Transposition

Musique et Sciences Sociales

4 | 2014

Musique et conflits armés après 1945

Morag J. Grant and Férdia J. Stone-Davis (éds.), *The Soundtrack of Conflict: The Role of Music in Radio Broadcasting in Wartime and in Conflict Situations*

Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 2013, 253 p.

Huw Hallam

Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transposition/994>

DOI : 10.4000/transposition.994

ISSN : 2110-6134

Éditeur

CRAL - Centre de recherche sur les arts et le langage

Référence électronique

Huw Hallam, « Morag J. Grant and Férdia J. Stone-Davis (éds.), *The Soundtrack of Conflict: The Role of Music in Radio Broadcasting in Wartime and in Conflict Situations* », *Transposition* [En ligne], 4 | 2014, mis en ligne le 15 juillet 2014, consulté le 22 septembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transposition/994> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/transposition.994>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 22 septembre 2020.

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Morag J. Grant and Férdia J. Stone-Davis (eds.), *The Soundtrack of Conflict: The Role of Music in Radio Broadcasting in Wartime and in Conflict Situations*, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 2013, 253 p.

- 1 *The Soundtrack of Conflict*, a new anthology edited by M. J. Grant and Férdia J. Stone-Davis, explores the presence of radio music broadcasting in war and conflict situations. The book comprises papers from a 2011 conference organised by Göttingen University's "Music, Conflict and the State" research group. Fifteen short chapters approach the topic from myriad angles, presenting case studies from the second World War through to the present, crossing three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa¹. While many contributors have recently completed musicology doctorates, others have backgrounds in law, anthropology, history and mass media studies, giving the book a highly interdisciplinary feel.
- 2 Two areas of concern prominent in recent music scholarship converge in the book's main topic: an interest in how musical experience has been transformed in the last century through the technological media that support and shape it²; and an interest in sound's

use for violent ends³. Thus, despite the editors' meek defence of their work as helping to "reduce a gap in the research literature" (p. 9), their topic will be of interest to a wide range of music scholars. The book's breadth notwithstanding, though, *The Soundtrack of Conflict* reads more as an exploratory departure than a culminating synthesis of research, methods and ideas.

- 3 A key difficulty faced by researchers examining political uses of music (in general) and radio broadcasting (specifically) is flagged in the editors' introduction. "[W]hen discussing the impact of music in radio broadcasting", they note, "we should be wary of explanations that presuppose a unidirectional, cause-and-effect model of musical communication" (p. 10). This warning echoes a point raised often enough in music scholarship to be treated as a first-order methodological problem. Music evidently does not do or say the same things to everyone. Broadcasting strategies and listeners' responses do not always align. Reconstruction of what transpires at both ends of a transmission is needed if its political quality is to be assessed – and gathering the archival traces to do that may be impossible in contexts raked over through civil war or imperial conquest.
- 4 Rarely do scholars grapple productively with the indeterminateness of music's effects. It is registered in barely a handful of chapters: notably, Inna Klause's discussion of responses to music used in the Soviet Gulag cultural re-education broadcasts; and Katherine Baber's observations about listeners to the *Zero Hour* radio programme broadcast from Tokyo during the Second World War and their ability to discount certain aspects of what they heard while taking pleasure from others. In a rich and thought provoking examination of the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda's (ICTR) 2006-08 trial of musician Simon Bikindi for incitement to genocide, James Parker points to an imbalance between the Tribunal's perception of the symbolic importance of Bikindi's role in the events of 1994 and its failure to find adequate ways to measure and appraise that role. The courtroom played out a pattern typical of writing on music and politics, whereby conviction that music *can* do significant political work trumps acknowledgement of the methodological issues involved in establishing what that work actually is.
- 5 The editors' introduction highlights two familiar ways of thinking about music in political terms: as it contributes to constructing identity, and as a medium for managing emotions (affects). Additionally some essays treat music simply as a vehicle for ideologically resonant messages, possibly framed through a broadcaster's programming approach. What is startling is the number of different levels – at least seven – within the broadcast situation at which the anthology's contributions address political elements. (Disappointingly, there is no concluding statement to clarify what the individual chapters might reveal collectively.)
- 6 The first level looks to the lyrics. This is the most obvious, but also potentially deceptive, site for the political in music. It is the level the ICTR largely failed to get beyond; and several chapters concentrate their discussions here. The next level addresses the patchwork of symbolic elements in the musical fabric. Again music is treated as a message to be read; though one senses from some chapters that subtle hermeneutic interpretation has little place in contexts torn apart by rape and bloodshed.
- 7 Thirdly, the analyst asks what musical sound *does*. Music is regarded as an agent of "affect" and able to shape its listeners' comportment. Paul Richards, examining rebel military practices in Sierra Leone, speculates about using neurology to explain how music structures "effervescent forms of collective action" (following Émile Durkheim and

Maurice Halbwachs) (p. 185-186). He considers how rhythmic regularity in military music serves co-ordinated action during combat (via drills) when emotion might easily eclipse strategy. Chen-Ching Cheng tells a very different story about the pirate broadcasting, in China, of Taiwanese pop singer Teresa Teng leading up to the Tiananmen Square massacre. Though more is said about the lyrics of Teng's songs than their musical qualities, an argument is made that broadcasting them into mainland China introduced affective elements that altered the Chinese Communist Party ideology's traction.

- 8 It matters also who the musicians are. At a fourth analytic level, questions of identity arise relating to how musicians are enlisted in the construction of traditions – often for plumping up patriotism. At a fifth, related level, who the musicians are matters because who is on whose side is being established: who are “our” friends? who is already complicit? Part of the Teng broadcast's power in Tiananmen Square was that it expressed solidarity, locating the protesters and celebrity as allies. Differently, Karine le Bail, addressing music in Vichy France, tells how the radio came to register, synecdochically through the performing artists it broadcast, the growing collaboration between France and Germany.
- 9 Two final levels relate to programme structuring and dissemination. Just as the radio projects allegiances between political “friends”, programming projects correlations between different forms of musical and non-musical content. The effectiveness of such projections – though important as most rightly assume them to be – is not self-evident, however. Baber, as noted, suggests that for the *Tokyo Zero Hour* programme's listeners, dissociating pleasure from politics was par for the course. Beau Bothwell makes a more unusual (though certainly insightful) argument about US music broadcasting in the Middle East through Radio Sawa, conjecturing that Radio Sawa's programme format, in addition to linking Arabic and Western songs as if in harmonious multicultural confraternity, constructs its audience in a particular way, shaping how it “consumes” the music and potentially its approach to consumerism more generally.
- 10 Of course, first the production of listening must occur at a more rudimentary level: through the set up, distribution and operation of transmitters and receivers – the organisation of how the formatted “content” is disseminated. Observing how in most recent coups d'état in Nigeria the state radio system has been appropriated to broadcast martial music, Oluwafemi Alexander Ladapo suggests counting this as an early warning of violent conflict. It is a pity, the anthology as a whole does not engage more with the technical side of broadcasting – particularly pirate and so-called black broadcasting – in conflict zones.
- 11 The sheer diversity of approaches and foci in *The Soundtrack of Conflict* works in two directions. It exposes just how complex and multi-dimensional the political work done by radio music broadcasting can be. But this in turn highlights how narrow the analytic purview of the individual chapters often is. Few consider more than two or three of the seven levels outlined above. No doubt, this reflects their brevity and the anthology's format (most chapters have fifteen or fewer pages of text, some under ten). Few also engage in theory building. Given the potential difficulties of reconstructing precisely how a particular approach to music broadcasting has functioned in a particular conflict situation, developing theory to guide interpretation and highlight variables and unknowns is necessary to advance research beyond simply affirming that the radio and music are frequently present and implicated in conflict situations.

- 12 If one of the most attractive aspects of this collection is its internationalism, desirable in a future project would be a more comparative approach, giving a greater sense of radio's *geography*: of how its use differs regionally and with regime style (democratic, neoliberal, totalitarian, etc.), and of its use as a technology of cultural imperialism (some chapters already move in this direction). A further issue is that radio is now an old (though by no means obsolete) technology in an increasingly complex media landscape. The internet, and the various forms of radio-like music dissemination that rely on it, must, I think, push us to change our conceptualisation of music broadcasting. The internet changes the rules, both technologically and with respect to the legal and geo-political framing of broadcasting. The Format changes. The who of the broadcaster changes. Censorship mechanisms change. The possibilities open to the listener change. Yet this is also why scholarship of the kind showcased in *The Soundtrack of Conflict*, far from being redundant, is now so important. New protocols remain to be fought for. New practices of resistance remain to be developed. Research and analysis must help bridge lessons learnable from the old to a future under construction.
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NOTES

1. Not five, as the book's blurb promises. Two chapters also relate to North American initiatives in Africa and West Asia.
 2. See especially, STERNE, Jonathan, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2003; STERNE, Jonathan, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2012; BORN, Georgina (ed.), *Music Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013; and BULL, Michael, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, London, Routledge, 2011.
 3. See especially, GOODMAN, Steve, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*, Cambridge, Ma., The MIT Press, 2010; and CUSICK, Suzanne G., "Music as Torture / Music as Weapon", in *Trans – revista transcultural de música*, N° 10, 2006 (available at: <http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/a152/music-as-torture-music-as-weapon>, accessed: 14/3/2014).
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Mots-clés : musique, conflit, radio, radiodiffusion, guerre

Keywords : music, conflict, broadcasting, war

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Huw Hallam has recently completed a PhD in music history and theory at King's College London. His research engages with a wide range of modern and contemporary music, sound art, and visual cultures, often focusing on their political dimensions and how they engage with temporality.