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

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## Chapter 7: Dancing the Diaspora

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

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

Much of the literature on Pacific migration has focused on population movement away from remote, small islands to urban centres abroad. A trend associated with this transition is the flow of goods and money in the other direction, back to home islands. These ‘remittances’ are seen to place considerable burden on Islanders abroad (Appleyard and Stahl 1995; Connell 1990, 1987; Loomis 1990a, 1990b). In the final section of this chapter, I present a different reading of this flow of goods and money among Cook Islanders based on the contention that gift giving is premised on reciprocity

of both objects and affect. I argue, following Epeli Hau'ofa's insights (1994, 1998), that attention to the affective as well as the material aspects of exchange presents a picture of the Cook Islands diaspora that is defined by interdependence, circularity and reciprocity rather than one-way exchange and dependence.

## **My Precious One**

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

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

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

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<sup>71</sup> Both E.H. Lamont (1994) and Te Rangi Hiroa (1932b) mention similar ceremonies which were performed to welcome and farewell visitors. See Chapter Two.

and lagoon smashed against the edges of the atoll and then seeped through most houses and buildings. The floor of the church hall was wet as were all the people in attendance.

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

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

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

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

You are born  
At the base wind of Vaiore [an islet]  
The life force of my precious one is  
let loose  
You are on your land  
Lift my child onto life  
Alas the cherished object  
Rock my cherished one  
Rock my cherished one  
The work of the expert  
Has so many aspects [He will guard  
the child]

The song was repeated a number of times. Each repetition increased in volume as the congregation began to slowly advance towards the seated pastor. In unison they swayed, shell necklaces draped along arms, hands gesturing gentle rocking motions and tears pouring down their faces. The pastor kept his head down for the whole ceremony. As the group came near to him, they individually approached him, kissed him on the cheeks and placed the shell necklaces over his head. By the time each person had presented the necklaces the top half of the pastor's body was covered and he could barely move. The local pastor then placed a hat on his bent head and a broom beside him.

Watch DVD: *Takakuravene*

### *Affect and Exchange*

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

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

And later:

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

Here, courtesies, dances, jokes, insults and food are not simply symbolic lubricants of economic exchange but have material and affective exchange value in and of themselves.

Gestures and sentiments are not merely appendages to the real business of economic exchange.

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

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

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

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

to fill out the *ei* discussion by detailing the other conversations that suggest its significance.

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

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

These discussions demonstrate a sense of the fragility in cultural ownership felt by some Tongarevans. The examples I have used all refer to Tongarevan objects; shell necklaces,

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

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

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<sup>72</sup> Selling alcohol has been banned on Tongareva since the late 1980s.

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

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

## Home and Away

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

Recent figures estimate that over 52,000 Cook Islanders live New Zealand and around 15,000 live in Australia (Statistics New Zealand 2002). While Cook Islanders have

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

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

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

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<sup>73</sup> More recent statistics on remittances are not, to my knowledge, available.

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

Travel among Cook Islands communities also displays interdependence and reciprocity. Relationships between Cook Islanders are maintained by frequent visits, emails and letters to and from home. Many Cook Islanders abroad return home at Christmas time and important events such as twenty-first birthdays, baptisms and weddings are postponed until the Christmas season. Family groups have reunions and funerals to attend at home and overseas. Village and island church, sports and dance groups regularly travel to and from the Cooks, New Zealand and Australia. Cook Islanders frequently undertake travel with large quantities of food and other goods. Islanders from home travel abroad with tropical food stuffs, island brooms, mats and *tivaevae*. White goods, coolers of meat, buckets of fried chicken, 'mink' blankets<sup>75</sup> and videotapes of music, return with islanders going home. These accoutrements are usually gifts for, or from, family members at home and abroad. When travelling in large groups, gifts are presented along with live music and dance. It is to these groups, *tere pati*, that I now turn.

### *Tere Pati*

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

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

<sup>75</sup> Mink blankets are synthetic blankets with figures of tigers, flowers and cartoon characters. Minks are given as presents at weddings and other major celebrations. During a wedding reception they are wrapped around a wedding couple along with *tivaevae* and tie-dyed sheets. The aesthetic and functional similarity between *tivaevae* and minks is an area of research that would be interesting to pursue.

point of getting married without family. On this point, I had people say to me: “You *papa'a* are *auouo* (crazy) – what about your poor mother or grandmother missing out like that?”.

Travelling in groups is a practice which Cook Islanders call *tere pati*. *Tere pati* are usually organised by island, village or family membership depending on the purpose of travel. Travel is undertaken for almost every type of activity. Church groups *tere* for religious anniversaries, to raise funds for a church projects (a new church or church hall); the Boys Brigade or Girl Scouts *tere* for brass band competitions; sports groups *tere* for international and regional competitions; dance groups *tere* for tourist promotion or group holidays; teachers college and school groups for educational exchange; women's groups' *tere* for conferences and fundraising; family groups travel for family reunions, weddings, important birthdays, headstone unveilings.<sup>76</sup> These family occasions are held both in the Cook Islands and abroad, primarily in New Zealand.

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

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<sup>76</sup> After a relative dies the family will save to buy a headstone and a few years later, when the headstone is bought a service is held to unveil it at the grave site.

trip was not primarily to raise money, Orama did make around \$9,000 through donations made at shows and sales of the Orama compact disk recording.

#### Watch DVD: Orama *tere* to Tahiti

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

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

#### ***“Dance is about Raising Funds”***

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

'pocket money' for themselves but otherwise the group pays for all food, accommodation and travel.

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

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

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

something *immediately* in return. The most common form of return, as the above quote suggests, is food and entertainment.

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

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

### ***Aro'a*: love and money**

The gestural quality of exchange is something Niko Besnier (1995) discusses in his study of Nukulaelae (a Tuvaluan atoll) literacy. He argues that on Nukulaelae, the emotion *alofa* (the linguistic equivalent of the Cook Islands *aro'a*, love) is the primary means through which economic exchange is understood and practiced. This is the way a Nukulaelae person explained the concept:

If you have *alofa* (for someone) ... you should have something desirable in your hand ... if you keep saying *alofa, alofa*, and you have nothing (to give) in (your) hand, that doesn't count as *alofa*. (Besnier 1995: 98)

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

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

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<sup>77</sup> The term *koni raoni* is specific to Aitutaki. Other islands in the Cooks (but not Rarotonga) also have Christmas celebrations which involve dancing, singing and fundraising between villages.

## ***Koni Raoni: Coming Home***

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

When church finished, everyone went home and changed into casual clothes. These consist of shorts, long skirts and T-shirts. Women put flowers in their hats and tied *pareu* around their hips to dance. Everyone waited for the sound of drums which announce the beginning of the *koni raoni*. *Koni raoni* means dance round; each year one village travels around the island in trucks and motorbikes led by a pickup truck of drummers who signal their arrival. The travelling village performs at each village hall or sports field on the island. It takes about six hours to complete all the performances.

The performing village had practised their new songs and choreography for weeks beforehand. They tie-dye T-shirts and *pareu* so that they have matching uniforms. Hats were made out of palm fronds and *ei* out of colourful sweets sewn together on a length of string. The performance began with a religious song and the speaker of the village welcomed the visiting village. Then the dancing started. The visiting village performed a range of popular Cook Islands songs, old favourites and drum dances. The dancing is partially choreographed and incorporates the *tarekareka* style described in earlier chapters. The performing village danced in lines of alternating boys and girls, men and women. As the momentum gathered, members of the host village danced in front of the performing village and members of the performing village dance out of their group to join the hosts. The dance style is similar to coupled or group nightclub dancing. The hosts in turn showed their appreciation by waving money in the air and throwing it into a collection bucket at the end of each set of dancing. Each set is about four to five songs, the end of which is signalled by the group leader blowing a whistle, which means it is time to donate money, and also time for the performing village to get back to their lines. After the show, the performers ate and drank at houses in the host village until the truck of drummers came past moving everyone on to the next village.

#### Watch DVD: *Koni Raoni*

The *koni raoni* was one of the most impressively happy events I saw in the Cook Islands. It is most obviously a form of dancing through which the Aitutakian community enacts spectacular sociality. People dance around the island and in the process gather up other people, money and food. The drumming is loud, the dancing infectious and people laugh, eat and drink a lot. It contrasts dramatically with the rest of the year, as it is one of the few events that brings the whole island together. While Aitutaki is a small island, socialising and general movement is generally limited to village of residence. For most of the year, people stay in their village and stay home and rarely go, “all the way to the other side” which is five minutes on a motorbike. In contrast, the *koni raoni* is characterised by an open house policy – anyone can drop in and get something to eat or

drink at anyone else's house. You talk to and dance with people you would normally have nothing to do with.

### *Competitive Dancing*

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

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

As part of a host group, it would be highly inappropriate to dance without throwing some money in the bowl. In fact, it would be unthinkable. After a bracket of four to five items,

the host village leader will make announcements: “100 from so and so family” and “500 dollars for the Melbourne *tere*” and these amounts are noted by the performing village’s ‘accountants’. As in other Pacific contexts, donations are always public. Christina Toren notes of Fiji, “the idea of an anonymous donation is absurd ... all instances of giving mark the fulfilment of a recognised obligation to one’s kin and incur obligations from the receivers” (1989: 146). The public display of money occurs in many contexts in the Cook Islands. For example, contributions to the church are read out during the service. At twenty-first birthday celebrations and weddings, parents keep a list of each present, who it was from and its estimated value. Then, when they attend someone else’s twenty-first birthday or wedding, they will check their list and reciprocate to the exact amount.

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



Figure 25: *Tere Pati* T-shirt

The Melbourne *tere pati* had 80 participants. The group brought four shipping crates of household and farming materials with them, including 80 mattresses which the *tere pati* used to sleep on and then donated to the village of Amuri when they left. Along with much of the village, I watched the crates being unpacked. What astounded me most were the huge amounts of toilet paper that were being unloaded. I asked about this and was told it was cheaper to buy toilet paper in bulk in Australia and ship it over than buy it “on the island”. Besides, supplies on the island may not be able to support the influx of people (nor would the shopkeepers have enough money to buy large amounts of toilet paper up-front).<sup>78</sup> The *tere pati* slept in the Amuri village hall (the village from which most of the *tere pati* originated from) and during their stay the male members of the *tere pati* rebuilt the hall’s roof with funds raised back in New Zealand and Australia.

Mamia’s brother and his family also came from Auckland for the *koni raoni*. They stayed at the family home in Ureia with the rest of us. They brought two containers of food with them which included frozen steak, minced meat, and New Zealand oysters and mussels.<sup>79</sup> They also had a crate that arrived on the same ship as the ones from the Auckland *tere pati*. It contained a new washing machine for the family home, a grass cutter, an outboard motor, a plastic outdoor table and matching chairs, and two pushbikes for the male nephews. They told me it cost \$500 to ship the crate. Both members of the *tere pati* and members of Mamia’s family also gave large sums of money to family members and to village organisations during the *koni raoni*.

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

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<sup>78</sup> General stores, called “dairys” in the Cook Islands would often run out of stock. Most shops also had little stock on display as the owners lacked the money to buy goods in large quantities.

<sup>79</sup> I discuss the significance of food within the Cook Islands diaspora in a forthcoming article, Alexeyeff (2004).

might be drawn. Home, as a category which includes geographical and imagined place, a sense of belonging and identity, and attachment to a community of people (Brah 1996; Clifford 1994, 1997), could be seen as having a higher affective value than commodities from overseas. The amounts remitted from New Zealand kin testify to their lack of *aro'a* of the home-grown variety. Those returning home pay tribute to home through gifts of goods and money. This return does not point simply to the higher 'symbolic' status of home but to its actual status, its affective materiality within a particular sort of economy, an economy governed by love – the *aro'a* of home and the *aro'a* of kin. Aitutakians living abroad give gifts which express the *aro'a* of their situation. While they may not have access to home, as a place of physical, social and spiritual nurture, they do have money, something most definitely lacking at home.

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

## Expanding Islands

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

However, events like the *puroku* in Tongareva outlined at the beginning of the chapter suggest that along with preservation of relationships across distance, the contemporary Cook Islands diaspora is infused by a longing for home and a palpable sense of lack and

loss experienced in the face of loved ones leaving home. The expressive culture displayed during the *koni raoni* which is full of *tamataora* and *tarekareka* – pleasure, joy, dancing and singing – contrasts with the *aro'a* of the *puroku*, which embodies the grief and pain love can cause.

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



Figure 26: Rose's Kitchen in Auckland

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

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

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

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

The twenty-first birthday was held at the Otara Reception Centre in South Auckland. The girl – Kura Maeva – is an only child who is adored by her parents. She has grown up in New Zealand, her parents moving there in the 1970s from Aitutaki. Twenty-first birthdays are important to most Cook Islanders as they are regarded as a form of ‘coming

out' and they are generally only given for children who are not married or who do not have children. For Kura's twenty-first birthday, family members came from Aitutaki, Rarotonga, and Sydney, other parts of New Zealand, San Francisco, and Los Angeles to take part in the celebration.

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

Watch DVD: Kura's Twenty-First Birthday Party<sup>80</sup>

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

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<sup>80</sup> This footage is an edited version of the video made by a filmmaker who specialises in Islander birthday and wedding videos.

of historical events lacks conviction unless accompanied by appropriate chants and songs”.



Figure 27: Papa Tunui Performing a *Pe'e*

For close family members it was a highly emotional event. Kura cried a lot. Her father was almost overcome when he presented her with the key and urged her “not to lock him out of her life”. There was also lots of laughter. Papa Tunui made a hilarious speech and the M.C. (who flew in from Sydney) made jokes throughout the evening. Many of his

jokes were at the expense of the diaspora – at one point in the evening he read out Kura's Curriculum Vitae which stated that she worked at Air New Zealand and he quipped, “Now we can all get free freight to Raro”. At the end of the evening he remarked: “Well I have enjoyed being the M.C. but you won't be happy when you see the bill for my airfare”. The M.C. also made expansive jokes about the village of Matavera on Rarotonga (the village from which Kura's mother). When reading out telegrams from relatives from this village he said: “From the City of Matavera” and: “From the United States of Matavera”.

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

This trip to Auckland made clear to me that Cook Islanders who live abroad, like many migrant groups, practice their ‘culture’ in more reflexive and acute ways than those who live at home (Baldassar 2001; Hall, S. 1990). Recall earlier in the chapter the woman from Tongareva saying, “If you want to see culture go to New Zealand, they are always making culture, sewing *ei* and that”. Cook Islanders in New Zealand have island and village functions every weekend, at which enormous amounts of Cook Islands food is served (much more than at functions in the Cooks). There is a disco in Auckland called Club Raro, and netball and rugby are organised not by island but village of origin. Dance teams and string bands also flourish in Auckland.

If we take diaspora as “an interpretative frame for analysing the economic, political and cultural modalities of a specific form of migrancy” (Brah 1996: 16), I contend that Cook Islands expressive forms play a highly significant role in the movement of people, goods, ideas, and sentiments between Cook Islands communities at home and abroad. Dance not only has something to say about symbolic matters but is affectively and materially embedded in the economic and political forces that shape the contemporary Cook Islands diaspora. As well as being embedded in the contemporary moment, expressive practices also actively produce the localising strategies of diasporic communities. As Appadurai (1996: 186) has argued, “locality-producing activities are not only context-driven but are also context-generative”. Throughout this chapter I have suggested that expressive forms are a central vehicle through which locality is expanded beyond national borders and re-produced in new and creative ways.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

Sea Breeze, so peaceful  
Back in Aitutaki  
I yearn to see you  
I would love to be there this night  
When I return  
We will all go  
We will have fun  
Sea Breeze<sup>81</sup>

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

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

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

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<sup>81</sup> The song lyrics to 'Sea Breeze' are in Maori. The English version above is my translation.

to hospitals and doctors' appointments. Each day family members visited. Some came with food, others with their church ministers (from a number of denominations) and we would all pray together for Mamia's recovery.

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

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

Throughout the drive we only listened to island music tapes. Sometimes Mamia would sing along. During fast songs Papa would sometimes wiggle his hips like a female to make us laugh. On our way into Tokoroa we were listening to Tangee's tape. Only then did Mamia tell me that her sister Rose had composed the song *Sea Breeze* which appeared on the tape (and which opens this chapter). *Sea Breeze* is a bar and restaurant which looks out on to the Aitutaki wharf. It is owned by a family relation and was the site of much *tarekareka* and *tamataora*. Mamia explained its meaning thus:

You know Rose has lived in Auckland for maybe twenty years. She wrote the song about how she missed Aitutaki. About how she was lonely here. She wants to go back. That's what we all want, to go home.

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

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



*church*  
*ura*

*no*  
*kare?*

echoed an even more familiar voice inside her head 2 herself

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

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

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

10 9 8 7 6 5 4  
.....

watch the c

through the trees  
through the houses

through the stones that paint each stop with a story of a somebody  
a n d a s o m e w h e r e t h a t a s o m e o n e (s) s t i l l l o v e  
S.....

can u c?

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

## **Dancing Cook Islands Modernity**

Throughout this thesis, I have investigated contemporary Cook Islands dancing and Cook Islands expressive culture more generally. From the outset, I was interested in the key role dance plays in negotiating aspects of Cook Islands sociality. I have argued that dancing, music, drumming and song are central to negotiating aspects of Cook Islands modernity, in particular local, national, gender and global identities. At the same time, dancing, for many Cook Islanders, plays a key role in the formation of more intimate forms of sociality, such as interpersonal relationships and individual aspirations and desires.

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

In many ways, dance is an ideal subject for the exploration of the processual and perspectival nature of subjectivity and social life. As a moving medium, it can only serve to stress the fluidity of relationships and affective dynamics of self-presentation. I have suggested that through dancing and the discourse surrounding it, Cook Islanders enter into a dialogue about ways of being 'Cook'. The key issues in this dialogue that are identified in this thesis include: debates about the past and the present, notions of 'us' and 'them', delineations between men and women, gender and sexuality. Furthermore, I have suggested that dancing derives its emotional force in a variety of ways. Dancing

affirms and celebrates dominant societal beliefs, practices and identities. Another way in which dancing derives emotional force is by negotiating and generating these norms at extra-linguistic, interactional and embodied levels of experience. This bodily movement between social agency and social constraint points to mediational power of expressive forms (Henry et al. 2000: 257).

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

Femininity has been central to my examination of Cook Islands dance practice. I have focussed on how femininity is explored through expressive practices. The complexities surrounding men and masculinities have not been fully considered. As Elliston (1997)

has argued in her examination of gender and nationalism in Tahiti, men and women are placed, and place themselves, differently within debates about Tahitian nationalism, family life, work and locality. Further research on the local inflections of masculinity would be a fascinating area for the analysis of Cook Islands modernity.

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

## **Beyond the Reef<sup>82</sup>**

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

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<sup>82</sup> This title is taken from the song *Beyond the Reef* by Jack Pitman. It was a popular dance tune and party song during my fieldwork. Maori lyrics often accompany the melody.

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

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

## **The End**

My examination of Cook Islands dance practices has demonstrated the creative, mobile and malleable ways Cook Islanders respond to, and create, global flows. My work as a whole has attempted to understand how Cook Islanders shape and negotiate their experiences through expressive practices. Over the course of this project I have come to

reconsider the relationship between the global and local as a simple opposition. My intention became to work through what Sahlins has called:

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

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

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