



Transculture Express.

The Artistania podcast with your hosts Frida and Abilaschan.

Episode 4: subversive sounds

In the fourth episode, we discuss subversive sound art and sound as research practice with artist and scholar Shanti Suki Osman. We talk about the politics of listening, the meaning of safer spaces, critical diversity and Shanti's research on women* of color in the music industry and academia. The episode also features an amazing sound performance by Shanti!

Frida: Welcome to the fourth episode of Transculture Express. Today we are going to talk about sound art about its subversive potentials and we will also talk about sound art as a research practice. Our guest today is artist and scholar Shanti Suki Osman. Welcome, Shanti. Hi.

Abilaschan: I'm gonna give you like a brief introduction about Shanti. If it's okay. And if I forget something you can just please, please feel free to add it. So yeah, you are Berlin based artists and educator who's working with sound, sound and radio exploring the topics of identity privilege and anti racism and feminism's. Giving regular lectures and academic conferences about topics related to music and music pedagogy about women Asterix of colour, identities, and technology. Your doctoral candidate at the Music pedagogy at Carl von Ossietzky universität in Oldenburg work focusing on women of colour in higher music education and research associated how value. Correct?

Shanti Suki Osman: This is correct. I'm not officially at Humboldt anymore. I just finished working this last semester so I'm just at work Oldenburg in terms of official employment that I'm very grateful to have.

Frida: Okay, before we start, we actually have a segment on this show in the beginning. It's called Musical discovery and in that we ask our guests what was their last musical discovery?

Abilaschan: It's an icebreaker

Shanti Suki Osman: This is a stressful icebreaker.

Abilaschan: No!

Shanti: No, it's great what was my last musical discovery...Okay, so I listened to, my favourite radio show is BBC One extra. This is what I really like to listen to. And one of the reasons why is because it plays great pop music. And I know that there's this singer called Jorja Smith and everyone has been like celebrating her for a very, very long time. And I think I heard her stuff a while ago. And then I think what has recently happened and this is not a lie, not just saying it because you asked me but I just listened to some of this stuff and it kind of clicked for the first time that she's amazing. So this this actually is a is a genuine recent discovery. So I rate Georgia Smith she's a great singer. And she does some, some really nice songs and I think she also did this- she did a couple of songs. that are kind of like, really about like, you know, black female empowerment and also like one that highlights so- police brutality and racism in the UK. So I think, I think that slowly I was like, okay, this is kind of cool because they're really poppy songs, but they're addressing these topics. And so yeah, there you go there's a latest discovery, even though it's not like you know, it's not like an unknown she's really famous, but I really like her.

Frida: I've never heard of her. So for me, that's new. And we will actually, we will put it on our playlist, we have a Spotify playlist for the podcast, and it's gonna go on there. Yeah, for our listeners.

Shanti: Great. That's great.

Frida: Okay, so as I said earlier, and Abilaschan as well, that you are a sound artist. Like I know a lot of musicians and I also know a lot of artists, but I don't know so many people who do sound art and that's why I wanted to ask as the very first question, How did you become interested in sound.

Shanti: I yeah, I really like this question and I think it's one of the reasons why if you notice, if I'm ever writing any like, text about myself like I'm always saying like I'm an artist who works with songs, sound, and radio because this-this label sound artist tends to carry a lot of weight which I just don't want, and it tends to be very specific, not a specific, or specific schools of sound art that comes from, you know, composition or neo classical music, and it's super nerdy, and it's super white, and we can maybe talk about a bit more about that later. Me personally, I'm a singer. I'm a pop singer, like I have been, you know, when I first started out doing like singer songwriter stuff at the age of 14/15. I remember playing gigs with friends in like my hometown, with a guitar and just singing, and when I first moved to Berlin and that's how I, that's how I was, as a musician. I didn't even call myself an artist but now everyone calls themselves an artist.

You know I was a musician, I was like songwriting and singing and this is what I do and then and then I sort of got more involved in electronic music, and that's how I met the wonderful Dafne Della Dafne who I am, together with in band called Late nights and Squat bars, and I call it like a band. I haven't told her but I should tell her that, I we should call it a movement because we do, we did. We do lots of songs we did lots of music videos but we've also put festivals on, and we also do a radio show, and we're also like extremely great friends so it's kind of like nice thing there. But through-through Dafne and the work with Late Nights and Squat Bars, we got to electronic music. So she was bringing her sort of like 80s Pop. She's a guitarist right she's like a really great rock guitarist like she she was bringing that influence into it and I was bringing all this like, you know soulful, a bit like Trip hop, you know this classic like British-British classic British alternative music bringing that to the vibe. And then like all of a sudden we discover somebody like MIA and we're just like whoa, what do we do with this? So we started like playing with electronic stuff. And that's when it went from. Okay, interpret is how you want I'm

going to say it very, very simply. That's how it kind of went from music to sound. And then I started like interpreting like this idea of music a little bit differently And I'm not saying this in the correct or incorrect ways, just in terms of tracing the perception like there was the music that I was producing with a guitar that would like maybe follow a rhythm or a melody and then there was the music I was producing with my with my vocals and then there was suddenly the sounds I was inputting through my laptop, you know, which was just like, Okay, well that's a sound but then if you put the sounds together it's kind of music. So there's that.

And then the second stage that got me to the sound art was was radio you know I had a friend of mine called Kate Donovan, who is a sound artist and radio maker, and works with CollaboRadio. She invited me in 2016, to, she just said like oh do you fancy doing a radio show? And that's when I, and I was like, yeah, I'd love to actually that'd be cool. And I developed the radio show Hidden Stories. It kind of does what it says you know, hidden stories like the idea was to kind of like, tell these different stories or unknown, unknown episodes of like activism or in. Whether environmental, political, or anti racist or just-just, I mean at the time at the time, I called it like post colonial stories because that was a word I was using that served this purpose of allowing me to move away from the mainstream narrative. And that's the word I used at the time, and I'm not sure if I would call it that now. Like I'm very open to like reassessing what we call things. So for example, I did, I did one radio show on fracking. And I, and I told story about two different anti fracking protests, protests, one in Romania, and one in a village in the UK. And then I would like play music that, in my way, in my interpretation related to that, so maybe there would be local musicians, or I think for one of them I even found this really awesome Romanian Trip hop singer, who did a song with David Lynch, which was incredible to find that so I played that on the track. And then I also did you know, another story about hiding gender identity and at different times when that was necessary, like looking at people in the 1950s and then one story in China and stuff. So it was really- it spanned all of this stuff. And I think that that experience with radio got me to sound art, there is there is a point to this, it got me to sound art because it was, it was this way of kind of connecting, connecting it or, and my approach to sound art. Therefore, I will always, my sound is very pop like it comes from pop music like it's very, it's like, I don't consider this stuff that I do to be

constant art. Whatever... maybe like concept art with a capital C and a capital A you know, like, I feel like it comes from really basic storytelling and expression.

Frida: Okay, so pop music and radio is like your show entry.

Abilaschan: Maybe you can also tell us, are you actively for example collecting sounds are like going on, like, what is your approach to the kind of like sonic-sphere?

Shanti: I love this question is, as we know right. Lots and lots of sound art people will also throw out the word 'field recording' and recording and all this stuff and I'm, I go about it again, in a very kind of very simple sort of way like often. For example right now, a lot of the like the performance that I will be doing like a lot of that is recorded sounds that I have made. You know a lot of it is is people talking as well but a lot of it is recorded sounds and sometimes it would just be like things that I maybe thought would sound nice. But I have an issue with it. It's a current issue. It's not something I'm fixed with but right now I feel like this idea of field recording. I don't know how I feel about going somewhere, recording something and then using that for a piece of artwork. I'm still trying to figure out how that, what that means and how that relates to just I mean this is now going in a different...direction but how that relates to kind of like bigger, bigger, more complex things like culture appropriation.

But so you know, so I'm very, very careful with it even though I feel like it's unavoidable. Like you know, you there are there are sounds that we take with songs that we record and I don't know... it's-it's a great question and I'm kind of a little bit like, with the answer I'm just not sure anymore. And I think there was, there was a time... one of the reasons why I stopped making the show Hidden Stories was because I felt a little bit like, ah, but like, ultimately it's just me telling someone else's stories...or let's just say like I questioned like, am I just reproducing what I say, what I'm trying to go against which is trying to kind of like open up spaces for other stories to come through but then if I'm the mouthpiece are these stories actually coming through? And I felt similarly, with my, with my approach to recording sounds, but something else just came to mind.

Just relating to sound and practices and storytelling and pop and form. So recently like in the past few-few years I feel like I've created a few sound pieces that I'm really kind of like, proud of in a way? Because they sort of, really a sort of tell these stories of racism or anti racism and feminism. And I remember creating one called Chipping Away, which I created for 'I am not your fortune cookie', which was an event that was put on by Vicky Truong and it was sort of a response to I think it was artweek Berlin there was like some really horrific like anti Asian racism like exoticism stereotypes party, where it was like over sexualized. Like Asian presenting bodies and like a group of people from the Asian community and also beyond, sort of like critiqued it and then they were just like oh, no, you know, this is just a party. Don't take it so seriously, it was pretty much the argument. And then Vicky created this event with the help of different associations. And for that event, I did a sound piece called Chipping Away which was based on different stories, or sorry, different voices surrounding this idea of being turned away from a club, because you look wrong. You don't look like you should be. I'm telling the story because when I go about creating these sound pieces, it's really very much like I create characters. So I create these different characters. So there was the there was the woman who was turned away at the door, there was the bouncer there was the friend who was reassuring her that it was that it was not such a big deal. And you know, then there was the kind of white, so the woman who's turned away is not white, obviously, and then there's a white friend kind of saying like, oh, but it happens to everybody. It happens to all women. It's not just you and then I remember trying to take these-these characters and then create sounds or find sounds based on these characters and then that's how storytelling begins. That was like all over but I just wanted to get back to the sonic practice thing because it's, it feels like collage, it feels like happy collage.

Abilaschan: Yeah, with your like, sort of like collaging, it still works out as a concept when I was thinking of your pieces and was like not that over complex, practice sound art so it's accessible and it's something that you can really like relate to, Like, kind of like can follow somehow that wasn't really that I had when I was listening to it.

Shanti: I'm really happy that you say it's accessible. That's something I kind of do very very consciously because so much is not accessible. And I think that's why.

Yeah I can, I'm really happy that you-you heard that through the pieces and I'm wondering if that's why I always said, I tend to repeat, okay it's not, it's not like conceptual it's not, it's not like conceptual and then one friend once said to me, no it is conceptual don't, there's no, it's not conceptual... what you mean is it's not, it's not like inaccessible. So, thanks for touching on that.

Frida: I have one more question about late nights and squat bars, if we can maybe go back there. You told us a story of how that started and some of the things that you were doing. I love that name. Late Nights and Squat Bars. I feel like I've been so many late nights in bars.

Shanti: I cannot take credit for the name. The name comes from Dafne Dela Dafne. She was in, she was doing many projects. And then we did a song together. Okay, I'm trying to think what's the official story? What's the story she likes to tell? One of the stories one of the stories is that she, she asked me to do backing singing on one of her songs. And then that's how we realised okay, this could be like a cool thing. And then we started making music together. And she already has like a one of her many projects called Late Nights and Squat Bars and like I was like lets just use that that name. It's a bloody great name for it. And it's kind of, yeah. But yeah, that's definitely the invention.

Frida: You touched upon what you did or is in the past and I wanted to know what you've been doing in the past year, or like, what are you working on now?

Shanti: So we, we're not currently working on anything at the moment. It's just, you know, projects in different directions. But we, one of the things we did, it's really funny actually, we did it just just before the pandemic, and we started making videos together, which was really lovely because I think that Dafne Dela Dafne was also making a still makes a wonderful radio show called Salon Daflon. And it's such a beautiful mix of like female musicians from unusual corners, like just music coming from different places and it's really poppy. And it's really great. And we did, we actually did like that on Late Nights and Squat Bars and it was so cool. And I, and we did one and funnily enough, just yesterday, we even talked about maybe doing like doing another one because we planned... we even had this whole format setup that we planned that we both like pick... hah, referring to your icebreaker

question. We planned that we would both pick like two songs that we discovered recently, that we had time to prepare two songs that we discovered recently, or two or three songs, and then we then we said we'd have like a feature artist that was like someone who influenced us. And the person that we did on the first episode was Mia, but we also talked about the problematics behind you know her most recent work, but also, we can't deny the fact that when her album dropped in 2007/2005, the first one, it just like blew us out the water. We already have like a featured artist, and then we already had one, one segment of the radio show, which was like to kind of like analyse and discuss one of our songs, because they're all stories as well, you know, a lot of the songs are stories too, so I'm really happy that you asked that because now I want to like plan our next episode, even though the first one was, it was literally like January 2020 is when we did it.

Frida: So there might be coming some, some new ones.

Shanti: I hope and I think the next thing we would do together would be this radio show because it's also, again, really accessible form at the moment

Abilaschan: I was also wondering like, because the show was aimed to ask like how are you dealing with certain artistic practices within the pandemic? And I was wondering if you may be recognised change within the sound of the city or your neighbourhood here, Neukolln for instance?

Shanti: Yeah, no, this is a really good question. So I cannot hear in my left ear at all. And I need to have a procedure at some point and it was supposed to happen in March and it didn't. And I don't know when it's gonna happen, but it's fine. It's not life threatening so I'm okay. But I really, it's got to the point where I really can't hear anything. And I remember before before the pandemic, so basically when I was out and about as I would have been normally like year and a half ago or longer now, it really bothered me. It was really a problem. I remember being in seminars and like always having to say to the students, oh, sorry, you know, couldn't you know, I can't really hear or could we all move to the front, you know, being in this big room. And how they echoing and sometimes people would say things and I was like, I really did not hear what that person said. And then trying to negotiate that, that truth in that moment.

So I remember as soon as it was one of the many lockdowns and it was like stay at home, and then I was teaching from my, I was teaching from home and then I would wear headphones. I could hear everything and then, you know, I'd maybe see one person or one or two people at a time. And I kind of forgot about it really at some point. I really forgot about it. And then I think when things started opening up again, gosh, I can't remember. It must have been like around summer time, like I remember like, July August, September. I remember sort of like being around more people. I don't, I never actually, I don't think I actually went indoors into like a big space because I think I was still a bit...well, still I'm very wary of it. But I remember just being around these people. And just being really disturbed by it because I had forgotten, or let's just say I had, I had to like relearn how to negotiate that from my hearing perspective. And that yeah, that that troubles me quite a lot. and I'm wondering if it's why during these phases where we have been, quote unquote, allowed to go out more, I mean, now is not really one of those phases, but during phases where we were allowed to go out more and we were allowed to be around more people, I often chose not to. And I think you know, a lot of it of course was because of because of Corona, but I think some of it was, maybe even subconsciously was because just having to negotiate and deal with the noise. Or like the lack of hearing of the noise, so I guess that's my answer to the question. I'm sure other people have other experiences as well, you know just being being at home and then suddenly being in a crowded space that's going to have this effect on people. So, yeah.

Abilaschan: Thank you for answering the question, I mean, thinking of like really taking one back and then get exposed to all these vibrant sounds or like I don't know maybe the fundamental, of the soundscape, of the city might also shifted or changed, for instance, like the city at night sounds completely different now in this pandemic times and before

Shanti: I mean I think whenever I'm cycling home or cycling at night, it's, it's silent, it's empty. It's really empty and it's kind of, I don't even know how to describe it other than empty. And even empty I'm trying to use a word that's not too loaded, like it's not even miserable empty, it's not even free empty, it's just empty...

Frida: A lot has changed, perceptions, in so many ways, right, just in the city, the city has changed. We've talked a lot about sound and I think it would be time to maybe also listen to some sounds! I don't know, do you want to say anything before we start listening or?

Shanti: Yes, I would like to if that's okay, because I, I thought a lot about what to present because you know, a lot of the sound pieces I do are exactly that. They're sound pieces. They're pre recorded, you know, constructed pieces. And last summer, again, when things were a little bit more relaxed and-and warmer...

So I'm part of the Arts Collective Altesfinanzamt, which is actually just around the corner from here and two of the- two of the collective led a festival, it was really great. And it was like, you know, social distance, a festival and it was called The Urge. And it's different members of the collective doing different things based on this idea of the urge to like, the urge to dance, the urge to listen, the urge to-to explain, because we were all feeling a bit like, you know, we're artists for what the hell are we doing? And I did a similar thing, then, where I kind of like put a lot of my pieces together in a sort of Ableton set, and I created like a sort of soundscape that went on for a long time, which is not what I'm gonna do today, but I wanted to use really similar material. Sorry, I, I talk a lot, but it's because it's exciting! You know, I've been spending all time in my room all day with no human being. And so actually what I've got here, as I would love to, part of what im going to do now is play for maybe 15 minutes where I'm going to like sort of weave different sounds in and out and we can also talk more about it afterwards. But for example, this is one of the pieces I will feature, is like an excerpt from this Chipping Away that I mentioned a minute ago...because I like it.

Frida: Okay.

Abilaschan: Lets hear it!

(Sounds play)

Frida: Thank you for, for letting us hear. It was really immersive. I also closed my eyes. And somehow, reminded me a lot of yeah, it was a bit like travelling. Also like

in my mind, that was travelling to different places, that may or may not have anything to do with the places that you actually were or that were in the recordings, but I think, at least in my head I was very...somewhere else. Thank you.

Shanti: You're welcome. I realised it's so funny because as I mentioned before I included a few sort of finished pieces there. And you know, I spent this whole time saying this you know, there's no concept, no concept, but all I want to do now is like, I need to explain like what-what all the pieces were and what they meant and then I'm not sure if it's a good or a bad thing. But it was, it was actually like you were saying that you found somewhere with whatever associations and I felt immersed in the in the kind of like the processes of all these pieces, which was really nice. Like I just mentioned the Chipping Away one which was the story in that was the one that I played quite prominently with this idea of the safe space a safe space where we will have you here, everyone's fine here, but then actually not. There was also a couple of other pieces that are really dear to me like this one called Voicing Up which was a lot of the kind of like kitchen noises that we heard like the kind of beating of the eggs, the kettle, and the washing machine. And this is a, this is, it's pretty dear to me. It came from kind of a sound piece that was part of a presentation of research at a symposium for Sonic Cyber Feminism's in 2017. And it was based on these very loose interviews that I did with some women. You know, women Asterix musicians of colour and it's based on colour, and like we had these very like, very relaxed interviews based on their experiences in the Berlin sort of electronic music scene. And through their interviews I came up with like these three different terms about how they negotiate the space.

And it's literally what my like PhD and such is now based on so it kind of feels quite special. But it starts with a sound piece, which is really nice. And there was, there was another piece I think maybe you heard my voice, it was a long time ago. It's from 2016 where, I was, there were some Audrey Lorde quotes. And that was part 14 of another, another sound piece that I made in conjunction with some research. And the piece was called...now it's a little bit silly... it's called 'exotic bird in the corner' and it's based on a quote by a, what's her name, Mavis Beighton. I will have to check that and it was a book that I read. and it was about women in rock. Like how like women and female musicians and rock music and how they are different and then have a have to just deal with being different.

And it was just this idea of like, you look upon like this exotic bird in the corner. And that particular sound piece was-was-was a result of interviews that I had, or discussions that I had with artists of colour and this idea of self exotification or self exoticisation. I'm not sure what the right word is... and like what we do in terms of survival, to use these bits of tangible, that we may or may not have and how we employ it or how do we distance ourselves from from this so called culture that's maybe read through our name, or do we lean into it and do we do it for commodification purposes, is it survival, and things like this. So I just wanted to just point out those two pieces in particular because they really came from research and.

Frida: No that's-that's really, thank you for pointing towards that. You can start Abilaschan.

Abilaschan: I mean this, the idea within the performance piece of chipping away, was also this idea or this concept of safe spaces or safe spaces. I was wondering like, about to ask you, about your thoughts on it because also the critical reflection of about this which was also possible from your LCC lecture in November, right? On this concept of safe spaces which also in these days experience like inflationary uses, in a way so I was wondering if you can maybe elaborate on the idea where it comes from. Also, within your academic profession for example and how this affected your sound piece.

Shanti: Okay, thanks. Yeah. I think the comfortable answer to that question would be talking about more how it relates to me at the moment like, I'm quite sure that this idea of safer and safe spaces came from like anti racist and like, you know, black feminist movements and queer movements and all this stuff. I don't have the details on who first did all this but I'm, 100, I'm sure it's clear, you know, it came from this idea of like strategy and survival, you know, this survival of creating spaces outside of the norm but then what do you do when you do have to physically enter institutions or you do have to negotiate a street that is, you know, populated by everybody, you know, how do you how do you create this idea of safe spaces? I'm I know that we-we-we've changed haven't we. We now talk about safer spaces because we, we happily acknowledge the fact that not not everybody can

feel safe, and we're there and then just the other day, my my friend Katie Lee Dunbar who is an artist and an educator. They recently mentioned this idea of a brave space to me, and I've never heard that before and they were just like, Oh no, it means it's this idea to be brave, and it's like, I'm kind of paraphrasing. Let's just say I'm paraphrasing not, not what, not what they said, not what Katie said, but I'm paraphrasing the discussion. The thoughts I had after the discussion. Which was this idea of you are brave enough to have agency in that space and you are brave enough, almost on the flip side to kind of deal with what might happen. I find that really interesting term and I was just thinking.

About my students and at the beginning of every seminar, at the very first session, I always sort of introduce a code of conduct with them. And I started doing it when we were doing online teaching because I thought, Okay, this needs to be done. but it also corresponded with the fact that I was teaching a seminar about feminism's and acoustic sounds, and I thought, okay, I want to just sort of like, it was my attempt in this academic setting to create something that somebody might call a safer space, you know, or that somebody might even face because it's the first time they've even heard of it. And then that's okay. I think. I think it's okay to kind of, you know, baby steps with some people and so, you know, the very first lecture the very first seminar I do, I'd say, Please read this. Everyone needs to read this. And then and there was one time where I had to refer back to it because I think one of the students said, you know, talked about this idea of racism being an opinion. I think it was a little bit problematic, obviously, and then I, and then I thought How do I how do I catch this moment? And keep it within the context of academia? I think it is relevant, but I do want to come back to this idea of of, you know, we've got this idea we've moved from this idea of what is safe what what creates a safe space, you know, acknowledgement, reflection, awareness of power dynamics. Or what is awareness of power dynamics is it just naming it? Or is it is it actually acting upon it? What does any of this awareness even mean if we're not actually changing the space, you know? And then and then this wonderful term I've just heard, like I said, from my friend, 'brave space'. I definitely want to research a little bit more where that comes from, and what that could mean and who was brave for who was being brave in that space. Like, is it the marginalised people being brave or is it the person who created the space that's being brave? And I think that is that is something that's really interesting.

You know, as I've sort of like been been working in educational arts contexts and doing projects where there is, you know, generally this sort of, Yeah, this is what we want to work towards. We want to like create, create opportunities for marginalised voices to come through, suddenly I find myself in academia and it's-it's really exciting and there are people who also want that. And there are a lot of people who just don't give a shit. Sorry.

And there's a lot of people who, you know, want to pursue their very, very important, interesting, exciting music research, but aren't aware of other things that are going on, and then I have to check myself and think okay, is it just that it's important to me, so I think it should be important to everybody. And then there is really, I'm going somewhere with this, and then there's really this sort of like idea that I've recently heard of, like, just literally back to this classic Yeah, calm down. Everything should be allowed. Provocation is good. Let's discuss everything, people should discuss provocation without getting too, without getting too linked. And just this is something that this is an idea that came that was I was presented with recently in a situation where I was fine. You know, who was the person that's saying, deal with the racist comment deal with the sexist lyrics. Deal with the, deal with the, with the misogyny, in a- in a- in an articulate way. In a way that doesn't doesn't get you agitated? Like who is it that's saying that, and who was actually, I'm going to put my cup of tea down, who is it who's actually got the ability to act on that without getting agitated and I find that is really interesting. And then I, then we have to come back to this idea of who's been brave in the space who's being complacent who's just holding the space, you know who is working to actively make it safe, and who isn't. There we go.

See I went off because I'm not somebody who can do that. That's just some of the thoughts I was having. So it's stuff that has come from maybe these, so there's more like arts, education and art making settings, to then see how that is lived out in an academic setting is is very interesting. And I know that you also asked as well about how that could be then reflected in sound, and it's a tricky one, I think it feels like such a feels like such an easy answer, but it starts with listening. Listening is the first step because listening is so linked to self reflection and reflectivity, so that would be my way to answer that part of the question.

Abilaschan: But then also like maybe from that. When I was taking a look on your research interests, there was also like on a doctoral profile saying decolonial listening as a practice, when I was like stumble upon this term I was thinking of like very music acoustical observation mode, for example, like very no analytical like this. Our trained years like norm years are ways of listening in a western context with like, listening in thirds. And then in comparison, like for me, for example, growing up with also carnatic music, or raga music for example, which has like quarter tone intervals, but decolonial listening, what would it mean in your practice? When I stumbled upon this term? I was not really sure. Maybe you can expand on that.

Shanti: Yeah I'm actually not sure either. I'm, I'm really, really happy that you mentioned that because I remember when I started using this term like decolonial listening, I stumbled across this great article by Tuck and Yang. It's called something like decoloniality... or decolonization is not a metaphor. And I remember reading this article with a couple of friends and it blew my mind because it made me realise like, oh, do I mean decolonial? Or do I mean, anti racist? Or do I mean social justice? And or do I just mean like, feminist you know, so, you know, I'm gonna do that classic thing by not answering your question but like throwing more questions at you like when let's just like I was using those terms. I very much think that I was working towards this idea exactly what you exactly what you said. You know, this this like, technical way of listening to things and this idea of like unlearning how we listen to things, like I also think that's really what I would have meant at the time. Honestly, I don't know if I would still call it decolonizing listening anymore. Like I-I've definitely altered my use of that word. And I think things change and I'm happy to be... Yeah, not like I'm just like using the word one day and not using it the other day, but I realised, you know, like, after reading like, okay, for some people, decolonization is like, give us back our land. Pay reparations. So I was like, that's not what I'm talking about. Like I'm talking about creating space for women of colour to do things for example, which is wonderful and I'm still thinking, like, if my work needs that term, I would say these days it's definitely more like intersectionality and I would, you know I'm-I've gone back to using the word diversity, like I think critical diversity is like, that, to me is a word that I feel very happy using and also really relates to the stuff that I'm trying to do in my kind of like university context as well.

And the research that I'm starting and this idea, it's really interesting cuz it's like, kind of like putting them all together. Like, if we want something to be diverse. Then the typical thing is like, okay, try and develop an approach to do this. What's the approach, is it decolonizing, is that a method. Or is the framework intersectional meaning like, do we look at all the various forms of discrimination and how various overlapping and intersecting forms of discrimination and power relations and then do we then have to do something with all of that in order to get to this like goal of diversity. So that's pretty much what I try and do. I don't know actually. Sorry, I just complicated that further, but I just wanted to just say that yes, decolonize is an important word, but I think that diversity and intersectionality are as well.

Frida: So I read that your PhD project and book is about, women of colour in higher education. Now since you kind of already gave us a brief introduction, but can you tell us maybe about what you have discovered.

Shanti: I can definitely tell you about what I plan. You know what I'm planning to do. I've always like you know, because of the pandemic because of corona I've not started yet, but now, I would like to tell you what I am planning to do. I briefly told you about the sound piece Voicing Up that I did. And when I, I interviewed very loosely, very kind of casually whatever that means. I interviewed these musicians and I kind of came up with these three terms or I discerned these three terms about how they negotiate their space, and one of them was stretching and the one was rejecting and the other one was enduring and stretching, stretching in terms of themselves. Creativity, like one one of the people I interviewed, they did talk about having a piece of equipment that they they had to learn it inside out because they couldn't afford to get the next model up. So they would have a piece of equipment they'd be like they would have to like stretch stretch their knowledge of this like or let's say but the more they learn about this, they had to like stretch their creativity to kind of match their knowledge because that's all they had available to them. so that was like one idea. So like stretching in that respect. And then the other thing like that came about was this idea of rejecting, which I thought was interesting, like this idea of rejecting the norm. So we talked about this idea of creating spaces outside of dominance structures, or maybe that was a something in my head, but, you know, forms that reject them. Like, you know, I spoke to a couple of people who sort of said, well, you know, if they don't want me I'm not gonna go or if they

don't want me there, I'm just gonna do something else. And so there was that, and then this idea of enduring, which is like, means two things, you know, enduring in the sense that it's, it lasts a long, long time. This is where this actually Chipping Away came from, it was such a beautiful, poignant term. It was actually a direct quote from one of the people I interviewed like, she said that like, I feel this way, slowly but surely, but I'm getting really exhausted. So it's this enduring, kind of like, stressful state, but also this idea of not giving up. So I've kind of said those three terms in a nutshell, and I think what what I want to do at this stage right now of my project is I basically want to say okay, so this is how professional musicians in Berlin are doing. What the hell is it like for students. You know, so my project at the moment, as it stands, ask me again in a year's time, is going to be looking at-I've asked, I'm asking for participants, you know, who are women, gender non conforming, non binary, people of colour. Students of pop music in Music Hochschulen And I could literally go on about this like, so...the reasons why I want to do that are as follows Music Hochschulen as opposed to universities, are very special places in Germany, and from what I have researched in terms of how they position themselves, like I found this very interesting document, which is actually their position, their position paper, because it's in New York, and they kind of position themselves and they have different answers. We are these are expectations. This is what we believe in. And, you know, it's great, and it's wonderful, but there's lots of these ideas of like nurturing tradition, and exceptionalism. Basically, I want to sort of question what that means to others, like with a capital O, or that what that means for other bodies and that context and I could have just left it at that, you know, it could have just been like music proximately but then I wanted to specify popular music. Because I mean, for black women, women of colour, non white women, non white people are just subject to stereotype, like really it's so simple it's like really like stereotypes of the point that even from the perspective of the teaching person, or the students, the music's that are created the expectations of what should be created. Yeah, so that's it in a nutshell, that's, that's it.

Frida: We will ask you again in one year,

Shanti: I would love it. Just sent me a voice message. Accountability on my part as well, that I actually do something.

Frida: Yeah, that sounds really interesting. I am interested in Yeah, finding out what you Yeah, what you discovered.

Abilaschan: I think that when I was like, suggesting you for this series. It was because a friend of mine showed me your LCC sound art, art visiting practitioner series, we are discussing about the three concepts that you also mentioned before and it was named empowering the margins, and it really like resonated with me, because I was there in a point in my life where I also needed to find some something to really maybe capture the thoughts that I had. You were really like giving me a concept or idea to actually grasp it somehow. And that's what I felt very like and like powerful about it. Like, the way how you try to describe this feelings that being in a margin, but also, at the same time, being aware of with the access that we get into the academia for intimate like specific spaces. What kind of also accountability or responsibility goes in hand with that and expectations from a certain community comes with it and the pressure that you feel because you're voicing up, you are like also demanding things that people might also put expectation of a certain way that you should represent and you're maybe scared about misrepresenting, or also not wanting to speak on the behalf of someone. And those were all like these different thoughts that I had in my mind back but where I couldn't really find a way to express and then I just listened to this sound piece and I was like, oh my god, someone is speaking my language right now, because I was really in this moment. In my life where I I was so indecisive and also insecure about it. I think there's so many out there like us feeling that way. And yeah, I wanted to thank you for that

Shanti: Oh my god. Thank you so much it means a lot to me because, yeah, it really means a lot to me. When I was invited to-to do a lecture as part of the visiting practitioner series it was you know, I think very right from the start, I was like, Okay, I'm just gonna just record a one hour long voice note, because this is what I'm doing these days. I'm sending voice messages to everybody, my mother, my friends all around the place people just down the road as well. It's like all voice messages, you know? And so I thought I'm gonna send a big one long voice note and everything you just described is like, yeah, nailed it. Like that's pretty much all the stuff I was thinking and I believe like the reason I was able to put it in this form, in

the reason I was able to talk about it is because a lot of the questions and that the insecurities and the doubts that we, that we all, the people may have had, I feel like it was a time where I was beginning to sort of, not make them smaller, but I was beginning to sort of not let them guide me specifically this idea of like fear, fear around representation. And right now in my life, again, ask me in a year again, but right now in my life, I really feel like I just, yeah, I'm not ashamed to say really basic things like and I think that part of that has come about being in an academic setting where the basic stuff is sometimes brushed over, or nobody knows it and you have to mention it. It's like this weird like opposition and I'm trying to find my feet with that. And so in a way like the way to make my life easy is to say the basic things just to call something racist when it is or sexist or homophobic and all this kind of stuff and so on. I had a wonderful conversation with another professor, a professor, black female professor, you know, we were talking a little bit in our preparation conversations about this idea of mentors, and I remember speaking, speaking to her and she said something that I really needed to hear, which was being silent does not mean you're accountable, like she was kind of giving me permission to rest, giving you permission to rest like just because it's interesting just because you don't speak out and get frustrated about this particular thing. It doesn't mean that you are.. that it is your fault that it's going wrong, you are allowed to rest. But in that moment when I spoke with her, I remember just thinking okay, so much actually comes from from here, like we're dealing, we're talking a lot in our work about the world and like how all these different things and that means that like, you know, you set your boundaries, keep yourself safe. And I think that's, that's the way to survive.

Abilaschan: Yeah, I mean. Politics of ears was also an expression that I stumbled upon when I was listening to one of your last radio series of Savvy Contemporary in which you also spoke. What are your like? Thoughts on the idea of the listening can be political or can be a political act.

Shanti: How can listening be a political act? I think, in a lot of ways, it's maybe what I've mentioned before, this idea of listening to something that isn't normally heard or you know, listening as a political act, because it often means you need to be quiet, it often means that some voice needs to be quiet, some perspective needs

to suddenly be dormant. you know, that maybe was dominating too much, you know, before

Frida: That was loud before.

Shanti: That was loud before exactly and I think that, yeah. again, this idea of unlearning listening as well, I think is really important... perception, and bias, and in our reactions to stuff and like unlearning, what, what an action might mean and I think that all comes from this idea of listening as well. You mentioned it actually earlier this this keynote that I did the decolonizing listening one and I remember that one of the examples that are used in that was, I use an example about; It's really sad; about the sort of medical care given to Black women. And this example was in the in the states and about how there was one woman who was talking about having lots of like gynaecological problems, and wasn't really taken seriously and was just sort of like, oh, yeah, you've got a sexually transmitted disease, 'dah dah dah dah' take these tablets. But it was it was something else, it was, it was more serious, wasn't life threatening, but it was something like that was not a sexually transmitted disease. it was like something that needed medication or needed treatment, but it was just this idea of the stereotype getting in the way of being really listened to.

So, if we want to talk about listening being a political act, like open aware listening, like direct listening and listening after, you know your biases have been put in check, after your own reflectivity... reflexivity has been has been dealt with by like listening. After you have questioned your own listening norms and your own listening patterns. After that, it can be really political and powerful because it allows different truths to come through. It allows, it allows, it allows different wisdoms to come through and it actually saves people's lives.

Abilaschan: Thank you for answering this question. I mean, now it's getting more concrete like when I was thinking about the idea, and then with the example that you gave was-

Shanti: I mean, again, like it's, it's an ongoing idea, and I think relating it to anecdotes and relating it to examples, is actually the best way to sort of understand things.

Frida: Oh, definitely. Yeah, that made so much sense to me, with that example that you mentioned. And I think that's applicable in so many other situations, right, where, yeah, we're all of these things that inform you know, how we understand the worlds shape, also our listening and therefore, if we yeah, spend time and try to, you know confront these structures and as you said, you know, checking our biases and and all that, then it can actually allow for a different kind of listening and hearing. Yeah.

Shanti: Yeah! I would say, that's when the fun starts, because that's when all the contradictions come in and like and I think that that the really beautiful part and maybe this is a nice way to think about kind of concluding these ideas, like, yeah, after, you know, after you've really put all this in check, and then you're listening with this, as aware as you possibly can, and then as soon as all this stuff comes in, it's like, well, then-then the new challenges start, you know, and I think that's kind of, that's sort of what excites me.

Abilaschan: That's a good time to leave the conversation I think! Yeah, round it up. That's a good ending. Thank you Shanti.

Frida: Yeah. well, thank you so much, Shanti, for being here with us today. It's been really, I wanted to say eye opening, but actually no, it's been ear opening. I hope you also enjoyed it on transcultural Express. Do you want to say goodbye?

Shanti: I just want to say thanks so much for the invitation. I had a great time.

Frida: Cool! We will actually be back the next time with another guest. Our next guest is Anthony who's a non binary singer songwriter and interdisciplinary being performer and singing teacher.