Of Gongs and Cannons: Music and Power in Island Southeast Asia

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This essay engages with a miscellaneous assortment of writings which span over four and a half centuries. Most of these texts have something to do with Island Southeast Asia, particularly the area formerly known as the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), and with the exploration, colonization, and domination of this region by Europeans from the sixteenth century to the present. This project therefore falls under the general rubric of postcolonial studies, and I hope to make a positive contribution to that field by attempting to destabilize conventional scholarly views on music and power, and the roles these play in the discourses of postcolonial musicology and ethnomusicology.[1]

Only by historicizing and interrogating Western academic conceptions of music, culture, and politics will we move closer to a more culturally sensitive portrayal of Island Southeast Asian musical performances and their significance before, during, and after European colonial rule. In this essay, then, I outline overlapping, complementary, yet incommensurable systems of power in Island Southeast Asia that have been served by sonic performance, either as an embodiment of centralized authority, a harmless aesthetic diversion from it, or, as was most often the case, both. Toward this end, this essay begins with a discussion of some influential views of music

and society in the contemporary academic scene and later evaluates their usefulness for discussing musical performance traditions of Island Southeast Asian cultures.

But first, one more prefatory note: I am aware that a central underlying premise of this work may be one some postcolonial writers will justifiably find suspect: namely, the premise that "music" has cross-cultural validity as an analytical category of human action. Gary Tomlinson reminds us that the modern European conception of "music" as it was developed by Rousseau and later thinkers "[was] an exemplary outgrowth of Western metaphysics...It is an ideological mechanism whose operation [would] eventually drown out whole realms of others' singing" (1995: 350-351). In his essay on Western representations of Aztec song, Tomlinson demonstrates how "music," along with terms such as "literature" and "poetry" is implicated in a colonial project that defines, controls, excludes, and dismisses the performance forms of colonized peoples. Suffice it to say that ethnomusicologists are hardly immune to the discursive ramifications of this deeply rooted project of classification and domination.

In an attempt to bypass the aestheticist, ethnocentric connotations the word often has, this essay will use the term "music" to refer to all those sonic performance genres that contain important nonsemantic formal features, including the conscious manipulation of periodicity, timbre, pitch, repetition, and dynamics. Some performance forms, not included under the heading "music" in the West, such as verbal art and chant, could no doubt fit into this generalized analytic version of the concept.[2] When conceived in the above manner, music can be a useful way to refer to sonically oriented, "analytically abstractable aspects" (Keil 1995b: 97) of performance genres in different cultures.

Liberating Music versus Coercive Civilisation

Of course, attempting a culturally non-specific definition for music can hardly erase centuries

of burdensome cultural baggage carried by that word in Western scholarly and artistic circles. This section will try to unload some of that baggage, for when making the treacherous voyage to precolonial Island Southeast Asia, it is best to travel light. First and foremost among the parcels weighing us down is the romantic notion that music-making, as a form of individual and collective embodied expression, should develop in opposition to dominant ideologies of social control and discipline—in other words, that the nature of musical performance predisposes it to have counterhegemonic effects.

Susan McClary has written that "[the] struggle over the body and the music that incites it has always been a central site of cultural contestation" (1994: 38). Whether or not McClary is correct in this assertion, it is significant that she limits her statement to "Western" music (and Western bodies), and thus avoids making the claim that the sensual, musicking body is necessarily a locus of resistance in all places and all times. Not all music researchers show McClary's restraint, however. In a 1995 issue of the American journal *Ethnomusicology*, an article by Charles Keil appears that, while ostensibly a discussion of his seminal theory of "participatory discrepancies," quickly becomes a fiery manifesto on the universal emancipatory and counterhegemonic potential of music-making. In broad outline, Keil claims that the "participatory discrepancies" of live musical performance (that is, the micro-level deviations from metric pulse and precise intonation that allow the music to "groove") create a group consciousness that brings people in touch with the "primary reality" of human nature and community. Significantly, Keil asserts that a significant part of the "magic" of music "grooves" is "...due to their cultural refusal to become *civilized* (fixed, printed, formalized, monumental, predictable)..."(1995a: 12, emphasis mine). Thus, musical performance has the power to liberate the participants from the constraints, controls, and power trips of "civilization," by encouraging

them to "...focus on...sensuous immersion in sound, taking pleasure in life (rather than asserting power over it)..."(1995a: 13). In this view, the experiential immediacy of musical performance is the natural enemy of hierarchy and technological regimentation (including writing); it is a form of sensuous rebellion against civilising forces seeking to inhibit and control human expression.

Keil has clearly taken much inspiration from Edward Sapir's classic exercise in anthropology as cultural critique, "Culture: Genuine and Spurious" (1949 [1924]), a source he cites frequently in his essay. This inspiration is evident in Keil's use of the term "civilization." Sapir separates "civilization" from "culture;" the former referring to the state of techno-economic development and general "sophistication" of a society, subject to evolutionary "progress," while the latter is that which makes life as a whole meaningful for the members of a society, irrespective of the level of technological advancement. He comments that "It is easier, generally speaking, for a genuine culture to subsist on a lower level of civilization..." adding (unforgivably!) that "What is sad about the passing of the [American] Indian is not the depletion of his numbers by disease nor even the contempt that is too often meted out to him in his life on the reservation, it is the fading away of genuine cultures, built though they were out of the materials of a low order of sophistication" (1949: 318).

Interestingly, Keil is far more pessimistic than Sapir about the possibility of a spiritually satisfying ("genuine") culture in the United States, "a civilization whose basic premise is fixed, eternal timelessness, the perfection of death" (Keil 1995a: 12) and instead validates "surviving localized traditional cultures" (13) as the primary possessors of authentic musical/communal expression. The real issue here, then, is the problematic, coercive nature of "civilization," which Keil views as the eternal adversary of liberatory, collective musical consciousness.

Both Sapir and Keil's essays reveal some of the "Romantic motives" (Stocking 1989) that underlie a good portion of the Western anthropological project. Both were also written by well-regarded, established voices in their respective disciplines who could get away with occasional primitivist polemics. I want to be clear about my motives for this discussion of Charles Keil's work. I, in no way intend to detract from his considerable scholarly accomplishments and contributions to the study of music and culture, and it is worth pointing out that Keil's efforts, spanning three decades, to celebrate the musics of oppressed and marginalized peoples have been crucial in obtaining both the discipline of ethnomusicology and the musics themselves the respect they deserve from the academy. No criticism I can make of some of Keil's more idealistic (yet compelling) claims can diminish his many achievements. That said, I hope to point out in the following pages the pitfalls of Keil's romantic assumption that the true nature of music is egalitarian and "uncivilized"—particularly where musics of Island Southeast Asia are concerned.

I am also not proposing here that Keil speaks for all or even a majority of ethnomusicologists. In a response—one of many—published in the same issue of *Ethnomusicology*, Dane L. Harwood comments, "Keil's desired music-making seems to be a sort of untamed samba group, once-dreamt and then somehow forgotten amid civilization's discontents" (1995: 76). More to the point, in another response Chris Waterman rhetorically asks, "Is the ultimate goal of ethnomusicology the classification of musics into groovy/liberating/primitive and non-groovy/oppressive/civilized types?" (Waterman 1995: 94). In a "Rejoinder" to one of the other respondents to his article, Keil seems to reply to this question in the affirmative: "[James] Kippen defends civilization by pointing to a few (not really "many") notations of inflexible durations in other civilizations. But all these notation systems and concomitant theories are

the products of dominant classes or castes and probably will disappear eventually with conditions of freedom, justice, equality, democratization" (Keil 1995b: 98; note that in the seventy years that separate Sapir's and Keil's essays, we have gone from the inevitable "passing" of the American Indian to the eventual disappearance of literate civilization—a most intriguing reversal!). This rather startling prediction gets us once again to the heart of the matter: clearly there is for Keil an invidious correlation between technology, social stratification, domination and graphic representation. This association, of course, has very deep roots in Western intellectual history. The anti-Enlightenment proposition that technological civilization is the root of all the world's evils is made explicit by Keil in an "Afterword" to his classic 1966 monograph *Urban Blues*: "I am calling for nothing less than a return to the relatively peaceful [!] cultural diversification and co-evolution of peoples that was the norm on this planet until the power-driven capital accumulating civilizations emerged a few thousand years ago" (1991: 228).

The notion that "expressive culture" ideally should be an agent of resistance against "power-driven, capital accumulating" civilization has been powerful and persuasive in Western culture. Lionel Trilling writes in *Sincerity and Authenticity*, his series of essays characterizing the aesthetic sensibility of the modern West, "Inferior art, commercial/popular art, has always been thought corrupting. But serious art, by which we mean such art as stands, overtly or by implication, in an adversary relation to the dominant culture—surely on this ground or nowhere a man can set up the smithy in which to forge his autonomous selfhood?" (1972: 67). It nearly goes without saying that the dominant Occidental cultural-aesthetic complex that Trilling describes in this passage, tied to historically specific conceptions of the individual Self pitted against Society, must be dismantled if we are to proceed with the postcolonial endeavour to construct a non-ethnocentric musicology. But we must go further than that.

As we shall see, the enduring romantic primitivist view of Music versus Civilization, and the simplistic savage/civilized dichotomy upon which it is based, breaks down in very interesting ways when confronted with certain musical practices of Island Southeast Asia. In fact, an unfortunate outcome of this dualistic logic, accepted uncritically by Keil, is its indirect contribution to a colonialist discourse of the Orient as a land of tyrannical, absolutist rulers and rigid social hierarchies, even as it validates the "groovy" African, Afro-Latin and Afro-American popular musics that lie at the centre of Keil's analysis.

The Shifting Cosmologies of Conquest: Early Encounters

Island Southeast Asia can be said to occupy an intermediary role in the discursive history of European colonialism. Mediating the dichotomy between "civilized" and "savage" man, the complex, socially stratified, literate societies of Asia came to be labelled "oriental despotisms" whose social development, while considerably more evolved than that of the primitive savage, had been arrested by an overdose of autocratic, absolutist control over the individual (Blaut 1993). Indeed, from the earliest European travelogues onward there has often been an implicit contrast made between the "divine kingships" of the Indies and the savage, leaderless hordes of the Americas (Boon 1990: 12).

One of the earliest of these travel narratives, the journal of Antonio Pigafetta, is a firsthand account of "The voyage and explorations of the Spaniards among the Moluccas, the islands that they found during said voyage, the Kings of these islands, their governments and manner of living, together with many other things" (Pigafetta 1969 [1525], frontispiece). Antonio Pigafetta was an Italian passenger who travelled on Ferdinand Magellan's historic voyage to the Spice

Islands (the Moluccas), now known primarily as the first successful circumnavigation of the globe by a European explorer. Pigafetta was also one of the few to survive the whole voyage, which claimed the lives of at least two hundred sailors, including Magellan himself.

Pigafetta's journal predates the rigid classificatory schemes of nineteenth century colonial discourse by over three hundred years; nevertheless his account appears to be situated on familiar discursive terrain, and the "data" it provides often tell us a great deal more about the preconceptions of the author than the different island peoples he encounters on the voyage. There are two main categories of native people in Pigafetta's narrative: "Moors" and "pagans"—the distinction between "Hindoo" and "animist" religions had not yet appeared.[3] More importantly, the peoples encountered by Magellan were also separated into those who had kings and those who lacked them, and therefore appeared to possess no real political organization at all; among those pagans who lacked kings, some ate human flesh. Pagans were considered easier to convert to Christianity than Moors (66), despite their tendency towards cannibalism and savagery.

Not surprisingly, the most meaningful opposition for Pigafetta remained that between Christian and non-Christian. Discussing the (frequent) disposal of corpses on the return voyage, Pigafetta observes that "...when they throw Christians into the sea, they sink to the bottom face up, and the [East] Indians face down" (147). At the same time, the continually shifting precolonial landscape of sameness and difference is evidenced by a passing remark towards the end of Pigafetta's book: "The people of China are white and wear clothing, and eat at tables as we do" (144), marking a final implicit contrast to the naked, bronze-skinned natives of the East Indies.

Pigafetta and others like him may be in part responsible for the development of the enduring Romantic invention of the "noble savage" free of the tyrannical constraints of civilization.

According to his account, as noted above, the various peoples encountered by the Europeans possessed either a centralized, autocratic government or were completely egalitarian or disorganized. Speaking of the natives of the Marianas Islands, he writes, "Each one lives according to his own wishes, having no king." (29). Similarly, "[The islands of] Mutir and Matian have no king, but are governed by the people" (112), "The people of these [Bandan] islands are Moors, and they do not have a king" (134; interestingly, this passage suggests the absence of a necessary correlation between Mohammedism and despotism in Pigafetta's thinking).

It is significant that according to Pigafetta's narrative Magellan's ships never conducted any formal trade with these autonomous peoples, whose acephalous political systems remained mysterious to Western minds until the advent of anthropological fieldwork in the twentieth century (though the pernicious Romantic myth of the "noble savage" lives on in the writings of late twentieth century ethnomusicologists). It certainly is not surprising that a government without a king was an alien concept to sixteenth century Europeans.

In time the European writers' grudging respect for and occasional admiration of the authority of East Indies rulers gave way to a thoroughgoing contempt for the "despotism" of Asian societies, as Enlightenment ideals of individual freedom and the rule of law began to influence occidental thought. "A farmer in Europe can do with his cattle what he likes," writes one seventeenth century Dutch colonial official, "In the same fashion the King here [in the East Indies] deals with his subjects because they belong to him, the same as the dumb cattle in Holland belong to the farmer. He can do with them what he likes. The law of this land is the will of the King" (quoted in Masselman 1963: 403). While this description sounds more like the Divine Right of Kings than any indigenous Southeast Asian political ideology, and arguably indicates a

fundamental misunderstanding of the complicated nature of authority in Indies societies (Boon 1977: 26-7, see also Wiener 1995), accounts such as these stressing the tyrannical oppression of native autocrats were to become crucial instruments for the legitimation of colonial rule, as the peoples of the Orient came to be portrayed as mindless subjects of absolute rulers, waiting to be rescued by the benevolent intervention of European rule.

The Sounds of "Despotism": Sonic Icons of Power

Aside from a single reference to "a violin with copper strings" played by the people of Cebu (82) and an occasional mention of "stringed instruments" played in a royal ensemble (89, 90), the scant references to native music in Pigafetta's account consistently refer to the energetic playing of trumpets, drums, and, most of all, "brass cymbals." By "cymbals" Pigafetta probably meant what we now call "gongs" (a Malay word which had yet to enter European lexicons). Almost all descriptions of music-making are associated with kings: "One day they came from [the island of] Tarenate [Ternate] with boats full of cloves... On Monday their king came playing on cymbals, passing between the ships, and they [the Europeans] discharged many bombards [cannon blasts]" (123); "Six days later, the king again sent three proas [ships] with great pomp, playing stringed instruments, drums, and brass cymbals as they circled the ship... And they (the Europeans) saluted them with bombards without stones [cannonballs]" (90).

An intriguing parallel exists here between the sonic impact of the gong and drum ensembles that proclaimed the arrival of the king and the cannon "bombards" discharged by Magellan's ships in response. The two parties appear to be engaging in an intercultural sonic dialogue of sorts — both asserting their power *vis-à-vis* the other through the deployment of powerful sound.

According to Pigafetta's account, the Europeans did not tell the natives that they fired the bombards to demonstrate their civilization's mastery of an apocalyptic technology of destruction; instead Magellan reassured the inhabitants of one island (Cebu) that they were "a sign of friendship and peace...in order to honour the king of the place..." (51), after ordering his ships to "arrange themselves in battle formation and to fire all their guns" at the Cebuano city that lay before them. "Wherefore these people were greatly frightened" (50). Such behaviour on Magellan's part is unlikely to have been a customary way of expressing "friendship and peace" in unfamiliar European harbours.

But what of the East Indian's sonic icons of power? What was the "signified" of the bronze metallophones' musical signifiers?

The Musical Semiotics of Legitimation: Aural Autocracies

"[The] gongs are beaten very softly and sweetly before the king's arrival...When the king does arrive in the outer square they begin to beat on all the large and small gongs with such force that there would have been no hope of hearing the beating of ten of our drums" (van Goens 1656: 229-30, describing the court of Mataram (Java); quoted in Reid 1988: 212).

Judith Becker, in an article on the political and cosmological significance of gong orchestras in Java, writes:

> Throughout lowland Southeast Asia, the most important ceremonials and dramatic performances are generally accompanied by some kind of ensemble that includes bronze

> gongs and drums... In Java, old, impressive gamelan were also *generators* of royal power. Through homologous associations with autochthonous energies of nature, gong ensembles and their music became metaphors for natural forces and became the instruments for the control of natural forces...[T]hese interpretations endowed the gamelan ensemble with a special aura that forged the link to figures of authority, to the kings and princes of the realm (1988: 385).

In her study Becker draws upon Benedict Anderson's influential essay "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture" (1990 [1972]) to explain the political significance of gong orchestras in Java. Anderson's main argument in this seminal work is that in "traditional" Javanese culture, political power is viewed as something that emanates from a powerful individual rather than an abstract, impersonal force located in relationships between actors. The Javanese notion of power, therefore, resembles what Max Weber identified as "charismatic authority"; it is concrete, homogenous, finite and "without moral implications as such" (1990: 22-23). As a result, Javanese political figures are more concerned with the concentration and accumulation of power than with its proper use.

Anderson's argument is more useful as a means to conceive alternate envisionings of the body politic than as an essentialist characterization of Javanese culture, traditional or modern. The notion of political power as an emanation of personal potency may help us, however, to examine

the semiotics of sonic presence invoked by gong orchestras in the service of kings. Rather than "taking pleasure in life" or "asserting power over it" (to borrow Keil's division between genuine and spurious musics), the performance of the royal gong ensemble invokes *power itself* as a physical, audio-tactile presence ultimately originating not only in the vibrations caused by mallets striking metal, but in the charismatic presence of the king. Thus, the gong ensemble performances could create a "sensuous immersion in sound" that actually upheld the sociopolitical order.

The spectacles of royal power in the courts of Island Southeast Asia were persuasive enough to cause European explorers to attribute social stability and centralized control to kingdoms where chaos and political contestation reigned outside the palace gates. James Boon, writing of the first Dutch expeditions to Bali in 1597, comments, "The Dutch had skirted in and out and round about a perpetual civil war, only to gain the impression of stability from the ritual surfaces of timeless central authority" (1977: 13). Ultimately, though, the legitimation strategies of Asian "despots" were no match for the more efficient killing technology of the European colonizers. While cannons and gong ensembles both create powerful sounds, only the former can kill, maim, and crush as well.

Two hundred twenty-three years after Magellan's voyage, the royal procession of Pakubuwana II from the smouldering ruins of Kartasura to his new palace at Solo (Surakarta)—a move supported by the Dutch East India Company—was accompanied by both Dutch and Javanese musicians. "Booming ceremonial gongs from Javanese gamelan orchestras stationed along the road to Solo were joined by Company 'music' sounded on trumpets and field drums" (Pemberton 1994b: 32). Also at hand to lend gravity to the ceremonial parade were Dutch cannons, firing military salutes to a monarch who would later concede much of his state power to Dutch

authorities (Ibid.: 37, see also Sumarsam 1995: 48-49).[4] Thus the tribute of bugles, and bombards paid to Pakubuwana were not so unlike the cannon blasts Magellan fired to honour island kings, each "salute" carrying within it an implicit threat of annihilation.

The experiential impact of drums, trumpets and cannons at the 1745 procession of Pakubuwana II appeared simultaneously to constitute the domestication of Dutch sonic power sources by the radiant sultan's divine authority and the subjugation of the ruler himself to the awesome threat of Dutch military force. This double signification served both the Company and the court, at the expense of the Javanese villagers soon to be subjected to colonial rule.[5]

The tremendous din of cannons, pistols, fireworks, Western musical ensembles and gamelan all sounding at once became increasingly common at Javanese court occasions in the nineteenth century.[6] Sumarsam suggests that these combined performances were intended to add to the crowded, noisy (*rame*) atmosphere of these occasions (1995: 59). In addition, he writes, "I suggest that the competition between Javanese and European sound in the court ritual, musical or non-musical (e.g., between the sound of gamelan and cannon salutes), provided a basis for developing a musical style that emphasized the production of the loudest sound; hence the increasing size and number of instruments in the gamelan ensemble"(1995: 62). Indeed, one of the gamelan ensembles commissioned by Pakubuwana IV, called Kyai Surak, included a gong so large that it required several men to play it.

> With a large gong mallet, each of them must stand up and strike the gong as hard as he can, trying to produce a loud, powerful sound. Perhaps this is an attempt to compete with the sound of the cannon (Sumarsam 1995: 63).

Although I question Sumarsam's division of gongs and cannons into "musical" and "non-musical" sounds, I agree with Sumarsam's assertion that there was more to these sonic combinations than an attempt to foster a festive atmosphere, and contend that the importance of "loud powerful sounds" at these occasions merits further attention.

Music and Power Revisited

John Blacking, like Keil, was a chief proponent of music-making as a vehicle for attaining egalitarian group consciousness and solidarity (and one of ethnomusicology's foremost thinkers). Interestingly, Blacking adds the following footnote in an article on Venda possession music: "In this paper, the problem of defining 'music' in different cultures will be left aside, though what applies in Venda can probably be generalized. Moreover, *discussion of the effects of noise or excessively amplified music is not relevant to arguments about the effects of musical symbols*" (1985: 85 n1, emphasis mine). Blacking's use of the words "noise" and "excessive" amplification contain an implicit musical value judgment that, rather than "leaving aside" the question of a cross-cultural definition of music, appears to legitimate some forms of music-making (communal, participatory, unamplified) at the expense of others. I would argue that this passage points to a blind spot in Blacking's thinking about music and society, for I would suggest that the somatic effects of powerful sound technologies (such as bronze metallophones) cannot realistically be excluded from an assessment of music's role in social groups.

As for the applicability of theories about the music-making in small-scale societies to music in general, Keil makes a less ambiguous case in regard to the Tiv. In the conclusion of his ethnography *Tiv Song* (1979), after an exhaustive list of what song "is" in Tiv society, Keil writes, "I have been saying 'song' rather than 'Tiv song' in writing these definitions derived from specifically Tiv circumstances, because I believe that what song is for Tiv it was for us once upon a time and can be again...Tiv see and hear, know and understand the great value of song, drama, and dance in the struggle for justice and equality. But do we?" (1979: 257-58).[7] These are powerful words—whether or not one agrees with them, however, is a separate question from whether or not it is useful to employ ideas of what music/song *should* be which incidentally exclude much of the world's music and song (including Western music, to a great extent). Indeed, by exclusively validating the music of small-scale, relatively "uncivilized" (in the Sapirean sense) groups as egalitarian and genuine, researchers reinscribe the "savage/civilized" distinction of Western colonialism (which fails to account for the great diversity of human sociopolitical arrangements in addition to being the very foundation stone of Eurocentrism) rather than placing it into question. Rather than destabilize the value assumptions of Western metaphysics, such an approach merely inverts them.

Most musicologists and ethnomusicologists would agree that musical performance involves social activity, incites the body, and conveys culturally mediated indexical and iconic meanings through humanly organized sound. None of these properties are intrinsically oppositional or non-hierarchical, and in some contexts the impact of performed sonic meanings may serve the interests of those who hold power. This is particularly the case when powerful individuals and classes can take advantage of available technologies (from gongs to gunpowder to loudspeakers) that enable the production of awesome sounds that exceed the sonic capabilities of mere

mortals. For music-making does not only provide society's members with a sense of humanity—it can evoke the superhuman as well.

Music and Power Re-revisited: "Culture" in Indonesia's New Order

John Pemberton, author of two groundbreaking critical works on Indonesia under President Soeharto's long-lived New Order regime (1994a, 1994b), began his academic career as an ethnomusicologist and student of gamelan. He mentions in the Acknowledgments of *On the Subject of "Java"* that he viewed his activities and those of his fellow gamelan enthusiasts as a counterhegemonic expression of sorts. "Indeed, our practice and performance of this indigenous Southeast Asian music seemed to embody, somehow, at least some of the spirit of protests against U.S. imperialist intervention in Southeast Asia" (1994b: ix). Such an attitude is very much in keeping with the Romantic ideal of music against an oppressive civilization. Pemberton was quick to abandon this view, however.

After arriving in Java to further his musical studies, Pemberton found resistance of a different sort: "I should note that the received Orientalist vision (both in modern Indonesia and abroad) of Central Javanese gamelan performance as a model of quasi-cosmic sobriety and harmonious equilibrium was pleasurably shattered by Surakarta musicians inspirited by vats of locally produced liquor (in a country where alcoholic consumption is not the norm) and by a pronounced sense of competitiveness. Even at the sonorous heart of Javanese "culture" was a sensibility at odds with the refined aesthetics of social harmony" (1994: ix-x). Pemberton proceeds to speculate whether this perceived contradiction partially inspired his choice of subject matter for his book: the interrogation of dominant New Order discourses of "culture" and politics (x).

He refrains from posing the question of whether his experience with state ideology and the transgressive gamelan performers influenced his decision, after returning to the United States, to leave ethnomusicology, enter the anthropology department at Cornell, and write a book (*On the Subject of "Java"*) without any substantive discussion of music whatsoever (the words "music," "aesthetics" and "gamelan" do not even appear in the index).

Pemberton's disenchantment with gamelan music's ideological function in New Order Indonesia is memorably expressed in an earlier article entitled "Musical Politics in Central Java (Or How Not to Listen to a Javanese Gamelan)" (1987) concerning the role of "refined" (*halus*) gong orchestras in contemporary Javanese weddings. "Offstage, the *halus* gamelan plays music that welcomes guests to chairs, keeps them in the chairs for hours, and then signals them to leave. Gamelan sound thus still displays its own peculiar powers by exhibiting a trance-like control over people; but it does so by a reverse logic of immobility and in the institutional interest of a very different order of power" (1987: 29). The refined, softly played style of gamelan Pemberton describes appears to have the opposite effect of the loud court ensembles that proclaimed the arrival of kings. Both styles nevertheless serve hegemonic functions, the latter by manifesting the potency of the ruler, the former by creating a perfectly passive and docile audience—a passivity encouraged by the cultural policies of the New Order military regime. Paul Stange has provided a critique of Pemberton's dim view of gamelan contemporary performance and reception: "When Pemberton says 'passive' he refers to the passivity of part of the person; he fails to note the spiritual within the same moment, not only because his idea of that guides him wrongly, but because that aspect did not register" (1990: 105).

Stange may well be correct that Pemberton allows his own boredom at Javanese ceremonies to keep him from taking account of the spiritual dimension of gamelan music. Nonetheless, the fact remains that while participation in the indigenous performance traditions of Java and Bali

may be an authentically liberating and even counterhegemonic experience for Western students and other "slow tourists" (Perlman 1995) in Indonesia, its spiritual meanings for Javanese and Balinese performers have unquestionably been affected by the official discourse of what was a phenomenally successful neocolonial despotism. "Indeed, one of the most distinctive features of New Order rule [was] the remarkable extent to which a rhetoric of culture enframe[d] political will, delineate[d] horizons of power" (Pemberton 1994b: 9).

By "enframing" gamelan performance as a "cultural" (that is, non-political) expression of an essentialized ethnic Javanese identity, the Soeharto regime actively deployed it in a strategy of nationalist legitimation. New Order ideology incorporated the music of the gamelan into an "aesthetics of social harmony" (and obedience and passivity)—an aesthetics that was once uncritically accepted by ethnomusicologists who studied court gamelan traditions. The New Order certainly did represent "a different order of power" than that possessed by precolonial Southeast Asian rulers. Its cooptation of musical performance is a reminder of the limitless ways in which music can relate to political power and authority—as well as a reminder that we cannot underestimate its role in legitimating that power. Furthermore, novel configurations of sound, performance, and politics undoubtedly have and will emerge in contemporary, post-New Order Indonesia, as competing regimes of power (the old technocracy, the revived remnants of regional sultanates, political transnational Islam, globalised markets, and so on) come dramatically to the fore in the absence of centralized authoritarian rule.

Conclusion

This article has travelled along an "intertextual chain of reading" (Boon 1990: 14) that spans over four centuries, from the precolonial opening of maritime trade in the East Indies to the contemporary postcolonial/neocolonial present. Needless to say, this chain has had many

gaps—some of the texts I've explored are perhaps not linked to a chain at all, but are connected to the others by the thinnest of discursive threads.

I have tried in this essay to take some preliminary steps toward an approach to musical performance in Island Southeast Asian history and culture. Clearly there is still much work to be done—a critique of our existing analytic categories such as the one put forth in the preceding pages is worth little if it does not lead to new substantive research demonstrably less encumbered by ethnocentric biases than earlier attempts. I will conclude by summarizing the programmatic ideas contained within the pages of this essay.

First, our deeply ingrained Romantic sensibilities notwithstanding, *no human sign system is inherently emancipatory or inherently oppressive.* Music can enslave, writing can liberate (otherwise, why would we bother producing postcolonial texts in the first place?). Our modern bureaucratic-rationalized modes of domination have little need for an activity as wasteful and unreliable as musical performance to reinforce their hold on individual minds (though the many musical institutions that remain—military marching bands, national anthems, patriotic songs, national folkloric displays—are nonetheless potent tools of legitimation). But not all structures of domination are founded upon efficiency, and the ambiguity of musical meaning can itself be exploited by those who wish to conceal the contradictions inherent in their bids for legitimacy. We must thus look past the Western rationalistic assumption that musical performance lacks true political efficacy (again, without reverting to Romantic ideals of artistic rebellion) when we consider the musico-political cultures of other civilizations.

It has certainly not been my intention here to argue that the functions and ideologies of music in Island Southeast Asia were the "opposite" of those that developed in the liberal West. Instead I have used the specific example of royal gong orchestras to illustrate the need for an

increased receptivity to alternative understandings of what musical performance 'does' in the world. Specifically, the power of sound ('musical' or otherwise) should always be viewed in light of cultural notions of power and authority.

Finally, the critique of primitivist, aestheticist ethnomusicology that runs throughout this paper voices the need for more reflection on scholars' motives, Romantic or otherwise, for studying the musics of postcolonial peoples. Myra Jehlen has observed, "Decolonization must begin at home with the recognition that the desire to recuperate the contingency of the European hegemony is not disinterested. We find ourselves, in the millennial twilight of the empire, with the urgent task of establishing that Europe's global dominion was not in the nature of things...that civilization can exist under different auspices" (Jehlen 1993: 691). We must be careful that the desire to condemn European modes of colonial domination does not lead to an unproductive, primitivist rejection of "civilization" under *any* auspices. I would add to the passage quoted above that the central issue postcolonial studies must confront is not only the contingency of European rule but also the persistence of structures of domination and colonization *in general*, and whether they must always be a necessary component of social life.

Postscript: Decolonizing Aesthetics?

While the quest to liberate an authentic self from society's conventions has been a major preoccupation in the last two centuries of humanist scholarship and aesthetics (Trilling 1972), perhaps the twenty-first century will some day be known for its emphasis on possible ways to unite individuals into communities that do not rely on hierarchy, inequality, and systematic structures of subordination for their survival.

In this quest for authentic community—the "genuine cultures" of Sapir and Keil's imagination, it is unlikely that the Western aestheticist project of formal contemplation and (individual) appreciation will be of much use, especially since its role in creating an artificial separation between "politics" and "culture" has been used to strip expressive forms (both legitimating and oppositional) of their agency and pragmatic meanings. I would suggest that even Charles Keil's celebration of the "participatory discrepancies" in musical performance ultimately defangs any political content they may have by constructing them as aesthetic objects, privileging the materiality of formal sonic features over specific contexts of performance.

The reframing of native performance forms as aesthetic objects was among the most powerful discursive strategies of European (and New Order) colonialism. This imposition of Western categories needs to be interrogated by postcolonial researchers who fully understand the risk of reinscribing them through their own discursive practices.[8] Furthermore, our conceptions of hegemony and domination also tend to have a "hyperreal Europe" (Chakrabarty 1992) as their reference point. It nearly goes without saying that any distinction made between musics based on a colonialist division of peoples into autonomous savage hordes, oriental despotisms, and enlightened, civilized European republics should be rejected once and for all, along with a narrow economistic, technological view of "power" that excludes the immaterial but potent force of cultural meanings created through performance, spectacle, and musical sound. Only after such a reorientation takes place can we begin to envision the possibility of a politically engaged, non-ethnocentric (ethno)musicology.

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NOTES

[1] This essay is an expanded version of a paper presented at the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology Annual Meeting, March 22-24, 1996, at the Peabody Conservatory of Music. I would like to thank Marina Roseman, Peter Manuel, Webb Keane, Gary Tomlinson, Sharon Wallach, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. All errors and fatuous generalizations are the sole responsibility of the author.

[2] Doris Stockmann has proposed a similar, more detailed definition in an article on the evolution of human music and dance behaviour: "The minimum conditions for calling a sound production musical/ protomusical should be a more or less intended/patterned movement within an acoustical operational space, that is, more extensive than the operational space of language. Examples include any extended use of the voice, such as falsetto, voice-masking, yoiks [sic?], yelling, jubilating [sic], warbling, etc., and of course, singing in the narrower sense of the word" (1985: 18).

[3] In the centuries since Magellan's voyage Western scholars have systematically de-emphasized the importance of Islam in Island Southeast Asia. See Woodward (1996) for an insightful critique of this peculiar orientalist practice, which has roots in the sorts of antagonisms Pigafetta and his European Christian companions felt towards "Moors."

[4] A particularly dramatic description of gongs and guns sounding together at a royal occasion can be found in an 1848 account of a Balinese cremation ceremony which included the sacrifice of three of the royal deceased's concubines:

> During the whole time, from the burning of the prince till the jump of the victims, the air resounded with clangour and noise of the numerous bands of music. The soldiers had drawn up outside the square and contributed to the noise by firing their muskets. In addition, some small cannon were discharged. There was not one among the fifty thousand Balinese present who did not show a merry face; no one seemed filled with repugnance or disgust except a few Europeans, whose only desire was to see an end of such barbarities (Friederich 1850: 12; translated in van der Kraan 1985: 117).

[5] Although most of the examples discussed in this essay come from Java or Bali, there exists some evidence that the link between gongs and hierarchical social arrangements is made by peoples throughout the Indonesian archipelago. V. K. Gorlinski (1994) has written a fascinating account of the use of gongs (both as valuable material possessions and powerful sound producers) for ritually marking and reinforcing differential social status among the Kenyah of Borneo. Further studies of this sort would add immensely to our understanding of how gongs function in maintaining relations of power and prestige throughout Island Southeast Asia.

[6] Miller and Chonpairot (1994) cite numerous reports of the use of cannons, trumpets, drums, and gongs in the court of Siam, dating from the earliest years of European contact. For example, they quote Fernao Mendez Pinto, an early Portuguese explorer, describing what transpired in the aftermath of a Ayuthaya king's cremation ceremony in 1548: "...this was accompanied with so horrible a din of cries, great Ordnance, Harquebuses, Drums, Bells, Cornets, and other different kinds of noyse, as it was impossible to hear it without trembling" (Pinto 1692: 276, quoted in Miller and Chonpairot 1994: 98).

[7] One of Keil's definitions of Tiv song is the following:

> Song, to put it bluntly, f—s authority in the ass; kings never sing in tales. In life, songs seem to work exclusively to the advantage of the weaker party in a dispute. In recent politics, composers seem to have raised and lowered the status of party personalities significantly, to no great advantage to themselves (1979: 254).

I find this passage intriguing because it contains a contradiction: if composers do have the option of *raising* the status of political figures through praise songs, how can it be claimed that all song is necessarily opposed to authority or works exclusively to the advantage of the weak? Even among the Tiv, it seems, music can both legitimate and delegitimate those in power.

[8] I am indebted to Gary Tomlinson for this insight, which was a central theme in the seminar he taught at the University of Pennsylvania in the spring of 1995. This essay contains material from a paper originally written for that course. For an illustration of the perils of Western metaphysical categories when approaching the expressive forms of colonized Others, see Tomlinson's "Ideologies of Aztec Song" (1995).