

## Indigenous Modernities: Introduction

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Indigenous modernities, a phrase which we have cast in the plural for this specially themed issue of *MUSICultures*, is a concept that has been infrequently defined though widely used in Indigenous circles in the Americas, Europe, and Australasia during the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Both “indigenous” and “modernities” are complicated and contested terms. Most definitions of “indigenous” recognize the reciprocal ties between people, their land and culture. “Indigenous” might mean simply “native of [a specific place or nation state]” as conceptualized by one of the authors (Léotar) in this volume. In other contexts, additional criteria have been developed. For the purpose of developing such tools as their Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, for instance, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (UNWGIP) developed a definition of “Indigenous People” as

those [people] which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems. (UNWGIP 2012)

The UN group’s emphasis on the relationality of different populations, its recognition of colonial injustices, and its implicit endorsement of contemporary struggles for rights and cultural sustainability is congruent with the views of many of the *MUSICultures* contributors.

“Modernity” is, of course, at least as complex and contested as Appadurai (1996), Fergusson (1999), Pratt (2002), and many others have theorized.

With Michelle Bigenho (2011), we encourage readers to ask not simply “what” is modernity but “when” did modernity begin? Some point to enlightenment philosophies in Europe as the demarcation of a “modern” emphasis on rationality. Some look more narrowly at style in artistic production and consider that the modern is congruent with new departures in the arts in the twentieth century. In her keynote address to the 2011 International Council for Traditional Music, where a number of the papers in this volume were first presented in conference format, Bigenho argued that for indigenous people, modernity began when their lives were first interrupted by colonizers, when their land was invaded. The newness that comes with encounter is central to other definitions of “alternative” modernities as well. Indeed, the very application of the concept of “modernity” to indigenous cultures is part of a broad movement to decouple the idea of the modern from Euroamerican centrism. Indigenous modernities often differ from the “developmentalist” narratives of “the West” and emphasize the fragmentation, deterritorialization, and struggles for reclamation that are parts of indigenous experience in most parts of the world. Reclamation, recontextualization, and expansions of “traditional” concepts to include new realms of experience are important elements of “modernity” in the studies in this volume.

Pertinent to “indigenous modernities” are various key texts that are cited, some repeatedly, by authors in this issue of *MUSICultures*. Some of these texts relate to colonial stereotypes that shape social expectations (Pisani 2005) but are often defied by indigenous artists. Deloria’s widely cited book, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004), theorizes the notion of expectation and the potential of the unexpected to transform social relationships. Other key texts address new processes of alliance, forms of cosmopolitanism, and networks, often transnational in scope, that inform politics as well as artistic practices (Appiah 2006, Breckenridge et al. 2002, Diamond 2007). Such alliances relate, at times, to global struggles for indigenous rights.

Other key texts focus on the foundational meanings of place in indigenous cultures (Basso 1996, Samuels 2004, Feld 1981, Feld and Basso 1996, Schafer 1994 [1977]). Many authors write with an awareness of, or an intent to contribute to, the development of an indigenous-centred theory as it has been pioneered by Battiste (2000), Smith (1999), Wilson (2008), Vizenor (2008), Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008), and others. These authors emphasize, among other things, the sovereignty of individual experience, the centrality of storytelling structures, and the importance of attention to and respect for all life on earth. Several authors in this issue have contextualized their work in relation to such themes.

As editors, we struggled with the many possibilities for grouping and ordering the papers to highlight the many resonances among them. The first four focus on individuals, continuing a stream of ethnomusicological work pioneered

by Charlotte Frisbie and David McAllester (Mitchell 1978) and continued by Judith Vander (1988), among others. The studies in this issue each point to the fact that individual experience inevitably challenges assertions that cultural groups are homogeneous, while also illustrating how individuals draw from, contribute to, and/or challenge socio-cultural norms. The mixed heritage and extremely varied experience of the musicians in Pamyua, about whom Bissett Perea writes, trouble easy assumptions about what it means to be “indigenous” in Alaska. The business savvy of this group also helps to redefine approaches to tradition in modern forms. Similarly, the rappers that Aplin has worked with have highly individual ways of expressing their commitment to Christianity and to the indigenous communities to which they belong. The two papers that follow explore how an individual’s traditional knowledge may be recast in new contexts. Solis presents a flute-maker from Papua New Guinea who works in tourist venues. The polysemy of both material and design are emphasized in relation to the flute-maker’s life and clientele. Meanwhile, Perea presents the trajectory of a song from Peyote religious ceremony to the world of jazz in the hands of Jim Pepper. Its recontextualization in a new performance genre becomes a window on the interplay of concepts about relationships, intellectual property, and the socially grounded nuances of genres or styles. In each of these four articles, the respect that each individual artist has for traditional forms and protocols is an important element. In light of the worldwide burgeoning of indigenous commercial music in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, it is not surprising that three of the four articles in this first grouping, as well as papers by Renner and Léotar, concern popular music, particularly as it relates to older repertoires or practices.

Not all contemporary Native American music production is popular music, of course. The next pairing of papers demonstrates some of the ways that Native Americans have contributed to a distinctive (and arguably unexpected) domain that many are now calling Classical Native music. Robinson explores the social and political efficacy of “hybrid” artistic practices, with a particular focus on Brent Michael Davids’s *Powwow Symphony*. While he is ultimately wary of the potential that some of the works he studies have for the reconciliation of native/non-native audiences, Avery is more positive about the power that works she has premiered as a cellist have had on her personal capacity for reflecting and relating. Avery creates a model for pairing the academic and (Haudenosaunee) indigenous approaches to inquiry and explanation, thus offering her own contribution to indigenous-centred theory.

Indigenous concepts are also central to the papers by Tulk and Léotar. Recognizing that a broad approach to acoustic ecology is congruent with the teachings she has been given in Mi’kmaq communities in eastern Canada, Tulk

explores historical and contemporary explanations about the sound production of non-human beings – animals and birds, as well as other natural phenomena. Like Solis, she demonstrates how traditional concepts are sufficiently expansive to accommodate new meanings. Léotar takes us to a very different social geography: the aesthetic concepts of the Karakalpak people of Uzbekistan. He identifies several key aesthetic criteria used by master bards to evaluate performances of epic songs by analyzing a master bard's response to a commercial arrangement of a traditional epic. This proved more successful than asking master bards to explain what made traditional performances, as represented on archival recordings, successful.

Through its focus on archival materials, Léotar's essay connects equally to the final pairing of papers by Renner and Corn. Just as Léotar examined mediated versions of a single piece of repertoire, Renner also highlights mediation. He describes how a contemporary Ainu ensemble in Japan uses archival video footage, not simply to learn repertoire but to construct performances in which source material and new renditions are presented simultaneously. He connects the work of the ensemble to global political struggles for recognition and rights, while also offering some candid reflections on the challenges of fieldwork. Like Robinson, Renner is concerned with historical and lingering asymmetries between indigenous and settler populations. Finally, Corn presents not research per se, but an informative essay about one of the most important national projects for reclaiming indigenous oral traditions: the National Recording Project for Indigenous Australia. The project models intercultural collaboration and community-centred research, pointing to potentially fruitful ways of working with indigenous communities elsewhere in the world. The capability of digital technologies to enable communities to undertake this reclamation, and the unique support of the Australian government, are certainly key components of this very modern enterprise.

While the resonances among these papers are numerous, we also recognize exclusions and asymmetries in the treatment of indigenous modernities. No single volume could, of course, cover such a vast topic in its entirety. This one clearly privileges First Nations practices in North America, while also recognizing groups such as Aboriginal Australians and Ainu who have similarly been pushed from their traditional lands and struggle now to reclaim recognition, land, and rights that settler populations have long enjoyed. The histories of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea differ to some extent in that indigenous groups continue to reside on and draw subsistence from their ancestral lands. The Karakalpaks also differ to the extent that they were autonomous for a short period before and after they became part of Uzbekistan in 1936, even though they share a history of deterritorialization with so many other indigenous people.

The partial and particular coverage for this themed issue of *MUSICultures* emerged from the opportunity afforded by the world conference of the International Council for Traditional Music in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 2011. This volume is a legacy of this event which was a cultural landmark for Canada since it had been 50 years since the world conference had convened in Canada.<sup>2</sup> Given that one of the conference themes, as well as a focus for one of the associated concerts scheduled as part of the concurrent SoundShift Festival, was "Indigenous Modernities," the volume is also an apt way to accommodate some of the many fine papers presented at the ICTM conference, and many other papers that were submitted independently in response to our Call for Papers. We are grateful to the CSTM/SCTM and to the editorial board (chaired by our co-editor Heather Sparling, who is the general editor) of *MUSICultures* for their generosity in allowing the journal to be used in this way. We are also grateful that authors who work in such diverse regions as Australia, Papua New Guinea, Japan, Uzbekistan, the United States, and Canada chose to contribute a compelling array of work to this project. The international dimension truly enables fruitful consideration of the struggles that indigenous people face and the creative strategies that they employ to strengthen their cultures in the twenty-first century. 🌱

## Notes

1. Diamond recalls that she first heard a discussion about the phrase in a symposium organized by Norwegian Sámi as part of the annual Riddu Riddu Festival in Norway in 2002, but the very fact that such a discussion was scheduled was indicative of the concept's currency by that time.

2. The only prior Canadian meeting was organized by Marius Barbeau in Quebec City in 1961.

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