Coloniality, post-coloniality and decolonization in music education in the former Jesuit reductions of Moxos (Bolivia)

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After the failure of the search for El Dorado, European interest evolved into a new phase, namely evangelization, carried out by the Society of Jesus. Around 1674, several expeditions involving a large number of Jesuits were undertaken in order to establish missions around the Amazonian region. In 1682, the first mission of Moxos was funded under the name of Nuestra Señora de Loreto. The aim of “reducing” the native people to one unique group was indeed a major factor influencing homogenization despite the existence of a wide variety of different native nations. Music as a tool for evangelization became an important aspect of the local identity even after the expulsion of the Jesuits. Cultural diversity had an essential role in music instruction and the creation of a particular “baroque” music style. This music continues to be performed today by local musicians who have preserved the scores for centuries and redefined their musical practices as expression of indigenous modernity and versatility in new music instruction models.

In colonial times, missionary music instruction was inspired by European music taking elements of native musical practices. The post-coloniality reduced the music instruction as an isolated non-formal practice. Cultural diversity had to respond to economic, religious and political interests which kept a colonial mentality for a long time. Nowadays, after three important educational reforms, the aim of applying a decolonized, intercultural, intracultural and plurilingual education is part of the new national constitution. This has an important impact on modern music education, local music schools in the region borrow elements
from the European conservatory model and from El Sistema, but also including old and new indigenous artistic practices.

Through an ethnographic and historical approach, this work will describe the evolution of music instruction during three different historical scenarios in order to examine the modern decolonized approaches which aim to empower local identity, cultural diversity, gender and social inclusion.