

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

Special Section: Knowing by Singing

## Introduction

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“To change settler colonial perception requires reorienting the form by which we share knowledge, the way we convey sound, song and music.”

—Dylan Robinson (2020, 28)

This special section explores song from a fundamental but unexplored perspective: as a way of knowing *for* anthropology. The themes touched upon include ontological politics and their relationship with anti- or decoloniality, the other-than-human, and the senses. Feld ([1982] 2012) has long argued for anthropology to attend to the epistemic importance of songs and sound, above all in his proposal for a synesthetic acoustemology (Feld 2015). However, the question of how this could apply to anthropological onto/epistemologies beyond projects focused on sound has yet to be addressed. Much anthropological work on songs or singing is, in the terminology of Tim Ingold (2013), *on* or *about*. What we are interested in is anthropological knowing *with*, *from*, or *through* song. Therefore, we ask: How can anthropologists take seriously the ways of knowing that constitute different practices of singing for shaping research? Rather than considering song solely as an object of ethnographic study, what possibilities arise if song is explored as an onto/epistemic practice for the recursive reformulation of anthropological work more broadly?

The ways of knowing by singing explored in this special section are relevant across anthropology for two reasons. First, they highlight the logocentrism that continues to underpin the bulk of anthropological knowledge production, despite sensory, process, ontological, and multimodal turns. Logocentrism is one of the primary means perpetuating epistemic colonialism. The articles in this special section explore the ways of knowing and being encapsulated in the practices, perception, and understandings of song in Bengali esoteric practices (Lorea), Sami yoiking (Aubinet), and DEAF onto/epistemologies (Robinson). They show how logocentrism is used to legitimize various forms of epistemic coloniality that forcefully attempt to silence these different ways of knowing.

Logocentrism is a language ideology and should not be confused with language in general; there are many different language ideologies, and *all* language use is underpinned by some form of language ideology (Woolard 2021). A logocentric language ideology incorporates a set of assumptions about language (logocentrism; Cavarero 2005),<sup>1</sup> writing (scriptocentrism; Conquergood 2002), and knowledge (referentialism, abstraction, universalism; Conquergood 2002). We refer to this language ideology complex as “logocentrism” as a shorthand.

In logocentrism, the rational, linear, and conceptual aspects of language alone are considered as developing and conveying knowledge (Cavarero 2005). All other aspects—the musical, sonic, imaginative, poetic, visceral, performative, and illocutionary qualities and possibilities of language—are disregarded (Cavarero 2005). Logocentrism separates song from speech, sound from concept (Ingold 2007, chapter 1), and human sounding from nonhuman “noise” (Cavarero 2005, 167). Decomposed in this way, song is hived off as a subject for subdisciplines such as ethnomusicology and folklore, whereas “language,” de-songed, retains a central place in anthropological practice, from its ubiquitous use in interviews and participant observation to the reading, writing, and recitation (e.g., at conferences) of texts.

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Crucially, the logocentrism that underpins such anthropological practices is neither necessary nor neutral. Essential to logocentrism is a hierarchization of knowledge that privileges Western academic epistemology, which has been implicated in the literal silencing of other ways of knowing. Yet, we differ significantly from proposals to move “beyond text” (Cox, Irving, Wright 2016). We argue that it is not language per se that is problematic. It is rather the assumptions about language and knowledge in logocentrism that we critique. Crucially, we retain an interest in exploring and working with words and writing because, in many forms of decolonial redress, local language revitalization and the lyrics of songs are central (Carter-Ényí and Carter-Ényí 2019; Robinson 2020).<sup>2</sup>

Second, drawing on their long-term practical engagement with sung and communicative practices in different contexts—in other words, from their experience of knowing by singing—the authors of the articles in this special section offer alternative understandings of the functions of knowledge:

- Knowing for ethical self-formation rather than for the accumulation of information (Lorea).
- A way of knowing that generates presence and relationships with humans and nonhumans, including landscape features and animals, present and absent (Aubinet).
- The recognition that different ways of knowing require different or reconfigured understanding of listening/voicing—in other words, a critique of the ethnocentric and able-bodied assumptions about the senses (Robinson).

Key to this special section is that what is required is an ontological reorientation about what songs *are* in different ways of knowing and being. These onto/epistemologies offer different, non-logocentric understandings of language, voice, sound, music, text, and knowledge.

People across the world incorporate bird and other nonhuman sounds into their language and thereby develop particular relationships to place (Feld [1982] 2012). In many Indigenous<sup>3</sup> ontologies, such places are living entities, and songs are ways of developing reciprocal relationships with spirit and other nonhumans (Magnat 2020; Robinson 2020). For First Nations people in Canada, songs *are* law, history, and medicine, among other ways of *doing* things (Robinson 2020, 153). Songs are also healing for the mediums of the Senoi Temiar, a rainforest-dwelling people in Malaysia (Roseman 1991). Specifically, songs are paths along which spirits travel, searching the landscape for the patient’s head-soul. These songs were given to the medium by the upper-body portions of plants. In fact, cases of nonhumans sharing songs with humans and making music together also abound in lowland South America (Brabec de Mori and Seeger 2013). And while much current anthropological work focuses on the semiotics of human–nonhuman communication, even Eduardo Kohn (2013), for instance, limits the exchange of symbolic meanings to the domain of human interaction. Drawing on both his native knowledge of Colombian Indigenous ontologies and his background in biology, Giraldo Herrera (2018) argues that symbolic communication does indeed cross species boundaries.

Based on the premise that practices shape perception and therefore what is *knowable* (Downey 2007), we offer the provocation that if anthropologists want to work toward dismantling epistemic colonialism, they have to:

- Recognize that the logocentrism that continues to underlie central professional practices directly participates in epistemic colonialism, and be willing to change that.
- Develop place- and relationship-specific ways of understanding what knowledge may be, and therefore appropriate ways for communicating and sharing that knowledge.

The articles in this special section by Lorea, Aubinet, and Robinson show how there are ways of knowing wrapped up in singing and experiencing song that are scholarly in their own right, albeit very different from each other or from what academics trained in Western universities might currently recognize as scholarship. These authors argue that the onto/epistemologies to which they were introduced during their fieldwork offer different ways of studying, exploring, and living in the world as humans and in relation to nonhumans. They also argue that epistemic colonialism, in the form of and justified by logocentrism, continues to subjugate such knowledges. Therefore, if anthropologists want to contribute to making a liveable future, with self-determining diverse communities that value connections to each other and to the environment, they will have to find ways of valorizing other ways of knowing and being as scholarship. As Robinson states in the epigraph, this will entail changing the form in which knowledge is *shared*, as well as shifting understandings of what knowledge *is*.

The approach we refer to as knowing by singing is not a panacea. It is but one possible way to attempt to combat the epistemic colonialism that pivotal disciplinary practices perpetrate. We believe each anthropological project will need to figure out the precise changes required depending on the different onto/epistemologies involved in the research.

Before proceeding, it is essential to explain our use of the term “onto/epistemology.” A central premise here is that questions of epistemology are inextricable from ontological ones. A characteristic of Western science—the rhetoric rather than the actual practices that go on in laboratories (Latour 2004)—is that knowledge can be abstracted from the ways of living through which it emerges. Any discussion of epistemology that treats it as separate from ontology therefore perpetuates science’s dissociation of knowing from being, a dissociation that, in treating the world as an *object* of knowledge, ready to be grasped, is significantly implicated in epistemic colonialism.

Native American scholar Shawn Wilson (2008, 13) makes the connection between epistemology, ontology, and research processes: “like myself, other Indigenous Scholars have in the past tried to use dominant research paradigms... . We have tried to include our cultures, traditional protocols and practices into the research process through adapting and adopting suitable methods. The problem with that is we can never really remove the tools from their underlying beliefs.” Wilson’s observation encapsulates the concerns of this special section: All practices are shaped by underlying ontological assumptions that in turn shape what is perceivable, what is knowable. Therefore, in order to become aware of such assumptions and then to make any sort of redress, what is needed are different practices for how anthropological knowledge is understood, made, and shared.

## PRACTICE SHAPES WHAT IS KNOWABLE

In a 1985 land-claim trial in Canada, the counsel for the plaintiffs directed Mary Johnson, Gitxsan hereditary chief Antgulilibix, to perform a *limx oo’y* (a dirge song). This song is part of her *adaawwk* (formal, ancient, collectively owned oral history). The judge permitted the song but interpreted it as an attempt to win him over with the aesthetics of the song. Dylan Robinson (2020), *xwélmexw* (Stó:lo) sound and Indigenous studies scholar, relates this case to show how the judge could not hear that such songs function as a legal order that they enact and body forth. Songs in these Indigenous ontologies, Robinson shows, are “more-than-aesthetic.”

Another witness who spoke at the trial, James Morrison (Txaaxkwok), explained that the song affected him bodily: “I can feel it... . I can hear the brook, I can hear the river runs... the air of the mountains... . I can feel it today... it memories back to the past [thousands of years of] what’s happened in the territory.” Robinson (2020, 45) explains that songs function as “primary legal and living documents” through this embodied feeling for history. The judge cannot hear or feel the relationship with place that the song elicits because he never engaged in activities and practices that would enable him to perceive what Morrison did. Settler-colonial forms of perception prevent listeners from understanding Indigenous song as more-than-aesthetic in what Robinson calls “normative listening.” Robinson links normative listening directly to Western forms of perception that view the world as resources to extract. He shows how any form of research or engagement that is not attentive to how perception is shaped by practices often ends up reproducing extractivism (Robinson 2020, 46).

The neuroanthropologist Greg Downey (2007, 236) carried out research with capoeiristas and found that their training changes the physiology of their eyes, concluding that “physiology and behaviour can be modified, affecting both what is ‘known’ and what is knowable.” Therefore, while Robinson draws our attention to the power relations, embedded through practice, in how we perceive, Downey shows how *any practice*, from reading, to martial arts, to singing, shapes how we perceive, and consequently, what can be known.

## CRITICAL VOICING POSITIONALITY

In his ethnography of song in South Korea, Harkness (2014) argues that the voice connects sound and body; it brings together the material locus of human sound-making with environmental sounding, as well as understandings of self and collective positioning. For this reason, Harkness proposes an analysis of “voice as a phonosonic nexus and voicing as the discursive alignment to a socially identifiable perspective [that] are linked semiotic phenomena by which persons and groups situate themselves in worlds of significance” (12). When people use their voice, both they themselves and other listeners situate the sound of their voice (timbre) in relation to complex assumptions about identity and belonging (Jacobsen-Bia 2014; Sun Eidsheim 2019). Voice is a site that unites political, personal, collective, and ecological matters while also being the site for the study of the *disruption* of “naturalness.” Judith Butler draws on examples of lip-synching in drag performances to highlight how gender is performative (cited in Schlichter 2011). Such performative possibilities uncover how the assumption that voice conveys “natural” or “authentic” identities is a contingent heteropatriarchal Western discourse (Schlichter 2011), and a flawed one at that. As Sun Eidsheim (2019 7, 33, 54) shows, the human voice is actually highly malleable. Therefore, it is the phonosonic nexus that informs the sorts of sounds people are enabled to or prevented from making.<sup>4</sup>

Robinson’s (2020) notion of “normative listening” is crucial here because one phonosonic nexus can block or subjugate another. Following Robinson (2020) and Todd (2015), in this section we present our own, Gatt’s and Lembo’s, critical voicing positionalities. We do this to reflexively relate our own listening/voicing biases and what these have enabled us to perceive. As Robinson states, it is essential to acknowledge that “the simple recognition of individual intersectional identity... involves understanding positionality not as a static construct, but as a process or state that fundamentally guides our actions and perception” (Robinson 2020, 39). We do want to avoid confessional position statements, which alleviate guilt but result in no redressive action (39). The aim of critical voicing positionalities, therefore, is to “unsettle” reified and universalist assumptions about what knowledge is (39), and consequently, what can be considered valid anthropological knowledge and scholarship.

I, Caroline Gatt, am a Maltese, white, cis female mother living in Austria. Unlike many Maltese who travel abroad, I have never experienced direct racism based on the color of my skin.<sup>5</sup> Many Maltese people are also perpetrators of serious racism in their own country (Mitchell 2002). Malta gained independence from Britain in 1964, and in this postcolonial context, language politics are central in the formation of a “national identity” (Mitchell 2002). Although now I speak Maltese fluently, I grew up speaking English and Italian because my family for many generations were either professionals (Italian speaking) or employed by the British colonial government and army (English speaking). As an English speaker, with all the associations and privileges that come with it, I have had regular experiences where both individuals and groups have actively attempted to silence

me, and sometimes aggressively. I have come to recognize the violence that both was and went with the English-language imposition and am now very careful about which language to use and how. In fact, the (relatively) minor experiences of these redressive silencing attempts have been formative for me.

I, Valeria Lembo, am a white cis woman of Italian origin living in Scotland, UK, and working in my second language, English. I am a first-generation postgraduate researcher working at the intersections of anthropology, health and social sciences, and performing arts. I grew up on a tourist hotspot island of South Italy, where educational, cultural, and job opportunities are limited. The local language context is characterized by a Neapolitan dialect–Italian standard continuum. Although most of my family members would speak dialect, as a child I was only allowed to speak standard Italian, experiencing communication barriers and estrangement within and outside the family context. Despite a rich cultural production in Neapolitan dialect, competence in the Italian standard language in favor of dialect use is still a marker of class and educational background. Furthermore, southern accents are mocked and stigmatized in a country characterized by a historical north/south divide and internal migration, where most of the economic development has been concentrated in the north.

The experiences of similar language politics in postcolonial contexts of our collaborator Gey Pin Ang added to the sense of urgency to address questions of voice, song, and language in the context of anthropological onto/epistemologies. Ang, an award-winning actor, director, and pedagogue from Singapore, has often spoken and written about her own similar experiences (Ang 2017). When she was a child in Singapore, all languages except for the four official languages (English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil) were banned. She was born into a Hokkien-speaking family, and had begun to speak it, but eventually she forgot it and learned only Mandarin and English when the ban was enforced. Ang has dedicated a large part of her performance work to exploring the traces of her interrupted Hokkien heritage.

Our intersectional experiences, Gatt's and Lembo's, offer what W. E. B. Du Bois (1994) has referred to as "double consciousness": being women, from islands in the peripheries of "Europe," with some experience of externalization, has put us in ambiguous marginal positions that influence our perceptions. This partly enabled us to begin questioning normative forms of perception embedded in anthropological practices. Further, as "white" anthropologists, we had access to spaces where "people say what they really think about Indigenous issues of People of Colour when they assume everyone in the room is Caucasian" (Todd 2016, 12). These experiences of whiteness have made us recognize the importance of working against epistemic coloniality in "ancient universities" and colonial metropolises.<sup>6</sup>

This leads to the dilemma of writing this text, which, in order to be published in *American Anthropologist*, required us to follow forms of argumentation and writing that are clearly logocentric, and in so doing reproduce the very form we are arguing against. On the one hand, during the research that led to this special section, we dedicated much more time and energy to collaborative work. This included developing different forms of exchange, gathering, performances, and crafting rather than publication. We also explored non-logocentric publication (Ang and Gatt 2017, Gatt 2017/2018; Gatt, Galafassi, and Ang 2021; Lembo 2015). However, we found that all these forms of sharing do not have significant impact, neither for our careers nor for our collaborators'. We feel it would be contradictory to entirely avoid forms of writing such as this introduction if that means that the sorts of arguments against logocentrism that we are making are not shared more widely. Our compromise has been to focus first and foremost on collaborative work and only secondarily on publishing in mainstream academic journals, with the queasy knowledge that in doing so we are participating in processes of epistemic colonialism. What is certain is that we look forward to any deeper engagements this writing might enable in the future.

## ACOUSTEMOLOGY

Across the field of research on sound and song in anthropology, Steven Feld's work is key. His *Sound and Sentiment* (Feld [1982] 2012) was the foundational study that drew recent anthropological attention to the relationship of sound and perception to epistemology. Feld's ethnography of the Kaluli focuses on the relationships that sound and songs facilitate in the rainforests of Papua New Guinea. Songs, so central in Kaluli communal events, rituals, and rites of passage, imitate the sounds of forest animals, and especially birds.<sup>7</sup> In the listening practices of the Kaluli he lived with, Feld finds a way of knowing the world around them, which he later goes on to refer to as an "acoustemology" (Feld 2015). Feld's work, like Ingold's (2000), draws attention to how epistemologies depend on skilled ways of attending to the world.

Feld has also produced many albums as part of his work. Already in the 1970s, he recognized the need for ethnographies in different modes: sound recordings that *are* ethnographies (Cox 2018). His most recent production, *Voices of the Rainforest* (Feld et al. 2019), is an immersive film offering ambient soundscapes. Feld's aim in this film is to attend to the world by means of the acoustemology he learned from his time living with the Kaluli. On the one hand, we draw heavily on Feld's work. On the other, however, we identify a problem, which the contributors and their ways of knowing by singing go some way to address.

In order to share the way of knowing Feld learned with the Kaluli, he predominantly works through notational technologies of Western derivation. For instance, for *Voices of the Rainforest* he used the latest sound- and film-recording technology. Beyond the fact that these methods are so expensive as to be out of reach of most researchers, what troubles us relates to the onto/epistemologies folded into such technologies.

Kaluli ways of knowing are intrinsically linked to their ways of sounding: their songs, stories, spoken forms, and other communicative and social practices (Feld [1982] 2012). As Feld himself argues, acoustemology is constituted in a "reflexive feedback between sounding and listening" (Feld

2015). Our point, contra Feld, is that for an understanding that is truly acousto/epistemological (rather than merely acoustemological), it is not enough to reflect on the experience of song or to listen back to what has already sounded. It is necessary to sing. Recall Mary Robinson's singing the *limx oo'y*, where song generates and reenacts specific embodied relationships. For the embodied change song brings about, *singing* may be as necessary to understanding an onto/epistemology as is learning to listen.

Both Gatt and Lembo have trained in laboratory theater in the post-Grotowskian tradition, where singing and song sharing are important parts of the performer's work and understood as means for exploring the world, including one's (forgotten) heritages (Ang 2017; Spatz 2019).<sup>8</sup> By sharing similar singing-training paths, as well as participating in many workshops together, we have also shared a way of perceiving the world that affected the way we engaged with anthropological training we underwent in parallel. Learning to sing and sharing songs in this post-Grotowskian tradition meant learning to listen and respond accordingly; this requires fine-tuning perceptual abilities for a social communication *in song* that is always contextual, historical, emplaced, and in movement. It requires a complex form of embodied learning that ranges from proprioception and interoception to acoustics, music, affective interaction, and storytelling. Elsewhere, Lembo (2016) has noted how her singing training has shaped the way she listened to and participated in fieldwork conversations, arguing that by attending to these conversations *as if* they were group-singing improvisations, she could shift her attention from preconceived questions to questions that truly mattered to the research participants.

This special section emerged from two workshops that Gatt and Lembo convened in 2018. These aimed at opening an academic space where performers, musicians, and anthropologists, or hybrid performer-anthropologists, could share their work, such that different onto/epistemologies would be equally valorized.<sup>9</sup> In planning the workshops, we borrowed ways of being in place and sharing practices that are common in the performing arts but not usually practiced in university lecture halls and seminar rooms. Most importantly, we ensured presenters could choose the way they wanted to share their work and what they needed from the other participants. In many cases, this included tasks that required everyone to carry out movement and sensory activations, playing and improvising music together, or simply being barefoot and listening to presentations by sitting on the ground. Conventional academic presentations were present, too. A core principle was that different practices and circulating affects in academic meetings can open up perceptual skills for recognizing different ways of knowing.

Besides participating in one of these workshops, Lorea, Aubinet, and Robinson have also undergone transformative perceptual training and different modes of apprenticeship. Resonant with our experience, these educational experiences also shaped their way of understanding singing and knowledge. Lorea accumulated a decade of ethnographic fieldwork and interactions with Bengali performers and gurus. Her practice-led research located in West Bengal, southern and western areas of Bangladesh, and the Andaman Islands was based on a rigorous apprenticeship of Baul ritual songs that involved both listening to and participating in performances and learning to perform for a public during the rituals herself. It is through practice that she could achieve an embodied understanding that her guru, Master Moshai, wanted to share with her: the epistemic distinction between *tasting* an esoteric truth and *reading* its description.

Aubinet also spent part of his fieldwork in Finnmark (northern Norway), participating in Sami yoik workshops to learn yoik repertoire and technique *by doing*. Without this practice, his questions about animality, presence, personhood, temporality, and the relationships between yoiking and (academic) writing could not have been formulated as they are.

Lastly, Robinson spent several years working as an administrator in the same Deaf-led theater where some of her research participants worked as artists before starting her fieldwork and research on deaf-centered ontology and epistemology. Her training in British Sign Language and lived experience as a daughter of an oral-deaf parent, as well as the years spent working at the Deaf-led theater, must all be considered part of an apprenticeship and education of attention that is integral to her anthropological work and way to approach Deaf-centered epistemology and the experience of access in her research participants' own terms.<sup>10</sup>

Gina Athena Ulysse (2013, 2019) offers an established example of knowing by singing: she carries out anthropological work *via* song and spoken word poetry, underpinned by her Haitian heritage through which her cultural critique and analysis unfolds. In the 1990s, Fiona Magowan spent two years learning *ngāthi-manikay* (crying songs) with Aboriginal women in northeast Australia. The process of being taught to sing these songs brought Magowan to argue that musical anthropology, as distinct from the the anthropology of music, or in our terms knowing by singing, "poses questions for the discipline about how the experience of performance might change the performance of anthropology" (Magowan 2001, 81). What this special section argues is that anthropologists more widely, beyond the cutting edge that Ulysse represents, have pressing scholarly reasons to unpack the logocentrism that underpins their assumptions embedded in anthropological uses of voice, language, and writing by attending to their academic practices.

## EPISTEMIC COLONIALISM

Anthropologists have already devoted much effort to unpacking the intrinsic links between ethnography and epistemology and the political implications of both (e.g., Marcus and Cushman 1982). With the growing number of multimodal projects, it may seem that our argument linking anthropological practices to epistemic colonialism has already been made. However, it only takes a quick browse through most anthropology journals to see that the bulk of their content is strictly required to follow logocentric forms. In this content, authors are only secondarily, if at all, permitted space to attempt to shift perceptual experience through their writing. Recalling Robinson's call in the epigraph—that it is the form of



knowledge that needs to be changed—one major factor blocking disciplinary revision is the epistemic colonialism perpetuated by these logocentric publishing practices (Santos 2014). As the contributors to this special section show, such epistemic colonialism is embedded in logocentrism, which has been *forcibly* imposed, by various means, as the dominant epistemology in locations around the world: through the banning of women's songs in Bengal (Lorea), by labeling yoiking as "shameful" by Christian groups in Lapland (Aubinet), and through multiple forms of physical and psychological mistreatment and abuse aimed at imposing "compulsory able-bodiedness" since the late 1800s on deaf people in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (Robinson).

Logocentrism underpins epistemic colonialism thus: Implied in logocentrism is a hierarchized classification of human races according to their prevalent sense organ, with the white European "eye-man" at the top and the Black African "skin-man" at the bottom (see Lorea, this section). As Lorea shows, this classification of the senses is also gendered: "Women were associated with debased oral culture, gossip, folklore, the realm of tales and superstition, while men were assumed to represent the propriety of grammar, logic, and literature." This hierarchy placed rich, old European white men at the top, descending through to women, lower classes, and, at the bottom, non-Westerners. Only the knowledge of those at the top was considered valid and universally true. Logocentrism is the mode of using and understanding language that both expresses and legitimizes this Western universalist onto/epistemology (Conquergood 2002; De Certeau 1984). The idea that Western rational knowledge, taking the form of logocentrism, is the only valid way of knowing has often been used to legitimize such processes of subjugation, which in turn is used to legitimize broader acts of domination (Santos 2014).

In principle, anthropologists have become increasingly aware of epistemic colonialism—for instance, in the ontological turn's aim for permanent decolonization of the mind (Viveiros de Castro et al. 2014) and the student movement calling to decolonize the university (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nisancioglu 2018).<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, much fieldwork remains instrumental (Marcus 2001) and extractive (Rodríguez 2015). And beyond fieldwork, in the "career-complex" of anthropology (Sanjek 2015), there is scope for much more onto/epistemic questioning.

Even the proponents of the ontological turn, for instance, do not question the reproduction of epistemic colonialism in the abstractions they effect. Holbraad (2012, 241), for example, insists that anthropological work is distinctly "intellectual work ... [it] takes the form of 'argument'—the *logos* in 'anthropology.'"<sup>12</sup> By focusing on generating anthropological concepts, they fail to make the connection between specific practices (the formation of intellectual, logocentric arguments) and epistemic colonialism (Ang and Gatt 2018b). In Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd's (2015, 251) terms, it is anthropological *praxis* that needs to be revised so that the discipline stops being a "de facto white public space."<sup>13</sup>

Anishabee and Haudenosaunee scholar Vanessa Watts (2013) critiques Donna Haraway's use of the notions of Coyote or the Trickster. On the one hand, Watts appreciates how Haraway's feminist antiessentialism works to undermine universalist depictions of knowledge. On the other hand, in the way Haraway uses concepts from localized knowledge, Watts notes that the Indigenous histories and protocols around such knowledge and stories are absent. In this, definitions of "knowledge" remain dictated by Western principles, and Indigenous stories become abstracted tools. Essentially, what this does is "erase the embodied, practiced, and legal-governance aspects of Indigenous ontologies as they are enacted by Indigenous actors" (Todd 2015, 17).

Indigenous scholars have linked the shift that is needed in this praxis directly to song—and to be precise, to the embodied ways of knowing in which song is living knowledge. In these calls, scholars argue for the need to change bodily practices in order to decolonize research. Carolyn Kenny, born of a Choctaw mother in Mississippi and first-generation Ukrainian father, and who was adopted into the Haida Nation in 1999, explains how Indigenous peoples often honor and nurture a connection to the natural world through song, "yet embodied ways of knowing that are pivotal to vocal traditions often remain absent from scholarly research, and ... the denigration and marginalization of this type of knowledge undermines our ability to build culturally diverse and health communities" (Magnat 2020, 41). Robinson (2020, 46) similarly explains this and also gives a concise example of epistemic violence:

Ontologically, many of our songs have their primary significance as law, history, teachings, or function as forms of *doing*. This is to say they are history, teaching, law that take the form of song, just as Western forms of law and history take the form of writing. Yet they cannot also be reduced to merely an alternative form of Western documentation—the exact equivalent to a book, or to written title of land. I have been repeatedly asked to account for the ways in which our songs serve as law, or how songs have life. At the heart of these questions has been a demand to explain how our songs fulfill the necessary and sufficient *Western* criteria that constitute a thing. To measure the "fit" of Indigenous processes by Western standards subjects them (and the Indigenous person who explains them) to epistemic violence, and reentrenches colonial principles and values.

Finally, Ngūgiwa Thiong'o (1981) and Quintina Carter-Ényi and Aaron Carter-Ényi (2019) argue that African musicians have resisted mental colonization by singing old songs in their native languages and practicing linguistic innovation through their musical practice.

## DIFFERENT WAYS OF KNOWING BY SINGING

Different ways of being and knowing, embedded in different sung/spoken/felt practices, have been and continue to be subjugated. As the articles in this special section show, in these processes of domination, Western rational epistemologies (often in the form of logocentrism), are mobilized as justification. However, not only have people around the world resisted this, but they also offered creative redressive possibilities. Robinson (2020, 12) argues that Indigenous methodologies of song, and the different ways of knowing/being these are embedded in, must “not merely [be] accepted within areas of publication and peer review but [be] understood as vital contributions to scholarship.” Here we outline the implications for anthropology as a discipline when these ways of knowing/being are taken seriously for anthropology.

Enslaved people in nineteenth-century United States were violently forbidden many forms of voicing and sounding and prevented from acquiring literacy (Conquergood 2002, 150). The soundscapes on plantations were tightly controlled by slaveholders, who enforced when and where enslaved people could sing and speak (Smith 2001, 68). How the voices of enslaved people were heard and understood was shaped by racism and entrenched in racist pseudoscience of the time, as well as some recent geneticists, who argued that Black people are innately noisy and “predisposed to hear particularly well” (Sun Eidsheim 2019, 40). Even with the abolition of slavery, this racism continued, and it continues to determine the essentialist way in which voices, especially Black voices, are heard in the United States and beyond. The racism of this is particularly evident in the context of opera, where rigorous training changes vocal timbre to sound like different “national schools” (song traditions based on historically specific European operatic styles), showing the malleability of the voice (Sun Eidsheim 2019, 54). Nonetheless, Black opera singers are regularly cast along racist principles to sing in what are considered “ethnic” roles or as villains (83).

Frederick Douglass first noted how the forms of communication that enslaved people developed were powerful modes of resistance. Enslaved people’s songs could slow the tempo of work to a more humane rhythm and generate sympathy in Northerners and the fight against slavery (Smith 2001, 67), or engender *ethnosympathy* (Sun Eidsheim 2019, 75). Field hollers functioned as forms of introduction and generation of sociality, which was otherwise impossible in the harsh working conditions. Spirituals served a similar function; they expressed and maintained spiritual life and conveyed important information and news in words, though often coded (Smith 2001, 80).

On the other side of the Atlantic, in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, working-class voicing and sounding, which carried specific forms of knowing and doing, were also silenced. As many factories were set up, rules were introduced by employers demanding silence even in processes that previously had accompanying working songs, such as in making fabrics (Korczynski 2014). In addition to the deafening roar of the new industrial machines, people would be fined for singing, whistling, and in some cases even talking (Korczynski 2014). This was accompanied by shifts in how music and song were shared, taught, and evaluated. The closed-throat Oxbridge choral style of singing was recorded and considered worthy of study, while the open-throated singing of music halls and in people’s homes was not (Horvitz 2010).<sup>14</sup> As well as being important as pedagogical tools, many work-song traditions generated social cohesion and healthier rhythms for hard labor (Hopkin 2019).

Indigenous peoples in Canada have had genocide and cultural genocide committed against them by the Canadian state. This was carried out through a combination of laws, such as the Indian Act, which included the “potlatch ban” (1884–1951), confining Indigenous peoples to reserves, and the residential schools. Among other violences, they were prohibited from speaking their native languages and singing their songs (Robinson 2020, 150). Before these policies were implemented, policies that shored up longer and equally destructive processes of Christian missionization, Indigenous families and communities in northwest Canada would travel widely for different seasonal activities, including harvesting, hunting and fishing, and important gatherings, such as potlatches (55). “All of these forms of control over the movement of Indigenous bodies did not just limit mobility, but fundamentally restricted the range, flexibility, and time of attention more generally, by restricting Indigenous *proprioceptive agency* within (and in relation to) [their] lands.” (55; emphasis added). Restricting Indigenous peoples’ practices forcibly changed their ways of perceiving and knowing the world.

As described above, rather than being only aesthetically important, songs are history, law, medicine, specific information like details about hunting grounds, and a vehicle for maintaining relationships with other-than-human beings. Songs in First Nation ontologies are alive (Magnat 2020, 21–22), and there are specific protocols about when and by whom they may be shared.<sup>15</sup>

Many Indigenous artists and scholars are working to redress the onto/epistemic violence done to songs. This work of redress also offers vital suggestions for how to shift anthropological work away from epistemic violence. Indigenous artist Peter Morin (Tahltan), for example, carefully wraps Indigenous artifacts in blankets as part of invited engagements in museums in order to give his relatives a chance to rest. In his work in museums and other public places, he sets up temporary longhouses to set in place the correct protocols of reciprocity, and he sings songs to visit his relatives held in such museums. Morin’s work is an example of knowing by singing, where the specific onto/epistemologies of song, what Robinson refers to as Indigenous structures, are taken into account.<sup>16</sup>

Carola Lorea’s article introduces us to the epistemology of singing among Bengali esoteric lineages that have been regularly banned and are now being revitalized. The singing practices of the different yet interrelated Bengali esoteric practitioners are ways of acquiring and exchanging a kind of knowledge that stands in contrast to doctrinal treatises and sacred scriptures, which are understood to provide an inferior kind of indirect and inferential knowledge. These esoteric ways of knowing by singing are therefore *explicitly* pitted against logocentric onto/epistemology, where knowledge inheres only in scripture. The knowledge attained through singing is part of their esoteric ethical self-formation, how to become more

human and more female, because women are understood to be closer to the ideal human (*mānuṣ*). Songs in these heterodox Bengali lineages are anthropopoietic. As Lorea writes, songs, “like anthropology, discuss the condition of being human, the ways of becoming human, and what this means to different people.” Central to Lorea’s article is the observation that knowing by singing among Bengali esoteric movements is embedded in a history of racial and gender-prejudiced ocularcentrism and scriptist bias, which makes their practices of knowing by singing both *anti*-patriarchal and *anti*-hierarchical.

Stéphane Aubinet’s article presents the Indigenous singing practice of the Sámi, the yoik, as a way of knowing that entwines humans, the landscape, animals, and other aspects of experience through a process of making the other present through song. As mentioned above, the yoik and other aspects of Indigenous ontologies were silenced through Christianization and shaming. Aubinet shows that the yoik offers a particular way of learning to attend to one’s surroundings and simultaneously a way to make persons and things present in their absence. This should not, however, be confused with representation. Yoikers insist that the deceased friend or the mountain they may be yoiking is brought forth in the yoik itself. This is what Aubinet calls “presentification.”

The ways of knowing of the yoikers directly contradict the human exceptionalism in definitions of language founded in a history of logocentrism. The same ancient Greek tradition that separated sonic aspects of the logos from reason also underwrote a separation of human sounds from animal sounds and an even wider separation from sounds made by other nonhumans (Cavarero 2005). Humans were alleged to have language and music; everything else was noise. This distinction, as well as being deeply entrenched in relation to “language proper,” remains in musicology, as in John Blacking’s (1973, 3) definition of music as “humanly organized sound.” In practice, however, this stark division between human and nonhuman song is belied by experience.

Nevertheless, wider debates tend once again to overlook the song-like or musical aspects of quasi-linguistic forms of presentification and communication. This special section addresses the gap, long ago identified (Feld and Fox 1994) but as yet unaddressed (Rice 2018), by asking: What do the specifics of song bring to studies of the other-than-human and biosemiotics? Aubinet offers an instance in which the division between semiosis and musicality is obviated through the presentification that yoiking brings about. The sort of attention that yoikers develop in order to yoik a wolf, for example, requires the teachable, imaginative capacity to become wolf. This is not an anthropomorphizing imagination, but quite the opposite: a sensibility that recognizes the porosity of the boundary between humans and other beings.

By highlighting nondeaf expectations of song and listening, Robinson reveals the aural biases that continue to perpetuate epistemic injustice in UK government policies of “accessibility.” In line with Deaf Anthropology, Robinson’s article explores perceptual experience through “differential sensory configurations.” For instance, not only do deaf people learn to see and touch differently from “hearing” people; they also come to process these as equivalent to aural events. Their particular visual and tactile attention *is* listening; likewise, the ways deaf people see *is* a mode of touching. Importantly, since there are many ways to be deaf, there are as many deaf ways of knowing. Robinson and her collaborators invite “hearing” readers to recognize how the senses need to be reconfigured to take into account deaf knowing.<sup>17</sup> Similarly to Robinson (2020, 47), who argues that “decolonizing musical practice involves becoming no longer sure what LISTENING is,” Robinson shows how revising assumptions about the senses is also essential for DEAF anthropology.

The link between the articles in this special section and the Indigenous scholars’ work cited above is precisely how they challenge Western normative understandings of songs and show how they not only are forms of knowledge but also encapsulate different ways of knowing. Specifically, they challenge the Western understanding of knowledge as an abstractable and free-floating “good” (Robinson 2020, 158) and offer alternative emplaced and situated understandings of knowledge. Watts proposes a principle of “Indigenous Place-Thought” in which knowledge is effectively relational and situated (see Todd 2016, 9).<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, Hawaiian scholar Manulani Aluli-Meyer (cited in Magnat 2020, 57) argues that Hawaiian epistemology is relevant beyond the confines of the geography where it originates and that it has universal relevance. However, the conception of universality she works with is based on the notion of specificity: a place-specific understanding of universality. Similarly, as outlined above, the articles in this special section emphasize how the different song practices and experiences of song they present offer different understandings and *ways of knowing* that offer creative potentials for destabilizing logocentric understandings of language, and consequently of speech/song and text, in anthropology.

## VOICING ANTHROPOLOGY OTHERWISE

We have argued that logocentrism perpetuates epistemic colonialism through the specific ways in which language, speech, and song are understood and used. We have shown how a key way to shift such onto/epistemic assumptions is to change practices. We have offered some examples of how we have changed our own practices in the workshops that led to this special section, where we explored academic voicing through song. We critiqued the logocentric ideology of language in which song and speech, sound and concept are separated, which questioning enables a reconsideration of the function of knowing and thus scholarship. In our own experiences of anthropology through song, we found that the function of research may be more importantly about the relationships it enables rather than only the informative content it produces. Other possibilities include exploring the sung qualities of writing. Robinson (2020, 81) suggests that instead of logocentric writing, scholars could explore writing *with* rather than writing *about*. This performative writing “enacts the affective force of the performance event” (Phelan cited in Robinson 2020, 81).



Once it becomes clear that what we need is an “ontological reorientation of what we believe we are listening to” when we hear and sing songs (Robinson 2020, 58), then it becomes possible to recognize speech/song/writing as the many functions they play: law, medicine, forms of sociality with other humans and other-than-humans. This in turn reorients what our understanding of knowledge is, from the Western abstractable “good” to emergent, emplaced, and situated concreteness. In doing so, each researcher will be required to figure out the appropriate ways the knowledge they coproduce may be shared.

We are certainly not suggesting that all anthropologists put away their pens and keyboards and start singing. In fact, moving from logocentric writing and voicing to knowing by singing requires even more attention to the politics of representation and cultural appropriation. As Robinson (2020) shows, even when Indigenous people are invited to sing their own songs without attention to the structures those songs are embedded in may lead to further extractivism, let alone if anthropologists began singing their collaborators’ songs. When Gatt began to use song in her academic presentations, she had been building on a twenty-year history of working in laboratory theater and later had ongoing guidance and invitations from Ang. What we are suggesting is in fact that anthropologists may need to give much more care to how they communicate their research in order to be appropriate to their specific research collaborators’ onto/epistemologies. In other words, knowing by singing is really a call for granular attention to the specific politics of ontology and knowledge informing each anthropological project.

This of course goes against the universalizing drive of Western epistemologies, where knowledge is transcendent. It also goes against the “publish or perish” pressure in anthropology. But the alternative, to carry on primarily producing logocentric documents that convey “abstractable” information (whether written or in film, photography, or sound), simply “reentrenches colonial principles and values” (Robinson 2020, 46). Robinson writes further that moving “toward anticolonial listening practices requires that the ‘fevered’ pace of consumption for knowledge resources be placed aside in favor of new temporalities of wonder disoriented from antirelational and nonsituated settler colonial positions of certainty.” (53). In fact, Conquergood (2002), who writes that logocentric forms of writing in anthropology participate in “subjugating” other knowledges, argues for knowledge to be located, engaged, and in solidarity rather than transcendent, abstracted, and separated from daily life.

In order to make this shift, we argue that anthropologists will also need to attend to how they voice their knowledge, what ideology of language underpins the way they carry out fieldwork, and how they communicate that research. This in turn depends entirely on recognizing that different song practices are more-than-aesthetic; they are forms of history; law; medicine; sociality with many possible actors, human and otherwise; resistance; and different configurations of the senses.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this introduction and special section, except where indicated otherwise, we refer to “logocentrism” following Cavarero’s (2005) definition, where the sonic qualities of voice are relegated to meaninglessness. “This is different to the sense defined by Derrida, where logocentrism is the idea that logos incarnates presence, whereas writing only constitutes a derived form of expression. From there, logocentrism is assimilated to the metaphysics of ‘presence’ and ‘identity’ that Derrida tried to ‘deconstruct’” (Aubinet, personal communication).

<sup>2</sup> The languages of the Niger-Congo region are tone languages and considered “musical” in themselves (Carter-Ényi and Carter-Ényi 2019, 62). Moreover, Carter-Ényi and Carter-Ényi (2019, 62), who examine the work of South African singer and activist Miriam Makeba, argue that “language and music are so tied in Africa, [that] to divorce a melody from its lyrics . . . is to disfigure the music.” Makeba insists that not only do the words matter in her songs but that “without language, there would be no song; without song, African music would not exist. Language and music are thus tied, as if by an umbilical cord. No one who ignores its linguistic aspects can hope to reach a profound understanding of African music” (cited in Carter-Ényi and Carter-Ényi 2019, 62).

<sup>3</sup> Following Wilson (2008, 4) we capitalize the word Indigenous to highlight the political process by which Indigenous peoples are engaging in to reclaim terms, research, and knowledge that concerns them.

<sup>4</sup> See Jacobsen-Bia (2014) for an ethnographic example of how Radmilla’s singing (Radmilla having a Native American mother and African American father) is received in the United States and what she does to destabilize people’s prejudices in order to become not only successful but celebrated in her Native American community.

<sup>5</sup> My husband, who is also Maltese, is routinely detained at airports for up to three hours having his identity documents scrutinized due to his skin color and facial hair. He has been the victim of racist violence in front of our own home in Scotland. The perpetrators were found guilty of aggravated racist assault. I include this very personal detail because Maltese people are often considered “white,” but this very much depends on the person’s skin color and the context rather than nationality.

<sup>6</sup> The University of Aberdeen is one of the United Kingdom’s seven “ancient” universities, listed as such by virtue of being founded before 1600.

- <sup>7</sup> Alfred Gell (1995) develops the argument surrounding this relationship and finds that the language of the Umeda of Papua New Guinea is rich in phonological iconisms. That is, the semantic meanings conveyed by words have a recognizable relationship to their speech sounds, as well as to sonic aspects of their environment. We mention this to offer further evidence that it is not language per se that excludes sonic meaningfulness but logocentric understandings of language, such as Saussurean linguistics (Saussure [1915] 1983).
- <sup>8</sup> This tradition has often been critiqued for some of its dubious appropriative practices in relation to song (Spatz 2019; Ulehla 2021). However, the same authors also struggle with how this form of research shifted their perception to be able to understand and work with the epistemic function of songs.
- <sup>9</sup> The workshops were "Of Words and Sounds," May 2018, Aberdeen, and "Knowing by Singing," June 2018, London (at the Royal Anthropological Institute's biennial conference). These two were the last in a series of workshops, research projects, collaborations, and study that Gatt embarked on starting in 2005 and culminating in Gatt's project "Crafting Anthropologies Otherwise" (2013–2018). Under scrutiny in this research was the epistemological basis for anthropological practice in fieldwork and beyond. The Crafting Anthropologies project was a subproject of "Knowing from the Inside" (ERC 2013–2018, Tim Ingold PI), in which Lembo was research assistant and collaborator. See also Ang and Gatt (2018a) and Gatt (2015, 2018, 2020, 2022) for other publications arising from this project.
- <sup>10</sup> Nina Sun Eidsheim (2019) also argues that her understandings are the result of her being a trained and practicing singer.
- <sup>11</sup> Although Faye Harrison (1991) long ago argued that in order to work toward a decolonial anthropology the structures scaffolding the discipline would need thorough revision, she does not question the coloniality of the onto/epistemologies embedded in her own ethnographic practices.
- <sup>12</sup> See Salmund (2013, 2014) for a different critique of the ontological turn in relation to epistemic colonialism.
- <sup>13</sup> Magnat (2020) and Robinson (2020) have similarly noted how musicology and sound studies remain deeply Eurocentric.
- <sup>14</sup> Listen to Frankie Armstrong on the class origin of the idea that some people can't sing, which led to an educational system that actively discouraged people from singing in open-throated styles <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b0979f3z>.
- <sup>15</sup> For instance, when Indigenous artifacts are kept in museum vitrines, always on display, they are never given a chance to rest, and Robinson (2020, 166) makes the argument that the many songs kept on recordings in museums are similarly on "life support" or poisoned by materials they are recorded on.
- <sup>16</sup> See also Magnat's (2020) suggestion, based on Wilson (2008), that performance ethnography can lead to research as ceremony.
- <sup>17</sup> Friedner and Helmreich (2012) also critique of Feld's "acoustemology" on this basis. Although Feld's acoustemology is synesthetic, he does not take into account signing and other nonspeaking communicative practices that Friedner and Helmreich suggest might undo phonocentric models of speech.
- <sup>18</sup> Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd notes the similarities of this proposal with Ingold's Dwelling ontology, which she notes he derives in part from Irvine Lowell, who did ethnographic work with Anishinaabe people. Todd argues that the fact that white scholars cite other white scholars, such as in this case, rather than the Anishinaabe scholars and knowledge holders themselves, is a clear example of how anthropology remains a defacto white public place.

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