Performing Palauan Identity: Popular Music in the Western Carolines

In the late 1980s, inhabitants began to utilize local popular music during customary first childbirth ceremonies on the islands of Palau, the Westernmost Micronesian island group. After several days of massages and medicinal baths, the ngasech (lit. ‘rising’), as this hot bath ritual is called in Palauan, culminates in the new mother’s first appearance in public. Following customary prescriptions regarding behavior, body ornaments and traditional apparel in meticulous detail, the woman walks out onto a coconut mat to receive yet another herbal bath and acknowledge the songs and dances addressed to her by the women of her own and her husband’s clans. The ngasech is an important aspect of the island’s highly complex customary exchange system of money and food, and a hallmark in any woman’s life. It is reminiscent of the discovery of the ‘proper’ way of childbirth at a point somewhere in the island’s mythological past which, mythology tells us, had heretofore nearly always ended in the young mother’s painful death. Standing on the coconut mat in symbolic traditional adornment, the young mother, who celebrates her very own ngasech today, is a patina-laden visual image of the continuity of Palauan lifeways and tradition.

The actual ritual is followed by socializing in the evening, and it was in this celebratory atmosphere that local popular music began to be played towards the end of the 20th century, replacing older musical genres that had previously served as entertainment for large crowds. According to Palauan custom, the new father’s side of the family is expected to perform customary dances and songs during this festivity. Once they had fulfilled this traditional obligation of providing the entertainment, other guests might join in and, in more recent decades, sing along with the band. But a few years after local bands had established themselves as common sights at the ngasech, the first-ranking female chief of Koror (bilung) authoritatively banned the involvement of pop bands in first-childbirth ceremonies on pain of a fine of US$1000. This ban became a hotly debated issue, and was finally lifted around 1996. Nowadays, pop musicians play at nearly every ngasech’s night.

In this article, I shall look at Palauan popular music, its historical development and the niches in Palauan society that it has occupied over time. There follows an overview of Palau’s most relevant cultural and historical contexts, together with a brief summary of this article’s theoretical premises. This will follow the history of popular music in Palau and its major transitions, including a description of the mechanisms governing the production of popular music in Palau, especially in a contemporary context. In the course of this consideration, the general characteristics of Palauan popular music will be considered. To conclude this part of the article, a specific song (Ongalek era Milad by Howard Charles and Deborah Toribiong) will serve to illustrate key characteristics of Palauan popular music. The situation described in the opening of this article, i.e. the dispute regarding the question whether popular music should be played during customary ceremonies or not, will be revisited in the concluding section. Against the background of the article, the bilung’s seemingly drastic and, in hindsight, largely ineffective measure, as well as its motivations and many contexts, will
appear in a new light – light that clearly shows that popular music in Palau is by no means perceived as entertainment devoid of cultural context, but that, on the contrary, it is situated in a subtle network of Palauan conceptions of cultural appropriateness.

It will become evident how popular music has been used in the continuous process of defining the Self in Palau, and how it has provided a space to negotiate imaginations of “who we (might) want to be.” Popular music in Palau speaks of the search for a notion of identity that is valid, not in spite of, but because of, three factors: the islands’ colonial history, their connectedness with the multimedia world of the 20th and 21st centuries and their traditional legacy. The short-lived nature of musical “taste of the time” in Palauan popular music is such a rich resource for the analysis of identity because “identity comes from the outside not the inside; it is something we put or try on, not something we reveal or discover.”5 Performing music “gives us a real experience of what the ideal could be”6 by involving language, mimics, gestures, and desires in performance. Popular music in Palau works to give both the performer and the listener alternative identities by placing itself in a particular social context, and that is why it makes a promising case study for the role of music in 21st century identity negotiation in the Pacific.

The Place of Music

The Palauan archipelago lies roughly 800 kilometers South-East of the Philippines, spans some 600 kilometers, and houses a population of about eighteen thousand. It is situated in the Western Pacific rim and is a part of the Austronesian linguistic and cultural belt. A politically independent republic, Palau reclaimed its political independence in 1994, after 95 years of foreign rule. Contact between Palauans and European and American navigators is documented from 1783 onward. Colonialism, beginning with the Spanish occupation in 1884, and the (primarily Christian) missions, has fundamentally altered the Palauan worldview and lifestyle. Today, various places, both real and imagined, resonate through Palauan music.7 In such a cross-grained amalgamation of the ‘local’ and the ‘non-local’, we like to see a ‘global village’: a world which partly seeks to melt into and absorb the many cultural influences, and partly wishes never to do so.

Perhaps one of the most influential conceptualizations of this world of ‘trans-national flows’ has been cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s concept of the ‘-scapes’, with which he describes a number of spaces, in which identity, culture and tradition are continually reconstructed: mediascapes, financescapes, ethnoscapes, technoscapes, and ideoscapes.8 These five neologisms all derive from the word ‘landscape’9 and denote the spaces in which culture flows and where a given culture communicates. Appadurai designed these ‘perspectival constructs’10 as tools to explore the disjunctions that he diagnosed in the ‘the new global cultural economy’. They are the spaces where the above-mentioned amalgamation happens (or does not happen).11 His concept is based on the incontrovertible fact that, in today’s world, there is no continent into which members of non-indigenous linguistic, religious, cultural and ethnic groups have not yet immigrated. This fact requires a new understanding of the space within which a given culture communicates.

As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic projects, the ethno in ethnography takes on a slippery, non-localized quality [...]. The landscapes of group identity – the ethnoscapes – around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially
bounded, historically unself-conscious, or culturally homogeneous. [...] The ethnoscapes of today’s world are profoundly interactive. 12

It is the ‘transnational cultural flows within which [new cosmopolitanisms] thrive, compete, and feed off one another in ways that defeat and confound many verities of the human sciences today.’ 13 Cultures appear deterritorialized, and instead of being localizable on a geographical map, they disseminate in what Appadurai names ‘ethnoscapes’ which, along with mediascapes, are the ‘-scape’ that is of most interest in the present context. Music is inherent to both ‘-scapes’, and it also fills their disjunctures. In music, locality is both a spatial and temporal fact and an expression of sensibility. Music, in this sense, is the result of ‘grassroots’ imaginative powers constructing a picture of the world in which Palau localizes its own place within a broader world of relations (in the global map, so to speak) – a place distinguished by the disparities between the actual worlds and their constructions, which are called upon by the imagination. Popular music in particular is not only inherently spatial; it is intrinsically mobile, taking listeners and performers to places, real and imagined. 15

The Appaduraian disjunctures demand particular attention from the academic observer, for it is here that incommensurable discursive spaces, such as those of Palauan popular music and the ngasech, meet and struggle with each other, negotiating cultural difference. By discussing examples from Palauan pop music culture in class, students are led to understand such conflicts on a sensual trajectory, which ideally allows them to see their own, as well as others’, listening habits in a more differentiated light.

An Island of Flows: Space(s), Time and Popular Music

Different thinking spaces have been meeting for more than two centuries on the islands of Palau and this has resulted in ever-changing disjunctures at their interfaces; spaces in which cultural discourse and negotiation of difference takes place. Popular music is one such thinking space.

Omnipresent in contemporary island life, popular music is disseminated over the local radio stations and is widely available on cassettes and CDs. More than other musical genres, popular music tends to be linked to a particular time and place; especially in the colonial context. It often embodies the changing local reflections on cultural differences between Self and Other. Music as a creative act can also be an adaptive strategy to locate the Own in a rapidly changing political and cultural landscape. In Palau, the evolution of popular music clearly sketches this search for a credible, contemporary cultural identity in response to transnational forces.

The Beat of 20th and 21st Centuries Palau: Popular Music Rising, Popular Music Thriving

In the Palauan context, several genres within the performing arts that emerged in the course of the 20th century can be referred to as ‘popular’; this includes historical genres that emerged in the first half of the century and which, in modified forms, are still performed today. For instance, the song type derebechesil is a type of love song which emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. Its musical language is suggestive of its roots in the period of the Japanese domination of Palau between the two world wars. However, tunes of Euro-
American origin are also popular (the lyrics to these tunes may be in Palauan or in an eclectic mix of Palauan and Japanese or English). Derebechesiil were sung without accompaniment in their early days. Modern performances of derebechesiil distinguish themselves from contemporary popular music by their history and, occasionally, certain melodic features. Their arrangement and performance spaces are largely commensurate with those of Palau pop. Some Palauan musicians also consider derebechesiil to be ‘Palauan classics’; a historical variety of Palau pop. For practical purposes however, and in line with Simon Frith’s argument, I shall use the term ‘Palauan popular music’ in a more narrow sense here and confine it to song types that are modeled on the musical idioms of the Euro-American and/or Japanese mass cultures, primarily targeting the youth. A defining feature of this popular music, moreover, is that its dissemination has primarily been channeled by the mass media (cassettes, CDs, radio, TV; the Internet does not play any significant role in this context) in Palau. Derebechesiil have received inspiration from Japanese folk songs. Although the mechanisms that characterize music of ‘mass’ cultures – the distribution networks, the dissemination strategies, and the influence of the trans-national music industry in particular, are fundamentally different in an island country as small as Palau, the general characteristics are identical; the music is commodified and purposefully designed for a target audience, which consumes the sounds offered to them.

On the other hand, the music ‘industry’ is far from being a profitable business in Palau, and musicians who produce recordings normally do so as private persons, ordering copies of their master tapes from recording studios in the Philippines. Musicians generally organize the financing, recording, and distribution through local stores themselves. The driving force behind such efforts is not economic, explains Howard Charles, who ranges among the most popular singers on the island:

Musicians today are mostly driven by the desire to become famous, which can happen overnight in Palau because everything is so small. The ease with which you can produce cassettes and CDs plays a significant role. But only the best musicians can really make any profit from them, as they [the recordings] are produced in the Philippines, and the minimum order there is 1000 copies. Only 15–20% are sold, and most musicians will end up with numerous leftovers.

The Palau Music Artists Association is one of the few institutions with access to more professional means of recording. This is evident in their CDs, which are issued for representative purposes, for instance in the context of the 9th Festival of Pacific Arts, which was hosted by Palau in 2004.

The first cassette produced for the Palauan market came out in the 1970s and was also distributed on neighboring islands. This, however, was not a result of a planned marketing strategy; many students from throughout the region were attending classes at Palau’s community college, and they brought the tapes back to their home islands, in this way spreading the music over the Western Carolines.

While the Palauan pop music idiom shares fundamental characteristics with Euro-American popular music, the networks of a music industry that would facilitate commercial distribution and marketing of such music through channels other than the media are virtually non-existent. This has led to a certain distinctiveness of the consumption practices of Palauan popular music which, in a subtle manner, distinguishes the same from trans-national music.
and lets remnants of cultural practices that have prevailed since before the arrival of foreigners on the islands shine through, as shall be seen.

Music of Many Places: How Does ‘Belonging’ Sound in Palau?

In the Japanese period, a preference among Palauans for tunes of Japanese derivation took root and today musical borrowing from the Japanese pop music idiom and repertory is still not unusual. This may partly be attributed to the novelty that the Japanese concept of melody constituted for Palauans. In Palauan traditional music, the melodic contours of musical genres are largely predefined, leaving little room for alteration of a given melodic outline beyond details. The idea that songs or chants can consist of individual lyrics and an individual melody was new to Palauans, who regard the lyrics of a given chant to be its main essence, onto which the respective musical genre’s form is grafted. But,

…as time went by, people began to understand Japanese popular music, how a melody can express the text. They started to translate songs, not in that they translated the lyrics word by word, but in that they picked melodies to fit a particular content.21

The idea of tonal space as a repository for musical creativity entered the Palauan concept of music. In the following, songs were not necessarily translated into Palauan as a whole; they could also be rendered in a heteroglossic mix of Japanese and Palauan. Howard Charles draws a broad distinction between the formative period of the genre and contemporary styles:

I like to consider modern Palauan music from the 1920s until the 1960s and 70s as the classic songs because the texts are very poetic and in line with Palauan thinking and Palauan ideas of respect. They are sophisticated in that they may allude to sexual issues, but always in a very censory way. You might just overhear it, or, if your sit at a family table, the kids won’t notice.22

Yet again, the lyrics are taken as reference points when it comes to classification issues. What Charles describes as ‘censory’ is actually a mode of composing lyrics that is directly related to that employed in customary chants; a characteristic feature of which is that content is encoded. Chants never give a complete story, and often, only syllables instead of complete words are given. As chants served as important educational devices, this practice contributed to the customary channeling of knowledge that was practiced in Palauan pre-contact society. He who was in the societal position to appropriate a certain body of knowledge would be instructed to do so. Only certain instructors would be able to fully explain such esoteric chants which, in conjunction with other oral history, fulfilled their function as carriers of culture. Generally, the songs referred to as ‘classic’ by Charles tend to be looked at with nostalgic admiration for precisely this feature of lyrical sophistication, which links old Palauan chants with pop music and ‘makes them truly Palauan’.23 Some Palauans even go so far as to call the deviation from this mode of composing lyrics ‘a denigration, loss of culture’.24 It is not considered at all contradictory to this ‘true Palauanness’ that the music which accompanies the lyrics Charles describes as a distinguishing feature were usually directly borrowed from foreign cultural material. The distinctly Palauan lyrics served to weave this new sound into the cultural fabric of Palau. In between the wars, this applied to the Japanese inventory of popular tunes, which provided a pool of melodic templates. With the beginning of the US administration, American pop and country standards gained in
popularity. Tunes were generally taken over without alterations, except for rhythmic changes that served to better accommodate the Palauan lyrics.

Musical accompaniment to the ‘classic songs’ was usually provided by string bands consisting of guitars, ukuleles, and/or mandolins, plus an optional drum set. The use of the ukulele as well as the playing technique usually employed by guitarists on music documents from 1963 clearly shows another important musical influence; that of Polynesia, Hawaii. Among other things, this style introduced into Palauan popular music a considerable component of the Hawaiian style slack key (Hawaiian: *ki ho'alu*). Playing techniques, namely ‘hammering-on’ and ‘pulling-off’, and the characteristic emphasis on harmonic progressions that are distinctive of slack key guitar playing, contribute to what in Palau is sometimes referred to as ‘that smooth and pan-Pacific island sound’ of Palauan popular music. Unlike in slack key music, however, the basic tuning of the guitar will not generally be altered for Palau pop.

Mediascapes brought another ‘island sound’ to the islands, which was then absorbed into the Palauan popular music idiom. Jamaican reggae, which distinctively shapes today’s popular music, uses instrumentation that has also contributed to the changes in modern Palauan music in comparison to the ‘classic songs’. Generally today, there are two means of accompanying pop songs. Firstly, by using a full band based on the Euro-American model, including guitars, keyboards and synthesizers, a drum set. The second style uses only a keyboard to accompany the vocalist. With the exception of major community festivities or other events that provide space for a full band, a singer accompanying him or herself on a keyboard is the most common option and there are few bands in Palau. In the case of keyboard-only accompaniment, the singer usually uses the preset rhythm and chord patterns that are available on a keyboard and adds a basic melody with the right hand. The arrangement normally emulates the Euro-American template as closely as possible. This results in the
constant re-occurrence of a set of sound patterns in much of Palau pop. Performances involving a full band, on the other hand, provide greater musical variety, including (sometimes improvised) instrumental solos. Professional recordings, in contrast to recordings prepared in basic home recording studios, usually involve ‘real’ musicians rather than drawing solely on a keyboard or synthesizer’s artificial sound reproduction capabilities. Yet, here too, the use of keyboard jingles and other pre-configured sounds is ubiquitous. However, these are fewer in comparison to the more basic recordings, and most have been prepared in connection with the above-mentioned Palau Music Artists Association.

Many Palauan pop songs are still directly borrowings from Euro-American and Japanese cultural material. Since the general intention is to emulate the original as closely as possibly, changes to the original material, if any, are minute. Musical creativity involving the composition of new tunes emerged relatively late, from around the 1950s to 1970s onwards, and is often associated with the compositions of Ymesei Ezekiel, who is considered the ‘most
According to local appraisals however, this development did not initiate a durable course of evolution, as ‘the creativity went down again with the impact of new media’ so much so that, today, most tunes are adapted whereas those that are non-adapted are usually older Palauan songs in a new arrangement. It is amply evident that, both before and after the ‘Classic Era’ of the ‘old Palauan songs’, the main working point of musicians has been the writing of new Palauan lyrics to an existing tune, and for reasons that relate to pre-contact notions about music. Both the songs from the ‘Golden Era’ and those that are composed anew by Palauans generally move within the spaces of the Euro-American and Japanese popular music languages. Adapted tunes are rendered mostly unaltered and involve preset rhythm patterns and chords plus, possibly, an improvised melody played with the right hand. This type of accompaniment is common across Micronesia. Musicians often explore the musical ‘middle ground’ between the Euro-American and Japanese idioms.

Attempts to reconcile (evolved) traditional Palauan music with the contemporary pop repertory are very rare, and most contemporary Palauans ‘see no relationship whatsoever between traditional and modern Palauan music’. One artist who is credited with trying to infuse distinctly local sounds into the contemporary pop idiom is the already mentioned Howard Charles. Charles, who studied music in the USA and is currently in charge of the music courses at Palau Community College, is aware of the implications of musical borrowing:

Most singers in Palau only borrow from outside sources, which I attribute to a lack of education. […] As far as my own work is concerned, I like to consider myself a radical. I am ahead of Palauan music, which is due to a general lack of creativity on the island.

A Palau Theme Song: Ongalek era Milad

For the ‘Palau Theme Song’ competition that preceded the 9th Festival of Pacific Arts, held in Palau in 2004, Charles composed the song Ongalek era Milad in collaboration with Debora Toribiong. This song, written to represent Palau as a nation during the festival, is in keeping with the contemporary Palau pop musical idiom, but is preceded by a rebetii (a type of traditional chant) that per se carries the patina to evoke among Palauans feelings of pride in a cultural Own. The introductory rebetii is performed not by the singers, but by a community elder and renowned rebetii specialist (Sophia Blachesos). Palauan ethics that identify elder community members as culture carriers, whose knowledge can never be equaled by a younger person, certainly played a vital part in the composers’ decision to have Sophia Blachesos chant the rebetii as a musically more or less separate item rather than to connect the performances of the rebetii and the subsequent song by having one of the singers perform the rebetii. Elders are considered to be inevitably more sophisticated chanters, and accordingly, an old voice is considered more appropriate to the performance of chants than a young one.

The sonic result of this conscious attempt to reconcile traditional and contemporary popular music illustrates important aspects of the contemporary relationship between the two. Musically, they coexist, but no intrinsic connection between them is sensed by the
performers. The singers do not engage in active performance of the respectively other musical style and, because chants are strongly associated with cultural legacy, which traditionally is maintained by the older generation, young performers ‘confine’ themselves to Palau pop if older performers are present. Yet at the same time, a combination, but not a blending, of the two ‘musical worlds’ was chosen for this song in order to represent the contemporary Palauan identity.

This song is one of the very rare instances of an attempted infusion of Palau pop with elements from the pre-contact musical culture. Unlike in other Pacific popular music cultures, no concerted attempts have been made in Palau so far to create a distinctly Palauan ‘island sound’. Palau popular music is still strongly connected with traditional music, and can even be considered a descendant of the latter. This relationship, however, is not musical, but functional, and in this, Palau pop takes an aspect of traditional music as its starting point and one of its most important parameters. That is to say, Palau pop music meets the culturally prescribed need for entertainment in complex contexts. To give but one example, a main performance space for contemporary pop music, in addition to the nightlife spaces is family functions (perhaps an omilil in a contemporary setting?). During such an event, ‘the musician likes to tease the honored guest by singing a song which refers to his ancestors, or something similar. Then the honored guest is obliged to stand up and dance and sing a “response”’. The described performance context here is similar to that of specific genres of traditional Palauan music, and the loosely prescribed exchange of songs plays a central role in the formation of the repertory of the Palauan traditional performing arts.

Outlook

The distinction between “traditional” and “popular” Palauan music is not that between ritually-bound music and music played for entertainment, for traditional Palauan music encompasses both. Rather, it is between Palauan musical styles that have existed on the islands before colonialization and those that have been developed in dialogue with musical styles brought in by various foreigners. This process received its initial impetus with the spread of Japanese popular music in Palau during the Japanese administration during World War I and II. After World War II, the growing influence of the United States throughout Micronesia also impacted Palauan music-making, introducing American popular music to the islands and, equally important, musical instruments such as the synthesizer.

In slowly succeeding customary song types during such festivities, Palauan popular music fulfills time-honored functions. But does that mean that customs and ceremonies are performed to everybody’s satisfaction? Certainly not. Several Palauans, especially of the generation born after 1950, have pointed out that the crucial criterion to be met is that, at a specific stage in a given ritual, “something” had to be delivered and, whilst a chant would always be preferable, it is considered secondary whether this would be a chant or a band playing. This, of course is a stance that other Palauans consider to be a severe breach of customs. When the bilung decided to ban Palauan popular music from customary ceremonies, her decision was welcomed by the latter group. Several informants stated that the main motivation behind this was that

…band members often became drunk and abused the event for partying, and this is not what it is supposed to be like. […] The childbirth ceremony] is a rather intimate event, and it’s sacred in a sense. […] But they turned the ceremony into a secular party like any other,
looking for a reason to drink […] The dance and music were originally to help the spirit of the occasion, but people misused it.\footnote{37}

It is unclear whether alcohol abuse was the most important reason for the \textit{bilung}’s ban. But what is clear is that Palau pop and the ‘sacred’ spaces of island customs are considered at least partially incommensurable by some members of Palauan society. While Palauan popular music might have taken over many functions formerly fulfilled by traditional music, it is not perceived as an equally valuable part of culture. It lacks the history, the rootedness in ancient culture, with its manifold implications for Palauan identity discourse, and it lacks the patina of traditional chants – or even traditional recreational songs, for that matter. Like the \textit{rebetii} and pop song in the song \textit{Ongalek era Milad}, the first childbirth ceremony and popular music can coexist, but at present they have not (yet?) combined forces in order to create a homogenous space for cultural practice. This eclecticism, however, is very characteristic of today’s Palauan cultural spaces. Accordingly, the ban was lifted again in the mid-1990s and today, popular music is played during most first childbirth ceremonies. Musical practice seems to have solved the dispute about appropriateness for the time being, but critical voices remain vocal and the debate continues. The question is not only whether and how customs may be altered. Ultimately, the question is also whether, in the current Palauan lifestyle, the old [(imagined) tradition] and the new (including Palau’s contemporary soundscape, which cannot be imagined without popular music) can live in peaceful coexistence, and whether this is desirable.

The history and current state of Palauan popular music speak of this island’s quest for the right answers; and, it also speaks of its quest for the right questions.

References

\textbf{Arjun Appadurai}  

\textbf{Gage Averill}  

\textbf{Peter W. Black & Loyola Darius}  

\textbf{John Connell & Chris Gibson}  

\textbf{Simon Frith}  
David Goldsworthy

Stuart Hall

Adrienne L. Kaeppler, Faustina K. Rehuher, Eve C. Pinsker, Deirdre Marhall-Dean, Mac Marshall, Larry Gabriel, Joakim Manniwell Peter, Juliana Flinn, Karen L- Nero, Judy Flores

Deirdre Marshall Dean

Edward W. Soja

Discography

Palau Theme Songs. 9th Festival of Pacific Arts, CD produced by the Belau Organizing Committee, 9th Festival of Pacific Arts, Island Music Production, Palau.

The Tribute, Island Music Production, Palau.

Footnotes

1. This article is based on my doctoral and post-doctoral fieldwork in Palau in 2005–2007, during which time I lived on the Palauan islands of Koror and Babeldaob. I am grateful to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for funding this research, and I also wish to thank the German National Academic Foundation (Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes) for subsequent support. About 50 interviews were conducted in connection with this research (interlocutors will be referenced in the following), and observations regarding the cultural context of popular music in contemporary Palau were mainly made during public functions, such as cultural fairs, family functions and official occasions (e.g., political events) as well as daily life. Public performances of popular music was recorded (audio and video) and commercial recordings were consulted.

2. My use of the term ‘traditional’ in this article is based on the indigenous usage of the term in Palau. It serves to describe orally transmitted customs, practices and lore which, according to local cultural memory, existed prior to any significant contact with foreigners (i.e. navigators from outside the Pacific basin). This point in time is usually taken to be the year 1783, when Captain Henry Wilson and his ship, the Antelope shipwrecked in the Palauan islands, which forced the crew to spend time in Palau while having the Antelope repaired.


7. See Kaeppler et. al. 1998 for an assessment of music in West Micronesia.


14. ‘Grassroots’, here, is a term used to invoke Appadurai’s concept of ‘grassroots globalization’ from below, as opposed to non-prefixed (corporate, capital-driven) globalization. Appadurai 2001.


16. I use the terms ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ in the sense employed by Soja, 1996.

17. See the booklet of the CD The Tribute, published by Island Music Production, Palau.


20. Ibid.


22. Ibid.


24. Ibid.

25. Barbara B. Smith Collection, disc III, tracks 1–21. This collection consists of recordings prepared by ethnomusicologist Barbara B. Smith in the 1960s and is stored in the Pacific Collection of the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, Hamilton Library. CD no. III includes recordings of the then-popular ABC Boys and the also popular Friday Night Club.

26. In this vein, the Polynesian-inspired matemahula dance emerged, to give an example.


30. Ibid. Similar comments were made by Howard Charles, personal communication, February 21, 2005; and Rusk R. Saburo, personal communication, January 15, 2005.


34. Palau Theme Songs. 9th Festival of Pacific Arts, CD produced by the Belau Organizing Committee, 9th Festival of Pacific Arts, Island Music Production, Palau.
35. See Goldsworthy, 1997 for a case study of New Caledonia and Averill, 1994 on Haiti. Both articles describe conscious attempts to assert a local identity through popular music by combining distinctly local sounds with idioms imported from without.


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**Biography**

Dr Birgit Abels, a postdoctoral fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, Netherlands. Birgit is a former doctoral fellow of the German National Academic Foundation and received her PhD dissertation from Ruhr University Bochum (Germany). After studying Music and Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental Studies (SOAS), London, UK, she obtained her MA in Musicology and Oriental Studies from Ruhr University. She has done ethnomusicological fieldwork in India and, more recently, Palau, and published on the music of both countries. In her PhD thesis, she explores transition in Palauan music with particular reference to the role of music in contemporary identity negotiation in Micronesia.