

Lessons for Ecomusicology from the Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation

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Abstract:

Ecomusicologists can be called upon to help contextualize ecological science, such as in the case of an after-school program being designed by the Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation (USRT) to teach Native Youth in Idaho, Eastern Oregon, and Nevada about climate vulnerability. In this essay, we examine projects such as the USRT curriculum, applying the writing of prominent Indigenous Ecological Philosopher, Dr. Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi). We argue that even though Whyte's writings don't provide suggestions directly relevant to improving the cultural relevance of the USRT eco-science curriculum, they do push us to reject the underlying assumptions that a long history of colonial dispossession and climate science can be separated. And because ecomusicology is implicated in "cultural relevance" programming, we argue that his writing also contains critiques of current ecomusicological agendas. We urge that these critiques be widely heeded within the field and in our collaborations with ecological non-profits and activist organizations.

Introduction

How can music be used in an ecology-based after-school program to teach Native youth about climate change? This question sparked our interest in the work of the Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation (USRT), a non-profit ecological coalition based in Boise, Idaho, because it seemed so profoundly ecomusicological. Like other ecomusicologists might, we wondered how

to extend the praxis-based ethos of this field to partner with a nonprofit, using our knowledge of Native American expressive culture to increase ecological literacy. And yet, after becoming familiar with the work of Indigenous ecological philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi), we realized the need to rethink the original question entirely, with broad implications for activist ecomusicology.

USRT is a non-profit tribal coalition formed and funded by four tribes from Eastern Oregon, Northern Nevada, and Southern Idaho, and headquartered in Boise, Idaho. While officially advocating on behalf of compacting tribes, USRT's current director and staff are non-Native, and further employ non-Native (and non-local) third party contractors to assist in projects such as conducting a climate change vulnerability assessment and developing after-school outreach curriculum. We found that despite the best intentions of USRT staff, and the official support of compacting tribes, the organization continually struggled with tribal community buy-in. The incorporation of local expressive culture (music, dance, storytelling) was designed to increase interest in the program, and we were drawn to this advocacy work as ecomusicologists.

Like the ecological movement more broadly, ecomusicology itself has occasionally drawn upon the wisdom of Indigenous knowledge-keepers for insight. And yet, while prominent scholars like Anthony Seeger (2016) and Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier (2016) have pushed us to think broadly through Indigenous ontologies about the assumed separation between nature/culture and music/sound, we found that ecomusicology has drawn little from the writing of Indigenous ecological scholars and activists themselves.

In this essay, we apply the writing of prominent Indigenous ecological philosophers to the problems encountered in the creation of the Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation after-school program. In particular, we draw upon the writings of Kyle Powys Whyte, environmental activist and George Willis Pack Professor of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan. In recent articles, Whyte lays out a series of critiques of the ecological movement. These writings include *Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crisis* (2018), *Too Late for Indigenous Climate Justice* (2019), and *Way Beyond the Lifeboat* (2019). We foreground Whyte and this handful of articles in particular not because they speak for all Indigenous ecological philosophy (something no one individual could possibly do given the diversity of distinct Indigenous nations and the variety of their responses to climate changes over hundreds of years). Rather we recognize Whyte as a leading voice within an interconnected and inter-tribal contemporary Indigenous intellectual ecological network. His writing is informed by dialogue and advocacy with a variety of Indigenous communities across the Upper Midwest, Northwest, New Zealand, and globally through his involvement with the Climate and Traditional Knowledges Workgroup for the US Department of the Interior and his current position as a member of the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council. Further, we highlight these three articles specifically not because they are exhaustive, but because they are a manageable set of readings that are good for any interested ecomusicologist or ecologically-inclined music scholar or student "to think with" (Levi-Strauss 1963:89).

In what follows, we argue that Whyte's writings don't really provide suggestions relevant to improving the cultural relevance of the USRT after-school program. Rather, they push us to reject the underlying assumptions of the program entirely: that a long history of colonial

dispossession and climate science can be separated. And because ecomusicology itself is implicated in “cultural relevance” programming, we engage a more thorough reading of the extant ecomusicological literature than would typically appear in a research article. Ultimately, we argue that Whyte’s writing also contains critiques of current ecomusicological agendas. We urge that these critiques be widely heeded within the field and in our collaborations with ecological non-profits and activist organizations.

Whyte’s writing contains three main critiques of relevance to both the after-school outreach of USRT and to ecomusicology more broadly. These critiques include a foregrounding of the “ecological crisis,” focusing on climate science as a separate domain from culture, and underestimating the importance of relationality as the answer to climate injustice. Until these concerns are adequately addressed, ecological advocacy like USRT’s will continue to perpetuate Indigenous ecological precarity, and ecomusicology will continue to serve at the margins of ecological advocacy.

The Upper Snake River Tribes

The Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation was founded in 1998 as a way to coordinate the ecological advocacy of the historically related tribes in and around Southern Idaho. It is modeled on two other tribal consortiums in the Northwest, one around Portland, Oregon and another around Spokane, Washington. USRT is a 501C3 non-profit that aims to serve the Shoshone-Paiute, Shoshone-Bannock, Fort McDermitt, and Burns Paiute peoples in ensuring “the protection, enhancement, and restoration of natural and cultural resources, activities, and rights of the Compacting Tribes” through treaties and other legal agreements (<https://uppersnakerivertribes.org/>). Even though Boise itself is not on contemporary tribal land, it was selected as USRT’s headquarters because it encompasses the state capitol (for access to state officials) and the region’s main airport (for access to federal officials). Moreover, it acts as a central and neutral meeting point to coordinate action among the compacting tribes (Hauser interview 8/8/2019).

Tribal rights for which USRT advocates include but are not limited to “hunting, fishing, gathering, and subsistence uses” of the Upper Snake River basin (<https://uppersnakerivertribes.org/about/>). This basin stretches from Boise across southern Idaho and into the mountains on the eastern border of the state. Salmon used to swim abundantly in these rivers, but dams between the Upper Snake and the Pacific Ocean (along the Lower Snake and the Columbia) have blocked their passage. Because of the traditional importance of salmon to the people of the Upper Snake, USRT’s charter makes explicit the organization’s goal to “Restore the Snake River Basin to a natural condition” (<https://uppersnakerivertribes.org/>).

The organization has tackled this challenge with various programs including a study of rangeland management, a fisheries management plan, contracting with a third party to conduct a vulnerability assessment, and conducting tribal outreach – including working groups to address these vulnerabilities and an after-school program based upon this assessment (Hauser interview 8/8/2019). However, rather than the wider lens of factors impacting climate challenges facing the tribes (including climate injustice), the focus of the after-school curriculum outreach was driven only by the third-party vulnerability assessment, which itself was focused primarily on at-risk species.

Fieldwork with USRT

Driven by a Bureau of Indian Affairs Climate Resilience Grant, the main project USRT undertook during the Summer of 2019 was creating and implementing a curriculum for a tribal after-school program. The curriculum incorporated information and data gained from the above-mentioned climate change vulnerability assessment. The assessment includes science-based predictions regarding how climate change would affect specific species that tribes had identified as culturally important.

For the months of June and July, DeAngeli worked as a part-time intern with USRT. The research project created was her own after consulting with the executive director, Scott Hauser, about what might be most helpful for the organization. Her primary goals were to identify best practices for after-school programs, to assist the curriculum builders (another third-party consulting organization), and to assist in the hiring of an after-school coordinator. DeAngeli's work included collecting relevant information from peer-reviewed articles and books, as well as nonprofits with similar programs for Indigenous youth. At the end of July, she helped to facilitate a two-day workshop for educators within each tribe to learn the curriculum they would be implementing in the after-school program for the upcoming semester. The workshop both taught a standard ecological science curriculum and sought to tailor it to incorporate local culture in ways that the youth would understand and appreciate.

In addition to DeAngeli's experience in USRT as an intern, Marshall conducted ethnographic research on USRT, including participant observation at public events, informal interviews with tribal members, and a formal interview with the USRT director. Because DeAngeli's relationship with USRT was primarily as an intern, not as a researcher, all information about the after-school/community outreach education program is taken from publicly available sources (<https://uppersnakerivertribes.org/projects/climate-community-outreach-education/>). Of particular interest to us is the way in which expressive cultural forms (music, dance, stories) were explicitly sought out in the development of the after-school programming in an attempt to make the eco-science curriculum more relevant and interesting to Native youth.

Ecological Crisis

Despite the fact that USRT was ostensibly formed to advocate for *both* natural and cultural resources, activities, and rights (<https://uppersnakerivertribes.org/>), the focus of USRT's programming has been on ecological crisis. From advocating against the lease renewal of the Idaho Power dams to the reestablishment of ceremonial fish harvesting in the Upper Snake tributaries (via artificially seeded streams), the focus of the organization is in promoting resilience in the face of climate threats. This focus is clear within the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (CCVA) and the related after-school program. And because of this singular focus on climate science and climate-science funding, a sense of urgency drove both the research of the CCVA and the development of the subsequent after-school curriculum.

Funded by a BIA Climate Resilience Grant, the 2019 CCVA sought to detail the potential vulnerabilities that may result from climate change in the Upper Snake River Basin in the coming years. The steps employed in conducting the research include looking at recent temperature patterns in the region, identifying shared concerns about threatened species with the tribes, determining the relative vulnerability rankings for these species, and holding workshops to

check the report with the tribes. The CCVA final report summarizes what changes to the climate will likely happen in the coming years in relation to its effects on the species identified as culturally important. USRT focused the current grant on research and education about the most vulnerable of the identified species. But the report makes clear that more research is needed, premised upon “an *urgent* need to assess the climate change vulnerability” of the species that were omitted by the first CCVA

(https://uppersnakerivertribes.org/app/uploads/2016/10/USRT.CCVA_.pdf, emphasis added).

A related sense of urgency is evident in the outreach products of the CCVA, due to the grant-funding cycle which required rapid concrete outcomes from the CCVA. The concern about producing these outcomes as evidence for upcoming grant cycles drove USRT to rapidly contract a different non-local third-party contractor to develop curriculum based upon the CCVA. The curriculum development started in May 2019, was taught to tribal after-school facilitators in late July 2019, and was deployed into schools in Fall 2019.

An overriding sense of urgency is evident in both of these related activities. The premise of the CCVA was to observe the effect of climate change on species important to the Native people of the region, ahead of assumed catastrophic change, by ordering research priorities based upon the most vulnerable species. And yet, “vulnerability,” it seems, had only one dimension here: based upon rapid climate shift, rather than broader social and political/economic factors. Equipping Native youth with “climate-based knowledge” seemed paramount to the USRT strategy. But at its core, this strategy was premised on the idea that the risk needing to be reduced was primarily due to “extreme weather events” and also to “harmful environmental trends” (<https://uppersnakerivertribes.org/projects/climate-community-outreach-education/>), which are also increasing due to global warming.

Indigenous Philosophers on “Crisis”

When we read Indigenous climate philosophers, however, we find a certain amount of ambivalence about “crisis” as the first axiom of climate change. Through both the writing of Indigenous science fiction writers (Whyte 2018) and the words of Indigenous leaders (Whyte 2019b), Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte illustrates that Indigenous People often experience climate change differently: not as a dramatic “tipping point,” but as yet another long-term and systematic manifestation of colonialism. In an interview with the *Ottawa Citizen*, for example, Inuit activist and author Sheila Watt-Cloutier is quoted as saying:

Climate change is yet another rapid assault on our way of life. It cannot be separated from the first waves of changes and assaults at the very core of the human spirit that has come our way. (Robb 2015)

While Whyte does not deny the existence of climate change or downplay the harm that it introduces to the planet, he highlights that Indigenous peoples do not have the same “tipping point” mind-set that drives the crisis narratives of non-Native ecological activism. To put it another way, Indigenous people often aren’t motivated by the threat that we must act to protect the planet before it is too late because they recognize that crisis has already happened, and is continuing to happen. Drawing upon the writings of other Indigenous intellectuals (like Daniel Wildcat) and researchers working closely with Indigenous collaborators (such as Candis Callison), as well as his own expertise, Whyte says:

Writing from a Potawatomi, North American perspective, I see Indigenous peoples as often perceiving the burdens of climate-related risks through their experiences of already having been deeply harmed by the economic, industrial, and military drivers behind anthropogenic climate change (Callison 2014; Wildcat 2009; Houser et al. 2001). (Whyte 2019b, 12)

Whyte sees this same shift in perspective as woven through the work of Indigenous fiction writers, as well. While non-Native science fiction writers depict humans struggling in nuclear wastelands or marauding about in leather and trench coats, Mad-Max style, on a dusty landscape, Whyte claims that Indigenous science fiction reveals a different apocalyptic timeline (Whyte 2017; 2018, 226). Largely, he argues, this shift in the apocalyptic imaginary among Indigenous writers is shaped by the shared understanding that Indigenous people already see themselves as living through ongoing crisis or “dystopian future” (Whyte 2018, 227). Whyte urges us to be cautious of the crisis mindset is because, he argues, while the “urgency” may or may not avert crisis, it will almost certainly sharpen existing structural inequalities. Powerful actors (motivated by crisis to act quickly) will continue to make decisions on behalf of Indigenous people without any attempts to more fully understand what they want or need (Whyte 2019a, 3) as they confront anthropogenic climate change.

Crisis in Ecomusicology

Ecomusicologists can learn caution around the concept of “crisis” as well. Since its recent inception, ecomusicology has been a field with crisis at its core. Climate crisis has been prominently featured in the prefaces of many recent collections of ecomusicological writing, as it provides a compelling answer to the “why now?” and “so what?” questions of scholarly relevance (Allen and Dawe 2016, 12). But the reliance on discourses of crisis is much more embedded in the field than this; crisis has actually framed ecomusicology itself through its prevalence in foundational work (see: Titon 2013, 8; Pedelty 2012, 13-48). Aaron Allen has long argued that ecomusicology is a field most influenced by musicology and eco-criticism (Allen 2011), an approach that Edwards calls, “an endeavor born of crisis” (2016, 153). And Jeff Titon has written authoritatively of the field as “the study of music, culture, sound and nature in a period of environmental crisis” (2013, 8). So through definitional frameworks themselves, we can see that a crisis-mindset has shaped our understanding of what ecomusicology is and why we are engaged in it.

Another way in which the underlying crisis-mindset of ecomusicology appears is in the praxis-based tendencies of the field. This is an ethnomusicological specialization that is founded around the idea that the *crisis* is too grave to sit idly by in an ivory tower as the world burns (Allen and Dawe 2016, 10), and urges scholars to *do something*. As Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier has pointed out, this concern for action is not atheoretical; it is fundamentally grounded in a “sense of crisis” (2016, 114), a *praxis* which rests upon the urgency generated by the image of a dying world (Rehding 2011, 410). Clearly, these definitional frameworks are the energy behind certain kinds of praxis-based projects, from Titon’s *Music and Sustainability* blog <http://sustainablemusic.blogspot.com> to Pedelty’s *ecosong.net*. These and other ecomusicological projects foreground scholarly activism based upon the assumption of a need for innovative solutions to meet an unprecedented ecological crisis. As Allen himself has argued, “Academic discourse avoiding the climate crisis can only enable denialism” (2019a, 35). And in

many ways this praxis amplifies larger attempts to use an activist stance to help decolonize ethnomusicology as a discipline, including in Indigenous music studies (see, for example Levine and Robinson's 2019 collection *Music and Modernity Among First Peoples of North America*).

However, just as with the "culturally-sensitive" after-school programming of USRT, ecomusicologists should be cautious about taking *crisis* as an axiomatic assumption, set as opposed to climate denialism. The present authors, and our reading of Whyte, asks us simply to check our positionality and our blinders. Rather than focusing on the impending catastrophe of climate change, ecomusicologists could perhaps take a moment to broaden our field of vision and consider the question "catastrophe for whom?" As Whyte points out, "While many people are concerned about crossing the ecological tipping point, the relational tipping point got crossed long ago thanks to systems of colonialism, capitalism, and industrialization" (2019a, 3). By shifting our mindset from preventing catastrophe to addressing an ongoing dystopian reality, we are much more likely to look for long-term solutions to underlying causes: to the greater benefit of all stakeholders.

Climate Science

Another challenge presented by Indigenous ecological philosophers is a critique of the primacy of climate science over other ways of mapping total vulnerability. This bias is certainly evident within USRT programming. According to the USRT community outreach program page, one of the "greatest challenges" facing tribal resource managers is in trying to get buy-in to climate initiatives from tribal leaders and members who "generally lack technical scientific backgrounds" (<https://uppersnakerivertribes.org/projects/climate-community-outreach-education/>). This lack of "climate science literacy" was identified as a major challenge by the USRT Director, Scott Hauser, as well. In contrast to the other tribal consortiums in the Northwest who can, according to Hauser, "deal with the Western science, but also retain the cultural," the tribal leaders of the Upper Snake "don't understand the science... so it all goes to the culture" (Hauser 8/8/2019). The lack of a shared paradigm leads to practical situations where federal/state officials and tribal officials are completely talking past one another. The design of USRT's after-school outreach, then, is in part to create a group of Native youth with "climate-based knowledge in order to help build support for "climate literacy and resilience" across their tribes (<https://uppersnakerivertribes.org/projects/climate-community-outreach-education/>). These statements make clear that USRT has identified climate change as a major risk to the tribes, and seeks to mitigate this risk and build resilience by ensuring tribal citizens understand climate science.

In order to achieve this goal, the after-school outreach program aimed to teach Western climate science to Native youth. The curriculum built in standard lessons and activities for teaching climate science literacy to children and teens, such as demonstrations of the effect of snow pack on snow melt or how climate change affects river flow, a board game to teach relative vulnerability of species, and doing observational drawing of flora and fauna. The curriculum paired with the Vulnerability Assessment in that it easily showed the impact of different warming scenarios on tribally-important species. It was not designed to ask *why* tribes are facing these vulnerabilities.

After establishing the baseline curriculum, the curriculum designers held a two-day workshop for the tribal after-school facilitators at the end of July 2019. The primary goal of the

workshop was to train the teachers on the curriculum they would be facilitating. However, the workshop was simultaneously used to brainstorm with local tribal facilitators ways in which the curriculum could be tailored to the Native youth through the addition of song, dance, storytelling, and other locally-important expressive forms. The curriculum designers deliberately sought out information of these types of expressive culture in order to make the curriculum more engaging and “locally relevant.” But other local concerns (such as persistent poverty, racism, systematic economic dispossession and generational trauma) were not addressed in either the core curriculum or the “tailoring” feedback.

Even USRT recognized that the division between the “science” and the “culture” was creating barriers for Indigenous participation. And yet, the non-Native staff seemed unable to imagine how the project might proceed differently. Indeed, when interviewing USRT Director Scott Hauser, he described the disconnection between climate science and culture as one of his main challenges. He said:

As the tribes say... Everything is cultural to them. You know? And so we’re very good at like science and technical stuff. ...Like Hells Canyon. We look at it as... there’s licensing, and there’s mercury issues, and there’s fish issues, and there’s dissolved oxygen issues, ...and disconnected flood plains, you know? But they look at it as... tribal leaders look at it as this cultural thing. And so we... we can not, as White people... we are unable to connect the science with the culture. Like, we understand it. In theory I understand it. But we can’t bring it together in some meaningful way. (Hauser interview 8/8/2019)

Indigenous Ecological Philosophers on the Primacy of Climate Science

According to Indigenous ecological philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte, the path to bringing knowledge together in a meaningful way is to destabilize the primacy of scientific measurements over addressing persistent patterns of colonialism and racism in the ordering of knowledge. He insists that a fact-based scientific epistemology cannot be separated from other realms of social life and other ways of knowing the world, and is not naturally superior. Indigenous intellectuals like Whyte remind us that science, despite its claims to objectivity, is culturally positioned, and in the case of human-caused climate change may indeed also be badly short-sighted. Whyte’s writing repeatedly insists that the root social causes of climate change must first be addressed. For instance, Whyte reflects that he occasionally hears criticism from (non-Native) climate activists that he isn’t really working on climate change but is just using it as another excuse to bring up justice problems like colonialism. But for him, they are the same problem (Whyte 2019a, 4).

Foregrounding persistent social structures of inequality, however, gives Indigenous philosophers like Whyte a wide-lens and holistic view that allows him to raise valid critiques of science-based solutions. For example, drawing on the work of Beymer-Grassis and Bassett (2012) and Cooke et al. (2017), Whyte points out that even “clean” solutions like hydropower and forest conservation “*still* involve the displacement of Indigenous peoples” (Whyte 2019b, 14), and therefore fail to mitigate the vulnerability of Indigenous peoples. Foregrounding Native sovereignty, similarly, allows Whyte (drawing on Cameron 2012 and Belfer, Ford and Maillet 2017) to focus on the ways in which public discourse of even Indigenous allies “including climate scientists and journalists” can continue to portray Indigenous people as vulnerable to climate change “without reference to the larger struggles with colonialism and capitalism” (Whyte

2019b, 14) – as if their vulnerability is a result of their own bad choices or lack of preparation, rather than a product of a legacy of colonialism.

Ecomusicology and Science

To a certain extent, ecomusicology has clearly recognized that a separation of ecological threats from social processes like structural inequality and colonialism is a false construction, and it has fervently argued against this division. Recent examples of calls for musicological engagement with climate *justice* include Angela Impey's book *Song Walking: Women, Music, and Environmental Justice in an African Borderland* (2018), Michael Silvers' (2018) study of the Brazilian *fórró*, and Mark Pedelty's profile of Indigenous Canadian *Idle No More* activists (2016, 249). Like those activists, Whyte insists that continuing to focus on the science of climate change without simultaneously resisting "the nexus of colonialism, capitalism, and industrialization" (Whyte 2019b, 20) will fundamentally undermine any lasting ecological change. What all of these recent studies maintain is that neither the significance of the endangered wildlife of southern Africa nor the drought-parched lands of the Brazilian *sertão* nor the oilfields of Canada can be understood by science alone. By focusing on music, these and other ecomusicological studies insist that the most urgent ecological problems are rooted in persistent social, economic, and political causes, and thus "their solutions lie far beyond the reach of scientific or technical knowledge" (Conway, Keniston and Marx 1999, 3). Music provides scholars like Impey and Silvers and Pedelty with a method of illustrating the cross-penetration of all of these realms.

And yet, within the field of ecomusicology, while we have shining examples of music scholarship focused on projects of ecological justice, we are often less good at challenging the superiority of scientific models in our own thinking about our work. In this critique of the extant ecomusicological literature, we are spurred by the work of Whyte to examine the ways scientific epistemologies are promoted over social ones through the dominant ecomusicological conversations about "ecosystems" and "sustainability." The problem with foregrounding scientific epistemologies, we argue, is that they purport to neutrality in domains that cannot ever be neutral, and thus continue to perpetuate the types of intellectual structures of inequality we as ecomusicologists often purport to challenge with our work.

The idea of regarding musical cultures as "ecosystems" rose from the influential work of Jeff Todd Titon (2019, xiv). Titon wrote into his widely-used Ethnomusicology textbook *Worlds of Music* that music functions like an ecological system: a source of energy, and a resource that can be "improved or polluted, used wisely or wasted" (Titon 2008, 31). In the face of criticism of this model (Keogh 2013; Keogh and Collinson 2016), Titon has insisted that he does not see musical ecosystems as characterized by the "equilibrium" and "instrumental consciousness" that plagued the structural-functionalists, but is thinking in terms of resilience and adaptive management (Titon 2016b). Nor does he aim to revisit the excesses of the cultural ecologists in presuming a power-neutral field in which people can freely choose what music they "produce" and "consume" (Titon 2019a, xiv). Since Titon's widespread introduction of ecosystems thinking into musical scholarship, many scholars have put this concept to use as a *metaphor* for the ways in which musical cultures interrelate (Shippers and Grant 2016). Allen (2018) emphasized that metaphorical readings of ecology are quite common in musical scholarship: listing, for example, the 2010 Society for Ethnomusicology conference theme of "Sound Ecologies," where 'ecology'

was typically read through the metaphorical lens of “connection.” But Titon himself has pointed out that metaphorical readings of ecosystems tend to over-emphasize an outmoded “balance-of-nature” idealism that current ecological science rejects (Titon 2018, 260). Titon further argues that he does not see ecosystems as simply metaphors for musical life, but as actual ecosystems bound together by sound, which he argues is a type of energy that “flows to connect, integrate, and disconnect and disintegrate various dynamic components within a music culture” (Titon 2019a, xiv).

The dynamic social effects of making music together are certainly worth contemplating, but viewed through Whyte’s Indigenous ecological philosophy, it seems to us that the most valuable insight in Titon’s work on ecosystems (one that he has begun to emphasize more in recent work) is the interconnected nature of ecosystems. This interconnection and interdependence is what Titon calls “ecology’s foundational tenet” (2009). And yet, there are many interconnected and interdependent models in our world. Take, for example, the family. If ecosystems are “useful ideas” (Pedelty 2016, 236) because of their interdependence, why do we favor this scientific model of interdependence over a more social one, especially given the problems of science-based models?

Which leads to the second science-based metaphor driving our field: sustainability. While recognizing that sustainability was introduced into ecomusicology as a way of promoting dynamic, rather than static, interaction within musical ecosystems, we still argue that its dominance is problematic.

Sustainability entered the conversation in ecomusicology as a way of framing how public music scholarship within ethnomusicology could work. Rooted in ecological ideas about interdependent energy systems, Titon’s early concept of musical ecosystems was rooted in his public-scholar drive to do more than “conserve” music and culture, and to therefore facilitate “cultural management” rather than “heritage management” (Titon 2009). There have been various productive directions in which conversations about the relevance of sustainability as a model have gone within ecomusicology (see Cooley et al. 2019). However, the application of sustainability in music cultures often slips the boundaries of Titon’s original framing (see DeWitt 2019, Guy 2019, and Post 2019).

Furthermore, as Aaron Allen astutely identifies, there are many problems with relying on a sustainability model since the connotations of the word can easily imply a kind of equilibrium or stasis (Allen 2019b). Allen advocates for a rejection of what he calls “sustainability-maintain” in favor of “sustainability-change”: a sustainability rooted in ecological concepts like resilience, adaptive management, and process-based learning (see also Turner 2019, 33; Titon 2008, 31; Allen 2019b, 44). As Allen points out, we may not want to sustain all cultural practices, especially those that perpetuate structural inequalities like colonialism.

Drawing upon the writing of Whyte, we would push this even further. Rather than sustainability, we challenge ecomusicologists to call for change. To do less may be to perpetuate systematic inequalities at the root of ecological vulnerability. In some of his most stinging critiques of ecological “allies,” Whyte calls attention to the fact that even those allies who work for the healing of the planet cannot deny that they are “actually living in what their ancestors would have seen as fantasy times” (Whyte 2018, 237). In this challenge, Whyte asks us to consider the ways in which even allies may be unwilling to renounce underlying conditions and frameworks that continue to disempower Indigenous peoples (Whyte 2018, 237). Scientific

analogies for social processes (whether loosely metaphorical or concretely mapped) evidence these kinds of colonial intellectual frameworks. Sustainability does not guarantee anti-colonialism, and it does not guarantee anti-racism. So why do we continue to rely upon the sustainability model?

In our estimation, the concept of interdependence is at the heart of what is valuable about frameworks of ecosystems or sustainability when it comes to musical cultures. But we resist the vision of this interconnection as one of organisms living in relation to other organisms and the environment, linked through cultural (even musical) processes (Heise 2017). We wonder why a natural-science based ecological model for interconnection between humans and the environment is even needed at all, when Indigenous philosophers already have a perfectly good model to describe this interdependence: relationality.

Relationships for Lasting Change

Alternately known as relationality, interdependence, and kin-centricity, the idea of interconnection is at the heart of much contemporary Indigenous ecological philosophy. Relationality rises from the understanding that relationships are the basic blueprint for social life, and its power lies in the wisdom that family (a reliable and interdependent social bond) does not simply exist. Rather, family is *made* through acts of what Whyte classifies as “consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity” (2019a, 2). A deep appreciation for the transformative potential of relationality can fundamentally change ecological activism for the better. And ecomusicologists, armed with a special knowledge of the relationship-building power of making music together, are uniquely poised to contribute to this direction.

The leadership at USRT already recognizes that the organization has a problem connecting to their compacting tribes. USRT is located in Boise, which is at least 150 miles away from compacting tribes in any direction. The largest of the compacting tribes (the Shoshone-Bannock) is over 230 miles away- a three-and-a-half hour drive each way. The distance between USRT and area tribes means that it is difficult to build meaningful Native/Non-Native partnerships. Meetings between stakeholders happen only once a month, and only half of those are face-to-face. In either format, they are not typically well-attended. USRT cannot build any meaningful relationality in this context; tribal members are barely given the opportunity to know staff members and vice versa.

While the staff at USRT is certainly doing the best they can with what they know, they underestimate the scope of the relationality problem for all of their other work. It is not common knowledge in Boise that, in 1863, Territorial Governor Caleb Lyons forced the Natives of the Boise Valley to sign a treaty agreeing to what turned out to be an ill-planned removal. The treaty they signed was never ratified by the U.S. Government, and no payment was ever made to them for the land. Despite this, in 1869 they were marched to the reservation at Fort Hall. Along the way families who could escape took shelter with relatives in Eastern Oregon and Northern Nevada, contributing to a great scattering of the bands. All of this is to say that the difficulty experienced by USRT in building sustained relationships with compacting tribes is a *direct* outcome of the colonial process: a *deliberate* scattering of people across the Upper Snake River plain. Until that underlying insult to justice is addressed, no amount of powwow songs or jingle dances will make climate-based curriculum relevant to tribal members. The challenge for us as ecomusicologists, then, is to expand the scope of our work to public-facing education of all

kinds, some of which might not have very much to do with music. (For an example of how the current project is progressing, see this article: [The Pendleton Incident in Boise's New Eagle Rock Park](#)).

Relationality is a re-prioritization of ecological work, affirming that the processes needed for social justice and ecological health are the same, and they are rooted in the deeply social work of healing relationships: with one another, with the non-human life around us, and with the earth itself. According to Whyte, these processes spring from, “relationships of mutual responsibilities, infused with appropriate qualities like consent and reciprocity,” and they are therefore often called “kin relationships” (2019a, 4). He further emphasizes that kin-centricity has always been at the root of Indigenous climate activism in North America, drawing examples from the 1998 Native Peoples/Native Homelands Climate Change Workshop, which led to the Albuquerque Declaration as well as the 2001 chapter on Indigenous climate change issues in the first US National Climate Assessment. At its core, this work by Indigenous ecological scholars and activists has always insisted that “climate-related dangers are inseparable from the absence of respect for relational qualities” (Whyte 2019a, 3). This suggests to us that as ecomusicological scholars, we neglect the importance of relationality at our own peril.

...and for Ecomusicology

As mentioned above, there is a healthy tradition within ecomusicology of deep concern with interconnection: between humans and other-than-humans, between culture and nature, and between music and sound. What we aim to do in this section is point these scholars toward the conversations already happening within Indigenous ecological philosophy that recognize these interconnections and argue for a durable, long-tested social model for understanding these interdependencies.

Kin-centricity may not appear as theoretically sophisticated as ‘perspectivism’ (Viveiros de Castro 2004), ‘acoustic multinaturalism’ (Ochoa Gaudier 2016), or ‘sentient ecology’ (Anderson 2000) within ecomusicology, but it is an eminently practical way of reframing the priorities of the discussion. It is directly translatable into concrete action both on the part of ecological activists and on the part of ecomusicological scholars. From the perspective of relationality, the human/non-human or nature/culture debates seem less relevant, because the question is not what something is called or how it is classified; the question is how you behave. Do you act like kin to other humans and non-humans, with mutual concern for each-other’s well-being and reciprocal relations? Then you are kin. The making and sustaining of kin (of all kinds) is the fundamental act of interconnection.

We are not the first within ecomusicology to highlight the importance of reciprocal relationships to the ecomusicological project (see Simonett 2016, Turner 2019, Kisliuk 2019). As stated above, every ecomusicologist who has adopted Tilton’s ecosystems or sustainability models connecting humans and non-human life on this planet through music already appreciates the importance of these interrelationships. But most have failed to engage with the Indigenous ecological philosophers and activists who have been arguing for kin-centric models for decades.

And yet, it is encouraging to read that Tilton’s most recent work has moved to name interconnection as relationality (2013, 2016). Tilton has begun to emphasize a sound ecology that is not just rooted in the environment, but that is also dedicated to social justice and is

critical of the exploitative economics of late capitalism (Allen 2019b, 50). In his forward to *Cultural Sustainabilities*, Titon explicitly ties both his work in sustainability and sound ecology to relationality. “A sound ecology,” he says, “teaches that all beings, human and otherwise, are interconnected. If so, then all beings are related. All beings are our relatives. A sound ecology points us toward an ethic of responsibility toward all beings, the common good, the commonwealth of nature and culture, and the sustainability of life itself” (Titon 2019a, xviii). And his recent writings on ecojustice encourage this movement to account for the relatedness of *all* beings (Titon 2019b). Relationality – both making and being good kin – is certainly good to think with.

So while the conversations of ecomusicologists are circling close to the concept of relationality, what we have emphasized here is that robust conversations about relationality and the relevance of this concept for addressing both systematic social inequalities as well as threats to climate health are already happening within Indigenous ecological philosophy. We encourage everyone to read and learn more, starting with the three Whyte articles we have highlighted, and direct them to Whyte’s collected resources on Indigenous peoples and climate justice: <https://kylewhyte.seas.umich.edu/climate-justice/>.

Then, instead of using Ingold’s ecological philosophy to argue that the social relations of humans are a subset of ecological relations (2011, 5), perhaps we can follow the advice of Indigenous ecological philosophers and use *kincentricity* to understand ecological relations as one subset of human social relations. And perhaps we can finally understand how decolonizing social relationships is the most important ecological work that we can do. As Whyte himself states, whether or not the ecological “tipping point” has been crossed, “relational qualities must be established or repaired for justice-oriented coordinated action to be possible” (Whyte 2019a, 3).

Conclusion

Indigenous activists ask us to focus on the primacy of relationality before all other things, and this is good news for ecomusicologists. As musicians we know the power of making music together for the building of robust social relationships: focusing on that social role of music is one of the hallmarks of ethnomusicology. And yet it is striking that the social bonding power of music making wasn’t mentioned in the responses to the 2018 SEM President’s Roundtable “Humanities’ Responses to the Anthropocene,” which asked the question, “What skill sets do musicians, music scholars, and ethnographers have that might be used to ameliorate humans’ destructive impact on our planet’s ecosystems?” (Cooley 2020, 301). Aaron Allen might be right: ethnomusicologists may not be particularly equipped to study and interpret ecosystems (Allen 2020, 306). But after reading Indigenous ecological philosophers like Kyle Powys Whyte, we are convinced that ethnomusicologists do have the tools to help ameliorate the relational imbalances that undergird the ecological ones: we know the power of building consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity through making music together.

Lest this pronouncement sound too Panglossian, two examples from the ecomusicological literature illustrate our point. Tim Cooley (2019) discusses the role of music making in the Polynesian Voyaging Society, a group of Indigenous activists from Hawaii who traveled around the world using the outrigger canoes of their ancestors. Cooley reports that while they had an explicitly ecological mission, their method of approaching climate change was

to gather with Indigenous people when they came to new ports to “exchange of food, stories, songs, and dances between” (Cooley 2019, 303). Cooley focuses on the utility of this method for building an inter-connected Indigenous network worldwide, but the potential for musical reciprocity is much greater. If the focus of “world music” courses wasn’t to “study others,” but rather to build relationships based on reciprocal exchange, ethnomusicology could be a transformational field.

The other example of how well suited ecomusicology is to foreground relationality is Andrew Mark’s research on music making among permanent residents of British Columbia’s Hornby Island. Mark found that music making is a way in which Islanders “develop collective and cooperative skills and social bonds” that they can then use when facing both social and environmental challenges on the Island (Mark 2016, 123). As musicians, ecomusicologists know that the majority of our time is spent in rehearsal. A perfectly in-synch performance may be transcendent, but the real relationships are forged during the hard process of working things out at rehearsal. And the utility of this relationship-building for ecological action is not lost on Mark. As he states, “In short: Musicking helps with sociality, which in turn can help the environment” (Mark 2016, 123). Making music together is a social act, one that builds the kinds of robust relationships necessary to coordinate action on climate change.

All of which brings both Marshall and DeAngeli back to the original challenge that got us interested in the work of USRT in the first place. Whyte’s writings highlight our complicity in a project that attempted to use music and culture to teach ecological science in a “culturally relevant” way. They have challenged us to think about the ways in which making music (*any kind of music*) could instead be used to build the kinds of healthy, reciprocal relationships needed to make all other work possible. And they have galvanized us to call for a type of ecomusicological advocacy work that fundamentally refuses the logics of cultural display and the relegation of expressive culture as window dressing to the “serious” work of climate science. As we move forward in our consultations with USRT, we will be suggesting that the best use of after-school program time may not be in teaching Native youth to measure water tables or to document the habitat loss of culturally-relevant species. Rather, we will be engaging in decidedly non-musical activism like introducing Whyte’s articles and resources to USRT staff and offering our time to discuss with them the real challenges presented by working for sustained relationality in a context of deliberate removal and erasure. And finally, we will trust in the wisdom of relational interdependence as the precondition for ecological justice, and suggest that instead focusing on powwow music, USRT should start, and participate in, some after-school country music or heavy metal bands with Native youth. The music that USRT staff and Native youth make together may not be good enough to mitigate the vulnerability presented by anthropogenic climate warming. But the relationships they make together just might be.

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Climate Change as *Pachakuti*: Response to “Lessons for Ecomusicology from the Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation” for the E-Seminar of the *Ecomusicology Review*

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I am honored to write a response to Marshall & DeAngeli’s timely essay “Lessons for Ecomusicology from the Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation” for the *Ecomusicology Review* E-Seminar. As I share much of the interest in integrating more Indigenous perspectives into the (all too) Western academic field of ecomusicology, I consider the essay an urgent follow up on previous intentions to rethink ecomusicology in more relational terms. In their essay, the authors draw on Indigenous ecological philosophy and critically examine a scientific ecology-based youth educational program on climate change in the context of Native American peoples of the Upper Snake River Tribes. During my research on Indigenous music and climate change in the Bolivian Andes, I was also confronted with some analytical limitations of ecomusicological frameworks. This has led me to draw on Latin American decoloniality theory in combination with South American ontological anthropology including perspectivist approaches and political ontology. Our points of departure are seemingly different, but I believe that we share a common denominator: we are interested in strengthening Indigenous perspectives within ecomusicology.

Regarding their essay, however, I found something disorienting. The more fundamental problem does not seem to be about epistemological differences between Indigenous (interdependence) and scientific (compartmentalization) knowledge perspectives on the climate change of the “one-world world” (Blaser & de la Cadena 2018, 3). Rather it is about ontological differences between distinct climate change worlds and realities: between different ontological frameworks as axiomatic systems of what exists and why. Among others, Marshall & DiAngelicite Viveiros de Castro (1998), Seeger (2016), and Ochoa Gautier (2016) without delving deeper into the implications of those ontological questions raised in these works (which is understandable given the useful brevity of their essay). I do believe that concepts such as “kin-centricity” and “relational tipping point” can be as groundbreaking as cosmological perspectivism. We must only situate them in the ontological realm, where they belong.

My aim in this brief response is to unfold this claim in two parts: First, I will show within the essay where epistemological problems could have been solved through raising ontological questions. In this context, I will discuss ecomusicology as a manifestation of modern sciences. Second, I will give an example of an ontology-driven approach about Indigenous music and climate change, drawing on my research among highland Indigenous peoples in the Bolivian Andes.

I agree that the crisis postulate in the context of Indigenous climate change realities is problematic. We need to think our climate present, and especially the future, in a different way: through the past. This is also expressed with the Aymara saying *qhip nayra uñtasa nayraqatar saraña*, or “looking behind and in front we are walking towards the future-past.” Here, spatiotemporal relations are very different. Past-present-future appear as a continuum from the Aymara viewpoint, indicating how Aymara Andeans understand change and continuity

throughspiraling circles. Indigenous analysis of climate change injustices linked to histories of colonialism can tell us how to approach and understand coupled social and environmental changes in different ways. The authors point this out very well.

But I find something incongruent in “Lessons for Ecomusicology” when it comes to analyzing Indigenous climate change realities within Indigenous spatiotemporal conceptions: those ontological dimensions in which climate change is negotiated and understood. Although the authors advocate for foregrounding structures of social inequalities, they still make an assumption from the scientific perspective about what climate change is, namely that it is the contemporary global physical one-world phenomenon we are dealing with in linear time. We hear about how climate change must be interpreted from Indigenous perspectives, but we do not hear anything about how Indigenous peoples conceptualize a changing climate within materially conditioned and ontologically framed lifeworlds. I find this to be a structure of cognitive inequality within the ontological realm.

The authors rightly argue that most ecological threats and current environmental problems cannot be solved by technical and objective natural scientific knowledge. I am convinced that most ecomusicologists would fundamentally agree with this. That is why ecomusicology and other environmental arts, humanities, and social sciences exist in the first place: to confront the predominance of natural scientific approaches to environmental and sustainability problems. (The same goes for human ecology, which is part of my own academic background.) The ecosystem analogy might seem contradictory in this regard, but music ecology and music sustainability have primarily developed in Applied Ethnomusicology rather than Ecomusicology, have they not? And haven’t ecomusicologists started critically scrutinizing these concepts from ecomusicological angles? Whatever the answers to these questions, the more critical issue in relation to Indigenous climate change realities is the general primacy of scientific knowledge and methodologies, i.e. particular universalism and the implicated coloniality of knowledge (as exposed by Latin American decoloniality scholars). We agree that there cannot be climate justice without social justice (as Marshall & DiAngeli point out). But we also need to take into consideration “cognitive justice” (de Sousa Santos 2007).

The epistemological dimension is only one side of the coin. Knowledge practices, including music-making, are always embedded in cosmological worlds in which they make sense. Again: there is an ontological dimension of Indigenous climate change realities, which Marshall & DiAngeli do not address. It is this ontological dimension, however, that stands to explain the difficulties in bringing together knowledge systems in the USRT program. Indigenous peoples and scientists do not talk about the same thing, which produces equivocations in the sense of Viveiros de Castro (2004) and potential ontological conflicts in the sense of Blaser (2013). An example Marshall & DiAngeli provide is Hells Canyon, which scientists understand “technically” and Native Americans “as this cultural thing” (7). But what about “climate,” wouldn’t that have the same distinction?

Ecomusicology, as any other manifestation of modern science, rests on a naturalist conception of the world, the dichotomy of nature and culture. Even in more relational sciences such as modern ecology (which informs ecomusicology), we find an analytical divide between “abiotic” and “biotic” components of ecosystems. Native or sentient ecologies, such as in Descola (1997) or Anderson (2000), show that this distinction is not accurate when it comes to Indigenous viewpoints. In the sentient ecology of the Andes, for example, mountains have

agentive powers and spirit. Are these “abiotic” or “biotic” components of the Andean environment? (They are probably both.) Therefore, we urgently need Indigenous sciences and universities (or rather pluriversities) with different ontological grounds. If we only “Indigenize” Euro-Western academia, Indigenous perspectives only risk ending up being one alternative cultural perception of a reified and objectively knowable nature; in other words, they are moved into the ontological structures of modernity. Towards the end of their essay, when the discussion turns to relationality, Marshall & DiAngeli seem to suggest two things, which they do not state explicitly: first, that Indigenous concepts are more accurate for analyzing Indigenous realities and that such concepts should therefore replace modern scientific ones; and second, that the naturalist conception of the world seems to be responsible for all man-made environmental problems and that it should be overcome (or at least sidestepped).

If the problem is the use of foreign analytical concepts to understand Indigenous worlds, then spaces need to be carved out for Indigenous peoples to develop their own concepts for analyzing — with epistemological *and* ontological self-determination and sovereignty — those social and environmental changes that affect them. If we want to overcome modern (scientific) naturalism, then relationality must be thought of as an ontological position, not as an epistemological one (as perhaps indirectly suggested by the authors, who also draw on Titon’s relational epistemology in this context). The consequences are not negligible: if relationality were understood as an epistemological position, it would only occupy a different cultural perception of the one-world nature. This would reconstitute naturalism and multiculturalism. Is this what Marshall & DiAngeli want? I do not think so, because otherwise why would they refer to perspectivist anthropology? Moreover, why would they advocate to regard ecological relations as part of social relations rather than vice versa? Especially with this latter idea, Marshall & DiAngeli come very close to how Descola described Amazonian Achua peoples: their animism makes them live *In the Society of Nature* (1994). It also resembles what I wrote about the perspective of an Andean *amawt’a*, a wiseman, who regards our human culture as part of “the culture of nature” (Hachmeyer, forthcoming). (Indigenous ecological philosophy is actually not about “ecology” in the modern sense, right? Is ecology here also an analogy for something else?) From my reading, I think that Marshall & DiAngeli point towards an ontological standpoint without really engaging it. But what would an ontologically driven approach to Indigenous music and climate change look like, and what are the implications of such an approach?

In this second part, I offer a brief example of such an ontological approach from my own research in the Bolivian Andes. In fact, there is an interesting parallel to begin with. In 2014, I came to the Bolivian Andes also as an intern of a local NGO, where I conducted field research for my master’s thesis in Human Ecology. Similar to DeAngeli, I started to collaborate on alternative educational programs with several Indigenous peoples of the Bolivian highlands and lowlands. We covered several topics such as territorial management, communitarian economies, and diverse environmental issues including water supply, waste disposal, pollution, and climate change. The difference to DeAngeli’s story was, perhaps, that the team I accompanied consisted of Indigenous educators, who used specific Indigenous teaching methods that symmetrically integrated scientific and Indigenous knowledge systems. Thus, dethroning scientific knowledge was everyday reality within a very practical decolonizing

perspective. This was also visible in the context of the NGO's climate change policies, which linked local lifeworlds to Indigenous modes and strategies of assessment and adaptation. But did this prevent us from ontological equivocations? No.

The director of the NGO was a Quechua Indigenous intellectual, who did not cease to point out, from a critical climate justice perspective, that developed core countries within the capitalist world system are in climate debt with periphery countries from the global south. He was, of course, absolutely right, even though Bolivia has relatively high per capita greenhouse gas emissions due to deforestation. But still, the kind of Aymara, Quechua, or Kallawaya subsistence farmers, who use firewood for cooking and reside in thatched adobe houses, have historically little to do with global warming and contemporary anthropogenic climate change. Interestingly, I find in him similar characteristics to the Indigenous leaders cited in "Lessons for Ecomusicology," particularly when Marshall & DiAngeli argue that Indigenous peoples "experience climate change differently: not as a dramatic 'tipping point,' but as yet another long-term and systematic manifestation of colonialism" (4). My NGO director often mentioned ideas of relationality and how Andeans understand their environmental relations as social and spiritual kin relations ("mountains are our grandparents; the earth is our mother"). But when workshop participants, for example in the Kallawaya region in northern La Paz Department (where I later continued my fieldwork), started to talk about different underlying causes of their changing local climate, I realized that we were not talking about the same thing (a parallel to Marshall & DiAngeli's example of Hells Canyon). There was a broad consensus that climate change exists, for example with severe droughts and variations in annual precipitation patterns. But Indigenous people not only "experience climate change differently" (Marshall & DiAngeli, 4, explaining Whyte); they had an altogether different explanation of what climate change is and why it happens. Among many others (for example, pollution caused by plastic waste; cf. Bold 2019), one argument for the changing climate, especially mentioned by elderly people, was the loss of cultural practices including more traditional forms of music-making. How do we understand this?

If we accept that we must depart from Indigenous perspectives on what music is, then we must also depart from Indigenous notions on what climate is. When Indigenous Andeans talk about "nature," they usually talk about the subjective agentive spirits behind natural formations and phenomena, such as the earth, mountains, rivers, lakes, sun, moon, winds, rains, rocks, etc.; different male and female guardian spirits that guard and guide life on earth (the most famous one is probably *pachamama*). To whom do Andeans refer when they talk about "climate"? They refer to those guardian spirits that are responsible for weather.

In Quechua or Aymara languages there is no generic word for climate. The word *pacha*, usually loosely translated as cosmos, has, however, a temporal, spatial, and meteorological dimension. The following examples are in Aymara:

(1) *Temporal dimension*: A specific moment in time is called *pacha*. Specific annual seasons are called *pacha* (as in *sarta pacha*, *illa pacha*, *chakan pacha*, *lakan pacha*, etc.). Different historical and past mythical epochs are referred to as *pacha* (as in *nayra pacha*, *chullpa pacha*, etc.). The temporal dimension is complex as it requires us to think of current and future events as repetitions of the past (*kuti*). Cyclicity is the key term here.

(2) *Spatial dimension*: The spatial dimension is linked to different layers of a shared and common multiverse, which are inhabited by different human and non-human living beings

(as in *alax pacha*, *chika pacha*, *aka pacha*, *manghi pacha*, *amay pacha*, etc.). The central concept is reciprocity (*ayni*), which is grounded in relationality. It is constant ontological tension on which the world's existence is founded. Here, relationality is not primarily played out between different beings (inter-relations) but rather within (intra-relations). Every apparently separate entity is only a relation by itself and a fractal within a continuous emergence of life.

(3) *Meteorological dimension*: The dry and rainy seasons of the year are called *awti pacha* and *jayllu pacha*, respectively. Within these seasons there are subdivisions, such as *juphi pacha* (moment/time/season of frost) and *lupilapaq pacha* (moment/time/season of the burning sun) during the dry season. These meteorological dimensions of *pacha* used to have a very clear and marked meteorological succession, with certain weather patterns linked to agricultural works (that is plowing requires a different *pacha* than sowing, weeding, or harvest).

To understand a changing climate in the Bolivian Andes, we must combine the meteorological dimension with the spatial and temporal dimensions. In other words, we must understand meteorological changes in the ontological realms of relationality and cyclicity. Now, where does music-making come in? Indigenous Andeans used to play different musical instruments and genres according to different *pachas*. If we suggest, as William Kay Archer (1964) did, that “we expect a music to be shaped by climate” (29), then Indigenous Andeans would respond that they rather expect climate to be shaped by their music. They related specific transformations of *pacha* to their ritual and musical practices. There are numerous musical ethnographies about specific musical seasonalities in rural communities in the Bolivian Andes. Frank Solomon (1997), for example, has called this phenomenon “musical construction of time” (93). Time is only but one dimension of *pacha*; a musical construction of *pacha* always further implies space and weather/climate. The distinction between weather (short-term meteorological events) and climate (averaged meteorological events over time) is a modern distinction. Indigenous Andeans do not see these as separated and usually refer to the meteorological *pacha* as a “physical-symbolic complex” (Rivière 1997, 34), in which one can read the functioning of relationality and cyclicity. Within that physical-symbolic complex, adverse weather events are often being related to non-reciprocal human behavior. Indigenous Andeans therefore used to organize annual rituals related to crop growth, fertility, and weather in order to guarantee, via offerings to powerful guardian spirits, an uninterrupted succession of *pachas* throughout the year, thus providing the basis for life.

Let me come back now to what elderly people in the Kallawaya region claimed to be the underlying cause for severe droughts and variations in rain fall: the decomposition of cultural practices, including traditional forms of music-making. Perhaps, given the above explanation of some Andean cosmology, I hope it is not difficult to understand these propositions. But rather than arguing that people have not understood well “climate change,” we must delve deeper into those ontological structures of Indigenous peoples in which their arguments do make sense, particularly as propositions of an ontologically different “climate change.” What we call “cultural” practices are, from an Indigenous Andean viewpoint, cosmological practices that try to maintain balance in a world of constant tensions. In fact, the whole complex of agrarian rituality and musical seasonality is getting lost in many rural parts of the Bolivian Andes. We

call this “cultural change.” But from an Indigenous Andean viewpoint, the “culture-nature” separation does not exist in that sense. We could perhaps better argue that the Kallawaya region experiences a shift from animism to naturalism, or an intrusion of modernity (as an ontological structure), which implies an ontological shift away from reciprocity and cyclicity as modes of relation — that is, it implies a *relational tipping point* as the loosening of the ontological tensions on which the world’s existence is founded. We can and should link this to histories of colonization, to modernity, to capitalism and globalization, and so on. But we are now situated on a very different plain, acknowledging epistemological *and* ontological self-determination and sovereignty.

Many environmental scholars, activists, and philosophers regard the ontological framework of modernity as the fundamental root cause of contemporary environmental problems. Even some ecologists claim that the problem is a dominant anthropocentric culture (Allen, 2011; see also Allen 2018; Allen & Titon 2020). Indigenous peoples’ knowledges and cosmologies, on the other hand, often foreground what environmental philosophers call ecocentrism (although I would prefer *cosmocentrism* in Indigenous contexts). But the concept of “culture” presupposes its own ontological status, whereas we need to question the entire ontological framework in which it makes sense. In that regard, climate change initiated an ontological reconfiguration of the world, putting an end to the modern myths of progress and mastery over nature.

I totally agree with Marshall & DiAngeli that shifting our mindset from preventing a catastrophe in the future to addressing an ongoing dystopian reality in the present is urgently necessary. Nevertheless, I believe that it is very important to ask how Indigenous peoples conceptualize our common climate future, and the common future of our planet, particularly in relation to ideas of non-anthropocentrism. I will end my response with an ethnographic vignette linked to a famous Andean origin myth.

On one occasion, I was herding goats and sheep with my host in Niñocorin, a valley community in the Kallawaya region. My host is an elder and a Kallawaya *yachaj* (wiseman and traditional healer), a very critical Indigenous thinker and an expert in traditional music. When he heard a specific whistle of a *chiwanku*, the Andean thrush, he explained that it usually announces a suitable time of sowing maize. This exemplifies how Andeans use sonic bioindicators that function as signs in an acoustemological sense. This year, however, the Kallawaya region experienced a severe drought, where early sowing was impossible. A delayed sowing decreases the time window for a proper growing cycle and increases the possibility of failed harvests. Suddenly, my host said that the bird itself seemed to be confused by all these climate changes going on, while adding that he hoped that climate will finally change once and for all. In this moment, I could not really follow up on his argument. I was dumbstruck. While Euro-Westerners increase efforts to mitigate climate change, my host hoped that it will finish up soon. Here again, another reality is making itself visible in which time is cyclic.

The cyclic concept with constant repetitions of the past is referred to as *kuti* in Andean Indigenous languages. *Kutis* happen on different scales and in different beings within varying intervals. There are *kutis* for humans, animals, and plants, different lifespans implying reproduction, as life always continues and repeats. The moon phases are seen as *kutis* as well. Day and night cycles are *kutis*. The cosmos itself has *kutis*, which are referred to as *pachakuti*.

These are the annual changes between dry and rainy season on a lower scale, but also entire world turnings or reversals on a larger cosmological scale. It seems that my host was suggesting that we are right now experiencing such a cosmological *pachakuti*, a climatic reversal of the world. In fact, these cosmological reversals usually happen within larger intervals of hundreds or thousands of years. If we are experiencing again a *pachakuti*, this would mean that the world is about to bring itself back into a new equilibrium due to the unbalance that has been produced over centuries and millennia.

If we delve deeper into the ancestral history of the Andes, many *pachakutis* have already occurred. The last one has brought forth our world, where we, the contemporary humans, are now living. Before that happened, ancestral beings called *chullpas* lived in a constant dawn-like world, another *pacha*. When the current sun was born, its tremendous heat has immediately burned up the *chullpas*, giving birth to us, new kinds of humans that mythical stories refer to as “people of the sun” (*inti jaqi*). In fact, we have survived this cataclysm, which is why we are living in our particular *pacha* now. The *chullpas*, however, who were used to darkness, have not. In different versions of this origin myth, the *chullpas* were depicted as not very friendly or harmonious beings. They did not maintain a respectful relationship with earth. They stole and took what they wanted. Inequality was severe during the times of the *chullpas* and honest, vulnerable people suffered. Against this background, one wonders whether this ancient Andean origin myth can tell us some truth about our distant or not-so-distant future. Will new humans be born out of the burning sun?

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Relationality as Social Justice Theory: Author Response to “Climate Change as *Pachakuti*”

Kimberly Jenkins Marshall (University of Oklahoma)

“Straddling worlds is irrelevant to straddling small pieces of land and trying to earn a living.”

Vine Deloria Jr. (1978, 86)

What a delight it is to be able to participate in this kind of scholarly dialogue. At this juncture in our field, where a relatively recent specialization (ecomusicology) matures within the context of dramatic disciplinary and societal re-examination, we feel this conversation is particularly important. DeAngeli and I would like to thank the entire ecomusicology community for participation in this E-Seminar, but especially the *Ecomusicology Review* editor Aaron Allen, the three anonymous peer reviewers of the original article, and especially Sebastian Hachmeyer for such a carefully considered and beautifully written response. I am grateful for the opportunity to continue the conversation.

As highlighted by our respondent, DeAngeli and I wrote our original article “Lessons for Ecomusicology from the Upper Snake River Tribes Foundation” with the intention of strengthening Indigenous perspectives within ecomusicology, an intention shared by Dr. Sebastian Hachmeyer and (I suspect) many other ecomusicologists as well. A further common denominator that we share with Hachmeyer is a belief that we cannot strengthen Indigenous perspectives within ecomusicology without attending to Indigenous realities. These guiding stars have led Hachmeyer to questions of Indigenous ontologies, and they have led us to questions of settler colonialism and historically patterned structural inequalities. Core questions about what music is and what music does can be central to both of these conversations. I regret that space and time constrain me from the nuanced response that I would like to provide. But with a mind toward the kind of engagement that the E-Seminar format engenders, I have framed the following response as less of a rebuttal and more of an invitation to dialogue for the broader community of ecomusicology scholars.

With this goal in mind, I ask three guiding questions: Should our scholarship center social justice? Does an ontological approach satisfy social justice concerns? And finally, is it possible to think of relationality as a framework that productively joins both ontological and social justice concerns, with an eye toward Indigenous futurity?

Should Our Scholarship Center Social Justice?

Dear all-

I have been participating in this discussion with private emails to relevant parties, but I think maybe it is time to say something out loud...

I am a Non-Native scholar. I need to say that out loud and acknowledge it, because I have to be able to look that identity in the eye and understand both the privileges and responsibilities that come with that identity vis a vis Indian Country. Maybe this is an Oklahoma thing, but I have also been taught that who I am doesn't matter as much as how I act and my responsibilities to and within specific Indigenous

communities. And I know that the problem is a structural one, not about bad or good people, and so no one person can condemn me outright or grant me absolution... We all have obligations.

I take seriously the perspectives of [the BIPOC scholars in this conversation] and know they need to be heard. I have been to most (all?) of the IM-SIG meetings over the past 7 years, and if you were there you also know that they need to be heard. This space is troubled. So I am not sure if a statement to SEM is needed. I do know that this SIG has work to do, right here. If we didn't, we wouldn't have Indigenous scholars saying that they feel unwelcome, unheard, and unvalued.

So I am not going to tell my story, since I am not interested in centering myself here. Nor am I interested in taking the easy route and pointing fingers at dead ancestors or rehashing old beefs. ...But if the white scholars in this room want to be Allies, then I think the most helpful thing we can do is to outline... concrete steps we will take to educate ourselves and to use our privilege as leverage to critique current settler structures and support Indigenous students and scholars.

During the troubled summer of 2020, I sent the above message (edited for continuity) to the listserv of the Indigenous Music Special Interest Group (IM-SIG) of the Society for Ethnomusicology. The IM-SIG listserv, like many within music studies, had been uncharacteristically active in the wake of Dr. Danielle Brown's "Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies: Especially Ethnomusicology and Music Education." Dr. Brown laid bare that the gross underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) scholars within music studies, and white ethnomusicology's tendency to speak *on behalf* of BIPOC communities, as evidence of a discipline that had not in any way seriously considered itself a colonialist and imperialist enterprise (<https://www.mypeopletellstories.com/blog/open-letter>). The IM-SIG listserv was discussing whether we should issue a follow-up statement on behalf of the section, and the resulting conversations revealed that many within the IM-SIG were grappling with the idea of ethnomusicology as extractive, imperialist, and potentially harmful to Indigenous communities for the first time.

In his response to the article at hand, Hachmeyer commented that he found our original article "disorienting" because we seemed to be centering debates about compartmentalization versus interdependence in the "one-world world" (and recommending the latter) rather than the "more fundamental problem" of "different ontological frameworks as axiomatic systems of what exists and why" (1). Our decisions to frame our essay as we did were deliberate, and while space constraints limited our original critiques of perspectivism, we made clear that we do not prioritize the questions that perspectivism raises. As we stated, "...the question is not what something is called or how it is classified; the question is how you behave [toward it]."

Any self-aware survey of academia can trace the rise and fall of theoretical trends within the disciplines, and ethnomusicology is no exception. In many ways the shape of the present discussion traces enthusiasm behind the "ontological turn" in anthropology from a decade ago, and the subsequent push-back against it. So what is to recommend one particular approach to understanding musical worlds over another?

In considering the answer to that question, I would urge the community to take critiques of the past year into consideration. I am personally positioned somewhat uniquely within ethnomusicology, because I am also trained as an anthropologist. And while

anthropology is no less of a culturally extractive discipline, it does have a 40-year head start in considering itself as such. So while I found the critiques of Dr. Brown and the Indigenous scholars in the IM-SIG stinging and timely, I did not find them disorienting or new.

I was disoriented in graduate school — when I read Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s condemnation of (anthropological) research itself as a colonial project, creating unequal benefit for those doing the researching and unequal cost for those being researched. Of Indigenous people, she said, “[Research] told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs” (Smith 1992: 3). I was also disoriented (still in graduate school) when I read Vine Deloria Jr.’s sharp castigation of ethnography as preoccupied with theoretical abstractions (*are Indians struggling because they are ‘warriors without weapons?’ or are they ‘straddling two worlds?’*) — theories that are unhelpful because they wholly neglect the political/economic realities of Indigenous life and anthropology’s complicity in creating those realities. As in the epigraph above, Deloria asserts that theories that don’t attend to the very urgent consequences of centuries of settler colonialism are a “plague” on Indian people. Put another way: “Abstract theories create abstract action” (Deloria 1978: 86).

Both Smith (Maori) and Deloria (Lakota) brought to anthropology an awareness that culturally extractive research is not a neutral process that benefits everyone equally – the costs and benefits of research are embedded in broader social worlds. I read this in Dr. Brown’s recent critiques as well. And although anthropology certainly hasn’t found all the right answers, it has started asking the right questions. And Indigenous scholars (like Smith and Deloria, but also Audra Simpson, Kim TallBear, Jean Dennison, Zoe Todd, and Valarie Lambert) have helped guide anthropology to think of research as creating both social capital as well as social debt. Because of this, researchers require reciprocity thinking and a consciousness of the ripples that our actions create. Who benefits from this research, and at the expense of whom?

It is not lost on me that I read both Smith and Deloria in anthropology classes because they are now canon there. Are they canon in ethnomusicology? If not, the critiques of the past few years suggest that they should be, along with the critiques by Indigenous music scholars Dylan Robinson (2020), Trevor Reed (2016) and Jessica Bissett Perea (2019). In a field of competing theoretical frameworks, as well as “both/and” compromises, don’t we have a moral imperative to consistently ask ourselves who benefits from a theoretical lens, and at the expense of whom?

Do Ontological Frameworks Center Social Justice?

As Charlotte Frisbie has pointed out “there is no word or phrase in the Navajo language that can be translated as ‘religion’ in the Western European sense of this term” (Frisbie 1987:xxiii). The word that has often been used to translate the European concept of “religion” is Diné Binahagha’, which is actually more accurately glossed as “moving about ceremonially” (Frisbie 1987:xxiii). ...Thus Diné Binahagha’ is only one facet of the sacred organizing principle of Sa’áh Naagháí Bik’eh Hózhóón (SNBH), a lifeway that included “language, land, cultural knowledge, protocols, trades, and living a distinct sustainable way of life” (Lee 2014:7) and that might be more generally glossed as ‘the Navajo Way.’ (Marshall 2016, 58)

The above quote comes from my own book *Upward, Not Sunwise: Resonant Rupture in Navajo Neo-Pentecostalism*. I reference it here because it is a well-worn touchstone for me in

thinking about Indigenous ontologies. Navajos have no word for religion. Except that they do. That word is “religion.” In English. It means what you think it means. And in studying the role of expressive culture in the spread of Neo-Pentecostalism among Navajos for over a decade, I repeatedly heard it invoked by Navajo pastors, who highly valued their Navajo identity (language, dress, foodways, family values, Nationhood, ancestral lands), and yet who preached against Navajo “traditional religion” as empowered by the Devil. The lack of an ontological category for religion didn’t stop Navajo pastors from wielding it as a weapon against other Navajos, nor did its ontological lack of separability from broader Navajo lifeways stop actual Navajos from separating it out. This impasse seems to suggest that either Navajo ontologies are broken, or these Navajos are – a call that is *certainly* beyond my ethnographic authority to say.

In his interpretation of the present essay, Hachmeyer reads into our advocacy for “relationality” a few suggestions. First, that “Indigenous concepts are more accurate for analyzing Indigenous realities and that such concepts should therefore replace modern scientific ones,” and also that “the naturalist conception of the world” is at the root of climate crisis (3). In this way, Hachmeyer has interpreted our critiques through a solidly ontological lens where, he suggests, “they belong.”

That DeAngeli and I did not adopt an ontological lens follows from our concerns to center social justice. Frankly, after over a decade of watching the ontological debates within anthropology, I have serious concerns about the ontological lens. Although music scholars may yet glean interesting insights from adopting such a theoretical framework (and certainly I would count Hachmeyer’s work among those that do), I also think that ethnomusicologists more broadly should be aware of the many critiques of the “Ontological Turn.”

In a laughably brief nutshell, ontological anthropology is a strain of theory coming out of work in Latin America. It is primarily associated with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2013), building upon the remains of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, and inspired by continental theorists like Bruno Latour and Phillipe Descola. In ethnomusicology it has primarily been articulated by scholars like Anthony Seeger and Anna María Ochoa Gautier. Building from the rarified character of the “Amerindian,” these scholars “find[] common analytic fuel in the sense that the ‘Enlightenment Great Divide’ between nature and culture is deeply flawed” and ultimately a colonizing intellectual framework (Bessire and Bond 2014, 440). As admirable as this theory is in trying to “take seriously” native views of what *is* the nature of reality (ontologies), mounting critiques of this approach began appearing around 2012. Because these critiques speak specifically to the lack of social justice within much of ontological theory, I feel three major critiques are worth rehearsing (all too) briefly here.

The first way in which ontological perspectives decenter social justice is the creation of a kind of “radical alterity” that is more of a construction of ethnographic fantasy than of actual lived experience for most Indigenous people. These descriptions turn on “mystical and mythical relationships” (Ramos 2012, 484), painting an all-too-familiar picture of Indigenous lives as always “alternate” to Western experiences. These radically alternative images of Indigenous peoples are *not* new in anthropology, rather they are “frighteningly familiar” (Bessire and Bond 2014, 442). Deloria, Smith, and others have already disposed of these ethnographic imaginings as self-serving to scholars and harmful to Indigenous people who are always already caught in a manufactured catch-22 between authenticity and modernity. The recent collection *Music and Modernity Among First Peoples of North America* (Levine and Robinson 2019) argues that this

false binary continues to persist in music studies, and for this problem the ontological lens is certainly not a corrective one.

A second criticism of the ontological lens from the perspective of social justice is the way in which ontologists tend to elevate certain Indigenous perspectives (shamans/ wise men/ elders) over others. In what is, again, an old model made new, the elevation of these kinds of “more authentic” Indigenous voices (which depend, of course, on the outside ethnographer for interpretation and presentation) is valued over the scholarship created by Indigenous scholars themselves. This framework perpetuates what Ramos (2012) calls a “sort of ventriloquism” which assures the production of a kind of “hyperreal Indian” (Ramos 1994). These perspectives overlook the complexities of the long colonially entangled histories of contemporary “Indigenous ontologies” (Ambercrombie 1998), as well as the historical refractions of gender in shamanism (Bacigalupo 2007). Meanwhile, Indigenous scholars like Sarah Hunt and Vanessa Watts argue that Indigenous thinking isn’t just “a well of ideas to draw from” but rather a practical set of contemporary instructions that guide “reciprocal duties” to place and to beings (human and non-human). Métis scholar Zoe Todd’s critiques are more pointed:

When anthropologists and other assembled social scientists sashay in and start cherry-picking parts of Indigenous thought that appeal to them *without engaging directly in (or unambiguously acknowledging) the political situation, agency and relationality of both Indigenous people and scholars*, we immediately become complicit in colonial violence. (Todd 2016, 18; emphasis original)

A related criticism of ontological projects from the perspective of social justice is that these models presume a totality of ontological worlds that simply do not exist. As I’m sure Hachmeyer knows very well (and as was exceedingly evident for me in conversations with Navajo neo-Pentecostals), any time spent on the ground with actual people demonstrates just how much Indigenous ontologies are contingent, partial, imperfect, deployed at certain times in certain ways and for certain ends, always within much larger structures of systems of power and inequality that are not set up to benefit everyone equally. As I have argued elsewhere (Marshall 2016), competing ontologies of rupture and continuity can and do co-exist in Indigenous communities, and musical practice — resonance — helps us to understand how they are (partially) reconciled. As Bessire and Bond (2014) pointed out in their widely read and stinging critique of the ontological turn, even the most isolated of Indigenous communities are already entangled in the “one-world world,” through both nonsensical violence and the totalizing flows of radioactive isotopes and hydrochlorinated pesticides, industrial pollutants as well as “logging, mining, agriculture, and oil extraction that routinely impinge on the premier sites of ontology” (Bessire and Bond 2014, 446). Todd is very clear on this point: is it socially just to use Indigenous cosmologies and knowledge systems “while ignoring the *contemporary* realities of Indigenous peoples vis-à-vis colonial nation-states?” (Todd 2016, 15-16). And if we are prioritizing “cognitive justice” over social justice, isn’t it relevant to also ask: cognitive justice for whom?

Can Relationality Unite Ontology and Social Justice, with an Eye Toward Indigenous Futurity?

A lot of our people are buried here, throughout this valley. And especially at Eagle Rock that [settlers] call “Castle Rock.” So we just wanted to let you know that we started this ‘Return of the Boise Valley People’ gathering 8 years ago, which was in 2010. And we decided we needed to come back here to honor our peoples’ memory, and let the

people of the City of Boise and the surrounding areas know that this is still our homeland. And we're never going to forget it. And someday we're gonna... we're gonna get it back. Because we still own title to this land. There was a treaty signed and... but it was never ratified. So really we still own title to this land. And someday we're gonna get it back. Thank you.

These are the words spoken by an elder from the Upper Snake River Tribes at the first ever official welcome ceremony for the “Return of the Boise Valley People” in June of 2018. After years of trying to build good relationships with this dispersed band of the Upper Snake River Tribes, the City of Boise officials were formally recognizing the *Koa'aga* (a mixed band of Shoshone and Paiute people who now call themselves the “Boise Valley People) and welcoming them to their ancestral homelands in Boise. The event was held on the steps of city hall in downtown Boise and featured speeches by officials from the descendent tribes, the military, and the Boise city council. The mayor of Boise was standing next to the tribal elder as she spoke these words, and he betrayed very little reaction to her unexpected assertion of ontology: *someday we're gonna get it back.*

In our original article, DeAngeli and I assert that “relationality” is a theoretical model, widely used in Indigenous studies, that can help ecomusicology orient itself toward socially just scholarship. And yet in Hachmeyer’s response, he encourages us to think about relationality not as epistemology (way of knowing the world), but as ontology (way of understanding what exists and why, with potential for multiple worlds/realities). I know we did not intend to write *ontological* in “Lessons for Ecomusicology,” for all the reasons rehearsed above. But Hachmeyer’s question did give me pause: is relationality *not* an ontology? Doesn’t cultivating reciprocal relationships with all kinds of human and non-human actors suggest a specific understanding of what exists in the world? I think it could be argued that it does. The elder’s words (above) do suggest a certain way of understanding past, present, and future obligations to the land in Boise.

But if ‘relationality’ is an ontological framework, I would argue that it pulls some of the best ideas from the ontologists and deploys them in the realm of the practical. For one thing, it takes seriously Indigenous world views, without divorcing them from complex Indigenous realities. Relationality is a social-justice oriented ontology.

For the Upper Snake River Tribes, relationality names not just what should be in the world but also what is fundamentally broken about the present. In Idaho, it isn’t simply a conceptual split between nature and culture that has stopped the salmon from returning to their spawning grounds in the high mountain springs of the Upper Snake — it is settlers profiting off that conceptual division in the concrete artifact of dams and reservoirs polluted with agricultural runoff. This breaking down of reciprocal ties into profit-driven extraction is both an ontological disjuncture and a structural inequality, with consequences for both climate and music. But relationality is an ontology with teeth. As Bessire and Bond observe, “We would do well to remember that, in the most concrete sense, modernity did not disrupt our planet’s climate, hydrocarbons did. Undue fixation on modernity misses the far more complicated and consequential geography of hydrocarbons in the unfolding constrictions of our present” (Bessire and Bond 2014, 447). Modernity didn’t disrupt the salmon runs, the dams did. And relationality is a way of naming what is broken without “deferring the critique” to some unnamed future time.

Second, relationality lends itself to a redemptive ontological framework because, like the best of ontological work, it values the articulations of a wide variety of Indigenous intellectuals. The original purpose of writing “Lessons for Ecomusicology” was to bring theoretical models of relationality developed in Indigenous Studies into conversations about interdependency and social justice happening within ecomusicology. The relational framework goes far, far beyond the work of Kyle Powys Whyte, although I appreciate his clear articulation of the four key values at the basis of relationality: consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity (Whyte 2019, 2). Rather than the rarified visions of shamans, relationality is an intellectual framework very commonly articulated across global Indigenous traditions. So commonly is it articulated that it calls attention not to the radical alterity of Indigenous worldviews, but to the uniqueness of this destructive historically and geographically specific tradition that *doesn't* value reciprocity: extractive, global, industrial capitalism.

And finally, relationality amplifies perhaps the best of ontology in that it is oriented toward Indigenous futurity. In voicing the claim “we’re gonna get it back,” the Upper Snake River Tribes elder quoted above challenges the inevitability of extractive settler futures. Ontologists commendably make space for the depiction of alternatives to present problems. Even Bessire and Bond, highly critical of the ontological turn, reflect how ontologists help to guide anthropology to “a disciplinary praxis closely attuned to the everyday creation of better worlds and the critical capacities of others” (Bessire and Bond 2014, 441). After the Welcome Ceremony described above, I sat with City of Boise staff as they discussed this moment of potential “Land Back” futures. Happy as they were to welcome Indigenous people to Boise’s multicultural mix, they expressed both dismay and confusion at the idea that the Boise Valley People could expect to get this land back. Boise metro is home to almost 750,000 settlers, and the US legal system has declared the land ceded. Give the land back? Impossible.

The ‘Indigenous Futurity’ at the heart of both relationality and the best of perspectivism challenges that impossibility. But this orientation requires more than imagination. It requires an acknowledgement of the fact that our shared reality is composed of both “potentialities but also contingencies, of becoming but also violence...” and that “our futures are contingent because our present is as well” (Bessire and Bond 2014, 450) — that there are limits to who can put into practice what they imagine the world to be. In this context, is it possible that relationality can be a productive framework for joining both ontological and social justice concerns, with an eye toward Indigenous futurity? And if so, what does it look like to recenter ethnomusicology not around cultural extraction and abstract theorization, but rather around the relational values of consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity?

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Response (12/6/21)

Mark Pedelty

Thank you so much, authors, responders, and facilitators for bringing forth this rich eseminar! The paper as well as the response and response-to-the-response have raised a number of important questions, and I am looking forward to assigning all three in an ecomusicology course (Spring, 2023).

A few for-what-it-is worth thoughts as part of the very interested audience. After vomiting these thoughts on to the page I found it necessary to come back up here and warn the reader the following is far more poorly formed than the well written and nicely edited pieces brought to us by Marshall and DeAngeli, as well as Hachmeyer. As I rip at some of that work, please do keep in mind that I, and I suspect most readers, share their objectives.

First, I really appreciated Dr. Marshall's quotations of Vine Deloria Jr. Deloria had a major impact on my research, teaching, and community work, including my decision to "study up," rather than keep the research gaze fixed squarely on the subaltern. And, his road map to collaboration has been oft-quoted, rarely followed. For example, Delora said that researchers should make sure that much of their grant funding goes directly to the communities with whom they work. Not as charity, but as a matter of respect and reciprocity.

On a related note, a song came to mind when I read each of these three pieces. Foreshadow's "[Take Back](#)" marks the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' taking back stewardship of the National Bison Range. What Shadow D. does in that song speaks volumes about the capacity for music to express new and old truths in regard to environmental justice, sovereignty, and meaningful collaboration. It is so important that voices are present and not just referenced. One beauty of this thing we call "organized sound" is how many people it takes to make it. Even in a "simple" performance like "Take Back," there are generations of Indigenous voices evoked, allies working across networks of time and space, and yes that even included an academic or two. Yet, in the end it is Shadow's voice that matters, and I know that he values our ears ("us" being those that listen).

Finally, perhaps we are coming to a point of movement maturity with Idle No More and similar developments, that the problem is no longer just about colonization and decolonization--and what both imply in terms of binary models of power and resistance--but also far more complex forms of engagement and theoretical framing. Artist, scholar, and Indigenous organizer Lila Watson and her colleagues put it so well, in the same decade that Custer Died for Your Sins hit the shelves: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." The conundrums of alliance, coalition, and collaboration will always be perplexing, but patronizing discourses have become almost as problematic as the more overt, legitimating ideologies. Hegemony works far more effectively via ideological obfuscation than it does through simply legitimation. In this debate over exactly what ecomusicology is and should be, I see a desire to engage (and thankfully, not reduce or control) the theoretical complexities of engaging power, degradation, inequity, and injustice, including the productive conundrums of engaging in more direct, yet artful, musical acts with the capacity to facilitate change. Anyone and everyone who does that work will be severely reproached for their theoretical and rhetorical imperfections.

Action inevitably invites such criticism, but that might be why it is helpful to remember that criticism is not the only mode of value in the academy.

Marshall and DeAngeli note "found that ecomusicology has drawn little from the writing of Indigenous ecological scholars and activists themselves." So true. I'll point the fingers back at myself. In *A Song to Save the Salish Sea* (2016), I dedicate just one of the 7 case studies to an Indigenous-led movement, Idle No More. To give another example, in a recent documentary about whale watching motor noise and the orca, I only make one direct reference in a [26 minute film](#) to Indigenous knowledge and practice, a musical montage of scenes in the credits advertising and explaining a Tseil-Waututh alternative to motorized whale watching. That response was worked out with Salish elders, entrepreneurs, and friends who helped me with the project. An incredibly incomplete and imperfect response. There is so much more to be done in regard to foregrounding Indigenous perspectives, especially if we are going to escape the insular dialectics and condemnations of the academy in order to do the important work so often referenced, yet so rarely done in more than a demonstration. Virtue signalling is alive and well, yet such criticism often shut down creative coalition rather than propel collective action. If there is one cage of cool I hope that new and early career scholars might begin to escape, it is that one. As one of my mentors, Nancy Schepper-Hughes once opined: "If you feel like a total fool you might be starting to actually make a difference." So much of the theoretical discourse since the poststructural turn illustrates Deloria's suggestion that abstract theory leads to abstract action, versus the important work that takes risks. Simple finger-pointing in the form of rhetorical criticism (the analysis-of-argument mode) often fails in that regard as well. So incredibly safe.

So much effort seems to be oriented toward rhetorically dissecting others' utterances with the assumption that there is some sort of perfect, singular, and achievable way to be critical, effective, collaborative, artful, decolonial, etc., a set of standards that never seem to be instantiated in any way but by implication and through reducing supposed opponents to straw persons (Hachmeyer's simplistic reduction of the variegated conversation of "Ecomusicology" to "a manifestation of modern science" is a good example). While I like this debate (debate?), I also sense that there is more both/and struggle sublimated therein than there is actual critique. Todd Gitlin's point that "They stormed the White House while we stormed the English Department" keeps ringing true. This thing called Ecomusicology sounds like a dangerous beast indeed. Ultimately, however, I would like to see more of a dissection of power and new perspectives on musical organizing than a line by line deconstruction of those that are, in their various incomplete and imperfect ways, also working toward those ends. Let's face it, most such criticisms are about professional posturing. Why take on actual power when we could instead fight each other over crumbs from the table? And that zero sum game always seems to start with misrepresentation, the need to characterize other scholars as inchoate dupes of power (ironically, drawing on the power of discipline to silence that which dares to transgress disciplinary boundaries).

What is so powerful in the Upper Snake River illustration is actual illustration. The ideas in play are instantiated. Is it perfect? Absolutely not. To quote the authors, "What does it look like to recenter ethnomusicology not around cultural extraction and abstract theorization, but rather around the relational values of consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity?" It does not look like anything any of us, including the authors, have done. Our actual attempts will give

us nothing but glimpses at those possibilities, but it is a set of powerful ideals that can propel meaningful action and discovery, especially when accompanied by and accomplished with humility. If the illusory goals of equity, justice, and biodiversity (to name just a few) don't give us that humility, I am not sure what will. Praxis-oriented examples like those that Marshall and DeAngeli have offered add much to our ongoing, collective struggles to learn, create, and collaborate in ways that work through, rather than pretend to get beyond, the radically inequitable entanglements in which we are all imbricated. Hachmeyer brought us lessons from Latin America. What I learned while doing research in El Salvador and Mexico was just how great a need Americans seem to have to paint the world in black and white, good guys and bad guys, the fallen vs the redeemed. The realities of power, inequality, and control are far worse than that, and far more complex than such binary models allow. Ecological thinking can help, but of course it is no panacea. Ecomusicology has been interesting, but is every bit as limited as the theoretical vantage points of those that seem to be so bothered by its existence. Point is, I remain suspicious of criticisms that paint various forms of potentially allied scholarship and community-based action as oppositional to each other. I see the possibility in this work to move us (i.e., those who care) beyond that reductive and unproductive way of making and studying music.

In solidarity and song,
Mark

Response (12/21/21)

Jeff Titon

“Ecojustice and Ontological Turns: A Response to Marshall and DeAngeli”

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Reading Kimberly Jenkins Marshall and Emma DeAngeli’s multi-layered essay and cautionary tale, followed by Sebastian Hachmeyer’s thoughtful reply and Marshall’s spirited rejoinder, three responses came to mind. One, that ecojustice is inclusive of social justice and compatible with Indigenous place-based ontologies. Two, that some of us went through our own ontological turns in ethnomusicology in the last century, though prior to and rather different from the ontological turns both in sound studies and in anthropological and Native discussions of Indigenous knowledges, each also quite different from the other. And three, that lessons learned in the past forty years from public folklore and applied ethnomusicology should also be helpful to those of us trying to practice an applied ecomusicology.

But first of all, kudos to DeAngeli and Marshall for an inspiring project and discussion of its implications. The disconnect between the USRT ecological science curriculum and the Native communities is made clear, as are the USRT cultural misperceptions that underlie it. The authors are to be commended also for thinking that an educational curriculum is an appropriate site for an ecomusicological intervention. It is instructive to read in Marshall and DeAngeli’s essay why the so-called crisis disciplines of the environmental humanities, ecomusicology being one of several, do not resonate with Indigenous peoples who centuries ago were forced into environmental catastrophe and social crisis by the very settler colonial societies who come now bearing alarms about extinctions and a climate emergency of which settlers are the cause. Of course, I am in agreement with Marshall and DeAngeli’s proposals concerning relationality and kin-centricity. Beyond that, let’s be on guard not to let kin-centricity be confused with the neo-Darwinian kin-selection theory (inclusive fitness) that explains away altruism by proclaiming that its hidden motive is a strategy for maximizing the survival of a creature’s genes.

On the so-called ontological turn, my response to the disagreement between DeAngeli and Marshall, and Hachmeyer, was not to take sides but to take heart in the proposition that ecojustice extends justice to all living beings, not just human beings (Titon 2019). In so doing it doesn’t seem to me that ecojustice or music ecology must divert energy from the social and economic justice projects, as some (e.g., Keogh and Collinson 2016) have claimed it does. Instead, ecojustice recognizes (as Indigenous thinkers do, and as ecofeminist Val Plumwood did) that violence wrought upon human beings (whether on account of color, gender, region, class, etc.) is not so different from violence wrought upon the Earth (Plumwood 1991); and that, to underscore what Marshall and DeAngeli highlight, relationality is extensive and reciprocity extends beyond human communities.

I believe that ecojustice represents a dissenting tradition within Euro-American history, one that is especially attuned to the sonic world (Erlmann 2010). Ecomusicology’s concern for nature is a recent manifestation of this dissent. As Marshall suggests, Zoe Todd (Métis)

identifies the particular ontological turn associated with "the Great Latour" as "just another Euro-Western academic narrative" that fails to engage with—even to acknowledge—millennia of Indigenous ontological thinking (Todd 2016, 7ff). The same critique cannot be made of Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism or Descola's "animism"; but as Marshall points out in the rejoinder, the ontological turn in anthropology has been subjected to a different kind of push-back from social justice activists like the anarchist David Graeber. It seems to me that ecojustice both overcomes these problems and also aligns with Indigenous place-based ontologies in which, to quote Todd from a different essay, the human *and* non-human beings existing in particular territories are sentient, have agency, deserve respect, and are "embedded in complex relationships informed by the legal traditions, languages, and histories" of the people who live in those places; and moreover that "agency and knowledge is not limited to human actors . . . but actually [is] distributed among the humans and non-humans present" in a particular place (Todd 2020, 29). In these Indigenous place-based ontologies ecosystems and habitats are more properly regarded as societies populated by varieties of living beings, not just humans (Watts 2013). For those reasons I believe ecojustice is an appropriate concept. It advocates for social justice even as it expands its reach, while offering a broader critique of neo-liberal, late capitalist politics and economics.

The discussion of ontologies also reminded me that ethnomusicology took its own ontological turn beginning in the late 1970s with the phenomenologically-informed ethnographic research of Ruth Stone, Tim Rice, and myself (for a summary see Berger 2015). That ontological turn may be described as an orientation toward subjective, lived experience, with immersion in music- and sound-worlds, and how "musical being-in-the-world" may bring about moments of special relationship among people with one another, with the divine or spirit-world, and even with musical instruments (e.g., Rice 1995; Titon 2008 [1997]). Of course, this is not the same thing as the ontological turns previously discussed, but it was—and I believe it remains—a fruitful ontologically-centered research avenue for anyone interested in the expressive culture of humans and other-than-human beings.

One lesson learned is that agencies like USRT are unlikely to succeed by executing top-down solutions from academic, museum, or government experts. Rather, as forty years' experience in the fields of public folklore and applied ethnomusicology has shown, the better practice is, first, to learn what problems are being identified by the partnering communities themselves, and then to learn what bottom-up, place-based solutions members of the local communities would themselves put forward. Afterwards when it is possible to find, and make, common ground and common cause, working together to implement community-based solutions has a better (but not a sure) chance of success. The USRT staff were also in a rough spot, hemmed in I suppose by a need to operate on grant monies that follow the program priorities of settler granting agencies. Worse, the USRT leader confessed ("with them it's all cultural!") that he didn't understand how to bridge what he presumed was a gap between Western science and Native cultures—but note that this is a gap that USRT put in place by insisting on a standard non-Native ecological science curriculum. Better to consult Native scientists (see, e.g., Native BioData 2021) and try to facilitate Native solutions. It is a lesson that applied ecomusicologists can learn from this case-study and others (e.g., Pedelty forthcoming) as well as from successes and failures in applied ethnomusicology and especially in public folklore

(for examples of which see Baron and Spitzer 2007; Hufford 2021; LiKEN 2021), where collaboration and reciprocity have been themes for several decades.

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Response (1/31/22)

Lee Veeraghavan

What a wonderful form and forum for scholarly engagement. My sincere thanks to the editors of *Ecomusicology Review* for creating the space for this conversation. It is a tangible positive intervention on multiple fronts, and I hope others will follow their lead in adapting a “slow conference” model to their platforms. I am also grateful to Kim Marshall and Emma DeAngeli for their vital research paper and Sebastian Hachmeyer for his thoughtful response. What follows is an attempt to articulate some of the stakes and implications of the exchange, as there are broad areas of agreement and real differences. I find myself asking three questions. What is gained by framing a model as either epistemological or ontological? What is the work of ‘social justice’ (intellectual and practical), and how does it relate to the political?

I believe that the main thrust of the critique levelled by Marshall and DeAngeli—ecomusicology would do well to learn from Indigenous ecological thought, and specifically the shift in perspective articulated by Kyle Powys Whyte from thinking of environmental crisis as a future threshold to understanding it as the result of colonialism—is constructive in several ways. It is intersectional in the best sense of the term: it highlights the intersection of what one might think of as two (or more) struggles and shows how they are actually the same; that a shift in perspective from the dominant political constituency to that of a less powerful group might make possible a productive and healthy alliance; it directs our gaze toward specific events, actors, and institutions; and it does not get bogged down in questions of what this means for any given sum of identities or movements of affect. It does the work of provincializing Europe and invites us to ask whether other drivers of ecocide might productively be re-historicized from an Indigenous perspective. (I am thinking here about how the enclosure of communally-used land in Europe incentivized colonialism by creating the grist for the capitalist mill—the need to sell one’s labor—but of course there are other examples.)

But this approach (let’s call it the epistemological/ontological shift for intersectional ends) is best suited to projects conceived to combat the drivers of climate change on an actionable level. It is fundamentally practical—that is, it makes possible a better political praxis by creating the conditions to build a coalition that might win. This is crucial, and Marshall and DeAngeli’s call for *change* in ecomusicological scholarship resonates on this level.

In contrast with this call to arms, I find the impulse to ontologize interesting. To be clear, I think Hachmeyer is convincing when he says that Kyle Powys Whyte is describing an ontological difference rather than a purely epistemological one, but it’s worth pointing out that for those of us who do not share an Indigenous ontology, the desired *action* is in fact epistemological: how can non-Indigenous people shift our understanding of climate change so that we can learn from Indigenous ontologies? One person’s ontology, in this case, is another person’s epistemology.

Ana Maria Ochoa observes that “[i]t is not by chance that ... studies [that question our concepts of sound and music] invariably have dealt with indigenous cultures in different parts of the world. This does not mean that suddenly it is time for all of us ‘to go native.’ To the contrary, indigenous ontologies from different parts of the world provide models even if, and especially when, they do not resonate with our own categories of knowledge and being”

(2016). The challenge for non-Indigenous scholars, then, is to articulate a space of difference and resist the urge to assimilate (to) it. I believe this is Hachmayer's worthy intention in framing the question as one of ontology versus epistemology. As a cautionary note, though, David Graeber has observed that the word 'ontology' often gets used in ethnographic disciplines as a substitute for 'culture,' presumably because the latter concept is thoroughly tainted (2013). The needle we must thread is neither to 'go native,' as Ochoa puts it, nor to slot 'Indigenous ontology' into the space of unthreatening difference occupied by 'culture' in a discipline and academy that largely understands politics as a function of diversity and inclusion, and the latter two through the lens of recognition.

But if we want our scholarship to serve the ends of environmental justice, say, in the realm of policy, different ontologies will be rendered through flawed and partial translation (strategic epistemologism?). Political coalition building requires us to look for commonalities across difference. This is one of the reasons that I do not think *all* ecomusicological scholarship should address itself to social justice. I would reframe Marshall's call for an ecomusicology dedicated to social justice as one *compatible with the goals* of people and movements fighting ecocide. This is partly because I think there are plenty of times when scholars—especially music scholars—should simply get out of the way and not look for opportunities to insert ourselves into life-and-death struggles we might not have the stomach for, but I am also uncomfortable with the term 'social justice' (gone the way of 'culture' and become a shibboleth) and prefer 'politics.'

In her response to Hachmayer, Marshall quotes Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd's critique of the ontological turn, in which she states that to move away from approaches that reproduce colonial domination, scholars ought to "[engage] directly in...or unambiguously [acknowledge] the political situation, agency and relationality of both Indigenous people and scholars" (2016). Todd's argument partly concerns the politics of citation, but this directive, quoted by Marshall, is to the point. We are *all* political actors, not necessarily dedicated to the same goals, and the same is true for Indigenous people and communities. Nor is it apparent that we are on the same page when it comes to the definition and desirability of social justice, and how those of us who think it would be a good thing ought to get there. In that regard, the epistemological/ontological shift called for in this exchange can occur only when certain political struggles within the music disciplines have already been won. Marshall and DeAngeli's intervention is welcome because it demarcates a field of battle.