

KEEP IT SIM- PLE MAKE IT FAST!

AN APPROACH
TO UNDERGROUND
MUSIC SCENES (VOL. 4)
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Keep it Simple, Make it Fast!

An approach to underground music scenes (vol. 4)

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11.3. Making 'Musical Asylum' and opening paths of imagination of migration in transit

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A b s t r a c t

This article is an account of an action research conducted during 2016 and 2017 in the Grande-Synthe camp for migrants near Dunkerque (France). DIY movement is about taking cultural production into one's own hand. I will show how, whereas the camp is a place where all forms of control on your own life seem to vanish, choosing the music you can listen to is something. It is a way of acting on your environment. Secondly, I will try to specify the kind of cultural production women could control in the gendered context of the camp. I will defend that, with the Kurdish women I worked with, we tried to produce cultural and fragile "asylums" (Tia De Nora, 2013), through listening activities. These cultural asylums take place in a situation where political asylum for these migrant women is a perspective and not a reality yet and is performed in the gendered context of camp.

Keywords: *Music, gender, migration camp, cultural imagination, diaspora.*

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1. Introduction

Real chronotopes of our contemporary globalization, objects of contradictory narratives, “jungles” “migration camps” and “centers” are also the places of production of a culture of life in transition. In these places, people settle precariously for a while. In these places of transition, exiles as well as volunteers and employees are engaged in the organization of very specific forms of hospitality that combine extremely strong and intense commitments to precarious presences.

It appears that music is one of the ways - there are others - through which exiles deploy forms of subjectivation that allow the building of more or less cosmopolitan collectives. By creating a range of space and time it gives them the possibility to commit in various ways.

Music has a “potential” of creating collective commitment. Exploring the conditions of realization of this potential is also an opportunity to explore some political dimensions of migration camps. DIY movement is about taking cultural production into one’s own hand, I will show how whereas the camp is a place where all forms of control on your own life seem to vanish, choosing the music you can listen to is something and it is a way of acting on your environment. Secondly, I will try to specify what kind of cultural production are we talking about: I will defend that, with the Kurdish women I worked with, we tried to produce cultural and fragile asylums, through listening activities, when the political one, even the possibility of asking for one, is denied to them.

2. Grande Synthe: Considering migration of transit as an art of dwelling temporary

Grande Synthe is a city on the outskirts of Dunkirk, one of the biggest French harbors. It is an industrialised city, affected by the crisis, and since the closure of the humanitarian reception center of Sangatte, it is a stage for the exiles, mainly Kurds, who seek to join England. The story of the Linière camp in Grande Synthe is linked to the commitment of the mayor of the town in search for dignified solutions for exiles passing through his city, and the implication of the ONG “Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)”. In the summer of 2015, the number of exiles literally exploded, overwhelming the local historical associations that provided humanitarian aid. The living conditions became extremely hard in the main camp of the city. In association with M.S.F. and various associations, particularly English such as “Aid Box Community” or “The Refugee Community Kitchen”, and against the will of the French government, the municipal team decided to build an atypical camp. It was made of wooden huts and then during the first months of installation, various buildings, also in wood, housing a recreation center, various collective kitchens, and the place of my inquiries: a women center, around a rehabilitated farmhouse. The camp was more than 95% Iraqi Kurdish *en route* to England and taking advantage of the nearby highway area.

The management of the camp was entrusted to a young humanitarian association, “Utopia 56”, involved in the waste management in Calais and Barosch camp and sharing with the municipal team the will to make the camp Linière a place open to associative and citizen initiatives. One the characteristic of the “humanitarian actors” of la Linière where their formal involvement into musical worlds: the leaders of Utopia and many volunteers came from a big French festival: les Vieilles Charrues and had experiences in the management

of camping festival and Aid Box convoy was linked to the English movement of free party and knew how to build autonomous places, the logistician of M.S.F. had been a stage manager in one of the music venue of Lille, and praised the sense of improvisation of the "cultural world". Aid Box Community is an organization from Bristol also linked to the local musical scene and the free party culture. Besides, Bristol is a city where the Kurdish cause supported by the anarcho punk scene is important. ABC built most of the installations and the camp landscape was a mix between the humanitarian architectural culture of M.S.F. and the art of temporary dwelling of festival and free party culture. The DIY culture was also perceivable in the way they tried to make the camp installations tools for the autonomy of the exiles.

"Utopia 56" did the job the first months of the camp installation, mobilizing a large number of volunteers, organizing logistics and trying to coordinate the initiatives of associations that came from all over Europe and did not necessarily share the same way of doing things, nor the same ethical objectives. Financially choked, the city of Grande Synthe finally obtained the financial support of the French government. "Utopia 56" gave way to another managing association, the AFEJI. This change had a lot of consequences on the camp: whereas the association as Aid Box community and Utopia came from the cultural world, the Afeji was from the social and humanitarian worlds and accepted the accentuation of control and the "encampement dynamic" (Agier & Lecadet, 2014)

Tensions in the camp increased over the months, linked to the gradual degradation of the camp (humid shelters, large puddles in the camp). Historical associations such as MSF, Utopia, withdrew totally. The reinforcement of control didn't help to reduce the violence suffered by the exiles on the camp from different groups of smugglers. Finally, the complete destruction of the camp of Calais, made the situation worse with the overpopulation and the difficult cohabitation between exiles. Ultimately a fire destroyed the camp of la Linière completely on 11 April 2017.

Despite efforts to humanize the living conditions on the la Linière camp, violence, precariousness and uncertainty constituted the "daily life" of the exiles. La Linière story is completely linked to the problematic of transit migration in Europe and of the grey area the European migration policies created. People who were in Grande-Synthe were not "supposed" to exist. They couldn't be expelled because they mostly came from countries in war, but they were not asking for asylum there. The ethnographic works led in the camps in the north of France questioned this transitory situation and its consequences²⁷⁸. The solutions imagined are though imagined just for transit, with the minimum humanitarian support and trying to organize the invisibility of these "people undesired but stuck in the border". Camps in this situation appeared to be the "only" solution possible.

This "border situation" and the question of the crossing of the border shaped the camp, organized by a network of multiple surveillances activities (from the police, the smugglers, the humanitarian association), and the kind of life in transit it was possible to live there.

The musical experiences on the camp cannot be understood without taking into account this reality, known and experienced in a different way by those who have been there. In these conditions, musical activities, listening or playing were part of a special form of dwelling in transit in a border situation.

278 Since the pioneer work of Smain Laacher in 2002.

3. Gendered soundscapes

The sensible order (Rancière, 2000) of the camp was not only visible, even though process of racialization were obvious and common to other humanitarian camps, it was also perceivable in the soundscapes of the camp. In these soundscapes, music played a major role, musicalisation of the places through the use of smartphones, or little soundsystems shaped the camp and organized “threshold effect” protecting a group from being heard, marking a form of appropriation of a collective equipment. The soundscapes of the camp tell us a lot of what Jacques Rancière calls a political aesthetic distributing the perceptible/the parts we take to the collective life/and the possibilities of recognition.

In the musical and audible regime of the camps, women voices, and women listening activities were completely absent. No women on stages, no women in the public of the concerts, no women in the places of collective music listening. This partition crossed another one: the attention to musical activities by the volunteers, but also by the few researchers (ethnomusicologists mainly) engaged in inquiries in the camp was an attention toward the musicians who could play music, listening to music wasn’t at all considered.

Women represented 10% of the exiles on the camp. Considering this, I decided to make a focus on their practices. This demanded to pay more *attention* to the listening activities and to look how they could be considered as forms of cultural productions.

The opening of a women’s and children’s center (called the Women Center), by British volunteers who had feminist concerns and who were used to create “all women” environment, enabled women to break out of the relative isolation of the shelters. This closed place, without window, sheltered feminine sociability, and subtracted them a little to the surveillance system. Often under criticisms. It was later attacked by fire.

In the Women Center, speakers allowed to amplify mobile phones. To find my place there, I simply came in once or twice a week, from the end of August to the end of November 2016. I spent each time two or three hours at the Women Center, with my mobile phone connected to a mobile speaker, and I brought a snack. I invited the women present to browse YouTube or Deezer and “play the DJ”, either from my own phone or from theirs connected to the speaker. This simple presence allowed me to put into practice a form of “care ethics”, guided by the following questions: “how to do, in such a situation, to preserve and maintain the human relations that are at stake? And, how can it be done without reinforcing the inequalities of gender, class and race?” (Laugier, 2010). It was not just a matter of looking at the musical practices and experiences of the women in the camp, but finding a way to investigate and return the work that guarantees respect for their singularity and capabilities. This work ethic had to take into account the actual conditions of life on the camp in other words, the situation. And it would require, as Gilligan pointed out, “a more contextual and narrative way of thinking than formal and abstract” (Laugier, 2010, p.5 ndlr.). Finally, it corresponded to an attempt built a point of view situated, in the situation from a concrete and engaged, connected, involved projects as emphasized by Donna Haraway (Haraway, 2007).

4. Musical Asylums

30 September 2016, Women Center, Camp de la Linière Grande-Synthe.

Adar wants to talk today, she wants to know how a French girl like me knows Tara Jaff a folk Kurdish harpist player. Today I had chosen this track to begin the session. She looks at my phone, and browse YouTube to find a Kurdish singer who sang with her, Adnan Karim, and after the song, she said to me in a smile: 'but you know, I also like Beyonce!', I smile back and we put Who run the World, singing and dancing, and laughing.

What did I discover? Nothing very new in fact: that listening collectively to music, can be described as a form of game, a double performance: a musical performance, and a performance of oneself. Following Tia DeNora's proposals (DeNora, 2016), music in this situation could be considered as a form of asylum. That is to say a place and a time in which one feels safe, a place open to creativity, a place of recognition of one's existence as someone. In this perspective, asylum is not the total institution described by Goffman which lack as he pointed out of real "asylums", but a place of "rehabilitation" which, for DeNora, functions via the possibility of engaging in common activities, including, for example, listening to music together. Musical asylum opens up the possibility of self-realization, through negotiation and adaptation with others. The way Adar escape to forms of cultural assignation, make links between us and the way we shared the Beyoncé song about being powerful women there on this camp, shows how listening is a cultural production opening paths to imagination in the context of camp and a form of performance.

Tia DeNora distinguishes two forms of asylum, those that operate on the principle of retirement, and those that operate on the principle of the rearrangement of a world of relationships and possibilities, which she calls "refurnishing": to give back skills and to act on the design of space to open catches to action. These two forms of asylum can be combined: the "rehabilitating" asylum is also a place of withdrawal from the "ordinary" social world.

Of course, it has also to do with the construction of shared value: to choose a piece of music is to share something that is valued, that is good in the present situation, is to engage in the production of the moment to live in common.

When we collectively managed to musicalise the Women Center so that the majority of women would engage in the session and we could influence the atmosphere of the place, we demonstrated an ability to act on our environment. Such an ability is allowed in few situations on the camp, and in the course of exile in general.

5. Doing with the technology

The mobile phone and its connection to the internet and streaming platforms have played a vital role in making music a medium for articulating the multiple dimensions of the world lived by exiles, particularly because it allowed alternating musical choices from the personal libraries contained on the phones (mine and those of some of the women) with choices from the

musical offer formatted via YouTube mainly. The availability of titles searched on YouTube validated the existence of a community of taste beyond the camp. Fans of the singers we wanted to listen to, the singers themselves, had taken the trouble to post these contents on the platform, to put them in shape, to comment on them, to make covers, to add images and translations etc ... The women of Grande-Synthe mobilized and relied on the creative activity of YouTube users to invent ways of being women, Kurds, exiled in this place of the Women's Center. The combination of these resources available online and through phones allowed them to connect their worlds, and to experience their reality: that of their life in their home country, their diaspora belonging, their life here on the camp, their desired life in Europe.

Most singers we listened to are members of the large Kurdish diaspora and have themselves experienced camps in Iraq or Iran. This omnipresence of exile in the mediascapes of the women of the camp helped to situate their adventure in an aesthetic and cultural history. The pieces we listened to were often clips of Kurdish variety shows from various Kurdish Kurdistan television channels or Kurdish transnational channels available on YouTube. The history of the Kurdish media is linked to the struggles for the independence of Kurdistan, and to the ideological and political ones that animate the different Kurdish regions. During the sessions, the women present alternated excerpts of NRT2 and extracts of Kurdistan TV broadcasts with very different positioning and history. This does not mean that the recontextualization of program extracts in the organized stream from YouTube's indexing criteria completely eliminates the program and the sender, or even completely breaks the ideological charge carried by the channel. The very style of the programs, up to the quality of the sound, the colors of the stage, the clothes of the presenters and the public often shown, remain elements organized from the perspective of the channel; but, listened-watched as part of our meetings, with as a first request the name of the interpreter, the fact that we can identify these videos first as extracts of variety shows, with their codes, and at last the way we listened to them as "variety music" shows the way the perspective of the continuity of an ideological work can't be totally maintained. It was held remotely, via the reassembly of titles, for the musical experience. Finally, this ideological framework of the Kurdish media is part of the life of exiles and Kurds in general and the way women used YouTube and its possibilities of rearrangement indicates how they "do with" and "in" this particular media context for, in fine, listen to music. This does not mean that the politico-ideological load of the source broadcasts is destroyed by the interpretation, nor, conversely, that the ideology continues to work masked, without the knowledge of these women. It is here all the sensible richness, all the potential power - (inter) subjective - of music and the circulation of cultural productions that open interpretative possibilities whose seizure remains partly unpredictable and, in any case, irreducible.

The musical landscapes were constituted through a relocation of the available musical resources and this activity has consequences that must be assumed: comforting one of the participants who starts to cry listening to one of the selected music for example. These gestures of comfort were part of the "rehabilitation" work that the musical experience opened up. Finally, the choices could also be the occasion of the manifestation of disagreements. Often these disagreements were more alive between the children present or between the children and the adults. The negotiations, and sometimes the impossibility of reaching an agreement other than that of the distribution

of time between the different protagonists (we listen to your song and then we will listen to yours), opened at least the possibility of thinking about the hospitality of this "Musical asylum" not only as a hospitality based on the ability to recognize and produce points of agreement, but also as a hospitality of cohabitation, sometimes even a hospitality of "confrontation" as Isaac Joseph puts it (Joseph, 1997).

6. Paying attention to vulnerability. Giving room to engagement and disengagement

Moreover, engaging in the proposed musical experience forced to accept a piece of play and it required a form of availability sometimes impossible in the conditions of encampment. The fact that the music is "available for the ears of others" and the lightness of the device, however, allowed to create "minimal openings" i.e. forms of recognition of the presence without obligation of a commitment that would go up to prevent the withdrawal (Joseph, 1997). In my opinion, it is precisely in this variety of forms of disengagement authorized by the fragility of certain "catches" that the hospitality of the Women's Center during the listening sessions was best guaranteed. If the ethics of care involves paying attention to vulnerability, if it requires a particular look, it might be said, it also implies attention to commitment provisions. An ethics from a care perspective could imply a right to disengagement.

7. Conclusion: Hey, M. policeman

The degradation of the women center, open to drafts, the growing difficulty of maintaining the unmixed character of the place, the exacerbated tensions between exiles and the difficulty of maintaining a dialogue with the volunteers who tried to make it work every day, themselves under heavy pressure, led me to put an end to the experiment. Shortly after, in January 2017, the Women's Center was the target of a fire. Rebuilt, it was again destroyed in the camp fire. Since the exiles are back in the woods, and subject to police harassment. The work of the Women Center continues though, in the informal camp, they equipped a van to be mobile. I came back in June 2018, the girls wanted to listen to Zumba, because they danced Zumba all over Europe with their mothers, they said. On the screen of my computer connected to YouTube, they rapidly remarked a Zumba clip on the song "Hey Mister Policeman" from Eva Simons. During the two days I stayed, they kept asking me to play the song again and again, and imitated the choreography, playing the "Zumba policeman". Here are the lyrics:

*Hey, mister policeman/I don't want no trouble/I
just wanna drop my jiggelin' down to the floor/Hey,
mister policeman/Why you wanna holla at me?/I just
wanna drop my jiggelin' down to the floor/ No arrest
badman mind ya bizz(bis)/ No arrest baddaman mind ya
business - Down to the floor.*



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