

Inculturation: Genealogies, Meanings, and Musical Dynamics

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The richly textured perspectives on inculturation offered in this volume of *Colloquium: Music, Worship, Arts* ask us to revisit and reconsider what is meant by inculturation as an idea, practice, and process.¹ Reading the accounts of Lawrence A. Hoffman, Michael Daniel Findikyan, Philip Tovey, Harold Miller, Bonnie Wade, and Pete Ward of the religious, social, and musical dynamics of inculturation in Armenia and its diaspora, England, Ireland, Japan, and Uganda, as part of global consumer cultures, and in spaces where embodied practices are changing in the face of disease or disability, one quickly appreciates the descriptive and critical value of thinking in terms of inculturation. Inculturation addresses important questions concerning agency, change, translation, consciousness, experience, and efficacy. At the same time, it raises questions about the exercise of power, the relationship of outward expression and inward belief, the nature of religious ideologies and the invariance of religious truths, and how the concept of culture is naturalized and deployed by those engaged in inculturation.

So how have we come to think, hear, and write in terms of inculturation? And what are the possibilities and limits of thinking, hearing, and writing in terms of inculturation? Here I work through these questions by outlining some of the genealogies, meanings, and musical dynamics of inculturation from my vantage point as an ethnomusicologist.

Genealogies

In its conventional sense, inculturation is a thoroughly Christian project, although it can apply to any number of non-Christian contexts when conceived of more generally.² Simply put, inculturation is the adaptation or transformation of Christian liturgical expressions and the gospel message under new or changing cultural conditions. In the Catholic Church, for instance, it is the claim, according to Fennela Cannell, “that local forms of approaching God may all be acceptable, and even necessary, as long as the presence of a transcendent deity presiding over all is acknowledged.”³ This often happens within the context of missionization, evangelization, conversion, renewal, migration, and displacement. Therefore, inculturation is intimately related to histories of globalization and encounter,⁴ the dynamics of colonial domination and missionization,⁵ the asymmetrical relationship between global North and South,⁶ and the meteoric growth of Pentecostal and Catholic Christianities outside the West.⁷ As the essays in this volume make clear, liturgical and musical practices register processes of inculturation wherever and whenever they occur, and those practices animate the transformative experience of inculturation across many differences.

Modern ideas of inculturation have been shaped by the universal scope of Christian religious ideology, the gospel imperatives of witnessing and evangelizing, the global communication of Christianity through Western ecclesial, social, liturgical, and musical forms, the creativity of new or changing Christian communities, and contemporary discourses of multiculturalism, indigeneity, and rights. Modern practices and processes of inculturation have been shaped by historical moments of translation, adaptation, and exchange between charismatic individuals and non- or newly Christian populations—Saints Cyril and Methodius and their counterparts in ninth-century Great Moravia, Saints Herman and Innocent and their Aleut and Tlingit counterparts in nineteenth-century Alaska, and Roberto de Nobili and his Tamil counterparts in seventeenth-century South India, for instance. In these cases (and in Catholicism’s post-Vatican

If emphasis on inculturation) it is important to recognize both the instrumental nature of the processes and relationships of power that reify normatively Christian and non-Christian cultures as well as the agentive, dignifying, and religiously meaningful possibilities that inculturation creates for all involved.

Inculturation can also be related to the idea of enculturation, which is invoked a few times in this volume as well. In its classic formulations, enculturation (or socialization or acculturation) is the way a person comes to know and thereby reproduce cultural forms and norms; it is a technique for describing how cosmologies, values, taboos, linguistic codes, kinship patterns, expressive practices, and whatever else might fall under the catch-all “culture” are transmitted ---to children or non-native outsiders.⁸ While the idea of enculturation seems to describe how the observable continuities and tangible differences that make “culture” something real come into being, its critics point out its reified, deterministic nature, its lack of nuance in addressing the relationship of structure and agency, and its ambivalence regarding change.

Bearing this in mind, there is, nevertheless, a shared, productive dimension to inculturation and enculturation. If inculturation is about the intercultural dynamics of religious translation and adaptation across differences, then enculturation can be about the intracultural dynamics of religious transmission and domestication within communities. In other words, enculturation can be understood as an extension of inculturation, the former being animated by charismatic “culture bearers” or in-group elites and the latter being animated by missionaries, evangelists, transnational religious formations, or states, for instance. While this approach does not circumvent the problem of “culture” latent in the ideas of inculturation and enculturation, it does move towards the kind of practice- and process-oriented approach I advocate at the end of this essay.

Meanings

Thinking, hearing, and writing in terms of inculturation bring ongoing debates in anthropology and ethnomusicology about the meaning of religious symbols and sounds to the fore. At the heart of these debates is a set of questions concerning the divergent theological, practical, and ethical approaches to inculturation: Is inculturation the expression of existing religious truths or the negotiation of new religious truths? Should religious practices be isomorphic across cultures or should they be similarly efficacious but formally different? Are similar practices the expressions of similar beliefs? To what extent is religious and cultural translation possible?

One approach to inculturation reflects the idea that meaning is transhistorical and inheres in or is embodied by religious symbols and sounds--.⁹ This kind of inculturation takes shape as a process of recontextualizing symbols and sounds within new or changing cultural conditions. Inculturation makes them meaningful by making them present, and isomorphism is taken as evidence of similar beliefs and efficacies. Another approach reflects the idea that meaning is enmeshed in social and historical particulars and is authorized collectively or institutionally through performance and repetition.¹⁰ Symbols and sounds are meaningful because there is consensus or contestation, efficacy or failure. Here, recognition and resistance attest to the power that accrues to these religious symbols and sounds.

In this volume, both Hoffman and Tovey examine these different ways of producing meaning through the processes and practices of inculturation. For Hoffman, there is inculturation that shows and inculturation that explains, the former being inherently dialogic and more like the

second approach I describe above, the latter being monolithic or potentially coercive and more like the first approach I describe above. For Tovey, following Victor Turner, there is inculturation based on the ideology of the symbol and inculturation based on the physical elements of the symbol, the former being an imposition and more like the first approach I describe above, the latter allowing for reinterpretation and more like the second approach I describe above.¹¹

This constant concern with meaning in the practices and processes of inculturation is what reproduces religious orthodoxies and creates new syncretisms. However, inculturation conceived in terms of orthodoxy and syncretism depends upon ideological constructions of time and space. Inculturation becomes meaningful in relation to originary, authentic, legitimate times and places, which are normatively Western, or in relation to how those originary, authentic, legitimate meanings are transformed at a chronological or spatial distance, thereby becoming “local.” So how might one think, listen, and write about inculturation beyond the “limits of meaning?”¹² How might one move, in Gregory Barz’s words, “beyond syncretism towards consciousness?”¹³

One can move beyond the limits of inculturation-as-meaning and the derivative nature of syncretisms that posit more authentic, more integral opposites by thinking, listening, and writing about inculturation as performance, feeling, experience, consciousness, embodiment, and efficacy, for example. The essays in this volume dealing with inculturation model these possibilities in a number of ways: by describing the felt necessity of inculturation within communities of Eastern Christians living in the West, by embracing the new efficacies that inculturation creates as it redefines concepts of normalcy, health, illness, ability, and disability, and by reframing the project of inculturation as something fundamentally about Westernness and difference by focusing on forms of mediation within Western publics. To these models I will add a few specifically musical ones of my own in this final section.

Musical Dynamics

Engaging the musical dynamics of inculturation necessitates moves beyond the limits of meaning because the ways in which inculturation happens musically are performative, feelingful, experiential, conscious, embodied, and efficacious. The musicality of inculturation reveals how new religious values, theologies, affective states, and modes of expression that deepen and elaborate canonical traditions come into being through the work of gifted individuals, the compulsion of rhythmic entrainment, the uncanniness of timbre, or the force of collective performance. The sounds of inculturation emerge in many ways—through the “baptism” of pre- or non-Christian genres and instruments, the rearrangement of forms and performance practices to meet practical liturgical needs, and the reimagination of musical ideals to better manifest the presence of the Holy Spirit, for instance. At the same time, listening to the sounds of inculturation—a brass band of Batak Christians in Sumatra playing their rendition of “Jesus, Keep Me Near The Cross”¹⁴ or Orthodox Christians in Kodiak, Alaska, singing the tone seven “Lord I Call” in Yup’ik¹⁵—means questioning the relationship of emerging or long-established musical practices to religious orthodoxies.

So does the reproduction and performance of canonical religious sound bear witness to religious beliefs that are the same because of inculturation? Or do such practices give voice to new religious truths and beliefs, and suggest ways in which religious messages may become universal precisely because their expression is not syncretic or derivative but integral and full of agency? In other words, is the ontology of sacred sound—its revealed, prophetic, divine, and efficacious

nature—translatable through inculturation, or are new ontologies of sacred sound engendered through inculturation?¹⁶

I suggest that the most valuable and illuminating answers to these questions come from ways of thinking, hearing, and writing about inculturation that neither collapse difference into sameness for the sake of orthodoxy, nor are content with the description of syncretism as the explanation of new religious phenomena. There is a third way of thinking, hearing, and writing about inculturation. This third way focuses more on the processes and practices of inculturation (and, by extension, enculturation) than on its outcomes; more on the negotiations, translations, and transformations that mediate religious messages in new cultural contexts and illuminate their value and potential in unexpected ways. Finally, this third way seeks out and takes seriously the experience and interpretation of those who have conventionally been subjects of inculturation—the colonized, the missionized, converts, minorities, non-Westerners, and those living in the global South. With this, we invert or move beyond the dynamics of inculturation, listening to and coming to understand religious, musical, and cultural change, personal transformation, and the making of theologies and soteriologies in the worlds of all those who practice world religions.

ENDNOTES

1. Also see C. Michael Hawn, "Singing with the Faithful of Every Time and Place: Thoughts on Liturgical Inculturation and Cross-Cultural Liturgy," *Colloquium: Music, Worship, Arts* 2 (2005): 109-24; and I-to Loh, "Contextualization versus Globalization: A Glimpse of Sounds and Symbols in Asian Worship," *ibid.*, 125-39.
2. See, e.g., Richard Sobol and Jeffrey Summit, *Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2002).
3. "Introduction," *The Anthropology of Christianity*, ed. Fennella Cannell (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 26.
4. See, e.g., Peter van der Veer, ed., *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
5. See, e.g., John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991-97); and John Bellarmine Vallier, "Ethnomusicology as Tool for the Christian Missionary," *European Meetings in Ethnomusicology* 10 (2003): 85-97.
6. See, e.g., Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
7. See, e.g., Fennella Cannell, ed., *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Simon Coleman, *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Joel Robbins, "On the Paradoxes of Global Pentecostalism and the Perils of Continuity Thinking," *Religion* 33 (2003): 221-31, and "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 117-43.

8. See Melville J. Herskovitz, *Man and His Works: The Science of Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Knopf, 1948), and *Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contact* (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1958); Margaret Mead, "Socialization and Enculturation," *Current Anthropology* 4/2 (1963): 184–88; and Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales, *Family, Socialization, and Interaction Process* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955).
9. See Clifford Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books 2000 [1973]).
10. See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
11. Also see Phillip Tovey, *Inculturation of Christian Worship: Exploring the Eucharist* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004).
12. Matthew Engelke and Matt Tomlinson, eds., *The Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity* (New York: Berghahn, 2006).
13. Gregory F. Barz, *Performing Religion: Negotiating Past and Present in Kwaya Music of Tanzania* (New York: Rodopi, 2003), 3.
14. Rob Boonzajer Flaes, *Brass Unbound: Secret Children of the Colonial Brass Band* (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 2000).
15. *Beautiful Beyond: Christian Songs in Native Languages* (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings SFW40480, 2004).
16. See Philip V. Bohlman, "Ontologies of Music," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

ADDITIONAL READING

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- . "'We are from different ethnic groups, but we live here as one family': The Musical Performance of Community in a Tanzanian *Kwaya*." In *Chorus and Community*, ed. Karen Ahlquist. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.
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