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Introduction: Sounding and Performing Resistance and Resilience

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Introduction

Sounding and Performing Resistance and Resilience

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ABSTRACT

The analysis of resistance and resilience in the articles in this special volume of *Music and Arts in Action* illustrates the complexity of the terms, their definitional ambiguities and situated tensions when they are used in conflict contexts. Rigorous debates have underlined the contested nature of the terms resistance and resilience, whereby resistance is considered a means of destabilising interpersonal and state hegemony and resilience is variously seen as an individual strategy for survival and wellbeing or an intervention impacting upon socio-economic structures. Theoretical discord further highlights the need for careful and detailed ethnographic investigation. Thus, while it might be tempting to avoid the terms altogether as some critics argue, close, critical ethnographic reading of the particularities of sonic atmospheres, as well as their corresponding musical and performative dynamics can render productive the relationship between resistance and resilience as contributors to this volume show. Thus, rather than jettison these terms we encouraged our contributors, (the majority of whose research is based in protracted conflict contexts), to take up the challenge of examining their application through vernacular understandings in order to demonstrate how individuals embody, mobilise and strategise their effects in the sounds and performances of everyday life.

KEYWORDS

Resistance; resilience; risk; accommodation; resourcefulness

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE VOLUME

This special volume of Music and Arts in Action illustrates the importance of engaging with detailed ethnographic case studies to show how sound and silence are inscribed in sonic atmospheres, sonic textures and performance strategies and thus inform new approaches to music in conflict contexts and for peacebuilding. Contributors to this volume span the gamut of different stages of career from doctoral candidates onwards and extend along the research-practitioner continuum, with the majority variously involved in amateur music-making, professional music teaching and performing. The volume, therefore, brings together theoretical analysis, which is a product of longstanding research expertise, with scholarly insights from those who have conducted recent in-depth ethnographic fieldwork. All of our contributors were involved in either one of two conference panels which we co-organised and which highlighted aspects of resistance and resilience, as follows: ‘Sounding and Performing Resistance and Resilience’ at the Association of Social Anthropologists’ annual conference, University of Oxford, UK, 3-5 October 2018 (<https://www.theasa.org/conferences/asa18/panels.html#6778>); and ‘Performing Heritage, Sustaining Livelihoods: Resilience, Recognition and Relationality’ panel held at the Australian Anthropological Society annual conference, James Cook University, Cairns, Australia, 4-7 December 2018, (<https://nomadit.co.uk/aas/aas2018/conferencesuite.php/panels#7016>).¹

The themes of these two conference panels are drawn together in the contributions to this volume. Through the Oxford conference panel, we explored entangled performative expressions of resistance and resilience arising from the emotional effects of sounds and movements in everyday life. As conveners we were concerned with the broad question:

- “What difference do sound, music and performance make to the analysis of resistance and resilience?”

In this Oxford panel, presenters addressed this orienting framework through questions such as, “What role does empathy play in protest or contexts of resistance and how is it mobilised?” Other presenters examined “the uncertainties, disruptions, impacts and evocations that sound, narration, movement and performance can generate among performers and audiences when considered through the lens of the politics of emotion”.

In the Cairns conference panel, we invited contributors to focus on the mutual influences and intersections between performance, heritage and sustainable livelihoods. Presenters explored the following issues among others:

- “How do resistance and resilience shape performance and its heritage legacies?”
- “What structural, policy and heritage conflicts arise in the ways that cultural heritage agendas and performances are valued and recognised in sites of contestation?”²

¹ The inspiration for these panels in part grew out of an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project ‘Sounding Conflict: From Resistance to Reconciliation’ (2017-2021, Magowan PI, grant number AH/P005381/1), which is hosted by the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen’s University Belfast where Hastings Donnan is Institute Director.

² The papers by Messeder, Hatzikidi, Robertson, Hashemi, Malcomson and Magowan were presented in Oxford, Jackson’s paper was presented in Cairns.

As the seven conference contributors to this special volume elaborate, these are complex and intricate questions, requiring fine-grained and detailed ethnographic background knowledge of the socio-legal and politico-religious dynamics of the countries, regions and conflicts in which they are working. The background to contestation and conflict informs their nuanced appreciation of the contested dynamics of the language and performance of song-texts, dances and personal narratives revealing otherwise latent processes of negotiation and conflict in identities and rights to perform.

Overall, the volume explores how sounds, songs and performances constitute culturally emergent forms of “egalitarian knowledge production and exchange” that can influence “...adversity, resilience, inequalities and transformational change” (Hart, et al., 2016, p. 6) in different countries around the globe. Contributors provide insights from Lebanon, Egypt, Brazil, Mexico, California and Australia as they seek to address tensions from autochthonous perspectives in the vernacular, thereby disrupting taken-for-granted western neoliberal assumptions. They begin from the premise that the terms resistance and resilience are deeply contested and problematic. As Malcomson (this volume) notes, “we must take an anti-essentialist approach to notions of resistance, ensuring that we neither essentialise the resistant subject nor the values attached to sites of resistance”. The following section offers an overview of some theoretical approaches to resistance and resilience and considers how indigenous structure and agency inform the vernacular languages around performance and can generate new insights into sound and music in conflict analysis.

RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE STUDIES IN CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

A key problem in elaborating the tensions around resistance and resilience is that the terms of debate, as well as the contexts and conditions to which they refer, are often quite disparate and, in some cases, contradictory: Resistance is often viewed as a mode of subverting, obfuscating, or silencing the powerful other, rendering it a destabilising, amorphous, provocative and ambiguous concept that may or may not produce beneficial results. Resilience is also considered to be a means of accruing resourcefulness to oneself, but it is also viewed as an effect generated by the extent to which one is able to: i). capitalise on the availability of personal and infrastructural resources for wellbeing; ii). have the physical, social and emotional intelligence and competence to draw upon them; iii). generate resources for oneself and others; and iv). strategise and negotiate situatedness in the process of accruing and sharing these resources (see also Ungar, 2008). Taking these principles into account, we also reflect here upon whether sonic or musical resilience is of a different or distinct nature to that of the wider social, political and economic factors of resilience that have been shown to comprise resilient adaptation.

Implicit in the terms resistance and resilience are the multifaceted dynamics of power and control that shape forms of hegemony and subordination between individuals, communities, states and nations. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, a field of theoretical scholarship has emerged in anthropological research on ‘resistance studies’ and ‘subaltern studies’, ranging from the analysis of oppressive socio-political systems and circumstances (e.g., Taussig, 1980) to the micro-politics of livelihoods and their ‘everyday forms of resistance’ (e.g., Foucault, 1972, 1978; de Certeau, 1984) (cited in Seymour, 2006, p. 303). The terminology of resistance (and resilience) has been fraught with difficulties since it was first introduced, variously referring to struggles between how large-scale systems and structures are perceived as producing the conditions for resistance and how individual

experiences, fears, desires and emotions come to be catalysts for action for those who are embedded in such cultural hegemonies.

These tensions have generated critiques in resistance studies, such as those by Strauss and Quinn, who highlight the need to appreciate the psychological dimensions of activism, as “resistance also rests on internalised cultural understandings...that ‘motivate’ actions leading to both social reproduction and social change” (Strauss and Quinn, 1997, p. 256). In this volume, we are interested in how sound-worlds organise different kinds of responses which may lead to acts, motivations and intentions of resistance and resilience. By examining the psychological motivations that can lead to resistance among individuals and between groups, anthropologists have accounted for resistance discourses by contrasting domains of subversive interaction, though they have more often done so through western neoliberal frameworks. James Scott, for example, distinguishes ‘public transcripts’ (‘the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate’) (Scott, 1985, p. 2), from ‘hidden transcripts’ (“discourse that takes place ‘offstage’, beyond direct observation by powerholders”) (Scott, 1985, p. 4). On the one hand, ‘hidden transcripts’ are evident for example, in Raheja and Gold’s (1994) research on North Indian women’s speech and songs, where the “women’s songfests enable them to challenge male stereotypes of female behaviour. Women subvert the status quo and ‘sing of such things as taking lovers and enjoying extramarital sex, as well as humiliating their husbands and other patrilineal kin” (Seymour, 2006, p. 309). Since their performances are not censored, they enable women to promote a collective ‘counter-hegemonic feminine identity that could lead to acts of opposition’ (Holland and Skinner, 1995, p. 280 cited in Seymour, 2006, p. 309). On the other hand, ‘public transcripts’ are a kind of musical score, “for the dominated, a stylised public performance through which they adopt the forms of deference and respect for the powerful that are needed to avoid punishment” (Little, 1993, p. 153). Scott notes that ‘public transcripts’ can be subverted either by using one’s position in society or by employing particular forms of language, such as “rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures [or] anonymity” (Scott, 1985, p. 137). In conflict contexts, the concept of the ‘public transcript’ also allows for “a veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion [...] in which ideological resistance is disguised, muted and veiled for safety’s sake” (Scott, 1985, p. 137). These conditions may apply as much to elites who may control what the powerless hear as to subordinates who may mask or code sounds, songs and performances to outwit the powerful.

Such veiling is evident in Hettie Malcomson’s account of a rap battle between an indigenous activist from southern Mexico and a non-activist, *mestiza* from the north of Mexico, as she notes that, while both rappers include inferences to “the entanglement of organised crime and state forces, the arms industry [and] the media”, these singers are extremely conscious that they must not reveal the identities of any of those involved for, “in this necropolitical context, naming names is akin to suicide” (this volume). Yet, her account eschews any reductionist tendency towards viewing their rap activities as resistance in “(white, liberal, masculinist, global northern) universalist” terms. Instead, she argues that these rap artists present alternative, yet equally important, interpretative dynamics, whereby one activist she describes engages in spiritual universalism as a mode of critical introspection, while another presents an explicit call for changes to violence.

In other contexts, modes of subversive power have had the potential either to become suppressed or to become a voice of and for democracy. For example, in the

late 18th and first half of the 19th century, African-American spirituals were deemed ‘codified protest songs’ that could assist in freeing slaves, e.g., the spiritual, *Steal Away to Jesus*, was considered to be an incitement to escape slavery (African American Spirituals). Just as singing was a form of resistance to slavery, so sound itself was a source of contention over which slaves sought to take control, by saying prayers into the soil, praying behind dampened cloths and bedclothes on the washing line, or putting their heads in pots, so that no one could hear them (Smith, 2001, pp. 80-81). The motivations behind African-American spirituals have been revived in the present day in the work of pop musicians, such as Bob Marley’s *Redemption Song* and Billy Bragg’s *Sing their Souls Back Home*, who have each drawn upon some of the ideas and sentiments of spirituals as freedom songs that highlight struggles and protests over democracy (African American Spirituals).

RESISTANCE, AGENCY AND ACCOMMODATION

In this volume, contributors deal with the term resistance across the domains of collective struggle and individual protest, highlighting the emotional agency of individuals and communal responses to the disempowering effects of sound and performance when subject to state controls. Thus, in answering the question, “What difference does music make [to the analysis of terms such as resistance, agency and accommodation]?” it is striking that across the papers contributors frequently refer to the constraints and limitations arising around and imposed by spatial and territorial interactions through musical performance.

In her research on the Black rural *quilombos* village communities of north-west Brazil, Katerina Hatzikidi shows how itinerant Catholic drummers, celebrating the feast of Santa Teresa, use music and rhythm to parade from community to community seeking donations that inscribe their identity, value and rights to religion, belonging and territory (this volume). In turn, these musical practices are considered (by *quilombolas*) to be viewed antagonistically by Evangelicals, causing fear amongst Catholics about their land tenure, provoking increased resistance to their Evangelical neighbours. Hatzikidi argues that the collective ritualistic drumming:

on behalf of all Catholic *quilombolas* becomes an essential part of their religious activism, or resistance, which is in turn one of the key local grass-roots forms of taking action in defence of their collective ethnic territory and of manifesting their historical resilience.

This sonic resistance affords an explicit means of addressing the perceived threat of religious, economic and political loss of control, further consolidating collective agency through what Hatzikidi elaborates as ‘performative religious praxis’.

However, resistance to perceived threats through performance praxis does not have to be collectively embodied. Individuals may also employ performances of cultural identity in order to challenge, subvert or otherwise hold to account the powers of the state. Messeder further shows how Lebanese Brazilian singer-dancer, Leila Khoury, engages in samba and belly-dance as an ‘act of meso-resistance’ to state surveillance (this volume). Counteracting the contentions of scholars who have critiqued ethnographically thin accounts or romanticised notions of resistance, Messeder demonstrates through ‘thick description’ how Leila’s ambiguous legal position as a dancer is a form of subversive meso-resistance, whereby she seeks an Artist’s Visa and attempts to renegotiate the negative stereotypes it engenders and the state restrictions it entails. By focusing on the fears, desires and emotions of individuals, it becomes clear how “resistance is just one kind of agentive act that is

complexly interwoven with accommodation – ‘there is no such thing as pure resistance’” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 93; cited in Seymour, 2006, p. 313). Rather, in certain interpersonal circumstances such as Leila’s, resilience may be perceived as an extension of meso-resistance that is prompted by the effects of an oppressive state context.

Yet, in other parts of the world such as the Middle East, where state violence is an everyday possibility, the ability ‘to shun’ the impositions of the state can have equally empowering effects. For example, Amin Hashemi discusses changing perspectives of music by the Iranian state during and post the Iran-Iraq war to show how resistance and resilience are expressed in different musical genres over time. He argues that musical resistance first manifested less as a form of aggression to opposition than as a means of maintaining cultural values. He posits that classical and popular music forms were rejected by the state for different reasons, whether due to an incompatibility with the moral values of Islam or due to post-war depoliticization and the suppression of music-making.

While such sonic conflicts can be used to stake territorial and political claims, they can also be employed to challenge the status quo from the ground. Johnson (2013, p. 48) discusses how young people turned “to sonic spaces as sites of mutual recognition” through the ‘sonic reclamation’ of Los Angeles following the destructive post-war interventions that deprived Black and Brown youth of shared spaces and devastated their residential areas. In this volume, Jackson further demonstrates how Krump dancing in Los Angeles and Melbourne embodies a generalised respectability that spatially demarcates crews (and youth gangs) territories from one another, whilst effecting a reciprocal understanding of each other’s sonic and performative authority and legitimacy. It is these “everyday reclamations of space, assertions of social citizenship and infrapolitical struggles [that] have created the conditions that [have] ultimately led to future successes for organised collective movements” (Kelley, 1996, p. 56).

RESILIENCE, THREAT AND RISK

Moving between these fluid, ambiguous and, at times, conflicting interpretations of resistance, it is not surprising that its counterpart resilience is often understood as the “capability to bounce back from an adverse experience” (Brader, 2011, p. 4), a process derived from returning “the quality of a material to regain its original shape after being bent, compressed or stretched” (Gunnestad, 2017, p. 1). This multifaceted concept is also impacted by numerous variables which some analysts have gathered under a common umbrella of ‘protective factors’ for the individual and community – these include external threats and internal responses to those risks. In his discussion of the intersections between group identity, resilience and music therapy, Robertson (this volume) outlines how resilience is both a risk and threat to social cohesion even though “resilience work is often considered a part of the mediation process” in peacebuilding. This mediational technique crosses over to the field of music therapy and it can be employed both to reduce potential negative factors as well as enhancing competency and ingroup identification, whether among music therapy clients or music practitioners. Yet, in discussing the ambivalence of music as a marker of ingroup or outgroup action, he posits that:

Music can, therefore, strengthen borders of group identity and can even plant the seeds of future conflict if the needs and wants of these groups begin to clash. In other words, music can help to bring one group together at the expense of widening the gulf between groups.

From the accounts thus far, we can see that while mediational, protective factors alone are insufficient to effect resilience, they can enhance self-image and reduce risk factors, thereby increasing the potential for coping. Nevertheless, in some contexts, scholarship has erroneously equated personal resilience, and threats from structural change as “a direct cause-and-effect outcome of individual characteristics” (Pasiali, 2012, p. 37). Rather, psychologists and development psychopathologists have argued that resilience should be considered “as both a process and outcome of complex interactions between personal characteristics (e.g. temperament, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-mastery, optimism and spirituality) and a person’s experiences leading to adaptive developmental outcomes” (Schaffer, 2006, cited in Pasiali, 2012, p. 38). Such an approach does not, however, give full credence to the political situatedness of the subaltern in national agendas, the risk or threat entailed for individuals and the nature of accountability, which it subsumes.

Ethnomusicological perspectives of resilience have highlighted the importance of political adaptation seen as:

a system’s capacity to recover and maintain its integrity, identity and continuity when subjected to forces of disturbance and change. [...] Adaptive management identifies what makes a music culture vulnerable, what makes it resilient and ameliorates the former while strengthening the latter (Titon, 2019, p. 157).

Morris and Kadetz (2018), for example, have brought these multiple elements together in analysing the role of music in fostering resilience in post-Katrina New Orleans. They show how the stressors of climate crisis created by Hurricane Katrina led to a sense of defencelessness which combined with resilience to alter long-term post-disaster outcomes for the city. They consider the combination of “risk factors”, “stress and mental health”; “protective factors and assets”; “social support”; “connections to community and mentoring”; and “the impact of music performance on performers and audience members” (Morris and Kadetz, 2018: 241-249). Similarly, in his research on resilience in arts and architecture, Jeremy Till (2015, p. 25) identified multiple conflicts in the built environment brought about by changing municipal structures that road roughshod over the agency of favela artists in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. There he evokes the resilience of favela residents in the concepts “Chaos Embracing. Transitional. Auto-organising. Collaboration. Indigenous. Diversity and Democracy.” These terms invoke interpersonal sociality rather than the more common concept of ‘ecological resilience’ which promotes a view of ‘external shocks’ impacting upon ecosystems and the ‘spatial resilience’ needed to adjust to the aftereffects of the disturbances (Chambers, Allen and Cushman, 2019).

A ‘POLITICS OF RESOURCEFULNESS’

Penhira et al., (2014) argue in relation to Indigenous discourse that it is not only the recovery from violence, destruction or disaster that is important but also how strategies for change are developed through a combination of ‘reactive’ and ‘proactive’ responses. ‘Reactive’ responses are those that are compelled and driven by state agendas to which Indigenous communities may be invited to respond, while ‘proactive’ agendas facilitate the reduction of risk and open up possibilities for more effective action in the long term. Inevitably, such a dichotomy of agendas is not as readily sustained in actual practice. Instead, we might suggest that the stressors and threats, which initially may cause fight or flight reactions, do in fact result in a range of emotional and psychological effects of which resistance and resilience are just

two forms of response, where resilience is “a kind of systemic property” (Lang 2010, p.16). Such systemic properties are manifest for example in Aboriginal communities, where “Resilience is a long process of healing that allows [one] to supersede the multiple trauma and the loss of culture experienced during [...] colonisation and after” (Tousignant and Sioui, 2009, p. 43).

Magowan (this volume) demonstrates how music facilitators working with refugees in Australia have developed an approach to music resilience that combines the systemic properties of music from different cultural backgrounds to begin to effect “a politics of resourcefulness” (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012, p. 263). While the properties of resourcefulness remain largely individualised for refugees, this approach does allow facilitators “to engage with injustice in terms of both redistribution and recognition [and work] towards a [collaborative] vision of resourceful communities, cities and regions” (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012, p. 263). By externalising and distancing the ‘dissolving’ effects of cultural and familial loss³, some refugees are using music as a national platform from which to reshape interpersonal perspectives of “self-esteem, self-efficacy and optimism” (Schaffer, 2006, cited in Pasiali, 2012, p. 38). Magowan concludes that through performance, they “have increased recognition for themselves and others in working towards inclusive and compassionate expressions of loss. By reterritorializing their music, they speak out the need for equality, recognition, rights and restitution for other refugees” (this volume).

CONCLUSION

As the articles in this volume attest, regional histories of spatial division, displacement, violence and conflict render readings of sonic atmospheres of cultural resistance and resilience distinct, yet they each bring forth critically intersecting ethnographic and theoretical conjunctures. It is not our intention, though, to try and collate generalised responses to state control and authority that underpin these varied processes of self-determination and interpersonal negotiation. Rather, each environment speaks in its own voice, revealing its particularities of conflict and demonstrating the emergence of complex interactions and reactions arising from prevailing vernacular and indigenous sonic and performative legacies. As we have seen, ‘dissolving’ cultural factors, whether compounded by drugs, violence, war or gang feuding can lead to destructive personal and interpersonal adjustments, yet such traits are generally subconscious, determining the extent to which one individual may be able to cope better than another further influencing how they are musically expressed. In each context, music is the critical dynamic behind “a will to social justice” (Spivak, 2012, cited in Mackinnon and Derickson, 2012, p. 255), whereby the deployment of resistance, resilience and indeed, ‘resourcefulness’, can be malleable and effective properties for social transformation, activism and recognition. The difference that music makes to diverse expressions of resistance, resilience and resourceful interactions is in how it can be (re)framed and (re)positioned as a driving force for change across conflict contexts, while at the same time, highlighting ongoing theoretical challenges that such analyses pose for future research.

³ Gunnestad (2006, italics in the original) argues that destructive cultural practices such as violence or alcoholism can lead to ‘a *dissolving culture*’ and ‘increased vulnerability’.

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