III. SALAM GODZILLA

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

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

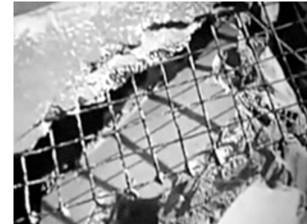
My research on sound and listening in Morocco initally focused on musical expression and its recorded forms. But what about the other domains of aurality and technicity that play a role in the ways people's realities are constructed? This chapter marks a shift in my approach toward extra-musical sound, 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

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

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.

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.

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).

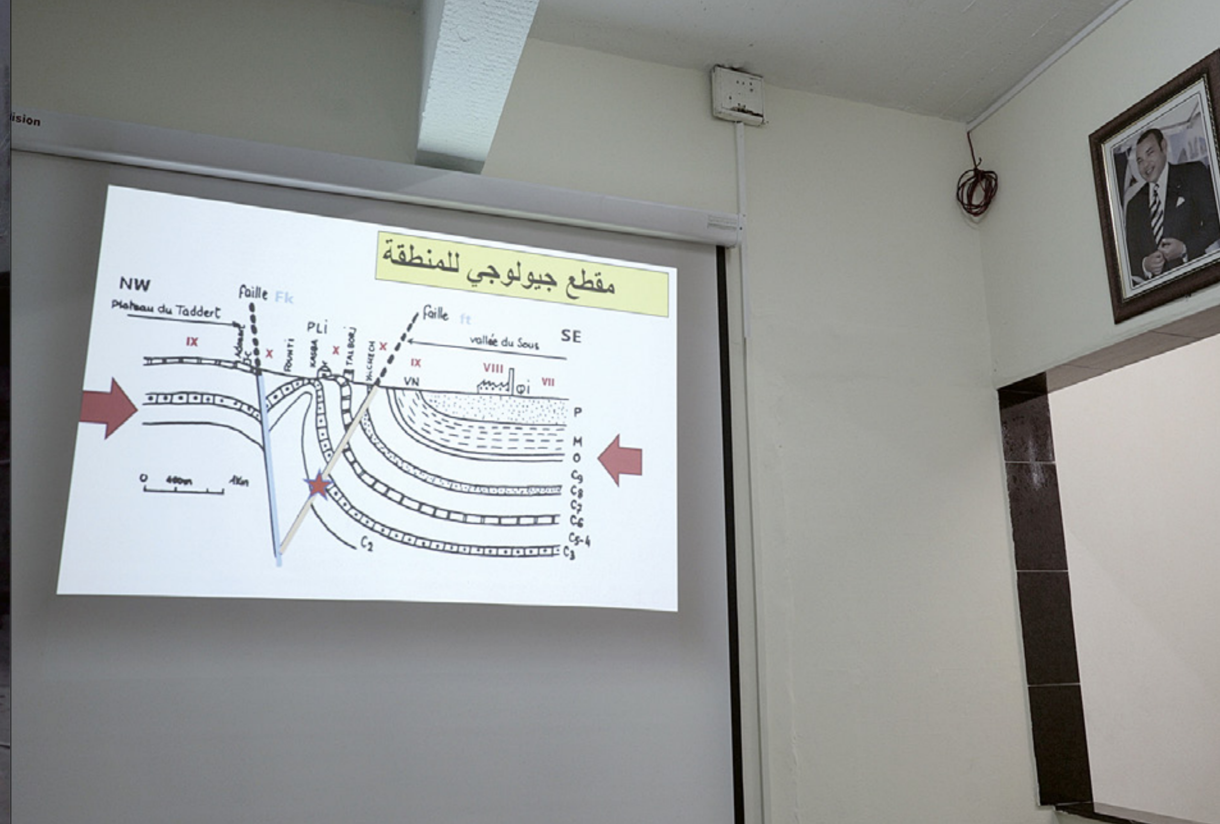
In his poem, Ibn Ighil uses the analogy of a "flooding river" (*wadi*) in order to explain the earthquake and its consequences (Brown and Lakhsassi 1980). Common in Tashlhit poetry as a metaphor for total destruction and death, the notion is also associated with disasters caused by evil spirits

(*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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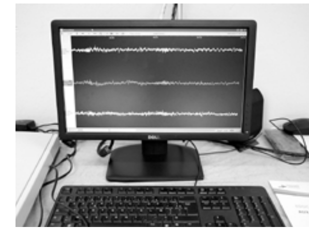

Top: Digital seismometer owned by the ASVTS organization in Agadir, 2018.
Bottom: Device used for visualizing the effects of seismic waves, Agadir, 2018.

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.

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

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.

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

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

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.

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

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

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).

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.