ana paha koe
I te tumu matangi o Vaiore
Ka manuku to ora taku kura nei

E runga paha koe taku henua
Siki tia taku tama ki runga te ora e
Aue te mata o te kakahi
Poipoi taku kura nei
Porapora taku kura nei
Te rave o te tahunga e
Tuketuke te ravea te tahanga e

You are born
At the base wind of Vaiore [an islet]
The life force of my precious one is
let loose
You are on your land
Lift my child onto life
Alas the cherished object
Rock my cherished one
Rock my cherished one
The work of the expert
Has so many aspects [He will guard the child]
The song was repeated a number of times. Each repetition increased in volume as the congregation began to slowly advance towards the seated pastor. In unison they swayed, shell necklaces draped along arms, hands gesturing gentle rocking motions and tears pouring down their faces. The pastor kept his head down for the whole ceremony. As the group came near to him, they individually approached him, kissed him on the cheeks and placed the shell necklaces over his head. By the time each person had presented the necklaces the top half of the pastor's body was covered and he could barely move. The local pastor then placed a hat on his bent head and a broom beside him.

Watch DVD: *Takakuravene*

**Affect and Exchange**

Marcel Mauss' classic definition of gift exchange as creating and sustaining relationships between persons and groups provides a useful basis for an understanding of the puroku. The *puroku* also highlights a lesser, but nevertheless persistent, theme in *The Gift* (1988) about the role of emotions and aesthetics in exchange. The gifts presented to the pastor are "alive with feeling" (Mauss 1988: 22). They are examples of the way gift exchange provides people with the opportunity to take "emotional stock of themselves and their situation as regards others" (Mauss 1988: 77-8). Although emotions and feeling are not central to Mauss' work, he does offer glimpses of what a study of affective exchange might include. In his discussion of Polynesian economics he suggests:

[Polynesian] exchange is not exclusively goods and wealth, real and personal property, and things of economic value. They exchange rather courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances and feasts; and fairs in which the market is but one element and the circulation of wealth but one part of a wide and enduring contract. (Mauss 1988: 3)

And later:

The circulation of goods follows that of men, women and children, of festival ritual, ceremonies and dances, jokes and injuries. Basically they are the same. (Mauss 1988: 44)

Here, courtesies, dances, jokes, insults and food are not simply symbolic lubricants of economic exchange but have material and affective exchange value in and of themselves.
Gestures and sentiments are not merely appendages to the real business of economic exchange.

The puroku is one node in the circulation of sentiments and gestures, goods and money among Cook Islands communities. As I have suggested throughout this thesis, much expressive culture mediates and elicits forms of affective and material exchange. It forms an interactive economy which generates emotions and gifts, such as money, that are traced onto, and animate, pre-existing lines of connection and affiliations – familial relationships, status relationships and island identification.

The puroku was an extremely emotional display and the strength of feeling was overwhelming. After speeches by the local and leaving pastors, the congregation left soon after back into the storm. I walked back home with a few women, who were discussing the event and one made the comment – "He got so many ei". Another woman said, "Yes, he could go back and sell them in Rarotonga", and another person remarked, "He could make hundreds of dollars out of us".

These comments perplexed me for a long time. They sat awkwardly with the genuine and concentrated feelings that were presented during the puroku. How could such extreme emotions be suddenly transformed into musings about money? How could the women even entertain the idea that gifts given with so much love could ever be sold? Were they questioning the pastor's integrity, and if so, why did they cry so much during the puroku? In any case, it was unlikely that the pastor would sell the ei, as most people kept them in their houses draped over pictures hanging on walls as decoration, or kept them in bowls and reused them to give to friends and family as farewell tokens.

The contradictions the ei discussion created for me are linked in my mind with other conversations and images that occurred while I was on Tongareva. Together I think they make sense and express something of the affective materiality of loss (and desire to maintain) Cook Islands communities in the contemporary era. To explore this loss I need
to fill out the *ei* discussion by detailing the other conversations that suggest its significance.

Many women weave hats, mats and baskets out of *rito* (the heart leaves of coconut palms). These are sold to business people on the island who send them to Rarotonga. *Rito* objects are a speciality of the northern group atolls and are in high demand for Cook Islanders in southern islands for themselves and to sell to tourists. The woman I stayed with on Tongareva told me that for the Christmas period most women who belong to the CICC make six *rito* hats, often with pearl shell inlays. They wear one new hat on each of the six important church days over Christmas – Christmas Eve, Christmas day (two services), New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day and White Sunday (the close of *pure epetoma* – prayer month). “We all spend a lot of time and effort on our hats. We also spend a lot of time looking at other women’s hats, how nice they are, what kind of weave they do. I am sure the pastor wouldn’t like it if he knew!” I asked her if she could show me some of her hats, and she replied: “Oh no! We sell them all to Rarotonga after we have worn them on those days”. I imagined these women, spending hours of work on having nice new hats to conspicuously display at Christmas time, and the transience of their pleasure brought about by economic necessity.

A male composer told me that young men on Tongareva take a lot of pride in composing songs and getting them recorded (usually by overseas Tongarevans). A few years ago one popular Rarotongan singer (who lives and works in Tahiti) recorded one of the Tongarevan’s songs and did not credit him as the composer – “she made lots of money on that record”. The composer wrote to the singer but never received a reply. So now, he does not try to record his songs: “That is why I don’t really take my songs out, they are just played around the island”. This conversation suggested songs were part of a global circuit, one which removed this composer’s authorship. In order to maintain some control over his products he decided keep the circulation of his music local.

These discussions demonstrate a sense of the fragility in cultural ownership felt by some Tongarevans. The examples I have used all refer to Tongarevan objects; shell necklaces,
*rito* hats, and songs but comments that accompany these objects encompass other more ephemeral aspects of Tongarevan culture; feelings of attachment, ownership, pride, belonging and love. The loss and threats to this culture is palpable; money is needed to subsist and out-migration is a consequence of this. Young people leave to get an education overseas, take up paid work, older people go to New Zealand for medical reasons as Cook Islanders are entitled to unemployment benefits and an old-age pension in New Zealand but not in the Cooks group. Tongarevan residents, like those of other outer islands, aim to stem the flow of migration away from their island. A relatively large scale commercial pearl industry was set up in the 1990s. It provides Tongarevans with some livelihood and, unlike many of the other outer islands, Tongareva seems to have more residents in the 20-50 year old age bracket. Many of them have returned from abroad to work in the pearl farming industry, but the austere lifestyle (no television, radio, organised sports or alcohol) does not always appeal to those who have spent time elsewhere.\(^{72}\)

The rigorous nature of pearl farming left little time for other activities. While some people I spoke to on Tongareva valued their cultural production and were concerned about maintaining it, many people expressed the opinion that ‘culture’ was a frivolous, luxurious activity, done by those who did not need to worry about basic survival. The Government Representative of Tongareva said to me, “It is useless you coming here to find out about dancing. You should learn how to dive”. Another woman commented: “If you want to see culture go to New Zealand. They are always making culture, sewing *ei* and that”. But on another occasion I overheard the same woman saying “*aue i te culture o te henua* [Oh! The culture of this island]. We used to have sport and dance. Now we have the pearl”. Of all the islands I visited on fieldwork, Tongareva was the only one where it was difficult to find people to talk to about dancing. While Government Representatives on all other islands I have visited spent time extolling cultural aspects of their island and their own involvement in artistic endeavours, the Government Representative of Tongareva remarked: “I never liked those things – dancing and singing”. By this he meant non-religious forms of dancing and singing. Religious-based

\(^{72}\) Selling alcohol has been banned on Tongareva since the late 1980s.
activities which include daily church attendance, Bible meetings and meetings of various church organised groups (such as the Boys Brigade and Girl Guides which have members whose ages range from eight to fifty years old), are the only non-work related activities that are held on Tongareva. During my visit to Tongareva these church groups undertook what I consider to be expressive forms. The marching band led the way into the church on Sunday; each Sunday evening an uapou was held, which included singing and ‘dancing’; the Boys Brigade performed a play based on a Tongarevan legend. However, these activities were not considered by the Tongarevans I met as ‘cultural’ practices but rather as religious activities.

To return to the puroku and the matter of selling ei, I believe these women were entertaining the notion that precious objects and precious emotions, which were produced on their island for their loved ones, could mean different things once they left their home. Rather than reminding Tongarevans abroad that “you belong to us” (and of the reciprocity and obligation this statement entails), their gifts could be transformed into money for individual profit. The sadness expressed at the puroku perhaps enacted not only grief at the loss of members of a small community but also the possibility that they would not return the same, or even at all.

**Home and Away**

I have begun with this case study and issues about the perceived fragility of diasporic communities to counterbalance what follows. In the remainder of the chapter I focus specifically on the ways Cook Islands communities maintain relationships across the contemporary Cook Islands diaspora through expressive cultural forms. In doing so, I do not wish to erase narratives of displacement and loss which inevitably accompany movement away from home (Hall, S. 1990: 223). I do, however, think the diligence with which Cook Islanders preserve connections to their home islands is important to an understanding of contemporary expressive practices.

Recent figures estimate that over 52,000 Cook Islanders live New Zealand and around 15,000 live in Australia (Statistics New Zealand 2002). While Cook Islanders have
migrated in significant numbers to New Zealand and beyond since the 1920s, the Cook Islands population has declined fairly dramatically since structural adjustment policies were introduced in 1996 by the Asia Development Bank (ADB) and New Zealand Overseas Development Aid (NZODA). As a result of these policies the public service, which employed over 60 per cent of the paid workforce, was cut by half. Combined with lack of jobs in the private sector, many people saw migration as their only option. Many Cook Islanders do not have the freedom to stay at home.

One of the main reasons given for out-migration in the Cook Islands is the islands’ lack of potential for economic growth, their distance from trade centres and their lack of resources. Like many Pacific nations, the Cook Islands are often characterised as having a MIRAB economy. That is, an economy defined by migration, remittances, aid, bureaucracy (Denoon et al. 2000: 402; Siikala 1991: 9). An NZODA report (1997: 19) stated that money sent home from New Zealand totalled $2.5 million in 1986.\textsuperscript{73} This figure only includes money sent home (via money transfer services); it does not include money taken home as gifts. The figure also does not include money spent by overseas Cook Islanders on airfares for kin, reverse charge phone calls from kin, or the cost of transporting items requested from home. These things would presumably make remittance figures significantly higher (Loomis 1990a, 1990b).

Much work on remittance patterns in the Cook Islands and other Pacific nations tends to emphasise the flow of goods and money from abroad to home (Lockwood 1993; Connell 1990; Loomis 1990a, 1990b). Relatives who live overseas are believed to be well off and are placed under considerable pressure to provide for family at home. While I have no doubt that the pressure to remit money and goods exists, I think that characterisations such as MIRAB and remittance economies do not present an adequate representation of the nature of Cook Islanders’ relationships. This contention is not new and a number of Pacific Islander scholars have made similar arguments, most notably Epeli Hau'ofa in his important work ‘Our Sea of Islands’ where he says that:

\textsuperscript{73} More recent statistics on remittances are not, to my knowledge, available.
Islanders in their homelands are not the parasites on their relatives abroad that misinterpreters of "remittances" would have us believe. Economists do not take account of the social centrality of the ancient practice of reciprocity ... They overlook the fact that for everything homeland relatives receive they reciprocate with goods they themselves produce, by maintaining ancestral roots and lands for everyone ... This is not dependence but interdependence. (Hau'ofa 1994: 157; and see Jolly 2001; Newnham 1989)74

Travel among Cook Islands communities also displays interdependence and reciprocity. Relationships between Cook Islanders are maintained by frequent visits, emails and letters to and from home. Many Cook Islanders abroad return home at Christmas time and important events such as twenty-first birthdays, baptisms and weddings are postponed until the Christmas season. Family groups have reunions and funerals to attend at home and overseas. Village and island church, sports and dance groups regularly travel to and from the Cooks, New Zealand and Australia. Cook Islanders frequently undertake travel with large quantities of food and other goods. Islanders from home travel abroad with tropical food stuffs, island brooms, mats and tivaevae. White goods, coolers of meat, buckets of fried chicken, ‘mink’ blankets75 and videotapes of music, return with islanders going home. These accoutrements are usually gifts for, or from, family members at home and abroad. When travelling in large groups, gifts are presented along with live music and dance. It is to these groups, tere pati, that I now turn.

_Tere Pati_

Cook Islanders prefer to travel in groups. Indeed, the idea of travelling alone is considered unusual to most people. Even if a person is undertaking a personal trip to see a doctor in New Zealand they are usually accompanied by a family member to “keep them company”. Travel is primarily undertaken to visit family and friends abroad and is concerned with creating and maintaining links with kin and community. A holiday or a trip to 'get away from it all' is fairly incomprehensible. Many Cook Islanders feel sorry for tourists who come to the Cook Islands on wedding packages as they cannot see the

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74 In his thesis on pearl farming in Manihiki, Raymond Newnham (1989) argues that Manihikians were actually remitting money and pearls to relatives in New Zealand. The islands' burgeoning pearl industry ended after Cyclone Martin in 1997.

75 Mink blankets are synthetic blankets with figures of tigers, flowers and cartoon characters. Minks are given as presents at weddings and other major celebrations. During a wedding reception they are wrapped around a wedding couple along with tivaevae and tie-dyed sheets. The aesthetic and functional similarity between tivaevae and minks is an area of research that would be interesting to pursue.
point of getting married without family. On this point, I had people say to me: "You papa'a are auouo (crazy) – what about your poor mother or grandmother missing out like that?".

Travelling in groups is a practice which Cook Islanders call tere pati. Tere pati are usually organised by island, village or family membership depending on the purpose of travel. Travel is undertaken for almost every type of activity. Church groups tere for religious anniversaries, to raise funds for a church projects (a new church or church hall); the Boys Brigade or Girl Scouts tere for brass band competitions; sports groups tere for international and regional competitions; dance groups tere for tourist promotion or group holidays; teachers college and school groups for educational exchange; women's groups’ tere for conferences and fundraising; family groups travel for family reunions, weddings, important birthdays, headstone unveilings. These family occasions are held both in the Cook Islands and abroad, primarily in New Zealand.

In December 1997 I undertook a tere with Orama. Around forty members of the group travelled to Tahiti to perform for two weeks. This kind of trip is commonly undertaken by dance groups as an opportunity for members to “see the world”, and to visit family and friends overseas. Many dance groups organised these trips to set goals for members to work towards every three to four years. On the Orama tere pati, airfares, accommodation and food (including mine, as it was decided I had earned my way because I operated the lights at hotel shows and helped to make costumes) were paid for by group savings. We stayed in the Cook Islands hostel in Papeete. All the females slept in one large room (around twenty of us) and the men slept in another. The group performed one to two shows a day, primarily at community halls around the island of Tahiti. We travelled around in an old-fashioned bus and we went sightseeing as a group. Many relatives living in Tahiti hosted Orama by putting on feasts. In return the hosts were presented with gifts the group had brought with them such as cartons of tinned corned beef and tivaevae sewn by older women in the group. While the purpose of the

76 After a relative dies the family will save to buy a headstone and a few years later, when the headstone is bought a service is held to unveil it at the grave site.
trip was not primarily to raise money, Orama did make around $9,000 through donations made at shows and sales of the Orama compact disk recording.

Watch DVD: Orama tere to Tahiti

As mentioned earlier, tere pati travel in uniform. Dance and church groups usually have uniforms made out of island print material. Many groups will have T-shirts made up with logo and design which display the purpose of the visit. For instance, a family will have a T-shirt made up displaying their family name, date and location of a family reunion. These T-shirts are sold to members of the tere pati as part of their fundraising efforts. Interestingly village pride seems to have been displayed on clothes for a long time. Rev Hutchin reported in 1896 that while visiting the village of Omaka, Tongareva he sighted a man with a “shirt with Omaka, Tongareva in red letters sewn upon it” (in Campbell 1984: 112).

Cook Islanders say travelling in groups is the best and most economical way to see the world. As an example, a woman in the Golden Oldies netball team said she could not have afforded to travel unless it was as part of a group. “It is a good system” she said, “you go to places as a guest, they put on kaikai (feast) for you, organise your accommodation, your transport, you don’t have to worry about anything and then they come here and you look after them”.

“Dance is about Raising Funds”

Before a group embarks on a trip overseas, they fundraise at home to pay for airfares and to cover travel expenses. These funds are put into a joint bank account, usually in the name of the group leader or the group accountant. The types of fundraising activities engaged in are raffles, sausage sizzles, selling plates of food and cleaning people’s plantations. What is particularly interesting about fundraising for group travel is that individuals are not expected to contribute their own money but they are expected to contribute to raising funds for the group as a whole. On trips overseas, people may bring
'pocket money' for themselves but otherwise the group pays for all food, accommodation and travel.

Many tere pati travel with the aim of making money for a particular community project, usually for materials to construct a church, village or island public building, such as halls, churches and schools. The primary way tere pati make money is by putting on series of dance performances at nightclubs or village halls. Money is made from ticket sales and from donations that occur during the performance. Most groups leaving from the Cook Islands, be they church, village, or family groups, will prepare 'items' to perform for their hosts. Groups from the outer islands will often raise extra money by performing on Rarotonga before they leave the country.

On many occasions I asked people about the point of tere pati, as the economics of the trips bewildered me. In these discussions, my argument was that it would make more financial sense if one was fundraising for, say, the village meeting house, to have people donate what they would have spent on airfares to New Zealand rather than spend money on airfares and go to New Zealand and fundraise. “So” I said, “you must be going for other reasons”. “No”, was often the not so patient reply, “we go to see our family of course, but we go mainly to raise funds”. I can only speculate that although tere pati travel along familial and island circuits, there is also something about the nature of fundraising which makes it something more than about money or family. I explore this in what follows.

Many people I knew constantly complain about the number of raffle tickets and plates of food they feel obligated to buy: “even if it breaks your balance, you still have to give”. As well as the obligation to give money, complaints are also made about changes in styles of fundraising. “It used to be that you got something for your money; there would be dinner dances to raise funds, or you get a plate of food or a show. Now you just get a piece of paper”. In other words, raffle tickets – a piece of paper – are not considered a satisfactory return for money outlaid. There is an expectation that one should receive
something *immediately* in return. The most common form of return, as the above quote suggests, is food and entertainment.

While I heard many people criticise raffles as a form of fundraising, I never heard anyone complain about having to give money for dance performances. As discussed in Chapter Three, at fundraising events that involve dancing or singing, a contribution bowl is placed at the front of the performers. Audience members get up and dance towards the performers waving money above their heads. They will place the money in the bowl or place the money in a particular performer’s costume, usually into the waist of a *pareu*. Rather than viewing it as an injunction, people often expressed giving money in emotional terms: “If a song gets in your heart, you can’t hide your money”.

The equation, money for entertainment, makes sense to Cook Islanders. It is central to most forms of exchange between villages, at weddings, haircutting ceremonies, shows for tourists and *tere pati*. Dance and song are seen as producing emotions in people which encourage the desire to give money. The quote used as the title of this section, “dance is about raising funds”, was said to me on many occasions. I was often told the point of dancing was to provide entertainment, *tarekareka*, and the elicitation of pleasurable response. However, dancing is not only about entertainment, it is also about making money. Dancing then, is not just an aesthetic endeavour which produces emotional effects, but also a form that ideally enables the representation – and maintenance – of particular community groups. And, in the contemporary era, this maintenance requires money.

**Aro’a: love and money**

The gestural quality of exchange is something Niko Besnier (1995) discusses in his study of Nukulaelae (a Tuvaluan atoll) literacy. He argues that on Nukulaelae, the emotion *alofa* (the linguistic equivalent of the Cook Islands *aro’a*, love) is the primary means through which economic exchange is understood and practiced. This is the way a Nukulaelae person explained the concept:
If you have alofa (for someone) ... you should have something desirable in your hand ... if you keep saying alofa, alofa, and you have nothing (to give) in (your) hand, that doesn’t count as alofa. (Besnier 1995: 98)

This explanation of alofa is similar to many Cook Islanders’ understanding of the relationship between love and material objects. Neither the term, alofa and aro’a, conveys a sense of ‘being in love’ with a person, but refers to divine love; love of God or a spiritual connection to homeland (Besnier 1995: 98; Savage 1980: 45). Aro’a includes notions such as affection, kindness, generosity, pity and sympathy. Aro’a also means gift or present; for example, ‘I give, forgive or welcome you with a gift’. To give aro’a (love) one gives a gift (aro’a). Besnier (1995: 99) defines this materiality of love as an “economy of affect – the flow and exchangeability of affectivity on the one hand and economic resources of the other”. One gives because of alofa and alofa is emphasised by a gift. In a similar fashion, many Cook Islanders express their aro’a in everyday interactions through the exchange of material goods. Aro’a, as love and gifts, forms part of reciprocal obligations, and attachment, to kin and the wider community. Besnier’s economy of affect is extremely relevant in the Cook Islands context. Expressive forms, such as dance, and gestures, such as the giving of parcels of food, are the sentiments and materials of transactions. Both are part of the same affective economy; they have emotional as well as material value.

Gifts and expressive gestures of love are a particularly prominent feature of exchange among Cook Islanders who are separated by substantial geographical distance. In what follows, I examine one example of the dynamics of gift exchange within the Cook Islands diaspora. I detail a celebration, the koni raoni, held on the island of Aitutaki each December 26 and New Years day.77 Aitutaki is an island in the southern group and has a population of around 2000. The koni raoni has international dimensions; it is attended by groups of Aitutakians who live abroad as well as those who live on Rarotonga. It involves dancing and singing around the island and donations of money.

77 The term koni raoni is specific to Aitutaki. Other islands in the Cooks (but not Rarotonga) also have Christmas celebrations which involve dancing, singing and fundraising between villages.
Koni Raoni: Coming Home

December 26, 1996. The day began very early; preparing food, setting up trestle tables for the upcoming feast, plaiting young girls’ hair and ironing clothes for the morning church service. At nine, all on the island walked in casual procession to their respective churches. Everyone had on their best church whites and new hats. One is not allowed to wear sunglasses to church and there was a glare from the pounding sun which catches the whiteness of people's clothes, the sandy road and the limestone buildings. One cannot wear flowers to church either, but Mamia and her sister Rose each picked one on the way and put it behind their ear. They tell me to get a flower too. I refused because I was trying to stick to the rules. The main component of the church ceremony was the hymn competition. Each village group sang a newly composed hymn. As a sign of appreciation, the other groups went up to the altar and put coins in a collection bowl for the church. It did seem like a church service because there was lots of laughing, joking and talking. Mamia’s father, Papa Tunui, is the speaker of his village, Ureia. He announced their song by saying, “We should win this competition because we have so many important people in our group; the opposition leader's wife Mrs Matapo, and Jean Tuara, the CEO for Manihi. We also have my daughter from my second marriage. I bet you all didn't know I was going around with a Russian once”. This last comment produced peals of laughter. Everyone looked at me and I was mortified. One group that sang only had seven very old people in it. They announced themselves as the “Magnificent Seven”. One of the women singing with them was 98 years old and blind. She sang her heart out and nearly fell over. Everyone had tears in their eyes after that.

When church finished, everyone went home and changed into casual clothes. These consist of shorts, long skirts and T-shirts. Women put flowers in their hats and tied pareu around their hips to dance. Everyone waited for the sound of drums which announce the beginning of the koni raoni. Koni raoni means dance round; each year one village travels around the island in trucks and motorbikes led by a pickup truck of drummers who signal their arrival. The travelling village performs at each village hall or sports field on the island. It takes about six hours to complete all the performances.
The performing village had practised their new songs and choreography for weeks beforehand. They tie-dye T-shirts and pareu so that they have matching uniforms. Hats were made out of palm fronds and ei out of colourful sweets sewn together on a length of string. The performance began with a religious song and the speaker of the village welcomed the visiting village. Then the dancing started. The visiting village performed a range of popular Cook Islands songs, old favourites and drum dances. The dancing is partially choreographed and incorporates the tarekareka style described in earlier chapters. The performing village danced in lines of alternating boys and girls, men and women. As the momentum gathered, members of the host village danced in front of the performing village and members of the performing village dance out of their group to join the hosts. The dance style is similar to coupled or group nightclub dancing. The hosts in turn showed their appreciation by waving money in the air and throwing it into a collection bucket at the end of each set of dancing. Each set is about four to five songs, the end of which is signalled by the group leader blowing a whistle, which means it is time to donate money, and also time for the performing village to get back to their lines. After the show, the performers ate and drank at houses in the host village until the truck of drummers came past moving everyone on to the next village.

Watch DVD: Koni Raoni

The koni raoni was one of the most impressively happy events I saw in the Cook Islands. It is most obviously a form of dancing through which the Aitutakian community enacts spectacular sociality. People dance around the island and in the process gather up other people, money and food. The drumming is loud, the dancing infectious and people laugh, eat and drink a lot. It contrasts dramatically with the rest of the year, as it is one of the few events that brings the whole island together. While Aitutaki is a small island, socialising and general movement is generally limited to village of residence. For most of the year, people stay in their village and stay home and rarely go, “all the way to the other side” which is five minutes on a motorbike. In contrast, the koni raoni is characterised by an open house policy – anyone can drop in and get something to eat or
drink at anyone else's house. You talk to and dance with people you would normally have nothing to do with.

**Competitive Dancing**

Money is central to the workings of the *konii raoni*. Some people say the *konii raoni* was started by the Sports Association in the 1920s. Other people say that the *konii raoni* is a "lend and loan business"; a way of raising funds for each village's community projects. So that each village benefits equally, the role of the performing village rotates each year which means each village performs every three years. The *konii raoni* is also a form of competitive exchange. Each village is expected to give more than the performing village gave them the last time. For example, the village performing in 1997 gave $1,400 to the village that they hosted on Christmas day in 1996. This village reciprocated with $2,800 the next year. The total takings for the day were $14,000. It is said that because villages tried to outdo the others with generosity, donations started getting out of hand and a limit of $2,000 per village was imposed. However, this limit is often ignored.

To say that the *konii raoni*, dancing, drinking, donating money and eating, is only—or even fundamentally—about raising funds is to commit a kind of vulgar materialism. Many people who participate in the *konii raoni* talk about it as a time of intense sociality which includes sharing food, drink, laughter, gossip and dancing as well as money. During the *konii raoni*, exchange of money facilitates the exchange of dancing. The amount of donations and number of people dancing determines the length of the performance. The more money the host village gives the longer the dance. Dancing also assists with raising money. As one woman commented to me: "You get carried away and just want to keep dancing and keep giving money". This comment is epitomised by the image of her at the *konii raoni* in 1997, wearing a wreath of gardenias on her head and a huge smile on her face. She is dancing towards the performers, her arm up-stretched, waving a 20 dollar note.

As part of a host group, it would be highly inappropriate to dance without throwing some money in the bowl. In fact, it would be unthinkable. After a bracket of four to five items,
the host village leader will make announcements: “100 from so and so family” and “500 dollars for the Melbourne tere” and these amounts are noted by the performing village’s ‘accountants’. As in other Pacific contexts, donations are always public. Christina Torch notes of Fiji, “the idea of an anonymous donation is absurd ... all instances of giving mark the fulfilment of a recognised obligation to one’s kin and incur obligations from the receivers” (1989: 146). The public display of money occurs in many contexts in the Cook Islands. For example, contributions to the church are read out during the service. At twenty-first birthday celebrations and weddings, parents keep a list of each present, who it was from and its estimated value. Then, when they attend someone else’s twenty-first birthday or wedding, they will check their list and reciprocate to the exact amount.

In 1996, the koni raoni, two tere pati attended, one was from Melbourne, the other from Auckland. All the members of the tere pati were Aitutakians who lived abroad. The Melbourne group wore green polo shirts which marked their identities. On the front a circular emblem featured the words “Teupokoenua – Melbourne” (Teupokoenua is one of the names for Aitutaki) and the figure of a kangaroo and palm tree. On the back was a map of Australia with Melbourne marked by a coconut tree. The map was surrounded by the words “Melbourne-Aitutaki Tour 96-97”. The T-shirt displayed the group’s identity and place as dual; they were Aitutakian but also Melbournians. They created Aitutaki in Melbourne and were the same, and not quite the same, as the Aitutaki hosts.

![Figure 25: Tere Pati T-shirt](image)
The Melbourne *tere pati* had 80 participants. The group brought four shipping crates of household and farming materials with them, including 80 mattresses which the *tere pati* used to sleep on and then donated to the village of Amuri when they left. Along with much of the village, I watched the crates being unpacked. What astounded me most were the huge amounts of toilet paper that were being unloaded. I asked about this and was told it was cheaper to buy toilet paper in bulk in Australia and ship it over than buy it “on the island”. Besides, supplies on the island may not be able to support the influx of people (nor would the shopkeepers have enough money to buy large amounts of toilet paper up-front). The *tere pati* slept in the Amuri village hall (the village from which most of the *tere pati* originated from) and during their stay the male members of the *tere pati* rebuilt the hall’s roof with funds raised back in New Zealand and Australia.

Mamia’s brother and his family also came from Auckland for the *koni raoni*. They stayed at the family home in Ureia with the rest of us. The brought two containers of food with them which included frozen steak, minced meat, and New Zealand oysters and mussels. They also had a crate that arrived on the same ship as the ones from the Auckland *tere pati*. It contained a new washing machine for the family home, a grass cutter, an outboard motor, a plastic outdoor table and matching chairs, and two pushbikes for the male nephews. They told me it cost $500 to ship the crate. Both members of the *tere pati* and members of Mamia’s family also gave large sums of money to family members and to village organisations during the *koni raoni*.

The food, goods and money with which these Aitutakians returned can be interpreted in a number of ways. If these commodities were measured in purely economic terms, it could be argued that the trip was a micro-example of the economic dependency that is seen to characterise the Pacific diaspora. However, if the returnee’s baggage is weighed in terms of an affective economics of the type suggested by Niko Besnier, a different conclusion

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78 General stores, called “dairys” in the Cook Islands would often run out of stock. Most shops also had little stock on display as the owners lacked the money to buy goods in large quantities.
79 I discuss the significance of food within the Cook Islands diaspora in a forthcoming article, Alexeyeff (2004).
might be drawn. Home, as a category which includes geographical and imagined place, a sense of belonging and identity, and attachment to a community of people (Brah 1996; Clifford 1994, 1997), could be seen as having a higher affective value than commodities from overseas. The amounts remitted from New Zealand kin testify to their lack of *aro’a* of the home-grown variety. Those returning home pay tribute to home through gifts of goods and money. This return does not point simply to the higher ‘symbolic’ status of home but to its actual status, its affective materiality within a particular sort of economy, an economy governed by love – the *aro’a* of home and the *aro’a* of kin. Aitutakians living abroad give gifts which express the *aro’a* of their situation. While they may not have access to home, as a place of physical, social and spiritual nurture, they do have money, something most definitely lacking at home.

The *koni raoni* creates an affective surplus. People display what is in their hearts by dancing money. In this instance, *aro’a* is about expressive exchange of material and affect as Mauss (1988) suggests. During the *koni raoni*, the exchange of dancing money contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of the community and materialises deep attachment to kin and to home islands.

**Expanding Islands**

In this chapter I have primarily focussed on the diligence with which Cook Islanders maintain relationships across vast geographical distances. I have attempted to show that this maintenance is based on reciprocal exchange between those at home and those abroad. Large groups travel in either direction laden with food, goods, guitars and ukuleles. Dancing, I suggest, is central to the aesthetics and protocol of travel. It is travel and the encounters they produce that foregrounds expressive forms, like flowers, dancing and food. These aesthetics of travel are crucial to the creation of Cook Islands communities.

However, events like the *puroku* in Tongareva outlined at the beginning of the chapter suggest that along with preservation of relationships across distance, the contemporary Cook Islands diaspora is infused by a longing for home and a palpable sense of lack and
loss experienced in the face of loved ones leaving home. The expressive culture
displayed during the koni raoni which is full of tamatawra and tarekareka – pleasure,
joy, dancing and singing – contrasts with the aro'au of the puroku, which embodies the
grief and pain love can cause.

The number of Aitutakians who return from within and beyond the Cook Islands to
participate in the koni raoni can be seen to illustrate a point Epeli Hau'ofa has made
about migration as enlargement as well as loss (Hau'ofa 1994: 155). Each year the island
of Aitutaki expands with people returning home. They undertake expansive gestures
during the koni raoni, and they return to their lives abroad satiated with home. Hau'ofa
(1994; see also Jolly 2001) also conceives of Oceania expanding as a form of world
enlargement, the creation of Pacific cities and communities abroad. On this point I will
conclude with a final case study.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 26: Rose's Kitchen in Auckland
Two months after returning from fieldwork, I was invited to Auckland for the twenty-first birthday party of Mamia’s niece. I stayed with Mamia at her sister Rose’s house in the Auckland suburb of Mangere. Auckland was cold and wet. The interior of Rose’s house was covered with pictures of palm trees gracefully dipping into the ocean and tourist promotion posters of beautiful Cook Islands girls in bikinis. Shell e'i hung around family photographs and dance costumes hung from the walls. The contrast between the pictures of home as tropical paradise and the grey Auckland surroundings was striking. That touristic images of home were prominently displayed also seemed significant. It was not until I read Miriam Kahn’s (2000) article on Tahitian tourism that the significance became clear to me. In this article Kahn argues:

Tahitians, on the whole, do not communicate their feelings and ideas about their place with images of turquoise lagoons or bare-breasted women on postcards and posters, or in magazines and guidebooks (Kahn 2000: 21).

The same could be said about Cook Islanders who live at home but those abroad, at least the houses I visited in Auckland, certainly use touristic images to communicate ideas about themselves.

Rose’s house was in a suburb with no white people (at least I didn’t see any). One day I caught the bus to Auckland University and asked the bus driver – who was New Zealand Maori – what bus I would catch back to Mangere. He look at me in amusement, “you're coming back here?” But I rarely caught the bus or walked around in any case. Most of the time I would drive around with Mamia and Rose to have lunch at shopping malls and visit their family and friends. Our car was big (like many of the cars I saw islanders drive, they are also often full with six or more people), and Rose always played island music loud when driving. I felt like I was in an island bubble. I saw Auckland through the tinted glass of the car with a soundtrack from the Cook Islands.

The twenty-first birthday was held at the Otara Reception Centre in South Auckland. The girl – Kura Maeva – is an only child who is adored by her parents. She has grown up in New Zealand, her parents moving there in the 1970s from Aitutaki. Twenty-first birthdays are important to most Cook Islanders as they are regarded as a form of ‘coming
out’ and they are generally only given for children who are not married or who do not have children. For Kura's twenty-first birthday, family members came from Aitutaki, Rarotonga, and Sydney, other parts of New Zealand, San Francisco, and Los Angeles to take part in the celebration.

People arrived and queued at the entrance. The older women wore long mu’umu’u and coats and ei, the older men wore suits and the twenty somethings wore black. Kura Maeva, her mother and father, greeted each guest at the door. Each person kissed Kura and gave her a present. While people were coming in they were entertained by the Vaimutu string band, Auckland’s most popular Cook Islands band. Trestle tables were numbered and organised by family groups: the paternal side of the family sat in one section of tables, the maternal side in another section and friends in another. After the greeting, Kura was led to a table of honour. She sat in the middle of it, on a huge wicker chair, her paternal grandparents on her left, maternal on her right. The night got underway with her mother and father presenting her with a black pearl necklace. Then Mamia and Rose sang a song they had composed for her. They followed this with the Cook Islands National Anthem, and then a priest gave a long sermon and an opening prayer. Speeches followed from the grandparents. Kura's parents presented her with a twenty-first birthday key which was made in Rarotonga. The cake was wheeled out and presented to her. The Master of Ceremonies read out the telegrams from family and friends unable to attend. Kura made a speech, the priest blessed the food and then we ate.

Watch DVD: Kura’s Twenty-First Birthday Party

Papa Tunui, Mamia’s father and Kura’s paternal grandfather, began his speech with the chant from which Kura's name originates. The chant is accompanied by powerful gestures, evoking the sky, earth, mountains and birds, and expressing the emotions of love and sadness which the words could not. It reminded me of a statement Te Rangi Hiroa makes in his Ethnology of Tongareva (1932b: 15): “For the Polynesian the recital

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80 This footage is an edited version of the video made by a filmmaker who specialises in Islander birthday and wedding videos.
of historical events lacks conviction unless accompanied by appropriate chants and songs”.

Figure 27: Papa Tunui Performing a Pe’e

For close family members it was a highly emotional event. Kura cried a lot. Her father was almost overcome when he presented her with the key and urged her “not to lock him out of her life”. There was also lots of laughter. Papa Tunui made a hilarious speech and the M.C. (who flew in from Sydney) made jokes throughout the evening. Many of his
jokes were at the expense of the diaspora — at one point in the evening he read out Kura’s Curriculum Vitae which stated that she worked at Air New Zealand and he quipped, “Now we can all get free freight to Raro”. At the end of the evening he remarked: “Well I have enjoyed being the M.C. but you won’t be happy when you see the bill for my airfare”. The M.C. also made expansive jokes about the village of Matavera on Rarotonga (the village from which Kura’s mother). When reading out telegrams from relatives from this village he said: “From the City of Matavera” and: “From the United States of Matavera”.

The string band loudly played throughout the evening, making it hard to talk. Each speech was interspersed by sets from the band and various guest artists singing. At most large events a female dances a solo and, on this occasion, it was performed by a former Miss Cook Islands. After dinner an Auckland-based Cook Islands dance group performed and the audience danced until one in the morning. There was all sorts of dancing; disco dancing, waltzing and Cook Islands dancing. At one stage, Papa Tunui came onto the dance floor to get a piece of the birthday cake which is presented to all the grandparents. The band started to play, as they knew he would dance. He danced tamataora style. He was joined by the maternal grandfather, Kura, and his daughters Mamia and Rose.

This trip to Auckland made clear to me that Cook Islanders who live abroad, like many migrant groups, practice their ‘culture’ in more reflexive and acute ways than those who live at home (Baldassar 2001; Hall, S. 1990). Recall earlier in the chapter the woman from Tongareva saying, “If you want to see culture go to New Zealand, they are always making culture, sewing ei and that”. Cook Islanders in New Zealand have island and village functions every weekend, at which enormous amounts of Cook Islands food is served (much more than at functions in the Cooks). There is a disco in Auckland called Club Raro, and netball and rugby are organised not by island but village of origin. Dance teams and string bands also flourish in Auckland.
If we take diaspora as “an interpretative frame for analysing the economic, political and cultural modalities of a specific form of migrancy” (Brah 1996: 16), I contend that Cook Islands expressive forms play a highly significant role in the movement of people, goods, ideas, and sentiments between Cook Islands communities at home and abroad. Dance not only has something to say about symbolic matters but is affectively and materially embedded in the economic and political forces that shape the contemporary Cook Islands diaspora. As well as being embedded in the contemporary moment, expressive practices also actively produce the localising strategies of diasporic communities. As Appadurai (1996: 186) has argued, “locality-producing activities are not only context-driven but are also context-generative”. Throughout this chapter I have suggested that expressive forms are a central vehicle through which locality is expanded beyond national borders and reproduced in new and creative ways.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

Sea Breeze, so peaceful
Back in Aitutaki
I yearn to see you
I would love to be there this night
When I return
We will all go
We will have fun
Sea Breeze

(Sung to the melody of We Three by the Inkspots)

I saw Mamia for the last time in Auckland six months before she died. Mamia and her sister Rose picked me up from the airport early on a Saturday morning. We headed straight for the Otara Market in South Auckland. This market is frequented by New Zealand Maori and Pacific Islanders. It sells island produce such as taro, cooked island food, mats, brooms, pareu and audio cassettes of Island artists. On Saturday mornings musical acts perform on a small stage erected in the middle of the market. When we arrived, Tangee, an old friend of Mamia’s from Rarotonga, was launching his third album, The Best of Me. Tangee, who had once told me he was the “paramount queen” on Rarotonga, was a flamboyant performer who had found considerable success in New Zealand and Tahiti, as well as at home on Rarotonga. He greeted us from the stage as the “lovely Tunui ladies and their albino sister” (the all-Islander crowd appreciated this joke). After the show we chatted with him briefly and he gave each of us a signed copy of his cassette.

The rest of my stay in Auckland was quiet. By this stage Mamia was visibly unwell; she had undergone a mastectomy but the cancer had spread to her bones. Her back was extremely sore and she tired easily. Her father, Papa Tunui, was also in Auckland for medical treatment and he was also staying at Rose’s house. During the day Papa Tunui would often stay in one of the two bedrooms and sleep. Rose said this was because he was very sad about Mamia’s illness. Over the next few weeks we only ventured out to go

81 The song lyrics to ‘Sea Breeze’ are in Maori. The English version above is my translation.
to hospitals and doctors’ appointments. Each day family members visited. Some came with food, others with their church ministers (from a number of denominations) and we would all pray together for Mamia’s recovery.

I suggested we hire a car and visit cousins in Tokoroa, a town three hours drive from Auckland. A few days later Mamia, Papa Tunui and I set off after Papa said a long prayer in the car to ensure our safety. On the way, I suggested we stop at various scenic places and have a look around. Papa wanted to stay in the car but Mamia was excited, “we are like real tourists!” We stopped for lunch at Tiraun, a tourist town. Papa Tunui had never been in a café before. He didn’t know how, or what, to order. He carried it off with much aplomb however and began to enjoy himself.

We also visited a large New Zealand Maori marae. Both Mamia and Papa Tunui had belonged to a tere pati who had stayed and performed there – Papa in the 1950s and 1980s and Mamia in the 1970s. As we approached the marae, both completely ignored the information shack which had a prominent sign: “Admission 10 dollars” and walked onto the marae as if they belonged. The two workers also appeared to ignore us. Mamia and Papa showed me where they had slept and where they danced. As they reminisced about tere pati past, I was struck by fundamental differences between this trip to Tokoroa and previous trips they had undertaken. Having travelled in large groups to New Zealand for island and national projects, their sense of belonging and pleasurable purpose revealed the forlorn nature of the trip we were presently undertaking.

Throughout the drive we only listened to island music tapes. Sometimes Mamia would sing along. During fast songs Papa would sometimes wiggle his hips like a female to make us laugh. On our way into Tokoroa we were listening to Tangee’s tape. Only then did Mamia tell me that her sister Rose had composed the song Sea Breeze which appeared on the tape (and which opens this chapter). Sea Breeze is a bar and restaurant which looks out on to the Aitutaki wharf. It is owned by a family relation and was the site of much tarekareka and tamataora. Mamia explained its meaning thus:
You know Rose has lived in Auckland for maybe twenty years. She wrote the song about how she missed Aitutaki. About how she was lonely here. She wants to go back. That’s what we all want, to go home.

The trip to Tokoroa also returns us to a number of themes explored throughout this thesis. It reiterates some of the issues raised in the previous chapter about the “production of locality” (Appadurai 1996: 178-199). Locality as produced and reproduced within diasporic Cook Islands communities is the modality through which I have attempted to extend Appadurai’s insights to an understanding of the crucial, generative role expressive culture plays in this reproduction. Much of this thesis has examined the ways in which global cultural flows are indigenized (Appadurai 1996). The song Sea Breeze is but one example of this. It is no longer We Three by the Inkspots. It is Rose’s song, a song which expresses deep felt desire for her home. It is also Rose’s way of producing and reproducing locality abroad as a community of feeling (Appadurai 1996: 181). Listening to Rose’s song and Mamia’s comments made me think about both the robustness and fragility of locality production in the Cook Islands diaspora. For the many Cook Islanders that had settled in New Zealand, home, as both a real and imagined place, produced a palpable sense of loss and yearning. At the same time, this ‘lack’ served to propel many Cook Islanders who live abroad to replicate practices from home.

The importance placed on locality-generating practices among diasporic communities has been made in numerous studies of migration and transnationalism (Werbner 1999; Massey 1997; Appadurai 1996). While I have given a sense of the movement within Cook Islands communities in this thesis, more intensive research into how Cook Islands communities abroad do expressive culture would be illuminating to an understanding of the affective relations of diasporic communities. A productive area of inquiry into Cook Islands transnational relationships would be an examination of journeys to the Cook Islands undertaken by Cook Islanders born abroad. During the course of my fieldwork, I encountered a number of young Cook Islands artists and poets who were raised in New Zealand and had returned home. Their innovative artistic styles often involved hybrid and creole approaches to Cook Islands, Polynesian and ‘Western’ art traditions. Their works markedly contrasted with the dominant forms of artistic production undertaken by ‘local’ residents. The latter’s work tended towards watercolour landscapes, life drawings
(particularly of dancers) and literary realism. The disjuncture between 'local' and 'overseas' Cook Islands art production, often leads to censure expressed by older generations about the authenticity of diasporic artwork and ultimately diasporic Cook Islanders identity.

The following poem was written by Audrey Brown-Pereira (Brown and Vaevae 2002) a New Zealand Cook Islander raised abroad. The poem conveys many of the concerns of this thesis. Audrey and I arrived in Rarotonga around the same time and during one of the many conversations we had about adjusting to life on Rarotonga she explained the inspiration for this poem. Very few local residents catch the bus which circles the island every half an hour. Although bus tickets are not expensive locals view the bus as a tourist bus. As she did not have a driver's licence, Audrey caught the bus to and from work in town. She would often pretend to be a tourist to avoid the incessant questions tourists always seemed to ask her when they suspected she was a Cook Islander. In the poem, broader identity issues are mapped onto a bus ride home. It includes a consideration of her shifting identity as local and not, as tourist and not. Criticisms made by 'locals' about her identity are raised, if she is local how come she can't speak Maori? (tuatua Maori). Or dance? (ura). Why doesn't she go to church? It is also a poem about the sea breeze.

**local tourist on a bus ride home**

cool breeze sweeping sweet sweat of sadness  
(through the cold hot air of the open closed window)

look "sweet-e"  
not with your i i dar-ling

? (anonymous object sits silently inside palm of her head)

the mist kisses the mountains  
the mountains kiss the sky  
(coloured pockets of green & gold & blue  
sing her a familiar song she thought she could never

understand

(fault?) tuatua maori no
church  
ura

echoed an even more familiar voice inside her head 2 herself

the bird flies over the sun
the sun flies in2 the sea

thoughts ( r ) / evolve as the km (s) clock from papa joe’s watch & the o-do-me-ter
of the yellow – yellow/jam packed/yellow/jam packed bus

(on the _ hr anti-clock-wise of
course)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

..........................

watch the c

through the trees
through the houses

through the stones that paint each stop with a story of a somebody
and a somewhere that a someone(s) still love
s........................

can u c?

as they pass herstory in arorangi &
tupapa.................

Dancing Cook Islands Modernity

Throughout this thesis, I have investigated contemporary Cook Islands dancing and Cook Islands expressive culture more generally. From the outset, I was interested in the key role dance plays in negotiating aspects of Cook Islands sociality. I have argued that dancing, music, drumming and song are central to negotiating aspects of Cook Islands modernity, in particular local, national, gender and global identities. At the same time, dancing, for many Cook Islanders, plays a key role in the formation of more intimate forms of sociality, such as interpersonal relationships and individual aspirations and desires.
Movement has been the controlling theme of this thesis. My approach to Cook Islands sociality has drawn on writing which emphasises the processual and creative nature of social life. Analyses of modernity, nationalism and globalisation, which aim at understanding the dynamics of the global-local nexus of the contemporary era, have provided me with analytic tools to understand expressive motility in relation to wider historical, social and political movements (Appadurai 1996, 2002; Clifford 1997; Miller 1995; Friedman 1994). My aims also intersect with scholarship undertaken in the Pacific region which problematise static notions of cultural production, tradition and authenticity best exemplified by the work of Jolly (2001, 1992), Jolly and Thomas (1992), Siasson (1999) and Nero (1992). This literature has enabled me to draw out politicised intentionality that goes into the creation of Cook Islands expressive culture. Onto this 'big picture' literature, I have endeavoured to meld approaches to performance that also stress the improvisational and provisional nature of expressive culture (Henry et al. 2000; O'Hanlon 1989; Schieffelin 1985, 1976). Two strands of this literature have been highly useful with regards to Cook Islands dance. The first strand concerns the gendered nature of performance (Cowan 1990) and the performativity of gender (Butler 1990). The second involves the poetics, politics and economy of affect (Besnier 1995; Wikan 1990; Abu-Lughod 1986). In utilising this diverse body of scholarly work, I have attempted to map the relationships between movement, embodiment, affect and broader political and economic forces in the Cook Islands. In other words, this thesis aims at accounting for both human agency, through bodily movement and techniques, and the constraints placed on motility arising from historically situated economic and political forces.

In many ways, dance is an ideal subject for the exploration of the processual and perspectival nature of subjectivity and social life. As a moving medium, it can only serve to stress the fluidity of relationships and affective dynamics of self-presentation. I have suggested that through dancing and the discourse surrounding it, Cook Islanders enter into a dialogue about ways of being 'Cook'. The key issues in this dialogue that are identified in this thesis include: debates about the past and the present, notions of 'us' and 'them', delineations between men and women, gender and sexuality. Furthermore, I have suggested that dancing derives its emotional force in a variety of ways. Dancing
affirms and celebrates dominant societal beliefs, practices and identities. Another way in which dancing derives emotional force is by negotiating and generating these norms at extra-linguistic, interactional and embodied levels of experience. This bodily movement between social agency and social constraint points to mediational power of expressive forms (Henry et al. 2000: 257).

The first chapter introduced the general themes of this thesis, that is, the interrelationship between dance practices and gender in a specific social and historical period. In the second chapter I provided a historical overview of expressive culture during pre-European, missionary, colonial and postcolonial eras. My aim was to trace the role expressive culture has played in the entertainment and incorporation of outsiders and external cultural flows and forces. I argued that attention to expressive culture points to moments of resistance, compliance, experimentation with, and oppression by, ideas and practices imposed by European invaders. I also suggested, following Sissons (1999), that the mobilisation of ‘culture’ throughout the Cook Islands post-independence history has not been an appendage to this history but a central element of Cook Islands symbolic and material nation-making projects. Chapter Three located debates about ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ (both implying the past) in the conceptualisation of dance in the present. I outlined how these debates are imbricated with anxieties about cultural homogenisation, cultural bastardisation, Westernisation and commodification. These anxieties are also expressed through concerns about ownership of cultural production and attempts to revive and codify ‘traditional’ cultural forms. In addition, I demonstrated the “differential values and meanings attached to modernity” (Elliston 1997: 481) by examining generational differences in opinion over notions of tradition and authenticity. Finally, I suggested that the categories ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ are fundamentally gendered and that ideas about femininity, particularly female sexuality, were utilized to express the ambivalence surrounding these concepts.

Femininity has been central to my examination of Cook Islands dance practice. I have focussed on how femininity is explored through expressive practices. The complexities surrounding men and masculinities have not been fully considered. As Elliston (1997)
has argued in her examination of gender and nationalism in Tahiti, men and women are placed, and place themselves, differently within debates about Tahitian nationalism, family life, work and locality. Further research on the local inflections of masculinity would be a fascinating area for the analysis of Cook Islands modernity.

After this overview of dance in the Cook Islands past and present, I turned my attention to a number of case studies which highlighted the gendered translocal nature of Cook Islands dance practice. In Chapter Four, Five and Six, I approached specific dance events as instances of “globalisation from below” (Appadurai 2001: 3). More specifically, I examined how local and global forces are implicated in the production the Miss Cook Islands beauty pageant, in cross-dressing performances and disco dancing. My particular interest was in the representation of Cook Islands femininity as a paragon of ‘traditional’ and moral ideals. I explored the ways in which women negotiate and incorporate these ideals through their dance practice and other expressive forms. I also showed the complex ways ‘local’ and ‘nonlocal’ ideas about gender, sex and sexuality are figured and refigured through expressive culture. In Chapter Seven, I mapped these gendered expressive identities onto translocal routes and returned to issues of globalisation through a consideration of diasporic Cook Islands communities. I argued that dance, and expressive culture more generally, has a pivotal role in the activation and maintenance of transnational communities and the affective ties which bind them.

**Beyond the Reef**

Dance scholarship sits at the intersection of important interdisciplinary debates (Appadurai 1992: 5). It contributes to an understanding of the politics of cultural practices, identity politics in local, national and global frames and the corporeal nature of identity politics. It also highlights the dynamic relations between culture, movement and the body – themes that have broader application in scholarly debate.

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82 This title is taken from the song *Beyond the Reef* by Jack Pitman. It was a popular dance tune and party song during my fieldwork. Maori lyrics often accompany the melody.
Collectively, this thesis pointed to a number of these broader issues. First, it has aimed to show the central role dance plays in the creation, preservation and display of individual and group identities. The pivotal place of expressive culture in ‘imagining’ groups and individuals has been the focus of a number of recent important works (for example Iwabuchi 2002; Feld 2001; Appadurai 1991; Gilroy 1987). As much recent theorising on nationalism, globalisation and postcolonialism suggests, identities are increasingly formed within global communication networks. The contemporary world as Appadurai (1996: 32) contends, is a "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" caught up in a politics of sameness and difference. The postcolonial disregard for borders has meant that borders, issues of place, displacement, identity and authenticity are increasingly debated in contemporary cultural criticism and in the lives of people. Through expressive practices Cook Islanders have responded with resilience and humour to these complex issues. Within the Pacific region, this has been inflected through an analysis of ‘tradition’, nation-making and regional migration (Nero 1992; Stevenson 1990, 1992). This thesis adds to Pacific scholarship in which the Cook Islands have been notably absent (with the exception of Sissons 1999). More generally, this thesis makes a contribution to an understanding of role of local cultural production in this global and diasporic era.

My interest in Cook Islands dancing progressively became entangled with an interest in the production of locality, with the “fragilities of cultural reproduction” (Appadurai 1996: 45) but also, and just as importantly, the continuities, stabilities and connections that indigenous groups impose upon a disjunctive global order. This thesis had attempted to meld attention to the complex, multi-layered detail of ‘local’ expressive culture and its relationship to broader cultural and economic forces.

The End

My examination of Cook Islands dance practices has demonstrated the creative, mobile and malleable ways Cook Islanders respond to, and create, global flows. My work as a whole has attempted to understand how Cook Islanders shape and negotiate their experiences through expressive practices. Over the course of this project I have come to
reconsider the relationship between the global and local as a simple opposition. My intention became to work through what Sahlins has called:

A complicated intercultural zone where the cultural differences are worked through in political and economic practice. "The beach" as Dening calls it – though it could as well be the plantation or the town. (Sahlins 1994: 385)

Throughout Cook Islands history, dance has always played a significant role in political and economic interchanges with outsiders – be they from other villages, islands or nations. Dance, I suggest, enables material, symbolic and affective transactions. On Cook Islands beaches, outsiders used to be greeted by dancing and chanting. Between villages, dance competitions were – and still are – held throughout the year. In towns, visiting officials are greeted by dances on the airport tarmac (the new beach) and dance is also foregrounded in the entertainment of tourists. In cities, such as Auckland, Melbourne and Sydney, translocal and transnational communities form and re-form new Cook Islands localities through creative strategies of which dancing is a vital component.

Cook Islands dancing is central to the display of who one is, and what one can become. Dancing, and expressive culture more generally, aspire to reinforce deeply affective notions of identity and belonging. In the process, these identities and communities are generated and explored. These expansive qualities are embodied in Cook Islands dance; the grace of Mamina’s movements, the vibrancy of her singing and her shining face aim at eliciting an affective response in those nearby. You dance to move people: to make them dance, laugh, cry and give money and goods. Only then is one dancing from the heart.
USE OF THESES

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

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University
August 2003
Appendix

Cook Islands Dance Genres

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

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

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

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

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

Kaparima: Action Song

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

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

**Pe’e: Chant**

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

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

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

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

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

**Ute: Commemorative Song**

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

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


