

**Unravelling/Desenredando<sup>1</sup>**  
**By Ximena Alarcón-Díaz and Ulf A.S. Holbrook**  
**Immersive listening to Colombian women's voices**

*Unravelling/Desenredando* invites you to immerse *yourself* in the sonic migratory journeys of nine Colombian women, and to explore individual and collective resonances with these voices.

The voices speak mainly in Spanish; translations into English, made by the women themselves, can be heard simultaneously via headphones. Other languages are also heard, as traces of their migratory journeys.

The installation invites you to breathe with and in between the electroacoustic spaces created by such voices and interactions, beyond the understanding of words, and to connect with the feelings that they transmit.

**Unravelling/Desenredando (for immersion / *para sumergirse*)**

Move freely in the space and explore points of listening in stillness.  
*Muévete libremente en el espacio y explora puntos de escucha en quietud*

Listen to the breathing in between the voices  
*Escucha la respiración entre las voces*

Simultaneously try to listen to your own breathing  
*Al mismo tiempo trata de escuchar tu propia respiración*

Qué resonancias crean estas voces en tí?  
*What resonances do these voices create in you?*

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**Unravelling/Desenredando** brings the voices of nine **\*Colombian migrant women in Europe**, recalling their *inner* **\*migratory journeys** using a graphic score of four spheres of migratory memory. They listen to each other, recall and improvise with **\*voice, words, songs and body movements**. The journeys are composed of two improvisations: an individual journey, sharing their unique sonic path within their migration, each supported by two women acting as **\*resonators**; and a collective journey where, in groups of three, they simultaneously listen through headphones to fragments of **\*testimonies** of other Colombian women in forced exile from the Colombian armed conflict, and synchronously recall their resonances with these stories.

These improvisations took place in 2018, through Ximena Alarcón's art research project **\*INTIMAL** in which she explored "how the body becomes an interface that keeps memory of place" in the context of Colombian women's migration. This was a departure to create INTIMAL (Interfaces for Relational Listening): an embodied interactive system to improvise collectively with body movement, voice and language, oral archives and memories of place across distant locations. The system supports the making of relations between the fragments left by migrations and conflict, and simultaneously the sensing of place and telepresence. The project used **\*Deep Listening practice** to stimulate women's creative process of listening and recalling migration across their diverse life experiences, trying to sense subtle common layers, opening paths for healing the social tissue and the network of trust.

A collaboration between Ximena Alarcón and Ulf A.S. Holbrook, the project began by recording the improvisations using **\*close mics** and **\*ambisonic recording techniques**. Envisioning this installation as being for a diversity of audiences, one year later they asked the nine women to translate their improvisations into English language. This added another layer of recall, within migration.

Bringing together their listening to this material, Ximena's aural memory as a Colombian migrant woman in Europe, and Ulf's interest in the aural space that these voices create, they composed *Unravelling/Desenredando*, a listening experience in an **\*immersive sound space** to listen in-between these women's experiences.

## Glossary

**\* Colombian migrant women in Europe:** coming from different generations, these women have migrated to the cities of Oslo, Barcelona and London within the last 25 years. They joined the project after a public call to participate, bringing their interest in listening to their migration and other Colombian women's testimonies of exile.

**\* migratory journeys:** an embodied metaphor proposed by Ximena Alarcón, to stimulate inner listening and breathing, body movement and vocal expression across four spheres of migratory memory.

**\* four spheres of migratory memory:** an ontology composed of *body stories* (stories the body remembers), *social body* (stories in their close social circle of family, friends, work and study), *native place* (stories directly linked to Colombia, its geography and nature, and political agency); *other lands* (stories lived in the lands where they migrate, its geography and nature, and political agency).

\* **voice, words, songs and body movement:** different layers of voice emerge in Unravelling/Desenredando: hums, whispers, words, rhymes and songs. They walk, run, jump, dance across directions, play with rhythm and breathe together.

\* **resonators:** the role of women who are listening deeply to another woman's story, and sounding and breathing with empathy when the story resonates with them.

\* **testimonies:** collected by the organisation Diaspora Women, from Colombian women living in Barcelona and London, who experienced forced migration. Ximena Alarcón proposed the *four spheres of migratory memory* as an ontology to listen to the fragments of migration recalled by these voices.

\* **INTIMAL:** the project was developed at the RITMO Centre, Dept of Musicology, University of Oslo thanks to a Marie Skłodowska Curie Individual Fellowship 2017-2019, awarded to Ximena Alarcón.

\* **Deep Listening practice:** A creative practice developed by the composer Pauline Oliveros, which supported these women's immersion in their migratory journeys, through dreams, listening to their bodies, voices, and surroundings. They immersed themselves through Deep Listening practice for one month.

\* **immersive sound space:** being surrounded by sound, and experiencing the perception of the listening space, as well as the spatiality of the sounds and their external references, the perception of multiple locations and the proximities between sounds.

\* **close microphones:** placed very close to the mouth, to record voice, breathing and emotional expression.

\* **ambisonic recording techniques:** made with microphones distributed in the space, to record interactions and body movement across the space. The ambisonic field opens space for these voices to meet in memory and synchronicities.

\* **songs:** fragments of these recalled songs might unravel further memories of gender, conflict and migration:

*Confesión.* by Marta Gómez (1999). This song became an anthem for Colombian migration in Europe.

*Do, Re, Mi.* Song from the Musical The Sound of Music. Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein (1959)

*Duerme Negrito.* Traditional Antillian Lullaby, compiled by Atahualpa Yupanqui. (1951)

*I'm gonna be (500 miles).* Scottish Pop song, by The Proclaimers (1988)

*La Flor de la Canela.* Peruvian Waltz by Chabuca Granda (1950)

*La Vieja Molienda.* Venezuelan Joropo by Raul Blanco (1958)

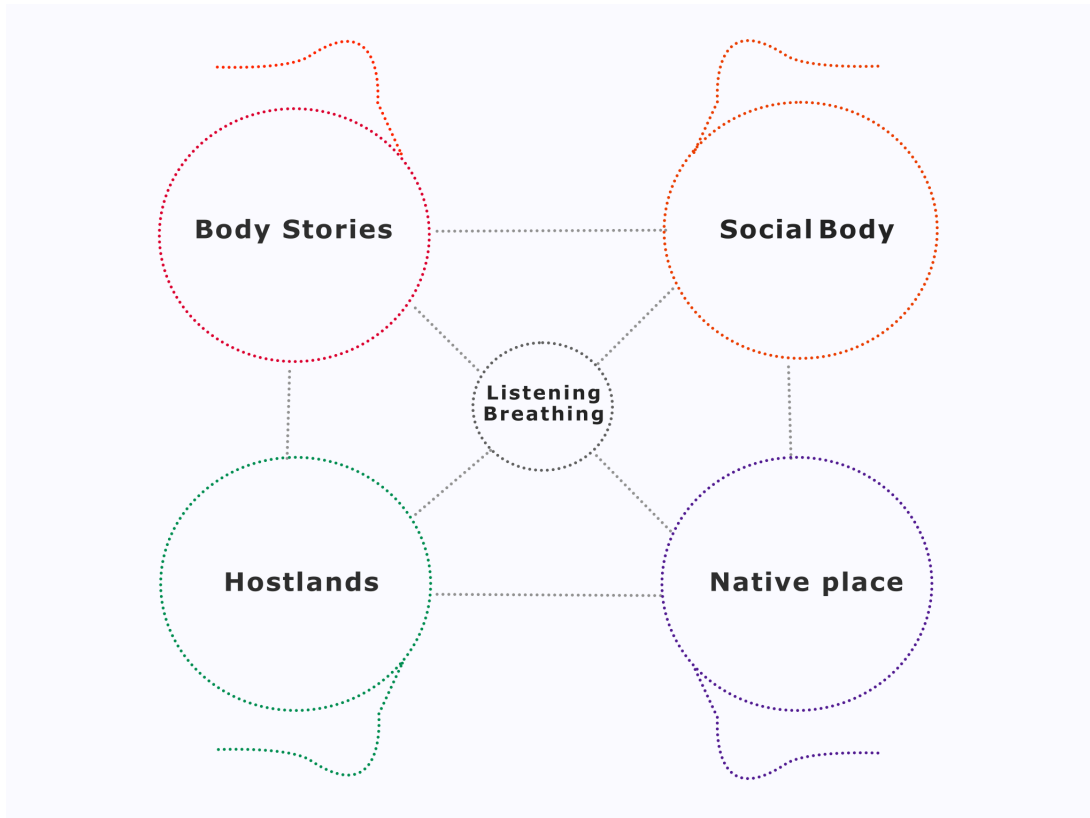
*Por qué me pega?* Colombian Bullerengue by Etelvina Maldonado (2002)

*Río Manzanares.* Venezuelan song by José Antonio López. (1971) In Unravelling it is sung as *Río Magdalena*, the longest Colombia river crossing the country and its history.

*Sol solecito* (Sun little Sun). Traditional children's rhyme. In Unravelling, it is recalled by different women.

*Velo que Bonito.* Traditional carol ( 'alabao' ) from Chocó, Colombian Pacific Coast.

**Graphic score of Four Spheres of Migratory Memory, to perform “A Migratory Journey”. By Ximena Alarcón, 2018.**



**Poetic embodied essence emerging from women’s listening to their Migratory Journeys**

*I think of Colombia and my body swells*  
*Pienso en Colombia y se me hincha el cuerpo*  
*I became a murmur*  
*Me convertí en un murmullo*  
*I never thought a mountain could replace my mom*  
*Nunca pensé que una montaña podría reemplazar a mi mamá*  
*Dónde están mis ancestros*  
*Where are my ancestors*

## Colombian conflict and grassroots initiatives for listening to women in exile

*“Colombian conflict is complex, not confusing, and we have to pierce the veil of confusion to understand that complexity”*

*“Exile is a condition on its own because of all the losses and disruption it causes, and at the same time it is the final shared path where many other experiences of violence converge.”*

Carlos Martín Beristain. Commissioner, Colombian Truth Commission (In Trans-parents, p. 128 -129)

Colombian political armed conflict spans more than 60 years and is part of the collective memory of at least three generations of Colombians. Its complexity was brought to light internationally with the historical peace agreement between the FARC guerrilla group, and the Colombian Government in 2016. The agreement, “includes measures concerning political participation, access to land and rural development, and also defines the central role of victims in the process of reconstructing the social fabric.” (idem)

The conflict’s complexity including actors such as paramilitary and guerrilla groups, State agents, (Commission of Truth, 2022), and the complicity and/or abandonment of the State, which failed to protect the innocent civil population, is still being revealed through actions led by three institutions part of the agreement: the Commission of Truth Clarification, Co-habitation and Non-Repetition; the Special Jurisdiction for Peace; and the Search Unit for Missing Persons. According to the Commission of Truth, the “phenomenon of Colombian exile and the number of refugees and of forcefully displaced population in other countries is an invisible fact. Although official reports in Colombia recognize there are 9 million victims as a consequence of the internal armed conflict, the gravity of the experience and of the situation who had to flee the country is not included in that number” (idem)

In Europe, the peace agreement stimulated grassroots initiatives, such as the collection of testimonies of Colombian women in exile in London and Barcelona, by the organisation Diaspora Women. According to a report derived from their work, psychological and physiological consequences of women’s migration experiences include feelings of guilt, fear, anger, indifference, powerlessness, disillusionment, social and family judgement, solidarity, the experience of silence and the manifestation of illness (Conciliation Resources, 2017). The INTIMAL project worked with these testimonies as an oral archive to be listened to, using deep and relational listening practices (Alarcón et al, 2019), and incorporated these in the system’s design (Alarcón, 2019). In the final performance between Oslo, Barcelona and Oslo (2019), with nine Colombian women, INTIMAL proved to be a catalyst for creating processes of collective remembering and catharsis, within the context of Colombian post-conflict and peacebuilding (see INTIMAL documentary, 2021). INTIMAL led to a social space, configurating as the Intimal collective, listening to and performing dreams and migratory journeys, expanding notions of femininity, territory and care (Intimal Collective, 2021).

Unravelling/Desenredando installation, builds on experiences of individual recall, and collective relational listening of these stories for a diversity of audiences to immerse and continue unravelling of these stories across time and space.

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