

## DECOLONOISE: Decolonial Struggle and Noise From Below

*But this reality, however dismal, motivates my desire to make my life, through fierce revolt, as joyful and fulfilling as possible! My hopelessness does not paralyze me with fear or depression; I celebrate it with hysterical laughter and ecstasy in spite of civilization's death march. I arm my desires with the urgency to live... against the social order of monotony and peaceful enslavement, to sleep beneath the stars, to feel sunshine and a breeze with every hair on my body, to listen to the late-night conversations of the insects, to become wild...*

— Flower Bomb!



### † Preamble

This essay is devoted to those whose words, sounds, and kindred spirits have kept me company in the head and the heart since I started to attend to my body and psyche and confront how coloniality has been hauntingly shaping everything within and around me, whose boundless compassion and fierce love have rescued me over and over when I'm spiraling down towards despair that shatters my entire existence and consumes my limited capacity to keep on crafting my world at the present of an increasingly foreclosed future.

With the aspiration to shed some light on the present and ways to live it as intensely and creatively outside and against the status quo as possible, I follow the trails of Tara Transitory — a trans queer of color originally from Singapore, living the life of a nomad, and performing sonic rituals of noise,<sup>2</sup> investigating how queer feminist decolonial thought and practice inform her local and day to day artistic projects which at the same time are self-consciously intended for decolonial effects and resisting systems of domination. I dwell on her profoundly imaginative and liberating sounds while grounding the discussion in her ongoing struggles at the intersection of resistance and creativity, where noises inhabit and born out of, the intersection where art and activism converge — both demand response and bearing witness, both call to sensations and actions.

Departed from a politics of unlocation inspired by Adrienne Rich's a politics of location<sup>3</sup> and the urgency to unname oneself (becoming anonymous) built upon Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of naming and renaming,<sup>4</sup> I learn to read and recount the stories about her ghostly, not fully knowable being, intangible, untethered, and unassimilable; her self-imposed exile as conscious physical

<sup>1</sup> Flower Bomb, *No Hope, No Future*, (Warzone Distro, 2019), 8–9.

<sup>2</sup> Find more info on Transitory's old website [onemannation.com/](http://onemannation.com/). This website has not been updated for a long time since Transitory no longer performs solo in front of audience. Current website of Transitory's duo: [nguventransitory.com/](http://nguventransitory.com/).

<sup>3</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," *Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980s*, ed. Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz and Iris Zavala (John Benjamins Publishing, 1985), 7–22.

<sup>4</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, "To(o) Queer the Writer," *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Duke University Press, 2009), 164–66.

withdrawing from and refusal to be kept in her place by the colonization of hegemonic and unjust powers; the liquidity of her identities and nomadism enabling an ability to traverse between visibility/aboveground and invisibility/underground, which is tactically deployed as disobedience and defiance against the regime of control and surveillance seeking to subjugate and stifle her voices that speak honestly and truthfully.

I share in this essay the sounds of Transitory's rage and grief, from which I have always drawn inspiration and strength, and think about how manifesting the noise and the "messiness," "filthiness," and "unwantedness," which have been used to describe noise, is practicing and becoming what Sara Ahmed methodologies as feminist killjoys in her manifesto or minoritarian killjoys of all kinds,<sup>5</sup> how performing it can be a method to resist, disrupt and deconstruct the dehumanizing identity and existence that have been imposed to benefit and perpetuate colonial order, how holding space for it, tuning in to it, taking it in, and feeling it all, with others, is a collective ritual of care and ecstasy, and how making noise and listening to noise can be the act of "speaking from wound" and "connecting through wound,"<sup>6</sup> which allows us to locate an affinity of committing to longing for a decolonial understanding and love.<sup>7</sup> Transitory's stories do not provide a set of maps for how to survive and achieve liberation in a world of turmoil, but fuel to continue struggling together and going down unknown and unexpected paths.

I am unsatisfied with the mere study of the sinister side of noise as a genre, and therefore, what I want to do here is to contextualize noise in project that can prove it to be not only a tool impracticable, impossible to, unutilizable, and unmanipulatable by the civilized social order but also a creative force to combat, destitute, and deactivate the power of the colonial and anthropocentric paradigms without falling into the danger of reproducing new homogenous and constituent power that only "bring[s] power down to earth in order to raise oneself above the heavens."<sup>8</sup>



### † The only way out is through: the struggle of decolonization

We have been caught in the net of a future that toxifies our relationships, steals our dreams, and cuts off our tongues. The never-ending hunger for power and resources, known as the fatal project of colonialism drives the expansion of this futurism into remote territories. Waving the banner of "progress" and "enlightenment," its empire maps out and carves up the earth and imposes

<sup>5</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook* (Allen Lane, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Laura E. Pérez, "Eros Ideologies and Methodology of 'The Oppressed,'" *Eros Ideologies* (Duke University Press, 2019), 22. And Gloria Anzaldúa, "Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound," *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Duke University Press, 2009), 305–17.

<sup>7</sup> Chéla Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, trans. Robert Hurley (Semiotext(e), 2015), 77. I will argue in this essay and the other two essays that what noise invokes is instead a kind of destituent power.

the narrative of its civilizational mission upon those it encounters. It distorts and destroys memories out of insecurity so that its own history can be entitled as the only remaining book read and inscribed universally. It dissects lives, all lives, and thrusts them into the role of property and objects. Some marked exploitable, expendable, and disposable by the hierarchical ranking of human value are consumed for the thirst of its capitalist devotees.

Its “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy,” as bell hooks calls, seeks the demise of those whose existence do not fall within its approval, whom it viciously calls the “others,”<sup>9</sup> to whom it promises the impossibility and unthinkability of anything outside of its normalcy. And it is not surprising that modernity/coloniality announces itself sonically as well: the imposition of how a body should sound and listen, the unwantedness and inaudibility of the sounds of the “others,” which are “inferior” and often deemed “noise,” inaccessible to the ear and the imaginary of the colonizer, or the homogenizing, fetishization, and appropriation of “world music.”<sup>10</sup> The non-believers who refuse to enunciate their own value in eurocentric and anthropocentric terms, resist to conform to its ideas, and battle its captivation are banished to the realms of the uncivilized, barbarian, depraved, savage, undocumented, unworthy, deviant, sinner, abomination, abjection, less than human, animal. It declares that the ‘others’ must be affronted and blamed, stripped bare, and targeted for disappearance, as they are the obstacles to the cancerous continuation of the empire’s progress, the threats to its social cohesion, and the enemies who contaminate and sabotage the construction of its “civilized world,” that builds its very structure by slavery and genocide, lays its foundation on stolen land, and feeds on a dying earth. The dehumanizing rhetoric and law of its colonial state are routine violence codified, and all its atrocities and crimes, enslavement, and murder enacted upon the “others” can, therefore, be righteously claimed legitimate. Andrea Smith writes about the “equation between Indian bodies and dirt” and how the founding of the United States through the genocide of Indigenous Peoples was justified: “This ‘absence’ is effected through the metaphorical transformation of Native bodies into a pollution of which the colonial body must constantly purify itself.”<sup>11</sup> The same trope is still deployed to the present day.

<sup>9</sup> Theorized by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, othering is “the business of *creating* the enemy, of delineating that opposition that must exist, in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others... a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes. It locates its ‘others’ by this process in the pursuit of that power within which its own subjectivity is established.” Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (Routledge, 2017), 158.

<sup>10</sup> I will discuss more on this in later sections. See also Roshanak Kheshti, *Modernity’s Ear* (New York University Press, 2015), A. M. Kanngieser, “Sonic Coloniality,” [rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/tran.12602](https://online.library.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/tran.12602), and Transnational Decolonial Institute, *Decolonial Aesthetics Manifesto*, <https://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/>.

<sup>11</sup> Andrea Smith, “Chapter I: Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide,” *Conquest* (Duke University Press, 2015), 9; In the ongoing genocidal war on Palestinians, where Israeli government representatives have been attempting to justify, obfuscate, and deny the brutality of occupation by weaponizing antisemitism and homophobic accusations and referring to Palestinians as “human animals” and “wild beasts” who deserve such violent treatment. As Hala Alyan writes, “a slaughter isn’t a slaughter if those being slaughtered are at fault, if they’ve been quietly and effectively dehumanized - in the media, through policy - for years. If nobody is a civilian, nobody can be a victim.” Hala Alyan, “The Palestine Double Standard” (New York Times Opinion, 2025). For more on this see Leah Cowan, “Chapter 4: Building borders through headlines and column inches,” *Border Nation* (Pluto Press, 2021), 50-75.

To be discovered — claimed knowable and known by the colonizer’s language — is the first violence the colonized has to go through. The violence is exacerbated through a relentless process of raced and gendered categorization and naming with socially constructed identifiers and adjectives,<sup>12</sup> which continues to manifest itself in contemporary times. This process chains the dispossessed and locks them up within the system where social institutions have repeatedly endeavored to antagonize their bodies and enforce their supposed incivility and illegitimacy, where wars are waged against their existence on multiple fronts. What the violence of naming has instilled in the dispossessed is the illusions of powerlessness — that their a priori flawed bodies need to be corrected, controlled, restricted, and governed, and a false image of security and comfort of attempting to legitimize themselves and moving closer towards the fully human status that belongs only to the bourgeois white Europeans. The anonymously authored zine *How to Destroy the World* illustrates this point:

Naming is a particular way that power works, but naming is not only that which confines, threatens, and attacks us — it is also that which has us work towards the reproduction of this world. When we enthusiastically engage in our identities, working to promote or produce them as such — to be better workers or queers or immigrants — we are still naming.<sup>15</sup>

Waiting for the colonizer’s recognition is a servile act — of those who still are trapped by the internalized colonial effects and shy away from making a break with what is unbearable about the existent power structures — when, as Frantz Fanon argues, the very terms of recognition are established by and align with the interests of the colonizer.<sup>14</sup>

The colonized have reluctantly come to learn that there is nothing to gain by petitioning the oppressors for an end to one’s oppressions. Instead, their visceral reactions to being in the midst of the intolerable conditions of the present, being fed up with the pervasive sense of deadness and the gaze that devours their bodies with hatred brew resistance. It compels them to take the initiative and enact the decolonial attitude which requires a decolonial turn — turning away from the project of the struggle for recognition of the colonizer and resigning from “the order of validation of modernity/coloniality.”<sup>15</sup> This is paralleled by what Sylvia Wynter calls for in her writings, in Katherine McKittrick’s words: “the possibility of undoing and unsettling—not replacing or occupying—Western conceptions of what it means to be human.”<sup>16</sup> This turn is the beginning of a project without end, called decolonization — an unmediated, unflinching, violent struggle for

<sup>12</sup> In *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*, Maria Lugones writes about this dehumanizing process and offers insightful analysis of the way in which racialized gender categories are constructed and made taboos in the colonial paradigm. María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia*, (vol. 25, no. 4, 2010), 742–59. [www.jstor.org/stable/40928654](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928654).

<sup>15</sup> Ignorant Research Institute, *How to Destroy The World* (Down & Out Distro, 2019). [downandoutdistro.noblogs.org/files/2019/02/hdtw-imposed.pdf](http://downandoutdistro.noblogs.org/files/2019/02/hdtw-imposed.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Glen Sean Coulthard, “The Politics of Recognition in Colonial Contexts,” *Red Skin, White Masks* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 26

<sup>15</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” 24. [caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres\\_Outline\\_Ten\\_Theses-10.25.16.pdf](http://caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres_Outline_Ten_Theses-10.25.16.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Katherine McKittrick, “Yours in the Intellectual Struggle,” *Sylvia Wynter*, ed. Katherine McKittrick, (Duke University Press, 2015), 2

autonomy wherein one seeks beyond the destruction, a total disentanglement, detachment, and deactivation, individually and collectively, in every instance, from and of the delusion of the colonizer's futurity and everything it entails and everything that defends it. The decolonial attitude shares a logic with the concept of destitution theorized by the anonymous French insurrectionist anarchist group The Invisible Committee, who writes:

There's no longer any place for innocence in this world. We only have the choice between two crimes: taking part in it or deserting it in order to bring it down — Where the 'constituents' place themselves in a dialectical relation of struggle with the ruling authority in order to take possession of it, destitute logic obeys the vital need to disengage from it. It doesn't abandon the struggle; it fastens on to the struggles positivity. It doesn't adjust itself to the movements of the adversary but to what is required for the increase of its own potential... To destitute is not primarily to attack the institution, but to attack the need we have of it.<sup>17</sup>

Shaped by anti-assimilationist feminist and queer sensitivities, the decolonial life project knows too the impossibility to reconcile and the fruitlessness to negotiate with system of oppressions caused by co-constituted power relations,<sup>18</sup> beyond race and the heteronormative framework of gender, only the necessity to rid oneself of the ever-changing web weaved of intertwining systems of domination, what feminist intersectional theorist Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza terms kyriarchy.<sup>19</sup>

Decoloniality is a lived position, like the destitute gesture — an embodiment of “desertion and attack, creation and wrecking, all at once”<sup>20</sup> — responding to Fanon's call for urgency in *The Wretched of the Earth* to act here and now.<sup>21</sup> To acknowledge the damage wrought upon our bodies, to unlearn the colonialist mentality that is deeply infected and embedded in one's psyche, to pursue the abolition of the imposed identities that alienate us and isolate us from each other as discreet beings, and to heal the trauma colonialism and its racial hierarchy and gendered violence have caused in all our lives. It is as much an antagonistic project as one of self-care, taken up by individuals and carried out in our personal lives, projects, and communities in an effort to keep depriving any significance of that named selves — the enemies within, draining their solidity and rendering them irrelevant until nothing stays intact, to collapse that space within ourselves until it is destitute enough for the reemergence of the infinite possibility of all that we are capable of becoming. The

<sup>17</sup> The Invisible Committee, *NOW*, tr. Robert Hurley (Semiotext(e), 2017), 78-80.

<sup>18</sup> Decolonial dyke-queer theorist Paola Bacchetta asserts the necessity of analyzing every condition, event, subject, or object as produced through what she termed co-production and co-formation of relations of power: e.g. capitalism is not reducible to class relations, it is composed of multiplicities of co-formation such as gender, sexuality, racism as well as co-production such as colonialism and neocolonialism. Bacchetta says: “Wherever we are located, we are part of the planet, not as some isolated unit somewhere. All relations of power across the planet are interconnected, as are all subjects and beings-becoming.” From “Decolonial Sexualities: Paola Bacchetta in Conversation with Suhraiya Jivraj and Sandeep Bakshi,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 22, no. 4 (2020): 574-85.

<sup>19</sup> Fiorenza describes kyriarchy as: “a complex pyramidal system of relations of domination that works through the violence of economic exploitation and lived subordination.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Introduction: A Critical Feminist Theology of Liberation: Reality and Vision,” *Transforming Vision* (1517 Media; Fortress Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>20</sup> The invisible Committee, *ibid*, 89.

<sup>21</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2004).

only way out is through.



### † Dwellers at the threshold: a politics of unlocation

Chicana dyke-feminist poet Gloria Anzaldúa — who was very aware of the colonial legacy and “sick” connotations embedded in the names — took the risk of naming and renaming herself, so that all the selves in her will not “get erased, omitted, or killed.”<sup>22</sup> To rename ourselves is to insist on being ourselves — in our bodies — in this world that is not built for us, to not forget the residues of the imposition of colonial identities left within ourselves, is to inherit and then pass on the sources of strength and the oppositional technologies that these names have predicated, keep those lifelines alive for that ambitious project of “extantation” — the persistence on “existing despite conditions that favor their imminent extinctions,”<sup>25</sup> for those whose survival, as Audre Lorde puts it, “is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service.”<sup>24</sup> So Tara Transitory did too. Trans\*queer and nomadic is how she describes and be herself.

The teaching of black feminists and feminists of color tells us to take seriously “the complex nodes of identity that are staged by a politics of location” even “as they refuse to be boxed into simplistic essentialist positions.”<sup>25</sup> Transitory's location is one of exclusion and contradiction, of negation and evasion. She left Singapore, where she confronted the enduring effects of British colonialism and imperialism and severe censorship permitting only arts aligned with the prevailing Singaporean agenda to survive while allowing no artist to “voice out any opposing opinions on the way things were wrong in the country.”<sup>26</sup> So she threw herself into exile and strayed across artificial geopolitical borders.<sup>27</sup> She gave herself and performed under the moniker One Man Nation around

<sup>22</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “To(o) Queer the Writer.”

<sup>25</sup> Nguyễn + Transitory, “Bird Bird, Touch Touch, Sing Sing,” [nguventransitory.com/index.php/bird-bird-touch-touch-sing-sing-2019/](http://nguventransitory.com/index.php/bird-bird-touch-touch-sing-sing-2019/). “extantation” is also the name of a performance space that Transitory organized in Northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. The space is, in Transitory's words, “for the extant, the forgotten, the marginalised, the uncategorised, the invisible, and for the ones in-between, [...] artist who are in a state of constant flux; who do not belong in well defined categories; experimental and ritual/folk performers; Women; trans\* (as in gender), queer, working-class, artists/activists/writers/communities; people with disabilities; those who are dispossessed, disempowered and displaced.” [extantation.wordpress.com/](http://extantation.wordpress.com/).

<sup>24</sup> Audre Lorde, “The Uses Of Anger,” *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*, ed. Roxane Gay, (W. W. Norton & Company, 2020). 59

<sup>25</sup> bell hooks and Michele Wallace cited in Caren Kaplan “The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice,” *Scattered Hegemonies*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 143

<sup>26</sup> For more background information, see Cedrik Ferment and Dimitri della Faille, *Not Your World Music: Noise in South East Asia* (Syrphe and Hushush, 2016), 159 and Psychmetalfreak, “One Man Nation - A Singaporean Artist in Exile, an Interview,” [psychmetalfreak.blogspot.com/2011/12/one-man-nation-singaporean-artist-in.html](http://psychmetalfreak.blogspot.com/2011/12/one-man-nation-singaporean-artist-in.html)

<sup>27</sup> By “stray,” I'm referring to how Sara Ahmed implicates this word in her essays, she writes that “to stray away” is “to err,” to deviate from the paths we are supposed to follow, paths that will lead us to the “right” direction towards happiness, when “happiness = the proximity to whiteness,” or, “happiness = the proximity to a white man.” Ahmed, *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook*, 118-119 and “Lesbian Feminism,” *Lesbian Feminism*, ed. Niharika Banerjee,

the world. Removing herself as Marc Chia and the ascribed identities it entailed, becoming the anonymous One Man Nation was her disbelief and insubordination of the restriction of an allotted role and a fixed place that nation-state and coloniality have fixed for her and an ideal of non-participation in this global machine of domination. It was her unwillingness to be entangled with and trapped in this decaying world she was leaving — her giving up on this world — as the willingness not to give up on opening up new impossible worlds or new ways of occupying the world. “A willful will; not willing as willing not.”<sup>28</sup> Here, the action of not doing, of not willing to do something, is far from reactive and privative.

When asked about her favorite place in her town in an interview, Transitory insisted, “I don’t have a town to call my own.”<sup>29</sup> She has committed to the jubilation of nomadic freedom, or living in ecstasy — *existanai* (ek-, out of; -histanai, to put, place) — out of place, as a “stranger” — “body out of place,”<sup>30</sup> unfitting for the recognition of civility and established norms. The enactment of the decolonial turn and destituent gesture, for Transitory, required disappearance, going deeper underground and away from discernibility, intelligibility, and comprehensibility. But this is not the end — getting there is to get to the portal from which immanent capacity can be accessed. William C. Anderson says it best in *The Nation on No Map*, where he recounts the stories of black anarchist insurrection and about how the location of the dispossessed has always been the habitat of radical currents, and how — by fiercely turning the tables, shifting perspectives — they have transformed the disadvantages of their dispossessed positionality into advantages, he writes, “statelessness is more than a lack of citizenship: it renders you nonexistent, a shadow. So why not embrace the darkness we’re in, the darkness we are, and organize through it and with it? Use the conditions that the state has placed on us to inform our most radical incursions.”<sup>31</sup> To endeavor the project of One Man Nation was how Transitory weaponized her alienation, how she expressed her decolonial attitude as a resolute “no,” how she attempted to free the unboundedness of the selves that embody multilocality and, more precisely, unlocality, mobilizing what Maria Lugones terms ‘world-traveling’<sup>32</sup> and shifting oneself into a nomad who dares to dream and experiment with living ungoverned forms of life that assemble none of the present.

A ‘one man nation’ does not exist. It stands for a place that cannot be found on this map,

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Kath Browne, Eduarda Ferreira, Marta Olasik and Julie Podmore (Zoe Books, 2019), 316

<sup>28</sup> Ahmed, “Lesbian Feminism,” 318.

<sup>29</sup> Digital in Berlin, “Tara Transitory Aka One Man Nation.”

<sup>30</sup> Ahmed, *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook*, 140-141. Andrew Culp interprets nomadism through a critical and philosophical lens in the chapter, “Nomadism: Barbarian, Not Pastoral,” in *Dark Deleuze*. He portrays nomads as those who arm the negative characteristics of “barbarian” — who “refuse to be educated in the language of the polis and act with a savage roughness that exceeds the boundaries of appropriateness” — as strategic refusal to conform to societal norms, asserting their autonomy and ability to resist assimilation and control by rejecting the logocentric and the cultural impositions of the state. Culp writes: “Nomads are perfectly satisfied with such a one-sided story. What initially appears as an insulting depiction of their limited capacities instead is a definition of how they avoid capture.” (Anarchist Library, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> William C. Anderson, “Chapter 1: Stateless Black,” *The Nation on No Map* (AK press, 2021),

<sup>32</sup> Lugones defines it as, in Kaplan’s words, “a process of simultaneous displacement and placement that acknowledges multiple locations.” From “The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice,” *Scattered Hegemonies*, 150.

the sign of ghostly and liminal existence — hybrid and fluid — that this map cannot hold. It has excluded itself from this world, exists outside of worlds, without a world, fluctuating between worlds but too other to feel at home and too willful to be the captive in and of any world. It learns the small tactics of becoming invisible, of withdrawing: “seeing without being seen, listening while pretending not to, pretending not to know how to read, how to obey the rules, to not understand a language, avoiding the gaze, staying still, going underground, forging fake papers.”<sup>33</sup> It renders itself non-existent, dwelling at the threshold in between the no longer here and not yet there, and learns to harness the powerful forces of invisibility and unlocality, turns them into strengths, and uses them to disrupt. To become nothing, so it can become anything, to be nowhere, so it can be situated in the constellations of struggles anywhere. The assertion of One Man Nation rings familiar with the trail left behind by the Zapatistas, who pointed towards similar means and have lived accordingly:

Zapatismo is not a new political ideology, or a rehash of old ideologies. Zapatismo is nothing, it does not exist. It only serves as a bridge, to cross from one side, to the other. So everyone fits within Zapatismo, everyone who wants to cross from one side, to the other. There are no universal recipes, lines, strategies, tactics, laws, rules, or slogans. There is only a desire — to build a better world, that is, a new world.<sup>34</sup>

Transitory no longer appears as One Man Nation, which “as a bridge,” has served its purpose for her crossing to Tara Transitory. She says that One Man Nation is of yesteryear’s, as well as Marc Chia, as she “begins the transition towards the female end of the gender spectrum.”<sup>35</sup> Her work *TRANSform\_TRANSmit\_TRANSced*, in which she presents “multiple forms of [herself] in her various gender-states,”<sup>36</sup> is about embodiment of the liquidity of transness and queerness. Albeit she confines her body in the same hotel room across five different performances — seemingly locatable, it is the fictions of time and the unlocality of her identities that this work ruminates, traverses, unravels — fleeing from and revoking her past selves to evoking and accessing other ones that were already in the process of germination. The body “lost-in-transition” is a body “out-of-place,” unruly and ecstatic.

Transitory makes noise, or “work which some consider art, some consider music. and some consider trash. Clearly, it never quite fits into neatly demarcated categories.”<sup>37</sup> And this is what I would call noise. When I use the term noise here, I am talking about the works genred as “noise

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<sup>33</sup> Françoise Vergès in an interview talks about how visibility, although plays crucial importance in minoritarian struggles, can be “an element of capitalistic logic: things must be made visible to become objects and merchandise.” Therefore, visibility/invisibility must be deployed strategically depends on the context, and invisibility can be especially useful and advantageous in a time when surveillance permeates all facets of our lives. She says that

“historically, the subalterns, the oppressed, have moved between visibility and invisibility: rupturing the hegemonic narrative, showing its structural function of erasure and going into hiding.” “A Decolonial Feminism: Timofei Gerber in Conversation with Françoise Vergès,” *Epoch Magazine*, (Issue 28, 2022).

<sup>34</sup> The Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous General Command of the EZLN (The Zapatista Army of National Liberation), quoted in Luis Hernández Navarro, “Zapatismo Today and Tomorrow,” (Schools for Chiapas, 2004), [schoolsforchiapas.org/library/zapatismo-today-tomorrow/](https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/zapatismo-today-tomorrow/)

<sup>35</sup> Transitory, “TRANSform\_TRANSmit\_TRANSced\_01,” 2015. [vimeo.com/52063821](https://vimeo.com/52063821).

<sup>36</sup> Transitory, “TRANSform, TRANSmit, TRANSced 02,” 2015. [vimeo.com/73658262](https://vimeo.com/73658262).

<sup>37</sup> Transitory, “One Man Nation,” [onemannation.com](http://onemannation.com).

music” that are, however, by definition, unthinkable, unknowable, undefinable, uncategorizable, and unlocatable. Paul Hegarty’s conceptualization of the amorphous “noise music” — which I incline toward — unveils that the only thing remains consistent in the practice of “noise music” as a genre is its negativity that uniformly rejects the position of being an appendage of or a hyphen to music: a music genre that is inherently anti-music. In *Noise/Music*, he writes that noise “can never be positively, definitively and timelessly located.”<sup>58</sup> This idea remains centered and is further explored in his *Annihilating Noise*:

Once you know noise, the noise is gone, it is just a different type of music. Once you know noise, in hindsight, it became not a harbinger of change but a premonition of sameness... Noise is not there, not in experimentation that is established, but in the complex, often contradictory and always paradoxical relation of noise to something that it is not, or seeks not to be, or is not allowed to be.<sup>59</sup>

“Noise music” — the politics of unlocationality and destituent power manifesting sonically — is the sound of nomads. Noise does not exist independently, but as the indifference and secession, mark the peripheral, outside, or underground of constituted dominant normative musical practices, meanings, and orders, and as the opposition, has always maintained its fertility to question, disobey, resist, subvert, destitute, and attack — unapologetically — ideologies and power relations that underpin such domination and normalcy. Like the feminist killjoy, noise sticks with the negative judgment that sticks with it. And the act of making noise is not the commitment to “straying” rooted in the defiance of norms simply for the sake of rebellion: being, acting, creating, performing in a way that one is not supposed to be being, acting, creating, and performing, but unparalleled freedom of a state of indifference towards being, acting, creating, and performing in any particular way at all. Noise can never be named after an artist or a specific collective group of artists, it is named after absolute hostility, and pure negation, and thus it becomes “a necessity,” as Dark Deleuze speaking through Andrew Culp, “in an era of generalized precarity, extreme class stratification, and summary executions of people of color.”<sup>40</sup> The decolonial attitude shares its affinity with noise.



### † Arming negativity: noise as the sound of feminist killjoys

*Though we have inherited a great many ideas about how to confront domination, we know that nothing is set in stone. From the shattered tools and bones of our predecessors, we craft our own weapons. Nothing is guaranteed to work, yet we attack regardless. We do so naked, having shed the rags of morality, ideology, and politics that had accumulated over time. We confront this world raw, in all its horrifying glory. We negate every truth and rule and we proceed with a spirit of incendiary experimentation. We dream big, expect little, and celebrate every moment of rupture... May*

<sup>58</sup> Paul Hegarty, Preface to *Noise/Music: A History* (The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), ix.

<sup>59</sup> Hegarty, “Noise Is Not the End,” *Annihilating Noise* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 6, 65.

<sup>40</sup> Culp, “From the Chapel to the Crypt,” *Dark Deleuze*.

*jouissance be the blessed flame that guides us into the void.* — Serafinski<sup>41</sup>

Noise, some say, is the “unwanted” sound that gets in the way<sup>42</sup> — always too loud, too messy, too ugly, too filthy, too intrusive, too aggressive, too excessive, too “out of place.” However, my relationship with noise has never been about thinking what it is, but feeling what it does. Katherine McKittrick teaches me, through her writing about the Detroit electro-techno duo Drexciya in “The Smallest Cell Remembers a Sound,” that the creative acts should be viewed “as verbs rather than nouns” and that the creative should be honored as theoretical.<sup>43</sup> Marie Thompson, in *Beyond Unwanted Sound*, also suggests a shift in how one views noise — moving from treating noise as a noun to a verb. She asks: “what does noise do? What is it that noise does before it is deemed unwanted or undesirable? What is it that noise does to become unwanted or undesirable?” I share Thompson’s curiosity, but our interests diverge when she adopts an informational approach to answer these questions, and even more so when she critiques the positioning of “noise as a negative phenomenon” in noise music and attempts to justify “noise’s positively productive capacity” with its use in music.<sup>44</sup>

Noise begins from feelings, lets through feelings, orchestrates with feelings, and ignites feelings, feelings I cannot escape, negative feelings, “bad” feelings, “ugly” feelings — that are permitted to be expressed by some bodies without accountability while perpetually excised, neglected, neutralized, invalidated, stigmatized, blamed, vilified, feared, and pathologized when the exhibitors of those feelings are the gendered and raced bodies of the “others.” We have been told to not let those feelings and emotions impede and defile our own and others’ paths towards that ultimate object of desire that is “happiness,”<sup>45</sup> that we have caused ourselves unhappiness and suffering for wanting to look at the uncomfortable truths about this ugly world, for having felt and lingered on those feelings, and have made ourselves the fools for not recognizing the futility of those feelings. Ahmed writes that “to speak out of anger as a woman of color is then to confirm your position as the cause of tension; your anger is what threatens the social bond.” We have been told that we are, in fact, the ones that violently damage the peace of civility when naming and shouting in rage at violence — “the exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence.”<sup>46</sup> We have been told

<sup>41</sup> Serafinski, “The Void,” *Blessed is the Flame*, (Pistols Drawn, 2016). 95

<sup>42</sup> For example, see Marie Thompson’s *Beyond Unwanted Sound* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017). In the preceding essay, I write that noise is the excess (in the Batailleian sense) of all sound, and scream is the excess of all language.

<sup>43</sup> Katherine McKittrick, “The Smallest Cell Remembers a Sound,” *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Duke University Press, 2021).

<sup>44</sup> Marie Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> Which is granted and defaulted to the privileged position of white and wealthy man and rewarded to only those who accept and are willing to adjust to the default. To be on the “right” path towards happiness is to move close in proximity to whiteness, or more precisely, to white man, or white and wealthy man. Ahmed, “The Happiness Turn,” *New Formations*, (vol. 2007, no. 65), 7. Similarly, the idea of “wellness,” as Johanna Hedva unravels in their *Sick Woman Theory*, implies the same assumption, they quote Ann Cvetkovich, who writes, “most medical literature tends to presume a white and middle-class subject for whom feeling bad is frequently a mystery because it doesn’t fit a life in which privilege and comfort make things seem fine on the surface.” Hedva, *Sick Woman Theory* (Topical Cream).

<sup>46</sup> Ahmed, “Feminist Killjoys And Other Willful Subjects,” *The Scholar and Feminist Online* (The Barnard Center for Research on Women, 2010).

that if we can just get over them, feel better and move on, or not, accept our servitude and the pathetic ascetic life that we deserve, and that the noise we make, our creativity — saturated with the too much-ness and the against-ness of our feelings — has no value for this civil society and its capitalist productivity.<sup>47</sup>

But those emotions and feelings were not smothered. They have persisted. They have become anchored in our flesh, integrated with our existence — always gathering, accumulating, pooling up inside of our bodies, fizzing at the edge of our skins, aching in our bones, surfacing in our dreams and nightmares, stinging like needles and burning like hot flames, demanding to be purged out. They are contained in the “secret places of pain,” as Ahmed puts it, inside of oneself, the places which Audre Lorde and many others who have evoked the queer-feminist killjoy encourage us to turn towards and have themselves fiercely laid bare in their creative works.<sup>48</sup> To kill joy is to not look away from these places, from what is difficult and painful to look at and give shape to. To encounter them, one puts oneself at risk of being lacerated by, in Lorde’s words, “the chaos of our strongest feelings,”<sup>49</sup> and so does encountering noise. The relationship one has with noise, be it performer or listener, can be difficult and, at times, achingly painful. Yet again, like the feminist killjoy, noise sticks with the negative judgment that sticks with it. Noise sticks with the negativity.

The will to arm negativity is not an obsession with or indulgence in self-pity and defeatism of seeking deeper and deeper into a mindset we are told would destroy us. It is, again what Ahmed would say, “a willful will; not willing as willing not.” The figure of the feminist killjoy is willful. We are not willing to preserve and submit to the idealization of “happiness,” we are not willing to live our life in a certain way in order to receive the reward of “happiness” that has been attached to so much human violence. Because we are willing not to give up that shadow inside of ourselves even when it is often darker than we are comfortable acknowledging, because we are willing not to give up on bringing those memories out of the shadow for change to happen, because we are willing not to give up on feeling everything — the last killjoy survival tip Ahmed gives us, because “owning the ugliest parts of [one]self is liberation,”<sup>50</sup> as another feminist of color killjoy noise maker Jenna Lee writes.

We have learned, from the grimoires of the killjoys, to surrender to and hold firmly to those moments when fury boils over us and cries pour out and to let them tell us the truth — “our deepest and nonrational knowledge”<sup>51</sup> — of ourselves and inform our very response and action in this world, and we have learned the ritual of dispelling and banishing the hold civilized social order’s shame-on-yous and shame-on-mes have over us and channeling the negative energies of those secret pains and wield such uncolonized forces with our burnout and used-up bodies to let them know —

<sup>47</sup> See also the following essay “In Defence of ‘Unwanted,’” in which I draw inspiration from Georges Bataille’s work and discuss the sacredness and excessiveness of noise in relation to the utilitarian world of the profane which considers the creative activity like a noise performance as an unproductive expenditure.

<sup>48</sup> Ahmed, “Willfulness and Feminist Subjectivity,” *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017).

<sup>49</sup> Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> From the linear note of noise musician Jenna Lee’s album release *The One That Got Away* (Black Ring Rituals Records, 2025). [blackringrituals.bandcamp.com/album/the-one-that-got-away](http://blackringrituals.bandcamp.com/album/the-one-that-got-away)

<sup>51</sup> Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.”

unashamedly — that we are not the innocent, we are also not the worthy victim, “we are bad, [and] we could be worse.”<sup>52</sup> What if this is where we find our killjoy joy? A painful joy, nonetheless vitalistic.

We want to take upon ourselves the challenge to “direct rage outward into creativity”<sup>53</sup> that Michelle Cliff did after being freed by the story of *Our Sister Killjoy*, Sissie,<sup>54</sup> and to give “no fucks and [record] the album [we] would’ve been too scared to record otherwise,” the act and process that healed Lee from the trauma of abuse.<sup>55</sup> And as we do, we are reminded of how Audre Lorde committed herself to “writing fire... until it comes out of [her] ears, [her] eyes, [her] noseholes — everywhere. Until it’s every breath [she] breathes.”<sup>56</sup> And we are reached by Gloaria Anzaldúa’s words in her letter to third world women writers: “Throw away abstraction and academic learning, the rules, the map and compass. Feel your way without blinders. To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked — not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat.”<sup>57</sup> Noise to me comes from and takes one to exactly the place where nothing is left of the body but “blood and pus and sweat,” and what Anzaldúa encourages us to do is also what the listenership with noise has taught me. This world has conditioned us to lose too much too easily, but it cannot deprive us of our rage and anger. Noise is one of the many creative and imaginative forces through which we can channel and purge that rage and anger out. And maybe what comes out without craft, what erupts on paper or through scream and noise will take us aback with the power we have been hiding in our deep core.

The emotional and the experiential are for Transitory where noise sprang from. As she and her partner/collaborator Nguyễn Baly write collectively, “how we feel, and what makes us vulnerable all inevitably gets transmitted” during the performance. No matter how neutral the setting of the performance is in itself, it “loses its neutrality once the bodies that carry their experiences enter the fold, bringing along histories, sentiments, memories, and interpretations. They infuse the collective experience, touching each of us with the usual mixes of anxieties, elations, pains, ebullitions, and ambiguities.”<sup>58</sup> One can kill joy by entering the space, by willfully bringing along with one’s body its memory stored in the “secret places of pain” and its “history that gets in the way.”<sup>59</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Andrew culp, “We Are Bad, but We Could Be Worse,” *A Guerrilla Guide to Refusal* (The University of Minnesota Press, 2022). The chapter title is also a slogan circulated by people from South American lesbian, sex worker, and trans circles.

<sup>53</sup> Michelle Cliff, *If I Could Write This in Fire* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008) quoted in Ahmed, *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook*.

<sup>54</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy* (Longman, 1994).

<sup>55</sup> From the linear note of Lee’s album *The One That Got Away*.

<sup>56</sup> Lorde, “December 9, 1985,” *A Burst of Light and Other Essays* (Ixia Press, 2017), 56.

<sup>57</sup> Anzaldúa, “Speaking In Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers,” *This Bridge Called My Back*, ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (SUNY press, 2015), 165-172.

A lot of the noise musicians have never had the “academic learning, the rules, the map and compass” to begin with and have never felt the need to acquire them.

<sup>58</sup> From Nguyễn + Transitory interview, “Failing at the Impossible: Attempts at Embodying Matriarchy,” by Kamila Metwaly (Nusasonic, 2021). [www.goethe.de/pri/nus/en/mag/fti.html](http://www.goethe.de/pri/nus/en/mag/fti.html).

<sup>59</sup> Ahmed, *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook*. In “Feminist Killjoys And Other Willful Subjects,” Ahmed’s definition of a killjoy is: “the one who gets in the way of other people’s happiness. Or just the one who is in the way—you can be in the way of whatever, if you are already perceived as being in the way.”

The performance of *Transitory*, operated under the banner of One Man Nation, is a visceral chaos fueled by fiery passion and feral rage that refuse to be purified and pacified. She embraces the corrosive power and sheer violence of noise as a weapon — that collapses all behavioral decorum and emotional constraints. *Transitory* screams fire. She uses her voice so willfully and abrasively, driving it to its limit — every one of her exhalations becomes a scream inflamed with frenzied energy sustaining indefinitely, enunciating the mess of emotions that language fails to articulate. The performance gets too loud, too messy, too ugly, too filthy, too intrusive, too aggressive, too excessive, too “out of place.” Yet *Transitory* sticks with it, it sticks with us, and we stick with her — the dangerous and murderous figure of the killjoy, amplified by the noise that gushes like blood, gathering, accumulating, pooling up, until her body wrenches, until her voice verges on tearing open, until an ecstatic void ruptures everything. I feel electrocuted by the noise, I hear the “chaos of [her] strongest feeling,” and I feel mine being ignited.



## † Epilogue

How to desire in a world that homogenizes desires? How to play in a world that is dictated by bare survival and views the act of playing as luxury? How to charge ourselves with the power of the erotic in the face of a society that seeks to vilify and snuff out its flame?<sup>60</sup> How to aspire beyond the appropriate use and expectation of this body, this very existence, that is deeply enmeshed in this “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy” milieu? How to relate intimately to each other and to love in ways that exceed the limits of the normalcy and narratives of the cultures of domination?

My response is that it is the creative act of fabulation — the make/remake/unmake-believe — that can instigate a break from a reality where all the aforementioned activities are deemed inappropriate, impossible, impossible, unthinkable, and it is in the viscerally creative and the imaginative terrain of art that we see the ripest opportunity to cause affects and ruptures which open up to,<sup>61</sup> what Chela Sandoval, drawing on Roland Barthes, calls, “a third, differential zone, a somewhere else” that is an unlocatable, encrypted “nonsite, no-place” voided of any preexisting meanings and colonial signifying systems by which it can be measured, represented, surveilled, and ordered.<sup>62</sup> This somewhere else, which holds noise or any creative act that seeks to “create another reality,” like Nguyễn + *Transitory*’s *Bird Bird, Touch Touch, Sing Sing*,<sup>63</sup> requires unmediated conflicts with — impossible and unthinkable to — this social order and is exactly the place where

<sup>60</sup> Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic.”

<sup>61</sup> And this opening, or “crossing” in Sandoval’s words, can be painful, as Sandoval writes, “it is initially a painful crossing to this no-place, this chiasmus, this crossroads, for here new kinds of powers imprecate the body as it is dissolved [...] where everything is possible—but only in exchange for the pain of the crossing.” Sandoval, “Love as a Hermeneutics of Social Change,” *Methodology*, 141.

<sup>62</sup> Sandoval, *ibid.* 142

<sup>63</sup> Write *Transitory* and her collaborator Nguyễn Baly. [nguyentransitory.com/index.php/bird-bird-touch-touch-sing-sing-2019/](http://nguyentransitory.com/index.php/bird-bird-touch-touch-sing-sing-2019/)

we can experiment and “rehearse for the subsequent transformation of the external environment.”<sup>64</sup>

We were taught to fear creativity, adventure, and play for the risk of the unknown. We were taught to fear the love, the passion, and the desire we possess for what they would reveal. But what I have encountered in the violent excess and the mad affectivity of many good noise performances, like the performance of *Transitory*, is the negation of the fears, the negation of the risks of being fully honest, of revealing oneself to and being lacerated by those that are unknown and unknowable and those that we desire and love. In Nguyễn + *Transitory*’s performance, love is manifested as the “lost magic” that utilizes the ritual of erotic and ecstatic intertwining of the two performers, whose wounding intimacy paradoxically exposes and simultaneously in spite of the selves.<sup>65</sup> They willfully become with each other by creating crevices through which the other can slip into the self which then unfolds itself toward the other. They communicate through the secret languages of touch, sound, noise, and scream and by opening themselves towards the possibility of having their boundaries lacerated and dissipated, themselves disorientated and reorientated by the other. They contemplate and receive each other not as the unwanted suggested by dominant cultures, but as limitless lovers with all their unpredictable and chaotic potentialities and possibilities. Love is understood here as the thing that “we cannot know [...] if we remain unable to surrender our attachment to power, if any feeling of vulnerability strikes terror in our hearts,” writes bell hooks, as committing “to being changed, to being acted upon by the beloved in a way that enables us to be more fully self-actualized.”<sup>66</sup>

Our experiment, our rehearsal, which occurs through the desire to live in connection with the others (humans or nonhumans) across and despite differences, through the desire “to get a little closer to the longed-for but unrealized world where we each are able to live, not by trying to make someone less than us, not by someone else’s blood or pain,”<sup>67</sup> can be with little discipline — like the unperformed moments of intensity and affectivity in Nguyễn + *Transitory*’s performance, but is based on and driven by the kind of love that can challenge the system of oppressions in its entirety even if it means to put ourselves at risk. And we can be afraid, because it is hard and painful, because we have no plan, because we hold no certainty of where it leads, because we see no visible end. We are destined to be enveloped by such fear, but fear is not synonymous with paralysis. We can still take action.

<sup>64</sup> dp writes in the linear note of his 2025 album release *Human Nature Denied* (Flag Day Recordings, 2025).

<sup>65</sup> In “Beyond the Human Pale,” I argue that the noise performance of the acts I choose to include in the essay can be seen as a willful self-sacrifice in which the performer becomes the sacrificer forsaking the power of the luxuriating self and is simultaneously the sacrificed, the power of whom is forsaken, and that what we sometimes experience in noise as the loss-of-self and ecstasy-outside-of-self can only happen through submission — action through passive, as a form of openness for encountering and being utterly altered by what is other to the self. And in the following essay, “In Defence of ‘Unwanted,’” I discuss how one becomes sovereign, as understood in Bataille’s work, in becoming “NOTHING” or ceasing to be. And being “NOTHING” is not privation or martyrdom, but a freedom of experiencing the world in any possible creative way that can be thought. This is, to me, a “more fully self-actualized” state enabled by love and the beloved as understanding the I as complicit in being a part of a coalition or what Michel Serres calls “the natural contract.”

<sup>66</sup> bell hooks, “Romance: Sweet Love,” *All About Love* (William Morrow, 2001). 185-187

<sup>67</sup> Minnie Bruce Pratt, “Identity: Skin Blood Heart,” *Yours in Struggle* (Long Haul Press, 1984).

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