

# Keeping the Canoe on Course. Performing Arts, Ecologies of Knowledge, and *Etak*

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## Abstract

*The performing arts constitute knowledge in many Pacific Island settings, as scholars in Pacific studies—Western Pacific music studies in particular—have emphasized for a long time. Their relational and ecological complexity has recently moved to the fore as a major category for the analysis of traditional performing arts in the Pacific Islands. Academic exploration of such knowledge, however, treads on complex ground: the postcolonial entanglement of ontological, epistemological and interdisciplinary challenges poses multiple difficulties for any research that pledges to be mindful of diversity and critical of the contemporaneity of colonialism and imperialism. In this contribution, I follow the call of Pacific Island scholars to consider the potential of etak as a critical tool that might help acknowledge these challenges. Etak is a central Carolinian nautical technique. Pacific Indigenous studies have used it prominently as an Indigenous response to the triangulating approaches common in social science research. In this article, I sound out the concept's potential usefulness for the study of the performing arts in the Western Pacific Island world and beyond. I also argue that etak resonates well with Tim Ingold's critique of conventional ethnography and offers viable suggestions for an improved methodology of working with music-making ethnographically.*

**Keywords:** music; performing arts; *etak*; Micronesia; Pacific Islander epistemology

## Mantenere la rotta della canoa. Arti performative, ecologie della conoscenza ed *etak*

*In molte isole del Pacifico le arti performative rappresentano il sapere, come hanno sottolineato per lungo tempo gli studiosi dei Pacific Studies - in particolare gli studi sulla musica del Pacifico occidentale. La loro complessità relazionale ed ecologica è recentemente emersa*

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*come una categoria rilevante per l'analisi delle arti performative tradizionali nelle isole del Pacifico. La ricerca accademica di tali saperi, tuttavia, si muove su un terreno complesso: l'intreccio postcoloniale dei problemi ontologici, epistemologici e interdisciplinari pone molteplici difficoltà per qualsiasi ricerca che si impegni ad essere consapevole della diversità e critica della contemporaneità del colonialismo e dell'imperialismo. In questo contributo, accolgo l'invito degli studiosi delle isole del Pacifico a considerare il potenziale dell'etak come uno strumento critico che potrebbe contribuire al riconoscimento di queste problematiche. L'etak è una tecnica nautica tipica delle Isole Caroline. Gli indigenous studies del Pacifico l'hanno ampiamente utilizzata come risposta indigena agli approcci di triangolazione comuni nella ricerca delle scienze sociali. In questo articolo, metto in evidenza le potenzialità di tale concetto per lo studio delle arti performative nelle isole del Pacifico occidentale e oltre. Sostengo anche che l'etak rispecchia bene la critica di Tim Ingold all'etnografia convenzionale e offre validi suggerimenti per una migliore metodologia di lavoro etnografico sul fare musica.*

**Parole-chiave:** musica; arti performative; *etak*; Micronesia; epistemologia degli isolani del Pacifico

## Introduction

Scholars from various fields have offered thorough ethnographies detailing the relationship between knowledge and sound-based performance practices in the Pacific Island world (Parmentier 1987; Drüppel 2009; Steiner 2015; Diettrich 2016)<sup>1</sup>. In recent years, part of the debate surrounding these issues has begun to center around music's relational and ecological complexity as a major category for the analysis of traditional performing arts in the Pacific Islands (Schwartz 2012a, 2012b; Diettrich 2018). However, against this backdrop, the academic exploration of the performing arts, and chanting in particular, as knowledge practices treads on complex ground: the postcolonial entanglement of ontological, epistemological and interdisciplinary challenges makes it both ethically unjustifiable and plainly impossible for scholars to work with analytical categories derived solely from a tradition of thinking about music that is decidedly North Atlantic in nature, relying on analytical vocabulary developed in connection with Eurogenic composed music. In the Western Pacific Island world, for instance, the North Atlantic notion of "music" is already problematic

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in itself because it barely reflects Indigenous ways of thinking about the performing arts, which do not necessarily distinguish between “music” vs. “dance”. However, most academic analytics by far continue to be founded on the hegemonic traditions of thinking undergirding the North Atlantic academy, not necessarily by intention but because these traditions of thinking are engrained in scholarly language. In this article, too, I draw on music studies and its analytical repertoire to explore Micronesian chanting and its relationship to knowledge. Implicitly addressing this difficulty, I follow the call of Pacific Island scholars to consider *etak* as a tool for critical analysis. Beyond the insights *etak* enables as an Indigenous intellectual resource, it can also help to acknowledge this challenge and aid in finding productive solutions.

*Etak* is a central Carolinian nautical technique. Pacific Indigenous studies scholars (e.g. Diaz & Kauanui 2001; Diaz 2011) have used it prominently. Methodologically consequential, the navigational technique *etak* views the canoe as the stable point within a sea of moving islands. Academically, *etak* is a metaphor for both Pacific struggles and diasporic predicaments. As a transdisciplinary corrective tool derived from Indigenous thinking, it points to the ideological structures inherent in scholarly disciplines. Importantly, *etak* also mediates between the varied systems of knowledge involved in (the academic study of) music-making, thus, allowing for an exploration of the repercussions arising between these different ways of knowing. *Etak* is not an interpretative technique; instead, it brings disparate knowledge and knowledge practices into conversation with one another. A different perspective both on knowledge about music and music as a knowledge practice emerges from this inter-epistemic dialogue (Aman 2019): a perspective which looks at how the various ways of knowing about and through music-making interrelate. This is why *etak* has the potential to aid in the task of tracing the epistemological framework of sound-based knowledge practices in the postcolonial Pacific Island world. In some ways, the agenda of this approach relates to the rationale of what in recent years has become known as the “New Ontology” – anthropological scholarship that assumes that:

Relativity is located not in the relationship between ethnographic data and varying social, cultural or political contexts, but rather in the relationship between the variable data in question and the varying ontological assumptions anthropologists must inevitably make in their attempt to describe them ethnographically (Holbraad & Pedersen 2017: 13).

The crucial point here is this: the language anthropologists use to describe their data carries inbuilt ontological assumptions which may not be relevant for the data in question at all and might even distort it. These implicit ontological assumptions, therefore, become the main object of analysis for the New Ontology (*Ibid.*). In this way, objects and terms of description enter into a dynamic relationship in which scholarly language and ontologies undergo continuous scrutiny. An *etak*-based analysis expands this approach in two ways: firstly, it brings at least two language-based knowledge systems, a scholarly one and an Indigenous one, into conversation with one another. Secondly, in grounding the analysis in the performing arts as epistemic practices (the metaphorical canoe here), it broadens the scope of what all might be considered knowledge to begin with, extending the New Ontology's self-reflexivity to the notion of knowledge. Herein lies *etak*'s potential to offer an alternative to an ocularcentric epistemology. Importantly, *etak* does not juxtapose these knowledge systems: it invites them to speak to one another about one another, looking for congruences and conflicts. Both as a nautical technique and an academic methodological concept, then, *etak* is much more about connection than it is about boundaries. In this, it deeply resonates with Tongan and Fijian anthropologist, writer and cultural visionary Epeli Hau'ofa's (1939–2009) dictum that «the sea is our pathway to each other» (2008: 58). Hau'ofa never ceased to emphasize the Pacific Islander perspective of viewing the ocean as a passageway rather than as water masses separating islands. Here, the link between the purpose of this article and this themed issue of *L'Uomo* becomes immediately evident: if the performing arts are a fruitful space for connections keen on gathering creatively internal and external trajectories, as the call for papers for this issue phrased it, "fino a prima di "then any analytical approach, then any analytical approach aimed at disentangling these various trajectories needs to take into account their varied epistemological configurations and seek to bring them into fruitful conversation.

But only when such conversation is more horizontal and less hegemonic can we explore the spaces opening up between the various knowledge systems involved. These spaces are important because they are precisely where the performing arts do their work. To chant, in that sense, is an intrinsically interstitial practice, and this is why it matters so profoundly that people in the Western Pacific Island world, but also all around the world choose to engage in it on a daily basis. On our journey to intellectually explore that engagement in a postcolonial world with decolonial ambitions, *etak*—as the tried and tested wisdom of how to navigate a vast ocean based

on making sense of what is between the various layers of one's reality—is well worth exploring. In proposing that we explore the productivity of *etak* for performing arts research, I hope to make a concrete suggestion within music studies for how we can perhaps expand the scope of a North Atlantic tradition of thought that, in keeping with its ocularcentric history, is acutely sensitized to text but still needs to develop a similarly potent analytical awareness of other dimensions of how humans relate to the world. These dimensions include structured movement and chanting.

I start with sketching the theoretical framework of this endeavor. This includes an exploration of the performing arts as a knowledge practice, with an emphasis on the knowledge inherent and specific to chanting. Building a bridge to the pivotal role of *etak* as a methodological concept, I then briefly discuss the notion of ecologies of knowledge as proposed by major figures who have shaped the Theory from the South. This is followed by a closer look at *etak* and its potential as a methodological concept for the ethnographic study of the performing arts more broadly. In closing, I offer an appraisal of the usefulness of *etak* for the study of Pacific Island performing arts and beyond, pointing out what the concept can (and cannot) potentially offer and relating it to anthropologist Tim Ingold's (2014) critique of ethnography. Since this contribution is conceptual in nature, it does not present specific ethnographic material or a case study. It is, however, based on methodological and theoretical insights gained from extensive ethnographic research in the Western Pacific Island world.

### **Music-making as a knowledge practice**

In epistemological terms, any knowledge inherent in music-making is procedural in nature: it is formed in the performance of a practice. This knowledge is, thus, the knowledge we derive from partaking in music by making, studying and learning—in short, by experiencing music. It is a type of knowledge that tends to escape verbal description and is, therefore, often prematurely considered ineffable. The knowledge of music unfolds itself through musical structures, textures and forms as well as through the meaningfulness (Abels 2017) arising from making music. This is how music-making makes sense: as an enactment and experience of knowledge-as-discovery. Such experience allows for an understanding of the world which can become a force of transformation (Kramer 2016: xi).

Curiously, in spite of the growing scholarly interest in sound studies and gauditory culture in recent decades, thus far, there have been few attempts to reach beyond sound-based performance as a representational practice. One of the reasons for the absence of such an approach lies in the methodological challenges the sonic experience itself poses: it is multisensorial, inherently ambiguous and highly elusive. That is to say, by nature, the sonic experience derives its efficacy from between established analytical categories. This is also where its potential for the study of human cultures is located. My approach, therefore, builds upon the idea that the performing arts are not just a representational strategy to express something (such as an identity, a sense of belonging). Instead, they form a mode of knowledge that has multilayered connections and ruptures with pasts, presents and futures, affective responsiveness, surrounding sensory orders and discursive configurations. The latter include ideas and sentiments pertaining to social frameworks, historical narratives and cultural dispositions. This is to say, making music is deeply imbricated with everyday life. Such interlacing with lived realities enables music-making practices to emerge not only as a crucial way of knowing and getting to know the complexity of one's connections; it also has the potential to offer coping strategies where word-based cultural techniques suggest less intuitive solutions because they primarily draw on discursive referential frameworks. Chanting, by contrast, allows people to make sense of and transform their surroundings because it enables them to put discursive and nondiscursive dimensions of knowing the world in conversation with one another.

Chanting as a knowledge practice, therefore, relates to and makes sense of the world in a way that often escapes verbal description. It shifts focus onto that which is not necessarily specific yet powerfully present: onto the felt rather than the factual and onto that which is between, rather than within, the categorical. If chanting is an epistemic practice that occupies the space between the seemingly fixed categories of a postcolonial world, then the analysis of chanting as a way of knowing calls for a methodology acknowledging the interstitial. This, in turn, means that to understand chanting as a knowledge practice, we have to enter into inter-epistemic dialog.

Pacific Islander ideas about the performing arts are often (partially) incommensurate with binary ontological categories, such as the mind–body divide that continues to underpin scholarly analysis (Leys 2011). Chanting, creating fleeting resonances between discursive and nondiscursive frameworks, holds a fundamentally corporeal experiential quality that

relates to both the discursive and the nondiscursive but does not confine itself to one or the other. Similarly, it goes beyond the either/or of inside vs. outside, creating an experiential *timespace* which is «both/and also», to use Soja's (1996) terminology. This uniquely musical «both/and also» is why chanting, and by extension music-making in a more general sense as well, form a particular epistemic register that offers alternatives to North Atlantic philosophies of knowing, which continue to be constitutive to the (in this sense, latently colonial) academy and typically build upon of the idea of knowledge as a mental state entailing truth (Nagel 2013; see also McGlynn 2014).

The knowledge inherent in sound-based performing arts, however, arises from the felt body's encounter with sound. When sound waves materially affect the felt body, the felt body transduces (Simondon 1964) them into something else. In this way, a sonic event becomes a recognizable musical structure, a familiar tune, a sentiment, or even a memory or sense of familiarity. Throughout this transductive process, the knowledge specific to the performing arts is not so much a knowledge of *what*; instead, it is a knowledge of *how*. As it mediates between various experiential orders beyond the felt-bodily and operates in their in-between (Abels 2018), the knowledge at stake here is the knowledge of how to bring the various trajectories of the human experience in connection with one another. This connection is forged in sound, and as such, it is a fleeting phenomenon.

The physical vibration of a sonic event is at the beginning of any such process. Vibration creates resonances, both materially and metaphorically: the sensation of a dance shout during a Micronesian men's dance, for instance, will merge with the intense historicity it resounds in the Indigenous listener, and that person may not necessarily be able to separate this from the listening sensation itself. This is how the performing arts bring about connection. As an epistemic register, the performing arts may not care to know *what* this connection might be; they do know, however, *how* to build the connection. This is the way in which the performing arts, as knowledge practices, create their efficacy.

While, at first glance, the fact that sonic transduction processes necessarily depend not on sound but on the experience of sound seems to be a general observation of mostly conceptual relevance, it also has deep methodological implications. Chanting as a knowledge practice is always a situated practice and deeply imbricated with its environment. This conceptualization of the knowledge as inherent in sonic practices resonates

well with recent critiques on the anthropology of sound (e.g. Eisenlohr 2018). Again, this points to the interstitial as a significant site of alternative knowledge generation based on understanding the world through chanting. As counter-knowledge practices are being increasingly acknowledged in postcolonial societies around the world—for instance, oral history and historical chants are being acknowledged as legal evidence in cases of land rights disputes (Babcock 2013)—we find ourselves in the middle of an epistemological shift.

Postcolonial epistemic configurations are layered, politically charged, always ambiguous and competitive. The knowledge of the performing arts can serve as an epistemological resource within this complex and explosive meshwork of rivalling and vastly diverging knowledge systems. An exploration of the performing arts as knowledge practices, therefore, is an attempt to contribute to the decolonizing project of mediating between the competing epistemic orders characteristic of postcolonial settings. In this, the first step is to acknowledge the multiplicity and concurrence of several knowledge systems at a time. In other words, we must embrace the epistemic configurations we are living in as an ecology of knowledges as proposed by scholars associated with the Theory from the South.

### Ecologies of knowledge

It is clear that the notion of the performing arts as knowledge practices provokes methodological counterpoints: between the empirical and critical ideation, between diverging epistemic configurations, and between the analysis of everyday practices and moments of dramatic conflict. Exploring the performing arts as knowledge practices does not provide an encompassing meta-narrative; neither is its scope merely local. Instead, it is positioned «on the awkward scale between the two, seeking to explain phenomena with reference *both* to their larger determinations and their contingent, proximate causes; this by plumbing the complex, often counter-intuitive points of articulation among them» (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012). Comaroff and Comaroff (*Ibid.*) further clarified that «the object of our praxis is to interrogate the connections between what it is that constitutes the lived world and the manner in which that world is experienced, acted upon, and inhabited by sentient human subjects» of very different backgrounds.

Such interrogation necessitates strictly collaborative research designs. The latter afford important insights by confronting diverging epistemic



vantage points systematically. However, they also require a mixed methods research design to address the materiality of sound as the medium in which the knowledge of the performing arts operates (music analysis, choreoanalysis), the lived experience of music-making (music ethnography) and the corporeality of music-making (phenomenological analysis) together in an ongoing dialogical fashion. The goal here is to enable a knowledge production process that is inclusive of all knowledge systems involved and driven by the goal of relational accountability among these knowledge systems. However, the analysis of music as one such knowledge system takes this popular postcolonial studies rhetoric a significant step further.

Most of the current North Atlantic academy continues to marginalize Indigenous ways of thinking, to the extent that scholars have questioned whether it is even possible to decolonize research on previously colonized people when these people's human condition is bound to be constructed through North Atlantic hegemony and ideology (e.g. Quijano 2000; Elabor-Idemudia 2002: 231). One possible answer to this conundrum is to problematize research «as a significant site of the struggle between the interest and knowing of the West and the interest and knowing of the 'Other'» (Smith 2012: 2). Pacific Indigenous scholar Tuhiwai Smith (*Ibid.*: 98) and others have argued that European imperialism is far from being a thing of the past. Academic research continues to play a major role in reinscribing imperialist ideologies. Against this backdrop, to explore Pacific Island performing arts as knowledge practices is to aim for Indigenous, choreo-musical and academic knowledge systems to advance one another. Such advancement can only grow from epistemological coexistence. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008), a key figure in the Theory from the South, has called for «ecologies of knowledges»: the conscious embracing of epistemological diversity as a theoretical and methodological framework designed to challenge the dominance of Eurocentric thought. Arguing that there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice, de Sousa Santos stated that

the epistemological diversity of the world is immense, as immense as its cultural diversity and... the recognition of such diversity must be at the core of the global resistance against capitalism and of the formulation of alternative forms of sociability.... The epistemological privilege granted to modern science from the seventeenth century onwards, which made possible the technological revolutions that consolidated Western supremacy, was also instrumental in suppressing other, non-scientific forms of knowledges and, at the same time, the

subaltern social groups whose social practices were informed by such knowledges (de Sousa Santos 2008: ix).

The epistemological shift de Sousa Santos called for is designed to acknowledge alternative epistemologies as potentially harboring new political strategies geared towards giving marginalized and oppressed groups the means by which to represent the world as their own. To explore the performing arts in the Western Pacific Island world as epistemic configurations is to follow de Sousa Santos's call and think about it through sonic practices. A methodological approach aiming to facilitate such a conversation between academic and Pacific epistemologies needs to position itself at the interfaces of the various ways of knowing without prioritizing one over the other.

It is crucial, instead, to analyze all these epistemic configurations as part of the multiple realities human beings have within their environment and emphasize the intellectual and human value inherent in putting divergent ways of thinking into perspective with one another. Therefore, focusing on the performing arts as procedural knowledge is a strategy to explore the insights arising between epistemological configurations and confrontations. In order to navigate the complex entanglement of the epistemological and ontological challenges arising from such an approach, I turn to *etak* as a multilayered form of methodological and theoretical triangulation informed by Pacific Indigenous ways of comprehending social and natural surroundings.

### *Etak*

The *etak* metaphor serves to address this entanglement head on. *Etak* is a multilayered form of methodological and theoretical triangulation informed by Pacific Indigenous ways of comprehending social and natural surroundings. However, it goes beyond triangulation methods established in the social sciences (Webb, Campbell & Sechrest 1966; Repko 2008: 124ff.; Alexiou 2014). These methods are employed for cross-verification and, hence, data validation. *Etak*, by contrast, prioritizes perspectivity. *Etak* means moving islands (Diaz forthcoming: 2; for what Diaz calls "classical treatments" of *etak*, also see Gladwin 1970, Lewis 1994). It suggests that movement should be the reference, not the fixed: while travelling, the canoe is taken to be stationary, while the islands and the stars are moving

past it (Lewis 1994). In the words of Filipino-Pohnpeian scholar Vicente M. Diaz, *etak* is a

technique for calculating distance traveled, or position at sea by triangulating the speed of the islands of departure and destination with that of a third reference island. This is accomplished, furthermore, by plotting these islands' courses in the celestial sky, which in effect serves as a veritable map for the world below. A map and time piece, a way of negotiating emplotment in time/space – or more precisely, a way of conceptualizing time/space in order to fix one's place – *etak* was a critical technological development... that permitted humans to traverse over 2/3rds of the globe's southern hemisphere millennia before Europeans ventured from eyesight of their shores (Diaz 2011: 25).

Diaz also added a more practice-oriented description:

First you steer towards the stars that mark the island of your destination. While doing so, you back sight your island of departure until you can no longer see it. At the same time, you calculate the rate at which a third island, off to the side, moves from beneath the stars where it sat when you left your island of departure, toward the stars under which it should sit if you were standing in the island of your destination (Diaz 2011: 26).

*Etak* goes hand in hand with storytelling and chanting (Diaz 2011). The chant, often detailing the responsibilities of oceanic stewardship, comments on the seascape as landmarks and seamarks passing by, which aids in mapping them on the celestial sky, anchoring one's positionality in fluid time and space. *Etak* is a cultural technique layering varied knowledge systems and extrapolating the knowledge—of the stars, local geography and sustainable resource management—emerging from the resonances forming between them. *Etak* serves to organize time and space by knowing where and when one is positioned between these epistemic layers. As such, it is reflective of multiple ways of knowing the world. *Etak* puts epistemologies into perspective and uses their interconnectedness as a resource. In this way, *etak* provides an analytical pathway for both the process of navigating the complexities of everyday Pacific Island life musically and the process of negotiating diverging epistemic frameworks as a scholar.

Methodologically, *etak* is also one possible response to Bohlman's (1993) intense, yet largely unheard, dictum that music scholarship is always a political act. Bohlman implied that music scholars have an ethical

responsibility to pay critical attention to and continue decentering the discursive formations in which we are disciplinarily trained. We need to be wary of essentializing music into hegemonic disciplinary and, hence, reductive narratives. The *etak* approach is able to sensitize us to the ideological interwovenness of the music we research and our own doing by exploring music-making practices in the Western Pacific as multilayered and contested epistemic configurations.

*Etak* serves to ensure the multiplicity of analytical and epistemological perspectives required for a postcolonial exploration of what all sound knowledge might entail and for whom. While it is a distinctly central Carolinian concept, Pacific Studies scholars have developed *etak* into an academic critique that emphasizes the relationality inherent in the epistemic configurations at stake in a given Pacific Island context. The analytical forte here is in *etak's* emphasis on

historical processes of cultural and social contact and interconnectivity not simply by valorizing movement, but by critically engaging the social and political processes of organizing space on and by which movement takes place precisely to combat exclusive categories of self and other and the bounded territoriality on which they are affixed.... "Grounding" oneself in a canoe and an oceanic culture that survives the generative and transformative histories of colonialism, as well as the politics they beget, offers a particularly deep, substantive, and compelling vantage point with which to map and move what are after all the mobile coordinates of Indigenous cultural and political consciousness (Diaz 2011: 21f.).

*Etak* opens up an analytical course «not overdetermined by the trajectories of western colonization», instead offering «a paradigm of rooted routes» (DeLoughrey 2007: 3). Rather than looking at music from the physically bounded islands of academic disciplines (music, Pacific Indigenous and postcolonial studies), with *etak*, we can choose to opt for the perspective of the expansive canoe. Thinking methodologically through *etak*, thus, leads beyond established triangulation methods as well as the metaphorical: it prioritizes being in a relationship over explanation and, thus, emphasizes the dialogical and collaborative. At the same time, *etak* ensures that the academic inquiry remains useful at all times for Pacific Island practical needs. This is crucial for any research that seeks to conjoin its conceptual, empirical and activist potential.

## Methodological implications

*Etak's* strength as an intellectual tool lies in the epistemological shift the concept requires: to think with *etak* means to explore relationality instead of hierarchy, resonance instead of factuality and becoming instead of being. It is a tool to decenter mainstream definitions of academic authority and, as such, is potentially a key instrument for decolonial approaches to the study of human cultures. Methodological impulses from Indigenous studies (Kovach 2009; Smith 2012) have served as a double corrective, expanding the epistemological scope of Pacific Indigenous studies—the knowledge production of which harkens back to colonial formations associated with scientific exploration and trade (Najita 2016: 1261)—and the North Atlantic academic disciplines of postcolonial and music studies.

The imperative to think beyond disciplinary narratives has emerged from this. *Etak*, as the navigational art of the in-between, resonates well with this. Considering music and structured movement as a medium irreducible to language, *etak* inquires how these three dimensions of musicking inform and amplify one another (cf. Abels 2017, 2018). Sonic experience is intrinsically multisensorial in nature (Feld 1996; Downey 2002; Clayton 2008; Thacker 2012; Simonett 2014; Eidsheim 2015), which is particularly crucial in Micronesian music-making practices (Dietrich 2002, 2009; Throop 2009; Schwartz 2012a, 2012b). The triangulately research design suggested by *etak* allows room for analytical and epistemic insights that may arise between questions, methods and categories. *Etak* requires a multi-method because, like the relationship between the moving canoe, the islands and the stars, the interconnection of music-making and its transforming environment (natural and social) is never directly causal but rather complex (Silvers 2018).

The analytical benefit of *etak* is potentially productive for any research into cultural practices, but it might emerge as particularly potent for music research because a strict dialogical implementation of analytical approaches, such as *etak*, suggests it is inevitably bound to draw closer to that which escapes language in the performing arts. As the performing arts cut across established categories of thinking (such as mind/body, feeling/reflection, materiality/immateriality and hearing/seeing/smelling), working in the in-between, any analytical approach inquiring into its epistemological dynamics must follow suit.

Exploring performing arts and other Indigenous knowledge practices the *etak* way might allow for academic and Pacific epistemologies to enter into conversation. As we consciously choose to position ourselves at the interface of several disciplines within the North Atlantic academy, *etak* reminds us to not prioritize one way of knowing over the other. Instead, it requires us to acknowledge and analyze all these epistemic configurations as part of the multiple realities human beings have within their environment. It emphasizes the intellectual and human value inherent in putting divergent ways of thinking into perspective with one another. In this way, focusing on music as procedural knowledge using *etak* is a strategy to explore the insights arising between epistemological configurations and confrontations.

## Conclusion

The central motivation behind adopting the notion of *etak* and developing it into an intellectual tool is to de-hierarchize competing and sometimes incompatible epistemologies. The aim is to arrive at an understanding of knowledge as a process rather than an authoritative explanatory model. The benefits of such an endeavor are obvious: they enable fresh vistas on cultural practices as procedural knowledge unfolding and, as such, they hold the potential to unveil them as knowledge resources that remain obscure within more conventional epistemological frameworks. Their radical focus on perspectivity leads to a rigorous decentering of the latter. The implications of this process are far-reaching because they inevitably include a decentering of academic authority. Thinking with *etak* gives equal weight to academic knowledge and knowing through music and inspires us to listen for the resonances and disruptions emerging between the two. In this way, *etak* invites us to assume a meta-analytical perspective on approaches to knowing as a cultural phenomenon. Such a move inevitably positions academic knowledge as one type of knowledge among many, stripping it of its authoritative aura and claims to power. This critical potential of the *etak* concept resonates well with Ingold's (2014) critique of the scholarly notion of ethnography. Arguing that ethnography as a term has lost much of its meaning, Ingold stated that ethnographicness is

a judgment that is cast upon them through retrospective conversion of the learning, remembering and note-taking which they call forth into pretexts for something else altogether. This ulterior purpose, concealed from the people whom you covertly register as informants, is documentary. It is this that turns

your experience, your memory and your notes into material — sometimes spun quasi-scientifically as “data” — upon which you subsequently hope to draw in the project of offering an account (Ingold 2014: 386).

Ingold, grappling with issues of authority, authorship and representation as well as the artificial binary of ethnography and theory, concluded that any meaningful anthropology must primarily seek out the couplings of the forward movement «of one’s own perception and action with the movements of others» (2014: 389). He called these couplings «correspondences». For Ingold, anthropology’s mission should be the effort to repair «the rupture between reality and imagination» (2014: 393) that has solidified the opposition of ethnography vs. theory. Ethnography would then no longer be «ethnography but the educational correspondences of real life. And theory [...] no longer theory, but an imagination nourished by its observational engagements with the world» (Ingold 2014: 393). There is healing, Ingold implies, in such a conscious dissolving of the established boundaries of academic scholarship: a healing capable of forging fruitful conversation between the fiercely competitive epistemological frameworks of a wounded postcolonial world. In the spirit of the ecologies of knowledge, which aim for a recognition of epistemological differences as the primary foundation for a less colonial future, *etak* might help us to forge a path where so far there has been none in the study of Western Pacific performing arts and beyond.

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