

Introduction: The Potential of a Sonic Turn

Toward an Acoustemology of the Post-Secular

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Abstract

A critical attention to religious sounds can respond to the call for a sonic turn in the study of religions, while also contributing to a trajectory for the interdisciplinary study of sound to grow out of its secularist and ethnocentric paradigms. After defining the key concepts and intellectual interventions of the book, this introduction offers a summary of the chapters, elucidating how they contribute to an acoustemology of the post-secular rooted in Asia as method. Then, it presents cross-cutting themes—senses, media, and power—and discusses religious sounds as inextricably connected with synesthetic bodily experiences and with configurations of space, while being always mediated and enmeshed with power structures. The final section links the rich and diverse empirical data of the chapters with broader debates in the study of religion and sound.

Keywords: Global South, Asia as method, sacred music, ocularcentrism, synesthesia

This book explores the understudied interstices between religion and sound. It contributes to a “sonic turn” in religious studies (Hackett 2012; 2018), an approach that a few scholars have invoked. This invocation needs to be advanced with further theoretical refinement, applied to varied methodological avenues, and taken into new directions. Why is a “sonically aware” approach necessary, and which kinds of new questions would that generate? Can a sonic turn challenge conventional modalities of data collection and knowledge production in academia? Can sound be a

decolonizing instrument in scholarship on religion? Moreover, can a focus on the religious provide a new opportunity for sound studies to adopt a post-secular and less ethnocentric standpoint?

The close relationship between sonic and religious spheres has been underresearched by both religion and sound scholars. Various theologies and cosmologies have generated theories of sound and sonic liberation (Beck 1993). At the same time, popular music scenes have been identified as new, postmodern forms of religion (Till 2020). Spirituality has often served as an important source of inspiration for musicians, while aesthetic expressions have been catalysts for the development of new religious movements. We address herein the auditory field of chanting, preaching, mourning, singing, and listening as a site for broader social negotiations, sectarian contestations, and trans-territorial identity formations, ultimately unsettling and multiplying existing discussions on religion, the senses, and the media.

By taking seriously what we hear and by considering sounds as modalities of knowledge and makers of culture in their own right, this volume sets the ground for explorations in a new field, which we might call “acoustemology of the post-secular.” “Acoustemology,” an expression introduced by Steven Feld, combines the terms “acoustic” and “epistemology” in order to refer to a sonic way of knowing and being in the world (Feld 1996). Understanding sounds as co-constitutive of culture, we apply this sonically sensitive approach to the study of the relationship between the human and the more-than-human,¹ including and transcending the institutionalized communities, authorities and practitioners that call themselves “religious.”

For decades, existing literature has equated religious sounds to “sacred music”: the highly complexly arranged sounds developed and/or used within traditional religions (Laack 2015, 235) that communicate with or help experience “transcendence” (Engelhardt and Bohlman 2016). But religious concepts and sensibilities leak outside of the category of sacred music (think

1 In environmental humanities and academic literature on the Anthropocene, terms like non-human, other-than-human, and more-than-human, often used interchangeably (Fenske and Norkunas 2017; Franklin 2017), refer to animals, plants and other ecological beings that interact and relate with the human realm. In the study of religion and spirituality, and in the de-secularized and post-secular writings on the Anthropocene (see Szerszynski 2017; Degnen 2018; Bubandt 2018), these terms may refer to divine entities, natural forces, gurus, spirits, gods and other agentive beings, whether immanent or transcendent, that are enmeshed with human lives. As humans are “never outside a sticky web of connections” (Bennett 2004, 365) with such entities, I use terms like non-human, other-than-human and more-than-human to avoid any essentialized dichotomy between matter (environment) and spirit (religion), and to avoid referring simplistically to supernatural forces (e.g., “God”) that would fail to reflect the richness and diversity of the theologies and onto-cosmologies included in this book.

of American Islamic hip-hop), while music is only one way in which humans organize sound-making practices. Which conceptual framework would then help us to make sense of the auspicious sound of women's ululation during ritual festivals, or the spontaneous syllables of glossolalic prayers?

In this volume, we step beyond the comfort zone of "sacred music" to reflect instead on the relatively unexplored terrain of theoretical and methodological discussions on sound in religious ontologies and practices, as well as on the theological undergirding of the configuration of sound as a semantic container. This requires us to elaborate on why we concentrate on sound, and what we mean by "religious".

In the first part (I) of this introduction we define some key concepts underpinning this book project to outline its main intellectual interventions: Our definition of religious sound, its backdrop in the history of sensory epistemology, our call for a post-secular approach, our use of Asia as method, combined with the global South as practice. In the second part (II) we offer a short summary of the book sections, connecting dots among its sixteen chapters and elucidating how these chapters contribute to an acoustemology of the post-secular rooted in Asia as method. In the third part (III) we dwell on cross-cutting themes—senses, media, and power—and contextualize them in the extant literature. Drawing examples provided by our contributors, we explore how religious sounds are inextricably connected with synesthetic bodily experiences, and with configurations of space, while being always mediated and enmeshed with power structures. This final section is meant to help the readers to link the rich and diverse empirical data of the individual essays with broader debates in the study of religion and sound.

Why sound?

Sound is a polysemous and culturally specific term. In English, it may denote one of the senses, or the physical phenomenon of propagation of continuous and regular vibrations through the air, or another medium. In Italian, my mother tongue, to "hear" and to "feel" are the same verb (*sentire*). In the Indic languages that I work with, sound has many terms: one of them is the same as "word," as well as "revelation" (*śabda*), while one of them means cosmogonic vibration shared by all sentient and non-sentient things (*nāḍ*), making sound a viable path toward soteriological goals.

A focus on the materiality and the politics of sound encompasses the realm of what has been traditionally referred to as music. Music has been

predominantly studied as a “thing,” rather than an event, or as the sum of musical “objects,” rather than the encounters and the actions that constitute the process of “musicking” (Small 1998). The relationship between sound and what is understood as music has radically transformed in the course of time (Solomos 2020). Even within the same culture, different groups of people can understand the same sounds differently: some may describe them as music, some as bad music, some as noise. Even silence, described as a scientifically measurable lack of sound waves (Laack 2015, 234), is culturally and historically contingent. There is hardly any human action taking place in the total absence of sound waves. What we mean by silence and how we interpret low decibel levels goes beyond the physicality of the auditory system; it is something that quantitative measures of loudness can hardly describe, as each biological ear is cultured, attuned, and socialized differently.² A friend from Bangladesh who migrated to Italy in his teens once told me that the most memorable sensation at his arrival was the daunting silence of the central train station of Roma Termini—a place that most Italians, especially from the north, would qualify as unsustainably noisy and chaotic. On the other hand, Italians are often ridiculed for being loud and for accompanying their expressions with exaggerated hand gestures, from the perspective of northern Europeans’ more sober aesthetic regimes.

The articulation of noise in any social setting “is an issue less of tone or decibel than of social temperaments, class background, and cultural desire” (Schwartz 2004, 51), firmly rooted in local hierarchies of class, taste, morality and power positions. While a focus on sacred music has often dominated the study of religious sounds, coalescing them under the aegis of artistic expression and liturgical repertoires, we consider culturally informed choices about sounds and silences as fundamental components of any religious engagement in their own right.³ Concentrating on sound gives us a chance to include but also surpass musicological concerns with structures and aesthetics of organized sound, in order to understand how sounds work, communicate and perform meaning in different socio-cultural ecologies of affect. Engagements and experiences of sounds are socially, culturally,

2 Judith Becker (2004) borrows Bourdieu’s *habitus* idea, and adapts it to processes of listening. In her words, such *habitus* of listening “underlines the interrelatedness of the perception of musical emotion and learned interactions. Our perceptions operate within a set of habits gradually established throughout our lives” (ibid., 71).

3 We are not the first in doing this. For instance, the recent *Hearing Southeast Asia* edited by Nathan Porath (2019) shows the importance of sound for understanding the processual implementation of hierarchy in the construction of the social environment and demonstrates that silence can be as important as sound in terms of the sonic articulation of hierarchy.

and morally informed and motivated and, thus, are essentially political in nature (Chandola 2012). This explains why our volume bears the subtitle “senses, media, and power” as the main areas where the implications of religious sounds resonate.

And yet sounds have often been treated as ephemeral, ornamental or secondary phenomena in the humanities and social sciences. John Chernoff rightly points out that for anthropologists, music is often something like a residue of *more fundamental* cultural concerns, something that enhances structures and functions that are *already there* (Chernoff 2002—my emphasis). In short, music is treated as derivative rather than determinative of culture. This approach signals an epistemological problem for the study of religion. Citing Ruth Illman (2019): “We need to realize that music, and the arts in general, are not just ornaments or illustrations of something more profoundly important to religion, but they are aspects of religious engagement in their own right.” When religion scholars pay attention to music, they often treat it as an “instrument” to reach a state of transcendence, a “vehicle” bringing higher or deeper truths, a “carrier” of more profound meanings, such as trance, prayers, or communication with god(s). Yet sonic mediations, whether they are transmitted via the voice, radio, printed text, internet or other media, are not solely conductors toward soteriological goals; they are also co-constitutive of communities and their values.

One of the main goals of this volume is to address scholars interested in religion broadly defined, irrespective of their specific field- or area-based training, and encourage them to revisit conventional sources, whether archival, literary, or ethnographic, with a sharp and curious ear, tuning their sonic awareness toward new empirical questions. The other principal aim of this volume is to persuade sound studies scholars to integrate into their research questions and methodology the importance of the religious, the non-religious, the spiritual and the secular, as critical components influencing the perception, consumption, and production of sounds in any society.

Why religious?

By focusing on religion, this book explores the role of sound in shaping communities, subjectivities, and sensitivities in their relationship with the nonhuman, the spiritual, and the assumed “secular.” The term post-secular in this introduction is not used in a temporal sense as the epoch of religious resurgence (Habermas 2008) or as the re-enchantment that comes after a

presumedly “secular age” (Taylor 2007). The post-secular approach allows us to recognize that religious authorities, concerns for the sacred, onto-cosmologies and ritual knowledge are all important dimensions that shape the ways people perceive, interpret, play, or forbid sounds. Recognizing that there has never been a totalizing and all-encompassing “secularization” process, we suggest the conceptual filter of the post-secular (as in post-secular literary criticism—see Morrissey 2009, 100 and Mączyńska 2009, 76 in Corrigan 2015) as a renewed engagement with the religious to think beyond the secularist frame of global North modernities. This approach hopes to respond to the gaps of those previous works and sub-fields that have taken secularization for granted. Secularization, predicting a decline in the influence of religious authorities and their separation from other social and political domains, has precise historical and geographical configurations, rooted in post-Enlightenment Europe. Anthropologists and religion scholars have abundantly demonstrated that there are multiple secularisms, and that even presumedly secular societies have never been “disenchanted.” Furthermore, even secularization is not free from religious sensibilities; the secular is not the absence of religion, but rather a particular practice of regulating and containing religious realms while these spill and leak in other social domains. In other words, the post-secular, in our use of the term, is not a fact or a time period, but rather a heuristic sensitivity to trace and to investigate the religious underpinnings that may influence any cultural formation, including sounds, noises and silences.

We understand religion beyond centrally sanctioned organizations, as enmeshed with culture in the way it influences people’s ways of living, consuming, eating, but also feeling, listening, and moving their bodies. Besides institutionalized religious communities and so-called world religions, this volume engages with spiritual, animistic, shamanic, subaltern, and marginalized religious communities, but also with the implicitly religious (Bailey 1983) and the re-enchanted (Maffesoli 1996) in purportedly secularized settings. We move away from the “mentalistic” and “dematerialized” (Meyer 2008) understanding of religion as a system of beliefs and ideas to which believers assented. Instead, echoing Csordas (1990), Asad (1993; 2003), de Vries (2008), Morgan (2009), and others, we understand as “religious” any kind of embodied practice that mobilizes the senses to cultivate relations between people, places, objects, and other-than-human agentive beings—including nature, spirits, ancestors, saints, deities, or energies. These embodied aesthetic practices constitute communities and shape the sensibilities of those who participate.

In short, we cannot discuss religious sounds as extrapolated from their diverse cultural contexts. Nor can we claim that there exists a common

material characteristic of a sound that humans can universally call “religious.” Rather, sounds are felt and represented as religious as a result of an attuned embodied knowledge, a *habitus* of listening (Becker 2004), and a complex aesthetic formation that we owe to our cultural environment, religious practices, and social factors such as class, caste, race, age, gender, and education. This also means that religious sound does not exist in a vacuum of power relations. Political and religious authorities legitimate what people hear (Weiner 2013; Sykes 2019). Wahhabi and Orthodox Jewish authorities have restricted the kinds of sounds that are fit to be heard, banning those that might stimulate dangerous sensual arousal. In colonial Ceylon, the British government issued a number of noise ordinances to regulate the sound of local religious processions. For each context we ought to pose questions of power: Who is allowed to play, record, reproduce or transmit religious sounds? Who is allowed to listen? And who gets to make those decisions?

Sounds materialize into spaces of unequal reception and representation, which are in turn shaped by the bodily perception of sound. Religious sounds function as salient means of community-making, intimately resonating in practitioners’ bodies, reinforcing their sense of unity and belonging. At the same time, they can awaken tensions and conflicts between minorities and dominant communities. This discussion unsettles conventional binaries—private and public, religious and secular, sacredness versus entertainment, inward and outward, material and transcendent, spiritual and technological, spatial and temporal—as they are systematically crossed in the production and reception of religious sounds.

Moreover, our focus on religion can offer a valuable contribution to the fertile and growing field of sound studies. This multidisciplinary field grew out of the work of Canadian researchers, initially concerned with the use of modern technologies and hard sciences to measure, record, preserve, and analyze sounds in relation to space. Arguably, because of its origins, the field has been overly preoccupied with the mediascapes of the global North and with audio technologies. Only very recently, scholars in this field have highlighted that “the establishment of sound studies as a fledgling discipline has largely elided the global South” (Steingo and Sykes 2019, 6). Major works in the modern study of sound have often taken for granted a white, middle-class, Western way of listening as an unmarked and normative universal parameter (Stadler 2015; Robinson 2020). As European and North American scholars, who have dominated this growing field, have a secular formation and primarily explored ostensibly non-religious contexts in so-called secular countries, sound studies literature largely depicts listening as a secular activity.

And yet, scholars of sound have recognized that understandings of aurality are linked to underlying ideologies about the self and the universe, and to theological positions about media (Sterne 2011). For example, the Western categorical division between sound and vision, the former associated with spirit and the latter pertaining to rationality, is indebted to Christian theology and to a “restatement of the longstanding spirit/letter distinction in Christian spiritualism” (Sterne 2003, 16). The “religious” emerged not only as a sub-genre or as a setting of the empirical study of sound, but as part of the process that generates our very definition of sound as a category (see Schmidt 2002). Nevertheless, as Jim Sykes (2019) observed, recent writings in sound studies have avoided religion and the secular altogether; perhaps this is because scholars lacked the specific training that would allow them to question their secularist bias and to recognize the ambiguity of “invisible” (Luckmann 1967) and “implicit” religion (Bailey 1983) in self-defined secular contexts.

Far from being a linear and chronological process from belief to non-belief, multiple modernities coexist, resulting in innumerable ways in which different cultures and societies organize their being secular, religious, or both (Rosati and Stoeckl 2012). The Eurocentrism of much sound studies scholarship has obfuscated these nuances through its secularist bias. By engaging an acoustemology of the post-secular, we propose an approach toward sound that is sensitive toward the religious, non-religious, and spiritual meanings of hearing and listening. Besides documenting and analyzing forms of sonic practices shared among people belonging to particular religious groups, we pay attention to the ways in which communities’ definitions of sound are coproduced by theological assumptions, sensitivities over purity and pollutions, anxieties and concerns about the sacred and the profane. The essays in this book collectively call for the recognition that religious sensibilities shape the ways people hear sounds, define sounds, play music, move their bodies, claim spaces and resist silencing. In doing so, this book takes a post-secular approach to discuss ontologies of sound. In the process, culturally sanctioned regulations of silences, rhythms, reverberations and melodies emerge as a fundamental modality of articulating affect and relationships between human and other-than-human beings.

Methodological deafness: The primacy of the visual

With a focus on the interface of sound and religion we hope to repair a methodological hindrance that has affected the field of religious studies

and produced its “disciplinary deafness” (Weiner 2009, 897). Texts have been given utmost priority as both objects and sources in this field for historical and cultural reasons. In modern Eurocentric epistemologies of the senses, ocularcentrism—the discourse establishing seeing as the highest sense, epistemologically as well as morally—has prevailed (Van Ede 2009, 62). This “hypertrophy of vision” (Ong 1967), went hand in hand with the “scriptist bias” of Western educational systems (Harris 1986, 46)—the tendency to assume that reliable information is written and printed. These are still dominant models in modern academia, posing a serious problem for the study of cultures that work with different epistemologies, including what Boaventura de Sousa Santos called the “epistemologies of the Global South” (2014). These paradigms produced a scholarship sanitized of sound, touch, smells, and that overlooked many forms of religious experiences and expressions.

Observation has been associated in the sciences with the collection of visual data and the quality of objectivity, sustaining claims of valid knowledge. According to R. Murray Schafer,

[in] the West, the ear has given way to the eye as the most important gatherer of environmental information. One of the most evident testaments of this change is the way in which we have come to imagine God. It was not until the Renaissance that [European Catholic Christian] God became portraiture. Previously he had been conceived as sound or vibration. (Schafer 1973)

This interpretation, reinforcing the idea that modernity and modern religious practices are visualist, having silenced and sanitized all sonic matters, is not exempted from sound criticism (Schmidt 2002; Baum 2019). Sound has always played important roles in religion and society. However, in modern Western knowledge systems writing became an “immutable and impersonal mode of discourse” tied to a “notion of objectivity” (Goody 1968, 44). Ocularcentrism and the scriptist bias of this epistemological model have been exported and imposed onto other systems of knowledge through the epistemic violence of colonialism and neoliberal regimes, suppressing, or at best inferiorizing, epistemologies of the global South that might present different sensory hierarchies (de Sousa Santos 2014). In sum, this Eurocentric epistemic paradigm has driven the ways we think about, collect, and represent knowledge, that is attributing primacy to visual, written, and printed sources at the expense of other sensory repositories of knowledge and different ways of sensing the world.

In the past decades, scholars have recovered and re-centered sound in several fields. Studying the acoustic ecology of the Kaluli people of New Guinea, Steven Feld (1982) challenged academic under-representations of sound through a revealing ethnography that established sound as the fundamental way in which people understand and relate to the environment. Sound has started to be taken seriously beyond the fields of musicology and ethnomusicology, entering debates in history and legal history (e.g., Corbin 1998; Weiner 2013), architecture (Howard and Moretti 2010; Ergin 2008), and the anthropology of religion (e.g., Hirschkind 2006; Eisenlohr 2017; 2018). Nevertheless, scholars of religion have been particularly “hard of hearing” and rarely engaged in the “multidisciplinary boom in sound studies” (Hackett 2012).

Beyond the scriptist bias: Sound as decolonizing tool

In the context of Asian religions, the scriptist bias has dominated the study of Hinduism and Buddhism (Coburn 1984), with a thriving scholarship on literary and philological works on ancient texts, anchored in the Orientalist and colonialist predilection for the written word. However, both these religious and textual traditions are hard to consider as separate from their emphasis on sound—not as just a distinct category per se, but rather as inextricably conversing with notions of cosmic vibration (*nāḍ*), oral revelation (*śruti*, literally “that which is heard”), syllabic sounds’ power and ritual efficacy (e.g., *mantra*), oral transmission and bodily techniques (e.g., yogic *āsana*). In the case of Hinduism, Guy Beck argued that even though sound is central to Hindu theology and ritual practice, this reality is missed by Western scholars who tend to emphasize visual components. His work demonstrates that this “sonic theology” (Beck 1993) constitutes an important nexus between otherwise distinct religious communities.

The essays in this volume present diverse configurations of the category of sound itself to usher a more inclusive global history of religious sounds.⁴ With a strong empirical emphasis on Asia as the ethnographic grounding of most contributions in this volume, and with the majority of the contributors being from Asia or based in Asia, this book addresses the interface of religion and sound while provincializing Europe (Chakrabarty 2000) and dislodging

4 We are inspired by Sykes and Steingo’s call for transcending the analysis of “sound in itself” and their commitment to situating sound in and from the South “not as a unified, alternative notion of what sound is but as diverse sonic ontologies, processes, and actions that cumulatively make up core components of the history of sound in global modernity” (Steingo and Sykes 2019, 4).

the global North as the central frame of reference. We do not argue that Asia is the global South, nor do we use the global South as a pretext to elide or omit a discussion of sounds in the places we generally assign to the global North due to their characteristics of socioeconomic and political power. Settings and sonic phenomena from the global North will appear, but only as some alternatives among the many possible ways in which sonic knowledge and practice are enacted, rather than central or normative. With sources and frameworks from multiple communities, rituals and traditions, we address and intentionally avoid the “Protestant bias” (Asad 1993; Pels 2008) of conventional approaches to religion and sound. Protestant presuppositions (Schopen 1991) have contributed to the ingrained perception of religion as a quiet and sober matter, a private business of silent readers of printed objects, with solemn sounds played privately, or confined inside of places of worship, as the only ensoundments of devotion toward a distant, transcendental god. This particular “sonic ideology,” which became coterminous with the making of modern secular soundscapes in the global North (see Weiner 2013; Tamimi Arab 2017), is only one among numerous coexisting and competing understandings of religious sounds and their relation to space, time, gods, and people.

Histories of sound are necessarily entangled with ideologies of race, gender, and empire. Different sensory epistemologies have been portrayed as racialized. During the 19th century, “primitive people” were associated with the “primitive senses.” The early-19th-century German scientist Lorenz Oken hierarchized the human races according to their prevalent sense organ: the white European is thus described as the “eye-man,” the “yellow Asian” as the “ear-man,” and so on, down to the “black African skin-man” at its closure (Oken 1847). This sensorial racism should be kept in mind in any discussion on how to decolonize the study of religion, and academic knowledge production in general (Nye 2018). To decolonize academia necessarily means to question this sensorial hierarchy and recognize it as culture-specific (Lorea 2022) or, as some have framed it, as Enlightenment’s “white mythology” (Jung 2002, 302). Recent works on sound, religious aesthetics and race (Stoever 2016, Crawley 2016) have exposed the problematic whiteness of sound studies and redefined aesthetics and politics of sound and race as mutually constitutive.

What is of central concern for the ethics and practices of knowledge production is to inquire how the visualist hierarchy of epistemological models, sustained by political liberalism and reiterated through Christian missionization, has created prejudices and denigrated not only other senses and other ways of knowing, but also the categories of body, woman, nature, and non-West as ultimate “others” (Jung 2002, 298). The work of scholars like Jung (2002), Classen (2005), Neufeld (2001; 2018), and Devorah (2017), among

others, have persuasively outlined how the hierarchy of the senses in modern European history is entangled with racial and gender discrimination. It is against this backdrop of a *sensist* and sexist epistemology that we propose to integrate sonic ways of knowing and to explore religious sounds beyond the global North as decolonizing tools for scholars and classrooms, toward a multimodal and multisensory future of academic knowledge production.

The majority of the essays in this volume are predominantly grounded in extensive and immersive fieldwork, giving voice to a sonic ethnography—or shall we say an *ethnophony* (Lorea 2022)—of religious communities. A sonic turn, however, does not neatly translate into a turn away from texts. Instead, it offers a sonically aware way to enrich our understanding of texts in their cultural context and performed life.⁵ Some essays combine ethnographic data with the textual study of historical sources, sacred texts, newspaper articles, and media discourses in the Asian languages that are relevant for the case being discussed (see Dean; Sarbadhikary; Henley; Graves).

All the essays in this volume integrate sound recordings and/or audio-visual samples as an inseparable part of their data and their argument. QR codes and external links to uploaded sound samples are inserted within the main text itself, rather than relegated to a footnote. This strategy is a small yet significant step to unsettle the entrenched academic hierarchy that considers text as the only—or the epistemically superior—way of disseminating knowledge. Some of the authors use a sonorous writing style embroidered with onomatopoeic words, integrating sound vignettes to offer sonic data within their prose (see Wartner-Attarzadeh and Weiss; Sarbadhikary). Overall, we hope that not only the concepts and the evidence discussed in these chapters, but also their very form, will contribute toward a future for the post-secular study of culture in which sounds are not considered as merely ancillary or ornamental, but rather part and parcel of academic knowledge production.

Asia as method, beyond the global North: Unbalanced histories of religious sounds

Several traditions rooted in Asia understand sound not only as integral to the cultivation of devotion, but also as a way of sensing and participating in the cosmos. For example, listening to recitations of the Qur'an, attending

5 Some examples of a sonically-aware textual research are Wilke and Moebus (2011) for Sanskrit textual traditions and McMurray (2015) for the Book of Mormon.

public sermons, and engaging in the sonic and kinesthetic techniques of *dhikr* are fundamental aspects of personal practice, as well as public piety for Muslim men (Qureshi 1997; Stille 2020). Tantric understandings of sound as cosmic vibration in premodern South Asia have been crucial in shaping the category of music (Williams 2019) and the development of soteriological techniques of the body that employ sound as path toward liberation (Wulff 1983). These culturally and historically contingent understandings may radically vary from the Western configuration of sound as a separate sense and from the English connotations of the term “sound” as a category to think with. Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes (2019), in their recent *Remapping Sound Studies*, attempt to diversify the voices that constitute the canon of sound studies scholars. They denounce the virtual absence of Asia and Africa in the works and in the bibliographies of sound studies, a field that has largely ignored voices and theories from the global South. There is no equivalent for the laudable *American Religious Sounds Project* (2018) in Asia or about Asia.⁶ Works on sacred music and congregational singing have experienced a resurgence, but they are predominantly set in monotheistic traditions of Western societies.⁷ The recent volume *Hearing Southeast Asia* (Porath 2019) breaks the monotony and offers a unique sound-centered approach to understand the region’s diverse socio-cultural semiotic frames of hierarchy and power.

Our collection of essays underscores the impossibility of conflating Asia with the global South. Indicators of wealth and development of a country like Singapore, where this book was born thanks to the generous funding of the Asia Research Institute, place it firmly within the global North, together with high-income East Asian countries. Within Singapore itself, however, there are several global Souths: socially, economically, or epistemologically marginalized sonic cultures and their practitioners, such as the spirit mediums discussed in Alvin Lim’s chapter and their

6 Directed by Isaac Weiner and Amy DeRogatis, the project started in 2018, funded by the Luce Foundation (see <https://religioussounds.osu.edu/>). Other initiatives intersecting religion and sound studies were equally based in North America; see “Ways of Hearing, Ways of Knowing: Listening for the Sounds of Religion” (2021), at St Louis University (<https://sounds-of-religion.com/>).

7 There is a well-established strand of literature on congregational singing as nurturing community, place and belonging (e.g., Nekola and Wagner 2017, Ingalls et al. 2018), and a Routledge series entirely dedicated to congregational music (preeminently Christian). Jeffrey Summit’s *The Lord’s Song in a Strange Land* (2000) studied the link between Jewish music and identity – spiritual and cultural – in five metropolitan Boston congregations. Monique Ingalls (2018), in *Singing the Congregation*, examines how the widespread adoption of a pop-rock-style congregational music shapes the way evangelical Christians understand worship.

undecipherable dialects. Likewise, this volume resists the neat correspondence between the “West” and the global North. While Italy is thought to be a developed “First World” country, the Roma camp dwellers and their Sufi musical practices analyzed by Marco Coppola do not find space in the modern aesthetic regimes of the global North. Studying religious sounds “beyond the global North” seeks to problematize rather than second any rigid boundary between north and south, west and “rest.” From Kuan-hsing Chen (2010) we borrowed the approach of “Asia as method”: rather than a continent, a geopolitical fact, or a tank for empirical data, Asia is a concept and a method that allows us to depart from methodological nationalism, transcend the focus on one particular post-Cold War “area” (South Asia, Southeast Asia, etc.), and emphasize instead empirical content from Asian sounds and Asian religious communities within and beyond the borders of Asian nation-states in order to mainstream a non-Eurocentric perspective. As a result, religious sounds of the global North appear in this collection as denaturalized, divested of assumptions of universality, and couched in their own localized, historicized and indigenized milieus.

Asia as method is defined by Chen as a procedure “multiply[ing] frames of reference in our subjectivity and worldview” (2010, 223) through the unique histories and cultures of Asian societies while acknowledging the West as constitutive of Asian subjectivity. Bringing together in the same volume Sufi chants of Roma minorities, mourning sounds of Shi’a women, and provocative hip movements of young Malay Muslims, we introduce analytical frameworks to understand modes of listening to, engaging with, and perceiving religious sounds from the global South that can be applied to a variety of geographical settings and socio-cultural textures.

Apart from featuring contributions about a plethora of Asian contexts and traditions, some of our contributors base their arguments on theories from Asia, while some ground their empirical data in the ethnography of subcultures, minority sound cultures and subaltern communities. The global South in this book is not found in a fixed cartography of power relationships. Rather, following Sinah Kloß, we use the global South as subversive heuristic practice. Kloß argues that the global South, when not simplistically referred to in terms of geography, has great potential to consolidate and empower “the various social actors that consider themselves to be in subaltern(ized) positionalities of global networks of power” (Kloß 2017, 1). Embracing the global South as process or practice, “new modes of knowledge production are created and learned and more balanced relationships in the global system of knowledge production are achieved” (ibid.).

Instead of considering global North and South as geographies of power, we resist the homogenizing tendency of subsuming cultural environments

under the physical rubric of the Southern or Northern hemisphere. There are global Souths throughout the high-income “First World” countries, as much as there are global Norths interspersed throughout Asia. Building upon the foundations laid by previous scholars (Chen 2010; Kloß 2017; Porath 2019; Steingo and Sykes 2019), our approach is meant to dislodge the empirical and epistemological predominance of the global North in our academic fields, and to move ideologically loaded and Eurocentric understandings of religion *and* sound to the periphery. Ideas of what is constitutive of a religious sound from the global North have been taken as neutral and universal, rather than culturally specific. By showcasing a range of sonic practices and ideologies which are radically different from Protestant-influenced secularist assumptions regarding both religion and sound, we seek to represent a more inclusive and diverse anthro-history of religious sounds.

The focus on the sonic ideologies of Islamic, Indic, Chinese, and Malay worlds in this book, ranging from Singapore to Pakistan and from southern China to the Bay of Bengal, comprises the aesthetics and the politics of a variety of cultural settings. These settings are far from being homogeneously representative of anything quintessentially “Asian.” Our emphasis on Asia is less a spatial focus on a predetermined area, and more a methodological frame that considers “Asian” as already, necessarily “global.” For example, in Rosalind Hackett’s chapter, American electronic music composers reference or integrate Tibetan Buddhist sounds. In Coppola’s chapter, Roma camps in Italy resound with Sufi music and dance that extend into transnational networks in the Balkans, Asia, and the Middle East. Female mourners in private domestic gatherings in Kolkata, in Halder’s chapter, reference the digitized sounds of Pakistani male Shi’a voices. The spaces that we acoustically engage with are not determined by their geopolitical area; rather, they are culturally constructed through religious sounds that offer meanings and values while serving to shape a sense of place and a sense of belonging to transregional networks. Following a critical/post-area studies perspective (Derichs 2014) we adopt the global South as a practice, a springboard that allows us to use Asian experiences and their inter-Asian, global and transnational histories to theorize on broader cultural phenomena. The centrality of Asian scholars and Asia-based case studies in this book is part of our larger commitment to epistemic justice and a contribution, with all its limitations, to the unfinished process of decolonization of knowledge.

This book comprises sixteen chapters organized in five sections. We have organized the chapters in a way that does not reflect area-based divisions, to give emphasis, instead, to inter-Asian and global connections, comparisons,

and resonances in content. We also avoided dividing chapters based on the “religion” that they focus on, because the sounds discussed in these contributions do not necessarily belong to a distinct institutionalized group. Rather, we arranged the content according to what sounds *do* to those who listen, the broader social processes they entail, and the questions they generate. While this means that chapters in the same section discuss similar and related topics, there remain a number of cross-cutting themes that consistently overlap and interconnect chapters across sections. These themes will be discussed and contextualized in Section III.

Section II.

Sounds of tongues and hearts: Semiotic ideologies and devotional bodies

Tongues and hearts represent here embodied metonyms of different dimensions of human sound: the semantic and logocentric aspect of speech on the one hand, and the affective qualities of the voice, often perceived as in tension, on the other. This latent tension paves the way for the analysis of glossolalic, ecstatic utterances of the Singaporean Christian pastors examined by Alvin Lim. In this and virtually all the other essays of this book, dichotomic lines separating language and affect are transgressed. Lim’s essay compares Christian sonic acts of glossolalia—or speaking in tongues, where the tongue acts as a performative gesture of the Holy Spirit—with Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese spirit mediums’ performances as gestures “of the tongue” and “in between tongues,” both requiring a translation to different media in order to be accessible to the devotee. Chinese spirit mediums’ gestures of the tongue include speaking in ancestral dialects that are incomprehensible to many devotees, and piercing the tongue to signal divine presence. In Lim’s essay these sonic acts figure as reproduced and multiplied through digital and social media that expand the temporality of the ritual and also the spatiality of the sacred.

While tongues here represent the complex relationship between body, language, and sonic mediation of divine presence, hearts are seats of remembrance and meditative unity in the yogic, Tantric, and Sufi communities discussed in the essays by Sukanya Sarbadhikary and Marco Romano Coppola. Whether they are Sanskrit mantras or esoteric letters of the Arabic alphabet, connections between sacred phonemes and syllables, loci of the human body, and stages or spheres of the cosmos, are drawn in many Asian traditions. In Coppola’s essay these connections are brought to the surface

through an immersive ethnography of Sufi *dhikr* as it is performed in a Roma camp near Florence, Italy. *Dhikr* performances cultivate presence (*ḥaḍra*) in the heart. Chanting a repetition of sacred syllables enacts a transduction of divine presence, performed together with precise movements of the breath, the body, and accompanying instruments. Phonic, onomatopoeic, pneumatic and sonic dimensions of this complex performance are aimed at establishing a biunivocal correspondence between subject and object of remembrance. Coppola interprets them as an ensoundment of the Sufi philosophical doctrine of synthesis of unity and multiplicity. On the social level, *dhikr* generates social relations through the renewal of bonds and the reaffirmation of the role of the spiritual master, or *shaykh*, while strengthening alliances with members coming from other Western and Eastern orders.

In Sarbadhikary's chapter, a thick web of connections between mantras, parts of the human body, and musical instruments emerges from a study of the conch shell, the flute, and the sacred drum (*khol*) that takes into consideration literary sources from premodern yogic and Tantric texts, as well as ethnographic sources from sonic meditators and craftsmen of musical instruments in contemporary West Bengal (India). Yogic bodies and music instruments are revealed as "mirror-echoes" of each other, with their inner cavities, flows of life-breath, and relations to primordial cosmogonic sound (*nāḍ*). These interwoven correspondences trace the profile of a "Hindu acoustemology," which Sarbadhikary defines as an essentially sonic way of experiencing the sacred in the body.

Gendering religious sounds: Agency, ritual spaces and sonic piety

Scholars interested in the history of the senses did not fail to notice that the senses in modern European history have been gendered—the eye as male and the ear as female, vision as penetrating, hearing as passively receiving, etc. (Schafer 1994, 11–12; Devorah 2017). These representations legitimize visual and written culture as the authoritative male domain, and neglect the ear, associated with the domain of rumor, gossip, fairy-tale, folklore, witchcraft, and the illegitimate knowledge of the oral feminine (see Classen 2005; Neufeld 2001; 2018). In other words, focusing on sound can uncover innovative material to discuss the broader spectrum of religion and gender (Hackett 2018b). Moreover, steering away from authoritative texts and sacred scriptures that are often confined to the male realm of authorized elite priesthood, sonic archives of religious knowledge can provide rich

repositories of evidence to uncover unwritten realms of female ritual agency, religious authority, and expertise (Weiss 2019).

Resounding in public spaces or leaking from the walls and doorways of private homes, religious sounds engender spaces of ritual authority as male, female, or other. They contribute to performing the creation of gender roles and expectations in specific communities. Whereas research on sacred music has often taken for granted male-dominated religious soundscapes as neutral and universal, this section investigates the intersections of sonic agency and authority with gender norms and power relations.

Epsita Halder compares male and female sonic practices during *Muharram* in Kolkata, where Shi'a communities are a double minority. Her chapter is based on a rich ethnography of women's mourning rituals in intimate and private spaces as sites of acoustic citizenship. These sonic practices of Islamic piety do not only entail listening through the ears but rather engulf the whole responsive body. The spatial gender segregation in her study of *Muharram* rituals is reflected in the unequal distribution and access to social media as sites where *Muharram* recitations are posted, shared, and recreated in a transnational Shi'a network. The prohibition to record female mourning voices through digital media in women-only spaces of recitation endows women with the role of gatekeepers who uphold traditional forms. Halder argues that for male mourners the public-private divide can be navigated more fluidly. While it is easier for scholars to notice the public and male-dominated aspects of *Muharram* rituals as territorializing forces making spatial claims (e.g., Werbner 1996; Eisenberg 2015), Halder suggests that private spaces of female mourning are equally powerful sites of sonic contestation and reclamation, although in subtler and oblique ways.

Rosalind Hackett explores the spiritual and religious underpinnings influencing female electronic music composers. Using both Western and Asian case studies, and scrutinizing the use of Asian religious sounds and body techniques by Western experimental composers, Hackett argues that the field of electronic music leads us into new interstitial and intersectional territories that should be grist for the mill of today's gender-aware scholars of religion, notably in the era of less institutionalized forms of religion.

Practitioners of religious sounds (*faqīrs*) in the shrine of the mystic saint Shah Latif, in Pakistan, shared sophisticated narratives on the entanglements between voice and gendered qualities with ethnomusicologist Pei-ling Huang. Huang contextualized these narratives within the practitioners' religiosity, as well as their political identity, to analyze the moral economy of a high-pitched voice that became popular for devotional singing in

the last decades. Like the *dhikr* (Urdu *zikr*) gatherings studied by Marco Romano Coppola, the context of Pei-ling Huang's essay is a ritual of sonic remembrance through techniques of the voice, the body, and the music instrument (the *danbūro*). The musician-devotees perform *hazri* at the shrine of the mystic saint, an act of worship through sitting down to sing for many hours, compared to the performance of *zikr* with both veins of the body and strings of the instrument. Similar to Sarbadhikary's yogic bodies, in this chapter the *faqīrs* and the *danbūro*'s bodies are ethically entwined. The *faqīr*'s voice is interdependent with the physical construction and the spiritual connotations of the *danbūro*'s body. Changes in the technology of the strings resulted into the change of pitch in the *faqīrs*' vocal cords. This new falsetto-sounding voice, interpreted by some as a female voice or as a mourning voice, is entangled with politics of identity, Sindhi nationalism, and the construction of a distinctive Sindhi Sufism. Voice in Huang's chapter is not merely equated with inner agency and identity; vocal pedagogy in religious contexts here navigates intersections of material and metaphorical, individual and sociopolitical.

In the final essay of this section, Talieh Wartner-Attarzadeh and Sarah Weiss compare sonic vignettes from Austria, Iran, and Greece to discuss women's religious sounds in their domestic, secluded and yet never completely "private" ritual spheres of acoustic agency. The authors suggest that church bells and the *adhan* (Islamic call for prayer) remind listeners of the patriarchy embedded in both Christianity and Islam. Such soundscapes are ubiquitous and normalized: just like the male-as-norm in linguistics, these sounds are heard as unmarked and neutral. The cultural domains of women are regulated with more severe restrictions, like the prohibition to consume and engage with secular music, and the taboo that prescribes that female mourning voices should not be heard outside of women-only domestic spaces, or it would hurt male sensibilities. Like Epsita Halder's chapter, Wartner-Attarzadeh and Weiss's sections on *rowzeh* (rituals of mourning in female-only spaces in Iran that combine rhythmic singing with movements of self-flagellation) encompass ritual and analyze *rowzeh* as opportunities for political participation, social mobility and economic independence. As multidimensional performances intersecting power, piety and pleasure, female mourning rituals in Iran can provide occasions to share burdens, forge social connections, increase women's mobility and enhance their ritual agency. More broadly, by applying gender filters to the study of soundscapes, the chapter provides nuanced cultural information to demonstrate how sounds might be gendering space and how gender ideologies can be ensounded.

Traveling sounds—Across boundaries and borderlands

Religious sounds are unlikely to be constituted by fixed repertoires in unchanged and static settings within a particular locale. As much as they are situated, emplaced, and contextually understood, religious sounds are always already traveling archives of religious and embodied knowledge, circulating within inter-Asian and transnational flows of people, items and ideas. Not only do they travel along with the mobility of migrants, refugees, nomadic communities, and diasporas, they also traverse and trespass the imagined boundaries that separate different religious identities within the same locality. Sounds hardly belong to one religion or the other, and often travel unattached from the burden of doctrine to navigate multiple sectarian boundaries. This section explores the meanings and the implications of traveling archives of religious sounds across such borders.

In the first two essays of this section, religious sounds are employed by displaced communities in order to perform their imagination of homeland (Lorea 2017), to consolidate collective memories, but also to heal from marginalization and to assert distinctive cultural identities in their new social settings. Kazi Fahmida Farzana's essay is focused on the Islamic-inflected poetics of sorrowful songs (*tarana*) of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. *Taranas* help Rohingya refugees cope with the fears and insecurity of displaced life, while affirming cultural identity and a sense of dignity. These songs work as archives of social memory, as source of pride, and as building material for resilience and resistance. *Taranas* are also a vehicle to address complaints to Allah. Building on an Islamic vocabulary to express pain and grief, these songs articulate expectations for divine justice and aspirations for social justice in this life.

Tasaw Lu discusses a festival-as-ritual in northern Taiwan where sounds and dances of displaced people from Yunannese borderlands articulate a sense of distinction, dignity and pride. The invented sounding of "exotic borderlands" is staged for the consumption of cultural tourists. Just like the Rohingya refugees discussed in Farzana's essay, the community studied by Lu has lost their territorial homeland. For this immigrant group, annual festival-as-ritual and the rituals within this festival are ways to reconnect with their ancestors, their imaginary homeland, their past and the cultural traditions that they had to leave behind. The chapter is focused on *dage*, literally "singing and dancing together," as recontextualized from the Thai-Myanmar borderlands into Taiwan. *Dage* in this chapter is not only echo of ancestral knowledge transmitted and passed down from the older generations; it is dynamic and skillfully reinvented in eclectic ways. The

Dage Parade within the annual festival performs a shift from the secular to the sacred space, also marked by a shift from recorded music to live music. When Burmese monks start chanting Theravada Buddhist verses, the soundscape is sanctioned as holy and ready for the performance of reinvented ancestral rituals dedicated to elements of nature.

Religious sounds might not belong to one or any particular institutional religion. South Asia has musical and ritual traditions that draw from both Muslim and Hindu heritage, and critique the very idea of a boundary separating Hindus and Muslims. The final essay of this section discusses the potential of religious sounds to penetrate the porosity of religious spheres that have been constructed as mutually “other.” The ensoundment of genres like Baul music, shared across the Indo-Bangladeshi border, are not specific to a particular community but rather constitute an aesthetic ground shared across people affiliated to different religious backgrounds. In Ben Krakauer’s essay, the possibility of a shared religious soundscape entails that Baul songs’ syncretic origins and melodies have the potential to act as a bulwark against the increasing influence of right-wing Hindu nationalist politics. Like in Farzana’s essay, here too sounds have the potential to build resistance. In this case Krakauer suggests that sounded repertoires of Bengali songs might constitute a threat to neocolonialist powers that would replace an inclusive Bengali grassroots tradition with imported forms of Hindu chauvinism and communal intolerance. Baul songs have an anti-sectarian message that operates not only through the semantic meaning conveyed through their song texts. Following Kaur (2016), Krakauer understands listening as an affective practice that can constitute an epistemic site where ethicality is experienced as embodied sensation rather than intellectual reasoning. Baul songs have witnessed a veritable revival, but will their anti-sectarian and egalitarian message be heard and felt in the performative contexts of revivalism? Krakauer’s essay on folk music revival, religion, and politics in West Bengal acts as a bridge to the next section on “Sonic Politics—Hearing Identity,” in which three essays collectively discuss the public interface of religious soundscapes with questions of socio-political power, authority, and identity formations.

Sonic politics—Hearing identity

Why is Jamaican dancehall music problematic but also very popular among young Malay Muslims in Singapore? Whose body is allowed to move in what way, and which music-dance complex is authorized to express a Muslim

body in a cosmopolitan Asian city? Who is authorized to hear the sounds of a sacred *gamelan* in Bali and why is it forbidden to record it? How loud is too loud for the Islamic call for prayer in Indonesia? Who is allowed to complain about religious noise, and who decides if salvific sound is a public nuisance?

As scholars in sound studies have noted, the ear, contrary to the eye, has no eyelid to shut down perception. When sound pervades public space and marks it with its religious connotations, the distinction between sacred sound, noise, art or nuisance is subjected to contested definitions. At the same time, sounds influence the ways in which bodies move, behave, and perceive a space. We may think of the different ways in which we move in a library, on a stage, in a temple, or in the kitchen. Bodily movements and perceptions hinge on religiously shaped sensibilities that influence how one should dance, listen, or avoid listening altogether to certain sounds.

The essays of this section complicate the discourse around religions, soundscapes, and politics of power by providing a detailed analysis of dancehall as ambiguously profane sound among Singaporean Muslims (Woods), ritual performance and the politics of recording in Bali (Aryandari), and the controversies surrounding amplified religious sounds in Indonesia and in the Netherlands (Henley). The essays are knitted together by the underlying threads of sonic identity politics, religious authority, and power.

Orlando Woods's chapter discusses how music and dance styles are globally circulated and consumed, and yet they are never neutral vis-à-vis the sonic ideologies of emplaced ethnoreligious communities. Young Muslims do most of their production and contestations of difference in the world of popular consumer culture. In multicultural and consumerist Singapore, dancehall—with its signature “bumper-grinding” sexually explicit choreography, is perceived as problematically profane sound, irreconcilable with sounds and kinesthetics associated with mainstream Malay Muslims. And yet it provides young Malay Muslims with ways of being different from traditional expectations and normative behaviors.

Citra Aryandari discusses recording as spatially and ritually contingent in the power dynamics of Bali, with its complex performative heritage and sonic-sacred ideologies. In the village community of Tenganan Pegringsingan annual ritual festivals featuring the celestial *gamelan* cannot be captured by any kind of audiovisual recording technology. This prohibition is believed to maintain the ritual space pure and it increases the sacrality of the ritual, as it makes it unique and unrepeatable. Aryandari compares this prohibition with her own recording practices for analytical purpose as an ethnomusicologist, and with the ubiquity of audio and video recordings in other performative contexts of Balinese society, such as the annual Bali Arts Festival. The act of

recording emerges as built upon power relationships and power distribution between insiders and outsiders, and between sacred village spaces and secular stages accessible to cultural tourism. Recording technologies are in their turn understood along pre-existing theological considerations about purity, pollution, and secrecy.

The last chapter of this section is on religious sound and social conflict. Religion is often a key element of ethnicity and other forms of collective identity in Asia, so conflicts and complaints over religious noise can be symptoms and causes of broader tensions within society. David Henley's detailed study of public sound controversies over the use of loudspeakers by Indonesian mosques includes the events which led in 2018 to the imprisonment of a non-Muslim ethnic Chinese woman who had complained about noise from the local mosque. Complaints about the volume of religious sounds, in this case the *adhan* or Islamic call to prayer, are perceived as offending the native majority and threatening its supremacy in the public sphere. The essay suggests that there is a close parallel between reformist approaches to religious sound in Indonesia and secularist approaches to Islamic "noise" in European countries. Both are manifestations of what Henley calls acoustic nativism, inspired by majoritarian identity politics.

Ensoundment and/as embodiment: Notes and noises of ritual performance

Sharing a collective experience of sound blurs boundaries between individual bodies of practitioners and creates a single collective body of devotion (Csordas 1997, 109; Eisenlohr 2018, 117). Underlying structures of sensing the world and communicating with the divine unfold through the ensoundment and/as embodiment of religious sounds. Religious sounds reflect cosmologies and ways of relating emotionally with the divine. The three essays of this concluding section, based on ethnographic and literary sources from East, South and Southeast Asia, discuss the embodiment and the ensoundment of cosmologies, liturgical frameworks, and emotional modalities of devotion. Religious sounds in this section are ensoundments and embodiments of both spiritual and scriptural worlds.

In the first essay of this section, Kenneth Dean guides the reader through the textual-historical sources that help shape conceptions of sound and ritual music in Chinese Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist traditions. Each of these diverse conceptualizations of sound find a place within polyphonic rituals in contemporary Southeast China. Masters of Ceremony ring bells

and play drums to alert the gods, temple committees invite opera troupes, brass bands, karaoke singers and disco dancers, while massive amounts of fireworks are exploded. Polyphonic rituals are characterized by a sonic overload and sonic excess where multitudes of sounds signify a multitude of liturgical frameworks at play.

Nathan Porath elaborates on his concept of ensoundment to communicate the richly phonic way in which indigenous people in Riau (Sumatra) make invisible beings audible and therefore explicit, opening a channel for them to interact with, separate from, and ultimately heal human beings. The chapter is focused on *dikei*, shamanic healing rituals that bring human and ethereal beings together for the purpose of healing and for the reconstruction of boundaries between human and ethereal dimensions. These numinous ensoundments are the acoustic icons of a presence making itself and its wishes known to humans through the vocal cords of the possessed shaman.

In the final essay of this section, Eben Graves contends that the oral-performative sphere can expand and enrich the textual archive. Like the essays by Sarbadhikary and by Dean, this chapter employs textual research (manuscripts and anthologies of Vaishnava *kīrtan* songs) and combines it with ethnography of the embodied and performed musical tradition. Beyond the written canon, embodied knowledge and orally-aurally transmitted practices of the performers include a vast repertoire of “interstitial lyrics” that are inextricably tied to the body of the singer-devotee. The physical body acts as an archive of songs and as a medium for the affective aims of lyrical performance. As interstitial lyrics progress in the song, fingers move upwards on the harmonium keyboard; a rise in melodic pitch and in emotional intensification is joined with an increase in tempo and rhythmic density of the accompanying instruments. In Alvin Lim’s case gestures of the tongue and spirit mediums’ speech needed a translation for the devotee. Performers of interstitial lyrics in Eben Graves’s case also provide acts of translation, making archaic poetic song texts accessible to the contemporary devotee, an act that Graves interprets as sonic equality. Sonic equality is the principle that all listeners are entitled to words of salvation. This equality might not be reflected in socio-political equality, but it is rooted in sound and equal participation in salvific sonic experiences.

The contributors of this volume offer us an acoustemology of the post-secular in the sense that they not only engage in fine-grained analysis of sounds shared by particular religious groups (Gaudiya Vaishnavas in Bengal, Roma Sufis in Florence, Chinese Daoists and so on) but also consider the clashes between religious, secular, and assumedly secular sonic ideologies (e.g., Henley; Wood) and the ways in which ethereal, ultramundane and

Asian sounds are mobilized by secular composers to evoke spiritually charged atmospheres (e.g., Hackett). The affordances of a post-secular approach enabled Tasaw Lu to consider a festival for Taiwanese cultural tourists as ritual, with a distinct temporality and with the use of sounds marking the festival space as sacred in particular phases of its course. Through the filter of the post-secular, our authors work on the acoustemology of communities that may not transmit genres straightforwardly labeled as “sacred music,” and nevertheless share precise ideas of which sounds in their cultural contexts are sanctioned as transgressive and prohibited, and which sounds are appropriate, spiritually powerful, or too noisy.

The authors of this volume engage with Asia not only as a region, but as a methodological choice; siting and citing Asian communities, networks and sounds, they provide data and theories that shift the position of the global North to one of the many possible points of reference. The essays of this volume demonstrate in concrete terms how Asia may feature not only as “object” of research, but as a platform to develop concepts that are useful to theorize religious sounds globally. For example, Wartner-Attarzadeh and Weiss employ women’s ritual sounds in Iran to theorize more broadly about religious sounds as instruments of power that gender particular spaces as male- or female-dominated. Henley analyzes the amplification of the call for prayer in Indonesia and then applies his findings to the context of northern Europe, using “Asian” material to reflect upon the sonic ideology of majoritarian nationalism at large. Hackett’s chapter unsettles the frontiers of Asian religious sound, discussing the global circulation of Asian religiosities and sonic techniques in the work of Western electronic music composers and their biographies.

In this sense, the chapters embody Asia as method as a postcolonial strategy to “release ourselves from an obsession with the West and Western knowledge, theories and epistemologies” and they suggest “a move toward Asia as a possible way of shifting points of reference and breaking away from the East-West binary structure” (Chen 2010, 215–6). The contributors present a range of theories of religious sounds from Asia: the “pipes of heaven” in the early Chinese sources discussed by Kenneth Dean, the primordial vibration, *nād*, that pervades the sonic cosmos and the perforated bodies of humans and instruments discussed by Sarbadhikary, and emic theories of mantras, the powerful linguistic yet asemantic syllables (called *monto* in Porath’s Indonesian context). These theories can dialogue with and enrich the fields of religion and sound studies, moving away from the latently Protestant secularism of their epistemological underpinnings. They do so through new definitions of religious sounds and a diversity of voices

that succeed in “multiplying frames of reference in our subjectivity and worldview” (Chen 2010).

Together, these chapters offer a wide array of examples for what it means to study religious sounds beyond the global North. They do so by implementing a post-secular perspective, integrating religion in and for sound studies, and offering case studies that, while grounded in distinct locales, can inspire analytical frameworks that can be abstracted and applied to other global contexts.

In the sections that follow, we contextualize the sonorous empirical data of the volume’s essays within larger debates that are pertinent to a post-secular acoustemology. With particular reference to our main foci—senses, media, and power—we discuss religious sounds in relation to the body sensorium, old and new media, and attention to power structures. These themes resonate throughout the volume and cut across its different sections.

Section III.

A multisensory and synesthetic approach to religious sounds

European modern ideologies of sound “in itself” or sound “as such”—as a separate analytical and cognitive container—have a specifically colonial and Christian heritage (Steingo and Sykes 2019, 23). Whereas several works on music and sound only address the auditory field of perception, one of the premises of this volume is that it is not possible to discuss sound as compartmentalized from other senses and from other locally relevant categories of reality, whether human or beyond human.

Throughout history, social-sacred space has been constructed through sound, smell and touch, a synesthetic *Gesamtkunstwerk* to be experienced by all senses simultaneously (Ergin 2008). While mostly visual terminology is utilized in architecture to discuss a place’s depth and height, color and light, Nina Ergin argued that an Ottoman mosque in the sixteenth century constituted a spiritual experience based on the auditory and the olfactory as much as on the visual reception of the divine. Sounds relate to tactile experiences, produce the feeling of spaces as warm or cold, friendly or unfriendly, solemn or casual. Archeoacoustical works (Pentcheva 2017) have challenged the priority accorded to ocularist and literary registers in order to direct critical attention to other ways of knowing the cosmos and mediating the divine.

Following a call for a “democracy of senses” (Bull and Back 2003) sound can be considered as interdependent and intimately connected with the broader sensorium. Instead of simplistically juxtaposing sound to vision,

the eye to the ear, the literate to the oral/aural, attention to sound necessarily requires attention to the entire body including proprioceptive and kinesthetic dimensions—ways of perceiving and moving the body in space. Following Ingold's suggestion that people not only hear sounds but "hear *in* sound," Nathan Porath's essay argues that people also see in sound and feel in sound, and therefore he analyzes sonic rituals of shamanic healing (*dikei*) as necessarily intersensorial experiences.

Our perception works in complex and fascinating ways through synesthesia—when perception in one sense triggers sensation in another one, like the warmth of a color, or the sharpness of a sound. When we hear the high-pitch buzzing sound of a mosquito flying close to our ears, for example, our skin becomes hyper-sensitive so that we are able to feel even the most delicate pressure of its legs landing on our body and we can act to protect ourselves from a bite. Different sensory frameworks of being-in-the-world have elaborated the division and the relation among various senses in culturally specific ways. Religions played a central role in developing techniques to sharpen, attune, control, master the senses and regulate their synesthetic interaction.

The materiality of sound and its capacity of being felt within the body puts it in a close relationship with touch, a "special and most personal sense" according to Schafer that is bound to meet with sound "where the lower frequencies of audible sound pass over to tactile vibrations (at about 20 hertz)" persuading him that hearing is "a way of touching at a distance" (Schafer 1994). Touch, the sense that conveys compassion, reciprocity and social obligation, conducts religious sounds through the body and the space, and changes our ways of perceiving both space and selves. Whoever has danced in a club has experienced the feeling of sensing low frequencies as vibrating inside the body. These vibrations can be felt in haptic and somatic ways by hearing-impaired persons—which is to say, sound is not only about "hearing" and calls for a more holistic, multisensory approach.

Marco Romano Coppola's essay exemplifies this approach as it describes *zikr* in Roma camps as pertaining to multiple sensory registers, encompassing sound, breathing, visual, proprioceptive, kinesthetic and imaginative spheres, while generating an all-embracing experience that he terms "hyperaesthesia." In this heightened sensory experience, participants' ordinary modality of attending to the world is altered.

The sonic performances of religious experience discussed in this volume are often accompanied by mutual touch, shaking hands, collective crying, hips moving, twirling in circles, hugging, jumping, burning incense, or reciprocally touching feet. Religious sounds do not only entail the modalities

of perception that are associated with the auditory system, but involve multiple sensory domains. This explains why Epsita Halder's chapter defines the sonic landscape of Muharram *majlises* (ritual mourning) as going beyond what one listens to with the ears, "engulfing" the responsive bodies of the participants. We may term this approach "synesthetic," following Van Ede's call for placing attention on synesthesia and on the ways in which the senses, rather than being separated in vacuum-sealed fields, blur and relate to each other in different interactive manners (2009, 67–68).

Culturally-framed attunements and habits regarding religious sounds shape the ways in which the body is supposed or not supposed to move (see Woods), which emotions are to be felt together with a certain repertoire of songs (see Graves), and which distinct conceptualizations of the body, inner and outer, emerge (Sarbadhikary). The body itself might be considered as extending into the music instrument played for worship (Huang), or as extending into components of audiovisual electronic media such as ear-phones and cameras (Lim). The playing/listening/dancing body of devotees is socialized into religious sounds that expect, forbid, or variously allow for producing movement—clapping hands, moving fingers through musical instruments, standing up versus sitting down, activating the vocal cords, or, on the other hand, restricting mobility, covering up body parts, performing stillness, and maintaining silence. According to Patrick Eisenlohr (2018, 4):

[C]ulturally attuned bodies and selves also ascribe power to sound. ... sounds contain suggestions of movement that bodies perceive. However, in order for sonic suggestions of movement to seize someone in a religious setting ..., they also must pass through bodily attunement and interact with religious and cultural values and ideologies that mediate the power of sound.

Focusing on the sonic dimensions of religion, and on the religious dimensions of sound, the chapters in this volume collectively remind us that sound does not sit in a neatly delimited sphere of sensory activity; culturally-shaped ways of organizing the senses are played out in the performance of religious sounds. At the same time, these synesthetic sensory engagements are not only reflective, but also determinative of religious community values.

Media, sonic mediations and technologies of communication

What are the implications at play when religiously charged sounds, like those of a sacred *gamelan*, get recorded, digitized, and commodified? What

happens to vernacular Shi'a mourning voices when they get recorded and circulated through social media? What is the impact on orally transmitted spiritual songs traditionally taught by a Baul guru, when these are learned through mobile phones or YouTube? Similar questions, addressed in the course of this book, remind us that a concentration on religious sounds necessarily reflects upon the new and changing relationships between religion, technicity and media.

While the phenomenality of sound is often understood as intangible, incorporeal and ephemeral (Cox 2011; Dyson 2009), religious sounds are inseparable from the materiality of their mediated and mediatic representation. Whether they are conveyed by human tongues or by a YouTube channel, religious sounds are mediated even when they are understood as ensouning the immediacy of divine presence. Different media, however, are located in different hierarchical positions of authenticity and authority. Religions often sanction, legitimize or prohibit particular forms of mediation. Discussing religious sounds as mediated by spirit mediums, social media, music instruments, or written corpora, several chapters in this volume address the theme of media, sonic mediations and technologies of communication.

Alvin Lim's chapter brings examples of Chinese spirit mediums and Charismatic preachers uploaded online and shared via social media. Their sounds mark the cyberspace as sacred, while the use of these media creates new audiences and allows devotees to participate without being physically present. Epsita Halder's chapter considers Shi'a mourning techniques performed live during *Muharram* rituals and also their recorded versions available on CD and VCD and on the internet. She argues that Shi'a women are not public actors in digital religion, because it is forbidden to record and share their mourning voices. However, their vocal techniques do not remain indifferent to the trends and styles made popular by the transnational circulation of male mourners' performances on social media. David Henley's chapter on sonic controversies around "religion out loud" (Weiner 2013) in Indonesia and in the Netherlands reveals that debates on the amplification of the call for prayer started as soon as loudspeakers became available. The introduction of this technology of amplification in Indonesian mosques was not taken for granted and it required theological debates. As late as 1977, one major Jakarta mosque still resisted using loudspeakers on the grounds that these "did not exist at the time of the prophet," reminding us that culturally informed and theologically inflected ideas regulate the use of audiovisual media and technologies (Eisenlohr 2009; Campbell 2010).

Religion and media scholars do not only refer to modern mass and social media (radio, television, online interactions etc.) but more broadly to the

older and newer technologies of communication that are inextricably part of all religious traditions as mediations between different planes of existence. Earlier works tended to juxtapose oral/aural and written/visual as two irreconcilable mediascapes pertaining to radically different worlds (Ong 1967). However, in our discussions, bodies of songs, digital soundscapes, and corpora of texts, are all part of a plethora of carriers within the broad assortment of media that religious communities have employed throughout their dynamic history. The influence is bilateral: religion shapes the media while the media change the message.

Sounds, texts and new media appear as constitutive and supportive of religious communities, together with pictorial representations, material icons, shared food items, embodied techniques and plentiful other forms (Meyer 2011). Rather than bifurcating the domains of the sounded and the textual, we establish methodological premises that do not implicitly consider the textual as superior and the sounded as pre-textual, less refined or in any way less authoritative.

At the same time, the sonic turn does not imply a turn away from texts. Several authors in this volume (particularly Sarbadhikary, Dean and Graves) demonstrate that combining textual-historical study of written sources with a sonically-aware ethnography of living religious communities can enrich and expand our understanding of those textual traditions. In Sarbadhikary's essay this mixed methodology provides a bridge between the world of texts, the world of affect, and entextualized bodies in yogic-Tantric traditions of religious sound. In Graves's essay, a focus on the embodied knowledge of *kīrtan* performers and their repertoire of lyrics can enrich the written canon while questioning its politics of selection, edition and omission of song text segments. Kenneth Dean's sophisticated knowledge of sound theories from ancient China, such as the ontogenetic material flows of sound energy in early Daoist discussions of the "pipes of heaven," allows him to draw connections with the multiple layers of ritual sound that animate religious performance in contemporary southern China.

The technicity of religion engenders anxieties and concerns relating to originality and authenticity. Scholars, however, have underlined the inseparability of religious practices from media, including the latter's technical dimensions. Hent de Vries has pointed out that "mediatization and the technology it entails form the condition of possibility for all revelation, for its revealability, so to speak. An element of technicity belongs to the realm of the 'transcendental,' and vice versa" (de Vries 2001, 28). Pei-ling Huang's essay reminds us of this nexus between technicity and religious sound. Her chapter documents a change in the vocal technique of *faqīrs*

who needed to modulate their voice to a higher pitch due to new material for *danbūro* strings that appeared in the markets in the twentieth century. Makers replaced earlier strings made from the softer zinc to the stronger steel, which allowed *faqīrs* to tighten the strings to higher pitches than before.

Whether distributed in the cheap bazar of small, privately-owned studio recordings, sold weekly at the dusty entrance of temples and shrines, played on loudspeakers at pilgrimage sites, or recorded on mobile phones of pious followers, audible media are rarely a single or coherent product, but rather a process that involves the creativity, interests and concerns of diverse parties, enclosing multiple layers of meaning. Religious sounds thus call for attention to the various forms, formats and technologies of communication that mediate and circulate them.

Sound, space, and power: Claiming and contesting the auditory landscape

With the success of Murray Schafer's (1994) concept of the *soundscape*—the totality of sounds perceived by an individual in a given spatial setting—social scientists sharpened their ears to study the cultural significance of sounding, silencing, musicking, as well as noise-making (Porcello et al. 2010). Some have criticized the term soundscape for its static and landscape-like underpinnings (Ingold 2011, 136–141), and the way it borrows from the visual domain, alienating the sensed experience of sound. Others felt uncomfortable with its holistic approach, which might conceal, or flatten, the many underlying contestations and debates that determine which sounds are allowed in the public space, and how their legal status can strengthen or threaten dominant ethics (Sykes 2015). Alain Corbin introduced the idea of the *auditory landscape* in his study of church bells in the French countryside (1998) and the way they shaped people's understandings of time and place. Several essays in this volume adopt the conceptual frameworks of soundscape and auditory landscape to reflect on place-making through sound and sonic contestations in the public sphere.

As Henley declares at the beginning of his chapter, sound “is a very public thing.” Religious sounds in multicultural cities claim territorial sovereignty and reinforce communities while establishing boundaries (Werbner 1996). Urban religious soundscapes also function as exacerbated platforms of intercultural tensions among religious and assumedly secular communities. Clashes around noise and loudness emerge as even more consequential than

doctrinal discord among majoritarian groups and their “others” (Weiner 2013; Tamimi Arab 2017; Henley, this volume).

Shared experiences of sound help migrants and displaced communities to make a place one’s own, turning a new space of dwelling into a place of belonging (Lu’s and Farzana’s chapters). Patrick Eisenlohr critically examined the scholarship on the relationship between religious soundscapes and place-making, which is often based on urban, predominantly Christian, and North Atlantic contexts. This literature has the tendency to neglect lived understandings of sound, or sonic efficacy—what sacred sound actually *does* to the people who are creating, listening to, and interpreting it. Eisenlohr balanced the lacunae inherent in the term “soundscape” by introducing the concept of *sonic atmospheres*, which highlights “somatic intermingling with sound” (2018, 13).

Such “somatic intermingling with sound” together with its intrusive potential of being collectively audible, makes religious sounds simultaneously public and private. The public performance of religious sound is an exceptional arena to interrogate power negotiations in spaces of religious diversity. Jim Sykes has focused on the ban on Tamil ritual drumming during Thaipusam procession in Singapore to discuss the ethical life of so-called secular cities (Sykes 2015). Mariam Goshadze studied the legal and inter-religious implications of the one-month “ban on drumming and noise-making” that every year is supposed to welcome visiting indigenous spirits in Ghana’s capital Accra (Goshadze 2018). The dynamics portrayed by these authors remind us that the ear offers a path into relations of power. Essays in this volume document complex social phenomena at play when religious sounds seep out of the walls of the places of worship where they are supposed to belong and flood into the streets and the public soundscape (see Henley; Wartner-Attarzadeh and Weiss). But they also contribute to the understanding of the fluid relationship between private and public space where sound is concerned, suggesting that private and restricted ritual spaces can be as political and as “territorializing” as public processions (Halder).

Religious sounds mark spaces as sacred not only in the urban context of physical space but also in the inner space of the body and in the cyberspace of the internet. For example, livestreaming and sharing sonic rituals online can turn the computer into a sacred place (Karapanagiotis 2010; Lim). Installing mantras in particular places of the subtle body, Tantric and yogic practitioners make their body divine; in the same traditions ritual music instruments are understood as reproducing the sound of the primordial mantras (Sarbadhikary’s chapter). In Porath’s chapter, the dimensions of sound and space intersect when the shaman mobilizes religious sounds to

bring together the cosmological spaces inhabited by human and by ethereal beings. Building upon and enhancing the literature on sound, space and place-making, the essays in this volume discuss the multiple ways in which religious sounds navigate public and private domains, mark places as sacred, project gendered connotations upon spaces, and claim territorial belonging.

Sonic bonding and belonging: Making community through sound

Steering away from outward soundscapes and investigating more intimate, felt dimensions of religious sounds, scholars have questioned the neutrality of laws regulating religious noise as “public nuisance,” and proposed instead a genuine concern for the respect of “sonic efficacy” (Sykes 2015, 409) as it is felt and interpreted by religious practitioners. Neglecting the emic importance accorded to sonic efficacy, religious sound cultures have been systematically erased through restrictive regulations in colonial and neocolonial contexts.

Oppressive regimes identified the power of drumming, singing, and sharing sonic experiences as a threat, due to their capacities to articulate resistance and to strengthen the sense of *communitas* (Finnegan 2003). Entire genres have been banned, considered obscene or incompatible with new standards of morality during colonial times (Banerjee 1987). Drumming among enslaved and indentured people was systematically banned in plantations (Rath 2000) throughout America and across the shores of the Indian Ocean. Christianizing and colonizing forces often coalesced to criminalize indigenous musical cultures, leading to a musical epistemicide in Africa (Chikowero 2015). These processes are by no means the monopoly of European colonialism. Sufi musical practices in central Asia have been threatened by the pressure of Wahhabi interpretations of music as un-Islamic as well as by the Russian influence of the early Soviet period (During 2005). Research on religion and sound can help to uncover forms of sonic epistemicide and musical torture (Harris 2020), while fostering an academic commitment to epistemic justice (de Sousa Santos 2014). Several essays in this volume explore religious sounds in the context of hegemonic domination and resistance. In Krakauer’s chapter the sonic epistemology of Baul songs has the potential to resist the neocolonial power of right-wing nationalist politics and of religious fundamentalism. As argued by Farzana in her chapter, songs allow Rohingya refugees to indirectly resist the authorities that they cannot openly confront. Hackett’s chapter discusses how the democratization of electronic musical technologies opened the

doors for contemporary women composers and performers to experiment and collaborate with their sounds, bodies, voices and recordings.

Emphasizing the permeability of boundaries between humans and their surroundings, including the environment and also other humans and more-than-human beings, the “felt-body” of people listening to religious sounds has an intrinsically social dimension: it is central to the ability of music to communitize (Eisenlohr 2018, 117). Acoustemology in a post-secular frame can underscore the tremendous potential of religious sounds for communities’ cohesion, resilience, and political mobilization, particularly in the context of marginalized (Farzana’s chapter), diasporic (Lu’s chapter), and minoritarian groups (Shi’a women in Halder’s chapter). At the same time, while religious sounds co-create communities, they also shape processes of exclusion and othering (Henley’s chapter).

Michel Foucault’s most famous diagram of power was the panopticon, but he also cited the confessional as an auditory technology of power. In the confessional, “the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing” (Foucault 1979, 64).⁸ Going beyond the ocularcentric dimensions of surveillance, studies on religious sound contribute to alternative understandings of manifestations of power, resistance, and dissent. For example, in Wartner-Attarzadeh and Weiss’s chapter, mourning rituals in private spaces where women cannot be seen and *overseen* by men are occasions for women to shape their political participation, economic independence, and ritual authority in indirect ways. In Lim’s chapter, the glossolalic and incomprehensible speech acts performed by the tongue of religious specialists are interpreted as acts of resistance to Singapore’s Public Order Act and language policies which established English and Mandarin as hegemonic. Speaking in tongues is an act of dissent that cannot be censored and censored by the authorities of the nation-state.

A large corpus of ethnomusicological literature on displaced and diasporic communities is focused on the community-making aspect of music, its role in shaping and consolidating a sense of belonging, a practice of identity (Mooney 2008; Poole 2004), and a performance of homeland (Lorea 2017). In Paul Gilroy’s idea of a diasporic, transnational and transoceanic black nation that is shared on several shores of the Black Atlantic, the circulation

8 Complementary to this view, I have examined how heterodox subaltern groups of practitioners employ silence (maintaining the esoteric secret) as a device of power to protect themselves from persecution and to awake a sense of authenticity and superiority of the spiritual teaching of low caste gurus (Lorea 2018).

and performance of black music builds *ties of affiliation and affect* (1993, 16). In a similar manner, in the Sikh diaspora, sounding of sacred song (*kīrtan*) in transnational spaces animates affective alliances that enable the building of local and global religious communities (Kaur 2018). In Farzana's chapter, diasporic songs of Islamic piety (*taranas*) are repositories of social memories, of lost pasts and shared visions of the future. In Lu's chapter, religious sounds eclectically borrowed from the Thai-Myanmar borderlands are reappropriated by a displaced group in Taiwan as social tools for recognition and assertion.

Works at the intersection of religion and sound can add to our understanding of communities by exploring the ways in which identities are created, sustained, or renegotiated through sound. Traditional music and dance are not simply transmitted from generation to generation; they are also contested, reinvented, or rejected by young generations. For example, young Malay Muslims in Singapore might prefer Jamaican dancehall to traditional Malay dance in their effort to challenge Islamic modernity in a multicultural, neoliberal urban space (Woods). In Aryandari's and Lu's chapters, cultural identities sustained through traditional music and dance are staged and displayed in festivals consumed by outsiders. With sonic evocations of golden pasts, mythological times and ancestral traditions, these festivals connect the community with a ritual sense of temporality. These out-of-the-ordinary rhythms, along with ensoundments of future aspirations, remind us that religious sounds have the capacity to produce the "time out of time" of a festival (Falassi 1987).

Underlying several contributions to this volume is the notion that subjectivities gather around shared sonic practices as "communities of sound" (Gopinath 2005).⁹ Actors and actions constituting the domain of religious sounds—chanting, preaching, mourning, singing, dancing, and listening—are embedded within broader social negotiations, identity formations, and power dynamics. Unsettling and expanding existing discussions on senses, media, and power, an acoustemology of the post-secular can make sense of religious sounds as productive of subjectivities and collectivities that coalesce around audible aesthetic formations. This volume demonstrates, in short, that religious sounds are not only produced by certain religious traditions, but rather produce religious communities, shaping the ethical self and sensitivity of those who participate.

9 Gayatri Gopinath (2005) discussed the idea of communities of sound in relation to British Asian bands of the 1990s and explains that it is suggestive of ways of organizing collectivity that bypass the realm of the visible, in a context where British Asians are rendered invisible or hypervisible (through racial stereotypes) within the dominant racial landscape in the UK.

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