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Rhythm-Relay-Relation: Anticolonial Media Activisms in Athens

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Abstract This chapter maps out a set of anticolonial media poetics, politics, and aesthetics. It centres on a series of collaborative radio programmes produced in Athens, Greece, as part of ongoing work with an activist collective in the city. The chapter works with ideas of rhythm, relay, and relation – which serve both as methods and as guiding concepts – and narrates a form of citizen soundwork: sonic practices that experiment with geographical, political, and technological imaginations. This work in Athens is a convergence and continuation of media activisms elsewhere, carrying collective methods of voicing and articulating belonging across migratory contexts. And it sounds out anticolonial media activisms that feed back across histories and geographies of resistance and liberation. These media activisms unmake colonial hierarchies of voice and knowledge; and make anticolonial publics, communicating across radical sonic cartographies and building political cultures that contest the colonialities of borders and citizenship regimes.

Keywords Rhythm. Relay. Relation. Anticolonialism. Activism. Radio. Citizenship.

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1 Introduction

"Hullo hullo… This is the BBC…" My colleague Wael puts on a plummy voice and a posh accent as we start recording. We are sitting in an improvised studio space – a couple of microphones in a back room of the building where we work – and setting down our conversations

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for a radio show we are making for a forthcoming festival in Athens. The show is called *Al'Athinioun*, meaning 'Athenians' in Arabic, and it details new Athenian identities and publics that develop through movements of various kinds. Unscripted and unplanned, the intro takes the tone of postcolonial parody – a mocking mic check, at once calling attention to and playing with the colonial geographies of the medium, skewering the seriousness of its imperial centres and histories, speaking back, sounding out a break with systems of representation, of voice and silence, of racialised media operations.

"Hullo hullo I would like to be on the clear other side of the earth". A line from Aimé Césaire's poem *Le Cristal Automatique* (1983, 123), in which the "hullo hullo" repeats throughout – a resonant refrain signalling experimentation with forms of address, connection, and amplification (Hill Jr 2013). As a work of the Négritude movement, the poem's experiments sit within a larger project of denouncing imperialism and Eurocentrism, forging techniques of voicing an "anti-imperial politics and ethics of recognition" (Hill Jr 2013, 137), and demanding that the "counter-testimonies of history be heard" (138). Radio – or what Edwin Hill Jr (2013) calls "le poste colonial" – played a central role in these anti/colonial vocalities: at once a relay point of imperial structures of governance and subject formation, and a space for developing diasporic intimacies and solidarities and emergent modes of resistance.

"Hullo hullo". This chapter seeks to hear these experiments and forms of address together, mapping out a set of anticolonial media poetics and aesthetics. It centres on the work of an organisation I'm part of in Athens – the Syrian and Greek Youth Forum (SGYF) – where we have been producing our own citizen media since 2019. Here I seek to amplify this work and to theorise a little, positing this as a kind of anticolonial media activism, something that feeds back across histories and geographies of resistance and liberation, and that builds spaces for transformation as much as representation. I focus on radio, which has been key to our media work from the get-go. And I write here in the company of three radio shows we have produced: *Al'Athinioun* (2020), *The Movement Exists in Voice and Sound* (2021), and *Relational City* (2022) – as well as with our online Citizen Sound Archive, which at once serves as storehouse and sounding board for these media activisms.

Media activisms are a space of convergence and collectivity. In our case, these radio pieces produced in (and about) Athens contain ideas and practices from multiple places: Syrian scholars highlight the importance of citizen media during the Syrian revolution from 2011 onwards (Halasa, Omareen, Mahfoud 2014); while Athens has many of its own histories of resistance, voiced through underground radio and related media (e.g. Panourgia 2009). Our work builds on both of these movements, attempting to hold them together. And I'll detail here how these media activisms create anticolonial as much as post-

colonial publics – in the sense that colonialities of borders and racialised regimes of citizenship are not confined to the past but continue into the present (e.g. Hall 1995; Mayblin, Turner 2021). Anticolonialism is an unfinished and ongoing project.[1] Colonial logics also continue to inform who has the right to narrate: the city, the nation, the European continent (cf. Said 1984). Anticolonial media finds ways out of representation traps – those systems of narration that strip people of agency and creativity, which map onto colonial hierarchies of voice and knowledge, and are shot through representations of migration and displacement.

The chapter seeks and speaks other imaginations and mediations. It works with ideas of rhythm, relay, and relation – which serve both as methods and as guiding concepts. Together these ideas describe the world-wide movements and entanglements of cultures and peoples (Shih 2018); the sonic cartographies that emerge as a result (Ochoa Gautier 2019); the ways that Europe has long contained multiple elsewheres; and the ways that media activisms generate transformative transmissions and anti-border broadcasts. I turn, first, to the question of citizen soundwork, detailing our radio projects in Athens. Second, the chapter places these movements into history, drawing the connections between migration, media, and anticolonial activisms that have long been circulating around the Mediterranean and beyond. I then focus, third, on practices of asserting a political voice that speaks both individually and collectively and across languages. And fourth, I develop ideas of relational media, showing how this citizen media pulls together movements and methods that remake publics and urban space.

These ideas align with anticolonial thought in refusing the notion of Europe as a discrete entity in global history (Césaire [1955] 2000) and drawing attention to the intimacies that exist across continents, empires, and archives (Lowe 2015). The result is a citizen media that calls out the forgetfulness of European history and the racisms of citizenship regimes. A media that is a method of social transformation, imagining things otherwise. A media that forms counterpublics, constructing audiences that collapse binaries of migrant and citizen, of refugee and European. A media that sings long histories of movement, encounter, exchange. Against the border spectacle of 'refugee crisis' that Europe continually produces, this chapter tells of creative activisms, stories built out of anticolonial energy, and publics that are decentred and multiple.

1 I use 'anticolonial' rather than 'decolonial' here, following Priyamvada Gopal (2021), who writes of anticolonialism as the necessary stage between colonialism and decolonisation. The media activisms narrated in this chapter are best described as anticolonial – part of the ongoing work of anticolonialism that exists in social movements but is often missed in academic discussions of decolonisation.

2 Citizen Soundwork

Based in Athens, Greece, since 2018, SGYF is an international activist movement working to build platforms of citizenship. Together we run the Active Citizens Sound Archive – a space for amplifying this citizenship work, for community mobilising, and collective research and knowledge production. Media was on the agenda from our first meeting, towards the end of 2018. Alongside our advocacy work for minoritised and precarious populations in the city, our focus on employment rights and opportunities for people of refugee background, our work with culture and performance as a means of communicating with and becoming part of Athenian publics – as a team we decided early that producing media would be an important part of our work.[2]

We began doing workshops on recording the city and its citizenships, using sound as a heuristic and a catalyst for narration (cf. Anand 2017; Gilroy 1993), and sharing skills of editing and mixing so that the team has the ability – the power – to produce its own media. This in turn stemmed from an activist lesson I learned early from my Syrian colleagues, who tell me that life as they experience it is very different from life as it is reported by the media; who tell me that we have a responsibility to record what is happening in Athens, and to spread word of the situation from within. Towards the end of 2019, a year after founding the organisation and several months after starting our recording workshop, we set up our Citizen Sound Archive – intended as a space for creation and documentation, a resource for the city, a platform for communication with movements elsewhere.

In many ways, this project maps onto definitions of citizen media sketched by Mona Baker and Bolette Blaagaard, who write of the "vital political, social and ethical issues relating to conceptions of citizenship and state boundaries, the construction of publics and social imaginaries, processes of co-optation and reverse co-optation, power and resistance, the ethics of witnessing and solidarity, and novel responses to the democratic deficit" (2016, 19) that are all part of this work. In the Sound Archive, our recordings sit within a much bigger project of remaking citizenship – away from statist renditions of belonging, defined by borders and papers and other technologies of exclusion, with territories indexed to ethnicities, languages and religions; and towards citizenships understood as a creative and collective set of methods and practices, something plural and migratory, that become spaces of coalition, foregrounding struggles that are shared and held in common.

2 I was lucky enough to be invited to be a member of the team after having spent the previous two years (2017-18) working with its co-founders in other capacities.

All of which is particularly pointed for people who revolted against dictatorship in Syria and have since found themselves at the sharp end of the colonialities of borders and citizenship regimes in Greece and Europe. Citizenship itself is a colonial project and product, a border, a bordering (Dyrness, Sepúlveda III 2020; Western, forthcoming). Our team is less concerned with questions of integration and inclusion into existing regimes of citizenship (though of course the material and social benefits of this are very real), and more interested in questions of social transformation and liberation from racialised systems of unfreedom that inform all aspects of life and livingness. Our media work has these politics built in, containing a set of methods, practices and narratives which inform the production process as much as the content (Baker, Blaagaard 2016, 12). Both citizenship and citizen media, from these perspectives, are processes more than they are fixed entities or outcomes.

On another level, then, these production practices resonate with what Anthony Reed terms *soundwork*. Thinking from Black studies and with Black sound, Reed details soundwork as a kind of political and aesthetic labour that "does not simply express an evolving consciousness and orientation toward freedom; it does not reflect the world in which it resonates, but meaningfully changes it" (Reed 2021, 4). The contexts are different – and definitely I do not wish to conflate forms of oppression that have specific histories, geographies, and colonialities – but I learn from Reed's soundwork and seek here to think it together with our media activism in Athens, transposing both into an anticolonial sound studies that foregrounds the creative liberation practices of marginalised communities.

From early 2020 we were making radio, using our archival recordings as the basis for programmes and episodes. Following a few failed attempts to work with large national broadcasters from various European countries – who insisted on individual stories of suffering and success, rather than our collective work of imagining – we found a home at an Athens-based station, Movement Radio. This station is sponsored by one of the big cultural centres in the city, so any claims on this being underground culture would be disingenuous. But between the station and our organisation there exists a set of shared focuses on Mediterranean circulations and futures, which has given us a platform to create and develop our citizen soundwork. And it is through this platform that we've produced a series of pieces that seek to remap and remake sonic imaginations of the city, the sea, and Europe's relations with its neighbouring continents.

Al'Athinioun speaks of Athenian identities that develop through movements – both movements across borders and social and political movements – and the kinds of publics that emerge as a result. The piece narrates a series of actions organised and performed by the team, and the underlying goals of finding and claiming kinds of so-

cial and cultural citizenship in a situation where many rights and dignities are denied. *The Movement Exists in Voice and Sound* is about revolutionary rhythms, anticolonial echoes, and political reverberations between and beyond Athens and Damascus. It centres on voice and sound as vehicles of uprising, of carrying the work of revolution across time and space, of city making, and of citizenship. *Relational City* hears an Athens built on relation and commonality: a place that contains other places; movements that contain other movements; citizenships that contain other citizenships. The programme sounds out a city that holds multiple cities inside it, based both on old entanglements of cultures and people, and on newer ideas and creativities.

These programmes constitute a form of media activism in which media is understood and used as an end in itself – not just as an amplifier of agendas (Dunbar-Hester 2014, vxiii). As citizen soundwork, these pieces utilise the contours and possibilities of the medium. They take sound seriously as a material of social change, as a mode of collectivity and an articulation of belonging, as something that is always moving, that can help us rethink citizenships through movement. And they work with techniques of radio broadcast – of rhythm, relay, and relation – that have developed through the medium's histories, and through anticolonial reappropriations of its technologies (Hill Jr 2013). With the remaining sections of this chapter, I will place our citizen soundwork into histories and geographies of insurgent media, collective poetics, and sonic counterpublics. This involves turning next to history, drawing the connections between migration, media, and anticolonial activism that have been circulating for centuries.

3 Anticolonial Media Histories

Media has long been a vector of modernity (Anand 2017, 14), which means it has also long been a vector of empire. Radio, in particular, became a colonial tool through the twentieth century, representing and transmitting colonial power. Bessire and Fisher (2012, 7) write of radio as a "portable missionary" – spreading the imperial word and imparting its worldviews. Dionne Brand, writing of her childhood in Trinidad, gives an account of this, depicting how "through the BBC broadcasts we were inhabited by British consciousness" (2001, 16-17). More generally, radio has accompanied and been a tool of international development and humanitarian intervention in various global contexts, continually rearticulating colonial dynamics (Hartley 2000; Tomiak 2018). Radio is a colonial relay point. Edwin Hill Jr, writing of French imperialism but in ways that apply across empires, posits radio as a "literal and conceptual site where a range of ideas about imperialism" and "diasporic relations were debated, transferred, and translated" (2013, 123).

Just as radio served as a colonial relay, it was also the opposite: an anticolonial agent, speaking counter-testimony to dominant histories (137). These politics were not inherent to the medium itself, which was (and is) rather a set of relations and "conditions of possibility for colonially or anticolonially speaking and hearing the world" (124). In this section I will sketch some anticolonial media histories (not a complete history!) which continue to resound into the present, and inform the formations of anticolonial publics in contemporary Europe. At the centre of these histories are experiments with geographical, political, and technological imaginations, all of which continue to reverberate.

Experimentation is a necessary part of the decolonial project. If we listen to anticolonial histories, we find experiments with imagination and solidarity. These experiments are not just political but cultural and aesthetic. To move first to the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Spirit of Bandung that animated and followed it, we find a focus on culture as much as politics. Thinking again with Césaire, Bandung was a "cultural event of the first order": a "peaceful uprising of peoples hungry not only for justice and dignity but also for what colonisation had taken away of the greatest importance: culture" ([1956] 2010, 131). This involved reforging cultural connections and intimacies severed by colonisation, but it also involved developing new forms of cultural expression through experimental idioms. Anna Agathangelou calls this Bandung's revolutionary poetics: "a poetics of solidarity, using verbs, tropes, and strophes to challenge and transform the consciousness of peoples" (2016, 102), inspiring grammars and creative possibilities, and fostering a global aesthetic imaginary and movement (102-3).

This imaginary also generated media techniques. The Spirit of Bandung developed alongside and through the expansion of shortwave radio, transmitting and relaying anticolonial movements at levels of both politics and poetics. Radio stations broadcast their support for independence and liberation movements, and broadcast a "new poetics of transnational and diasporic relating" (Hill Jr 2013, 124). In Hill Jr's words, "radio functioned as a critical relay point for negritude's critiques of colonial truth and racial ideology" (2013, 124). And it also sounded out new vernaculars – the rhymes and rhythms of what Khadija El Alaoui (2016) calls "Street Bandung", which disseminated and drove forward anticolonial aspirations. These rhymes and rhythms ring out through radiophonic relay. Anticolonial appropriations of radio constitute participatory relays of knowledge, central to anticolonial theory and praxis. And relay, to borrow a vocabulary from Édouard Glissant (1997), is a technique of relation.

"On every side the idea is being relayed. When you awaken an observation, a certainty, a hope, they are already struggling somewhere, elsewhere, in another form" (Glissant 1997, 45). Sound me-

dia is a tool of simultaneity, connecting and generating publics that collapse geographical distances. These intimacies predate radio, of course, but they take on new aesthetics and political possibilities in broadcast circulation. Sound scholars narrate how radio and recorded musics became a soundtrack to decolonisation. Social diasporas, produced through the forced movements of people over centuries of empire, are also sonic diasporas, generating both a vernacular avant-garde (Reed 2021) and a peripheral modernity (Denning 2015). Sound bounces around diasporic public spheres through sonic infrastructures and intimacies (Goffe 2020a), unmapping colonial geographies of centres and peripheries (Goffe 2020b).

Circulation, reverberation. Tuning this back into the geographies of this chapter, these relays and relations, rhythms and reverberations have long histories in Mediterranean contexts. Anticolonial media circulates through Mediterranean feedback loops – through periodicals, pamphlets, plays, poetry, performance, cinema, radio, and records – turning the sea into a space of contestation. Ilham Khuri-Makdisi (2013), charting these contestatory popular cultures in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, details how new publics (and notions of the public) emerged in Eastern Mediterranean cities. These publics are rooted in what Khuri-Makdisi terms a “popular anti-imperialism” (2013, 144), as people thought, created, and organised against both direct and indirect forms of imperialism. Through these practices, the Eastern Mediterranean became a global region and stimulated a global radicalism.

Media was again central to these connections and contestations, relaying anticolonial poetics and politics across global diasporas – including across a Syrian diaspora that straddled North Africa, Southwest Asia, South America, and Europe. And compellingly, Khuri-Makdisi writes of how these movements and mediations allowed people to “connect and create imagining communities and ties of solidarity across lands and seas” (2013, 32). The term “imagining communities” is so helpful here precisely because it thinks across and against, rather than within and with national borders. It thus does the opposite work of Benedict Anderson’s much better-known (1991) term “imagined communities” – those implicitly homogenous groups that form the populace of the nation-state, conceived and performed through print media or broadcast sound (Western 2018). Imagining communities make anticolonial publics, communicating through rhythm, relay, and relation across transnational radical trajectories, building political cultures that do not map onto national(ist) and Eurocentric histories. These media geographies decentre and destabilise ideas of European publics. And they distort representations of migration, and colonial hierarchies of voice embedded within them.

4 Escape Routes from Representation Traps

In 1951, the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) – what is now the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR – released a set of 78rpm discs called *The Refugees Sing*, featuring recordings made in refugee camps across Europe after World War 2. In the liner notes, the IRO Director General, Donald Kingsley, made a claim for the voices contained therein as heralding a world in the making. "These are the voices of the refugees themselves", he writes, "recorded in the camps where they lived suspended between two worlds. It is more than music. It is the voice of an age – the age of the refugee" (IRO 1951). I start this section here to illustrate that the trope of refugee voices – and the kinds of claims made about them – is not new. It is, instead, something recursive and repeating, which continues to animate many representations of displacement: predicated on ideas of transparency and agency, but equally reproducing ideas of refugeeness as separate from the rest of humanity (Malkki 1996), and with a set of narratives and narrative politics built in.

We can think of these as representation traps. State work, humanitarianism, mainstream media, and much scholarship rests upon and recycles a set of narratives that allow people of refugee background to speak only through certain frames: serving up reductive prototypes of flight and suffering; or centring 'refugee stories' of trauma and overcoming. Recent literatures challenge notions that these storytelling practices are somehow inherently useful – especially when they speak only in tragic tropes, and silence people as critical and active(ist) subjects.[3] There are two tasks here. The first is to recognise the colonialities built into these systems of representation. The second is to find ways out of them, hearing how people use media activisms to chart escape routes from these representation traps. Both tasks require pushing against frames of 'refugee voices': representational practices built on conceits of 'giving voice', recycling humanitarian models that encourage sympathy instead of solidarity, aid instead of activism.

The colonialities in question centre on what Lilie Chouliaraki (2016) calls "hierarchies of voice". In representation traps, and in media geographies of crisis, particular groups of people are confined to the role of witness – considered unable to theorise on events and situations, which is then left to supposed expert authorities. These hierarchies of voice are also hierarchies of knowledge. And this work of classification and organising people and knowledges into categories was (and continues to be) central to the colonial project (Lowe 2015). Displacements and migrations are bound up with colonial pasts and

3 Cabot 2016; 2019; Nayel 2013; Tammas 2019; Vera Espinoza 2019; Western 2020a.

ongoing colonialities, as are the institutional forms of protection and knowledge production that dominate the systems of representation under discussion here. As Lucy Mayblin and Joe Turner (2021) write, both UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) emerged out of European colonialism: founded in response to particular historical moments to support European refugees, only later expanding their geographical scope, but arguably not changing their political priorities.

The kinds of knowledge valued and produced by news organisations (Trilling 2019) and by universities and academic disciplines (McKittrick 2021) map onto these colonial geographies and hierarchies. And the task of building escape routes involves not just unlearning hierarchies of voice and knowledge, but building relational spaces that cut across (and subvert) these sectors. As Katherine McKittrick puts it, detailing how anticolonial studies and Black studies does this kind of work:

> Part of our intellectual task is to work out how different kinds and types of voices *relate to each other* and open up unexpected and surprising ways to think about liberation, knowledge, history, race, gender, narrative, and blackness. (2021, 50)

This is coalition work – the work of voicing, thinking, and listening in collective formations, unbound by colonial structures of expertise and erasure. And in so doing, developing and asserting forms of political voice that refuse the roles and prototypes outlined above.

Refusal and escape routes take on an anticolonial politics. They produce a kind of feedback – introducing disruption and dissonance into regimes of who speaks, who is silenced, and on whose terms communication takes place. We bring this politics to our work in Athens. At times explicitly so, as when we ran a workshop on “Sounding an Anticolonial Athens” with friends and like-minded organisations in the city in 2021: listening and sounding against cultural borders that are constantly drawn to define and delineate notions of the public, both in urban space and in the city at large. Rather than reproducing national(ist) renditions of the city, or European ideal visions in which Athens becomes a sign and symbol of European civilisation, we sought instead to place Athens on the Mediterranean, rethinking its geographies in relation with other Mediterranean cities, through long histories of connections with other places across and around the sea, and through rhythms of diversity at street level.

And at times this is more implicit, as in our radio work. Here we combine knowledges and voices to narrate the city as we see and hear it. This means not just claiming the right to the city, but the right to write the city. Which is close to what Edward Said (1984) called the permission to narrate – except in this case people are not

asking for permission, but are claiming the right to narrate as one of many rights to be at once fought for and asserted. An accumulation of knowledges; a set of collective methods. Importantly (and this is another anticolonial point), these methods do not begin and end in Europe, but carry across relational geographies. Citizen media played a vital role in revolution in Syria from 2011 onwards. In Omar Alassad's words, "the real story of the Syrian revolution began the moment the country's citizens became citizen-journalists" (2014, 113). And this work of making media from behind the "media curtain" (cooke 2017, 43) held steady through a set of shared practices of narrating, archiving, and amplifying revolution.

This citizen media work centred on collective memory-making and building a potential archive – an archive both of revolutionary potential and holding the possibility of future commemoration (cooke, 2017, 7). The potential archive combined a new audiovisual language with accounts of intimate defiance and everyday contestation (Elias, Omareen 2014, 258). Again this involved soundwork. Dozens of radio stations opened during the uprising to replace official broadcasting – set up both by Syrians living abroad and in Syria itself (Alassad 2014, 115; cooke 2017, 113) – and women installed loudspeakers on the rooftops of buildings and in parks, to broadcast revolutionary songs during demonstrations (Sahloul 2014). And again this involved remaking citizenship as something grounded in culture and creativity, rather than something defined, conferred and denied by the state; in this case an authoritarian regime (Yassin-Kassab, Al-Shami 2018).

These are mobile practices. Revolutionary soundwork was the subject of our radio show, *The Movement Exists in Voice and Sound*, in which my colleague Kareem narrates the vocalities of uprising and the ways that sound stimulates and carries into movements across radical trajectories around the Mediterranean and beyond. Revolutionary techniques and aesthetics – including building insurgent media infrastructures (Reed 2021, 5) – carry across migratory contexts, feeding into assertions of refugee rights and social citizenships in Europe. Yet these migratory activisms are almost completely missing from accounts of migration that focus only on the deathscapes of the Mediterranean and crisis at the borders (Western 2020b). Such practices are enrolled in slower processes of building anticolonial publics in Europe – forms of emergence rather than emergency – joining with longer histories and rhythms of migratory and diasporic resistance and solidarity (e.g. Emejulu, Sobande 2019). And they also lock into global patterns of the refusal of hierarchies of voice and colonial projects of representation.

Escaping representation traps involves (and I close this section with the wonderful work of Sujatha Fernandes) building "autonomous collective spaces of resistance that can forge new representations" (2017, 162), and finding modes of narration that seek "to transform

rather than reproduce global hierarchies and structures of power through movements for social change" (4). Anticolonial publics and media activisms show how this works and what it sounds like, moving in rhythm on a planetary scale. These are rhythms of community and commonality, of movement and migration, of citizenship and city making, of archiving and imagining. And these rhythms make relational geographies and relational media, which is where I turn for this chapter's final section.

5 Relational Media

"Athens now, I believe it's holding other cities. We are in Athens and we are free to express ourselves and express our city, to bring our city's feeling and our city's struggle. Athens is giving us this space" (SGYF 2022). I start this final section with some lines from my colleague Kareem in our programme *Relational City*. This idea – and the programme in general – resonate with the themes of this chapter: listening and speaking in relation, narrating the city, and thinking across anticolonial histories and geographies of contestation. But here I want to focus in on the work of relation, and the ways that it produces relational media. Citizen media is ultimately a set of relations: a collective inscription (Hill Jr 2013, 126), a community building practice (Baker, Blaagaard 2016, 14). This last section thinks this through activist knowledge, circular movements, and sonic cartographies.

At the time of writing, our organisation is in the process of expanding our media work – setting up a Citizen Media Lab in Athens to continue our soundwork and also to develop new directions for our media activisms. This involves renting a physical space in the city, intended to be a gathering place as well as a production site. In a proposal we wrote to send to prospective funders and to related organisations in the city, we outlined our goals and plans for the space:

> The Lab will not only be a site of media production in the conventional sense, but a place of advocacy and community mobilising, of research and learning. We will run study groups on citizenship, history, and various social and political issues. We will connect with social movements around the world. We will host discussions as well as producing media across and through multiple languages. We will develop a community of activist writers and producers. (Personal document, on file)

This plan points in two directions. On one level, it centres ideas of activist knowledge. This means taking seriously the roles of knowledge and research in social movements and citizen media, and recognising the important of spaces of combining knowledge and building ca-

pacity, so that these movements might circulate and reverberate and gain traction elsewhere (Choudry 2015). We take inspiration from the work of movements worldwide, and the work of establishing centres of collective learning and resistance. We think with Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who writes of the "embodied political experimentation" which is at the heart of many movements – conveying how people are simultaneously looking for and creating a guide to action, "to theorise or map or plan their way out of the margins" (2008, 50). In her work in Lisbon, Gilmore describes spaces of study and struggle as "pop-up universities" (2020, 177). We run with this idea in Athens, and follow this logic to imagine our space as one of pop-up media and media theory – pulling both down from elite spaces and repositioning them as things that are produced by everyone.

Again this is an anticolonial move. It challenges the tendency to think of theory as something which is generated in universities, and the corollary tendency to think of theory as coming from the global north, to then be applied everywhere else – suggesting that European knowledge is universal, and other knowledge can only be hyperlocal (Choudry, Kapoor 2010). Instead we think of knowledge, media, and theory as existing in motion and in relation, travelling and converging in local contexts. As we relay in *Relational City*, Athens now contains Damascus and Aleppo, contains Alexandria, contains Gaza, contains cities from all around and beyond the Eastern Mediterranean. This creates relational ways of being and belonging, with commonalities rooted in shared experience and knowledge, all of which are channelled into our media work.

On a second level, this work fits into a circle of movements in the city. We find ourselves in relation and conversation with other grassroots organisations, all of whom produce citizen media in different ways, and all of whom work to re-imagine questions of urban citizenship in Athens. To give a couple of examples, friends at Victoria Square Project are running a project titled "Who is the Contemporary Athenian?", seeking to think Athenian society "beyond labels like 'immigrant', refugee, first or second generation, Greek etc, but under the common ground of the neighbours and co-citizens" (Victoria Square Project 2020). And friends at ANASA Cultural Centre of African Arts and Culture have been working since 2010 towards the "empowerment and inclusion, through art and culture, of young people of African origin who were either born in Greece or came as migrants or refugees" (ANASA 2022).

These movements often come together at events in the city, and in 2022 we collectively broadcast an online discussion of Athenian citizenships, produced by the Onassis Cultural Centre in collaboration with SGYF (Onassis Stegi 2022) **[fig. 1]**. This circle of movements became a circular conversation, a relational citizen media, at once focused on the specificities of the city, yet with a planetary imagina-

tion – speaking with and to movements around the world. To borrow an idea from the philosopher Kostas Axelos, relational citizen media conveys a kind of planetary thought (1964), and these cross-movement gatherings manifest as "roundtables of eternal return" (Deleuze 2004, 157) – rhythms and relays and relations that loop across trajectories in space-time on a global scale.

Figure 1 Still from the online discussion "8 Athenians Discuss: What Does it Mean to be an Active Citizen Today?", 2022. Onassis Stegi, Athens. © Pavlos Fysakis for Onassis Stegi

To plug this back into our radio work, my last point is that anticolonial soundwork and relational media make new sonic cartographies (Ochoa Gautier 2019). Publics in Europe have always existed in, and have been produced by, intimate relations with people and politics elsewhere (Lowe 2015). These anti/colonial relations play out through sonic circulations (Reed 2021, 12), and we cannot position Europe as ever having been a self-contained space (cf. Césaire [1955] 2000). Yet as well as connecting pasts and presents (and not placing them in linear formation), it is important to keep listening for the specific relations that make up places and publics in Europe today. Media is key to understanding this "cartography of desires, narratives, and competing claims to legitimacy" (Reed 2021, 19). And sounds, through their constant movements and crossings, refigure the borders of citizenship (Chávez 2017, 5).

6 Outro

"I hope one day we could just really see the whole world as cities and neighbourhoods without actual borders between countries. And you could see it all smoothly flowing with each other" (SGYF 2022). The last words are Wael's, again from our programme *Relational City*. Spoken into our microphone as we walked together around the neighbourhoods of Athens, these ideas speak an everyday politics that tie together the main themes of this chapter: escaping representation traps that frame how voice is produced and received; picking up anticolonial media histories that push against Eurocolonial bordering practices; thinking in relation as cities exist within other cities, all flowing together; and constituting a kind of citizen soundwork that expresses these politics and poetics. This chapter has sought to sound out anticolonial media activisms in Athens, stretching anticolonialisms across geographies and histories. I've narrated these activisms through rhythm, relay, and relation – all of which continue to transform media, publics, and culture.

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