

Arguing with Songs: An anthropological approach to music, ideology, and gendered subjectivity

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Arguing with Songs

An anthropological approach to music, ideology, and gendered subjectivity

“You cannot argue with a song” (Bloch 1974:71)

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This article seeks to problematize the anthropological tendency to view music as an autonomous force, suggesting that it may be better viewed as a discursive medium. It draws on existing anthropological, sociological, and musicological literature to argue that analogously to language and sound, the locus of the power of music lies less in its form and more in the various ways in which it is produced, circulated, consumed, and performed in culturally specific ways. Gendered ideology is located in these concrete, material actions of musical production, circulation, consumption, and performance; hence these musical activities serve to constitute the gendered subject in relation to dominant ideological power structures. Ultimately, by suggesting a way in which anthropologists could think productively with issues of music, gender, power, and agency, the article highlights the need to narrow the perceived disciplinary distance between anthropology and ethnomusicology.

KEY WORDS agency, gender, ideology, music, power, subjectivity

If one group accepts the sound of wind in the trees as music and another does not, or if one group accepts the croaking of frogs and the other denies it as music, it is evident that [different] concepts of what music is ... must distinctively shape music sound. [Merriam 1964:63]

Insofar as what constitutes ‘the musical’ is based on a subjective, culturally-constructed, and individually-contested dichotomy between music and noise, it has proven almost impossible to find a stable, analytically useful definition of the concept (Nattiez 1990).¹ A definition of music as we know it, as “combining vocal or instrumental sounds to produce beauty of form, harmony, melody, rhythm, [and] expressive content”² is inadequate in that it is largely a reflection of Western aesthetic philosophy whereby “beauty is irrevocably tied up with art” (Merriam 1964:266). For the purposes of this cross-cultural analysis, then, I take as my starting point Farnsworth’s broad idea of music as “socially acceptable patterns of sound” (1958:17). This allows space for the inevitable cultural variation in the “aesthetic attitude” which constitutes the definition of music (Merriam 1964:270; see also Nattiez 1990).

The key focus of this article is a theorization of music as representing an ideological discursive medium akin to language and sound, which constitutes gendered subjectivity by bringing 'gendered-selves' into being through power. In working towards this conclusion, the structure of the argument will be as follows. In the first section, I will trace the history of music in anthropology from structuralism to post-structuralism, arguing that what unites these seemingly disparate schools of thought is the idea that music is an autonomous, powerful force. Beyond this, I suggest instead that the locus of the power of music lies less in its form and more in the various ways in which it is produced, circulated, and consumed in culturally specific ways (DeNora 2000; see also Marx 1867). The second section argues that musical ideology is not separable from but rather located in the material actions of musical production, circulation, and consumption, which serve to constitute the subject through ideology and power (Althusser 1971; Kulick 2003; Rice 2003). I will elaborate the analytical validity of incorporating this theoretical stance into the anthropology of music by means of an analogy with the discursive media of language and sound. The third section explores the ways in which the framework elaborated in the first two sections illuminates the ways in which the production, circulation, consumption, and performance of music, in certain contexts, constitutes women's gendered subjectivity by calling into being the 'gendered-self' (Butler 1995, 1997; Althusser 1979). The fourth and final section considers some of the ways in which the constitution of gendered subjectivity through music also subtly enables opportunities for the enactment of women's agency (Mahmood 2005, 2001).

Embedded within this argument are two broader aims. Firstly, this argument expands on the argument of a group of scholars who have called for the recognition of the phenomenological significance of sound and in doing so point to music as a medium of power and social control in its contribution to the formation of subjectivity (Feld 1988; Feld and Brenneis 2004). Secondly, in recognizing that language, sound, and music have in common their inseparability from power relations and their mobilization to constitute gendered subjectivity, it can also be viewed as an attempt to narrow the perceived disciplinary distance between ethnomusicology and anthropology. It is curious to me that anthropologists have theorized language and sound as discursive media, yet music continues to be mostly viewed as the preserve of ethnomusicologists, occupying only a marginal space in anthropological literature.

Music in anthropology: an autonomous force?

What place has music held thus far within anthropology? Many have pointed to what they view as its notable absence in the literature (see Feld and Brenneis 2004; Samuels et al. 2010). In response to Clifford's question "what of the ethnographic ear?" a group of scholars have argued for recognition that the aural dimension of social life is as important as, if not more important than, the visual dimension in terms of human existence (1986:12; Erlmann 2004; Feld 1988; Feld & Brenneis 2004; Rice 2003; Stoller 1984; Spray 2011). This can be seen as an attempt to break away from the Western epistemological overemphasis on observation, from the elevation of writing to the status of the most productive anthropological tool, and from the uncritical use of grand theoretical frameworks in contexts where they are likely to be inapplicable.³

However, whilst this growing body of literature is crucial in working towards a more reflexive anthropology, we should be apprehensive of taking Clifford's question at face value. Clifford and others are perhaps incorrect to posit that the importance of the aural has been wholly ignored in anthropological practice. Rather, music has been present, even if only at the sidelines of the discipline, but has been misrepresented by both structuralist and post-structuralist anthropologists. It has repeatedly been theorized as an autonomous force, which is inadequate insofar as the real locus of musical power is to be found in the musical means of production; that is, in the production, circulation, and consumption of music by human beings (DeNora 2000; Godelier 1986; McClary 1991; see also Merriam 1964).

Some of the earliest mentions of music in anthropology are found in the work of Levi-Strauss (1978, 1969). His structuralist framework led him to establish a theoretical perspective whereby he perceived music to be analogous to, and representative of social structure. In the same way in which social institutions can only be considered relative to one another, musical notes only gain meaning when they are combined to contrast with each other. In other words, just as we cannot consider the social institution of marriage without considering its relation to politics in any given society, we must understand the relative relationships of musical notes to one another in order to comprehend an entire piece of music. Two further analogies proposed by Levi-Strauss (1978, 1969) are illustrative here. Firstly, the same principles apply to mythology; myths only make logical sense in their entirety. Secondly, the same is taken to be applicable for language, whereby a word only gains meaning in relation to other words which together form a system of culturally coherent symbols (see also Saussure 1916, 1983).⁴ Furthermore, underlying myth, music, and language are a series of binary oppositions which reveal the central contradictions of any given society. Ultimately, for structuralist thinkers, music, mythology, or language, given that they are social institutions in and of themselves make sense only insofar as they work with, and most importantly *mirror*, the entire cultural system of which they are a part whereby "changes in one element produce changes in other elements" (Merriam 1964:247; see also Levi-Strauss 1979, 1969; Uzendoski et al. 2005).

The work of Merriam (1964) and Uzendoski et al. (2005) follows clearly in this structuralist tradition. Firstly, Merriam (1964) argues that the dichotomous distinctions in the roles of children vis-à-vis adults and men vis-à-vis women are universally reflected in musical structure, which is reminiscent of the ways in which Levi-Strauss (1978, 1969) assumed the underlying structures of society to exist in the form of a series of binary oppositions.⁵ In pushing the 'music reflects society' hypothesis even further, Merriam (1964) argues that in some contexts music is further reflective of kinship structure, religion, political organization, and economics. Similarly, Uzendoski et al. (2005) posit that the social institutions of myth and music exist in relation to one another in their argument that the songs of Napo Runa women living in Amazonian Ecuador are a microcosm of mythology insofar as they reflect the mythological qualities of a bird that forms a central part of Napo Runa cosmology (see also Feld 1988, 1990:44–85).

Anthropological theorizations of music have largely moved beyond a structuralist perspective and tend to explore how music has a productive role in the *creation* of society, as opposed to being a mere representation of it. Seeger's (2004) work with the Suyá, an

Amazonian group living in the Xingu National Park in Mato Grosso, Brazil, clearly follows in this line of thinking. Music, for the Suyá, actively creates and affirms the “fabric of social life” (2004:6) and serves to produce a feeling of communality (compare to Durkheim 1965). The central focus of his ethnography is the ‘Mouse Ceremony’: a fourteen day long ritual which marks the passage of a young boy into adulthood, of which music, as Seeger (2004) sees it, forms a central part in generating and highlighting the young boy’s new identity. He further demonstrates how music assists in the coordination of collective economic activities such as hunting, as well as having a central place in the consolidation of relationships between men and their relatives, between humans and animals, and more broadly between the Suyá and their cosmology (see also Campbell 1995; Samuels et al. 2010).

In a manner comparable to Seeger (2004), Bloch (1974) also attributes to music a more active role in creating social life in his discussion of a Merina circumcision ceremony in Madagascar. However, rather than viewing music as creating communality, he views it as a source of power. He describes Merina circumcision rituals as being dominated by the repetition of songs, which are of a formalized nature. By this he means that there exist strict rules concerning how the songs should be sung and received by the audience, which involve a denial of a choice of intonation or rhythm and a series of stringent ritualized responses to the song. He argues that this formalization is less a reflection of ritual authority and more the source of social control. As an inherent consequence of formalization, the idiosyncratic nature of each ritual becomes irrelevant given that the creative potential of the music is so limited. Ultimately, as the possibility for creativity for the individual singer diminishes, the authority stemming from the musical form increases. As Bloch concisely puts it, “you cannot argue with a song” (1974:71; see also Keane 1997; compare to Csordas 1987:463; Harding 2000:47).

Thus far, it may appear that these thinkers are approaching music from radically contrasting theoretical perspectives. Whereas Levi-Strauss (1978, 1969), Merriam (1964), and Uzendoski et al. (2005) see music as representative of social structure, Seeger (2010) essentially sees music as creating collective effervescence in the Durkheimian (1965) sense, and Bloch (1974) argues for the acknowledgement of the authority-inducing aspects of song. However, there is a common thread of thought running through most of these thinkers’ work. What unites Levi-Strauss (1978, 1969), Seeger (2010), and Bloch (1974) is that they all, albeit implicitly, see music as an autonomous, powerful force.⁶ Their work resonates with McClary’s suggestion that “Western culture ... has tried throughout much of its history to mask the fact that actual people usually produce the sounds that constitute music” (1991:136). Put simply, music for these thinkers has agency by itself (compare to McLuhan 2001 [1964]).

Levi-Strauss, (1978) with his focus on the meanings inherent in structure, allows little room for actions of human beings in his work. To take a concrete example of this, in his discussion of one of Johann Sebastian Bach’s fugues, he argues that the story told by this particular piece of music is one regarding the development of social relations between two groups, whereby one group is ‘good’ and the other ‘bad.’ The fugues represent the chase of one group by the other, and the ending of the piece is a musical rendition of how the conflict is eventually solved (see also 1969). In this analysis, the piece of music itself delivers its meaning. He consequently omits to consider that the power of music to convey

a certain message lies not in the musical score itself, but in the way in which the music is understood and received in different contexts (see also Nattiez 1990:26).

A similar issue is to be found in Seeger's (2004) work, which may sound a curious claim when viewed in the light of his devotion of an entire chapter of his ethnography to the origin of songs (2004:52–64). However, the agentive power that he attributes to music comes to the forefront in his discussion of the gendered nature of the ritual. He briefly notes that the female participation in the musical ritual is minimal and further states that the function of the ritual is social reproduction, which suggests to me that Suyá women are consciously denied a role in social reproduction — a denial facilitated with music (compare to Godelier 1986). Seeger (2004), however, overlooks the possibility that Suyá men manipulate music as a means to their own end of male superiority, instead locating the power of music to create male solidarity and female subordination in the agency of the musical form itself. Viewing music as having intrinsic power to create female subordination almost serves to naturalize and consolidate this subordination by making it appear to be inevitable, thus halting the possibility for social change.

Bloch (1974) likewise views music as autonomous in his analysis of the power of songs to generate religious authority in the Merina circumcision ritual. He follows Durkheim's (1965) argument that through participation in ritual, collective representations come to have a force of their own, a stance that arguably leads to the application of agency to songs. For Bloch, the authority which stems from the ritualized singing is not to be found in the *process* of formalization or in the context in which the songs are sung, but rather in the musical structure, whereby “power [emerges] through form” (1974:60; compare to Csordas 1987; Harding 2000:47). The omission of the composition process and of context leads to issues which can be illustrated via a brief hypothetical example: if the power of the song lies in the song itself, then singing a formalized song would have the same social effect if sung by a woman whilst she is fishing as it does when sung by an established elder in a circumcision ceremony. Given that this is clearly not the case, then it surely cannot stand that the power of the song lies in its structure (compare to Bloch 1974; see also Keane 1997).

Ultimately, then, music in anthropology has not been ignored, but it has been seriously misrepresented due to assumptions that the locus of the power of music lies in its form. In following an assumption that musical meanings are immanent, these anthropologists have misrecognized the ways in which musical meanings are constructed in a particular context by musical producers, circulators, and consumers (DeNora 2000; McClary 1991; Merriam 1964). These authors are clearly correct in bringing our attention to the power of music, but “music...is not a ‘force’ like gravity” (DeNora 2000:99). The power of music is attributed by human beings and as such, is intrinsically connected to the musical means of production (see further Marx 1867).

This proposition finds its ethnographic counterpart in the work of Godelier (1986). He argues that female inequality, for the Baruya of Papua New Guinea, stems from their restricted access to the mode of production and to the material means of communication. Sacred flutes, which are used to communicate with spirit mediums during the male initiation rites, are accessible by men only. Although women will inevitably hear the music from afar, their punishment for coming into close contact with the magical instruments

is death (compare to Stoller 1984:564). Locating the power of the music of the sacred flute to evoke female subordination in the musical form itself implies the subordination to be inevitable.⁷ By contrast, turning to an analysis in which we consider from the outset that musical power is intrinsically connected to the musical means of production leads to the realization that the music of the sacred flute cannot exist without being played and produced by men, which ultimately implies greater possibility for social change (compare to Seeger 2004; see also DeNora 2000; Godelier 1986; McClary 1991).

The musical means of production and musical ideology

Of course, we would be left with an incomplete picture if we only consider the production of musical ideology. Given that it is also necessary to consider the reproduction of ideology, the argument here seeks to follow thinkers like Foucault (1981, 1990, 1991, 1995) and Althusser (1971) in an attempt to break away from the classical Marxist (1867) view that there is a material base (the musical means of production) which gives rise to ideology (see also Irvine 1989). In this, I propose ideological musical discourse to be embedded in material actions, or more specifically, in its production, consumption, circulation, and performance, which ultimately constitutes subjectivity by bringing beings into power through “repeated performance of norms” (Mahmood 2001:211; see also Butler 1990, 1995, 1997).

Insofar as the most fruitful way to demonstrate what I mean by this is through an analogy with the discursive mediums of language and sound, there is some value to be retained from the analogy between language and music proposed by Levi-Strauss (1969, 1978). The focus of this section, however, lies less in language and music being similarly representative of social structure, and more in their analogous capabilities as ideological discursive media, which constitute individuals’ subjectivity by bringing them into being through power (compare to Foucault 1981). My development of this analogy will be threefold. Firstly, I will consider Althusser’s (1971) and secondly Kulick’s (2003) subtly different theorizations of the way in which language interacts with material actions in order to call subjects into being, thus playing a key role in constituting their subjectivity. Thirdly, Rice’s (2003) theorization of the ways in which sound produces a particular type of subject is pertinent in that it provides a bridge between language and music. This bridge lays the final groundwork for the remainder of this article as a marriage of theory and ethnography, in which I will demonstrate the broader benefits of moving towards a view of music as an ideological, discursive medium that is embedded in acts of production, circulation, and consumption. This theoretical stance, I later argue, can shed valuable light on the constitution of gendered subjectivity.

Althusser (1971) has hypothesized that at the precise moment in which an individual turns around on the street in response to a police officer shouting ‘Hey, you!’ he or she is brought into existence as a subject of all-pervasive state ideology. The reason that this act of hailing produces the subject is that the individual is always aware that the police officer’s shouting was addressed to him or her. In Althusser’s words, “the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him [or her] who is being hailed” (1971:174). Despite the importance of this analysis in terms of it bringing to light the connection between language and subject formation and the phenomenological action of turning around to face a figure of state authority, one limitation of Althusser’s (1971) analysis lies in his

implication that “recognition is the necessary and sufficient condition of subjectivity” (Dolar 1993:80). What if we were to complicate his analysis by suggesting that subjectivity can be constituted through language even while an individual is largely unaware of it?

Kulick (2003) adopts a line of thought that is in many ways comparable to that of Althusser (1971). He argues that uttering the word ‘no’ in certain situations serves to produce men and women as sexual subjects, which is somewhat analogous to the effect of Althusser’s (1971) police officer’s ‘Hey, you!’. For Kulick (2003), in the instance of heterosexual rape, for example, a woman’s ‘no’ uttered to a man is distorted to mean “keep trying” (2003:141). What is intended as a refusal of acknowledgement is interpreted as a form of acknowledgement. Consequently, women are repeatedly blamed for failing to state their refusal strongly enough, and ultimately the inferior subject position of ‘woman’ is produced and consolidated in part through the normative utterance ‘no.’ Ultimately, Kulick (2003) complicates, and thus moves beyond Althusser’s (1971) theorization of language and subject formation in that he does not take it as a given that the subject is even subconsciously aware of the ways in which enunciating the word ‘no’ inadvertently produces her as a sexual, inferior female subject (Dolar 1993:80, Kulick 2003; see also Lakoff 1975).

How might this be applicable to music? An exposure of a bridge between the ways in which language and music call subjects into being can be found in Rice’s (2003:4) ethnography conducted in the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary hospital, in which he discusses how sounds in a hospital work to bring patients into being as what he terms “patient selves” (see also Kapferer 1979:116). In contrast to Althusser (1971) and Kulick’s (2003) focus on language, for Rice (2003) the patient’s subjectivity is constituted through the non-linguistic acoustic dimensions of the hospital. The sounds of nursing staff preparing food, changing shifts, or rolling a medicine trolley along the floor, amongst other often intrusive noises, work towards the subconscious formation of the patient as a particular type of passive, docile subject (compare to Foucault 1995, 1991, 1981).⁸ Rice (2003) follows Foucault (1995, 1991, 1981) to argue that it always remains a possibility that the patient is under surveillance at any given time, in that the patient cannot see, and thus can never be sure whether he or she is being watched, which means that surveillance is self-perpetuating given the constant possibility of being watched. However, Rice’s (2003) work is also an attempt to move beyond Foucault’s (1995, 1991) emphasis on the ways in which control is exercised silently towards recognizing the monopolization of sound for the purposes of social control, whereby “sound appears to reinforce and complement the visual mechanism of authority rather than undermine it” (Rice 2003:8). Ultimately, then, for Rice (2003:4), hospital sounds function as a sonic form of surveillance, embedded in the material actions of doctors and nurses, which bring the patient into being as a specific type of docile “patient-self[f].”

Taking Rice’s (2003:4) analysis as a starting-point, the remainder of this article is an exploration of the ways in which the ideas developed in these first two sections can be seen to be applicable in a cross-cultural context. In other words, given that the power of music does not emerge from its form, how is it produced, circulated, and manipulated by human beings? How does it come to form an ideological discourse, which brings gendered subjects into being through power through the “repeated performance of norms” (Mahmood 2001:211; see also Butler 1990)?⁹

Music and gender: forming the 'gendered-self'

It has been noted elsewhere that the intricate connections between music and gender present fertile fields of study (see Stafford & Dodd 2013). Merriam has argued that gender differentiations are universally mirrored in music, or that “music reflects, and in a sense symbolizes, male-female roles” (1964:248). Some songs, musical instruments, or musical styles, insofar as he views them, will be inevitably reserved for men and others for women. He argues that this division can be made on a coercive, restrictive basis, or there may be mutual agreement that some musical styles or songs are more suited to men and others to women. Merriam’s (1964) argument, although certainly not universally applicable, does find some empirical support from Uzendoski et al. (2005) who in their work with the Amazonian Napo Runa argue that the gender differentiations of musical practice whereby women sing and men play instruments reflect complementary gender roles (see also Seeger 2004).

However, Merriam’s (1964) structuralist perspective is inadequate in its failure to address the highly consequential matter of who controls the production, circulation, consumption, and performance of musical discourse. It may well be the case that some musical instruments are reserved only for men, but to know whether these reservations are controlled by women has implications for the question of female autonomy (compare to Godelier 1986; Merriam 1964; Uzendoski et al. 2005). This section marries the theory developed in the previous two sections to an ethnography developed from sociology, musicology, and anthropology to demonstrate how such a perspective may illuminate gender relations. Insofar as music as a gendered ideology is concretely located in the material actions of production, circulation, consumption, and performance it can often be seen as playing a key role in constituting female subjectivity.¹⁰ In other words, I posit here that the material acts of music, in certain contexts, are inseparable from gendered power-relations and thus serve to bring into being the ‘gendered-self’ (see Althusser 1971; Butler 1990, 1995, 1997; Kulick 2003; Mahmood 2001, 2005; Rice 2003).

In the West, this ‘gendered-self’ tends to be forced into a normative gender binary of masculine-feminine, and is assumed to be heterosexual (Butler 1990; Halberstam 1998; Kulick 1997; Nanda 1986). These categories have reached an ethnographic brick wall when anthropologists have considered the constructed nature of gender, which has been illuminating of the fact that “many meanings that we perceive as ‘natural’ are the result of codified systems to which we have become acculturated” (Nattiez 1990:123). This codified, discursive system is often seen to be language, but music exists alongside language and also serves to naturalize gender roles, bringing the ‘gendered-self’ into being as a normative subject of dominant ideology (see also Cameron 1997).

DeNora (2000) takes this as her starting point in her focus on the connections between music, circulation and gender to consider their collaborative role in the formation of gendered subjectivity. Although her argument is grounded in England, her suggestion, if taken metaphorically, could be analytically fruitful if applied cross-culturally, analogously to the analytical usefulness of Althusser’s (1971) police officer. DeNora (2000) posits that the question of who has control over a record player is more than a trivial matter of creating a musical backdrop for a romantic situation, and much more than a reflection

of already existing gender hierarchies. The critical difference between being a man or a woman pressing ‘play’ on the record player is central to the question of sexual and gendered subjectivity. Insofar as it is an act which produces subjects as sexual, it cannot be seen as an apolitical attempt to create an intimate ambient environment (Engelke 2012; see also Kulick 2003; McClary 1991). Music, then, when viewed as an ideological discourse, “is much more than a decorative art...it is a powerful medium of social order” (DeNora 2000:163).

Similarly, McClary’s (1991) analysis of Western operatic musical discourse points to the ways in which it is manipulated primarily to constitute sixteenth-century female subjectivity as subordinate in relation to men. Taking as her starting point a departure from other musicologists who have persistently attempted to describe music in terms of its structure, she traces and deconstructs the male-biased nature of Western music on the analytical basis that “music is always a political activity, and to inhibit criticism of its effects is likewise a political act” (1991:26). In the West, during the 16th century, male and female linguistic utterances were considered to be radically different (see also Lakoff 1975). Whereas male rhetoric equated to intellect and power, female rhetoric was taken to be a manifestation of sexual prowess. Insofar as opera production was (and largely remains) a male-dominated sphere, the gender politics created a circulation of operatic discursive constructions of women as sexual, powerless subjects, which in turn served to consolidate these gender discriminations. Prior to opera production being unveiled as a male-dominated field, the study of operatic musical discourse as autonomous has served to reproduce and consolidate the dominant cultural hypothesis that male is to female what intellectual is to sexual, and to naturalize the use of music as a medium manipulated to construct feminine subjectivity as inevitably powerless and subordinate (compare to Ortner 1973).

In considering how these ideas may be seen to resonate cross-culturally, Brinkman’s (2001) ethnography, based on songs that were sung to her during interviews with Angolan immigrants in Namibia, is seminal. The key focus of her book concerns the relationship between singing, gender, and politics — her more specific line of analysis being the 1961 Angolan war for independence. The surface connection between gender, singing, and politics, she argues, is as follows. Before the war, songs were sung mostly by men but in the periods during and after the war, women began to sing too. It seems then, on the surface, that gender equality is increasing, given that the act of singing became increasingly accessible to both men and women. However, Brinkman (2001) compels us to look beyond music as autonomous; to consider the fact that prior to the war, it was women who composed and circulated songs. In contrast, “during [and after] the war, the production and distribution of song largely became an affair of men and took on a more systematic character” (2001:25–26). This demonstrates that underlying the apparent increasing respect for the place of women in Namibian society is increasing gender inequality. As one informant put it, “women [know] more suffering,” which is intrinsically related to the fact that they have lost control over the means of production of songs (2001:69; see also Godelier 1986; DeNora 2000).

In Brinkman’s (2001) account, then, insofar as the songs are produced and controlled by men, they interact with male power to form a discourse which ultimately serves to produce the subjectivity of women as inferior ‘gendered-selves’; a subjectivity reproduced

and consolidated through the performance of songs. Ultimately, this demonstrates the concrete methodological issues which arise from a lack of cross-cultural focus on the producers, circulators, and consumers of these discourses of power: it blinds us to the crucial ways in which the ideology of music as emerging from thin air serves to naturalize and obscure gender inequalities.

On the other hand, this constitution of the subjectivity of the 'gendered-self' is not always necessarily a negative experience, but even so it remains intrinsically connected to power, production, circulation, and distribution (compare to Butler 1990, 1995, 1997). James' (1999) ethnography of the songs of women migrants, which form part of the broader musical style 'kiba,' (which he broadly translates into 'to stamp') in Johannesburg, South Africa, is a pertinent case in point. Prior to the 1970's, the 'kiba' was an entirely male musical domain, but women have since "evolved an autonomous and a specifically female version" of the 'kiba' (1999:45). 'Women's kiba' has migration as its foundation, which means that the women's songs can be interpreted, to an extent, as being musical discourses that are rooted in the power relations of migration. However, they simultaneously represent a creative adoption and reinvention of some of the men's musical style. Most importantly, 'women's kiba' is produced and circulated firmly within women's control, generating companionship and solidarity.

In the South African context then, despite the migrant women beginning their careers as disparate individuals who were dependent on men for social interaction, their control over the production and circulation of 'kiba,' or in other words, their monopoly on the musical discourse has ultimately enabled them to form a new-found sense of themselves as autonomous wage-earning women migrants (James 1999). To misinterpret music as an autonomous force in this context would obscure an important factor of these women's lives: the ways in which women produce and circulate the songs as a discourse which serves to mobilize their gendered subjectivity in ways that are beneficial for their own empowerment.

What unites these scholars is their argument that "musical discourse" is utilized in the political and social organization of gender, or the formation of gendered subjectivity (Nattiez 1990:xi; see also Brinkman 2001, DeNora 2000, James 1999, McClary 1991). Ultimately, a theorization of musical discourse as it interacts with power structures to bring into being the 'gendered-self' through repetition of concrete acts, whether as a negative or a positive experience, is intrinsically connected to a move beyond considering music to be an autonomous force (compare to Bloch 1974; Levi-Strauss 1969, 1978; Seeger 2004). Taking a step back from the ideology of music as operating with a power of its own, instead viewing it as a malleable medium of social control can, in certain contexts, shed valuable light on the deeper complexities of cross-cultural gender dynamics. A continuing reproduction of the ideology of the autonomy of music will leave us oblivious to the ways in which the dichotomous, discursive, and often hierarchical gender binary of male-female becomes naturalized through this exact ideology.

The musical agency of women

In following a fully Foucauldian (1981, 1995) line of analysis, I realize that I would be close to reproducing an argument akin to that of the Frankfurt School, epitomized by

Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944) article in which they argued that cultural products such as music, films, and radio are imprinted on individuals who have no scope for agency (Adorno & Horkheimer 1944; Benjamin 1968; Marcuse 1964). Although I agree with the basic premise of the Frankfurt School that music and politics are inextricably intertwined, it is also by now well established that the Frankfurt or Foucauldian (1981, 1995) standpoint tends towards an entirely pessimistic formulation of subjectivity. Beyond this, as McClary (1991:139) poses, "how does a woman ... negotiate with established musical discourses?" Taking this question as a starting point, this section seeks to establish a broader dialect between musical structure and agency, which ultimately allows analytical scope for the "interpretive flexibility" that musical structures often enable (DeNora 2000:43; see also Bourdieu 1990).

In theorizing musical agency, it is firstly necessary to consider a broader definition of agency beyond viewing it as synonymous with resistance (Bulter 1995, 1997, 1990; compare to Gramsci 1975). Mahmood's (2005, 2001) idea of relations of domination not necessarily being a simple matter of oppression or resistance is pertinent here. For her, the binary of agency and domination cannot account for "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (Jassal 2012:15), or in other words, the ways in which agency can be importantly enabled by dominant structures of power (Mahmood 2005, 2001). Mahmood's (2005, 2001) work in Egypt demonstrates the ways in which pious Muslim women "strive to become ... shy, modest, preserving, and humble — attributes that have hitherto also secured their subordination" (Jassal 2012:14). These values are mobilized to cultivate the women's subjectivity; their 'gendered' (and in this case 'religious') selves (Agrama 2010; ; Hirschkind 2001, 2004; Jassal 2012; Mahmood 2005, 2001; compare to Butler 1995, 1997, 1990; see Laidlow 2002 for criticisms). A similar conceptualization of women's agency as self-cultivation enabled by dominant structures, I posit, can be fruitfully applied to musical discourses.¹¹

In moving towards an application of this theory of agency to an analysis of the 'gendered-self' in music, an illuminating analogy can be developed from scholarly discussions of the relationship between headphones and alienation in the general Hegelian sense of estrangement (see Bull 2000; Feld 1988; Rice 2003). Feld (1988) has argued that the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea consider headphones as representative of a desire for self-alienation. The private act of listening to music through headphones challenges the Kaluli conceptualization of music as being a public, communal activity (Feld 1988). A different idea of headphones stems from the Western capitalist context. Bull (2000) has discussed the ways in which headphones are utilized by individuals in London in opposition against the dominant urban landscape and the broader capitalist system. Using headphones to listen to personal music on the commute to work, for example, is a way to re-appropriate strict capitalist time for one's own pleasure (Bull 2000).

However, there are some subtle similarities in both theories. Comparably to Feld's (1988) conceptualization of headphones as alienation, an interesting paradox is illuminated in Bull's (2000) suggestion that headphone users are manipulating what is ultimately an alienating piece of mass produced technology in order to 'resist' capitalist alienation (compare to Marx 1867). Headphones thus cannot quite equate to resistance, and resonate more accurately with the cultivation of agency as theorized by Mahmood (2001, 2005). Although headphones provide some form of empowerment and control to

an individual commuting to work on the underground transport system in London, they remain firmly within, and in some ways are enabled by the broader project of capitalism (Bull 2000; Feld 1988; compare to Yochim 2010).

Likewise, women's musical agency often occupies a similar "liminal" space in relation to male musical discourses (Turner 1969:96; *Bluestockings Magazine* 2014; Farrugia 2012; Lindvall 2009, 2010; McClary 1991). In applying Mahmood's (2005, 2001) theory of agency, we can move towards realizing that women do have agency within the male-dominated musical discourse, insofar as they produce, distribute and circulate music in order to produce themselves as particular agentic gendered subjects.

One apt example of this comes from the paradoxical nature of Western aerobics (DeNora 2000). Although Western musical production is inherently male-dominated, the activity of aerobics, or in other words, exercise accompanied with music, has emerged from research conducted in Western contexts to be female-dominated (Farrugia 2012; McClary 1991; DeNora 2000). DeNora (2000) argues that females attending aerobics classes in England mobilize music to motivate their exercise, and thus to enhance their fitness levels. She argues that music is used to "produce them as coherent social and socially disciplined beings" (DeNora 2000:49). In a manner that resonates with Mahmood's (2001, 2005) analysis, these women likewise practice self-cultivation and enact their female agency by manipulating music for their own benefit simultaneously within, and against, the male-dominated domain of Western music. More specifically, this agency is importantly enabled by the very discourse that should, in theory, constrain it (see also Farrugia 2012; McClary 1991).

Another example of this type of agency is found in Jassal's (2012) ethnography of North Indian folk songs. She argues that peasant women's songs that accompany their agricultural labour in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Western Bihar simultaneously "articulate the patriarchal values even as they critique them" (Jassal 2012:69; see also Stafford 2008). Whilst men largely work in the industry and service sectors, it is women who remain dependent on agricultural production, and their work is assumed to be merely supplementary to the male migrant income. The songs sung by the women articulate the need for men to recognize their important social role, and Jassal (2012) argues that they serve to strengthen the group of women as a collective. This seems, at first glance, to be an act of resistance in opposition to the unequal power relations between men and women. However, it is only by considering Mahmood's (2005) definition of agency that we can recognize the "bittersweet" paradox of these musical acts (Jassal 2012:91). It lies in the fact that the songs also match the rhythm of the repetitive agricultural tasks, which has a phenomenological effect on the women of increasing their economic productivity (see also DeNora 2000). Therefore, the agency of the women and their empowering collective singing remains firmly within and is importantly enabled by the patriarchal system (Jassal 2012; see also James 1999).

Ultimately, Mahmood's (2005, 2001) theorization of agency beyond viewing it as synonymous with resistance is a crucial coda to the end of this article. It cautions us not to be too quick to conclude that following their subjectivation as 'gendered-selves,' women transmit gender ideologies that further reinforce their marginal position. It is a concept which enables us to recognize a specific form of agency which is enabled by structures of

domination, which in turn leads to the consideration that certain contexts, women are, in their own ways, arguing with songs (see also Bloch 1974:71; Butler 1990, 1995, 1997).

Conclusions: listen to the sound of silence

The crux of the argument of this article has been a theoretical move away from seeing the power of music as autonomously emerging from its form or score (see also Bloch 1974 Levi-Strauss 1978, 1969; Seeger 2004).¹² Instead, I have argued that music has no power outside of the contexts in which it is produced, circulated, distributed, and performed. Arguing against the position that the ideology of gender relations is separate from the musical means of production (Marx 1867), I have suggested that analogously to language and sound, music is a discursive medium that can be utilized in various contexts to bring subjects into being through power. I have explored this in relation to the formation of the ‘gendered-self,’ arguing that the reproduction of the ideology of music is often seen to be concretely embedded in repeated actions (compare to Butler 1990, 1995, 1997). Further, I have argued that in the malleable medium of music, we find scope for arguments with songs (compare to Bloch 1974:171). Music can also be utilized by individuals or groups enacting their agency in Mahmood’s (2001, 2005) sense, crucially enabled by the dominant discourses, which points us towards a more complex interplay of structure and agency from a musical and anthropological perspective (compare to Bourdieu 1990).

Before I conclude, I would like to briefly reflect on what implications such an argument may have with regard to Samuel et al.’s (2010:330) call for an “aural reflexive turn.” This group of scholars takes issue with the fact that whilst there has been a visual reflexive turn in terms of how anthropologists interpret their data and write their ethnographies, which has fundamentally altered the ways in which anthropologists write and conduct fieldwork, no such representational critique has happened in the domain of the aural (see Clifford 1986; Geertz 1973). Samuel et al. (2010) ask, somewhat rhetorically, why representational issues of sound have largely been neglected, but they omit to outline an approach towards this reflexive turn.

One positive step forward towards a sonic-orientated reflexivity can be hypothesized with regard to the concept of silence and its relation to ethnographic practice. Broadly, this article can be viewed as an approach to “culture [as something that] may be heard and how we may listen to women who are rarely heard” (Jassal 2012:112). By contrast, some anthropologists have explicitly chosen to ignore silence. For example, Seeger (2004), in his ethnography of Amazonian singing practices, briefly notes that “silence [is] the mark of...socially disruptive emotions,” but then uses the negative connotations surrounding silence to argue that sound should be the primary research focus, which is curious given that silence is a crucial component of music. In that Feld (1988) similarly notes that for the Kaluli, silence equates to social alienation, I am more inclined to agree with Das (1997) who calls for a renewed research attention to silence, to what cannot be expressed with sound, which would have the twofold benefit of illuminating the complex interactions between social relationships, sound and silence, and shedding valuable light on the anthropologist’s own position as a fieldworker (Basso 1970; see also Stoller 1984; Walker 2013:203–216).

Ultimately, what I hope to have demonstrated is that the anthropology of music presents a fruitful and productive research avenue for anthropologists and ethnomusicologists alike. In pointing towards the centrality of power, subjectivation, and gender in music, perhaps we can begin to conceptualize rescuing it from its current position at the sidelines of anthropology.

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Notes

- 1 To take one example of this definitional difficulty, opinions differ over whether to include under the rubric of the term 'music' the magical word, or 'speaking in tongues,' which in its deviation from the 'normative' linguistic structure is seen by some as more akin to music than to language (see Bloch 1974; Csordas 1990:28; Malinowski 1935; Stoller 1984:563).
- 2 OED Online, under the word "music," <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/124108>, accessed March 29, 2014.
- 3 This movement correlates with the increasing centrality of the phenomenological approach which stresses the avoidance of Western theoretical frameworks in favour of taking seriously lived experience as it is told (Bidney 1973; Csordas 1990; Jackson 1996; Throop & Desjarlais 2011).
- 4 Levi-Strauss (1978) argues that language and music differ importantly: whereas language is composed of phonemes, words, and sentences, music is composed of notes (equivalent to phonemes) followed by sentences; where language is a three-part process, music is a two-part process.
- 5 It is debatable whether this theorization would be applicable in the Amazon. Children are not treated as being vulnerable or 'young' in opposition to the 'wise' adults, but instead are given cigarettes and hallucinogenic drugs and are essentially treated as equal members of society (Rubenstein 2012; see also Harner 1978).
- 6 Although Merriam's (1964:14) work has a problematically structuralist theoretical stance, he cannot be said to be subject to the criticism that he locates agency in the form of music, given that he states from the outset that "music cannot exist on a level outside the control and behaviour of people." Likewise, Uzendoski et al. (2005) argue that it is the act of singing that is important, which points towards their acknowledgement of power being located beyond the musical form.
- 7 This hierarchy is not universally applicable (compare to Ortner 1973). However, even ethnographic work which focuses on the gendered nature of instruments as conducive to harmonious relations between men and women, such as that of Uzendoski et al. (2005), still points to a connection between music and gender and as such still resonates with Godelier (1986) and others (DeNora 2000; McClary 1991; see also Feld 1990).
- 8 This is reminiscent of Porath's (2008) argument concerning sound as a trigger of illness which points to an intrinsic connection between sound and its phenomenological relation to bodily construction (see also DeNora 2000; Jassal 2012; Merriam 1964; Nattiez 1990; Samuels et al. 2010).

- 9 It is largely due to limited space that I maintain gendered subjectivity as my key focus; this analytical standpoint could likely be fruitfully applied to considerations of religion, nationalism, and class distinctions (see Bourdieu 1984; Broyles 1991; Weber 1975;). This is especially salient insofar as gender is invariably mediated by these concepts, amongst many others.
- 10 For an interesting analysis of the subtle connections between gendered ideology and materiality in Amazonia, see Walker (2013:45–49).
- 11 The benefits of opening such a discussion are twofold: just as Mahmood’s (2001, 2005) idea of agency can assist us in articulating a clearer conceptualization of music, incorporating an idea of music within anthropology could be of assistance in articulating a better theory of agency (DeNora 2000; see also Bull 2000).
- 12 “Listen to the sound of silence” is a taken from the song “The Sound of Silence” by Simon and Garfunkel, two American folk singers who sang together mostly in the 1960s (see Renosano 2010).

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