

“Libres” by Moro: Politicizing Sound

**By means of sampling,
the producer connects
the historical slave
trade with the global
"refugee crisis" of 2015.**

Moro is the artist name of Mauro Guz Bejar, a musician from Buenos Aires, Argentina.¹ Born in 1993, Guz Bejar enjoyed a broad musical education. He started playing guitar at eleven years old and later studied jazz guitar at a conservatory. He played in several rock and jazz bands, and—having a membership at a local theater—regularly attended classical music concerts. He took his first steps into electronic music production during high school, when he started using the DAW Sonar. He produced his first EP at that time, but never released it because he considered it inadequate. Later, he changed his producing environment to Apple’s Logic Pro, before moving to Ableton’s Live and back to Logic Pro again. He explained his return to Logic Pro with reference to sound quality. Although he considered Live “easier and faster,” he was not satisfied with the sound of his Live productions. Hence, Guz Bejar is the only producer featured in these case studies who does not work with Live. This illustrates the prominence of Ableton Live in the field of electronic music production since the early 2010s.

In 2016, during my research, Guz Bejar moved from Argentina to Berlin, Germany. He hoped that this relocation would advance his career as a professional musician. He explained that he had moved to Berlin because

¹ Unless otherwise stated, this chapter is based on email conversations that took place between October 10, 2016 and January 28, 2017; an exchange of emails in February 2019; one interview via Skype on January 25, 2017; and one interview in Berlin on January 28, 2018.

I wanted to tour with playing music and I wanted to see live shows too. Living in Argentina is really hard. All flights are super expensive and the live shows that come to Argentina are super big. So, there's some stuff that you wouldn't be able to see. But it's mainly because I wanted to try and work from this; get gigs and play in Europe.

Guz Bejar's move to Europe was a godsend for my research, as it allowed me to meet him in person during a research trip to Berlin in January 2018. At that point, he was still trying to make a stable income from his musical activities. He mainly earned his income from performing as a DJ and occasionally working as a sound engineer at concerts. I met Guz Bejar at his shared apartment in the Berlin neighborhood of Neukölln, where I conducted the interview in front of his workstation in his bedroom. It is not just this producing environment that characterizes Guz Bejar as a laptop producer: he also handles the production of his music alone, and organizes his own performances. At the time of this study he has released two EPs, *San Benito* (2016, NON Worldwide) and *Irrelevant* (2018, Janus), on two well-known labels in the domain of experimental electronica. These labels handle the digital distribution of the productions through all prevalent online platforms. Even more so than in the two previous case studies, the music that Guz Bejar releases under his Moro pseudonym is shaped by the distinctive aesthetics of experimental electronica. His sounds are rough and fragmented, combining numerous different noises, samples, and effects. Moreover, as I will show in this case study, his tracks play with the conventions of electronic club music in particular.

Moro's tracks play with the conventions of electronic club music.

It was Lara Sarkissian, the subject of the previous case study, who directed my attention to Guz Bejar's tracks. She mentioned his name during one of our first conversations and I checked out his productions afterwards. At that time, Guz Bejar had only released his debut EP, *San Benito* (January 22, 2016). I was interested in his work because I could recognize the processing of a great number of samples. Through the press texts for *San Benito*, I could further read about the political ideas and themes addressed in these tracks. At the time of my research, the label NON Worldwide was receiving considerable coverage from music writers. In the domain of experimental electronica, they drew attention with their highly political, boundary-pushing agenda, including announcing the borderless nation of NON, said to represent "the African diaspora" (Lozano 2017).² All of these aspects qualified Guz Bejar's tracks for the present study.

The track "Libres" was chosen after an initial exchange of emails. I had asked the producer why he relies on sampling as a production method, and he mentioned the track as an example:

² I followed other NON Worldwide-affiliated artists during the research stage, but none resulted in a case study.

I can simply like the sound, or because I feel that sound means something in that context. Or I can actually try and take that sound and completely change it to make it mean something else, like I did on the track “Libres” where I sample chain sounds, and by changing their dynamics, I make them have a clave rhythm, historically used as a resistance expression.

As opposed to the other case studies, this track processes a recorded “environmental” sound (the chain sound Guz Bejar mentions), rather than a larger excerpt of media material (Eomac, M.E.S.H.) or music (Lara Sarkissian, COOL FOR YOU). As this is a widespread sampling strategy, it is important to include it in this study. The following analysis will aim to examine the relation between meaning and production, and to identify how the producer politicizes a sound that I will characterize as non-contextual and as acousmatic in character.

I cannot rely on any statistics that might indicate the reach of “Libres.” The initial upload on SoundCloud has been deleted. The EP remains accessible through Bandcamp, where the statistics are visible for the uploader only. However, I assume a limited reach of the track in general, comparable to that of the other tracks studied.

Background: Ethnicity in Argentina

To contextualize the sampling strategy behind “Libres,” it is helpful to introduce a few ongoing debates around the ethnic composition of Argentinian society. Today, most sources rely on a claim from the *CIA World Factbook* that 97 percent of Argentinian citizens are ethnically “white” (Schwartz 2008; Gates 2014). Today, as well as in the past, the dominant national narrative in Argentina emphasizes that Argentinian society exclusively descends from white immigration from Europe. Other ethnicities, such as indigenous people or Afro-Argentines, have been either broadly ignored or absorbed into an all-white conception of society.

Alejandro Grimson (2007) writes of “ethnic invisibility” in Argentina. He argues that Argentina has maintained a “myth of homogeneity,” and has accordingly forced “cultural and ethnic homogenization.” According to Grimson, these strategies of “de-ethnicization” were interrupted only by a short period of neoliberal politics in the 1990s. At that time, ethnicity was used to distinguish between white Argentinian citizens and foreigners. Grimson states that, after the country’s economic crisis in the early 2000s, the national narrative turned again towards the “unmarking” of ethnicity and the “re-absorption” of immigrant groups. However, racism was always present in Argentina. Grimson illustrates that Blackness was and still is “associated with being of lower-class status.” This means that in Argentina, black skin color is not a necessary

Other ethnicities, such as indigenous people or Afro-Argentines, have been either broadly ignored or absorbed into an all-white conception of society.

condition of being considered Black: “In common language to be ‘poor’ is to be ‘Black’.”

The case of the Afro-Argentine ethnic group is of particular relevance to this analysis. In the national census of 2010, only 0.37% of Argentinian citizens identified as “Afro-Argentine” (Wikipedia 2019a). The figure was not always so low; African slaves played an important role in Argentina just as in other American countries. As Alejandro Frigerio has shown, the Black population in Buenos Aires accounted for around 30 percent of the city’s total population between 1778 and 1838 (Frigerio 2000, 4)—the number was even higher in the countryside in the late 1700s, reaching around 50 percent (Gates 2014). The reasons for the dramatic decline of these numbers are various, and illustrate the country’s complex tactics of “de-ethnicization.”

For a long time, scholars and politicians identified assimilation through marriage, diseases, and involvement in wars as the main causes. Today, the narrative of a diminishing Black population is contested, and revealed as part of a broader discursive strategy of minimizing “the role played by the Black community in Argentina” (Frigerio 2000, 3; Gates 2014). These authors explain the decline in numbers through the country’s repressive politics against Blacks—such as the forced recruitment of Africans into the army and the lack of efforts to register Afro-Argentines for the national census—and the simultaneous focus on “‘whitening’ Argentina’s population through European immigration” (Gates 2014).

These factors have led to the marginalization of Black communities in today’s Argentinian society. The significance of the Afro-Argentine population for the country’s history is largely ignored, too. Henry Gates, Jr. writes in a blog entry that, in fact, Black Argentinians left considerable marks, not least in the nation’s most important cultural export: as Robert Thompson (2005, 7) has compellingly argued, “African and Afro-Argentine influences are continuous in the rise, development, and achievement of the tango.” According to Thompson, the Black Argentinian-Uruguayan dancing groups known as *candombe* are one of the main roots of tango. Another is the Afro-Cuban *habanera* rhythm (7–9).

Sample Source

This analysis will focus its attention on the track’s chain sound sample. The sample in question consists of external sound material. Guz Bejar shared the original sound file with me—a four-second long uncompressed audio clip—but was not able to further retrace its origin. He remembered that he was searching, using the term “chain sound(s),” in an online database containing a large number of free sounds. The only evidence I have at this point is the title of the file (“Chain.wav”), the producer’s memory, and the audio track itself. The character of the recorded sound—a regularly repeating

noise, gradually decreasing in tempo—leads me to assume that the sound was mechanically produced, most probably by unwinding a coiled metal chain. When searching for similar chain sounds in the database freesounds.org, I came across the sound of a large loading bay door which resembles Guz Bejar’s sampling source (mmaruska 2014). The sound file is almost undoubtedly a field recording, as a background noise is briefly audible in the last part of the recording, before being cropped by the recording’s end.³

Sample Processing

Unlike the other case studies, I was not able to access the digital project file for “Libres.” While we were sitting in front of his computer, Guz Bejar realized that he had lost the files when replacing his hard drive. Nevertheless, he could still access the samples processed in the track as he had saved them in a sample library in his DAW. As such, he was able to instantly rebuild parts of the track. As we have seen in the previous analyses, many processes of music production are concealed in the final version of a track. Without the digital project file, our means of analysis are limited. It is thus rarely possible in what follows to go beyond what can be verified through the mastered version of the track.

“Libres” is a collage of a large number of samples. This compositional style is characteristic of Guz Bejar’s productions. Alongside the chain sound, the track combines further samples such as water sounds (prominent examples, at 0:00, 0:11, and 0:20, sound like something or someone being thrown into water; another can be heard in the first breakdown section, between 1:31 and 1:50); alarm sounds (the first appears at 0:02, and a second as a four-note melody in the background from 0:16); and further chain sounds (audible in the interlude from 0:34 to 0:51). The chain sound in question appears at crucial moments in the track, as the transcript below illustrates. The first row below the indication of the different sections of the track shows the appearance of the chain sample (highlighted in green) while the second row represents the kick drum (grey).

Most of the sampled sounds are presented for the first time in the introduction without being rhythmically structured. The chain sample is played seven times in full in the track (indicated by the sign × at 0:03, 0:08, 0:13, 1:49, 1:57, 2:08, and 2:17).⁴ After 0:27, the sample fades in as a clave rhythm, and is subsequently looped. The sample thus dominates the track prior to the full breakdown at 0:37. By “breakdown section” I refer to parts of the track where the kick drum is partially removed, leaving a “significantly thinner [sonic] texture.” The practice of bringing back the beat after such a section,

“Libres” is a collage of a large number of samples.

→ Figure 8.1

³ I have uploaded the original sample file to SoundCloud. It is accessible via my article on the track “Libres” on Norient (Liechti 2017g).

⁴ The instances at 1:57, 2:08, and 2:17 are barely audible (information source: producer).

called “dropping the beat,” is common in EDM, as Mark Butler (2006, 325–26) explains.

As we have seen, the sample is introduced towards the end of the track’s first section, being only barely audible in the background before that. In contrast, the breakdown section that follows is dominated by the chain sample. In the track’s subsequent second part, the sample remains in the background, again barely audible, before returning as a fully audible sound for the last time in the second breakdown section.

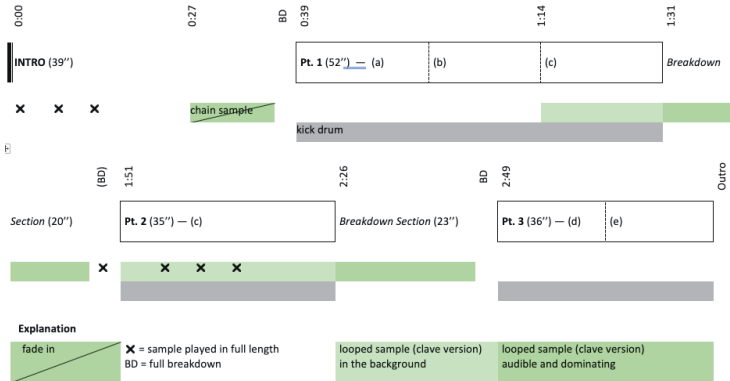


Figure 8.1: Transcript focusing on processing of the chain sample in “Libres”

In summary, the sample underpins the track to a great extent, and dominates both the end of the introduction and the two breakdown sections. Guz Bejar commented on the underlying presence of the sample: “I might mute [the sample] for a few seconds or it might go unnoticed because there are other, louder sounds, but when they stop you can hear it.”

A constituting element of “Libres” is its contrasting rhythms. The sample itself is mostly triggered in a 3–2 rumba clave pattern.⁵ David Peñalosa describes four meanings of the term “clave”: (1) as a Spanish word, “clave” means “code” or “key.” (2) It refers to particular five-stroke rhythmic patterns. According to Peñalosa, this “key pattern” underlies an overwhelming portion of Afro-Cuban music. He identifies its origins in sub-Saharan music traditions. (3) “Clave” more generally describes “the organizing principle of most Afro-Cuban rhythms.” Moreover, (4) its plural form, “claves,” refers to the wooden instrument, two sticks which are used to play clave patterns (Peñalosa 2012, 254). In this analysis, I will mostly rely on the second meaning. The function of a key pattern in the music is to

guide all members of the ensemble by conveying the structural code of the rhythm in a condensed and concentrated form. Key patterns are typically clapped or played on idiophones, for example a bell, a piece of bamboo or wooden claves. (55; italics original)

In these crucial parts of the track, the listener’s attention is drawn to the sample due to the lack of kick drum.

⁵ Clave rhythms are distinguished in types of “3–2” or “2–3,” indicating whether the first half of the bar contains three strokes or two (Peñalosa 2012).

As Peñalosa writes, “the actual clave pattern does not need to be played in order for the music to be ‘in clave’” (88). In “Libres,” the clave pattern functions as an underlying principle. To illustrate this, I have compiled the most prominent rhythmic patterns of each section. This overview shows that each part of the track has its own rhythmic patterns. The track is organized in a 4/4 time signature, but without any quantization of the beats, which Guz Bejar records directly using a MIDI keyboard. This producing method shapes the nature of the track as much as it hinders an exact transcription of the rhythms. Hence, the transcripts below should be read as an approximation only.

The kick drum patterns, in particular, change rhythm constantly. There is no beat that is accentuated regularly. This continuous change of accentuations, the overlapping of contrasting rhythms (most of all in sections (a) and (b)), and the variety of sounds culminate in a highly complex sound aesthetic.

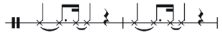
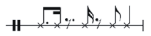

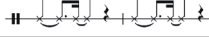
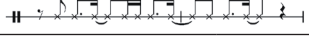
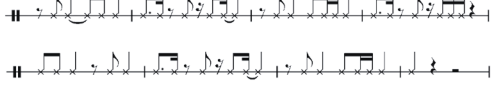
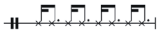
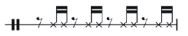
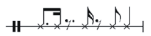
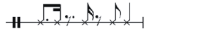

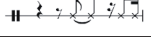
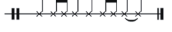
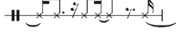
Intro	Alarm 	Chain Sample (Rumba Clave) 
(a)	Kick 	Alarm 
(b)	Alarm 	
	Kick 	
(c)	Kick 	Hi-Hat 
		Chain Sample (Rumba Clave) 
Breakdown Sections		Chain Sample (Rumba Clave) 
(d)	Kick 	Hi-Hat 
(e)	Kick 	Hi-Hat 

Table 8.1: Rhythmic patterns in “Libres”⁶

The clave rhythm unifies most of these patterns, consolidating its function as the track’s key underlying pattern. It not only appears in the intro, both breakdown sections, and section (c), but rhythmic elements in other patterns are also related to the clave pattern, strengthening the perception of the clave as the core rhythm. To illustrate this, the next table compares the strokes of the first bar of each pattern with the rumba clave pattern (first row). The highlighted strokes coincide with the clave strokes and are thus “with-clave.”

⁶ The transcription was verified and revised by David Leuthold. The sample referred to here as alarm is the distinct four note melody in the background of the track. The sample underlying this melody is of an alarm from a ship. It should not be confused with another sound appearing in the track, which also resembles the howling of an alarm.

The strokes that do not align with clave strokes are “counter-clave” (Peñalosa 2012, 92). This overview illustrates that all patterns are heavily based on with-clave strokes, except for the hi-hat in section (d), which is completely counter-clave.

	1	e	+	a	2	e	+	a	3	e	+	a	4	e	+	a	
Rumba Clave	x			x				x			x		x				
Alarm (Intro)	x							x									
Kick (a)	x				x			x	x					x	x	x	
Alarm (b)			x		x			x			x	x	x				x
Kick (b)			x		x						x		x				
Kick (c)	x	x			x	x			x	x			x	x			
Hi-Hat (c)			x	x			x	x			x	x				x	x
Kick (d)	x		x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x			x	
Hi-Hat (d)							x								x		x
Kick (e)	x		x	x	x		x		x	x	x						
Hi-Hat (e)		x				x		x									x

Table 8.2: With-clave and counter-clave in “Libres”

The rhythmic structure of “Libres” can be summarized as a development. It starts with polyrhythmic overlay and results in a homogeneous structure. This is shown by the clave pattern, which gets more and more accentuated towards the end of the track. In the first parts, (a) and (b), the prominent and foundational kick drum contains only two with-clave strokes. This is still the case in part (c), though the hi-hat adds the other three with-clave strokes. In part (d), the kick drum finally contains the entire clave pattern, while in part (e), the kick drum in combination with the hi-hat contains four with-clave strokes.

Finally, it is interesting to examine how the producer applied the chain sample to the clave rhythm. To compose his sample collages, Guz Bejar generally connects his source material to the keys of a MIDI keyboard. He then triggers the samples with different pitches and records them directly in his DAW. He followed the same procedure for “Libres.” To avoid having the sample start from the beginning each time he triggered a stroke of the clave pattern on the keyboard, the producer made use of an unconventional trick: he applied a tremolo effect to the sample. This effect changes the dynamics of the input signal, modulating its volume up and down. Normally, this is done in rapid succession to create a trembling effect. When processing the chain sample, Guz Bejar adjusted the parameters of the effect to have the resulting interruptions of the audio signal execute a clave rhythm. This way, a full clave rhythm was recorded each time the sample was triggered via keyboard, through rhythmic interruption of the full sample-clip.

Apart from this rhythmic reorganization of the source material, the sample was barely manipulated by the producer. Although he may have adjusted minor parameters, the general contours were maintained, as proven through a comparison of the source file and the mastered track.

Sample Visibility and Reasons for Sampling

(a) Reasons for Sampling

The reasons for sampling behind the processing of the chain sample in “Libres” must be situated mainly within the contextual approach of the SSR. Within that, the active, narrative, and personal perspectives are engaged (in order of relevance). The material and procedural approaches are of, at most, minor significance. Finally, there is no significant element of accident to this strategy (accidental approach). On the contrary, the producer consciously searched for the targeted sample material.

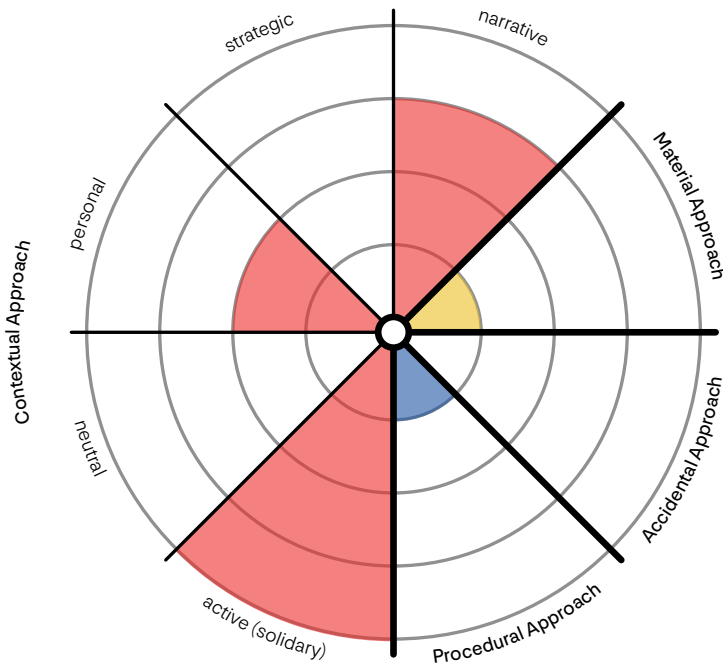


Figure 8.2: SSR: reasons for sampling in “Libres”

The track “Libres,” along with the entire *San Benito* EP, has a political and conceptual basis. In the liner notes for the EP, accessible via Bandcamp (NON Worldwide 2016), the producer discusses the ethnic composition of Argentinian society and the history of the Afro-Argentines, and refers to the debates discussed above regarding the strategic concealment of ethnic groups in Argentina.

Guz Bejar writes that Argentina’s population primarily consists of European immigrants, explaining that the native inhabitants of the country were “violently murdered and taken away from their territories.” He continues by recapitulating the history of the Afro-Argentines who are, according to him, “usually hidden in history books.” He concludes that Black communities in Argentina became

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more and more mixed with white European descendants and therefore “African heritage (...) started to be on purpose ignored by the government.” I will quote the following paragraphs in full, in which Guz Bejar refers to tango and emphasizes its Afro-Argentinian roots.

My country's musical culture is probably best known because of tango, both music and dance. Tango started to get popular in the 19th century, by that time really few African population was left. Tango was born from candombe, milonga, rumba (all Afro-South American rhythms) and the mix with the white/mixed population. Of course, the African part is completely erased/hidden and the development of the genre went on the European side, therefore less rhythm and more romantic/harmonic type. In the 2000s, some groups started doing what was then called electronic tango, which is no more than house rhythm with tango aesthetic. Argentina's white European wanna be culture more interested in aesthetic forgot the most important thing about tango and what made it stand out in the first place, which is its rhythm.

I was born here, in this land and close to this river (Río de la Plata, place where all the slave ships entered and went from Argentina to Uruguay). Land and water make us who we are, I feel one of my duties is to go back to the African part of tango, to reclaim the rhythm and to make it important and visible again.

As part of this duty I'm making this genre I decided to call Ramba (which is the mixture of Argentinian/Uruguayan/Cuban and all the rhythms that share the same DNA and most important CLAVE, or as we call it, Madera). (NON Worldwide 2016)

I want to highlight three points that can be drawn from this quotation: (1) Guz Bejar emphasizes the significance of Black culture for the tradition of tango. He refers to the candombe dancing groups and stresses the importance of particular rhythms. He therefore implicitly references the tango rhythm, known as habanera. Following Peñalosa (2012, 41), this Afro-Cuban pattern is the “basic rhythmic cell in dp [duple-pulse] clave music.” Moreover, Guz Bejar directly connects rhythm to the arriving slave ships and thus to their African origin.

Guz Bejar directly connects rhythm to the arriving slave ships and thus to their African origin.

(2) The producer relates these historical remarks to his own biography. By stating that he was born in Argentina, and by speaking in the first-person plural (“land and water make us who we are”), he shows his self-identification as Argentine. (3) Guz Bejar also formulates an activist aim that he pursues in his music. The self-created genre “ramba” is introduced as an attempt to reclaim “the African part of tango”—the rhythm—and to make this rhythm “important

and visible again.” He calls this task his “duty” as an Argentinian. As the most central of these rhythms he names the Cuban clave pattern. In the producer’s context, it is apparently called “madera.”

In “Libres,” Guz Bejar implemented these conceptual considerations through musical means, especially through the production method of sampling. He explained his thoughts behind the track in our conversations:

“Libres” means “free.” Free from something. The whole EP is about slavery, slavery ship roads. At that time, I was also thinking about refugees now which might also use those kinds of ocean boats to move from continent to continent. So, I was thinking about the idea of them trying to be free from something and then coming to another place, but they might not get that freedom they are looking for. I start that track with falling chain sounds, as if they were taking off their chains.

In the track, the producer aimed to connect the historical transatlantic slave trade with the global “refugee crisis” of the early 21st century.⁷ Guz Bejar produced these tracks in the year prior to their release in January 2016, a period in which the numbers of immigrants entering Europe, for example, considerably increased. This track thus directly reflects the political events of 2015.

Regarding the integration of these considerations into the music itself, two elements play a crucial role: the sampled sounds and the rhythms. First, the symbol of the chain has served as a strong and effective metaphor for bondage. The liberation from chains further symbolizes attempts at reaching freedom through escape to Europe or, equally, escape from historical slavery and the ongoing strategic concealment of Black communities in Argentinian society. The symbol of water is also significant, as detectable in the track’s sampled water sounds, and in the artwork of the EP, which shows the producer’s hometown, Buenos Aires, threatened by massive waves coming in from the Río de la Plata.

The second element used by Guz Bejar to convey his conceptual concerns is rhythm. He considers the clave rhythm inherent to the DNA of Afro-South American music. This corresponds to what we have learned of the clave as a key pattern in Afro-Cuban music (Peñalosa 2012). By composing a track substantially reliant on the clave rhythm, Guz Bejar pursues his goal of making “the African part” of Argentinian culture “important and visible again.”

7 I put the term in quotation marks because I consider the use of the word “crisis” problematic in this context. A “crisis” describes “a time of intense difficulty or danger” (Oxford Dictionary). Speaking of the movement of refugees as a crisis presupposes an evaluation of the situation which can, in turn, be politically exploited. I would prefer to speak of these events in a more neutral way, as “global refugee movements” or the “flow of refugees.” I have nevertheless chosen the term “crisis” here due to its widespread usage.



Figure 8.3: Cover artwork of *San Benito* designed by Chino Amobi (NON Worldwide 2016)

Through the production method of sampling, the producer is able to combine both elements: the symbol of the chain and the Afro-South American rhythmic pattern. These observations make it clear that there is a highly political motive behind this sampling strategy. The producer's aim is to raise awareness of Argentinian society's ties to the history of the transatlantic slave trade, and uncover the cultural significance of a minoritized group of Argentinian society, namely its Black population. These motives are covered by the active perspective in the SSR. More specifically, this sampling strategy can be described using the solidary sub-category, as introduced above. Reasons for sampling that fall into this category tend to show solidarity with minorities; they sensitize, and aim to give voice to specific minoritarian groups of people.

→ Chapter 5

Although this sampling strategy is about raising awareness of other, underprivileged people, the producer's own position remains key, as demonstrated in the EP liner notes quoted above. Guz Bejar sees the reclaiming of Afro-South American rhythms as his "duty" as an Argentinian. The track and the EP thus reflect his personal heritage too. These tracks are about his feeling of belonging to Argentinian society. The sampled water sounds directly refer to the Río de la Plata, where he grew up and where slavery ships used to dock.

Another aspect to the clave rhythm further strengthens

The producer's aim is to raise awareness of Argentinian society's ties to the history of the transatlantic slave trade, and uncover the cultural significance of a minoritized group of Argentinian society.

the track's political aspirations. In our conversations, Guz Bejar referred to the clave rhythm as having been "historically used as a resistance expression." I tried to verify this after our interview, with little success. Beyond the tremendous significance of the pattern for a great range of African and Afro-American music genres, I did not find any hint of a specific political meaning to it. I thus assume that this association is personal to the producer. Guz Bejar later mentioned a further association: the clave pattern "is like the rhythm that people used here and in Uruguay when they were protesting, which is the [*clicks his fingers in the clave rhythm*]. It was used in a political way, you could say."

It is not that the clave pattern signifies protest *per se*. Rather, the rhythm is part of the soundscape of protests. Guz Bejar showed me a couple of YouTube videos to underline his argument—see for example loslugosi (2009) and Cacerolazo (2018). He explained that the rhythm is at the core of the soundscapes recorded in those videos. Rather than being explicitly played, the presence of the rhythm is implicit. This corresponds to the character of clave-based music, in which the clave pattern must not be played for it to be an underlying element (Peñalosa 2012, 88). The producer further clarified how he understands the clave pattern's connection to the political sphere:

At least in Argentina, in Uruguay, when there are protests usually there are drums and usually they are playing these two rhythms. So, it kind of became a symbol of it. (...) It's not that people are... when they clap, they're like "Oh yeah, we're protesting!" I feel it's like a... a unity thing.

According to Guz Bejar, this rhythm has the strength to unite people, for example in protest. The motif of protest also appeared on the producer's second EP, *Irrelevant* (2018), produced after his move to Europe. On this EP, he sampled the metallic sound of people hitting pans in the street: a popular form of protest in many South American countries called "cacerolazo" (Cacerolazo 2018). These sounds, and the clave pattern, occur not only in street protests, but also during carnival and in soccer stadiums. For Guz Bejar, researching these sounds and rhythms on YouTube and processing them in his productions is thus a means of accessing memories. It reminds him of where he comes from and gives him an opportunity to think about home. Similar to the way that [Lara Sarkissian](#) expresses her Armenianness and Americanness through sampling, Guz Bejar expresses his Argentinianess.

In order to analyze reasons behind sampling strategies, it is important to uncover the producer's thoughts and considerations. What is crucial in this case is that Guz Bejar himself connects this rhythm with his own lived experience of the world, particularly memories of protests. Accordingly, I consider the personal perspective to be part of Guz Bejar's sampling strategy too.

Researching these sounds and rhythms on YouTube and processing them in productions is a means of accessing memories.

→ Chapter 7

I have so far discussed reasons for sampling relating to the political considerations and aims behind the track and the EP on which it appears. They primarily illuminate the sample's relationship to the clave rhythm. However, these intentions only partially explain why Guz Bejar selected the sound of an unwinding metal chain in particular. To understand more, we need to bring the narrative perspective of the SSR into the discussion. The producer chose the chain sample in order to evoke a particular atmosphere, but also a particular setting: "When I started that track, the only thing I knew was I had an image of chains... I was picturing the two speakers and I knew that I want people to be able to look at falling chains."

For this, Guz Bejar needed the sound of an unwinding chain—rather than one which is simply moving, for example. As already discussed, the producer sees these falling chains as symbolic of slaves trying to liberate themselves from bondage. The use of samples in "Libres" allowed Guz Bejar to tell a story about ships and bondage—a story about the transatlantic slave trade: "There are chain sounds all over and not only those, there are others as well. Especially in the first five seconds it looks as if someone is getting out of a ship or something."

Bringing together all of these strands, I would suggest that the track should be understood as representing a transition. The first part of the track, with its overlaid rhythms and complex sound aesthetic, represents the world of today, with its flow of refugees, its ongoing slavery, and its strategic concealment of minorities. However, as we can hear, the chains are falling: people are freeing themselves from bondage and moving towards another world. The second part of the track paints a utopian picture of a world that has finally released itself from eurocentrism. This is represented by the clave rhythm, which gets more and more accentuated towards the end of the track. Here, I follow Guz Bejar's own understanding of the clave as an alternative rhythmic key to the four-on-the-floor beat of much ("Western") contemporary club music:

*I mean especially club music, since all the popularity of techno and house music and EDM, where most of the rhythm is like monarchized—I don't know if that adjective exists—but it's mostly ruled by these four kicks, you know *dum dum dum dum*. And I see that basically as a measure, because you're getting someone saying, "One two three four, one two three four." So, I'm still trying to make people not guide themselves by that. You still have to negotiate with dance rules. Especially with Western dance rules where people might not be so much open to dancing to difficult stuff, they are quite used to someone's saying,*

The second part of the track paints a utopian picture of a world that has finally released itself from eurocentrism.

“One two three four.” It’s that.⁸

I do not want to claim this subjective reading of “Libres” as the only correct one or as the one intended by the producer. I rather want to show what perspectives on a popular music track can be revealed through analyzing sampling strategies. Sampling here is the crucial method that allowed Guz Bejar to compose a message in this particular way. The external chain sound, with its metaphorical meaning, was as necessary to this as the particular rhythm used. In combination with the sample, the clave pattern added further essential levels of meaning to the composition.

The SSR diagram reveals two more categories to be relevant: the material and the procedural approaches. Regarding the former, it is again difficult to trace concrete reasons. Everything the producer mentioned in our conversations was linked with some sort of (extra-musical) meaning and thus fell under the contextual approach. The producer never indicated that he chose this particular chain sample according to an aesthetic or material parameter. However, I would not completely exclude this category from the diagram. Indeed, I would suggest retaining it for every sampling process, unless there is strong evidence for not doing so. If the particular chain sample was not aesthetically pleasing to the producer, he would most certainly have looked for another one, or else would have consciously selected it despite or because of its aesthetics. I have thus retained this category to indicate potential gaps in the analysis that cannot be retraced, even through in-depth research.

→ Figure 8.2

Finally, the procedural approach is not of great significance to this sampling strategy. I thus won’t discuss it further at this point, though I will return to two minor procedural reasons in the concluding chapter of this book.

(b) Attitude

A look at the producer’s attitude towards the sampled material makes particularly clear the differences between this sampling strategy and others presented in this book. As opposed to the sampling material from the other case studies, Guz Bejar processes what I call “non-contextual” sound material. In the other case studies, the samples carry contextual layers of meaning which influence or determine the sampling strategy in question: they are produced by an entertaining musician (Lara Sarkissian); they derive from a religious tradition issuing from a colonial context (COOL FOR YOU); they discuss the social taboo of bestiality (Eomac); or

⁸ Discussing rough drafts of this book, David Leuthold made another observation that, while not directly related to the sample, further illustrates this point: through Guz Bejar’s conscious decision not to quantize his rhythms, he metaphorically liberates the rhythm. This corresponds, on the one hand, to his aim of providing alternatives to heavily quantized four-on-the-floor patterns, and on the other, to the track’s title (“Libres”) and the associated socio-historical narrative.

they document an armed conflict (M.E.S.H.). In contrast, the chain sample in “Libres” comes with almost no contextual information. In the first instance, it is simply the sound of a chain.

Of course, contextual information could potentially be transmitted via the sound database from which the producer downloaded the sample. As I do not know the original source, I am not able to trace this information. However, since the producer did not refer to such information, I assume that he effectively approached the sound as “non-contextual.” This also means that there is no detectable attitude of the producer towards the sampled material.

Nevertheless, it is possible for even non-contextual sounds to be strongly connected with personal associations and memories. In these cases, the sounds are loaded with new contextual meaning at the moment of their encounter with the producer. See the example of Katie Gately in Chapter 5.

(c) Visibility

In terms of visibility, the sampling strategy behind the processing of the chain sample in “Libres” is neither blatantly obvious nor completely concealed. Accordingly, the master fader on the FOV is positioned in the middle of its range.

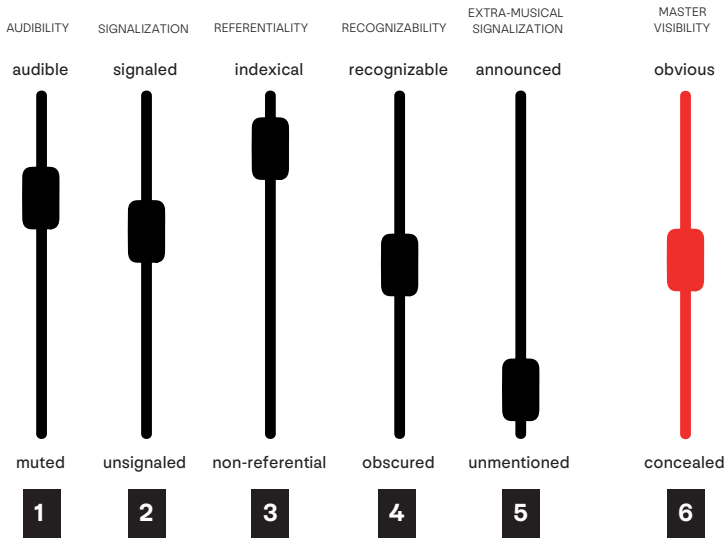


Figure 8.4: FOV: sample visibility in “Libres”

Fader number 1, showing the degree of audibility, is set close to its highest position. It is possible to hear the chain sample both in its non-manipulated form (for example in the introduction of the track, at 0:03, 0:08, and 0:13) and in its looped and rhythmized version (at the end of the interlude and in both breakdown sections). However, the non-manipulated sample is usually played along with various other sounds. This challenges its audibility, as does the processing of the second version of the sample to express the clave rhythm. This is why I have not positioned the first fader at its highest point.

It is likely that the track’s processed sounds—including the chain sounds—will be perceived as samples, so the second fader is also positioned in the upper part of its range. The presence of samples is signaled by the producer’s sample-collage compositional style.

The processing and combination of a great number of samples, particularly extra-musical sound material such as sounds of water, chains, and alarms, leads to a sound aesthetic that signals the presence of samples.

Fader number 3 indicates that the processed sound is highly referential. As illustrated before, the producer considers the chain sound a metaphor for the history of slavery. This layer of meaning is crucial to understanding the use of the chain sample in the track. The final two faders are positioned in the middle (number 4, showing recognizability) and in a low position (number 5, showing extra-musical signalization) respectively. Through its rhythmization, the original chain sound is only barely recognizable, and even when it is presented in full, the sound is (as already mentioned) mostly covered by other sounds. Finally, there is no extra-musical signalization of the processing of the chain sample. Although the producer publicly announced the concept behind the track and the EP, he did not discuss the chain sample in particular.

The visibility of this sampling process is thus neither obvious nor concealed. Following the three general fields of sampling motives introduced before, the present sampling process mainly relies on the field of inspiration—the source material is processed because it inspired the producer. However, if we consider this sampling strategy to be part of a greater compositional strategy, and thus examine sampling intentions on that scale, we would need to include the field of communication too.

→ Chapter 5, p 115

Conclusion and Prospect

This case study has presented an artistic strategy that uses sampling in three fundamental ways: as a tool of communication (to raise awareness of minorities; SSR: active, specifically solidary perspective); as a tool of memory and identity construction (to address own lived experience and to express Argentinianess; SSR: personal perspective); and as a compositional tool (to evoke a particular atmosphere; SSR: narrative perspective/material approach). Three concluding aspects will now be discussed: (a) the non-contextual character of the sampled source material and its implications for sampling as a production method; (b) the established process of the politicization of sound; and (c) the analyzed track's seismic substance.

(a) Processing Non-Contextual Sounds

In contrast to the other case studies in this book, “Libres” processes an almost non-contextual sound. This means that the sound source did not bring substantial contextual information into the sampling process. However, the chain sound was by no means completely

free of contextual meaning—if such a thing as a completely non-contextual sound exists at all. The sound of a chain is culturally coded and may represent bondage or imprisonment in many contexts. As shown, the producer later connected to this level of meaning—and he did not do so by accident.

Nevertheless, the sound did not come with specific contextual information regarding where and for what purpose it was originally recorded. To a certain extent, this sound is acousmatic (Schaeffer 1966). The pioneer of *musique concrète*, Pierre Schaeffer, introduced this term to describe sound that is heard without its originating source being visible. This term could be applied to all sampled sounds that are not played in combination with a projected (moving) image: the source in sample-based music is, by definition, never visible. However, if we widen our understanding of the concept of visibility, we could consider sounds to be acousmatic if they are audible to a high degree (FOV fader 1) while simultaneously (almost) completely concealing their sources (FOV fader 5, or the appearance of the sound in its source context).

→ Figure 8.4

Hence, sounds can either already appear acousmatic in their source context (“Libres”), or they can acquire an “acousmatic character” through particular methods of sampling (“Perversas” and “Methy Imbiß”). In “Libres,” the acousmatic character of the sample source opens up a space in which the producer can apply his own layers of meaning. This strategy allows the producer to avoid delicate ethical debates, such as those on cultural appropriation. Such debates would become relevant if Guz Bejar had, for example, used sounds from Black history in place of the chain sample.

The acousmatic character of the sample source opens up a space in which the producer can apply his own layers of meaning.

The processing of non-contextual sound also raises the question of the particularity of the production method of sampling as such. In fact, sampling is not essential in the present case. The same result could have been achieved through processing a recording of a “self-played” chain. In all of the other case studies, a simple substitution of the sampled sound with a self-recorded alternative would not have been possible without losing crucial levels of meaning. In other words: if the chain sample had been taken from, for example, a YouTube video that brought with it some contextual information, our analysis of the sampling strategy would have been substantially different.

This leads me to two wider conclusions at this point: (1) a particular strength of sampling as a musical production technique is its ability to connect various complex levels of meaning; and (2) there is a further, pragmatic reasoning behind Guz Bejar’s sampling strategy: it would have been impractical to self-record a chain sound. However, this reason, which would belong to the procedural approach in the SSR, was not a conscious intention on the part of the producer.

(b) The Politicization of Sound

As Guz Bejar explained, his processing of the chain sample emanated from a compositional experiment: “[I was] experimenting with grabbing something that has no rhythm and put[ing] it with another thing.” More precisely, he took the non-contextual sound of a chain and combined it with a particular rhythm, the clave pattern. In this way, the two elements, the chain sound and the rhythm, brought to the final track their own levels of meaning.

Through this process of sampling, Guz Bejar composed a political message without recourse to lyrics. He not only connected the past (the transatlantic slave trade) with the present (the global refugee “crisis” and the situation of minorities in Argentina). He also wove his personal lived experiences of protest into the track: the combination of the “image of falling chains” with the protest-related clave rhythm turned the track into a call for freedom, or to resistance. Through sampling, Guz Bejar recreated the soundscape of protest, turning “Libres” into a form of 21st century protest music.

This sampling strategy corresponds with general statements about sampling made by the producer, as previously quoted. Guz Bejar understands “sampling as a weapon of expanding or remembering a message”: a distinctly communicational motive. “You can also see sampling as a way to agree with some idea,” the producer added.⁹ However, our analysis of the visibility of the sampling process in question has shown that the producer left it open whether his message or, in this case, his protestation will be heard. This pushes me to understand this sampling strategy as personal too; as, at least to a certain extent, a personal argument regarding a political subject (similar to Lara Sarkissian’s “kenats”). One might now ask if this example suggests that, more generally, the character of musical protest in the 21st century is neither obvious nor concealed. Further studies need to take over at this point, among them an elaborated study of reception.

I finally understand this sampling strategy as an example of the politicization of sound material. A formerly non-contextual sound is loaded with context and political meaning through the process of sampling and the application of a particular rhythm. I draw the concept of politicized sound from Helmut Rösing (2004). Rösing characterizes the politicization of music as the transformation of “autonomous music,” which was not composed with a political intention, into music that is connected to the political. He gives the example of Franz Liszt’s symphonic poem “Les Préludes,” which became political music when it was used to introduce German

Through sampling, Guz Bejar recreated the soundscape of protest, turning “Libres” into a form of 21st century protest music.

→ Chapter 5

⁹ This could also be interpreted as a general sampling motive, categorized under the procedural approach. However, in this analysis, this motive is also present in the three contextual perspectives.

Radio announcements by the Wehrmacht during World War II (163; Liechti 2010). Rösing describes a process of reception which involves the reinterpretation of the musical source. If we understand sampling as a process of reception too—reception of the sampling material—we can apply Rösing’s concept to it. In our case, it is not about the politicization of previously neutral music but the politicization of previously non-contextual sound.

(c) Seismographic Substance

Let me finally discuss the seismographic substance revealed through this close reading of the sampling strategy behind “Libres.” In short, the track speaks of the producer’s own lived experience of this world. The subject of the track (transatlantic migration) reflects political events (the global refugee “crisis”) and social realities (the invisibility of ethnicity in Argentinian society) in the year of its production (2015). The application of the clave pattern reproduces soundscapes familiar to the producer (the sounds of Argentinian protest), and by using the metaphor of the chain and by emphasizing the clave pattern (the “DNA of Afro-South American music”), the producer challenges Eurocentric narratives, as I have shown. “Libres” thus represents a non-European view of the world in a domain largely shaped by “Western” approaches: experimental electronica.

It is remarkable that Guz Bejar himself crossed the Atlantic, moving to Berlin after the production and release of his first EP. This path of migration has also left traces in Guz Bejar’s musical practice; analyzing his sampling strategies could reveal such a trace. As I have mentioned, Guz Bejar once again addressed the subject of protest on his second EP, *Irrelevant*, released in 2018. He produced this EP mainly in Europe and was working on the final productions for it when I spoke to him in front of his computer in his Berlin apartment. On *Irrelevant*, he sampled metal sounds from the characteristic South American cacerolazo protests. More than on his first EP and the track “Libres,” the subject of protest had become a strong reminder of the producer’s home, and sampling had become a tool of memory. This episode shows the potential for further anthropological fieldwork. Such research should sharpen the producer’s position in Argentinian society in particular, further contextualize the producer’s sampling strategies, and analyze correlations and potential discrepancies. Such a study could ask how place influences the musical practice of producers, and how migration affects cultural meaning.

A formerly non-contextual sound is loaded with context and political meaning through the process of sampling and the application of a particular rhythm.



To close this case study, I will, once again, reflect on the involvement of the producer in my research. In contrast to the other case studies, Mauro Guz Bejar gave no particular reason as to why he was willing to contribute to my study. To my question he replied simply, “I guess it sounded like a nice thing to do.” This time, we must content ourselves with no concrete motivation. For a study focusing on motives, motivations, and intentions, this represents a crucial limitation: despite in-depth research, it is not always possible to access important motivations and intentions behind human actions. Sometimes there simply were none. But sometimes this means that they remain concealed, whether consciously or unconsciously.

The previous case studies have examined sampling strategies in which both active and personal contextual perspectives were involved. They enabled rich and in-depth discussions of the processes of sampling in question. As we will see in the next case study, if these two perspectives are missing, the methodical approach undertaken in this study cannot reach comparable depth. It is nonetheless important to include such strategies, first to show the range of sampling strategies, and second, to further illustrate the applicability of the tools developed in this book. Eomac’s “Perversas” represents the opposite approach to that found in “Libres”: instead of politicizing non-contextual sound, our next producer depoliticizes highly contextual media material.

