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Performing Indigenous Sovereignties across the Pacific

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This chapter is a 'writing-performance'; reflecting the spirit of festivals as transient, dynamic, performative, meaning-making engagements. It is located on the increasingly ubiquitous 'ground' of festivals and performances on which Indigenous peoples publicly stage their identities both for themselves and for tourists and other visitors to experience, interpret and value. This performative ground is shaped by the intersection of post-colonial dynamics of places and their peoples, and the forces of commodification, which extend increasingly to culture and identity. Upon this festival 'ground', one core argument repeats the underlying rhythm: Indigenous cultural expression and sovereignty politics are deeply intertwined. They are intertwined in such a way as to open and enable spaces for distinctively Indigenous expressions of agency in the overlapping domains of culture and politics. This is a claim that culture and the performance of culture are deeply political acts.

Overlaying this argument are two very differently situated Pacific festival case studies (from Hilo and Port Moresby), much like dancers embodying and embellishing a rhythmic beat. These trans-Pacific sites provide empirical evidence of the intersection of politics and culture at the core of this argument. The research was undertaken in the spirit of a translocal, comparative ethnographic study of festivals; a touring

methodology of observation, interviews and some participant observation. As observed in many places, anthropologists and tourists have a great deal in common,¹ in particular their attempts to create value from their conspicuous mobilities through the accumulation of carefully curated souvenirs, images, field notes, stories, anecdotes and experiences. Anthropologists generally do not like to be confused for tourists, despite the obvious similarities. The short duration of most of my fieldwork for this research made the resemblance not just likely, but an integral part of my method as tourist-researcher.

This identity conflation was made patently obvious to me in one awkward touristic research moment at the Ho'olaule'a (community hula celebration event) prior to the Merrie Monarch Festival in Hilo on the big island of Hawai'i. I was pulled up on stage to dance by a member of the Tahitian dance troupe, and in the process I became an amusing part of the show, 'Look, Haole (white man) dancing!' This classic, even clichéd, trope reversing the touristic gaze back onto the audience is still an effective power inversion strategy used by performers at tourist events. The awkward dances of tourists pulled on stage are a humorous and potent reminder of the cultural expertise of the real performers, born from long-term training within an ancestral performative tradition. It is my hope that each 'tourist snapshot' in this chapter-performance exceeds simple reinscription into a colonising touristic or anthropological value production system. The 'snapshots' are intended to carry an excess beyond writing; a sense of the performative effervescence that makes cultural performance traditions so engaging; the 'shining' quality as Yolngu Aboriginal aesthetics would have it, or perhaps even its Pacifica mana.²

1 James Clifford, 1997, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; John Hutnyk and Raminder Kaur (eds), 1999, *Travel Worlds: Journeys in Contemporary Cultural Politics*, London, Zed Books; John Hutnyk, 2000, *Critique of Exotica*, London: Pluto Press; Peter Phipps, 2006, 'Tourism and terrorism: An intimate equivalence', in *Tourists and Tourism: A Reader*, ed. Sharon Bohn Gmelch, pp. 71–90, Illinois: Waveland Press.

2 Howard Morphy, 1991, *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Howard Morphy, 2008, *Becoming Art: Exploring Cross-cultural Categories*, Coogee: University of New South Wales Press.



Figure 84. The author dancing awkwardly at the community day.

Source. Photographed by Jason Kimberley, 31 March 2008. Used with permission.

Constrained as we are by both the limits of writing, and an academic heritage that grapples with a divide between intellectual critical practice and performative traditions,³ this chapter is a performative production of value, but necessarily distinct from the brilliant performance traditions to which it seeks to pay due respect.⁴ The gourd rhythm, stamping feet, swaying bodies and chant of Hawaiian hula kuhiko could accompany, enhance and implicitly critique this text. Play the sound track of your choice now; get up and dance.

3 Jacques Derrida, 1982, *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press; Katerina Martina Teaiwa, 2012, 'Choreographing difference: The (body) politics of Banaban dance', *The Contemporary Pacific* 24(1) Spring: 65–94.

4 This research is indebted to the generosity of cultural specialists in Australia, Hawai'i, Papua New Guinea and Kham. It is, among other things, an attempt to reciprocate that generosity by acknowledging these cultural treasures and their ancestral connections in continuity with current struggles.

The claims I make in this touring research agenda are grounded in fieldwork-based case studies of a number of Australian Indigenous festivals, particularly Garma in northeast Arnhem Land,⁵ festivals in Tibetan Amdo, and the two festivals described in this chapter. These two annual festivals are Hiri Moale held in the Papua New Guinea capital Port Moresby, and the Merrie Monarch Festival in Hilo, Hawai'i; the latter contrasted with the experience of a thoroughly commercial Hawaiian cultural performance. The circumstances of these Indigenous peoples vary enormously: from Kanaka Maoli mourning the transformation of their independent Kingdom of Hawai'i into a US military, plantation and recreation outpost, contrasted with the situation of land encroachment experienced by the Motu-Koita people as customary owners of the land and waters in and around Port Moresby as the capital city of an independent post-colonial state.

Ritualised cultural performance has been an integral part of Indigenous encounters with colonising cultures from earliest contacts to the present day. The historical record suggests a broad pattern whereby these performances become more significant in periods when colonial relations are more strongly contested or are shifting into new terrain. Edward Said foregrounds the centrality of anti-colonial, national cultural practice in *Culture and Imperialism*, where the narrativisation of the nation through literature is understood as central to the struggle over sovereignty.⁶ The Subaltern Studies school of Indian historiographers brings this same Foucauldian idea of the ubiquity of power to the performative politics of Indian peasants and tribals resisting colonial authority.⁷ Historians of Pacific colonial encounters such as Inga Clendinnen, Greg Dening, Marshall Sahlins and others, emphasise an acute colonial sensitivity to these performances as a theatre of power integral to the earliest phases of colonisation.⁸ They argue for taking these cultural performances seriously from both sides of the colonial encounter; lifting them out of the historical footnotes

5 Peter Phipps, 2010, 'Performances of power: Indigenous cultural festivals as globally engaged cultural strategy', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 35(3): 217–40.

6 Edward W. Said, 1993, *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Chatto and Windus.

7 Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1988, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press.

8 Inga Clendinnen, 2003, *Dancing with Strangers*, Melbourne, Text Publishing; Greg Dening, 1993, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power, and Theatre on the Bounty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Marshall Sahlins, 1995, *How 'Natives' Think: About Captain Cook, for Example*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

and onto centre-stage of the colonial process—whether it be Captain Cook’s finally fatal encounters with Hawaiian ritual and politics,⁹ or the New South Wales convict colony’s first Governor Arthur Phillip’s misrecognition of his own ritual spearing orchestrated by his adopted kin, Bennelong.¹⁰

I argue that this performative reading of the colonial experience applies equally to other phases of the colonial–post-colonial–decolonial process. The missionary process, for example, has its requisite ritual performances of Christian conversion and adherence, cleanliness and order, while failure to conform with these expectations are read as the inevitable signs of recidivism into a state of savagery requiring constant vigilance, punishment, repentance and reform; all confirming the genocidal logic underpinning imperial-missionary colonialism. The nation-building version of colonialism sets up similar impossible binaries of Indigenous subjectivity, both invoking and rejecting the incorporation of the ‘native’ into the national narrative. It demands ritual performances of enacted good citizenship and exemplary national subjectivity both through performances of Indigenous alterity for and within the nation, and conformity with the norms of national productive labour and reproductive order. Paradoxically those very performances of Indigenous alterity being demanded for the nation (folk dance, corroboree, national-foundational historical re-enactment, ‘traditional’ festival) are symbolic evidence of the inevitable failure to live up to the national-modern ideal, thereby justifying their exclusion through racism and other forms of discrimination. Our ‘good/bad citizen/native’ fails to reach the impossible national ideal even though the colonising-national ‘we’ tried so very hard to include them in this overdetermined colonial theatre of power. This is the closed logic of colonial exclusion critiqued so powerfully in Richard Bell’s artwork and essay, ‘Aboriginal Art – It’s a white thing’.¹¹

9 Gananath Obeyesekere, 1992, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

10 Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*.

11 And related artwork, *Scientia E Metaphysica (Bell’s Theorum)*, more commonly known by the text written across it, ‘Aboriginal Art – It’s a white thing’, which won the 2003 Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award. Richard Bell, 2002. ‘Bells theorum: Aboriginal art – It’s a white thing’, *The Koori History Website Project*. See also Richard Bell, *Australian Art It’s An Aboriginal Thing*, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, TarraWarra Museum of Art collection, 2006.

At every stage of these colonising processes Indigenous peoples have performed serious, often urgent ritual displays and responses to cultural, political, spiritual and ethical domination, and transform or repair social relations through an Indigenous theatre of power. These performances have sometimes been the best strategy available to call colonisers into reciprocal intellectual recognition with Indigenous performative gifts of knowledge and ritual; in effect a realm of Indigenous sovereignty.¹² Tragically, these performances are often misunderstood and trivialised; if they are valued, it is most often for their ability to be commodified as tourist performances, or to enhance the settler-colonial or national narrative. Where their cultural-political significance has been recognised, particularly in more repressive colonial phases or where these Indigenous rituals made overt sovereign claims, they have been answered in further acts of cultural repression and violence. Examples of this dynamic abound, from missionary repression of Hawaiian hula and Aboriginal corroborees (for example, the Mulunga cult of the Kalkadoon resistance), to state repression of Sioux ghost dance rituals or the repeated banning (since 2008) of contemporary Khampa Tibetan horse festivals. Sometimes they have been understood and deeply resonated with individuals and specific groups from the colonising culture, while failing to make inroads at the institutional-social level.

Politics and culture: Indigenous sovereignties

For all this diversity of historical experience and current circumstance, peoples from all these settings hold regular festivals and cultural performances, all treat them as a significant part of their cultural life, and all of them are concerned in different ways, with the question of Indigenous sovereignty; what that means, how to express it, and how to enact and enforce it. It should be no great surprise then that questions of Indigenous sovereign expression are present at Indigenous festivals; sometimes overtly, more often obliquely, and of course in very different ways in these different circumstances, but strongly present nonetheless. For the purpose of this argument, it is

12 Stephen Muecke, 2004, *Ancient & Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press. See particularly Muecke's references to the 'ghost dance' style *Mulunga* cult of late-nineteenth-century Queensland. Similarly the 'adjustment movement' of north east Arnhem Land described in Morphy, *Ancestral Connections*, 1991.

sufficient to understand Indigenous sovereignties, in contradistinction from classical Westphalian nation-state sovereignty, as varied, uneven and frequently overlaying other forms of sovereignty.¹³ For example, some Australian Indigenous groups have various forms of judicially recognised or state legislated native title or gazetted reserves (such as Yolngu in Arnhem Land), with certain rights that follow this recognition, in many cases co-existing with other rights such as leasehold title or mineral rights. In the Pacific, this overlapping or partial sovereignty can be found in the idea of free association of micro-nations such as Cook Islands or Marshall Islands with larger states such as New Zealand or the USA respectively.

More complex, and more challenging still for conventional political science understandings of sovereignty as absolute and singular, is the co-existence of contesting models of sovereignty. In these circumstances the dominant, colonising entity will very often refuse or fail to acknowledge the separate or co-existing sovereign claim of colonised or sub-nationally distinct Indigenous peoples to their full sovereignty (the absolute challenge of separatism), or certain kinds of partial, autonomous sovereign expression. While these concepts are not entirely foreign to post-colonial jurisprudence, it is not surprising that Indigenous notions of partial and overlaying sovereignties are the most substantial conceptual challenge to colonising systems, which see sovereign power as singular domination and any contrary claim as rebellion to be crushed. Indigenous sovereignties can be much more tolerant of ambiguity and multiplicity both for strategic imperatives (colonisers have the guns/police/welfare/law, etc.) as well as generally more open epistemological dispositions based in histories of overlapping and interdependent cultural and territorial domains (sovereignties).

This more complex expression of contested sovereignty, particularly in the massively asymmetrical circumstances of Indigenous groups facing modernising states, is particularly well suited to expression through culture, and in performative cultural expressions. Festivals

13 Aileen M. Moreton-Robinson, 2011, 'Virtuous racial states: The possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples', *Griffith Law Review* 20(3): 641–58; John Bern and Susan Dodds, 2000, 'On the plurality of interests: Aboriginal self-government and land rights', in *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, ed. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton and Will Sanders, pp. 163–65, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

and related performances are condensation events; those theatres of power mentioned earlier, imbued with concentrated symbolic meanings, rich in deliberate communicative acts expressing identity, where forms of lived or aspirational cultural difference are more self-consciously and deliberately curated and performed than in most daily life.¹⁴ Communities' and individuals' cultural purposes in conducting and participating in festivals can include expression of collective identity and solidarity, cultural aspiration and forward projection, cultural nostalgia and reclamation, cultural assertion against other groups and their (sovereign) claims, and of course through all this, the cultivation of pleasure.

The intersection of colonial with capitalist epistemologies has tended to brutally trivialise or commercialise (frequently both) cultural enjoyments unevenly across social space. This burden falls most particularly on colonised and other dominated social groups, and the commercialised display of dominated cultures and bodies for the entertainment and reinscription of the power of the dominant cultures and groups. Jane Desmond traces this process of 'staging tourism' in Hawai'i through the commodification of leisure that has grown exponentially since the late nineteenth century.¹⁵

For Indigenous communities, festivals can be a brilliant strategic vehicle for staging, performing and asserting culture in the context of this dominant capitalist ethos (selling tickets, handicrafts, food, etc.). There need be no contradiction between making commercial uses of culture as a tourist service (though this is frequently a source of internal community tension) while at the same time projecting and renewing it for non-commercial, collective purposes. As Kalissa Alexeyeff has argued in *Dancing from the Heart*, cultural performance has a crucial place in the formation of Cook Islands identities and meaningful, expressive lives that far exceeds the limited utility of the tourist economy.¹⁶ Enjoyment can also be an act of resistance against the dominant global culture and its preferences for productivity and commodified pleasures. Pleasure in the experience of specific, collective cultural difference really matters to people—most urgently

14 Arnold Van Gennep, 1960 [1909], *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

15 Jane Desmond, 1999, *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

16 Kalissa Alexeyeff, 2009, *Dancing from the Heart: Movement, Gender and Sociality in the Cook Islands*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

to groups facing adversity. This is a serious point given the profound existential crisis the experience of (post)colonisation forces on Indigenous peoples.

From Merrie Monarch to tourist Lu‘au

This struggle for cultural survival in the face of colonial cultures of domination and commodification is dramatically illustrated in Hawai‘i. Hula has been a long-standing, ubiquitous presence in the Hawaiian tourism industry,¹⁷ but also has a deep history as a profound cultural practice of spiritual and political significance.¹⁸ Having been repressed by early missionaries in the Hawaiian kingdom, it has had various stages of revival, intimately associated with revivals of Hawaiian identity and claims to sovereignty. The most important of these revivals was in the second half of the nineteenth century when King David Kalākaua brought a modified form of hula back into the official life of the court and thus the international public sphere at his carefully staged Poni Mō‘ī (coronation) event, which was attended by international monarchs and government officials.

Today the US occupation of Hawai‘i is founded on an illegal coup against this Kingdom of Hawai‘i a little over 100 years ago,¹⁹ ostensibly legitimised through the 1959 act of statehood by plebiscite. In this context, cultural performance is no longer seen as any kind of threat to the established (post)colonial order. United States’ hegemonic power at the cultural level is based on the rough settler-colonial equation as follows: massive military presence + performative liberal democracy + demographic dominance + (limited) economic opportunity = settler-colonial legitimacy. Hawaiian sovereignty activists’ continuing cultural challenges to the legitimacy of the colonising state order therefore largely face official indifference, while more overtly political actions such as homeland reoccupations or blockades of military or civil development over sacred sites are brutally repressed.

17 Desmond, *Staging Tourism*.

18 Haunani-Kay Trask, 1999, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai‘i*, Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press; Amy K. Stillman, 1998, *Sacred Hula: The Historical Hula ‘Āla‘apapa*, Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press; Noenoe K. Silva, 2004, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

19 The 1993 US Congress ‘Apology Resolution’ (US Public Law 103–150) signed into law by Bill Clinton recognises US involvement in this overthrow.

Nearly 100 years after Kalākau's initiatives to revive hula and sustain Hawaiian cultural and political sovereignty, another hula revival was underway, epitomised by a festival named in his honour. According to a key figure in this renaissance, and festival founder, Uncle George Na'ope, the Merrie Monarch Festival was initially a state-sponsored tourism initiative in the early 1960s.²⁰ Held annually in Hilo, on Hawai'i Island, by 1971 it had incorporated a hula competition as its core activity, and rapidly became the centrepiece of another revival of the hula tradition. The competition draws in hālau (hula schools) from across the Hawaiian islands and North America, the Hawaiian diaspora in the USA (California, Nevada, Utah and elsewhere), and hula enthusiasts from around the world, particularly Japan.

From its very inception, the Merrie Monarch Festival was organised around the playful device that presumed the festival to be happening under the rule of the last Hawaiian King.²¹ The competition within the Merrie Monarch Festival is overseen by a 'Hawaiian Royal Court' (selected to perform in this role for the duration of the festival) enthroned on an enormous float drawn by a truck. By honouring this Hawaiian monarch, the festival plays with the notion of the continuing sovereignty of the Hawaiian Kingdom, which was overthrown in a coup by American sugar planters in 1893.

This festival, with all its attendant Americanised modernity of a televised competition, ticket sales and t-shirts, has become a key institution in the revival and strengthening of the hula tradition; setting standards and managing innovations in the tradition. The festival is a key institutional element of hula as the living expression of an ancient practice reconfigured to the requirements of international modernity under the Hawaiian Kingdom, and reconfigured again in the face of the onslaught of twentieth-century American military, plantation and tourist capitalism. In her discussion of hula, Hunani-Kay Trask says, 'The cultural revitalization that Hawaiians are now experiencing and transmitting to their children is as much a repudiation of colonization by so-called Western civilization in its American form as it is a reclamation of our own past and our own

20 George Na'ope, 2006, 'The early years of the Merrie Monarch Festival', *Humu Mo'olelo, Journal of the Hula Arts* 1(1): 72–89.

21 Ibid.

ways of life ... its political effect is decolonization of the mind'.²² As a prominent expression of that 'revitalization' Trask describes, and despite being framed by the colonial artifice of 'competition', the festival is a cultural political act towards this 'decolonization of the mind'.

The lu'au as social practice

In stark contrast to the Merrie Monarch festival, as a performance of sovereignty the place of hula (and related Hawaiian cultural forms) in the commercial lu'au is considerably more ambivalent as a performance of sovereignty. 'Germaine's Luau' is a commercial operation owned and managed by a Japanese tourist company on the west coast of Oahu, and is a classic example of the commercialisation of Hawaiian culture into a massified tourist theme park-style experience.

A lu'au is a Hawaiian feast with a long cross-cultural history, which has become a popular, almost obligatory, tourist experience of a commercialised form of Hawaiian culture. I attended Germaine's Luau as part of an academic conference on cultural diversity, and with my fellow academics-become-tourists reacted with varying degrees of self-conscious horror and delight. The experience began as our group was bused from Waikiki along a busy freeway in the southwestern corner of Oahu, past many miles of military bases and the rundown industrial and residential infrastructure that maintains them. All along the way the bus hosts kept up a repartee of good humour, perhaps to distract us from the traffic jams and industrial wastelands we were part of. The bus hosts created a fictive kinship of cousinhood between us, interspersed with friendly jokes about Australian degeneracy, demanding audience participation from reluctant academics on board.

Arriving at Kapolei, the buses came to a stop beside the Campbell Industrial Estate, with a prominent oil refinery immediately in front of us. I arrived with Owens Wiwa, brother of the murdered Nigerian Ogoni delta human rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. Owens knows the smell of oil all too well from his Ogoni Nigerian homeland, and he confirmed the acrid smell of oil processing and its associated petrochemical wastes burning our nostrils. This was the site of Germaine's

22 Trask, "'Lovely hula hands': Corporate tourism and the prostitution of Hawaiian culture'. in *From a Native Daughter*, p. 142.

Luau, where we were unloaded, factory style, to line up and be ‘traditionally greeted by a Hawaiian host’ with the gift of a lei of shells manufactured in the Philippines, and to pose for a photo against the backdrop of the sun setting over the sea and a couple of surviving but sick-looking coconut palms (which were planted by and signify Germaine’s Luau’s original owners). Conference participants, being quick to appreciate the irony of their surroundings, quickly turned their cameras on the aging industrial infrastructure that had been remarkably selected as the setting for this lu’au.



Figure 85. Conference participants and others at Germaine’s Lu’au with refinery in background.

Source. Photo courtesy of Common Ground Conferences, 13 February 2003.

In an echo of the Merrie Monarch festival’s recreation of a temporary performative Hawaiian monarch, we were invited to witness ‘the King and Queen’ of Hawai’i preside over the ceremonial opening of the earth oven (set in concrete), and removal of the cooked pig from within. Unlike the Merrie Monarch festival performance, this ersatz monarch, styled after the first king to unite the Hawaiian islands (Kamehameha I) had the limited duty to perform this one spectacle, and then be gone to leave us undisturbed to our industrial-scale consumption. We were sent by the table to line up and receive our ‘authentic Hawaiian meal’ of rice, poi, pork, chicken, fish and so on, on a disposable polystyrene platter.

Our large group sat with many many others at benches and tables, eating our lu'au foods as a floor show of 'Polynesian culture', mostly Tahitian-style dance and fire twirling, was performed on stage and broadcast over loudspeakers. This was interrupted by visits to the bar for our '3 complimentary exotic cocktails' of brightly coloured drinks, which by their very names signal the link between American imperialism and its leisure culture: 'Blue Hawaiian' and 'Pina Colada'.

Despite an Adorno-style academic predisposition for anomie when subject to mass-culture consumption experiences,²³ the conference participants made the most of the evening and most tried to enjoy themselves. One academic (not me this time) was enticed to join the 'audience participation' segment of the floor show, being dressed with a few other male visitors in grass skirts and coconut brassieres for a transcultural 'drag show', where the audience voted by voice for the best dancer. The Germaine's Luau staff appeared habituated to this performative parody of their cultures, being seen enjoying a meal and conversation, laughing relaxed together off to the side of the main scene. Afterwards, as we were reloading on to our buses, some of the 'professional Polynesian' protagonists of the floor show were practicing their fire-stick skills, and appearing to coach each other in slight improvements in performance, which along with some of the dancing showed moments of real virtuosity. These small moments of normal behaviour in the 'behind-the-scenes' narrative are a reminder of the everydayness of the flattening out of social and community life into forms available for easy commodification. Trask describes the process by which young Hawaiians are drawn into this normalised world of cultural commodification,

Hawaiians, meanwhile, have little choice in all this. We can fill up the unemployment lines, enter the military, work in the tourist industry, or leave Hawai'i. Increasingly, Hawaiians are leaving, not by choice but out of economic necessity.

Our people who work in the industry-dancers, waiters, singers, valets, gardeners, housekeepers, bartenders, and even a few managers-make between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year, an impossible salary for a family

23 Hutnyk, *Critique of Exotica*.

in Hawai'i. Psychologically, our young people have begun to think of tourism as the only employment opportunity, trapped as they are by the lack of alternatives.²⁴

Germaine's Luau positions Hawaiians and the other Polynesians who work there as relatively passive cultural ciphers, serving 'happily' in the tourism industry as cultural performers and catering staff. On learning conference delegates were being sent to Germaine's Luau, Hawaiian sovereignty activist Mililani Trask, a keynote speaker at the conference, had insisted we should attend precisely because of these experiences of grotesque commodification of Hawaiian culture. As tourist-academics, the experience also provoked the possibility that none of us is immune from the alienating experience of self-commodification; academics can also become paid performers of commodified parodies of our deeper cultures and selves.

Hiri Moale, urban space and resource royalties

The Hiri Moale festival is a celebration of Motu-Koita identity, the Papuan traditional owners of land and sea in and around Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea. The festival is also a complex local strategy for reasserting this Indigenous sovereignty within the city, renewing local traditions, while also providing the centrepiece of nation-day celebrations in the capital. Port Moresby faces many of the same challenges as other rapidly growing cities in the resource-rich developing world. With a mostly rural population living in subsistence-based tribal communities, the 35-year-old post-colonial state has only ever had a very shallow penetration into the social fabric. Increasingly, this remarkably diverse rural population is coming to the city for services and opportunities, and changing both local and national politics in the process. For the Motu-Koita landowners this shift puts them at the centre of national urban development with all its attendant risks and opportunities, and inevitable cultural anxieties.

24 Trask, "'Lovely hula hands': Corporate tourism and the prostitution of Hawaiian culture', in *From a Native Daughter*, p. 145.

Essentially, the Hiri Moale festival revolves around commemorating and preserving memory of the historic Motuan hiri trade of epic voyages and their related cultural practices, and has become a major event in the life of Motu-Koita people living in and around Port Moresby, as well as a significant event for many other residents of the city. Held annually in Port Moresby, it has been timed to coincide with the PNG independence day celebrations in mid-September every year (except 2008). This timing is strategic, as it justifies and attracts local government and other funding for the festival, but it also links the festival into complex dynamics as a local Indigenous event embedded within the multi-ethnic, capital-city celebrations of national independence.

In a program extending over six days, the Hiri Moale festival has a number of key elements and events. Two key elements lie at its centre: the construction and sailing of two lagatoi (large, multi-hulled Motu vessels specific to the hiri trade) and the Hiri Hanenamo, or 'Hiri maiden' selection. Structured as a competition, the Hiri Hanenamo panel of judges assesses young women already selected by their community to represent each of the 16 Motu-Koita villages on the performance of traditional dance, a test of Motu cultural knowledge and language and, in the spirit of beauty contests, the ability to present and converse with dignity in formal western evening wear.

The signature event of the festival, and most popular, is held at specially built elevated huts and shade shelters at Ela Beach. The lagatoi sail into Ela Beach packed with singing villagers from the villages selected to build them from scratch over eight weeks. The singers on the lagatoi are answered by the crowd massed on the beach to greet them. After speeches and the exchange of gifts by the lagatoi captains to Assembly and local government officials, the Hiri Hanenamo emerge from the huts in grass skirts and naked 'tattooed' torsos, calling out and swaying in time, under the watchful eye of the judges, and a large crowd bolstered partly by men motivated by the relative novelty of seeing *kastom* (hence topless) female dancers in increasingly modern Port Moresby.

The Hiri Hanenamo tattoo designs are drawn on the young women's bodies by their mothers and grandmothers using marker pens in place of traditional permanent tattoos. This layering of traditional designs on the skin as a temporary performance of customary ways of

being associated with hiri, and hence deep Motu cultural traditions, involves a complicated set of negotiations for the community and for the young women themselves. The first of these is shedding normal city clothes for the customary costume described above, but also immersion in archaic language, songs and knowledge related to the hiri tradition. Another layer of complexity is added by the fact that hiri is a seafaring Motu tradition, but the competition is open to contestants from traditionally inland-dwelling Koitabu communities, since the two identities are now practically and politically intertwined in the structure and politics of everyday life in and around Port Moresby. Some other of these negotiations are not unrelated to the tensions inherent in 'beauty pageants' everywhere, which fetishise traditional, somewhat archaic ideas of female beauty and gender-specific cultural competence, while repressing other aspects of young women's actual experience of their place in the world. This is a dialectic that requires them to be both emblems or paragons of community traditions and virtues, while also being effective, competent social actors in the increasingly globally connected modern city. The overlay of these dual identities is captured symbolically in the image below: the traditional pattern drawn on in temporary marker pen, while a popular icon of global feminine identity, the blooming rose, is tattooed permanently beside it.

The festival culminates in a big cultural event that includes a street parade and performances by neighbouring and related cultural groups resident in mosbi at the Hubert Murray stadium (headquarters of the Motu-Koita Assembly), by extension an acknowledgement by those groups of the special status of Motu-Koita in the city. The event closes with more performances by the Hiri Hanenamo, speeches and the awarding of the Hiri Hanenamo title and sash to the winner. The winner has the benefit of a paid office position with the Assembly for a year, in addition to the personal, family and village prestige brought by her victory.



Figure 86. Hiri Hanenamo tattooed lower leg.

Source. Photographed by Peter Phipps, 17 September 2010.

While all this annual activity reinforces the presence and a certain cultural authority of Motu-Koita in mosbi, it is not uncontested. In 2006, a clan leader from Boera village (just outside the National Capital District area) applied for a court injunction to prevent the Hiri Moale festival from proceeding. Boera village has a special status as the origin site of the hiri legend, knowledge and tradition, being shared

with other Motu villages from there. This legal action was motivated by a sense that the special status of the customary authorities in Boera were not being properly acknowledged by the provincial government authorities who ran the festival at that time. While unsuccessful, the court action reasserted Boera's place in the hiri tradition, a contestation of internal Motu authority motivated substantially by resource royalty politics that has become a major disruptive force in Motu-Koita internal dynamics for most of the past decade. The rights to stage a cultural performance tradition such as this can just as easily intersect with the overwhelming dynamics of the global resource extraction industry as in this case study from Papua New Guinea.

Conclusion—indigenous theatres of power

The case studies discussed briefly in this chapter illustrate the potent connections between contemporary cultural performance and claims to Indigenous power in two very different Pacific contexts. These Indigenous theatres of power draw on strong local cultural roots, but are the product of highly adaptive, mobile cultural forms. In this chapter I have tried to illustrate that hula, lu'au and hiri are variously Hawaiian and Motuan cultural traditions, but their contemporary staging is through hybrid, mobile cultural forms derived from colonial experience and the available global palette of performative modes, in these cases respectively: a dance competition, a tourist dinner show and a beauty pageant-style format. The first and last of these being embedded in the thoroughly globalised form of 'the festival', which is well established as both a commercial and cultural form throughout the Pacific and beyond. While the more overtly touristic 'dinner show' format of the lu'au experience may provide fewer opportunities to articulate Indigenous sovereignties, indeed they may have more of a tendency to reinscribe stereotypes of the happily subaltern 'native', even these thoroughly commercial stagings have subversive elements and opportunities for at least staging ambivalence towards the (post)colonial order. Whether it be under the oppressive authority of missions, other colonising state agencies, or the independent nation-state and the related pressures on land and resources from vastly powerful interests as in Papua New Guinea, festivals and other staged cultural performances have been spaces for mobility, contesting power, reforming identities and asserting Indigenous differences across the Pacific.

Despite, and sometimes even enabled by, the increasing mobility and commodification of identity and culture, these performances continue to contest the idea of a single sovereign power or cultural value. Instead, performances of these Pacific cultures are deployed to disrupt and reorient dominant national and sub-national social formations and insist on the co-existing Indigenous sovereignties discussed at the outset of this chapter. This doesn't mean these performances of power will prevail over other social forces, but they are a significant component in the contested dialogue between Indigenous communities and other social actors, institutions and forces. To perform and celebrate culture, despite its marginalisation and distortion by dominant cultures, the colonising state or processes of commodification, is an expression of the will to continue to exist in difference despite those cultures of domination which trivialise, degrade or reify Indigenous cultural difference. That stubborn insistence to survive and persist is in itself an act of resistance and a sovereign expression of the most existential kind.

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