

# *Musical Traditions*

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*Discovery, Inquiry, Interpretation, and Application*

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# Doing Embodied Research in Ethnomusicology

## Reflections of Fieldwork in Iran

Alexandra Balandina

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**Abstract:** While ethnomusicologists accept that music making is an embodied practice, and while they have developed important research areas that explore the bodily aspects of musical phenomena, they seldom refer to the embodied aspect of their own research work.

In this paper I explore ethnomusicological works that discuss embodied research practices of musical traditions. I examine ethnomusicological research methods based on the researcher's bodily dimension in ethnographic fieldwork. I will consider in particular the retrospective means by which ethnomusicologists have investigated the activities of

musical performance, and I will consider the role of learning to perform as an embodied research technique. My paper attempts to answer the following questions: How ethnomusicologists as embodied researchers may empower their research methods? What is the role of learning to perform as a method in studying music cultures? What is the value of embodied interpretation in researching musical traditions? How does embodied research help to understand human experiences of music making and how does it communicate their significance to the readers? In what ways embodied interpretations engage with audiences in more evocative ways? Do embodied interpretations add any value to the way the music cultures are presented? Which aspect of musical traditions can best be understood by employing embodied research? Exploring the contemporary literature of socio-cultural anthropology and ethnomusicology and drawing on my own fieldwork in Iran, I will suggest how ethnomusicologists may employ embodied research practices to facilitate the depth and breadth of ethnographic survey, and to create further potential for researching, analyzing, and theorizing musical traditions.

**Keywords:** ethnomusicology, embodiment, embodied research, experiential fieldwork, performance, learning to perform, Iran.

### ☞ *Introduction: The Disembodied Ethnomusicologist*

While participant-observation methods of inquiry have been adopted by ethnomusicologists at least since the 1960s, and while self-reflexivity and emphasis on fieldwork experience constitute substantial part of present day ethnomusicological ethnography, explicitly embodied methods of participatory research are still not well theorized and developed in our field (with the exception perhaps of dance ethnography<sup>1</sup>).

Ethnomusicologists today rarely discuss about bodily activities that are involved in the research process — such as observation, interpretation and analysis, learning to perform or music making — and that impinge upon the experiences of the researcher and the researched. Our bodies

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, COWAN 1990, WAINWRIGHT AND TURNER 2004, NESS 2003, and THOMAS 2003.



have been ignored in our research following the, cogently criticized for decades now, Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body. Our physical body “wears a cloak of invisibility, is both there and not there, lives and works without being seen...” — a characteristic phrase by Gourlay (1978: 4), used in the late 1970s to criticize the missing ethnomusicologist/author from the ethnographic account, the same phrase used here in a somewhat different frame in order to emphasize the disembodied ethnomusicologist today.

Since the late 1970s and 1980s major critiques in anthropology, glossed as the ‘reflexive turn’, and influenced by postmodern, feminist, and postcolonial theories, questioning the “epistemological, methodological, psychological, ethical and political implications of fieldwork” (STOCKING 1983: 9) had a powerful effect in ethnomusicology too.<sup>2</sup> These critical interrogations raised serious issues about the role of the fieldworker, who can no longer be seen as a detached observer collecting information and facts, but is an active participant, inherently subjective and partial, involved in the construction of knowledge and its representation.

Ethnomusicologists have responded by reinserting the fieldworker in the research process interrogating at the same time their role in the process of knowledge construction, reflecting on the nature of the human relations and their implication in fieldwork, stressing the importance of understanding through experience, rather than simply understanding through data collection (see HELLIER AND TINOCO 2003, BARZ AND COLLEY 2008/1997) and realizing that “ethnographic truths are inherently partial” (CLIFFORD 1986: 7).

However, my argument in this paper is that, while ethnomusicologists, defenders of the ‘new fieldwork’, reflexively interrogate their role in the process of fieldwork and representations constructed through research, still trapped in the Cartesian dichotomization between mind and body, employ intellectual reflexivity, neglecting by and large the implications of their physical presence in the field. Within ethnomusicology, the experiential dimension of fieldwork and the focus on the affective, sensory,

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2 Several anthropological publications had a dominant role in this discourse, among which are: CLIFFORD AND MARCUS 1986, MARCUS AND FISCHER 1986, MYERHOFF AND RUBY 1982, STOCKING 1983, FABIAN 1983.

and emotional sites help to dissolve similar value laden oppositions such as cognition and emotion (see FELD 1990, ROSEMAN 1991, SEEGER 1987).

“It is only in experience that we know” (BARZ AND COOLEY 2008: 12), “fieldwork is experience, and the experience of people making music” (ibid. 14) sound like a promising mottoes for ethnomusicological fieldwork.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, although editors of *Shadows in the Field*, a cornerstone book about fieldwork in ethnomusicology, stress “participatory participant-observation” and “face-to-face interaction” (ibid. 4) they do not offer any detailed theoretical attention to the ethnomusicologist as embodied participant.

With few exceptions (RICE 2008/1997, WONG 2008, BAILY 2001), that hardly change the general picture, a focus on the body as a topic within (ethno)musicology is recent,<sup>4</sup> and concerns mainly the people that we study,<sup>5</sup> while ethnomusicologists are by and large physically detached from the written account following a disembodied analytical consciousness.

The study of body and embodiment has been the subject of much research in the humanities and social sciences, beginning in the early 1970s and increasing in the late 1980s.<sup>6</sup> The body as a tool of research has been an increasingly prominent site in anthropology, dance anthropology or ethnochoreology, and sociology since the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> We should not forget that

3 See Bigenho who argues that experience is also a social construct and often unexamined as a component of social analysis (2008: 29–30).

4 Returning to the body and theoretical consideration about the relationship between body and music is recent within ethnomusicology, starting more systematically around the 1990s. Symptomatic of this has been the neglect of dance in ethnomusicology and, one could argue, the establishment of separate disciplines that focus on dance, such as dance anthropology, ethnochoreology, and generally dance studies that may also include performance.

5 See, for example, various articles in edited volumes by SCOTT (2000) and BLACKING (1977), also KUBIK 1979, VAN ZILE 1988, WALSER AND MCCLARY 1993, LEPPERT 1993, FRITH 1996, STURMAN 1997, ROMAN-VELASQUEZ 1999, WONG 2000, and DAVIDSON 2001, 2002, and 2006).

6 The explosion of academic literature on the body within the humanities and the social sciences has been stimulated by the work of FOUCAULT (1973, 1977, 1978), BOURDIEU (1977, 1984), by feminist theorists (ALLEN AND GROSZ 1987, BORDO 1993, BUTLER 1993, MARTIN 1987, ORTNER AND WHITEHEAD 1981), and recent theorists of performance as a category of political action (BUTLER 1990, MARTIN 1990). See also CSORDAS 2005/1999 who talks about the theoretical status of the body in anthropology, and offers a thorough bibliography on this theme.

7 Works on the body as a methodological starting point include JACKSON 1989, CORIN 1990, CSORDAS 1990, FRANK 1986, PANDOLFI 1990, TURNER 2000, and OKELY 2007.

one of the very first collections on the anthropology of the body, containing several papers by ethnomusicologists on the biological foundation of music making, was edited by anthropologist-ethnomusicologist John Blacking in 1977, who called into question the distinction between mind and body (1977: 18), and between biological and cultural anthropology (1977: 2). Since then, ethnomusicologists have realized the importance of researching music making as embodied practice, and have developed important research areas<sup>8</sup> that explore bodily aspects of musical phenomena.

It is the field of socio-cultural and medical anthropology, affected by theories in phenomenology<sup>9</sup>, that play a leading role in developing approaches to ethnography that engage with the senses as a means of inquiry (and not solely as an object of study). Ethnomusicology once again will benefit by adopting interdisciplinary approaches following anthropological understanding of learning and knowing situated in embodied practice and movement.<sup>10</sup>

My aim in this paper is to suggest some of the possibilities that arise from placing the embodied reflexive ethnomusicologist at the centre of analysis, and to highlight the opportunity that embodiment presents to researching music cultures.

In addition, my aim is to show how learning to perform as a research technique can assist *bodily ways of gathering experience*, and thus embodied understanding of musical cultures. Drawing on my experience of learning to perform in Iran, I wish to extend John Baily's argument of learning to perform as a research method into learning to perform as bodily experience and bodily knowledge in understanding musical cultures. In essence, I want to emphasize learning to perform as participatory and embodied research tool, effective to facilitate musical, cultural, and personal understanding.

8 Blacking, for instance, had a strong interest in music and the body and adopted the term 'the biology of music making' to refer to the biological foundation of music making (1992). Baily has theorized about the relationship between music structure and human movement. He has extensively theorized about 'embodied cognition' and has shown that the object of thought in music making is not the detached head, but its profane counterpart, the body (1977, 1985, 1995a).

9 Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964), who argued that perception is essentially a bodily experience, should be cited as the one who has had the most influence on recent work.

10 See Stone's analysis (2008: 165–176) about the recent turn in ethnomusicology towards phenomenological sociology (rather than the whole of phenomenology) for theoretical inspiration.

I will also try to show how our experience as ethnographers and music makers in the field can highlight a more explicit embodied research methodology. By drawing on the contemporary literature of socio-cultural anthropology and drawing on my fieldwork experience in Iran, I will show how embodied research helps understand people making music and music cultures. First, though, I want to write about how my embodied self informs interpretations in the field, and examine the relationship between embodiment, knowledge and understanding.

☞ *Entering the field as embodied researcher*

During my fieldwork in Iran I was not simply a researcher doing participant observation but an embodied researcher, where the biological, the gendered, the racialized, the cultural, and the musical body became an important tool, or better: a subject that experienced and understood one part of the society, religion, politics, and music culture in contemporary Iran.

My first taste of my embodied dimension in the field began before entering Iran. While boarding on *Iran Air* at the Greek airport, I had to submit my gendered body to the rules of the Islamic Democracy and wear a scarf. This was my first embodied subordination, and it felt as the very first imposition of the Iranian state on my body.

The next subordination of my body concerned food and alcohol consumption. I had to follow certain ritual fasting regulations, which forbid food consumption in public places during the daytime, through the months of Ramadan (a period of mourning and fasting). Then, as alcohol consumption was forbidden and penalized — nevertheless alcohol is consumed by a large portion of the Iranian middle class in the private space — like the average Iranian, I would also obtain alcohol from the black market with the fear and hope that I wouldn't get caught.

My gendered body had to adapt to the inconsistent and contradictory regulations with regards to the public transportation in Tehran. For example, while in the bus I had to follow the strict segregation between men and women; in the underground I had two options: one to use all train coaches, or two, to use the last coach that is meant for women only. In

the taxi, the situation was completely the opposite, men and women would freely sit one next to the other, and would often squeeze romantically one another when sitting in the front seat.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, as dancing in public places in Iran is forbidden, I felt restricted to express my feelings in public places (such as music restaurants, or concerts halls) through body movements because they could easily be misinterpreted as dance-like movements. Fortunately, I never experienced the stringency to cover my voice in public places, as I am not particularly fond of singing (to remind the reader that female solo singing in front of a male audience is strictly forbidden).

Generally, although I had the constant feeling that the private domain can be invaded at any time by the authorities, my body, and especially my gendered body, was more docile in the public than in the private sphere (demarcation of public and private domain in Iran applies to many aspects of everyday lifestyle, including entertainment practices, food and alcohol consumption).<sup>12</sup>

My racialized and gendered body was a target of sexual harassment and was often inseparable in the minds of outside observers whose gendered gaze would see me as western white female flesh. This combination of foreign and female flesh would arouse the fantasy of various government officials who often tried to exercise their power over me.

Furthermore, the first bodily markers of my identity, such as gender, age, and ethnicity influenced in important ways my research, my interpersonal relationship with other musicians and my experience of the public sphere in Iran. I felt that my age and ethnicity were important factors in establishing and developing friendly relationships. Being in my early thirties I could easily communicate with the post-revolutionary generation of musicians who were near my age (30% of the Iranian population is below 30 years old). Musicians were also more positively inclined towards me because of my Greek citizenship (and not Western European or American who have rather negative image in Iran). Generally, Iranians view Greeks with sympathy because they both have ancient history and civilization

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11 Taxis in Tehran allow two people, besides the driver, to seat at the front seat.

12 On the demarcation between public and private domain in Islam and Iran and the invasion in the private domain in Iran see KAR 2003 and KADIVAR 2003.

that intersected during the Greek-Persian wars, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. I also noticed that I expressed my cultural temperament through my gendered identity and my bodily comportment. Embodying the Greek temperament, my rather bold, highly expressive and demonstrative body posture, movements and gestures, could not straight away understand, follow and adapt to the general 'rules' of bodily behaviour of the middle Iranian woman who appears to be more reserved and modest. And, at the very beginning of my fieldwork, as I describe in the following incident, I could not differentiate which movements are proper and lawful and which are not (i.e. how to correct the headscarf in public places, in which public places was safe or not to put a lipstick, etc.).

On a very hot summer day, sharing with two more people the back seat of a taxi running on the six lane Tehran highway, feeling my hair sticking on my forehead and my headscarf slowly slipping back, I took it off for just 3–4 seconds in order to neatly fold it and put it back again on my head. I had seen many women doing this in public places and, being in the taxi, a public yet with a feel of privacy space, I felt safe to fix my headscarf. At that moment I saw the taxi driver looking at me through the mirror with a panic written on his eyes, which I could not decode at that instant, but I had realized later as the incident run through my head over and over again as I was trying to understand what had happened. The taxi driver suddenly stopped the car, I saw a police car parking in front of us, and nodded to me that I should get off the taxi. Getting off the cab, with my heart beating out of fear, I instantly inspected mentally my clothing: I was wearing black, lengthy and loose raincoat, in accordance with the strict female dressing code. However, my red painted toes popping out of my sandals at that moment seemed so sensual that I felt almost naked and wanted urgently to cover myself. I had heard that at that time it was not forbidden to wear open sandals, but I was still afraid that they could make a fuss about it, as they often did with the loose scarf on women's hair. I was frightened about what it might happen. Would they take me to the police like they did with so many young Iranian people who wore western dress code or a loose scarf on their head? Would I have the chance to call someone? Would they have an interpreter? All these questions fled my

head in seconds as the police men checked my dress code with their eyes. Fortunately, they could immediately see that I was foreigner and asked me in poor English “passport? passport?”. Standing there, on the Tehran highway, in front of the police car, and shaking with fear I replied with a trembled voice in my poor Farsi “khune, khune” (home, home). Out of fear, I could not remember how those few seconds past, and whether or not the police made a remark about me fixing the headscarf. Fortunately the taxi driver was still waiting for me, and at last I was sitting in the back seat again, shuddering and breathing with difficulty. Apparently, they let me go because I was a *hareji* (foreigner). Few days later I looked carefully at other women trying to understand how they fix their scarf in public places. Apparently, the main difference was that while they take off the scarf from their head, they keep it very close and above their head (while I took it off folding it in front of my eyes). In addition, Iranian women, although they correct their scarf in public places, they do it covertly, quietly, behind a wall for instance, hiding from the unwanted gaze.

With the passage of time I noticed that I had adopted many patterns of bodily comportment and behaviour, restricting at the same time a wide range of my previous flamboyant body language, which I had realized especially upon my return back to Greece. For example, I was uncomfortable wearing sleeveless clothing, feeling almost naked. Or, in another instance, when in an Athens bar, holding a gin and tonic in my hand, I shivered hearing the serene of a passing police car. I was thus able to recognize new bodily knowledge, new bodily norms and values that I had internalized through bodily experience and reproduced through my body.

I adopted these patterns of somatic behaviour some by effort, other unconsciously and instinctively and others through the ‘culture of fear’<sup>13</sup> that imbues the body itself. As Csordas puts it, the body is not a “fixed, material entity subject to the empirical rules of biological science, existing

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13 Broadly, the term implies that fear is a “totalizing condition that orchestrate all the rhythms of daily life” (MARGOLD 1999: 64), internalized by individuals and social groups, and disseminated by the political structure. It is a powerful force of socio-political control that distorts the capacities of a group to act. The term ‘culture of fear’ is a more recent synonym to the term ‘culture of terror’ developed by Taussig (1984, 1987).

prior to the mutability and flux of cultural change and diversity” (1994: 1), instead the body is subject to cultural transformations. These bodily transformations helped me to comprehend and engage with the Iranian reality grounded now in my bodily experience. My everyday body became the observant participator, a subject of knowledge and understanding of wide range of practices and processes, learning about ideological, learning about political, religious, and bodily aspects in contemporary Iran. According to Judith Okely,

Knowing others through the instrument of the field worker’s own body involves deconstructing the body as a cultural, biographical construction through a lived and interactive encounter with others’ cultural construction and bodily experience. This is not merely verbal, nor merely cerebral, but a kinetic and sensual process both conscious and unconscious which occurs in unpredictable, uncontrollable ways (2007: 77).

For example, it is through the lived body that I experienced the disciplinary power that the Iranian body is submitted to in multidimensional ways in everyday social life.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, my gendered, racial and biological (and musical body as I will show further) became a subject that perceived many forms of control and regulation, that I was relatively unable to resist, had I wanted to; a site of experience through which I observed, explored, internalized or rejected multifarious social and cultural values. As Crossley argues, “My experience is embodied but it is *not an experience of* my body. It is an embodied experience of the world around me” (CROSSLEY 2007: 82).

Our embodiment is our point of view on the world. According to Merlau-Ponty (1962) our bodies provide us with our “opening onto”, our “vehicle of being in”, and our “means of communication with” the world. Our body is a mode of being in the world, it locates us in the world, putting us in a spatio-temporal relation with other beings and giving us a standpoint, literally, from which to perceive them. Our embodiment is

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14 Obviously, there are many other fields of practice that dictate how the body should be regulated — in sports for example, in the media, or in the arts (including theatre, cinema, painting, music, sculpture). See for instance Tober and Budian (2007) who discuss body management and health and well-being in Islam.



the basis of our consciousness. For Merleau-Ponty “our perception ends in objects...”, and it begins in the body (CSORDAS 2002: 61). Thus, human bodies, for the phenomenologist — obviously including the body of the observer — are both “perceptible and perceiving, sensible and sentient” (CROSSLEY 2007: 82). As Csordas argues, “the body is a productive starting point for analyzing culture and self” (2002: 87).

Embodiment seems to shift the study of society and culture to an examination of the processes at work in everyday experience and interaction. A central point in ethnographic embodied research according to Aaron Turner, is “the shift from seeing culture as principally located in people’s minds in concepts and values to a perspective on culture as the embodied and enacted result of continually coming to terms with the world in which one lives” (TURNER 2000: 53). Consequently, if culture can be “understood to be embodied and sustained and developed in practice, interaction and disposition” (TURNER 2000: 53), then, one could argue, music culture could be also studied as such.

However, even if we attend fieldwork with our bodies, we may still be uncertain about how to translate our bodily experience into our writings, and how to balance the experiential and descriptive with the commentary and analysis. Csordas advocates a “methodological balance between representation and being-in-the-world” (CSORDAS 2005/1999: 186), which may be achieved by “invoking being-in-the world [...] under the sign of the *reflective*” (ibid. 2005/1999: 185). In order to do this he suggests raising the level of methodological self-consciousness by recognizing the “mind in the body” and by inserting the “phenomenological sense of embodiment into the ethnographic enterprise” (ibid. 185, 186). The body is not merely a source, the raw material for representation but “the seat of subjectivity and the ground of intersubjectivity” (ibid. 186).

In the following section, I will explore how learning to perform as a research technique can better assist our embodied understanding of musical cultures. In doing this, I will explore the relationship between the bodily experiences of the ethnomusicologist in the process of learning a musical instrument, and then I will provide empirical examples from my own embodied musical field work in Iran.

☞ *Knowledge from the Body*<sup>15</sup>: *Learning to Perform as an Embodied Research Technique in Ethnomusicological Fieldwork*

It was Mantle Hood (1960) who advocated performance practice as a means of truly understanding another music culture in which a well articulated theoretical music systems did not exist. Though, according to Baily, “Hood did not advocate learning to perform as a research technique to be employed in ethnomusicological fieldwork” (2001: 85). Nevertheless, as the history of our field has shown, Hood’s bi-musicality has influenced many ethnomusicologists who, since at least the late 1980s, have offered descriptions of their experience of learning another music in the field.<sup>16</sup>

Baily, one of the proponents of ‘learning to perform’, has extensively theorized about the advantages of ‘learning to perform’ as a research technique in ethnomusicology (see BAILY 1995b, 2001, 2008). Two of these are pertinent to the physicality of learning to play an instrument. First, the ethnomusicologist-performer learns operationally the structures of music: “in terms of what you *do*, and by implication, what you have to *know*” (2008: 122). Second, s/he acquires experiential understanding of the relationship between the human sensory-motor system and the instrument’s morphology. Although Baily extensively refers to the ‘ergonomics’ of music (1995b, 2001, 2008), one observes that “he doesn’t dwell on the specific significance of bodily experience and bodily knowledge” (WONG 2008: 81).<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, most of the early advocates that have referred to their own experience of learning to perform in terms of the physicality of learning to play an instrument have not developed the issue of embodiment beyond ‘the biology of music making’, a term that Blacking came to conceive in 1992. Blacking, for example, was interested in showing the relationship between the musical structure and the human body, or the interaction between the morphology of a musical instrument and patterns of movement. Berliner was particularly interested in exploring the “metaphoric relationship

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15 Title borrowed from Retsikas (2008).

16 The literature becomes more systematic especially after the mid 1990s and it includes BLACKING 1967, 1973; CHERNOFF 1979; KONIG 1980; KIPPEN 1988; RICE 1994, 1995; FEINTUCH 1995; BAILY 1995b, 2001, 2008; TITON 1995; BRINNER 1995; and BAKAN 1999.

17 However, elsewhere (1977, 1985, 1995a), Baily considers the body as a site of musical thought.

between the structure of *mbira* music and the structure of the instrument itself” (BERLINER 1978: 1). Baily also, has investigated the spatio-motor mode of music thought “as a legitimate and commonly used mode of musical thought” (BAILY 1985: 257) and has considered extensively the auditory, kinaesthetic, and visual information that may be involved in music making (BAILY *ibid.*).

Since the mid 1990s — a time when ethnomusicologists begun reflecting about their learning to perform — the prevalent assumption was that learning to play an instrument was an important research technique that could help “gain and deepen rapport with informants” and attain “something wider, encompassing musical, cultural and personal understanding” (SILVERMAN 1995: 312).<sup>18</sup> Learning to perform in the 1990s became, thus, an incentive to theorize about the insider/outsider dichotomy, to realize the importance of experience rather than data gathering, to reflect on the fieldwork process and on our relationships with the people we study, and to delve into the realms of senses, feelings, and emotions.

Admittedly, one can find some thoughts and ideas about the physicality of music making and its relationship to music understanding in the literature of learning to perform in the early 1990s, but these thoughts are scattered and hardly ever theorized or developed in any systematic way. Feintuch for example, mentions in passing that the “biological basis for shared musical experience [may be] leading to a form of knowing not otherwise available” (1995: 304). Keil also mentions in brief that “In order to understand what any musician is doing, you have to have done some of it yourself. [...] Unless you physically do it, it’s not really apprehensible, and you’re not hearing all there is to hear inside the music” (KEIL AND FELD 1994: 29–30).

In fact, by 1990s only few ethnomusicologists address embodiment in learning music in terms of how mechanics of learning, rehearsing or performing contribute to their overall understanding of musical traditions, that is, beyond music structure. Regula Qureshi’s study, for example, on

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18 This is particularly evident in the articles on learning to perform published in *The Journal of American Folklore* Summer 1995. See TITON 1995, SILVERMAN 1995, RICE 1995, FEINTUCH 1995, and ROSENBERG 1995.

the politics of affect in Indian *sarangi* shows how the embodied practice of making and hearing music expanded her understanding of the “musical, physical and metaphorical sites of the *sarangi*” (QURESHI 2000: 813). In addition, Timothy Rice’s reflections (1994) on his own experiences in learning the Bulgarian bagpipe (*gaida*) explore the “visual-aural-kinaesthetic” dimensions in learning music (1995: 271). His understanding of the ornamental nature of Bulgarian music resulted not only from his theoretical understanding of the music but also from the specifically physical process in learning the instrument. According to Rice,

Thus a fundamental change in cognition led to my acquiring a *gaida* player’s fingers, a change that added the tactile, kinaesthetic domain of sensation and understanding to what had previously been visual and aural. I was now working in all three dimensions of this visual-aural-kinaesthetic tradition (RICE 1995: 271).

More importantly, in the same paper, Rice observes that “the self is implicated in every study of the Other” and “understandings of the Other are ultimately released as self-understandings” (1995: 272–273), ideas that he is going to develop further (see RICE 2008/1997) and are important in the discourse about positioning our embodied subjectivity in the research process.

In sum, most ethnomusicologists who have referred to the embodied aspects of learning music in the early- and mid-1990s, have rarely tackled learning to perform as embodied research technique within ethnomusicology, and only few have explicitly theorized about the social and cultural meanings in the bodily experience and production of music.

This picture changes with the publication of *Shadows in the Field* (1997/2008), where contributors are among the first to consider the intersection between experience and embodiment beyond the mechanics of learning and performing, through the lenses of hermeneutics, phenomenology, performativity, and autoethnography.

Titon, for example, following hermeneutic phenomenology, calls for theories of knowledge based on understanding, rather than explanation, through lived experience (TITON 2008/1997: 27). He suggests to ground

musical knowing, that is knowledge of or about music, in musical being, in the practice of music. Here is how Titon describes this musical way of ‘being-in-the-world’:

Desire compels me to make music. I feel this desire as an affective presence, a residue of pleasure built up from my previous experiences with music and dance that makes me seek it out in order to know it better. It is a curiosity of all my bodily senses and I feel it embodied in them: an embodied curiosity. Knowing people making music begins with my experience of music. Playing the fiddle, banjo, or guitar with others, I hear music; I feel its presence; I am moved, internally; I move, externally. Music overcomes me with longing. I feel its affective power within me (TITON 2008: 31).

Titon’s compelling writings suggest that our way of musical knowing, that follows from our musical being-in-the-world, forms the basis for knowing people making music. However, he doesn’t offer any detailed explanations about how this embodied musical experience and knowledge relates to the social and cultural meaning of performance or music making.

Deborah Wong’s article is also an important contribution to the embodied aspects of fieldwork. As ethnographer/*taiko* player who pursues an embodied experience of the *taiko* jam — “a collective bodily experience” (WONG 2008: 84) — she explores the corporeal and sonic aspects of *taiko* jam that offer “productive models for thinking about sound, ethnography, subjectivity, and performativity” (ibid.).

Thus, it is only recently that some ethnomusicologists have started reflecting on their bodily music participation to understand the cultural and social systems within which music occurs.

For me, learning to perform was decisive in becoming aware of my multi-dimensional, multisensory, and multi-sited embodied participation during fieldwork. Learning to perform the *tombak*, a goblet shaped drum used in Iranian classical music, was such an intense physical activity that it literally changed my body and it made me cognizant of the impact of music culture on my body and generally the impact of Iranian culture on my cultural body.

During the first stage of learning to perform the *tombak* I concentrated on learning the basic playing techniques, and I soon noticed that I started to embody them together with other gestures and body postures when playing this instrument. I began to 'think' with my body when attempting to achieve the 'how to' by doing. The stringent teachings that all my *tombak* teachers employed in relation to correct body movement and body control helped me achieve this.

In addition, taking into account that imitation is one of the best learning methods and that correct movement upon the instrument is essential in learning to perform the *tombak*, I started observing and imitating musician's body posture during performance. Initially, I began observing, imitating, and gradually adopting certain body postures and behaviours of my music teachers first and then the bodies of other Iranian musicians, both in the private and in the public sphere, first indoors during lessons and rehearsals and progressively outdoors on the music stage.

Gradually, physical changes occurred in my body that made me cognizant once again that experience is irreducibly multisensory. I could control better my body posture; my fingers became faster, thinner, stronger, and more muscular.<sup>19</sup> My sensation of touch grew; through my fingertips I could differentiate the quality of the instruments I played with. Also, my aural perception developed, I could distinguish the quality of various beats and ornaments, and I could hear musical structures clearer.

These multisensory bodily transformations, fostered through learning to perform, informed my ethnomusicological understanding allowing different perspectives and insights about musical structures, teaching practices, playing styles and repertoires. Developing my aural, tactile, and performance skills I began comprehending experientially how *tombak* players learn and develop their playing skills, how and why specific techniques have to be executed, which body posture is acceptable both in terms of aesthetics and in terms of politically correct public behaviour. Equally important, through learning to perform an Iranian music instrument in Iran, my body became a sentient agent adopting gradually Iranian codes of behaviour. In essence, learning through and with my body, I began adopting Iranian modes of

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<sup>19</sup> Moreover, my hands would often become an object of observation by other musicians, convincing them or not about my capabilities in playing the instrument.

somatic behaviour, critical for the understanding of the music culture of *tombak* players in contemporary Iran.

Summarizing, during fieldwork my body, although at times submissive, docile, compliant, and receptive, was never neutral. My bodily changes, physical and cultural, are indicators of my embodied immersion in the researched music culture. Attending the field as embodied researcher made me not only understand certain important aspects about Iranian music culture, otherwise inaccessible, but it also offered me a somatic experience of the Iranian socio-cultural body. Embodied research made me more cognizant of my cultural body and the cultural bodies of those that I studied in a concrete social, cultural, and historical context.

It is of crucial importance to understand that learning to perform is much more than a field research technique: it is a multisensory embodied research tool of encounter and interaction with people making music. The music experience and understanding acquired by the ethnomusicologist become an embodied knowledge, as the ethnomusicologist often grows into a performer, a teacher, a mediator, and a transmitter of the music tradition s/he has learned (See BAILY 2001, SHELEMAY 2005/1997, BALANDINA 2007: 44–48).

### ☞ *Concluding Remarks*

In this paper I tried to show the importance of consciously integrating the body in the process and production of knowledge. In the beginning of this paper I have been arguing that the mood of reflexivity within ethnomusicology (with exception perhaps in dance studies) has been engaged with mainly as intellectual subjects. By not situating research and analysis in the embodied participating ethnomusicologist, many opportunities for theory and analysis are being missed. These opportunities are based on accepting the ethnomusicologist as physical, sensing, embodied participant in a cultural world. By attending the embodied practice of ethnography and its “intensely sensuous way of knowing” (CONQUERGOOD 1991: 180), I suggest that there is something new to be learned, that otherwise could be unattainable to access. It is time to recognize the “living body/subjective self of the researcher” (SPRY 2001: 711). It is

time for ethnomusicologists to discover that our body is our experiencing agent and salient partner in the research process. We should introduce our body in our scholarship by starting acknowledging, recognizing, feeling, interpreting, and writing about the embodied research aspects during fieldwork. We should consider our body as “a site for scholarly awareness” (SPRY 2001: 706). If we focus on embodiment, not in its own right, but as an avenue of approach to culture and self, as Csordas suggests (1994), is not to study anything new or different but to address familiar topics — music making, gender, improvisation, performance — from a different standpoint.

In my case, bodily transformations, social, cultural, and musical, were that of the apprentice absorbing Iranian music and culture, providing nuanced accounts of the complex knowledge/power equation enacted in the field. Learning to perform gave me the opportunity to re-inhabit my body and to become acutely conscious of the embodied dimension of my field research.

In other words, learning to perform has an epistemological justification, as a research method it offers new theoretical perspectives in field research and it creates further potentials for researching, analyzing and theorizing musical cultures. Learning to perform helps the experiential, dialogical, participatory way of “knowing people making music” to use Titon’s famous new phrase (TITON 2005/1997: 31). In essence, learning to perform can be one way to train ourselves for multidimensional and multisensory embodied participation, research, experience, and understanding.

Embodiment, as Csordas argues, is a “methodological standpoint in which bodily experience is understood to be the existential ground of culture and self, and therefore a valuable starting point for their analysis” (1994: 269). Moreover, embodiment gives us the opportunity to integrate the body and heart in academic writing; it gives the opportunity to write as integrated mind/body researchers, not only as detached head researchers. As Kisluik has argued, “embodiment and learning to perform breaks the chasm between mind and body, and between mind and experience” and other related dualisms such as art/scholarship, or self/other (see KISLUIK 2002: 107). In addition, integrating the embodied researcher in our



ethnography, as Wong shows, encourages more powerful ethnographic practices for ethnomusicologists: autoethnography and performative ethnography-writing (2008). Embodiment enables us to better engage the lived experience of myself with others, to move our readers, students or colleagues emotionally and intellectually.

As Geertz has argued, to become a convincing 'I-witness', one must, so it seems, first become a convincing 'I' (1988: 78–79). To offer thus a 'convincing I-witnessing approach' (ibid), one must first become an integrated 'I', that is, a living, physical, participating, embodied, and sentient researcher.

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