

Afterword:
**Making the most of circumstances: reflecting on the experience of two
ethnomusicologist parents**

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As Laudan Nooshin points out in her introduction, the contributions to this collection concern parenting and academia in general, and fieldwork with children in particular: the second topic perhaps represents the first coordinated effort from ethnomusicology to engage in a debate more established within cognate disciplines, anthropology *in primis* (see for example Cassell 1994 and Korpela et al. 2016). We will look at these topics in turn, commenting from our own perspective – that of a couple of ethnomusicologists and parents, who often share research in the field, but also work in the same department and therefore often have to juggle overlapping work commitments and schedules.

Given the high levels of stress and long working hours reported by academics across all disciplines (Kinman and Wray 2013), and the well-documented additional barriers faced by female academics and by those with caring responsibilities, it is hardly surprising that in academic disciplines involving fieldwork some find these issues exacerbated, and many find it difficult to pursue a career that involves significant travel without compromising their family lives (see Lynn, Howells and Stein 2018). Our own story belies that wider truth, perhaps, given the many positives we report, so it is worth repeating the obvious: it is doubly difficult to plan fieldwork – whether as a family, or as an individual leaving the family at home – alongside the other demands of an academic job, so time away becomes doubly precious as a result. The positives we recount should be understood in that broader, challenging perspective.

Our shared experience as parents dates from a period in which we both held reasonably secure positions, and both had significant fieldwork histories behind us, separately and as a team. Our experiences are – as other authors in this issue have highlighted – intertwined with wider issues concerning gender equality and career development in academia. These experiences have not always been positive: apart from the institutionally-embedded discrimination we have observed in different settings, we have encountered individuals opposed to the cause of greater gender equality or critical of the extension of rights enjoyed by those with caring responsibilities. There is still much to do. Having said that, in recent years we have welcomed a number of changes, including – in addition to developments in legislation around parental leave (a change in UK law in 2015 to allow parents to adjust the distribution of parental leave between them) – a more sensitive and parent-friendly approach to scheduling meetings and teaching hours. No matter how small these steps might seem, they reflect a move towards a more inclusive and family-oriented work environment.

Ethnomusicological conferences are usually characterised by a relaxed atmosphere, so our decisions on whether to attend together with our son or not are usually linked to logistics, schooling or costs rather than concerns about appropriateness. Of course, many work events are still difficult to manage (for example those taking place outside school hours). When managing such occasions, we have tried, whenever possible, to convey a sense of equally-shared responsibility. In the university we have often decided to take our son along to social events attended by colleagues and students, conscious of the message that this choice would send out to our academic community. We were particularly pleased when a junior female

colleague told Laura that seeing us bringing our boy to these gatherings had encouraged her to take her husband and toddler too: it was good to hear that our example had made a positive difference.

Our fieldwork experiences echo in many ways those of Henry Stobart and Georgie Pope. The first time we took our son to India he had just turned two. The trip took place after more than three years of absence and marked a resumption of our work in India after a long period. Crucially, it included visits to old friends to introduce him to them, and this turned out to be a sort of rite of passage through which we took on new personae as a *family* of researchers. Acquiring these new personae made us easier to relate to for many Indian friends and contacts, while also allowing us to look at the field through a different lens. Our schedule had to be planned in a more child-friendly way: especially during our first two trips with him while he was still very young, our research activities had to take into account the needs of a small boy. We soon got used to scheduling meetings according to his routine, to hearing his voice appearing in interview recordings, or to taking turns attending concerts while the other played with him outside the performance venue. As he grew up and became more vocal in demanding our time, we had to make do with whatever entertainment we could arrange, including, for example, “exhilarating” rides on “voo-cars” (“voo” being his onomatopoeia for the engine of autorickshaws) across polluted roads – the bumpier the better –, much to the amusement of the local drivers who promptly renamed their vehicles adopting his neologism to attract our attention. If Miguel Mera is right that parenting can help one become more time efficient, it is also true that activities such as note taking, writing, and preparing equipment can be difficult to reconcile with a toddler’s routine.

While our schedule took on new aspects unrelated to music-making, but nonetheless giving us a new perspective on everyday life – such as visiting parks and playgrounds frequented by local families – it also changed the dynamics of our relationships with musical friends and acquaintances. Those to whom we were already close, but with whom we had only previously discussed musical matters, revealed more private personae to us, as we did to them. (We like to believe that our son will one day be able to tell his own children of amusing music students by climbing on their teachers’ living-room furniture, while being entertained by these world-renowned singers performing the title tune of his favourite cartoon. More likely he will not: after all, these were just friends of his parents and, as Mera points out, children are very good at putting us in our place.)

That being as it may, the main point is that working as a family unit allowed us to see and be seen in a new light, and to understand the musical activities of our contacts in different ways thanks to the new contexts that had opened up to us. The experience, when we manage to get away, has been professionally and personally positive. We see the opportunity of working in the field as a family as a complement to our past experiences, which we can no longer replicate: individual, less comfortable and over longer periods, or teamwork involving intensive travel and tight recording schedules. We are aware, of course, that we have been particularly fortunate: working in Indian cities in recent years has been, pollution and traffic aside, physically comfortable for a visitor with research funding.

The papers included in this issue which discuss fieldwork share the perspective of researchers who were able to be accompanied by their families in the field, and they discuss some of the challenges encountered: the Stobart family’s lengthy stay in South America probably represents the most felicitous combination of circumstances (in which all members of the family were integrated in the local life in some way). In all of the cases presented here,

travelling for work with a small child is dependent on the availability of an accompanying partner. For many, however, a partner might not always be available. Similarly, travelling as a family might not be possible for a number of reasons, including financial constraints, incompatibility with schooling arrangements or health risks. We should spare a thought here for situations in which taking one's own family into the field is not possible or advisable, or in which researchers might find themselves separated from their families for long periods. How do considerations of this kind shape the experience of the researcher planning and carrying out fieldwork?

One of the pillars of modern ethnomusicology, fieldwork is experienced at the intersection between private and public spheres (Hood 1971; Nettl 2005), in that blurred dimension which is so difficult to theorise, but which inevitably shapes our relationships and thus our research. Doing fieldwork as a family adds another layer to the complexity of these relationships and to the personae we take on. However, if the theorisation of the private is unavoidably challenging – as Nooshin and Stobart also stress – some reflection on existing paradigms is still possible, and in fact necessary. The model of the extended stay in the field which is in many ways desirable to get to know a culture (but which becomes difficult to achieve once one lands an academic job) has already been challenged as we redefine what might constitute a 'field', but the evolving challenges faced by academics may be another factor in this process. Shorter, focussed periods might be easier to reconcile with schooling or might be preferable to parents who cannot take their families along.

Working together and sharing the same research in the field has proved most of the advantageous model in our specific situation: the compromises we have made, such as the missed opportunities to attend musical events, have been outweighed by the practical advantages. Necessity is the mother of invention, and our fieldwork has evolved to fit the boundaries of possibility. Nonetheless, these circumstances also give us the opportunity to reflect on the different affordances of contrasting fieldwork models, and to welcome an ever-greater diversity of practice.

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