

Editorial: Reckoning with Musicology's Past and Present

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Black Lives Matter! The clarion call of the most recent season of discontent. A simple certainty, yet a truth long silenced. A chorus of many calling out the racism that has long been systemic. A moment of reckoning with past and present, sounded unambiguously and insistently. A moment of recognition to which musicology must respond.

So much has happened since the editorial that appeared in the most recent issue of *Acta Musicologica* (92, no. 1) that we feel compelled once again to address critical issues in musicology with the present editorial, rather than wait until next spring. Even as the last issue was about to appear, a series of events took place that would make the need for reckoning with systemic racism immediate. The murder of the unarmed African American George Floyd by police in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, unleashed anger and protest across the United States and the world. Many histories intersected at that moment, amassing the memories of a racism that refused to abate, that itself repelled all reasoned attempts at restraining it.

At that moment, it also became clear that Floyd's murder was not an isolated event, but rather it was part of a longer and more expansive history of violence against Black lives. That music, so capable of sounding response to racism, also mobilized the voices of anti-racism, was hardly surprising. The list of the lives lost to the unjust and unjustified exercise of power was vast, and in the course of many histories the names of Indigenous and colonized populations, racial and religious minorities, people of color throughout the world, had filled it to overflowing. "Say her name" chanted those gathered in public protest to the murder of Breonna Taylor by police in her own apartment in the night of March 13, 2020. More names would quickly be said, swelling in the streets and spilling over to civil society worldwide, transforming the moment of reckoning in the history of the present—our present.

Among the many reasons that this moment exacts its claim for reckoning, the recognition that racism is and has been systemic is especially important. Racism that is systemic not only exists in past and present, it connects them. We must search everywhere for such racism, knowing we shall find it everywhere. In response to the ubiquity of the systemic call for recognizing that Black Lives Matter underwent a sea change during the summer of 2020, emerging as a movement that encompassed the history of the present, insisting that racism is systemic in the world we coinhabit with others. As a movement Black Lives Matter insists that we reckon with the systemic, first identifying it, then asking that we act decisively to dismantle it.

By addressing such issues in this editorial it is not our aim to point fingers or claim moral high ground, but rather to respond to the call of the BLM movement for recognition of the practices that have become systemic and therefore require a concerted reckoning. We believe that such reckoning is not only possible for an academic society that represents a global musicology as fully as the IMS, but it also enables musicologists more critically to act in ways that bring real change to those systemic practices that close rather than expand the paths to musical knowledge. We begin here by identifying several of the areas whose systemic presence could most critically respond to the critical reckoning in BLM's challenge.

Racism/Anti-Racism: In the summer of 2020 it had also been fifty years since the fourteen-year-old Emmett Till from Chicago was lynched by white killers while visiting relatives in Mississippi. That half-century in American history had been preceded by three and half earlier centuries since the first African slaves were brought to the American colonies. One history of racism piled upon countless others, deepening their systemic presence and demanding a new reckoning with American history as a whole, engendering responses such as the "1619 Project," which mapped out strategies for teaching anti-racism in American schools and public institutions.

Colonialism: Even as scholars in the humanities and social scientists began confronting colonialism in the aftermath of World War II, they surrendered to the tendency of locating it in the past, above all, by suggesting that something called post-colonialism could replace it. Colonialism has not gone away, nor has it diminished, but rather it persists because it is systemic. Colonial legacies remain in the ways we divide up the cultures of the world, accepting (and celebrating) the hegemony of some and denying the existence of others. Excluded and divided by the colonial parsing of national borders, entire communities, cultures, and religions—Kurds and Rohingyas are striking examples—are relegated to pre-colonial realms of silence.

Decolonizing Musicology: To admit to and describe the lingering legacy of colonialism, however, is not yet to address all that has made it systemic, first and foremost, the multiple forms of racism that it reinforces. Traditional pedagogical approaches have, for example, long been complicit in moving Indigenous peoples and racial minorities to the margins of music history. When music histories account for the margins at all, they very often do so in order to shift focus quickly to the center and the canonic. We search long and hard to find a music history that, if it includes the music of Indigenous peoples at all, does not begin merely briefly with them. Racial and religious minorities, too, are recolonized in music histories of their own, globally and systemically so. The persistence of such recolonization as the reinforcement of the systemic requires attention to the structures of our teaching and research themselves, decolonizing musicology as we practice it.

Genocide: Over the course of the last few decades, musicologists have begun to research music practices in connection with genocide. These were mostly forced music activities, through which victims could however find expression for and relief from their suffering. This topic was suppressed in musicology for a long time, but now research is being intensified, on a wider scope of themes. Genocide is unfortunately a topic of the present as well as the past, in various parts of the world. One of the aims of this research is to protect and honor the memory of the musicians who were victims of genocide.

Minorities: Minorities are communities or individual people who are at a high risk of discrimination due to their ethnic background, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or social and economic disadvantages. Musicological research of music cultures and practices in areas containing ethnic minorities is no exception these days. Since 1999, there has been a study group called “Music and Minorities” within the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM). In 2019, Ursula Hemetek founded the “Music and Minorities Research Center” at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna.

Migrants: Our 2016 editorial was dedicated to this theme (“Musicians at the Borders”). Here, we paid tribute to many foremothers and forefathers whose lives were endangered at borders in tragic times, and through whom contemporary musicology was made possible. Many qualities of contemporary musicology emerged because these ancestors managed to cross the borders. Today, people also fear for their lives at borders, and for many, music continues to be an important part of life or a profession. Often, music is one of the few things that migrants may bring with them. Such music is not only valuable for migrants themselves. It is our task as musicologists to react to political developments. In this case, we must study the music of people who are unjustly depicted as undesirable by certain political movements.

The Black Lives Matter movement is a call for collective reckoning with systemic racism and historical *longue durée* inseparable from the systemic. It is our belief and conviction that *Acta Musicologica* can and should provide a critical forum for such collective reckoning. Even as music scholars address the challenge of systemic racism and by extension the systemic dimensions that accrue to an international musicology, *Acta* provides a mirror for critical reflection. Reckoning with the past and present of musicology can become common purpose in the pages of *Acta*. It would mean that we listen in new ways, at this moment clearly in ways that respond to the BLM movement, and that such listening requires the forms of activism that a scholarly journal can most inclusively set in motion. The moment for such reckoning, we recognize when we listen to the voices asserting that Black Lives Matter, has long been upon us.