Music, Conflict and the State
Summary of research activities and achievements, 2008-2014
Introduction

The research group “Music, Conflict and the State” was set up in 2008 by social musicologist M. J. Grant as part of the University of Göttingen’s strategy to promote younger scientists working in innovative and interdisciplinary fields. With generous support from funds won competitively by the University under the Federal Republic of Germany’s “Excellence Initiative”, the research group aimed to create an international centre for research into the role of music in conflict situations, particularly where music is used to promote, facilitate and accompany violent responses to conflict. This ambitious project came at a time when musicological study of the relationship between music and war, and music and violence more generally, was still in its infancy. The group’s contribution to basic research in this field aimed, amongst other things, to extend the historical remit of work on music and conflict to periods before the twentieth century, and to develop theoretical frameworks. Emphasis was also given to networking with external researchers and others working on related topics, with significant resources directed to hosting and attending international meetings. The group’s strategy of promoting interdisciplinary exchange and in-depth critical discussion on key areas of concern has been recognised and applauded by many scholars and practitioners who have participated in these events.

Six years later, the research group has achieved international recognition for pursuing work in difficult and in many cases disturbing areas of musicological research. A particular focus in recent years has been the use of music as an instrument of torture, a subject on which the group has become a world research leader. A large number of publications on this and other topics, including numerous collections of essays edited by members of the group, along with frequent invitations to lectures, presentations and media interviews, have ensured that the group has made a significant and also public contribution to the study of music and violence. Unfortunately, the initial aim to establish a longer-term centre for this work in Göttingen has not come to fruition. As the group draws to a close in its present form, this report summarises some of its most important achievements, achievements which form the foundation for future research which – we hope and fully intend – will be continued elsewhere.
There is nothing natural about warfare. The act of killing another human is, for the vast majority of people, not only morally repugnant but may in fact go against our very biological nature. Warfare depends, therefore, on social and not just technological strategies to overcome this resistance. The use of music to this end is almost certainly as old as war itself, yet we still know relatively little about this subject. Much existing commentary on music’s function and impact in wartime is based on tropes about music and violence that have only rarely been backed up with empirical evidence.

The research group “Music, Conflict and the State” has helped lay the foundations for a social musicology of war which, in turn, promises to be of enormous importance for the interdisciplinary study of armed conflict. Where previous researchers have on the whole focussed on war’s impact on musical life, or music’s impact on war at several stages removed from the actual fighting, the research group has focused increasingly on the lived experience of combatants and others at or close to the moment of violence itself. Extensive work in the historical anthropology of music in war is key to this endeavour: only by studying developments in the role of music in warfare and military practice across a longer period will we have an empirically sound basis for discussions on changing roles of music in more recent conflicts.

Music and the role of children in war

A key focus in this emerging musicology of war has been the role of children. Children, particularly boys, have been used as military musicians for many centuries. The “little drummer boys” employed by European and American armies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are well-known from paintings, popular fiction and songs, but these portrayals generally tell us little about the lived experience of these children, or the hard social realities that often lie behind their recruitment. Exploring both fact and fiction is essential in order to understand not only these realities, but also the various functions that younger military musicians fulfilled, both directly and also symbolically, in propaganda for and against war.
Drummer boys may be a thing of the past, but music continues to play an important role in the lives of hundreds of thousands of child soldiers in the contemporary world. Research conducted by doctoral candidate Cornelia Nuxoll among former juvenile combatants of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in the civil war in Sierra Leone (1991–2002) has shown that music, particularly songs, played an important role in training new recruits. The songs used were generally adopted from those already in use among rebel forces in neighbouring Liberia. Former RUF combatants described how singing these songs contributed to their physical fitness and also created a sense of cohesion within the units, which in turn increased their readiness to move into battle. While similar phenomena are known from other wars, it is significant that the songs used were unfamiliar and composed in a language which the combatants did not understand. This underlines the importance of understanding musical activity as a distinctive mode of communication and interaction quite apart from the semantic content of any texts thus transmitted.

RUF rebels played recordings of local music both to lure civilians out of hiding and to instil fear and terror into them – a key strategy of guerilla forces in what have been termed “new wars”. Underage combatants in Sierra Leone also turned to music to manage their experiences of war. Many recruits in the first stage of the conflict relaxed by listening to roots reggae, which also affirmed the righteousness of their armed and increasingly brutal struggle: the young combatants identified with the stylised image of the “sufferer” and the “freedom fighter” common in reggae songs on sociopolitical themes. Previous studies on the war in Sierra Leone have mentioned combatants’ referencing of US gangsta rappers, but the role of reggae has not been recognised before now.

**Theorising music and war**

War is a complex social phenomenon that does not end with the termination of hostilities. How we communicate information about the nature, purpose and outcomes of past conflicts can affect future societies and conflicts as well, and musical practices are often central elements in this process. Such “music in the reporting of violence” is thus intimately connected with, and yet distinct from, two other fields of activity, “music in the preparation of violence” and “music at the moment of violence”. These categories were developed by M. J. Grant as a way of distinguishing between quite different phenomena and impacts of music in war. They provide the framework for a major monograph on the social musicology of war, currently in planning, which will combine existing knowledge on music and war with original research and perspectives gained from general theories of war and combat developed in other disciplines. This monograph will present possibly the first consolidated theory of music’s role in war.
The Soundtrack of Conflict

Since the early twentieth century, radio has been one of the most important media both generally and in the specific context of armed conflict. Relatively cheap and with the ability to transmit over long ranges – and over international borders – radio has become central to the wartime strategies of governments and guerrilla groups alike. The role of music on radio in wartime and in conflict situations has, however, only rarely been the focus of scholarly attention, despite the central role that music plays in this medium.

A three-day international conference organised by the research group in September 2011 welcomed speakers from a total of four continents and representing a number of disciplines including musicology, social anthropology, history and law. Topics covered ranged from the role of music broadcasts in twentieth-century dictatorships, through World War II and the Cold War to recent conflicts in Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka, amongst others. The conference also featured a lecture-performance by the theatre group International Institute of Political Murder, derived from their acclaimed theatre piece Hate Radio.

Proceedings from the conference were published in 2013 by Olms Verlag. The book, which like the conference has the full title The Soundtrack of Conflict: The Role of Music in Radio Broadcasting in Wartime and in Conflict Situations, was featured on BBC Radio 3’s flagship classical music magazine programme Music Matters in February 2014.
Colonial music practices are not something that took place far away, between conquistadores or emigrants and extra-European “Others”. Rather, they are fundamental components of a European and global music history forged in the context of political, social, military and missionary encounters. Situated on the border between “western” music, intercultural exchange and political expansionism, colonial music history is thus more than a history of compositions or of musicians: a sociological approach is necessary if we are to understand and analyse this topic in a global context, and in terms of both global and local impacts.

The research group “Music, Conflict and the State” has played a key role in establishing the field of colonial music historiography in Germany and in promoting international exchange on this topic. Under the direction of postdoctoral researcher Christian Storch, whose current project focuses on colonial music practices in the Estado da India (16th–17th centuries), the group has organised two international events relating to colonial music history. The proceedings of the first of these, a workshop on Jesuit music practices in Latin America held in January 2011, are being prepared for publication. A further symposium held during the international congress of the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung in September 2012 saw musicologists from Germany, Spain, India, Portugal, Brazil, the USA and the UK discuss the relationship between music and enlightenment within colonial contexts.
The research group “Music, Conflict and the State” was established just a few months before a landmark decision in international justice: in December 2008, musician Simon Bikindi was found guilty of crimes relating to genocide for his part in the Rwandan genocide of 1998. His eventual conviction related to a speech rather than Bikindi’s musical activities, but the role of his music in the genocide was discussed in detail during the trial, and recognised in the text of the trial chamber’s decision.

That music plays a crucial role in identity politics, and in the formation and consolidation of social groups, is a truism of recent scholarship. Nevertheless, the exact mechanisms at work here, particularly when music is used to promote hatred, discrimination and violence, are still not sufficiently understood. Probing these mechanisms is however a prerequisite to developing adequate and appropriate responses, and requires that we adopt an approach to musical communication and interaction that moves beyond causalistic and unidirectional theories, and beyond theories that give precedence to language.

This cross-cutting topic impinges on many projects undertaken by members of the research group, as well as being the specific focus of lectures and writings on the roles music can play in preparing and committing genocide – including in Rwanda – and in promoting or consolidating sectarian and ethnic tensions. The group’s first ever workshop heard from leading scholars working on the role of musical and cultural practices in the conflicts in Northern Ireland and former Yugoslavia. In the intervening period, the group has successfully linked musicological research with theories on discrimination, hatred and violence developed in fields such as genocide studies, sociology, social anthropology, political science and law. In 2011-2, the group also hosted two visiting scholars working on the music of contemporary right-wing extremist groups, and to mark this organised a workshop attended by leading researchers in this field.
Music and Torture

The use of music as an instrument of torture came to widespread public attention in the early twenty-first century in connection with US practices used in the “war on terror”. Studies on the use of music in Nazi concentration camps had already demonstrated systematic practices of humiliation, degradation and torture using music. Research conducted and promoted by the research group “Music, Conflict and the State” has supplemented these studies with investigations into historical and current incidences of music in torture in a number of regions. Two expert workshops, an international conference held in March 2013, and two special issues of journals, have propelled the group to international renown for its work to reveal and theorise the extent and impact of the use of music in torture.

Tracing the history of a global phenomenon
Understanding the long-standing relationship between music and punishment is imperative if we are to understand the logic behind music and torture in more recent times as well. Publications written and edited by members of the research group have explored such topics as musical references in torture practices used in medieval Europe, and the role of music in public denunciation and punishment in a number of other historical contexts. The history of military discipline and punishment is a particularly important topic, since military organisations are very often implicated in the systematic use of torture. Tracing such traditions can help us understand both the development of specific practices, and the symbolic significance of music in rituals of punishment.
Music, Terror and Manipulation: The Case of Greece

In the context of a larger-scale project investigating the use of music by the Greek Junta (1967-1974) to legitimise the regime and terrorise opponents, a project funded by a Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship, Dr. Anna Papaeti has shown that both mechanical sound and music were used as methods of torture against political prisoners. Cases studied include the use of a non-stop electrical bell in the isolation cells at the Pireaus Police Headquarters (Pireaus Asfalia); the use of a mechanical sound (“motor”) at Athens Police Headquarters (Athens Asfalia) during brutal physical torture; and most importantly the use of Greek popular songs of the time by the Special Interrogation Unit of the Greek Military Police (EAT/ESA), combined with other methods that included stress positions, sensory deprivation, and withholding of food and drink. Prisoners on the barren island of Giaros (1967-1968) were also bombarded with music (including folk songs and marches) and speeches as a method of “reeducation”. The project has raised several methodological issues, including in connection with ethical standards designed to protect interviewees: these do not always take into account national customs and contexts, or the strong desire of some survivors to tell their stories and record their legacy for history. The project has also provided further evidence of how music used in interrogation and torture has different impacts on different people. The fact that music was widely understood as a means of resistance to the Junta, and that even today the gravity of psychological torture is often not recognised, has meant that abuses related to music were not necessarily understood or recorded as such, even by those who suffered from them. In many cases, their suffering has been recognised and fully accepted perhaps for the first time in the course of this research.

The way forward

Pilot studies by the group into the use of music against detainees in Turkey, the Middle East and Russia have uncovered yet more evidence for the extensive use of both forced singing and forced listening, including in the present. Though still in their early stages, these case studies demonstrate again the often devastating effects of such practices on the psychological and physical well-being of prisoners. Some accounts detail suicidal tendencies in prisoners subjected to these practices. These investigations have also provided further evidence of a worrying tendency to downplay the scope and the impact of the use of music in torture, even among those involved in the fight against torture. More research and more outreach work is clearly needed if we are to ensure that the use of music in torture is recognised for what it is: torture.
Conferences and meetings organised by the group

Conferences organised

   Organised with financial support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinsschaft, the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture, and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Niedersachsen e.V.

   Organised with financial support from the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture and with foundational support from the EU Marie Curie programme (FP7).

Workshops, symposia and expert meetings organised

   Organised in collaboration with the Lichtenberg-Kolleg, University of Göttingen.

❖ *Sociocultural and Musical Aspects of the War in Sierra Leone*, workshop, May 2010.

   Organised with financial support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinsschaft and the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture

❖ *Psychological and Therapeutic Aspects of Music Torture*, expert meeting, November 2011.


❖ *The Journey of Music(s)*, symposium during the 15th international congress of the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, September 2012.

❖ *Rechts in der Mitte? Musik in parteipolitischer Werbung rechter Parteien in Deutschland*, workshop, October 2013.
   Organised in conjunction with Prof. Samuel Salzborn (Institute of Political Science, University of Göttingen).
Publications

Books


Doctoral dissertation

Special issues of journals


Articles and book chapters


Articles and book chapters submitted

Grant, M. J., Jacobs, Mareike, Möllemann, Rebecca, Münz, Simone Christine & Nuxoll, Cornelia, ‘Music, the “Third Reich” and the 8 Stages of Genocide’, accepted for publication in Wojciech Klimczyk & Agata Świerzowska, eds., Music and Genocide, volume currently under review with a major academic publisher.
Papers, presentations and lectures

M. J. Grant


Participant in panel discussion ‘Kann Musik Folter sein?’, HUMAN RIGHTS TALKS, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, Vienna, April 2014, video available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn2rbX3RVHs

‘Listening to Torture’, seminar series The Listening Workshop, Humanities and Arts Research Centre at Royal Holloway, University of London, February 2014.


Member of discussion panel at the choral workshop and symposium ‘The Ballad of Magna Carta’, Toleranz - Eine Spurensuche: 22nd Knechtsteden Festival of Early Music, Cologne, September 2013.


‘Was hat Musik mit Krieg zu tun?’, guest lecture in the university course Wirkungen von Musik: Theoretische und empirische Zugänge, Bremen, November 2012.


M. J. Grant & Cornelia Nuxoll

Cornelia Nuxoll


‘“We listened to it because of the message.” Juvenile Soldiers and the Role of Music in the Sierra Leone Civil War’, evening panel on *Music and War*, AMS/SEM/SMT Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, the Society for Ethnomusicology and the Society for Music Theory, New Orleans, November 2012.


Rebecca Möllemann & Ingvill Morlandstö


Ingvill Morlandstö


Simone Christine Münz


Anna Papaeti


‘Music, Torture and Testimony: Reopening the Case of the Greek Junta (1967-74)’, conference Interrogating Trauma in the Humanities, Lincoln, August 2012.

Férdia J. Stone-Davis


Christian Storch


Contact

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The group’s website at the University of Göttingen will not be updated after April 2014. Some material on past research and future projects, particularly on music and torture, will be available at www.social-musicology.net.

Members of the group, 2008-2014

Group leader
M. J. Grant 2008-2014

Research assistants
Cornelia Nuxoll 2008-2014
Christian Storch 2010-2014
Stephanie Leder 2010-2014
Anna Papaeti * 2011-2014
Simone Christine Münz 2008-2011
Férdia J. Stone-Davis 2012-2014
Ingvill Morlandstö 2008-2009

Student assistants
Rebecca Möllemann 2008-2009
Mareike Jacobs 2009-2010
Joshua Weitzel 2011-2012
Lisa-Maria Hallenberger 2013

Visiting scholars
Kirsten Dyck (Fulbright) 2011-2012
Joe Stroud (DAAD) 2012

Secretarial support
Anke Schmidt

* Marie Curie Intra-European Fellow (FP7)

Picture credits
Title page – Military signal horn built by Julius Altrichter, Frankfurt an der Oder, between 1868–1915. Originally from the collection of Felix Hoerberger, who played it as a soldier during the Second World War; now held in the Musical Instrument Collection of the University of Göttingen, Inventory No. 1195.
p.1 – “The Drummer Boy’s Dream” (c. 1866) by Frederic James Shields, © Trustees of the British Museum.
p.4 – Official logo for the conference and book The Soundtrack of Conflict, designed by Philip Bais/Leading Image.
p.5 – Depiction of an Indo-Portuguese wedding from Pietro della Valle, Reiß-Beschreibung in die orientalische Länder (Geneva, 1674), public domain.
p.6 – Kigali Memorial Centre, Gisozi, Rwanda. Image by Fanny Scherzer and released for common use by her.