

Musical Awakenings. Between Cultural Regeneration and Political Claims in Oceania¹

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«The local people articulate with the dominant cultural order even as they take their distance from it, jiving to the world beat while making their own music»

Marshal Sahlins, *Goodbye Tristes Tropes: Ethnography in the Context of Modern World History*, 1994: 470

Mobility, rootedness and performance in the Oceanic renaissance

Violent upheavals, dramatic “fatal impacts” and deep oblivion have marked the history of Oceania for a long time, influencing the imaginaries and representations of those who have studied it, who have often described it as a longed-for «paradise found» that was immediately «lost» (Spate 1988). However, over the last half-century, in a strikingly similar way, Oceanians have become the protagonists of innovative cultural phenomena and important processes of self-determination.

¹ This introduction is the result of a shared process of reflection and writing, with the first paragraph attributed to Matteo Aria and the second, the third and the fourth to Matteo Gallo. We would like to thank Grazia Portoghesi Tuzi, Alexander Mawyer, Antonello Ricci, Monika Stern, Serge Tcherkezoff and Ofer Gazit for the suggestions and feedbacks. They have been fundamental to refine the article. However, the authors take sole responsibility for the views expressed in this text.

Looking at these unique revivals and interpreting the late decolonization of the Pacific², many anthropologists have highlighted the «politics of identity» (Gagné 2013; Salaün 2013; Maurer 2019; Favole 2021), calling these unusual and «surprising» (Clifford 2004) compared to the processes developed in previous decades in African, Caribbean and Asian contexts. According to these perspectives, most Oceanian independence claims in the 1970s/1980s³ proposed conceptions of sovereignty and nationhood that were more flexible than those traditionally promoted since the 19th century by Western states. Oceania was thus able to open up new connections between local, global, regional and national dimensions. Indeed, the historical context in which the indigenous awakenings of Pacific islands took place saw the «afflictions of the nation-state» as less crucial and less viable «for the construction of a better future» (Clifford 2004: 82). The influences of the late capitalist system have certainly led to the commodification of the politics of localism and culture (Friedman 1994; Babadzan 1999), but also provided a wide scope for the creation of composite forms of national identity (Firth 2000) and political regimes based on the reconstruction of regional networks, inter-island relations and a new, often

² Late in their colonization and under peculiar conditions, the Pacific islands were one of the last regions in the world to gain political independence from the Western powers. Samoa gained independence from the colonial regime in 1962, Nauru in 1968, Tonga and Fiji in 1970, Papua New Guinea in 1975, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands in 1978, Kiribati in 1979, Vanuatu in 1980, and the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia in 1990. A large number of territories (New Caledonia, French Polynesia, American Samoa, etc.) and indigenous groups (Maori, Indigenous Australians) remain under colonial sovereignty and, as Favole (2021) points out, today they claim autonomy and forms of “late” or “shared” political, environmental and intellectual sovereignty, while rejecting the idealized form of the sovereign state.

³ In 1972, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was built in front of the Australian Parliament of Canberra in protest against the non-recognition of property rights on aboriginal lands. The Aboriginal Land Rights Act for the Northern Territories was signed in 1976, followed in 1993 by the National Native Title Act, which recognized Indigenous people’s perduring presence on and ownership of land. In 1977 the Front de Libération de la Polynésie was born in Tahiti, which in 1983 became the Tāvini Huirā’atira nō te Ao Mā’ohi, promoting the registration of French Polynesia on the UN list of non-self-governing territories to be decolonized. In 1979 the Front de Libération National Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) was created in New Caledonia and on December 1, 1984 it promulgated the Gouvernement Provisoire de la Kanaky (GPK). In 1988 the Bougainville Revolutionary Army was created to fight for the independence of Papua New Guinea while in the same year many secessionist movements appeared in Hawaii (Ka Pakaūkai, Poka Laenui, Ka Lahui, Nation of Hawai’i, etc.).

conflictual and dialectical relationship with colonial homelands (Favole 2021).

In this regard, the ideology of the Pacific Way, theorized by the New Zealand anthropologist and sociologist Crocombe (1976) and the Fijian leader Ratu Kamisese Mara⁴, aimed at promoting interdependencies between the different archipelagos of Oceania⁵, has been interpreted as one of the main expressions of the islanders' skill in elaborating their own values and traditions and re-imagining their relationships with their ancestors, with the past and with colonial domination. An extensive political and cultural movement, supported by artists, intellectuals and writers, contributed to the emergence of new identities - Kanak, Ma'ohi and Ni-Vanuatu, to mention a few - by rearticulating Western elements such as colonialism, market economy, socialism, Christianity or democracy alongside the rediscovery of specific internal structural aspects. Practices and visions like Epe-li Hau'ofa's⁶ sea of islands or the shared sovereignty proposed by Jean Marie Tjibaou⁷, combine flexible identities, past memories and contemporary situations, and old and new traditions of «indigenous cosmopolitanism» and attachments to the land (Clifford 2004). Such «cultural inventions»

⁴ The term Pacific Way was first adopted by the Prime Minister of Fiji Ratu, Sir Kamisese Mara, in his speech to the UN General Assembly in 1970. In 1976 Crocombe published a manifesto giving more theoretical depth to this concept, linking it to a set of values coming from a rural world and opposed to those of Western urban societies. He outlined an anti-materialist, anti-individualist universe based on sharing, cooperation, solidarity and fraternity, proposed as an alternative model of development halfway between “*kastom*” and capitalism.

⁵ As Tarcisius Kabutaulaka (2021: 3) pointed out, commenting on the recent withdrawal of the five Micronesian states from the Pacific Island Forum: «The Pacific Way is a set of ideas, visions and processes that are dynamic, reinventing itself under new contexts while simultaneously grounded to core value» and still represents an active tool of diplomacy through which the various Pacific archipelagos build and negotiate their relations and interdependencies.

⁶ Epe-li Hau'ofa (2008) theorizes on a trans-Pacific identity that attempts to break down the rigid geographical boundaries of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia imposed by Dumont d'Urville, instead narrating the Pacific and its people, «the people of the sea», as a whole sea of constantly interconnected islands.

⁷ According to Tjibaou, sovereignty must be understood as the right to choose the partners of exchange and the power to relate specifically to other human beings and the earth. Independence represents the power to select the networks of interdependence in which to be situated, because, except in “myth”, no single Country is truly “independent” and fully sovereign (Tjibaou 1996).

(Wagner 1975) re-interpreted and, sometimes, replaced both local peculiarities and the rigid geographical divisions between Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, displaying the emergence of subaltern regions invisible in the dichotomous models of centre/periphery or globalisation/localism⁸. Indeed, as Marshall Sahlins (1997: 180-181) and Epeli Hau'ofa (1993) pointed out, since the Second World War the peoples of the Pacific have, unlike Western stereotypes that stressed their «minuteness», undertaken an extraordinary «world enlargement» that has allowed them to spread, connect and circulate throughout the world without losing their roots and attachment to the land⁹.

During the 1960s and 1970s, it was precisely the relationships, exchanges and study journeys undertaken in their respective colonial “motherlands” that made a number of young indigenous people aware of their colonized condition and, at the same time, allowed them to incorporate and re-elaborate Western knowledge to create the political and identity projects outlined above¹⁰. These figures, defined as «passeurs culturels» because of their ability to master several worlds and languages (Aria & Favole 2011), played a central role in the period of the «cultural awakening» by undertaking original processes of rediscovery and re-semanticization of their own traditions, according to a model which, although constantly in transformation, today continues to allow young indigenous generations to be the driving force behind further changes and new rituals (Gagné & Jerome 2009; Lee 2019). Considering the topics discussed in this mono-

⁸ In some cases, such geographical divisions have even been incorporated locally by different actors to generate new ways of imagining themselves. As Webb and Webb-Gannon (2016) have shown, many contemporary music bands have revisited Melanesian identity, turning the pejorative associations of the term (related to the blackness of the skin) into a feature to celebrate.

⁹ *Océanitude*, a neologism recently proposed by the Ni-Vanuatu poet and novelist Paul Tavo, reaffirms precisely the fundamental role of mobility and migration «as a source of cultural rootedness» and presents the Pacific peoples as «rooted travelers» (Maurer, 2019: 116), echoing the metaphor of the pirogue and the tree presented by Joël Bonnemaïson (1996). On this subject, see also Bambridge, D'arcy and Mawyer (2021) and Fair (2020).

¹⁰ Besides Jean-Marie Tjibaou we can also name Nidoïsh Naisseline and Déwé Gorodé in New Caledonia, Walter Lini and Grace Molisa in Vanuatu, Henri Hiro and Chantal Spitz in Tahiti, George Helm in Hawaii and many others. For many of them, the nationalist/independentist issues were combined with transnational elements not only of the Pacific Way but also of two other universalisms, missionary Christianity and socialism.

graphic issue, devoted to the intertwining of music and politics in the Pacific islands, an important aspect of the Oceanian renaissance has been the strong drive to show off the rediscovered past through articulated cultural performances.

Since the 1970s, the emergence of several cultural centers, arts festivals¹¹, creative musical expression and a wide range of actions staging local identities oppressed by colonization, have led an intense debate among Pacific anthropologists, ethnomusicologists and historians over the invention of traditions. Many contributors have investigated the ways in which cultural revivals and re-appropriations were often voluntarily created, or strongly shaped and transformed, to respond to precise political and economic interests¹². From this perspective, the revival of ancient navigational arts, the re-emergence of practices such as tattooing, dancing, marching on fire and, more generally, the revalorization of *coutume* (or *kastom*), were interpreted as artificial folkloric performances that had a key role in the formation of a nationalist state ideology; inventions, in fact, constructed by urban elites and political administrative cadres to essentialize cultural authenticity and legitimize the hegemonic role of the newborn leadership (Babadzan 1999; Howard 1983).

At the same time, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists engaged in the field directly supported indigenous struggles to enhance and preserve forms of local dance, music and songs, encouraging decolonization processes and making an essential contribution to the indigenous claims of the islanders by creating spaces for discussion and confrontation with indigenous performers¹³.

¹¹ On this subject, see Glowczewski & Henry (2011).

¹² The studies of Allan Hanson (1989) have shown how contemporary Maori, in inventing the fundamental aspects of their culture presented as traditional, also took inspiration from the intellectual perspectives produced by New Zealand scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jocelyn Linnekin (1983) focused on exploring how contemporary Hawaiian nationalists readapted their traditions for political purposes. Roger Keesing's (1989) reflections, which anticipate the distinction between heritage and history formulated by Lowenthal (1998), described how Pacific peoples create a past and myths about ancestral ways of living that bear no relation to the actual past (see also earlier studies by Keesing & Tonkinson 1982 and Babadzan 1982).

¹³ It would be impossible to cite here the extensive ethnomusicological bibliography devoted to Oceania, which includes ethnographies aimed at describing and analyzing choreographic and musical expression, compositional processes, instruments, the

This is exemplified, for example, by the intense debate on the property of land that has developed since the 1990s (Feld 2003), which has led a number of researchers to play an active role in the processes of defending the rights of indigenous communities¹⁴. In this regard, Australian ethnomusicologists played an emblematic role in the identification and restitution of property rights to Aboriginal people (see Koch 1994; Magowan 1994; Tuzi 2010)¹⁵. In this drive to become «intellectuals organic to the subaltern classes», to quote Gramsci's famous expression, their attention often turned exclusively to the residual elements of local cultures that had survived the devastating effects of colonialism, leaving aside all the hybrid and «popular» forms that were emerging (such as reggae, commercial music, folk, hip-hop, etc.) and which themselves represented expressions and symbols of vitality and emancipation.

linguistic dimension of musical discourse, performative aspects and musical theoretical principles of different indigenous communities or of particular geographical areas (see Ellis 1964; Moyle 1983; Zemp 1972, 1974; Feld 1982; Barwick & Ellis 1987; Barwick 1989, 1990; Amman 1998, 2012; Wild 1984 e 1987; Magowan & Neuenfeldt 2005; Webb 2019). Works exemplify applicative interventions in ethnomusicological research include Moyle (1983, 1986), Ellis (1994); Koch (1994, 2019); Magowan (1994); Marett (1994, 2005); Dumbar-Hall (1996); Webb et al. Dumbar-Hall (1996); Gibson & Dumbar-Hall (2000); Hinchman & Hinchman 1998; Stern (2007); Koch & Crowe 2013 and Mackinlay & Barney (2017).

¹⁴ See Moyle (1983, 1986); Dumbar-Hall (1996); Ellis (1994); Gibson & Dumbar-Hall (2000); Hinchman & Hinchman (1998); Koch (1994, 2019); Marett (1994); Moyle (1983, 1986); Morris (1989); Stubington (1987, 1994).

¹⁵ The recognition of Native Title Rights (1976, 1993) based on the cultural traditions, myths and laws of the «Dreaming Ancestors» revealed the intimate connection between music, clans and places. The performance of the songs during court proceedings thus represented one of the most effective proofs of the ownership rights of the indigenous people over those lands: «The songs have texts that relate to Dreamtime people and events, localized as specific places. The ceremony owners own these places. Therefore, the song owners own the land» (Moyle 1983: 66). In recent years, ethnomusicologists have also been directly involved in the repatriation of recordings scattered in various international archives. The «repatriation» of indigenous musical heritage, collected since the end of the 19th century, has raised a number of legal and ethical issues relating not only to the property rights of sound documents, but also to their management and how they can be circulated. A debate that has involved ethnomusicologists, archives officials, representatives of indigenous communities, performers and cultural institutions and has generated, in some cases, interesting examples of «participatory archiving» (see for example: Barwick & Thierberger 2018; Koch 2019; Moyle 2019; Barwick & Green & Vaarzon-Morel 2020).

Nevertheless, these “impure” and “inauthentic” spaces have been supported by the scholars who have tried to overcome the dichotomies between resistance and subjugation, between tradition and invention, and who have focused their work on showing the leading role of local actors in the construction of history and in the processes of social regeneration, and their capacity to be simultaneously be rooted and in transformation¹⁶. As Sahlins’ epigraph suggests, these studies have revealed the processes of assimilation, transformation and re-appropriation of local and global elements that underpin indigenous claims, thus helping shift the focus from the well-known debate on the invention of tradition to the many “traditions of invention”. In undertaking this theoretical shift, authors such as Jolly (1992), Linnekin and Thomas (1992), Turner (1997), Wittersheim (1999), Clifford (2001) and Sahlins himself (1994) revealed the limits of the critical stances previously evoked and aimed at identifying the economic/political reasons behind cultural buzz.

Following their approach, reading cultural renaissances only in terms of inventions and as instruments for conferring power could fail to catch the spontaneous and emotionally involving dimensions that characterize these expressions. It is important to recognize the complexity of these phenomena, understood more globally as indigenous tactics of control and management of relationships with the dominant societies (Turner 1997)¹⁷.

The tension between connections, intersections and contaminations presents several analogies with the analyses of English and North American urban (sub)cultures proposed in the same years by the Cultural Studies team. The works of the Birmingham sociologists described dynamic, porous cultures, traversed by major colonial conflicts and concepts such as class, race and power. Their innovative gaze made it possible to consider the urban “styles” of the Teddy boys, Skinheads and Mods, Rastas and Rockers, and their ska, reggae, punk and rock music, as real «youth cultures», placing them at the core of academic debate (Hall & Jefferson 1993

¹⁶ See Wagner (1975), Clifford (1988, 2001), Thomas (1991), Jolly (1992), Linnekin & Thomas (1992) Sahlins (1994), Turner (1997), Wittersheim (1999) and Borofsky (2000). Such perspectives have been reaffirmed and reworked more recently by Bensa (2006), Hau’ofa (2008), Jolly, Tcherkézoff and Tryon, (2009) and in Italy by Paini (2007), Aria (2007) and Favole (2010).

¹⁷ For Sahlins (1994: 459), in particular, «Western scholars have too often been inclined to erase cultural meanings by considering them trivial, on the grounds that instances of continuity were false».

[1975]). Inspired by similar perspectives, James Clifford uses Stuart Hall's concept of "articulation" to understand the political and cultural scenarios taking place in the Pacific and to highlight how the fields of the hegemonic and the subaltern, institutional politics and movements from below, the colonizers and the colonized, should not be considered as completely separate and opposed universes, but as constantly interconnected, in the same way as the identities they produce.

The connections with the Cultural Studies work mentioned here are also particularly relevant for interpreting and understanding the centrality of new musical productions and, more generally, "neo-traditional" and "popular" performances in the cultural awakenings of Oceania. As a heritage supporting local identities, or as a real tool through which to transmit messages of protest and revolt, these phenomena have been not only the soundtrack of indigenous struggles but also powerful instruments of political claims, through which to re-enact history, revisit the past and thus reformulate relationships with the various Pacific archipelagos and with the colonial powers. In this arena the processes of institutionalization, patrimonialization, commercialization, reification and folklorization coexist with more or less unexpected, improvised and pervasive actions from below disseminating and consolidating local knowledge to support indigenous awakening and revalorization.

In accordance with these positions, a number of recent researchers who have worked on tracing the history of popular music in Melanesia highlighted the central role of performances in the processes of decolonization and the construction of a pan-Melanesian belonging and solidarity, as «vital forms of popular expression» (Webb-Gannon & Webb & Solis 2018: 179). Such works have highlighted the strong connections between the artistic productions that have developed in the Pacific since the 1960s and musical styles such as reggae and rock, as well as concepts like *négritude* and Black Power. These concepts, coming from African and Atlantic contexts, have been reformulated locally through music to give strength and meaning to indigenous re-appropriations (Webb 1993, 2015, 2019; Crowdy 2016; Webb-Gannon & Webb 2016, 2019; Stern 2017).

Indigenous youth, political sovereignty and hybrid music

In dialogue with such perspectives, this special issue focuses on the close links between the dimensions of the political and musical practices, ques-

tioning the multiple forms of sovereignty that are at stake in these islands. As we will see in the articles that make up this volume, Oceanic artistic movements from Australia to Hawaii have in some cases provided new pathways towards independence or autonomy; in other cases, they have produced unprecedented dynamics of patrimonialization and transmission, or offered new generations spaces for reaffirmation and contestation.

Indeed, a recurring element in many of the contributions is the central role of young people since the 1970s in the processes of cultural revival and struggles for indigenous rights. Often it is precisely artistic performances and musical productions that have allowed new generations to engage actively and critically in the construction of emerging societies, and continue today to make new ways of protest and participation possible¹⁸.

The first and last articles in this monographic issue of *L'Uomo* address these arguments by focusing on a fundamental period in New Caledonian history, «les événements» (1984-88), which has often been described mainly for the radicalization, conflict and violence. Through different and complementary perspectives, Jean-Michel Beudet and Matteo Gallo outline the heritage buzz that marked those lands even before the creation of the main cultural institutions aimed at the development of Kanak traditions and inaugurated with the Matignon-Oudinot (1988) and Nouméa (1998) agreements. Then, in the final article in this issue, the ethnomusicologist Beudet evokes his field experience and his direct involvement as a member of the former Office Culturel, Scientifique et Technique Canaque (OCSTC) in heritage projects supported by the independence party cadres. Through excerpts of field notes, many of them unpublished, the text describes the efforts of young Kanak men and women to rediscover and enhance local knowledge and contribute to the shaping of the new Kanaky nation. The scholar's accounts provide evidence of the deep connection between artistic practices and the struggle for independence, well expressed by the birth of the musical and intellectual movement known as *kaneka*.

Gallo's opening article dwells on the genesis of this hybrid musical expression, *kaneka*. Combining archival data, ethnography and interviews, it traces the poetics and practices of the young protagonists of this historical period, young people marked by the constant tension between the struggle against the colonial yoke and the need to assert themselves and legitimize

¹⁸ Hip-hop, for example, is one of the main creative spaces currently being used by indigenous youth (Dunbar-Hall 2006; Lefevre 2013; Minestrelli 2017).

themselves against the authority of the elders. What emerges is a scenario in which the intensification of the armed struggle against French domination is accompanied by the rediscovery and promotion of the Kanak heritage, a scenario fed by the fruitful intertwining of the perspectives of a rising generation of local intellectuals formed in France, the involvement of some *engagé* researchers (including Jean-Michel Beaudet himself) and the work of young artists, activists and musicians on the field. As showed by Gallo, in connecting traditional songs, rhythms and musical instruments with reggae, blues, jazz and rock sounds, *kaneka* has been not only one of the main fruits of this synergistic convergence, but also a space in which kanak boys and girls have displayed their abilities to act in the world and project themselves into the future while remaining rooted in their own culture. Thanks to the mobility, fluidity and continuous transformation of this artistic movement, *kaneka* remains an inspiration for new generations of activists, providing a special arena in which they can constantly redefine their identity.

The analyses of Beaudet and Gallo are thus in line with recent studies of Pacific societies that, instead of interpreting youth practices in post-colonial situations in terms of social problems, deviance and marginalization, have preferred to highlight their creative and generative cultural dimensions (Gagné 2009, 2013; Gagné & Jerome 2009; Lefevre 2013; Tamisari 2016; Lee 2019). Franca Tamisari's article (the third in order of appearance) on the Yolngu community of Milingimbi in Arnhem Land, Australia, also moves in this direction, exploring the educational and political dimension of musical productions, focused on a famous local rock band, the Wirrinyga Band, which was particularly active during the 1980s and 1990s. As in New Caledonia, in Australia indigenous claims to land and rights have been supported by cultural policies aimed at valorizing heritage. In this context, Australian Indigenous popular music (as well as more recent rap and hip-hop productions) offers a space of activism in which young people become aware of the current situation and imagine ways to balance the changes of the present with the preservation of the past.

Moving to Polynesia, and the role played by performance and new generations during the period known as the «Hawaiian Renaissance» (1964-1980), Kevin Fellezs' article, which follows that of Gallo and precedes that of Tamisari, explores the use of music has been a non-violent political tool used by the Kanaka Maoli people since the mid-1960s to challenge the American occupation. In these years, not differently from *kaneka* history,

young Hawaiians have been involved in a revival of musical traditions, mixing old songs with jazz, hip-hop and rock sounds. This gave rise to numerous groups that, under the generic label of *hapa haole* music (a hybrid commercial style that literally means «half-foreign»), helped foster a new political activism and identity pride. Inspired by songs, often in the vernacular language like those of musician and activist George Helm, young Kanaka Maoli have opened up to new forms of struggle and social criticism.

However, it should be emphasized that the youth productions described so far have sometimes (and from many angles) been judged as illegitimate, inauthentic or deeply contaminated and corrupted. Older members of some Oceanian societies have, for example, strongly criticized the new performances as not being fully “developed” or, in some cases, as emblematic of an inappropriate break with “tradition”. The scientific community itself has long regarded such productions as mere inventions, a symptom of cultural loss or a symbol of colonial power. These views are partially confirmed by Raymond Ammann’s article (the fifth in order of appearance) which, in reviewing some traditional ceremonies, dances and music from different Melanesian cultural regions (New Caledonia, Vanuatu, PNG), insists on their irreversible decline, not mitigated by recent «renaissances». The ethnomusicologist argues, in fact, that new generations of urban youth, lacking access to local knowledge and to the direct transmission of knowledge, are often no longer able to «feel the presence of ancestors» and to fully experience the sensory and emotional power of ancient performances. Consequently, the musical practices produced by this generation, in contexts undergoing profound transformations, can only give rise to impure phenomena, unfinished and only partially in continuity with the past¹⁹.

Ammann’s remarks about a “dying” tradition opposed to a modernity leading to homogenization pose a crucial question in the debate about the “authenticity” of contemporary artistic expressions. They raise the question whether contemporary forms should be understood as the fruit of mass culture and as Oceanian expressions of Western forms, in domination over local particularisms. These questions evoke, in part, the critical

¹⁹ This position is expressed even more explicitly in an earlier publication on traditional Kanak music and dances in which, starting from a strong idea of “authenticity”, the scholar asks «how kanak is» the newborn *kaneka* music (Ammann, 1998).

analyses of the Frankfurt School, which see a pervasive system of control in industry and cultural consumption not less effective than that of totalitarian regimes (Adorno & Horkheimer 1947), and see in jazz an exemplary form of pure cultural impoverishment, conformism and resignation to the current situation²⁰. This viewpoint stands in opposition to the aforementioned Cultural Studies works that see globalization and the consequent planetary diffusion of popular music not as negative phenomena producing cultural homogenization, but as significant local processes revealing the agency of social actors.

More generally, the articles by Beaudet, Gallo, Tamisari and Fellezs presented in this volume fit into the framework of the latter perspective, interpreting the forms of popular music that have emerged in the Pacific in recent decades not as mere expressions of subjugation to insidious mass culture, but as statements of locality and social regeneration. In other words, they are understood and described as complex creative dimensions that support the emancipation of Pacific peoples, whose condition still remains a minority or not fully acknowledged, and provide a voice for anti-colonial messages and for criticism of institutions, elders and local politicians.

Sound, experience and memory

The urge to capture the potential of indigenous voices by deconstructing dominant imaginaries is linked to another key issue discussed by several authors in this issue and which recalls the perspectives inaugurated by the pioneering work of Steven Feld (1981, 1982). His innovative studies took into account the bodily dimension of sound and listening to underline how music, in addition to having a strong political connotation (already well highlighted by Jacques Attali in 1977), also represents a real «dispositive» of knowledge and a form of experience.

In this regard, Birgit Abels in her conceptual article (the fourth in order of appearance) invites us to decolonize the study of musical practices by adopting an interdisciplinary approach combining formal and phenome-

²⁰ The German sociologist and musicologist interpreted mass consumerism, which boomed in the United States in the second half of the 20th century, as a refined instrument of domination, arguing that behind the veil of a potential democratization of the access and use of information and knowledge, these new articulations of culture in fact hide insidious forms of domination.

nological analysis with an ethnography attentive to other perceptions of reality, in order to account for local ontologies and different ways of feeling and thinking about the world. In focusing on the inhabitants of the Caroline Islands of Micronesia, the ethnomusicologist reveals how songs and dances occupy a central position in learning processes. Sound, the body and the vibrations set off by melodies participate, like verbal language, in the acquisition of knowledge and memory. Abels also establishes a strong connection between the local concept of *etak* (a local form of navigation based on a specific way of perceiving the environment) and music, since both are relational practices involving knowledge about ourselves and others, human and non-human.

Several of these suggestions also appear in the above-mentioned works by Fellezs and Tamisari. The ethnomusicologist Fellezs, in his ethnographic immersion in indigenous contexts, deconstructs certain colonial imaginaries about Hawaii conveyed by specific performances. In particular, radical participation in musical practices allows Fellez to reconsider the aesthetic ideal of the «nahenahe»²¹, i.e. the melodiousness of Hawaiian commercial music, usually classified under the label of «soft music» and contrasted with more «hard», «aggressive» and «virile» styles. His research challenges Western stereotypes that associate the softness of this musical genre with weakness and passivity and lead to reading the “pacific” attitudes of indigenous peoples as a sign of docility and submission. For Fellezs, however, this type of Hawaiian music is a form of expression deeply connected to the practices of sovereignty and anti-colonial struggle, and not merely a sweet and seductive sound directed at tourist consumption. The anthropologist Tamisari highlights the fundamental role of musical performances and practices in the processes of learning and transmission of knowledge addressed to the young Yolngu generations as well as to the non-indigenous communities of the region. The Wurrinyga Band’s popular songs, just like the Yolngu ceremonial songs, represent for Tamisari a space for communication, imagination and sharing of experiences, as well as language and values deeply connected to the land, to people’s psycho-physical well-being and to history.

The relationship between music and cognitive processes is also explored in Ammann’s contribution, which, in line with the studies of Steven Feld (1982) and Keith Basso (1996) and those presented here by Tamisari,

²¹ A Kanaka Maoli term generally translated as «soft», «sweet», or «melodious».

dwells on the links between sound and sentiment, and between music and land. For Ammann, a performance cannot be fully understood without taking into account its emotional and spiritual aspects, a deeply experienced universe of meaning and significance connected with ancestors and history. In traditional Melanesian songs and dances, the past and the present are intimately entangled, offering social actors the chance to «be transferred to mythical times», to experience the connection with invisible forces and finally to acquire genealogical knowledge and understanding.

Francesco Lattanzi's subsequent article about the entanglement of traditional songs, new performances and the «return of the heroes» in the Islands of French Polynesia society takes a similar position. In this case, the analysis of the texts of the performances staged in some recent festivals (such as the *Heiva* in Tahiti) makes it possible to retrace the role of music in historical processes and its relationship with power and memory, revealing not only forgotten stories of colonial violence and resistance, but also conflicts and internal divisions that have crossed and still mark this world of islands.

«Intellectuals in reverse» and *engagés* researchers

Many contributions to this volume address the issue, widely discussed in both anthropology and ethnomusicology debates, of the role of the researcher in the field and his or her commitment to the struggles for emancipation of the peoples with whom he or she interacts. Behind the artistic and musical performances in Oceania described so far, there is a universe composed by multiple connections and links that include the stories and biographies of pacific-islander scholars as well as of many anthropologists, ethnomusicologists and artists *engagés* who have dealt with these realities, often remaining completely involved. In some situations, they have used the resources of the Western world (the music industry and its technologies) or simply their own artistic talents (Saura & Levy 2013) to support the indigenous cause, to which their contribution gives an international dimension. As Steven Feld has shown, sometimes the simple act of valorizing music is an essentially political act in certain (post)colonial contexts, transforming the fieldworkers into «musical activists» (Feld 2003: 39). At the same time, listening to the other person and to the soundscape in which he or she is immersed is an important condition for entering into other cultural categories of specific forms of life (Ricci 2016). This attitude

can transition to playing together and has brought several scholars to participate in artistic and musical projects by participating in performances or as members of local bands. In these cases, sound, hearing and their own bodies have been used both as vectors through which to build a connection in the field and as means of «understanding reality» in its constant transformations (Feld 1982; Stern 2016; Tamisari 2018)²².

Such commitments and participation in processes of identity, as well as involvement in local cultural policies, are well exemplified by the concluding article in this issue of *L'Uomo*, where Beaudet's ethnography reveals his decision to situate himself in a relationship of reciprocity and responsibility with his interlocutors, upsetting the canonical equilibrium to the point of questioning his own role as a researcher. Following and expanding on these suggestions, it seems particularly fruitful to try to trace a connection with the political and educational efforts made in the 1950s and 1970s by a number of intellectuals and scholars interested in popular culture in Italy, combining ethical-political commitment with a new vision of the social sciences and history, a commitment that consisted primarily in «giving voice» to the subaltern classes and creating, through their memories and cultural productions, a new history «from below».

According to the historian Gianni Bosio, who in those years was working on the relationship between Italian popular culture and the *engagé* research milieu, the magnetophone represented an innovative and fundamental tool for combining such spaces as well as an emblem of the transformation of relationships in the field. This almost “magical” recording medium, which exponentially increased the possibilities of documentation and democratized the production of knowledge, not only made it possible to effectively give voice to the working classes but also encouraged the intellectual to listen to and learn from them, thus reversing the canonical relationship between “high” and “popular” culture. As Fabio Dei points out, the image of the «*intellettuale rovesciato*», the «intellectual in reverse», providing the title to one of Gianni Bosio's main collections of essays, perfectly expresses the attempt to redefine the relationship between the researcher and his or her interlocutors, bringing to the fore the creative and cognitive power of subaltern productions (Dei 2018: 26). The relationship

²² It should be mentioned that in these domains, the concept of “field” has also extended to the web, which provides an interesting alternative space for transmitting musical messages of solidarity with indigenous struggles (Webb-Gannon & Webb 2019).

established between Beaudet and the Kanak political cadres is an example of the overturning of the ethnologist-native relationship in the Oceanian context, transforming the ethnomusicologist into a «heritage technician» with the task of recording, on his equipment, the immaterial culture and also the task of transmitting his skills to the indigenous (Beaudet 2017)²³.

Narratives of intense “militant” ethnographies that gave rise to grassroots forms of cultural and political engagement and collaboration, such as those experienced by Beaudet, do not often receive sufficient attention in Oceanian scientific literature. Our volume is meant to open up to the analysis of such experiences, both individual and collective, with the conviction that this may allow us to reflect deeply on the attempt to find more horizontal and less hegemonic ethnographic practices. We have chosen to focus on the islands of Oceania, hoping to overcome the geographical and linguistic boundaries within which the various archipelagos are set, which have often led scholars to narrate only some of these realities without grasping the many existing connections. By addressing the profound connections between music and politics in the processes of sovereignty in the Pacific Islands, this monographic issue aims to intensify the dialogue between anthropology and ethnomusicology, and also to link Anglophone and Francophone literary productions with some perspectives from Italian research - thus the choice to host articles in English, French and Italian. We seek to expand Pacific gazes and voices and, as with the musical phenomena we will be discussing, allow them to creatively contaminate each other.

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²³ In this regard, another well-known example is represented by the fieldwork of Alban Bensa in New Caledonia. In a climate of intense intellectual fervor, at the end of the 1970s the French anthropologist - moved by the desire «to see the Kanak people finally acknowledged in their complexity and greatness» (Mwà Vée 2002: 20) - together with several elderly Kanak speakers, set up a small research group called the «Académie paicé» that recorded and transcribed oral memory of a region in the north of Grande Terre, with the aim of constructing a first Kanak history “from below” (Bensa 1995, 2008; Gallo 2016).

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