

# AMERICAN MUSIC REVIEW



**HISAM**

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for Studies in  
American Music

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# FEMINOPRAXIS RUIDISTAS: COLLECTIVES OF NOISE, AFFECTION, AND SOUND IN LATIN AMERICA

ANA ALFONSINA MORA-FLORES

*“To hear with a feminist ear is to hear who is not heard, and how we are not heard.” -Sara Ahmed*

As a classical pianist, I used to have quite a structured way of listening based on my formal conservatory training from the age of nine. My conception of sound was very straightforward: it was simply an element of creating music and a pleasant sensation for the listener. On the other hand, noise was something unpleasant, uncomfortable to the ears, and associated with an error, meaning that it was something to avoid. But these ideas are based on biased perception and cultural context. Nevertheless, I was always very attracted to dissonances or “noises” present in some contemporary music, but it wasn’t until later in my life that I began listening with a feminist ear. I started to explore the works of wonderful thinkers, philosophers, and artists through the texts and music of Pauline Oliveros, Linda Nochlin, and Gayatri Spivak, who were pioneers in the intersection of arts and feminism.

Latin American writers were no exception, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Francesca Gargallo, Marcela Lagarde, Mónica Mayer, Maris Bustamante, Susan Campos Fonseca, Ana María Romano, Isabel Nogueira, and others from autonomous communities such as the Zapatista movement, not to mention some examples portraying incarnated feminism that predate these theories and academic spaces, emanate from a complex cosmogony that is still very much alive. With this broadened perspective of diversity in feminisms I have sought to find, recalling Oliveros and Nochlin, the women and non-binary creators in the history of music, particularly in the experimental music scene where noise/ruido finds a home and a specific movement. Here, I map the names from this academic lineage that have been accessible to me

onto an extant history of Euro-American feminist arts. These names include Alida Vazquez, Alicia Urreta (Mexico), Jacqueline Nova (Colombia), Leni Alexander (Chile), Beatriz Ferreyra (Argentina), and Jocy de Oliveira (Brazil), just to mention a few. As a consequence of this work, more questions started to appear in my mind, such as: What happened to all the artists in the diaspora who didn’t belong to an institution or academic space? And most importantly, what are the women of my generation creating and what is their motivation?

While these questions were making noise in my mind, they also resonated in my practice as a musician and educator. At the same time, I encountered several collectives of women and non-binary sound artists making noise/ruido including both Feminoise Latinoamérica and Híbridas y Quimeras. These collectives have created safe and gender-inclusive communities that did not exist previously. In these communities, women can feel free to share their work and experiences through the construction of noise/ruido music that resonates with their feminist praxis, even when conditions are precarious and their lives may be endangered. This movement has enriched not only sound practices but also is creating an interdisciplinary dialogue permeated by a sense of belonging, affection, and empowerment. The noise music they have created as a result serves as an unexpected political statement in an experimental music scene that is still largely male-dominated. This movement is, even now, expanding and decentralizing in other territories of Latin America.

**The politics of noise/ruido: Cacerolazos and contemporary feminist movements in Latin America**

In Ana Alonso Minutti's words: "noise/ruído has a powerful potential that produces actions. Noising does not operate from power, but from a powerless position that empowers others. Noising is communal; a shared identity that operates in solidarity. It is empathy that leads to action. Noising is a decolonizing methodology and is intrinsically connected to social activism. While having its roots in the present, noising enacts a better future" (2019).<sup>1</sup> Noise/ruído has taken a prominent place in manifestations where women have taken charge of public space to work towards better life conditions, equity, and to protest against gender violence. For example, at la marcha de las cacerolas vacías in Santiago de Chile, 2 December 1971, women took to the streets with pans, kitchenware, and any other home objects available to make noise and raise their voices in protest of the food shortage that had resulted from the socialist government of president Salvador Allende (Memoria Chilena. Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, n.d.).<sup>2</sup> Since then, the cacerolazo has become a resonant symbol and potential of noise/ruído in the streets of Latin America against injustice. #NiUnaMenos (2015) in Argentina and #VivasNos Queremos (2016), known as Primavera Púrpura (Purple Spring) in Mexico City, are two examples of local movements that subsequently expanded globally as a result of the high rates of femicides against women and non-binary identities.

The noise/ruído that accompanied these movements through the cacerolazos, percussion, consignas that created their rhythm, vulvatucadas, and the heartbeats and bodies of each one who participated have had the societal effect of raising consciousness, and in the best cases, modifying laws and guaranteeing their human rights. All this collective female power has resonance in the collectives of experimental music who have started to dialogue, listening to each other and questioning the violence in their respective contexts: lack of safe spaces; disparity in representation; gender-based exclusion; the misconception that only men can be creators and producers. As a result of this work, there was an effervescent moment when numerous collectives, in and outside of feminist academic spaces, emerged and started to make noise, including: Festival en Tiempo Real, FIME- Festival

Internacional de Música Experimental, Sonora músicas e feminismos, Mujeres en la experimentación sonora//Latinoamérica, #VIVAS, ARDA, Cyborgirrls:



Figure 2. Cover *Feminoise Latinoamérica Vol. 1* by REBE CA

Encuentro Tecnofeminista.

## Feminoise Latinoamérica and Híbridas y Quimeras

Two particular collectives in which noise/ruído has been a nodal part of collaborative creation and political motivation, and where sound, technology, and activism intersect: Feminoise Latinoamérica (Buenos Aires, Argentina) and Híbridas y Quimeras (Ciudad de México).

In 2016, Maia Koenig, a multidisciplinary, self-taught artist, was touring from Buenos Aires to Colombia and noticed how women were a minority in the line-ups of the places where she performed. The justification on the part of the organizers of these gigs held that the women that they



Figure 2. Festival Internacional Feminoise Latinoamérica. Haba Zsen. 4 April 2019, BA, Argentina. (Photo by author.)

knew “weren’t talented enough.” But in Bogotá, Colombia, it was different. Ana Maria Romano, the organizer of Festival en Tiempo Real since 2009, has created a safe space specifically for women and non-binary artists. Here, Koenig had the opportunity not only to perform, but also to share her knowledge of LDJsound, circuit bending, and DIY(Do-It-Yourself) practices through offering workshops. During her tour, she met many other women artists that would contradict the arguments of the lack of visibility and/or skill given previously by male organizers and producers. When she came returned from her tour, she created a Facebook group called Feminoise Latinoamérica and launched an open call to create a compilation on her independent label Sisters Triangla. The first album (Figure 1), united more than 60 artists making noise. In listening to the album, the perception of noise/ruido goes beyond a genre label associated with noise artists such as Merzbow or Masonna in 2018, Feminoise Latinoamérica officially formed as a collective and in 2019 their first international festival took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, congregating more than 50 women and non-binary multidisciplinary and sound artists for three days of sharing through concerts, talks, and workshops (shown in Figure 2). With their manifesto and appeal to artists (shown in Example 1), independent nodes were created, as well as collaborations with other collectives and independent women and non-binary artists from provinces and countries including Rosario, La Plata, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Mexico.



Example 1. Screenshot Video in YouTube Manifesto Feminoise Latinoamérica  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lgm3nNFMkY>

Híbridos and Quimeras was founded in 2017 after a conversation between Libertad Figueroa, Piaka Roela, Itzel Noyz, Mabe Fratti, and Constanza

Piña in which they reflected on the gender disparity in experimental music. They decided to organize a series of events, naming the first one Híbridos, Mosaicos y Quimeras [hybrids, mosaics, and chimeras] (shown in Figure 3) inspired by Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” (Museum 2019).<sup>3</sup> In



Figure 3. Flyer from the first event of Híbridos y Quimeras, 3 September 2017. Illustration by Lurhi Peña.

the case of both the compilation recording and the collaboration with Feminoise, DIY (Do-It-Yourself)/DIT (Do-It-Together) culture had a significant effect not only on the organization of the events, but also on participants’ encounters and experiences. The feeling of being in a safe space, in constant dialogue, and sharing knowledge in a horizontal way unavailable in a male-dominated field, has changed. Even outside of the field of Sound Studies, these kinds of experimental practices are destabilizing hegemonic forms of listening and discourse while pointing towards a feminist politics of listening (Campeato and Bonafé 2019, 217)<sup>4</sup>.

My intention is not to romanticize the work of these collectives, because, of course, there are problems such as the widespread economic precarity in Latin America that makes buying musical instruments, synthesizers, and sound systems less accessible; the budget to book venues, the payment of the artists more difficult; the expenses of creation, production, and promotion of artists’ work, as well as their own security and life expenses more

complicated. Many of these women artists are mothers, and others must take multiple part-time jobs not related to music. They have managed to overcome many of these obstacles, but they have sorted them out with self-made instruments, the use of open and free software as a tool for sound creation and editing, self-promotion, and more, even during the pandemic years. I have seen the power of collectivity work autonomously, but also in how several state and private institutions are opening their resources to support and give visibility to these collectives and their artists. Yet, more support is still needed.

### **Feminopraxis ruidistas: Towards a situated, neologistic methodology**

During this research, I myself have had to overcome some challenges, especially at the moment of naming these interdisciplinary practices where feminisms, noise/ruido, activism, science, and technology, intersect in situated places, but at the same time exist in diverse contexts like Latin America. First, as the praxis of experimental music was in the underground and undocumented, the sources and documentation are still in progress. This

**I HAVE SEEN THE POWER OF COLLECTIVITY WORK AUTONOMOUSLY, BUT ALSO IN HOW SEVERAL STATE AND PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS ARE OPENING THEIR RESOURCES TO SUPPORT AND GIVE VISIBILITY TO THESE COLLECTIVES AND THEIR ARTISTS. YET, MORE SUPPORT IS STILL NEEDED.**

has led me to oral histories and to recording the voices of women and non-binary artists as my primary source materials. Second, as a specific and

situated practice, seeking a way to categorize the collective work of Feminoise Latinoamérica and Híbridas y Quimeras has motivated me to experiment with my categories of analysis.



*Figure 4. Interview photo of author (far left) with members of Híbridas y Quimeras. 12 July 2019. Fonoteca Nacional. Photo by author.*

I propose calling these performance, community, and compositional practices “Feminopraxis ruidistas”<sup>5</sup> not only as an analytical tool for this particular research but also as a terminology that could be used for other case studies with similar dynamics in Latin America. But why use a neologism? Language takes a very important role in our society, it gives a sense and meaning to our world. Noise/ruido per se is a performing and traveling concept just as the women and non-binary artists conceived it to be in Latin America. It is a concept in constant transformation and reconfiguration through their bodies and in these specific cases, heard through a feminist ear.

Mieke Bal’s statement: “No concept is meaningful for cultural analysis unless it helps us to understand the object better on its -the object’s- own terms” (2002, 8)<sup>6</sup> resonates with the concept of the feminopraxis ruidista. In naming this artform from my own experience and that of the artists involved in these feminist practices moved by noise/ruido, one element has been omnipresent: affection. Through the interviews with the artists, during the creative projects that I was invited to participate in, the colleagues that listened with feminist ears, in the events and spaces that we continue to share online and in person, and in the constant care we show to each other beyond the projects,

we feel a noise of affection.

In conclusion, feminopraxis ruidistas decolonize and situate noise/ruido. They occupy spaces so you can express yourself and be heard when no one heard you before. They create community and networks through sound to be visible and help each other. They share their knowledge, not simply academic learning, but with ancestral sentipensares that have been underestimated in their power. They pledge justice against gender-based violence, reconfiguring the history of music, and creating visibility and representation not just for a future possible world, but for a present one available to everyone.

Lately, I have been asking myself: how much noise/ruido do we need to keep making in order to be heard? Honestly, I don't know the answer, but we should keep our ears open and listen, because noise is the message.

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5. Feminopraxis ruidistas is a concept derived of the doctoral thesis "Diosas del ruido: Feminopraxis ruidistas, una propuesta conceptual a partir de las acciones colectivas de Feminoise Latinoamérica e Híbridas y Quimeras ( 2017-2021)" (Not published). You can find the documentation in the following link <https://feminopraxisruidis.wixsite.com/feminopraxis>

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# INSTITUTE NEWS 2022-2023

FOR MANY LONGTIME READERS OF THE INSTITUTE'S TWENTIETH-CENTURY "ISAM NEWSLETTER" OR EVEN THE EARLY ISSUES OF AMERICAN MUSIC REVIEW, THE RECENT DELAYS IN DISTRIBUTION TIME MAY HAVE COME AS A SURPRISE. WELL, READERS, I'M HERE TO SAY THAT THIS PARTICULAR ISSUE OF AMR IS, AS ADVERTISED, PACKED WITH NEWS! BELOW, I'LL DETAIL SOME OF THE BIG CHANGES AFOOT AT THE HITCHCOCK INSTITUTE, IN ADDITION TO ALL THE INFORMATION NEEDED TO ATTEND—VIRTUALLY OR IN-PERSON—OUR CENTENNIAL BIRTHDAY BENEFIT CONCERT CELEBRATING H.W.H.'S 100TH ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2023. IT'S BEEN A WILDLY BUSY YEAR FOR US AT HISAM, SO READ ON, AND, BY ALL MEANS, KEEP IN TOUCH.

## "GOING THROUGH CHANGES"

Our best and biggest news comes from HISAM Advisory Board member, **Susan Tyler Hitchcock**, daughter of Institute founder H. Wiley. After about a year of work among a small group of board members in a silent phase of fundraising, Susan made a gift of \$15,000 to a new fund, the Hitchcock Institute Fund for Studies in American Music, that was matched by Disney Corporation to equal \$30,000. Other Board members including **Ray Allen, Nancy Hager, Ellie Hisama, Tammy Kernodle, Carol Oja, Kitty Preston,** and **Judith Tick**, have also made generous contributions to the fund, and the faculty, staff, and students who work with and for HISAM cannot deeply enough express our gratitude. How will these funds be used? In the coming years, HISAM directors will apply these funds to a variety of initiatives, including support of American music programming, guest editorships, and artist residencies, not unlike the performance we hope you'll attend on September 28th.

Because of a mandatory recertification of all Institutes and Centers CUNY-wide in 2022-2023, the faculty and staff at the Hitchcock Institute have chosen to take a renewed, united perspective on the mission that has guided us—particularly over the past four years as we galvanized our priorities and resources during a pandemic and a public higher education recession. CUNY's mandate to become self-sustaining (i.e. without any direct Brooklyn College support, with the exception of CUNY event-based grants) has necessitated a change in the scope of our workload and

public output for the time being. Our hope is that the outcome of this concentrated program will not only feature a more expansive faculty network of Americanist contributors and HISAM directors within CUNY, but also a broader and more diverse array of topics covered in both *American Music Review* and in the Music in Polycultural America Speaker Series.

Some of the visible changes are:

- 1) In this transitional year, we have shifted from two published issues of *American Music Review* per year to one issue per year.
- 2) In lieu of our typical six to eight speakers for the Music in Polycultural America Speaker Series, we will now hold three to four events between September and May.
- 3) Instead of sourcing HISAM leadership from Brooklyn College faculty alone, HISAM directors (who serve for a maximum term of three years) may be appointed from any of the 26 CUNY colleges, so long as they are enthusiastic and qualified.

We were able to put these new ideas into practice during the course of the 2022-2023 academic year, holding three successful events on the Brooklyn College campus that also livestreamed on our HISAM Facebook feed. The transition back to more fully-in-person teaching and performance proved challenging to many among our community members, but by the end of the spring semester the students had begun to re-acclimatize and took joy in the experience of live music-making



and listening once again.

We held three successful events that were live-streamed during the course of the 2022-2023 academic year, with the second and third events serving as part of the SVMPA's Spring Arts Fest. The Fall 22 event, "Women, Sound, Transformation" featured two major Latina figures in music production; the second, in Spring 2023, brought out the musical minimalists from 1970s lower Manhattan for a night of Glass, Adams, and Cage; and the third connected South African jazz great **Mandla Mlangeni** with Brooklyn College jazz students and the Bed-Stuy jazz community.

In early November of 2022, our first event (co-sponsored by the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities, the Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, and the Department of American Studies) featured two Latina recording artists from opposite sides of the studio window. In "Women, Sound, Transformation," jazz singer/composer **Claudia Acuña** and seasoned producer **Angela Piva** talked individually and in conversation about their experiences as women who have broken stereotypes and glass ceilings in their respective fields. They talked openly about feminism, institutional sexism in professional music, and ageing, and then Acuña performed two songs from her latest album.



In late April 2023, two HISAM events occurred back-to-back. First, in a collaborative performance event featuring members of the Brooklyn College Contemporary Ensemble, CONTEMPO, and the Brooklyn College music faculty, the S.E.M. Ensemble, the Ostravská Ensemble, and directors **Marianne Gythfeldt** and **Petr Kotik**, the Buchwald Theater stage came alive with minimalist music composed across more than five decades.

Second, the Brooklyn College jazz ensembles



Mlanda Mlangeni. Photo by Alexia Webster.

joined community greats with **Ronnie Burrage** playing jazz standards, and then engaging with new compositions under the direction of South African composer Mandla Mlangeni, who joined the group from his work with Jazz at Lincoln Center.

## IN THIS ISSUE

This issue of American Music Review breaks ground in several areas. By shifting our subject matter to a broadly-conceived "music south of the contiguous forty-eight," the authors of these articles also shifted to three scholars whose first languages are Spanish and French. In considering the colonialist practices of Western European editing, as an editorial team, we decided to alter our view of "foreign language phrases." In light of these authors' multilingual facility and the complexity and politicized nature of defining what is linguistically foreign, as a team, we decided to italicize in the case of titles and larger works, but not in the case of "foreign language words and phrases." Let us know if you find this more, or less confusing! Do you, as a music scholar, performer, teacher or patron have a story to tell about language and American culture? We'd love to hear it. Write us at [hisam.at.bc@gmail.com](mailto:hisam.at.bc@gmail.com).

The author of our cover article, **Ana Alfonsina Mora-Flores** (Brooklyn College alumna—MM Piano Performance) gave a live, spoken version of her article in Fall 2021 during the second wave COVID lockdown. When folks ask about feminist intersectionality, the title of Mora's work comes to mind: "Feminopraxis ruidistas: Collectives of Noise, Affection, and Sound in Latin America." In her writing, Mora takes the distinct risk of publicly

bringing linking Latin American women's need for safe spaces and their human right to musical creativity. Her talk's title alone attracted the only Zoom-bomber our speaker series has ever had—as quickly as we were able to remove the unwanted user, Mora and her work were violated by this hurtful digital attack. But this is all the more reason to publish and redouble our support of Mora's brave and important feminist project which forms a part of her in progress PhD thesis at the University of Mexico.

Composer/producer/cultural theorist **Loïc Bertrand's** article resonates with Mora's in numerous ways, not the least of which is its interdisciplinarity. Rarely does the author of an article on French Creole literature of the late-nineteenth century highlight the sound world of the novel as a locus of meaning so important that it deserves a fulsome treatment all its own. What's more, Bertrand delves into colonial and linguistic narratives in connection with sound studies and the meanings of identity as they intersect with nation. Ethnomusicologist **Carlos Cuestas** reviews the latest book from Ben Lapidus, *New York and the International Sound of Latin Music 1940-1990*, published by University of Mississippi in 2021. Through the lens of his performerly ear and his work in the field of Latin American music scholarship, Cuestas unpacks the complex argument Lapidus weaves with regard to the character, sound, style, and meaning of Latin music over the course of the book. Cuestas provides a thorough and intriguing review that, in and of itself, gives an introduction to the genre.

## HISAM STAFF NEWS

Although **Haley Garrick** spent less than two years with us at the Hitchcock Institute in as HISAM assistant, her incredible resourcefulness has left a major impression. Now that Haley has graduated with her MA in Musicology from Brooklyn College, having completed her thesis, "Voicing Resistance and Refusal in Inuit Katajjaq" and secured a full-time post as Marketing and Communications Coordinator for the American Musicological Society, we'll miss seeing her in the HISAM office. Happily,

she has agreed to stay on as a contributing editor for *American Music Review*. Good luck, Haley, and see you in Denver at the AMS meeting!

**Michelle Yom**, AMR Managing Editor and Musicology Candidate at the Graduate Center, has continued teaching in the American Studies department at Brooklyn College and, this semester, began teaching a course on Black music topics at the Aaron Copland School of Music based at Queens College. Yom also organized a concert through the Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean at the Graduate Center featuring pianist **Matthew Shipp** playing improvised solos. Yom's ongoing dissertation research plays a crucial part in the Centennial Celebration of H. Wiley Hitchcock, and we have her to thank for co-authorship of the Elebash Grant that will fund the evening's events. Cecil Taylor's 1976 work, *A Rat's Mass / Procession In Shout*, is the central topic of Yom's ongoing dissertation work, and we are all excited to experience premiere scenes on the second half of the Hitchcock Concert.

**Jeff Taylor** is now Director of the Conservatory of Music at Brooklyn College. However, he remains on the staff of the Institute and will help with publications and events. He looks forward to helping guide HISAM into a new stage of its history. He continues research into the strange and surprisingly complex world of player piano rolls, and their relationship with live and acoustically-recorded piano performances in the 1920s. He remains involved in a writing project that is bringing together musicologists and highly specialized world of piano roll collectors and instrument restorers.

2023-24 kept me on my toes with a wide variety of internal and external leadership opportunities which included serving as Faculty Associate to the Dean of Visual, Media and Performing Arts here at Brooklyn College under a new Interim Dean, María Perèz y González. In that capacity I learned a great deal and was also able to expand my vision for accessibility and inclusion at Brooklyn College for disabled students, staff, and faculty. In October 2022 and January 2023, respectively, I shared the fantastic news that both of my long term book projects were finally under contract! Stay tuned in 2024

for a monograph, *American Opera and the Disabling of Women* (Amherst College), and a collection of essays co-edited with hip hop scholar Lauron Kehrer, “Better Be Good to Me”: *American Popular Songs as Domestic Violence Narratives* (University of Michigan, Music & Social Justice Series).

Finally, on a rainy afternoon late in the Spring semester of 2023, I opened my email to three pieces of extraordinary news. Not only had I been promoted to full professor, but I had received one of two inaugural Tow Awards for Excellence in Mentoring. As if this were not enough to occupy my thoughts, my phone buzzed, and the provost informed me I would need to serve as Interim Dean for the School of Visual, Media, and Performing Arts for 2023-2024.

Although I have loved my work as the Director of the Hitchcock Institute, and as Editor-in-Chief of *American Music Review*, I could not be happier or more excited to introduce our next Director, Dr. **Agustina Checa**! Agustina represents

many “firsts” for HISAM—she will be the first director based outside of Brooklyn College, as well as the first director with a degree in Ethnomusicology specializing in Latin American popular musics. She is also the first director with a specialization in digital technologies, a skill that can only deepen the Institute’s digital footprint as we move farther away from an analog existence. Read more about Agustina and her work here.

I plan to keep my ties with HISAM in my new position by serving as a Contributing Editor, and perhaps, at some point again, as its Director. But for now, happy reading, happy research, and see you on 28 September in Elebash Hall!

Take care and keep in touch,

Stephanie Jensen-Moulton  
sjensenmoulton@brooklyn.cuny.edu

# O’O: SOUNDING ERASED HISTORY

BY LOÏC BERTRAND

Malcolm's X had at least two functions: it crossed out the ~~master's name~~ and marked the loss of Malcolm’s original African name. In this article, I examine another way of responding to the same erasure by sounding an unwritten history. Victor Jean-Louis, a sound engineer and writer from Martinique, was also denied his ancestor's name—Baghio’o—which was nonetheless known and orally transmitted in the Jean-Louis family." The name Baghio’o refers to an ancestor, taken from Africa to the West Indies in the 16th or 17th century. It is the story of a name and its genealogy that Jean-Louis Baghio’o (pen-name of Victor Jean-Louis) wrote in *Le flamboyant à fleurs bleues* (*The Blue-Flame Tree*). It is an oral/aural history presented from the perspective of a family descended from enslaved people. Beginning with a legendary black pirate called Baghio’o, a name which contains the “O’O”—the sound of people under his command shouting while hijacking slave ships to free the “ebony”.



Figure 1: photo of Victor Jean-Louis alias Jean-Louis Baghio'o, from the personal archive of Wyck Jean-Louis.

Born in Martinique in 1910, Victor Jean-Louis moved to France in 1923 and became a sound engineer. After serving as Officer during WWII and working for Radio Vichy, he joined Pierre Schaeffer at the Studio d'Essai de la Radiodiffusion Française, and participated in the creation of the SORAFOM (Société de radiodiffusion de la France d'outre-mer), developing radio in Africa in the context of decolonization after the war. Victor Jean-Louis is first the author of books on sound for radio, television and cinema. He also wrote novels. *Issandre le Mûlatre* (*Issandre the Mulatto*), published in 1949, is signed Jean-Louis Baghio'o, a pen-name Victor shared with his father, Jean Symphorien Henri Jean-Louis (1874-1958), the son of a formerly enslaved person and an Indian. The book is prefaced by Katherine Dunham, a pioneer in African-American modern dance who performed *La Guiabliesse* in Ruthe Page's 1934 adaptation of the Martinican folk tale that inspired Baghio'o. *Issandre le Mûlatre* is a legend turned into a novel, where music, dance, and poetry are central. The book starts with the evocation of a glorious voice, that of the earth, which rises to sing the legend: "The song repeats again [...] the impalpable murmur of the wave." One should note that some passages of the book were adapted to radio in 1944, under the title "Chants des Isles" as an audio preface to the book.

Jean-Louis returned to Martinique in 1951 and stayed until 1954. He discovered a manuscript in the family archives and published it under the title *Les Jeux du Soleil*. Its original author is supposed to be one of the first Baghio'os, as Jean-Louis writes in the preface BAGHIO'O, arrived in the Antilles in the holds of a slave ship, would have been sultan of Timbuktu. According to the former slaves from Sudan, this name would mean: "the Blessed." He adds: "Wherever I went in Guadeloupe, I followed in Baghio'o's footsteps." Baghio'o, the author, briefly describes his ancestor before adding that one day he may make a more detailed portrait of him. Twenty years later, the project became *Le flamboyant à fleurs bleues* (1973). More than a portrait of a man, it is the story of the Baghio'o family published as an epic novel.

After the French Revolution of 1848 and the Emancipation Proclamation, a commission was established to prepare a civil status and names for

formerly enslaved people in the French colonies using "a system of names that are infinitely varied by inverting the letters of certain words taken at random." The first name of Victor Jean-Louis's grandfather, "Jean-Louis," became his last name. Victor's father's legal name was Jean-Louis Jeune [Jr.], but he signed his publications Jean-Louis Baghio'o, the pen name Victor Jean-Louis would follow.

In the novel, the name Baghio'o refers to an old line of Guadeloupian enslaved people, which goes back to a legendary black pirate who unleashed his men aboard slave ships, shouting "O'O! . . . O'O." Some claim this hero might have been "O'Mackendal," referencing Haitian Maroon leader François Mackendal, but historical events may have mingled with legend: "The founder of. . . [the Baghio'o family] is a memory in the oral tradition, doubtless glorified by the shadowy charm of legend." At the same time, Baghio'o advises the reader not to doubt the authenticity of the events in *Le Flamboyant*: "All the characters mentioned in the book existed for real. Some, like O'Balou, are known to all West Indians."

The family story was first told to Victor Jean-Louis by his maternal grandmother. It is part of an oral tradition, a family memory, completed through historical and genealogical investigations. As Maryse Condé writes in the afterword, "This historical research, or this appeal to the past, often takes the form of re-creating history by linguistic means, in an attempt to combat what the Martinique poet Edouard Glissant has called in *Le Discours Antillais*, the effacement of the collective memory." In the original French, and not Stephen Romer's translation, Condé writes "effacer un raturage" (erase a "crossing-out" or an "erasure"). To erase an erasure, one could think in *sous-rature*, a procedure that operates by crossing out a text (erasure), but which is limited to the logic of writing. Baghio'o's writing followed another path. The "appeal to the past" relies on orality—oral tradition being the source—making audible what has been erased from written history. Indeed, Baghio'o use of sound appears as a central tool in narrating a story challenging the dominant colonial narrative. Baghio'o chronicles the lives of people whose memories and pasts were erased: "The family tree at the beginning of the story functions

as the emblem of a historical continuum, of which for a long time the people themselves could have no notion, deprived as they were of their language and cultural inheritance.”

At stake is writing “a new Antillean mythology [...] purged of images conceived solely by and for the whites.” *Le flamboyant* is a story of resistance. The reference to piracy is a reminder that the locale of the West Indies was a contested space. Since the seventeenth century, piracy has been an obstacle to colonial powers, the expansion of international trade and slavery, and a refuge for rebels of all sorts. Along with the portrait of the black pirate, Baghio’o shows that descendants of enslaved people did not wait for emancipation: “Freedom was not granted by the colonizers but won through struggle.” In other words, the history of the colonies is the history of the slave uprisings.

Europeans settled in Guadeloupe and Martinique in 1635, the land already inhabited by indigenous Arawaks and Caribs. The first African enslaved people arrived in 1650. Slave resistance was immediately widespread, with a significant uprising in 1656 and mass marronage that lasted for years. Ownership of the islands was passed to the French West India Company before it was annexed to France in 1674. Institutionalized slavery, enforced by the Code Noir in 1685, led to a boom in the sugar plantation economy.

By the seventeenth century, the Dutch had learned how to refine sugar using “the secret of refining, the technique by which all traces of coloured matter are eliminated by the mild, sweet tasting cane extract.” In fact, the story of *The Blue-Flame Tree* starts with the refining of sugar. In Martinique, Father Labat captured O’O Baidindingue, an ancestor of the Baghio’os who also knew the secret of refining sugar and bargained his knowledge for his freedom. O’O Baidindingue thus became a slave who shrewdly secured his freedom. He later built his own sugar refinery, and his wife, La Rouquine (“the Red-Head”), originally “captured in Nantes”, was helping runaway slaves when Louis XIV legalized the slavery in 1685. Shortly after, a ban on mixed marriages passed, and an order declared null any freedom granted without having had previously obtained administrative authorization. O’O Baidindingue and La Rouquine fled, leaving behind their two

children, two métisses boys the legend calls “The Big-Twins.” At age fourteen, the twins also flee. Baghio’o describes the scene as follows. Notice the inscription of sounds in the text:

**THEIR SMALL BARE FEET HITTING THE EARTH:**

–FLAP! FLAP! FLAP!

**AND THE HILLS IN FEEBLE ECHO WENT:**

– FLOP! . . . FLOP! . . . FLÔÔ!

Sounding against the growlings of dogs and the whistle of whiplashes cutting the air. The plantation negroes started to cry out, quietly at first, then louder and louder:

O’O! . . . O’O!

and in faster and faster rhythm:

– O’O! . . . O’O!

– O’O! . . . O’O! . . . O’O!

– O’O! . . . O’O! . . . O’O! . . . O’O!

**THE BOYS TOOK COURAGE AND MADE UP GROUND.**

– FLAP . . . FLAP . . .

– FLAP . . . FLAP . . . FLAP . . .

– FLAP . . . FLAP . . . FÔ . . . Ô . . .

From all the surrounding fields, these strange onomatopoeic sounds punctuated the pursuit:

– O’O! . . . O’O!

’O’O! . . . O’O!’ . . . O!’

’O’O! . . . O’O! . . . O! . . . O!’

The huts emptied. Everyone started running behind the keepers. The keepers followed the mastiffs and urged them on; the dogs tailed the children; the children tensed their muscles:

– FLAP! FLAP – FLAP . . .

– FLAP! FLAP – FLAP! . . .

The rabble followed; each man gripped a cutlass.

O’O! . . . O’O!’

O’O! . . . O’O!’ . . . O!’

The tom-tom beat out the rhythm:

–BANGUE!

– BIDIP – BANDAMBANGUE!

– ABABA, ABABA!

EVERYONE RAN IN ONE GREAT FREE-FOR-ALL.

O’O! . . . O’O!’

– BANDANGUE!

– TACA, TACATA . . .

– ABABA! . . . ABABA!

– BANGUE! . . . O’O! . . . BIP! . . . BIDIP!

– FRII! . . . FLAP!

– FÔ . . . O! . . . O!

Bamboos and sticks; stretched skins, vibrating to rhythm and cadence; songs and sounds; sounds and cries in the clearness:

’O! O!’

– BANGUE.

– BIDIP, BIP!

’O!’

– FLAP! . . . FLII . . .

Flight within flight, rhythm within rhythm; movement and cadence in teh drunken progress towards death:

’HALT!’

’NEVER!’

’O! O!’

– FLAP – FLAP . . . OWW!!

**CRIES. CHANTS. DANCES. BRAWLS. IT WAS APPALLING – DOGS SLAUGHTERED, KEEPERS CUT TO MINCEMEAT; HOUSES AND CHAPELS ON FIRE; RAPES, SCREAMS AND DEATH, EVERYWHERE DEATH, ONE EXTRAORDINARY SURGE OF DEATH. SUCH IS VIOLENCE. WHO WANTED IT? . . . AND KILLING. ABABA! . . . ABABA!**

The first written sounds of the passage are onomatopoeias, “words” that phonetically imitate, resemble, or suggest noises made by things or actions; names can also be onomatopoeias, such as O’Baindindingue: “the one who can triple a head stroke: “Baingue! dingue! dingue!” These first onomatopoeias are introduced by an em dash, a punctuation used in the French language to mark a dialogue, which suggests that Baghio’o notates “sounds of things” as “voices.” In the original French text, the “O’O”—“strange onomatopoeias”—are introduced in the same way, with an em dash and without quotation mark (as opposed to the English translation). Baghio’o’s inscription of sounds blurs thus the usual distinction between things and words.

Later in the same scene, sounds, noises, and verbal onomatopoeias enter a multi-voiced soundscape. Different sounds echo, respond, follow, or oppose each other, interweaving to create an ensemble that could literally be called a fugue: a flight and a pursuit where voices chase each other. But in this contrapuntal composition, the hunter becomes the prey, and the “O’O” signals this reversal. Coming from the surrounding fields, the “strange onomatopoeic sounds” punctuate the pursuit and the “plantation negroes” start to run after the guards, the guards behind the dogs, the dogs behind the boys. The marronage, punctuated by the tam-tam, the O’O and a myriad of other sounds (“Bamboos and sticks; stretched skins, vibrating to rhythm and cadence; songs and sounds; sounds and cries in the clearness”), turns

into a general uprising (“Cries. Songs. Dances. Brawls. Turn in fire, rape, screams...”), followed by the most violent repression. Notice how the English translation changes the values of two terms: the “sounds” appear in the original French text as “noises” (“bruits”) and “clearness” as “purity” (“pureté”). So we should read: “noises and cries, in their purity,” which reverse the values of noises, usually opposed to “pure sounds” or pitches in Western classical music.

O’O is not simply a cry of resistance. It is the locus from which Western conceptions of language and music are questioned by drawing a continuity between physical movements and sounds, exemplified in one of the first descriptions of the O’O: “It was both like a deep and prolonged burp, a kind of growl that rose from the entrails, rolled down the throat and exploded in a shock wave charged with hatred.” The inscription of sounds in the text not only “auralizes” the alphabet, altering the distinction between writing and orality; but it also fundamentally alters categories of sounds and related conceptions of language and/or music. The O’O has thus to be heard through a series of displacements that draw a new “distribution of the sensible” or dissensus, which among other implications, “refunctionalizes the ear in literary history.” From an aural perspective, the ear comes first, before the voice, as it appears in another scene of the book, the fight between O’Balou the blacksmith, another ancestor of Baghio’o, and Father Magloire.

Since his wife Chimène was burned alive (accused of sorcery and of helping runaway slaves), O’Balou has been “sourd et muet” (“deaf and mute”). So when Magloire comes to challenge him in his forge and speaks to him, O’Balou can neither hear nor speak back: “Instead, he stared intensely at Father Magloire’s lips. The latter quickly understood what that meant and, with complete naturalness, began to speak with his hands, making the same cabbalistic signs as Tonto[n]-Hubé, in that secret language – neither Latin, French nor Creole – unknown in the country.” This “secret language,” used by Tonton Hubé the “quimboiseur” (magician) belongs to the category of sign languages, considering these signs do not use a vocal apparatus or spoken words but gestures and visual-manual modality to convey meaning. Indeed, Father Magloire repeats the sentence wordlessly (“...! . . .”). And O’Balou “showed that he understood by plunging the iron shoe into a water butt” which Baghio’o notates as “Plouf! . . . a-hi-hu! Ahii! . . . ! . . .” At this point, the text transforms as sounds Baghio’o notates as onomatopoeias answer Magloire’s “sign language.” The noises

of hot-tempered iron and hammer blows (“Tita! . . . Titat! . . .”), bouncing on the anvil with a muffled sound, “sang out in iambs and trochees.” And suddenly, the hammer begins to speak, as O’Balou is “hammering out syllables which corresponded to varying lengths of sound, the hammer dancing on the anvil and the anvil singing under the hammer. Father Magloire saw the words with his eyes, and heard the ‘sound-signs’ of the extraordinary speaking tom-tom.”



Figure 2: photo of the Baghio’o family, from the personal archive of Wyck Jean-Louis.

If a hammer can speak, it clearly shows a dissensus that challenges usual perceptions and knowledge: things cannot speak, except when one reconsiders the “mystical” character of the commodity to investigate human-object relations beyond “fetishism.” The idea that things can speak echoes the concept Schaeffer coined as the “language of things” with regard specifically to the radio. But Baghio’o shows another face of the concept, related to the emancipation of enslaved people from object-commodities to subject-persons. The “language of things,” blurring the opposition between words and things, subject and object, human or non-human, reverses the categories informing slavery, deconstructing the concept of language and promoting noises, echoing a central aspect of the Caribbean Discourse: “Since speech was forbidden, slaves camouflaged the word under the

**AS BAGHIO'O WRITES, CREOLE RESULTS FROM A MULTIPLICITY OF "CHAOTIC MEETINGS." IT DOES NOT COME FROM A UNIQUE ROOT BUT IS DERIVED FROM AN OTHER. FOR GLISSANT, CREOLE IS A TRACE (LIKE JAZZ OR CARIBBEAN MUSIC), A PLACE OF SURVIVAL FOR DESCENDANTS OF ENSLAVED AFRICANS. THE O'O ALSO CAN BE CONSIDERED A TRACE, SIGNALING THE FILIATION TO THE AFRICAN ANCESTORS. BUT AS A TRACE, IT ALSO EXPOSES THE VERY PRINCIPLE OF RELATION.**

provocative intensity of the scream. No one could translate the meaning of what seemed to be nothing but a shout. It was taken to be nothing but a call of an animal. This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise."

To finish, I would like to show how these displacements relate to criticism of coloniality. Later in the book, Baghio'o expands on the two "Little Twins" who can "talk" to each other while separated. Choutoumounou, sent on a boat to study for his exams under a tutor, hears Pampou in his head. They "talk" in a telepathic way, reminiscent of radio. They even "listen together" to the silence of the water, the roar of the waterfalls, the whispers of wavelets telling secrets, or the pitching of the ship, punctuated by the ancestral call, O'O, as part of a mute "voice": "The voice said nothing, pronounced not a single syllable, but it enthralled [Choutoumounou] to the very fibre of his being." Yet Choutoumounou remains deaf to other voices, the shouting crew, the voices of the captain or that of his professor who asks him, with contempt, not to speak Creole: "Creole slang is the worst of calamities, massacring as it does the French language, which is the most beautiful in the world. The genius of French, which is to say its clarity, order, and measure [...] lies in its ability to reflect the most civilized thought without distortion."

By placing in opposition the civilized clarity of French and a confused Creole, also called "petit nègre," the professor embodies the discourse of Colonialism. Choutoumounou answers this idea with an inner thought. Creole is not an attempt to reproduce the French language but "the historical result of social adaptation to

life in the Caribbean, created out of the chaotic meeting of nearly all the European languages in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its accentual values, with strong intonations – unknown in France – that distinguish it from jargon, dialect, and slang, place it among spontaneous means of communication that allow an almost universal understanding." At this point, Creole appears as the general frame where the O'O takes place. Indeed, Creole illustrates a central aspect of the O'O, as it exemplifies a Poetics of Relation.

As Baghio'o writes, Creole results from a multiplicity of "chaotic meetings." It does not come from a unique root but is derived from an Other. For Glissant, Creole is a trace (like jazz or Caribbean music), a place of survival for descendants of enslaved Africans. The O'O also can be considered a trace, signaling the filiation to the African ancestors. But as a trace, it also exposes the very principle of Relation. Defined as a "dual," the O'O functions as a "doubling" and as a connector. Phonetically, it is a gemination (hence the twins), a lengthening of a sound represented by a double letter: "The prefix O'O is the most honorable of names. Its twin syllables, full of sound, evoke the double purity of sky and sea, elements that mould the very soul of the slave." Baghio'o comments: "All those who live in the West Indies and descend from African slaves, have had to cross the Atlantic and they always had the sea before their eyes, this sea always beginning again and the blue sky above." The O'O carries the memory of The Middle Passage as its "Primal Scene," but it also exceeds the idea of origin, opening on what Glissant calls a digenesis. Tracing an African lineage, it also marks a process of creolization. Digenesis is the genesis of Creole societies. In this way, Baghio'o insists on the métissages that weaved the family's history, with ancestors from Brittany, Africa or India. Creolization is "the general economy of Relation." It cannot be inscribed in identities or essence. In this sense, it disrupts the color-line. Far from any synthesis, melting-pot, or multiculturalism, its effects are unpredictable.

The O'O conceals this unpredictability, as it can be read or heard in many ways: it is a cry of resistance and a sonic marker that traces a genealogy, an appeal to the past, a calling or a "sound-sign" that makes room for the writing of an aural history. As a shout, it is a direct expression of the body, a "pure sound" that can also become a chant, lead a melody, or orchestrate a fugue. Oscillating between "natural sound" and "musical form," the O'O runs along the historical line separating "speech" from "song," a line that "was initially enunciated through



shouts that sounded like sustaining a long note." O'O can be heard as a noise, a howling that resists the musical concept of pitch and disrupts the opposition between nature and culture as applied to people and/or sounds. In many senses, the O'O of Baghio'o exposes a "categorical crisis." Both beyond and inscribed in the name, it is a sound and graphic mark that traces a limit of Eurocentric categories.

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1 Lauren Yoder, "Mythmaking in the Caribbean: Jean-Louis Baghio'o and Le Flamboyant à Fleurs Bleues," *Callaloo* 41 (1989): 667.

2 For example, see Victor Jean-Louis, *L'ingénieur du son en radio-diffusion, cinéma, télévision* (Chiron, ca. 1954).

3 Henri Jean-Louis was the first black magistrate of Martinique, a writer and a militant for pan-Caribbeanism and pan-Africanism. See Charles W. Scheel, "Jean-Louis Baghio'o Father and Son: Two Twentieth Century Writers from the Antilles, Between Four Continents," *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 357, no. 1 (2016): 63–77.

4 Joanna Dee Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 29.

5 Jean-Louis Baghio'o, Issandre Le Mulâtre, vol. 174, *Écrits Français d'outre-Mer* (Fasquelle, 1949).

6 Jacques Homo, "Une Création Radiophonique Créole," *Globe*, December 24, 1944.

7 Jean-Louis Baghio'o, *Les Jeux Du Soleil* (Coop-art graphique, 1960).

8 These naming operations were initially planned to take place for only two months—for the emancipated to participate in the coming elections—but at least in Martinique, they continued until 1858. For a discussion on the family names in Guadeloupe and Martinique, see Emmanuel Gordien, "Les patronymes attribués aux anciens esclaves des colonies françaises," *In Situ: Revue des patrimoines* 20 (February 13, 2013).

9 Jean-Louis Baghio'o, *The Blue Flame-Tree*, trans. Stephen Romer (Carcenet Press, 1984), 7.

10 "Radio Interview with Claude Montcalm (Prod.)," September 24, 1973, PHD99222047, INA.

11 Maryse Condé, "Afterword," in *The Blue Flame-Tree* (Carcenet Press, 1984), 139.

12 *Ibid.*, 139.

13 *Ibid.*, 139.

14 "Radio Interview with Claude Montcalm (Prod.)."

15 Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy, 1830-1848* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

16 Jean-Louis Baghio'o, *The Blue Flame-Tree*, trans. Stephen

Romer (Carcenet Press, 1984), 8.

17 *Ibid.*, 9.

18 *Ibid.*, 17-19.

19 *Ibid.*, 22.

20 The English word fugue derives from the 16th century French word fugue or Italian fuga, that come from Latin fuga, related to fugere ("to flee") and fugare ("to chase").

21 Baghio'o, *The Blue Flame-Tree*, 10.

22 Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique*, Hors collection (La Fabrique Éditions, 2000); Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia, Sign, Storage, Transmission* (Duke University Press, 2014), 16.

23 Jean-Louis Baghio'o, *Le Flamboyant à fleurs bleues* (Paris: Éditions caribéennes, 1981), 95. Curiously, Stephen Romer translates "sourd et muet" as "heard nothing and couldn't reply." Baghio'o, *The Blue Flame-Tree*, 57.

24 Baghio'o, *The Blue Flame-Tree*, 57.

25 *Ibid.*, 58.

26 See Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 on "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof." For a discussion on the resistance of the object as black performance, see Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 5–6.

27 Loïc Bertrand, "The Language of Things: An Archaeology of Musique Concrète," *Organised Sound* 22, no. 3 (December 2017): 354–61.

28 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, CARAF Books (University Press of Virginia, 1989), 124.

29 Baghio'o, *The Blue Flame-Tree*, 104.

30 *Ibid.*, 105.

31 The expression "petit nègre" is a derogatory term to designate a pidgin language. The English translation goes further: "You have to renounce the little negro in you."

32 Baghio'o, *The Blue Flame-Tree*, 106.

33 Édouard Glissant, *Traité Du Tout-Monde*, Poétique 4 (Gallimard, 1997), 19.

34 Baghio'o, *The Blue Flame-Tree*, 23.

35 "Radio Interview with Claude Montcalm (Prod.)."

36 Following the legal abolition of slavery in 1848, the colonial administrations advocated recourse to "workers" from Madeira, India, China and Africa to counter the wage and social demands of the formerly enslaved.

37 Edouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, (Gallimard, 1997), 26.

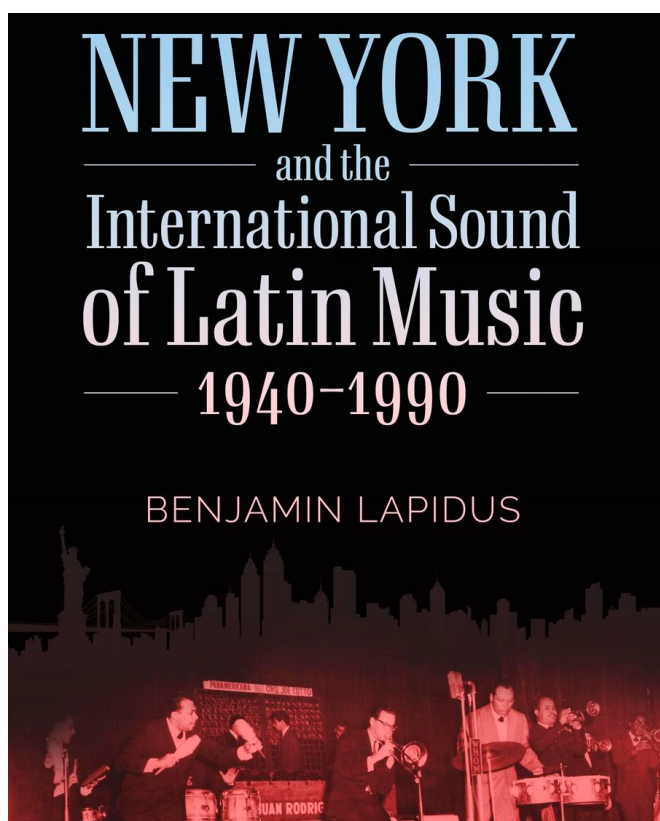
38 *Ibid.*, 37.

39 Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality*, 45.

40 *Ibid.*, 47.

**LAPIDUS, BEN. 2021. *NEW YORK AND THE INTERNATIONAL SOUND OF LATIN MUSIC 1940-1990*. JACKSON: UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI PRESS.**

**BY CARLOS CUESTAS**



The global phenomenon of 1970's "Latin" music continues to encourage scholars and enthusiasts to dig up the past in ever more nuanced ways. Though its history and main characters have been widely documented over the past three decades, these works center on established figures, musical analysis, and historical and sociological studies of the 1970's "Latin" music scene. To date, this approach has lacked a commitment to tell the history of this music from below: the stories of wide networks of diverse peoples that contributed with the establishment of "Latin" music as the quintessential genre of migrants from the Spanish Caribbean and some

South American countries. Ben Lapidus's book *New York and the International Sound of Latin Music 1940-1990* offers an in-depth, on-the-ground historical approach to what the author calls Latin music, the music popularized as "salsa," by examining the complex, cross-racial, and multi-ethnic networks that made this genre possible. Decentering established historical narratives, Lapidus focuses on music education, instrument making and production, inter-ethnic collaborations, and engages in complex discussions of the musical, social, and political elements shaping Spanish Caribbean music made in New York.

Lapidus's work demonstrates an impressive breadth of methods shown through archival and ethnographic research. The reader is privy to Lapidus's expertise on secondary literature, access to private record collections, as well as interviews with interlocutors from the period, and anecdotal experiences that imbue the book with personality but could have been more present throughout the text. The material is organized in ten themes found in the book's introduction and conclusion and worth repeating in this review: (1) Physical and metaphysical aspects of clave;

(2) the importance of folklore; (3) music education; (4) musical biculturalism and triculturalism; (5) the evolution of the anticipated bass part; (6) instrument making and its impact on performance and recording; (7) the role of dance; (8) lineages of musicians; (9) inter-ethnic collaboration; and (10) the role of jazz.

The book's best moments occur in the linking of descriptive musical aspects of "Latin" music to both archival and ethnographic material. In such passages, aspects of what Lapidus posits as music biculturalism and triculturalism complement the narrative around

the development of the anticipated bass, instances of inter-ethnic collaboration, and the role of jazz in “Latin” music. The intersection between these four themes is interchangeable. For example, Lapidus traces the influence of jazz in “Latin” music through musical analysis, interviews with musicians and producers, and historical analysis of the New York City jazz and “Latin” music scene.

Lapidus outlines how aspects of the material realities of minority groups (Black, Jewish, Latinx, immigrants) played a pivotal role in the development of “Latin” music and its scene. He successfully traces musicians’ upbringing in underserved neighborhoods with the need of negotiating identity and place as migrants and minorities. Furthermore, he rightly dedicates a substantial amount of space in the book to the collision between the chilling realities of Cold War politics and the overwhelming Cuban human and musical components of this new genre. Throughout the book, Lapidus consistently shows how historical and musical aspects of the twentieth century resulted in developments that kept pushing harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, and recording techniques of “Latin” music to uncharted territories.

Lapidus’s work stems from the premise of how extramusical aspects of a racialized group (Latinos/as/x)—the social, the political, the historical—shaped what he calls “Latin” music. This approach, then, utilizes historiography and contested categories such as race, ethnicity, and *Latinidad* teleologically, as a means to a (musical) end. I find this approach problematic in several ways. Borrowing from Laó-Montes and other scholars to deploy the category “Latin” (the book’s largest conceptual category), Lapidus cites Laó-Montes’s assertion that “The ‘Latino’ category collapses the differences between and among colonial/racial subjects, colonial immigrants, and immigrants in the U.S. empire”. What Laó-Montes, and by extension Lapidus, ignore is that such collapse found in the “Latino” category reifies the physical and epistemic erasures of Indigenous and Black populations in Caribbean and continental Spanish colonies, a violence inextricable from the term “Latin/Latino/Latinx/Latinidad.” As Walter Mignolo reminds us, the conceptual framework of “Latinidad” is borne out of Spanish criollos during the nineteenth-century nation building project that deliberately eliminated Native and African-descended populations (Mignolo 2005). Thus, by not engaging with the still operative colonialism of the term “Latin” and assuming dividing differences in

these populations had “collapsed,” the book’s use of the term “Latin” does not question key factors at play in the formation of identities and on-the-ground political struggles of people from Spanish speaking countries south of the U.S. border.

The uncritical deployment of the term “Latin” throughout the book permeates Lapidus’s description of the history of music education for racialized Latinos in New York. The chapter dedicated to it is rich in historical sources and sheds light on the individual and institutional foundations of music education for this population in the twentieth century. A high point of the chapter is the thick description of Johnny Colón’s music school and other grassroots efforts centered around music education, mentoring programs, and the work of the community to support youth interested in music. Luminaries such as Charlie Palmieri, Tito Nieves, and Rubén Rodríguez were involved as faculty or students (or both) at one point or another. Lapidus’s epistemological framing of musical training stands in contrast to a communal effort to provide open spaces for music education in the racialized Latino community of New York City. For example, his description of piano instruction emphasizes how teachers insisted on classical music training over any other style, especially the “Latin” styles students sought at the time. The book is filled with such episodes. Lapidus tepidly questions these omissions by positing that instructors were safeguarding their own playing careers, thus being reticent in teaching their craft to potential competition. Simultaneously, Lapidus offers location of lessons and recitals in recognized venues for classical music such as Carnegie Hall and students playing classical music portraying them as admirable and respectable. I read these historical realities as symptomatic of coloniality, the operating force and mindset behind colonialism, and as proof that racialized Latinos in the empire needed to perform assimilation to prove their worth in an Anglo-American society. These efforts have yet to pay off.

As post- and decolonial studies argue, imposed racial or ethnic categories work to not only justify a white hegemonic position but also to force colonial subjects to recognize themselves as non-sufficient. This is Du Bois’s double-consciousness operating in the racialized Latino community discussed in the book; these are Fanon’s and Césaire’s warnings and admonitions; this is the fire behind Chakrabarti’s efforts to provincialize Europe and the subaltern studies group critique of coloniality; this is Said’s Othering at work; this is what animates

decolonial scholarship of Escobar, Mignolo, Walsh, and so many scholars of the Latin American decolonial project. Except for Du Bois, the critical scholarship mentioned questions coloniality/colonialism developed in the 1950s and, dealing with the decolonial Latin American group specifically, since the 1990s on—the time period of secondary sources that Lapidus relies on the most but one he does not meaningfully engage.

An insufficient engagement with critical scholarship on race and racial formation in the US and Latin America constitutes another result of the teleological historiographic approach of this book. In chapter 4—provocatively titled “This Guy Does Not Look Latin,” and subtitled “Race, Ethnicity and Musical Identity in New York”—Lapidus centers the conversation around Panamanian musicians that inhabit the liminal zone of reading Afro-American yet speaking Spanish and playing “Latin” music. The musicians in this chapter inhabit the racial tensions of not belonging to the Black community of New York while being singled out by racialized Latino and American musicians and audiences. The tensions within the racialized Latino musicians prove fruitful and are yet more examples of coloniality at play. For not only do musicians belonging to the Latino category experience the racial tensions of the US, but they also carry these tensions with them, reiterating the pervasive racism they experienced in Latin America. This is a problem difficult to engage within a book centered on music-as-object. Yet the wealth of studies approaching race critically as a systematic problem that stems back to colonial times in Latin America and the US also makes it impossible to ignore. Instead of framing the issue of race from a theoretical standpoint, particularly in chapter 4, Lapidus focuses on the travails of his Panamanian subjects, engaging in highly descriptive mini-biographies but failing to frame their experiences within larger theoretical issues surrounding race.

Given the stakes of race scholarship and race relations in the United States, Lapidus fails to deliver a satisfactory analysis of race, ethnicity, and musical identity in New York. His lack of framing the archival and ethnographic material in established critical scholarship on race that constitute the core of this chapter (and this book) results in a missed opportunity to establish this work within a larger corpus of cultural studies. This is particularly disappointing given the fluid conversations taking place in new generations of racialized Latino/a/x who did not experience the “Latin” music scene Lapidus

studies yet whose historical context is intrinsically tied to it.

Throughout the book, Lapidus offers a masterful analysis that centers the musical elements surrounded by social narratives. This is demonstrated in chapters 3 (“Sonny Bravo, *Típica 73*, and the New York Sound”), chapter 5 (“Puerto Rican Engagement with Jazz and Its Effects on Latin Music”), and chapter 6 (“Where is Barry? Another Look at Jews and Latin Music in New York”). Chapter 3 locates legendary pianist and arranger Sonny Bravo, his family lineages, and his decisive contributions within what Lapidus calls “Latin” music. This chapter offers generous musical analysis and piano transcriptions. Most importantly, it successfully shows that the evolution of the anticipated bass in “Latin music” was a product of musical experimentation in New York by mostly Puerto Rican musicians. Lapidus also traces the emergence of an ever more complicated and jazz-conversant style in Bravo’s playing, and its crucial influence in his *Típica 73* orchestra. This chapter will scratch the itch of people approaching the book in search of a linear and almost chronological development of a harmonic language within “Latin” music.

Chapters 5 and 6 are more alike in narrative style and approach. Puerto Rican musicians’ experiences with jazz, explored in chapter 5, constitute evidence of “Latin” musicians’ profound interest in this world. Lapidus offers rich narratives of these performers’ relentless pursuit of knowledge about the world of jazz through interviews that reveal tensions between Puerto Rican musicians who were conversant in both jazz and “Latin” music and those who considered themselves “jazz-only” musicians. Through ethnographic evidence, Lapidus demonstrates how jazz became such an ingrained part of salsa.

Chapter 6 takes an archival perspective, persuasively tracing both the contribution of Jewish musicians to the genre and how the music associated with the figure of the East Coast Latino inspired thousands of Jewish audiences during the 20th century. Lapidus narrates the history of trombonist Barry Rogers who pioneered the powerful trombone sound still pervasive in salsa orchestras today, popularized by Willie Colón. Similarly, a small but crucial section on the popular pianist Larry Harlow, “*El Judío Maravilloso*” (The Marvelous Jew) describes Harlow’s incalculable contribution to what became “Latin” music in New York. Filled with thick descriptions, this chapter also references the celebrated incursions of Eydie Gormé and popular singer and film star Abbe Lane in the genre. Finally, a section dedicated

to “Latin” dance and the Catskills circuit is a laudable effort in representing the presence of Jewish musicians, artists, and audiences in this music scene during the twentieth century.

The last chapter of the book reflects upon the musical impact of Cuban musicians who left the island during the Mariel Boatlift, a complicated chapter of US-Cuban relations during the Cold War. Known as Los Marielitos, this generation of Cuban refugees constituted another chapter in the history of Caribbean migration to the United States and, for the purposes of this review, a compelling contribution to the “Latin” music scene of 1980s New York. Lapidus brings to bear his wealth of resources and decades-long experience with this music scene through to the final chapter, which is as much about the Marielitos as it is about the New York City music scene. The author specifically concentrates on a venue for experimental music called Soundscape (in reference to the work of Canadian musicologist R. Murray Shafer). Lapidus’s interviews reveal the affective and artistic value of this venue for newly arrived Cuban musicians, as it was a meeting place for networking and musical experimentation.

New York and the International Sound of Music 1940-1990 is a welcomed and valuable addition to the literature engaging with this period. Lapidus’s theoretical and practical knowledge of “Latin” music positions him as one of the foremost authorities in this genre. However, despite his profound knowledge of the music and unparalleled access to musicians and private archives, or perhaps because of the wealth of this access, the volume ignores critical approaches of the term “Latin” developed in the last thirty years. There is no circumventing the discourses that critically approach “Latinidad” in exchange for descriptive analysis, nor can these be extricated from studies about music. Music is political, as celebrated salsa singer Ruben Blades reminds us in each of his lyrics.

Lapidus succeeds in contributing to gaps in the history of “Latin” music, especially in his impassionate approach to writing the history of salsa from the bottom up. By mentioning racialized Latino music instructors by name, tracing musical genealogies, the participation of Jewish musicians in music making and instrument making and inscribing the names and stories of five decades of contributors, this book is a prized reference for a reading that, in Lapidus’s words, presents “the city as music.”

A different reading approaches this book from a

Latin Americanist critical perspective curious about what the author means by “Latin” especially in relation to music. For the term “Latin” is burdensome and in constant flow, with the US diaspora speaking in terms of Latinx and the Spanish speaking Latin Americans complicating it with the gender-neutral ending e, as in Latine. Though the book’s main preoccupation is music and how a diverse group of people developed it within a historical timeframe, the political stakes of knowledge production of, by, or about racialized groups demand a critical engagement with terminology such as “Latin,” race, and ethnicity. The book, for the most part, takes for granted these terms. Such approach makes me question why these terms figure in this book at all if they are not contextualized in the much larger field of critical race studies. Furthermore, there is the issue of leaving the task of representation to the reader. At best, the reader will pick up on the author’s reticence to engage with these terms. At worst, the colonial epistemology in which the terms “Latin” and “Latino/a/x” reside will continue to operate with impunity. Such a reading, in my view, is an unnecessary risk.

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1 Ben Lapidus, *New York and the International Sound of Latin Music 1940-1990* (University of Mississippi Press, 2021), xv.

2 The failure of an ethnocentric Latin American nation-building process is evident in the continuous presence and ongoing resistance of racial minorities in these countries. These groups’ ontologies directly oppose capitalism’s ethos of exploitation and accumulation, particularly of natural resources, putting them in direct opposition with national governments’ plans for industrial development. They also represent a beacon of hope in fighting the effects of alienation, individualism, and anthropocentric climate change.

3 Insofar as the adjective “Latin” lacks a critical approach in the book, I choose to always write it in quotation marks. For a discussion on the uses of Latino/a/e/x see Idalis Villanueva Alarcón, Joel Alejandro Mejia, Janice Mejia, and Renata Revelo, “Latiné, Latinx, Latina, Latino, or Hispanic: Problematizing terms often used in engineering education”. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 1 no. 5 (September 2022); Cristobal Salinas Jr., “The Complexity of the “x” in Latinx: How Latinx/a/o Students Relate to, Identify With, and Understand the Term Latinx,” *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 19, no. 2 (2020): 149–168.

4 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review Press, 2000); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference-New Edition* (Princeton University Press, 2008); William Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. (Norton Critical Editions, 1999); Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," *Cultural Studies* 21, 2-3: 179-210; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press 1963); Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Blackwell, 2005); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979).

5 This book had the potential to be in conversation with works analyzing cultural production with racial issues commonly associated with the works of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and, Heidi Carolyn Feldman, among others.

6 Lapidus, xiii.

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