

From Pacific Resistance to *pacific resistance*: Expressions of *Mā'ohi*-ness in Contemporary Tahitian Popular Music

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Abstract: This article investigates the emergence of protest music in Tahiti, understood as voiced feelings of opposition against social or political injustice and processes of cultural standardization, as well as more implicit and “pacific” forms of artistic reactions to such issues. The study identifies a system of overlapping musical “fields” within the Tahitian musical landscape, and discusses key historical, cultural, and artistic factors that have, led in the last decades to the emergence of contemporary Tahitian protest music. It unveils connections between literature, oratory art, and songwriting, and looks into their implications on the work of selected singers-songwriters.

Résumé : Cet article examine l’émergence de la musique engagée à Tahiti, comprise à la fois comme l’expression de sentiments d’opposition contre l’injustice sociale ou politique et les processus de standardisation culturelle, et comme de plus implicites et « pacifiques » formes de réactions artistiques à de tels problèmes. L’étude identifie au sein du paysage musical tahitien un système de « champs » musicaux s’entrecroisant, et analyse les facteurs historiques, culturels et artistiques ayant conduit dans les dernières décennies à l’émergence de la musique engagée tahitienne. Elle dévoile les connections entre littérature, art oratoire et chanson, et aborde leurs implications sur le travail d’une sélection d’auteurs-compositeurs-interprètes.

Bobby Holcomb, a Hawaiian-born painter and singer who settled in Huahine in the Leeward Islands (French Polynesia) in 1976, gained renown among French Polynesian people with his song “Orio” (1985). Over a reggae- and Latin-inflected accompaniment featuring a smooth acoustic guitar, an electric bass, and a keyboard, Holcomb sings a generous incantation to Rio, the androgynous patron god of Tahitian fishermen (Craig 1989: 230):

‘O Rio te atua
Vahine nō te moana

Tautai rava‘ai
 Tāpe‘a tā‘oe ‘ofe
 Hī ai ‘oe nā te a‘au
 ‘O Rio atua vahine

‘O Rio ‘o Rio e
 A ho‘i mai i uta nei
 ‘Āfa‘i mai (i) te faufa‘a nō te moana nui e
 Nō Maeva nui e

O Rio, goddess
 Of the ocean
 And of fishermen
 Hold your rod
 With which you fish on the reef
 O Rio, the goddess

O Rio, o Rio
 Return to the shore
 Bring the treasures of the great ocean
 For Maeva

Holcomb rapidly earned the local audience’s respect. French Polynesians¹ valued what they saw as his simplicity, proximity, and sincerity. Although not *Mā‘ohi*-born,² he valorized local Polynesian culture in his songs (see Benhamza’s filmed interviews [2013]), conveying a rising pride in indigenous identity in the realm of popular song. The enormous success of his songs suggests that he touched on something essential to local people. Combining elements from reggae with indigenous cultural heritage – including language, mythology, and rhetoric – “Orio” may embody a form of positive action against the insecurities and injustices that had resulted from the continuous and often unequal interactions between indigenous culture and a western way of life. I am interested in exploring whether the contrast between Holcomb’s songwriting and the dominant form of light pop at that time reflects the emergence of a particular kind of protest music. More broadly, I am interested in the various facets of indigenous cultural heritage that Tahitian writers and composers of protest music have drawn upon.

I use the term “pacific” to name a process of musical resistance in order to emphasize its peaceful character and intent, its strong determination in promoting cultural values without necessarily engaging explicitly in social

or political struggle, and its geographic roots. Following Peddie (2006), I consider protest music to be a “complex dialectic,” a fluid expression that cannot be reduced to a youth culture ideology or a political tool of colonized people used against hegemonic power. This article attends to the emergence of popular protest music in Tahiti, understood not only as explicitly voiced opposition to social or political injustice, but also as more implicit, indirect, and “pacific” forms of artistic resistance and opposition. I also explore protest music’s connections with cultural heritage and traditional practices, and I hypothesize that the relative cultural and artistic isolation of French Polynesia from Anglophone areas of the Pacific³ has resulted in the development of distinct expressions of protest in indigenous music, compared with other protest music movements in the Pacific.

Using both primary and secondary sources on the one hand, and interviews with cultural representatives on the other, I discuss key historical, cultural, and artistic factors that have led in the last decades to the emergence of contemporary Tahitian protest music. Framing the matter within a Tahitian musical “system” – understood as a coherent but complex and interacting cultural landscape open to external influences – I investigate how the history of colonial and postcolonial indigenous consciousness in traditional arts, letters, and popular music (specifically as a response to the 1970s cultural revival) might shed light on contemporary musical expressions of protest. I explore how particular forms of protest and rhetoric are expressed across a variety of musical genres in contemporary Tahitian music, and how strong cultural values, conveyed through “pacific” songwriting, are asserted in opposition to the pervasiveness of western culture.

I suggest that indigenous popular musicians’ rhetoric is rooted in the indigenous oratory tradition known as ‘ōrero. In promoting Mā'ohi identity, these musicians enact a subtle form of “pacific” resistance to an encroaching western way of life. This resistance operates through the creative expression of indigenous pride and indigeneity, explicit references to pre-colonial times, celebration of their homeland, and reaffirmation of what former senator Richard Ariihau Tuheiava called Polynesians’ “ancestral pact” with their environment (Massau 2011).

Whether implicitly or explicitly, contemporary Tahitian popular music now generally engages with the claim for Mā'ohi-ness. From the 1960s onwards, Tahitian intellectuals originating from the local Protestant community began redefining Polynesian culture, and they theorized the concept of indigenous identity. At the same time, an artistic movement without overt political content or cause arose, seeking to revive traditional arts. Influenced by the intellectuals of the cultural revival, songwriting began to echo literary trends

and techniques while maintaining strong links with the oratory tradition. In addition, the acquisition of “multi-musicality” – a musician’s ability to perform in various musical idioms (Tenzer 2010 [2006]: 38) – represents both a reflection of the multicultural reality of contemporary Tahiti, and a form of freedom for Tahitian musicians who have claimed the right to navigate between traditional and popular musical genres for economic, cultural, and aesthetic purposes.

Scholarship on indigenous protest in general is abundant. For example, Opp (2009) and McAdam (2010), among others, have theorized in various ways protest as perceptions of, and reactions against, social and political injustices. Latin America has long been a primary site for the study of the origins, dynamics, and implications of social protest in relation to indigenous movements and politics. Yashar (1998, 1999) and Sawyer (2004) have investigated the politicization of indigenous identity and ethnic cleavages, and the challenges such processes pose to local democracies, whereas Jackson and Warren (2005), Rice (2012), and De la Cadena (2010) focus on the shifts in the rhetoric of cultural identity, strategies of self-representation, and the relevance of culture in indigenous politics. In the United States, the rise and decline of black insurgency and the role of key institutions in its dynamics is another significant area of scholarly interest (Jenkins and Eckert 1986).

Music, being grounded in the social, represents a privileged channel for protest (Peddie 2006, see also 2012). Martinelli introduces an analytic model of protest music around the variables of performance contexts, lyrics, and music (2017). For Martinelli, songs of social protest articulate various degrees of rhetoric ranging from aggressive to diplomatic, if not “soft and corny” (14–15). Reggae is particularly interesting in that it has become a global symbol of group cohesion, facilitating the constitution of an intellectual and spiritual community engaged in counter-hegemonic struggles (Alvarez 2008). In the Pacific, starting in the early 1980s, reggae – as a music of global resistance – rapidly became a privileged channel of expression for the emergence of a regional identity centred on Melanesia (Dietrich, Moulin, and Webb 2011: 103). Following the writings of Pacific Islander thinkers and intellectuals such as Bernard Narokobi, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Epeli Hau‘ofa, and Walter Lini, songwriters helped to develop the idea of the “Pacific Way,” which promotes a set of values shared among Pacific peoples including mutuality, compassion, and caring for one another. The rhetoric of a “positive Melanesian consciousness,” one that Webb and Webb-Gannon also refer to as “Melanesianism” or “Wantokism” (2016: 63, 72–73), emanates from a number of popular songs, and embodies “a desire on the part of many Melanesians to re-envision their region for the present time” (60). Although this musical expression of regional

identity is centred on Melanesia, it also encompasses indigenous people from French Polynesia (*ta'ata mā'ohi*), as “Warrior,” a song by George Veikoso, a Hawai'i-based Fijian singer who performs under the name “Fiji,” suggests (69):

This is a call for the unity of Polynesians, Micronesians, and
Melanesians

Return to your roots again

Never get caught up in all the political situations

That never gonna ever change

All they will do is try to trick us into another system

Remember where you came from

...

Kanaka maoli [indigenous Hawaiian people], tangata maori
[indigenous people from New Zealand], ta'ata ma'ohi
[indigenous people from French Polynesia]

Whatever you want to be known as

Just know that we are one in this Pasifikan [Oceanian], land

Let us come together

For Webb and Webb-Gannon, the promotion of Melanesian identity, inspired by the American Black Power movement’s expression of cultural pride, and employing “a unique, local politics of blackness grounded in the region’s historical labeling as the ‘black’ and, by inference, inferior islands … affirms solidarity with demands for political independence” (2016: 60-61).

As a unifying musical genre and vehicle of a non-violent understanding of protest, reggae also spread throughout French Polynesia in the 1980s and 1990s. More broadly, the “Pacific Way” finds an echo in French Polynesian popular music in the form of this positive manner of affirming and transmitting strong cultural values, and resisting dominant narratives.

Tahitian musicians, like other Pacific Islanders (and, indeed, musicians everywhere), have absorbed new musical practices and instruments, and “have used these to achieve their own ends” (Dietrich, Moulin, and Webb 2011: 97). Today, they enact their artistic and cultural agenda as much in the traditional arts sector as in popular music. A few influential artists and producers have shaped the Tahitian popular music sector, which is remarkably diverse and dynamic given the size of the local population – the Tahitian population is around 180,000 (2012 census) – resulting in the blossoming of a number of popular music groups since the early 20th century.⁴

In the 1960s, before the cultural revival, the dominant trend in popular music was lighthearted songs used to “celebrate happy parties, Hinano beer, and

stories of lovely *vahine* [women] and sailors” (Saura 1998: 54-55). In addition to reacting against social and political injustice, how do popular musicians embody what Tahitian intellectual Jean-Marc Tera‘itetuatini Pambrun has called the “paradox of an inner cultural conflict”? According to Pambrun, because Tahitian people – regardless of ethnicity – are today unable to fully assume their own identity, whether ancient or new, because of the “forced coexistence of ... two incompatible cultural matrices[:] ... the Mā‘ohi inspired tradition and Westernized modernity” (103), they live a “deep psychological and ideological trauma” (2008: 92-93).⁵ The Tahitian cultural landscape articulates this crisis through the “steady and uncontrollable reference to Mā‘ohi-ness” (92-93).

Pambrun severely criticizes the low degree of creativity and reactivity of many popular music songwriters, and paints a rather negative picture of Tahitian popular music (2008: 99-101). While he highlights the lack of singers’ political and social engagement in popular music during the 1980s and 1990s, I suggest that these “conformist” songs might actually represent a form of indirect – and pacific – resistance to a model of society and a music industry imposed from the outside. Because what might be called conventional popular music (as opposed to explicit protest songs) shares song themes and instrumentation with ‘aparima – a storytelling dance featuring expressive hand movements, accompanied by guitars, ukuleles, and the *tariparau* (bass drum) – it complements the strong creativity observed in ‘ori tahiti (Tahitian traditional dance), through which Tahitian composers celebrate “the stunning beauty of their land as well as the physical and spiritual qualities of its people” (Saura 1998: 54). The success of the sonic aesthetic conveyed through a number of recordings by Oceane Production, although highly criticized at the time of their release for their supposed lack of creativity (Zik Prod, interview, September 3, 2013; Roura, interview, September 8, 2013), today embodies an ideal form of “happy music” in which, for several decades, many Tahitian people recognized themselves.

The first section of this article contextualizes and investigates the historical grounds for expressions of political and social protest. It interprets the emergence of the concept of Mā‘ohi-ness as a crystallization of resistance against processes of cultural standardization and their threats to indigenous culture. In the second section, on the basis of interviews undertaken in Tahiti in 2013, I contextualize the Tahitian popular music sector within the contemporary Tahitian musical landscape, comprising overlapping and permeating musical fields connected to the literary realm and to the oratory tradition. This global framework guides the analysis of the development of protest songs vis-à-vis expressions of Mā‘ohi-ness. The last section interprets the contemporary traditional arts as a form of implicit protest through

the diachronic analysis of the connections between literature, ‘ōrero, and songwriting. It analyzes the works of three key personalities in contemporary Tahitian music, and concludes with an example of a form of musical protest that may, at first glance, seem disconnected from issues typically identified with indigenous cultural identity.

Grounds for expressions of political and social protest

Tahiti entered the era of postcolonial modernity in the early 1960s. The installation of the Centre d’Expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP, the French Pacific Nuclear Testing Centre) in 1962 – not without political and social turmoil, as filmmaker Marie-Hélène Villierme has shown (2012) – represented a new era in Tahiti, heralding important economic growth, increased flows of money and people, and a nascent tourism industry.⁶ Subsequent to the establishment of the CEP, the creation of Télé Tahiti in 1965, the first Tahitian television channel, was followed by a growing diversification that exposed Tahitians to dominant forms and sounds of popular music in global circulation.⁷ Following the arrival of a mass internet network in the early 2000s (the French Polynesian government authorized the creation of a national network in 1995), the success of social media networks (particularly Facebook) among urban French Polynesians has had deep consequences for the way music is listened to, circulated, and produced in the area, enabling artists to directly reach audiences beyond the confines of the French Polynesian archipelago.

The socio-economic boom that followed the installation of the CEP gave rise to what has been called the “bomb generation” (Stevenson 1992: 120; Brami-Celentano 2002b: 648). Atheism developed as a “culturally legitimate option,” changing how society is organized (Babadzan 1982: 22–24). Alongside the political contestations of colonialism, this period saw the rapid expansion of the cultural revival movement. In the 1950s, a spontaneous artistic movement relating to traditional culture arose, embodied by Madeleine Moua.⁸ In 1956, she founded Heiva, the first professional traditional dance group in the area (Lehartel, interview, September 18, 2013), which subsequently became an incubator for a new generation of indigenous talent. Her actions were representative of many similar initiatives that promoted and sustained ancestral knowledge without intending cultural identity and heritage to be understood as politically contentious. Nor were such initiatives isolated to French Polynesia. From the 1960s onwards, however, Tahitian intellectuals from the Protestant community, educated in theology and social sciences, began redefining Polynesian culture by adopting and adapting non-

indigenous concepts, including the concepts of culture, tradition, identity, and nature (Saura 2008: 59). This redefinition of Tahitian culture became known as the cultural revival and gained rapid support from new Tahitian cultural institutions, which emphasized cultural identity as heritage.⁹

Protestant elites have been as influential in French Polynesia and its cultural revival as they have been elsewhere in the Pacific. The elites used the sacralization of their origins and cultural heritage for their own theological ends (Babadzan 2009: 193), and despite having contributed to the destruction of indigenous culture in the early stages of colonization, they now came to preserve and transmit it (Langevin 1990: 146, 60). Protestant practices helped to sustain the literary register of the Tahitian language, providing a context for ritualized speech, exegesis, and polyphonic singing (Saura 2008: 64). For example, the Protestant liturgy (and the Académie Tahitienne) became the primary context in which Tahitian *beau parler*, or ‘ōrerora ‘a parau, could be practiced, although it is also used in political discourse (Tetumu and Teahua 2008: 5) and, as will be discussed below, it has nurtured both traditional singing and popular music.

The issues surrounding Mā‘ohi identity and their rhetorical articulation, together with their connection to religious practice, constitute the basis for the emergence of protest songs about perceptions of culture loss and fears of out-of-control globalization processes, as well as the basis for claims for indigenous identity in popular music. In the following two examples, I show how the meaning of “Mā‘ohi” has shifted with the cultural revival. The first excerpt is taken from “Tiare Mā‘ohi,” a pre-revival popular song by John Gobrait released in the early 1950s, in which the term “Mā‘ohi” simply relates to the native characteristics of the plant by the same name.

Rā‘au maita‘i
 Te tiare mā‘ohi
 Tei tupu i tō‘u pae fare e
 E ti‘i ana vau
 Pāfa ‘i noa mai
 E poe i tōna ‘ūta‘a e

It is a good plant
 This tiare Mā‘ohi
 That grows next to my house
 I am going to find it
 To pick it
 And put it on my ear

By contrast, “Hīmene a vau”¹⁰ by Aldo Raveino (2010), a song arranged in mainstream reggae style, uses the term to refer specifically to indigenous people of French Polynesia, and the song conveys a strong feeling of pride.

Tau tau te manu, ei ni'a i te 'āma'a
 Tau tau te manu 'āfa'i te reo e! he!
 'Āfa'i tō'u nei 'āi'a i te ao nei! he!
 E ti'a mai 'oe, e nūma'a Mā'ohi e!

A bird perches on a branch
 A bird perches, then it sends words!
 To promote the country abroad!
 Stand up, be proud of yourself, Mā'ohi people!

Tahitian cultural identity is based on some combination of a constructivist approach¹¹ that draws on a multi-ethnic political discourse and on “substantivist traditionalist” representations, which link the concept of nation or community with an origin (Saura 2011: 1-2). This duality can often be recognized in the vocabulary employed to express identity. The words “Tahitian,” “Polynesian,” and “Mā’ohi” have a history that is important to review here briefly. These terms, as Brami-Celentano states, are broadly employed as synonyms, largely thanks to the efforts of westernized Polynesian “mixed blood” elites, and contribute to the redefinition of ethnic borders (2002a: 367-8). The term “Tahitian” was historically employed in opposition to *popa 'ā* (white people) and *tinitō* (Chinese immigrants), before the expansion of the use of “Polynesians,” a term recently claimed by indigenous people as “a cultural label and a political banner” (368), but also claimed by western people and people of mixed heritage in a constructivist vision. Meanwhile, the term “Mā’ohi” “refers to a rewarding image of the ancestral culture” (Saura 2011: 14). Raapoto argues that the term is defined in opposition to “Tahitian”: Mā’ohi refers to the dignity of belonging to a community of shared traditions, language, culture, and ideology, whose duty it is “to understand, to become impregnated with our past, our culture, our language, to create a new world in our image and in our dimension” (1988: 5-6).

Pambrun is perhaps one of the few Tahitian intellectuals who has articulated the complexities of Tahitian conceptions of tradition, identity, and culture (2008: 59, 96, 139). For him, the claim for Mā’ohi identity has ceased because the dominant discourse imposes limits on how to live traditionally: “ancestral rituals and practices are tolerated [only] insofar as they remain at the level of folklore,” that is, at a superficial level represented by the tourism

industry. Except in the case of traditional dance groups, which, for Pambrun, form “spontaneous and permanent activities referring to the past,” these limitations constitute a threat to deeper thinking about Mā‘ohi identity (2008: 107). According to Pambrun, the solution to this cultural crisis and the key to sustaining tradition lies in the “resacralization of Mā‘ohi culture” through “the claim[ing] of Mā‘ohi spiritual and religious beliefs” in order to “retrieve the consistency of the pre-contact world” (2008: 21-22, 168).

In the early 1990s, scholars questioned the sustainability of traditional Tahitian society. Langevin asserts that, as cultural mixing increases, the Mā‘ohi ethnic group will be at ever greater risk, particularly compared to the expansion of the *demi* group (French colloquial term for Tahitian people of mixed blood, especially Chinese and Tahitian), whose members never knew the pre-CEP period (Langevin 1990: 162). For Babadzan, the threat to Tahitian identity could come from a folklorization and a commodification of traditions (1982). He questions the capacity of Tahitian society to integrate innovation yet avoid the traps of westernization. Babadzan also points out that the deculturation process has been accelerated by social policies in urban zones, where a vulnerable generation of indigenous youth has emerged.

However, Brami-Celentano has subsequently shown how disadvantaged urban youth in search of an identity have claimed Mā‘ohi identity and contributed to its redefinition (2002b: 649). According to her, the redefinition of identity occurs through conflict, as the selection and reinterpretation of elements from the past regularly gives rise to intense debate. Brami-Celentano also describes the indigenization (what she calls “maohisation”) of imported cultural models, resulting, for example, in the “fun” subculture associated with surfing among young, urban Tahitians (2002b: 657). The development of the surfing subculture, however, was ultimately overtaken by the appropriation of indigenous cultural symbols to serve commercial purposes. Fig. 1 shows how a local surf-wear brand co-opted the mythological figures of Ta‘aroa and Hine from their original, indigenous contexts.

The surfing subculture is strongly associated with western musical styles, styles with which Tahitian youth deeply identify, along with hi-fi systems and a western-oriented sound aesthetic. The identity revival among urban Tahitian youth has been, for Brami-Celentano, a “true effort to adapt to the new living conditions resulting from the beginning of the post-CEP era in French Polynesia” (2002b: 657).¹² It is characterized by a disjunction between, on the one hand, an identity defined by both a lack of resources and a quest for cultural points of reference and, on the other hand, an idealized Mā‘ohi identity (Brami-Celentano 2002b: 657).



Fig. 1. Surfwear shop in Papeete illustrating the commodification of indigenous mythology (Photo by the author, September 16, 2013).

Brami-Celentano does also warn about the limitations of neat, ready-made categories to explain the ambiguous and contradictory aspects of identity. In the contemporary, globalized, acculturated context, young Tahitians – who do not participate in the political activism practiced by their predecessors – claim their identity both through various forms of cultural commitment and with external signs of belonging to the Mā'ohi community, such as tattooing. In contrast to their elders, who believe that traditional culture must be preserved and protected, young Tahitians emphasize the need to promote their culture internationally and to modernize it through creative research and borrowings from other cultures (Brami-Celentano 2002b: 654-5). Consequently, inspired by the pioneers of contemporary Tahitian popular music, new music groups have emerged that engage with contemporary musical genres such as heavy metal, rap, and reggae.

The establishment of the CEP, together with the exponentially increasing flows of peoples, information, material goods, and culture that has followed, as well as the cultural revival that has arisen in reaction to these flows, has occasioned important transformations in the Tahitian cultural landscape. There is, for example,

a growing dichotomy between an increasingly westernized popular culture and a *culture d'élite* (Saura 2008: 24-25), exemplified by the institutionalization of culture and the development of the Heiva (an annual celebration featuring many different kinds of activities celebrating Ma‘ohi cultural heritage).¹³ This turmoil has shaped the cultural landscape and its dynamics, with important consequences for musical change, creativity, and innovation.

Polynesian Literary Themes and Protest Music

A closer look at the literary figures of the cultural revival period is useful to fully understand the rhetoric employed in contemporary pacific protest music. Henri Hiro, a Tahitian intellectual, playwright, filmmaker, and poet, articulated the main themes and vocabulary that were developed in Polynesian literature and that have pervaded contemporary songwriting ever since.

Hiro believed that literature offered an efficient means of returning to the source of Polynesian culture (2004: 80). For him, Ma‘ohi people are disconnected from Polynesian culture due to the length of time spent away from it. In the poem “Aitau,” Hiro reveals his cosmic vision of temporality, the detrimental effects of colonization on indigenous culture, and the necessity of connecting with the past. Using a metaphoric neologism (combining ‘ai, the formal term for “to eat” and *tau*, “time”),¹⁴ Hiro exhorts his kin to find their own way to connect to the past and build a new society.

‘Ua rau te tau
 Tō‘u pāahira‘a i te hiti o tō‘u nei fenua,
 ‘Ua horo pūpara noa te mana‘o
 O te hinarere i te ātea ‘e.

‘Ua rau te tau
 Tō‘u hōparara‘a i tō‘u nei fenua,
 ‘Ua tīravarava noa te ti‘aturira‘a
 O te hinarere i ni‘a i te peu vavi.

‘Ua rau te tau
 Tō‘u ti‘avarura‘a
 I te mānava i papa i tō‘u nei fenua,
 ‘Ua ‘ōere haere noa
 Te hinarere i tō‘u nei fenua.
 ‘Aitau rā, ‘aitau rā, ‘aitau rā i tō‘u nei fenua!

It's been far too long
Since I sat at my homeland's side.

The previous generation carelessly tossed
Their ways of thinking into the deserts of elsewhere.

For far too long
I've forsaken my country.
The conviction of the new generation
Feeds itself on vanity.

It's been far too long since
I reached down into myself to find the roots
Of my people
Just as the new generation
Wanders about, lost in its own homeland.
Devour the time, devour the lost time.
Consume the ravaged waste
So that the deep past can unite with the future.

Despite Hiro's wish, Mā'ohi people did not immediately articulate a shared way of thinking (Devatine 2006: 149). Tahitian writer Flora Devatine noted, however, that a Polynesian identity was progressively emerging in literature (2006). A growing number of writers, poets, and songwriters started using literature as a way to connect with their Mā'ohi cultural identity, just as Hiro had advocated. Among them, several female French Polynesian writers emerged (Mateata-Allain 2005). *L'île des rêves écrasés (Island of Crushed Dreams)*, Chantal Spitz's first novel (2013b [1991]), is widely accepted as the first novel in French Polynesian literature. This novel, writes Pallai, constitutes "the beginning of ... a radical questioning of the unbalanced relationship established by descriptive and cultural exoticism" (2015). Using a vigorous, dynamic, innovative, and dissenting style, Spitz enacts Hiro's wish and advocates a renegotiation of the postcolonial condition and a new approach to intercultural relationships:

Progressing upstream in the rivers of memory in order to reach the origin of the harm ... a demanding trip up the meandering rivulets of pain and terror patiently accumulated ... in order to rebuild our interiority devastated by the violence of contempt,

and to cease accepting ourselves as colonized. (Spitz 2013a: 70–71, qtd. in Pallai 2015)

It is unclear as to when and how the themes surrounding indigenous identity conveyed in Tahitian literature first began to be adopted into songwriting. In popular music, however, as will be demonstrated below, the capacity to convey strong cultural values through protest songs has emerged since the 1990s, drawing on the oratory tradition. Devatine argues for the significance of recent songwriters in French Polynesia:

Among the least renowned and yet the most active [people] in the field, are ... the composers of songs, traditional or operatic, popular, modern, whose songs are increasingly protesting, songs with lyrics increasingly inspired by the Bible, laments, prayers, supplications, complaints, to all the gods, whether ancestral or Christian.¹⁵ (2006: 150)

Next I examine the impact of the oratory tradition on the emergence of an authoritative voice in Tahitian contemporary music, whether popular or traditional.

Literature, Orality, and Traditional Arts

Whether indirectly pacific or overtly protesting in orientation, contemporary songwriting, infused with themes and vocabulary from an emergent Tahitian literature, is also intimately linked with orality and the oratory tradition. ‘Orero is an ancestral literary oral expressive form with social and political aims. It serves as the repository of ancestral memory. In pre-contact society, it was “the living book of religion, of tradition, of sacred chants, of politics”¹⁶ (de Bovis 1978 [1855], qtd. in Mesplé 1995: 53). To engage the audience, the orator uses various rhetorical devices: reciting; chanting; changing intonation, rhythm, and speed of the discourse; and combining them with gesture (*‘apa*) and dance.

‘Orero was reintroduced into cultural celebrations during the cultural revival of the 1970s, affirming the vitality and richness of Polynesian literary culture (Tetumu and Teahua 2008: 5). Oratory art, now integrated into the Heiva and into primary school curricula, has become a fully artistic discipline. Today, it is very popular among Polynesians and is part of many political, religious, and cultural events (Pambrun 2008: 106). ‘Orero recitation is usually accompanied by traditional instruments such as the pū, the vivo, and

the *pahu tupa'i rima* (membrane drum). Among ‘ōrero subgenres, *Ta'u* (also termed *Pāta'u* or *Pāta'uta'u* [Tetumu and Teahua 2008: 10]) is a very rhythmic speech form with pedagogic and mnemonic aims. This form is encountered in popular kaina music as in “Patautau” by Tahitian music ensemble Kahitia Nau Nau.¹⁷

In “Fa‘ateni ‘āi‘a” (“Supplication for the Motherland”),¹⁸ an example of ‘ōrero *fa‘ateni* (a subgenre of ‘ōrero that glorifies a particular land, person, deed, or action), Raapoto praises the beauty of his motherland with pride. Such themes were particularly common in popular music during the first half of the 20th century and remain at the core of contemporary storytelling dance (‘aparima).

E te tari‘a e,
 A fa‘aro‘o i te navenave o tā‘u pehe
 E te mata e,
 A hi‘o i te nehenehe o tō‘u fenua
 E te ihu e,
 A ho‘i i te no‘ano‘a o te miri
 E te vaha e,
 A fāna‘o te haumārū o te pape
 E tā‘u vārua e,
 A te‘ote‘o, e fenua maita‘i tō‘oe
 A ‘oū‘au‘a, tei mua ia ‘oe te ora

O my ear,
 Listen to my melodious chant
 And you, eye,
 Admire the beauty of my homeland
 And you, nose,
 Breathe the pleasant perfume of the basil
 And you, mouth,
 Taste the freshness of the water
 And you, spirit,
 Be proud, the homeland is generous to you
 Rejoice, life lies before you.

In Polynesian culture, orality, writing, and poetry are intimately linked. Elements from the oratory tradition pervade literature as well as the lyrics of traditional and popular music. Devatine labels literature inflected by the oratory tradition as “oral writing”:

Oral writing is *te reo ‘ōrero*, the language, the discourse. It is *te pehe*, the chant, to sing, the traditional song. It is *te pehepehe*, the poem, the celebration through poetry, through singing. It is the writing of the chant, the writing of the poetry, the discourse of refined eloquence, toward which speech and literature have to progress. It is the writing of a laudatory poem of glorification, to celebrate the homeland, the country, and the people. It is the writing of a speech to say, to sing, and to chant, in a language sometimes spontaneous and impulsive, sometimes elaborated and refined. (email to the author, April 18, 2016)

The work of Patrick Amaru, a renowned ‘aparima songwriter, embodies the connection between songwriting and contemporary Mā‘ohi literature. As in ‘ōrero, his songwriting draws on natural imagery using a refined and highly poetic style. In addition to conveying the notion of exoticism and counter-exoticism (Pallai 2015), Amaru’s work develops a revivalist discourse about indigenous identity, focusing particularly on the rhetoric surrounding the term “Mā‘ohi” (Saura 2008).

Pride in homeland, often conveyed in ‘ōrero fa‘atenei and ‘aparima, also clearly emerges in the lyrics of many popular songs. For example, in “Pahoho,” the renowned popular music group Te Ava Piti¹⁹ celebrates the beauty of the *fenua* (“motherland”):

Pahoho o te miti, te Avarua
 ‘Ua taupitihia tā‘u ari‘i
 I te tiare ‘Apetahi
 Tiare ‘una‘una
 Nō tō‘u ‘āi‘a herechia e au e
 ‘Uturoa mata a‘ia‘i
 Matotea tei ni‘a
 Tepua tei raro
 Pahoho

The sea roars in the Avarua channel
 Announces the arrival of my king
 With the tiare Apetahi
 A very beautiful flower
 From my beloved homeland
 The radiant ‘Uturoa Bay,

Which Matotea overhangs
 Tepua lies down to the reef
 Roar

Later, the expression of love of place, which was already present in early 20th-century popular songs, spread from traditional expressive forms into imported musical genres such as reggae and rap. In “Tō‘u Fenua” (2012), which employs a standard reggae-rap instrumentation including drums, bass, guitar, and keys, Mesik alternates rapping verses and a melodic chorus. But instead of drawing on typical ‘aparima imagery (i.e., beauty of the pastoral homeland, themes connected to nature), he expresses pride in contemporary social behaviours and a local way of life.

Oh-oh, oh-oh, yeah, tō‘u fenua,
 Porinetia (repeat)
 Ma terre natale n'est pas une carte postale,
 Elle n'est pas que sable, eaux turquoise, et cocotiers.
 C'est loin d'être une occidentale denudée,
 C'est tout un art de vivre made in à la locale !
 Chez nous, on ne connaît que le tutoiement,
 T'es le frère la soeur de tout le monde évidemment !
 Chez nous, il y a des vélos sans pédales,
 Il y a des charrettes qui font boum, brad c'est de la balle!

Oh-oh, oh-oh, yeah, my fenua,
 Polynesia (repeat)
 My homeland is not a postcard,
 It is not only about sand, turquoise water, and coconut trees.
 It is far from being a naked western girl,
 It is a whole local way of life!
 Here we talk to each other with familiarity,
 You are of course everyone's brother or sister!
 Here there are bikes without pedals,
 There are noisy chariots, brother it's really cool!²⁰

As noted earlier, the reggae genre has spread in the Pacific as a vehicle through which to construct indigenous identities and to protest western hegemony (see also Levisen 2017). Referring to positive values of hospitality and pride in the homeland, the song above illustrates both the “pacific” and “Pacific” qualities in this localized reggae song.

Three Key Figures in Contemporary Tahitian Popular Music

Intimately linked to colonial history, Tahitian popular music has developed within a music industry framework where a small number of musicians and producers have had a significant impact on musical repertoire, style, and production. These influential artists include American pianist Eddie Lund (who settled permanently in Tahiti in 1938 and founded the Reo Tahiti recording company in the 1950s), Tahitian cinematographer and producer Gaston Guibert (founder of the first professional recording studio on the island), and French composer Yves Roche (who collaborated with Gaston Guibert and Eddie Lund before creating his own label, Manuiti Records, in 1965). Roche took Tahitian music to an international audience through a joint venture with Criterion Records in Los Angeles in the late 1950s and 1960s. A composer of about 500 songs, he contributed significantly to the shaping of Tahitian popular music during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Besides these producers, Oceane Production issued recordings of a number of local musicians from 1980 to 2003, including Bobby Holcomb and the group Fenua.²¹ Lund, Guibert, Roche, and others helped to establish Tahitian popular music as part of a global network of popular musics, and created the music industry foundations for the development of protest music in Tahiti.

Three figures emerge as central to the protest movement in Tahitian music: Bobby Holcomb, Angelo Neuffer, and Aldo Raveino, all of whom articulate in various forms the messages initially disseminated by Tahitian intellectuals such as Henri Hiro. These three became models for subsequent generations of indigenous musicians.

Bobby Holcomb, introduced at the start of this article, rapidly became an iconic figure of the cultural revival. He can be considered one of the first protest song figures *à la tahitienne*. He had an in-depth knowledge of Tahitian and Polynesian culture, which he depicted in his songs. He was the first non-Tahitian singer to sing in the Tahitian language, which he set to an accompaniment, combining elements from jazz, R&B, rock 'n' roll, and reggae (Lind 2005: 121). His lifestyle was almost countercultural in its simplicity, and he ignored the hotel circuit, preferring to perform for islanders in community centres, youth clubs, hospitals, and sports fields, sometimes travelling great distances to do so. Although occasionally dismissed by Tahitians (because he was not Tahitian-born) and by government officials (because he criticized plans for nuclear testing), he was deeply engaged in promoting Polynesian culture and in defending the environment, encouraging environmental awareness in Tahiti's polluted capital of Papeete. "SOS teie," for example, is a reggae track campaigning for a nuclear-free environment. A member of Pupu

‘Arioi, a group of intellectuals, singers, and actors formed in the late 1970s around Henri Hiro, which aimed to promote indigenous culture, Holcomb collaborated with Hiro as a costume designer and a scenographer in his filmed play, *Ariipaea-Vahine* (1983).²² He popularized some of Hiro’s poems by setting them to music, including “O ‘oe tō ‘oe rima” or “Te Upe‘a” (both 1991). His attachment to the motherland, his commitment to bringing Hiro’s writings to the public, and his dedication to conveying Polynesian legends, poetry, and imagery in his songs exemplify the way he contributed to the reconnection of Mā‘ohi people with their culture and to the expression in popular music of indigenous identity and pride.

Holcomb’s works influenced several popular music groups in a number of musical genres, including contemporary rap and hip hop (e.g., rapper Weston, who refers to Bobby as an inspiration: see Jeff Benhamza 2013). A number of contemporary Tahitian singers and musicians debuted with Holcomb: for example, singers Angelo Neuffer and Aldo Raveino, together with guitarist Michel Poroi, all participated in a famous 1988 Tahitian concert known as “Bobby and Angelo.” However, although Neuffer and Raveino express pride in Tahitian culture and celebrate the fenua as traditional artists do in ‘ōrero and ‘aparima, they do not always take Bobby Holcomb’s pacific approach. Instead, these singers and others offer explicit critiques of social issues, domestic violence, and political corruption, set in western-derived musical genres such as rock and reggae.

Toward the end of the 1980s, Aldo Raveino, a Tahitian journalist and political activist, founded the popular music group Manahune. *Manahune* is the Tahitian term for the inferior caste in pre-contact Tahitian society, and was resuscitated by the cultural revivalists as a name for the proletariat. In choosing this word for his group’s name, Raveino reminds his audience that he is an average Tahitian person, and he created this group in order to give average Tahitian people a voice.²³ Considered to be the first Mā‘ohi pop music group,²⁴ Manahune’s music employs a mainstream backbeat while adding traditional percussion instruments such as the *tō’ere* and the Australian didgeridoo.

Raveino’s texts highlight social unrest in Tahiti and combine questions relating to indigenous identity, the Tahitian language, and the motherland in order to awaken his listeners’ consciousness.²⁵ Manahune’s use of the Tahitian language and protest imagery on their 2010 and 2015 albums exemplify the group’s concerns with social justice.

Both album covers depict a clenched fist, a global symbol of protest movements, together with iconic Tahitian words related to sacredness and indigeneity. The group affirms its strong connection with, and support of, claims for indigenous identity, articulating an appreciation for the motherland



Fig. 2. Manahune's album cover for *Tumu Nui* (2015).²⁶

and for Mā'ohi identity reinforced by their use of the Tahitian language.²⁷ On the album *Tumu Nui*, Raveino sets Tahitian texts over a rhythm section alternating reggae, rock, and folk grooves, including brass and flute riffs, a choir reminiscent of traditional male *ha'u*²⁸ singers, a subsidiary *tō'ere* (Tahitian slit drum) rhythmic accompaniment, and ukulele textures using *hula* strumming style (an indigenous strumming technique derived from the basic pattern shown in Fig. 3). Raveino's song texts denounce contemporary Tahitian social ills related to delinquency, violence, drugs, religion, and politics.

In the late 1990s, singer Angelo Ariitai Neuffer became recognized as a spokesperson for his generation, integrating into his Tahitian-only lyrics "the Mā'ohi spiritual quest," "millenarian and apocalyptic speeches," and "the denunciation of decadent Franco-Tahitian politics" (Saura 1998: 54). Saura



Fig. 3. Hula strumming pattern. The musical notation employed here derives from the indigenous notation convention for tō-'ere rhythms.

observes the similarities between Neuffer's rhetoric and the 1970s literary rhetoric of Duro Raapoto and Henri Hiro (1998: 54-5). Neuffer's texts also deal with issues related to the power of money as in his album, *Perofeta nō te ho'o* (*Prophets of Money*, 1992), which highlights its negative power. His lyrics question the commodification of traditional heritage increasingly occurring as a consequence of the cultural revival: "far from reacting against this coarse manipulation, we participate in this cultural suicide, hypnotized by our bitterness, our vanity, and our fantasies. We sell our soul in making money with our culture, yet this was given to us" (Neuffer 2013: 39, qtd in Pallai 2014).²⁹ Among his successful protest songs are the reggae song "Ta'ero atomi" ("Nuclear Poison," 1995), which protests the nuclear tests the French government resumed in 1995 in Moruroa atoll, and the album *Atire Atire* (*Enough, Enough!* 1998), which includes songs denouncing French rule and the local pro-French establishment.

A Kaleidoscopic Realm of Protest

Following influential musicians such as Holcomb, Raveino, and Neuffer, a new generation of protest musicians emerged who embraced contemporary music styles. Some of these newer groups, however, started to develop a less "pacific" and more aggressive imagery and discourse of protest. In the late 1990s, the band Vārua 'Ino (Evil Spirit) introduced hard rock to Tahiti and "caused some commotion in the [local] Catholic community" (Saura 1998: 55). Today, Tikahiri, a self-defined gothic rock and Pā'umotu rock band founded in 2007 by two tattoo artists of mixed Pā'umotu, Anglo-Saxon, and Tahitian origins and including two teachers from the Conservatoire Artistique, plays heavy metal flavoured with elements of Polynesian tradition. The band includes, for example, a violoncello that, according to the singers, aims to embody the idea of earth and volcanic lava.³⁰ Their sound is atypical within the Tahitian soundscape.

In borrowing images of fire, darkness, and animality from global forms of goth and heavy metal, and in appropriating them into the French Polynesian

context, Tikahiri makes its own claim for Mā‘ohi identity. Tikahiri represents itself as a “sonic paradox” breaking “all conventions and expectations for South Pacific music by combining modern rock and goth with a distinctive Polynesian spin that echoes the battle cry of warriors past.” For example, imagery on the cover of their 2015 album *Son of Sun*, featuring the artists against a dark-red background, and the lyrics of their song, “Wolf,” both draw on the Polynesian mythological theme of the *pō* (“the underworld, the world of spirits, the world of night” [Craig 1989: 212]):

I am standing tall,
 High pressure in my veins
 The animal is growing stronger
 And it’s kill the man in me
 One quarter human, one quarter wolf, one quarter alien, one
 quarter ghost
 Something different
 Something special I am
 This is the way … this is the way … this is the way I like it

In contrast to the claims for indigenous identity discussed above, and in contrast to the feelings conveyed in the ‘ōrero fa’atenei, the group Fenuastyle articulates a sense of isolation that contradicts with the Pacific Way and the interconnectedness between oceanian peoples that Hau‘ofa once promoted (1993). The cover of their 2010 album *Sans Taboo* represents Tahiti as a floating skull crowned with the symbols of surf culture, drifting in the middle of an empty ocean. It illustrates anxieties relating to a feeling of disconnection from both the French ruling nation and other Pacific nations, as do the lyrics of the unpublished song, “Mon Fenua”:

A world at the end of the world
 It is my world
 A very small black point on the map
 My fenua³¹

In this song, a feeling of pride yields to a feeling of pessimism and abandonment. Fenuastyle’s rhetoric comes as a counter-example, a kind of anti-‘ōrero, and demonstrates that the idea of an inclusive Pacific Way might not necessarily be shared by all. This despondency contrasts with the other forms of musical protest described above, and with Tahitians’ implicit refusal to allow their culture to be overwhelmed by alien cultures, as can be inferred

from the ongoing popularity of traditional arts and their institutionalization.

Ultimately, these various musical expressions of opposition to, objection to, disagreement with, and denunciation of social, political, and economic issues cannot be separated from claims for, and pride in, Tahitians' cultural identity. Altogether, these musical expressions form a highly dynamic musical landscape where musicians serve their own artistic agendas by drawing on the indigenous oratory tradition and a growing literary culture. The resulting increase in groups inspired by earlier popular musicians and their use of traditional culture demonstrates Tahitians' creative and original response to the threat posed to their culture by the processes of globalization, while demonstrating the various strategies – Pacific, “pacific,” or explicit – enacted by Tahitian musicians to resist western globalization in music. The study of the examples above show that Tahitian musicians' protest not only connects with explicit forms of protest and expressions of solidarity with the themes featured in the Pacific (and Melanesian) Way, but they also broaden the common understanding of protest song in conveying a positive, indirect form of resistance that draws on indigenous traditional arts and literary culture. 

Notes

1. For those unfamiliar with French Polynesia, it is a collection of 118 islands, of which 76 are inhabited, forming a “collectivity” of France. While it has its own government, France maintains control of justice, university education, security, and defense. Tahiti is the most populous of French Polynesia's islands. French Polynesia is part of the broader region of Polynesia, which includes Hawai‘i as well as Aotearoa/New Zealand, Sāmoa, and the Cook Islands, among other islands. Polynesia is contiguous with Melanesia (a region that includes Vanuatu, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea) and Micronesia (a region that includes Guam and Kiribati).

2. Tahitian term by which indigenous French Polynesians refer to themselves.

3. This relative cultural autonomy is related to linguistic borders, a specific educational system, and politico-economical alliances (see Mateata-Allain 2005; McCall 2010).

4. In October 2013, Odyssée, a media and book shop in Papeete, Tahiti, had more than 140 recordings of local music in stock, including new releases, compilations, and re-releases of recordings by singers of indigenous popular music.

5. All quotations of Pambrun are my own translations.

6. After the inauguration of the Fa‘ā‘ā airport in 1961, tourism numbers rose from 8,563 to about 130,000 per year in the 1980s (Gay 1995: 276, 80). This figure rapidly grew during the 1990s, reaching 250,000 tourists in 2000. However, the 2008 global economic crisis severely impacted tourism, which has since stabilized

around 180,000 per year since 2014 (<http://www.ispf.pf/bases/Tourisme/EFT/Details.aspx> [accessed 23 January 2017]).

7. For further information about the history of media and their influence on French Polynesia, see Bambridge (2001), Bambridge, et al. (2002), and <http://cinematamua.canalblog.com/archives/2006/08/04/2413177.html> (accessed 23 January 2017).

8. For more information about this important figure of Tahitian traditional arts, see her interview at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_9wU5wv-0M (accessed 20 April 2013).

9. The Maison des Jeunes-Maison de la Culture (1971), the Académie Tahitienne (1972), the Musée de Tahiti et des Iles (1977), the Conservatoire Artistique (1978), and the Centre des Métiers d'art (1980).

10. The song can be viewed on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lG2a4MPHypo> (accessed 11 August 2017).

11. For further information about constructivist and substantivist views on Tahitian indigenous culture, see Saura (2008).

12. Author's translation.

13. The word “*heiva*” means “entertainment,” implicitly understood to mean dance and indigenous culture. The word was chosen in 1986 to rename the festival, formerly called Tiurai. The Heiva starts in late June and continues through mid-July. The activities include not only traditional music and dance competitions but also a ‘ōrero competition, canoe races, cooking, traditional sports competitions, and fire walking. It is easy to confuse the festival with the dance group by the same name, mentioned earlier in this article.

14. Neologisms are a widespread rhetorical device in the Tahitian language. The word ‘ai is also close to ‘a’ī: will to eat fish, and has the secondary meaning of “to take over” (<http://www.farevanaa.pf/dictionnaire.php> [accessed 12 July 2016]).

15. All quotations of Devatine are the author's translations.

16. Author's translation.

17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqf1Sbmw0jo> (accessed 5 December 2013).

18. <http://www.cir7.dep.pf/circo/mod/Res-ped-lcp/act-Te-piri-e-te-pehepehe.pdf> (accessed 20 October 2017). Author's translation from Tahitian.

19. A recording of this song can be heard on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Q_Ayb5sH8c (accessed 12 July 2016).

20. http://media.wix.com/ugd/1194e1_2997edccd4964201bf7d98746b2b2bf4.pdf (accessed 12 July 2016). Author's translation.

21. Created in the late 1990s by Madeleine Mou'a's grandson, Guy Laurens, Fenua was an example of a successful attempt to mix traditional musical elements with dance floor and techno music genres. See for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-QKNGd6cGo> (accessed 26 September 2015).

22. *Ariipaea-Vahine* can be viewed on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QE-BnOzuoG0>) (accessed 12 July 2016).

23. <http://www.mangrove.nc/index.php/artistes/artistes-de-tahiti/344/manahune>. (accessed 14 August 2017).
24. <http://monvr.pf/regard-du-chroniqueur-multimedia-aldo-raveino-25-ans-de-musique/> (accessed 19 July 2016).
25. <http://monvr.pf/regard-du-chroniqueur-multimedia-aldo-raveino-25-ans-de-musique/> (accessed 19 July 2016).
26. <http://www.mangrove.nc/index.php/catalogue/albums-de-tahiti/537/tumu-nui> (accessed 12 July 2016).
27. <http://monvr.pf/regard-du-chroniqueur-multimedia-aldo-raveino-25-ans-de-musique/> (accessed 26 June 2016).
28. In traditional *hīmene* singing, the ha'u is the male voice layer constituting the song's foundation. Men sing a wordless and strongly pulsating drone, mouths closed, and sometimes add guttural effects and hand clapping.
29. Author's translation.
30. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Tikahiri/23842196196> (accessed 13 July 2015).
31. Author's translation.

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