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Listening Across the Green Line

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Beyond the narrow legal status of belonging to a state, citizenship has increasingly been defined as ‘the practices of becoming claim-making subjects in various sites and scales’ in the work of Engin F. Isin and others and has come to include various social and political struggles (Isin 2008, 16). Listening is key to such acts of citizenship, creating the potential for mutualities, networks of support and solidarity, as well as the intersection of struggles. As Lucia Farinati and Claudia Firth put it in their book *The Force of Listening* (Farinati and Firth 2017, 15), listening creates a political space that harbours a transformative potential: ‘the place we are embarking upon and traverse together is one that is created through this exchange of experiences, acts and practices of listening’.

Recently I began thinking about the role of listening with regard to the Cyprus conflict and citizenship through my own acoustic experiences as a post-war Cypriot who grew up in the southwest of the country, far away from the Green Line that has divided the island since the 1974 Turkish invasion and occupation of the north. Since 1974, Turkish Cypriots and



Overlooking the Green Line,
Nicosia 2023 © Anna Papaeti

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refused to leave their villages) have lived in the north. Freedom of movement and communication between the two parts were not possible until 2003, when checkpoints opened. Those in the north found themselves in an impossible situation. Turkish Cypriots were citizens of a state they had no access to. At the same time, they were citizens of the break-away Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which no country other than Turkey has recognised internationally; they were inaudible and invisible for the Greek-Cypriot community. Enclaved Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the north had limited rights; just like Turkish Cypriots, they were also citizens of a Republic to which they had no access and where they had no real voice. Any representation was limited and mediated by official channels on special occasions, mainly the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC) radio and television. Greek-Cypriot governments instrumentalised the difficulties of those enclaved in their political rhetoric against Turkey but failed to engage the Greek-Cypriot community and younger generations with their struggles.

During this period, the radio was the main space

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the north. In the mid 1990s, there was some contact between members of the two communities in the buffer zone, organized by international diplomatic missions. By bringing together Greek and Turkish Cypriots, they aimed at undoing the biases of both educational systems, the polarising political rhetoric and the chasm of separation. These were stopped in 1997 when the check-point was closed. At the end of 1999, communication through telephone became possible for the first time since 1974, initiated through a UN line to facilitate communication in the context of the biocommunal efforts.

In the 29 years that the Green Line remained an absolute barrier of the freedom of movement and communication, the main sonic reminder of the spectral existence of the enclaved in our everyday lives were brief messages sent by friends and family, broadcast by CyBC radio every day at 1.40 PM after the news bulletin. Initially established by the Red Cross in 1974, this service was essentially taken over by the CyBC. Read in a sonically telegraphic way mirroring their writing style, sharply and abruptly

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Despite any minor differentiations, all of them began in an identical manner: ‘X sends a message to her parents [BREAK]. She is well. [BREAK] [...]’. These monologic statements of ‘wellness’ bore the ‘poisonous knowledge’ of displacement, family separation, occupation, and division (Das 2000, 221–222). A sonic and verbal *ostinato* broadcast on a daily basis, they were heard but, as I would argue, mostly not listened to.

In 1999, this situation was changed through the radio programme ‘Peace Garden’, established by Turkish-Cypriot poet Neşe Yaşın for Astra Radio – the radio station of the Greek-Cypriot communist party AKEL. ‘Peace Garden’ was broadcast on Tuesday evening at 9 PM until 2003, bringing into contact citizens from across the Green Line and from all communities. The program was created when telecommunications between north and south became possible through a UN line. People would call in to talk, or leave their contact details, and ‘**Peace Garden**’ producers would call back to facilitate communication. Themed specials included ‘Lost Memories’, ‘Interviews with Members of Youth



the first time a space for exchange between the divided communities and those separated by the war. It became the space where members of these communities were able to re-engage with one another, listen to and with each other after 26 years of silence, reclaiming their place and voice in the social and political sphere.

Listening, in this sense, became a potentially transformative process, and the radio waves – a potently transformative space, an acoustic territory that ruptured what Jacques Rancière calls the ‘distribution of the sensible’ that heavily relied on silenced (hi)stories supported by the education systems and governments of both sides (Rancière 2004). At a time when the Green Line was an impenetrable limit, listening gave rise to a political space where the other and the different social and political struggles could be acknowledged. It was a space where the notion of citizenship in its broader sense could be reclaimed and reinvented from below, bottom up, creating the potential of a dialogical process between Cypriots.



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