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

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Chapter 5: Dragging Drag – Performing Sex, Gender and Locality⁵⁷

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 *ei*. 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.⁵⁸ 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

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 Maraerenga. 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

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'

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

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)

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 *laelae* ('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);⁶¹ 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.⁶²

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.

⁶¹ 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 met women who lived together and performed masculine roles but their sexuality was never spoken about.

⁶² 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 or 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*”.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”.

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 (Besnier 1994: 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, “*laelae* 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 *laelae* sexuality contrasts dramatically with the hyper-visibility of *laelae* 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.)”.⁶⁴ 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 *laelae* sexuality is admired in certain

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 woman; 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:

[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)

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 *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 increasingly 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 our 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)

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, whose 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.⁶⁶ 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).

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 Orama 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 spoilsport – “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.

1981). 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 *tamure* 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 ease 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).⁶⁷ 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

⁶⁷ See Shore (1981) and Levy (1973) for similar analyses of public and private behaviour in the Pacific.

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.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹

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

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” (*tamataora*). 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:

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

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.