

## Anthony Seeger's Contribution to Ethnomusicology: A Bio-Bibliography of The *Why Suyá Sing's* (1987) Author

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### ABSTRACT

This research is a bio-bibliographical study of an American ethnomusicologist, Anthony Seeger. Issues discussed include seeking information about Seeger as an important figure, his contribution to scientific development, music education, music history, and basic knowledge of ethnomusicology. Since the data are in the form of written sources that not only come from his works but also the works of others who cite his works so that literature review is used as a research method to obtain answers to the problems raised. This study concluded that the anthropological approach greatly influenced the characteristics of Seeger's field research in studying the Suyá's music in the interior part of Brazil. The report from the research turned out to be an essential source for the development of Seeger's theories of musical anthropology. From the success of Seeger, we could learn how important fieldwork is in ethnomusicology.

Keywords: ethnomusicology; fieldwork; musical anthropology; Seeger; Suyá

### ABSTRAK

**Kontribusi Anthony Seeger Terhadap Etnomusikologi: Sebuah Bio-Bibliografi Pengarang The Why Suyá Sing (1987).** Penelitian ini adalah studi bio-bibliografi seorang etnomusikolog Amerika, Anthony Seeger. Masalah yang dibahas termasuk mencari informasi tentang Seeger sebagai tokoh penting, kontribusinya terhadap pengembangan ilmiah, pendidikan musik, sejarah musik, dan pengetahuan dasar tentang etnomusikologi. Karena semua data tersebut dalam bentuk sumber tertulis yang tidak hanya berasal dari karya-karyanya tetapi juga karya-karya orang lain yang mengutip karya-karyanya, sehingga tinjauan pustaka digunakan sebagai metode penelitian untuk mendapatkan jawaban atas masalah yang diajukan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendekatan antropologis sangat mempengaruhi karakteristik penelitian lapangan Seeger dalam mempelajari musik Suyá di bagian interior Brasil. Laporan dari penelitian ini ternyata menjadi sumber penting untuk pengembangan teori antropologi musikal Seeger. Dari keberhasilan Seeger, kita bisa belajar betapa pentingnya kerja lapangan dalam etnomusikologi.

Kata kunci: etnomusikologi; kerja lapangan; antropologi musikal; Seeger; Suyá

### Introduction

Toward the end of the 20th-century, ethnomusicological studies have experienced rapid development. The developments did not only occur in America and Europe but also in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia. Up to date, ethnomusicology has become a study field that is offered in Indonesian higher education institutions. It is provided in all art colleges, such as the Indonesian Institute of the Arts and the Indonesian Institute of Cultural

Arts, as well as in public universities which open arts programs, such as the University of Northern Sumatra and the University of Mulawarman, East Kalimantan. The program developments are understandable, considering that Indonesia is very rich with a variety of traditional music so that more ethnomusicologists are needed.

The overall development of ethnomusicological conceptual ideas until the 1980s has involved sociological approaches into it so that it covers the music of the world entirely. Besides, the

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revitalization of anthropological influences and its contextualization in a series of hermeneutic and postmodernist approaches also contributed to its development. At the same time, other international dimension phenomena such as large-scale migration, world music, or the cultural mosaics of large cities, occurred in the years leading up to the 21st century. These developments closed the era in which historical musicology, systematic musicology, and ethnomusicology were discussed as separate disciplines. Ethnomusicologists no longer only deal with descriptions of certain musical languages but increasingly deepen intercultural approaches and comparative studies (Porter, 1995).

Ethnomusicological topics have developed rapidly covering the fields of ideology, gender, cultural policy, and its relationship to the phenomenon of music. Since the discipline of ethnomusicology is divided into compartmentalization dichotomy between American and European, it has produced imaginary boundaries that never existed. Since the 1960s, a liquid exchange between the two zones has existed. Moreover, it must be maintained in the future for the complete development of the discipline (Porter, 1995). Up to now the theoretical approach and ethnomusicological methods used in Indonesia, and possibly also in Southeast Asia, considers both European and American concepts so that, as examples, works of literature from Merriam (1964) and other accompanying works of literature including Kunst (1959) and Nettl (1965 & 1983) have been used extensively.

One of the American ethnomusicological schools whose theories and methods are rarely mentioned in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, is a musical anthropology approach that relies on the results of comprehensive field research. In this connection, this paper discusses the contribution of Anthony Seeger (born 1945) in initiating musical anthropology as one of the new approaches in the study of ethnomusicology. Since the last quarter of the 20th century, Seeger has become famous in this field. The idea of musical anthropology is based on extensive field studies on the ethnic Indian Suyá, in northern Mato Grosso, Brazil, from 1970 to 1973, then followed by continuous visits for the next 30 years until 2004 (Roseman, 2005). The results of

the study have been comprehensively outlined in his famous musicology book, the *Why Suyá Sing: A Musical Anthropology of an Amazonian People* (A. Seeger, 1987).

Up to date, ethnomusicological studies that refer to sources concerning in-depth and extensive field research, especially from Seeger's works in Southeast Asia aside from being quantitatively rare. Although no one has based it on in-depth field research, it does not mean that no one has ever done field research. From many field research reports, as an example, Indrawan (Indrawan, 1994, 1996) has carried out a short-term study that based on up to three months ethnomusicological fieldwork in Northern Sumatera. The study was a concern with the traditional two-stringed lute in five districts of Northern Sumatera province, Indonesia. It was done in the context of his master studies completion in the field of performance art studies. The other study was his six months fieldwork concerning the art traditions of Indonesian traditional Islamic boarding school's musical performance, in several districts of the Special Region of Yogyakarta Indrawan (2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2018); and Indrawan, Andari, & Suryati (2009). Other studies were reflected in the reference sources cited by Santaella (2014) in his study on the *Kakula* music in Central Sulawesi, and also research on the *Klong Yao* in the context of identity presentation of the Siamese minority in Malaysia (Tassanawongwara & Hussin, 2019). Besides, in discussing the Spectromorphological timbral notation as a tool for Malaysian ethnomusicology, Abdullah & Blackburn (2015) did not cite the common ethnomusicological inheritance of theories and methods reference sources. Likewise, Hood (2014 & 2016) in discussing traditional music notation in Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, rarely considers those sources.

This study concerns with the theoretical concept of field research to look at the contribution of an American anthropologist, Anthony Seeger, in ethnomusicological studies. Issues concerning theoretical concepts in ethnomusicologist are rarely discussed in Indonesian music studies. In the studies, they mostly discussed musicological as well as cultural aspects of local traditional music or instruments. For example, Sunarto and

Elu (2018: 113-121) who studied the form and meaning, or interpretation, of the Timor's gong during the traditional *Tfua Ton* in Napan. Fitria (2018: 131-145) did a musicological analysis of the *Ladrang Slamet* core melody or, skeletal melodic outline, which is performed by using the *Slendro* scale within the frame of the *Manyura* musical organizing concept. The other example was the most current study concerning Indonesian performance studies by (Hartitum, 2019: 1-12) on a traditional bowed strings instrument, the *rabab*, which was utilised to accompany a traditional art of speech performance in Southern Coast district of Western Sumatera province.

Among the studies based their studies on standard methods and theories of ethnomusicology. For example Saidon & Shah (2015), then the collaborative authorship of Sulong, Saidon, and Hashim (2013), as well as Chan's (2016) work. They refer to common works of literature such as Merriam (1964) and Nettl, (1965 and 1983). Several of them also considered modern ethnomusicological theory from Blume (Blum, 1992). Furthermore, Pugh-Kitingan (2017) refers to anthropological ethnomusicology-based literature, including from Blacking, (1973 and 1995) and Burkholder (1994). Nevertheless, Attan (2012) in discussing the Gambus performance style in Johor, Malaysia, also refers to classical ethnomusicological sources and methods. It seems that compared to the researchers mentioned above the latter is the most productive in referring his work to the common theories and methods of ethnomusicology, such as from Kunst (1959), M. Hood (1982), Merriam (1964), and Blacking (1973).

The brief literature survey above indicates that so far ethnomusicological research in the Southeast Asian Region that is conducted through comprehensive fieldwork is still very little. Besides that, Seeger's musical anthropology concept has not been considered as a theoretical and methodological potential in ethnomusicological studies in this region. In this connection, Seeger's bio-bibliography study discussed in this paper needs to be done to increase the knowledge treasury and the development of the field in this region. Thus, the problem that needs to be solved in this study is:

To know who is Anthony Seeger? How do his works affect the development of music studies? How is its contribution to the field of education? what is his role in the development of ethnomusicological historical maps? and how important are his works to the basic study of ethnomusicology?

## Methodes

This bio-bibliographical study utilizes a literature review method that is applied to a thematic analysis approach. Although it is uncommon, the literature review could be treated as a research methodology (Snyder, 2019). The literature review method is also known as the literature method (Lin, 2009:198-181) and also as the Comprehensive Literature Review (Onwueg & Frels, 2016: 48-64). Thus the literature review method is a theoretical analysis methodology that selects and discusses theoretical and descriptive materials, and in certain contexts, compares concepts (Comerasamy, 2012). The data used in this bio-bibliography project are the main works of the figure to be studied, in this context is Anthony Seeger, then analyzed them thematically to gain knowledge about the contribution of this figure (see Boyatzis, 1988). The literature discussed encompasses the citation of Seeger's works, their contributions in the fields of music education, the history of ethnomusicology, and basic reference enrichment for the field of ethnomusicology.

During the last quarter of the 20th century, Anthony Seeger had become famous in the field of ethnomusicology. Although the details of the biography are not easy to find, the concepts and theoretical approaches have been widely quoted. Besides his works have been used as references by other authors, he has also given contributions to ethnomusicological library sources, issues concerning original music copyright, non-Western music education source, ethnomusicological history, and ethnomusicological theories and methods.

## Brief Biography

Anthony Seeger, the grandson of a well-known American musicologist, Charles Seeger,

studied at Harvard University and the University of Chicago. His biographical notes available widely in several academic products promotion websites, for example, of his recording (Harris, 2020) and his masterpiece (Praabook, 2020). He taught at the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for 12 years from 1975 to 1982 and then he was a lecturer at Indiana University until 1988 (Béhague, 1991, p. 363). Spear (1994) mentioned that Seeger is an anthropologist, a field collector, an archivist, and the head of the Smithsonian/Folkways Records. When he contributed a review to the *Ethnomusicology* journal in 1992, a short biography was provided. During that year he was the president of the Society for Ethnomusicology and the publisher of the journal. Until then he was also a director of the Indiana University Traditional Archives for Traditional Music, as well as a curator and a record director of the Smithsonian Folkways at the Smithsonian Institute.

As an ethnomusicologist who specialized in Brazilian Indian music, he was trained in anthropology and well experienced in field research, archives, and records. The biographical notes in the 1992 edition of the *Ethnomusicology* journal also mentioned that in addition to his phenomenal work, the *Why Suyá Sing* (1987), (A. Seeger & Spear, 1987) he also wrote three other books. One such book might be *Early Field Recordings* which he was co-authored with Spear (A. Seeger & Spear, 1987). It was published when he was a Professor of Anthropology at Indiana University, in the same year as the publication of the *Why Suyá Sing*. (Béhague, 1991: 363) Between 1986 and 1979 Seeger wrote at least three important articles in the *ethnomusicology* journal, “What can we learn when they sing? Vocal Genres from *Suyá* Indians of Central Brazil” (Seeger, 1979), “Response to Feld & Roseman” (A. Seeger, 1986a), and “The Role of Sound Archives in Ethnomusicology Today” (A. Seeger, 1986b).

### Indigenous Copyright and Library Sources

The importance of Seeger’s theoretical innovation in ethnomusicological field research is evidenced by many of his works that have been

cited. Seeger’s attention was not only devoted to written documentation and field recording archives but also the copyright issue on indigenous music. In some discussions about the context of world music library sources, his contributions were frequently cited. Vandermeer (1994), in his article concerning the contribution of ethnomusicology in music library collection which draws implications on reference service discussing reference sources in world music. In this writing, he mentioned that Seeger’s (1987) musical anthropology theory, as a term, that is contrary to the Merriam’s (1964) anthropology of music, has been regarded as one of the achievements in the recent ethnomusicology definitional account. The book concerning musical anthropology of Amazonian people, the Seeger’s *Why Suyá Sing* (1987), was considered the best book in the 1988 musicological publication series. Due to that reason Seeger, the author, was awarded the Kinkeldy 1988 prize by the American Musicological Society (Vandermeer, 1994: 11, 15).

Seeger has made sound archives of field recording become closer to the library uses. It is not only because of the increased use of online databases in the field recording cataloguing but also the rising trend of returning copies of the recording to the indigenous cultures in which libraries play an essential role. To remind librarians concerning the critical role of sound archives in ethnomusicology, Spear (1994) quotes a warning from a Seeger’s (1991) work which was given a unique title “After the Alligator Swallows Your Microphone: The Future of Field Recordings”. Here Seeger criticized that until then most librarians who had been devoted to documenting commercial records would have difficulty in understanding the enthusiasm of archivists to record imperfect structures. They also hardly understand why each item has no title, a clear beginning, or even an ending, except where the recording was finished. It seems that they have not wholeheartedly handled field data archiving.

Besides making many efforts in archiving fieldwork recording, Seeger was also aware of issues covering copyright of indigenous music. In his work concerning singing songs from other different cultures (A. Seeger, 1991b) which were based on his field on the *Suyá* Indians, discusses

the problem of copyright in traditional music. He offers some possibilities and efforts at protecting musicians and indigenous people from exploitation through the musical copyrights.

The only article by another author that entirely explains Seeger's efforts in protecting the rights and the documenting of *Suyá*'s music is Roberts (1996). He based his writing on a ten days trip by the author to the *Suyá*'s land in Central Brazil. On that occasion, he accompanied Seeger who also brought a professional photographer Enrico Ferorelli, for an anthropological mission. Besides explaining Seeger's fieldwork activity he also described some special characteristics of the *Suyá* and Seeger's field research experiences since 1971. One of Seeger's activities in the ten days visit was to train the *Suyá* in documenting their own tradition activities (Roberts, 1996:63-75).

### Non-Western Music Education

Information about Seeger's works can be founded in general sources that were published during the last decade of the 20th century. Seeger has given a great contribution to music resources for non-Western music education. This is reflected in the citations of his work in Lundquist *et. al.* (1999) who have strived to provide world music culture information in a reference book as a source for music educators. This book provides ethnomusicological bibliographies in the context of non-Western music education ranged from general to specific sources. Seeger's contribution can be founded in section four, specifically in items on general source models for compiling material in the study of Brazilian folk, classical, and popular music (A. Seeger, 1979, 1980; A. Seeger & Spear, 1987), general themes in musical ethnography (A. Seeger, 1992; Sitsky, 2002), and specific themes in cultural coherence (A. Seeger, 1980). In the general sources, the revised and expanded edition of Bartis & Glatt (1994) comprises listings of some items related to folklife and folklore where ethnomusicology is also included (Lundquist *et al.*, 1999: 122).

In publications concerning models compiling educational materials in musical genre studies, especially on Brazilian Folk, Classical, and Popular

Music, two of Seeger's works are suggested. The first is "What can we learn when they sing? Vocal Genres of the *Suyá* Indians of Central Brazil" (A. Seeger, 1979) which described the discussion and comparison of *Suyá* vocal music practices, which highlights the importance of reference to connection with the socio-cultural context. The other is the *Why *Suyá* Sing* (A. Seeger, 1987), a field research report on the musical performance of the *Suyá* Indians in the Amazonian River area of Brazil, specifically the Xingu region of Mato Grosso (Lundquist *et al.*, 1999: 179). It is still connected to non-Western music education that his article, "Ethnography of Music" in Myers's *Ethnomusicology: an Introduction* (1992) has been considered an important ethnomusicological source. This article that identifies Charles Seeger's *conspectus* is helpful for students who have difficulty with Seeger's writings. In an attempt to mediate the rift between musicological and anthropological approaches, Seeger (1992:107) suggests that everyone is free to question anything about music. Due to that reason, no one or any discipline can monopolize what question we do (see Lundquist, 1998: 216). In studying cultural coherence Seeger (1980: 7-43) explained the relationships between musical sounds among an Amazonian society and their cultural contexts. He explained how the two-part division within shout songs (the *akia*) are related to the dualism in other spheres of *Suyá* society and that melodic contour and singing style change according to the context in which a singer performs the *akia*.

### Ethnomusicology History

In the context of ethnomusicology history, Seeger was considered as an ethnomusicologist example who has succeeded in assessing the whole of not only ethnographic complex, but also multidisciplinary approaches, styles of musical ethnography, and music, that is used as a technique for the understanding and reconstruction of cultural history. Seeger's ethnomusicological efforts and contributions have been used as references by other distinguished ethnomusicologists, such as Béhague (1991). In the chapter about the significant

influence of the world's cultural diversity to the ethnomusicological method, Seeger's contribution was discussed by Béhague. Besides, he is one of the contributors to the book who describe the Ideological history reflection of Latin American Ethnomusicology.

Compared to Cameu in 1977 who was criticized as a dedicated musician who had no awareness of ethnomusicological method in her survey about Brazilian music, (see Aytai, 1978) Seeger and Bastos (see Jacques, 2016; Seeger, 1984) were considered as the ethnomusicologists who has had assessed the whole ethnographical complex of Indian music. Béhague (1991: 64) notifies that when Seeger taught at the Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, he had contributed anthropological and folkloristic influences that were beneficial to Brazilian scholars. In addition, he conducted field research alone among the *Suyá* Indians from Xingu and produced the best studies (1979, 1980, 1987).

Béhague's (1991) comments in a chapter about the benefit of multi-disciplinary approaches to ethnomusicological field research, again refer to the three acclaimed Seeger works (A. Seeger, 1979, 1980, 1987). Shelemay (1991: 286), another Nettl & Bohlman's (1991) contributors who studied the scholarship of recording technology, recording industry, and ethnomusicological, agrees with Seeger that due to the colonial pattern weakening on ethnomusicological activities caused by technological advances, recording equipment is no longer considered a symbol of Western power as happened in the mid-1970s. Her conclusion then refers to Seeger's comments on the important role of recording technology. The comment is that the recording technology has been with us for a long time so that we do not remember when it started. Because what survives from most of music ethnographers is the fieldwork recording in the deposited sound archives, recording technology is not only an integral part of their intellectual history discipline but also it is increasingly important as the part of our future (Seeger, 1986b: 261-276).

In the last chapter of Nettl & Bohlman (1991) that discusses the styles of musical ethnography, Seeger argues that different approaches to the history of ethnomusicology over a century was

a series of what Kuhn in 1970 called as the "paradigm shift," where there was no major shift in theoretical conceptualization except the differences in the way the same question has been asked (Nickles, 2003). The different approaches to the history of ethnomusicology reflect the different understandings of the field and Seeger analogizes it as a disagreement on a debate whether a glass is half-full or empty. He tried to link the difference between approaches in musical ethnography by stressing the acknowledgement of questions rather than to research the answer to them. Seeger mentions that to examine the characteristics of musical ethnography and the continuity of its performance with the former Seeger argues that the unity of discipline in musicological communication between traditions comes from the question and not from how to examine the respondent's answer (Seeger, 1991c: 342).

To discuss the variance between ethnography and ethnography of music Seeger mentions Charles Seeger's *Conspectus of the resources of the methodological process* which stressed the flexibility of ethnomusicology in its approaches (see Pescatello, 1992; C. Seeger, 1951, 1977). He mentioned two contrasting ethnographical styles of Rousseau (1779) and the three ethnomusicologists Wallaschek (Graziano & Johnson, 2006), Stumpf (Stumpf & Trippett, 2012) and Sachs (1913). In conclusion, Charles Seeger mentioned that narrative questions about music that were determined historically produced an ethnographic style of music (Seeger, 1991c: 342-355).

Seeger, (1991d) concern with music as a technique for the understanding of cultural history reconstruction, which Merriam considered as a part of ethnomusicology. (Merriam, 1964: 277-282) He analyzed the issue of the poly-musicality phenomenon among different groups of American Indians from a historical perspective. He assumes that it is a subjective understanding of the past from the perspective of the present. Seeger (1991d) mentioned that when singing in groups, the *Suyá* do more than just creating sounds at the time. They were also creating the past and projecting themselves on the future of their own construction under various circumstances. Thus, they unite the

present with the past and the future in a way that makes sense. (A. Seeger, 1991d: 23-24) In this situation, some social groups interpret and create their past(s), present(s) and their vision(s) of the future partly through musical performances. Therefore, the present realization in the musical structures, values, and performance, is the demonstration of certain attitudes about the past and future. He found that in the Suyá community, music is a part of the social process which interprets the past, creates the present, and projecting their future.

### **Ethnomusicological Basic References**

Ethnomusicological references offered by Seeger encompass music ethnography, the interpretation of socio-musical action, analysis of musical style, and gender issues. In a recent basic ethnomusicological reference, Myers (1992) included Seeger as one of its important contributors. In this book, Seeger's writing about ethnographical style, which formerly appeared in Nettl & Bohlman (1991) is refined in a longer and more complete explanation about theory and method in ethnomusicology with the new title, the 'Ethnography of Music' (A. Seeger, 1992). In this article, he again mentioned Charles Seeger's *Conspectus* as 'roadmaps' to ethnomusicology. Referring to that *Conspectus* he commented on the tendency of his musical ethnography that some of his writing concerns with structuralizing of culture (Myers, 1992; A. Seeger, 1979, 1980, 1987).

His analytical approaches have been discussed by other contributors to that book. Among them are Myers herself in giving Antony Seeger's research among the Suyá, a remote community of the Amazon (1987) as an example of a new fieldwork trend to do research in an area untouched by Western life (Myers, 1992: 14). She considers Seeger's work on the Suyá as an example of an ethnomusicologist with an anthropological inclination who has selected a musical culture in illustrating his theoretical issues (Myers 1992: 26).

Blum in his contribution article "Analysis of Musical Style" of that book considered Seeger's view in the interpretation of socio-musical action. In observing a performance Seeger pays closer

attention to the action of musicians so that they are more concerned about the action. In this regard, Blum assumed that what was needed in the investigation of his subjects was to make the collection a prolonged interpretation process. In addition, it is also the development of an appropriate strategy in linking the analysis and interpretation of the collection (Blum, 1992; A. Seeger, 1979: 391).

Blum uses Seeger's field experiences in giving an example of an analysis of musical style, precisely in the way Seeger described the juxtaposed two *Suyá* vocal techniques. He interprets the traits by directly asking the musicians what each genre accomplishes (Blum, 1992: 200). Nettl (1992), in his chapter "Recent Directions in Ethnomusicology" in Myers (1992) assumed that Seeger was concentrate on 'concept', using musical sound and observed behaviour as a background, rather than an articulated theory of culture to explain why music had a particular style (Nettl, 1992: 387).

Sarkissian (1992: 339) mentioned that in the discussion of gender issues Seeger found that music plays an important role. Seeger mentioned in the context of Brazilian Suyá that when entering puberty Suyá men sing as a form of communication with his mother and sisters of distant relatives, both socially and spatially, so that direct communication was taboo. A man can visit the home of his mother or sister by singing *ngere*, a group genre that is a mixture of voices and the sinking of individuality. Direct communication individually can only be done through the *akia* genre. However, in this genre, the men sing together each perform their own unique song in an individual style (A. Seeger, 1979).

### **Conclusion**

To sum up this observation, we consider a survey on a bio-bibliography of an author of the book that we choose will much helpful in understanding the book contents as well as the theoretical concepts of its author. After surveying most of Anthony Seeger's works and other authors' academic awareness of his efforts, we would say that the best ethnomusicological field research is

time-consuming. Therefore, it is not easy to be done by an “outsider” researcher. Nevertheless, from the success of Anthony Seeger, we could learn how vital fieldwork is in ethnomusicology. No one of Seeger’s works and other author’s writings about him and his works had not been based on his field research. It means that from one possible field research experience, an ethnomusicologist will be very productive. In conclusion, to be a productive ethnomusicologist one needs to take a specialization in a particular culture.

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