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When Only War Can Kill the Silence: Listening to No One Is Innocent after 13 November 2015

Quand il ne reste que la guerre pour tuer le silence : Écouter No One Is Innocent après le 13 novembre 2015

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am convinced that artistic creation is a means of exploring aspects of human life which is different in nature but complementary to academic research. In 2018 I began composing a series of radio-inspired electroacoustic miniatures based on Bataclan survivors' testimonies. The first of these pieces, entitled "Le concert d'après", is based on some of the testimonies presented in this text. It was nominated for the flashstory competition of the *sonOhr* radio & podcast festival 2019 (Bern, Switzerland). "Le concert d'après" can be heard here: https://msc.hypotheses.org/2075.

Introduction

1 A FEW MONTHS after the Paris terrorist attacks of 13 November 2015, I met several Bataclan survivors.[1] I felt that music would be more central than ever in their lives, that sound had acquired a new importance. I was astonished to find out how true that was. During the discussions with these women and men who were slowly recovering after the attack, we talked about their new ways of listening to sounds and music. The survivors told me about the sounds that took them back inside the Bataclan, their enjoyment of, addiction or aversion to concerts, and how listening to certain songs reminded them of their lives before 13 November. Their testimonies were of great value in analysing the role of sound and music listening practices, both in the trauma caused by having

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experienced extreme violence and through their healing processes. In fact, as Joshua Pilzer suggests in his research on what he calls 'survivors' music', survivors "have much to tell and to teach us about the nature and significance of their experiences, about the arts of surviving, mitigating, and preventing the more ugly sides of social life, about ethics, and about the art of human flourishing" (Pilzer, 2015: 482-483).

2 The name of one particular French rock band frequently emerged during these meetings: No One Is Innocent. Many of the survivors were fans, others became so because of the political resonance of their music. Two people in particular told me how important No One Is Innocent was to them in the days following the attack. Both Marc and Jean[2] attended concerts that No One Is Innocent gave during their *Propaganda* tour in autumn 2015: Marc in Rennes on 14 November, Jean in Paris on 30 November. These concerts were key and defining events in their lives after the Bataclan attack.

3 In May 2018 I had the opportunity to talk with Kemar, the singer of No One Is Innocent.[3] We discussed the events of 2015, war and terrorism, their albums *Propaganda*[4] and *Frankenstein*,[5] the role of music within resistance movements. This text combines this interview with the testimonies of Marc and Jean concerning the relationship between the committed and angry rock of No One Is Innocent and their recovery process after 13 November 2015. It explores the connections between performing and listening to music when people are most vulnerable following a terrorist attack. The article shows how sound and music can create connections and networks of resistance when faced with the sensory experience of armed violence and its consequences.

"*Silence is getting louder*" [6]: Societies confronted with their own monsters

4 *Frankenstein*, No One Is Innocent's latest album, refers to nightmarish situations that our governments have caused here or elsewhere, and to the creation of our own 'monsters.' The citizens of the countries affected by these monsters support, suffer or resist to varying degrees, their hold and their consequences. "*Frankenstein* is about Donald Trump. We're talking about Western interference in the Middle East that fucked things up and sent us Daesh, AQIM [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb] and all those terrorists. We are talking about the *revenants*, the French returning from Syria. We also talk about the power of finance and what it brings about in our societies." These monsters mobilise themselves and try to justify their existence and actions within what François Cusset calls the new logic of the global circulation of violence. No One Is Innocent's songs show the interdependence of the violence produced by these monsters by placing them "in a larger whole, where this circulation takes place, where it digs its own furrow" (Cusset, 2018: 7). The violence that is unleashed here, in our 'peaceful' countries, is linked to the violence that is unleashed there, in war zones.[7]

5 No One Is Innocent faces these monsters head-on in their music and without concessions. Music full of rage, political music which makes what is silenced resonate. "We are a band that, from the beginning, knew who we were, what we wanted to do in music and what we wanted to say. The idea was to use music to express what we thought about the state of things. We had to use our music, we really wanted to do 'angry rock' because we were angry about a lot of things we wanted to talk about. That's how we used music."[8]

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6 Among the 'monsters' that haunt No One Is Innocent's music are war, and the horror and the consequences of armed violence. The war that keeps coming back, killing people to "keep the peace," 'droning' human beings without having judged them. "*The armed response of our republics, that's democratic progress*,"[9] No One Is Innocent critically sings in 'Frankenstein.' However, No One Is Innocent denounces war while singing about people who oppose it. In their *Frankenstein* album, they pay tribute to Muhammad Ali: "*Your left is your words, your right your ideals. Fighting militant with your fist always high. [...] You mark the bodies as you strike the minds, fight against war and knock it down.*"[10] Muhammad Ali 'The Greatest,' was heavyweight world champion and a conscientious objector. He was arrested and stripped of his title because he refused to go to Vietnam to take part in a war that he considered deeply unjust. For No One Is Innocent, "*when only war can kill silence, we have to shout loud and clear, preferably all together*."[11]

Figure . When only war can kill the silence…

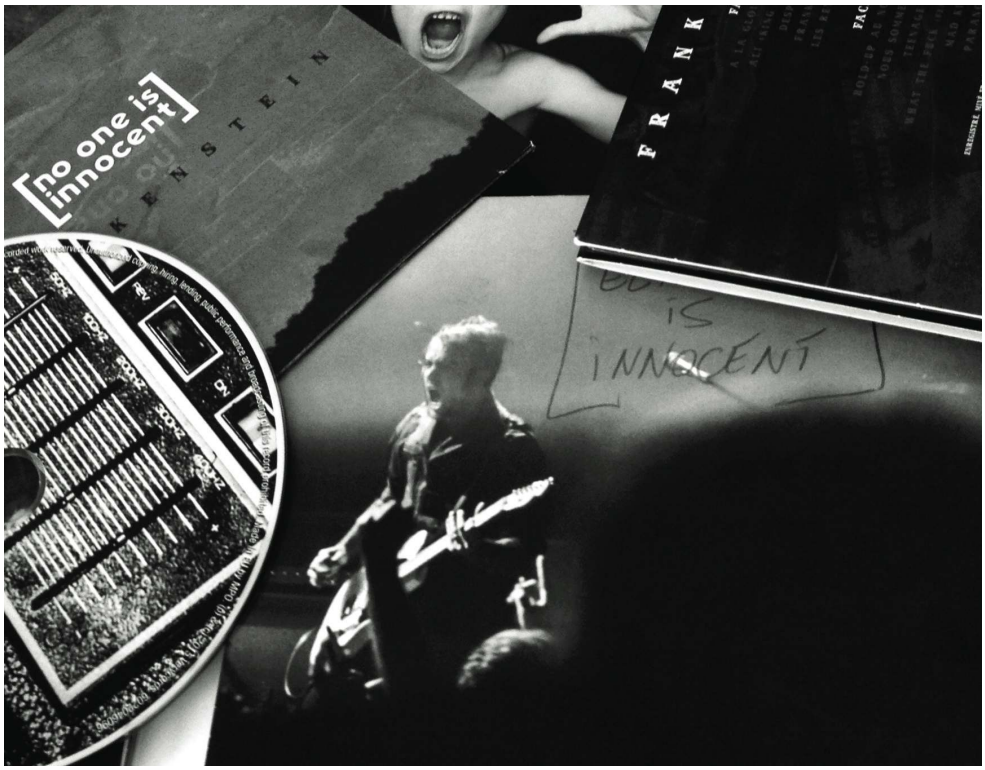

PHOTO : LUIS VELASCO-PUFLEAU (CC-BY-SA)

7 This is how No One's music echoes some historical voices from resistance movements. I ask Kemar about the current relevance of their song 'Chile,'[12] which they continue to play in concert twenty years after writing it. He tells me that they brought back this song after a concert in Santiago de Chile which affected them a lot. "It was a few years after the end of Pinochet's dictatorship and we had the chance to meet a lot of people because we, as French people, were the representatives of freedom of expression, of a certain idea of freedom. When we returned to France, we were writing our second album and I wanted to write about Chile. For me Victor Jara, Allende, these are the people who at a given moment demonstrate a certain notion of resistance. They showed a way of resistance against a dictatorial power. But beyond that, for us, when we play this song, it's also a

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notion of resistance related to the political and social reality in our countries, to defend principles."[13]

"After the mourning, comes the rage"[14]: From Charlie to Bataclan

8 No One Is Innocent wrote their album *Propaganda* after the January 2015 attacks in Paris. Their song 'Charlie' is a tribute to Charlie Hebdo staff and contributors, who were killed because of their drawings. "For us, this is an abomination. If we didn't talk about this, it would be a professional failing,"[15] says Kemar. Moreover, as artists they defend the right to free speech, even if their opinions clash with those in power. No One Is Innocent refuses to be silenced.

> "Regarding Charlie's attack, there is something very important that has been affected, which is freedom of expression. It's important because, in a certain way, we built our group around freedom of expression. We are No One Is Innocent and we talk about certain subjects, and we consider that nobody should piss us off us because we want to talk about one subject or another".[16]

Free speech is fundamental because without the freedom to think, write, and speak, there is no free will, no common humanity.[17]

9 "*We must face them head on. Charlie keep talking to me*,"[18] sings No One Is Innocent. They refuse silence, they resist and stand up to assault with anger and generosity. "There were a lot of songs in homage to Charlie, but we chose to do it with angry rock, and that's what pleased Charlie Hebdo's people, with whom we're still friends and keep in touch. What they liked about us was our sincerity and the authenticity of what we had done, and it was especially the rage side, the rage... In the same way that in them, after what happened, there was a rage that built up, we just interpreted into music what they were feeling."[19]

10 On the evening of 13 November 2015, No One Is Innocent played in a small venue in Saint-Brieuc (Brittany). After the horror of the Bataclan, many concerts all over France were cancelled. For No One Is Innocent, there was no question of putting down their instruments. Shanka, the guitarist of the band, recalls: "When we heard about Bataclan, we decided straight away that we would continue no matter what happened" (Egraz, 2016: 24). It is a matter of being faithful to the situation by critically exploring all its possibilities, by drawing from this situation "the affirmative humanity that it contains" (Badiou, 2002: 15).

Listening to No One Is Innocent after 13 November 2015

11 "Music can't stop. There isn't a day I don't listen to music. Music used to be a passion, now it's a binding thread in my life."[20] This is how Marc describes his relationship with music after 'Le Bataclan,' a sort of unreal event from which he managed to escape but during which he lost one of his best friends to the terrorists' bullets.

12 In his passion for music, No One Is Innocent's rock has a special place. On 14 November 2015, less than 24 hours after leaving Bataclan, Marc decided to go as planned to the No One Is Innocent concert in Rennes. For him, the two events are two halves of one whole.

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One event took life, the other keeps it going. He does not consider it as the 'concert of the aftermath.' The block of memories and impressions of 13 and 14 November 2015 is a mix of the sounds of Bataclan's bullets, the love and trust of his parents, the phone call confirming the death of his friend, the welcome given by his elder brother in Rennes, the energy and emotion on the stage of the members of No One Is Innocent.

13 Listening to No One Is Innocent in concert just after Bataclan, "is still something very powerful. Today, listening to their songs again, I can feel what I felt when I was at the concert. So I have an even stronger connection with No One Is Innocent. Especially in relation to their album *Propaganda*, to the subjects they deal with. I don't think I'll never get tired of listening to their music because it's more than just loving the music, it's feeling." [21] Marc came out of the concert exhausted but transformed. He could dance, shout and sing. He expressed his anger. He gradually started to reconnect with his body.

Ethics and politics of rock music: taking care of yourself and others

14 Music can't stop. No One Is Innocent continued its *Propaganda* tour. On 30 November 2015 they gave a concert in Paris, with huge security. On stage at La Cigale, they invited members of Charlie Hebdo's editorial board to speak. Kemar explained to me that doing this was mainly to give them love: "They spoke to the audience and what they said was very moving, but above all we wanted them to take a dose of love, a dose of kindness, a dose of warmth from the 1,400 people who were at La Cigale that evening."[22]

15 The concert of No One Is Innocent created a space for sharing and expressing emotions that broke the silence and transformed the recent experience of armed violence. "Life must take over all the horrors we have seen, lived through," asserted Jean.[23] On the evening of 30 November he went to the concert because he felt sure he had to do it to help his sister, who was seriously injured at the Bataclan. He also had to do it to help himself recover. Even though his passion for music and his habit of going to rock concerts were nothing new, he seized on them at that time as a way of staying attached to life.

> "That night," says Jean, "there was a special atmosphere, there was a group that was really angry, committed. There was a lot of rage in me, a lot of fatigue too because my sister had been in a coma for more than ten days. I thought, 'If I don't go, I won't be myself.' We have to fight this as best we can. I felt that there was something inside me that really made me want to go. I was right, I was right because it was really good to see that concert. And since then, I've been to more concerts."[24]

16 Going to a rock concert in the weeks following the 13 November attacks was not an insignificant act. Aude, Jean's wife, was afraid for him because she was certain there would be another attack. However, even though she was convinced that he would die that night, she let him go because she knew it was a matter of living life and transforming death. Jean recalls:

> "I experienced a special evening, like I had never experienced before, for me it was the concert after Bataclan. I expressed my rage through movement, through dance. I came home soaked in sweat. It was another dimension for me, I was somewhere else. As if there was someone else inside me, I can't explain it."[25]

17 He immersed himself in the sound of No One Is Innocent, engaged his body in a sonic ritual with hundreds of others and transformed his physical memory of armed violence.

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Jean went back home to Aude, who remembers the way he looked at that particular moment: "When he arrived, he was still in a bit of a trance. There was something intensely alive about him, that opened his eyes wide. He seemed both relieved and revived by going to the gig. He had regained life."[26] Jean's sister left hospital three months later.

Figure . Silvana Gallinotti, *Rasguña las piedras*, 2018

PHOTO: SERGIO SANTAMARÍA BORGES. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS.

18 Maintaining the connection between playing rock music and caring for each other became essential for No One Is Innocent during their concerts that followed 13 November 2015. The group knew that in the packed La Cigale, there were many survivors, friends and relatives of the Bataclan victims. They dedicated their song 'Jihad propaganda' to "friends and strangers who fell at the Bataclan."[27] They acknowledged the courage of their public, thanked them for being there. "During the concert of La Cigale, at the end of each song, we realized the importance of the presence of the people who were there", Kemar told me. "To come to a No One Is Innocent concert, just two weeks after the Bataclan attack, wow! What courage!" Carried by its inherent political dimension, the concert is a kind of healing ritual, a collective sharing of emotions in a context of extreme vulnerability of the bodies. "We felt this moment was a kind of therapy, that is, we came to heal ourselves by playing for people, and these people also came to heal themselves by listening to us. So there was a kind of osmosis between a group coming to play, the people listening to them, and everyone feeling good."[28] It is essential to accept the vulnerability of bodies, the 'precarity' about which the philosopher Judith Butler speaks, in order to act and move collectively, and resist the destruction of common life (Butler, 2015: 99-153).

19 The connections between ethics and politics in No One Is Innocent's rock are powerful: taking care of yourself and others while denouncing the cynicism of the 'democratic'

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arms trade,[29] of the merchants of hatred towards others; showing the interdependence of the violence suffered here and that which is inflicted elsewhere. These connections produce a critical shift "in relation to the frames deployed by dominant media sources during times of war" (Butler, 2010: 9). Thus, the angry rock of No One Is Innocent creates networks of resistance, emotional spaces to transform the sensory experience and collective memory of armed violence.

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Discography

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No One Is Innocent, *Frankenstein*, Verycords, 2018.

NOTES

1. Between April 2016 and March 2017, I met nine survivors: five women and four men aged between 29 and 42. I also met three relatives of survivors or victims, all of them in their sixties: the mother of a survivor, the father of two survivors (brother and sister) and the father of a victim who died in the attack. Most of these people were members of the two main victims associations of the 13 November Paris attacks, *13 November 2015: fraternité et vérité* and *Life for Paris* . I would like to thank them for agreeing to speak to me and for their trust.
2. Names have been changed to respect the privacy of individuals.
3. Interview at Irréversible festival in Monthey (Switzerland), 26 May 2018. I would like to thank Sophie Es-Borrat, press officer at Irréversible, for making this interview possible.
4. No One Is Innocent, *Propaganda*, Verycords, 2015.
5. No One Is Innocent, *Frankenstein*, Verycords, 2018.
6. No One Is Innocent, "Ne reste-t-il que la guerre pour tuer le silence ?", *No One Is Innocent*, Island Records, 1994.
7. One of the keys to analysing this interdependence of violence is the global arms trade. This extremely lucrative market was dominated, for the period 2013-2017, by the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China, which shared 74% of total arms exports. For the same period, the largest arms importers were India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and China (Blenckner, 2018).
8. Interview from the author with Kemar, Monthey, 26 May 2018.
9. No One Is Innocent, "Frankenstein", *Frankenstein*, Verycords, 2018.
10. No One Is Innocent, "Ali (King of the ring)", *Frankenstein*, Verycords, 2018
11. No One Is Innocent, "20 ans", *Propaganda*, Verycords, 2015.
12. No One Is Innocent, "Chile", *Utopia*, Island Records, 1997.
13. Interview from the author with Kemar, Monthey, 26 May 2018.
14. No One Is Innocent, "Charlie", *Propaganda*, Verycords, 2015.
15. Interview from the author with Kemar, Monthey, 26 May 2018.
16. Ibid.
17. On the state of music censorship and artistic freedom in the world, see Plipat (2018) and Shaheed (2013).
18. No One Is Innocent, "Charlie", *Propaganda*, Verycords, 2015.
19. Interview from the author with Kemar, Monthey, 26 May 2018.
20. Interview from the author with Marc B., Paris, 27 September 2016.
21. Interview from the author with Marc B., Paris, 2 June 2016.
22. Interview from the author with Kemar, Monthey, 26 May 2018.

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23. Interview from the author with Jean L., Bordeaux, 5 October 2016.
24. Interview from the author with Jean L., Paris, 31 May 2016.
25. Ibid.
26. Interview from the author with Aude C., Paris, 28 September 2016.
27. No One Is Innocent, "Djihad Propaganda", *Barricades Live*, Verycords, 2016 (recorded live at La Cigale, 30 November 2015).
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29. See, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "National reports on arms exports," https://www.sipri.org/databases/national-reports (accessed 17 September 2018).

ABSTRACTS

Based on an interview with the singer of No One Is Innocent, this article explores some of the ethical and political issues of attending concerts and performing music after the terroristattacks of 13 November 2015 in Paris. The article combines this interview with the testimonies of two survivors of the Bataclan attack concerning the relationship between the rock music of No One Is Innocent and the survivors' healing process. In the daysand weeks following the 13 November attacks, performing or attending a music concert was not insignificant. This article shows how sound and music can create networks of resistance; how the ritual of concert can constitute a space of transformation of thesensory experience and collective memory of armed violence.

Partant d'un entretien avec le chanteur de No One Is Innocent, cet article explore certains des enjeux éthiques et politiques de l'écoute et de la création musicale après les attentats du 13 novembre 2015 à Paris. Il croise les témoignages de deux rescapés de l'attentat du Bataclan concernant les rapports entre le rock de No One Is Innocent et leur processus de reconstruction. Dans les jours et les semaines qui ont suivi les attentats du 13 novembre, jouer ou assister à un concert de rock n'est pas un acte anodin. Cet article montre de quelle façon le son et la musique peuvent tisser des réseaux de résistance ; de quelle façon le rituel du concert peut constituer un espace de transformation de l'expérience sensorielle et de la mémoire collective de la violence armée.

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