Storytelling and Disrupting Borders: A Sicilian Workshop

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Palermo, Sicily, mid-October 2018. For a newcomer to the city, the noise is deafening. Sirens, car horns, people shouting—in Italian, Bengali, Arabic, and Igbo. The walls of this 2018 CulturalCapital of Italy are equally "noisy," covered in anti-Fascist and anti-corruption graffiti and posters. The audiovisual environment is multilingual and politically intent. This context is vital for understanding the inheritance tracks workshop that took place after the meeting of a transnational team working on a European-funded media literacy project for refugee, asylum-seeking, and migrant women. This team was meeting in a small non-air-conditioned NGO office not far from Palermo's central post office, commissioned in 1934 by Benito Mussolini, and the alleyways of the market area, Ballarò. Long a Mafia stronghold, where *pizzo* (protection money) is still demanded, Ballarò is where new arrivals to the city, largely Nigerians and Bangladeshis, set up stalls and small shops. It is shabby and vibrant but there remains a sense that it is still somehow dangerous; as tourists walking with NGO colleagues, we were told not to carry credit cards or items of worth.

In a *New York Times* piece on the area, Jason Horowitz (2019) noted how Palermo is "a city with a history dating back to at least the Phoenicians that adapted to conquerors and waves of immigration. And Ballarò market, in the center of town, is where many of those complications are playing out" (para. 9). The mayor of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando (2018) is an advocate for immigration and maintains that Palermo is home to all who live there; there are no migrants in Palermo, everyone is a "Palermitani." Orlando defied interior minister Matteo Salvini's Italian government to allow the Doctors without Borders migrant rescue boat *Aquarius* to dock in January 2018 (Wintour, Tondo, and Kirchgaessner 2018). This city,

with its political and historical struggles, was the backdrop to our inheritance tracks meeting meeting. Arguably, it is one whose own inheritance has troubling elements and which now troubles a broader Italian politics.

The office where we met belonged to the host partner of the meeting, CESIE, a European Centre of Studies and Initiatives, a nonprofit, apolitical, and nongovernmental organization, established in 2001, inspired by the work and theories of the pacifist Danilo Dolci (1924–1997). Ten participants, comprising two academics, one support staff, and seven NGO workers, took part in the ninety- minute inheritance tracks workshop, which, in this chapter, I argue worked to gently disrupt modalities of communication and expression.

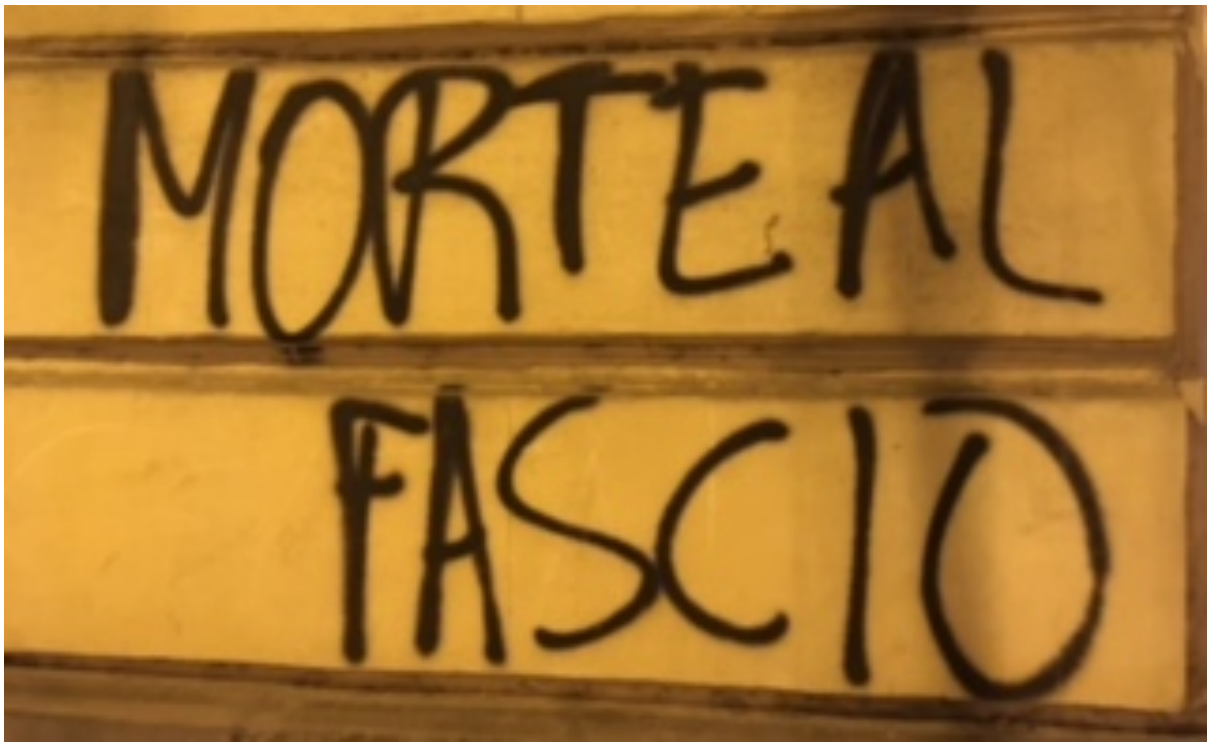

Figure X.1. Graffiti on Via Roma, Palermo, October 2018. Photo: Abigail Gardner.

I explore the dynamics of those changing modalities by concentrating on the idea of storytelling and borders, using theoretical work from digital storytelling, music and memory, and my own practical experience of working on digital storytelling initiatives. Where the

previous chapter dealt with shared interpretations of borderscapes in an eastern Finnish town library, here, the storytelling that accompanied the songs reveals the contingency of borders, especially those of the affective self, and of place and time—of what belongs where. My involvement in the project and in this particular workshop relates to my research in digital storytelling which I use to position the Palermo workshop as a storytelling event. My focus here is firmly on the storytelling prompted by song choices. on affective selves revealed in confessional "moments" (Lefebvre 2004; Radstone 2007), and on affective "contagion" (Gibbs 2001; Ahmed 2004). José van Dijck, who works on the intersection of music, media studies, and memory, talks about the "inter-generational transfer of personal and collective heritage, not only by sharing music, but also by sharing stories" (2014: 111). And these stories were produced in a specific place, in Palermo. The chapter is therefore a story about the "song worlds" emergent within a Sicilian inheritance tracks workshop, which itself involved storytelling prompted by songs chosen by the participants.

I use the phrase "song worlds" to refer to the interplay between a song and its role in one particular moment in a participant's life (or relationship to a particular person) and the worlds that are shared within the space of the workshop. A song therefore acts as a prop or a context for remembering past moments, certain people, and their own selves in that time and place. The use of the song in the workshop as a prop, an object around which to tell a story, was similar to how photographs and prized possessions are used in digital storytelling. I have used the latter method in European and UK projects. In the European project, teenagers' stories were used to promote intercultural awareness (MYSTY 2018). In UK research with military veterans, funded by Age UK, flags, medals, and certificates triggered stories (Veterans' Voices 2019). Another project used digital stories to build self-esteem among vulnerable adults (GEM: Going the Extra Mile Project 2017).

The inheritance tracks workshop in Palermo shared similar starting points to digital storytelling but differed in one very simple facet: music. Comparable to the artifacts and photographs used to prompt stories in digital storytelling, participants were asked in advance to choose two songs, which acted as a memory objects (van Dijck 2007). However, a track by Ennio Morricone does not do the same affective work as an old black-and-white photograph or a veteran's medal precisely *because* it is a piece of music. Playing, listening to, and sharing music changes the affective atmosphere. There is a shift in an inheritance tracks workshop and it is like a key change. First, the mood alters (DeNora 2000; Kassabian 2013). And importantly, it alters for different participants according to their own previous exposure to the track playing. Is it something they know? What might their relationship to it be? Music being played not only takes the individual who chose it on a narrative journey, but invites all other group members to travel with them too. The resulting stories and conversations demonstrated an iterativity different to the worked-out scripts of digital storytelling. The Palermo workshop had a distinctive character because of this recalibrated, iterative, and shared sonic environment.

Second, the workshop affected the participants' bodies. They were listening to music and this had not only an emotional effect on the group, but also a bodily one; some people started to sway, to move to the music. This meant that the group shared common modes of listening that enabled them to switch register and listen with their bodies (Regev 2013).

As mentioned, the ten workshop participants—nine women and one man—were part of the transnational team working on an Erasmus+ Key Action 2 funded project. These projects are funded by the European Commission for work that develops, shares, or transfers best practices and innovative approaches in the fields of education, training, and youth. Ours was called Media Literacy for Refugee, Asylum Seeking and Migrant Women (MedLIT 2018), had been awarded €251,530, and ran from November 1, 2016 to October 31, 2018.

The team was made up of six partners: five NGOs (in Italy, Austria, Malta, Ireland, and Greece) and a UK university, which was in charge of the budget and the management of the whole project. The team had built an online toolkit that could be used to develop the digital media literacy of refugee, asylum–seeking, and migrant women, specifically low-skilled women.

Pilot research across the countries involved, in the form of focus groups (some of which had been carried out in refugee camps in Northern Greece), had revealed high levels of social media use in parallel with low levels of trust in "media," along with a willingness to learn. Following this preliminary research, the team built an online free-to-access e-learning platform. Uptake of this educational opportunity was driven through peer-to-peer networks. The UK team had worked on the methodology and focus groups, the Greek team had built the platform, and the Italians were charged with the peer-to-peer networking element. The curriculum had been developed by the team in response to demand from the target audience. It offered different access points depending on the skill level of the user. Online modules ranged from how to access health care and education to how to use a computerto how to spot fake news.

Inheritance Tracks in Palermo

The Palermo workshop ran along similar lines as others in the inheritance tracks project. All participants were asked to send two tracks: one they had inherited and one that they wanted to pass on. All the tracks that could be were uploaded to a Spotify playlist. Songs that were not on Spotify were sent via YouTube. There were no queries about the initial request; no one questioned what "inheritance" was (as has happened since). Having worked on the MedLIT project, the workshop participants were familiar with each other but not close. Allow me to introduce them, as identified by the initial of their first name. The group included two women

in their fifties, D and S(2), from the Inishowen Development Partnership in Buncrana, Ireland; one Spanish woman in her twenties, A(1), who was working in Malta for FSM, a migrant support organization; one woman in her thirties from Athens (E), representing KMOP (a long-established Greek NGO); one woman in her twenties from Austria (B), working for Verein Multikulturell, an NGO in Innsbruck that has since closed down; an American media academic in her forties from the University of York (K), who was the evaluator on the project; two Italian women, one in her twenties and the other in her thirties, S(1) and R, respectively, who worked for the host CESIE (an NGO in Palermo with a broad range of activities related to migrant and youth support); one man in his forties from the University of Gloucestershire (G), the project manager; and myself, A(2), a music and media academic in my fifties. All participants were White. I was the project lead on MedLIT and had introduced the idea of doing the inheritance tracks workshop with the team over the previous month.

After our formal project meeting ended, I indicated that we were going to start the workshop. Before we started, I introduced why we were doing the session, explained what it was for, and mentioned what experience I had had of previous workshops. I told the group that at some points in previous workshops, participants had felt very emotional, and to bear that in mind as we proceeded. From my laptop, I then played one track from the Spotify playlist to the group. As Ros Jennings had done in the Women, Ageing and Media Summer School 2017 inheritance tracks workshop, this group played a game. After I had chosen and played a track, the group had to guess who had chosen it, while the individual "chooser" could not identify themselves. This added an element of 'play' to the proceedings, and assumed some interpersonal awareness which had been built up over the two years of team members working together.

None of the team, apart from myself, had taken part in such a workshop before, but all had chosen and sent at least one track prior to the meeting. From their selections, it appeared easier for most of the group select a track they had inherited than to choose one they might pass on; especially for the younger women and the one man who did not have children. "Passing on," for these younger group members, was more about sharing something they appreciated. In Palermo, "inheritance" of tracks came mainly from a parent or an aunt (three each of mothers and fathers; one aunt), and so via a heterosexual family, and from work "family" (colleagues). This may indicate something "troubling" about the notion of inheritance, about how it is inextricably tied up a cultural imagination to a biological family, which had been questioned in prior workshops. In a previous workshop run by Professor Ros Jennings as part of the Women, Ageing and Media Summer School (July 2017), queer families and radio families occupied those roles of "family." By radio family I refer to the idea of a radio presenter acting as a member of the listener's extended family, fulfilling the role of an elder sibling. For me that person was John Peel, Radio 1 deejay, and his late-night shows in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Table 1. Tracks Chosen by Participants in the Palermo Workshop

Participant (age)	**Occupation** (nationality)	**Inherited track(s)** (artist, nationality)	**Inherited from**	**Track to pass on** (artist)	**Passed on to**
A(1) (mid 20s)	NGO worker in Malta (Spanish)	"Duerme Negrito" (Mercedes Sosa, Argentinian)	Mother	None	N/A

A(2) (mid 50s)	Media academic (British)	"The Only Living Boy in New York" (Simon and Garfunkel, American)	Father	"Oh! Sweet Nuthin' " (Velvet Underground, American)	Own children
B (late 20s)	NGO worker, (Austrian)	"O Leãozinho" (Caetano Veloso, Brazilian)	Colleague who repeatedly played it	"Aïcha" (Khaled, Algerian)	No one in particular
D (mid 50s)	NGO community support, (Irish)	"Dead Skunk" (Loudon Wainwright III, American)	Aunts	*Astral Weeks* (Van Morrison, Northern Irish)	No one in particular
E (30s)	NGO worker (Greek)	"Am Thimisis to onirou mou" (Vasilis Legas, Greek)	Parents	"She's a Rainbow" (Rolling Stones, British)	Daughter
G (late 40s)	University funding manager (British)	"The Good, the Bad and the Ugly"	Father	None	No one to pass it on to … yet

		(Ennio Morricone, Italian)			
K (late 40s)	Academic (American)	"Dancing Queen" (ABBA, Swedish)	Mother	"Dancing Queen" (ABBA, Swedish)	Her children
R (30s)	NGO manager (Italian)	"Talkin' Bout a Revolution" (Tracy Chapman, American)	Heard as a teenager	"Jamono" (Daara J Family, Senegalese)	No one in particular
S(1) (20s)	NGO worker (Italian)	"Sunrise" (Simply Red, British)	Father	"You're All the World to Me" (Tony Bennett, American)	Someone special
S(2) (50s)	Community worker (Irish)	"Top of the World" (Carpenters, American)	A neighbor	"I Will Survive" (Gloria Gaynor, American)	No one in particular

Table 1 illustrates the music choices made by the group, with members identified by their first initials. What the table obscures is how important the group dynamics were in working to sculpt the resulting narratives. The songs were the props for the ensuing stories revealed in that small, hot office in Palermo. The reminiscence that these song props enabled was told to a group; the process was iterative and communal, and stories were commented on, interjected with, added to, and questioned. The stories revealed affective selves and political selves; they engendered empathy and relied on memory. They also troubled the borders of how to belong

in this temporary space of working professionals. Nobody knew in advance what they would be sharing; nobody knew in advance how much what they revealed would offer traction for the conversations that followed. And so the workshop was both an act of individual remembrance and a collective sharing and learning.

Affective Selves and Empathetic Listeners

Let us consider what had happened before the inheritance tracks workshop, in our team's project meeting. We had followed a formal agenda, had agreed on actions, had noted what had worked about our project and what we needed to do next. Minutes had been taken. The day before, we had met a group of five Nigerian women from the support network the Associazione Donne di Benin City Palermo (2018). Many of these women are survivors of human trafficking into Sicily, and we heard from them how important it was for them and their community to be media literate, to start rebuilding their lives and recovering their agency. To talk about music after these meetings seemed to me at the time to border on the frivolous. I was wrong. And I had felt this before. When, on September 19, 2018, I had first asked the team to be involved in a workshop, I had had trouble explaining its purpose and why it was important, but the email replies were all positive and indicated the two tracks requested. My reservations about asking something outside the parameters of the professional may have had more to do with my discomfort over shared affectivity than anything else. So yes, the first "trouble" encountered was my own discomfort at the possibility of emotion entering the workshop This became apparent at the start of the workshop by the first two participants.

I started the session by asking K about her choice. I knew her well and considered that with her background in public speaking, getting her to share her story first would be a "safe bet." But as the song "Dancing Queen" echoed across the high ceiling of the office, people

started swaying and K began to cry. The tears continued with the second participant's story. Immediately, there was an affective change, which I consider later in the chapter with reference to Gibbs's (2001) notion of "contagion."

The second storyteller, S(1), was the young leader for the Italian team. She had a long-established working relationship with the local migrant community, some of whom were using their new-found media literacy skills to produce a recipe book. After I played her inherited track "Sunrise," by Simply Red, she said only that the track "remembers me my father" before choking back tears. Noticing that her work colleague, R, was supporting her with her arm, I went on to the next track, having thanked her for it. Afterwards she told me how her father had died suddenly and unexpectedly when he was in his early forties and she was twelve. A heightened sense of emotional intelligence in the group allowed participants the space to both tell and *not* tell stories. Stories can generate empathy and trust in the audience; at the same time, they demonstrate their usefulness because they have the power to give meaning to human behaviors and to trigger emotions across the group present.

S(1) was involved in a process of "narrating the self" in a way that altered the texture of the meeting. I want to briefly draw on Rebecca Solnit's 2014 work to suggest how important this modulation was. In her book *Men Explain Things to Me: And Other Essays*, Solnit writes of the power of narrating the self. This process, she notes, is crucial for many women, whose histories and stories are hidden, untold, unmapped. Against a background of domestic and sexual violence, abuse, and erasure, she argues that "the ability to tell your own story, in words or images, is already a victory, already a revolt" (in the essay "Grandmother Spider"). Articulating the self and making audible what has previously been inaudible is for her the work of feminism. For me, in this chapter, her words do much to frame a small moment where a group of people came together to tell each other stories about the music and songs that were important to them. This reference to "revolt" stresses the importance of

claiming small moments of "telling" that can be a route to affective moments of connection. And perhaps this telling is also a revolt insofar as it brings into focus the affective self, the emotional self, the wounded and bereaved self. This revelation is what we saw with K's and S(1)'s stories, which immediately disrupted the atmosphere of the workshop. We all had to shift our emotional antennae. We all started really listening. This required us, as a group, to perform our empathy, which was apparent at later moments in the workshop when there was instant recognition and responsiveness.

For example, for her track to pass on, E told the story of how she heard the Rolling Stones' song "She's a Rainbow." "Two days before I give birth," she said, "I was driving and I was listening to the radio. It is for my daughter." Many in the group were amazed that she was driving that close to having her child. Half of the group were mothers, and this experience and the shared memories of childbirth were apparent in the others' reactions to E when she talked about her song. Stories of dancing around kitchens also provided points of empathy, even when a song was new to the group. Participant D chose Loudon Wainwright III's song "Dead Skunk" as her inherited track because it had been played by her two aunts. She remembered "being in their kitchen and my aunts dancing around." In reference to the American songwriter, she continued: "I always go to see him with my aunts and my cousins. When he comes to Ireland, we all go to Belfast or Dublin to see him." Her reminiscence of shared intergenerational female dancing was something that the other women in the group responded to, showing that D's narrative was one that resonated.

For three younger women in the group—A(1), B, and R—inherited track choices centered on their political identities and morals and their ongoing professional activity, especially in relation to working with migrants. Their stories also demonstrate the importance of passing a song on, and so the inheritance here is a moral or political one. "Duerme Negrito," a song by the Argentinian singer Mercedes Sosa, was sung to A(1) by her mother

when she was growing up in Burgos, Northern Spain. The song is also, as A(1) herself said, her mother passing on her moral framework to her, given that it sings of injustice and racism. She told how her mother had a social conscience, something she too has inherited. “Duerme Negrito” is about a small boy whose mother tells him not to worry, how she will always return to him and feed him even though she has to go out to work. A(1) went on to say that the song was

> a lullaby I remember as a child. I hadn’t realized who it [the singer] was but I really like it. I remember my mum singing this. It is a very sad song. I was always asking for it and we would sing it together. It’s a bittersweet kind of memory.[….] Recently I am living with a musician and she loves this kind of music, and she sings this song. It is my lullaby.

A(1), the youngest member of the group, reveals intimacies to this group she will never meet again, since she left the Maltese NGO shortly afterwards. But the group empathized with and recognized the close relationship she was referring to. The lullaby is a kind of gift, something that is precious.

Participant G, too, referred to this idea when he noted that he did not have a track to pass on as he had “no one to give it to … yet.” Participant S(1) wanted to pass on “You’re All the World to Me,” by Tony Bennett. “I really love the song,” she said, adding that she wanted to dedicate it “to a special person.” The song itself comes from the 1951 musical *Royal Wedding*, starring Fred Astaire and Jane Powell (dir. Stanley Donen). The song was clearly a gift from a past, when her father was still alive. Without knowing to whom it will be given, it is a treasure bound up in her relationship with her father, which is still wrapped up in loss. My chosen record too reminded me of my father. As I told the group, he “was really into

music, he liked jazz, classical, had catholic taste. He used to sit in the living room in his chair with the headphones on, listening to this. I loved it, as it's a sad song." My father had died not that long before the workshop, and listening to this song brought back the memory of him turning towards the record player in his special swivel chair, which he sat in to listen to his hi-fi system.

In her work on pop music as a resource for memory, van Dijck argues that when people tell stories about the music they remember, "what we see … is an inter-generational transfer of personal and collective heritage, not only by sharing music, but also by sharing stories" (2014: 111). Van Dijck's study is primarily concerned with memory and its relationship with various media, including sound technologies. Here, I am less concerned with music and memory, more with how memory is replayed in the present through storytelling about song, and how that present then offers connections. But what she has to say about sharing the stories generated by these memories is important for the inheritance tracks project and became clear in the Palermo workshop. To further quote van Dijck:

> [S]tories, like records, are mere resources in the process of reminiscence, a process that often involves imagination as much as retention. In other words, our personal musical repertoire is a *living* memory [emphasis original] that stimulates narrative engagement from the first time we hear a song to each time we replay it at later stages in life. It is this vivid process of narrative recall that gives meaning to an album and assigns personal and cultural value to a song. (2014: 111)

The process of tagging inheritance and passing on asks for a relationship to the past and the future, putting the individual into a perceived, produced lineage. It marks them out as a recipient and a giver of musical pieces entwined with stories of the self. And the fact that the

storytelling in our workshop took place with us all sat round in a circle, meant that its process was also similar to digital storytelling. But where van Dijck is using music as a resource for memory, I was using it as a resource for investigating inheritance: what it might mean to inherit music, and how music is interwoven with autobiographical narratives and retelling.

This workshop was a process of replaying, where the memory objects were songs chosen specifically for their emotional resonance and perhaps too out of a desire to relay that importance. What happened in the session was a "tagging" process, whereby stories related to song and family were passed on to others in the group. This passing on revealed common and uncommon inheritances, which then became the topic of conversation.

"Used in popular music and memory research, 'autobiographical memory' has come to be typically described in the literature *as memory for events or information concerning the self*" (Istvandity 2016: 232, emphasis original). This passing on of personal history was apparent when participant D told how she wanted to pass on any of the songs from Van Morrison's album *Astral Weeks*. "It's fifty years old," she said, and added that it was recorded in Boston, where I was living at the time. The group knew nothing about the artist, so D had to situate him as a Northern Irish musician, from Belfast. But they had known of her spending a long time in Boston when she was much younger. This song then invited the group into recollecting her past collectively. The "emotional investment" (van Dijck 2014: 109) D had in the song was essential to the group's understanding of her choice of it.

Two of the participants, R and B, shared songs that were primarily linked to their working lives and professional identity. R chose as her inherited track Tracy Chapman's "Talkin' Bout a Revolution," saying that "as a teenager" it was her "favorite song ever." She said the song chimed with her "attitude and vision of life." She chose to pass on "Jamono," by Daara J Family, a song sung in Wolof, the main language of Senegal. For R, whose job

and life revolves around supporting young migrants, and who has adopted migrant children, the song sings about the hopes of young people who want to "cross the Mediterranean," to "cross the sea to change their life," and she said she "make[s] them listen to the song." The track was not on Spotify in October 2018, being only accessible on YouTube. It is now there. The group knew from her work profile that R was engaged with projects that integrated migrants into Italy and perhaps were left with no new knowledge of any life prior to this politically and socially engaged persona. The same was the case for B, who added her comments via Facebook Messenger at a later date (March 2020), since she had to leave the workshop early to catch her flight. The track she inherited—"O Leãozinho," by the Brazilian artist Caetano Velosa—was from a work colleague who used to listen to it all the time. In her words: "At first I did not like it, but then due to the endless repetition of the song, I started to like it." The song she wanted to pass on was "Aïcha," by the Algerian Raï musician Khaled. "The song reminds me of my time that I spent in Mauritania[,] and whenever I listened to it a lot of good memories came up." Both of these women shared stories that were bound up in their professional lives, while B also wanted to pass on a song that she herself had fond memories of.

These several songs were new to the group, but others were supranational, having already crossed borders. Everyone knew ABBA's "Dancing Queen" and everyone knew Gloria Gaynor's disco-era hit "I Will Survive." These songs were part of a musical lingua franca that due to the dominance of the Anglo-American distribution system, had been heard by all group members. This was not the case for tracks like my track to pass on "Oh! Sweet Nuthin' " by the Velvet Underground, or any of Van Morrison's music from the album *Astral Weeks.* These were songs whose importance to the individual relied on the personal narrative to have the song make sense to the rest of the group; they needed the story as an orientation point. My story about "Oh! Sweet Nuthin' " was that the song took me back to a teenage time

when the radio, and one radio deejay in particular, John Peel, was central to my understanding of what music could be and what worlds it conjured up. In turn, I wanted my children to hear songs from other worlds and experience them as doorways to difference. "I heard this on the radio, on the John Peel show," I told the group. "I grew up in a tiny village in the middle of nowhere and as a bit of a weird kid [laughter]. [John Peel] was my window of escape from this boring, rural place. My kids are into music, so I pass this on to them."

Whereas a number of songs crossed borders, some borders remained, the result of language barriers and limits in international record distribution. Participant E played a Greek ballad, "Am Thimisis to onirou mou," sung by Vasilis Lekkas, and although the group recognized that it was being sung in Greek, they had not encountered the song before. "He's the greatest composer in Greece," E remarked. "It's a song my father inherited me. We listened to it on our street and on our holidays." The group needed that personal information to be able to connect to her memories of the song. van Dijck has noted the importance of understanding the variables that go into making musical memories, which "are shaped through social practices and cultural forms as much as through individual emotions" (2014: 116). So here, E's musical memories were wrapped up in a mix of other life events. Added to this is the potential for what Kenton O'Hara and Barry Brown called "musical occasioning" (2006: 5). This happens when "music is not simply paired with memories but, rather, music is seen as a fundamental part of the thing remembered as well as a fundamental means 'through' which the remembering is done" (5). It is both the means to and a part of the memory. The Palermo participants first encountered their memories when asked to choose a song; they then encountered the memories again in the group workshop and narrated them to the group. And for me now, writing some eighteen months later, my memories of the session, the city, the heat, and those individuals are all associated with the songs we played. What the song stories session did was to act as another iterative moment in that memory, enabling

those stories to be witnessed. It included moments of instant "witnessing," wherein other group members related to a song as they knew it, and other moments of delay, where the emotions in the song were clear but the language not known.

The inheritance tracks workshop in Palermo was experiential and embodied; participants shared stories, sang, and moved to the music. Did I mention dancing? When, at the start of the session, K, who had chosen ABBA's "Dancing Queen," started to sway, those sitting next to her—D and S(2)—also swayed and then moved their arms. This immediately changed the nature of the meeting, and acted as a point of transition from professionalism to friendship and "fun." Movement happened again at the end of the hour, when S(2)'s second choice came on. Gloria Gaynor's anthem "I Will Survive" (1978) is a disco classic, and when they heard it, everyone in the room started singing and moving to it. The one man in the group expressed discomfort and jokingly said, "I didn't sign up for this." He had joined in the singing for S(2)'s first choice, "Top of the World," by the Carpenters, but the move from singing to dancing was a border he appeared uncomfortable to cross.

This singular discomfort, the unintended dancing at "classics," and the explanation that had to accompany songs that were new to the group illustrate the importance of what I would like to term "shared currency." This refers to how members of the group might share an experience, say, of motherhood or of long road trips, and how this shared currency enabled an affective response within the workshop group. The degree to which the workshop had affective impact relied on these shared currencies. It also depended on shared knowledge (of pop songs, of films), and when that commonality was missing (as in the case of E's inheritance track or of R's), extra narrative was required to provide context. Might it be that those stories based on recognized songs were able to provide more texture to the workshop, as other participants brought their own experiences of the song to the discussion, multiplying the narratives? What was going on in that workshop might be conceptualized through

theories of affect, notably from Sara Ahmed and Anna Gibbs. The latter's 2001 work on "communicable affect" and "contagion" through an analysis of the Australian prime minister Pauline Hanson's emotional impact referred to the idea that "[b]odies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear—in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion" (para. 1).

In Gibbs's work, affect is "catching," and this is key to understanding how the conversations worked in Palermo when there was shared "currency." The group was being bound together by emotions that were evoked by the stories and songs. When Ahmed (2004) talks about "affective economies," she mentions how emotions flow between bodies and bind them together. As she wrote, "[W]hile emotions do not positively reside in a subject or figure, they still work to bind subjects together. Indeed, to put it more strongly, the nonresidence of emotions is what makes them 'binding' " (124). It is also worth thinking about how these binds were varied; they were temporary and in respect of the stories people told and/or the songs that were played. They were also binding the participants, albeit fleetingly, to their individual pasts.

The particular block of 90 minutes that had been set aside for the workshop outside the business of the project meeting meant that it was operating in a different modality. In this sense, more borderscapes were at play. In Ricoeur's theory, the borders between past and present collapse as the past returns to the present (Ricoeur in Negus 2012: 483). In Palermo, the borders of propriety and expectation shifted as the focus spotlit the individual and not the meeting agenda. The air changed. This group was a temporary "network," but the music inherited was clearly, in the words of O'Hara and Brown, after DeNora,

a resource for social "occasioning" in the way it was chosen, listened to and discussed. And so, music became a vehicle through which tastes and values were understood, discussed and evaluated.

When S(2) played "Top of the World" by the Carpenters, a song that many of the group sang along to, her story about how she encountered it illustrates how it is hitched in her memory to a particular person, place, and occasion. "My parents didn't listen to music, just Irish traditional music. This song, I heard it from a neighbor of mine … she actually sang the song at her wedding." With these words S(2) set the scene, as did all the participants as they contextualized their songs, with stories whose details resonated with others in the group. These "orientation points," either moments or people recollected, offered the group some points of contact between each other. That is, their recollection of parental singing, lost fathers, absent fathers, or driving mothers (on road trips in cars) offered a form of "access" where a collective identification was shared through the narration of one song story.

Their recollections also acted as windows into other worlds. Participant D's and S(2)'s stories of Ireland, where dancing happened in kitchens and music came from neighbors' houses, suggested a place of conviviality and sharing. E's talk of listening to Greek singers in the summer evenings, A(1)'s talk of her mother singing her lullabies: these stories conjured up pasts that were never mine, but enriched the knowledge I had of these people. They were places I would never go, such road trips across the northern American states in the 1970s, as K narrated. These stories remain vivid to me, and this was unexpected.

In the theory of Roland Barthes, these moments acted as "punctums." Barthes' punctum has an 'acute effect … something in a photograph that pricks the viewer, pierces his/her consciousness and is perceived as poignant' (Ribière 2008: 64). Barthes' use of the term with reference to how photographs might be viewed made play of the word's Latin

origin, to “sting” or to “prick” and thereby to jolt the viewer. In that “jolt” comes a realization of something that jumps out at you, that engages you emotionally. This happened in the group a number of times, especially around narratives of childbirth and loss, which many of the group had experienced. One singularly unexpected moment was when the only male member of the group talked about his absent father. This individual was known to the group as the finance and project management officer; he was polite and private. I had talked to him many times about his mother, who is a dual Israeli and British national, having been born before 1948 in Palestine. I had worked with his mother on a small-scale film documentary about women in the local Orthodox synagogue. In three years of a working relationship, my colleague’s father had been entirely missing in conversations, but he became visible when G spoke about his inheritance track.

> I think I picked this because my father’s idea of parenting was making us watch westerns [laughter], which I’m not complaining about at all. Not just the track “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly,” but all the soundtracks to spaghetti westerns sit with me, because … I think my moral code […]I learnt from watching westerns—bad cowboys and good cowboys, the good always shoot the bad. The way I behave, a black-and-white sense of morality—[these tracks] left an imprint on me in terms of ways of behaving. […] He used to tell us [G and his brother] stories based on the westerns, ’cause me and my brother shared a room—can’t really remember, maybe I made the whole thing up.

The group had never been witness to a personal testimony from G, and it was unexpected. Since his role was as budget coordinator and project manager, his contributions were on financial and administrative matters, and in social settings too he was reserved. The group were especially silent listening to him; it was novel to hear him speaking about his past and about a father whose emotional involvement was via television. The group dynamic

ensured that there was a safety net to the proceedings, that we were all going to leave Sicily later that day or the following day, that this workshop was not going to be repeated. That G offered a caveat at the end of his story that perhaps his memory was fallible could indicate that he was trying to annul the emotions he had made apparent through the telling of that story. Van Dijck notes how "[a] memory changes each time it is recalled, and its content is determined more by the present than by the past" (2014: 109). The temporary nature of the meeting and the knowledge that the group would never meet together again could have been factors contributing to the *freedom to tell* that this unique workshop enabled.

Stories in Place

Context and place are important for understanding the discussions that happened in this inheritance tracks workshop. The group was meeting because of the political context of rapid migration into Europe. Their work was in dealing with those who had crossed borders, who were categorized as "migrants." The word supposes that the subject is always moving, not fixed, always on the border of "citizen" (Cabot 2016; Western 2020). It solidifies the flight from somewhere and maps it onto an ongoing alien subjectivity. The focus on that autumn afternoon was not with migration and migrants, but on the team's inheritance tracks, their own "sonic agency," in "listening and being heard" (LaBelle 2018: 4, quoted in Western 2020: 296). Work on sound and migration is tangential to the session we had in Sicily, although I am now conducting research in that area. What is useful from those working in the field is the idea that migration is as much a sonic as a physical process. There is, in listening, the potential "to open creative engagements when representing displacement" (Western 2020: 296). And here I found out how that process was key to opening up and shifting the borders of the group's understanding of each other.

How people reacted to each other, how they talked, what they shared during the workshop (and then privately afterwards) indicated that the entire 90 minutes was clearly differentiated in their minds from the previous business. The workshop was not on the official meeting agenda, and so it was placed and contextualized in a novel space. Writing on the very different ways in which "context" has been conceived with regard to music therapy, Even Ruud (2010) addresses the context of musical experience. It is also useful to note that the inheritance tracks workshop was not conceived of as a therapeutic tool, but rather one that sought to interrogate transference of music across lives, and so across individual subjective borders. In that regard, it was interrogating music' place within individual lives, and its journey across generations. Here is Ruud on the context of music:

> How we experience music and how music will affect us will depend on our musical background, the influence of the music we have chosen, and the particular situation in which we experience the music. In other words, in such a contextual understanding, the music, the person, and the situation work together in a relational or mutual relation where changes in any of these components will change the meaning produced. (2010: 57)

The idea that meanings are reliant on the relationship between all these different variables illustrates how the conversations that emerged from the Palermo workshop were unique. There were layers of experience at work. First, there was the individual's song story, one that meant something important to them, one whose narration sometimes came with emotion, even tears. When K heard her chosen inherited track of ABBA's "Dancing Queen," which had been played on long car trips to a holiday cabin in North America, her comments of "I heard it from my mum. I want to pass it on to my children … It just makes me happy"

resounded with others, who recalled similar types of car journeys listening to parental music choices. In the recollection of that track, it came into the present, was heard by the group on a laptop, and had a shared meaning through the responses to it. At the beginning of this chapter, I referred to the idea that these song stories were exchanged in "confessional" moments (Radstone 2004). Susannah Radstone's focus is feminist literary confession and memoir. She details the history of the term "confession" and its prevalence in contemporary popular media culture and reality TV. Something of the person is needed by an audience, and there is an exchange: from the confessor there is information, from the confessor (or TV audience) there is acceptance (or disapproval). Confession can be a pouring out of the heart, truth, or emotions in order to be forgiven, to move forward, and to indicate to the rest of a group that one has atoned, all in line with the Judeo-Christian origin and practice of the term. Here what is useful to keep of it is the idea of an individual revealing something new of themselves to an audience.

In Summary

After the meeting ended, two project team members, D and E, had to leave to get to the airport. The rest of us walked across town to eat lunch together at Moltivolti. This nonprofit restaurant, meeting place, and social hub was set up in 2014 by eight friends from across Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. The CESIE team are well known at Moltivolti, where the food is a mixture of African, Asian, and Italian cuisine. At our lunch, it was as if the inheritance tracks workshop had not happened. We were back in the sunlight of the Sicilian capital, which as I said at the outset is very noisy, and we were in our assigned roles: project lead, hosts, project members. Whatever "trouble" was engendered in that one hour was now smoothed over, unspoken. I want to think again then about place, for it is important to consider the locational and temporal context of these song stories (Forman 2002; Lefebvre

2004). They took “place” in geographically and temporally contextualized bodies. The stories that emerged illuminate shared and shifting musical affiliations and affections, where popular music is handed down and across ages, sometimes where the lines of inheritance are not only familial, but also contextualized within a broader complex “traffic.” The “inheritances” here were the library of potential pasts that were gifted or chosen, acknowledged, negotiated, and shared in a small hot room in those 90 minutes in the autumn of 2018. There was also a series of small “displacements” happening in that time, notably in the shift in emotion that had been enabled by the recollection and sharing of the songs and the stories that accompanied them. A change had taken place.

Solnit’s idea of storytelling as a revolt is of use to understand what happened in Palermo, because small moments of listening and telling have the potential to blur borders. Her work is about feminist recoveries of forgotten histories and erased subject worlds. But there is something I would like to take from it. *Troubling Inheritance*, as indicated in the introduction to this book, is about the complexities around inheritance in relation to music: how we remember it, and who with. My reading of Solnit’s assertion was that storytelling might be disruptive; what we tell and where we tell it, how we listen and how we react to the story, may disturb some kind of stasis or status quo. The disruptions noted here are modal, they are small and nuanced, but they reveal the potential for song stories to be instrumental in those changes.

In Palermo, the professionalism of the meeting was disrupted, as was the veneer of “appropriate” (unemotional) business behavior. I myself had been troubled by this possibility at the very start, not wanting to “waste people’s time” with the original request in September 2018. Borders of behavior were shifted. Borders of time were crossed together and shared, as people shared the song stories. Towards the end of the session, people were dancing and singing along to the songs. They were united for a short time by the emotional bindings that

emerged through the process. There was an atmospheric change in the room caused by the dedicated time of shared listening and telling. Differences and commonalities were revealed, and temporary affective alliances and sympathies emerged. There was a generosity at play in both the 90-minute workshop and its forgetting. The participants knew how to listen and then how to forget. Modalities of behavior and of perception were reconfigured as the group moved from being a group of NGO workers and academics on a media research project to a group of storytellers and listeners. All of these disruptions were afforded by the choice of one or two songs that were important to them and part of their own "lifetime soundtrack" (Istvandity 2016. This song story workshop offered a space for telling and listening; it offered agency and bore witness. It was so much more than just the hour and a half it took. Writing this more than two years later has been instructive. Listening again to the songs on the Spotify playlist and to the recorded audio of the meeting itself does what those songs did in the meeting. It crosses borders and affects me, takes me back to the hot little room in Sicily, and is treasured.

Discography

ABBA. "Dancing Queen." Recorded August 4–5, 1975, as lead single on fourth studio album, *Arrivals*, released 1976. Written by Benny Andersson, Björn Ulvaeus, and Stig Anderson. Produced by B. Andersson and B. Ulvaeus, Polar Music.

Bennett, Tony. "You're All the World to Me." Composed in 1950 by Burton Lane, lyrics by Alan J. Lerner, for the MGM musical *Royal Wedding* [film] (1951), directed by Stanley Donen.

The Carpenters. "'On Top of the World." Recorded 1972 on album *A Song for You* and released as a single in 1973. Written and composed by Richard Carpenter and John Bettis. Produced by Karen Carpenter and R. Carpenter, A&M.

Chapman, Tracy. “Talkin’ Bout a Revolution.” Recorded 1988 as second single on eponymous album *Tracy Chapman*. Produced by D. Kerschenbaum, Elektra Records.

Daara J Family. “Jamono.” Produced in Senegal.

Gaynor, Gloria. “I Will Survive.” Released 1978. Written by Freddie Peren and Dino Fekaris. Produced by D. Fekaris, Polydor Records.

Khaled. “Aïcha.” 1996. Produced by Goldman and Khaled, EMI.

Lekkas, Vasilis. “Am Thimisis to onirou mou.” Remember My Dream

Morricone, Ennio. “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.” Theme song for same-named movie, 1966, directed by Sergio Leone and starring Clint Eastwood. Written by E. Morricone. Produced by P. Santomarino, Parade.

Morrison, Van. *Astral Weeks*. Released 1968 as second studio album. Recorded at Century Sound Studios, New York. Produced by Lewis. Merenstein, Warner Bros. Records.

Rolling Stones. “She’s a Rainbow.” Song on 1967 album *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. Written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. Produced by the Rolling Stones.

Simon and Garfunkel. “The Only Living Boy in New York.” Song on 1970 album *Bridge over Troubled Water*. Written by Paul Simon. Produced by P. Simon and Art Garfunkel, Columbia Records.

Simply Red. “Sunrise.” Chart-topping song on the soul band’s 2003 album *Home*. Produced by A. Wright, Warner Music.

Sosa, Mercedes. “Duerme Negrito.” Third track on Spanish singer’s 1971 album *Gracias a la vida*. Produced by Fonogram S.A.

Veloso, Caetano. “O Leãozinho” (Little lion). Eighth track on Brazilian singer-songwriter’s 1977 album *Bicho*.

The Velvet Underground. “Oh! Sweet Nuthin’.” Released 1970 on American rock group’s fourth studio album, *Loaded*. Produced by Geoff Haslam, Shel Kagan, and the Velvet Underground, Cotillion Records.

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