

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Sounds and the Politics of Listening

Jeanette S. Jouili, *College of Charleston*

Annelies Moors, *University of Amsterdam*

In the course of the last decades, sonic forms of Islam—including sound, music, and the spoken word—have diversified and become publicly present through an increasingly wide range of new technologies. These include, for instance, the call to prayer (*adhān*) disseminated through loudspeakers, radio, and television; the circulation of Quranic recitations, sermons, and *anasheed* (Islamic hymns or chants) through audio- and video-cassettes, and more recently the Internet; as well as new, more often contested, musical genres, such as Islamic pop, country, rock, and rap music. The audiences for such musical sounds have also pluralized as Islamic performers today appear at multicultural festivals and religiously-mixed cultural events, in addition to targeting dedicated Muslim listeners. And mediated Islamic sounds more generally circulate widely today, sometimes on a global scale, far beyond the control of producers and performers.¹ These sounds not only reach the ears of their intended publics, but also those of Muslims and non-Muslims that they do not target.²

In this special collection, we discuss the effects of the public presence of audible Islam by focusing on how Islamic sounds are produced, circulated, and listened to with different levels of intentionality by a wide variety of audiences in local settings where state and non-state actors manage religion in different ways. The individual contributions to this

special collection all combine theoretical reflection on sonic Islam with substantial ethnographic fieldwork in Muslim-majority settings as well as in locations where Muslims constitute a religious minority.³ In her contribution, Jeanette Jouili focuses on the Islamically inspired artistic scene in France. She shows how ambitions to create a faith-sustaining artistic environment at times become entangled with civic projects that both aim to educate the largely working-class Muslim community to appreciate the arts, but also often seek to achieve a broader reach for their artistic projects. Focusing on rappers' "stage talk" at live festivals in Morocco, Kendra Salois analyzes how hip hop performers and audiences collectively co-constitute a counterpublic that seeks to shape responsible modern citizens rather than pious Muslims, without, however, being indifferent to Islamic ethics. Isaac Weiner, examining a 2004 dispute about the amplified Islamic call to prayer from a mosque in Hamtramck, Michigan, shows how attempts to keep the public sphere free from religion paradoxically highlight the public presence of religion, while those in favor of multiculturalism and public religion tend to mute the specific religious character of a ritual, in this context the *adhān*. Brian Larkin, who explores the use of loudspeakers by religious actors in the city of Jos, Nigeria, points out how they are central to religious contests between Sufi and Salafi-inspired movements as well as between Muslims and Pentecostal churches. Rather than a tool to communicate a religious message, loudspeakers function as a mode of presence-making and a means to silence others.

Before returning to these individual contributions and how they relate to each other, we briefly elaborate on two trends that have engendered a new interest in auditory Islam. First, we discuss the transformation and proliferation of Islamic soundscapes in the public sphere, and how this relates to the emergence and transformation of the Islamic revival movement and to the dynamics of the (secular) governance of Islam. Next, we turn to new theoretical perspectives that have stimulated scholars to engage with this greater auditory presence of Islam, in particular the renewed interest in anthropology of the senses and sensorial perception, and the turn in Islamic studies from a textual approach to focusing on the multiple ways in which Muslims live Islam.

The Aurality of Islam: Contested Traditions and Recent Developments

There is a long tradition of scholars arguing for the centrality of the sonic or auditory in Islam (al-Faruqi 1985, During 1997). The first Quranic verse revealed started with the word “*Iqra*,” that is, “Recite!” Throughout Islamic history, the art of the proper recitation of the Quran (*tajwīd*) has been highly valued, as has the correct performance of the Islamic call to prayer, even if the media through which these are amplified (loudspeakers) or broadcasted (radio) have, at times, been topics of considerable debate (Eickelman and Anderson 1999, Khan 2011). Other sonic forms, in particular those categorized as music, have been more often contested and the subject of censure. Whereas in some circles, notably in many Sufi orders, the rhythmic repetition of the name of God (dhikr)—accompanied by ritualistic, rhythmic, and sometimes ecstatic movements—is inherently part of the religious practice (Frischkopf 2001, Kapchan 2007), those inserting themselves in a more scripturalist tradition have been generally critical of such forms of worship. Discussions among Muslim scholars about the legitimacy of music and the desirability of performing anāshid by including musical instruments (beyond the drum) have a long history and are still current (Al-Faruqi 1985, Nelson 1982, Shiloah 1995; see also Salois this issue, Otterbeck 2008).

Many contemporary forms of auditory Islam have been influenced by the Islamic revival, a broad and heterogeneous movement emerging in the 1970s and 1980s as a critical response to the increased secularization of everyday life. In its earlier days, the more orthodox strands were (in contrast to their Sufi-inspired counterparts) characterized by a rather austere stance (Bayat 2007). Adopting a more skeptical position about musical legitimacy, they generally rejected entertainment as un-Islamic and as diverting believers from their religious duties. The auditory forms they propagated generally converged around the more serious devotional genres, such as Quranic recitations and sermons. These sounds became increasingly present in the public because, according to protagonists of the Islamic revival, it was not only the task of religious specialists but of all Muslims to engage in *da’wa* (invitation to Islam) activities. New technologies, first audio-cassettes (Hirschkind 2006) and later the Internet, enabled them to reach wider and more diverse publics (Eickelman and Anderson 1999).

However, within a few decades, the orthodox Islamic revival movement has become more diversified, as the demands of its growing middle class constituencies engendered the development of Islamic production, media, and entertainment sectors (Navaro-Yashin 2002, Gökariksel and McLarney 2010). Many groups showed themselves increasingly favorable toward new forms of artistic entertainment and consumption that were Islamically licit (*halal*) and attractive to the younger generations (Deeb and Harb 2007). Next to the older da'wa activities, a wide variety of forms of entertainment and consumption has emerged that is labelled “halal fun” (see Jouili this issue). As a result, entertainment—including low-scale forms that are organized by volunteers with very little funding (see Jouili this issue)—has become a greater constituent force of religious sociability. At the same time, the merger of commerce and religion—which has a long history, as evident in such forms as religious festivals—has become far more generalized.

The Sensorial Turn, Audition, and the Disciplining of the Muslim Ear

The scholarly interest in contemporary Islamic sonic practices has also been stimulated and enriched by shifting academic paradigms. Exposing the limits of the “textual paradigm” of the literary turn of the 1980s, anthropologists have advocated the return to the question of embodiment and the senses as a source of knowledge, engendering a “sensorial turn” (see, for instance, Csordas 1994; Howes 1991, 2003; Porcello et al. 2010; Stoller 1989; Taussig 1993). It is in the context of this broader paradigm shift that listening practices, sounds, and soundscapes have emerged as a promising arena for research (Samuels et al. 2010). After pioneering ethnographic work on sounds and listening in rainforest societies (Feld 1982), anthropologists have turned their attention to aurality in the context of modern, post-colonial landscapes, studying sonic practices in urban contexts, the politics of music production (inside and outside the recording studio) and its consumption and circulation in the globalizing music industry, as well as the ways in which modern media and sound technologies shape contemporary aesthetic sensibilities (Samuels et al. 2010).

Reflecting on sonic practices and their effects, anthropologists could also build on established scholarship in other disciplines, such as that of auditory history, which has vocally criticized the presumptions of Western

ocularcentrism (Connor 2004, Corbin 1998). As Erlman (2004) has argued, to fully understand the specific ways the auditory interacts with other senses and how the sensorium is imagined and represented in specific settings, we need to better grasp “the cultural production of auditory perception” (2004:3). Such an approach asks for specific attentiveness to existing discursive traditions with their respective sensory epistemologies, and to the particular historical and political settings in which these traditions unfold and evolve. In the specific context of Islamic traditions, this would then also include a critical engagement with the idea of Islam being the aural religion par excellence, which has at times been criticized as yet another form of orientalist essentialization (Stokes 2002). Rather than thinking of the senses in terms of dichotomies, such as the visual versus the aural, this requires the recognition that whereas the sonic has its own specificities (such as its ephemeral nature and the problems of containment), the auditory sense cannot be isolated from the other senses, as human experience is multi-sensorial. As all contributions to this collection demonstrate (see also Erlmann 2004, Connor 2004, Howes 2006, Porcello et al. 2010), auditory performances always work in complicated ways with the other senses.

Debates about the public presence of religion have clearly benefitted from the renewed interest in sensorial perception. Earlier work, following Habermas (1991), considered the modern public sphere as secular and constituted through rational deliberation, relegating religion and its irrational passions to the private (see, for instance, Calhoun 1992). Alternative perspectives inspired by the work of Talal Asad (2003) have, in contrast, argued that secular governance, rather than separating state and religion, constructs the category of the religious and subordinates religion to the powers of the modern state, which involves the reform of religious sensibilities in ways conducive to the imperatives of the state (Mahmood 2005, Hirschkind 2006, Agrama 2010). Both religion and secular power function then as subject-fashioning projects, deploying certain kinds of mental and embodied disciplines in order to shape sensibilities that involve the human sensorium in important ways (Asad 2003; Hirschkind 2006, 2011).

Following this line of thought, scholars have provided rich historical material to show how, in the Euro-American space from the Enlightenment onward, a process has been set into motion to re-discipline the senses, auditory and otherwise, of the faithful in a more rationalist way in order to fashion appropriate modern individuals (see Schmidt 2000). Similarly,

in the late 19th century in the Muslim world, a discourse of reform and modernization turned the more festive and ecstatic forms of devotion into an object of much criticism and rebuke (Schielke 2012). The post-colonial state's concern with defining a type of state-Islam subservient to the project of the modernizing state has equally impacted practices of listening in religious settings (Hirschkind 2006). With the emergence of modern media technologies, new possibilities have been provided for the circulation of religious contents, for reviving and transforming traditional practices of self-cultivation, and for manifesting its presence to multiple audiences (Meyer and Moors 2006, Eisenlohr 2012). Mediation reconfigures and re-vives—sometimes in contested ways—devotional (auditory) practices, but also the debates about the appropriateness of these practices in modernizing or secular contexts.

These questions are also of relevance in Muslim-minority settings. In Europe, there has been a growing anxiety about the meaning of citizenship, leading to a culturalization of this very notion. With citizenship no longer referring merely to legal rights and obligations, but increasingly to the requirement to internalize cultural values, Muslim minorities are under pressure to provide evidence of their support for the nation's dominant values (Appadurai 2006, Geschiere 2009). The acceptance of these values is often made equivalent to Muslim's "secularization," and therefore to their religiosity's inobtrusiveness. This therefore raises the question of whether it is the greater sonic presence of Islam (such as the call to prayer), linked to a Muslim quest for recognition, that has engendered public debate or whether the secular (or non-Muslim) ear has simply developed a greater anxiety about Islamic sounds (see Weiner this issue).

In the post 9/11 climate, state actors involved in the domestication and the securitization of Islam have also turned to the culture sector, engaging Muslims through the arts. Both at the national and the transnational levels, deradicalization projects and cultural diplomacy programs categorize Muslims either as liberal and moderate (and hence desirable) or as fundamentalist and radical (that is, as undesirable), aiming to mobilize the former against the latter. As a result, some performers have become the beneficiaries of state support, while others are increasingly marginalized (Aidi 2011, Jouili 2013; see also Winegar 2008, Swedenburg 2004).

Beyond the focus on the presence of Islamic sounds in their complex relation to secular power and its disciplinary techniques, the by now well-documented shift in Islamic studies from a focus on textual forms of Islam

to the ways in which Muslims live Islam, has also drawn attention to a much broader range of sounds in Muslim contexts (Marsden 2005). Rather than considering particular sounds as either religious or secular in themselves, sounds may move into and out of the category of the religious in the course of their production, circulation, and consumption, depending on the intentions of those engaging with them. Religious sonic practices may also be re-signified in order to appear more legitimate or comfortable to secular ears, such as when they are transformed into art, folklore, or the cultural heritage of an ethnic group (Tambar 2010), or when they are turned from an Islamic devotional practice into a generalized spiritual experience (Kapchan 2008). In a similar vein, those involved in forms of halal fun may present the Islamic ethics involved, such as non-vulgar language, in universal rather than particularistic terms.

Islamic Soundscapes and the Politics of Listening: The Contributions

The articles in this special collection all discuss questions related to the production and circulation of sonic Islam, as well as the politics of listening. Jouili and Salois address, respectively, the question of specific circumscribed publics defined around certain aesthetic (listening) practices. The Moroccan hip hop artists Salois studies as well as the pious French Muslims Jouili discusses both express a concern for educating and disciplining their audiences and cultivating certain ethical dispositions built on a pedagogy of listening—the former aspiring to promote the responsible, critical citizen-subject, the latter the pious and cultivated Muslim subject. One is defined explicitly through the intention of producing Islamically licit arts for an audience mainly affiliated with Islamic revival circles in a minority context. For the other, situated in a Muslim-majority but not explicitly religiously defined context, Islamic legitimacy is not the primary concern. Nonetheless, it does inform cultural norms and ethical and aesthetic dispositions. Salois's hip hop artists seek to localize a transnational hip hop culture and adjust it to local concerns and sensibilities, making it successful by building on locally available understandings of listening and appropriate responsiveness, which are also informed by Islamic traditions. Jouili's artists seek to appropriate local (mainstream) ideas and practices of culture (popular or more elite) and to attune them to Islamic normativities—which are simultaneously fashioned by a range of different

sensibilities and defined by minority condition and culture (rooted in the *banlieues*, or suburbs) and by desire for upward social mobility.

Whereas the pious artists in France mainly operate on a very grass-roots level without the support of a French republican state wary of Muslim “communitarian” practices and expressions, the cultural events that host Moroccan hip hop artists are regularly supported either by state funding or public–private partnerships, which are reflective of the neoliberal privatization processes in that country. While indeed critical voices, the artists call especially for individual citizens to accept responsibility as a means to fight for justice, thereby locating the possibility for positive change in the self, rather than in the systemic structures of the state. Yet, Salois cautions us against merely reading this young, urban counterpublic as co-opted by the state. In a political context where these artists cannot or do not want to become the target of state suspicion (and ultimately repression), they nonetheless contribute to promoting sensibilities that enable new forms of solidarities (transcending older lineage, class, or party-based ones) that might, in the long run, be an important condition for broader social (and political) change. Unlike the Moroccan hip hop artists, the pious artists discussed in Jouili’s article do not only pursue their artistic endeavours far away from any state support, but are also quite disconnected from other mainstream cultural and artistic spheres. Not all artists are happy with their underground status, as they aspire to reach a broader public with their positive, ethical messages, which they explain by a complicated articulation of French republican and Islamic universalisms. Interestingly, however, at least according to the pious audiences, the success of the artistic project lies precisely in its specific catering to Muslim tastes and the counterpublics’ closed character, which makes the idea of “opening up” to larger, mainstream audiences a contested one.

In contrast to Salois’s and Jouili’s focus on the soundscapes of specific circumscribed publics, Larkin’s and Weiner’s contributions are more explicitly concerned with the “spilling over” of sounds outside of their religious constituency, a process mediated by loudspeakers in pluralist and contested social and political spaces. While the initial call (whether *adhān* or other Muslim or Christian messages) is an address destined for a specific audience that is expected to have already cultivated a sensory responsiveness (or is, at least, expected to further cultivate this responsiveness), these sounds also travel to other ears. In these new

contexts, the processes of reception are not entirely predictable; they are potentially conflictual, open to being attributed a whole set of different meanings. In Larkin's discussion of Plateau State, Nigeria, religious messages spilling over from one religious community to another can be seen as a provocation, which may elicit (in a context of already long-existing ethnic and religious hostility) a violent response. In the context of multi-ethnic Hamtramck, Michigan, the call for prayer disseminated from the roof of a mosque to the surrounding neighborhood can be seen as the illegitimate audible presence of a mistrusted religious minority, or as the sign of multicultural and multi-faith conviviality. The ways these initial messages become re-appropriated, attended to or not, responded to or ignored, or perhaps even reformulated are not entirely foreseeable. Moreover, as both authors show, responses are not completely arbitrary, as they are always already embedded within the specific histories, resources, discourses, and constellations of power active and interacting in the specific moment.

In Hamtramck, the "new-comer" religion Islam pursues legal mechanisms for its sounds to leave the well-prescribed place of the interior of a religious building, relying on the established institutions of a secular, pluralist state. The potential for success in this endeavour, as Weiner demonstrates, also depends on the possibility of listening to the religious sound in ways that correspond to the well-delineated place of (inoffensive) secularized religions that constitutes one of the American intellectual traditions to accommodate religious pluralism. Larkin, on the other hand, exposes how—in the absence of a strong state where the management of ethnic and religious diversity has been problematic ever since colonial rule, a situation inherited and exacerbated in the post-colonial nation-state)—the spilling over of particular religious sounds always risks jeopardizing the very fragile equilibrium between diverse groups. Under such circumstances, cultivating inattention as a conscious, willed act may be a necessity.

The articles of this special collection collectively contribute to ongoing debates about the production of publics, the presence of religion in the public, and the sensorial forms and mediations such presence takes on. They join those critical of restricting the public sphere to the secular (excluding the religious) and to rational deliberation (excluding expressive, sensorial, and corporeal forms of presence), and add to these debates a specific focus on the audible or the sonic. By no means isolating

the aural from the other senses, they actively engage with the particularities of sonic Islam and its mediations. In doing so, they also shift the focus within the field of sonic Islam, going beyond sound as a means of inclusion and religious belonging as a pre-existing identity. ■

Endnotes:

¹The term "Islamic sounds" is self-descriptive. It includes both the sounds that performers or audiences consider as linked to Islam, as well as the sounds that participants in public debate label as Islamic.

²In this introduction, we use the term public both as a synonym for concrete audiences and as inspired by Warner (2005) in the sense of a public that comes into being in relation to sounds and their circulation. Such publics are constituted through attention (see also Larkin this issue), are imaginary, and are performative, not expressing pre-existing identities, but forming and transforming them.

³Most of these articles, except for Salois's contribution, build on papers presented at the Autumn School on "Islamic Sounds, Secular Sounds and the Politics of Listening," held in 2010 at the University of Amsterdam.

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Foreign Language Translations:

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