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# SONICIZATION OF GENDER IN TANZANIA *KWAYA* CONGREGATIONAL MUSIC

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## Abstract

In this article, I introduce issues related to the embodiment of gendered sound in contemporary Tanzanian Christian choral communities (East Africa). By pulling back the layers of meaning that frequently veil congregational singing, I suggest that a focus on the routinely reiterated sounds produced by *kwayas* (Kiswahili for “choir”), that participate within that greater congregational space leads to a normalization of the performance of a localized gendering process—the sounding of sopranos, for example—that I label “sonic gendering.” This proposal confirms Judith Butler’s admonition that it is through rearticulation and repetition, such as when a *kwaya* continually affirms sonic gendering daily, that constitutive gender norms are reworked within a given cultural context (2011[1993], ix). I suggest that everyday singing in a *kwaya* facilitates the re-performing, re-consumption, and continuous re-embodiment of a process of gendering.

## Keywords

Music, Gender, Performance, Religion, Choral Singing, Colonialization, Fieldwork, East Africa

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## INTRODUCTION

In vain, the evening breeze off the Indian Ocean tried to cool down the oppressive temperature in the Dar Es Salaam city center as Gideon Mdegella, *mwalimu* (“teacher/conductor”) of the *kwaya* (“choir”), opened the evening rehearsal by singing several recently introduced melodic incipits for the sopranos and altos to indicate their opening pitches and to remind them of the melodies. Mdegella adopted his typical teaching falsetto with its concomitant rapid-fire vibrato different from his normal chest voice. This vibrato was then immediately matched by the women of the *kwaya*. I noted at the time that the women never found it odd that they were learning to sing their melodies and harmonies by imitating a man (who in turn was himself imitating the timbre of a woman with his falsetto range and fast, reedy vibrato quality). The men of the choral group sit apart from the women, relaxed in their chairs much as they do in everyday life, and I noticed that after a long day’s work, the men of the *kwaya* collectively adopted a much more relaxed timbre in their singing. As the evening progressed and the *kwaya* established their groove, I noticed that the sounds of the men and the women were purposefully not blending—the masculine sound was relaxed while the feminine sound was tense. It was as if each group—sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses—was asserting unique identities and individually gendered qualities through sound by projecting those sounds off each other.

In this article, I reflect on gender(ing) as an embodied sonic process that occurs within the wide variety of Christian congregational communities in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. I suggest that East African choral singing represents a localized sounded tradition that produces a uniquely culturally situated gendered performance. In the article, I demonstrate several specific ways in which gendering of sound helps to produce the local through congregational music-making. To highlight the role of gender identity within the dynamic agency assumed by East African church congregational singing groups, I point directly toward a process of gender formation that occurs *within* community, the specific sounding of gender identity that occurs within a community’s musical performances. My focus on the gendering of sound in this article is an attempt to situate that process within an intentionally localizing act rather than labeling gender as an inherited and passive universal social construction. Suggesting that a group of singers in

a *kwaya* can gender sound is intended to reference the active engagement of those gendering decisions rather than the passive social reconstruction of gender identity.

The field research in East Africa supporting this article began in 1993, the same year as the publication of the first edition of Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993). Butler's text initially presented challenges for academic disciplines regarding both inherited and perceived (reiterated and reinvented) gender. I carried many of the author's central concepts with me in my early fieldwork. Butler's theories appealed to ethnomusicology, mainly due to the ability of contemporary performances to underscore and replicate historically informed identity constructions. (Numerous ethnomusicological studies also inform the genesis of my early gender formulations. Works such as Ellen Koskoff's edited volume, *Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1989[1987]), cracked the door open for the culture-specific, localized understanding of gendering through musical performances. Carol Robertson's chapter, "Power and Gender in the Musical Experiences of Women," in that volume, directly addresses many of the issues outlined below). For Butler, the repetition and rearticulation of gender are markers of normativity and constitute both expectation and re-articulation:

If gender is constructed through relations of power and, specifically normative constraints that not only produce but also regulate various bodily beings, how might agency be derived from this notion of gender as the effect of productive constraint? If gender is not an artifice to be taken on or taken off at will and, hence, not an effect of choice, how are we to understand the constitutive and compelling status of gender norms without falling into the trap of cultural determinism? How precisely are we to understand the ritualized repetition by which such norms produce and stabilize not only the effect of gender but the materiality of sex? And can this repetition, this rearticulation, also constitute the occasion for a critical reworking of apparently constitutive gender norms? (Butler 2011[1993], ix)

I initially approached my field experiences with choral singing communities in Tanzania with Butler's unpacking of the "constitutive and compelling" aspects of gender normativity in mind, especially regarding articulating gender as a stabilizing force within the communities with which I was privileged to work. As I began to outline this article, I found it helpful to reflect on the gendering that occurs through performing of "Europe" (i.e., mission hymnody or composing in the style of Western hymnody), that is the sounding that communicates when the adopted agency of African communities translates foreign in(to) local. (For outlines of local indigenization processes in ethnomusicology, see the guest-edited volume of *The World of Music* by T.M. Scruggs, *Musical Reverberations from the Encounter of Local and Global Belief Systems* [2005]. See especially the articles by Scruggs [2005], Sherinian [2005], and Barz [2005] in that volume that each attempt to understand the positionality of "local" indigenous traditions within performances of inherited Western art traditions.)

### **THE LOCALIZATION OF INHERITED SOUNDS: SINGING HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER**

In this article, I introduce a basic premise involving the performance of gender norms, which assumes that musical rearticulations embraced by a given community function as a primary site for both an individuated and collective negotiation of gender. Based on such a grounding assumption, a culture's musical performance of gender(s) is continuously defined, re-enacted, and re-constructed over time according to community expectations rooted in historical and inherited norms. In the various case studies presented in the article, I outline different ways a lens on expressive culture can adjust its focus to clarify issues of gender relationships and gender identity within collective congregational singing.

Musical performances frequently aid in the definition of self and the communication of that self-definition in contradistinction to the greater community. Issues of gender are, as a consequence, critical to any study of music as expressive culture, both regarding the individual and the community as a whole. By its nature, expressive culture in Africa (music, dance, and drama) involves the individual human body and voice interacting with like or dissimilar bodies and voices. I suspect that in this day and age, we can take it for granted that what may sound on the surface as inherited sonic gendering in the form of European choral singing norms can be best understood now as a rearticulated performance of localization in East Africa. Thus, I approach gendering-as-process from various perspectives, primarily through music's individual and collective sonic embodiment. Put another way, I am keen to understand the distinction between collective and individualized gendering that occurs within the singing of Christian congregational performances and how such gendering is localized. In so doing, I take the indigenization of Christian music theories articulated in ethnomusicology for quite some time and apply it to gender (through musical timbre and range) in these Christian performance contexts.

The sounding of gender is not typically foregrounded in the research of either historical or contemporary musical performance practice within ethnomusicological studies of Christian communities. Yet, related issues are nevertheless fully present even when not of critical concern. In addition, the importance of gender and gendered expressions are often made more evident through their absence or neglect. Only recently have ethnographies in

anthropology and ethnomusicology embraced theories based on the particularization of unique and culture-specific gender constructions regarding localized Christian performance, a necessary initial step for understanding the localization of a culture's overall musical expressions. Historically, this process has been frequently reversed, with studies beginning with analyses of musical phenomena to understand issues regarding gender rather than the other way around.

### THE SOUNDING OF GENDER IN CONGREGATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN TANZANIA

My introduction of the sounding of gender leads to the double-barreled concept of legitimation and subversion of the human singing voice, the primary focus of my early research on Tanzanian *kwaya* music. I should state upfront that “*kwaya*” is more than a mere translation of the English term, choir, into KiSwahili. Instead, it is simultaneously a term denoting an ensemble, the music sung by a choir, and the social phenomenon crafted when a group gathers to create a community. It is a widely adopted localized term for a specific African phenomenon, albeit with Western musical origins. In my fieldwork in East Africa, I focused primarily on how Tanzanian performers used *kwaya* music to negotiate between their colonial/missionary past and post-colonial/post-mission present to understand how these two—past and present—are coterminous and (re-)performed within a *kwaya* community daily.

*Kwaya* music, an East African performance genre often relegated to the periphery of the colonial imperative by researchers during my initial research in the early 1990s, represents a challenge for gender inquiry. For example, the musicians with whom I work have strongly encouraged me to view the many changes in *kwaya* music over time as attempts at transforming the genre into a more “African” and less “European” one. This challenge has logically led me to consider patterns of change and possible shifts in the sounding of gender relationships over time.

The performance of individual and communal spirituality in *kwaya* music has long existed within an inherited musical tradition, precisely that of European and American mission hymnody. While there are current efforts to break the mold that continues to regenerate this musical tradition, most Christians in Tanzania still experience and perform their spirituality through what is frequently labeled as a “foreign” medium, as one of my informants once put it. Within the context of church-based performance, the division by sex into distinct male and female vocal sections within any given *kwaya* mirrors, in many cases, the sex-segregation of the congregational seating within a church comprised of the ecclesial descendants of 19<sup>th</sup>-century mission Christianity, and thus the intentional sounding of gender within a congregation. This contemporary gendering of sacred space occurs within inherited architecture first introduced by European missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and remains constant today. In this case, the retention of *kwayas* can be viewed as a gendered microcosm of the larger worship community. A strict gendered spatial division is also frequently enforced during Sunday worship services. A problem with analyzing *kwaya* music regarding a foreign influence on gender relationships is that it would be too easy to focus exclusively on four-part harmony as an expression of a neat musical sex segregation occurring in *kwayas*. However, labeling such sonic gendering as a retention of European colonial heritage would not take us very far in approaching contemporary gender identities in Tanzania on their terms.

In my field research, I frequently sang within the tenor or “*sauti ya tatu*” (“third voice”) sections within a variety of *kwaya* communities in and around Dar Es Salaam. Several questions related to gender arose during the performance-observation model of fieldwork I adopted: What is the sound of gender in a Tanzanian *kwaya*? Do Tanzanians experience their gender both orally and aurally? Does the musical segregation by sex of Western hymnody force some form of a gender hierarchy, with high voices as dominant (that is, *on top*), lower voices as supportive, and middle voices constantly interacting between the two? Can there be, for example, a sensual experience of being male in a Tanzanian *kwaya*? Is masculine identity a product of one's sound? Such issues related to the sounding of gender are certainly nuanced in local contexts, especially when we consider those *kwayas* in which women either augment or comprise the tenor section entirely. In such situations, the layers of gendered sonic expectations inherited along with European four-part harmony assume a localized gendering as the timbre of the female voices blends with male voices to form the internal tenor lines. (By range, I refer to the musical amplitude (high notes, low notes) adopted by the voices of men and women. Timbre references the quality of the vocal sounds produced by singers, and the tone color they adopt, which is frequently locally determined.)

An audio example of such localized gendering can be heard on the compact disc accompanying *Performing Religion: Negotiating Past and Present in Kwaya Music of Tanzania* (2003). On the second track of the CD, “Bwana Amefufuka” [“Christ the Lord is Risen Today”], a distinctive sonic gendering occurs in which the women's voices, the strong voice of 50-year-old church matriarch Mama Mgana in particular, can be heard inserting a localized timbre into an inherited European, Christian-sounding model. In this case, women do not intentionally subvert the dominant male authority of the voice of the choir's male director. Instead, the women's voices engender a direct economic response to the paucity of men, whose participation in regular church-related organizations such as *kwayas* is frequently mediated by work-related obligations. In this way, the *kwaya* often exists outside of the gendered sound produced by the sex segregation of the churches with whom I worked, in

which women sat on one side of the congregation while men sat on the other side, with the central aisle dividing the two. Men and women sing *together* in close physical proximity within *kwayas*, while they sing physically *separated* in congregations. Musical harmony brings the sexes together in a *kwaya* while spatially separating men from women in a congregation.

Sherinian approaches a similar (but sonically quite distinct) sounding occurring within Christian Karnatak choral singing within practices in India. As Sherinian suggests, unison singing dictates a particular thin high feminine timbre that has represented challenges due to a preference for a male-dictated *sruti* (pitch) tone appropriate for the male range:

[U]rban church practices in the determination of gendered vocal range and a preference for an urban middle-class female aesthetic influenced by Tamil (Bollywood-style) film music seem to have been the overarching factors that determined performance practice and aesthetics in this seminary context. (2005:5)

Sherinian also posits that a particular male hegemony in this situation is mapped onto Christian Karnatak musical contexts in which men and women perform together due to cultural expectations of a specific valued timbral sounding. In a somewhat related condition, the pedagogy adopted by Tanzanian *kwayas* when learning new material also contributes to a distinct sonic gendering. *Kwayas* are almost exclusively led by a male *mwalimu* (teacher-conductor) who frequently introduces individual soprano and alto lines for new pieces by singing in male falsetto voice in the vocal range of the women, as evoked by Gideon Mdegella in the epigraph occurring in Protestant Lutheran Church that opens this article. The colonial heritage of male-directed music education—including the infusion of the pedagogical masculine gendered sound—when reinscribed onto the postcolonial body, for example, the inherited choral singing tradition maintains a social hegemony whereby men teach women how to sing by singing in falsetto. Falsetto, however, is not only a vocal range; it also assumes and requires a timbral shift in the quality of the male singing voice, frequently preferencing a faster vibrato.

I remember at the time of my field research making a note of this particular pedagogy device used by male *walimu* (pl., “teachers”) of *kwayas*, particularly in regards to the men singing in the falsetto voice to be heard in the female range, asking myself if this was a peculiarly African way of teaching women. In my own experiences in the United States, white male choir directors of mainline Protestant church music typically (and I fully realize I am overgeneralizing) do not teach women by singing their lines, but rather by playing the music line on a piano and then singing it in the corresponding male octave range. While there is indeed variety in this pedagogy, it is nevertheless usual to rely on a keyboard instrument for melodic instruction. According to Zoe Sherinian’s field research in India, choral instructors in seminaries and some churches typically play musical lines on a small, portable harmonium keyboard and sing in their normal and comfortable masculine range; women assume that they should adopt their appropriate range an octave higher when singing these lines back. Does the teacher in Indian and American contexts, however, also translate (or teach) a timbral quality, or is this pedagogical issue related to sonic gendering in African contexts? The falsetto-like quality of many soprano *kwaya* sections in Tanzania—with little to no vibrato along with a distinctive breathy quality [in contrast to fast vibrato adopted by male *kwaya* directors when demonstrating in a female range]—can be identified in Track No. 15, “‘Sikiliza’, Asema Bwana” [“‘Listen,’ Says the Lord”], included on the CD accompanying *Performing Religion* (Barz 2003). This original composition by director and composer Gideon Mdegella, features the soprano section of *Kwaya ya Upendo* (the “Love Choir”), one of the resident *kwayas* at the Azania Front Lutheran Cathedral in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. One can easily hear the “*sauti ya moja*” (“first voice,” sopranos) producing a falsetto-like, almost boyish sonic gendering preferred by most female *kwaya* sections. I submit that this widely adopted sonic gendering is modeled on the pedagogical intervention of male teachers singing alto and soprano parts in a male falsetto voice. Thus the resultant performance of a female timbre represents a product consisting of a male-gendered musical conflation for the women in a *kwaya*.

The prevalence of a male-determined and male-generated timbre adopted by women does not necessarily indicate the total hegemony of a dominant sounding. Instead, women singing in contemporary Tanzanian *kwayas* engage the agency of subversion within a localized oral transmission mode. In the oral tradition demanded in learning to sing *kwaya* songs, the subjugation of the colonial voice’s sonic authority now roots localized traditions that were once dominated by musical structures of four-part harmony. Such a condition demands what Judith Butler has labeled a “reconsideration of the figure of the body as mute, prior to culture, awaiting signification, a figure that cross-checks with the figure of the feminine, awaiting the inscription-as-incision of the masculine signifier for entrance into language and culture” (199:188). Despite my early reluctance to map the postcolonial (contemporary *local/African* congregational singing traditions) onto the colonial (historic *foreign/European* mission hymnody), I do now readily admit to the significance of the interstice between both, what Jack Goody refers to as the “interface” between oral traditions and literate traditions (1987). It is within this culturally “riven” state, as Butler suggests below that emergent identities appear, and in the case of *kwayas*, the space where new sonic gendering occurs:

Of course, Homi Bhabha's work on the mimetic splitting of the postcolonial subject is close to my own in several ways: not only the appropriation of the colonial "voice" by the colonized, but the split condition of identification are crucial to a notion of performativity that emphasizes the way minority identities are produced and riven at the same time under conditions of domination (Butler 1999:192)

### WHICH CAME FIRST? GENDER OR SOUND?

An alternate way to frame the main questions raised in this article would be to ask whether it is one's chosen gender identity that generates one's sound (that can be culturally gendered or labeled), or, conversely, whether it is the sound of one's voice that produces one's gender in response to (consciously or unconsciously) the sound of a teacher? Can such a sounding in the latter formulation be considered an act of gendering? The performance of gender seems to intensify when there is perceived conflict between what audiences expect and what artists project. No singer has manipulated audience expectations based on sonic gendering more than k. d. lang, who continues to adopt a soft-"butch" lesbian musical persona through using sexy vocal gestures directed toward a female love object in her low female alto range. In so doing, according to Zoe Sherinian, the adoption of lang's butch gendered exteriority, her adopted style and dress, is not in "imitation of male heterosexuality within lesbian subculture but a deconstruction through inversion of the hegemony that requires female bodies to be heterosexually feminine, to be objectified, inactive, controlled and the negated mirror of male subjectivity" (2001:110). More recently, the Filipina singing sensation Charice Pempengco, known for her performances on *Glee* and with singers such as Celine Dion, transformed herself from her early performances as a highly feminized (some have said stereotypical) Asian female to an image more like a boy, disarming her audiences because she retains her strong female singing range. In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, the artist known by her first name, "Charice," stated, "basically my soul is male...but I'm not going to go through that stage [gender reassignment] where I'm going to change everything." The dilemma for any artist, particularly Charice, is simply the embodiment of her voice. Her body (vocal cords influenced by hormones) produces her voice while simultaneously challenging listeners to rethink the image. This gendered vessel accompanies the sounding of that gendering. For her audience, Charice's *voice* is still the same; only her exteriority has changed. Charice's corporeal transcendence resonates with k. d.'s gender reflection:

I am completely a woman. My body is completely a woman's body. I think the male thing is just a way of surviving—outside. Inside I'm completely a woman. The stage gives you the emancipation to do things. Because you know there has always been cross-dressing on stage—always since theater began. And it's the pace to do it. It's about art transcending sex. But still retaining sexual elements. (Lemon 1992:42, as quoted in Sherinian 2001:110)

Whether k. d. and Charice are understood as manipulating social expectations of their gender identity or sound, their sonic gendering creates newly expanded social spaces for collective performance and reception of gender.

I experienced the collective sounding of such expected gendering daily in Tanzanian churches both when I sang with *kwayas* and in the male section of a congregation. My prescribed male, cisgender identity would always dictate and anticipate the masculine-gendered soundscape that would quickly envelop me once singing began. By invoking a cisgender identity, I point directly at that gender identity that reflects the sex identity at birth: "From an epistemological standpoint, the word is essentially a straightforward antonym of 'transgender.' Both words share Latin roots, with 'trans' meaning across, beyond, or on the other side of' and 'cis' meaning 'on this side of.' Add the suffix 'gender' onto either word, and both terms emerge as strictly descriptive adjectives" (Brydum 2015).

The most appropriate musical example I can locate for readers that offers the sounding of such gendering within the genre of Tanzanian *kwaya* is an audio track included on the CD accompanying *Music in East Africa* (Barz 2004). Track No. 9 features a recording made at a *kwaya* competition at the Kariakoo Lutheran Church in Dar Es Salaam, during which the collective competing *kwayas* sang the competition's "set song," typically a German hymn that may have found its way out of common parlance in the African Christian context. As I listen now to this collective recording of "Mahali ni Pazuri" ("Wie lieblich ist's hienieden" / "This House is Beautiful"), an 18<sup>th</sup>-century German Lutheran hymn, I find myself immediately located within a sonically defined masculine space within the historic architecture of an East African church with its brick walls and tall wooden gabled ceilings. In this recording, my positionality within the gendered sounding is quite pronounced as the booming voices of the men enveloping me in the tenor and bass section of the choir produced a strong gendering of the space for my fieldwork microphones (see also Barz 2003 for an extended discussion of gendering that occurs within the performative context of congregational singing in Tanzania). The positioning of the microphones used in this recording does more than highlight a dominant masculine sound, however.<sup>1</sup> The positioning, more importantly,

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<sup>1</sup> I should note that I was holding the microphone in the male section of the choir and thus my own gendered position within the community explains why the male voices dominate in the recording.

reveals something of the sense of the process of sonic corporeality when one sings one's masculinity—one's gendering thus produces one's gendered sounding. For example, an audience member or congregant would have heard and participated in forming a distinctly different blended gender performance rather than this peculiarly masculine sonic gendering.

A more significant issue, involving the "which comes first" question in this section's header, concerns historicization, namely music's ability to create and maintain a particular gendered community within Protestant Lutheran communities over time. How has, for example, the maintenance of a spatially gendered congregational separation in African churches mapped onto the gendered musical separation in European harmony historically? And, can this concentrated social phenomenon be understood as a particularly localized sonic gendering of Christianity? An overlay of gender in African Christian congregations may skew what on the surface may appear to be an inherently multi-gendered community until the music begins and the sonic corporeality of gender envelops and defines religious spaces. The very physiology of the human vocal cords contributes to a specific sonic gendering of timbre. Thus when men teach women in a gender-appropriate range (but "false" timbre), the result may very well be the creation of a timbral-fluid gendered Christian community.

Is this aural phenomenon experienced in the recording of "Mahali ni Pazuri" detailed earlier in this section merely a sex-centered phenomenon, or is it a gendered expression? Which comes first? For example, does one become a "Tanzanian male" by singing with other "Tanzanian males" in a congregational setting? And if so, how does such sonic isolation, the positionality within masculine space, fit into that gendered equation? With this brief discussion of the gendering ability of musical performances of Tanzanian *kwayas*, I realize that I have privileged sound while neglecting the various social hierarchies associated with *kwayas*. There are certainly other issues to explore concerning gender relationships in *kwaya* music. In this regard, the social organization of *kwayas* is a logical place point of entry. In my field research with *kwayas* in Dar Es Salaam, for example, I did not encounter a single female *mwenyekiti* (chairperson), *mwalimu* (teacher/composer), or conductor of an adult congregational *kwaya*. Thus I base my analysis on the dominance of male gender identity on sonic gendering within Tanzanian *kwayas*. (I direct the reader to my other studies on Tanzania *kwaya* performance for additional reflection on gender issues in the social hierarchies of *kwayas*: Barz 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006.)

#### THE ASSUMED UNGENDERED, UNMARKED CATEGORY OF "FIELDWORKER" IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL FIELD RESEARCH

I now introduce a disciplinary reflection that unmasks what is perhaps the strongest gendered bias that remains largely unacknowledged in ethnomusicological thought, what is often the privilege of the ethnomusicologist's gender (see Babiracki 2008[1997] for further insight on gender and the ethnomusicologist within the context of field research). It will quickly become apparent that a focus on the fieldworker-as-unmarked-category relates directly to the history of engaging research among Christian congregational communities in Ethnomusicology.

Scattered throughout this section is the refuse of an academic discipline, presumed intellectual "pollution" of hegemonic social systems that litter the path of those musicians who "do not belong" and who, therefore, should not be acknowledged and whose lives should not be studied or discussed. While this section may seem tangential initially, I suspect that focusing on the researcher in Christian musical contexts will reveal yet another critical layer of sonic gendering.

The positioning of the "I" in the following sections intentionally highlights the individual in ethnomusicological field research. What may appear at first to be indulgent or hyper-reflexive is, in fact, an attempt on the author's part to reveal layers of intellectual hegemony that dictate not only how ethnomusicologists study what they do but, perhaps more importantly, *why* they do so. OK, let's go back in time 30 years. I first moved to East Africa in 1992 after completing my doctoral course work to engage in research that now seems a bit cliché. I left the United States to teach at the University of Dar Es Salaam and to engage in my initial doctoral field research studying the drumming traditions of the Wagogo people, not realizing at the time that I traveled with a large sticker on my forehead reading "typical male ethnomusicologist" (that is, a male scholar who studies that which they are *expected* [and expect of themselves] to study!) I remember working with a drummer in a village outside of Dar regularly who tolerated my endless questions about *traditional* Wagogo music particularities. One day, my drumming teacher's impatience peaked. We stopped drumming as he asked me in KiSwahili why I kept using a specific term in our lessons. The term? "Muziki." I was flustered since I did not know the cause of the linguistic breakdown at that time. I did what any foreign researcher does at such a point. I reached into my cargo pants pocket and pulled out my copy of the two-volume Oxford-Swahili dictionary and pointed to a particular word in the Swahili section. My teacher took the dictionary from me and looked intently at the English translation of the term. "Muziki" = "Music." He handed the dictionary back to me and laughed, asking me who had published it. Oxford, I responded. And where was it published? England, I answered again, not entirely understanding where this line of questioning was leading. After chuckling, my drumming teacher pointed down the main village pathway to a church. He said that is where you find "muziki." I pursued the question. If *that* which occurred in the Christian church was *muziki*, what was drumming? His response? *Ngoma*. I was confused. I knew from my dictionary that

*ngoma* meant “drum.” But what was the term for women dancing to our drumming? *Ngoma*. When people sing to our drumming? *Ngoma*. What was the whole thing called when we sang, danced, and drummed? *Ngoma*. And...when a *kwaya* sang down the pathway in the Christian congregational church? What was that called? Without pausing, he stated, *muziki*.

During my field research in East Africa, I found myself singing, performing, and competing with various Tanzanian *kwayas* and studying *muziki* as performed by Christian congregations. Eventually, I had to submit a dissertation proposal “back home” at Brown University. At the time, there was still a reluctance to engage and support research in several academic disciplines on African expressive culture that focused on what one faculty colleague referred to in a letter to me as “pollution.” I assume what they meant by invoking that term was that I was expected as a graduate student *at that moment in time* to produce knowledge, and contribute scholarship that resembled what can only be understood as having emerged from an inherited colonial model of consuming Africa as a timeless, native environment with pure, untainted musical traditions. Pollution was not deemed acceptable. That was 25 years ago. Nevertheless, I was persistent and persuasive, finally winning my colleagues and mentors over to my side. I remember sending home cassette tapes of the “real” Africa, real Africans attending fundamental African churches blending *ngoma* with *muziki*.

The academy was a different place then, and the discipline of ethnomusicology had its own mission, if you will, to maintain its relevance and position within that academy. I understand that now. But, mucking my way through the so-called pollution of foreign musics during that time in our discipline brings back memories, not all of them comfortable ones. And this is perhaps why I was initially reticent to present my early research findings when I returned from fieldwork in the early 1990s. At my first post-fieldwork Society for Ethnomusicology conference, I gave a paper on the music of Tanzanian *kwayas*. During the Question-and-Answer period following the paper, a member of the audience stood up, addressing their question to me as “Father Gregory.” I was shaken at the time, flustered that I had been put into a category, a box containing the only way colleagues knew how to listen to reflections on religion, specifically Christianity, in a third-world context. My mentor at Brown University, Jeff Titon, pulled me aside afterward saying, “we can’t affect how people are going to receive us.” He then winked at me as he said, “I warned you.” Later in the conference, another senior ethnomusicologist approached me, saying, “We need to talk about your *packaging*.” My race and my gender not only affected what I was encouraged to study in Africa by my colleagues and mentors. More importantly, my race and gender affected how my scholarship was received back home. I had not yet considered the variety of ways in which my gender specifically provided filters through which people would receive me and receive my information about Tanzanian *kwayas*. I began to see myself at the time as a scholar that was both pre-gendered and post-gendered in my field research. And most importantly, I began to question whether my own gender identity and corporeal positionality within my field research in African Christian congregations manipulated aspects of the soundscape that I would spend years assessing, documenting, and evaluating, only to have others twice removed from the experience then re-manipulate in their own perception of the sonic gendering occurring in *kwayas*.

My role models at the time for studying musical pollutants in Christian congregational communities in my discipline? All were in that very conference room at the 1994 meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology. All were postgraduate students. All were confronting and grappling with similar, if not the same, issues. Not wanting to be associated with the label, “Christian Ethnomusicologist” (a genuine and very different academic pursuit with a very different agenda), young scholars engaging in field research among Christian communities studied the reality of everyday life in non-Western contexts that not only included a relationship with Christian culture but more importantly redefined aspects of inherited European hegemony in regards to patterns of sonic gendering. For many, the issue is that Christianity as an indigenized localized religion is a reality that many scholars relate to whether they are studying it or not in many non-Western contexts. As communicated to me, at that time, some younger scholars felt they could no longer sit on their hands and ignore the reality of the West’s impact on non-Western music, and, more importantly, non-Western engagement with the binary modality of local and global, specifically regarding Christianity. In retrospect, I perhaps could have made it easier for myself and others. My long-term academic appointment has always included a joint appointment with a Divinity School, further confusing those who may not understand the difference between the “study” of religion and the “practice” of religion. And then, a true dilemma. I published my first book based partly on my dissertation with a press in Amsterdam in a book series that at the time focused on the expressive culture surrounding religion in African contexts, but soon morphed into a series populated almost exclusively by missiological titles. Thus “doing” work on Christian sounded identity has for quite some time been conflated with “being” a part of those very Christian congregations that we study.

This circuitous pathway many of us traversed in the 1990s eventually led to a critical moment in Ethnomusicology as a discipline, one in which elements of world Christian religious praxis would no longer be received as pollutants or external influences on indigenous cultural stylistics by academic disciplines. With the intervention of doctoral dissertations and ethnographies by younger scholars (young at that time!)—Carol Muller (1994), Zoe Sherinian (1998), Suzel Reily (2002), Gregory Barz (1997), T.M. Scruggs (2005), and others—ethnomusicology launched a public re-evaluation of its historical positionality within studies of music and Christian contexts. The ethnographies and dissertations emerging from the 1990s accomplished much in their focus on

Christian choral and congregational music-making practices as an expression of localized communal identity. And these scholars accomplished this in a very political way. While not intending to introduce a polemic, ethnomusicology's relatively recent embrace of localized Christian contexts begs a focus on how discipline-specific theories are onboarded and become mainstream. One cannot imagine, for example, how theological theorization unfolded in Zoe Sherinian's new text *Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology* (2013) could have otherwise appeared without the conversations about power, hegemony, and Christian cultural practices that took place in the SEM hallways in the mid-1990s. Similarly, Carol Muller's superlative ethnography of the Nazarite Religious movement in South Africa, *Rituals of Fertility and the Sacrifice of Desire: Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa* (1999), is a result of ethnomusicology's increasingly open embrace of Christian sonic cultures. That such recent studies of the confluence of foreign and localized music traditions involving the performance of Christian musicking around the world are flourishing and embraced gives me hope. I am grateful for the groundbreaking efforts of colleagues in ethnomusicology who set a foundation, a theoretical pathway for my work, and the contemporary scholarship of so-called pollution within studies of Christian congregational singing.

### CONCLUSION

When presented as dichotomous categories—Western vs. African, indigenous vs. foreign, men vs. women, masculine vs. feminine—such social constructions deny what is, for many, a process that involves an individual and communal choice that is frequently historically informed. Africanists have long contributed to interdisciplinary efforts that actively problematize dichotomous models in ethnomusicology for positioning change and adaptation. Among contributions in the 1990s that approached the multivalent nature of change, specifically regarding spirituality and disaffection within African contexts, are two ethnographies: Michelle Kisliuk's study of the BaAka people of Centrafrique, *Seize the Dance! BaAka Musical Life and the Ethnography of Performance* (1998) and Carol Muller's previously mentioned *Rituals of Fertility and the Sacrifice of Desire: Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa* (1999). Each moves eloquently beyond treating adaptation and indigenization as merely oppositional. Kisliuk's final chapter, "Managing Missionaries and Modernity," focuses directly on issues related to adaptation as a culture-specific process, one that involves multiple levels of change in a "dialogue with modernity" (1998:191), specifically within the sounding of gender within Christian musical performance. One of the most potent scenarios that unfold in Muller's ethnography is the inalienable Nazarite hymn-singing style that becomes "re-Africanized" within the context of women's performance: "in the performance of sacred song and dance, the Western and Nazarite discourse are reconstructed as a single body of truth" (1999:107). Kisliuk and Muller both draw on aspects of adaptation inherent in Steven Kaplan's six-part typology (1995) for positioning music within cultural change, demonstrating the interdependence of forms of change, and set the stage for our journey down our polluted pathway (see Barz 2005 for an extensive explication of Kaplan's typology and how it can be applied to Christian congregational singing: see also Sherinian 2013 for an alternative yet complementary analysis drawing on Kaplan's typology).

My focus on gender in this article—and by extension, on the active process of gendering that occurs with Tanzanian *kwayas*—provoked two process questions. First, I posed the question of whether the sounds generated within Christian choral performance gender that community, creating a sonic grid defining and delineating a culture-specific gender division. Second, I approached the issue of the specific gender identity of *kwaya* members to query the source of gendered sounds and thus the production of the gender identity(-ies) of the community overall. In response to the second issue, the corporeality of individual *kwaya* members may very well engender sound, yet when coupled with the first question, musical performances must be understood to give gender constructions its sound, and it is within everyday performance in a *kwaya* that gender identity is sonically (re-)produced within *kwaya* communities. We can then conclude that the sonic gendering in Christian congregational singing tells us that local Tanzanian *kwayas* actively perform gender into being sonically while contributing sonically to the gendering process of others around them.

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### Brief Bio

**Gregory Barz** is a professor of ethnomusicology and director of the School of Music at Boston University. An ethnomusicologist, he has engaged in field research in Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Israel. He received his Ph.D. from Brown University and his MA from the University of Chicago. His current research project is on global drag traditions, focusing on drag performance in Boston and Israel. A former opera singer, Barz's latest book is a co-edited volume titled *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology* (Oxford). In addition, he has co-edited *The Culture of AIDS in Africa: Hope and Healing in Music and the Arts* (Oxford) and two editions of *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Oxford). His monograph, *Singing for Life: HIV/AIDS and Music in Uganda* (Routledge), applies the central tenets of medical ethnomusicology to a study of HIV prevention in East Africa. His book, *Music in East Africa: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*, was also published by Oxford. He has produced four compact discs and a documentary film and received a GRAMMY nomination in the Best Traditional World Music category as a producer of *Singing for Life: Songs of Hope, Healing, and HIV/AIDS in Uganda* (Smithsonian Folkways).