



UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION THROUGH SHARED LISTENING EXPERIENCES

MARIANNE DECOSTER-TAIVALKOSKI

Lecturer in Media & Sonic Arts

Head of the Centre for Music & Technology, Sibelius Academy University of the Arts

Marianne Decoster-Taivalkoski is an electronic musician, interactive media, and sound artist born in France and based in Helsinki since 1993. She is a media and sonic arts lecturer and doctoral student at the Centre for Music and Technology at the Sibelius Academy of the Uniarts.

The topic of migration is important in my life. Indeed, my autobiographical trajectory provides me with a multifaceted perspective on the matters of displacement, transposition, and adaptation. In addition to a family cultural heritage of past migration and travels, I have experienced much geo-sociological adaptation in my life. These range from immigration from France to Finland in my early twenties, thirty years ago, to maternal and intercultural adaptation through international adoption processes, to communication adaptation with a relative in a coma, to body identity adaptation from breast cancer, to material, occupational, and multilingual context adaptation at work. This background certainly shapes my sensibility to and motivation towards investigating questions of migration and adaptation.

But the fundamental interest that drives me as an artist-researcher to deal with the theme of migration comes from the observation that migration needs to be addressed in an experiential manner. Beyond political, scientific, or societal discourses accessible to readers or media consumers, migration is a lived subject that can be addressed through an experiential, non-verbal, and dynamic form. My proposition fosters cultural and identity questions through shared listening experiences that bring people together. This is the central idea of my doctoral project, which started last fall at the Centre for Music and Technology of the University of the Arts Helsinki.

In my approach, people's lives in the contexts of departure and arrival are marked by migration. Nevertheless, this research project's migrating subjects are not the people but the artistic pro-

cesses that are carried out for the creation of sonic constellations (sound compositions that are heard in a particular spatial arrangement). The creative processes are started in a context of departure and are then moved, transposed, and adapted to a context of arrival.

Family sonic memories

In early January this year, I was able to go on my first field trip to West Cameroon as part of my doctoral research. I selected West Cameroon as a starting context for the first sonic creation process of the research because of an autobiographical link that is made up of many layers of migration. This first trip has been an occasion to embrace my linkage to a context I had never experienced before and nevertheless felt connected to through family memories and particularly what my mother had transmitted to me.

My grandmother Yvonne left France for West Cameroon as a missionary in her early twenties, back in 1928. My grandfather Horace, a young agro-engineer, decided to leave France to build a coffee plantation in Africa and settled in West Cameroon in Foubot, Mangoum, in 1934 on the left bank of the Noun River. My mother, Béatrice, was born in Bangoua in 1937. Béatrice lived all her childhood in Mangoum on the plantation, exploring freely the nature and environment around the house, with Bamiléké immigrants around her.

Moving to France in the late 1940s was a difficult loss and adaptation process for my mother. She treasured her childhood memories and al-

ways felt a bit like an outsider, having a singular way of understanding social relations and of being in her environment. She kept very strong embodied memories of her childhood, in the form of sound and movement. She transmitted to my brothers and me these impressions and memories verbally and in an embodied manner.

I grew up with memories of a past Mangoum without ever going there or seeing many pictures. I have felt an emotional tie to the place and the people, whose ways of living my mother was referring to and showing us, as these ways of being were, she said, part of her childhood and affects. As an example, her way of using the floor in the kitchen as an extra space for storing pans and baskets was something I never saw elsewhere. When the kitchen was overcrowded, she would say: "Let's do it Bamiléké style - it is clever!" She also preferred to sit on the floor when there were many guests at home. Even very late in her life she was delighted to use the floor as a support to work on something manual.

An African childhood's freedom was fleshed out in Béatrice's memory of climbing up the mango trees and eating the fresh fruits, sitting alone in peace high up on a branch on top of the hill, looking at the vast sceneries of the Grassfield Mountains all around her, all the while hearing people's activities faraway down there in the fields. My mother encouraged us to climb the trees in our garden in France and let us play and imagine stories there for hours. For my brothers and me, climbing a tree was always bringing our mother's accounts into life in our present. I was able to sense an embodied memory transmitted to me through her accounts and encouragements, and the work of my imagination. I was coming from a mother who climbed trees in Africa, I was climbing trees myself, and we were sharing the extraordinary sensation of climbing the tree and the power of imagining a place far away in time and geography. All this was bringing us together, creating complicity and understanding between us, but also defining our identity.

Among the sounds of her childhood, she described the impressive tumults of the Noun River, whose imagined sound intensity grew with the knowledge that crocodiles and hippopotamuses were hidden there. She also told us about the vast drumming of the rain on the resonating metal roof of the house, covering suddenly all other sounds, filling all silences. The beauty of this music would take her away from all activities to just listen for an indefinite time, immersed in the sonic world of this rain, a very powerful yet calming sound at the same time.

These stories of Cameroon that I was told as a child always contained sound memories, which played a central role in the imagination of living in the place, in the imagination of my mother's experience, and in my attempt to make it mine and to share that experience with her through an imagined sound. The sound memories were very vivid in the way I imagined them. I am certain that growing up with these stories has shaped my listening sensibility and contributed to building my identity as a musician and sound artist. Moreover, shared sound memories or shared listening experiences seemed to be at the core of creating a feeling of togetherness, of communality, which in turn acts in structuring identity and culture.

Recorded sonic environments can transport the listener to an imagined place. Besides verbal accounts of sonic worlds, recordings are a possible way to share a particular listening experience of a specific place. I put together the artistic frame for the first project of my research with this conviction.

Exploring the sonic environments of Cameroon

The principal artistic activity of my first trip to Cameroon was to explore places through listening and recording sound environments. I recorded environmental sounds, voices, and my own sounds and movements in interaction with the environment. My aim was to make traces of experiencing sonic worlds new to me, but to which I had been sensitized in my own childhood through the accounts of family memories. This activity involved meeting people and negotiating the right to record in their territories. It was oriented towards discovering the meaning of the environmental sounds they live in and interact with, sharing a lived experience of listening together to these sound environments.

In Bangoua, my team and I first met the chief and his brother and were lead on a tour around the "village", the territory belonging to their community. I made recordings that for me represent the moment of our common experience of being in this sonic milieu. The group included me, an outsider recognised as a daughter of the chief because my mother was born in Bangoua, my hosts, locals acquainted to the specificities of this sonic world, and my team, Bamiléké from other villages, understanding this sonic world. I was invited to listen to a sacred place, a waterfall in the forest. This involved going there with a proper guide who was able to give a prayer to allow me, the outsider, to access the place. This guide was blind – a

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specialist of listening. I asked him at the end what were the sounds he prefers in his sonic world. They were exactly those I had recorded, the music of the wind in the banana tree leaves, and the jumping and splashing water stream at the sacred fall resonating in the forest. Somehow during this walk with many accompanying people chatting around, the essential aspects and meaning of the sonic world of the village had emerged, involving me, the stranger, in a shared listening, making me part of a common experience, part of a common world. I didn't feel like an outsider anymore.

In Dajou, Gloria, a ten-year-old girl, took me along on a walk to listen to her sonic milieu. I recorded the whole walk, our movements, our steps, sonic environments, and our conversation. She understood my purpose at once when we stopped to listen to the modulation of the frictions of the dry grasses dancing with the wind. She said: "So, you understand the music of the wind, don't you? Then I know where to take you." Listening to the bird's songs in front of her family hut became our place of encounter and from there we went on a long walk noting each birdcall along the way. The dry season forced birds to hide in the shade of the few trees letting only their calls to be heard. Then Gloria wanted to take me to "chatting waters" a bit further away. We arranged to be accompanied there. It was an enchanting waterfall with nine streams; it was loud and inaccessible for most of the village women. We shared this moment of listening all together and recording. Gloria had taken me to walk through the most significant sonic places that she experiences every day. She made me part of her world by sharing her listening experience. After our tour, I let her listen to the recordings, and she was amazed by hearing her own voice. We agreed to do this again later and now I am trying to get her a small audio recording device.

After finally finding the place where my mother had spent her childhood in Mangoum, and what is left of the house, I was left to myself. My explorative recordings there were guided by memories evoked by present sounds, or by perspectives I recognized from old pictures. What does one hear from that angle, looking in that direction? What did Horace and Yvonne listen to while taking a picture from that spot? I was pursuing the feeling of travelling inside many layers of time through listening and recording. I felt the presence of Horace, Yvonne, and Béatrice within this sonic world on the top of the dry hill. The soil and its vegetation crackled under each step, raising puffs of red dust, brushing gigantic grasses swishing in the wind, entering fuzzy, buzzing clouds under flowering trees, and floating far away, the blended voices of

people working in the fields torn up sporadically by a motorcycle's roar on the sand road.

Back in Helsinki, I had the occasion to play back some extracts of my field recordings to a few colleagues. From our short listening session emerged a strong and shared impression of being transported to the original environment and being able to interact with it through the felt presences, movements, sounds and breathing carried by these recordings.

Interpersonal and intercultural encounters through listening

Drawing from my background and the experience of this first research trip, I am inclined to think that there are similarities in sharing a listening experience simultaneously or at different times, either as a transmitted embodied memory or through a recording that is carrying the mark of the bodily presence of the recordist. These similarities lay in the impression of "partaking", the feeling of being involved in a same world, which appears to me as emerging from kinaesthetic sensations and relating to the listener's embodiment in the act of listening.

This first trip and the artistic activity I was able to develop within the social context I was in proved also that experiencing a common listening situation enables sharing beyond cultural differences. Within a common intention of listening to a sonic world and enacting this intention, we create communalities, even though we appear to be from distinct worlds.

My experience as an artist on this first voyage provides information on migration as a transformation from being the Other to becoming part of an Us, part of a shared experience. This process requires action and intention from both sides, a desire for encounter, an impetus to move towards an encounter. A migrant, like I was in Dajou, cannot adapt to a new context without being welcomed and guided, without shared experiences, and the implication of persons from the new context. The mutual intention or desire for sharing and fostering encounters is necessary in the building of a sense of belonging to a community.

It seems that shared listening experiences of sonic worlds can enable us to create a common world. If that is the case then an experiential understanding of migration should be attainable through shared listening, particularly when the intention is to share the experience between different cultural contexts, to transport the listeners through sonic worlds, and to let sonic worlds mingle between listeners.

KIRJA-ARVIOT



Soudakova Anna (2020). *Mitä männyt näkevät*. Atena. 244 s. ISBN 978-952-300-654-6.

Valoa suomalaiseen maahanmuuttokirjallisuuteen – Anna Soudakovan vaikuttava läpimurto

Seitsemän vuotta sitten viimeistelin edesmenneen kollegani Arno Tannerin kanssa kirjaamme *Venäjänkieliset Suomessa – huomisen suomalaiset*. Teoksessa suomalaiset ja venäläistaustaiset kirjoittajat pohtivat monipuolisesti nopeasti kasvavan vähemmistömme kulttuurisia ja yhteiskuntapoliittisia ilmiöitä. Tuolloin venäjänkielisiä oli maassamme noin 70 000 henkeä. Tänä päivänä luku on lähes 100 000. Suomessahan rekisteröidään kieli, mutta ei etnisyyttä. Siten tiedämme tarkkaan venäjänkielisten, mutta emme venäläisten lukumäärää maassamme (Tanner & Söderling 2016).

Kirjan toimittaminen koettiin tärkeäksi, koska maassamme oli todella vähän tietoa suurimmas- ta maahanmuuttajataustaisesta vähemmistöstämme. Tämä tietovaje koski sekä yhteiskun-



Soudakova Anna (2022). *Varjele varjoani*. Atena. 273 s. ISBN 978-951-142-339-3.

nallisia että kulttuurisia ilmiöitä. Läpileikkaavana tuloksena oli venäjänkielisten kokema ulkopuolisuuden tunne. Esimerkiksi Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko ei ole venäjänkielisten mieleen; papit ovat liian vapaita, ja liturgiakin vääränkielinen. Tunnusomaista on sekin, että venäläisistä tai venäläistaustaisista huippu-urheilijoista kyllä kirjoitetaan tiedotusvälineissämme, mutta ei juurikaan vähemmistön omista liikuntamielityksistä tai harrastuksista.

Vuonna 1983 Leningradissa syntyneen Anna Soudakovan vanhemmat päättivät muuttaa Suomeen ja Turkuun vuonna 1991. Annan äidin isoisä oli aikoinaan muuttanut Kanadasta Neuvostoliittoon monen muun amerikkalaisen kanssa rakentamaan sosialismia. Presidentti Koiviston päätös vuonna 1990 suoda inkeriläisille sekä muille venäjänsuomalaisille pa- luumuuttajan status toi perheen Suomeen. Anna Soudakova toimii Vantaalla alakouluikäisten maahanmuuttajaoppilaiden opettajana. Hänen taustansa on