This book is about contemporary Cook Islands dancing and, more generally, about expressive culture. It explores the variety of ways in which expressive practices generate aspects of Cook Islands social life. Dancing, I suggest, plays a key role in articulating the aesthetic, moral, political, and economic agendas of postcolonial Cook Islanders. The mediational power of expressive practices serves to engage local identities with broader global processes. One crucial aspect of this dialogue is that it is fundamentally gendered. Ideas about Cook Islands femininity and female dance practices are powerful conduits through which notions of Cook Islands locality, modernity, and globalization are explored.

As the prologue makes clear, expressive practices are also a vital aspect of the production of more intimate forms of social life. I began with them 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 social life is assembled through performance practices, ranging from dancing and singing to informal jokes, lively conversation, and
amenable dispositions. The prologue is also a dedication. Mamia died of breast cancer on June 24, 2002. She played a highly influential role in my fieldwork in the Cook Islands. As well as being a significant source of information, she provided enormous support. She organized a place for me to live on Rarotonga (with her next-door neighbor Mama Kan), assisted in arranging interviews, gave me dance lessons, and took me to her home island of Aitutaki on numerous occasions.

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 government policies toward the performing arts and Mamia's life history is somewhat uncanny. Here I present these histories in tandem, for they serve to show the influence that government policies have on the ground ("on the beach," as Cook Islanders say) and the significance of performing arts in many people's daily lives.

Mamia was born on the island of Aitutaki in the village of Ureia in 1953. She was the youngest of seven children; four girls and three boys (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 harbormaster. He is a *tumu kōrero* (expert in traditional matters) and a *mata'iapo* (subchief) for Tamatoa *ariki* (chief) and was a choreographer, dancer, and composer. He is also a CICC deacon and the chairman of the Ureia village committee. Mamia's parents began what was possibly the first commercial dance group on Aitutaki in the 1950s. Aitutaki was a refueling point on the "Coral Route" of the Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL) service, which flew from Auckland, Fiji, Samoa, and Aitutaki through to Tahiti during the 1950s. Papa Tunui was asked by the airline to provide passengers with an island meal and a dance performance while the plane refueled. He then became the leader for the Aitutaki dance team, formed in 1964. He managed the team's *tere pati* (traveling party) to Tahiti in 1964, where they performed at the Turai (Bastille celebrations), and he managed tours to Hawai‘i in 1978 and Tahiti in 1980.²

Mamia 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. But 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, organized dance performances took place only at a few official events throughout the year. Mamia said she danced at primary school on special occasions such as parents’ day and when important visitors such as government ministers and school inspectors came to visit.

The Cook Islands became self-governing in free association with New Zealand in 1965. The first premier (then prime minister) of the Cook Islands was an Aitutakian, Albert Henry. Henry’s Cook Islands Party saw the revival of local traditions as a key way of forging an independent nation-state. His initiatives included the establishment of a Culture Division to record and collect local customs and traditions. He also made Cook Islands Māori culture a compulsory subject in schools, which included the study of the national language, Cook Islands Māori, and he created a government-sponsored national dance team (Sissons 1999; Baddeley 1978). Mamia attended Tereora College on Rarotonga from 1968, because education on Aitutaki, as on most of the “outer islands” (the collective name for all of the Cook Islands except Rarotonga), only extended to junior high school.
levels. At Tereora College, Mamia joined the school dance team, which was run by Turepu Turepu, a highly influential composer and choreographer. This group traveled to New Zealand and Tahiti and performed in the annual Constitution Celebrations “festival of dance.” This festival was another Albert Henry initiative aimed at forging national sentiment and unifying the islands. The Constitution Celebrations began in 1966 and included participants from many outer islands. The competition between each island group was fierce, but, according to Mamia, because of Turepu’s talents the Tereora College team won every year.

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

From 1974 until 1978 Mamia was employed in the Culture Division (which included an anthropological division and archives) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. 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 Culture Division’s archives. The Cook Islands Democratic Party under Tom Davis (1978–1988) abandoned support of the arts, closing the Culture Division and, among other actions, stopping funding to CINAT. Economic development, particularly the development of tourism and related service industries, took precedence. Mamia got a job as a tourist officer, welcoming visitors at the airport and then at the Bank of Nauru branch on Rarotonga. Because CINAT had disbanded, Mamia joined a newly formed dance group, Te Ivi Māori (the Bones of the Ancestors) and traveled to Hawai‘i, the US mainland, Europe, France, Germany, and Italy. These trips were primarily for the purpose of tourist promotion and were organized by the Cook Islands Tourist Authority. Te Ivi Māori also began the Dancer of the Year competition for solo male and female dancers, which is now an integral component of the annual dance calendar. Mamia won the competition in 1980, 1981, and 1983. She retired from competitions in 1985.

When the Cook Islands Party returned to power in 1989, “culture” 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. As a result of severe economic recession, the government was in the process of radically restructuring the economy. 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 such as the South Pacific Games in Micronesia, the Commonwealth Games in Malaysia, and the Olympic Games in Sydney.

The very first day I met her, she had just returned from a trip to introduce Cook Islands Tattslotto, a lottery game, to Cook Islander communities in New Zealand. 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 might be considered specialized skills in Western contexts are regarded as everyday activities in the Cook Islands. Mamia just happened to excel at these activities, owing, I believe, to a particular mix of talent, confidence, determination, and charisma. Doing things well distinguished 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.

One reason that Cook Islanders consider performing arts to be things “you just do” is 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 visited 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'ā [white people] are so strict! Here no one is out—you just go up the back row.”

This being said, talent in the performing arts is categorized differently from talent on, for example, the netball court or rugby field. People who are considered to be particularly talented or have a gift are called ta'unga (expert in some aspect of Māori culture). The term has semimystical qualities; people have “gifts” either from God, ancestors, or talent that is “in the family blood.” The term ta'unga is used in reference to dancers, musicians, composers, singers, and costume makers. Ta'unga is usually reserved for older people. For instance, people called Māmiā’s father, Papa Tunui, a ta'unga. Māmiā was not directly described as one, but she was recognized as “the next one,” that is, the next ta'unga of the Tunui family. In this sense, those who excel in Māori culture are often attributed with sacred qualities. Some speak of having dreams or visions that inspire them. Māmiā, however, was extremely pragmatic about her talents, never speaking of them as divine or mystical.

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

Despite her worldliness, Māmiā was also considered a “local local.” “Local local” is a term used to describe Cook Islanders who are proud of their home and their culture, as opposed to locals who act like papa’ā. The latter tend to speak primarily in English, wear Western-style clothes, denigrate Māori culture, and go only to particular bars and restaurants on Rarotonga. Māmiā went to both “high-class” and “local local” bars but preferred having parties at home. She was fond of wearing island print dresses (mu‘umu‘u), although she did wear papa’ā clothes. Although Māmiā spoke English very well, as a “local local,” she spoke Māori as often as possible, particularly to her son who refused to speak it. 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 fifty minutes away by plane), usually on official sport
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 location in Cook Islands postindependence history illustrates the centrality of dance and other expressive forms (including netball) in the life of one individual. It also demonstrates the importance of cultural production to government’s vision of a postcolonial nation-state. Finally, Mamia’s story shows the forms of personal, social, and geographical mobility that dancing can produce. By dancing, Mamia made a living, traveled throughout her country, and saw the world. Her songs and stories about her dancing and netball playing still circulate among Cook Islander communities at home and abroad. Expressive culture made Mamia a person of renown.

LOCATING THE COOK ISLANDS

The Cook Islands is a colonial category. Linguistic and archaeological research suggests that the northern Cook Islands were settled from Samoa and the southern islands from the Society Islands (Craig and King 1981; Bellwood 1979). Prior to European invasion, economic, political, and artistic links existed between the various islands that now make up the Cooks and neighboring islands, and these ties were maintained despite efforts of early missionaries to control the movement of indigenous populations. 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. Today the Cook Islands are a group of fifteen islands in central Polynesia. They are named after Captain James Cook, who charted the southern islands in 1773 and 1777. The larger southern group (Aitutaki, Atiu, Mangāia, Manuae, Ma’u'ē, Mitī'ārō, Rarotonga, and Takutea) is mainly composed of upraised coral and volcanic formations, while the northern group (Manihiki, Nassau, Tongareva, Pukapuka, Rakahanga, Palmerston, and Suwarrow) are low-lying coral atolls. The islands are dispersed over two million square kilometers of sea; their total landmass is 241 square kilometers.

Rarotonga, in the southern group, is the administrative and economic capital of the group. In 2007 well over half the population of the Cooks, approximately 9,000 people, resided on Rarotonga, fewer than 3,000 lived in the southern group, and about 1,000 lived in the northern group (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2007). Because the two major industries, tourism and offshore banking, are based on Rarotonga, the island’s population includes large numbers of outer islanders, and
Map 2  The Cook Islands
those with outer islands heritage.\textsuperscript{7} Papa'ā expatriates, mainly from New Zealand, constitute approximately 5 percent of the Cook Islands population, and they tend to work in the upper levels of the tourist and banking industries. Visitors to the Cook Islands (a category that includes both tourists and expatriate Cook Islanders) make up a quarter of the total population on Rarotonga.\textsuperscript{8}

The Cook Islands population is largely diasporic. Approximately 58,000 Cook Islanders live in New Zealand, and an estimated 10,000 in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007; Statistics New Zealand 2006). The main reason for this is that limited arable land, cyclones, and transportation costs all place restrictions on economic development. The Cook Islands has relied heavily on the export of agricultural produce to New Zealand; however, when New Zealand deregulated its economy in the mid-1980s, the Cook Islands lost preferential access to this market and was unable to compete with larger exporters such as Australia. Some tropical fruit, taro, and fish are still exported, and pearls are the major export industry in the northern-group islands of Manihiki and Tongareva. In terms of internal trade, Rarotonga and Aitutaki are the only two islands to produce tropical fruit and vegetables for commercial sale; other islands in the southern group purchase fresh produce at considerable cost from Rarotonga. Most basic foodstuffs are imported from New Zealand, and shop-bought foods (tinned corned beef and fish, rice, and savory biscuits) are staples on all islands, supplemented with local fruit, coconut, and root vegetables. The only products that are exported from outer islands to Rarotonga are pearls and handicrafts (such as carved pearl shells and woven mats), which are highly sought after by locals and tourists alike.

The country is also dependent on foreign aid and remittances. Like many small Pacific nations, the Cook Islands is characterized as having a MIRAB (migration, remittances, aid, and bureaucracy) economy (Bertram 1999; Bertram and Watters 1985). Mainstream economic assessment of MIRAB economies is largely negative; they are viewed as inefficient welfare systems that retard productive economic growth. These assumptions are being challenged through an examination of the worldviews of Pacific Islanders and their understandings of economic and social security (see Connell and Brown 2005; Poirine 1998; Hau'ofa 1994). Certainly in the Cook Islands case the MIRAB system gave the islands the highest per-capita GDP in the Pacific, enabling many Cook Islanders to remain in the nation-state rather than move abroad for employment possibilities (NZODA 1997). This ended in 1996 when a structural adjustment program, aimed at reforming and revitalizing the Cook Islands economy, implemented among other things the reduction of the public service by half. Given that 60 percent of the paid workforce
were employed by government (up to 75 percent in the outer islands) and the lack of other income-generating opportunities, this led to a dramatic increase in emigration (NZODA 1997). In 1996 the residential population of the Cook Islands was 18,000. In 2001 the residential population dropped to 15,000, and in 2006 to 11,800 (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2007). Assuming constant demographic variables, these figures suggest that in ten years about 6,000 Cook Islanders—a third of the total population—left the nation-state, particularly those of workforce participation age, and especially those between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four years have migrated overseas (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2005).

Cook Islands Māori (Rarotongan) and English are the official languages of the group. In each outer island, and between outer islander communities on Rarotonga, local dialects are spoken. Retention of linguistic diversity reflects a pride in, and connection to, home islands that older people attempt to encourage in younger generations born on Rarotonga. Island music (popular Cook Islands songs) is one particularly effective vehicle for this transmission, as composers from the outer islands or from outer islands communities consciously utilize their islands’ dialect in lyrics. These songs are broadcast on Radio Cook Islands, the national radio station, and they also circulate through audio and video recordings produced by the burgeoning local recording industry. The national television station, Cook Islands Television (CITV), stopped broadcasting to the outer islands during the economic reforms, because outer islanders could not afford the electricity required to transmit from their local stations. The national newspaper has only small circulation in the southern group and an even smaller circulation in the north. Outer islanders display little interest in these mediums anyway, for they perceive them to be biased toward Rarotongan content. Despite the lack of national communication vehicles, a number of cross-cutting networks connect the islands and communities abroad. Travel within the Cooks is undertaken primarily by plane (Air Rarotonga is the locally owned airline) and less frequently by ship. Rarotonga has the only international airport and is principally serviced by Air New Zealand.

Along with these contemporary economic factors, three forms of social differentiation—rank, gender, and religious belief—all shape expressive practices, cultural production, and reception. Rank is an important form of social classification in contemporary Cook Islands society. Most of the islands in the group have a system of hereditary chieftainship that determines land ownership and defines social obligations.9 Rarotonga, for example, is divided into three districts (vaka)—Takitumu, Te Au O Tonga, and Puaikura—and each district has one or
more chiefly lines associated with it. Land is further divided into subdistricts (tāpere) owned by a descent group (ngāti) headed by a subdistrict chief (mata'iapō) and a number of junior chiefs (rangatira) who represent extended family groups (kōpū tangata). Since independence, the 'Ui Ariki (House of Ariki) has formed the upper house of parliament and includes representatives from each island. Subdistrict and junior chiefs make up an advisory council called the Kōutu Nui, which also advises government on customary matters. Neither body has legislative power, but they act as advisory committees to national and local government on land use, land ownership, community welfare, and culture issues (see Baddeley 1978; Sissons 1994, 1999). The latter area ranges from imposing rā'ui (a system whereby access to a particular resource or area is forbidden for a given period) to expressing concerns about teenage drinking and crime.

Family descent groups are ranked by their proximity to titleholders. While these rankings are often disputed, an individual's position within this system is largely ascribed. As one young expatriate Cook Islander returning to the islands for the first time expressed it: “I mean nothing; what I have achieved means nothing. All that matters here is who your family is.” At the same time, alongside hereditary rank other forms of achieved status provide alternative, or supplementary, forms of prestige. Educational achievement, accomplishment in the performing arts, business acumen, and leadership in political and religious organizations are all important sources of status.

Rank and gender intersect to shape the social status of individual men and women. Women who hold titled positions have higher social standing in relation to untitled men, for example. Concurrently, gender is crucial to the organization of social roles in both public and domestic spheres. Much domestic work is gender segregated. Work such as laboring on plantations and reef fishing are considered men's work. Housework, cooking, and tending gardens are largely women's responsibilities. Child care, however, is often the domain of grandparents, who take up this role so that both parents can earn wages to support the extended family. Rather than being an expression of gender-based difference and inequality, the gender division of labor is largely viewed as expressing “natural” complementariness. As a further example of this, men and women tend to socialize primarily in gender-segregated groupings, both sexes stating a preference for the company of their own sex. In the public sphere both men and women undertake paid work. On Rarotonga, women and men engage in waged employment in roughly equal numbers, although women are underrepresented in the upper strata of workplaces, politics, and religious institutions.
Forms of religious practice pervade most aspects of everyday life in the Cook Islands. Regardless of denomination or an individual’s degree of religious belief or involvement, at each community event the proceedings open and close with a prayer. Even small activities, such as a staff meeting or a fishing trip, begin and end with prayer. The majority of Cook Islanders (55 percent) belong to the Cook Islands Christian Church (the descendant of London Missionary Society Protestantism). Roman Catholic (17 percent) and Seventh-day Adventist (8 percent) are the next-largest groups (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2001). Evangelical churches are becoming increasingly popular, particularly Assemblies of God and the Apostolic Revival Fellowship. There are also followers of Baha’i and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons), particularly on Rarotonga.

ANTHROPOLOGY, DANCE, AND EXPRESSION CULTURE

Within Pacific anthropology, the Cook Islands has received little attention. The northwestern atoll Pukapuka is the exception. Aside from Jeffrey Sissons’ informative works (1995, 1997, 1999), which explore the link between Cook Islands dance and nationalism, there have been no anthropological studies of Cook Islands dance. As Cook Islands dance is a polyphonic form, involving poetic song texts, vocals, drums, string instruments, artifacts, and costumes, I draw upon a number of ethnomusicological and material culture analyses of Cook Islands (Lawrence 1992, 1993; Jonassen 1991; Laird 1982; Salisbury 1983; McLean 1980). The focus of this work diverges from mine, however, in that it tends to concentrate on the structural and formal features of the Cook Islands performing arts rather than on the contextual nature of these practices.

This book is more closely aligned with anthropological studies that examine dance and other expressive forms as practices and mediums of social action rather than as fixed aspects of “culture,” “tradition,” or “identity.” I draw on analyses of performance that examine its mediational nature and that emphasize the political significance of expressive forms. However, in arguing for the politicization of expressive forms, I am not suggesting they are simply reflections of outside forces such as politics, economics, religion, and so on. Rather, I take my lead from approaches that view cultural production and artistic practice as generative forces rather than passive mirrors of other aspects of social life. By analyzing specific examples of Cook Islanders’ expressive practice, I show how they are imbricated in shaping contemporary political, economic, and other social agendas.
Arguing for the dynamic nature of expressive practices does not negate the possibility that these forms also mark out particular identities. Indeed, Cook Islands dance makes strong statements that evoke and affirm group identities. For instance, throughout Cook Islands postindependence history, dance has been used as a politicized symbol to articulate local, national, regional, and international aims. Culture (dance and music particularly) has been an important aspect of nation making, an instrument for both fostering and displaying national pride at independence celebrations, national and regional competitions, and the various community events held in the Cook Islands diaspora. So while I have no argument with the idea that dance can reinforce or demarcate particular identities, my point is that these identities are not stagnant, and thus dance practice is tied up not only in signification but explication. The work that people put into creating personal and group identities through expressive forms makes these identities emergent rather than predetermined.

Dance, because of its visual and affective immediacy, is a particularly productive arena for the performance and contestation of important personal and social identities. Dance is compelling because it communicates at affective and embodied levels as well as cognitive ones. In order to capture the multisensorial nature of dance performance, I approach dance performances from a number of angles. I explore song texts and the themes they raise, I include the analysis of dance choreography and music compositions given by their creators, and I analyze the talk that surrounds dance—the evaluations of dance performances and of dancers, and the gossip, commentary, and other verbal narratives that dance produces. At the same time, I allow for the possibility that not all aspects of dance practices can be translated into verbal form. In a number of the examples presented here the meanings of certain movements and gestures are extralinguistic and interactional bodily realms of experience. This extralinguistic quality tends to occur when performers are expressing, thinking, or feeling values that are not hegemonic, such as nonnormative sexualities. Things that are difficult to speak—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.

I chose to use the phrase “dancing from the heart” as the title of this book because it is the evocative expression most often used by Cook Islanders to explain the key characteristic of their dance. The importance of emotions to successful dance practice is an important component of dance practice throughout the world; what is particular to Cook Islands dance practice is the centrality of “happiness.”
When I asked Cook Islanders why they danced, the most frequent responses were “Because it makes me happy” and “The main thing about dancing is to express happiness; then you are dancing from the heart.” I would answer these statements with probing questions about the possibility of “deeper” and more “serious” meaning. But, as people kept insisting that dancing was really about pleasurable emotions, I began to question my own assumptions that “happiness” was a trivial state, and started to seriously investigate the significance of happiness.

Finding academic studies to assist understanding the meaning of dancing from the heart presented a challenge. Anthropological studies of emotion tend to focus on negative emotions such as pain, loss, grief, and trauma, not on pleasurable ones. These states are put forward, often implicitly, as foundational, as somehow more real and certainly more significant than positive emotional states. Balancing this trend, this book analyzes states like happiness and pleasure to illustrate that happy bodies and happy movements, rather than being transitory or epiphenomenal, are worthy of analysis and have a bearing on Cook Islands norms and ideals.

In Cook Islands Māori, the most commonly used words for pleasurable emotions are mataora and rekareka. The two terms cover a range of emotions, including happiness, joy, festivity, merriment, delight, and fun. The causative prefix tā is often employed to emphasize the “performative” characteristics of these states—that is, the way pleasure is able to be induced, particularly by expressive forms. So, for instance, tāmataora is defined in a Māori-language dictionary as “to entertain, to make joyful; to do those things or acts that will be a source of joy, pleasure, etc., to others” (Savage [1962] 1980, 149). The terms tārekareka and tāmataora are most commonly used to describe expressive forms such as dance, singing, drama, and sport. As such, tāmataora and tārekareka explicitly link pleasurable feeling and expressive forms. While there are Māori terms for dancing (‘ura), singing (‘imene), and playing musical instruments (for example, hitting drums, rutu pa‘u, and playing string instruments, akatangi), there is no overall term for performance, art, or music. Although English terms are occasionally used, dance and music are referred to by their specific genres in Cook Islands Māori—for instance, ‘ura pa‘u (drum dance) or ‘imene tuki (religious songs).

Rather than simply an expression of a state internal to an individual, mataora and rekareka denote a mode of social action. Mamia most clearly articulated the connection between pleasurable states, dance and music to a general philosophy for living: “You see, the point of life is to have fun, ‘anga‘anga tāmataora. You know, we try to enjoy our life over here, 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.
When you hear the drums, it makes your blood move, you must dance—it is me coming out dancing, me being happy.”

Mamia’s explanation was in English, except for one Māori phrase she used to supplement her thoughts. The term ‘anga’anga tāmataora (literally, “to work pleasure”) is close in sentiment to the English expression “the good life.” Mamia’s formula for the good life is one in which aesthetics inform everyday dispositions; music and dance both enhance and create life’s enjoyment. More particularly, happiness is communicated through bodily means. Embodied expressive practices are emotionally transformative and are recognized as such. Mamia’s definition also gestures to music’s role in playing out personal emotions of sadness and its role in soothing negative feeling. This solitary form is replaced by the sound of drums, a sound that heralds social events and celebrations and a sound that, in her poetic description, forces her to emerge, dancing.

Mamia’s expression “coming out dancing” is a neat condensation of values that are considered important to Cook Islanders. As in many small, kin-based communities, sociability and collective life are valued, while introspection, individual pursuits, and solitary behavior are variously considered rude, selfish, and unhealthy. The idea of desiring to have “time to yourself,” “personal time,” “down-time,” and the like, so fundamental to Western individualism, is largely incomprehensible. Sociability is seen as both natural and obligatory to Cook Islanders, and integrative practices are emphasized over solitary ones. The case studies examined throughout the book will make clear that happiness is very much linked to sociability. From formal occasions to spontaneous events, the gathering of people to eat, drink, and converse is vital to Cook Islands notions of “the good life.” Expressive forms such as dance and song are essential to creating successful social exchanges; they convey the heart of those values and ideals that Cook Islanders hold dear.

Dancing from the heart is not just embodied in the virtuosity of the dancers but also created through interaction with audience members. Most dance performances that take place in local contexts aim at eliciting a response from the audience. This response involves vigorous clapping and crying out as the performance takes place, as well as members of the audience getting up to dance with, and give money to, performers. To show appreciation, individuals will rise from their seats and dance up to the performers, waving money above their heads; the money is then placed either in a contribution bowl or in dancers’ costumes.

Humor is a highly significant vehicle to evoke “happiness” in many performance contexts. Both audience and dancers may perform humorous movements, a practice termed “clowning” by scholars of Pacific comedic traditions (Hereniko
1995; Mitchell 1992; Sinavaiana 1992; White 1991; Huntsman and Hooper 1975). Dancing in the manner of the opposite sex and combining Cook Islands and Western dance movements are two particularly popular strategies that I draw attention to in this book. Making people laugh is not the only aspect of clowning performances, however. Many dance performances are highly competitive—village competes against village at Christmas dance celebrations, and island groups compete against each other at national dance competitions. Adding humorous elements to dance performances may guarantee a win in a competition. Conversely, members of the audience may dance in humorous ways to tease and hopefully infuriate performers into making mistakes and, as a result, lose the competition. Humor is also a critical aspect of other competitive events. Church groups compete in formal and informal singing competitions, while youth church groups have competitive sports days. Intervillage rugby and netball competitions take place each Saturday. Feasts held for village events are also framed in terms of competition, with different groups striving to provide the most food. Competitions are considered to make people try harder (‘akamāro’iro’i) and incite them to display their village, family, or themselves in the best light, through physical or aesthetic prowess and the provision of food and money. Some events involve the announcement of a winner and the awarding of prizes; many do not. The latter are considered unofficial competitions, in that a winner is not announced, but a particular group will consider themselves to have won and tease or jokingly boast about it to others. Winning status is often judged on the amount of money received from a performance or the amount of laughter, dancing, and applause a group was able to extract from the audience.18

A theme running throughout the book is the way that humorous expressive forms are a vehicle for structuring interactions with “outsiders,” be they from other families, villages, islands, or nations. I take my lead from work undertaken on the Pacific and elsewhere that considers the role of humor in negotiating and resisting colonial and postcolonial relations. Like Donna Goldstein in her analysis of the role humor and laughter play in expressing power relations, I view humor as “a vehicle for expressing sentiments that are difficult to communicate publicly or that point to areas of discontent in social life. The meanings behind laughter reveal both the cracks in the system and the masked or more subtle ways that power is challenged” (2003, 5). I focus particularly on the ways Cook Islanders have used performance humor to express power imbalances resulting from incursions from papa’ā: missionary and colonial administrators and now tourists, as the embodiment of Western affluence and the inequities of global capitalism more generally.
In these instances humor operates as both critical commentary on and an oppositional aesthetic to extant status, race, and economic hierarchies.

Happiness is not a “natural” emotional state, a point important to stress given the deep history of the idea of the “smiling carefree native” (Desmond 1999; Trask 1993). Indeed, as Mamia suggests, achieving the good life is a social duty that takes work. The term tāmataora emphasizes that effort is required to make or cause happiness. Of course, not all dance performances or contexts aim at eliciting happiness, merriment, or laughter. Particular music genres, ceremonies, and associated chants and songs are performed to convey grief, sorrow, and loss. These kinds of performances are taken up throughout the book and serve, by their stark contrast, to underline the sociability, attachment, and belonging that lies at the heart of Cook Islands dance.

DANCE AND GENDER

Dance is one arena where bodily ideas about gender are obviously reproduced. In Cook Islands dance, male and female movements suggest ideals of masculinity and femininity, respectively. Dance movements, techniques, choreography, costumes, and singing all present notions of normative femininity and masculinity. Men (tāne) dance as warriors; they are strong and muscular, they exaggeratedly dance the physicality of “traditional” work; they fish, row canoes, and husk coconuts with their teeth. In contrast, women (va’ine) dance the beauty of nature; their hand movements suggest gently undulating waves; their hips, clothed in grass skirts, allude to swaying palms. Their movements are graceful, demure, and gentle.

A “third gender” category, called laelae, also exists in the Cook Islands (Herdt 1994). As is discussed in chapter 4, laelae are biological men who adopt female comportment and dress and may express sexual preference for heterosexual men. Laelae are prominent in the performing arts as choreographers, composers, costume and set designers, and event organizers. Additionally, a number of Cook Islands dance performances involve parodic gender reversal. These range from Western-style drag queen competitions (performed primarily, but not exclusively, by laelae) to fund-raising performances of cross-dressing and dancing (usually male-to-female performances by both heterosexuals and laelae) for various sport, church, and village associations. These performances in part reinscribe normative and highly codified gendered movement. They are also potential explorations of other nonnormative movements and practices. Either way, Cook Islanders find these reversals highly entertaining and humorous, suggesting there is certain
pleasure to be derived from the representation of deviance from hegemonic gendered norms and practices.

My focus in this work is primarily in the relationship between femininity (articulated by both women and laelae) and Cook Islands expressive forms. This is because femininity figures prominently in assessments of Cook Islands dance practice and debates about cultural authenticity and tradition. Cook Islands femininity is often represented as the paragon of both traditional and moral ideals and in relation to Cook Islands dance. For instance, almost all of the debate about demarcating the traditional from the modern in dance is centered around female dance movements and female costumes, with traditional forms being seen as refined as opposed to sexually explicit modern ones (see chapter 2). The connection of female bodily presentation with issues of prestige, reputation, and sexuality is central. Furthermore, there is clear asymmetry in the evaluations of femininity and masculinity, a point feminist scholars have made across all societies. As Yuval-Davies (1997, 23) argues, women act as “symbolic border guards” in debates about national identity and perceived threats to cultural integrity from outside forces. In the Cook Islands such debates primarily center on threats posed by Westernization and globalization.

The expression of certain emotions in the public sphere is also highly gendered. Public joking and parodic dancing are primarily a male preserve. Women who are past child-rearing age and not of high status may publicly cross-dress and dance, but young women and women of chiefly status are constrained from doing so unless they are in all-female company. Women who flaunt these rules (and certainly some do) are open to criticism and speculation about their virtue. To understand how and why dance is often problematic for women in ways that it is not for men, I have found valuable the work of Jane Cowan (1990) on dance in northern Greece. Cowan argues that this problem centers 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. Women who dance well represent the pinnacle of femininity. Simultaneously, they cannot dance “too much” (ibid., 200) or in ways that are potentially damaging to their reputation. The ambiguous potency of dance in relation to femininity demonstrates the complex and polysemous nature of expressive forms. As Cowan states: “Dance 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” (ibid., 20).
LA YERED MOBILITY

Movement is the controlling theme of this book. Most literally, this theme is taken up in the examination of bodily motility in Cook Islands dance. The ability to move people, to provoke emotional responses, is another vital component of dance practice. The focus on moving bodies has crucially informed the analytical framework employed. Questions about the corporeal production of identities, the embodied nature of self-presentation and social exchange, and the dynamic interplay between human agency and societal norms all came to the fore as I attempted to understand the significance of expressive forms in the lives of Cook Islanders.

In many ways, dance is an ideal subject for the exploration of the processual and provisional nature of identities and social life. As a moving medium, it can serve only to stress the creative work that goes into crafting selves and societies. It is also necessary to stress that this creativity does not take place in a free-for-all vacuum; social action is shaped and constrained by hegemonic ideologies and concomitant power relations. Particularly relevant in the Cook Islands context are prevailing gender ideologies and notions of female sexuality and reputation. Wider historical and global forces are also brought to bear on expressive practices and the people who engage in them.

Arjun Appadurai (2001) characterizes globalization as involving the ever-increasing flow of ideas, images, and people at the service of the economic imperatives of capitalism. Movement, in all these forms, is a fundamental component of Cook Islanders’ experience of global capitalism. Cook Islanders, like other Pacific Islanders, have long traditions of migration, travel, and exploration involving economic and cultural exchange. Movement was, and still is, a central component of Pacific history and Pacific Islanders’ contemporary experience (Jolly 2007; Lockwood 2004; Spickard 2002; Hau’ofa 1994, 1998). In the Cook Islands, familial and community networks are maintained across the diaspora through frequent visits home and abroad for weddings, funerals, family reunions, village and island events, and Christmas celebrations. The transnational nature of Cook Islands communities is also evidenced in the frequent travel undertaken for business. Government employees and members of nongovernmental organizations are regularly abroad, attending regional meetings and conferences. Tourist operators take dance groups on promotional tours in Europe and the United States, and business entrepreneurs travel to attract investment in agricultural and tourism projects.

Cook Islands communities, both at home and abroad, also actively consume non-Cook Islands aesthetic forms. These include papa’ā popular music, movies,
and television and regional artistic products, particularly Tahitian and Samoan music and fashion. In addition, a sizable expatriate community and the large tourist industry mean that many Cook Islanders engage with papaʻā on a daily basis. These interactions are largely experienced ambivalently. On the one hand, tourism and tourist-related industries are major employers on the islands, providing income and other benefits such as opportunities to travel. On the other hand, tourism emphasizes disparities in wealth and opportunity that exist between tourists and those employed to serve them. These social and economic inequities are further reinforced in diasporic Cook Islander communities, where many undertake low-paid and unstable work in factories, construction, and security.

Expressive forms, dance in particular, are often the focal point of this ambivalence toward the cultural, economic, and political movements of global capitalism. Intense debate about what constitutes Cook Islands dance movement, costuming, and music communicates anxieties about cultural homogenization, Westernization, commodification, and attempts to codify what constitutes authentic cultural traditions. These debates are primarily framed in oppositional terms; Cook Islands versus papaʻā, local versus global, traditional and modern. In analyzing these debates, I consider these categories not 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.” What I call local is a concept informed by the interplay between competing perspectives—colonial, postcolonial, Western, global, and regional.

Studies of modernity, nationalism, and globalization, which aim at understanding the dynamics of the contemporary global-local nexus, provide the analytic tools to understand Cook Islands expressive forms in relation to these wider historical, social, and political movements (especially Tsing 2002, 2005; Appadurai 1996, 2001; Clifford 1997; Miller 1995; Friedman 1994). As Appadurai analyzed global media and mass migration, I explore expressive culture as a series of practices that experiment with modernity. 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). This view of global-local relations complicates simple understandings of globalization as a force of modernity that is either accommodated or resisted by local communities. It moves us beyond the distinction of “global” forces and local places, as all force making and place making are both local and global (Tsing 2002, 477). As the case studies examined in this work demonstrate, global cultural flows are placed; they are actively
assimilated into local styles. Local forces are often simultaneously oriented toward
global (and regional and transnational) sites.

My aims also intersect with scholarship undertaken in the Pacific region that
problematises static notions of cultural production, tradition, and authenticity. With the formation of independent nation-states throughout much of the Pacific
there has been a revival of tradition and an increasing importance placed on forms
understood to be precolonial. Artistic production and the refashioning of cultural
institutions are often singled out as areas around which these questions of identity
and tradition are articulated. The performing arts in particular are a key vehicle
through which Pacific Islanders assert and negotiate who they are at the local, na-
tional, regional, and global levels (Lockwood 1993; Stevenson 1992; Nero 1992).

In the Cook Islands, contemporary dance practices are shaped by competing ideas
about the islands’ past. Debates about precolonial traditions, missionization, and
colonialism pervade discussions concerning contemporary dance and expressive
culture. What is seen to constitute tradition is the subject of heated debate, primar-
ily between contemporary dance group leaders and members of the older genera-
tions who organized dance and youth groups. Both younger and older performers
claim that their dance forms are more traditional and, as such, more authentically
Cook Islands.

THE POLITICS OF LOCATION

My main period of fieldwork in the Cook Islands was from November 1996 until
May 1998 when I was primarily located on Rarotonga. It was, in retrospect, an
extremely significant time to be engaged in fieldwork, as the stringent economic
reforms discussed above were just being implemented. As a result of the reforms,
a number of government-sponsored cultural activities were postponed during this
period. The year 1997 was the first in which the Constitution Celebrations were
held without any outer islands delegation. Celebrations were to be held on each
island, but no islands actually celebrated the day. The mayor of Tongareva told me
subsequently: “What was there to celebrate? This government has sold us away.”

On Rarotonga the celebrations were held in an attenuated form. The main event,
the festival of dance, was a (supposedly) noncompetitive dance performance fea-
turing four Rarotongan dance groups. Other cultural events were “postponed” due
to budget cuts. 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 organizations spoke of the benefits of
privatization; 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 economic restructuring brought into stark relief opposing beliefs about the nature of paid work and community obligations, economic and social exchange, and the role of expressive forms in these realms of social life.

Despite the decline in government-funded performing arts, dance remained an important aspect of many community events. Dance and other cultural activities that serviced the tourist industry also continued. At the more local level, dance performances, both spontaneous and choreographed, were held at life-stage events such as weddings, haircutting ceremonies, and twenty-first birthdays and during island and village events like Christmas and New Year celebrations. Dance, music, and song performances also took place at functions such as school productions, beauty contests, talent quests, song contests, drag queen shows, and community fund-raisers, as well as at nightclubs and parties. Religious-based events involving singing and dance were held weekly across the various denominations, and forms of religious singing and movement (dancing is prohibited by many denominations) were included across a range of community occasions.

The network of people I came in contact with over the course of my fieldwork was very much influenced by Mamia and her family. In the initial stages I had expressed an interest to Mamia in learning Cook Islands dance, and she kindly offered to teach me. Many of these lessons ended up being held over at the house where Mama Kan (a fellow Aitutakian) lived. Mamia wanted to “keep her company,” because Mama Kan worked the night shift at Telecom Cook Islands and was home alone during the day. A few months later, both women decided I should live with Mama Kan so that we could provide company for each other. These two women, and their extended families and friends, have fundamentally shaped my understanding of Cook Islands social life.

During the 1996–1998 period of fieldwork, Mamia’s cousin Carmen Temata was the permanent 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 at ministry events such as the Constitution Celebrations. Mamia’s uncle Ota Joseph (OJ) also worked at the ministry as
a special projects officer, collecting oral histories and overseeing cultural events. 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”). Being located at Ministry of Cultural Development gave me firsthand insight into the organization and promotion of government-sponsored performing arts.

Mamia’s sister Api’i belonged to the Orama dance troupe, which became the central dance group in my research. This group was run by Sonny Williams and Georgina Keenan-Williams, both of whom were also enormously influential to my work. Both have devoted their lives to the performing arts, Georgina as a dancer, choreographer, and graphic artist, and Sonny as a dancer and drummer, and, eventually, the head of the Ministry of Cultural Development. I participated in Orama’s weekly rehearsals and also attended hotel shows twice a week, where I was promoted from spectator to babysitter (of dancers’ children) and then operator of stage lights, a job that meant timing the lights with drumbeats. I also assisted in costume preparation, which involved making fresh components of costumes on the days of performance, such as flower wreaths (‘ei) and leafy girdles (rautī tīti). I also worked on biannual costume workshops, which involved treating pandanus in order to make grass skirts (pāreu kiri’au) and sewing, screen-printing, and weaving other more permanent costume components.

Learning Cook Islands dance was a frustrating and often humiliating experience. 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. Foreign representations of Polynesian sensual exoticness shaped my initial understanding of Cook Islands dancing. The dancers were young and slim, scantily clad in coconut bras and grass skirts, and shaking their hips in ways that seemed highly sexual. As I came to know Cook Islands norms of bodily display and movement, the picture became far more complicated. Although display of the upper thigh is viewed as immodest by Cook Islanders, revealing the stomach is not. Young Cook Islands women will rarely wear a bikini in mixed company and will go to great lengths to cover their upper thighs with pāreu or shorts. Similarly, dancing styles—particularly the hip movements of female dancers—while certainly meant to be sensual in some contexts, also signify grace, skill, and technical competence.

Although based on Rarotonga, I also traveled to a number of outer islands, as well as to Tahiti and New Zealand. Often it was the travel undertaken by Cook Islanders I knew that necessitated my own travel. I visited Aitutaki with Mamia
on numerous occasions, often laden with goods purchased by Mama Kan for her relatives. I also spent a few months in Ma’uke and Tongareva and undertook a trip with the Orama dance troupe to Tahiti when they went there to perform. These trips were invaluable as they allowed me to experience the to-and-fro movement between islands and between urban situations and village ones, that characterizes the lifestyles of many Cook Islanders. The trips were also important because they provided comparative material for my main fieldwork on Rarotonga. People I spoke to about dance always classified dances into southern group and northern group styles (and then further categorized them into island differences). In addition, people on Rarotonga constantly compared Rarotongan expressive practices with those of the outer islands. The outer islands (except Aitutaki) were considered both to be backward (“like Rarotonga was twenty years ago”) and more culturally “authentic.” Rarotonga, in this comparison, was described as a “cultural fruit salad” that had lost a lot of traditional knowledge and practices.

As a consequence my fieldwork was necessarily multi-sited. It followed the geographical movements of people I knew on Rarotonga to their home islands and to communities abroad. Although most of my writing is about events and people based on Rarotonga, it was impossible to limit it to Rarotonga or even to easily use the term “Rarotongans.” Key people on Rarotonga, such as Mamia and Mama Kan, defined themselves as Aitutakians. Similarly, Orama co-leader Sonny Williams was born on Rarotonga but identified strongly with his Manihikian “side,” and he represented himself as a Manihikian. Rather than attempting to create a study about a geographically bounded group—and in the process incarcerating local residents (see DeLoughrey 2007, 197)—this book foregrounds the mobility of people’s lives to give a sense of how expressive culture, and dance in particular, travels through local, national, and international milieus.

As well as observing and participating in various dance contexts, I conducted and recorded around sixty informal 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 who had previously been dancers but now were not, because their acquired religious beliefs prohibited dancing. My formal interviews were based on questions about individuals’ 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, and playing instruments were connected to other significant events and passions. In general terms, the two main passions were land claims and
the concomitant issue of relationships with kin. Often these local issues would be linked to more global concerns about the influence of papa'ā ways on the maintenance of identity, traditions, and performing arts genres.

The observations made in this work are obviously shaped by my personal history and intellectual interests. They are also shaped by the way Cook Islanders perceived me, essential to which was my status as twenty-something, single, white, and female, a collection of attributes that equated me with tourists and their hedonistic desires. My research was often “jokingly” discussed as a thinly veiled excuse to have a good time. People would frequently 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.” The point I took from comments such as these is that knowledge acquisition is positional, situated, and partial (Marcus 1998; di Leonardo 1991). That this analytical perspective is as relevant to the strategies Cook Islanders used to locate me (as both a gendered and sexualized researcher/tourist), as it is to my position as a Western researcher, provides a reflexive element that permeates the book. I aim to use reflexivity as a “politics of location” to show how I am located not only by my personal history but also by wider political social relations.

The people I was close to attempted to turn me into a different kind of young woman than the free and easy tourist. Mama Kan in particular wanted to me to be a “good girl” and reflect the training that Mamia and herself were putting into me. This training included teaching me how to dance properly, not to be stingy with money (as most papa'ā were considered to be), and to tend to personal grooming. It will become clear as the book progresses that evaluation of female dancers incorporates their moral and physical comportment. At home, I was required to participate in everyday domestic chores. Mama Kan was a particularly tidy person and she would survey my sweeping or raking, sometimes remarking, “You want a Ph.D., but I wouldn’t even give you a master’s in housekeeping.” Furthermore both Mamia and Mama Kan were shocked that I rarely ironed clothes, and they insisted that I do so. My hair was also problematic, as it was curly and I often wore it loose. Most Cook Islander females wore their hair tied back in buns that I considered severe. Mama Kan told me once that women at her workplace had mentioned to her that my hair was very messy, and she asked me to buy a comb and “make it nice”: “You can’t live here with hair like that. It will shame us.”

Despite my desire to conform to the norms of Cook Islands femininity, my researcher role continually thwarted these attempts. 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 probably meant that, unlike most papaʻā on the island, I talked to and socialized with locals. She wasn’t entirely convinced, however, and said enigmatically, “But you know more people on the island than I do.” This comment referenced another sense that being panaʻakari is opposite to the way an ideal Cook Islands young woman would behave. While they were demure, graceful, and poised, I was loud, forthright, and “clownish.” I mentioned this to a local girlfriend who said, “Well, if you acted like a proper Rarotongan girl, all shy, it would have taken you ten years to get your research done!” Rather than be reassured by this assertion, I felt that I had failed to conform to Cook Islands standards of femininity and that I had confirmed negative assessments of papaʻā femininity held by Cook Islanders.

Most anthropologists are keenly aware that their discipline bears the marks of exploitative colonial and postcolonial relations. Anthropology has been both the “handmaiden of colonialism,” involved in the subjugation of indigenous people, and an instrument for recording and understanding “other” cultures. The contradictory nature of the discipline is still evident today. Anthropologists are caught up in postcolonial power relations while they simultaneously press for equality and understanding of those who suffer the ongoing impacts of colonialism. Having keenly experienced ethical dilemmas about the voyeurism of undertaking fieldwork and about the writing and representing of others (part of it self-indulgent guilt and part of it a necessary act of acknowledging the complexity of my chosen discipline), I can only write this book because I believe the practice of anthropology—engaging with people for long periods of time and attempting to accurately present their worldviews—is a valuable endeavor that can enrich understandings of the gamut of human experience, within the scholarly community and beyond.

In the following two chapters I examine Cook Islands dance in a broad political, social, and historical context. Together the chapters provide a chronological overview of important issues and debates surrounding contemporary Cook Islands dance practices. Two related themes emerge. The first theme is the negotiation of Cook Islands modernity. Traditions such as dance are crucial to this negotiation in a global, postcolonial setting. The second theme is the central role that discourses about Cook Islands femininity—expressed through idioms of morality, respectability, and containment—play in the evaluation of both tradition and modernity.
In chapter 1, I discuss the role of dance and other expressive forms in precolonial and colonial social life to show the complex historical processes that inform contemporary dance practice. My primary focus is on the way forms of entertainment, tārekareka, have been transformed and renegotiated since European invasion. Chapter 2 examines debates surrounding contemporary dance practice principally on the island of Rarotonga, where the contiguity between dance, government sponsorship, tourism, and other global forces gives these contests an urgency that is not experienced to the same degree on the outer islands. The contemporary dance scene on Rarotonga and the relationship between cultural producers and the tourist industry are my starting point. While tourism is crucial to the performing arts, debates about the industry inflect local concerns about globalization and its impact on Cook Islands values. The main areas of concern that emerge are the perceived rise in individualism over communalism, the commodification of cultural forms, and the influence of religious belief in shaping moral evaluations of tradition and modernity. I pay particular attention to the stark generational difference of opinion about tradition and modernity, and local and global, in contests about culture.

The relationship between dance and Cook Islands femininity is the main focus of the next three chapters. In chapter 3, 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. On the other hand, 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 4, I investigate the culturally specific ways in which cross-dressing and dancing connect with issues of gender, sex, and sexuality through femininity. Both chapters 3 and 4 also illustrate how Cook Islanders use global forms such as beauty pageants (both drag and straight) as performative commentaries on various local social tensions.

I move from public to less formal and visible areas of Cook Islands dance culture in chapter 5, where I consider how Western nightclubs, music, and dance have been transformed and incorporated into Cook Islands performative contexts. Again, these more informal dance contexts are linked to evaluations of femininity and the construction of gender relations more broadly. I explore how tāmataora and tārekareka, the pleasurable, genial aspects of social life, are configured and constructed after dark. Parties and events at nightclubs I attended in the Cook
Islands, aimed to achieve heightened states of happiness through drinking, dancing, and socializing, and yet many ended with drunken arguments, accusations, and sometimes physical fights. While such conflict is not considered ideal, it is commonplace. The embodied contradiction between the convivial and adversarial nature of collective participation fills out the picture of the gendered and exploratory aspects of Cook Islands performance contexts.

Chapter 6 concludes the book by focusing on the role of expressive culture in the maintenance of transnational communities. The chapter follows the movement of Cook Islanders to and from the nation-state, showing how aesthetic exchange is a pivotal component in the arrivals, departures, and events associated with this geographical movement. These exchanges are also related to broader affective and economic concerns and demonstrate the ways in which global and local flows are negotiated by contemporary Cook Islanders.