

Sonic Sovereignty: Hip-Hop, Indigeneity, and Shifting Popular Music Mainstreams.

By Liz Przybylski. New York: New York University Press, 2023. 328 pages. \$94 cloth; \$32 paper; \$30 e-book.

Liz Przybylski delivers a groundbreaking examination of the cultural hustle of Indigenous hip-hop and electronic dance music (EDM) artists in *Sonic Sovereignty*. She provides an in-depth analysis of how these indigenous artists break down, remix, and reconstruct their political, cultural, and territorial autonomy through hip-hop and digital media. Focused on the years 2008–14, the book examines the centrality of a radio station as physical infrastructure for a hip-hop community primarily at the local and regional level. Anchored in the original concept of “sonic sovereignty,” Przybylski argues that music is not just a vehicle for expression but a domain of Indigenous self-determination and land-based resistance. Przybylski reveals how artists’ journeys through sonic space parallel movements for land back, gender justice, and decolonial futures. As these artists spin the proverbial block in parallel temporality for their culture through hip-hop, the author shows that they don’t simply create—they indigenize, dab, gas, ground beats and create flows, and deliver sanctified and innovatively lit performances that are part of specific territories, languages, and kinship systems.

One of the book’s most compelling aspects focuses on the Halluci Nation—the artists formerly known as Tribe Called Red—whose electrifying, rizz-level blend of powwow and drum circle samples with EDM generates a visceral sonic protest against settler colonialism. Przybylski’s term “remix sovereignty” describes how the group manipulates—through mashups, beat juggles, grounds, and dubs—genre expectations, performing Indigenous modernity in spaces like nightclubs and global music festivals, where it’s often erased. Similarly, Snotty Nose Rez Kids are recognized for bringing razor-sharp lyrical prose to their music, blending trap beats with unapologetically political content that critiques settler colonialism, celebrates Indigenous identity, and confronts challenging issues such as land theft, pipelines, and racism with a fiercely focused urgency. Equally striking is Przybylski’s exploration of gender in Indigenous hip-hop. She spotlights two-spirit and women artists such as T-Rhyme and Iskwé, whose lyrical and vocal dynamics resist colonial heteropatriarchy, offering what she calls “sonic activism.” These voices reconfigure Indigenous presence not just in the public sphere but also in the intimate domain of the very act of listening itself.

In the chapter on sovereignty, Przybylski demonstrates how artists like Frank Waln utilize digital and social media platforms, such as Twitter and YouTube, to create expansive, open-world networks that form part of a sweeping Indigenous activism. Digital circulation becomes a mode of both visibility and survivance. Her final chapter on archives reconceptualizes, mixes, and dubs memory and preservation, illustrating how mix tapes, live streams, and community storytelling constitute an

Indigenous-controlled sonic archive that challenges institutional erasure and reestablishes autonomy.

The book is fascinating, but it needs further development to have a real impact. The introduction of decolonial listening as a way for Indigenous hip-hop to challenge and disrupt settler colonial norms on Indigenous terms is incredible—and yet Przybylski doesn't fully clarify what this looks like in practice. How are listeners, especially those from different non-Indigenous backgrounds, supposed to change their habits, to recognize or to truly embody this particular form of decolonial listening? The book concept would have benefited greatly from sonic and video accompaniments. Without concrete guidance, the idea risks becoming a trendy phrase rather than a meaningful practice. As of right now, the idea opens a door but doesn't quite show us the way through—or, more to the point, kick in the door.

We both enjoyed how Przybylski introduces Indigenous hip-hop scenes and artists like Hallucination (we have followed them since way before the name change), Drezus, and Mob Bounce. They are not simply Indigenous hip-hop artists but media architects who are redefining the mainstream by navigating (and hacking) the shifting terrain of entertainment; being rooted in authentic identity while being commercially viable brings about tension. But through all of this, agency, infrastructure, and a fierce, bombastic revolution are emerging through platforms, not just as an art form but as a political infrastructure based around sound and lyrics.

Sonic Sovereignty is both a scholarly and political achievement. It compels us to listen differently, to explore, and to recognize music as a land where the struggle for Indigenous futures is already being sounded, one lyrical bar and beat drop at a time.

Mic check, #landback! Ya feel us?

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