

“Experimental” Music Practice and/or Self-Determination Politics: A Sicilian Diasporic Perspective

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Abstract: How can an intellectual project, centred on the revindication of one’s peripheral identity, be based on a privileged, ethnocentric corpus of (extra)musical practices and rituals — described as “experimental”, “new” or “contemporary” — that is inevitably imbricated with impalpable and yet perniciously operative notions such as “erudite”, “classical”, “Western”, “European”, etc.? On the one hand, self-determination activism and avant-garde music may both be seen as forms of symbolic production characterised by situations of substantial political isolation. On the other hand, claims for territorial and ethnic liberation may clash with the not-so-implicitly Eurocentric, white, aristocratic premises upon which the whole “erudite music” rubric is predicated. In addition, as someone born and grown up in the Southern fringes of Europe, who has lived and worked both in Northern Europe and South America, I also need to acknowledge the slippery nature of my supposed peripherality, always suspended between the racialised stereotypes traditionally assigned to Sicilians and the privileged condition of a white EU passport holder.

Keywords: peripherality; privilege; self-determination; avant-garde; Eurocentrism

Prática musical "experimental" e/ou autodeterminação política: uma perspectiva diaspórica siciliana

Resumo: Como pode um projeto intelectual, centrado na reivindicação da própria identidade periférica, ser baseado em um corpus privilegiado e etnocêntrico de práticas e rituais (extra)musicais – definidos como “experimentais”, “novos”, e “contemporâneos” – que è inevitavelmente imbricado com as noções, impalpáveis e mesmo assim operativas, de “erudito”, “clássico”, “ocidental”, “europeu”, etc.? Por um lado, o ativismo pela autodeterminação e a música de vanguarda podem ambas ser vistas como formas de produção simbólica, caracterizadas por situações de substancial isolamento político. Por outro lado, reivindicações de independência territorial e étnica podem chocar com as premissas eurocêtricas, brancas e aristocráticas nas quais todo o conceito de “música erudita” se sustenta. Outrossim, como sujeito nascido e criado no extremo sul da Europa, que têm morado e trabalhado tanto no Norte da Europa, quanto na América do Sul, eu devo também reconhecer a natureza ambígua da minha suposta perifericidade, que está sempre suspensa entre os estereótipos racializados dos sicilianos e a condição privilegiada de um branco europeu.

Palavras-chave: perifericidade; privilégio; autodeterminação; vanguarda; eurocentrismo.

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INTRODUCTION

I commonly situate the start of my “serious” compositional production between the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2009. These were the first months of what would turn out to be a 7-year long stay in the North of England, studying and working at the University of Leeds. This was also the period when I started realising that I could use Sicilian to name my pieces: part of that was due to the fact that everyone uses Italian for music, and as a speaker of Italian I find that often inappropriate and ultimately unexciting, whereas nobody has got a clue about Sicilian and then they find it interesting or at least obscure. Most of why I started naming pieces in Sicilian, though, has to do with the fact that in those years I was becoming more and more reflective about my own Sicilianness, and got to meet several movements and associations which were concerned with this same issue, from a range of different standpoints: some were more like culture revival associations, others were interested in politics and in campaigning for forms of territorial self-determination – basically, autonomy or independence.

So, looking back at this period I am often struck by the naivety of my own confidence with the political significance of my work, and also with the fact that composing and disseminating “contemporary” or “experimental” music could effectively contribute to the cause. In my 2013 PhD thesis, I got as far as claiming that

my examination of these issues [on Sicily] is tightly intertwined with my activity as contemporary experimental composer, in that both involve an effort in challenging assumptions and coming to terms with situations of substantial political isolation (MESSINA, 2013a, p. 5).

Here the very idea of complaining about political isolation is symptomatic of the perception that this isolation is somewhat anomalous or undeserved. Moreover, in the above passage I actively connect contemporary experimental composition with intellectual activism. But how can an intellectual project, centred on the revindication of one’s peripheral identity, be based on such a privileged, ethnocentric corpus of (extra)musical practices and rituals — described as “experimental”, “new” or “contemporary” — that is inevitably imbricated with impalpable and yet perniciously operative notions such as “erudite”, “classical”, “Western”, “European”, etc.?

On the one hand, surely decolonial self-determination activism and avant-garde music may both be seen as forms of symbolic production characterised by political isolation. On the other



hand, however, claims for territorial and ethnic liberation may clash with the not-so-implicitly Eurocentric, white, aristocratic premises upon which the whole “erudite music” rubric is predicated. Of course, one should be aware that independence politics may well be, and often is, reducible to Eurocentrism and whiteness, especially in Europe. This may be the case even in Sicily, and at times it is the case, despite the violent racialisation to which our bodies, cultures and territories, are subjected when they are set against the whiteness of Northern Italians and Northern/Western Europeans; however, my interest in Sicilian self-determination is precisely the opposite — I look precisely at my racialised identity in order to imagine a space that is freed from the normativity of European and Italian whiteness. Again, how can this imaginary space exist in the context of elitist, abstract, white music?

Early responses to this question are to be found in my production from the early 2010s. For example, in the orchestral piece *U mpastu*,¹ I use variation in the density of isolated and repeated fragments in order to reproduce the imperialistic regime of unequal exchange that regulates the economic relations between the North and the South of Italy (cf. ZITARA, 1973). In *A banner*,² I call for two unsynchronised ensembles with two different conductors as an allegory of the ambiguous geopolitical relations between Italy and Sicily. *Antudo*³ is a lyrical piece based on the eponymous motto from the Sicilian Vespers, used again by the Separatists in the 1940s and by contemporary independence movements. Several other pieces of mine focus on Sicilian self-determination, but in general, in these pieces, my use of material in the context of evocative allegorical coding fails to address the elitist and exclusive nature of this very material.

There is more, as I also need to acknowledge the slippery nature of my supposed peripherality, always suspended between the racialised stereotypes traditionally assigned to Sicilians and the privileged condition of a white EU passport holder. I divided this paper in two different parts, both concerned with my trajectory as a diasporic subject: in the first one, I look at my own production in terms of self-discovery as Other; in the second one, I provide an example of how

1. Premiered in Leeds on 12 June 2010 by the LUUMS Symphony Orchestra conducted by Adam Fergler. Published by MAP Editions in 2013 (MESSINA, 2013b). Recording available at <<https://bit.ly/2EErri>>.

2. Premiered in Leeds on 18 March 2011 by the LSTwo Ensemble conducted by Mic Spencer and Jessica Ward. Published by MAP Editions in 2013 (MESSINA, 2013c). Recording available at <<https://bit.ly/36WdML5>>.

3. A first version for violin, violoncello and harmonium was premiered in Edinburgh on 12 December 2011 by the Red Note Ensemble conducted by John Harris. Recording available at <<https://bit.ly/2ECrKFK>>. Later versions for solo cello were performed by Seth Woods and Leticia Porto.

my positionality as a peripheral, racialised Other, upon another dislocation to South America and Amazonia, may quickly turn into the privileged and arrogant *locus* of enunciation of the coloniser.

PART 1: “I’M A FILTHY WOG, AND PROUD!”

My trajectory is marked by a manifold and complex Otherness, that is partly describable with the help of Frantz Fanon’s work, and in particular the book *Black Skin, White Masks*. A renowned passage from this book explains how the young Antilleans self-represent themselves. They identify “with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages—an all-white truth” (FANON, 2008, p. 114). This confidence in their own whiteness lasts up to the point when they go to Europe, and understand they are seen as the savages in movies and comics. They then immediately feel that “in the collective unconscious, black = ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality” (FANON, 2008, p. 149). They therefore start feeling immoral and ashamed.

Now, I want to dislocate the discussion for one minute from aural to visual culture, and show how my experience of Sicilian, for example, can be compared with Fanon’s description, even with the fundamental disclaimer that I am totally aware of my privileged status as a white European subject, who does not want to appropriate black histories of global sufferings and oppression.

The movie scene I refer to articulates at least my own Fanonian discovery of Otherness. In the film *Volcano* by William Dieterle (1950), upon landing in the Aeolian island of Vulcano, the Italian actress Anna Magnani meets the racialised stares of the Sicilian women (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: stills from the landing scene in William Dieterle’s *Volcano*.



Source: <<https://youtu.be/4XqP6IvEb4s>>.

This kind of scene reappears cyclically in films about Sicily, the clichéd landing in front of the angry, racialised islanders: most notably, it appears in the film *Stromboli* by Roberto Rossellini (1950), with Ingrid Bergman playing the Nordic character disgusted by the local women. As in



Fanon, here the Otherness of these women is my own Otherness as a Sicilian: although the images encourage me to identify with the white Italian or Nordic protagonist, I am secretly conscious that the representation of these Sicilian women is actually the representation of me, too.

A Cronulla si junceru

Between the end of November 2015 and the end of May 2016, I resided in Sydney as a visiting researcher based at Macquarie University. I made it to Australia in time to be there for the 10th anniversary of the Cronulla riots – or pogroms, as described by Suvendrini Perera (2009). On 11 December 2005, a multitude of over 5000 angry Anglo-Celtic yobs gathered at Cronulla beach in order to exert punitive violence against Arab and Muslim communities (Fig. 2), in what was nicknamed as the “National Leb and Wog bashing day” (AL-NATOUR, 2017).

Figure 2: A mob of angry white rioters brutally attacking victim Safi Mehri in Cronulla. Photo credit: Andrew Meares.



Source: <<https://bit.ly/2PI9pgD>>.

Soon it was clear to me that the “anti-wog” feeling that triggered the riots was about me, too. After all, Australia has a whole history of racialised violence against Southern Italians, ranging from the whiteness screenings of prospective immigrants made by Australian immigration officials (PUGLIESE, 2002), to any sort of violent bullying suffered by Southern Italian kids at school (BOCCABELLA, 2011), etc.

A few years later, in 2018, I wrote a text-based piece titled *A Cronulla si junceru* (“They gathered up in Cronulla”),⁴ in which I use Sicilian recitation alongside free improvisation in order to re-narrate the events – essentially, Anglo-white violence against the so-called *Lebs*, which stands for Lebanese, a general slur against people “of Middle Eastern appearance” (quoting the local press, but also cf. PUGLIESE, 2003; AL-NATOUR, 2017).

A Cronulla si junceru, na ddhu jornu, cchiossai di cincumila chistiani. All’ottu e menza già ndrummyvanu e cunsavanu i cuffulari. S’accupava rô cauru, e cchissi ccà nzuppilu nzuppilu accuminciavanu a scattari. A manziornu, mbriachi comu tanti signi, arrustevanu canni ri poccu e caddhozzi ri sasizza, ppì llassaricilli curriri ncoddu ê libbanisi.

[They gathered up in Cronulla, on that day: more than five thousand people. At 8.30am they were already drinking and starting the barbecues. It was boiling hot, and these people, little by little, were starting to go bonkers. By midday, all drunk as skunks, they were roasting pork meat and sausages, in order to throw them at the Lebs].

I re-narrate the events from the point of view of an imaginary Sicilian person who witnessed the violence and attempts to describe it, lingering on the most brutal details in order to avoid establishing any sympathy for the fierce perpetrators of the violence – contrary to what has been extensively done by Australian media (cf. WISE, 2017).

Appoi accuminciaru a scassaricci i machini a cchiddi ca pareunu nnicchiddhu cchiù libbanisi ri l’autri. Scassunu ssi machini, e appoi ncagghiunu a dduj carusi mediurientali e ccuminciunu a ssuntumarili rê coppa. E mentri chissi ccà a munseddhu vastunaunu a ssi dduj carusi, na fuddha ri ggenti mbriachi taliava e arrireva. Ccu ll’occhi russi, assappanati ri sangu, si ciccaunu a malajucata, tiniunu u schifu, ppì ffozza ddhu jornu cci’ava a nesciri u mottu.

[Later they started smashing the cars of those who looked a bit more Lebs than the others. They smash the cars, and then they bump into two Middle Eastern guys and start beating them up. And while the mob bashes these two guys, a crowd of drunk people stares at them laughing. With red eyes, soaked in blood, these mobsters were looking for trouble; they were making a mess, as if they wanted someone to end up dead on that day].

This imaginary narrator gets to the point of wondering what could have happened if s/he was “mistaken” for a “Leb” and lynched in the middle of the crowd.

Ju pensu ca su ppì ddiri cc’jera ju ddhu jornu, sti scattati m’avissunu scassatu a lignati macari a mmia, a mmia ccu tutti i me cumpagni catanisi, palemmitani, sciacchitani. Ddhu jornu n-cafolu ri ggenti comu a nuatri, emigranti siciliani, napulitani, greci, marrucchini, palestinesi, si stesino ê casi rô scantu, nzemmula

4. Recordings and script available at <<https://mega.nz/#F!2pBhTIDT!TvPg9iDzWF6lcbKjqMLAuw>>. Recorded in August, 2018 by myself with the Grupo de Improvisação Livre – G.I.L. and presented in Sciacca, Sicily, as part of the Ritrovarsi festival. Also performed in Rio Branco with G.I.L. on 22 August 2018, and in João Pessoa with Artesanato Furioso on 23 October 2018.



cchê só figghi e niputi, nanzamai cci puteva capitari quacchiccosa. Sydney addi-vintau ncampu ri battagghia, ccù scerri a tutti i banni.

[I bet if I was there on that day, these idiots would have beaten me up, too, they would have beaten me with all my mates from Catania, Palermo, or Sciacca. On that day, a lot of people like us, immigrants from Sicily, Neapolitans, Greeks, Moroccans, Palestinians, they all stayed home in fear, together with their children and grandchildren, afraid that something could happen to them. Sydney became a battlefield, with fights everywhere].

Indeed, during my stay in Sydney, I heard many stories from people of Southern European, North African and Middle Eastern backgrounds who locked themselves at home in order to avoid the mess that was going on in the streets.

I saw them colours of your flag

Further into my stay in Sydney, I then witnessed Australia Day (better known as Invasion Day or Survival Day, celebrated on 26 January), and the shameless parade of whiteness it involves, in the face of the dispossessed, Indigenous owners of the land. This episode inspired a solo-speech piece that I completed a few weeks later, titled *I saw them colours of your flag*, which was recorded by Lauren Redhead as part of her independent album *solo speaking* (REDHEAD, 2016). On Invasion Day, I did not want to participate to the celebration of the persisting invasion of the land where I was temporarily residing, and hence decided to participate to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders counter-event in downtown Sydney, called Yabun Festival.

The impressions of the whole day at Yabun Festival, with the contextual stop at Redfern Station; the walk to Victoria Park where the Festival was taking place (because even that park needed to have a settler colonial name, surely?); and the white people trying to disrupt the event, provided the content material for the piece (MESSINA, 2017).

You know they celebrate that crap at the end of January, when they got here in 1788 and started plundering your land and killing your people? Well I went to Victoria Park on that day, because how the hell do you want to name a bloody park round here??! No, seriously, what the fuck, but then there was also your own counter-festival down there, and guess what? Those clowns with their blue flags were trying to hijack your event, breaking in your shows, interrupting your speeches, as if the whole country hailing the fucking invasion wasn't enough for them!

In the piece, I get to the point of offering to wrap myself in the Aboriginal flag, but I first situate myself: “I’m a filthy wog, and proud!”. This wog declaration serves to avoid appro-

priating Aboriginal histories of suffering and oppression while standing in solidarity against a white Anglo-Celtic, Aussie-dominated country: “I’ll wrap myself in your proud banner: / I love it, as – unlike this country – / There’s no fucking white in it”. While directly referring to the white Commonwealth stars on the Australian flag, as opposed to the black, red and yellow Aboriginal flag, my comment here is an obvious disavowal of whiteness in the face of the persistent settler-colonial mentality that characterises Anglo-Celtic Australia.

PART 2: “I WANT TO OCCUPY YOUR SKIN”

The disavowal of whiteness declared and performed in *I saw them colours of your flag* somewhat clashes with my parallel trajectory in Brazilian Amazonia, that started before my stay in Australia and continued after my return. As a European – and, in particular, Italian – subject I (more or less consciously) embody the role and the aspirations of the coloniser.

In his famous reading of Jan Van der Straet’s painting *America* (Fig. 3), Michel de Certeau illustrates the shortcomings of the racio-gendered colonial mentality that characterises Eurocentric images of South America:

Figure 3: Jan Van der Straet’s painting *America*, as it appears on Michel de Certeau’s *The Writing of History* (1988).





Amerigo Vespucci the voyager arrives from the sea. A crusader standing erect, his body in armor, he bears the European weapons of meaning [a cruciform staff with a banner bearing the Southern Cross, a navigational astrolabe, and a sword—each of these referring to discourses of mastery—religious truth, scientific truth, and military power]. Behind him are the vessels that will bring back to the European West the spoils of a paradise. Before him is the Indian “America,” a nude woman reclining in her hammock, an unnamed presence of difference, a body which awakens within a space of exotic fauna and flora. An inaugural scene: after a moment of stupor, on this threshold dotted with colonnades of trees, the conqueror will write the body of the other and trace there his own history. From her he will make a historied body—a blazon—of his labors and phantasms. She will be “Latin” America (DE CERTEAU, 1988, pp. xxv-xxvi).

How can I possibly avoid reproducing this mentality when creating, pronouncing or commenting something about Amazonia? Even with the best intentions, is it really possible, as a white European subject, to eliminate one’s violent arrogation of the “European weapons of meaning”? Is it really possible to come to terms innocently with the temptation to write one’s “own history” on the bodies and territories of the local population? In a nutshell, can my presence in Amazonia, or elsewhere in South America, ever be innocent?

A Language I Never Heard

For example, in 2017 I participated to Ursprung Collective’s work *A Language I Never Heard*,⁵ a lo-fi music video on an eponymous track by Israfel Sivad, who wrote and declaimed the lyrics, and Reify, who wrote and produced the music. I filmed and edited the images, as I stated, in a very lo-fi fashion, using my phone during various trips to the border between Amazonian Bolivia and Brazil, in the cities of Cobija, Epitaciolândia and Brasília.

Everybody else has gone to sleep / except for me and the bats, and / we can’t get close enough to you. // I want to occupy your skin; / my soul commingled with yours – / one body, one breath, one vein, // one love. // I can’t say too much as / the moon turns to blood, / earthquakes rock my continent. // The apocalypse devours my mind / as your arm brushes mine. I / speak a language I never heard // before. // But it seems maybe you / understand, maybe you heard it, / too. Constellations return. // They light our silhouette in / a primordial bath. You’ve given birth / to me in a land where I never knew // I died.

A Language I Never Heard uses the violent language of the coloniser. The poem deploys an imagery that inscribes colonial occupation and exploitation, while it describes a relationship of love and desire. The poet’s male voice explicitly says “I want to occupy your skin”, and uses signifiers such as “continent”, “language”, or better, “language I never heard”, “primordial”,

5. Completed in 2017 and available at <<https://youtu.be/zk7tG-2gQb0>>.

“land”, that are all intrinsically connected to the rhetoric of the *terra nullius*, of the demographic void to be domesticated, populated and civilised. Importantly, the use of these signifiers connotes the ownership of the female body, in line with the well-known correspondence between colonial occupation and patriarchal domination (WILLIAMSON, 1986; MOANE, 2011).

Here, again, De Certeau’s critique of Van der Straet’s *America* may turn out handy:

This erotic and warlike scene has an almost mythic value. It represents the beginning of a new function of writing in the West. Jan Van der Straet’s staging of the disembarkment surely depicts Vespucci’s surprise as he faces this world, the first to grasp clearly that she is a *nouva terra* not yet existing on maps—an unknown body destined to bear the name, Amerigo, of its inventor. But what is really initiated here is a colonization of the body by the discourse of power. This is *writing that conquers*. It will use the New World as if it were a blank, “savage” page on which Western desire will be written. It will transform the space of the other into a field of expansion for a system of production. For the moment of a rupture between a subject and an object of the operation, between a *will to write* and a *written body* (or a body to be written), this writing fabricates Western history (DE CERTEAU, 1988, p. xxvi).

Taking as a starting point whiteness, defined by Sara Ahmed as “zero-point of orientation” (AHMED, 2007), the other is fundamentally deprived of their space, and then imagined as exotic and primordial. Literally, a violent act of writing superimposes a layer of history over what is already there. As much as Israfel Sivad’s poem utilizes a lexicon of colonial exploitation, Reify’s music provides sonic elements that reinforce this lexicon, and my own images domesticate Cobija’s urban space, submitting it to my own zero-point of whiteness, violently resignifying the

Figure 4: A still from the video *A language I Never Heard*.



Source: <<https://youtu.be/zk7tG-2gQb0>>.



place from my own Eurocentric and Brazil-centric coordinates (Fig. 4). In other words, even with a self-critical glance, I internalise my own Europeanness, as well as the point of view of a Brazilian resident, in order to racialise Amazonian Bolivia with my own observation.

FINAL REMARKS

The status of my participation in this last collective work is even more problematic in light of the violent coup d'état that has recently overthrown President Evo Morales in Bolivia. On 10 November 2019, Morales was forced to resign by the head of the army (BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT..., 2019). On 12 November, he flew to Mexico in exile (DRAKE, 2019).

Not only was Bolivia's Plurinational Utopia destroyed by religious bigotry and white supremacism, but also by the hypocritical intellectual relativism of many fellow academics whose activities have actively undermined Morales. In August 2016, I participated to the prestigious academic conference 12th Jornadas Andinas de Literatura Latinoamericana (JALLA), that was celebrated in La Paz. To the shock and disappointment of me and many of my Brazilian colleagues, former Bolivian President Carlos Mesa Gisbert, disguised as a common “historian”, was invited to pronounce the final keynote speech at the conference.⁶ As a runner-up to the October 2019 elections that had confirmed Morales's presidency for the fourth time, Mesa was then involved in the coup d'état that forced Morales to the resignation and exile (BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT..., 2019).

As an academic and firm supporter of JALLA's spirit and intents, I repudiate Mesa's 2016 speech as a “historian”⁷ as well as the organisers' decision to let him talk at the event. As noted in a personal conversation by my friend, colleague and collaborator Jairo de Araújo Souza, who was also attending JALLA in La Paz, “unfortunately, in 2016 we witnessed a live rehearsal of the coup d'état”.⁸

Needless to say, the Bolivian dream of a Plurinational Indigenous State kind of went through the same appropriation process I symbolically apply to Cobija and Bolivian Amazonia in

6. Teresa Di Somma and I published a critique of Mesa's speech at JALLA 2016 in the 2nd volume of the analytical dictionary *Uwa'kirü* (MESSINA; DI SOMMA, 2017).

7. It has to be said that Mesa is indeed one of Bolivia's most respected historians, alongside his mother Teresa Gisbert. However, his keynote at JALLA 2016 was the speech of a politician, who did not hesitate in claiming that Bolivia should be considered part of “the West” and in expressing his discontent with the 2009 Plurinational Constitution (cf. MESSINA; DI SOMMA, 2017).

8. “Lamentavelmente assistimos em 2016 ao ensaio do golpe ao vivo” Jairo de Araújo Souza, personal conversation with the author, 12 November 2019.

my video. Another despicable event connected to the Bolivian coup d'état also resonates with the racio-gendered desire of domination that characterises *A Language I Never Heard*: on 7 November, Patricia Arce, Mayor of the small town of Vinto affiliated to Morales's party MAS (Movement for Socialism), was beaten up by anti-Morales protesters “who dragged her through the streets bare-foot, covered her in red paint and forcibly cut her hair” (BOLIVIA MAYOR..., 2019) (Fig. 5).

Regardless of the ethnicity of the perpetrators of the violence, here it is evident that the rage against Evo Morales and his party is nothing short of a reactionary settler-colonial re-

Figure 5: Mayor Patricia Arce forced to parade disfigured by protesters.



Source: <<https://bbc.in/2ZeVDW0>>

taliation against any minimal attempt to advance the project of a country that acknowledges the non-negotiable right to Indigenous sovereignty. I say this with utter disappointment towards some colleagues whose work I absolutely respect, but who have shown indifference or even open hostility against Morales's project and even against the 2009 Plurinational Constitution: among them, JALLA's general coordinator Guillermo Mariaca Iturri.⁹

Talking about hypocritical intellectual relativism, once again I need to problematise the significance of my activity as an “experimental” composer, and reflect on the inevitable clash

9. A few days after the exile to which Morales was forced, Mariaca accused him of “cowardice” [*cobardía*], called him “a tyrant” [*un tirano*] and hailed the new birth of “street democracy and citizen politics” [*La democracia de la calle y la política ciudadana hemos terminado de nacer*] (MARIACA ITURRI, 2019).



between ambitious intellectual projects and personal/collective deception. Surely, I maintain that my artistic attempts to reclaim and therefore dignify my wog status are totally sincere, sound and legitimate. On the other hand, the most basic intellectual honesty urges me to admit my substantial belonging to the most violent and bloodthirsty ethnic group/geopolitical colossus of human history, that is once again evocable through signifiers like “European”, “white”, “the West”, even “Italy”, etc. I am not just talking of a historical legacy; I am talking about the immense privilege of being able, at any given time, to appropriate Otherness and force it violently into my own racialised categories. Having said that, I do not really disown *A Language I Never Heard*, I rather take full responsibility for it, as long as its problematic status is admitted.

The very texture of what we call “experimental” or “contemporary”, intended as generic concepts that claim universality while concealing their often exclusive “white-only” applicability, might definitely be part of the problem here. And while I reclaim my belonging to both “experimental music” and “academic studies”, I have no hesitation in recognising the non-innocent shortcomings of both these rubrics.

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