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

Kalissa Anna Alexeyeff

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Chapter 1: On the Beach – An Introduction

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

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

geography and political structures of the Cook Islands, I present these histories in tandem, as they serve to show the influence government policies have on the ground (“on the beach” Cook Islanders say) and the centrality of performing arts in many people’s daily lives on Rarotonga. I then discuss my fieldwork methodology, theoretical orientation and organisation of this thesis.

Overview of the Cook Islands

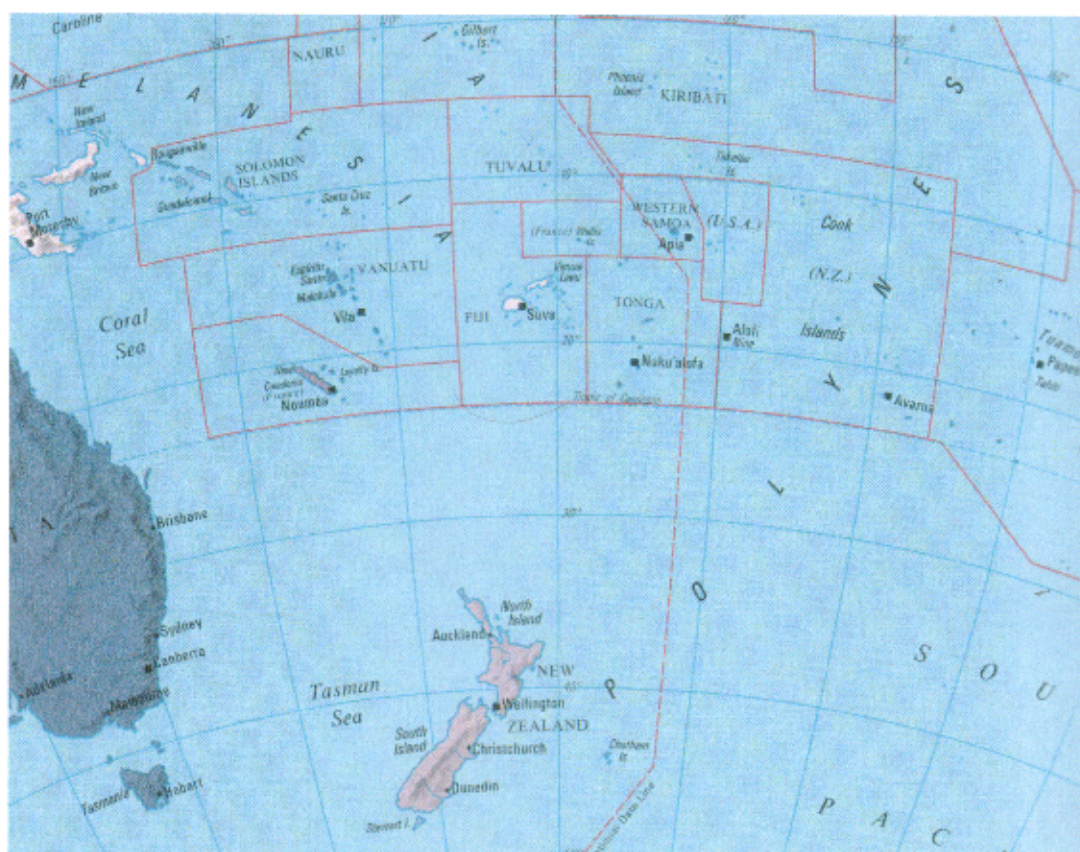


Figure 2: Oceania

The Cook Islands are located in the South Pacific between Niue, Samoa and French Polynesia. Air New Zealand is the only airline that currently flies to the Cooks. The route is Auckland, Rarotonga, Papeete. To travel to neighbouring Pacific Islands, such as Samoa and Tonga, one needs to travel via Auckland.

Rarotonga has the only international airport (opened in 1974) in the Cook Islands. Shipping services between the Cook Islands are somewhat unreliable. All the inhabited islands (except Rakahanga and Palmerston) are serviced by Air Rarotonga, a locally owned airline.

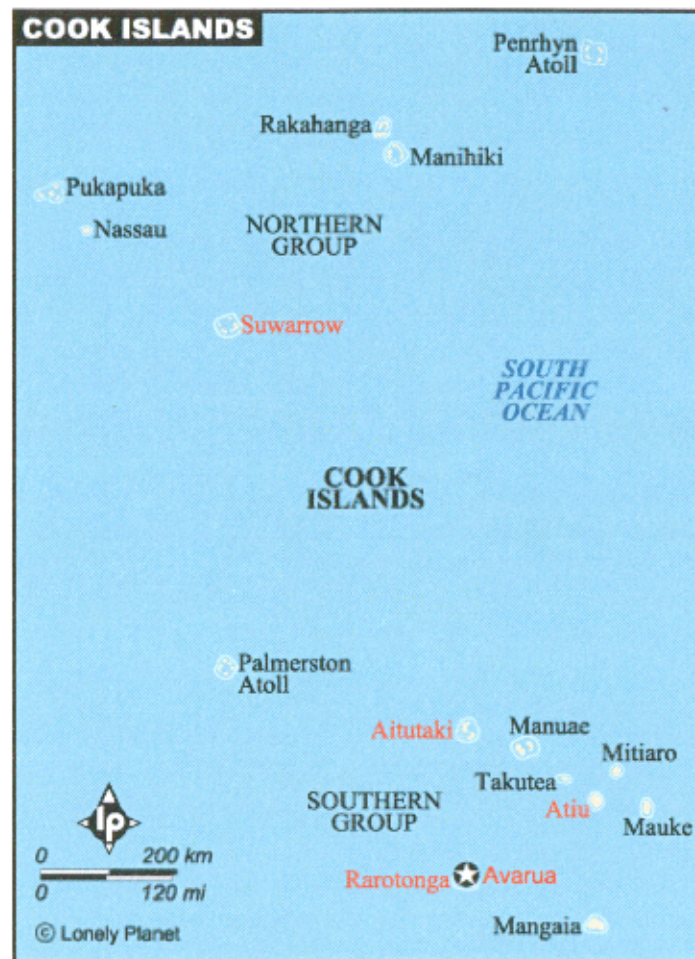


Figure 3: The Cook Islands

The fifteen islands are divided into a northern group of seven coral atolls (Palmerston, Tongareva (Penrhyn), Rakahanga, Manihiki, Pukapuka, Nassau and Suvarrow) and a southern group of eight islands comprised mostly of upraised coral or volcanic formations (Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Mangaia, Ma'uke, Mitiaro, Atiu, Manuae and Takutea). Manuae, Takutea, and Suvarrow are uninhabited. The islands are dispersed over two million square kilometres of sea; their total landmass is 241 square kilometres. In 2000

the total population of the Cook Islands was 14,000, 87 per cent located in the southern group (*Cook Islands News* 18/4/01).

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

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

Rarotonga in the southern group is the administrative and political capital of the Cooks. It is 32 kilometres around and has a population of approximately 11,000. All the other islands are referred to as the 'outer islands'. The Cook Islands main industry is tourism which is primarily centred on Rarotonga and Aitutaki. Almost 73,000 tourists visited the Cooks in 2000 (*CIN* 20/2/01). The other major industry is offshore banking. Approximately 5 per cent of the Cook Islands population comprises expatriates who predominantly work in this industry. The majority of Cook Islanders live abroad. 52,600 live in New Zealand and an estimated 15,000 in Australia (*Statistics New Zealand* 2002).



Figure 4: Jetsave Tourist Map of Rarotonga

Rarotonga is divided into three districts (*vaka*): Takitumu, Te Au O Tonga (or Avarua, the name of the main town on Rarotonga) and Puaikura (or Arorangi). Each district has a paramount chief (*ariki*). Takitumu has two chiefs – Pa *ariki* in the north and Kainuku *ariki* in the south. Makea, Karika and Vakatini *ariki* represent Te Au O Tonga and Tinomana *ariki* represents Puaikura. The *Ui Ariki* (House of *Ariki*) forms the upper house of parliament. They have no legislative power but act as advisors to national and local government on land use, land ownership and ‘custom’ issues. The latter range from imposing *raui* (prohibitions on fishing in sections of the reef at certain times of the year), to expressing concerns about teenage drinking in a village. Each district on Rarotonga is divided into sub-districts (*tapere*), which dissect the island into pie shaped sections which extend from the tip in the mountainous interior into the lagoon that surrounds the island. Land in each sub-district is owned by a descent group (*ngati*) headed by a sub-district chief (*mata’iapo*) and a number of junior chiefs (*rangatira*) who represent extended family lines (*kopu tangata*). *Mata’iapo* and *rangatira* make up an advisory council called the *Koutu Nui* who also advise government on customary matters.

“Dancing was how I saw the world”

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

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

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

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

¹ The usual spelling of the phrase is *tere party*. I once saw a large cargo crate on Aitutaki with the words "Aitutaki *tere pati*" written with red paint; *pati* is a Maorification of the word party. I also adopt this spelling.



Figure 5: Mamia's Cousins, Aitutaki 1950s

The Cook Islands became self-governing in 1965. Its first Premier (then Prime Minister) was the Aitutakian, Albert Henry. Henry, who had taken an interest in anthropology in this youth (Henry, G. 1997 pers. comm.),² saw the revival of local traditions as a way of forging an independent nation state. His initiatives included the establishment of the *Ui Ariki* and a Cultural Division (including Anthropology and Archives). He also made 'Maori culture' a compulsory subject in schools, instituted a national 'festival of dance' as part of annual independence celebrations and created a government sponsored national dance team (Sissons 1995, 1997, 1999; Baddeley 1978).

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

² Geoffrey Henry is Albert Henry's cousin who became the second Cook Islands Party Prime Minister in 1989.

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



Figure 6: Mamia at Dance Practice

“Dancing was how I saw the world”, Mamia remarked. She first went overseas with the Tercora dance team who performed in Tahiti to fundraise money for the college. She was asked to join the Cook Islands National Arts (CINAT), the government funded national performing arts group in 1969. With CINAT she performed at the opening of the Sydney Opera House in front of Queen Elizabeth II in 1973. She also toured with CINAT to Fiji New Zealand and Australia while participating in the Festival of Pacific Arts.



Figure 7: Mamia, CINAT Performance

From 1974 until 1978 Mamia was employed in the Cultural Division, Ministry of Social Services. She was one of only five employees. Her role was to record oral histories and coordinate cultural events. In this position she spent three months at Auckland University transcribing tapes from, and recording songs for the Cultural Divisions Archive. The Democratic Party under Tom Davis (1978-1988) abandoned support of the arts, closing the Cultural Division and among other actions, stopping funding to CINAT. Economic development, particularly the development of tourism and related service industries took precedence (Sissons 1999: 91). Mamia got a job as a tourist officer, welcoming visitors at the airport and then at the Bank of Nauru branch on Rarotonga. As CINAT had

disbanded, Mamia joined a newly formed dance group *Te Ivi Maori* (The Bones of the Ancestors) and travelled to Hawai'i, America, Europe, France, Germany and Italy. These trips were primarily tourist promotion trips organised by Tourism Cook Islands. *Te Ivi Maori* also began the Dancer of the Year, a solo male and female dance competition that is now an integral component of the annual dance calendar. Mamia won the competition in 1980, 1981, and 1983. She then “retired” from dancing in 1985.³

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

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

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

⁴ In this thesis I place the terms tradition and culture in inverted commas to indicate the problematic nature of these terms. The only occasions I do not do so is when I am quoting others or when I am engaged in critical discussion about the terms. Throughout, I argue against the view of culture as a ‘thing’, and for a view of culture as a processual series of practices. Likewise, I understand tradition to be a negotiated and contested term.

The very first day I met her she had just returned from a trip to New Zealand to introduce Cook Islands Tattslotto to Cook Islands communities over there. CISOA's funding came from Tattslotto and the new scheme Mamia was promoting was called 'Home Free'; each month, two Cook Islanders who lived in New Zealand would win free airline tickets home. On that day she said laughing: "culture is no longer where the money is, it is all going into sport, so I am following the trend!".

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

Part of the reason performing arts are considered things 'you just do' is because of their everyday nature. Young children are constantly being bounced on the knees of adults to the rhythm of various drumbeats. The beat is also sung – "te, tete te te te". Most households I went into had a guitar or ukulele and the *active* creation of music and singing (rather than *listening* to music) was also widespread. At many parties I was urged to sing along but would excuse myself, explaining that I couldn't. Every time someone would say, "But everyone can sing". I would then explain how I was asked to leave the school choir at primary school and as a result never sang again. This story was received with incredulity: "*papa'a* are strict, here no-one is out, you just go up the back". This open policy operates not only at schools but also in professional dance groups. The main dance group I was involved with never refused a person who requested to join the group. If they were not particularly good dancers they may have to attend a number of rehearsals before joining performances and, would usually dance in the back rows.

To a certain extent it is possible to argue that performing arts in the Cook Islands are not categorised as “abstract, capitalised Art” (Williams 1976: 41) but as one set of skills amongst others. While there are Maori terms for dance (*ura*), singing (*imene*) and playing instruments (*rutu*, hit drums; *akatangi*, play string instruments), there is no overall term for 'performing arts' or for 'music' (Lawrence 1993: 76). Dance and music are referred to by their specific genres, for instance drum dance (*ura pa'u*) or religious songs (*imene tuki*) or more often by the term *tarekareka* which means to cause pleasure or fun (Savage 1980: 357). *Tarekareka* is the term used to refer to a number of entertainment forms (dance, sport, drama, and oratory) as well as jokes, amusing conversation or actions. That dance is linked to sport, joke telling and witty conversation by the umbrella term *tarekareka* suggests that a reified division between art, as Williams suggests, and mundane activity does not exist in the Cook Islands in the same way that it does in 'Western' capitalist societies.

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

Mamia always struck me as very cosmopolitan. As a well-seasoned traveller she did not get particularly excited before a trip and would casually pack on the day of her departure. Her house was full of trinkets she had purchased or been given in other places: Samoan

mats, a mask from Papua New Guinea, flags, figurines and snow-domes. In 2000 she sent me a postcard from Paris of the Arc de Triomphe which began: “Bonjour Kalissa!! Am in Paris for an IOC world conference for WIS”. I think it was her easy use of acronyms that took me a considerable time to work out (International Olympic Committee, Women in Sport) as much as her urbane location that impressed me.

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

Despite her worldliness, Mamia was also considered a “local local”. “Local local” is a term used to describe people who are proud of their home and their ‘culture’, as opposed to locals who act like *papa’a* (white people). The latter would tend to speak primarily in English, wear ‘Western’ style clothes, denigrate Maori culture and only go to particular bars and restaurants on Rarotonga. Mamia went to “high class bars” and “local local” bars but preferred having parties at home. She was fond of wearing *mu’umu’u* (island print dresses) although she did wear ‘Western’ clothes. While Mamia spoke English extremely well, as a “local local” she spoke Maori as often as possible, particularly to her son who refused to speak it. She bemoaned the decline of teaching Maori culture, particularly Maori language. She was also concerned about maintaining knowledge of Aitutakian cultural forms and was preparing a manuscript of Aitutakian songs for Aitutakian children to learn at school. Although she had not lived long-term on Aitutaki since the mid-1970s, she professed a deep attachment to it as her “homeland”. She

returned there every few months (Aitutaki is only an hour away by plane) usually on official business and stayed extra days to see family (her father and one brother still lived there) and friends. Her dream was to return to Aitutaki permanently and support herself by building a small guesthouse for tourists.

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

The Fieldwork

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

Watch DVD: Magda and Me (part one)

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

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

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

⁵ Jolly (1997) provides an insightful historical account of the sexualised representation of Polynesian women.

local dance groups. However, there was still plenty to observe. Dance and other cultural activities which serviced (and were serviced by) the tourist industry continued to take place. Rarotonga and Aitutaki, the two main tourist destinations, had a number of groups that performed weekly at hotels. Dancing also occurred in many other situations, ranging from annual celebrations such as Easter and Christmas festivals, rites of passage such as weddings, haircutting ceremonies⁶ and twenty-first birthdays, as well as formal and informal island, village and family functions.

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

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

⁶ *Pakoti’anga Rauru*, a ‘coming of age’ ceremony for young men. Until approximately the age of thirteen, some young boys’ hair is grown long. At the haircutting ceremony families are assigned a lock to cut and provide the child with a present of money. They are considered to be declining in importance.

Mama Kan lived. Mamia wanted to “keep her company” as she worked night-shift at Telecom Cook Islands and was home alone during the day. Mama Kan’s house was colonial style with a large surrounding veranda which was used as a lounge room. Mamia and I practised at one end of the veranda and Mama Kan sat on her couch watching us, commenting on my progress and laughing a lot. Mama Kan occasionally wrote poems. She wrote this one about my attempts to dance:

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

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

Watch DVD: Magda and Me (part two)

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

⁷ In English this line is ‘To the front, to the back, up high, down low’. *Akauka* is the local term for the smooth side to side (with a slight curve) hip movement practised by women.



Figure 8: Mama Kan's House

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

Fieldwork and Femininity

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

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

I mentioned once to a group of people at the Ministry of Cultural Development that at home in Australia we raked leaves rarely, perhaps a few times in autumn. The group laughed and commented on how messy *papa’a* are in general. Those that had been overseas commented on the state of people’s lawns in Auckland; how shameful it was that they did not keep them tidy. Then one of the group told a story that made a profound impression on me. It was about a woman who was thought to be “loose”⁸ and who was

⁸ By all accounts, there is no prostitution in the Cook Islands. However, some women are considered to engage in sexual relations with members of the opposite sex for money, alcohol and other goods.

also renowned for having an extremely clean house and garden. At the annual *tutaka*, which is an island wide house and garden inspection run by the island council, the woman always received special mention in the newspaper as having the tidiest garden in her village. The storyteller then claimed she had even seen her and her children out in their garden during a cyclone, in pouring rain and strong winds, attempting to catch leaves before they fell to the ground. The audience laughed at the absurdity of the image but the vivid picture of a woman's desperate fight against a cyclone to maintain her 'clean' reputation remained with me, forcefully directing my attention towards the moral implications of domesticity. The link between domestic cleanliness and respectable femininity remained a salient one throughout my fieldwork.

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

⁹ This is partly because the person leaving will be inundated with requests to take goods and gifts for family members on other islands and abroad. Interestingly, this injunction to be 'secretive' also applies if you are at a party. You don't tell your host you are leaving. You say "I am just going to look at my bike", "I am going to the toilet" or most commonly you just slip away. Being direct and letting your host know you are leaving is considered rude. It is tantamount to announcing that you are not enjoying the person's company.

This concern with privacy is also expressed in gendered comportment. Mama Kan once told me that a woman at the market said I was a *pana'akari*. I was offended because I understood the word to mean 'crazy'. However, Mama Kan explained that in this instance it meant that I talked to anyone. In one sense this was considered a good quality because "many *papa'a* on the island think they are better than us locals". In another sense being *pana'akari* was the opposite of the way an ideal Cook Islands young woman would behave. While they were demure, graceful and poised, I was loud, forthright and 'clownish' (that is, attempting to dance, speak Maori and making a fool of myself on both counts). I mentioned this to a local girlfriend who kindly said, "well if you acted like a proper Rarotongan girl, all shy, it would have taken you ten years to get your research done!".

Participating in Dance

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

¹⁰ I occasionally danced with Orama but at "local" shows not tourist ones. The most amazing experience was dancing at the Constitution Celebrations in 1998. While local audiences found it most enjoyable and humorous watching *papa'a* dancing, dance group leaders realised that tourists wanted the 'real thing', not images of themselves. Senior members of Orama would say to me "once you get a tan you can dance, and when your hair grows long, maybe you could get a brown wig!".

'belong' to Orama. As such I could not involve myself with other groups partly because of the (mostly friendly) rivalry that exists between dance groups on Rarotonga. I did, however, attend dance rehearsals and performances of all the other groups and conduct interviews with their leaders and key dancers.

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

Every April the Dancer of the Year competitions are held. This competition has senior, intermediate, junior divisions and "Golden Oldies" and "*papa'a*" sections. The latter two are the most popular with local audiences as they are often extremely humorous. The "oldies" are Cook Islanders over 40 years of age and while many female contestants are serious, the majority of male contestants aim to make the audience laugh. They perform chants with suggestive lyrics and accompany them with obscene movements. The *papa'a* competition usually comprises tourists who have had no training or practice. Their imitation of Cook Islands dancing is seen as hysterically funny to locals. This humour is added to by the mock seriousness of the event, including a professional Master of Ceremonies (M.C.) and a panel of judges.

In 1997 I joined the *papa'a* competition, an action taken seriously by members of the Orama dance group and, to a certain extent, by Mamia. She chose a recent song for me to dance to and she choreographed my movements. Gina and other members from Orama assisted with my technique and costumes saying, "you have to win, you are representing us". I was surprised, and still am, at how important my performance was to members of the group. I was most relieved to win the competition, partly because it gave me exposure that was extremely useful for my research. My picture appeared on the front page of the newspaper with the title "Doctor of Dance"; when I went into the ANZ bank, the teller started humming "Kalissa's song" as it had come to be known; at the airport people unknown to me would cry out "Kaliiiiisssa" (mimicking the M.C. who had a distinctive pronunciation of my name). Footage of the *papa'a* competition was repeatedly shown on the television, particularly as a filler before the news. It was particularly useful because people who had declined interviews now rang and offered to participate in my study.

Watch DVD: Magda and Me (part three)

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

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

Methodology

As well as participant observation in various dance contexts, I conducted and recorded around 60 formal interviews with dancers, choreographers and musicians. I attempted to interview performers from different age groups as generational differences of opinion about dance and music are quite marked. I also interviewed people that had previously been dancers but now did not dance because of their religious beliefs. My formal interviews were based on questions about individual’s life histories. Interviewees tended to speak passionately and with endurance about dance. Many interviewees did not separate stories of their involvement in performing arts with other aspects of their lives. Dancing, singing or playing instruments were connected to other events and passions. In general terms, the two main passions were land claims and the concomitant issue of relationships with kin.¹¹ Often these local issues would be linked to more global concerns about the influence of *papa’a* ways on the maintenance of identity, traditions, and performing arts genres.

¹¹ While land in the Cook Islands is inalienable, the New Zealand colonial administration introduced a land tenure act in 1915 which required all land to be registered through the Land Court. Succession claims (and contestations), confirmation of leases and applications for partition take up a considerable amount of time and money.

I attended many different kinds of social events in which dance was a central activity. These ranged from life stage events such as weddings, haircutting ceremonies and twenty-first birthdays, to annual events like Christmas, New Year, Easter and independence celebrations which involved whole islands or village groups. There were many other functions that occurred throughout the eighteen-month period of my fieldwork. I also attended school functions, such as parents' day (which included dance performances by individual children and by grades), beauty contests, talent quests, song contests, drag queen shows, community fundraisers and performances to celebrate the completion of a community project such as a new village hall or school building. On Rarotonga there was a performing arts event (not directly related to the tourist industry) approximately every two to three weeks. This clearly points to the centrality of performing arts in the lives of many of the 10,000 people who lived on the island during this time.

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

Watch DVD: *Nuku*, Gospel Day

For part of my fieldwork I had access to a Hi8 video recorder which I used to record dance events. Some of these events I have edited and included in this thesis as a DVD. There were a number of reasons for the inclusion of the DVD. Firstly, as I am writing about moving bodies, I felt it made sense to include kinetic images, not just still photographs. Secondly, non-verbal interaction is notoriously difficult to fully describe and the visual images should assist in fleshing out these descriptions. Thirdly, a

recognition that visual and verbal communication/representation are different orders, that cannot necessarily be translated into one another (MacDougall 1999, 1998; Gilroy 1987) informs my inclusion of a DVD. While many anthropologists of dance and cultural expression liken it to a linguistic text (Lewis 1992; Geertz 1973),¹² I argue that expressive forms can be extra-linguistic and non-cognitive realms of experience and knowing.

Layered Mobility

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

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

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

While Geertz concedes that the cockfight says something through “a vocabulary of sentiment” and is a “sentimental education”, in the last instance he insists that we can not just interpret the “banal tautologies of affect” but the “use of emotion for cognitive ends” (Geertz 1973: 449).

islands. The outer islands (except Aitutaki) were simultaneously considered to be backward (“like Rarotonga was twenty years ago”) and more culturally ‘authentic’. Rarotonga, in this comparison, was described as a “cultural fruit salad” which has lost a lot of traditional knowledge and practices.

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

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

While this thesis is primarily about the people I knew on Rarotonga, it was not possible to write solely about Rarotonga or Rarotongans as very few people identified as such. Of course there were Rarotongan families but most people, even if they were born on Rarotonga, oriented themselves towards the “home” islands of their families.



Figure 9: Cook's Legacy

My fieldwork then was necessarily multi-sited (Marcus 1998). It followed the geographical movements of people I knew on Rarotonga to their home-islands and to communities abroad. As a number of the chapters in this thesis demonstrate, travel is inherent to Cook Islands sociality, defined through the maintenance of familial, village and island and other group (such as dance and sport) relationships. Producing a multi-sited ethnography, however, is a difficult task. Most of my writing is about events and people based on Rarotonga. However, it was impossible to limit my writing to Rarotonga or even to easily use the term 'Rarotongans'. Key people on Rarotonga, such as Mamia and Mama Kan, define themselves as Aitutakians. Similarly, Orama co-leader Sonny Williams was born on Rarotonga but identifies strongly with his Manihikian "side" and he represents himself as a Manihikian.

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

My understanding of the layered mobility of contemporary Cook Islands expressive culture is also informed by writing on modernity, nationalism and globalisation (Iwabuchi 2002; Appadurai 2001, 1996; Miller 1995; Friedman 1994). My goal is to analyse the dynamics of the global-local nexus in order to understand expressive practices in relation to wider historical, social and political movements. The work of

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

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

Anthropology, Dance and Performance

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

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

Aside from Jeffrey Sissons informative work (1995, 1997, 1999) which explores the link between Cook Islands dance and nationalism, there have been no anthropological studies of Cook Islands dance. However, a number of ethnomusicological and material culture analyses of Cook Islands music provide a potentially useful starting point (Lawrence

1993, 1992; Jonassen 1991; Little 1990; Laird 1982; Salisbury 1983; McLean 1980). As Cook Islands dance is a polyphonic form, involving poetic song texts, vocals, drums, string instruments, artefacts and costumes, I draw upon these studies throughout the thesis. Their focus, however, diverges from mine in that they tend to concentrate on the structural and formal features of the Cook Islands performing arts rather than on the social and contextual nature of these practices.

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

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

forms of structural analysis particularly relevant to this thesis.¹³ I aim to explore how expressive movements are generative rather than simply illustrative of other aspects of social life.

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

Dance and Identities

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

¹³ Such as frame analysis (Cowan 1990) or Peircean semiotics (Lewis 1992).

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

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

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

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

There is one further relevant criticism of models of expressive forms as communicative. In his writing on adornment and display among the Wahgi, Papua New Guinea, O'Hanlon (1989) argues that the notion that art is a conduit for communicating information rests on the premise that artistic practices express what is already known. The possibility that meanings are emergent rather than predetermined is not considered.

For O'Hanlon, it is precisely those things that are not known but are up for debate, clarification and evaluation that are worked through in performance and display (1989: 20-1). In a similar vein, Schieffelin (1985) also criticises meaning and communication-centred approaches to performance on the grounds that the performative aspects of "ritual":

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

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

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

Schieffelin's account of performance also points to the embodied nature of knowing as opposed to (or as well as) cognitive knowledge. The issue of how to understand non-verbal forms of expression has vexed many dance scholars. I view dance as a non-verbal form, which at times is interrelated with verbal modes of communication. I analyse the talk that surrounds dance – the evaluations of dance performances and of dancers; the gossip, commentary and narratives it produces (Cowan 1990: 25). At the same time I allow for the possibility that not all non-verbal expressions can be translated into verbal

ones. In a number of case studies presented here the meanings of certain movements and gestures are extra-linguistic and non-cognitive bodily realms of experience. I suggest that, in certain instances, expressive forms are used to express things that cannot be spoken. This extra linguistic quality tends to occur when performers are expressing, thinking or feeling values that are not hegemonic, such as non-normative sexualities. Intimate emotions, such as personal grief and sorrow also find expression in dance, song, and music, when other forms of communication are not capable of serving this need.

Dance and (E)motion

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

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

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

Mamia's emphasis on enjoyment and the display of pleasure are central to many Cook Islanders' definition of a good dancer. Dance group leaders are always encouraging their dancers to smile and laugh when they are performing. Dancers that do not look like they are enjoying themselves or who are concentrating too hard are not considered good dancers, regardless of their technical abilities. Conversely, dancers that are not particularly adept can 'get away with it' if they display enjoyment. When Mamia danced she was the embodiment of a good dancer; she had flawless technique, she sang, laughed

and her face glowed. I recognised this face as “stage face”; a face I had been taught when doing classical ballet. This “stage face” is smooth and radiant, involving a big smile and a glistening ethereal gaze raised above an audience.¹⁵

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

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

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

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

things or acts that will be a source of joy, pleasure, etc., to others” (Savage 1980: 149). *Tarekareka*, as I mentioned earlier, also refers to both pleasurable states and to expressive forms such as dance, sport and drama.

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

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

As Mamia suggests achieving ‘the good life’ takes work. *Tamataora*, the effort to *make* or *cause* happiness or pleasure, is important to stress given ‘western’ representation of Cook Islanders as happy dancing Polynesians. Unni Wikan (1990) makes this point clearly in her work on how emotions are managed in Bali. The struggle to keep one’s face bright and clear as part of the effort taken to manage turbulent emotions, is often mistaken as an essential characteristic:

What Westerners have perceived as an innate aesthetic mood, an ingrained disposition to be graceful and poised, I found instead to reflect a deliberate attitude, a willed response of 'not caring', 'forgetting' the bad that has come to pass. (Wikan 1990: xvi)

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

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

There is a considerable body of scholarly literature in the Pacific which examines the performative states of happiness, such as humour, laughter, joking or clowning, and their association with expressive forms (Hereniko 1995; Macintyre 1992; Sinavaiana 1992; Huntsman and Hooper 1975). I draw from this work but at the same time I find it necessary to not only examine expressions of happiness through joking and laughter but to also attempt to understand happiness itself as an interactional mode. Academic studies of emotion (for an overview see Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Lutz and White 1986) tend to focus on negative emotional states such as pain (Seremetakis 1991), loss, grief and trauma (Wikan 1990; Abu-Lughod 1986; Rosaldo 1980), not on pleasurable ones. These states are put forward, often implicitly, as foundational and somehow more 'real' than positive emotions. Similarly, studies of the body tend to focus on the body in pain: deviant, tortured, criminalised and volatile. Balancing this trend, this thesis analyses states like happiness, joy and pleasure. I suggest that happy bodies and happy movements, rather than being transitory or epiphenomenal are important and worthy of analysis in and of themselves.

Like many of the studies emphasising the social constructedness of emotions, I view emotions as social as well as psychological categories which are "embodied, conceptual, moral, and ideational constructs that place the self in a dynamic relation to social structure" (Seremetakis 1991: 4). I am also interested in the ways in which emotions are communicated through bodily means. Here, Marcel Mauss' work on body techniques is particularly useful as he attempts to think of emotions and bodies simultaneously. He argues that body techniques are a form of physical education and at the same time, an education in composure. In his reflection on initiation rites, he writes:

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

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

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

Dance and Gender

Dance is one arena where bodily ideas about gender are obviously reproduced. In Cook Islands dance, male and female movements often suggest ideals of masculinity and femininity. The men are warriors – they are usually strong and physically well built. They exaggeratedly dance the physicality of 'traditional' work; they fish, row canoes, and husk coconuts with their teeth. In contrast, the women dance the beauty of nature;

their hand movements suggest soft waves, their hips, clothed in grass skirts, allude to swaying palms. Their movements are graceful, demure and gentle. Throughout the thesis I examine how gender ideologies are expressed in the physical and emotional components of Cook Islands dance. Dance movements, techniques, choreography, costumes and singing all present ideas about normative femininity and masculinity.

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

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

In addition to examining how gender is performed, I am concerned with the interrelationship between dance and everyday movement – the ways in which ideas about masculinity and femininity presented in dance are connected to a broader “cultural style” (Lewis 1992: 132). In the Cook Islands, everyday bodily comportment and action is highly gendered and difference from prescribed roles is noted. An incident which occurred during fieldwork highlights this surveillance of the minutiae of gendered movement. The main form of transportation in the Cook Islands is by motorbike. Men sit on their motorbikes casually hunched with their legs spread while women sit close to the

front of the motorbike, their backs rigid and their knees firmly together. An Australian archaeologist took a Cook Islands woman and me to the site he was excavating. He led the way on his motorbike and the Cook Islands woman drove the other bike with me on the back. On the way she exclaimed to me in disgust: "Look at how he is sitting on his bike, like a girl with his knees in like that. He should have them out". I asked: "What for? You can ride your bike however you like". She replied, "So he can show off how big his dingdong is!".

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

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

... associated with control by others ... but also with freedom; suffering but also release; sociability but also competition; display but also exposure; sensuality but also the potential for loss of status; power but also vulnerability; expressions of individuality but also of social accountability. (Cowan 1990: 20)

The importance of Cowan's approach is that it treats dance as inseparable from the people who do it. Like Cowan, I am interested in how dancing bodies are *actively* involved in both celebrating and exploring sexual and gender inequality. Throughout this thesis I am concerned with the way cultural ideas and practices are embodied in dance and in the performativity of dancing bodies. Dance practices, I argue, are not straightforward reflections of prior social, political or personal relations, but rather, dancing is a site where these processes are elaborated, represented and debated.

Thesis Overview

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

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

Chapter Two is concerned with the role of dance and other expressive forms in precolonial and colonial social life. Its aim is to show the historical processes that inform contemporary dance practice. The primary focus is on the way forms of entertainment,

tarekareka, have been transformed and renegotiated since European invasion. Chapter Three examines debates surrounding contemporary dance practice. Dance and talk about dancing are influenced by ideas about the pre-European and colonial Cook Islands past. Central to these debates is the issue of cultural ownership and loss which is expressed through notions of modernity and tradition.

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

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

sentiments it produces and fosters, is a central component in the arrivals, departures and events associated with this movement.

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

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

Chapter 2: *Are Karioi* – The House of Entertainment

In 1992 the Sixth Festival of Pacific Arts was held on Rarotonga.¹⁶ In order to host this event, which included participants from the majority of the Pacific Island states, the Cook Islands government built a large complex, *Te Puna Korero*: The Sir Geoffrey Henry National Arts Centre, named in honour of the Prime Minister. The \$12 million¹⁷ complex houses the National Library, National Museum and the Ministry of Cultural Development. The centrepiece is a 2,300 seat auditorium called the *Are Karioi Nui* (Big House of Entertainment). This name comes from legends about *Are Karioi*, houses of entertainment or amusements, that existed pre-European invasion; “the place where the lighter side of tribal life was taught and indulged in, such as games, dances, etc” (Savage 1980: 41).

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

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

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

¹⁷ As part of the 1996–1997 economic reforms, Cook Islands currency was replaced with New Zealand currency. When I mention monetary amounts in this thesis I am referring to New Zealand dollars.

There is this fella named Ikaroa and his wife is named Otaua. He is from Tahiti. And he tells his wife, "I have heard of this place where everybody enjoys themselves. I am going to go around the islands and find it. When I find that place that is good for us I will come back and I will get you and we will go there". So he travels around and he comes to Aitutaki. When he gets here he sees so many young people walking. He asks, "Where are you going to?". The young people say, "we are going to the entertainment house". Ikaroa asks, "Can I come with you?", and the people say, "Okay come on".

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸ The other story told about the origin of dancing and drumming is about a competition between Rarotonga and Raiatea, Tahiti. It is interesting because it points to the existence of competition and rivalry but also of mutual exchange between French Polynesia and the Cook Islands: "Many years ago, at a time when Raiatea was referred to as the Avaiki Runga and Rarotonga was Avaiki Raro, the very first ever dancing competition was initiated between the two islands which were close to each other. Every manner

past and present entertainment practices. Rather than viewing these links as an argument for the immutable continuity of ‘tradition’, I understand ‘tradition’ as the distinctive way change proceeds (Sahlins 1994: 380). In other words, I argue that contemporary Cook Islands dance practice can be seen as possessing both continuity with past practices, and as reflecting disjunctures produced by European rule. Further, the ways in which these changes were negotiated by Cook Islanders also reflects ‘tradition’ as a distinctive style of local response to outside forces.

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

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

of technique was applied and in the end dancers from Rarotonga were judged by the Gods Tangaroa, Oro and Tutavake as being far superior and were duly declared as winners. The people of Raiatea were very upset. The Rarotongans although pleased to have won felt sorry for the Raiatea people. The Rarotongans then felt that possibly their drums, which had been invented in Rarotonga, had given them an advantage. Another drum was quickly made and it was carried by a special delegation from Rarotonga as a gift to the people of Raiatea. The people of Raiatea received the delegation from Rarotonga with angry words and quickly killed the visitors. The Gods were angered and Rarotonga (meaning down south) was moved “down south” where it remained to this day” (Jonassen 1991: iii).

¹⁹ The Society Islands have a well-documented tradition of *arioi*, as a distinct class of men and women who performed plays, dance and athletic games (T. Henry 1928; Levy 1973). It does not appear, however, that a class of entertainers like the Tahitian *arioi* existed on Rarotonga. Rather, entertainment, performed by villagers and visitors, was undertaken at particular sites.

‘traditional’ forms. In 1974, the premier, Sir Albert Henry, held a workshop for all the *tumu korero* (holders of knowledge, usually male elders) and the first subject on the agenda was the meaning and contemporary relevance of the *Are Karioi*.

The first section of this chapter examines early texts which mention ‘pre-contact’ Cook Islands dancing and other expressive forms. The influence of missionary and colonial regimes is the subject of the second and third sections and in the fourth and final section I discuss the role dance, and ‘culture’ more generally, played in creating an independent nation-state. My central concern here is with the role dance may have played in shaping precolonial, colonial and postcolonial Cook Islands culture. The historical record of expressive practices is fragmentary. The two published general histories of the Cook Islands, Richard Gilson’s (1980) *The Cook Islands: 1820-1950* and Dick Scott’s (1991) *Years of the Pooh-Bah*, both concentrate on the political (narrowly defined) affairs of missionaries, colonialists and the local population. Gilson, for instance, views changes to housing arrangements, haircuts, the abolition of tattooing and prohibition of entertainment as “superficial changes” separate from “a number of important changes in the social structure” (Gilson 1980: 32). According to Gilson, these include missionary implementation of a new legal system, property laws and trade practices. The brief history presented here partially attempts to redress these kinds of claims. I suggest that expressive practices have important political, economic and ideological dimensions which are as much a part of the “social structure” as any other practice (Comaroff 1996: 19).

My interpretation of historical expressive practices is primarily drawn from colonial records. I undertook archival research at the archives of Ministry of Cultural Development and the National Library of the Cook Islands. This primarily involved examining colonial government records from the 1890s until 1965. These included letters from Resident Agents on outer islands to the Resident Commissioner on Rarotonga and minutes of island councils meetings which occasionally contained information about dance performances being staged, particularly for official visitors to the island. I also examined newspapers for dance events and reports from the 1950s onwards. From the

1950s, newspapers reported arrivals and departures from the Cooks (particularly large *tere pati* who often travel for fundraising and dancing), often including photos of eminent arrivals. From the 1960s until the 1970s, newspapers contained many instructional articles on how to be a ‘civilised’ Cook Islander. These ranged from articles about personal grooming and hygiene, to those titled: ‘Why it is important to save money not spend it’. The *Cook Islands News*, which began in the 1950s, also provides an important pictorial and written record of the expressive culture.²⁰

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

Dance in Precolonial Settings

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

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

²⁰ The *Cook Islands News* is produced on Rarotonga and has limited distribution to the southern group.

and amusements took place, and it was the ambition of all to excel in these entertainments. (Hiroa 1927: 36)

That entertainments were held for wealthy unmarried women²¹ is supported in the work of William Wyatt Gill, an early London Missionary Society missionary. In what follows Gill describes a rite of female maturity. He does not mention *Are Karioi* 'houses' saying this rite takes place in the open air (presumably these structures had been destroyed by missionaries), he provides some insight into the aesthetics of femininity and masculinity during this period:

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

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

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

Entertaining Outsiders

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

²¹ Only Pukapuka, the most western island of the Cooks has a tradition of the 'sacred maid' which are similar to Samoan *taupou* (Hecht 1977).

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

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

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

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

The women shook their heads in a mournful way, by no means reassuring, as they looked at us, and while their song continued tears fell from their eyes. Their voices, before low and plaintive, now rose to a piercing and unearthly yell, and the hands were clapped more quickly and violently, an act to which they were stimulated by sundry pokes behind the men's spears. The men themselves also now joined in with their deep voices, and, strange to say, they too commenced crying. The women became so excited that they began to cut their arms with small clam shells, which, in the midst of all their distress, they had been leisurely sharpening on stones for the purpose. The more they cut the more they screamed, with the most discordant sounds, the men also joining in, and accompanying them in this outrageous proceeding. Before they ceased their legs, arms, and faces were streaming with blood, and,

as they wiped away the ever-flowing tears, now mingling with the red stream on the cheeks, their visages became perfectly horrific. (Lamont 1994: 125; see also Hiroa 1932b: 72-75)

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

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

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

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

During the performance a number of boys frequently passed me on all-fours, making a noise something like that of dogs. On the return of the men these youths scampered off amongst the woods, pursued by men with their spears who, pretending alarm when the boys turned and shouted “Bow-wow!” fled in their turn. The actors themselves were so amused that they could scarcely play their parts, and on the conclusion of their performance they all sat down

in the highest good humour to partake of our “*dejeuner sans fourchette*” (Lamont 1994: 318).²²

I include this play as it demonstrates the role of expressive forms in retelling significant events and the existence of dramatic performances pre-European contact. These performances, called *nuku* in many of the Cook Islands, had as their themes local myths and legends and topical events (Lawrence 1993: 170; Hiroa 1932a: 198-203). These were transformed under missionisation into religious plays called *nuku tapu* (holy plays) and they quite possibly drew upon pre-missionary performance forms. Secular plays called *nuku enua* or *nuku tupuna* (plays of the land or plays of the ancestors) continue to be performed on Tongareva during Christmas celebrations and on Rarotonga during the Constitution Celebrations.



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

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

²² Gill ([1892] 1979: 8) also notes “semi-dramatic performances” held on Mangaia.

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

Watch DVD: A History of the Cook Islands

Ceremonial Ritual

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

On Rarotonga, March was the time of plenty and:

... the people bedecked the emblems of the festival of fasting with garlands of flowers, and then built an immense "Kariei House" (in which to meet and sing and dance) and plenty of bruised bread-fruit and over-ripe bread-fruit was eaten by all the people ... After this the "Eva-tipa" was performed ... in the form of a drama showing the mode of attack and defence

in warfare ... Then the "Kapa-rakau" ... which was an exhibition of attack and guard in spear play, the whole thing being executed in time with drum beating and chanting of war songs. (Taraare 1920: 131)

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



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

Historical accounts of pre-European social life suggest warring between *vaka* and raids for food and people were common (Gilson 1980: 15; Beaglehole 1957). As a consequence, most religious ceremonies tended to be held within each *vaka*. However Taraare gives an example of one festival which contradicts this view of segregation between districts and rampant warfare. According to his account, at least once a year

island-wide festivals were held involving dancing, eating, and gift giving. These practices probably established and affirmed cross-district relationships. In June:

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

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

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

The London Missionary Society 1823-1888

In 1821, John Williams of the London Missionary Society (LMS) landed on Aitutaki. He left two Society Islander converts, Papeiha and Rio, to proselytise and returned two years later with more Society Islanders landing them on Atiu, Ma'uke, Mitiaro and Rarotonga. The first European missionary, Charles Pitman, and his wife settled on Rarotonga in 1823, followed by Aaron Buzacott and his family in 1828. Rarotonga became the centre for LMS activity in the region. Takamoa Theological college, "the first training institution for native evangelists in the South Seas" (Buzacott and Sunderland 1985 [1866]: 133), was established in 1839. The pastors trained there then travelled to the northern Cook Islands, Samoa, New Hebrides and Papua New Guinea. By 1824 the southern Cook Islands were under missionary influence. The northern Cooks were converted later, primarily by Rarotongan teachers. In 1849, the LMS went to Manihiki

and Rakahanga, and they arrived on Pukapuka in 1857 (Beaglehole 1938: 5). Before the wreck of the *Chatham* Tongareva's inhabitants had been seen as dangerous cannibals; the island was called 'Danger Island'. It was not until Lamont and the other crewmembers were rescued and taken to Rarotonga that the LMS thought it was viable to send missionaries to Tongareva. Native missionaries were landed in 1855.

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

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

Missionary laws and morality

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

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

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

(Jolly and Macintyre 1989: 6; Ralston 1987). It is to these transformations in notions of gender that I now turn.

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

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

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

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

Missionary ideas about the local women's autonomy (especially their lack of domesticity and imputed sexual independence) as opposed to Christian piousness and propriety resulted in intensive efforts to promote the latter in local hearts and minds. These included lessons in domesticity with a particular emphasis on cooking, cleaning and sewing. Adoption practices, called "feeding children" (*angai tamariki*), were condemned. Purportedly lascivious 'leisure' activities were replaced with a Christian education – Bible-reading groups, church meetings, and classroom instruction. In the next section I

examine a number of the changes introduced, focussing on missionary laws which prohibited or restrained local forms of expressive culture, personal aesthetics and intimate relations.

Missions and gendered comportment

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

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

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

Pa [a Rarotongan *ariki*] told me that two men had their legs tattooed in the old style and he saw them tied to a tree and the marks holystoned out so that the skin was entirely torn away. (Gudgeon in Scott 1991: 305)

Changes to personal adornment aimed at the embodiment of Christian morality. The LMS also aimed at establishing productive activity among locals and making the mission economically self-sufficient. John Williams, in 1833, brought spinning wheels, a warping machine and loom in order that Rarotongans could begin production of their own clothes. Mr. Buzacott reported that:

The chief's wife and daughter, and most of the respectable girls of the settlement were taught to spin and soon thirty spinning wheels were in motion all day long. (in Beaglehole 1957: 68)

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

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

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

This last point intersects with anthropological studies of the role of objects and exchange relations (Otto and Thomas 1997; Howes 1996; Jolly 1992; Thomas, N. 1991) and writing about mimesis and appropriation during missionary and colonial contact (Comaroff 1996; Stoller 1995; Friedman 1994). Stoller's (1995) analysis of the ways in which images of colonial rulers were incorporated into West African plastic arts and forms of spirit possession is particularly relevant here. He views these instances of cultural appropriation as a form of mimesis (following Taussig 1993) which engenders a sense of comprehension, mastery and access to foreign power in order to reconstitute it for local uses (Stoller 1995: 195). In the Cook Islands, LMS missionaries attempts to assert their authority and local compliance through clothing, housing and social

organisation in general may have also been appropriated for local purposes. Objects of Christian ideology such as dresses, bonnets and no-less material things as hairstyles and floral adornment did not have singular meanings or effects as they became entangled with local relations and practices. The ways in which *ariki* used European markers of status to confirm and express their eminence is one such example.

Ariki political and economic power was consolidated during the early missionary years as the LMS relied on them to provide people to convert, land and construction workers for settlements. They amassed large amounts of capital from fines and the control of trade (particularly in food) with missionaries. In contrast to the modest dwellings missionary representatives lived in, *ariki* had grand 'Western' style 'palaces' to house themselves and their families (Gilson 1980: 33). By 1882, four of the five *ariki* on Rarotonga were women. Missionaries disparagingly noted that they were impressed that Britain's sovereign, Queen Victoria, was a female and desired to adopt the protocol of the English court.²³ The *excesses* of local adoption of European material culture disturbed missionary teachers who were attempting to teach sobriety and austerity. According to Gilson:

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

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

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

Leisure and Entertainment

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

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

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

Aside from Gill’s occasional commentary on dance, there is very little recorded evidence of what occurred to local dance practices during the height of the missionary period. Dancing was banned along with related activities such as singing local music, local style drumming and drinking *kava*. These practices were considered to form a complex of lascivious behaviour which led to fornication and adultery. The majority of ‘blue laws’ were directed towards the repression of sexual excess. If people were caught in an

adulterous situation they were variously kept in stocks, fined and flogged. Women were further punished by having their long hair cut off (Beaglehole 1957: 62).²⁴

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

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

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

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

A New Zealand Colony, 1901-1965

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

²⁴ This is significant given the value placed on hair in the Cook Islands and throughout the Pacific (see Mageo 1994; Loomis 1984). In the Cook Islands, hair was cut (and still is) with the death of a family member.

petitioning for Britain to make the Cook Islands a protectorate. Requests were consistently refused as the islands were seen to have little to offer in the way of natural resources and commerce. It was the rivalries between French and British interests in the Pacific that saw Britain reluctantly make the southern group of the Cook Islands a British protectorate in 1888. Both the northern and southern group became annexed to New Zealand in 1901.

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

Due to protests from European residents and *ariki*, Moss was eventually recalled to New Zealand. Major W.E. Gudgeon, his replacement, was Resident Commissioner on Rarotonga for eleven years (1898-1909). He radically altered local practices. Unlike Moss, he did not think self-government was achievable and concentrated on consolidating New Zealand trade interests. He set about centralising federal government on Rarotonga and aimed to crush chiefly authority. Gudgeon achieved this by disbanding the *ariki* council and replacing it with a Federal High Court, which was headed by a European chief justice (Gudgeon himself). He was also in charge of the police and public service. These actions ensured that attempts at self-government were quashed (Gilson 1980: 123).

After these two most influential Residential Commissioners, Moss and Gudgeon, the Resident Commissioners that followed implemented policies which were dependent largely on the state of trade with New Zealand. The 1920s to mid 1930s were prosperous in terms of trade and New Zealand's Labour government increased spending on education and health both within the Cook Islands and by providing scholarships for Cook Islanders in New Zealand. From 1909 until 1934, the Cook Islands were administered by New Zealand's Ministry of Native Affairs. During this period the *taihoa* (go slow) policy was implemented to bring about the gradual Europeanisation of Cook Islanders (Thompson 1994: 80). Formal, Western education was stressed as the primary means of assimilation. However, to ease the transition towards Europeanisation, local practices such as 'native arts' and Polynesian history were included in school curriculum (Gilson 1980: 174-5).

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

Colonialism and Expressive Culture

Throughout the colonial period it appears that it was the contexts in which expressive culture was performed, rather than the forms *per se*, which were problematic to colonial administrators. Indigenous dancing, singing and music that was performed in unofficial contexts – that is, for entertainment, which usually meant parties or dances involving alcohol – were considered unwholesome and detrimental to the civilising mission of the colonial regime. At the same time, local cultural practices were foregrounded and displayed throughout the islands on special official occasions, particularly those involving Commonwealth events and the arrival of visitors on the islands. Queen Victoria's golden (1887) and diamond (1897) jubilees were celebrated on many of the islands with officially sanctioned dance and sport competitions. Similarly, in 1937 Viggo

Rasmussen, the Resident Agent on Tongareva, organised a large feast and dance competition between its two villages (Rasmussen 1937).²⁵ In 1938, Rasmussen wrote a memorandum to the Resident Commissioner concerning the preparations for the visit of the Governor General, Viscount Galway, to Tongareva:

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵ For other examples of inter-village competitions through dance, sport and singing see Hiroa 1932a, 1932b, 1944; Beaglehole 1937, 1957; Beckett 1964.

²⁶ According to Scott (1991: 309), the Cook Islands earned a place in the Guinness Book of records in the 1960s for having the largest cinema-going population in the world.

In his book *Doctor in Paradise* (1941), S.M. Lambert tells of his time administering in the Cook Islands:

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



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

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

On Christmas Day, 1925, I gave a party for the natives who had helped me generously with my work. To foster competition and please myself with a pretty show, I offered a prize for the best *hura* dance among the girls. One of the prettiest creatures that ever shook a grass skirt was a light-coloured native named Ann Masters, winner from the start. After her lovely *hura* she put on European clothes, and looked as though she had just walked off Park Avenue. In my role as dancing master I taught her the foxtrot. We danced for two hours I imagine. (Lambert 1947: 279-280)

From the 1920s on Rarotonga, trade and politics were mainly conducted at the district, rather than island wide, level. Each district had its own fruit co-operative, packing and sanitation sheds and fruit committee (Gilson 1980: 134). These packing sheds were also used for dances. A number of older people stressed to me that the floor of the sheds were wooden and that the sound of feet stamping on the floor would make you go to the dance. I did not find this piece of information relevant until an old man said “the floor was like a drum, you just had to go and dance”. All sorts of dancing was done (waltz, foxtrot, one-step and local styles) and bands played *papa'a* music often with Maori words – “songs about here” as one woman succinctly put it.

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

Jane Tararo – a case study

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

Jane Tararo formed a dance group from members of her family and her village, Oiretumu in the 1930s. The group performed at gospel day celebrations (*nuku*), Christmas celebrations (including inter-village dance competitions) and staged performances for important visitors and fundraising occasions for village projects. They also undertook a

tere (travelling party) to Rarotonga in the 1950s to raise money for the village. I spoke to a number of older women about this dance group and most spoke about Jane's "talent" with reverence and awe. One woman was more pragmatic: "Jane was a favourite girl; she didn't have to do washing or cleaning, just sit around and eat. So all she could do was dance". One of the most interesting things that came out of these conversations was the way in which dance practice was tied to broader notions of gendered comportment and behaviour. Another woman told me that Jane:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the 10th May 1935 there was another letter, frantic in tone:

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

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

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

Jane Tararo also had a habit of bypassing Captain Vellenoweth and writing directly to Judge Ayson. On April 30th 1936, she wrote a letter to Judge Ayson proposing that she organise a "visiting party", consisting of 80 people, to travel to Tahiti in November of that year (Tararo 1936). She requested that Ayson organise the necessary passports. Ayson then wrote to Vellenoweth (n.d.): "80 seems a large number" was his reply. He was concerned that they would have insufficient funds for fares and "to keep themselves decently while in Tahiti". In particular, he was anxious that they would be staying in "slum areas" of Tahiti – "If they propose to stay in a bad quarter then the question will

arise whether we should give passports”.²⁷ Vellenoweth responded on the 20th of May 1936:

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

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

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

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

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

²⁷ Presumably Ayson is referring to the land in Papeete bought by a number of men from Ma’uke, Mitiaro and Atiu in the 1940s. These men bought the land with money they earned working in the French Polynesian island of Makatea mining phosphate (Gilson 1980: 192). Today this land is called Patutoa. It houses a Cook Islands hostel where many Cook Islanders stay when they visit Tahiti. I stayed there with the Orama dance troupe on our tour of Tahiti (see DVD ‘Orama Tere to Tahiti’ and Chapter Seven).

Mei te mea ra dingdong to'ou
I would like your dingdong
Ko taku ia e inganaro nei
I desire you, sexually
Aere mai ra e tane
Good bye my man
Kia amiri atu au i koe
I want to hammer you.

Later Colonial Policy: the beginning of dance groups on Rarotonga

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

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

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

The Boys' Brigade and Girl Guides offer a certain beneficial interest, but both these organisations provide only a small outlet for youthful energies ... The Church supplies an emotional outlet and Bible reading and discussion certainly has an intellectual value, but its doctrine is, in the eyes of the youth, far removed from reality. There are weekly cinema shows, but these provide no benefit whatsoever and their crudely sensational and sexual films have a damaging effect upon youthful minds. Dances are held occasionally and these in moderation have a wholesome effect. Games played in the daytime occupy a very important place in the young man's life – often so important as to distract him from other more useful occupations ... Extravagant feasts often occur, particularly under the aegis of the Church, but these no longer have any ritual value and merely encourage waste and add to poverty already dire. (*CIA* n.d. file 11/14/3)

The picture presented is of physically and sexually active youth, with little wholesome outlet for their energies. As the Church, Boys' Brigade and Girl Guides provided inadequate instruction, plans were made in 1956 to establish youth centres. A 1956 directive planned to establish separate centres for each sex. The idea of centres was to be explained at village meetings with "stress being laid upon the fact that the basic idea really stems from ancient tribal practices – the *Are Vananga* (House of Learning)" (CIA n.d. file 11/14/3). At young men's centres, members would receive instruction in English, book-keeping, civics, citizenship, general knowledge, health education, agriculture, tribal history and custom, crafts and woodwork. Presumably this list is in order of importance. In the young women's centres suggests the "accent should be placed on the following areas: Formal English, House Craft, Diet, Cooking, Mothercraft, Hygiene, Health, Dress Making, Crafts, Tribal History and Customs, Civics, Citizenship and General Knowledge" (CIA n.d. file 11/14/3). The building for the Young Women's Centre was to be a model house with a kitchen garden attached.

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

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

This woman – like many of her generation – is proud to have learnt skills that they saw as be both civilised and cosmopolitan. Her comments reflect the role colonial officials played in regulating the colonised through "character development" ...through seemingly unimportant body habits and practices: posture, movement, dress, eating" (Stoller 1995: 72-73).

Youth centres also aimed at keeping young people on Rarotonga rather than migrating to work in New Zealand.²⁸ Naomi Iro, one of the founders of Titikaveka village youth group in 1959, explained:

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

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

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

Another woman elaborates this point:

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

²⁸ In 1951 an estimated 1,000 people left for New Zealand to work as labourers and domestic servants (Beaglehole 1957: 138).

I can offer two partial explanations for this reassessment of the value of performing arts on Rarotonga. The first is that from the late 1940s, independence movements were beginning to develop in the Cook Islands and throwing off the shackles of colonialism involved a revaluation of precolonial forms. This revival of 'traditional' expressive forms accompanied decolonisation in many Pacific Island nations (Jolly and Thomas 1992; Nero 1992). The other related explanation is that 'traditional' expressive forms came to play a central role in the burgeoning tourist industry on Rarotonga. A process I examine in the following section.

Independence and Cultural Revival

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

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

[Because of] the fragmentation of our people due to the scattered nature of the small islands on which many of them live in isolation from the centre [Rarotonga] ... very few visualise us

as a nation ... Because of this, our people on the Outer Islands are apt to consider themselves as of a separate identity, hence our second basic aim which is clearly defined in our Party's Manifesto: "To mould the scattered people of our new Nation into one united people".

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

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

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

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

The second one is the Youth Clubs. The purpose of these are to gather young people together for entertainment [*tamataora*], entertainment with meaning. This is the purpose, to search for good entertainment through the spirit of Christianity. In youth clubs you can find stories of the past and that is when you know where you come from. [Tumu Korero 1974, my translation]

Entertainment with meaning, in Henry's view, is the acquisition of local 'traditional knowledge' overlaid with healthy and moral entertainment (the product of Christian values). The conduit for this style of entertainment is the youth groups. In his work Jeffrey Sissons (1999) suggests that under Henry's government "dancing youth" came to embody both the nation's traditions and the nation's future as a young, progressive and modern nation. Youth groups came to play a central part in facilitating entertainment. They performed at hotels and on tourist liners. They were utilised by government for state functions, providing dance performances for visiting dignitaries and welcoming and farewelling local government members at the airport. As well as official and tourist performances, youth groups also provided entertainment at socials held at packing sheds and theatres in town. The other two projects, which became central to Henry's vision of a proud united nation-state, involved foregrounding expressive culture in particular music and dance. These projects were the Constitution Celebrations and the Cook Islands National Arts Theatre.

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

²⁹ Over the years a range of events have been added to and discarded from the Celebrations. The Constitution Ball took place in the 1960s-1980s. It was an invitation only event for government ministers and local and overseas dignitaries. The Ball included a dinner, entertainment from Rarotongan youth dance groups and guests took part in a waltzing competition. For the rest of the population, open air dances in packing sheds around Rarotonga were held. Other events included: Senior Citizens day, a Carnival and Agricultural Show. The 'Star Song Quest' and Beauty Contests were also popular events held during the 1970s. From 1987 a Constitution disco was organised which included a disco dancing competition. The

most popular, as they allow the various island groups to compete against each other. This sense of competition has somewhat undermined the government's promotion of 'unity' and 'togetherness' (Sissons 1995). Former dance festival participants have said to me that the main aim of the dance festival is to perform inter-island cultural difference and for these to be judged and ranked. Intrigue, suspense, accusations of favouritism and vote-rigging are central themes in the history of the dance competition. Judges and government officials are all suspected to display bias towards their 'home' island.³⁰ Attempts have been made to make the festival of dance a non-competitive event. However during the years when this has been implemented, attendance, and participation by outer islands groups, has dropped dramatically. The success of the Constitution Celebrations relies on the dance festival being competitive; the tension between unity and competitiveness appears to be what makes the celebrations 'successful'.

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

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

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

South Pacific Festival of Arts in 1972 as well as organising a number of Australian arts events (Dean and Carell pers. comm., 1998, 1983).

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

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

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

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

Unsurprisingly, the paper suggests that the Cook Islands should embrace tourism. It outlines the need for transport and access to islands (that is, airports) and the

development of tourist accommodation. The provision of 'entertainment' was also a crucial component in establishment of the industry:

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

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



Figure 13: Ota Joseph at Airport Opening Ceremony

Commerce and Culture 1978 - 1998

When the Democratic Party under Sir Tom Davis was elected in 1978, government funding of the arts largely ceased. From 1978 economic development, private enterprise and education were stressed by the Democrats. The Cultural Division and CINAT were

dismantled, government sponsorship of the Constitution Celebrations was reduced and funding to Youth Clubs was cut.

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

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

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

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

We have already entered an era of economic growth but to proceed without also sustaining our cultural heritage would be like placing all paddles on one side of a canoe: we could never

stay on our course. Knowledge of and respect for the past gives us what we need for the future. (MOCD 1992: 3)

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



Figure 14: National Arts Centre (Note *Tivaevae* Display)

This arts centre represents the biggest investment in arts funding to date. Geoffrey Henry's leanings towards government sponsorship of 'culture' have been criticised post-1992. This is because the Cook Islands faced severe economic recession as a result of excessive government spending, a large foreign debt and a decline in export industries, principally agriculture. Stringent economic reforms were implemented in the latter half of 1996 at the recommendation of the Asia Development Bank and New Zealand Overseas Development Aid. International aid was suspended until the Cook Islands

adopted the structural adjustment program which included “down-sizing” the public service. Public service employee numbers were halved and those that remained were required to take a 15 per cent salary cut (NZODA 1997).

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

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

In my education there was a wedge between myself as a young modern Cook Islander and myself as a native Cook Islander...Very quickly we turned into God-fearing dusky brown skinned Victorians,³¹ and then dusky skinned Kiwis and with getting a scholarship [to study in New Zealand] I was forced to choose ...

Culture is what we are rich in. That is what we built our nation on. I try to encourage the culture even though I may be criticised.

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

³¹ Henry is referring to the repressive social norms of the Victorian era.

Henry identifies a number of issues that are examined in more depth in the following chapter. The tensions between notions of tradition, modernity and Christian morality, all assemble around contemporary Cook Islands dance practice and expressive culture more generally. Dance looms large in diagnoses of the state and the nature of contemporary Cook Islands 'culture'.

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