

## Creating Tableaus of Moving Beauty



In the exploration of basic rhythms of everyday experience, I argued that the conceptualization of dynamics characterizing important fields of everyday experience appeared to take the form of a motion of separation and merging that may be represented as a serial image of transformation (see Chapter 3). Such an image of transformation implied that states of the world elaborated in Polynesian cosmology and cosmogony should be viewed as temporary phases within an ongoing motion of growth and regeneration, produced by a process of merging, separation and re-merging. Mapping reconstructions of Polynesian cosmology (Gunson 1990: 15–16) onto a serial image of transformation, I found that they first of all resonated with the middle figure of the series (see Chapter 2) depicting a temporary state of optimal separateness.

Similarly, it is possible to map a spatial image of tableaus of ceremonial elaboration onto such a serial image. Thus, it would make sense to describe a kava ceremony, for example, in terms of the two halves of the ‘group of kava-makers’ (*tou’á*) and the position of supreme rank (*olovaha*) ‘facing one another’ (*fesiofaki*) across a ‘gap/space’ (*vaha’á*) upheld by the ranked positions of the kava drinkers (*álofi*). Again, such an image would resonate with the middle image in the series depicting a state of optimal separateness, rather than the wider process of regeneration and growth produced by merging, separation and re-merging. Here, then, I shall make an effort to follow the threads discovered through exploration in the preceding chapters of rhythms dominating everyday experience. Thus I would argue for the value of making time a part of the context of interpretation by focusing on what may be called the ceremonial process of transformation rather than the ‘ceremonial tableau’ (which represents an important, meaningful instance or phase within a wider process of transformation). By ceremonial

process, I do not wish to evoke the whole complex of concepts developed by Van Gennep and Turner to approach initiation rituals such as those of 'liminality', 'communitas-societas' and 'structure-anti-structure' associated with 'ritual process' and 'rites of passage' (Turner 1969). I use ceremonial process to refer to a chain of events moving along phases of anticipation, preparation, staging and performance. A process by which an occasion is brought to 'stand apart' (*mahu'i*) as one of particular 'importance' (*mahu'inga*) and by which a momentarily materialized order collapses again as that which constituted the ceremonial tableau flows back into or re-merges with the flow of everyday life. It seems to me that insight into important aspects of the meaning of a ceremonial tableau of unidimensional differentiation may be gained by opening up this 'frozen moment' in time to explore how it articulates with the diversity of activities that have been undertaken to create it. From the point of view of the numerous experiencing individuals who have gone out of their way to contribute to the whole transformational process of creating the ceremonial tableau, the meanings that may be constructed from the tableau itself may very well be insignificant in comparison with the meanings of this tableau as the realization of the capability to create it by common effort in order to achieve a common aim. In this chapter, then, I shall describe and undertake an analysis of ceremonial aesthetics, which lends its perspective from enduring perceptions of the world and its workings as discovered in everyday routines of engaging and referring to fundamental rhythms of the environment.

## A Royal Visit

'Have you heard?' asked Melena'a, 'The Queen will come to Kotu next week and plans to spend the night here.' A royal visit was an extraordinary event. But she did not sound particularly proud or pleased that the Queen had chosen to spend the night on Kotu, out of all the islands of the Lulunga district. Later I asked Kotu's town officer, Heamasi Koloa, why people appeared to look forward to the visit with less enthusiasm than one might have expected. As *ofisa kolo* and steward of the 'King's Church' (Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga), he carried a great part of the responsibility for making the royal visit a success. Asked if a royal visit was not a happy occasion, he answered:

That is true, but she comes on very short notice. Next week is the first week of the New Year, the 'week of prayer' (*uike lotu*) in our church. People are busy preparing the feasts of that week. Not so long ago we had the *misinale* (annual collection of money for the church), and then Amini died,<sup>1</sup> and much work was done to bring food and 'Tongan goods' (*koloa fakatonga*) for the funeral. Now it is said that the old

woman, Foli, is very weak. She is more than a hundred years old and has numerous kinsmen. Her funeral shall be very large. People are very busy preparing for the week of prayer as it is and exhausted by 'doing the duties/fulfilling obligations' (*fai fatongia*) and by 'carrying the burdens' (*fua kavenga*) of these things. The last time the Queen visited the Lulunga district, she stayed on Kotu, and it is a good thing that she has chosen Kotu again, but this has been a time of much work for us, and we are exhausted. It will be hard for people to become 'warm inside' (*loto māfana*) to do the work and the duties for the Queen's welcome.

So, initially people did not appear to anticipate the visit with great enthusiasm. Nevertheless, as the day of her arrival approached, people grew gradually more energetic and increasingly committed to the collaborative tasks of preparation. In order to make people 'warm inside' for the Queen's visit, Koloa decided to assemble an extraordinary 'village meeting' (*fono*<sup>2</sup>). At this meeting, he suggested that each 'api or 'home' should bring 5 *pa'anga* (which equalled about 3.5 US\$) so that the last large pig remaining on Kotu after the most recent funeral could be bought for 'Taufatōfua's basket to the Royal House' (*kato 'o Taufatōfua ki Lotoā*<sup>3</sup>). Towards the end of the meeting, when Koloa had made his announcements, 'Atu Hē, a man in his forties, asked to be heard:

It is good to bring money to buy the woman Lose 'Ilangana's large pig for the basket. But from the times of old the important thing in Taufatōfua's basket to the King is the *fonu* (turtle). It is said that the man Lotima down in *lalo* (the low end of the village) has caught a large turtle for the feast he shall give in the week of prayer. It would be right to bring the turtle for Taufatōfua's basket. If Lotima feels warm inside for this visit, maybe he will sell his turtle.<sup>4</sup> That is all.

Then Ana Afitu, a woman in her early seventies, asked to be heard:

Taufatōfua's basket to the King is an important thing. But it would be very 'beautiful' (*faka'ofó'ofa*) if all the homes of this land brought food to the home of the town officer to prepare a 'board of food' (*kaipola*) for the welcome of the Queen's following here on Kotu. Another thing is the *ngatu* (barkcloth), the *fala* (plaited pandanus mats) and the *lolo tonga* (Tongan oil<sup>5</sup>). It is 'up to them' (*fa'itelihā*; 'to do as one pleases'), but it would be right for the women to bring out these from their 'beds' (*mohenga*<sup>6</sup>) for the Queen's visit.

Meletoa, Koloa's wife, then spoke:

The Queen has been here on Kotu before. When she was here, she wanted to see the 'hidden burial mound' (*langi tu'u lilo*) and the 'pair of pools' (*ongo vai*<sup>7</sup>) of *Veifua* and

Tökilangi behind *fa'itoka* (the village cemetery). These places are very 'overgrown' (*vaoa*). It would be good if these places were to be cleared to become 'nice and clean' (*ma'a lelei*) for the Queen's visit.

Finally, Koloa thanked people for the suggestions and said that it would be well if each home were to bring 10 *pa'anga* (about 7 US\$) so that both the pig and the turtle could be included in Taufatōfua's basket to the King's House. He also told people to devote themselves to the task of cutting the grass of the village and to pay particular attention to the cemetery, the twin pools in the forest and the 'public roads' (*hala pule'anga*) leading to them. Everyone should do 'as they pleased' (*fa'iteliha pē*) and bring food and Tongan wealth for the Queen's welcome according to how 'warm they were inside' (*loto māfana*<sup>8</sup>). He also admonished people in general, and the youth in particular, to attend to their appearances during the Queen's visit. Thus, he said that no one must go out on the village roads without a *ta'ovala* (plaited matting worn around the waist), go outside their homes 'without a shirt' (*ta'e kofu*) or 'eat while standing up' (*kai tu'u*) in public. Such things, he emphasized, would show a 'lack of respect' (*ta'e faka'apa'apa*) for the important visitors. He reminded the elders of their duty to see to it that the young people of their households should keep the 'taboos' (*tapu*) so that the land would be 'orderly' (*maau*) for the Queen's visit:

We all know that it is hard for 'the young people' (*kautalavou*; lit. 'the good-looking ones') to remember how to behave, but we must pay attention to their behaviour and keep on telling them what to do. 'Do not leave it to them to make them lead us all' (*'O'ua tuku 'ia ke nau pule kitautolu*). 'Let us all try to achieve orderliness in our living' (*Feinga ke tau maau he nofo*)!

Over the next few days, root crops were provided for the 'earth oven' (*umu*). Small- and medium-sized pigs were slaughtered and carved up. Kava was pounded. Rubble was picked up and burnt. The grass was cut in the village, in the cemetery and along the public path to the twin pools in the forest behind the cemetery. Large amounts of barkcloth and mats were provided by village women to decorate the room in which the Queen would sleep, and a temporary house was erected nearby. Wooden columns were erected to make portals decked with fragrant flowers. A 200-meter path of barkcloth, on which the Queen was to walk, was laid out from *Fanga lahi*, the Great Landing on the beach, where she would first set foot on Kotu, to the Queen's quarters on the *mala'e*, the 'central village green'. The contrast between people's rather reserved initial response to the news of the visit and the later fervour of their commitment to the work of making Kotu a beautiful place, worthy of the important occasion of a royal visit, was very striking. It was evident that as people warmed to the project of preparing

for the visit they came to enjoy very much the practical experience of working together to create an event of extraordinary importance and beauty. In contrast to what may have been expected on the basis of their initial sceptical response to the news of the Queen's visit, they appeared quite joyous. The sounds of joking, laughter and loud music filled the village. In short, people seemed to be having a very good time. When the Queen arrived, this atmosphere of industrious activity and humorous festivity of 'making happy' (*fakafiefia*) went on to be punctuated at certain points by short moments of solemnity, silence and immobility of which the 'ilokava ceremony of the 'Queen's welcome' was the most marked one.

### The Queen's Kava

As we waited to welcome Queen Mata'aho, the kava drinkers were already sitting on the ground with legs crossed on the central village green, chatting, joking and smoking. When the Queen arrived and was seated at the head of the kava circle, it was like the introduction of a powerful magnet; immediately everything became oriented towards her. That the ceremonial occasion involved strict constraints on action was soon made clear in no uncertain terms. Koloa had some time earlier 'appointed me to the local talking-chief title *Fāhiva*' (*fakanofa ki he hingoa fakamatāpule ko Fāhiva*<sup>9</sup>), which entitled me to take part in the Queen's kava ceremony. When I took a picture of the Queen from my own position in the kava circle, one of the policemen who had accompanied her immediately came over and demanded that I stop disturbing the ceremony. This was the first and only time I met with photo restrictions in Tonga, where people were generally quite willing to be photographed. Having accepted a role in the task at hand, I was clearly obliged to abide by the constraints of the ceremonial occasion. I was told later that I could have 'done as I pleased' (*fa'iteliha*) and been free to take pictures of the ceremony if I did not partake in the kava. The attention of the kava drinkers should be exclusively directed towards the head of the circle, and any activity or, indeed, movement whatsoever should be directed at the partaking of her kava. For instance, smoking was not permitted during the ceremony, because it was perceived to divert the drinkers' attention from the shared task of celebrating this important occasion of hierarchical differentiation. After one round of kava, the Queen withdrew to the house that had been prepared for her. Once she had left, the kava ceremony seemed to lose its 'magnetic pole'. Attention shifted as it gravitated towards several visiting notables present. Later on, as other visitors of importance and rank excused themselves, the kava ceremony loosened up even more, becoming dominated by joking, smoking and drinking in a manner resembling that which had characterized it prior to the arrival of the Queen

and her entourage of important people; proceedings steadily slipped back into a more informal mode of communication (for similar observations of ‘ceremonial slippage’ with regard to kava drinking, see Rogers 1975: 375–77). Early next morning, events peaked again as a procession of villagers brought root crops, a large pig, a turtle, barkcloth, mats and Tongan oil and presented it to the Queen, who was again seated at the head of her kava. The procession was led by some middle-aged married women with painted faces expressing their ‘warmth inside’ (*loto māfana*) by clowning around or ‘making happy’ (*fakafiefia*) at this occasion of lavish generosity.<sup>10</sup> The wife of the minister of one of the local churches presented the ‘basket’, asking the Queen to accept the ‘tiny’ pig and turtle and the rest of the ‘rubbish’ they were bringing as a small token of gratitude and respect.<sup>11</sup> The Queen, herself, remained silent and immobile, with the Queen’s ‘talking chief’ (*matāpule*) thanking the minister’s wife for the generous gift on her behalf. The Queen was taken on a tour of the island and shown the ‘twin waters’ (*vai māhanga*) and the ‘Hidden burial mound’ (*Langi tu’u lilo*) behind the cemetery. When she left, most of Kotu’s people escorted her to the beach of the ‘Great Landing’ (*Fanga lahi*) and remained there to wave goodbye and cheer until her boat left *Namolahi* Lagoon for another island.<sup>12</sup>

At the village meeting the following month, the town officer thanked people for having ‘done their duties’ (*fai fatongia*) and ‘carried their burdens’ (*fua kavenga*). He thanked them for making contributions to the presentation of food, kava and wealth and for making themselves and the land itself orderly and beautiful for the Queen’s visit. He thanked the women, especially, for having provided the barkcloth and mats to make this possible. He then went on to ask them if they would start the work of weaving a 15-foot mat to be presented to the King on the next anniversary of his reign. On behalf of the women, Meletoa asked to be heard, saying that the women of Kotu would be quite happy to start this work immediately and would be able to finish it in a few days. A man in his fifties wanted to know whether the other women thought likewise about this. Ana Afitu asked to be heard:

I do not think that the men should worry about this thing. The town officer’s wife is quite right. It shall be no problem for us to do our part of the duty of this land to the King. I do not know why this man asks whether we are able to do our duties. It is not the women of this island who waste their time playing cards and sleeping off from too much kava drinking. Who was it that did the work of preparing this island for the Queen’s visit? Who was it that prepared the house in which the Queen slept to make it beautiful? Who provided the mats, the barkcloth and the Tongan oil for her welcome and for the royal basket? And what did the men do? It should have been the duty of the men of this island to go out fishing to get the ‘goatfish’ (*vete*), both for the feast of welcome of the Queen’s following and for Taufatōfua’s basket to the

King's House, but this was not done. The men should not worry about the duties of the women of this island!

After the meeting, Koloa agreed that the woman had been speaking the truth: 'She is quite right ... It is the women who carry most of the burdens of doing duties of various kinds. The men have become more lazy.' A man in his early forties, however, did not quite agree:

It is true. The women fulfil their obligations by weaving and by providing barkcloth as they have done from the days of old, but the men are not lazy. The large pig and the turtle for the Queen's basket was bought for money earned by men working hard on Tōfua growing the kava or night diving in the lagoon. The money for the annual *misinale* collections of the church, where does it come from? It comes from the selling of kava and fish. And matters of the family: housing, clothing, the children's education ... Where does the money come from for all these things? If you build a 'Tongan house' (*faletonga*), the women can help in the weaving of the ropes and matings for the roof, the floors and the walls. Even the children can help by bringing the things used to build a 'Tongan house'. Much kava growing and fishing must be done by the men to buy the things needed to build a wooden European house. The truth is that men work more now because everybody wants the money.

## Ceremonial Process

In the following, I shall approach the process of preparing and presenting the kava, the 'food' (*ngoue*) and the 'wealth' (*koloa*) during the Queen's visit as a realization of a motion towards a 'well-ordered' (*maau*) state of appearances and creating an event of extraordinary 'importance' (*mahu'inga*) by the imposition of strict and 'beautifying' (*faka'ofa'ofa*) 'constraints' (*tapu*) on behaviour. I shall argue that the creation of the many events of extraordinary beauty and significance that were so characteristic of Kotu sociality in the last decades of the twentieth century involved action that may be interpreted to remove that which spontaneously or 'haphazardly crops up' (*tupu noa* 'ia pē) in the flow of ordinary everyday events. Relatively frequent ceremonial occasions stood out in sharp contrast to ordinary and haphazard events of no particular significance. Instead of just cropping up, happening or appearing as a result of whims and personal preferences, ceremonial events of extraordinary significance involved bodies, food and behaviour all aligned in a particular direction by a common purpose and a common attentiveness to a centre of orientation.

The imposition of strict constraints on action was very striking during the Queen's visit to Kotu. This was most obvious at what stood out as peaks

in the ceremonial process of the Queen's visit; the kava drinking and gift presentation, where everything that happened was oriented towards the Queen. But attention to details, on how to proceed, on protocol and rules constituted an important theme throughout the process of preparation. One way of approaching the constraints of the Queen's 'ilokava is to concentrate on the spatial organization of the kava ceremony as a tableau of ceremonial elaboration (Biersack 1991). According to the Tongan noble V'éhala, important occasions of kava drinking may best be characterized by the fact that: 'You can't move around freely;<sup>13</sup> you have to move according to this or that; there are regulations' (see Biersack 1991: 246). I would have been 'free to do as I pleased' (*fa'iteliha*), move about and take pictures, if I had not been sitting in the circle of the Queen's 'ilokava. But in partaking, I was bound to the task at hand and immobilized by strict constraints. This makes it possible to view the constraints as increasing as events proceeded towards the pivotal point of the ceremonial process and as a characteristic of the inside as opposed to the outside of the ceremonial tableau. As proceedings move towards a pivotal point in the flow of events, a ceremonial tableau may be interpreted to come temporarily into being; a materialization of a highly differentiated order in which one criterion of ideal differentiation is elaborated to the exclusion of several other potential criteria of social differentiation: 'In the kava ceremony the principle of stratification by titles is marked off as clearly as possible from all other forms of social differentiation' (Bott 1972b: 217; see also Perminow 1995).

More than the momentary reality<sup>14</sup> of frozen order and importance, what intrigued me about the Queen's visit to Kotu was the process of transformation from the day when rumours about her visit first started to spread until she arrived, five days later, to head the kava ceremony of welcome. The 'Queen's visit' illustrates well what I perceive to be a general characteristic of ceremonial processes; events moved from the relatively disoriented practices of everyday interaction, via frequent, idealized instances of unambiguous orientation. These ideal orders were 'frozen' by constraints too demanding to last and, thus, soon lost their ideal orientation in favour of the practical and ambiguous realities of everyday life interaction. To me, the frozen moment of unambiguous orientation of the ceremonial tableau makes sense; first of all, in terms of the dramatic movement of a wider process of transformation. It may be that to Tongans, who consistently used the terms *maau* ('orderly') and *faka'ofó'ofa* ('beautiful') to describe the quality of occasions of unambiguous orientation, the value of such an occasion was precisely that it realized an ideal (or even unrealistic) state of affairs, defying the muddled realities of everyday life. Achieving such an unlikely occurrence, even for an instant, demands the strict constraint of other orientational potentials. It also demands a lot of creative effort aimed



at making the land, its bodies, its provisions and other materials presentable. Aesthetics clearly played an important part in this achievement, and as Kaeppler does in her examination of the relationship between art, aesthetics and social structure in Tonga, I too shall focus on some 'cultural forms that result from creative processes that use or "manipulate" words, sounds, movements, materials, and spaces in such a way that they formalise or intensify the formalisation of the non-formal' (Kaeppler 1990: 60). I would agree with her proposition 'that aesthetic experiences in Tonga are realized when fundamental cultural principles are made specific in works of art (that is, when the deep structure is manifested in a cultural form resulting from creative processes that manipulate movement, sound, words, spaces, or materials)' (ibid.: 70). Like Firth, I would regard aesthetic experience to be produced by 'attributing meaningful pattern ... accompanied by a feeling of rightness in that order ... satisfying some inner recognition of values' (Firth 1992: 16). And also as Firth does, I would emphasize that aesthetic experience 'is never a purely passive condition; it involves some degree of ideational and emotional engagement with the relations suggested by the object' (ibid.).

## The Force of Beauty

The strong emphasis on beautification, which characterized ceremonial processes on Kotu, may be approached in terms of the imposition of strict constraints: containing, masking, removing, isolating, separating and channelling forceful elements of human existence. The aesthetic value of the most important materials of personal beautification and public decoration in Tonga (as elsewhere in Polynesia; Gell 1995) may seem to be inextricably interwoven with their capacity to keep things apart. Thus, a part of what makes barkcloth decorative is that the potential capacity of the 'skin' of the tree (*kili*) to delimit has been potentiated by being worked upon according to strict procedures of production, transforming the grey 'skin/bark' (*kili*) of tiny trees that would appear to be of 'no account' (*noa*) into huge, colourful tableaux of outstanding order (*maau*) and significance. For instance, when 'Ahokava Lātū, the president of the Constitutional Church of Tonga, came to the funeral of his kinsman Amini Laukau on Kotu in 1991, a *ngatu* ('barkcloth') was placed on the ground at the head of the feast of welcome to emphasize the superiority of his position. Likewise, the superiority of the person of the highest ceremonial rank (*fahu*) at the same funeral seemed to utilize the power of *ngatu* to 'uplift'. The *fahu* was said to be free and liberated from restrictions to 'do as they pleased' (*fa'iteliha*) and had the privilege of sitting by the head of his deceased kinsman on the *ngatu* upon which the body of the deceased rested and that was *tapu* to all others. That *ngatu*

was perceived to have the capacity to elevate was further indicated by the fact that the *fahu* additionally had the privilege of sitting on a chair, whereas all others sat on the floor. This capacity to elevate or achieve vertical differentiation, however, may seem to be an instance of a more fundamental capacity to keep things apart.

The perceived capacity of *ngatu* to isolate or keep things apart may be illustrated by its use in burying the dead. Kotu people agreed that it may be harmful for a person to be exposed to the bones of his or her patrilineal relatives of the first ascending generation. These bones were said to be ‘taboo’ (*tapu*). Since most graves are used several times on Kotu, the bones of those already buried in a grave were normally exposed during the digging of a grave. Before the body of the dead was lowered into the grave, persons to whom the bones were taboo were protected by those liberated from this taboo to ‘do as they pleased’ (*fa’iteliha*). Holding the edges of a large *ngatu* and raising their arms above their heads, they formed the *ā kolo* or ‘village fence’ of protection by encircling the grave. Only those free from taboo should be ‘inside the fence’ (*loto ā kolo*) during the burial. The protective capacity of *ngatu* was replaced by a ‘village of people’ (*kolo tangata*) when the number of kin ‘free from restraint’ was high enough to make it possible for them to form an ‘enclosure of people’ (*ā tangata*), standing shoulder to shoulder around the pit.

As for the dead body itself, it is first ‘wrapped in a piece of *ngatu*’ (*kofu-kofu he ngatu vala*), extending from the feet to the armpits. It is then encased, cocoon-like, in a larger piece of *ngatu*, treated with scented Tongan oil. The *ngatu*, itself, is made from the ‘inner bark’ (*kili ma’a* or ‘clean bark’ as opposed to the *kili ‘uli* or ‘outer/dark/dirty bark’) of the Paper mulberry tree (*hiapo*), referred to as its ‘skin’<sup>15</sup> (*kili*) (See also Fanua 1986; Kaeppler 1990; Van der Grijp 1993: 61–62). The bark is beaten with a wooden mallet into paper thin strips that are pasted together by the use of parboiled ‘arrowroot’ (*mahoā’a*) to form wider strips. The strips made out of the inner bark of the wider ends of the trunks are joined together to become a long sheet making up the ‘upper layer/surface’ (*lau’olunga*) of the *ngatu*. Bark sheets made from the narrow ends of the trunks become the ‘lower layer/underside’ (*laulalo*) of the *ngatu*.

The body of the dead, then, may be said to receive several layers of extra skin of *ngatu*, separating the bones that remain from their underground environment when the body deteriorates. Although more resilient than the skin of the deceased, the *ngatu* eventually breaks down. The ‘Tongan illness’ (*mahaki fakatonga*) known as *akafia* (‘full of roots’<sup>16</sup>) was widely held to be caused by the breakdown of what protects the remains of the human body from contact with underground forces of wild growth. Lea, the middle-aged son in my *‘api*, explained:

Sometimes the 'roots' (*aka*) of trees and bushes that are close to the grave grow into it and penetrate the *ngatu* in which the body of the dead has been wrapped. If the roots penetrate the bones of the deceased, this may cause pain or weakness for living kinsmen that may not be cured by Western medicine or those Tongan healing practices that treat the body of the one who is ill. If the leg bones are pierced by the roots, then it is the legs of the living that hurt or become weak. If the head is pierced by roots, it causes a headache that will not go away. Roots piercing the back cause chronic backaches.

I asked if anything could be done to cure such an illness. 'It can be cured,' claimed Lea, 'by going to the grave at night, opening it up and caring for the bones.' He continued:

The bones must be unwrapped. Destroyed barkcloth must be replaced, and the roots that have penetrated them must be removed. Then the bones must be cleaned, treated with Tongan oil and properly wrapped in new *ngatu*. The grave must be inspected to make sure that the bones of the different persons that have been buried there have not shifted. One must make sure that they lie separately, not on top of each other.

Lea informed me that such a task was not the job of the person who is ill:

When *akafia* is suspected to cause illness, the afflicted must tell some relative who is 'free/can do as one pleases' (*atā/fa'iteliha*) to unearth the bones and care for them. Do you remember my mother's brother (*fa'ētangata*) who lives on Tongatapu? He became very ill. His legs hurt and he was hardly able to walk. The illness did not pass, so he went to a soothsayer who could read cards and who told him that the cause of his pain was *akafia* of his father's bones buried here on Kotu. Since I am his sister's son (*ilamutu*) and 'unrestrained' to the bones of my 'grandfathers' (*kuitangata*), he phoned me to ask for help. One night I and my son went to the grave and tended the bones properly. Immediately the pain went away, and he was healed.

## Roots of Pain

To the best of my knowledge, the *akafia* syndrome remains unexplored. Whistler does mention it, however, in the glossary of his exploration of Tongan herbal medicine and defines it as: 'A type of headache thought to be caused by the growth of tree roots into the skull of a deceased relative. The cure is to exhume and carefully rebury the bones. This is probably what Churchward and Parsons called *haukiva'e*'<sup>17</sup> (Whistler 1992: 111). In greater detail, *akafia* and its cure were related to processes and qualities pertaining to the substances of bones, roots, *ngatu* and Tongan oil. The processes that

seemed to cause the sickness were wild growth and decay, while the cure consisted of weeding (the area close to the grave), removing roots from the bones, renewing *ngatu* and oiling the bones. Put differently, sickness seemed to result when the resilient 'skin' of protection, separating the most enduring remains of the body from its underground environment, gave way to the encroaching potency of wild growth. In all the cases referred to on Kotu where chronic illness was thought to result from *akafia*, the genealogical distance between the bones and the one who was sick was very short. There seemed to be no limit to the effective geographical reach of *akafia*; people who had left the *fonua* ('homeland/island') for other peripheral islands or for Nuku'alofa – or people who had settled overseas – who became the victims of *akafia* had to recruit the assistance of relatives who had remained on the *fonua* in order to regain health. Pain, then, seemed to be incurred by neglect of the relatively recent dead; in the course of letting their names slip from memory and thus dropping their names from everyday communication in the local community, their graves were no longer kept free of weeds as the multiple demands and possibilities of the present turned people to other tasks and other places. As the dead receded still further out of mention and memory, their bones seemed to become less bothersome, although persons of particular rank or local reputation seemed to linger on 'below the land' (*lolofonua*) and affect the living in the shape of 'beings of the other side/kind'.

A conversation about what happens when people die contained numerous 'ghost stories' about the dead of Kotu. As *tevolo* ('devils', 'spirits') or *fa'ahikehe* ('beings of the other kind'), they were known to leave their underground dwellings in the cemetery to roam about the wild bush and enter the village at night. Some held that the *fa'ahikehe* sometimes punished disrespectful behaviour by causing untimely death in the village. But most people felt that these beings were just 'naughty/evil' (*pau'u*) in nature; they often caused problems by entering someone's body, causing him or her to behave in a weirdly uncontrollable and unpredictable manner (*āvanga*; 'sickness caused by a *fa'ahikehe/tevolo* spirit; see also Cowling 1990b; Whistler 1992: 53–55; Gordon 1996).

The unease with the inevitability of the process by which the dead tend to be crowded out of mention and memory by the multiple urgencies and mobilities of the present may also be illustrated by the local practice of 'naming' (*fakahingoa*) children after a namesake. As Rogers reported from Niuatoputapu (Rogers 1975: 267), the naming of a child is considered to be an important formative event on Kotu because it represents one of the earliest efforts to 'build/construct/assemble' (*ngaohi*) the child by attaching it to the one choosing the name and the one after whom the child is named. The naming thus opens up for the child the possibility of forming a lasting bond

with his or her name-giver, and the child is expected to develop a personal style resembling that of its namesake. Quite often, one of the elders of the 'father's side' (*fā'ahi ʻo tamai*) is asked by the parents to be the name-giver. Several of the elder name-givers on Kotu felt that one of the good things about being asked to choose the name of the child was that it allowed them to stop personal names from slipping out of mention and memory by reviving names of persons from the past. Thus, one old man on Kotu expressed his satisfaction at having done a beautiful thing when he chose the name of a man 'that had been old and weak in my youth, so that this name shall not disappear from the land.'

The practices and possible meanings of 'naming' and 'root penetration' make up rich fields of exploration in their own right. I touch upon them here to illustrate the constitutive aspect of aesthetics; beautiful and shapely things (like a *ngatu*) and beautiful and orderly proceedings (like 'building a child' or drinking kava) constitute 'important' (*mahu'inga*) events and contribute to counteract, harness or channel the strength of 'wild growth' (*tupu noa'ia*) or the muddled and manifold urgencies of everyday social living; the undergrowth from which important events stand out.

## The Beauty of the *Lohu Loa* Harvesting Stick

The interrelatedness of the conceptions of beauty, order and importance came out clearly in the way people talked about the value of particular events. The terms *faka'ofō'ōfa* ('beauty', 'beautiful') *maau* ('well ordered', 'orderly') and *mahu'inga* ('important') were often used as more or less interchangeable synonyms, all sharing the antonym of *noa/noa'ia* ('nought/without value/ haphazard/insignificant/dumb/un-ordered/good for nothing/of no account') used by people trying to describe the aesthetic and functional significance of specific events. When witnessing or referring to kava party procedures, the proceedings at a funeral, the planting of the 'first yam' (*tokamu'a*) or the kava, events of 'child building' (*ngaohi fanau*), the 'construction of a speech' (*ngaohi lea*), a 'dance' (*ta'olunga*) well-performed, a 'song' (*hiva*) well sung and so on, people would often shake their heads slowly, touched or moved by what they saw, and exclaim: '*Mālie 'aupito! Ko e me'a mahu'inga 'eni. Sio ai, faka'ofō'ōfa eh? ... maau 'aupito* ('How pleasing! Here is an important thing. Look, it is beautiful, isn't it? ... very well ordered').

Having made the exclamation, people evidently felt that they had said all that was needed and were generally not inclined to elaborate further on the worth and meaning of the act or occasion. Being asked what it is that makes a funeral an 'important occasion' (*me'a mahu'inga*), however, Koloa elaborated:

One of the things that makes the funeral an important thing is that it makes clear to the young the ‘manner of the land’ (*anga fakafonua*) and the ‘manner of the family’ (*anga ’o e fāmili*). Things do not just happen ‘aimlessly’ (*noa’ia pē*) at the funeral but according to this or that making things that happen ‘very well ordered’ (*maau ’aupito*). The duties of the mother’s side are different from the duties of the father’s side; the ‘leader of the funeral’ (*tu’utu’uni ’o e putu*) is different from the ‘ceremonial chief’ (*fahu*); the ‘working people’ (*kau ngāue*) are different from the ‘kava drinkers’; and those ‘outside the funeral’ (*tu’a ’o e putu*) are different from those of the ‘body/substance of the funeral’ (*sino ’o e putu*). All these different things are made clear because people perform different duties and must act and dress in different manners in the funeral. The dress and the *ta’ovala* (‘plaited waist matting’) of those ‘outside’ the funeral (*kautu’a*), the ‘low side’ (*mā’ulalo*), like the children and the ‘younger brother’s’ (*kautehina*) of the dead ... they must wear ‘black colours’ (*teunga’uli*) and the *motumotu* (‘coarse plaited mat covering most of the body’); they must ‘work at the fire’ (*ngāue he afi*) to prepare the food ‘outside the place of the funeral’ (*’i tu’a mala’e*). The ‘high side’ (*mā’olunga*) ... those of the ‘body of the funeral’ (*sino ’o e putu*) like the ‘grandchildren’ (*mokopuna*), the ‘fathers’ (senior relatives on the father’s side), the sister’s children; they are unrestrained and may stay close to the corpse ‘inside the place of the funeral’ (*’i loto mala’e*). They do not work and may wear ‘white clothes’ (*teungahina*) and a small and comfortable *ta’ovala*. At other times, it is difficult to know the manner of the land and the family because things happen haphazardly as people want to have this or that and ‘twist and turn’ (*āmio*) in the manner of their living, but the funeral makes things clear. That is why I think the choice of the *tu’utu’uni ’o e putu* (‘leader of the funeral’) who receives and ‘distributes’ (*tufa*) the food and the *fahu* (‘chief of the funeral’) who receives the ‘wealth’ (*koloa*) is an important thing. Do you remember the funeral of Amini? Epalahame was the *fahu* in that funeral, and that was a very beautiful thing. Amini’s father was Kilione, and the sister of Kilione was Hingano. Epalahame is the son of Hingano’s daughter. Epalahame comes from the sister of Amini’s father. According to my thinking, it is most beautiful to choose the *fahu* like that: ‘according to the long harvesting stick’ (*lohu loa*<sup>18</sup>); because then people may see the manner of the family and remember the people who lived on the land before. But often the *fahu* is chosen according to ‘the crop and its harvesting stick’ (*to’u kai mo hono lohu*<sup>19</sup>). At Amini’s funeral, his ‘sister’ (*tuofefine*) wanted her own son, Amini’s ‘sister’s son’ (*’ilamutu*) to be the *fahu* of the funeral. When Amini learnt that his sister wanted her own son to be the *fahu* of his funeral, he did not like it and refused her. It is true; he is Amini’s ‘chief’ (*eiki*) and unrestrained, and important to Amini’s ‘generation’ (*to’u*), but it would not be ‘a long harvesting stick’ (*lohu loa*). Also, Amini was the eldest, older than this sister (*tuofefine*) and the ‘leading mother’s brother’ (*fa’ētan-gata pule*) of his sister’s son. No, I think that choosing Epalahame was better. The long harvesting stick is ‘more beautiful’ (*faka’ofo’ofo ange*) ... ‘more well-ordered’ (*maau ange*). And the *tu’utu’uni* (‘leader’) of that funeral ... was Tevita Fanua, and it

was ‘the long harvesting stick’ (*lohu loa*). His father’s father was the ‘oldest brother’ (*ta’okete*), and the father of Amini was among the ‘younger brothers’ (*kautehina*). In the manner of ‘the harvesting stick of this year’s crop’ (*to’u kai mo hono lohu*), Amini was Tevita’s ‘father’ (*tamai* i.e. ‘father’s brother’), but in the manner of ‘the long harvesting stick’, Tevita is the ‘head’ (*ulumotu’a*) of this ‘family’ (*fāmilii*<sup>20</sup>) because he ‘comes here’ (*hoko mai*) from the oldest brother (*ta’okete*), while Amini comes here from a ‘younger brother’ (*tehina*). But during the funeral Tevita became very angry (*’ita*) because one of Amini’s younger brothers took away from Tevita the task of distributing the food of the funeral on the people. That was not a good thing; not in the manner of ‘the long harvesting stick’ (*lohu loa*). It did not make known to people much about the ‘manner of the family’ (*anga ’o e fāmili*).

The intimately interrelated capacities of ‘beauty’ (*faka’ofu’ofa*), ‘order’ (*maau*) and ‘importance’ (*mahu’inga*) to create moments of optimal separateness from a general flow of ‘aimless’ events that are of ‘no account’ because of things happening *noa’ia pē* (‘haphazardly’) may also be illuminated semantically. The core of the term *mahu’inga* (‘importance’, ‘important’), *mahu’i*, may seem familiar from the foregoing exploration of tidal and diurnal dynamics. Thus, it was first encountered in the exploration of the conceptualization of the tidal motion of ebb tide – that is, the motion of separation from ‘high tide’ (*tau ’a e tahi*) to ‘low tide’ (*mamaha ’a e tahi*); *mahu’i ’a e tahi ke mamaha*. *Mahu’i* means literally ‘to wrench, tear apart or separate forcefully’ (a branch wrenched from a tree, a child weaned away from the mother’s breast and so on). The noun-forming suffix *-nga* pertains to ‘the thing that achieves’, the quality described by the semantic core or ‘the grounds/reason for this quality’. For instance, according to Churchward (Churchward 1953: 239), *mālohi* signifies ‘strong’ while *mālohi-nga* signifies ‘that which strengthens’. Thus, it is possible to interpret the term *mahu’i-nga* to signify ‘that which forcefully wrenches apart’, ‘the grounds on which something is separated’ or, in other words, a powerful criterion by which something is thrown into relief by causing other things of potential prominence to melt into the background. This is, no doubt, to some degree how ‘importance’ must be constituted everywhere, but ‘importance’ is not everywhere so strongly and consistently coupled with what constitutes ‘beauty’. The strong linkage between the conception of *maau* (‘orderly’, ‘well ordered’) and moving events evoking pleasurable feelings was first of all made clear by the look of satisfaction and admiration on the faces of those who made these exclamations. But this linkage may also be illuminated semantically. Thus, the writing of Tongan poetry, utilizing the evocative potentials of Tongan linguistic imagery most fully, is referred to as *fatu maau* or *fa’u maau*, meaning to ‘create/make/build/compose/construct’ (*fa’u/fatu*) ‘order/orderliness’ (*maau*).

## The Force of ‘Warmth Inside’

The term *faka’ofo’ofa* (‘beautiful’, ‘beauty’), itself, may be interpreted in terms of the capacity of events and things to evoke states of internal motion, the perception of which appeared to touch people ‘inside’ (*i loto*); to strike a chord calling forth people’s capacity to engage one another in events of social cooperation. The morphological core of the term *faka’ofo’ofa* (‘beauty/beautiful’) is *’ofa* (‘love/compassion’) reduplicated for intensification (*-’ofo’ofa*) and prefixed by the causative *faka-*. *Me’a ’ofa* or ‘thing of love’ is the Tongan expression for a concrete ‘gift/present’, but the emphasis is on the act of giving more than the thing given. The point is that generous deeds of giving may be seen as acts that express and evoke *’ofa* (‘love/compassion’) as a state of being that has moved beyond the confines of self-sufficiency and self-interest to engage the surrounding world. A possible semantic interpretation of the term *faka’ofo’ofa* (‘beauty/beautiful’) would be ‘causing internal *’ofa*’ or, simply, ‘intensely moving’. A related term *faka’ofa*, consisting of the morphological core *’ofa* and the causative prefix *faka-*, but without the intensifying reduplication, is by Churchward interpreted to mean precisely ‘moving/stirring (to pity)’. This interpretation of the constitutive force of ‘beauty’ to cause internal transformation in terms of being ‘stirred’ or ‘moved’ seems consonant with the description of engagement and deeply felt commitment in terms of being ‘warm inside’ (*loto māfana*<sup>21</sup>).

I realize that the interpretation of ‘love/compassion’ as moving or stirring to break out of isolation and self-sufficiency presupposes the existence of a notion of a human desire or predisposition to withdraw from the world and remain isolated and self-sufficient. This may seem to contradict some conventions of thinking about the difference between the ‘West’ and the ‘Other’. Indeed, individual isolation and self-sufficiency seem often to have been thought of as characteristic traits of ‘Western ways of life’ as opposed to those of the ‘Other’. As Bradd Shore claims also to be the case for Samoans, Tongans ‘live most of their lives in a very public arena’ (Shore 1982: 148), as ‘powerful norms of social life ... keep people in almost constant social interaction’ (ibid.: 148). Like Samoans, Tongans would rarely claim that they like being by themselves. As social isolation is generally understood ‘to encourage antisocial urges and acts’ (ibid.: 148), such a claim would be morally questionable. Thus, the ideological emphasis on visibility and participation in the public arena did not seem to be produced by notions of inherent desirability but by notions of moral necessity. A perceived human disposition to withdraw and the general desirability of being self-sufficient and of being left in peace from demands of intense socializing, in general, and ‘open-handedness’ (*nimahomo*) or generosity, in particular,



indeed seemed to constitute an undercurrent in most moral discourses on Kotu. A Western couple moved to Kotu in 1990 and decided that the village was too crowded and noisy and so arranged to live by themselves in the plantation area. People seemed to have no problem understanding that they found it desirable to do so. Several did, however, question the morality of their choosing to withdraw from the social intensity of village living, and they frequently asked one another, ‘What are they talking about up there? What are they eating on their own? What secret things are they up to out there in the bush?’

People did not treat the chronic demands for intense socializing and generosity that characterized everyday village living as something inherently desirable, to be taken for granted, and they were very conscious that it involved both a strong resolve and an effort to defy an understandable desire for withdrawal and self-sufficiency. The very acts of taking part in the proceedings of a funeral, ‘composing a speech’ (*ngaohi lea*) or going to a kava party and presenting a ‘novel/original’ (*fóou*) or ‘entertaining’ (*mālie*) story were treated as generous ‘gifts/things of love’ (*me’a ófa*). Thus, a man who very seldom went to kava parties on Kotu was, when he made one of his rare appearances, received with the ironic greeting *malo é fakamotu*; literally, ‘congratulations on coming away from your island’ (i.e. isolation). People would sometimes, during streams of events involving particularly numerous or strenuous ‘duties’ (*fai fātongia*) and ‘solicitations’ (*fai kole*), exclaim: ‘*Fakahela mo’oni ‘a e anga fakatonga eh!*’ (‘The Tongan way is in truth exhausting, isn’t it!’). One generous fisherman, coming ashore with a nice catch after having spent several hours spear-diving, made this same exclamation when he returned to his *‘api* with about a fourth of the catch intact, the rest having been given away in response to fish-less villagers’ ‘solicitations’ (*kole*). Likewise, this exclamation was sometimes made by my companions to express sympathy on days when particularly numerous solicitations demanded my own attention. People all agreed that it was a ‘good thing to beg’ (*sai kole*) for things and assistance. But they evidently also felt that it represented exhausting work, taxing their personal ‘strength’ or ‘energy’ (*ivi*) to ‘respond to solicitations’ (*tali ‘a e kole*). Comments about the ‘exhausting Tongan way’ were not only, or even primarily, made with reference to materially costly demands but with reference to a concentration of numerous solicitations for material trifles of everyday consumption that disturbed one’s peace or contributed to distract one from whatever one was doing. Again, the desirability of not being disturbed, of not being distracted from one’s purpose and of holding onto whatever assets one might control by declining to respond positively to acts of solicitation did seem to be highly understandable to all, albeit morally questionable, to say the least.<sup>22</sup>

## Wild and Cultivated Growth

I have emphasized that the efforts of beautification characterizing ceremonial processes in Tonga may be described in terms of the imposition of strict constraints, containing, masking, removing, isolating, separating and channelling constitutive forces. The aesthetic value of the most important materials of personal beautification, such as the *ta'ovala* ('plaited waist matting'), used to cover up parts of the body, and scented 'Tongan oil' (*lolo fakatonga*) and 'garlands' (*kahoa*) of fragrant flowers, used to create a mask of scent, may be approached in a similar manner to that used with reference to the significance of *ngatu* above. One of the things that was emphasized regarding scented oils, 'Tongan soap' (*koa fakatonga*<sup>23</sup>) and fragrant flowers was their 'nice smell' (*namu lelei*) in situations that would otherwise be dominated by odours emerging from within the body. Thus, several persons on Kotu accounted for the custom of giving away garlands of fragrant flowers at leave-takings for their capacity to create an atmosphere of *namu lelei* during an uncomfortable voyage that might otherwise be dominated by the 'reek/putrid smell' (*namu palaku*) of seasickness. Similarly, fragrant flowers were always used to create an atmosphere of *namu lelei* at sick- or death beds by being placed in the containers into which those who were ill spat or vomited.

*Noa/noa'ia*<sup>24</sup> ('of no account/worthless/aimless/disarrayed/insignificant/haphazard') is a central concept in the context of kava ceremonies and other ceremonial processes involving efforts to beautify and establish occasions of importance. The interrelated concepts of *faka'ofó'ofa* (beauty), *maau* ('well-ordered/orderliness') and *mahu'inga* ('importance') all exist in opposition to things that are *noa/noa'ia*. All of these qualities appear to be what mark extraordinary occasions or that throw them into relief against a background of unmarked events. According to Johansen, who studied Maori everyday religiosity in the 1950s, 'The term *noa* does not mean "polluted", but rather 'free', 'nothing', 'unmarked', and 'unconstrained.' It suggests action that is unguided, without purpose or destination. The profane, *noa*, thus characterizes everyday life, in which everything happens more informally and freely, but also more casually and haphazardly' (Johansen, see Shore 1989: 166). '... If these associations are accurate, then *tapu* conversely means "contained" or "bound", suggesting the creative (and hence sacred) containment of *mana*, and the concomitant subordination of humans to its divine wellspring' (ibid.).

In the everyday flow of communication on Kotu, however, *noa* was not usually used as the antonym of *tapu*. In most contexts, the first choice of antonym for *tapu* was *fa'iteliha* ('to be unrestrained' or '*atā* ('free)'), while people used *maau* (well-ordered, orderly), *faka'ofó'ofa* and *mahu'inga* to

describe opposite qualities of *noa/noa'ia*. Thus, young men on Kotu sometimes returned dejectedly from an unsuccessful search for available kava parties exclaiming: '*Ko fonua ta'eole mo'oni ko Kotu! 'Oku tapu pē 'a e tou'a kotoa pē he po'oni*' ('Kotu is in truth a boring place! All the kava girls are taboo tonight'). One of the most consistent behavioural aspects of the brother-sister relationship of mutual 'respect' (*faka'apa'apa*) was that a man should not join a kava party at which his cross-sex sibling prepared the kava. The form and content of communication at kava parties was understood to be at odds with the restraint that should characterize brother-sister interaction (Rogers 1975, 1977; Perminow 1993a, 1995). When, on the other hand, women referred to as 'new kava girls' (*tou'a fo'ou*) prepared the kava (that is, women who are not siblings), the young men would say: '*Ko tou'a fo'ou ai. 'Oku atā pē 'e tamaiki ki ai*' ('There is a new kava girl there. The boys are free to go there').

Thus, *atā* ('free') and *fa'iteliha* ('to do as one pleases, to be unrestrained') seem conceptually linked to *tapu* ('constraint/constrained') by strongly implying the liberation from potential or specific 'constraints' (*tapu*). *Noa/noa'ia*, on the other hand, did not seem to presuppose *tapu* or constraints in the same way; it pertained to a state produced by acts neither explicitly nor implicitly constrained by, nor liberated from, a purposeful procedure. Thus, it referred to things that just crop up from within the dim reaches of whatever it is that constitutes the source of personal desires and motivations, much as wild weeds crop up to grow *noa'ia pē* (*tupu noa'ia pē*; 'grow/crop up aimlessly/all over') from within the dim reaches of that which constitutes the source of growth. Given the way these terms were used on Kotu, *noa* may perhaps best be understood to pertain to a kind of natural, untamed potency undifferentiated and unrefined by purposeful procedures. *Tapu* ('constraints'), personal beautification and decoration involving the use of materials and procedures isolating and separating elements from each other may perhaps best be understood as a purposeful channelling or harnessing of undomesticated *noa* qualities always threatening to spill indiscriminately out of a melting pot of wild potency. In this perspective, *tapu* (constraints) and 'beauty' (*faka'ofó'ofa*) may be said to make kava ceremonies or food presentations marked or 'outstanding/important' (*mahu'inga*) occasions because they effect a transition from a state of affairs of *noa'ia* to a state of affairs of *maau* (orderliness, being well proportioned). I perceive the process of transforming human existence from states of *noa* to states of *maau* as a very persistent theme of Tongan ceremonial aesthetics and sociality and one that certainly engaged people on Kotu in the last decades of the twentieth century. It appears to go more or less without saying that social realities might easily come to be wholly dominated by qualities of *noa*; unpredictability, uncertainty, aimlessness,

haphazardness, lack of respect, disobedience, self-sufficiency, greed, unchecked strength, wild growth and aimless creativity. It was as if such a 'natural' and chaotic state of affairs may only be escaped by staging, again and again, events that transformed states of *noa* into states of *maau*, albeit as momentary glimpses of exemplary orderliness. This was, in a sense, an unrealistic, unidimensional orderliness that demanded so much effort, so much unitedness of purpose and such strict constraints on personal conduct that it could not but collapse. Thus, the peaks or pivotal points of ceremonial processes were always quite quickly done with before cross purposes, variations in personal preferences and an inherent desirability to be liberated 'to please oneself/be/free' (*fa'iteliha/ātā*) returned things to a default state dominated by a flow of events of 'no account' (*noa*).

## Dumb Truths about Human Nature

At one point I discussed with one of my Tongan friends what may be called the *noa* aspect of being Tongan in terms of conceptions of personhood. I argued that Tongan conceptions of personhood seemed to involve a conviction that people share an unlimited capacity for deceit, greed, violence and sexual aggression. He did not seem to think that this represented an extraordinary insight or that this was peculiar to *Tongan* conceptions of the person. To his mind, it was not a truth about Tonga or Tongans at all but rather a general truth about human nature. I have not met any Tongans who did not take for granted that this rather pessimistic view of human nature constitutes a natural reality and thus a fundamental challenge for morality and sociality.

These 'truths' about human nature may be described as the *noa* aspect of the person, not only in the sense of being 'without order/chaotic' but also in the sense of being 'dumb', 'nought' or 'good for nothing' (all of which *noa* signifies) as a theme of discourse. The relevance of dumb truths was indicated in another discussion with Koloa, when a friend came to visit me during fieldwork on Kotu. Koloa complained that my friend was not *mali-mali* or 'smiling'. For Koloa, the main criterion of not being *malimali* other than facial expression is that no effort is made, actively or responsively, to look others in the eyes. As a guest, he said, one should wear a 'lively/attentive face' (*mata mo'ui*). When I objected that people's faces vary and that some may look more melancholy than others, he said that everybody is able to 'compose a good face' (*ngaohi mata lelei*) if they wanted to and made an effort. I retreated to another line of defence on behalf of my visitor, saying that it could be a rather overwhelming experience to come all the way around the world to a Pacific village where everything is different and new to you. I argued that this may have made my friend tired, insecure

and withdrawn. I went on to argue that, according to our customs, it may sometimes be considered insincere to 'put on a happy face' if this does not correspond with how you feel 'inside' (*'i loto*). He laughed then, saying that the *anga fakapālangi* ('European way') was not good for much if it did not make you realize that the relationship between the 'inside' (*loto*) and how you act is the other way round: 'When you compose a happy face you change what you feel inside, making it the same as your face.'

Like Samoans, then, my Tongan informants appeared to take a Hobbesian view of 'human nature' (Shore 1982: 157). Thus, one may perhaps characterize the Tongan conception of the dim reaches of private experience as related to: '... a conception of forces that are understood as an ineradicable residue of destructive energy or will, against which social life is set' (ibid.: 148). The relationship between this 'ineradicable residue of energy or will' – what I have called a 'melting pot' of personal capacities and desires – and social conduct may in my view be seen as analogous to the relationship between the indispensable phase of merging in the procreative motion of growth, regeneration and cultivation – that is, if nothing is done to channel or work with the force or growth potentials generated by this motion, weeds or plants 'of no account' will 'crop up haphazardly' (*noa 'ia pē*) to crowd out the 'important' (*mahu'inga*) cultivated plants on which humans depend for survival. My findings indicate that people shared an assumption about the existence of reaches of personal (emotional, creative, destructive) potentials 'within' (*'i loto*) that were patently 'unfathomable' and 'chaotic' (*noa*) as well as 'useless' or 'nought' (*noa*) as a topic of discourse. In a sense, perhaps, being *malimali*, or 'composing a happy face', and other efforts to create a bright and shining visage can be viewed as a personal process (or ritual) of transforming human existence from a state of *noa* to a state of *maau*. The analytical significance of focusing on the whole process of personal and spatial beautification and ceremonial elaboration, rather than the end product of beauty and order, is that the moments of beauty and order may be seen to gain constitutive potency from people's energetic and enthusiastic commitment, steadily increasing as procedures of preparation force a wedge of order, beauty and enlightenment (*maau/faka'ofa'ofa/maama*) into an inherently unfathomable, unpredictable, changing and murky existence (*noa/fakapo'uli*). This focus involves a perspective on ceremonial aesthetics and personal beautification not first of all as frozen tableaux, celebrating or expressing a particular state of social or personal order, but rather as active ingredients in processes constituting and reconstituting the person, as well as the social relationships that constitute and reconstitute community, by people's active commitment to rework and refine the raw materials of human existence into resources of human sociality. The rare occasion of a

visit by the Queen of Tonga to Kotu represents a dramatic example of ceremonial transformation. Less extraordinary sequences of events, in which people nevertheless seemed to dedicate themselves to create moments of 'beauty'/'order'/'importance' (*faka'ōfo'ofa/maau/mahu'inga*), frequently occurred to break the monotonous flow of everyday village life. The most illuminating example of constitutively powerful processes of transformation (apart from the frequent occasions of kava drinking; see Perminow 1993a, 1995), by which quite concrete raw materials of human existence may be said to be transformed into resources of personal and social (re-) constitution, was perhaps the frequent staging of feasts; *kaipola* or *kai fakaafe*. In order to pave the way for an interpretation of the constitutive significance of feasting in the local community, it is first necessary to present local eating practices in general against a background of which the *kaipola* and the *kai fakaafe* stood out in sharp relief.

### Everyday Eating

On Kotu, everyday meals did not seem to have a fixed time of occurrence, although meals were loosely referred to as *kai pongipongi* ('morning meal'), *kai ho'atā* ('midday meal') and *kai efiafi* ('afternoon/evening meal') (See also Rogers 1975: 328). The actual timing of meals was, first of all, influenced by the accessibility of *me'akiki*; the ingredients of a meal that complemented the staple *me'akai* of manioc, taro, yams, sweet potatoes and breadfruit to make up what was considered a complete and satisfying meal. Since fish was the overwhelmingly predominant *me'akiki* of the main everyday meal on Kotu, the availability of fresh fish was a sort of timekeeper of everyday eating. The importance of the availability of seafood for the timing of the meals on Kotu is well illustrated by a statement made by a visitor from Tongatapu in 1991: 'The sea decides when to eat here on Kotu!'

As a first rule of thumb, everyday eating moved to the rhythm of the tides. It did so because most fishing activities followed the tides and people generally preferred to eat as soon as possible after the fish had been brought ashore. However, everyday eating was made more complex by the rhythm of other natural phenomena of varying periodicity. First of all, as we saw in the previous chapter, the amount of natural light during the night varies over the four quarters of the moon. This in its turn affected 'night fishing' (*ama uku*). *Ama uku* involved the use of an electric torch and spear. On dark nights with no moonlight, the fish, which were said to be sleeping, 'stayed put' (*nofo maau*) when the torch was shined upon them and were most easily speared at low tide. If, on the other hand, the moon was up to illuminate the *Namolahi* Lagoon, the fish were said to be awake and would dart about much as they would during the daytime, making them hard to

catch. In the second quarter of the moon, the conditions for night fishing were said to deteriorate with a waxing moon staying up increasingly far into the night. As we have seen earlier, sunset and moonrise coincide around full moon and alternate to provide illumination throughout the diurnal cycle. 'Reciprocal day' (*fē'aho'aki*) was said to leave no part of the night with conditions suitable for night fishing. During the third quarter, moonrise lags increasingly behind sunset, leading to a growing number of early nights, referred to as the 'dark ones' (*kaupō'uli*), in true darkness. Around the fourth quarter of the moon, the period of darkness comes to encompass the occurrence of low tide to again provide optimal conditions for night diving. These conditions last for at least the last quarter of one lunation and the first quarter of the next.

The basic significance of these natural rhythms for everyday eating was that they decided exactly when fresh fish was available and thus when it would be time for the main meal of the day. During the first and last quarters of the moon, night fishing would often make fresh fish available from the early morning, and so the main meal more frequently occurred well before noon. For some of the men, it even occurred before sunrise, as returning from a long night of kava drinking they would have a meal of fresh fish before going to sleep. During the second and third quarters, on the other hand, fresh seafood would normally be acquired through daytime 'net fishing' (*kupenga*), 'hook and line fishing' (*taumata'u*, 'octopus lure fishing' (*maka feke*) and 'shellfish/seaweed collecting' (*fingota*) whenever the tide was suitable during the day. Thus, the main meal would more frequently occur in the afternoon or evening during those quarters of the moon. Also, there are natural seasonal variations influencing the level of activity of night diving. The temperature of the sea drops markedly during the 'cool season' (*taimi momoko*), making night diving less attractive in the months from May through September. Thus, the range within which the occurrence of the main meal varied was not constant over the year. Additionally, natural occurrences of a more haphazard nature influenced eating times, first of all by periodically reducing the availability of fish. As may be recalled, the conditions referred to as *loka 'a e namo* ('the lagoon is on the move/astir') transform the *Namolahi* Lagoon into a troubled seascape of forceful currents in the lagoon to make fishing impracticable. Sometimes, strong winds or stormy weather make the sea too rough for fishing, leaving people to complement the staple components of the full meal with corned beef, occasionally available mutton flaps, an occasional chicken or whatever meat they could lay claim to.

Occasions such as funerals involved huge amounts of meat or fish often served to detach everyday eating from the rhythm of the marine environment. When a person died, a significant amount of food was 'distributed

to each home' (*tufa faka'api*) in the village and eaten over the next week or so. Also, when Kotu people participated in the funerals of deceased relatives on nearby islands of Ha'apai, they would bring back their share of the funerary food presentation and redistribute it to neighbours, friends and relatives. Thus, funerals and other occasions where food was presented and distributed trickled into the flow of everyday eating as an unlooked for albeit welcome opportunity to include in the everyday diet high status food like yam, pork, horse meat, turtle, skipjack tuna and so on. Events of everyday eating, then, may be said to occur in an ad hoc fashion, being influenced by multiple movements, combinations and coincidences in the natural and social environments. Everyday eating appeared to be *noa'ia pē* ('of no account', 'insignificant' and 'good for nothing') in the sense of not having a specific purpose or aim (apart from that of reconstituting oneself by regaining personal strength<sup>25</sup>), cropping up 'haphazardly' (*noa'ia*) as a result of the unpredictable combination of other events. It may be described as 'non-ordered' (*noa'ia*) in the sense of not being dominated by specific procedures oriented around a pivotal point of reference producing a specific order of differentiation. People seldom sat down together but ate their food by themselves at different stages of preparation and according to their personal preference, their whims and fancies. Some would merely grab a piece of boiled manioc, roasted breadfruit or sweet potato and a fish and sit down under a tree, or eat standing up somewhere in the 'api. Some would have the fish raw; others would bring their fish to the fire to roast it before eating or wait until the fish had cooked in boiling water.

One might think some of the constraints pertaining to the imperative of behaving with respect and deference towards sisters, fathers and elder brothers would remain at meal times, to give all occasions of eating a specific order, but the ideal that the father of the home should have his food before the children was very seldom realized. On the contrary, most children ate before their parents because they were usually simply given a piece of root crop and a raw fish, while grown-ups generally had the patience to wait for the fish to be roasted or boiled. Similarly, the ideal that a brother and sister should not eat together was seldom put into practice because of the general absence of commensality at everyday events of eating.

To sum up, then, the timing of everyday eating was influenced by the rhythm of surrounding dynamics and events for making *me'akiki* (a non-starchy food source, such as fish) available. In its organization, it was relatively unordered, characterized by a lack of commensality and dominated by individual tastes and preferences with regard to preparation and whether to sit down or eat standing up.



## *Ngaohi Pola*; ‘Building Boards of Food’

Some eating events and/or food presentations stood out sharply against the backdrop of everyday eating routines. Such extraordinary feasts were referred to by the terms *kai fakaafe* (‘eat by invitation’) and/or *kaipola* (‘eating the board of food’). A third term *kai ‘umu* (‘eating the earth oven’) primarily referred to the family meal that routinely followed the main 10 AM church service on Sundays. This did not involve a prolonged and elaborate process of preparation and collaboration between a large number of kinsmen, neighbours, friends and fellow worshippers. To the extent that it did involve cooperation between ‘homes’, it was in the form of ‘mutual help’ (*fetokoniaki*) from close kin and neighbours to achieve a well-balanced meal (see also Rogers 1975: 339). The most salient characteristic of the *kai ‘umu* seemed to be that of communion and sharing. In contrast, the *kai fakaafe* and the *kaipola* had a more public profile and involved a much stronger emphasis on a protocol involving differentiation and separation.

*Kai fakaafe*, according to Churchward, refers to feasts to which specific persons have been invited. On Kotu, it was mostly used to refer to food presentations involving prominent members of the church and congregation during the ‘week of praying’ (*uike lotu*) at the beginning of the year, as well as other feasts related to the church schedule, such as ‘quarterly church district meetings’ (*kuata*), the annual ‘congregational missionary collect’ (*misinale*) and the annual ‘church conference’ (*konfelenisi o siasi*). Finally, the term *kaipola* was used as a general term of reference for a variety of events of food presentation and eating that accompanied occasions on which persons were installed to social positions or that constituted or reasserted social relationships. Thus, *kaipolas* were prepared as ‘feasts of welcome’ (*kai talitali*), as ‘feasts of goodbye’ (*kai fakamavae*), as feasts marking the first and twenty-first birthday (*fai‘aho*), when a person was admitted to the group of preachers in the congregation (*hū ki he kau malanga*), and so on.

To understand the significance of these events in a manner that may do justice to their importance for the people who created them, I shall approach the culinary tableaux of ‘beauty’, ‘order’ and ‘importance’ in the context of their making. Rather than focusing on the *kaipola* at which food has been placed in an orderly fashion as a fixed and stable tableau, I shall first of all focus on the ‘building/assembling of the board of food’ (*ngaohi pola*). Moved by a ‘warmth inside’ (*loto māfana*) to commit to the task of ‘building’ (*ngaohi*) such a tableau, people seemed to generate yet more ‘warmth’ within themselves and others. By the ‘warmth’ of their mutual commitment, people devoted themselves to utilizing their common creative capacity to stage stable moments of unidimensional ‘separateness/

importance' (*mahu'inga*) 'torn loose' (*mahu'i*) from the flux of multiple contingencies of ordinary everyday life.

The 'building/assembling of a board of food' (*ngaohi pola*), then, may be said to stand out as the achievement of a momentary glimpse of clear, single and definite order by people using their joint capacity to separate and differentiate. Thus, the process may be described in the following way. From the point of view of persons accepting the responsibility to 'build a board of food', resources must be marshalled and ingredients must be collected by utilizing any connection that may contribute to presenting a 'well proportioned' (*maau*) and 'beautiful and moving' (*faka'ofa'ofa*) *kaipola* to mark an 'important' (*mahu'inga*) event. 'Close kinsmen' (*kāinga ofi*) in the community, 'neighbours' (*kaungā'api*) and 'fellow worshippers' (*kau lotu*) were said to 'just offer assistance' (*ō mai pē ke tokoni*) out of 'love/compassion' (*ofa pē*) or as a part of more or less stable relations of 'mutual assistance' (*fetokoniaki/fe'ofa'ofani*) (Rogers 1975: 143; Decktor Korn 1978: 407). People did not generally account for the help they received or offered in terms of kin relationships, although one of the strongest ideals of kin interaction in Tonga is that kin should help one another (Cowling 1990a: 192). People emphasized that *fetokoniaki* was a matter of doing something out of a feeling of *ofa* more than of having the 'same blood' (*toto tatau*). 'Blood'-relatedness seemed to be one among several potential relationships to be utilized in assembling a 'board of food' and was of particular significance when it came to acquiring choice ingredients that were hard to obtain locally. Thus, the Kotu phone booth<sup>26</sup> was very busy with people calling relatives who had moved to Nuku'alofa. Although not among the obligatory ingredients (being pork and yam, and extra-local and imported food such as melons, onions, corned beef chop-suey), boxes of soft drink and sweets were, when possible, incorporated into the food tableau to make it an outstanding presentation. Such sweet and colourful elements were referred to as *teuteu*, signifying 'decoration'. And indeed, such ingredients laid out neatly on the *pola* was perceived to add to its 'beauty'.

The next step involved 'building an earth oven' (*ngaohi 'umu*) by placing firewood and stones in a hole in the ground and 'lighting it up' (*faka'afu*; lit. 'make hot and steamy'). The 'red hot stones' (*kakaha*) were then 'spread out' (*ū*) in the hole and 'covered with leaves' (*lepo'i*) before the 'wrapped' (*kake'i*) and unwrapped ingredients were 'placed' in the pit (*ta'ō*), 'covered with a layer of plantain leaves' (*tau*) and 'buried' with earth (*tanu*). Most foods were placed indiscriminately or without a particular order (*noa'ia pē*), but some were placed in close proximity to the stones. Once the food was 'cooked' (*moho*) in the 'steam and heat' (*afu*) of the 'oven' (*ngoto'umu*), it was 'opened up' (*fuke 'a e 'umu*) by removing the earth and the 'leaf covering' (*tou-mohomoho*). The 'cooked food of the oven' (*fei'umu*) was then

'lifted out' (*hiko*) carefully (it was not to be handled haphazardly). The food was then first placed in separate heaps according to its kind and then placed on the *pola* according to its rank and worth. Thus, the most prestigious or most highly-ranked food was placed towards the 'frontal/preceding end' (*mu'a*) of the *pola*, with food of decreasing worth or rank placed down the length of the *pola* and hence 'following after' (*mui mai*) the food 'leading the way' (*mu'a mai*) towards the focal position at the 'front of the board' (*mu'a 'o e pola*).

The individual pieces of the *kahokaho/tokamu'a* ('first (early) yam') and other prestigious root crops (the 'frontal/head' (*kongamu'a/ulu*) 'middle' (*kongaloto*) or 'posterior' (*kongamui*)) were examined to determine where they should be placed on the board. The 'chiefly' *kahokaho* yam was also referred to as *tokamu'a*, signifying a 'preceding/foundational' crop. The *tokamu'a* was recognized as a key crop with a capacity to mature faster than other kinds of yams and root crops and was planted in a small section of the garden referred to as the *ma'ala*. It was often described by elder farmers on Kotu in terms of precedence; '*Toki mu'a mai 'e tokamu'a hoko mui mai pē 'e tokamui/tokalahi*' ('The first crop leads the way here and then the late/big crop follows in its wake'). Elsewhere (see Perminow 2001), I argued that the 'inasi presentation of 'first fruit' to the *Tu'i Tonga* and his son, which was witnessed by Captain Cook on Tongatapu at the beginning of July 1777, made good sense as part of a year cycle ritual related to the growth of the *tokamu'a* crop 'leading the way' (*mu'a mai*) so that the *tokamui* crop that was about to be planted might 'follow in its wake' (*mui mai*).

As a crop 'leading the way', older farmers felt that it was important that the business of planting the *kahokaho* yam in the *ma'ala* should not be done 'whimsically' or 'without order' (*noa'ia*), as may be recalled. Koloa described just which planting strategy should be followed in order to make the *ma'ala* an 'important/outstanding' (*mahu'inga*), 'well-ordered' (*maau*) and 'beautiful' (*faka'ofa'ofa*) thing. One should differentiate between the 'frontal section/head' (*konga mu'a/ulu*), the 'middle section' (*konga loto*) and the 'posterior section' (*konga mui*) of the 'mature yams/seed yams' (*ufimotu'a*) set aside from the previous crop to be 'cut up' (*matofi*) and multiplied for planting.

Do you see the small piece that is attached to the 'head of the yam' (*'ulu'i 'ufi*)? That is the piece of the 'old yam' (*'ufi motu'a*). The 'son' (*foha*) originated from it. By that you know what is the 'head of the yam' (*'ulu'i 'ufi*). You should not plant the *kahokaho* yam 'haphazardly' (*noa'ia pē*) but plant the pieces in separate rows according to which part of the seed yam they come from. The 'sons' of the old yam 'originating/growing/emerging' (*tupu*) from the pieces of the front grow faster than those of the middle, which in their turn grow faster than those of the last part of the yam. This

makes your *ma'ala* 'well proportioned' (*maau*) and very 'beautiful' (*faka'ofu'ofa*). You can see in it the 'nature/manner of growth' (*anga 'oe tupu*).

Among meat, pork was described as having the highest rank, but modes of carving up the slaughtered pig as well as the resulting pieces of pork were also ranked among themselves. Thus, Koloa set apart as a 'more important thing' (*me'a mahu'inga ange*) the mode of 'carving up the pig along the throat' (*tafa puaka fakakioa*), by separating all of the 'underside' (*lalo*) of the pig, from the joint of the 'upper jaw' (*loungutu 'olunga*) and the 'lower jaw' (*loungutu lalo*) to the area between the tail and the anal opening. After dividing the pig, the 'upper side' was separated into four sections of decreasing rank: *tu'a 'i puaka* ('mid-back'), *ulu* (head and neck), *hiku* ('lower back') and *mui'ulu* ('upper back'). Except for the liver (*ate*), which should be 'passed forward' (*ate ki mu'a*) to the chief (during the process of preparing the feast), and the rectum (*lemu*), sexual organs and bladder (*tangai mimi*), which should be buried (to prevent the dogs from eating them), the 'entrails' (*to'oto'onga*) should be eaten by the 'working people' (*kau ngāue*). The fat around the 'intestines' (*ngakau*) was said to be very 'tasty' (*ifo*) and particularly important for 'renewing strength' (*fakafo'ou ivi*) spent on the hot and exhausting work of preparing the feast. The 'turtle' (*fonu*) and the 'skipjack tuna' (*'atu*) stood out from among the species of the sea as 'food' (*me'akiki*) of particular importance.

Often a *kaipola* presentation would consist of several 'boards' (*pola*), with the most prestigious *pola* at the 'front' (*mu'a 'oe pola*) and physically elevated by being placed on a low table (10 to 20 centimetres high) while the rest of the 'boards' were placed on the ground. The process of laying out the food on the *pola* was normally closely supervised by the 'leader of the work' (*pule ngāue*), the 'master of the earth oven' (*tu'utu'uni 'o e 'umu*) or another person (generally an older man) familiar with 'matters of respect/protocol' (*anga faka'apa'apa*). Instructions included: '*Ave 'ufi ko ia ki hē. 'Ulu pē ki mu'a 'o e pola*' ('Bring that yam over there with its "head" towards the "front" of the *pola*').

Elsewhere, I have shown how the distribution of essential qualities of plants along a continuum between frontal and posterior ends appears to be a part of an enduring perspective on qualitative differences in Tonga (see Perminow 2011). Thus, every growing plant was understood to have an end that 'leads the way' (the *mu'a*) and an end that 'follows behind' (the *mui*). And the essential qualities of all plants were quite consistently described to be concentrated towards the 'preceding/leading end' (*mu'a*). Thus, it appeared to go without saying that, for instance, the preceding end of the 'sugar cane' (*tō*) is its sweetest part. Likewise, everyone knew that the preceding end of the intoxicating kava root produces the strongest kava.

People familiar with housebuilding knew as a matter of fact that the preceding end of a tree – used as the ‘central roof beam’ (*toʻufūfū*) leading from a ‘chiefly’ (*ʻeiki*) ‘frontal end’ (*tāmuʻa*) to a ‘commoner’ (*tuʻa*) ‘posterior end’ (*tāmui*) in traditional ‘Tongan houses’ (*fale tonga*) – would have the hardest wood. Thus, recalling the days when it was still common to build such houses, Koloa described how builders decided which was the ‘leading end’ by the feel of the wood as they worked it with their tools. Likewise, in carving objects designed to last, wood carvers would describe a piece of wood from the *muʻa* of the ‘ironwood tree’ (*toa*) (the *Casuarina*) as most ‘suitable’ (*aonga*), albeit offering particularly fierce resistance to those working with it. During fieldwork among Tongan woodcarvers in 2004, the significance of the qualities of the *muʻa ʻo e toa* (‘the preceding end of the ironwood’) was brought home to me as I complained about the hardness of a particularly unforgiving piece of ironwood, which I was struggling to carve into a ‘headrest’ (*kali*). The woodcarver Feʻao Fehoko explained the challenge of shaping a piece of *toa* wood that was ‘frontal’ or *muʻa*: ‘The *toa* is a tree that fights. When you strike it with the chisel, it strikes you right back! The first headrest you carved was “still young/later” (*kei mui*), but this one is “from before/old” (*muʻa pē*).’

So the qualities of sweetness, strength/bitterness and hardness were all clearly understood as increasing towards the *muʻa* end of a plant or crop. With the *kahokaho* yam, the emphasis was not on any substantial quality of size, taste or texture; rather, it was on the difference in reproductive speed and rate of growth of the preceding end and the part of the yam following in its wake. The quality that appeared to be emphasized, then, was vitality, its very capacity to regenerate and grow. It was this capacity that made it the *tokamuʻa*; the crop that leads the way. The end that leads the way was also perceived to be the oldest part of the plant, the reason for the existence of the parts that follow in its wake. Thus, the broad base of the coconut palm, for instance, is known by the term *tefito*, signifying, according to Churchward, ‘basis or centre, principal or most essential part, or cause or reason’ (Churchward 1959: 475).

Other scholars of Tongan culture and society have been struck by the extent to which the conceptual pair *muʻa* and *mui* appears to produce characteristic expressive forms (linguistically, materially and socially). Thus, the linguist Giovanni Bennardo has used precisely the conceptual opposition between *muʻa* and *mui* to identify what he hypothesizes as a foundational model of radiality in Tongan cognition, characterizing Tongan perceptions of spatial, temporal and social relationships (Bennardo 2009). He argues that radiality constitutes a ‘cognitive molecule’ that in Tonga plays a role in the ‘generation and organization of a variety of knowledge domains’ (ibid.: 173). My own findings, like Bennardo’s, indicate that the opposition

between *mu'a* and *mui* indeed does operate across a wide variety of skills and practices in Tonga in the composition of beautiful, valuable and useful things by differentiating essential qualities of components of the environment (see Perminow 2011). Like his linguistic material, my own ethnography indicates that the relationship between *mu'a* and *mui* is a relationship between origin and result, cause and effect. In contrast to Bennardo, I have no ambition to locate 'cognitive molecules' and foundational cognitive schema. Rather, I approach the constitutive significance of the relationship between *mu'a* and *mui* through what Tim Ingold, influenced by James Gibson's ecological approach to perception, refers to as people's creative involvement with components of the environment (Ingold 2000: 2–3).

We have seen that the yam's presentation in differentiated sections on boards of food mirrored or recapitulated the manner of its growth. Thus, the tableau of 'beauty, order and importance' constituted by hierarchically differentiated food increasing in worth with proximity to the 'chiefly position' at the 'front' (*mu'a*) at the same time may be interpreted to incorporate the process of growth itself. In Fox's terms of the relationship between Austronesian notions of precedence and growth, the 'board of food' laid out between the 'frontal' (*mu'a*) and the 'posterior' (*mui*) end may be said 'to move here' (*mu'a mai*) from the 'source', 'root', 'base', 'trunk' (Fox 1995: 218; 2008) of that which 'follows after' (*mui mai*).

Consuming such culinary tableaus of exemplary order was generally done rather quickly, often not taking more than 30 minutes. During the meal itself, 'conversation' (*talanoa*) was not common. The 'words' (*lea*) spoken were rather 'assembled/composed' speeches (*ngaohi*) to fit the occasion and were presented in turn. The persons to whom the *pola* was presented were usually unable to make more than a slight dent in the heaps of food laid out, and when they left the table, the 'working people' usually replaced them. This second seating along the *pola* was much more informal. Speeches would give way to conversation. Silence and solemnity would give way to laughter, joking and moving about. Food and words would be passed along those seated along the *pola* and on to those sitting (or even standing<sup>27</sup>) nearby, blurring the border between the tableau of the *pola* and its environment. Food would also be 'distributed' (*tufa*) by being put in small baskets and tins to be carried by children to the homes of those who had contributed to the work of building the board of food or to homes towards which the feast givers' 'door was open' (*ava 'a e matapā*<sup>28</sup>) and from where food would be sent onwards across Kotu. Most of the food that had for a short time constituted a tableau of outstanding beauty and unidimensional order of precedence would thus trickle into the flow of everyday consumption. And to my mind, it was against such a backdrop that the creation of momentary glimpses of 'beauty' stood out and gained constitutive potency.

## The Constitutive Potency of Merging and Separation

The serial image used to describe the characteristics of environmental dynamics explored in Chapter 2 and 3 may be used to understand what makes the frequent building of tableaux of order and emotionally moving beauty experientially meaningful and constitutively potent. Indeed, the image of a motion of merging, separation and re-merging coming out of the exploration of perceptions of environmental dynamics is very well suited to describe both the mode in which these tableaux were ‘constructed’ (*ngaohi*) and the way such feats of creativity articulated the multiple flows of everyday events. The ‘bringing together’ of food (*tokonaki*) of different kinds and from a wide variety of local and extra-local sources to be placed together beneath a ‘layer of leaves’ (*tau*<sup>29</sup>) to be transformed by a heat that brings it to a ‘well-cooked’<sup>30</sup> (*moho lelei*), ‘soft’ (*molū*) and ‘easy to swallow’ (*folongofua*) state may be interpreted as an analogous recapitulation of the regenerative phase of merging. The significance of the foods in the context of ‘building’ a *pola* may lie in their transformation in being baked more than in ‘any inhering qualities of the foods themselves’ (Pollock 1992: 32). This does not mean that the general quality of Tongan foods was not classified ‘according to its reputed effect on the body’ (Manderson 1986: 127, see Leivestad 1995: 101). Thus, Rogers discovered that Tongans of Niuatopotapu ranked foods ‘according to their innate and comparative energy giving qualities’:

Amongst kiki foods which give *ivi*, ‘power, influence, energy’, pork is the strongest. Pork and turtle (because they are too fatty) and raw fish and octopus (because they are too ‘strong’) are unsuitable for very sick or pregnant people ... Me’akai foods give strength (*fakamālohi*). The strongest is long yam generally considered the best me’akai for the hardest work. (Rogers 1975: 300–1)

Clearly, any ‘innate and comparative energy giving qualities’ are of constant significance in the ‘biological event’ (Pollock 1992: 32) of eating. Additionally, in ‘building boards of food’ that stand out from other events of eating, the human capacity to utilize and harness this energy becomes very important in making some social events of eating occasions of particular constitutive potency.

The ‘opening of the earth oven’ (*fuke ‘a e ‘umu*) and the ‘separation’ (*mavavevahe*) of types and parts of food stuffs by a specific order of precedence, orienting and placing them along an axis of hierarchical differentiation that recaptures their ‘manner of growth’<sup>31</sup> (*anga ‘o e tupu*), may be interpreted as an analogous recapitulation of the regenerative phase of ‘coming apart’ (*māfoa, mahu‘i*). Finally, the moment of separateness, made to stand out as a tableau of ‘importance’ (*mahu‘inga*), ‘order’ (*maau*) and ‘moving beauty’

(*faka'ofó'ofa*) by the imposition of strict constraints or taboos on speech and motion does not endure but in reality very soon re-merges with the environment from which it was momentarily 'torn' (*mahu'i*).

As was true in the conceptualization of tidal, diurnal and lunar dynamics explored in previous chapters, everyday routines in which events may just crop up 'haphazardly, without significance' (*noa'ia pē*), or be staged as an occasion of 'importance, order and beauty' (*mahu'inga, maau, faka'ofó'ofa*) by the imposition of strict 'constraints' (*tapu*) do not exist in a stable oppositional relationship but as phases in the dynamic realities of the world. These dynamic realities will be useful as I, in the next chapter, turn to everyday sociality and morality by exploring the characteristics of establishing and re-creating social bonds in such a world. The ethnography of local sociality produced on the perspective of such enduring dynamics will in the concluding chapter be key in solving the puzzle of responses and attitudes to the ongoing environmental change presented in the introduction.

## Notes

1. Amini had worked as a steward of the Kotu congregation of the Constitutional Church of Tonga for many years and was well respected. Many people had attended his funeral, making it a very demanding, albeit important, event on Kotu a short time before the Queen's visit.
2. *Fono* means 'to command, to direct, to give instructions' and is the term for the general village meeting that was normally held the first Monday of each month. At the *fono*, the town officer, representing King and Government, would inform villagers about public events or important undertakings in the upcoming month and instruct or encourage villagers to contribute to fulfil the obligations of the island. The town officer of Kotu also used these meetings to address specific instances of conflict and moral breaches that had occurred since the last *fono*. He also advised people on where they should concentrate their farming activities over the next month in order to make the island prosperous and bountiful.
3. *Kato* means 'basket/container', and *kato 'o Taufatōfua* refers to the tribute brought by the chief of Kotu and Tōfua on behalf of the people of his territory. *Lotoā* means 'inside the fence/enclosure', which is a term that refers to the Tu'i Kanokupolu title of the current Royal rulers of Tonga.
4. Lotima agreed to sell his turtle for 200 *pa'anga* (equalling 140 US\$). This was considered to show that he was really 'warm-hearted/warm inside' (*loto māfana*), both because everyone knew that he had planned to make his own feast in the upcoming week of prayer memorable and also because the market price of a turtle in Nuku'alofa would be higher.
5. The main ingredient of Tongan oil is coconut oil, but wild nuts growing in the 'uncultivated forest' (*vao*) and parts of other plants and flowers are added in varying



measures to create a great diversity of differing scents and viscosity. Tongan oil was used on Kotu as part of the everyday routines of personal hygiene for all, both to soften the skin and because it 'smells nice' (*namu lelei*). For festive occasions, it was used in generous quantities to make the hair shine and the skin glisten. It was also used to renew the shine and luster of painted 'barkcloth' (*ngatu*) and to enhance the smooth, black appearance of basalt pebbles (*kilikili*) used to decorate the graves of someone recently buried. Women usually had one or a few favorite recipes. The different Tongan oils enjoyed varying degrees of popularity and were generally referred to by the names of the women who made them.

6. *Mohenga* is the general term for a bed but also refers to bridewealth and the repository of 'Tongan wealth' (*koloa fakatonga*) in the form of barkcloth and mats, which generally made up a significant part of the beds of married couples in Kotu homes and which was extracted from when need arose to make a presentation at funerals or other ceremonial occasions.
7. *Vaitupu* means literally 'emerging/growing water' and usually refers to ponds or wells dug out to gain access to fresh water consisting of rainwater that has filtered through the soil and floats on seawater reservoirs.
8. *Loto* signifies 'inside' as well as 'heart', and the expression may be translated as 'warmth of the heart' as well as 'warmth inside'.
9. *Fāhiva* signifies the number 49 but was also the name of a location in the *Namolahi* Lagoon associated with turtle fishing. According to Koloa, an uncommonly light-skinned man named Matei had held the title in the past, and he thus felt that it was a particularly appropriate title for a 'white foreigner' or *pālangi*.
10. On any occasion involving strong encouragement to contribute generously for some greater communal good, as with, for instance, the annual collection of money for the churches (*misinale*), middle-aged and elderly female 'clowns' contributed to make the occasion a 'happy event' (*me'a fiefia*) by acting in ways that would otherwise have been considered 'silly' (*laupisi*) and disrespectful. According to some informants, the clowning around of women resulted from the belief that women are more easily moved by projects of cooperation that demand extraordinary generosity and more often express their 'warmth inside' (*loto māfana*) by 'making happy' (*fakafiefia*) and by shedding tears (*tangi*).
11. The conventions of making presentations of foods and goods routinely consisted of the person handing it over elaborating on the poverty of the gift in terms of quality as well as quantity. This communicative mode of selfabasement is known as *fakatōkilalo* and is considered to show respect for and 'uplift/praise' (*hiki hake*) the receiver of the presentation. Thus, the language of presentation transformed pigs and yams of extraordinary size to small and insignificant trifles and barkcloth and mats of extraordinary beauty to worthless rubbish. This practice of self-depreciation was extremely common at ceremonial presentations of food and wealth and is referred to as *heliaki* ('to say one thing and mean another') in Tonga.

12. In contrast to the characteristic laments of grief accompanying leave takings among close kin, this leave taking was characterized by a festive atmosphere of cheers and laughter. People seemed pleased with a job well done and were quite happy to devote themselves to the task of making the upcoming 'week of prayer' (*uike lotu*) a memorable one.
13. It is not clear whether he made this statement in Tongan or English, but the Tongan expression that would most likely be used to make the statement 'You can't move around freely' would be either '*Oku 'ikai ke 'alu noa'ia pē*, which may be translated as 'There is no whimsical/haphazard moving about' or '*Oku 'ikai ke ngofua/tapu 'alu noa'ia pē* ('It is not allowed/it is forbidden to move about whimsically') (without purpose in terms of the task at hand).
14. In an examination of the significance of the cross-cousin relationship in Fiji, Christina Toren interprets Fijian 'ritual practices' precisely in terms of their transitory reality in a wider regenerative dynamic: 'In their ritual practice Fijians succeed momentarily in the struggle to contain the equal, competitive relation between cross cousins, and the threat of disorder it sometimes represents, within the bounds of hierarchical kinship. That this struggle is in principle unending is a product of the fact that all dynamic, fertile and affective processes are founded in the relation between cross-cousins' (Toren 1995: 76).
15. The different parts of Tongan plants and trees are referred to by terms that are also used for, or are easily associated with, parts of the human body. Thus, the trunk of the tree may be referred to as its 'body' (*sino*), the bark as its 'skin' (*kili*) and the plant mass as its 'flesh/meat/substance' (*kakano*).
16. *aka*; roots (Churchward 1959: 3) *fia*; suffix forming adjectives and intransitive verbs (Churchward 1953: 244) denoting 'full of'.
17. The term *hau-ki-vaē* consists of a word pertaining to sharp objects/piercing and foot/leg. If Whistler is right, the term may seem to indicate a specific kind of root penetration (*akafia*) by describing which bones have been pierced. Conceivable terms like *hau-ki-'ulu* ('piercing the head'), *hau-ki-tu'a* ('piercing the back') may perhaps be other meaningful labels for specific kinds of the general syndrome of *akafia*. Also, according to Churchward, the term *haukivaē* may refer specifically to a 'throat disease' (Churchward 1954: 214) rather than an affliction of the head or legs.
18. *Lohu loa* means, literally, 'The long harvesting stick' (*Hako loa* means, literally, 'a trunk growing long before the boughs branch off' or, metaphorically, 'a long line of descendants') and is used to describe the strategy of tracing genealogies to the original pair of siblings that constitute the source of a kin relationship, to establish relative worth or appropriate behavior in later generations.
19. The Tongan proverb (*leatonga*) *To'u kai mo hono lohu* means, literally, 'The crop and its harvesting stick' or 'Each crop has its own harvesting stick' and is used to express the notion that 'each generation has its own people of prominence or strength'. In the context of establishing kin relations, the expression describes a

- strategy of concentrating the search for consanguinal links among contemporaries within the most immediate environment of your own generation.
20. The term *fāмили* was used in several different senses in different situations on Kotu to refer to ‘nuclear family’, ‘bilateral kindred’ (also referred to as *kāinga*), as well as ‘shallow patrilineage’, sometimes referred to as *fāhinga* in the literature of Tongan kinship and sometimes referred to as *ha’a* on Kotu. The expression *tokonaki fakaha’a* (but not *tufa fakafāhinga*) was sometimes used to describe the bringing of uncooked food to a funeral by groups of kinsmen recognizing common patrilineal ancestry to a constellation of eldest (*ta’okete*) and younger (*kautehina*) brothers in some previous generation in the relatively recent past.
  21. *Loto momoko/loto mokomoko*, meaning literally ‘cold/cool inside’, was used to refer to an inner state of being unmoved – uncooperative about engaging in a task. The term *loto vela*, on the other hand, means literally ‘burning inside’ and refers to an inner state of wanting something too much, lusting for something or being consumed by desire for self-gratification, generating a need to ‘cool down’ (*fakamokomoko*).
  22. The Samoan novelist Albert Wendt has captured the desirability of withdrawal and isolation produced by the multiple demands of village life in Samoa very well in his novel *Po’uli’uli*. The novel starts with a prominent member of the local community, a family head, fed up with the constant demands made on him and resolving to remain in his room. He refuses to engage in village affairs or, indeed, even to speak to the members of his family (Wendt 1987). A sudden refusal to cooperate is otherwise associated with the Samoan term *musu*, signifying extreme non-cooperativeness born of social pressure. This is primarily associated with Samoan youths frustrated with a lack of autonomy (Freeman 1983).
  23. *Koa fakatonga*, or *mātuitui*, is made by chewing (*mama*) to a pulp ‘candlenuts’ (*fua tuitui*) and the small tubers (*foha*) of ‘nut grass’ (*pako*) with the ‘flowers’ (*matala’i*) of the ‘Perfume Tree’ (*Mohokoi*; *cananga odorata* or Ylang-ylang, see Whistler 1992: 86). This scented pulp is then smeared onto the body, with dust and grime coming off in rolls as it is rubbed along the limbs with the palm of the hand, leaving ‘nice smelling’ (*namu lelei*), ‘clean’ (*ma’a lelei*) skin. The advantages of this soap were said to be that it demands no water to work and is thus good if you want to freshen up during voyages at sea.
  24. *Noa’ia* consists of the semantic core of *noa*, pertaining to a lack of orderliness, worthlessness or aimlessness, while, according to Churchward, the suffix ‘*ia*’ serves to emphasize or intensify the quality of the thing, act or state referred to.
  25. This does not imply that everyday eating was considered to be ‘of no account’ in an absolute sense. On the contrary, the anthropologist Rogers has described Tongan conceptualization of food in the following manner: ‘An important dimension concerning the quality of foods is their energy giving (*ivi*) and strength giving (*mālohi*) qualities ... Weariness (from physical exertion) is immediately banished by eating even a meal of *me’akai*; it is transformed into a feeling of

- strength and energy potential by eating *kiki*. Consequently to give a person food in Tonga is to give him life and strength, food becomes the direct key to physical and sexual performance' (Rogers 1975: 300).
26. Kotu first became linked to the rest of the world by means of telecommunication, with a phone booth installed at the government primary school (*'api lau tohi*) in 1987. In 1991, telephone numbers to try in order to marshal resources for 'building of boards of food' could be seen scribbled on the inside wall of the booth.
  27. The exchange of things or words between one seated at a *pola* and one standing 'outside' the *pola* was considered extremely inappropriate during the first serving of the *kaipola*.
  28. The expression *'oku ava 'a e matapā* means literally 'the door is open' and was used on Kotu to describe persons willing to help (*fetokoniaki*), reflected in a flow of support and food/items.
  29. The term *tau* refers to the green plantain or banana leaves, with the suffix *aki* meaning 'to cover the food with green leaves' (*tau-aki*). Thus, *tau*, here, refers to that which contains rather than 'to be joined with' as in the strong union between land and sea at high tide and day and night in the phase of stable darkness.
  30. Although Tongans, like other Polynesians but in contrast to many other seaboard Austronesians, eat raw fish (see Leivestad 1995: 85), they very much prefer meat that is 'well cooked' (*moho lelei*). Food, including fish, coming out of the *'umu* should be 'well-cooked' and 'soft' (*molū*).
  31. This recapturing of the manner of growth may also seem to be involved in the presentation of kava to a chief. A kava should be presented to a chief by placing the 'peeled' (*kava tele*) but uncut kava on the ground with the 'frontal part' (*mu'a kava*) closest to the root of the kava plant pointing towards the 'talking chief' (*matāpule*), who will be sitting next to the chiefly position and 'performing the duty' (*faifatongia*) of directing the preparation of the kava (*ui kava*).