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Musical Citizenship as a means to Disrupting Exclusions: Potentials and Limitations as Understood in times of a Pandemic.

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Abstract:
This article focuses on the potential of in-group music lessons to foster musical citizenship. It further discusses the relation between musical citizenship and conventional citizenship and shows how musical citizenship re-orientates our thoughts towards citizenship, particularly in the light of the recent pandemic. The discussion is based upon reflection on semi-structured interviews conducted during my ethnographic fieldwork research on musicking among refugees sheltering in reception centres. The discussion is framed with approaches to citizenship and musical citizenship. The discussion is structured in three parts. First, I conceptualize my interlocutors’ current ‘in limbo’ status. Second, I show how music-learning in-group fosters musical citizenship, and helps navigate exclusions. Third, the attention shifts on how music learning was impacted by the way that the lockdown was implemented as a measure to limit the spread of the pandemic, highlighting the inclusivity of ‘musical citizenship’ undermined by (conventional) citizenship and the relevant exclusionary policies.

Keywords: inclusivity, agency, music, participatory, asylum seekers, reception centres

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Introductory notes
‘That concert has been one of the most beautiful moments. Our friend video-recorded the concert, and sent it back home, for people to see us.’ (interlocutor I, 2019).
‘…the concert for the TV was very important for us, because we are refugees in Greece, and… we wanted to show on TV that there are some refugees in Greece who are doing music … that this music we couldn’t do in Iran or in Afghanistan, we have done it here, with the freedom that we have…’ (interlocutor II, 2020).

My interlocutors’ words introduce this article, as they suggest aspects of (musical) citizenship, of which they were deprived as asylum seekers: visibility, audibility. I discuss how musical citizenship -as the outcome of learning music in-group, its fruit being performing at concerts- shows the potential of making/learning music ‘together’
for inclusivity, and contrasts with the exclusions fostered by (conventional) citizenship. I develop the discussion – framed with approaches to citizenship and musical citizenship- reflecting upon semi-structured interviews conducted during my ethnographic fieldwork research (see Eriksen 2010) on musicking among refugees sheltering in reception centres.

On citizenship and its loss
In the modern era, ‘sovereignty’ prevails as the ‘primary political category’ (Nyers 2006: xi), its main agents being the nation-states. Sovereignty exercises the organization of social and political order within specific time and space. Thus, citizenship emerges as a basic dichotomy in a world primarily organized by nation-states, and shaped along their dividing borders. Citizenship is granted by nation-states and marks the recognition of subjects’ legitimate belonging within the space ordered by their sovereignty. Consequently, fleeing from that nation-state, and seeking for asylum to another, signifies the loss of the privilege to have citizenship (ibid: 9).

States may be widely envisioned as granting people within their territory with citizenship and (welfare) rights, protecting them from the risks to which they would otherwise be exposed (see Ní Mhurchú 2016: 164; see also Favell 2014: 3). Focusing on the social rights within the periphery of the state, Balibar describes this aspect of citizenship as ‘social citizenship’ and discusses it as a means for protecting from exclusion (2015: 48). Refugees may be envisaged as a proof of the limits to the protection and rights citizenship grants, as their presence within another state-entity and their plea for asylum recognition, signify the loss of protection and rights their home-state was supposed to offer them. While waiting for the completion of asylum process, it is up to the host society to grant asylum seekers with access to ‘social rights’ (e.g. education, healthcare), that alleviate their marginality, and mitigate their exclusion. Music lessons, under this scope, given their educational character, although realized in informal contexts, facilitate some sort of ‘social citizenship’.

Citizenship, as any political practice, is ‘territorialized’ (Balibar 2015: 68). Becoming refugees involves losing their recognized legitimate space within their home-states and waiting for citizens of another (host) state to recognize their status-alternatively, to recognize their entity within its boundaries and allocate them with the appropriate space (social and physical). Being a refugee and having citizenship are two mutually exclusive states of being, that involve contradictory social positions, and consequently asymmetrical rights over their authority to occupy space.

Performing at the concerts occurred at a time when my interlocutors were ‘in limbo’, waiting to be granted with a legitimate status that would allow them to plan their lives in Greece/ Europe. They were temporarily sheltering at refugee reception centres, unable to make a living on their own or afford losing the material reception conditions provided to them by UN (GCR 2020a; aida& ECRE 2020).

Refugee reception centres, are located outside urban areas, consequently they hardly enable their residents to be and feel included in the host society. Additionally to distance, walls or fences surround them, while security guards or police monitor the gates. Containers serve as housing to one or more families depended upon the number of members of each family and the available space in a camp. Refugees may
well have passed the external EU borders and be on Greek territory, however, camps seem to reproduce these boundaries, showing a persistent desire to keep them out, as not belonging to what is regarded to constitute host society (Brown 2010). Being ‘in limbo’ seems to align with a liminal spatial existence too, marginal to the city, evoking the notion of ‘gray space’ (Yiftachel 2009). On the other hand, refugees’ exclusion is how the host states allows them to be within its territory (Nyers 2006: xiii). Consequently, their (in)visibility and (in)audibility to the host society is shaped within this context (see Cabot 2016), while their mobility depends upon the relevant regulations decided and implemented by the relevant authorities. After all, within the given sociopolitical order, refugees having lost the rights embedded in availing of citizenship, they have further lost their ‘right to have rights’ (see DeGooyer et al. 2018).

My interlocutors lived and practiced music in the liminal spaces of refugee reception centres. In order to perform at the concerts, they moved outside these contexts and into the city. Moreover, online transmission of their concerts facilitated their virtual mobility towards previous ‘homes’ from which they had fled. When they performed, they gained visibility as music-makers, defying the pre-allocated to them position in host society and making their own space. While their recent experiences inevitably informed the individual meaningfulness of making music, the visibility they gained due to their engagement with music, reinforced alternative ways of perception to the ones imposed by sovereignty. My interlocutors built this capacity through learning music and performing in-group. Moreover, while excluded from the privileges of (conventional) citizenship, they managed to renegotiate their social/spatial position as determined by it.

Artistic Citizenship, Musical citizenship
Attempts to define artistic citizenship focus on the essence of art, as well as the essence of citizenship, evoking certain ontological understandings of what an artist should do and how a citizen should act, so that society prospers and democracy thrives (Elliott et al. 2016). Such approaches, while suggesting core elements that constitute artistic citizenship, also evoke certain ways of thinking as shaped in the West throughout history (Stokes 2018). However, the capacity of music to form artistic citizenship lies in the acts that occur within the collective music-making context, as well as what music-making involves. In other words, it lies in the ‘skills and understandings that make up being an artist’ (Silverman and Eliott 2016: 100), as well as the interactions and the meanings embedded in it, that occur within a music-making context (Small 1998; Turino 2008).

While citizenship as a legal status is exclusionary (Balibar 2015; Nyers 2006) —my interlocutors embodying this very exclusion—, citizenship seen as ‘political belonging’ has a ‘participatory dimension’ (Yuval-Davis 2011: 46). This participatory dimension is situated in the frames that define the constitution of any collectivity, as shaped by the politics defining its boundaries on an inclusion/exclusion basis. These boundaries intersect with the state-individual relationship that the legal status of citizenship suggests (ibid: 48-49). Considering the participatory dimension of citizenship leads us to focus on the acts that constitute citizenship, as well as to consider who acts as a citizen is expected to act (Ní Mhurchú 2016; Isin and Neilson 2008). It allows us to
focus on the acting subject and their agency, that while informed by given contexts, they also challenge and disrupt them (see Ortner 2006). After all, disruption is identified as a means of social change, and artistic citizenship - particularly within musical contexts - as a means to facilitate it (Turino 2016).

Small introduces the term *musicking*, to illustrate the active process that involves participating ‘... in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing ... ’ (1998: 9). He further emphasizes the meaningfulness of this process to the participants, embedded in their previous experiences, in ways that resonate with their relations outside musicking. At the same time, musicking, demanding participants’ active engagement in it, encourages the renegotiation of existing relationships and interactions and the experimentation with new ones (*ibid*: 140). Participants’ aspirations of musicking are enacted at an individual and a collective level, within the space and time shaped by musicking. As this space and time are distinct, participants have the chance to interact in ways alternative to the ones suggested by the given contexts that have defined their subjectivities.

Turino further elaborating on the participatory dimension of musicking argues for its capacity to shape participants in ways that challenge given contexts marked by their status (2016). This capacity occurs from the prerequisites for participatory musicking to happen – that is, be ‘voluntarily open to anyone interested’-, as well as from the prerequisites to allow the continuity of participation – that is, be ‘pleasurable’-, which facilitates the creation of a community based on the ethics of music-making (*ibid*: 298).

Learning music in-group establishes the first disruption to citizenship-related experiences for my interlocutors, especially when the teachers were from the host society. Additionally to the ‘novelty’ of having the necessary resources and learning music without feeling under threat - given the socio-political contexts from which they fled-, learning music contrasted refugees’ current experiences in reception centres. My interlocutors were well aware that each asylum seeker’s application was examined on an individual basis, unless they were/had underage children (GCR 2020b). While they shared the experience of displacement with other refugees in the camps, the assessment of their application was individual and affected by factors depending on their personal circumstances (GCR 2020c). The individual examination of the asylum applications confirms perceptions of citizenship as the relationship between an individual and the state (see Wiles 2016: 23). To that end, music learning showed an alternative perception of belonging, that transcended the tight limits of individual and/or family belonging, or national/ethnic belonging, proposing a broader experiencing of ‘affiliation, of shared identity’ (see Bowman 2016: 64).

Engaging in musicking entailed focusing on the purpose of joining (learn/teach music) the music lessons, as well as on the ultimate goals of the lessons (perform the learnt/taught repertory to an audience). Participants were partners to this endeavor and had to collaborate to achieve their goals (see Wenger 1998), overriding the existing barriers (e.g. language barriers). Moreover, individual efforts were inextricably connected with achieving the collective goal, that of performing the taught repertory at a concert. Achieving this goal involved acquiring individually the necessary music skills, as well as learning to listen to each other to be able to perform
collectively. In other words, each one’s individual effort and course of action were recognized as crucial to the whole group’s performance. Navigating any differences suggested by different backgrounds that further informed their ‘in limbo’ present, was prerequisite of achieving the collective goal.

Moreover, while their education was disrupted due to war and displacement – seriously undermining available options for education/ job seeking etc. in the host country- music skills could hopefully suggest ways into the prospective host society, including the ability to play a musical instrument and continue music studies, play in an ensemble, or being familiar with music repertories common there. Additionally, music lessons enabled them to move regularly outside the camp and interact with people from the host society, thus also learning English, a language necessary not only for the interactions with other musicians, but also for the prospective relocation.

As a student’s mother argued, highlighting the opposing poles of daily (family) life in the camp with that in the music lessons: ‘It is important for children to learn music. You think that music is another life, not like in the home, alone, but with other people.’ (interlocutor III, 2020). For someone living in a cramped reception centre, it was impossible to be or feel literally ‘alone’, as the total lack of space (in the camp, as well as the shared containers) reinforced people’s physical and aural presence onto each other in a most inhumane way. Feeling ‘alone’ could only make sense considering the individually experienced state ‘in limbo’, as shaped by asylum application process.

To that end, ‘alone’ involved a sense of ‘helplessness’ too, meaning that no one officially helped them when fleeing their countries, or when being ‘in limbo’, unaware of the duration of this situation, or its outcome. Once more, music lessons disrupted this sense, acting as proof of actual ‘help’, and offering an example of alternative shared belonging. As another mother characteristically said about the reasons why she encouraged her children to join the music lessons, ‘I like music so much - when my kids grow up, I hope that my kids help other people, weaker, refugees, like the music teachers here, give happiness to other people.’ (interlocutor IV, 2020). Additionally to the actual sense of ‘help’, her words reveal one more dimension of artistic citizenship, related to the participants’ aspirations of whom they would like to become (see Bowman 2016: 75). According to her words, music teachers embodied a positive example of acting that strongly contradicted with the refugee/ asylum application experience. Therefore, her children should learn music in order to acquire the skills that enabled the music teachers to assume this role in their lives and follow in their steps (offer help to the weaker, refugees).

A teacher, asylum seeker himself, assumed a similar approach: ‘... I can help those people who are interested in music and who are now starting to learn playing music. For those who live in Greece, but because they don’t know Greek language, they cannot go to Greek courses. I started teaching them music theory, and as soon as they can speak Greek better, they can go to other teachers, Greek teachers. I help them to find their own way...’ (interlocutor II, 2020). His students were also refugees, with their status either recognized or pending. My interlocutor, himself struggling to make his way into the host society, was well aware of the language barrier that could hinder participation in activities with Greeks, especially if they were in an institutionalized (music) educational context. On the contrary, music skills and knowledge could
compensate for the lack of language proficiency. Being a professional musician himself and familiar with Western Art Music, he focused on teaching his students what he thought would help them move more efficiently into music lessons delivered by Greek institutions, and consequently help them make their way into host society. Being unable to make a living officially as a music teacher due to his status, as well as the particularities of music education sector in Greece, he employed his musical skills and knowledge within informal music teaching contexts. This way, he actively supported his students to transit more smoothly into the host society, than he did, mediating in a way this process. Furthermore, his words and actions highlighted the capacity of music to translate and carry value and recognition across different contexts. Teaching music facilitated his student’s familiarization not only with repertories echoing their home-countries, but also those that could be encountered in Greek/European institutions. Moreover, he highlighted that music skills and knowledge can be transferrable across different contexts, therefore enabling the music learner to move along more smoothly.

The status and the space that matters: exclusions reinforced at the outbreak of pandemic

The implementation of emergency lockdown in order to limit the spread of coronavirus in spring 2020 restricted movements to the ‘absolutely necessary’ for everyone living within Greek territory. Strict fines were imposed on those breaching the restrictions. While citizens were instructed to ‘stay at home’, asylum seekers were instructed to ‘stay at camp’, as the regulation was officially ‘translated’, conveniently overlooking the living conditions in a camp.

Further restrictions applied for the residents of camps and remained mostly in place even when the lockdown was over in summer 2020 (GMMA 2020a). 10% of the population of the camp was allowed to leave it per hour. Finally, time limitations as per the residents’ right to leave the camp applied, when no such limitations were in place for the rest of the population (GMMA 2020b). Different restrictions on a spatial basis, hindered residents of the camps-previously able to participate in music lessons and rehearsals outside the camp- from doing so unconditionally. Should the session not be re-scheduled aligning with the restrictions for the residents of the camps, they had either to leave earlier interrupting the collective musicking, or move irregularly and take the risks that regulations breach involved. In any case, their difference occurring from their status was stressed -a difference they did not choose.

The reason behind these restrictions was residents’-of-the-camps increased vulnerability due to their cramped living conditions, which have been the outcome of the implemented policies and have been severely criticized (UN 2020). In these conditions, ‘keeping social distance’ to be safe from the coronavirus has been inevitable -if not ironic. The only distance retained was between the reception centres and the urban settings, which has been additionally difficult to travel. Eventually, the space allocated to asylum seekers defined the impact of the pandemic to their daily life, increasing their marginalization and otherization from the host society (Marshall and Kyratsou 2020).

During lockdown, technology was devised to bridge the distance and the limits set, and online lessons/ rehearsals were organized. Participation to an online music lesson
in a synchronous manner, however, was hardly possible for those lacking their own devices to log in to the session or the necessary space and time to do so without disruptions. This applied for the vast majority of those sheltering in reception centres, as there is total lack of space, and a mobile phone is usually shared among family members.

Few residents of the camps (all of them engaged in musicking long before the pandemic) continued to engage despite the existing barriers and the lack of motivation, as for the time being, the prospect of being together or performing at a concert was missing. Their persistence contrasted with the circumstances they experienced as asylum seekers in camps, especially as the lockdown involved further delays to their in-limbo condition. It retained a sense of pre-pandemic life, and relation with the world out-of-camp. Key to that was the relations fostered by engaging in learning/teaching music that transcended the citizenship boundaries. These relationships displayed an alternative to the lived experience of exclusion, embedded in in-group music learning.

**Concluding Remarks**

While citizenship reflects specific spatial and political belonging, and affiliation with a particular nation-state, musical citizenship relates with people’s actions participating in musicking.

Musical citizenship is the outcome of learning to (musically) inter-act in a way that a citizen would be expected to do, disrupting the excluding contexts emerging from (conventional) citizenship and proposing for inclusivity. It is rooted in a sense of belonging based on the shared experience of making music together, the embedded meanings and the in-between interactions of the participants to the musicking. Musicking questions and transcends any boundaries that different backgrounds may set among participants and proposes for a sense of belonging stemming from what participants make together, and how they ensure this happens, highlighting the potentials underlying in the individual aims and wishes of the participants, as well as the prerequisites to inter-act collectively and materialize these collective goals. Consequently, it allows us to think over what constitutes ‘citizens’ and work towards reconstitution of inclusivity.

While musical citizenship illustrates asylum seekers’ capacity to renegotiate their position, as conscious acting subjects, and claim their way into host society, the outbreak of pandemic reinforced the structural inequalities and exclusions. It also highlighted the urgency for collaborating bottom-up for the disruption of excluding contexts and for promoting inclusivity, and the potential of in-group music learning in doing so.

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¹ Pouri Panagiota (Melia), lawyer, and legal adviser at UNHCR, gives a detailed account of the policies implemented by Greek government before and during the pandemic targeting the residents of Greek reception centres, highlighting their unequal treatment that sharpened during pandemic (2020).