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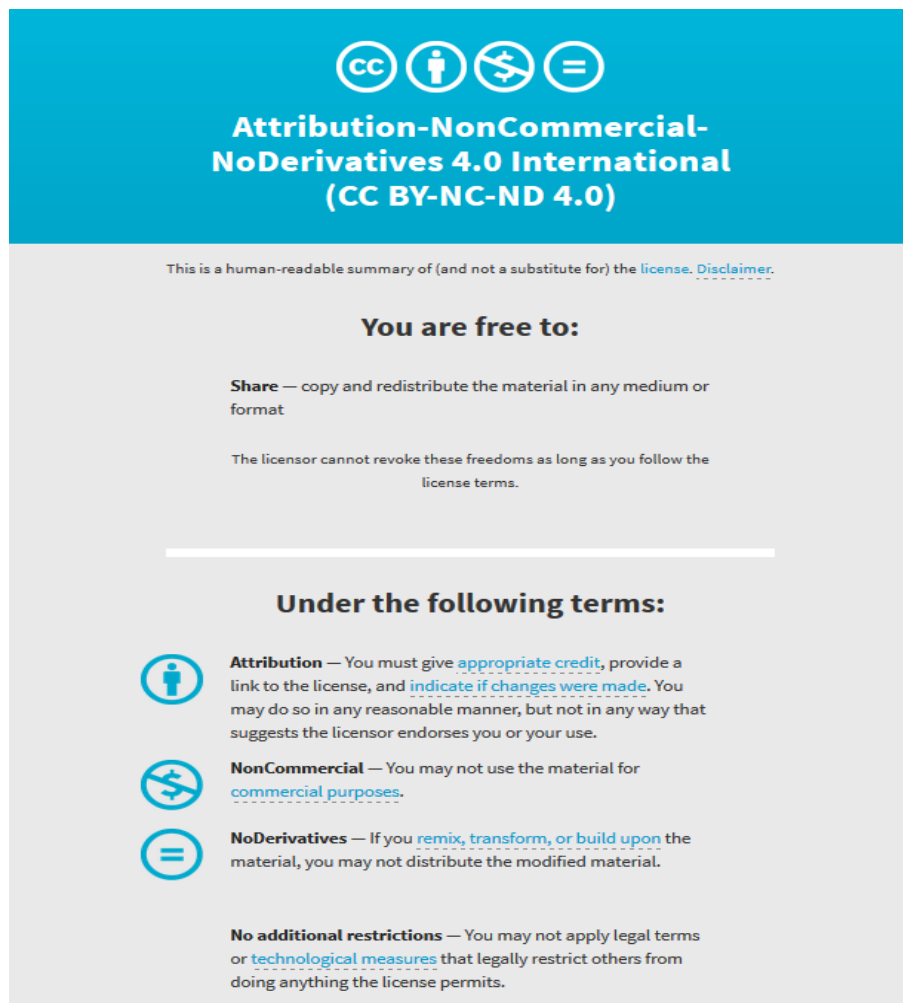
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'Dancing for joy':

Gender and relational spaces in Papua New Guinea

Alison Dundon

Abstract

Among the Gogodala of Papua New Guinea, a predominantly rural population in the Western Province, dance is a site of considerable emotion. Owama gi — 'dancing for joy' — is particularly so, a seemingly spontaneous series of sensuous movements through which women express both pleasure and pride in the beauty and ability of their male kin as well as the efficacy of their own webs of relatedness. Women express their compulsion to dance at these occasions in terms of expressions like 'you cannot help yourself'. In this chapter, I examine the performance of owama gi as the sensual and embodied generation of what I refer to as relational space, in which happiness, pride and pleasure in relationships between women and their children, fathers, uncles and brothers are elicited and appreciated. At the same time, dancing for joy is an overtly public performance of the central role that women play in the lives and achievements of their kin. I analyse the ways in which, although understood as spontaneous expressions of pleasure and joy, such dances and the behaviour of those who perform them are highly proscribed. The chapter seeks to contribute to an analysis of the substantive connection between space, sensory experience and human emotions through an exploration of the ways in which the senses and emotions both generate, and are generated by, certain kinds of gendered relationships and performative spaces.

Introduction

The articulation of emotion is spatially mediated ... [W]hen we speak of the 'heights of joy' and the 'depths of despair', significant others are comfortingly close or distressingly distant. (Davidson & Milligan 2004:523)

It is September 1995. I am sitting behind a recently erected bamboo fence that runs the length and breadth of the football field in Balimo with over one thousand people who, like me, are there to watch the dances, canoe races, sports and other performances that make up the Balimo Show. Although I had been in the Gogodala-speaking area of the Western Province of Papua New Guinea for more than eight months by this stage, conducting research for my doctoral thesis, this was the first formal event that I had attended which brought together these performances. After one particularly arresting 'traditional' Gogodala dance, or *maiyata*, by a dance troupe consisting of both men and women clad in stately long grass skirts and colourful *ikewa*, or dance plaques, on their heads, two women hastily stood up in the crowd and, with loud cries, ran to join the dancers on the field.

As the dance made its way around the inside of the fence to the beat of the hand-held *kundu* (Tok Pisin) or *waluwa* drums played by the men and the cane rattles held by the women, the two interlopers weaved their way in amongst the performance, insinuating themselves into the careful movements and beat of the music. One of the women, the younger of the two, removed her shirt and danced in her bra and skirt. As she followed the troupe around the ground, she raised her hands above her head and exaggerated the roll of her buttocks, hips and legs. The older woman also began to dance in a similar fashion, making various facial contortions, including sticking out her tongue and emitting a startling yell. Both women seemed quite oblivious to the crowd who, by this time, had begun to respond to these new participants with whistles, shouted comments and a great deal of laughter at their antics. The dancers continued unperturbed in the performance, seemingly unaware of the noise, proximity and movements of the women in their path. But although there were many groups performing at the same time on the field, this particular troupe now seemed to have the attention of the majority of the audience, united by the movements of the two women and the response of the crowd.

In this chapter, I explore the dynamics of this seemingly spontaneous and informal dance-like performance of women, referred to in Gogodala as *owama gi* or in English as 'dancing for joy'. I argue that *owama gi* opens up a space in which Gogodala women can embody, experience and express the emotions elicited by certain kin-based relationships. Dancing for joy, which is generated by a sensual engagement with the performance and by intense emotions like pride and happiness, appears to be largely unrehearsed if not completely spontaneous: a celebration of motherhood, sisterhood or being a loved and valued daughter. Indeed, women, from single girls to grandmothers,

express their compulsion to dance at these occasions in terms of phrases like 'you cannot help yourself'. It is in reality, however, proscribed not only in its movements and context but also in terms of who performs it and for whom it is performed — so that, understood as spontaneous expressions of pleasure, such dances involve certain types of bodily comportment and stylised movements. In addition, dancing for joy is always danced for someone, not only to draw attention to the quality of performer and performance, success or achievement, but also to chart public connections between the women who perform *owama gi* and those who are the source of the celebration. In this sense, dancing for joy is a performance in which 'the emotional content of human relations is deliberately laid bare' (Wood & Smith 2004:535); and an 'ephemeral' and 'intangible' dance performance (see Henry 2011) that is simultaneously 'a geographical act' (Wood & Smith 2004:535). It involves the sensual and embodied generation of space, in which emotions associated with relationships between women and their children, uncles, fathers, and brothers are elicited, and is a highly visible demonstration of the central role that women play in the lives and achievements of their close kin.

This account seeks to foreground the analysis of the substantive connection between space, sensory experience and human emotions through an exploration of the ways in which sensual immersion and emotion both generate, and are generated by, certain kinds of gendered relationships and spaces. Bader and Martin-Iverson (2014:154) note that while performances (like, I would argue, dancing for joy) negotiate and establish 'intersubjective relations and social values' at the time, they also 'extend beyond the performance experience as such, contributing to the construction, re-negotiation, maintenance and transformation of social groups and identities'. Like Bader and Martin-Iverson (156), I believe that it is analytically useful to see 'performance as a form of social action' and to focus on the ways in which 'performance both produces and is produced by social relationships'.

Marilyn Strathern (1988) has argued that, in Melanesia, performance is a form of social action that is a process of not just the production, but also the revelation of social and intimate relationships. In this chapter, I argue that the performance of dancing for joy is simultaneously constitutive and revelatory, and this is mediated by the ways in which both senses and emotions inform and structure these performances. In the process, performances of dancing for joy become 'powerful emotional ways of making the world, and they tap directly into the power of emotions to shape social life' (Bader & Martin-Iverson 2014:544). As Bondi, Davidson and Smith (2005:3) suggest, emotions are 'relational flows, fluxes or currents, in-between people and places rather than "things" or "objects" to be studied or measured'. In this context, bodies and persons are buffeted, created and moved by these 'flows, fluxes, or currents' (5). Here, I look at the extent to which the flow and flux of emotion is an inherent aspect of dancing for joy, and is both a source and expression of intimate, kin-based relationships. During the performance of *owama gi*, women utilise their moving bodies and those of

their male kin to create spaces that embody as well as generate the emotional intimacy of gendered relationality.

In the following section, I explore the contexts of dancing for joy and the role of senses and emotions in the generation of a 'compulsion' or overwhelming desire to dance. I then discuss who performs *owama gi* and how this forms part of a wider set of work-based practices referred to as *ato ela gi*, which is the everyday basis of being a 'good' or 'true' woman. I then analyse this in terms of the gendered and relational constitution of people through blood and clan canoes, to which all Gogodala claim affiliation, and the ways in which dancing for joy is both generated by these relational and affective ties and constitutive of them. In this sense, I argue that the performance of *owama gi* is 'by its very nature a way of life "in the making"' (Wood & Smith 2004:535).

'Can't help myself': Sensual and emotive spaces

Performance does not merely express, but rather constitutes and is constituted by social values and intersubjective relationships. (Bader & Martin-Iverson 2014:154)

Owama gi is performed exclusively by women, who, immersed in a sensual engagement with a performance, game or event, are moved by an overpowering emotion most closely translated as joy or intense happiness to take to their feet and dance. These women say that they find it impossible to resist 'the call' to move, dance and thus express the strong emotions that they experience at these times. Women note that their sensual interaction with significant others in engagement with their dance, game or race often makes it impossible to sit quietly. Some refer to the powerful beat of the drums in traditional dances or the haunting rattle of the bamboo cane repeatedly hitting the ground during the stately movements of the dance as the initial prompt or impulse to move. This is a common response to the sound of a beating drum or rattle used now most often during dancing held at cultural events (see Dundon 2002). In the past, when ceremonies or *maiyata* were still performed between two or three Gogodala villages, people were drawn to the village and ceremony by the sound of this music. Others say that the painted and stately beauty of the dancers or the full-faced youth of the children collecting prizes, or the sweaty, muscular and shiny-skinned evidence of the exertions and efforts of the players, paddlers or children playing sports bring about the feeling or compulsion to dance for joy. A certain kind of sensual engagement in the original performance or activity by women in the audience lies, then, at the base of the compulsion to dance *owama gi*.

Dancing for joy takes various forms but is generally recognisable — indeed, it is important that it is. Most women dance with extended arms, rolling hip or leg movements and rapid facial contortions that often include movement of the tongue and eyes. These are usually accompanied by loud whoops or calls, whether by the women themselves or women on the sidelines or in the audience. The removal of

clothing, usually shirts or blouses (*meri*), often is seen as representative of the intensity of the emotion that gives rise to the compulsion to dance; it accentuates the loss of control over feelings and usual patterns of behaviour. While public nudity (particularly in mixed company and performed by women) in this predominantly evangelical Christian community is greatly discouraged, naked breasts are not perceived to be sexually provocative. In fact, breasts are in many ways indicative, more than any other part of a woman's body, of her ability and capacity to nurture her clan and her children. The revelation of a dancing woman's thighs is never part of *owama gi*, however, and would generate a great deal of immediate displeasure and censure from the crowd, and shame on the intended recipient of the dance.

Owama gi is performed in various contexts: from canoe races, traditional dancing performances like that described above, to school award nights or assemblies, and various sporting games and events. The context and space of dancing for joy is, like its movements and those who perform it, proscribed and focuses particularly on events that are understood to either be or have 'traditional' or 'customary' components, or, increasingly, on those events associated with performance and skills in educational arenas. The performance of 'dancing for joy' often accompanies the end of a canoe race, for example. Canoe races, *gawa maiyata* in the Gogodala language, have a long history in the area, noted first by A.P. Lyons, Resident Magistrate of Western Division in 1916 (1926:351-2); they were originally part of a series of *maiyata* or ceremonies held during cycles of male initiations (see Dundon 2013). They are usually now held as the penultimate 'customary' activity at the end of events like the one described above or at community school openings, national independence celebrations and, increasingly, as the basis of a 'cultural festival' (Dundon 2013). Canoe races are based on serious competitions between giant dugout canoes raced by men on the waterways of the area. Each canoe represents a clan and a village, and each of the paddlers is identified as a crew member through his affiliation with the village and/or clan. Towards the conclusion of the race, as the leading canoes make their way towards the finishing point, women closely related to the contestants and the canoes in the race begin to dance on the banks of the river. Some may jump into the water, initiating *owama gi*, celebrating the return of the men and the victory of their canoes. Others may even wade into the water and jump onto the front of the canoes, toppling the men into the shallow water. All of this generates a great deal of amusement from the watchers on the banks and substantially heightens enjoyment of the race (Dundon 2013:11). This was described to me by several people before I attended any canoe races as a source of some ribald humour and a great deal of both pride and amusement.

Dancing *owama gi* at sporting events is not as common an occurrence as it is at canoe races. Nonetheless, at venues like weekly football games (Australian Rugby League) held in Balimo town every Saturday on the main oval, women may feel moved enough to get up and dance. These games regularly draw crowds of hundreds

of spectators, primarily from neighbouring or comparatively close villages and small towns. Spectators may spend hours travelling to the games and back to their own villages, while others stay in town or neighbouring villages with relatives. The enthusiasm of spectators and players alike is high during the football season, and emotions are evident in the physical and verbal violence that sometimes marks such sporting events. *Owama gi* in this context is most likely to take place after a goal has been scored or at the end of a match, during which a clan has been honoured by the valour and skill of the victorious team or certain 'star' players. Women may also dance for joy during and after school sporting events, particularly sports carnivals or games of basketball, football or soccer held on the weekends. These dances celebrate the skill and beauty of their children, grandchildren or those of close kin but are often muted. Many women dancing for joy at school events, for example, will not remove clothing but simply sway and dance on the sidelines to demonstrate and embody their emotion and inability to 'help themselves'.

Dancing for joy has correlates with performances by 'audience' members in various parts of the Torres Straits. Henry (2011:182), drawing on her own work as well as ethnography by Maureen Fuary and Jeremy Beckett, notes the presence of performances that resonate with dancing for joy among the Gogodala. During more formal or 'traditional' dance performances, audience members may spontaneously 'jump up' and dance close to their kin, thereby taking the opportunity to 'mark publicly particular kin relationships' (182). In this context, women jump up and dance briefly close to male kin or simply next to a kinsman with a kerosene lantern — thereby drawing attention to 'his performance, of which she as a kinswoman is immensely proud' (182). Dancers are also often sprayed with perfume or dusted with talcum powder, an expression of 'audience appreciation and delight' with extra perfume reserved for special kin (182). Henry (2011:183) also quotes Beckett recalling such an event in which 'women, mainly older women, and occasionally older men do a funny dance, while serious dancing is going'. To which, he noted, 'dancers are not supposed to respond'. While Beckett told Henry this was often just to 'make people happy', it was also often used to 'celebrate the dance of a favourite son or brother, or nephew' (as cited in Henry 2011:183). In the Western Torres Straits, during a performance referred to as *kaythian*, a woman 'will spontaneously join the dance team of men and perform in a comic or exaggerated way in front of one or more of them'. At the event Henry attended, 'exaggerated cavorting by women' occurred during several of the performances 'to the delight of the participant audience' (183).

Like *owama gi*, this kind of dance-like performance is based on emotional flows between performers and participant audience members, the latter of whom are 'active participants in the collective endeavour of dance performances or music-making' (Bader & Martin-Iverson 2014:154). Increasingly among the Gogodala, women have begun to perform *owama gi* during school assemblies or school prize-giving celebrations. In

this context, women will only perform as their child or grandchild is collecting a prize or performing a drama during the assembly or prize-giving event and again may do so from their place in the audience and without the removal of any clothing. The actions of these women draw attention to the attributes and skill of the children and are much appreciated by audience members as long as they are more muted than *owama gi* performed on the oval during sports and 'traditional' cultural events.

Good and joyful women

So who performs dancing for joy among Gogodala speakers? Unlike among communities in the Torres Strait, dancing for joy is only ever performed by women and is part of a wider set of practices that characterise what is referred to in Gogodala as *ato ela gi*, or the 'women's way of life'. *Ato ela gi* is practised primarily by women living in villages in the Western Province, but also by Gogodala women living further afield, who continue to build their lives around certain central practices and principles that revolve around active participation in subsistence activities, and behaviour that ranges from regular attendance at church to birthing and raising children (see Dundon 2005). It is often rationalised by commonly held preconceptions about the role of women in families, clans and villages. What *ato ela gi* signifies in the contemporary context is somewhat ambivalent as well as differently experienced and articulated. Yet it emerges in this commentary as the appropriate moral and behavioural model for village women, one that women themselves generally embrace, and attribute their own actions to, however differently they understand it. It is also the basis for designating women as 'good or true women' — *susaegi bapi*.

Ato ela gi has changed considerably over the generations. According to the memories of elderly women who were brought up in the time either directly before the arrival of the first missionaries, or in the early period of their co-residence with the Gogodala, women's practices have been transformed. Along with this transformation, or perhaps coterminous with it, the moral and caring community of the past has also changed. A woman in her sixties, Sibalato, commented quite vehemently one day:

When we were young, it was different: it was not the same. Nowadays ladies, everybody, want to get things from everybody, steal things. In those days, we never wanted to do those things. After making sago in the bush, we all came home. At the same time, we would help other people in need, help other women who didn't have sago, strings [for wrapping sago] or sago leaves [to cook the sago in]. At the same time, women nowadays are very greedy and selfish — they want to eat those things by themselves; they don't want to share things. Before, it was good when our parents taught us. Now the lifestyle [*ela gi*] is not that good. In the past it was good, people loved each other and shared. It was good. After catching fish, I bring them and put them in a balago [bark sheet] and share them among people in the village. (Sibalato, 7 October 2004)

This dialogue, which is the basis of a fairly common lament amongst women of the older generation, is hotly disputed by women in their late teens and early twenties — young women yet to marry, who provide diligently for their sister's husbands and children, or their elderly parents and grandparents, or newly married women with small children. These women maintain that they do, know and understand *ato ela gi* and that their lives are as distinctly patterned as their bodies by the cadence of women's work.

Ato ela gi is based largely on the kinds of *oko* 'work' or activities that bring together food, water and shelter and that strive to produce and maintain families, clans and villages. Of necessity, it revolves around the rhythms of village life and the seasonal transformations of the local landscape. Work is central to the Gogodala lifestyle — even paid employment, although this is understood as somewhat different from village 'work'. Although much work is shared between women and men, like gardening or the collection of water or firewood, and often carried out in unison, other activities are explicitly gendered. Certain jobs are predominantly performed by women, while others are performed by men and are the basis of *dala ela gi* — the male way of life — with a focus on hunting, game fishing, gardening and building houses.

But *ato ela gi* is more than a set of subsistence activities, constitutive of bodies and persons as they are, and *oko* or work is understood within a wide framework of practices. For women in particular, work encompasses the conception, pregnancy and birthing of children as well as their care and wellbeing. Marriage brings about a situation in which women and their husbands seek to establish their own family within the wider framework of extended family, clan and canoe as well as village. They are expected to do so through forming a partnership in which they undertake work that benefits not only themselves but this wider network of kin and clan relationships. In this sense, practising *ato ela gi* is also the basis of being *susaegi bapi* — a 'true' or 'good' woman. Gogodala women who practise *ato ela gi* aim to be perceived as a 'good woman', a phrase which encompasses the wider range of practices and commitments of *ato ela gi*. In this context, this is often a very significant source or site of conflict and contestation. A good woman is

hardworking and rich; [good at] making sago *baya gi*; good at gathering things *lopala mowadae gi*; [fishing, firewood, water etc — bringing things back to the house]; *ila sala gi* — chopping firewood; *saba salamina gi* — sweeping [the] floor [and] organising the room; *aei lapela gi* — sweeping under the house, weeding. (Awato, 15 September 2004)

Owama gi can also be a part of being a good or true woman, but not all women perform *owama gi*. In fact, the majority of Gogodala women do not ever stand up in public and dance for their children, brothers, cousins or fathers. They represent themselves as 'shy' or quiet women who feel such emotions and happiness but resist the desire to stand up and dance. Others may dance at some moments or events but

not at others. Yet these women are proud and impassioned by the emotions that they experience at these events. Those women who do dance, then, are referred to as *owama ato* — women who dance for joy. *Owama ato* are those women who often stand up in church or fellowship meetings to sing or lead the discussions or who are moved by the Holy Spirit during Christian revivals. They are women who are more easily or readily called into public displays of affection and emotion. Both types of women — whether they dance or not — can claim to be good or true women, but sometimes those who dance come under the imputation from others that their emotional readiness has the potential to lead to problems. In that sense, although *owama gi* is both a central part of *ato ela gi* and an emotional expression and experience of it, there is a limit to which women can authentically practise it and still be good women. Much of this relates specifically to the extent to which dancing for joy is understood to be legitimate in the instance it is performed — that is, whether the woman dancing is truly engaged in *ato ela gi* is a good woman.

Performing relationships: Blood and canoes

Relatedness and clan membership are central to *ato ela gi* and being *susaegi bapi*, and form the basis of 'authentic' or *gi bapi* ('real' or 'true') performances of dancing for joy. In Papua New Guinea, the importance of relatedness is foregrounded in analytic models that propose the Melanesian person as 'dividual' or 'partible' rather than as the Western 'individual'. That is, the Melanesian person is relationally conceived, nurtured and constituted (see Strathern 1988), a 'composite formed of relations with a plurality of other persons' (Mosko 2010:218). In this context, it is argued that these 'relational persons' are defined more by relationships than any kind of 'personality' or unique individual characteristics (Hemer 2013:17). Consequently, people situate themselves in a network of relationships that generate a variety of opportunities for, as well as constraints on, action and agency. This has been debated and disputed in various contexts (see for example Hemer 2013; Hess 2006; Mosko 2010; Robbins 2002; Smith 2012; Strathern 1988), and arose largely out of Marilyn Strathern's *Gender of the Gift* (1988), in which she proffered a primary metaphor for Melanesian sociality: that of the Melanesian person as multiple and relationally conceived. In this conception of the Melanesian person, people stood as 'a microcosm of social relations' (176). Strathern proposed that when a person acted and engaged in activities, social relations were objectified and thereby revealed. She wrote that in the process '[r]elations and persons become in effect homologous, the capabilities of persons revealing the social relations of which they are composed, and social relations revealing the persons they produce' (173). In this sense, people are the product or objectification of 'the gifts, contributions and detachments of others' — gifts generally expected to be reciprocated (Mosko 2010:218).

Various ethnographers have pointed to the problematic nature of positing (even metaphorically) an incommensurability between the 'Melanesian' and 'Western' person, which LiPuma (1998:75) notes is actually a comparison of ethnographically informed patterns of personhood in Melanesia with Western ideologies of personhood rather than its lived reality (see also Hess 2006; Mosko 2010). Several have pointed to the ethnographic reality of both the 'dividual' or partible and the 'individual' in both Melanesian and Western personhood (see for example Hemer 2013; Hess 2006; LiPuma 1998; Mosko 2010). Nonetheless, Melanesian societies do exhibit a primary focus on what Robbins (2002:190, 203) refers to as 'relationalism', which has at its base a paramount value for relationships and is based on 'relationalist assumptions'. Gogodala, too, speak in 'relationalist terms' and privilege a relational model of conception, nurture and maturation. This is particularly evident in contexts like performances of dancing for joy, where women dance at events and/or celebrations which demonstrate their connections of kinship and clanship — through 'blood' (*dede*) and 'clan canoes' (*udaga gawa*). Clan canoes are the smallest and most intimate Gogodala social grouping and clan canoes, as a social unit, are the source of people's names, access to land as well as potential marriage partners, and a variety of affiliations. Clan canoes are arranged into clans (*udaga*), of which there are eight, four in one moiety and four in the other. The two moieties are the most basic organisational unit, and divide Gogodala into either the red (Segela) moiety or the white (Paiya) one. As Gogodala clan groups are based on patrilineal ties, women and men derive their clan canoe affiliation from their father and are said to literally and metaphorically 'stand or sit' in that canoe — *naepe udaga gawala lelelowa*. In this way, clan canoes are a metaphorical space for membership, personhood and relatedness in the most basic sense.

Clan canoes, as much as people, objectify and thereby reveal the social relations of people who sit or ride in these spaces. During the time of the primary Gogodala ancestors, the original or 'real' canoes were given to the first ancestors by their father, one canoe for each of the eight clans or *udaga*: these eight canoes became the *kabigina gawa* or 'big clan canoes' for each of these clans. Big clan canoes hold the greatest number of people, which locate them within certain ancestral and contemporary social and political relationships. People in these clan canoes trace their genealogies from the first ancestral owner of the canoe to their own, collapsing the generations between this originary ancestor and the person's great-grandfather. Personal genealogies of this nature are utilised in the allocation of names, marriage alliances and for claims to land and resources.

But while a person's own clan canoe is the basis of claims to being a certain kind of person, people also ride or 'sit' in the canoe of their mother's clan — *agipe gawala dila waminaeno* — which also confers certain privileges and identification with that clan canoe. A person's relationship to their mother's clan canoe is very important

and is often regarded with great affection: a man called Kelaki, for example, said in late 2004 that 'mothers [are] like a gateway to this world. Without mothers, we wouldn't be staying like this — it was her hard work that we are alive' (23 October). Women in particular are also marked, quite literally, by their work as *aeibaiga* — as the 'ground' out of which people and canoes are produced and constituted. Women are *aeibaiga*, providing the site and potential for development and growth — in terms of conception, pregnancy and birth, as well as through the reproduction of the clan canoe of their husbands. Women allow children and clan canoes to grow within their wombs (*sege ana*) — literally, the resting place of children: '[T]he child stays in there and is nourished through the food that the mother feeds it. The mother provides that *ana*, that mother provides that ground now' (Kelaki, 23 October 2004). Another man, Sagalu, pointed out that 'mothers are like a canoe to us because we came out of her body and we are connected through the umbilical cord, *dinipala*. [The] father is just [providing] the blood' (23 October 2004). Referring to the enduring connection between people and their mother's clan canoe, he pointed out that a 'mother's body is like a canoe and people are attached to their mother's canoe through something like an umbilical cord'. If people are always attached to the canoe and body of their mother through the enduring embodied relationship of pregnancy and birthing, they owe the continuing existence and significance of their own clan canoe to women as *aeibaiga* — the 'ground' that makes life possible.

It is not surprising, then, that Gogodala in general express not only an ongoing debt to the clan canoe of their mother and her brothers and male kin, but also a great emotion that often spills out in displays of *owama gi* at sporting events, canoe races and traditional dances held during the opening of new schools or trade-stores or events of national significance like Independence Day. In sporting events or canoe races, men, women and children play in the teams of their mother's clan canoe rather than in their own, or men paddle the village racing canoe that their mother or grandmother was born into. In this way, competitors demonstrate their ongoing connection to the canoe out of which they were born, into the clan canoe or social group of their father. Even in the case of children receiving commendations or prizes during school assemblies or speech days, mothers and maternal aunts are seen to be especially important in their children's achievements.

Yet despite the significance of mothers and their clan canoes on such occasions, they are not usually part of the official celebrations on such days and there is little space for the articulation of such ties or their impact on the success of these events. Women will not often stand in public to make speeches about their role in the success of their children, grandchildren or male kin, and they are offered few opportunities to make public declarations in general, even in a context of increased levels of education and employment for girls and women. Dancing for joy enables women to create a space in which they can 'perform' the significance of the emotive and substantial ties that

connect people through their maternal clan canoes and blood — particularly through the bodies of their mothers and maternal kin. But while the performance of *owama gi* prefaces these relationalist values, it is a performance that also draws attention to the 'individual' aspects of the people involved — the agency and embodied power of the woman dancing for joy, the beauty, skill and capabilities of the dancer, child or sports player. In this way, dancing for joy is never simply a 'dividual' event or performance: the performance also foregrounds emotions and actions which emphasise individual aspects of those to whom it is directed and those who dance it.

Conclusions

Among the Gogodala, a spatial logic of intimacy is apparent in performances of *owama gi*, in which people not only take on 'particular rules and roles' (see Thein 2005:192), but also generate a visible space that foregrounds collective and personal foundational relationships. Wood and Smith note that

performance spaces create settings in which relations of intimacy — those close, risky, emotionally charged relationships which are more usually reserved for 'private' encounters with familiar people — might be engaged in by comparative strangers in a 'public setting'. (2004:539)

In performances like dancing for joy, this can create or initiate bonds that give rise to intimacy or even 'nurture a sense of intimacy' (Wood & Smith 2004:539). In dancing for joy, the spaces between the dancers become, temporarily at least, spaces that prefigure intimate relationships in which women are primary social and physiological mediators. In this context, women enact and reveal not only pleasure and pride in the beauty and ability of their male kin or (grand)children, but also the efficacy of their own webs of relatedness, processes of nurture, enabling bodies and capabilities as good or true women. It is a very public but also intimate way in which Gogodala women underscore the importance of the role they play in their primary relationships.

Dancing for joy is generated by, and generates, a great deal of emotion, ranging from happiness and joy to pride. Wood and Smith (2004:537-8) argue that this kind of generation of shared emotions is essential for the 'making of performances that work' and that are thereby perceived as authentic. In many ways, while neither performers nor audience 'necessarily [understand] why they are engaging with each other in such emotionally powerful ways', the 'power of the experience is palpable to both performers and to those with whom they are bound within a particular performance space' (537-8). I have argued that the meaning of the performance of *owama gi* is clearly understood and people engage within the performance space in certain ways, whether that space is a canoe race, a dance contest or a school hall. As Henry (2011:180) writes about the mutually constitutive relationship between emotion and meaning in dance:

'[D]ance is about feeling, but it is also about meaning. We understand the meaning of dance through feeling and we feel dance through understanding what it might mean'.

Nonetheless, the performance of *owama gi* differs according to the women involved, the relatives for whom they dance, and the context in which it takes place. And the generation of emotional engagement is one that binds people within the performance space of *owama gi*. In this sense, then, what happens is not simply about 'what is heard or what is felt' — in this case, the importance of women in social and personal relationships — but is also about the relationship that is formed through the performance itself (Wood & Smith 2004:537). That dancing for joy occurs during performances that already celebrate and constitute shared identification through blood, clans and canoes is not surprising, given that women are perceived to be at the centre of such relationships, as the 'ground' out of which such collectives are possible.¹ Dancing for joy is both generated by relational and affective ties and constitutive of them, and in this sense, the performance is 'by its very nature a way of life "in the making"' (535) through the generation of emotions in others — the audience, dancers, sports players and children. Such emotions, whether expressed through happiness, laughter, pride, quiet or even ribald amusement, temporarily connect and unite the participating audience, the official performers and the women dancing for joy.

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1 Henry (2011:183) notes this for similar performances in the Torres Straits, in which the 'particular intercorporeal aesthetic experience of the performance is flavoured by [the community's] ability to understand what the comic, sexually charged frolicking of the women, and other ribald interventions from the participant audience, symbolically represent in terms of the specific nature of the relationships being "spotlighted"'.

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