

UNESCO on the Ground: Local Perspectives on Intangible Cultural Heritage.* Michael Dylan Foster and Lisa Gilman, eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. 180 pp.

Review by Timothy Lloyd

This volume is the second in the Indiana University Press's "Encounters: Explorations in Folklore and Ethnomusicology" series, intended to repurpose journal special issues into book format in a timely manner. The provenance of *UNESCO on the Ground* is as follows: 2011 discussions among some of the authors led to a session on the topic at the 2012 annual meeting of the American Folklore Society, followed by initial publication (also by the Indiana University Press) as Volume 52, Number 2-3 of the *Journal of Folklore Research* in 2015, and subsequent publication in book format in the same year.

The book presents the "on the ground" perspectives of particular "individuals [and communities] grappling on a grassroots level with the ramifications of UNESCO [intangible cultural heritage, or ICH] decisions" (2) as a complement to other studies of ICH policy and practice (such as Bendix, Eggert, and Peselmann's *Heritage Regimes and the State*, Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2012) that work at the nation-state level. These perspectives are presented in six case studies, given similar shape by the editors through their requirement that each essay follow this pattern: (1) an introduction to the ICH element; (2) a summary of the cultural, geographic, and cultural background and context of the element; (3) a "when, where, why, who, and how" (9) description of the ICH element; (4) the current status of the ICH element with relation to UNESCO review, designation, and protection; (5) individual and community on-the-ground perspectives regarding the element; and (6) a concluding discussion and contextualization. This requirement does not constrain the value of the case studies; in fact, it enhances them by making them more closely comparable.

Preceding the case studies, Michael Dylan Foster's introduction provides a brief overview of UNESCO'S 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; outlines the intellectual tradition of folklorists paying careful attention to the complexities of local situations, which he terms "esocultural" (4); and reminds us that local, national, and international ICH entities and processes always interact.

In the case studies, Leah Lowthorp describes the Kutiyattam Sanskrit theater of Kerala State in southwestern India; Kyoim Yun examines the Yöngdüng Rite, a shamanic ritual from Cheju Island off the southern coast of South Korea; Lisa Gilman reports on the Vimbuza healing ritual of northern Malawi; Michael Dylan Foster outlines the Toshidon ritual on the island of Shimo-Koshikijima off the southwestern coast of Japan; Carol Silverman assays the Teškoto men's dance of western Macedonia; and Ziyang You details the tradition called "visiting sacred relatives in Hongtong" in China's Shanxi Province.

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Collectively, the case studies reinforce many of the same difficulties and paradoxes noted by studies working at a larger level of attempts to fix traditions into official, standardized versions. Generally, things turn out to be much more complicated than they first appear. Unforeseen, and mostly negative, consequences are the norm. Costs, often disproportionate, accompany or closely follow almost every benefit. The primary value of *UNESCO on the Ground* is that it reaches and reinforces these conclusions through modest, local, esocultural examples, and that focus is its major contribution to the scholarly discourse. Happily, that contribution is supported by the authors' and editors' definite commitment to clear, straightforward language and style.

Taking the role of respondents to these case studies in print (though their authors did not take part in the 2012 AFS annual meeting session), three concluding essays expand on and complement the case-study conversation, providing valuable background and interpretation. Anthony Seeger provides an extremely helpful practical ethnography of the UNESCO organization and its ICH enterprise that opens up the UNESCO "black box," and makes clear that there is no single "UNESCO" entity or process. Valdimar Hafstein humorously and effectively interprets the ICH process, via epidemiology, as one of the diagnosis and treatment of a disease. Dorry Noyes grounds her essay in the idea (an old one to folklorists) of comparison, which she pursues by pulling out and examining the patterns and variations of local practice, and the outcomes of ICH recognition, in the case studies. As she notes, this volume foregrounds comparison as a technique through trying out insights by "imposing a common but temporary framework of analysis" (164). She suggests in conclusion that humble, careful work on the ground by communities and folklorists may provide workable futures for local cultural expressions both inside and outside the transnational ICH system. It is particularly gratifying that *UNESCO on the Ground* ends with such a modestly positive recommendation. *UNESCO on the Ground* would have been strengthened by case studies from Latin America, Australia, and Oceania along with those from Africa, Asia, and Europe that it includes. (North America, for better or for worse, is not present in this volume; as of this writing at least, neither Canada nor the United States has signed UNESCO's ICH Convention.) Nevertheless, this is an excellent and useful book for both individual and classroom learning.

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