

## Engaging Communities and Cultures in Ethnomusicology: An Introduction

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Ethnomusicology has recently demonstrated an increasing interest in collaborative and community-based research. Dialogic processes characterize much of this work. These processes value and integrate a wide variety of people, materials, experiences, perspectives, knowledge, memories and practices to facilitate respectful and productive dialogue between academics, the communities with whom they work and partners across sectors. They change the ways in which research is conceived and practiced, transform how knowledge is created and represented and stimulate participation with students, scholars and wider communities, all of whom serve as social and cultural activists. Such praxis-based collaboration (Lassiter 2005) engages research partners from the inception of the research through its various stages of dissemination; it likewise facilitates ongoing relationships. This deeply collaborative research is frequently designed to meet both community-defined and private/public sector stakeholder needs as well as institutional academic goals. Intensely responsive to the continually changing environment in which the researcher is working, it also often integrates emergent practices. Research aims and outcomes in these collaborative projects enable the comprehension of histories, communities and cultural practices such as music and dance from the “inside out”: from the vantage points of those who live and make them, and make them meaningful. Collaborative processes also provide an opportunity to rethink research methods in which communities are not only the focus of study but are also research partners (Greenspan 1998; Lambert 2007). Results of this work integrate a “shared authority” (Frisch 1990; Corbett and Miller 2006; High 2009) that is inherent in definitions of research and in the resulting representations of experiences. For this special issue,

“Connecting with Communities,” I invited articles arising out of research that engages collaborative, community-engaged methodologies. I solicited works that critically consider the research process, demonstrating the important contributions such research makes to scholarship and also to the communities involved.

In some ways, the language being used to describe this research—collaborative, community-engaged and even “participatory” and “applied”—seems redundant. The people about whom we write in ethnomusicology, in almost all cases, have been collaborative in the sense that they give their time to us by teaching us music and dance practices, sharing their stories in interviews and inviting us to participate in their cultural practices and community events. In resulting representations of these participatory research processes, it has long been important to integrate emic perspectives and “insider” typologies into representations of music and culture. Without such collaboration, it may have been impossible for any ethnomusicologist to conduct research on living practices. This is true even of the earliest kinds of research, such as song collecting. While disciplinary discussions related to the meanings of these terms persist, technologies and methods of research (this special issue stands in evidence of such a discussion in ethnomusicology), Canada’s research institutes have jointly articulated clear definitions for collaborative, community-based and community-engaged research in their recent Tri-Council Policy on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes 2010). Discussions of Tri-Council research ethics policies have become increasingly prominent in this country since at least the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, significant and ongoing changes around the globe have driven debates over research ethics policies, especially as they pertain to new possibilities afforded to researchers through new technologies.

In the mid-1990s, when I was a graduate student at York University, I was encouraged to elicit feedback from in-community research participants on drafts of my papers that also drew on published representations of those groups. My professors also encouraged the practice of sharing early research drafts with research participants in relation to a feminist ethics<sup>2</sup> in particular and ethics in research involving people in general. However, such a sharing was usually carried out with only those most closely and directly involved with the process, and the mode of representation—the research output—was still, typically, the academic journal article or book.

Since that time, many of us have developed this further. If we are concerned about how people are represented in research outputs, and if the medium is a message, then involving research participants in the process from much earlier stages—from inception—and in decisions regarding the shape of

research outcomes makes good sense. Research participants are increasingly expressing interest in the production of outcomes that would be useful to them in their communities, and/or as they advocate for their communities in other spheres—the latter often collaboratively executed with researchers. Out of a sense of reciprocity (Titon 2015), and for more nuanced reasons (as noted by Ceribašić, discussed below), researchers have acquiesced; after all, research participants spend their time and energies teaching and sharing with researchers. Some researchers (including me) are also excited to have the opportunity to learn new skills through the production of, for example, exhibitions, popular press publications and web-based resources. We are eager to encounter novel possibilities for the representation of knowledge and to share our work with new audiences, thus facilitating new dialogues and learning from new perspectives related to ongoing research. Where learning new skills—and connecting with partners across sectors—is concerned, community-based research also provides new possibilities for employment. Employment is an increasingly vital concern for scholars in light of the changing requirements for graduate students, so components of applied and community-based research provide valuable training opportunities. While I reference my own experiences and observations, a general trend in research is toward including people in communities both as drivers of research projects and as research participants. Their vital role has been noted in other publications (e.g., Vallier 2010).

In North America and elsewhere, greater prominence has recently been given to those of us who conduct research with the artists and community members amongst whom we live—though as Žmegač et al. (2006) have written, such research may not be new for ethnographers in other parts of the world. Naila Ceribašić has pointed out that an “ethnography of the proximate” affords supplementary possibilities for enriched dialogue with research participants and new opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways to our communities (2011; drawing on Žmegač et al., 2006).<sup>3</sup> Ethnography of the proximate entails a host of complexities regarding our responsibilities to our community research partners, scholarly communities and funders, as well as ourselves. Such complexities arise particularly with respect to “negotiating relationships of power between researchers and their subjects” (Žmegač et al. 2006: 294). This includes issues of representation and the instrumentalization of the researcher toward (political) objectives of the researched.

As Ceribašić writes, a researcher of/with communities in which she lives is inherently “applied” since she has “a keen, personal, existential interest in society where her research is located, and therefore she acts (that is, she cannot not act) in concordance with her notions of what is good and right,

as well as of what is possible and feasible in a certain socio-political context” (2011). Resulting representations of such research are “actually testimonies of relationships we built together based on the dialogical, reflective (self-reflective) and experiential character of the whole undertaking, and the ultimate intention of our work is to benefit these people, individuals and communities whom we owe our research experience, our life as researchers” (2011). These relationships and the specific knowledge gained through them are the result of—and also result in—some of the complexities Ceribašić describes (and as Marcoux et al. will discuss, later in this special issue). However, the relationships, knowledge and complexities also follow from research that has the intention of benefitting the people about whom/with whom it is being carried out.

... When doing ethnomusicology of the proximate such an approach and intention [of doing public good/producing research that is of benefit to the community] are in advance implied, even if not plainly expressed, as is often the case; they come out of *necessity* because with our fieldwork interlocutors we share a society, the basics of our living, the same social, political and media space, they can and do read our publications (what also means certain control over them), we simply cannot afford ourselves to misinterpret their views, distinction between doers and knowers are blurred and changeable, we work together on applied projects, such are exhibitions, festivals, films, heritage sites, etcetera. (Ceribašić 2011).

Thus an “ethnography of the proximate” introduces new and often challenging complexities for the researcher, though the work is necessary.

Inherent in these complexities are tensions between the participants’ (including the researcher’s) perspectives and interests. These tensions can be very productive, however, since the new knowledge(s) gained in collaborative, community-based research can result in important insights. Ethnomusicology has conventionally invoked music as a symbol of cultural/national/group unity, or presented musical phenomena as typical products of larger social organisms. However, community-based research compels the researcher, in her representations of these communities and in her research outcomes, to attend to and include the many different voices and perspectives of those who make up communities.

Anthropologists Douglas Holmes and George Marcus note that researchers whose work is directed to praxis and social change recognize—

and indeed expect—that collaborative, community-based practice will involve tensions and contradictions that are typically productive in important ways.

Paradigm shifts and dialogues have become a constant presence within and across the theoretical frameworks that organize both qualitative inquiry and the social and human sciences . . . The desire for critical, multivoiced, postcolonial ethnographies increases as capitalism extends its global reach . . . We now understand that the civic-minded qualitative researcher uses a set of material practices that bring the world into play. These practices are not neutral tools. This researcher thinks historically and interactionally, always mindful of the structural processes that make race, gender and class potentially repressive presences in daily life. The material practices of qualitative inquiry turn the researcher into a methodological (and epistemological) *bricoleur*. This person is an artist, a quilt maker, a skilled craftsperson, a maker of montages and collages. The interpretive bricoleur can interview, observe, study material culture, think within and beyond visual methods, write poetry or fiction, write autoethnography, construct narratives that tell explanatory stories, use qualitative computer software, do text-based inquiries, construct *testimonies* using focus group interviews, and even engage in applied ethnography and policy formulation. . . . It is apparent that the constantly changing field of qualitative researcher is defined by a series of tension and contradictions as well as emergent understandings. (Holmes and Marcus 2005:1084)

As the above quote demonstrates, a greater inclusiveness can be facilitated by integrating diverse disciplinary perspectives and research methods.

At this juncture, I return to the changing shape of research outcomes, transformed through researchers' increasing dedication to working *with* the community members being researched. These communities will often wish for at least some part of the research outcomes to be useful to them. For example, they may want a researcher to create an exhibit in their local community, in addition to a scholarly paper, or they may wish to hold a local conference that welcomes public audience members to explore topics of research alongside scholars. This may be held in a public library or community hall rather than (or in addition to) a university. Researchers can also expect their writings and representations to be scrutinized by their community research partners. In light of increasing Internet use and concerted efforts to create and publish

“open access” research materials,<sup>4</sup> researchers are dealing with a new level of accountability to their interlocutors. Indeed, funders now typically encourage scholars to produce research outcomes in multiple forms and for multiple audiences. In Canada and the UK, for example, government funders press for the outcomes of publicly funded research to be widely accessible and useful to the public that funds it. Further, our home institutions, invested in researchers and their work (and also wanting to develop relationships with local communities), urge their researchers to promote and share their work in a community-minded way, producing accessible research that can be used by diverse audiences. All of this greater accessibility and engagement of research participants feeds back into a greater degree of involvement and agency for research participants in research processes, the creation of knowledge and the shape and production of outcomes. Of course, as a number of articles in this special issue attest, relationships developed through the research questions and data gathered, as well as through the entire research process itself, can also be an important research outcome.

Alongside developments that encourage research participants’ expanded agency, ethnomusicologists have increasingly recognized and integrated different kinds of knowledge into their research. The value of such a practice is evident when researchers from across multiple disciplines collaborate with communities. For example, Tomie Hahn’s award-winning *Sensational Knowledge* (2007) addresses ways in which (multi)sensory information shapes our individual realities. Studies with indigenous groups have also given prominence to notions of experience as knowledge and, particularly, Traditional Indigenous Knowledge (TIK) and oral traditions. These and other studies have underscored the importance of collaboratively engaging our interlocutors in both the process of research—the experience—and the representations of knowledge. For instance, the fact that knowledge is only selectively shared between research participants and researchers, and that there are limitations to the sharing, has come to the fore.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the partial nature of the knowledge and experience represented in and through ethnography, there is much to be learned through the process of ethnography and through engaging with our interlocutors and teachers. There is likewise a great deal to learn from the ethnographic representations of the knowledge that are collaboratively created through those processes. And community-engaged methods provide means to integrate a greater variety of perspectives and kinds of knowledge.

Ethnomusicologists are increasingly turning to innovative and interdisciplinary methods in their efforts to represent these different kinds of knowledge and experience, and to attend to the complexities of their research

environments. For example, flexible and responsive emergent methods have helped research teams with whom I have worked to adapt and modify training in our efforts to meet the aims and objectives of our research projects. Emergent practices are typically interdisciplinary and involve critical considerations of epistemologies and methodologies. Such research often results in “hybrid methodologies that begin to modify traditional disciplinary methods or even create innovative methods, all of which push not only the methodological borders of disciplines but also the paradigmatic borders” (Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2010: 2). What Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) calls “research-creation,” or “the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation” is one such example of innovation in research methods.<sup>6</sup> Recent explosions of digital and multimedia representations often involve interdisciplinary collaborations (e.g. Bussière 2003; Cook et al. 2010; Dyens 1994; Lange 2001; Ranaweera et al. 2011; Ridington et al. 2011; Seeger 2004; Srinivasan 2005; Stewart and Sandler 2008; Taylor 2001; Treloy and Emberly 2013). Both research-creation and digital technologies development are part of the increasingly common representation of research through digital and interactive multimedia Internet-based outcomes in community-based ethnomusicological research.

One outcome of such increasingly collaborative and community-based research that has arisen in the field of ethnomusicology is the development of a paradigm known as “applied ethnomusicology.” Folklore—ethnomusicology’s disciplinary cousin—has long had an “applied” or “public” category, especially concerning researchers employed by public institutions such as museums.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, some anthropologists have articulated “public” and “applied” anthropology categories.<sup>8</sup> Applied ethnomusicology is perhaps most notably addressed in the recent edited collection, *Applied Ethnomusicology: Historical and Contemporary Approaches* (Harrison, Mackinlay and Pettan 2010) which, as the title suggests, considers the work of ethnomusicologists who have historically engaged in work guided by principles of social responsibility. These applied disciplinary branches involve research that aims to solve concrete (social) problems.

The first article in this special collection is written by Klisala Harrison, one of the editors of the *Applied Ethnomusicology* volume cited above. Harrison has been investigating historical and theoretical dimensions of applied ethnomusicology in various publications in recent years (e.g., 2010, 2012). In her contribution to the current special issue of *MUSICultures*, Harrison reviews recent years of applied ethnomusicology and postulates, by attending to changes in discourse on applied ethnomusicology since 2010, that we may

be able to identify a “second wave.” Post-2010 discourse, she argues, is more inclusive of work done outside academe; scholars are increasingly focusing on activism and solving concrete social problems. Today, scholars who practice applied ethnomusicology are also more likely to critically reflect upon their practices, Harrison argues. To be sure, the relative proliferation of publications on the topic, including those that consider such practice in retrospect (e.g., Harrison 2012), provides the opportunity for such critical reflection.

As Harrison notes in her article, historically significant thinkers inspire the applied work of many ethnomusicologists today, such as ethnomusicologist Michael MacDonald, the author of the second article in this volume. MacDonald, with collaborator hip hop emcee Andre Hamilton, offers an evocative example of collaborative research and “intellectual partnership” inspired by methods that Freire developed for community engagement. MacDonald engages deeply with cultural studies, critical pedagogy and subjectivity theory, especially, in his articulation of “aesthetic systems theory.” MacDonald gives an account of his inspiration, via Freire’s *conscientização* (the process through which one’s consciousness is raised), to create of a critical pedagogy of music. MacDonald’s subsequent dialogue with emcee Andre Hamilton, part of which is documented in this article, led to their founding of Edmonton’s CIPHER5, a circle of engagement where hiphoppas, students and professional researchers meet weekly to co-create and share knowledge about Hip-hop Kulture. Participants—scholars and community members—engage collaboratively in critical thinking about the knowledge that results in the potential for a marginalized music community (one not typically embraced within formal music institutions such as university programs) to understand the systems that produce that marginalization and critique and alter those systems. MacDonald suggests that such productive collaborations might provide new and useful understandings for faculty who work with/in music communities, cultures and education.

The third contribution to this volume, by anthropologist Bob White, likewise draws on historically significant thinkers including Johannes Fabian, Raymond Williams and Hans-Georg Gadamer. It “gives a central place to the role of the conversation,” the dialogic, in research. White studies popular music and consciousness through research conducted in Montreal with musicians from Congo-Zaire. In this, he engages Fabian’s notions of the past, Williams’ “structures of feeling” and Gadamer’s “dialogical hermeneutics.” White includes transcriptions of interviews and conversations through which memories, linked to song performances that he and the research participants experienced together, were mobilized. White describes how the act of communally listening to popular songs led to new understandings of how



political events unfolded in the popular imagination. The original version of White's contribution to this special issue was published in French (2009); we hope to expand the readership of this important article by publishing it in English translation. By including White's work here, we also hope to facilitate dialogue across different languages, thereby encouraging much-needed translingual academic discourse in the field of ethnomusicology.<sup>9</sup>

The subsequent article is a collaboration between two professors, a postdoctoral fellow and a graduate student. It addresses the benefits, challenges and multiple relationships that emerge in a community-based research project in Quebec. The authors, Duchesneau, Gervasi, Couture and Marcoux-Gendron, reflect upon their work in the project, which engages nine professional musical organizations in Quebec and seeks to build connections between communities of professional musicians/practitioners (the community research partners in this project) and communities of scholars. In this community-based project, researchers work with musical organizations to help them identify ways to increase their audiences, which in turn increases direct revenues (through ticket sales) and indirect revenues (sponsorships, external funding). The authors, writing collaboratively, focus on the processes of building trust in their community-engaged research—in this case, between practitioners (and the community organizations of which they are a part, such as orchestras and festivals) and researchers. Through their reflection, the authors raise questions and present issues about the ways in which researchers build relationships with their partners in community-engaged research.

Glenn Patterson and Laura Risk, in their article on digital archiving, also discuss work carried out with musicians and cultural organizations in Quebec. Their work centres on an intense collaboration that ultimately produced a curated selection of archival recordings, both personal and institutional. In this community-initiated project, the authors digitized these archival recordings and curated a selected collection, from which they produced a CD with detailed liner notes. Patterson and Risk continue productive and evolving relationships with these communities through such activities as teaching music lessons and publishing scholarly material. They also mindfully note instances where there are different degrees of collaboration in their ongoing work. Moreover, they remark on relationships and cases where activities requiring specialized skills and knowledge are carried out by them alone. In this article, Patterson and Risk focus on the value of a process they call "slow archiving," which is literally time-consuming and privileges relationship building within the community. The authors also reflect upon their research in the context of the changing role of archives, best practices in archival and community-based research, as well as the meaning and value of community-engaged ethnomusicology and its outcomes.

The last two contributions arise from new branches in ethnomusicology. Michael Bakan's article is an example of the recently established "medical ethnomusicology," of which he is a main proponent. Its focus is on musicality and autism. Bakan opens his paper by describing a paradigm for understanding autism as an instance of "neurodiversity" rather than a pathology. He proposes that "stimming" (odd, unusual or repetitive behaviours) be understood as a manifestation of neurodiversity (rather than pathology), and that his autistic musical interlocutors be considered the music/cultural experts and culture-bearers of their autistic ways of thinking, doing and musicking in the emergent musicultural community of which they are a part. This ascribes Bakan's interlocutors a position "of agency and culture and community," though he is careful not to suggest that this is an uncomplicated position to take. Bakan is involved as a leader in such a group, called Artism, which is "about music and community and ability, not therapy and isolation and disability." Bakan describes his experiences and observations, focusing on the activities of one young music-maker, Zolabeen. Zolabeen's story provides "new horizons of perspective and understanding" about stimming as a "powerful expression of musical and social engagement." In this compelling article, Bakan—with Zolabeen—reminds us of the importance of listening as a means of connecting with others as we practise ethnography.

The final contribution to this special issue is a short piece of fiction, which I requested from Jeff Todd Titon, a well-respected and established scholar. Titon's contribution to the current special issue of *MUSICultures* asks readers to expand the possibilities for research, and representations of our research/learning in ethnomusicology. One of Titon's most recent contributions to the field is his innovative written work, such as his blog on Sustainable Music.<sup>10</sup> For this special issue, Titon has experimented with a thoughtful short story, "Flight Call." This contribution asks readers to expand their ideas about who our interlocutors may be; it also urges us to consider alternative forms of representing the knowledge and experience gained through research and our engagement with communities. (Readers wishing to pursue this line of thinking further might also like to read Titon's blog post "Ecomusicologies 2014 and Birdsong," 2014.) Following Titon's short story is the (co-edited) transcription of an interview I conducted with the author about his story, research practice and related ideas.

All of the contributions in this special issue are excellent examples of strong collaborative and deeply engaged community-based research. They each make valuable contributions to ongoing discussions regarding the important ways that ethnomusicologists connect with and contribute to communities through research. Yet, as Ceribašić has noted (2011), the practices, affordances

and complexities related to collaborative, community-based research in which we as researchers, and ethnomusicology as a discipline, are all so deeply implicated remain largely un-theorized. Together with the contributing authors in the present issue, I hope this special issue of *MUSICultures: Connecting with Communities* enlivens the ongoing dialogue on this rich and rewarding topic. 🍁

## Notes

1. The first Tri-Council Policy was issued in 1998, with amendments in 2000, 2002 and 2005 (Canadian Institutes: 1998). See [http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/archives/tcps-eptc/docs/TCPS%20October%202005\\_E.pdf](http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/archives/tcps-eptc/docs/TCPS%20October%202005_E.pdf). Similarly, the Society for Ethnomusicology issued their current Position Statement on Ethics in 1998 (Society for Ethnomusicology: 1998). See <http://www.ethnomusicology.org/?page=EthicsStatement>

2. See Gilligan 1993, Bridgeman and Bobiwash 1999 and Mies 1983—though the remark in the text is intended to refer more generally to a discourse of feminist research ethics and practices.

3. My thanks to Naila Ceribašić for sharing a copy of her speaking notes of this unpublished statement, presented at the 2011 ICTM/CSTM meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland.

4. See the Tri-Council policy on open access: [http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/policies-politiques/OpenAccess-LibreAcces\\_eng.asp](http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/policies-politiques/OpenAccess-LibreAcces_eng.asp) (accessed February 14, 2015).

5. See Diamond's discussions of different kinds of knowledge, encounter and collaborations with consultants (2008, especially "Chapter 1, Traditions of Knowledge: Indigenous Knowledge and the Western Music School," pages 1-34). See also the lengthy treatment of related issues in Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008).

6. From SSHRC's Definition of Terms: "Research-creation: An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms). Research-creation cannot be limited to the interpretation or analysis of a creator's work, conventional works of technological development, or work that focuses on the creation of curricula. The research-creation process and the resulting artistic work are judged according to SSHRC's established merit review criteria." This is not to suggest that the terms "creative" and "academic" and their implied difference are by any means self-evident.

7. For information about applied and public folklore, see, for example, Jones (1994) and Evans (2000).

8. For an introduction to "public anthropology," see Borofsky (2004); for a

discussion about “applied anthropology,” see Kedia and Willigan (2005).

9. In her 2012 article, Harrison begins with an acknowledgement of the article’s scope: English-language works. But the current issue—both by heavily referencing works that appear in Croatian, in this introduction, and by including this translated scholarship of White—aims to broaden the scope of the scholarship we engage and inspire a vibrant dialogue between the different language worlds.

10. <http://sustainablemusic.blogspot.ca>

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