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NEGOTIATING THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL: ETHNOMUSICOLOGISTS AND UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

by Rebecca S. Miller, Svanibor Pettan, Anne K. Rasmussen, and Margaret Sarkissian

The panel, “Negotiating the Personal and Professional: Ethnomusicologists and Uncomfortable Truths,” presented at the Forty-third ICTM World Conference in Astana, Kazakhstan, grew out of informal conversations common among ethnomusicologists. As practitioners in our discipline, we are involved in complex webs of experience, relationships, and representations focused around music, broadly defined. Our work is inherently social and, when in the field, we develop close relationships with our teachers and consultants as we become comfortable in our sites of research. We are grateful for priceless access to communities and individuals. The intensity and combination of certain relationships and circumstances, however, can lead to conflicting expectations, unanticipated misunderstanding, and situations of personal and professional conflict.

What drove our panel was the notion of “uncomfortable truths” that emerges when ethnomusicologists must absorb complicated personal experiences and relationships and make sense of them, both personally and professionally.¹ We transform such experiences into products (articles, books, recordings, films, etc.) that communicate something to our audiences, who often have no direct contact with the people and cultures we represent. Our dilemma, with its accompanying discourse, has a long history that centres around the concept and practice of fieldwork, something that has been in dynamic and constant flux since the “crisis of representation” in the late 1980s (Marcus and Fisher 1986). Many of the issues we highlight in these four miniature essays have become central to fieldwork, which has shifted over the last two decades from what was once viewed simply as a set of methodologies to a broader and critical interrogation of practice (see Barz and Cooley 1997). Ethnomusicologists also have increasingly embraced an experiential approach to fieldwork by reframing their research experiences and relationships in terms of their own positionality, assumptions, and learning processes (Kisliuk 1997, Hagedorn 2001). Our aim, then, is to reinvigorate and advance the discussion surrounding our work as ethnomusicologists in the field.

The four authors each began conducting fieldwork about thirty years ago. With the occasional exception, most of our research projects have positioned us as outsiders or newcomers, necessitating a near-constant critical evaluation of how we comport ourselves. That said, every ethnomusicologist, whether insider or outsider, encounters disjunctures during fieldwork, and later, when “writing culture”—difficult moments when we realize that our aims and expectations do not necessarily align with those of the people with whom we interact in

1. We would like to acknowledge the early foundational contributions of our colleague, Ted Solis.

the field (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Abu-Lughod 1993). What responsibility do we—academics who employ oral history and lived experience as primary methodologies—have to our informants, research associates, and collaborators? How do we serve our academic and public audiences as we try to convey “the whole picture” of our research worlds? How do we best articulate and analyse the tensions that inevitably arise from our work, even when such conflicts are not necessarily resolved? To address some of these concerns from new perspectives, we thought it useful to explore the often murky ethical strait between two shores of our ethnomusicological identity: our academic desire to uncover data, cultural stories, and systems of significance and our equally strong commitment to socially responsible relationships. We assume that this continuing dialogue will be of use to those following in our footsteps, because, as teachers, we are faced with modelling and transmitting our understanding of professional ethics to our students. In Astana, each of us presented concerns that have arisen in our work. We then opened the floor to a conversation with members of our audience. Judging by the size of our audience, the intensity of the discussion that followed, and the many conversations that later occurred in the corridors, uncomfortable truths warrant ongoing discussion in a public forum.

We offer, here, our thoughts on a variety of experiences. Our approaches range from an examination of a single fieldwork incident that neatly demonstrates larger issues, both to the community in question and to the field of ethnomusicology in general (Miller); the unique concerns specific to maintaining close and ongoing ties to one community for over twenty-five years (Sarkissian); and two examinations of multiple issues ranging from the personal to the political and beyond as they arise in diverse cultural and geographic settings (Rasmussen, Pettan). Following our short, individual essays, we reunite to offer a few “Final thoughts.”

Rebecca S. Miller on testing fieldwork ethics in Carriacou (Grenada)

In the late 1990s, I conducted fieldwork on the island of Carriacou, one of three islands of the Eastern Caribbean nation of Grenada. Mine is a tale of entanglement in a complex, long-standing community dynamic that grew murkier with each decision I made. My experience underscores unforeseen ethical quandaries encountered during fieldwork when the immediacy of local expectations is pitted against set research plans. More crucially, my example is revealing of larger, historical realities of outsider involvement that inadvertently reinscribes historically fraught and decidedly problematic power relationships.

Carriacou is a small island approximately seven and a half miles long and three and a half miles wide. It is home to about 5,000 Kayaks (local term for Carriacouan), descendants of enslaved Africans from West Africa and Congo. Since the late 1600s, Carriacou was buffeted between English and French rule until gaining independence in 1974 (see Miller 2005, 2007). My husband and I lived in the southern village of L’Esterre, home to many outstanding traditional musicians, singers, and dancers. I focused my fieldwork there as well as in the northernmost

village of Windward, whose residents are also known to be excellent traditional musicians. Windward people are descended from Scottish boat builders who, in the early 1800s, intermarried with the local Afro-Caribbean population, giving rise to an island-wide understanding of racial difference. Windward residents are also known for their excellent boat building and fishing skills; as a result, this community enjoys a higher standard of living overall in comparison to residents of other villages. These factors of class and race have long fuelled tensions between L'Esterre and Windward. I became entangled in this dynamic while researching Parang, a high profile annual music festival in Carriacou that takes place the weekend before Christmas. Among other events, Parang features two traditional music competitions. I will focus on one of these: the Hosannah band competition.

For as long as the oldest Kayaks can remember, each village in Carriacou had one or two Hosannah bands—groups of carollers that strolled from house to house through their village and beyond in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Hosannah bands sang Christmas carols, hymns, and seasonal songs *a cappella* in a unique, local style. This community-based tradition began to fade in the late twentieth century. In an effort to resuscitate it, the Parang Committee instituted a Hosannah band competition in 1989. Villages sent an eight-member band to perform two standard Christmas carols and compete for cash prizes and the honour of being named the best Hosannah band in Carriacou. The evening competition took place at a large outdoor venue and attracted standing-room only audiences. Two of the four judges were local music teachers/singers; the other two were officers in the Grenadian Ministry of Culture who travelled to Carriacou every year to judge the competition. In consultation with these officers, the Parang Committee established a long list of specific aesthetic criteria on which to judge each Hosannah band—criteria that clearly privileged a standardized, western choral sound rather than the distinctly local, traditional Kayak singing style.

I wanted to observe The New Tide Carolers, L'Esterre's Hosannah band, as they prepared for Parang. I also wanted to document their lovely idiosyncratic choral harmony singing that is specific to Carriacou. The band's members welcomed me into a comfortable research situation. After a few weeks, however, it became clear that the group needed help and they asked if I could coach them in their musical preparations. While I and other ethnomusicologists and anthropologists have written about our direct musical involvement with the group that we are documenting (see, among others, Barz 2003, Narayan 1997, Babiracki 1997, Bogdan and Biklen 1998, Taylor 2003, Miller 2007), my situation, I felt, pushed the boundaries of appropriate research. On the one hand, I surely wanted access to the group. On the other hand, what was the point of studying and documenting a musical performance process that I, a total outsider, was essentially orchestrating? I was hesitant to say yes, but more to the point, I couldn't say no. Carriacouan culture is built on a complex system of giving and reciprocity; volunteerism is the norm. It was clear that I had the skills and the time to help, and I was soon coaching the group. It was a delightful process; rehearsals were a pleasure.

I soon discovered that my musical and scholarly interest in Carriacou's unique choral singing style wasn't necessarily shared by the members of the band: in fact,

while the singers ultimately retained some aspects of this older, idiosyncratic style, they were keen on me teaching them fairly standard four-part vocal arrangements in order to be more competitive. The New Tide Carolers wanted to win and to do so, they correctly believed that they needed to master the decidedly nonlocal judging criteria. While I did not want to tamper with the local style that I had come to study, it was clear that my opinion was basically irrelevant.

Other issues soon emerged. I hoped to do fieldwork with the Hosannah band from Windward called Splendiferous. I approached the leader who knew that I was a visiting musician living in L'Esterre and connected to the New Tide Carolers. My request was immediately refused. When I told the New Tide Carolers about Splendiferous' refusal, they suggested that I was perceived to be a spy, somebody who would observe and then undermine Splendiferous' efforts. I had clearly underestimated the intensity surrounding the long-time, bitter rivalry between the two groups.

This explained my total surprise, a few weeks later, when a singer with Splendiferous called me to say that the group was having trouble with their Parang competition pieces and they wondered if I could come to Windward to help them. Things had really gotten complicated. Not only was I manipulating the cultural form that I was attempting to document, but I had now, apparently, become part of the competition itself. Ultimately, I chose not to help the Windward Hosannah band despite the access that work would have afforded. It would have been a breach of loyalty to help out the competition. And, while none of this was going along my plan, it was clearly the right thing to do. In fieldwork terms, I was essentially negotiating Tim Rice's notion (borrowed in part from Paul Ricoeur) of the "hermeneutic arc," moving from my own preconceptions of how things ought to be through a learning process of how things actually are to a new cognition of the relation of self with others (Rice 1997:117).

What I found out later was that Hosannah bands almost always had relied on a coach to prepare them for the Parang Festival. And these coaches were almost always outsiders. One year, for example, a retired music teacher from the United States had coached Splendiferous; oddly enough (or maybe not), he had coached the New Tide Carolers the year before. But that piece of information completely paled in comparison to what I next learned: Splendiferous routinely received help from one or two of those cultural officers at the Ministry of Culture in Grenada, the same officers who regularly served as judges of the Hosannah band competition. While this irked The New Tide Carolers, they, like others, treated what amounted to a massive conflict of interest as more or less normal.

That Hosannah bands looked beyond the local for assistance is entirely consistent with Carriacou's postcolonial history. There is a constant presence of Peace Corps teachers and other volunteers from various service organizations. The local Catholic priests and Anglican ministers are typically white, most hailing from Ireland and Canada. With this historical reality of non-Kayak teachers and clergy comes the long-time association of outsider authority and knowledge. My role as a white, non-native Hosannah band coach/teacher was not only customary but, on some level, expected.

That year, the New Tide Carolers from L'Esterre came in second to Splendiferous from Windward, generating accusations of unfair judging from the New Tide Carolers as well as assertions by Splendiferous that they deserved first place because their overall sound was smoother and better blended. In 2001, the Parang Committee dropped the Hosannah band competition altogether, in no small part because of the acrimony generated by the event. Since then, one or two invited Hosannah bands are featured on the opening night of Parang in a short performance of Christmas carols.

My presence in Carriacou that year unexpectedly landed me squarely in the centre of the Hosannah band competition narrative, clearly reinforcing the considerable extant tensions between the two leading groups. In retrospect, my entanglement in this deeply rooted intervillage rivalry was just another manifestation of the tensions that had existed well before I arrived and, in all probability, would not end with my departure.

Beyond this looms the larger question: is it ethical for ethnomusicologists to work—even in a small way—within a damaging postcolonial legacy of perceived cultural hierarchy, one inherited over centuries of political domination? Did my participation as coach in the Hosannah band competition fundamentally reinforce what, historically, has been a misguided postcolonial understanding of outsider authority and knowledge? There is no single answer here except to acknowledge the reality that fieldwork often inadvertently reinscribes long-embedded hierarchies of power and authority. At the same time, however, my participation cohered with the communities' contemporary and central core values of volunteerism and giving. Given that we are guests when in the field, this type of reciprocity goes a long way to balance intractable—and indeed, uncomfortable—historical realities with the more immediate and constructive expectations of community loyalty and giving.

Margaret Sarkissian on navigating a long-term relationship with the field

Near the end of one's graduate study one ordinarily undertakes field research in a society or culture or subculture, or perhaps a genre in which one later becomes known as a specialist. This dissertation fieldwork, which is preceded by cultural and linguistic preparation, usually involves a year or more of residence in the field venue ... Interestingly, it seems that in middle age, many ethnomusicologists add a second world area to their fields of expertise. (Nettl 2005:6–7)

Bruno Nettle's characterization of a typical ethnomusicologist's profile is familiar to many of us who came of academic age in the 1980s and the 1990s. We often began our formal studies in graduate school, though some of us may have had the advantage of undergraduate coursework or a serendipitous experience that introduced us to the discipline. Many of us were outsiders to the communities we studied. Fieldwork was a rite of passage often undertaken with inadequate preparation. It was sink or swim; in my graduate programme there was no fieldwork methods course to prepare us for the real-life choices, decisions, and dilemmas we

would inevitably face. We listened carefully to and learned from the experiences shared by our professors and more advanced graduate students. I bought Bruce Jackson's *Fieldwork* (1987) on my way to Malaysia. I still have the same dog-eared, mosquito-coil-smelling copy that was my primary companion during the first uncertain weeks in the field when, like anyone in a new environment, I felt alone, miserable, and convinced I had made the biggest mistake of my life.

My field site was a village, the Portuguese Settlement, in Malacca. Malacca itself, located halfway between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore on the Straits of Malacca, is Malaysia's oldest city. Founded around 1400 by Parameswara, conquered by the Portuguese in 1511, the Dutch in 1641, and ceded to the British in 1824, Malacca was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. In 1990 the Portuguese Settlement comprised 120 houses, about 1,200 residents, and was located on the outskirts of the city (population ca. 295,000) to which it was connected by the #17 Town Bus service. The most common means of transportation, aside from the rickety green and white buses, were mopeds and bicycles. Hardly anyone had a car; residents rarely travelled far, and, when they did, long-distance buses sufficed. Few homes had telephones; the first pay phone (domestic calls only) appeared in mid-1991. Occasional calls home necessitated cycling across the city to the Telecom Office, where international calls could be placed. More affordable connections to the outside world were aérograms, pale blue dispatches sent weekly to my parents in England and less often to my academic advisor in Illinois.

Despite this apparent isolation, the village—the only enclave of Portuguese descendants in Malaysia—was changing fast. 1990 was the first Visit Malaysia Year, and 7.4 million tourists arrived, up from 4.8 million in 1989 (Tourism Malaysia 2015). None of my pre-fieldwork research had prepared me for the Portuguese Settlement becoming a stop on the “Historical Malacca” tour. Sleek air-conditioned coaches swept into the village every day, disgorging passengers who took photographs, perhaps dined and watched a cultural show, re-embarked, and were spirited away. This unforeseen wrinkle required an immediate recalibration on my part; cultural tourism became the focus of my fieldwork. I also borrowed a wheezy accordion and became a participant–observer. Having never played accordion before, I was as much a project for Settlement musicians as learning their music was for me. Making music together created a bond that none of us expected at the outset.

Why did the bond endure and deepen? For me, it all went back to a conversation that I had early in my stay. I was sitting under the large shady *ketapang* tree by the sea wall where the old fishermen passed the time of day, drinking tea, when Tony Sta. Maria leaned over and said, “You researchers come here and become part of our lives, like our sisters or our children, and then you disappear and never come back” (Sarkissian 2000:5). I promised myself that I wouldn't be like the others; physically returning was clearly important. I gradually came to understand that life in the Portuguese Settlement is based on social reciprocity in the form of multiple intersecting webs of obligation. “Coming back” was the one currency I had, then, that was meaningful. When residents tell me, “You're the only one who comes back,” I know my commitment is appreciated; but never in my wildest imaginings

did I expect that over a quarter century later, I would still be returning. I have witnessed a generation's worth of weddings, christenings, and funerals. I can tell a young man about the grandfather he barely remembers, who I can still see leaning over the garden fence telling me stories of life during World War II. I am firmly embedded in those crosscutting webs of social obligation.

My annual visits have encompassed my own personal transition: from financially insecure, single graduate student to financially comfortable, married full professor with long-suffering husband in tow. In addition, my relationship with the field has spanned (survived/been enhanced by) other significant changes, ranging from new ethnographic methodologies to the explosion of social media. I reached Malacca as the tsunami of the anthropological crisis in representation crashed onto ethnomusicological shores. Clifford Geertz had "laid the groundwork for the two most important developments associated with [the critique of objectivity]: reflexive attention to the process of fieldwork and ... literary attention to the production of written representations" (Abu-Lughod 1990:9), but it took time before ethnomusicologists began to speak openly and frankly about their own fieldwork. It was the essays in Barz and Cooley's *Shadows in the Field* (1997) that inspired another recalibration as I, like many of my peers, reevaluated how I conducted and reflected on fieldwork and how I privileged the collaborative aspects of knowledge making.

This kind of deep ethnographic work takes time. Instead of making Nettl's middle-aged ethnomusicologist's leap, my singular trajectory has allowed me to nurture long-term relationships that have led to a greater connection with and understanding of the community. I find myself embedded in what Kay Shelemay has called "a medium-term longitudinal or multi-temporal study" (Shelemay 2013). A quarter century of conversations with musicians and elderly residents, experience performing Malaysian–Portuguese folkloric music and dance with Settlement cultural troupes, and my own archival research puts me in the odd position of having more culture bearer-type knowledge than most younger generation residents. I have an increasing responsibility to be a resource—another strand in the web of obligation—despite being excited by the changes I witness as the next generation negotiates their own solutions to twenty-first century challenges.

Changes in ethnographic method have been enhanced by developments in communications few of us could have foreseen and which have altered the landscape for fieldworkers in multiple and complicated ways. In 1990 there was no connection with the Portuguese Settlement outside physical presence. Even if I wrote letters, residents didn't write back. Today, communication is near instantaneous and mostly free: I look forward to weekly video calls with close friends via Skype or Viber, daily Facebook interactions with a broad range of community members (now spread across the globe), and incessant banter between dance troupe members through a WhatsApp chat group. The impact of social media has created new possibilities for virtual ethnography (Bryant 1995, Lysloff 2003, Murthy 2008, Wood 2008, Alexander 2011). I have begun to explore the new global communities developing on Facebook: Settlement residents who engage in a diasporic conversation worldwide; Portuguese descendants across Asia who

connect to share music and experiences; and even Iberian Portuguese who enact new forms of cyber-colonial engagement (Sarkissian 2013).

There are plusses and minuses to extreme connectivity. The field is no longer somewhere I go once a year; it is part of my lived life, 24/7. There is no down time. I hear about births, deaths, gigs, successes and failures, and even quarrels in real time. In the process, the line between worlds has become blurred to the point of erasure. Colleagues, family members, and fieldwork friends are now globally interconnected. At times this can approach the oddly surreal, as, for example, when Malacca friends comment on Facebook photographs posted by professional colleagues. At moments of crisis, however, near instantaneous communication can be truly overwhelming. For example, in April 2013, when Carrienne de Costa, 22, was tragically killed in a taxi accident, her parents called me before they left the Settlement to claim her body. Unable to return and be physically present at the pre-funeral vigil, I was touched when the family called me on Skype, allowing me to interact virtually with community members gathered at the house, surrounding the open coffin of the beautiful young woman whom I had known her entire life.

I have reflected primarily inwards, on negotiating my long-term connection with a single field site. I am deeply aware that I also have an outward connection to the world through my scholarly writing. While I would like to think my writing is more nuanced than that of less rooted, more transient scholars, I have found it harder at times to write (or appraise the work of others) given the twenty-five years of backstory that sometimes weighs me down. As published work circulates globally in ever more unexpected ways, however, I find myself becoming increasingly conscious of my audience, choosing my words with ever-greater care, knowing that my readers are now as likely to be community members as professional colleagues: one more strand in the ever-expanding web of social obligations.

Anne K. Rasmussen on the beginnings of a stratigraphy

My fieldwork has focused on Arab musical aesthetics: first, among Arab Americans; second, through teaching, performance, scholarship, and advocacy as an activist ethnomusicologist; third, in Indonesia among people in the business of religion and religious musical performance; and fourth, in the Sultanate of Oman. Although organized chronologically throughout a twenty-five-year career, these projects intersect with one another and double back on themselves like a stratigraphic sequence comprising multiple layers of sedimentary rock which has been folded upon itself. I began my research in the late 1980s under the mentorship of UCLA Professor A. J. Racy, who, as an immigrant musician from Lebanon himself, was also an informant. My research with a community of “hyphenated Americans” was embroidered upon a tapestry of a multicultural American music comprised of innumerable distinctive voices. As a result, the critique of American music as it is consistently canonized and recononized into subgroups of insiders and outsiders has concerned my teaching and scholarship for more than two decades (Rasmussen 2004a, Lornell and Rasmussen 2016).

Encouraged by mentors who perform in the field and in the classroom, I learned the performance practice of Arab music, first on the *'ud*, and later on violin, percussion, singing, and *qanun*. For me, the practice of Arab music has been a methodology for fieldwork, teaching, activist outreach, and community engagement. Through the ensemble I direct, I have become a transmitter of Arab musical traditions and, having hosted more than sixty guest artists, I am also a patron of traditional musicians from the Arab and Middle East region in the United States (Rasmussen 2004b).

Beginning gradually in 1996 and fully in 1999, my work shifted to Jakarta, Indonesia. With my background in the Arabic language, Islamic cultural practice was open to me in ways that were, perhaps, less accessible to the Indonesianist ethnomusicologists and anthropologists whose published works were prominent at the time. As I discovered domains of performative religion and women's activities in religious ritual and education, I found them to be of mutual interest to me and the myriad communities I encountered in Indonesia. Everyone had something to say about the public performance of religion in the post-Suharto era of reform, *Reformasi*.

In 2010 I turned my interests again to the Arab world and to the roots and routes of the Arabic language and culture that were so influential in Indonesia. I shifted my focus to the Arabian Peninsula, hoping to find connections in the trade winds of the Indian Ocean (Rasmussen 2016). While my sights were set on Yemen, political instability impinged on that plan; simultaneously, possibilities opened up in Yemen's neighbour, the Sultanate of Oman. In 2010–11 I was awarded a research fellowship through the Omani Royal Court, the *Diwan*, to document the music of that nation and then to disseminate that research through the mediums of teaching, presentation, and publication.

I now discuss, in reverse order, some of the uncomfortable truths of each of these "worlds of music." The fellowship from the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center presented a remarkable opportunity for new research. While my patrons expected that I would document folkloric music, my interest was in all of Oman's musics, in the lives of professional and amateur musicians, and in the social, political, and economic structures that drive music-making in this ancient yet very young nation. Contemporary national music, I learned, is often produced outside of Oman and this conundrum has led me to explore economies of musical labour and a transnational music industry that belies the nation-state as an operational category. Such networks of arts labour also reveal fascinating profiles of diasporic Iraqis in the Gulf's transnational music industry. I am also struck by the labour of ethnic and racial minorities in Oman, who make some of the most exciting music but who have unequal access to the power structures of the Omani arts world, including such processes as festival programming and applications to UNESCO for inscription in the registry of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Arabic: *at-turath ghair al madi*).

While no one in Oman would challenge the set of circumstances I describe, my ethnomusicological interpretation produces an uncomfortable counterpoint to the truly incredible narrative of nation that Omanis recite. Characteristic of our profession, it is often the dissonance and conflict that we tease out of a musical

scene, rather than the nice stories, that make great ethnomusicology. In some cases, our interpretations can be unsettling for our consultants, but in other situations we actuate stories that our friends in the field may not be in a position to either tell or see.

My writings on Muslim Indonesia acknowledge my positionality as a representative of the culturally Christian West, and its deeply embedded phobia vis-à-vis the Islamic world and stubborn confusion about the place of women in that world. I have also written against the grain of Arab perspectives on Muslim Southeast Asia and Indonesianist interpretations of Islamic phenomena (Rasmussen 2010; Harnish and Rasmussen 2011). On one front I face voyeuristic fascination with Muslim women among certain students, colleagues, and audiences. I lift the veil on the myth of the Muslim woman by explaining my experience of being with women and girls as a peer, a performer, a student, a mentor, a mother, a wife. Simultaneously, I try to suspend my urge to “liberate them” into my own archetypal sisterhood. My publicized experiences are intended as an antidote to the tropes of Islamophobia that are ever refreshed by current events. On another front, my presentations to non-Indonesian Muslims are sometimes met with disbelief, denial, and freely offered “corrections,” behaviours symptomatic of the widespread unawareness of Muslim Indonesia.

Postcolonial relationships of power seemed to consistently follow me in Indonesia, one aspect of a political world in which I was involuntarily implicated and from which I inadvertently benefitted. I was also compromised by my expectations for artistic expression. There is a lot to understand about the performances of piety and the ways in which they reference and employ multiple technologies and realms of discourse. At times I was confronted with scenarios that I found duplicitous and performances that seemed aesthetically questionable. These are examples of just some of the aspects of my research that have kept me awake at night.

The musical life of Arab Americans, the topic of my first publications, is one in which I myself am involved, albeit as a perpetual outsider. I find the contemporary Arab music scene in the United States, while dynamic and inclusive of both heritage and affinity learners, to be markedly gendered and controlled by certain gatekeepers. I also know that some of the aesthetic and social practices that I value in the music are neither articulated nor transmitted well by certain practitioners to whom I defer when they are invited as guest artists. The art of compromise in music-making, as in all other things, comes in handy.

Given the uncomfortable truths we inevitably encounter in the field, how do we know what to write and when do we get it right? In my experience, the intimacies of social interaction and musical collaboration are key to the ethnographic enterprise. The ritual of return, while difficult to imagine in the early stages of a career, is also essential. Returning to the communities that have welcomed me in the past, sometimes with the material products of my research, is itself a performance of intention and respect. But interaction, collaboration, and the rites of return can be extremely difficult to commodify in the currency of the academy. Nevertheless, deepening relationships through return and repetition invite the emergence of

unique histories and traditions that immeasurably enrich the process of mutual “knowing” (see also Kisliuk 1997).

It is only on rare occasions that the labyrinthine nature of our work, with its constant vacillation between the personal and the professional and its uncomfortable truths, is recognized by our interlocutors or mirrored in their own work. I end with one such expression: a quote from a letter from Syrian-born American composer and musician Kareem Roustom, who wrote me after a year-long residency at The College of William and Mary. During his residency, Kareem and I had an ongoing conversation about the expectations of his patrons and audiences (and resulting commissions) to compose in an “authentically” Arab or Oriental or Eastern style. Most of the time, Roustom just wanted to compose as a composer and to be recognized for his music rather than for any sort of ethnic authenticity or gimmick, a term he glosses in his letter with the Yiddish word, “shtick.”

Knowing that *everybody* has a “shtick,” from the ‘serious’ Guggenheim composers to night-club singers, confirmed my intuition that *sincerity* and *clarity of purpose* will always shine through for me above all else. These were two qualities that I found in abundance while working with you this past year. ‘Authenticity,’ in my humble opinion, is something that ultimately comes from the heart and has less to do with credentials and heritage than it does with character and intent. And you, *Doktora Anne*, are as *asli* [authentic] as anyone I’ve met. (Kareem Roustom, letter, 14 April 2015; italics and punctuation in the original)²

Kareem Roustom’s struggle with authenticity, and his recognition that this enigmatic chimera is one that affects both of us, albeit in different but interconnected contexts, suggests that uncomfortable truths may not be germane only for the researcher; rather, uncomfortable truths may be created together and shared by those who are woven into the texture of our work and its relationships.

Svanibor Pettan on learning from four case studies

At the SEM/ICTM Forum in Limerick in 2015, the first conference that brought together the two major societies in the discipline, co-chairs Beverley Diamond and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco made a plea to the gathered ethnomusicologists: let’s make ourselves (safely) vulnerable (El-Shawan Castelo-Branco et al. 2015). It is worth pointing to our vulnerability by addressing uncomfortable truths if this can be helpful to our colleagues and serve the discipline as a whole. Because my professional experiences encompass a variety of cultural contexts, I share here four diverse cases, some of them linked primarily to fieldwork and all of them linked to the decision-making process in writing: to include them or not?

In the words of Regine Allgayer Kaufmann:

2. Kareem Roustom was a composer-, musician-, artist-in-residence at The College of William and Mary, 2014–15.

When in 1980 I prepared my first field research trip to Brasil I felt that I was insufficiently or not at all prepared for this enterprise. Published field manuals were not yet available, and there was no seminar as a part of my university education in ethnomusicology to prepare me for what was considered to be “the human face” of the discipline. So I started the trip with some rather unspecific advices from colleagues based on confidence in commonsense and human reason ... Now, while teaching at the University of Vienna, I ... train our students on how to face unknown and complex situations: to get some sense of control, to protect themselves, and to reduce dangers to whatever extent possible. (2006:14–15)

Like Allgayer Kaufmann, I was certainly not sufficiently prepared for the task as an undergraduate student doing fieldwork in Tanzania in 1982. Doing research outside my country of origin was highly unusual, and I became the first ethnomusicologist (in-the-making) from then-Yugoslavia to travel to Africa to collect data for an academic thesis. My financial resources were limited and my fieldwork equipment was borrowed from my supervisor’s research institute. I had rather scarce secondary research sources, but my African student friends prepared me for the experience with some basic language skills and cultural insights. When I arrived in Tanzania, literally everything in the new environment was interesting to a twenty-two-year-old student who had never before travelled outside of Europe.

At some point, while taking pictures in an urban area, armed men in uniforms suddenly surrounded me. They took me to their commander who explained that I, obviously unknowingly, had stumbled into an area of military importance and that the film from my still camera needed to be confiscated and destroyed. This unfortunate situation took place soon after I recorded an important musical event relevant for my thesis, so removal of the film from my camera would mean the loss of the previously collected photographs. The fact that I brought with me a total of only five rolls of film and knew of no local shop that sold film supported my determination to try to save the film in my camera against the commander’s request. Our conversation lasted for more than two hours, gradually moving from an unquestionable demand to a conversation about friendly relations between Tanzania and Yugoslavia, and finally about the commonalities and differences between African and European music. In the end, the film remained safely in my camera. On the one hand, this experience revealed my naiveté at the time, but on the other hand, it teaches that a seemingly hopeless situation can have a happy end thanks to a determined, honest, and well-argued dialogue.

It is, perhaps, more uncomfortable to reveal a situation to which I brought both myself and a local female scholar in Sri Lanka in 2007 when I was already an experienced fieldworker. We were documenting a night-long staged ritual. During a break, I proposed that we take a walk on the nearby road. My Sri Lankan colleague claimed that it was potentially dangerous to move around after midnight, but I insisted. During the walk, a motorcycle with three young men abruptly stopped next to us. We tried to avoid the men—to whom a scene of a foreigner walking with a local woman in the middle of the night obviously looked inappropriate—by joining those few other people in the street, but it did not help. The biggest of the three jumped in front of us, ready to attack me without asking any questions. Despite her

smaller size and lack of outdoor experience in the night, my Sri Lankan colleague bravely moved between us and shouted at the intruder that she teaches at the nearby university and that I had come to give a guest lecture there. With a big surprise on his face, he asked me what my discipline was. “Ethnomusicology,” I replied. “Ethno what?” he tried to repeat. It was just enough for opening up communication, replacing potential violence with words. A few more sentences brought this episode to a happy end and the three men finally departed. My Sri Lankan colleague could not stop shaking for some time. I felt guilty for disregarding her earlier warning and for irresponsibly putting both of us in danger. This experience is a useful reminder that researchers must listen to the voices of insiders, regardless of their own levels of confidence.

From 1986 to 1987, I was living in Egypt, doing fieldwork on dance-related music for my MA thesis. In March 2002, just by chance, I discovered my name in a web review of a book on “Zionist misuses of Egyptian music.” The reviewer claimed that the author of the book referred to my research fifteen years ago, when I, a “pro-Israeli Yugoslav ethnomusicologist” abused the trust of researchers at an institute in Cairo and recorded everything I could lay my hands on. The author linked me in a bizarre way with such composers as Camille Saint-Saëns and Ernest Bloch and with music researchers such as Robert Lachmann and Amnon Shiloah. Our shared hidden agenda—according to him—was to undermine Arabic music. He criticized the institute’s researchers for failing to prevent me, “a Zionist fox,” from working there on the collected sources and from visiting villages all over the country. After consulting with some international colleagues—specialists in Egyptian music—I went to Cairo to find out from the author himself why he wrote lies about me. I met him in his home and learned that the “truth” about me originated from informal gossip at the institute, where he heard that I had travelled to Israel during my stay in Egypt. In fact, I did travel to Israel to visit a Yugoslav colleague who had a grant for study in Jerusalem. The author apologized to me personally, but refused to make the apology public. Despite that, the editor of the online journal agreed to remove the review from the Internet. This case shows that an irresponsible writer in any context can sully a researcher’s reputation and that the researcher has to react against a falsehood.

In 1999, a decade after my father—composer and musicologist Hubert Pettan—died in Croatia, I decided to write a research article about him. Prior to the moment when the “ethnomusicology of the individual” (Stock 2001) and “the ethnomusicology of Western art music” (Nooshin 2011) had become recognized trends in the discipline, my article was also unusual in the sense that I was a son writing about his father. The fact that I had lived with him for several decades meant that I could write with more insight than other researchers. As a family member, I had access to his diaries, which he began writing at the age of sixteen and through which one could beautifully follow his personal and intellectual growth. When my mother realized that they also contained details regarding his sexual life, she suggested burning them instantly. As a scholar, I disagreed, but—in consultation with my mother—presented only a selection of less personal comments in my article (Pettan 1999). The diaries remain in the family possession, while the rest

of his written legacy was donated posthumously to selected major libraries in accordance with his wishes.

In my part of this composite article I decided to avoid terrain and topics that I have written about extensively elsewhere, such as music and war, or Romani musicianship in the former Yugoslavia. In accordance with my three coauthors, I address three research situations in which I was a cultural outsider, while in the fourth, I identify myself as an extreme insider. The first two case studies point to the researcher's vulnerability at any time and place—regardless of experience—and stress the necessity of sensitive and responsible conduct at all career stages. The second two case studies address the process and implications of writing: the former focuses on writing about the researcher and, the latter, writing by the researcher. In both cases, the personal and professional integrity of people are at stake, which requires highly ethical decision-making. No matter how harsh our research experiences are, it is worth making ourselves vulnerable (see also Behar 1996) by sharing uncomfortable truths: unpleasant and questionable situations are as inevitable as they are acceptable and even helpful, as long as we learn from them.

Final thoughts

Virtually every ethnomusicologist who conducts ethnographic fieldwork faces challenging interactions. For some, what we have chosen to write about only scratches the surface. Many experiences of ethnography are left in the field and, for a variety of reasons, are never made public in our presentations and published work. Some experiences may just be too raw for us to churn into the analytical discourse that our mentors, colleagues, and students expect of us. Other experiences may be inappropriate to air in public. And we may just prefer to keep some things to ourselves. That said, our collective voices here underscore the near-universality of several central issues.

Our panel in Astana ended with a lively discussion that generated a number of themes not taken up in detail (or simply, not specifically addressed) in our four presentations. Chief among the concerns routinely negotiated in the field are those of voice and agency—both those of the researcher and those of their research partners—at all stages of research and writing. Our position as mediators between worlds often requires that we take vocal stands at particular moments—times when the right, moral, or ethical response is not always clear, and especially when there is no obvious single answer. Furthermore, we all find ourselves, from time to time, caught between the observer's passive maxim not to cause harm and the activist's desire to facilitate local change for the better. We are sometimes torn between our research partners' requests for advocacy (e.g., social, political, ecological, or in the form of patronage), our own moral and aesthetic compasses, and our formal obligations to institutions, both at home and in the field, such as granting agencies and publishers.

While matters of gender, as a framework for analysis, have significantly informed our field during the course of our careers, our profession has not systematically acknowledged the ways that our fieldwork and our field are gendered. As professors, we caution women—particularly single women—on their way to the field, of their vulnerability and the misunderstandings their solo status might cause. But do we do the same for men? Although women often acknowledge the advantages and challenges of gender in the field, men speak less often to the role that their gender and sexualities play in the intercultural relationships—both personal and professional—that they develop in research sites. Perhaps intimate and amorous relationships, or even just the advantages and disadvantages of flirtatious banter, have no place in our writing. They nevertheless have an effect on our experience in the field and not writing about them, in some ways reflects the ways in which our profession and the academy skews toward white heteronormativity (see Wong 2015).

We also must address the frequent negotiation between the personal and the professional in the knowledge formation process, both in fieldwork and in writing. Our personal and professional spheres frequently overlap thanks to the fact that we, as private persons, literally live our profession. Our “being, knowing, and doing” (Titon 2015:9) far exceeds paid hours and results in dynamic and multilayered relations with our consultants that range from sharing daily joys and disappointments to dialogic ethnographic collaborations (Araújo 2006). There are also situations in which the intersection between the personal and professional becomes the research itself (Babiracki 1997, McDonald 2015). Revealing these intersections requires a certain amount of courage on the part of the researcher. For the reader, these narratives offer a new perspective that benefits scholarly knowledge and understanding. The four of us wish to encourage their further inclusion and consideration in ethnomusicological praxis.

Community engagement, collaboration, and activism have increasingly become a requirement of our discipline. Many ethnomusicologists consciously “give back” in various ways (e.g., education, volunteerism, cash contributions, advocacy) to the communities and the individuals with whom they work. We believe that it is incumbent on us, as teachers in institutions of higher education, to better integrate issues of reciprocity and the question of who benefits from our research into our courses and our advising, and to flag these objectives as central to our discipline when educating our colleagues and administrators. We trust that our discussion of these complexities—complexities that are so characteristic of our profession—will engender further dialogue with our peers, our research partners, and our students.

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