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George Herzog: A Contemporary Look at His Work and Ideas

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In part I of "George Herzog: A Contemporary Look at His Work and Ideas," Daniel Reed discussed the early influences on George Herzog in his studies in Berlin and at Columbia University, and the ways in which scholars defined "primitive music" during the first half of the twentieth-century. We are pleased to continue here with part II of his article.

REPRESENTATION OF THE "OTHER"

Intimately connected with the notion of primitive peoples and music is the issue of how these peoples and music were represented in academic writing of the time. Just as the field of study and the study object were defined broadly, primitive peoples and their arts tended to be characterized in rather broad and sometimes monolithic, homogenous terms. For example, anthropologist Eduard Sapir's 1929 article involving one relatively small group of people in Liberia was named "The Voice of Africa: Some Gwaebó Proverbs" (Sapir 1929). Herzog and Courlander shared with the readers of the African stories they published (*The Cow-Tail Switch*, 1947) such facts as "Cleanliness of body and home is carefully observed in Negro Africa. Africans bathe in hot water in the morning and again in the evening after they have returned home from their daily tasks" (Courlander and Herzog 1947:139). Implicit in such portrayals of Africa is a tendency common among anthropologists at the time: The desire to esteem primitive peoples. Much like Malinowski in his writings of the same period which attempted to show that Trobriand islanders were able to think in rational, scientific terms like civilized peoples in the West (Malinowski

1948), Herzog reacted against social evolutionary thought by arguing that primitives were not so "primitive" after all.

Describing a Liberian parable about the subject of time, Herzog in 1947 wrote, "The personification of Time is one of many examples which show that 'primitives' are by no means incapable of abstraction, as is sometimes maintained" (1947:137). Discussing West African drum signaling, he wrote that "signaling as a technique is intricately interwoven with phenomena of social life and structure; it displays the same type of sophistication which we know of African music and folklore" (Herzog 1945:218). Likewise, in his book on Jabo proverbs, Herzog wrote: "The wide range of applicability and the ease with which the meaning of a proverb can at times shade into its opposite, suggest that in Africa the use of proverbs may become an intricate and artistic intellectual exercise" (Herzog 1936b:6). In a sense, Herzog constructed the entire introduction to this book as a counter argument to "theories which hold that the mental processes of the 'primitive' are prelogical" (Herzog 1936b:12). Herzog and many of his contemporaries clearly wished to esteem primitive peoples--an honorable mission motivated by good intentions. Yet, in so doing, they perpetuated colonial distinctions between themselves and a faceless 'other.' Individual voices of the people they studied were often lost within the portrayal of a "primitive" world.

Looking behind the scenes at Herzog's correspondence, one sometimes uncovers less favorable representations of primitive peoples. More specifically, these writings suggest a perpetuation of ideas of Western colonial domination and the backwardness of the "other." Ruth Stone has analyzed a letter Herzog wrote to Fay Cooper Cole at the National Research Council just before his 1930 trip to Liberia. As Stone points out, Herzog's relationship with his field assistant, Liberian George Blooah, is portrayed as asymmetrical, even patronizing. In this letter, Herzog states that upon arrival in Liberia, that *he himself* will have to establish himself and Blooah with the Liberian authorities, and that banking will be better handled by him alone. The West and primitive African are contrasted in the letter as

well. Herzog promises he will write to Cole from the field, writing "I will have to investigate first, how much of the mail in Liberia disappears in the ocean or is disposed of by similar efficient methods, before I could be certain of the percentage of my accounts actually reaching the shores of Western civilization." Likewise, Herzog wrote that he would have access to "White missionaries" as well as the seaport of Cape Palmas, neither too far from his field site, so that his research team would be "within easy reach of anything we may need" (Herzog 1929c:2). Thus, he emphasized both the remoteness of his field site and his connections to "Western civilization" as a kind of safety net to provide those essentials that he would need that were unavailable in wild Liberia. As Stone comments, "Herzog alternately seemed to indicate control of the situation, dominating even his research assistant, and at other times emphasized the isolation, remove, and primitiveness of the field site, making his control all the more heroic" (Stone 1992:4).

AUTHORITY AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE INFORMANT

Explicit in Herzog's letter to Cole, and implicit in much of his other published works of the era, is the issue of the scholar's authority in relation to the informant. As Stone points out, the scholar's voice has often dominated written ethnographies, which often describe "one-sided acts of the researcher" and leave the people being studied silent (Stone 1992:1).

Eduard Sapir also worked with George Blooah in writing his articles about Gwaebos peoples. Some of the same issues evident in Herzog's letter to Cole come to the fore in analyzing the way Blooah is portrayed in Sapir's publications. Sapir, in discussing the credentials of his research assistant, emphasizes Blooah's Western education. Blooah "received his education" from White missionaries in Liberia before moving on to the U.S. to continue study at the University of Chicago. Implied, of course, is that no other "education" took place in Blooah's life among his own people; Blooah only became "educated" through his contacts with the West (Sapir 1929:183). Herzog wrote that Blooah was "taught to write his language phonetically" by researchers in Chicago, portraying Blooah as the passive recipient of Western knowledge (Herzog 1936b:1). Again, the West was portrayed as the ultimate authority, and only through contact with this authority was Blooah's credibility established.

Herzog's correspondence reveals even more the way he conceived of his relationship with Blooah. In 1931, Herzog received a letter from P.B. Byrne, Assistant Secretary of the Chicago World's Fair Centennial Celebration, inquiring about Blooah, who was apparently interested in setting up "an African exhibit" in the centennial celebration exposition. Byrne wrote:

... we understand that ... Charles G. Blooah ... is under your supervision. We are not, at this time, particularly desirous to know his financial rating, but rather whether or not he is honest and trustworthy and

pays his bills, and if we attempt to do anything through him to obtain such an exhibit, that any moneys collected by him will be honestly and properly accounted for ... Reports received concerning Mr. Blooah are not entirely satisfactory (Byrne 1931:1).

Herzog replied:

... I may say that my contacts with Mr. Blooah are of a purely scientific nature so that I am hardly in a position to comment on his trustworthiness. I may add, however, that according to my experience, some phases of our standards of legal or financial responsibility prove at times too intricate to be grasped by natives of Africa (of whom Mr. Blooah is one). This, then, can easily lead to entanglements, no matter how unintentionally (Herzog 1931a:1).

It is important to note that by this time, Herzog and Blooah had spent a considerable amount of time together, meeting in the U.S. and negotiating their trip to Liberia, travelling by ship to Africa, during which time Blooah taught Herzog his language, spending most of the year 1930 together working in Liberia, sailing back together, and continuing at least a close professional relationship in Chicago for nine months or so before this letter was written. Yet, Herzog puts considerable distance between him and Blooah in this letter, portraying their relationship as "purely scientific"; in fact, given only the information in this letter, Herzog could just as well be describing his relationship to an organism in a petrie dish. Furthermore, while Herzog's published writing on this subject represents Africans as logical and sophisticated, in this letter he constructs a representation of Africans in which they are incapable of grasping the more complex Western world of "intricate" legal and financial standards. Writing to Kroeber that same year, Herzog again described Blooah as a kind of passive scientific object:

Blooah is still around but soon he will be kicked

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upward; for the time being, he is being oscillated between becoming a case-history to a psychoanalyst (who wants to make him a disciple, for the benefit of Anthropology and the oppressed races of Africa) and swelling the Dept. of Anthropology. . . (Herzog 1931b:1).

In this same letter, Herzog describes his busy schedule, made more hectic by "Keeping him (Blooah) alive" (1931b: 1), suggesting that he was providing for or sponsoring Blooah's time in Chicago.

All in all, Blooah completely lacks agency in these letters. The portrayal of him is more akin to a scientific specimen--a source of scholarly fascination--than to a human being. I am not deriding our ethnomusicological forefathers; rather, I am outlining through Herzog's and others' words some elements of the historical context in which they worked.

In fact, Herzog in this respect is far from one-

...we as scholars assume a certain authority without which the type of work we do would not be possible.

dimensional. I have found many instances in which Herzog lent credence to indigenous voices of the people he studied, including Blooah. For example, Herzog devotes an entire section of his article on West African drum signaling to "Native theory and terminology" (Herzog 1945:230-2). Likewise, Herzog called for the necessity of learning the "native classification" of songs when recording primitive music (Herzog 1936a:15). While he may not have paid as much heed to analysis of indigenous terms and concepts as we do today ("Partial as these native theories are, they are not without interest" [1945:232]), the fact that he interested himself in them at all places Herzog well ahead of his time.

Despite the depersonalized accounts of his relationship to Blooah in letters, Herzog credited Blooah in publications, as did Sapir. Blooah is officially credited prominently next to the author's name as the "assistant" in both Sapir's "The Voice of Africa" ("Assisted by Charles G. Blooah") and Herzog's *Jabo Proverbs* ("With The Assistance of Charles G. Blooah") (Sapir 1929; Herzog 1936b). Even more striking is the fact that, in later publications of his own, Herzog effectively elevated Blooah to status of co-author of *Jabo Proverbs* (George Herzog and Charles G. Blooah, *Jabo Proverbs from Eastern Liberia*, Oxford University Press, 1936" in *The Cow-Tail Switch*, Courlander and Herzog, 1947: 139). And in the text of *Jabo Proverbs*, Blooah received direct credit for his ideas: a "B" follows each section of the book that Herzog determined was contributed by Blooah (see p. vi of *Jabo Proverbs* for explanation). Finally, Herzog warmly acknowledges and thanks Blooah in the book's Forward, further giving voice and identity to his "assistant" (Herzog 1936b:

viii).

Yet, just as is still true today, Herzog was clearly in control of whether or not his subjects of study would receive a voice, or credit, in written publication. This is simply a fact of our enterprise--that is, we as scholars assume a certain authority without which the type of work we do would not be possible. Yet, this assumption of authority took somewhat different, and sometimes more blatant, forms during Herzog's career than it often does today. Herzog's correspondence shows numerous examples of scholars trading recordings and ideas back and forth, determining for themselves what issues to prioritize with regard to the "materials" for their publications. Perhaps most striking was the correspondence between Herzog and the Evans sisters, Bessie and M.G., who used Herzog's transcriptions and recordings for their book *American Indian Dance Steps* (1931). These three scholars wrote back and forth at least five times discussing relatively minute details of the music sound represented by Herzog's transcriptions. Impressive for their attention to detail, these letters reveal scholars discussing among themselves what is important in representations of music long removed from the context of the people who created it. Again, the voices of the performers are silent (Herzog 1931c; Evans and Evans 1931).

Turning back to the press, we see in a *Seattle Post Intelligence* article about Herzog's 1952 visit to the University of Washington campus a clear example of the assumption of academic authority and its representation to the general public. Including a photograph with the revealing caption "DR. GEORGE HERZOG: Knows Primitive Music," the article portrays Herzog as a specialist with the authority to decide what is good and bad in native American music. Under the headline, "EXPERT LAUDS INDIAN MUSIC," the article reads:

A noted anthropologist Friday termed the "Indian Love Call" and the "Waters of Minnetonka" strictly "musical junk" when compared to native melodies of Pacific Northwest Indians. . . "The [Northwest Indian] music is rich and varied, showing true artistry," Dr. Herzog said. "It is an indication that the early Indians of this area had a more sophisticated culture than primitive peoples in most of North America. Some of the music is good enough for a concert tour" (*Seattle Post Intelligence* 9-15-52).

Herzog, by virtue of his scholarly credentials, was able to proclaim to the public not only the value of selected primitive musics, but the level of sophistication of whole culture groups. Of course, this sense of sophistication is based simply on a few recordings judged according to Western ideals. Just as any tendency toward Western-style rational thought among primitives was laudable, so any music that could be presented in a Western concert setting was worthy of authoritative praise.

Yet another issue that has emerged from Herzog's publications and letters was the issue of ownership of recorded materials and musical ideas. While today the issue of copyright law is beginning to be discussed in ethnomusicological circles (see Seeger 1992a:345-59), during Herzog's period standards of

ownership were quite different. I mentioned above the way that recordings were sent around and borrowed by scholars for various research purposes. One such exchange took place between Herzog and anthropologist Rachel Commons. Herzog wrote to Commons in 1932, asking to borrow recordings she had made so that he could "work on them" (presumably analyze them musically). Herzog wrote, "Of course, technically they are the property of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. . ." (Herzog 1932:1). These records were not the property of the Native American musicians who sang them, nor of their tribe, nor even of Commons who had recorded them; rather, they were the property of the department within which she was working when she made the recordings. Thus, music of other peoples was (and still is) freely transferred and "worked on" by scholars without consideration being given to the possibility of the music "belonging" to the musicians who created it.

Similarly, Herzog wrote frequently about the utility of preserving primitive music for future use by Western composers. In an application essay for a Guggenheim fellowship, he wrote: "The music of our age has much to gain from a study of Indian music. . . the songs, when presented in adequate form, can be utilized by our modern composers" (Herzog 1933b:2). Again, there was no consideration of the ownership rights of the original performers of the music. Once recorded, these songs

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were available as useful material to inspire or be incorporated by composers into their compositions. This phenomenon has continued in more recent decades, as Western recording artists have incorporated into their own recorded compositions actual field recordings themselves, building these compositions around "exotic" sounds of primitive peoples (for example, see Mitchell 1975 or Byrne and Eno 1981).

However, Herzog did mention the issue of ownership in a short 1935 article on the subject of recording Primitive Music:

On the Northwest Coast of American and among primitives in some other places, this sense of songs as property approaches our ideas of copyright. This 'property sense' for songs naturally conditions negotiations between collector and informant (Herzog 1935b:190).

Unfortunately, Herzog did not go on to discuss exactly how this property sense conditioned interactions between collector and informant. Still, the fact that he mentioned ownership at all as an issue is to be considered unique during this era.

As I have mentioned, the method of intensively analyzing recordings that one may or may not have actually

recorded oneself originated in von Hornbostel's time, but continued to be a common method during Herzog's period in America. The obvious result of such study is a complete silence of indigenous voices in the resulting work. When Herzog and the Evans sisters discussed back and forth the way certain passages in a Sun Dance song should be conceived, in what time signature, what exact note, etc., they were adopting and assuming the authority to decide for themselves. For an expert, these answers were in the text; no discussions with the musicians were necessary.

Similarly, when a native voice was required, one was sufficient to represent an entire culture group. For example, when Sapir studied Gwaebol language, Blooah was his sole informant, which was sufficient for Sapir to write with confidence and authority about the language of an entire African ethnic group (Sapir 1930:30).

Yet, here again Herzog shows a glimmer of awareness of the limitations of doing research out of context of the people he studied. In discussing new technologies being developed for sound recording analysis in 1936, Herzog wrote:

It should not be overlooked, however, that the more refined the technic becomes, the more its material is taken out of context. The more "objective" and microscopic the technic, the more distortion is apt to be introduced by the inevitable separation from the setting in which the material functions (Herzog 1936a:8).

Herzog demonstrates a remarkable level of awareness here, yet it is nonetheless a limited awareness; while he was aware that more microscopic techniques of analysis are less contextually-grounded, I wonder to what extent he considered just how out of context the entire enterprise of detailed sound analysis was, without the aid of indigenous guidance. Occasionally there are other clues of his awareness; in fact, the following quotation suggests recognition of the limitations of his methods and of his circumstances: "The field worker in primitive music is seldom in the position to extend his study into attempting to acquire on the spot a very intimate knowledge of tribal life—a life which in North America has become impoverished or has vanished altogether (Herzog 1936a: 6). Thus, since the way of life that he *would* study has vanished, it made perfect sense to do his analyses of music sound in isolation.

But isolation from context can result in significant misunderstanding, and often did for Herzog and his associates. For instance, Herzog in 1934 wrote to Andrade, who did research in Central America: "Too bad there is no Indian music (apparently not, anyhow) among the Maya" (Herzog 1934b:1). This statement might reveal a lack of contextual experience; on the other hand, it might point to another limitation that primitive music researchers placed upon themselves: that of studying only "pure" primitive music. Herzog may have been referring to the fact that there was no Maya music that was not in some way affected by the Spanish presence in the region—a much more reasonable assertion. Concern for purity emerges as a constant theme in Herzog's writing. In 1936, he lamented the emerging phenomenon of the folk festival on the grounds that

"singers from different areas are brought into contact with each other" thus permanently tainting previously pure musical styles (1936a:49). Music could be kept pure and could be studied in its pure form by "capturing" it on "objective records" (Herzog 1936a:3, 14).

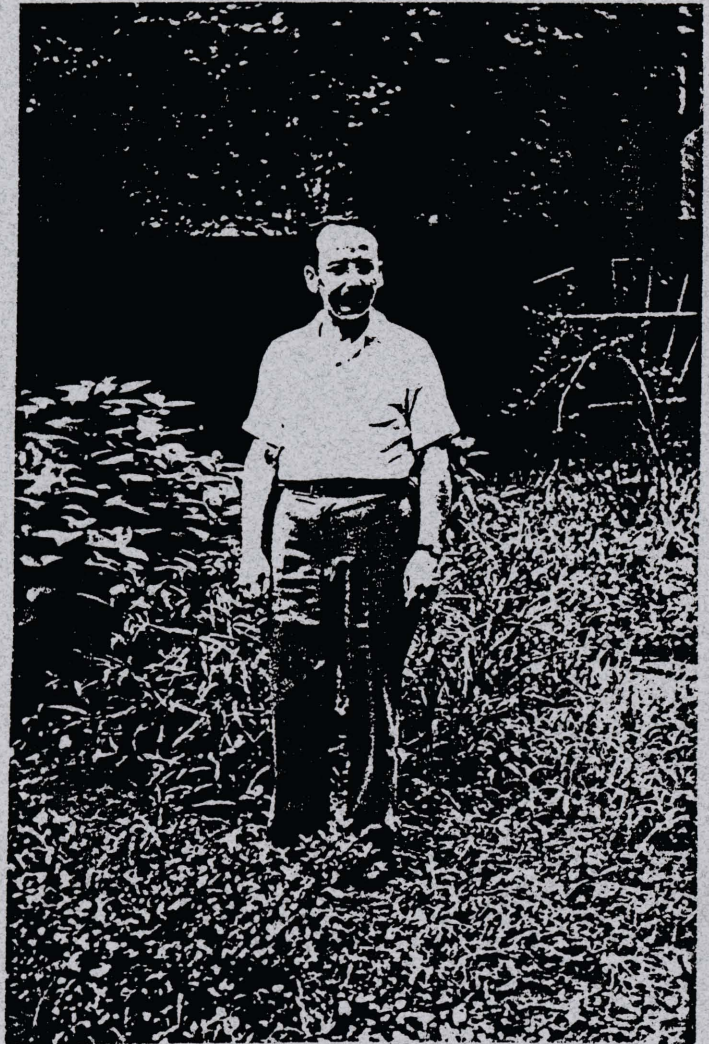
HERZOG'S WORK PRESAGING THE FUTURE

A pattern has clearly developed by now in this discussion: that I can no sooner discuss work of Herzog that appears limited from our perspective before I am compelled to discuss work of Herzog that to some extent predicts or is more in alignment with ethnomusicological ideas today. In fact, Herzog's attempt to unify the field (*Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States*, 1936) contains many ideas that resonate with standard notions of ethnomusicological thought today. I have shown above that Herzog valued music in pure isolation, in objective records, secure from the taint of outside sources. Yet, Herzog also predicted that, while commercial music may have been considered "hybrid and cheap" in 1936 from a scholar's point of view, "future research will find these same hybrid forms worthy of study" (Herzog 1936a:57). Time has certainly proven this prediction correct, as many ethnomusicologists today concern themselves with popular and other "hybrid" forms of music.

Furthermore, while Herzog valued "objective records" and conducted a great deal of research out of the context of the people he studied, he hinted at an awareness of the pitfalls of this type of research. Discussing technological innovations regarding methods of transcription and analysis, Herzog sounded a warning: "It should be emphasized, however, that while graphs of sound waves are more 'objective,' they are not real from the viewpoint of musical or esthetic experience" (Herzog 1936a:17). Again, Herzog's ideas can be seen as somewhat visionary, as he recognized the shortcomings of research methods that removed sound from human experience. Likewise, Herzog had a sophisticated notion of artistic creation and variation. He recognized the limitations of recordings and manuscripts in giving the impression of what we may call a "fixed text":

... our ideal and concept of the fixed artistic form communicated to future generations through written record, in the "true" or "correct" version, is to be contrasted with a more fluid form which is recreated rather than "reproduced" every time it is performed. . . . The costs of music printing, however, often prevent publishing more than one "characteristic" version of the melody. . . . what has been published so far in extended form has been offered without an analysis of variation (Herzog 1936a:11-12).

Herzog went on to suggest printing multiple transcriptions of the same songs in ethnomusicological publications in order to more accurately represent music as fluid. Similarly, Herzog portrayed Jabo proverbs not as static forms that are passed down but as verbal forms that exhibit "flexibility in imagery, thinking and application." He wrote:



George Herzog, New York, early 1940s

Proverbs may be one means by which tradition and the community domineers over the individual in primitive society; but this flexibility indicates that the individual may make terms with both tradition and the group (Herzog 1936b:14).

Thus, Herzog suggested a fairly sophisticated notion of the individual and group interaction in the human creative process, as opposed to the static notion of tradition that was dominant during this era.

As I have already shown, Herzog valued "native" ideas about music. I have also discussed examples in which Herzog's perspective on primitive music was to a great extent trapped in notions about music in the West. Yet, he believed strongly in recognizing the importance of "studying Indian music as special forms developed in a special setting," at one point criticizing music researcher John C. Fillmore, who argued that Indian song exhibited an "implicit" feeling for harmony (Herzog 1936a:4). Herzog wrote on numerous occasions about the ways musical categories of the West are not necessarily cross-cultural:

Music, it appears, is not a universal language. Features which in one style carry a certain emotional or symbolic value may have an entirely different significance in another style, or may function in an entirely different realm (Herzog 1936a:7).

Herzog also wrote of the importance of recognizing that ideas about music do not necessarily align across cultures:

... the element of aesthetic appreciation is not absent from primitive life, although the forms in which it is expressed and enjoyed may not be strictly equivalent to our own. To miss this lack of direct equivalence would be to miss one of the most important "experiences" the collector can undergo or transmit (Herzog 1935b:181).

In these quotations, Herzog emphasizes that categories of musical thought are culture-bound, and that awareness of the differences between cultures is a critical aspect of the "experience" of the researcher.

In certain passages, Herzog also foreshadows today's trend toward personal involvement (participation) and personal awareness (reflexivity) in music research. I was shocked to read his account of learning to play "every signal, first on one drum, then on two . . ." as part of his methodology for learning about Liberian drum signaling, more than twenty years before Mantle Hood's *The Ethnomusicologist* (1971) made performance fashionable as a method (Herzog 1945:221-2). While I have shown that Herzog preferred to study primitive arts that remained pure and had not mixed with other cultures, he was apparently comfortable with the idea that *his* presence had impact on the material he collected. Regarding the collection of Jabo proverbs, he wrote:

Many proverbs were quoted by the natives in connexion with the expedition's stay. The circumstances under which a proverb was quoted were always recorded, no matter how trivial the occasion. It is hoped that this background will give the reader a view of native life, of the manner in which proverbs function and are applied and, incidentally, of the native's attitude towards the white man who is temporarily his neighbour (Herzog 1936b:vi).

That Herzog would take into account, and write about, the impact of his presence on the materials he collected was extraordinary for his time.

The manner of presentation of the text in *Jabo Proverbs* is also quite impressive. Herzog published the text in the Jabo language, followed by a literal translation in English, and finally a version in common English language usage. Herzog wanted to extend this kind of linguistic detail to the study of sung text as well:

It ought to become standard practice that whenever native music is recorded, the cooperation of qualified linguists be made part of the work of recording and

analysis; many basic musical features can be fully appreciated and understood only when they are seen in conjunction with poetic and textual detail (Herzog 1990 [1942]:206-7).

Again, Herzog presaged what would become standard practice in the discipline. Not only have ethnomusicologists drawn heavily on linguistic theoretical models, but understanding language to the point of being able to unpack indigenous terminology has also become the norm for many ethnographers of music.

In conclusion, Herzog emerges as a scholar who perhaps deserves more credit for innovation than he has received. While Herzog in many ways exemplifies the historical period in which he worked, in other respects his work appears as nearly visionary. Nettl writes that Herzog was innovative in the way that he "combines approaches from various sources" while also providing a strong leadership role and publishing "practical, evenhanded, and comprehensive models" (Nettl 1991:272). This interdisciplinary approach resonates with much ethnomusicological study today.

Herzog clearly deserves credit for his practical and sometimes innovative ideas. Yet, there also is much in Herzog's work that many of us today would probably prefer not to repeat. Some of the issues that emerge from this study are not so easily avoidable, though. Individual voices were often lost in the grand scheme of Herzog's studies of "primitive peoples." At other points, Herzog gave voice to the people he studied much as we try to do today, albeit always invoking his scholarly authority to do so--an authority that shows remnants of an elite, dominating culture in control. This dynamic remains with those of us engaged in cross-cultural study of music today.

In this article, I have explored multiple dimensions of Herzog's work, from the perspective of both his and my historical contexts. By looking at the disjunctures between the various ways Herzog represented himself and was represented by others, we can gain a more holistic sense of Herzog's contributions to the field. Furthermore, this historical study can serve to remind us of issues that remain central to the ethnomusicological enterprise.

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