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A Fresh Approach to Transculturation in Contemporary Music in Tahiti

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***Abstract** / Transculturation has been underway since the beginning of Western presence in French Polynesia, and it is now clear that syncretism and ‘borrowing’ practices were already present in the pre-contact Pacific Islands. Nevertheless, the global flow of culture has gradually intensified over time, and there is a need to examine recent expressions resulting from such processes. Further, it is worthwhile attempting to ascertain precisely what the role and condition of pre-contact material in contemporary creative life at the present time is. Focusing on the interactions occurring in this metaphorical “contact zone”, as defined by Mary-Louise Pratt (2007), and drawing on Marshall Sahlins’s theory of indigenisation of modernity (Sahlins 1993, Babadzan 2009) as well as the concept of localisation (Appadurai 1996, Diettrich, Moulin, and Webb 2011), this paper presents the outcomes of a fieldwork in Tahiti, French Polynesia in October 2013. The purpose is to attempt to understand the conditions of the interactions occurring at three levels – those of musical systems, material and conceptual tools, and socio-cultural practices – and to comprehend what and how these interactions contribute to musical change. After a brief outline of the specificities of contemporary Tahitian musical life and a discussion of the methodological tools employed, the study isolates three situations where transculturation processes occur: in the traditional musical idiom, in instrumentation and in transmission processes.*

Introduction

In speaking of music as both message and symbolic reality, Jean Molino notes that when transmitted music is modified, transformed and re-created.¹ This is equally true for the immediate relationships between musicians and their audiences, and for the transfer of a music from one culture to another. Musical change in the Pacific Islands was taking place long before there was a Western presence in the region.² Since the beginning of Westernisation however, sometimes dramatic cultural changes have come about. The intersection of trajectories between cultures in what Mary-Louise Pratt named the “contact zone” led to a strong metamorphosis of indigenous culture and music, in a context of “radical inequality” and “intractable conflict”.³ However, as Marshall Sahlins explained, this would not inexorably lead to the disappearance of

¹Jean Molino, Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Jonathan Goldman, *Le Singe Musicien: Essais De Sémiologie Et D'anthropologie De La Musique* (Arles: Actes sud, 2009), 123, 196-197.

² See Mervyn McLean, “Towards the Differentiation of Music Areas in Oceania”, *Anthropos* (1979): 717-36, and Roger Blench and Dendo Mallam, “Musical Instruments and Musical Practice as Markers of the Austronesian Expansion Post-Taiwan”, Paper presented at the 18th Congress of the Indo-pacific Prehistory Association (Manila: University of the Philippines, 2006).

³ Mary-Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2007), 8.

Geoffroy Colson

cultural specificities.⁴ Instead, it is possible that music, as an expressive form, contributes to the rewriting of modernity through “vernacular globalisation...in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern”.⁵ Specifically, artists follow a creative process that takes exogenous sounds and localises them by making alternations and adjustments that ‘personalise’ pieces and make them sound more familiar.⁶

In Tahiti, no recent in-depth studies have been undertaken on contemporary musical creations to address the question of musical change and creative dynamics in operation. As the global flow of culture has gradually intensified over time, there is a need to examine recent expressions resulting from such processes. The purpose of this study, in isolating three situations where transculturation processes occur, is to attempt to understand the conditions of the interactions, and to thereby comprehend how these interactions contribute to musical change. Drawing on the work of Jean-Marc Pambrun, a guiding question of this study is to ask whether it is possible that the “problematic forced coexistence of two incompatible cultural matrixes (the *Mā‘ohi* inspired tradition and the Western modernity)”, has produced particular creations and taken original paths in recent years.⁷

The Transcultural Approach

The abundance of terms used to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures, as well as the various meanings ascribed to them, reflects the difficulty involved in approaching the blurred boundaries of syncretic music and musical change. Yet, the transcultural approach appears to be an appropriate tool, as it is ideologically independent.⁸ It also presents the advantage of setting up a conceptual framework that embraces both a synchronic and diachronic perspective on the process resulting from musical intercultural contact. It focuses not only on the processes of acquisition or loss

⁴ Alain Babadzan, *Le Spectacle De La Culture: Globalisation Et Traditionalismes En Océanie* (Paris: L'Harmattan. Connaissance des Hommes, 2009), 170. “Marshall Sahlins’ thesis of the indigenisation of modernity aims at refuting the idea, widely shared, including among anthropologists, that modernisation process would lead to the disappearance of the cultural specificities of non-Western societies, even to their own disappearance” (Translation by author).

⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4, 10.

⁶ Brian Diettrich, Jane Freeman Moulin and Michael Webb, *Music in Pacific Island Cultures: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁷ Jean-Marc Tera'itetuatini Pambrun, *Les voies de la tradition* (Le Manuscrit, 2008), 103. *Mā‘ohi* is the Tahitian term by which French Polynesians refer to themselves.

⁸ Shay Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition* (University of Rochester Press, 2011), 6. In the Western context of his study, Loya recalls how “nationalist narratives tend to invent ways of reading cultures that emphasize mythic, timeless qualities, and obscure the messy realities of cultural mixing, especially in multiethnic regions”.

of cultural features, but also on the creative processes and the emergence of new idioms.⁹

Furthermore, a pre-condition of establishing an efficient way of dealing with syncretic musical forms in Tahiti is to avoid considering traditional forms and acculturated forms as distinct entities. As Allan Thomas explains, “[n]ative musicians seldom make absolute distinctions between traditional and acculturated forms, so that ethnomusicologists, by pursuing only historic survivals, could be seen in this field to be promoting a division and value judgment of their own making”.¹⁰ Jane Moulin confirms Thomas’s point, advising that ‘a firm knowledge of historical practice, the replication of known compositions from the past, and a concern with ‘authenticity’ are simply not important to many Tahitians in defining their culture”.¹¹ Along similar lines, Pambrun stated in 2005 that the position of many Western thinkers, who consider the act of creation to be opposed to tradition and thereby disrupted from the past, is also an ideological and intellectual trap for traditional communities.¹² Accordingly, the intention here is not to erect an artificial fence where one is not needed, nor to discuss the hypothetical ‘purity’ or ‘authenticity’ of music. Rather, I will consider the various genres of contemporary music and music-making contexts in Tahiti as a coherent system resulting from a historical continuum, blossoming in various forms and expressions.

Understanding the Tahitian Cultural Context

Knowledge of pre-contact music in Tahiti is limited.¹³ What is known is that musical instruments included the *pahu* (skin drums of various sizes, beaten with sticks or by hand), the *vivo* (nose flute), the *pū* (conch trumpet) and the *ihara* (a gong made of bamboo), all of which are still in use in traditional performances.¹⁴ Other instruments

⁹ Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo Cubano Del Tabaco Y El Azúcar*, vol. 42 (Fundacion Biblioteca Ayacuch, 1987), 96. See also Margaret J. Kartomi, “The Processes and Results of Musical Culture Contact: A Discussion of Terminology and Concepts”, *Ethnomusicology* 25, no. 2 (1981).

¹⁰ Allan Thomas, “The Study of Acculturated Music in Oceania: ‘Cheap and Tawdry Borrowed Tunes’?”, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 90, no. 2 (1981): 184.

¹¹ Jane Freeman Moulin, “What’s Mine Is Yours? Cultural Borrowing in a Pacific Context”, *The Contemporary Pacific* 8, no. 1 (1996): 145.

¹² Pambrun, *Les Voies De La Tradition*, 180. “Western thought has often valued the relationship between tradition and creation in terms of opposition between ‘ancients and moderns’, as if creation would entail a radical break with the past, which constitutes, according to me, an ideological and intellectual trap set for indigenous communities to make them abandon their customs. In fact, everything depends on the conception of creation we have: a break with the past or a renewal from it” (Translation by author).

¹³ For further reading about pre-contact Tahitian society, see Teuira Henry and John M. Orsmond, *Ancient Tahiti*, vol. 48 (Kraus Reprint, 1928), Edmond de Bovis, *Tahitian Society before the Arrival of the Europeans* (Hawaii: Brigham Young University), 1976) and Douglas L. Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1974).

¹⁴ For more information on pre-contact instruments, see Manfred Kelkel, *A La Découverte De La Musique Polynésienne Traditionnelle* (Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France, 1981), 31-54. In this article, I adopt the Tahitian spelling recommended by the *Académie Tahitienne*, except for names passed in Western vernacular language (e.g. ukulele).

occasionally mentioned by Manfred Kelkel and Douglas Oliver are the castanets, the musical bow and various types of whistles.¹⁵ The *tō'ere* or log drum, which is extensively used in contemporary Tahitian drum dances, is mentioned in the early times of the contact but may have been introduced in the late 18th century from the Cook Islands to the Society Islands.¹⁶

Fundamentally linked to dance, music was predominantly vocal and conferred a secondary role to the musical instruments. Important vocal features included psalmody, overlapping, a narrow scale range, the importance of timbre and expressive deformations, and the regular use of fortissimo to generate intensity. It is not clearly established whether polyphony existed in Tahiti before Western contact; however, Raymond Mesplé makes the hypothesis of the pre-existence of “plurilinear processes” in multipart singing.¹⁷

According to Kelkel, the Polynesian conception of music is ruled by a “principle of articulation...a rule of polarity that the musician seeks to integrate in an upper level unit”.¹⁸ Antiphony, primary and secondary rhythmic patterns, the opposition of singing and instrumental accompaniment, of melodic progression and drone are features still present in contemporary music that may also have characterised pre-contact music.

Colonisation and missionisation in Tahiti had a brisk and enormous impact, as reported by historian and mythologist, Robert D. Craig.¹⁹ As early as in 1855, Edmond de Bovis himself stated that a few decades after the instauration of the *Code Pomare* (1819) -- a legislation that in particular forbade traditional music and dance performances -- the impact was evident. He noted: “hardly anything remains of the ancient culture and language [...] the present generation no longer knows anything of its ancestors”.²⁰ The contemporary musical landscape embeds the history of the cultural changes that have come about since the beginning of Westernisation, including those of more contemporary times. Since 1945, the colonisation process in Tahiti has brought about fast economic growth that lead to the availability and affordability of non-traditional instruments. The development of modern communication means in the 1960s accelerated the acculturation process.

In the 1950s, a spontaneous artistic movement relating to traditional culture arose. Embodied by Madeleine Mouā, leader of the traditional dance group Heiva

¹⁵ Manfred Kelkel, *A La Découverte De La Musique Polynésienne Traditionnelle* (Paris: Publications orientalistes de France, 1981); Douglas L Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society*, vol. 3 (University Press of Hawaii Honolulu, 1974).

¹⁶ Helen Reeves Lawrence, “Is the “Tahitian” Drum Dance Really Tahitian? Re-Evaluating the Evidence for the Origins of Contemporary Polynesian Drum Dance,” *Yearbook for traditional music* (1992).

¹⁷ Raymond Mesplé, *Les Hîmene En Polynésie Française* (Université Lyon 2, 1986):188. According to Mesplé, these processes are “primitive forms of polyphony” [translation by author] as they don’t refer to the vertical harmony developed by Western musical theory.

¹⁸ Kelkel, *A La Découverte De La Musique Polynésienne Traditionnelle*, 109.

¹⁹ Robert D. Craig, Preface to de Bovis, *Tahitian Society before the Arrival of the Europeans*, i.

²⁰ Ibid.

formed in 1956, the movement gained institutional support from organisations which emphasised cultural identity as a heritage, without contentious political value.²¹ In the 1970s, intellectuals from the Protestant community initiated a cultural revival movement, calling for a return to Polynesian culture and customs. These leaders theorised the concept of *Mā'ohi* identity, as discussed below.²²

Today, contemporary artistic genres in Tahiti comprise a variety of forms. These include *'ori Tahiti* (Tahitian dance), *'orero* (oratory art), and *hīmene* (traditional singing), which are all displayed during the *Heiva* as well as other traditional arts competitions.²³ In addition, Tahitians sing and play string band songs, religious songs (either Protestant or Catholic), popular music derived from Western genres, jazz and Western art music. Cultural institutions, associations, producers and independent musicians promote casual or regular performances, in touristic infrastructures or in public cultural facilities.

'Ori Tahiti includes four basic genres, *ōte'a*, *pā'ō'ā*, *hivināu*, and *'aparima*.²⁴ *Ōte'a* is a drum-accompanied dance where men and women dance separately.²⁵ It features duple and quadratic metre and, as discussed below uses characteristic rhythmic cells types. *Pā'ō'ā* and *hivināu* are mixed male-female group dances where solo recitation alternates with unison answer by the group and *'aparima* is a storytelling dance featuring expressive hand movements, accompanied by guitars, ukuleles and the bass drum, *tariparau*. Harmonically, the musicians provide a Westernised tonal background to the dance.

Choral singing comes in a variety of forms and features an equal heterogeneity of songs.²⁶ A cappella *hīmene tārava* and *hīmene rū'au* are syncretic genres derived from the missionary songs. Other genres include *hīmene nota*, clearly non-indigenous four-part singing, and *hīmene puta*, which are written religious songs. The *'ūtē* song genre consists of a main melody performed alternately by one or two singers. It is sustained by a sung ostinato and accompanied by guitars and ukuleles, sometimes

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bruno Saura has extensively investigated the history and the specificities of this cultural revival. See Bruno Saura, *Tahiti Mā'ohi: Culture, Identité, Religion Et Nationalisme En Polynésie Française* (Au vent des îles, 2008).

²³ The *Heiva i Tahiti* is an annual celebration that starts in late June and continues through mid-July, which features many different kinds of activities, among them traditional music and dance competitions. In this article the term *Heiva*, when non-italicised, refers to the Madeleine Mouā's dance group.

²⁴ The reader will find further details in Adrienne Kaeppler and Jacob W Love, *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: Australia and the Pacific Islands* (New York: Garland Pub., 1998).

²⁵ Contemporary drum ensemble instruments include the *tō'ere* (log drum played with one stick), the *tariparau* (double-membrane bass drum), the *fa'atete* (short one-head drum played with two sticks), the *pahu tupa'i rima* (tall one-headed hand-struck drum) and the *ihara* (see page 5).

²⁶ For further reading about *hīmene* in Tahiti, see Mesplé, *Les Hīmene En Polynésie Française* and Raymond Mesplé, *Hymnologie Protestante Et Acculturation Musicale À Tahiti Et En Imerina (Madagascar)* (Université de la Réunion, 1995).

Geoffroy Colson

including the *vivo* and percussion. Early twentieth versions also include the accordion or the harmonica.

Contemporary traditional art is highly creative. In the 1980s when the revival of traditional culture was just beginning, Tahitian writer Turo Raapoto was already prefiguring the theory of the “*reformulation permanente*” developed in New Caledonia by Jean-Marie Tjibaou:²⁷

We are not preaching a return to the past; there are always retrograde minds eager to accuse. If the imagination can be defined as the faculty to create something new from something old, then it is our duty to understand, to become impregnated with our past, our culture, our language, to create a new world in our image and in our dimension.²⁸

However, points of view differ about the pros and the cons of tradition and modernity in both ensemble leaders and the audience.²⁹ This reflects the debate on constructions of cultural identity, which oscillates between two poles. The first comprises an essentialist vision constructed through the *Mā‘ohi* identity, which valorises “objective elements perceived as the essence of a group”.³⁰ The second is marked by a constructivist approach to identity where Polynesian-ness is the result of “a collective dynamic construction if not a personal choice”.³¹ Jean-Marc Tera‘itetuatini Pambrun aspires to conciliate this dichotomy as follows:

For some people, tradition – this entity arisen from primitive times rejected by the Gospels – remains suspect, even heretic. For others, creation – this new being brought from outside which would come and threaten an indigenous culture which authenticity is hardly attested – disturbs and worries (...) It is not about privileging tradition vis-à-vis creation, or vice-versa, but it is about how can we let them thrive and make them live together in the same space of cultural expression, where *Mā‘ohi* identity can be not only preserved but also enriched by its own creations.³²

²⁷ Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Alban Bensaand Éric Wittersheim, *La Présence Kanak* (Editions O. Jacob, 1996).

²⁸ Turo Raapoto (1980), as quoted and translated in Robert Nicole, “Resisting Orientalism: Pacific Literature in French”, *Inside out: Literature, cultural politics, and identity in the new Pacific*, no. 119 (1999): 275.

²⁹ Saura, *Tahiti Mā‘ohi: Culture, Identité, Religion Et Nationalisme En Polynésie Française*, 384. ‘[T]he debate between tradition and modernity continuously shakes both ensemble leaders and the audience, some denouncing the restriction risks threatening Tahitian dance, others, on the contrary, the loss of its identity due to too many borrowings. (Translation by author).

³⁰ Translation by author.

³¹ Saura, *Tahiti Mā‘ohi: Culture, Identité, Religion Et Nationalisme En Polynésie Française*, 45.

³² Pambrun, *Les Voies De La Tradition*, 177 (Translation by author).

A Fresh Approach to Transculturation in Contemporary Music in Tahiti

The analysis of the factors underpinning the creativity in the Tahitian musical system, of its meaning and reasons, particularly in its relations with elements resulting from intercultural contact will bring further elements to better comprehend the way contemporary artistic life embodies the balance between tradition and creation as described by Pambrun, and the way *Mā'ohi* cultural identity is also an on-going construction.

Fieldwork

Over a six week period in September and October 2013, I undertook extensive fieldwork on the island of Tahiti. The study aims to gain a better understanding of the musical practices and their cultural context, to comprehend processes through which pre-European contact music forms transform to 'become' contemporary music and to identify compositional processes employed in contemporary indigenous music making.

The fieldwork took place between the Pā'ea and Papeno'ō districts, including the urban area of Pape'ete (see Figure 1). My activities included interviewing indigenous and non-indigenous musicians and ensemble leaders as well as key informants in the indigenous cultural sector. I participated in music making with the aim of learning musical systems and identifying compositional processes employed in contemporary indigenous music making. Where possible, I made recordings of music making in various contexts: informal performances in public areas, religious ceremonies, music and dance rehearsals, on-stage performances, teaching situations, individual performances and private demonstrations I requested.

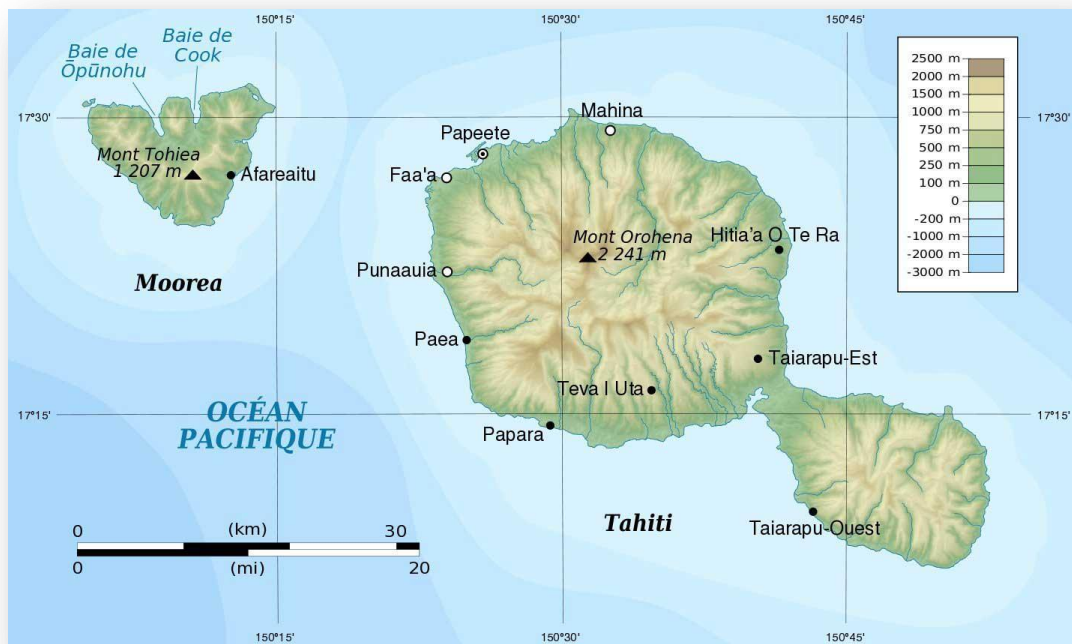


Figure 1 Map of Tahiti Island
(Supplied by NASA Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SWBD, SRTM3 v.2), public domain).

The study adopts the ‘performing observer’ method, where the ethnomusicologist learns to play in order to obtain access to a more in-depth and intimate understanding of the aesthetics and creativity of the music. To this end, I attended lessons on ukulele and traditional percussion at the Conservatoire Artistique de Polynésie Française in Pape‘ete.³³ I was also able to learn from other experts in traditional music.

Following the well-tried methodological framework proposed by Arom, I examined three types of situations where processes of transculturation occur.³⁴ Arom’s representation of a musical system consists of interactive concentric circles of data. In this study, the inner circle of the musical corpus and its system is exemplified by the artistic production of a traditional dance ensemble. Instrumentation and terminologies illustrate the second circle, which comprises the material and conceptual tools related to music. The third circle encompasses the socio-cultural conditions of the music activity, which is exemplified by the transmission processes in the traditional idiom. Finally, the poietic level typifies the fourth, outer circle of the general symbolism.³⁵

Innovation in ‘Ori Tahiti

Understanding the music making context in Tahiti requires acknowledging the overriding importance of the *Heiva* to musical life. The competitive context of the *Heiva*, as well as the financial incentive of its prize and the prestige it confers on the winners, is particularly stimulating for traditional music and dance groups. The great annual celebration rules cultural life throughout the year for traditional music and dance ensembles, whether through the intense involvement required from its participants and the personal consequences for the artists, or through the artistic impact on subsequent performances. Despite the instrumental and stylistic restrictions imposed by the competition’s regulations, the groups show evidence of impressive creativity in dance, music and costumes and reflect the various schools of music and dance practice in Tahiti, from those claiming to be representative of the genuine Tahitian spirit and style (e.g. *Tamariki Poerani*), to those aiming at overtaking the limits of traditional dance (e.g. *Manahau*).

The purpose of this article is to point out some transcultural elements in the musical system of the ‘*ote‘a* genre, and to connect the musical system characteristics with the poietic aspects. One of the most obvious features, easily identifiable through a number of traditional groups performances, is the extensive use of rhythmic cells derived from Latin-American music. For example, notable dancer and ensemble leader, Libor Prokop said he introduced, probably for the first time, rhythms he described as

³³ Referred to as Conservatoire Artistique in the remaining sections of this article.

³⁴ Simha Arom, “Nouvelles Perspectives Dans La Description Des Musiques De Tradition Orale,” *Revue de musicologie* 68, no. 1/2 (1982): 198-212. See also : Molino, Nattiez, and Goldman, *Le Singe Musicien: Essais De Sémiologie Et D'anthropologie De La Musique*, 215.

³⁵ Poietic process, as define by Molino, refers to the process of creation. See Molino, Nattiez, and Goldman, *Le Singe Musicien: Essais De Sémiologie Et D'anthropologie De La Musique*, 215.

“bolero” in the Heikura Nui musical arrangements.³⁶ As usual when an innovation meets success in the dance groups, imitation spread virally among the other groups. In addition, the basic rhythm cell, or *pehe*, played by the percussion instruments and called *Samba* is well known and widely used by *tō‘ere* players (see Figure 2 and Video 1). However, it is currently unknown when this rhythmic pattern could have been introduced in the repertoire. Similarly, Video 2 shows a short excerpt of a Manahau rehearsal, in which the percussion arrangement incorporates a rhythm pattern derived from a *salsa 3-2 clave* rhythm.

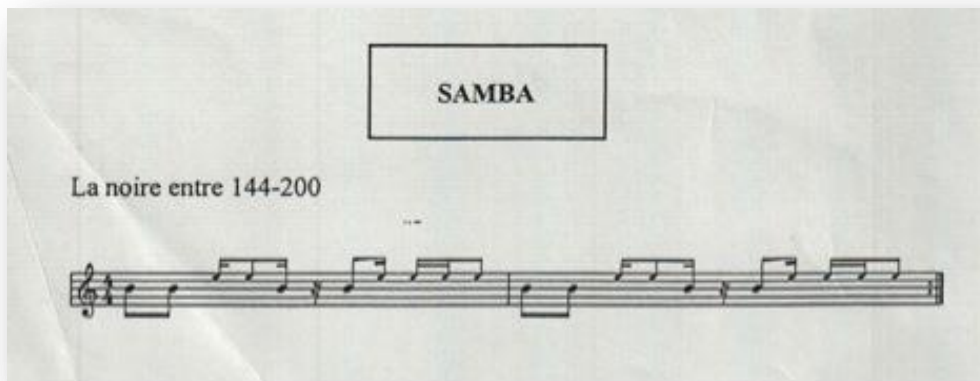
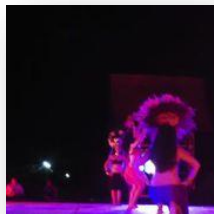


Figure 2 *Pehe Samba*, as transcribed by Stephane Rossoni in S. Rossoni., and R Taae, “Relevés De Cellules Rythmiques (*Tō‘ere*)” (Conservatoire Artistique Territorial, 1998).



Video 1
Traditional dance group Nonahere performing
at the 11th Festival of Pacific Arts, Honiara,
Solomon Islands, July 2012.



Video 2
Manahau ensemble in rehearsal in
Faa‘a, September 2013.

Videos supplied by author.

³⁶ During personal communication with this author on 24 September 2013, Libor Prokop stated: “We did experiences with ternary rhythms, and...I tried to support this on percussion. [...] What you can listen as ternary in the percussion music, for example the bolero, ...I have developed this concept” (Translation by author). Libor Prokop was a dancer in the group *Temaeva* and then the *ra‘atira* (ensemble leader) for Heikura Nui from 1993 to 1996.

Among the contemporary traditional dance ensembles, the group Manahau has been appreciated – and sometimes criticised – for its particularly well-developed ability to incorporate non-Polynesian elements in its creations. In the last decade, Manahau has recorded four CDs containing music composed in collaboration with two French musicians teaching at the Conservatoire Artistique. In 2004, the group performed the musical *Les Noces de Manahau*, in which a seventy-musician symphonic orchestra and choir performed with traditional instruments.

Manahau’s creations exemplify the way cultural shifts in the poietic processes resonate in the performance. As Figure 3 illustrates, symbolism dominates the construction of traditional dance performances, which are fundamentally narratives. In contemporary performances, however, Manahau’s leader, Jean-Marie Biret makes the following point:

I don’t use the ancient gestures, apart from when I constrain myself to keep some in order to stay ‘at home’, because the stories I tell and my vocabulary don’t fit with the ancient stories. It is not about the ocean, it’s about balance, harmony, things like that [...] Things we wouldn’t have spoken about in the ancient times. So I have to create new attitudes, new gestures.³⁷

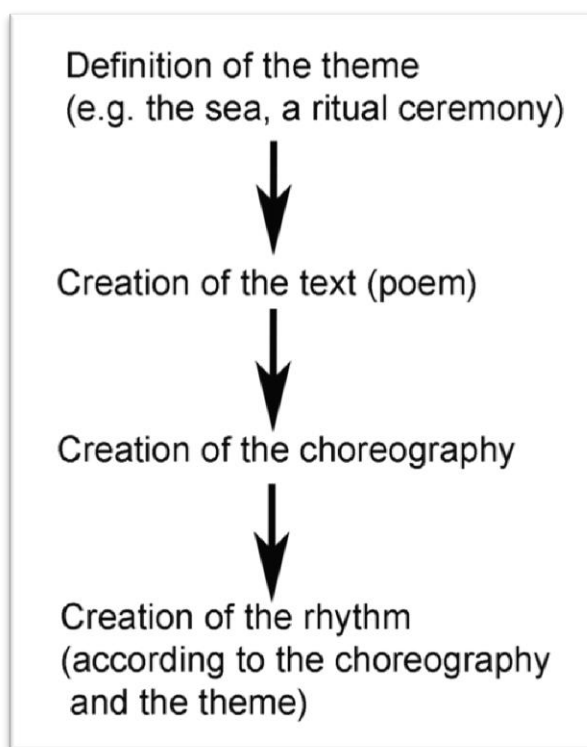


Figure 3 Creation process in traditional dance groups in D. Raapoto, *La musique polynésienne au Collège*, 1996 (Translation by author).

³⁷ By “ancient gestures” Biret means the codified movement in *’ori Tahiti* (Jean-Marie Biret, Personal Communication, 9 September 2013 (Translation by author)).

A Fresh Approach to Transculturation in Contemporary Music in Tahiti

Jean-Marie Biret grew up in New Caledonia, eventually moving to Tahiti, his mother's home. His multicultural profile and his lack of command of the Tahitian language impacts on the creative processes of his performances. He says:

I write in French because if I had to do it in Tahitian, my vocabulary would have been too poor, and I could not have expressed my thoughts. And my thoughts, maybe very Westernised, I don't know, obliged my Tahitian-speaking partners to express things that don't exist in the Tahitian thinking. [...] Some have even invented words, or said things with the help of images because there was not the equivalent in Tahitian.³⁸

It is clear that in the case of Manahau, the transcultural personal experience of the leader directly influences the syntax of his creations, whether in the dance movements, in the music or in the themes chosen by Jean-Marie Biret. Nevertheless, Manahau creations remain deeply rooted in tradition. These regularly refer to traditional instruments, musical syntax and dance movements. In addition, the intention Jean-Marie Biret puts into his performances correlates to what Pambrun refers to as immemorial depth, rooted in spirituality.³⁹ In a way, Manahau's work exemplifies the manner in which the "[i]nteraction between human beings, collaborations, [and] the true knowledge of the Other" generates stunning innovation and creation.⁴⁰ In addition, in terms of Henri Hiro's ideal regarding the interactions between different cultures, the results can be understood positively as comprising a constructive dialogue between the cultures.⁴¹

Another recent evolution has also appeared in the conception of the performances. In the 1990s, choirs began to appear with the dance ensembles such as O Tahiti E. In the 2000s, *Les Grands Ballets de Tahiti* performed a series of musicals. The first in the series was *Tabu*, staged in 2001, which featured stylised forms of traditional dance. With reference to the musical, choreographer Lorenzo Schmidt declared "it is not folklore anymore, it is art. One may not appreciate it, but art also wills to puzzle".⁴² The second musical *Nui Terre des Dieux* (2006), was described by the same choreographer as "a dance show that aims at being universal and where emotion prevails".⁴³ Anthropologist Bruno Saura saw in these performances the expression of an ever increasing break from traditional dance. In such cases, he advises, the main

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Pambrun, *Les Voies De La Tradition*.

⁴⁰ Simha Arom, Simha Arom and Denis-Constant Martin, "Combiner Les Sons Pour RéInventer Le Monde," *L'Homme* n° 177-178(2006), 163.

⁴¹ Hiro was a Tahitian intellectual thinker and protagonist of the cultural revival in the 1970s and 1980s. He stated: "[C]ultures have to meet. I refuse to think in terms of opposing things, opposing colors: harmony also lies in contrast" (Translation by author). Henri Hiro, *Pehepehe I Taù Nunaa* (Tahiti: Haere Po, 2004), 83.

⁴² Lorenzo Schmidt, *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, Septembre 4, 2001, 27 in Bruno Saura, *Tahiti Mā'ohi: Culture, Identité, Religion Et Nationalisme En Polynésie Française*, 386 (Translation by author).

⁴³ Lorenzo Schmidt, *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, September 2, 2006, 17 and 387 (Translation by author).

motivation for innovative ensembles is not the protection and the transmission of cultural heritage, but rather a desire “to position themselves inside their culture, to favour the search for personal fulfilment, and for the acknowledgement of the audience”.⁴⁴ In the case of the performances of *Les Grands Ballets de Tahiti*, the creators target the tastes of a Western audience rather than those of the local population by drawing on local traditions without feeling any obligation to be constrained by them. In doing so, the dance group bring to the international audience a personalized, re-created vision of the Tahitian cultural heritage. By contrast, other ensembles such as Temaeva choose to focus the narrative on local contemporary issues, using Western-derived accessories such as umbrellas, tins, and even motorcycles in their shows.⁴⁵ In each case, the manner in which a performance is constructed is highly influenced by the target audience as well as the kind of message delivered.

In the end, these examples show how ‘*ori Tahiti* can become the ground from which a conception of local art develops far beyond traditional canons. These innovations can be perceived as provocative for some Tahitians whose notions regarding traditional value have been disturbed; however, it is undisputable that these performances participate, even as single experiences, in the construction of contemporary indigenous aesthetics and the Tahitian cultural landscape.

Instruments and Terminologies

In this section, I explore the way transculturation processes pervade the circle of the material and conceptual tools defined by Arom. These are respectively the musical instruments (tuning, resources and limits, and playing techniques) and the terminologies applied to the units articulating the musical discourse and to the repertoires.

Some instruments from exogenous origin have been present in the music for so long that they are considered as ‘traditional’, whether their shape has undergone transformations (e.g. the *tariparau*, deriving from the European bass drum, and the ukulele) or not (guitar, accordion, harmonica). The ‘localisation’ process embodied by the Tahitian ukulele is a striking example. It derives from the Hawaiian ‘*ukulele*, itself a variation of the Portuguese *braguinha*, the shape, structure, and tuning of which have been significantly altered.⁴⁶ As seen in Video 5, a second set of strings has been added, and the tuning (G4-C5-E5-A4) is different from the Hawaiian ‘*ukulele*, the four inner strings (C and E) being tuned one octave higher. Rare versions of the instrument have two sets of 6 strings.

Among other inclusions in contemporary music ensembles in Tahiti, the harmonica and the accordion are two instruments whose presence in French Polynesia have been attested to since the nineteenth century, and are sometimes still included in sung genres (see Video 3). More recently, djembes and congas have been occasionally

⁴⁴ Saura, *Tahiti Mā‘ohi: Culture, Identité, Religion Et Nationalisme En Polynésie Française*, 387-8.

⁴⁵ Temaeva conducted by Coco Hotahota, as reported by Fabien Dinard and Frédéric Rossoni. Personal communication, 6 and 26 September 2013.

⁴⁶ The Hawaiian ‘*ukulele* is also named *kamaka* in Tahiti after a particular brand.

A Fresh Approach to Transculturation in Contemporary Music in Tahiti

included in the percussion section (see Figure 4). Original arrangements can also include electrified classical instruments, such as the violoncello (see Figure 5). Accessory percussion instruments such as maracas (see Figure 6) and spoons (shaken in a bottle of the local beer, *Hinano*) often accompany string band music.



Figure 4 Toa 'Ura group drums and percussion set: djembes, conga, Tahitian *pahu tupa'i rima*. Showcase during the "Salon du Tourisme" (Tourism expo), September 2013, Pape'ete. Photo supplied by author.

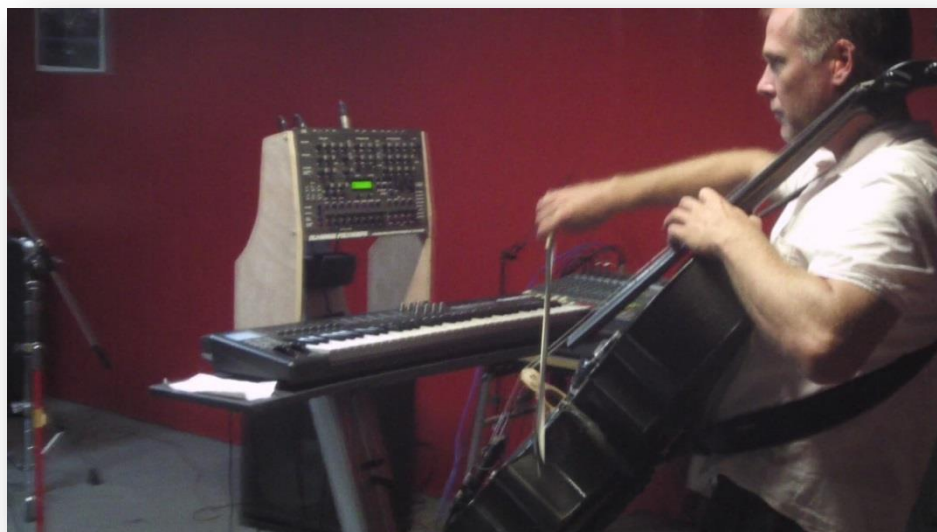
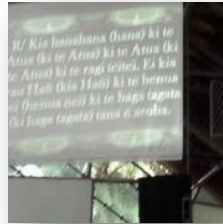


Figure 5 Electrified cello in Tikahiri group, *pa'umotu*⁴⁷ Rock, in rehearsal in Faa'a. Photo supplied by author.

⁴⁷ From *Tuāmotu* Islands.



Video 3
String band Kahitia Nau Nau performing at the Pape‘ete market. A small PA system plays a pre-recorded accordion part. Film supplied by author.



Video 4
Hymn at the Maria No Te Hau church Sunday mass, Pape‘ete. Filmed by author.



Video 5
Ukulele solo in Kahitia Nau Nau showcase in “Rayons Zik X” television program, Polynésie 1ère (2012), Producer: Zik Prod, Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHRb_bwTeJw.



Figure 6 String band in the Pape‘ete city centre. Photo supplied by author.

Other musical genres, including string band music played during the *bringues* (private parties) or in the streets, religious songs performed in Catholic churches (see Video 4), and contemporary popular music can occasionally employ the electric bass, guitars, arranger keyboards, and the Western drum set (see Figure 4). The introduction of Western harmonic instruments tuned in equal temperament have had important implications on the musical system, for example the stabilization of pitch for singers, or the extensive use of the tonal system in sung genres, such as *‘aparima*, *‘ūtē* or the string band repertoire. However, music-making contexts influence the orchestration: the ukulele holds a central role in traditional genres and *bringue* music, but no evidence has

A Fresh Approach to Transculturation in Contemporary Music in Tahiti

been found of the ukulele in religious musical contexts. Conversely, electric keyboards and synthesisers are widely used in the latter but are not included in traditional art genres.

Another determining factor in the evolution of the pitch and timbre in Tahitian music is the use of contemporary power tools in instrument making. The use of chainsaws has had an effect on the timbre of the *tō'ere*, as they make it easier to carve larger logs. In recent years, the height and diameter of *tō'ere* have increased, producing a lower, deeper sound and thus enriching the sonic palette of the percussion section. Occasionally, modern materials replace traditional ones in the making of traditional instruments. However, this does not have a striking influence on the instruments' timbre. For example, PVC⁴⁸ tubes are often used to make the *vivo* or the *pahu tupa'i rima*, and cooking gas bottles are used in the making of the *fa'atete*. Ultimately, progress in ukulele construction processes results in the supply of more versatile instruments which facilitate the development of virtuosic techniques. Ukulele players emulate one another during the newly created Hitia'a Ukulele Festival (2010), and showcase their distinctive nervous and rapid strumming technique. Video 7 shows the very specific *pa'umotu* guitar and ukulele strumming.

Styles, dance movements and rhythmic patterns of the traditional art repertoire mostly receive Tahitian designations. However, some Tahitian names such as *hīmene* (songs) and *hivināu* are localised forms of Western words. By contrast, the terminology associated with guitar and ukulele strumming patterns, usually deriving from non-indigenous measure divisions and beat accentuations, borrows non-Polynesian words: *foxtrot*, *valse*, *marche*, and *samba*, together with *pa'umotu* and Hawaiian names: respectively *kaina* and *hula*.



Video 6

Flute introduction in the December Gala at the *Conservatoire Artistique*. Pape'ete, 2012. Video supplied by *Conservatoire Artistique*.



Video 7

Spontaneous encounter between a traditional percussion ensemble and Alex Acuña, Peruvian drummer in the afro-Cuban jazz style, Pape'ete, 2013. Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fk9-YE_5PzM.

⁴⁸ Polyvinyl chloride.

This article has shown how transculturation can affect the orchestration and the associated musical terminologies, and thereby the musical system itself. But transculturation also happens through encounters between performers from various backgrounds, who meet for casual projects and generate new instrument combinations, such as Western flute and indigenous orchestra (see Video 6), or Western drums and indigenous percussion (see Video 7). Indigenous musicians cooperate with musicians from non-Tahitian musical backgrounds (e.g. a teacher in Western music at the Conservatoire Artistique or a well-known jazz drummer touring in Tahiti) towards a syncretic musical outcome.

Ultimately, many contemporary indigenous musicians learn both indigenous and Western musical systems and are able to perform equally well in either traditional ensembles or the Western popular music groups showcased in hotels, bars and restaurants. However, this kind of bi-musicality does not seem to have noticeable consequences on the repertoire concerned. Although traditional art genres deploy an extraordinary creative vitality, they remain very stable. One explanation for this stability may lie in the rules of the *Heiva* organisation committee, which excludes any recently introduced non-Polynesian instruments.

Socio-Cultural Contexts: A Focus on the Transmission Processes

In Tahiti, traditional arts are taught in numerous private schools and in private studios. However, the history of public institutions that have administered the teaching of music, including the Conservatoire Artistique and the Ministry of Education, provide a further rich resource for understanding contemporary music-making. Since its creation in 1979, the Conservatoire Artistique has developed a Department of Traditional Arts, in which *'orero* (poetry and oratory), *'ori Tahiti*, and traditional percussion, ukulele and guitar are taught. In parallel, since 1990, traditional music teaching in high schools has been formalised, entailing a specific training of the Music Education teachers. Additionally, *'orero*, which occasionally includes percussion, *vivo* and singing, is taught in primary schools and regularly gives way to oratory competitions.

In these institutions, the transmission processes have resulted in an ongoing shift towards Western methodologies. The *Conservatoire Artistique*, as Frédéric Cibard said, is a place with no equivalent in the Pacific, where Western and traditional arts are taught at the same level.⁴⁹ It represents a unique model of integration where indigenous and Western epistemologies meet under a single authority, with regularly scheduled interactions and intercultural crossovers. The success of the traditional arts section at the Conservatoire Artistique (comprising of approximately eight hundred students in 2013) illustrates the keen interest of the Tahitian population in the fundamentals of Tahitian culture.

The transcription of traditional rhythms in Western notation typifies the methodological shift. The variety of notation systems, illustrated here in the example of

⁴⁹ Frédéric Cibard, Personal communication, 5 September 2013.

A Fresh Approach to Transculturation in Contemporary Music in Tahiti

the basic pattern called *Pahae* (see Figure 7), denotes the differences in the conception of the rhythm. Video 8 shows the standard interpretation of this *pehe*, as taught today at the *Conservatoire Artistique*.

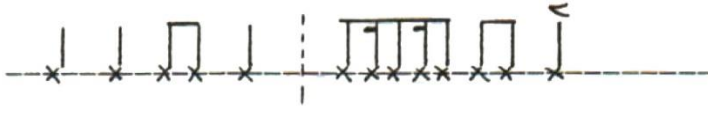

1.	<p>CTRDP – Ministry of Education, 1993.</p> 
2.	<p>Conservatoire Artistique. Stéphane Rossoni, 1997.</p> 
3.	<p>Conservatoire Artistique – Traditional Arts Department – Hans Faatauirā. 2010.</p> <p><i>Le Pahae. x4</i></p> <p>base. . . □ □ □ □ □ } ①</p> <p>pulsat² } ②</p> <p>sof. □ □ □ □ □ } ③</p> <p> = TA □ = TATA □ = TARA</p>
4.	<p>Conservatoire Artistique – Traditional Arts Department – Heremoana Urima, 2013.</p> <p><i>Pahae</i> □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □</p> <p> : ta □ : tata □ : tara</p>

Figure 7 Various transcriptions of the *Pahae* pattern, by French (examples 1, 2) and indigenous (examples 3, 4) teachers.



Video 8 *Pahae* pattern, played by Heremoana Urima, percussion teacher at the *Conservatoire Artistique*. September 2012. Video supplied by author.

The convention of indigenous teachers regarding notation is to select both the indigenous phonetic designation of the rhythm cells (*ta*, *tata* and *tara*) and the minimum meaningful elements derived from the Western solfeggio necessary to learn – and remember – the basic pattern. No time signature is employed, and the note durations do not necessarily correspond to their exact value. The Western notation has been localised by the indigenous teachers in order to correspond to their conception of the rhythm. Example 3 in Figure 7 clearly shows where the pulse is, but Example 4 does not. In this case, listening to the example played by the teacher is essential.

In terms of formal education, in order to provide equivalency with French diplomas, the Conservatoire Artistique has progressively aligned the teaching methods and practices with those in use in France, including the selection process of the students, the organisation of auditions, the creation of achievement levels, and the standardisation of examinations. Although, in my experience, the transmission process may be more flexible in the department of traditional arts than it is in the classical or jazz departments, the situation at the Conservatoire Artistique exemplifies a significant conceptual change that cannot but impact Tahitian music and dance. As Jane Moulin notes, the way people think about the arts and their transmission processes “affects opinions about the proper way to dance as well as the proper way to learn dance”.⁵⁰ Furthermore, “[c]ontrasting with other, older ways of passing on knowledge, the classroom embodies a move from the older *’ite* ‘see/know’ valuating of knowledge to a *ha’api’i* ‘learn/teach’ mode of thought”.⁵¹ This model, created by Moulin for changing transmission methods, emphasises the growing role in culture of the concept of elevation carried by the Tahitian word *ha’api’i* (*ha’a*: meaning ‘action’, used as a prefix, *pi’i*: meaning ‘being learnt’), defined by Saura as “surpassing ordinary practical behaviours” and is connected to the broader concept of high culture as opposed to popular culture.⁵²

However, despite the increasing alignment of the Conservatoire Artistique’s administration and assessment policies with international standards, the transmission process continues to carry a deeply Polynesian epistemology. As far as it has been observed inside the classroom, and within the framework set up by the administration, the teacher remains free to transmit knowledge using his/her own methodologies, whether these are Western musical notation, chord charts, repetition and imitation, or creativity development. It is as if the old *’ite* mode of transmission was in a way embedded in the *ha’api’i* methodology. For example, the ukulele course is segmented in several predetermined steps including gradual skills that students have to master (*ha’api’i*). However, in the classroom, methods based on observation, imitation and

⁵⁰Jane Freeman Moulin, “From Quinn’s Bar to Conservatory: Redefining the Traditions of Tahitian Dance,” in *Traditionalism and Modernity in the Music and Dance of Oceania: Essays in Honour of Barbara B. Smith*, ed. Helen Reeves Lawrence and Don Niles (Oceania Monograph, 2001), 234.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 234.

⁵²Saura, *Tahiti Mā’ohi: Culture, Identité, Religion Et Nationalisme En Polynésie Française*, 24-25.

repetition are used extensively (*'ite*). Furthermore, other important characteristics of musical life in Tahiti, over and above the entertainment value of music are present in the classroom. These include ideas relating to the collective character of music, or to music as a tool for construction of community.⁵³

In addition to the old *'ite* and the new *'ha'api'i* modes of acquiring knowledge, other profoundly Polynesian modes are still very common among some musicians and dancers in Tahiti. Pambrun wrote that dreaming is an important way of acquiring knowledge, a possible bridge to the past to retrieve lost forms.⁵⁴ This was confirmed by Fabien Dinard, Head of the Conservatoire Artistique, and in the wider cultural context by members of the Haururu Association, an organisation occupied in preserving the environment and the culture of the Papeno'o valley in Tahiti.⁵⁵

Finally, as the Conservatoire Artistique Public Relations officer, Frédéric Cibard, explained, the process of transmitting deeper knowledge remains confidential:

[h]ere, in the transmission of an art, there are very specific, hidden, extremely touchy rules. You can't show how to do(...) When you show you choose to whom you show (sic). It is a bit like this neo-oriental side of things, where you have the master, and the student.⁵⁶

The academic teaching provided at the Conservatoire Artistique transmits the fundamentals of traditional arts through a Westernized transmission process, fundamentals that are accessible to anyone interested in Tahitian culture. However, a musician wanting to extend his or her knowledge beyond such readily accessible fundamentals needs to conform to the indigenous transmission rules that Cibard refers to, and establish a personal, chosen relationship with the master. Therefore, it is likely that the process of transculturation does not alter the process of transmitting deeper knowledge, because it remains restricted and accessible only to those who learn from a master.

Conclusion

Considering the contemporary Tahitian musical landscape as a coherent system allows a better understanding of transculturation processes and their implications on Tahitian culture. Through Arom's model, this article has demonstrated how Tahitian cultural specificity continues through a transcultural experience that operates as a major force contributing to shaping the extraordinary creative dynamism in contemporary artistic

⁵³ Saura, Personal communication, 5 September 2013.

⁵⁴ "The *ra'atira* recompose dances and texts inspired by the dreams", Pambrun, *Les Voies De La Tradition*, 136-38 (Translation by author).

⁵⁵ On 4 October 2013 in Fare Hape, an archaeological site maintained by the association in the Papeno'o valley, a long and very passionate discussion occurred between the association members about the importance of the dreams to connect with their past and their ancestors.

⁵⁶ Frédéric Cibard, Personal communication, 5 September 2013 (Translation by author).

Geoffroy Colson

life. Textural, harmonic, melodic and rhythmic borrowings have enriched the musical system, particularly through the introduction of new instruments or the evolution of instrumental construction and design. Unfamiliar forms of collaborations between performers regularly produce intercultural musical crossovers. Performances benefit from the introduction of unusual narratives and their associated symbolism. The diffusion of knowledge towards the Tahitian population benefits from new transmission processes.

The metamorphosis of Tahitian culture that began with the earliest Western presence and continues to the present day has indeed led to a loss of pre-contact practices. Fifty years after the first communication revolution, Tahiti embraces the internet. Although nobody can predict its impact on Tahitian culture, the popularity of Facebook and Youtube among young Tahitian adults exemplifies an increasing exchange of information and knowledge, particularly in the musical sphere. However, *in fine*, it is plausible that the compartmentalisation of music-making contexts and the stability of the aesthetics conveyed by the various musical genres may be powerful resistors to musical change. Contemporary syncretism in Tahiti is not a force of deculturation, but rather, as Marshall Sahlins explains, the systematic condition of the Tahitians' culturalism, understood as "the indigenous claims of authenticity and autonomy".⁵⁷ Through both the continued permeation of specific traditional Tahitian cultural attributes and the mindful acceptance and negotiation of the consequences of transcultural processes, *Mā'ohi* culture may be prepared to face with confidence the cultural consequences of the rising tide of globalisation.

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⁵⁷ Marshall Sahlins, "Goodbye to Tristes Tropes: Ethnography in the Context of Modern World History," *The Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 1 (1993), 19.

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Geoffroy Colson

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