

# Lessons Learned, Questions Raised: Writing a History of Ethnomusicology in Canada (II)\*

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It is no surprise to readers of this journal that, in such a reference book as the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, decisions about what or who is included or how subjects are interpreted are socially constructed, not objective or natural. In the course of writing an article on the history of ethnomusicology in Canada for the second edition of *EMC*, James Robbins and I debated a number of issues about the values implicit in our construction of the topic. In retrospect, we can see more easily where our choices supported, and where they opposed, mainstream social constructions. In the article he published in Volume 20 of the *Canadian Folk Music Journal*, Robbins dealt with a number of issues that guided our representation of the discipline's history: concepts of the commercial, purist retentions, differential emphases on the vantages of insider/outsider, and impacts of nationalism. I raise several more questions about the boundaries Robbins and I imposed. Implicit in these boundaries are, of course, ideological notions. Accordingly, some of the concerns he suggested return here.

By examining some of the challenges of ideology and boundary making, and by critiquing our attempts at solutions, we have intended neither self-congratulation nor an essay in the "tsk tsk school" of social science. Rather, our comments reflect our belief that historiography is, at least partially, a means of connecting our past to our future. As such, it could be considered, perhaps, part of a ritual process in which, as Victor Turner observes (1986), we speak in the subjunctive mode: what if we were to have asked x, or included y? How have we drawn our knowledge of our selves and how could it be redrawn?

## Boundaries

In one of the metalogues which he constructed 'as if' speaking with his daughter Mary Catherine, Gregory Bateson once wrote a short piece called "Why Do Things Have Outlines?" (1972, 27):

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\* This is a slightly altered version of a paper read at the Canadian Society for Musical Traditions Conference in Montreal, May, 1992. At that time, it preceded a companion piece by James Robbins which was subsequently published in the *Canadian Folk Music Journal/Revue de musique folklorique canadienne*, 1992, vol. 20, pp. 3-8.

Daughter: Daddy, why do things have outlines?

Father: Do they? I don't know. What sort of things do you mean?

D. I mean when I draw things, why do they have outlines?

F. Well, what about other sorts of things? A flock of sheep? Or a conversation? Do they have outlines?

D. Don't be silly. I can't draw a conversation. I mean THINGS.

F. Yes? I was just trying to find out just what you meant. Do you mean 'Why do we give things outlines when we draw them?' or do you mean that things have outlines whether we draw them or not?

The dilemma with which Gregory confronted Mary Catherine is of course, apropos to a discussion of the boundaries of "ethnomusicology in Canada." Does this subject resemble a flock of sheep which changes its outline as it moves from one place to another over time? Or must we consider which sheep we regard as part of the flock; which hill we are standing on as we look at their outline; whether we draw around the sheepdog in the middle of the flock? Whose idea is this flock anyway? The sheep, the shepherd's, the sheepdog's? Translated into more familiar terms, what is the 1993 definition of "ethnomusicology," that uncomfortable term with its untenable assumptions of self and Other, or mainstream and margin? How does the definition vary from different historical vantage points and perspectives? Whose definition of "music" should we use? Which sort of "-ology"; whose way of knowing? Then there is this other flock of sheep, currently known as "Canada." Which boundaries do we use prior to 1867 (or possibly, after 1993)? What about sovereign First Nations living within those boundaries? How do we draw around them? And why?

### **Definitions of "Ethnomusicology"**

We defined "ethnomusicology" as "the scholarly study of music, broadly conceived to include music as object, as social practice, and as concept." This is perhaps a bigger subject than the *EMC* editors initially intended us to write about. Is it completely impracticable? Imperialistic? Dishonest? Wishful? Unfortunately, we did not sustain the broad definition throughout the article, arguably because some sub-topics were treated separately in other articles.

Consider a case in point. We cite 17th- and 18th- century descriptions of Native music and dance by European missionaries, explorers, and settlers, but we do not explore their accounts of hymn singing, military balls or band concerts, topics covered in other *EMC* articles. These were often the intracultural performance contexts of that era, and for many, they have continued as such to the present. An examination of these events might have

necessitated a modification of our claim that research within intracultural contexts is relatively recent.

Our treatment of performance events was inconsistent in other regards. We cite casual accounts and even fiction into the 19th century but not in the 20th. Under the rubric "European observers and participants, 1600-1860," we refer to diaries and reports by explorers (e.g., Jacques Cartier and John Ross), aristocratic European visitors (e.g., the duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt and Anna Jameson), and in a subsequent section, a novel by Ralph Connor. Later sections cite putatively more focused accounts, academic studies, and anthologies. But we could argue that "impressionistic" descriptions (cf. van Maanen 1988) of performance in Canada continue to be published in novels, and that the contemporary equivalent of diaries and reports is sometimes oral history, most of which is ignored in our bibliographic overview.

Our account of "music as object" is biased toward print sources rather than recordings. It is easy to find transcriptions of Newfoundland folksongs by Kenneth Peacock or Iroquois social dances by Gertrude Kurath, Quebec contredanse choreographies by Simonne Voyer or British Columbia ballads compiled by Philip Thomas. However, the article's bibliographic survey does not provide ready access to specific records issued by P.E.I.'s Islander series, the pow-wow tapes of Sunshine Records, nor indeed, to the musicians documented on tape by the Ontario Folklife Archive. We list several printed anthologies, especially of folk songs, thereby enhancing the authority of print, even for traditions that challenge the exclusivity of that authority. We cover record series much less comprehensively and list virtually none of the many cassettes produced and often distributed locally or regionally. To what extent is this bias an extension of the stereotypically academic mistrust of the potential commercial success of cassettes and other recorded media? To what extent does it cloud the understanding of transmission processes, mass mediation, and urbanization?

### **Definitions of "Ethnomusicologist"**

In response to instances cited above, one could argue that missionaries, explorers, colonial wives, and novelists are not ethnomusicologists. To whom have we applied that label retroactively and without their permission? The enormous differences between lawyer Marc Lescarbot and Hudson Bay employee Edward Ermatinger, novelist Ralph Connor and semiotician Jean-Jacques Nattiez, all of whom are cited in our article, certainly defy attempts to create a unidimensional explanation of those we regarded as "doing" ethnomusicology.

Uneven in our historiographic article was the treatment of primary culture bearers: both musicians and intracultural documenters or representers. We included, for example, references to 19th-century manuscript

compilers (e.g., Ermatinger and Alan Ash) but ignored such collections for later periods, when academically trained wordsmiths proliferated. The fiddle-tune compilations of Jerry Holland and Buddy McMaster, or indeed, the popular compilations of works by singer-songwriters comprise parallel, unacknowledged modern sources.

Another instance of unevenness stemmed from the rather unusual place that composers have held in Canadian ethnomusicology. From Ernest Gagnon to Ernest Macmillan and Kenneth Peacock (and continuing to the present generation of ethnomusicology students), composers have been acknowledged not only as collectors and researchers but also as “arrangers” of folk material. Their inclusion under the rubric “ethnomusicology” (as well as the general exclusion of such creative work from biographical articles or surveys of “composition”) risks conflation with stereotypic notions of simple-folk-in-need-of-sophistication.

There is further unevenness in the relative ages of the ethnomusicologists we acknowledged. Due to the development of university-based ethnomusicology programmes in the 70s and 80s, a preponderant amount of work on Canadian topics since then has been done by students. What sort of bias did this age shift produce in our account?

In each case we need to ask carefully whether the “flock” actually has this outline or whether we have given it this outline. Are these shifts a true reflection of history or a product of historiography? The bottom line is that, as the amount of research on Canadian musical traditions increases, the breadth of individuals we acknowledge as legitimate researchers decreases. Is this an obvious and justifiable decision or an exclusionary bias in our article?

### **Definitions of Geographic and Political Outlines**

Whose definition of Canada should we use, given the historical changes of boundaries, including those that are still contested? Our approach was inclusive. We discussed studies of 16th-to-19th-century musical traditions which took place in geographic entities which were not to become Canada until 1867, as well as problematic regions (e.g., New France, which included parts of Illinois and Wisconsin; Rupertsland; and Newfoundland, prior to 1949) and references to First Nations—sovereign Nations within Canadian boundaries. Why this retroactive state-binding? We have a ready answer, of course: to prevent things from slipping through the net. Short of writing an “Encyclopedia of Music in Pre-Confederation Newfoundland,” might we not have lost reference to James Murphy’s collections from the first decades of the 20th century or even many of Gerald S. Doyle’s editions.

Consider a second example: we (along with such music historians as Helmut Kallmann and Willy Amtmann) mention Claude Dablon, the explorer who edited a transcription of an Illinois Calumet song which

appears in the 1673 manuscript of Père Jacques Marquette's "Récit des voyages." Dablon's role in the transmission process has been difficult to sort out and this, together with the various inaccuracies in copies of Reuben Gold Thwaite's *Jesuit Relations*, provides a fascinating early example of the mediation of notational practices in the construction of our knowledge about Native music. Nonetheless, in the annals of American music history, this might not be deemed so important.

The question we wish to raise here is as follows: Do our good intentions of inclusiveness hide or imply the standard nationalist boundary claims, claims that presume to include by right any community within current state boundaries whether or not it was ever part of the state? How can we prevent things from slipping through the net without allowing such an inference?

### Conclusion

The linear narrative of the "Ethnomusicology" article in *EMC*, 1st edition, was clearly set forth in a statement about evolutionary development from amateurism to professionalism. As Foucault has demonstrated, history is filled with "sudden take-offs ..., transformations which fail to correspond to the calm continuist image that is normally accredited" (Rabinow 1984, 54). Our short retrospective indicates that, while our *EMC* article celebrated and interpreted some of the "sudden takeoffs" and "transformations" of knowledge within Canadian ethnomusicology, it also maintained certain "narratives" of linearity by shifting definitional boundaries—boundaries of ethnomusicology, ethnomusicologists, and Canadians—from one section to another. Furthermore, whereas in 1991 boundary making was a fundamental concern, we anticipate that boundary crossing may prove still more fruitful as a focus for a history of ethnomusicology in *EMC*, 3rd edition.

### NOTE

1. Curiously, Canadian history has been criticized for exactly this feature, its "episodic quality" as Frank Underhill called it, the lack of a narrative plan. Underhill was known for his vigorous advocacy of intellectual history, which he saw as the remedy for this lack (see, for example, John Schultz' appraisal, 1990, 52-55). Jack Granatstein also describes Canadian political history as "episodic," attributing this feature to research that has been "based on insufficient understanding of the country's social and economic development" (1982, 3).

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**Sommaire:** *Dans la foulée du débat de l'article de James Robbins (paru dans un no du Journal de l'an dernier), Beverley Diamond se penche sur les problèmes de définition et de délimitation, une question qui a surgi lors de la préparation de l'article conjoint avec Robbins sur l'"Ethnomusicologie", pour la deuxième édition de l'Encyclopédie de la musique au Canada. Plus particulièrement, Diamond pose un regard critique sur les acceptions d'ethnomusicologie, d'ethnomusicologues et même de Canada, telles qu'elles ont pu être délimitées à travers les siècles.*