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# Introduction: Developing Anti-Racist Pedagogies and Praxis in Ethnomusicology: Dialogues and Reflections

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## INTRODUCTION

### Developing Anti-Racist Pedagogies and Praxis in Ethnomusicology: Dialogues and Reflections

MEGHAN FORSYTH and MARCIA OSTASHEWSKI

Over the past several years, issues of coloniality, systemic racism, and police brutality in North America have at last come to the attention of a wider public. Similarly, within academia, intensified calls to address systemic inequities and racism have finally confronted all music researchers, educators, and universities with a pressing need to adopt frameworks centred on principles of shared responsibility, equal opportunity, and action. The task is enormous and multifaceted. As Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson emphasized in his open letter “To All Who Should Be Concerned,” published in the journal *Intersections*, it is time to transform “systems of music education into spaces where different epistemologies and values of music and world views are equally supported” (2019: 137). As co-editors of this special issue, we have endeavoured to listen well and to learn from our colleagues and community partners who have long been advocating for change in academe. We offer this special issue in an attempt to contribute to positive, meaningful, and lasting change, all the while recognizing that there is much work yet to be done.

As individual scholars, we are all at different points on the long journey toward dismantling oppressive discourses in our academic fields, research, and teaching, but it is essential to recognize and acknowledge that scholars who embody Indigenous, Black, and racialized subjectivities have long been producing exceptional scholarship and working to decolonize the institutions of academia; many of our colleagues around the world have been doing this work tirelessly in their institutions and communities. This special issue aims to bring together some of this expertise and creativity to help further conversations around anti-racist pedagogies and practices. It responds to movements within academia to adopt anticolonial and anti-racist pedagogies, including timely

*This article has accompanying videos on our YouTube channel. You can find them on the playlist for MUSICultures volume 50, available here: [http://bit.ly/MUSICultures\\_50](http://bit.ly/MUSICultures_50). With the ephemerality of web-based media in mind, our online content may not always be accessible. We apologize for any inconvenience.*

responses to violence against marginalized communities, and addresses university-level curricular development in ethnomusicology as well as formal and informal music education outside of universities.

Our theme emerged in conjunction with two nodes of scholarly activity. First, the Call to Action of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music (CSTM) endeavours to take concrete steps toward challenging systemic racism while reaffirming the society's "commitment to fight for equal opportunity and to eradicate barriers of race, language, culture, and background within our scholarly society" (2019). We (Marcia Ostashewski and Meghan Forsyth, then president and secretary of CSTM, respectively) led the CSTM executive and membership in the research and development of the Call to Action, which was ratified in early 2021 by the CSTM membership after an extensive consultation process. This special issue is another outcome of these collective efforts.

The second node of scholarly activity that arose in 2020, also a direct outcome of CSTM's Call to Action, is the DIALOGUES research and engagement program facilitated by a partnership between CSTM and the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), supported by funding by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Hosted by the Centre for Sound Communities at Cape Breton University and co-led by Ostashewski, Forsyth, and Malaysian scholar Tan Sooi Beng, the project invited Canadian and international scholars to work together on multiple initiatives toward the decolonization of sound, music, and dance studies. The broader DIALOGUES project included a series of workshops on topics such as disrupting white supremacy in the academy, anti-racist pedagogies in ethnomusicology, and tools and strategies to foster collaboration in and democratization of scholarship and research. The grant also provided support for the inaugural *ICTM Dialogues* sessions, in which presenters from around the world shared ideas and proposed and critiqued approaches to decolonizing music and dance studies. The broader SSHRC-funded project resulted in greater inclusion of scholars from diverse backgrounds in both ICTM and CSTM and fostered vital regional and transnational conversations toward decolonizing music and dance studies. Significantly, it provided meaningful opportunities for research training and career and network development for more than thirty early career scholars from Indigenous, Black and racialized communities and marginalized backgrounds.

Two major publications have arisen from the DIALOGUES project. The first is a digital book titled *Dialogues: Towards Decolonizing Music and Dance Studies* (2022), featuring papers on topics such as decoloniality, praxis, collaborative ethnography, and ways of knowing. These papers resulted from the inaugural year of the ICTM Dialogues sessions. DIALOGUES project co-

leads Tan Sooi Beng and Marcia Ostashewski served as co-editors of the digital book and made several choices to foster inclusivity and accessibility in it. These include a digital format and integration of materials in a variety of media, a modified peer-review process, and free online access at <https://ictmdialogues.org/>. Notably, the book includes videos of non-English-speaking heritage bearers who share their knowledge in their own languages, and on their own terms.

The second publication arising from the DIALOGUES project is this special issue of *MUSICultures* on anti-racist pedagogies, which has benefited from the involvement and support of the broader DIALOGUES team. In consultation with an extended group of CSTM members, Forsyth and Ostashewski curated four online workshop sessions on Developing Anti-racist Pedagogies in Ethnomusicology in conjunction with the first virtual CSTM Meeting in November 2021. These workshops and discussion circles focused on university-level curricular development in ethnomusicology and dovetailed with another DIALOGUES workshop on Disrupting the Legacies of Colonialism and White Supremacy in Music Schools led by Dylan Robinson (supported by postdoctoral fellow Jeremy Strachan).

The virtual sessions on anti-racist pedagogies provided structured opportunities for participants to engage in respectful and sensitive dialogue about designing inclusive and anti-racist syllabi and courses that would better identify, understand, and integrate scholarship, issues, and experiences of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities; dialogic research as praxis for social change; engaging local knowledge holders in teaching; and other themes related to anti-racism and decolonizing the field of ethnomusicology. These sessions built upon existing relationships between researchers, artists, and communities to respond to urgent needs for change in ethnomusicology as expressed by Black, Indigenous and racialized students, scholars, and community-based researchers — people whose daily challenges resulting from histories of racism and colonialism have been exponentially compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like the *Dialogues: Towards Decolonizing Music and Dance Studies* (2022) digital book, these sessions and this publication have benefited from a diverse and engaged group of presenters, authors, and editorial team members. Working with *MUSICultures* editor Gordon E. Smith, we proudly include the new “Voices” section that *MUSICultures* piloted in volume 49. “Voices” are non-peer-reviewed contributions from a wide range of scholars and practitioners that engage new ideas and strategies; as such, they foster the inclusion of a greater diversity of voices and provide opportunities for readers to engage with new positionalities and perspectives in the field of music studies. They are novel

contributions ranging from brief essays including deeply personal insights on the special issue's theme, practical educational resource guides, interviews exploring the special issue's topic through the relating of individual experiences, and reflections and dialogues with culture bearers and knowledge holders. As guest editors, we have enjoyed working closely with the authors of the "Voices" section to prepare their contributions for publication, and value the ways in which this new format has facilitated the involvement of new scholars and their insights and experiences in discourse around anti-racist pedagogies in ethnomusicology. The authors of the "Voices" pieces have noted our collaborative process was supportive; it also led to additional publications and presentation opportunities beyond the current initiative. We hope that you feel as encouraged and excited by the articles and the "Voices" pieces as we have been at each step in the development of this project, from engaging with our colleagues in informal conversations and online sessions to inviting submissions for the special issue and working with the authors to bring this issue to fruition. We invite you to continue to work with all of us to vitalize your classrooms as communities and spaces that nurture mutually supportive and caring relationships — spaces that inspire activism, advocacy, and allyship; increase equity, diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility; and facilitate meaningful reconciliation and decolonization of our campuses and the broader communities in which we live and work.

This issue of *MUSICultures* brings together a variety of perspectives and case studies on the theme of anti-racist pedagogies in ethnomusicology. As guest editors, we encouraged contributions that engaged with anti-racist course design and other projects that sought to identify, understand, and integrate scholarship, issues, and experiences of Indigenous, Black, racialized, minoritized, and marginalized communities, as well as submissions that address broader themes related to anti-racism and decolonization in our field. We also encouraged authors to consider diverse formats, such as edited interviews, other forms of dialogues, and position papers, as well as traditional scholarly articles.

In "‘Music of Sound’: Using Existing Sonic Environments to Develop Inclusive, Experiential, and Collaborative Pedagogy in Malaysia," Tan Sooi Beng and Toh Lai Chee introduce and evaluate a community-based arts practice in which they have been involved for decades. Their practice engages young people and audiences from diverse ethno-religious backgrounds in the living heritage of the multicultural city and UNESCO World Heritage Site, George Town, Malaysia. The authors demonstrate how a socially engaged arts methodology that was developed through the project celebrates diverse musical knowledges and learning pathways, as well as encourages inclusive and anti-racist collaborations.

Jing Xia, too, examines the pedagogical possibilities of intercultural music-making. She explores a case study of a virtual university-community collaboration that took place in the context of an undergraduate music composition course. Through autoethnography and analysis of the multifaceted interactions between students in Newfoundland and Labrador and members of the Toronto-based East-West fusion chamber group PhoeNX Ensemble, Xia's study provides a compelling example of the nuances, complexities, and opportunities of intercultural exchange, collaboration, and communication.

Continuing in the realm of university music teaching, Margaret E. Walker suggests several "acts of anti-racist pedagogy" — ideas for how university instructors tasked with teaching music history may begin to dismantle the unmarked white superiority that is embedded in most Western post-secondary music programs. Walker posits that by "ethnicizing" European and Euro-American elite music, acknowledging the origins of Western music history and its methods, and expanding our disciplinary barriers we may address and disrupt ideas of European universality and exceptionalism.

Drawing on similar theoretical concepts as Walker, in "Stratégies pour une pédagogie alternative de l'histoire de la musique : Trois études de cas autour de rencontres interculturelles," Sandria P. Bouliane and D. Linda Pearce focus on the practical application of three case studies that aim to provide an alternative and more inclusive theoretical framework and pedagogical approach for teaching Western classical music history in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Their approach centres narratives of cultural exchange and musical intersections and emphasizes the plurality of identities and religious affiliations.

Finally, in "Schools of Music as Social Institutions in Service to Society," Timothy Rice reflects on the colonial legacy of music programs in North America from the 1960s onward and traces Rice's experiences at academic institutions in Canada and the United States. Examining the content and philosophical underpinnings of various course syllabi, Rice's self-reflection challenges readers to imagine their own solutions to curricular reform and to addressing racist aspects of classical music and its history.

The contributions to the "Voices" section of this special issue cover a wide range of perspectives, topics, case studies, and resources related to anti-racist music education and their own experiences as artists and scholars. In "On Drumming and (Online) Facilitation," Daniel Akira Stadnicki reflects critically on the drum circle industry and his own experience as a community drumming facilitator, as well as his role in creating digital learning resources to accompany online workshops facilitated by Mali-based musician, *griot*, and artist-researcher Lassana Diabaté. Stadnicki considers some of the lessons learned about the politics of facilitation and anti-racist strategies gleaned through experience

in both academic and community settings and provides a practical teaching resource for music facilitation.

Historian and poet Afua Cooper and music education scholar Jodi Stark also explore the possibilities and challenges of anti-racism in academe in their curated, thought-provoking conversation transcript “‘What Shall She Bring Forth from Her Travail?’ A Conversation About Anti-Racist Pedagogy.” Through an examination of Cooper’s multifaceted work, their dialogue explores what anti-racism might look like in music studies and the humanities and social sciences, more broadly.

In “A New (Old) Approach to Learning Western Art Music,” Brian Jude de Lima picks up the thread of jazz pedagogy in Cooper and Stark’s piece, advocating for a recentring of oral/aural learning and improvisatory practices in post-secondary Western classical and jazz music programs, as well as teaching jazz as a social practice. Doing so, de Lima suggests, may help to attract and retain more diverse students in our university programs and foreground more diverse methodologies and modalities for learning music.

Anishinaabe musician, composer, and scholar Melody McKiver contributes an edited transcript of their conversation with Alberta-based Cree multidisciplinary artist Jessica McMann titled “Surviving Racist Music Pedagogies,” in which they describe their experiences of anti-Indigenous racism in the Canadian post-secondary music system and challenges facing Indigenous classical music professionals working in Canada.

Chanel Rolle’s paper, “Reimagining the Canon: A Case Study of Decolonizing Music Practices,” describes a student-led project she founded that focused on BIPOC educational programming in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Designed to supplement the province’s high school curriculum, the project sought to address issues of intentional representation and inclusion, as well as challenges that educators face in accessing resources.

In “Transatlantic Connections in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Anti-Racist Pedagogies, Community Engagement, and Professional Development in a Canada-Mali Collaboration,” doctoral student Eric Taylor Gomes Escudero describes his experience working as a graduate research assistant on a research-creation project. He advocates for the inclusion of early career scholars in praxis- and community-based projects, both for the professional learning opportunities they offer and for what these scholars themselves can bring to the table.

This special issue of *MUSiCultures* has benefited from the generosity, creativity, care, hard work, and assistance of a team of people. We would like to thank editor Gordon E. Smith for allowing us the space and time to do this work in a way that we feel honours the contributors and their stories, and for his encouragement and understanding along the way. Again, we thank

the presenters and contributors of the anti-racists pedagogies workshops that inspired this publication and its contents. Their deep and critical engagement with anti-racism and pedagogy, and their sharing of experiences and ideas fostered rich discussions and have helped many of us to make meaningful changes in our courses and on our campuses. Last but certainly not least, our very warmest thanks to all of the contributors for sharing their knowledge and experiences with us. We could not ask for more. 🍁

## Notes

1. The sessions were recorded and can be viewed online on The Centre for Sound Communities YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVgxz4a5n4ZZjwmGWowf69pZN5mwj7pxg>.

Authors involved in the *Dialogues: Towards Decolonizing Music and Dance Studies* digital publication (<https://ictmdialogues.org/>) reported similar experiences; see the introduction, under “Reflections and Moving Forward” (Tan and Ostashewski 2022).

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