To our faithful readers and those perusing our pages for the first time, welcome to Volume 10 of 

*SEM Student News*. Within ethnomusicology and cognate disciplines, the term “diaspora” has been problematized and defended, substituted and accepted; here, our contributors engage with the issues and current trends of diaspora music studies, broadly defined, and you will find a variety of problems, solutions, and case studies that deal with such ideas. As a researcher whose primary focus has not been on disaporic communities in the traditional sense—peoples displaced from a “homeland” but retaining (or not) cultural ties to that “home”—my knowledge base of these issues has grown in editing this volume. It is my hope that yours will too. I am pleased to say that we had numerous responses to our calls for submission, and we look forward to continued engagement with both student and professional ethnomusicologists. For this volume, the discussion on diaspora took many forms and each editorial brings to light questions regarding both communities’ positions as well as the researchers’ positions concerning “diasporic” identity. This volume’s cover image is a prime example. The Mardi Gras Indian traditions in New Orleans are quite unique, but as the photographer of the above image points out, they are indeed diasporic—representing the Atlantic experience and the New World experience—of African Americans working within these communities. This nuanced understanding of diaspora lends agency to the community and avoids resorting to broad labels or outsider assumptions. Many of the thoughts shared in this volume center on this idea of self-identification and the understanding of complex emotional, cultural, and historical processes.

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*By Justin R. Hunter (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa)*
SEM Reports
announcements, conference calls, new initiatives

By Justin R. Hunter (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa)

In this column we call attention to exciting ways for you, as a student and scholar, to get involved in SEM and beyond. From conference announcements to publication news, this column is your go-to place for updates and information to become more active as an ethnomusicologist. If you have announcements, calls for participation, or new programs that should be included in an upcoming volume, contact us at semstudentnews@gmail.com.

Conferences in 2015:

- College Music Society International Conference
  June 17–24, Stockholm, Sweden & Helsinki, Finland
- British Forum for Ethnomusicology & Société Française d’Ethnomusicologie (joint conference)
  July 2–5, Paris, France
- Congress on Dance Research & Society for Dance History Scholars (joint conference)
  July 4–7, Athens, Greece
- International Council for Traditional Music
  July 16–22, Astana, Kazakhstan
- Society for Music Theory
  October 29–November 1, St. Louis, Missouri
- College Music Society & Association for Technology in Music Instruction
  November 5–7, Indianapolis, Indiana
- American Musicological Society
  November 12–15, Louisville, Kentucky
- American Anthropological Association
  November 18–22, Denver, Colorado
- Society for Ethnomusicology
  December 3–6, Austin, Texas

Sound Matters: SEM’s online publication, *Sound Matters*, hosted on the SEM website, offers content on a variety of subjects related to music, sound, and ethnomusicology. The publication seeks lively and accessible posts that provide stimulating reading for both specialists and general readers. They encourage authors to consider this an opportunity to transcend the boundaries of traditional print with brief writings that may integrate hyperlinks and multimedia examples.

Possibilities for *Sound Matters* include research vignettes, profiles of cultural organizations, interviews, working notes, roundtables, virtual symposia, and meditations on timely subjects that encourage responses. Content is moderated by the editor, who may also consult outside reviewers. For more information, visit the *Sound Matters* page.

Connect with SEM Student News on Facebook and at SEM

SEM Student Union Blog: The SU blog celebrated its first anniversary/birthday this past February. The blog has seen some exciting projects in the past year: In Discipline, a multi-lingual series aimed at sharing the experiences of ethnomusicology students throughout Europe; a collaboration with the WannaBeEthno bloggers, who are associated with the SU undergraduate committee and work to speak directly to undergraduate student concerns; and a new project we are launching in June on Ethnomusicology and Parenthood, which will share the thoughts and experiences of students who started families while pursuing their degrees. From Liza Munk, Ana-Maria Alarcon-Jiménez, Jennie Williams, and Heather Strohschein: thank you to everyone for your support, encouragement, and ideas. For more information and to suggest blog topics, please contact us at semsuhblog@gmail.com.

Stay Current with SEM: SEM encourages you to join or renew now to get the most out of your membership! Student memberships are $40 and run from January to December. Members receive significantly reduced conference registration fees ($90 vs. $130), access to the website Members’ Area and *SEM Newsletter*, hard copies of *Ethnomusicology* for the year, and discounts with major publishers, including Smithsonian Folkways and Oxford University Press! You also get to help determine the future of our society and field by participating in our annual Board and Council election. Memberships can be purchased online at www.ethnomusicology.org. Feel free to contact Jennifer Studebaker at sem@indiana.edu if you have any questions or help logging in.
The SEM Student Union is actively working with SEM Student News to develop a platform for student thoughts and concerns. For this volume on diaspora, we approached students whose research experiences offered a sense of some of the issues concerning this topic, representing various roles as insiders and outsiders, practitioners and novices, as well as the use of numerous methodologies for understanding the relationships between music, diaspora, and identity. This theme of music and diaspora is both intriguing and challenging within the field of ethnomusicology, particularly for many students working within this paradigm. Music is central to the diasporic experience, linking migrants’ current place of residence with their place of origin, often forming a collective musical memory. Conceptually, however, diaspora is problematic in that it usually implies a process of moving outwards, typically, from a geographical, cultural and/or “racial” origin (Wade 2008). The point of origin is often key to the definition of diaspora, without which the concept descends into generalized incoherence (Brubaker 2005).

Many graduate students encounter multiple issues that complicate conceptualizations of diaspora in their research. Julia Topper, a graduate student at the University of Maryland, finds diaspora to be misleading with regards to her work on Irish step dance in Japan. She states, “I am not studying a group of people who reside away from their homeland, but a dance tradition that has been transplanted and is practiced outside its place of origin by people who are not native to the tradition” (pers. comm. 2015). She questions if musical traditions can be considered diasporic or if the term diaspora should be reserved exclusively for people. This problematic strikes a distinct chord within my own research on the mariachi tradition among migrant communities. As a transnational music form, mariachi is performed and celebrated by Mexicans and Mexican Americans on both sides of the border. However, in Fort Worth, migrant communities from Nochistlán (a rural pueblo in Central Mexico) hires native ensembles from the region, bringing them to the United States in lieu of hiring local groups which are seen as inauthentic. In this instance, regional context becomes a definitive factor for music and musicians acting as “sign-vehicles” for identity among particular Mexican diasporic communities. Yet mariachi retains a strong presence among generational Mexican American communities who arguably do not share the same diasporic experience.

Erica Watson, a doctoral student at the University of Memphis, in discussing her work on African-American cultural practices, states that as a member of a diasporic group, researchers can “make assumptions just because you share that cultural experience or the legacy” (pers. comm. 2015). In this case, a scholar may be blinded to the vast differences within diasporic groups, especially with regards to issues of identity. Erica goes on to share, “I’m African-American, and while investigating some other African-American cultural practices, I felt as much of an outsider as I believe someone who was not African-American or familiar with African-American cultural heritage” (pers. comm. 2015). This highlights the understanding that diasporic identities are “creolized, syncretized, hybridized and chronically continued on next page . . .
impure cultural forms” (Gilroy 2000, 129). Erica concludes that ethnomusicologists therefore must be sensitive to any conclusions drawn from research with diasporic groups.

During her time researching youth of Japanese descent in Argentina, Ana Maria Alarcón Jiménez, a PhD candidate at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, examined the relationship between musical practices and the social construction and production of space for and by the Japanese-Argentinean youth in Buenos Aires. Exotic perceptions of the “Other” (in this case Japanese) can be a significant factor when observing identity construction among generational-descent groups. Exoticization of the “other” can lead to romanticized perceptions of diasporic music traditions. As a first year graduate student, I’ll never forget the day I came to the realization that my research had been biased by my own socially constructed romantic notions of mariachi. Brubaker (2005) maintains that diaspora should be used in adjectival form to refer to the phenomenon of the diasporic stance or attitude adopted by people who seek to maintain or create identities referring to their homeland. In this way, the study of musical performance in diasporic contexts can reflect strains of cultural continuity, which may persist alongside cultural change (Wade 2008). Therefore, student researchers should explore contrasting approaches to difference and representations of Otherness within multicultural societies, affirming our commitment to musical ethnicity in studying diasporic music making.

References:
ENDER TERWILLIGER (Wesleyan University): I remember looking up from my master’s thesis presentation entitled “Taiwanese Musicians in Diaspora” to a very puzzled collection of faces. After twenty minutes of going through my fieldwork, the class was still not sure who my subjects were. When I began my research on Taiwanese musicians who play Chinese orchestra instruments in England, I originally used the phrase “in diaspora” because I wanted to describe all levels of people in this community: recent immigrants, second-generation Taiwanese, those who had left willingly and those who had left for political or economic reasons; in short, anyone who felt a connection to Taiwan. This felt connection, no matter how imagined it may be, was central to my research. However, I found that using the term “diaspora” summoned connotations of more famous diasporas (Jewish, Armenian, etc.) whose displaced immigrants were afforded little-to-no agency or hope of return. Yes, many of my subjects are immigrants, but many return to their home country often, and furthermore utilize internet technologies that allow them to exist in a transcontinental media network. As I took questions from my confused audience, I realized that the musicians’ agency is what had caused the confusion. Using diaspora failed to allude to the upwardly-mobile, tech-savvy, frequent-flyer-miles-earning musicians at hand. For my purposes, “transnational” seems a better term that provides connotations of someone who is purposefully displaced. Diaspora implied a helplessness and a naiveté, causing me to wonder: is the term implicitly condescending? And does it have use in today’s globalized world?

JESSICA HAJEK (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign): I was on a bus in the Dominican Republic in 2009, heading from a town along the border with Haiti toward the large northern city of Santiago about two hours away. Every twenty minutes or so, we were stopped at military checkpoints. Even as an obvious foreigner, my documents were never checked—these men were tasked with finding and stopping Haitians from illegally entering the country. In my research, I have only begun to scratch the surface of a musico-religious practice called gagá in the Dominican Republic. Interestingly, “Dominican” gagá is known as rara by Haitians in Haiti and among the Haitian diaspora in places like the US, Canada, and Europe. This raises the question: “How does one approach the study of a population and a musical practice that, from certain vantage points, looks like a diaspora study but, on the surface, acts like something else?” Although the term “diaspora” is problematic, the concept can still be useful for understanding social and cultural phenomena, rather than labeling people with an inflexible category. My goal is not to exclude Haitian-Dominicans from the realm of Haitian diaspora studies, but instead to expand our current theoretical approaches to and understandings of this discursive term.

LARRY OLIVER CATUNGAL (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa): My investigation into Filipino diasporic communities, in places such as San Francisco, centers on the use of Philippine music traditions and modern understandings of “Third Culture Kid” (TCK) identities. TCKs can be defined as “…a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture . . . [who] frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures [experienced], while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock and Van Reken 2009 [1999] 13). One of my field consultants, Ron, combines kulintang—a southern Philippine gong-chime tradition—with Electronic Dance Music (EDM) to negotiate his identity as both Filipino and American.

“The State of the Field” column welcomes student opinions on issues addressed in each volume. Volume 11, out in Fall/Winter 2015, will look to the trajectories between ethnomusicology and music education. To share your thoughts on this subject, or in future volumes, please contact our editor at semstudentnews@gmail.com.
Ron reflects on this combination by explaining that the kulintang links him to his Filipino heritage while EDM connects him to personal experiences growing up in the US. His efforts speak to audiences beyond his diasporic community and, according to Ron, this musical production attempts to alleviate associated stereotypical and stigmatic views of the Southern Philippines. In a radio interview, he describes his endeavours as “trying to bring kulintang music to young ears—young people love electronic music.” While he is not the first to experiment with combining kulintang with other popular music forms, active members in the Philippine arts and culture scene in the Bay Area—many of whom participate in productions that also express their Filipino and American identities—greatly appreciate his work. Ron’s music and TCK identity illustrate a complicated entanglement of connections and experiences that provide grounds for an alternative approach in the discourse of diaspora in ethnomusicology.

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**ELIZABETH NEALE (Cardiff University):** The Cornish in South Australia have utilized music not only to evoke but also to reconceptualize their homeland. Cornwall, a region of the UK, has a global diaspora that has resulted from a 19th-century labor-imperial dispersal across the new worlds. I am currently developing an historical ethnography of the 1890 genesis of the Cornish Association of South Australia that is uncovering challenges to typical conceptions of patriotism and musical re-codings of regional, national, and imperial identities. The founders of the “patriotic” Association foregrounded Cornwall’s historic independence from England, promoting the Cornish as Celts who were racially distinct from the English and integral within the British imperial hegemony. I believe that the diasporic locus facilitated these nested, overlapping and colliding dialogues of identity within which Cornish patriotism was directed primarily toward Cornwall (the regional homeland) and secondarily toward the British empire (the imperial power), bypassing England (the nation-state) completely. Regarding musical performance, the Association promoted Christmas carols, a choral genre prevalent in Cornwall, as an ancient musical inheritance. However, musical materials in contemporary expressions of post-colonial Cornish-

**MICHALIS POUPAZIS (University College Cork):** Even as diasporic studies have celebrated the notions and interplay of cosmopolitanism, globalisation, and transnationalism, diasporas themselves manifest special challenges to traditional fieldwork. Tracking multi-sited musical traditions and narratives collectively is an almost impossible task. My ethnographic work tunes into individual Cypriots (both Greek- and Turkish-speaking) in Larnaca, North Cyprus and Birmingham, UK, and tracks their experiences through participation in symbolic acts, such as wedding rituals. It seeks to provide insights on the relationship(s) between music and memory in a cosmopolitan and transnational environment, while stressing the importance of the moment and the individual. Such research underpins ephemeral moments, when memories, feelings, settings, habits, desires, and actions combine to add new layers to human experience or imagination. An example is the Turkish-speaking Cypriots’ utterance of musical resources and humor when dealing with transnational identities thrown at them; from Muslim, migrant, Cypriot, Turkish, to kebab shop owner/producer, all leading to a communal contingency of meaning, experience and creation.

In order to track such tendencies also applying beyond the Cypriot example, we have to start considering the moments in the field as modern diasporas that—while perhaps easy to locate—are concurrently easy to lose due to their dispersed elements. In seeking answers, we need to focus on individual experience as it turns into moments and memories, while simultaneously attending to memory’s collective role in constructing musical sound and performance. Individual narratives, dislocated resources, a variety of spaces and multi-sites, all in different time- and generation-intervals comprise the moment, while the moment explains how people experience the transnational and cosmopolitan realities in which they live.
Dear SEM,

As established thus far, “diaspora,” as an idea and term, has been regarded with some concern of late. Here we asked ethnomusicology faculty to reflect on their use of the term. Each respondent was asked, “In your work, what issues have arisen when researching musical diasporas? What advice and suggestions would you give students aiming to work with diasporic communities?”

MARK SLOBIN: The metaphor encoded in the Greek word “diaspora” describes the scattering of seeds. This implies an active agent moving out into a space to re-create conditions found at “home” in hopes of fruitfully multiplying or providing means of subsistence. We do not find this literal situation often these days, except in commercial terms, where it is corporations doing the spreading of capital and modified seed crops. Communities do not deliberately seek to replicate. Rather, they re-invent selected musical practices as part of creating new community formations. Connections run along transnational trails of concerts and websites that feature new, unifying circuits spread across multiple population concentrations, rather than purely bilateral homeland-displaced-colony relations.

So as I’ve written elsewhere, “diaspora,” after years of being stretched to the point of breaking, can resume its useful function only if we define it narrowly and precisely for musical ties of sentiment and memory among specific populations who think and act in ways that consciously engage a homeland-centered sensibility as members of a transplanted community. Considering etymologically similar terms—dispersal, dispersion—can be helpful, especially for cultural categories such as repertoires and musical instruments.

But “diaspora” will not fade away. There are entrenched uses of the term that will bleed through from other community, media, and cultural studies discourses. Our job is twofold: to sift through the usages coming to ethnomusicology from non-music writings to help frame our presentations and to check our own practice to see whether and how we can integrate the term precisely and cogently.

SUSAN ASAI: Diaspora is still evolving as a concept and analytical tool. The complex cultural and political milieu in which we research and write in the twenty-first century calls for analytical concepts that help us unpack layers of history and intercultural contact. Diaspora offers a broad conceptual space for analysis of the social and political meanings of musical performance as it intersects with ethnicity, identity, gender, geopolitics, post-colonial conditions, displacement, national policies of the host country, intercultural dynamics, and “interethnic power relations” (Um 2005, 1). Diasporic connections provide a cultural base for studying musical hybridity resulting from the intercultural contact of immigrant populations within their host country. Cultural heritage plays an important role in the aesthetic preferences many musicians embed in their work as they engage in border crossings that both affirm and challenge their “sense of identity and difference” (Ramnarine 2007, 7).

The historical specificity of diasporas highlights the sociopolitical challenges many immigrant groups face upon arriving in racially and culturally inhospitable host countries. Cultural politics frames the conditions of such groups seeking to belong and participate in the national culture. It is through increased cultural plurality in music and the arts that populations can create alternative hospitable cultural sites in nations where citizenship and social acceptance for many peoples remains out of reach. Hybridized forms of music and art allow groups to retain an aesthetic thread to their homeland while combining it with influences arising from the intercultural contact they have with populations in the host country. For Japanese Americans, the impact of diasporic and transnational connections to Japan have ebbed and flowed across generations, but their homeland’s cultural imprint remains.

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TINA K. RAMNARINE: When I first started researching musical diasporas, I had to rethink some conceptual models within ethnomusicology, such as “cultural mapping,” which rested on the idea of “a music and a society.” In doing so, I engaged early on with expanding disciplinary geographic frames of reference, taking one step towards themes we increasingly foregrounded such as transnationalism, globalisation, and place. Diaspora also compels us to think historically—e.g., I looked at labour histories, nineteenth-century British imperialism, and performance styles in musical exchanges to find out more about Caribbean popular music and Canadian fiddle traditions—which emphasises the centrality of memory in people’s sense of belonging. Since diaspora discourses often centre on loss and dislocation, it is worthwhile to consider belonging and to pose alternative questions about the interplay between diaspora, nation, and generational transmission. One of my studies (2007) focused on diasporic intersections and asked: “where is home in the diaspora?” It teased out the politics of responding to such a question, as well as the possibilities for conceptualising global political action around a shared vision of “one world.” I suggested that “home” can be in the “diaspora” in order to rethink both concepts and to reconsider the insuperabilities of difference ingrained in everyday encounter and ethnographic modes of thinking.

There are new considerations for researchers of diaspora today, including increasing travel possibilities, the use of digital and media technologies in forging connections, critical historical revision based on new questions about the past and re-readings of sources, and ecological approaches showing how, for example, human and plant histories are interlinked. Today we can be attentive to distinctions between migrations and diasporas (as the latter term has become somewhat depoliticised). We have opportunities to interact with interdisciplinary research foci including border studies, regional studies, and global histories to promote thinking on a large-scale about musical practices, creative processes, and human (dis-)connections in ethnomusicology.

References:

SYLVIA ALAJAJI: You know how when you stare at a word long enough, it eventually seems to transform before your eyes, almost as if you’re seeing that particular arrangement of letters for the first time? You say the word out loud, repeat it a few times. With each utterance, it becomes stranger and more unfamiliar—meaningless, even. In many ways, my past experience studying diaspora has been the same: the longer I spent with it, the less I seemed to understand it. As soon as I felt it within reach—as soon as I felt that I had sorted through the complex network of identifications, orientations, and attachments of the communities with which I was working—there it would go, slipping from my grasp. I would play a song, hear a lyric, or be told something by an interviewee, and suddenly whatever precarious understanding I had come to would crumble before me. I was standing on shifting ground, longing for something more concrete. The more I thought about my fieldwork in terms of those concepts so prevalent in the literatures on diasporas—concepts such as home, homeland, hostland, nation, transnational, and so on—the more those concepts began to breakdown, and along with them, the concept of diaspora itself.

Eventually, I realized that this space—this fantastically messy, fragmented, fluid, multi-dimensional space—is exactly where I needed to be, for that is where diaspora resides. It’s a space refreshingly resistant to theory. In freeing my attachments to those concepts—or at least in approaching them with the skepticism, flexibility, and ambivalence of my interviewees—I began to understand diaspora. As much as such a thing is possible, stepping back from the theories and concepts invites the possibility of seeing through the eyes of one in diaspora. As Edward Said writes of the exilic condition, “seeing ‘the entire world as a foreign land’ makes possible originality of vision” (2000, 186). And indeed, it is diaspora’s “originality of vision” towards which we, as scholars, must strive. An ideal to be sure, but one that allows us to get closer to the diasporic condition.

So, stare. Stare until your vision gets cloudy, the words begin to blur, and nothing seems to make sense anymore. Then step back and look at it all anew. Embrace it. It’s exactly where you need to be. ☯

References:
Discerning Diaspora: roots and routes

By Davin Rosenberg (University of California, Davis)

“Diaspora” is, as a concept, and diasporas are, as communities, quicksilver—mutable in character and prone to variable interpretation. Likewise, diaspora is complicated by its multivalency as an entity, collectivity, experience, practice, category of analysis, metaphor, and process; and by a preponderance of suffixes: -a, -ic, -an, -ama, -icity, -ism, -ization, -ology, -ist, -istics. Sukanya Banerjee’s (2012, 4) reiteration of James Clifford’s (1994) use of roots and routes in relation to diasporas emphasizes experiences of dispersion and displacement inherent to diasporic processes and are thus helpful concepts in approaching a definition. Kim Butler, in similar fashion, posits diaspora as a framework of study that focuses on diasporization processes and facilitates comparative diasporan study (2001, 194). Investigating roots and routes enables a polythetic diaspora discourse that Clifford suggests is “conducive to tracking (rather than policing) . . . [a] range of diasporic forms” (1994, 307). Of course, there are perils in overgeneralizing and reifying an abstract schema, but if a definition of diaspora is recognized as a dynamic device that is flexible yet distinctive, and understood as a processual nexus of roots and routes, it reveals opportunity for tracing/tracking such experiences to discover their origins and where they lead. And, as Banerjee reflects, “even if the ensuing conversation sounds dissonant at times, such dissonance testifies to the robustness and the heterogeneity of diasporic practice” (2012, 6).

Diaspora is derived from the Greek diaspeirein (διασπείρειν “disperse”; from dia “across” and speirein “scatter”), meaning a “scattering of seeds,” and, in its original prototypical sense, connoted the dispersion/forced exile of Jewish peoples from their homeland. In the Jewish and subsequent diasporic experiences, a collective homeland memory and myth (remembered and re-imagined), dispersion (to multiple hostlands), and ongoing displacement (from a homeland, and fellow diasporas), are fundamental and contiguous diasporic phenomena. However, the majority of additional criteria commonly identified in the literature (e.g., in Safran 1991 and Cohen 2008) are epiphenomena reflective of some diasporic experiences but not ubiquitous processes that distinguish diasporic from other migrant and transnational groups. Dispersion is experienced as an uprooting—compelled (forced) or voluntary—from a homeland that is continually remembered and (re)imagined as diasporas route and reroot themselves in a hostland.

Displacement is both spatial and temporal; the latter increasingly so with ensuing generations and descendants. The resulting networks of communities—forming multidirectional interrelationships, or routes, between the home and diasporas—share a sense of solidarity based on common experiences and a homeland orientation, which reveals multilocal cultures—what Clifford styles as transnational networks of “contrapuntal modernity” that actively include a homeland and fellow diaspora sites as continual places of attachment (1994, 311).

A teleology of origin and eventual return is often attributed to the homeland myth, serving as a fundamental point of group solidarity; yet Clifford suggests that “decentered, lateral connections may be [just] as important . . . and a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projections of a specific origin” (1994, 306). Similarly, Turino notes that “home” is potentially more a symbolic than practical point of return, but a homeland origin story remains “part of a unifying discourse” (2004, 5). It is important to remember that return may not be a possibility for some diasporic groups since homelands change, cease to or never exist (i.e., are conceptual or metaphorical). Butler posits that a homeland connection and “issues of return,” as opposed to the idea of a physical return, are essential elements to diasporan experiences (2001, 205); and Cohen’s concept of a “deterritorialized diaspora” emphasizes contexts in which transnational bonds exist despite untenably articulated territorial claims, particularly in a digital global age where “a diaspora can, to some degree, be cemented or recreated through the mind, through artefacts [sic] and popular culture, and through a shared imagination” (2008, 7–8). Despite various guises, a seminal root and uprooting, subsequent routes of migration and mobilization, and

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rerooting represent multiple points for diasporic solidarity formation.

Rerooting embodies the socially recurrent adaptation and (re)creation of cultural practices and identity in a hostland as a homeland is remembered and (re)imagined. Here, root refutes temporariness and implies a prolonged rerooting and maintenance of “collective homes away from home” (Clifford 1994, 308), where a hostland serves as “grounds for contesting and consolidating notions of identity and difference” over an extended, even interminable, period of time (Banerjee 2012, 11)—what Brubaker describes as “boundary-maintenance” (2005, 5). Butler discusses the notion of latent diasporas, which reveal a different route and root experience in that they become operative (sometimes long) after moving to a hostland, where group identity and self-awareness is established post-migration and a sense of solidarity is delayed (2001, 207).

As such, rooting processes illuminate the contextual displacement of communities that distinguish themselves locally as they maintain identifications with, and routes and connections to, places and times that are elsewhere (Clifford 1994, 308) but also the routes navigated within the diaspora-hostland relationship.

In the end, a functioning definition of diaspora calls attention to processes and experiences, roots and routes that enable diasporic consciousness, without formulating and holding to any particular paradigm that potentially alienates groups and experiences that do not align with a single metaphysical formula. The roots and routes of each community are inescapably idiosyncratic and increasingly complicated and obscured by modern technologies; yet diasporic discourses that consider their affinity with experiences of dispersion and displacement can be fruitful, whether or not “diaspora” is always recognizable.

References:

Diaspora, Transnationalism, Globalism, Oh My!
academic discourse and use

By Maria Stankova (New York University)

In academic discourse, the terms diaspora and transnationalism have fuzzy boundaries and a close relationship, even more so when they are used in conjunction with the term globalization; according to Khachig Tölölyan, the founder of Diaspora Studies, diasporas are “the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (1991). The difference between uses of the terms diaspora and transnationalism on the one hand, and globalization on the other, is that globalization has been used to imply universalization, whereas diaspora and transnationalism have been used to imply both universalization and the preservation of specificity. For example, the right to self-determination is considered a global and universal right, but diasporas exercise it locally, depending on local conditions. Because of this, diaspora and transnationalism are often used in relation to the term “glocalisation” (globalization plus localization), rather than to globalization (Robertson 1995).

The differences between the terms diaspora and transnationalism lie in the way they have been used in academic discourse. The term diaspora is much older and more politically charged. Before the 1930s, scholars used it to describe three big dispersions—the Armenian, the Jewish, and the Greek. In the 1960s the term started being used to mean all forms of dispersion and became extremely popular in scholarship.

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This history can be found in Stephane Dufoix’s dissertation “La Dispersion” (2012). Some of the historical events contributing to its popularity include the Civil Rights Movement and the Civil Rights Act (1964), as well as the United States Congress of the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which removed immigration quotas thus enabling immigrants from all over the world access to the United States. “Diaspora” has become especially popular in the past decade and has been used for political purposes in public discourse as well. Nationalist groups or governments use the concept for the purposes of building nation-states or controlling communities abroad. Others use it to create connections between economically successful politicians and entrepreneurs (Faist 2004). In contrast, the term transnationalism is not as politically charged but has some political connotations. For instance, during the transnational turn in the early 1990s, scholars like Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc developed an approach that shifted the focus from multinational companies and political parties—that had been the subject of earlier transnational studies—to migrants as important social agents.

Scholars of transnationalism tend to examine identity change as a result of the increased mobility of people, goods, and ideas, and as a result of cross-border experiences (e.g., hybrid identities), while diaspora studies emphasize (a) collective identity. Because of its focus on mobility and networks, transnationalism is a term that maintains closer links to social science. It is also a much broader term that has been used to describe not only communities, but also capital flows, citizenship, corporations, non-governmental organizations, politics, services, social movements, social networks, families, migration circuits, identities, public spaces, and public cultures. In contrast, the term diaspora is used in a narrower context to describe primarily religious and national communities, as well as practices such as entrepreneurship. The ideas of community and dispersal are more important for scholars of diaspora studies where “diasporas are a special category of ethnicized dispersion” (Tölöyan 2011). The terms “mobility” and “networks” are more important for scholars of transnationalism:

Transnationalism as long-distance networks certainly preceded ‘the nation.’ Yet today these systems of ties, interactions, exchange and mobility function intensively and in real time while being spread throughout the world. (Vertovec 1999)

Additionally, within diaspora studies, maintaining generational continuity is much more important: “In my own practice as a scholar, I call ‘diasporas’ those communities of the dispersed who develop varieties of association that endure at least into their third generation” (Tölöyan 2011). In transnationalism studies only the first generation is the usual subject of study.

References:

Connect with us on Facebook and the SEM webpage. Both platforms are updated regularly including resource lists, calls for submission, and other outlets to stay engaged as ethnomusicologists.
The Fate of Diaspora

By Ben Dumbauld (The Graduate Center, City University of New York)

In the introduction to the third volume of Selected Reports on Ethnomusicology, James Porter issues a warning: “there is obvious danger in conceiving of groups . . . as relatively homogenous kinds of entities bound by the same cluster of traits, or by the same value systems, beliefs, expressive behavior, and so forth” (1978, 10). Here, Porter is critiquing the notion of ethnic homogeneity within Euro-American immigrant communities, but I find myself wondering, over thirty years after this publication, if we have really moved past this issue. The transfer of ethnomusicological interest in the 1990s from issues of “ethnic” to “diasporic” communities might lead us to believe Porter’s argument has been at least partially remedied; that the transnationalism at the heart of diasporic communities disrupts the hegemony of the nation-state and allows new subjectivities to emerge—subjectivities not delineated simply by ethnic or national characteristics. Yet, as Dirlik (2002) and Ang (2003) reveal, diasporic membership continues to be largely founded upon those very notions of national or ethnic belonging. Like hybridity, diaspora threatens to reify the very concepts it is supposed to disrupt.

At the core of this issue is the inherent ambiguity of the term diaspora itself. It bears remembering that of Safran’s (1991) oft-cited criteria for diasporic communities, only two characteristics—the dispersal from an original homeland and a continued commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland—are empirically traceable. The rest are almost completely based upon affect: e.g., feelings of nostalgia, solidarity, or alienation. Moreover, it seems in later literature these affectual qualifications of diasporic membership quickly overtook the empirical ones. A case in point might be Kiri Miller’s definition of the sacred harp community as a diaspora. Here, diaspora does not serve as an immigrant community, but as a “metaphorical claim of organic dispersal and reproduction,” often articulated by sacred harp singers as feelings of nostalgia, ambivalence toward southern cultural heritage, and fears of assimilation or cultural disappearance (2008, 28–30).

Miller’s definition of diaspora as “a claim” rather than a stable political or social category has also been also promoted by Brubaker (2005), and in Zheng’s appropriately titled Claiming Diaspora (2010). This may not be a regrettable development; perhaps a turn to affect and a sense of diasporic consciousness not delimited by a particular migration history is the most appropriate lens through which to examine subjectivity in an increasingly globalized world. However, the notion that diaspora is more of a claim than an essence requires further examination. Firstly, if diaspora is a claim, then who is making it? Miller openly acknowledges that the term “diaspora” is hardly used by the sacred harp community, and it seems somewhat unclear whether Zheng’s use of “claiming diaspora” as a political project is her own or one explicitly articulated by the Chinese-American community with whom she works. I feel there needs to be reflexivity here, and as ethnographers we might consider the implications of interpellating a community as a diaspora, especially when they may not consider themselves as such. Secondly, what is the purpose of making such a claim? Often diaspora seems to be used by scholars less as a description of an actual social formation and more as a methodological entry point into examining the cultural histories of communities—a practice Mishra dubs the diasporic “scene of archival specificity” (2006). If this is the case, I cannot help but wonder if the term “diaspora” is needed at all for this kind of project—especially if we are increasingly able to claim any transnational community as diasporic.

There is, however, an upside to the increasing ubiquity of diaspora as a descriptor: while its continued deployment in academic discourse may decrease its theoretic impetus, its deployment among our interlocutors will better reveal the cultural, political, or economic issues at stake within the communities with whom we work. Undoubtedly, if “diaspora” is a word commonly articulated by a particular community, it is done so in ways unique to the ongoing issues that community faces. Ultimately, the future of diaspora as a term may very well be relegated to the same fate as “authenticity”: a concept not so much used by us, but deeply investigated insofar as it is used by our interlocutors. Such a fate should not be lamented.

References:
The Diasporic Nyunga Nyunga Mbira

By Austin R. Richey (Eastman School of Music)

On his 2010 album *Wona Baba Maraire*, Zimbabwean-American musician Tendai Maraire reveals a multifaceted identity; while a majority of the album features Shona language alongside the *mbira dzaVadzimu*, the pop sensibilities and sound of the *nyunga nyunga mbira* on the final track, “Is She?,” exposes an “in-between” space in which I suggest Maraire constructs a particularly diasporic identity. As I discuss here, the nyunga nyunga is largely emblematic of a cosmopolitan Zimbabwean culture within the nation’s borders, particularly in comparison with the mbira dzaVadzimu, which has long signified a more indigenous cultural orientation. As the nyunga nyunga entered into the Zimbabwean diaspora, however, it assumed a type of historical authority nearly equal to that of the dzaVadzimu, illustrating how musical instruments acquire new meanings beyond their place of origin.

Originally introduced to Zimbabwe from Mozambique, the nyunga nyunga largely maintains a “foreign” status in Zimbabwe (see Tracy 1961). In fact, the instrument’s otherness made the nyunga nyunga an ideal candidate for incorporation into the colonial-era curriculum of Kwanongoma College; it was ethnically neutral at a national level while remaining identifiable African. The nyunga nyunga also lacked a connection to Shona spirituality, making it more readily acceptable to the cosmopolitans involved in Kwanongoma’s founding, and enabling educators to teach music in an African context without reinforcing cultural values contrary to their own.

Educated at Kwanongoma, Tendai’s father, Dumisani Maraire, himself an ethnomusicologist, was one of the largest proponents of the mbira nyunga nyunga both in and outside of Zimbabwe. Reflecting on the way his father used the instrument to build cultural bridges, Tendai Maraire remarked to me, “I think that Western civilization can understand the nyunga nyunga easier than they can the dzaVadzimu” (Maraire 2013).

By the early 1990s, Dumisani’s large following of students in North America, concentrated in Washington and Oregon, led him to publish an instructional book titled *The Nyunga Nyunga Mbira: Lesson Book One* (1991) which offered tablature notation of several songs; this followed the established convention of using notation to teach the instrument in Zimbabwe.

The Nyunga Nyunga Mbira: Lesson Book One is a revealing text. Within it, Dumisani Maraire’s own cosmopolitan status is reinforced by his assertion of the nyunga nyunga as a strong signifier of local Zimbabwean musical identity. After years of enculturation into a worldview of “modernist reform” (see Turino 2000), Dumisani interpreted the inherently cosmopolitan nyunga nyunga as a marker of indigenous and local musical authority. In the process, Dumisani’s approach to the nyunga nyunga illustrated how diasporic Zimbabweans could redefine themselves in terms of indigenous Shona culture, while simultaneously remaining apart from local Shona identity.

Through his performances of both the mbira dzaVadzimu and the nyunga nyunga, Tendai Maraire navigates the multiple worlds in which he lives: the American superculture (see Slobin 1993), the Zimbabwean culture of his parents, the centuries old African diaspora of the “Black Atlantic” (Gilroy 1993), and the emerging Zimbabwean diaspora. In the song “Is She?” the nyunga nyunga melds with pop gestures, such as auto-tuning and English vocals, allowing Maraire to situate himself between these various cultural poles; it is this in-between-ness that supports Maraire’s diasporic identification. Maraire recalls that while in the studio recording *Wona Baba Maraire*, the song emerged suddenly, as if a spiritual force was guiding his hands:

*I just started playing and [“Is She?”] came to me. That’s a one take song, and I wrestled with it being on there, but it wasn’t about me. If it was about me, it wouldn’t have been on there ’cause I was being a stickler about everything being in Shona. I made it, I did it, I felt it. There was nothing I could do. It was the only nyunga nyunga song on the album. I didn’t even mean for that to be on there. But it worked; it had a purpose* (Maraire 2013).

While the term diaspora is most often used to theorize the movement of people, the diasporic process is also evident in the way musical instruments acquire new meaning as they leave their place of origin. This shift of meaning is clearly visible in the way the Zimbabwean nyunga nyunga has transitioned from an icon of a cosmopolitan Zimbabwean cultural formation within the nation, to a more authoritative icon of Shona culture writ large.

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———. 2013. Interview by Austin T. Richey, June.


“It is good to be Jewish. We Nigerians—we are trying, but we must try harder. We must try more. I believe my music can create a positive impact, letting people know their roots, their origins, their customs, their traditions—what they need to know. It is for the Jews: those with black skin and those in the world entirely.”

—Igbo Jewish musician, Zadok Chayim ben Moshe (2014)

There is widespread belief among the Igbo of Nigeria, the country’s third-largest ethnic group, that they are descendants of the tribes of Israel. Due to British colonialism and missionary activity, most Igbo now practice Christianity, but many concurrently consider themselves genealogically Jewish, hold their indigenous ancestral religion to be a residual form of Judaism, and believe their forbearers settled in Nigeria after being exiled from Israel. Following their failed bid for Biafran independence from Nigeria (the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970), Igbo self-identification as Jews intensified. Igbo saw themselves as sufferers of genocide—like the Jews of World War II Europe—and as inhabitants of a beleaguered plot of land surrounded by hostile forces—similar to the Jewish state of Israel.

The Civil War initiated a still-ongoing period of intense questioning among the Igbo concerning their history, present situation, and future prospects. Some Igbo also began to question why, if they were in fact Jews, they were practicing Christianity rather than Judaism. Over the next few decades these seekers gradually began to find one another, acquire printed material on Judaism, photocopy any available prayer books, teach themselves to read and pray in Hebrew, and advance their practice of the Jewish faith. More recently, greater access to the Internet in Nigeria made it possible for them to scour for information about Judaism and Hebrew. This Igbo Jewish community, which is not yet recognized by any Jewish denomination or by the state of Israel, numbers between 2,000 and 5,000 people throughout Nigeria.

Locally-produced music, as well as Jewish music from sources outside of Nigeria, has played an important role in the development of Igbo Judaism. Drawing from their multifaceted backgrounds, Igbo Jews have used a newly created musical tradition for worship, as a teaching tool, and as a resource to build their community and establish their individualized religious identity. By combining Hebrew text, sub-Saharan African vocal styles and harmonies, and elements of Christian gospel hymns, their music generates an original sound, helping Igbo Jews establish themselves as a distinct community in Nigeria’s religious landscape. As Igbo Jewish musician Chislon Eben Cohen explains:

“We have men and women who are turning to Judaism, but who don’t know how to read or write [in Hebrew]. So the only thing they enjoy in the synagogue is the melody, and when you come up with the melody, they are very, very quick to capture the lyrics and to sing along. So when you do that, you’ve made it better for them that Shabbat [i.e., Sabbath], and then the next Shabbat they will come.”

—Eben Cohen (2014)

Despite the prominent role music has played in the development of Igbo Judaism, during fieldwork conducted in Nigeria’s capital of Abuja in the summer of 2014 we observed a significant shortage of liturgical music employed during worship at Abuja’s four mostly-Igbo synagogues: Tikvat Israel, Gihon, Igbo Israel Heritage, and Plant for the Growth of Israel. At Tikvat Israel, for example, congregants explained that although the elders and most attendees had cherished liturgical music, there had recently been a sharp decline in its use due to a desire—particularly among some of the younger members who are adept at leading the Hebrew-language services—to strive towards more total emulation of non-Nigerian Judaism. These younger prayer leaders believed that a decrease in original, locally-composed music during worship was a step towards spiritual growth. This may also be seen as part of continued on next page . . .
Songs of a Lost Tribe

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effort to emulate their Jewish counterparts outside of Nigeria, who do not share that music. Since, as a general truth, younger members now know Hebrew better than their elders at Tikvat Israel, and may also be more knowledgeable about Jewish prayer practice, they have been allowed to set the tone for worship.

Although 21st century Judaism is anything but normative, Igbo Jews in Abuja have been constructing and reconstructing notions of ideal Jewish practice and attempting to further align their practices with the international Orthodox Jewish community. Three primary sources for Jewish education have been print media obtained from abroad, the Internet, and foreign Jewish visitors. Igbo Jews want to carve out a distinct community within Nigeria but, seeing themselves as part of the larger Jewish diaspora, also seek validation from outside the country. Despite having an established Igbo culture, tradition, and sense of identity—as well as an established self-identity as members of Jewish Jewry—Igbo Jews are still finding their feet when it comes to Jewish religious expression within a Nigerian context, a struggle that includes questions about the use and place of liturgical music. The appropriateness of locally-produced liturgical music is an area where young and old in Abuja’s Igbo synagogues have not yet come to a consensus, and the construction and reconstruction of ideal Jewish practice in Nigeria continues.

References:

Diaspora and Technology
connecting communities

By Amanda Daly Berman (Boston University)

In the twenty-first century, exponential surges in technology have had far-reaching impacts on diasporic communities in contemporary society. Whereas in previous generations, leaving one’s homeland often created a cleavage, today accessing the culture of one’s homeland is as easy as watching a video on YouTube, reading the local newspaper online, or viewing a concert through livestream. The launches of Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006 collapsed the geographic distances between homeland and diasporic sites. Today, one can communicate with and keep track of relatives, friends, and “friends” around the world via Facebook. YouTube provides an outlet for viewing concerts, clips of news broadcasts, and social activism. One recent and emblematic example is a video of a young woman in the Middle East who lay lifeless after being stoned to death—a clip that sparked worldwide outrage. Twitter allows for concise posts of 140 characters or less posted in real time; this technology is utilized by many public works departments to provide public safety updates and alerts. During times of crisis, these Web sites also give a simple, quick way for informing others of one’s safety—or lack thereof. This means of communication was used effectively in the hours and days following the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings.

These technological developments are particularly significant for engaging with the arts. The amount of academic writing on the social media-arts-diaspora connection remains slim, but a number of scholars have taken to examining digital diaspora (Karim 2003; Everett 2009; Brinkerhoff 2012), as well as online communities, social media, and their connection to social capital (Wu Song 2009; Hochheiser and Shneiderman 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2011; Bobrowskas 2012; Schrooten 2012).

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**Diaspora and Technology**

Antoci, Sabatini, and Sodini 2013; Lee, Kim, and Ahn 2014). Writing in the field of ethnomusicology on diaspora and the arts, which was spurred by Slobin’s 1994 article “Music in Diaspora: The View from Euro-America,” has continued to flourish, with notable case studies by Stokes (2004), Monson (2000), Zheng (2010), and Shelemay (2011). However, a theory on technology’s connection to the arts in diasporic communities has not been discussed in depth. Turino and Lea (2004) address the Internet’s potential affect on diasporic communities’ and their homelands’ experience and engagement, but their writing predates the technological shift of the past decade. An updated version of the text would be particularly ripe at this time in the field. Recent SEM presentations on the use of the Internet in Irish music provide a cornerstone for building a strong foundation for the arts-diaspora-technology topological triad. The rising use of Skype, YouTube, and Web platforms for musical instrument lessons must also be addressed when examining this line of work, as many individuals are now able to study the music of their homeland from the comfort of their own home, rather than securing travel documents, grant funding, and travelling to a different (either distant or nearby) location.

Today, writings of a diasporic group may also be affected by changes in publication outlets, e.g., the decline of the printed text. However, for those who are technologically literate, chat rooms, Facebook pages, and message boards can provide a means of connection. Basu’s (2009) work on the Scottish diaspora recognizes that such boards allow a platform for “e-gniting” (igniting emotions via the Web) glorification of the homeland. Further, the imagined homeland can find a new borderless, spaceless home online. Brinkerhoff’s (2009) argument states that “migrant integration can be eased when diasporans (members of diasporas) have opportunities to express their hybrid identities (a sense of self that is neither wholly of the homeland nor exclusively reflective of the hostland) collectively” (2009, 2). This lens is helpful for considering the phenomenology of the “musicodigital” experience for diasporic individuals and communities who want to connect to and perhaps learn from the homeland. These individuals may be one to three generations removed from the homeland, yet are able to view (and learn) its music and culture, giving “armchair ethnography” an entirely new meaning.

Slobin (2012) notes that the parameters of the term “diaspora,” much like the borders of diasporic communities, are impossible to neatly corral. Further, much like any term, diaspora’s relevance as a theoretical frame continues to be tested and argued. To many, diaspora still holds the connotation of involuntary movement even though the definition has expanded to include groups who have elected to leave their homeland, as well as those who make a second move to a third location. The terms hybridity and transnationalism have come to the forefront in theoretical analysis of such groups. Nonetheless, diaspora, while it sounds trite, is ever important because of globalization, immigration, and the continued ease of exposure to other cultures as facilitated by technology and improvements in transit.

References:


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Volume 11 of *SEM Student News* will center on the convergence and trajectories of ethnomusicology and music education. If you have opinions on these areas of teaching music, watch for our call for submissions in the fall or contact us at semstudentnews@gmail.com.
Towards an Ethnography of the ‘Diasporic’

By Jason R. Nguyen (Indiana University)

“Where are you from?”
“But where are you really from?”
“Winston-Salem. Tobacco country. I’m a country boy.”
“I mean . . .” — “You mean ‘where are your parents from?’” — “. . . Yeah.”
“My parents left Vietnam during the war.”

Some version of this exchange is probably familiar to anyone who appears ‘foreign’ to an average (white) American, and each time it happens to me, I am reminded how much of the so-called ‘diasporic experience’ is an imposition, a racialized overdetermination. Being a Vietnamese American, I obviously have experiences and expressive culture that are either historically linked (transferred through a particular history) or semiotically referential (meaningfully and socially connected) to being Vietnamese, but they exist in relation to other possible ways of being that are perhaps equally important. People might ‘do’ diaspora, but only at certain times in specific cultural contexts. Indeed the framing of a communicative exchange as referential to a particular logic of diaspora is a negotiation of interpretive frames and can thus be an analytical diagnostic for discursive power: after all, where I “come from” is the only informational morsel necessary for someone to maintain and reinforce the diasporic order of things.

The word “diaspora” is a label, a name, and perhaps even a useful one, but as Wittgenstein famously stated, “only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning” (2001 [1921], 16). To do an ethnography of a particular diaspora is to jump into the nexus of the concept of diaspora itself, so it is vital to be theoretically rigorous about what sorts of meanings, experiences, and behaviors the word signifies in our research both with regard to the researcher and to his interlocutors, especially since many communities exhibiting diasporic features do not refer to themselves as a diaspora. Ultimately, ‘diaspora’ is a slippery concept, and words historically used to designate the Other often face the problem that the Other is a diverse group of often unrelated people whose most relevant similarity is their Otherness.

I have stopped referring to the people I study as the “Vietnamese diaspora” for a variety of reasons. First, my interlocutors often use and are familiar with other terms that speak more closely to their individual experiences (e.g., overseas Vietnamese; American of Vietnamese descent; and Vietnamese refugee [ngrìi Việt hai ngoi; ngrìi Mỹ gốc Việt; and ngrìi Việt ty nan, respectively]). Furthermore, designating a group as a diaspora often draws arbitrary lines in human networks (e.g., does a Vietnamese person’s non-Vietnamese partner count as part of the diaspora?) or privileges expressive acts that are directly referential to the diaspora concept (e.g., a Vietnamese ‘cultural show’) over those that may be important to people or groups but are not obviously diasporic (e.g., the electronic dance music [EDM]-themed after-party). Instead, I suggest that we think of ‘diaspora’ as a project of human organization, a means of maintaining social networks and communicating cultural meanings. After all, discourses of diaspora can be both a ‘strategy’ (of the privileged) for walling racialized peoples off from civic and intellectual participation and a ‘tactic’ (of the under-privileged) for self-organization (de Certeau 1984, xix). Consequently, rather than being an a priori state of a community, diaspora is performed, claimed (Zheng 2010), built (Ignacio 2004), etc.

By realizing that diaspora is performative rather than existential, we can investigate diasporization as discrete acts and performances. Furthermore, shifting the unit of analysis described by the word “diaspora” from people (who are part of a diaspora) to behaviors (that signify diaspora to help those people achieve certain social ends) keeps research grounded in the thick description (Geertz 1973) that makes ethnography a valuable methodology while maintaining links to interdisciplinary conversations about unique diasporic configurations. Thus, while Mark Slobin notes in “The Destiny of Diaspora in Ethnomusicology” that the word “diaspora” has found two extremes—an uncritical usage on one hand and near abandonment on the other (2012 [2003], 98)—I hope that my treatment of the topic here provides a useful compass for navigating a middle path.

References:

Reflections on Multi-Sited Ethnographies
an interview with Deborah Wong

By Alex W. Rodriguez (University of California, Los Angeles)

As more ethnomusicologists turn their research towards questions of diaspora and mobility, it will be very important for us to consider some of the disciplinary and methodological practices that underlie our work. In my own work on jazz clubs around the world, I have often found myself questioning assumptions about what it means to “do fieldwork.” That process has led me to seek out models for rigorous, multi-sited ethnography; Deborah Wong’s 2004 book Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music, which explores the many musical sounds Asian Americans make in many different spaces, is a prime example. For this piece, I reached out to Dr. Wong, professor at University of California, Riverside, to get a sense of how her attention to diasporic music-making has informed her research practices.

After publishing your first book on Thai Buddhist ritual music, what went into your decision to write your second book, Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music? Did the shift in focus arise in a moment of inspiration, or more gradually over time?

I wrote about my shift from Thailand to Asian America in Chapters 1 and 2 of Speak It Louder. Every scholar has their own unique stories about how they discovered new research projects, but looking back at my own decisions, I see I’ve been fairly consistent. I tend to follow my curiosity and, after a certain amount of time has passed, I then realize I’m pursuing something that could be articulated as a research project. All my long-term research projects to date were set in motion by my need to make sense of specific political crises. Growing up during the Vietnam War made me want to know more about mainland Southeast Asia. The LA uprising in 1992 made the importance of African American/Asian American encounters urgently evident to me. In 1998, the death of nineteen-year-old Tyisha Miller at the hands of four Riverside Police Department officers pulled me into community-based work on police accountability, though I only began to think of it as research after fourteen years of sustained work! My first publication on audio recordings of officer-involved deaths will soon appear in a fantastic new book edited by Deborah Kapchan, titled Theorizing Sound Writing (Wesleyan University Press, forthcoming).

How have you tended to inhabit that interim time-space, while you are pursuing something but have yet to articulate it as a research project? I imagine that it can be a challenge to trust the uncertainty of that position.

Actually, I’ve never felt uneasy or uncertain about emergent research. That moment when I think “Hey, I should pay more attention to that” is my critical sensibilities talking to me, telling me I’ve tipped over from life-as-fieldwork to the crystallization of a possible project. (BTW, that’s an homage to the incomparable Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Twenty-five years ago she gave a talk and a bunch of us took her out for dinner afterwards, and at one point during dinnertime conversation she said, “Life is a fieldtrip!,” and it stuck with me.) With some projects, I’ve reached a point where ‘doing research’ is simply habitual; you know, it’s Wednesday night so I’m off to taiko practice, or I check my RSS feeds for police accountability news. I imagine you’re at the same point with your on-going research at bluewhale?

Yes, I’ve found that to be true with my work in Los Angeles. As I have been conducting fieldwork here, I have noticed myself grappling with some doubts about the “legitimacy” of this quotidian side of the research. The fieldwork you conducted for the book takes place entirely in the United States; did that present any challenges given our field’s origins in the study of "non-Western" music? If so, what were your strategies for engaging with those obstacles?

As far as I can tell, most North American doctoral programs in ethnomusicology still train graduate students to do ethnographic research as if it will be conducted elsewhere and in a full-time, sustained way for at least a year. We’ve carried forward Malinowski’s imperatives quite faithfully! We train our students to design research projects that emulate his model, not least because the major research grants—SSRC IDRF, Fulbright IIE, Fulbright-Hays, and Wenner-Gren—reproduce Malinowski’s terms. Ethnomusicologists who are U.S. citizens face real funding challenges when they want to do sustained ethnographic research in the U.S. [because] all those grants stipulate research done elsewhere. Almost thirty years ago, Marcus and Fischer famously argued for the “repatriation of ethnographic research” (Marcus and Fischer 1986, 152ff) and Kamala Visweswaran recast this as “homework” (Visweswaran 1994, 101–13), continued on next page . . .
Reflections on Multi-Sited Ethnographies

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so the funding agencies haven’t yet caught up with the sea change that followed the 1990s crisis in representation. By no means is this an either-or issue: obviously, it’s imperative for U.S. scholars to do research outside the U.S. (hopefully in an anti-imperial way). Still, it’s quite evident that a majority of SEM members are based in North America, that many of us do research on North American musics, and that many of us do research both within and outside the U.S.

Were there any methodological surprises that emerged from your geographically dispersed approach to ethnography?

My research on Asian American musicking was conducted intermittently over many years and was multi-sited. Speak It Louder is thus a series of case studies and—intentionally—was not a study of a single phenomenon. Although this kind of approach remains somewhat unusual in ethnomusicology, it’s utterly pro forma in literary criticism, where scholars tend to pursue a critical question through a range of texts.

That’s a very good point. Do you have a sense of why this discrepancy exists between the fields, beyond the vicissitudes of grant funding?

Well, in my opinion, it’s about the perceived function of critical and cultural theory in ethnomusicology. We tend to be really conscientious ethnographers and in many cases we prefer to let theoretical questions emerge from the material. That is, first we spend time getting to know people and places on their own terms, and then we turn to interpretation. That’s an ethically sound methodology, if a bit unrealistic and perhaps even a bit naive. We’re a bit suspicious of “applying” theory to ethnographic phenomena, for good reasons. But this limits our theoretical contributions: at its worst, we simply test-drive theory from other fields. I acknowledge that different projects have different critical directionality. Sometimes we start with the phenomenon and sometimes we start with a theoretical question. Ideally both are in the mix, of course. But I know any number of scholars in other disciplines who primarily locate themselves via big theoretical areas (e.g., would say their specialty is critical race studies with a focus on African American visual arts). An ethnomusicologist is more likely to locate themselves via area studies, e.g., I’m a specialist in such-and-such music from such-and-such a place, and I “use” postcolonial theory to understand it. The contrast is striking to me. Thorough area studies training is essential, but at some level I’d like ethnomusicology to be part of—and even generate!—the big theoretical questions of our times. Some scholars argue that theories come and go but the stuff that endures is what we deposit in archives. I think there’s a false consciousness to that. In fact, let me ride that Marxist perspective right to a big theoretical question: why aren’t there fifty or a hundred ethnomusicologists tightly focused on late capitalism? It’s so obviously the issue of our historical moment. Tim Taylor and Anna Morcom have put that dead center as an analytic and their work stands out as a result (Taylor 2012; Morcom 2015).

Much of your fieldwork for Speak It Louder took place "close to home," in the university music departments where you taught during the course of conducting fieldwork. How did this work affect your understanding of the relationship between teaching in university music departments and ethnomusicological fieldwork research?

Well, less than half of Speak It Louder addressed university-based musicking, but I guess it’s evident I’m fascinated by the fraught process of having community-based Asian American musicians perform on campus, and I take my university-based colleagues seriously as community workers. More deeply, I’ve followed critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, and Freirean pedagogy of the oppressed for many years because those models offer very clear ways to reconfigure the classroom as an extension of communities rather than a rarified space. Besides, I think we all know that the ethnographic perspective can’t be turned on and off once it’s learned, and that means life and research aren’t different or separate. As an ethnographer, I’m always doing research. Without fetishizing it, I think the “ethnographic impulse” offers a politically and ethically grounded means to live in the world, and since a significant part of my life is lived in the classroom, how could I not be an ethnographer there too?

Especially in your chapter on taiko, your perspective is grounded in your participation as a musician. How did you experience your own musicality threading itself through your fieldwork? And how do you negotiate the practice of writing about music-making in which you participate as a performer?

I think it’s important not to valorize our experiences as performers. From the bimusicality of the 1960s to the
Reflections on Multi-Sited Ethnographies... continued

anthropology of experience in the 1990s, ethnomusicologist’s experiences have remained one of our key fascinations. I’d say we’ve theorized it in wildly different ways, and that’s a disciplinary strength! In my humble opinion, we shouldn’t harden it into anything in particular (e.g., part of “the” ethnomusicological approach that makes us different from anthropologists, etc.). When writing about my experiences as a taiko student, I drew from a huge range of models—from Titon’s and Rice’s use of phenomenology (Titon 2008; Rice 2008) to Tomie Hahn’s “sensual orientations” (Hahn 2007, 2–5) to Barbara Browning’s descriptions of being danced by the “pure presence” of the orixás (Browning 1995, 44). I don’t think ethnomusicologists should necessarily learn from praxis or be performers. Rather, in some contexts performance is a site where certain questions are effectively explored. In my taiko research, I was focused on embodied subjectivities shaped specifically by ethnicity and gender. I remain certain that many Asian American women of several generations are drawn to taiko with those needs and hopes, so I eventually drew on my own performance experiences to help understand that. In other contexts, I think the lived experiences of the ethnomusicologist as a listener or a fan could be more useful. It all depends. I’d love to see ethnographers write about their experiences as patrons, producers, curators, deans, and more.

What recommendations do you have for early-career scholars whose research would benefit from a multi-sited ethnographic approach?

For early career scholars, it’s a tightrope act. It’s absolutely essential to make oneself into a specialist at that career stage, whether in specific geocultural configurations, methodologies, or technologies. Doing multi-sited ethnographic work means being twice as prepared and trained, right? As ethnographers, we generally hold multi-sited research to the same standards as deep, sustained, single-sited research. But it’s also essential to develop additional training of a kind possibly not as necessary for single-sited research—coding software like Atlas.ti or nVivo may offer useful means to see patterns across different sites, for instance.

What comparative insights and patterns have emerged for you in your more recent work? An international protest movement confronting police violence has expanded dramatically in recent months; one of the characteristics of this movement has been its diffuse spatiality. My current research is focused on police accountability in Riverside, California. In that sense, I’m sticking with the methods I know best—I’m doing deep, sustained ethnographic work in one community, and I aim to address its particularities with care and commitment. Having written that sentence, I’m already poised to qualify it! Riverside is many communities; my research is both sustained and intermittent; inevitably, I have only partial understandings of this byzantine complex; etc. But the really different thing about this project is how it frees me up to engage as fully as I can with the explosion of public sphere commentary and response to police brutality, especially in the last three years. Social media has offered essential, generative platforms for new critical formations, so I’ve followed responses to the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown across Twitter, various blogs, SoundCloud, Facebook, and beyond. I can only have a partial understanding of this mediasphere. I regard this kind of commentary not as raw ethnographic material but, again, as dynamic critical formations-in-the-making. It’s inspiring, and it’s also pushed me beyond direct observational ethnographic methods to a more Freirean position. That’s utopian but necessary.

Are there any other reflections, thoughts, or ideas that I didn’t address in the questions above?

Thanks for your terrific questions. I know your dissertation research will address just these issues, and I look forward to the next conversation!
Diasporic Sounds
a resource list

By SarahVictoria Rosemann (Wesleyan University) and Davin Rosenberg (University of California, Davis)

In putting this scholarly resource list together, we were faced with the question of how to narrow down the literature in “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” (Brubaker 2005). Before 1930, the term “diaspora” was used only to refer to dispersed populations in forced exile; most frequently in reference to the Jewish diaspora. This seemingly simple definition expanded in the 1990s and is now relatively nebulous. Diaspora is currently used to reference dispersions of people—forced or voluntary, multiple or single generational, permanently or temporarily displaced—with an imagined conception of a homeland or perhaps homelands. This makes the definition of a diaspora such that any scholar wishing to study a community will most likely encounter these theoretical approaches.

To organize this list, we have chosen to focus on literature that reflects the broad and varied theoretical approaches scholars have taken in the last thirty years. Half of the sources are music-centric while the other half come from the broad field of diaspora studies. The literature below often focuses on case-studies of particular diasporic communities around the world. The other articles focus on theoretical approaches to diaspora, often aimed at advancing the field.

For an extended and further contextualized resource list on the intersection of music and diaspora, please find a stand-alone publication on SEM’s website: Music and Diaspora: A Resource List.

Publications — Music-centric


continued on next page...
Diasporic Sounds


Publications — Diaspora


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Diasporic Sounds

... continued

Social Text 98. 2009. Special Issue: Diaspora and the Localities of Race.

Did we miss something? Check out our resource lists on SEM’s website, SEM Student News, for a more in-depth reference list for Volume 10. If we still missed something, contact us at semstudentnews@gmail.com. We will be happy to add citations and resources.
West O’teaches online world music courses at the University of Hawai’i and currently teaches online world music courses at the University of Hawai’i West O’ahu.

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Amanda is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at Boston University. Her dissertation examines the role of digital social capital in the Cape Breton community in greater Boston. She has researched and presented on medical ethnomusicology and music torture and is very interested in music and sports, particularly music’s presence in baseball. She was the first student to graduate from Wheaton College (MA) with a degree in ethnomusicology (2003), and she received an MA in coexistence and conflict from Brandeis University (2007).

Maria Stankova, contributor
Maria is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at New York University. Her primary research interests lie at the intersection between music and politics, music and economics, and music and identity. Her current scholarship is an ethnographic and analytical study of the phenomenon of ethnic choral music through the lens of globalization. She currently directs the NYU Bulgarian Chorus, composes music for various projects and ensembles, and dances with the Bosilek Bulgarian Folk Dance Ensemble.

SarahVictoria Rosemann, researcher
SarahVictoria is a Masters student in ethnomusicology at Wesleyan University. Her primary research interests lie in the study of music in the Tibetan refugee diaspora. She focuses on the intersection of politics and music, globalization, transmission of performance and the creation of identity. Her current scholarship examines Tibetan Folk Opera, Ache Lhanno, through the lens of globalization and gender theory.

Note: The cover image is a photo of a Mardi Gras Indian dancer in New Orleans on “Super Sunday,” March 2011, taken and submitted with permission by Erica Watson (University of Memphis).