7 Sonic Gendering of Ritual Spaces

Talieh Wartner-Attarzadeh & Sarah Weiss

Abstract
Both the sound of bells from churches and the *adhan* from mosques call their communities to gather and punctuate the day at regular intervals. They also gender public spaces as male, addressing the (mostly) men who serve as leaders in the religion, as well as the men whose lives are described in scriptures—words that were predominantly recorded by men. Drawing on comparative case studies from Asia and Europe, we argue that through performance, in particular at mourning rituals, women sonically gender spaces, temporarily as female. In claiming those spaces, women performers create opportunities for articulating commentary and opinion about their lives and their community.

Keywords: religious sound, Rowzeh, Shi'a, Iran, Graz, women's performance

Sound Vignette 1: Early evening in Surakarta, Central Java

The shadows get longer as the sun suddenly melts into the horizon in late-afternoon Surakarta, Central Java. Shaking off the heavy heat of the afternoon, the city's alleyways and streets begin once again to stir. Children call to one another; flip-flops flap; hens peck and poke desultorily; birds in cages coo and fluff their wings as their human "servants" murmur and click lovingly, offering fruit or rice for an evening snack. In this heavily populated *kampung* neighborhood—in which inside and outside merge sonically over the tops of disattached walls—the scrape of a plastic bucket against cement is followed immediately by the spatter of water coursing onto the ground as people *mandi* (or bathe), repeatedly scooping up water and dousing themselves to wash away the dust and heat of the day as they prepare for evening activities. From the direction of the local mosque, a sharp electric pop echoes through the neighborhood, louder than any other single

Lorea, Carola E., & Rosalind I.J. Hackett (eds): *Religious Sounds Beyond the Global North. Senses, Media and Power*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 2024.
DOI: 10.5117/9789463726269_CH07

sound. Amplified scuffling of book pages brushing near the microphone as they are turned and a rough, but productive, clearing of a throat signify the beginning of *sholat magrib* (*salat maghrib*), the evening prayer that marks the setting of the sun and the beginning of the next Muslim day. A lone male voice intones a few low syllables before his supple voice arches upward, sounding the *azan* (*adhan*) or call to prayer. Lasting for at least a minute, usually longer, one man's pious voice dominates the soundscape in the *kampung*. It is only one part of a euphonic but disconnected chorus of like voices. Myriad *azans* sound out, their melodic pathways intersecting and separating, one from each neighborhood mosque as far as the ear can hear, until their final tones are reached and the hum and buzz of amplified voices gradually dissipates and daily life resounds once again—the snatch of a syllable spoken to another man heard just as the microphone is switched off.[1]

Sound Vignette 2: Early evening in Graz, Austria

The whoosh of bikes whisking past, ridden by happily chatting friends ignoring the repetitive creak of a pedal and the fluttering of a fender; the surprisingly loud, slow-down hum of an electric car pausing abruptly at a zebra crossing; the roar and clatter of a skateboard and cranky honks from small trucks, sounds layering on top of one another, suddenly obliterated by an insistent, tonal, pam-pomming of emergency vehicles tearing through the rush hour traffic and dopplering into the distance. As they close for the night, café owners zip wires through the legs and arms of their outside tables and chairs, a rough scrape of metal against cobblestone as one chair resists. A quiet clanging from a church begins, first one stroke, then another at the same pitch, seemingly distant, struck on the other side of the bell. More bells of different tones join, increasing in volume, cascades of sound rolling out of the tower nearby; sonic patterns shifting and morphing, eventually inverting as bells of different sizes swing at different rates. Billowing up, filling the space, leaving no room for the sounds of the rush-hour street. Other bells in other towers in the neighborhood take up the call, each with its own series of tones and patterns, some louder than others, some voluptuously bronzy, others thinner and tinnier. Depending on the wind, the Mur valley echoes the clangs and bongs of church bells from both sides, delayed pingings sounding off the rocky edifice of Schlossberg. Gradually the bells in the

1 David Henley (2019) explores the political and cultural ramifications of the sonic competition between different mosques in Indonesia.

towers finish their rounds, a few faint bongs recall the clangorously rich cascades of a few minutes ago. The last strike, a sound halo quietly floating away, audible to those at a short distance from the tower but not those at the base. A tire squeals as a confident driver rounds the corner on the cobbled street and the roar of rush hour is once again brimming up.

Sonic gendering of public spaces

For people living in either Surakarta or Graz, the sonic experiences described above are quotidian. Such familiarity can render them almost unnoticeable. For some in each city, however, the sounds are comforting reminders of hours passed in a day, signaling a moment to stop and pray, to remember one's place in the world and one's religious duty. For others, the sounds simply signal the end of the day or they are an irritating interruption that renders conversation, in person or electronic, temporarily inaudible. Perhaps for those visiting, the sounds may be wondrously exotic and confirming of some kind of "authentic" experience not available in one's hometown. It is likely that most who hear these iconic local manifestations of ritual sonic expression do not experience them as gendering the soundscape male. But such gendering surely happens in both locations. The sound of the *azan* in Indonesia and the church bells in Austria serve to remind the listener, at least one who chooses to hear with an awareness of gender, of the patriarchy embedded in both Islam and Christianity. The male authority that structures each religion and organizes the practice of worship down to the daily reminders to bend and pray and think of God are all implied in those everyday sounds, sounds that are also heard simply as a part of a particular local soundscape.

That we do not regularly think about the ways in which the Surakartan *azan* and the bells of Graz gender the soundscape is surely due, in part, to the fact that each happens multiple times in a day, seven days a week with a few extra soundings added on specific days of worship. But our lack of attention to them has also to do with the "male-as-norm" phenomenon. Although this idea arose originally in linguistics, feminist scholars have found the concept to be a useful analogy for understanding the structuring of society in various contexts around the world.[2] We find a similar pattern

2 Many feminist scholars have analyzed this tendency including de Beauvoir (1949); Irigaray (1985); Lerner (1986); Spender (1998); Fletcher (2013), among others. We should also note that histories of the actions of men are often told as the history of a place or time in general, and

when it comes to the gendering of soundscapes: those that are, in fact, gendered male are perceived more usually as neutral or unmarked and those that are female tend to be marked. In addition to creating and marking the space in which they are heard, the sounds of religious activities temporarily gender public spaces in ways that can both confirm and contest public norms, simply by their sounding. In this essay we explore the ways in which gender is implicated and contested in sonic constructions of sacred-spatial creations of place, configurations that are always mediated by and enmeshed with power structures of the locale. One brief example of a temporarily "gendered as female" public soundscape—from mid-twentieth-century, rural Greece—will suffice to set the scene for our primary case study located in Khorramshahr, southern Iran. Our study of the gendering of public spaces as female in Iran is based on a ritual called *rowzeh*. *Rowzeh* is a women's gathering in which professional female lamenters, known as *mollāyeh*, guide their female co-participants through a series of song texts commemorating the death of Imam Husayn[3], the martyr whose death is integral to the identity of Shi'a Muslims in the greater Islamic world. In each of the following contexts, the gendering of the spaces as female differentiates them from the unmarked, male-as-norm, quotidian soundscape. Our essay contributes to the foregrounding of understudied connections between bodies, media, and sounds in the private and public life of religions beyond the global North.

Sound Vignette 3: Lamentation in Potamia, Greece (mid-twentieth century)

A dry raspy wind soughs through the dry leaves, more audible than the tentative downward-arcing melodies; dispersed voices in heterophonic, out-of-time togetherness, finding one another on the same pitch at the bottom of each arc. Growing stronger, more women join the lament as they recognize various texts. Sniffs, gentle throat clearings, the occasional sob escapes to punctuate the murmuring chorus. One voice utters a few words, and a sigh escapes from somewhere deep within her torso, rasping through her throat. Beginning again, with resignation, she lines out the text and others catch the melody, expertly tracking her melismas. Wept

interpreted as universal. Hence the historical constructions of maleness and masculinity at particular places and times remain nearly invisible (Louie 2002, 5).

3 Imam Ḥossein ibn 'Ali (transliterated in this book as Husayn,), was the third Imam in Shi'a Islam. Husayn was killed by the troops of the second Umayyad Caliph, Yazid ibn Mu'āwiya at the desert of Karbala in 680 CE. Shi'a Muslims around the world believe that Husayn, as the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, should have become the next caliph. His death can be considered as the culmination of historical events in the world of Shi'a Islam.

statements dissolve into sobs, quickly smothered by comforting shushings and admonitions to stay calm and not lose control. Unaware, small birds chirp and argue with one another in a nearby bush, cheerful punctuations interrupting the otherwise mournful soundscape; the clear, high voice of a lone male priest resonates mellifluously in the distance, detached.[4]

In the rural Greek funerals of Potamia in the mid-1970s,[5] the professional lamenters wail and weep on behalf of others, sonically leading the bereaved, shifting the burden of appropriately lamenting the dead to themselves. Whether quiet murmuring as described above or loud and heartrending, their utterances are always controlled, even while those on whose behalf they mourn may be weeping uncontrollably. The lamenters may choose to speak directly to the dead, asking them, through poetry, to return or they may intone the voices of the dead, singing poetic lines through which the dead indicate that they cannot return, they must continue moving away from their loved ones, while the lamenters decry the cruel world that has brought such sorrow. These "conversations" actively gender the spaces in which lamentation can be heard as temporarily female.

> Public lamentation—both the singing of the sound and the hearing it articulated by others—helps to separate the grief from the singers and listeners as well as the other mourners. Sung out into the world, grief is externalized. It is moved beyond those who suffer; the emotional burden is shifted, however momentarily, to the shoulders of the community members who can hear the lament. (Weiss 2019, 34)

The sound of embodied grief performed out loud by a group cannot be unheard or ignored. It dominates a soundscape when present, as in the description above.[6] As suggested by the insistence that grievers remain in control, public expressions of grief always contain the possibility of spinning out of control, disrupting ordered society, represented in our Sound Vignette 3 by the lonely, unacknowledged chanting of the male priest. In her analysis of lamentation in ancient Greece, Gail Holst-Warhaft notes that in Aeschylus's tragedy *The Persians*, women lament what, in their view, was the unnecessary death of their husbands, lovers, and sons. They close the

4 This description is based on recordings made by Loring Danforth in the mid-1970s in Potamia, Greece. He shared with us his recordings and gave us permission to describe them.

5 As documented by Loring Danforth (1982) and reanalyzed by Weiss (2019, 27–45).

6 See Alexiou (1974) and Holst-Warhaft (1992) for a discussion of the ways in which the female soundscape of lamentation in Greece is considered endangering to society.

last scene of the play with their defiant lamentation, sharply critiquing the hubris of the Persian king (Holst-Warhaft 1992, 129, 133, 161). Lamentation was, and remains, a potent sonic tool for women in Greece.

Sound Vignette 4: Muḥarram rowzeh in Khorramshahr, Iran (*early twenty-first century*)

The pedestrian path sizzles from the heat of the afternoon in the crowded city center of Khorramshahr. In a few hours at sunset, the cooler streets will be full of women, men, and children who gather to mourn Husayn's death together. Suddenly, the pathway is blocked by numerous women flocking around the doorway of a house, their black *chador*s rustling and flapping gently as they walk. The wall next to the door is festooned with a large black flag on the wall announcing that a *rowzeh* is currently being hosted. On the other side of the street, men prepare their market stands for the flood of people that will course through the street later during those evening rituals of Muḥarram. While preparing, the men slurp watermelon and spit the seeds. They pop the tops off soft-drink bottles and play the songs of Koweitipour[7] through their huge speakers, very loudly. The door of the house gapes open momentarily. Only women are allowed to enter the house. No man even looks inside, though they persistently pass by. Despite the rush of hot blood in the ears of those enduring the high temperatures on the street, when the door opens, the voice of a woman flows out into the street, weeping and at the same time singing a sad song. Other women can be heard crying and saying loudly *yā imamā*! (oh, our Imam!), *yā Ḥosseinā*! (oh, our Husayn!), as the first voice asks them to join in and sing along with her, all accompanied by muffled, rhythmic thumpings. This sonic glimpse is heard for a few seconds each time the door is opened for additional guests. The passionate crying is an important characteristic of the mourning rituals of southern Iranian women, an important feature to be distinguished from men's rituals. Religious singing, in combination with flagellations, is of course an integral part of men's rituals, but a large part of their ceremonies consists of readings or sermons that exclude crying.

Everyone near the doorway, the men setting up their stands across the street as well as the women entering the house, can hear those muffled sounds of sung commemorative mourning and collective grief. Whereas the public streets in Iran are always gendered male, the sounds that waft out as the door is opened to allow more female guests to enter instantly remind

7 Gholam-Ali Koweitipour is a famous religious singer (Persian: *maddāh*) from Khorramshahr.

the outside world of the "hidden"—yet well known—women's activities that are taking place inside.

Inside the house, it is a comfortable temperature, thanks to air conditioning. Ritual hosts offer the women inside a delicious cold lemonade. Not everyone cries out loud. Some pray quietly for their loved ones who have passed away. Young teenagers show each other something on their glowing cellphones, giggling. Older women look for young, beautiful and devout women who would be suitable marriage candidates for their sons. The woman heard to be crying from outside is not crying, in that she does not actually weep with tears. She is the *mollāyeh* and leader of this ritual. She summons a crying voice from deep within her chest, in order to affect her audience emotionally. Her usually petite, conversational voice now sounds astonishingly rough, almost as if a man were singing. This deep vocal timbre is highly desired by her audience. It ensounds the pain, suffering, and torture that Imam Husayn and his companions experienced, maybe even the pain that she and her audience have experienced over a lifetime.

Iranian women and rowzeh in religious and historical context

In many West Asian countries where Islam is the official religion of the state, the cultural activities of women often encounter severe restrictions in both their religious and secular activities. Those restrictions manifest in several ways and can affect the cultural lives of women from all social classes, albeit differently. In what follows, we examine the sonic aspects of the religious and cultural practice of *rowzeh*, a private event in which Iranian women must negotiate the social limitations regarding gathering outside of family groups and musical practices even within a religious context.

Islamic law in Iran, which has been written, developed, interpreted, and performed by men, has caused not only the marginalization of women's role in general, it has resulted in the near-absolute separation of their religious and secular musical activities. Although many Iranian women from the upper or upper-middle classes have access to the practice and consumption of secular music, for a significant number of women from the lower, middle, or even religious upper classes access to this kind of music is prohibited. It should be noted that many of these limitations are recognized, and even imposed, by religious women themselves who consider the consumption of music or playing musical instruments as a sin, and a form of impureness. Suzanne Cusick notes that "history and culture shape the gender ideology of the present" (Cusick 1999, 485). Perhaps this might explain why pious,

Iranian women continue to constrict the boundaries of their own freedom in society as they raise new generations of children.

It should be mentioned that, generally, religious people in Iran have no problem with practicing music as long as the music has no "dangerous" effects. John Baily refers to these "dangerous" effects as "negative powers." These negative powers can lead the people to neglect their prayers at the proper time and be over-involved in music in ways that would compromise their wider duties as good Muslims (Baily 1988, 146). In contradiction to restrictions surrounding the performance and appreciation of secular music, perspectives and rules about women's religious vocal practices have developed differently in contemporary Iran. Singing is especially appreciated when women perform mourning chants for the holy personalities of Islam, as long as these activities take place in a domestic and women-only space. This "loophole" has allowed for the development and persistence of a wide variety of women's religious rituals full of sonic expression in Iran and in many other Islamic countries such as Iraq, Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia. While performing an Islamic practice and performing their religious duties, the obstacles to gathering and "sounding together" that women would normally be required to navigate are less stringent. In what follows we argue that the ritual of *rowzeh* provides women unprecedented opportunities for political participation in subtle ways, not only by fulfilling their religious duties, but also through increasing their social mobility and economic independence.

No matter what age, religion, political opinion, or education these women have, there are two shared experiences of their religious gatherings. First, they have to deal with the restrictions on women and women's movement through space as determined by men in their male-dominated society. Second, they create and exist in a sonic environment that is heard only by women. In this kind of space, women can enjoy comparatively more freedom than when they are in public, socialize with other women, and engage in their religious activities in a "safe" manner[8].

Rowzeh rituals take place on days commemorating the deaths of the holy personalities of Islam and, in particular, every day during the Arabic sacred mourning month of Muḥarram, during which the martyrdom of Imam Husayn is commemorated. There is no sonic sign such as the prayer call *adhan* or church bells to inform women about the upcoming *rowzeh* or the correct gathering time. Everything related to attending a *rowzeh* proceeds more subtly. Perhaps a phone call between friends or a coincidental encounter between women in the city at the daily market—these are the

8 In and around the place of performance there should be no men (*nāmaḥram*).

means through which women become aware of the news and exact dates/time of the *rowzeh* (and other women-only) rituals. Simply due to their lived experiences, almost all women in Khorramshahr who belong to the women's religious network know where and when a *rowzeh* will take place. The *rowzeh* participants belong to diverse social classes. They live in Khorramshahr or in small villages near the city. Attending a single *rowzeh* are women without any standardized education, women with some years of basic schooling, and some with high-school diplomas. Women with university or professional degrees less frequently attend *rowzeh* ceremonies but such women cannot be excluded from the list. Despite this educational diversity, the majority of the *rowzeh* participants in Khorramshahr consist of middle-aged women from the middle class.

A Muḥarram *rowzeh* can be hosted by ritual organizers at any time during the day from early morning through early evening. Once the organizers have secured the attendance of one or more *mollāyeh*, the news about the time and location begins to circulate. Participating women make an appointment with their acquaintances to attend the *rowzeh* together. Once they meet up at the first *rowzeh* of their day, they often continue on with their friends visiting other *rowzeh* taking place on the same day. Traveling together, they will likely join different groups of women at each event. Due to the strict regulations governing women's activities outside their homes in Iran, religious events such as *rowzeh* are considered to be an optimal opportunity for women to communicate with one another, simultaneously expanding the reach of their social circles and their familiarity with the city, staying out long past the hour when they would normally return home.[9] Pious women of Khorramshahr organize the *rowzeh* as a free, private event for all the women from the city.

The mourning rituals of *rowzeh* are sorrowful, combining rhythmic singing, often accompanied by self-flagellation—on faces, chests, or poem books—and sad songs. Each *rowzeh* consists of eight parts that include, variously, narration, metrical, and non-metrical singing. Many religious Iranians associate the flagellation with purifying body and soul. They believe that having pain in their own body and experiencing a sense of suffering similar to that which Husayn endured can reward them (*ṯawāb*) for their future life, especially for the Last Judgment (*ruz-e ġiyāmat*). *Rowzehs* are performed in a dark space called *ḥosseiniyeh,* a space that is usually a large

9 Historically, women who participate and perform in these lamentation rituals have been referred to in the literature as wailers or (professional) mourners (Arabic: *nawāiḥ*, sg *nāiḥa*) (Hickmann 1970, 45).

living room in the home of the host, temporarily dedicated to Imam Husayn, hence the label *ḥosseiniyeh*. The walls of a *ḥosseiniyeh* are covered with black cloth. Ritual attendees are supposed to wear black clothes as well, for black is the color of mourning. Although it is forbidden for men to join the ritual, women still need to cover their hair. Some believe that the soul of the deceased Imam is present at the ritual and so they must cover their heads as a form of modesty. Before the arrival of ritual attendants, ritual hosts make sure the *ḥosseiniyeh* is clean and orderly. The air should be fragrant with rose water. There should be enough drinks and snacks, because before and after each ritual women consume food together. The hosts are supposed to invite one or more *mollāyeh*. Many ritual attendants choose to participate in a particular *rowzeh* because their favorite *mollāyeh* will officiate. Their attitudes towards a *mollāyeh* can resemble audience excitement on seeing, or maybe even meeting, a famous conductor in an after-show party at a classical music concert. The *mollāyeh* performs as the primary vocal leader of the ritual, guiding and structuring the whole ceremony through the various stages of the ritual, along with giving instructions to the participants on how to behave during the ceremony. As soon as the *mollāyeh* enters a *rowzeh*, all women are supposed to follow her orders.

Even though *rowzehs* are held in an enclosed space, and the *ḥosseiniyeh* is usually deep inside the host's house, women try to be careful so that no man might hear their voices and the sounds of their rhythmic striking of books and chests from outside. That said, sounds generated from the *rowzeh* can be heard beyond those safe female boundaries. As described in the sound vignette above, due to the acoustics of Khorramshahri houses, it is possible to hear a blurred and muffled version of the chanting, not only when the door to the house is opened but also through the walls, depending on the size of the house. Given the number of women singing, the identification of particular voices is next to impossible. Nevertheless, for many men, it is a near "tragedy" to hear those women's mourning sounds, even though they are filled with religious commitment. One ritual host recounted to Wartner-Attarzadeh that her father once brought her a complaint from the men in the neighborhood. "They kindly said that people can hear the voice of the *mollāyeh* from outside and that it is a sin to hear that voice. It is nice when women show their honor to the Imam Husayn. However, it must be considered more carefully that their voices should not be heard from outside."[10]

In response to the men's objections about accidentally hearing the sounds of women engaging in their *rowzeh*, ritual hosts defend themselves by

10 Ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh, personal communication, September 2019.

explaining that women have a right, even a duty, to practice the ritual and commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. In the end, men are generally satisfied with the arguments of the hosts. Nevertheless, this sanctioned religious activity is understood by some men as a mere time-wasting pastime for housewives who love to gossip. During her research, Wartner-Attarzadeh was informed by one male interlocutor that, "It is not worthy to research *rowzeh*. It's just a scene for the gossipers who want to dance and have fun."[11] Those who hold these kinds of opinions are even more outraged when they stumble accidentally into the temporarily gendered-as-female soundscape caused by the seepage of the sound outside and around the doorway to the home in which a *rowzeh* is occurring. The fact that the sound from these so-called private rituals can often be heard outside the houses in which they are hosted suggests that we must also understand *rowzeh* to be public events.

Why rowzeh?

Why is this lamentation ritual so popular in Khorramshahr, especially considering the time and money spent to host them, and the problems a host and her guests may encounter moving to and from the events? Our ethnography has revealed that many women associate their life events, their own sad experiences and personal problems with the poems and the sounding of the sadness in the *rowzeh*.[12] Losing a father, brother, or son are important reasons why women cry in the ritual and why some *mollāyeh* perform the ritual. "I have a deep wound in my soul, in the deepest of my heart. I will never forget that as if it was yesterday. I will never forgive them" (*Mollāyeh* Māmān Marziyeh, personal communication, September 2019). These are the words of a *mollāyeh*, whose young son died some years ago in a hospital because of the carelessness of the hospital's staff. "They thought he was dead. But he was alive when they put him in the morgue cooler, said the pathologist when it was too late. My son was frozen to death. He became a martyr," she explained. She mourns the death of her son and does self-flagellation by beating her breasts or forehead when she hears the name of Husayn and when she herself performs the *rowzeh*.

11 Anonymous, personal communication, June 2015. It should be noted that in Persian one sarcastic term for dancing in general refers to the body movements involved in ritualized self-flagellation.

12 See research from Isabelle Clark-Decès (2005) for a discussion of a similar elision of mourning agendas among Tamil Dalits.

The *mollāyeh* are skillful in using dynamic and timbral changes when they recite the sorrowful religious chants. These chants and the whole experience of collective mourning provide moments for the processing and commemoration of private tragedies through the contemplation of the tragedy and grief of Husayn's death. The sorrows endured by women in their own lives are both sharpened and relieved through these collective acts.

Based on her professional experiences, a *mollāyeh* knows already which words will touch her audience most dramatically. She emphasizes words such as children, women, loneliness, tent, night, tears, etc. by sustaining the syllables, applying different ornaments, or changing her vocal register moving most often into higher tones—a sonic range that is associated with raised emotions and also the keening of people in mourning. All of this is enhanced by the fact that *mollāyeh* prefer to use deep, chest-voice singing in their ritual performances, believing that this sound quality comforts the hearts of their audience. One can find the same kind of women's lamentation in funerals of the region as well. However, the question of how *mollāyeh* achieve a vocal timbre that sounds so deep and masculine cannot be answered at this stage of research. It is a fact that amateur *mollāyeh* practice for many years to produce this timbre from their professional *mollāyeh* teachers.[13]

In addition to the relief that comes from sharing the burden of tragedy, many women admit that *rowzeh* provide opportunities for them to meet other women and to communicate with them. In general, Islamic rituals are considered to be meeting places where women can connect through a common effort or in this case through the preparation for, and listening to or presenting, the performance. Azam Torab writes:

> The women meet … not only because of the social support and freedom of expression these settings provide in the absence of men, but also because of the immense enjoyment they derive from a sense of self-esteem, competency and moral and social worth conferred by attendance at the gatherings and by becoming more pious. (Torab 1996, 236)

Attending a *rowzeh* has benefits for its participants. It helps to promote their mental health and social life as well as enhancing their quality of life. Participation in *rowzeh* allows for the cultivation of respect for one another as hosts and donors. Participants get the opportunity to meet famous

13 Wartner-Attarzadeh is currently doing research on the aesthetics and training of singing as a *mollāyeh*.

performers. The host gains prestige by procuring renowned performers for her event. Many women donate food and other materials to help with preparations for the *rowzeh*, while others bring donations of money. These donations are understood to be for religious purposes as they help ensure that the event takes place successfully. Contributing to such events reveals the generosity and piousness as well as the relative financial wealth of the women who donate. Donation is a highly respected act among many pious Iranians. Through these acts, women create (consciously or unconsciously) an advantageous position for themselves in their community. Hosting and contributing to *rowzeh* performances reinforces ties of solidarity, respectful obligation, and reciprocity, among the women of the community.

Far more than a simple ritual commemorating the martyrs of Shi'a Islam, a *rowzeh* is a place where social, economic, and hidden political connections and power are formed and demonstrated. The men whose wives host these events also gain in less explicit ways by "allowing" the events to take place under their roofs. The husbands of participants who find themselves in the same room with famous *mollāyeh* performers will retell those stories to their friends, even if they comment on the impropriety of hearing women's voices sounding out through the doorways. The families of *mollāyeh* benefit financially from the fees they receive for performing and earn higher status thanks to the pious performers within their communities. As irritated as some men may be when they accidentally walk into those temporarily gendered-as-female public soundscapes, the muffled voices of women floating near the doorways and walls of the hosts' houses signal much more than a breach of propriety.

Conclusion

The everyday gendering as male of the public spaces in our first two sound vignettes—church bells in Graz and the call to prayer in Surakarta—is unmarked, and often unnoticed. The gendering of the public space as female through public lamentation in Potamia or near a house hosting a *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr, on the other hand, is marked, noticed and, if not visible, decidedly audible in the public soundscape. We argue that thinking about gender in the context of the analysis of soundscapes provides nuanced cultural information that might otherwise remain unheard and unknown. For instance, mourning in Greece can signal resistance to societal norms and possibilities for disorder. Mourning in Iran can signal power, piousness, and pleasures; it provides an occasion to share burdens, forge social

connections, and enhance women's mobility and ritual agency. If women are not usually as "audible" in public soundscapes as men, they are often the public voices of collective mourning. Whether this is because women allow themselves to be so or are constructed as more emotional is not a question we can answer with the ethnographic data available. Nevertheless, the raw, unrestrained sounds of collective female mourning cut deep into the everyday sounds of a community, envoicing women and conveying much more than grief.

References

Alexiou, Margaret. 1974. *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baily, John. 1988. *Music of Afghanistan: Professional Musicians in the City of Herat*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1949 (trans. 2011). *The Second Sex*, translated by Constance Borde. New York, NY: Vintage

Clark-Decès, Isabelle. 2005. *No One Cries for the Dead: Tamil Dirges, Rowdy Songs, and Graveyard Petitions*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Cusick, Suzanne. 1999. "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism." In *Rethinking Music,* edited by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everest*,* 471–98. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Danforth, Loring. 1982. *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece.* Photography by Alexander Tsiaras. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fletcher, Jeannine Hill. 2013. *Motherhood as Metaphor: Engendering Interreligious Dialogue*. Bordering Religions: Concepts, Conflicts, and Conversations series. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Henley, David. 2019. "Sound Wars: Piety, Civility, and the Battle for Indonesian Ears." *Hearing Southeast Asia: Sounds of Hierarchy and Power in Context*, edited by Nathan Porath, 228–53. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Hickmann, Hans. 1970. "Die Musik des Arabisch-Islamischen Bereichs." In *Handbuch der Orientalistik. 1. Abteilung: Der Nahe und der Mittlere Osten. Ergänzungsband 4: Orientalische Musik*, edited by Bertold Spuler, 1–134. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Holst-Warhaft, Gail. 1992. *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*. London: Routledge.

Irigaray 1985 [1974]. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian Gill. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Lerner, Gerda. 1986. *The Creation of Patriarchy.* Oxford and London: Oxford University Press.

Louie, Kam. 2002. *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spender, Dale. 1998. *Man Made Language*. London: Pandora.

Torab, Azam. 1996. "Piety as Gendered Agency: A Study of *Jalaseh* Ritual Discourse in an Urban Neighbourhood in Iran." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2(2): 235–52.

About the authors

Talieh Wartner-Attarzadeh is a PhD candidate based in the Institute for Ethnomusicology at the University for Music and Performing Arts, Graz, Austria. In her dissertation she deals with post-revolutionary Iranian puppets and how they resist government-based restrictions against music and dance performances on the Iranian national television.

Sarah Weiss, University Professor, Ethnomusicology, Kunstuniversität Graz, specializes in Southeast Asia. Her work examines gender, ritual, postcoloniality, and hybridity in comparative contexts. Her books include: *Ritual Soundings: Women Performers in World Religions* (2019) and *Listening to an Earlier Java: Aesthetics, Gender and the Music of Wayang in Central Java* (2007).