Sawt, Bodies, Species

Sonic Pluralism in Morocco

Gilles Aubry

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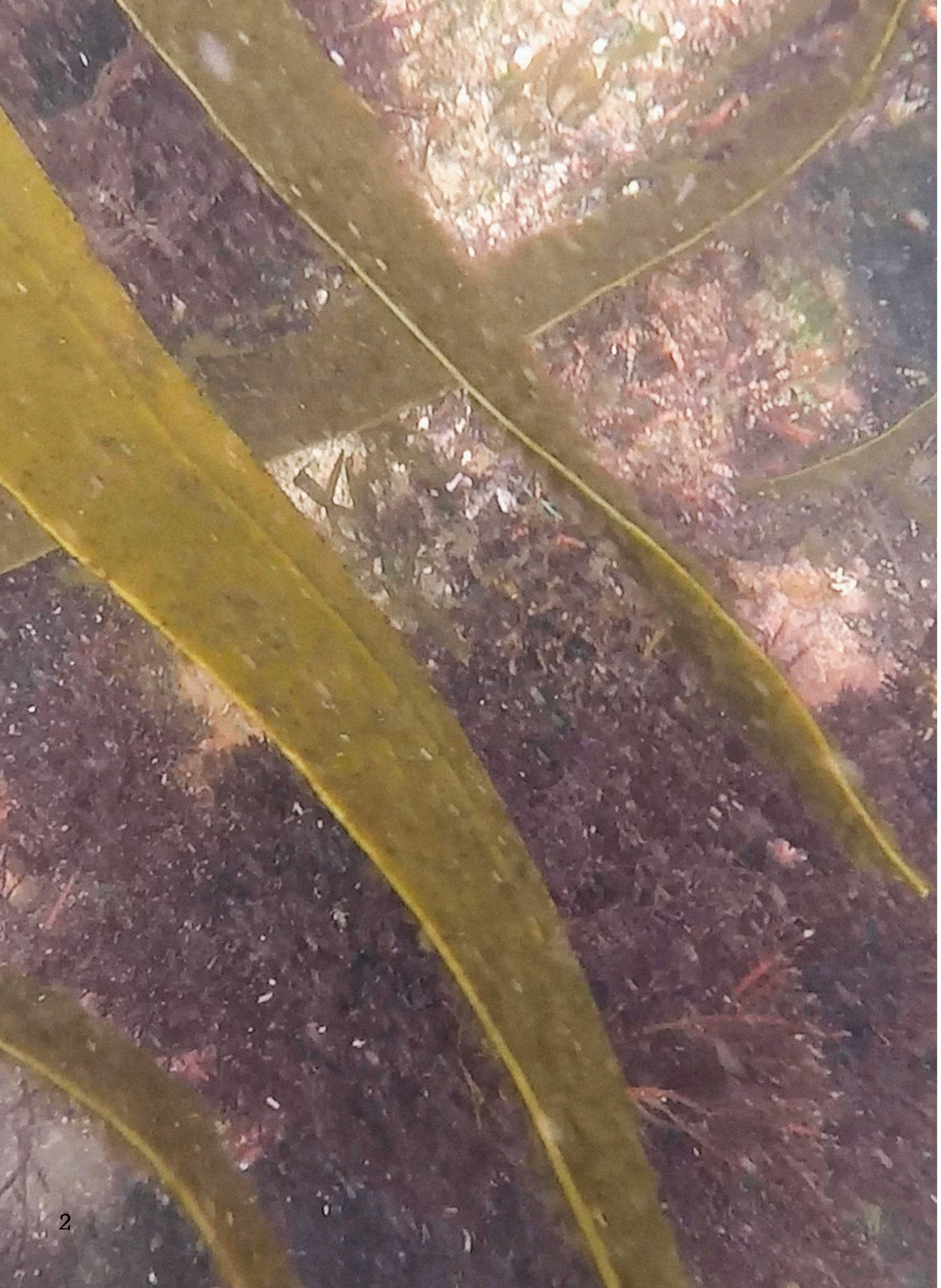

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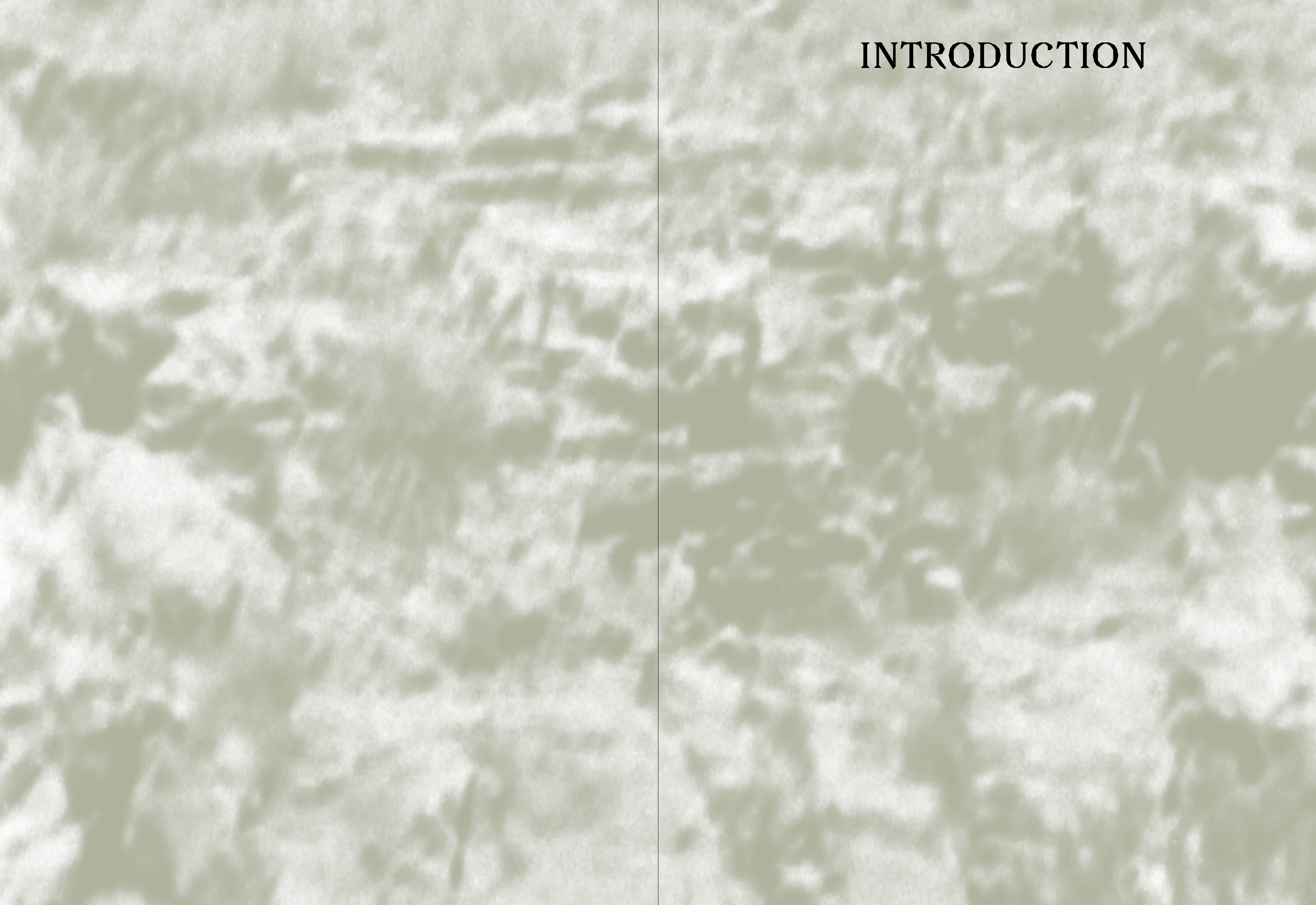
INTRODUCTION



This book emerged from a series of encounters and exchanges in, through, and about sound in Morocco between 2012 and 2019. I initially engaged in this project through an invitation as a sound artist to create a piece on the 1959 *Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection* for an exhibition. I traveled to Tangier to access digital copies of the recordings made by Bowles fifty-three years earlier, covering various genres of ethnic music. My first encounter with "Moroccan sound" was thus doubly mediated: by technological reproduction, and at the same time by Paul Bowles's own sensitivity and ideas on music and Moroccan culture. Listening to these recordings with people from Tafraout revealed a multiplicity of positions from which they could be interpreted today: as musical examples of an initiative in cultural preservation; as an aural souvenir of deceased family members and acquaintances; as objects of aesthetic contemplation; as signs of a past idealized in the name of contested cultural politics; as a case of western cultural appropriation calling for restitution; and as digital cultural artifacts that could be easily circulated in a participative art project. Although each of these positions were equally valid, they were nevertheless all enabled by the sound recordings themselves, likely reproducing a story in which the West is the main protagonist of a local sound modernity.

The concept of "modern sound" (Thompson 2013) was introduced by European colonizers in North Africa via imported audio technology in the early twentieth century. Sustained by an ideology of technical innovation and social progress, sound was part of a narrative of modernity which naturalized and justified the West's material domination of local populations. The colonized were turned into "passive and docile" participants in this narrative, removed from the production of an *effective* history of sonic modernity (Bhabha 1994). Sound's coloniality is perpetuated today in Morocco through dispositives of power and knowledge inherited from French occupation, nationalized and Islamized after independence in 1956. Continuities can be observed between the *technocratic* modes of listening of the French colonial administration and those of the current neoliberal regime supported by the Moroccan state. Other continuities surface in the state's cultural policy, in technical and administrative infrastructures, communication technologies, and state-owned media, as well as in research and education programs. Postcolonial bodies, too, bear traces of colonial inscriptions of power and control, as "historical artifacts of the Moroccan experience with French colonialism and an emblem of the Islamic postcolonial condition" (Amster 2013). The Moroccan body is "fragmented," marked as "un-modern," while at the same time "contaminated by modernity and colonialism." As I will argue, postcolonial aurality echoes this fragmentation. People's listening and sounding practices express competing notions of embodiment and subjectivity, which can be traced back to locally significant epistemologies and dichotomies. Human-environmental interactions, equally, are marked by a century of colonial overexploitation of land, water, minerals, and biodiversity, perpetuated today through state-sponsored neoliberal extractivism. Locally, however, ecological voices point to a more complex history of "co-domestication" (Losey et al. 2018) between people and their environment, revealing the possibility of extra-human agencies.

In *Sawt, Bodies, Species*, I offer an account on sound and listening in Morocco across a wide domain of activities, including musical expression, art, sound archives, urban planning, building techniques, seismology, healing practices, industrial extractivism, and ecology. As the book's title suggests, my approach supports a pluralist perspective on aurality and ecology, which seeks to establish connections between historically separated fields of sonic knowledge, including ethnomusicology, sound studies, phenomenology, sound art history, acoustic ecology, and North African studies. Sound translates as *sawt* in Arabic, which literally means "voice" (Shiloah 1995).[1] Sound in Morocco thus never quite corresponds with its modern western understanding as a concept and phenomenon separable from the other senses, which can be technologically measured, reproduced, and commodified. As a manifestation of human or extra-human voice, sawt intimately relates to the body. If embodiment in the Arabo-Islamic tradition expresses a unity between matter and spirituality (*tawhid*) (Dieste 2013), this divine unity came to clash with the notion of the biological body supported by colonial medicine during French occupation. Rather than seeing the post-colonial body as "incomplete or failed modernity," Amster (2013) suggests to understand it as an "embodiment-as-process," manifesting the "work of subjectivity making itself." Postcolonial embodiment thus offers an alternative perspective on both modernity and aurality simultaneously. Such an embodied, processual, and relational understanding of sound and listening certainly drives my project, and it does so for several reasons.

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[1] Islamic scholarship assigns various meanings to the term "sawt," including "sound," "voice," and "song" (Shiloah 1995).

In addressing the relationship between music and sound, ethnomusicological scholarship has interpreted "music" primarily as a dimension of cultural identity and territorial belonging, often without considering "sound" as a social and symbolic practice operating in concrete, material environments (Frishkopf and Spinetti 2018). On the opposite, the materially and technologically inclined field of sound studies has remained largely Eurocentric so far, arguably sustaining universal categories of listening subjects (secular, white, and middle-class), of urban spaces characterized by sharp divisions between public and private space (the global city), and of notions of sound itself (Steingo and Sykes 2019). Despite a growing interest in "indigenous" and "ethnic" knowledge and expression, institutional sound art equally seems reluctant to question the coloniality of its modernist canon, sustained by a number of "invisible" aesthetic conventions (Groth 2020). As Dylan Robinson (2020) puts it, the structure of western aesthetics might be enriched by *other* sights and sounds, but without unsettling the world-view it supports. In the field of political ecology, finally, calls for a radical departure from anthropocentric, naturalist worldviews in the face of climate change frequently remain abstract and speculative. Redistributing intentionality and responsibility across more-than-human "assemblages" may quickly lead to a depoliticizing of differences in positions between humans themselves, when doing so from a relatively privileged position (Schulz 2017). The necessary re-mapping of aural knowledge and practices across these disciplines implies not only a questioning of abstractions such as "modern sound," "space," and "technology." It also involves a deeper re-examination of western concepts inherited from the Enlightenment period, including "subjectivity," "embodiment," "the human," and "nature." As the Moroccan poet and activist Abdellatif Laâbi (1966) aptly remarked, "colonial science cannot be accepted, nor rejected;" therefore it must be "digested," and from there it can be re-evaluated. My research in Morocco is an attempt to participate in this conversation from my position as an artist and sound scholar.

SONIC PLURALISM

Each of the six chapters of the book discusses a particular aural field from which I engage in a reflection on the coloniality of sound, knowledge, and power in Morocco. These fields do not refer individually to a single point in place and time and they can be better described as heterogeneous assemblages of signs, materials, affects, and narratives, linked together across time and space through a dense web of relations. These assemblages progressively emerged through exchanges, conversations, and interventions with a number of local artists, musicians, scientists, and other people—mostly in rural and peripheral regions of Morocco. Listening was always a central modality of these exchanges. To speak with Lucia Farinati and Claudia Firth (2017), I was "interested in exploring what listening can do," as it takes place in individual and collective processes concerned with the possibility of social, political, and ecological change. This experience gave me a sense of what I call "sonic pluralism," that is a capacity to combine conceptually distinct notions of sound. In a strict sense, sonic pluralism refers to a kind of aural *syncretism*, that is an amalgamation of different epistemologies manifested through aural practices. Sonic pluralism thus simultaneously refers to the constitutive plurality of the postcolonial aural field *and* to people's ability to act upon their own listening in order to find new meanings in aural experience. Although sonic pluralism may afford in principle endless possibilities of positioning oneself in relation to sound, these possibilities appear, however, constrained in practice by the particular historical position of listening subjects. My examples attests to people's concrete efforts to emancipate from perceptual and epistemological schemes which are often felt as oppressive. Sonic pluralism therefore refers to people's ways of questioning the limits of what can be perceived from one's particular position, in order to sometimes better circumvent these limits.

This questioning may take different forms, as the examples from my case studies demonstrate.

On a sound epistemological level, sonic pluralism in my study pertains to examples of direct engagement with recording technology and colonial music archives. Local initiatives open up new perspectives on colonial sound epistemology, raising questions about the "erasure effects" of ethnographic recording, about racist ideas and misrepresentation of "native cultures," and about sound itself as a modern western technological concept. By drawing on multiple epistemologies, sonic pluralism participates in attempts to re-purpose sonic knowledge for local needs; this entails a negotiation about the relationship between musical expression, knowledge, technology, and history (Chapters I and II). At a subjective and experiential level, sonic pluralism informs people's personal experimentation with listening and sounding; this frequently involves liminal aural experience, which in my examples is manifested in transcultural sound encounters (Chapter II), in popular Sufi healing practices (Chapter IV), and in sound artistic experiments at the limits of audition (Chapter V and VI). As such, sonic pluralism involves processes of subjective redrawing and self-formation; the body appears as a site from which the perceived fragmentedness of the self can be reworked, by drawing on locally relevant knowledge, spiritual practices, or artistic strategies. In the domain of ecology, sonic pluralism pertains to processes of co-formation between people and their environment. In rural areas in particular, environmental listening mirrors locally significant symbolic representations of space, which occasionally conflict with technocratic modes of land management (Chapter III and V) and with industrial extraction of "natural resources" (Chapter VI).

By highlighting the situated, embodied, epistemic, agentive, and ecological dimensions of aurality, sonic pluralism corresponds with a number of existing concepts in the field of sound studies: with Feld's (2017) notion of "acoustemology;" with Ochoa Gautier's (2014) discussion of "aurality;" with Kapchan's (2015) definition of the "sound body;" with Pettman's (2017) "sonic intimacy," as well as with Goodman's (2010) "unsound," to name a few. My research equally draws on recent contributions *outside* of sound and music studies in Morocco, which highlight additional local dimensions of pluralism: "medical pluralism" can be observed in people's combining of traditional healing and biomedicine (Amster 2013); architectural pluralism is expressed in the mix of traditional and industrial building techniques in vernacular architecture (González Sancho 2017); ontological pluralism is expressed in the polysemic status of trees (Delplancke and Aumeeruddy-Thomas 2017), and of stones (Simenel et al. 2016).

Sonic pluralism reveals alternative genealogies of sound and listening, which in my examples can be traced back to Islamic scholarship, Sufi practices, Berber-Amazigh cosmologies, along with other locally significant knowledges. This *more-than-sonic* approach offers a new perspective on aurality in Morocco, also informing alternate narratives on sonic modernity in North Africa. Sonic pluralism, ultimately, refers to the ever-changing ontological status of sound *itself*. Sound's material, symbolic, affective, and aesthetic dimensions are reworked by people through listening and sounding practices. As a result, sound in Morocco is continuously becoming *out of itself*; if bodies carry histories of embodiment within themselves, so too does sound. Sound, as "sawt," is thus always a "sound body." Sound "in-itself," as an autonomous phenomenon that can be observed from the outside, is de-centered in my study; it appears even more as a particular product of modern western subjectivity, despite its persistence in contemporary discourses.

PERIPHERAL AURAL FIELDS

My research covers three main geographical and socio-linguistic areas of Morocco: the Berber-Tashlhit speaking *Souss* region between Agadir and the Anti-Atlas mountains in the Southwest; the Arabized and rural *Jbala* land of the Pre-Rif region in the North; and the industrial western Atlantic coast between Safi and El Jadida. The three regions are geographically and culturally distinct from one another; however, they share a comparable "peripheral" status within a geography of neoliberal "uneven development" of the last thirty years in Morocco (Bogaert 2015). By prioritizing metropolitan growth, along with tourism, real estate development, offshore activities, and mega projects in the northern urban centers, governmental strategies have increased the divide between town and country, between coastal cities and inland cities, and between different regions in Morocco. This trend can be traced back to the policies of the French Protectorate and the distinction between a "Maroc utile" (useful Morocco) and a "Maroc inutile" (useless Morocco). As Bogaert (2015) notes, this figurative image was called into existence by the first Resident-General of the French Protectorate, Hubert Lyautey:

> In order to extract the main wealth of Morocco, comprising mainly minerals such as phosphate and agricultural products, colonial planning anticipated the creation of entirely new urban areas (villes nouvelles) and the installment of industrial complexes (e.g. the port of Casablanca). In addition, the French developed road and railroad networks to improve the transportation of goods and create an "Atlantic axis" between Kenitra and Safi with Casablanca as economic centre. This part of Morocco is what Lyautey called le Maroc utile, which connected the newly developed coastal cities and the surrounding fertile Atlantic plains (Abu Lughod 1980). Maroc inutile represented those areas that were not of economic interest and actually resisted French colonialism until the "pacification" ended in the 1930s.

Whilst rural and mountainous areas have been systematically neglected by the colonial authorities and later by the Moroccan state, cities such as Safi and Agadir have seen their initial "useful" status decline as a result of structural adjustment since the 2000s. Neoliberal management and technological automatization have led to a massive reduction of the workforce, leading to a rise in unemployment affecting the younger generations especially.[2] This tendency was accompanied by a gradual and continuous retreat of public authorities from the provision of health, education, and cultural infrastructures (Boudarbat and Ajbilou 2009). The marginalization of economically less utilizable regions has led to an increase of "small town protests" (Bogaert 2015) in the last twenty years, often brutally repressed by the authorities.

These events manifest a growing dissent with the state, signaling a failure by King Mohammed VI to implement significant changes in state policy since the beginning of his reign in 1999. Living conditions have continued to deteriorate despite Morocco's increasing economic growth. The democratic transition process remains slow and cases of corruption and abuse in the field of human rights are regularly reported. On 20 February 2011, 150,000 to 200,000 Moroccans marched the streets demanding justice and democracy in the wake of the "Arab Spring" protests (Maghraoui 2013). However, this popular movement neither led to a regime change, nor did it fundamentally alter the relationship between the state and its citizens. The activists of the "February 20" democratic movement did not succeed in actively involving large parts of the working-classes and the rural and urban poor as a group, despite the fact that some of their demands coincided. Whereas Hamouchene (2019) denounces a lack of political consciousness in many of the working-class protesters, Bogaert (2015) suggests that it is actually capitalist uneven development that has encouraged and deepened such a binary relationship.

MUSICAL EXPRESSION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN MOROCCO

My research is informed by the current socio-economic and political situation in Morocco, and by the continuities which can be observed between colonial and neoliberal state policies and institutions. In the field of cultural politics, a number of recent contributions focus on music as an expression of "cultural identity" in relation to particular power configurations articulated locally and transnationally (Goodman 2005; Boum 2007). This includes a constant negotiation between independent cultural actors and the state which holds considerable power over the development of the cultural scene. Identity politics also surface in "hybridization processes" (Boum 2007) between "traditional" forms of musical expression and foreign music styles, including modern western and Middle Eastern popular music. Several important phases are highlighted in the evolution of these processes since the country's independence in 1956. The state's cultural agenda of the early postcolonial years clearly emphasized the Arabo-Islamic "roots" of the new nation, sidestepping ethnic and rural forms of cultural expression

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[2] Amongst other causes explaining this boom in youth unemployment, Boudarbat and Ajbilou (2009) mention a disproportional growth of youth population over the past thirty years, as well as an unequal education system.

(Goodman 2005). This early phase was followed by a "New Song" movement in the 1970s, combining vernacular elements with a modern western sound, and politically oriented lyrics (Simour 2016). Tradition was literally "re-invented" as part of the modernizing project in which the new singers were engaged, thus perpetuating "colonial stereotypes" about oral cultures (Goodman 2005). The repressive "Years of Lead" of Hassan II's regime in the 1980s led to the emergence of a largely "de-politicized" fusion music scene in the mid-1990s (Simour 2016). Stimulated by a booming "world music" market, musicians were experimenting further with formal hybridizations, celebrating "multiculturalist visions, coexistence, and tolerance."

King Mohammed VI's enthronement in 1999 marked the beginning of a re-orientation by the state of its nationalist agenda toward a "multicultural" national identity, promoted in state-funded media and music festivals (Boum 2007; Kapchan 2008). Because this new ideological construction only brought superficial improvements in the field of democratic rights and expression, music remains an important site of social contestation in contemporary Morocco. This manifests in rap music in particular (Almeida 2017), and in protest songs to a lesser extent (Granci 2015). Political content in the public sphere remains however highly monitored by the authorities, and cases of people arrested for criticizing the monarchy or stately institutions are frequent.[3] The effects of the continuous ideological re-invention of past traditions as part of contested identity politics were omnipresent in my attempts to engage with historical music recordings through listening sessions in Morocco.

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[3] Even though most reported cases concern journalists and activists, they also include musicians and people posting critical song lyrics. (https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/morocco-rapper-sentenced-2)

As a result, old songs were often reduced to signs of an idealized past, making it difficult to discuss them as actual music practices. In a sense, sonic pluralism responds to the superficiality of state multiculturalism by foregrounding alternate modes of sovereignty, as manifested through specific practices of listening and sounding.

COLLABORATIVE ARTISTIC RESEARCH

As a far-reaching methodological concept for the co-production and mediation of knowledge in anthropological and artistic research, "collaboration" has been key to my project since the beginning (Marcus 2006; Papastergiadis 2012). Each of the aural fields discussed in the chapters have emerged from observations, conversations, and experiments carried out with local artists, musicians, scientists, and other people. In most cases, these partnerships were based on an initial agreement to engage with specific places and situations, without knowing in advance what *exactly* would define the terms of our collaboration. We were obviously aware of each other's practice and interests, and sound was not always the starting point of our interactions. The subject matter was often defined by my collaborators' current focus: the archival research initiated by the Agadiri musician Ali Faiq on the French Speech Archives informed our exchanges on colonial sound epistemology, leading to additional sound experiments and recordings (Chapters I and III); Ramia Beladel's engagement as a performing artist with popular Sufism provided a starting point for our joint research on healing practices in the Jbala region (Chapter IV); Abdeljalil Saouli's art practice and experience with vernacular building techniques triggered our experiments in stone sounding (Chapter V); Younes Boundir's scientific observations on seaweed and pollution informed our collaboration on the western Atlantic coast (Chapter VI). By being responsive to my partners' needs and interests, and by aligning in part my own research to their projects, collaboration between us turned into a "co-creative" process of mutual learning (Ferguson et al. 2015; Alexandra 2017). Later on, some of these projects came to include more people through participatory modes of intervention, involving music and dance groups in Ait Milk and Tafraout, art communities in Marrakech and Moulay Bouchta, and a group of seaweed-harvesting women in Sidi Bouzid.

DIMENSIONS OF SONIC PLURALISM

Sonic pluralism recapitulates my attempts to think sound and aurality together with the terms of modernity and coloniality in Morocco. On the level of social agency, sonic pluralism amounts to a form of negotiation and mediation between opposing tendencies in society, and between conflicting knowledges. As a dimension of subjective formation and embodiment, sonic pluralism participates in individual and collective processes of self-formation and governance. Sonic pluralism is particularly indebted to Walter Mignolo's (2011) pedagogical principle of "border epistemology." If being appears irremediably entangled with the "colonial matrix of power and knowledge," the body offers a site from which it becomes possible to re-work the borders of these entanglements. Sonic pluralism is concerned with such processes and translates them into the aural domain. I also draw on the notion of "performativity," amply discussed in gender studies (Butler 1990) and in artistic research (Bolt 2016). The transformative power of sonic pluralism is expressed in people's "acts" of listening and sounding, aimed at questioning and shifting social conventions. The principles of agency, border epistemology, and performativity generally inform my interpretation of aural practices *as* sonic pluralism. In the following, I provide a number of examples from my case studies to support this interpretation. For the sake of clarity, I have grouped these examples according to four dimensions of sonic pluralism: aural mediation, self-governance, aural co-domestication, and aesthetics.

SONIC PLURALISM AS AURAL MEDIATION

The notion of "mediation" in sonic pluralism pertains to local modes of engagement with sound technology, as well as to processes of negotiation between different epistemologies of sound and listening. Early postcolonial anthropological studies of technology have already stressed how colonial subjects understood and "indigenized" foreign technologies in their own conceptual schema. Franz Fanon (1959) provides a remarkable example with his account on the use of the radio by the Algerian resistance during the war of independence. Radio as a foreign technology was culturally "digested" in connection with the national struggle, he notes, turned into a fighting instrument for the people and a protective organ against anxiety.

By recognizing a certain agency in local sound technological practices, recent contributions in African sound studies succeeded to deeply complicate earlier sound narratives on the continent. In his study on media technologies in Nigeria, Brian Larkin (2008) pays particular attention to "unintended consequences" and the "autonomous power" of technological objects themselves, which create technical and social potentials outside their sponsors' control. Domestication processes of technologies as objects that have meaning reveal new social agency, as well as the *limits* of that agency. Charles Hirschkind (2006) used a similar approach in his study of taped Islamic sermons in the popular quarters of Cairo in the 1990s. With the increasing popularity of such tapes, taped sermons have become more independent from the mosque performances that they reproduced. They constitute a new "signifying practice," one oriented to an emergent ethical and political community being forged by the Islamic Revival. These new forms of "ethical" listening feature in the formation of an aural "counter-history," which questions modernist formations of politics and religion and the ideologies that sustain and legitimate them. Overall, these accounts simultaneously confirm and contradict the western ideals of modern sound and listening: technologically mediated listening acquires social meaning in linear flows of information, *as much as* in technical noise, fragmentation, and inefficiency (Larkin 2008); audio media are consumed privately as part of neoliberal markets, whereas local understandings of "privacy" are deeply entangled with notions of collectivity and specific forms of associational life, community, and authority (Hirschkind 2006); the affective and sensory dimensions of listening pertain to secular rationalities, *as much as* to moral and religious sensibilities. All of these aspects informed my own research on sonic pluralism. Sonic pluralism, therefore, is not just about combining multiple sound epistemologies, but more fundamentally about creating socially relevant continuities between them.

In Chapter I, aural mediation is foregrounded in my study on itinerant rwais music, a poetic genre of oral expression characteristic of early modernity in Morocco. If rwais musicians had no or little control over technologies of sound reproduction in the early days of the music industry, examples show that they soon began to take advantage of the social and technological transformations brought by modernity under French occupation. I consider how man-machine relationships were consciously reflected in rwais songs, as part of wider changes taking place in Moroccan society in the early twentieth century. Through their particular social position as itinerant bards, the rwais often acted as mediators between various groups of populations and between various instances of knowledge and authority (Schuyler 1979). I discuss these aspects through the lens of sonic pluralism, arguing that rwais "sound" was characterized by social, moral, and epistemological mediation. If rwais expression appears in decline today, its spirit of mediation continues to animate local initiatives of cultural transmission. This interpretation is supported by my repeated exchanges with the Agadiri singer Ali Faiq about a set of rwais songs recorded for the French Speech Archives in the 1920s. By studying the archive through "close-listening" and by analyzing its metadata, Ali Faiq became progressively more familiar with French colonial sound epistemology. His engagement amounts to a form of sonic pluralism, where potentially oppressive knowledge is acquired in order to be critically re-purposed for different needs. By showing that a whole field of rwais expression existed outside of the music recording industry, Ali Faiq managed to regain agency in history making for his own community. Beyond a mere re-appropriation of cultural artifacts, sonic pluralism entails the re-appropriation of knowledge—in this case on sound recording, archival techniques, and historiography, as well as their circulation through cultural mediation.

In Chapter II, sonic pluralism surfaces in listening sessions with people in Tafraout, a Berber town visited in 1959 by Paul Bowles (1910-1999) in order to record a village music performance. Our conversations highlight a plurality of perspectives on the Bowles recordings, revealing colonial continuities in the celebration of past "Berber-Amazigh traditions" through revivalist tendencies.[4] If traditional music practice has lost in social significance on a local level, it offers a new visibility to Berber culture on the "world stage" (Goodman 2005). In the case of female musicians especially, transnational mobility provides them with increased social agency and financial autonomy. Whereas local "sound" essentially serves as a currency on the world music market, listening appears less likely to be commodified in the process. Our exchanges foregrounded the active role of the audience in local village music, whose presence is integral to the performance. Despite significant changes in society, listening plays an important part in the aural (and oral) transmission of locally significant symbolic representations, which mediate between people and virtual realms of being.

Chapter III examines the plurality of aural responses generated by the earthquake that destroyed the city of Agadir in 1960. I draw a comparison between the modes of *technocratic listening* mobilized by the scientific experts in charge of the city's reconstruction, and the *analogical* listening that surfaces in Ibn Ighil's poetic account of the disaster. Through the notion of "seismic risk" (Williford 2017), experts in Agadir attempted to anticipate *future* seismic vibrations through a mix of scientific and bureaucratic practices. For the local administration, this meant the possibility to expropriate people living in the city center and to seize their land in the name of the "public interest." The poet, on the other hand, relied on locally significant analogies in order to virtually re-enact the affect caused by destruction, facilitating thus an affective reconfiguration process by the listeners. These examples highlight opposing notions of sonic virtuality: a scientific one expressed in statistical risk prediction, and a performative one expressed in the poet's versifying practice. This brings me to a discussion of Steve Goodman's (2010) "unsound" as an expression of "future sound" and "sonic virtuality." While Goodman argues that unsound transcends the culturality of audition by relying on "universal" phenomena connecting material vibration to human affect, my examples suggest, on the contrary, that the virtual can be equally colonized by oppressive forces *and* reclaimed by postcolonial subjects. Overall, my study confirms some of Larkin's and Hirschkind's observations on the mediating function of sound technologies in (North) Africa. My examples also extend these observations to other modes of engagement with "modern," "material," and "virtual" sound, calling for a reconsideration of the terms that define technology in the first place. If I am less inclined to foreground the "autonomous power" of technological objects *themselves*, it is to better highlight people's agency in mediating between different notions of sound and technology.

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[4] The term "Berber" today in Morocco applies to Berberophone populations, who represent approximately 40 percent of the total inhabitants. This includes dialects spoken principally in the mountainous regions of the Rif and the Middle Atlas in the North and center, and the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas mountains, as well as the Souss Valley in the South. Berber populations generally define themselves through Indigeneity and language. The term "Amazigh" translates into "free men," and was progressively introduced by Berber nationalist leaders as an indigenous term of self-referral. They claimed also that the various Berber dialects had once constituted a single, pan-Maghrebi language called Tamazight (Goodman 2005).

SONIC PLURALISM AS AN EXPRESSION OF SELF-GOVERNANCE

Attending to people's daily activities during my research in Morocco gave me a sense of how central sound and listening are to local ways of knowing and being. Steven Feld's (2017) concept of "acoustemology" was particularly helpful for describing sonic knowledge surfacing in non-musical activities and in people's interactions with their environment. If cultural music studies often tend to produce abstract representations of music practices as "cultural texts" (Goodman 2005), acoustemology engages with sound and listening as a simultaneously social and material process, and as an "experiential nexus of sonic sensation" (Feld 2017). My own approach is an attempt to operate between sonic experience, knowledge, and representation, without losing sight of the vectors of power and difference that largely determine these borders. This brought me to consider sound in relationship with *embodiment*, an aspect addressed by a number of studies on sound and gender in Morocco. Alessandra Ciucci (2012) for instance describes the capacity of female *aiṭa* singers to convey a "multisensory experience of the countryside" through their voice. She identifies a tension between the representation of a normative, gendered identity ("to be a voice") and a means of personal, bodily, and sexualized expression ("to have a voice").

In Chapter IV, I discuss listening and embodiment in relation to popular Sufi healing practices. I draw on observations from my joint research with the artist Ramia Beladel during the *moussem* in Moulay Bouchta, an annual celebration of a local muslim saint. In popular Sufism, sound channels the healing power (*baraka*) of particular saints and spirits; music and prayers are therefore important components of trance rituals (*hadra*) and other healing practices. Devotional listening (*samaa*) is also a key aspect of liturgy in Sufi religious orders. Samaa listening and praise frequently lead to ecstatic states of worship, facilitating a spiritual journey through several states of consciousness (Kapchan 2016). People of all classes engage with Sufism in Morocco, often in parallel to other religious practices and biomedicine. Sufi healing expresses alternative conceptions of being and embodiment, and therefore also of aurality. Turning to traditional healing is a way to show dissatisfaction with state politics, especially amongst the poorer people (Amster 2013). Access to quality medical treatment is indeed difficult to reach in peripheral regions and costly; financial support from the state is scarce or non-existent. This is a source of frustration for people, and perceived as an instance of social injustice.

Sufi sound practices highlight an additional dimension of sonic pluralism pertaining to people's aspiration for social justice and "self-governance" (Luxon 2008). Drawing on Foucault (1977), Luxon describes self-governance as "a set of specific practices and tactics by which to supersede the disciplining effects of governmentality." Ethical self-governance and the independence it affords are attested through "the acts one undertakes and the speech-act (*l'énoncé*) with which one testifies to these publicly." Apart from speech, the body offers a site from which people can reclaim alternative modes of sovereignty associated with Sufism. Ramia Beladel's own involvement with healing practices offers another example of the female body as a site of contestation. As part of a new wave of "plural feminisms" in North Africa (Jay 2018), bodily practices extend the repertoire of protest to "personal revolutions" or "microrebellions" (Salime 2014). Unlike older feminist forms of action, these micro revolutions are more in concert with "neoliberal subjectivities and entrepreneurial forms of self-promotion, self-reliance, and self-governance." Ramia Beladel's performative art practice mirrors such tendencies; she engaged with Sufism in order to become her *own* healer, according to the principle of "self-reliance" evoked by Salime. These observations resulted in a discussion of the notion of the "sound body," elaborated by Deborah Kapchan (2015) from the model provided by Sufi spiritual practice. By defining the "sound body" as a supposedly "unmarked" body, "free of the dichotomies of modern subjectivity," and made of pure "vibrant materiality," Kapchan arguably sidesteps differences between "fully human," privileged bodies, and stigmatized postcolonial bodies. By contrast, my exchanges with Ramia Beladel highlight a plural sound body, continuously re-entangled in the materiality of being and coloniality, glorious and vulnerable in its struggle for sovereignty.

SONIC PLURALISM AS AURAL CO-DOMESTICATION

The last two chapters of the book engage with sound and listening through an examination of human-environmental interactions. Given the lack of contributions in North African environmental sound studies, my approach was initially grounded in western literature on "soundscapes" (Schafer 1977; Thompson 2013; Helmreich 2016; Ingold 2007); "acoustic territories" (LaBelle 2010); "acoustic ecology" (Wrightson 2000; Krause 2012); "natural radio" (Kahn 2013); and "eco-oriented" sound art (Oliveros 2005; Carlyle 2007; Cusack 2013). Since the 2000s, discourses on sound ecology increasingly refer to debates on the effects of anthropogenic activities on climate change and biodiversity, aka "the Anthropocene" (Davis and Turpin 2015). As many authors argue, the devastation that characterizes the Anthropocene derives from a particular nexus of epistemic, technological, social, political, and economic entanglements with capitalism (Latour 2004; Morton 2009; Haraway 2016). As a mode of accumulation based on the brutal exploitation of natural resources, Hamouchene (2019) similarly sees the cause of environmental damage and social injustice in extractivism. In Morocco, he notes, contemporary extractivism relies on activities which overexploit land, water, minerals, and biodiversity, such as agribusiness, intensive forestry, industrial fish farming, and mass tourism. It is facilitated by "a society with limited democratic rights" and operationalized via neoliberal plans promoting private investment.

Researching environmental sound provided a fertile ground for deeper engagement with the modes of binary thinking constitutive of modern western subjectivity. Based on dichotomies such as nature vs culture, body vs mind, private vs public space, etc., binary thinking does not only seem increasingly limited for apprehending and representing certain realities. It also appears hegemonic, in its effects both on the environment and on a large part of the world's human population, indeed as an ideological cause of the Anthropocene. In Chapter V, I describe my collaboration with the artist Abdeljalil Saouli in northern Morocco. Our experiments in stone sounding provided a concrete starting point for a reflection on the "nature" of stone, and of sound. Saouli recognizes a particular *affect* in stones, which extends to their sound as a distinct category of "stonesound." In Saouli's practice, listening and sounding are primarily a modality of entering into a functional

and affective relationship with the world. This amounts to a conscious form of sonic pluralism, supported by different epistemologies of sound, matter, and embodiment, including Islamic scholarship, western science, and local knowledge. I refer to this experience in terms of "aural co-domestication," a notion inspired by recent animal studies (Anderson 2018) and ethnobotanical studies (Delplancke and Aumeeruddy-Thomas 2017; Stépanoff and Vigne 2018). Anthropocentric models of domestication become increasingly contested and new models describe humans not only as agents, but also as *objects* of domestication. Consequently, domestication entails "co-domestication" as a bi- or multilateral process, in the sense that it never grants total control by one side over the other side (Anderson 2018). As another dimension of sonic pluralism, aural co-domestication pertains to a local history of interaction between people and their environment. Listening mirrors locally significant dichotomies: the wild and the domestic, the rural and the urban, the local and the foreign, etc. (Delplancke and Aumeeruddy-Thomas 2017). These distinctions, however, can be relative in reality; the "variable" and "hybrid" status of things rather tends to reinforce continuities between these dichotomies. Aural co-domestication therefore entails the possibility of extra-human agencies, which mediate between people and their own representations.

Because they invoke "deep" geological timescales, meta-narratives on the Anthropocene frequently remain abstract and speculative. Researching in Morocco's peripheral regions gave me a better sense of the reality of inhabitants who not only suffer from industrial pollution, but also bear the social costs of an economy based on exploitative labor. This was particularly the case in the Safi area on the Western Atlantic coast, a region known for its fish and phosphate industries, plagued simultaneously by pollution, exploitative labour, high unemployment, and socio-economic marginalization (Chapter VI). Because most of these phenomena are silent, mute or inaudible, environmental sound could not be reduced to what was directly perceivable through hearing and recording. Different sound concepts and practices were therefore needed in order to attend to the affective, material, social, and technocratic dimensions of the local ecology. Pauline Oliveros's (2005) notion of "deep listening" and Dominic Pettman's (2017) "intimate listening" were useful for "attuning" to marine ecosystems and to the effects of industrial pollution. I also refer to Pettman's concept of "ecological voice" in order to describe human-environmental interactions and cultural representations of the sea.

Like the postcolonial body, the natural field appears fragmented and contested by competing ideologies. As an expression of sonic pluralism, the local "voice of the sea" foregrounds processes of negotiation between symbolic and technocratic space. The status of marine life varies according to the circumstances of the interactions between people and their environment. My study on red seaweed in El Jadida illustrates this aspect. Red seaweed is known locally as a domestic grass (*r'bia*) used in medical preparations; as a natural "species" (*gelidium*) whose exploitation is regulated by administrative quotas; and as *agar*, a gelling product used in the food and pharmaceutical industry. Collecting seaweed represents an important source of revenue for poorer people in Sidi Bouzid who often work without a license. At the same time, red seaweed populations are themselves endangered by this industry and by the massive pollution caused by phosphate plants along the coast. If people bear the social and environmental cost of extractivism, they also rely on marine life for subsisting. In order to find a proper ground for a meaningful relationship with the environment, solutions need to be found locally. Protest actions in the town of Imider have opened up new ways in this direction, by drawing on a local indigenous model of decentralized decision-making, incorporating principles of radical democracy, ecology, and gender equality (Bogaert 2016). Orality, as much as aurality, is a significant dimension of the Imider model of self-governance. This model expresses a form of sonic pluralism, offering new perspectives for initiatives concerned simultaneously with social *and* environmental justice.

SONIC PLURALISM AS AESTHETICS

On the level of aesthetics, sonic pluralism in my study primarily relates to the artistic strategies and aesthetic conventions mobilized during the research process. This includes my own practice and position as a sound artist, as well as interventions developed in collaboration with other people in Morocco. The collaborative principle was established as part of the project methodology from the very beginning, in order to enable a pluralist perspective on sound and aurality. Sonic pluralism therefore appears as a dimension of the "transcultural" learning process between the research participants, in which differences in position were "made visible and negotiated" (Suhr and Willerslev 2013). This process importantly relied on a practical engagement with sound and listening—a number of joint interventions to which we could refer afterwards in our conversations. Different kinds of art practice have informed these exchanges over the years, including listening sessions, sound and video documentation, composing and editing, site-specific experiments, workshops, commissions, as well as public performances, talks, and exhibitions.

This approach was motivated initially by my critical engagement with Paul Bowles's 1959 music recording project in Morocco (see Chapter II). Bowles's unconventional approach to ethnographic recording mirrored his own sensibility as an American writer and composer. He found in the tape-recorder a new medium of aesthetic expression with the possibility of shaping sound in order to produce certain *effects* upon the listeners. Bowles's sonic pluralism is expressed in his attempts to shift the conventions of academic western music, by serving as a mediator between "serious," "popular," and "folk" music. Moroccan music for Bowles was a privileged site of emotional engagement with what he believed were local manifestations of premodern minds: "primitive" cultures, folk music and trance rituals, exoticism, drugs, illiteracy, and sometimes mere poverty. Sonic experience was a part of Bowles's intellectual and spiritual "redrawing," in reaction to the white-patriarchal model of Protestant conservatism still prevalent in the US after WWII (Chandarlapaty 2015). These practices appear ambivalent today, because Bowles often retained the patriarchal attitude of salvage anthropology. Musicians were forced by the local authorities to come and perform and they didn't know that they were being recorded. Only Paul Bowles is known today, while the musicians have been forgotten, along with their names and biographies (see Chapter II). From an aesthetic perspective, Bowles shared a sensitivity for *material sound* with experimental composers like John Cage, which circulated in the avant-garde music scene. As Marie Thompson (2017) suggests, western experimental aesthetics are inherited from the modernist paradigm of traceless scientific observation, which recapitulates the "self-invisibilization" of the white, masculine, and Eurocentric standpoint. As it sustains its own privileges, "white aurality" does not only amplify its views on material sound and listening, but also marginalizes other voices, practices, and histories.

The various "erasure effects" observed in Paul Bowles's recording practices have nourished my own reflection on sound-based research practice. New approaches were required to circumvent the limitations of conventional documentary aesthetics. In order to reveal their agentive and transformative potential, local ways of listening and sounding needed to be presented as iterative and performative processes. Because performativity involves not only the representation but arguably also "the constitution or production of realities" (Lundström 2008), filming and recording became part of an exchange process between the project participants. Meaning emerged in this movement through the combination of multiple perspectives carrying specific ways of generating knowledge. This principle informs a plural sound aesthetics in my project, characterized by non-linearity, fragmentation, polyphony, and narrative inconclusiveness. This aesthetics informs the content of the artworks produced collaboratively, as much as the principles that structure these works. Form and content are thus conceptually related through the notion of pluralism. Knowledge is not presented through a linear narration but as a plural field, mapping the capacities afforded by particular historical positions. This brings me to reflect upon my own position as a European male sound artist and researcher in Morocco (see Chapters III and V in particular). The exchanges with my local collaborators were crucial for unpacking the culturality of my own listening and for attending to the blind spots of white aurality. While some of the sound concepts identified in these exchanges remained "opaque" and somehow inaccessible to me, their local significance informs a pluralist perspective on aurality and ecology. Sonic pluralism, ultimately, is the expression of a temporary "community of practice" (Wenger 1999), framed by a set of common social, environmental, and aesthetic concerns. Unlike Bowles's engagement, ours was not (primarily) geared toward the *individual* redrawing of the participants. It tended much more to become a *collective* redrawing that left each participant transformed.

ACCOMPANYING AUDIO AND VIDEO ESSAYS

Together, the six chapters trace a larger constellation of aural fields intersecting each other culturally, epistemologically, historically, and, to a lesser extent, geographically. Each chapter provides a link to a corresponding audio or video essay accessible online, save for the first chapter: *And who sees the mystery* (Chapter II) presents collective listening sessions and

sound experiments in Tafraout based on music recordings made by Paul Bowles in 1959; *Salam Godzilla* (Chapter III) is a tentative reconstitution of the 1960 Agadir Earthquake on a sound-conceptual level; *A wasted breath inside a balloon* (Chapter IV) is a sonic restitution of a performance by Ramia Beladel, borrowing elements from popular Sufism; *STONESOUND* (Chapter V) documents a series of experiments in stone sounding with Abdeljalil Saouli in Moulay Bouchta; *Atlantic Ragagar* (Chapter VI) emerged from a collective attempt to "listen" to seaweed and pollution on the Atlantic coast. These works do not simply document or illustrate my research. Rather, they are the outcome of an aesthetic "theory-practice" (Lundström 2008) based on performative and interventionist strategies. Subject matter was not *chosen*, but *produced* in the works as part of an open research process, often preceding my analysis. As a result, these audio and visual essays further complicate—and at times may even contradict—my written interpretations in this book. The interplay between these elements may reveal yet other dimensions of sonic pluralism, providing a starting point for future conversations in sound studies and sound art.

I.

BETWEEN COLONIAL AND ETHICAL NOISE

The French Speech Archives, rwais sound, and aural mediation

> O flower of the desert! Where is your shelter when the heat gets intense?
> O flower! Give my regards to the one tattooed with henna and tell her I'm in love with her!
> O hunter! You haven't set the goats free yet, please don't kill them!
> O traveler! Don't come back with counterfeit money, rather bring gemstones!
> O hunter in the forest! Can I accompany you to go in peace?
> O hunter! If you find a doe with her fawn, please don't kill her!
> O flower of the desert!
> – Song by raissa Abouche Tamassit,
> Pathé recording, 1920s[1]

These lyrics stem from a song by *raissa*[2] Abouche Tamassit, a female singer from Tiznit in southwestern Morocco. Recorded by the French record company Pathé in the 1920s, the song was presented to me by the Agadiri singer Ali Faiq while I visited him in 2017. The song provides a possible introduction to some of the topics that have preoccupied me during my sound research in Morocco: the struggle of local populations for subsistence under the oppressive effects of French colonial occupation (flower of the desert); the economic transformation and modernization of a rural society (*counterfeit money*); and a local sense of interconnectedness with environmental life (please don't kill her!), which today we might call "ecological consciousness." To Ali Faiq, however, the recorded song was significant for yet additional reasons. He retrieved it online from the "Pathé collection of Arab and Oriental 78 rpm recordings," made accessible in digital form by the French National Library (BNF) in 2013.

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[1] Translation from Berber-Tashlhit language into French by Ali Faiq, further translated into English by Laura Lot.

[2] The music recordings discussed in this chapter relate to *rwais* oral expression (masculine singular *rais*; female *raissa*), a term designating professional, itinerant musicians from the Berber-Tashlhit speaking area of southwestern Morocco (Souss). The term *Tashlhit* designates the Berber dialect spoken in the Souss region, *Ishlhin* its inhabitants. Both terms are etymologically related (Schuyler 1979).

Containing rare non-commercial recordings captured by Pathé for the French Speech Archives between 1911 and 1930, the collection is described in an article by Hinda Ouijjani (2013). The paper was brought to the attention of Ali Faiq who was able to identify a number of rwais songs in the collection previously unknown to most music experts in his community. As a musician and as a local cultural agent committed to the perpetuation of rwais expression in the Souss-Massa region Ali Faiq went on researching deeper into these recordings, sharing the songs with peer musicians and releasing a CD containing new interpretations in 2016. The tracks featuring Abouche Tamassit are an important discovery, Ali Faiq declared, because only male artists were remembered so far as part of the early rwais history.[3] These recordings also show that Abouche Tamassit was not just an excellent singer but also a very good string instrument *(lotar)* player, which is unusual for a raissa, even by today's standards. Ali Faiq thus recognizes in Abouche Tamassit someone who dared to affirm herself as a female artist within a conservative society. Finally, the Pathé recordings matter to Ali Faiq because they preceded by a few years the records commercialized in 1929 by the Gramophone company, so far considered to be the oldest existing rwais music recordings.

To my knowledge, Ali Faiq's project is a unique case of music re-appropriation from digitized colonial sound archives in Morocco—also because online access to such archives is a recent phenomenon. As I will elaborate in more detail, his self-initiated archival research allowed him to re-introduce these songs to his community and to propose a new narrative of early rwais sound history. By studying the archive through "close

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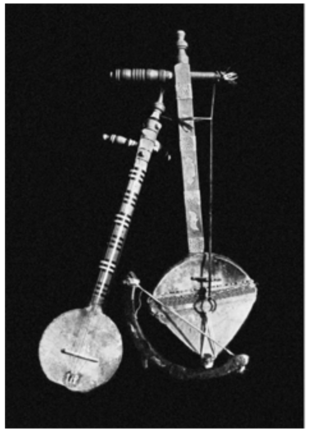
[3] Ali Faiq's statements in this chapter are transcribed from my personal communication with him between October 2013 and March 2019 at his home in Ait Milk near Agadir.

Raissa Abouche Tamassit, circa 1925.

listening" (Hoffmann 2015) and analyzing its metadata, Ali Faiq became progressively more familiar with French colonial sound epistemology. This allows me to discuss his practice in terms of sonic pluralism, where potentially oppressive knowledge is acquired in order to be critically re-purposed for different ends. Beyond a mere re-appropriation of cultural artifacts, sonic pluralism entails a re-appropriation of knowledge—in this case on sound archival techniques, historiography, as well as circulation of this knowledge through cultural mediation. Drawing on these observations, I further embark on a re-examination of the history of sound technologies in Morocco and North Africa, aware of the fact that this history is often reduced to "a story of Western influence" (Steingo and Sykes 2019). If local musicians had no or little control over technologies of sound reproduction in the beginning, examples show that rwais musicians soon began to take advantage of the social and technological transformations brought by modernity under French occupation, albeit within certain limits. I consider how man-machine relationships were consciously reflected in rwais songs, as part of wider changes ongoing in Moroccan society in the early twentieth century. Through their particular social position as itinerant bards, the rwais often acted as mediators between various groups of populations, and between various instances of knowledge and authority. I discuss these aspects through the lens of sonic pluralism, arguing that rwais *sound* was characterized by social and epistemological mediation, collective authorship, and by a particularly situated *ethical noise*. I consider how such a history is necessarily framed by the promises and anxieties brought by modernization and colonialism, offering thus a different account of sonic modernity in Morocco.

RWAIS EXPRESSION IN SOUTHWESTERN MOROCCO

Rwais itinerant musicians live in the Berber-Tashlhit speaking area of southwestern Morocco, a territory which is part of today's administrative region of Souss-Massa. Dominated by the Anti-Atlas mountains, the region faces the Atlantic coast. Its capital is Agadir. Rwais musicians' use of the *rebab*, a monochord fiddle of West African origin, and the *lotar*, a four-stringed lute guitar of Arab origin, distinguishes their music from other genres in Morocco (Schuyler 1979). The musicians usually perform alone or in small groups, and continuous moving has always been essential to their art. The rwais share a common language with village music from the same region (*ahwash*), as well as basic elements of melodic and rhythmic organization. Because of their mobility, the rwais are not just professional musicians but "journalists, historians, and moralists," Schuyler suggests, or at least they were having such a function until the emergence of electronic media reaching into the villages, in particular the radio. Noting the decline of rwais expression following socio-economic transformations in 1979, Schuyler even predicted their disappearance. Although one can still occasionally spot a rais musician playing on the streets of Agadir or Tafraout today, most remaining professionals are indeed aging without younger ones to continue the tradition. Rwais music nevertheless still exists as a genre of commercial music produced locally and marketed to a regional audience, as well as to members of the Tashlhit speaking diaspora in Morocco and abroad.


Lotar and rebab instruments.

ALI FAIQ AND RWAIS CONVENTIONS

Born in 1965, Ali Faiq grew up in Dcheira, a densely populated town situated 10 kilometers south of Agadir. He started his career as a professional singer and songwriter in the late 1980s with the band Dounia Amarg. Over the years, he became an important voice of the Berber-Ishlhin popular music scene in Morocco, releasing several albums with the band Amarg Fusion and later under his own name. Using Berber-Tashlhit language consistently in all of his songs, Ali Faiq's music can be best described as "fusion" (Simour 2016). It combines local elements, such as melodies, rhythms, and instruments, with diverse music styles (mainly reggae, funk, and jazz). Although not a professional rais himself, Ali Faiq has been exposed to this art since his childhood and started attending rwais music meetings in the early 2000s. Initially, the older rwais received him with a certain skepticism because of his activities as a pop musician, Ali Faiq recalls. He managed to gain their trust over the years, however, and started singing with them. He progressively became an active promoter of rwais expression and was involved in initiatives for the perpetuation and transmission of its oral repertory and history.

I was first introduced to Ali Faiq in June 2013 during the *Timitar* Music Festival in Agadir and visited him later in October at his family home in Ait Milk. He was organizing a rwais music convention for the first time (*assise des rwais* in French, *igiwr* in Tashlhit). Unlike concerts, rwais conventions are dedicated to the exchange of musical ideas, songs, and melodies between rwais peer practitioners—professionals as well as advanced amateurs. In the intimate atmosphere of Ali Faiq's home, a dozen of (exclusively male) musicians came together on that night and played for several hours, alternating between individually sung verses, collective choruses, and instrumental parts.

Later on, Ali Faiq showed me his collection of early and rare rwais recordings, including digital copies of 78 rpm records published in the 1930s by labels such as Baidaphone and Gramophone. As part of our listening session and interview, he played one track from the 1920s Pathé recordings, which he had recently retrieved from the French National Library (BNF) Gallica website. We resumed our exchange in 2017, following the publication of his CD *Isktitn* (commemoration) with new interpretations of the Pathé songs. Apart from my interest and admiration for Ali Faiq's work as a musician in general, I came to realize that his research activities on historical recordings and archives were relevant to my own study in Morocco. Several questions emerged: how did Ali Faiq listen to and interpret the recordings from the digitized 1920s Pathé collection? What were the consequences for the status of these colonial sound archives? What were the consequences for rwais history from his perspective? And, importantly, how could this research become a starting point for reconsidering the entangled relationships between early commercial recording, sound technology, colonial sound epistemology, and Berber vernacular modernity? Addressing these questions through joint listening sessions and conversations highlighted Ali Faiq's critical engagement with diverse—and at times conflicting—sound epistemologies. Before engaging further with these questions, it is necessary to consider the beginning of the music industry in Morocco and its relation to the colonial epistemology at the origin of the French Speech Archives.

EARLY COMMERCIAL RECORDINGS IN NORTH AFRICA

Commercial music recordings were introduced in North Africa at the very beginning of the twentieth century. As early as 1902, the French record company Pathé published "a special list of Egyptian cylinders" (Gronow 1981), and recordings for the British Gramophone Company soon followed. In 1912, Morocco became a French protectorate, in agreement with other European powers as part of the Treaty of Fez. In the same year, Pathé published a repertory of several hundred North-African recordings, and special catalogues were issued for Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Record companies were primarily targeting the European populations living in North Africa during the years of French, Spanish, British, and Italian occupation in the region (Ouijjani 2013). The music records market also included privileged "indigenous" customers, as the bilingual French/Arabic catalogues of Moroccan music attest.

Along with the emergence of a record-consuming audience, the recorded music market also created the new category of "recording artists." Whereas most of them were recruited for the foreign record companies by local agents amongst the locally successful musicians, the technical constraints of early recording devices also played a role in the process. The final choice of artists was made by western engineers sent on recording tours around the world, who had little understanding of the local music expressions they were encountering. In order to make commercially satisfying records, they thus favored the most "phonogenic" artists, that is the ones who had the best dispositions for producing successful recordings. For singers, this meant most of all having a voice strong enough to be captured by the low-sensitive diaphragms of the recording apparatus. Musicians also needed to quickly adapt to the specific technical, spatial, and temporal recording conditions, including shortening the songs to appropriate record durations, performing without an audience and without moving, and directing the other musicians in order to find the best configuration for group recordings in front of the phonograph horn.

In his book *The Audible Past*, Jonathan Sterne (2003) extensively comments on the cultural origins of sound reproduction technologies, arguing that instead of being reproduced, sound was rather produced anew with these technologies. Deconstructing the relation between original and copy, he contends that early sound recording was fundamentally about producing a particular kind of listening experience, in line with the emergence of a bourgeois middle class form of listening. It was not until the 1960s that a similar middle class population slowly emerged in Morocco, following the country's independence and growing urbanization (Boufous and Khariss 2015). While only European residents and the Moroccan bourgeoisie could afford music records and players during the colonial era, people from lower classes came into contact with recorded music through spaces of socialization, such as weddings, celebrations, and cafés in particular (Ouijjani 2013). This led to a progressive transformation of the listeners' musical taste, privileging particular urban popular music genres, frequently modeled after successful Egyptian productions. Consequently, the practice and economy of local musicians was affected, both in terms of style and performing opportunities, as they were now competing with cheaper music playing machines.

The introduction of modern sound reproduction in Morocco led to a redistribution of authority and vulnerability amongst music makers, listeners, and other cultural actors, fostering creative new approaches in some cases, while silencing certain practices in others. In most accounts on the early music industry in the Global South, however, sonic modernity is often reduced to a history of the impact of successive waves of western technological innovations on local practices, and the ways these practices had to adapt to the changes induced by technology in order to survive. As a result, we are left with the impression that sonic modernity has remained relatively unquestioned as a locally situated phenomenon in North Africa, and that it was de-facto assimilated together with the technology that embodied it. According to Emily Thompson (2013), the "modern sound" episteme emerged out of the "increasing technological mediation" of sound in the "machine age." This included both the control of the behavior of sound in space through engineering techniques and the modelization of sound as an abstraction through scientific measuring techniques, exemplified later in the electric sound signal. These technological innovations were accompanied by socio-economic transformations of the ways people interacted with sound, which were increasingly defined by "acts of consumption." Modern sound was thus importantly also a "commodity," generating in turn new trends in the culture of listening. According to Thompson's narrative, sonic modernity cannot be reduced to a set of modern sound technological innovations alone, and should be approached as a social phenomenon constantly under construction—a soundscape, ultimately dictating who gets to hear what at which point in history.

The means of technological sound production undoubtedly remained in the hands of European and American companies at least until the independence of the North African countries in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Sonic modernity in the region, however, can be traced back to even before the advent of such technologies at the end of the nineteenth century. The progressive transition of Morocco to a market economy and its increasing exchanges with European countries led to social transformations. The population in cities increased and a new bourgeoisie emerged, benefiting from operations in international trade and the finance sector. While slow and relatively modest in scale, these changes certainly affected the overall soundscapes of cities and the ways people were listening to them. More generally, the perceived experience of social, spatial, and temporal change arguably led to the emergence of early forms of modern subjectivity in Morocco, albeit very unevenly, and despite the resistance to modernization on the part of the country's successive rulers before French occupation.

Fahmy (2013) proposes possible directions for a sonic approach to early modern history in the Middle East, suggesting that information about sound, noise, and aurality could be retrieved from sharia cases, civil courts, and police records of the nineteenth century. Additional elements for the reconstruction of past soundscapes may be found in the material-architectural study of mosques and churches, as well as in written accounts of the transformations of urban space. While these ideas may certainly apply to Morocco as well, a detailed reconstruction of Morocco's pre-protectorate soundscape lays beyond the scope of my study. What I want to suggest here is the possibility and necessity to look beyond western technology in order to consider how sound and listening became "modern" in North Africa. Sound technological reproduction and transmission is only one aspect of a larger constellation, including nascent capitalism, urban growth, industrialization, increasing mobility, the emergence of new social classes, evolving religious practices, and European colonization.

THE FRENCH SPEECH ARCHIVES AND THE COLONIAL BECOMING OF SOUND RECORDING

Initiated in 1911 by philologist Ferdinand Brunot, the French Speech Archives (Archives de la Parole) are exemplary of how modern sound technology led to the domestication of speech and music as scientific objects and commodities at the same time. Dedicated to "the recording, the preservation, and the study of all the manifestations of speech" (Cordereix 2014), the French Speech Archives emerged from the fields of Roman philology and experimental phonetics. In response to the "supremacy of written language," Brunot believed that technologies of sound reproduction could provide an appropriate way to inscribe and transmit the specificity of the speech act, preserving thus its "absolute integrity." Central to the objectification of speech was its materialization as a physical medium via recording equipment. This equipment was provided by Emile Pathé, owner of the commercial Pathé Records company and manufacturer of phonographs. Unlike the music recording industry, linguistic and phonetic sciences were very much interested in the scientific measurement of voices, which was then only possible through additional techniques of sound visualization involving photographic processes. As Cordereix (2014) suggests, a dialectic emerged between the sonic inscription and the visual representation of speech, which was about "seeing what one hears and hearing what one sees." Visual metaphors were indeed abundant in Brunot's inaugural speech of the Archives in 1911, in which he compared them to a "microscope of speech," allowing one to "observe the infinitely small." Rather than actually listening to the recorded voices themselves, and in turn being affected by them, scientists like Brunot were more interested in a kind of biological observation of speech, as his constant references to natural sciences and evolutionist theses attest.

Between 1911 and 1920, the Speech Archives grew to contain several hundred sound recordings, organized into categories such as famous personalities, regional dialects, and foreign languages. During the 1920s and 1930s, new folk music recordings were added under the direction of Hubert Pernot, including 620 records of "Arab and Oriental music" donated by Pathé.[4] While the exact dates and recording circumstances of the discs remain unclear, the collection also contains three printed catalogues of the Moroccan recordings edited by Pathé in 1912, 1926, and 1930. The front cover is decorated with "arabesque" patterns and red watermarks, along with the Pathé logo representing a (French) rooster. No information about the artists is provided, but the first four pages of the bilingual (French-Arabic) catalogue contain seven photographs representing some of them.

As the online notes suggest, Pathé's donation of this collection to the French Speech Archives "perpetuated the historical links" between the company and the research institution. It also maintained an epistemological connection between industry and science, as well as practices of objectification and commodification of voices and identities based on a mix of technology and colonial ideology. In 1931, an employee of the French Speech Archives, Philippe Stern, supervised the *Music Anthology of the Colonial Exhibition* in Paris (Cordereix 2006). Together with his assistant Mady Humbert-Lavergne, Stern managed to record 346 documents, described by Cordereix as a (sonic) topography of the *Colonial Exhibition* and its pavilions. None of them, however, were directly recorded inside the human zoo-like exhibition, as planned initially, but in the studios of the phonetic institute at Sorbonne University. The "Asian" songs of the *Anthology* were performed by professional musicians "hosted" for the exhibition, while the "Northern and Western African" parts were performed by colonial soldiers of the French armies stationed nearby.

Pernot described the *Music Anthology of the Colonial Exhibition* as "a scientific work" and at the same time as "an extensive work of French propaganda, in its best sense" (Cordereix 2006). With the *Anthology*, the racist ideology underlying the *Colonial Exhibition* project was implemented at the core of the scientific recording methodology supported by the French Speech Archives. In this manner, sound, materialized as recording, became an instrument of colonial propaganda, part of a general movement of objectification, aestheticization, and spectacularization of the colonized "Other." In the *Colonial Exhibition*, the classificatory logic of the Pathé catalogues was transposed into an architectural configuration of pavilions representing the countries colonized by France. The various forms of individual and collective musical expression became naturalized as "indigenous cultures" through the recordings. Geographical locations in the catalogues now found their counterparts in the dehumanized bodies presented in the exhibition. Despite the fact that the Pathé record company and the French Speech Archives were initially distinct projects, the study of their "historical links" tends to demonstrate how sound technology became central to the conceptualization of *modern sound* as an equally commercial *and* scientific product. While sound first became "modern" because it was "perceived to demonstrate man's technical mastery over his physical environment" (Thompson 2013), sound also became an instrument of European colonial mastery over its cultural Other during the first third of the twentieth century.

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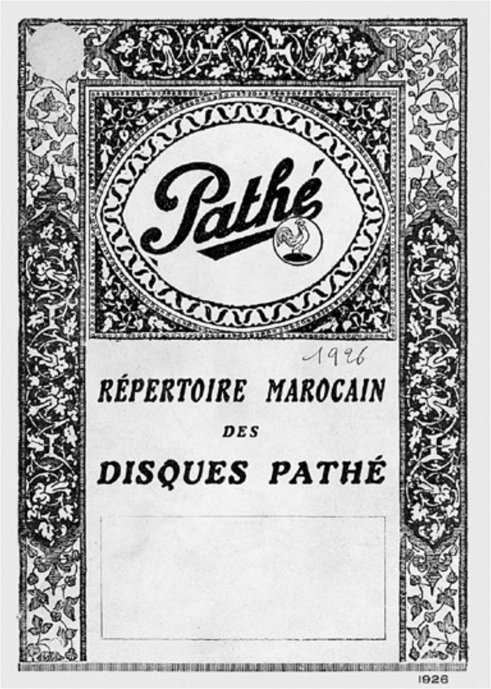
[4] The 1926 catalogue contains a list with the names of forty-two artists associated with seven Moroccan cities (Casablanca, Rabat, Fez, Marrakesh, Mogador [Essaouira], Tanger, and Tétouan), for a total of 494 tracks. Information retrieved from https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb42535309c

Top: Cover of the 1926 Pathé Catalogue of Moroccan Records.
Bottom: Page 3 of the same catalogue.

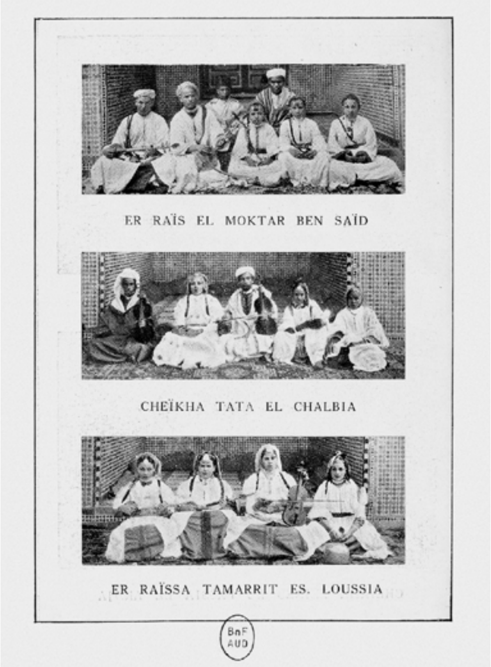


Pathé

1926

RÉPERTOIRE MAROCAIN
DES
DISQUES PATHÉ

1926



ER RAÏS EL MOKTAR BEN SAÏD

CHEÏKHA TATA EL CHALBIA

ER RAÏSSA TAMARRIT ES. LOUSSIA

BnF AUD

LISTENING TO DIGITIZED COLONIAL SOUND ARCHIVES TODAY

The entire recording collection of the French Speech Archives was later transferred to the newly created French National Sound Library (Phonothèque Nationale) in 1938. While stored and physically preserved in good conditions, their fragility made them accessible only by special permission until their digitization and online publication on the Gallica website in 2013. Such limited accessibility was often the result of colonial politics applied to practices of collecting and archiving. As Hoffmann (2015) suggests, the existence of a large amount of early phonographic records made in Africa, and kept in European sound archives, was rarely known to African researchers and their communities of origin. With the newly accessible digital archives, the nature of the information retrievable online remains conditioned by the preceding material "disaggregation" of the physical recording medium into digital audio files and a series of images (record, cylinder, labels). The digital fragmentation of the sounding object is just one of the "figuring effects" of the archive over time, Hoffmann argues. She further describes these effects as

> the result of the imbrication of practices and politics of preservation and omission, logics of inclusion and exclusion, of labeling and registration, which speak of the technologies and interests at play, of configurations of power, societal and/or scientific aims of preservation, of retaining, storing, creating knowledge and freezing, of rules of evidence, all of which constitute particular records (and not others).

From a scientific perspective, listening to digital sound archives entails tracing back the successive steps that led to their constitution. Importantly, digital archives also do not allow one to listen to the past directly, but to acoustic archives and historical sound files. Hoffmann further identifies possible approaches to such listening, to which I refer here in an attempt to describe Ali Faiq's own way of engaging with the digital recordings of the Pathé collection.

ALI FAIQ'S CLOSE LISTENING TO THE PATHÉ RECORDINGS

The research undertaken by Ali Faiq on the Pathé Moroccan recordings pertains to a handful of rwais musicians.[5] His engagement with the recordings emerged out of his general interest to discover "hidden" or lesser-known rwais songs, and to share them with Tashlhit speaking listeners. I am always searching, he explains, because preserving heritage involves looking for hidden parts of it. If I perform a very well-known song to an audience, Ali Faiq adds, I'm not contributing anything new, but if I sing something unknown, then there is added value to my performance. Collecting "hidden heritage" by digging into old recordings and gathering songs directly from older rwais thus became part of Ali Faiq's practice in cultural preservation. When the rwais recordings of the Pathé collection were made accessible online, he soon recognized in them a "treasure."

Between February 2018 and April 2019, Ali Faiq and I sat together on several occasions in front of the Gallica website on his computer, as I was curious to learn more about his way of listening to the Pathé recordings, and about how he made sense of them. Some of these sessions were video documented, with one short excerpt featuring in my film *Salam Godzilla* (see Chapter III). This setting provided a more formal context from which he could be heard and seen talking to me about these recordings, and indirectly to a larger, presumedly western, audience. Next to a button for the playback of the audio file (without download function), each page on the Gallica website contains a scanned image of the original record label and notes about the recording.[6] In the beginning of the interview, Ali Faiq declares that the people at the French National Library really liked the *Isktitn* CD that resulted from his project. He mentions that the CD contains a written reference to the library and that permission was requested (and granted) beforehand for using five of the songs in the publication. He argues that his project played a direct role in the local promotion of the French institution, making listeners in the region aware of its existence, together with the Pathé recordings.

DISQUE
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238
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Abouche Tammassit

Label of a Pathé record from the French Speech Archives, Paris, 1920s.

Regarding the notes on the recordings in the collection, Ali Faiq observes that most song titles and artist names are spelled incorrectly in their Roman notation. For this reason, he decided to rename some of the songs in a way that seemed more appropriate when presenting them to a Tashlhit speaking audience. The categorization of the songs as "foreign traditional music" does not trigger any comment by Ali Faiq. When it comes to the language of the songs, however, their improper categorization as "Arabic" instead of Tashlhit appears highly problematic to him. The people in charge of the archive have generally failed to identify the spoken dialects that were recorded, he adds. His remarks did not surprise me, given the long history of struggle of Amazigh minorities for recognition of their respective dialects as official languages in Morocco. This did not change until the dialects were introduced into the constitution in 2011. Despite uncertainties regarding the precise date of some of the recordings in the Pathé collection, others are clearly dated to 1927, Ali Faiq observes. He also notes that the 80 rpm recording technique was of a "previous generation" compared to the 78 rpm recording technique, which was standardized shortly after.

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[5] The Pathé collection contains recordings by the following rwais musicians: rais Abdallah Ennair, rais Boudjemâa, rais Mohamed Soussi, and raissa Abouche Tamassit.

[6] The notes contain the following information: song title; publisher; year of initial publication/recording; category; document type; language; format; description; property rights; date of online publication; and various reference numbers.

This information allows him to claim that the Pathé recordings preceded by a few years those published by the Gramophone company in 1929—so far considered to be the oldest rwais music recordings.

According to Hoffmann (2015), archival "metadata," such as the information contained on the Gallica website, reveal much about the practices at play in the creation of the archive. Yet, they often have little to say on the content of the recordings. For colonial and imperial archives, metadata often relate to "premediated ideas of natives," of which the recordings provide "musical examples." In the case of the Pathé rwais recordings, the idea of "natives" conveyed in the metadata is that of a "foreign," "Arab," and "traditional" culture. These terms largely correspond with known stereotypes about "Arab culture," such as "pre-modern," "exotic," "fanatic," and "Other," as described by Said in his examination of western "orientalist" representations (Said 1978). Even though Ali Faiq did not comment on these stereotypes, he made a point showing that much of the information provided in the Archives' metadata is incorrect.

Ali Faiq approached the French Speech Archives as a rwais music expert and practitioner, an amateur historian, and a self-taught specialist in early sound recording technology and archival techniques. Through his close listening to the Pathé rwais recordings, he managed to re-situate the Tashlhit recordings as part of the specific genre of rwais oral expression in southwestern Morocco. While the tracks are identified as "music" in the online notes, he objected that rwais expression is much more than just music, encompassing a whole set of professional practices, such as poetry, storytelling, news reporting, messaging, moral advising, dance, a specific way of dressing, and more. With his comment, Ali Faiq reacted to the "dislodgement" effect of archival recording—that is the extraction of a sung or spoken fragment from "a body of genre-specific texts and from referential frames." Dislodgement itself is the result of specific practices of "extractive listening," which "foregoes registration," leading to the "erasure of particular speaking positions" (Hoffmann 2015). Ali Faiq's close listening was driven by the necessity to counter this erasure and by his desire to reconstruct the recorded voices as historical subjects. He retrieved information from the recordings by analyzing them in terms of accent, melodic and poetic style, narrative content, and the mentioning of specific places and individual names. By further cross-checking these data with other musicological sources, he managed to reassemble them into biographical fragments.

One of the archived voices caught Ali Faiq's attention in particular: Abouche Tamassit, the female raissa mentioned in my introduction. These are the only known recordings of her, he notes in the interview, and few people were aware of her existence previously. This is because no commercial recordings were made of her and also because she didn't travel much, unlike the male rwais. Abouche Tamassit was only allowed to perform in the private houses of powerful local personalities, such as the pasha Thami El Glaoui (1879-1956), an ally of the French Protectorate in the Atlas region. Her voice is "magical," Ali Faiq declares, "it makes me travel to the Massa region when I hear it, also with her accent." Ali Faiq insists on her talent as a musician, noting that she was also a very good lotar player and that she had a particular way of mixing melodic modes. Her poetic verses were excellent too, he continues, and she was well aware of the modernity of her time, alluding to automobiles and airplanes in one of the songs. In one song she laments about her own condition, as in the following verses: "O dove, can I fly away with you? I'd like to go with you, but I'm chained." The fact that she was recorded by Pathé in Marrakesh also shows that she had reached a respectable professional status, Ali Faiq remarks, after starting her career in Tiznit. So far, only male artists were remembered as part of the early rwais history. Abouche Tamassit is an important example of someone who dared to affirm herself as an artist within a conservative and patriarchal society, where women were forbidden to sing in the presence of men. Her voice matters even more today, Ali Faiq concludes, as a model for female singers who are still often perceived as "socially deviant," but also for all the people who, like him, have chosen to be an artist in a society "that doesn't take art seriously as a profession."

Ali Faiq clearly appears affected by his findings. His critical engagement with colonial archives shines a new light on existing representations of rwais musicians. If sonic pluralism is primarily concerned with countering the oppressive effects of particular epistemologies, it is also very much about re-negotiating the terms of the relationship between coloniality and knowledge itself. Western scientific knowledge and locally situated knowledges were never granted an equal status, and the authority of the former is deeply entangled with the coloniality of power. In order to gain knowledge from the archive for himself and his community, Ali Faiq first had to engage with colonial sound epistemology and its logics of cultural othering. Sonic pluralism, therefore, very much appears as a process of mediation and negotiation between competing epistemologies and representations. As it entails a form of "border thinking" (Mignolo 2011), sonic pluralism allows shifting the borders of knowledge and authority. The concept of knowledge itself is transformed in the process, re-embodied from a particular standpoint, and re-purposed for different needs.

Overall, the recordings help to better picture "the true situation of the rwais at the time," Ali Faiq argues, identifying in the songs signs of the diversity of their practices and influences—melodic as well as linguistic, also attesting to their mobility. The rwais were "open artists," he remarks, who traveled beyond tribal borders in order to share their knowledge with other tribes and communities. The songs from the French Speech Archives also show that there were masterful rwais who have not been commercially recorded. Their music had all the attributes of "serious music" (*musique savante*) of their time with its own rules and aesthetics, Ali Faiq also claims. Although his research was limited to a couple of songs preceding those shellac discs formerly know as "the first rwais recordings," he didn't claim that he had found "older oldest" rwais recordings. Instead, he made a point to show that the recordings were incorrectly described in the Archives' metadata, thus reclaiming them from the "colonial noise map" (Denning 2015) for his own community. By cross-interpreting some of the information retrieved via close listening to the recordings with other sources, Ali Faiq also managed to demonstrate that a whole field of rwais expression existed outside of the recordings, and *before* recording especially.

The scarcity of serious research on rwais music helps to better situate Ali Faiq's project. He rightly argues that the history of rwais expression "has not been written yet." There is no objectivity, he says; everyone here sees rwais history in their own way. There are no scientific repertories of rwais songs and recordings, no bibliography on rwais music, no proper biographies of the rwais themselves. While a few ethnomusicological studies on rwais music exist, they are usually compiled by foreign scholars (e.g. Chottin 1930; Schuyler 1979), and thus hard to access for local musicians, he regrets. As a consequence, there is limited scientific understanding of rwais music in terms of styles, genres, and schools, he adds, equally acknowledging the importance of critical expertise for evaluating musical productions and helping practitioners to solve problems encountered during the creation of new works. Such knowledge is indispensable to the creative evolution of music and for its transmission, he continues, which may explain why jazz

BnF Gallica
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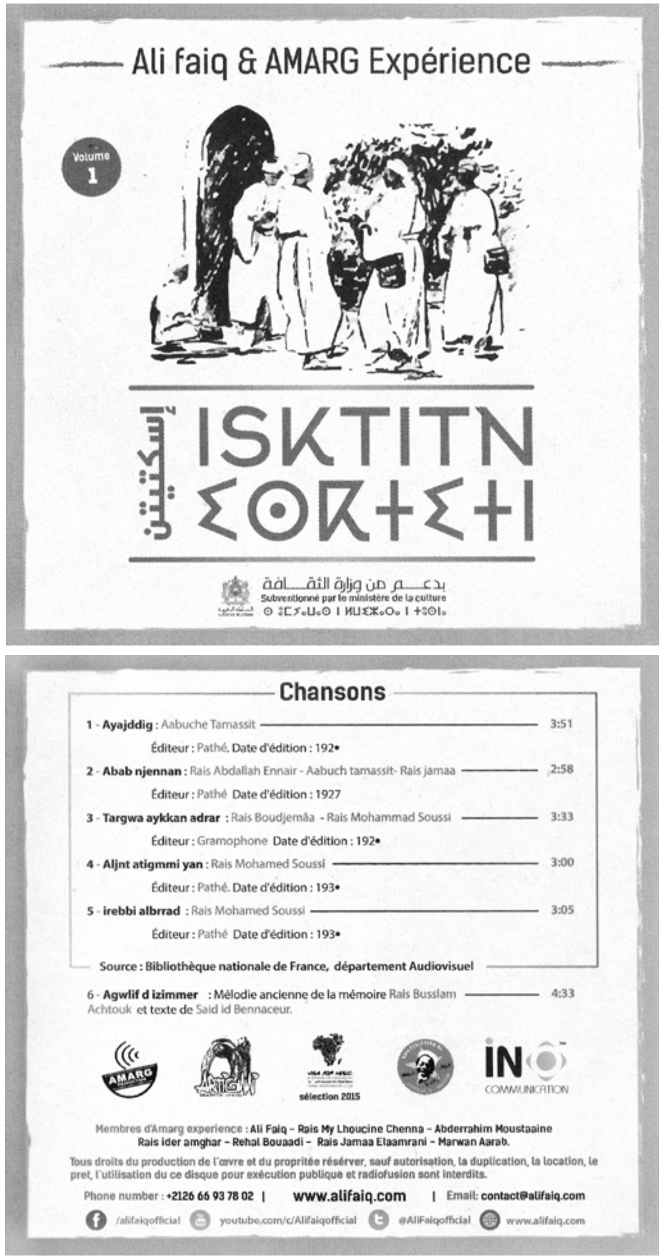
58.437
Ksida El Nouar
قصيدة النوار
Abouche Tammasit
عبوش تمسيت
Activer Windows

or Latin American music, for example, are taught worldwide in conservatories, while Berber music is not. Even though Ali Faiq only rarely expressed his dissatisfaction with Moroccan state policies on culture and education, such critiques were often implicit in his comments. He repeatedly called for better funding for research and community-based rwais initiatives.

ALI FAIQ'S CD *ISKTITN*

Additional questions emerge regarding Ali Faiq's efforts to disseminate the rwais songs from the French Speech Archives among his community and beyond. So far, his initiatives have taken two different forms: a CD publication in 2016, and the transmission of the songs as part of rwais musician gatherings. These two forms relate to distinct contexts: commercial music production in one case, and community work in the other. Ali Faiq found himself in the ambivalent position of a "native ethnographer" (Goodman 2005), raising questions about the ways the songs were brought into relation with particular ideological agendas.

Published as a self-release by Ali Faiq in 2016, the CD *Isktitn* (commemoration) contains five songs retrieved from the Pathé collection and one additional song based on a previously undocumented rwais melody. The songs have been re-arranged into new "fusion" versions, combining western instruments (electric bass and guitar, drums, and keyboards), together with rwais instruments (lotar and rebab). Next to Ali Faiq on vocals, the band includes three former members of Amarg Fusion and three rwais musicians. The ensemble was named Amarg Experience with the intention of bringing a younger audience into contact with rwais expression, according to Ali Faiq. While the band kept the original melodies and lyrics for the new versions, they play them at a slower tempo than on the Pathé recordings, and the rhythmical accompaniment is frequently in "half time." The melodies are enriched with modern jazz harmonies and counterpointed by bass lines in West African pop style. The lotar and rebab instruments mostly follow the voice in the traditional way, with melodic embellishments by the rebab. Most songs have the character of groovy ballads, often punctuated by uneven time signatures and bar sequences. Added reverberation and paddy synth sounds produce an overall spacious impression. Possibly reminiscent of the 1980s



Cover and back cover of the CD *Isktitn* by Ali Faiq and Amarg Experience, 2016.

Chansons

1 - **Ayajddig** : Aabuche Tamassit — 3:51
Éditeur : Pathé. Date d'édition : 192•

2 - **Abab njennan** : Rais Abdallah Ennair - Aabuch tamassit- Rais jamaa — 2:58
Éditeur : Pathé Date d'édition : 1927

3 - **Targwa aykkan adrar** : Rais Boudjemâa - Rais Mohammad Soussi — 3:33
Éditeur : Gramophone Date d'édition : 192•

4 - **Aljnt atigmmi yan** : Rais Mohamed Soussi — 3:00
Éditeur : Pathé. Date d'édition : 193•

5 - **irebbi albrrad** : Rais Mohamed Soussi — 3:05
Éditeur : Pathé Date d'édition : 193•

Source : Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Audiovisuel

6 - **Agwlif d izimmer** : Mélodie ancienne de la mémoire Rais Busslam Achtouk et texte de Said id Bennaceur. — 4:33

Membres d'Amarg experience : **Ali Faiq – Rais My Lhoucine Chenna – Abderrahim Moustaaine**
Rais ider amghar – Rehal Bouaadi – Rais Jamaa Elaamrani – Marwan Aarab.

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Anglo-American and West African world music sound, the CD greatly differs in sound and style from the unsophisticated and direct tone of the recorded versions from the 1920s and 30s. It offers modernized versions of these songs, produced in order to reach a young, urbanized audience of regional and diasporic Tashlhit speakers, and potentially also a wider audience on the world stage. Particularly striking in this regard is the first track, which starts with a fifteen second excerpt of an Abouche Tamassit Pathé recording, before fading into the band's reinterpretation of the same song. On the one hand, this short fragment arguably reduces the original song to a mere "sign of the past." On the other, it conveys a sense of Abouche Tamassit's voice and style, potentially initiating future conversations about her life and work, and women's place in the history of rwais expression.

Overall, the musical content of the CD is coherent with the fusion/world music style characterizing Ali Faiq's previous albums. The packaging, however, appears more ambiguous. The song titles and authors' names are provided in Tashlhit language on the back cover in Roman transliteration. The remaining texts are in French, including the name of the original editor (Pathé) and dates, as well as contact information and links to social media. The first five songs are visually grouped together by a frame indicating their provenance from the French National Library. The front cover shows a black and white drawing of unidentified musicians in traditional costume, along with the logo of the Moroccan Ministry of Culture (in Arabic, French, and Tifinagh). The cover evokes the sepia tones of early photographs. This appearance somehow contrasts with the modern sounding music recordings, possibly reducing its visual appeal for a younger audience. The sparse information in French targets educated listeners more attuned to questions about history and heritage. The dates highlight an *old* tradition, a sign of an *authentic* culture to be commemorated.

The logo of the Ministry of Culture further complicates the CD's subtext. In addition to the state's financial contribution, the logo also acknowledges the state's symbolic recognition of Amazigh traditions. With its title in Roman, Tifinagh, and Arabic scripts especially, the CD cover conveys the state's current ideology of the inclusion of minorities as part of its multicultural identity policy. This ideology remains ambiguous, however, because these very minorities continue to be denied full cultural recognition and political rights (Boum 2007). The juxtaposition of diverse, and at times contradictory, cultural references on the CD cover mirrors Ali Faiq's difficult position in a context of competing cultural-political agendas. Each of these ideologies—state multiculturalism, Berber-Amazigh activism, and global music consumerism—dictate their own way of dealing with culture, alterity, tradition, and modernity. While the musical content generally fits the requirements of the world music market, the packaging echoes the struggle between state and Amazigh ideological discourses. The absence of detailed liner notes arguably adds confusion and ambiguity to Ali Faiq's project and intention. Without information about the songs, lyrics, their historical significance, the biographies of their rwais authors, and more generally about Ali Faiq's research in the French Speech Archives, the CD does not quite fulfill its educative ambitions.

CIRCULATION OF THE PATHÉ SONGS AT RWAIS CONVENTIONS

Ali Faiq also decided to re-introduce the Pathé songs in his community through oral transmission at rwais music conventions (*Igiwr)*. These assemblies are concerned with the cultivation and perpetuation of cultural memory. In my analysis, I draw on Kansteiner's (2002) definition of "cultural memory" as a body comprising reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose cultivation serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Rwais conventions highlight the ambiguous relationship between "cultural memory" and "history" and question the divide between "academic and non-academic representations of the past."

Ali Faiq began taking part in rwais conventions around 2000, hosting some of them at his family home in Ait Milk since 2013. The main purpose of these conventions is to come together and practice rwais music. They take place spontaneously and the number of musicians varies according to their availability. The principle is simple, Ali Faiq comments: we discuss, we share a meal together, we make a playlist, and we play. It's not a jam session, but a practice session, he adds. I had the chance to attend two rwais conventions at Ali Faiq's house in Ait Milk in 2013 and 2019, plus another one in Bigra in 2018. Each time, the participants (all male) arrived in the early evening, chatted together for a bit, then played in a circle for several hours. About ten musicians were present each time, including lotar, rebab, and naqus (metal percussion) players, sometimes switching between instruments. Ali Faiq performed as a vocalist, alternating with other singers, with all the musicians singing during choruses. The session always started with a long instrumental prelude (*Astara*, Schuyler 1979), as is necessary for the tuning of the string instruments. The performance evolved into other parts characteristic for rwais music, alternating between sung poetry (*Amarg*); rhythmical melodic sections in various time signatures and tempi (*Tebil*, *Tamssust*, *Ladrub*, *Qtaa*, and *Ti n-lhalqt*); occasional verbal improvisations (*Mashkhara*); and sometimes concluding with a prayer invoking Allah's benediction (*Fatha*). Several rounds of mint tea were served, as well as a tagine, a slow-cooked meal prepared with meat and vegetables in a large clay pot. The atmosphere at these conventions was joyful and convivial, and I always felt very much welcome as a guest of Ali Faiq.

The term "Igiwr" (litterally "sitting together") is not mentioned in the glossary provided by Schuyler as part of his extensive study of rwais music practices. However, the rwais conventions as I have experienced them come close to what Schuyler (1979) describes as "practice sessions" in comparison to various forms of public performances:

> The rwais practice their music, they don't rehearse for performance. Musicians often get together for informal performances in each other's home, or, particularly, in the inns or residential cafés that serve itinerant musicians in the big cities. These sessions provide entertainment and practice for all the participants. This gives older performers the chance to show off their knowledge of the more obscure parts of the repertory and younger performers the chance to expand their repertory. At the same time, the rwais also use these occasions to try out new compositions before an audience of their peers. Finally, the café sessions serve as a talent market as well: groups for the hlaqas are formed in cafés, and local group leaders often dip into the reservoir of musicians to pull out an extra sideman at the last minute for a wedding or restaurant performance. Café performances do not, however, constitute advance preparation or rehearsal for a specific performance. Indeed, the pieces performed during practice sessions are often precisely those that would not be performed in a public situation: new, unfinished pieces; old and difficult pieces; and current, popular songs too closely identified with one performer to be played by another.

The main focus of rwais conventions today appears similar to the sessions described by Schuyler, namely music practice and the sharing of lesser-known melodies. The context in which the sessions take place has nevertheless changed radically, moving away from a situation where it was still possible to sustain one's own life as a professional rwais musician, to the present situation where this is hardly the case anymore. I could easily verify this during the meetings I attended, where only a few musicians were introduced to me as professional rwais, usually in their fifties or older, while the majority of the participants were experienced amateur musicians. Largely in their forties and fifties, they were part of the working class and middle class. There was only one younger musician present, a teacher and the son of one of the older musicians. The process of oral transmission of rwais expression between the generations is extinct, Ali Faiq explains, and young musicians don't aspire to become professional rwais anymore. For this reason, young musicians are regularly invited to join the conventions on the condition that they use rwais instruments and perform the old rwais songs. Although rwais conventions have existed for a long time, nowadays they mirror the participants' efforts to preserve common heritage. These events are part of a current return to the sources, a "revival" of the rwais tradition, Ali Faiq comments.

Rwais conventions, as they are practiced today, are part of a larger movement concerned with the valorization of cultural memory, in a context where "identity is problematized" (Kansteiner 2002). Several causes are at the origin of the current crisis of Berber-Ishlhin identity: the state's enduring denial of political and economic rights to minorities (Boum 2007); the partial failure of previous attempts to construct stable alternative postcolonial identities as part of the cultural revivals of the 1970s and 80s (Simour 2016); and the fragmenting and destabilizing effects of globalization on identity, further amplified by the dematerializing effects of digital media networks (Goodman 2005). Ali Faiq's initial engagement with rwais expression developed as part of his activities as a pop singer in the band Amarg Fusion, primarily via listening to commercial rwais recordings, followed by the inclusion of a few songs in the band's repertory. This encounter was only "superficial," he explains, until he started attending rwais meetings and got to know their art by way of direct "impregnation," rather than through records. This was doubtlessly a formative experience for Ali Faiq, granting him access to a new field of knowledge and practice, and possibly also evoking a new sense of belonging and identity. His research project on the Pathé recordings emerged from this experience, entrusting him with a new role as a *mediator* between the rwais community and their cultural memory.

When representations of the past are stored in archives, libraries, and museums, cultural memories first occur in a mode of "potentiality" (Kansteiner 2002). They later become "actual" memories when these representations are adopted and given new meaning in different social and historical contexts. Interestingly, Ali Faiq chose not to playback the Pathé recordings during the meetings, and instead performed some of the songs to the rwais, as he was curious about their reaction. The rwais were intrigued by the songs, he recalls, asking for their provenance and mentioning other verses and melodies associated with them. The songs were progressively adopted as part of the repertory performed in rwais conventions, as I personally witnessed in 2018 and 2019. In this sense, Ali Faiq's project provides a successful example of cultural re-appropriation of recordings from colonial archives.

If rwais conventions nowadays can be defined predominantly as a celebration of cultural memory, they still foster creative music practices. These include verbal improvisation (*Mashkhara*), of which I witnessed an impressive example during a convention in Bigra in 2018. In a sequence lasting more than ten minutes, one rais improvised a series of fast poetic verses, successively addressing several of the musicians and guests, including myself, often in a humorous, biting tone. In another instance, I attended the performance of a new song composed by Ali Faiq based on a 1920s melody by l'Hajj Belaid and a written text by a poet from the region, who was described to me as the "Baudelaire of the Souss." The third example is related to the oral transmission of a melody sung by an old rwais that Ali Faiq heard during a convention, which was not previously documented on a recording. Ali Faiq adapted it into a new song for his *Isktitn* CD, preserving the melody on a published medium. My point with these examples is to demonstrate that creation in contemporary rwais expression is not only synonymous with composition in the sense of original songwriting, but also pertains to the recombination of melodies and verses from various Ishlhin authors, source media, and epochs.

Ali Faiq's choice to reintroduce the songs through direct transmission at rwais conventions could possibly be regarded as an example of "performing natural memory," in other words as a simulation of direct oral transmission, masking at the same time the colonial origins of these "oral texts" in the French Speech Archives (see Goodman 2005). Ali Faiq's intention was not to "restore the past" in the name of an idealized modern Berber-Ishlhin culture and identity; his approach instead draws on a self-invented research methodology. By confronting older rwais musicians with the Pathé songs, he was able to observe their reactions and elicit new melodies from their responses. His method was successful because it demonstrated that neither the historical quality nor the archival origin of the songs interested the rwais at first. What mattered was the possibility of relating the Pathé songs with other elements of their "repertory of ideas" (Schuyler 1979). It was only at a later stage that Ali Faiq shared information about the songs and his research inside the archive during these meetings, and thereafter in public presentations. Through his approach, he arguably managed to avoid fetishizing the recordings themselves as traces of an imagined "authentic" rwais past. As Kansteiner (2002) remarks, images of the past (and sounds, too in this case) can easily be instrumentalized in the name of ideological propaganda as "signposts, directing people who remember to preferred meanings by the fastest route."

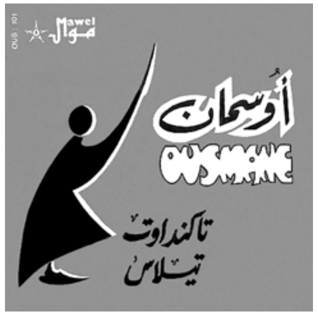
RWAIS EXPRESSION AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

Ali Faiq's engagement with the Pathé colonial archive can be explained in part by the lack of serious musicological work on rwais expression and by his dissatisfaction about the ways rwais history is generally understood in his community. As he remarked on several occasions during our exchanges, it is the first generation of *recording* artists who continue to be viewed as the pioneers and founders of rwais expression today. This "first" generation includes the famous El-Hajj Belaid who recorded for Baidaphone in 1929, soon followed by Sasbo, Rzuq, Bubakr Azaqri, and Bubakr Anshad. Schuyler (1979) made a similar observation in his own study, noting that the media had given the rwais "a new history and hierarchy:"

> Traditionally, the rwais have been ranked by their colleagues and their audience on the basis of their musical, poetic and choreographic ability on the one hand, and on their age, experience and moral rectitude on the other hand. Initially, the early recordings changed neither the relative ranking of the rwais, nor the nature of the hierarchy. The prestige of some musicians was enhanced, but this only reaffirmed, and slightly exaggerated, their existing status. With the passing of years, however, the reputation of the early recording has continued to grow. Professional genealogies, like the social and biological genealogies of mountain tribes, have always been shallow, rarely reaching beyond three or four generations. Hajj Belaid would undoubtedly be remembered today even if he had not been the first to record. Yet, coincidentally or not, the rwais cannot recall any notable musician before Belaid's time. [...] The existence of recordings has given Belaid and others a permanent claim on certain turns of melodic and poetic phrase. Thus, though the rwais continue to recycle musical material, no modern rais can hope to approach his predecessors' reputation for originality and inspiration.

As Schuyler suggests, commercial recording has progressively become the dominant reference for narrating the history of rwais expression, if not the *only* reference in absence of proper ethnomusicological research. As products of the French colonial era, the Pathé recordings were part of "the polyphony of subaltern musical cultures" (Denning 2015) recorded and circulated by producers and engineers who knew little about them, and who "often regarded them as *noise*" (Schuyler 1979). Whereas the rwais sometimes gained prestige and economical retribution from their interactions with commercial recording, their position remained subaltern as the music market was entirely controlled by western companies until independence. These unequal terms of interaction continued after independence in 1956 through SMEDIP (Société marocaine d'édition et distribution de phonographes) and its subsidiary label Koutoubiaphone, who established a virtual monopoly over the top performers of the Souss region (Schuyler 1979). Though the rwais initially couldn't yet directly engage with the tools of modern technological sound reproduction, the situation changed with the introduction of cassette recordings in the 1970s. Pirate cassette stores became big in 1976, Schuyler observes, along with new practices of creating tailor-made playlists on cassettes for the customers. The rwais started making tapes of their own performances and selling them, granting themselves a greater voice in the production and distribution of their music, though with little financial return. These experiments helped to cast off the temporal and conceptual limitations of the commercial 45 rpm format, giving the rwais a certain agency in technological sound production. Young rwais also found a new tool for studying the repertory of cassettes, leading to a transformation of former learning modes based on direct transmission. While this was in principle a continuation of the rwais practice of collecting ideas and indeed gave them access to new, foreign music sources, it also turned rwais music increasingly into a repertory of fixed songs.

With the electrification of popular music in 1970s Morocco, new forms of creative engagement with sound technology appeared. Along with the Moroccan "New Song" movement, groups like Ousmane and Izanzaren created music based on western instruments, electronic amplification, and effects, while borrowing rhythms, melodies, and structures from rwais music (Lefebure 1986). Many of the bands' musicians had a formal music education and others came from universities. They wrote new songs in Tashlhit and other Berber dialects in an attempt to create a modern "cultural affirmation of a pan-Berber cultural identity. With their "liberationist ideas," these bands arguably came close to what could be called *Berber futurism*, as some of the record covers perhaps illustrate. The new Berber song movement soon lost some of its ideological fervor, however. Confronted by brutal state repression in the 1980s under Hassan II's rule, the movement later evolved into more commercial fusion music, from where Ali Faiq emerged as a professional singer in the 1990s.

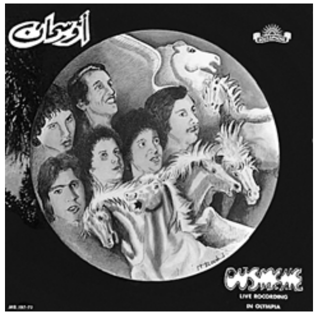


Cover of the record *Takandout* by Ousmane, 1976.

RWAIS SOUND AND TECHNOLOGICAL AWARENESS

The brief overview of the history of commercial rwais recordings tends to demonstrate that rwais musicians had no or little control over the means of sound technological reproduction. According to this narrative, technology is mostly described in terms of "effects" and "affects," in short, as an external force imposed by Europeans on local musicians and cultural agents. The successive generations of electronic media have progressively eroded the social function of rwais expression, the story goes. Rwais history has become increasingly dependent on the commercial music market, ultimately reducing rwais expression to a sub-genre of the contemporary world music industry. When western narratives of sonic modernity limit themselves to a story of technological progress and industrialization where native populations have no agency, then they tend to perpetuate a colonial understanding of technology. As Louis Chude-Sokei (2016) argues, the "racism of technology" is grounded in the ideological colonial assumption that "race (primitive past) cannot be conciliated with technology (modern future)." This is best exemplified today by the so-called "digital divide," a metaphor that maintains an underlying assumption that "people of color cannot keep pace with our high-tech society." This does not need to be so, Chude-Sokei argues. "Sound" is the place where race became a crucial element in the engagement with technology, he continues, and Black music provides the signs of technological production in which Black people function with some degree of primacy. By focusing on music as a "space of sound production," it becomes possible to reorient our listening towards practices that attest to a conscious engagement with "man-machine relationships."

In the last part of this chapter, I further engage with rwais (musical and poetic) "sound" as a site of conscious engagement with technology, human-machines relationships, as well as other transformations brought by western modernity. Because of their mobility, the rwais were witnessing changes ongoing at all levels of Moroccan society in the early twentieth century—in the villages as well as in the cities. Thanks to their scholarly and religious education, they were able to reflect on such transformations and offer moral guidance to their listeners through their songs. The songs recorded by El-Hajj Belaid (1873-1945) provide a good overview of the situation in the 1920s and 1930s. Belaid's broad thematic content includes



Cover of the record *Live at Olympia* by Ousmane, 1972.

evocations of his suffering with poetry, wandering, and traveling; courtly love and the celebration of feminine beauty; as well as social criticism (Ameskane 2012). Hajj Belaid played an "undeniable role as an historian of everyday life," Ameskane notes, "in recording events that shook the region." He also left anthology pieces about his travels, describing his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1910 and his visit to King Mohammed V.

Several of Belaid's songs address technological innovations introduced by the colonizers, as in "Chifour outoumoubil" (automobile). Peyron (2010) also observed that many verses alluding to symbols of modernity can be identified in Berber poetry of the time, referring to petrol, the gas-cylinder, the steamship, the aeroplane, the bus, the car, and more. Belaid's song "L'makina" is especially striking with its title referring to "the machine," and more specifically here to the phonograph:

> I have to stop making verses, because someone
> had the good idea to invent the phonograph
> that can precisely recall speech without
> modifications.
>
> These benefactors, we need to talk about them
> our forefathers only spoke about horse riders
> and their feats.
>
> We talk about cars, tea, and buildings
> and about the news from Fes, Marrakesh,
> and even Goulmime.[7]

In this song, Belaid makes clear references to the symbols of modernity described by Peyron: cars, buildings, and tea (which was introduced to Morocco in the nineteenth century). He also marks his difference vis-à-vis previous generations of rwais who were more concerned with pastoral and heroic themes, although he himself notoriously traveled across the mountains on a mule in order to "collect melodies" sung by villagers, often women (Schuyler 1979). Belaid's description of the phonograph as a faithful speech recording machine is not without irony; he realizes that it might well take his own job away from him. What's more, his verses suggest that the machine may have additional powers, opening up a whole field of ontological questions regarding the status of sound, voice, the body, as well as humans and machines themselves. Is the newly reproduced voice a new subject or is it just an object of consumption? If the machine can potentially replace a human, is it a new being? A new body? Does it conversely turn the human into a machine-like creature? If these questions do not find a direct answer in Belaid's song, they do however surface in it through the expression of the poet's trouble caused by the machine. "L'makina" provides thus an early example of intellectual engagement with man-machine relationships in Morocco, which curiously resonates with current anxieties triggered by ubiquitous computation, artificial intelligence, and automatization.

In order to widen my analysis of rwais "sound" as a site of knowledge production and technological engagement, I need to turn to yet other aspects of rwais sound and transmission practices. One of these aspects is the continuous mobility of rwais musicians, which "has always been essential to their art" (Schuyler 1979), because of the economic necessity to find paying audiences beyond their home region, and as a way to *collect* new materials for their songs. As a result, their repertory uses melodic ideas from "external sources," such as Moroccan Andalusian music, Arab folk music, and western music. In the following lines, Schuyler describes the rwais repertory as a processual aggregation of ideas:

> We have seen that the rwais repertory is not a collection of fixed pieces, but rather a collection of ideas. Elements are combined into new ones, but the underlying elements of the music-rhythm, mode and structure remain constant. The music, thus, qualifies to what Constantin Brăiloiu terms "création collective" (1973: 142). The basic elements of the repertory, as well as many complete melodies, belong equally to all rwais, and, indeed, to all Ishlhin, since there is constant interchange between the village and professional

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[7] Excerpt of *L'makina*, El-Hajj Belaid, circa 1937. French translation by Ali Faiq, English translation by the author.

> repertories. The individual musicians may stand out for their ability to recombine old patterns in new ways, or, more rarely, for their creation of new patterns. But the resulting compositions are, on the one hand, the summation of the efforts of the composer's predecessors, and, on the other hand, a contribution to the efforts of his successors.

The plurality that characterizes the particular modernity of rwais sound now appears more clearly. Plurality is expressed in the multiplicity of sources—local, external, and recorded—that inform the *content* of rwais sound, which are collected by traveling and later aggregated into the common "repertory of ideas." The combinatory principle that characterizes this repertory also gives a plural status to songs in rwais expression. Instead of being fixed narratives, songs allow for multiple combinations of ideas, and therefore interpretations of specific themes. The constant interchanges between rwais musicians themselves and the collective dimension of their repertoire also suggest a plural understanding of authorship, which relativizes the importance of individual expression and intellectual ownership. The relationship between rwais expression and memory does not correspond with a single historical memory category, as it combines various forms of "natural memory" (direct transmission), "modern cultural memory" (memory as institution and knowledge system), and "post-modern cultural memory" (memory constituted primarily through media consumption) (Kantseiner 2002). Rwais expression and its repertory therefore come close to a *living archive,* that is an embodied, relational, and collectively distributed mode of knowledge production and transmission.

The effects of recorded media on oral rwais expression should not be minimized, however, with their tendency to enhance the prestige of individual musicians, and to turn songs into fixed forms and narratives. If tensions existed between the oral and technologically mediated forms of rwais expression, the rwais were also well aware of them and reflected them in their art. These tensions were part of wider transformations in Moroccan society, which the rwais were witnessing through their constant traveling and social interactions. Because of their particular role in society, the rwais were not just professional musicians, but "journalists, historians and moralists," Schuyler suggests (1979). He further describes their function as "mediators" (Schuyler 1979b), between rural and urban populations, between orthodox and syncretic practices of Islam, between tribalism and individualism, and more generally between "opposing tendencies" within society. Early modernity brought new opportunities, such as traveling and material consumption for the privileged ones, along with economical anxieties, family separation, exploitative labour, colonial oppression, and uncertainties regarding people's lives in general. The tensions caused by modern technology in rwais oral expression were thus just one aspect of the "opposing tendencies" that characterized early modernity in Morocco. The rwais' education and poetic skills allowed them to reflect these tensions in their songs, providing intellectual and moral guidance to their audiences. Such practices mirror a form of plural epistemological thinking and sounding. The rwais' capacity to reflect on opposing tendencies and to mediate between competing knowledges and ideologies is what granted them agency in Moroccan society, as well as the population's respect.

THE ETHICAL NOISE OF RWAIS SOUND

Western sound media, such as the telephone, radio, and sound recording, conveyed information through technologies of energetic sound transduction, material fixation, broadcasting, and amplification. Rwais sound practices, on the contrary, enabled the memorizing and transmission of information through a regulated combination of "rhythm, mode and structure" (Schuyler 1979). While modern sound transmission came to be conceptualized in terms of "signal" vs "noise" (Thompson 2013), rwais sound can best be described as signal *and* noise. If technical noise had to be controlled and eliminated at all costs in the name of an hypothetical "pure" signal, the inevitable erasure and distortion of information as part of rwais mediation amounts to a form of ethical noise, I propose. As a result of subjective mediation, ethical noise was produced through the moral and poetic evaluation of information proper to rwais expression. Rwais sound was thus no less efficient than western communication technology, but only differently (in-)efficient. Jonathan Sterne (2003) already made this point demonstrating that (sonic) content was never just "reproduced" through sound technologies, but always produced anew as part of ideologically driven social-material practices. With its mediating, ethical, and poetic dimension, rwais sound resulted from a particularly situated plural sound practice. Grounded in a local sense of place and community, rwais sound welcomed experiments with new epistemological configurations as part of their repertory of ideas. As an expression of sonic pluralism, rwais mediation amounted to a constant negotiation between the moral imperatives of their community and the promises of individual emancipation brought by modernity and technical innovations.

The notion of ethical noise resonates with today's concerns by media professionals for the moral necessity to create the conditions for "ethically responsible media" (Dwyer 2012). While the purposes of media to inform, educate, and entertain remain constant, Dwyer notes, an ethical media that informs a democratic citizenry is paramount. Schuyler (1979) interestingly makes a similar observation about rwais songs: "A song is not meant to be mere entertainment, but rather, it should contain a message, either a lesson about human nature and life in general, a commentary on a specific situation, or both." Although rwais expression was certainly under surveillance by local and colonial authorities, it yet embodied a form of independent media, operating between various religious, political, and economical forces. It is worth mentioning the fact that an independent media remains wishful thinking in Morocco up to this day, as recent cases of sentenced journalists and bloggers unfortunately demonstrate.[8]

THE META-RAIS: ALI FAIQ AS CULTURAL AND EPISTEMIC MEDIATOR

When considering Ali Faiq's chosen method for engaging with the Pathé recordings and re-introducing old songs in the rwais community, I argue

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[8] Freedom of information in contemporary Morocco is indeed far from being a reality, as the website of the NGO "Reporters without Borders" attests: https://rsf.org/en/behind-morocco-s-throne-day-journalists-are-being-persecuted

that he very much acted as a mediator. First as a *cultural* mediator between the rwais community and external agents, like myself, including other researchers, cultural promoters, journalists, state representatives, and non-Ishlhin music audiences. Second, as an *epistemic* mediator between rwais modes of knowledge-production and exterior ones, such as academic historiography and colonial epistemology. Ali Faiq thus appears like a new kind of rais, indeed a *meta-rais*, because his ways of mediating are not restricted by the conventional rules of rwais expression.

While a comprehensive rwais historiography yet remains to be written, Ali Faiq opened up a new path in this direction. At times in which rwais expression is threatened by extinction, he calls for a better institutional recognition of this particular art form. By stating that "preservation is not only about recording songs, but also about circulating them and re-integrating them into the repertory," Ali Faiq comes close to current tendencies in applied ethnomusicology.[9] Highly politicized in Morocco, the field of cultural heritage is simultaneously being claimed by the state, minority leaders, and foreign promoters. This inevitably turns Ali Faiq's position into an uncomfortable one, which is perhaps best illustrated by his *Isktitn* CD. Although rwais conventions are themselves not devoid of contradictions—between a celebration of "tradition" and attempts to negotiate and transmit this heritage into the future—they do, however, provide a context for experimenting with new approaches in music creation, community building, and education. People like Ali Faiq certainly have a decisive role to play in this configuration, through their capacity to mediate between the rwais community, commercial music circles, academic discourse, and, to some extent, state institutions.

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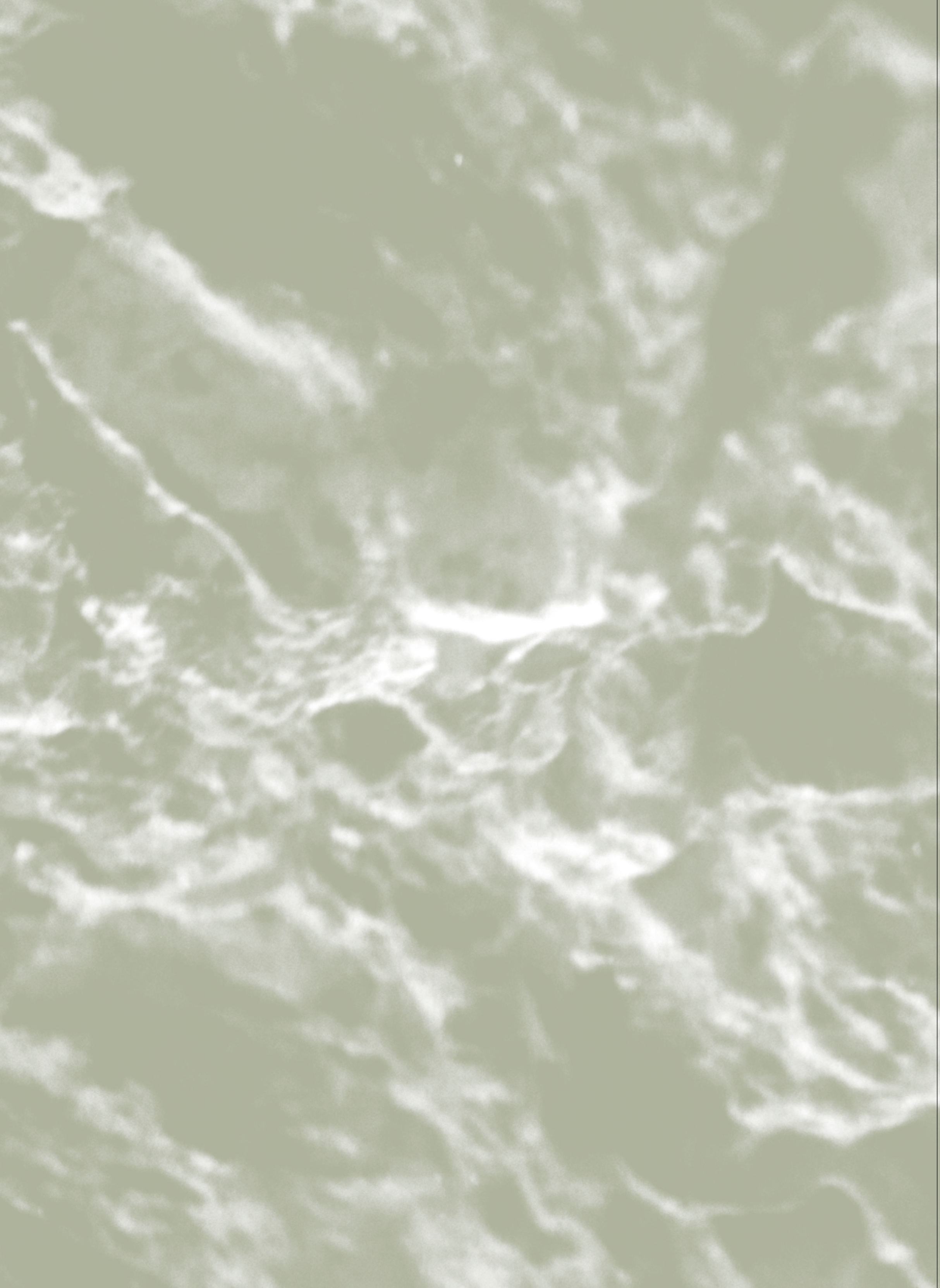
[9] For a general overview of these practices, see *Ethnomusicology Forum* Vol. 21, No. 2, August 2012.

As part of a series of workshops organized by Ali Faiq, young musicians were given the opportunity to play with experienced rwais and familiarize themselves with their repertory and instruments. The rwais repertoire needs to evolve, Ali Faiq comments, otherwise it will die. His experience in commercial fusion music and as an active participant in rwais conventions makes him an ideal agent of transmission and innovation. The knowledge he acquired about the Pathé recordings, about early recording techniques, and about archives in general represents a significant addition to the rwais repertory of ideas and practices, and should be part of the transmission process in the future. The priority for defenders of social justice today in Morocco lies in "economic and educational opportunities" for all citizens (Boum 2007) and for minorities especially. This certainly requires a structural decolonization of knowledge and learning in Moroccan institutions. Ali Faiq's project provides a significant example in this direction, and as such it could be a model for future initiatives.

Raissa Fatima Tabaamrant, 2016

Besides education, the greater inclusion of women will possibly come to play a crucial role in rwais expression. The rise of a new generation of feminist voices brought a series of changes in the legislation pertaining to women's rights and gender equality. According to Fatima Sadiqi (2014), a new feminist "Center" emerged from the Arab Spring protests in 2011 as an ideological middle-ground where secular and Islamist paradigms confront each other over women's rights. In 2012, Fatima Tabaamrant was the first raissa to become a member of the Moroccan parliament, advocating for Amazigh and women's rights. This certainly is a sign that positions are moving in Morocco, progressively generating more space for public female expression. Ali Faiq's research activities and cultural initiative are part of these transformations, informed by persisting inequalities faced by ethnic and gendered minorities in Morocco. His project emerged from an awareness that knowledge can provide the means to overcome oppression. Almost a hundred years after Abouche Tamassit's appearance on the Pathé recordings, raissa Tabaamrant expresses a similar idea in the following verses:

> Life is no longer what it was.
> This is the time of knowledge,
> Even for those who've never been to school.
> Grab your chance, sisters!
> It is never too late to learn.
> – Fatima Tabaamrant, in Sadiqi 2014



II.

LISTEN, THAT'S US!

Responses from Tafraout to the *Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection* (1959)

VIDEO
And who sees the mystery
by Gilles Aubry and Zouheir Atbane
2014, 27'01", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/17881/2/aw.mp4

et:
qui:
voit:
le:
mys

Photo-booth picture of Paul Bowles sent to Bruce Morissette from Paris in 1930. The French phrase translates as "and who sees the mystery."

In 1959, the US writer and composer Paul Bowles (1910-1999) travelled across Morocco in order to record traditional music performances. In five months, he managed to document 250 examples, covering some of the most significant Moroccan music genres. The music tapes were later sent to the Library of Congress in Washington in order to be archived. A double LP record containing some of these tracks was published in 1972, making a strong impression on western audiences interested in folk music. In 2010, the entire *Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection*[1] was digitized, and copies were sent to the American Legation in Tangier (TALIM), where it is now accessible for consultation. From a musicological perspective, the collection represents an early attempt of cultural preservation by means of modern audio technology. While a few other examples exist,[2] the *Bowles Collection* is remarkable in its size and scope, as well as regarding to the diversity of the music genres that it documents. For the field of sound studies and sound art, Bowles's recording project in Morocco is striking for yet other reasons. Paul Bowles was indeed not an ethnographer, but an established writer and composer with an expressed interest in sound aesthetics and avant-garde music practices. As an American expatriate who lived in Tangier since 1947, he was well acquainted with Morocco and had a clear opinion about Moroccan music and society. Questions therefore arise on how Bowles's ideas were inscribed onto the recordings. What kind of listening experience did he seek to enable, and for which audiences? How did he practically approach recording during these sessions? How did he interact with the local authorities and with the musicians?

[1] A detailed description of the collection is available on the website of the American Folklife Center: https://www.loc.gov/folklife/guides/paulbowles.html. After a failed attempt to collaborate with the Moroccan Ministry of Culture in order to make the Bowles recordings accessible online, Gerald Loftus, the former director of the American Legation in Tangier (TALIM), came to an agreement with the Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT in Boston. About half of the recordings are now freely accessible and downloadable on their website. Direct link: https://archnet.org/authorities/2872

[2] Commercial recordings were made by companies such as Pathé, Gramophone, and Baidaphone as early as in the 1920s (see Chapter 1); the ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu made a few Moroccan recordings in the early 1950s for the Ethnographic Museum in Geneva, accessible via this link: http://www.ville-ge.ch/meg/sql/musinfo_public_ph.php?id=7755.
Alan Lomax also made recordings in Morocco in 1967, accessible online at the Lomax Digital Archive: https://archive.culturalequity.org/node/790

In what ways was Bowles's approach different from earlier recording initiatives in North Africa, colonial and commercial ones? What can be learned by engaging with these recordings in Morocco today?

These questions emerged when I first accessed the *Bowles Collection* in Tangier in 2012. What I heard seemed to materialize ideas and practices that felt already familiar to me as a field recordist and sound artist. These ideas had to do with using sound recording as a way to document situations in remote places, capturing aspects of local cultures, music, voices, and soundscapes, with the possibility of using them later in music compositions. I was well aware of the risks of cultural appropriation and exoticization inherent in such practices, but it wasn't clear to me how exactly power asymmetries tend to be reproduced through listening and recording. Paul Bowles's notes[3] contain detailed descriptions of the 1959 recording sessions. Studying these notes gave me a better sense of how Bowles concretely engaged in recording situations. In this chapter, I consider how Bowles's non-academic approach to sound documentation was fueled by the desire for a "personal redrawing" (Chandarlapaty 2015) and by his belief that sound provided one of the ways to accomplish it. I compare these findings to comments by people in Tafraout, elicited in 2013 during listening sessions. The comparison shows a number of limitations and power imbalances in Bowles's music preservation project, which I discuss in terms of colonial structures, whiteness, and privileges.

More generally, the research in Tafraout highlights the plurality of listenings enabled by historical recordings in a context where cultural expression appears highly politicized. Tensions in the cultural and social fields become more apparent, to which people respond differently according to their needs and interests. Some of these findings also appear in the video *And who sees the mystery* (Aubry and Atbane 2014),[4] which I produced as part of this research in collaboration with the performer Zouheir Atbane. I describe our joint research in Tafraout as an attempt to circumvent some of the limitations identified in Paul Bowles's recording practices. If recording cannot account for the complex sociality of existing or past music traditions, I suggest that this very impossibility offers a new starting point for a reflection on sound, aurality, and alterity. In such a configuration, recording appears as a medium for transcultural exchange and aesthetic experimentation, rather than as a means of cultural preservation. Sonic pluralism is manifested through the multiplicity of aural perspectives enabled by this approach and through the diversity of our research methods—listening sessions, conversations, text commissions, field recording, music rehearsals, and performances. Subjective redrawing becomes a collective project, I argue in conclusion, expressed in the negotiation inherent in transcultural listening.

Access Copy
Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection
AFC 1960/001: AFS 11623

Top: CDs and field notes from the *Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection*, Tangier 2012.
Bottom: CD label from the same collection.

PAUL BOWLES'S 1959 MUSIC RECORDINGS IN MOROCCO

At the time he made his recordings, Paul Bowles had been living in Tangier for twelve years as an American expatriate, a city which had the special status of an International Zone established by France, Spain, and Great Britain in 1923. Like

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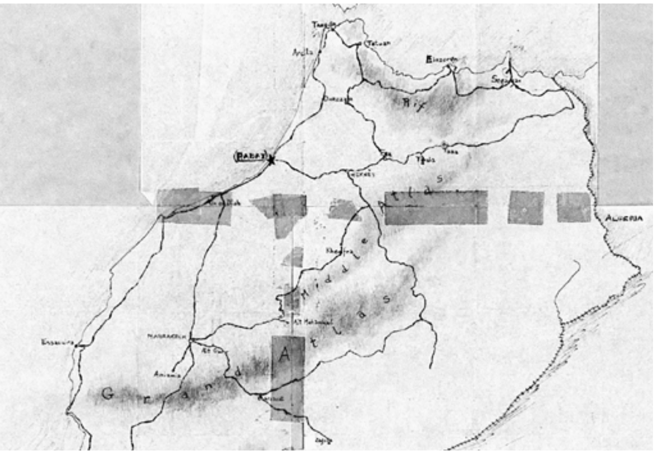
[3] Paul Bowles's 1959 field notes are preserved at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. They are now accessible on the website of the Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT in Boston. Direct link: https://archnet.org/authorities/2872

[4] The video *And who sees the mystery* (Aubry and Atbane 2014) can be accessed via the following link: https://arbor.bfh.ch/17881/2/aw.mp4 The work was commissioned for the exhibition *Why Ain't You Rich If You're So Smart*, a parallel project to the Marrakech Art Biennale 2014.



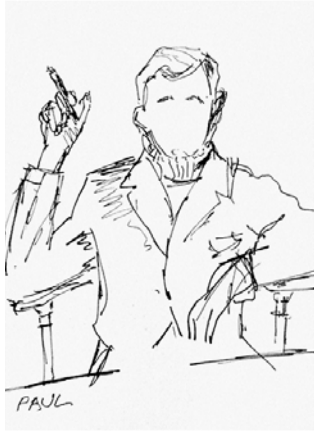
Top: Map of Paul Bowles's recording trips in Morocco, 1959.
Bottom: Photo documentation of Paul Bowles's recording session in Essaouira with Gnaoua musicians, 1959.

William Burroughs, Alfred Chester, and other American writers, Bowles found Tangier to be a place of intellectual and sexual freedom that offered space for personal experimentation. In reaction to the white patriarchal model of Protestant conservatism still prevalent in the US after WWII, these artists were keen to engage with new modes of subjectivity, based on a personal, spiritual, and intellectual "redrawing" (Chandarlapaty 2015). For Bowles, this happened through his encounters in Tangier with what he believed were local manifestations of premodern minds: "primitive" cultures, folk music and trance rituals, exoticism, drugs, illiteracy, and sometimes mere poverty. The ethical significance of these meetings raises critical questions regarding Bowles's behavior. If the shadow of colonial racism and separateness was discarded amid personal involvement with "natives," Bowles, however, often retained the patriarchal attitude of salvage anthropology. While his admiration for oral cultures was sincere, it often went together with a yearning for "authenticity" in local traditions (Mullins 2002), and with a certain romanticization of non-western lifestyles.

Music for Bowles was a privileged site of emotional engagement with local sensitivity. He became fond of *Jilala*, *Gnaoua*, and various styles of Berber music, which were presumedly devoid of western musical and musicological influences. He arguably heard in them the possibility of a "cosmic agency," an "antidote" against modern man's malevolence and technological paranoia, together with a promise of a "psychic regeneration" (Chandarlapaty 2015). These aspects were central to his recording project in Morocco, and therefore, to a large extent, determined his aesthetic approach to recording. As his proposal to the Library of Congress in Washington in 1957 attests, Bowles wanted to preserve music traditions from the growing modernization of the country and cultural policy of the newly independent Moroccan state (Schuyler 2015). Once his proposal was accepted by the Library and secured financially with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, Bowles started his project without following a proper scientific method. "I'm making music to sound the way I want it to sound," Bowles once declared (Schuyler 2015). He never considered himself a scholar or an ethnomusicologist, and his plan was to record as many different examples as possible.

As the Moroccan scholar Hassan Bourara (2014) remarks, the persona consciously adopted by Paul Bowles—his self-portrait as an "invisible spectator"—was cultivated during his earliest North African excursions. The ensuing detached attitude involved a self-distancing on Paul Bowles's part, the better to avoid intrusions while recording the musicians. It was an aesthetic decision generally construed as a desire for objective representation: to have the locals play as they normally do during gatherings and celebrations. Like earlier collectors, Bowles believed that his job was to "capture" the sounds, and that it was up to others to make sense of them (Schuyler 2015). The idea of using modern sound technology in order to preserve cultural traditions from the dangers of modernization was not new. As a form of "salvage anthropology," it relied on faith in the ability of sound reproduction technology to preserve cultures. For Sterne (2003), the principle of *permanence* in sound ethnography was a "Victorian fantasy," as "the performance itself was transformed in order to be reproduced."

If Bowles believed in part in the possibility to preserve music performances through recording, his notes show that he was not just a recording technician in these sessions. By clearly expressing his preference for certain instruments and his distaste for others, and by taking initiative during the recording in order to modify the balance between the instruments, or by asking for unusual music interpretations, he clearly assumed the role of a producer. He relied on his own aesthetic taste and conception of what makes a good recording as well as on his self-granted right to impose modifications on the musicians. Bowles was especially interested in the emotional power of music and listening. He frequently refers to the musicians' and listeners' "ecstatic" and "hypnotic" mind states in his notes, and occasionally describes other affective states induced by music listening, such as "solitude." If Paul Bowles liked to see himself as an "invisible" spectator, he was certainly not a *passive* spectator. In sound, and in recording, he found a new mode of artistic expression, geared toward the production of specific effects on his audience. He targeted primarily western listeners, who like him were adepts of transformative aural experiences.



Portrait of Paul Bowles, part of the TALIM collection in Tangier, 2012.

RESEARCH IN TAFRAOUT AND THE VIDEO *AND WHO SEES THE MYSTERY*

I visited Tafraout in 2013, a Berber-Amazigh town in the Anti-Atlas mountains, where Paul Bowles recorded a village music performance in August 1959. I was joined during this trip by the performer Zouheir Atbane from Casablanca, who also had an interest in field recording. We spent several weeks interviewing local musicians, organizing listening sessions, and experimenting with diverse artistic strategies. We learned a great deal from these encounters, and from each other through our exchanges. With his artistic and linguistic skills, Zouheir was an ideal research companion, well aware of the implications of fieldwork. Our collaboration led to several joint artistic realizations and presentations.[5]

The video *And who sees the mystery* retraces our engagement with the Bowles recordings in Tafraout, offering a parallel narrative to this chapter. It includes sound footages of listening sessions, interviews, soundscapes, excerpts of the Bowles recordings, as well as new recordings with local musicians. The video contains no images and consists of a soundtrack with white text on a black background. The format felt relevant in this case, because we were exploring the limits of

[5] Apart from the video *And who sees the mystery*, my collaboration with Zouheir Atbane resulted in the performance *Befuddling the archive*, presented at the French Cultural Institute in Marrakech in 2014. In 2015, Zouheir Atbane contributed a silent video (untitled) to the exhibition *Dissonant Archives*, which I co-curated at the Oslo10 art space in Basel. In 2017 we joined again for a presentation at the art space Le Cube in Rabat.

sound recording as a medium for documentation and preservation, and because of the various instances of invisibility addressed in the work. The text provides English subtitles to the voices in Moroccan-Arabic and Berber-Tashlhit, as well as additional elements. The work is structured in five parts: part I is a discussion on the content of the Bowles recordings with the musician Mohamed Anjjar; part II focuses on Paul Bowles himself and on his music preservation project; part III includes a conversation with Mina Haddadi, a local cultural promoter, and a new song by the band Addal; part IV is a digression on acousmatic sound in avant-garde music; and the concluding part V offers comments on the erasure effects of sound recording.

Listening session with Mohamed Anjjar and Zouheir Atbane, Tafraout, 2013.

LISTENING TO THE BOWLES RECORDINGS WITH MOHAMED ANJJAR

The performance recorded by Paul Bowles in 1959 contains seven tracks of *Ahwash* music, which is a form of expression common in the Grand-Atlas and Anti-Atlas mountain regions of Morocco. Not limited to music, Ahwash performances include dance and improvised poetic exchanges, with up to sixty performers (Rovsing Olsen 1997). The tracks include chanting and percussion played by a core group of thirteen musicians. The chanting alternates between solo and group parts, accompanied by slow and powerful rhythms, and punctuated by joyful shouts. Bowles's notes on this session only mention the group leader's name, Maalem Ahmed, and there is no information on the other performers. When we arrived in Tafraout in June 2013, Zouheir Atbane and I introduced ourselves to the local authorities, who put us in touch with a local Ahwash group. None of our interlocutors had ever heard of the Bowles recordings. One of the musicians, however, quickly identified in one of the songs the voice of Mohamed Anjjar, an eighty-five year-old carpenter from a nearby village. Meeting with Mr Anjjar at his house in Tahala was a true highlight of our research. We spent an entire afternoon listening to the Bowles recordings, and he shared many comments and memories with us. Recorded excerpts of this session are featured in the video. One can feel emotion in Mohamed Anjjar's voice as he hears the fifty-four year-old recordings for the first time:

> Listen, that's us! This comes from us, it's old! [...] Moulay the Haj, it's him singing! All those who are singing this song are dead. Today, I and my brother are the only ones left. The others are gone![6]

Mr Anjjar goes on with explanations on the poetic content of the songs, highlighting moral values in the community:

> The lyrics are always linked to the values of sharing and generosity. [...] This song praises the "generous hand." When this hand is cut off, then everyone is sad. But nobody regrets it when it is stingy. [...] This other one is about love, which should be free of material interests. [...] This one is like a prayer, the lyrics invoke peace and wish other countries to resolve their conflict and to live in peace. [...] This one is about King Mohammed V:

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[6] All of Mohamed Anjjar's statements have been transcribed from our recorded listening session at his home in Tahala on 13.6.2014. English translation by the author.

> "God have mercy on your soul and that you may always be with us." It was our choice. We were happy to sing for our King.

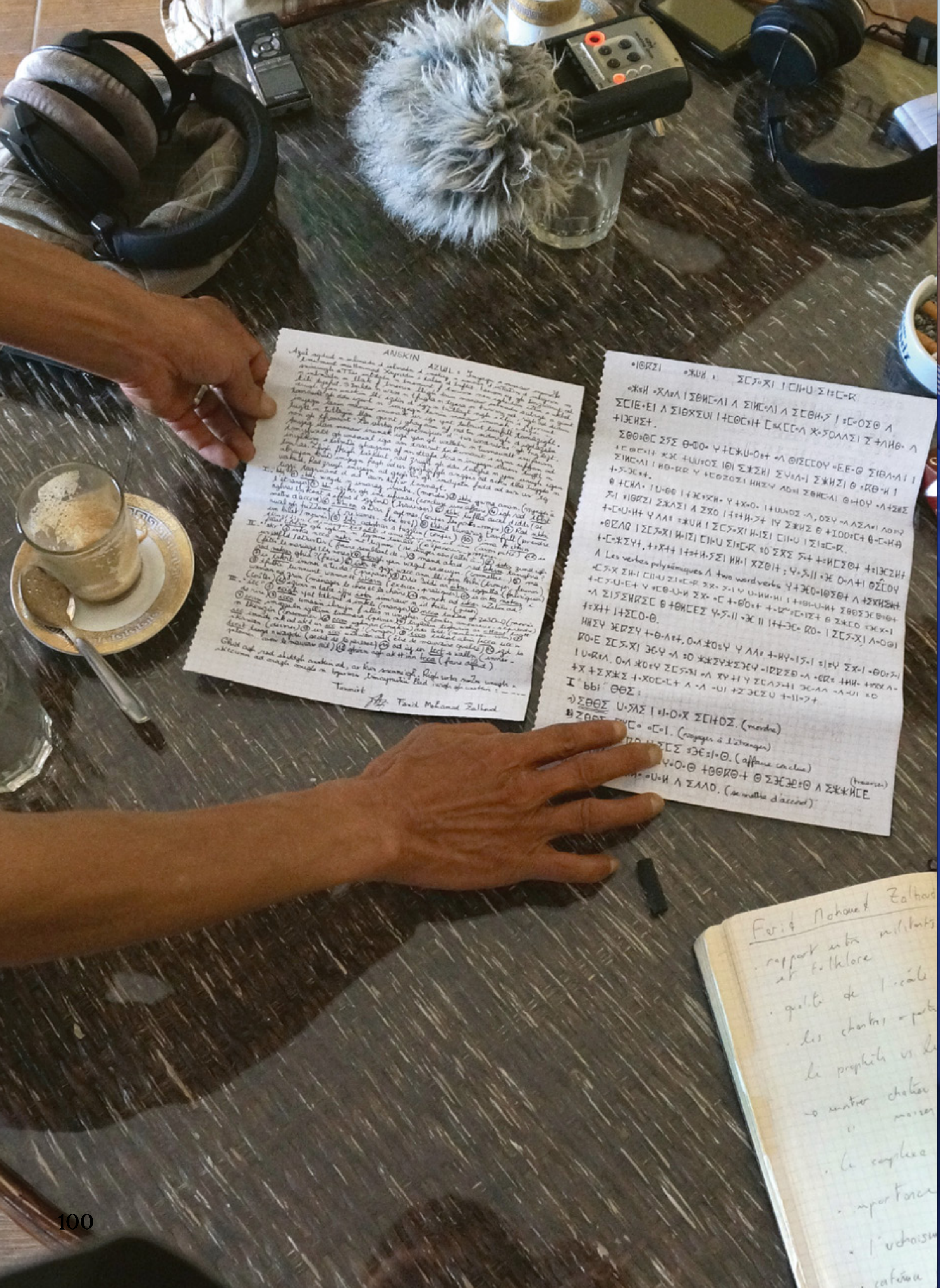
We also shared Bowles's notes with Mohamed Anjjar, as we were curious about his reaction. Because Bowles needed electricity for powering his Ampex tape-recorder, the recordings took place at the military fort (*bordj*):

> Getting musicians in Tafraout was complicated. The acting governmental chief took us several miles down the valley one morning to meet a certain caid who would send out a moqqadem to each village, commanding the men to appear the following night at the military bordj. (Bowles 1960)

As Mohamed Anjjar bitterly recalls, it was not unusual for villagers to be forced to perform Ahwash during the years of French occupation in the region, and even after the country's independence in 1956:

> We were forced to go! Yes! And we didn't know we were being recorded by this American man. I don't recognize the guy on the photo. Foreigners were always protected, inaccessible. The men of the caid would not let us speak to them or exchange addresses.

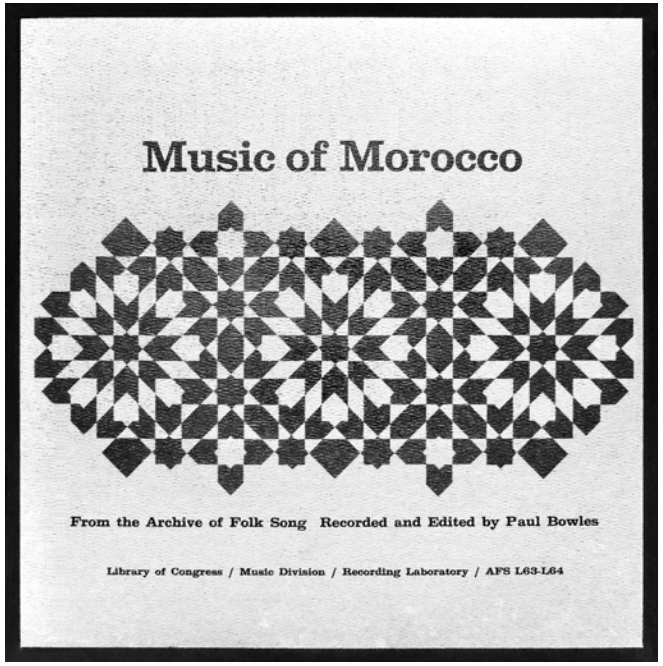
Instead of the ecstatic and regenerative feeling intended by Bowles with his recordings, Mr Anjjar's comments express fear and frustration. This is especially the case when evoking the *caid* and his men—the fierce executives of French colonial power in the rural regions of Morocco. While Bowles did not receive official permission for his project from the Moroccan state authorities, he did not hesitate to use his influential position as an American citizen to convince the local authorities of commanding the musicians to come and play for him. For a project aimed at preserving local musical traditions, this procedure seems highly questionable. It is safe to assume that all of Bowles's recordings of large Berber music groups in his collection took place under similar circumstances. The musicians were forced to play in front of him and the local authorities, sometimes even in the presence of armed soldiers.



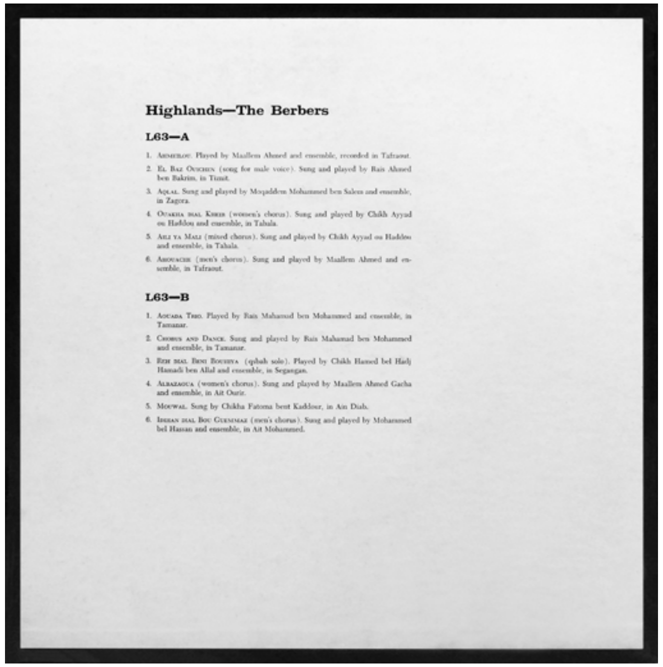
As Mullins (2002) suggests, Bowles was not a defender of western colonialism and frequently criticized the negative influence of French politics in his writings. Bowles's freedom of experimentation, however, was secured through the specific forms of political and juridical domination established in Tangier by colonial powers. American residents, for example, were not subject to Moroccan laws or taxes. They thus participated in the social structures of colonization, and their interactions with Moroccan people were shaped by the psychology of colonialism. The methods Bowles used to achieve his recordings mirror the privileges of his position, an aspect his notes do not reflect. There is thus an *erasure effect* of recording, which invisibilizes the particular position of its author. This erasure effect extends to the musicians themselves, whose names and biographies have not been preserved. While acknowledging the significance of Bowles's project, Mohamed Anjjar clearly expresses frustration over the fact that today, only Paul Bowles is credited but not the musicians:

> These recordings are indeed an example of preservation. I regret that only Paul Bowles is known today. The musicians themselves, they have been forgotten! One never mentions them as important contributors to preservation. What is missing are the names and the biographies of the musicians, so that they are not presented as anonymous people.

Two of the Tafraout recordings are featured on the LP *Music of Morocco* published in 1972 by the Library of Congress in Washington DC. The liner notes do not provide additional information on the musicians. Instead, the publication reverses the white colonial fantasy of racial and civilizational superiority into a celebration of sonic primitivism: following Paul Bowles's indications, the first record (*Highlands–The Berbers*) contains "pure" Berber music, whereas the second (*Lowlands– Influent Strains*) features "hybrid" music with Arabic, Sub-Saharan, or Jewish influences. With this editorial choice, *Music of Morocco* appears as a possible American response to the nationalist cultural agenda of the Moroccan state at the time. The record also perpetuates a tendency inherited from colonial ethnography to objectify musicians into static cultural representations, omitting their names and biographies, and denying them authorship and copyrights. This added weight to our conversation with Mr Anjjar:


Music of Morocco
From the Archive of Folk Song Recorded and Edited by Paul Bowles
Library of Congress / Music Division / Recording Laboratory / AFS L63-L64

Cover of the record *Music of Morocco* by Paul Bowles, 1972.



Highlands—The Berbers

L63—A

1. Ahmeilou. Played by Maallem Ahmed and ensemble, recorded in Tafraout.
2. El Baz Ouichen (song for male voice). Sung and played by Rais Ahmed ben Bakrim, in Tiznit.
3. Aqlal. Sung and played by Moqaddem Mohammed ben Salem and ensemble, in Zagora.
4. Ouakha dial Kbir (women's chorus). Sung and played by Chikh Ayyad ou Haddou and ensemble, in Tahala.
5. Aili ya Maii (mixed chorus). Sung and played by Chikh Ayyad ou Haddou and ensemble, in Tahala.
6. Ahouache (men's chorus). Sung and played by Maallem Ahmed and ensemble, in Tafraout.

L63—B

1. Aouada Tbel. Played by Rais Mahamad ben Mohammed and ensemble, in Tamanar.
2. Chorus and Dance. Sung and played by Rais Mahamad ben Mohammed and ensemble, in Tamanar.
3. Reh dial Beni Bouhiya (qibah solo). Played by Chikh Hamed bel Hadj Hamadi ben Allal and ensemble, in Segangan.
4. Alrazaouia (women's chorus). Sung and played by Maallem Ahmed Gacha and ensemble, in Ait Ouriz.
5. Mouwal. Sung by Chikha Fatoma bent Kaddour, in Ain Diab.
6. Izran dial Bou Guemmaz (men's chorus). Sung and played by Mohammed bel Hassan and ensemble, in Ait Mohammed.

> Identification is not only the name, but it is also the origin of the people, their history. [...] We never thought to say that it was our music! I participated in the recordings, but I don't own them. We didn't know that we were being recorded. It's not correct to record without the musicians being aware. I find it outrageous!

Mohamed Anjjar's declarations resonate with current debates on ownership and access to ethnographic collections, and on the pressing issue of "cultural restitution."[7] These aspects were part of our conversations with other community members in Tafraout, highlighting tensions in the field of cultural politics in Morocco and beyond.

STATE CULTURAL POLITICS AND THE REVIVAL OF BERBER CULTURE

Our next interlocutor in Tafraout was Mohamed Farid Zalhoud, who worked as a French teacher in the local school. Mr Zalhoud is also an erudite writer and poet, a scholar in English literature, and an Amazigh cultural activist. We learned a lot from him about Amazigh culture and state cultural politics in particular. As part of a generation who grew up during the early post-colonial period in Morocco under the reign of King Hassan II, Farid Zalhoud became a cultural opponent to the state's nationalist politics in the 1980s, struggling for the recognition of Amazigh culture and political rights. Following the involvement of Berber-Amazigh leaders in two failed coups-d'état against the monarchy in 1971 and 1972, the state's primary objective was to

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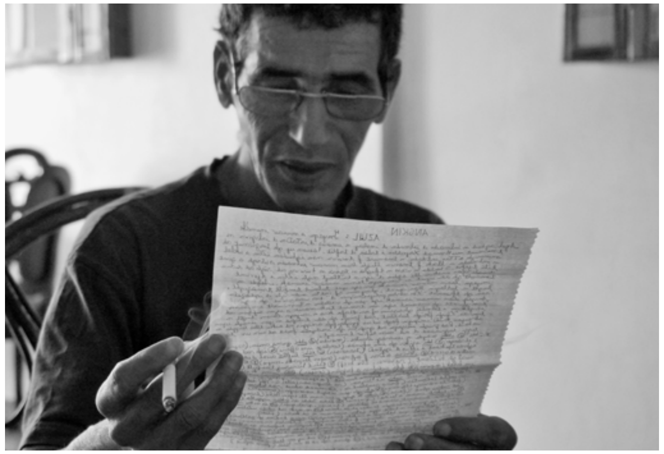
[7] The restitution of cultural objects is the subject of an ongoing debate, especially in and around western cultural institutions. For more information on this topic in the field of ethnographic music recordings, see Reddy and Sonneborn (2013).



Listening session with Mohamed Farid Zalhoud, Tafraout, 2013.

counter the political aspirations of the Berbers (Boum 2007). This happened through a structural marginalization of these populations, together with a folklorization of their culture. As a result, the Berber representation in national culture was now reduced to a set of "backward" and "uncivilized" traditions staged as part of national festivals and touristic events. In the following comment, Farid Zalhoud calls for a different orientation in state cultural policy:

> State politics in the field of cultural preservation are too often limited to a mere folklorization of Amazigh music, that is inviting ensembles for festivals or touristic events. Preservation is a matter of collective work. The musicians, the state, the associations, the intellectuals, that is representatives of each field of competence should be involved. What is needed is the consolidation of the local bounds between the musicians and the population, in order for them to be appreciated and demanded. This also means involving younger generations of musicians via musical activities at school.[8]

The reforms proposed by Mr Zalhoud in the field of cultural work and education present similarities with the declarations by Ali Faiq in the previous chapter. As a writer and admirer of Paul Bowles's literary work, Farid Zalhoud was very sympathetic to Bowles's music preservation project. His voice can be heard reading some of Bowles's notes in our video, and later a poem that he wrote in Berber-Tashlhit language as a response to our project.

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[8] Excerpt from an interview in French with Mohamed Farid Zalhoud in Tafraout, 13.10.2013. English translation by the author.

THE GROUP ADDAL: BERBER CULTURE ON THE WORLD STAGE

Yet additional voices populate the soundtrack of *And who sees the mystery*. In the video, one can hear the members of a local female music ensemble named Addal. Along with other bands in the region and throughout the country, Addal is part of a broader revival in Berber cultural expression, which emerged out of the political necessity to re-define modern Berber cultural identity. Following the side-stepping by the state of Berber political claims in the 1970s, culture progressively became "the currency" through which Berber identity could by made visible on the "world stage," and through which recognition could be attained (Goodman 2005). In order to create a unified representation of Berber cultural identity from a diversity of populations across the country and the diaspora, common cultural roots had to be discursively assembled, as part of a new ideological narrative on Berberity, or rather Amazighity. Folklore music and dance, along with artisanal objects and the Amazigh *Tifinagh* script, were central to this operation, as they were particularly well adapted to the global circulation of representations through various media, starting with tapes, CDs, and later videos and digital media.

Stills from an Ahwash music video-CD by Bnet Ellouz, date unknown.

According to music scholar Miriam Rovsing Olsen (1997), traditional Ahwash celebrations, as they existed in the region up until the 1970s, lasted for a whole night, including complex group choreographies, chanting, and percussion, alternating with long sections of improvised poetic battles between single members of the audience. While similar performances can still be experienced today as part of wedding celebrations in the homes of wealthy families in the region, the sacred and participative dimensions that had characterized Ahwash expression in the past seem to be lost. The group Addal, with its repertoire of short, fixed songs, well suited for cultural consumption in festival contexts, managed to create a kind of portable and commodified version of Ahwash. Since the band's creation in 1995 by Mina Haddadi, songs were adapted from the local repertoire for a transnational audience, as part of an increasingly globalized music market. The band released a number of CDs on local music labels. These productions became quite popular in the region and in the diaspora, enabling the band to perform at a fair amount of festivals in Morocco and Europe.

Significantly, most of the band members were single women in their twenties to fifties, several of them single mothers, and for this reason stigmatized by the village community. In a context where a woman's status as a single mother is a taboo and prevents her from benefiting from state support (Salime 2014), the band came as an opportunity for its members to subsist economically. Being a member of Addal is therefore not just a matter of skilled musicianship. This activity plays a part in the formation of "transnational subjects," characterized by the mobilization of particular "spaces, networks, and resources," and informed by an awareness that "mobility itself is one of the most powerful resources available today" (Biemann 2008). While this offers new possibilities for single women to enhance their position in society, the working conditions of musicians in transnational economies remain, however, precarious and highly uncertain. If gender inequality in Morocco is produced and reproduced by a patriarchal society, gender division is equally a major constitutive force of global capitalism, and therefore sustains some of these inequalities.

Working with Addal led to the recording of a couple of songs. Some of these recordings can be heard in the video (sections III and V), along with excerpts of our conversation with Mina Haddadi about the band's distinctive appearance on stage: the ten singers stand in a line as they perform, wearing one single piece of cloth (*chech*) covering all their faces. Two different narratives were presented to us about the origin of the collective veil in the region. The first narrative describes the veil as a sign of resistance against the French occupiers, who used to force female musicians to perform in front of them during the colonial period. The second narrative refers to the veil as a regional custom, a sign of God's protection, and the women's due respect when they appear publicly, without being directly associated with the islamic *hijab* or *burqa*. As we were told later, the large cloth was also a way for women performers to agree on the song lyrics without being seen by the audience, in times where poetic improvisation was still part of Ahwash expression. According to Mina Haddadi, it is the first narrative about the colonial origin of the veil that is usually reproduced in festival programs, especially in Europe.

TRIBUTE TO THE EAR: ERASURE EFFECTS OF RECORDING AND THE ACTIVE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

Commercial music productions turn cultural identity into a set of unified and simplified representations, so that they can easily circulate on the world stage. Anyone sympathetic to a particular cultural expression can participate in its celebration as part of World Music events, as they offer musical products that can be appreciated without pre-existing knowledge about their context. Audiences are thus transformed in the process, and cannot be addressed any more by the musicians as participants aware of the socio-political subtext of the performance. Mohamed Anjjar was very conscious of this effect in our discussion on the Bowles recordings. Not only were the musicians' names forgotten, he observed, but also the audience, that is the community of villagers who usually participated in Ahwash celebrations. "Ahwash is for the people," he declares in the video, and "basically not a service to satisfy so and so." The constitutive sociality of Ahwash expression was not taken into account by Paul Bowles for his cultural preservation project. In response to the multiple erasure effects identified in the Bowles recordings, we invited Farid Zalhoud to compose a new poem for our video that would tell of the significance of audience participation in Ahwash music. Written in Berber-Tashlhit language, and titled *Tribute to the Ear*, the poem is essentially an ode to music lovers and connoisseurs, men and women of the community who have "harvested many songs:"

Tribute to the ear!
Hello to those gathered here!
I am happy having found
beings who have harvested many songs
Tribute to the ear!
To our evening I brought singing
nectar that the heart has foraged
Tribute to the ear!
For a tribute to the ear that hears me
the golden crown I brought this evening
amongst the connoisseurs of speech
Tribute to the ear!
Women with bangs, music lovers,
I come for them
they are the gullies where singing flows.[9]

The poem appears at the end of the video (section V), along with the recording of a festive song performed by the women of Addal. While the music itself addresses a virtual, transnational community of listeners, the poem arguably re-introduces a sense of local participation in Ahwash expression.

PAUL BOWLES, SONIC MATERIALISM, AND WHITE AURALITY

In our video, Paul Bowles's aesthetic approach to recording is further brought into relation with the broader field of western avant-garde music. Current debates in this field pertain to the "nature" of sound itself, basically contrasting materialist accounts of sound with culturalist accounts. Perhaps best exemplified by the Cagean position in the history of avant-garde arts, the defenders of a "realist" and "materialist" account of sound argue for its conception "beyond the domain of culture, signification, and representation," proposing instead its theorization as a "material flux," as a "force" endowed with agency, and capable of generating its own form of thought (Cox 2011). While provocative and challenging, such a view becomes problematic, when it fails to recognize its own situatedness as part of "histories of whiteness and coloniality" (Thompson 2017). The possibility to account for sound-in-itself indeed posits the capacity for sound artists to imagine themselves in a subjectless position, from which sound can be observed from everywhere and nowhere. As it sustains its own privileges, white aurality does not only amplify its views on material sound and listening, but importantly also marginalizes other voices, practices, and histories.

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[9] Original text by Mohamed Farid Zalhoud. English translation by Tom Kenis.

As a composer with a formal education in modern classical music, and as a prolific music reviewer in American magazines, Paul Bowles was well aware of ideas that spread in the avant-garde music circles of his time. Like John Cage, he engaged early with tape experimentations, expressing also his fascination with "sound for its own sake" (Schuyler 2015). While cultivating a rather anti-intellectual posture and supporting forms of popular music expression, such as jazz and folk music, Bowles shared a sensibility for material sound with experimental composers, more than with ethnographers. He was not so much (if at all) interested in the local social significance of music practices, and indeed his notes contain no information about the songs and choreographies that would reveal them as socially coded practices. Paul Bowles also did not hesitate to intervene in the recording situations, dictating the musicians where to stand and which instruments to use or not use. It is therefore much more the *sound* of music that mattered to Bowles, with the possibility of shaping it in order to produce certain *effects* on the listeners. He found in the tape-recorder a device that allowed him to tell a story in sound, which was essentially a story about himself as a listener. Instead of the former white colonial aural culture characterizing modernity, Paul Bowles contributed with his approach to the makings of postmodern and postcolonial white aurality based on self-expression and emancipation. What appears problematic today is the invisibilization of Bowles's own sociality and privileges as part of this process, an aspect recurrent in avant-garde sound art practices focusing on sound as their primary material.

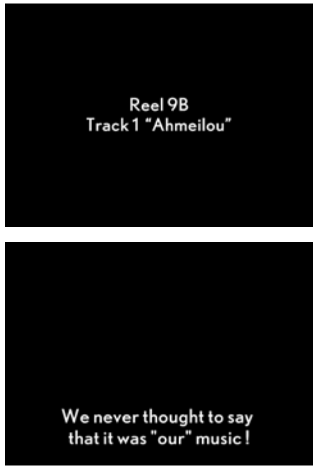
In *And who sees the mystery*, mystery refers to the self-mystifying posture often adopted by avant-garde composers and (sound) artists alike, and to the ambiguous status attributed by them to sound, between socially significant phenomenon and autonomous object. The correspondence between Bowles's sound practices and western avant-garde music is established in section IV of the video. The sequence opens with a sound collage in the style of French musique concrète, starting with frog recordings, followed by other "concrete" sounds (water drops, voices, birds, motorcycle), further developing into a rhythmical, percussive part, and culminating in the introduction of an expressive female voice singing in Berber-Tashlhit language. I recorded all of these sounds during my stay in Tafraout. Their status in the sequence ambiguously oscillates between field recordings (documentation of specific places and situations) and abstracted musical elements that are part of a larger composition. The text along the soundtrack narrates an imaginary conversation between an anonymous composer and his audience.[10] The composer provides a definition of "acousmatic music," a term proposed by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer in his 1966 *Treatise on musical objects*. He makes a comparison between the role of the loudspeaker in electroacoustic music performances and the veil used by the Greek philosopher Pythagoras in order to remain hidden while teaching his students, who were called "acousmatics." By separating sounds from their sources, he argues, the loudspeaker acts like a veil, making sound therefore autonomous and available for new mental

[10] The text in this section of the video has been freely adapted from a conference paper by the French composer François Bayle (Bayle 2007).

associations. While this position arguably resulted in significant works in the history of composition and sound art, it also appears as a radical dismissal of the documentary status of recorded sounds—that is of the inextricable sociality of the conditions of their production (Sterne 2003). By favoring abstraction and transcendence, acousmatic aesthetics recapitulate art's and (serious) music's supposedly special ontological status. The soundtrack in this section of the video mimics this aesthetic and at the same time contradicts its logic. Starting as an abstract composition, the soundtrack progressively evolves into an expressive vocal performance recorded during an Ahwash music night in Tafraout in 2013. As a result, a tension arises between the sonic and the textual content of the sequence, calling perhaps into question the listener's own assumptions about the relationship between sounds and their sources, about the ontological status of recorded sounds, and about the ethical consequences of such assumptions

PAUL BOWLES'S SONIC PLURALISM

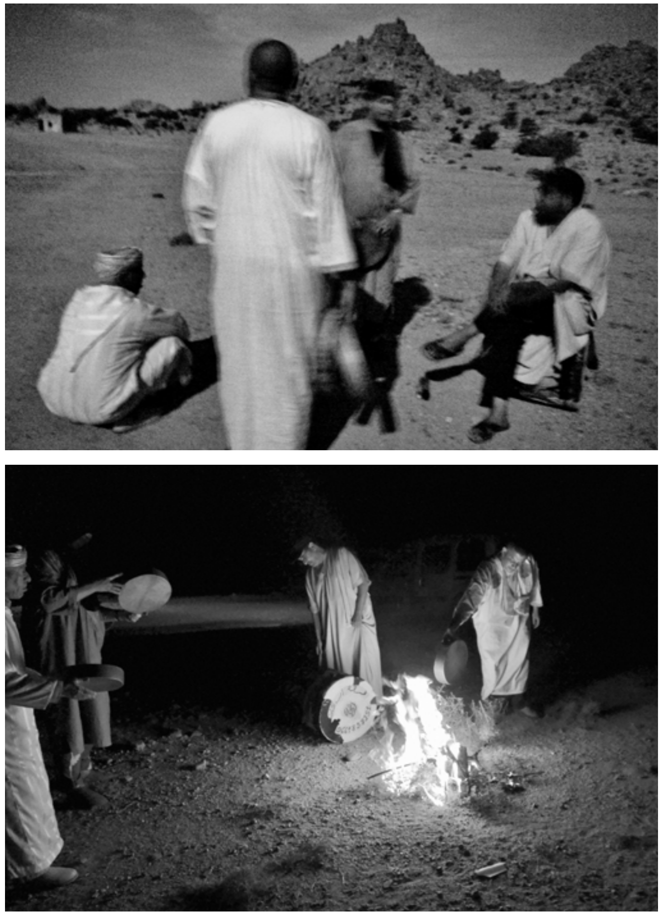
The structure of *And who sees the mystery* mirrors the indexical logic of the *Paul Bowles Collection*. Inter-titles in the video provide information about the track titles, dates, recording location, and numerical index in the *Collection*. This information guides the spectator's listening experience, while reminding them that this experience is necessarily conditioned by Bowles's own listening and recording practices. As a result, Mohamed Anjjar's comments are given a status of


Reel 9B
Track 1 "Ahmeilou"

We never thought to say
that it was "our" music!

Stills from *And who sees the mystery* by Gilles Aubry and Zouheir Atbane 2014.

Night recording session with musicians from Tafraout, 2013.



supplementary notes in the *Bowles Collection.*[11] This approach is part of an attempt to re-tell history by including the perspectives of local people who were initially excluded from it.

A somewhat similar approach was used by musicologist Philip D. Schuyler for the CD re-edition of *Paul Bowles's Music of Morocco* in 2015.[12] The 120-page booklet accompanying the remastered music recordings contains a well-documented introduction by Schuyler, along with his own comments on Bowles's notes. This information helps the reader situate the musical examples on the ethnomusicological map of Moroccan music. The entire publication, however, contains only two brief and rather anecdotal comments by Moroccan music scholars. The critical views on Paul Bowles expressed by Hassan Bourara (1996), Mohamed Choukri (1996), and Greg Mullins (2002) are not discussed in the introduction (although they are referenced in the bibliography). More importantly, the editor did not seize the opportunity provided by this re-edition for a reflection on transcultural sound practices, cultural appropriation, and restitution. As such, the 2015 version of *Music of Morocco* appears like a missed occasion to engage with a re-examination of white aurality.

Because of his anti-conformist ideas, manners, lifestyle, and aesthetics, Paul Bowles was, and remains today, an influential and controversial figure in Morocco, America, and beyond. It is precisely for this reason that it is necessary to re-examine his work today, I argue. With his thoughtful and provocative work, Bowles participated in the intellectual rebirth of western modernism after WWII, popularizing countercultural ideas and non-mainstream lifestyles that provided the foundation for subsequent cultural revolutions–from hippie and psychedelia in 1960s, to punk rock and alternative culture in the 1980s. Bowles's non-academic approach to music prefigured the dissolution of centuries-old historical, regional, and intellectual boundaries in western music, clearly influencing the rise of western pop music (Chandarlapaty 2015). This is precisely where Paul Bowles's sonic pluralism is manifested. First, by reworking the borders between ethnography, academic music, and mainstream culture, and second, by repurposing sonic experience toward a deterritorialization of white western subjectivity, adopting experience and reality "far beyond one's social realm." Bowles's renegade approach to ethnography in Morocco was thus not primarily geared toward the preservation of "other" cultures; it was alterity that provided the "stuff" needed for his own spiritual and intellectual redrawing. Sonic experience became a site for experimenting with a plurality of possible "selves" through listening and recording practices. Bowles's plural sound practice arguably played a role in his attempt to let oneself develop, rather than finding oneself "passively developed" by modernization processes and mainstream consuming culture (Diederichsen 2019).

Listening session with Hamida Khaddouj, Mammas Ben Rais, Mina Moustaid, and Zouheir Atbane, Tafraout, 2013.

SONIC PLURALISM AS COLLECTIVE LEARNING PROCESS

While radical and transgressive, Bowles's experimentations in Morocco were not devoid of power asymmetries, and perpetuated some of the systemic inequalities of European colonialism.

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[11] Bowles's 1959 field notes about his recording trip were presented in their totality (100 pages) as part of the installation at the 2014 Marrakech Biennale (Aubry and Atbane 2014). Later in 2015, the archive of the research project was presented as part of our installation *Ears in Morocco* in the *Dissonant Archive* exhibition in Basel (Aubry and Atbane 2015). It included fifty CDs and a printed booklet that reproduced the indexing system used by Paul Bowles in his original field notes. New pages were added with our own notes, photo documentation, and interview transcriptions.

[12] *Music of Morocco: Recorded by Paul Bowles*, 1959, 4 CDs, Dust to Digital, 2015

This was also the case with his music preservation project, causing in some cases moral prejudice about the recorded musicians. Such prejudices are integral to the history of postwar, countercultural white aurality, and we (white western sound artists, experimental musicians, and listeners alike) have to deal with this history today. Examples abound in recent underground music productions, which perpetuate ideas and practices inherited in part from Paul Bowles. These productions often conjure a nonacademic, immersive approach to musical alterity, together with a taste for exotic strangeness. Facilitated by an unequal economy of global mobility, these projects often reproduce the power asymmetries identified so far in Paul Bowles's project.[13]

If power asymmetries cannot be overcome by simply changing one's behavior, as they are indeed systemic, then it is perhaps necessary to acknowledge their existence by making differences in positions visible (and audible) as part of art and music productions. This idea informs a "transcultural" approach to alterity (Suhr and Willerslev 2013), which relies on "an active process of interaction between self and others [...] whereby difference is accounted for and negotiated." In *And who sees the mystery*, transcultural negotiation was part of our conversations with people in Tafraout, and rendered audible through the polyphonic principle that structures the work itself. Unlike Bowles's, our project was not geared toward the individual redrawing of the participants. It tended much more to a *collective* redrawing that we facilitated through a temporary "community of practice" (Wenger 1999). Sonic pluralism became thus the expression of a mutual learning process, out of which each

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[13] To name just one, yet paradigmatic example, the US label "Sublime Frequencies" commercially releases recordings made by its traveling members in all corners of the world. According to their website, the label "focuses on an aesthetic of extra-geography and soulful experience inspired by music and culture, world travel, research, and the pioneering recording labels of the past." The description presents striking similarities with Paul Bowles's ideas on music and recording. While admirably functioning as a non-profit organization, and despite a sincere commitment to non-mainstream music practices, the label perhaps fails to address the asymmetric power relations that sustain its economy and aesthetics. Some of these issues are discussed in the volume "Punk Ethnography: Artists & Scholars Listen to Sublime Frequencies" (2016), edited by Michael E. Veal and E. Tammy Kim.

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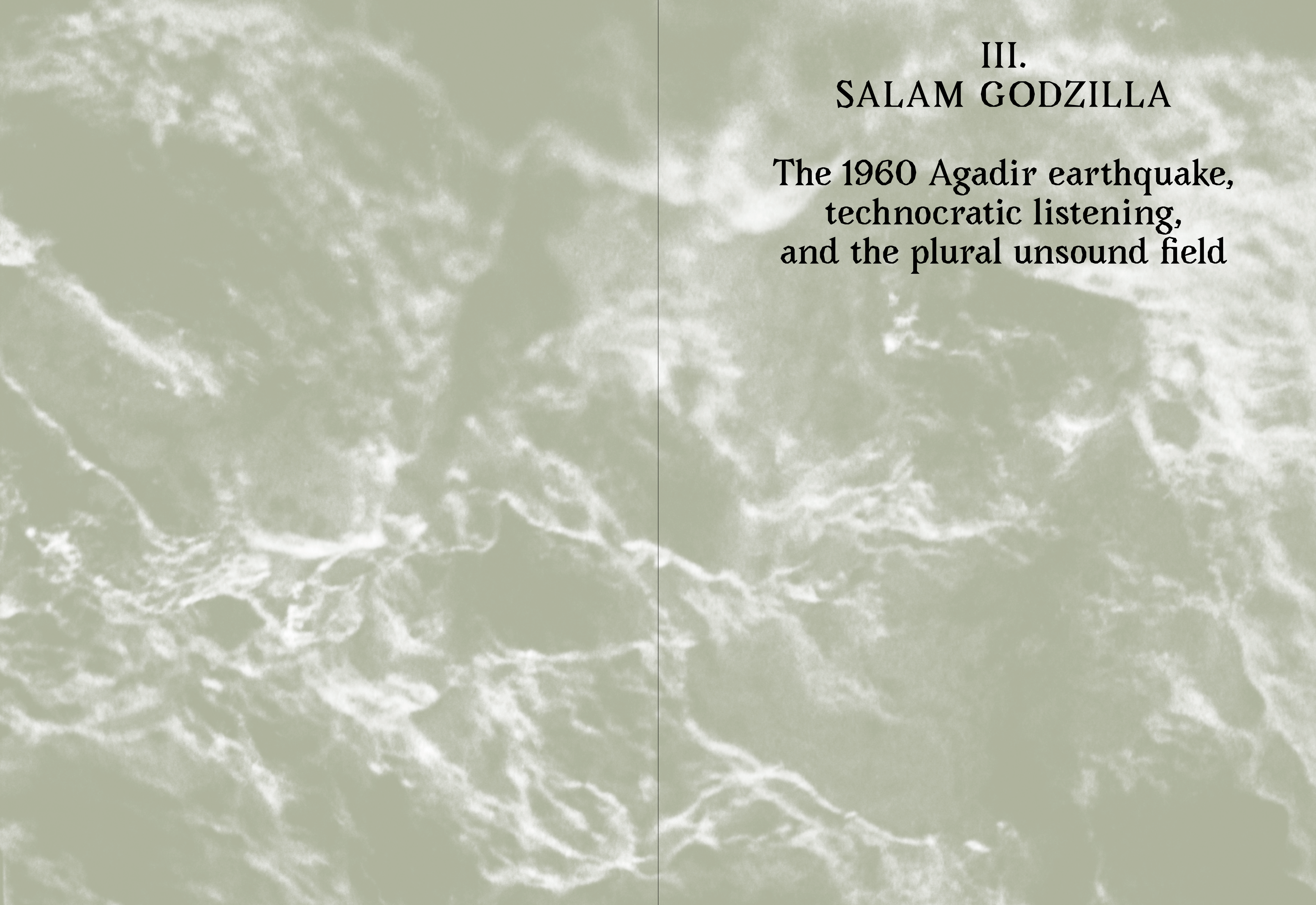
participant came out transformed. By making differences in position and privileges more apparent, this approach allowed to re-situate Paul Bowles's sound practices within a broader field of white aurality and western sound experimentalism. It made me re-examine my own position within those fields, and consider different uses of sound that were less likely to reproduce power asymmetries and create erasure effects. Paul Bowles certainly had a sense of the transformative power of sound on a personal, subjective level. At a public level, on the contrary, he never abandoned his "white man" persona, that "invisible spectator" he chose to constantly perform. This persona allowed him to remain in the safe zone of whiteness, perhaps preventing him to attune more deeply to the conditions of the people he interacted with in Morocco.



III.

SALAM GODZILLA

The 1960 Agadir earthquake, technocratic listening, and the plural unsound field

VIDEO
Salam Godzilla
by Gilles Aubry
2019, 40'35", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18256/2/sg.mp4

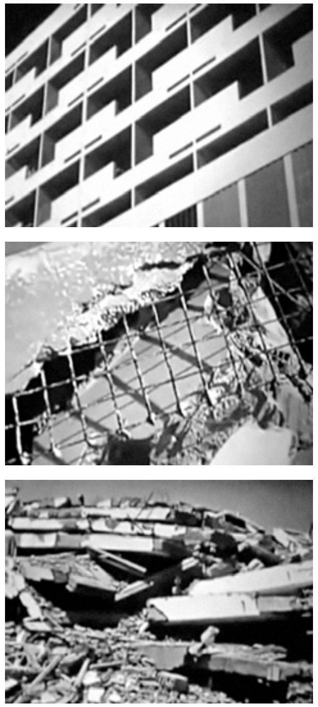
My research on sound and listening in Morocco initally focused on musical expression and its recorded forms. But what about the other domains of aurality and technicity that play a role in the ways people's realities are constructed? This chapter marks a shift in my approach toward extra-musical sound, and environmental sound in particular. This orientation considerably widened the scope of my study; it also helped me identify new interpretative angles, inspired by contributions less directly related to sound and music studies, such as natural sciences and urban studies. What follows is the result of my engagement with the earthquake that destroyed the port city of Agadir on 29 February 1960. The seism killed an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 people of a population of 48,000, destroying about 70 percent of the city buildings (Williford 2017). When approached as a combination of natural, social, and technological factors, natural disasters can reveal much about the ways people relate to their environment; by extension, examining the sonic dimension of natural disasters may bring a new perspective on aurality in human-environmental relationships. Seismic waves are indeed relevant to sound studies, as they operate within a range that covers the low end of audible frequencies (about 20 hertz) and the very low oscillations of the whole Earth, with the potential to equally affect bodies and environments.[1] I thus wanted to find out how the earthquake was "heard" at the time, by the population and by the experts in charge of the reconstruction process, and with what consequences. Ultimately, this approach offers new insights on the ways people relate to *sound* itself, as a social, environmental, and technological phenomenon.

[1] The dominant frequency range of small to moderate earthquakes extends in waves from about 1 to 0.1 hertz, while the lowest waves can reach a period of 54 minutes. (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica 2020)

According to historian Daniel Williford (2017), the reconstruction process in Agadir inaugurated a new era of modern postwar urbanism in Morocco. In his article about the earthquake, Williford offers a detailed analysis of the countless reports produced by experts and bureaucrats during the months following the seism in 1960. This account inspired my own attempt to retrace the scientific and bureaucratic listening practices mobilized during the reconstruction process. In search for additional sources about the earthquake, I identified an oral poem composed in 1960 by Ibn Ighil, a well-known minstrel-poet (*anddam*) living in the south of Agadir. Tape-recorded by Kenneth L. Brown in 1970, Ibn Ighil's *Tale of Agadir* describes the earthquake and searches for its meaning. Based on a commented transcript and English translation by Brown and Lakhsassi (1980), I approach the poem here as a locally situated account of the disaster, allowing for comparison with the official reports described in Williford's article. Both for the poet and the experts, facing the earthquake and its consequences had a significant sonic dimension, particularly in terms of *who* and *what* was heard as they delivered their respective interpretation of the event. I focus on the sound and listening concepts that can be identified in each case, with particular attention to social, affective, and political aspects.

ACOUSTEMOLOGY, SONIC VIRTUALITY, AND UNSOUND

The 1960 Agadir earthquake offers an opportunity to examine how sound and listening are crucial in the ways realities are constructed from very distinct positions. Feld's (2017) notion of "acoustemology" is useful for analyzing such processes as part of embodied and relational knowledge practices. Following such an interpretative framework, I suggest that Ibn Ighil's versifying generates a *virtual* form of sonic materiality. Modern science itself has arguably long entered the field of virtuality by relying on probability and statistics for risk prediction. This equally applies to the field of technological sound and listening. In order to address that which cannot be heard yet—future earthquakes in this case—I refer to Steve Goodman's (2010) notion of "unsound." As another name for the "not yet audible" and "future sound," Goodman coined the term in order to denote the potential of "sonic virtuality, the nexus of imperceptible vibration." Starting from the peripheries of human audition, infrasound and ultrasound, the unsound becomes a way to question the limits of sound itself. This involves a reworking of the sharp distinctions between the physical, the phenomenological, and the affective dimensions of sound and listening. The relation between these terms is re-conceptualized as a *continuum* between *vibration* (sonic materialism) and *vibe* (ambience, mood, and affect). While Goodman's unsound has been criticized for its potentially depoliticizing effect[2], my contribution aims to diversify and re-politicize this concept by showing that sonic virtuality can be equally colonized by oppressive forces and reclaimed by marginalized groups of the population. My examples reveal a multiplicity of unsound fields in Agadir. The earthquake and its aftermaths arguably made the intersections between those fields more visible, highlighting the plurality of aural knowledges and practices mobilized in order to respond to the disaster.



Concrete structures damaged by the earthquake in Agadir, 1960. Stills from *Et maintenant Agadir* by Louis Roger, 1960.

THE FILM *SALAM GODZILLA*

Besides Williford's article and Ibn Ighil's poem, my study draws on my own artistic-ethnographic research in Agadir. Carried out in 2017 and 2018, the research led to the realization of a film essay, *Salam Godzilla* (Aubry 2019),[3] to which I frequently refer in this chapter. The film emerged from the need to engage with the earthquake in the present. It is therefore not simply a documentary about the disaster, but rather its tentative reconstitution on a sound-conceptual level. The main elements in the film were chosen for their potential to embody—and arguably not just represent—particular sound worlds, knowledges, practices, and affects, which I further interpret in terms of particular unsounds. These elements include diverse locations, organizations, footage, and protagonists—including myself—that were brought into new relations for the film through direct encounters, staging, performance, and montage. I collaborated with the Agadiri singer Ali Faiq in order to produce a new sung version of Ibn Ighil's poem, performed in original Berber-Tashlhit language. The main location of the film is the Salam movie theater in the center of Agadir, a modernist construction built in 1946 by architect Boubker Fakih Tetouani. The building survived the earthquake while most of the area was destroyed.

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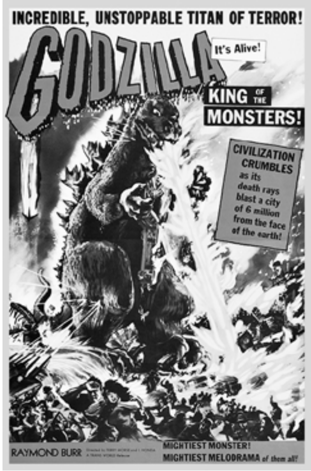
[2] As Robin James (2007) aptly remarked, Goodman tends to position the unsound against "[sound] theory's past commitments to representational dualisms, skeptical melancholy, and identity politics," thereby privileging a "subpolitical" level of sonic experience.

[3] The film *Salam Godzilla* (Aubry 2019, 40:35, HD video) can be accessed via https://arbor.bfh.ch/18256/2/sg.mp4

Salam movie theater in Agadir, 1950s.

With its remarkable design and history, the theater became important for my film because of an anecdote reported by several local sources: the film projected inside on the very night of the earthquake in 1960 was *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (Honda and Morse 1956). Known as the first Japanese science-fiction movie, it features a giant reptilian monster causing fear and destruction in the Tokyo area. The film is often linked with the collectively repressed trauma of the 1945 nuclear bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Noriega 1987). This anecdote not only inspired the title of my own film, but also its content. It opened up a field of possibilities for the treatment of the environmental dimension of the earthquake, alongside questions of extra-human agency and monstrous representations.


INCREDIBLE, UNSTOPPABLE TITAN OF TERROR!
GODZILLA
It's Alive!
KING OF THE MONSTERS!
CIVILIZATION CRUMBLES as its death rays blast a city of 6 million from the face of the earth!
RAYMOND BURR
MIGHTIEST MONSTER! MIGHTIEST MELODRAMA of them all!

Film poster of *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (1956).

Over the course of my study, I became particularly interested in the possibility to engage with extra-human voices. In this case, the question was whether the Earth itself could be considered a living entity, possibly with its own voice, of which the earthquake would be a particularly violent manifestation. As Pettman (2017) suggests, listening to the sounds of nature can become "a way of attuning ourselves to a more radical alterity than our own species," which in turn "can afford new forms of being together." Expanding the conceptual spectrum of what counts as a voice is "one way to better understand—and thus challenge—the technical foundation and legacy of taxonomy (gender, class, race, species)," he argues. As I will elaborate later in this chapter, various human and extra-human voices come to matter in *Salam Godzilla*. They include the poet Ibn Ighil and the singer Ali Faiq; the rwais dancers Lahcen Aattar and Ali Bazegra; the Agadiri artists Dounia Fikri and Abderrahim Nidalha; the Earth; Godzilla; the group of anonymous dinosaurs who left their footprints on a beach near Agadir about 100 millions years ago; as well as the keeper of the site, Samir Benteyane. I describe how some of these protagonists were brought into relation with one another in my film, often in opposition to the dominant voices of scientific experts, the media, bureaucrats, and local authorities. While I mainly focus on audible aspects of the disaster, I feel equally obliged to attend to the quiet presence of bodies and the inaudible dimensions of affect and becoming.

TECHNOCRATIC UNSOUND: EXPERT AND BUREAUCRATIC LISTENING AFTER THE 1960 AGADIR EARTHQUAKE

In the days following the 1960 Agadir earthquake, international teams of experts in geology, seismology, and town planning were invited to study the feasibility of rebuilding the city on the same site. Orchestrated by King Mohammed V and his son, Prince Moulay Hassan, the reconstruction of the city went on swiftly. According to Williford (2017), the expert teams produced numerous scientific reports on the catastrophe and its possible causes over the months that followed, leading to a "re-writing" of Agadir as a "vulnerable space." Through seismic data and other techniques they were able to measure the intensity of the seismic waves and to territorialize them in the form of isoseismal maps. By mapping the site into four zones of decreasing danger, the experts created a "transition from intensity to risk—from past to future." They introduced the notion of "seismic risk" in an attempt to stabilize the relationship between nature, technology, and politics. As a "heterogeneous product of expert and bureaucratic practices," Williford adds, seismic risk became a way "to distribute both blame and authority." For the local administration, this provided an opportunity to expropriate people living in the city center and to seize their land in the name of "public interest." With such practices, Williford argues, the authorities perpetuated the forms of systemic violence of the French protectorate. As a result, he concludes, the city's slums grew dramatically following the official end of the reconstruction in 1966, and would come to house over a quarter of the city's population by 1978. The 1960 earthquake today remains a traumatic event in the memory of Agadir's population, commemorated every year with an official ceremony.

From an aural perspective, the approach taken by the teams of international experts in charge of Agadir's reconstruction had much in common with modern western ways of listening and thinking about sound. As Emily Thompson (2013) notes, the development of new technological instruments in the 1920s allowed for electrical representations and measurements of acoustic phenomena as "sound-signals." "This new sound was modern," she writes, because it was "efficient," and because it was perceived to demonstrate man's technical mastery over the physical environment. Modern sound and listening was certainly not a novelty in Agadir in 1960; commercial music recordings and radio had been progressively introduced in North-Africa by the European colonizers since the beginning of the twentieth century. With the French occupation of Agadir in 1913, the city quickly grew into a tourist resort, and became an important industrial center for agriculture, fisheries, and mineral extraction. Michel Ecochard's city planning maintained a strict division between the "Indigenous" and the "European" populations of the city (Jafri et al. 2013). As people migrated from all over the country to work in the industries, they were housed in the Indigenous neighborhoods of Talborj and Ihchach, both completely destroyed later by the earthquake. While no detailed academic study of the 1960 Agadir soundscape has been proposed yet, it would certainly show important differences between the everyday sonic experiences of its populations with respect to this division. In any case, people were already familiar with western sound technological innovations, and a local vernacular sonic modernity had equally emerged (see Chapter I).

Inhabitants interviewed after the earthquake, Agadir 1960. Stills from *Et maintenant Agadir* by Louis Roger, 1960

Although Agadir's populace certainly had things to say about the disaster and the reconstruction of their city, they were not heard by the authorities. The scientific experts re-sounded the earthquake as an abstraction constructed from sound signals, models, and maps. Born originally in masonry and later extended via observational techniques used in civil engineering, modern seismology was progressively "re-constructed as a geophysical science" (Clancey 2006), equipped with a new set of instruments and practices borrowed from the disciplines of physics and geology. Designed in 1880, the seismograph was one of the first devices that allowed the precise graphic recording of the Earth's vibrations, and soon became the instrumental kernel on which the new science of seismology was built subsequently. With this device, modern seismology soon started to describe earthquakes as "quantifiable geophysical occurrences," conceptually separated from the lived experiences of disasters as socio-environmental phenomena (Williford 2017). The seismograph ultimately became a dispositive for silencing the multi-sensory, local, collective, and affective dimensions of the earthquake. What's more, the experts engaged in a process of sonic *prediction*, policing the distribution and potential of future vibrations through seismic risk management. This brought listening to a new stage of late modern development, which I propose to call *technocratic listening*. Whereas seismic risk management may appear as a mere logical and statistical process, Williford (2017) shows that it was carried out in complete alignment with the Moroccan authorities' agenda of modern urban development. This agenda was highly political, with the goal to consolidate the state's presence in the southern part of the country. Transitioning between the colonial violence of the French Protectorate and new forms of structural violence by the Moroccan state, technocratic listening was equally deaf to the claims of the population. By condemning traditional construction methods as the root cause of inordinate levels of death and destruction, engineers in Agadir obscured the role of material inequalities between European and Moroccan neighborhoods of the former colonial city in shaping the distribution of fatalities. The authorities met peaceful protests by expropriated citizens with detainment, followed by absurd administrative requirements, and ending with displacement from their temporary homes back to their "cities of origin." Other attempts by survivors and victim organizations to participate in decision-making on matters related to the reconstruction were also shut out of the planning process.

With its presumed capacity to represent and predict sound events statistically, technocratic listening has much in common with the notion of "unsound" introduced in the beginning of this chapter. In this case, the "not yet audible" does not only stand for future earthquakes, or the promise of seismic safety. *The technocratic unsound* becomes the dark side of "future sound," preemptively policing any future attempt by the population to interfere with the reconstruction process, or become involved in seismic risk management. As such, the technocratic unsound can be traced back to the colonial urban politics of French occupation, reformulated later by the Moroccan authorities into a "positive technocracy, nationalized and Islamicized" (Williford 2017).

Top: An army officer speaks to a French TV reporter after the earthquake, Agadir 1960. Still from *Et maintenant Agadir* by Louis Roger, 1960.
Bottom: Still from *Retour à Agadir* by Mohamed Afifi, 1967

IBN IGHIL'S
TALE OF AGADIR

As the news of the Agadir earthquake quickly propagated throughout the country, so did accounts of it by some of the survivors. Ibn Ighil from Touzounine composed a chanted poem about the earthquake shortly after the catastrophe. I turned the poem into a song for my film *Salam Godzilla* in collaboration with the singer Ali Faiq, based on the following English translation by Brown and Lakhsassi (1980):

> The Tale of Agadir
>
> Praise be to God, The Exalted. Destruction is like a wadi.
> Whenever you come, O Time, it gets up and leaves.
>
> I.
> Agadir has been destroyed. Buried in it someone's thousands.
> Woe! They died, all the people, none escaped.
> All those who were there, the tribe, totally obliterated.
> They hadn't accomplished their ambitions, nothing was finished,
> Arab and Berber, no one escaped it.
> Whoever had entered it, never again would get out.
> Jews died, and Christians, too, on that day,
> And Muslims, with a curse, and those who were righteous.
> Children died, and women, too, on that day.
>
> II.
> Gold was buried, carpets buried; Those shops
> Of goods, all gone, nothing in them but wind;
> The quarter of Ihshash destroyed in an instant, nothing
> in it but dirt.
> There's Talborjt, tiles and marble completely hidden;
> Pillars of reinforced cement, here they are, no longer
> supporting a thing;
> Abattoir and Ville Nouvelle, little remained of them;
> There they were, cracked through, not yet having fallen
> on that day;

Founti and the Great Citadel became powder, powder.
Praise be yours, O God, it happened in a minute;
At midnight, just like a dream.

III.
Some wretches were pulled out, their soul hadn't left them.
Ready to rise, they were, to become conscious.
Some were pulled out, to be taken to that which is everlasting.
They didn't inform their companions, they saw no one;
They abandoned friends and children simply passed on.
Some carried on, their time hadn't ended;
They still make use of worldly possessions.
Not all Muslims were the same in that catastrophe.
Orphans and children were quite lost,
Their parents died, leaving them only sorrows.

IV.
Where are those who were strong, whose money wasn't small?
Praise be yours, O God, they are begging with their hands for
something small.
Whoever saw them became saddened; O God, why is it like that?
Divine omnipotence, who will oppose it?
A creature can do nothing, for it's God who does as he wishes:
He is the Powerful and the Punisher. Those who want to be happy
Will avoid, let's hope, the forbidden, if they want to be saved.
Mighty God has sworn his oath that those who do not return
To walk along the path of the Prophet of the Pegasus Alborak
Will be struck by Him with starvation, until they experience
awareness.

V.
Where is that place of the righteous men,
Of the carpets, of the trays and tea?
God has destroyed it with fate. There is nothing in it but wind,
Children of Adam, listen: You've no common sense,
Those who have seen all of their grandparents pass away,
Have sent off their parents and their children, too,

While they remained behind them, occupied with the pleasures
of this world.
One who has faith, if he truly sees what happens,
One who is owed debts will forgive in order to be happy;
And he will continue to pray and fast. Let's hope he can be saved,
Leaves words to those who want them, so that they not disturb him.
Because this world is not everlasting; in it there is nothing
but sorrow.
For those who occupy themselves with it, until their hearts become
filled with remorse.
The moral of these words, truly, I am going to summarize them:
I finish my words with God, may he have mercy on our parents;
May he have mercy on my Master Muhammad, and the Companions,
and upon us.
May Our Lord forgive our sins when we pass before him.
O Messenger of God, our intercessor, guarantee all of us.
The remembrance of God's name is good: it indeed provides courage;
For those who say it, the horrors of this world are resolved;
God places them in his paradise when they descend into the earth.
There it is (the story of) Agadir!

In their interpretation of Ibn Ighil's poem, Brown and Lakhsassi (1980) see in it "a moral and a warning," alluding to the possibility that God destroyed Agadir to punish the iniquities of its inhabitants. In the context of my own study, Ibn Ighil's poem particularly interested me because of its "performative" character (Butler 1990). This allowed me to approach the poem as a kind of oral re-enactment of the earthquake. I refer in my analysis to the epistemological framework of traditional Berber societies in Morocco, described by Simenel, Aderghal, Sabir, and Auclair (2016) in terms of "analogism." According to the analogical scheme, meaning emerges by bringing things and facts into relation with "analogies" familiar to the people of a community. Knowledge, therefore, is not "acquired," but shaped through an "ongoing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection" (Feld 2017).

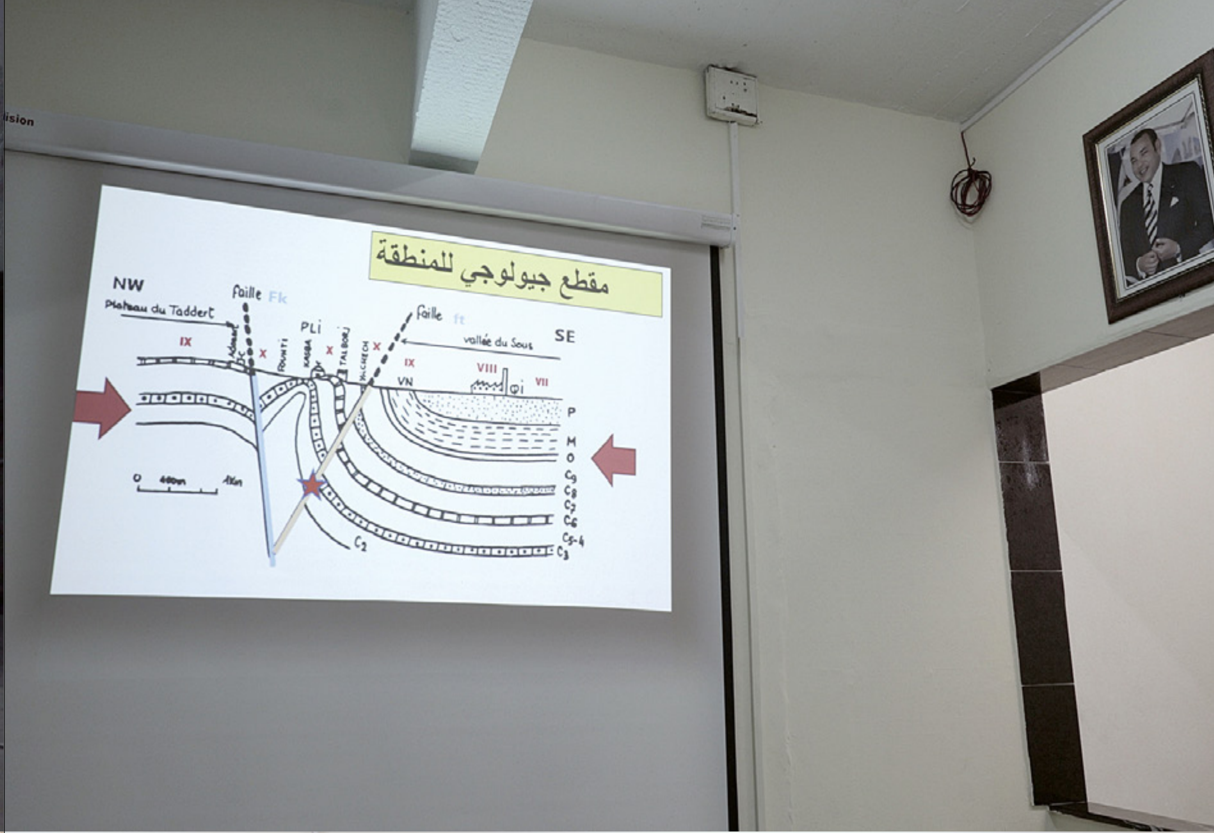
In his poem, Ibn Ighil uses the analogy of a "flooding river" (*wadi*) in order to explain the earthquake and its consequences (Brown and Lakhsassi 1980). Common in Tashlhit poetry as a metaphor for total destruction and death, the notion is also associated with disasters caused by evil spirits (*jnoun*), with dreadful noise, and sometimes even with war and other catastrophes of human origin (*siba*). The poet renders the destruction of the city of Agadir into a list, or rather a "collection" (Moutu 2007) of people, goods, neighborhoods, construction materials, moral values, and other continuities that were affected, killed, obliterated, wounded, buried, covered, cracked through, or disintegrated. The poet, it seems, proceeds through the construction of a *virtual* Agadir, guiding the listener through various places and spaces, materializing them at the same time as they are destroyed through his detailed descriptions. In order to reinforce this impression or *affect* caused by destruction, Ibn Ighil uses expressions from various sources, including the Qur'an and the French technical vocabulary of construction (Brown and Lakhsassi 1980). By bringing these elements into *new* relations, the poet re-enacts the catastrophe on an affective level. At a certain point, the feeling of loss reaches its climax and an affective "reconfiguration process" (Moutu 2007) involves listeners, individually and collectively. As Moutu notes, time is an important aspect of the ontological work of collections. In them, he writes, "we encounter momentary loss, a returning and a projection towards the future."

THE POET'S ANALOGICAL UNSOUND

> "I neither read, nor write, it's versifying I practice."
> – Ibn Ighil

In this line from another of his poems, Ibn Ighil alludes to his illiteracy and lack of schooling. As Brown and Lakhsassi (1980) note, "it is a widespread opinion among Berber speakers [...] that a person without instruction can only speak of things of *this world*." Minstrel-poets like Ibn Ighil, however, are able to speak of all things because they are considered to be supernaturally inspired. The wisdom inspired by God or by a saint indeed confers the poet with a poetic license allowing them to try to encompass the universe.

Ibn Ighil's poetic versifying is part of a local acoustemology, which relies on analogies in order to make sense of the world. Aural knowledge therefore emerges in the interaction between the poet's analogical sounding and the audience's analogical listening. This process generates its own instance of *sonic materiality*, which is not necessarily related to physical properties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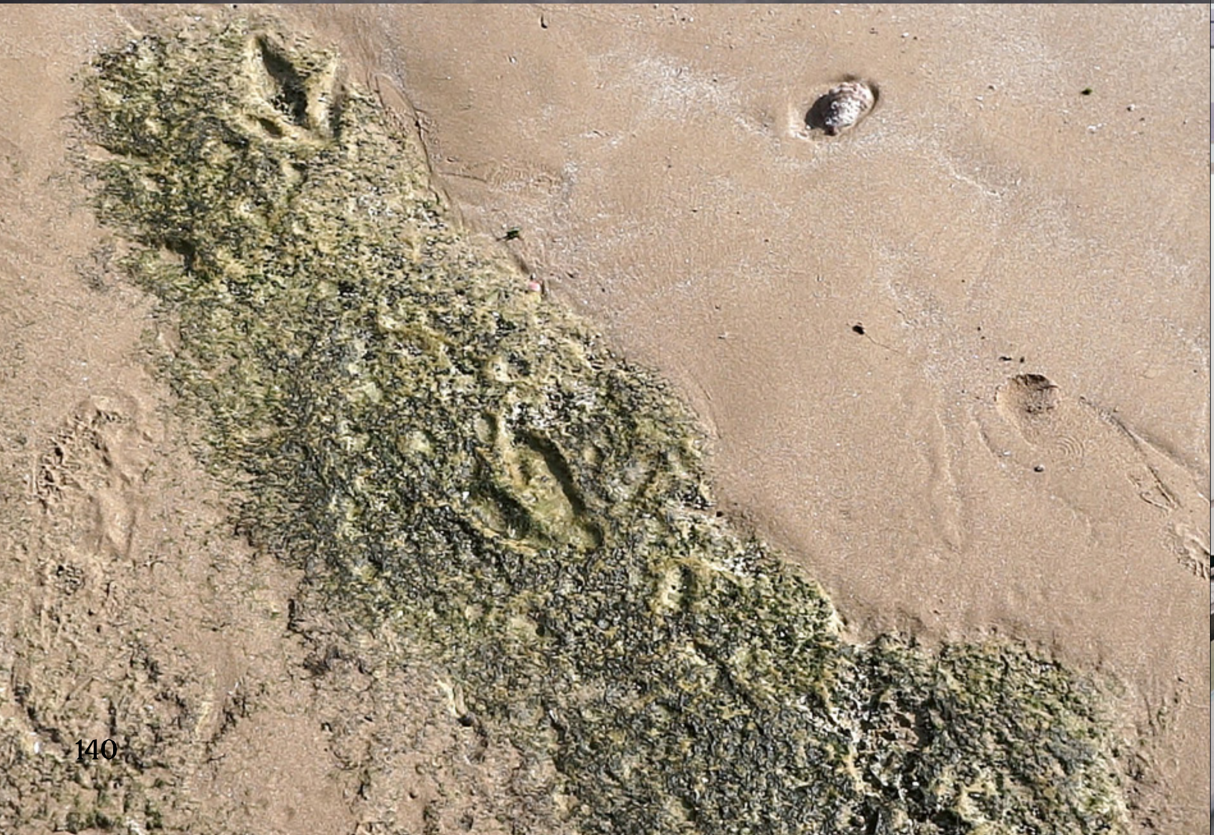

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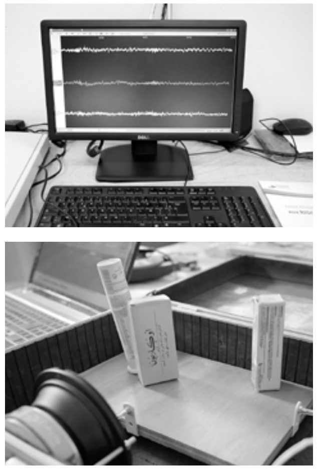
Impression Numérique



Top: Digital seismometer owned by the ASVTS organization in Agadir, 2018.
Bottom: Device used for visualizing the effects of seismic waves, Agadir, 2018.

of sound. Rather, materiality "discloses itself" as it is created through analogical sounding and listening (Henare et al. 2007). If Ibn Ighil's sound world cannot be heard in a cochlear sense, it can perhaps be better apprehended as "a-audible" (etymologically meaning "toward audible" or "not heard yet").

Compared to the technocratic unsound of the Agadir experts, Ibn Ighil's versifying figures a different unsound. Like its technocratic counterpart, the poet's *analogical unsound* relies on the virtual, the not-yet-audible, the possible, and the future in order to respond to desires and anxieties in the present. It does not rest on scientific concepts, however, but establishes new relationships between what is experienced and what is already known. The analogical unsound is "dialogical and polyphonic," as well as always "experiential and contextual" (Feld 2017).

FIGURING THE UNSOUND IN THE FILM *SALAM GODZILLA*

Sixty years after the disaster, the Moroccan technocratic regime is still in place, including its unsound. While Agadir's population today is mostly concentrated in peripheral areas of the city and the adjacent towns of Inezgane and Dcheira, the reconstructed city center mainly hosts administrative buildings and touristic infrastructures. The low sound intensity in this area is striking in comparison with other large Moroccan cities, and the run-down aspect of the 1960s modernist buildings accentuates the impression of a ghost-like city. Throughout the film *Salam Godzilla*, the *technocratic* and the *analogical* unsounds are brought into dialogue. Embodied in Ali Faiq's voice, Ibn Ighil's *Tale of Agadir* provides a counterpoint to the visible achievements of the city's experts in seismology and urban planning. The experts' approach is represented in the film through historical film footage showing the destruction of Agadir, including technical descriptions and close-up views of damaged concrete structures, as well as images of the newly reconstructed Agadir. During my field research in 2018, I visited the local non-governmental organization ASVTS[4] dedicated to seismic risk prevention. Created in 2002 without state support, this organization provides basic information to the population about seismic activity and teaches life-saving actions for emergency situations. Although modest in size, the initiative attests to the efforts of Agadiri citizens to appropriate seismological expertise for the benefit of the community.

Ibn Ighil's song introduces a different narrative of the 1960 earthquake into the film. The poem is a tribute to the victims amongst the population, and at the same time an evocation of Agadir as it existed before its destruction. "With the reconstruction, the city has lost its soul," I was often told by people during my stay in Agadir. The song therefore relates to a local affect about the city and its possible becoming. If the reconstruction cannot be undone, the desire for alternative futures of Agadir can still be expressed. The song strangely resonates with the post-apocalyptic landscape of Oufella Hill in the film—the site of the former citadel of Agadir. Entirely destroyed by the earthquake in 1960, the place is today a vast wasteland surrounded by a stone wall. People come to Oufella Hill to admire the view of the surroundings. Several TV and telecommunication antennas have been installed at the top, next to a local saint's mausoleum. With hundreds of bodies still buried in the ground, the site also functions as an informal memorial to the 1960 earthquake's victims, awaiting redevelopment. Due to its emptiness and unfinished character, the place appears like an invitation to imagine a new city to be assembled from the heterogenous elements that already compose it. Oufella Hill perhaps best exemplifies the unsound field I have attempted to assemble in my film, which is not unified, and rather emerges through a plurality of knowledges, processes, and affects.

Top: Oufella Hill after the earthquake in 1960.
Bottom: Oufella Hill in 2018.

DISRUPTING THE COLONIAL UNSOUND

Apart from the technocratic unsound and the poet's analogical unsound, additional virtual sound fields populate *Salam Godzilla*. The French colonial unsound is conveyed in the film via music recordings made by Pathé in the 1920s (see Chapter I). In one scene of the film, the singer Ali Faiq sits in front of his computer, presenting a song by raissa Abouche Tamassit from the Pathé collection. Tamassit's recorded voice figures a "virtual sound being," which is itself a product of colonial sound epistemology (Hoffmann 2015). This virtual being participates in the colonial unsound, a western imaginary based on the racial categorization of "natives" and rendered through sound-technological inscription.

The oppressive effects of the colonial unsound are addressed in the next scene of the film that features two dancers engaged in a performative "battle" with a Pathé shellac record. The scene includes elements from three different sources that are brought into ambiguous relationships via staging and editing. The first source is the audiovisual documentation of a performance created in collaboration with Ali Faiq and the artist Abderrahim Nidalha. Two dancers from the region, Lahcen Aattar and Ali Bazegra, were invited to perform a "traditional" rwais dance next to a turntable placed on the ground. Rwais choreographies are well-known for their loud rhythmical stomping, which I thought could be regarded as a bodily form of conversation with the Earth, in reference to the earthquake. This idea was pushed further by arranging the record player next to the dancers' feet; one can see the needle jump on the record with each of their steps. The second source is a low frequency drone sound figuring the Earth's continuous "voice." The third source is a close-up video capture of a "vibrating suitcase," a device used by the organization ASVTS to visualize the effects of seismic waves as part of their program for earthquake prevention. Edited together, these elements follow a simple dramaturgy in which the dancers initially appear to be in conversation with the droning Earth, progressively engaging in a battle against the record player, shaking the ground with increasing intensity, and ultimately making the colonial record playback ineffective. Despite its obvious mise-en-scène, the sequence is an attempt to present rwais dance as an agentive sound practice. The scene results in the disruption of the colonial unsound at its most vulnerable level, that is the material fragility of the record and its playback device. Ultimately, the local analogical unsound—embodied here by the two dancers—is allowed to become the driving force in this configuration.

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[4] Association Sciences de la Vie et de la Terre Souss (ASVTS), a non-governmental organization created in 2002 in Agadir. Website: https://www.asvts.ma

It can easily be argued that the redistribution of epistemological power in this scene only takes place on a symbolic level of representation, and through the mediation of my own exterior position. The basic principle of the sequence, however, emerged from my conversations with the protagonists beforehand, and was validated by them. This principle is "performative" in Judith Butler's sense (1990) as an "act" that transforms the subject. In this case, the performance creates a break in the colonial representation of the protagonists as "native" and "subaltern" subjects (see Chapter I), turning their dance skills into a powerful means for reclaiming agency and self-sovereignty. This effect can be visibly apprehended and potentially reproduced as part of new performances. The scene therefore informs a pluralist perspective on knowledge and technology, encouraging future discussions and experiments beyond the film.

INTERSPECIES UNSOUND

As part of my research in Agadir, I became interested in phenomena that could be considered an expression of the "voice of the Earth." This brought me to a beach in the town of Anza near Agadir, where 100-million-year-old dinosaur footprints have been identified by scientists a couple of years ago (Masrour et al. 2017). I visited Anza beach for the first time in 2017 and took part in a guided tour by the keeper of the site, Samir Benteyane. I made video shots of his interactions with the dinosaur footprints that later became part of my film *Salam Godzilla*. In these shots, Samir Benteyane indicates the position of the traces on the ground, washes away the sand, and explains their specificity. He performs a kind of choreography in order for visitors like myself to better visualize the dinosaur paths, re-enacting the movement of various dinosaur species. Benteyane's guided tour ends with a series of live sand drawings representing dinosaurs—an operation complicated by the nearby presence of sea waves.

Samir Benteyane, the keeper of the dinosaur footprint site in Anza, 2018.

While watching the shots a bit later, I was struck by Samir Benteyane's care and attention for the footprints, and his affective way of relating to dinosaurs across geological time. I invited him for another sand drawing session outside of his work activities, interviewing him also on his passion for dinosaurs. Dinosaurs are "important," he declares in the film, because "the traces they left can help us live, and *survive*." Researching them can "make you *feel* what life is about," he adds. By sensually and sensitively engaging with extra-human traces at an existential level, Samir Benteyane therefore entered into a kind of horizontal relationship with them. This way of relating also has an important sonic dimension, albeit a silent one. By expressing his desire "to speak with dinosaurs in order to know what they think," Samir Benteyane recognizes the possibility of an extra-human voice in them. His intimate engagement with dinosaurs figures an *interspecies unsound*. This unsound arguably attests to "the enmeshments of human existence and responsibility with various co-species"

(Tiainen 2017)—with extinct species in this case. More pragmatically, as a man who grew up in an Agadir slum and later found himself unemployed, Samir Benteyane was able to turn the dinosaur site in Anza into a source of regular income through the financial contributions of the visitors. The relationship that I describe here in terms of interspecies unsound emerged thus from the necessity for Benteyane to subsist economically, as part of the region's tourist economy. This doesn't alter the sincerity of his interest and affective engagement with dinosaurs. It rather characterizes a particular awareness of human existence at a time of global ecological crisis, where individual economic survival and global species' survival appears entangled more than ever before.

When a team of paleontologists led by Professor Masrour came from Agadir's Ibn Zhor University in order to study the traces following their discovery, Samir Benteyane was also present and offered his help. He became aware of the methods and discourses applied in the scientific field, as his Facebook posts demonstrate. This did not fundamentally change the nature of his own relationship with the site, quite on the contrary. Researching dinosaurs perhaps not only allowed him to better "feel what life is about," but also what *else* it could be about. With its potential to facilitate "trans-species flows of becoming" (Tiainen 2017), Samir Benteyane's unsound demonstrates a particular ecological sensitivity, arguably a precondition for shared planetary survival. For this reason, Samir's speech in *Salam Godzilla* needed to be clearly audible. His declarations are featured in the closing scene, possibly opening new perspectives in "unsound studies."

SALAM WHITENESS: PERFORMING TROUBLED WHITE AURALITY

Prior to my final comments on *Salam Godzilla* and the unsound, I want to address my own presence in the film as a researcher/sound performer. The soundtrack was composed in part from my recorded sound improvisations inside the Salam movie theater in Agadir. The recordings were produced over the course of several sessions, using acoustic feedback as primary sound material. Equipped with a microphone, a recording device, a portable loudspeaker, and a couple of FX pedals, I was continuously feeding the microphone signal into the loudspeaker while recording. This setting generated a sustained tone, modulated by changes in the mic orientation and my slow movements through the space. These sessions were video documented and are featured in the film, turning myself into a protagonist. The decision to appear in the film emerged from the necessity to disclose myself in the context of my research in Agadir. As a white European male subject, my position is clearly marked by privilege, situated within a long, racialized history of western research. These shots create a tension because images of white researchers in North-Africa remain associated with past misrepresentations and appropriations of local cultures by western knowledge. This tension is further amplified by the presence of my microphone, a device often associated with ethnographic documentation and sound archiving. What's more, the abstract quality of the feedback tone points to western experimental sound aesthetics with historical links to "histories of whiteness, patriarchy, and coloniality" (Thompson 2017, see also Chapters I and II).

Sound experiments by Gilles Aubry inside the Salam movie theater in Agadir, 2018.

White aurality relies on norms and conventions, which often remain invisible and unaddressed: particular regimes of sound production, listening, and aesthetics that tend to silence other voices and realities. The abandoned Salam movie theater seemed appropriate for a performance intended to make such conventions more explicit. I approached the building simultaneously as a resonant acoustic space, as a social environment, and as a stage for the production of cinematic images. The particular sociality and history of the theater are progressively revealed in the film through exterior shots and historical photographs. My presence inside the building with a mic in hand creates an ambiguity because there is no clear subject to be recorded in this space, except for myself. Visually, the microphone becomes a prop, pointing to western ethnographic and aesthetic practices. Sonically, however, the microphone isn't used for recording, but for the production of feedback, which is essentially a process of acoustic amplification. The film protagonist (myself) moves through the dark theater space, pointing the microphone at dirty walls and distant noises, experimenting with different feedback configurations. The sound field is amplified and transformed, revealing traffic noise and voices from the outside, offering new possibilities for affective listening. Listening indeed "configures the body," allowing for a negotiation of the given social and material conditions (Vieira de Oliveira 2022). My body is mobilized simultaneously as a marker of identity and as a site of subjective experience. Space is not simply a physical container, but a place of encounter between the listener and the conventions that shape listening. Similarly, the microphone is not just a recording instrument, but a technical prosthesis for aural attunement. Social and material conventions are temporarily shifting, making room for minor affects to grow within oneself. Salam Godzilla! Hello monster, hello whiteness, hello trouble. The filmic process enables many encounters, the outcomes of which remain uncertain. As such, it is an ever incomplete process, which needs to be re-iterated in order to become more effective.

ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON *SALAM GODZILLA* AND THE UNSOUND

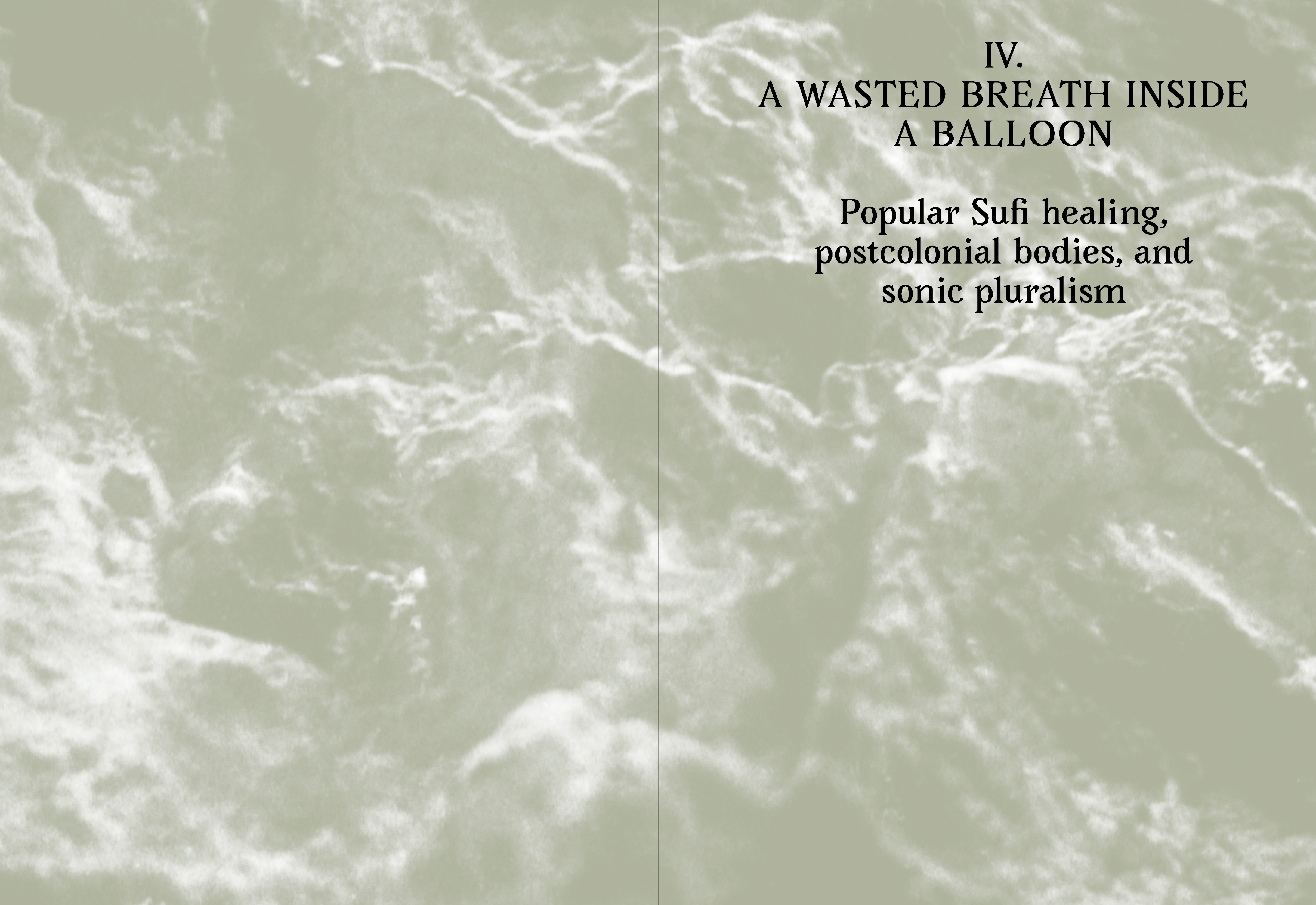
Several options can be considered when situating *Salam Godzilla* within the wider field of artistic research: is it an ethnographic film? A "techno-ecological" artwork (Tiainen 2017)? A "transcultural montage" (Suhr and Willerslev 2013)? Or—to propose a new term—an "*un*soundscape"? Each of these terms comes with particular connotations, pertaining also to the status of the sounds and images. This status is fluid in *Salam Godzilla*, oscillating between the formal elements of music composition, the conceptual categories of a critical essay, and the documentation of performative situations. Some of the scenes stand as autonomous performances within the film, such as Ali Faiq's singing, Samir Benteyane's interactions with dinosaur traces, and the rwais' dance sequence. In the latter case, however, the original

Top: Artistic intervention by Samir Benteyane and Abderrahim Nidalha, Anza beach, 2018.
Bottom: Samir Benteyane at Anza beach, 2018.

dance performance has been re-articulated through heavy editing and the introduction of additional images, blurring once more the borders between documentary and fiction. Beyond its aesthetics, the film raises questions about the onto-epistemological propositions embedded within it and the various modes of positionality, agency, and accountability it evokes.

Throughout this chapter, I have described several instances of unsound in relation to particular groups or individuals. These positions may remain vague at times, or too general. As an example, the category of "scientific, technical, and bureaucratic" experts in Agadir certainly does not refer to a homogenous group. It included people from different origins (mostly European, North American, and Moroccan), and from different socio-economic groups, though most of them were male. What matters today is the troubling continuity of technocratic management from the colonial context of French occupation to the post-colonial context of Moroccan independence, up to the present context of global neoliberalism and biopolitical power. The colonial unsound and the technocratic unsound are historically and ideologically connected. They anticipated the present methods of abstraction used by neoliberal decision-makers to monitor and control societies (James 2019), a system currently supported in Morocco by its authoritarian regime. As Robin James argues, neoliberal ideology has been increasingly *naturalized* in recent philosophical discourse using the sonic model of "acoustic resonance." It therefore remains urgent to propose other sound models, which I attempted here by diversifying the notion of "unsound" initially proposed by Goodman (2010).

Although it is in itself an abstract concept, the unsound refers to aspects of experience, which are far from abstract and instead clearly embodied, lived, and felt. The unsound is also relevant as a term because it refers to that part of sonic experience that refuses to be recorded, measured, quantified, or domesticated. Goodman (2010) ambiguously suggests that the unsound transcends the culturality of audition by relying on "vibration" as a phenomenon that "connects every separate entity in the cosmos." My examples demonstrate, on the contrary, that sonic virtuality very much mirrors the distinct needs and interests of particular listeners' groups. The unsound therefore appears central to a re-negotiation of affect and perception in potentially oppressive contexts, ultimately determining *who* gets to hear *what*. As such, the unsound is open to alternative, often marginalized sound histories. These histories relate to ways of knowing and being *in* sound that often cannot be accounted for when using theories *about* sound itself, as in the case of Ibn Ighil's *Tale of Agadir*. Sound-in-itself, as an autonomous physical object, loses its significance in my study and becomes decentered. Listening, on the contrary, is particularly relevant as an embodied experience and as a voluntary act of "registering" (human and extra-human) voices that give "an account of themselves" (Farinati and Firth 2017). Sounding, finally, is equally a crucial aspect in my study. As I have attempted to demonstrate with Ibn Ighil's poem and Samir Benteyane's interspecies interactions, sounding is not limited to the production of physical sound; it also consists in generating virtual sound worlds via affective, poetic, and bodily engagement. These practices exemplify the plurality of possible perspectives on sound and aural knowledge, revealing at times unsuspected agency. Through sounding and listening, change can be enacted from a marginal position at an experiential and affective level, which is a necessary condition for change on a wider socio-political level. Like Ibn Ighil's poetic response to the 1960 Agadir earthquake, the unsound allows to affectively survive catastrophes by creating virtual-material worlds. It supports the possibility of being and experiencing *despite* scientific evidence, enacting thus a form of resistance.



IV.

A WASTED BREATH INSIDE A BALLOON

Popular Sufi healing, postcolonial bodies, and sonic pluralism

AUDIO
A wasted breath inside a balloon
by Gilles Aubry and Ramia Beladel
2019, 39'03", stereo audio
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18259/2/wb.mp3

> It's Thursday morning. Getting prepared for my performance, my lila, well dressed in my pink takchita, my make-up on, my offerings ready: white balloons and white threads attached to white small stones. A white chair in a green yard near to the graveyard, the spirit is present. I'm in the presence of absence, not steady, but ready, ready to blow the balloons, ready to put some pieces out of myself, ready to put my breath outside my body into the balloons' bodies, ready to do the sacrifice.
> – Ramia Beladel, Moulay Idriss, 2014

Ramia Beladel's words above refer to her 2014 performance *Waiting for Godot to bless me* in Moulay Idriss.[1] In the video documenting the performance, one can see her sitting on a chair in an open area, repeating the same sequence of actions several times: she takes a white balloon from a basket, blows it, seals it with a thread attached to a stone, digs a hole in the ground in front of her, buries the stone, raises her hands to her heart, and returns to the chair. After several minutes, she starts sobbing, her face and body visibly affected by a sad feeling, progressively growing into loud cries, preventing her from blowing more balloons. Eventually her cries attenuate and she recollects herself, sitting still for a while before leaving the camera frame. Ramia Beladel describes her performance as a "personal healing ritual,"[2] inspired by her experience with popular Sufism in northern Morocco. The same performance was repeated twice in 2015, and once more in August 2017, during the celebration of a local muslim saint (*moussem*) in the town of Moulay Bouchta al

[1] The performance is part of Ramia Beladel's artistic project *Waiting for Godot to bless me* (2014-ongoing), documented on her artist website: https://ramiabeladel.wixsite.com/beladel/post/waiting-for-godot-to-bless-me-2014-ongoing

[2] Ramia Beladel's statements stem from interviews I conducted with her between August 2017 and March 2019, as well as from her artist website.

Khamar. I joined Ramia Beladel for ten days on this occasion, attending and documenting the ceremonies with her. On the fourth day, she performed a new version of *Waiting for Godot to bless me*, which was video-documented and published later on her website.[3] Our joint research led to the creation of a sound piece entitled *A wasted breath inside a balloon* (Aubry and Beladel 2019). The piece was composed for the most part on location using my mobile sound studio, and finalized later during work sessions in Marrakesh.[4] The piece features a monologue by Ramia Beladel, field recordings, and music from the moussem, as well as sound experiments with balloons.

In this chapter, I continue my examination of sound and aurality in Morocco through a reflection on Ramia Beladel's performative art practice. I consider new dimensions of sonic experience relative to embodiment, healing practices, gender, and performative art. Moussem celebrations in Morocco are associated with spirit possession and saintly healing (*baraka*) in Sufi brotherhoods. Healing practices take several forms, including prayers at the saint's mausoleum, purification rituals, exorcisms, and trance rituals. These practices have fascinated several generations of western anthropologists (see Doutté 1908; Westermarck 1926; Gellner 1969; Crapanzano 1973; Dieste 2013). I rely on these accounts in order to situate Ramia Beladel's artistic engagement with Sufism, along with scholarly writing on new feminist movements in North Africa (Salime 2014; Jay 2018). Attending the moussem in Moulay Bouchta gave me a sense of how the spiritual world of popular Sufism relates to everyday life. I also learned from

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[3] The video can be accessed via the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AU4GUmeoxno&t=101s

[4] The sound piece can be accessed via the following link: https://arbor.bfh.ch/18259/2/wb.mp3 A basic version was created during my stay in Moulay Bouchta in August 2017 and further elaborated over the course of successive working sessions with Ramia Beladel in Marrakesh between November 2017 and September 2018. The piece premiered at the *Sonohr Festival* in Bern in February 2019, and was presented in March 2019 in Moulay Bouchta during the *Sakhra Encounters*.

Preparation for Ramia Beladel's performance *Waiting for Godot to bless me*, Moulay Bouchta, 2017.

Ramia Beladel's own research on healing rituals and from her interactions with women healers. Our exchanges highlighted the centrality of the body in such practices, pointing to the complex history of postcolonial embodiment. According to historian Ellen J. Amster (2013), postcolonial embodiment in North Africa can be traced back to the encounter between local healing practices and colonial biomedicine at the end of the nineteenth century. The body appears as a field whose domination has been contested for more than a century by competing ideological projects, namely political Sufism, colonialism, and Islamic nationalism. These effects can still be viscerally felt today through the hybridity and fragmentedness of postcolonial bodies. People respond in part to these effects through "medical pluralism," combining traditional healing and biomedicine.

Amster's account made me realize that embodiment is a crucial aspect for apprehending sound and aurality in Morocco. Because body and soul form a continuous whole (*tawhid*) in the Islamic cosmological model (Dieste 2013), it makes little sense to consider sound as an autonomous phenomenon. What's more, the Arabic word for "sound," *sawt*, also means "voice." Sound in Morocco is therefore always a *sound body*. Like the body described by Amster (2013), postcolonial aurality appears as a fragmented field that can best be apprehended in terms of *pluralism*. In practice, sonic pluralism is mostly implicit and intuitive; it can, however, be consciously enacted in situations where conflicting epistemologies are perceived as limiting or oppressive. Sound can heal, as we will see, if one believes that malevolent spirits can possess bodies and be expelled by the sound of a rifle. Listening can heal too, when mobilized as part of trance rituals or performative art practice. Sonic pluralism is involved in individual or collective tactics of "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo 2011), guided by aspirations of personal emancipation. Sound, bodies, and selves are continuously remade in the process, queered, and re-entangled at the border of knowledge, materiality, and coloniality. The notion of sonic pluralism initially emerged from my case study in this chapter. It gradually gained significance for my entire project in Morocco, eventually providing the general conceptual framework and title for the present book.

POPULAR SUFISM AND MUSLIM SAINTS

My research took place in Moulay Bouchta al Khamar, a small town situated 60 kilometers north of Fès in the Pre-Rif region of Morocco. I joined Ramia Beladel in August 2017 for the annual celebration or moussem of the town's founder and protector, Saint Moulay Bouchta (fourteenth century), also known as "father of the rain" (Odinot 1932). The cult of Muslim saints is widespread in Morocco and can be traced back to the emergence of Sufi brotherhoods in the twelfth century (Doutté 1908; Westermarck 1926; Gellner 1969). Once a year, people congregate from all over the country and abroad for several days of festivities and ceremonies, invoking the saint's baraka against diseases, infertility, or psychic troubles. Adepts of popular Sufi practices in Morocco believe that diseases can be caused by spirits (jnoun) who come to inhabit human bodies under certain circumstances. Daily interferences between humans and spirits are accepted by a large part of the Moroccan population as a very condition of existence (Crapanzano 1973). This belief bridges all social categories, spanning class, level of education, age, and geographical origin (Rhani 2009). Spirit names are associated with particular colors, scents, and choreographies. The effects of possession are broadly divided into two groups: a "hostile" type, where the spirit aggresses the person it inhabits, and a "benevolent" type, through which the person benefits from the spirit's power, accepting its presence, even desiring it. While hostile possession needs to be cured through an "exorcism ritual," usually performed by an Islamic cleric (*fqih*), certain spirits require a ritual of "adorcism" in order to remain benevolent—usually a trance ritual (*lila*) followed by a special meal (*hlou*). Such practices are an important part of the business of religious brotherhoods, *gnawa*, *hamadsha*, and *issawa* in particular, mediated by the healing power of Muslim saints and their descendants (*chorfa*).

Ramia Beladel's performance *Waiting for Godot to bless me*, Moulay Bouchta, 2017.

RAMIA BELADEL'S PERFORMANCE *WAITING FOR GODOT TO BLESS ME*

Born 1987 in Marrakesh, Ramia Beladel graduated from the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) in Tetouan in 2013. She uses a variety of media (drawing, objects, photography, video) and formats (installations and performances), and her work has been presented in Morocco and internationally. In her performance *Waiting for Godot to bless me*, Ramia Beladel borrows elements from popular Sufism, which she started exploring in 2014 as part of an art residency in Sidi Ali. Guided by a woman healer, she attended a *lila* (trance ritual) for the first time on this occasion, where participants celebrated their possessing spirit (*mlouk*). She didn't fully get involved in the ritual, however, as she had felt hindered by her Islamic religious education. Although widespread in Morocco, popular healing practices are indeed condemned by the official Islamic doctrine, considered as "outside of proper Islamic piety" (Witulski 2019). Ramia Beladel engaged with popular Sufism in her own way, aware that it would take time to familiarize herself with the knowledge and practices associated with it. As a result, she created a performance defined as her "own ritual," based on the core principles of the traditional *lila*: offering, trance, and sacrifice. She wrote a set of instructions for it, and later invited other artists to make their own version of the performance:

> Dress in fine clothing.
> Find yourself centered and silent.
> Sit in a white chair under an open sky.
> Offering: white balloons and white threads attached to white small stones.
> Sacrifice: inflate the balloons one by one.
> By inflating the balloons you are giving a part of yourself (your breath) to another body (the balloons). Seed the inflated balloons in the ground, so they will be autonomous bodies. Now your breath, a part of you, exists inside another body.
> Trance: inflate the balloons one by one until you can't do it anymore, until you lose control of your body, and you can't ask it anymore to inflate.[5]

The artist Abdeljalil Saouli and I were the only audience members at Ramia Beladel's performance in Moulay Bouchta. It lasted 22 minutes and took place under a tree outside of the village, next to a local saint's grave. Ramia Beladel was wearing a purple traditional dress (*takchita*). She blew into approximately ten balloons until she started crying, eventually ending the performance. While in the beginning I was attentive to the poetic quality of the scene, particularly with the white balloons softly moving in the wind, I found myself surprised and touched, as Ramia Beladel started crying. Later on, she commented that this time her trance had been "jovial," in comparison to the sadness of the initial version of the performance in 2014. With each blow into a balloon, she explained, she was able to "exteriorize all the feelings previously accumulated" through a process of emotional cleansing culminating in cathartic cries. This healing process arguably relies on a symbolism of *purification*, a notion that equally involves body and mind in the scholarly Arabo-Islamic tradition (Dieste 2013). I do not want to reduce Ramia Beladel's performance to this tradition, however, as her work undoubtedly exists as an autonomous artwork, with its own poetics and references. What I am interested in is the relation between sound, affect, and embodiment in the performance. In order to better understand this relationship, it is necessary to consider discourses on embodiment in Morocco, a notion that historically refers to competing epistemologies.

Ramia Beladel's performance *Waiting for Godot to bless me*, Moulay Bouchta, 2017.

EMBODIMENT IN MOROCCO AND THE FRAGMENTED POSTCOLONIAL BODY

In her book *Medicine and the Saints*, Ellen J. Amster (2013) describes the human body in precolonial Morocco as a "meeting-place of divinity and materiality." Islam articulates a "human body radiant of meaning," she notes, "a body as a signifier, a wellspring of meaning and the foundation of human subjectivity." Dieste (2013) offers a similar description, highlighting the ontological specificities of such a model of embodiment:

> "[One] of the main features of the scholarly Arabo-Muslim notion of a person is the idea of "tawhid" or unity between matter and spirituality, i.e. the idea that body and soul form a continuous whole. This continuity can be seen at work in the significant notions

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[5] Instructions reproduced from Ramia Beladel's website: https://ramiabeladel.wixsite.com/beladel/post/waiting-for-godot-to-bless-me-2014-ongoing.

> of purity and pollution. Bodily purity is not mere material hygiene, it is a requisite for the salvation of the soul. For this reason, the rituals of purification are not restricted to simple washing of the body, but include a cleansing of the spirit. The spirit turns into the body and vice versa. Thus it is that the Cartesian division between nature and culture, or the conception that separates body and spirit, does not match the holistic conception of the tawhid. The body is defined as a microcosmos which represents society and the universe."

The Islamic cosmological model was able to accommodate two distinct ways of knowing: Sufi spiritual knowledge based on saintly healing, and "Galenic" medicine developed by early Arab physicians such as Ibn Sina (980-1037) and Al Antaki (1543-1599) (Amster 2013). The concept of divine embodiment was constitutive of the precolonial Sufi political model in Morocco. Sovereignty was invested in the geopolitical moral body of the community of believers (*umma*), and authority was negotiated through a human body known as contiguous with the land, Islamic history in Morocco, and temporal politics. Sufi spiritual healing connected layers of reality otherwise fragmented in temporal life—politics, geography, history, the soul, and God—restoring the individual's integration into a divine cosmological and moral order.

The Sufi Islamic "body-subject" came to clash heavily with Western medicine as part of the colonial encounter in nineteenth century Morocco, and later during the French occupation of the country (1912-1956). Western medicine in the early nineteenth century redefined the human body as a "finite, biologically-contrived entity, knowable and cultivable through the scientific method," and thus conceptually separated it from the individual and sovereign *subject* of the Enlightenment (Amster 2013). The biological body provided the template for the invention by colonial medicine of "native bodies" as pathological objects of scientific knowledge. Via the naturalization of a racist ideology elaborated in the name of progress and civilization, native bodies were turned into sites of inscription of colonial power and control. For French colonizers, saintly healing and magic practices were clear signs of "a primitive mind trapped in the literal, visual, and sensory body, a Muslim *mentalité* incapable of abstract or conceptual thought." Instead of banning traditional healing practices entirely, colonial medicine instead chose to enact the necessary transformation of native subjects directly through their bodies. Colonial "biopower" was thus forcefully channeled into bodies, hidden in symbolic languages of corporeality and woven into traditional healing practice. From there, Amster (2013) traces the emergence of the post-independence Moroccan state as an Islamic monarchy:

Ramia Beladel's performance
Waiting for Godot to bless me,
Moulay Bouchta, 2017.

> The Sufi political model of popular sovereignty declined in Morocco between 1900 and 1930, progressively replaced by a new nationalist narrative elaborated by the Moroccan Sultan Abd al-Hafiz. Using a combination of Islamic modernist thought (*salafiyya*) from the Muslim Orient and of French positivism, the sultan re-casted himself as the popular representation of the collective Moroccan self, inscribed on living bodies in public Islamic rituals, sexual relations, birth, and death. The historical alliance of sultan-science-nationalism-salafiyya accounts for Morocco's emergence from colonialism in 1956 as an Islamic monarchy rather than a secular Arab-socialist state like neighboring Algeria, Tunisia, or Egypt. In the King, Morocco retains an Islamic sovereignty re-embodied. In the Moroccan postcolonial state, a positive technocracy nationalized and Islamicized.

According to Amster, the contemporary Moroccan body is "an archive, a repository of a lost form of political authority." This *fragmented* body expresses different and layered ways of knowing from Sufi and positive epistemologies, and the competing models of sovereignty they evoke. The postcolonial body is therefore an historical artifact of the Moroccan experience with French colonialism and an emblem of the Islamic postcolonial condition. Postcolonial bodies escape modern scientific understanding, Amster argues, and suffer from "double exclusion:"

> They are intermediate realities that Bruno Latour calls "hybrids" (Latour 1991), realities that are the unthinkable, the unconscious of a modernity that offers a promise, a guarantee, that man can exact truth from nature and have sovereignty over himself as a citizen-subject. The Moroccan body is f-l-baynat, in the betweens, at the interstice between tradition and modernity, Occident and Orient, nature and culture. It is marked as un-modern, while at the same time contaminated by modernity and colonialism. It suffers from a double exclusion: an exclusion from full political rights, and from the present of modern temporality.

Postcolonial bodies remind the white Western subject of their own hybridity, especially in the dark ecological age of toxic nature-culture contaminations. As the modern fantasy of a strict nature-culture divide appears more and more untenable in the face of global warming and planetary extinction, the body is certainly the primary site to re-examine modern Western subjectivity. For postcolonial subjects, however, the priority lays perhaps not so much in a renewed engagement with "non-human" or "more-than-human" alterity. Their struggle is much more about the recovery of a "fully human" status, withheld from them as a result of the double exclusion described by Amster. It is therefore a highly political project of individual and collective emancipation in which Sufi ways of being and concepts of sovereign embodiment play a central role. Despite its co-optation a century ago by nationalist leaders and colonizers alike, the Muslim body remains "a site of Islamic Sufi knowing, of self-determination, and a potential base of resistance to the modern Moroccan state."

EPISTEMOLOGICAL PLURALISM IN RAMIA BELADEL'S PRACTICE

Amster's account of embodiment in Morocco is useful for situating Ramia Beladel's engagement with Sufism within her art practice. Her engagement became an opportunity to reflect and experiment with the cultural-epistemological "fragmentedness" of her own postcolonial "body-self," as part

of a process of personal reconfiguration. Her observations on Sufi knowledge mirror Amster's (2013) notion of "medical pluralism:"

> Popular Sufism is far from the elitist practices of Sufi masters, whose spiritual accomplishment is based on erudite knowledge. Popular spiritual practices are not based on academic knowledge, but on everyday practice. People have a sensitivity for what's going on in their inner selves, often leading to the need to connect with this "other," who is not really defined. [...] They are people who find themselves in situations that appear inexplicable: they feel sick, or mad. Many of them went first through a psychological treatment that ultimately didn't help. They later found their inner peace through traditional healing practices.

Several epistemologies are evoked in these lines—erudite Sufism, popular healing, and biomedicine—that permeate people's lives in different ways. If people of all classes in Morocco engage with popular Sufi practices, it is often for different reasons. Amongst these reasons, Amster (2013) mentions the costliness of biomedicine, alternate conceptions of illness and the body, and a "dissent from the state." Quality medical treatments are indeed costly in Morocco, and financial support from the state is scarce or non-existent, especially in the case of psychological diseases that require lengthy treatments. This is often a source of frustration for people and perceived as a lack of social justice. Turning to traditional healing is a way for people to manifest their dissatisfaction with state politics. Medical pluralism, or the mixing of traditional healing with biomedicine, is therefore more widespread among lower classes.

For Ramia Beladel, the terms of her engagement with popular Sufi practices are different. As an educated young woman who grew up in a relatively privileged family in Marrakesh, her interest in Sufism emerged perhaps more from personal curiosity than sheer necessity. However, this does not diminish the significance of her experience with Sufism, quite on the contrary. By consciously choosing to engage with popular healing practices, she reworks the borders of conflicting epistemologies within herself and in her social field. For Mignolo (2011), "border epistemology" provides a method for decolonial thinking, which is importantly practiced "not just through the mind, but with the whole body." Through her self-invented aesthetic method of border thinking, Ramia Beladel attempted to regain agency in "self-governance" (Luxon 2008). While this experience informed both her performance and our joint sound piece, the two works render the ontological workings of epistemological pluralism differently. In the performance, this process is internalized and rendered straightforwardly through affective transformation. In the sound piece, different registers of being and knowing are addressed both discursively and through the sound mix.

A WASTED BREATH INSIDE A BALLOON

As part of our conversations, Ramia Beladel often expressed her discomfort with her position as a woman and as an artist in Moroccan society. This feeling poetically surfaces in her monologue in our sound piece *A wasted breath inside a balloon*:

I do exist in my mind.
I do exist in your mind.
I do exist, I do exist.
A wasted breath, inside a balloon.
I'm a wasted breath inside a balloon.
I'm a worker who didn't find a work yet.
I'm a homeless who didn't find a home yet.
I'm a swimmer who didn't find a sea yet.
I'm a traveler who didn't find a destination yet.
I'm the yet.
I'm the yet that we use at the end of a sentence
when a work is undone.
I'm the yet.
I'm completely incomplete.
I'm a dishonored commitment, a missed appointment.
I'm an infinite movement.
Movement? I'm a mimicry of movement.
Who? Who?
Me, me, me.
The kids, the family, the conditions, the time,
the wife, the mother, the dad, the country,
the sex, the second sex, the third sex,
the society, the traditions, the pretexts.
The pretexts.
I'm the prefix that we use in a word
because we are so lazy to invent a new one.
I'm the other ramblings of myself.
I'm a there that is not yet the here.
I'm Godot, who waits for himself to come.

Ramia Beladel's performance
Waiting for Godot to bless me,
Moulay Bouchta, 2017.

As the monologue suggests, Ramia Beladel's discomfort has to do with a sensation of incompleteness, combined perhaps with feelings of shame and anger. If incompleteness may relate to expectations expressed by society, it possibly also points to a rupture at a deeper level of being. This rupture has to do with an existential "in-betweenness," as Ramia Beladel explains:

> Like me, many people have to deal with this in-between situation in their lives. There has been a break in the past, followed by trouble and confrontation. Things took shape and became more and more fixed. Now we have the in-between situation. That is, you keep a door open, and in our times, there are many doors closing. Hence the problematic of borders, refugees, visas, etc. Sometimes you take one step back in order to better move forward. You circle around the center in order to understand it. There are many openings and closings, the negotiation is constant in the formation of an identity.

From this break in the past, namely colonialism, modern Moroccan subjectivity has emerged in the "in-between," that is in the interstice between tradition and modernity, Occident and Orient, nature and culture (Amster 2013). Marked by fragmentation, hybridity, and double exclusion, postcolonial subjects need to constantly negotiate their position in society, as Ramia Beladel puts it. They struggle with an unpredictable system of structural inequalities, a world of social and technocratic "doors" that can quickly turn into walls. For Ramia Beladel, this negotiation is further complicated by her particular position as a woman artist, starting with her own family:

> In every society and for a long time, artists have never been considered as normal people. Stereotypes endure about artists, about their inspiration, their effervescence, the mad artist, Van Gogh's story, and all that. I am considered to be different by my own family, I'm a little freak for them. They say: she's away with her mind, she thinks of a new artwork, she's not with us. Even if they don't tell me directly, I can also feel the expectations of my parents towards me as a daughter. By choosing to be an artist, it is as if I have escaped these expectations. So far, they haven't been able to introduce me as an artist. They say I'm an interior designer, a decorator, or if they say an artist, they seem to be doubting it.

Beyond her family, being a woman artist places Ramia Beladel generally at odds with socially attributed gender roles. This position is further complicated when female performers appear publicly. Taboos regarding the female body are well alive, especially regarding nudity. Female performers are quickly compared by conservative audiences to the "festive bodies" of cabaret dancer-singers (*shikhat*), known for their highly sexualized dances and shamelessness (Kapchan 1994). Such normative female representations are strongly contested, however, and Morocco has a long history of feminist movements, struggles, and reclamations, which I briefly review in relation to Ramia Beladel's position.

WOMEN'S LEGAL STATUS IN MOROCCO AND BODY POLITICS

The status of women in Morocco is legally defined in the Family Code (*Moudawana*), promulgated for the first time in 1958 after independence and followed by successive revisions. According to Jay (2018), the family

ideal in the first version of the Moudawana depended on symbols of national unity. Women's rights and status were directly connected through the figure of the mother. The situation changed in the 1970s and 1980s with the emergence of Islamic feminist movements that rejected both the patriarchal Moroccan model based on "misogynistic readings of religious texts" and a Western feminism that "dismissed Muslim cultures." Following King Mohammed VI's enthronement, a revised version of the Family Code was promulgated in 2004, ensuring new rights to custody and divorce for women, and restricting polygamy (Jay 2018). These reforms have hardly been implemented, however, and led to resistance from a society that remains "deeply patriarchal" (Biagi and Frosini 2014). Cases of sexual harassment and forced virginity tests are frequently reported in the media. Extramarital sexual relationships are still a punishable crime in Morocco, and hundreds of unmarried couples are arrested each year for this reason, creating heated controversies. While early forms of feminist mobilization in North Africa tended to marginalize the body and sexuality in order to prioritize reforming state laws, new forms of activism have emerged in the region that focus on the female body as a site of contestation (Salime 2014). By relying on "sexualized scripts" rather than "moralizing" ones, these actions extended the repertoire of protest to "personal revolutions," or "micro-rebellions," proliferating in the fluidity and interwoven pathways of cyber-space. Unlike older feminist forms of action, these micro revolutions are more in concert with "neoliberal subjectivities and entrepreneurial forms of self-promotion, self-reliance, and self-governance."

BODY POLITICS IN RAMIA BELADEL'S PRACTICE

Ramia Beladel's performance *Waiting for Godot to bless me* is the result of her engagement with popular Sufism; it also expresses a need for individual emancipation, which is a central claim of the new generation of plural feminisms in North Africa. Her body is central to this quest and her art practice. More than simply spiritual cleansing, her performance mirrors a process of self-formation. If traditional healing practices offer possibilities for personal experimentation, Ramia Beladel did not simply follow the instructions of the healers she encountered. She became her *own* healer as part of her art practice, according to the principle of "self-reliance" evoked by Salime (2014). Her practical engagement with popular Sufism made the borders of her own subjectivity more apparent, as she comments:

> Certain ways of knowing, religious or mathematical ones, prevent us from enjoying other experiences. My Islamic religious education restricts myself from believing in popular healing practices. Since I was a child I was told that it is "haram" (forbidden by Islam), and superstition. I am now thirty-two and I started four years ago. I need to take my time in order to move toward a change, slowly but surely. In the beginning, I was hindered by skepticism when attending trance rituals. After a discussion with a healer, I decided not to judge anymore and I stopped asking questions, aware that I wasn't wise enough to understand. During the moussem, I try not to be this rational mind, but to exteriorize everything I have experienced before, what is buried within myself. It's like therapy, a descent into hell, psychoanalysis.

The conflicting borders between rational scientific knowledge, modern orthodox (*salafiya*) Islam, medical therapy, and popular Sufi healing were not simply *identified* by Ramia Beladel. She repeatedly explored and questioned these borders through her whole self, body, and heart. The difficulty of this process is rendered in the following excerpt of *A wasted breath inside a balloon*, symbolically compared to self-rewriting on a blank sheet:

> A blind site, a white paper.
> Lots of three dots, lots of exclamations, and questions as well.
> Hard to put a point after a sentence, harder to put one
> sentence in one meaning.
> Different elements, different connotations, different spirits,
> different vibes, different body languages, different songs,
> lyrics, tunes, all that seems not enough to reach
> the exaltation.

AISHA, A SPIRITUAL HEALER IN MOULAY BOUCHTA

As a site where the spiritual world of popular Sufism meets with everyday life, the moussem in Moulay Bouchta was a perfect ground for Ramia Beladel's experiments in self-formation. It was also an occasion for me to join her in her research, and together we followed some of the moussem's events and ceremonies. We spent most of our time in front of the saint's mausoleum in the village center. The small square was always crowded, with villagers and pilgrims alike, along with sellers, healers, musicians, dancers, descendants of the saint (*chorfa*), and state representatives. The ceremonies included Sufi music and dance performances, the public ritual sacrifice of a cow, as well as a choreographed healing ritual based on rifle firing and the smell of gunpowder (*bokharia*). Most of these situations were audio documented and excerpts can be heard in our sound piece, retracing more or less the chronology of their succession.

Ramia Beladel was especially interested in meeting older women who presented themselves as spiritual healers. She got to know a woman in her sixties, Aisha, who claimed to be possessed by the female spirit Aisha Oumima, also declaring herself a "free woman." We met several times with Aisha, recording a couple of praise songs with her. Frequently designated as "possessed healers" (*mlaïkiya*), "psychics" (*chouaffa*), or even as "witches" (*sahhara*), women like Aisha often find their vocation as healers in the power of the spirit that inhabits them (Rhani 2009). In some cases, this brings them financial autonomy, as well as a certain freedom of action and movement. They are, however, often criticized by members of their communities and families, accused of sorcery, sometimes forced to cease their activities, or are summoned to exert outside of their own community. In our sound piece, one can hear Aisha complaining about such accusations, translated into French by Ramia Beladel. Later in the piece, Aisha speaks of a woman whom she is guiding through spiritual healing, to which Ramia Beladel adds her own comments:

> This woman is possessed by the spirit of Malika. There's another spirit too, who creates a block. She turned 40 years old and she's still not married. It's the spirit who blocks her, keeping away her suitors. And the woman is waiting like that, unable to get

> married. A woman who turns 40, that's it, she can't hope for anything anymore.

Overall, Ramia Beladel shows a lot of respect and admiration for women like Aisha, who guided her through her initiation to popular Sufism. “I understand Aisha when she says that she is a free woman,” Ramia Beladel declares and adds: “when you possess such a spiritual talent, you feel empowered, and this power gives you freedom.” Aisha also appears in Ramia Beladel's monologue in the sound piece:

> Day after day, I keep talking to Aisha, who is guiding the women through the healing ritual. Free, independent, powerful, she helps them to get rid of their inner demons. The need to create my own performance becomes stronger and stronger, I have demons, lots of them, I need to wash them away. Splashing water from a bucket, I wash myself in Bir Alchifa, the sacred well, surrounded by the underwear left by women before me, breaking from the past into a new present.

TRANCE, PERFORMATIVITY, AND INTRA-ACTION

On the day of her performance in Moulay Bouchta, Ramia Beladel was fully prepared, empowered by her experience in the moussem and her interactions with Aisha. Prior to the performance, she went through a henna tattoo ritual and purified herself in the sacred well of the saint's house (*zawiya*). Her monologue describes her state of mind just before the performance:

> I can be well dressed,
> I can invent my own ritual,
> I can go into a trance,
> I believe in what I'm doing,
> I believe in art,
> I believe in my body,
> and I'm aware of the spirit that I belong to,
> I can do my own lila.

Ramia Beladel's assertive tone in this part sharply contrasts with the opening of her monologue in the piece. The part marks a transition from a state of incompleteness to her self-affirmation as a woman artist, empowered through spirituality. If this section of the monologue precedes Ramia Beladel's trance ritual in the sound piece, it is, however, already part of it, anticipating the ritual's transformative effect. She continues with a description of the ritual:

> It's Thursday morning, I'm preparing for my lila, my offerings are ready: white balloons and white threads attached to white small stones; a white chair under a tree near the saint's grave. Ready to blow the balloons, ready to disperse pieces of myself. The spirit is present. I'm digging in order to seed the balloons. Shivering body, goosebumps, I am the ramblings of my breath. My trance is coming. My body, my closed mind, I start crying, unable to stop myself, I'm losing control, I'm away from myself. One balloon after another, my trance is jovial, tears of joy, tears for the new things I've gone through during this journey, tears for the women who are willing to do anything in order to be blessed and to be free, even using gunshots as therapy. I'm no more a blind site, a white paper, I'm at the same stage of belief together with the women who were in trance, while I was staring at them suspiciously. I believe in my art and they believe in their ritual. I'm in a perpetual state of change, changing weather, changing thoughts, perspectives, interpretations, all that seems not enough to reach the exuberance of these "inner practices."

Written a few days after the moussem for our sound piece, Ramia Beladel's monologue offers an interesting counterpoint to her performance piece. The text describes the trance as a succession of physical and emotional transformations. Breath by breath, balloon after balloon, Ramia Beladel disperses "pieces of herself," until she reaches a state of being "away from herself," to finally better recollect herself. The monologue is clearly a "performative speech act," through which the subject "comes into being" as a new "I" (Butler 1990). In comparison, the process is less transparent in the performance-ritual. Hidden in the opacity of embodiment, the ontological work of trance is only perceptible from the outside through Ramia Beladel's cries and other visible manifestations of affect. If both the performance and the sound piece have a performative character, the transformation is perhaps more effective in the former case, while it is rather symbolic in the latter. In the performance, the body is the site where subjective postcolonial fragmentation can be reworked, through a form of intra-border dwelling:

> The trance creates something like a boiling inside of me, I put things into question, certain principles. It's not fake, it's not theater, it happens in my guts. With this kind of ritual, you become able to open yourself to your own self, not through reflection, but through other means. It's like taking a picture without a camera.

Ramia Beladel's last sentence is of course intriguing. The apparent paradox that surfaces in the expression "taking a picture [of oneself] without a camera" sounds like an invitation to break with conceptual dichotomies such as subject vs object, thought vs matter, or representation vs reality. This expression evokes the possibility to be on both sides of the (absent) camera at the same time, that is simultaneously subject *and* object. In such a case, the body is that special ontological camera that allows for an "entanglement of matter and meaning," as in the "intra-active" model of posthumanist performativity proposed by Karen Barad (2007). "Matter and meaning are not separate elements," she writes, "mattering is simultaneously a matter of substance and significance." As a result, Barad argues, there is "no unambiguous way to differentiate between the object and agencies of observation." Through her performative ritual, Ramia Beladel arguably entered into the ambiguous territory of intra-action, becoming her "new self," as she observed herself.

THE SOUND BODY

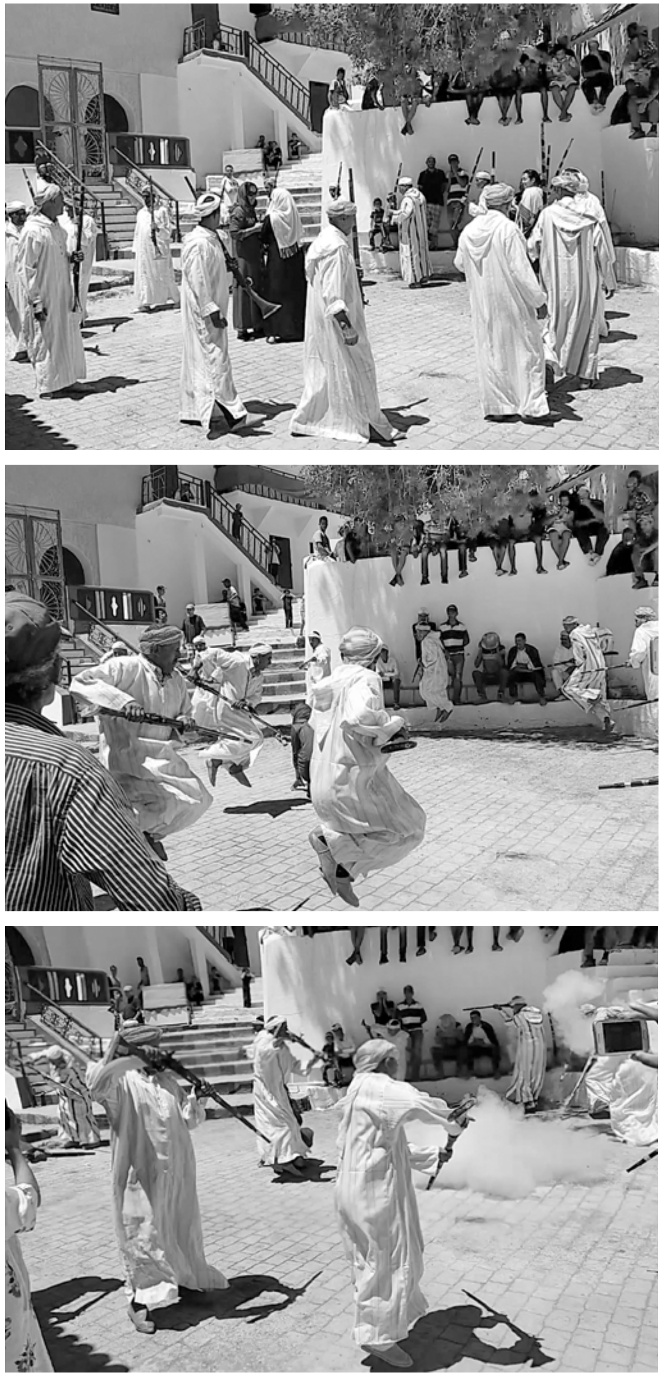
Before examining more closely the sonic dimension of Ramia Beladel's performative practice, it is important to introduce Debora Kapchan's notion of "sound body" (Kapchan 2015). This notion is particularly relevant to my research because Kapchan expanded it through her year-long engagement with Sufism in Morocco as a scholar in sound and performance studies (Kapchan 2016). She highlights the significance of sound and listening in

Sufi spiritual practice. Liturgy is composed of prayer recitation as well as a *dhikr* (remembrance) ceremony, in which the names of God are repeated aloud over and over quite rapidly and with much fervor. The word *samaa* names both the genre of Sufi praise song in Morocco as well as the act of deep listening to that praise. Samaa listening and praise frequently lead to ecstatic states of worship, facilitating a "journey through several states." Sufi spiritual practice provides Kapchan with a model for elaborating her concept of the "sound body that is permeable and responsive to the rhythms of its environment, able to be reoriented easily when in proximity with, or touched by, other melodies, rituals, ecologies, institutions." She contrasts the sound body with the "juridical body of the Enlightenment" and its dualisms. The sound body emerges in performative "listening acts," she adds, whose affective dimension transforms not only ideas, but also the actual chemistry of our bodies.

In the light of the complex political history of postcolonial embodiment traced by Amster, Kapchan's notion of the "sound body" may appear limited because it remains too universal. It doesn't fully account for differences in position between "fully human," privileged bodies, and stigmatized, fragmented, postcolonial bodies. Instead of conceiving the possibility for a dialogue and negotiation between the individual and the social body *as part of* the sound body, Kapchan seems to reduce the sound body to a material, resonant body that ultimately appears trans-historical, and therefore potentially depoliticized. What I find productive in the concept of the sound body is the possibility it offers to re-examine sound itself from the perspective of embodiment. "Existentially speaking it is hard to think sound apart from the body," Kapchan (2017) writes. In its modern scientific definition, sound indeed strangely resembles the "biological body" devised by medical science as a finite object, "knowable and cultivable through the scientific method" (Amster 2013).

POSTCOLONIAL AURALITY AND SONIC PLURALISM

During my research in Morocco, I often found it difficult to have conversations on sound "itself," as if this notion was irrelevant or foreign to most people I encountered. Discussing voices and bodies felt like a better place to start



Bokharia healing ritual in front of the saint's mausoleum in Moulay Bouchta, 2017. A female patient stands in the center of a circle of horsemen equipped with rifles. The men perform a dance ending with the firing of rifles, causing the blocking spirit to leave the patient's body.

when examining histories of sound and listening. Apart from music, the body is therefore the place to start examining histories of sound and listening. Like the postcolonial body described by Amster, I argue that aurality in Morocco can best be apprehended in terms of *epistemological pluralism*. The term *sonic pluralism* refers to an amalgamation of different epistemologies manifested in sounding and listening practices. In Morocco, these epistemologies can be traced back to Islamo-Arabic scholarship, Berber cosmology, Sufism, modern science, and possibly other sources—all entangled through the colonial matrix of power. Pluralism equally pertains to the status of sound *itself*, as a fragmented field through which postcolonial realities are constructed. As a result, sound is continuously becoming *out of itself;* sound is always a "sound body" because it does not make sense independently from listening subjects. Sound *in itself*, as an autonomous phenomenon that can be observed from the outside, turns out to be a product of modern Western subjectivity. It only makes sense as a particular case in the history of listening, despite its persistence in contemporary sound discourse.

SOUND IN RAMIA BELADEL'S PERFORMANCE

Sound, listening, and breathing play important roles in Ramia Beladel's performance; her practice is inspired in part by Sufi sound concepts, she explains:

> In spiritual Sufi practice, breath and listening are closely interconnected via the notion of "samaa," that is listening with an "awakened heart." It is this principle that can lead to a union with the divine, with the spiritual, and with oneself. Breath leads to samaa, and samaa leads to the divine.

In the performance, trance is enacted through breathing into balloons. According to Dieste (2013), "breath" is a complex notion in the Moroccan Arabo-Islamic tradition. It refers both to *ruh* (divine breath, soul) and *nafs* (animal soul), the latter referring more specifically to human emotions and passions as uncontrolled expressions. Both terms also mean "breathing

Bokharia healing ritual in front of the saint's mausoleum in Moulay Bouchta, 2017.

and air, a means of vital and bodily strength which maintains life," and some afflictions are interpreted as an obstruction of breathing. If breathing and listening are central to Ramia Beladel's practice, she never directly referred to sound itself as an autonomous phenomenon, rather always in combination with listening and embodiment.

To some extent, Ramia Beladel's *Waiting for Godot to bless me* can be considered as a realization of Kapchan's (2015) "sound body." The performance comes close to a "listening act," in which a new subject emerges through deep, trance-like listening. Our joint sound piece *A wasted breath inside a balloon*, on the contrary, points to the complex sociality of the moussem in Moulay Bouchta, as well as to Ramia Beladel's position within it. Besides her spoken script and field recordings, the piece contains an additional layer made of balloon sounds. Derived from Ramia Beladel's use of balloons in her performance, this abstract soundscape is an attempt to represent the fluctuations of her inner affective self. The script draws on various oral and literary registers, including live translation, descriptions, diary, and monologue. Throughout this script, Ramia Beladel's position is changing. If in the beginning she immerses herself in the moussem and manages to bond with some of the women healers, she later clearly distances herself: "I believe in my art and they believe in their ritual," she says in the last part of the monologue. Ramia Beladel and Aisha, the woman healer, differ in their convictions; they also differ in class and education, which inevitably positions them apart from one another in the social field of privilege and agency. Despite these differences, they found ways of connecting on the level of spirituality, empathy, and mutual care.

Through her engagement with popular Sufism, Ramia Beladel certainly realized that gender normativity tends to be reproduced in healing practices. In the previous example of the unmarried 40-year-old woman, Aisha interpreted the situation as a result of the negative influence of a blocking spirit. The woman required a curative treatment, Aisha declared, and therefore sanctioned her for deviating from the social norm. Ramia Beladel herself was "diagnosed" by a *fqih* (Islamic cleric) in 2014, who declared that she was possessed by "Malika," a spirit mentioned by Crapanzano (1973) in his list of Moroccan *jinn* and *jinniya*:

> Lalla Malika is very beautiful and dresses, as they say, with a lot of chic. She demands the same elegance of all her followers.

> She is a flirt and quite promiscuous, and she especially enjoys relationships with married men. I have been told she speaks only French and that she lives in clothes cabinets. Lalla Malika is always gay, and she does not attack her followers. She likes to laugh and tickle them, and she is responsible when a group of women suddenly begin giggling. She prefers the color pink and requires her followers to wear eau de cologne and burn sandal.

If the transgressive character of the spirit Malika is striking in this description, one should not forget that such an ambiguous female figure is by no way accepted in Moroccan society; it is rather presented as a pathology that needs to be controlled and cured. The association of the spirit Malika with French language highlights the exteriority of this figure for Moroccan society, while at the same time acknowledging her participation amongst the pantheon of Moroccan spirits. If Ramia Beladel made a reference to Malika in her performance by wearing a pink dress (the color of the *jinniya)*, she did not engage with her spirit in the traditional way of popular Sufism, preferring instead her own ritual.

To sum up, Ramia Beladel integrated elements from popular Sufism into her own art practice, while clearly situating herself within a distinct social field. From her contested position as a woman artist, she found inspiration in the daily struggle of women healers, while affirming at the same time her own values. These values come close to the new generation of "plural feminism" in North Africa, defined by Salime (2014) as "dignity, individual freedoms, religious choice, the right to subversion, and self-expression." Even if Ramia Beladel repeatedly declared that she doesn't see herself as a feminist, her performance presents similarities with the self-assertive tone of feminist "microrebellions" described by Salime. For Ramia Beladel, microrebellion does not necessarily entail provocation or direct confrontation, however, but mostly irony and indifference, as she puts it:

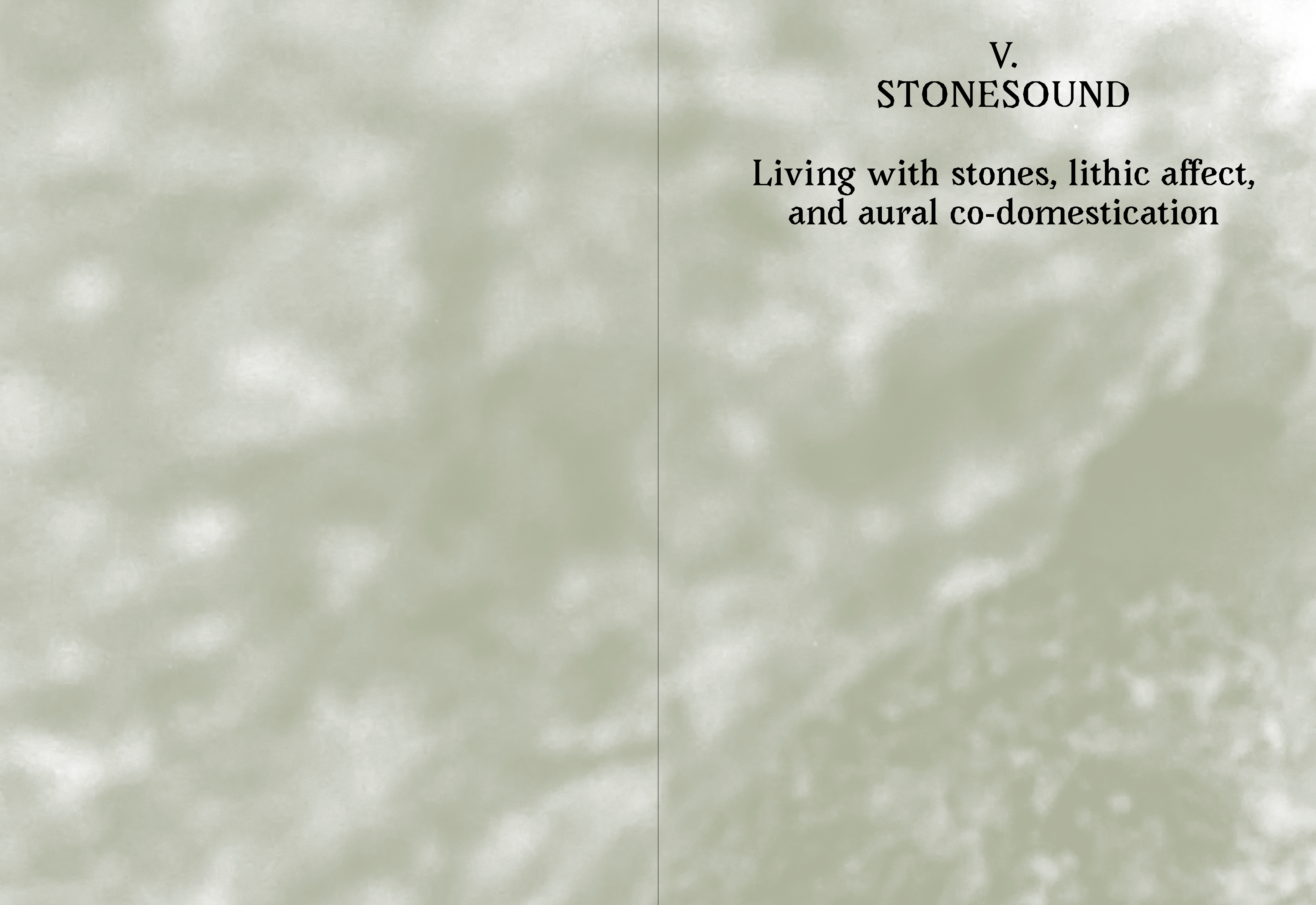
> When I'm back in Marrakesh from the moussem, as I walk through the medina, I stare at supposedly "normal" people with irony. When people react with skepticism to my experience in popular Sufism, I don't argue with them. Even my family criticizes me sometimes for going to the moussem, as it is "against the religion." I don't even answer, I smile, I say "yes yes." There's a saying: "hesitation is loud and self-confidence is calm." If I wasn't certain of what I'm doing, I would surely enter into a conflict with my family.

BODY POLITICS OF SUFI-ORIENTED CONTEMPORARY ART IN MOROCCO

The sound piece *A wasted breath inside a balloon* mirrors the complexity of Ramia Beladel's position as a woman artist within conflicting epistemological and social fields. The piece becomes a stage where these tensions can be acted out and possibly resolved, at least temporarily. Out of the performative "speech act" mediated by the script, Ramia Beladel emerges as a new self. This transformation is only possible through her intellectual and bodily engagement with popular Sufism. The "sound body" in our joint piece does not correspond with Kapchan's (2015) "unmarked" body, "free of the dichotomies of modern subjectivity," and supposedly made of pure "vibrant materiality." It is much more a "plural sound body," that is a *fully* postcolonial body, continuously re-entangled in the materiality of knowledge and coloniality, glorious and vulnerable in its struggle for sovereignty.

In comparison with the sound piece, Ramia Beladel's performance *Waiting for Godot to bless me* perhaps comes closer to Kapchan's definition of the sound body. The performance nevertheless exceeds this definition, precisely because it exists as part of the highly coded field of global contemporary art. As such, it is not *any body*, which is visually presented in a trance-like state in the video, but a body that can be identified by an international audience as a young North African woman artist, dressed in an elegant modern-traditional dress. Whereas the spiritual bodily practice at the center of Ramia Beladel's performance is personal and intimate, the artwork itself is clearly designed for the "world stage" (Goodman 2005). Through its presentation as a video on the artist's website along with English texts, Ramia Beladel made the work accessible for circulation in the global virtual space of cultural goods. This orientation was productive in her case, leading to new residencies and public presentations in Morocco, as well as in Europe and South America.

I end this chapter with a comment on the political dimension of Sufism in Moroccan contemporary art. Following Amster (2013), I evoked the persistence of Sufi epistemology in Morocco through practices such as "medical pluralism." Sufi thought is well alive today in Morocco and represents a contested site of power, claimed at the same time by the monarchy, political parties, and working-class communities of believers. This is important when considering contemporary artworks that refer to Sufi thought. Art historian Cynthia Becker (2009) notes that Sufism was embraced first as "Moroccan national heritage" in the early 1960s by the modernist artists of the Casablanca School in an attempt to break with the academism and colonialism of European art. Painters such as Farid Belkahia and Mohamed Melehi found inspiration in Sufi symbolism and calligraphic scripts to create their own abstract visual language. As part of a new generation of artists who emerged with the coming to power of King Mohammed VI in 1999, Younès Rahmoun in his work relies on Sufi meditation and repetition. For Rahmoun, Sufism is a personal transcendental expression that serves as a bridge between the human and the divine. Yet, Becker contends, Rahmoun's art clearly corresponds with the image of Sufism propagated by the monarchy for its own benefit—one of universality and understanding across cultures. In a context characterized by uneven political rights and persistent limitations in freedom of expression, Becker sees Rahmoun's apparent alignment with the state's official discourse on Sufism as a form of "self-censorship." A similar comment could be made about Ramia Beladel's work, herself a former student of Rahmoun at the art institute in Tetouan. If Beladel's and Rahmoun's work appear apolitical to Western art criticism, then it is perhaps because these works are *differently* political, or micro-political. Sufi practice in Moroccan contemporary art is political precisely because it is centered on the postcolonial body. Like in instances of "medical pluralism," and similarly in recent forms of feminist activism, engaging one's own body (in traditional healing or in artistic actions) has increasingly become a way for people to reclaim a "legitimate voice," often denied in institutional settings (Salime 2014). In the present context of disillusionment with the state as a channel for social justice, the body is a site from which opposition to structural violence and institutionalized state corruption can be manifested. Especially, the perceived failure of the Arab Spring revolution in 2011 made it necessary for artists in North Africa to find new modes of extra-institutional criticism. For some of them, engaging with Sufism through their own body—and not simply on the level of cultural representation—can be seen as an attempt to relocate the political within the body. Like feminist acts of microrebellions, these practices invoke new forms of resistance; this potentially includes experimenting with the borders of censorship—a notoriously unclear territory in Morocco. By engaging with the ontological work of Sufi practice, these artists find a means of subjective transformation from which they can potentially reclaim a legitimate voice. The question ultimately remains whether these energies are sufficient "to fuel an increase in the body's powers" (Marks 2015) and in creative thought.



V.

STONESOUND

Living with stones, lithic affect, and aural co-domestication

VIDEO
STONESOUND
by Gilles Aubry and Abdeljalil Saouli
2019, 10'23", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18258/3/st.mp4

> When I was a child, I could see only stones when I left my house. Stones allow us to ask heavy questions. Stones are weighty, they fall, they change with the seasonal cycles... I've slept with stones and understood many things through them. Sometimes I can feel heat from the stones, there's a connection between us... Their state changes, they become powder. When I hold a stone, there's a sensation and if I search more, I discover more. In such traces I can read messages. There's no need for a written language for humans to be in relation with non-humans. I want to make a library of stones.
> – Abdeljalil Saouli, artist in Moulay Bouchta al Khamar

The lines above stem from a panel discussion with the artist Abdeljalil Saouli as part of an exhibition at Le 18 in Marrakesh in 2018. Using simple words, he evokes the richness of his year-long interactions with stones in his native village of Moulay Bouchta al Khamar. Although I was well aware of the use of natural materials in his art practice, it was the first time I heard him expressing a personal and affective connection to stones. So far, my research on ecological voices in Morocco had brought to my attention a few cases of human-stone interactions: stone cairns and sacred caves in relation to sainthood in various regions; paleolithic rock art in the Atlas mountains; and industrial rock mining, which started during the years of the French occupation and today represents a major source of income for the Moroccan state. In his statement, Abdeljalil Saouli pointed to new ways of approaching sonic materiality in my research. I started to see connections with building techniques and vernacular architecture, as well as with domestication processes between people and their environment. I was keen to hear more about Abdeljalil Saouli's daily experience of cohabiting with stones, of knowing through them, and of building and making art with them. I was also curious if other people in the village had similar experiences with stones and rocks, how they would talk about them, and about the ways stones were part of a larger eco-social environment. Above all, I was keen to join Saouli in artistic sound experiments and to enter a conversation with him about listening, sonic materiality, and natural forces. The present chapter retraces the findings and observations resulting from our collaboration in Moulay Bouchta, presented here as a case of speculative sound ethnography, or "acoustemology" of stones, to use Steven Feld's (2017) terminology.

MOULAY BOUCHTA AND THE PRE-RIF REGION IN MOROCCO

Situated 60 kilometers north of Fès in the administrative province of Taounate in northern Morocco, the village of Moulay Bouchta al Khamar is divided into an upper and a lower part. In the upper part, traditional houses surround the mausoleum of Saint Moulay Bouchta (fourteenth century), the village founder and "father of the rain" (Odinot 1932). The lower part of the village was built during the French occupation, including administrative and school buildings concentrated around a large market area. The region belongs to the Pre-Rif area, delimited in the north by the Rif mountain range and by vast fertile plains in the south. The local terrain is somewhat irregular, characterized by soft marly hills interspersed with large sandstone and limestone formations. Mount Amergou is the highest of these formations, overlooking the village of Moulay Bouchta. The annual variations in temperature and rainfall can be quite extreme, ranging from 5°C with abundant rainfalls in the winter to 40°C with extended dry periods in the summer. The landscape changes accordingly, alternating between lush green vegetation during the wet months and ochre tones from May to October. The impact of water and wind erosion on the landscape is visible, with abrupt changes and fractures in the topography revealing the complex geological configuration of the Rif area. Historically and culturally, the region is part of the *Jbala* land, a territory of related Berber tribes who were Arabized since the seventh century, sharing a common "mountain Arabic" dialect (Aumeeruddy-Thomas et al. 2017). The local economy is based on a fragile combination of crops, tree plantations, and livestock (Medkouri and Zerkaoui 2018), with a significant percentage of olive oil production.

DOMESTICATION PROCESSES IN THE RIF REGION

While the Rif region historically has received less attention from researchers than the Atlas and Sous regions, there is now renewed interest in the area's remarkable agro-biodiversity. For decades, the politics of agrarian modernization and modern development have marginalized local environmental know-how as a result of the French and Spanish colonizers' rule in the 1950s,

which was further intensified by the Moroccan authorities after independence (Medkouri and Zerkaoui 2018). Recent studies in ethnobotany, ecology, anthropology, and linguistics have highlighted the diversity of wild and domestic plant and animal species in the region, the significance of vernacular agrarian knowledge and practices, as well as the richness in rural vocabulary for designating species and agrarian spaces. Aumeeruddy-Thomas, Caubet, Hmimsa and Angeles (2017) argue that almond, olive, and fig trees have *agency* in the domestication process between humans and their environment. Trees mediate between humans, their own representations, and sense of history, as well as between humans and "supranatural forces," thus ensuring reciprocal exchanges. The very notion of "domestication" is currently under scrutiny in the field of biology and anthropology. Stépanoff and Vigne (2018) contend that domestication cannot be described as "a homogenous reality," but as "a variety of ongoing interconnected biological and social transformations which extend through a continuum of interactions between control and autonomy." Humans are not enough to create and maintain a "domesticatory link;" "non-human agencies" are also needed, of the environment as well as of plants and animals. Anthropocentric models of domestication become increasingly contested, and new models describe humans not only as agents, but also as *objects* of domestication. As genetic, biological, and cultural evidence suggests, humans are made by their environment as they interact with it. Consequently, "domestication entails co-domestication" (Anderson 2018) as a bi- or multilateral process, in the sense that it never grants total control to one side over the other.

A STORY OF SOUND, AURALITY, AND ECOLOGY

In this chapter, I examine the ways sound and listening participate in co-domestication processes between people and their environment in Moulay Bouchta. Since it is hardly possible to attend to people's listening through direct observation, I rely on a series of experiments in stone sounding carried out in collaboration with the artist Abdeljalil Saouli. Stones are ubiquitous in the landscape of Moulay Bouchta and serve as the primary building material in vernacular houses. Local building practices are themselves part of bidirectional processes of domestication, in which stones have a certain agency.

Abdeljalil Saouli himself relied on such practices in order to build his own house, and stones have been companions in his life since his childhood, as we will see. Sounding stones with him gave me a sense of an affective connection to stones, and of the role of listening in this relationship. Abdeljalil Saouli recognizes a particular *affect* in stones, which also characterizes their sound as a distinct category of *stonesound*. Listening and sounding is primarily a modality of entering into a relationship with the world through his art practice and daily life. Through conscious appropriation of local sound practices and knowledge, combined with modern scientific concepts, his aesthetic practice is an expression of *sonic pluralism*. Although it is perhaps problematic to generalize Saouli's particular sonic discourse to the whole population of Moulay Bouchta and beyond in Morocco, it does, however, pertain to a local history of sound and listening. The story Abdeljalil Saouli tells through listening to and sounding stones informs a particular narrative on postcolonial aurality, which is at odds with prevalent discourses on sonic modernity. Because this story is deeply entangled with the coloniality of knowledge, it is also a story of resistance, motivated by aspirations of self-definition shared by many people in Morocco and North Africa. This story indirectly questions the hegemony of white Western aurality in sound studies and sound art, including my own; it also informs a decolonial dialogue on posthumanism, contributing thus to a pluralist perspective on aurality and ecology.

RESEARCHING IN MOULAY BOUCHTA WITH ABDELJALIL SAOULI

I visited Abdeljalil Saouli for the first time at his home in Moulay Bouchta in July 2017. Born in 1984, he graduated from the National Institute of Fine Arts in Tetouan (INBA) in 2012. He made a name for himself as part of a new generation of artists in Morocco and participated in several individual and group exhibitions in the country and abroad. He worked with art galleries and received commissions for sculptural works in public spaces. Yet, unsatisfied with his situation as a freelance artist in Tetouan, Abdeljalil Saouli decided to relocate to Moulay Bouchta. He built a house on a family-owned land plot with direct access to the natural materials needed for his sculptural practice. During my repeated stays at Abdeljalil Saouli's place, I was able to admire his artworks displayed in the house and its surroundings. Made of wood, clay, metal, grass and paper paste, earth, or polyester, the artworks had a strong and almost animate presence. The house itself was impressive, built with the help of villagers and family members using mostly natural materials such as stone, earth, and wood.

Abdeljalil Saouli and his house in Moulay Bouchta, 2018.

In September 2018, Abdeljalil Saouli invited me, together with the architect Carlos Pérez Marín, to embark on a new collaborative project combining research, art practice, sound, and architecture. Saouli's proposed working theme was *la maison*, which translates from French into English both as "house" and "home". He had started exploring this theme in his art practice through sketches, architecture models, and material assemblages informed by local building techniques. We spent about ten days researching vernacular architecture and building techniques, attentive to the ways local constructions were particularly well adapted to the steep and uneven topography of the region and to the environmental conditions in general. We also visited local saint sanctuaries and several houses in the neighborhood, studying their architecture and conversing with their owners. As we wanted to include sound as well in our research, we made a series of experiments in stone *sounding*. I interpret these experiments in this chapter as a material and affective form of engagement with sound. The video *STONESOUND* (Aubry and Saouli 2019)[1] is an outcome of our collaborative research. It documents a stone sounding experiment, layered with text fragments from our conversations. The work was presented for the first time in Moulay

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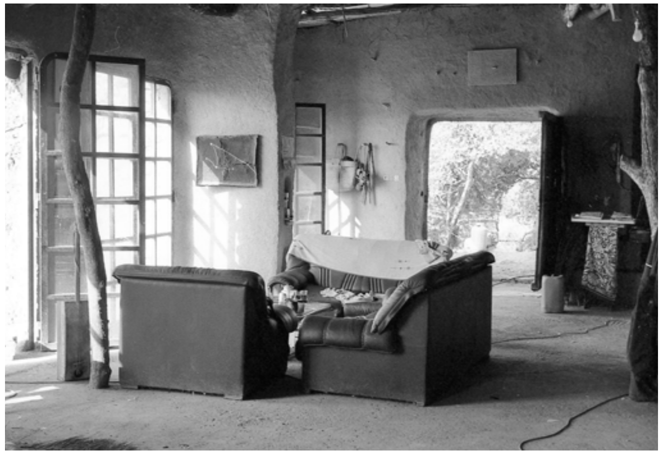
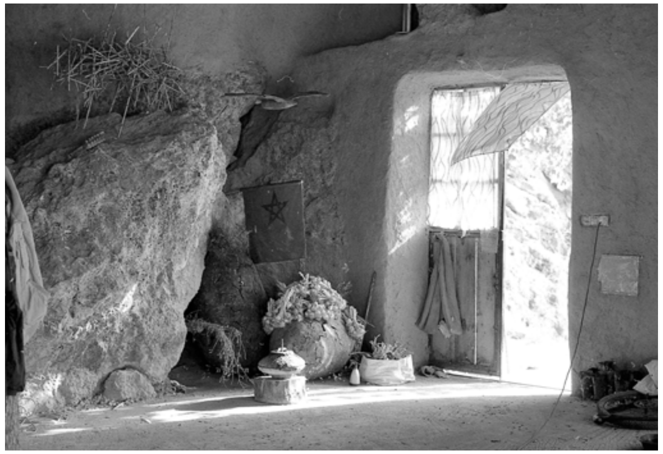
[1] The video can be accessed via the following link: https://arbor.bfh.ch/18258/3/st.mp4





Interior views of Abdeljalil Saouli's house, Moulay Bouchta, 2018.

Bouchta in March 2019 during the *Sakhra Encounters*, a three-day-long public event combining a site-specific exhibition, performances, workshops, and group discussions.[2]

LIVING WITH STONES

Abdeljalil Saouli's house came to play an important role in our exchanges, not only as accommodation and a work space, but especially as a place where Saouli's vision, sensitivity, and thinking could be physically experienced and discussed. The house itself is an artwork, responding to Saouli's perceived necessity to live in quasi-symbiosis with the rock formation around it. The house sits just below a hilltop accosting the village, overlooked by a 30-meter-high cliff. With its rectangular shape, the building leans directly against this massive rock wall on one side. The opposite wall is covered with large glass windows, allowing for a spectacular view of the valley and the large garden area. Saouli explains his decision to build a house at this location because he used to sometimes sleep there as a kid, seeking refuge in the rocks from a troubled family context. Commenting on his house, he declares:

> The stones were here before the architecture, and I was already used to living with them. I believe the stones needed me, they called me to sleep here in the beginning, and I've asked them many questions. I've created a space compatible with myself, based on what I need, how I sleep, how I walk, read, think, shower, eat, see, and sense. I was looking for stability and balance. In order to keep a steady

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[2] The *Sakhra Encounters* is an artist-run initiative by Abdeljalil Saouli, Gilles Aubry, and Carlos Pérez Marín, which took place in March 2018. A documentation is accessible via the following link: http://radioappartement22.com/?s=sakhra

> temperature in the space, I've created this 'box' and looked for materials that can live next to stones. I've used olive tree wood to build the walls. I've consolidated them with a mix of earth and straw and I've modeled the whole thing. I needed to create a space for, with, and on stones, an architectural space that includes stones as living objects.[3]

The house's building materials are commonly found in Jbala villages. Vernacular architecture in the region uses "simple, pre-industrial building techniques and tools" (González Sancho 2017). Complex problems are solved by breaking them into a chain of more simple ones. These techniques turn natural materials like earth, wood, and stone into efficient building elements. The lower sections of the walls are made of stones, isolating the house from humidity and ground water. Adobe bricks are used for the upper parts and finished with a protective mortar layer (*tahnika*). Vernacular houses are functional in all aspects regarding building, volume, and materials. They usually show little variations in typology over time and mirror a farming lifestyle.

The adaptive capacity of Jbala architecture is one of its defining characteristics, as it rarely aspires to radically modify the environment. Large stone blocks become part of the house's walls, rather than being cut up or displaced. Local houses seem literally imbricated in the mountains, making it difficult to clearly distinguish between the built and the natural environment. White mortar coating further complicates this distinction, often covering surfaces where built and non-built elements intersect, accentuating the impression of continuity between them. Frequent maintenance is needed because natural materials tend to deteriorate under the effect of wind, erosion, humidity, and temperature changes. Vernacular houses thus appear like living entities, breathing with the climate, evolving with the environmental conditions, and growing in size together with the family. While concrete has become more frequent in new constructions, it necessitates a special permit by the local authorities. This brings a number of complications because this permit can only be granted upon presenting an official land property title. Many families do not possess such titles, as land was often passed on from one generation to the next without administrative procedures. As a consequence, people have to engage in lengthy and costly processes for legalizing their property titles. Sometimes, people told me, they manage to circumvent these procedures through corruption.

Vernacular architecture in Moulay Bouchta, 2018.

Hoffman (2002) describes the perpetuation of local knowledge and its transformation under the effects of modernization as a "syncretic process of innovation." This relation predates globalization in Moroccan rural societies and continues to operate through the contemporary production of "rural modernity." By drawing from an expanded repertoire of external influences, vernacular building amounts to a form of architectural pluralism. Pluralism is expressed in the combination of traditional and industrial materials; it is equally manifested in the interactions between the local collective modes of land management and the regulations imposed by the state administration. Rural modernity is therefore not merely a reproduction of ancestral practices, but a more dynamic process of innovation and adaptation. Abdeljalil Saouli's house reproduces some of the principles of local vernacular architecture, especially in terms of building materials, techniques, and adaptation to the environment. It also differs from local practices on aspects such as proportions, functionality, and aesthetics. By returning to his hometown to design a space compatible with his needs, Saouli engaged in a reflexive process about his life and art practice. As the following lines attest, this reflection touches on deeper existential and ontological questions:

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[3] The declarations by Abdeljalil Saouli reproduced in this chapter stem from our conversations in French between September 2018 and March 2019. All English translations by the author.

> I ask myself such questions ... why am I here? Why stones? Why not elsewhere? But it depends. I really feel comfortable here. I also search in matter, in earth. In the Qur'an, they say we are born from earth. The Earth for me is an ensemble of all the materials of this planet. I am matter too. This means that my own matter and the one of stones are close. Physically, stone is stagnating matter. Stone is the matter that gives me more breath. Crossing a mountain is hard, but there's breath. The body has to move more, to work more, and becomes more alive. It gets a lot of breath. When you walk on stones, you walk on more risks, as you may fall if you're not concentrating. Risk means that you have to be in balance, it's a study of the relationship between your own weight and the space.

These words are striking because they rely on a metaphysical discourse in order to establish connections between matter (stones, earth), being, and embodiment, as well as natural and spiritual forces. Abdeljalil Saouli refers to the scholarly Arabo-Islamic tradition, in particular to the notion of *tawhid*—the idea that body and soul form a continuous whole (Dieste 2013). His descriptions also point to Al-Antaki's "Galenic anatomy," which compares "man to elements of the physical world, air, water, fire, and earth" (Amster 2013). Physiological transformation is produced by temperature and humidity, while reason, memory, and sense perception are motivated by mechanical powers: "natural power" directs the beating of the heart, "animal power" moves the body, and "psychological power" draws from the sensory organs. Saouli is not an Islamic scholar, but a contemporary artist whose education also includes natural sciences. As such, he is well aware of modern scientific discourses on matter, body, life, and sound.

Epistemological pluralism, for Saouli, is therefore essentially a poetic strategy constitutive of his art practice. This approach informs his creative work with materials, manually and conceptually, including the design of his house. His descriptions rely on precise observations and constitute a precious source of information. I have attempted to cross-check this information with other sources whenever possible during my visits in Moulay Bouchta. Our exchanges revealed elements for a locally situated material sound theory, albeit a poetic and personal one.

SOUNDING STONES

My repeated stays at Abdeljalil Saouli's house in Moulay Bouchta gave me a sense of living with stones. I wanted to focus more specifically on listening as a research practice in our collaboration, and Saouli agreed to a series of joint experiments in stone sounding. Our approach started as I began beating the stone wall inside his house with a metallic object. "Did you really find the sound of stone in the recording you just did?" he asked, and I replied: "I don't know yet, I find it interesting to sound stones by beating them." Then he added: "You should hit a stone with another stone in order to keep the stone sound. Not with metal. We're going to try this out." So we did; and made a series of experiments whose goal was not entirely clear to us initially.

Because stones rarely emit sound, our approach mostly relied on basic sounding techniques. "Sounding," as Stefan Helmreich (2016) suggests—in the proper sense of "measuring the depth of something"—is appropriate for investigating things not yet known, things whose limits are not clear, or whose boundaries may be obscured. By sounding stones through beating, Abdeljalil Saouli and I engaged in a close sonic investigation of the materiality of stones, inquiring about their matter, hardness, weight, and inner structure in an attempt to ask them "many questions" in Saouli's own words. In doing so we were also able to dwell at the unclear borders of abstract terms like *matter*, *stone*, *sound*, *life*, *the human*, *the self*, and their complex entanglements. We carried out four experiments during my visit in September 2018, which we documented and later reflected in our conversations. These experiments took place at three different locations and lasted for about 30 to 60 minutes each.

EXPERIMENT 1
(3 September 2018, 4 p.m., Mount Amergou)

We took a long walk at the top of Mount Amergou overlooking the village, where I made recordings by inserting my microphone in stones carved by water erosion. These cavities acted as natural resonators and filters for the ambient sounds. They made for abstract wind recordings, with differences in sound colors between them, according to the size and shape of each cavity. Distant voices of kids playing in the valley are also audible on the recordings, along with cars, birds, and other animals. During the same session Abdeljalil Saouli played with stones by rubbing them against each other. Overall, this experiment was an interesting first step in our collaboration, showing differences between our respective approaches to sound and ecological voices. I was searching for unusual listening points with my microphone, approaching sound in terms of resonance, soundscape, and as a series of short, later comparable recordings. The results were quite predictable, with some nuances between the takes. Saouli conversely focused on the tactile and textural qualities of stones and other things, actively sounding them and pointing to particular landmarks.

Gilles Aubry and Abdeljalil Saouli on Mount Amergou, 2018.

EXPERIMENT 2
(4 September 2018, 6:30 p.m., Moulay Bouchta)

For the second experiment, Abdeljalil Saouli suggested to record a "sound wall," as he called it, by tapping with a small stone on each of the stones of a wall bordering his own plot of land. The wall was about 30 meters long and made of limestone rocks layered on top of each other without cement. He started at one end of the wall, tapping each stone two to four times, slowly moving along the wall while I was recording. It took us about 50 minutes to reach the other end, stopping at times for additional comments. Despite its simplicity, this experiment turned out to be pleasantly surprising for both of us; firstly because we shared a listening experience, and secondly for the interesting conversation it triggered. Saouli's soft beating on the limestone rocks produced a rich variety of sounds with subtle and endless variations in pitch, resonance, density, and texture. After about fifteen minutes, our listening had reached an intense level of concentration, floating freely between stone sounds, background sounds, and something more interior to ourselves. The wall itself was the score for this experiment, guiding our progression and helping our concentration. The soundscape around us was quite vivid when we started shortly before dusk. We could hear donkeys, sheep, birds, the voices of kids playing, and someone hammering at a distance. The scene quietened as the light diminished, with crickets progressively blending in, soon followed by the barking of distant farm dogs. Sounding stones reminded Saouli of his experience of breaking stones while building his house, leading to more comments on stones and sound in general. Here is an excerpt of the conversation between Abdeljalil Saouli (AS) and myself, Gilles Aubry (GA):

AS: We've finished the wall!

GA: Did you build this wall?

AS: Yes, and I built it again with sound now, wow! With sound one can build a wall quickly, but when you have to move all these stones in reality, it takes much longer. I built this wall a first time, and now I've drawn it again with sound.

GA: I was trying to anticipate the sounds as you were hitting, but what one hears doesn't always correspond with what one sees.

AS: The sound difference between the various stone types and sizes is very rich. I built this wall initially in order to stabilize the ground at the foot of the hill, but I didn't know I would listen to it one day through a microphone!

GA: We could also hear someone hitting something in the background at some point.

AS: Yes, there was someone who, like me, was telling a story through hitting stones; it's a way of speaking through stones. (Starts hitting stones again.) Through the sound you can hear a void inside, you can feel the sound entering the stone to create an echo. Through that you understand if there's a void or not. Here there's a void, a bit, a bit more ... You can also feel the vibration of the stone when you hit it. Listen to the difference with wood. (He hits it.). And here's concrete, but we don't need to hear that. Oh, Bouchta (Saouli's uncle) just came back home. When one breaks stones, one needs to hit first in order to find the cracks. Like this, I talk to the stone, I speak with it. It's not a hit, it's a demand to the stone, so that it tells me how to work. It tells me about its weight, its fragility, it's a whole sound analysis of the stone by the ear as a working method. If there's a crack, then it's possible to insert the chisel; you understand where to break it. There's also a method for breaking stones with fire. You heat the stone for a long time and then you throw water on it, which creates cracks.

Stone wall used for experiment 2, Moulay Bouchta, 2018.

GA: Did you break stones to build your house?

AS: Here we had to break large stones, there was a four-to-five-ton-heavy rock over there. We used five different hammers to break it, one 6 kg chisel, another one of 10 kg, and a 20 kg crowbar.

GA: It sounds like a fight with the stone, how does the body react?

AS: Breaking stones is like praying, you need an intense concentration, otherwise there might be bad consequences, as the risks are high. I don't work alone, but with an assistant. You have to be aware that there are other hands near the chisel. You're throwing a heavy weight and you need to be precise, or you'll stop quickly. That's why I'm saying it's like praying because you need to be clean and focused. You can feel gravity in the contact between a stone and a human.

GA: It vibrates too ...

AS: Yes, I become a thermometer of the stone through the gesture of hitting it. I can feel if it's about to break, or if I need to hit more, if there's heat left. Many specific words and expressions about such things exist in the stone cutting profession. I started breaking stones for building two and a half years ago. There's always a weird paradox in breaking something in order to build something else. You can also feel the connection between stones when building with them, adjusting them in order to create a straight line. You can feel their weight as you slide them in search of the point of equilibrium. The sound changes as you slide stones on top of each other, as the weight is displaced. When you insert small rocks between the stones, their sound also changes. When someone hits a stone at a distance, you can hear if it's about to break or not. There's a whole dialogue between the stone and me.

GA: Do you use stones in your art practice?

AS: I've worked a lot with stones during my studies in fine arts, not so much by breaking them, but rather through rubbing them and other processes of alteration.

GA: What we just did was like a performance.

AS: Yes, we've sounded differences between the stones, and at the same time I've constructed the wall again through sounding.

EXPERIMENTS 3 & 4

(5 September 2018, 11 a.m. and 5 p.m., Moulay Bouchta,)

The third and fourth experiments took place at the hilltop overlooking Abdeljalil Saouli's house, a karstic area covered with large limestone blocks. Carved by water erosion, the rocks look as if they have been placed on top of each other by a giant hand, leaving empty spaces between them. Their surfaces are irregular and contain many cracks and interstices, resulting in significant differences in mass and density between blocks of a similar size. We explored a zone of about 50 by 50 meters, sounding rocks by hitting them as we were progressing without following a systematic plan. Saouli used the flat of his hand for the third experiment, which lasted about thirty minutes. Later on that day we returned to the same place for a fourth experiment using a rock for beating stones. We made a video using a GoPro camera attached to Saouli's forehead. He was very familiar with the terrain, progressing quickly between the stones, while I was moving slower after him with the microphone. Other sounds in the background also attracted our attention during the experiments, with cicadas dominating during the day and more voices from the village later at dusk, including the call for prayer from mosques across the valley.

The results of these last two experiments were quite surprising because of the physical and structural complexity of the karst rock formation we were exploring. While I initially expected little difference between the stone sounds, our approach revealed a remarkable variety of pitch, resonance, density, and texture, clearly audible in the soundtrack of our *STONESOUND* video. Following Saouli's swift movements between the rocks was an experience in its own right and significant of the playful and performative character of our approach. I was obviously less comfortable moving my body in this environment than he was, and at times slightly anxious that some of the rocks could fall as we were climbing or hitting them. Experiments 3 and 4 became thus a kind of auscultation of the internal complexity of karst rocks and their interconnections, producing an impression of relative fragility and hollowness of the entire mountain. In other words, we sounded the effects of water erosion and geological time on limestone. These experiments became a way for us to enter into a particular relationship with the mountain, involving our bodies and senses, ultimately affecting the perception of ourselves and the environment.

RECORDING STONES

Roaming rocky locations, encountering stones in sound, learning about their materiality and affect, experiencing ourselves while doing it—all of that was part of our experiments. The way I attended to sound was certainly very different to Saouli. I spent most of the time listening through my microphone and headphones, and my experience was largely mediated by these technological devices. As an art practice, field recording has more to it than mere sound collecting, or worse, sound "hunting."
What matters especially to me is the performative dimension of field recording, that is a way of *composing* one's own listening while recording, rather than just documenting sounds already present in the environment. This involves moving in, and around, near and distant sound sources and therefore creating a new sound field through a spontaneous choreography. The directional, stereophonic microphone acts simultaneously as a sound magnifier, amplifier, filter, and spatial panner, opening up wide possibilities of playing with my own listening, affect, and sensations. The resulting recordings bear traces of this experience, though arguably abstracted through the several stages of technological sonic transduction. The recording itself is not necessarily an end in the artistic process, but rather a byproduct of listening. Field recording as an art practice is also an important way of questioning the ever-changing relations between the self, the environment, and technology. As Pettman (2017) suggests, new technologies allow for new forms of listening, which in turn afford new forms of being together:

Recording experiment by Gilles Aubry, Mount Amergou, 2018.

> Technologies oblige us to rethink what 'being together' even means [...] in a socioeconomic system so efficient in producing alienation and isolation. Who or what counts as a 'being'?
> A sonic approach to rapidly changing instances and understandings of intimacy can help us address such vital questions. Expanding the conceptual spectrum of what counts as a voice is one way to better understand—and thus challenge—the technical foundation and legacy of taxonomy (gender, class, race, species).

What does "being together" with stones mean? Do stones count as beings? Do all sounds count as voices (as the Arabic translation of sound, *sawt*, suggests)? Is listening a form of domestication? These were important questions for our experiments. To use Pettman's words, sounding stones became "a way of attuning ourselves to a more radical alterity than our own species." I did not have Saouli's special connection to stones, however, and stones were not sounding by themselves. My own experience was thus mediated twice in these experiments, by the recording apparatus and by Saouli's sounding and comments.

SOUNDING AND LISTENING AS AURAL CO-DOMESTICATION

What perhaps struck me most during our experiments was the dialogical character of Abdeljalil Saouli's sonic interactions with stones. "There's a whole dialogue between stones and me," he said on several occasions, also comparing his beating to a "questioning" and to a "demand to the stones," to which they would respond by "telling me about their weight and fragility." From these interactions, Saouli learns about the stones and about the possible ways to "work with them" for his building and art-making activities. Sounding is also an "encounter with matter," and at the same time a "taming" of matter. "The encounter of two matters is your goal," he declares, "it's a training of matter, a relation between forces, when one matter 'eats' the other one, like when you sharpen a knife on a stone for the ritual throat-cutting of an animal." An important part of Saouli's sonic knowledge of stones is the result of his building activities. He started breaking stones a few years earlier for building his house, having learned from other people working with stones in the village. Saouli had a long experience of listening to stones, even before he started working with them. While the domestication of matter represents an important finality of listening to stones as part of local building techniques, this process always prioritizes reciprocity by taking into account the "reflexive productions of feedback" (Feld 2017). These are the stones' responses to Saouli's "demands" to them, as they sound, vibrate, resonate, heat, resist, hurt, and break eventually.

Sounding and listening appear as an interactive, iterative, and multisensory learning process, in which knowledge is accumulated rather than acquired. This auditory learning process can be described as a form of *aural co-domestication*, where people are "made" in return by things and other agents in their surroundings as they interact with them. Relational, iterative knowledge similarly informs practices in silviculture and agriculture in the Jbala region, and this applies to other activities as well (Delplancke and Aumeeruddy-Thomas 2017). Local knowledge aims to produce a "functional model of the world" (Feld 2017), and therefore generally reproduces locally significant ontological dichotomies, such as domestic vs wild, local vs foreign, mundane vs sacred, as well as life vs non-life (Delplancke and Aumeeruddy-Thomas 2017). While these categories apply in principle to sounding and listening, they can be relative in reality. The status of things, like stones and trees, is indeed variable, and often tends to reinforce continuities between the dichotomies mentioned above. In the case of almond trees, Delplancke and Aumeeruddy-Thomas have shown differences in status between trees of the same species, attributed to variable parameters such as water presence, market prices, land ownership, hybridization experiments, sentimental values attached to family trees, and locally recognized forms of "self-expression" of almond trees themselves. Similarly, Simenel, Aderghal, Sabir and Auclair (2016) have described the complex and "polysemic" ways rural communities make use of stone cairns for negotiating the boundaries between symbolic and technocratic space. While stone cairns are used as cadastral markers in state forest management, they are also seen as a saint stopover, as a middle point between the human world (cultivated space) and that of the genies (forest), as a belvedere, and as a ritual space. As a result, the negotiation of ontologies around the cairn generates "hybrid modalities of forest management and, thus, of public policies." While stones generally have a lower status of recognition than animals and plants, they do, however, participate in the reciprocal domestic link between people and their environment. This relationship surfaces in Abdeljalil Saouli's comment:

> Other people here also share this kind of connection with stones. I've spent entire evenings sitting on stones with people; stones are part of the landscape. People know very well the relationship between their own body and stones. Kids are good at throwing stones, they know their environment, the shape and the weight of things.

I conducted a series of interviews with people in Moulay Bouchta in March 2019, including a professional stone breaker and a mason. They were usually quick at explaining that breaking stones was "just a job" for them, if indeed a particularly hard and underpaid job. Like Saouli, however, they often referred to their interactions with stones as a kind of dialogue, interpreting every possible visual and audible sign as a form of expression by the stones themselves. As another example in stone sounding in Moulay Bouchta, I personally witnessed how kids use a special throwing technique that produces a loud, buzzing sound (*var'nen*), which serves to control goats from a distance. Working and playing are part of the aural domestication of stones, which involves attending to their "agency and positionalities" (Feld 2017). As stones demonstrate a specific agency, their "otherness" turns into a "significant otherness." Meaning thus emerges through aural domestication, as part of a local history of sounding and listening as cohabiting. More observations would be needed in order to demonstrate how the plural and contingent status of sounds and stones may affect communal life, rural identity, or public policy more generally in Moulay Bouchta. The fact that a special permit is required for using concrete in construction, but not for stone, provides one such example, attesting to the "hybrid modality" of administrative land management evoked by Simenel et al. (2016).

PLAYING WITH STONES AND LITHIC AFFECT

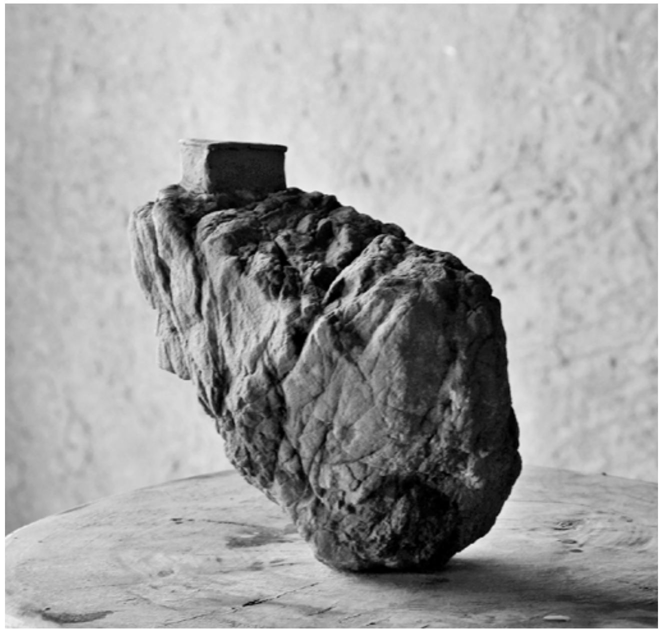
Besides building and cohabiting with stones, *playing* is an important dimension of Abdeljalil Saouli's interactions with stones and other materials. "Working with matter as an artist," he explains in an interview, "is for me a process comparable to the joyful playing of a kid, who in doing so is discovering the world" (Saouli in Benchrif 2015). In the same article, he declares:

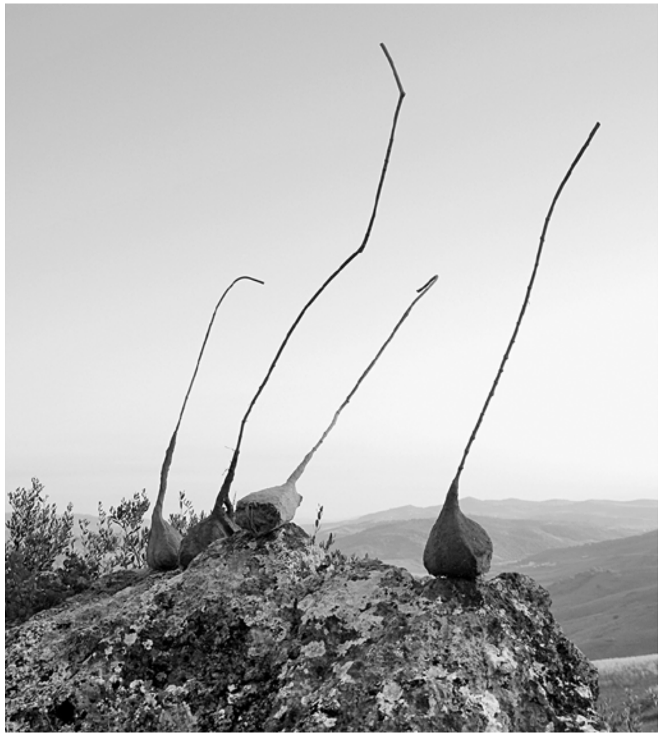
> I play a lot in my art practice, with seriousness and concentration. I look, I touch, I manipulate, and ideas follow. The eye discovers, the hand palpates, and the mind enters the game, with the idea of divining the world by transforming it. By touching an object, my hand guides me through the gestures of creating another object, not necessarily similar, that carries the soul of the first one. It's a process that I cannot entirely define, between playing and working, in line with a given object and a given environment. Each artwork needs attention and effort to become something that can speak and communicate. I am particularly interested in raw materials, with little or no processing. I observe things in their natural environment and I can guess more or less what they will become later. I don't re-invent the real, I let it become according to its own law. I intervene at the level of concept and fabrication of the object, in an attempt to reveal the message contained in the things I manipulate.

Whereas playing is frequently part of creative and learning activities in general, it is also a fundamental aspect of the process of "autonomous language acquisition" (Simenel 2017). Simenel observed that the linguistic competences of children in rural Morocco significantly improve when they start taking part in pastoral activities in the forest at the age of seven or eight, outside of their schooling time. In the absence of adults and in the company of older children, they engage in a "linguistic game" consisting of experimenting with vocabulary and syntax, departing from their perception of the diversity of shapes that can be observed in the forest. They continuously *re-invent* names for things and beings they encounter, using "the tools of analogical thinking," such as metaphor, which consists in experiencing something new in terms of something else.

In many ways, Abdeljalil Saouli's art practice presents similarities with the "autonomous learning process," Simenel describes. Transposed into the field of art-making, playing becomes a process of observation and interaction with materials, attentive to their transformation. "Stones change in shape, color, smell, temperature, and weight under the effects of time, light, weather conditions, seasonal cycles, and erosion," Saouli comments. There is thus a specific affect attached to the ontological category of "stone." From a naturalist perspective, the stone affect is often conceived in terms of "the inert," "non-life," and "death." In Saouli's wording, however, lithic affect appears vitalized, closer to "stability," "stagnation," and "resonance,"—what "stone" is "searching for," in other words its *becoming*. All of these terms point toward a possible connection to a slow temporality of being, bringing new affordances for imagination and sensing, as expressed by Saouli:

Artworks by Abdeljalil Saouli.
Top: *Pierre de Rivière*, 2018.
Bottom: *Untitled*, 2019.





> When you touch a stone, you can feel the connection between the space and the object. Each stone is its own shape, texture, and color. These material qualities respond precisely with what you need on the level of your imagination of what is touchable. I live together with stones in a very serious, physical way.

THE SOUND OF STONES VS STONESOUND

Sounding stones like we did during our experiments is not a very common thing to do, even for a sound artist. It was not our intention to turn stones into musical instruments, such as lithophones, nor to create musical effects like rhythmical patterns or timbral compositions. Our sounding by tapping was much more a "questioning" of the stones, as Saouli said, a way of knocking at their "ontological door," or perhaps a kind of artistic auscultation. We did not spend much time on each stone, moving rather quickly from one to the next, as if the comparison between them was more important. Saouli repeatedly commented on what we were hearing and on sound *itself* as a phenomenon:

> Sound is energy, it's a weight too. Sound is the sounding weight of matter. When you rub one matter against another, sound is a result of their confrontation.

In Saouli's words, sound appears as a byproduct of material encounters and, as such, retains the characteristics of the material objects from which it originates. As acoustic traces of things, sounds vary according to things themselves. Saouli's sound descriptions pertain to the weight, hardness, hollowness, size, and texture. "It's better to hit a stone with another stone," he adds, "in order to keep intact the stone sound." The "stone sound" importantly comes as a category distinct from other materials such as wood or concrete, and, as such, carries with itself the specific *affect* of stones. Thus, it is possible to "reconstruct" a stone wall by sounding it, which Saouli also compares to a "sound drawing" of the wall. There is therefore a direct, analogical connection between things and their sound that is also maintained in the recording.

From my position as a sound artist and researcher, I had to face contradictory feelings resulting from the double mediation of my auditory experience with the sound of stones. On the one hand, my microphone was telling me that stone sounds, like any other sounds, are simply the audible manifestation of material vibrations. On the other, I had a sincere interest in Abdeljalil Saouli's affective story of relating to stones through sound. I found myself confronted with two different material sound concepts: one abstract, autonomous, universal sound concept, and one particular "stonesound" concept, situated and affective. It would be a mistake to simply oppose these two concepts in terms of "modern" vs "traditional." If tactility and analogy predominates in Abdeljalil Saouli's listening, he occasionally also points to the possibility of sound analysis and abstraction:

> It's a whole sound analysis of the stone by the ear and the working method. [...] I become a thermometer of the stone through the gesture of hitting it. [...] Through the sound you can hear a void inside, you can feel that the sound entered the stone to create an echo. [...] You can feel gravity in the contact between a stone and a human.

Abdeljalil Saouli has no formal training in acoustics, but he is aware that this field of scientific study of sound exists. He knows that the scientific method relies on technical measurement and analysis, and transposes this methodology into his own embodied working method, where the *body* becomes a measurement tool and the *ear* an instrument for analysis. This method is of course useful for breaking stones and building walls, more than any scientific knowledge about sound. Saouli invited me to join him in a kind of plural sound practice, in which the terms of acoustic science, geology, technology, embodied knowledge, and affect could be re-negotiated in favor of a meaningful co-habitation between people and stones. For Saouli, *stonesound* is the expression of "gravity," both in the sense of *heavy force* and *seriousness*. In gravity, he finds stability, strength, balance, heat, protection, and breath. This is particularly apparent in the sounding of the stone wall in our second experiment. Sounding, cutting, playing, and other forms of interaction with stones become a way of "telling a story" and of "speaking through stones."

Sonic pluralism is a key aspect for making sense of our stone sounding experiments and for describing aural co-domestication processes in Moulay Bouchta. The "stonesound" concept surfacing in Abdeljalil Saouli's declarations is his way of responding to our artistic questioning of *what the sound of stones might be*. He shows his capacity to compose with various ontologies—analogical, naturalist, relational, artistic, and more. Stones are clearly agentic in creating ontological continuities in the case of his house: between the vernacular and the industrial, the domestic and the wild, the built and the spontaneous, the past and the present. On the level of sound and listening, Saouli's stonesound expresses the continuum between physical vibration and the perceived sense of it, between material ontology and phenomenology, between nature and technology, and between life and non-life. Sonic pluralism, however, is not just about combining multiple sound epistemologies, but more fundamentally about creating socially relevant continuities between them. The hybrid and polysemic status of things therefore needs to be stabilized through a continuous process of negotiation. Negotiation is an important aspect of sonic pluralism, enabled in everyday life by social interactions. Artistic collaboration is a particular form of negotiation, characterized in my exchanges with Saouli by performativity and mutual learning.

STONESOUND AND WHITE AURALITY

As noted previously, my experience in stone sounding was doubly mediated: first through Abdeljalil Saouli's beating and comments, and second through my microphone. I progressively started to *understand* Saouli's particular stonesound concept, but I could not directly *experience* it on my own. When Abdeljalil Saouli asked me "did you really find the sound of stone in the recording you just did?" I perhaps mistook it as a confirmation that we were both searching for *the* sound of stone, as something existing on its own, which we could then study together. As it became clear that Saouli already knew the sound of stones as stonesound, I came to understand that he was probably asking if I had found *my* sound of stone. As Thompson (2017) suggests, searching for "sound-in-itself" has a long history in Western sound art and experimental music, a position she situates in the wider field of "white aurality." As the aural dimension of whiteness, white aurality is part of an oppressive "process of racialization" of sensitivity that produces and orders spatio-temporal relations, and enhances and limits a body's affective capacities in relation to its surroundings. Although race has never been a topic of discussion between Abdeljalil Saouli and myself, there is no doubt that our respective positions are differently marked in regard to the long colonial history of race and racialization in Morocco. Processes of exclusion from "the white-defined realm of being" were integral to the racial politics of the French protectorate between 1912 and 1956 and are perpetuated up to this day through technocratic state governance, exclusive Western border regimes, and global capitalism. Abdeljalil Saouli's lived experience of "coloredness" certainly bears the traces of this exclusion. As such, this experience is part of the story he and other people in Moulay Bouchta tell by sounding stones and listening.

Stills from *STONESOUND* by Gilles Aubry and Abdeljalil Saouli 2019.

In his examination of the affordances of technological sound for Black subjectivity, Alexander Weheliye (2005) proposes a different approach to "the sonic," in which he finds an "instance of opacity" in reference to Glissant (1990). Opacity is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy, Weheliye notes, but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Thinking sonically adduces a mode of divining the world that sounds its multitude of opacities without drowning their singularities in the noise of transparency. The sonic opens up possibilities for thinking, hearing, seeing, and apprehending the subject in a number of different arenas, but it is by no way "preconscious," or in "strict opposition to the visual or the language." If white aurality is perhaps characterized by its desire to disappear within "the noise of transparency" while still keeping its privileges, Weheliye's "Black aurality" finds an important way of subsisting in sonic opacity. The sonic provides a new analytic framework that does not posit meaning and/or intelligibility as its teleological end point, but rather focuses on "texture" and "interwovenness." Saouli's stonesound is a concept that equally remains intransparent, opaque, and perhaps relatively unintelligible from my point of view, despite our conversations. What matters in the end is that it allows him to create and subsist within it, in all the seriousness of his cohabitation with stones.

What Abdeljalil Saouli's stonesound demands from me, and possibly from other attentive readers, is to attend to one's own "white aurality" in all its historicity, partiality, and privileges. While the history of my socialization as a white European male listener certainly goes back to my early childhood, it is perhaps worth mentioning here my time as a jazz music student in a Swiss music school in the 1990s. I spent years studying jazz saxophone by focusing primarily on Afro-American musical expression; the history of racial segregation and Black emancipation in the US was however clearly not part of that program. Retrospectively, my jazz education appears as a troubling experience in institutionalized white aurality, along the lines of Greg Tate's (2003) "everything but the burden." Since then I have become familiar with countless instances of "white sound" as part of my education and practice in experimental electronic music. Whiteness is integral to the history and culture of serious and avant-garde music in the West; it is also expressed in its "universal" sound terminology, through abstractions such as the "sound object," the "sound signal," the "sound sample," "immersive sound," and the "acousmatic." If field recording is often reduced to sound hunting, it is paradoxically this very practice that made me aware of sound's sociality. Making durational recordings of Berlin courtyards around 2006 changed my perception of the sound field, from a recording studio to a *social sound field*, bringing me to reflect on my own position as a listening subject. The recordings were then not just music materials, but a set of documents, indeed "ear-opening accounts of human relations" within the city of Berlin (Helmreich 2016). The objectifying and hegemonic character of white aurality became a real concern as I started re-examining colonial sound archives as part of art projects in Germany, France, and India. The question of the "self-invisibilization" of the "modest" white listener (Thompson 2017) became crucial along my engagement with the Moroccan recordings of Paul Bowles (1959), who called himself an "invisible spectator" (see Chapter II).

A DECOLONIAL ECOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

The naturalization of sound into an abstraction that can be recorded and commodified is at the core of the Western understanding of "modern sound" (Thompson 2004). Similarly, the naturalization of nature is currently debated in political ecology. Stone discloses "queer vivacity," Cohen (2015) argues, pointing to the necessity to "re-enchant" Western thought in the name of an ecological project beyond anthropocentricity. Such a move may appear problematic, however. As Schulz (2017) notes in his decolonial reading of "new materialist" philosophies, thinking in terms of more-than-human entanglements might simply replace the idea of an undifferentiated humanity with another abstract universal. Distributing intentionality and responsibility across more-than-human "assemblages" potentially has a depoliticizing effect when doing so from a relatively privileged position. One would be better off starting from one's own standpoint, aware that multiple loci of enunciation coexist and are entangled through the coloniality of knowledge, being, and power.

Sounding stones together with Abdeljalil Saouli was a simple but serious attempt at decolonial sound-ecological dialogue. While Saouli's stonesound remains "opaque" and somehow inaccessible to me, its mere *possibility* informs a pluriversal dialogue on aurality and ecology.

If expressions such as the "human" and "non-human" appear too universal, then we need more concepts such as Saouli's stonesound in order to articulate differently the complex entanglements of subjectivities, abstractions, and agencies. For Weheliye (2005), thinking sonically offers an alternative for apprehending subjectivity. It does so by decentering the logos and meaning—while not entirely discarding them—in order to "divine the world," perhaps rather than defining it. For me, Abdeljalil Saouli's sonic thinking is an invitation to decenter one's sovereign self in order to better attend to one's "opaque" self, by dwelling at the border between sound, knowledge, and coloniality.

VI.

ATLANTIC RAGAGAR

Seaweed, pollution, and the voice of the sea

VIDEO
Atlantic Ragagar
by Gilles Aubry
2022, 31'43", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18255/2/ar.mp4

VIDEO
The Binding Effect
by Gilles Aubry
2021, 15'51", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18257/2/be.mp4

R'bia (red seaweed) in Sidi Bouzid, 2019.

– Good morning!
– Good morning, my son! What do you do, my son?
– I collect seaweed.
– Ok. Are you making an experiment?
– Yes. I'm researching this species.
– Ok, so next time, try to tell them what we're enduring here.
– I know about that. You get 10 dirhams per kilo of red seaweed.
– Exactly! My son, speak about us to our King, if you can.
– Yes, I know, it's gonna be alright.
– How are you going to communicate this message to the King? It's always the powerful ones who make profit! And us, we only have God to help us! We make big efforts, always, every day we end up exhausted. It's always the same price we get, and they always pay late. They give us a hard time to pay us those cents! Always a hard time! But, ok, in the end it's God who helps us. What can we do about it! Me, I'm a daughter of the sea! Hey my son, I was born here you know! El Jadida, that's us! My son, you know that without the sea we would starve! Nothing, it's hard, no work for our children! How do you think we've survived so far? We only have the sea for us! All we're asking for is health and security. May God protect our King![1]
– Fatima B., Sidi Bouzid, 2018

The lines above are an excerpt from a conversation between Younes Boundir, a biologist at Marrakesh Cadi Ayyad University, and Fatima B., a seaweed collector from El Jadida. Like dozens of other women, Fatima B. comes every morning at dawn

[1] Conversation recorded and translated from Moroccan Arabic into French by Younes Boundir in 2018; English translation by the author. Fatima B. is a fictive name. All of the local interlocutors in this chapter are given fictive names in order to preserve their anonymity.

to harvest red seaweed in Sidi Bouzid, a beach near El Jadida on the Moroccan Atlantic coast. She plucks seaweed with her bare hands and puts them inside a cotton ball around her waist, half immersed in seawater. After five to six hours of tedious work, she has collected enough seaweed to fill up a bigger fabric bag; she walks back to her home in the suburbs with the 10 kg bag on her head. She gets five dirhams per kilo of fresh seaweed from a *laabara* (weigher), a local intermediary in the seaweed business. Fatima makes about 1500 dirhams a month (approx. €140) through her activity during the seaweed season (May to October), barely enough to survive. While women of all ages collect seaweed directly on the shore, men too participate in this economy by snorkeling in shallow waters. Red seaweed (*gelidium*) is used as a gelling agent in the food and pharmaceutical industry, also know as *agar agar*. Gelidium has been harvested in Morocco since the 1950s and production is currently booming.[2]

The conversation with Fatima was recorded in August 2018, during my joint field trip with Younes Boundir to Sidi Bouzid. Boundir and I had met the year before in Marrakesh and started an exchange about his scientific research in "biomonitoring" on the Atlantic coast. By observing and measuring the effects of aquatic pollutants on various seaweed species, he explained, seaweed can be used for monitoring anthropic pollution. Seven locations on the coast served as monitoring stations, to which Younes Boundir regularly traveled in order to make measurements and observations. Sidi Bouzid beach has very low levels of water pollution and seaweed can grow in near to ideal conditions (Boundir et al. 2019). The place

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[2] Morocco's current gelidium production represents 82 percent of the global market, in contrast to 23 percent in the 1960s (Santos and Melo 2018).

functioned as a "control station" in Boundir's comparative study of several locations. Sadly, the situation is very different further south on the coast, where the pollution generated by industrial activities seriously impacts biodiversity: phosphate fertilizer plants run by the OCP Group in Jorf Lasfar and Safi; fish canning plants in Safi; industrial and tourist harbors in Safi and Essaouira; and a brand new coal power plant south of Safi. At these stations, Younes Boundir's measurements showed high concentrations of phosphorus and heavy metals (lead, cadmium, chrome, and copper). Through additional biochemical and physiological analysis of brown seaweed samples, Boundir also demonstrated the sensitivity of this species to pollutants, explaining its scarcity at some of the industrial sites.

Younes Boundir's research provided a concrete entry point into industrial culture and ecology on the Atlantic coast, with obvious socio-political implications. I was especially curious about the perception by local people of the complex interactions between industrial activities and the ecosystem. It was not clear in the beginning how this could connect to my own research on sound and listening. Yet I was keen to engage in an inter-disciplinary exchange with Younes Boundir, given his personal interest for social and artistic matters. Our collaboration started with a series of interviews by Boundir on the coast during one of his research trips, which he recorded using one of my sound devices. People, often fishermen, were generally eager to talk to him, especially in the proximity of industrial waste pipes in Safi. They mentioned the impact of pollution on fishing, the diminishing of marine biodiversity compared to previous decades, and their difficulty to survive economically under these conditions. More generally, people complained about the lack of job opportunities in the region and shared their feeling of being abandoned by the state. Whenever the population had made demands to the authorities, they were usually disregarded. Listening to these recordings together with Younes Boundir triggered conversations between us about people's lives and concerns on the coast, about his own scientific work on marine ecology, and about how we could explore together the links between these two fields.

THE *ATLANTIC RAGAGAR* PROJECT

In August 2018, Younes Boundir and I took a first research trip to El Jadida, leading to a series of observations, encounters, and interviews with local

Red seaweed (gelidium), research documentation by Younes Boundir, 2018.

people, like Fatima B. Following this experience, our collaboration took the form a joint artistic research project titled *Atlantic Ragagar*. For Younes Boundir, the main objective was to study the impact of pollution on the marine ecosystem and to publish scientific reports that could serve the community for exerting pressure on the authorities.[3] In order to preserve marine biodiversity, he declared, it is necessary to regulate the toxic emissions of industrial activities. Emission norms do exist in Morocco, yet are often not respected. Industry spokespeople argue that the sea has the capacity for self-regeneration, but this capacity is limited, he added. Seaweed is very sensitive to pollution and the range of interactions between species is a good indicator of the degree of pollution. When the sea is affected by pollution, people are ultimately also impacted via the chain of ecological interaction. The sea does not speak, Boundir commented, but it can *tell stories*, and one simply has to listen to them. The "voice of the sea, that's the best topic," he concluded. To me, as a sound artist and anthropologist, the "voice of the sea" also sounded like a good starting point. I was curious about the possible meanings of "voice" in this context, and how it could be apprehended through listening, considering the seemingly mute nature of seaweed and pollution. If the voice of the sea raises the possibility of an "extra-human, ecological voice" (Pettman 2017), how is it constituted, and by whom? How can notions such as nature, culture, subjectivity, and embodiment be re-examined through such a voice, from the perspective of sound studies and eco-criticism? How best to approach and render audible the voice of the sea through art practice on the Moroccan Atlantic coast? These questions informed the project with Younes Boundir over the following three years, leading to a series of research trips and public presentations in art contexts.[4] In September 2019, Imane Zoubai joined us in Sidi Bouzid, then a student at the National Institute of Visual Arts (INBA) in Tetouan. Our exchange with her led to a series of interventions in Sidi Bouzid and Safi, which we video-documented. These research materials are featured in the film *Atlantic Ragagar* (Aubry 2021).[5]

In this final chapter, I focus on the aural dimensions of human-environmental interaction on the Moroccan Atlantic coast. I consider previous accounts on ecological voices by composers and scholars, and how listening can become a modality for attuning to extra-human alterity. Based on findings from the *Atlantic Ragagar* project, I describe a *natural voice of the sea*. This voice emerges in scientific imagery and contemporary visuality, in close relationship with the technocratic modes of industrial exploitation and neoliberal management of "natural resources." The natural voice of the sea is therefore an abstract and bodiless voice. I further identify an *intimate voice of the sea*, which relates to the long history of co-domestication between local populations and marine life in the area. As part of this history, people recognize a certain autonomy and agency in marine life. I discuss yet other instances of the voice of the sea, which emerged through our joint research methodology. This involved a number of artistic experiments and participative interventions, revealing a plurality of perspectives on aurality and ecology. These aspects highlight new dimensions of sonic pluralism. Because seaweed and pollution cannot be heard directly, our listening principally relied on our capacity to

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[3] The statements by Younes Boundir reported in this text stem from an initial conversation between us recorded in Marrakesh in April 2018, as well as from additional exchanges during our collaboration between August 2018 and September 2019.

[4] So far, my collaboration with Younes Boundir has led to the following realizations: the installation *Unsound Traces* (Aubry 2018) as part of the 2018 Casablanca Art Biennale; a presentation by Younes Boundir including some of our research material at the *Qanat* exhibition at Le 18 in Marrakesh in November 2018; a joint performance as part of the *Qanat* program in March 2019; and the joint exhibition *Atlantic Ragagar* (Aubry and Boundir 2021) at the art space La Chambre de l'Art in Bruxelles in September 2021. See http://www.earpolitics.net/projects/atlantic-ragagar-exhibition-program-2021.

[5] The film *Atlantic Ragagar* can be accessed via the following link: https://arbor.bfh.ch/18255/2/ar.mp4.

Top: Mosaic wall representing industrial culture in Safi, 2019. Bottom: Imane Zoubai and Younes Boundir in conversation with a seaweed collector in Sidi Bouzid, 2019.

relate *affectively* to the world. Sonic pluralism points to the necessity to "unreduce" (Latour 2004) the conceptual borders between the different senses, therefore also questioning the relevance of disciplinary borders between visuality and aurality. Another aspect pertains to the collective and participative dimensions of the research with Younes Boundir, Imane Zoubai, and other people in El Jadida and Safi. Knowledge emerged through repeated exchanges between the participants, giving way to a temporary "community of practice" (Wenger 1999). Sonic pluralism is manifested here in the collective expression of knowledge and affect, framed by a set of common concerns about social and environmental justice. The chapter concludes with an examination of the relations between the micro-political dimensions of our research and wider socio-economical and environmental issues in Morocco. This raises questions about how human rights can be extended to include extra-human lives, without automatically depoliticizing differences in positions between humans themselves. If our project did not produce any clear and definitive answers to this problematic, it nevertheless allowed for alternative forms of public engagement and reflection on socio-environmental justice, as I argue in conclusion.

ECOLOGICAL VOICES IN THEORY

In the field of sound studies and sound art, the voice of the sea historically refers to discussions on "soundscapes" (Schafer 1977; Thompson 2013; Helmreich 2016; Ingold 2007), "acoustic ecology" (Wrightson 2000), and "acoustic territories" (LaBelle 2010). The possibility of "extra-human voices" (Pettman 2017) raises additional questions about the subjectivity, presence, and agency of extra-human beings such as animals, plants, and other creatures and entities. These questions further resonate in current debates and artistic positions that explore the "ontological co-formation" of human and extra-human beings, in contrast to traditional "naturalist taxonomies" that place humans above all other species and organic and non-organic matter generally (Tiainen 2017). Together with other members of the World Soundscape Project (WSP), the composer Richard Murray Schafer (1977) was a pioneer in addressing the ecological significance of sound environments. If he recognized in them "indicators of social conditions," he nevertheless maintained a strict division between man-made and extra-human sounds. With the term "soundscape," he arguably established a tendency to aestheticize extra-human sounds as objects of human contemplation. Vilem Flusser (1979) is another thinker who examined natural sounds from the perspective of natural-cultural entanglements. As part of his phenomenological experimentation, he describes environmental sounds, such as wind, in terms of "voices that call us" and as "a someone to whom we must respond."

For Dominic Pettman (2017), sonic environments do not only "interpellate us" as subjects, but also "constitute us as ontological beings." While scientific survey projects often tend to present changes in ecosystems in terms of a "visual voice of nature," listening intently to environmental sounds offers a way of engaging with "a more radical alterity than our own species." This requires suspending our habitual assumptions in order to attend to such voices. Some of these assumptions regard the exceptionality of humans in *having* a voice, or their self-granted habilitation to "paternalistically" give a voice to other species who cannot speak for themselves. When considering at which point a sound can become a voice, Pettman suggests that "voice" does not represent an "intrinsic characteristic of any given sound." It is much more a "transitive event," resulting from the *affective* experience of the listening subject. In order to be considered a voice at all, extra-human manifestations must therefore resonate intimately with the listener, or else they are experienced as noise or static. Ecological listening also pervades the work and writings of composer Pauline Oliveros (2005). Through her theory-practice method coined "deep listening" she invites the listener to attend to her connectedness to "the whole environment and beyond." "Listening is survival!" she adds, in reference to the capacity of extra-human beings to "completely" register human presence. She alludes to the "symbiotic" and "limitless" dimensions of listening, which can extend beyond mere acoustic perception. If ecological voices are immanently singular, this does not prevent humans from experiencing alliances, sympathies, and harmonies with other species through the very process of "co-constitutive listening" (Pettman 2017).

THE NATURAL VOICE OF THE SEA

My examination of the possible meanings of the voice of the sea on the Moroccan Atlantic coast begins with seaweed, which took on an important role in our project from the start: first, as a biological object as part of Younes Boundir's research on macro algae; second, as bio-monitoring agent indicating anthropic pollution; third (for gelidium especially), as a "natural resource" that is used locally and exploited for the benefit of transnational extractive industries; and fourth, as co-partner in our artistic experiments and interventions. Seaweed was at the center of our attention during our first trip to El Jadida in August 2018. We started in Sidi Bouzid, Younes Boundir's control area. We often called it the "seaweed paradise" because of the site's excellent water condition. Roaming the beach during the low-tide hours in the morning was a very enjoyable experience, as we could closely observe dozens of seaweed, shellfish, and bird species. Younes Boundir taught me many things about marine biology and seaweed especially. After some time, I was able to recognize some of the most common seaweed species in the area, identifying them with their Latin name: green algae (codium and ulva) in the supra-tidal zone, large brown seaweed (laminaria) in the medium area, and red seaweed (gelidium) in the infra-tidal zone. Boundir also introduced me to scientific terms pertaining to the modes of intra- and inter-species interactions, and to their milieu: biotope, substrate, symbiosis, epiphyte, saprophyte, biocenosis, and other terms, which at first sounded like a poem by Donna Haraway, but ultimately helped me to better apprehend the complexity of seaweed life. We also shot underwater videos of seaweed populations using a GoPro camera. In Sidi Bouzid, and lower on the coast in Ifitry, we ended up with remarkable images showing the abundance of seaweed in these locations, where interactions between species are clearly visible.

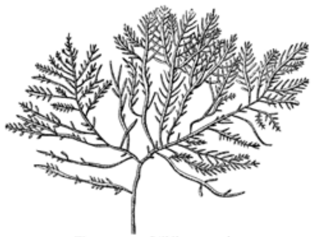

Fig. 327. — Gélidium corné.

Hand drawn gelidium,
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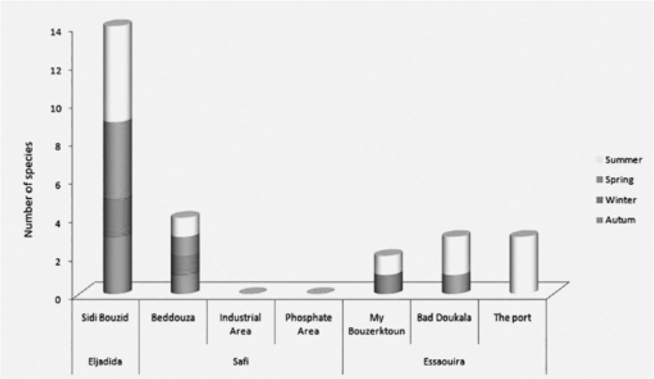

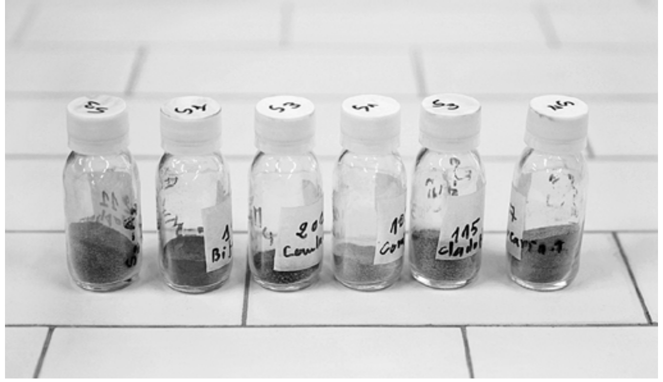

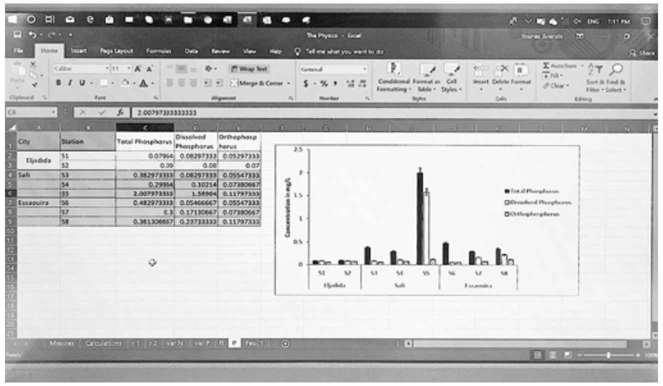

2.007973333333333

City	Station	Total Phosphorus	Dissolved Phosphorus	Orthophosphorus
Eljadida	S1	0.07964	0.08297333	0.05297333
	S2	0.09	0.08	0.07
Safi	S3	0.382973333	0.08297333	0.05547333
	S4	0.29964	0.10214	0.07380667
	S5	2.007973333	1.58964	0.11797333
Essaouira	S6	0.482973333	0.05466667	0.05547333
	S7	0.3	0.17130667	0.07380667
	S8	0.361306667	0.23733333	0.11797333

Seaweed samples and visual data produced by Younes Boundir as part of his research on pollution biomonitoring on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, 2018.

Later on, we visited other monitoring stations in industrial areas further south on the coast. The first station was a fish canning zone in Safi, host to factories that produce various types of canned sardines and mackerel.[6] Because an important part of the production has been relocated elsewhere on the coast since the 1980s, many factories have stopped their activities in Safi. Industrial infrastructures are worn out, and the factories discharge their polluted waters through a large pipe directly into the sea. At this station, Boundir measured significantly higher concentrations of lead and cadmium in the seawater than at the Sidi Bouzid control station (Boundir et al. 2019). The water was visibly blurred by organic particles, preventing the light from penetrating below the sea level and causing an excessive oxygen concentration in the water. High concentrations of heavy metals were also found at a third station near a chemical plant owned by the OCP group specializing in phosphate derivatives.[7] Apart from lead and cadmium, Boundir's measurements revealed a strong presence of phosphate elements in the seawater. In this case, too, polluted water from the plant was, and still is today, discharged directly into the sea, resulting in a yellowish tinge of the water. Accumulations of phosphogypsum, a radioactive by-product of fertilizer production, were visible along hundreds of meters on the shore. The underwater shots in the film *Atlantic Ragagar* show a complete absence of seaweed in this area, and reveal the turbidity of the water caused by phosphogypsum particles.

In a recent article on the ecological status of Morocco's Atlantic coast, Younes Boundir and his peers evaluate the effects of aquatic pollutants on a brown macro-algae species (Boundir et al. 2019). Their data demonstrate that pollution significantly affects the algae's physiology, and that this species tends to disappear in highly polluted areas. Scientists often metaphorically refer to a "voice" of nature, Pettman (2017) remarks, for example, in ecological survey projects that render changes in the planet's ecosystem visible through long-time monitoring, using measurements, data visualizations, and maps. A similar *natural voice of the sea* emerges in Younes Boundir's scientific study on the interactions between seaweed organisms, anthropic pollution, and seawater on the Atlantic coast. Boundir's article does not go as far as to claim the necessity to *reduce* pollution in the name of biodiversity and environmental justice. He simply sticks to the facts, as is customary in scientific journals. Here, the *natural voice of the sea* is not grounded in affective perception; it is a product of scientific methodology.

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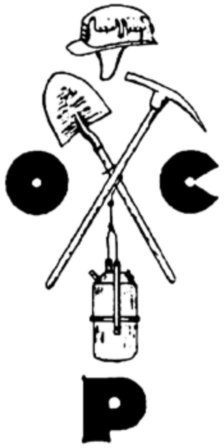
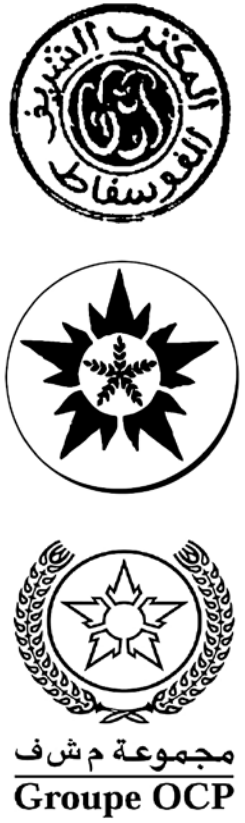
[6] Introduced by the French in Morocco during the interwar period, the fish industry employed 6000 workers in twenty-four factories and eight canning shops in 1932, mainly in the Atlantic ports (Irbouh 2001). This activity was further developed after the country's independence in 1956, and Morocco remains today the largest global producer of canned sardines, with 115,000 tons exported in 2009 (Caquel 2015). Following a severe drop in fish abundance in the Safi region in the 1980s, the coastal fleet transferred its activities southwards, and the production in this area has been in decline ever since (Atmani 2003). Owned by private companies such as MIDAV (formerly SAREX), fish factories in Safi still seasonally employ about a thousand people, of whom 90 percent are women.

[7] Created in 1920 during the French occupation of Morocco, the company Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP) is the first phosphate exporter in the world, a leader on the phosphoric acid market, and a major producer of solid fertilizers (Boyer and Scotto 2013). With about 20,000 employees, the OCP Group is the largest employer in Morocco, exploiting four mining sites and several chemical plants in the country. In 2008, the OCP was privatized, with the Moroccan state remaining the only shareholder. The Moroccan King nominated a new director. Thanks to neoliberal restructuring, the company was able to quadruple its profits since 2009 (5.4 billion dirhams in 2018).

According to Irmgard Emmelhainz (2015), the visuality of contemporary scientific imagery turns images into "signs of cognition," that is epistemological products that are "indifferent" to the viewer. Through machinic vision, images have become scientific, managerial, and military instruments of knowledge—and thus of capital and power. This involves "a passage from representation to presentation," through which images no longer relay the subjects of "belief" or the objects of contemplation, instead coming to be perceived as "an extension of the world." Through data visualization and scientific imagery, seaweed, pollution, and seawater are therefore *naturalized* into abstract objects of study, whose interactions and evolution can be modeled and predicted. "Water" is indeed a "modern abstraction," which emerged alongside and was made legible through agricultural, hydroelectric, and potable-water management regimes (Helmreich 2016). Similarly, the *natural voice of the sea* creates the conditions for the technocratic management of marine life and pollution, between industrial exploitation and ecological preservation. State programs for fishing and agricultural management, such as the "Plan Halieutis" and the "Plan Maroc Vert" produce abstract visualizations and maps of natural resources (Hamouchene 2019). Through such plans, the "natural voice" is further constituted through principles of industrial exploitation, environmental regulations, and strategies of economic predictions. As a sonic metaphor for contemporary modes of technocratic management and exploitation of natural resources, the "visual voice of nature" therefore always posits a subjectless, *external* observer. This "free-floating bird's eye" mirrors the present moment's "ubiquitous condition of groundlessness" (Emmelhainz 2015). Groundlessness characterizes the Anthropocene, as we lack any ground on which to found politics, social lives, or a meaningful relationship with the environment.



Top and right: Visual logos of the OCP Group between 1920 and 2000.



Phosphate, as a product of marine sedimentation and a source of industrial pollution, further complicates the web of interactions that constitutes the *natural voice of the sea*. In the language of corporate groups such as the Moroccan OCP, phosphate is naturalized as a plentiful resource that is discovered, extracted, transported, refined, marketed, applied, and perhaps recycled (Jackson 2016). As part of this narrative, phosphate-based fertilizer helped foster radically increased crop yields and the feeding of a large and growing human population. Phosphate extraction was central to the agrochemical "Green Revolution" of the 1950s, and became a key force in the spatial production of postcolonial nation states like Morocco. In the case of the Bou-Craa mines in Western Sahara, phosphate extraction was secured through military intervention by the Moroccan state. The mines were turned into a military camp traversed by sand walls, stones, and barbed wire installed to protect them in a context of the rising Polisario Front insurgency.

For a long time, industrial companies considered pollution to be a regrettable—but in the end negligible—collateral damage of their activities. Things started to change in recent decades with the increasing ecological awareness of international institutions. Global players such as the OCP group were now expected to demonstrate their ecological commitment as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. The OCP group is today "a pioneer in ecological development," we are told (Donsimoni and Labaronne 2014). As part of its ambitious "green" program, the company announced a series of territorial redevelopment projects, amongst them a "green mine" in Khouribga, a "green city" in Benguerir, and the "green rehabilitation" of the industrial zone in Safi . Despite these announcements, the yellow tones of phosphogypsum predominate in the coastal landscape near the OCP plant in Safi, as our 2019 video documentation attests. Instead of green rehabilitation, the massive pipe discharging the OCP plant's toxic sewage has been recently replaced by an underwater pipe, thereby simply camouflaging its presence. Further down the coast, a new coal power plant was recently built on a plot of land owned by OCP, raising serious concerns by local activists about possible health and ecological consequences (Abir 2015). Aside from seawater pollution, air pollution caused by the OCP plant's toxic fumes is a health risk for Safi's inhabitants. A high rate of pulmonary and cancerous diseases have been reported in the area in a publication by the NGO Swissaid (2019). Although—or because—measurements by the NGO's experts have shown a significant concentration of toxic substances in the air near the OCP plant, the Moroccan authorities have contested the study's validity.

The polemic surrounding industrial pollution in Safi—OCP and local authorities versus OCP workers, inhabitants, and NGOs—creates a crisis for the presumed objectivity of scientific observation. Each side claims its own truth about pollution, with different results and interpretations. Because the Moroccan authorities have so far refused to publicize their own results, and because industrial pollution continues to affect the ecosystem and people's health in Safi, the OCP group's ecological program appears as a mere greenwashing operation, far from genuine ecological and social commitment. The lack of consensus progressively turns the *natural voice of the sea* into a cacophony, further diffracting into a proliferation of digital images across social networks. How can we transform our relationships with such a multiplicity of diverging points of view, Emmelhainz (2015) asks, to provide a heightened sense of place? How to allow for collective autonomous subjectivation, and a new sense of politics and image? A partial answer can be found in the actions taken by street protesters. In 2011, dozens of people occupied a square in front of the OCP administration in the mining town of Khouribga, and blocked the phosphate transport to and from the chemical processing plant in Safi (Bogaert 2015). In 2014, the Moroccan Human Rights Organization (AMDH) organized a demonstration in Safi against the construction of the new coal power plant. OCP employees have started an initiative in for better health conditions at work, despite the company's frequent attempts to intimidate the participants of such actions.[8]

Current visual logos of the OCP Group (2020).

Through social protests, the *natural voice of the sea* becomes much more "vocal" and audible, full of "grain" (Barthes 1977) and affect. As Emmelhainz (2015) reminds us, the crisis of visuality in the age of the Anthropocene is, however, deeper. Groundless seeing brought about by "communicative capitalism" turns images into information, sensations, and intensities without meaning. As we are increasingly causing

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[8] See https://web.archive.org/web/20161021115455/https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/06/23/opc-maroc_n_10632622.html

Top: Dried seaweed on a laabara plot, Sidi Bouzid, 2019.
Bottom: Seaweed drying on a rooftop in Sidi Bouzid, 2019.

numerous extinctions, we also extinguish that which makes us, and supports us, as humans. If it is urgent to recover human vision from "passive observation" as an "act of seeing," listening can also provide ways to meaningfully reconnect with the world. Listening itself is not immune to machinization, as the implementation of algorithmic listening technology through voice assistants illustrates.[9] In ecological practice, however, listening offers the possibility for a "deep" (Oliveros 2005), "intimate" (Pettman 2017), and "intentional" (Kapchan 2016) attunement to alterity.

THE INTIMATE VOICE OF THE SEA

During our time in Sidi Bouzid, Younes Boundir and I witnessed people's seaweed harvesting activities on the beach. We had no difficulties starting conversations with them, provided that we were not filming. After a couple of days, our presence was generally well accepted. We became more familiar with a local *sense* of the sea by following people's daily interactions with the marine environment. Drawing on Steven Feld's (2017) "acoustemological" method, I describe these forms of interaction in terms of "embodied," "relational," and "cumulative" knowledge. A different *voice of the sea* emerges from the local ways of engaging with place and space-time, which I call an *intimate voice of the sea*. This voice diverges from accounts that tend to naturalize environments into abstract systems and models, or into static objects of aesthetic contemplation. People's knowledge of the sea and its creatures in Sidi Bouzid mirrors domesticatory links between them. These relations include various dimensions: spatial, temporal, bodily, semantic, socio-economical, administrative, and others, which I briefly review here. As I already suggested, people are not only *agents* in this process, but also *objects*, constituted as humans by their environment through interaction (Stépanoff and Vigne 2018; see also Chapter V).

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[9] As an example, machinic listening is implemented in Apple's "Siri" and Amazon's "Alexa" voice assistants.

The people we encountered in Sidi Bouzid worked as seaweed collectors (mainly women) and fishermen (exclusively men). For all of them, making a living from collecting marine resources meant that they adapted their own existence to the ocean's cycles and rhythms, as well as to meteorological conditions. Some of them could tell us the state of the sea by listening from afar and by observing the sky. They had a precise sense of the ocean water level, knowing exactly when to go to the beach to collect specific kinds of shellfish or seaweed. On the Atlantic coast in the summer season, low tide oscillates between 4 and 10 a.m., with an offset of approximately 30 minutes per day. It is therefore not uncommon for women to start their harvesting activities in the sub-tidal zone at night, provided there is enough moonlight. While men sometimes wear diving suits for snorkeling in the fresh Atlantic waters, the women cover their entire bodies with several layers of cotton clothes, including headscarves. Older women pick seaweed washed by the ocean onto the beach; younger ones spend hours half-immersed in seawater, tearing seaweed with their bare hands. This means hours of exposure to water salinity, intense sunlight, and quickly changing air temperatures. Their activities are further complicated by the presence of strong waves and sharp rocks covering the ground. The women have told us that physical injuries are common and include painful bites by moray fish. People's bodies are marked by the marine environment in many ways; they are physically exhausted, altered, burned, sometimes injured, or even healed by it.

Until thirty years ago, people caught fish directly by the shore. Nowadays, they have to sail several miles out to sea to find catch due to the OCP phosphate plant's activities 10 kilometers down the coast. Certain species of fish feed on seaweed, and this in turn affects their taste, someone explained. A drop in seaweed population therefore leads to a drop in fish abundance. Fusia S., a free diver, witnessed a diminution of gametes in seawater that are necessary for seaweed reproduction, leading to a drop in certain species in the area. Pollution also affects the texture of the fish meat and the rigidity of their bones, a fisherman told us. These examples highlight local common

knowledge of marine life, including reproduction cycles, food chains, and the impact of pollution. They also suggest that people in Sidi Bouzid are "made," or "domesticated," by the sea through continuous interaction and direct contact with the sea, and via their nutrition. People's common knowledge gives rise to an *intimate voice of the sea*, which expresses interspecies co-dependence.

The domesticatory link between human and marine life on the Moroccan Atlantic coast also manifests in the language and cultural representations. Local names for large seaweed species often refer to familiar and terrestrial things, turning the marine environment into an extension of people's domestic space: red algae (gelidium) harvested for industrial exploitation is simply called "r'biaa," which literally means "the one like grass"; large brown seaweed (laminaria) is called "cinta" (belt, from the French word "ceinture"); and another brown species is called "fula" (bean). Similar analogies exist for fish and shellfish species along the coast, whose common names often evoke objects (spoon, knife), terrestrial animals (ram, jackal, dog), or human activities (blacksmith) (Lâtaoui 1999). For the anthropologist Romain Simenel (2017), vernacular naming practices in Morocco allow for social and semantic continuity between "domestic" and "wild" territories. In Berber Islamic "analogical" cosmology, these territories are symbolically related to "the world of humans" and "the world of spirits" (*jnoun*) respectively. These worlds are not conceptually separated, and interactions between them are frequent, often mediated by the spiritual power of Islamic saints. According to Laoust (1923), saints in the region were celebrated as protectors of fishermen, and numerous shrines can still be spotted on the coast. These traditions seem largely extinct, but remain part of the local collective memory. Mussels, in particular, are endowed with divine blessing and can be found on graves in cemeteries. Further north in Ain Diab near Casablanca, healing rituals related to the sea still exist today. Instructed by local healers, women stand through seven waves in order to benefit from a particular saint's healing power (baraka).

The *intimate voice of the sea* echoes local culture, mediated through dialects, rituals, and other representations. Cultural representations in rural Morocco are often "more-than-cultural" (Aumeeruddy-Thomas et al. 2017). Far from being static, conceptual divisions between "nature" and "culture" figure a continuous process of interactions, to which extra-human and supernatural agents actively contribute alongside humans. The ontological status of things, plants, humans, and animals therefore varies under certain circumstances, further troubling dichotomies such as local vs foreign, domestic vs wild, and human vs non-human (Simenel 2017). Local names for things mirror centuries of interactions between Berber and Arabic dialects in the region, as well as the more recent influence of French and Spanish presences (Lâtaoui 1999). In local administrative registers, commercial transactions are usually described with the French names of seafood products. The exploitation of marine resources is controlled by the authorities through a system of licenses, official seasons, and quotas. Unlike professional hookah divers who extract seaweed from the seabed in industrial quantities (two to three tons per day), the people we encountered in Sidi Bouzid generally operate on a much smaller scale. Women harvest on average 10 to 20 kg of seaweed per day, while free divers like Hicham A. are able to collect up to 100 kg. Compared to industrial techniques of extraction, their rudimentary hand-collecting technique appears more sustainable for the environment, not only in terms of quantity, but also because the seaweed "roots" (technically called holdfast) usually remain intact in the process, allowing the plant to grow again. Most of the people we met didn't own licenses and engaged informally in harvesting activities. The ones with licenses are the laabara (weighers), intermediaries who buy up the collected seaweed and resell it to big companies, such as the privately owned Setexam. Their presence is signaled by large seaweed piles across the city, often guarded by several men. Once harvested, seaweed quickly mutates from a "creature of the sea" into an abstract economical resource, a process mediated by state legislations and transnational market prices. People in Sidi Bouzid often knew the exact current seaweed wholesale price, aware of the substantial profits made by brokers and bigger companies.

Women on the beach frequently complained to us about being paid very late by the laabara, and about the hardship of their existence. "Without the sea we would starve," Fatima B. declared in her interview with Younes Boundir. While people in Morocco often rely on other family members for economic subsistence, she explained that even her graduated son did not find a job, alluding to corruption in the state administration. People in Sidi Bouzid engage in seaweed harvesting out of sheer economic necessity. "If we were all equal, I wouldn't sit here doing this job," Fatima B. said. Yet, living from marine resources has a long history on the Moroccan Atlantic coast, where fishing is traditionally a complement to agro-pastoral activities

(Caquel 2015). It is thus not necessarily the activity itself that makes people unhappy but an awareness that they suffer from a system that benefits a few privileged ones. People can no longer rely on the sea to make a living and find themselves heavily dependent on extractivist industries.

THE VOICE OF THE SEA IN *ATLANTIC RAGAGAR*

So far in this chapter, I have sketched two possible modalities of the voice of the sea on the Moroccan Atlantic coast. The *natural voice of the sea* figures an abstract voice, emerging through modern technological means of visualization, mapping, prediction, and management of life forms; it is a groundless voice, indifferent to its listeners. The second modality, the *intimate voice of the sea*, pertains to a local history of interaction between humans and marine life; this voice also manifests people's continuous efforts to adapt to—and sometimes resist—the naturalizing force of capitalist extractivism. In order to attend to a more personal voice of the sea as part of the *Atlantic Ragagar* project, we had to compose our own research methodology. Researching together with Younes Boundir and Imane Zoubai became a collective process based on mutual learning. Our approach borrowed from feminist methodology, grounded in positionality, performativity, and micro-political interventions as possible ways of "becoming otherwise" (Neimanis 2016). I describe these experiments in the following sections to reveal the plurality of perspectives on aurality and ecology in our approach. Yet another voice of the sea emerges from these descriptions: a collective, polyphonic, distributed, troubled, interspecies voice—the *Ragagar voice of the sea*.

Our initial observations of marine life in Sidi Bouzid resulted in a series of video shots of seaweed, on the shore and underwater. We also documented some of the polluted sites: fish factories and the OCP phosphor plant in Safi; industrial discharge areas on the coast; and visible pollution, such as phosphogypsum sediments and fish residues in seawater. Compared to the charts, plots, and maps generated by Younes Boundir from physico-chemical measurements and data visualization techniques, the video shots represent complex environmental phenomena rather poorly. The underwater seaweed images are visually stunning, but they often remain distant from their subject, as it is often the case in conventional nature documentaries. Our documentary approach became more successful as we were invited to people's homes in Sidi Bouzid. We recorded the presence of seaweed in domestic spaces and on private land plots. These images are featured in the *Atlantic Ragagar* video. They convey a sense of how marine life matters in people's existence, and how seaweed is turned into a resource as part of the local economy.

Alongside our documentation and interviews with local people, we needed to find ways of engaging more directly with coastal ecology. This was facilitated through Imane Zoubai's participation, a visual artist and vocalist from Fez. We met during the *Sakhra Encounters* in Moulay Bouchta, where I came to appreciate her talent as a singer and improviser. During our research trip in September 2019, we made a series of performative interventions at specific locations in Sidi Bouzid and in Safi. Informed by ideas and practices of "deep listening" (Oliveros 2005), "interspecies performance" (Tiainen 2017), and "trans-corporeality" (Alaimo 2010), the goal of these experiments was to explore possible forms of affective and material interactions with seaweed, seawater, and pollution. Our approach started with sound walks on the beach in Sidi Bouzid, as a mode of attuning to the site. While I was inclined to listen silently during those walks, Imane Zoubai frequently started humming melodies. Freely improvised, or borrowed from popular *melhun* sung poetry, these melodies responded to her feelings about the place, between "serenity and sorrow," as she said. We expanded this approach with a series of vocal interventions on the beach near the OCP chemical plant in Safi. We spent a whole day visiting the industrial area, interviewing people and documenting the visible signs of pollution on the shore. Imane Zoubai's vocal improvisations are featured in *Atlantic Ragagar*. Her voice acts like an affective sensor through which we can feel emphatically the trouble caused by environmental pollution.

Later on, we started including material elements in our interventions. We transferred small quantities of seawater from Sidi Bouzid to some of the polluted stations, invoking practices of care-taking, ecological maintenance, and healing. Elsewhere, we staged a respiratory exchange with seaweed. Using a plastic tube, Imane Zoubai exhaled carbon dioxide directly to the seaweed underwater. The gas was turned into oxygen through the plant's photosynthesis capacities, and fed in return into the air inhaled by Zoubai. For another experiment in interspecies performance, Imane Zoubai immersed herself amongst seaweed in the sea, physically entangling herself with the plants' "bodily natures" (Alaimo 2010). While it is difficult to evaluate these experiments in quantifiable terms (what quantity of Zoubai's carbon dioxide was *really* turned into oxygen by the seaweed plant?), these interventions aimed to shift the conventions of taxonomic representation. Performative acts make room for an affect of mutual co-formation, supporting trans-species flows of becoming across the conventionally separated terms of human and non-human beings. These attempts are recapitulated in *Atlantic Ragagar*, along with the film's pressing question: How to listen to pollution and to its effects? Each sequence explores a different modality of listening and sounding: observation and attunement; vocal responses to pollution at specific locations; performative interactions with seaweed and seawater; poetic speech acts; and sound improvisations based on a graphic score representing Boundir's measurements of water pollution.

THE BINDING POWER OF AGAR POWDER

In order to make room for additional participants in our research, we organized a baking session with a group of women in Sidi Bouzid. We noticed that local people were often unaware of the culinary use of agar products derived from red seaweed. I brought a pack of agar powder produced by Lanuco, a German company working with Moroccan suppliers. Younes Boundir and I baked a small quantity of agar jelly sweets, good enough to be presented to some of the women busy collecting seaweed on the beach. The women were not very impressed with the taste and look of our sweets, but they showed an interest in the powder, and in its retail price in particular. Following these exchanges, one of the women agreed to host a collective baking session at her home. Our group included our host Hadja N., her sister-in-law Zora S., their colleagues Fatima H. and Fusia S., two younger women, and several children. After the introductions, we spent about three hours baking jelly sweets together, followed by a round of discussion, group pictures, and food tasting. It did not take long for the women to appreciate the culinary potential of agar powder. Each of them had their own approach to baking, adding ingredients to their preparations such as nuts, dried fruit, and cocoa powder. As we sat together at the end, the women were keen to share information on their personal experience with the local seaweed industry, local uses of seaweed, food habits, marine ecology, state regulations, and various aspects of social life in the region. The session is documented in a second video, *The Binding Effect*,[10] produced for the *Atlantic Ragagar* exhibition in Brussels. New knowledge emerged through this participative approach. This gave us a better insight into human-environmental interactions in the region, informing my account on the *intimate voice of the sea*. The session was very convivial, marking a significant step in our involvement with the local community. The binding quality of agar powder became effective not only on a chemical, culinary level, but also through the production of social interactions.

Baking experiments with agar powder, Sidi Bouzid, 2019.

THE SHARED CONCERNS OF SONIC PLURALISM

Bringing agar powder to Sidi Bouzid closed the transnational circle of industrial production and consumption of red seaweed, aka gelidium, aka r'biaa. As its different names suggest, red seaweed can be known and experienced in different ways: as a scientific object of study, as a natural resource, as a domestic "companion species," as an agent of marine biodiversity, as a culinary ingredient, and probably in a number of yet unrecognizable ways. A particular *Ragagar voice of the sea* emerged through our project, highlighting multiple ways of interconnecting with the environment, and of making sense of this experience. When Fatima B. introduced herself as "daughter of the sea," this sounded at first like a metaphorical kind of affiliation; a way for her to mark her cultural difference to foreign visitors. For materialist feminist authors, however, this expression can make sense *literally*. In her posthumanist account of human bodies as "bodies of water," Astrida Neimanis (2016) insists on the constant embodied process of watery intake, transformation, and exchange—drinking, peeing, sweating, sponging, weeping. Our "wateriness" verifies that "we have never been (only) human," both materially and conceptually. Stacy Alaimo (2010) follows a similar argumentation for "trans-corporeality," which posits that the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from the environment. Past and future bodies swim through us, and one is arguably always born from one's own material environment, indeed a "daughter of the sea" (or son).

Overall, the *Atlantic Ragagar* project represents an additional step in my exploration of sonic pluralism. Because seaweed and pollution cannot be heard directly, this limitation encouraged a different approach to sonic experience: ways of listening *between* the senses, and *through* the different senses. Sonic pluralism is concerned with cross-modalities of perception, questioning the relevance of disciplinary borders between visuality and aurality. What "listening can do," in this case, is to radically reconsider the limits of one's own capacity to perceive and understand the world. Because voice is not an "intrinsic characteristic of any given sound" (Pettman 2017), interspecies listening very much amounts to letting extra-human manifestations resonate intimately with the listener or a group of listeners. Sonic pluralism, therefore, is not a "matter of facts, but a matter of concern" (Latour 2004), and of shared concern especially in our case. What started as an inter-disciplinary conversation between a biologist, a sound anthropologist, and a performance artist, progressively gave way to a collective learning process (see also Chapter II), involving more and more people, perspectives, and ways of knowing. The *Ragagar voice of the sea* is the voice of an assembly. This collectively distributed voice renders visible the plurality of standpoints from which it originates, without being reduced to one single, particular standpoint. By dwelling at the border between art, science, and ecology, our assembly generated an "extra-disciplinary" field of knowledge (Holmes 2008), framed by a set of shared concerns about social and environmental justice. Change was enacted socially through the collective production of knowledge and affect, as well as trans-corporeally through material interaction with the environment, turning perhaps each of us slightly more into daughters and sons of the sea.

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[10] The video *The Binding Effect* (Aubry 2021, 15:51) can be accessed via the following link: https://arbor.bfh.ch/18257/2/be.mp4

Baking session with Hadja N., Zora S., Fatima H., and Fusia S., Sidi Bouzid, 2019. Stills from *The Binding Effect* by Gilles Aubry 2021.

THE MICRO- AND MACRO-POLITICS OF THE VOICE OF THE SEA

The *Atlantic Ragagar* project was an attempt to engage with environmental pollution and social realities from a ground level, informed by conversations and participative interventions with people in El Jadida and Safi. Our micro-political approach highlighted a number of tensions and frustrations in people's lives, related to unemployment, economical vulnerability, health insecurity, corruption, and a general lack of state support. As expressed by our interlocutors, socio-economic anxieties generally appeared more pressing than other issues, such as civil democratic rights, radical political change, or environmental justice. On a wider political scale, accounts of social protests in Morocco often stress similar distinctions between socio-economically motivated protests by the poorer part of the population, and more radical, political protests by human and ecological rights activists. The latter group is commonly associated with the *February 20* movement in Morocco, which emerged in 2011 during the "Arab Spring" uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in (Hamouchene 2019; Bogaert 2015). The 2011 protests and riots in the mining province of Khouribga offer a telling example of the apparent fracture between protest movements in the Kingdom. Between February and August 2011, unemployed youth from the town occupied a square in front of the OCP local administration, blocking also the railway that transports phosphate to the port cities of Safi and Casablanca. Their action was joined later by protesters in Safi, who blocked the local OCP chemical plant. The protesters explicitly distanced themselves from the political goals of the *February 20* movement; they simply demanded more jobs and expressed their explicit desire to be recruited by the OCP: "In other countries they revolt for freedom, here we revolt for work" (Bogaert 2015).

The revolts in Khouribga and Safi are part of a long list of "small town protests" in Morocco since the early 2000s. Socio-economic struggles in peripheral regions are often fragmented, Bogaert (2015) notes, shaped by the local context in which they are embedded. Protesters oppose not so much the idea of neoliberalism as the negative outcomes it produces. During the heyday of the *February 20* movement, democratic activists did not succeed—neither in Khouribga nor in other places—in actively involving large parts of the working-classes, and the rural and the urban poor as a group, despite the fact that some of their demands coincided. Whereas Hamouchene (2019) denounces a lack of political consciousness by many of the working-class protesters, Bogaert (2015) argues on the contrary that every economic struggle in an authoritarian or absolutist state is *de facto* political. While the *February 20* movement may seem in decline, the daily struggle in Morocco's small towns and villages continues. The Moroccan authorities are apparently very aware of the risks that such movements represent. This is evidenced by the heavy jail sentences pronounced against the leaders of the recent *Hirak* revolt in the Rif region.[11]

Protests at the OCP administrative office in Khouribga, March 2011.

The concerns expressed by people like Fatima B., Hadja N., Fusia S., and Hicham A. in Sidi Bouzid certainly feed a sense of injustice against the state and "the powerful ones." Compared to the socio-economical costs borne by these people, environmental issues remain perhaps secondary. Our interlocutors in Safi and El Jadida never referred to dystopian ecological grand-narratives such as the "Anthropocene" or "climate emergency." They nevertheless showed an ecological sensitivity, expressed in the recognition of their dependency on marine life, and in their awareness of the negative impact of industrial extractivism on their environment. During the COP22 climate conference in Marrakesh in 2016, the Moroccan authorities did not miss the opportunity to show the world their "deep" ecological commitment through projects such as the "green city" in Benguerir. They were also quick to blame their own citizens for not being enough "environmentally responsible," a sense which should be better "taught" to people, according to some state representatives (Bogaert 2016). What the authorities did not mention were the effects of green grabbing, devastating mining pollution, the violation of social rights, and land expulsion, all in the name of "sustainable development." When climate emergency turns into an emergency state of social control for the ruling elites, people run the risk of being consigned to an endless present of authoritarian capitalism (Demos 2019). Indigenous activists remind us that they are already "postapocalyptic;" the communities they represent have already lived through the exact socio-environmental breakdown that climate scientists now predict. Social injustice and environmental damages are the logical consequences of extractivism, which relies on capital accumulation through the brutal exploitation of natural resources destined particularly for export to world markets. In Morocco, contemporary extractivism is not limited to minerals and phosphate, it extends into activities that overexploit land, water, and biodiversity; it includes agribusiness, intensive forestry, industrial fish farming, and mass tourism (Hamouchene 2019). Overexploitation is facilitated by a society with limited democratic rights, and operationalized via neoliberal plans promoting private investment. In peripheral regions especially, people have suffered from extractivism since its introduction as part of the French colonial plan of natural resource exploitation in the 1920s. They have thus often witnessed the progressive extinction of local ways of being part of environmental life. As these populations are struggling to survive ever since, *they* might be in a better position to teach us how to resist the effects of ecological extinction eventually awaiting all of us.

The sit-in protest initiated by the villagers of Imider 300 kilometers south of Marrakesh represents a case in point in the field of resistance to neoliberal state oppression. Confronted with economic marginalization, the dangerous pollution of their grazing lands, and a severe water shortage resulting from the exploitation of a nearby silver mine, the villagers collectively decided to oppose the state-owned mining company (Bogaert 2016). Between 2011 and 2019, they implanted a permanent encampment on top of the hill to guard a valve and a water reservoir. A general assembly was established according to the local Indigenous model of decentralized decision-making, which incorporated principles of radical democracy and gender equality. In their pamphlets, the protesters rejected "sustainable development" in favor of "social, Indigenous (Berber-Amazigh), and environmental rights, including principles of community-based management of local goods (commons), such as water and land." Although Imider remains by far an

[11] Following the massive uprisings in the Rif region between 2016 and 2017, the movement's leader Nasser Zefzafi was convicted to a 20-year sentence along with the other detainees, sparking waves of outrage and social discontent among Moroccans.

Top: computer destroyed by protesters in Khouribga, March 2011.
Middle: OCP representative at a press conference.
Bottom: protesters gathering in Khouribga.

exception in Morocco, their achievements may inspire other people to engage with protest in the future. According to Bogaert (2015), "small town revolts" demonstrate a gradual shift in the geographic center of gravity of social protests in Morocco from the urban centers to the peripheries. Even if they appear sometimes fragmented, short-lived, and limited in their scope of political demands, these actions nevertheless create their own space for different kinds of struggles to intersect, locally and via social media.

If the notions of "rights," "justice," and "commons" appear central to trans-localized forms of social struggles today, common understandings of these terms may, and perhaps need to, vary from case to case, in order to respond to the current crisis of "universal" democratic rights. I like to see the *Atlantic Ragagar* project as a rehearsing process for new modes of socio-environmental activism. Sidi-Bouzid and Safi represent just two sites where the oppressive effects of global extractivism are felt particularly acutely, amongst many other places in Morocco and beyond. Rights, justice, and commons can quickly become abstract notions, if they are not grounded in concrete processes. The reality observed in Safi and El Jadida calls for the necessity to reconsider the relations between "human rights" and "extra-human rights." This is certainly not an easy demand, and should better be addressed case by case through community-based decision-making, as in Imider. To conciliate human rights with extra-human rights indeed quickly appears problematic, if one is to avoid de-politicizing differences in positions between humans themselves. We entered this problematic through multiple ways—scientific, artistic, socio-anthropological, eco-critical, and community-based—, which resulted in a new, troubled *Ragagar voice of the sea*. This voice adds to the vocality of local protesters and activists, allowing for alternative forms of engagement. It speaks of our attempts to produce new, "shifting versions" of ourselves along the way, individually, collectively, and across species.

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VIDEO AND SOUND WORKS

And who sees the mystery
by Gilles Aubry and Zouheir Atbane
2014, 27'01", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/17881/2/aw.mp4

Following the repatriation in 2010 of the *Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection* from Washington to Tangier, Gilles Aubry and Zouheir Atbane undertook collaborative research on the reception of these recordings in today's Morocco. The film follows their residency in Tafraout, a village where Paul Bowles recorded an Ahwash music performance in 1959. In exchange with local musicians, the artists deliver an interpretation of the return of these music recordings to their original location, including the documentation of listening sessions, discussions, and music sessions. The work examines the micro-politics of invisibility: Paul Bowles as an "invisible spectator;" the veil as a strategy of resistance during the French occupation of Morocco; the Pythagorean curtain of French acousmatic music.

World premiere at ESAV Marrakesh, as part of the exhibition *Why ain't you rich if you're so smart*, 2014.

Salam Godzilla
by Gilles Aubry
2019, 40'35", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18256/2/sg.mp4

Agadir, 1960. A violent earthquake destroyed the whole town, except for a few buildings, including the Salam movie theatre. By a strange twist of fate, apparently the film shown that night was *Godzilla: King of the Monsters*, a famous figure of post-apocalyptic days. This coincidence guides Gilles Aubry, all ears to echoes of the past, as he leads an investigation and tries to spot distant or tenuous traces left by time. The film features rich material, where dinosaur tracks, newsreels, or even seismic surveys can resonate with poetic verses sung by Ali Faiq, or the movements of rwais dancers. Shot inside the cinema and in the surroundings of Agadir, the film is driven by an abstract soundtrack recorded on location.

World premiere at *Visions du Réel* International Film Festival, Nyon, 2019.

International premiere at FID Marseille 2019.

Moroccan premiere at Arab Media Lab, Marrakesh, 2020.

A wasted breath inside a balloon

by Gilles Aubry and Ramia Beladel
2019, 39'03", stereo audio
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18259/2/wb.mp3

The piece results from collaboration between the artists Ramia Beladel and Gilles Aubry in Moulay Bouchta l'Khmar, a village in the northern part of Morocco. Informed by Beladel's long term research on popular Sufism, the piece documents events which took place in July 2017 during the annual celebration of the local saint Moulay Bouchta. One can hear songs, prayers, field recordings, and an excerpt of *bokharia*, a healing ritual based on the powerful sound of rifles. The piece also provides a stage for a performance by Beladel relying on introspection, trance, and self-reconfiguration, breath by breath, balloon after balloon.

World premiere at *Sonohr* Radio Festival, Bern, 2019.

Moroccan premiere at Sakhra Encounters, a festival and exhibition in Moulay Bouchta, 2019.

STONESOUND

by Gilles Aubry and Abdeljalil Saouli
2019, 10'23", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18258/3/st.mp4

STONESOUND documents an experiment in stone sounding in Moulay Bouchta. Abdeljalil Saouli speaks about his relationship with stones, as part of a local history of co-evolution between humans and their environment. A rich soundscape emerges, somewhere between a lithophone instrument, a sound lab, and a living ecosystem carved by water erosion. The general notion of "sound" is re-examined through the notion of "stone-sound," pointing to a relational understanding of sound and listening.

World premiere at *Sakhra Encounters*, a festival and exhibition in Moulay Bouchta, 2019.

International premiere at Simon Fraser University as part of the Festival *A Light Footprint in the Cosmos*, 2022.

The Binding Effect

by Gilles Aubry
2021, 15'51", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18257/2/be.mp4

The video documents a baking session in 2019 with a group of women who collect red seaweed for a living in Sidi Bouzid. Baking sweets with agar powder becomes an opportunity for conversations on seaweed life, marine ecology, pollution, and human labour.

World premiere at La Chambre de l'Art, Bruxelles, 2021, as part of the exhibition *Atlantic Ragagar*.

Atlantic Ragagar

by Gilles Aubry
2022, 31'43", HD video
https://arbor.bfh.ch/18255/2/ar.mp4

Atlantic Ragagar is an experimental film on seaweed and pollution on the Moroccan Atlantic coast. With its clear water, the beach in Sidi Bouzid is known as a seaweed paradise. Further down the coast in Safi, marine biodiversity suffers from the pollution caused by phosphate plants and fish factories, with dramatic consequences for the population's health. The film is an attempt to "listen" to pollution and its effects on coastal life, inviting the spectator into a process of ecological transformation. If pollution often remains hidden in the landscape, the effects of toxicity are rendered through the voice and bodily presence of performer Imane Zoubai. The film unfolds through her vocal interventions, first on the beach and later in the studio during improvised sessions. As she hums, sings, breathes, and silently interacts with algae, a new figure progressively emerges, "maouj," an aquatic body open to transcorporeal and interspecies speculations.

World premiere and special mention at Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival (IDFF) 2022.

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