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Re-imagining through Sound: The Postcolonial Ear in *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*

> Each film exists not in order to bring an essentialized, preexisting Carmen into being; the film is a cinematographic trace, what is left behind, as residue, like a comet's tail.
> (Ann Davis and Phil Powrie, "Theorizing Carmen")

The main issue posed by writing this article on the South African film *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, directed by Mark Dornford-May in 2005 and winner of the Golden Berlin Bear in the same year, is how to locate myself in it – as a scholar, an opera lover with a soft spot for Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), but also an Italian native speaker with no knowledge of Xhosa, the language in which the text that interpellates me is performed and sung. It is on this lack of knowledge that the following considerations are based, as the film confronts and reworks a masterpiece of Western classical music while undermining the illusion of full comprehension by an audience familiar with both the story and the music of Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) but far less acquainted with Xhosa or maybe even with the South African setting of the film. More than a reading, then, this will be an attempt to listen from a "point of hearing"[1] – a position which offers a partial, relational experience in opposition to the rigorous distinction between subject and object presupposed by the point of view; and this necessarily marks the following as a series of reflections or refractions more than a comprehensive reading of either *Carmen* or *U-Carmen*.

[1] Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 121.

The practice of singing a well-known tune to different words or to the same words translated into another language sets up a complementary dynamics of familiarity and estrangement. In an essay written with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler mentions the singing of the US anthem in Spanish by illegal residents in California. This case, while different in terms of actors and performative spaces, shows some similarities to the signifying practices at work in *U-Carmen*. To Butler, this performance poses a question of property (as well as propriety): "to whom does this anthem belong?" she asks.[2] While the Bush administration maintained that the anthem could only be sung in English, its 'mother-tongue', the migrants' gesture claimed the national tune as their own. At the same time, the performance made the anthem itself sound foreign, different from the sound singers and listeners (American and otherwise) have been used to sing along to. This listening experience proves somewhat similar to that of many of *U-Carmen*'s audiences. Familiar with the French libretto of Bizet's *Carmen*, used to humming the renowned Habanera from act I of the opera to the words "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle", they find themselves confronted with the Other sonorities and clicks of Xhosa, so immediately and utterly 'foreign' to European ears.

[2] Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007), 58.

Through this act of estrangement, *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* deploys an aural strategy that displaces the usual *Carmen* audiences from the privileged place created for them by the structures of classical music. Via its interpellation of the 'postcolonial ear', it relocates its spectator, framing her/him less as someone watching a film than as someone who is subject to multiple (and not only aural) interpellations not necessarily coalescing around a single positionality. As will emerge from the following considerations, the postcolonial ear is not based on one among the many different sensorial languages of the film or on the prominence that it gives to one or another of these languages, but on a different interpellation of the spectator by the cinematic text. Louis Althusser has famously argued that

Fig. 1: "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle", still from Mark Dornford-May, *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, 2005, Spier Films.

> ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'[3]

[3] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideology State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)", in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. trans. by Ben Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 181.

The policeman's hailing calls his listener into subjectivity. Similarly, Bizet's *Carmen*, structured according to the musical as well as ideological discourses of Western modernity, hails its audience into received power-knowledge structures relating to gender, race and class, interpellating it into Western subjecthood. Conversely, when the audience is interpellated through the postcolonial ear created by the performances in *U-Carmen*, it is deprived both of the privileges of its position and of the ideological constraints that this engenders; the positionality it now inhabits is altogether more fraught and insecure.

Translating Carmen to Khayelitsha

The choice of Carmen as a way of telling a story about contemporary South Africa is not as odd as it may at first sound. Both the opera and Mérimée's 1845 novella, published in the orientalist-titled *Revue des deux mondes*, by which it was inspired, engage in a portrayal of difference where ethnicity intertwines with gender and class to create a character that has constantly been interpreted (both on stage and in criticism) as the embodiment of the Other. Mérimée's Carmen is a woman, a gipsy, *and* an underprivileged worker in a cigarette factory: her dangerous mobility spans geographies (as a gipsy), languages (Spanish and Romani), and even genders, as she claims for herself a freedom, sexual and otherwise, that male characters feel is their own prerogative. It is because of these multiple transgressions that she has

to die at the hand of the same Don José as the one who tells her story in Mérimée's novella: only in this way can her death reinstate and secure hegemonic narratives of gender, race, and class. As Elizabeth Bronfen has it,

> What is controlled with Carmen's murder is Otherness as constant volatility, as sexual difference, and as death's presence in life in the form of fading. What is controlled is Otherness, when this functions as a force disruptive of the security of sameness, of clear oppositions and stable identities.[4]

[4] Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 189.

In its transmigration from one medium to another, Carmen's story also exposes the shifting ground on which ethnic alterity stands. In Mérimée's novella, the symbolic realm of Otherness actually encompasses the gipsy Carmen as well as the Basque Don José, who is first met by the narrator as a notorious brigand and exotic specimen:

> I had no doubt that the man I was dealing with was a smuggler, or perhaps a robber. But what odds was it to me? … I was delighted at this chance to learn what a brigand is like. It isn't every day that you encounter one, and there is a certain pleasure in finding yourself in the presence of a dangerous individual, especially when you sense that he's feeling mild and amenable.[5]

[5] Prosper Mérimée, "Carmen", in *Carmen and Other Stories*, trans. by Nicholas Jotcham (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2008), 5.

In the original text, Don José features only partly as first person narrator, as he tells the primary chronicler about his love story with Carmen and the ensuing murder while waiting to be executed, integrating the latter's account of Carmen's story. He thus by no means endangers the role of the main narrator, a Frenchman well versed in letters and foreign languages, who, with his orientalist imagery and first-hand knowledge of cultural alterity, remains the primary source of authority in the text. He introduces himself to the reader in the course of an archaeological trip to Andalusia he has undertaken in order to look for the site of the Munda battle, an episode recounted in the *Bellum Hispaniense*. His findings, he tells his readers, will solve "the geographical problem which is holding all learned Europe in suspense".[6] *Carmen* represents a detour from this archaeological effort, where archaeology, as Catherine Hall argues, together with mapping and ethnography constitutes the disciplinary backbone of imperial power-knowledge.[7]

[6] Mérimée, "Carmen", 1.

[7] See Catherine Hall, *Cultures of Empire: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 25 ff.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the last chapter of the novella, added over a year after publication, should describe the culture and language of the Romani people, with Carmen reduced to the status of a specimen.[8] The novella employs a number of strategies expressing a Foucauldian "drive for control",[9] which finds its climax on the one hand in the killing of the woman and on the other in the domestication of her cultural difference through the detailed description of the narrator's study of Romani language. The novella closes with the (supposedly) Romani saying "a closed mouth, no fly can enter",[10] effectively pointing to the silencing of Carmen: "writing over Carmen's language, the Frenchman attempts to write her off. Sealing every possible orifice, the sexual and the verbal, he brings the story to its end – silence".[11]

[8] Mérimée, "Carmen", 333-340; it should be noted that this chapter is published separately at the end of the volume in the edition used for this essay.

[9] Paul Robinson, "Mérimée's *Carmen*", in Susan McClary, ed., *Georges Bizet. Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.

[10] Mérimée, "Carmen", 339.

[11] Robinson, "Mérimée's *Carmen*", 14.

In Bizet's opera the main control device, the French narrator, disappears and the balance between exoticism and ethnography is redrawn according to the standards of *opéra comique*. The most explicit shift occurs in the character of Don José, made to occupy the place left empty by the disappearing Frenchman and accordingly to undergo a process of de-exoticization, especially in musical terms. The 'neutral' – i.e. Western – musical structure of the opera embraces Don José and leaves out Carmen: his canonical melodies (the most well-known being the "Flower Song" solo from act II) are in tune with the overall language of the opera and form an 'exotic' contrast both to the plethora of closed numbers, vocal runs and dance rhythms that characterize Carmen and her people and also to the Spanish setting of the opera as a whole with its toreadors and smugglers.[12] Don José becomes affiliated with the Europeanness of the opera's musical language, which is identified as classical (i.e., Western and white) by virtue of its very opposition to Carmen's own markedly exotic codes. Yet the divide between the two musical languages is only apparent, as both belong to the same milieu: even in exotic tunes, "what the European ear expected to hear was its own image of difference: this music reinscribes not so much its ostensible musical modes as European notions of what the Other is like".[13]

Carmen then could be said to interpellate its (Western) audience via a 'colonial ear', which guarantees the listener's positionality as the privileged subject of Western modernity, white, European and male. What happens when the opera is relocated in an ethnically othered setting such as the South African township of Khayelitsha? What happens, in particular, to the supposed neutrality of its musical language, including the conventional exoticism encoded in Carmen's own music? This displacement both exploits the connotation of Carmen as cultural Other and displaces her Otherness by eschewing the traditional codes of exoticism associated with Africa. The South Africa portrayed in the film is a contemporary setting, where African visual as well as aural elements (starting with the Xhosa used for dialogues and lyrics) are counterpointed by an outstandingly faithful rendition of Bizet's score. The film was based on a production of Bizet's opera by the South African company, Dimpho Di Kopane, meaning "combined talents" in Sesotho, one of the eleven official languages of South Africa. The company was founded in 2000 and includes about forty artists recruited across the South African territory; its work focuses on musical productions, including English medieval mystery cycles and John Gay's *The Beggars' Opera*, while in 2009 it presented its *Magic Flute* at the Singapore Art Festival – all works translated from their original languages into Xhosa, which is also an official language in South Africa.[14]

The translation of the libretto and the setting of the story in present-day Khayelitsha involved a number of adaptations of plot and characters, in what can rightly be referred to as a postcolonial appropriation of both novella and opera.[15] Carmen still works in a cigarette factory, but she also sings in a choir, the Gipsy Cigarette Choir, and her friends are not smugglers but drug traffickers. Jongikhaya, the Don José character, is a policeman who fled his native village after accidentally

[12] See Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet. Carmen*, 44-61.

[13] Ibid., 54.

[14] For further information about the company see Camilla Driver, ed., *A Short History of Dimpho Di Kopane: A South African Lyric Theatre Company* (Cape Town: Spier and Nando's, 2004).

[15] Linda Hutcheon mentions *U-Carmen*, together with Otto Preminger's *Carmen Jones* (1954) and Joseph Gaï Ramaka's *Karmen Geï* (2001), as postcolonial adaptations of *Carmen*, enacting a "transculturation" of the story as well as of the music: see her *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 153.

killing his brother. Most interestingly for an analysis of the use of opera in the film, the counterpart for Bizet's toreador Escamillo, Lulamile Nkomo, becomes an opera singer, coming back to his native Khayelitsha to give a recital after gaining fame and wealth abroad.

This complex adaptation of plot and characters clearly marks the intention to grant accessibility to story, dialogues and lyrics to a wide audience in the South African context. Yet this operation also results in a postcolonial appropriation of *Carmen*, marking the exclusion of French speakers, and more generally of audiences familiar with the French libretto, from complete access to the text. For them, the result of this linguistic shift is an unremitting estrangement, which I intend to confront by basing the following analysis of the film not on an English and/or Italian translation of the script, but on its English subtitles. Although this option is not to be excluded altogether, and may represent a further step in this research, I believe it is necessary to underline the production's decision to situate *U-Carmen* outside linguistic accessibility for a spectator such as myself. For European audiences, Xhosa is not only a foreign language but is also associated with migrants and the dispossessed, since although the number of Xhosa-speaking migrants to Europe is actually quite small Xhosa is a recognizably *African* language and not, arguably, a language with a cultural tradition that would grant it access to the hallowed halls of the opera theatre. Hence, the following reflections privilege this point of hearing, with a consequent stress on the representation of cultural alterity through the rewriting of Bizet's opera.

The theme of the opacity of translation is addressed in the very first sequence of the film, which shows a long close-up of Pauline Malefane, who plays Carmen, while a male voice-over recites a passage from Mérimée's novella, translated into Xhosa, describing canonical features of feminine beauty in contrast with the gipsy's own nonconforming charm.[16] The very first frames of the film confront the spectator with Malefane's gaze, looking straight into the camera, while the voice-over interpellates the audience into 'reading' her, her face in particular, through the characteristics enumerated by the narrative. As the male voice proceeds, Malefane's face comes closer and closer to the camera as the voice moves from a description of the ideal woman to one of Carmen herself. The audience is thus led to try to superimpose the described woman onto Malefane: are her eyes "slanting but remarkably wide", her lips "rather full but finely chiselled", her hair "rather coarse and black, with a sheen like a raven's wing"? Is her face "disconcerting but unforgettable"? Does she possess the "strange wild beauty" Mérimée's oriental imagery attributed to the gipsy Carmen?

[16] Mérimée, "Carmen", 14.

Yet, for the audience not able to understand Xhosa, the 'reading' of Malefane's face must be paired with the reading of subtitles – which of course helps in understanding the scene, but also highlights the act of translating Mérimée's text from nineteenth century Paris to twenty-first century Khayelitsha. In the change of focus away from Malefane's face to the written text and vice versa, reading is self-reflexively foregrounded and displaced, making the spectator aware of her/his

effort to interpret both the voice s/he hears and the body s/he sees. On the one hand, then, the sequence elaborates an economy of reading that frames Carmen as the object of the orientalist and patriarchal gaze foregrounded by the novella; on the other, it stages the impossibility of reading Carmen through the opacity of translation. Moreover, the refusal to use the French original (where French is also an African language) dispossesses the 'original' of its authority and universality.

The other side of this operation is of course the accessibility granted by the film to the wider Xhosa-speaking audience. The use of African languages in literary and cultural production has been supported, among others, by Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who argues against the use of colonial languages as being unable ever to create a truly decolonized African culture.[17] In cinema, many directors have answered his appeal by producing films in African languages, which are then subtitled for distribution;[18] nevertheless, subtitles stage the distance between the text and the audience who needs to read them. They can be assimilated to other, literary strategies which make the alterity of the postcolonial text explicit for a global audience: "the post-colonial text, by developing specific ways of both constituting cultural distance and at the same time bridging it, indicates that it is the 'gap' rather than the experience (or at least the *concept* of a gap between experiences) which is created by language".[19]

Sound, Vision, and the Postcolonial Ear

The use of Xhosa also contributes to the aesthetics of realism at work in the film through the portrayal of its South African setting. Khayelitsha, featured already in the title, is one of the townships in the Cape Town area: created literally out of nowhere on the Cape Flats in the early Eighties, it was designed as a way to house African residents who since the late Fifties had been subjected to "a deliberate policy of exclusion and harassment", in order to leave other Cape Town neighbourhoods to white residents.[20] The original project envisioned "a well laid out town in which house-holders would upgrade core houses";[21] yet this informal settlement soon developed into an actual sprawl, characterized by derelict housing with little or no electricity and no plumbing. In the early Nineties, "four out of every five people in Khayelitsha live in two- or three-roomed shacks made of corrugated iron, plastic, cardboard and soft wood in some combination".[22]

This is the landscape that meets the audience's eye in *U-Carmen*, where Bizet's score is superimposed on a visual representation of Khayelitsha which borrows heavily from the codes of realist cinema in order to stage the violence embedded in the Carmen narrative as a consequence of life in the township. Most of the film is shot on location, thus avoiding the artificiality of staged sets in favour of the 'raw' effect of an urban setting. Other recurrent features are the use of hand-held cameras, which "creates the impression that the operator is a participant observer, caught up in the thick of action and events",[23] and a sparse use of montage, with the result that many scenes are shot in long takes which give the feeling of physically following

[17] See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Currey, 1986), xiv, where the author recounts his own shift from English to Gĩkũyũ.

[18] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 192. The issue of *U-Carmen*'s accessibility for an African audience also resonates with recent debates on South African cinema addressing the need to rethink the idea of film as a 'global' product, which too often implies privileging European (or European-friendly) stories and languages: see Lucia Saks, *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa: The Race for Representation* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010), 77-78.

[19] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge [1989] 2002), 64.

[20] Gillian P. Cook, "Khayelitsha: New Settlement Forms in the Cape Peninsula", in David M. Smith, ed., *The Apartheid City and Beyond: Urbanization and Social Change in South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1992), 126.

[21] Ibid., 128.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 103.

Fig. 2: Between exoticism and realism: the streets of Khayelitsha, still from Mark Dornford-May, *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, 2005, Lady Film (Italy).

the characters as they move through the streets, alleys and wide roads, staging Khayelitsha for the eye of the camera and of the audience.

This emerges quite clearly in the opening scenes of the film, where Malefane's close-up is abruptly interrupted by a flash and a series of cacophonous sounds, like an orchestra tuning up before a concert. The camera backs up to show the interior of a makeshift photographer's studio where Carmen is having her picture taken, then further away and out of the studio at ground level, moving backwards in fast forward through alleys and backyards followed by children whose laughter intertwines with the dissonant backdrop sounds, until the frame widens up to close the sequence with a pan shot of the township from above. Then, after the audience has been led from Carmen's face through the streets and up into the Khayelitsha sky, the sequence continues with only the soundtrack of ambient noise, background voices and passing cars, with a montage of people fixing roofs, barber shops, stray dogs, street markets of food and (apparently second-hand) furniture, until we see Carmen approaching from an unpaved side street. As she belatedly joins the choir rehearsing bits from *Carmen*, the opera overture starts introducing more street scenes featuring street vendors, horse-drawn carts with tyres, kids on roller-skates and courtyard animals.

The general picture, often echoed later in the film, is one of diffused and apparently unsolvable poverty, but also of an ethnically diverse but still segregated community: in the scenes described above, everyone is black, as in most of the film. The Khayelitsha shown in the film is to all intents and purposes an all-black neighbourhood, which still bears the imprint of the urban policy that founded it in the apartheid era. White characters are mostly limited to flashbacks: here, their presence is strictly related to the metatextual element introduced by Lulamile, the opera singer, thus commenting both on ethnic relationships in post-apartheid South Africa and, at the same time, on the affiliation of operatic music to white cultural hegemony.

Lulamile's story can be read in counterpoint to Carmen's: she is arrested for assaulting a fellow labourer who switched the TV off during his performance; Jongi gets involved in the drug traffic during a party thrown to celebrate his return; his performance at the township school is the setting for Jongi and Carmen's final confrontation and her murder. Lulamile's success story is the other side of Carmen's tragedy, as he has managed to do what she can not: in escaping from Khayelitsha, he has been set free from the dynamics of poverty and violence that compel Carmen to seduce a policeman to avoid imprisonment and then to work as a prostitute for drug-dealers and finally be killed by her jealous and possessive lover.

Significantly, Carmen never seems to meet any whites in her daily life and work. On the contrary, white characters appear in memories of Lulamile's early years.

Shortly after his first appearance on the TV screen, the flashback to his childhood starts while he is driving across the South African countryside to the tune of *Carmen*'s entr'acte from act III, a pastoral melody for flute and orchestra evoking the mountain landscape where the gipsies are camping. In sharp contrast with this idyllic soundtrack is the ruthlessness of the images from the flashback, showing how Lulamile's equally peaceful childhood was shattered by the killing of his family by two policemen (one of whom at least is clearly white). The sequence proceeds with the child being entrusted by his grandfather to a white priest, who utters one of the very few English sentences in the film: "Come with me, you're safe with us". Finally, Lulamile is shown taking singing lessons from two white instructors. Through these characters – a policeman, a priest, and two music teachers – the film briefly but firmly traces a paradigm of interracial relationships, which can be of violence or care or even education but are all based on the same hierarchy: only by making good use of the relations with a white community which manages access to the only options for social mobility can someone from the township literally (as well as metaphorically) get out of Khayelitsha.

The only other white characters present in the film are the four instrumentalists accompanying Lulamile in his recital at the end of the film. As a consequence, classical music, as a Western and orientalist genre, seems at first to belong firmly to the white side of the black-white divide – a location the film reinstates, but also undermines through its own rewriting of *Carmen*. Far from being reduced to an expression of white hegemony and cultural colonialism, the visual association of opera with whiteness that structures Lulamile's story is actually countered by the film itself, which shows all the characters singing Bizet's score. The 'neutral', Western sound of the opera, including Carmen's exotic numbers, is grafted into a strongly situated visual language, where issues related to contemporary South Africa are confronted with the intentional immediacy emerging in the scenes discussed above. The result, to quote Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin again, is to make the "gap between experiences" resonate, to make cultural difference visible and audible without producing it as an easily manageable exotic commodity, where 'South African' and 'black' may seamlessly substitute for 'Spanish' and 'gipsy'. This shift leaves a trace, a residue "like a comet's tail",[24] which spoils the comfortable exoticism embedded in Bizet's musical language by staging its foreignness to the film's other languages, visual and otherwise.

The postcolonial ear is interpellated by this residue, which undoes the cultural authority of Western classical music by making its supposedly hegemonic language occupy the space of the Other.

[24] Ann Davis and Phil Powrie,"Theorizing Carmen", in Phil Powrie, Bruce Babington and Ann Davies, eds., *Carmen on Film. A Cultural History* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2007), 17.

Fig. 3: Metatextuality and intertextuality: Lulamile as Escamillo on TV, still from Mark Dornford-May, *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, 2005, Lady Film (Italy).

This emerges most evidently when the film stages competing aural languages engaging the cinematic space, reassessing the power imbalances that structure the opera. Not only throughout the film does Bizet's music have to compete with background noise and dialogue; but in two instances another music, in both cases sung by women, contends with Bizet for the audience's attention.

The first occurs at the end of the overture. Following Carmen, the audience is finally led into the cigarette factory, where the workers sing to accompany their work to a rhythm that counterpoints the final bars of the music, until both music and choir stop simultaneously as the scene ends. The first impression is that of a mistake – a case of bad soundtrack montage: the effect is to make the audience suddenly aware of Bizet's music, which had until then been 'invisible' as staple background sound, sustaining the rhythm of montage. The music is pushed both to the forefront of the audience's attention and outside the frame, as its extra-diegetic source is made apparent against the women's intra-diegetic song. The result parallels the use of Xhosa as a way of marking not the film's foreignness – and consequent exoticism – for the non South African audience, but the audience's own foreignness to the film's setting and language: the comfortable position guaranteed inside the opera by the music's European affiliation is no longer available, it is (literally) pushed outside the frame.

The second instance portrays a ceremony performed by Lulamile when he sacrifices a bull to his ancestors to thank them for their support while he was away from Khayelitsha, allowing him to become a famous opera singer. The ceremonial killing of a bull is, of course, also at the centre of the bullfight that frames the last act of Bizet's opera: here, Carmen's death is coterminous with the death of the bull, as we can infer by the choir that extols the might of the bullfighter just as Carmen falls under Don José's knife. The rhetoric of ceremonial sacrifice permeates Carmen's gruesome demise: the heroine stands as a scapegoat whose death works to consolidate the system her existence threatened, "the dissonant Other who is necessary for the motivation and sustaining of the plot."[25]

The film undoes the patriarchal ideology sustained in the opera by relocating the killing of the bull in a context of celebration and achievement, which shows Carmen without Jongi, who has just left to run to his mother's deathbed. In this festive atmosphere Carmen, the paramount Other, is shown as part of a healthy – if harsh – social environment, and as perfectly integrated in a community built on the sharing of food and wealth. Yet Bizet's version of the slaughtering of the bull is not simply dismissed: the entr'acte from the last act of the opera, foreboding Carmen's sacrificial slaughter in the festive rhythm for violins and Spanish-sounding tambourines, starts at the very moment when the cry of the bull announces that the sacrifice has taken place. The sudden irruption of Bizet's music undercuts to the knowledgeable audience the apparently idyllic atmosphere by evoking the violence that hovers just outside the edge of this scene – Jongi's gendered violence but also that of apartheid and post-apartheid race conflicts, of police misdemeanour and drug-dealing.

[25] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings. Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Oxford, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 57.

Yet the women counteract this narrative by their own singing and dancing to what is markedly 'another' tune. As the scene cuts to Jongi sitting on a train on his way back to Khayelitsha, where he is shortly going to kill Carmen, the women's music fades out and Bizet's music becomes the soundtrack to Jongi's glowering face, exposing the opera's complicity with his motives and with Carmen's murder. The misalignment of the two soundtracks – and of soundtrack and image – undermines the very dynamic that would ground the white self and the black Other in Don José and Carmen respectively: it refuses to represent either Carmen or South Africa as exotic, stepping back from full visibility and audibility for an audience situated inside the tradition that has produced both Mérimée's and Bizet's versions of the story.

This last example best embodies the way the film displaces the audience from the safe position of a point of view into the unsafe position of the point of hearing, pushing it into the fraught space of the postcolonial ear, where no language, be it Xhosa, Bizet's music or the representation of Khayelitsha (both aural and visual), is completely transparent. The opacity of the text reverberates onto the audience, as its positionality becomes almost impossible to name. What is the audience that is being 'Other'ed by the representational strategies of the postcolonial ear in *U-Carmen*? Is it a 'European' or 'Western' audience against an 'African' one? A non-Xhosa-speaking against a Xhosa-speaking one? Or a non-South African against a South African one? Naturally, none of these binaries works, but the film does not simply efface them; the use of different aural and visual languages interpellates different audiences differently, problematizing the way classical music still shapes hegemonic narratives of gender, race and class. The question posed by *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* is whether *Carmen*, and the cultural legacy it embodies, may be reduced to a perpetuation of these narratives, or whether it could contribute to a different structure of feeling: "we could consider music as one of the languages we inhabit, dwell in, and in which we, our histories, cultures, and identities, are constituted. ... At this point to ask what music is, is to ask what our culture is, who we are, and what are we doing here."[26]

[26] Iain Chambers, *Culture after Humanism. History, Culture, Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 115.