POLITICIZATION OF *LA CULTURE MA'OHI:* THE CREATION OF A TAHITIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY

Karen Stevenson
University of California, Los Angeles

Today, the peoples of the Pacific are using their arts and culture to re-educate themselves about their ancient traditions and historical past. They are creating histories and traditions in their attempts to consolidate political and cultural identities. In so doing, they are destroying self-effacing stereotypes, promoting self-esteem, and creating national identities. Ironically, many of these endeavors have been assisted by the colonizing governments who originally instigated the demise of these cultural traditions.[1]

Even though broad similarities exist among many cultures of the Pacific, each group or island culture has a history unique unto itself. In the contemporary Pacific the institutionalization of culture (for example, the creation of museums, festivals, and art schools) and the cultural identities these institutions have created have led scholars to treat *kastom,* Hawaiiana, Maoritanga, *fa'a-Samoa,* and the Ma'ohi culture movement under the same rubric--the creation or modification of traditions for political purposes.[2] These political and cultural movements are seen in terms of the assertion of Pacific identity and the demand for a political voice. However, the relationships these groups have had, historically, with their colonial governments demonstrate the cultural and political diversity of Pacific peoples.

Integral to these cultural traditions are the many roles of the arts. Art, always an essential aspect of the cultural traditions of Pacific peoples, has allowed for the visual and verbal interpretation of cultural, religious, and political practices. The arts are, therefore, not simply decorative or an embellishment but an integral element in the political

essence of Pacific identity. For example, the verbal arts (oration, the recitation of genealogies, the passing down of histories and mythologies) have always held political importance, as they were essential to the maintenance of political power. Today, Pacific peoples are heralding language and the verbal arts as something of cultural value and contemporary importance that also allows for the consolidation of modern political identities.

The Maori, for example, believe in their descent from seven tribes, each representing a canoe in the Great Fleet that migrated to New Zealand from central Polynesia. This mythical belief has recently been called into question by scholars who believe that it was an invented tradition created by late nineteenth-century scholars (Hanson 1989). Even though this myth may have been created by Western scholars, it is an integral element in Maoritanga (the Maori culture; literally, "of the Maori people") and as such serves the Maori as a tool of political and cultural identity. The Maori example illustrates that culture, tradition, and identity are fast becoming the tools by which Pacific peoples are proclaiming both their uniqueness and their independence.

In Tahiti and throughout French Polynesia, the creation of *la culture ma'ohi* has been a long time in coming.[3] Diverse influences "created" the Tahitian postcontact culture and are the basis for *la culture ma'ohi.* First, the relationship Tahiti had with other islands in central Polynesia allowed for the exchange and development of artistic and religious traditions. It is believed that there was frequent interaction between Tahiti, the Marquesas, the Austral and the Cook islands before European contact. Evidence for this includes artifacts from these island groups found in Tahiti (Rose 1979; Stevenson 1988). Second, European contact with Tahiti was made by the British in 1768, and the London Missionary Society began its evangelical work in 1797. Finally, by the mid-nineteenth century Tahiti was incorporated into the French colonial empire, and the Catholic church was firmly established as an alternative to Protestantism. The Tahitians modified and reinterpreted their culture in reaction to the several influences that were introduced by outsiders and seized upon by indigenous politicians of the day. The interplay between these three political and religious ideologies allowed for a give and take that enabled the Tahitians to adhere to the cultural and artistic traditions they valued. By the end of the nineteenth century, French rule replaced the Tahitian monarchy and Christianity had overcome the indigenous religious system. However, the Tahitian language and many cultural and artistic traditions remained an integral part of Tahitian society (Stevenson 1990b).

Currently, however, the arts and cultural traditions of Tahiti are being institutionalized as the result of a perceived need to reeducate and enculturate the Tahitian populace, arising from fluctuations in cultural values in the twentieth century in response to the importation of the modern world. Politicians suggest that this approach is actually an economic and not a cultural policy. Yet, Tahiti is undergoing a renaissance of its cultural heritage. The result has been the creation of *la culture ma'ohi.*

La Culture Ma'ohi

The Tahitian word *ma'ohi,* signifying an indigene of the Society Islands, was first used politically after World War II.[4] In 1945 Tahiti was granted universal suffrage, and in 1953 the Territorial Assembly was organized, giving the Society Islands a political voice in both Tahiti and France (Tagupa 1976:6). At this time the terms *ma'ohi* and *ta'ata Tahiti* were used to distinguish between the indigene and the colonialist living in Tahiti. In 1958 *ma'ohi* became associated with Pouvana'a, who led a nationalist party seeking independence from France.[5] The movement was squelched when Pouvana'a was exiled and incarcerated in the Prison des Baumettes, France, for eight years (Robineau 1987:18). However, his movement and its demise provided the impetus for change. As Tagupa explains, "The Pouvana'a movement was an intense effort to restore the Polynesian identity of the islands community, where alien groups and institutions held the essential reins of political, educational, and economic power" (1976:12).

Today the term *ma'ohi* remains politically charged, but its meaning has become more complex. Raapoto used the term in distinct contrast to "Tahitian" whose "denomination has an essentially demagogic, touristic, snobbish and rubbish vocation. 'Tahitian' is the *pareu* shirt whose material is printed in Lyon or in Japan; it's the Marquesan *tiki* called Tahitian as well as the *tapa* of Tonga, Uvea, or Samoa sold in Papeete. . . . Tahiti is an exotic product made by the Western World for the consumption of their fellow countrymen" (1980:3). *Ma'ohi* refers rather to that which is indigenous. It is a community of shared traditions, language, culture, and ideology whose duty it is "to understand, to become impregnated with our past, our culture, our language, to create a new world in our image and in our dimension" (Raapoto 1980:5).

This contemporary identity has become a political identity as well, with Tahiti's changing political status under the statutes of 1977 and 1984.[6] With the granting of internal autonomy, Tahitian cultural tradi-

tions have been consolidated into *la culture ma'ohi,* the Ma'ohi culture movement. Key to this cultural identity is the ability of Tahitians to govern their own affairs and determine their future. Jacques Teheiura, Tahiti's minister of culture from 1981 to 1987, stated that "culture is the future" (1989:107), and intimated that the stimulation of traditional culture is a governmental obligation (1989:110). The use of a cultural identity to create a responsibility to the past is also seen in Melanesia. Keesing stated, "*kastom* everywhere represents a commitment to pride, as counter to colonial racism and scorn for native ways, a commitment to ancestors and their rules, a commitment to communal solidarity rather than individualism, to lands and villages rather than money and progress" (1982:371).

Contemporary Ma'ohi identity is quite different from that envisioned by Pouvana'a. Until the Pouvana'a movement there was little cause for the Tahitians to question their identity. Tahitians and Demis (people who are half Tahitian, half European) alike were covetous of American and European material possessions, and a good education seemed necessary for advancement in colonial Tahitian society. These goals did not appear contradictory to being Tahitian. Tahitian arts and cultural-traditions as well as the Tahitian language were maintained. However, the 1960s saw a tremendous influx of French political and economic authority, which challenged the cultural values of the Tahitians. The creation of a contemporary Ma'ohi identity is not only a new manifestation of a cultural heritage integral to Tahitian society, but a manifestation of an identity in contradistinction to the French.

The Institutionalization of the Arts

The goals that Raapoto outlined in 1980 determined the need to reeducate, destroy stereotypes, and promote a Tahitian identity. Marco Tevane, as minister of culture from 1970 to 1976, felt that these goals could best be achieved by the institutionalization and reinterpretation of traditions (pers. com., Nov. 1989). This process, inspired by but not contingent upon Pouvana'a's nationalistic movement, was first manifested in the reconstruction of Marae Arahurahu in 1954. In a project organized by the Société des Études Océaniennes and financially assisted by the South Pacific Commission, the *marae* (religious enclosure) was reconstructed and embellished to demonstrate the majesty of such traditional monuments. An underlying assumption of this project was that there would be tourist interest in such a historical monument.

An interesting aside to the reconstruction of Marae Arahurahu and

the "magnificent folk procession" that inaugurated it (Garanger 1969:29) were the local interpretations regarding the *marae.* The Tahitian populace showed a marked disinterest and lack of knowledge about the *marae* or folkloric manifestation. However, many were aghast at the appropriation of a religious monument as a tourist attraction. Missionary doctrine equating such festivities to ancient pagan practices created an aura of disapproval within the church. The colonialists and Demis, who watched the event with excitement, associated those involved in the inaugural festivities with the independence movement.

Marco Tevane, a participant in the inaugural ceremony as well as the annual presentations that followed, claimed that the goal of these activities was to present a venue for the Ma'ohi to discover or rediscover their culture (pers. com., Nov. 1989). This is not to suggest that the Tahitian culture had been destroyed. However, those traditions associated with ancient religious practices, especially practices associated with the *ari'i* (chiefs), had been disregarded when Christianity and a new government replaced the traditional political and religious systems. Important *marae* were abandoned in the early nineteenth century, and priests as well as their assistants who were in charge of the *marae* grounds, paraphernalia, and practices no longer found their power and prestige to be associated with a *marae* or its knowledge. As a result, information about these activities was not passed to the next generation. The lost ceremonial knowledge included the preparation of regalia, the construction of objects, the composition of chants, the choreography of the ceremonies, and what is now believed to be about twenty thousand words in the Tahitian language (Louis Savoie, pers. com., Jan. 1990).

Another cultural change that took place in the 1950s involved Tahitian dance. Always an integral aspect of Tahitian culture (Moulin 1979; Stevenson 1990a, 1990b), the dance underwent a codification in an attempt to create a standard base on which creativity could be encouraged. Dance groups had competed annually for fifty years in the festival known today as the *heiva.* The respectability of dance was heightened by the standardization of the art form through the creation of a semiprofessional dance troupe by Madeleine Moua. Competitions now took place between semiprofessional groups rather than between groups organized by the district or the church. Aspirations to membership in these dance troupes (and to their prestige, international travel, and income) strengthened the quality of the performances and inspired the imaginations of choreographers, costume designers, and musicians.

The importance of these early activities (involving *marae* and dance)

lies in the foundation they supplied both for the reinterpretation of cultural traditions and for the creation of a cultural identity--*la culture ma'ohi.* The most recognized venue for the perpetuation of these traditions is the annual *heiva.* An institution in and of itself, the *heiva* has celebrated the cultural heritage of the Tahitian people since 1881. This festival has always had a political function in its demonstration and perpetuation of Tahitian cultural traditions. During the past century, however, traditions have been modified and reinterpreted to assert a uniquely Tahitian identity. The Tahitians used the events in the *heiva* to reinforce their identity in contradistinction to the French, countering periods of increased French intervention with greater participation in the *heiva.* Thus the *heiva* itself has aided in the creation of this identity (Stevenson 1990b).

The mid-1960s saw the true beginnings of Tahiti's institutionalization of culture. The economic backing for the cultural changes came from the French government. However, the content of these programs was in direct opposition to a tremendous influx of French military personnel, Western goods, and increased tourism (Stevenson 1990b). In 1965 Marco Tevane founded the Club Ma'ohi. This association was organized to aid in the creation and reinterpretation of traditional values. An offshoot of the club was the creation of the title Tane Tahiti, which venerated such Tahitian values as strength, agility, ability in subsistence activities (fishing, paddling, copra preparation), and proficiency in the Tahitian language. Also in 1965, the Musée Gauguin was inaugurated as Tahiti's first museum. At this time the development of culture emphasized a European framework. However, in 1966 the government bought land for an ethnographic museum focusing on Tahiti and Polynesia, and in 1967 l'Académie Tahitienne was created. Although this academy was placed within a French scholarly framework, its goal was to study and standardize the Tahitian language. The academy was followed by the Maison des Jeunes and the Maison de la Culture, whose goals were to develop the arts and French cultural values.

In contrast to the 1960s, the 1970s saw the creation of institutions whose roles were to perpetuate the cultural heritage of Tahiti. The first implementation of a new cultural policy was a result of legislation in 1971. In 1975 the Tahitian Academy changed its name to Te Fare Vana'a. This change in name reflected the French acceptance of Tahitian as a national language. It also symbolized the academy's struggle to have Tahitian taught in the school system. As such the use of Tahitian became associated with Tahiti's new move toward internal government. Te Fare Vana'a, whose role was to study and standardize a language,

now placed its emphasis on recording myths and genealogies, teaching the art of oratory, and creating texts from which Tahitian would be taught.

Although the Tahitians did not lose their language to colonial administrators, it was only after years of struggle that Tahitian became part of the French curriculum in the mid-1970s. As a result, Tahitian children today are learning about their language, the significance of their cultural traditions, and the majesty of their past as well as the role these have in contemporary traditions. As Henri Bouvier has stated, *"Une langue . . . établisse un solide pont entre leur passé et leur avenir"* (Saura 1986:66).[7]

The cultural initiative continued, and the importance of the traditional arts was recognized in the establishment of the Musée de Tahiti et des Îles in 1977. The basis of its collection was the archaeological artifacts collected by the Société des Études Oceaniénnes, an academic society based in Pape'ete since 1917, coupled with the collections of the Catholic and Protestant churches. In 1980 the museum was expanded and renamed the Centre Polynésien des Sciences Humaines (Te Ana Vaha Rau). The museum was now a department of the center, which also included a department of archaeology and a department of oral traditions.[8]

The year 1980 also saw the establishment of OTAC--Office Territoriale d'Action Culturelle (Te Fare Tauhiti Nui). OTAC incorporated the former Maison des Jeunes and the Maison de la Culture. Whereas their mandate was to develop the culture of Tahiti, OTAC's greatest role in this creation of culture comes from the department of Fêtes et Manifestations, which is responsible for the organization and implementation of the *heiva* and all other cultural activities. Also within OTAC are research and development, and educational programing departments; a library; and a theater.

The arts of Tahiti are undergoing a renaissance owing to the financial and organizational support given by OTAC, *Artisanals* (artist co-ops) are encouraging competitive exhibitions of their arts *(tifaifai--*appliqué, plaiting, carving). "Traditional tattoo" has been reintroduced to Tahiti, productions of Tahitian literature are being presented, and large manifestations of "cultural traditions" are produced in the forms of *marae* reenactments[9] and the *umu-ti,* or firewalk.

This artistic renaissance was also aided by the formation of the Centre Métier d'Arts in 1981. This art center teaches the technical skills and aesthetic sensibilities required by an artist. A three-year program leads to a territorial diploma. The center offers an alternative to the French

school system and at the same time instills a knowledge of and respect for Tahitian cultural traditions.

The implementation of cultural policy is also seen on television and heard on the radio. The nightly news is programed in both Tahitian and French, and Tahitian radio stations abound. The institutionalization of culture has been so thorough that it is difficult to avoid some sort of encounter with Tahitian culture on any given day.

A more thorough and widespread knowledge of the value of traditional Tahitian activities has resulted from the institutionalization of Tahitian culture. As such, a "shared cultural heritage" has been created in Tahiti. Instead of being Tahitian in a French society, the Tahitians are now choosing what they value from both cultures. As in other areas of the Pacific, the creation of institutions has become a political tool to develop ethnic pride and cultural understanding. As Linnekin stated: "A shared cultural heritage is a basic ingredient in both objective and subjective definitions of ethnicity. . . . In nationalistic movements, tradition becomes a rallying cry and a political symbol. Cultural revivalists search for an authentic heritage as the basis for ethnic distinctions; as they rediscover a culture they also create it" (1983:241).

The Role of the Arts in *la Culture Ma'ohi*

The early explorers of Tahiti were not only intrigued but also mystified by its arts. Their journals are filled with long passages describing dance and ceremonies at the *marae;* and there was frequent mention of tattoo (an operation many sailors underwent), *tapa* cloth, and the extraordinary costumes of mourners and warriors. These initial observations were firmly implanted in the European mind and remain the foundation of Tahiti's international reputation.

Dance has undergone tremendous innovation and change over the past two hundred years. However, the creativity necessary for contemporary dance competitions is often inspired by descriptions recorded by the early explorers. One such is the description of Tahitian dance by Joseph Banks, a member of Cook's *Endeavour* voyage:

> In the course of our walk we met a set of strolling dancers Calld by the Indians Heiva who detained us 2 hours and during all that time entertained us highly indeed. They consisted of 3 drums, 2 women dancers, and 6 men . . . keeping excellent time to the drums which beat brisk and loud; they soon began to shake their hips giving the folds of cloth that lay upon them a

very quick motion which was continued during the whole dance they sometimes standing, sometimes sitting and sometimes resting on their knees and elbows and generally moving their fingers with a quickness scarce to be imagined. The chief entertainment of the spectators seemed however to arise from the lascivious motions they often made. (Beaglehole 1963:325)

The British were enthralled not only by the dance, but also by the costumes. William Wales recorded one such description:

The dress of the performers is extraordinary and grand on these occasions. It consists of a great quantity of thick cloth of different colors bound very tight round the waist with cords, and disposed so as to stand off sideways from the hips in a vast number of plaits or folds to the extent of a fine lady's petticoat when in full dress. To this is attached a parcel of coats below, and a sort of waist coat without sleeves above. Round the head is wound a great quantity of plaited hair in such a manner as [to] stand up like a coronet, and this is stuck full of small flowers of various colors. (1772-1774, 1)

Dancers, their costumes, and their choreographed performances highlight the annual *heiva* competitions. Creativity and innovation are strongly rewarded. Thus this mainstay of Tahiti's cultural and artistic heritage is strengthened by the constant reinterpretation and modification of a tradition. The changes seen in the dance are best exemplified in dance costuming. Once clothed in *tapa* and human hair, today dancers are bedecked in plant fibers (hibiscus, coconut, pandanus) and flowers. In their attempts to be both authentic and innovative, costume designers have used the descriptions and drawings from the early explorer voyages in the creation of contemporary costumes (Figure 1).

Innovation, especially in costuming, is also seen in other *heiva* spectacles, especially the *marae* reenactments and the *umu-ti.* In these events costume design is representative of the contemporary modification of past costume traditions. Using bits and pieces of various traditional costumes (for example, by combining the mourners' and dance costumes), new designs are created and posited as authentic (Figure 2). In the late 1970s and early 1980s the most extraordinary and flamboyant costumes were well received. These included headdresses (inspired by the warrior's headdress or *fau*) that critics associated with Las Vegas or a Folies Bergères review. The contemporary aesthetic leans toward simplicity so

FIGURE 1. **A dancer at a _marae_ reenactment in July 1989 wearing a cloth costume with feather tassel and breast ornament.** (Photo by Karen Stevenson)

FIGURE 2. **A flamboyant headdress worn by' a dancer from the group "Maeva" at a *heiva* in 1989.** (Photo by Karen Stevenson)

that a simple fabric (representing *tapa*) or a skirt of leaves is now seen as more credible (see Figure 1).

The need for innovation and the creation of tradition began in the 1950s owing to a lack of knowledge about Tahitian culture. In 1954, at the time of the first *marae* reenactment, little was known about *marae* ceremonies. Drawing from scholarly works, especially Teuira Henry (1928), a historic reenactment was created. The theme, the investiture of an *ari'i,* was chosen because of the documentation available on that ceremony. Costumes were designed by gathering information from photographs together with drawings and descriptions from early explorer voyages. Musical accompaniments to chants and dances were composed for the occasion. Not knowing how these chants should sound or what dances might have been appropriate, those involved attempted to recreate a traditional ceremony (Marco Tevane, pers. com., July 1989; see also Jacquier 1954). As there is no feasible way of knowing how authentic these recreations might be, one must look at these reenactments as only an interpretation of the traditional past.

Another cultural reenactment, first introduced into the *heiva* in 1957, is the *umu-ti* (Figure 3). This event now plays a large role in *la culture ma'ohi* as it reinterprets a religious ceremony once held under the auspices of the ancient priesthood of Ra'iatea. As Ra'iatea was one of the last islands to receive Europeans, it is believed that its ceremony survived missionization.[10] The function, traditionally, was to ask the gods for help in times of scarcity. Today the performers have no link to the line of priests who had performed the ceremony, and most of their information regarding it comes from Henry (1928). It has become a mystifying phenomenon, suggesting that with the aid of the gods one can walk across burning rocks. The intervention of the gods is key in the re-creation of a mystical aura associated with the gods and the invocation of a celebrated past.

Raymond Graffe, the self-proclaimed high priest of fire, believes that missionization has destroyed Tahitian culture, and only a respect and knowledge of the traditional gods will enable Ma'ohi culture to continue (pers. com., Nov. 1989). The reinstatement of the gods as purveyors of knowledge, protectors, and beneficent beings is, therefore, important to the Ma'ohi cause. The glorification of traditions destroys the pagan stereotype and demonstrates the complex society of the ancient Tahitians.

Even though the Tahitians are Christians, many have not abandoned indigenous ideologies. As Teiwaki comments about the Maori, "After 120 years there is little doubt that Christianity has become an integral

FIGURE 3. **Dancers clothed in *ti* leaves perform for the *umu-ti,* 1989.**
(Photo by Karen Stevenson)

part of our present way of life, but it is surprising how persistent many
of the old beliefs and superstitions have been" (1980:7). The cultural
reenactment of the *umu-ti* (performed for large crowds) has empowered
the populace with a relationship with their traditional gods. The result
is a contemporary notion of ancient Tahiti as something to emulate and
be proud of.

    This pride is most often seen in the commitment to Ma'ohi culture.
The most visible manifestation is the renaissance of tattoo. Traditional
tattoo was reintroduced to Tahiti in 1982 by Tavana, an entrepreneur

from Hawai'i.[11] With the help of Tavana, Teve, a young Tahitian dancer, was tattooed by Samoan tattoo artist Lesa Li'o. Teve, with his full body tattoo, became a role model for those interested in this traditional art form (Figure 4). Here again the notion of a modified tradition serving contemporary purposes comes to the fore, as this ancient art form had disappeared in the late nineteenth century. The motifs introduced by Tavana are a compilation of Marquesan, Samoan, Tahitian, and artistic imagery. The initial reintroduction took place under the auspices of OTAC during the 1982 *heiva,* thereby officially sanctioning the event and giving the demonstration an air of authenticity.

Prior to the early 1980s tattoo was, for the most part, associated with youth gangs and those involved in the independence movement (Tea Hirshon, pers. com., July 1989). Today, tattoo has become an accepted symbol of Ma'ohi culture. To many it is decorative and "fashionable"; to some it is a lasting mark demonstrating their commitment to Tahitian cultural identity (Stevenson 1990a, 1990b). The majority of those tattooed are young adults, many of whom are also involved in dance or outrigger canoe racing. Their involvement in *la culture ma'ohi* is marked by their tattoo and further demonstrated in their participation in events integral to Tahitian society (Figure 5).

Also of importance in Ma'ohi identity are athletic endeavors such as outrigger canoe racing, the javelin throw, or the fruit carriers race, as well as subsistence activities (such as copra preparation and *niau,* or coconut frond plaiting) and art production (for example, *tifaifai*).[12] Canoe racing has been a part of the *heiva* since its beginnings and has always been an integral part of Tahitian existence. Outrigger canoe racing is now an international sporting event that brings status and prestige to Tahiti. The importance of the outrigger is symbolized in its incorporation in one of Tahiti's flags.

The production of items for sale, including arts and crafts, reinforces a Ma'ohi identity as it reiterates, on a day-to-day basis, Tahiti's cultural traditions. The plaiting of *niau* for housing materials reflects traditional architectural styles, and the use of plaited baskets and hats recalls an ancient lifestyle. *Tifaifai,* introduced by missionary wives, incorporated the floral motifs of Tahitian *tapa;* the form persists today (Figure 6). Hammond states, "Although *tifaifai* originated as a result of Polynesian contact with the Western world in relatively recent times, the art form is now an integral part of Polynesian cultural tradition" (1986b:53).

The importance of these art forms in the creation of a Ma'ohi identity lies in their reinforcement of the value of Tahiti's artistic and cultural heritage. The development of the arts strengthens this identity vis-à-vis
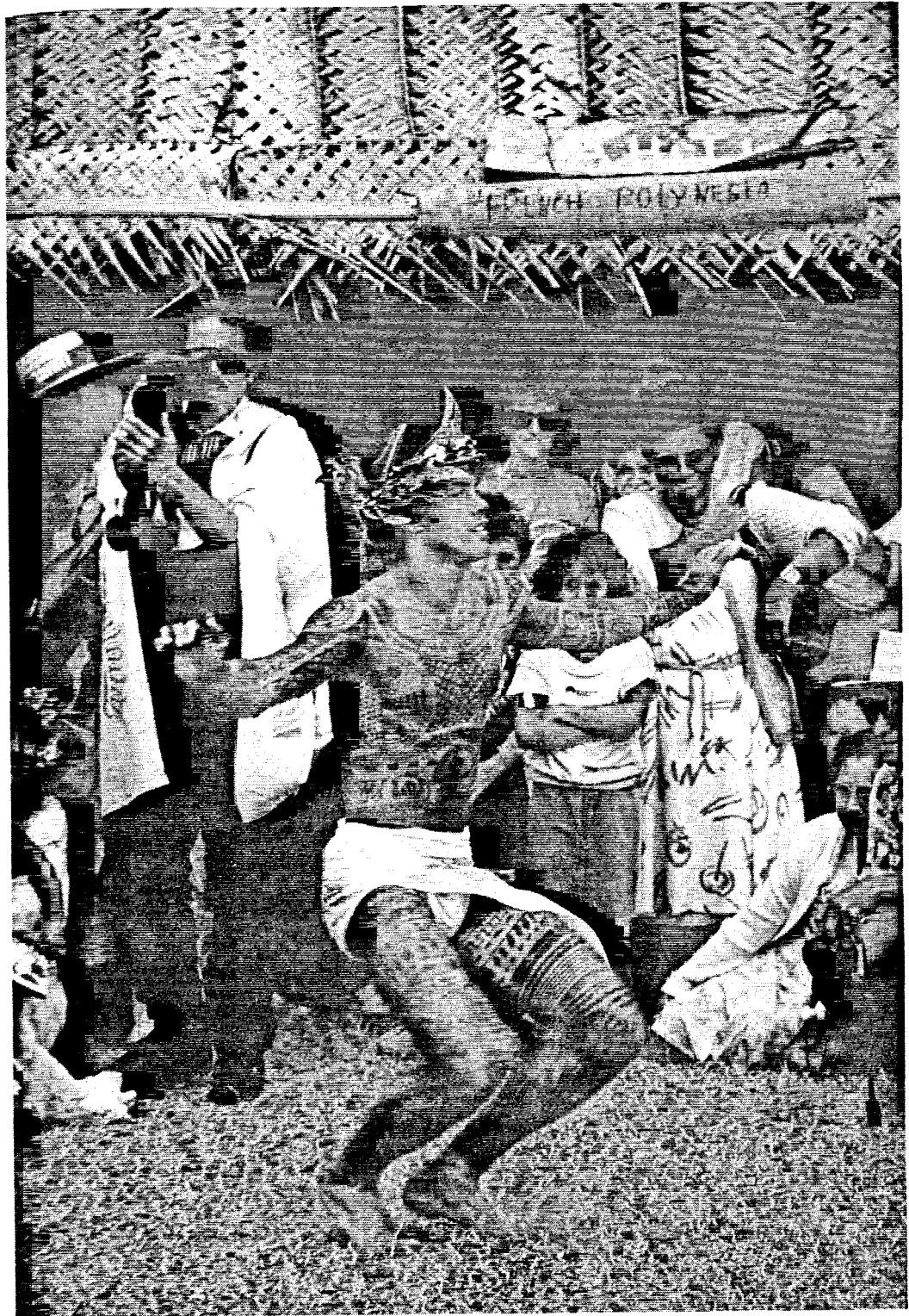
FIGURE 4. **Teve performing as a member of the Tahitian delegation to the Festival of Pacific Arts, Townsville, Australia, 1988.** (Photo by Karen Stevenson)

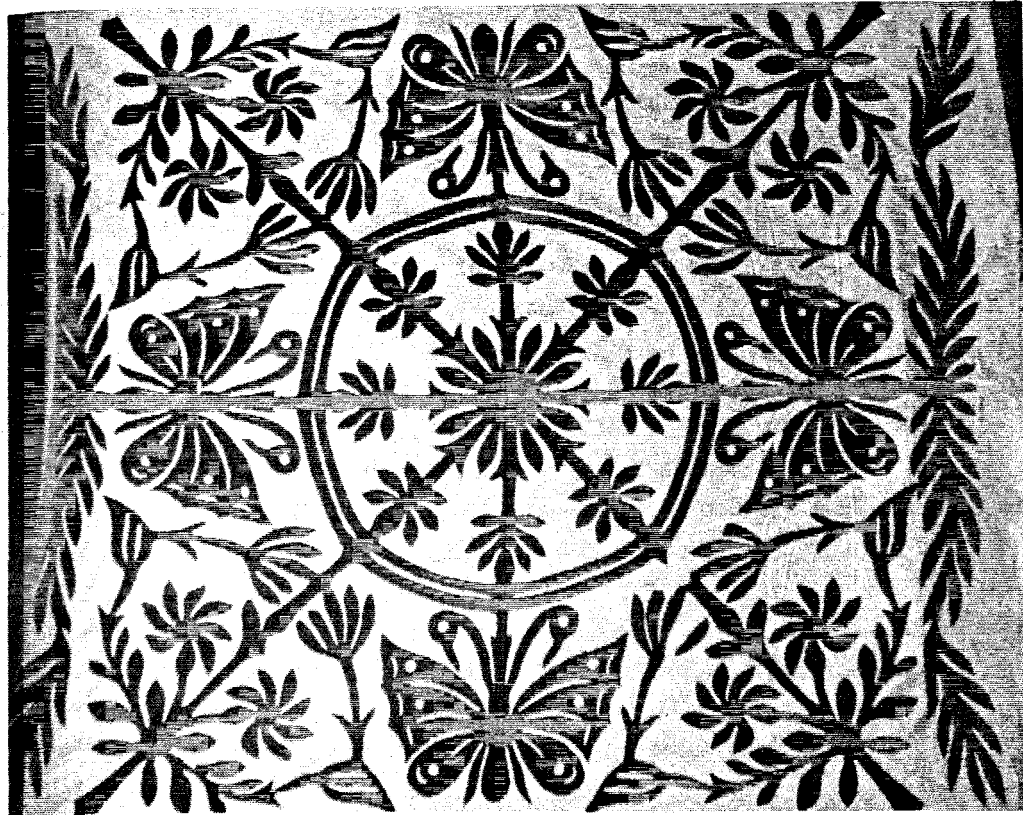FIGURE 5. **A "traditional" tattoo on a dancer at a *marae* reenactment, July 1989.** (Photo by Karen Stevenson)

FIGURE 6. **Top: A** *tifajfai* **dating to 1910, owned by Eric Teri'i Nui o Tahiti Pommier. Bottom: Papaya theme seen in a contemporary** *tifaifai* **detail, Village des Artisans, Tipaerui, 1990.** (Photos by Karen Stevenson)

both the colonial presence of the French and the modernization of Tahitian society. The result is a national identity--a Tahitian identity.

The Politicization of Culture

"Since Custom legitimates political unity and identity, what people accept as true custom becomes the subject of political dispute" (Lindstrom 1982:318). Lindstrom's statement is easily applied to Tahiti's creation of a cultural and political identity. Within the past twenty-five years, what is and is not Tahitian, what is authentic, and what is left of Ma'ohi cultural heritage has been the focus of much debate. Marco Tevane fought for the institutionalization of Tahitian culture against many who asked why (pers. com., Nov. 1989). In the context of other Pacific nations, the answer reflects the need to create a future unique to themselves and separate from the colonial governments under whose reign many traditions were lost (Linnekin 1990).

The Ma'ohi identity in Tahiti, however, is being used to alter the perception of identity and cultural values. The institutionalization of culture was necessary to educate and enculturate the *ma'ohi* population. The politics of culture in Tahiti lies in the government support of artistic and cultural activities, not in an overt attempt to manipulate this identity as a political tool. As such the Ma'ohi identity cannot be compared to the Hawaiian or Maori causes. In Hawai'i, cultural and political identities have become intertwined (Linnekin 1990). Hawaiians use this cultural-political identity to fight political battles concerning land rights, sovereignty, and even the definition of what or who is Hawaiian. The Maori are also using their identity to assert their cultural and political unity, and to gain for it the recognition of the New Zealand government (Hanson 1989:894).

In contrast to these very political usages of cultural identity, Tahitian politicians are using their artistic heritage to heighten the awareness of a cultural past and to create a cultural identity for a Tahitian future. Even though the Ma'ohi identity seems to be gaining momentum, there is little said in the current political rhetoric about the arts. Louis Savoie, the former minister of finance, suggested that funding for the arts is seen as a socioeconomic policy that perpetuates artistic traditions, not a cultural policy (pers. com., Jan. 1990).

Oscar Temanu, the mayor of Fa'a'a, does, however, use the Ma'ohi identity to promote his platform of independence. This use of the Ma'ohi identity is most obviously seen in the recent construction of his new mayor's office. Designed in traditional *ma'ohi* style, it is a complex

of single-story, rectangular-shaped buildings with rounded ends. Roofs are made of *niau,* walls of bamboo are supported by an infrastructure of carved beams, and the interior is papered with *tapa.* Generic tiki images abound, as does a sense of community and accessibility. Temanu uses this complex as a metaphor for Tahiti's living cultural traditions. The complex also embodies Temanu's commitment to Tahitian culture and identity, which is seen as the underlying impetus for independence and a political symbol distinguishing Temanu's political platform from that of Jean Juventin, the mayor of Pape'ete (Marco Tevane, pers. com., Nov. 1989). Pape'ete's mayor's office, inaugurated in May 1990, takes the form of the old palace--in Temanu's eyes, an obvious symbol of colonialism.

Temanu's efforts suggest that Tahiti's cultural identity might become as politicized as Hawaiiana or Maoritanga. However, the creation of identities and the reinterpretation of traditions are currently seen as only one aspect of the social and economic development of Tahiti. The institutionalization of the arts has instilled in the Ma'ohi a knowledge of and pride in their cultural heritage, created tourist revenues, and reinterpreted and perpetuated cultural traditions that might have become extinct. The identity created--*la culture ma'ohi*--will allow the Tahitians to create their future in terms of their past.

NOTES

1. These efforts are encouraged with the economic assistance given by colonizing governments. It is rare that a struggling nation of the Pacific can support its arts and culture without this aid.

2. A short list of the contributions to this discussion includes Hanson 1989, Keesing 1989, Keesing and Tonkinson 1982, Lindstrom 1982, Linnekin 1983, Linnekin and Poyer 1990, Lucas 1989, Raapoto 1980, Robineau 1987, Stevenson 1990b, and Tonkinson 1982.

3. *Ma'ohi* is a term used throughout French Polynesia (the Society, Marquesa, Austral, Tuamotu, and Gambier islands) to denote an indigene of these islands. At the time of European contact, the ruling chiefs of Tahiti either controlled or maintained economic relations with many of the islands that would become French Polynesia. Today, Tahiti is the capital of both the Society Islands and French Polynesia and is therefore often used as a generic term denoting all the islands and their peoples. In this article I use the terms *Tahiti* and *Tahitians* to distinguish the people and arts of the Society Islands with specific emphasis on the island of Tahiti.

4. *"Ma'ohi"* is a Polynesian word used by various culture groups. It is spelled differently throughout Polynesia dependent on the language spoken. Thus *"ma'ohi"* and "Maori" are in fact the same word.

5. For further information on Pouvanaʻa, see Danielsson and Danielsson 1974; Tagupa 1976.

6. In 1977 the French government granted administrative autonomy. Although the decree had little effect legally, it paved the way for further reforms and was seen by Tahitian autonomists as a major step. In 1984 internal autonomy was granted, giving the Tahitian government jurisdiction over all local affairs, public services, and the budget.

7. This can be translated as: "A language establishes a solid bridge between their past and their future."

8. The department of archaeology has recently undertaken a survey of all of French Polynesia and currently is directing a multinational excavation of a site in the Papeʻenoʻo Valley.

9. "*Marae* reenactment" is my term for the cultural productions/dramas that are seen annually in Tahiti. These presentations are based on a historical reinterpretation of cultural events that might have taken place at a *marae* prior to the nineteenth century.

10. Descriptions of this ceremony can be found in Henry 1928. See Stevenson (1990a, 1990b) for a discussion of its evolution from an ancient practice to a contemporary manifestation.

11. Tavana is known for his dance spectacle that was housed in Honolulu's Moana Hotel. Long interested in tattoo, he was tattooed by Samoan artists, who also taught him the craft. Traditional Polynesian tattoo was done by hand with a bone-toothed instrument and a mallet. The dye is created from a mixture of candlenut soot and water.

12. The art of plaiting is seen both in the subsistence activity of creating building materials (roofing, flooring, walls) and in crafts (such as the making of purses, hats, and mats).