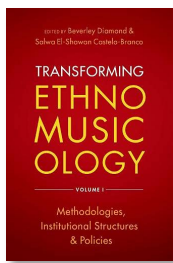


[Review] *Transforming Ethnomusicology: Methodologies, Institutional Structures, and Policies*, by Beverly Diamond and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco



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Diamond, Beverly, and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, eds. 2021. *Transforming Ethnomusicology: Methodologies, Institutional Structures, and Policies*, Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press. 272 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-751760-4

The telltale is a strip of cloth attached to a nautical sail and is used to indicate the precise direction of the wind in relation to the sail itself. *Transforming Ethnomusicology* is just such a telltale that both indicates and argues for a socially and politically engaged activist ethnomusicology at the center of the prevailing winds of ethnomusicology. As such an indicator, this collection of essays follows Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley's *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (1997), which signaled the turn to a reflexive and experiential approach to fieldwork, along with Svanibor Pettan and Jeff Todd Titon's *Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology* (2015), which signaled both a turn to advocacy and an acceptance of applied ethnomusicology as a celebrated practice within the discipline.

The introduction by editors Beverly Diamond and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco defines this activist current as deeply rooted in and motivated by the carefully crafted ethics and core values of ethnomusicology's two leading scholarly societies, the International Council of Traditional Music (ICTM), and the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM). They reference ICTM's "Declaration of Ethical Principles and Professional Integrity," which not only calls members to "do no harm" but also to do their work in such a way as to "bring benefit to those who collaborate with us directly." Additionally, the statement recognizes that this duty is "privileged over and above demands or expectations emerging from individuals or organizations outside that immediate context."

The opening chapters substantiate the editor's argument that activist ethnomusicology centers on the historical outflow of institutional structures, policies, and especially the values of ICTM and SEM. For those who might wonder if activist research is a passing fad or an insurrection from the fringes, consider that six of the fourteen contributors to this book have served as president, vice president, or board member of ICTM, SEM, or both. The wind has been blowing in this direction for some time. Despite extensive references to long histories

and deep roots, this volume represents new topics, new methodologies, and new approaches to the field of ethnomusicology. The chapters presented here do in fact “extend the boundaries of praxis in ethnomusicology” (4).

Methodology is a primary focus of volume 1 because, as Deborah Wong presciently states, “We will need to step beyond the methods we know so well if we want to inhabit fully the historical moment before us” (200). Several of the offerings engage familiar approaches such as PAR (Participatory Action Research) in nuanced ways, while others propose new methodologies such as critical activist research (Shau), engaged activist research (Beng), and witnessing (Wong). Additionally, an assortment of welcome and stimulating neologisms are proposed throughout.

Various themes wend through the ethnographic chapters, appearing and reappearing to confirm the prevailing winds. These themes include ethical and moral dilemmas as sparking initiatives, obligation to do more than create knowledge, bearing witness as both method and stance, messiness, interrogation of unequal power structures (and attempts to level the same), transdisciplinarity, collaboration, and the productivity of collaborative tensions.

The editors wisely chose venerable ethnomusicologist and anthropologist Anthony Seeger for the initial chapter. Seeger situates activist and politically engaged ethnomusicology in relation to similar developments in the larger, and older, field of anthropology in which his roots lie. Examples from the US and Brazil demonstrate the anthropological academy’s early and dismissive critiques of applied endeavors, as if to preclude potential reactions to the activist endeavors presented here. Seeger’s chapter builds upon the claim that activist ethnomusicology is rooted in the core values and historical trajectory of ICTM and SEM.

Immediately following Seeger’s essay is a brief history of both ICTM and SEM by Svanibor Pettan. His chapter provides an insightful comparison of the similarities and uniqueness of each society, complete with some of the more colloquial criticisms of each for the other. Oddly for this collection, activist ethnomusicology is not situated in this historical presentation; that said, this is a useful and concise comparative historical presentation.

Luke Eric Lassiter’s “Collaborative Ethnography” (chapter 3) segues smoothly from the volume’s initial emphasis on historical roots to the immediacy of ethnographic examples. He first traces the ideological roots of collaborative ethnography from Jeff Todd Titon’s “hermeneutic phenomenology,” Steven Feld’s “dialogic editing,” and Elaine Lawless’s “reciprocal ethnography.” Lassiter then differentiates collaborative ethnography from collaborative research among multiple institutional scholars and explores the “range of possibilities” that it creates. Lassiter offers three noteworthy suggestions for collaborative practice: 1) True collaborative research should produce collaborative theory and methods (70). 2) Relationships complicate the entire process (70). And 3) collaborative research necessitates “nuanced understandings of history” to collaborate across divergent “moral and ethical sensibilities” (71). Lassiter elucidates via real-world examples and, in an understated fashion, asserts that “Collaborative research is, of course, difficult. But it is a different *kind* of difficult” (69; emphasis in original).

“We don’t remember days, we remember moments,” wrote Cesar Pavane, and many of the authors here highlight poignant moments which launched them into the waters of engaged activist research. For David A. McDonald (chapter 4), reading the words “the Supreme Court denied the cert” (73) was the transformative

instance in which injustice overwhelmed and empathies overburdened. It was a juncture in which the author's ethical values demanded a different outcome, which in turn required a different methodology, one in which a different set of metrics would measure success. Such moments are a strength of this volume.

McDonald was called upon to give expert testimony in a high-profile trial of the Holy Land Foundation Five (HLF5), accused of supporting terrorist activities. In particular, McDonald's expertise in Palestinian music and songs of political protest was required regarding musician Mufid Abdul-Quader. Mufid did not materially participate in the activities of the others, but his musical performances were deemed by the prosecution to render him complicit. As McDonald poignantly laments, "the act of singing was itself an instrumentality of the crime" (80).

After the conviction and denial of appeal, McDonald sought ways to leverage his position in the pursuit of justice for Mufid. McDonald's declaration, "My research began not with a question, but with a problem" (82), could serve as a characteristic statement for many of the ethnographies in this volume. McDonald defines himself as a "scholar-activist" (85), his methodology as an iteration of PAR, and in a fascinating turn, he describes the contingent nature of his own institutional relationships in that pivotal moment.

Oliver Y. Shao's activist interventions (chapter 5) are accomplished on behalf of marginalized Dinka Christians residing in the Kakuma refugee camp on the Kenyan side of the Somali border. They focus on the freedom to perform *mathira*, a public parade celebrating Christian faith during the Christmas and holiday seasons. Shao's ethnography situates the Dinka both closely—in terms of the potential volatilities along ethnic and religious lines in the camp—and broadly—as a people sharing a camp space carefully and forcibly circumscribed by local, national, and transnational entities in a tenuous geopolitical arena.

Shao proposes a "critical activist approach" that addresses immediate needs as it also works toward social transformations: a messy journey with many unexpected moments and few tidy outcomes. In the face of uncertainty, Shao identifies a "politics of possibility" through which activist campaigns produce new possibilities (99). The reflection at this chapter's conclusion is a savvy account of the author's struggle to reconcile intended and unintended outcomes of a project which transcends typical boundaries.

In chapter 6, Becky Liebman takes a more conventional ethnographic approach, focusing on the "joyful protest" of HONK! ensemble. As a participant observer, Liebman investigates a culture of protest and the solidarity which emerges among HONK! ensembles. Their solidarity, however, is not based on agreement over the issue around which an individual ensemble was formed, but rather is based on an agreement regarding the right to public protest and the choice of HONK! ensembles as an expression of that protest.

Haiti's ubiquitous trash problem becomes the focus of activist interventions by Rebecca Dirksen in chapter 7. Dirksen's conventional research transforms into an activist engagement after the devastation of the January 2010 earthquake. The music and video protest project that emerges is a combination of grass-roots activism and strategically connected politics throughout which Dirksen carefully manages the optics of her own position—frequently hidden from view but leveraging a position "to break through the *blokis*—that jammed up traffic" (124).

In chapter 8, Tan Sooi Beng argues for an "engaged activist research" to describe the author's role in revitalizing the tenuous tradition of Chinese *potehi* puppet theater. Beng's scholarship theorizes each step of the process and the positionalities of each partner, including the author's own. She argues for localized "people-

centered” knowledge production, which engages consultants rather than informants in polyvocal processes, while warning that “the line between collaboration and imposition is thin” (147).

West Philadelphia becomes a site for activist interventions that reciprocally benefit both local West Philadelphia residents and University of Pennsylvania students in chapter 9 by Carol Ann Muller and Nica C. Ohman. Academically Based Community Research is the heading under which Penn students engage with West Philadelphia faith-based communities through projects designed to both generate knowledge and benefit the local community. Unequal power relations are in focus at every step of this urban PAR endeavor which engages both Muslim and Christian faith communities. The elegant term “organic intellectuals” emerges here to convey status to local unpublished musical experts. The chapter also includes a wonderful segment in which Muller and Ohman explore the value of “not knowing” as motivation for research, as anti-reductionist stance, and as a necessary starting point for artists. There are many such insightful moments in this volume.

In South Sudan, Angela Impey depicts the role of ritual public speech, actions, song, and performance—including blood sacrifice—as efficacious for achieving peace between conflicting parties. Such local, effective processes stand in stark contrast to previous fruitless attempts by the government to negotiate and legislate peace between Nuer and Dinka peoples through private (courtroom) speech, formal testimony, and printed texts. Impey draws on Dwight Conquergood’s “embodied epistemologies” and “different ways of knowing” to frame the local actions through which peace was achieved. Impey’s role here is not an activist one; rather, the author is presenting transdisciplinary possibilities for future activist interventions—interventions which will require “an understanding of knowledge systems as multiple, performative, and culturally contingent” (169).

In the final chapter, Deborah Wong proposes witnessing as both methodology and stance. The Officer Involved Death of African American teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, is the pivotal moment which transforms Wong’s position from academic to activist. A seven minute, thirty-nine second audio recording of the fatal encounter serves as a focal point, or more accurately a sounding point, to anchor witnessing as both methodology and stance. As an ethnomusicologist, Wong’s attempts to transform the recording into a viable witness through repeated listening is both fruitless and exasperating. Ethnographic tools and skills fall short. But the audio remains. And so, Wong embraces the unintelligible recording as evidence of the unimaginable and defiantly replays it to claim a stance as both ally and as witness—and by witnessing, as an act of “bringing collectivities into being.”

If I have a concern with this volume, it is regarding the dangers of activist waters and whether ethnomusicology’s methodologies are sufficient to safeguard against them. The scholars presented here are adept at moving from the wide-angle to the zoom lens, skillfully and ceaselessly interrogating their own positions as well as those of the people with whom they are collaborating in relation to myriad power and relational structures. But are the core values and methodologies of the field—and the innovative additions presented here—sufficient for waves of student scholars who have yet to hone such skills? How do we avoid unknowingly becoming pawns in someone else’s political game? If our values, methodologies, and filtering lenses are not sufficiently rigorous, we may find that activist engagement to “bring benefit” results in little more than making the prevailing rhetoric louder.

Of particular interest to the readers of *Ethnodoxology* is that this volume’s recognition of activist ethnomusicology as a respectable academic endeavor is a welcome development for all of those criticized for their work in applied ethnomusicology or ethnodoxology in the service of Christian mission. Additionally,

nonprofits and NGOs of all kinds would be wise to carefully consider Anthony Seeger’s “Lessons for Ethnomusicologists” (36–38), particularly regarding codes of ethics, public stands, and awareness of worker’s backgrounds and their implications for the communities in which they serve.

The winds of activist ethnomusicology are blowing and have been for some time; does this stream indicate the center of the field? I think not—not yet, anyway. What is evident is that prior evolutions in the discipline’s ethics and values—wherein the mandate to “do no harm” became “bring benefit to those who collaborate with us directly”—have leveraged the ideological space for today’s activist endeavors within the discipline. Where we once simply asked, “What types of knowledge will be created?” we now require our scholars to also state: Who will create this knowledge? To whom will it belong? And who will benefit from it? Or, in the words of one young man in a refugee camp, “How is researching our problems going to help us?” (87).

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