

GENDER AND POWER IN TONGAN TOURIST PERFORMANCES¹

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Based on ethnographic research in Tonga in 2008 and 2009, this essay examines how gender relations and categories are defined during tourist performances. This definition is anchored within and constrained by social inequalities, which are in turn negotiated through constructing gender distinctions. Body practices, as much as discourses, are involved in this negotiation. The results yield new insights into the power relationships generally at stake in tourism and help lead to understanding of how the transformation of gender norms is linked to body practices. (Tonga, tourism, gender, body, performance)

Tourism can be defined as a place where ethnic or cultural identities are negotiated and shaped, a subject much discussed in anthropology and sociology (Adams 2003; Barthel-Bouchier 2001; Bossen 2000; Doquet 2003; Lanfant, Allock, and Bruner 1995; Nesper 2003; Picard and Wood 1997; Sissons 1999). Tourism is also a particularly relevant context in which to study the construction of gender,² a subject that has received less attention than the processes of cultural identity negotiation (Pritchard and Morgan 2000). The two subjects should be addressed concurrently, because the shaping of cultural or racial identities is inextricably linked to the way gender categories are defined (Butler 1999: xvi). Indeed, the authentic, non-Western “Other” used in the tourism industry to promote local cultures is often gendered. For example, a prominent figure on New Zealand postcards and brochures is an indigenous (Māori) male, while in French Polynesia “many brochures display pretty young women in sexy ‘primitive’ dresses” (Silver 1993:304; see also Kahn 2000). In Hawai‘i, as Desmond (1999) shows, the image of the “primitive Hawaiian” as conveyed in the West is equally gendered as racialized: Hawaiians are depicted as being refined primitives, similarly to the New Zealand Māori, shown brown not black, but they are also feminized (more like Tahitians), for it is the figure of the *hula* girl that predominates.

In addition, the two processes of cultural identity production and gender construction are a matter of power (Dorlin 2007:50). Regarding the concept of

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“performativity,” Dorlin (2007) points out that the body, and the gendered body in particular, is an effect of power. This comment can be extended to tourism and the production of “otherness”, because tourism practices are often based on asymmetrical power relationships (Silver 1993:309). When these power relationships are taken into account, analysis shows that it is the tourists themselves who take on the role of deciding what can and cannot be displayed in tourist attractions and performances (Adams 1984; Bruner 1991:241; Markula 1997:216-7; Michel 2006:61). The promotion of tourist destinations relies on the ability to demonstrate primitiveness (Silver 1993:310) or exaggerate salient ethnic markers (Adams 1984:471), which are simplified and repeated to the point of becoming stereotypes. These stereotypes are then used by tourists to evaluate their experiences (Adams 1984:472). If they want to satisfy tourists, actors involved in the tourism industry thus have little choice but to give consistency to a stereotypical image. Some merely conclude from this that “it is international mass tourism that sets the terms of the encounter, for the tourists have the power and the money, and they know what they want,” as Bruner (1991:241) does. This seems true when looking at tourist publicity in French Polynesia. To attract tourists, brochures, postcards, and internet promotion sites use the common trope of beautiful, desirable women (Kahn 2000), even if in reality there is little chance for a visitor to meet nude Polynesian young women lying or walking on the beach in Tahiti.

However, recent works on tourism in the Pacific and elsewhere indicate the need to look beyond the stereotypical, staged images to see how performers manage to subtly comment on and resist these stereotypes. Humor, in particular, is a way of coming to terms with the hegemonic dimensions of tourism (Alexeyeff 2008:78-9; Balme 2007; Buntén 2008). Resistance can also be achieved through a play on gendered categories in performances (Mageo 2008). In Sāmoa, male tourists are invited on stage to dance (generally the Tahitian *tāmūrē*) and are taught the female part of the dance, based on hip shaking and graceful arm movements (Mageo 2008). As the man’s dance is normally based on a movement of the knees, the male tourist is put in an awkward situation. It is a way of contesting the idealized Polynesian woman of tourism marketing by displaying a bizarre caricature of it, thus revealing the “fictive and constructed nature of gendered and raced identities” (Mageo 2008:62). It is also a way, more broadly speaking, of challenging the tourists’ power to impose their desires and stereotypes by ridiculing them (Mageo 2008:74). If we accept that the construction of gender distinction is inextricably linked to that of cultural/ethnic identity and that both are embedded in the definition of social hierarchies at large, the study of the

negotiation of gendered distinction in tourist interactions can yield new insights into the power relationships at stake in tourism more generally.

Using Tongan tourist performances as a case study, this article examines how the construction of gender categories in tourism is inscribed within and constrained by broader social inequalities (defined on the basis of economic wealth, social status, geographical mobility, etc.) and how the latter may in turn be negotiated through the process of constructing gender distinction. While Tonga is an archipelago in what has been called Polynesia since the European navigators entered the Pacific Ocean,³ Tongan society is more than the population of this group of islands. What takes place in Tonga today cannot be understood without taking into account the Tongan communities in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States (Besnier 2011). The 100,000 to a quarter million overseas Tongans “constitute both a secondary audience for all social action and points of contact between Tonga and the rest of the world” (Besnier 2011:42, 74). Although many of these expatriate Tongans regularly come to their home country to visit their relatives, along with tourists from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, Tonga has not become a prime tourist destination in the Pacific. In comparison to the Cook Islands, which 83,333 people visited in 2004, and French Polynesia with 211,893 visitors for that same year, the number of visitors to Tonga remains relatively low with 40,110 visitors in 2003 and 41,208 in 2004 (South Pacific Tourism Organisation 2005:1). These comparisons must be made while keeping in mind that the size of Tonga is about three times that of the Cook Islands. Despite these low figures, tourism is an interesting point of entry to study changes in Tongan society, as it is one of the few social occasions that brings together Tongans living in Tonga, Tongan visitors from afar, and international tourists. The dinner and show type of entertainment, locally called “floorshows,” offers an opportunity to see how the interaction between these categories of people is at play in the redefinition of gender.

Floorshows are music and dance performances that include dinner cooked in the traditional earth oven, called *‘umu*. The performance very often comprises of dances from other Polynesian archipelagos, such as a Tahitian *‘ōte‘a* or a Hawaiian hula. These female dances, based on hip movements, differ very much from Tongan female dances, in which the performer moves very little, except for her arms and head movements, as will be explained in more detail below. The inclusion of *‘ōte‘a* or hula in Tongan tourist shows is not innocent: the Tahitian female dances observed by navigators in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have greatly contributed to the development of the idea that Polynesian women are lascivious, attractive, and

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sexually available (Tcherkézoff 2004a:9, 337). Today, hula and ‘ōte‘a are still very much associated, in international tourists’ minds particularly, to the above-mentioned images of the hula girl and the *vahine* (“woman” in Tahitian), although the image of the hula girl is much more meaningful and salient for most Tongans, who are more familiar with Hawai‘i than Tahiti, given that many Tongans live in Hawai‘i.⁴

Tongan tourist performances bring together people whose socioeconomic status and ability to travel are very unequal. Whereas performers are young men and women who generally have never had the opportunity to travel across seas and who earn very little money, visitors can afford to travel to Tonga from New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Europe. Once in Tonga, they pay for entertainment that costs between 35 and 45 Tongan *Pa‘anga* (Tongan currency), which is about three times what a performer earns per night. The use of the image of the idealized Polynesian woman in this context might simply be interpreted as an answer to “visitors’ preconceptions of the savage and thrilling South Seas” (Stillman 1988:161-2) and a result of international power relationships (Pritchard and Morgan 2000:900), which may lead to the “tahitianization” (Stillman 1988:161) or homogenization of Polynesian feminine identities.⁵

However, as recent studies on gender and sexuality have underlined, globalization is not a one-way phenomenon, and cultural change is not an inevitable process of homogenization (Alexeyeff 2008; Roux 2009, 2011). The issue cannot be reduced to an opposition between Tonga and the West or between a Pacific Island gender model and a Western one. As mentioned earlier, during floorshows, relationships involve a range of actors. We need to consider the diversity of representations, expectations, socio-economic statuses, and origins among visitors as well as among performers. Understanding how tourist performances create a particular configuration of gender categories will then bring a larger problem into perspective: how does this construction relate to power relationships at large, not only between tourists and performers, but also between men and women, Tongan visitors and Tongan performers, non-Tongan visitors and Tongan performers, etc.? As the body, and particularly the dancing body, is central to these dynamics, this case study also brings to light new perspectives on how the transformations of gender norms are linked to body practices.

METHODS

The data for this essay were collected during two fieldwork sessions in Tonga in 2008 and 2009 totaling seven months, with an additional three weeks in 2012. This was part of a larger research project on tourist performances in both Tonga and New Zealand. The methods used include in-

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depth interviews, observations, film recordings of tourist performances, and questionnaires distributed to visitors. Interviews were conducted with performers and managers of cultural shows on Tongatapu (Tonga's main island). Most tourist performances occurred in hotels or resorts in the capital city, Nuku'alofa, or along the coastal beaches of the eastern (Hahake) or western (Hihifo) districts. Another show took place in the Tongan National Cultural Center, formerly government-owned but now partly privatized. In total, four weekly tourist shows were held in 2008 and six in 2009. The performers or managers interviewed were from all the groups in Tongatapu. Most interviews were conducted in English. Four were conducted with an interpreter.

The methods used and the interview schedules were not initially orientated towards a research question on the dynamics of gender. It is in analyzing the data that the importance of this theme emerged as central to the understanding of the negotiation of cultural identities and power relationships. Topics such as love affairs, sexuality, and marriage were rarely discussed during interviews but were mentioned more often during informal discussions that took place during the performers' rehearsals or during my dance apprenticeship with them. Material acquired through participant observation was also used in the study of tourists' conceptions of Tonga and of Tongan women. I attended several floorshows with visitors, which allowed for overhearing their spontaneous comments on the dancers and other aspects of the show. However, most of the time I observed cultural shows from a distanced point of view and distributed questionnaires to visitors at the end of the shows. Questionnaires (about 200), conducted in English with all categories of visitors (people in Tonga for work, Tongans, non-Tongans, and tourists), are not analyzed quantitatively here.

TOURISM AND GENDER NORMS IN TONGA

The image of the barely clothed woman who "appeals to Western tourists as much for [her] exoticism as for [her] sexuality" (Silver 1993:304) is particularly prevalent in French Polynesia. It has been constructed since first contact with French and British navigators, who may have mistaken religious or politically-motivated acts (such as the "offering" of young girls to the navigators) for purely sexually-motivated ones (Tcherkézoff 2004a: 317-9; 2004b:47). The construction of this "Tahitian woman of stereotype" (Green 2002:226) is embedded in relationships of power and is part of a colonial process. This image has been extended to other Polynesian archipelagos:

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“Indeed, the Western ideal type of the lascivious-but-innocent vahine, invented by Commerson in 1769 and by Bougainville in 1771, and confirmed by Hawkesworth in 1773, was the vision of Polynesian women that would overwhelm all others in the Western imagination” (Tcherkézoff 2004b:67).

When the British navigator James Cook arrived in Tonga in 1773, French Polynesia was again the lens through which he observed the Tongan islands and their inhabitants. Comparisons with what had been observed in ‘Otaheiti’ (Tahiti) are ever-present in his descriptions of the Tongan archipelago. He often underlines the gracefulness of dances and expresses his admiration for “the most beautiful forms that imagination can conceive in the younger part of the Sex.” (Cook 1967:111). Cook and his crew seem to have enjoyed the same kind of welcome as in Tahiti: “The good natured old Chief introduced to me a woman and gave me to understand that I might retire with her, she was next offered to Captain Furneaux, but met with a refusal from both, tho she was neither old, nor ugly.” (Cook quoted in van der Grijp 1994:35). This does not mean that women were invariably described in exactly the same way or that they succumbed to the pressure to conform to the ideal of the vahine. For example, in Hawai‘i, where Cook and his crew stayed longer than in Tahiti, descriptions of women were more complex and defied stereotyping (Green 2002:233). The same can be said for Tonga, where Cook was surprised to see women boxing (Cook 1967:108).

In reality, Tonga and Tahiti are not and have never been tightly connected, due in particular to different histories of contact with Euro-Americans, and the word “vahine” is meaningless for most Tongans. However, Tahiti as an imaginary paradisiacal island continues to shape visitors’ preconceptions of the South Pacific, which is also influenced, particularly for American tourists, by representations of Hawai‘i. The destination image of Hawai‘i is deeply feminized: “long before they disembark from the plane, Hawaii’s mainlander visitors have encountered the image of the ‘hula girl’,” who is deemed to be “accessible, hospitable, beautiful and ‘natural’” (Desmond 1997:86). No matter how diverse the norms pertaining to femininity might be or have been in island women’s lives, the eroticized female body and other “alluring objectifications” have “become a part of Pacific realities, most palpably in these processes and images of the tourist industry” (Jolly 1997:121). This is partly true for Tonga.

Many visitors to the island who are Tongans living elsewhere are not looking for the kind of exoticism Europeans, Americans, or New Zealanders might seek. Tourism must cater to a wide range of expectations—from young Australians with Tongan ancestry who want to learn more about their origins (such as a young woman, describing herself as part Tongan, who wanted to “get to know [her] Tongan heritage”)—to European backpackers who choose to

stop in Tonga because it is far from the main tourist destinations. Members of the Tongan diaspora are not necessarily in search of their Tongan heritage; they more often come to attend their church's annual conference, for other reunions, or to visit their relatives. Non-Tongan visitors are attracted by the variety of activities offered by these tropical islands, such as snorkeling, diving, fishing, or sunbathing. New Zealanders and Australians might also choose Tonga as a destination because of the relatively low cost of flights and accommodation compared to other South Pacific destinations.

Marketing for Tongan tourism plays on the distinctive traits of Tonga compared to other islands: Tonga is presented as a unique case of enduring traditions, the "last remaining kingdom" in the South Pacific, where visitors can enjoy "a unique experience, with a living culture steeped in tradition" (Jasons Travel Media 2009:4). Tourists arriving in Tonga today will not find nude or semi-nude girls pictured on postcards, as in Tahiti, where the "découpage and montage of images...has been mainly by the French, Americans, and demi" (Kahn 2000:16). Nonetheless, Tongan tourism marketing often makes use of images of smiling young women, and the flowers they wear in their hair or on their dresses clearly make the connection with other Polynesian archipelagos. Some promotion websites portray girls in bikinis or dancing girls whose breasts are covered by coconut shells, two things that will not actually be seen in Tonga (see for example <http://www.tongaholidays.com.au/>).

This image is in stark contrast with Tongans' ideas about what femininity is or should be. There is no one definition of femininity in Tonga, as norms apply variously according to one's rank, age, and place of residence (town or village, for example). In addition, these norms change quickly. The way Tongan girls and women act and dress does not fit what people have seen in postcards from the South Pacific or Gauguin's paintings. It is important to recognize the relatively high status of women in Tongan society. As sisters outrank brothers (this rule extends to the generation below ego), women outrank most men in their own family group. By contrast, women can be said to be dominated in political life (from which they are nearly absent) or in relation to their husbands and husbands' families, in particular their sisters-in-law (Douaire-Marsaudon 1998; Philips 2003). Although the status of women depends on specific contexts and relationships, generally women are highly respected.

Women in Tonga are expected to wear skirts or dresses reaching down to their ankles and shirts covering their forearms. Today this rule tends to be relaxed, especially in the capital city, but it is rare for a woman to wear a skirt

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showing her knees. When swimming, Tongan men and women remain fully dressed. Although boys occasionally go shirtless, it is unthinkable for girls to show their belly in public.⁶ Moreover, most Tongan women wear their hair tied in a bun, instead of in free-flowing locks. This “binding of female hair in Tonga iconicized and continues to iconicize social control and in particular sexual restraint” (Besnier 2011:166-7).

Far from being a bewitching vahine, a girl is not supposed to make advances on any man, although this ideal depiction does not necessarily match actual behavior. Girls’ premarital virginity is valorized, although today this is mainly the concern for high-ranking (Besnier 1997:15) or conservative families. Among high-ranking people, rituals are still enacted to give proof of the girl’s virginity on her first night with her husband (but I was told this proof can be manipulated). Men, on the contrary, are expected to be promiscuous (Besnier 1997:14), particularly when young, which evidently results in premarital pregnancies being common. These pregnancies are always embarrassing for the family of the young woman. Though the child might be greatly desired and looked after by the mother’s relatives, it nevertheless brings shame upon the woman’s family. Although “sweetheart-sweetheart relationships,” as Philips (2003:269-71) calls them, are the subject of many songs, young people’s love affairs are never ostensibly acknowledged. A girl and a boy alone together may, in some circumstances, be exposed to mockery and slander even if they sit or walk at a distance from each other. Even married couples avoid physical contact in public.

Aesthetic expressive practices such as dance are a relevant point of entry for the study of gender distinction in Tonga. Group dances that mix men and women (for example, the *lakalaka*) iconicize the differences expected between them and help to reproduce these differences. Tongans also consider female dance performances as a way of demonstrating “good” femininity (as in the Cook Islands [Alexeyeff 2009]), not only because it is an opportunity for girls to show their beauty and grace—two attributes of youthful femininity—but also because it allows them to demonstrate their moral sense. This link between dancing and good behavior is explicit with some of the female dancers I interviewed:

Q: What, according to you, makes a good Tongan performance?

Ana: Firstly it’s the movement, it’s the *haka* movement, the way they do the movement, and not only that but the costumes, it should be Tongan. Because to her, she believes good behavior, a good person can do proper dancing...a good person, a person with good behavior is one that believes in Tongan values...people with good behaviour...it’s obvious to tell, the way they dress...and it shows when they dance.⁷

During the *tau'olunga* (a female solo dance that only unmarried girls are allowed to perform), girls have their bodies covered with coconut oil (*lolo*). This is for aesthetics and is also a way to show virginity: a girl whose skin absorbs coconut oil is thought to have lost her virginity. I was also told that the way a young woman stands when doing the *tau'olunga* can also be an indication of her virginity. She must have her feet and legs together. "The female dancer's restricted movements and smile iconicize society's control of virginal femininity and her acquiescence of it, but the fact that she occupies the center of everyone's attention is also semiotic of high rank" (Besnier 2011:134).

For tourists, dance performances continue to be platforms for discussing what makes a good woman and for performing and discussing femininity, especially in the case of performers and Tonga visitors. All the female performers I interviewed at floorshows were unmarried and continued to define good femininity as being linked to a girl's moral sense. The different floorshow groups are highly competitive. Comments that the members of one group make about those of another are often critical of the other dancers' abilities and skills. Criticism does not stop there. Female performers, for example, sometimes accuse girls working for other floorshows as being of easy virtue. Thus, far from valorizing free sexuality before marriage, performers of tourist shows continue to respect premarital abstinence, even if practices are not always congruent with discourse. Norms evoked by floorshow performers to define femininity are therefore far from the idealized identity of Polynesian women constructed since colonization and depicted in tourist brochures. How then do people cope with this tension between an imaginary Polynesian femininity and Tongan norms?

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER CATEGORIES IN TOURIST PERFORMANCES

Body practices

Floorshows are a dinner and dance performance. On arriving, patrons first make their way to the buffet. Depending on the location, the show either starts while people are eating or afterwards. The dance performance includes Tongan *faiva* (dance and music); *tau'olunga* (female dances); *mako* and *kailao* (male dances); *mā'ulu'ulu*, *sōkē*, or *lakalaka* (group dances of men and women); and dances from other Polynesian archipelagos. Visitors are likely, for example, to see a Tahitian 'ōte'a (a hip-shaking dance performed to drums) or, more rarely, a *'aparima*, a Hawaiian hula, a Māori haka, or a

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Samoan *siva*. Among the various floorshows I attended in 2008 and 2009, two staged only Tongan faiva and no others. All the others were based on a mix of Tongan performances and other Polynesian dances. The introduction of non-Tongan Polynesian dances is not new. In a film recorded by the BBC in 1976, a dance group that performed for tourists was presented as Tongans who were taught the dances of other Pacific islands in Hawai'i (McIntyre 1976).⁸ But the importance of Polynesian dances in Tonga seems to have grown during the last decade. According to a lady who opened a dance studio in 2008, the practice of non-Tongan dances in Tonga is much more widely accepted now than it was 20 years ago. During the Miss Heilala competitions of 2008 and 2009 (to elect Miss Tonga, also called Miss Heilala, from the name of the emblematic Tongan flower), contestants often chose to perform a Tahitian or Hawaiian dance for the talent test which, according to some informants, was not the case ten years ago. Actually, Tahitian and Hawaiian dances were performed during the Heilala competition ten or twenty years ago (Teilhet-Fisk 1996:193) in place of the tau'olunga: in order to save face for Tongan girls who were not able to perform a proper tau'olunga but had taken Hawaiian dance classes in their respective countries (Teilhet-Fisk 1996:193). Today, all the expatriate participants know how to dance a tau'olunga very well and are considered as serious competitors by local contestants; skills in other Polynesian dances are only used for the talent test and are more valorized now than they used to be.

Nevertheless, the performers I interviewed did not explain why non-Tongan dances were included in floorshows. Rather, they stressed what makes Tonga different from other Polynesian archipelagos and expressed great pride in being Tongan. Although these discourses of pride and identity might seem similar to that of young Māori from New Zealand, for example, it is important to keep in mind that the political context in Tonga is very different from that of Hawai'i or New Zealand. Tonga has never been colonized (having been a protected state for 70 years), and dancing is not linked to indigenous political claims, as it is in Hawai'i or New Zealand. When asked to compare Tongan culture with other Polynesian cultures, several performers mentioned Sāmoa, probably because it is geographically close and has strong historical connections with Tonga. Most performers were not able to make such a comparison with Tahiti, which is much further away, because they know little about it. They generally had much more precise ideas about Hawai'i, where many Tongans live today. Dance was often the main cultural feature mentioned to illustrate the differences between Tonga and other Pacific islands:

'Ofa: It's very different, the Tongan dances from the Polynesian dances, Hawaiian dances. Because the Tongan dances it's very hard, you know how to move step by step by step. But

the Polynesian dances are easy, it's all like, you know, one technique. But the Tongan dances are very very different from any dance.

So the explanation offered for why other Polynesian dances were included had little to do with the cultural significance of those dances for Tongans: most performers simply think that Tahitian or Hawaiian dances are more appropriate for entertainment than the Tongan *faiva*, because the latter are thought to be boring for international tourists, notably because they are slower. Tongan and Tahitian or Hawaiian dance styles are indeed very different. As Kaeppler (2001:54) points out, “The Polynesian region can be separated into two major subcanons—West Polynesian and East Polynesian. The main movement differences centre on the use of the hips. In West Polynesia hip movements are not a significant dimension in themselves but derive from the stepping of the feet. In East Polynesia, hip movements add a rhythmic and aesthetic dimension.” Although this dichotomy could be debated, it gives an idea of the contrast between the Tongan female solo dance, the *tau'olunga*, and the Tahitian *'ōte'a*: during the *tau'olunga*, the dancer must keep her hips and chest aligned and the largest movements are those of the hands and arms. The use of hip movements, even if little emphasized, is judged ridiculous or vulgar. Hawaiian hula and Tahitian *'aparima* are, like the *tau'olunga*, accompanied by musical instruments (guitars and ukuleles) and are “based on poetry that is objectified, alluded to, or mimed by the arms and hands” (Kaeppler 2001:54). While telling a story with her hands, the female dancer must perform hip movements, which are more or less fast but always sweeping. The *'ōte'a* is a dance accompanied only by percussion instruments (in Tongan floorshows they are generally replaced by a CD): the movement of the hips (rotations—*ami* and *fa'arapu* for example—or swaying from side to side—*tāmau*) follows the tempo. The dancer must adapt to variations of the rhythm during the dance and demonstrate her ability to follow the fastest beats. This may explain why the *'ōte'a* has been interpreted by Europeans as having sexual connotations. Both hula and *'ōte'a* also differ from *tau'olunga* in the way leg movements and steps are used: *tau'olunga* dancers move very little and only occasionally take a step forward, backward, sideward, or turn round. As this dancer explains:

Losa: there is a kind of special feeling when you dance a Tongan dance, there are certain qualities, an authenticity about the Tongan dance that I like. [...]

Q: What makes Tongan dances authentic?

Losa: Like I said, what makes it authentic, especially for the girls, is the way they would stand still the whole song. If they tend to step or move their legs, they move it in a way that you

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don't lift up your leg. As soon as you lift up your leg, it kind of looks Tahitian, or Hawaiian, it makes a difference.

Clearly, the Tongan tau'olunga has special importance for Losa, and she distinguishes Tongan from Tahitian or Hawaiian dances mainly based on how the legs are used (which also indicates that the importance attributed to hip movements when describing the differences between various dance genres in the Pacific might result from a Eurocentric point of view). Moving across the performance space is a constitutive part of Tahitian and Hawaiian dances, but it is nonexistent in tau'olunga, except for the dancer's entry onto the stage. The "tahitianization" of the music and dance performance may lead to a "tahitianization" of Tongan female identity: by staging Tahitian 'ōte'a and Hawaiian hula, Tongan performers let visitors think that Tongan women are—as Tahitian women are supposed to be—"available." However, there are further elements in play that give nuance to this point of view.

Most of the time, the Tahitian and Hawaiian dance numbers are not performed by all the female dancers in a group. An important criterion for selecting which dancers will perform 'ōte'a and hula is body shape. Tongans generally think that the quality of a dance performance depends partly on the dancer's body shape and size. For Tongan faiva, the dancer—and the female dancer in particular—should preferably be tall and large. On the contrary, Tongans generally think that for Hawaiian dances, and even more so for Tahitian dances, the performer needs to be slim. Although the dancers need to be physically fit to perform a fast 'ōte'a, there are no objective reasons for thinking that they need to be slim; this seems to derive mainly from Tongan perceptions and explains why the dancers chosen to perform these numbers are often the slimmest of the group.

Another criterion for choosing who will perform Tahitian or Hawaiian dances is based upon knowledge of the dancers' skill. Some have learnt these dances before, like the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This church's congregants are renowned for admiring American modernity (Besnier 2011:211). In youth groups affiliated with this church, Tongans often learn how to perform non-Tongan dances, and some even get the opportunity to travel to Hawai'i as students at Brigham Young University ("BYU"), which is owned by the church. While studying at BYU, students often work at the famous Polynesian Cultural Center ("PCC"), a theme park that stages Polynesian cultural practices. In Tonga, some of these students work at the Tongan National Cultural Center. Because of their experience at the PCC (and probably also because they are keen to break some Tongan norms and traditional practices), they are then more likely to be performing or teaching dances from Sāmoa, Hawai'i, or Tahiti. Members of other churches might also have seen other Polynesian dances, as a young woman belonging

to the Church of Tonga (Protestant) explained. She went on “missionary work” in the Cook Islands, where she learnt local dances (which are similar to those of Tahiti). However, performers who have traveled afar are an exception, and there are other ways to learn an ‘ōte‘a or a hula, for example, from friends or from videos found on the internet.

So while some female performers become specialized in the performance of ‘ōte‘a or hula and do not dance Tongan numbers, others do not execute Tahitian or Hawaiian dances because they are judged not to have the proper body shape, because they had never learnt these dances, or simply because they do not want to. Not performing ‘ōte‘a or other Polynesian female dances can be a way of resisting the tahitianization of the show and asserting a distinctive Tongan identity. In fact, the women who perform only Tongan faiva seem to be perfectly content. Most of them express their preference for the Tongan faiva, as is the case for one dancer, who started to learn Tongan tau‘olunga when she began working for a floorshow: “I think I am just happy [about] that, you know, because in a way you would not be called that you are a real Tongan unless you do the dance. I am happy to learn about my own culture.” Most of the girls who do Tahitian or Hawaiian numbers seem to prefer them. However, the way in which they perform helps to produce a femininity which is not exactly that expected by non-Tongan visitors.

The outfits Tongan girls wear during the Tahitian or Hawaiian dances are very different from those worn in Tahiti. When dancing, young Tahitian women wear short tops, sometimes covering only their breasts, and their *pāreu* are likely to be open high up on the thigh. This is particularly true for the best dancers who perform during competitions. In order to show the perfection of their movements, they wear very simple, short *pāreu*. *Pāreu* are always attached low on the hips, which increases the visibility of the movements. When performing tau‘olunga, young Tongan women wear clothing that covers their body from the armpits to the knees. When Tongan women perform a hula or an ‘ōte‘a, they wear costumes of a different material but similar shape to those worn for the Tongan tau‘olunga. For example, I have never seen a Tongan performer in a tourist show showing her belly or thighs during a Tahitian ‘ōte‘a (I have seen this only once in Tonga, during a Miss Heilala Competition). In addition, the movements of the Tongan women performing ‘ōte‘a or hula might be considered inferior by people familiar with Tahitian or Hawaiian dances. Tongan performers rarely excel in these dances, as they usually learn them as adults. Their lack of skill is generally acknowledged by the performers themselves, like this dancer who had just begun to perform Tahitian dance:

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Q: Now you are going to dance the Tahitian [dances] as Losa has left?

Kalo: Yes, but I am not good yet. Because I know how to dance, but I don't know how to express...to do it in front of people...sometimes I am shy because I don't know what to do, when the music is slow.

Hip movements performed by Tongan dancers are generally not as ample as when performed by Tahitians. In addition, the dancer must adapt her movements to the variation of the rhythm (the type of movement performed with the hips varies according to the beat). Tongan performers who have not received proper training have difficulty knowing when some movement should be performed.

These elements create dissonances with the stereotype of the lascivious-but-innocent Polynesian woman and sometimes generate confusion or dissatisfaction among visitors, particularly among non-Tongans. While many non-Tongan male customers asserted that the dances they had liked most were either the "hips-shaking Hawaiian dance" (a New Zealand visitor) or the "Tahitian female dances" (a French-Australian visitor), when asked if the dances lived up to their expectations, an Australian visiting Tonga for work stated: "I would have liked the women to shake it more and faster." Neither do the performers' bodies correspond to the Euro-American stereotype of the attractive Polynesian woman depicted in brochures and advertisements. Although some dancers tend to be slim in terms of Tongan criteria (especially those responsible for performing the Tahitian 'ōte'a), this seems to be insufficient and does not correspond to what the Euro-American customers I interviewed during the shows would define as slim and attractive. Indeed, some male New Zealand and French visitors considered the female dancers to be lacking attractiveness according to their standards. Contrary to these non-Tongan visitors, Tongan members of the audience generally expressed a preference for Tongan numbers, such as this customer, according to whom "they should eliminate the Polynesian dances." Despite the fact that the way the performers' bodies are dressed, ornamented, or even shaped tends to assert a local definition of femininity, some Tongan visitors expressed dissatisfaction when it came to the body size and appearance of the female dancers, as much for non-Tongan items as for Tongan ones. One of them, for example, asserted that "girls were too fat for the Polynesian dances," while another one exclaimed, "if Tongan oil is too expensive it's ok but they would look better with Tongan oil," meaning that the oil used was of bad quality, reflecting the fact that baby lotions are often used in place of coconut oil.

Discourses

Masters of ceremonies are both men and women in charge of describing and explaining the staged cultural elements during tourist performances. Their jokes present the same kind of ambiguities as revealed by the examination of performance and body practices: on the one hand, some masters of ceremonies seem willing to satisfy the heterosexual tourists' desire—particularly that of men—for an exotic and sensual Other. But some jokes and comments nuance this view or even resist it entirely. The great majority of speeches are delivered in English, although MCs sometimes shift to Tongan when they want to be understood by the Tongan audience only. Masters of ceremonies' speeches tend to reinforce a gender distinction grounded in a heteronormative point of view: females are presented as beautiful and graceful, while male dancers are presented as physically strong. On the contrary, references to persons whose behavior might question these norms, such as *fakaleitī* or *leitī* (transgendered men) are carefully avoided: presenting a heteronormative self to the audience seems very important here. For example, two male MCs introduce the mako (a male Tongan dance) by stressing the dancers' desirability and physical strength. One of them evokes the fact that the “boys” climb coconut trees everyday (which they actually do not), which he says gives them their “muscular” appearance. At the same time that he praises their manly physique, this MC presents his “boys” as being innocent and virginal. Addressing the non-Tongan girls in the audience, he says: “girls, don't touch any of my boys. They have never been touched,” which generally induces laughter. Through these words, he might be addressing (and mocking) the assumed strong libido of foreign women, but he is also diminishing the sexual prowess of his “boys” (who are often presented as being ignorant islanders, coming directly from the “bush” or from distant islands).

“Girls” are even more frequently presented as desirable and attractive than “boys” in MCs' speeches. At the same time their availability is sometimes questioned. This is how one MC introduces a tau'olunga (Tongan dance):

MC: Is there any single and available young man? [As nobody answers, the MC repeats his question] Single and available? Raise your hands. [An Australian customer raises his hand, pressured by his friends] We have one, and your name is? Your name sir?

Visitor: Chris

MC: Chris, and is this your first time in Tonga?

Visitor: Yes, first time.

MC: Oh wonderful! These lovely ladies are single and available, and I have their phone numbers [laughter]. The question is: do you have ten dollars? I also accept credit cards, master cards [laughter]. Chris and his table, of friends, family, welcome to the Tongan

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National Cultural Centre, presenting our lovely young ladies with an exciting next item. After the men picked wild flowers they watched how the lovely young ladies string them into fine garlands we call *kahoa*. Our next item is simply called *kahoa*.

This speech can be interpreted in different ways. It plays on the assumed desire of the foreigners for the young Tongan women on stage; it also underlines their availability. The ending is more ambiguous: it could be interpreted as a conscious, cynical and provocative enactment of the tourists' stereotype ("locals" often being perceived by some tourists as mostly interested in money), a way to make visitors aware of their own stereotypes about the "primitive Other" (Balme 2007). A similar logic is described by Le Menestrel (2002) in her study of Acadian tourism in Louisiana. It could also be interpreted as a way to mock the tourists' desire for the exotic girls (as Cook Islanders do during their tourist shows [Alexeyeff 2009]), a desire presented here as excessive and immoral, as it is assumed that tourists would be ready to pay to satisfy it. Bunten (2008) reports that, in tourist interactions, "jokes are effective as subversive tools because they can be used to violate codes of normal speech behavior in a nonthreatening manner" (Bunten 2008:389). Indeed, it is precisely because they are open to multiple interpretations that they are effective, nonthreatening tools. Whatever the right interpretation is, the master of ceremonies appears in this speech as the one with the power, in particular the (virtual) power to give tourists what they want (here, access to the "lovely ladies'" phone numbers).

When introducing Tahitian or Hawaiian dances, male masters of ceremonies (more than female masters of ceremonies) explicitly emphasize the sexual aspect of these dances. But this is never done in a process of tahitianization of the female performers. On the contrary, they address visitors' misconceptions of Tongan femininity, either directly or indirectly, through humor. The following excerpt from the presentation of a male MC who manages a show where only Tongan *faiva* are performed illustrates the first case:

MC: In Hopola'ā, the show is traditional, you know sometimes it looks boring, for the tourists from overseas. Like the young man over here, he would expect to come to the Islands and see hula girls, yes? [The MC makes a little hip movement. The audience laughs.] Is that right? [The question is addressed to a young white man in the audience]

[Answer inaudible]

MC: With coconut top? [More laughter in the audience] Is that right?

[Answer inaudible]

MC: He is very honest. And that's how it is advertised in the world: 'Go to the Islands, you'll see Island girls...tell a story with their hips'. Not in Hopola'ā, not in Tonga! Our people should preserve our dances. That's why you see men very tough and rough, women very graceful, covered from the top to the bottom, that's a sign of respect.

The portrayal of Tongan femininity and masculinity given by this master of ceremonies stems from hegemonic heterosexual Tongan norms, which are emphatically reiterated during floorshows. Nonetheless, this speech helps the MC challenge the tourists' (alleged) representations of Polynesian femininity.

An extract from another master of ceremonies' speech demonstrates his desire to keep Tahiti and the image of the Tahitian vahine at a distance. Unlike the previous MC, this one, introducing a Tahitian 'ōte'a, explains:

East Polynesia is French, and among the French Polynesian Islands, we have Tahiti. Now listen carefully young men; you know Tahiti is renowned for the beauty of their lovely young ladies. They say when they dance, if you watch their hands alone, you will miss half of the story. The other half of the story is told by their hips. Young men, that would be this part of the body [he shows his buttock]. Two young men over there, name and where are you from, hingoa [name]? [The two boys answer] Alani comes from New Zealand, Misi comes from a very small village called Longoteme [laughter].

In this speech, the Master of Ceremonies addresses young men in the audience and, at the end, he **interpolates** specifically two young men from Tonga. Humor emerges here because the MC is mocking the young men, who are presented as being innocent enough not to realize the sexual dimension of the dance, indeed so innocent that if they were not told to, they would not watch the female dancers' hips. This is amplified by the choice of presenting one young man as coming from the "bush;" i.e., from a small village on the main island (Tongatapu), and not from the capital city. But, while speaking to the young Tongan men, the MC is also using the non-Tongan visitors as "unratified participants" (Goffman 1981:9) who overhear what is being said and who must understand that, although Tongans perform (Tahitian) dances that tourists see as having sexual connotations, Tonga is not Tahiti.

Comment [epmqb1]: I am not sure about what "interpolate" means but I meant "call out", "hail" (I thought I could say "interpellate")

Comment [a2]: I had actually never heard of interpellate before, and thought you meant interpolate. After looking up interpellate, I don't really think it fits here.

Can we instead say that the MC specifically recognizes two young men from Tonga?

DISCUSSION

Dorlin (2007) argues for a need to consider racialized and gendered identities at the same time, not only because racial and sexual domination are built on similar grounds and follow a similar logic, but also because they are intertwined in a unique process of domination. For example, the way the colonial gaze defined the femininity or masculinity of the colonized was used to assert colonial domination (Dorlin 2007:59). The definition of the indigenous female as being attractive and available can be to the detriment of the indigenous male. Race is not an operative concept in the context of Tonga, and I do not intend to draw a parallel between colonization and tourism, but examining the way idealized Polynesian feminine identity is staged and/or

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resisted during tourist performances can tell us more about the broader power relationships at stake in the tourist encounter. Tourist performances are situations in which external forces (hegemonic dimensions of tourism marketing and tourists' expectations) affect gendered identities and actors. Tahitian and Hawaiian dances are performed to satisfy tourists' expectations of meeting a South Seas fantasy. Nevertheless, the way dances are performed and the humor is used by MCs keeps Tahiti at a distance, showing that the image of the hula girl or the vahine is not simply imposed but negotiated.

Butler's (1993) concept of "performativity" might be useful to understand how this works. His philosophical theory toward gender studies has been to show that gender, even when understood as a social construction, is not part of the individual's intrinsic attributes. Performativity "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler 1993:2). This concept offers more insight into the way gendered categories are defined and maintained: the construction of gendered identity is not achieved at some point in an individual's life, but is instead continuously negotiated during an entire lifetime through performative movements and practices. As I understand it, these movements and practices do not simply give consistency to or embody a pre-existing gendered identity but help to define and shape it through the sequence of acts performed. Performativity is thus what makes sex hierarchies possibly unstable. For if gender distinction and hierarchies have to be repeatedly asserted to be successful, failures in this repetition introduce possibilities of change (Butler 1999:179; Dorlin 2007:51). Bourdieu's (2000) concept of *hexis*, on the contrary, accentuates the role of the body as an instrument of social reproduction. But uniting Butler's concept of performativity and Bourdieu's *hexis* might further our understanding of how social structures and norms can be challenged and reproduced at the same time.

Normative Tongan femininity is unconsciously reproduced through performativity. The way dancing bodies are shaped, ornamented, and dressed (even when performing a Tahitian 'ōte'a or a Hawaiian hula) all indicate that Tongan norms of femininity are favored over the external image of the sensual and available Polynesian woman. The dancing bodies help to reproduce the definition of femininity as being linked to premarital virginity and a sense of modesty (an English word used by Tongans to describe one aspect of ideal feminine behavior). In other words, the *hexis* (Bourdieu 2000:286) is so deeply inscribed into the performers' bodies that it cannot be easily erased. By their imperfect performance or simply by refusing to perform Tahitian or Hawaiian dances, Tongan dancers can be described as resisting (whether they intend to or not) the imposition of a homogenizing image of femininity.

At the same time, these performances also create dissonances for the Tongan audience. The performance of Tahitian and Hawaiian dances questions Tongan gender norms and normative femininity in particular. Performing these dances, whose styles are very different from the Tongan female *faiva*, cannot take place without impact, and it inevitably brings changes and new considerations to what it is to be a woman and how a woman should act. In addition, these dances are not only performed to satisfy tourists, but also because some young women are willing to perform them. Consequently, these dances have gained in importance for some Tongans. What emerges does not exactly fit the Western fantasy, nor does it simply reproduce hegemonic Tongan femininity; instead, it contributes to a more complex and heterogeneous definition of femininity, which not only results from a negotiation between these two opposite and contradictory views of how women should be and act, but also reflects the diversity of performers' visions and lives. The process of femininity construction at stake is inscribed in a larger (re)definition of femininity in Tonga today, where young women claim the right to wear shorter skirts in the street, to go out at night with friends, and to make advances on boys, while at the same time continuing to express attachment to values of good behaviour—because, for example, having a relationship out of wedlock is still stigmatized.

Some have stressed the need to understand who the people are whose identity is constantly being constituted through social action and how the reconceptualization of identity as fragmented and unstable helps in understanding how structures of inequality are reproduced (Besnier 1997). The definition of gender categories is now widely considered by scholars as being relational and historical (Jolly 2008; Théry 2008), as much in Western as in non-Western societies, although this is made more obscure in Western contexts (Théry 2008). I have tried to locate here the negotiation of gender categories and norms in a set of social relations between actors whose social status, wealth, and geographical mobility are unequal. This negotiation takes place in a social context, where gender categories can be negotiated only within certain limits. The study of this production of femininity reveals that international tourists' dominant position is not secured in real interaction. Admittedly, some floorshow managers explain that they have chosen to include non-Tongan Polynesian dances to entertain non-Tongans. But the result is qualified: either managers or female performers choose not to perform these dances when they do not want to, or dancers willing to do so do not stage exactly what international tourists expect. Masters of ceremonies might attempt to eroticize the performance to satisfy the tourists' alleged

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desire for an exotic female Other, but at the same time, they challenge this fantasized femininity and the sexual interpretation of the dance performance through both humorous and serious comments and through a play on interpellations of members in the audience.

CONCLUSION

The asymmetric social relationships generated by Tongan floorshows induce a re-examination of gender categories. The way femininity is defined in return contributes to a negotiation of power relationships. Bodies and discourses are involved as media in this process. Performativity and discourses (particularly jokes) both contribute resistance to the hegemonic imposition of the idealized Polynesian female identity and help to redefine the power relationships between international tourists and locals. Bodies play a major role in this construction of femininity; the constraints imposed by body hexis and the subversive power of performativity are both at play in this process, which does not create a new femininity out of nothing, but contributes to the shaping of a more complex one, challenging different normative femininities.

NOTES

1. I warmly thank the Tongans who helped me throughout this research, particularly Aneleisia and Pita Lincoln Vi, the Koloamatangi family, Akanesi Tupou and Afui Lelena. I also thank Niko Besnier, Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon, Mahalia Lassibile, and Maxime Vanhoenacker for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article. Thanks also to the C.R.E.D.O. (Centre for Research and Documentation on Oceania, France) and to the Musée du Quai Branly for their financial support.
2. Following Théry (2008), I define gender in this article as the feminine/masculine distinction determined through social actions and relations.
3. The division of the Pacific into Polynesia/Melanesia/Micronesia and Malaysia, proposed by J. S. C. Dumont d'Urville in 1834, was not only a geographical mapping, it was also a racial classification (Tcherkézoff 2003:179). It relied on the opposition of the fair, well-proportioned inhabitants of Polynesia to the dark brown, disproportioned inhabitants of Melanesia.
4. The words pertaining to femininity in the different Polynesian languages have close consonances (*wāhine*, *vahine*, *fefine*, etc.), but very different meanings and connotations. *Ta'ahine* is the Tongan word that was originally used for high-ranking women only. Today, it is used for young women. *Vahine* means woman or wife in Tahitian. It has been associated, as well as the 'hula girl' (Desmond 1997; 1999), with the image of the "lascivious-but-innocent" Polynesian woman.
5. It could be argued that men too are pressured by a homogenizing idealized image of Polynesian masculinity, based on physical strength and beauty. One floorshow, for example, stages the Māori haka, connecting—in visitors' imagination—Tongan men with the fierce Māori "warriors" or sportsmen of the Western imagination (Hokowhitu 2004; van Meijl 1994).

6. Missionary work and Christianization strongly influence norms related to clothing and femininity. In a description of a group of women dancing, Williamson (quoted by Cook), mentions that “the custom of going with the upper part of their bodies naked is thought no way indecent” (Cook 1967:111).
7. The names of persons and places have been changed to preserve their anonymity.
8. McIntyre, M., dir. 1976. *The Honourable Out-of-step*. BBC. Film. This film, entitled “The Honourable Out-of-Step” in reference to Hon. Ve’ehala, a renowned *punake* (poet, composer, choreographer) who is at the centre of this documentary, describes the ceremonies and feasts that celebrated the centenary of the Tongan Constitution in 1975. It is particularly focused on the preparation of one of the dances that was performed on this occasion, a *lakalaka* composed by Hon. Ve’ehala. A copy of this film was obtained from the Tonga Broadcasting Commission, whom I thank for this, in 2012.

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Comment [epmqb3]: okay

Comment [a4]: Okay. What we're going to do is cite the pdf that you sent me.

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