

PACIFIC FESTIVALS AS DYNAMIC CONTACT ZONES

The Case of Tapati Rapa Nui

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Abstract

In the contemporary Pacific, cultural festivals provide important points of contact between people at local, national, colonial and global levels, contributing to the complex processes by which issues of identity and indigeneity are explored and mediated. This article presents new ethnographic research concerning the annual Tapati Rapa Nui festival of Easter Island (Rapanui). Now into its fourth decade, Tapati Rapa Nui is one of very few public contexts in which ancient Rapanui traditions are re-enacted for a contemporary audience. This article employs historian Mary Pratt's conceptualisation of "contact zones" (1992) to describe the specific characteristics of Tapati Rapa Nui as a nexus between indigenous, colonial and international cultures. It examines the relationship between cultural performance and international tourism in the contemporary Pacific, arguing that festivals like Tapati Rapa Nui are able to cater to the cultural heritage needs of islander communities as well as satisfying the curiosity of outsider audiences.

Keywords

Pacific festivals, Tapati Rapa Nui, dynamic contact zones

Introduction

In the 21st Century Pacific, almost every island or island group in Oceania now hosts an annual or biennial local festival centring on indigenous and localised performance cultures. Performers from throughout the region also participate in regional and international festivals where they perform for, interact with, influence and borrow from each other, and the festival as a conceptual space has therefore become of increasing importance to Pacific ethnography in recent years. The social construction of celebration has long been a research imperative for ethnographers, largely because of the capacity for structured performance to convey conceptualisations of identity, ethnicity, and belonging (Manning, 1983; Turner, 1984). However, the rise of the festival in the Pacific as a rationalised, funded, and anticipated event transcends many extant ethnographic research frameworks because of the ways in which festivals also engage with post-colonial 'global post-modern' phenomena (Hall, 1991) such as tourism, globalised media and entertainment industries, reconstruction (and construction) of islands as independent political entities, and economic development. Indeed, far from

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just vehicles for the construction of cultural identity, successful local festivals now represent social wellbeing and survival, especially for smaller islands or island groups.

The case of Tapati Rapa Nui (or 'Rapa Nui Week': the annual cultural festival of Easter Island) is an example of this process. While Tapati Rapa Nui (henceforth Tapati) is mentioned from time to time in academic literature and popular media, the only extant research to attempt the examination of Tapati as a specific and unique study is an obscure undergraduate thesis written by Rapanui students at a Chilean university over a decade ago (Tuki and Paoa, 1991). Meanwhile, Tapati – like similar festivals on other Pacific islands – is rapidly assuming a defining role in the maintenance and representation of Rapanui cultural heritage. This article seeks to address the lack of information in academic literature concerning Tapati, and in doing so, to provide a theoretical framework for research into festivals as cultural phenomena. This framework is grounded in the discourse of 'contact zones' - a concept developed by historian Mary Pratt (1992) and subsequently transformed by James Clifford (1997) and others. In this article, I expand the framework of contact zones to deal with the numerous types of contact that occur as a result of Tapati. I use the program of the 2003 Tapati festival as the basis for discussing how the festival works. My descriptions of Tapati events and their social function draw from a methodological foundation in thick description (Geertz, 1975), and are grounded in extensive ethnographic fieldwork, including observation and participation in the 2002 and 2003 Tapati festivals. These descriptions are intended as an introduction to Tapati, rather than as a comprehensive history of the festival itself, and they represent the starting point in what I hope will become an important research focus both in my own work, and in Pacific scholarship more generally.

Pacific Festivals as Dynamic Contact Zones

In her 1992 book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Pratt employs the term 'contact zone' as a way of describing the space of colonial encounters: "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict..." (1992: 6). This usage acknowledges the ongoing effects of contact, as Pratt articulates:

'contact zone' is an attempt to invoke the special and temporal correspondence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term contact, I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. (1992: 7)

Subsequent usages of Pratt's term have both reinforced and expanded its meaning. In a recent book regarding histories of indigenous Canadian women, for example, Pickles and Rutherford adopt a 'contact zone' perspective to articulate the disruption caused by the historical positioning of aboriginal peoples as 'others' (2005: 4). Alternatively, indigenous religion scholar David Carrasco views the concept of 'contact zone' as a way of articulating a sense of space in descriptions of cultural history, and implores other researchers to consider the value of this concept as a way of dealing with incomplete and open-ended historical narrative (2004: 132). In his influential book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century* (1997), James Clifford employs and expands Pratt's concept of contact zones in two significant ways.

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Figure 1 - Map of location of Rapanui (Easter Island) in the South Pacific (adapted from Flenley and Bahn, 2002: x).

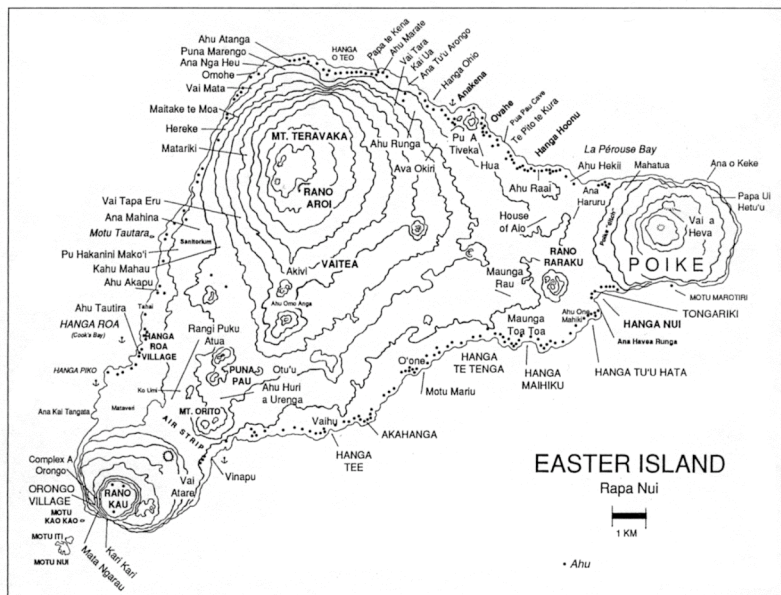


Figure 2 – Map of Rapanui (Easter Island) (adapted from Flenley and Bahn, 2002: 11).

Firstly, while Pratt's conceptualisation of contact zones is intended for a colonial framework inhabited by westerners and 'others', functioning as an alternative to western-grounded terms like 'frontier' (Clifford, 1997: 192), Clifford notes that a contact zone perspective is equally applicable to spatially-mediated interaction in other cultural settings: "the notion of a contact zone... can be extended to include cultural relations within the same state, region or city – in the centers rather than the frontiers of nations and empires. The distances at issue here are more social than geographic" (1997: 204). Secondly, Clifford expands this usage by applying it to institutions as spaces of contact. Specifically, he describes Museums as contact zones and uses the term to articulate issues in the commodification of culture (1997: 213-219), stating that, "when museums are seen as contact zones, their organising structure as a collection becomes an ongoing historical political, moral relationship – a power-charged set of exchanges" (2007: 192).

Like Clifford's evaluation of museums as contact zones, I consider the festival to be a contact zone in which culture is on display. However, while Clifford constructs the museum as a location in which knowledgeable insiders construct a display for the benefit of visitors, I regard the cultural festival as a space in which there are multiple layers of display, and where the boundaries between curator and visitor, or performer and audience, are sometimes blurred. This stance echoes Pratt's call for the decolonisation of knowledge (1992: 2), as it queries the ethnocentric assumption that cultural performances in the Pacific are intended for a tourist audience, and moves beyond the limited binary opposition of 'hosts' and 'guests' (Dawe, 2004: 10). While tourist audiences certainly play an important part in the maintenance and development of festival performances, they constitute just one of a number of contact zone parties. As the following study of Tapati Rapa Nui demonstrates, the festival contact zone can be just as meaningful for insider participants as it is for outsiders, and a variety of circumstances mediate the degree of cultural knowledge brought into the contact zone by these parties regardless of whether they belong to the local culture or not. In this article, I have identified four types of contact in the Tapati contact zone: international contact with tourists from beyond the Pacific region; intra-national contact with tourists, authorities, and functionaries from mainland Chile; inter-clan contact between traditional kinship groups on Rapanui; and intergenerational contact between Rapanui islanders. These complex interactions demonstrate that an expanded contact zone framework is useful beyond the binary discourses of coloniser/colonised, performer/audience and host/guest. Furthermore, in concert with Carrasco's view, this expanded framework more keenly reveals the continuing evolution of festival performances on Rapanui as performers adapt to encounters in the contact zone, and it is therefore a useful means for discussing the dynamics of change and adaptation in this unique Pacific context.

The Importance of Festivals in the Pacific

Festivals, celebrations, and performance competitions are deeply ingrained in the histories of many Pacific island cultures. In some cases, inter-clan and inter-island competitions are known to have existed since pre-contact times, and versions of some of these events continue in the 21st Century. In other cases, colonised populations were encouraged to regard the colonising nation's national days as moments for local celebration, and it is for this reason that dates like July 4 and 14 are celebrated in the Pacific, thousands of miles away from both Philadelphia and Paris. Ethnographers across disciplines have included descriptions and analyses of festivals in their

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portrayals of Pacific cultures for some time, but rarely do festivals figure as their primary object of study. Notwithstanding the often brief and incomplete descriptions in encyclopaedic works such as the Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music or the Rough Guide to World Music, a comprehensive study that covers all of the cultural festivals in Oceania has yet to be produced. Nevertheless, recent projects such as Matori Yamamoto's *Art and Identity in the Pacific: Festival of Pacific Arts* (2006) are beginning to enhance the groundwork covered in an already impressive list of publications individually detailing specific certain high profile festivals like the Festival of Pacific Arts.

The current prevalence of cultural festivals in the Pacific can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly the gradual decolonisation of Pacific islands in the 1960s and 70s required that new countries find mechanisms for establishing unique cultural and political identities, and this has often been mediated through performances held to mark their own independence days. Secondly, the establishment of the quadrennial Festival of Pacific Arts (FPA) in 1972 created a regional framework for the performance and mediation of cultural identity, and the institutionalisation of this festival within the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC, formerly South Pacific Commission), demonstrated that indigenous performing arts could be beneficial to economic, diplomatic and national development.

This was certainly the case for Rapanui, which began participating in the FPA in 1976. At this time, Rapanui was (and still is) a Chilean colony and its people categorised as one of the three main indigenous groups of this South American nation. The FPA (and other regional festivals) provided Rapanui culture bearers with an unprecedented opportunity to explore their Polynesian cultural heritage in the company of other Polynesians, and this experience informed the way that successive generations of Rapanui authorities have sought to generate an awareness (nationally and internationally) of Rapanui cultural difference. Furthermore, Rapanui performers exploit ancient links with Tahiti, and new contacts generated through the FPA and other festivals, to build a profile of their island as a idyllic Polynesian tourist destination - a 'standard trope of utopianism' (Bohlman, 2000: 14) - and tourism now provides a sustainable livelihood for many Rapanui islanders. Rapanui experiences at regional festivals since the 1970s have also helped to shape the format of Rapanui's own cultural festival, Tapati.

The origins of Tapati Rapa Nui

Like many aspects of Rapanui culture, the origins of Tapati have been mythologised by generations of culture bearers, resulting in a general perception of the festival as a traditional and timeless phenomenon. It is pertinent to note, however, that the current standard format of Tapati Rapa Nui is a relatively recent development, consolidated in the 1990s, and the festival itself was unknown prior to the 1950s. Some islanders assert that the performative and competitive aspects of the festival are a continuation of ancient pre-contact cultural practices, such as the *koro paina* ceremonies witnessed by early ethnographers (Routledge, 1919; Métraux, 1940). Other islanders maintain that the festival was founded on a localised version of a western tradition: the *reina de la primavera* or 'spring queen' festivals that were once widespread in Chile and are still practiced in villages throughout Latin America. In reality, through a series of separate but linked performance categories, Tapati manages to incorporate both of these positions as well as many others in between, providing a creolised 'third language'

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(Jourdan, 1996: 46) for the expression of cultural identity that extends beyond the binary opposition of indigenous and introduced practices.

The consolidation of Tapati Rapa Nui as a vehicle for cultural representation reflects a broader history of contact and cultural negotiation that is not so overtly apparent in the performances and activities included in the modern festival. Like elsewhere in Polynesia, the importance of performance competitions in pre-contact Rapanui culture has been asserted by generations of scholars. With a population divided into separate clans, competitions revolving around both artistic and physical performance once provided important mechanisms for interaction and social stability. An example of this is the well-known *tangata manu* or 'bird man' ceremony documented by missionaries in the 19th Century and recreated by Hollywood in the Kevin Reynolds film *Rapa Nui*. This annual ceremony revolved around a test of physical endurance, where representatives of different clans would compete on behalf of their respective leaders for the clan's right to govern over the entire population for a year. The competition required participants to descend a 200-metre cliff face from the ceremonial city of Orongo into the shark-infested waters below, and then swim for a kilometre or more out to a rocky islet where migrating sooty terns would arrive annually to nest. The first competitor to find a bird egg would be deemed the winner of the competition and designated *tangata manu* – a special rank that invited certain social privileges – and his *ariki* would become the overall ruler of the island until the next year's competition. This physical contest was an accepted means for maintaining social control on an island where inter-clan conflict had previously caused immense disunity and chaos, and it continued to be practiced right up until the establishment of Christian missions in the 1860s. The subsequent historicisation of the *tangata manu* ceremony in Western scholarship and popular culture, and the diffusion of this information back to Rapa Nui, has reinforced the contemporary Rapanui conceptualisation of physical endurance as a signifier of indigeneity.

The performing arts also provided pre-contact Rapanui islanders with socially acceptable mechanisms for interaction, political negotiation and, in some cases, dissent. Lineage chants called *hui tupuna* provided a mechanism for ascertaining the social rank of individuals seeking to involve themselves in political discussions, and songs were used both to mark ceremonies and commemorate important people or events. Interestingly, in a hierarchical society where public disrespect of one's superiors was likely to be met with severe punishment, pre-contact Rapa Nui performance practices included a duelling-song genre called *ei* that permitted jesting and covert insults to be conveyed through skilfully-constructed song texts. While the practice of *ei* was prohibited by parish priest Sebastian Englert in the 1930s, and the *tangata manu* ceremony had declined long before that, knowledge of these cultural practices survived well into the 20th Century, providing a traditional foundation for the song competitions that are central to Tapati Rapa Nui.

Angela Tuki and Christian Paoa attribute the beginning of Tapati to the arrival of a large group of Chilean visitors in 1968, whose visit was celebrated with a makeshift festival (1991: 30). Alternatively, a similar festival held 30 years earlier to mark the 50th anniversary of the island's annexation by Chile could just as easily be seen as a progenitor to Tapati. Influential local priest Sebastian Englert is credited by some with trying to establish a kind of annual festival of Rapanui culture in the 1950s, and this seems to have coincided with the increasing influence of Chilean culture on the island. While the dates for Tapati have changed over the years (it has been moved from September [Spring-time], through November, into January and February), the 'Spring

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Queen' influence on the early festivities can be seen in the retention of a competition to find the island's 'queen', a street parade, and a fashion parade. The festival was finally formalised, utilising the name Tapati Rapanui on printed posters, in 1980 (Hotus [et al.], 2000: 172). In 1991, Tuki and Paoa documented the objectives of the festival as follows:

1. *To show many aspects of the island's culture, emphasising the integration of ancient traditions in the contemporaneous activities of the event,*
2. *To maintain and encourage traditions, folklore, and other cultural products as tools that validate local culture as inherited from the ancestors,*
3. *The creation of new artistic expressions, providing the opportunity for new folklore to be portrayed alongside traditional culture,*
4. *To initiate new generations in the ways of Rapanui tradition through wide community participation in the event, thus securing the transference of customs, beliefs and tradition from one generation to the next, and*
5. *[To achieve] the international diffusion of Rapanui culture, in order to increase outsider understanding of Rapanui culture and encouraging tourism as an important means of generation income for a large proportion of the island population. (1991: 30-31)*

By the mid 1990s, Tapati had become so large that it audiences could no longer fit in the municipal gymnasium where it was usually held, and a permanent outdoor space was created for the festival with an open-air stage on the sea-shore at Hanga Varevare. In recent years, the staging has been enhanced through professional lighting and sound reinforcement flown in from Chile, and elaborate set designs created as a backdrop for performances. Non-Rapanui producers provide some guidance in these matters, but the increasingly professional staging also reflects the skills learned by Rapanui islanders who were employed in set construction and other production tasks during the on-island filming of Kevin Reynolds' Hollywood film *Rapa Nui* in 1993.

Tapati Festival Structure

The Tapati festival revolves around a series of individual and group competitions in endurance sports, traditional art and folk performance, held over two weeks in early February. Contestants compete for individual glory and prizes as well as to win points in favour of a candidate for the title of Tapati Queen. This regal title is held for a year, and entitles the holder to certain privileges such as prizes of cash and goods, study scholarships and travel entitlements. The contestants, or *candidatas* are always young women, usually in their late teens or early twenties, and while there is no limit to the number of *candidatas* who may compete in any year, the considerable financial and human resources required to mount a Tapati campaign usually result in the field being limited to only two or three contestants. Tapati is similar to the much larger Festival of Pacific Arts in its overall structure and in the way it simultaneously incorporates traditional and contemporary cultural practices. In describing these elements, I borrow a

tripartite framework developed by Matori Yamamoto for describing the FPA: performing arts, exhibitions, and festival village (2006: 5-6). Tapati Rapa Nui is described below in terms of sporting and endurance events, art and performance, and festival village.

Sporting and Endurance Events

Physical prowess has become a major theme in the contemporary construction of Rapanui cultural identity, especially for young men, and the competition aspect of Tapati provides a unique framework for this identity to be explored. From ocean voyagers to legends of powerful warriors and the Herculean efforts associated with *tangata manu*, Rapanui history is replete with examples of physically endowed culture heroes who live large in contemporary Rapanui culture (Bendrups, 2006). In a contemporary environment where modern, western and colonial influences dictate the education and experiences of Rapanui youth, these legendary figures provide a conduit to the past, and youth who seek to emulate their ancestors through feats of physical prowess are therefore arguably engaged in a process of cultural revival.

Tests of endurance begin on the first night of Tapati, when a fleet of local fishermen depart on a high sea fishing competition in small boats. This nightlong competition ends with an 8am weigh-in, and the contestant with the largest overall catch wins a prize, prestige, and points in favour of their *candidata*. Later that day, the entire catch is cooked on a traditional *tunu ahi* (barbecue) and gifted to the community and visiting spectators. Alongside high sea fishing, canoe racing and spear fishing (called traditional fishing, or *hi kau mata oru*) are regarded as traditional Rapanui 'sports', and competitions in both of these areas follow through the week. While contestants are permitted to use their existing boats for the high sea fishing, they are conversely expected to build their own canoes for racing. Rapanui does not have any historical knowledge of pre-contact boat building practices, however, and the homemade canoes are therefore modelled on western vessels, not ancient Polynesian ones. The fishing and racing events are accompanied by sporting events that are more familiar to a global audience including cycling, swimming, horse racing, a round-island marathon, sprints, and soccer matches.

There are two further endurance events that are unique to Tapati. The first of these is a localised version of triathlon, called *Tau'a Rapa Nui*, which is held in the shallow volcano crater of Rano Raraku, better known as the quarry site for the island's iconic *moai aringa ora* statues. Rano Raraku is some distance from the town of Hangaroa, where most other Tapati events take place, and the convoy of cars leading to the *Tau'a Rapa Nui* enhances the spectacle of this all day event. As there is no public transportation, visiting spectators and locals without cars both rely on hitching lifts in packed trucks and utility vehicles, generating a sense of community if only temporarily. For the first stage of race, contestants must traverse the rocky crater rim on foot, weighed down with heavy bunches of bananas strung on a pole across their shoulders. They then swim across the crater lake, sometimes utilising *pora* (a traditional floatation device formed from a bunch of reeds), and return aboard small reed boats (*vaka ama*) built specifically for the race. Contestants, including occasional foreign contestants, will often adorn themselves with *takona* symbols and body paint for the race, lending to the visual spectacle. A shorter race for children on *pora* precedes the triathlon.

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The second unique endurance event is called *haka pei*. Described in the 2003 festival program as 'banana slippery down the mountain', *haka pei* is a competition in which young Rapanui men courageously descend a steep volcanic slope on banana-palm trunks that have been lashed together to form a body-length board. The contestants lie atop their boards like bobsled racers to gather speed as they launch themselves from the top of the hill, with the aim of making it to the bottom, or as far down the hill as possible. There is only one run per contestant, and the one who achieves the longest run before falling off, grinding to a halt, or smashing their board is deemed victorious in this event. Some participants have mastered the art of *haka pei* to the extent that they are able to move from a lying to an upright position while descending the hill, and some of these adopt a surfing pose to ride the board along flatter sections of the hill slope. This unusual grass-skiing/surfing spectacle captivates tourist audiences, and the danger posed to contestants is reinforced by the ambulance stationed at the foot of the hill for the duration of the *haka pei*. As in the *Tau'a Rapa Nui*, *haka pei* contestants compete almost naked and adorned with *takona*. The competition is restricted to young Rapanui men, and they prepare for *haka pei* through private ceremonies and rituals designed to enhance their *mana*, or spiritual power.

Art and Performance Events

The performing arts constitute an important area for cultural representation and maintenance throughout the Pacific. In the Tapati context, festival organisers have also devised novel ways of promoting skills in a variety of pre-contact domestic art forms that would otherwise not normally be considered as part of a festival or competition program. The creative tasks of traditional ceremonial and daily life, including carving, cloth manufacture, and the fabrication of clothing and adornments are all represented in Tapati through individual competitions. Furthermore, competitions are held for important categories of song, dance and drama, including both ancient and contemporary repertoires.

Carving and sculpting in timber and stone is central to traditional Rapanui culture. Throughout the contact and colonial periods, Rapanui carvers managed to make a living from producing replicas of ancient wooden and stone monuments and trading or selling these items to visitors. Many such carvings traded in the late 19th Century now appear in museum collections. For Tapati, two carving competitions have been devised: a large stone sculpture prize, and a time-limited competition for wood sculpting based around three simple ancient designs: *tahonga* (stylised bird egg), *rei miro* (traditional chief's breast plate) and *honu* (sea turtle). The large stone sculptures are created by their sculptors over many months in private before being submitted to the Tapati judges. Sculptors have free artistic license over these creations, but they are expected to use traditional Rapanui symbols, figures and designs in their work. These sculptures are often more than a cubic metre in size. Conversely, the small wooden carvings are done in full view of spectators, and competitors must fashion their designs from rough-sawn chunks of avocado wood within an hour.

Like many of Tapati's sporting events, carving is a domain in which only men compete. Meanwhile, *tingitingi mahute* (the manufacture of cloth from paperbark, known elsewhere as *tapa*) is a process reserved for women, especially young girls. In order to produce *tapa*, thick stems of paper mulberry must be soaked in water and then beaten to a thin film and dried. This time-consuming traditional process uses a large smooth

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stone and either stone or wooden beaters, and in an era of readily available clothing from Chile and Tahiti, it is only practiced when traditional dress is required for Tapati events and tourist shows. In order to generate spectator interest, participants in the *tingitingi mahute* section of Tapati dress in traditional clothes manufactured for the event and are encouraged to accompany their beating work with songs drawn from traditional repertoire. They process their *mahute* in a designated festival space, passing the cloth on to be judged and then used for the fabrication of tapa dresses, called *moenga*, and other apparel. Women are also largely responsible for making the shell necklaces that are worn by performers and *candidatas*, in various stages of the Tapati competition. A recent addition to the Tapati competition schedule is a fashion show for *candidatas* where each prospective queen must commission a wardrobe constructed entirely from traditional materials, and then model these outfits on the public stage during one of the festival evenings. This competition has revolutionised the construction of traditional dress as Rapanui artisans have used it as an opportunity to try increasingly inventive designs with local traditional products.

The preparation and fabrication of traditional apparel begins well before the start of Tapati, as teams of performers in certain performance genres must also be garbed in traditional dress for their heats. These teams can include up to 100 or more performers, creating hundreds of hours of costume work for the *candidatas* and their supporters. Not only must *mahute* be beaten out, but shells and feathers must also be collected, flax and reeds split and dried, and string for fastening of costumes scraped from the fibrous outer stalk of the banana palm. If performers wish to use clubs, staffs, or other adornments, these must also be made from scratch for the festival. This process can take months, and many participants sacrifice their entire days and nights in the weeks leading up to Tapati in order to get it done. The rewards, however, are considerable, as many Tapati points are awarded in these performance categories, and particularly impressive performances and costumes are likely to be remembered by the wider community, bringing praise upon the organising family.

A cornerstone of the Tapati festival is the 'folklore' competition, where teams of children, youth and adult performance troupes present traditional songs and dances adorned in traditional dress. These competitions occur in three heats on the concert stage over a number of nights during Tapati, and the victorious ensemble provides a further rendition of their performance for the final concert of the festival. The groups range in number up to around 30 or 40 performers, and generally learn lyrics and action-song dance moves to three songs in each category. They are accompanied by stringbands incorporating as many musicians as can be gathered by the *candidata*, and they rehearse for the festival in special spaces created on land owned by the *candidata's* family, away from the eyes of competing candidates. Each year, the musical director of each folklore group tries to develop a list of songs drawn from traditional repertoire that will be sufficiently interesting or obscure to catch the attention of the judges, who are all music and dance experts. Meanwhile, choreographers develop original dance routines that articulate the songs' meaning through hand, arm and face movements, while also trying to avoid repetitious gestures that may be frowned upon by the judging panel.

The best adult singers amongst these costumed performers also provide the *candidatas'* ensembles for the *koro haka opo* choir competition held during Tapati. *Koro haka opo* is regarded as a pre-contact form of musical entertainment in which two opposing groups of singers sing in turn until such time as one group either runs out of songs, repeats a song already performed, or makes an obvious mistake in their

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performance. This format has been adopted exactly for Tapati, with the addition of a stringband accompaniment and prizes and points for the victorious ensemble. While *koro haka opo* are group performances, they also test the abilities and status of each group leader. This part of the Tapati competition is therefore keenly contested and cautiously prepared, and the annual *koro haka opo* has been known to run all night before a winner has been decided. Indeed, in 2003, the judges of the *koro haka opo* elected to nominate a winner when, at 5am, the competition showed no signs of ending.

Other group and individual performances without traditional dress or dancing occur in Tapati's nightly shows. Competition categories include *riu tupuna* (ancient songs, performed in small groups), *himene api* (contemporary songs, performed solo), *kaikai* (the presentation of traditional string figures with chanted accompaniment, performed solo), *ute* (commemorative songs, performed in small groups), *upaupa* (solo accordion, sometimes with the performer also singing), and *a'amu tuai* (the recitation and dramatic rendition of ancient legends by small acting troupes). In addition, a category of performance in which individuals appear painted in *takona* symbols and proceed to dramatically announce the specific meanings of these symbols has become part of the Rapanui evening show in recent years.

Festival Village

The public spectacle of races, performances, and other competitions generates a celebration atmosphere in Hangarua during the two weeks of Tapati. The Hanga Varevare stage area itself becomes a kind of festival village, with reed huts (called *hare mauku*) built in two rows to serve meals and drinks to festival spectators. These huts are themselves worth competition points, and a prize is awarded to the *hare mauku* that is judged to be the best decorated at the start of the festival. In the field adjoining this space, a gastronomic competition with meals made out of local foods is put on display early in the festival, and spectators are invited to sample these dishes. The corridor created by the *hare mauku* at the edge of the performance stage generates a kind of temporary streetscape, and combined with the grass underfoot, the smoke of open fires and the audible lapping of the nearby seashore, this space exudes a sense of otherness. Back in the shop-lined streets of Hangarua, the celebration atmosphere spills over into regular community activities such as the Sunday Mass, which is designated the Tapati Mass during the festival and conducted with an expanded cohort of church musicians and a wider than normal repertoire of Rapanui hymns.

The crowning glory of Tapati, however, is the *pere'oa kahu reka tua'i* street parade, held towards the end of the festival, which descends along the main street of Hangarua from the airport at one edge of town to the performance stage at the other. This street parade provides an opportunity for the performances and artworks judged throughout the competition to be put on display again, carried on floats of cars and trucks adorned with foliage, carved decorations, and occasional scale models of landmarks, artefacts and other representations of pre-contact Rapanui life. It is also a competition event in its own right: for the parade, *candidatas* are awarded points based not on the quality of their performances but on the sheer number of people painted in *takona* who are included in their parade section. Tourists and other visitors are therefore often invited by Rapanui performers to participate in this segment of the festival, as long as they are willing to strip down to their underpants and be covered in body paint. Rapanui islanders are themselves unused to exposure and adornment of this kind, and the

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spectacle therefore generates a great deal of energy even amongst performers who have, by this stage, been campaigning for their *candidata* non-stop for nearly two weeks.

The street parade effectively marks the end of the point scoring for the candidatas who vie for festival Queen, and in 2003, the winner was announced during the next evening concert. To finish the festival, in recent years, the organisers of Tapati have developed a stylised crowning ceremony, held at sunset at the impressively restored archaeological site of Tahai, on the final evening of the festival. This coronation takes the form of a structured performance. The new queen is paraded towards an open cave on the Tahai site, where community elders and festival authorities await her with cloaks and other items that were once used as symbols of rank for pre-contact Rapanui chiefs. In 2003, a group of expert performers provided a sequence of songs with regal themes, including some songs about the founding king and Queen of Rapanui, reflecting the solemnity of the occasion. After this final evening, Hangaroa becomes a much quieter town as many of the families who had immersed themselves in Tapati disappear to camp on ancestral lands to rest and relax out of reach of the community. The *hare mauku* are dismantled, and the performance stage at Hanga Varevare returns to being a small rise in a wide grassy field.

Tapati as a Dynamic Contact Zone

Tapati is significant to international tourists and internal tourists from Chile because it provides an open entry point into Rapanui culture. For most urban Chileans, however, the image of Rapanui as a place is perhaps more acute than it is for international tourists, because of the way that Rapanui culture is mass-mediated in Chile. While practically distinct to other Chilean performance cultures, Rapanui performance culture has been woven into mainstream Chilean cultural consciousness through decades of performance by nationalist folklorists and folk groups, and by historically centralist government policy that has situated the Rapanui people alongside the Aymara and Mapuche as one of Chile's three main indigenous groups. Most Chileans at some time in their childhood education learn to perform one or two Rapanui songs and dances, and in the same way that Hawai'i is attractive as an exotic yet 'local' destination for North Americans, Rapanui is an exotic but familiar tourist destination for middle and upper class Chileans. Therefore, when Chilean tourists observe and participate in Tapati, they are both 'away' and 'at home' and this contact zone therefore has ramifications for how they will subsequently view Rapanui and Rapanui islanders within the national context.

With regard to its ramifications within Rapanui society, the competition focus of Tapati provides a rare glimpse into the social influence of family and clan ties that once supported the island's entire political structure. The Rapanui people once lived in independent clan groups across the entire island, but in the 1890s, the Chilean government's decision to lease the island to pastoralists for sheep ranching led to the ghettoisation of the entire population in the area of Hangaroa, where the current town is located. Throughout the 20th Century, Chilean government systems (both autocratic and democratic) replaced traditional political systems on Rapanui, and clan affiliations therefore became a point of interpersonal mediation rather than a matter of social rank or status. However, the competition for Queen of Tapati demonstrates the continuing role of family and clan affiliations in Rapanui society. In order to succeed, a Tapati

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candidata must amass considerable support from others in the community to fill the roles of performers, builders, carvers, drivers, cooks, cleaners, costume makers, and most importantly, instructors and culture bearers. She needs to provide a place for this army of supporters to work, materials for them to work with, and food to sustain them through the long hours of preparation and rehearsal. Where the enlisting of performers is concerned, it pays to have a good relationship with one's siblings, cousins, second cousins, aunts and uncles, and as many others as can be persuaded to join the family effort. In this sense, the Tapati contact zone provides a framework for the reaffirmation of a very ancient type of socialisation.

Prospective *candidatas* are entirely reliant on the assistance of *taina* or 'kin' for their success, and it is often the case that the candidate with the largest cohort of helpers wins by sheer force of numbers. The pool of possible assistants is not limited to blood relatives, as divergent families who regard themselves as historically aligned will often join forces to support a *candidata*. Indeed, the interwoven complexity of kinship on Rapanui makes it possible for just about any islander to legitimately support any candidate, and it is often the case that competition participants have to choose between candidates that could both be regarded as kin. The political manoeuvring of parents seeking expert help for their daughters' planned candidatures can begin years in advance, with powerful or knowledgeable relatives and friends being pressured, cajoled or otherwise persuaded into a commitment of future support. Such manoeuvring might involve specific gifts, or even reciprocal commitments of assistance for future festivals or in other areas of island life. In this sense, Tapati Rapa Nui is not just a two-week festival but also a cultural process that can extend over months and years.

Finally, Tapati provides an intergenerational contact zone for Rapanui islanders. Since the 1960s, successful Rapanui students have been sent to mainland Chile for their secondary school studies, returning to their island home only over the summer months. While Rapanui now has a comprehensive local school system, many students still travel to Chile throughout their teenage years. Furthermore, many Rapanui youths pursue tertiary education in Chile, as well as New Zealand, the United States, and elsewhere. As a result, a large proportion of contemporary Rapanui youth are isolated from their elders and culture bearers during important formative years, and are therefore denied access to important stores of oral history. The traditional elements of Tapati go some way in redressing this imbalance. Preparations for Tapati begin in earnest after Christmas, shortly after the homecoming of Rapanui students in Chile, and continue with increasing intensity until the festival occurs shortly before the beginning of the next academic year. During this time, young Rapanui learn songs, dances, stories, skills in carving, building, traditional costume and other areas. Furthermore, the time spent preparing and rehearsing for Tapati is time in which older generations of islanders slowly unwrap parcels of cultural heritage from their collective memories and experiences as they gradually become intimate with the young.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Tapati Rapa Nui is attractive to international audiences. A wealth of commentary in travel websites and personal blogs on the internet reveals this clearly to be the case. If construed as a meeting point between 'hosts' and 'guests', the festival could be theorised as an example of 'cultural invention' (Linnekin, 1991) and thereby positioned in the debate over authenticity that still pervades much research in Pacific cultures. Alternatively, it could be portrayed merely as entertainment and spectacle, or

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as evidence of opportunistic islanders trying to capitalise on the tourist dollar. Indeed, it could be all of these things. However, as this article reveals, there are cultural forces at play in the Tapati contact zone that are far more significant for the future of Rapanui culture than any discussion of authenticity, commercialism or globalisation. As a contact zone, the Tapati festival is also an access point to contemporary Rapanui culture, as much for complete outsiders as for the Rapanui themselves. In developing a broad program of perceived traditional and non-traditional events, the organisers of Rapanui are intelligently laying broad pathways for the future development of Rapanui culture, and the inclusive format of the festival's competitions ensures that many islanders are included in this process of cultural self-determination.

The preliminary analysis of Tapati presented here benefits from the application of an expended 'contact zone' framework that recognises multiple points of contact and interaction. Through this framework, the intricacies and influences of internal, colonial and international contacts may be ascertained and evaluated for their respective roles within the festival itself. This article has shown that Tapati Rapa Nui, like many other Pacific festivals, is a zone in which local concerns are still the driving force behind the festival, and that while international tourism and cultural commodification are present in the zone, they do not necessarily have significant generative influence over the performance of culture within it.

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