

Analytical Stories, Ethnography, and Cultural Values

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This paper uses two vignettes to explore relationships between author-driven analysis and ethnographic encounters. In the first vignette, a song analysis is informed by ethnography and designed, both in content and mode of delivery, to re-inscribe ideas from the culture. This vignette involves the “soul of a *niggun*” (a wordless Hassidic song); the cultural ideas have to do with temporal experience and the relationship between song and prayer. I presented the analysis in a public forum; a video excerpt will be shown and discussed. In the second vignette, I struggle with a tension between anonymous notation in the practice of music analysis and individual orality in the experience of practitioners of Jewish Biblical chant. I analyze elements of improvisation, pacing, dynamics, and timbre in recordings from my fieldwork. I also reflect on the possibilities and limitations of music analysis vis-à-vis personal connections formed through music and ritual.

The larger goal of the paper is to enrich our discussion of methodology in analytical approaches to world music so that it is not only about the terms and methods of representation, but also about the stories that we tell and how they relate to cultural ideas and values.