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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE: BEYOND INVENTING TRADITIONS

The Invention of Tradition, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger and published in 1983 by Cambridge University Press, was an important call for those of us in the human sciences to rethink the way we understand tradition. The framework of invented tradition as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, [and] which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983:1) is one that continues to shape our work in many ways. The ten essays in this volume build upon and extend this framework of tradition beyond its “appearance and establishment” (ibid.) to present innovative, distinctive, and diverse interpretations of expressive cultures through music, dance, ritual, theatre, and institutional practices.

Bell Yung’s poignant reminder that creativity constitutes tradition is echoed by all our authors. By examining the creative processes of playwrights, theatre directors, and performers, Klisala Harrison examines the historical, traditional, and popular aesthetics and mechanisms they use to develop Indigenous theatre of Canada and Sámi. In a similar way, Guilnard Moufarrej focuses on the transmission of ancient Syro-Maronite chants among the Lebanese communities in the United States. Creativity abounds in the way the chants are adapted through the use of different languages and liturgical structures of Maronite churches. The language used for texts may vary as much as the assenting and dissenting opinions around it. Yet it is precisely the emerging affinities created through such discourses, and the use of persistent sound patterns through existing tunes and poetic metres (cf. Treitler 1974) that shape chant performance as a key tradition in the transformation of Maronite communities.

Changes to tradition, Andrew Snyder contends, will not necessarily destroy it. On the contrary, he shows how the contra dance is sustained by changing its form, and argues that the degendering of contra dance refocuses this tradition as an integral part of the broader dance world. Tes Slominski helps us understand how ambiguities about the scope and meaning of the “public” in the 1935 Public Dance Halls Act impacted the way Irish traditional musicians define what is or is not part of “the tradition” in Irish traditional music, and in the process, displaces the role of women musicians. Interestingly, ambiguity also characterises the performance practices associated with the Chinese seven-string zither. As Bell Yung demonstrates, ambiguities in rhythm are precisely the interstices where creativity propels tradition.

Fundamental to Hobsbawm and Ranger's volume is a distinction between genuine and invented traditions (Hobsbawm 1983:8), that is, on what is tradition, with an inclination towards a narrative of nation, nationalism, and related discourses (*ibid.*:13–14). Collectively, our authors in this volume focus on the processes that shape tradition from multiple perspectives. It is not so much whether a tradition is genuine or spurious (Handler and Linnekin 1984), nor only about why it became a tradition, but how it transforms and sustains itself as a tradition. In Andrea Shaheen Espinosa's study, it is the diasporic experiences that shape the meanings and values of tradition, and which inform the musical practices of Syrian-Argentine individuals in Buenos Aires. For Michael O'Toole, it is about how the Turkish lute symbolises tradition for Turkish communities in Berlin, and how the instrument is a catalyst for inculcating values of tradition through music pedagogy in the development of Turkish-German identities.

Anna Yates-Lu illustrates how Korean artists negotiate pressures they face in contemporary Korean society by strategically integrating traditional and popular music to create new fusion traditions. And using case studies in Tamale (Ghana) and Jakarta (Indonesia), Karl Haas and Maho Ishiguro respectively illustrate how public performances of communal rituals, and religious song and dance are not only celebratory, dazzling, and fun, but are important social traditions of moral authority that enable Ghanian men and Indonesian young women to navigate rapid social changes. Broadly then, the essays in this volume show how traditions of expressive cultures are inextricably bound to everyday lives. After all, to paraphrase Nuri Karademirli's words in Michael O'Toole's study, it is through learning music and dance that we become more humane.

By no means am I suggesting that all the essays in this volume use tradition as a focal point, nor do I imply that they should be read as such. Each essay was submitted with its unique direction and approach, evaluated, and later selected based on its distinctive strengths. My preamble here is simply one of many threads that emerged as I worked through these very fine works with their distinguished authors. My gratitude goes to Karl Haas, Klisala Harrison, Maho Ishiguro, Guilnard Moufarrej, Michael O'Toole, Andrea Shaheen Espinosa, Tes Slominski, Andrew Snyder, Anna Yates-Lu, and Bell Yung for their creative research, and their patience and understanding as we worked through the new processes involved in the transition for our volume to be published by Cambridge University Press.

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