



TRANS 20 (2016)

DOSSIER: INDIGENOUS MUSICAL PRACTICES AND POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA

Introduction to Special Dossier: Indigenous Musical Practices and Politics in Latin America

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The late twentieth century has seen an upsurge of studies of globalization in disciplines such as popular music studies, anthropology, cultural studies, and ethnomusicology that focus on cultural hybrids caused by mass migrations (Aparicio and Jáquez 2003; Biddle and Knights 2007; Corona and Madrid 2008; Madrid 2011; Fernández L’Hoeste and Vila 2013). Of special interest have been the new forms of cultural exchange, ways of resistance and worldviews forged by dislocated rural people living in cosmopolitan, urban environments. The global flux of goods and people has challenged scholars to perceive location as a heavily trafficked crossroad rather than a fixed point (Lipsitz 1994; Clifford 1997). While globalization has called for critical theoretical analyses of the continuation of colonial histories and political economy (García Canclini 1995, 2014; Hannerz 1996; Mignolo 2000), it is ethnographies rooted in the direct encounter and active participation in local and translocal musical practices that provide a deeper insight into the cultural, social, political, and ethical struggle of indigenous communities.

After two subsequent Decades of Indigenous Peoples, launched by the United Nations in 1994, and the 2007 Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, there still exists a deep chasm between how indigenous knowledge is imagined by different sectors of society. Indigenous knowledge in metropolitan imagination, according to Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, “is conceptualized as the negative of mainstream prevailing ideas” (2009: 27). On the other hand, in indigenous assertions about the specificity and difference of their knowledge resonate mainstream conceptualizations. “If they want to carry the day, indigenous people have to conform to expectations, not contest them. They have to make do with knowledge and culture as other people understand them and come to terms with the contradictions they might entail,” she concludes (2009: 29). As ethnography reveals, there are myriads of ways in which indigenous people reconcile different, if not opposed, expectations and imaginations.

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This dossier tracks current ways of conceiving, practicing, and consuming music created by indigenous people in Latin America. The nine empirical studies collected in this dossier examine concrete practices of indigenous conceptualization, production and reception of music based on traditional knowledge, i.e., the complex bodies and systems of knowledge, practices and representations that are maintained and developed by local or indigenous communities through the history. The contributions can be roughly grouped into those that center on the recontextualization of indigenous traditions through negotiations with both the academia and non-indigenous public opinions (Líliam Barros Cohen, Rosângela Pereira de Tugny, Andrés García Molina, and Miguel García) and those that relate to traditional practices that are utilized to deal with the consequences of an aggressive expansion of neoliberal capitalism and modernization in the area (Helena Simonett, Henry Stobart, Julio Mendívil, and Veronica Pacheco). The authors offer an alternative view of indigenous cultures in the postmodern world — one that is not limited to describe indigenous reaction to the advancement of industrial technology and the capitalist economic system, but one that arises from inside these vibrant indigenous music communities and that shows their agency and distinguishes their policies. Fully aware that indigenization and globalization are inextricably connected processes, they problematize, rather than simplify, the issues that result from our increasingly connected worlds.

Based on ethnographic fieldtrips by a group of researchers from the Federal University of Pará to various ethnic communities in the Brazilian Amazon region, Líliam Barros Cohen reflects on the production of cultural knowledge, both by community representatives as well as the academia. Challenged by a multiethnic urban environment, indigenous people are engaging in selected musical practices to negotiate their identities vis-à-vis other ethnic groups, tourists, and academics alike. With the latter, they have started, what Barros Cohen calls, a “collaborative partnership,” offering traditional knowledge as exchange for research products that are relevant to the communities themselves; thus actively shaping a distinct image of “Amazon Amerindians.”

In popular imagination, Brazilian Amerindians that have been able to maintain their language and traditional way of life, including a fully functioning ritual system, are either seen as the country’s “pure” or “backward” Indians that have resisted, or refused, to assimilate into mainstream society. A much more nuanced interpretation is given by Rosângela Pereira de Tugny, whose experience draws from many years of fieldwork among the Tikmũ’ũn, a group of indigenous people in Minas Gerais. To create a future for themselves that does not follow the dominant national ideology of *mestiçagem*, she contends that indigenous people must reverse the narrative of colonial history. The strength for doing so lies in the shamanistic rituals and the *yãmĩyxop*’s repertoire that stress the idea of transformation or “becoming another” in order to becoming oneself. The author shows that the consumption and production of modern music genres like Brazilian pop and rock does not alter the sacred repertoire of the Tikmũ’ũn who refuse to mix these styles.

Based on fieldwork in the Upper Putumayo region of Colombia, Andrés García Molina poses new questions regarding indigenous notions and uses of ceremonial sound, as well as shamanic practices as a kind of labor with monetary value. García Molina rebuts deep-seated perceptions of shamans, and indigenous populations in general, that romanticize, exoticize, and essentialize them as “Other.” Psychoactive agents, once used exclusively by indigenous people in traditional ceremonial settings, have become a global commodity and more and more non-indigenous people are seeking “true” spiritual experiences facilitated by “true” shamans. Western imaginary of shamanism as a pre-capitalist practice clashes with practitioners’ own idea of their profession as a source of income. García Molina opens up a new discussion of the place of shamanic practices in modern society.

Miguel García's interest in the "transensorial perception" of musical practices among Argentine indigenous people stems from the analytical limits of soundscape studies. Rather than simply perceiving their sounding environment, the Pilagá actively shape it by "mapping" the nightly space through sound. Modernization, particularly the current "electro-domestication" of the Pilagá's daily life, has had a major impact on their sounding environment, adding voices from radio and television broadcast, ringtones and other sources, compelling them to hear differently. But how can we know of how others listen and think about their soundscapes? García does not intend to solve the dilemma of the ethnomusicologist's observing ear; instead, he invites us to ponder about the subjectivity, and hence multiplicity, of auditory perception.

Over the past decade, Helena Simonett has observed profound changes in indigenous communities of Northwest Mexico. Her historically and ecologically informed study of a unique kind of cocoon leg rattles used in indigenous ceremonies and equally so by an ever-increasing number of mestizos to participate in carnival-like revelries during Holy Week sheds light on the ongoing complicated relationship between indigenous and mestizo populations that share the same space. It is not only the commercialization of the cocoon rattles, but also the region's dependence on agribusinesses and their heavy use of chemicals to increase crop yields, as well as the effects of a noticeable climate change in the wake of El Niño that have committed the moths to near extinction. Despite the epistemological, ontological and cosmological significance of the materiality of the rattles, some indigenous people have started to creatively refashion their instruments with man-made materials such as plastic water hoses and aluminum cans. Mestizos, on the other hand, unaware of their complicity in the disappearance of the moths, regard such materials as "inauthentic" and insist in wearing "traditional" leg rattles in their revelries.

Henry Stobart's in-depth analysis of VCD (Video Compact Disc) productions in the Bolivian Andes focuses on the visual representations of indigeneity in both regional music recordings for low-income, largely indigenous populations and mestizo productions for a national and international "world music" audience. Drawing upon many years of ethnomusicological research in the area and from first-hand experience as technical assistant to a local VCD producer, Stobart explores how "landscape" is used in these music videos to conjure up particular forms of imaginary, encapsulated in what he calls an *Andean arcadia*. There are noticeable differences in the depiction of landscape in these audio-visual productions, diligently pointed out by the author, but his main question is whether such inclusion of nature imagery in local VCD productions ought to be understood as an assimilation of the mainstream romanticist imagery of indigenous Andean people or as a special topographical relationship with landscape indigenous people retain with the place they call home. Rather than presenting a simple answer, Stobart challenges the reader to contemplate different perspectives.

Julio Mendivil takes a close look at current media representations in the ongoing confrontation between the rural population of Cajamarca, northern Peru, and transnational mining corporations, backed by the Peruvian government and the press. To refute the official representation of Cajamarca resistance as detrimental to the Nation's economic development, local musicians, and some Peruvian ethnomusicologists who got engaged in the conflict, use traditional musical practices to strategically foster a different image of Cajamarca. The new protest songs against the mining corporations build on an older repertoire of songs that stresses self-defense and solidarity among communities in the struggle for justice. Broadcasting via radio and the Internet has become an important cultural tool for the communities' self-representation.

Veronica Pacheco focuses on the rituals indigenous (Nahua) people of eastern Mexico have developed to ensure that life-giving waters would bring bountiful harvests to their cornfields. Her

research centers on the participatory aspects of musical performance to reinforce communal reciprocity and to secure individual and collective wellbeing. The highly structured ritual interchange with various deities also produces and reinforces solidarity among community members. Experiences resulting from these collective performances can afford communities to act, such as mobilizing against tourist companies, governmental institutions, or even the mighty oil company Pemex that encroach upon sacred indigenous land. It remains to be seen how Nahuatl's lived customs will hold up against neoliberal capitalist economic forces.

The ethnographic studies included in this dossier are based in six Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. Despite their different local histories, indigenous people all over have begun to develop new strategies to grapple with the vestiges of European colonialism, thereby asserting the specificity and difference of their knowledges. The current dossier is an acknowledgment of indigenous agency and ingenuity to encounter the legacies of structured, institutional, and interactional power.

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Julio Mendívil is a Peruvian author, musician, and ethnomusicologist living between Germany and Austria. He has published *La agonía del condenado* (León, 1998), *Todas las voces: artículos sobre música popular* (Lima, 2001), *Ein musikalisches Stück Heimat: ethnologische Beobachtungen zum deutschen Schlager* (Bielefeld, 2008), *Del juju al uauco* (Quito, 2009). *En contra de la música* (Buenos Aires, 2016) and several articles in musicological and academic journals in Europe and Latin America. From 2008 until 2012 Julio Mendívil led the ethnomusicological Department of the Institute for Musicology at the University of Cologne. Between 2012 and March 2016 Julio Mendívil was Chair of the Association for the Study of Popular Music, Latin American Branch, between 2013 and 2015 director of the Center for World Music at the University of Hildesheim, and between 2015 and 2017 Professor for Ethnomusicology at the Goethe-University Frankfurt, in Germany. At the moment he is Full Professor for Ethnomusicology at the University Vienna in Austria and chair of the Association for the Study of Popular Music.

Helena Simonett received her PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently Senior Research Associate at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Switzerland. She conducted extensive research on Mexican popular music and its transnational diffusion and explores the role of indigenous ceremonial music and dance in northwestern Mexico. Her publications include *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders* (2001) and *En Sinaloa nació: historia de la música de banda* (2004). She is editor of *The Accordion in the Americas: Klezmer, Polka, Tango, Zydeco, and More!* (2012) and (with Javier León) of *A Latin American Music Reader: Views from the South* (2016). With Bernardo Esquer López, she produced the children's book *Ca'anáriam — Hombre que no hizo fuego* (2012) in Yoreme and Spanish language (with English translation).

Cita recomendada

Mendívil, Julio y Helena Simonett. 2016. "Introduction to the Special Dossier Indigenous Musical Practices and Politics in Latin America". *TRANS-Revista Transcultural de Música/Transcultural Music Review* 20 [Fecha de consulta: dd/mm/aa]



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