

Beyond intentionality: exploring creativity and resistance within a UK Immigration Removal Centre.

Abstract

This paper considers the place of creativity within UK Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) as a way of developing understandings of resistance within these spaces. It draws upon empirical research undertaken within an IRC, to explore the role of improvised music making between staff and detainees. This work arises out of a concern that framings of resistance within IRCs have been characterised by acts that intentionally challenge the particular manifestation of sovereign power within these sites, where non-citizens are incarcerated. This study interferes with the prevailing view that for an act to be considered resistance it must be characterized by intent, and follows Foucault to argue that to resist something is to create something, as ‘inventive, as mobile’ as power itself (1977, 267). Consequently this paper explores creativity as ‘poiesis’, drawing upon work by Agamben (2014) and Deleuze (1987) to explore the potentiality of improvised music within an IRC. [148 words]

Keywords: immigration detention; resistance; creativity; intentionality; poiesis.

Total Word Count, including references and footnotes: 8,980

Introduction

Immigration control has become one of the ‘defining features’ of the modern sovereign state (Squire 2009, 5). States reassert and extend what has been described as a ‘spectral sovereignty’ through the control of the restless bodies of migrants, whose very autonomy in arriving at the border disrupts the established trinity of nation, state and territory (De Genova and Peutz 2010, 2; Agamben 2005). Indeed, sovereign power’s ability to establish the division between citizen and ‘other’ through the ubiquitous presence of contemporary practices of border control, is of such importance to the means by which a territorial order is constituted in terms of state governance and national belonging that ‘one is tempted to say that were there no immigrants knocking at the doors, they would have to be invented’ (Bauman 2004, 56; Weber 2008).

Within this context, the incarceration of non-citizens in ‘specific facilities for the purposes of realising an immigration-related goal’ has calcified into an important means for the state to assert its authority, and establish a distinction between the figure of the citizen and that of the ‘other’ (Silverman 2014, 169). There has been a pervasive growth of immigration detention centres across Western liberal democracies, relying upon multiple and intersecting authorities, forms of knowledge and technologies to facilitate the state’s expunge of unwanted ‘foreign’ bodies from the borders of its polity (Andrijasevic 2010, 148).

In the UK, individuals may be indefinitely detained in Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) typically to establish their identity or to facilitate their removal. On any given day, approximately 3,300 foreign nationals are detained under Immigration Act powers, in one of the 12 IRCs across the country (Bosworth 2014). Furthermore, since May 2013 the government has made 1,000 beds available in prisons that are designated for ex-prisoners ‘who have finished their sentence and are awaiting deportation’ (ibid, 3). Whilst the number of individuals detained in the UK is comparatively small compared to those within the community without ‘legal documentation’¹, or the number of foreign nationals in prison, Bosworth argues that their small size belies the considerable political, ‘moral, ethical, and legal dilemmas they raise’ (2014, 3).

¹ Given that undocumented migrants are largely invisible, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) states that it does not publish data estimating the size of the ‘illegal’ migrant population (ONS 2015). In 2007 the London School of Economics estimated the number of irregular migrants to be 618,000, based on the 2001 Census data, with a margin of error of 200,000 (Gordon et al. 2009; Bosworth 2014). Whilst media outlets, and political parties have claimed that this figure is considerably higher, it is near impossible to know how many individuals are in the UK illegally. However, it can be reasonably assumed that this figure is significantly greater than the approximately 3,300 individuals in IRCs in the UK.

Bosworth further notes that these centres are unstable and disputed spaces ‘about which we know very little’, particularly regarding the everyday lives and realities for immigration detainees (ibid., 3). Indeed, this paper agrees with Mountz et al. who argue that with the rapid expansion, privatization and proliferation of detention facilities there is a ‘pressing and clear rationale for more empirical research on immigration detention’ (2013, 523). Despite this call, immigration detention had, until comparatively recently, been largely neglected within the Social Sciences with ‘few pieces of academic research based on interviews or fieldwork in a detention centre’ having been published (Bosworth 2011, 178).

This paper moves to address concerns over the lack of empirical research within such sites of exclusion, by drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork within a UK IRC, and exploring the role of improvised music within the centre. The research was undertaken with the charity Music in Detention, who are permitted by the Home Office, and the outsourced management of the centres, to run music workshops within several IRCs². These workshops are intended to facilitate informal shared improvised music making between staff and detainees, aiming to allow detainees the opportunity to express themselves through music. Music in Detention also run workshops linking detainees to local community groups, setting up communications between them and with music exchanged through CDs, which circulate beyond the centres themselves. Importantly for this study, Music in Detention do not campaign against detention, instead they are an independent charity that ‘works through music to give voice to immigration detainees and create channels of communication between them, immigration and detention staff, local communities and the wider public’ (Speyer 2008). For this research, I undertook participant observation within a Music in Detention workshop, together with interviewing their volunteers and informally chatting to detainees³. These methods reflect this study’s contribution of a complex, multifaceted and empirically-informed analysis to the existing literature on resistance within IRCs, as the detail

² As of June 2015, Music in Detention worked in 4 IRCs (Harmondsworth, Colnbrook, Campsfield House and Yarl’s Wood), with the specificities of access determined by the regime management of each centre.

³ The knowledge produced from this fieldwork is positioned within the space-time of the music workshop and cannot be separated from it. Thus this research cannot be extrapolated to other situations. What then, is the utility of this study? This study attempts to address these concerns by utilising the example as a *device*, reflecting Agamben’s discussion of the example as neither inductive nor deductive but instead as playing alongside the ‘universal’ as “it is never possible to separate its exemplarity from its singularity” (2009, 31). The examples from the workshop I attended, are not intended to be reflection of a general picture, yet neither are they limited to their own particularities; instead the example dances between the ‘singular’ and the ‘universal’, as a device to ‘signal something about the world’, and ‘make intelligible’ a broader political context (Amoore and Hall 2013, 97; Agamben 2009, 9).

afforded by ethnographic fieldwork can ‘reveal the plurality’ of these spaces, and attend to the messy, complex and ambiguous nature of life and resistance within an IRC (Howell 1997, 14).

This study therefore arises out of a concern that framings of resistance within the contested spaces of IRCs have been characterised by specific, often extreme acts of defiance, that are intentionally challenging the particular manifestation of sovereign power within these sites (see Bosworth 2014; Edkins and Pin-Fat 2004, 2005; Puggioni 2014). As Strunk and Leitner (2013, 62) argue, too many articles on migrant resistance have focused on migrants acting against the state as opposed to exploring the ‘productive and affirmative power that promotes alternative imaginaries and institutional change’. This paper therefore interferes with the dominant articulation of resistance within IRCs by arguing that resistance must be understood as plural and distributed, operating without or beyond intent. In conceptualising resistance in this way, a more complex understanding of the temporalities of detention is advanced through the notion of polyrhythmic time. This disputes linear narratives of progress underpinning resistance as an intentional movement towards a goal, or telos. The paper concludes by arguing for further investigation of the potentialities of acts, moments or encounters that serve to unsettle the governance of such sites.

Beyond intentionality: Framing resistance within UK Immigration Removal Centres.

Conceptualisations of resistance within IRCs have been framed by the view that ‘acts of resistance’ require the *intention* of subjects and/or a recognition of intent by a target or observer. Indeed this view that resistance necessitates conscious intent is, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) argue, central to debates over whether an act ‘constitutes’ resistance. Resistance is primarily seen as a purposeful response by an oppressed individual or group to a particular configuration of power relations, and thus requires an intentional action towards a goal, or telos⁴. Within the context of immigration detention, this can take the form of contesting the legalities of detention, immanent deportation, the daily regime of the centre (e.g. food provision, activities, respect from staff) or making a claim to citizenship (Bosworth 2012; Hall 2012; Puggioni 2014). Action here

⁴ The word ‘intent’ is derived from the Latin *intendere* (verb), or *intentus* (adjective). It means ‘to stretch out, to strain’ (*tendere*) ‘towards’ (*in*), to direct action towards a purpose (Ainsworth, Morell, and Carey 1823). The notion of telos, an end goal, is therefore bound up with the idea of a subject acting with intent.

is interpreted as directed towards an envisaged result, at a future considered preferable to the present.

Within the literature addressing resistance within IRCs, particular attention has been given to extreme, 'romantic and heroic' moments of defiance (Bleiker 2000, 256). Examples of this include detainee hunger strikes, lip and eye-socket sewing, suicides, institutional level complaints, protests by activist groups, direct appeals over deportations and politically motivated disruptive artwork. These acts are intended to be, or read as, deliberate contestations of the particular manifestation of sovereign power within such sites. Indeed, Agamben's conceptualisation of the camp as the *nomos* of modern state power (1998, 2005) has haunted much theorising of resistance within IRCs, with scholars turning to analyse how detainees challenge their depiction of 'bare life' (Edkins and Pin-Fat 2004, 2005; Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Squire 2009; Puggioni 2014). Valuable consideration has also been given to resistance at the level of the body (Puggioni 2014; Edkins and Pin-Fat 2004, 2005; Hall 2012; Bosworth 2014); the hidden transcripts and tactics of detainees (Scott 2005; see Hall 2012), the actions of external campaigners (Johnson 2012; Nyers and Rygiel 2012; De Genova and Peutz 2010), and bids for recognition or assertions of an identity that is not dictated by the state (Bosworth 2012; Bosworth 2014; Bosworth and Slade 2014). In this literature, acts are retrospectively categorised into examples of resistance, with commentary on the relative success or failure of detainees, staff and activist movements to achieve their *telos*, their intended future.

Importantly, this paper does not seek to dispute this work, nor to deny that these scholars recognise the complexity of resistance within these spaces. My work does not negate the imperative to act to prevent deportation, the importance of supporting campaigns to end immigration detention, nor the psychological impact Bosworth (2012) notes that doing something about their situation may have upon detainees. Instead, this paper suggests that exclusively considering resistance that takes a particular form increases 'the visibility of these modes of politics whilst simultaneously rendering other modes invisible' (Amoore 2005, 7) and that this view of resistance as 'versus' sovereign power masks the ambiguities of thoughts, feelings and actions within an IRC. This research therefore contributes an alternative dimension to this body of literature, arising out of a concern that the messy, ambiguous and intrinsically entangled relationships between power and resistance are yet to be fully explored within these spaces. Yet my response refutes the critique of relying solely on theory rather than empirics, (the 'allures of

applying Foucault and Agamben') when trying to explore resistance within these spaces (Bosworth 2014, 53), as it utilises ethnographic research to explore the nuances, ambiguities and uncertainties of (in)action within a music workshop. In short, in arguing for an attention to resistance beyond intent, this paper does not state that intent is not significant when researching resistance, but is noting instead the limitations of only understanding resistance as constituted by seemingly intentional acts.

To do this, an understanding of the temporalities of resistance as polyrhythmic is put forward. Such a temporal framing challenges the linear conception of time underpinning resistance as intentional movement towards a telos. Instead a polyrhythmic framing poses the time of resistance as non-linear, non-teleological, and non-causal. Such a conception of time is vital for a politics of resistance without intended goal, where (imagined) futures are multiple possibilities that remain undetermined. The future of polyrhythmic time is not preconfigured around strategically directed lines of intent, but rather is always already riddled with uncertainty (Foucault 1980). Accordingly 'within every line there is a braid of other lines' and any reading of resistance that focuses upon the 'one line' that is seen to emerge from this quiver of possible futures can be considered a reduction of this multiplicity (Carter 2009, 8). When articulated through this lens, the idea that resistance requires a stretching out towards a particular outcome is underpinned by a 'linearization of intent' that 'too often eludes the complex, emergent world in which we live' (Thrift 2007, vii). Acting with the intention of a particular future therefore requires the foresight that an action will result in particular consequences, which will be a situation that, in part, resolves some of the problems of the present. This paper discusses what an additional, empirically grounded, exploration into resistance beyond intent can bring, resistance situated within an understanding of time as polyrhythmic, where actions are unable to be directly linked to future events and instead examines the politics of remaining open to the multiplicity of future directions that moments of improvised music may bring.

Resistance, Creativity and Poiesis

Resistance is therefore plural, emerges in the fissures between the 'strong' and the 'weak' and is not exterior to power, but rather 'coextensive and absolutely contemporaneous' to power (Bleiker 2000; Foucault 2009, xx). Resistance emerges from the strategic field of relations of power, and these relations of power only exist relative to a multiplicity of points of resistance. Resistance therefore is not a passive underside, nor is it a reactive phenomenon. Instead Foucault

argues that to resist something is to activate something, as ‘inventive, as mobile’ as power itself (1977, 276). It is for this reason that this paper engages with creativity, understood here as *poiesis*. Poiesis is etymologically derived from the Ancient Greek ‘*poi-eo*’, taken here to be ‘to make or to transform, a process of reconciling thought with matter and time, or man with his world’ (The Free Dictionary 2012). Aristotle used poiesis in his discussions of potentiality, which are then developed by Agamben’s reading of Deleuze (2014; 1987)⁵. In comparison, creativity derives from the Latin *creō*, ‘to bring into being, to cause to exist’ suggesting a deliberate act of human creation (Barnhart and Steinmetz 1988, 1134). It is this association with human intent that this paper is trying to avoid by exploring creativity as poiesis, and as this allows for an attunement to the inseparability of the process and product of creation, when exploring resistance within IRCs. This view of creativity as poiesis, as without requiring intent or direction at telos, can be further expanded upon through the thought of Gilles Deleuze, as his work sees a world in constant creation. Deleuze’s plural, empiricist philosophy is underpinned by the view that the state of things are “neither unities nor totalities but *multiplicities*” (2006, vi). For Deleuze every ‘thing’ is made up of a set of lines or dimensions that are ‘irreducible to one another’, multiple parts that relate but constantly work through their separation (ibid; Richardson 2014). Within this view, ‘neither the subject of creativity, nor creativity as a subject can be contained’ and instead creativity, when understood as poiesis, must be traced ‘immanently through the alignment of forces that mark it as a process without conclusion’ (Richardson 2014, 70).

This paper specifically takes its understanding of potentiality through Agamben’s reading (2014) of Deleuze’s 1987 lecture *On Cinema: What is the creative act?* where he discussed an act of creativity as an act of resistance, arguing that in any creative act, or poesis, there is something that resists creation and counters explanation. This power that hinders and arrests potentiality in its movement to the act is what Agamben calls impotentiality - the power not to be, so potentiality contains within itself an ambivalence: it can contain in itself an irreducible resistance (2014). Agamben draws upon Deleuze’s discussion of potentiality, and develops it, arguing for an

⁵ Given the breadth of philosophical engagement with ‘potentiality’ (originating in Aristotelian metaphysics and since woven throughout much of continental philosophy: most pertinently in Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Benjamin, Derrida, Deleuze and Agamben), this paper specifically utilises Agamben’s reading of Deleuze to engage with poesis and potentiality (2014). Such a reading of potentiality therefore aligns with Deleuze’s conception of pure becoming, which (through his reading of Nietzsche) he articulates as the ‘enveloping’ rather than an exhaustion of actuality, thereby removing any association with ‘telos’ (Deleuze 2004; Ikoniadou 2014, 18).

attention to potentiality in acts, or processes of creation, that is Agamben argues that if creativity were only a potentiality to do something that can only pass into the act, then it would be the production of an order that has ignored the potentiality not to be, which is not an adequate conception of creativity as it presupposes the multiple, contradictory aspects of creativity as both product and process (1999).

Thus Agamben challenges the assumed link between potentiality and actuality that underpins so much of the previously discussed literature on resistance within an IRC: the view that resistance needs to be directed at a telos, an end goal where a potential outcome is attempted to be realised, or actualised (ibid.). Instead, in focusing on the potentiality of something to be, or do, not be or not do, the assumed temporal linearity between potentiality to actuality is disrupted. Creativity as poesis encompasses the potentiality *not to be*, which is not simply another potentiality besides the potentiality to be: if, as Agamben writes ‘potentiality to not-be originally belongs to all potentiality, then there is truly potentiality only where the potentiality to not-be does not lag behind actuality but passes fully into it as such’ (ibid., 183). This does not mean that it disappears in actuality; instead, it *preserves* itself as such in actuality. Therefore in Agamben’s formulation, actuality is no longer simply the using-up of potentiality; it is the full realization of impotentiality, the potential to not-be (2014).

Playing with time: improvised music within immigration detention.

Within the context of the immigration apparatus in the UK, Cwerner (2004, 73) notes how ‘time has been fore-grounded as a major dimension and resource upon which some agents deem it appropriate to exert power, manifesting in the ‘fast-tracking’, ‘streamlining’ and ‘speeding up’ of the asylum process’. The control of time, as a strategic political act, is reflected in the institutional rhythms of IRCs and other institutions in the wider regime of border security, detention and deportation (see Gill 2009; Griffiths 2013; Mountz 2013; Mountz et al. 2013). Inside detention facilities, migrants become knowable through minute control of intimate aspects of their lives; their time is controlled by the state (Conlon 2010). Laser controlled door sensors, locked cells, head counts, and daily sign-ins serve to reaffirm state control over migrants’ bodies and their daily routines, even if their identities remain in question (Conlon 2010; Larsen and Piché 2009; Wilder 2010). Time is therefore central to the apparatus of control within the IRC, making it pertinent to explore in relation to discussions of power, resistance and creativity.

Indeed the IRC can be seen to represent a temporal juxtaposition between containment and mobility, as the apparatus of detention serves to render migrant bodies immobile, with the objective of moving them elsewhere (Mountz et al. 2013). Thus little can be anticipated, as the deportability of the migrant's body means that they cannot plan for the near future and live in a period of perceived temporal stasis. Detainees exist in this contradiction between immanent and absent change (Griffiths 2013). Unlike prison, time in detention is not cumulative, and migrants do not know when they are going to be released, or where they will go. After a long wait, and a forced idleness, removal directions can take place within 48 hours, and detainees are frequently moved between IRCs with little or no prior warning (ibid.; Gill 2009) The variations of tempo through which immigration detainees, and other 'deportable' migrants experience time (frenzied, deaccelerating and suspended), are used by Griffiths (2013) to demonstrate that time is a metaphor by which detainees express and describe the uncertainty and disorientating confusion that characterises the UK immigration detention system. This non-linear experience of time, which was echoed by many of the participants of this study, aligns with conceptions of time as polyrhythmic, where the past is always already folded into the present. Resistance here is framed in relation to this understanding of time as non-linear, moments where the institutional rhythms of the IRC are momentarily disrupted, encounters where the certainty of the sovereign decision is unsettled and humanity exposed, through the improvised music that took place in the Music in Detention workshop.

(Dis)united beats: Rhythm within a Music in Detention workshop

Music in Detention offer optional sessions within IRCs for detainees to take part in improvised music making, with their volunteers stressing that in this space there was no 'correct' beat, no set piece to play. This improvised music is characterised by a lack of predetermined structure, a non-linear conception of time and thus 'involves a constant balancing act between complexity and comprehensibility, control and disorder, constancy and unpredictability' (Borgo 2002, 182). There is no clear direction to the music, no governing focus and instead an attention to the in-the-moment creativity as a process, as neither the performer nor the listener knows what form the music will take. This results in a constant incompleteness to the music: 'improvisation can never be finalised; it remains always incomplete' and thus improvised music in the IRC can be considered political as it can provide a 'potentially disruptive force', one that has the potential to

unsettle the performance of the sovereign decision to draw lines determining entry to the political life of the state (Kanellopoulos 2011, 126).

The Music in Detention workshop I attended was dominated by improvisation. Throughout the afternoon music would arise out of the group present, often without a clear origin and with one detainee beginning a song whilst the rest of us would improvise an accompanying beat.

“Some people then began to sing, whilst everyone else played drums in the background. There wasn't a clear beat, and it seemed like everyone was sort of doing their own thing, but all together because one person was singing and everyone else was relatively silent. The music got gradually more crazy, with people singing on top of each other, and having two microphones being passed around got a bit complicated. It was really noisy, and I don't think anyone really knew what was going on.” [Field notes]

The detainees, IRC officer and Music in Detention staff were all fueling this improvised music making. The rhythm of the group was not preset, with no singular individual able to dictate where the music would go, as everyone came together with the material components of the space, to sustain this process of creating music: as with improvisation ‘there is no script, and the stage is formed on the spot and sustained by the development of this sense of responsibility’ (Kanellopoulos 2011, 119).

Consequently improvisation is denoted by a period of continual surprise, a constant reinvention of a future that cannot be anticipated. In this moment, the detainees are unsettling the control that the IRC management has over their time, their rhythms and routines. The biopolitical control over everyday life in the IRC is momentarily agitated in the chaos of the improvisation as the routine that dominates these spaces is, briefly, thrown up in the air with the messiness and unpredictability of this interruption. In these moments of improvisation, where the detainees themselves come together in an unpredictable performance to interrupt a linear sequence, the apparent linearity of time dictated by the IRC management is challenged.

Furthermore, Michael⁶, from Music in Detention, who was ‘leading’ the workshop, noted

⁶All names of staff, detainees and Music in Detention volunteers are pseudonyms.

that he intentionally placed an emphasis on improvisation as it allowed detainees the freedom to insert their own beat into the music. Music, Michael argued, gave detainees the ability to express themselves in a way that transcended language barriers. This allowed detainees who did not speak the same language to come together and play music. Detainees were encouraged to sing about their past, their home and their journey. In doing so music became a 'vehicle' to 'transport us to another place and another time' beyond the IRC (Valentine 1995, 481). By encouraging detainees to fit their own beats into the music, and help to shape its flow, elements of different cultures were expressed:

" You get to see the view of the whole world, different nationalities in the same place. You might not understand language but you understand rhythm". (Abdul, Workshop Participant).

Abdul here notes the apparent uniting force of rhythm, and how in the context of a workshop consisting of many languages and unfamiliar forms of music, being able to join in with an underlying beat gave him a sense of unity, of celebrating a diverse grouping of people. This description of rhythm resonates with Agamben's claim that 'in a musical piece, although it is somehow in time, we perceive rhythm as something that escapes the incessant flights of instants and appears almost as the presence of an atemporal dimension in time' (1999, 99). Indeed, in Lefebvre's work on rhythm he states that there is no identical or absolute repetition, as 'there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive' (2004, 6). Thus rhythm always contains an 'immanent potential for disruption', a conflict or dissonance between rhythms which Lefebvre terms 'arrhythmia' (Edensor 2010, 3; Lefebvre 2004). Whilst many accounts (see De Certeau 1988, Flusty 2000) place any arrhythmic improvisation as a form of resistance, this paper is concerned with this immanent potentiality of rhythm in relation to conceptualisations of resistance beyond intentionality. It therefore considers rhythm as a means to render audible the non-linearity of time, allowing for a conceptualisation of actuality and potentiality that exceeds a binary distinction. The rhythms of improvised music in the Music in Detention workshop open up experiences of time, beyond the seemingly one-directional linearity denoted by the centre management. In doing so rhythm exposes the human timescales of the detainees, officers (and researchers) to a more 'intuitive, rhythmic, felt temporality' (Langer

1953, 110) one where the coexisting tensions of the apparent ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ become exposed.

Rhythm therefore opens the structure of a subject’s being in the world, signaling an on-going, disharmonious process of poiesis, as multiple components of the music-making chime discordantly. Yet, this is not to claim that improvised music provides a universal language, or that it brings multiple bodies together united as one under the experience of same beat. Instead it is to acknowledge the frictions that are necessarily inherent to improvised music when understood as an always becoming, never-to-be completed (dis)unity, and the multiple ephemeral responses that may arise from a rhythm resonating with moments of an individual’s past:

“Joseph [IRC officer] explained that he was going to sing a song from his home country in Southern Africa he had learnt in 5th grade. This was interesting as although Joseph works for [the outsourced management company]⁷ was making it that known he too was a migrant, and from Southern Africa - directly linking him with many detainees present. Joseph then sang a song in Zulu, which some of the detainees knew and joined in with shouts of recognition, whilst the rest of us just sat and drummed along with the beat” [Field notes]

This moment where the music played connected to the past experiences of some of those at the workshop, correlates with the ontological underpinning of Deleuze’s philosophy, of a world in constant creation, and the corresponding claim that the past and present are in a virtual co-existence: the past is formed at the same time as the present, as if the present was not past at the same time as the present, then it would never pass and a new present would never arrive. Conceptualising the music of detainees and officers through poiesis, allows for this co-existence to be understood in its potentiality, as things, memories and feelings resonate discordantly though time; music can stimulate an unintended, unexpected affective response. In the encounter detailed above, IRC officer Joseph’s singing in Zulu constitutes a surprise, a moment that disrupts the dominant logics of this space. Yet such moments of connection or association that bring diverse space-times into the present, are not choreographed or scripted. This episode serves to highlight the importance of framing resistance as plural, as the intervention of Joseph does not ‘fit’ into the

⁷ The specific country Joseph is from, together with the management company running the IRC have been concealed to protect the officer’s identity.

expected resistant subject, identified as the locus of resistance within an IRC. Instead, it is possible to multiply the possible points of resistance that are made visible in this space, beyond the anticipated detainee acting against sovereign power. As an IRC officer with his own migration journey, Joseph is complexly woven into the sovereign assemblage: a security worker, a migrant, with a history of suffering or loss? It is not possible to capture this legacy, it is potential and in this potential, the ambiguous positioning that Joseph embodies escapes from the governing lines of in/exclusion drawn by the state. Joseph's improvisation in Zulu can therefore be seen to momentarily disrupt the experience of time within the IRC as this unanticipated interruption can make present memories and past emotions; music can be a device for 'replaying the temporal soundtrack of that moment' (DeNora 1999, 48–49).

In unsettling the rhythms of this space, improvisation provides an interesting framework with which to examine the 'cracks of resistance and contestation' that can be seen to potentially emerge within the IRC (Squire 2009, 158). Despite the workshop's apparent flexibility, 'in the end if we are there it is because they want us to be there' (Emily, Music in Detention). How can improvisation be considered to open up the opportunity for resistance, if this itself took place within the very timetable that it appeared to unsettle? How can improvised music be considered political? Crucially however, resistance and dominance are mutually imbricated in the process of improvisation; it is not possible to escape sovereign power, and resistance would not be possible if this were so. Shutting down these moments by categorizing them as to whether they can be considered acts of resistance, is an interpretation that limits the reading of these acts, ignoring the multiplicities, complexities and ambiguities that playing or hearing a familiar beat can bring. It is this ambiguity, the potentiality of rhythm, that allows for an openness to a 'future that has yet to be determined', one that exceeds that dictated by the IRC management (Sharpe et al. 2014, 124).

Further to this, Amoore and Hall (2013, 106) note how 'incompleteness, uncertainty, and indeterminacy are the condition of possibility for the making of political claims'. In the IRC context, a world of complete certainty and determined futures would constitute a fully administered world with no possibility for politics and no space for a political claim to be made. The staff and detainees' improvised music making provided ambiguous moments where the certainty of their exclusion was disrupted. This improvisation was political in its very unknowability, as it challenged and resisted the certainty of the production of a governable political order (ibid.). This resistance does not need to be 'in opposition to the sovereign state'

(Amoore 2005, 6), and crucially, is not necessarily characterised by intent: ‘the point of interruption is not to rally to an issue or to call for a specific response but rather to deface the apparently smooth and seamless surface of certainty’ (Amoore and Hall 2010, 312). The creative process of improvising whilst unsettling and disrupting the normal routine of the IRC is no ‘locus of great refusal’ (Foucault 1978, 95). Instead it is the very potentiality of the process of improvisation, the multiplicity of possible futures that it may open up, that resists capture by the sovereign state.

Immigration enforcement: relations of power within a Music in Detention workshop.

“After the music workshops I started to see the officers differently. I saw it as, they are actually creating a programme of activities for us to get involved in, ‘cos it is stressful being away from your family and they’re trying to help you by making a more calm and better environment”
[Workshop participant, Campsfield House, Music in Detention CD 2012]

Music in Detention aim to ‘create channels of communication’ between detainees and staff within IRCs (Speyer 2008). Workshops are set up with the intention of opening up a shared space, where staff and detainees can break out of their ‘normal’ roles and share in the experience of playing music together. Focusing solely on intended outcomes in these workshops misses such relations of care and help. Inevitably however, the interaction between officers and detainees within Music in Detention workshops varies between the centres and the individual staff who monitor the workshops (Emily, Music in Detention)⁸. At the workshop I attended, the officer, ‘Joseph’, who was present, joined in with the workshop and sang about his own migration story from Southern Africa, sharing experiences, songs and language with detainees. He also permitted the detainees to express their grievances at immigration control and the IRC management, even joining in their laughter when it was directed at particular aspects of centre life.

“The Eastern European group [of detainees] get hold of the microphone again, and the loudest

⁸ Music in Detention note that staff participation usually takes the form of either joining in the activity or encouraging detainees to take part. However, there are reports of officers declining to join in, and in one case, showing disdain by ‘covering their ears’, which impacts upon the atmosphere of the room (Bruce 2015, 15)

of the group starts to sing a One Republic song. He lustily and tunelessly belts out “lately I’ve been, I’ve been losing sleep”. Everyone stops and stares at him, and many begin to laugh. It isn’t immediately clear why everyone (including Joseph) is laughing. I also laugh, but I’m not sure if they are laughing at his singing, what he is singing or his voice.” [Field notes]

The reasons, if any, behind Joseph’ participation the workshop cannot be inferred from observations, and yet his participation in the improvised music and laughter does not diminish its political significance, instead it serves to highlight the complex, often contradictory entanglements of resistance and power. The detainees may not aim to overthrow the apparatus of detention regime, yet in laughing at it, in it and with it they expose the fragility of the performance of the sovereign decision to attempt exclude them from the political life of the state. Laughter occurs within the very framework that is subverts; it is ambivalent, ‘unofficial but legalised’ (Bakhtin 1984, 89). Therefore laughter can be considered more than a helpless or superficial act but about ‘subverting the expected’ through moments of uncontrollable hilarity (Amoore and Hall 2013, 90). There does not have to be a coherent political agenda behind the advent of laughter for it to be a potentially political moment of interruption; laughter can be considered to temporarily suspend the biopolitical regime of control in the IRC by unsettling the certainty of a known future and disrupting sovereign power’s ability to regulate these spaces. This laughter troubles the performance of sovereign power, revealing its contingencies and ‘the swarm of possibilities that had to be left out when this line was taken’ (Carter 2009, 1). These ‘swarms’ of moments, or ruptures that emerge, may trouble the continued performance of the state within these sites, and therefore are political, but they do not require intent behind these actions to be considered resistance.

However, as these moments took place within the framework of the IRC itself, they can be seen to ‘challenge the establishment in a safe way’ (Michael, Music in Detention), with officers able to shut down or prevent any behaviour they deem to be dangerous. Deviance may be allowed within the space of the workshop but, as Music in Detention volunteer Emily articulated, this is only permitted in the context of a strict regime: ‘there is A, B, C, D and as long as you comply with that then that’s fine, then you can say, write poetry against me, you can insult me, you can do what you want as long as you comply with these things’. Viewing the temporalities of resistance as polyrhythmic however, allows for a conceptualization of resistance within existing hierarchies to be understood as creative, and open to multiple possibilities This framework

destablises the necessity of (in)action towards a telos, and acknowledges that dissent is always already present in the exercise of power and resistance to the ‘paradoxical logic of sovereignty’ is not that which ‘transcends, or overcomes’, but that which disrupts the performance of sovereign power within these sites (Amoore and Hall 2013, 113).

This complexity is further exemplified by the moments within the workshop where, without his uniform, it would have been difficult to place IRC officer Joseph as a member of staff. However, a situation erupted where this ambiguity of his positionality as irreducibly both an immigrant and a petty sovereign came to the fore:

Sam [Detainee] now comes to the front of the room and gives a warning that he will only sing the second verse of the song he has written, as the first is too explicit. Michael [Music in Detention] explains that as we are all adults here, we don't mind and that this is a space for sharing. Joseph [IRC Officer] follows this up with “what happens here stays here - this is your chance!” I don't fully understand all the lyrics but the rap gets increasingly graphic, and Joseph jumps up quickly and stops him ... good-naturedly saying, “okay, okay TOO explicit!” The detainees mainly laugh and some shout back to Joseph “what happens here stays here - this is your chance?!” [Field notes]

Here Joseph shuts down a potentially disruptive moment, seeming to reassert sovereign power within this space and reinstating the hierarchies within the room. Yet, as discussed earlier resistance and dominance are mutually imbricated in the process of improvisation; it is not possible to escape sovereign power, and resistance would not be possible if this were so.

These complex entanglements are visually illustrated by artwork by ex-detainee Zbigniew Cedro of a Music in Detention workshop [Figure 1] which appears to indicate that the workshop is liberating, bringing detainees together and breaking down the walls of the IRC. A smiling IRC officer is also present and a detainee has his arm around his shoulders. This may have been intended to reflect the ability of the workshop to provide moments where the power hierarchies within the IRC are subverted, and how the shared encounter of playing music together provides moments of apparent unity between officers and detainees. A space of collective experiences is produced, where both officers and detainees can escape out of the usual rhythms of daily life into other space-times where the usual encounters and hierarchies that dictate much of everyday life

within the centre are disrupted. The actions of Joseph in the workshop I attended however, suggested that whilst officers and detainees may *appear* to be momentarily equal, a workshop may mask the hierarchies until such an encounter (such as Sam's explicit rap) brings the power of the officer, as a petty sovereign back to the fore.

This inability to escape from the seeming contradiction of power relations is illustrated by figure of the Angel peeling back Cedro's image of imagined possibilities to reveal a solid brick wall behind. Underlying, supporting and forming this momentary opening of an alternative political imagining is the very power that is curtailing it. This is echoed by a Music in Detention volunteer's frustration at the contradictions in the workshop: 'yeah these guys had a moment of suspension, a moment of reflection and of empowerment, but when you see it in a bigger scale, the system of how things work in the company, the state, the UK Border Agency, we [Music in Detention] are just the exact thing they need to show the wider population that "we care about our detainees"'. Any possibility of resistance here, is therefore permitted by, and contingent upon, sovereign power. The breaking down of walls, the melting of the bars and the apparent unity between officers and detainees, are 'cracks' (Squire 2009, 158), moments that have been opened up and yet are unable to be untangled from the apparatus that controls and creates the these spaces.

However, in unsettling the normal rhythm and routine of this space, with a process of creativity that is simultaneously within sovereign power, and contesting it, improvised music provides an interesting demonstration of the potentiality, that Amoore states, 'retains the capacity for imagination in a different political mode' (2013, 161), the idea for staff and detainees that things could be otherwise. Although seemingly innocuous and mundane, this paper argues for an attention to a polyrhythmic temporality, to suggest that improvised music is political in its 'thick potentiality', as it exemplifies a creative process where the answer to the question of action is not already determined and it is this openness to the 'sense of the possible' (Sharpe et al. 2014, 121; Isin and Nielsen 2008, 4) that creates new political imaginaries and spaces for claims to be made.

Furthermore, acting on such potentialities is a form of governance of life and, Amoore argues, that this form of governing can only act 'on a potentiality that is already actualised as a possibility' (2013, 26), noting that there are other forms of potentiality that are never 'grasped' or realised, that provide interruptions to the smooth governance of such sites within the borderzone.

This paper has explored the improvised music that occurred within a Music in Detention workshop to argue for a conceptualization of the temporalities of resistance as polyrhythmic, suggesting that this exposes a necessarily contradictory element of resistance, and that the openness to the potentialities that acts can bring that is to be celebrated: an act, encounter or thought within an IRC can be both resistant and compliant, and settling on it as ‘resistance’ can ignore the very potentialities and ambiguities that serve to unsettle any definitive sense of what the future might bring and the opening up of new possibilities for political claims within these spaces.

Conclusions

This paper has considered creativity within UK IRCs in an attempt to develop understandings of resistance within these sites. It has put forward an understanding of resistance as plural, articulated through a polyrhythmic temporality. It has drawn upon empirical research undertaken with the charity Music in Detention within IRC, to examine the role of improvised music making between staff and detainees. In exploring resistance beyond intent, this study has wider implications for theorisations of resistance beyond the site of the IRC, and resonates with broader debates surrounding conceptualisations of migrant resistance. Writing at the time of the Mediterranean ‘refugee crisis’, and the associated rise in migrant camps, reception and detention centres across Europe, such an approach raises questions concerning the importance of being able to imagine other futures. What are the political and practical implications of an openness ‘to the future, the shape of which is as yet unknowable’? (Sharpe et al. 2014, 116). What might it mean to conceive of a (‘progressive’) politics of resistance when thinking beyond intentionality? Can, does, or should this provide us with hope?

This study arose out of a concern that that dominant articulations of resistance within IRCs are not engaging with these questions, and are instead characterised by acts that are intended to be, or read as, acts against the legalities or conditions of their detention, and intended exclusion from participation within the nation-state. This research has interfered with this dominant articulation by positing resistance as multiple, without requiring intent, following Foucault to argue that to resist something is to activate something, as ‘inventive, as mobile’ as power itself (1977, 267). Understanding resistance as beyond intent, occurring through polyrhythmic time requires it to be understood as creative, as open to multiple possibilities and

therefore, creativity has been conceptualised through poesis. This framing allows for attention to the inseparability between the processes and products of creation and this work has utilised work by Agamben (2014) and Deleuze (1987, 2006) to explore the *potentiality* of improvised music within an IRC. In exploring improvised music as providing momentary distortions to sovereign power, this paper has argued that resistance does not need to be read in the ‘context of a larger global purpose’ (de Goede 2005, 380), and that it is never possible to settle on a moment within these workshops as definitively ‘resistance’, as this would be to ignore both the plurality of modes of resistance and their inseparability from the sovereign state (Amoore 2005).

Crucially it is this ‘vulnerability to the potential’, to ‘neither accept nor refuse, stepping forward and stepping backward at the same time’ (Amoore 2013, 173; Agamben 1999, 255) that contains within it the space for critical response. The detainees’ improvised music and laughter provided ambiguous moments where the certainty of their exclusion was disrupted. This improvisation was political in its very unknowability, as it challenged and resisted the certainty of the production of a governable political order. I have argued that the creative process of improvising whilst unsettling and disrupting the normal routine of the IRC should not be simply read as an act of intentional resistance. Instead it is the very potentiality of the polyrhythmic processes of improvisation that resists capture by the sovereign state. It is never possible to settle on a moment within improvised music as resistance, as this would be to ignore both the plurality of modes of resistance and their inseparability from sovereign power. It is this incompleteness, and the potentiality of improvisation that is crucial for developing understanding of migrant resistance, as it serves both to interrupt and undermine the logic of the state’s decision to exclude.

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