

(De)Coloniality and the Sonic Rewriting of Power

Patricia Caicedo

To engage with (de)coloniality through music is to confront the colonial narratives that have shaped our sonic world, often invisibly. These narratives have naturalised the supremacy of Eurocentric aesthetics, elevating “art music” as a proxy for whiteness, rationality, and centrality – while relegating the vocal traditions of formerly colonised peoples to the margins, as derivative, exotic, or folkloric. What has been called “peripheral” is not marginal by essence but by systematic exclusion.

My work with Latin American art song reveals how deeply these narratives are embedded in training, performance, and reception. Classical singers, even in Latin America, are often trained to reproduce Central European vocal ideals and languages, ignoring the timbres, bodies, and histories of their own cultures. In doing so, they replicate the very hierarchies that silence them. This internalised coloniality affects not only institutional structures, but also the performer’s voice, body, and identity.

To decolonise music is not merely to add repertoire – it is to transform consciousness. It is an invitation to *listen otherwise*, to rethink who and what defines “art,” and to revalue the expressive traditions of bodies long silenced. We must develop new ears and freer minds.

This work also requires a radical rethinking of language. Colonial paradigms live in the very words we use. We must challenge inherited categories and question the hierarchies they impose. Terms like *art*, *folk*, or *popular* are not neutral – they carry embedded assumptions about legitimacy and value. I insist: they are all *songs*. Period. Songs that move through flexible, fluid spaces where meanings are negotiated, exchanged, and transformed. Refusing to fragment them into artificial tiers allows us to honor their full expressive power.

Song, understood in its totality, is not only a mirror of identity – it is also a tool of transformation. It is in song that we reclaim our histories, our languages, our emotions, our bodies. It is in song that we resist.

About the author

Patricia Caicedo is a soprano, musicologist, and physician whose work explores Latin American and Iberian art song, the relationship between music and health, and decolonial thought. She has released eleven albums and authored numerous scholarly articles, critical editions, and books, including *The Latin American Art Song: Sounds of the Imagined Nations* and *We Are What We Listen To: The Impact of Music on Individual and Social Health*. She is the founder and director of the Barcelona Festival of Song, an international summer program dedicated to the history and interpretation of Latin American and Iberian vocal repertoire. A frequent guest at universities and conservatories worldwide, she gives lectures, masterclasses, and concerts globally. She created Mundo Arts, a digital platform that has grown into a music publisher, record label, and online store. Patricia holds a Ph.D. in musicology from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and a Medical Doctor degree from the Escuela Colombiana de Medicina. She is a former board member of the International Music Council and was a visiting scholar at the Center for Iberian and Latin American Music at UC Riverside. She hosts the podcast *Resonances: Where Music, Health, and Identity Meet*.

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