

Sound map of a migration journey: a sonic essay

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing cross-border regime crisis in Europe and Latin America has led to the generation of new refugee and migrant camps, which this work considers as an important aspect of the European colonial legacy and of the postcolonial era. Particularly relevant in this sonic essay is the relation and contrast between the Italian migratory history towards South America in the 1950s, especially towards Argentina, and the current migration of communities from the African continent towards Italy – addressing the self-called settlement *Tiburtina*, and derogatorily named by the press “Hotel Africa”, as a case study. I am interested in contrasting and overlapping past and present stories of migrations framed by racism and exclusion, and inclusive past processes of European diasporas in the global south. The sound method used in this essay is part of my ongoing reflections on the juxtaposition between artistic practices and ethnography. Starting from the different tracks overlapping in this sonic composition, I am interested in reflecting on the multiple histories, mixing past and present, languages, rhythms and sonic materialities. I opened ground for new interpretations of the state of in-betweenness, waiting and transformative process that migrant communities experience when they are navigating through border regimes and European colonial legacies.

Keywords

migration, colonial legacy, postcolonial, ethnography, sound method, artistic practices

Introduction

The current crisis of Europe and Latin America’s border regimes results in the formation of new refugee and migrant camps, which this work considers as an important aspect of the European colonial legacy and the postcolonial era. Of particular interest in this sonic essay is the relation and contrast between the Italian migratory history towards South America in the 1950s, particularly towards Argentina, and the current migration of communities from the African continent towards Italy. I am interested in contrasting and overlapping past and present stories of migrations framed by racism and exclusion, and inclusive past processes of European diasporas in the global south. *Sound Map of a Migration Journey* was produced in 2018 in the context of the art residency *The Others* at Latitudo and EU Magic Carpets in Rome, Italy. As part of this residency, I first developed an archival investigation into accounts of migratory stories of Italian communities to Argentina since the 1950s and how the European colonial legacy continued to intertwine with South American societies. Secondly, I researched the ongoing migration of Eritrean, Sudanese and Ethiopian communities to Rome, focusing on the

history of an informal settlement self-called *Tiburtina* and derogatorily named “Hotel Africa” by the press. These new informal settlements in Europe’s so-called ‘non-places’ have been transformed into contexts in which the ‘social’ and the ‘place’ are in the making, where it is still possible to find the colonial legacy in the inhabitants’ own stories and places of origin. Such is the example of Eritrea, which was formally adopted in 1890 with the formation of Italian Eritrea or “Colonia Eritrea.”

Within the first reflections of my work in art and anthropology and on critical European and migration studies, I considered these informal settlements as liminal places due to their degree of in-betweenness; past/present, colonial legacy/coloniality, uncertainties and stagnation in front of the border regime. Later, my findings tended to criticize the concept of liminality for its apolitical degree, abstraction and ambiguity, which can be challenging when one is engaging with migratory processes. Currently, I am researching different perspectives of the term ‘limbo’, which is still related to liminality for having in common the concept of threshold, considered the gateway and the beginning of a state of in-betweenness. ‘Limbo’ was the word I heard most from migrants’ and volunteers’ voices in the *Tiburtina* camp, as they self-described their feeling of living and experiencing a permanent temporality within border regimes as a ‘purgatory state’.

Additionally, the sound method used in this essay is part of my ongoing reflections on the juxtaposition between artistic practices and ethnography. The data collection and production of sound archives, sonorous poems and academic storytelling are other ways of producing knowledge within a decolonial framework. Starting from the different tracks overlapping in this sonic composition, I am interested in reflecting on the multiple histories, mixing past and present, languages, rhythms and sonic materialities. If one looks at the various materials from a colonialist approach, it becomes impossible to place them in the same timeline or in the same ‘track’. However, inspired by Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt’s work *Tracks Studies*, I am interested in experimenting – through the overlapping and looping of these migratory histories – other ways of listening to coloniality from a decolonial standpoint. In Ismaiel-Wendt’s words: “The track does not imagine a fixed entity, it does not know a single order of events – and thereby lacks a hierarchy between melody, sound and rhythm – and it is polymorphous and free from the sole task of representation” (2013, 98). In this sonic-essay, I opened ground for new interpretations of the state of in-betweenness, waiting and transformative process that migrant communities experience when they are navigating through border regimes and European colonial legacies. *Sound Map of a Migration Journey* opens the way for reflections on how these self-made camps created contexts in which the ‘social’ and the ‘place’ are in the making. Then, there will be the need to further analyze the possibility to create other forms of living outside the colonial matrix.

Listening instructions

This sonic essay is composed by audio-tracks in Italian, Spanish and English. The first two languages come from sound archive recording materials from the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (AAMOD) and poetic readings of the writings of Lupo & Burtscher, Formazero, Altrospazio. The English language is my voice-over narrating my creative thinking on non-places and liminal places. As this is a multiplicity of tracks with overlapping of languages and sound materials, it is indispensable to read the translations and transcriptions below while listening to the audio work, as the plurality of sensory traces should be experienced simultaneously. By deciding to line up the transcriptions in one language, I intended to transform it into a kind of poetic narrative that merges with the sound piece.



PLEASE LISTEN: **SOUND MAP OF A MIGRATION JOURNEY**



Fig 1. Film Materials – Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico, Rome, 2018 ©Luis do Rosario.

00:18 – **Track 1** (Original audio in Italian. Translated into English)¹

This is a short story of a long journey, a journey of 40 days and 8,000 kilometers in Patagonia, from San Carlos de Bariloche to Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world. The images shown represent a summary of our story, focused on the pleasure, curiosity and emotions felt by people who discover for the first time one of the last sanctuaries of nature. It is a land at the end of the world, four times bigger than Italy, with one inhabitant per square kilometer (AAMOD).

00:48 – Track 2 (Transcribed from the English language * Literal transcription without English editing)²

Liminality. The current migration crisis has developed many refugee and migrant camps in Europe and the rest of the world.³ It is probably a consequence of all this legacy of colonialism, imperialism and the current neocolonial context. These camps are an important example of postcolonial times.

In this residency in Rome, I am interested in reflecting, from an ethnographic and artistic point of view, on two states of migration. The past migration from the Italian community to South America in the 50s and the current migration in Italy. Two physical places in a different time (and space) (Garland 2018, 2021).

01:36 – Track 1 (Audio originally in the Italian language. Translated into English)

The boat is supposed to keep a distance of at least 300 meters from the front of the glacier, because sudden ice-slides can be dangerous. Sometimes they are small blocks, but occasionally entire walls of ice fall down rapidly. The change is continuous and uninterrupted, the balance is always precarious. The impression that one collects, as absurd as it may seem, is to be in front of a living organism that advances and retracts, it dies and is reborn. The hushed desire of the observer is that all of this can be preserved, also in the future, from any interference of humans (AAMOD).

02:25 – Track 3 (Original audio in Italian. Translated into English)

The square of San Carlos de Bariloche, where we met the ‘tani’, the Italian immigrants. There are talks, and stories are told. A warm invitation for one of the regular social dinners comes out. They are strictly prohibited to women. Many of them display a manifest satisfaction for the stuff they have accumulated with hard work, together with a social respectability that they could never have dreamed about... (AAMOD).

02:46 – Track 2 (Transcribed from the English language * Literal transcription without English editing)

These places, these non-places in Rome and also in South America, these maybe are understood as a liminal space and/or in between states, and how these two realities in different times are related, opposite and connected, helping to explain the current Italian identity. Through all my travels around Europe and Latin America, I have seen and been in different camps. I went to refugee camps, migrant camps and transit camps. There was one current word used by the outsider, people who are not living in the camp, this white European privileged (or not). This current word that has been used is that we are the outsiders (Garland 2018, 2021).

03:44 – Track 3 (Original audio in Italian. Translated into English)

“La Boca” is the refuge where the dream of peace of many inhabitants of Genoa is accomplished. It is here that the tireless work of the immigrant worker has been transformed into wealth with the protections of our “Signora della Guardia” (AAMOD).

04:01 – Track 3 (Original audio in Italian. Translated into English)

This immigration is largely but not exclusively bound to navigation and is visible in the city of Buenos Aires, in the neighborhood of “La Boca” (AAMOD).

04:13 – Track 3 (Original audio in Italian. Translated into English)

The Argentinian dictatorship begins on a morning in which many asked for nothing better than a group of military men to clean the country from corruption and social insecurity. In an almost unnoticed fashion, the regime made more than 30.000 people vanish, and at least as many were exiled. Finally, many people had to flee into exile, and many searched for the genealogy of grandparents and great-grandparents. Surely, these folks did not look for such circumstance, but it did happen to them. They ended up doing this kind of choice (looking for their genealogy), which would have been unthinkable when they were young and rebellious, as they were not interested in family and traditions. And they were even less interested in knowing about grandparents and great-grandparents, whom they ignored (AAMOD).

05:01 – Track 3 (Original audio in Italian. Translated into English)

For sure, there is a search for the origins of many Italian descendants. The grandchildren wanted to remember what the children wanted to forget. The children wanted to be one hundred percent Argentinian. They were a little ashamed of the dialect their parents spoke. But the grandchildren have a more relaxed relationship with these origins... (AAMOD).

05:30

Sound of Water.

05:42

Glorious and patriotic songs.

05:57 – Track 4 (Original audio in Spanish. Translated into English)

Italy, one of the civilizations of the West, has presented to the Latin world the priceless riches of its millenary cultural treasure. Here the spirit of a dominant race emerged, which prevailed in Europe and later in America and which greatly influenced the formation of the new race of

the new world. From ancient times our land has been linked to the great Italian nation (AAMOD).

06:32 – Track 4 (Original audio in Spanish. Translated into English)

The Italian people were forged in sacrifice. Many were the episodes in their lives that severely tested the mettle of their men, the strength of their women. The resilience of the Italian people has always been enormous. With the pride of those who feel strong, with the awareness of their capacity many times demonstrated, with the courage of those who face uncertainty... (AAMOD).

06:57 – Track 5 (Original audio in Italian. Translated into English)

The entrance and the exit, tea, coffee, cookies, the door, the kitchen, lunch, the bathroom, the clock, the cell phones, the memories, the images, the experiences, the desires, the sorrows and the loves, the tracks and the plots, the passages and the escapes, the *passeurs*, the voyages and arrivals, the boat, the jeeps, the desert, the sea, the shipwrecked ones, the fear, the prayer, the waves, the gasoline, the captain, the mirages, the jail, the police, the coast guard, the helicopter, the camp, the commission, the residence permit, the denial, the deportation, the police station, the waiting, the offense, the reception center, the occupied house, the controllers on the bus and on the subway, the fines, the employment agencies, the turnarounds, Termini, the call center, phone cards, offices, cafeterias, doctors and medicines, bodies, scares and surprises, parents and friends, the living and the dead, adventures and misadventures, hopes and disappointments, faiths and beliefs... (Lupo & Burtscher, Formazero, Altrospazio 2007).

08:10 – Track 5 (Original audio in Italian. Translated into English)

Hotel Africa-hateful journalistic label that the occupiers have always firmly rejected. It has thus become an open laboratory on new and possible forms of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers while simultaneously developing a sustainable proposal for the signifying reuse of this kind of space. Thus, three restaurants (one Eritrean, one Sudanese and one Ethiopian), two bars, a market, a laundry, two mosques, a meeting room and other services – managed and used by the entire community but also open to patrons – have emerged in the two occupied warehouses, renamed *Asmara* and *Khartoum* and each one inhabited by circa 580 people (Lupo & Burtscher, Formazero, Altrospazio 2007).

08:53 – Track 2 (Transcribed from the English language * Literal transcription without English editing)

Refugee camps, transitory, non-place... to describe these places as non-places in the eyes of the outsiders. We, as outsiders, said these places are non-places. But these camps are understood and described as transit spaces, places without history or a developed identity, where the waiting and lack of possibility for the place-making become definite characteristics. The notion of non-places was first explored by Auge (in these non-places). For me, I am more reflecting about this non-place as more of a liminal space because they are waiting there, and they are making their own home. They normalize this, and they start to say this is their home. That is why my thoughts of spaces and limbo were related to the concept of liminality and spatial liminality. Not only as a space of rituals, like (Van) Gennep was saying but also with the contemporary vision of liminality. These spaces in between (Garland 2018, 2021).

10:19 – Track 2 (Original audio in Spanish. Translated into English)

The others, they
 (Pomelo 2018)

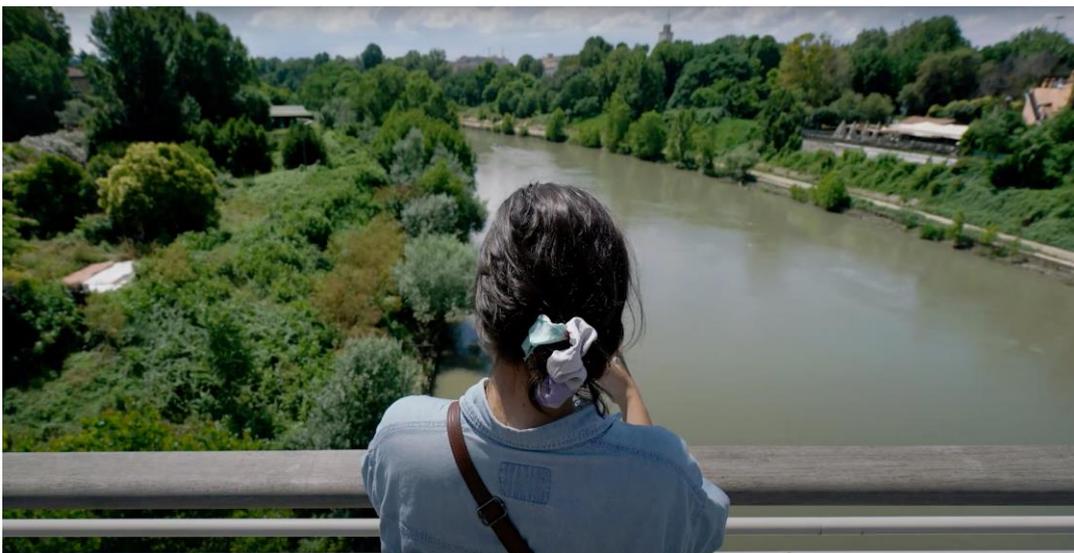


Fig. 2. In the context of the art residency *Latitudo & EU Magic Carpet*, Rome, 2018 ©Luis do Rosario.

Notes

¹ I selected *Track 1* as it represents in a poetic form the exoticism produced by European colonies towards natural sites in South America. From the old ship voyages to ‘discover’ the new continent all the way to today’s natural extractivism. In the tone, the rhythm and the way of narrating in this track, somehow from my South American imagination, I sensed the colonial legacy and coloniality.

² *Track 2* is the literal transcription (without editing) of the audio creating my thoughts when I am speaking. In a first instance, I am interested in documenting my process of thinking, translating/speaking (from Spanish to English) which sonically could capture the different traces of my own migratory process. Somehow, this is embodied in my ‘incorrect English’. A second instance, I am interested in stressing what it means to speak ‘incorrect English’ and also with an accent and how these different layers could hide elements of colonial heritage.

³ This sound piece was created in 2018 when my first reflections were about the contemporary migration in Europe. Nowadays, it is problematic to use the term ‘migration crisis’ because it is understood that migrants are not the primary trigger of the current cross-border challenges. For this reason, it is relevant to frame it as the crisis of border regimes, highlighting the colonial legacy and coloniality.

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