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Sounds Like ‘Home’: The Synchrony and Dissonance of Podcasting as Boundary Object

Introduction

Working at the intersection of migration studies and radio studies, we interrogate podcasting’s potential as a practice-based activist research method. This article documents an ethnomimetic research project conducted together with Konstkupan (The Art Hive), a migrant-focused community arts space in Malmö, Sweden. Ethnomimesis describes a combination of artistic research and ethnography, what O’Neill and Hubbard describe as the ‘re-telling of life narratives in artistic form’ (O’Neill and Hubbard 2010: 48). Drawing on perspectives from science and technology studies, we argue that the value of podcasting as an ethnomimetic research method exists in its potential to function as a ‘boundary object’ (Star and Griesemer 1989). Boundary objects are technologies and work processes that bridge social worlds and serve as sites of communication and translation across the different communities of practice that work with them (Star 2010).

The *Picturing Home* project aimed to bring together Malmö residents of various backgrounds to talk about what it means to make home, and to belong. While *Picturing Home* was meant to be an in-person series of workshops, the global COVID-19 pandemic required the project’s conveners (the authors of this article) to rework its logistics. The result was an intimate community of autochthonous Swedes and new arrivals from varied backgrounds who convened around a multimedia project consisting of Zoom workshops, an Instagram ‘archive’, and the podcast, which is the focus of this article.

We begin by situating our work within the radio studies literature about podcasting, which has of late framed podcasting as a mature medium – that is, a medium that has been absorbed into the mainstream (Berry 2020, Bonini 2015). In framing the podcast as a boundary object, we argue that podcasting may yet possess radical potential, especially in its

use as a research object and method: in cultivating and recording moments of community between and among academics and various social groups, podcasting may disrupt extant institutional, political, and cultural hierarchies. We argue further that the potential of podcasting in general lies not only in bringing together likeminded communities, but also in its role as a bridge and a reflection of the politics of everyday life in a local context.

Accordingly, podcasts deploy the format's affordances (Dubber 2013) to provide a space for rich, sometimes unlikely, intimacies to emerge.

We end by discussing what is at stake in archiving this emergence in a publicly available format, considering what such texts might mean for both research and for a society reckoning with the relationship between migration, community, and belonging.

Podcasting as Boundary Object

Podcasting's development 'from a do-it-yourself, amateur niche medium into a commercial mass medium' (Bonini 2015: 27) is well-documented in the radio studies literature (Berry 2015, 2020; Cwynar 2015; Fox, Berry, and Llinares 2018; Patterson 2016; Spinelli and Dann 2019; Sullivan 2018). However, despite podcasting's mass appeal and its continuing 'formalization' (Sullivan 2018), podcasting remains a term that is highly contested by podcast producers, scholars, and those within the radio industry. Richard Berry argues that the huge diversity of audio media and production practices that can be accommodated under the term *podcasting* demonstrates that 'the tensions between the political, technical, economic and cultural means of defining 'podcasting' are live debates that are yet to be settled' (Berry 2020: 68).

Literature that documents podcasting's activist potential has recognised the significance of podcasting's intimate personal narratives and argued that they are important in building solidarity amongst and across marginalized groups (de los Ríos 2020; Florini 2019;

Vrikki and Malik 2019). In her research on Black American podcasting networks, Florini states that part of podcasting's political power exists in its potential to convene intimate listening publics, in what she terms 'enclaves' (Florini 2019: 69). Podcasting's audio enclaves are for Florini 'quasi-private spaces', which provide an important opportunity for unpoliced conversation and the building of 'counterhegemonic' solidarities among marginalized groups (Florini 2019: 69, 71, and 79). In her research on podcasting as an 'acoustic pedagogical tool' (de los Ríos 2020: 2) for Chicax/Latinx high school students in the Southwest of the United States, de los Ríos also argues that podcasting can be a resource to build solidarity among marginalized youth connecting their 'personal experiences to broader pressing discourses about immigration, language, racialization processes and resistance' (1). This literature acknowledging podcasting's progressive potential, as a tool for both teaching and building solidarities, provides important insights into podcasting's value as a boundary object.

Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer define boundary objects as those scientific objects that

are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites [...] They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation. (Star and Griesemer 1989: 393)

Boundary objects reside between social worlds or communities of practice' (Star 2010), and so can mean different things to different stakeholders. However, in order to function as a means of communication and cooperation, a boundary object must at the same time be cohesive enough to satisfy the criteria of an 'ideal type' – a "“good enough” road map for all parties' (Star and Griesemer 1989: 410). Star and Griesemer observe that boundary objects

and the translations they afford are important within transdisciplinary research, where collaborators from different communities of practice seek to work together to produce new knowledge. Podcasting emerged as a productive boundary object within the *Picturing Home* project because podcasting as a mode of media production was familiar, accessible, and useful for all participants, but podcasting was also adaptable and unsettled enough to allow different stakeholders to pursue their own interests within the podcast production.

The *Picturing Home* podcast also emerged as an important boundary object within this ethnographic artistic research project because its privileging of voice and listening as modes of engagement afforded the researchers and Konstkupan participants the opportunity to create and share intimate personal narratives exploring experiences of migration, home, and belonging. Mia Lindgren argues that the ‘movement towards personal narratives [in podcasting] is intrinsically linked to the intimate nature of the audio medium’ (Lindgren 2016: 2). Radio’s potential to afford intimate storytelling and listening experience is well documented in the literature (Chignell 2009; Crisell 1994 [1986]; Douglas 2004; Loviglio 2005). Podcast scholars argue further that radio’s intimacy becomes strongly emphasized in podcasting (Florini 2019; Murray 2019; Spinelli & Dann 2019), with Berry stating that while radio is an intimate medium, ‘podcasting takes this a stage further and offers, in many instances, a sense of “hyper-intimacy”’ (Berry 2016: 666).

If we understand podcasting as a boundary object that connects and translates between diverse communities of practice, its political significance lies in its potential to convene small, diverse, but attentive ‘listening publics’ (Lacey 2013b) among its producers, participants, and niche audiences. Following Kate Lacey, we use the term listening public to emphasize the political agency of listening as a ‘critical activity of individuals *producing* and participating in political and public culture’ (Lacey 2013a: 13, emphasis in original).

The Making of *Picturing Home*

Studies at the nexus of migration and media have frequently centred on framing in news coverage (e.g., Lawlor 2015; Varju and Plaut 2017; Lulle and Ungure 2015; Caviedes 2015; Berry, Garcia Blanco and Moore, 2016, etc.), or how migrants use media technologies and platforms to negotiate both their movements between places and issues related to immigration practicalities and, further on, their identities, upon arrival (e.g., Gillespie et al., 2016; Frouws et al., 2016). In privileging social, digital, and mass media, this literature obscures the grounded production of migrants themselves. While popular texts and academic studies of online behaviours and digital communities in diaspora certainly do exist (e.g., Houssein 2013, Dekker and Engbersen 2014), relatively few of these are dedicated to podcasting.

To be sure, there are increasing numbers of podcasts dedicated to narrating the various experiences and challenges of migration. Podcast series like *Al Empire* and *Kerning Cultures* examine stories from the Arab world and the Arab diaspora. Other podcasts – like *Displaced*, *Refugees on Air*, and *Refugees' Stories Podcast* – deal specifically with the stories of refugees. It seems a glaring oversight that while there are numerous academic podcasts *about* migration, there is scant research on podcasting in the *context of* migration. Indeed, the relative ease of the podcasting format makes it accessible for underrepresented groups to tell their stories, a fact that should interest scholars of media and migration.

The ambition to produce the *Picturing Home* podcast together with Konstkupan emerged from a long engagement with the organization and the desire to embrace and explore further the community arts practices that Konstkupan had been developing since its opening in 2017. Konstkupan's work with newly arrived young migrants exists within a Swedish political context in which attitudes towards migration have become increasingly polarized. The 2018 Eurobarometer published by the European Commission showed that less than 25% of Swedes felt the country's approach to integration had been successful. Anna Lund and

Andrea Voyer (2020), who researched young people in Malmö, refer to a ‘crisis of meaning’, in which Swedes feel their national identity is at a crisis point and so react by subjecting non-ethnic Swedes to everyday racism and exclusion. In order to combat stigmatization, they write, there must be ‘a shift from the assimilative mode of incorporation – that there is one way to be Swedish – to the multicultural mode: a recognition of the equal civil status of new groups’ cultural characteristics’ (Lund and Voyer 2020: 198).

Konstkupan is one of those organizations in Malmö seeking to challenge the dominant assimilationist rhetoric in Sweden by creating spaces within which diverse expressions of Swedish-ness can be produced. Erin Cory, one of the authors of this article, initiated an action research engagement together with Konstkupan soon after the project was initiated in 2017, spending time with Konstkupan’s participants and project leaders at their community art space in Sofielund, Malmö. As part of this engagement and in collaboration with Konstkupan’s project leaders, Erin devised *Picturing Home* as a series of in-situ workshops – proposing photography, collage, walking and sound-mapping, as collaborative art methods within action research. This project deployed a methodology that O’Neill describes as ‘ethno-mimesis’, which is ‘a combination of ethnographic work and artistic re-presentations of the ethnographic developed through participatory action research’ (O’Neill 2005: n.p.). Ethno-mimesis involves the interlocutor’s (in O’Neill’s work, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers) taking on the role of storyteller and working with an ethnographer and an artist to ‘find ways and means of re-presenting her story facilitated by the collaborative process’ (O’Neill & Hubbard 2010: 48) in order to encourage the discursive shifts akin to those promoted by Lund and Voyer (2020).

Scheduled to begin in early March 2020, the in-situ *Picturing Home* workshops were canceled at short notice as the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic became apparent.

Although Sweden’s guidelines on restricted movement and physical meetings were lax compared to other European countries, Konstkupan shut down to protect its members and the

general public. Without a physical space in which to meet, Erin and Konstkupan's directors had to reconsider what might be possible. Hugo joined the project at this juncture and brought with him a wealth of audio technology experience, which was instrumental in adapting the workshops and production methods to online and digital formats. This rescheduled online project took place in April–June 2020, in the form of five three-hour online Zoom workshops, related podcast recordings, and a 'digital archive' on Instagram composed of stories posted by workshop participants.¹ Each online workshop was organized around a particular theme with sessions like 'Sounds Like Home' or 'Teaching Home'. Participants were encouraged to share with each other objects, photographs, songs, and sounds from their own homes as prompts to tell their stories of migration and home-making in Sweden. With the permission of the participants all the Zoom workshop sessions were recorded as audio.

After each online workshop, one or two of the workshop participants were invited to contribute to a podcast recording. Following the long-form interview and discussion format common to podcasting (Florini, 2019; Vrikki and Malik, 2019), the podcast recording allowed both the researcher hosting the podcast and the participants to return to work produced during the Zoom workshops and explore the themes around migration, home, and belonging in greater depth. The production process for the podcast followed the production conventions common to radio 'magazine programmes' (Åberg 1997; Chignell 2009: 30), with short audio clips from the workshop recordings selected, edited, and organized into a loose structure or 'running order' by the researchers before the recording. During the recording of the podcast the researchers and participants listened the audio clips taken from the Zoom workshops developing an iterative process in which participants explored how the sounds and stories shared by others during the workshops resonated with their own experiences of migration and making home in Sweden.

Picturing Home: The Making and Deployment of a Boundary Object

In what follows, we elaborate on the *Picturing Home* podcast, narrating its production, how it was used by participants, and its value as a research object. In tracing the podcast's emergence as a research object, we analyse its role as a site of collaborative media production (Löwgren and Reimer: 2013) that brought together diverse stakeholders and produced rich documentation of the *Picturing Home* project in an audio format. In exploring the value of the *Picturing Home* podcast as a research object, we apply the categories of boundary objects –ideal type and repository – laid out by Star and Griesemer (1989) in their foundational work. We develop this analysis in applying the subsequent work by Star (2010), which refines and furthers the boundary object concept specifically in its application to artistic research (Schindler 2020). Following the multimodal nature of this research, our analysis draws on observations made during the production of the podcast, but it also includes an analysis of the final podcast episodes and reflections from a participant on the experience of listening back to finished podcasts. The podcasts produced during this research are available through SoundCloud and syndicated via iTunes, and we hope that readers will complement their reading of this analysis by engaging with the audio material that it addresses.ⁱⁱ

Institutional Context: Konstkupan as Boundary Infrastructure

The ethnomimetic methodologies of the *Picturing Home* project were strongly informed by the activist and community arts practices that Konstkupan had already successfully established during the three years that it has supported young migrants in Malmö. Konstkupan was set up as a space where new arrivals and locals could engage in artistic practices of their choosing. While it hosted regular workshops, Konstkupan also provided supplies that participants could use for whatever sort of art they wanted to create. With a stated mission to connect new arrivals with others in the city and support them in gaining access to the public space and public

institutions from which they were often excluded, Konstkupan was in many ways itself already positioned as a boundary object – a common space where individuals could express themselves through the tools and supplies at hand, working together with practitioners and teachers from diverse artistic disciplines. In connecting Konstkupan and its participants with teachers and researchers working at Malmö University, *Picturing Home* sought to contribute to this key part of Konstkupan’s mission by providing a bridge between young migrants in Malmö and the city’s university. In her later work on boundary objects, Star (2010) suggests we consider ‘object’ in its broadest terms, as a ‘set of work arrangements that are at once material and processual’ (604). Star argues that boundary work occurs within infrastructure that ‘both shapes and is shaped by the conventions of a community of practice’ (611). Accordingly, in *Picturing Home*, Konstkupan can be understood as a boundary infrastructure within which diverse boundary work can prosper; a site of collaboration that can accommodate different meanings for different users; an employer to some in this project; a safe haven for others; and, for the authors of this article, a research object that might offer insight into the complex politics of migration in Malmö and Sweden.

Production Process: Podcast as Ideal Type

A focus on the conditions and processes in and through which boundary objects come into being allows us to track how they ‘tack back-and-forth’ between the specific and the abstract (Star 2010: 605). Part of *Picturing Home*’s specificity arises from the intimate and personal narratives afforded by podcasting as an audio medium, but podcasting first emerged as a productive format in the context of this project because with a legacy of DIY, amateur, and activist engagement podcasting also constituted a continuation of conditions already in place in the larger Konstkupan organization.

The original in-situ workshops planned to take place at Konstkupan’s community arts

space had been centred around collaborative and ethnomimetic methods. When we were faced with taking these workshops and methods into digital space, podcasting was embraced by participants partly because the technologies were familiar and accessible but also because podcasting was well suited to the type of collaborative arts practice already established at Konstakupan. Deploying an ethnomimetic methodology meant centring the work on the stories and experiences of our interlocutors. However, in the case of the podcast, this was done in a way that engaged stories of many individuals in the creation of a single project. Thus, while participants (and producers) were engaged with the same endeavor (creating a podcast), what they contributed to it and took away from it was formulated from their own experiences, stories, and desires, a key component of boundary work. The push and pull of scripting, narrating, and editing required intensive collaboration between key stakeholders – between participants, between participants and producers, and between the producers themselves, but the loose structure of the long-form interview and discussion format common to podcasting allowed space for the participants to tell their own stories in their own way.

This plasticity of boundary objects means that actors can collaborate on them without necessarily coming to a consensus about what they mean. Star and Griesemer (1989) state that boundary objects are ‘weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individual use’ (393). However, to function successfully as a boundary object there has to exist first broad agreement on an object as an ‘ideal type’. All participants in *Picturing Home* were already generally familiar with podcasting as a cultural text, even if they had previously never participated in recording one; thus, podcasting’s popularity and the diversity of audio content which the term can accommodate ensured that all participants recognised podcasting as an ‘ideal type’. Once participants recognised podcasting as an ideal type which could accommodate different interests, the participants could ‘tack back-and-forth’ between a vague common object and a more specific individual use (Star 2010: 605). We argue that the

possibility for each individual to identify specific use and value within the project helped to motivate sustained engagement during the difficult and disruptive circumstances caused by the first wave of a global pandemic. For Konstkupan's employees and project leaders, the podcast became a way to document and promote their activities as artists and curators, while also promoting the broader Konstkupan project. For the authors, the podcast recording offered an important opportunity to conduct longer semi-structured interviews with participants and talk in greater depth with them about their artistic practice and their experience of migration. While for Jasmin, a participant new to Konstkupan, participation in the podcast became important for its therapeutic value. In Episode 2, she says:

It's hard for me to come up with a definition [of home] but it's also hard to connect with what [...] home traditionally means, so doing this was part of a little bit of a challenge, but in a good way. My brother actually encouraged me to do this he said it would be kind of therapeutic. ('Episode Two: Talking Photos', May 2020)

Drawing on the methods and communication practices already in use by Konstkupan *Picturing Home* worked to instigate multi-modal processes that combined together different media, including Instagram and Zoom video conference for generating source material, Zencast for recording the podcast, and SoundCloud and iTunes for distributing the finished podcast. Participants were already well-versed in social media use, with their own personal Facebook and Instagram accounts, and were engaging with each other's posts on the Instagram feed that had been created specifically for the project. The Zoom video conferences that were used to connect workshop participants already established a measure of intimacy by bringing participants into each-others homes. Structured around 'tasks' that encouraged participants to reflect on experiences of migration, home and belonging the initial Zoom workshops allowed space for improvisation and spontaneity with participants from

Konstkupan and Malmö University getting to know each other in a convivial environment facilitated by Erin.

Jasmin noted in an interview after the project's culmination that the iterative and multimedia aspect of the overall project was important to her and helped her to feel 'safer' in sharing publicly on the podcast:

Having the podcast done in connection with the [Zoom] workshop made it easier. I don't think we would have had as many of the same discussions that we ended up having if we had only had the podcast. Because in a lot of ways the podcast was more about reflecting more on what we talked about in the workshop, in a space that was more comfortable, and accepting, where people felt safe sharing.

Using podcasting as a method to revisit material produced during the Zoom workshops, and deciding that podcasting would be used to document this project, involved shifting the production to an audio-only environment. The clips extracted from the workshop were in audio only and the recordings were done using Zencaster an audio only voice over internet protocol (VoIP). In her reflections on the project Jasmin noted that the shift to an audio only mode of engagement helped to encourage a more intimate mode of engagement:

The difference between doing the workshops and seeing each other, and then the podcast and only focusing on hearing, makes it stand out in a different way, because you don't have that distraction. You focus on what the person is actually saying, you listen more, and how that feels to you then, based on the tone of their voice and the words they are saying.

Jasmin's comments here suggest the potential of podcasting and other audio media that destabilize the established hierarchy of senses, in which the visual dominates the auditory (Lacey 2013: 3). The shift from a very open and exploratory workshop environment involving all the participants to a more focused and structured audio-only conversation with only one or two participants, afforded the enhanced intimacy of personal narratives that Mia Lindgren describes (2016).

The informal nature of the recording enabled participants the opportunity to direct the arc of each episode and offered them the freedom to introduce new elements that had not been anticipated by the researchers. The loose and collaborative nature of recording also enabled researchers to agree with participants on what personal information could be included and what details should be removed from the final edited version of the programme.

For example, during one recording session, a participant told the story of their underground tattoo studio. Because their case was not yet settled in the migration system, whether or not to include this conversation became a topic of intense conversation. Star and Griesemer (1989) point to these moments in which the ‘marginal’ nature of some experiences becomes visible, and the interplay of multiple social worlds and identities needs to be addressed (411).

In this case, the participant had discussed tattoo work within the safety of the workshop setting, where other participants were apprised of their precarious migration status and had given their word to protect the participant by not speaking about their status or trade outside of the workshop. The familiarity of the workshop environment bled over into the podcast recording. Because Erin has looked extensively into the Swedish migration system as part of her research, she was especially concerned about what the public nature of the podcast might mean for this particular participant. After some discussion, the participants and producers of that episode agreed to edit out this story in favour of another anecdote from the same participant, thus engaging in the ‘central cooperative task’ of standardized forms, which is the “translation” of each other’s perspectives’ (412).

Involving participants in production tasks – including scripting, editing, and recording – was an ethical decision (as will be discussed later) and also opened up layers of discussion about episodes’ content and lines of inquiry. What ended up as audio content demonstrates

something of the ways a boundary object both connects communities and reflects their differences.

‘We Should Make a New Club for Non-Fitting People’: Resonance and Dissonance

In Episode 2, Jasmin listened to a clip from Sara, a Swedish university researcher, talking about a photo from her childhood. Sara brought this photo to a workshop and told the group about the sensory memories it evokes for her, of lying in a pool of light in her childhood living room. Now, Sara said, she looks for that same kind of light wherever she lives. In the podcast recording, Jasmin responds to this clip by noting that she looks for light like this too, as it reminds her of a swing in her grandmother’s garden in Baghdad. Listening to Sara brought back for Jasmin deeply rooted sensory memories of home, which she has tried to recapture in Malmö, particularly in a place she enjoys sitting in a local park. After the podcast went live, Jasmin reflected that the second time she heard Sara talk about the light in her living room, ‘It resonated more, I could close my eyes listening to her talk and be in my own light’ (‘Episode 2: Talking Photos’, 2020).

In the exchanges between Sara and Jasmin, both live in the workshop setting and then re-told in the podcast, we see some of what Schindler (2020), following work in psychology and psychotherapy in her discussion of the boundary object, calls ‘synchrony’. The theorists Schindler engages describe synchrony as emerging from ‘interaction partners’, people who are working together on a task. It is a feeling of ‘mutual comprehension, which is mirrored in bodies that behave, move, and perceive similarly’ (Koole and Tschacher 2016: 9; cited in Schindler 2020: 111). This synchrony ‘refers to activities that are carried out at the same time, that are coordinated, composed, and that follow a common rhythm’ (Schindler 2020: 111). And yet, we might deploy this concept as something that offers a way of understanding the sensory connections Jasmin, Sara, and others in our group experienced.

Jasmin's invocation of resonance recalls Kate Lacey's work, in which she describes the intimacy afforded by radio formats:

It is apposite to think of speech resonating with the listener. Resonance is a property of acoustic space that is a form of causality, but not the linear causality associated with visual culture. Resonance is therefore about responsiveness, but it need not be responsiveness in kind, nor need it be immediate. A speech can resonate with a listener without the listener responding in speech. (Lacey 2013: 166-167)

While Jasmin did not experience lying in the sun with Sara in real time, both the workshop and podcast provided a space where their specific memories of seeking light could be remembered by both participants, and felt anew. For Lacey, mediated listening is not necessarily passive; rather, audio formats afford an intimacy that is not determined by limitations of time or space, nor is it predicated on 'immediate responsiveness' (166).

Like Lacey, Schindler (2020) notes that not all synchrony comes from experiences happening in tandem. Rather, she writes, synchrony can refer to things that exist in *correspondence* to each other; indeed, 'the pure ability or will to synchronize does not necessarily lead to synchrony' (112). Instead, we might trace the synchrony precipitated by *Picturing Home* through how '(the) ability to synchronize with others enables emotion contagion [...] [It] allows us to spontaneously embody the affective experiences of familiar others, and this embodiment fosters better social understanding' (Wheatley, Kang, Parkinson, and Looser 2012: 594, cited in Schindler 2020: 111).

In Schindler's understanding, this 'emotional contagion' presumes a togetherness or understanding that is deeply positive, in that it has the power to *bridge* the divides between particular people or communities. However, we argue that there is another dimension to this emotional contagion. As Star and Griesemer (1989) themselves pointed out, *context matters*.

Boundary objects cannot exist fully apart from the social and political conditions that preceded them or necessitated their construction.

In Episode 5, 'Sounds Like Home', Jasmin and Malin, a Swedish researcher native to Malmö, had a conversation that began as a response to an audio clip from the workshop that illustrated the sounds of protest in Malmö and the public demonstrations that often take place in the district of Mollevången, where Malin had lived as a child. Eventually, the conversation veered toward recent events in Malmö, particularly the Black Lives Matter protests, and how the sounds of protest reflect the racial politics of the city. The episode became a record of two people from very different backgrounds agreeing on the importance of the global protests and also taking issue with some of the local logistics, especially the apparent cooptation by white organizers. Jasmin and Malin's passion for the issue appears to be an example of the emotional contagion relayed through the boundary object of the podcast. However, as Jasmin later reflected, while she felt connected to Malin in talking about the significance of the protests, at the same time, she also noticed the difference in their cultures. Malin mentioned in the episode that she did not attend some of the protests because of her worry about cooptation. But for Jasmin, as someone 'coming from a background where a lot of important issues don't get addressed' and now 'living in a country where you can voice your opinions', being able to attend a protest for an issue important to oneself or one's friends feels like a privilege she would not want to miss out on ('Episode 5: Sounds Like Home', 2020).

The dissonance Jasmin described in her reflection on this conversation recalls Star and Griesemer's (1989) argument that the acceptance of a boundary object by a diverse range of stakeholders does not necessarily mean there is consensus on the meanings or representations produced in or by the boundary objects. It is rather that the boundary objects themselves become a site at which disagreements can be negotiated by different stakeholders and it is through this process of negotiation that the boundary objects come to carry the

‘traces of multiple viewpoints, translations and incomplete battles’ (412) in their representations.

This significance of dissonance in practices of listening is addressed specifically by political scientist Susan Bickford. Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, Bickford (1996) stresses the importance of listening in political engagement, but also states that listening and its political communicative engagement ‘does not necessarily take its meaning from, or its purpose to be, consensus’ (24). For Bickford political action ‘depends not on the possibility of consensus but on the presence of listening [...] Listening – as part of a conception of adversarial communication – is a crucial political activity that enables us to give democratic shape to our being together in the world’ (18-19). Bickford’s acknowledgment of a progressive listening that can accommodate dissonance opens up an important site of analysis that is often absent from extant discussions of progressive political listening, which typically emphasize only ‘empathy and compassion’ (2).

Other moments that seemed to invoke both resonance and dissonance, illustrating how boundary objects can both bridge communities and mirror persistent challenges faced by migrants, included discussions between Jasmin and Atoosa. In a clip played in Episode 2, Atoosa, Konstkupan’s artistic director who migrated to Sweden from Iran, and Jasmin bantered about questions of belonging and feeling at home.

Atoosa: I think I really enjoy not belong to anywhere right now, because it’s kind of affected everything I do. Sometimes you feel you belong to something or somewhere, it always makes effect on what you do, what you like. [...] But now because I don’t belong anywhere, I feel so free, with whatever I do. [...] I feel like a lot of things I do does not fit in the culture I come from and actually some people would want me to die, or would hate me. It would never fit there. And also, here, I never feel like I’m gonna fit here, as like a Swedish person. [...] Sometimes I ask people here, like my partner, like what does it mean to be Swedish? Like you say, ‘I’m Swedish’. What does it mean? And some people get very uncomfortable, because like, ‘I’m born

here', but like it's a deeper meaning. For me it's like, fit in to the culture, fit into the name. Like I say I'm Iranian, what does it mean? I haven't been there for more than nine years.

Jasmin: Yeah, but don't you get that feeling that people ask you where you're from, and they're like, oh you're Iranian, that makes sense, and they need to put you in that kind of box. It's hard for you to explain to them like yeah maybe I was born there or grew up there but I don't fit that specific category of being Iranian, whatever that means. Because I have that same feeling. I left where I was from when I was eight years old. And even in a neighbouring country I didn't fit in. And even meeting people from my home country, I have to swear on everything that I am Iraqi, or that I am from Iraq, and they don't believe me because I don't look, or sound, so I have to find certain things they can relate to, and they get smaller and fewer as time goes by. So, I think when I meet people like you, who don't fit in, you fit in by not fitting in, if that makes any sense.

Atoosa: Exactly. We should make a new club for non-fitting people. ('Episode 2: Talking Photos', 2020)

In thinking about hearing this exchange a second time, in the context of the podcast, Jasmin said,

Hearing that back, it brought back that, we're all the same, no matter where we come from [...] [Because I'm Iraqi] people used to make fun of me for having a friend from Iran. In Sweden, it doesn't matter, people mix them up anyway, we might as well be from the same country. We can connect over our 'foreignness'. We can connect over our feeling of being misunderstood. It gets me excited about the whole thing all over again. (('Episode 2: Talking Photos', 2020)

Jasmin's examples demonstrate how the emotions channeled through both the sound clips and synchronous conversations provoked both intimacy and a renewed critical reflection on the cultural contours of life in Sweden for someone with a migration background. The 'tacking back and forth' of the boundary object is thus not merely about the specific and the

abstract, but also about the move between specific identities and specific communities in relation to one another. The emotional contagion channeled through the audio of conversations and prerecorded clips varies, parsing out along different lines of affinity and shared experience.

It is crucial to consider not only how a boundary object is interpreted, but also the context in which it is embedded (Star 2010: 613). While we were at first keen to see the podcast as a community-builder, facilitating intimacy and solidarity between people who might not otherwise have met, and while it is safe to say that the podcast built understanding and friendship between participants, it also distilled down into an audio format some of the pressures and politics of the local Swedish context. What participants took away from their participation, and the connections they made both to each other and to their own experiences, was thus clearly different depending on their own positionality within that context. What emerged was in some respects more interesting than our hopes for a community-building project could have been: the audio content presents a rich patchwork of connections and borders, which both reflects and challenges the assimilationist politics of everyday life in contemporary Sweden.

Podcast as Research Object: Ethics, Possibilities, and Limitations

In invoking the ethnomimetic process as part of this project, we hoped to combat some of the research fatigue associated with migration studies (Karoooma 2019, Omata 2019). It was our hope that in prioritizing migrant stories and fostering a collaborative project, wherein participants had a say in the shape and content of the project and could represent themselves, we might hold space for narratives that are often put through the sieve of academic and state discourses.

Part of this ethical charge, too, was to dismantle the bordering practices of academia,

which often situate researchers, interlocutors, and the larger public as distinct communities, with the first having mostly exclusive access to the published research texts that often sit behind paywalls. As a deliberate challenge to this dynamic, which we view as limiting at best and exploitative at worst, we made a conscious decision to document and disseminate our work first and primarily as a podcast that is accessible and hopefully an entertaining listen for the participants and anyone else that wishes to download it. The public and accessible nature of podcasting, and its availability to both academic and non-academic groups, make it well-placed as an object around which myriad processes of analysis and theorisation can continue, illustrating how, as Schindler (2020) argues, ‘boundary objects that served as method during the work process can become a means of interpretation and analysis in staged environments’ (109) for both expert and non-expert groups.

The staged environments in this case are the Soundcloud and iTunes platforms, which host the podcast and where the podcast can be contextualized and made available to a wide listening public. Specifically, relevant to the podcast’s role as boundary object in this sense is its function as a ‘repository’ (Star and Griesemer 1989: 410). Repositories are ‘ordered “piles” of objects which are indexed in standardized fashion (...) People can use or borrow from the “pile” for their own purposes without having directly to negotiate differences in purpose’ (410).

The idea of boundary object as ‘repository’ captures well the experience of accessing an episode of the podcast from either platform. In both places, the podcasts are archived, labelled, and available for loan to anyone wishing to listen. On both platforms, the research material is presented with sufficient contextualisation to allow a listener to consume the podcasts as either entertainment or as part of their engagement with scientific research.

The possibility to work together within a shared space in which participants acknowledge shared interests and a desire to collaborate, without demanding total agreement on the purpose and value of the outcomes, suggests the opportunity that boundary objects

offer to work productively at the intersection of different disciplines and social worlds. However, while acknowledging the potential of podcasting as a boundary object and the translations it facilitated, we must also acknowledge that collaborative work around a boundary object does not necessarily resolve inequalities and power imbalances that are already at play between collaborators (Huvila 2011; Star 2010). Boundary objects can also reveal edges and peripheries that isolate and exclude. There exists a risk that a boundary object that works to facilitate collaboration between two or more communities of practice may also work to hinder or prevent collaboration from others (Stoytcheva 2013).

For example, although podcasting emerged as a familiar and accessible medium within which participants were happy to work, producing rich narratives strongly connected to the homes and lived experience of those participating, using the video conference application Zoom to convene workshops and Zencast recording software to record podcast episodes required access to personal computers and reliable internet connections – a fact that also worked to exclude some younger Konstkupan participants and members of the community who live in more precarious domestic situations. During an informal midproject evaluation Atoosa told us that some of the regular users of Konstkupan did not have access to or did not feel comfortable with the technologies that we chose to facilitate the project. In this case a boundary object that was particularly successful in facilitating collaboration between Malmö University researchers and Konstkupan's employees also worked to exclude other members of Konstkupan's community of practice.

In arguing for the value of podcasting as a boundary object and the potential of podcast production to open spaces for meaningful translation between different social worlds, it is also important to acknowledge that working with boundary objects does not resolve issues of power imbalance and privilege and that the access to all parts of a boundary object are not necessarily equal to all parties. In his work on archaeological reports and their function as

boundary objects, Huvila (2011) provides some useful insights into these operations, stating that ‘documentary boundary objects create and maintain hegemonies within communities and achieve authority over other intersecting communities. In general terms, it is argued that the creation or reshaping of a boundary object is always an attempt to make a hegemonic intervention’ (2536).

Although the researchers endeavoured to instigate a collaborative process in the preliminary workshops and in scripting and recording the podcasts, following the conventions of radio and podcast production as the instigators and ‘producers’ of the podcast, it was ultimately the authors of this article that decided on the final edit of the programme and published audio files online for distribution via SoundCloud and through iTunes. Although we prioritised ethical practice seeking clear and unambiguous consent for the ‘broadcasting’ of all material, in the very final stage of production there was a clear imbalance towards the choices of the researchers/producers. This is a pattern that is consistent with Huvila’s findings, in which it is observed that ‘the boundary crossings and shaping of boundary objects incorporate articulations of power even if a boundary object may appear as a seemingly consensual device’ (2537). In a follow-up interview, Jasmin indicated that she was aware of the editorial process as something in which the authors ‘shaped’ the conversation, and that she was conscious of how the script influenced her own answers – at times, she worried she would veer too much ‘off topic’ in her responses.

Power imbalances also found expression through the *Picturing Home* podcast in other ways. Although produced in Sweden together with participants that spoke a variety of languages (including Arabic, Farsi and Swedish), English remained the lingua franca of both workshops and podcast production. Using English was a choice consistent with Konstkupan’s work, where English is often used when it is a language shared between collaborators from different backgrounds. However, this dominance of English arguably privileged the

researcher/producers, who are both native English speakers, while potentially marginalising those participants less confident in English. Although the dominance of the English language points to power imbalances tolerated within the boundary object, the aural affordances of podcasting also made clear the polyglot nature of Konstkupan's work and gave it full expression, with contributions in the podcast and workshops in Arabic, Farsi, Swedish, and Spanish, although the material 'broadcast' was predominantly in English.

Conclusion

This article finds radical potential in podcasting as a boundary object. As a boundary object, podcasting affords a site of collaborative artistic production at which researchers from Malmö University and members of Konstkupan, a migrant-focused community arts space in Malmö, Sweden, can work together to produce audio narratives that explore the participants' diverse experiences of migration, home, and belonging. We argue that podcasting is successful as a boundary object because it has matured sufficiently as a medium to be accepted as an 'ideal type' (Star and Griesemer 1989: 410), yet the term podcasting still remains 'unsettled' (Berry 2020) enough to allow for it be appropriated by different participants to pursue their own interests. The acceptance of a boundary object by a diverse range of stakeholders does not demand consensus on the meanings or representations produced in or by the boundary object. As a boundary object the *Picturing Home* podcast emerged as space within which understanding and solidarity could be built in the 'synchrony' (Schindler 2020) of exchanges and narratives; however, podcasting also proved itself capable of accommodating a 'dissonance' (Bickford 1996) that resulted in the expression of power imbalances between participants that remained unresolved. Podcasting's potential in affording intimate 'personal narratives' (Lindgren 2016) contributed to its potential to afford synchrony and the formation of 'enclaves' within which Florini (2019) detects podcasting's activist potential. In

acknowledging the activist potential of podcasting as a boundary object, we dispute an increasingly dominant narrative within radio studies, which posits that as podcasting becomes ‘formalised’ (Sullivan 2018) as a commercial mass medium, its subversive potential declines. Contrary to this pessimistic view, our research demonstrates that podcasting’s legacy as a DIY, amateur, and activist medium remains imbued in the forms of engagement it affords. Its radical potential can be found in its use as an ‘acoustic pedagogical tool’ (de los Rios 2020: 2) as well as in research that connects diverse, sometimes marginalised participants and enables them to tell their own stories together. As an accessible mass medium, podcasting also offers potential to disseminate academic research in a way that circumvents the exclusionary practices of academia. We would like to see this research as an invitation within radio and audio studies to pursue the potential inclusivity of practice-based methods and to explore further sound and audio technologies at the intersection of art, activism, and academic research.

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ⁱ Please visit <https://www.instagram.com/picturing.home/>

ⁱⁱ The podcast can be found at <https://soundcloud.com/picturinghome>