Sampling Politics: Music and the Geocultural
M.I. Franklin, Oxford University Press (forthcoming)

Extended Abstract and Table of Contents

Abstract

The uptake of popular culture in the study of world politics has become a growth area over the last few years. The main emphasis to date has been on visual and digital media content (TV, cinema, video, computer games, comics), with some interest in literature (hi-brow to pulp fiction) and, to a lesser extent, the contemporary arts and design (theatre, the arts, fashion). This book addresses one dimension to this thriving interest; music as a constituent factor in the audible – aural and sonic – dimensions to the popular culture and world politics nexus. This study develops themes from a book-length contribution on music at the outset of this 'popular cultural shift' (Franklin 2005). It delves more deeply into the aim of that volume, and interventions since then (Davies and Franklin 2015), to forge productive links between the (popular) music research, cultural studies, and the study of world politics.

The primary objective is to develop a consciously critical musicological approach to exploring how a piece of music works as an expressive and experiential dimension to international affairs marked by changes in the international state system and the conduct of national politics, internet media and communications, and post-9/11 tensions. These historical shifts have had their own implications for debates in (new) music research as well as cultural studies and sociology, the main disciplines in which music is analysed, various developments in theory and research debated. Like other art forms and their accompanying sociocultural dynamics music is increasingly created, consumed, enjoyed and also contested across national borders, social settings, and cultural traditions through the web, dedicated digital media, and networked - portable and digital - devices. The focus for this book and the research underpinning it is, as the title suggests, the geocultural politics of music sampling since the middle of the last century. Each chapter treats a particular piece of music as an example of sampling, strictly and loosely construed. Each case is examined as a musical artefact and set of cultural practices – composition, performance, circulation and (re) production, in light of the wider political and sociocultural contexts at the time of its making, and since.

Sampling here is taken in several ways. First, it refers more strictly to a specific technological and musical practice that dates from the 1980's with the conjuncture of rap and hip-hop, digital compositional techniques and tools, and the rise of the internet - or more specifically the web, as a global platform for music making and consumption. Together these developments have radically altered the art and business of music making, realigned the gatekeeping powers of the majors and with that the global political economy of consumption and distribution of popular music, along with other media and cultural forms. Secondly, as borrowing, directly or indirectly in musical terms, sampling also works as a form of musical quotation. These studies show how sampling as a practice can also be stretched back in time and over into other art forms and settings. This means that sampling as a socio-musical practice, as an internal, mutually reinforcing conversation precedes its establishment in the last decades as the epitome of internet-dependent musical cultures. The influence of mid-20th century generations of avant-garde, electronic music composers in the classical tradition whose experiments with electronic forms of recording, playback, and loops are still audible in the work of popular musicians since then.

Third, I stretch the term sideways, across musical traditions and idioms, in order to consider the contested ethics of sampling practices when engaged from across the musical conventions of other, non-western societies and (popular) cultures. I consider what happens when these combinations and collaborations

collapse aesthetic and cultural distinctions between sacred and secular music, formal and informal conventions around performance, execution, significance, and heritage. These socioculturally, and therewith ethically contested practices permeate subsequent contestations around more than just legal ownership and control that now drive the global business of music licensing. In the wake of how established artists in the west have a chequered record in the way they handle 'samples' from other cultural traditions, the rise of (digital) copyright regimes in the music and entertainment industry goes hand in hand with tailor-made applications that patrol the web, and monitor accessing and downloading behaviour online on behalf of putative, legal rights-holders.

The book is comprised of eight chapters, five of which are dedicated to one particular example of sampling – broadly defined as indicated above. Each case is unpacked, the core sample considered, on its own terms and within the work that sampled it and in the context of the larger ensemble in which this piece was released, mostly as albums or a larger conceptual intervention. Each piece in question has its own legacy since released or re-released with the manifest content shifting its significance for the interconnections between these examples reflect, and are inflected by sociocultural, musical, and political issues over time. Further archival research and interviews, insights from several years of student responses to these pieces, corroborate the musicological analysis. The penultimate chapter considers how sampling epitomizes the tension in digital-age music making itself as these techniques and other forms of borrowing in musical cultures develop against the backdrop of the global music industry's successive attempts to maintain control and access through copyright. This chapter broaches an area that has yet to be fully considered; what these corporate take-backs of copyright through commercial file-sharing mean in context of increased online tracking and surveillance by business actors and governments. With both these actors working together to refine ways to track and prosecute copyright transgressions, litigation has become integral to the musical history and geocultural politics of sampling as both a creative and extractive practice.

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