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Original Article

Exploring everyday resilience in the creative industries through devised theatre: A case of performing arts students and recent graduates in Ghana

Rashida Resario
University of Ghana, Ghana

Robin Steedman
Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

Thilde Langevang
Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

Abstract

The concept of resilience has become widely used to account for how people respond both to acute crisis and, increasingly, to protracted precarity. Yet, cultural studies theorists have also vigorously critiqued resilience discourse as a tool of neoliberal governmentality. In this article, we turn from the discourse of resilience to the practice of resilience. We argue, through a case of theatre students and recent graduates in Ghana, that the practice of resilience can be both individual and collective. Moreover, we show that resilience practices involve the exercise of agency at various scales through the specific practices of coping, reworking, and resisting. Finally, we show the merits of using artistic research methods, such as devised theatre, to unveil the complex ways that creatives practice resilience in the everyday.

Corresponding author:
Rashida Resario, Theatre Arts Department, School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana.
Email: rresario@ug.edu.gh

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Introduction

The concept of resilience has become widely used to account for how people respond both to acute crisis, such as action in the aftermath of disasters, and, increasingly, to the challenges posed by protracted precarity. A central focus of studies on resilience in the field of cultural studies has been the discourse of resilience as propagated by powerful actors and in media and popular culture (Gill and Orgad, 2018; King et al., 2021; McRobbie, 2020; Newsinger and Serafini, 2021). The central location of this scholarship is the neoliberal United Kingdom. Resilience has been vigorously critiqued in this literature as a tool of neoliberal governmentality. In this mode of critique, resilience discourse is perpetuated by policy makers and in popular culture exhortations to be more adaptable, bounce-backable, and to reframe negative experiences as opportunities for growth. Accordingly, resilience discourse individualizes responsibility for suffering: those who cannot bounce back from adversity have themselves to blame because of their failure to cultivate their own resilience.

In this article, we turn our gaze towards the everyday resilience practices of performing arts students and recent graduates in Ghana, and thus shift focus from the actors *promulgating* resilience (governments, media) to the actors *practising* resilience. The relevant question then becomes: 'How do young people practice resilience?' Empirically, we add to the literature a discussion of how young creatives in the global South practice resilience. Theoretically, we build on the long-standing tradition of resilience scholarship in Africa (Abukari, 2018; Anwar and Graham, 2020; Fletcher, 2015; Hunter, 2001; Theron et al., 2013), and particularly the seminal work of Katz (2004), to shine new light on everyday practices of resilience and, in so doing invigorate the discussion of resilience within cultural studies. We will show that, in contrast to the dominant picture of resilience as individualistic and passive in the literature, in Ghana the practice of resilience is both individual and collective. Moreover, we will show that resilience practices involve the exercise of agency at various scales through the specific practices of coping, reworking, and resisting (following Katz, 2004). We also show how the practice of resilience involves continuous efforts enacted in the course of everyday life.

In order to unveil the complex ways that creatives practice resilience, we use artistic research methods, in combination with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Specifically, we argue that practices of resilience are well captured and appreciated through the use of devised theatre. Devised theatre is a process that relies on improvisation and co-creation using material from participants' stories and creative resources, resulting in a performance. Using this process affords researchers the opportunity to explore not only the challenges and hardships that young creatives are facing, but also to uncover the often less visible everyday acts that make up the practice of resilience.

This case of performing arts students and recent graduates in Ghana is interesting for several reasons. Across the world, early career creatives have little stability and face difficulties in starting careers in the creative sector (Comunian et al., 2011). Entering the creative industries from a creative degree is characterized by 'extended transition periods, multiple entry attempts and employment within and outside the creative industry' (Ashton, 2015: 29). Moreover, Ghana is a prime example of a 'precarious geography' in the global South (Waite, 2009), that is, places which have a long history of insecure and informal labour markets. Furthermore, the creative industries in Ghana occupy a position described as 'emerging' with no well-developed infrastructure or support mechanisms (Alacovska et al., 2021; Langevang, 2017). After a brief burst of support in the early 1960s, the arts have been consistently neglected by the government (Shipley, 2015). Crucially, in addition to a challenging industrial context, a creative career has little social value in Ghana, something students are confronted with immediately upon entering university. Performing arts students often suffer ridicule based on the perceived non-vocational nature of the programme, as well as the perception that creative arts courses are for the 'academically weak learners' (Artwatch Ghana, 2017: 3). Students are consistently confronted with mockery for studying performing arts, often through the culturally specific term 'dondology', a 'derogatory name invented and applied to those who studied music, dance and drama at the University of Ghana' (Acheampong, 1995: 29). Theatre students are thus in a position where they need to be able to cope with and work through precarity – that is, they must be resilient.

The concept of resilience

In a basic sense, resilience is the ability to bounce back from some form of adversity or, as Brewer et al. (2019: 1114) put it, 'a dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of adversity or challenge'. The concept emerged from the field of psychology to explain the adaptability of individuals in the face of adverse conditions (Luthar et al., 2000), but has since migrated to a wide variety of fields. The sheer pervasiveness of the concept – across disciplines and locations of analysis – makes it essential, as Anderson (2015: 62) charges, to examine the differing spatialities and temporalities of resilience, how it plays out at different times in different contexts. We do so in the context of creative industries in Africa.

The cultural and creative industries have been an important site for resilience scholarship (Comunian and England, 2020; Frauts, 2019; Jennings et al., 2016; Khlystova et al., 2022; Newsinger and Serafini, 2021; Pasquinelli and Sjöholm, 2015, Yue, 2022). Pratt (2017: 136) argues that 'the cultural field is "born resilient"' because 'radical market uncertainty and risk … characterizes the cultural field'. Frauts (2019: 408), in writing about resilience and the creative industries in Kingston, Jamaica, has identified three trajectories that circumscribe scholarly interest in the concept of resilience: resilience as an empowerment tool, as enabling neoliberal regimes, and as a complex concept caught up in a 'double bind' which accounts for ways in which power and domination are reinforced and at the same time resisted by people. Resilience is a 'complex and ambivalent' concept (Comunian and England, 2020: 603), and thus one that requires context-specific study that can 'reveal ambiguous and contradictory results' (Frauts, 2019: 396).

The politics of resilience have emerged as a strong focus of research. The ability to bounce back is not apolitical because the causes of the need for resilience are so often political. For example, scholarship on the UK strongly argues that the neoliberal government creates the need for resilience through its policies of austerity (McRobbie, 2020). Austerity makes life worse for people. The ideology of resilience pushes them to take self-responsibility to overcome the conditions created by austerity, and then blames them when they cannot. Rottenberg (2022: 336) puts it succinctly when mobilizing McRobbie's concept of the perfect-imperfect-resilience *dispositif* (p-i-r) to say 'resilience-training and welfare shaming are, in effect, two sides of the same p-i-r coin'. Critics in this vein suggest resilience is discursively mobilized in 'neoliberal thought and governance' to place 'the responsibility of neoliberal crisis onto individuals' (Newsinger and Serafini, 2021: 594).

An important question thus becomes: who is responsible for being resilient? The cultural sector may be 'born resilient' but this 'resilience is outsourced to flexible or freelance workers who bear the costs and risks of uncertainty' (Pratt, 2017: 136). And while creative workers may be 'veterans at tackling frustration without despair' who 'face fear bravely and with humor', as in the case of Northern Irish community arts workers (Jennings et al., 2016: 21), celebrating this capacity risks undercutting focus on the transformation needed to make their careers more sustainable. The risk of teaching students to be resilient in the face of creative labour market conditions is that it naturalizes those conditions (Phillipov, 2021). There is a risk that:

> the need for resilience also becomes part of our everyday common-sense, one which binds us to its terms and reconciles us to its conditions. This popular truth, as all truths do, has the ability to become a kind of inevitability, reducing our capacity to think or act otherwise (McRobbie, 2020: 62–3).

In addressing the popularity of resilience in policy circles, critics have drawn attention to the need for policy to be directed at more sustainable interventions for the industry, rather than relying on its ability to withstand shocks (Comunian and England, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020).

Scholars have recently began to turn from the 'emergency resilience' framing that has dominated the creative industries and instead focus on other facets of resilience (Yue, 2022). Yue (2022: 2) offers a conceptualization of 'ecological resilience' in the creative industries, for example 'long-term adaptability through creative iteration and transformation'. Here the focus is on what makes resilience sustainable, durable, and continuous. This perspective sees 'resilient capacities as creative (rather than reactive) in ways they open up new practices and spaces of change' (Yue, 2022: 9). This perspective aligns with that of Gandini and Cossu (2021: 435) who suggest, in the case of coworking spaces, that 'resilient spaces embrace innovation and change, looking to set out practices of organisation that adapt to the context they inhabit and exist in harmony with it', where developing social and communitarian relations are central. These perspectives suggest the possibility of a collective and communal resilience existing instead of, or alongside, a neoliberal individual resilience.

A focus on the communal and collective resonates with the long tradition of resilience scholarship in Africa. Within creative industry studies, resilience has dominantly been

studied in the global North. However, there is a long-standing focus on resilience in Africa across other fields, notably in studies of climate change (Darkwah et al., 2018), geography (Anwar and Graham, 2020; Katz, 2004), youth studies (Abukari, 2018; Theron et al., 2013), health (Hunter, 2001), and development studies (Fletcher, 2015). Such studies emphasize the rootedness of resilience in the African values of community, 'where individuals are integrally part of a larger community, and it is community that facilitates individual self-realization' (Theron et al., 2013: 66). Fletcher (2015: 60), in studying the concept of resilience among the Dagara of the Upper West Region of Ghana, has noted that 'the separation identified in Western society between individual and community resilience is indistinct in Dagara society'. Youth resilience studies in Ghana have also highlighted the role of community and interpersonal relationships in building resilience among young people faced with adversity (Abukari, 2018; Hunter, 2001).

Scholars have argued that in order to study the mundane acts that people individually and collectively use to navigate precarious circumstances we must study the everyday. In her seminal study of young people navigating the currents of globalization in Howa, Sudan and New York City, USA, Katz (2004) developed a typology of responses to marginalization and crisis. She termed these 'fluid and overlapping categories' resilience, reworking, and resistance (Katz, 2004: 240). Practices of resilience are actions taken to 'get by each day' (Katz, 2004: 244). Practices of reworking are ones 'that alter the conditions of people's existence to enable more workable lives and create more viable terrains of practice' (Katz, 2004: 247). Finally, practices of resistance invoke 'oppositional consciousness' and 'confront and redress historically and geographically specific conditions of oppression and exploitations at various scales' (Katz, 2004: 251). Katz importantly focuses on how young people practise resilience, reworking, and resistance in the everyday. A focus on the everyday puts focus on the *process* through which marginalized people get by in specific places, and the range of responses they deploy to cope with, but also to change, their circumstances (Betteridge and Webber, 2019). Since resilience is not static but rather 'achieved daily over time' (Lenette et al., 2013: 639), it makes sense to study it in the context of everyday life.

We both draw on and modify Katz's typology in our efforts to understand the everyday resilience of performing arts students and recent graduates in Ghana. Rather than seeing resilience as a separate practice from reworking and resisting, we will show that, in our case, resilience is composed of the everyday practices of coping, reworking, and resisting.

Research methods

Data for this article were collected during January 2020 in Accra, Ghana. We used multiple qualitative methods, including a devised theatre process and performance, and 10 semi-structured interviews. The participants comprised 17 performing arts students and recent graduates from the University of Ghana. The participants included seven women and ten men, who ranged in age from 20 to 32 with the majority in their early twenties. Six were undergraduate students, two were graduate students, and the remaining nine were recent graduates doing their National Service at the University of Ghana.

The participants were recruited by the first author, a faculty member at the School of Performing Arts (SPA) at the University of Ghana who had taught most of our participants. The participants received lunch, snacks, and transportation money (which act as a form of payment) for the duration of the four-day workshop. Participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity. The study received ethical approval from the University of Ghana.

Devised theatre is a process-driven art, which we used to study the participants' experiences, daily study and work practices, and career aspirations. We approached devised theatre as a form of collaborative arts-based research, which is useful for providing 'new perspectives on the lived world' (Foster, 2016). The process of devising engages with the 'ideas and identities of the creators' to create a world through 'play, performance, research, discussion, improvisation, and myriad other activities' (Perry, 2011: 68). This process results in a performance with multiple authors, voices, perspectives, and modes of presentation (Etchells, 1999), that provide rich insight into experiences beyond conventional ways of knowing.

To kick-start the devising process, we began with a group discussion facilitated by the first author and observed by the other authors (see Figure 1 for a visualization of our process). We used 'dondology' (a derogatory term coined to mock performing arts students) as a prompt to get the conversation going. The participants shared their experiences with the word, which revealed their vulnerabilities and insecurities regarding their programme of study, their challenges, and their aspirations. At the end of the session, which lasted about three hours, we asked each participant to write a short piece beginning with 'once upon a time, I was/am a theatre student' (depending on whether they have graduated or were still students), to be presented the following day. They were also asked to think about games and story ideas based on their experiences for plot development. Guided by the 'once upon a time' prompt, the participants came ready on day two with their short pieces telling stories about their own experiences in narrative, song, spoken word, and poetry. At the end of the storytelling session, we all moved to the main stage where the devising began with the aim of weaving the diverse stories shared by the participants into a performance. Following a democratic process (Gatt, 2012), the participants selected one of the recent graduates among them to lead the collaborative creation. The leader led discussions trying to find interesting stories that highlight the key experiences from stigma and challenges with the programme, to coping mechanisms and survival strategies. A structure for the performance emerged on the third day as the participants engaged in physical and mental games and improvisational techniques using material developed from the previous days. The fourth day began with a rehearsal and ended with the public performance.

We found the devised theatre method useful as it allowed for 'multiple voices and interwoven stories of collaborative play building' (Perry, 2011: 64). The devising process empowered the participants to own and share their stories and through that 'develop their personal, social, artistic, and political being as they contribute to the process of devising and feel a sense of ownership' (Gatt, 2012: 208). Crucially, the devising process allowed for the use of performance techniques and tools of play-making that were 'indigenous' (by training) to the participants (Okagbue, 2002). We also found the method of devised theatre valuable because of its collaborative character, which offers

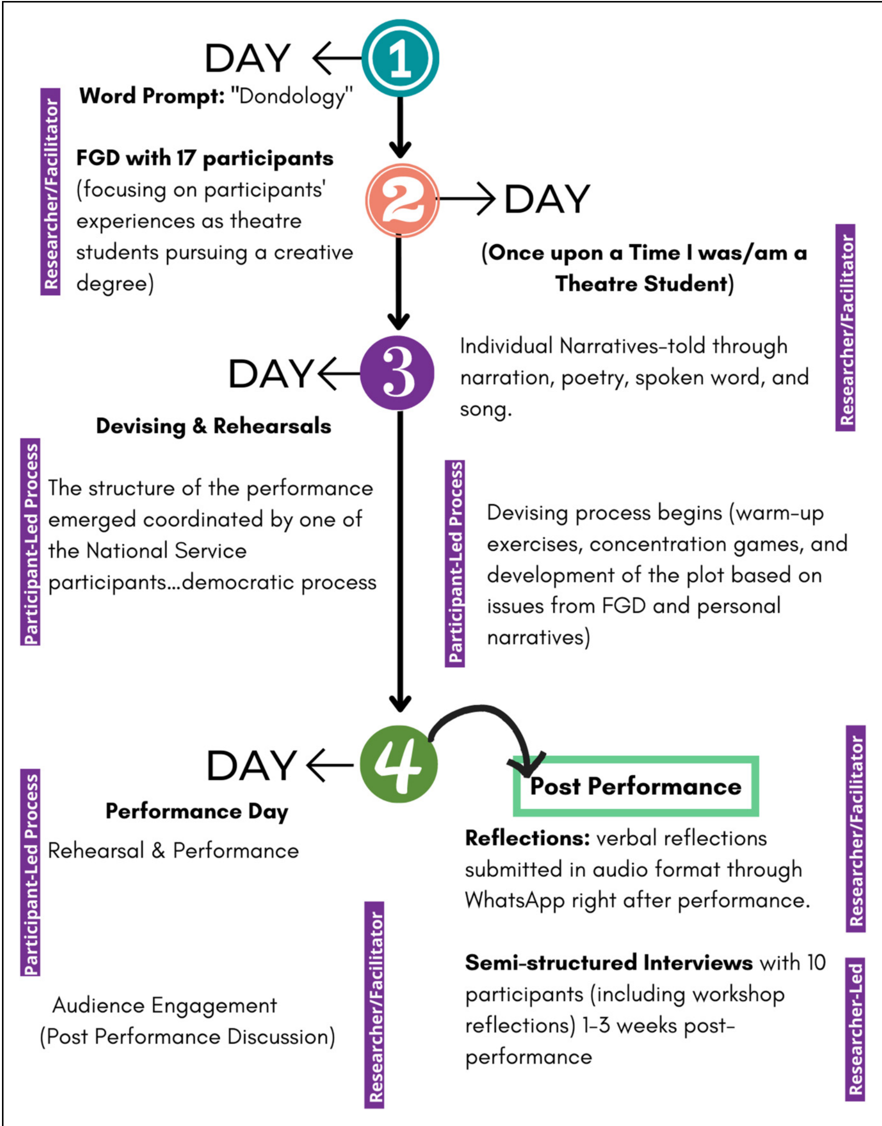

Figure 1. Timeline for the devising process, performance, post-performance discussions, and interviews
Source: Created by authors.

opportunities to raise 'critical consciousness, highlight social relations and to promote deeper understanding among the participants, facilitators and audiences' (Foster, 2016: 2). The devising process was collaborative in that the participants worked together to create a performance out of their individual and shared experiences as theatre students.

It created an environment where the students could learn from each other through comparison and critique (Perry, 2011). Participants in the collaborative process learn from each other 'through doing, comparing, and contemplating each other's input (critique) and at the same time troubling and unravelling knowledge, experience, and subjectivity' (Perry, 2011: 68). In the absence of a script guiding the creation process, participants in devised theatre tap material from their own ideas and experiences, confronting personal and interpersonal struggles, which are then expressed to engage an audience (Perry, 2011). Collaborating with others becomes the key mediator in the process of self-expression in devised theatre (Ames, 2018).

Studies of resilience in creative work have tended to rely solely on semi-structured interviews. While conventional methods are suited to investigating *individualized* creative work within prevailing conceptualizations of such work as the result of self-regulating forces of neoliberal governance, arts-based methods, such as devised theatre, are inherently collaborative and may thus reveal *communal* and *relational* dimensions of creative work that are inaccessible by other research methods (Langevang et al., 2021). For decades, the focus has been on incorporating the arts into conventional social science research processes, much to the neglect of how artistic methods and processes can aid in uncovering deep insights about creative practice and creative industries (Langevang et al., 2021). Arts-based methods enable a diversity of experiences to be communicated (Leavy, 2015). They 'act as a reminder that there are possibilities for things to be otherwise' and open up possibilities for seeing 'small but significant acts of resistance' (Foster, 2016: 1–2). They are particularly good for exploring the 'the lived experiences, imaginations, emotions, and possible solutions' people have to the challenges they face (Brown et al., 2017). Using arts-based methods such as devised theatre enabled us to understand not only the constraints, mockery and oppressive structures the participants were facing but also the 'resistance buried in the everyday' (Foster, 2016: 2).

Our research process, however, had key challenges related to our positions of power in relation to our research participants. One of the researchers is a lecturer in the SPA while the other two members are from a university in the global North and have disciplinary backgrounds in film studies and geography respectively. We each occupied different roles in the process, ranging from active facilitation to passive observation. We acknowledge that unequal power dynamics between the SPA faculty member and her students, as well as between the two researchers from the global North and students from the global South, might negatively affect the students' willingness and ability to express themselves freely. We tried to mitigate this risk in different ways. First, the first author, who occupied a direct power position in relation to the students (being their teacher), shared her experience of being a theatre student in a way that revealed a different side of her than the participants were used to seeing. We hoped this shared vulnerability would make them more comfortable in sharing their experiences. Second, the semi-structured interviews were conducted by an author unaffiliated with the University of Ghana, 1–3 weeks after the workshop. The interviewer and interviewees had the opportunity to get to know each other through many informal conversations over the course of the four-day workshop and were on a friendly first-name basis by the time of the interviews – a notable mark of comfort in a context where hierarchies between academics and students, including using academic titles, are strictly observed. Interviews focused on the participants'

motivations for studying performing arts, their perceptions of their education, their work experience, and their aspirations for the future. At the end of the interview, they were also asked to reflect on their experiences of participating in the research. The interviews and group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The performance and rehearsal processes were video recorded. The data were analysed thematically using Nvivo.

We did not specifically ask students about resilience in the interviews or use it as a guiding concept in the framing of the devising process. Rather, as we analysed our data we were continually struck by the way our participants were managing to continue despite an extremely challenging environment. That is, our participants were continually being resilient. We thus began to ask: how did they manage to be resilient? We saw that they managed through both individual and collective action in the course of everyday life and enacted different modes/types of resilience. We then turned to exploring why and how they adopted and enacted each practice of resilience. Here we were inspired by Katz's typology of resilience, reworking, and resistance, but noticed that it did not explain our data entirely. We thus modified her framework to explain the overarching practices of resilience that our participants undertook: coping, reworking, and resisting. Before presenting our findings we will now briefly outline the context of our study.

Setting the scene: theatre education and careers in Ghana

Early theatre practitioners in Ghana acquired their training informally through imitating popular culture, and at the School of Music and Drama (now School of Performing Arts) at the University of Ghana when it was established in 1962. The first attempts made at developing Ghanaian theatre began during the first phase of the National Theatre Movement (1956–63). The 1950s to mid-1960s saw a marriage between the struggle for cultural and political independence and Ghanaian theatre in a way that ensured structural and financial support for theatre as a key vehicle for cultural identity (Gibbs, 2009). The first independent government, led by Kwame Nkrumah, strongly believed in and supported the arts. However, the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966 and the ensuing economic downturn of the late 1970s and the 1980s affected the growth and development of the creative sector, especially the performing arts (Collins, 2005; Gibbs, 2009). The lack of funding for performing artists, and dwindling audiences for performances at the National Theatre (in Accra) and in other spaces, led many to declare that 'the theatre in Ghana is dying' (Gibbs, 2009: xxiv). In spite of the complete erosion of state support, the performing arts have remained afloat due to efforts by private entrepreneurs, amateur groups, and student performances at educational institutions across the country.

The School of Performing Arts (SPA) at the University of Ghana is comprised of the Theatre, Music, and Dance departments. It offers undergraduate (BA/BFA), graduate (MA/MPhil/MFA), and postgraduate programmes (PhD). These programmes train students in the theoretical, technical, applied, and creative aspects of the performative and media arts. The current student enrolment at the school across all programmes and departments (including non-performing arts students taking performing arts courses) stands at 5965 (University of Ghana, 2022). Even though all programmes offered by the SPA have practical components, the BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) and the MFA (Master of

Fine Arts) programmes offer professional training aimed at producing technically competent graduates for creative practice in film, radio, television, theatre, and related fields. Due to the triadic training in music, dance, and theatre, career paths for SPA graduates tend to be diverse ranging from specialist creatives who establish their own theatre or other creative businesses, or who find employment in television and radio stations, to embedded creatives who use their creativity in non-creative fields such as banking and insurance.

The wider economy in Ghana is highly informal – as much as 80–90% is informal (Langevang, 2015) – and as a result young people are pushed to start their own businesses. Since the Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1980s, the government has embarked on a neoliberal plan emphasizing the private sector as key to economic development (Arthur, 2006). There are few formal institutions that can employ recent graduates in their specialist areas (e.g. repertory theatres). Therefore, the theatre economy is almost entirely composed of small production companies run by a single entrepreneur or small group of collaborators. Theatre students and recent graduates thus work within a context where people, and especially young people, very frequently start their own businesses.

Practising resilience: coping, reworking, and resisting

We will now examine how performing arts students and recent graduates respond to mockery, career uncertainty, and injustice. We focus on their everyday practices of getting by in an effort to claim their spots as artists, and show how they practise resilience through coping, reworking, and resisting. We argue that each of their resilience practices is enacted at both individual and collective levels in the course of everyday life as they pursue their studies and prepare for artistic careers.

Coping

Key to resilience, and what we call coping, is finding 'ways to get by each day' in the face of challenges (Katz, 2004: 245). Everyday practices such as singing, telling jokes to oneself and laughing very hard, are ways that some of our participants coped with challenges they faced on a daily basis. Additionally, being performing arts students and participating in performance provided a significant avenue for coping. Performing helped students get by, as we can see in the case of Dakeh. He was mocked daily during his studies, as he told us:

> I had this annoying friend. He made it like his life mission to just come and torment me because I have decided that I'm going to study theatre. Every morning he will come to my room 'Eh you, after school you won't get work.'

For him, acting was 'therapeutic' because it gave him 'the chance to come and pretend to be a different person' and could thus relieve his stress. Performing also helped Richardson cope because 'anytime I get on stage I feel like the world doesn't matter any more'. These strategies helped our participants to individually manage the pressures they face as performing arts students and find the strength to look ahead.

While they felt they had many challenges in front of them, our participants were very hopeful for the future and believed they had the individual skills and dispositions necessary to succeed in artistic careers. Efua, for example, said:

> I've been riding on my passion for art and it just takes me wherever I want to go in the arts. So, I know that with that particular feeling, that history, I know that I will move forward. I will not work [in a non-creative sector], I will find a job in the arts.

Ernest felt similarly: 'I never worry about getting a job or that I won't make a living after school. No, no, no. As long as I still have my creative talent with me, there's always going to be a way.' Benjamin accepted that he would have to struggle, and this acceptance helped him cope with precarity. As he put it, 'Being an artist comes with a certain struggle but I think I've just come to terms [with] who I am and the kind of life I want to live. So, I'm just willing to go through the struggle.' In Benjamin's words we see a romantic rhetoric of the suffering (if not starving) artist (Negus and Pickering, 2004). We agree with Newsinger and Serafini (2021: 603) when they state 'individual resilience in the face of trauma and crisis might be necessary for individual survival, but it is not a basis upon which to challenge austerity', that is, to confront the conditions under which being resilient is made necessary in the first place. Our participants felt they could *personally* overcome the challenges performing artists face. However, many of these challenges are deep-seated and structural, and thus it is problematic to make overcoming them a personal responsibility, so that if only the right disposition could be developed, success would be reached (Gill and Orgad, 2018; McRobbie, 2020).

However, our research participants did not only practise individual coping and were not only trying to be resilient on an individual scale. While they believed strongly in their individual talents, they were not *individualistic*. Rather, they continually demonstrated the importance of community for their resilience, which echoes the points of Fletcher (2015) and Theron et al. (2013) that individual and community resilience are closely connected. Gertrude, for instance, talked about how she found comfort in knowing that she was not alone in her challenges:

> Initially, I thought I was the only one feeling those challenges and … those criticisms maybe on campus or the hostel. But when I came and found like colleagues saying similar things, I was like 'Oh actually I'm not the only one in it.'

This sense of 'I am not alone in this' provides comfort and confidence. Gertrude was able to self-realize as an artist through participating in an artistic community.

Our participants also acted with great care towards each other as members of the same artistic community and helped each other to cope, as we saw through the devising process. The scenes chosen for the final performance also demonstrated the importance of a shared community. For example, in one scene, the participants stood in a diagonal line across the stage and individuals would step out and make a short comment about their individual experiences before rejoining the line – a process that was meant to demonstrate that their individual experiences of pain united them as a group. The devising process revealed the communal and relational dimensions of this practice of resilience

(Langevang et al., 2021). As part of the 'once upon a time' exercise, Shirley wrote a very personal monologue that included the following excerpt:

> No artistic approval. Just deep silence. At the end of every difficult delivery, I am insecure. Would my child, these creative works, be rejected? Tagged as not good enough? … What if I do not possess enough to win a Nobel Prize…. I say I am … a half-baked process.

Shirley had never performed before. However, she was comfortable sharing that kind of vulnerability about her doubts and insecurities as an artist with her peers. The group agreed to feature her monologue when they devised the play. She received coaching on delivery, stage movement, and projection which gave her the confidence to step on stage and face an audience. Being in a community helped her face insecurity and adversity (Abukari, 2018; Hunter, 2001). The devising process revealed how the students also cope with their difficulties by working together to support each other in addition to their individual coping strategies.

Coping does not change the status quo, but this kind of resilience practice can be 'fortifying' and thus 'offer the possibility of fostering something beyond recuperation' (Katz, 2004: 246). Coping through performing, individual psychological fortitude, being part of a community of shared experience, and helping each other gave our participants the foundation to pursue more agentic practices of resilience, namely reworking and resisting, as we will now explore.

Reworking

Many of our participants had a significant amount of experience performing in Accra's theatre scene, an experience that was almost unavoidable, as David explained:

> You can't be in this department as a theatre art student or a performing art student without working outside campus while you are in school, yeah. Because as you are here, your colleagues or your seniors who graduated school have established companies, they have their own theatre organizations and stuff. So, they normally come around to look out for talents that they can actually engage in their businesses outside. So, we work a lot. I work a lot.

Reworking involves taking 'focused, often pragmatic' action in response to an identified problem (Katz, 2004: 247). In the case of our participants, the most significant challenge that led to reworking was transitioning into paid work in the performing arts.

The SPA trains students to believe they have to create their own jobs since there are no clear-cut jobs for them out there; however, they are not given the entrepreneurial training to be able to create those opportunities for themselves. Throughout our workshop it became clear that the students and graduates felt ill-prepared to face the challenges of running their own creative businesses and theatre companies, something that a lot of them wished to do. Their lack of practical business skills – skills that they were not taught while at university – was something they felt contributed to their lived experience of precarity. Dakeh, a recent graduate, drew attention to this limitation in his training:

> I will say, the biggest challenge I'm facing is, I'm not really experienced with the whole business side yet. I'm so used to being the creative and it's like you spend so much time on the creative

process then when it's done, what happens next? You have no idea how to do marketing, how to put it out there. And how to make your money's worth out of it. So, I'm still learning.

Faced with the inadequacies in their programme's curriculum the students adopted practices of reworking to learn the skills they felt they lacked. They found other ways of getting the knowledge they needed – notably, these practices of reworking did not challenge the curriculum itself but rather worked around it. Reworking often included personal initiatives. For example, Ernest started a poetry club on campus to develop his skills as a spoken-word artist and Dakeh learned to act for multiple platforms beyond theatre, including radio and voiceover acting. Others diversified into selling hair products and shoes to support their creative pursuits. In all these cases, the students and recent graduates acted pragmatically to position themselves within the creative field, make a living in the meantime, and getting the practical experience and business knowledge needed to transition to paid work.

One strategy to try to make money and guard against exploitation was to ask for contracts for their work. However, this was mostly ineffective. Benjamin wanted contracts because it would guarantee that no one would 'pull out' of the deal, but his clients would not agree. He explained: 'so far none of them have been willing to do any contract.… It's just they prefer it to be word of mouth so that in case of anything, you don't have proof.' This lack of job protection was a major challenge our participants faced, and their most successful reworking strategy to overcome it was to pool their resources and work together. In contexts of protracted precarity, 'relational work becomes vital for maintaining a resilient and meaningful attachment to work' (Alacovska, 2018: 1565), and this was certainly true in Ghana. Developing a strong community of people who can be relied on is essential for getting things done. Dakeh, for example, has developed a strategy of 'hustling favours' from his colleagues to advance his goals for his artistic practice:

So, for me it's basically like hustling favours out of people. So, if you approach me and it [has to do with money] and I see I can't pay that amount, I will find out if there's something I could do for you so that you could do this for me.

Dakeh devised a pragmatic response to his financial problems (barter of skills), which made his strategy of hustling favours one of reworking.

Collaboration helped our participants to rework and redirect their resources towards mitigating the uncertainties of their artistic pursuits. Our participants often pooled their resources (skills in diverse specializations such as directing, acting, set design and finances) for industry gigs. Working together in a collaborative way helps to reduce the risk of having to bear all the financial costs of producing a performance or executing a gig. Dakeh, in sharing his plans to put up a performance with his friends at the National Theatre, further underscored the practice of working together to create performances:

I'm preparing with a group of my friends. I work with also performing artists. What we are doing is, we are making spoken-word pieces [to] turn them into a mix media like an experimental

devised theatre performance. Yes, so, this is the second time we are putting this up, first time we put it up as presentation on campus.

Through working together in student groups they could avoid the problem of being exploited by outsiders, but, importantly, these actions were a work-around to get by in a difficult environment: they did not challenge the conditions underpinning the status quo where, as Garbin put it, students and graduates got exploited '*because* we were students or people who have recently graduated from the university' (emphasis added).

Resistance

The resilient practices of coping and reworking were more common than resisting, as is usually the case (Anwar and Graham, 2020; Betteridge and Webber, 2019; Katz, 2004). For some of our participants, simply being performing arts students was an act of resisting. Benjamin changed his programme of study in defiance of his parents' wishes so he could pursue his passion for animation. Similarly, Nila reflected on her decision to change her study programme without the knowledge of her parents: 'I blessed the day I went to the internet café to change my courses from mathematics, statistics and economics. And I am a proud theatre arts student.' Both resisted the idea that creative subjects were not worthy of study at university. They had a different vision of the future than the one their parents wanted and were willing to defy them to get it.

Through our devised theatre methods we were able to uncover 'small but significant acts of resistance' (Foster, 2016: 1–2) that our participants used to try to transform their circumstances. Our participants were opposed to current labour conditions and desired change. As David said, 'our culture and our traditional beliefs and things demand that sometimes we do free things. But free things these days are becoming too much.' This feeling that current conditions were 'too much' was widely held, as was revealed through the devising process.

Ernest wrote a song to express his experiences dealing with shady payment practices and why he feels like a 'verbal contract is not enough'. He presented a song as part of the 'once upon a time I was/am a theatre student' exercise. The entire group performed the song during the devised theatre performance since they felt that Ernest's song reflected their communal experience of being young performers. The following is an excerpt from the song, narrating his outrage at being given only GHS200 for a performance where he was promised GHS800:

Some people just dey bore me, if you no get money don't call me.

Some people just dey bore me, if you no get money don't call me.

You call me for a gig I say I go charge this,

so I perform to the crowd everybody dey clap,

I say give me my cash, make I go see my hand,

this was not part of the plan.

> You say you go give me 800, now you dey give me 200.
>
> You say you go give me 800, now you dey give me 200.

According to Katz (2004: 251), an oppositional critical consciousness targeting 'historically and geographically specific conditions of oppression and exploitation' is the defining feature of resisting. When the students joined together to perform Ernest's song – since they saw it as emblematic of the different future they all wanted – they demonstrated a collective oppositional consciousness. For our participants, public performance was thus an important space for practising resistance.

Our research methods generated a space where the students had a chance to confront their lecturers and express their dissatisfaction with aspects of their education. The devised theatre performance was open to the public, but it was predominantly attended by lecturers in the SPA, students, National Service personnel, and others from within the university community. The Ghanaian university system is very hierarchical, with a power disparity between students and academics and a strong culture of students not voicing their opinions. An event where students could publicly speak critically about their programme, including those training them, was thus highly unusual.

After the performance, we had an open discussion where audience members could share their opinions about the performance. Several members of staff were strongly critical of the students' and graduates' desire for entrepreneurial training. For example, one lecturer from the department was disturbed by the song and its phrase 'if you don't get money don't call me'. She felt that money is a great commodity, but making art is a *calling* and that 'your muse might depart if you put money first'. Here we could witness an important divide between students and staff over what a theatre education should do. Having invested so much into their artistic education, some like David working multiple jobs to pay his fees, the students expressed a strong desire to make a living with their art. The performance presented an opportunity for this unexpressed expectation to reveal itself, which then forced a response that points to the lecturers' assumptions about arts education. The opportunity to express their critiques to their lecturers excited our participants. Ernest, for example, said:

> More often, we perform to youth and younger people or maybe my mates, but this audience were people who were like my fathers. And what I was saying caused a stir in them meaning that they were really paying attention to what I was saying. So, it's something that really excited me a great deal.

Likewise, Shirley was 'really happy that they listened to us, they got our ideas, and they also shared their perspectives'. However, they were not content to simply be heard, they wanted change to happen. Garbin, for example, felt, 'Now they should have a feeling of how we are feeling and then if it's possible, change the line of the other generation that are coming.' They hoped that the performance would lead to transformation of the educational system of which they were a part. Their collective practices of resisting were generated within the safe space of our workshop; however, we believe that this resisting is durable because the workshop space revealed that they had a

collective oppositional consciousness and they stood by the critiques they made in their play after the workshop was over.

Katz reminds us 'if resistance is to be more durable and broadly effective, something more than anger should drive it: a vision of what else could be' (2004: 253). The students had a vision for a different future, one where performing arts were valued academically, where their skills were appreciated financially, and where they would learn the business skills needed in their future creative careers. Through the method of devised theatre, we gave our participants a stage on which to share that different future and perform resistance.

Conclusions

In this article, we have explored the experiences and resilience practices of students and early career performing artists in Ghana. We found that resilience is a process that takes place in everyday life through the practices of coping, reworking, and resisting (following Katz, 2004). We modified Katz's typology of resilience, reworking, and resisting by conceptualizing resilience as encompassing the practices of coping, reworking, and resisting. Our participants saw themselves as capable and bounce-back-able, but theirs was not simply a 'romantic resilience' (Newsinger and Serafini, 2021) because they continually showed us that the everyday practice of resilience required working together and deploying a variety of strategies that would help them persevere through – but also in some instances seek to change – their circumstances. We show that resilience practices exist on a spectrum, with varying degrees of agency and change-making deployed within them. Through coping our participants could get by, despite the significant challenges they were facing, and while coping strategies did not change the status quo, they did give students and graduates the foundation to pursue the more agentic practices of reworking and resisting. Without this foundation, these other practices would not have been possible. While coping was the predominant practice in our data, practices of reworking and resisting were still significant. Through reworking our participants took pragmatic action to work around the challenges they were facing. They adopted individual reworking practices, but found more success when they worked collectively. Finally, while it was the least common strategy, our participants did resist their parents, exploitative industry figures, and their university. Through acts of defiance in their everyday lives and in public performance they worked for a different future.

Our contributions to the literature on cultural and creative industries and resilience are twofold. Our first contribution is to centre the everyday practice of resilience and to differentiate between types of resilience practices. Critical resilience scholarship in cultural studies has predominantly focused on actors promulgating resilience. Prominent critics of resilience have written vital critiques about neoliberalism and how various austerity governments have disingenuously advocated for resilience as a way of sidestepping their own responsibilities for providing social welfare (McRobbie, 2020; Newsinger and Serafini, 2021). In some contexts the call to 'be resilient' might just dress up a process where individuals have foisted upon themselves the responsibility for their own circumstances – circumstances that are so often outside their control, or, indeed, the control of any one individual. While these critiques of resilience discourse are vital for explaining macro-

structural processes, they neglect the everyday and 'it is in the dynamic space of everyday life-worlds' that we can see the process of resilience unfold (Lenette et al., 2013: 639). Katz (2004: 246) reminds us that in many places – and we would argue contemporary Ghana is one of them – 'recuperation itself is an achievement'. This fact is glossed over in critiques that centre resilience discourse instead of everyday resilience practices. Studies of resilience discourse and resilience practice are both necessary if we are to understand how people navigate precarity.

Our second contribution is methodological. Our method of inquiry, devised theatre, played a key role in getting to the heart of our participants' concerns and everyday practices of resilience, namely coping, reworking, and resisting. Devised theatre, as a process-based method of inquiry (Perry, 2011), allowed enough room for participants to shape their own stories using tools they are familiar with. Using play-making processes well known to our participants, enabled them to express themselves beyond words, adding an extra layer of meaning to their expressions (Okagbue, 2002). We found that the devised theatre process generated a convivial space and a sense of community where everybody, over time, developed confidence to speak out (not only in words) and also actively voice their criticism, including towards their educational programme. Devised theatre provides a space for raising 'critical consciousness' (Foster, 2016: 2), and this happened in our workshop. The method was particularly useful for uncovering communal dimensions of coping and reworking, and for making visible the practices of resisting that may have remained hidden without our participants being given a space to build and express resistance.

Through our case of theatre students and recent graduates in Ghana, we hope to have shone new light on everyday practices of resilience, and in so doing opened up new pathways for the study of resilience in cultural studies that can more fully encompass the diversity of ways in which people cope with, rework, and resist the challenges of their lives.

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ORCID iD

Rashida Resario https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2671-2466

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Author Biographies

Rashida Resario is a lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana. Her research interests include creative industries and creative labour, the interaction of cultures through performance, dramaturgy, mediated performance, and gender in performance. Her research has been funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation and Danida. Her work has been published in journals such as *Media, Culture & Society*, *Cultural Trends*, *Information, Communication & Society*, and *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. She is currently a co-principal investigator in a collaborative research project: Advancing Creative Industries for Development in Ghana, funded by Danida.

Robin Steedman is a Postdoc at Copenhagen Business School. She is interested in global creative and cultural industries, and in questions of diversity and inequality in media production, distribution and viewership. Her work has been published in journals such as *Poetics*, *Information, Communication & Society*, *Cultural Trends*, and *Environment and Planning A*. Her first book, *Creative Hustling: Women Making and Distributing Films from Nairobi*, is forthcoming from the MIT Press.

Thilde Langevang is Associate Professor at Copenhagen Business School. Her research interests focus on entrepreneurship, work, livelihoods and creative industries in Africa with a particular focus on young people and women. She is the coordinator of the international, interdisciplinary and collaborative research project Advancing Creative Industries for Development in Ghana, which is funded by Danida. Her work has been published in journals such as *Economic Geography*, *Environment and Planning A*, *World Development*, *Geoforum*, *International Development Planning Review*, *Business and Society*, *Information*, *Communication & Society* and *Cultural Trends.*