Abstract

The article arises from reflections on the author’s fieldwork first in West Africa, then in Fiji, and finally in a modern urban setting in Britain. Music has sometimes been considered to lie outside the field of mainstream anthropology, either merely left to members of other disciplines such as musicology, folklore or social history, or else seen as a highly specialist concern rather than part of the overall ethnography of a particular culture or community. This article challenges this view as misleading on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Far from being marginal to anthropology or to society, the study of music relates to established and developing branches of anthropology and leads into fundamental issues about the nature of humanity.