

Music and change in Nain, Nunatsiavut: More White does not always mean less Inuit

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Article abstract

This paper focuses on Inuitized Western music in Nain, Labrador, as part of a broader look at Inuit responses to change. Drawing on interviews and sustained ethnographic research, I show how a relaxing of strict socio-musical categories coincided with a decline in Moravian missionary influence in the second half of the 20th century. A notable indifference to musical difference is, I suggest, consistent with an Inuit equanimity toward environmental forces of change that cannot be helped (*ajunamat*). I then give reasons why discursive imbalances are a continued concern and show how the effects of sustained colonial and missionary activity (hybridities, mixtures, overlaps, co-presences) do not always produce the emotional and psychic dissonances sometimes associated with postcolonial ambivalence. Ultimately, I propose thinking of Inuitized Western musical forms as visible protrusions of a much deeper substrate of affective continuities and that such inherited ways of being in the world can remain constant even while specific cultural forms may change.

Music and change in Nain, Nunatsiavut: More White does not always mean less Inuit

Tom Artiss*

Résumé: Musique et changement culturel à Nain, Nunatsiavut: plus blanc ne veut pas toujours dire moins inuit

Cet article porte sur les réinterprétations inuit de la musique occidentale à Nain, au Labrador, dans le cadre d'une étude des réactions des Inuit au changement. En me basant sur des entrevues et une recherche ethnographique approfondie, je démontre que le relâchement de la rigidité des catégories socio-musicales a coïncidé avec le déclin de l'influence missionnaire morave au cours de la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle. Je suggère que l'indifférence à la différence musicale traduit l'équanimité des Inuit devant les forces environnementales d'un changement «que l'on ne peut empêcher» (*ajunamat*). J'expose ensuite les raisons pour lesquelles le déséquilibre discursif reste une préoccupation constante et je démontre que les effets d'une activité coloniale et missionnaire soutenue (métissages, mélanges, chevauchements, coprésences) ne produisent pas toujours les discordances émotionnelles et psychiques que l'on associe parfois à l'ambivalence postcoloniale. En fin de compte, je suggère que les formes musicales occidentales réinterprétées par les Inuit peuvent être comprises comme les manifestations visibles d'un substrat bien plus profond de pérennités affectives, et que ces façons héritées d'être au monde peuvent se perpétuer même lorsque certaines formes culturelles spécifiques se modifient.

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This paper focuses on Inuitized Western music in Nain, Labrador, as part of a broader look at Inuit responses to change. Drawing on interviews and sustained ethnographic research, I show how a relaxing of strict socio-musical categories coincided with a decline in Moravian missionary influence in the second half of the 20th century. A notable indifference to musical difference is, I suggest, consistent with an Inuit equanimity toward environmental forces of change that “cannot be helped” (*ajunamat*). I then give reasons why discursive imbalances are a continued concern and show how the effects of sustained colonial and missionary activity (hybridities, mixtures, overlaps, co-presences) do not always produce the emotional and psychic dissonances sometimes associated with postcolonial ambivalence. Ultimately, I propose thinking of Inuitized Western musical forms as visible protrusions of a much deeper substrate of affective continuities and that such inherited ways of being in the world can remain constant even while specific cultural forms may change.

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Introduction

In the Inuit community of Nain, Nunatsiavut,¹ Inuitized Western music *is* Inuit music. Traditional Inuit drumming, dancing, and throat singing—dormant for almost two centuries following the arrival of Moravian missionaries in the late 18th century—have been revitalized in the last few decades. While these pre-contact practices play an important role in an ongoing negotiation and galvanization of Inuit identity, especially as it pertains to sovereignty politics, they tend to be regarded locally as symbolic relics of a bygone era.² Instead, most Inuit in Nain today identify with Moravian hymns and locally composed folk/country songs sung in Inuktitut, Newfoundland fiddle/accordion music, and contemporary popular music (country, rock, pop, and rap).

One way to interpret the prominence of Inuitized Western music in Nain is to emphasize cultural erosion where, over time, “traditional” practices and lifeways have been replaced by “modern” ones.³ That Moravian missionaries filled the musical void they created—promoting their own sacred music while prohibiting Inuit drumming, dancing, and throat singing—might appear to bear this out (Hawkes 1970[1916]; Hiller 1967). A cursory appraisal of post-contact musical practices might also point to significant cultural erosion based on the borrowed aspects of the music itself (e.g., tonal and formal sonic structures). However, in addition to acknowledging the corrosive effects of colonization and missionary influence, it is important to consider ways in which Inuit ideas about their own culture and identity do not always square with exogenous analyses that emphasize loss. Few Inuit lament the displacement of the harpoon by the rifle, the kayak by the speedboat, or the dogsled by the snowmobile. Inuit have ingeniously incorporated and adapted new technologies to suit their particular needs for centuries (Kaplan 1985, 2012). Any technology that makes the job of hunting a seal easier is likely to be embraced with enthusiasm. Such pragmatism is recounted in an early Moravian document that describes some of the challenges that missionaries encountered in their efforts to convert Inuit to Christianity in Labrador. Shortly after settling in Nain in 1771, missionary Jens Haven wrote that, “they [Inuit] often ask whether Jesus, as more powerful than Torngat [an Inuit spirit], can procure more food than he” (Hiller 1967: 173). All this is not to diminish the destructive impact of colonial and missionary activity in Labrador and elsewhere. Rather, the transformational force of such hegemonies is precisely what makes the ease with which

¹ Nunatsiavut, an Inuit region in Labrador, was granted semi-autonomous political status in 2005 after more than 30 years of land claims negotiations with provincial and federal governments.

² In over 30 interviews I did for my Ph.D. research, when asked to give examples of “Inuit music,” not a single respondent mentioned Inuit drumming or throat singing first. When the Nunatsiavut government selected members of the local drumming and dancing group to represent the region with a performance at the opening ceremonies of the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010, some older Inuit thought the Nain (Moravian) Choir should have been sent instead.

³ An example of what I am referring to as cultural erosion discourse appears in an article about the Inughuit of Northwest Greenland by linguistic anthropologist Stephen Pax Leonard (2010): “The loss of their rich oral heritage seems particularly sudden and jarring, given that it has been replaced in part by a diet of violent, expletive-packed American films and apparently addictive bingo. For the most part, the Inughuit no longer sit around reciting stories and myths to one another, but are instead glued to Danish television.”

Labrador Inuit have adopted and adapted new technologies and cultural forms so remarkable.

This paper, then, considers Inuit responses to change in the context of music. Extending scholarship that recognizes Inuitized Western music in Labrador as uniquely Inuit (Gordon 2007; Lutz 1982) and drawing on the recollections of a local Inuit radio producer and Moravian lay minister, I show how pronounced socio-musical categories were imagined, erected, and maintained primarily through missionary regulation and control. Conversely, reduction of Moravian influence beginning in the second half of the 20th century coincided with relaxation of these marked categories of distinction, revealing a notable indifference to musical difference. This leads into a discussion that examines, first, why discursive imbalances are a continued concern and, second, why the effects of sustained colonial and missionary activity (hybridities, mixtures, overlaps, co-presences) do not always produce the emotional and psychic dissonances often associated with postcolonial ambivalence (Bhabha 2007). Such a notable (though not comprehensive) equanimity in response to change, I suggest, is captured by the Inuktitut word *ajunamat* ('it cannot be helped'). Ultimately, I propose thinking of Inuitized Western musical forms as visible protrusions of a much deeper substrate of affective continuities and that such inherited ways of being, feeling, and experiencing can remain constant even while cultural forms themselves may change.

Inuitized Western music in Nain and beyond

The prevalence of Euro-American music in Northern Labrador was first examined ethnographically by Maija Lutz (1982) in her catalogue of Labrador Inuit musical practices. Lutz notes that, while she initially travelled to Labrador to document authentic pre-contact Inuit music, during her stay she discovered a “vibrant musical culture of borrowed ideas and practices.” Attributing a dearth of scholarship on the musical practices of the Labrador Inuit to a blind spot among ethnographers, she writes:

The prevailing idea has been that the prohibition by the Moravian missionaries of any activity which could be construed as related to the “heathen” beliefs of the Inuit has entirely eliminated any vestiges of traditional Inuit musical practice and that music which has been introduced to the Inuit by the whites is not worthy of much consideration (Lutz 1982: 1).

Breaking with disciplinary conventions of her time, Lutz recognized the significance of the Inuitized Western music:

The Inuit of Labrador have adopted European musical practices [that] have become almost “symbols” of the Labrador Inuit [...]. Since music plays a very vital role in the Inuit communities of Labrador today, one cannot speak about these communities without acknowledging that borrowed musical ideas have become an integral part of Inuit culture (Lutz 1982: 1).

While Lutz does not discount pre-contact musical practices, she is concerned that privileging them neglects locally recognized connections between “borrowed” music

and Inuit cultural identity. Moreover, she points out, “Disregarding all music which has been borrowed leaves the Labrador Inuit with virtually no music at all” (ibid.).

Such concerns are not new. Inuit scholarship of the second half of the 20th century has fallen into two general categories: acculturationist and adaptationist (Wenzel 2001). Acculturationists regard the material impact of Euro-American society in northern Canada as having a corrosive effect on traditional Inuit lifeways (Honigmann and Honigmann 1970; Hughes 1965; Vallee 1967; Willmott 1961). In such interpretations, the addition of Euro-American culture corresponds to an equivalent subtraction of Inuit culture. More recently, adaptationists consider the incorporation of Euro-American imports (e.g., skidoos, rifles, CB radios, compasses) to be historically consistent with an Inuit willingness to embrace new technologies and ideas (Brice-Bennett 1977; Brody 1987; Kemp 1971; Smith 1991; Wenzel 2001). The Inuit, they argue, are not in imminent danger of being passively subsumed by a dominant social, economic, political, and cultural world order encroaching from the South. Rather, they are active agents in the appropriation of new technologies that do not detract from but *contribute to* traditional lifeways.

Returning to music, prior to Lutz, scant and brief references to music in Labrador tend to regard the prevalence of Western music and a corresponding scarcity of pre-contact music as consequences of historical forces working *on* the Inuit, not precipitated *by* them. Inuit-Moravian brass bands and hymn choirs, for example, were considered to be rewards for missionary patience and persistence (Davey 1905; Hawkes 1970[1916]; Peacock 1977). The Haydn-like compositional style of Moravian music was all part of a larger evangelical effort to civilize and Christianize the “heathen” Inuit, whose drumming, dancing, and throat singing were equated with devil worship (Sophie Angnatok, pers. comm. 2009; Hiller 1967; Peacock 1977).

A more recent consideration of musical Inuitization in Labrador is Tom Gordon’s (2007) musicological analysis of hand-copied Moravian musical scores and sheet music, *Found in Translation: The Inuit Voice in Moravian Music*. Through a painstaking examination of almost 10,000 surviving Moravian music manuscripts, Gordon traces a “copy-chain” (ibid.: 288) of Moravian hymns, sung liturgies, and elaborate anthems from their origins in Saxony, where the Moravian Church was based. Specifically, he identifies a notable “drift of re-composition” (ibid.: 300) at various copying stages of a particular Moravian anthem, *NâlegaK Jêsuse piulijivut*. The musical score is derived from Johann Gotlieb Naumann’s 1780 opera seria, *Cora und Alonzo*, repurposed a year later for the Moravian Church, with the current sacred text replacing the original libretto (ibid.: 290). Over time, changes to ornamentation, tempo, rhythm, and tonal register in the hand-copied part sets, he argues, reflect ways in which the “Labrador Inuit seemed able to transpose their own musical preferences onto the repertoire that the Moravians brought to them” (ibid.: 307). Ultimately, rejecting the idea that consistent aesthetic preferences for such things as a “homogeneous sonority over dramatic effect” (ibid.) reflects the technical limitations of the performers, Gordon (2007: 312) adduces “a found voice of the Inuit, a music that has assumed the identity of the voice which intones it.”

Beyond Labrador's borders but still within the scope of music and modernization, others are foregrounding similar dynamics. Discussing musical Inuitization in Greenland, Brian Johansen (2001: 186-187) argues that the creative opportunities afforded by addition of new musical forms can contribute to, and even improve Inuit quality of life. Similarly, musicologist and historian Jessica Perea (2012: 35) has brought attention to the relevance and importance of non-traditional music among Inuit in Alaska, identifying "a pro-modern performance aesthetic" that helps realize "the diversity of contemporary Alaska Native musical life and the fluidity of contemporary Native identity formation." That Perea is echoing concerns familiar to Lutz almost three decades earlier—namely, a tendency in universities to favour "traditional" musical forms over borrowed or hybridized ones—is a reminder that such prioritizations persist. Perea's study, it should be mentioned, is part of a larger body of scholarship about "Indigenous modernities" that shares a common interest in "reclamation, recontextualization, and expansions of 'traditional' concepts to include new [Indigenous] realms of experience" (Diamond et al. 2012: 2).

Sarah Ittulak's last kitchen party: A typical informal musical gathering

In line with adaptationist interpretations of culture contact, such as those just mentioned, I will now share material from my fieldwork, first, to illustrate the extent to which Western music is invested with Inuitness and, second, to establish a historical pattern of musical tastes and practices that tends toward inclusivity and variety more than differentiation and discrimination. Local indifference to musical difference, I will argue, reflects deeply rooted Inuit attitudes toward change characterized by equanimity.

The following extract from my field notes describes a typical informal musical gathering in Nain, where songs with both religious and non-religious lyrical content converge.

December 27th, 2010: I received a telephone call at 8 p.m. last night from Margaret Metcalfe. Her mother, Sarah Ittulak (81), was inviting me to her house [...] [I had met Sarah briefly a few days earlier, on Christmas morning. Others present were Margaret (her daughter), Lucas (her husband), and Jupi (Lucas's brother, visiting from George River). Over the course of the evening, half a dozen others dropped in. Sarah had been an active member of the Nain Choir, and as a Merkuratsuk by birth she also had strong ties to the land.] Sarah was sitting in a wheelchair at the kitchen table, occasionally sipping from a can of beer that she kept in a pouch hanging from her armrest. When she saw my guitar, her face lit up. I asked if she would like to sing something but she wanted me to go first. I sang *Labradorimiut* in Inuktitut. Everyone joined in for the choruses, singing with enthusiasm. Lucas disappeared for a moment, returning with his guitar in time to add another layer, creating a musical build that could not have been crafted more effectively in a recording studio. That his guitar was slightly out of tune with mine did not detract from the affective crescendo, in fact it seemed to intensify it. The last few chords gave way to whooping and clapping. Sarah was grateful that I sang the words in her language. I then accompanied Margaret for a few songs from her own repertoire, and her mother was moved to tears.

After a short break in the music spent getting to know each other—which mostly involved establishing mutual people connections—Sarah started to sing, accompanied again by Lucas on guitar. Song after song, Sarah led and Lucas followed, with hardly enough time in-between for me to jot down titles and lyrical content. Margaret did her best to translate histories and meanings on the fly but Sarah was on a roll. Their performance generated a gamut of reactions from a rapt audience: tears, laughter, hand-clapping, foot-stomping, and solemnity. One song elicited a particularly heartfelt response and Sarah paused long enough to answer a few of my questions, with Margaret translating words I didn't know. The lyrics nostalgically recalled “them days,” spent out on the land in the areas surrounding Hebron. After one comment I didn't understand, Margaret translated: “Mom says in them days, out on the land, we lived proper. Here [in Nain] we live to die [...]” (Atriss 2010).⁴

Margaret Metcalfe explained later that we had been listening to a variety of Moravian hymns and folk ballads, several written by Sarah Ittulak herself. As I would learn, Sarah Ittulak's kitchen party typified unregulated musical settings in Nain where all types of music are welcome. But it has not always been the case that musical styles and genres move freely from one context to another. By several accounts, sacred and secular songs would not have alternated 50 years ago, as they did at Sarah Ittulak's kitchen party, without a significant degree of ambivalence, apparently absent here and at dozens of other musical gatherings I attended, with one notable exception. To this day, Inuk hunter and musician Eli Merkuratsuk does not permit Moravian hymns to be sung at his kitchen parties. The contrast is noteworthy, given Ittulak's longtime involvement with the Church compared with Merkuratsuk's sporadic attendance. While there may be much more going on, for the purposes here, Merkuratsuk's restriction is a temporal anomaly, a holdover from a time when missionary socio-musical regulation had more purchase. As I will show, pronounced categories of musical practice were largely determined by a combination of geographical and ideological factors. Only with the passage of time and a decline in Moravian influence have secular/religious and Inuit/non-Inuit distinctions merged—socially, ethnically, ideologically, and musically.

Music, people, and place

Labradorimiut, the song I played at Ittulak's kitchen party, was written and recorded in the early 1980s by Sid Dicker in a country music style, accompanying himself on acoustic guitar. The lyrics, sung in Inuktitut, evoke Inuit hunting traditions and lifeways. Dicker, a Kallunangajuk (i.e. a settler), wrote the lyrics in English and translated them into Inuktitut with the help of his Inuk wife, Mary. Although he was a fluent speaker, English was his first language. Like many Kallunangajuit, Dicker had grown up listening to the secular fiddle and accordion music introduced by sailors and seasonal fishermen in the 19th century, as well as the folk/country songs later available via radio broadcasts and vinyl records from the South. The song owes its tonality to music-making traditions that flourished in the outlying areas surrounding Nain, away

⁴ Her words, it turned out, were prophetic. Shortly after we left that night, Sarah fell and hit her head on a wall-mounted fire extinguisher. She passed away early the next morning, and most of her music (with the exception of four songs I found in storage at the radio station) went to the grave with her.

from the gaze of the missionaries.⁵ A typical musical gathering, usually held on a Sunday afternoon, consisted of a mixture of Newfoundland fiddle/accordion tunes and Moravian hymns, adapted for guitar accompaniment in ways that invite comparison to gospel songs by American country music artists, such as Hank Williams and Johnny Cash. Fiddle and accordion step-dance music was mostly performed by men. Inuit gospel songs were usually sung by women and accompanied by men. It should be noted that, by and large, such gendering continues today.

The post-Second-World-War period was notable, being a time when secular and sacred music converged in the musical repertoires of the small island communities surrounding Nain. Previously, Inuit musical performance and practice in Labrador tended to be either sacred or secular, a division determined largely by a combination of geography and ideology. Moravian music was played in Moravian settlements, such as Nain and Hopedale, and secular music flourished on the surrounding islands. In the communities, musical performance and practice were contingent on church-related activities. Because musical church instruments, such as strings and organs, were confined to church services, so too was the playing of them. Brass instruments (trumpets, trombones, tubas) were not generally played at church—although they were also kept there—but were used for church-related events (e.g., the early morning roving performance that went through the town on Easter Sunday) or ceremonial occasions (e.g., welcoming of visiting dignitaries).

Today, Moravian hymns are most frequently performed at church or at church-related events, and when they are played in an informal context, like Sarah's kitchen party, they are divested of Moravian Church ritual. This is reflected in the contrasting performance styles in religious and non-religious settings. Hymn singing at church is led by the organist, in four parts, and follows formal syllabic metering and cadence structures, usually with pauses at the end of each line and stanza. However, many Inuit would spend significant portions of the year in hunting camps, away from the Moravian settlements, where diverse practices and genres commonly converged. In such settings, hymns were sung informally, *a capella*, and mostly by women to their children and grandchildren. When the same hymns are performed by singers informally, in their homes, this performance model is absent; to a listener who is not familiar with Inuktitut or the particular melody, a hymn is indistinguishable from a folk/country song.

There is a noteworthy contrast between institutional and informal performances of Moravian hymns in different contexts. It remains unclear whether or not the Moravians discouraged hymn singing in camps. However, that such music was occasionally divorced from its evangelical purpose may have been a cause for concern among the missionaries. As I will show, the missionaries placed great importance on connections between music and its context. At the very least, hymn singing in non-religious contexts prefigured enthusiastic adoption and adaptation of secular music by Inuit,

⁵ Musical life on the islands was described to me in interviews with Sam Dicker (in his early 60s) and Hayward Ford (in his 70s), who both grew up on Black Island.

especially in the second half of the 20th century, due in large part to increased access to radio broadcasting and mail-order sound recordings.

Just as the Moravians deemed musical practices rooted in shamanism incompatible with their evangelical efforts, they also frowned on secular Western music. To them, fiddles and accordions were associated with dancing, drinking, and womanizing. Attitudes surviving from times when missionaries actively promoted the sacred/secular distinction are still occasionally evident. In one of several interviews, Gordon Obed (in his early 60s at the time and announcer/producer at OkâlaKatiget, the local radio station) discussed the importance of upholding such distinctions, based on a concern—inherited from missionaries and some Inuit Church elders—that the religious significance of traditional hymns and anthems was gradually losing purchase. In one interview, Obed, now a lay minister in the Church, described how in the mid-1980s he was reprimanded by Church elders for including in his radio program hymns intended for very specific religious occasions. At the time, he said, he did not know better. To give a sense of how Moravian music is still distinguished from other music associated with pleasure and enjoyment, it is worth quoting Obed at length:

One time, with the OK [OKâlaKatiget] Society in the old building, it was my dad's birthday, and I played *tatiKattuk* [a Moravian hymn] for his birthday. I got told off bad by Uncle Jerry Sillett and David Harris [Inuit Moravian Church elders]. This is not anyday music, it's for married couples' festival day. I s'pose from there, I started keeping my ears open for that sort of thing. I figured that church music, or hymns, is not, to me, any time you want to play them [...] you don't just turn them on, you gotta be careful. That's how I always seen it. Like I said earlier, Tom, anyone in their right mind not gonna play *Silent Night* just cause they wanna hear it. I got touched pretty much that time, I got really caught. I thought gee, that's right, I shoulda probably asked first. Obviously I tried to get resentful and prove my point but I told myself later that, "Oh they're right then, that's the way it should be" [...].

One hymn that is played regularly now is *Aggagatiuluit*. That was played mostly or only at the Widows' Day 5 p.m. closing service as the last hymn by the choir. And I remember hearing that Tom Starr called the radio station and said, "This is not a hymn you play any time. This is the Widows' Day hymn [...]." David [Harris] also mentioned this to me. But, I s'pose, people didn't listen and they kept playing it and playing it, and people gave up on it. And now it's a regular. Another one is *Gudip Jesume*, that's for Young Women's Day at the 5 o'clock closing service, the last hymn by the choir. That's being played regularly too [...].

I find that some people up there [radio producers], people like Joanna ask me [...] "People are asking for this hymn or that hymn, should we play it?" I say, "I dunno Joanna, I s'pose we should ask David." But hymns like that, they went through that process and somewhere it got out of hand. But ahh, they're good to listen to. But the time they are s'posed to be played, s'posed to be listened to, and what reason [...] is not there anymore [...]. they're almost like regular hymns now (Gordon Obed, pers. comm. 2010).

Obed's inherited sense of responsibility reveals powerfully perceived connections between music and its context. As he says, hymns were often assigned to specific church occasions, and their associations were deemed significant enough to warrant careful monitoring and regulation by elders. But these strict associations between

hymns and their contexts do not appear to be born out of a concern that Moravian music is in danger of being displaced by secular music. The hymns themselves remain very popular and are frequently requested at the radio station. However, the Widows' Day ceremony for which *Aggagatiuluit* is a signature—along with most of the other Church ceremonies that make up the calendar year—is no longer relevant community-wide in the way it once was. Once an accessory to Moravian evangelism, music is now the Church's most vivid legacy. It is perhaps an added twist that this lasting musical legacy, as a life-support system for the expiring Moravian Church, is made possible not in spite of the expanded contexts with which a given hymn is now associated but because of them. A hymn like *Aggagatiuluit* is relevant because its performance is *not* restricted to Widows' Day.

In this case, there is virtually no perceptible anxiety over the preservation of specific musical forms, as stand-alone cultural artifacts. Rather, the fault-line is conceived in terms of ideologies and lifestyles: religious versus secular. Efforts to keep certain hymns protected from everyday non-religious experiences indicate much deeper Moravian concerns about the corrupting potential of secular influence. In its strongest form, exhibited in the missionary ethos, anxiety is rooted in a logic of displacement: more secular equals less religious. The religious-based attitudes and imperatives are carried over from a time when missionaries did their best to monitor and control the activities of their Inuit flock—evident in an expectation that hymns be performed in their religious contexts. There was, however, a gradual breakdown of formal barriers separating secular from sacred practices around the mid-20th century. By the time Moravian minister Rev. F.W. Peacock left Nain in 1968, such a relaxation was already established—perhaps because he appears to have been less authoritarian than his predecessors. His leadership responsibilities were taken over by Inuit Church elders—such as Martin Martin and Jerry Sillett—who were less inclined to regulate and enforce the ethos they inherited from the missionaries.

Obed experienced this transition firsthand as a child and young man growing up in a family with strong ties to the Moravian Church. He remembers missionary concerns about Inuit/settler relations and also ways in which Inuit elders responded to the leadership responsibilities they inherited from outgoing Moravian ministers.⁶ For the Moravians, music was identified as an evangelical battleground on two related fronts: ideology and context. On the first front, they combatted shamanistic drumming, and later Newfoundland fiddle/accordion dance music, with Christian hymns and anthems. On the second, they identified a need to control music and context based on two further concerns: associations between secular music and immoral behaviour in camp settings, and concerns that religious music should be played only in religious contexts. It was not enough to rely on the inherent spiritual purity of hymns. Divorced from their religious context, they risked being indiscriminately absorbed into a general Inuit musical repertoire, for amusement and pleasure. In contrast, while Inuit Church leaders such as Martin Martin and Jerry Sillett remained faithful to the religious ethos

⁶ A transcription of part of my interview with Obed where he described this transition appears in my Ph.D. dissertation (Artiss 2014: 53-55).

underpinning the missionaries' strict regulation of socio-musical contexts, they refrained from enforcing moral codes of conduct in a heavy-handed way, choosing instead to advise caution. This historical relaxation of social and moral strictures also happens to coincide with a loosening of socio-musical categories, evident today at informal musical gatherings like Ittulak's.

In sum, Moravian missionaries identified correlations between music and lifestyle, which they tried to regulate. In the same way that they initially prohibited drumming and throat singing in their settlements, they later discouraged secular music. This regulation resulted in pronounced social divisions, articulated musically. Under the gaze of the missionaries, sacred music was predominant in the communities, while out on the surrounding islands (mostly fishing and sealing camps), beyond their gaze, a vibrant tradition of Newfoundland, Scottish, and American folk music thrived. As the missionaries' influence over local Inuit began to wane in the second half of the 20th century, so too did these distinct geographically and ideologically delineated categories of musical practice. As such, a genealogy of musical tastes and practices in Nain reveals how, without the Moravians to enforce musically mediated social categories, local Inuit gravitated toward socio-musical non-distinction. When considered in tandem with the ways in which Labrador Inuit enthusiastically embraced and internalized Moravian music in the 19th century, making it their own as it were, it suggests that their musical appreciation transcends particular forms and traditions.

Indifference to musical difference

The above-mentioned examples convey how music, without regulation, spans social contexts and categories, rather than adhering to or reinforcing categorical distinctions. Moravian socio-musical categories occasionally linger on in the attitudes of some older Inuit (e.g., Obed's gentle remonstrance of his co-announcers at the radio station and Merkuratsuk's no-hymn kitchen party rule) but, for the most part, musical styles and genres, given the opportunity, move freely and intermingle in a variety of musical contexts. A typical kitchen party is one example that reflects a certain indifference to specific musical styles, traditions, sounds, and genres. Others include the local radio station, the local bar, school concerts, the biennial music festival, Katilautta, and even the church. While hymns are sung at the bar even less frequently than secular songs are sung at church—funeral services often include a popular song associated with the deceased person—neither occurrence generates angst in the way it would have 50 years ago.

Similarly, a cursory appraisal of music programming at the local radio station might give the impression that genre distinctions are more important than they are. Weekly programs such as "Teen Rockers" on Thursdays and "Country Music Hour" on Fridays are, in practice, very loose guidelines for radio hosts, who often include requested songs that fall outside the musical category of the particular show. Such indifference to musical difference is most evident during Christmastime and the Easter

season, when the station is inundated with dozens of song requests daily, and no effort is made to be consistent with the shows' musical themes.

Musical tastes show some predictable generational differences. People who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, are inclined to request something by Creedence Clearwater Revival or Kris Kristofferson rather than a ubiquitous pop song, such as *I Gotta a Feeling* by The Black Eyed Peas (a top-40 hit during my time there). But even here, taste preferences based on age are not nearly as pronounced as one might expect. By and large, community-wide musical preferences rarely correspond to social formations in ways that might be observed in larger urban settings, such as those described by Straw (1991) in the Montreal dance music scene of the 1990s and Bourdieu's (1984) meticulous correlations between cultural taste and class. While examples of socio-musical distinction can be singled out if locating exceptions is the aim, kitchen parties and radio programming are more indicative of general preferences and dispositions, as are school concerts and music festivals (like Katilautta), where musical variety is promoted and where one can expect to hear pop songs in English, folk/country songs in Inuktitut, Moravian hymns, Inuit drumming and dancing, and Inuit throat singing.

In terms of general responses to musical categories and, specifically, changes in prevalence from one category to the next over time, the inclusion of "new" music—whether at kitchen parties, on radio programs, at music festivals, or at school concerts—is not thought of as having a negative impact on musical practices that have been around much longer. Just as local Inuit smilingly shrug off "Kallunak" (White) nostalgia for harpoons and igloos, they pay little attention to the idea that a performance of *Labradorimiut* in the hotel bar, for instance, might somehow be connected to a decline in significance of Moravian hymnody. Things change. People change. Music changes. *Ajunamat* ('it cannot be helped').⁷

Discussion

In part, my comments so far about Inuit responses to change can be thought of as a continuation of and contribution to adaptationist scholarship that recasts Inuit as active agents in their own transformation processes. Building on Lutz's (1982) observations about the importance of musical functions over and above particular forms, the Labrador Inuit's indifference to musical difference further emphasizes the creative and productive capacities among Inuit not only to cope with forces of change, but also to divert and convert flows of power in ways that work for them, not just against them. In many ways, this emphasis—focusing on examples of adaptation that highlight Inuit creativity and ingenuity—is a discursive choice. Indeed, it could be argued that the main difference between acculturationist and adaptationist interpretations lies in a

⁷ Oblate missionary Raymond de Cocola—who lived with the Inuinait of the Canadian Central Arctic from 1937 to 1949—translated the related term *ayorama* (very likely *ayurnarman*, see Lowe 1983: 9) as 'that's the way it is' (de Cocola and King 2007[1955]).

discursive displacement or semantic shift *from* the idea of responsibility (of the colonizer) *to* the idea of agency (of the colonized).⁸ One could take the critique further and argue that adaptationist analyses overlook the destructive effects of one-way colonial—and in this particular case also evangelical—hegemony. But as postcolonial critics such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak have demonstrated, meaning, representation, and discourse have played important roles in establishing and maintaining colonial power asymmetries (Said 1978, 1993; Spivak 1988; Spivak and Harasym 1990).

In case it appears that time and personal politics distance us from colonial responsibility, I will briefly review past discourse about Indigenous peoples to demonstrate how our own commentaries still risk perpetuating discursive hegemony. For many years leading up to and following the Trudeau Government’s policy of assimilation laid out in the White Paper tabled in Parliament in 1969, the political message to and about Aboriginal peoples was that they were not White enough (Government of Canada 1969). It was thought that the “Indian Problem”⁹ could be solved by removing Aboriginal children from their homes and communities and placing them in residential schools, where they would receive a standardized education equipping them with tools to participate in mainstream Canadian society (Milloy 1999). This was the dominant discourse of the 1960s and 1970s. But the White Paper was offensive to Aboriginal peoples, and instead of supplying administrators with a blueprint for assimilation, it quickly galvanized nationwide opposition among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. It was summarily scrapped, and cultural homogeneity was eventually rejected in favour of heterogeneity.

Years of Aboriginal activism and negotiations stressing ethnic diversity, distinctiveness, and autonomy have since led to Aboriginal land claims settlements and to semi-autonomous ethno-political regions, including that of the Labrador Inuit, Nunatsiavut. But the pendulum now occasionally swings the other way, as Aboriginal peoples face a new lamentation from cultural commentators. Concerns about cultural erosion expressed in academic journals, print media, and TV documentaries often implicitly frame the discourse in terms of inadequacies: the Inuit of northwest Greenland play video games and watch too much TV (Pax Leonard 2010); the Tlingit of British Columbia are too corporate (Dombrowski 2002); so-and-so Indigenous peoples are on the verge of losing their language forever (CELC 2014; UNESCO 2014; WOLP 2014). Where Aboriginal peoples were once not White enough, now they are in danger of becoming too White. When considered in this way, one inadequacy discourse simply replaces another.

I raise these last examples to bring attention to a particular challenge that confronts much research about Aboriginal peoples: the extent to which exogenous commentary reflects the variety of feelings, thoughts, wishes, and concerns of those it speaks for. In

⁸ The idea of discursive displacement in postcolonial contexts is developed by Spivak (1988).

⁹ The “Indian Problem” was articulated first in the 1930s by the deputy superintendent of the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott (Leslie 1978).

each case mentioned above, the question is one of emphasis, not accuracy. That is, the picture painted may be real, but it is not complete and, I would argue, not balanced. Lutz (1982) struggled against this selective blindness 35 years ago, and responses to my own research suggest it persists today, not so much as outright dismissal, but as general indifference. Pre-contact traditional culture—especially the possibility of its extinction—tends to be more compelling.

Selective blindness to Indigenous modernities, as historian and musicologist Jessica Perea (2011) points out, is not the only challenge to balanced discourse. In the introduction to her Ph.D. dissertation, Perea relays an anecdote that reveals institutional resistance to Aboriginal self-representation. According to a prominent musicologist, being an Alaska Native conducting research on her own community makes her a “rootsicologist,” a researcher whose objectivity and critical capacities are compromised by personal affinity and proximity to the subject (Perea 2011: 3-4). Extending this logic, English scholars cannot be authorities on the history of England, Gender Studies should be the domain of straight men only, and French sociology is for all but the French. Needless to say, this is not a consensus position at most universities. While the musicologist’s dated commitment to a scientific view-from-nowhere is likely more the exception than the rule, his assumption that Perea should be disqualified from examining her own culture because she risks sacrificing skepticism for advocacy does highlight a more common preconception in commentaries about Aboriginal peoples: that focusing on a particular aspect or dynamic in a specific setting implicitly negates other contrasting ones. This return to the displacement logic that underpins much erosion discourse raises another challenge to balanced representation.

When remote northern Canadian communities such as Nain are featured in provincial or national news programs, it is usually to report social problems like poverty, violence, substance abuse, and other tragedies. For most White Canadians raised in southern regions these images inform our ideas of the Indigenous “Other.” Indeed, when I arrived in Nain, many of these issues were in evidence. Elsewhere I have written about the psychological and material impacts of sustained colonial interference and domination (Artiss 2014: 4-8). Alarming high rates of suicide, child neglect, domestic violence, and substance addictions could all be seen to bear out Bhabha’s (1994: 85) location of psychic dissonance in the “ambivalent” or “split” postcolonial subject. However, local indifference to specific musical styles in Nain is one of many examples where the effects of colonial contact reveal little discernable ambivalence (snowmobiles, rifles, speedboats, and CB radios, mentioned above, are a few others). My point here is that real material, emotional, and psychological trauma co-exists with hybridities, mixtures, blends, and overlaps that produce little or no psychic dissonance. In the same way new musical forms are not in an inverse existential relationship with old ones; equanimity and ambivalence are co-present and non-conflicting. Adapting Bhabha’s concept of ambivalence, I call these non-conflicting co-presences “ambimodalities” (Artiss 2014: 59).

The equanimity—or absence of emotional and psychic dissonance—inferred by instantiations of ambimodality might be correlated here with the Inuit concept of

ajunamat, which concludes the previous section. *Ajunamat* ('it cannot be helped') captures a particular response to circumstantial outcomes beyond human control. I heard it used occasionally during three winter hunting expeditions over sea ice to areas surrounding and including Hebron, about a three-day snowmobile journey north from Nain. Having learned how to survive out on the land from his father and grandfather—both legendary hunters and guides—Eli Merkuratsuk epitomizes a response-based approach to survival. Conditions (ice, snow, weather, animals, skidoos) are constantly changing, sometimes quickly and dramatically, and it is often necessary to adapt accordingly. We brought enough food and gasoline for a one-week trip, but when weather conditions kept us away for longer we hunted more partridge and seal and fished more Arctic char (running out of tobacco was a far more serious concern!). When Merkuratsuk's skidoo broke down, not an uncommon occurrence, he would improvise, often fashioning a part from mechanical bits and pieces in his orange plastic toolbox.

Ways of being in the world that involve continually responding to unpredictable circumstances also inform Inuit ideas about end goals. Take, for example, Merkuratsuk's concept of a fixed destination. He has none. Decisions about places to make camp and the amount of time spent there were often determined by forces beyond our control, such as weather, sea ice, amount of snow on our chosen route, mechanical issues, and so on. There were stopping points along the way, camps where we might stay, but the real destination was wherever the caribou happened to be when we found them. If, when we set out in the morning, I asked Merkuratsuk where we would stay that night, he would shrug and smile: "*atsuk*" ('I don't know'). Or, if he was in a playful (or impatient) mood: "*apikKuin*" ('none of your business'). While there were directions and aims, they were understood to be contingent, not controlled. *Ajunamat*, then, is a particular sentiment or feeling that accompanies Inuit responses to change, change that cannot be regulated or reversed.

It has been suggested that such a contingency-based "traditional" approach to survival among Labrador Inuit contrasts with "rational" European ones that stress preparation and foresight (Ben-Dor 1966: 47-48). Implicit in such a juxtaposition is a hierarchy, with rational planning in the privileged position. Survival strategies that respond to needs as they arise are perceived as passive and non-rational in comparison. Other ethnographers have noted responses to powerful forces of change, explaining an Inuit deference to White authority, *ilira* (respect, awe, fear) as a holdover from pre-missionary times when the spirits of shamanism were similarly feared (Brody 2000: 43, 46; cf. Briggs 1970; de Coccola and King 2007[1955]). While there is perhaps an element of fatalism in an acceptance of things that cannot be helped, it would be a mistake to attribute passive resignation to *ajunamat*; accompanying such acceptance is intense pride in relentless commitment to survival, *sappulik* ('never give up'). Indeed, there is little room for passivity or inertia out on the land because life is so intensely action-based. Instead, *ajunamat* refers to a state of mind that does not dwell on unexpected changes of fortune; no time for lamenting loss (of direction, food, shelter, control), only for response (flexibility, creativity, adaptation, improvisation). As a highly experienced hunter, Merkuratsuk is a virtuoso of contingency.

In the context of my research on music of the Labrador Inuit, my comments about *ajunamat* serve two purposes. First, they allow a semantic inversion—from Inuit lacking rational foresight to Merkuratsuk as a virtuoso of contingency—that is in keeping with efforts that aim to redress a discursive imbalance. Second, as an explanation for responses to change characterized by equanimity and, in particular, for understanding indifference to musical difference, *ajunamat* raises a second issue that veers away from discourse and into ontological territory. Specifically, as a deeply embedded, linguistically indexed Inuit way of being in the world, *ajunamat* introduces continuity into a discussion that has heretofore focused primarily on change.

When Lutz (1982: 1) writes that “disregarding all music which has been borrowed leaves the Labrador Inuit with virtually no music at all,” she touches on an important conundrum: if Inuitized Western music *is* Inuit music, then what, if anything, persists? Lutz’s own response: while the form may have changed, many of the functions have not. When Moravian hymns replaced Inuit drumming and throat singing, Inuit aesthetic sensibilities were carried over to new modes of musical expression. This point is corroborated by Gordon’s (2007) location of a continuity of Inuit preferences in hand-copied sheet music. For each author, unique Inuit sensibilities are recognized, to some extent, as independent from particular musical forms. Thought of in this way, particular songs, hymns, styles, and genres deliver Inuit expression as much as they constitute it.

Along similar lines, Nattiez (1983: 460) has described Inuit throat songs as “‘host-structures’, symbolic forms susceptible to absorbing sound sources of various origins: meaningless syllables and archaic words, names of ancestors or of old people, animal-names, toponyms, words designating something present at the time of the performance.” The phrase was coined for throat songs only, and the very specific functional purposes they serve. Nevertheless, coupled with the observations of Lutz and Gordon, Nattiez’s “host structures” further establishes the capacity of Inuit musical expression to find a home in any given musical form. Related, though a little farther afield, Williams (1977: 131) imagines “structures of feeling”—collective underlying dispositions of a historical generation—as more than the by-products of changing institutions, cultural formations, and beliefs. For him, while the latter may be more easily located historically, what really changes is “something quite general, over a wide range.” Williams’s emphasis on change is less important here than the idea that, while structures of feeling are expressed in discrete cultural forms, they do not rely on the specificity of those forms.

Williams’s untangling of structures of feeling from discrete cultural forms, coupled with Nattiez’s host structures, prompts one final meditation: that examples of Inuitized Western music in Nain might be thought of as visible protrusions of a much deeper and broader substrate of affective continuities. Powerful feelings, values, dispositions, beliefs, attitudes, and general ways of being in the world are continually percolating beneath the surface and constitute Inuitness as much as the musical forms that mediate them. I would even argue that these sensibilities find songs that suit them rather than the other way around. They are like family members and friends. Their participation in social gatherings contributes to and creates—in a collective rather than an authorship

sense—moments that become memories. This accumulation of feelingful memories then builds and binds emotional connections. While such affective continuities are not independent of the music that bears them, neither are they dependent on specific songs, hymns, styles, or traditions. Where one form of musical expression may appear to die out as another takes its place, Inuitness can remain constant. In this way, more White does not necessarily mean less Inuit.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was not to contradict cultural commentators and preservationists who focus on erosion—many of whom echo real grassroots concerns—or to replace pathologies of loss with ambimodalities. It was, rather, to add another layer to discourse about cultural transformation among the Labrador Inuit so that the various responses to change of those immediately affected are more widely represented. One such response is their indifference to musical difference. That a relaxing of socio-musical categories corresponds with a decline of Moravian influence suggests that the degree of importance local Inuit place on particular cultural forms and practices is not always reflected in the literature about them.

Ajunamat ('it cannot be helped'), as a deeply embedded Inuit way of being in the world, perhaps helps explain such equanimity in the face of change. Whether the focus is music, hunting technologies, clothing, or even language, my point is that beneath these cultural protrusions lies a substrate of affective continuities, including *ajurnamat*, that can remain intact even while the material or expressive objects themselves change. In tandem with *sappulik* ('never give up') *ajurnamat* is a source of Inuit pride. Indeed, should the sources of such pride go the way of igloos and dogsleds, I venture the loss would hurt much more. Again, I am not suggesting we stop being concerned about culture loss. But there is much more to being Inuit than the most visible protrusions of our worry.

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