WOMEN, ART, AND THE CRAFTING OF ETHNICITY IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH POLYNESIA

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Tradition is a highly charged arena of political debate in French Polynesia. Both pro-French and pro-independence forces appeal to notions of Polynesian tradition in their claims to represent the Polynesian ethnic majority. The two sides in this political debate have adopted different definitions of what constitutes authentic Polynesian tradition. The independence movement has sponsored the recreation of precolonial arts and customs: voyaging canoes, thatched houses, tattoo, even Polynesian religion. This movement is led by urban intellectuals and artists. For many nationalists the only authentic traditional customs are those that existed before European conquest. Their revival of indigenous customs is known as the Ma'ohi culture movement and is described by Stevenson elsewhere in this volume.

The pro-French side in this political contest embraces the evolved tradition of the mission and colonial periods, which is the tradition familiar to most working-class and rural islanders.[1] This tradition is epitomized by an idealized picture of rural Polynesian culture: it is devoutly Christian; centered on the home, the garden, and the sea; and emphasizes values of modesty, generosity, and hospitality. Its arts are local appropriations of imported materials: cloth *pareu,* piecework *tifaifai* bedcovers, elaborately plaited hats, Christian *himene* songs. These arts are locally known as *artisanat traditionnel.* Women artists in this tradition organize cooperative associations, whose activities will be discussed in detail below.

Just as local Polynesians accepted imported materials and trans-

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formed them into distinctive art forms, they also accepted many Asian and European immigrants and absorbed them into island society. This Polynesian tradition judges ethnicity by behavior, values, and contributions to the local community, not on biological inheritance (see Levy 1973:215; Linnekin and Poyer 1990: introduction, 8; Jones 1991:14-15).[2] This accommodating tradition seems an obvious instrument for those politicians who advocate continuing ties to France and expanding foreign investment.

The focus of this article is the role of women artists in the *artisanat traditionnel* cooperative movement and on the Territorial political stage. The basic argument is that politicians, on the one hand, use their power as patrons of craft cooperatives to compel women artists to promote their political aims. Displays and performances created by these women artists serve to craft the politician's image as a traditional, legitimate, ethnically Polynesian leader loyal to the interests of the working-class, Polynesian majority. On the other hand, leaders of cooperative organizations use the political system to gain access to markets, resources, and power for women artists.

This article starts with a description of the craft cooperative movement and then analyzes the patron-client relationship between local politicians and craft cooperatives. Next, it details how politicans use women artists and *artisanat traditionnel* as symbols of Polynesian ethnic identity and of legitimate authority. I conclude with a discussion of the threat that political and commercial arrangements pose to the traditional prestige of women artists in their local communities.

Associations Artisanales

Artisanat traditionnel includes those crafts that have been continuously practiced over the past several centuries by Polynesian women and men. Genres widely considered *artisanat traditionnel* include all types of plant (and artificial) fiber plaiting, weaving, shredding, and tying; wood and stone carving; the making of jewelry and ornaments from shells, seeds, feathers, and fresh flowers; as well as sewing and decorating cloth pillows, bedspreads, other household furnishings, and certain types of clothing. Male artists perform virtually all the carving of wood, stone, or shell and some plant fiber work, and tend to work out of private workshops, rarely joining cooperatives. The craft cooperative *(association artisanale)* movement represents mainly the interests of women artists. Women artists work in cloth, plant fiber, shell, feathers, and fresh flowers.

The organization of women artists into cooperatives provides an important opportunity to earn cash, particularly in rural areas. In one suburban district I studied, only 43 percent of all adult women hold wage employment (ITSTAT 1984, 23:2). The other 56 percent are housewives. Because most Polynesian women (71 percent) stop school at age fifteen, after the legally required primary stage, employed women usually hold low-paying service jobs as cooks, maids, or child-care providers (see also Fages 1971:162). They may also participate in cash cropping of garden vegetables or tree fruit, but this work is difficult, of low status, and requires access to increasingly scarce garden land; furthermore, profits must be shared with the landowners. On Mo'orea, Taha'a, and Rurutu, I met women who grew vanilla, coffee, or flowers to earn a little cash (see Lockwood 1988 on women and cash cropping on Tubuai).

Women join craft cooperatives for access to a market for homemade crafts, for income that they alone control, and because they have a say in the management of the organization. This measure of independence from their families and from the predations of merchant middlemen and market resellers is an important factor in women's decisions to join cooperatives (see also Finney 1965:23-24; Hammond 1986a:266; Lockwood 1988:273; and Jones 1991:34-36).

Local Associations

Local associations, of which there are hundreds in French Polynesia, are the basic unit of artisanat organization. With growing territorial government support for cultural programs in the late 1970s and early 1980s, women organized themselves into cooperative associations, or *associations artisanales* (Lockwood 1983:54-55; Stevenson, this volume).[3] The purpose of these organizations is the commercial production, promotion, and marketing of traditional crafts. Each district or village contains at least one craft association, and typically several, primarily representing women artists and the full range of traditional materials.[4] The association commonly has a building or "center" for meetings, work space, and exhibition of items for sale. In contrast to the groups of churchwomen or kinswomen who meet to work together *(pupu)* in traditional communities, these new associations are highly structured, organized into larger groups, directly involved in politics, and concerned primarily with making money. Members enjoy socializing and often work side by side on individual projects, offering each other help and advice, but labor exchange is rarely practiced in craft

associations. Associations range in size from a dozen members in isolated Tuamotu island communities, to more than forty members in some Austral and Society islands communes (Service de l'Artisanat Traditionnel 1987:2).

The larger craft cooperatives are typically housed in neotraditional-style buildings that are oval, with a pandanus thatch roof, cement walls and floor, and sliding glass doors. A small garden frames the cooperative building. If the district boasts a tourist attraction, the building is placed next to it. The interior of a typical craft cooperative building *(fare artisanat)* is filled with finished items for sale. Low tables line the walls holding pillows, bedcovers, clothing, and shellwork. Other tables may display the work of local men; there may be wood objects such as tikis and ukeleles, or carved mother-of-pearl. The walls are hung with *tifaifai* and fancy piecework pillowcases. In the center of the oval room, there are mats laid flat on the floor with woven bags and baskets arranged on them, rolled mats, and treelike stands blooming with hats. There are three or four racks of long shell *hei* necklaces and hand-painted *pareu* skirts and dresses.

A small group of women usually sits inside, keeping shop, gossiping, and quietly sewing or plaiting. Other members come and go, dropping off finished crafts or food for a special event, picking up raw materials, or checking to see if they have sold anything. Once a month, at a general meeting, members who fail to meet their obligations (in the form of dues, turns minding the store, or contributions of labor and food to collective events) are scolded, plans for upcoming events and exhibitions are discussed, and the latest news from the government offices in charge of tourism and development are mulled over. In many villages, the craft cooperative building is as important a local meeting place as the mayor's office and the general store.

Federations

The relationship between politicians and women in the craft movement extends beyond the local level, through federations of cooperatives. At the intermediate level, local cooperatives join larger federations. In 1987 there were six federations in French Polynesia: four based on Tahiti and one each in the Tuamotus and the Marquesas. They represented over four hundred associations with more than thirty-seven hundred members, according to the Service de l'Artisanat Traditionnel (Tila Mazière, pers. com., 1988).[5] One of the larger federations, Pu Maohi F.A.A.T.I. (Fédération des Associations d'Artisans de Tahiti et

des Îles), had more than forty associations and over one thousand artists in 1987, according to its founder, Caroline Solari (pers. com., 1987). Another federation, the Comité Territoriale des Associations Artisanales et Culturels Maohi, led by Stella Lehartel, included fifty member associations and more than three thousand artists in 1985 and has increased in size since that time (Lehartel 1985:3).

Federations usually have member associations on several islands.[6] Their role is to coordinate the movement of people and goods between communities. Associations in rural communities ship raw materials such as rolls of pandanus or bamboo, shells, or feathers to the urban or suburban associations. In return, the urban groups market finished craft items for associations in more isolated areas. The federation also serves as a go-between, arranging for the urban cooperatives on Tahiti to purchase and ship imported materials such as fabric, dyes, or sewing machine parts for their counterparts on remote islands.

When a group of artists visits another island for an exposition or other special event, the women are the guests of the local association belonging to the same federation. Women from outer islands teach Tahitian women techniques forgotten in Tahiti, and Tahitian women in turn share the latest innovations in technique or materials from Tahiti. This relationship, based on cooperation, sharing, and exchange of information, contrasts strongly with the competitive relationship between federations. Federations compete for choice exhibition spaces in Pape'ete, for leadership positions on government advisory committees, for invitations to represent the Territory on overseas tours and tourist brochures, and for government grants.

Because there are several federations with overlapping territories, there is also competition between federations to attract member associations. In the organizing meetings I attended, artists appraised which federation president was more effective in organizing and promoting events such as large exhibitions for member associations and which federations best facilitated material and personnel transfer between islands. Occasionally, someone raises the issue of which federation president is a more accomplished artist and thus better equipped to understand artists' problems and to direct youth training programs.

While federations serve to promote development in the craft sector, they also serve political interests. Artists told me privately that political patrons pressure local cooperatives to participate in federations primarily to support their political alliances and ambitions on a territorial level. In fact, local associations often have no choice but to join the federation that their local patron politician favors. Federations, as groups

of cooperatives, are linked to groups of allied politicians in the major political parties.

The half dozen or so women who lead large associations and federations are powerful figures in the island political scene. On the one hand, politicians recognize their power to organize people, plan events, and marshal goods and labor, and they seek to enlist the support of these prominent women artists. On the other hand, there is a constant jockeying on the part of these craft movement leaders for favors controlled by political leaders and their appointees: limited aid grants, prime exhibition space in the capital, and opportunities to represent the Territory in tourism campaigns and on foreign promotional tours (to the Pacific Arts Festival, for example). All of these women are well connected in the complex political and civil-service hierarchy. They use their resources and connections to secure advantages for their associations and hope that they are not outmaneuvered by a rival (in those cases where a politician promises something a more powerful colleague may have offered to another federation, as often happens in the huge, complex territorial bureaucracy).[7]

Government Institutions

The highest level of government concerned with development in the craft sector is a cabinet minister in the territorial government whose responsibilities include *artisanat traditionnel.* This is a relatively new responsibility and for many years followed its key supporter, Georges Kelly, as he changed portfolios: in 1985 he had the Ministère de la Jeunesse, des Sports, de l'Éducation Populaire et de l'Artisanat Traditionnel; in 1988, the Ministère de l'Agriculture, de la Culture et de L'Artisanat Traditionnel; in 1989, Ministère de l'Agriculture et de l'Artisanat Traditionnel; and in 1990, the Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Artisanat Traditionnel et du Patrimoine Culturel. Kelly was also vice-president of the Territory's government from 1988 to 1991 and held a post in the Territorial Assembly. With the return of Gaston Flosse's Tahoera'a Huira'atira party to power in 1991, *artisanat traditionnel* came under the control of Justin Arapari and the reconstructed Ministère de la Culture, de l'Artisanat Traditionnel et des Postes et Telecommunications.

Government activities in this area are channeled through the Service de l'Artisanat Traditionnel, administered since its creation in 1987 by Tila Mazière, whose charge is to encourage the development of crafts.[8] The Service organizes large expositions and contests, arranges for expo-

sitions and sales contracts overseas, and disburses small grants for travel and helps with purchases of equipment such as sewing machines. The Service also sponsors conferences for artists and association leaders to voice their concerns to government representatives and conducts survey research on obstacles to development in the craft sector. Other offices in the complex territorial bureaucracy support traditional arts; most important are the Office Territorial de l'Action Culturel (OTAC) and the Tourist Promotion Board (its local acronym is OPATTI, Office de la Promotion et d'Animation Touristique de Tahiti et ses Îles). Many other offices, for example those concerned with education and activities for young people, sponsor art education and expositions.

To summarize the important features of the *artisanat traditionnel* movement, home- and family-based traditional artists have emerged into the public, commercial, and political arenas. The women's craft cooperative movement has had a large impact on working-class Polynesian women, with hundreds of active cooperatives, several major annual exhibitions, foreign tours, and a new public role in cultural policy making. Both Polynesian women and local politicians are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by this new form of organization.

The Politics of Patronage

There are a dozen political parties in French Polynesia. Most center on a single charismatic leader and focus on electing him or her to the important office of mayor or representative to the Territorial Assembly. The primary locus of political activity is the commune mayor's office. (Mayors are the elected leaders of communes, of which there are forty-eight in French Polynesia, generally comprising a single village and the surrounding district, although in sparsely populated areas districts may be combined to form communes.) Only the three or four larger parties launch territory-wide campaigns and are allied with major metropolitan French political parties. Because, in the French system, a single individual can hold as many offices as he or she can win election to, it is often the case that a mayor is also a representative to the Territorial Assembly. The result is a remarkable concentration of power in a handful of politicians who hold several offices simultaneously: a mayor's office, a seat in the assembly, and perhaps a cabinet post or seat in the French or European parliament. As it is not physically possible to be in two or three offices simultaneously, day-to-day operations are left in the hands of a small army of *adjoints.*

Political life in Pape'ete, French Polynesia's only city, is more complicated than village politics. We will examine the role of the politician as patron of the arts and manipulator of traditional symbols beginning in the village. In rural districts, the commune mayor's office is the center of political power. The mayor is usually the most important patron an artist or group of artists can have. Most communes contain one or two craft associations. The mayor's office usually offers major support to only one association, by building a shop and meeting place for a cooperative *(fare artisanat),* which is constructed on public land alongside the main road or as part of a local tourist landmark. The mayor's office pays the telephone and electrical bills, and sends someone to cut the grass in the garden. With the mayor's help, the association also maintains a small stand in the Pape'ete marketplace. The mayor frequently addresses the quarterly association meetings and may hold an honorary office in the association.

In larger, more populous communes, the mayor may give assistance to several smaller cooperatives, in the form of small loans or grants and occasional help from public employees with heavy labor, in addition to the major patronage of one larger association. Smaller groups rarely persist in the face of the competitive advantages that official sponsorship provides: a well-maintained, permanent home in a highly visible location and opportunities to be in the public eye at official events.[9] Thus, craft cooperatives have strong incentives to seek and maintain the favor of the mayor, their most important patron.

Through their support of craft associations, mayors promote jobs and income for local citizens and foster district pride in the many competitive exhibitions that take place in the capital. The mayor forms a political alliance with the craft association. In return for his or her support, the mayor expects the support of the association and, ideally, the allegiance of its members.[10] The artists decorate public buildings for ceremonies and festivals, perform as singers and dancers for visiting dignitaries, and host fund-raising lunches, dinners, and dances for the mayor's political party. During election campaigns they hand out buttons and flyers, put up posters, and help get out the vote. These duties take up a lot of time, particularly for the president of the craft association, who in some cases spends more time on politics than on making or promoting art.

So why would one do it? What compels craft associations to enter into relationships with politicians that many artists consider exploitative? Basically, it is the competitive advantage over other local artists, resulting from increased exposure and access to resources. Secondarily, some

members of an association may support a politician out of genuine conviction and loyalty to the political philosophy he or she espouses. Many artists also believe in the importance of community service and point to youth training programs in the arts sponsored by the mayor as a worthy cause to support.

Beyond these motivations that lead artists to join politically active associations, artists also stress the camaraderie of membership in the association and their enjoyment of social activities.[11] The opportunity to participate in the public performance of tradition and politics is important in small rural communities. Craft associations offer Polynesian women positions of leadership and social prominence, the possibility of getting their pictures in the newspaper, and an arena in which to advance the prestige of their families. And to some extent, craft associations may provide support to their local mayor because the right to labor and gifts is traditionally the prerogative of leadership in Polynesian society.

Mayors have considerable power to assist their loyal supporters, usually by offering to send commune employees and equipment to help businesses, churches, and private individuals with difficult jobs. They find jobs for the relatives of their supporters, and conversely, their supporters hire employees sent to them by the mayor. Craft associations benefit from mayoral support, and some members feel they owe their loyalty in return. The favors that a mayor expects in return for patronage vary depending on the age and ambition of the mayor, the proximity of an election, and the size of the commune. Businesses and organizations that do not support the mayor find that the new sidewalk is on the other side of the road and the new drainage ditch runs across their parking lot.

Political activities are specifically forbidden under the official organizing charter for artisanal organizations, partly to prevent discrimination on the basis of political or religious affiliation against individuals wishing to join cooperatives (Service de l'Artisanat Traditionnel n.d.). Still, it is not unusual for a craft association, or any other business or organization for that matter, to engage in political activities. Business people in Tahiti must offer support by making cash contributions, giving promises of votes, and putting up campaign posters, for example, to maintain good relationships with the mayors of their communes. The consensus in the artistic community is that a mayor should be able to demand occasional services from client craft cooperatives, preferably in community activities that are not purely political in nature, such as school fairs or training programs for unemployed young people.

However, when a mayor uses his or her power over a cooperative to demand performances, goods, and services for purely political events such as campaign fund raisers, party rallies, and private parties for political allies, conflict within the craft cooperative can erupt. Conflict over political activities may even lead the cooperative to split into two separate associations. The problem may be simply that working for a patron interferes with earnings from craft production, or it may reflect a deeper dissatisfaction with the political leadership of the commune and of the cooperative. In some cases, a new association is formed and receives some support from a rival political party. If this rival party is successful in defeating the incumbent mayor at election time, the splinter association usually takes over the commune *fare artisanat* as a reward for its efforts during the campaign. The power of incumbency should not be underestimated, however; forming a splinter association is a risky strategy for dissatisfied, ambitious artists to pursue.

When a local politician fails to win reelection, his or her client craft cooperatives must seek the favor of the successful rival. Although the association may survive, there is nearly always a change in leadership at the association as well. At the district level, a newly elected mayor engineers the replacement of an association president who campaigned for his or her rival. Replacement with a loyal supporter is harder to effect at the federation level, where leaders are too powerful to be upset by the results of a single election.

The Crafting of Ethnicity

Women artists are important to politicians because these artists can create for a leader an image of legitimate authority based on identification with the local Polynesian working-class majority. The political power of women artists is based in part on their social importance as elders in their communities. Women artists are collectively referred to as *mama* or *mama ru'au* in the Tahitian language. Local people refer to most middle-aged and older Polynesian women as *Mama,* both as a term of reference and in direct address. As a term of address, it expresses respect, affection, and familiarity. To call a woman *Mama* also implies the attainment of maturity, responsibility, and respectability in her community.[12] *Mama ru'au* translates literally as "old woman" or "grandmother," but it is also used to honor women wise in the ways of tradition, oral history, and craft (Langevin-Duval n.d.:26-27).

Women artists are a source of collective Polynesian pride in creativity, resourcefulness, entrepreneurship, knowledge, and skill. They provide

a positive image of Polynesian womanhood that contrasts with the image of the tourist brochure beauty who is forever young, overtly sexual, and easily exploited. For Polynesian women, the growing prominence of famous women artists creates a space--the artists' associations and federations--in which women can act independently of male relatives publicly and politically.

Politicians gain respectability from the public support of the socially prominent women of their district. These women artists are considered to be exemplars of traditional Polynesian family values--honesty, generosity, hospitality, nurturance, and piety--values that politicians gladly associate themselves with.

To win the votes of the Polynesian majority (over 70 percent of the population), a politician must appear to be of Polynesian ethnicity. Many politicians come rather from the class of highly educated, relatively wealthy, part-European Demis, who are widely resented by working-class Polynesians.[13] For Polynesians, however, ethnicity is more a matter of life-style than of ancestry (see Levy 1973:215; Jones 1991:12-14; for Pacific Islanders in general, see Linnekin and Poyer 1990:8). Politicians' public support of local *mamas* and their craft cooperatives and the public performances of these women for their patrons produce an image of shared fictive kinship and Polynesian ethnicity. Politicians who successfully make this identification with the Polynesian majority are popularly referred to as *metua,* which translates to "parent" (see Danielsson 1986:25). The presence of a crowd of loyal *mamas* with their accompanying Polynesian music, dance, costumes, and traditional hospitality is a powerful symbol of belonging to the people,

Politicians also use other traditional symbols and behaviors to reinforce this public ethnic image. Fluency in the Tahitian language and oratorical style is practically a prerequisite for office. Politicians are likely to adopt the more casual clothing style of the islands (*pareu* shirt and trousers for men, flowered dresses for women) rather than the formal European suit. Such behaviors become meaningful when people doubt an individual politician's honesty and loyalty to his or her constituents. Traditional symbols assert, "I am like you, I share your values, I am looking out for community interests (not my own or those of any foreign power), I am accessible to you."

Island politicians have to balance the desire to appear cosmopolitan and sophisticated alongside military officers, civil servants, and business people with the need to appear to be ordinary Polynesians to their constituents. In recent years, charges of corruption and misuse of power have resulted in boycotts, blockades, strikes, and even riots in Pape'ete.

In the current climate of political instability and economic crisis, the wearing of elegant European suits and rumors of too frequent presence at fancy cocktail parties, rather than at church in one's home district, are dangerous threats to established politicians. In this situation, the traditional symbols assume a heightened importance. It is not easy to maintain traditional values and support economic development at the same time, as women artists have also discovered. The failure of politicians to meet this challenge convincingly accounts, in part, for the cynicism with which many Polynesians regard the business of politics.

The Power of Tradition

The political geography of French Polynesia has changed little since the contact period. Modern communes are divided along the borders of ancient chiefdoms. The position of chief was only gradually transformed into the modern elected office it is today, passing through periods in which chiefs were nominated by the queen and confirmed by an election of sorts or simply appointed by French colonial administrators (see Newbury 1980:186-216). Somewhere along the line chiefs lost their ancient titles as *ari'i* or *ra'atira* and were simply called *tavana,* a Polynesian transformation of the English word "governor."

The ancient chiefdom and the modern organization of communes with popularly elected mayors have only a few things in common, the most important being deliberate attempts by modern politicians to call on the authority of tradition.[14] Modern politicians subtly invoke symbols and qualities of traditional chiefdom to reinforce their authority and to imply that they are the sole legitimate candidates for a local office. During campaigns for election to the territorial government, mayors travel to other districts and outer islands soliciting votes. On arrival in a distant village or island, they may be received with gifts of *tifaifai* piecework bedcovers (wrapped around them as barkcloth once would have been; see Hammond 1986b:55) and handwoven hats, and smothered in flower necklaces (see also Lockwood 1983:54). These images of decorated political figures are, of course, transmitted throughout French Polynesia through television news and the two newspapers, and are noted by the population of their home district.

The welcome that a politician receives far from home is a direct measure of his or her political power and personal charisma. High-ranking chiefs in the past also went on tours of the island or neighboring islands to test alliances and loyalty. Gifts, feasts, and entertainment were symbols of alliance, loyalty, friendship, and power then as now. Photogenic displays of allegiance and affection are arranged through networks of

women's craft cooperatives (federations) and alliances of powerful Tahitian politicians and less influential politicians from outer islands.

Politicians use traditional *artisanat,* as they construct their identities as ethnic Polynesians, to further their claims to traditional sources and uses of power. The power to convene labor groups to produce prestige goods, such as fine mats or barkcloth, was a prerogative of chiefdom in the precolonial social order. The manifest ability to marshal labor from loyal supporters is still an indication of political power in Tahiti. The size and appearance of a politician's entourage, which is greatly improved by the addition of a score of traditional artists, is also an important sign of political health.

Island politicians symbolize their similarity to traditional chiefs by drawing these subtle parallels without comparing themselves explicitly to traditional chiefs or calling for a return to the system of hereditary title holding. The revival of contact-period chiefdoms is not a popular idea in modern French Polynesia, nor has the restoration of the monarchy been proposed, even by members of the Maʻohi movement. Appeals to traditional authority, designed to impress a working-class Polynesian electorate, use symbols and practices associated with chiefdom with great caution.[15] Nonetheless, the use of chiefly devices such as the grand tour, with ceremonial greetings and presentation of gifts, the sponsorship of festivals and feasts, and the convening of local labor on communal projects entails subtle but powerful evocations of chiefly authority.

The building of grand public meeting places is another traditional symbolization of chiefly prerogative and power employed by modern politicians. Powerful political leaders have led a movement away from the modern pan-Pacific concrete construction of public buildings that characterized the building boom of the sixties and seventies, in favor of the revival of traditional architectures. The mayor of Papeʻete, Jean Juventin, built a replica of the nineteenth-century Pomare Palace to house his offices in the late 1980s. Independence leader and mayor of Faʻaʻa Oscar Temaru countered this edifice with a huge complex of traditional thatched oval buildings in the style of Tahitian meetinghouses of centuries past. These two leaders are appealing to the two competing concepts of Polynesian tradition and identity discussed at the outset of this article. Identification with both of these traditions lends an air of legitimate authority to a leader, albeit with different audiences.

Politics and Prestige: A Dilemma for Women Artists

The involvement of craft associations in political activities is controversial in Tahiti. Many Polynesian women consider political activities

worldly, corrupting, and the domain of men. Respectable Christian mothers and grandmothers are not expected to act in this arena (see also Langevin-Duval n.d.:30). Many Polynesians, especially devout Christians, refuse to participate in politics and do not vote. Many civil servants refuse to join political parties because they fear losing their posts during a change of government. Alienation, cynicism, and apathy on the part of the Polynesian majority and election boycotts organized by the independence movement also discredit conventional political activities.

For those who disapprove of the commercialization of traditional crafts, the political entanglements of craft movement leaders are a further reason for the condemnation of the movement. The commercial, competitive, individualistic values that are necessary for success in business and politics are in direct conflict with the traditional values of generosity, egalitarianism, and modesty that *mamas* are supposed to embody. This contradiction leads to criticism from Polynesians outside of the movement and can endanger women artists' prestige in their local communities (see Jones 1991:77-79; also Debra Kirch's 1984 study of Tongan craft sellers). Within the women's craft movement, some artists complain that political activities drain energy and resources away from economic and artistic development. These women view political activities as the expropriation of their movement by male politicians for their own ends, which have little in common with women's agendas for social and economic change in Tahiti or for individual economic advancement.

From another perspective, the alliance between politicians and women artists is inevitable and not necessarily bad for the women involved. It is widely recognized that craft associations need political support in the form of grants, subsidies, financial advice, and facilities to compete with imported products and to export local crafts. Although some politicians exploit their dependent clients, there is a limit beyond which the women involved switch their political allegiance to other leaders (Jones 1991:67-70). Because politicians want craft association assistance in staging public events, impressing visitors, and getting out the vote, women leaders gain access to the network of power long dominated by men.

The attitude that women should not involve themselves in politics is largely a result of European ideas about women imposed during the colonial period (Lockwood 1988:269). In traditional Polynesian society, women exercised secular authority in many instances. As women gain access to political power in metropolitan France, women are beginning

to be elected and appointed to offices in French-dominated Tahiti. Women organized into cooperative associations have more opportunities to effect political change than they have had through other rural institutions, such as traditionally neutral church organizations.

Conclusion: Tradition, Ethnicity, and Culture Change

The women's art movement in contemporary French Polynesia has its roots in a continuous tradition of women's communal work groups and a continuous historical evolution of traditional art genres. However, the movement has been criticized for breaking out of established modes of production for traditional arts by entering the modern marketplace, introducing competition, and involving artists in political affairs. The older forms of private, family-based production and consumption as well as production for making gifts or for charitable purposes persist in most communities. However, the introduction of market values into a realm traditionally characterized by generosity, hospitality, and modesty has been a major change in Polynesian society. This transformation of tradition has created social conflict and sometimes threatens the prestige of women artists in their local communities.

A second major change has been the adoption of the women's art movement by local politicians eager to assert and reinforce their images as men and women of the people. The presence of women artists and their dramatic visual and performance arts at political events is a powerful symbol of traditional authority and Polynesian ethnic identity.

The women's crafts movement and the Maʻohi revival movement are beginning to come together in spite of political, generational, and religious differences. Independence leaders sponsor craft cooperatives in their home districts and employ many of the same symbols that conservative politicians use to assert their identification with the Polynesian majority. For example, all island politicians wear flowered *pareu* shirts while campaigning and all are decked with flower *hei* or *tifaifai* when they make stops on the grand tours of other friendly districts. Pro-French political parties also support the revitalization of indigenous language and culture (see Stevenson, this volume). Folkloric dance groups, often associated with the Maʻohi movement, are working together with more conservative artists to revive ancient costume styles and materials, including barkcloth, featherwork, and tattoo. Polynesian artists and performers in both these movements share the Maʻohi language and in many cases are members of the same families.[16] So if the ideological contrast between two groups of artists making compet-

ing claims to authenticity and authority may seem dramatic, in fact it is much more complicated. The future status of these traditions is part of the ongoing debate over the future direction of Polynesian society.

This is a time of great change, challenge, and conflict in French Polynesia. The artistic renaissance and the growing interest in local history are important steps in strengthening island culture and building a basis for self-reliance. In spite of the risks associated with commercialization, Polynesian artists have reached new levels of public recognition and acknowledgment. The contemporary arts of French Polynesia are integrated fully into island political and cultural life as emblems of ethnic identity and traditional values, creativity, and resilience in the face of change.

NOTES

I conducted fifteen months of research in French Polynesia on three trips between 1985 and 1989, focusing primarily on the women's craft cooperative movement. My research was funded in part by the Center for Research in International Studies at Stanford University. In Tahiti, I enjoyed the considerable assistance of the Musée de Tahiti et des Îles, the Centre Polynésien des Sciences Humaines, and the Service de l'Artisanat Traditionnel. I worked with several cooperatives and many artists, whose privacy I respect. The opinions stated in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

The phenomena of the Ma'ohi revival and the women's craft cooperatives occur throughout the five archipelagoes of French Polynesia. The generalizations suggested here are based on observations made in urban Pape'ete and in rural communities on Tahiti and several outer islands. The distinction between the urban culture of the northwestern coast of Tahiti and the rural culture of the outer districts and islands is one of the key constructions in local discourses on tradition and ethnicity. Urban and rural Polynesian society are closer than ever before, owing to improved communications and transportation. So while there are important differences between districts, islands, and archipelagoes, there is truly a sense of national identity--some call it Ma'ohi, others Polynesian or Tahitian--among the residents of French Polynesia. It is these shared experiences that I choose to illuminate in this article.

1. One of my Tahitian friends explained to me that she was Tahitian first, but she would always also be French. Many Polynesians feel pride in their French citizenship. They may have been educated in France, served in the French military, or received their paychecks from the French administration. Several other islanders expressed to me the desire to be connected to the wider world through France and the fear that independence would bring isolation. Thus far, the appeals of loyalty and opportunity in continuing association with France have outweighed the arguments of Ma'ohi nationalism.

2. There is a considerable literature describing the complexities of ethnic categorization in French Polynesia (for example, Kay 1975; Robineau 1975; Levy 1973; Newbury 1980; Oliver 1981; Panoff 1989; Jones 1991). The Ma'ohi versus Polynesian or Tahitian distinction does not define two discrete groups, but is a politically charged distinction in French

Polynesia (see, for example, Raapoto 1988; Temaru 1988). The term "Ma'ohi" is used by all Tahitian speakers to refer to native Polynesians, regardless of political affiliation. "Tahitian" is used to refer to native Polynesians of Tahiti and nearby islands, but it is also applied to persons of mixed ethnic heritage who choose to live in the Polynesian style. The term "Tahitian" is rejected by some members of the Ma'ohi movement. I choose to use "Polynesian" as an unmarked term for islanders of native ancestry or life-style.

3. The first such craft cooperative may have been founded in Pueu in 1967 (Ringon 1971:37).

4. The membership in *associations artisanales* is overwhelmingly female. Male artists tend to work out of private workshops *(ateliers)* adjacent to their homes. Typically, these workshops support only one craftsman, although more prominent artists sometimes take apprentices or hire younger men (usually relatives) to assist with large orders. A few men participate in the cooperative movement, but there are rarely more than one or two in a single association. Many associations have no male membership.

5. In an earlier report the Service de l'Artisanat Traditionnel documented the rapid increase in the number of associations, an increase of 75 percent (from 175 to 306 associations) in only one year, 1985-1986 (1987:2).

6. Island groups continue to specialize in craft production, particularly in raw materials. The Tuamotus are a famous source of shells of all types, including the black pearl oyster *(Pinctada margaritifera);* most of the pandanus used in making mats, baskets, and hats is produced in the Austral Islands; the Marquesas have many active wood carvers and produce some barkcloth (see Service de l'Artisanat 1987; Jones 1991).

7. Many artists complained that the Service de l'Artisanat Traditionnel favored a particular federation, To complicate matters, the minister in charge of the Service, Georges Kelly, supported a rival women's craft federation leader. Jean Juventin, mayor of Pape'ete and successor to Tila Mazière's brother's position as president of the Territorial Assembly, supported yet another powerful federation.

8. Madame Mazière is the sister of a prominent Tahitian politician, Jacques Teuira, who was president of the Territorial Assembly (and also mayor of the commune of Arue and president of various labor organizations) when she was appointed *chef de Service* in 1987. Many local people suspected that she gained her post through the favor of her powerful brother. Madame Mazière rigorously defended her qualifications for office in personal conversations and in the press. Although I heard much gossip about her political intrigues, in her dealings with me, Madame Mazière was unfailingly helpful and generous.

9. Despite the proliferation of cooperatives in the 1980s, only a few appear to be able to thrive over long periods of time, probably those with official sponsors. Data from one of the Austral Islands, supplied by the Service de l'Artisanat, suggest a pattern in which groups of artists split from a large cooperative to found a new group, which is active for a year or so and then dissolves. A few small, family-based cooperatives persist over time, surviving on word-of-mouth commissions and selling through market resellers in Pape'ete.

10. Robineau sums up the dynamic of this relationship: "Thus the chief is caught up in a prestige dynamics that he must master if he wants to maintain his status. In other words, between the people and their chief, there is a dialectic of reciprocity in which the chief provides services--material in the form of subsistence or money, moral owing to the district's renown--and the people provide their allegiance" (1988:189).

11. Many women artists choose not to join cooperatives and work at home alone or with close friends and relatives. Some gave disapproval of political activities as a reason for not joining their local cooperative. For further discussion of alternative modes of artistic production, see Jones 1991:chap. 3.

12. Younger women, even if they are mothers, are called *Mama* only by their children. Attainment of respectable status in the community and the title of *Mama* are usually earned only by women in stable marital or consensual unions.

13. Levy made this observation nearly twenty years ago, and it still rings true:

> The qualities which make for good village leadership--unintrusiveness, sensitivity to group consensus, humility and the lack of any obvious ambition, a desire for harmony--are by no means virtues for political leadership or for a political representative at the *territorial* level, let alone at the metropolitan level in France. At both these levels partisanship, aggressiveness, and the ability to represent one's people against the interests of other legislators or executives seem to be necessary virtues. But these are the very characteristics the people of Piri find suspect, unpleasant, un-Tahitian, and dangerous in a leader. . . . The Tahitian language has many words indicating "stuck-up," "putting on airs," proud, making oneself high. The administrator, the *tavana,* and the villager should avoid such behavior. The lack of such tendencies is considered to be one of the characteristics of a *ma'ohi,* and one of the frequent descriptions of an *'afa* is that he is becoming "proud and inflated." (1973:206-207)

13. *'Afa* is a synonym for the French *demi,* referring to a person of mixed ethnic inheritance but particularly to those with at least some Polynesian ancestry who nonetheless act like Europeans.

14. The role of mayors in Polynesian communities has been widely discussed (Levy 1973:204-206; Oliver 1981:256-265; Baré 1987:408-409; Robineau 1988:189-190). The comparison of modern *tavana* (mayors) with traditional chiefs has been critiqued by Oliver (1981). My observations revealed a pattern of greater power and control over resources by mayors in the late 1980s than Oliver described for the 1950s.

15. Newbury discusses class division among Polynesians in reference to the charismatic nationalist leader Pouvana'a O'opa: "His role as a mouthpiece for deep-seated grievances on the part of the peasantry against the *demis* as a class . . . the foremost political leader of Tahiti in the 1950s was the antithesis of the *ari'i* class who reacted to European contact by attempting to select elements profitable to their own status, whereas Pouvanaa's reaction has been one of rejection" (1988:73-74).

16. It is interesting that the leadership of the Ma'ohi movement is almost exclusively male, whereas women dominate the *artisanat* movement. Of course, both movements include members of various genders (including male transvestites, or *mahu*), but the basic difference remains an intriguing problem for later analysis.