UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII
MANOA

Living the Dance: The March 5th Celebration

research submitted
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES

Aurelia Anastasia Kinslow

June 2005

Committee

Kathy Ferguson
Terence Wesley-Smith
Katerina M. Teaiwa, Chair
To Tunui and Roberto who taught me that:

“Dance is a lifestyle”
I would like to humbly acknowledge my mother and father Diane and Hosea Koani, my godfather Benoit Flicoteaux and my grandmother Edna Lee Samuel for their unconditional love and support; Tunui Tully and Roberto Vargas Jr. who taught me the art of expression and that “dance is a lifestyle”; and of course my undying gratitude and admiration goes to Makau Foster.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my advisors Katerina Teaiwa, Kathy Ferguson and Terence Wesley-Smith, as well as to David Hanlon for his kindness and encouragement. I would like to pay tribute to the many people who have given freely of their time, hearts and resources to contribute to this project. A partial list includes: Roiti Silva, Katia Sanfal, Rosemary Casey, Pierre-Marie Decoudras, Jack Ward, Bruno Saura, Sylvia Richaud, Jerome Feldman, Sonia Daoui, Alistra Bruel, Amanda E. K. Budde, Hinanui Cauchois, Tamara Marie, Olivier Ragon, Fabrice “Cheick” Juste, Annalisa Vetrone, Tanya Tahauri, Anne-Laure Tanchoux, Telly Gotin, Teraimaeva and Vainono Faraire, Telesia “Tui” Fihipalai, Make, the staff and friends from the Foyer de Jeunes Filles, Terou Piritua, Kelly Terorotua, Terito Izal, Kelani Perrone, Reiri, Ariinatai Lichtle, Nathalie and François Bernier, Carmen Nolte. Mauruuru roa! Kuraura kia koutou. Yours always, Ka’ili.
SYNOPSIS OF DVD

*Living the Dance: The March 5th Celebration*

The montage on the attached DVD gives a visual representation of the author’s lived experience in Tahiti in the spring of 2005 as she is unexpectedly invited to participate in the first of a week-long, annual protestant cultural festival in commemoration of the arrival of Christianity in Tahiti. The montage is built in three parts.

The first part gives a glimpse of the political climate upon the author’s arrival in Tahiti with the campaigning and demonstrations in the streets of Papeete. The second part shows the members of the dance group as they prepared for the performance in the March 5th festivities. Weaved into this narrative is Terito’s casual performance of one of the group’s most heart-felt numbers, “O òe to òe rima”, with the song interpreted by Bobby Holcomb playing in the background. Finally, the night of the performance is shown, with images of the group’s presentation as well as clips from several of the other groups that performed that evening.
Introduction

On March 5th, 1797, the Duff, a ship carrying thirty missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived in Tahiti and anchored at Matavai Bay. According to Louise Peltzer in *Chronologie des événements politiques, sociaux et culturels de Tahiti et des archipels de la Polynésie Française*, a light earthquake had shaken the island of Tahiti two days earlier (Peltzer 2002, 25-27). This was a sign of ominous proportions to many.

On the morning of their arrival, the passengers of the Duff were still trying to dry out from the storms they had encountered at sea a few days earlier. They reached the western shores of Tahiti the previous evening, and saw the sun rise from across the district of Ahutaru. On land, King Pomare was on leave to Taiarapu to gather the arii. His seventeen-year-old son Tu and his wife were watching the ship come to shore. On the cliffs of Mount Aorai, Vaiareti’s gaze was hesitant, moving between the large white sail on the horizon and his father, whose body was extensively tattooed, who walked toward the marae for the routine offering to Oro. On the coast, the rumour spread and left many in wonder. “Who’s coming?” The inhabitants of the island recalled voyagers like Samuel Wallis, James Cook, Louis-Antoine Bougainville, and William Bligh, who’d come successively since 1767. Suspicious, the old Hitoti, demanded that his arms be brought. This new canoe without balancer could bring alcohol or epidemic! As the missionaries prepared for landing on the island, the great priest Ha’amanemane who was in his fare, asked one of his five wives to prepare tapa and a tiputa. He wished to greet the newcomers in a generous and dignified manner, and perhaps also hoped that they would
offer him some gunpowder. At shore, the arioi were already pushing their canoes out. They would near the ship before anyone else (Marsauche 1997, 9-10).

This passage in time, re-imagined by French Polynesia journalist Gilles Marsauche introduces the arrival of the London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries. The bringing of the Bible by the LMS missionaries is an event thought to be very significant in the history of Tahiti, and for its impact on Tahitian society. This event is well celebrated in contemporary Tahiti. Every year on March 5th, it is commemorated in a holiday called ‘l’arrivée de l’évangile’. This year, I had the privilege of witnessing the festivities that for the first time, the Protestant church presented in the form of a week-long festival. It was a wonderful celebration of Tahitian culture with music, dance and other types of traditional activities, which I found rather ironic as the church itself has contributed to the near eradication of similar aspects of culture across the region.

Throughout Pacific history the relationship between the church and dance has mainly been one of total repression. Native forms of music like drumming the pahu were forbidden and so were the dances that accompanied them since foreigners labeled the movements lascivious and indecent.

In fact in Tahiti, these same missionaries would have major influence in the creation of a series of law codes aimed at conducting the government of Pomare Vahine I in all lands under her sovereignty including the islands of Tahiti and Moorea. Created in 1842, it was titled the Code Pomare (Pomare code). It contained one particular law made up of six articles that banned dances and songs judged inappropriate and troublesome (Fayn, 5 Apr 2005). But during the late twentieth century and into the 21st, this historical tide would be reversed in an astonishing way.
Considerations, Methods and Approach

‘Ori Tahiti or Tahitian dance plays a central role in contemporary Tahitian society’s community celebrations and gatherings like weddings, public dedications, and receptions for visiting groups. However, the context of entertainment for tourists is the one ‘Ori Tahiti is best known for. At the onset of this research project I set out to show that like many other forms of performance, ‘Ori Tahiti can be a powerful tool for the expression of political viewpoints and activism. As opposed to taking an approach often employed in past studies in which the focus was in describing and analyzing the dance form in itself, I offered to begin to locate these performance traditions within the cadre of power relations with the West. I wanted to offer a new look at ‘Ori Tahiti from the perspective of a long-time performer of this dance form, in hopes that this study will in turn motivate further interest in the resistance of the Maohi people to French colonialism and in the role dance plays to promote change.

In my preparative work before taking on the research, I carefully considered different authors’ suggestions for researchers. Annette Lareau’s essay titled “Appendix Common Problems in Field Work: A Personal Essay” mentioned the “traps, delays, and frustrations which inevitably accompany field work,” and refers to the type of situations where researchers may encounter difficulties say in conducting interviews, or in finding crucial information in the place or context where the researcher expects to find it. Yet for the research project I planned to undertake, I thought it would’ve been favorable to remain flexible as I moved into the project and encountered different obstacles. I chose to keep a relaxed grip on certain ideas, enough so to allow different and perhaps less obvious details to come into view. This proved to be by far the most beneficial concept during the
period of research, as indeed much of my material came to me in unanticipated ways, while its structure was taking shape on site as I lived it out in dance and in personal encounters.

Another consideration I looked carefully into during my preparations to do research was in the issue of the insider/outsider debate. Nancy Naples raises it in her book *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research* (2003). This debate carries a lot of weight in Naples’ discipline of anthropology, and subsequently is also a hot topic in Pacific Islands Studies, an interdisciplinary field very much built on anthropology. It has considerable bearing in fields that used and scrutinized indigenous knowledge but were dominated by foreigners. As more indigenous scholars emerged from these very fields, they began to re-claim this knowledge as their own and challenge foreign scholars whose studies were Eurocentric and offered little to the societies and peoples that they studied. This is a complex debate, and much has been written in efforts to solve it. But it was only when I searched outside of my home department and explored feminist theory that I found a satisfactory answer to this question.

Naples has a very particular way of making sense of the Insider vs. Outsider dichotomy. With a materialist feminist analysis, she “challenges the false divide between insider and outsider research and between so-called objective or scientific and indigenous knowledge … by recognizing the fluidity of insiderness and outsideness”. She goes on to suggest that,

we are never fully outside or inside the ‘community’; our relationship to the community is never expressed in general terms, but is constantly being negotiated and
renegotiated in particular, everyday interactions, and these interactions are themselves enacted in shifting relationships among community residents (ibid, 49-66).

From the onset, I felt strongly about this author’s position, having experienced these ambiguous kinds of situations several times in the past. I anticipated that in Tahiti these categories would be as fluid as Naples describes in her text. The things that could qualify me as insider could be things like the language I speak, my physical appearance, my ability to dance and my understanding of the songs and gestures, or even a thing as simple as being a woman. In a different context these very things could make me an outsider. My Parisian accent in French is one I’ve already had experiences with as people from the metropolis are often viewed with suspicion, and it is sometimes puzzling for some people from Tahiti who initially think that I am Tahitian because of my physical appearance to hear me speak in this way.

On site, this insider vs. outsider “dilemma” turned out to be far less problematic than it is often made to be, and I agree all the more with Naples’ analysis. The borders between the inside and the outside categories are always quite fluid, changing as environment, time and personalities vary. In person, I’ve always found that the best thing to do is to try and introduce oneself in terms that are familiar to the other person in order to find connections.

This project was to be in two parts with a written component and a photo and short film montage to complement my narrative. My methods included interviewing, participant observation, archival and library research, photographing and keeping a personal journal. Participant observation, I liked to define as my own participation in dance classes at least twice a week, where I would take care to keep a certain level of
awareness of the material being taught, of the students’ behavior and responses, and of the contexts in which the numbers would later be performed.

Along with the courses I signed up for at the university, I had arranged to take dance classes from one of my mentors, Makau Foster, sensing that my research would depend highly on what I learned as a participating member of one or more dance groups. In fact, my intuition proved sound as interacting within these organizations was what primarily fueled my research in Tahiti.

Like all research undertakings, my project entailed quite a bit of library and archival research. My initial research in that sphere involved finding material on resistance and dance. As I began making sense of my on-site findings, I began including more historical material, and information on the main contributors to the cultural renewal of Tahiti. This research began to give me a good sense of the historical context in which different resistance movements took root.

Another exercise I employed during my research was keeping a personal journal. This proved to be quite an effective method as it enabled me not only to record the events of the day, but also to keep track of the different feelings, as well as the different hopes and frustrations that go with the process of research. This method was immensely helpful in narrowing and clarifying my focus, and in grounding my research. It also gave me interesting material to build my project around, as I could draw from the journal to explain how I proceeded in doing my project, and give a description of how it worked on a personal level.

All of the methods and considerations that I looked into before my departure proved to be helpful on site. I am particularly glad to have followed my committee chair
Katerina Teaiwa’s advice to “stay open” and not cling too tightly to my ideas so as not to let any fresh insights pass me by, and it was this special awareness that enabled me to envision the specific nuances and particularities that shaped this project.

Making sure my camera was handy at all times, I shot at special events, at interviews, and captured landscapes and the city. I would then arrange and re-arrange these images on my computer in order to let my narrative stand out on its own and perhaps link them with words, in poetic or narrative form, or with short video clips of dances in motion. I repeated this exercise regularly, combining the images with my video clip footage together to form a montage. This eventually resulted in the creation of the DVD named “Living the Dance: The March 5th Celebration”, my complement to the written component that is presented together with this paper (the synopsis of the DVD is attached with the visual component package).

The process of creating this montage was in itself very helpful to the overall making of this project. It helped me to formulate a clear outline for my written work as it forced me to visualize the different sections and order the images into a narrative. My initial outline for the written work came out of my visual component. From that point on, I could build on this outline, adding new data and details to clarify my ideas. After I had produced the DVD, I felt more prepared to relate my ideas in written form, and also more confident in my ability to take on the written component once I knew I had completed one entire project of its own.

Now I will present a detailed account of the experiences that led up to my encounter with this fascinating subject. I begin with my arrival in Tahiti and my residence in the “Foyer de Jeunes Filles”. I explain how I got involved in the first annual...
week long festival in celebration of the 5th of March holiday. I describe some of the preparations involved, and the meaning of the numbers performed by our dance group. I follow into a presentation of individuals who had a tremendous role in the cultural renewal of the late nineteen-sixties to seventies, and who brought a fresh outlook to the Protestant church that would be more indigenous-centered, and that would privilege indigenous culture rather than oppress it. Finally I present an exposé of the various levels on which dance has persisted and grown over the years – from the Tiurai (later known as the Heiva), the work of very talented choreographers and group leaders such as Madeleine Mou’a, and through the work of her successors who like she often turned dance into political and social commentary. In my last example of this, I come back to the night of the March 5th festival and to my experience as a participant. I present this event as a product of all of the previous examples combined: the cultural renewal, the work of Henri Hiro and other activists, the boldness of Madeleine Mou’a and Coco Hotahota’s flair for controversy, and a church that has become increasingly more indigenous-centered over the years.

French Polynesia’s Protestant church (Église Evangélique de Polynésie Française – E.E.P.F.) would have an unexpected and fascinating role in the cultural renewal begun in the early sixties and seventies. My task in this paper is to show the different ways in which dance in Tahiti has benefited from this revival of culture, and to show that today the church is a significant contributor to the revaluing and the continued promotion of Tahitian dance.
Le Foyer de Jeunes Filles

On January 29th, I departed from Honolulu to Tahiti to continue studying the Tahitian language at the University of French Polynesia (UPF) and to further my Master’s research. This trip was made possible by the Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship granted to me until the end of the spring semester of 2005. During the preparations that preceded my trip, the director of international relations at UPF offered me two housing options. The first would be on campus in dorms, and the second was at the Protestant-run housing complex for young women called the “Foyer de Jeunes Filles de Paofai.” After consulting with Tahitian friends in Hawaii, I opted for the Foyer, since I figured it would offer a friendly and supportive environment to begin with, as well as a place that was reasonably close to town. My friends had strongly suggested that the campus housing was poorly lit at night, was too isolated for comfort with buses running infrequently and irregularly, and was too far from the supermarket to walk. It seemed logical to move into the Foyer.

Friends of my Tahitian friends in Hawaii picked me up from the airport when I arrived around midnight of January 30th. Tamara and her boyfriend Olivier drove me directly to the Foyer and helped me haul my suitcases up the five flights of stairs that led up to my room on the highest floor. As we began our painful climb into the dark staircase of the building, I began to see piles of rubble and tile, heaps of dust. I nearly tripped over stairs that were uneven. When we arrived on the last floor, we could see that at least twenty pieces of large furniture had been laid on top of one another and filled the long hall.
A stream of thoughts began running through my head, “Is this where I’ve got to live? Is it always this dirty? Doesn’t anyone clean up?” Then, when I opened the door to my room a waft of the scent of moldy laundry escaped from inside. There were two beds positioned on opposite sides of the room. One was covered with a single white sheet, the other, covered by three small pillows and a tifaifai\(^1\) was unmade. Books and sheets of paper covered the desk next to it, and various objects could be seen lying on the floor. My nervousness redoubled, “Oh no, does this mean I’ve got to live with a messy roommate?! Didn’t anyone tell her that someone was moving in to share the room? Is this the way people are welcomed around here?!?” My friends also expressed their awkward feeling about the place, having never imagined it to be in such a ruinous state. I took a deep breath to gather myself, put all of my things down, and accepted my friends invitation to go get something to eat. It was a good thing that the roulottes at Place Vaiete were still serving food. Some of them serve food past 3 am on weekend nights.

It was reassuring to find that my roommate was actually a very friendly person who did not hesitate to do what she could to help make my transition from one Pacific country to another smoother. The next day, I awoke to the beautiful voices of the women singing Tahitian hymns at the Protestant church next door, and my roommate offered to show me around town. She showed me all the essentials, including the market and the pharmacies nearby, as well as the least expensive bookstore to buy my Tahitian literature. We were on our way back when loud voices and honking could be heard in the streets below the Vaima shopping complex. A stream of cars could be seen rolling slowly down the narrow street with people inside and beside them waving blue and white flags. Men, women and

\(^1\) Tahitian blanket or quilt made with light cloth printed with island motifs.
small children of predominantly Tahitian background were present. This demonstration was led by the independence party to campaign for leader Oscar Temaru.

On May 23rd of 2004, Temaru was elected president of French Polynesia, but his government was overturned by a censure motion vote initiated by his opponent Gaston Floss. Temaru’s presidency had only lasted four months. Temaru then requested for French President Jacques Chirac to dissolve Tahiti’s parliament and for new elections to be held that would legitimate his presidency. In a letter sent by fax to the Elysée Palace in Paris, Temaru stated,

I present a new request for dissolution while insisting on the absolute need for such a measure. The voters of French Polynesia, deeply attached to democratic values and republican principles (a sense of citizenship and national security), cannot understand that their vote could be diverted in such an obvious way and be so little respectful of their wishes.” (Tahitipresse, 15 Oct 2004)

In October of that year, a demonstration of at least 15,000 people was held in Papeete to demand the dissolution of the parliament and to show support for pro-independence leader Oscar Temaru. This was the largest rally ever held in French Polynesia.

After a very lengthy decision making process, the French government finally granted a re-election to French Polynesia. This was only a partial election, leaving out the islands of Tahiti and Moorea on which the populations are the largest. I came to Tahiti in the midst of the campaigning for these re-elections.

From the time I arrived, the competing parties of Gaston Floss (Tahoeraa Huiraatira), and Oscar Temaru (Tavini Huiraatira) held many rallies in the streets of Papeete. When there were no organized rallies, people would ride around town with their
pick-up trucks adorned with flags. People on foot wore their party tee shirts or simply represented their allegiance by wearing the colors orange for the Tahoeraa, or blue for the Tavini. Teenagers and young men rode around on their bikes with their flags attached to the back of their seats. Even the trucks (the local buses) demonstrated by placing flags in the drivers’ cabin or attaching flags to the sides of the vehicle. One truck had nearly built an altar to his preferred party leader in the driver’s cabin. He had Oscar Temaru’s picture glued to the windshield with shell crowns around it and plastic flowers laid below it. On February 5th, an especially large parade took place where the streets were filled with thousands of people (see figure 1).

The Foyer did offer the support I’d expected to find from a close-knit community of young women. I met friends within the first week that I’ve kept in touch with since. It was also a very exciting time to be living in the middle of Papeete. However, the living conditions within the establishment were unbearable by my standards. There was enough dust to give half of the girls constant allergies. There was seldom any hot water in the evenings, hazardous construction material were strewn about the halls at all times and yet the work never seemed to progress. Construction workers with missing teeth accosted the young women nearly each morning as they passed to reach the bathroom at the other side of the long hallway. I could only stand a month of this – the time by which my rent money ran out – but during that period I was able to meet very interesting people. And I soon found out that the women in the organization’s staff and management were also quite involved in the community.

One of the Foyer’s staff hailed me over as I passed the office one afternoon. She told me that she was one of the main organizers of a large Protestant gathering that would
be a celebration of the local youth and Tahitian culture. Tahiti and the outer islands are zoned into subdivisions (arrondissements) that are numbered and recognized by the Tahitian Protestant church. All over the islands, performers were being called upon to represent their subdivisions and perform at the festival in Papeete.

Within the city of Papeete, the Protestant church recognized two subdivisions. The Foyer de Jeunes Filles stood in one of them, and the lady was helping pool dancers for it. She’d heard that I was an experienced dancer and was convinced that I was very good since I came from Hawaii. When I asked her why she believed this, she answered that most Tahitian dancers she’d seen or heard of from Hawaii were the cream of the crop and were known to be very serious and dedicated dancers. She then offered to pick me up every Saturday morning to practice for this performance at the junior high school named after Tahiti’s last queen, Pomare IV.

Preparing for March 5th

We began practicing in earnest a few days later, and I’d already begun dancing with Makau Foster’s dance school once to three times a week. All of the girls were quite young. Some were between the ages of twelve and fifteen with maybe one or two eighteen-year olds, and two others who like I, were in their early twenties. There were to be about twenty of us girls performing and about six boys between the ages of twelve and fifteen.

As for our drummers, the group leader had worked on recruiting mostly children in an effort to reflect the festival’s theme, “Jeune, vis ta foi, construis ton avenir” –
Youth, Live your Faith, Build your Future. All of the drummers were boys and were mostly teenagers, but there was also a nine year old, and a ten year old. The group also included at least two adults to offer guidance to the less experienced, but the numbers varied as attendance was not regular. There were women among the group of musicians who sang, but the drumming was reserved for the young boys to showcase their talent despite their young age.

In Tahitian dance, it is more common for the drumming to be interpreted by men. This has shown true in my experience with several dance groups and for the myriad other groups I’ve seen perform. In an article entitled, “Gender and its Relationship to the Essential Traits of Tahitian Dance” (1989), Jane Moulin discusses this particularity explaining that in her four years of work as a participant observer of the drumming which accompanies ote’a, she never once saw a female playing the to’ere or the fa’atete whereas she has seen a female play the pahu in a case of extreme emergency (ibid, 3).

Nowadays, women can be seen playing the to’ere though this is still unusual. For instance, the Hawaii-based Polynesian dance troupe Te Vai Ura Nui once had two female musicians at a time, whom alternated between playing pahu, ukulele and to’ere as well as the fa’atete. California-based Nonosina’s lead to’ere drummer is a woman. At first, I wondered if this difference came from the cultural influence of the US, and that perhaps women who desired to play drums in Tahiti were looked down upon. But upon further investigation, I found that this is not the case. I found that at the Conservatoire of Tahiti, a well-recognized and respected institution, some of the young percussion students were girls. Moreover, one of my informants related that her father who was an accomplished drummer had tried to teach his daughters to play percussions. He encouraged them to
become performing drummers. She said that she was willing to learn the basics, but didn’t pursue her drumming any further. Her opinion was that in general the women are simply more interested in dancing (interview 2 May 2005).

We practiced over a period of a month and a half, and until the last week, we only practiced for an hour or two on Saturdays. The same went for the drummers, and this was quite unfortunate since they were learning everything on the spot and were not experienced enough to compensate for this.

Every Tahitian percussion group must have a leader to call out the different phases of the number being played, just like a conductor would for a classical music concert. But this groups’ leader was seldom present, which caused disarray amongst the drummers, with self-appointed leaders competing with each other to direct the rest of the group. This was quite frustrating for the young members of the group and equally frustrating for the dancers who tried to learn dances on half-learned songs.

There were also leaders among the dancers. The main one was the instructor who had composed the entirety of the show, but he had stretched himself between creating the costumes, teaching and conducting the young musicians and singers, teaching the girls’ and the boys’ dances separately, as well as preparing some theatrical interludes meant to be played out between the dance numbers. He was thus obliged to ask one of the eldest and most experienced dancers to teach the numbers.

The attendance of the committed dancers was far from perfect and the same held for the leaders. Was it a lack of dedication? Did it stem from an ego problem? Or were the different absentees genuinely busy? Whatever their reasons were, these consistent absences led to my being recruited as a leader more than once, as I was one of the three
more experienced dancers and one who never missed rehearsals. Then, at the end of our second rehearsal, three of the main organizers called me over. I knew immediately that they were going to demand something serious. The instructor said that to each performance in this festival, a “best dancer” was to perform a solo to represent their group and their subdivision. He wanted to know if I’d be willing to perform the part. I was shocked and awkwardly replied that there were others in the group who were more talented than I, but the leaders insisted, and in a pitiful attempt to get myself out of the situation I exclaimed, “but I’ve only been here for two weeks!” “That’s OK,” said one of the organizers smiling, she insisted that I would do really well, but that was actually beside the point. Something was making feel quite uncomfortable about the whole situation and it wasn’t the solo performance itself. I sensed that a situation that I had found myself caught in more than once in my experience as a performer risked repeating itself. That is, a situation where everything is completely disorganized, where numbers and costumes are half prepared in the rush, where communication breaks down between the instructor and the students – in other words, a situation that can become degrading for all involved. This feeling of apprehension was too strong to ignore, so I asked if I could think about it before giving them a definite answer.

During the following practices the girls rehearsed the same ote’a ² and ‘aparima ³ we had learned in the first two rehearsals, but one ‘aparima remained unlearned. This was the fairest of all our songs, “O ‘oe to’oe rima” interpreted by Bobby Holcomb a

---

² ote’a: the Tahitian dance genre most consistent with the ancient style of dancing, and most often accompanies a heavy ensemble of percussions.

³ ‘aparima: a more modern Tahitian dance genre which often employs slower moves, and which accompanies music which features voice and string instruments.
Hawaiian expatriate to the Tahitian Islands, native rights and cultural activist, and close friend of Henri Hiro, the original composer of the poem by the same title.

Together with the singers and the musicians, the dancers had begun learning this song before the dance itself. Many of us became very attached to this song since we had learned the meaning of the words and sensed the emotional impact of the song before we began to learn the moves. The actual instruction of the dance began when the group leader, the main leader of the female dancers, and I met the third “elite dancer” – as the teacher tended to refer to us – to catch her up on all of the rehearsals she hadn’t attended. She was a dance instructor herself and was quite busy with her work, so we met her at her studio. Here, the two of us taught her all of the numbers she had missed in one session since she has a very keen memory. When we were through, the instructor taught us the final ‘aparima.

The instructor would inform me of his purpose in creating this performance as he dropped me off after our final rehearsal. He employed the song “O ‘oe to ‘oe rima” in the second part of our presentation in an effort to reflect the aforementioned theme of the festival, which he interpreted as “your life is in your hands, use them”. He elaborated, “if you are in a rut, it is because you’ve created it. Use your own hands to change your future.” Through this number, he aimed to re-present this message through culture, in the words of the culture. And like Hiro when he wrote the poem, like Holcomb when he interpreted the verses into a song, the group leader meant to encourage the youth to continue living their culture through his choreography and overall presentation (personal communication 4 March 2005).
“O ʻō te to ʻō rima”

The poem titled “O ʻō te to ʻō rima” was originally written in Tahitian and was translated into French by the author himself as he often did with his writing. It appears in Pehepehe i tau nūnna: Message Poétique (2004), a book which compiles Henri Hiro’s most famous written work including, prose, poetry and plays. I’ve included both versions of the original poem in the appendix, and translated the poem from the French version.

“Your tomorrow is your hand”

To each day its share of grief?
On the night that carries the name of Turu,
One must whip Ruahatu, catch,
Shake Tahauru (fishing god),
Seek after Matatini (god of nets whose eyes are innumerable).
Turu (god of productive work) is
lying, immobile,
Ruahatu remains dumb,
Matatini keeps his eyes shut,
One must find them,
Wake them from their sleep.
The gods laze around, stretched out,
They shift
And shift again in their own vomit,
Chilled to the bone by Māraī
(the cold wind that gnaws)
They are sated from the fat of mara.
They raise their heads only for a caress from the trade winds.
They are indifferent to the time that passes, insensitive to the moans.
They remain deaf to the insults, they make fun of agonies. They lay with open mouths, satiated, defecating, their only task is to fart, They creak with fat. And finding strength to open an eye, All they think of saying is, “Go gather shells And crustaceans: sea crabs, Five fingered conches, and elongated conches, Periwinkles, And earth crabs. Here’s your fishing, here are your subsistence foods!”

Doesn’t the one who calls to the gods for help Receive but grief in return? Is he not condemned to eat just shells?

It is your hand, and only your hand, That is able to make you live. This hand that is a good toiler of the earth, A courageous hand, a delicate hand And full of cares, this fertile hand. Because don’t we say: “The night of Turu is a good night for all planting”?

Hiro’s message is made clear throughout the poem and his conclusion. He encourages his people to take action in their lives as opposed to imploring the gods for help. He would like for his people to look within in order to make changes instead of looking outwards, or expecting change to come from outside. In other words, he says to
the reader, “your future is in your own hands.” On a more physical level, Hiro encourages his people to literally return to the earth and take on agriculture as befitting the traditional Tahitian way of life. His work in cinematography exemplifies this idea of returning to the earth and agriculture, an idea that was also quite prevalent at the time Hiro created these works, in the nineteen-seventies.

The cultural renewal and the Indigenization of the Protestant Church

At the end of the nineteen-sixties, a few intellectuals fighting against the implantation of the nuclear center in the Pacific contributed strongly to the emergence of the Tahitian cultural renewal, and to the rehabilitation of a culture which had previously been denigrated and progressively institutionalized. According to Alexandrine Brami who wrote a Master’s Thesis titled Le Renouveau Identitaire et Culturel dans la Jeunesse à Tahiti: La Culture et l’Identite Maohi (October 2000), some of these intellectuals are now at the head of major cultural institutions who frame and socialize the youth of Tahiti. This is why it is important to introduce some of the most emblematic and significant figures of the cultural renewal in Tahiti.

Henri Hiro was one of these head activists. Born on Moorea, on January 1st 1944, he was raised in Punaauia, Tahiti, by parents whom only spoke Tahitian. He learned everything in his native language. Later, he pursued religious studies at the Faculté Libre de l’Église Réformée in Montpellier, France and earned a degree in theology. In an interview with Tahitian writer Michou Chaze, Hiro explained that this was a period of reflection in his life. It was right after May 68, a period of massive social unrest in Paris
and across France. Being away allowed him to reconsider his culture, his people, his
country, the situation he was in, the church’s activities and what it offered from a new
perspective. When he came back to the church in his home islands, he brought all of these
great questions with him. But his inquisitiveness and desire for change was not well
received by the church at the time. When he voiced his disapproval of nuclear testing and
demonstrated publicly, the church forced him to leave. But this did not discourage him in
his activism (Hiro 2004, 82-83).

Hiro was then appointed director of the Maison des Jeunes - Maison de la Culture
(cultural institution) in Tipaerui, Tahiti and directed it until 1980. He took part in the
creation of a socialist party that stood for social justice, and evolution within political
institutions. He stated that the idea of independence hadn’t come to be at this time. His
work within the Maison de la Culture involved a lot of work to “rehabilitate Polynesian
culture”, to emphasize the place and importance of the Tahitian language, of dance, of
songs and of theatrical expression (ibid, 83).

Hiro eventually resigned, and began working on the Protestant publication *Te Ve’a
Porotetani* while pursuing his activism alongside Oscar Temaru in his independence
party Tavini Huiraatira. Hiro states that he dedicated himself entirely to revive traditional
culture as a whole. He took it upon himself to offer a full and complete way of life to the
Tahitian population, and not pieces of a dislocated whole. He explains, “Polynesian life
in its totality means: everything, the house, the food, the clothing, its economy, its way of
living, its songs, its dances, its music, everything together, everything (ibid, 83-84).”

Henri Hiro fought during the period when French Polynesia was fighting for the
status of internal autonomy. He also created the independence socialist party la Mana Te
Nunaa, led the ecological movement Ia Ora te Natura, and became the vice-president of the Tavini Huiraatira in 1986 (Saura 1988, 68). Hiro is well recognized for his productive career in film, theatre and acting. He has also translated novels from French to Tahitian, and adapted them into plays (<http://chez.manaonline.pf/~colhitia/fr/frhceleb/frecriv/frhiro.htm> 12 Nov 2004). Hiro unfortunately passed away in his mid-thirties, but he is admired in Tahiti for his accomplishments and dedication to reviving Tahiti’s traditional culture and language. Tahitian writer Michou Chaze, who met Henri Hiro through his wife, relates that he was one of those people who naturally draws others to him, and was great at bringing people together regardless of their social class. She says,

He showed us the richness of our culture, but he was in no way an extremist, he did not denigrate what the west had brought. Henri only regretted our taking on western culture to the detriment of our own. In other words, I would say that he is the father of the cultural resurgence. We owe him John Marai’s theatre (Tahitian dramatist), our “conservatoire” (school of dance, music, voice...) we owe him EVERYTHING. (Chaze, 12 Nov 2004)

Also coming out of the Protestant church is another highly significant figure in the movement for the cultural renewal of Tahiti. This is Duro A. Raapoto whose work in poetry and prose is composed entirely in reo ma’ohi or Tahitian. He is the son of the late pastor Samuela Raapoto, the first president of the E.E.P.F. Raapoto was also a student in theology before choosing his career as a professor of the Tahitian language. Having written extensively, he is recognized by many as the Protestant church’s leading intellectual. According to Bruno Saura in his essay, “Naissance d’une pensée millénariste ethnique et développement du nationalisme à Tahiti”, the authorship of Raapoto is all the
more prolific as he receives the institutional support of the church in his ideas and his work. However, his work goes relatively unnoticed in Tahiti outside of the Protestant community because of the particularity of the language employed and because it is distributed by an ecclesiastical institution. It eludes the attention of most French, but also many of the native institutional actors that order politics, economics and education in Tahiti (Saura 2003, 3).

As Saura has shown, the work coming out of the Protestant church from intellectuals such as Raapoto is politically significant because on the one hand, it is the product of particular historical conditions such as the joining of the region into France, or the contestation of its colonial presence and of nuclear testing during the previous thirty years. On the other hand, it fuels history by contributing to the making of a Tahitian nationalist discourse, or even an ideology (ibid, 2, 46).

“It would be a mistake to limit Raapoto’s work to the category of theology”, says the author. The Protestant church in Tahiti is historically and politically significant in its framing of local elites and the rural populations, in its front-line struggle in the political evolution of the Territory, and its denunciation of the largest issues in contemporary Polynesian society (nuclear testing, land sales, etc) (ibid, 4).

In his essay “Culture et Renouveau Culture!” which appeared in the Encyclopédie de la Polynésie Française (1998), Saura claims that the creation of the Maohi Club in 1965 was the first organized Tahitian activist group whose actions would push towards a cultural renewal. Later, cultural institutions were created that also contributed largely to the revaluing of culture. These included the Fare Vana’a, the Tahitian academy, and the creation of a Tahitian center for the humanities in 1980 (Centre Polynésien des Sciences
Humaines – C.P.S.H) that included three working departments in archeology, traditions, and the Museum of Tahiti (Musée de Tahiti et des îles). The Territorial Office for Cultural Action (Office Territoriale pour L’Action Culturelle – O.T.A.C) succeeded the Maison des Jeunes - Maison de la Culture that was created in 1970 in order to facilitate the distribution of cultural and artistic work created in Tahiti. But whereas this institution catered to work that was in implicit reference to French culture, the O.T.A.C. was created in 1980 in an effort to develop the Tahitian culture and the French culture simultaneously. However the institution soon lost a lot of its dynamism and autonomy and became more of an administrative service (ibid, 66).

The author adds that through the actions of these cultural institutions stemmed a renewed interest in the representation of Tahitian culture in the form of cultural demonstrations (ibid, 68). Though in parallel, the limitations of industries such as agricultural and food industries, the demographic pressure on the job market and the erasure of the public sector’s ability to lighten such pressure have caused territorial authorities to inscribe touristic development into its first priorities and to make Tahitian culture a privileged tool to be used for its benefit (Brami 2000, 25).

Saura cites the coming of the Hokule’a in Tahiti in 1976 as the first major cultural demonstration, but adds that ten year later, representations of culture were many and diverse, and the great canoe was no longer the main symbol of the cultural renewal. Gradually dance performances, the traditional sports like canoe paddling, and a variety of traditional arts were taken up publicly once more (ibid, 66-67).

Tahitian dance had begun rising from the ashes far before some of these activists had begun their work. But in the mid-fifties, its growth would acquire a lot of momentum
so that in the midst of the cultural renewal, the performance of dance would be as much of a catalyst to the cultural renewal as it benefited from the revival of culture.

As Patrick O’Reilly has shown in La Danse à Tahiti (1972), ‘Ori Tahiti made its way into official Tahitian life once again in the beginning of the twentieth century. Due to prohibitions and heavy sanctions, people had previously had to hide in the depths of the valleys in order to dance and party secretly. Oddly, the yearly commemoration of the taking of the Bastille on July 14th would be the incentive for the creation of a festival that brought together games, songs and dances (Heiva Nui Programme 2005, 6). The celebration would be called the Tiurai after the Tahitian word for July. Here performers from different districts around the islands could come together and compete for prizes. In 1926, men’s ote’a were receiving 3 prizes at 500, 300 and 200 francs; two prizes only were awarded to women. The drummers often had to beat on old gasoline barrels, and dancers performed in costumes that were quite simple. The more skirt made from burao fibers was the main component of the costume and was accessorized with crowns and necklaces of fresh plants and flowers. Gradually, the female dancers were able to reveal their bodies with the riddance of the mission dress, and eventually toplessness was reintroduced and accepted. However, these female performers were not every day ladies, but rather showgirls from the “Queen” and the “Lafayette” (O’Reilly, 19-22).

These routine types of performances were broken through with the appearance of dance groups. In 1956, a passionate and well-organized dance instructor named Madeleine Mou’a created the group Heiva. The two princesses Terii and Takau, daughters of Tahiti’s last queen were under Mou’a’s tutelage. This would be the first time
young women from reputable families would dance in public in Papeete. This move caused a scandal, but Mou’a asserted that she was giving back life and nobility to dance.

Mou’a is credited to be one of the first instructors who attempted to codify the dance moves in ‘Ori Tahiti. Her special attention to every detail in her dance performances including presentation, costumes, the direction of her orchestra, as well as her artful use of ancient and every day life themes brought her distinction. In 1987 she was honored with a prestigious award that acknowledged her contributions to the cultural renewal (Saura 1988, 68).

Only a few years after the creation of the group Heiva, several dance groups existed in Tahiti that had been formed by Mou’a’s students (O’Reilly 1972, 19-22). One of these students, an extremely talented and dynamic man named Coco Hotahota worked together with comedian John Marai to develop dance and theatre through the O.T.A.C. He also put together his own group, Te Maeva, which remains very strong until this day. Bruno Saura comments that dance became a means of resistance through the creative mind of this group’s leader.

In 1980, in protest of the growing use of synthetic materials in costumes, Coco Hotahota made his group dance in more skirts on which tin cans were attached. In 1985 his teenaged dancers invaded the stage of Vaiete dressed in western clothing, riding motorcycles, and with walkman earphones on their heads, but soon discarded these tokens of modernity to better perform and demonstrate their pride of being indigenous Tahitians. Though Hotahota’s innovations were filled with sincere questioning, they also had a provocative aspect. Sometimes he went so far as to introduce the sexual act or the act of giving birth in the themes of his choreographies as a symbol of life. Although these
themes were controversial and have caused him to be misunderstood at times, his work has given the Tiurai a whole new dimension (Saura 1988, 72).

The very same year, French Polynesia was charged with the organization of the South Pacific Arts Festival, a gathering in which delegations from all regions in the Pacific could show the vivacity of their cultural traditions through song and dance from their countries. For this occasion, ex-President Gaston Flosse moved the Tiurai dates so that it could begin on June 29th. This period coincided with the acquisition of the internal autonomy status the following September. Saura adds that,

from this point on, the arts festival would be thought of as being a way to prove to other independent countries in the Pacific that the autonomy status enjoyed by (French) Polynesia was the guarantor of economical development without putting the proclaimed authenticity of Maohi culture into question (ibid, 69)

Gaston Floss was altering the popular tradition of the Tiurai to fit his political agenda. So too, complaints had been directed towards the committee of the Heiva for making the entry fees increasingly more expensive each year.

Makau Foster’s dance school and the Conservatoire were the first to open the Heiva des Ecoles (Heiva of Schools) over ten years ago. This was a part of the festival that preceded the July competitions and was made to showcase the different dance schools and what they’d learned throughout the school year. Makau related that in the beginning, the Heiva des Ecoles was free to attend. Then, they began to charge five hundred French Pacific francs for the entry. This year, the entry fee cost one thousand five hundred to two thousand francs depending on the placement (personal communication 17 May 2005).
Moreover, fewer dance groups are entering the Heiva for the competition than the norm in previous years. Since the Heiva organizing committee has placed heavy restrictions on groups’ presentations and narrowed their options, increasingly more groups are ceasing to participate. Many say the recent Heiva restrictions privilege dance groups that have embraced modern styles and technique, to the detriment of the groups who create within the parameters of their traditional training. Many group leaders have chosen not to present their groups in protest of what they feel is unfair and discriminatory. This year some of the most famous groups such as Te Maeva and Tamariki Poerani (see fig. 2) refused to attend and both took trips to the US instead.

Traditionally, the Heiva welcomed groups from the outer islands. In 2001, I was able to see a group from Mangareva perform. But today, the outer islands have their own festivals that take place at the same time as the Heiva Nui of Papeete (see fig. 3). Many districts around Tahiti have done the same for several years. Cultural festivals are very popular in Tahiti, this is probably a reason why the Protestant church decided to celebrate the 5th of March holiday through a festival that would gather its believers and promote its own ideas.

Alexandrine Brami gives us interesting insight into the role of the Protestant church in Tahiti in the cultural renewal. She asserts that the Protestant church has more followers than all other denominations in French Polynesia. She adds,

If the pastors of the LMS have vigorously fought against polytheism and its symbols upon its arrival, the Evangelical church became the guardian of Tahitian traditions. Let us also point out that the initiative of translating the Bible in Tahitian in 1865 allowed the church to stand out as the foremost protectors of its language and later for the acquisition of its ecclesiastical autonomy in 1963 has reinforced its “Polynesian” character (ibid, 46).
Brami illustrates her claim by quoting Victor Segalen in his book *Les Immémoriaux* (1956) who'd held the evangelical missionaries accountable for destroying the Tahitian culture and thus contributing to the possible extinction of the Polynesian race. The author described Chief Paofai’s struggle against things foreign and the way he was betrayed by his friend Terii who ceased practicing oral tradition and accepted to become a deacon of the new religion. But Brami comments that Segalen must have underestimated the Polynesians’ ability for resistance. She cites Henri Hiro’s own film adaptation of *Les Immémoriaux* (1983), that suggested the development of a syncretic process which enabled Tahitians to overcome the clash between their old religion and Christianity and to preserve knowledge from their immemorial past to survive in the new culture (ibid, 46).

The people of French Polynesia consider religion, and particularly the Protestant religion a central element of their identity. In fact, Brami adds that since the indigenous Protestant church was already in place before the arrival of the French, it is presented as being part of the culture preceding the protectorate and thus represents identity in relation to its intrusion. The Tahitian Protestant church, led by the indigenous is considered to be the “only Tahitian institution that has existed since the end of royalty itself and more so the end of ancient Tahiti.” (qtd. in Brami 104). Indeed this idea that the Protestant religion is an integrated part of the *maohi* is supported and legitimized by the representatives of high cultural institutions of the Territory like Louise Peltzer (current president of the University of French Polynesia and professor of the Tahitian language (UPF)), Jacques Ihorai (president of the E.E.P.F), Duro Raapoto son of pastor Samuel
Raapoto, (the first president of the E.E.P.F., writer, poet, and foremost intellectual of the Protestant church since the death of Henri Hiro), and also Maco Tevane, (previous minister, president of the Tahitian academy, chief of the Polynesian delegation for the Pacific Arts Festival). The work of these individuals whom are well known and respected throughout Tahiti is particularly significant as the ideas carried in their writing and discourses are transmitted to the Polynesian youth (ibid, 105-107).

- II -

Resistance in the classroom, in the promotion of tradition

The dance instructor with whom I worked the most during my stay in Tahiti, Makau Foster had once learned from Coco Hotahota, one of Madeleine Mou’a’s students. His was the legendary dance group Te Maeva, which I mentioned earlier.

Makau’s dance classes were interesting from the first day, and not only because of the exquisite dances we learned. During the first fifteen minutes of practice, our instructor usually sat us down and “talked-story” with us, telling us about her life experiences and teaching us valuable lessons. For instance, she would try to communicate to the young women in the class, most of which were between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, how privileged they are to live in these times. She explained that in her youth, young women knew many restrictions and were considerably constrained in their freedom to express themselves through speech, their appearance and the way they carried themselves. She told us, “Nowadays, you girls can look pretty by wearing a flower on your ear. In my day, wearing a flower on your ear made you pass for a whore”. Yet what is more natural than for a young woman to place a flower on her ear? She told us that if a
popular song played on the radio, they were not to be seen moving around to the music, (much less dancing to it) or they could be punished. But worst of all, children could not be heard speaking in their native tongue in the schoolyard. Many schools practiced shaming towards young children in this case, often by making a child carry a seashell which he must pass on to the next child heard speaking Tahitian or any other Polynesian language. At the end of the day, the last child left with the shell in his possession received punishment, often in the form of doing chores. Two men from Makau’s generation have related the same experiences to me. The language stigma imposed by French colonialist practices is ever present among today’s’ Tahitian elders.

In fact the subject of language came up often during these talk-story sessions at the beginning of Makau’s classes. The instructor often took the opportunity to stress upon the girls how important it was for them to learn their language. Out of all the students, it seemed as if not a single one spoke Tahitian fluently, though a couple may have hidden it out of embarrassment. Only a handful out of thirty girls understood and replied when the instructor spoke in Tahitian. She emphasized that language was one’s ‘hiro’a tumu’, one’s culture and constantly challenged the girls to define these Tahitian terms that constitute the foundation of the cultural renewal discourse. She reprimanded the girls for taking dance so lightly, for taking it for granted as something that will always be there at their disposal because they are Tahitian. As an instructor who travels abroad regularly to teach groups around the Pacific and the Pacific rim, she warned one day of the talent of newly rising dancers in Mexico. She related that the dancers were particularly strong in expressing their emotion through facial expressions, that their dancing was filled with feeling. She told the girls in our class that while the culture is indeed their own,
understanding the dance and the language used is what makes them Tahitian. But when
the girls lose their language and their comprehension, there is need to worry. She warned
gravely, “watch out girls, or there will be a day when foreigners will snatch your
culture!” (Personal communication 2/4, 2/18, 3/23)

- III -

Experiencing March 5th

It was 4 'o clock and the entire group had met at the Pater Stadium in Pirae for a rush
rehearsal before the performance. We put our belongings and costumes in a corner of the
field and awaited instructions. After wasting about a half hour, we began rehearsing the
place changes and dances, but without music since the musicians hadn’t yet arrived. The
instructor paced around with his cell phone on his ear. The two people he had chosen to
perform the theatrical interludes with him had not given any news.

When I got back to him to tell him I would perform the solo, he’d offered to
create the costume insisting that it would be very nice. As time for the performance came
near, I offered to make the costume myself many times though I did not have the
materials at hand, but he always refused. On the day, I came with a lei and a headpiece as
I expected he wouldn’t bring much of a costume, but when I approached him to ask
whether he had brought it, I found that he didn’t have it all. In that moment, I had to resist
a strong desire to scream and had given up on the idea of performing the solo when one
of my friends among the lead dancers brought two costumes composed of cloth bra tops
and skirts to be adorned.
I thanked her a thousand times and asked one of the women from the Foyer who'd help make costumes, if she didn’t have a little something extra for me to wear as a necklace or bracelet. At this moment, she pulled out some fiber and carved mother of pearl shells from her bag and proceeded to twist and weave these materials into a neckpiece that would at once hold up my top (which was too small) and decorate the costume beautifully. She also makes a bracelet to match. There is a portrait of this wonderful woman and I at the end of the film montage. Needless to say, if it weren’t for these great people I might have left altogether. But as the stadium began to fill up and the different groups from many other districts were gathering on the sides to prepare for their performances, the atmosphere was much more positive and interesting.

In the program, we were supposed to be the group to open the night, but instead the district of Moorea, and two groups performing himene tarava⁴ (see fig. 4), presented their shows before us. Ours was followed by a performance from the other Papeete subdivision.

The performance from the Moorea group was very impressive with hundreds of participants and full, fresh costumes made from shredded ti leaves. Through their singing, their shouts and their gestures, they communicated much energy and happiness. The drums sounded loudly and clearly in a way that was full and well amplified. They resounded across the stadium and the vibration could be felt in one’s very body. This group presented a magnificent performance that made the festivities. It was the largest group to go on the night of our performance, but someone informed me that the previous

---

⁴himene tarava: a variety of traditional singing. (Fare Vana’a)
night, a group from the Eastern districts of Tahiti came with eight hundred strong; enough to fill the stadium from one end to the other!

The himene tarava was also very impressive. These groups are often composed of middle-aged to elderly men and women, so that the younger people often complain of being bored during these types of performances. But many people, myself included, find these performances very powerful. This group’s performance was fantastic, as its members were very lively and enthusiastic while they performed. They were especially amazing when they walked out in a rhythmic march, singing their group’s anthem triumphantly and with so much pride.

The himene were followed by our own performance. We were much fewer in numbers with only thirty or so dancers, but our dancers certainly took a lot of pride in the performance. Everything went well, except that we had to remove the theatrical interludes from the performance since the actors didn’t show up. Young as they were, the dancers rendered each number to perfection and enjoyed themselves doing so. Our spectators rewarded us with loud cheers, and reported later that we had performed something of quality. This of course depended on all involved, and in retrospect, the two eldest girls and I were pleasantly surprised to see that even some of the most reticent dancers had given their maximum. The musicians who’d had a lot of trouble playing well during the rehearsals all of a sudden played very clearly and loudly, the way drummers need to play in order for the dancers to follow the music correctly and execute the moves with assurance.

The final performance was very good, and they performed with such enthusiasm that all of the numbers combined made up a performance that went well over the assigned
time of half an hour. Their numbers reached about two hundred and the men and women all wore the colors blue and white to represent their subdivision of Papeete. The women wore unrevealing western style dresses and the men wore blue shirts and white pants. But the dance moves were just as characteristically Tahitian as the ones from the Moorea district whose natural fiber costumes revealed the women’s stomachs and shoulders and the men’s chests. The performers from this group were also very lively, singing to every song while performing every move with a maximum of energy.

**Conclusion**

The role of French Polynesia’s Protestant church in the cultural renewal and its revaluing of aspects of culture that were denigrated by the first missionaries of the church nearly two hundred years earlier are truly fascinating. I often wonder how these same missionaries would have reacted if they’d seen all of these Protestant women, children and men praising Taaroa through dance (one and the same with Jehovah according to Raapoto) (Saura, lecture notes 16 May 2005) and having a wonderful time being themselves.

To witness such a large scale Protestant gathering in celebration of youth and culture was astounding on many levels. Not only was this a very elaborate and fun-filled presentation, it also showed that the church caters to needs and priorities of Tahitians as a Pacific institution that privileges the indigenous, and celebrating culture, dancing and chanting are important to them.
This festival not only showed, as the director of the Foyer de Jeunes Filles once suggested, that the Protestant church is definitely a force to reckon with in Tahiti, but also that it has done its share to keep the Tahitian culture with all of its main components alive (and kicking!).

Oscar Temaru and the pro-independence party are back in power since March 9th 2005. In the 2005 Heiva program, Oscar Temaru wrote an opening letter in which he promised to bring back the population’s Tiurai festival of the past, the population’s authentic Heiva for which some still feel nostalgic. Because he says, “the Heiva shouldn’t be the festival that brings together the elite, but a festival that brings together the entire population!” (Temaru, 2005, 1) It will be interesting to see in which ways culture and performance will be affected by the abrupt political change. Will it continue to be promoted as a signifier of identity for the Tahitian people? Will the traditional Tahitian arts continue to be celebrated? That is for the Maohi people to decide and for someone else to find out. In the meantime, I will return to doing what I enjoy best, DANCE!
Makau Foster's Tamariki Poerani
The Heiva Nui of 2005

Fig. 3
ote'a

tarava performed at the Protestant festival of Pirae, March 2005
Himene Tarava performed by Tamarri Tipaerui at the Heiva Nui 2005
The last section of this song is the part which Holcomb has framed with an unforgettable melody. Through this song, these last verses are widely known in Tahiti. ²

---

¹ The diacritical markings in this transcription correspond to the way the poem is transcribed in Pehepehe i tau nūnāa: Message Poétique, with circumflexes replacing macrons for this symbol was not available to me.

² This song can be heard in the DVD component of this project.
A chaque jour faut-il sa peine ?
Le soir où la lune porte le nom de Turu,
Il faut fouetter Ruahatu, attraper,
Secouer Tahauru (dieu de la pêche),
Chercher Matatini (dieu des filets aux yeux inombrables).
Turu (le dieu du travail productif) est étendu, immobile,
Ruahatu reste muet,
Matatini garde les yeux fermés,
Il faut les trouver,
Les réveiller de leur sommeil.
Les dieux se prélassent étendus,
Ils se tournent
Et se retournent dans leur vomissures,
Transis par le froid par la faute de Mārai
(le vent qui refroidit et qui ronge)
Ils sont repus de la graisse du mara.
Ils ne lèvent la tête que pour une caresse des alizés.
Ils sont indifférents au temps qui passe, insensibles aux gémissements.
Ils restent sordus face aux insultes, ils se moquent des agonies.
Ils gisent la bouche ouverte, repus,
Déféquant, leur seul tâche est le pet,

Ils craquent de graisse.
Et trouvant la force d’ouvrir un oeil,
Tout ce qu’ils trouvent à te dire c’est :
"Va ramasser de coquillages
Et des crustacées : des crabes de mer,
Des conques à cinq doigts, des conques
Allongées, des bigorneaux
Et des crabes de terre.
Voilà ta pêche, voilà tes aliments de subsistance !"

Celui qui appelle les dieux à son aide
Ne recoit-il que peines en retourn ?
Est-il condamné à ne manger que des coquilles ?

C’est ta main, et ta main seule
Qui est en mesure de te faire vivre.
Cette main bonne retourneuse de terre,
Une main courageuse, une main délicate
Et pleine de soins, cette main fertile.
Car ne dit-on pas :
"Le soir de Turu est une bonne nuit pour toutes les plantations ?"
Works Cited

Academie Tahitienne. Dictionnaire Tahitien/Français: Fa’atōrō Parau Tahiti/Farani, Fare Vana’a, 1999.


Fayn, Marion. “La Danse à Tahiti: Origines et Sources (XVIIIe – début XIXe siècles) <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/pacifique/tahiti/danse.html> 5 April 2005


“Henri Hiro” <http://chez.mana-online.pf/~colhitia/fr/frhceleb/frecreiv/frhiro.htm> 12 November 2004


Lareau, Annette. “Appendix Common Problems in Field Work: A Personal Essay” Qualitative Research in Higher Education (pp. 313-336)


Tahauri, Tanya Tearo Kuraigo, Personal interview 5/2/2005
