Reimagining the Representation of Ethnographic Knowledge: The Philosophy and Methodology of a Digital Humanities Project

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When I was thirteen, I traveled to Japan on my own to visit my pen pal, a friend I made after her father stayed with my family. The experience of cultural difference was intense for a young girl on her own who’d never been to a non-English-speaking country and who didn’t speak much Japanese beyond rudimentary phrases. In some ways, however, I feel like this experience set me down the path of a career dedicated to understanding, explaining, and celebrating cultural differences, including musical ones. Somewhere after that visit I obtained a shakuhachi (an end-blown bamboo flute). I started going to the public library to devour LP records from around the world. Then, in high school, I was introduced to this thing called ethnomusicology after seeing a documentary about music in Tuva. I’ve never figured out just what documentary I saw, but I was hooked. Music and travel—that’s what I wanted to do.
When I went to college, I actively pursued ethnomusicology, and quickly developed a less romanticized notion of what the field involved. I had the fortune during my B.A. to conduct fieldwork in Indonesia, exploring and documenting sonic practices. I’ve been engaged in ethnomusicology since the early 1990s. As I have taught generations of undergraduate students about ethnomusicology over the last 15 years, including one I am proud to call my co-author, I came to question why we privilege the written word to represent the rich sensorial performative worlds we study. The digital project that we introduce here is very much a result of my experiences teaching at a liberal arts college. It’s a response, in part, to what, where, and who I teach. I am now dedicated to the public humanities, including developing co-constructed and accessible public-facing formats, both for my own scholarship and for students in my classes. I am excited to take you inside the project and to do so with my recently graduated collaborator, Gabriela Linares.

GABRIELA LINARES

During my undergraduate years as a voice major, I became interested in the ethnography of sound, leading me to also declare a musicology major with a focus in ethnomusicology. This experience fundamentally shifted the way I engage with and think about music. I am now more alert to the ways in which music is intertwined within political and social movements. It can be very easy for students—and instructors—to conform to colonialist frameworks within academia. They are, for example, very prominent in classes in music theory, music history, or others where curricula are centered around canons of white, European music and systems of engaging with it. I remember sitting in my first undergraduate music theory class as a woman of color who did not grow up in the U.S. and feeling lost. The music that represented my identity and fueled my passion for music and singing was in no way close to what was prioritized or considered appropriate for examination in my classes. Whenever music outside the canon would appear in my
courses, its inclusion was tokenistic at best: worthy of comparison, but not serious consideration in its own right.

Students of color often don’t feel part of “the history” taught in music curricula and are often dehumanized by the white supremacist narratives taught in schools, colleges and conservatories. The excluded histories of marginalized communities, those communities at the center of current socio-political movements, have been historically expressed through music, art, and poetry. Because music is central to humanity, diverse practices studied in the ethnomusicology classroom may allow us to fill in these gaps in history and decenter dominant white narratives by exemplifying the voices of those who have been oppressed and misrepresented. There is a need for more conversation and a multiplicity of voices when studying this thing we call “music.” With the help of ethnographic research that works with and for a community, we can engage with music and people in a meaningful way.

As a student in ethnomusicology, I confronted and reconsidered a series of questions: Who has the power to write the history of music? Who is the intended audience of our scholarship? What is the goal of it? Ultimately, the most important question for me is: who is benefitting from this research and why is it being conducted? I learned that one has to be aware about the space they occupy when conducting research and how one’s background, race, gender, sexuality, and economic status may inform the ways we interact with and are perceived by others. Being in the field of ethnomusicology exposed how much work there is to do in the music academy. As a student and academic of color, I am committed to entering uncomfortable places that were not created for nor catered to me. In my career, I aim to change and decenter mainstream approaches in order to see growth in curricula and move away from colonialist practices. This way we can expose the importance of the excluded musical narratives and move toward the expansion of curricula moldable to different identities and experiences with music.
At its heart, ethnography is storytelling. Just like investigative journalists, oral historians, and documentary filmmakers, ethnographers are interested in telling stories about people and their experiences. But the focus of the stories and the methods for collecting and presenting them vary between these approaches. Ethno/musicologists who use ethnographic methods research the human experience through sound, music, movement, gesture, and/or other related practices. They are concerned with how these practices are embedded in social lives and inflected with cultural, political, gendered, racial, economic, and other factors. Ethnographers tell stories about these performative practices but especially about the people who engage with them. They are concerned with the meanings these practices hold in people’s lives.

By invoking the word “story” here we don’t mean to imply that these are entirely fictionalized accounts, but rather that they are always subjective and shaped for a targeted audience. In sharing ethnographic knowledge, there is always the question of which stories to tell, how to tell them, and through what media. Those questions can be answered in part by thinking about the following ones: What is the purpose of the ethnographic project? What audience are the authors trying to reach? Whose voices are amplified and whose are marginalized or excluded from those accounts? How ethnographers choose to represent ethnographic knowledge shapes and restricts their arguments. Print media offer one set of advantages, while audio recordings, films, and podcasts offer others. Ethnographers are ultimately curators of material. They—we—must consider which medium best represents the material evidence and which reaches the right audience.

In this essay, we ask how ethnographers might harness the power of digital tools affiliated with the Digital Humanities (glossed for now as the intersection of digital technology with humanistic inquiry) to explore new ways to tell these stories and share ethnographic knowledge. If each medium chosen by
a scholar offers particular advantages and limits, what does a digital format offer that print or audio or video alone does not? We argue that engaging with the Digital Humanities presents a creative possibility, an opportunity to think outside the box. Digital platforms offer exciting possibilities to re-envision the shape of ethnographic stories and expand potential audiences for them. For example, digital platforms let ethnographers move away from the emphasis on the written word and, instead, play with the presentation of stories by exploring non-linear formats. Digital platforms offer visualization tools that enable new ways of conceptualizing the data. They provide a series of other interactive tools that allow users to make discoveries for themselves, offering multiple pathways for navigating and interpreting the material. They enable the integration and annotation of multimedia, providing users with a more sensory experience than words alone. They allow collaboration and facilitate the presentation of multiple authorial voices. In conceptualizing and designing the project we discuss here, we were particularly attracted to the capacity of the digital to make scholarly projects public-facing and accessible to communities with whom ethno/musicologists work. So much scholarly knowledge is inaccessible to the public, either because it is behind a paywall or because it is laden with alienating technical jargon. Digital platforms, however, allow free access to anyone with an internet connection. They also offer multiple modes of engaging material.

Just as importantly, the Digital Humanities contribute to the shifting landscape and conversations about ways to engage ethically in music studies, and especially in ethno/musicology. These shifts include calls for decolonizing, decentering, and intervening in traditional modes of scholarly production through anti-colonial projects; community engagement through applied or activist projects; public ethno/musicology; collaborative ethnography; and repatriation. The Digital Humanities offer one possible intervention among many. They allow scholars, teachers,
and students to grapple with issues of representation and authorial voice in ethnography.

This essay presents a collaboratively-designed Digital Humanities project, *Song in the Sumatran Highlands*, as a model to help you think through the possibilities of the digital. Following the philosophy of acknowledging the collaborative production of knowledge, this article has been collaboratively conceived and written by a teacher-scholar, Jennifer, and her recently graduated student collaborator, Gabriela, who worked closely with Jennifer on the design and construction of the digital project from July 2020 to June 2021. *Song in the Sumatran Highlands* is a large-scale, interactive, interpretative, multimedia ethnography and archive that celebrates and documents saluang, a prominent Minangkabau vocal genre from West Sumatra, Indonesia. In this article, we introduce you to the project’s methodology, philosophy, and interventions. As you read about the Digital Humanities and this project, we invite you to think about the various media through which you have encountered scholarly knowledge thus far. How is our project similar to or different from other ethno/musicological work you have encountered? What does our digital format offer that other media do not? While the project we share here is large-scale, Digital Humanities projects need not be. We aim to introduce you to tools and ways of thinking that you might consider applying to your own, smaller-scale research projects in an effort to make humanities work more public-facing. As you read along, we invite you to be creative. Think about the sonic stories you want to tell, what tools you need to tell them, and what medium best fits each story.

The project at the heart of this article, *Song in the Sumatran Highlands*, is based on the ethnographic research of Jennifer in West Sumatra, Indonesia since 1998. We therefore provide a very brief introduction to ethnographic methods in general, followed by description of Jennifer’s research and the role of ethnography in the classroom. We then outline the philosophy of Digital Humanities before focusing on the project. We conclude with a
call for students and scholars alike to take up Digital Humanities to share ethnographic work.

A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Just as there are multiple ethno/musicologies or ways of practicing ethno/musicology around the world, as Samuel Araújo points out, there are “many possible modes of doing ethnographies of musical practices” and ways to share ethnomusicological work. Here we just have room to discuss the ethnographic practice that produced *Song in the Sumatran Highlands*. This methodology, often known as fieldwork, is a process of long-term, immersive learning that investigates the ways in which sound, music, and related practices are embedded in social lives. While visiting “the field” used to mean going somewhere “else,” now “the field” exists anywhere, ranging from home to abroad and taking place anywhere sound and related practices are produced and/or consumed: a nightclub, a conservatory, a recording studio, a city, a village, and beyond. An ethnographer might be intimately familiar with and from the sonic world they are studying or relatively new to it. The ideal “long-term” duration of fieldwork can mean months, a year, or longer. “Immersion” means that to the greatest extent possible, an ethnographer joins the community under consideration: they reside with a local family; learn the local language; and abide by local customs and rules of social life, including modes of dress, eating, and communicating. This process is obviously easier if one is doing ethnography at “home,” but even that is complicated by a different set of factors. Ethnographic research for an ethno/musicologist can involve a range of different activities: learning to play, sing or make music within the genre/s of interest; making audiovisual documentation of performances and processes; conducting interviews (see fig. 1); taking notes; and hanging out. Jennifer has engaged in each of these activities to varying degrees.
Jennifer’s interest in saluang, the vocal and flute genre at the heart of *Song in the Sumatran Highlands*, began when she first heard the Smithsonian Folkways recording, *Night Music of West Sumatra*. She subsequently became an exchange student at Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia (ASKI for short, the College of Indonesian Arts, which has been renamed twice since) for a year in 1998–1999. That was followed by 14 months of doctoral fieldwork in 2003–2004. Return trips in the summers of 2010, 2015, and 2016 all involved research with saluang. Her positionality structured the process of fieldwork. For example, as an unmarried, childless, cisgender white woman, research on saluang presented some challenges. Saluang performances happen late at night. In the conservative Muslim society where Jennifer conducted research,
it was not appropriate for a woman to be out at night on her own. She needed an appropriate chaperone, someone to escort her to and from performances. Different men over the years have filled these roles. In 2016, she hired an assistant, Saiful Hadi, known on the saluang circuit as Pak Ketua

![Figure 2. Jennifer and Saiful Hadi working on translating song texts.](image)

Jennifer didn’t think of Saiful as secondary; his centrality to the process made him a collaborator in the research. His network and connections enabled, and also constrained, her experience and knowledge of the genre. Saiful’s influence on Jennifer’s work reinforces what we’ve already said: ethnographic research is always partial. Ethnographers have access to a particular set of experiences, like a videographer capturing one angle at a time. Furthermore, an ethnographer’s presence at events shifts the dynamics of them. For example, Jennifer and Saiful Hadi became the subject of teasing song texts. That might not have happened if Jennifer had been a man, transgender, married, or accompanied by her partner.
As you can see, fieldwork is crucial to the way ethnographers collect, interpret, and then share knowledge. It is to representation—how knowledge is shared—that we now turn.

**INSPIRATION FOR A PERSONAL SHIFT IN REPRESENTATIONAL PRACTICES**

In the United States, graduate schools and institutions of higher education generally encourage scholars to follow conventional paths of scholarly production: that mainly means producing articles and books, usually in print. But Jennifer’s pedagogical practice and recent, pressing conversations in the field about ethics and public relevance encouraged her to reconsider what it means to be an ethno/musicologist in the 21st century. As a result, she became more invested in community-engaged work and the Digital Humanities. She was particularly inspired by the work of those scholars interested in representing “content in a medium that is most proximate to the source of knowledge,”16 including Steven Feld, an early advocate of doing “ethnographic work in and through the medium of sound.”17

Because our philosophy of using digital platforms is the result of our experiences as a teacher-scholar and student-scholar, we should address the role of ethnographic research in the classroom. What can students learn from engaging with ethnographic research? How do the modes in which knowledge is disseminated affect the reception of that material? We begin by highlighting the experiences of Gabriela, who took classes with several ethno/musicologists, not just her co-author, during her studies. Reading ethnographic accounts, including traditional print books and articles, gave Gabriela the opportunity to engage with music in a multidimensional way, different from other kinds of music studies. As a student, her aim was to be able to hear multiple perspectives and diverse voices within an ethnography. Ethno/musicology courses exposed Gabriela to conversations...
surrounding ownership, diversity, and inclusivity while helping her break away from colonialist ideas as to what practices are considered art or valuable.

Unless they come with a companion recording, however, books about a scholar’s ethnographic research often do not provide a sonic experience for the reader. When Gabriela read ethnographies, she found it hard to internalize the arguments without sonic examples. She found it unfortunate that the very thing driving ethnographic research—i.e., the sounds—were often absent in or secondary to the finished product. As a teacher, Jennifer knew that the more accessible the materials, the better students learn. Students were more receptive to learning about sound when they could learn through sound. For example, when Jennifer teaches the history of sound recording, it helps her students to hear the graininess of a cylinder phonograph machine. Sounded examples contextualize information and bring the experience to life for the students. With their capacity to incorporate multimedia, digital platforms help all users—including students—to learn through those sensory experiences.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

Digital Humanities is an approach to humanistic scholarship more than a particular set of tools or methods. As the grounding philosophy behind the design for *Song in the Sumatran Highlands*, it is worth outlining the approach. The best definitions are broad, like the following:

Digital Humanities refers to new modes of scholarship [...] Digital Humanities is less a unified field than an array of convergent practices that explore a universe in which print is no longer the primary medium in which knowledge is produced and disseminated.  

Digital Humanities, furthermore, is about “developing new forms of inquiry and knowledge production” while expanding
audiences for scholarship and redrawing traditional academic boundaries. It is equally important to clarify what Digital Humanities is not: it is not simply data put online, nor merely the study of digital artifacts.\textsuperscript{19} For example, we have deliberately not used the term “digital ethnography” because it is typically used to mean the ethnographic study of digital life and virtual communities, such as YouTube, Facebook, and other social media platforms, or using digital tools to do ethnography, such as online interviewing.\textsuperscript{20} Digital ethnography, then, is not about the way in which research is shared—our interest here. Digital ethnography could be shared through traditional print or through a digital platform. In the Digital Humanities, however, scholars harness digital tools to make discoveries and arguments not possible in more traditional print formats.\textsuperscript{21}

We were particularly attracted by the capacity of Digital Humanities to offer new modes of knowledge production. This would allow us to make multimedia-rich ethnographic material widely accessible and bring users closer to the sensory world of saluang performance in Sumatra. But would we use an existing digital platform, or build one from scratch? Scalar is described by its creators at The Alliance for Networking Visual Culture as “Born-digital, open source, media-rich scholarly publishing that’s as easy as blogging.”\textsuperscript{22} Jennifer decided to go with this pre-existing platform because it allowed her and trained students like Gabriela to do the bulk of the work themselves with no coding expertise. With the provision of a rich interface for multimedia display and text, interactive tools, and flexible structure, Scalar fit many needs of the project:

- **Scalar is multimodal:** this means it can represent the same knowledge through different modes, appealing to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners, in addition to those who learn best by reading.
- **Scalar can incorporate a range of media,** whether digitized analog or born-digital, such as photographs, documents,
audio, video, and interfaces with streaming media, such as YouTube and SoundCloud.

- Scalar has a flexible, non-linear structure. “Print,” Burdick et al. write, “typically offers a single viewing angle, linear organization, a research output characterized by finitude and stability, and a scale of documentation and argumentation that has to respect the physical proportions of the book.” Digital Humanities, in contrast, offers flexible, fluid scale, zoomable structures moldable to the project’s needs. Designers have to create their own structures for a project’s interface, which can involve individualized, user-driven pathways of discovery.

- Scalar allows collaborative design and authorship: The “complexity and scale” of a Digital Humanities project means they are typically collaborative in nature, rather than the more traditional single authorship model of humanities. They also require participants with different kinds of expertise.

- Scalar easily embeds digital tools: These include—but are not limited to—Google Maps and TimelineJS, “an open-source tool that enables anyone to build visually rich, interactive timelines.”

- Scalar is accessible: anyone with an internet connection can access projects built using Scalar and it has an adaptable interface for smartphones and tablets.

To test-run the capacity of the software in a lower-stakes environment, Jennifer adopted Scalar in a class where Gabriela was a student. We created a site called Sounding Decolonial Futures: Decentering Ethnomusicology’s Colonialist Legacies, which suggests some of the ways this technology can be adapted to pedagogical projects. That experience and the conversations about language, accessibility, and visual display shaped the design of Song in the Sumatran Highlands. We now turn our attention to the project.
A DIGITAL HUMANITIES PROJECT: SONG IN THE SUMATRAN HIGHLANDS

_Song in the Sumatran Highlands_ takes advantage of Scalar to provide an innovative, interactive multimedia ethnography and archive that celebrates saluang. The site is an ethnographic archive in that it is a repository for still photography, audio, and audiovisual recordings collected over more than twenty years. But it is not just a static repository. It offers interpretation along with interactive tools that help users connect multimedia to context. The site is full of stories that address the meanings of this music in people’s lives. By sharing lived experiences through multimedia, the site aims to bring users as close as possible to localized ways of experiencing saluang in the highlands of West Sumatra.

_Song in the Sumatran Highlands_ makes two main contributions: that of the content and that of the medium. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first large-scale project in any language on saluang, arguably the most important vocal genre of the Minangkabau people. The genre is remarkable for a number of reasons, which are explored in the site: 1) the poetry of the texts involve an important form of oral literature that contains emotional depth, subtle allusion, and erotic sensitivity; 2) it engages geographic imaginaries to provide sonic manifestations of and affective attachment to place with repertoire and performers named for places of origin; 3) performances are important venues for socialization and reveal deeply gendered interactions between singers and their audiences; and 4) the genre has evolved considerably over the last fifty years, including the gender of the singers and the expansion of repertoire to incorporate pop material. These arguments could have been presented in a book with a linear format, but Scalar offered the possibility to re-envision the shape of the project. The interface was built and tools incorporated to suit the structural dimensions of the arguments and nature of the content presented.26
The site is built around four important components of saluang: the songs that make up the repertoire, the people who perform or are devotees; the performances where songs are activated by people who perform and those who request specific songs; and the places connected to songs, people, and performances. This structure is reflected as the core part of the Table of Contents (see fig. 4 below). At the time of writing, the site, which like many Digital Humanities projects will always be in a state of evolution, lists 450+ song titles (see fig. 5), some 128 people, 19 performances or recording sessions, and 180 places. There are over 400 renditions of songs with nearly that many audio recordings, 30+ video recordings, and hundreds of images. The site presents a number of interactive digital tools, including maps, timelines, network visualizations, and annotation of audio examples to allow users to learn song structures or find key features.
Figure 4. Table of Contents, which reveals major sections and possible pathways through them.

Figure 5. Example of a List of Songs. Te E is a well-known singer who kept her own list of songs in the repertoire.
The site maps place by tagging song titles, landmarks referenced in song texts, performers, and performances with geospatial metadata (latitude and longitude). This is represented on the Google Maps interface embedded in the software (see fig. 6). We use images to illustrate places wherever possible so that the user gets a sense of what it is like to be there (see fig. 7).29, 30, 31

Figure 6. Mapping Saluang. Each red pin represents a place that is geotagged. Clicking on the pin reveals a brief description of the place, along with providing a hyperlink to the place homepage, as indicated in the example of “Place: Bonjo.” The user can change the scale and the interface between plain map, terrain (recommended), and satellite.

The mapping element is important to this project because we are interested in the sonic manifestations of place. Jennifer was inspired by the work of Steven Feld, who explores how song
texts map trails through the rainforest, and Angela Impey, who explores song routes constituted by women who sang as they walked, including shifting routes enforced by geopolitical borders. Feld, however, does not offer visual maps to contextualize his argument, and Impey, who included maps, did not include sound to contextualize hers. In contrast, Scalar allows us to bring these elements together, linking sounds with place. In saluang, this linkage is important: many songs are named for or closely associated with specific places, some performers are named for the village from which they come, and song texts mention places. The interactive Google Map tool embedded throughout the site allows users to zoom in and out to see the landscape and
its topographical features, to understand the relative proximity or distance between places.

At one level our project is a response to an articulated community need: the documentation of the extant repertoire. Jennifer’s collaborators in Sumatra—performers and devotees alike—referenced the precarious nature of the genre with changing aesthetic preferences and social habits. She discussed building a digital archive with them. The site currently provides a database of song titles illustrated through audio examples but it functions as much more than a database (see fig. 8).36

![Figure 8a. Example of a Song Page. Like pages for places, pages for songs build in visual material and hyperlinks to connected material where appropriate.](image)

Song pages, like those of key performers, build in interactive visualizations, revealing the connections between a song, its renditions, and audiovisual examples, and connections to specific people, places, and performances. When users encounter a visualization like this, some connections will pop up:37, 38
Figure 8b. Visualization of a Song’s Connections. These connections include all the places this song, “Suntiang Patah Batikam,” occurs throughout the site. The visualizations are color-coded (green dots, for example, are media files). Here most of the individual renditions are indicated by a yellow dot. Clicking on them will reveal connections to the performers of that rendition, as seen in the next figure.

Figure 8c. Visualization of a Song’s Connections. Here we are going deeper by clicking on renditions to reveal performers’ names.
Users can trace the ways those songs are activated in performance and connected to places and particular people. They can see the texts for individual renditions of the songs, tracking changes from one performance to the next. Scalar allows the annotation of media with time markings so users can easily follow structural divisions (see fig. 9).39

Figure 9. Example of a Rendition of a Song. A rendition page includes the audiovisual media for that specific rendition, the list of performers, and annotations of song sections, enabling the user to appreciate the song structure.

Scalar also allows the annotation of song texts, so that contextual information about translations can be included (see fig. 10). When those lyrics reference places, a map is included.40

Figure 10. Example of Lyrics Layout with Annotations. The lyrics, where possible, are included under the audio example, often in three languages: the original Minangkabau, the Indonesian translation, and the English translation (enabled by the Indonesian translation).
Individual iterations of a song, like this rendition of “Suntiang Patah Batikam,” are connected back to the song’s homepage, allowing comparison of textual and structural differences between versions of the “same” song. For example, Jennifer recorded eleven different renditions of this song. Mapping the repertoire at individual performances Jennifer attended reveals the contours of the performance practice, which songs are most frequently performed, where, and when.\textsuperscript{41}

\textbf{Figure 11.} Example of a Page for a Person. The home pages for people include photographs, biographical details, songs they have composed, connections to performances Jennifer witnessed, and snippets of interviews with them.
The incorporation of visuals in the site allows the audience to put a face to the people who own and perform the music (see fig. 11). In the past, early ethno/musicological practices mislabeled, disembodied, and exotified the people they aimed to represent. While books often blur the lines between individual voices, Digital Humanities offer tools where practitioners can amplify the voices of marginalized peoples through media. Rather than having a scholar speaking for an individual in written accounts, digital platforms offer diverse ways in which people can tell their own stories about their music. The incorporation of images and snippets of interviews allows users to see the performers and hear their voices. This point is an important one. Rather than the voice of the ethnographer becoming the privileged one, it becomes one among many.

Digital platforms, which allow for such non-linear structures and multiple voices, offer the scope for decentralizing authority, or what Ramella calls the de-hierarchization of knowledge. We have not tried to create a digital book here, something to be read through chronologically from start to finish, but something very different. Users of the site will be able to navigate through individualized pathways: for example, they could opt to trace out iterations of a particular song or follow specific performances, performers, or places (see fig. 12). After an introductory module that grounds the user in the basics, the interface is designed to allow for multiple entry points and intersecting pathways for engaging the material. By allowing users to follow individualized pathways they become co-creators in the knowledge formation. Each user will discover unique connections, not just those laid out by site designers and content creators. The design also incorporates a section that provides modules for specific pedagogical purposes, so that the material can be adapted for classroom use.
Part of the appeal of a digital site is the capacity to provide multilingual access. Jennifer was inspired by Jennifer Kyker’s site, *Sekuru’s Stories*, which includes sections in the original Shona language. While *Song in the Sumatran Highlands* is being built in English first, a later phase plans to incorporate Indonesian-language sections, ensuring greater access for members of the saluang community.

Most significantly, the affordances of the digital—meaning the tools and the interface that allow users to explore the material—enable new conceptualizations of the data. These affordances reveal different ways of aggregating and seeing the data than would be possible in print. For example, Scalar also offers a rich array of tools for modeling and visualizing relationalities in data, including tag clouds, tree diagrams, and timelines (see fig. 13).
Figure 13 a–c. Power of Visualization. This tag visualization helps reveal the song titles heard during fieldwork in 2003–2004 (fig. 13a.), those heard in 2015–2016 (fig. 13b.), and the handful of titles that were heard in both periods (fig. 13c.). The interactive visualization comes to life as you click on the red dot revealing the titles connected to each time frame. The creator and the user can visually appreciate that there were many different titles performed in each time period—slightly more in 2015–2016—but only a handful were performed in both periods, speaking to the richness of the repertoire.
Another critical tool we deployed was an interactive timeline. This was Gabriela's brilliant idea to represent the structure of performances. This tool allows users to scroll through a performance to see how it unfolds over time, including how long songs lasted and when breaks occurred. It shows what kinds of songs were performed when (see fig. 14).48

Figure 14. Example of an Interactive Timeline. You can scroll or click through the timeline of a performance to see the individual songs, which are presented according to locally relevant categories.
As Gabriela suggests, presenting scholarship digitally allows for the project and its data to breathe and evolve. One can revisit narratives, make changes, and allow for the project to morph over time. Indeed, since starting to build the project, Jennifer had the idea that she could work with scholars in West Sumatra to incorporate their archival photos and recordings into the site, presenting an accessible repository for important cultural history. She could also invite other scholars to contribute independently authored modules. In short, this digital platform and the tools it can incorporate, such as maps, timelines, visualizations, and annotations, radically enhance scholars’ abilities to tell our stories, present our arguments, and engage broader audience bases.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, we have argued that the Digital Humanities offers a set of tools to help humanists, ethno/musicologists, and other ethnographers to tell their stories in compelling new ways that are accessible not only to the public but especially to the communities with whom we work. We have also modeled a faculty-student collaboration, both in designing and building the site but also in co-authoring this article. For Gabriela, working behind the scenes on the project revealed not only the complexities of conducting ethnographic research, but also the detail and care that is involved in sharing research. Most importantly, through the repetitive tasks of building individual pages and connecting content, she came to appreciate how deeply the material is intertwined and how this format allowed the data to come to life. For Jennifer, this was a first experience in the collaborative presentation of ethnographic research. It was revolutionary to have someone to bounce ideas off, including questions of design and framing of the material for a non-specialist audience.

We call for students and scholars to actively work towards diversifying academic practice, to insert love, care and passion into
all work. The Digital Humanities, including the project we discuss here, offers one possible path. Having digital tools at our disposal as scholars has enabled new possibilities to display research in a way that is presented in multiple modes where text is enhanced with sound and visual material.

We encourage our readers to collaborate with musical communities with the end goal of decentering dominant modes of knowledge production and dissemination, particularly in cases where music and people have been excluded and misrepresented in broader music curricula. By incorporating diverse ways of representing data, as creators of the site we were better able to center our partners’ voices and what these practices mean to them. There is much work still to be done. We remain committed to challenging and dismantling dominant white modes of knowledge production in ethno/musicology and the music academy, changing not just who gets a seat at the table but what the table itself looks like.

We chose to adapt a Digital Humanities approach to our work because we believe providing access to ethnographic knowledge for the communities with whom we work and the public is not just necessary, but our ethical and moral responsibility. We firmly believe that engagement in such digital platforms and with the questions laid out here is useful beyond any particular project, course, or degree program. The Digital Humanities teaches tools for problem-solving, collaborating, and thinking about different modes of communication. We invite our student readers to prompt your faculty to engage in conversations, if they are not already, about the relative merits of presenting scholarly arguments in and through different media, whether that be for student work or in their own ethnographic practices.

As you explore music scholarship in ethno/musicology and other fields, we leave you with a series of questions to consider and discuss:
- How and why do scholars choose a particular medium through which to present their scholarly work? You might need to think about personal, societal, financial, and institutional reasons.
- What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of different media, including Digital Humanities?
- Who is creating ethnographic or other Digital Humanities projects and for whom? How does the positionality of author(s) and audience limit the projects’ scope and the medium chosen?
- What ethical questions about authority, voice, representation, and access can and should guide scholarly production?

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NOTES


6. For example, Chie Sakakibara, “Collaborative Reciprocity Revisited: Giving Back through the Community-Partnered Inupiaq Music Heritage Repatriation Project,” in *Giving Back: Research and Reciprocity in Indigenous Settings*, ed. RDK Herman (Corvallis: Oregon State University, 2018), 109–27; Frank


12. Note that Te E is not included in the image. This is deliberate. When Jennifer interviewed women at home, they were often in their house clothes and without headscarves, as they would appear to members of their household, not members outside it. In other words, they were not dressed for public appearance.


14. We deliberately use the word “collaborator” in this article in order to move away from older formulations, like “informant” and “interlocutor” in order to recognize and suggest that the researcher works collaboratively in the field with people. These people are as integral to the research process as the researcher.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


DISCOGRAPHY


**SELECT DIGITAL PROJECTS**


