# 1 Latmikaik's Children and Their Music

**Abstract**
This chapter provides a conceptual and ethnographic view into the world of this book. It introduces the historical and cultural settings of music-making in Palau. I provide a historically informed perspective on the relationship between the role of Palauan chant traditions and musical structures and textures. Exploring the competing music ontologies and epistemologies that have been formative to current performance practice from both historical and post-colonial perspectives, I draft to what extent the neo-phenomenological concept of meaningfulness might prove helpful to unpack the central role traditionally attributed to music-making in Palau.

**Keywords:** chelitákl rechuódel, chanting, neo-phenomenology, atmospheres

E-Reberbong obom ngasech ra ngesechelel a meseksikt
e tourengreng er kau obil meaii mang
arturang el ngara sob a chilat er kau e Reberbong
el kmo ngika ngelekel a chelid,
mengdi imong ra delal e,
e meremang ngera kosisiik --- iiang.

Reberbong, when you go on top of the Pleiades,
there we sing to you that you are high,
respected people show respect to you.
And they say: You are the son of an *chelíd*.
You're only one son of your mother
and now you're coming. What are you looking for?

When I first met Wilhelm, a *rubák* I visited quite often to discuss everything related to chelitákl rechuódel, he already knew that I had come to talk to him

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Sound example 1 *E-Reberbong*. Chesóls chanted by Wilhelm Rengiil, Koror/Palau, recorded on 14 February 2005.

about traditional chanting. Several people had referred me to him, a highly respected chanter known for his vast knowledge of traditional repertoire. His wife and another woman were also present. Before I even had a chance to introduce myself, he gestured for me to sit down and for everyone to be quiet so that he could chant. He smiled when he realised I understood, and so did the two women. And then Wilhelm started his chant: "E-Reberbong obom ngasech ra ngesechelel a meseksikt…"

*E-Reberbong* is an chesóls, which is arguably the most traditional and political genre of chelitákl rechuódel. I discuss chesóls in greater detail in Chapter 2. More specifically, *E-Reberbong* is an *otengelel a chesóls*, a "bringing down of chesóls". Together with the *okisel a chesóls*, the "rising of chesóls", the otengelel a chesóls is the traditional preamble preceding the performance of a full chesóls. The okisel a chesóls, also featured in sound example 1, continues to be a standard element of contemporary chesóls performance. It consists of the chanter's exclamation "o-desuokl", to which everyone partaking in the situation will respond, "huei!". The okisel a chesóls is a historical performance practice described in some of the earliest descriptions of Palauan music-making, including that of Captain Henry Wilson of the *East India Company* ship *Antelope*, shipwrecked in Palau on 10 August 1783 (a few years later compiled and published by George Keate as *An Account of the Pelew Islands*, see Keate 1788). This sequence will typically be repeated, with slight alterations ("o-desuoklel", response: *"hu-a-huii"*). Contemporary Palauans are unsure about the exact meaning of these words, but the "o-desuokl" is taken as an opening marker signifying to everyone around at the beginning of an chesóls performance to call them into the appropriate state of mind. "Hm… huei!" is an expression of approval and encouragement for the chanter and a required response at the end of every chesóls stanza until the present day. "O-desuokl", by contrast, is not necessarily a part of contemporary chesóls performances, even if elder chanters tend to regard performances lacking the okisel a chesóls as disrespectful.

The otengelel a chesóls, of which "E-Reberbong" is an example, is a particular type of chesóls with which it shares the same musical structure.

Directly following an okisel a chesóls, it is supposed to be delivered before the performance of the actual chesóls, i.e., the main chesóls of the performance. Chesóls are often political in nature, detailing decision-making processes or the mythological or historical background of a given situation. Created by deities, they are not human-made. This makes them powerful interpolations in legal disputes and communal decision-making processes alike: They stand for the divine origin of Palauan order and social structure, and, as such, they demand unreserved respect. It is this sense of respectfulness and humbleness that an otengelel a chesóls is supposed to establish prior to the performance of a main chesóls: its purpose is to establish a connection, through its own resounding, with the spiritual world, seeking the deities' and ancestral spirits' blessing for the ensuing performance of chesóls. Rarely sung today, an otengelel a chesóls tells of a traditional worldview in which mundane practices are shot through with spirituality. It only took a chant to conjure up the sensation of that interconnection between daily life and the divine. This is, quite tangibly, what *E-Reberbong* does: The chant reminds hereditary title holders (here, reberbong of Melekeok) to be mindful of their traditional responsibility and origin when they are about to make a political decision: "You are the son of an chelíd/ You're only one son of your mother." The general sentiment, powerfully resounding in the unfolding of the otengelel a chesóls, is clear: remember the divine origins of the islands, honour your ancestors, respect the laws of the land and the sea, know your place in history and, against the backdrop of all this, take responsible stewardship of your community according to your place within the social hierarchy.

My Palauan interlocutors have connected "the feel" of specific Palauan musical genres in many different ways with a sense of revelatory value and importance that only music-making could provide them with. The otengelel a chesóls above points to how deeply this sentiment is entangled with traditional Palauan notions of both history and community. In many ways, some of the Palauan traditional chant repertoire is historiographical in nature, encoding historical narratives in "physically manifested vehicles that bear cultural endowed meaning" (Parmentier 1987, 11), i.e., structured sound in the sense of musical genre conventions and their performative enactment. Anthropologist Richard Parmentier referred to the Benjaminian aura to describe the prime functioning of non-linguistic narrative modalities of Palauan history. They are "extensionally deployed in social action, and by encoding the layered course of historical change they make possible an intentional sense of cultural continuity through time"

(Parmentier 1987, 12). Such a narration of history can occur through objects, such as wooden carvings, pottery or pictures, or through cultural practices, such as music-making and dance. Beyond their role as a historiographical device, the Palauan traditional performing arts "come to play a vital role in social action, because they are constantly modified, manipulated, contested, and concealed. There is, in other words, a constant interplay between the 'sedimenting' power of contexts of action and the 'typifying' function of historicizing representation" (Parmentier 1987, 13). *Music Worlding in Palau* extends, or perhaps twists, Parmentier's argument by suggesting that the sedimenting power of music-making and dancing in Palau resides primarily in their capacity to manifest atmospherically. By manifesting atmospherically, chants do not only open space for modification, manipulation, contestation and concealment. They also (re-)build their many contextual frameworks and, in return, themselves, and create possibilities for robust change both of historical narratives and possible future realities.

This chapter establishes the ethnographic and conceptual context for my subsequent analysis of meaningfulness in the Palauan performing arts. In two main sections, I look at the ethnographic and cultural setting of music-making in Palau and then the key concepts of the neo-phenomenology of atmospheres with which these settings resonate. Neither section is meant to be comprehensive in any way (for an encompassing overview of the first, see Parmentier 1987). They serve more as a means to sound out to what extent the neo-phenomenological concept of meaningfulness can help unpack the central role traditionally attributed to music-making in Palau. All of this serves to set the scene for the remainder of this book, which probes the scope and intellectual implications of meaningfulness as an analytical concept for Palau.

## Palau

Palau is situated some 800 kilometres southeast of the Philippines and is currently home to a population of about 21,000. Palauan oral history details the creation of the islands, and many historical sites continue to remain as visible evidence of those stories. Three charter myths are central: they tell of Latmikaik, Chuab and Milad, respectively. Each of them, along with their stories, mark distinct *renged*, historical polities, in Palauan history (Parmentier 1987, 128). There are a number of conflicting varieties of the

charter myths. Japanese anthropologist Hijikata, who first arrived in Palau in 1929, recorded the creation as follows:

> In the beginning was *Uchelianged*, the god of heaven. *Uchelianged* caused a *btuch* (star), driven along by an *eabed* (squall), to fall from heaven. This resulted in the creation of the island of Ngeriab on the island of Beliliou [Peliliu]; then, the shallows of Mekaeb were formed next to it. *Uchelianged* then sent a *kim* (giant clam) from heaven down to the world below. The *kim* gave birth to *Latmikaik*, who lived in the sea. However, when *Latmikaik* became pregnant and the time of birth was near at hand, she was troubled because, lacking a vulva, she had no way of giving birth. She thereupon consulted with *kim*, which agreed to let her use its *berdel* (mantle). *Latmikaik* mounted the mantle between her legs and was then able to give birth. (Hijikata 1996; italics in original)

Other versions of the myth insist that Latmikaik first gave birth to a great number of children that were both fish and human: they were human on the land but fish in the sea (Umetaro 1974, 10). Uchelianged asked Latmikaik to have her children pile up rocks and then make the pile collapse; the scattered rocks became Chelbacheb, Palau's Rock Islands. They dot the area from Southern Koror to Northern Peleliu. He then ordered them to pile the stones so that they would create a path between Angaur and Babeldaob. In this way, the vertical structure of the cosmos from Latmikaik's residence at the bottom of the sea to the seat of Uchelianged in the heavens shifted to a horizontal emphasis (see, e.g., Dobbin and Hezel 2011, 166-76). Latmikaik is also the mother and source of all life on the Palauan islands, which is why one of the coronae of Venus, all named after fertility goddesses, is named after her. Her dwelling deep in the ocean seals the Palauan people's visceral connection with the ocean, a theme that resonates with similar notions across Oceania: "In the beginning was the ocean" is how the Tongan creation story begins, and "Tongan deep history states that people originated in the *moana* (deep sea), and that *Limu* (seaweed) and *Kele* (sea sediment) are our primordial parents" (Kaʻili 2017b); "we sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood", says Teresa Teaiwa (in Hauʻofa 1997, 124), and Tongan and Fijian writer and anthropologist Epeli Hauʻofa states,

> Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views

> that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed place, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. (Hau'ofa 1993, 16)

Hijikata continues:

> The child was the goddess *Obechad*. *Obechad* was the progenitor of *chad* (human beings) and, since there were no male gods, brought the goddess *Turang* into the world by virgin birth. Then, *Turang* likewise gave birth on her own to the great goddess *Chuab*. (Hijikata 1996, 9; italics in original)[14]

Chuab, who had an insatiable appetite, rapidly grew larger. At some point, she toppled over and her body parts became Palau: Ngarchelong is her head, Ngetkib in Airai her genitals (Hijikata 1996, 10). Uchelianged had ordered Chuab to create chiefly councils, an assignment which Chuab passed on to her four to five children. They travelled up North and along their route created the councils. These two first myths, thus, "describe the foundation of the Belauan cultural order in the 'era of *Chuab'* as a loosely knit string of eight villages located along the eastern side of the archipelago" (Parmentier 1987, 128; italics in original). The long story of Milad, many versions of which are probably the least coherent (for Krämer's version, see 1929a, 61-7 and KETC 2017b, 46-50; for an overview, see Parmentier 1987, 157-96), while the story itself is the most complex and marks the next era – or more aptly perhaps, the transition between the "archaic world and the new world" (Parmentier 1987, 156). Milad initiated another reconstitution of Palauan

14 Cf. the version recorded by anthropologist Augustin Krämer, who headed a fieldwork expedition to Micronesia in the first decade of the twentieth century:

> "Story 1. The Creation of The Spirits of the Land.
> In the oldest days there was no land and people did not exist, only a volcanic rock, the *risóis*, rose out of the sea. *Galid* spirit *Tpereákl* and the woman *Latmikáik* originated from it; he went to heaven, from where he often came down, and she lived at the bottom of the sea. In due course she created numerous fish and the first human beings *arúgel*. First she gave birth to two sons, a *Ugéliángĕd* and a *Ugéldátk*, then two girls. In addition, many sons and female creatures in the form of fish were born. The first two sons married the two girls and the other man the fish-women. Now the long fish, the eels and rays, etc., started to build a house for the couples, while the other fish fetched stones from the bottom of the sea and piled them up, until an island appeared above the surface of the sea; this is today's *Ngeaûr* [Angaur]. The *galid* spirit piled up more and more, until a high tower made from sand and stone was created; [s]he had the form of a human being and was called a *Guáp* [*Chuab*]. When the giant had been completed, they started a fire at his feet so that he toppled over. The debris created the *Gogeál*-islands and the *Pélau*-land. The *galid* spirit spread all over Palau. There still existed no sun." (Krämer 1929a, 1; see also KETC 2017b; italics in original)

Figure 3 An illustration of the story of Chuab. Gable detail of the Belau National Museum bai at Koror. Photo by author.

social order, and historical sights continue to embody her story all the way into the present. For example:

> at the rocky peak of Roismlengui range [...] a goddess named Milad [...] landed after a great flood, and [...] gave birth to four children in the form of stones at the foot of the mountain. These four children were to become "cornerposts" of the Belauan political order – in fact, Milad's eldest son was Imeiong, the capital of the district [...]. (Parmentier 1987, 4)

The physical world is deeply entangled with social and historical patterns which, in turn, were determined by mythological cosmology. Palauan political structure, hierarchy and laws are of divine origin, similar to a lot of Micronesia. The gods also appointed the village rubáks (chiefs). The latter have decision-making power through the institution of the klobak, the village council bestowed with judicial, legislative and administrative power. The klobak held meetings in the bai (community house). Such meetings followed prescribed patterns regarding seating arrangements, food distribution, etc.; they also formed the exclusive performance space for particular types of chants. The mode of communication was *kelulau*, 'whispering principles': a rubák whispered his statement to a messenger, who, in turn, proceeded to pass it on to the rubák who was supposed to receive that information (Palau

Society of Historians 1997, 63; also see Rechebei and McPhetres 1997). Kelulau was used in a broader sense to describe the process of decision-making and legislation in the bai.

The gods also created dance and, subsequently, music. Oral tradition stresses the connection between dance and nature: the god Uchelechelíd coincidentally watched a bluefin jack jumping after a sardine and was so amused by what he saw that he turned the wooden replica of a mackerel into an insigne, which dancers still carry today (Krämer 1926, 315). There is also a story detailing how Uchelechelíd was inspired by the hunting movements of a fish and modelled the ruk dance after it. The linkage between dance and divinity, as well as its nascency in the mythical age where gods and men coexisted in the physical world but which is not entirely separate from the present, adds up to a legitimising power that lends meaningfulness to dance. The past is no different from the present *per se*, and events largely follow a "replaying pattern well documented in myths, chants, and narratives" (Parmentier 1987, 3); the performing arts are crucial to energising this cyclical structure.

A number of traditional musical genres, including omengeredákl, are considered *olángch* (Palauan: "mnemonic marker"; "external sign"). Olángch is a complex Palauan term. Richard Parmentier translates it as "signs of history", further qualifying it as those "representational expressions which, through their iconic, indexical, and residually symbolic properties, record and classify events as history, that selective discourse about the diachrony of a society" (Parmentier 1987, 11). Their aura is what engenders objects or cultural practices with an encompassing power to stand for Palauan historicity at large. This aura, which is "[…] derived from their contiguity with the original context [, …] makes these objects appropriate signs of history" (Parmentier 1987, 3). As such, they are "frequently considered to be concrete embodiments or repositories of the past they record, that is, to be endowed with the essentialized or reified property of historicity" (Parmentier 1987, 12). The historicity of signs of history, thus, resides in their specific materiality. Drawing on neo-phenomenologist Gernot Böhme, I will add to this that with their materiality come the atmospheres that emanate from their materiality (Böhme 1995). In the case of omengeredákl, singing is "aesthetic labor" (Böhme 1995, 35-38), a process in which spaces, people, objects and, in this case, cultural practices are given qualities that make them exude something through their specific material form – something vague and unspecific, perhaps, but something significant nonetheless. This significance is inextricably connected with the materiality of the object or practice in question. This is why musical

analysis in this book will address the intertwining of the sonic materiality and atmosphere. After all, this was what made Victoria, Oribech and their fellow singers think immediately of grander schemes within which current musical practices "made sense", as they put it on that February afternoon in Melekeok: the musical form and structure of omengeredákl and their enactment in sound.

In twenty-first-century post-colonial, and to a considerable extent, neo-colonial Palau, however, singing as aesthetic labour is a type of labour that carries the weight of a great many contradictions – both past and present. History in Palau knows several frames; in fact, there is a multiplicity of historical narratives enveloping contemporary Palauan cultural practices. As for most Pacific Islanders, history for Palauans certainly "did not begin with the arrival of foreigners, as most non-indigenous histories do" (Salesa 2014, 36). Still, North Atlantic historiographic narratives are a part of the islands' post-colonial entanglement.

## North Atlantic narratives of Palauan history

North Atlantic scholarly accounts of Micronesia's earliest human history are still largely unclear and sometimes contradictory. However, there is academic consensus that traffic and migration, particularly from Southeast Asia, laid the foundations of West Micronesian cultures. To date, scholars do not agree about the exact beginning of migration into West Micronesia, but 3000 to 1000 BC evolves as a reasonable approximation. Long before Europeans first took note of the Palauan islands in 1522, the Palauans were part of an inter-island trade and communication network, especially with the islands of Yap, according to linguistic and archaeological evidence (Abels 2008). In 1686, Francisco Lazcano seized the Palau islands for the Spanish crown, terming them "the Carolinas". Spain took virtually no action to actually colonise its newly acquired territory, and missions were not significantly successful until the late nineteenth century. In 1783, four years after James Cook's second voyage, when mutual violence between European explorers and Pacific Islanders had thoroughly dashed the European dream of an earthly Eden in the Pacific Ocean, Captain Henry Wilson of the British East India Company and the *Antelope* made the first thoroughly documented contact between Palauans and Europeans. The *Antelope* was shipwrecked on 10 August that year just off Koror Island, which remains the centre of the island nation. The Palauans helped Captain Wilson to build a new ship, named *Oroolong*, with the *Antelope*'s

Figure 4 Unidentified crew members and brass band of the German *MS Condor* on a visit in Palau in 1911. From the collection of Dieter Klein, Düsseldorf (Germany).

remnants. Ever since the *Antelope* incident, Europeans have maintained a relatively constant presence on the Palau islands, but that did not affect Palauan everyday life to any significant degree. This situation changed when Germany bought Spain's Western Carolina territory for a bargain in 1899 and immediately established a colonial government on neighbouring Yap with outposts on Palau, which increased German marine traffic in the area (see figs. 4 and 5).

In 1914, at the outset of WWI, Japanese forces displaced the militarily unprepared German administrative staff in Micronesia and occupied all of Micronesia except Guam. Until WWII, Japan had been allotted a Class C mandate by the League of Nations. The Japanese presence changed Palauans' lives profoundly. A Japanese educational system was implemented, and Koror, which remains the most populated area of Palau, became not only the administrative headquarters of the Japanese Pacific territory but also a small metropolis with paved roads, electricity, cinemas and geisha houses by 1940 (Parmentier 1987; Rechebei and McPhetres 1997).

WWII brought massive violence to Palau, which was caught in the midst of a war between the world's largest nation-states. While the early war years were mostly quiet, toward "the middle and end of the war [...] the

Figure 5 Unidentified Palauans with an accordion. Undated (but most likely from the first decade of the 20th century). From the collection of Dieter Klein, Düsseldorf (Germany).

suffering caused by American bombing attacks, hunger, repression by the Japanese, and dislocation from their villages brought a new perspective in the lives of the Palauans at the time" (Rechebei and MacPhetres 1997, 179). As early as 1939, the Japanese military had begun to increase their military presence in Micronesia, but it was really the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i, on 7 December 1941 that marked the beginning of WWII in the Pacific. The move to push the Japanese military out of Micronesia was initiated only three years later, in 1944. Starting in Kiribati, the US Airforce began attacking Japanese military bases and industrial sites across Micronesia. One of the most bitter battles of WWII in the Pacific was fought in Peliliu, Southern Palau. "Operation Stalemate II" took place from September to November 1944 and cost more than 12,000 lives, by far the most on the Japanese side. The Japanese government formally surrendered in September 1945, and the US Navy became the interim administrative authority until 1947, when the United Nations and the US signed the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which gave the US full power and authority over, among others, the Palauan islands. Tiny Palau opted to re-establish her political independence in the final quarter of the twentieth century when the Trust Territory became its present political organisation instead of joining the Federated States of Micronesia. This political status was eventually achieved in 1994, putting an end to nearly a century of Spanish, German, Japanese and US

colonisation. Palau has been dependent on the USA's economic assistance, stipulated in the Compact of Free Association, ever since the early 1980s. The Compact provides several million US dollars annually in subsidies and grants. The US insisted when negotiating Palau's status of political independence that they (the US) be given the right to store and operate nuclear vessels and weapons on Palauan territory. They continue to hold this right.

Palau's rapidly growing main industry has been tourism in the twenty-first century, with the majority of visitors coming from Japan, Taiwan and the US. The number of annual visitors currently outnumbers the overall population by far. Under the aegis of the semi-governmental Palau Legacy Project, the country has been trying to boost its own brand of ecotourism, in which traditional chants (chelitákl rechuódel) and dances play a particular role. The relationship between Palauan cultural history and tourism, however, has been complex. Addressing the islands' encompassing vulnerability as a Small Island Developing State in the face of climate change and environmental challenges, including the impact of large-scale tourism on natural resources, the campaign video revolves around one central question: "Legends help Palau preserve its past. But can they protect its future?"[15] This question refers to the complexities of Palau's post-colonial present: climate change, a seemingly uncontrollable growth of tourism and the injustice of global market economies, all against the backdrop of a turbulent colonial history spanning several centuries that has left its lasting mark on the islands. In tarrying with twenty-first-century reality, initiatives such as the Palau Legacy Project and the rising number of traditional arts performances suggest that chants such as olángch seem to provide a resource to which to turn. One reason for this, *Music Worlding in Palau* suggests, lies in what I call meaningfulness.

## Meaningfulness

This meaningfulness is, by definition, experiential. A key argument of this book is that meaningfulness, manifesting as musical sensation, is a prerequisite for *knowing* through music: only where things fall into place, where it all makes sense in the sensation of a musical event, can knowledge

15 The campaign video is available at https://palaupledge.com, last accessed 20 March 2019. See Abels (2018a) for an in-depth exploration of the campaign and the role attributed to the performing arts within the initiative.

emerge from the diffuse energy circulating in the feedback loop between musical structures, historical narratives, social formations and cultural meshworks in the Ingoldian sense. Musical meaningfulness, that is to say, gives rise to the Gestalten at the heart of what we think we comprehend through music (and only music). This book is invested in exploring these Gestalten.

Scholars in Pacific studies, and Western Pacific music studies in particular, have long observed that music constitutes a distinct type of knowledge in many Pacific cultures, offering nuanced accounts of the relationship between knowledge and sound-based performance practices (e.g., Diettrich 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2021; Drüppel 2009; Parmentier 1987; Steiner 2015; to name but a few). They have also suggested more recently that music's relational and ecological complexity is a central category for the analysis of traditional performing arts in the Pacific Islands (Diettrich 2018b; Rehuher 1998; Schwartz 2012). Extending this work, I argue that Palauan chelitákl rechuódel enable a deeply relational and, importantly, uniquely *musical* way of comprehending the world (cf. Ingold 2013). If the intellectual project of this book is to better understand the distinctly musical workings of this comprehension that, by all evidence, forms such an important epistemic register in twenty-first-century Palau, then the notion of musical meaningfulness may be a missing link. The sensation of musical meaningfulness results from the transductive process in which a material sound event becomes a shared feeling loaded with historicity, relationality and connectivity. The notion of meaningfulness suggests that music-making is a felt-bodily practice moulding the lived experience of being in the world: It brings out the turbulent complexity of one's relationality and reaches out actively to one's surroundings. One could argue that music and dance are also dwelling practices: They do not merely represent or occupy time and space. Instead, they are strategies of (felt-)bodily practising and rearranging time and space and, as such, of world-making through the felt body (Abels 2020a). Emphasising the inseparability of (felt-)bodily practices and world-making, process philosopher Erin Manning calls this process "body-worlding": a movement that gives rise to a sensation of self that "is one with the world, not body/world but body worlding" (Manning [2009] 2012, 6). I believe that thinking with meaningfulness can be crucial to making this rather abstract idea analytically productive in the Palauan context.

The importance my interlocutors attribute to chelitákl rechuódel suggests that this is a repertoire allowing navigation, if not temporary integration, of the competing frames contemporary Palau is made up of.

To them, the meaningfulness with which the traditional performing arts are imbued does not resolve any of the frictions and contradictions that arise between these frames. Instead, it renders the connection between the fixed bits, the scattered pieces and their in-between experienceable: somehow, they seem to suggest, it all belongs. In making meaningfulness felt, the performance of a traditional chant seems to offer a fleeting sensation of belonging in the post-colonial predicament of Palau; a vague and unspecific moment of atmospheric meaningfulness where it all makes sense. The sonic, and more specifically the musical, seem to be particularly capable of rendering this meaningfulness experienceable. Eisenlohr has called this the "sonic privilege" vis-à-vis the holistic character of sensory experience. Referring to the sensory dimensions of religious experience, he argues:

> The sonic [...] lies in close proximity to the holistic Gestalten, the atmospheric core of the sensory spectacle of religion. This atmospheric core cannot be reduced to single sensory impressions, but emerges prior to the singling out of such impressions, whether visual, auditory, or otherwise. (Eisenlohr 2019)

What is this sonic meaningfulness? More specifically, what is musical meaningfulness?

## Schmitz on Meaningfulness

I adopt the term meaningfulness (Bedeutsamkeit) from the work of Hermann Schmitz, who himself derived the term through Heidegger (see Riedel 2020a, 268). Schmitz is an unusual figure in German-speaking philosophy and arguably one of the most radical and iconoclastic thinkers in the field. His interest as a neo-phenomenologist is in the immediacy of the lived experience and the material *a priori* of phenomena and sensations (Andermann 2007, 254). His fascination is in the qualia of phenomena-as-experienced. Schmitz's focus on the immediate lived experience grows from his critique of what he calls the "dominant European intellectualist culture"[16] (Schmitz 2007, 7): the historical ontological and epistemological assumptions that form the exclusive foundation of North Atlantic philosophy. He calls

16 Original text: " [die] dominante[...] europäische[...] Intellektualkultur".

these assumptions the "abstraction basis" (Abstraktionsbasis), by which he understands

> the tenaciously powerful layer of things taken for granted that form a filter between the immediate experience of life, on the one hand, and concepts, theories and evaluations, on the other hand. The abstraction basis decides what is taken to be important enough that it finds its way into theories and evaluations through words and terms.[17] (Schmitz 2007, 11)

Schmitz is interested in the immediate lived experience precisely because it does not pass through the filter he describes above. He, thus, deliberately reaches for what is prior to the hegemony of the abstraction basis. He dates the emergence of the dominant European intellectualist culture, with its focus on ratio and quantification, its disregard for the lived experience and the felt body, and its latent mind/body divide, to the ancient Greece of the second half of the fifth century BC. Since then, he claims, the abstraction basis has not been changed to any significant extent (Schmitz 2007, 12), and it has managed to systematically mute the significance of the felt-bodily experience from North Atlantic thinking:

> 2400 years later [the abstraction basis of European thought] still profoundly distorts our experience of ourselves and the world. The conceptual outlook in which we find ourselves is dominated by the mind/body dualism in its various guises and with its consequent conceptions of both the person (as split up into the two fundamentally distinct spheres of body and mind) and the world (as split up into the domains of res extensa and res cogitans). What gets lost from view, on these dominant perspectives, is the felt body with its quite specific dynamics, rhythms of stirrings and corporeal movements, and its ways of being constantly involved in the manifold forms of holistic sensing of situations – rich modes of experience that cannot adequately be narrowed down to perception by means of the sense organs. Instead, sensing by means of the felt body is a holistic exchange of corporeal dynamics, a vibrant attunement to meaningful surroundings. (Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan 2011, 244)

17 Original text: "[…] die zäh prägende Schicht vermeintlicher Selbstverständlichkeiten, die zwischen der unwillkürlichen Lebenserfahrung einerseits, den Begriffen, Theorien und Bewertungen andereseits den Filter bildet. […] Die Abstraktionsbasis entscheidet darüber, was so wichtig genommen wird, daß es durch Worte und Begriffe Eingang in Theorien und Bewertungen findet."

His project, in short, is to leave behind everything that has gone wrong in the North Atlantic philosophical tradition – and to him, that is nearly everything that happened after about 500 BC. Working toward this goal, Schmitz's lifework amounts to

> a systematic phenomenology of the felt body and the various forms of embodied experience [... It] draws out several implications of this broad approach, resulting in phenomenological theories of subjectivity and personhood, of emotions and feelings, of space and time, of art, of religious and spiritual experience, of morals and law – to name just the key themes. (Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan 2011, 242)

It is important to note that the felt body, to Schmitz, is not an oppositional binary to the material body. Schmitz's felt body's

> mode of existence cannot be separated from its becoming manifest to the conscious subject in specific kinds of corporeal feeling. These corporeal feelings are crucially distinct from what usually gets described under the term 'bodily sensations' (in psychology or the analytical philosophy of mind): the [felt] body becomes manifest in holistic corporeal stirrings such as vigour and languidness, in one's being corporeally gripped by emotions and room-filling atmospheres, and equally in one's corporeal orientation in the world in contexts of perception, action and spatial navigation. Moreover, the [felt] body presents an absolute location of subjective orientation and opens the dimension of a predimensional, surfaceless space.[18] (Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan 2011, 245)

This notion of surfaceless space is crucial to the key concepts of Schmitzian neo-phenomenology: the felt body, atmospheres and, in the context of this book, musical Gestalt. Schmitz's space is primarily not locational, measurable Cartesian space ("Ortsraum"), which he regards as a reductive representation of space. Instead, the felt body encounters space as pre-dimensional and surfaceless. To Schmitz, these are the "deeper layers" of spatiality (2016, 83): superficial, locational space and deeper space are separated by the surface, the category any measurability relies on. Measurable space is insignificant to felt-bodily experience: "The alienation of space from the felt body begins

18 Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan (2011) translate the German "Leib" as "feeling body" in this text. I have used "[felt] body" in the quotes above where Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan use "feeling body" to avoid terminological confusion and maintain consistency.

with the surface",[19] he contends. Conversely, this means that the felt body is particularly receptive to surfaceless phenomena, and these include, for instance, not only the wind and weather but also the sonic and, by extension, music. Indeed, sound itself has an aspatial phenomenology (Krueger 2011, 64; O'Shaughnessy 1984, 199). Music, a surfaceless phenomenon, thus, allows for the temporary familiarisation of time and space with the felt body; as such, it also allows for the temporary familiarisation of the felt body with its own spatiality, its own temporality. The key mechanisms in this process are atmospheric suggestions of motion (Bewegungssuggestionen). Chapter 2 will offer a more practical exploration of the concept. Here, it is important to note that sonic events exude suggestions of motion, which people can then take in felt-bodily; in Schmitz's terminology, they "encorporate" (einleiben) them. The moment several people encorporate a given musical situation's suggestions of movement in a similar manner, motional patterns emerge – patterns which interrelate and connect those who are encorporating the suggestions of movement. Schmitz calls this communitization process "solidary encorporation". The latter creates shared situations in which people temporarily unite in a "We-Leib" (Wir-Leib) – a felt-bodily collective that includes all the individual "I-Leiber" (Schmitz 1978, 96). The solidary encorporation of musical suggestions of motion, thus, holds an intrinsically social dimension, which is central to the communitization capacity of music. Music, and dance, in other words, have the capacity to render one's being-in-relation experienceable through solidary encorporation; moreover, they also allow for the modulation of this situational relationality. This is where music's transformational potential lies. From the perspective of Schmitzian neo-phenomenology, music is social becoming rendered aesthetically experienceable in a distinctly sonic way.

## Surfaceless: Beyond the Binaries

Conceiving both the sonic and the felt body as surfaceless, Schmitz's ideas open up analytical avenues leading beyond the binaries of subject vs. object and the internal vs. the external. Schmitz defines the felt body as everything a person experiences within the vicinity of their body as belonging to themselves "without drawing on the five senses and the perceptual body schema parasitic on them" (Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan 2011, 253). "Within the vicinity" here does not mean within the boundaries of their material

19 Original text: "[M]it der Fläche beginnt die Entfremdung des Raums vom Leib".

body: the felt body is a surfaceless phenomenon independent from relative positionality measured as distance.

> The felt body is, for Schmitz, neither physical materiality nor a regime of the senses (Schmitz [1978] 2015, 17); its very essence is, instead, *dynamism*. This dynamism of the felt-body (*sic*) centres in an axis Schmitz terms vital drive ("*vitaler Antrieb*") which unfolds in the "intertwined tendencies of contraction and expansion" of "tension and swelling" (Schmitz 2009, 34). Since the felt-body is not a secluded entity but is, instead, an organic bundle of dynamics, it is structurally open to situational dynamics. Crucially, sound, music and atmosphere are also essentially dynamics – they all take shape in expansion and contraction, tension and swelling, and operate by way of stirring and [suggestions of motion] (Schmitz [1978] 2005, 245). (Riedel 2018, 178; italics in original)

The felt body manifests in corporeal stirrings, such as affective involvement. It extends, indivisible, as pre-dimensional (i.e., not three-dimensional) volume; its dynamism unfolds as expansion and contraction (Schmitz 2009, 16). Schmitz clarifies the relationship between expansion and contraction using the example of inhalation: One feels one's intake of breath as a "felt-bodily isle" (Leibesinsel) near the chest or stomach. In this isle,

> contraction and expansion compete, with first expansion and then, towards the end of inhaling, contraction dominating; this island is voluminous, but it is not surrounded by surfaces or dissectible into surfaces. Hence, it is not three-dimensional. […] Such a pre-dimensional volume also appears in other areas of [felt-bodily] experience, for instance, […] as the volume of sound, which, is sharp, pointed and narrow in the case of a shrill whistle, but expansive and soft in a dull gong or chime. The felt body is nearly always occupied by such felt-bodily isles.[20] (Schmitz 2009, 16)

20 Original text: "[Das Einatmen wird in der Leibesinsel gespürt,] in der simultan Engung und Weitung konkurrieren, wobei anfangs die Weitung und später, gegen Ende des Einatmens, die Engung überwiegt; diese Insel ist voluminös, aber weder von Flächen umschlossen noch durch Flächen zerlegbar und daher auch nicht dreidimensional […]. Solch ein prädimensionales Volumen kommt auch in anderen Erfahrungsbereichen vor, etwa […] als Schallvolumen, das beim schrillen Pfiff scharf, spitz und eng ist, beim dumpfen Gong oder Glockenschlag aber ausladend weit und weich. Der Leib ist fast immer […] von solchen Leibesinseln besetzt […]." (Schmitz 2009, 16) For more on Schmitz' felt-bodily isles and on feeling oneself as a felt body, see Griffero (2017, 59-65).

If the pre-dimensional volume of Schmitz's felt body is not bounded by surfaces, then the felt body cannot, unlike the material body, be defined based on its distance to objects, people or anything else. Its boundedness lies more in how it sets itself apart from the surrounding vastness

> in an absolutely local way, as is also the case in the perception of the climate, such as when one steps out of an airless room into the open and, inhaling deeply, feels liberated because one can now unfold felt-bodily into a vastness that accepts [one's felt body into it] but does not dissolve [one's felt body].[21] (Schmitz 2009, 17)

So, the felt body's dynamics of contraction and expansion are stimulated by the vital drive. The latter mediates the motion of both expansion, which widens the felt body, and contraction, which keeps together the felt-bodily isles. Schmitz compares the vital drive to the pressure of the "steam under which people are like a kettle"[22] (Schmitz 2009, 19). At the same time, the vital drive requires the antagonism of contraction as tension and expansion as swelling. However, it is not the only mediator between contraction and expansion. Another is felt-bodily direction (leibliche Richtung), which, unlike geometric direction, does not rely on lines (and, hence, superficial space) in any way. Felt-bodily direction leads out of contraction and into expansion, for instance, in the case of the gaze. It constitutes a non-cognitive body schema. Schmitz calls this schema the motor-bodily schema. The motor-bodily schema offers "orientation vis-à-vis the spatial relations of the limbs" (ibid.). In addition to the neural processing of sensory stimuli, it is the mechanism which, among many other things, prevents pedestrians on the streets from bumping into one another. It is the motor-bodily schema that makes them follow the co-ordinated human flow of movement that prevents this from happening. This is a rather literary example of the more abstract mechanism at work: the motor-bodily schema modulates, through the felt body, a person's connectedness with other people, which itself is in a constant state of flux. At the same time, it is related to the phenomenon Schmitz calls solidary encorporation (solidarische Einleibung): through the

21 Original text: "[Leibliche Abgrenzung] ist vielmehr in absolut-örtlicher Abgehobenheit aus seiner umgebenden Weite begründet, wie sie auch in der klimatischen Wahrnehmung vorkommt, wenn man z.B. aus dumpfer Luft ins Freie tritt und sich im tiefen Aufatmen befreit fühlt, weil man sich in einer aufnehmenden Weite leiblich spürbar entfalten kann, ohne in ihr zu zergehen."

22 Original text: "Dampf, unter dem ein Mensch wie ein Kessel steht".

latter, the vital drive brings people into experiential connection with one another without creating a hierarchy among the encorporated.

Against this backdrop, a Schmitzian take on music would be as follows: When people participate in music, they feel the music within the realm of their felt bodies as belonging to themselves because they are – potentially or actually – engaging in contraction and expansion and, therefore, inseparable from the music in their felt-bodily experience. Music suggests motion to Schmitz. Such suggestions of motion are "prefigurations of motion on resting or moving *Gestalten,* or on movement; [they always extend beyond] the movement that will possibly be executed"[23] (Schmitz 2016, 67). Suggestions of motion are the mechanisms that enable felt-bodily communication (Schmitz 2014, 85) and, like Schmitz's synesthetic characters, they have bridging qualities (Brückenqualitäten) which facilitate encorporation in the first place. Synesthetic characters are intermodal properties of sensory qualia. Schmitz gives the example of the adjective "cool": one can only describe a person as "cool" if one knows about the felt-bodily experience of coolness. Synesthetic characters, therefore, invest a category of felt-bodily experience in sensory qualia (Schmitz 1964).

Bridging qualities are key to musical meaningfulness: They are what makes a specific musical, for a specific person, so much more than a mere 'carrier' of meaning. They enable music to seize a person and their entire being felt-bodily. Suggestions of motion, in short, stimulate contraction and expansion; bridging qualities modulate them. This is the mechanism through which music speaks to the vital drive. In itself, the vital drive is neither facing a specific direction nor directed in any way. It is located more in the dynamic interlocking of contraction and expansion. It can transcend the boundaries of bodies and connect felt bodies with one another and with, in Schmitz's words, "felt-bodiless Gestalten" (leiblose Gestalten). This connection, in turn, potentially facilitates solidary encorporation. The category facilitating the most immediate type of encorporation are Schmitz's half things:

> Half things are different from things primarily by virtue of two properties: 1. Their duration may be interrupted, i.e., they go and return but it does not make any sense to ask what they did in the meantime; and 2. while the causality of things is tripartite, divided into cause (e.g., a falling

23 Suggestions of motion in the original German text are "Vorzeichnungen von Bewegung an ruhenden oder bewegten Gestalten oder an Bewegungen, immer über das Ausmaß der eventuell ausgeführten Bewegung hinaus".

> stone), impact (e.g., you are being hit) and effect (e.g., the item that was hit breaks), the causality of half things is bipartite and immediate: i.e., cause and effect are one and the same thing.[24] (Schmitz 2014, 84f.)

Sound is a half thing for Schmitz. As a half thing, it modulates contraction and expansion as a dialogical dynamism; the vital drive keeps this dynamism going; and the motor-bodily schema, finding orientation in music and musical structures, offers the sensation of being-in-relation with others whose motor-bodily schema finds orientation in music. This is the process facilitating the solidary encorporation of music. This particular mode of being-in-relation can only be experienced through sound, which makes it a distinctly sonic experience.

Any experience of sound is obviously intrinsically synesthetic. And yet, there is something uniquely sonic about it that accounts for its central role in creating atmospheres. The atmospheric Gestalten characterising a musical situation cannot be reduced to single sensory impressions but emerge prior to the singling out of such impressions, be they visual, auditory or other. But if the sonic lies in close proximity to those Gestalten, then sound is situated at the atmospheric core of sensory experience (Eisenlohr 2019). The notion of a sonic privilege points to the immediacy of the sonic experience as central in the transductive process that turns a material sonic event into an atmospheric Gestalt. This immediacy is why the sonic, for Schmitz, is a half thing. When listening, we experience our felt body in its temporo-spatial directionality: listening to it, we hear a voice within ourselves, but simultaneously, that voice is also coming from a particular direction and is itself in the continuous process of contraction and expansion. The felt body's directionality, that is to say, goes far beyond cognitive aspects of perception and affect in the psychological sense.[25]

Musical structure unfolds through specific parameters. These parameters modulate, both temporally and spatially, contraction and expansion as well

24 Original text: "Halbdinge unterscheiden sich von Volldingen durch zwei Eigenschaften: 1. Ihre Dauer ist unterbrechbar, d.h. sie kommen, gehen und kommen wieder, ohne dass es Sinn hat, zu fragen, wie sie die Zwischenzeit verbracht haben. 2. Während die Kausalität der Dinge dreigliedrig ist, gegliedert in Ursache (z.B. fallender Stein), Einwirkung (z.B. Stoß) und Effekt (z.B. Zertrümmerung oder Verrückkung des getroffenen Gegenstandes), ist die Kausalität der Halbdinge zweigliedrig und unmittelbar, indem Ursache und Einwirkung zusammenfallen." Griffero (2017) translates half things as quasi-things.

25 Addressing the ethical dimension inherent in the Islamic cultural history of listening, anthropologist Charles Hirschkind identified a number of bodily predispositions for listening practices (2006, e.g., 82).

as tension and relaxation, and this modulation is experienced in and by the felt body: changes in pitch, the dynamic friction of tonal complexity, rhythmical fluctuations, changes in volume, etc. Through these modulations, music's complex suggestions of motion seize the felt body. The moment they seize several felt bodies, they orientate those felt bodies' dynamics of contraction and expansion, establishing a relationship between them. The result is a specifically musical form of solidary encorporation, which is prior to the strategies of identification, affiliation and discrimination that are often taken to be central to musicological narratives of musical meaning. Music also mediates the connectivity of felt bodies as experiential fields (Erlebnisfeld). This is, not least, a precondition for the phenomenon of musical intimacy: only through such mediation can experiential fields shared felt-bodily, in which bridging qualities can yield particular effects, e.g., affective proximity, come about. The immediacy of this involvement accounts for its considerable and, simultaneously, fragile, atmospheric potential – an atmospheric potential mostly asubjective in nature.

## Musical Meaning | Musical Meaningfulness

Such a fragile atmospheric potential is naturally difficult to describe in words, let alone in scholarly language, which is invested in argumentative unambiguity and logical clarity. This, however, does not necessarily make it less accessible for scholarly inquiry than other phenomena. Quite the contrary, I believe that it is a commonplace but misleading assumption, cultivated, not least, by music scholars, to think that music's efficacy ultimately derives from a powerful and enigmatic quality which cannot possibly be specified (Kramer 2012, 396; also see Riedel 2015). Such a perspective implicitly or explicitly distinguishes musical meaning as signifié from that ineffable quality of music which, in this way, becomes the mysterious, by definition inaccessible proprium of music studies.

Meaning has been the subject of a great number of long-standing discussions against the backdrop of a range of intellectual traditions, including structuralism, semiotics, discourse analysis and hermeneutics. These discussions all consider meaning but are subject to a highly restrictive discourse that regards music as interpretive (e.g., Kramer 2011, 65): meaning can be hermeneutically specified, circumscribed or even described if only to a certain degree (cf. Chapin and Kramer 2009; Goehr 1993; Kramer 2002, 2011). Foregoing most of the complex history of the term for now, I do not intend to essentialise the complex history of theories about musical

meaning in music studies and beyond. Instead, focusing on the corporeality of what music means, I try to take a different perspective: one addressing meaningfulness as atmospheric manifestation and corporeal impression. Schmitz characterises meaningfulness as "internally diffuse" or "manifoldly chaotic"[26] (1990, 19). Meaningfulness consists of a "whole gathering of meanings", but these meanings are not, or not necessarily, individually identifiable or describable, except in metaphorical terms. Instead, they may be experienced as atmospheres or themes. Meaningfulness, thus, refers to loaded impressions of a whole, according to Schmitz. These impressions are loaded because they communicate more meaningfulness than people can "tease out using language" (Schmitz 1990, 19) – in other words, meaningfulness goes somewhere words cannot follow. We are dealing with

> something manifold which is tersely closed and detached, on the one hand, and peculiarly internally diffuse, on the other: The situations in question are not all discrete and, hence, they cannot be specified, for it is not always clear in the way they relate to one another which is identical to which and which is different from which.[27] (Schmitz 2005, 104)

Meaningfulness is, therefore, by no means an opposite of "meaning" but one possible manifestation of what music means. If the "mind/body problem" (Crane and Patterson 2000; Leys 2011) is still prevalent in the North Atlantic academy, then "meaning" has been associated with "mind". Meaningfulness, however, leaves the "mind" part of the dichotomy; if we consider the felt body (Leib) to be the nexus between an atmosphere and an individual, then it is located in between the body and mind and relates to both. This in-between space is where atmospheres do their work (cf. Vadén and Torvinen 2014). Music's internally diffuse meaningfulness may, at times, present itself as an atmosphere that will be experienced with the felt body, leveraging both affective and interpretative frames but exceeding both by way of its primarily corporeal experiential quality.

What might be the analytical merit of the term meaningfulness? Schmitz's notion of meaningfulness hinges on the definition that feelings "are atmospheres poured out spatially that move the felt (not the

26 "Binnendiffus" and "mannigfaltig chaotisch" in the original text.

27 Original text: "[M]an hat es also mit einem Mannigfaltigen zu tun, das prägnant geschlossen und abgehoben ist, aber doch eigentümlich binnendiffus: Die vorschwebenden Sachverhalte usw. sind nicht alle einzeln und lassen sich deshalb auch nicht aufzählen, weil in ihrem Verhältnis zueinander nicht oder nicht in allen Fällen feststeht, welche mit welchen identisch und welche von welchen verschieden sind."

material) body" (Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan 2011, 247). Feelings are "out there", in other words, and, as atmospheres, they have the capacity of drawing in people who happen to be located in the place inhabited by these feelings. With this, Schmitz takes a tough stance on what he calls the "psychologistic-reductionist-introjectionist objectification" prevalent in North Atlantic philosophy, which, according to him, results in "the consequent dogma that man consists of body and soul" but "fails in that the relation of the conscious subject to their private inner sphere cannot be adequately characterised, even though a number of suggestions are in place" (Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan 2011, 247). Looking at the various ways in which the felt body affords corporeal sensation and, with this, corporeal dynamics, Schmitz directs his analysis toward the (felt) bodily practices involved in humans' interactions with the world. The felt body, to Schmitz, is highly sensitive to the space around it, and especially to the spatially "poured out" feelings often called atmosphere. Its involvement with its surroundings is "both realized and mediated by corporeal feelings that in turn make manifest (disclose) goings-on in the environment" (Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan 2011, 245). These corporeal feelings react to the environment's suggestions of motion by expanding or contracting vis-à-vis the world. This is an immediate, pre-reflective way of intermingling with the world that Schmitz calls "self-consciousness without identification [… I]t can be characterized further by noting the irrevocable 'mine-ness' that is stamped upon every experience of a conscious subject" (Schmitz, Slaby, and Müllan 2011, 245).

Suggestions of motion, according to Schmitz, are "prefigurations of motion of figures that are either in repose or motion, or of motions; [these prefigurations] always exceed the scope of the motion that may actually be executed" (Schmitz 2014, 76; translated from the original German). This facilitates encorporation and is, thus, the key to understanding how a specific atmosphere's musical suggestions of motion are capable of taking hold of people completely and making them want to dance and sing along; or, in the case of the omengeredákl example I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, of suggesting an encompassing sense of belonging to them. To participate in this way is a manner of knowing and relating to the world with the felt body, "a mode of thought, already in the act" (Manning and Massumi 2014, vii) that takes place in the felt body. Atmospheres do not dictate feelings; they are, instead, spatially present feelings that activate modalities for the (felt) body to align with the world. These modalities are experienced as musical meaningfulness – the sensation of everything making sense to which the omengeredákl singers in Melekeok referred.

Meaningfulness in music, thus, may be experienced as atmospheric suggestions of motion. The key difference between musical meaningfulness and musical meanings is that the latter are the result of interpretive techniques attributing meaning, whereas meaningfulness emerges from their specific forms of articulation and manifests as a corporeal experience. Still, meaning and meaningfulness are not entirely separate because the attribution of meaning is always taking place vis-à-vis the (felt) body. Their relationship is one of both tension and simultaneity. This is what makes culturally specific atmospheres, such as the ones I will describe in the following chapters, possible. Meaningfulness highlights other facets of the complex ways in which music has meaning: those that the felt body immediately tunes into and resonates with but that largely escape interpretive techniques. The moment music becomes manifest as an atmosphere, it charges situations with complex meaningfulness. This happens through the experience of music's distinctive aesthetics, as Victoria, Oribech and the other women suggested when they said, "[And] when you know [how you're supposed to fill in your vocal part], it'll make a lot of sense to you. You'll know what to do." It also manifests in an otengelel a chesóls, making the visceral connection of contemporary life on the islands, with its spiritual history, tangible in the lived experience of the chant. This statement aligns with anthropologist Karen Nero's observation that in Palau, as in much of Micronesia,

> [...] aesthetic emphasis is on the perfection of the performance rather than the creation of a lasting object. When perfection is achieved, the thrill of recognition in the audience fulfills local sensibilities, but translates poorly into academic discourse. (Nero 1999, 257)

Meaningfulness, thus, is the sum of several layers of meaning that cannot necessarily be identified or described. Typically experienced as atmosphere or theme, it refers to the manifold impressions of a whole, which "become meaningful because they communicate more meaningfulness than we can possibly describe with words"[28] (Schmitz 1990, 19). We are, thus, dealing with

> a manifold phenomenon that is clearly bounded and detached, yet unmistakeably internally diffuse: The phenomena in question are not separate from one another. Hence, they cannot be specified. This is because it is not or not in all cases clear in their relationship with one

28 Original text: "[...] die dadurch vielsagend sind, daß sie uns mehr an Bedeutsamkeit mitteilen, als wir sagend aus ihnen herausholen können."

> another which is identical to which and which are different from which.[29] (Schmitz 2005, 104)

The internally diffuse meaningfulness of music yields its effect through suggestions of motion as atmosphere. This means that it is experienced felt-bodily, affectively and, at the same time, interpretatively.

## Musical Meaningfulness and Atmospheres

The sonic immediacy and affective power of a sensation of belonging, such as the one described at the beginning of this chapter, derives from the felt-bodily communication among those present in the situation. The situation was a classic example of the process Schmitz calls "solidary encorporation". However, simultaneously, that same sensation of belonging lies latent in the sonic materiality of the chant-as-cultural-memory itself. To chant omengeredákl is to enact the experiential knowledge of how to evoke that latency atmospherically. The audience, felt-bodily attuned to responding to that memory, increasingly encorporated the chant's sonic suggestions of motion. They were affected by and themselves co-produced the atmosphere of the Schmitzian we-Leib. This is how the omengeredákl became meaningful in this particular situation: in felt-bodily feeling itself, for the we-Leib, the past, the present and the future coalesced in a shared sonic experience for the fleeting moment of the chant. The meaningfulness arising from that experience was brought about felt-bodily, rendering the material sonic connection between one's thrownness, in the Heideggerian sense, one's affective arrangements (Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2019) and sensual perception, and historical and cultural narratives experienceable in the felt body. It brought to the fore, in other words, the felt-bodily imbrication of individuals and community with their life-world. Music as atmosphere, thus, is profoundly relational in nature. Music's capacity to render this relationality felt in both all its complexity and specificity is what accounts for music's supposedly ineffable qualities to a significant extent.

29 Original text: "[M]an hat es also mit einem Mannigfaltigen zu tun, das prägnant geschlossen und abgehoben ist, aber doch eigentümlich binnendiffus: Die vorschwebenden Sachverhalte usw. sind nicht alle einzeln und lassen sich deshalb auch nicht aufzählen, weil in ihrem Verhältnis zueinander nicht oder nicht in allen Fällen feststeht, welche mit welchen identisch und welche von welchen verschieden sind."

Meaningfulness, internally diffuse, is experienced mostly as atmosphere. As such, it affects the felt body: Musical suggestions of motion generate and emphasise relationships and, in doing so, they render possible both friction and resonance between the divergent frames that make up the human experience. In the case of the omengeredákl performance, suggestions of motion affected I-Leiber to join and form a we-Leib. As part of the we-Leib, they also evoked narratives of the (colonial) past and (post-colonial) present as discursive formations, rendering both the omengeredákl and the encorporation process intrinsically political. But they also opened resonant spaces (see Chapter 5) for felt-bodily attunement. A we-Leib, that is to say, offers strategies of social positioning within historical and political formations through atmosphere. Importantly, such atmospheric positioning through attunement to meaningfulness is inseparable from the affective and felt-bodily experience of the latter. As music suggests motion through its structure and acoustic qualities, it is capable of bringing people together in the experience of such motion. The encorporation of musical motion, thus, is social becoming rendered as aesthetic experience. To listen is always also to potentially belong.

Music not only co-produces atmospheres, it also allows for fresh analytical approaches to their workings. Historicity, spatiality, temporality, sociality – they all have a feel, a temporary atmospheric nature springing from a given situation. As music leads these and other felt dimensions of human life beyond what they stand for, it is a cultural practice of Böhme's aesthetic labour. The aesthetic labour of music has affective capacity precisely because it cannot necessarily be broken down into specific signifiés. This is because both music and atmosphere are located in the space of the unspecific, characterised by an in-betweenness that makes it both an objective and a subjective experience (Vadén and Torvinen 2014, 211), and something that is neither. Capable of rendering this unspecific yet powerful atmospheric meaningfulness experienceable, music 'knows' something about atmospheres, and this invites further inquiry into how these processes work. The following chapters will pursue this avenue by addressing various dimensions of music in Palau as meaningful.

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Figure 6 Bai ornament in Galáp (Ngaraard) as documented by Augustin Krämer during the Hamburg South Seas Expedition. (Krämer 1929b, double plate 16) Krämer's description: "The terrible singer, right Ngardórok, left Ngarsúl, right center dance platform with men in women's skirts performing the ruk dance, far left the singer, who when his wife (left of him) came, went away with her, after which the remaining also left before the performance was finished and complained." (KETC 2017c, 82)