

Big Ideas in Art + Culture + Improvisation: meLê yamomo in conversation with Teilhard Paradela

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Transcription by Nick Fraser and Maddy Morais

This transcript is based on a video recording of this event that is publicly available through this link: <https://vimeo.com/783399935>

Anna Bowen: So, it's a pleasure to have meLê and Teilhard here with us. MeLê is Berlin and Amsterdam-based and he's Assistant Professor of Performance Studies, Sound Studies, Artistic Research, and Decoloniality at the University of Amsterdam and the author of *Sounding Modernities* which came out in 2018. He's also a composer, artist, theatre maker, and curator. He hosts the podcast *Sonic Entanglements*, which you can find quite easily wherever you listen to podcasts. He's the director of a project called *Decolonizing Southeast Asian Sound Archives*, which is in the midst of uncovering and repatriating early colonial sound recordings. He's the resident artist and a curator of the *Decolonial Frequencies Festival* at Theater Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin. His work engages with the topics of sonic migrations, queer aesthetics, and post- and de-colonial acoustimologies: thinking of sound and listening as ways of knowing.

Teilhard Paradela is visiting us from Montreal. They work as a policy maker, community leader, historian, archivist, and dramaturge. They immigrated from the Philippines to Canada where they settled in the unceded ancestral and traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations—what we know as Vancouver. They are a scholar of Philippine cinema, literature, and culture and completed their PhD on the media during the Marcos regime in the Philippines.

Please join me in welcoming meLê and Teilhard.

(applause)

Teilhard Paradela: *Magandang gabi salamat*, good evening. Thank you so much for coming to this performance. Thank you, Anna, for the generous introduction, and to the Musagetes Foundation, the Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation, as well as their partners for hosting us here in Guelph. We come here with gratitude, respect, and humility. We recognize that we're coming to a contested space, to a place with a long history of displacement and dispossession, of colonialism and colonial violence.

So, we're both migrant scholars, artists, activists, and archivists. Both of us come from the Philippines, but I immigrated to Canada in my twenties. MeLê migrated to Europe in his 30s, and we actually met in Amsterdam when we did our graduate studies in Performance Studies 14 years ago now. And we've been discussing some of the ideas which made it to the film and it's actually the first time that I saw this video. So, my first question to meLê is about the texture of his performance. There are lots of interruptions. There are lots of different speeds in

pace, especially with the voice. There are also redundancies and replications, but also gaps and silences. So, my first question to you and I'm sure a lot of people are interested to know—why did you present your lecture in in this way? Really experimenting with sound textures and especially, I think I saw glimpse of you in the video, so there's some mediation there, but you're also performing for us live at a certain points.

meLê yamomo: Thanks very much, Tei. And thank you everyone for coming to listen to this lecture/performance/video this evening. Before I answer that, I want to add that I've known Tei for 14 years and I did specifically ask if it's possible that I have this conversation with Tei in front of you today. I mean, it's rare that we see each other in person because it's a decent ocean away (laughs) but we've kept our friendship through the times. And Tei, there's a secret that I'm going to tell you now, that when I was writing the book *Sounding Modernities*, which was actually an extension of my PhD dissertation, I had a crisis one time. I ended up Skyping with Tei and, at least for me in Munich, it was past midnight. I was having this crisis and it was actually Tei who helped me solve some of the epistemological questions that I was asking at the time. So, a lot of these things that I've presented, it has been through the dramaturgy of Tei that some of them emerged. And I think one of the things that we want to underscore particularly is that when we think about the decoloniality of academia, of scholarship, and of artistic practice, we sometimes tend to imagine this as the work of one genius, but that's never the case. It's always a conversation and it's the conversations that we've had that have inspired the building of many of these ideas. And so, this is part of the reason why I insisted that Tei should be part of the conversation part of this evening.

And that segues well into the particular format in which I presented this video. This video has different iterations, but I think that this particular way of showing videos—without my body—started off just a few years after I finished my PhD as a young, emerging, “junior” scholar; an early-career scholar situated in Europe. I became very aware immediately of the particular politics of the body and of the racialized identities that we have as scholars, thinkers, and artists of color. Especially the way that I occupy, the way that I live in Europe and practice my scholarship and my artistry there, I often notice how oftentimes, before I've even opened my mouth and speak that my very physical presence—the body, this queer body of color—that stands before an audience (oftentimes a very white European audience), an anti-dramaturgy has already transpired around what I am allowed to speak about and what I am not allowed to speak about. In fact, Walter Dignolo talks a lot about this when he says that a German, a Dutch, a British, a French [scholar] could study an Indigenous Community, publish about it, and produce knowledge about it. But it never is the other way around. So, it's funny that it's probably more “thinkable” to think that an American could be a Filipino scholar, but it would be rare that you'd find a Filipino being an American Scholar in a North American University.

So, we see how flows of knowledge of what parameters there exist within identities of productions of knowledge. I was thinking a lot about this theory, and we could talk later more in detail about the *sonos* in the body. I was also inspired by how at the beginning the 19th century, a little bit earlier on in fact—the 16th century—with the invention of the telescope and later on, the invention of the microscope, we've managed to kind of tear apart holes and understand how things are operating. In a way, to me, this is what I'm trying to do with sound. I wanted to use the microscope metaphorically as a way to disentangle, but I realized that it is not just the sound but its attachment to the body that actually shapes the way that we understand the world and the body—which is a sounding body. It is very crucial—in the centre of how we understand. In a way this was the beginning of me thinking, “what happens to my lecture if I remove it from my body?” Is it even possible? And I think this was the

beginning of this experiment and that just evolved into these different forms right now, that I use to present not just as a body that lectures, but really a sound that is produced even in the absence of a body.

So, when I show this triangulation, we default to operating in such a way that when there is this embodied voice in our minds, we're already producing a body. So, we are trained to do this. And therefore, even though these are historically determined, and we project notions, we project *sonos*, we project images on our own bodies and other bodies, it is a history of production and all that we could ever say are just echoes of things and part of the performance. It's a loop of all that we've ever been thinking that answers and that keeps circulating through our bodies throughout history.

Teilhard Paradela: Thank you so much for that. Just speaking up on your point about theorizing, and how when we think about theorizing, we really think about, you know, ideas floating in the air . . . disembodied, right? So, this is the tradition that we got from Continental philosophers. And I was struck by this conversation that we had a few weeks ago about how theorizing is a very unnatural and even dangerous preoccupation for BIPOC scholars and artists. So, I'm wondering if you can elaborate on that, and at the same time, push back against this notion of theorizing as a universalizing act. When we talk about "theory," it's being thought *of* as us. This will apply to all situations, all contexts, that what you're presenting is a theory that is historically grounded and bounded by geography, by place and space. I think this is a very important intervention or contribution to our current cultural conversations here in Canada, thinking about reconciliation and our relationship with the Indigenous, the First Nations of this land. So yes, I'm wondering if you can speak more about those two points.

meLê yamomo: I will try. It's a very complex question, but perhaps one way that I'd like to answer this is to return to how a lot of these things that I think about [are] situated in a very embodied experience.

Maybe one step back, to provide context: one thing that surprised me when I first moved to Europe to do my Graduate Studies is the way that education and knowledge production is structured in Continental Europe. There's a big segregation between the university and a *Hochschule* in German or *Höogeschool* in Dutch, in the Netherlands. If you want to study music, you go to *Hochschule* or *Höogeschool*. So, an [embodied] practice is not considered scientific, and Universities are where you do scientific work. And therefore, when I first entered Europe, I entered through the University system. Also, to make this a little bit more personal, so that it's more understandable how I ended up thinking about these things from a very personal level, my ambition at that time was really to come to Europe and to become an opera director. But I ended up having this scholarship to do a theater studies project, which is very theoretical, which I really enjoyed. I was getting to know continental philosophers from German professors who really studied deeply on these thoughts. And at some point, I was wondering "what should I do after this Masters?" I should say that I realize we're doing this in a university and maybe I need to cross the bridge, which is quite a big bridge—a gap—in Europe. If you follow a particular track, you end up on that track and it's harder to get off and switch to another train. This has to do as well with funding. If you are "legible" to the art institution as having an art degree, then you get grants from that track, but it's hard to get the grant from researching because these are parallel tracks that rarely converge. I ended up doing a PhD and then realized that the track that I [was] taking had become farther and farther from my original ambition. But it was really this journey that made me realize that I'm glad that I followed this track. Maybe this is going to be a little bit of a story now, and I'll try to make it brief,

but I have to tell this trajectory so you understand how I ended up with these questions that I'm asking, and then eventually answer the question that you're saying.

So, I ended up doing a PhD in Munich, where I was studying under Christopher Baum, who had received funding from the German Research Council where he was asking questions around global theatre history. He said that one of the key ideas, one of the key cultural phenomena that happened in the 19th century was the migration of theatre throughout the world. That through all these interconnected ships—steamships—ideas migrated through performances. You know, the beginning of the carbonization of the world started with the steamship because it's a very inefficient fuel. This is how the British Empire built itself; it needed stops so that it could keep coaling, it could only travel a certain number of kilometers and then it needed to stop and then put on coal. So technically, every stop becomes a British colony. So, that is how the British colonies were built. And at each stop, there were opera houses, and theatres, and concert halls that were built, because then this is the beginning of globalization. Where we built an “empire track” of interconnected coal lines, and interconnected steamships, and interconnected ideas, and interconnected aesthetics. And finally, we are watching the same aesthetics around the world. So, this is one of his arguments. It was a great idea, but I was problematizing the fact that . . . is *my* job in this project following a Germanic idea of globalization that is . . . let's not even speak of colonialism. We know now, of course, that globalization and colonialism, modernity and colonialism are just, you know . . .

Teilhard Paradelá: Two sides of the same coin.

meLê yamomo: Yes, two sides of the same coin. That to be able to establish this route, to be able to bridge everything together, means that we have to extract lands, you have to occupy spaces so that you can build this entire imperial plan. And in a way, it never speaks of colonialism. And at that point I was just writing my dissertation, thinking that “well, this also happened in the Philippines.” So, this was my first argument, and I went to the Philippines and found archival materials.

But I also got into a crisis. I think this is the time that I started talking to you, some 12 years ago, 10 years ago, and I was just asking “what is my role in European academia?” Is it just to legitimize or add? Am I just a provider of case studies—of case studies from my region—to an already formulated theoretical framework and an already formulated historiographical framework of how we understand modernity in the world? And therefore, my job as a post-migrant scholar is to say, “well this also happened here, let me bring some proofs.” And so, this shifted when . . . I think I'd stopped writing my dissertation. I had a break for six months and was really thinking hard “is this what I want to do?” And around this time, I realized that I'm glad I didn't do that opera training. Because I realized that there's something about the way that we understand the world that predates even our own understanding. That even my ambition to become an opera director was historically determined. That ambition that I want, it has been implanted in me even before I became conscious of “what aesthetics do I want to experience the world?”

This deep thinking brought me to the active question of “okay sure, Aida played in Manila, sure Puccini was playing in Indonesia.” But my questions shifted to “but how were they listened to?” How do we listen? Because that's when I realized that I'd constructed this. I think that part of my post-colonial—moving towards de-colonial—question had shifted. My understanding now is that musicology has become a European institution and, for that matter, universities and academia

are European institutions, to be able to implement its imperial interests around the world. And therefore, it's there to make standardized knowledge production, including how, for example, the way that we should listen to Mozart—that there is only one *sonos* of Mozart, and that all of us are supposed to experience it. If my body is incapable of understanding or acquiring that *sonos*, then there is a problem with this brown, queer body. And that we need to build conservatories so that we can train these bodies to be where we could implant these songs, so that our project that requires the songs could be built on top of each other.

And I've had the opportunity to look back at history and ask the question "when did these songs begin?" and how are we now expecting that this is universal, when in fact, these are indeed implanted? I wanted to listen to that moment when they first heard Aida in Manila. And what were they listening [to]? But it's hard of course because we don't have the actual recordings. I have to read through documents and listen "against the grain" as we say in archival studies, in history. And there are a few ways that I did this. [. . .] That's how I ended up with my sound question.

After my PhD, I thought about this so much. So, I've been reading all these . . . I have to use guesswork through these documents, archival documents, [to find] how they were listened to. I have to also understand that the archive is a colonial institution. When I was looking for the evidence that I was looking for in Singapore, in Vietnam, I didn't find it where I would want it to be. Because I was thinking it would be sorted in the arts and culture section, but there's none of it there.

In one situation, I was in Singapore for one week. It's very expensive in Singapore, so I could only research there for one week. Every day I would be there, on the last day, my flight was in the evening, and I still stayed, because I was thinking "why can't I find the theatre? Where are the musicians? Where are the local musicians I'm looking for? The local theatre artists that I'm looking for?" And then out of desperation, I went to the fire department, the police department, and the sanitation department. There, I found the musicians. Because of course, in colonial Singapore, the purpose of the colonial government is to organize and to police the locals. So, the concert hall at night, essentially, is the most flammable building because they use actual candles and fire to light up the stage. And so, therefore, the musicians, if you want to do a concert, you need to write all the names of the musicians and submit it to the fire department to get permission. So, that is how I found the names of the musicians—by looking at the fire department. Also, the police department, because in the Philippines, because you have to pay for tickets to be able to watch concerts. That's also how I knew that the locals were listening to the local opera is because it's in the tropics. So, the sound would go through, because these are tropical buildings, you can't completely enclose it because it's in the tropics. So, the sounds would actually filter out through some of the crosswind architectural structures. But then the police. . . oftentimes, these visiting French and Italian opera companies needed to call the police to patrol around the opera houses to shoo away the locals who were listening outside of the buildings.

And so, this is how I knew that they were listening. I don't have materials of them telling about how they listen, but I knew they were listening. And so that's why I ended up thinking "well, I'd better find recordings, the earliest possible recordings." And when I found them, I sat there listening to some of these recordings that are really, really moving. I found them in Europe, and they call them cemeteries because this where all these recordings from the beginning of the 20th century from the colonies are scored to die because sounds—as I've been arguing—only matter if they are connected to the bodies to which they are supposed to be listened by.

And if you remove them and you put them in an archive in Europe—away from the source communities—then they just die. These are just cemeteries until a body like mine connects to it and then finally, they are re-animated.

So, this has been to answer—now this is a very long answer—I'm getting back to your question now (laughter). Sometimes this theorization really is indeed a very Eurocentric way of constructing knowledge. This is what my frustration was in beginning as an early, junior scholar—thinking that I cannot participate in this knowledge production where my body is removed from this, by writing books where I cannot even show the body from which these thoughts have emerged. And that I need to return always on stage, to also think and re-situate my body—this listening body—that connects to these archival materials that I work with, and that these knowledge productions are embodied. They are situated.

(applause)

Teilhard Paradela: Right. Thank you.

I think we should open the floor to questions and comments from the audience.

Audience member 1: How would you interpret something that is a pure sound? And what I mean by that is . . . think of space, for example, Jupiter makes a very distinct sound. The sun makes a very distinct sound, the cosmic background radiation makes a unique sound but when you're talking about colonizing technologies, we're hearing it through a piece of technology that's been developed by a colonizer. So, how would you interpret something based in creation that literally doesn't have a culture attached to it?

meLê yamomo: Thanks for the question and I think I will not be able to answer that (laughter) because I think that's the point. I think this is part of an emerging interest that we are building in knowledge production—that all our knowledge has so far been very anthropocentric. The way that we understand everything—whether it's through sight but also through sound—is very specific to our species. We happen to listen to very specific frequencies that other species may not be capable of listening to and therefore, all the knowledge that we could produce is very anthropocentric. All we could ever say about what we listen to is situated in the frequency [range] that we are capable of listening to, and the particular vibration it can produce through our bodies. We could (and we are) trying our best to find interspecies ways of communication, but also understanding other modes of listening. But you're right, and in a way, it is a very humbling thought indeed. That all we could ever really talk about now and understand is all that this particular species that we have could hear and talk about. And what does that matter to other species? At least in a way, of course. I do have an argument as well there, but that's my short answer that I could give you now. I don't know if that satisfies you.

Teilhard Paradela: If I can add, even our technologies of recording or exploring space, they're really rooted in the colonial imaginary. The language that we use in space travel, we can trace that to the explorations in the 17th and 18th century, even in our imaginary, like *Star Wars* for instance, right? It's there. It's really the way we think about space, the way we think of this broad expanse. Beyond that, we're using colonial language. And in a way, that's the ambition too. It's not, you know, learning new cultures who look like us (more or less) but it's really that. So, I think we need to decolonize that imaginary as well. And to go back to meLê's point, to really go beyond ourselves and think about it from the point of view of the sun and not from

our own point of view. And even speaking about “point of view”, it's already very human-centred.

meLê yamomo: If I may just add one small thing, and this doesn't answer to your question, I just want to point out a particular picture of this diversity. I'm a curator as well, of a festival called *Colonial Frequencies* where I'm asking for different ways of listening. And one of the musicians that I work with is [Johannes Mahom Privago] from Jogjakarta in Indonesia. The reason why I am extremely fascinated, and really impressed by the soundscape that he can produce is because he creates instruments. He's an instrument builder. And he does this by going through garbage, he picks up things from the garbage. And he has been living in Europe for the last three years. So, he would go to a German garbage dump, and pick things and then build instruments. But the most fascinating thing about it is that when he starts playing that, it sounds so Jogjakarta. It sounds Javanese. He could hear Javanese sounds in German garbage. I think this is fascinating, because yes, we could remove culture from objects—the existence of object—but at the same time, it's so fascinating that we could embed tremendous different kinds of imagination in the same [object], even the very garbage that that we see. There is one exception, though. He says that German plastic bags are too thick, so this particular reedy sound that he does with this kind of reed instrument from Jogjakarta cannot be produced because it's too thick, so he still asked his friend to bring this flimsy plastic from Indonesia.

Teilhard Paradela: At least it's not ending up in the Pacific Ocean.

Audience member 2: Where you are, in Europe, and in the sound and music world, it's super-white obviously. And I find that the conversations and discussions about race and colonization in Europe to be a bit behind other places (like here), and I'm wondering how your work is received there in those circles and also, what other skills are needed there in the sound world?

meLê yamomo: Thanks for the question. It's very complex to answer this. There's a danger that we bring back colonialism as if it's a competition of different nation-states, when in fact, I think the very concept of nation-states is a colonial invention. The fact that the way that we control the bodies that could migrate is a kind of extension of direction. I'm thinking a lot about how we could create the concept of post-migration. How could we not include or postpone migration as a way to determine? Because the fact that all people of color will always be asked "where are you really from?" is because we've racialized who can migrate. We know that a white person can be anywhere in the world and it's okay, but when you're a brown person, you're always asked "where are you from?" And therefore, we frame everything within migration and it's in a way a colonialism, and every discourse about it is much deeper than how we engage it. But really, how do we construct societies or loss, really, about this? And in a way, even if I'm in the Philippines, a lot of these colonial epistemologies exist anyway. Anywhere we go. And I think that it's important to think about de-coloniality as also a trans-national and post-national project. How can we find alliances that might not pull us back to structures or systems that actually gave birth to and institutionalized some of the violences that colonialism produced? Including concepts of visas and passports, for example, so that we know who is allowed to move and not. Or who can study and who is to be studied? That's kind of like, part of the question I was asking as well, is that we are all capable. I am capable of becoming a colonizer once privilege arrives at me. I think the quick answer to your question is that Europe is the imperial centre, and that indeed, there are still problems that it is facing, but that doesn't also necessarily mean that outside Europe [it doesn't exist]. . . because it is also this concept, of course that the way that we discuss now—colonialism—it's a very specific meaning that started in the 16th century. A

particular way of imagining the world. Of course, there are different ways that the world has been conquered, and re-conquered, but there's a particular imagination that transpired in the 16th century through which a lot of the epistemic violence that we're still experiencing now were built at that time. And it still echoes. It is still embedded in the laws, in the educational system, in the music that we listen to in the pleasures that we are having, in the ambition that I'm allowed to imagine including, why did I want to become an opera director to begin with? Where did that ambition come from? I grew up in the Philippines and I wanted to come to Europe to become that. Why? So, it's centuries of imaginations that has beginnings in how the world needs to be imagined and how we should experience it. In what is pleasure? And what is pain? That's been all pre-programmed in all of us.

Teilhard Paradela: And if I can just build on your point about trans-national solidarity. Before meLê came, I told him that the University of Guelph is very generative in the thinking and in the organizing of intercultural theatre here in Canada. A well-known professor started theorizing about intercultural theatre (a professor from University of Guelph, and he's now a professor emeritus—Ric Knowles), and that theorizing around intercultural theatre has really pushed Asian-Canadian theatre artists and musicians to do their work as well. But even with the spaces provided by this thinking and theorizing about intercultural theater, some Asian-Canadian theatre artists, and musicians, they find work outside of Canada. Canada's too big but at the same time, it's too small for Asian-Canadian theatre artists. So, they go to Europe, they go to Asia, they build solidarities across national lines. So, this is an example of collaboration. Perhaps, to do art we might have to go beyond national boundaries to sustain that work. And I think it goes back to that migrant ethos that, yeah, you're in many places, but in none of those places. You make connections wherever you go, and you leverage those connections to keep on creating art.

Audience member 3: [. . .] When you're decolonizing—and breaking the system is sometimes about finding the root of where we're from—[and] going to tribes and finding how disconnected they are from the Western world, how are you having these conversations? Are you trying to find out how they might be coming at it in ways that are not already “tainted” with the whole idea [of colonialism]? Because here we are, trying to find new systems, but what does that look like?

meLê yamomo: Thanks for your question. [. . .] I've been reflecting a lot about this. Because I think sometimes, we think about colonialism that ended sometime in the 1950s and 60s, 70s, depending on which territory we're talking about, but forget also that there are other historical trajectories that carried some of these traditions, carried some of these ideologies, including the Cold War. For example, one of the Cold War projects is the idea that started from Russia and kind of circulated around the world, that kind of actually even infiltrated into the United Nations, where there's this imagination of a “kumbaya,” different indigenous people, ethnic people wearing their costumes that they could sit beside each other. So, we have this view of “U.N.” kind of parades, with everybody wearing these different costumes, and this was very central to the imagination of the post-colonial Philippine Republic. That is also very colonial in that, imagine if trained ethnomusicologists and anthropologists in the US, through Fulbright Scholarships, went back to the Philippines and traveled to the different islands, the 7000 islands of the Philippines. [Imagine] they extracted knowledge, producing handbooks and manuals of what are the songs, what are the dances of the different ethnicities, and then created a theatre spectacle out of this that continues to run at the National Theatre and has toured around Europe, a kind of “This is the Philippines” [show], in all these costumes. And what you're pointing at, is that many of these Filipinos are Christians who are working in the city, or are urbanized. But these theatricalized costumes take over particular identities of

indigenous communities and present this as a national identity of Filipinos. So, this is one of the contexts that I think your question is coming from. But one thing that I'm getting at is that we sometimes talk about de-coloniality as something very polemical, that it's just an ideology where we constantly need a discourse that constantly negates colonialism, because the very word itself is like colonialism. We just put words before it . . . "de-". So, then what is it really? And what actions or what concrete actions are we doing? The new projects that I'm working on funded by the EU and the Dutch Research Council, *Sonic Entanglements* and *Decolonizing Southeast Asian Sound Archives*, are opening up these archival objects and reconnecting them to the community. We have for example, reconnected them with some indigenous communities—who are in diaspora, now living in the UK—who think of these archival materials, maybe with a certain romantic perspective. But some of them are also saying, "yeah, but why would we want to listen to that? That culture is still alive!" I think this is one of those things that will complicate some of the issues we're talking about. It's kind of going in the direction of the archive now, and I think that's another very western idea, the archive. This idea, which is also colonial, to gather things, to standardize them, and to preserve them in particular ways. It's very mediated. Even the technology with which we capture them is a "media-tization" of a particular culture. It's just a representation of the culture. As I've said, these recordings are useless until they connect again to the body [by] which it's supposed to be listened to. And we sometimes forget that the very things that we are recording are archives [themselves]. These epics, these chants, the way that a certain person memorizes them and sings them or performs them, say once a year, is an archiving process. The body is an archive that memorizes these songs so that they can be performed over and over again, and it's a meta-archive. The embodied archive has to be recorded so that it can be archived again, but to these communities, this recorded archive is not the archive. The archive is still the one that is embedded in the body. The [other] is just a representation of that embodied archive that is still alive. So, this is one of those conflicts that we encounter. But nevertheless, we are bringing back some of these. I have partners from the Philippines. The UP Centre for Ethnomusicology [. . .] has been doing a lot of restitution work. And one of the things that I'm also trying to do is, because there are many initiatives in Europe to do repatriation and restitution that I'm communicating with, that maybe we should talk to communities who are already doing the work. And so, the last three weeks before coming here, I was traveling around with partners from Southeast Asia where we traveled to these different archives. And rather than initiating, I instigated this conversation with "okay, let's listen to how projects in the Philippines are doing this restitution rather than us coming up again." This is the thing—de-coloniality, restitution, repatriation, these are also becoming an industry where there's money that has been released. Then White professors take over again, and they try to reinvent the wheel but then again, are there communities who have been doing this? Who have been invested in this work, who have emotional and intellectual labour that has been done in this? Why do we just want to profit from it? Why can't we just connect with them because they're already doing the work? So, this is one of those things that I'm doing, reconnecting some of these already existing initiatives in the ground. So, I'm very much aware of the question, and these are some of the immediate answers that I have, but again, we always encounter certain things. I could talk a lot about this, but I'll stop there just to kind of paint a picture of where I am with these projects that I'm working on.

Teilhard Paradela: I think what's important in this engagement is giving these indigenous communities in the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia agency to really engage with this archival material. And something that we can borrow from Canada is the issue of governance around these materials. Inviting them to be part of the discussion of ownership in the usage of these materials. Something we can talk about more. (laughs)

meLê yamomo: One of the projects that they're trying to do as well is rethinking the methodologies of ethnomusicology. So, not just the what, the where, the when, the who, but also the how and why. One of the things they're trying to do is say "can we just transfer the technology and allow the indigenous community to record?" Then we are the ones who come in ask them, "can we borrow your recordings?" rather than having all these ethnomusicologists enter these spaces, record, and then take them back. In a Marxist way, this is producing more and more surplus of profit from after you've already extracted it. To kind of perform the "return" is a profitable act as well. One that gains capital to the system that started the entire system.

Teilhard Paradela: I know Curtis, you raised your hand. Do we have time for a couple more? Curtis, go ahead, please.

Audience member 4 ("Curtis"): Well, I think you just answered the question I was going to ask. But it brought up another question for me about access to the archive because that's a whole other set of issues, especially when you're talking about which bodies resonate to these sounds. We're kind of living in this digital age where hypothetically anyone could have access to an archive if it was available. So how do you confront the question of providing access?

meLê yamomo: Thanks for this question. This is a big question that we ask within our network, because we talk about digitization as . . . you know, a lot of us think that it is the way to make things accessible. But many archivists think that this is not necessarily the case. The main point—and I think you mentioned one of the key words—the two key words in our project are "access/agency" and "discussion/discourse." And to decolonize, we need to transfer the [agency], we need to make archives accessible. But that's your question. I think it's intertwined with notions of agency. Who gets to decide about modes of access, and also the kind of discourse that is generated? Just another example: after doing this tour that I've been doing, entering different archives, one of our partners happily announced on Facebook that there are certain recordings from 1938 [. . .] that is now found and that hasn't been digitized yet. They're still in wax cylinders we are now in negotiation, and it's a pretty important archive to digitize. They're now going to be repatriated. A German colleague interrupted this post and said "yeah, but it's already been done. I've already written a lot of articles about this in the 1980s." And then he posted this *academia.com* webpage on Facebook, completely missing the point. That's not the point. This is the first time that there's now a possibility to reconnect this with the community where it comes from, and that we give them the agency to tell about what these recordings are about, not another German talking, producing, getting a professorship because he "produced" knowledge based on these recordings.

[. . .]

Audience member 5: You're talking about passports and visas, but I wonder in terms of sounds . . . don't you think that we can also resonate with sound without understanding why, but actually, it just makes your body vibrate? And even though you're not from this culture, or you're not a part of this structure, it just resonates, and you don't know why. I wonder what you think about that.

meLê yamomo: Yes, of course. I think that there's something always truly fundamentally human in any human cultural production that we're doing. And that is not what I'm questioning. What I'm questioning is, why—in these very particular recordings—why would there be interests in capturing them, and then putting them in recorders, moving them back, but

disallowing the bodies that produced them to move? So, we're not arguing about the power of the sounds, but the way that we're controlling and removing that sound from the body, and then policing the body from movement. There were earlier works on the history of music, that talk about the beginning of the 20th century when recording technology was created. Finally, the world has been globalized because we could now listen to the songs from the Amazon, in Sweden, and all these things. But what is invisible in this conversation is that yes, we have invented the technology that on the one hand, can continuously extract things and move them around the world, but still develop policies that disallow bodies to move. And I think that is that is where the conversation with de-coloniality is situated. Not in the power of the sound, but the bodies that produce the sound that are still constantly policed. And who profits from such extraction, still? Certainly not the Indigenous communities where they come from.

Teilhard Paradela: There's also that layer about technologies. I studied how Filipinos started listening to the radio in the 1930s, and radio was always seen as a community property. So, you listen to the radio not as an individual but as a community and it brings people along. Nowadays, with our technologies that allow us to block off from the community, just to listen, I think that's another way of disciplining our bodies and [preventing] any form of solidarity or community with others. Yes, we listen to the same podcasts sometimes, but the experience is so individual, it's so optimized. We don't even have to talk about legislation and policies, we can just think about how technologies can determine how we listen and how we engage with each other. So, that's something to think about as well. Again, the power of sound, but there are always ways to circumscribe that at work.

meLê yamomo: Maybe one last commentary to kind of tie together some of these arguments that I'm building with archive, with artistic practice, with research, and why they are all part of an entire colonial project. In a way, again as a Marxist, we know that everything anyway is driven by capital, and therefore, everything is built on where the capital should flow. And therefore, if we talk about, say, "musical archives can only exist if there are recordings somewhere," it's a useless archive unless they are performed. And actually, the performing over and over again of Beethoven and Mozart, the building of concert halls, are also archival projects, because they are useless unless they are performed. But this is one of those questions: in the last 500 years, where did all the capital go? And what institutions did we build so that specific archives are [privileged] and certain archives disappear? What kind of power are we building in the constant repetition of all these operas, and building opera houses, channeling our national resources so that they can exist? While at the same time, using the same power so that certain archives also disappear.

I'll end with that.

(applause)