



HAL
open science

Youth With a Mission in the Pacific Islands

Yannick Fer

► **To cite this version:**

Yannick Fer. Youth With a Mission in the Pacific Islands: From Evangelical globalization to the reshaping of local cultural identities. Fiona Magowan; Carolyn Schwartz. Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific, Brill, pp.81-101, 2016, 10.1163/9789004311459_006 . halshs-01306383

HAL Id: halshs-01306383

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01306383>

Submitted on 28 Dec 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Youth with a Mission in the Pacific Islands: From Charismatic Global Culture to the Reshaping of Local Cultural Identities

Yannick Fer

The rise of Pentecostal-charismatic movements in Polynesia today is opening up new spaces for converts to engage in the contemporary dynamics of globalization, encouraging them to question the intertwined links between religion, culture, and the land, as shaped by local Christian cultures. A complex articulation of converts' voluntary disaffiliation from traditional religion and their critical reappropriation of Christianity create dilemmas of identity, as Polynesian "Christian tradition" finds no unanimous response within the Pentecostal-charismatic field. Indeed, in recent decades, these movements have led to a double diversification, brought about on the one hand, by the growth of The Christianity of the South and, on the other hand, by the increasing separation of charismatic streams from classical Pentecostal theology.

As Pentecostalism entails individual salvation, which implies both a distancing from "the world" and a search for social respectability, most classical Pentecostal churches tend to avoid any compromise with the "pagan" element of Polynesian cultures, especially in their ban of bodily expressions such as dance. As J. Casanova (2001, 438, quoted in Robbins 2003, 221) remarks, "It is in their very struggle against local culture that they prove how locally rooted they are." Due to the long history of Christianity in Polynesia, Pentecostal churches struggle with the dichotomy between the latent presence of "pagan" spirits and rigorous control inherited from the Western missionaries over cultural bodily expressions within the temple (Babadzan 1982, Fer 2009b). In contrast with this dualistic view of Pentecostals, some charismatic movements regard the resurgence of Polynesian dances in the Christian space as a symbol of individual liberation, enabling converts to be truly "who they are," a regaining of freedom that leads to "rediscovery" and renewal of the roots linking individuals to their culture and motherland. Thus, a global charismatic culture oriented towards personal empowerment (Coleman 2000) inspires new religious reappropriations of local cultures, breaking away from the heritage of nineteenth century Protestant missions.

The charismatic network Youth with a Mission (YWAM), which has been present in Oceania for forty years, exemplifies this global transformation of the [82] Pentecostal-charismatic field and its local impact upon reshaping the identity of Pacific Islander youth. After situating this network within contemporary Pacific Island Protestantism and the post-World War ii American context, I will examine the patterns of YWAM global culture, including its positive representation of cultural diversity. This religious representation of the "concert of the nations" draws from a pluralistic credo (diversity as a "positive factor that contributes to the health and the growth of the mission") and from an "intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson 1992, 8), post-1945.

I intend to show how these trends generated a militant reappropriation and renewal of cultural identities within the Christian space among young Polynesian converts at the outset of the 1980s. In particular, the Island Breeze movement, a YWAM ministry launched in 1979 by the Samoan Sosene Le'au, claims to seek the "redemption of cultures" and advocates the use of Polynesian dances as both an expression of Christian faith and a universal missionary tool.

Finally, an analysis of the links between the YWAM global charismatic culture and this local religious renewing and reshaping of Polynesian cultural identities illuminates several points of adjustment or tension: between individual "new birth," regional migrations, and cultural authenticity; and between historical relationships of domination and the emergence of a "Christian indigeneity" influenced by the global theology of "spiritual warfare."

New Religious Actors

The rise of Pentecostal-charismatic movements in the Pacific Islands is part of a wider phenomenon: the continuous scattering of religious identities that can often create the coexistence of different religious memberships within a single Island community or family. Religious pluralism is amplified by a set of well-known factors such as migration, education, the development of transportation and communication, urbanization, and intergenerational tensions. It is also linked to a deeper evolution of the patterns of individual belonging and engagement in terms of one's relationships with religious institutions. Since the 1970s, Pentecostal-charismatic movements have followed three distinct methods of expansion that have contributed to building a new religious space, structured by a set of distinctions—and oppositions—between competing actors and theological options.

The first method of expansion consisted of establishing new local churches affiliated with the international denominations of classical Pentecostalism. Thus, the American Assemblies of God (AoG), which have been present in Fiji since the 1920s–30s, trained Pacific missionaries who, in the 1960s–70s, [83] participated in the expansion of the denomination to Samoa, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, and several islands in Vanuatu (New Hebrides), notably through the regional networks of working migration (Larson 1997, 333). Throughout the 1980s, regional denominations (often originating from Australia and New Zealand) also planted churches in the Pacific Islands, including The New Life movement from New Zealand and the Christian Outreach Centers stemming from a Brisbane mega-church, among others (Ernst 2006, 365–372). And a third type of independent church has since burgeoned at the intersection of these regional circulations and local initiatives, leading to the creation of new local or national denominations.

The second area of expansion in charismatic beliefs was provided by the subtle growth of evangelical streams within the Protestant historical churches in Oceania. While this phenomenon did not directly challenge the legitimacy of the older churches (in contrast to the creation of new competing churches), it pointed to a relativization of membership and institutional authority, and opened up connections to regional networks of “born again” Pacific Christians beyond local frameworks and boundaries of church, island, or nation. Mistrust of local church authorities—suspected of being too “religious” to be fully “spiritual”—and the accession to a “Christian identity” seen as supra-denominational and authentically Oceanic, have led to a regional construction of a “globalized charismatic Protestant ‘public,’ whose boundaries of adherence may be ambiguous, but which involve the cultivation of a sense of mutual awareness and interaction among dispersed evangelicals” (Coleman 2000, 115).

This “network culture” (Mary 2000, 122) has strong affinities with the orientation of a third type of actor, the evangelical organizations operating today in the Pacific Islands—and more specifically the youth missionary networks that emerged in the U.S. between the end of World War II and the beginning of the 1960s. Regarded by many historical Protestant churches as valued “experts” and non-denominational partners in their struggle against youth disaffiliation, these organizations have in fact fostered a “charismatization” of Pacific Island Protestantism and facilitated the detachment of youth from traditional church authorities. Originally, these organizations were closely tied to North American fundamentalist para-church culture (Carpenter 1997, 53) and to the post-World War II social and ideological context in the U.S., and yet, they have found favorable conditions for their development in Oceania.

“Waves of Youth”

The foundations of these youth missionary networks expressed a generational breakaway from classical forms of church life, inspired by both the revivalist [84] Protestant tradition and a quest

for individual freedom against the dominant social conformism. In 1944, the first network, Youth for Christ (YFC), was launched by “a coalition of youthful, relatively unknown evangelists” (Carpenter 1997, 161) from a Baptist fundamentalist background. Juvenile delinquency had emerged as a national problem, and the YFC rallies featured, “young evangelists who sounded more like older brothers than worried parents” and “hammered at the sins of youthful desire while featuring carefully orchestrated visions of innocence, heroism, and loyalty to a global cause, all wrapped in a format and idiom borrowed from radio variety shows and patriotic musical revues” (Carpenter 1997, 168–169). In the Pacific Islands, such an association of moral conservatism, evangelical fervor, generational discourse, and youth music matches the concerns of historical church leaders, as well as the expectations of young Protestants looking for alternative forms of religious engagement. Campus Crusade for Christ (CCFC), a second evangelical youth network established in 1951, also illustrates significant changes brought about by rising levels of education—notably in the attitudes vis-à-vis traditional authority and inherited beliefs—and the role of these missionary organizations in the training of future social elites, in the U.S. and worldwide. During the 1970s and 80s, CCFC planted student groups in Australian and New Zealand campuses, later extending its influence to recently opened Pacific Island universities, like the University of Papua New Guinea (opened in 1965) or the University of South Pacific (Fiji, in 1968). The Pacific Island demography—where people under 15 account for 32.1 per cent of the total population (in Micronesia), and as much as 39.4 per cent in Melanesia—makes this focus on the young generations even more strategic (Fer 2009a).

The international network Youth with a Mission (YWAM) was established in 1960 by Loren Cunningham who was then in charge of youth activities in the Los Angeles district of the AoG. While being in line with most of the values and strategies of the two previous youth missionary organizations, YWAM has distinguished itself through a charismatic credo, which inspires a more radical deconstruction of religious membership, and a comprehension of Christian faith in terms of personal adventure. Indeed, it shares with YFC and CCFC the appropriation of youth cultural expressions, to convey a conservative evangelical message concerned with national “moral decline” and the Cold War struggle between good and evil forces. However, YWAM distances itself from the biblical reading advocated by fundamentalism, valuing the “spirit” (the free action of the Holy Spirit, which “blows where it chooses”)¹ rather than “the letter.” This charismatic orientation leads YWAM to invest in all domains of [85] social life and any form of expression likely to serve its missionary goals, making no distinction between sacred and profane, Christian and secular. “The kingdom of God is in each of us and we carry it with us everywhere we go,” Cunningham writes, and he goes on: “I think for a Christian, the secular world should not exist. Each of us stands in a kingdom or in the other: light or darkness” (Cunningham 1997, 141,148). So the issue is not whether an activity or domain is “Christian,” but only whether the individual who is acting is truly a “born again” Christian. This shifting perspective implies a de-institutionalized world-view and a de-professionalization of missionary work, which in 1964 led to a split between Cunningham and the American AoG. After this, YWAM became an independent and non-denominational organization and began to work with Protestant churches from various theological backgrounds—as well as with some local Catholic churches. Thus, YWAM has emerged as one of the more emblematic networks of a charismatic Protestantism that has increasingly distanced itself from an historical Pentecostalism more concerned with the control of individual lives and experiences.

Cunningham’s “vision” was to engage “waves of youth” in short-term missionary outreaches, primarily relying on the interpersonal relationships likely to arise from encounters among young persons of the same age, despite cultural barriers. During the 1970s, a less expected encounter between YWAM and hippie culture gave these missionary outreaches and the overall missionary

¹ 1 John, 3:8.

In: F. Magowan et C. Schwartz (eds.), 2016. *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, p. 81-101.

network a more specific profile, rooted in a kind of non-conformist evangelical counter-culture. Indeed, following the Hippie Trail up to Kabul, Floyd McClung—one of the first YWAM team members and the son of a Californian Pentecostal minister, who aimed to save these “lost souls” through a fraternization strategy—was himself led to adopt a series of hippie cultural characteristics: the clothes, long hair and beard, and musical styles but also community life, frugality, and mobility. Other YWAMers from an evangelical background, especially in Europe, also found in the YWAM credo a way to express in Christian terms the rebellion of their generation against the “traditions and rules” of social conformism (Schaerer 1991, 11–12).

A Global Charismatic Culture

The “spiritual principle of identification” formulated by McClung (1988, 48) contributed to the development of a religious world-view that combines the personal relationship with God and missionary activism with opposition to a consumption-based society and Western-dominant culture (considered “dechristianized”). This principle transformed religious life into a worldwide [86] adventure full of intercultural friendships and constant travel, without much money, in Volkswagen combis. This “change of scenery” paradigm is in line with the charismatic discourse on the need to “move beyond your comfort zone” to gain personal empowerment. It echoes what R. Liogier describes as an “individuo-globalism,” characteristic of contemporary spiritualities and associating individualism with global consciousness (Liogier 2009). So, a set of specific features converge to form a distinct charismatic culture, which can be described in the terms used by Coleman in his study of the Faith Movement:

...an attitude towards the global circumstance that is composed of specific aesthetic and embodied elements as well as conscious thought. ... Charismatics therefore construct a world within *the* world, setting up arenas for action, agency and imagination that invoke the global circumstance in a way that is distinct, even ‘sub-cultural,’ in its combination of noetic, material and physical elements. In doing so, they compete with other, equally ‘universalising’ and yet distinct ideologies, each containing a different version of what it means to be global. (Coleman 2000, 51–52)

This global culture, or the shared dispositions which constitute a YWAM habitus, includes the promotion of individual autonomy, the deconstruction of sacred/profane distinctions and of institutional belonging, and the contesting of classical church authority in favour of peer-horizontal relationships. These dispositions have been taught since 1978 by the Discipleship Training Schools (DTS, a three-month training course followed by a three-month field mission) that aim to forge “a Christian character.” They are conveyed not so much by a structured and explicit doctrine as by a distinct way of being and acting. “I immediately saw the difference, the freedom of speech, in the teaching,” said Jonas, a French Polynesian Protestant who discovered YWAM in 1985 during a training program for leaders of his church youth movement (Interview of 31 May 2001 with Jonas, Tahiti).

Since its creation, YWAM has developed an abundance of training and missionary programs across a wide range of areas including humanitarian aid, religious socialization of children, biblical counselling, music, sport, communications, sciences, and many others. It is today one of the world’s principal missionary bodies of evangelical Protestantism, active in 173 countries with about 15,000 permanent staff—over 50 per cent of whom hail from non- Western regions. Remembering his childhood, Cunningham says:

When we lived in Los Angeles...on my street, there were Hispanic..., we had Jewish, we had Chinese, we had Japanese, one of my best friends was [87] black, you know.... So that I didn’t

In: F. Magowan et C. Schwartz (eds.), 2016. *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, p. 81-101.

think of ethnicity as being a major problem, I saw that as part of an exciting and more fulfilling life.

(Interview of 6 May 2005 with Loren Cunningham, on Kona, Big Island, Hawaii).

Due to the international growth of YWAM, youth view the intercultural encounter as a challenge—an exciting dimension of a missionary adventure in the age of globalization—and it has become a core element of the organization itself, contributing to building an all-encompassing religious and organizational culture able to transcend cultural barriers. But the positive view of cultural diversity that Cunningham evokes through the California melting-pot was, at the outset of YWAM, less a pluralist understanding of the world than an extension of the American experience to a global scale: an evangelical version of American providential universalism, as exemplified by Billy Graham (Fath 2002, 114). When, in 1992, the YWAM “foundational values” stated that “cultural, racial and theological diversity...are positive factors that contribute to the health and growth of the mission,” this was primarily because a network with global ambitions must embrace all diversities for pragmatic purposes: to draw from these diversities any available resource useful to its missionary work. In his book *Is That Really You, God?*, published in 1984, Cunningham plainly expressed the traditional and dominant evangelical view that the individual freedom brought by conversion implies ridding oneself of constraining cultural identities and boundaries, which he described as “different ‘systems’ that separate us,” whereas “people are people everywhere” (Cunningham 1984, 41). The new version of the foundational values adopted in December 2010 by the YWAM Global Leadership Team² summarizes several significant changes that occurred over the intervening 18 years. To analyze all of them would lead us beyond the purpose of this chapter; but suffice to say that “theological diversity” has been changed to “denominational diversity,” and “ethnic” has replaced “racial.” The new sentence now mentions the contribution of culture in apparently more restrictive and theological terms than previously:

We believe that ethnic, linguistic and denominational diversity, along with redeemed aspects of culture, are positive factors that contribute to the health and growth of the mission.

[88] This new discourse can hardly be understood without reference to the Pacific history of YWAM and to the circumstances in which, in the 1980s, YWAM was challenged by young Polynesians who promoted a militant reappropriation of Pacific Island cultural expressions—especially dances—within the Pentecostal-charismatic field. While these youths drew their inspiration from the YWAM global charismatic culture, they clearly challenged the dominant evangelical understanding of the relationships between individual conversion, bodies, and cultures, as well as the Pacific Island “Christian tradition” of local historical Protestant churches. The cultural “new birth” they advocated has fostered a reinterpretation of the alliance of Christianity and local cultures, within the symbolical framework of global exchanges among the “nations” of the world.

At the Birth of Island Breeze

It is an evening event in April 2005, on the heights of Kona (Big Island, Hawaii). Cunningham and the students of the University of the Nations campus, who for the most part came from South Korea to attend a DTS School here, are watching an “evening of praise” as directed by June and Paulo Matai, a Samoan couple. On the stage, mimes, classical dance, and hip-hop or jazz rhythms

² The Global Leadership Team is, along with the international board (Team 3, formed by the international Chairman, president, and director), the highest body of YWAM. This international assembly gathers regional leaders and leaders of the “international ministries” that function independently from local or regional authority (see Fer 2010, 50 and following).

In: F. Magowan et C. Schwartz (eds.), 2016. *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, p. 81-101.

mix with Polynesian dances. Then Polynesians in traditional clothes, Indians in sarongs, and a Messianic Jew wearing a prayer shawl and tefillins stand side-by-side to symbolize the happy diversity of the “born again” nations.

The program is eclectic, but June Mataia also emphasizes her attachment to the “true” Samoan culture, claiming these intertwined cultural and musical influences not as the local replication of some charismatic global newspeak, but as the free expression of her own personality, which extends beyond her Samoan origin (Interview of 29 April 2005 with June Mataia, Kona). Her approach illustrates the complex relationship between individual freedom and cultural identities expressed by Island Breeze, as well as the ambiguities, misunderstandings, and discussions it has generated within YWAM.

Like Sosene Le’au, the founder of Island Breeze, June Mataia was raised in the Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa (a Protestant church stemming from the London Missionary Society) and educated in the Polynesian Christian tradition, driven by rigor and respect for the authority of elders. Encouraged by friends, she attended a DTS School in Maui (Hawaii) at the age of 17, and there, “found the Lord...,” experienced what is a relationship with the Lord” (Interview of 29 April 2005 with June Mataia, Kona), but chose to stay in the Congregational Church. Nevertheless, when she joined YWAM—and Island Breeze—in Hawaii as a permanent staff member (YWAMer) at the end of the [89] 1980s, she moved away from this familial religious background. As for Sosene Le’au, he converted to evangelical Protestantism during his final year in high school, responding to the missionary outreach of American Evangelicals of Samoan origin on his native island of Ta’u (Eastern American Samoa). One year later, he joined the AoG in Pago Pago—the capital city—where he pursued his studies and heard about the DTS Schools held by YWAM in Hawaii.

The young Polynesians who took part alongside him in the launch of Island Breeze, in 1979–80, had all been marked by a similar detachment from traditional Polynesian Protestantism, due to migration and/or conversion to Pentecostalism. Twelve students formed the initial group who, in 1979, attended a DTS School directed by Sosene Le’au in Hawaii. All of them were Samoan, except two Hawaiians and a New Zealander of South-African origin. Coleman Kealoha Kaopua, one of the Hawaiian students, explains:

We had quite a bit of Pacific Islanders in that student body, and I have to admit that in YWAM that is unusual to have, you know, especially in Hawaii, a student body that is mostly Pacific Islands—you don’t see that very often. So that was an unusual school.

(Interview with Coleman Kealoha Kaopua, 3 May 2005, in Kona)

The charismatic culture of YWAM values the free expression of the self, the deconstruction of sacred/profane oppositions, and the overcoming of cultural local “systems” associated with a Universalist celebration of diversity. Until Island Breeze questioned cultural expressions, these three elements mostly contributed to the implicit maintenance of a Western-dominant view of *cultures*. Indeed, the reappropriation and reshaping of cultural identity that these young Polynesian converts initiated, at a time of unusual cultural intimacy, led to a celebration and renewal of *the* Polynesian culture—considered a natural component of each person and an expression of individual freedom “in Christ”:

The other thing was that all students—and this is true in life, in ministry, anywhere—you bring a part of who you are into the mix. And, because we’re Pacific Islanders, and because we’re accustomed to certain expressions and certain ways of doing things, the worship time gained a very different look than the typical worship at that time in another school: because we are

In: F. Magowan et C. Schwartz (eds.), 2016. *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, p. 81-101.

Pacific Islanders, we like to move our hands, you know, express ourselves, and we did. And that's when the seeds for Island Breeze started because it was observed that, you know, these expressions were meant for worship.

(Interview with Coleman Kealoha Kaopua, 3 May 2005, in Kona)

[90] Migration and Folklorization

This cultural introspection takes the form of an ambiguous cultural “new birth” that leads individuals who “have stepped out of ‘their original culture’ for a while” (Le’au 1997, 54) to revert to it and to renew it, through a personal choice. Thus, they re-engage with the cultural dimension of their “true identity” and claim a “redemption of cultures” that includes a personal reappropriation of culture, as well as a critical reinterpretation (under the influence of the charismatic credo) of what went without saying when they were still “natural” actors of these cultures. June Mataia remained in Island Breeze for 17 years, distancing herself from the group in the early 2000s and launching her own ministry of praise music, Warriors Come Home. She says:

Those who grew up in their culture are very strong...but those who never did try to grasp something to hold on to, and then they become some- thing so glamorized that it doesn't look like culture, it looks wonderful for white persons, because it's different and impressive.... It's not real culture, for me that's a show, but it wasn't our culture, we were learning dances.

This issue of cultural authenticity or “roots” underlines the influence of regional migrations on the cultural identities shaped by Island Breeze. YWAM was established in the Pacific region at the end of the 1960s, first in New Zealand, then in Hawaii (where the first campus of its university opened in 1978), and finally across most of the Pacific Islands. Regional migration and the presence of a strong Pacific Peoples community in New Zealand (296,000 persons, or 7,4 per cent of the total population) have played a major role in the development of YWAM and the evolution of Island Breeze. The first YWAM outreach campaign, in February 1967, was a door-to-door campaign in the Ponsonby quarter of Auckland, where most of the Pacific Peoples then lived. The goal of Cunningham was to reach the Pacific Islands through this migrant population. The successful tour that Island Breeze organized in 1980 among Protestant Pacific Peoples and Maori in New Zealand finally helped YWAM to recruit its first missionaries for the Pacific Islands, among the New Zealand- born young Polynesian Protestants, during the 1980s. Coleman (2000, 229) writes:

The globalizing charismatic habitus incorporates the imagery and practices of youth—physical movement, deployment of contemporary musical forms, technology—and locates them within a context of protest against an established religio-political order.

[91] In the Pacific Islands, as well as among the New Zealand Pacific Peoples, young Protestants saw in this charismatic culture an opportunity to escape the authority of traditional church hierarchy and the rigorism inherited from early Western missionaries, through the liberation of self-expression and a credo focused on personal destiny (“God has a plan for your life”). This charismatic culture echoed the social changes experienced by this generation. Living in a context of social and geographical mobility, associated with an elevation of education levels and the decline of the self-subsisting family economy, indeed YWAM seemed to offer the resources needed to “progress,” “learn more” (Besnier 2011, 109), and “see more” by entering the global networks of a worldwide charismatic culture.

In New Zealand, Polynesian migration has contributed to the development of community through conservative churches that aim to maintain religion as it was in the islands of origin; at the same

time, it has encouraged individuals to distance themselves from the traditional structures of religious authority. Thus, the cultural “new birth” offered by Island Breeze appeared to the youth of these churches as a reappropriation of their cultural identity away from the obligations of family heritage and the constraints of traditional churches, whose elders tended to consider themselves as New Zealanders rather than Pacific Islanders, especially due to their insufficient mastery of Polynesian languages. This process of reappropriation/reinterpretation, evoked by June Mataia when referring to Polynesian youth trying “to grasp something to hold on to,” is quite similar to what De Certeau (1975) has analyzed as “folklorization.” This concept refers to the fragmentation and scattering of the various elements of a tradition that occurs when those elements escape from the authority of the bodies in charge of perpetuating the community memory. The new agency of these elements, then, relies on more personal and isolated initiatives, depending on circumstances and individual experiences. It potentially transforms culture in a partly chosen identity, as an alternative to unsecured identities generated by the incorporation of stigma associated with a minority and socially dominated ethnic community. As June Mataia explains:

There are Polynesians that...especially those who have grown up in a different culture, let's say, for instance, some Samoans, especially in New Zealand, they grew up in New Zealand, born and raised in New Zealand and they didn't like what they saw about their culture: a lot of trouble makers, you know, always bad news, so they felt ashamed and so they don't want to be Samoans, they want to be Maori, New Zealander. And we have those in Island Breeze, some of our founding members were like that, for a long time they carried this thing that they didn't want to be Samoans.

(Interview with June Mataia, op. cit.)

[92] Thus, the founder of the New Zealand branch of Island Breeze is a New Zealand-born Samoan who, “has always considered himself as a Maori”³—the Maori indigenous people being seen here as the ideal figure of cultural roots and strong connection to a native land. In individual consciousness, as well as within YWAM, the cultural identifications that Island Breeze espouse combine a conception of cultural identity as the very expression of their personal freedom as “born again” Pacific Peoples, together with an emphasis on traditional belonging rooted in an individual's innate connection to the land and his/her culture. *In fine*, these expressions can convey a form of identity assignment and have generated both tensions and constructive ambiguities. Of this dilemma, June Mataia says:

I get very mad sometimes, you know, because, you know, sometimes, “oh, June, you, sing Polynesian songs, do Polynesian culture.” I say no, my blood is Polynesian. I don't have to sing my Polynesian songs, but when I sing that comes out because it's who I am, that's my expression.

(Interview with June Mataia, op. cit.)

Culture as a Medium of Universal Communication

Through its extensive use of touristic display codes, Island Breeze's representation of Pacific cultural authenticity involves a local renewal and reappropriation of culture; one that is

³ Interview with Ray Totorewa, director of Island Breeze New Zealand, in Tauranga (New Zealand), 19 September 2005.

paradoxically based on a paradigm of globalization that transforms the stereotyped expression of cultural differences into a medium for universal communication. *Ad intra*, Island Breeze indeed advocates the rehabilitation of Pacific cultural expressions banned from Protestant temples and condemned as non-Christian by classical Pentecostal churches. *Ad extra*, its missionary ambition implies the use of universal media, able to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. From the outset, as Island Breeze prepared its first tour in New Zealand in 1980, this double perspective has been present, and has led the founders of the group to seek inspiration in the Polynesian cultural show business, as Kaopua explains:

And that's when we began to learn more songs and dances. We realized that we were limited as far to traditional stuff to do, so we had friends [93] who were in the business, you know, Polynesian show-business, and they came and taught us a few things, so we added that to what we already did. And that's what we went to New Zealand with, our first outreach.

(Interview with Coleman Kealoha Kaopua, 3 May 2005, in Kona)

The Island Breeze's representation of culture draws inspiration from the "fictionalization" of the world developed by the modern tourism industry (Augé 1997, 14). In 1985, the founding group of Island Breeze even signed a contract with the King Kamehameha Hotel in Kona: since then (with only a short interruption in 1990), *Island Breeze Productions inc.* has earned a strong reputation and significant income by performing a dinner-show, five days a week, on the beach at Kamakahonu Bay. At first glance, the dances they perform at the King Kamehameha Hotel do not differ from dances performed at any other touristic spot in Hawaii. The audience—mostly American tourists—takes no offence at the female dancers' dress, which is not scant as usual but much more modest. Rather than a Christian show, they see a Pacific cultural show with Samoan fire dance, Maori *haka*, Tahitian dance, or Fijian stick dance. And yet, the Tahitian songs are Christian praise songs, the Fijian sticks evoke "spiritual warfare," and the show includes the story of Henry Opukahaia, the first Hawaiian convert, who contributed to the introduction of Christianity into Hawaii in the early nineteenth century. As Malogne-Fer⁴ remarks of a cultural revival in a French Polynesian Protestant church, Polynesians are not passive objects under Western eyes, but active participants who construct representations of their culture at the intersection of their own system of references and their understanding of the expectations of tourists—who are also potential converts in the present case.

The international implantation of Island Breeze,⁵ the participation of its missionary-dancers in YWAM world tours,⁶ and all the missionary outreaches organized during sporting world events—especially at the Olympic Games, where YWAM has been systematically present since 1972—show how their strategic use of cultural stereotypes finds its place within evangelical globalization. [94] Through easy-to-identify cultural dances, their performances in fact contribute to transforming cultural differences into a means of universal communication. While still expressing a specific identity, culture as displayed by Island Breeze is no longer the sign of an insuperable otherness; rather, it is designed as a means of communication, considered a more authentic (and therefore more effective) way of presenting oneself to others. Put in other words,

⁴ Malogne-Fer in this volume.

⁵ Today, Island Breeze is established in Australia, New Zealand, and in several Pacific Islands, as well as in Florida, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Brazil, and Missouri (in Native American lands).

⁶ Since 1993, Island Breeze shows have been a part of the Impact World Tour, a YWAM "crosscultural" world campaign targeting urban youth through a mix of cultural dance and multi-media shows, street sports, strength demonstrations, and electric guitars, to "present the Gospel in twenty-first century relevant ways using elements of the culture itself to deliver the message of Jesus" (ywamcampaigns.com).

In: F. Magowan et C. Schwartz (eds.), 2016. *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, p. 81-101.

cultural diversity becomes a kind of universal cliché that can help engage conversation—and missionary work — in any place in the world.

Protocols, Stones, and Nations

The concept of Christian indigeneity represents a cornerstone within this charismatic “concert of the nations,” as it is conceptualized as an ideal balancing position between the personal rupture brought by conversion and the continuity of “first” cultural belonging. Since the 1990s, the Polynesian cultures that Island Breeze reformulated using the vocabulary of a global charismatic culture have fostered new connections with other indigenous peoples. Kaopua says:

The Lord started to open that up in 1990 when a Canadian gentleman who came to Hawaii just felt in love with Island Breeze. He said there are Native Americans in Canada that would love to have Island Breeze come to “them.” So he set it up for us in 1990. We did Vancouver, we started in Ontario and then we ended up on the west side, in Vancouver, we even did Washington State. ... Christianity suddenly took a different color, the Christianity we brought to them was not white, it was brown, and they could relate to it.

(Interview with Coleman Kealoha Kaopua, 3 May 2005, in Kona)

Several parallel developments in world diplomacy and in charismatic Protestantism contributed to the emergence of new Christian indigenous networks in the 1990s on the one hand, and a new charismatic discourse of “nations” on the other. In Kaopua’s thinking, the idea of a natural recognition between Native Americans and Polynesians is based on the shared conscience of a South Christianity that tends today to grow in opposition to Western historical domination and contemporary “dechristianization.” It also goes with the progressive recognition of an indigenous meta-identity, or generic indigeneity (Morin 2009) based on similar experiences—colonization, land dispossession, exploitation, cultural repression—and primarily defined in terms of a specific relationship with land and ancestors. In charismatic Protestantism, these global processes notably led in 1996 to the launch of a World Christian [95] Gathering of Indigenous People (WCGIP), initiated by a Maori leader and close friend of YWAM’s Monte Ohia.⁷ This kind of movement points to a contesting of Western supremacy in the field of charismatic Protestantism. But it also pursues the moral rehabilitation of evangelical missions through a reversal of perspective: the evangelical credo, often denounced as a factor of major destabilization, becomes here a rallying point for indigenous people who claim to find “freedom in Christ.”

Movements like Island Breeze and the WCGIP—and, under their influence, YWAM itself—symbolize this “reconciliation” through the ritual performance of cultural “protocols” that supposedly proclaim the respect of “born again” individuals (freed from any inherited obligation) for the traditional authorities of the indigenous nations. “We could really relate to the Native Americans because we, in the mix of the people we had, we were able to maintain a lot of protocol,” explains Kaopua, who mentions the exchange of ritual goods and the official request submitted to the tribal council before entering its territory. According to Le’au, this respect in a way regains ties with Polynesian cultural authenticity:

⁷ A former minister of the Maori prophetic Church Ratana, Monte Ohia officially joined YWAM in 1999 and was the director of the YWAM base in Auckland from 2001 to 2003.

In: F. Magowan et C. Schwartz (eds.), 2016. *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, p. 81-101.

I was taught from an early age to respect those who were older than me. They were honored in our culture because they had the wisdom and knowledge that came from experience. That's the way it is throughout the Polynesian islands. (Le'au 1997, 32).

The 1990s also saw the growing influence of spiritual warfare theology on evangelical Protestantism. This theology, elaborated by North American theologians (especially Peter C. Wagner), has been widely spread by YWAM. It focuses on the spiritual liberation of territories, articulated with a "spiritual mapping" of local "demonic strongholds" at the city and national level, and gives a very specific role to indigenous peoples as the "spiritual gatekeepers" of the territories to be conquered. Beyond the symbolic attempt of Island Breeze's young Polynesians to reconcile with their cultures of origin, the performance of cultural protocols and the relationships between YWAM and the indigenous peoples⁸ express a religious worldview that considers the connections between [96] individual, land, and culture as a strategic element in the ideological battle between good and evil. This imaginary world is peopled with "nations," understood as the spiritual personification of a people and a land, and symbolized by the national flag. It is displayed at the "place of the nations" at the YWAM campus in Kona, where the flags of all nations represented on the campus are constantly flying.⁹ In summer 2006, the campus magazine *Transformations* announced that a further project called "Stones of the Nations" and inspired by Christian indigenous rituals would soon complete this representation, symbolizing the connection to the land with stones collected from around the world:

Over the years, Loren Cunningham has collected stones from all the nations of the world. They will be laid at the base of the fountain wall and an engraved tile will identify each by its country of origin.¹⁰

Polynesian Bodies

Nevertheless, this charismatic representation of indigeneity and cultural diversity still stumbles on an implicit asymmetry that Island Breeze does question, but without totally overcoming it. The story of Island Breeze's genesis recalls how strongly Christianity has encompassed the domestication of the "pagan nature" from its outset in Oceania (Eves 1996), as it situates the beginnings of liberation in the body, "because we are Pacific Islanders, we like to move our hands, you know, express ourselves, and we did." The historic Protestant churches have perpetuated this legacy of Western domination, in the name of a Pacific Christian tradition, reaffirmed by classical Pentecostalism to prevent any resurgence of the local "spirits."

The non-Western body remains associated with emotion in a series of structuring oppositions: emotion, body, charisma, and archaism versus spirit, institution, and modernity (Fer 2010). It has a logic of domination that weighs especially on women. Coleman notes that global charismatic culture differs from a mainstream Western habitus, as its styles of faith and bodily deportment involve, "the evocation of bodily possession by powerful, externally derived and divine forces" (Coleman 2000, 139). In the case of YWAM, this liberation of the body through possession joins with radical individualism and a deconstruction of sacred/profane distinctions eventually to legitimate the use [97] of bodily cultural expressions within the Christian space. The question is no longer, "Is it Christian to dance?" but rather, "Is the dancer a true Christian?" Nevertheless, even if Island Breeze and the religious actors described by Coleman are part of the same global religious

⁸ "When we started the Impact World Tour [in New Zealand]—Jay Lucas, the director of YWAM New Zealand, explains—the first thing that we did, we actually visited local *marae* [Maori community houses], sat down with the elders and asked for their permission to come and do the Impact Word Tour, that's the first thing we did in each location." (Interview in Auckland, 13 September 2005).

⁹ See also Rey 2010.

¹⁰ *Transformations*, 2006 2:7, summer.

field, their positions (and dispositions) in this field are in fact quite different, underlining the gap between those who might easily call for a loosening of behavioral codes and others who need to maintain relative modesty. Rather than a deviation from a mainstream Western habitus, charismatic practices in the Western context indeed participate in a wider social process of “informalization” which relies on pre-existing apparatuses of self-regulation. In this social process described by Wouters, “the constraint towards ‘becoming accustomed to’ self-restraint is at the same time a constraint to be unconstrained, to be confident and at ease” (Wouters 1995, 119). From the 1950s to the 1980s, it eventually led to a greater openness to emotions, even “dangerous” ones, which charismatics can experience now without shame or fear of losing self-control. These experiences are felt by individuals who “can take the liberty” (Wouters 2010, 172–173) of doing so, because they own (and are seen as owning) an inalienable capacity of self-regulation, based on a set of embodied dispositions.

In contrast, the initial embarrassment, or even hostile reactions that Island Breeze aroused among many YWAM leaders, and the persistence of a Christian habitus inherited from Western missionaries in Polynesia, subjected the members of Island Breeze to social logics of domination¹¹ and imposed modesty. Furthermore, since the effects of male domination reinforced the impact of cultural domination, this domestication concerned the bodies of female dancers more so than their male counterparts (transfigured into “God’s warriors”). A Tahitian pastor close to Island Breeze explained, “T-shirt and ankle-length *pareo*”:¹² you must “leave aside everything that is about seduction” (Interview with Pastor William Tua in Tahiti, 25 November 2001). From the eighteenth century, the Western male view imagined Polynesian women as an archetype of woman, “a being-perceived,” (Malogne-Fer 2011), which “exists first through and for the gaze of others, that is, as welcoming, attractive and available *objects*” [98] (Bourdieu 2001, 66). For some Polynesian female dancers, the free expression of the self “in the Holy Spirit” that Island Breeze encourages has instilled a conflict of loyalty or double-bind between the constraints of this symbolic dependence on the male/Western gaze and the duties that derive from a militant reappropriation and renewal of Polynesian culture which must be claimed through the body. Kaopua says:

Some of us hesitated, my wife for instance, she was a dancer in Waikiki ever since she was 16 years old, 14 or 15. So she knew Polynesian dancing, she got saved while she was dancing and she wore a coconut, you know, the whole thing, she did it. She got saved during that time and she found that’s great, she loves God now and she’s bringing joy to people’s hearts, [through] dance. And then one day, the Lord dropped the scales from her eyes and gave her the revelation that those men that she thought she was bringing joy to, they were actually lusting after her. And after this revelation, she was down, she couldn’t do it anymore, because she began to see the truth of what was going on. She was devastated. So she gave up, she stopped. So when she came into YWAM, she thought OK, I am a missionary now, OK God, you can use me. And then she became a part of this group that started to embrace Polynesian dancing as a means of serving God. She was like in conflict, she was in a major conflict. And she didn’t break through until maybe a couple of years later [when she had a new revelation] that it is truly a gift from Him and that man would do what man would do, but she needs to do what God calls her to do.

¹¹ In their relationship to the dominated classes, Bourdieu remarks, the dominant classes “attribute to themselves spiritual and intellectual strength, a self-control that predisposes them to control others, a strength of soul or spirit which allows them to conceive their relationship to the dominated—the ‘masses,’ women, the young—as that of the soul to the body, understanding to sensibility, culture to nature.” (Bourdieu 1979, 558).

¹² Chantal, who has practiced the dances taught by Island Breeze at a Pentecostal/charismatic church in Tahiti, explains, “That was not too sensual, the female dancers wore a T-shirt and an ankle-length *pareo*” (interview in Tahiti, 4 May 2001).

In: F. Magowan et C. Schwartz (eds.), 2016. *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, p. 81-101.

(Interview with Coleman Kealoha Kaopua, op. cit.)

Conclusion

In 2000, Frank Naea became the first non-Western international president of ywam. He was born in New Zealand of a Samoan father and a Maori mother. He also includes in his family genealogy, “a lot of other cultural heritages that come from different nations, English, Scottish, German, and Canadian,” but he considers himself first and foremost Polynesian and indigenous (Interview with Frank Naea in Auckland, New Zealand, 5 October 2005). At the age of 20, he encountered Island Breeze as a youth leader in an evangelical church in Auckland and decided to join it:

This team came along and it was so different. They sing modern-day expressions, using modern musical form and structure. They used their [99] language and culture to bring this message, and that was the first time I’ve seen dance, music, worship, culture, custom, all put together. And it was not outside in some cultural festival, it was in the context of the Christian message. And it was so incredibly impacting on me!

(Interview with Frank Naea in Auckland, New Zealand, 5 October 2005)

In September 2000, the international celebration of the 40th anniversary of YWAM took place in Auckland and was opened by a *Powhiri*, a five-hour traditional Maori welcoming ceremony, with songs, dances, and discourses by the *Kaumtua* (tribal elders). After a three-year mandate and two years of reflection, Naea came back to Auckland in 2005. Along with other former leaders of ywam, he contributed to launching the Kiwi Party, a right-wing Christian party (of which he was president for some years). Afterwards he got involved in the Awhi Project, “a community aid to New Zealand families and children in need” in Otara, one of the main Polynesian districts in the Auckland suburbs.

This personal itinerary condenses the ways in which the same global charismatic culture can be refracted in various cultural, religious, political, and social fields, and can contribute in turn to the evolution of international networks such as YWAM. The lasting dispositions that young Polynesians have incorporated via their socialization in the “foundational values” of YWAM are not simply invested in a global and encompassing religious space. Rather, this socialization builds, “the relationship of ontological complicity” (Bourdieu 1994, 151–154) between the habitus (i.e. mental structures) and the field (i.e. the objective structures of the social space) that produces the illusion: this disposition to “play the game,” to believe in its rules and in the value of its stakes. Yet, the case of Island Breeze shows that it can also produce dissonances, due to implicit relationships of domination and to the specific history of Polynesian Christianity, which puts local churches at the forefront of the contemporary renewing and reshaping of cultural identities. Therefore, the young Polynesians engaged in Island Breeze have “played the game” their own way, at the same time locally reproducing the dispositions taught by a global charismatic culture. The history of YWAM in the Pacific Islands should not be seen as a simple replication, at the local scale, of a global religious model, but rather as the result of an “intentionless invention of regulated improvisation” (Bourdieu 1980, 95) produced by the dynamic relationship between dispositions and social structures. This innovation occurs at the intersection of individual initiatives, cultural dynamics, and the circulations or interactions between the different spheres of global charismatic Protestantism.

References

In: F. Magowan et C. Schwartz (eds.), 2016. *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, p. 81-101.

- Augé, Marc. 1997. *L'impossible voyage. Le tourisme et ses images*. Paris: Payot et Rivages.
- Babadzan, Alain. 1982. *Naissance d'une tradition. Changement culturel et syncrétisme religieux aux îles Australes (Polynésie française)*. Paris: L'Orstom.
- Besnier, Niko. 2011. *On the Edge of the Global. Modern Anxieties in a Pacific Island Nation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. *La distinction, critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- . 1980. *Le sens pratique*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- . 1994. *Questions de sociologie*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- . 2001. *Masculine Domination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Carpenter Joel A., 1997. *Revive Us Again. The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Casanova, José. 2001. "Religion, the new millennium and globalization." *Sociology of Religion* 62: 415–441.
- Coleman, Simon. 2000. *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity. Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cunningham, Loren. 1984. *Is that really You, God? Hearing the Voice of God*. Lincoln, Virginia: Chosen Books.
- . 1997. *Tout à gagner, la méthode de Dieu*. Burtigny: Jeunesse en Mission (1989. *Winning God's Way*. Seattle: YWAM Publishing).
- De Certeau, Michel. 1975. *L'Écriture de l'histoire*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Ernst, Manfred. (ed.) 2006. *Globalization and the Re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands*. Suva (Fiji): Pacific Theological College.
- Eves, Richard. 1996. "Colonialism, Corporeality and Character: Methodist Missions and the Refashioning of Bodies in the Pacific." *History and Anthropology* 10 (1): 85–138.
- Fath, Sébastien. 2002. *Billy Graham, pape protestant?* Paris: Albin Michel.
- Fer, Yannick. 2009a. "Conversions pentecôtistes en Polynésie française: logiques culturelles et déterminants sociaux d'un 'choix personnel'." In *Anthropologie du christianisme en Océanie*, edited by Y. Fer and G. Malogne-Fer, 149–168. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- . 2009b. "Les réseaux missionnaires évangéliques en Océanie: mobilités intergénérationnelles et reconfigurations du militantisme chrétien." *Revue internationale de politique comparée* 16 (1):119–133.
- . 2010. *L'offensive évangélique. Voyage au cœur des réseaux militants de Jeunesse en Mission*. Geneva: Labor et Fides.
- Larson, Lawrence R., 1997. *The Spirit in Paradise. The History of the «Assemblies of God of Fiji» and its outreaches to other Island countries throughout the South Pacific*. Saint-Louis (Missouri): Plus Communications.
- Le'au, Sosene, 1997. *Called to Honor Him. How Men and Women are Redeeming Cultures*. Tampa: Culture Com Press.
- Liogier, Raphael. 2009. "L'individuo-globalisme: nouvelle culture croyante des sociétés industrielles avancées." *Revue internationale de politique comparée* 16 (1):135–154.
- Malogne-Fer, Gwendoline. 2011. "Le rôle des femmes dans l'évangélisation protestante de Tahiti et des îles 'adjacentes'." *French Historical Studies* 34 (1):57–86.
- Mary, André. 2000. "L'anthropologue au risque des religions mondiales." *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 24 (1):117–135.
- McClung, Floyd. 1988. *Living on the Devil's Doorstep. The McClung Family Story*. Waco (Texas): Word Books.
- Morin, Françoise 2009. "L'autochtonie comme processus d'ethnogenèse." In *Autochtonies. Vues de France et du Québec*, edited by N. Gagné, N., T. Martin, T. and M. Salaün, 59–73. Québec: Presses universitaires de Laval.
- Rey, Jeanne, 2010. "A la conquête des Nations (Unies). Combat spirituel, millénarisme et internationalization." In *Chrétiens africains en Europe*, edited by S. Fancello and A. Mary, 351–379. Paris: Karthala.
- Robbins, Joel. 2003. "On the paradoxes of global Pentecostalism and the perils of continuity thinking." *Religion* 33 (3):221–231.

In: F. Magowan et C. Schwartz (eds.), 2016. *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, p. 81-101.

Robertson, Roland. 1992. *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage. Schaerer, Daniel. 1991. *Allez dans le monde entier*. Paris: Jeunesse en Mission.

Wouters, Cas. 1995. "Etiquette Books and Emotion Management in the 20th Century: Part One: The Integration of Social Classes." *Journal of Social History* 29 (1):107-124.

———. 2010. "Comment les processus de civilization se sont-ils prolongés? De la 'seconde nature' à la «troisième nature.» *Vingtième Siècle* 106 (2): 161-175.