Ethnomusicology, Fieldwork, and the Refugee Experience: Notes on Afghan Music in Austria

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Abstract

In this article, I discuss ethnomusicological takes on refugees and forced migration relating to five years of fieldwork within the Afghan community in Vienna. Against the background of the recent surge in ethnomusicological studies on forced migration, I critically interrogate my own positionality in relation to the coloniality of asylum that inherently racializes relations between researchers and refugees in ethnographic work. I then review narratives of "crises" and effects of "borders" in relation to migration between Afghanistan and Europe, specifically Austria.

In the article's main section, various scenarios of Afghan musical practice in Vienna are outlined while offering insights into the musical worlds of the city's Afghan diaspora both regarding online and offline settings. I approach music as an everyday practice with a perspective strongly shaped by my friendship with Qais Behbood and Bahram Ajezyar. I then specifically discuss Afghan pop music, presenting two Vienna-based singers, Dawood Sarkhosh and Masih Shadab, referring to song examples.

Concludingly, I address relationships, partnerships and friendships in ethnographic field-work on forced migration. I contrast friendship with the coloniality of asylum-related research on music and dance and suggest friendship and affection as an ethnographic mode.

Dari Abstract

موسیقی شناسی قومی، تحقیق میدانی، و تجربهٔ پناهندگی:

یادداشت هایی در مورد موسیقی افغانی در اتریش

مارکو کولبل

چکیده

در این مقاله من در مورد پناهندگان و مهاجرت اجباری از نگاه موسیقی شناسی قومی بحث میکنم. این اثر بر
اساس پنج سال تحقیق میدانی در میان جامعهٔ مهاجرین افغان در ویانا تهیه شده است. در بستر افزایش مجدد
تحقیقات موسیقی‌شناسی قومی دربارهٔ مهاجرت اجباری، من با نگاهی انتقادی موقعیت خودم را در رابطه با
پناهندگی، که پدیده ای استعماری است و در تحقیقات موسیقی قومی رابطهٔ محققان با پناهندگان را
نژادی می‌کند، بررسی می‌کنم. سپس روایت‌های «بحران» و تأثیرات «مرزها» را در رابطه با مهاجرت بین
افغانستان و اروپا، به‌ویژه اتریش، مرور می‌کنم.

در بخش اصلی مقاله، من سناریوهایی مختلفی را در مورد جایگاه موسیقی در میان جامعهٔ افغانی در ویانا
به بررسی گرفته و ایده هایی را در مورد جهان موسیقایی دیاسپورای افغان در این شهر، چه آنلاین و چه در
محیط فیزیکی، ارائه می‌دهم. من با موسیقی به عنوان یک عمل روزمره برخورد کرده و با دیدگاهی به آن می
بینم که به شدت از دوستی من با قیس بهبود و بهرام عاجزیار شکل گرفته است. من به طور خاص در مورد
موسیقی پاپ افغانستان صحبت می کنم و دو خوانندهٔ ساکن ویانا به نام های داوود سرخوش و مسیح شاداب
را با اشاره به نمونه هایی از آهنگ های شان معرفی می کنم.

در پایان، من به روابط فردی، شراکت، و دوستی در کار میدانی قوم نگارانه در مورد مهاجرت اجباری می
پردازم. من دوستی را با ماهیت استعماری تحقیقاتی که مربوط به موسیقی و رقص پناهندگان می شود مقایسه
کرده و دوستی و محبت را به عنوان حالتی از قوم نگاری پیشنهاد می کنم.

German Abstract

Ethnomusikologie, Feldforschung und Fluchterfahrung:
Bemerkungen zu afghanischer Musik in Österreich

Basierend auf fünf Jahren Feldforschung mit der afghanischen Community in Wien nimmt
dieser Artikel ethnomusikologische Standpunkte zu Flucht und Geflüchteten ein. Angesichts der
rezenten Zunahme an ethnomusikologischer Fluchtforschung, hinterfrage ich meine eigene
Positionalität in Bezug auf koloniale Logiken von Asyl und deren rassifizierende Effekte auf die
Beziehungen zwischen Forschenden und Geflüchteten in ethnographischer Forschung. Ich gehe
weiters auf Krisennarrative und die Auswirkung von Grenzsystemen in Bezug auf die Migration
zwischen Afghanistan und Europa, insbesondere Österreich, ein.

Der Hauptteil des Artikels stellt verschiedene Szenarien afghanischer Musikpraxis in Wien vor und bietet Einblicke in die musikalischen Welten der Wiener afghanischen Diaspora, sowohl online als auch offline. Musik wird dabei als alltägliche Praxis verstanden – meine Perspektive ist stark von meiner Freundschaft mit Qais Behbood und Bahram Ajezyar geprägt. Ein besonderer Fokus liegt auf afghanischer Popmusik, die anhand von zwei Wiener Sängern, Dawood Sarkhosh und Masih Shadab näher erläutert wird.

Abschließend thematisiere ich Beziehungen, Partner*innenschaft und Freund*innenschaft in ethnographischer Feldforschung zu Flucht. Ich kontrastiere Freund*innenschaft mit der Kolonialität von asylbezogener Forschung zu Musik und Tanz und stelle Freund*innenschaft und Zuneigung als ethnographische Methode in den Raum.

Introduction: Refugees as Academic Fashion

Humans' right to mobility varies with their place of birth. Put as bluntly as that, this fact plainly exposes its absurdity. Yet, people from the Global North often fail to fathom the extent to which they have normalized the criminalization and policing of human movement from the Global South. Migration, they have learned, brings "crisis." Asylum seekers, they are being taught, must earn their right to stay. Governments and tabloid media throughout the Global North tend to successfully frame asylum as an optional charity – a humanist and humanitarian act that depends on the respective state's benevolence. The underlying mission, keeping refugees away, faces less and less rebellion as it is backed up by multilateral agreements that pursue increasingly restrictive border regimes,[1] especially since their temporal breakdown during the long summer of migration in 2015 (Hess et al. 2017). Leftist political activism and academia generally oppose these restrictive asylum policies. The opposition, however, frequently and implicitly fosters colonial logics of asylum and essentialist ideas of Europeanness, as I will discuss in this introductory section.

Since the long summer of migration, asylum-related research in Ethnomusicology has significantly gained momentum (see for example Öğüt 2015; 2021; Kurtişoğlu, Öztürk, and Hajj 2016; Caruso 2017; 2019; Emery 2017; Karimi 2017; Kölbl 2018; 2020; Gill 2019; Prieske 2019; Sechehaye and Martiniello 2019; Simonett 2019; Christidis 2020; Pistrick 2020; Western 2020). Amidst this heated debate, a considerable number of ethnomusicologists felt the need, if not a responsibility, to engage with refugees and their music. For a discipline that is deemed to deal with cultural diversity and the "Other" (see Wong 2006), it seemed only logical to engage with the people whose cultural differences and ethnic Otherness were the central topic of media discourse. This (recent) surge in ethnomusicological studies on music and forced migration, however, also shows how academia is invested in engaging with topical political struggle, and how the humanities gain legitimacy in narrating not only the experiences of refugees but also their pain.

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[1] Recent examples of such multilateral agreements are the London Compact 2018 (United Nations 2018) and the EU Pact on Migration 2020 (European Commission 2020).

Anthropologist Heath Cabot (2019: 261) stresses how problematic metaphors like "waves" and "flows" – often used to describe migrating humans – actually also pertain to the rise of ethnographic scholarship on refugees. Following discussions on forced migration related to the Second World War and the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, the "recent fascination with refugees" (ibid.) in academia is connected with the possibility of carrying out research in one's hometown or simply travelling to the European South. The so-called "refugee crisis," Cabot argues was "sexy and exciting when it arrived on Europe's shores," rendering scholars to "heroes in moments of first response" (ibid.: 265). Scholarship on refugees, however, actually follows the logics of "crisis chasing," adding to the exceptionalism that surrounds the figure of the refugee, as Cabot (ibid.: 264–265) sharply analyses. Following this line of argument, scholarship on refugees is thus indeed "part of the refugee regime" (ibid.: 265). It benefits from being framed as "socially relevant" and simultaneously reiterates the logics of marginalization and coloniality that it seeks to critique.

Fieldwork and the Coloniality of Asylum

My own path towards researching music and dance within the Afghan refugee experience shows a similar pattern. A few months after the long summer of migration 2015, my colleague Ursula Hemetek and I had already finished a draft of a connected research project description. Our university, mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, was eager to not only support the project financially but also by providing housing on campus. Given the department's focus on ethnomusicological minority research,[2] we felt the necessity to engage with the supposedly "new musics" that were about to become part of Vienna's soundscape. After 14 young asylum seekers from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan had moved into their rooms on university campus, we started our research project titled "Musical Identifications of Young Refugees" – which seemed like a good topic to start with. We embarked on fieldwork rather unprepared, without any deeper knowledge on the musical backgrounds and the migration paths of our field partners. Weekly fieldwork sessions that focused on music consumption and musical preferences, however, quickly helped us learn about respective countries of origin, the particularities of migration experiences, and the significance of music and dance. Furthermore, we were able to form friendships, some of which grew into important private as well as professional relationships over the years.

In the first months of our fieldwork, we started focussing on Afghan music, since the thriving musical life of the Afghan community had already been palpable in Vienna. Although "participatory research" and "dialogical knowledge production" had been part of our research design from the very beginning, it was only during this initial fieldwork that these buzzwords gained meaning. As we started attending Afghan

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[2] Ethnomusicological research on music and minorities constitutes a prime research area at mdw's Department of Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology since the 1990s (Hemetek n.d.).

musical events, festivities and concerts together, it was the young Afghans living on campus that provided us with an understanding of the necessary cultural, linguistic and musical expertise needed in the field. Since engaging with music at concerts and parties provided joy and meaning during the precarity of asylum processes, these regular activities were of great value. The collaborative idea was especially important for choosing the musical events and taking a community-based perspective – relating to both the social positionality and the camera lens (Kölbl 2018).

Two years later, the initially pursued focus on musical identifications shifted towards an ethnography of Afghan music in Vienna. While the young asylum seekers had already left the flats on campus, having moved to other shared flats in the city, some of them remained our most important research partners. Here, "research partners" is not a euphemism for interlocutors, informants or respondents, meant to avoid the outdated hierarchical concepts these terms semantically transport. "Research partners" rather refers to actual partnership and friendship in the field that form the very basis of the ethnographic knowledge presented in this article.

The relation between ethnomusicologists and people seeking asylum, however, is inherently hierarchical, even if a given research description strives to foreground equity. In her sharp analysis of the production of racialized subjectivities within refugee activism and social work, Fiorenza Picozza (2021) demonstrates how the "coloniality of asylum" tacitly shapes relations between asylum seekers and leftist refugee activists. Refugee activism and social work show striking parallels to ethnographic refugee research. In their interaction with refugees, both fields fore-ground solidarity as well as "political and moral commitment" (ibid.: 148). In both settings "coloniality renders refugee newcomers … objects of someone else's compassion" (ibid.: xvii).

Ethnomusicological refugee research not only takes place in a highly politicised field but also often claims to actively engage in political struggle. It does so, however, "through the asymmetry of struggling for someone else" (ibid.: 148). In Europe, ethnomusicological refugee researchers are often white, situated in academia, and perceived as European, while the people they engage with receive highly racialized attributions as to their non-whiteness and "non-Europeanized" (Hesse 2007: 656; see also Picozza 2021: xvi) situatedness. The racialized relations between researchers and refugees mirror more general representational imbalances within music and dance research and evoke "the ways that predominantly white scholars … presumed that they understood BIPOC and were authorities on cultures to which they did not belong," as experienced by Danielle Brown (2020) at conferences of the Society for Ethnomusicology.

In their pioneering work on decolonizing ethnography in (undocumented) migrant research settings, Carolina Alonso Bejarano, Lucia López Juárez, Mirian A. Mijangos García, and Daniel M. Goldstein (2019: 136) argue that anthropology's coloniality is expressed in its central method, ethnography, and its subsequent forms of theorizing and writing. The academic researcher's sovereignty over choosing methods and questions, over sorting out and analysing data, and over deciding what, how and for

whom to write reiterates imbalances and epistemological dominance (ibid.: 28). Those with experiences of forced migration – now often subjects of "(neo)colonial aggression and exploitation" – however, are not only knowledge bearers but need to be acknowledged as "capable knowledge producers" (ibid.: 136–137).

While music and dance researchers whose biography entails experiences of forced migration add central positions to the discourse, I want to stress that white, majority-privileged researchers generally experience easier access to the education, the resources, and the social and cultural capital necessary to engage with academic studies on music and asylum. This research setting not only creates the figure of the "refugee" but also departs from the assumption of the figure of the "researcher." In ethnographic music research, the figure of the "refugee" represents a recent musical influx, a cultural addition stemming from cultural realms outside European borders, while the figure of the "researcher" embodies a "specifically European and postcolonial 'good' whiteness, premised on liberal, democratic and humanitarian discourses" (Picozza 2021: xxiii). This distinction, Picozza (2021: xxiv) argues, inherently renders refugees as "external" to Europe. Accordingly, the fact that (people whose ancestors once were) refugees and their music have already been part of Europe for centuries usually eludes present narrations of music and forced migration.

On Borders and Crises: Between Afghanistan and Europe

European media and governments have created a tenacious name for the migrations of the summer months of 2015: the "refugee crisis." This proclaimed crisis – generally framed as being brought *to* Europe – actually was and is a crisis experienced and produced *by* Europe, or, as Tom Western puts it, "a crisis of political will and morality" (2020: 306). During the temporal breakdown of Europe's racist and classist border regime (Hess et al. 2017), the crisis metaphor was advantageous since it successfully identifies refugees as a problem external to Europe. The long summer of migration accordingly constituted a crisis of the border regime – however, it never stopped being a "crisis of the refugees themselves" (Tazzioli 2017: 13).

During this long summer of migration (the term signifies a broader time frame, encompassing the years before and after 2015), the Afghan community in Austria grew considerably. Between 2015 and 2019, Afghans constituted the largest group of asylum seekers in Austria, the majority of which were unaccompanied male minors (Kohlbacher, Lehner, and Rasuly-Paleczek 2020). With around 50,000 people in 2020, Afghans represent the biggest Asian community in Austria (ibid.). While there had already been large Afghan communities in countries like the UK and Germany (emerging after the Soviet Coup in 1978, see below), the migrations of 2015/16 were constitutive for the Afghan community in Austria, as was the case in the Netherlands and Sweden. From this perspective, the proclaimed "crisis" pertains to the formation of new minorities, to demographic innovations that in essence are individual's lived

realities. Not only are there human lives behind these statistical numbers, they also indicate a social life and a cultural realm with musical happenings.

"Crises" have also shaped Afghanistan's history, especially in the last four decades. Afghanistan's constitutional monarchy – today often romanticized as a free, liberal and gender-equal phase in the state's history – was turned into a republic in 1973 with the approval of the USSR. After the communist coup in 1978 and the Soviet invasion at the end of 1979, the Mujaheddin combated the Soviet troops and started their rule in 1992. In 1996 they were defeated by the Taliban who installed their subsequent regime in 1996. This reign ended with the US-invasion in the early 2000s, which the US framed as a political answer to 9/11. The invasion resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2004. This republic was a democracy of poor political stability – Daesh and the Taliban violently controlled large areas, while attacks and bombings were regular occurrences. During the process of revising this text in 2021, the Taliban again seized power in Afghanistan. An international media outcry followed – caring about the political situation in Afghanistan suddenly had become mainstream. For a lot of Afghans, especially marginalized groups, the political changes of 2021 are having terrible consequences. The global media obsession with Afghanistan in the summer of 2021, however, rarely corresponded to well-founded reporting but rather showcased Western news outlet's inclination to poverty porn as well as sensationalizing violence and oppression.

Representations of Afghanistan in Western knowledge production often focus on the above-mentioned history of wars and discuss the country's seeming malfunction. Especially discourses on international development assert an apparent impossibility of democracy, reifying notions of savageness and backwardness – already during the years before the Taliban seized power in summer 2021. Another crisis becomes apparent, namely a "crisis in geographical or spatial representation," that characterises the "'failure' of Afghanistan to fit into a taxonomy with which the Anglophone epistemic community is familiar," as Nivi Manchanda (2020: 104) puts it.[3] Afghanistan was and continues to be narrated as a "non-place," which inhibits full acknowledgement of individual agency and autonomy – a one-sided representation that also affects the perception of Afghan asylum seekers within the European border regime.

In these contexts, Afghans are considered virtually equivalent with troubled, war-ravaged unfortunates – the term Afghans is literally equated with the status of IDPs (internally displaced persons) and refugees. Afghans indeed once constituted the biggest group of refugees around the world (UNHCR 2015), and they make up the third-highest number of refugees worldwide in 2020 (UNHCR 2021). Of an estimated total of six million Afghan refugees, Afghanistan's neighbouring countries Pakistan and Iran

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[3] While this quotation addresses geopolitical representation, Manchanda also elaborates on the "crisis in the historiographic and sociological study of Afghanistan" (2020: 105) and addresses the ways the humanities construct narratives of failure when addressing the country. The ethnomusicological representation of post-9/11 Afghanistan mirrors these characterizations, as war and exile take centre position in Afghan music studies.

host about 95 percent. The first terror regime of the Taliban incited a major exodus, specifically for people in the field of music and arts. The Taliban's ban on music inhibited every form of musical practice, musical instruments, dancing and music recordings, with the exception of Taliban "chants" (see Baily 2001; 2016). Musicians relocated to Pakistani, Iranian, North-American and European exiles, where they established musical communities (Baily 2016). After the fall of the Taliban, "the very sound of music became a symbol, even a signal, of freedom," as John Baily (ibid.: 159) asserts. However, music's notions of immorality – explained through religion – continued to have an effect, even after the fall of the Taliban. After regaining power in 2021, the Taliban promoted a supposed change in their stances on women's rights, the status of minority groups and, not least, the position of music and dance. Soon it became clear that the Taliban were not planning on keeping these promises, leading to a considerable number of musicians fleeing the country, as it had been the case two decades earlier (Nasar 2021).

Although migrations from Afghanistan to Austria mirror the various "crises" Afghanistan went through, the migrations are autonomous projects that rely on self-determined strategies of migration. The concept of an "autonomy of migration" (Bojadžijev and Karakayalı 2007) that defies victimizing narrations of forced migrations highlights the individual agency of a migrating person. However, it simultaneously "risks romanticising border struggles" by depicting refugees as embodiments of resilience and "heroic resistance" (Picozza 2021: 120). Acknowledging the agency of refugees, however, seems crucial, especially in relation to the trope of the "illegal" or "bogus" asylum seeker that connects illegality and illegitimacy to the mere existence of refugees. This trope is based on scepticism towards the rightfulness of seeking asylum. Asylum seekers' motives are "suspect," connotations with delinquency expand from "illegalized" border crossings to behaviour in the new abode (Scheel and Squire 2014), producing negative stereotypes like dysfunctionality and inauthenticity (Stepputat and Nyberg Sørensen 2014). European asylum policies also use depictions of "illegal" refugees and "economic migrants" in legitimizing the infamous and indeed illegal pushbacks at the EU's external borders, especially between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Since 2018, asylum procedures of Afghans in Austria often result in negative asylum decisions or the withdrawal of the subsidiary protection status. Long periods of confinement in detention followed by deportations by plane to Kabul have become increasingly common. Afghans in Austria face harsh structural inequality and severe individual discrimination in everyday life. The political and interpersonal treatment of Afghans in Austria mirrors their systematic criminalisation and social denunciation in public discourse.

These dynamics of Othering are based on racist media depictions that focus on crime coverage, particularly sensationalizing sexual crimes. Afghans' nationality, their asylum status, their enforced unemployment and their religion, Islam, are the main components of this coverage, adding to the cultivation of the figure of "the Afghan refuge" alongside intersectional categories like gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity,

age, education, class, nationality, and asylum status. The demographic structure of Afghan asylum seekers since 2015 does indeed show a prevalence of young men under the age of 25 in precarious economic situations with little to no access to education. Their sexualisation and criminalization, however, is simply incorrect. Press releases focusing on the percentage of Afghan nationality of crime suspects are overly disproportionate to actual crime convictions, as an in-depth study was able to show (Gaigg et al. 2019). These practices result in the steady discursive creation of the Muslim Other while fuelling anti-Muslim and anti-Afghan racism.

Discrimination in everyday life, e.g., on the streets, is also centred around bodies and bodily appearance. The look of young Afghans, their hairstyle and fashion, makes them "detectable as Other," inciting a dangerous visibility and a political meaning in social space. This classification of looks also builds on racist notions of South Asian bodies, even though Afghanistan's ethnic and racial diversity does not allow for racial stereotypes. This extreme Othering in everyday life transgresses the political sphere and pertains to the social space in particular, exposing Afghans to microaggressions and everyday racism.

Afghan Music and Dance in Vienna – Diaspora and Lived Realities

In the following discussion on music and dance by the Afghan community in Vienna, I focus on three components: music consumption and musical identifications; scenarios of Afghan music in Vienna; and Afghan pop music as glocal sound. Shaped by the collaboration with my friends Qais Behbood and Bahram Ajezyar, I approach music as a part of everyday life for Afghans with refugee experience. While music consumption and musical identifications of community members (like Qais who does not pursue music professionally) constitute a central approach, I also include perspectives of musicians, like Bahram. In both cases, I join my friends' community-based perspective on music. Accordingly, we were less invested with the fields of fusion, world music and music that is staged for "intercultural communication" and the representation of cultural diversity – events that often target a White, mostly Austrian audience.[4] Rather, we used music's significance within the community itself as the central perspective.

As for the Afghan refugee experience, music consumption and musical identifications are closely intertwined and depend on individual biographies and experiences of migration specifically. Migrations from Afghanistan to Europe often take years if not decades, in the process exposing asylum seekers to various countries, cultural traditions and musics, respectively. For those who have lived in Afghanistan (many of the Afghans in Austria were actually born "as refugees" in Iran), live music events, like concerts or parties, are scarcely part of their wealth of musical experiences, with the exception of private festivities, like weddings. Accordingly, listening to

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[4] In Austria, those events sometimes feature Afghan music, however, more frequently present Iraqi and Syrian music, often in conjunction with musical elements of world music, jazz and Western classical art music.

recorded music typically constitutes the most common mode of engaging with music during the migration process and in the new living environment.

In this context, smartphones are the main source of music. These multifunctional devices are generally of prime relevance during and after the migration, since they not only enable communication, but also help to map out locations, facilitate translations and store pictures and other memorable material (see Alencar, Kondova, and Ribbens 2019). Regarding the consumption of music, online musical archives such as YouTube guarantee a constant availability of music and have become primary arenas of musical action. Mobile phones have become "tools of broadcast and transmission," as Tom Western (2021: 158) notes. Next to Afghan traditional musics and Afghan classical music genres, the central musical style of both musical identification and musical consumption is Afghan pop music, a musical genre that I will discuss in detail below.

YouTube is probably the biggest storage space for Afghan pop music since it contains officially published Afghan pop songs as well as Afghan pop songs that are released exclusively on YouTube and are not available on specialised music streaming platforms like Spotify or Apple Music. YouTube also provides musical content that has not been officially published, such as (private) recordings of live performances, musical events and concerts. This is especially relevant to Afghan traditional musics. Of course, other musical styles, like the musics of interim host countries, US-American popular music, as well as popular music in the German language, especially *Deutschrap*,[5] are relevant musical points of reference for Afghans in Austria – not only in relation to learning German, but also as a way of continuous interaction with cultural expressions of the majority society.

Musicking with the smartphone, however, does not represent mere consumption, a "passive" reception. As Rachel Beckles Willson (2021) has shown, mobile phones are central to musical communication, whether it be within refugees' peer groups or in asylum-related fieldwork and participatory research. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok form relevant arenas for musical and bodily practice, among them activities like sharing with your followers how you and your friends dance to music on Instagram or lip-syncing to Afghan pop songs on TikTok. TikTok specifically enables global interconnection regardless of one's location. The app's specific modes of virtual backgrounds and sonic spaces allow for a new and rather literal understanding of Martin Stokes' (1994; for his reconsideration thereof see also 2017) notion of experiencing place through music. Regardless of time and space, social media allows for musical expressions within a broader collective, without legal or geographical borders, especially when access to offline musical gatherings is difficult – no matter if it is during the flight or amidst curfews due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tied to these online spaces are their offline components, the various scenarios of Afghan music in Vienna. Afghan musical life in Vienna mirrors the well-documented

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[5] The term refers to Rap and Hip Hop, mostly in German language, that is produced in Germany as well as Austria or Switzerland. *Deutschrap* artists often meet postmigrant identity narratives or have experiences of migration.

practices of Afghan music in exile, especially Pakistani cities like Peshawar and Islamabad that were crucial to the continuation of Afghan music practice when music was banned in Afghanistan (see Baily 2005; 2016). Less influential but similarly relevant were and are Iranian cities like Mashhad and Teheran (see Baily 1999; 2016) and, not least, the musical life of the diaspora communities in Canada, the US and Europe (see Baily 1999; 2005; 2014).

When it comes to the various scenarios of Afghan music, private festivities, particularly weddings, constitute a prime area for the social use of Afghan music in Vienna. One of my friends, Vienna-based tabla player Bahram Ajezyar, regularly performs at weddings and other concerts that are directed almost exclusively towards the Afghan community in Vienna or other major Austrian cities. Speaking of himself as a "wedding musician" (orig. German: *Hochzeitsmusiker*), he would sometimes play at two or more festivities in one night (before a longer pause of performances owing to the COVID-19 pandemic). Bahram came to Austria with his family as a child over two decades ago. In the refugee camp of the city of Vöcklabruck, a music group playing *musiqi mahali* (Dari for "local music," meaning folk music) triggered his interest in playing the tabla. He started learning the instrument within the community. The family moved to London when he was a teenager, where he also had tabla lessons before relocating to Vienna.

Bahram is a well-known figure in the Afghan musical community in Vienna and abroad. At times, he was even flown in for weddings in other European countries like Sweden. Bahram's musical practice encompasses Afghan traditional musical styles and Afghan pop music alike – the boundaries between the two are fluent. As documented with other migrant communities (Hemetek and Bajrektarević 2000; Hemetek and Sağlam 2008), privately organized festivities like weddings constitute not only an important employment opportunity for local musicians but also serve as a site of engaging with musical traditions in the context of said community's musical heritage.

At Afghan weddings, one of the main possibilities of cultural expression is dancing: bodily interaction with (mostly) community members to music that is ethnically coded. Dancing also plays a crucial role at Afghan concerts, mostly organized by Afghan cultural societies. These concerts feature local musicians and often also Afghan pop music stars from abroad who perform internationally. These events rely on concert-like settings (introductory speeches, performance on the stage, seating areas), however, dancing – usually in the second half of concerts – is a central form of expression.

Specifically aimed at a dancing audience are Afghan club events. Making use of the infrastructure of other migrant communities with a longer history of urban community building, Afghan club events often take place in the urban periphery – for example, in Turkish discotheques. Although this sharing of spaces follows capitalist logics of venue lease and event culture, it also harks back on what could be framed as a relation between a refugee self and a migrant Other, following Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's attempt to shift attention from "local host communities and the national population" (2016: 2) towards other migrant groups that often constitute important communities of reference. While attending Afghan club events with Afghan friends, I witnessed how

the collective embodiment of ethnically coded sounds not only gains meaning as to Afghan refugees' diasporic relocation but also in the light of the hostility that Afghans face outside of these musical spaces. In Vienna as well as in other European cities, Afghans are often not allowed to enter mainstream clubs. Elaha Soroor,[6] a Hazara Singer based in London, shared the experiences of young Afghan refugees that she worked with for a music workshop in Sweden with me – experiences that correspond to those of young refugees in Vienna:

> The boys were saying that the bouncers don't let them go to the club, because the bouncer doesn't like the way that they walk or their appearance. It is really sad, because, you know, the young person who wants to party, the only place that he or she can go – I mean *she* cannot go, because *she* is not allowed – but the guy who wants to go and party would go to an Afghan concert and party (Elaha Soroor, public artist talk, October 8, 2020).

Elaha Soroor addresses a significant phenomenon: gender segregation in Afghan musical spaces. Traditionally, virtually all musical activity by Afghan women is relegated to the "privacy of domestic surroundings," as Veronica Doubleday (2000: 812) notes. Especially in dance, religiously explained notions of sexual morality affect ideas of female modesty. An androcentric and patriarchal visual regime prefers to invisibilize female bodies in order to deprive the male gaze from (hetero)sexualised content. Due to the alleged non-sexual nature of a same-sex gaze, Afghan dance traditionally involves same-sex dancing only (assuming a heteronormative exclusivity of sexual desire).

This gender segregation leads to a strong male predominance on dancefloors at public events. It is generally men who dance. Although at public Viennese events, women occasionally dance as well, it remains an explicit exception. Women who dare to dance in public mostly do so without attracting too much attention – commonly, these women have spent most of their lives in Austria. Event organizer Sonja Latifi, who fled from Kabul to Austria with her parents as a small child after the Taliban had seized power in Afghanistan in 1996, illustrated the pressure Afghan women in Austria tend to experience: "We grew up in a culture, where it is shameful. If I stand up and start dancing – of course they'll say, 'what is she doing?' I cannot change that alone. I need other woman to slowly, slowly change this" (Sonja Latifi, interview, May 15, 2019).[7] Latifi, who works in event management, started organizing women-only parties to enable women to experience the joy of dancing to Afghan pop music. These female-only parties follow strict guidelines regarding social media to secure the safety of the women attending – what happens at the party venue should stay there instead of being spread

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[6] Singer Elaha Soroor grew up in Iran and moved to Afghanistan as a teenager. After her participation in the TV singing contest *Afghan Star* (see footnote 8), she started her musical career. Her ways of artistic expression are manifold, with her recent musical publications departing from mainstream Afghan pop music paths and taking a nuanced creative stance on her own musical heritage. The album *Songs of Our Mothers* that she recorded together with her band Kefaya is reviewed by Ali Karimi (2021) in this journal.

[7] The interview was led in German and translated to English by the author.

around on the internet. Sonja Latifi's long term goal is to empower women and to slowly break down gender restrictions in public dancing.

Afghan pop music constitutes a central musical style of on- and offline musical practices in Vienna. A short historical excurse is necessary to provide a rough overview on the musical specifics of Afghan pop music: From the 1950s up until the late 1970s, in the "heyday of music in Afghanistan" (Baily 2000: 810), Radio Afghanistan served as the country's musical centre, forming a "bastion of modernism," as John Baily (2001: 18) frames it. Radio Afghanistan developed and broadcast a specific sound representing an Afghan national identity and a "pan-ethnic, distinctively Afghan society," as Marc Slobin (1974: 148) puts it. From the combination of Pashtu traditional music and Hindustani music theory, the basis for contemporary Afghan pop music has emerged. Initially oriented towards classical and regional-traditional styles, the inclusion of elements of "Western" popular music as well as the influence of neighbouring popular music, i.e. Pakistani, Indian, Iranian and Tajik, as well as movie soundtracks increased in the 1970s (Baily 2001: 17).

Afghan pop in the 21st century boasts distinct Afghan musical features, such as melodic material and certain dance rhythms as well as traditional musical instruments: tablas, harmonium, rubab, dambura or sitar. Other components are musical character-istics of "Anglo-American pop-rock" (Regev 2007: 319), such as beats and harmonization as well as associated instruments like keyboard, electric guitar and drum kit. Afghan pop's central position in contemporary Afghan music becomes palpable through, e.g., the popular TV singing contest *Afghan Star*.[8] As the TV show used to incite public discussions on musical performances of singers (when it was still aired before the Taliban regained power in 2021), *Afghan Star*'s significance in contemporary Afghanistan resembles the central position of Radio Afghanistan described by Baily (2001) for the 1970s and 80s.

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[8] In 2020, the show aired its 15th season, representing one of Afghanistan's most popular TV events. The specific local adaption of the global format of TV singing contests not only generates geopolitical and cultural meaning, the show also constituted a political threat to the social system of post-Taliban Afghanistan, as Michael Klemm (2013: 43) argues. Afghan clerics, for example, condemned the show's moral incompatibility with Islam (Constable 2017), which points to the socially transformative power of the song performances. Compared to its counterparts in the Global North, *Afghan Star* foregrounded issues like tradition, ethnicity, national identity and social values – a phenomenon quite common for TV singing contests in "non-western" musics (see Yang 2017). Since the show was available online via the website of host station Tolo TV, as well as on YouTube, it also served as a relevant musical forum for the Afghan diaspora. The public debates concerning *Afghan Star* were also related to understandings of gender and sexuality in Afghan society. Female participants were fewer in numbers; however, their participation regularly sparked public controversies. After participating in the TV show, they were exposed to acts of violence, often having had to relocate in order to be safe. While these controversies were extremely dangerous for the lives of the female singers, they also stimulated the public debate on women's rights, making female Afghan Star contestants "media martyrs" (Osman 2014: 883), owing to the significance their female bodies gained on the public screen.

In Vienna, Afghan pop music has become a musical part of the city's cultural landscape over the course of the last five years, steadily gaining importance. As mentioned in the introduction, joint visits of Afghan pop music events became a regular activity, enabling us – the concert visitors – to experience Afghan pop music performances and the different ways the audience utilizes them. Big Afghan pop stars like Aryana Sayeed or Farhad Darya are regular guests in Vienna's major popular music concert locations. Fans from neighbouring countries travel to Vienna, with the concert audiences being made up almost exclusively of Afghans. In June 2019, Vienna's Gasometer concert hall even hosted an international Afghan music award show, the Diamond Music Awards, gathering the who's who of the Afghan pop music scene on the red carpet in Vienna.[9]

Dawood Sarkhosh, one of the most popular figures of the Afghan music scene, has been living in Vienna for decades – going entirely unnoticed by the city's music industry and cultural scene.[10] His brother Sarwar Sarkhosh, a famous Hazara musician from the region of Hazarajat, who was also an activist fighting for his minority community, was killed by an anti-Hazara militia in 1983. Upon this, Dawood Sarkhosh decided to become a musician as well, as Hiromi Sakata (2013: 79) recounts, who met the brothers during her fieldwork in the 1970s and 80s. Ali Karimi stresses the importance of Dawood Sarkhosh's music for Hazaras, who were and are still facing discrimination and persecution during the reign of various political regimes (2017). From the attacks that caused his brother's death, to the civil war in Kabul in the 1990s, up to the exodus during the Taliban regime and the recent migrations, Dawood Sarkhosh's music negotiates and mediates political situations and Hazara's minority identity.

Dawood Sarkhosh plays the dambura, his repertoire encompassing traditional music as well as pop ballads and up-tempo songs in Hazaragi and Dari. During two of his concerts in Vienna (2016, 2018), he performed his well-known pop hits in the first part of the concert, while finishing the evening with pieces from the traditional repertoire performed by him along with students that he teaches as an Ustad[11] in Vienna. An illustrative example of how Sharkosh's music relates to the refugee experience is the well-known song "Sarzamin-e Man" ("My Homeland"; Sarkhosh 1998) that Sarkhosh originally released when many people fled their homes after the Taliban had seized power in 1996. The song gained fresh relevance during the recent migrations to Europe between 2014 and 2019 as well as in 2021. While the melody is based on the Turkish Arabesk song "Haydi söyle" ("Come On, Say It"; Tatlıses 1994) by İbrahim Tatlıses, the lyrics explicitly deal with forced migration from Afghanistan and the country's troublesome situation. Throughout Europe, the song gained great relevance

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[9] See, for example, the award show's Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/diamondmusicawards/, accessed November 5, 2021).

[10] During the process of revising this article, I learned that Dawood Sarkhosh had moved to Canada in the fall of 2021.

[11] In the Indo-Persian language area, an Ustad is a well-respected music master with a decade-long artistic experience who teaches a circle of students following the principle of a master-apprentice relationship.

in the realm of intercultural music projects – resulting in musically questionable versions of "Sarzamin-e Man" that are framed with the notion of an "Afghan folk song."[12]

A musical career like Dawood Sarkhosh's is not comparable to the situation of the majority of Afghan musicians in Austria, like young singer Masih Shadab. He fled from Kabul to Austria after the Taliban had killed his brother while they were actually targeting Masih himself because of his musical activities. He and his siblings had to flee to Europe and Canada; his parents were staying in Kabul. In Vienna, he suddenly gained popularity via Facebook, after posting "Mhajr Afghan" ("Afghan Refugee"), a short song featuring him singing and playing the harmonium. The song explicitly deals with the refugee experience and thus went viral, again showcasing social media's significance as a musical space. The song also played an important role during his asylum process. When interviewed, he recounted how during the asylum interview, he simply pointed out to the song, saying: "Please listen to this music, such is my problem" (Masih Shadab, interview, June 27, 2018). Talking with Masih, he stressed how thankful he is for the dynamics the song incited and locates his musical practice within the collective refugee experience of his community:

> And really, this music has helped me. Before, I had another opinion on music. I thought, ok, music is only fun and leisure. I didn't know how to start, for example, what should I sing and about what. But this music has helped me. I have found out that you have to sing from your heart and to know the problems of people, to sing about these problems (Masih Shadab, interview, June 27, 2018).[13]

Today, Masih works as a professional musician in Vienna. He produces his music with the help of a global network for diasporic music production that that operates mainly online. Masih's song "Shab, shab" ("Night, Night"; Shadab 2018) is a notable example of diasporic music production that does not topically relate to pain and suffering, thus rendering the refugee experience secondary. The instrumental part of the song was recorded, produced and edited in Hamburg, Germany, while Masih recorded the vocal part in a Bosnian-owned Studio in Vienna. The video – displaying a romantic love story featuring a somewhat emancipated women – invites the viewer on a journey through Austria's tourist site clichés: Vienna, the Mondsee and Salzburg, with the music featuring Afghan sound markers. The visual and sonic levels, however, are not contradictive, but strikingly display diasporic relocation.[14]

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[12] Two examples of "Sarzamin-e Man" in intercultural music contexts:

1) Choir project Singasylum at the fifth inter-religious peace concert "Human first – united in music" (orig. Fünftes Interreligiöses Friedenkonzert "Zuerst Mensch – in Musik vereint"), 2019, Kreuzkirche Dresden, Germany (Singasylum 2019; starting from minute 5:45)

2) Students of the Internationella gymnasiet Uppsala, Sweden and students of the Lilla Akademien Stockholm, Sweden – Concert in the Eric Ericsonhallen, 2019 (Körkraft 2019).

[13] The interview was led in German and translated to English by the author.

[14] Farzaneh Hemmasi (2020) makes similar observations when discussing Iranian music in California. Especially the depiction of femininity in Iranian pop music videos in Los Angeles shows striking parallels. Farzaneh stresses the transcultural effects of migrant musicking,

It becomes apparent that Afghan pop music constitutes a central musical practice of 21st century Afghan music practice inside and outside of Afghanistan. The Afghan pop music scene outside of Afghanistan consists of a network of musicians, music and film producers, not only providing their local diasporic communities with musical outputs but also representing relevant musical impulses for their country of origin, Afghanistan.

Concluding Remarks on Ethnography, Friendship, and the Refugee Experience

Taking up the coloniality and implicit racialisations of refugee research settings in music and dance research that I have elaborated on in the beginning of this text, I want to interrogate my own navigation through academia and refugee research and address friendship and affection in ethnographic fieldwork. Thinking of all the friends and field partners that shaped this text, I sense a certain disparity between my personal relationships and the way classical journal articles, like this one, present and represent knowledge. When presenting knowledge in canonical academic formats, the historically situated violence of coloniality that comes with utilizing research into marketable knowledge gains very sharp contours for me. I resonate with Heath Cabot, when she shares how "tropes of victimhood" (2019: 266) imbue her own writing on refugees – the writing that is in fact aimed at critically contesting these tropes. Ethnographic knowledge production on refugee communities constitutes a sort of cultural measurement of specific demographic groups that is inherently reproducing colonial traditions of systematizing and categorizing. To engage in academic research and writing about (specifically undocumented) refugees, then, means to maintain the same "abusive systems that produce migrant vulnerability in the first place" (Alonso Bejarano et al. 2019: 9). Simultaneously, within an environment of anti-Muslim racism and anti-Afghan sentiments, knowledge on commonly positively framed cultural expressions like music and dance gains political relevance – also because it is making use of established and valued institutional logics of academia.

To an extent, the colonial structures of knowledge production on racialized Others thus also serve as zones of political redefinitions. Ethnography can "destabilize *representations of 'crisis'*" in "engaging the ethnographic ear," as Tom Western (2020: 305) puts it, and thereby has the power to disrupt predominant narratives on refugees, whether they are racist and dehumanizing or paternalistic and victimizing. Western also suggests to embrace the "*crisis of representation*" (ibid.: 305) in redefining archived data with a decolonizing stance: As much as ethnographic recordings are documentary, they are also creative and portray relationships.

prompting her to speak of "Tehrangeles," emphasising the positive ambiguity of diasporic music practice (ibid.: 117–119).

Making transparent the intimacy of relationships, partnerships, and friendships within research is not only a way of acknowledging one's personal involvement instead of using distancing and factifying language, but also allows for thinking of oneself and one's work as dependent on and shaped by human interaction. Friendship counteracts ownership of knowledge and makes possible an "owership" of knowledge (Charissa Granger and Cornelia Gruber, pers. comm., June 24, 2021). Collaboration and relationships in the field result in personal transformations of everyone involved – personal transformations that inherently entail political transformations (Alonso Bejarano et al. 2019: 146). Friendship helps to free up not only the process of generating knowledge, but the very meaning of knowledge as well. Modes of friendships encompass investment in social relations and the building of long-term understanding as well as trust. It entails joint navigation through asylum bureaucracy as well as joyful dancing.

Representations of the refugee experience in music and dance research often focus on "refugee voices," as Tom Western (2020: 304) notes, taking advocative positions that neglect refugees' autonomy and agency. He calls out the strained idea of "'giving voice' to the voiceless" (ibid.), a common trope of how the interaction between refugees and researchers is scholarly narrated to be dismantling its inherent coloniality. Although friendship can sometimes disarm this coloniality, it cannot guarantee resolving greater hegemonies. However, friendship constitutes an "essentially political relationship . . . of allegiance and responsibility" and is not entirely private and personal but a "condition of work" (Gordon 2018: 76). Friendship is one of the most powerful outcomes of ethnographic research, showing valuable possibilities of ethnography. In the field of asylum-related music studies, friendship may counter the spectacle of suffering through shifting the focus on cultural agency, on musical and bodily expressivity and joy.

Acknowledgements

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