Letter from the Editors

When we proposed this issue on “Music and Theory” in November 2019, we did so, well, in theory. At the time, we considered the various negotiations that many, if not most, graduate students learn to make as they internalize approaches from ethnomusicology, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and, yes, even music theories.

However, the world is a different place now. Or so it seems. For so many of our colleagues, it is the same world, with a newly-heightened awareness of inequality, violence, cultural attrition, and inscription of bias.

When we received article submissions in the middle of May, the world was in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Graduate students and university faculty were teaching courses online that were designed for the classroom, and students who relied on multiple “gigs” were losing their primary and supplemental income during the economic shutdown.

As we move to publish this issue, the ways that the pandemic highlights social and structural inequality (in the U.S. and around the world) have been further acknowledged in the current political uprising, lifting up demands for racial justice. Protesting the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, and so many, many other people of color in acts of police brutality and negligence, the refrain “Black Lives Matter” has become more insistent (though not any more urgent) than it was before.

Within our own field, and within the Society for Ethnomusicology, the dispersal of Danielle Brown’s 2020 essay, “An Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies,” on the SEM-L listserv has challenged ethnomusicological complacency. Brown’s nuanced...
Discussion of several interconnected issues within our field particularly calls out the disproportional, power-imbalanced practice of white scholars capitalizing on culture inscribed by Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), and subsequently enjoying a type of moral complacency justified by their white “championing” of these cultures and materials. She suggests several interventions, including inviting more (or any) BIPOC scholars to truly participate, as students and as organizers within the Society for Ethnomusicology, rather than tokenizing and subsequently silencing their voices; and also renegotiating terms of engagement with partners and collaborators that acknowledges power differentials in a more assertive way. But most of all, Brown’s letter calls for the end of any claims to reflexivity that do not include culpability for institutional violences inherent in academics, and particularly in SEM’s corner of music studies.

Reflexivity, as a concept, should never have been conceived of as either an affective shield against outer scrutiny or a magnet for praise, Brown’s letter reminds us. It should always be a magnifier of our own innermost disjunctions, faults, and inconsistencies. Reflexive thought should provoke a personal diagnostic reckoning with the emotional drives that push us to do this work, and how those feelings may be inextricably entangled in hegemonic biases. Yes, Brown is calling for a systemic reorganization of music studies, and of our Society in particular. But she is also asking for deep reflection on our own personal responsibilities—rather than deflection, self-assuagement, selective absolution, or “not all white ethnomusicologists....”

Many of the reactions on the SEM-L listserv have been painful to read. The number of established scholars who have refuted or downplayed Brown’s claims with boilerplate responses has been shocking. Many of these same, and other, scholars have doubled down on social media, particularly in Facebook groups, by challenging BIPOC scholars, often students, to the modern online equivalent of a duel. It is noticeable that students have not participated in the back-and-forth on the listserv. Though students currently make up 22.7% of the Society, the amount of attrition as they graduate and enter an unforgivingly sparse job market, or leave their programs due to personal decisions or academic pressures and abuses, means that students—and especially BIPOC students—cannot feel comfortable participating in this space as older, more established, and more institutionally-supported scholars hold that ground. Gage Averill sent a well-reasoned and supportive response to Brown’s letter on the listserv that pointed to the domination of this and many other spaces by established scholars, writing, “I think every older SEM scholar needs to ask themselves if they’ve ever nixed a project, proposal or publication because they’re threatened by new voices, diverse perspectives, and direct intellectual and ideological challenges” (2020).

As some of these established scholars weigh in with inconsiderate, dismissive, or aggressively argumentative reactions, many of the negative messages appearing on the listserv disproportionally hurt and silence the BIPOC students who are already marginalized and under-supported in our field, elsewhere in academia, and in the broader cultural landscape. This phenomenon is not new. When SEM-L polemics were brought up in a committee at the SEM Annual Meeting in Fall 2019, I (ESC) made the suggestion that students were cowed and silenced by these kinds of listserv discussions, and perhaps some (self-policing, as well as lightly moderating) guidelines should be put into effect. I was told by one established scholar that I was “advocating for censorship.” What I heard was, “the listserv isn’t for them.”

SEM Student News is for students. We want to try to find ways (with your help) to amplify the voices of BIPOC scholars, and feature work that reimagines the approaches, viewpoints, recognitions, and future of our field and our Society. We have made, and will make, mistakes in this endeavor—but we hope to be redirected and guided by the views and ethics of our student readership and contributors. Funnily enough, though this issue may have been conceived theoretically, the excellent pieces submitted indicate a bright, beneficial, and partial corrective reimagining of that future. Shuo Yang deliberately invokes the term “decolonizing” in her essay discussing “halfie” international scholars and the challenges and opportunities they face in ethnomusicology. Jon Bullock criticizes the historical framing of “Theory”...
Letter from the Editors

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As something fixed within a rigid disciplinary system, instead considering the interaction of theory and practice in Middle East anthropology and the ways it might address the inequities faced by scholars along lines of race, sexuality, age, and gender. In Thoughts from the Field, Hannah Adamy invites us to take stock of our own positions during this moment, while contributors reflect on issues regarding space and travel, heritage and identity, and the meanings inherent in fieldwork relationships. Responding to our Dear SEM prompt, Dr. Michael Gallopo offers a critical oscillation between potential damages and benefits of theory, suggesting how an open engagement with theory might produce meaningful social change; and Dr. John-Carlos Perea reflects on the way he has used theory to create space and meaning in his relationship with ethnomusicology. And Diego Pani reviews the 2019 documentary A Bolu about the Sardinian canto a tenore tradition, where—through an interview with ethnomusicologist, writer, and a tenore singer Bustianu Pilosu—he centers the knowledgeable and passionate practitioners of this genre.

As a student-focused and -produced publication, we would very much like to hear from graduate students in and adjacent to our field, and we will be reaching out to organizations that feature and amplify BIPOC voices in ethnomusicology to find fruitful ways to collaborate. Please feel free to respond to this letter, or to any of the pieces you see in this issue; or propose new topics, angles, theories of your own. Apply to work with us as an editor or contributing writer, if your interest, productive bandwidth, and schedule allow. And to all those established scholars and faculty in the field who have worked with us, fostered our ideas and shaped our knowledge, and vocally supported this publication—thank you. We are proud and happy to number you among our excellent mentors, readers, and sponsors. But this isn’t for you.

Eugenia Siegel Conte, Editor (University of California, Santa Barbara)
& Jesse Freedman, Assistant Editor (University of California, Riverside)

Cover Image. Chalk graffiti added near the Black Lives Matter street mural in front of City Hall, Fresno, California, June 2020. Photo by ESC.
Dear SEM,

A Response Column by Eugenia Siegel Conte (University of California, Santa Barbara) and Jesse Freedman (University of California, Riverside), with Dr. Michael Gallope (University of Minnesota) and Dr. John-Carlos Perea (American Indian Studies, College of Ethnic Studies, San Francisco State University).

What is theory, and how does it connect to daily life? How do we identify and approach the theoretical materials that best suit our fieldwork and represent our partners and consultants in the field? And how can we rethink our relationship to theory in the new practicalities perpetuated by the COVID-19 pandemic? In this issue of “Dear SEM,” we queried established scholars about how they approach theory and knit theoretical materials and processes with practical matters, asking,

How have you seen ethnomusicology as a discipline change its relationship with theory? In what sorts of exciting or unexpected ways do you see theory being used by your students, and what do you do to foster and/or challenge these approaches? Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time where our lives feel so dominated by practical concerns (hand-washing, social-distancing, etc.), how can theory be used to sustain and enrich us and our communities? How do you see theory, and our relationship with it, moving forward from this moment?

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**DR. MICHAEL GALLOPE**
*University of Minnesota*

To me, theorizing is ubiquitous; it is like breathing. It happens all over the world, in all different types of circumstances, and emerges from thinkers young and old. It is written in carefully crafted texts, and spoken in wildly speculative off-the-cuff conversations. Even the most evidence-based science lives and breathes with theorizing. There is no limit on the power of theory, good and bad: it can be revolutionary and mind-blowing, boring and tedious, conspiratorial and regressive.

Theories of all kinds saturate musical life, just as they do our scholarly accounts. It is difficult if not impossible to understand the music of another person or society whose spiritual worldview, social and political ideals, or metaphysical sources of inspiration are not known. A scholar who has assumed that they have understood a musical culture without taking account of the circulation of ideas and concepts—both latent and manifest—has likely missed something important about the ways musicians think and feel about their own work.

Music is also conditioned by vast social, political, and economic structures that organize life on a large scale. Theories are invaluable for making sense of the power and significance of music within these macro-processes. After all, many salient theories in the humanities (notably those derived from Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx) posit that social actors are not fully aware of what they do. These thinkers hold that human life is structured by moral norms, repressions of the unconscious, and the political economy of class struggle, respectively. Inevitably, such theories help explain musical situations where actors on the ground claim to think about it differently. Thus, adopting these critical lenses requires an extraordinary dialectical balancing act; one needs to meaningfully explain the structures and regularities of life—many of which can be ideological and unjust—while still giving voice to what people themselves report about their worlds.

At the level of method, theory helps us reflect on the regularities of our own thinking as a field. This kind of theory helps us acknowledge our frameworks and aims as scholars. There is no theory-free research; we always have lenses, biases, narratives, motives, and agendas. There is an ethics to theorizing them thoroughly and explicitly, which is a way of putting them on the table. Theory-as-method can also help us show why our research topic is relevant to a broader community of scholars. Without theory, one risks an overly localized perspective with too little acknowledgment of larger scholarly conversations in play.

Theory is no less crucial to disciplinary change. Without a healthy sphere of theoretical debate, the biases and mistakes of our past thinking would continue unreformed. There is no question that making our scholarship more diverse and inclusive, for example, requires all sorts of practical actions. The protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the long overdue calls to overturn racism in all its forms have only made this disciplinary work more

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urgent. We need to write new textbooks, propose new kinds of curricula, restructure our academic societies, and interrogate our biases and assumptions. But this work is inseparable from theory; it requires a critical examination and revision of the kinds of knowledge scholars reproduce.

To theorize is often to dissent, even to the point of risking one’s life and limb. It can embody dramatic and ethical virtues. But theorizing can also be wielded as a bludgeon over others. It can be used as a tool to intimidate, or perform authority in instances when that authority is not warranted. In its worst incarnations, it rides roughshod over the valuable thinking of musicians and listeners themselves or becomes unwelcoming to others. With this in mind, it may be helpful to maintain a note of caution, a sense of modesty and hospitality, as well as a sensitivity toward structural imbalances and a recognition that one’s own biases are inevitably going to be in play. Power can mean insight, emancipation, and inclusion, but it can also mean exclusion, loss, even silencing. Responsive, ethical, and generous approaches are crucial.

Such are the many paradoxes of theory and its many relationships to musical life. In the messy and craggy history of human societies, a great many of the most liberating and the most horrifying events in modern history have been profoundly informed by theory and affected by music. True social progress seems impossible without both. Music’s sensory impact may push us forward and help us develop our sense of self; it can inspire and transform us. It can also be used to praise the status quo, sweep challenges under the rug, and inspire the worst. Theories are no less powerful and duplicitous. In a world of incessant social change and material crisis, the puzzling entwinements of theory and music remain perennially relevant and finally unanswerable.

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Dear SEM,

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In the messy and craggy history of human societies, a great many of the most liberating and the most horrifying events in modern history have been profoundly informed by theory and affected by music.

DR. JOHN-CARLOS PEREA (American Indian Studies, College of Ethnic Studies, San Francisco State University)

I want to begin by thanking the Editorial Board for inviting me to participate in this issue of SEM Student News. Thank you very much for this opportunity! After reflecting on the prompt, I found myself returning to an experience I first wrote about in my textbook (2014, xiv) that I believe to be relevant to the present discussion.

My first SEM meeting was in Atlanta in 2005. At the time I was between my MA and PhD qualifying exams at the University of California, Berkeley, and Bonnie Wade told me that if I was coming to SEM I had to first contact David McAllester and see if he and I could meet at the conference. As a second-year American Indian graduate student working broadly at the time on urban intertribal American Indian musical cultures, the idea of meeting with such a foundational figure both in my area and the discipline of ethnomusicology seemed impossible. I wrote a letter to McAllester introducing myself and asking to meet, and his response contained a theoretical intervention that I continue to return to today. McAllester wrote, “I had just written, in an article, that much of the future of American Indian ethnomusicology will be ‘homework,’ rather than ‘fieldwork,’ and in the hands of Native musicologists. We can lay the ‘ethno’ to rest, or better still assume it refers to all of us.”

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Dear SEM,

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In two sentences, McAllester reframed the subjective/objective opposition between homework and fieldwork while also referring to the power dynamics of prefixed musicology that we continue to discuss fifteen years later. I call this a theoretical intervention because these statements changed my perception of what, who, and why ethnomusicology is by creating a space for me to think about what ethnomusicology could be (Lipsitz 2015, 9), not just in relation to my identity as a graduate student but also in relation to my identity as an urban American Indian ethnomusicologist.

In this context, Beverley Diamond’s call to “regard musical practices as theory not as objects to which we might apply theory” (2007, 170)—when paired with McAllester’s letter—takes fieldwork and perhaps even ethnomusicology from object to process using supportive logic that has allowed me the space and a place to participate in generative and unexpected ways which, I hope, have contributed to our field. I want my students to find those same senses of space and place that are unique to them and their own lived experiences, and to mobilize them to conduct their work in a responsible, respectful, and reciprocal manner.

It is still incredibly empowering to remember and reflect on the example of such a formative academic elder critiquing something he literally helped to found. At the same time, his critique also passes on a responsibility that has taken on new meaning since March 2020. COVID-19 is changing our relationship to spaces and places. The SEM-L list has of late been home to any number of messages showing the amazing work being done to continue work with students online, expanding the idea of what online education could be. For myself, I wonder what effect McAllester’s message might have had if it had come through email instead of as a letter, and how it might have been if I had heard him sing at the meeting via videoconference instead of in person.

With these memories in mind, my responsibility does not change regardless of the answer. In the moment I must continue to figure out how to make and share creative spaces and places that empower and Indigenize, as they were made and shared with me. When I think about returning to classrooms and conferences in the future, I hope to do so remembering the work that has come before, and striving not to retrench in previous behaviors. In this way I can, through the example of McAllester, Diamond, Lipsitz, and many others before me, remain process-oriented rather than product-driven, and in doing so find new ways to make theory practical.

References


At SEM Student News, we try to address the most pressing issues and diverse research fields. Please email your suggestions to semstudentnews@gmail.com.
Thoughts from the Field

Reflections on Knowledge and Relationships during a Pandemic

A Column by Hannah Adamy (University of California, Davis), with contributors Federica Nardella (King’s College London), Jiayi Liao (SDSZ Beijing Normal University), Grijda Spiri (University of California, Santa Cruz), and Samuel Hunt (Dallas International University).

In this iteration of “Thoughts from the Field,” I ask you to consider two questions you have most likely already asked yourself: Who am I, and what am I doing? These two questions, one grappling with identity and the other with practice, are also often the questions that echo through relationships in ethnographic encounters: Who am I, and what am I doing?

Federica Nardella reflects on her identity as a researcher within the new intimacies of a digitized archive. In an intersection of closeness and distance, Federica proposes that the archivist in the digital archive enters at a close distance, as the usual barriers of the archive shift and the aura that accompanies historical materials is not present in the digital archive, or is at least less palpable. Jiayi Liao also ruminates on the role identity plays in shaping revitalization efforts for heritage musics, a classic ethnomusicological issue. Even during a time of less certainty, culture bearers are passing on their knowledge.

Both Grijda Spiri and Samuel Hunt consider how the pandemic has not only delayed, but perhaps fundamentally changed, fieldwork for early career scholars. Grijda expresses hope that the world will return to a state that makes her fieldwork in Albania possible, whereas Samuel reflects on his own feelings of disappointment and frustration, reminding us to honor relationships, even when it is improbable that the fruits of that labor will be recognizable as “research.”

As you read along, I invite you to readjust yourself to be in relation with “unproductive” knowledge, that is, that which does not necessarily move us toward professional prestige or attend to a timetable. Loving, or at least generous, relationships involve being flexible with one’s time, sometimes making us less productive in the academic sense—and building knowledge of self that is unrelated to our output. Allow this unproductive knowledge to guide your answer. Who are you? What are you doing?

Archival Solitude in the Time of Self-Isolation and Social Distancing

FEDERICA NARDELLA (King’s College London)

I am currently in Istanbul, working on 19th-century Ottoman song-lyrics collections. The COVID-19 emergency has highlighted the disjunctures between the theory and reality of fieldwork, the paradox of closeness through distance that it poses, and for an archival researcher, the issue of digital archives. The archival researcher cultivates a kind of closeness to sources, but archives are now shut due to the implementation of social distancing. This made me reevaluate the intimacy of solitary archival conversations. How does social distancing differ from the distances the historian ordinarily experiences in the course of digital archive work?

The safe, digital interface creates distance between the archive researcher and the archive’s materials, but digital interfaces also bridge distance. The physicality of archival material carries an historical presence, but virtual editions still make that presence accessible. The digital archive is a liminal space in that it makes the archive close while reminding me of distance. When I am in the digital archive, it feels as though closeness and distance have almost merged. There, the researcher is within it because she is without, operating in the close distance, truly in the liminal. One night in the Fatih area, I took a photograph of an illuminated Istanbul mosque. The image struck me as this merging point between air and matter, evanescence and permanence, that is the liminal point for the archival researcher as she ponders the space between the physical and the digital.

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Traditional Music Revitalization—A Call for Cultural Identity and Dialect Preservation

JIAYI LIAO (SDSZ Beijing Normal University)

The issue of music and identity has been a crucial focus in ethnomusicology research since the early 1980s. Recently, scholars reemphasized the importance of this theme, calling for community-based studies in discussion of music identity. My fieldwork in Oucuo Village in Minnan (the south of Fujian Province, China), fostered new thoughts on the relationship between nanyin—the “living fossil” of ancient Chinese music that was prevalent in Minnan—and Minnanese identity.

I conducted fieldwork on the Soil Project in Oucuo Village. This project, which teaches children nanyin, is named metaphorically, invoking a poetic hope of planting seeds in the younger generation that will guide nanyin into the future. In the field, I gathered data through class observation, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with primary school students at the project as well as senior nanyin inheritors.

From them, I realized a crucial reason for nanyin’s marginalization in modern society: the fading of long-held identity. Sung in Minnan dialect, nanyin is a crucial symbol of Minnanese identity. However, Minnan dialect has been gradually replaced by Mandarin. The younger generations typically view the dialect as a symbol of provincialism rather than a unique identity one can be proud of. In Oucuo Village, however, most young people speak or at least understand Minnan dialect. Moreover, the villagers share a mutual ancestor, Shenzhi Wang, a man who brought court music in northern China to Minnan and thus contributed greatly to nanyin around the end of
Thoughts from the Field  
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the 9th Century. Such a common kinship solidifies the villagers’ collective Minnanese identity and creates a fertile environment in which nanyin may thrive today, even in a pandemic.

With their love for nanyin, teachers and students at the Soil Project continue to work together to face the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic situation gradually improves in the village, although teachers and students are still unable to meet weekly indoors as usual, they have begun to continue nanyin study by meeting outdoors in the community. Music and identity are intertwined in ethnomusicology; their interplay throughout history goes on to define the vitality of both. As a student intrigued by musical anthropology studies and cultural heritage protection, I believe the preservation of musical heritage is incomplete unless accompanied by the nurturing of community cultural identity. 🎻

You can read more about nanyin and the Soil Project in Liao’s article on pg. 36.

Shaofeng Lyu, the Director of the Soil Project, holds the microphone for the youngest student participating in the project (4 years old) as she performs nanyin, while other students play the pipa alongside a teacher behind them. Photo by the author.

Fieldwork Interruptions and Adapting to a New Post-Pandemic World
Grijda Spiri (University of California, Santa Cruz)

The uncertainties of doctoral studies are not new. Funding situations, the courses offered during a quarter, and teaching assistant responsibilities play a significant role in planning for graduate students’ research activities. However, the uncertainties brought due to the ongoing pandemic, COVID-19, have left many of us unprepared in our response as the pandemic affects our personal and graduate lives at different levels.

The pandemic and the global lockdown have shelved my fieldwork plans. I was supposed to head to Albania in June for two months to do my fieldwork. My preparation took several months, contacting my interlocutors over emails and phones, and planning my travel. However, even if the country reopens the borders and I travel there, I am worried if meeting my interlocutors is the right decision to make. The people I am interviewing are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19, as all of them are above the age of 70.

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Thoughts from the Field

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Therefore, I have decided to rework my fieldwork plans and schedule my trip for when we return to normalcy. Technology is already helping us to stay in touch and continue our daily life in a less hectic way, so I am considering using every technological innovation to help continue my academic research. I feel fortunate to have the necessary support to weather the pandemic as I shelter in place, and I am hopeful that we will be able to resume our research in the post-pandemic world. 🌱

Image (L). Gjirokastër, Albania—the city of laments. Photo by the author.

Relationships Make Fieldwork Meaningful
SAMUEL HUNT (Dallas International University)

At first when Florida began to lock down in response to COVID-19, I hoped to continue my research of hula performance despite the circumstances. My first hula lesson, about one month prior, had actually taken place via texting, so I thought my teacher and I were prepared. Unfortunately, even that scenario was idealistic for a pandemic-stressed time, and everyone—my teacher included—had their own troubles. I tried to practice on my own, but I hadn’t learned enough to feel I was doing any good to the artistic tradition. Out of respect for my teacher and her culture, I had agreed not to seek knowledge of hula from anyone else. So my research came to a sad, sputtering stop.

I was disappointed—and angry, really. It was not the result I wanted for my hard work, and it was not how I had tried to steer things. When COVID-19 interfered, I wish I could say I was empathetic toward my teacher, but it was not her or her family I thought of, just myself. As I began to cut losses and move on, someone much wiser than me suggested I reach out to her with a compassionate text. No mention of research or hula, just How are you and your family? I hope you’re doing ok in this craziness.

Then I recognized that I had been in the field merely “to collect [my data], and only incidentally to meet people” (Beaudry 2008, 228–9). Instead, as Nicole Beaudry suggests, “[h]uman relationships not only influence the quality of my work but are what makes fieldwork a meaningful experience” (245). Do I believe this? Yes. So my research will have to change, or wait.

People before product.

And so the meaning of my research was found in the halting of it. Though I hope to continue my research, I am content with the so-called unproductiveness of human connection. 🌱

Reference
In the late morning of Sunday, April 5, I received a message from one of the vocalists from the young singing group in the Rosariu confraternity of Santu Lussurgiu, the Sardinian village where I am from. It is Palm Sunday. I am in Washington, D.C., and the singer is reaching out from Italy, six hours ahead of me. He asks me if I can help him and the other singers to put together a video of a song that the four singers can record separately, each one from their own home.

Italy has been in lockdown since the beginning of March 2020 due to the enormous and overwhelming COVID-19 outbreak that forced the Italian government to completely shut down the country and order people to stay at home. Usually, in Sardinia, these days, the days of the Holy Week, are entirely dedicated to the rituals in which multipart singing represents the link between a community and the sacred realm. To sing a cuncordu (four-part song) is not only to sing; it is to serve a community as a whole, sonically defining the space of the ritual.

The young singers from Santu Lussurgiu saw different videos of “stay at home” performances made by different musicians, some recorded days earlier. For example, a multipart singing group from a village nearby, Scano di Montiferro, uploaded a video of a song performed from a distance, with each singer recording at home. The Santu Lussurgiu singers wanted to do something similar.
the same thing, and to publish it online during the first days of the strangest Holy Week they have ever witnessed.

They chose to sing an Istudiantina, a song form mostly sung on mixed protane-secular occasions. The lyrics of the chosen version are usually sung by a senior member of the confraternity every year at the end of the Palm Sunday ritual. This particular version of the istudiantina, for them, means that Holy Week is about to start.

**Cuncordu** singing is the topic of my dissertation, my main field of research, but more important, these singers are friends. Some of them are family. I am happy, honored, to help. We quickly organize the recording. The ‘oghe (usually the voice that begins the instudiantina) will be the first to record his track with the smartphone, serving as the first layer for the recording of the other three—contra, cuntrattu, and bassu.

Once I received the videos, my wife and I opened the editing software and begin to listen. Here, we have to recall our experience of listeners. What voice has to enter at what time? How do the chord concatenations have to end? Through these virtual means, we imagined a real, in-person performance of cuncordu, trying to piece together these four separate voices.

We finished the video and sent back to the singers. They promptly uploaded it on Facebook with text explaining that this is a way to overcome the distance and the impossibility to sing together, wishing all fellow villagers and online viewers a good Holy Week. In a few hours, the video collected hundreds of comments. The majority of them are words of gratitude for the ability to live through the pandemic through traditions, of comments. The majority of them are words of gratitude for the ability to live through the pandemic through traditions, and for the emotional moment that the video portrays and incites in its viewers.

**Cuncordu** singing is primarily about togetherness—to sing in front of each other, a collective performance of four voices that have to stay close, to breathe the same air, and face each other. Nevertheless, this quarantine is forcing us all to revise our habits and affords us acts of private, domestic reaffirmation of who we are. This song expresses who these young singers are, even confined in their homes, even in this age of quarantine.

**SEM Student News** is beginning a posting project called “Dispatches,” a series of short, image, audio, or video-based submissions that we can circulate widely on our social media pages and may include or link to in future issues. We hope that these submissions will provide a space for graduate music scholars to continue sharing their work during the COVID-19 experience, drawing from fieldwork (past or present) and engagements in the classroom.

These posts should include something visual, auditory, or interactive that you might share on your own social media which relates in some way to your work, experiences during COVID with scholarship and teaching, or (professionally-appropriate) personal pastimes and thought processes. They can be creative or poetic and may include nonlinear or abstract elements to engage with our field in unexpected ways. We ask that 250-500 words of captioning is included with the work, and that all photos or images are included with appropriate permissions.

some textual content: 

**Video Credits**

Cuncordu Sos Zovanos de su Rosariu - Istudiantina
Nicola Migheli - ‘Oghe
Sergio Scalas – Cuntrattu
Antonio Melani – Contra
Tonio Cadau – Bassu

Edit and Audio Mix by Elena Cabitza & Diego Pani

For more about Sardinian four-part singing traditions, see the author’s interview (pg. 44) with ethnomusicologist and singer Bustianu Pilosu about Pilosu’s role in developing the documentary film A Bolu (2019).
The Future of Theory

Cause for Hope?

By Jon Bullock (University of Chicago)

Theory—it’s one of those words that can invoke both excitement and disdain among graduate students. It’s also become something of a running joke (or lament, depending on your point of view) to those of us in music scholarship who have internalized the assumption that “theory” is only something that can originate in other disciplines—or something that is only available to certain sub-groups of us, especially those who can pass as “bros.” At the same time, theory (which I abstain from defining here since so many of us use the term in such generative ways) can just as often become a weapon, used to lay bare the systems of oppression that continue to marginalize the poor, the weak, women, people of color, and anyone who dares to defy the American capitalist dream and highlight the unrecognized labor required to fuel the status quo. Likewise, in the classroom, theory can sometimes help convince non-majors (and majors too) that music might actually be worth studying, might actually have something to teach us about the ways humans inhabit the world. In a time when so many of us are rethinking the status quo, and glimmers of hope abound in the midst of unparalleled darkness—as many of us dare to think that the current upheaval just might provide the possibility of a new kind of future—what room is there for theory going forward? Dare we imagine a future in which those women, queer scholars, and scholars of color who have contributed so much of theoretical value to musicology in particular no longer face the “chauvinism of intellectual dominance” (Loza 2006, 361), a future in which the theoretical contributions of these scholars are no longer marginalized in favor of those of their predominantly white male colleagues? In short, how does, or should, theory writ large impact the future of our discipline?

Before offering just one possible answer to this question, let me turn to an example from a discipline that we sometimes view as more generative of theory than our own—anthropology. What is it exactly about anthropology that seems to make it such a hotbed for theoretical formulation and application? While I don’t presume to know enough to try and answer that question here (and I realize the potential pitfalls of talking about such a vast discipline as if it were easily graspable or describable), this kind of inquiry brings to mind a valuable case study from an area of anthropology I read most often in my own research—the anthropology of the Middle East. In addition to providing valuable insights that inform my own work in the region, Middle East anthropology has contributed much of theoretical value to many disciplines, whether in the realm of “nativist” or feminist anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991), subaltern and postcolonial anthropology (Kandiyoti 2015), or the anthropology of sound (Hirschkind 2006, Fahmi 2015), to name just a few examples. At the same time, anthropologists of the Middle East have also struggled within their own discipline as many confront sexism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and violent reactions against any criticism.

In a time when so many of us are rethinking the status quo, and glimmers of hope abound in the midst of unparalleled darkness—as many of us dare to think that the current upheaval just might provide the possibility of a new kind of future—what room is there for theory going forward?

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1 As a way of acknowledging the often-invisible work of women scholars, I would like to thank my colleague Amy Skjerseth, PhD candidate in Cinema and Media Studies (University of Chicago), for taking the time to read this article in its various draft forms and to offer valuable feedback.

2 I am not referring to music theory as a form of analysis here, but rather to the kinds of theory (which might be a part of some music analysis) that many of us have learned to associate with the names of dead white men.

3 I am thinking here of the contributions of scholars such as Will Cheng, Roger Grant, Carolyn Abbate, Kyra Gaunt, Guthrie Ramsey, and Kofi Agawu, among others.

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of the Israeli state at every stage of their academic careers. I am not suggesting that these traits cannot exist in various sinister forms among Middle East anthropologists themselves, but rather that the unique challenges faced by this particular group of scholars have forced many Middle East anthropologists to develop and utilize theory as a way of not only representing their own fieldwork, but also addressing the internal politics of their discipline.

Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar's *Anthropology's Politics: Disciplining the Middle East* (2016) examines the ways anthropologists of the Middle East have been forced to confront issues such as those mentioned above over the past several decades. As Deeb and Winegar state in their introduction, "The consummate image of the scholarly life is that it is defined by the free and impassioned pursuit of ideas. We conduct research and we teach; we produce, question, and impart knowledge. Yet all of us working in colleges and universities know that the life on which we once, perhaps naively, embarked is also filled with politics, much of it quite fraught" (1). They go on to suggest that anthropology of the Middle East provides a particularly fruitful case study of the discipline's internal politics owing to the recent U.S. foreign policy emphasis on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the inclusion of MENA in the birth of area studies during the Cold War, and the unique challenges that have faced scholars who work in the region since 9/11 and the beginning of the U.S.-led "War on Terror." While Deeb and Winegar do not suggest that theory offers an antidote to the widespread racism and xenophobia found on college campuses across the U.S. (both in classrooms and in administrative units), the value of their anthropology of anthropologists is found in the ways they demonstrate these and other traits that are exacerbated by what they call the "neoliberalization of the university" to be "potent, interlinked, and historically dense" (182).

Interestingly, Deeb and Winegar’s interviews with MENA anthropologists led them to consistently highlight several different areas that they think influence the kinds of answers provided by their interlocutors; these areas include gender, race, and the generation during which scholars received their training. Writing about the specific challenges of navigating graduate school, for example, Deeb and Winegar describe the experiences of a 1960s–trained female anthropologist who was told by Marshall Sahlins that women should not be anthropologists, 1990s-trained female anthropologists who repeatedly faced warnings about marrying Arab men, and region-related scholars who have struggled since 9/11 with becoming their departments’ “token” Arabs, responsible for relieving white anxieties about the Middle East (55–57). Other areas that reveal differences marked by gender, race, and generation include scholars’ reasons for wanting to enter the field in the first place (27–52)—experiences involving conflicts in the classroom (90–97) and the emotional and mental costs of self-censorship in both researching and teaching (110–114). In each of these areas, these and other scholars have contributed to their discipline’s body of theoretical contributions by refusing to separate their theoretical work from their work as ethnographers and as individuals within a discipline fraught with its own internal forms of marginalization.

If Middle East anthropologists, then, have contributed to the use of theory in academia, it would seem they have done so only at great cost to themselves...
and in direct relation to the internal politics of MENA anthropology and anthropology as a whole. As Jessica Winegar put it in a recent conversation about *Anthropology’s Politics*, “In our work, we found that one cannot really separate life, ethnography, and theory. This is a basic anthropological point, I suppose, about the contingency and interrelatedness of things” (correspondence with author, reproduced with permission). In other words, “theory” never exists only as theory, and those who utilize it as if it does are most likely those whose experiences of disciplinary politics have provided them with an advantage of one sort or another. As we think about the future of theory within our own discipline, then, one thing is clear: a mere longing for theoretical relevance is not enough. Until we begin to examine the ways scholars in our own discipline address questions of gender, race, and generational difference, there is still much work left to do, and work far more important than the “theoretical.” Until we acknowledge the struggles of women and queer ethnomusicologists, along with ethnomusicologists of color, within our own graduate programs and music departments, we may yet be guilty of supporting the bifurcation of theory from the lives and careers of the marginalized among us.

It has sometimes been suggested that each ethnomusicologists’ focus on a different geographical region is one reason we lack a unified body of theory relevant to those working in every corner of our discipline. Perhaps, however, we can better understand the gaps that theory might be used to fill if we study the ways in which women, people of color, and others who are marginalized within our discipline continue to experience difficulties in graduate school, on the job market, and in their teaching and publishing. Perhaps addressing our own inequities will prove an important first step toward the dethroning of theory as a roadblock to the expansion of the kinds of knowledge we value and the kinds of people we view as capable of producing that knowledge. If we commit ourselves to understanding and changing our own status quo, the future could quite possibly be one in which theory is understood as just one small part of what we do—one piece of a larger puzzle that may yet provide us a glimpse of hope that things really can change.

References


While space does not permit me to address it here, Deeb and Winegar also describe the internal politics of MENA anthropology in relation to organizations such as the AAA and MESA.
The COVID-19 Pandemic & the Future of Ethnomusicology

By Dr. Evrim Hikmet Öğüt (Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul)

It has been months since most of the world realized the gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the privileged ones—who have the financial sources to maintain their lives without working outside—took shelter in their homes. With every passing day, we have a better understanding that what we are going through is not a short-term disaster, during which we will stay in our homes for a while and then go back to “normal.” First and foremost, this worldwide phenomenon, with a sense of uncertainty surrounding the “defeat” of the virus, brings forth a unique dimension to our experience. As we feel closer to death and loss, we are also witnessing the deterioration of all the institutions, health systems being the most important, that we assume to be working along with the immutable nature of social inequalities “in sickness and in health.” Furthermore, the already existing economic crisis will only deepen with unforeseeable consequences that increase worries about the future, even for those in the most privileged positions. We must also face the truth that the emergence of this pandemic cannot be considered independently from the current global climate crisis. We need to apprehend that our relationship with nature may pave the way for similar pandemics in the following years, perhaps leading to an age of viruses or other disasters. Thus, we cannot assume the current circumstance developed along with COVID-19 is an exception.

Due to all these reasons, when the pandemic finally ends, we can only imagine “going back home” if we understand that “home is a place where you have never been,” as poetically described by Ursula Le Guin in The Dispossessed (1994, 70). Even for those who, so far, have been safe and sound, the impact of this reality on daily life is indisputable. The pandemic has changed social relationships, compelling us to discover new forms and means of interaction and socialization. Family members and friends are socializing over Zoom meetings, neighbors are meeting in their hallways, and nursing home residents are playing bingo with the help of a megaphone. We strive to recreate the already familiar social relations in a new context and spatiality or to explore new forms of co-existence. Web-based tools such as Zoom—for those with abundant and reliable internet access—can be considered to play a more effective and widespread role than a megaphone in this endeavor. The use of the internet in distance education is also an essential part of this.

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Internet tools and virtual communication possibilities have had a significant impact on musical performance and listening practices. Online practices, which have been used previously but are now employed more than ever, have become the dominant form of musical performance. We witness the transformation of collective performance practices via the internet. Musicians have few options other than collective performance through simultaneous—if lag is not an issue—or edited successively captured and subsequently layered recordings for collective performance. Even though the audience contributes to these online performances by likes and sending emojis, which is not the same as watching a live concert, it gives room for interaction and the audience’s contribution to their bodily existence by cheering, clapping, dancing, etc. The collective dimension of listening practice is also under transformation. Simultaneous listening, entertainment, and dancing have gained a new dimension through online Zoom parties where individualism and collectivity are experienced simultaneously.

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Considering the free online live performances, and the symphony/opera houses that open their archives, it may be said that online performances give more access to music for the audience who doesn’t have physical or economic access to these performances than ever. Cultural and class-based barriers should not be underestimated. At this moment, the question of “how long and to what extent this access will remain free?” or “what kind of restrictions will be put into place?” remains unanswered. Besides these changes in music making and listening, musicians’ and other music industry workers’ already precarious work is now completely disrupted. Questions have started to arise concerning how new regulations will possibly affect the disorganized, informally employed laborers, who will be left outside, and what kind of new economic networks will come into being.

We, who stay at home, live in a paradoxical moment: we are confined to our homes and stay informed about what is going on outside only via the internet; however, we can stay informed about the whole world in the same way as well. This transformation, unsurprisingly, attracts the attention of the theorists and practitioners of social sciences and humanities. Researchers using ethnographic methods, namely long-term research based on observation and various interview techniques, have started to consider the potential of online ethnography. In the field of ethnomusicology, we transition to a new phase where digital ethnography resources are widely shared, and the scope and methodology of ongoing research projects and student work are rapidly adjusting to online ethnographic research under these new circumstances.

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The Ethnomusicology Reading Group chose “Digital Ethnography” as its topic for Summer 2020.\(^{1}\)

Digital ethnography (Underberg and Zorn 2014; Pink et al. 2016, etc.), originating from various concepts emerged at the dawn of 21st century such as netnography (Kozinets 1998), virtual ethnography (Mason 1999), and media ethnography (Lindlof & Shatzer 1998), has developed with the efforts of researchers from various fields. Until today, researchers from diverse disciplines have conducted studies under different conceptualizations both through the media provided by the internet and online observation and interview techniques. Similarly, in the field of ethnomusicology, several studies examine the online circulation, production, performance, and listening (consumption) conditions of music and use online techniques on their own or accompanied by conventional ethnographic tools. What is new today is that there is almost no other outlet for the music performer, and the researcher is deprived of face-to-face interview possibilities. Thus, under the given circumstances, digital ethnography is the primary method we have. If we bear in mind that new forms of social interaction originating from the pandemic may become somehow permanent practices, we can safely assume that the use of digital ethnography as a methodology will become more prevalent in our discipline as well.

\(^{1}\) For further reading, see Musicovid – An International Research Network (n.d.) and Ethnomusicology Reading Group (n.d.).

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At the same time, we can easily foresee that this new age initiated by the pandemic will lead to a comprehensive paradigmatic transformation in the social sciences. Another tragedy, World War II, created a significant rupture in our understanding of the world with postwar technological advances, the golden age of capitalism in the 1970s, as well as the previously unimaginable destruction that caused notable changes in the social sciences from study areas to disciplinary divisions (Wallerstein 1996). Similarly, we can assume that this pandemic will transform our ways of understanding, thinking, imagining, and doing in our daily lives as well as academic disciplines. We are not currently able to perceive all the economic and ideological aspects of this new world. We only know that the sole barrier between us and a world where capitalism has become even more devastating, and authoritarianism has become the norm, is our determination and will to fight back.

As our epoch has only recently been described as the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000), it is impossible to know if a new post-human epoch—for instance, where viruses can overcome people—will commence or not. One of the primary views about the concept of Anthropocene suggests that this epoch started with the worldwide population rise and technological advances in the 1950s accompanied with humans’ extreme intervention on nature (Zalasiewicz et al. 2015). By drawing attention to capitalism’s role in this process and stating that humans’ devastating impact on nature is not independent from the capitalist system, it is also proposed that this epoch should be called “Capitalocene” (Moore 2014).

As stated before, we can only acknowledge our current conditions by thinking about the emergence of the pandemic as part of the capitalist destruction of nature. No matter how we name it, we have started to face the effects of capitalism on the environment and human life in the harshest way possible. The climate change debate is not new to the field. Ethnomusicology has acknowledged this reality and contributes to relevant literature in the field of ecomusicology. Adding to pioneer studies of Jeff Todd Titon in the field, many ethnomusicologists published articles independently or in the compilations with the researchers from other disciplines (Allen and Dawe 2017). The relatively new discussion on the human-centric ontology of music has just opened in the context of Anthropocene (Sykes 2020). We can anticipate that the field of ethnomusicology will increasingly lean toward ecomusicology, Anthropocene, and post-human studies in the following years.

We are on the edge of a new age in which we see the world with fresh eyes, develop new forms of interaction and expression, and put them into use with new means. As much as the psychological effects of loss, death, proximity to illness, and the experience of lockdown, the inequities we have faced and our solidarity practices in response to them will transform us all. We already see that music accompanies social relations as before, acquires new forms with them, and enters into circulation with novel performance forms and channels. Musicians, listeners, and music market workers, who are all affected by these new conditions, undergo a transformation and gain new experiences. We, as ethnomusicologists, will have our share of this transformation as well. In order to understand these new relations of music, and relations formed through music, we will develop new perspectives and methods; in fact, we have already started!

References

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2 Choosing WWII as an example is not a coincidence. See Karen Cirillo’s 2020 article on UNDP News: “Coronavirus: World Bank confirms deepest recession since World War Two.”

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Future of Ethnomusicology

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Over the last nine years, we have touched on many topics, including sound and sensory studies, decolonization, the job market, health, diaspora, interdisciplinarity, funding, and more. You can check them all out by visiting semsn.com.
In the final chapter of his “Red Book,” Bruno Nettl frames ethnomusicologists’ use of theories from other disciplines as a positive contribution to the study of music, praising the discipline’s blending of original findings with literature from other disciplines such as anthropology and cultural studies (Nettl 2014, 483). This omnivorous approach to theory, while potentially productive, can also present some challenges to early-career scholars, such as myself, who are trying to figure out where their research fits within the discipline of ethnomusicology. As I began work on my master’s thesis, which focuses on the use of the word “local” and its derivations in ethnomusicology, I became frustrated with what I perceived as a lack of theoretical offerings by the field of ethnomusicology on this topic. I searched for ethnomusicological works that modeled how to investigate how the term local is imbued with meaning in the way that we talk and write about music, but the theories I found most helpful often came from outside the discipline.

The word local appears frequently in ethnomusicological work, but it is rarely problematized and defined. Perhaps ethnomusicologists take the idea of the local for granted as it is implied by our understanding of the traditional fieldwork model, which focuses on sustained interaction with a relatively small-scale community (Barz and Cooley 2008, 12). But as new ways of doing ethnography have emerged—multi-sited, virtual, archival, etc.—the position of local studies as the “conceptual centre of our field” (Rice 2010, 107) is no longer a given. We should therefore pay more attention to what we mean when we use the word local in our scholarship, and what it means to the people we study.

The most recent sustained attention to the term “local” in the field comes from Suzel Reily and Katherine Brucher’s *The Routledge Companion to Local Musicking* (2018). Reily and Brucher’s framing of this volume demonstrates the type of theoretical mixture described by Nettl, as they identify three strains of thought that guide their organization of the volume. They combine the theoretical contributions of music scholars Christopher Small (1998) and Ruth Finnegan (1989) with the theory of locality offered by cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai (1996). Before this edited volume was published, I relied heavily on Appadurai’s work as one of the few sustained, theoretical discussions of the interplay between the social and material processes through which locality is produced. With this new edited volume in hand, I finally had some established ethnomusicologists to draw inspiration from as I began to consider how music and locality interact in my fieldsite, El Paso, Texas.

Appadurai defines locality as “primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial,” as a “phenomenological quality, which expresses itself in certain kinds of agency” (Appadurai 1996, 178). He constructs a dialectical relationship between the neighborhood—the situated, actual community—and locality as a domain of social life, arguing that “locality is always emergent from the practices of local subjects in specific neighborhoods” (1996, 198). In setting out this dialectic nature of the neighborhood, Appadurai lays the foundation for considering locality as a social production that emerges out of the interactions that create these neighborhoods. In other words, both neighborhoods and locality are socially-constructed.

A specific effort by local actors to revitalize the downtown area of El Paso provides a provocative example of the type of social practices Appadurai describes through which the material organization of neighborhoods and the production of locality are achieved. Through a brief discussion of this example, I suggest that a theorization of locality that foregrounds the relationship between the production of neighborhoods and the production of locality is a potentially fruitful position from which to address the role of music and musicians in the material and social production of local spaces.

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1 This article includes material from my recently completed master’s thesis titled “Localities on the Border: Toward a Consideration of Musicking in El Paso, Texas.” While the thesis was largely a literature review, it does include some information from two weekend-long exploratory field trips to the city. I suggest El Paso is a fascinating future site of sustained ethnographic fieldwork, as its position on the U.S.–Mexico border renders questions of the local even more complicated.

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Why the Trolleys Sing

Tracking Locality in El Paso, TX

By Katherine Morics (Independent Scholar)
Why the Trolleys Sing

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As part of larger efforts to revitalize the downtown area of El Paso, the city invested in a new streetcar line serving the area. The city had the streetcars from 1881 until 1974, when the line closed and the trains were taken to the desert—where they sat until they were restored. New tracks were later laid and the streetcar line reopened in November of 2018. In May 2019, the El Paso International Music Foundation (EPIMF) launched, in collaboration with the streetcar and the downtown district, a concert series called Trolley Tracks on the last Thursday of each month. These concerts took place on board the trolley as it ran its route, with local musicians performing shows for riders and the passersby on the street as the trolley passed through. A promotional flyer for the performance by garage rock band Nalgadas, posted on the EPIMF Facebook page, illustrates the connections between organizations and municipal players that presented these concerts.

The institutions listed as partners for this concert series are the City of El Paso, the Museums and Cultural Affairs Department (MCAD), the El Paso International Music Foundation, and Fusion Magazine, a Spanish/English bilingual arts and culture magazine based in El Paso. The Trolley Tracks concert series represents a fascinating convergence of institutions that come together to create spatially meaningful musical practice amid the restructuring of the downtown El Paso neighborhood and local music scenes. As local musicians are quite literally embedded in the city's infrastructure through events like this, live performance becomes part of revitalization efforts, directly including them in conversations about what El Paso might look like in the future.

I see Trolley Tracks as one example of the production of new contexts Appadurai describes in his work on the production of locality. In its explicit use of the physical infrastructure of the El Paso Streetcar, the Trolley Tracks event suggests new material contexts for the downtown area of El Paso and for the music scene in the city. I understand the value of Appadurai's conceptualization of locality to be the productive tension he sets up between the neighborhood and locality by addressing the role of space and place as they are experienced by human beings without closing off the possibility that these spaces and places can be changed—in other words, that new contexts for the production of locality can be created. As ethnomusicologists continue to both work toward the construction of our own “ethnomusical theory” (Rice 2010) and to borrow from other scholars to consider locality and music, we should continue to pay attention to how musicians on the ground are already thinking about what the local looks, feels, and sounds like. In El Paso, these negotiations of the local are influenced in no small part by the cultural and economic consequences of the city’s location on the U.S.–Mexico border. Foregrounding theorizations of locality from all scholars, whether they work within the discipline of ethnomusicology and the formal structures of academia or not, can help us address these larger issues of global significance that are experienced and felt at the local level.

2 These efforts include the construction of urban parks and a new baseball stadium, as well as large-scale renovation of public places in the downtown area (Steuteville 2018).

3 The El Paso International Music Foundation (EPIMF) is a nonprofit organization whose stated mission is to support the local music scene of El Paso through professional development and event organizing. See their Facebook page for more information.

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Why the Trolleys Sing

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References

The hyperlinks highlighting parenthetical references in Student News articles provide links between the text and our annotated bibliography, which features that highlighted work. Use this link to jump to the annotated bibliography. When you have finished investigating the bibliographic entry, click on the link provided in the annotated bibliography to return to the article that you were reading.
By Niall Edwards-FitzSimons (University of Sydney)

In the course of my doctoral research on the sitting dance genres of Aceh, Indonesia, I have had to work to find the right balance between the theoretical concerns I wanted to investigate when I started and the head-spinning wealth of information, ideas and experiences arising from the research process. This tension between the deployment of existing theory to interpret the experiences we have in the field, and the need to center the practices of the people we work with, is something ethnomusicologists must negotiate.

In preparing to write my doctoral thesis, I have been attempting to examine how it exists in my own work. “Ethnomusicological theory,” according to Timothy Rice, has “yet to take firm root in our disciplinary imagination” (Rice 2010, 100). John Blacking thought we wouldn’t be able to fully “exploit” music until we have “a more general theory of music-making to reconcile the structures of a cultural phenomenon with its biological foundations” (Blacking 1992, 308). The desire to understand how the powerful social, spiritual and personal relationships we have with music result from our biology and evolutionary history is what drew me to music scholarship. I’m fascinated by the hypothesis that the prosocial effects of synchronized, mutually entrained rhythmic movement are key to musicking as an adaptive behavior (Trainor and Cirelli 2015). Previous studies have concluded that these effects support the benefits to social cohesion thought to arise from musical behavior (McNeill 1995, Shulkin and Raglan 2014), and may be related to the heightened rapport generated by imitation (Chartrand and van Baaren 2009, Hove and Risen 2009).

When I began my doctorate, my aim was to explore these ideas in a setting of mutual entrainment; that is, two or more people performing rhythmic movement synchronised to the same beat (Clayton, Sager and Will 2005). While researchers in neuroscience and music psychology have done much to advance these ideas, mostly with lab-based finger or foot tapping tests, these bear little resemblance to “real” musical activity. It’s up to ethnographers to find out whether the conclusions about the structure and biology of music that researchers draw from these tests can describe what happens in active musicking and dance settings. After seeing a performance by Suara Indonesia Dance Group in Sydney, I was drawn to the sitting dances of Aceh, a number of distinct but related dance genres in which participants kneel while singing, clapping, and performing complex interlocking patterns of movement. All sitting dance genres require intense rhythmic coordination between the participants, who synchronize singing, body percussion, and dance movements. I saw the affinities between my hypothesis and the existing discourse around these dances. I became fascinated with the concept/value of kekompakan (“compactness,” “solidarity,” or “togetherness”) that was expressed in these dances and was a prominent thread connecting the testimony of the 91 individuals with whom I recorded conversations. People told me that achieving kekompakan—moving as one co-ordinated entity by keeping movements precisely in time and with the same affect and level of energy—was the most important factor to ensuring a successful performance, also using terms like kebersamaan (“togetherness”) and kesatuan (“unity”). Kekompakan was also said to be a major factor in the judges’ assessments of the high school and university dance groups competing at the large Ratoh Jaroe competitions held in Jakarta and elsewhere. It seemed that this concept had some resonance with the rapport-building effects of entrained rhythmic movement that had sparked my interest.

Over a year of participant observation in the Ratoh Bantai dance with Suara in Sydney and around nine months of work in Indonesia, I learned more about the people, places, groups, and institutions that form the world of these dances. I often asked continued on next page . . .
specific questions about the things I was interested in; the subjective experience of rhythmic entrainment, how participation affected the relationship between dancers, and motivations for participation. But these topics only formed a part of often free-ranging, sometimes multi-hour discussions I had with dancers, musicians, choreographers, students and administrators. As the people I spoke to shared their knowledge and experiences with me, I developed a much broader perspective on the application of my work.

While there have been recent publications on these music and dance practices (Kartomi 2007, 2010, 2013; Juaini et al. 2016), including a recent doctoral thesis (Ishiguro 2018), I’m not aware of any attempts at documentation of the rapid rise of several of these dance genres to prominence in Indonesia over the last decade. More and more, I started to see my role as a documentarian of these events. I aimed to write a history of their growth in the 21st century that would encompass all of the information and experiences that people had shared with me. I look back on this instinct as an honest reaction to the responsibility I felt toward those who had shared their knowledge with me, but one laced with hubris.

A visit to Desa Kuta Blang, a village on the outskirts of Bireuën, Aceh, served to reinforce the feeling that it was my responsibility to document and share everything I was learning. Syeh Ayi M. Nurli, leader and main teacher of the village dance group Jeumpa Puteh, expressed his happiness that I was there to document his community’s variety of sitting dance, Rapai Pulot Geurimpheng. While in-depth documentation of dance forms and movements had not been a major concern for my project at first, I felt some pressure to step into the role of documentarian ethnomusicologist, a role that required additional work not necessarily inspired by my own research interests. It seemed expected that I would want to record video and audio of the rehearsal, take many photos and record every detail of the movements and arrangement of bodies in space, when I had initially been more interested in talking to the participants about why they valued their participation, how it felt to move with the group, and what performing these dances meant for them and their community. When I finished traveling and my focus shifted to writing, I became increasingly nervous about how all the different pieces of my thesis would fit together. How could I structure it to effectively encompass all that I felt I needed to include? I had started to feel it was selfish to want to pursue the questions that had sparked my research, that my duty was to use my thesis to somehow relay all of the different things people had shared with

**Video Link.** After the author’s visit to Desa Kuta Blang in June 2019, Syeh Nurli and the group produced a short documentary about their dance and its history. It placed second in the documentary competition Lomba Film Dokumenter Pendek Estafet Budaya Aceh 2019 (Acehnese Cultural Relay Short Documentary Film Competition 2019).
me. As students in ethnomusicology, transmitting the knowledge and perspectives of the people we speak to in their own words and representing their communities accurately in our writing are an important part of our duty (Chavez and Skelchy 2016). Too often the voices of the people who share their knowledge with us “have been smoothed into the expository prose of more-or-less interchangeable “informants”” (Clifford 1988, 49). I started to worry that framing my thesis around the questions that had motivated me might erase the perspectives of the people I spoke to, that I might be bending their words to serve my own purposes.

It made me think about what I have to offer, to music scholarship and to the people I spoke to and learned from, in the creation of my thesis. At one time, access to sophisticated audio and video recording equipment funded by our institutions was a special privilege of ethnomusicologists, giving us an ability to document and preserve performance culture that its custodians didn’t have. Now anyone with a smartphone is able to fulfill this role, and people are enthusiastically engaged in documenting their own cultures (see, for example, the documentary film linked on the previous page). The role of documentarian seems a presumptive one for an outsider to want to fulfill in these circumstances. According to Jonathan Stock, ethnomusicologists can “listen critically, observe closely and participate as fully as we can” (Stock 2008, 190). I started to question what this participant observation and “critical” listening should aim to achieve. It has felt to me like we are too focused on our own experiences, that our methodology of participant observation might be a way we credential ourselves to make our own opinions, deductions and guesses about the culture we study somehow authoritative. We have built up a powerful “research imaginary” out of our “own immersion stories, replete with their own particular challenges of doing ‘real’ and ‘serious’ fieldwork,” stories that inevitably center the personal journey of the researcher (Lassiter and Campbell 2010, 759).

Rather than attempting to achieve an expert status myself, I can engage in participant observation to build context and understanding, to improve my ability to ask the right questions. I can gather testimony, identify patterns and draw plausible connections to other kinds of knowledge. I can build layers of understanding by linking different ways of knowing, acting as a node that connects subjective experience, tradition, oral history, and the kinds of knowledge produced in academia. Ethnomusicologists who are insiders, who do their ethnomusicology within their home culture, have an even more powerful capacity to act in this regard (for examples of this complex negotiation, see Shuo Yang’s article on pg. 27 about “in-between” ethnomusicologists).

Recognizing the authority of people’s accounts of their own cultures and experiences over our powers of observation and description, and having this knowledge inform our theories, seems vital if we are to attempt to do our work in a way that can both center the perspectives of the people whose cultures we study and fulfill the expectations of our Western institutions. Whether this is really possible in a discipline so firmly rooted in colonialism is a subject of ongoing debate. If it is, I think it will require a “rethinking of ethnography as primarily about speaking and listening, instead of observing” (Conquergood 2013, 87). In my case, I realized that the concept of kekompakan and the ways that people explained it to me had shaped my thinking on synchronised rhythmic movement and the utility of dance and musicking in inspiring unity and togetherness. The way practitioners of Acehnese sitting dances envisage this idea of unity as about compactness—meaning the tight binding together of

![Image](image.jpg) *Sanggar Jeumpa Puteh rehearsing at Desa Kuta Blang, Bireun Regency, Aceh, June 2019. Photo by the author.*

*Striking a Balance* . . . continued on next page . . .
Striking a Balance

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a whole group in their movements, and the mutual obligations to interlock safely in practices involving swinging heads and flying elbows—pushed me toward a new understanding of how synchronised rhythmic movement works, as well as a new appreciation for the way it affects the group performing the Acehnese sitting dances, the audience watching them, and the communities and societies they belong to. Through this process of discussion and experience, the hypothesis that I worried about imposing on the testimony shared with me has itself been shaped by the discourse I’ve been exposed to.

There is a tendency in ethnomusicology to only make passing reference to theory from other disciplines “for the authority and interdisciplinarity it appears to give” (Rice 2010, 101). We do not seem prepared to challenge these theories based on what we learn during the research process. In my own thesis, I hope instead to make the music-psych theory around entrainment and prosociality an “object of sustained argumentation” by examining it in the light of the knowledge and experiences so generously shared with me (Rice 2010, 101). In doing so I will attempt to present the perspectives of the people I spoke to fairly and accurately, be sure I never seek to contradict or override them, or think I know better than they do about what is going on or what is important. Rather than erasing emic perspectives, Western theory must be there to add layers of understanding, and it is useless if it does not ring true with the ways people understand their participation in their own cultures.

References


In-Between Scholars on Decolonizing Ethnomusicology

By Shuo Yang (University of Pittsburgh)

I am an international graduate student from China, one of the many international students studying in U.S. graduate programs in ethnomusicology. We form a large and very diverse community drawn from cultures across the world and speak from different standpoints. Some of us face specific challenges: language barriers (which also leads to extra time and energy spent on our work), limited funding opportunities, visa issues, difficulties in networking, and a lack of confidence to pursue an academic career in our host country, just to name a few. My own experience of studying abroad has at times made me feel like I do not fit easily into the academic traditions of either my homeland or my host country. We are the “in-between” ethnomusicologists, stuck between insider and outsider—and our status as “in-between” grants us the opportunity to disrupt the predominant voice of North America and Western Europe, using our liminal positionalities to reshape ethnomusicology as a discipline.

In Lila Abu-Lughod’s “Writing Against Culture” (1991), she uses the term “halfie scholar[s]” to describe a community “whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage” (187), which definitely includes international students. However, while Abu-Lughod points out various complexities in these scholars’ day-to-day experiences, the term “halfie” implies a static identity and a sense of incompleteness. Instead of embodying the whole, we are only represented as two halves. In contrast to Abu-Lughod’s notion of “halfie,” I prefer the term “in-between,” because it implies a sense of uncertainty and anxiety for someone still searching for the future. As “in-between ethnomusicologists,” we sometimes get lost on the journey and experience dislocations while away from home. However, at the same time, the term “in-between” also suggests a sense of fluidity, a sense of becoming, and a sense of possibility.

Being an international student is, first of all, a privilege for a lot of us, because being able to pursue higher education in a First World country or to have education in different cultural backgrounds is often reinforced by better social-economic status, higher social mobility, and wider access to resources that provide us with the necessary social and cultural capital (Beech 2019, 9). Meanwhile, being in-between home and the host country, sometimes in-between multiple locales, also brings great challenges. In my own case, being in-between weakens my sense of belonging. Because China is where I was born and grew up, I am not a U.S. scholar. However, because most of my higher education did not take place in China, I am also not an insider in Chinese academia, and am treated by Chinese scholars as someone with a U.S. (instead of Chinese) educational background. Being in-between means that it will be impossible for me to fully grasp and embody one identity.

...being in-between home and the host country, sometimes in-between multiple locales, also brings great challenges. In my own case, being in-between weakens my sense of belonging.

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1 In this article, the term “international students” refers to students in U.S. graduate programs in ethnomusicology who come from epistemic perspectives outside the hegemonic centers of knowledge production in the United States and Western Europe. And “international scholars” indicate scholars who come from and work in academia outside North America and Western Europe.

2 The use of “we” in this article is by no means to undermine the heterogeneity of experiences, standpoints, and sites of enunciation of international students. Rather, it is more indicative of the commonality of challenges and uneasiness international students confront as a community, their agency of disrupting the mechanism that undergirds the Euro-American centered logic of center and periphery, as well as where I stand.
In-Between Scholars

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or the other. More important, within North American academia, international students are seen by Americans, not as part of “the West,” but as an “Other.” We often face greater pressure to locate and identify ourselves or to act as native informants of cultural knowledge that is not necessarily our own (Lâm 1994, 890; Wong 2006, 14; Abu-Lughod 1991, 142). We are often assigned various cultural stereotypes. In everyday life, our positionalities are almost always only associated with our places of departure, even if the identities that we inhabit are unfixed and fluid (Romero 2001, 6–9; Stock and Chiener 2008). We are often seen as an extension of a local scholarship rather than a co-constitutive part of North American academia, but our research is evaluated solely based on the standard and current trends of Euro-American ethnomusicology. This difficult situation presents a huge challenge for international students trying to survive in an unfamiliar and unequal environment, using a language that is not our mother tongue, and it also bestows upon us a huge sense of responsibility to challenge the existing power inequalities and to raise our own voices.

Today, research in ethnomusicology is still dominated by North American and Western European ways of thinking, knowing, and doing research, while alternative ethnomusicologies in different statuses, practices, engagements with other disciplines, and embedded in different intellectual histories co-exist in different parts of the world.5 Regarding the relationship between Euro-American academia and the voices of international scholars, Euro-American theories and research concerns are being applied by ethnomusicologists to research basically all musics, while other ways of knowing and corresponding research traditions are rarely considered and consulted as important research references or are just seen as “area studies.” Further, it is extremely difficult for international scholars to break into the mainstream discourse of ethnomusicology due to factors including the hegemony of the dominant culture, language barriers, limited resources, and travel restrictions (León 1999: 176–78; Jackson, 2006: 282–84; Loza 2006). I have witnessed in different international conferences how frustrated international scholars could become when they want to share their excellent research but have to shorten or simplify it because they cannot speak English fluently.

Methods for decolonizing the discipline have been offered by different scholars to disrupt the academic hegemony of Western epistemologies and to bring in different voices (Qureshi 1995; Witzleben 1997; continued on next page...)

3 In Western academy settings, such as in world music ensembles, there is already an earlier history of essentialism and treating cultural bearers and native teachers as the representation of a totalized culture and its authenticity (Racy, Marcus, and Solís 2004, 159).

4 I was once asked by a senior scholar from the U.S. at a SEM Annual Conference to mingle with other people when I was having a conversation with another young scholar from China because, according to him, Chinese students are always too shy to talk to people who are not Chinese.

5 For example, before Western ethnomusicology was introduced into China in the 1980s, a long history of music research had already existed. The research system, methodologies, and academic concerns of current ethnomusicology in China all present a continuation of China’s music research tradition since the early 20th century. For discussions in English on ethnomusicology research outside North America and West Europe, see Kidula 2006; León 1999; Park 1998; Wong 1999; Witzleben 1997; Shen 1999; Yang 2003.
In-Between Scholars

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Greve 2016; Loza 2006). SEM Student News dedicated a whole issue to “Decolonizing Ethnomusicology” (2016) advocating for different critical voices on this pressing matter. SEM also launched the Ethnomusicology Translations project, a peer-reviewed, open-access online series for scholarship in languages other than English. While these are all valuable interventions, most of these discussions have been conducted through the hegemonic structure of Euro-American scholarship. On the other side, migrant scholars who work in English-speaking contexts have done significant work criticizing academic colonialism and offering alternative frameworks and methodologies of disciplinary transformations (Nketia 1984; Agawu 1992, 2003; León 1999; Ochoa Gautier 2014, 2019). However, the number is still small, not to mention the marginalized status of discussions outside the English-speaking world. Their voices are still to a large extent missing in the conversation.

As international students, some of us who have been academically trained in different research traditions are constantly negotiating with different academic epistemologies and research approaches. These engagements are neither isolated nor unidirectional, but rather interrelated and mutually dependent. In the North American education system, most of the academic sources we read have been written by North American and Western European scholars in English and taught by Western or Western-trained professors. We write in English, present in English, and try to think like an English speaker. Meanwhile, it is the same training that has given us the language tools to raise awareness of alternative modes of doing ethnomusicology outside the center of knowledge production and has also allowed us to start a dialogue with Western scholars and Western epistemologies from within. It is also this process of engaging and negotiating with Western scholarship that has led us to reevaluate our relationships with ourselves, the institutional system that we are in, and scholarship of disciplinary peripheries, which represents a way to decolonize the hegemonic voice of Euro/U.S.-centric ethnomusicology in ourselves.

Decolonizing ethnomusicology does not mean ignoring and rejecting the interactions and co-constitutive relationship between the Euro-American scholarship and other research traditions. Rather, it is about rearranging and redistributing the power relationship so that international scholars do not feel marginalized and are able to freely engage in what Ramón Flecha calls “egalitarian dialogue” (2000) with Euro-American academia on the same platform, or in what Ramón Grosfoguel proposes as a “horizontal dialogue” to create a common critical language of decolonization that is “anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist” while respecting the epistemic perspective of critical thinking “from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies” (2011, 25; emphasis added). One crucial way to break the universalization of Euro/U.S.-centric norms, in which international students could play a special role, is to address different scholarship’s distinctive paths and to show that any music research tradition does not develop in a vacuum. Further, international scholars should advocate that these traditions not be ignored by Euro-American scholars and excluded from ethnomusicology curricula. Meanwhile, our embodiment of epistemologies from both sides also equips us with a critical perspective to look at ethnomusicologies we align with from a distance and to raise original questions that might be overlooked by local academics.

In 2018, the Joint Symposium of the ICTM Study Groups on Applied Ethnomusicology and on Music, Education and Social Inclusion was held in the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing. I was fortunate to work as a local translator with a few other Chinese students who are or were studying in Euro-American graduate programs

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6 Although Travis A. Jackson does not directly speak to the community of international scholars, he points out the hegemony in the canon of ethnomusicology literature occupied mostly by Western white, largely middle-class male scholars, as well as the non-Hispanic white majority of the membership of America’s major academic associations such as SEM, which both resonate with the problematic environment that international scholars have to face.

7 For example, Witzleben (1997) offers a comparative discussion to question the suitability of Western ethnomusicology for the study of musics and the training of international scholars in non-Euro-American societies and to advocate for a multicultural awareness of music. Greve (2016) anticipates a merge of different sub-domains of music scholarship toward interculturality of music without the geographical, historical, and stylistic circumscription. All these interventions are expressed from Euro-American perspective, situated in Euro-American academy, or take Euro-American ethnomusicology as the point of departure.
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in ethnomusicology. Before the conference, local organizers prepared both Chinese and English versions of the conference programme, abstracts, and presentation slides. During each presentation, we tried our best to give a summary of the presentation in either English or Chinese depending on the language used by the presenter, translated the Q&A section, and contextualized different research projects for foreign scholars. It was, without doubt, a huge amount of work for a four-day symposium, and there were some unavoidable issues, such as shortened presentation time and unstable efficiency of translation, but all of these efforts created a shared platform outside of Euro-American academia. In this conference, scholars from different research traditions listen to and learn from each other and share different meanings and practices of music education and applied ethnomusicology in different sociocultural contexts. The work of international students in this dialogue was crucial, because we were not just translating words in two languages verbatim, but we were also trying to translate perspectives in a culturally and academically situated manner while being careful not to abuse the power of that mediating role. This bi- or trilingualism has enabled us to reduce the mis/untranslatability between intellectual trajectories and to ensure that the dialogue does not occur from only one site of enunciation.

Decolonizing ethnomusicology requires more equitable platforms for scholars from different backgrounds to communicate across languages and ideologies while holding on to their own ways of thinking, knowing, and doing research. Being in-between allows us to see the distinctiveness of the historical paths and current discourses of different ethnomusicologies, and to recognize how problematic it is to imprint the model of European/U.S. academia on the development of other ethnomusicologies. To decolonize ethnomusicology, international students, who are going to be the main force of international voices in the future, are an important channel to connect different scholarships and to let our ethnomusicologies be heard.

References

8 Remote presentation was allowed in this symposium. There were also travel subsidies and financial support available for delegates lacking funding.

9 Of course, the translation work is still very limited, because our bi- or trilingual fluency also confines us to Euro-American and Chinese contexts, which excluded scholars from other intellectual traditions such as those in other parts of East Asia and Latin America.
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Visit semsn.com for the latest and past issues, calls, announcements, cross publications, supplementary materials, and more.
This article reflects on a multimedial exhibit titled “Re-Discovering the Ney Collection” in which a set of reed-flute instruments were on display at the Marian Anderson Gallery of the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library at the University of Pennsylvania during Spring 2020. I participated in the exhibit as the curator in collaboration with Dwaune Latimer, Keeper of the African Collections of Penn Museum, the support of Liza Vick, Head of the Otto E. Albrecht Music Library and Media Center, and Anna Brancati, Senior Registrar of Penn Museum.

I elaborate here on what Emily Dolan and John Tresch call “new organology” to suggest that the agency of instruments can take the lead in curatorial works and lay out themes that only instruments can set into motion. New organology studies the ethical work instruments help accomplish, and the world of situations and mediations in which they are co-constituted (Tresch and Dolan 2013, 284). In a nutshell, these authors make us wonder “if instruments are frequently accused of making humans act mechanically, why should we not take seriously instruments’ oft-noted lifelike capacities?” (Tresch and Dolan 2013, 285).

My take on the instrument’s agency does not claim that sonic objects can set up a gallery exhibit just as curators do. Far from mystifying objects or human intervention, this agential shift upon instruments appears as an opportunity to experiment with gallery spaces as multimedial infrastructures, in which viewers could interact with ethnomusicological debates rendered in non-text based formats. This theoretical approach to instruments also prompts ethnomusicologists to go beyond the display of prescriptive information on how humans have used instruments. In other words, I suggest that the creation of modalities for rendering instruments’ agential power are duties imposed on humans, so that instruments can accomplish the ethical works for which they are needed.

Since I had arrived on the University of Pennsylvania campus in 2014, I wanted to see the reed flutes, as my interlocutors in Istanbul were always talking about the most ancient in the world kept at the Penn Museum. For over ten years, I conducted ethnographic research on Muslim mysticism, analytics of listening, and liturgical Sufi practices in contemporary Istanbul (Castrillón 2012, 2014). But it was not until 2018 that I was able to work with the instruments and study their “second life as heritage” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 149) in the museum collection, thanks to a serendipitous request made by Dwaune Latimer, who wanted my informed opinion about the after being contacted by Turkish musician Zeki Sözen and German scholar Klaus Schmidt.

In my research, I have learned that many who consider the from a devotional standpoint think that the instrument always finds the performer. My interlocutors insist that the existence of the is solely determined by its purpose of telling humans the story of their return to the primordial intimacy with the Divine (al-Lah). That story is explained through the sounds it makes noticeable. The ethical work of the, in terms of the new organological approach, is to find a who can reveal a world through its sounds and performance. This theoretical approach toward instruments positions me, as a researcher and performer, within a personal stance often characterized as applied ethnomusicology, which Svanibor Pettan described

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as the scholar’s free decision to “intervene into the human and cultural environment of his or her research interest” (2015, 33). However, in my case, this personal stance—more than a free decision—is part of the network of obligations through which the ethical work of the ney could be fulfilled. Therefore, the conditions in which these instruments found me, including the fact that I was not able to play them due to the conservation policy of the museum, prompted me to rethink what kind of world they want us to know, thus decentering my “personal interest” in the instrument as a performer.

The multimedial exhibit, then, became an experiment to assemble my informed opinion about the ney reed-flutes acquired by Sarah Frishmuth from Egypt to educate a white audience on Islamic art in Philadelphia and New York (Lindsey 2010, 2015). Between 1954 and 1958, the university museum hosted an organological exhibit entitled “4000 Years of Music,” featuring most of the instruments donated by Frishmuth, who was a renowned Philadelphian collector. It was initially curated by horn player and music librarian Theodore Seder, and later by the Hungarian pianist Agi Jambor (Mott 1992). However, its records did not list vertical flutes, such as the ney, but instruments of different origins that were either transverse, end, or duct flutes. Therefore, the ney instruments had not been seen publicly since they were donated.

In this regard, the presence of these instruments finally on display did not attempt to offer a single explanation of who performed on them, or what they represented for a particular community. Instead, the experimental character of the exhibit opened potential articulations of these instruments “seen as the cornerstone of the relationships they implicate” (Dolan and Tresch 2013, 292) in conjunction with other objects, sounds, texts, and images as they set into motion worlds through exchange, gaps, joints, similarities, and differences. These instruments could dynamize a sense of belonging among current Egyptian immigrants in Philadelphia, but also spark academic interest in historical communities of Muslim Ottomans in Cairo, or even recapture the attention of international scholars and musicians in different

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countries. The story of the human return to the primordial intimacy with the Divine goes beyond a colonial boundary that imagines the ney secluded in a Turkish cultural regiment.

Finally, after two years of preparation, this experiment in new organology turned into a music recital, and an on-site and an online exhibit. The concert was presented in December 2019 in collaboration with Ibrahim Miari, a Palestinian-Israeli Hebrew instructor and Sufi dancer at the university library. The repertoire of the recital arranged composers, tuning systems, and music genres associated with the instruments under three concepts: place, timbre, and the ethical work of the instruments. These concepts attempted to immerse the audience into the world of mediations opened by the instruments and the art forms performed during the nineteenth century in Istanbul and Cairo, the period when Frishmuth acquired the instruments.

The gallery exhibit opened in February 2020 and consisted of four cases arranged in collaboration with Chelsea Rizzolo. The first case featured the instruments, organized so that viewers could look through magnifying glasses to see the non-human forms on the ney surface presenting a variety of animals—imagery that often reference deities. The second case established a comparison between the figurative presence of these images on the reed-flutes and images on reed-pens in Muslim-related arts. The third case featured two musicological discussions: the antiquity of the objects owned by the UPenn Museum, and the relation between aurality and Muslim mysticism in the Middle East. Lastly, the fourth case drew a connection between Mevlevi Sufi lodges of Istanbul and Egypt, presenting short biographies of ney performers who commutted to these cities during the end of the nineteenth century.

What began as my own stance on objects of personal interest as a musician practitioner shifted into a theoretical recentering on the multiple lives of instruments, in which their musical quality was not defined beforehand, but envisioned as continuous processes of becoming—processes that enable “new capacities for experiencing music, becoming with it, researching it, and grasping its emergences as part of socio-material realities” (Pirkko Moisala et al. 2014, 73). The experimental performance of research on a gallery exhibit produces not only added value, or heritage, but also conceptual vehicles through which ethnography, decolonial critique, and new approaches to organology may acquire multimedial infrastructures beyond text-based formats. After the COVID-19 pandemic was declared and the university library was closed, the online exhibit became one of the limited opportunities to visit, and the human capability to interact in person was further decentered. You can visit the exhibit online on the University of Pennsylvania Penn Libraries website.

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Experiments on New Organology

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References

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Tradition vs. Innovation
Nanyin’s Heritage and Vitality

By Jiayi Liao (SDSZ Beijing Normal University)

Nanyin, known as the “living fossil” of ancient Chinese music, is prevalent in Minnan, the southern part of Fujian Province in China. Intrigued by its historical, aesthetic, and spiritual values, scholars have studied nanyin with ethnomusicological theories (Wang 2007). Nanyin originated in court music of the Tang Dynasty and was brought to Minnan by southward immigrants escaping social upheavals. It interacted with local folk music and gradually developed into a symbol of Minnanese identity. Sung in Minnan dialect, it represents the sound of motherland for Minnan people in China and overseas diaspora. Brought to Southeast Asia by Minnan immigrants, nanyin became intertwined with local rituals and has been a long-lasting influence on Minnanese communities, as shown in international nanyin festivals and numerous nanyin associations in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia today (Fushiki 2016).¹

Nanyin was placed on the World Intangible Cultural Heritage list by UNESCO in 2009. However, similar to some cultural heritages in other parts of the world, nanyin faces the danger of extinction in recent decades. Oucuo Village in Minnan, a place with a long tradition of nanyin, is one such case. There is a nanyin club called Huaiyin (“The Sound of the Pagoda Tree”) in the village. The club is over 400 years old, but it has declined recently due to the lack of interest in nanyin from younger generations of musicians. In the face of this challenge, the Soil Project was established in the village in 2018 to revitalize nanyin, and along with it, the village’s long legacy of nanyin pedagogy, practice, and performance. The organization provides classes and programs that teach children nanyin and encourages them to preserve local cultural heritage and identity.

I conducted fieldwork in Oucuo to study this project as an effort to pass down nanyin tradition. There are some controversies in this process: should changes be incorporated to adapt nanyin into the modern context, or preserve the tradition as it was previously understood? Some participants believe nanyin’s slow and elegant rhythm is unfit for today’s fast-paced society, so they view bold innovations as necessary to maintain the music’s vitality. Conversely, other enthusiasts are worried that nanyin’s unique “essence” (yi) might get lost in innovation, so they advocate for loyal preservation of the tradition (Chen 2019). The Soil Project explores and attempts to balance the relationship between tradition and innovation in teaching and performance.

Nanyin can be performed instrumentally or with both instruments and singing. Students at the project learn to perform classical nanyin pieces such as “Straight into the Garden” and “Plum Blossom.” They also learn traditional instruments such as the pipa, the leading instrument in a nanyin ensemble (Wang 2007). The crooked-necked and horizontally held southern pipa unique to nanyin resembles the ancient version of this instrument, depicted paintings as early as the Southern Tang Dynasty (937-975), whereas the more widely used northern pipa is straight-necked and is now held vertically. The term “living fossil” describes how study of nanyin allows glimpses into Chinese music history. Along with the instruments, performing methods of lost ancient music such as Tang Dynasty court music are preserved in some nanyin practices.

Some participants believe nanyin’s slow and elegant rhythm is unfit for today’s fast-paced society, so they view bold innovations as necessary to maintain the music’s vitality. Conversely, other enthusiasts are worried that nanyin’s unique “essence” (yi) might get lost in innovation...

¹ Issues in nanyin regarding musical change, notions of identity, and diaspora are discussed further by Sau-Ping Lim (2014).
Moreover, teachers at the project insist on using *gongchapu*, *nanyin*’s unique notation system, as well as “teaching by mouth and heart,” the traditional oral/aural *nanyin* teaching method in which the teacher performs repeatedly until students capture the nuances of a phrase or performance practice and can mirror back these practices and sounds. Notations translated into Western systems are available in online databases (Hong and Zeng 2017). However, students at the project learn with *gongchapu*, copying the notations by hand every time they begin to learn a new piece.

The choice of notational styles in transmitting traditions is based on an understanding of traditional methods’ necessity and effectiveness in practice. It is far from enough to simply follow *gongchapu* in actual learning, although it indicates definite pitch, tempo, and *pipa* fingerings, because *gongchapu* only records the “backbone” notes played by the *pipa*, leaving much space for singers to add individualized *runqiang*, embellishments around the fundamental material that provide transitions between notes or enrich the music. The subtleties in *runqiang* demonstrate the performers’ talents and are nearly impossible to notate. Efforts to record them in a staff are unsuccessful, as such strict notation cannot represent the flexibility of the performance.

To grasp the subtleties, the direct interaction between students and the teacher in “teaching by mouth and heart” is crucial. At first, the students merely imitate the teacher. Gradually, they can add *runqiang* instinctively by themselves when they encounter a new piece. Flexibility in performance practice does not mean musical carelessness or chaos. There are various unwritten rules for *runqiang* related to Chinese culture and aesthetics. For instance, it’s important to keep the embellishments moderate, according to the “Golden Mean” in Confucianism (Chen 2016). Those rules are hard to concretize, but “teaching by mouth and heart” is an effective way to convey them.

Apart from practical considerations of teaching effectiveness, the preference of traditional methods is related to the Chinese philosophy that the most essential part is impossible to express through words and must be experienced by heart. In *nanyin*, people believe “teaching by mouth and heart” is necessary for learners to grasp the music’s essence. Moreover, aesthetically, Chinese art’s ultimate pursuit is *xieyi*, the capture of “ambience and essence.” Chinese water ink paintings explore the spirituality under forms, intentionally leaving blanks

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Tradition vs. Innovation

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for imagination and interpretation of *yi* ("essence"). Similarly, in nanyin music, *gongchapu* leaves space for each performer’s understanding and expression of *yi*, which differs as their spiritual state varies.

While reasonably preserving traditions in teaching, the Soil Project actively embraces innovations in performance in two major ways. The first way is composing new songs with traditional approaches and inspirations, as exemplified by “Farewell at Mount Wu,” a new nanyin piece composed by Zhuo Shengxiang, a nanyin inheritor, performer, and teacher at the Soil Project. The lyrics in “Farewell at Mount Wu” came from a poem written during the Tang Dynasty. The poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties continues to be a great inspiration for new nanyin composition, as its rhyme and rhythm are highly compatible with nanyin practices. According to Lyu Shaofeng, the director of the project, this type of innovation also makes nanyin more approachable for the children, who are familiar with the poems.

The second way is a bold creative collaboration with Western music. Children at the project sang “Straight into the Garden,” a traditional nanyin piece, alongside world-famous conductor Wang Jin, Austrian musicians, and a Western orchestra. A similar experiment is being undertaken by Siong Leng Musical Association (SLMA), a well-known nanyin association in Singapore that actively seeks to incorporate contemporary voice into this traditional music form. In 2019, SLMA held an activity called “An Evening of Nanyin Jazz” that merged nanyin with jazz and pop songs, giving contemporary renditions of traditional tunes.

Although both ways face potential challenges from those who are skeptical of innovation and protective of the tradition, the Soil Project’s efforts to achieve a balance between innovation and tradition are worth considering in the broader context of preserving nanyin’s vitality. It respects the tradition by using old methods to teach classic pieces. At the same time, it is open to innovations that help introduce nanyin to a broader audience—to children and to the world. Furthermore, the project expands beyond past limits of physical space, facilitating nanyin

![](image_url)

*Image.* Led by Chinese-Austrian conductor Wang Jin (Jim Wang), Austrian singer Aurora Twarowski and children at the Soil Project sing “Straight into the Garden.” Austrians Mario Hossen (violin) and Michaela Wang (piano) play alongside Zhuo Shengxiang (pipa) and Lin Sumei (dongxiao), with Western orchestra accompaniment. Photo provided by Lyu Shaofeng.

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preservation through an online platform run by Lin Sumei, a teacher at the project. The platform posts updates of the project’s teaching and performance, introduces nanyin stories and major events, and presents collections of new compositions.

The Soil Project’s case provides insights into the debate of tradition and innovation in the preservation of nanyin, and similarly, other forms of cultural heritage. It shows that strict traditions without any changes are “fossils.” It is the innovations that make the fossils “living.” In the river passing down cultural heritage, innovations are tributaries that bring continuous vitality into the mainstream of traditions. It is the delicate interplay between adherence to tradition and tasteful, idiomatic innovation—in some ways represented by rigid gongchapu and flexible runqiang—celebrated by the Soil Project that may allow nanyin to live on, benefitting the Minnanese communities it has come to represent.

References
By Nicolás Aguía (University of Pittsburgh)

Orfeo choir is a semi-professional vocal ensemble composed of people from diverse musical backgrounds. Their activities are based in the Sebastian Romero LGBTI Center (hereafter “the Center”), which serves the community by offering art workshops and free counseling. The Center is run by Bibian Sophia Cáceres, a community leader in Teusaquillo who was formerly a sex worker in the Santa Fé neighborhood of Bogotá. In May 2018, I met up with one of the founders of the choir, my longtime friend and collaborator Alfonso J. Venegas, in Bogotá, Colombia. He told me about the ensemble, which he was forming in partnership with conductor Daniel S. Gonzalez. During the meeting, we discussed the idea that I could write a piece for the choir.

In Orfeo Choir’s artistic practice, they seek to “build a decolonized performative space” that dislocates assumptions about gender ingrained in conservative Colombian society (“Información,” Facebook page). In creating an art piece that resonates with this mission, we questioned how the Center’s community, Venegas, and myself could develop a collaborative piece that decolonizes gender. What kind of music could be sung to challenge society’s strictures concerning the human body and gender identity in a place like Bogotá? Venegas and I approached Cáceres and another choir member, Sarah González, who is also an activist of the Fundación Grupo de Acción y Apoyo a Personas Trans (Foundation for the Support of Trans People, hereafter GAAT), to see if they would be interested in collaborating with us on a choral piece built around their perspectives as trans women. In a series of interviews, we addressed themes such as infancy, personal aspirations, violence, and social struggle, which also shaped the core narrative of the composition, an oratorio.

The oratorio is structured in three sections, and each one highlights a specific theme. As part of the performance, Cáceres and González are on the stage telling their stories, while the choir and a small chamber ensemble (percussion, oboe, and piano) accompany them. In the first section, they speak about a ritual in which a new trans sex worker has to endure the process of group humiliation to become part of the community in Santa Fé, through which this marginalized community reconfigures a way to connect with each other, creating an alternative society that seeks to establish its own conditions. Since Cáceres used to work as a sex worker in Santa Fé, her accounts are presented in dialogue with the life stories of other sex workers González has learned about as a GAAT member. The second section is centered on the death of González’s grandfather and Cáceres’s struggles as a sex worker. It establishes a tension between death as an awareness of mortality and as the borderline expression of a precarious existence. The last movement expands on themes of marginality and violence through Cáceres and González’s encounters with the state and religious organizations, tales from their childhoods, and the upbringings that shaped who they are.

Cáceres and González’s life experiences are embedded in a society haunted by the colonial historical mechanism that conflates gender with the sex assigned at birth and equates sexuality with reproduction. This taxonomic device suppresses sexual diversity and functions as a tool to regulate social gender roles. In Colombia, the patriarchal model that restricts sexuality and pleasure to reproductive functions creates an environment that enforces political agendas tainted by the colonial Christian legacy (Bustamante 2009, 128). According to Colombian historian and gender studies scholar Walter Alfonso Bustamante, this legacy can be traced to the idea of the *pecado* continued on next page . . .
nefando (“heinous sin”) presented in the biblical texts and the Augustinian and Thomist exegesis, which labels a consensual sexual act between two people of the same sex as sodomy (2009, 113). Even today, religious dogma is still a major influence on the conservative views of a large section of the population and is the foundation of the ideological platform of various political parties. In Bustamante’s historical research, he analyzes how the religious concept of sodomy was reinscribed in the pathologization of “homosexuality,” and how it informed the conservative views of the legislators that shaped Colombian law during the early 20th century (119). As a consequence of lawmakers’ obsession with keeping “the good habits and costumes” in society, the Penal Code of 1936 was legislated, in which homosexuality was criminalized (120). It was not until 1980 that the decision was overruled (132). Under the Constitution of 1991, sexual diversity was finally broadly acknowledged, and some limited institutional policies started to expand the legal framework and rights for the LGBTI population (Aparicio 2009, 46).

Despite historical battles against sexual discrimination in Colombia, the structural mechanism that creates the hierarchical taxonomies and “proper ways of being” is one of the colonial axes of power operating in Colombian society. In Argentinian philosopher Maria Lugones’ decolonial critique of historical gender taxonomies in societies, she notes that “coloniality does not refer just to racial classification. It is an encompassing phenomenon since it is one of the axes of the system of power and as such it permeates all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/intersubjectivity, the production of knowledge from within these intersubjective relations” (2007, 191). Cáceres and González’s perspectives expose the ontological violence that this colonial axis of power creates by marginalizing sexual diversity. They also reveal the body politics at stake within the sexual dimorphism that reduces sexuality and gender to the cultural male/female binary. Following Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro Gómez’s discussion extended from Antonio Gramsci’s philosophy on hegemony, the battle for hegemony takes place in the “common sense:” the cultural symbolic values embedded in the network of intersubjective relations of everyday existence shared by the dominators and the dominated (2019, 222). The testimonies included in the oratorio portray life experiences and affections that voice alterity, bringing to light the division of what is allowed and what is not, and expose the everyday violence that Cáceres, González, and their community endure.¹

¹ On the colonial legacy’s devices for creating taxonomical divisions in Colombian society, Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier (2014) provides a profound discussion on coloniality’s influence on epistemic configurations in which sound, music and language created a hierarchical divide among the Colombian population.
“Santa Fé Oratorio”

In a conversation with Brazilian cultural critic Suely Rolnik (2006), French philosopher Felix Guattari mentions the idea of a “female becoming,” an assemblage of singularized femininities that acknowledges differences in their subjective conformations and deviates from the normalized heterosexuality in society. The “female becoming” surfaces as a micropolitical movement because there is a predominant masculine subjectivity that dominates and restricts that becoming (92). In Guattari’s words: “there is not a symmetry between a masculine society, masculinized and a female becoming” (ibid.). In the oratorio, Cáceres and González’s narratives manifest the existence of a “trans becoming” as an intersubjective movement subverting symbolic cultural forces that normalize society according to the heteronormative model in Colombia. The oratorio aims to connect art-making with the micropolitical movement that voices alterity. By structuring the piece according to their experiences, the narrative is centered on sexuality and gender and the way they are framed in Colombian society, instead of on institutional discourses and life experiences that navigate stratified socio-cultural conditions.

Brazilian ethnomusicologist Samuel Araujo argues that musical ethnography needs to move away “from studying the ‘foreign Other’ towards studying the ‘Other among us,’ in the fractures of hegemonic social formations, with emphasis on cultures substantially experienced by the researcher (one might add, oftentimes in his/her own locale)” (2009, 39). This oratorio, by placing the narrative in Bogotá, establishes a connection between Venegas, Cáceres, González, and myself through shared cultural symbols that mark the division between the feminine and masculine. I understand that, as a heterosexual cis-male, I cannot fully grasp Cáceres’ and González’s life experiences as marginalized individuals, but we inhabit the same space traversed by the colonial legacies that affect the network of relationships as a whole. We have witnessed how ideological hierarchies permeate institutions and create divisions among Colombians. These shared experiences, my years of friendship with Venegas, and my listening and learning process with Cáceres and González enabled me to work toward allyship, taking part in the creation of a piece that amplifies their perspectives. Hopefully, the oratorio will work as a bridge to connect their accounts with a broader audience and to foment artistic practices that challenge the hegemony of heteronormativity.

Postscript: “At the moment, the choir is on hold. But as soon as the COVID-19 crisis starts to improve, we will gather and pick up the pieces to rebuild the choir that territorializes our innermost selves” (Alfonso José Venegas, Facebook message to author, May 8, 2020).

References

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“Santa Fé Oratorio”

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A Bolu (Documentary film, 2019)
An interview with Bustianu Pilosu, writer & art director

By Diego Pani (Memorial University of Newfoundland)

The press release for the documentary A Bolu (2019) presents the documentary film as a “choral story,” a journey through Sardinia to discover one of the most significant aspects of Sardinian cultural heritage, the multipart singing tradition of *canto a tenore*.

*Canto a tenore* is, in fact, one of the liveliest traditional musical genres of the island, usually performed by four different singers, mostly in parallel-moving chords. There are presently more than 150 multipart singing groups all over Sardinia. More than 100 villages and small towns have their own traditional multipart singing practices, with their own local musical techniques, repertoires, and song texts, that are related to different contexts of social life according to the local customs of each village.

*A Bolu* introduces the viewer to the world of *canto a tenore* with the juxtaposition of the dialogues between different generations of singers from different parts of Sardinia. Beautiful aerial shots transport the visual journey from one village to another, connecting the sense of flight with the immediacy of the musical performance in *canto a tenore*. In fact, in the Sardinian language, the meaning of “a bolu” is connected to the act of flying. “A bolu” also means to do a task with ease and rapidity, and is related to the extemporization of verses, rhymes, sounds, and patterns in *canto a tenore*.

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Video Link. Film trailer for A Bolu (2019).
A Bolu (2019)  
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The documentary was directed by Davide Melis and produced by Karel (a Sardinian independent production company established in 1997 in the city of Cagliari) and features the work of Sardinian ethnomusicologist and a tenore singer Bustianu Pilosu, who serves as co-author, content consultant, and art director for the film. I sat down and talked about A Bolu with Pilosu, a connoisseur of the cultural and social universes of Sardinian multipart singing and oral poetry. Pilosu, as an active singer and a trained ethnomusicologist, occupies a liminal position located on the threshold between performance, the context of oral multipart singing traditions, and the critical gaze of the ethnographic researcher. Pilosu’s point of view comes from “a position at the point where their own culture and the culture of their research subject intersect” (Bendrups 2000, 35). His experience as a contra (one of the vocal parts of the tenore) informs his academic craft, and vice-versa. His methodology recognizes his role and his subjectivity as imperative for the establishment of a dialogue between different contexts of expressive culture, the one related to the tenore performances and socio-cultural milieu, and the ethnomusicological academic context of research dissemination.

DP: How did the idea for A Bolu develop?

BP: The idea for the film was conceived at the suggestion of a singer from the town of Orgosolo. The director Davide Melis contacted me, explaining his idea for a documentary film dedicated to a tenore singing. We were immediately in tune with each other, and we drafted a plan for the writing of a documentary that had to expose a practice that is not only musical and poetic, but is also a way of being in the world and being with others, a practice deeply rooted in the cultural milieu of each community involved. We immediately thought of the theme of flight as the guiding thread of the work, a flight that started from the mountains and reached the sea, passing by houses, farms, workplaces, and town squares to tell the story of lives, ideas, and especially the music of these places and these people.  

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Image. Bustianu Pilosu (left) and director Davide Melis (center) on set.

Image. A tenore group from the town of Mamoiaada sings for the camera.
The documentary explores the contemporary contexts of canto a tenore via singers’ dialogues. They are the first and only narrators. What influenced this decision?

BP: The initial idea was to allow singers to talk about their vocal practice and experiences as if they were addressing a foreigner who knows nothing about this practice. This hypothetical traveler has to be accompanied by a guide, a singer who would open the doors of this musical world to him. However, after meeting the singers and seeing how much they wanted to tell their story, we gradually abandoned that first idea of a traveler and entirely gave room to the singers.

In this framework I am the guide, but I never appear in the film. My most significant task was choosing the protagonists. I had the aim of portraying the incredible, complex variety of styles and personalities that populate this musical universe, avoiding the clichés about this practice, and exhibiting music linked to the communities, to the life of the villages, to the jobs that are done in those towns of the Sardinian hinterland. The dialogues of the singers involved tell of a complex, lively reality, which takes place differently in each village.

DP: Have you wondered whether your presence as a researcher and the massive cameras could alter the ordinary performance contexts of canto a tenore?

BP: We tried to be careful to make our presence as “light” as possible. Just by being there, we alter the normal performative context. For this reason, we had to be aware of our presence, physical and intellectual, entering on tiptoe, trying to stay on the sidelines of the scenery. In this sense, my dual role as researcher and singer helped me a lot. First of all, the singers know me, not as a researcher, but as a singer, and they respect me as a friend, as a brother, because they know that I understand what they are talking about, being part of that world myself.

DP: In my opinion, the film masterfully illustrates a fundamental element: the centrality of tenore singing as a social practice within the small villages of central Sardinia.

BP: This is one of the central drives to what we wanted to show—the extreme importance that this practice has in the lives of the performers who identify as a tenore singers and who choose a tenore singing to define their links to a community. Singing acts as a glue between their individual lives and the community; they acquire a specific role, a social and cultural status linked to this practice. Singing a tenore is as important as work, as important as relationships, and often as important as family. Each singer represents himself in music to the collectivity of his village.

DP: The film highlights the tremendous historical and cultural awareness of each singer.

BP: This is one of the elements that most satisfies
level within these musical worlds is not seen. The level of intellectual exchange created between singers and the exceptionally high knowledge of the musical system that underlies this practice are hidden.

The interview discussions highlighted in the film show an incredible variety of language and understanding of a specific lexicon and Sardinian native language and an extreme elasticity in the intellectual discourse on this music, which displays how high each singer’s level of knowledge and awareness is.

DP: Each performance of the film is presented as a whole. There are no cuts in the middle of them, and the viewer can listen to whole songs. This is a crucial choice that ultimately affects the general aesthetic of the movie. In your opinion, what kind of information does the purely visual realm of the documentary provide?

BP: Musical performances are central to showing the complexity of this practice. The spatial positioning of the singers, their gestures, the actual physical proximity between one singer and another, the concentration of gestures, and their respect for the musical and physical spaces within the song visually present a sophisticated, contemporary practice, which shows the Sardinia of today.


References


Theories in the Field & Classroom

An Annotated Bibliography

By Subash Giri (University of Alberta) and Anna Wright (University of British Columbia)

Theory is integral to the ethnomusicologist’s work. Our field’s relatively short history demonstrates the use of varying theories, including scientific theory, music theory, and theory from social sciences and humanities (Rice 2010). Ethnomusicology in more recent decades has increasingly revolved around interdisciplinary research fostering intersections between these and other disciplines, leading to a much larger theoretical scope (Stone 2008). This diversity of approaches often raises particular challenges in addressing and embracing the theories, knowledges, and methodologies that are necessary in ethnomusicological scholarship. In compiling this literature list, we focused on this theme of interdisciplinaryity and strove to include a diverse range of sub-disciplines, theories, and voices. Despite an interdisciplinary approach, a common thread emerges in many of these subdisciplines within their pedagogical theory: each field or subject was in some way shaped by adherence or opposition to hierarchical structures in place in the academy. Accordingly, many more recent publications are increasingly addressing these structural issues directly.

We have therefore separated our annotations into two larger theoretical sections: the first dealing with theory and pedagogy, directly addressing structural and interdisciplinary issues; the second dealing more specifically with ethnomusicology, ethnographic practice, and a respectful study of music, people, and culture. Most works to some extent cross this imposed boundary, and each, in some way, fundamentally centers around the academy and how it responds to, supports, and prioritizes (or does not prioritize) scholarship. As academics in a field as interdisciplinary and intercultural as ethnomusicology, we are uniquely situated to interact with these structural issues, and so it is imperative that we pay careful attention to how and what we teach. This shortlist of publications approaches these issues in a sensitive, productive, and informative way.

A complementary and more extensive bibliography, including more selected publications as well as online resources, will be published on our website soon. If you have any addition to our resource list or any suggestions for this column, please contact us!

Annotated Bibliography

Theories in the Classroom


In this essay, Abu-Lughod examines the problematic position of feminist and “halfie” anthropologists that recline at the intersection of self/other binary—a system of difference built on historically constructed divides in anthropology. She discusses three crucial issues: the danger of sliding into subjectivity and consequently presenting a partial picture due to positionality; having multiple audiences; and the power inherent in the distinction of self and others. She posits that these three issues put feminists and halfies into a dilemma in experiencing and challenging fundamental distinctions between self and other that is defined in anthropological discourse. Further, she affirms the role of culture as a prime anthropological tool to form this distinction practice. Abu-Lughod argues that the defined concept of culture in anthropology is laden with the assumptions of divide between scholar (self) and culture under investigation (other) that has resulted in a separation, asymmetry, and hierarchy. Thus, she suggests anthropologists should consider strategies for writing against culture and proposes three different modes: discourse and practice—avoiding overly coherent, bounded representation, and recognition of various, shifting, and competing statements with practical effects; connections—community and anthropologist; and ethnographies of the particular—writing about community or people without generalizing or othering. Abu-Lughod’s work in this article is significant in shaping critical theoretical discussion and new direction in anthropological discourse. The essay can contribute a valuable resource to ethnomusicologists, as the issues raised by Abu-Lughod are closely linked with the ethnomusicological practice. Featured in Bullock (pg. 13) and Yang (pg. 27).

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This article discusses a theoretical approach called “new knowledge-producing praxis” (28) in the discipline of ethnomusicology. Araújo argues that the current field’s theory (insider/outsider; engaged native/neutral foreign observer) is rooted in academic authority, resulting in asymmetrical power between researcher and researched community. This theoretical practice takes power from the researched community by disallowing the community from participation, access, collaboration, and decision-making; it produces knowledge through a top-down neo-colonial system of validation. Araújo emphasizes the role of a participatory model of ethnography in ethnomusicological research and stresses its reconsideration in the current theory of ethnomusicology. *Featured in Aguía (pg. 40).*


*From Black Power to Hip Hop* is a collection of essays by Collins focussing on issues of modern black feminism and its expression through popular modern art forms such as hip hop. This book offers an in-depth and enlightening exploration of collective identity politics in a modern setting, calling out various forms of continuing oppression in the 21st century from division of emotional and physical labour to environmental sustainability. Following on her previous work such as *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), which challenges the structural problems present in academia and details the repercussions this has on both the systems of knowledge validation and the exclusion of bearers of knowledge not validated through academic routes, *From Black Power to Hip Hop* hammers home the importance of music in generating and sustaining collective identities and the importance of these identities in times of social movement.


Dirksen discusses the dichotomy between mainstream ethnomusicology and applied ethnomusicology, referencing its many subareas: academic vs non-academic research, pure vs practical scholarship, and theoretical vs atheoretical knowledge. She examines the presumption of applied ethnomusicology as non-academic and an atheoretical subject within academia resulting in little attention within university settings. She points out that a dearth of publicity, little academic publication, gaps in literature, and scarcity of critical evaluation on the results of applied research are some crucial problems in applied ethnomusicology. The perception that applied research is not “serious” research, and questions regarding the scholarly legitimacy of applied work, are contributing factors to strengthen those presumptions. However, the author argues that applied ethnomusicology uses the same theoretical discussions that conventional scholarship has engaged in for the last fifty years. Furthermore, she posits the boundaries of domains in ethnomusicology have expanded significantly and that they have opened avenues of new theoretical exploration. Despite growing expansion in the domains, challenges in the fieldwork, and potential for new theoretical exploration in applied ethnomusicology, Dirksen points out the need for serious theoretical discussion in the larger discipline of ethnomusicology.


*The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures,* while not relating specifically to musical performance (focusing instead on theatrical exchange), still brings to the surface many of the larger-scale institutional and structural problems our discipline faces. This book focuses on case studies to explore the politics of globalization, maintaining that processes of

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interweaving performance cultures are also inherently political processes and thus demonstrating that politics and aesthetics cannot be separated. In addressing the embeddedness of politics in performance, this publication relates both theoretically and practically to many of the publications listed here in their quest for musical study and practice in a respectful and inclusive setting.


*Issues in African American Music: Power, Gender, Race, Representation* is a collection of twenty-one essays on African American music grouped in four larger sections: “Interpreting Music,” “Mass Mediation,” “Gender,” and “Musical Agency: African American Music as Resistance.” Looking at African American music with each of these subtopics in mind, this collection interacts with numerous disciplines and theories and covers a huge wealth of knowledge and discussion. Topics range from the politics of race erasure in defining musical origins to black men’s sexuality in gospel performance, and from many prominent scholars, including but not limited to Portia K. Maultsby, Mark Anthony Neal, and Olly Wilson. The final section, comprising essays on communal coherence and individual expression and music, politics, and political/social agency, is particularly relevant right now as we try to decolonise our workplaces, bookshelves, and classrooms.


In this recently published book, Robinson studies sonic encounters and examines an individual relationship with a particular sound or music and how one’s positionality guides their perceptual logics on such sonic encounters. Robinson particularly delineates the positionalities of listening and forms of perception both in Indigenous and colonial settlers. He describes the Indigenous perspective of sonic encounter that offers attributes of subject-subject relation, i.e., correlation between the listener and the listened-to, in an act of listening guided by an ethical responsibility—unlike the Western sense orientation of sound as content. Robinson discusses different instances of increasing Indigenous participation in Western art music since the early 1990s, as some Indigenous singers, instrumentalists, and other performers have been offered opportunities within classical compositions and performances. He views this phenomenon of inclusion through the terminology of “inclusionary music” and “inclusionary performance,” arguing that such structure of inclusion is profoundly asymmetrical and nonreciprocal, reinforcing system of colonial logic and focused on finding the ways to fit Indigenous musicians into Western paradigm or performance. The book evaluates decolonial practices of listening and presents examples of how to perceive Indigenous sovereignty in sound, music, or song supporting the practice of resurgent listening.


Yao shares her insights and pedagogical process in constructing an upper-level undergraduate seminar using #staywoke as the organizing principle in course creation to encourage an antiracist critical consciousness (440). Yao highlights the view that antiracist work already tends to be done by those precariously positioned within the profession, placing the work of challenging the power dynamics of the corporate university in the hands of those who have little job security. Yao’s article is especially helpful for those looking to address these issues in the classroom for the first time. The structural problems identified here are something that ethnomusicologists should be aware of, and supporting antiracist work and critical self-reflection in our pedagogy should be a priority.

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Theories in the Field & Classroom

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Theories in the Field


This book investigates theories involving fieldwork in ethnomusicology and discusses the need to transform the ethnomusicological or anthropological method of “old fieldwork” (13), traditionally centered around analyses and ethnographic representation of music cultures, into a new perspective of knowing and experiencing fieldwork. Drawing from their own experiences in the field, contributors to this revised edition suggest new theories for twenty-first century ethnomusicological fieldwork that incorporates elements of participant-observation, active community involvement, and the ability to learn or know about a given music-cultural practice. Further, they argue that this shift from “representation [text] towards experience” (4) encapsulates the essence of fieldwork in this postcolonial and postmodern ethnographic praxis. The authors also suggest possible changes in the fundamental structure of ethnographic fieldwork, a broader spectrum of fieldwork situations, and a paradigm shift caused by various factors in current fieldwork. While this collective volume of essays was published more than a decade ago, it is still useful and relevant in the discussion of critical issues, concerns, and directions in current ethnomusicological fieldwork. Chapters from this book are featured in Thoughts from the Field (pg. 10), Morics (pg. 20), and Yang (pg. 28).


In this article, Emberly points out the importance of child- and youth-centered music culture research in ethnomusicology as a discipline. Drawing on examples from her research with children and young people in Venda communities in South Africa, refugee youth in Western Australia, and children and young people in Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, Emberly highlights some ethical and methodological problems in the existing scholarship of ethnomusicological research on child and youth music culture. She discusses her new methodological approach centered on firsthand knowledge, opinion, and ideas of children and youth within a given culture rather than merely relying on adult interpretation in such research. She also indicts the failure by university programs and human ethics review boards to train researchers in child and youth research. The article contributes important knowledge in the area of children and youth research and underscores ethical and methodological dilemmas, particularly questions of human ethics focused on involving subjects in the ethnographic research process, access of data, ownership, and responsibility in collaborative research.


This book includes works from a number of eminent scholars mentored at some stage by Kay Kaufman Shelemay, such as Mark Kligman, Carol Ann Muller, and Kiri Miller. The chapters written by these scholars encompass a vast array of subject matters and approaches, including historical and virtual ethnographies, transnational and migratory communities, music literacy, and memory. I appreciate that this collection provides real-life examples of many hard-to-navigate ethnographic scenarios while simultaneously exploring more theoretical issues such as archival history and the influence of the writers of history on living musics and the ethnography of virtual spaces and ownership/inclusion in these spaces. This collection and each article included is therefore uniquely relevant to the subject of this issue and the pedagogical lens through which we have constructed this annotated bibliography.

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Muller works with vocalist Benjamin to follow Benjamin’s extraordinary personal story of music and migration as a jazz singer in the twentieth century. Benjamin and Abdullah Abrahim’s stories, interpolated in the text, provide instances for Muller to narrate and reflect on her own narrative from an academic perspective, often providing insights into issues such as musical identity, migration, and the music industry that still remain relevant today. The pairing of stories and anecdotes with discussions on accessibility in academia complements the work done in Shadows in the Field (2008) and other publications listed that call for more personal anthropological fieldwork. This book particularly demonstrates the kind of impact that a paired narrative approach can communicate.


This book focuses on practices of listening and aural perception, particularly how vocal music and vocal expression has evolved to reflect a period of postcolonial change. Ochoa Gautier confronts this relationship with colonialism head on, recognizing that the recognition of Latin-American intellectual critical theory does not often penetrate the Anglo-American world, and the issues this creates with critical thinking on the colonial. The book examines how different listening practices lead to local aural expressive genres, pointing out that these listening practices in turn lead to the development of concepts of “local culture” and “local nature” that form a huge part of aural consciousness. Ochoa Gautier excavates this aural identity and consciousness through sections on travel writing, literary history, songbooks, ethnographies, political writings and practices of musical notation, each section dealing with the relationship between the ear and the voice in a different way. Featured in Yang (pg. 29) and Aguía (pg. 41).


Rice points out the need for ethnomusicological studies that engage music within the social, political, economic, and ecological crises many people are facing in the world today. He conducts a critical review of various studies in ethnomusicology since the 1950s. Reporting that, after the late 1990s, few studies address these themes, Rice asks, “why has it taken so long for ethnomusicologists, and only a few of them at that, to come to grips with an ethnomusicology of troubled times and places?” (192). He discusses five principal reasons why ethnomusicologists shift their thoughts away from such studies. Rice also makes suggestions related to the question of whether studies of these new themes will change theory and methodology in ethnomusicology and whether the nature of music studied in such a context could be helpful in resolving some of the underlying issues of conflict, violence, disease, and resulting social disruption. An article from 2010 by Rice about interrelated issues is featured in Morics (pg. 21) and Edwards-FitzSimons (pg. 26).
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Eugenia is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. After completing an MA in Ethnomusicology at Wesleyan University, researching identity in choral music and performance in Oahu, Hawai'i, she broadened her scholarly interests to include voice studies and sound studies, and how they may be applied to choral musical practice. Her current projects focus on her experiences singing with and observing semi-professional and professional choirs in North America and Europe.

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Katherine is an independent scholar living in Austin, TX. She received her MA in ethnomusicology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her master’s thesis explored the concept of the local in contemporary ethnomusicological scholarship, and its potential utility in approaching the live music scenes of the border city of El Paso, Texas. She plays the violin, and was an active member of the son jarocho ensemble at UCSB.

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Rosa is a PhD student in ethnomusicology at the University of Pittsburgh. She holds a BA in music from Emory University and an MA in ethnomusicology from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she completed her thesis entitled “Buddha’s Songs: Musical Practices in Taiwanese Buddhist Renaissance.” Rosa’s primary interest is Chinese popular music and the rise of various singing contest reality shows. She is currently investigating how reality shows construct a “Voice of China” and a narrative of the “China Dream.”
Niall Edwards-FitzSimons, Associate Editor
Niall is a PhD candidate working on unceded Gadigal land at the University of Sydney, where he also tutors in courses on Australian music, popular music, music media and digital music techniques. His doctoral research is focused on the concept of togetherness in Acehnese sitting dances, in pursuit of which he has worked with dance groups across Aceh and in Jakarta, Sydney and Melbourne. He is a musician, beatmaker/DJ and longtime broadcaster and volunteer with Sydney’s Radio Skid Row.

Catherine Mullen, Associate Editor
Catherine is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at Indiana University. She holds a BA in ethnomusicology from Barnard College and recently completed a dual masters degree in ethnomusicology and library science at Indiana University. Her research addresses the intersection of popular music preservation and the digital, focusing primarily on the role of music archives and the affective dynamics and equitable capabilities of community-based archival initiatives.

Subash Giri, Researcher
Subash is a PhD student in ethnomusicology at the Department of Music University of Alberta. He holds three first-class Master’s Degrees: Hindustani Classical Voice and Sociology from University of Nepal, and Music Management from University of Agder, Norway. He is a principal instructor of the Indian Music Ensemble at the University of Alberta. His research focuses on Nepal and India. His main areas of research interest are applied ethnomusicology; traditional music of South Asia; music and diaspora, music sustainability and cultural continuity; and music and community well-being.

Anna Wright, Researcher
Anna is a current student in ethnomusicology at the University of British Columbia, soon to begin her PhD at Brown University. She is originally from Scotland, and her research interests revolve around Scottish music (vocal and instrumental) and the ways in which this music interacts with individual and collective identity, politics, and nationalism.

Hannah Adamy, “Thoughts from the Field” Columnist
Hannah is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology and researcher for the Office of Public Scholarship and Engagement at UC Davis. She is collaborating with a group of women musicians in Sacramento as well as an international alliance of rock music camps for girls. Her research focuses on the politics of voice and voicing in intergenerational community organizing.
Jon Bullock, Writer
Jon is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago. He holds a BA in religion, an MA in ethnomusicology, and an MA in music. His research interests include the interstices of music and nationalism, modernity, and global migration/diaspora. He has also written about music and religion, including music censorship within the Christian church, and various sonic phenomena within Islamic performative and theological traditions. The working title of his dissertation project is “(Re)sounding Tradition: Iraqi Kurdish Musicians and the Transformation of Musical Practice, 1923–Present.”

Diego Pani, Media Columnist
Diego is the manager of the musical patrimony of the Istituto Superiore Regionale Etnografico (ISRE) and a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at Memorial University of Newfoundland. His research focuses on the dynamics of music performance of young generations of musicians in reference to the mediatization of vernacular traditions and popular music scenes of Sardinia island, Italy. Additionally, he is engaged in the production of documentary films and photo reportages. Besides his academic work, he sings in the rock’n’roll band King Howl and manages DIY record label Talk About Records.

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