

INTRODUCTION

Extract from: Gilles Aubry, *Sawt Bodies Spaces*.
Sonic Pluralism in Morocco, adocs 2023.
[Full open access PDF here](#)

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

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

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.

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 worldview 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 attest 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, agentic, 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 (Bouarbat 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.

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

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

(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.

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 Agadir 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 irredeemably 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

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).

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.

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 *aita* 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.