

30. Contested Sounds: Post-Colonial Encounters, Representation and Appropriation in Music (Workshop)

Lisa Johnson, Saarland University

Hauke Dorsch, Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz

In the discussion of the musical encounter of the global North and South, issues of representation, decolonization, and appropriation are becoming increasingly important. The concept of appropriation, which is used as a means of criticizing the exploitation of less powerful musical communities by more powerful musicians or representatives of the music industry, is strongly influenced by ideas of representation and the understanding of music as a marketable commodity. Often, however, the critique is directed only at the musicians and not at the broader structures that sustain the relations of exploitation. Identity and culture –though posited as in flux (Hannerz)– become a site of protection based on notions of pure cultural heritage and ownership. This new ethnic absolutism (Gilroy) implies an understanding of culture as authentic, static, encapsulated and has left many anthropologists and ethnomusicologists baffled after years of deconstructing ethnic essentialism. We would still argue, that sound and music are sites of cultural transformation, constantly borrowing, remixing, versioning, and reinventing. This is acknowledged by research that turns to the small scale, the micro-aural, the specific moments of engagement (Meintjes). Does a close description of human interaction with sound, as in the analysis of soundscapes (Murray Schafer) and acoustic ecology, or an acoustically extended epistemology, as in acoustemology (Feld), lead to more nuanced understandings of musical sound, representation, and appropriation?

In this workshop, we invite contributions that reconsider how we listen to the field and how we as anthropologists are able to represent where and to whom we are listening and from what positionality. In addition, we seek entries that discuss the methodological and epistemological repertoire for exploring the contested terrain of sound and music by taking seriously the diverse perspectives of the actors involved and the responses of researchers to them.

Debating the Ethics of Ownership and Appropriation in Global Digital Afrobeats Culture

Rashid Abdul-Bakar Jeduah, Università degli Studi di Milano Statale

Tom Simmert, Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz

The recent global success of afrobeats is enabled by digital platforms, where digital subjects from the continent and the diaspora, alongside non-African enthusiasts, participate through content creation. Our research projects use ethnographic, digital-ethnographic, and native digital methods to examine this. As with the

globalization of other genres, the globalization of afrobeats brings with it debates about representation, ownership, and appropriation. With our contribution, we would like to show the ways in which the discussions that take place in our research fields are often contributions to a new ethics of cultural property and its appropriation, and negotiate correspondingly complex questions: what South African influences do Nigerian artists draw on, for example, before their songs become the inspiration for German musicians? What role do collaborations and the transparency of influences play? What affective qualities do transcultural creative contents release and to what extent do they interfere with ethical issues? We explore content and comments that can provide polyphonic answers to these questions, making productive a debate heated by apparent polarity. At the same time, we want to take our own positionalities seriously and critically consider the role we ourselves play as scholars, music enthusiasts, and digital subjects.

Reflexive Encounters, Collaboration, and the Use of Music in Ethnographic Filmmaking: Examples from Ethiopia and Liberia

Till Trojer, London Business School

Reflecting on two films from Ethiopia (Trojer 2021) and Liberia (forthcoming; co-directed with Liberian filmmaker Siatta Johnson), I am interested in anthropology as a reflective, relational, and ethical ethnographic encounter. This encounter is reflective in the sense that it includes the perspectives of interlocutors and collaborators in the way the research is co-crafted and shared. Using specific examples of integrating music, selected by my interlocutor groups (Ethiopia), or explicitly created by artists (Liberia), into my documentaries, I argue that music in ethnographic films not only thickens the ethnographic description (Henley) and offers multisensorial experiences to enhance the audience immersion (Boudreault-Fournier), but provides the opportunities for anthropologists to work with, promote and support underrepresented artists. However, this form of appreciation – as opposed to appropriation – is complicated by the “theatres of ownership” (Aragon and Leach), international landscape of copyright laws, and institutions and individuals of power. I, therefore, propose an anthropology that is actively involved in overcoming these contested discourses by co-crafting research and creating collaborative processes of knowledge production.

"Tell me Tolly": Indigenous Appropriation, Ethnographic Knowledge Production, and Sound Heritage in Kiribati

Wolfgang Kempf, University of Göttingen

This paper is based on the exploration of an archival tape collection as an effect of a sociotechnical assemblage of institutions, funding, technical devices, transport chains, documentation systems and local actors. The focus is on a collection of audio documents assembled by Gerd Koch and his wife between 1963 and 1964 in the southern Gilbert Islands (now Kiribati). My main focus is on one of the few recordings with explicit reference to labor migration, appropriation, and cultural change. An indigenous adaptation of a popular song disseminated on gramophone records, "Tell me Tolly" had, according to Koch, found its way from the phosphate island of Nauru to his research area. Koch's specific representation of the song, I will argue, was closely related to his methodological approach of a general survey of culture that offered little room for detailed analysis. New findings on "Tell me Tolly" point to cultural appropriation as mimesis and address the question of the value of such recordings today as intangible cultural heritage.

Reactivation of Asháninka-Nomatsiguenga Music: Bridging the Rifts of Archived Historical Soundscapes

Ingrid Kummels, Freie Universität Berlin

This contribution examines the issue of property rights involved when "returning" or rather reactivating historical recordings in an Asháninka-Nomatsiguenga community of the Peruvian Central Rainforest. It argues the necessity of conceiving past sonic recordings as uneven historical soundscapes that require leveling the inequalities inscribed in them. At the same time, audio tapes also contain empowering qualities which can be triggered in favor of those whose cultural expressions were once recorded. In the context of Shared Soundscapes, a project funded by DFG, historical recordings from the private archive of Manfred Schäfer (1949-2003) are being reactivated. This anthropologist and activist documented soundscapes of oratory, music, and dance starting in the late 1970s when community land rights were being secured. Today those who were documented and their descendants engage in interpreting historical materials based on their own archival methods; they decide how to deal with these materials based on their current interests and visions of the future. Restoring the rights to their songs is a prerequisite for redressing the disparities implied in the creation and storage of historical recordings. This requires a long-term dialogue that takes

into consideration the agencies exercised by local musicians, political leaders, anthropologists, and archivists.