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ILLNESS NARRATIVE

Music as Illness; Music as Healing

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Abstract Throughout the Soviet Union, the arts became tied to ethnicity through the project of Socialist Realism. When, in 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic became independent from the Soviet Union, its national narrative continued to be built upon tropes of Kyrgyz ethnicity. Through their engagement with images of the ethno-national self, the arts provide a great source of beauty. Defining beauty as a representation of the self that is pure whole, and stable, Julia Kristeva asserts that beauty and suffering are part of the same phenomena. Arthur Kleinman argues that suffering is best understood as existing within the triangulated relationship of cultural representation, collective experience, and subjectivity. Music too is part of this triangulated relationship, and therefore, a part of suffering. Drawing upon ten months of ethnographic fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, this article explores the illness experience of a single Kyrgyz musician. In doing so, it illustrates music's role in self-formation and the development of social, economic, and political ties and the shifts that occur in these during illness. In drawing forth the role of music in the construction of racialized ethnicities, this article demonstrates how the experience of transformative beauty can coexist with turmoil, marginalization, and violence.

Keywords Beauty · Social suffering · Ethnicity · Nationalism · Illness · Music · Kyrgyzstan

Introduction

Speaking in Russian, the *komuz* player addressed me by the Kyrgyz name she had given. "Myram Gul," she said, "When you get back to the United States of

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America, call me from time to time [and ask] 'Nurzad, are you still alive?'" Upon uttering these words, Nurzad released a hearty laugh that rippled forth from deep within a broad belly. Her laughter was infectious and I couldn't help but join her. Still, I appreciated her humor's darker undertones: A dead person could not answer the phone, and the sound of her voice should be enough to let me know that she was alive. Nurzad's playful statement served as a reminder that a recent diagnosis of cancer had made life uncertain and brought death precariously close. In telling the story of a Kyrgyz musician whose musical practice has been transformed by illness, this article explores the ways illness destabilizes constructs of self and music alongside social networks, systems of patronage, and the audience–performer relationship. The uncertainties surrounding illness draw forth competing moral projects involving religion, ethnicity, and citizenship and enable the interrogation of a dominant narrative based upon the tropes of a single ethnicity: the Kyrgyz.

Illness, Kleinman argues, is a form of suffering, existing within the triangulated relationship of cultural representation, collective experience, and subjectivity. Defining cultural representation as "the collective patterns of meaning that inform art, theodicy, and other cultural forms," collective experience as "the [historical] events and social processes that helped to define the lives of whole generations of people" and subjectivity as "the somato-moral dimension [of an individual] where illness often occurs," Kleinman posits that a shift within any one of these affects the remaining two (Kleinman and Seeman 2000, p. 239). Throughout this article, I argue that music too is a part this triangulated relationship and is therefore a site of moral tensions and a forum for the negotiation of identity (Kleinman 2006).

Just as the vocal arts cannot be separated from the physical and moral body that produces it (Rahaim 2012), music per se cannot be separated from musical practice. In as much as the activities and beliefs that comprise musical practice lend meaning to the production of sound, enabling certain acoustic phenomena to become music, so does musical meaning change alongside shifts in these surrounding beliefs and practices (Avorgbedor 2003). Alongside John Janzen, I argue that healing in relationship to music is not made possible through isolated acoustic phenomena such as intervals, vibrations, or timbre, but rather through a multifaceted and cross-modal experience irreducible to the sum-total of its parts (Janzen 2000).[1]

The complexities surrounding music and healing have been well studied in relation to lament: As suggested by Margarita Mazo, the listening body reacts not only to paramusical elements shared with crying, but also to various contexts evoked by the genre, such as the resurgent memory of a death. The ability of the listener to engage productively with larger physiological, psychological, and social process through lament enables the alleviation of suffering (Mazo, personal

[1] See The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology (Koen et al. 2008) for discussions seeking to understand the healing properties of music within the intersection of "(a) the physics of sound, (b) the biophysiological realms of perception and sensation, and (c) social, cultural, historical, and individual realms of meaning (Roseman 2008, p. 27). In a survey of approaches to music therapy, Kenneth Aigen criticizes such medical models as conflicting with approaches where human relationships, creative processes, and contextual factors are key. Aigen argues that "a medical model for music therapy is just not possible because there is no analogue in music therapy to the intervention as it is conceived in medicine" (Aigen 2014, p. 28).

communication).[2] Elizabeth Tolbert suggests that the lamenter enters a trance-like state, venting her own feelings and mediating transpersonal experiences of mourning and the transition between life and death (Tolbert 2009). In Kyrgyzstan, lamenting is part of ethnically marked [Kyrgyz] burial and mourning.[3] The *komuz* [Kyrgyz: lute] not only brings the news of death and conveys a state of grief, but is also said to "weep" while doing so. This happens through the transposition of elements of crying to the melody, timbre, rhythm, and articulation of *komuz* performance (Pritchard 2011). Just as the drums beaten during ritual mourning for the Imam Husain "may act as a surrogate for the human body" in pain (Wolf 2009, p. 346), so may the *komuz* act as a surrogate for—and an extension of—the human body in grief, as well as a means of expressing and mediating other states of emotion appropriate to other occasions and contexts.

According to Regula Qureshi, such processes of mourning and remembrance can be pushed toward an experience of the sublime. In considering 'the sublime', Qureshi describes music making as "an act that embodies social affirmation, contestation [and] even transcendence" (Qureshi 2000, p. 19). Music, then, is a medium for beauty. With reference to Sigmund Freud and Jacque Lacan, Julia Kristeva's conceives of beauty not as a culturally bounded aesthetic construct, but as a psychic impulse: "Beauty is an Imaginary." As such, beauty is as a representation of the self that is pure whole and stable. Beauty restores hope, enables creative pleasure, and initiates healing. Kristeva cautions, however, that suffering is beauty's other face (Kristeva 1989) and, although psychically necessary, the co-process of abjection makes this beauty brittle (Kristeva 1982).

Manifest in ethical, religious, and aesthetic work, beauty "remakes the actual practices of ordinary life, forging new synergies between values and emotions, so that collective significance, transcendence, and the sense of ultimate order and control come to animate who we are" (Kleinman 2006, p. 14). In exploring music's role in the these processes, I have come to regard healing as an experience of personal transformation that touches the physical, emotional, psychological, and social aspects of individual selves. Following upon Christopher Dole's research on the tensions between secularism and religiosity that mark the social and political life of Turkey, I assert that within the healing process, individuals not only reformulate competing projects of world making, but also participate in a series of interlocking struggles in relationship to competing cultural authorities and the power of the state (Dole 2012, pp. 5–6).

Thus, this article draws forth two coexistent processes of suffering: One, of an individual whom illness threatens to push from the center of social and political life. Two, of a larger group of people estranged and marginalized by the same processes that make healing possible. In as much as Nurzad occupies a central position in

[2] This material was most recently presented by Margarita Mazo in a paper titled "Crying Is Good for You: Affective Heart Responses to Vocal Expressions of Sadness and Grief" at the 2013 SEM Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, IN. See also Mazo 1994a, b.

[3] Although lamenting is practiced by many of the people who comprised the Soviet Union, in the Soviet period *koshok* was elevated as a Kyrgyz national tradition. In its effort to turn the oral traditions practice in Kyrgyzstan into the literary traditions of the Kyrgyz people, ethnicity and nation, volumes of *koshok* text were published as "people's poetry."

social and political life and is invested in maintaining that position, Nurzad participates in the creation of a racialized center and margin, aiding the construction of Kyrgyz ethnic and national identity alongside the estrangement and alienation of citizens excluded from these constructs. Despite its healing role, Nurzad's music partakes in social suffering, defined as the ways in which structural tensions press down and leak into everyday individual experiences, creating narratives of pain, sorrow, alienation, marginalization, and loss (Kleinman and Byrom 1995).

Ethnicity and Religion

Nurzad is the professional player of a three stringed fretless lute called the *komuz*. In Soviet times, the *komuz* was elevated to the status of Kyrgyz national instrument, evoking complex constructs of the Kyrgyz people, ethnicity, and nation. These ethnic constructs have been built upon Joseph Stalin's definition of narod. Stalin defined *narod* as "a historically formed and stable community of people which has emerged on the basis of common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up, the later being manifest in a common shared culture" (Kozolov and Bromley 1989, p. 426).

This definition motivated the creation of the various republics and regions that comprised the Soviet Union and the establishment of independent states upon its dissolution in 1991 as the subdivisions of the Soviet Union were claimed by those titular nationalities to whom the Soviet constitution granted sovereignty. Thus, the designation of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic as the national territory of the Kyrgyz people, ethnicity, and nation continued into independence. Thirty-five percent of the population in Kyrgyzstan claim another identity which is—by law—inscribed upon their passport. Although the majority of these are Uzbek, Russians, Uyghurs, Dungans, Circassians, Koreans, Germans, Bukharin Jews, Kurds, Meshketian Turks, and Tajiks, among others, are also included among the non-Kyrgyz.

These ethnicities were created and solidified not only through Soviet cultural policies but also through the project of Socialist Realism which advocated the development of arts "national in form, socialist in content" (Levin 1984). As a result, the same constructions of ethnicity that comprised the Soviet Union came to constitute the arts, which Soviet scholars saw as arising from the socioeconomic conditions of a given *narod* (Beliaev 1975). Marked by a constant flow of people, languages, and identities (Golden 2012), the ethnic heterogeneity of Central Asia was furthered through waves of voluntary migration and mass deportation (Polian 2004). In addition, religious identities were secularized and subsumed into concepts of shared culture and language (Khalid 2003). This has enabled processes of estrangement and marginalization to extend to those ethnic Kyrgyz who do not speak the Kyrgyz language, or to those who have converted to Christianity. In contrast to the profoundly national religious revival of neighboring Uzbekistan (Khalid 2007), Kyrgyzstan seems to be experiencing an untying of religious and national identity. This was captured by one Kyrgyz scholar during a funeral: Male participants known for holding more doctrinal views on Islam recited a verse from

the Koran over the *koshok* [Kyrgyz: lament] of women. In persisting in their respective performances, both groups negotiated tensions between religious and national identity (Kuchumkulova 2007).

In Kyrgyzstan—as well as in Tuva—human and animal ancestors are actively involved in the transmission of musical knowledge, even as musical practice serves as a means of interacting with ancestors and spirits that animate the natural world (Levin 2006). Within my own research, this was exemplified by a *kyl kyiak* [Kyrgyz: carved fiddle] maker whose everyday routine included interactions with these ancestor-spirits. Such experiences are intertwined with the creation of an ethnic-based national narrative: According to Mathijis Pelkmans, the activities of evangelical Christians in Kyrgyzstan have come to include narration of the life of Jesus through the genre of epic recitation typically reserved for the hero Manas. The increased use of Kyrgyz language, costumes, instruments, and symbols have caused members of non-Kyrgyz ethnicities to become less attracted to religious services (Pelkmans 2007, p. 893). This points to the ways ethnic-based marginalization seeps into all forums for social interaction through the arts, furthering processes of social suffering.[4]

Ethnicity and Race

Drawing upon the stages of social evolution presented by Karl Marx in his Communist Manifesto, the Bolsheviks perceived the various people of the Soviet Union as existing in different historical stages. In its struggle to overcome history, the Soviet Union sought to hurl its varied *narod* through the successive stages of social development so that they, as a united Soviet people, could join efforts in building the final utopian stage of communism (Hirsch 2005, pp. 7–9). This teleological approach has introduced evolutionist notions of superiority and inferiority into the academy as well as into the general populace, allowing ethnicity to become racialized (Hirsch 2005, pp. 239–246).

Philip Bohlman and Roland Radano argue that music participates in the "shifting matrix of ideological constructs of difference associated with body type and color" that comprise the racial imagination, remaining "forever on the loose, subject to reformation within the memories and imaginations of the social as it blurs into other categories constituting difference" (Bohlman and Radano 2000, p. 5). Soviet citizens use the word *negr* to reference individuals of African origin or descent. The word *negr* is not inherently pejorative, although it may be made so by context. *Chernyi* [Russian: blackness], however, is. *Chernyi* refers to spatial and temporal displacement and to a lack of full civil rights and a normal standard of living. These constructions have allowed populations of Africans formerly enslaved under the Ottoman Empire to become incorporated into non-African ethnicities (such as Russian), while other Soviet ethnicities (such as those of the Caucuses) are

[4] Based on my experience, I suggest that the association of musical practice (Kyrgyz or other) with Christian worship has dramatically altered perceptions of musical practice among more nationally minded Kyrgyz, enabling the denial of music to become a salient part of reclaimed Islamic identities and narratives in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

'blackened' and claim 'blackness' (Fikes and Lemon 2002)[5] In Kyrgyzstan, this can be seen in regards to members of non-Kyrgyz ethnicities: Even as the grandmother of the Circassian family with whom I stayed praised the richly laden table with the comment: "Today we are eating like white people!," the child of an Uzbek father and Russian mother remembered being taunted by the name *chernomazyi* [Russian: black smudge] as she played in her neighborhood in Osh. More revealing, however, was a comment made by Nurzad. In reflecting upon the African American who had become her newest *komuz* student, she also reflected upon the blackness of her fellow citizens: "Just as years of oppression within the capitalist system made African Americans rebellious and violent, so were the Uzbek populations of Kyrgyzstan beginning to rise-up." This, Nurzad felt, had been evidenced by the inter-ethnic violence of 2010.

Music and Violence

In April 2010, masses of protesters stormed the center of government in Bishkek. President Kurmanbek Bakiev shocked the nation by firing upon protesters before abandoning his office. These events inspired Nurzad to recount them musically. Within the composition, events are described metaphorically through a repeated melody marked by elongating variations and unsteady rhythmic motifs. Assuming the Kyrgyz people, ethnicity, and nation to be a stable entity whose history has been subsumed by surrounding peoples (Tchoroev 2002), Nurzad portrays the building sorrow, frustration, and anger of this long-subjugated people arising in the Soviet period and continuing into independence. According to Nurzad's musical narrative, these emotions erupted on April 7, 2010 in the form of mass protests. Through the removal of a corrupt government, frustration and anger were transformed into relief and hope for a better tomorrow as heard in an elongated pause followed by a distinctive change in timbre, tonal center, and rhythm.

According to another *komuz* player, Asan Kaybylda uulu—from horse to train, the rhythms, and melodies of Kyrgyz music—has incorporated the changing rhythms and melodies of everyday life, enabling the history of a people, ethnicity, and nation to be told through melody.[6] Just as pan-Turkic ideas entered recitation of the Manas epic amid patronage by Kazakh ethnographer Cokan Valikhanov, so too did patronage shift to party and patrimony by the state (Prior 2000), so that, amid the rise of pro-Bolshevik activism in Central Asia, the *akyn* [Kyrgyz: bard] too came to sing of Lenin (Vinogradov 1958). Like their Russian counterparts, the musicians and composers of Kyrgyzstan have maintained their creative integrity, negotiating lived-experience with the interests of the state through the medium of art (Pritchard 2013). Thus, Nurzad's composition, entitled 'Chyn kurandyn jetisi' [Kyrgyz: April

[5] For further discussion of race relationships and the construction of blackness in the Soviet Union, see: Black (1977), Matusevich (2008) and Phillips (1997). For a discussion of music as a mediator of these constructions, see Helbig (2014).

[6] Although Kaybylda ulu relayed these ideas to me in person, they have been expanded upon in a manuscript completed during his lifetime but published only after his death: Kaybylda uulu, Asan. 2000. *Küü bayany: Birinchi kitep [The History of Melody: Book One]*. Bishkek: Elpek.

7], continues the role of the Kyrgyz musician as one who records the past, sometimes reliving it in trance-like performance, and who, in doing so, provides philosophical insight and social commentary.[7]

Amid the events of April 7, celebrated and described by Nurzad, Rosa Otunbayeva became the acting President of the Kyrgyz Republic. One year later, Otunbayeva traveled to the United States of America to receive an award for 'International Women of Courage'. Nurzad accompanied her, writing and performing a composition in the President's honor. Unlike 'Chyn kurandyn jetisi', this *küü* [Kyrgyz: a genre of instrumental music] seeks to evoke the mood of celebration as indicated by its title: *Mayram Küü* [Kyrgyz: A Mood of Celebration].[8] According to the U.S. Department of State, Otunbayeva had been given this award for stepping forward as national leader and for keeping Kyrgyzstan whole "in the face of a collapsing, corrupt government, strong regional divisions and widespread economic stagnation."[9] In narrating Bakiev's overthrow and Otunbayeva's victory through music, Nurzad demonstrates the way in which her music—like those of *komuz* players before her—actively participates in the construction of Kyrgyz history and in the development of a national narrative based on the shared experience, interests, and understandings of a single ethnicity.

What has been omitted from this narrative is that only two months into Otunbayeva's presidency, violence between (ethnic) Kyrgyz and (ethnic) Uzbek communities erupted in the southern city of Osh: According to official reports, approximately 470 people were killed, 1,900 hospitalized, 111,000 fled the borders, and 300,000 were internally displaced.[10] During this period, *mahallas* or historic Uzbek neighborhood were attacked, houses looted and burned, and residents beaten, raped, and killed. Incidents in which women were undressed and forced to walk naked or even dance before their persecutors were reported. In such moments 'musicking' becomes not the means of listening to and performing culture defined by Bruno Nettl, but rather a dehumanizing act of humiliation and torture (Nettl 1983).

Touching upon this other side of the acoustic register, E. Valentine Daniel notes that the narrative capacity of music and language decays amid the cries and moans of torment and pain, followed by the silence that is death (Daniel 1996). Likewise, in listening to documentation of war in the Congo alongside post-war testimonies, Nancy Hunt leads her reader through the violence encapsulated in hushed voices, the sounds of people scattering in flight, weeping, and humourless laughter (Hunt 2008). Even as Charles Hirschkind highlights the role of listening practices in the

[7] A video of Nurzad playing this melody against footage of the 'revolution' may be seen here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0HvEZ5tEF0.

[8] A video that Nurzad made using footage from her time in Washington D.C. may be seen here: http://video.mail.ru/mail/kzhyldyzdary/834/837.html.

[9] The U.S. Department of State Announcement of Award Recipients may be found here: http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/03/157710.htm.

[10] See *The Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events of Southern Kyrgyzstan* (June 2010) at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Report_490.pdf and the Kyrgyz government's response to this report at http://www.fergananews.com/archive/2011/kg_comments_english_final.pdf.

formation of an ethical self (Hirschkind 2006), Susan Cusick demonstrates that the systematic negation of these listening practices—through music used as a medium of torture—can be psychically destructive (Cusick 2008).

These events form the silent and little acknowledged backdrop to Nurzad's musical career and point to the entanglement of musical practice in processes of social suffering: Two years later, a plethora of signification continue to surround the 'revolution' of April 2010, while an uncanny silence shrouded the inter-ethnic violence that followed. Included within this silence was the distinct absence of 'Uzbek' music once prevalent in most public spaces (Liu 2012).

Brittle Beauty

Describing the violence, rape, and abduction of women during the partitioning of Pakistan and India, including the painful inscriptions of nationalist slogans on their bodies, Veena Das presents violence as a shore of unknown distance, asserting that such "scenes of violence constitute the threshold within which ordinary life is lived." Drawing upon the language of psychoanalysis, Das argues that the nation is "an absent object to be made magically visible in [the] magnified sexuality" of violence. As the nation is deified through women, the bodies of women become "surfaces on which the text of their nation is written." This creates "a future memory by which men of the other community would never be able to forget that the women as territory had already been claimed and occupied by other men" (Das 1997, pp. 68, 74–75, 85). Similar processes were seen in Kyrgyzstan after a similar eruption of inter-ethnic violence in 1991. One Kyrgyz defendant claimed that he had killed an Uzbek in order to show that he was Kyrgyz; another insisted that he would never have raped a woman of his own ethnicity (Tishkov 1998). From the forced unveiling of women in Uzbekistan by Soviet activists to forced re-veiling by their opponents, the bodies of women have been consistently caught-up in constructions of Soviet and post-Soviet ethnic and national identities. More so, the negative elevation of certain customs as crimes particular to a given ethnos-nation, such as bride kidnapping, has caused the perpetration of these violent acts to become an affirmation of ethnic and national identity (Northrop 2004).

Similar violence is enacted upon musical instruments as seen in John Baily's observation of Afghan musicians who, in Taliban controlled areas, burry their instruments to prevent them from being destroyed (Baily 1986). In Soviet Central Asia, such violence has been extended through forced changes to intervals, intonation, orchestration, and performance. These acts are violent in that they disrupt, disfigure, and even destroy musical knowledge and its associated meanings and practices (During 2005). Like the magnified sexuality of violence, and the brutalized bodies of women, musical genres, instruments, and geographies also participate in these ongoing processes of differentiation and bordering. Like the body of the (female) musician, her instrument and its associated genres are extensions of ethnicity and nation, enabling concern for the health of body, instrument, and music to become concern for ethnicity and nation.

In advocating the restoration of pre-Soviet musical practices, During fails to acknowledge the process of bordering that can accompany the elevation of ethnicity and nation, and which can turn to violence (During 2005). Nick Megoran argues that as geographical boundaries materialize, rematerialize, and dematerialize in uneven cycles, so do the associated (social) borders of ethnicity (Megoran 2012, p. 466). Likewise, Madeleine Reeves comments that "the salience of the border for locals lies less in its overt violence… than in the threat that is implicit (Reeves 2007, p. 290). This implicit threat is indicative of the unacknowledged yet co-present abject. In theorizing the abject, Kristeva argues that it is through such terrifying and often violent expulsion of matter, emotions, memories, cultural forms, and people that the borders of the self are drawn up, enabling the creation of a brittle beauty. This image of the self as pure, whole, and stable enables the construction of individual, ethnicity, and nation (Kristeva 1982, 1989).

Music as Life; Music as Self

As a *komuz* player, Nurzad specializes in a genre of solo instrumental music known as *küü*: *Küü* is a narrative genre, associated with the retelling of stories, myths, personal experiences, and historical events. Kyrgyz speakers typically translate the word *küü* as *nastroenie*, a Russian word[11] meaning 'mood' and associate it with *nastroika*, a colloquialism for 'tuning'. Seeing *stroi* [Russian: structure] as the common root of both words, Nurzad explained that the 'structure' of a *küü*—that is, the way in which it was *ustroen* or 'built'—could partake in, as well as narrate, the 'construction' of a time, a place, a nation, or an individual. These three words are etymologically related only within the Kyrgyz musical imagination. In connecting them, Nurzad drew upon metaphors of material products and labor that pervaded the language of the Soviet Union, presenting music as part of the architecture of the self, both individual and collective.

Even Ruud (1997) argues that music cultivates "an awareness of feelings, bodily presence, inner core and authentic self," "feelings of belonging to a community and different vantage points from which to consider one's world," "a particular time and place that embodies what one has lived through and to which one feels perpetually connected" and "experiences of energy and power… outside of the daily experience of time and space" (Aigen 2014, p. 52). Building upon the work of Antonio Damasio, Judith Becker adds that within the act of musicking, certain elements of the autobiographical self shift: The core self—a sense of here-in-now—becomes attuned to the movements, sounds, rhythms, timbres, and images of musical performance, even as the extended consciousness—the connection to

[11] Throughout my research in Kyrgyzstan, I moved among artists, musicians, and audience members of various ethnic groups, each speaking their respective languages. Although I made an effort to learn musical terms in Kyrgyz when interacting with Kyrgyz-speaking musicians, Russian remained my primary language of research and communication. Kyrgyz-speaking musicians typically translate musical terms through Russian for the benefit of their non-Kyrgyz speaking compatriots. In Kyrgyzstan, the process of translation represents the mediation of key terms and concepts through language—and art—that remain inflected by shared Soviet experience (see İğmen 2012).

personal history, life-long memories and a social sense of being—is temporarily displaced, forgotten, or replaced by an alternative persona (Becker 2004, pp. 131–149). Both can be seen in Nurzad's engagement with music in health and in illness.

During our conversations, Nurzad's portrayed of a significant portion of her personal life through the performance and discussion of a composition entitled 'Sezimdegi Tolgoo'.[12] After graduation, Nurzad got married, gave birth, and divorced. Prior to marriage, Nurzad's husband seemed a man of status, education, and upbringing. After marriage, Nurzad discovered her husband had lied about his status, education, and upbringing and that he had been previously married. He was jealous of Nurzad's professional success and unable to tolerate a strong and independent woman. Due to the tumultuous relationship, Nurzad had mixed feelings about her pregnancy, and yet she chose to give birth. Nurzad captures this moment in 'Sezimdegi Tolgoo'. Rather than a representation of experience, the composition is experience recreated and remembered through performance (Becker 2004).

Although Nurzad never spoke of the intercessions of ancestors or spirits, in discussing her process of composition, she conveyed the sense that the *komuz* carries a creative will independent of the musician: The composition had not been written all at once. Rather bits of melody rose up alongside the events of Nurzad's life. The beginning melody had come to Nurzad while visiting Lake Issuk-Kul, a place of strong spiritual presence for many Kyrgyz. The rest had followed, bit by bit. After her daughter was born, it was as if the *komuz* would not let her go. Nurzad would nurse the child, put the child to sleep and—as if bending to the will of an external entity—pick up the *komuz* and compose. According to Nurzad, *sezim* refers to *chustvo* [Russian: feeling, sense, sensation] and *tolgoo* has the dual meaning of *nastroenie* [Russian: mood] and *razhdenie* [Russian: birthing]. Thus, "Sezimdegi Tolgoo" refers to the complex physical, emotional, and life-altering experience of giving birth. Nurzad daughter was also named Sezim. This added yet another layer of meaning to the *küü* that seemed to have been born in the same moment as Nurzad's daughter. Thus, the title of the composition may also be interpreted as "A Melody about a Feeling," "Feelings about Sezim," or "Sezim's Birth."

Although Nurzad had named her daughter, it was her mentor who named the *küü* upon grasping its affect-laden narrative. Such encounters suggest that, as a culturally bounded genre made comprehensible through lifetimes of social interaction, *küü* mediates transpersonal communication of complex physical, emotional, and psychological experiences not easily conveyed in words and thus provides a forum for the alleviation of suffering (Tolbert 2009; Mazo 1994a, b). Unlike the language of agency created through metaphors of body damage, this musical language reduces the shocked aversion to uninvited presentations of bodily damage, enabling the ongoing recognition of person alongside the pain that he or she experiences (Scarry 2009, pp. 284, 289). Indeed, Nurzad had played the *küü* for the *akyn* in hopes of lifting her spirits, commenting "she was sick like me, and died [of cancer]." In examining the birth of this composition and the experience entailed

[12] A video of Nurzad playing this melody with footage of her daughter may be seen here: http://video.mail.ru/mail/baatyrov.urmat/_myvideo/435.html?liked=1.

in it, one can see the extent to which music has become entangled in the subjectivity of an individual person, alongside ethnicity and nation.

These subjectivities are formed through modes of socialization (Rasanayagam 2011). As a mode of socialization, music facilitates the sharing of individual experiences and provides a means for their convergence. For Nurzad, this could be seen during a 2005 performance in Estonia with the *kyl kyiak* player Bakit Chiterbaev. During the performance, Chiterbaev had played a song about a white swan. According to Megan Rancier, Chiterbaev's instrument—known as the *qyl qobyz* among Kazakhs—resembles a swan when held strings facing down, and is associated with ritual interactions with the swan not only as an animal, but as an ancestor and animate force of nature (Rancier 2009a, p. 80). As the visual and melodic images evoked by *küü* are rooted in a close relationship to human and animal ancestors as well as natural forces (see Levin 2006; Zarcone 2013), it is not surprising that Nurzad perceived a swan to join them on stage. Not only does this suggest a masterful performance, it also suggests the power of music to call upon and create that which it evokes, such grief (Mazo 1994a) or powerful non-human entities (Becker 2004, pp. 83–84).

For Nurzad, the performance captured "musical flow, transcendence, experiencing oneself as the source of aesthetic creation, being in the moment, bonding [and] participating in one's culture." These are described by Kenneth Aigen as the therapeutic elements of music, enabling a deep connection to "the authentic sense of self" as well as the intense comradery of people who share a liminal state together" (Aigen 2014, pp. 67, 143–144). "I got high from the performance," Nurzad said, "[Chierbaev's] playing gave me energy. My playing gave him energy and it went like that, in a big circle." This state of heightened emotion seemed to be shared with audience members in a way that is similar to deep listening or nearness to trance (Becker 2004, p. 2).

"After the performance, the Kyrgyz and Kazaks that were in the audience came up. They said 'We have never experience such a great performance before, not in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan or Estonia!"' After this performance, Chiterbaev—who was not in the habit of consuming alcohol[13] or speaking to musicians of a lesser-caliber—spoke to Nurzad for the first time. Some audience members wanted to take the two musicians out for a celebratory round of beer and Chiterbaev said: 'C'mon Nurzad, let's drink!' Nurzad commented: "it had been such a remarkable performance even Chiterbaev felt like celebrating." In adding to the depths of experience, Nurzad's talent was affirmed, and her status as a professional musician acknowledged by Chiterbaev. More so, audience members were privileged to host these two musicians: In his research on the social gatherings of Uyghur men, Jay Dautcher observes the "the truly successful event requires one or perhaps two special participants… someone known as a skilled raconteur of jokes… or a skilled performer of [Uyghur] folk and popular music. One special guest [is] sufficient to raise the standard of… entertainment above that of the everyday, and a gathering with a top jokester and a top musician was an event long remembered" (Dautcher 2009, p. 144). Having discussed the entanglement of music in a healthy self and in social relationships, I will now examine the way in which illness affects these entanglements.

[13] Despite the fact that most Kyrgyz identify as Muslim, alcohol consumption is common. Those who see their musical practice in relationship to spiritual gifts, however, often refrain from alcohol consumption as it is disruptive to their relationship with ancestors and spirits.

When Music Becomes Ill

In introducing The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology, the editors note that each individual presents "a unique cultural landscape that can be best understood in its own terms," arguing that music affects change upon "the thoughts, bodily attributes, emotions, relations, beliefs, and spiritual capacities that form the complex of the self" (Koen 2008). In contrast, I argue that what makes music integral to the creation, shaping, and (re)formation of this personal landscape is that music is inseparable from the self. In the following discussion, I will demonstrate that just as changes in musical practice bring positive, negative, and neutral changes to the self, so too do changes in subjectivity, sociality, and narrated identities bring positive, negative, and neutral change to music.

Nurzad realized she was sick in the summer of 2011, approximately eight months prior to our first meeting. At its onset, Nurzad's illness held the same possibility for revulsion as an open wound (Scarry 2009, p. 280). To her horror, Nurzad discovered a lump in her right breast the size of a ping-pong ball. Shortly after diagnosis, she had the breast removed. Nurzad thought this would be the end of her illness; however, cancer was discovered in the left breast, causing her to have the second removed as well. These consecutive surgeries left the *komuz* player in considerable pain and with limited mobility. She was unable to lift her arms above her shoulders. Strumming became strenuous and the virtuoso player experienced a decrease in skill that frustrated her practice.

Following these two surgeries, Nurzad began chemotherapy, receiving an intravenous treatment of taxol every 21 days. Her hair fell out and her appetite disappeared. She became fatigued and nauseated. Her muscles ached, and she experienced a temporary loss in control of her fine motor skills—essential for playing a musical instrument. Nurzad also began to suffer from anemia, causing her doctors to withhold treatment until her red blood cell count normalized. As Julie Livingston has observed, the fact that cancer treatment consists of cutting, poisoning, and burning, places it in an ambiguous space between harming and healing (Livingston 2012). Indeed, Nurzad referred to the side effects of treatment as "dying" and the slow physical renewal that followed as "coming back to life." Nurzad added wryly that due to the twenty-day cycle of treatment she would barely be restored to life before being asked to die again.

Just as medical treatment for cancer was helpful and harmful, creating negative side effects while also destroying disease, so too was the alternative narrative frame to which Nurzad turned for guidance.[14] For many Kyrgyz, illness is seen as a sign of close engagement with spirits who exact a price for their assistance or as a sign of an unfulfilled spiritual gift in which musical talent is often included. Only by embracing and mastering the gift can illness be offset (Aitpaeva 2009). Unlike many

[14] Engaging with Holbein's 'Portrait of the Dead Christ', Kristeva sets forth the layers of melancholia, shattered hopes, and unbearable anguish captured in the unadorned representation of human death, alongside the death of God, whom Kristeva associates with order and meaning. For Kristeva, an impulse toward order and meaning is necessary for healing. This impulse may manifest through religion or art (Kristeva 1989). In the case of Nurzad, these two mediums for order and meaning have come into conflict, suggesting "competing moral frames" (Kleinman 2006).

of her contemporaries, Nurzad neglected such views, turning instead to Islam. In doing so, she embraced the practice of *namaz* alongside the desire to improve her life and character. Although transformative, this process drew forth tensions between prayer and music, alongside religious and national identities. Whereas helping clients "find their musical groove" may help overcome "barriers to participating in, and establishing a sense of belonging to their culture" (Aigen 2014, p. 54), the healing potential of music may be limited by internal cultural tensions encapsulated in musical practice. If, for Nurzad, the healing potential of music is made ambiguous through her embrace of a narrative frame constructed in contrast to musical practice, for many of Nurzad's compatriots, the pressure to assimilate into an alien people, ethnicity, and nation has made music a source of social suffering.

One acquaintance noted that since her diagnosis, Nurzad had become "too serious. She doesn't joke [the way she used to]. She is hard on herself. She claims she used to be a delinquent, but I don't believe it. She is such a good, kind person. She is like a man—honest, sincere and forthright. I think she is taking this disease too much to heart." Nurzad saw it otherwise: from childhood mischief to the termination of a difficult marriage, she had cast aside her role as caregiver, prioritizing professional success over family and faith. Thus, Nurzad came to see her career as a musician—and music itself—as source of immorality. This self-assessment was accompanied by newfound anxieties concerning the compatibility of musicianship with *namaz* [Arabic: the physical act of prayer]. Indeed, in a study of frame drums in Muslim societies in the Middle East, Veronica Doubleday observes that "ideologies about female submissiveness and modesty have caused restrictions in many domains, including music." Focusing upon musical instruments, "male legists [have ascribed] negative powers to musical instruments, saying they cause human beings to lapse into sin" (Doubleday 1999, pp. 103–104). Likewise, amid discussion of ritual mourning for the Imam Husain, Richard Wolf notes that "excepting a few branches of Sufism, Islamic legalists have tended to frown on musical instruments for purposes other than public celebration (weddings especially) or the military" (Wolf 2009, p. 345) As Wolf's discussion demonstrates, these positions extend not only from scripture, but also from moral subject positions fostered in relationship to key figures and from historical associations with a given genre or instrument (Wolf 2009).

That Nurzad had been offered many explanations for her diagnosis of cancer could be seen in the way her sister probed with defensive hostility whether I assumed cancer was caused by a malignant spirit. This aligned with the common conception of death as a living entity which latched onto certain individuals.[15] This conversation gradually flowed into Nurzad's own concept of illness: Nurzad traced the onset of her illness directly to her performance of *Mayram* Küü in Washington D.C.

Just as representatives of the various peoples, ethnicities, and nations of the Soviet Union traveled to Moscow, offering gifts of live-music, dance, and theater to the Soviet authority personified by Joseph Stalin (Iğmen 2012, p. 134), so did

[15] In a similar vein, an ethnically Russian citizen of Kyrgyzstan—mentioned in the epilogue—felt his mother's cancer had been caused by an evil presence. Using an analogy from his profession, the man explained that just as hacker might choose to break into a system rather than find out from the programmer how it worked, so too had he had turned toward magic for a cure rather dealing directly with the giver of the disease.

Nurzad go to the United States of America to perform before Barak Obama, the President of the United States. After this performance, Nurzad returned with nice clothes and money for a new car. Professional success was manifest in these material possessions. With the eyes of the world upon her, it seemed to Nurzad that someone had begun to envy that success, bringing about an ill-wish which led to cancer. Like the concept of *nazar* in Turkey (see Dole 2012), this ill-wish was held in the gaze, a particularly threatening location for a performer continually looked upon by audience members.

Nurzad explained this threat further in reflecting upon her role as a television show host. The threat of audience gaze prevented her from returning to television: "How can I go like this?" she asked, taking off her hat to reveal a head with only few remaining strands of hair. "I'll have to put on make-up, dress up. It takes so much time. And there will be thousands of eyes watching me. I don't need all those eyes." In as much as meaning is co-created between audience members and performer in the moment of performance (Schieffelin 1993), Nurzad's statement reveals a dysfunctional and even dangerous element to the performance process, one that has the potential to alter the health and well-being of a performer. This perception is indicative of the ways in which "the experience of illness" not only reaches "into the inner world of patients" but also stretches out through sociality; illness expands not only into "a household, a family or a social network" but also to sound, instrument, and musical practice, altering the performer–audience relationship (Kleinman 2000, p. 231).

In turning toward Islam for a cure, Nurzad had been told that her musicianship was not compatible with the practice of Islam. "God has no love for music," her sister bristled. Nurzad's sister did not agree with these principle and consistently encouraged Nurzad to pick up the *komuz* and play. "Singing about love is more reprehensible than simply playing a melody," Nurzad continued, "but playing the *komuz* is discouraged." Nurzad added that lately she had lost her desire to play the *komuz*: "I don't even want to hold the instrument. People make me do it, but I don't have the mood," Nurzad said, playing upon the dual meaning of *küü*. The isolating nature of physical and emotional suffering, caused Nurzad not only to recede from a larger social world, but also from musical practice. At the same time, Nurzad recalled how, under the influence of pain-killers and anesthesia after surgery, she repeatedly asked "How am I going to play the komuz?" This statement is indicative that, for Nurzad, what is at stake is music: "Playing is also a disease like cancer. I shouldn't play, but the instrument calls to me."

In this instance, Nurzad presented the instrument as malignant, similar to the illness affecting her body-self. Musical practice became a morally transgressive act leading to sin and cancer a disciplining mechanism: "Before I got sick I used to say 'I'm a musician. I can't stop and pray five times a day. I don't have time!' Then I got sick and I found time. Maybe God gave me cancer because he wanted me to find time to pray. Rather than travel around the world it would have been better to stay at home, pray and wait until the next life to play komuz." Through these words Nurzad revealed that she was willing to exchange her entire career and sense of identity in order to dispel illness and restore life. Facing the certainty of death—also a brittle

beauty—Nurzad dreamed of a future life, beyond death, in which both she and her musical practice might be made whole again.

The Cost of Illness: Finances, Social Ties, and Moral Projects

Just as illness pathologized Nurzad's relationship to her instrument and made the interactions of audience and performer dangerous, so too did illness force changes in her social ties. As João Biehl demonstrates, dysfunctions in medical systems can further the experience of suffering. In Brazil, illness has become "the ground on which experiments with change and breaks in intimate household relationships can occur. Families can dispose of their unwanted and unproductive members, sometimes without sanction…" (Biehl 2001). In Kyrgyzstan, these shifts and ruptures extend into the systems of mutual reciprocity, which enable social viability. In as much as the sufferer is unable or perceived to be unable to maintain a requisite level of reciprocity, illness takes a toll on these ties, affecting the ability to seek treatment and the choice of treatment sought. Too often, the monetary cost of treatment exceeds the abilities of a given social network, forcing the sufferer to either find additional means of support or less expensive—and often less-effective—means of treatment.

Nurzad's treatment was expensive: The two surgeries had cost 10,000 som, approximately 250 U.S. dollars. The money for these surgeries had been contributed by family members. The taxol (chemotherapy) treatment cost 750 dollars per injection. If given a treatment every 25 days for a 6-month period, the total cost of taxol treatment would amount to 4500 dollars. After receiving the final taxol treatment, Nurzad would need to check that the cancer has not metastasized or spread into other organs or tissue. Just as in Botswana in the 1980s, the technology needed to do this is not available in Kyrgyzstan (Livingston 2012). Nurzad would need to travel to China for proper assessment. Afterward, she would begin a new round of treatment with herceptin: Nurzad estimated that the trip to China would cost 3,000 dollars. Each course of herceptin would cost 2500 dollars. To complete the requisite four courses, Nurzad needed 10,000 dollars. The total cost of treatment for Nurzad was 17,750 dollars, an amount that exceeded her individual means, as well as those of her family members.[16]

At the music conservatory, Nurzad earned approximately 300 each month. Additional income had to be provided through significant lifestyle changes. Nurzad decide to rent out her apartment and move into an inexpensive dormitory. She

16

COST OF TREATMENT	NURZAD'S INCOME
$250 for surgery	$300 from Conservatory salary
+$4,500 for six injections of taxol at $750 each	$300 from tenant
+$3,000 for travel to China	$100 from komuz lessons
+ $10,000 for four courses of herceptin at $2,500 each	unknown additional amount through family
= TOTAL: $17,750	=TOTAL: $700

shared this small room with her daughter and sister, and the kitchen and shower with conservatory students. Despite the additional 300 dollars this brought to her income, Nurzad needed an additional 150 dollars per month for taxol. She also needed to provide for her daughter. Nurzad did not say how she made up the lack, but it may be assumed that—like most people living in Kyrgyzstan—she did so through assistance from friends and family, going into debt with the promise of returned favors (Kuehanst 2004). Such systems of favors, however, could not be relied upon without repayment: When I met Nurzad, she was actively seeking a means to supplement her income, eventually taking a *komuz* student willing to pay 100 per month for weekly lessons.

Traveling to China and receiving four courses of herceptin required such a sum that Nurzad said: "Even if my entire family were to pull all their resources, they would not be able to come up with this amount." For this reason, Nurzad hoped to use her position as a musician who had served not one, but three Kyrgyz Presidents to find a benefactor. She hoped that this benefactor would be Rosa Otunbayeva, for whom she had written a *küü* and to whose patronage Nurzad traced the origin of her disease.

Nurzad recalled how a journalist had once asked whether or not Nurzad felt Otunbayeva really understood and appreciated the *komuz* and its music. At the time, Nurzad answered "I do because she chose me to play." Upon later reflection, however, Nurzad considered that Otunbayeva might have been using the *komuz* only for political game. "I'll know whether or not Otunbayeva really understands komuz [music] depending on her answer to my request [for financial support during the final stages of her treatment]." In saying this, Nurzad pointed to *narodnost* as a moral frame: not only did Otunbayeva owe Nurzad as an individual who supported her political career, but—in Nurzad's view—as a former President of Kyrgyzstan, Otunbayeva was obligated to support the Kyrgyz ethnicity, people, and nation of whom she, and her authority were an extension. Just as Nurzad's own life was entangled in music, so too were the lives of the Kyrgyz people, ethnicity, and nation entangled in Nurzad's music.

Not long after this conversation, Nurzad ran into Otunbayeva at a concert of Kyrgyz music. This encounter led Nurzad to further question Oyunbayeva's dedication to Kyrgyz music and her legitimacy as a politician: In conversation, Nurzad learned that Otunbayeva worked as the director of a foundation that sought to raise the cultural awareness of underprivileged children by supporting performances of music extending from the art traditions of Germany, France, and England. "Why would a woman whose presidency was marked by the komuz now start supporting classical music?" Nurzad remarked rhetorically. Nurzad claimed it was better to provide Kyrgyz music for these children as "[the children] will understand it easily and once they can understand their own music they can easily understand that of Europe." Like many other Kyrgyz musicians, Nurzad railed against a musical tradition she associated with Russian-Soviet dominance over the Kyrgyz, and was aghast by Otunbayeva's overt support for what seemed to her to be an identical project.

During this encounter, Otunbayeva politely refused Nurzad's request, saying "I only receive a salary." This drew disappointment and anger from Nurzad: "It is

common knowledge that the ex-presidents of Kyrgyzstan are from wealthy families," the musician said. "After leaving office they receive a car, tax exemption and an ongoing stipend." As far as Nurzad was concerned, Otunbayeva's response veiled a lack of empathy that undermined her claims of dedication to the Kyrgyz people and their music. For Nurzad, the promotion of Kyrgyz ethnicity was a moral project in which State and citizen were equally implicated. The values, responsibilities, and actions stemming from this sense of right and wrong may not coincide with that of others and may indeed include terrible acts such as slavery or genocide (Kleinman 2006). In calling upon Otunbayeva to affirm her support for this moral project through financial support of a Kyrgyz musician and performer of Kyrgyz music, Nurzad demonstrated the way in which her instrument, music, and career participated in efforts to restore the social, cultural, economic, and political territory of Kyrgyzstan to the Kyrgyz at the expense of other ethnicities and their associated musical traditions.

Race and Rejoicing

Despite uncertainties surrounding musical practice, Nurzad's life depended on treatment. Knowing her financial need, I introduced Nurzad to Albert. A newly arrived employee of USAID, Albert spoke neither Russian nor Kyrgyz, and had little access to the local population. He needed a hobby, and as he was familiar with the guitar, playing the *komuz* seemed ideal. Not only was Albert a citizen of the United States of America, he was of African descent. Even as the color of his skin marked him, so too did the presence of the *komuz* in his hands challenge concepts of instrument and music held by local audiences. Throughout the Soviet Union, "Africanness" carries associations not only with savagery, but also with inequalities of power and rebellion (Matusevich 2008). These associations exist in stark contrast with the construction of the *komuz* as representative of Kyrgyz civilization and therefore as a civilizing force. As the upcoming discussion will demonstrate, Albert's handing of the *komuz* evoked anxieties about the potential mishandling of a nation and people. At the same time, Albert's study of Kyrgyz music was also perceived as a process of cultivation, through which Albert could became more in tune with Kyrgyz culture and language. This was seen in the ways in which Kyrgyz people reacted to the *komuz* in Albert's hands. Initially attempted to practice in a park near his house, Albert was frequently interrupted by people wanting to have their pictures taken with this exotic character and his *komuz*.

On another occasion, Albert and I traveled by bus to purchase a *komuz* case. Standing beside him, I became aware of a tense and cautious gaze which I did not usually experience. During this time, I recalled a conversation overheard on the same bus: Speaking in Russian, the man sitting behind me had asked his neighbor if he thought the three Nigerian passengers were brothers. "How can they be brothers?" the neighbor replied "They would first have to be people." Likewise, amid Nurzad's teasing that I should marry Albert, Nurzad set forth a stream of racializing stereotypes, which—one might imagine—Nurzad was forced to engage each time she spoke of her student to her sister. It was within this very conversation

that Nurzad linked African Americans living in the United States to the Uzbeks of Kyrgyzstan. Such conversations draw forth the Soviet racial imagination that informs encounters with difference.

Observing Albert's attempts to find the most comfortable means of carrying the instrument in its newly fitted case, a Kyrgyz man approached us, commenting: "You needn't nosit [Russian: carry] the komuz, you need to ukhazhivat [Russian: attend to, care for]." This word *ukhazhivat* is more typically used in reference to the attention a husband gives to his wife, and its use here again draws attention to the shared relationship of women and musical instruments to constructs of ethnicity and nation. Curious about this man who had suddenly inserted himself into the conversation, I asked whether or not he was a musician. The passerby replied with a guarded and authoritative air: "I am mestny [Russian: a local] and have played some in my lifetime." Just as Nurzad asserted that *küü* was coded in the blood, so did this man imply that knowledge of the *komuz* is part of being Kyrgyz. In as much as the *komuz* was the instrument of his ethnicity and nation, so too did it belong to every member of the 'Kyrgyz' *narod*. Seeing the symbol of his nation held in the hands of a man so markedly foreign, and who, presumably, had little knowledge of the language, culture, or history associated with the instrument, had given the man pause. Although the stranger did not deny Albert the right to play the *komuz*, he took a patronizing role, educating Albert how to handle the instrument respectfully: through my translation, the man told Albert to hold the instrument up above his waist, rather than letting it dangle like a briefcase, for—like the Kyrgyz flag—it was to be kept raised.

Despite the lack of shared language, Nurzad did her best to convey the interrelationship of musical practice, instrument, and people to Albert in his lessons, emphasizing the stories, histories, customs, and belief that surrounded each *küü*. As a site of cultural exchange, Albert's lessons offered Nurzad a space for renewal and transformation: After several weeks of lessons, Nurzad arrived with a new *komuz* commissioned especially for her student. As she presented the instrument, her eyes sparkled: "It is such a good instrument I want it for myself," she said, encouraging Albert to play it immediately. In presenting the new *komuz*, Nurzad made a wish: "Let this komuz be handled with care. Let it not be touched with dirty hands or be broken. Let it be played well, so well that my heart rejoices and in my rejoicing I forget my illness." In this way, Nurzad indicated that a transformation was taking place not only in her experience of illness, but also in her relationship to music. "Mayram Gul knows how I didn't even want to touch the komuz," Nurzad said, later in the lesson, "but now that I started teaching you, I want to play again. I couldn't even lift my arms, but now [that I am teaching you] I have found strength."[17]

Albert agreed that Nurzad's words were supported by her visage: For weeks, Nurzad had arrived at his lessons looking weak, drained, exhausted, and worn-

[17] Citing Colin Lee, Aigen quotes a participant in music therapy as saying: "Through music I fly. In improvising I leave behind the realities of my illness, my tumor and the degeneration of my living." Although expressing a similar sentiment, Nurzad's transformation is more clearly attributed to music as the "interpersonal realm where individuals who engage with one another as sentient beings interact", as described by Gary Ansdell (Aigen 2014, p. 46).

down. Although her tiredness did not go away, she seemed to find some extra internal reserve within the course of each lesson. As the lessons progressed, her spirits lifted, and Nurzad became more animated. She reproached Albert for his errors, praised him for his successes, teased him until he laughed, and then joined him in his laughter. During these moments, Nurzad seemed to have forgotten her illness. Sometimes she even performed for us with tears welling in her eyes as she played. The mix of emotions present in the combination of laughter, music, and tears is describable only as *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is the simultaneous experience of pleasure and pain, joy, and suffering which enables release and signifies healing (Kristeva 1989).

These experiences might have led to the transcendence of ethnic boundaries. In Nurzad's case, however, such transcendence was not possible because her music was too entangled in the history of a single people, ethnicity, and nation. "Rather than learn a hundred songs, it is better to learn one song like a real Kyrgyz," Nurzad told Albert. Playful mischief gathered in the musician's voice as she turned to me and added: "Let him learn to play that one song so well that he and I can present it together on Kyrgyz National Television (KTR)!" Within the sociality of their lessons, Nurzad lost her fear of audience gaze, indicating that the performer–audience relationship had begun to normalize. Well aware of the ideas of the exotic and the primitive that Albert's skin color excited in the Soviet-Kyrgyz imagination, Nurzad wanted to grab the attention of the nation by putting the performance of Kyrgyz music by a person of African descent on television. Nurzad explained that through this televised performance, she could thank Albert for his support while also explaining her absence. The most important thing, however, was that a performance by Albert could serve as a lesson to the Kyrgyz people: "It'll make them stop and think, 'if a negr can play the komuz what about me, a Kyrgyz person?' It'll pique their interest and shame them. It will give them a stimulus to learn." In mobilizing the racializing tropes of ethnicity, Nurzad affirmed her love of music and her dedication to serve the Kyrgyz people, ethnicity, and nation.

That such performances aided the estrangement of non-Kyrgyz citizens was highlighted for me not by Nurzad, but by a Uyghur musician. The musician recalled how, as a small child, he, like many other Soviet children, had joined the local folk ensemble of his ethno-nation through the *Dom Kulturi* [Russian: House of Culture]. Two years later, he initiated his career by giving a televised performance on Kyrgyz Television–Radio (KTR) in the city of Frunze. Frunze was the Soviet name for Bishkek, and the musician's choice to use that former name was a means of speaking-back to the ongoing process of Kyrgyzification. The show had featured all kinds of inter-ethnic performances and was called "Kyrgyzstan Nashee Obshee Dom" [Russian: Kyrgyzstan, Our Shared Home]. In 2008, the show had been taken off the air "because Kyrgyzstan is no longer our shared home."

An Alternative Ending

Ten years before, I witnessed what could have become Nurzad's fate, had only the *komuz* player been fully pushed by illness, poverty, and ethnicity to the margins of

social and political life: I had promised to check on the mother of a friend who had come to Bishkek for chemotherapy. I quickly discovered she was living off of the sweet rolls she purchased at a nearby *kiosk* [Russian: a small booth that sells basic food items]. Hospital patients were expected to be fed by their families, but with her son on the other side of a mountain pass, Rosa had to fend for herself. Soon after my visit, Rosa returned home to Naryn City where she—an ethnic Russian—had spent the majority of her life. Once housing a Soviet military base and Russian-speaking personnel, post-independence, the language, culture, and population of the city had shifted almost entirely to Kyrgyz.

Rosa marked each return from the hospital by placing a piece of bread in a bag.[18] This time, however, Rosa developed lesions on her body that smelled like rot, and quickly became unable to care for herself. Seeing that death was inevitable, a local doctor agreed to give her daily shots of morphine. I don't know whether it was the cancer or the drugs, but Rosa soon lost her ability to recognize people and places. In moments of paranoia, she would count non-existent money. Thinking she was in the hospital, Rosa would beg to be taken home. To comfort her, Rosa's son would help count the pieces of paper she thought were money. He walked with her around the room, pretending to take her home even though that was already where they were. Sometimes Rosa would become euphoric, and the two would sit together in bed, singing songs as tears streamed down her son's face. At night I slept nearby, listening to Rosa's laborious breathing until finally one evening, the breathing stopped: one by one, we realized she was dead.

Rosa's illness did not raise uncertainties regarding the morality of musical practice or the relationship of citizen to state. As an ethnic Russian, Rosa's existence was already far from the state and the development of a national narrative. Her burial, however, raised questions about ethnicity: having sought cures in candles, frogs, spells, the channeling of energy, and the laying on of hands amid prayers to Jehovah, Rosa came to assert that "God is One" and requested to be buried "Muslim." With the help of a close Kyrgyz friend, she was laid to rest with the slaughter of a sheep, the ritual frying of bread, and the recitation of the Koran. A Kyrgyz name was inscribed upon her headstone. These events caused such negative reaction among the local Russians that some stopped speaking to her son. In contrast, rumors spread through the Kyrgyz speaking community that Rosa's son had "become Kyrgyz." These circumstances suggest that there are other ways of entering an ethnicity than 'blood'. Despite his fluency in [Kyrgyz] language and custom, Rosa's son did not accept this newly acquired identity and immigrated to Russia. Inclusion within the dominant ethnicity was not enough to prevent his estrangement or heal his loss.

In contrast, Nurzad's ethnic identity and her connection to a prominent politician enabled a twist in plot: After leaving Kyrgyzstan, I received word from Albert that he had indeed performed on Kyrgyz television. More so, Otunbayeva worked with a group of businessmen to raise money for Nurzad. I cannot be certain what caused Otunbayeva to reconsider Nurzad's request any more than I can be certain what caused her to initially refuse it. It is possible that Otunbayeva initiated this fund-

[18] This collection of bread-pieces was discovered by Rosa's son after her death.

raiser out of sympathy and the desire to support a woman who had served the nation through music. Otunbayeva may also have been interested in preventing bad press and expanding her constituent base. Regardless of her reasons, Otunbayeva affirmed her position as a humanitarian politician dedicated to the plight of individual citizens, not only in the eyes of her constituents but also in Nurzad's personal narrative. Certainly Otunbayeva—like her Soviet predecessors—was well aware that this narrative would be told in words and music. Through these fund-raising efforts, Otunbayeva (re)established a relationship of patronage which she may find politically advantageous in the near future as music remains a powerful political tool in Kyrgyzstan. I cannot say that the same would have happened had Nurzad been of non-Kyrgyz ethnicity, or a performer within a different musical tradition.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how music is involved in the making and remaking of selves. As such, music has the potential to participate equally in illness and in health. In as much as music is central to the life of a musician, music participates in systems of mutual reciprocity which can be drastically altered by illness. In this particular case, music becomes a site of moral uncertainty, revealing conflicting moral frames for individuals as well as the state. The social and political backdrop of Nurzad's shifting narrative illuminates the ways in which Soviet constructs of race and ethnicity merge with musical practice, enabling the *komuz* player's compositions and performances to participate in larger processes of social suffering. Despite the newly emerging tensions with piety, for Nurzad, *komuz* music remains an effective medium for personal transformation. This healing potential is limited, however, for those excluded from constructions of the [Kyrgyz] national self in which *komuz* music participates. This is due to the experience of this particular music as part of larger processes of the ethnic-based alienation, marginalization, and violence.

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