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To cite this article: Ana-María Alarcón-Jiménez, Raquel Jiménez Pasalodos & Margarita Díaz-Andreu (2023) A glimpse behind closed doors. Alfred L. Kroeber and the representation of native Californian music, *History and Anthropology*, 34:3, 521-539, DOI: [10.1080/02757206.2021.1983561](https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2021.1983561)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2021.1983561>



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Published online: 30 Sep 2021.



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A glimpse behind closed doors. Alfred L. Kroeber and the representation of native Californian music

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ABSTRACT



This article looks into the early twentieth century history of anthropological approaches to the study of music. Specifically, it delves into Alfred L. Kroeber's work on Native Californian cultures. It inquires into why Kroeber did not include music in his anthropological publications, despite collecting and analysing Native Californian music in private.

KEYWORDS

Alfred L. Kroeber; anthropology and music; representing Native Californian music; comparative musicology; inter-disciplinary histories

In the past decade concrete efforts have been made to give music research a more prominent position in the discipline of anthropology. Critical invitations on the part of both anthropologists and ethnomusicologists to move towards a 'sounded anthropology' (Samuels et al. 2010) led, for example, to the creation of the Music and Sound Interest Group in the American Anthropological Association in 2009. However, despite the growing number of reflections that have contributed to the 'postcolonial move that draws sounded ways of knowing and thinking closer into the centre of anthropology' (Samuels et al. 2010, 339), not much has been said about the history of the treatment of musical practices as separate from anthropological endeavours.¹

A look into anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber's work on Native Californian cultures during the first half of the twentieth century offers some answers in this respect. In this article, we aim to inquire into why Kroeber kept music away from his anthropological publications even though 'behind closed doors' he did much to collect information on Native Californian music. It is well known that Kroeber recorded a large number of songs; participated in the organization and preservation of the recordings in the University of California Museum of Anthropology that had moved from San Francisco to Berkeley in 1931 (Kroeber 1960; Jacknis 2013, 256–257); collected musical instruments; transcribed and translated song lyrics; and engaged in music analysis (Keeling 1992, 9–10; Jacknis 2003). In these pages, we contend that Kroeber conceptualized music as musical sound and music research as the objective and scientific study of that sound. Moreover, his way of understanding

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music impacted on his concept of music research as separate from anthropological investigation. In the light of a recent statement by anthropologist Michelle Bigenho in which she encouraged anthropologists who consider themselves to be 'non-musicians' to learn proficiencies in music and write about 'social life through the lens of music' (Bigenho 2008, 30), we show that, throughout his academic career, Alfred L. Kroeber devoted time to learning and developing proficiency in music but he did not write about social life through the lens of music (and perhaps was not convinced that he should).

The first part of this article looks at and questions Alfred L. Kroeber's explicit decision to exclude Native American music from one of his most important and well-known texts, the *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Kroeber 1925, vii–viii). The second part focuses on Kroeber's critical views on the state of the art of Native American music research. In some of his publications Kroeber stated that Native Californian music had only been imperfectly analysed and inadequately transcribed. Building on these criticisms, we show Kroeber's alignment with the theoretical and methodological framework of comparative musicology, as well as his awareness of the limits of that particular approach. As will become clear throughout this article, Kroeber engaged in conceptual contradictions between Native Californian and Western art music aesthetics and analysis. In our view, such contradictions derived, first of all, from the scholar's realization that the music of his own culture, and specifically Western art music, could not be used as a 'standard' for understanding Native American musical practices; and secondly from the complexities he found to propose an alternative framework for hearing, analysing and understanding indigenous Californian music.

Leaving music and sound out of the handbook of the Indians of California

In *Alfred Kroeber. A Personal Configuration* (1970), Theodora Kroeber recalled her late husband's love of music (Kroeber 1970, 266). She acknowledged his father's influence on his general disposition towards theatre and other performing arts (Kroeber 1970, 7). She explained that going to concerts and the opera was part of Alfred L. Kroeber's life from his upbringing in the German-American community of New York to his adult years in Berkeley and San Francisco (Kroeber 1970, 77).² She described the anthropologist's inclination to listen attentively to music without engaging in any other activity or human interaction (Kroeber 1970, 266). She also explained his negative opinion of the piano (an instrument he began to learn as a child) as a result of an overly strict teacher who caused him to quit and led him to conceive the instrument in later years as annoying and impure (Kroeber 1970, 17). Nevertheless, according to Theodora Kroeber, this initial musical training turned out to be 'useful for the later linguist and listener to music in other modes' (Kroeber 1970, 17).

Anthropologist Sean O'Neill argued that Alfred L. Kroeber acquired both an appreciation of music and an idea about its importance in anthropological research from his mentor, the renowned anthropologist Franz Boas (O'Neill 2015, 141). As in the case of other Boas students, including anthropologists Zora Neale Hurston, Melville Herskovits, Edward Sapir, George Herzog and Helen H. Roberts, Kroeber was interested in music (O'Neill 2015, 139–143). For instance, his wax cylinder recordings of Californian Native American songs outnumbered his numerous recordings of spoken indigenous narratives (Keeling 1991, xvi). In fact, O'Neill suggested that Kroeber's collection of recordings should

be seen as part of the Boasian legacy (2015, 142). Furthermore, like Boas, Kroeber also engaged in music research even though their approaches differed greatly.³ Whereas Franz Boas focused some of his fieldwork and anthropological texts on musical practices (occasionally transcribing music himself) (Jacknis 1996; O'Neill 2015), Kroeber separated his anthropological and musical inquiries, keeping the latter private and undertaking them with the help of musicians (Jacknis 2003; O'Neill 2015). In this respect, the Berkeley scholar was able to count on the assistance of William Kretschmer (Keeling 1992, 9–10; Jacknis 2003, 239, 250), an Austrian musician who helped him transcribe recorded songs, preparing them for the anthropologist's later musical analysis. Thus, whereas Kroeber's wax cylinder recordings (made both in the field and in the museum) were available at the University of California Museum of Anthropology for public consultation (Kroeber 1960; Seeger 1972, 135; Jacknis 2003, 255–256), his manuscripts and notes on music analysis remained in his archive. Except for a few song lyrics, they never made it into Kroeber's prolific body of work.

As seen above, Alfred L. Kroeber had an appreciation for music and a desire to collect Native American songs in the field to later study them in his own time. In this section we look into why he aimed to keep music out of his *Handbook of the Indians of California*. We inquire into what he excluded and, finally, we also consider whether, from a contemporary perspective, he actually 'succeeded' in omitting music from his masterwork.

Muting musical sound

In the preface to his *Handbook of the Indians of California*, Alfred L. Kroeber included the following statement:

One cultural activity of the profoundest emotional import I have regretfully felt compelled to refrain from considering – music. There is no question that any attempt at a well-rounded description of the culture of a people which omits music from its consideration is imperfect. But in the present case the difficulties were enormous. Primitive music is so thoroughly different from our own as to be practically unintelligible except on long acquaintance. (Kroeber 1925, vii–viii)

In the process of omitting music from his *Handbook*, as the above paragraph suggests, Kroeber implemented a conceptualization of music that entailed its possible removal from anthropological studies. Nevertheless, in a statement that recalled Boasian perspectives, he also highlighted a view of music as being important for understanding human cultural practices. Moreover, in accordance with the musicological views contemporary to his time,⁴ he placed Native Californian music in the category of 'primitive music', hinting at difference as an argument for its omission.

Kroeber's concept of music resonates with anthropologist Michelle Bigenho's idea of the music box, that is, a critical characterization of music that recalls 'the decoration that sits on a shelf and produces sounds when wound' (2011, 12). In Kroeber's view, it was possible to store the music box in a drawer and set it aside regardless of the intricate and prominent role that music and sound played in the ways of being in the world of his indigenous interlocutors. In fact, Kroeber's muting of musical sound, his disengagement of this sound from the beings, places and practices that produced, danced and listened to it, was at odds with his own knowledge of Native Californian cultures. This becomes clear

when looking at one of his previous publications, his article on 'The Yokuts Language of South Central California' (1907). In it, although Kroeber did not include 'music' in his list of terms of the different Yokutsan languages from south-central California, he incorporated the Yauelmani Yokuts word *ilka*, transcribed and translated by the scholar as water, singing and song altogether (Kroeber 1907, 283, 305, 306). This multiple meaning hinted at the importance of Yokuts songs as repositories of different kinds of knowledge (for example, healing, weather control), as well as to the tangled relationship between the beings/places from whom songs were acquired (for example, a lake) and the process of accessing and sharing that knowledge with others (for example, singing). Instead of referring to the Native Californian conceptual approaches related to music that he knew, he followed a materialistic outlook to differentiate Native American musical and non-musical objects of study. Put simply, musical objects of study were, for him, those sonic aspects of culture that he considered apt to be recorded, archived and preserved for later study; they included almost exclusively 'songs'. In contrast, non-musical objects of study comprised all the other sonic, performing and listening practices he witnessed and read about in the context of indigenous Californian rituals, ceremonies and everyday life activities. In the *Handbook* and other works, Kroeber discussed some of these 'non-musical objects of study' in the form of linguistic and anthropological writing.

Refraining from dealing with music in the *Handbook* entailed, from Kroeber's point of view, excluding the knowledge derived from the study of recorded Native Californian songs. Methodologically speaking, the study of songs involved listening to those recordings repeatedly, transcribing them in the form of musical notation and engaging in musical analysis. This epistemological regime followed by Kroeber, which was profoundly influenced by comparative musicology as we explain later in this paper, was thought to allow researchers to reach an 'objective' understanding of music that was not part of their own cultural realm. Objectivity here entailed getting to know Native American music from 'scientific' appraisals of its musical sound, rather than from the researcher's subjective musical expectations. Objectivity and musical training were aspects that Kroeber called for, implicitly, when he wrote about the importance of a 'long acquaintance' for understanding Native Californian music.

Reflecting further on the above mentioned quotation one might ask: why only music? If the Native Californian dance, verbal, economic, social, political and religious practices that Kroeber mentioned in the *Handbook* were all different from the researcher's and, moreover, getting to know them also required a long acquaintance, what was so different about music? Kroeber reflected on related matters as he stated that:

Music, like art, is difficult to characterize without a special vocabulary that has grown up around it. Such vocabularies do not exist for most primitive arts because their essential qualities are too foreign from our own. Usually it is only certain incidental features of an alien art that have any meaning in our thinking and feeling. We detach these aspects of expression from their roots and describe them in terms which seem significant but are of real meaning only as they refer to our own schemes. It is only the individual endowed with exceptional sympathy or sensibility that can understand any primitive art without a long acquaintance. (1925, 95)

From Kroeber's perspective, understanding Native Californian music was therefore a unidirectional exercise. The conceptual authority of the Euro-American researcher prevailed over that of the peoples he researched.

It could be argued that the working process in which Kroeber collected or mined raw data to be studied and made sense of by academics conflicted with his intention of understanding Native Californian cultures on their own terms. In the case of music he proposed that the knowledge process should be different because not only did it require a sensitive and sympathetic academic, but one with a ‘trained ear’. Furthermore, by this same logic, music was not to be studied in the field but in a music lab or a quiet room, where recordings could be listened to, analysed and transcribed in isolation, in keeping with the German comparative musicology method. In our view, this difference with respect to the study of other Native Californian cultural practices, reified music in a particular way and led the scholar to aim for its exclusion from the *Handbook*. In that text, after all, Kroeber mostly dealt with Native Californian cultural aspects that, in his opinion, could be grasped both in the field and in ethnological and historical documents and narratives linked to the field.

Native American music in the handbook

As we have shown above, Alfred L. Kroeber intended to keep music separate from his masterwork. But did he actually manage to do this? If we recall the triple connotation of the Yauelmani Yokuts word *Ilka* (song, water and singing) it could be said that although he succeeded in muting the sound of music (and thus, from his point of view, ‘music’), certain aspects of Native Californian songs, musical contexts and musical practices were indeed mentioned in the *Handbook*. Moreover, Kroeber’s interests in material culture opened up a space for the inclusion of both images and brief references to Native American musical instruments, most of which were part of the collection of the University of California Museum of Anthropology (Kroeber 1925, xvii).

In general terms, Kroeber used cultural information in the *Handbook* to look for culture traits. He aimed to provide evidence for his mapping of Native California into ‘culture areas’ and sub-areas. In fact, each area was defined by the concentration of what the anthropologist considered to be similar traits in a particular region. In his view ‘the distribution of traits within an area gave clues to the historical relations between the area’s groups’ (Buckley 1989, 17). Moreover, he assumed that the social groups included in a culture area were culturally related (Modzelewski 2012, 16). In the *Handbook*, Kroeber distinguished four such areas for Native Californian cultures: Northwestern, Central, Southern and the Colorado River. Despite his stated intention to refrain from considering music in his *Handbook* mentioned above (1925, vii–viii), songs and musical instruments were sometimes brought up to validate the delimitation of culture areas. On Page 96, for example, he explained that ‘the difference of northwestern songs from those of central California in mass is considerable’ (Kroeber 1925, 96). Furthermore, in the few cases that he perceived Native Californian songs to be particularly distinctive, they were addressed in longer specific sections of the *Handbook*. This was the case of the songs of the Yurok people (whose culture the anthropologist had studied for longer and therefore knew better), as well as the song series of the Luiseño and Mohave people.

Kroeber’s comparative study of Native Californian religious practices and creation stories played an important role in delineating the aforementioned culture areas (Buckley 1989, 16). Hence, rituals and ceremonies were described to characterize all the tribes represented in the *Handbook* and songs, singing, dancing and musical instruments

were touched on in these contexts. Initially, musical instruments were briefly described by type and material. In some cases, there were fleeting references to who might use them, where, and on what occasions. In this respect, for example, the cocoon rattle was portrayed as an instrument used throughout California for 'shamanistic practices and ritualistic singing' (Kroeber 1925, 823).⁵ Musical instruments were also discussed in relation to Kroeber's argument on the correlation of both stylistic development in music and the decorative arts with formal organization in the religious, intellectual, social and political fields (Kroeber 1936, 109). When the available evidence did not support this correlation, he alluded either to vocal music or musical instruments to offer alternative explanations. In short, such explanations revealed the centrality of melodic complexity for the anthropologist's own views on musical 'progress'. In this vein, he stated that 'this extreme poverty of [musical] instruments among a people [Yurok] not deficient in technical devices suggests a strong [pitch-based] stylization of their vocal music' (1925, 97). Moreover, surprised that the flute, 'the only true [Native Californian] musical instrument in our sense' was not used by any Californian tribes in rituals or ceremonies, he reasoned that 'the cause might be their [the instruments'] imperfection' (1925, 824).

Singing was also included in Kroeber's depictions of rituals, ceremonies and everyday life practices. Concomitant with the author's decision to mute musical sound in his text, singing was mentioned soundlessly with rare references to sonic qualities such as volume, voice register and texture. Throughout the *Handbook*, the action of singing was located and contextualized within different processes, including healing, mourning, weather control and both animal-human and more-than-human-human interactions. Sonic information can still be derived from the narratives on these contexts, especially when singing and dancing are brought up together. In these cases, even if not much can be learned about the voices singing, it is possible to hear some implicit audible references from descriptions alluding to the 'type' of singer (human beings, trees, more-than-human-beings), their gender, formation (solo, in groups), their location and displacement in space, the place of performance (indoors, outdoors, near a river, at the sweat house), their dress and ritual regalia, and the length and kind of interaction between singers and dancers.

As is well known, in addition to religion and creation stories, language also played a key role in Kroeber's division of California into culture areas, as well as in his diffusionist appraisals. Song tunes and lyrics were important in this respect. Indeed, as Kroeber wrote in reference to the song series of what he called the Lower Colorado (Mohave) region: 'a comparison of the songs – both words and tune – which appear to be the concrete elements most frequently and completely transmitted, should readily solve most of the interrelations of source and of borrowing by the several tribes' (1925, 788). In the *Handbook*, the tunes were not discussed but the scholar did write about song lyrics. In our view, Kroeber's approach to song lyrics agreed with an understanding of 'song' proffered by the ethnologist Alice C. Fletcher, for whom songs were 'words arranged in metrical form and adapted to be set to music' (1915, 231). Within this framework, silencing the music set out the words for literary and linguistic analyses. Kroeber discussed the content of lyrics, their mention of geographical places, creation stories and the use of non-verbal vocalizations. Although in the *Handbook*, Kroeber mainly included the translated English language versions of song lyrics,⁶ in previous and later publications he presented a more detailed lexicological and grammatical study of Native Californian lyrics,

including both a transcription in their original language and its corresponding English translation (see for instance Kroeber 1907, 1963). Kroeber, of course, was not the only anthropologist to show an interest in Native American song lyrics. His former mentor, Franz Boas, always encouraged his students and colleagues to transcribe and study song texts (Jacknis 1996; O'Neill 2015, 129). For him, this particular approach was a means of obtaining knowledge from within for the 'treatment of anthropological problems' (Boas 1906 (2013), 644). In the *Handbook*, however, such knowledge from within was transformed to fit the cultural expectations of California's dominant society. The publication of song lyrics in their English translation and the use of such translations to illustrate rituals and ceremonies for a Euro-American readership is one instance of this transformation.

From a contemporary ethnomusicological point of view, Kroeber's *Handbook* dealt with music and musical practices. After all, not only musical sound, but all the issues concerned with who, for whom, why, when, where and how musical sound is produced are constitutive of music from this standpoint. It is also possible to venture to say that for early twentieth century anthropologists like Franz Boas and Edward Sapir, for whom musical contexts were important in their more nuanced and holistic anthropological approach to the study of music (O'Neill 2015, 147), the *Handbook* could be read as dealing with music. However, in Kroeber's own conceptualization of music, the book excluded Native Californian music.

Kroeber's anthropological approach to the study of music suggested in the *Handbook* was further explained in his article 'Culture Element Distribution III: Area and Climax' (1936), one of the few anthropological texts in which he wrote directly about indigenous Californian music. In that paper, Kroeber proposed a fifth culture area (the Northeast) and he presented a map of the musical styles of Native California with four musical zones, most of which he had already hinted at in his masterwork: Northwestern (including Yurok music), Central (covering almost half of the map of California), Southern (including Luiseño music), and Yuman (Mohave, Lower Colorado) (Kroeber 1936, 109). Kroeber discussed these regions exclusively in terms of musical sound; he determined them through an intended quantitative analysis of musical style for which he claimed not to have enough data (as evident in the largest Central musical style zone). His tracing of the Yuman area was based on George Herzog's work on Yuman music (Herzog 1928), an interaction that hinted towards the kind of collaboration that Kroeber aspired to but, except for this instance, never consolidated.

Looking at both the *Handbook* and the 1936 article, it appears that, from Kroeber's perspective, the study of music as musical sound had the potential to provide meaningful data to both aid and confirm his tracing of culture and music areas, the location of centres of cultural specialization and the delineation of paths of cultural distribution among different Native American tribes. Ultimately, Kroeber believed that when songs travelled from one place and culture to another over time, their performance context and the narrative content of their lyrics would change, whereas in contrast structural aspects of their musical sound (and the etymology of the words in their lyrics) would remain underlying. For him (and in general for comparative musicologists at the time), the careful study of this inner sonic material was able to reveal important information with regard to the origins and diffusion of songs, styles and cultural contacts. Excavating songs in this way entailed a 'technical procedure' (Kroeber 1936, 113) that required

musical specialization. As mentioned earlier, this approach to music indicated that the musical information relevant to his anthropological scholarship could only be processed by musically-trained anthropologists. Moreover, it also meant that musical knowledge of Native Californian music was not to be learned from Native Californian people themselves but from removed (and probably Euro-American) music specialists. Perhaps such forced epistemological displacement and marked division of labour complicated Kroeber's gathering of musical 'data' and, therefore, limited his publication of ideas on music to three papers (Kroeber 1918, 1936; Moss and Kroeber 1919). This contrasted with the anthropological work of some of his colleagues, including Franz Boas (with thirty publications directly focusing on music) (O'Neill 2015). Boas considered that music, defined more broadly, could be directly studied by specialists in anthropology.

Excluding the 'inauthentic'

In this further reflection on the representation of Native Californian music and musical practices in Alfred L. Kroeber's *Handbook*, we discuss Kroeber's decision to disregard Native Californian popular musical practices as sites for anthropological research. Alfred L. Kroeber's bibliography on Native Californian cultures spans from 1902 to the summer of 1960 (Steward 1961; Jacknis 2013). During his six decades of anthropological writing and numerous yearly publications on Native American cultures from this part of the continent, the scholar was able to revise, maintain and also change some of his statements and positions (see for instance Kroeber 1963, 168; Laverty 2003, 66–67). One of the approaches he sustained throughout his academic scholarship was the representation of indigenous cultures in an essentialist manner. More concisely, his research avoided dealing with Native Californian cultural 'traits that might have become mixed or tainted from encounters with others' (Lightfoot 2005, 227). In fact, as is widely known, Kroeber and other salvage anthropologists, like his former doctoral students Anna H. Gayton and Harold E. Driver, focused their attention on indigenous cultural practices that they thought were close to disappearing.⁷ Their research process implemented the memory culture methodology, a practice that consisted of interviewing Native American elders (born before the 1849–1855 Gold Rush) who were deemed apt by the scholars to remember precontact native life (Lightfoot 2005, 46–47, 227). It was precisely this precontact native life that salvage anthropologists aimed at studying and preserving. The salvage anthropological approach excluded the present of the people interviewed, it overlooked conflict, and it showed little inclination towards the study of the 'violent, but also inventive, history of culture contacts that shaped the Indian people' who were Kroeber's and other scholars' interlocutors (Clifford 2013, 170).

Following this salvage anthropological framework, Kroeber stated in his *Handbook* that he had 'omitted (...) [the] accounts of the relations of the natives with the whites and of the events befalling them after such contact was established' (1925, vi). Regarding culture and musical contexts, this decision meant that the anthropologist's text did not deal with either Native Californian popular musical contexts or their related technologies (including the guitar, violin and phonograph). He also dismissed music and other cultural practices pertaining to Catholic and Christian worship on Native Californian rancherías and reservations. Several specific examples of what he omitted in this respect can be highlighted. In the case of the Yokuts tribes from south-central California, there is evidence of the

importance of square dancing at both the Tule River Reservation (Frank and Goldberg 2010, 203) and the Santa Rosa Rancheria from at least 1916. In the latter, John P. Harrington, an ethnographer from the Smithsonian Institution, and his then wife and research assistant Carobeth Harrington (known as Carobeth Laird from 1922), mentioned that on Christmas Eve 1916 a ‘square and round dancing’ celebration took place, with music by Tachi-Yokut fiddlers Joe and Leon (Harrington 1917, Image 220). The Harringtons’ fieldnotes were full of salvage anthropological perspectives as they wrote detailed information on Yokuts recreational and ritual dances but barely mentioned, or did not pay attention to, what they labelled ‘American’ dances:

[Tachi-Yokut ritual specialist] R.T. [Roberto Testa] finished dancing [a *kam* or dance sequence, on the New Year’s Eve of 1916] about 1:30 [a.m.]. (...) Jo had brought over his violin. I left but heard that they danced Am. (J_American Antiquity) dances until morning. (Harrington 1917, Image 238)

Even though Kroeber’s fieldwork on Yokuts territories in 1900, 1902, 1903, 1904 and 1906 preceded the Harringtons’ (1916–1917), before he published the *Handbook* the Berkeley professor was most probably aware of it all: the importance of square dancing, the incorporation of those dances and their music as social codas to the Yokuts *kam* dances, and the use of the violin and the phonograph by Tule River and Tachi Yokuts tribal members. In fact, as a leading anthropologist on the West Coast and, given his expertise and high level of communication with scholars in his country and other parts of the world, he was probably aware of the significance of square dancing to other Native American tribes in the United States, such as the Cherokee people in North Carolina throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Jamison 2015, 38). Nevertheless, these cultural practices entailed, as he himself put it, a ‘historical treatment’ that was methodologically distant from his anthropological goals (Kroeber 1925, vi). It could be argued that Kroeber’s attempts to draw conceptual and methodological lines to separate the ‘authentic’ from the ‘inauthentic’ in the cultural realm of Native California were also an attempt to define separate disciplinary grounds for anthropological, historical and musical research.

Alfred L. Kroeber’s implicit formulation of ‘Native Californian music as an object of study’ as the musical sound of certain Native Californian songs is not surprising when looked at in its historical context. Nevertheless, it is striking to read accounts of Native Californian music that, despite having been written in the twenty-first century, still resonate with Kroeber’s musical framework without a critical appraisal. To continue with the example of the Yokuts tribes from south-central California, it is possible to say that the salvage anthropological approach discussed above permeates the encyclopaedic entries dealing with Yokuts music even in some of the most important and worldwide distributed music reference works in the English language. In the *Oxford Music Dictionary Online* (Keeling 2014) and the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (Keeling 2001) the characterization of Yokuts music closely follows that of Kroeber’s (as well as that of Anna H. Gayton). Although Richard Keeling, author of both entries, adds details on Yokuts musical form and style derived from his musical analysis of early twentieth century song recordings (made by Kroeber and other Euro-American scholars), Yokuts popular music and musicians are excluded. In our view, it is time to change this approach and to include these and other musical practices that, for over a century, have been

important in the socio-musical life of reservations and rancherías. A Yokuts rock/blues/country music band like the Redblooms, with their 'Redblood musical style' (Ziegler 2013), and a career of more than fifty years performing at parties, weddings and other rituals in Yokuts territories, is essential to understand and represent Yokuts music in a more accurate and empirical way. Most importantly, given the impact that sources such as the aforementioned encyclopaedias can have on both research and teaching at different levels (from student to professional research and from early schooling to graduate school), these sources should include and consult Yokuts tribes and Native American tribes more broadly, to collaborate in the entries that represent them and their cultural and musical practices.

Native American music for specialized ears. Kroeber's approach to Native American music research

During the first decades of the twentieth century in the United States there were discussions on how to turn Native American and African American music research into a scientific endeavour. Psychologist Walter V. Bingham, for instance, dismissed the use of what he called the 'interpretative or artistic method'. This was a phrase he used to criticize Frederick J. Burton's inquiries into what Anishinaabe singers 'meant to sing' rather than the 'scientific' analysis of the sonic data of their recorded songs (Bingham 1914, 423). Kroeber himself thought that Native American music research was a field in its infancy. He argued that individual researchers working on that area of inquiry needed to coordinate efforts to advance towards a better and more scientific approach (Kroeber 1918). On this path towards science, as his statements about the study of music suggest, Kroeber was influenced by the work of comparative musicologists such as George Herzog and Herzog's former mentor, Erich Moritz von Hornbostel (Keeling 1992, 9–10). Kroeber met the latter twice, in 1915 and 1925, and they exchanged correspondence between 1925 and 1934. They also jointly coordinated a duplication project to safeguard the cylinder collection of the University of California Museum of Anthropology prior to World War Two (Kroeber 1960; Jacknis 2003, 2002, personal communication).⁸ In the sections below, we begin by looking into Kroeber's contradictory curiosity for music and his lack of interest in giving a more central space to music and music research in his published work. After that we offer a brief overview of the Berlin school of comparative musicology. Lastly, we show that Kroeber's few published musicological critiques of Native American music research, within this comparative framework, were mainly concerned with issues pertaining to music notation and tonality.

Kroeber's duality: a private interest but a public distance

In Kroeber's scholarship, the study of Native Californian music and musical practices occupied a marginal place. By the same token, neither his students' work nor the many anthropological publications he edited altered this marginalization of music. This was also the case in the context of the culture element surveys that Kroeber implemented in the 1930s, a research method applied throughout the state of California that consisted of asking Native American people to note the presence or absence of over a thousand listed cultural traits. These answers were later published and statistically analysed to

refine both the tracing of culture areas and the premises of the links among their inhabitants (Lightfoot 2005, 38; Jacknis 2013). Musical instruments and the acquisition and use of songs in certain religious and ritual practices were among the few musically-centred questions included in the survey (see for instance Driver 1937; Harrington 1942; Aginsky 1943).

The marginality of music in Kroeber's publications was compatible with his perception of music research as a marginal choice for a professional specialization in anthropology. In a personal letter to George Herzog, Kroeber criticized him for

not wanting to be listed as an anthropologist and preferring the rank of specialist in Music (sic) within anthropology. (...) Don't close yourself in. You have worked on language, general ethnology, folklore, and social organization and law in the field, besides music (...). (in Reed 1993, 72)

As explained above, Kroeber saw 'music as an object of study' in terms of musical sound, and music specialists, trained in music conservatories, as those capable of developing thorough musical transcriptions and analyses. Although, ultimately, he believed the information derived from these analyses could be used by anthropologists as evidence for refining anthropological hypotheses, he was not convinced about mixing anthropological and musicological matters. This is evident in his critique of the anthropologist and music researcher Frances Densmore's *Teton Sioux Music*:

The volume largely consists of transcriptions, individual analyses and ethnological material. This rather diverse mass of material is presented in a dovetailed manner that is unlikely to satisfy either the music student or the ethnologist. Musically nothing is gained and normally something lost by having two songs and their analyses separated by a ceremonial description or biography. Reciprocally, the student of Sioux religion will feel the same way about the interspersed songs. (Kroeber 1918, 448)

Kroeber devoted time to investigating the Native American songs that he and other researchers had recorded. Music and music research occupied a more central place in his personal and private life. Comparative musicology, it could be said, was one of his 'hobbies'. Moreover, the scholar's affinity for music led him to reflect on and define it as a non-representational art with 'strong visceral and kinaesthetic appeal', in which inter-related gestalt 'themes' were capable of evoking 'affect, response, emotion' (Kroeber 1963, 63).⁹ These avenues of research (music and the musicking body, music and affect and music as expressive culture) were mentioned by Kroeber but not academically pursued.¹⁰ Kroeber's private study of Native American music and his few direct public engagements with state of the art Native American music research (Kroeber 1918; Moss and Kroeber 1919) were influenced by the ideas of the Berlin School of comparative musicology.

Comparative musicology: a brief overview

In his study of non-European music (then referred to as 'primitive' and 'exotic' music) at the beginning of the twentieth century, Erich Moritz von Hornbostel (1877–1937) and his colleagues from the *Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv* advocated the use of music recordings and the repetitive listening that these allowed for to attain 'objective' and 'scientific' music transcriptions and music analyses (Abraham and von Hornbostel 1904 (1975);

von Hornbostel 1905 (1975); Markham, Terauchi, and Wolpert 2017, 51). These analyses from different cultural contexts were to be systematically compared to answer questions on the origins, evolution, variation and diffusion of music. Moreover, the aims of comparative musicology also included looking into 'the nature of the musically beautiful' and preserving and collecting music from different parts of the world (von Hornbostel 1905 (1975), 249, 252). Among the 'most important tasks of comparative musicology' were determining pitch and interval size with the utmost precision (von Hornbostel 1905 (1975), 257). In their quest for precision, comparative musicologists measured interval distances in cents according to the work of Alexander J. Ellis (Ellis 1885; Abraham and von Hornbostel 1903 (1975), 15; Stock 2007). Hornbostel's musicological studies, therefore, included tables indicating cents measurements in addition to music transcriptions in the European five-line music staff. Comparative musicologists' use of recorded music as a site of musical knowledge changed long established musicological paradigms (Rehding 2003, 177). For instance, it advocated a non-intrusive attitude on the part of music researchers (Ames 2003, 314; Rehding 2003, 178) and also called for those same researchers to avoid deriving conclusions from Western art music – or, as Kroeber called it, 'our music' (Kroeber 1918, 447) – when evaluating non-European music (in terms of its tonal degrees, tonal systems, consonance, scales, intervals, texture, musical terminology, rhythm and melodic content) (von Hornbostel 1905 (1975)).

Musicologist Alexander Rehding has warned against thinking about the comparative musicologists from the *Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv* as cultural relativists by today's standards (Rehding 2003, 180). On the one hand, it is true that those scholars stressed the importance of understanding non-European music on its own terms, before proceeding to compare it. On the other hand, they conceived what they labelled as 'primitive music' (including Native American music) as simpler and less developed music that could provide answers about 'the music of our ancestors' (von Hornbostel 1905 (1975), 269). In this Eurocentric model 'that fundamentally confused morphology with history' (Ames 2003, 316), musical development was characterized as moving towards greater technical complexity, a factor generally construed in terms of melody/melodic range, harmony and musical structure and form. It is important to mention here that, although Alfred L. Kroeber used the 'primitive music' label to refer to Native Californian music, the anthropologist struggled between sometimes accepting and sometimes rejecting it and its conceptual underpinnings. In the *Handbook*, for example, he juggled his views on Native Californian music and aesthetics as 'less cultivated' (Kroeber 1925, 541) and his judgment of precisely those views as derived from a poor understanding of 'the real merits' of Californian indigenous 'folklore' (encompassing music) (Kroeber 1925, 541).

In Hornbostel's view, ethnologists and musicologists had clearly differentiated roles in the realm of music research. Ethnologists were in charge of going into the field and recording musical renditions (von Hornbostel 1905 (1975), 251); musicologists were to study the musical sound of such recordings; and musical practices and contexts fell 'more under the competence of the ethnologist than the musicologist' (von Hornbostel 1905 (1975), 268). Conversely, the study of dance called for a mutual collaboration; as Hornbostel put it: 'here [in the study of dance] is fertile ground for the combined research of ethnologists and musicians' (Abraham and von Hornbostel 1904 (1975), 187). This division of labour contrasted with that of Boas and the music researchers who had studied or had been advised by him in the United States (including Natalie Curtis, George Herzog,

Helen H. Roberts and, although not a Boas 'alumna', Frances Densmore). In addition to transcribing, analysing, and comparing music, these researchers undertook fieldwork, had a broad knowledge of their field, recorded music and studied musical contexts. In other words, to use Hornbostel's professional divisions, they engaged in both ethnological and musicological matters.¹¹ As we stated earlier, Kroeber's perspective of the study of music resonated with Hornbostel's. Even within his own professional practice, and despite his love for music, as explained above, he separated anthropological research from that of music. It was only in private, behind closed doors, that he experimented with a more fluid procedure, thus bending the borders of otherwise rigid academic delimitations. However, as we explain next, there were two exceptions (Kroeber 1918; Moss and Kroeber 1919).

On notating music and getting to tonality

In the late 1910s, Alfred L. Kroeber published two papers in which he brought up his knowledge of comparative musicology, thus showing the wider public that he was cognizant of such matters. The first has already been mentioned above: his review of Frances Densmore's monograph *Teton Sioux Music* (1918). The second was a jointly written article on Nabaloi Filipino songs (Moss and Kroeber 1919). In both texts, Kroeber, like Densmore, Helen H. Roberts and other contemporary music researchers, was critical of the use of the five-line staff to notate non-European music. In his view, this kind of notation had limited graphic capacity to accommodate pitches other than the twelve tempered half steps of Western European scales. Moreover, Kroeber worried that an erroneous notation of pitches forced authors to fit them into an unsuitable medium of representation that would lead to mistakes in the analysis of intervals, scales and tonalities and, ultimately, to flawed views on musical knowledge (Moss and Kroeber 1919). In this quest for accuracy, Kroeber was critical of transcriptions that used 'ordinary musical notation with only an occasional indication of pitch deviation' (Kroeber 1918, 446), although on other occasions he overlooked minor errors (Moss and Kroeber 1919, 195). This was the case of 'Nabaloi Songs', for which ethnologist Claude R. Moss recorded and translated twelve songs. Teodoro Francisco (a school band instructor in Kabayan, the Philippines) transcribed them into a music staff and Kroeber analysed them, although the former was not included as a co-author. It is possible that both the division of labour and the geographical distance played a role in Kroeber's acceptance of what he thought was a slightly inaccurate transcription. In addition to precision, music researchers like Helen H. Roberts also advocated for alternative notation systems that would make their work more accessible to 'the average reader' (Roberts 1922, 156). Contradictorily, in spite of these issues, both Kroeber's private musical analyses and the few he published were based on transcriptions rendered into the five-line music staff (Moss and Kroeber 1919; Keeling 1992, 9–10). Surely, the advantages of a music notation system that was popular among musicians and music researchers in Europe, the United States and other parts of the world outstripped its disadvantages.

Tonality was another musical aspect that Kroeber reflected on and recommended studying objectively or, more precisely, without 'subjective' appraisals with reference to our [Western art] 'music' (1918, 447). From Kroeber's perspective, the 'problem' of tonality lay in unveiling whether non-European music had 'anything corresponding to our tonic or key feeling' (Moss and Kroeber 1919, 195). For this, he departed from the hypothesis that such music tended to have less inclination towards a sense of tonality 'than we exact'

(Moss and Kroeber 1919, 195). In his view, determining the tonic of a song entailed a process of identification of ‘a tone brought into prominence by repetition or accentuation, possibly by the structure of the melody; and [that it] would, with high probability, be either the first or the last note of the song’ (Kroeber 1918, 446–447). A year later, however, Kroeber contradicted this meticulous procedure as he stated that there was no fixed method to find the tonic, and that researchers should proceed case by case, by ‘trial and error’ (Moss and Kroeber 1919, 196). ‘Nabaloi Songs’ had a combination of both of these approaches, as Kroeber analysed Francisco’s music transcriptions to inductively propose that this music material had a tendency towards a tonic, while he located the tonic at the end of each song (Moss and Kroeber 1919, 195–198). Reviewing ‘Nabaloi Songs’, Helen H. Roberts judged this location of the tonic as arbitrary (Roberts 1919). She was also critical of Kroeber’s exclusive reliance on musical sound to reach his conclusions, while she contested his suggestion that there was a ‘Nabaloi scale’, adding

if we could discover a tonic, the exact nature of the Nabaloi scale or scales could be easily solved. Without direct information from the people themselves, or an investigation of their musical instruments, the determination of their scale would be a difficult matter. (Roberts 1919, 457)

As we have seen so far, unlike Roberts’ suggestions, Kroeber approached ‘music as an object of study’ as a sonically abstract cultural object. For him, musical answers, like physical or mathematical answers, lay within their own scientific material. However, this focus on musical sound, as the above statements reveal, did not suffice for succeeding in the quest for the musical objectivity that Kroeber hoped for. After all, this musical ‘objectivity’, as Roberts hinted, required an engagement with the ‘musical subjects’ to whom the music to be analysed belonged, as well as with their ‘subjective’ musical knowledge.¹²

Conclusion

This article has inquired into Alfred L. Kroeber’s approach to the study of music within the scope of his anthropological work on Native California. In the first part of the text, we focused on his *Handbook of the Indians of California* (1925), one of his most important and well-known publications, in which the anthropologist explicitly stated that he had excluded Native American music (1925, vii–viii). This purposeful exclusion allowed us to read the book as an important source to learn about what Kroeber thought about music and how he conceptualized it. In the second section of the paper, we focused on Kroeber’s views of and approaches to Native American music research. Moreover, we showed his alignment with the work of early twentieth century German comparative musicologists such as Erich Moritz von Hornbostel and we delved into some of Kroeber’s few published works on music.

In both the first and the second parts of this article, we showed that in Kroeber’s view the study of music was not a task for anthropologists but for music specialists, that is, for individuals trained in music conservatories or who had taken lessons akin to the Western art music curricula. This specialization, we argued, was related to Kroeber’s conceptualization of music as musical sound. An important point to emerge from this in the context of Kroeber’s work is that Native Californian musical knowledge was displaced from the people such knowledge belongs to. For instance, Kroeber knew of indigenous concepts

such as *ilka* that denoted a tight-knit relationship between a song or a song sequence and the performance, place, beings, and process whereby those songs were learned. Nevertheless, this Native American concept was relegated to a word list, and it was thus never mobilized as an idea that could teach and elucidate important aspects of Native Californian musical and cultural practices.

Overall, we hope this article contributes, from a particular case study, to the history of music studies within the discipline of anthropology. This history is important for understanding the development of both anthropological and ethnomusicological research on music. Furthermore, bringing out this history might help to evidence and therefore question and change valuable although presently outdated encyclopaedic representations of Native American musical practices. For, in addition to Kroeber's impact in twentieth century anthropological knowledge, his approach to Native Californian musics has resonated into the twenty-first century, as Richard Keeling's encyclopaedic entries in the *Oxford Music Dictionary Online* (2014) and the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (2001) illustrate. This is problematic, as it perpetuates the transmission of distorted representations of indigenous cultural practices to music students and scholars around the world. Given the current attention of postcolonial critiques to academic representations of indigenous histories and identities, this article serves as a reminder to critically revise these and other reference publications to reflect something beyond early twentieth century anthropological and ethnomusicological perspectives. Revising, of course, is not enough. To go beyond the scope of Kroeber's work on Native Californian musical practices, indigenous voices are needed. In fact, questioning the marginal place of sound and music within salvage anthropological works means calling for a re-centring of those works around indigenous voices and epistemologies.

Notes

1. A very important contribution is that of anthropologists Ira Jacknis (1996, 2014) and Sean O'Neill (2015). In fact, O'Neill, has asserted that 'in moving music to the periphery – in relegating it to a specialty – it seems that the field [of anthropology] has potentially turned away from one of the most important hallmarks of our species' (2015, 130).
2. Alfred L. Kroeber's first wife was Henriette Rothschild (1877–1913). She studied piano at the Music Academy of San Francisco; she also took piano and musicology courses in Germany, and she was an active member of the German-Jewish cultural community of San Francisco (Kroeber 1970, 77; Jacknis 2003, 250). As anthropologist Ira Jacknis has pointed out, she, very probably, also encouraged Kroeber's musical interests (Jacknis 2003, 250).
3. For an in-depth analysis of Franz Boas and Alfred L. Kroeber's contrasting anthropological careers and approaches see Ira Jacknis' 'The First Boasian: Alfred Kroeber and Franz Boas, 1896–1905' (2002).
4. It is important to underline that the *Handbook*, although published in 1925, was in fact compiled by 1914 and written between 1914 and 1915 (Buckley 1996, 225). These were also especially prolific years for comparative musicologists from the School of Berlin.
5. This kind of definite statement regarding, for instance, the use of the rattle, contrasts with Boas' more nuanced approach. As O'Neill noted, Boas portrayed the rattle as having different meanings and uses depending on the Native American cultural context (O'Neill 2015, 135).
6. See, for instance, the lyrics of a song from the Yokuts peoples' rattlesnake ceremony translated into English by Kroeber in his *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Kroeber 1925, 506).
7. However, the exception to this was Cora du Bois, who wrote her PhD on the 1870 Ghost Dance (1939).

8. We would like to thank anthropologist Ira Jacknis for sharing with us (in September 2020) important information regarding Alfred L. Kroeber's correspondence with Hornbostel and other music researchers and musicians, such as George Herzog, Helen H. Roberts and Charles Seeger.
9. This definition remained unpublished during Alfred L. Kroeber's lifetime. It appeared in an essay included in a posthumous volume edited by his widow, Theodora (Kroeber 1963).
10. Already in the *Handbook*, Kroeber wrote: 'for centuries hundreds of thousands of human beings in California have been forming a [musical] style, a variety of styles, according to nation and occasion, in which they expressed some of their profoundest feelings' (1925, 96).
11. Helen Roberts was sceptical of approaches to music research like Hornbostel's. She wrote that 'European writers not as familiar with American ethnology as they might be, tend to speak of Indians as a unit' (Roberts 1932, 102). Also, note the contrast between the number of female music researchers in the United States and the more male-driven environment of the Berlin school of comparative musicology (to learn more about the work of some of these female music scholars see Frisbie 1989 and Jensen and Patterson 2015).
12. As anthropologist Ira Jacknis showed in his chapter 'Yahi Culture in the Wax Museum. Ishi's Sound Recordings' (2003), Kroeber's procedure for recording music entailed a more dialectical approach than that used for studying it. When recording Ishi's musical renditions, for instance, Kroeber invited Native American collaborator Sam Batwi, and he paid attention to Batwi's indications regarding the proper body posture for listening to Ishi's renditions to the gramophone. There was also an implicit negotiation in terms of time in which Ishi and the anthropologists present at the recording session adjusted their use of the available technological means, pushed the limits of such means, and tried to understand each other's needs and expectations. Lyric transcription also entailed a closer collaboration between the anthropologists making the recordings and the Native American people being recorded, as the language knowledge of the latter was essential for the former to be able to adequately transcribe song lyrics and speech. Regarding the translation of lyrics, Kroeber came to understand that Native American song lyrics were often only to be understood by Native American people (Jacknis 2003).

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our profound gratitude both to musicologist Elisabeth Le Guin for her valuable comments on an early draft of this paper, and to anthropologist Ira Jacknis, for providing us with some of his articles and also for his comments on a later version of this text. We assume full responsibility for the content of this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, ERC Artsoundscapes project (Grant Agreement No. 787842).

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