Salam Godzilla

Unsounding the 1960 Agadir Earthquake

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Introduction

On February 29th 1960 at 23:41, the port city of Agadir in the South-West region of Morocco was struck by a massive earthquake, reaching an intensity of 5.7 on the Richter scale. The seism killed an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 people of a population of 48,000 and destroyed about 70% of the city buildings.[1] Orchestrated by King Mohamed V and his son, Prince Moulay Hassan, the reconstruction of the city went on swiftly, inaugurating a new era of modern postwar urbanism. In his recent article on the reconstruction process, the historian Daniel Williford argues that the countless reports produced by scientific experts and bureaucrats following the earthquake led to a re-writing of Agadir as a »vulnerable space«.[2] The experts, he writes, fashioned a notion of »seismic risk« in order to interpret the earthquake and damages through a combination of »human, natural and technological« factors.[3] This ultimately had significant consequences for the Agadir population, resulting in mass-expropriations of inhabitants, environmental pollution and a dramatical growth of the city's slums over the two decades following the earthquake.[4] With its high number of victims and considerable destruction, the 1960 earthquake remains as a traumatic event in the memory of the Agadir population even today, and is commemorated every year in an official ceremony.

In this chapter, I return to the 1960 Agadir earthquake in order to study the multiple sonic dimensions of this event and its aftermaths, as part of my research project on sound and listening histories in Morocco. Infrasonic seismic waves are indeed relevant to my study, as they operate in a range covering the low end of audible frequencies

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1 Williford 2017.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.

(about 20 hertz) and the very low oscillations of the whole Earth,[5] with the potential to equally affect bodies and environments. In search for local sources about the earthquake, I was able to identify an aural poem composed in 1960 by Ibn Ighil, a well-known minstrel-poet (*anddam*), living in the south of Agadir. Tape-recorded by Kenneth L. Brown in 1970, Ibn Ighil's »*Tale of Agadir*«[6] describes the 1960 Agadir earthquake and searches for its meaning. Based on a commented transcript and English translation of the poem by Brown & Lakhsassi (1980), I approach it here as a locally situated account of the disaster, allowing for comparison with the official seismic reports described in Williford's article. For both parts, I argue, facing the earthquake and its consequences had a significant sonic dimension, in particular in terms of »who« and »what« was heard in order to deliver their respective interpretation of the event. I focus on the sound and listening concepts that can be identified in each case with a particular attention to social and material aspects.

Numerous academic contributions about histories of (Western) modern listening have emerged over the past 20 years, which are useful for analysing the sonic aspects relevant to the scientific work of the international experts in Agadir. This is far less the case for locally situated sonic knowledges in North-Africa, hence my interest in studying Ibn Ighil's poem. Indeed, most existing contributions on Berber-Amazigh sound worlds address performative, poetic-linguistic and formal aspects of music practices, often in rural contexts. Although some authors have commented on the ›intrusion‹ of modernity in Berber poetry with elements such as the car, the airplane, electricity, visas and immigration,[7] I haven't been able to identify contributions on modern Berber »listening histories« ,[8] even less on listening outside of musical contexts. Material, technological and especially environmental listening remains thus a largely unexplored area of *North-African* (sound and media) *Studies*, which makes the 1960 Agadir earthquake particularly relevant to my own research.

Acoustemology, sonic virtuality and unsound

Earthquakes are usually referred to as environmental phenomena, or rather as ›natural disasters‹. Williford brilliantly shows in his article that such events are better to be approached as a complex combination of natural, social and technological factors,

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5　The dominant frequency range of small to moderate earthquakes extends in waves from about 1 to 0.1 hertz, while the lowest waves can reach a period of 54 minutes (Bolt 2020, https://www.britannica.com/science/earthquake-geology/Properties-of-seismic-waves)

6　Brown / Lakhsassi 1980.

7　Cf. Peyron 2010.

8　Cf. Feld 2017.

which need to be historicised in order to reveal their political dimensions.[9] Ibn Ighil responded instead to the earthquake with an analogical *re-creation* of its destructive and affective impact, as I will argue, so that a »reconfiguration process«[10] ultimately became possible for the listeners. The 1960 Agadir earthquake provides thus a case of a modern, techno-environmental crisis from which to examine how sound and listening practices participated in the ways realities were constructed from very distinct positions. Feld's notion of »acoustemology« constitutes an important reference when it is about describing sound worlds and experiences emerging from »embodied« and »relational« knowledge practices.[11] I refer to this notion in order to situate Ibn Ighil's poem in a local field of sonic knowledge, able to generate its own instance of *sonic materiality.* Although materiality in Ibn Ighil's poem can perhaps be best described in *virtual* terms, its effects are no less *real* than those produced by Western scientific discourses on sound, as I will argue.

With the notion of »risk« – and the associated techniques of statistical prediction – modern science itself has long entered the field of virtuality, as Williford importantly reminds us in his analysis of the experts' and bureaucrats' practices that followed the Agadir earthquake. I suggest that this equally applies to the field of technological sound and listening. In order to address that which cannot yet be heard – future earthquakes in this case – I refer to Steve Goodman's notion of »unsound«.[12] As another name for the »not yet audible« and »future sound«,[13] Goodman coins the term *unsound* in order to denote the potential of »sonic virtuality, the nexus of imperceptible vibration«.[14] Starting from »the peripheries of human audition, of infrasound and ultrasound, both of which modulate the affective sensorium in ways we still do not fully comprehend«,[15] the unsound becomes a way to question the limits of sound itself. This importantly comes with a deconstruction of the sharp distinction between the physical, the phenomenological and the affective dimensions of sound. The relation between these terms is re-conceptualised as a *continuum* between *vibration* (sonic materialism) and *vibe* (ambience, mood and affect).[16] In contrast to the scientific definition of sound as a phenomenon of material vibration within the range of human audition (approximately 20-20,000 Hz), which can be technically measured, recorded, reproduced and commodified, the unsound also includes the inaudible, virtual and simply »possible sound worlds«.[17] As such, it is open to alternative, often

9 Cf. Williford 2017.
10 Cf. Moutu 2007.
11 Cf. Feld 2017.
12 Cf. Goodman 2010.
13 Ibid., 192.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Cf. ibid.
17 Cf. Voegelin 2014.

marginalised sound histories and acoustemologies. It can help to bring them into conversation with existing scientific discourses, while at the same time highlighting the situatedness and particular ideological agenda of every discourse about sound and matter in general.

Salam Godzilla

Next to Williford's article and Ibn Ighil's poem on the 1960 Agadir earthquake, my study equally draws on my own artistic-ethnographic research in Agadir. Conducted in 2017 and 2018, the research led to the realisation of an audiovisual essay, *Salam Godzilla*,[18] to which I frequently refer here. The film is available online;[19] therefore, it is highly recommended to watch it in regard to this text. »*Salam Godzilla*« emerged from the felt necessity to engage with the earthquake in the present. It is not simply a documentary about the disaster, but rather a tentative reconstitution of it on a sound-conceptual level. The main elements in the film were chosen for their potential to embody – and arguably not just *represent* – particular sound worlds, knowledges, practices and affects, which I further interpret here in terms of particular *unsounds*. These elements include diverse locations, institutions, footages and protagonists, including myself, that were brought into new relations for the film through direct encounters, staging, performance and subsequently through montage. I collaborated with the Agadiri singer Ali Faiq in order to produce a new sung version of Ibn Ighil's oral poem, performed in the original Berber-Tashelhit language. The main location of the film is the »Salam« movie theater in the centre of Agadir, a modernist construction built in 1946 by the architect Boubker Fakih Tetouani. The building survived the earthquake while most of the area was destroyed. Aside from its remarkable design and history, the theatre became important for my film because of an anecdote reported by several local sources: the film projected inside on the very night of the earthquake in 1960 was »*Godzilla, King of the Monsters*«[20]. Famous for being the first Japanese science-fiction movie, it features a giant, reptilian monster and includes several scenes of extensive destruction of Tokyo city. The film is also often brought into relation with the collectively repressed trauma of the 1945 nuclear bombings in Hiroshima and Nagazaki. The title of my own film was inspired not only by the anecdote of the 1960 earthquake at the »Salam«, but also by the 1956 film's content, opening a field of possibilities for the treatment of the environmental dimension of the earthquake, together with the question of extra-human agency and monstrous representations.

18 Aubry 2019.

19 The film *Salam Godzilla* (41′) can be accessed online via the following link
   https://archive.org/details/salamgodzilla

20 Honda / Morse 1956.

In the course of my research, I became particularly interested in the possibility to engage with extra-human voices. In this case, the question was whether the Earth itself should be considered as a being, possibly with her own voice, of which the earthquake would be a particularly violent manifestation. As Pettman suggests, listening to the sounds of nature can potentially become »a way of attuning ourselves to a more radical alterity than our own species«, which in turn »afford new forms of being together«.[21] He also suggests that »expanding the conceptual spectrum of what counts as a voice is one way to better understand – and thus challenge – the technical foundation and legacy of taxonomy (gender, class, race, species)«.[22] As I will elaborate later, various human and extra-human voices come to matter in *Salam Godzilla.* This includes the Berber-Tashelhit poet Ibn Ighil, the Rwais dancers Lahcen Aattar and Ali Bazegra, the Agadiri artists Dounia Fikri and Abderrahim Nidalha, as well as the Earth, Godzilla, the group of anonymous dinosaurs who left their footprints on a beach near Agadir about 100 millions years ago, and the keeper of this site, Samir Benteyane.

In the following sections, I describe how some of these protagonists were brought into relation with each other in my film, often in opposition to the dominant voices of scientific experts, media reporters, bureaucrats and authorities. I come to identify several instances of »unsound«, each of them particularly »situated«,[23] in an attempt to listen beyond cochlear perception to »a-audible«[24] voices and future sounds. I finally return to my own, privileged position in the film, via a reflection on »white aurality«,[25] and on my efforts to challenge and trouble such a position.

Technocratic unsound: Expert and bureaucrat listening after the 1960 Agadir earthquake

On the days following the 1960 Agadir earthquake, international teams of experts in geology, seismology and town planning were invited by King Mohamed V in order to study the feasibility of rebuilding the city on the same site. According to Williford, these teams produced countless scientific reports on the catastrophe and its possible causes over the next couple of months.[26] Through seismic data and other techniques, they were able to *measure* the intensity of the seismic (sound) waves and to *territorialise* them in the form of »isoseismal maps«.[27] By mapping the site into »four zones of

21 Cf. Pettman 2017.
22 Ibid.
23 Cf. Haraway 1988.
24 Cf. Henare / Holbraad / Wastell 2007.
25 Cf. Thompson 2017.
26 Cf. Williford 2017.
27 Ibid., 983.

decreasing danger«, the experts also created a »transition from intensity to risk – from past to future«.[28] They introduced the notion of »seismic risk« in an attempt to »stabilize the relationship between nature, technology, and politics«.[29] As a »heterogeneous *product* of expert and bureaucratic practices«, Williford adds, seismic risk became a way »to distribute both blame and authority«.[30] This meant the possibility for the local administration to expropriate people living in the city centre and seize their land in the name of »public interest«. With such practices, Williford argues, the authorities perpetuated the forms of systemic violence of the French protectorate.[31] As a result, he concludes, »the city's slums grew dramatically following the official end of the reconstruction in 1966, and would house over a quarter of the city's population by 1978«.[32] Considered on the level of sound and listening practices, the approach taken by the teams of international experts in charge of the reconstruction of Agadir had much in common with modern ways of listening and thinking about sound. As Emily Thompson notes, the development of new technological instruments in the 1920s allowed for electrical representations and measurements of acoustical phenomena as »soundsignals«.[33] »This new sound was modern«, she writes, because it was »efficient«, and because »it was perceived to demonstrate man's technical mastery over his physical environment«.[34] The experts in Agadir similarly re-sounded the earthquake as an abstraction constructed from sound signals, models and maps. The seismograph, while allowing for the visual recording of infrasonic seismic waves, quickly became a dispositive for silencing the multi-sensory, local, collective and affective dimensions of the earthquake. Moreover, the experts engaged into a process of sonic *prediction*, policing the distribution and potential of *future* vibrations through seismic risk management. This was not simply modern listening any more, but rather a late modern version of it, which I propose to call *technocratic listening*. Although technocratic listening may appear as a mere logical and statistical process of vibration management, it was carried in complete alignment with the Moroccan authorities' agenda of modern urban development and consolidation of the state's presence in the south,[35] thus being highly political. As part of a transition process between the colonial violence of the French Protectorate and new forms of structural violence implemented by the Moroccan state, technocratic listening was equally deaf to the claims of the population. By condemning »traditional construction methods as the root cause of inordinate levels of death and destruction«,[36]

28 Ibid., 993.
29 Ibid., 985.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 1006.
32 Ibid., 1008.
33 Thompson 2012, 118.
34 Cf. ibid.
35 Williford 2017, 987.
36 Ibid., 988.

engineers in Agadir »obscured the role of material inequalities between European and Moroccan neighborhoods of the formerly colonial city in shaping the distribution of fatalities«.[37] Peaceful protests by »expropriated citizens« were met by the authorities first by detainment, followed by absurd administrative requirements, ending with their expulsion of their temporary homes back to their »cities of origin«.[38] Other attempts by survivors to join into victim's organisations in order to participate in decision-making on matters related to the reconstruction were also shut out of the planning process.[39]

Technocratic listening can be further described using Goodman's notion of »unsound«,[40] introduced in the beginning of this chapter. By encompassing the virtual and the affective potential of particular sound and listening practices, the unsound allows us to engage with the predictive dimension of technocratic listening, beyond the directly audible manifestations of physical sound phenomena. The »not yet audible«[41] does not only stand for future earthquakes, or the promise of seismic safety. The *technocratic unsound* is more so the dark side of »future sound«, I argue, preemptively policing any future attempt by the population to interfere with the reconstruction process, or to become involved in seismic risk management. As such, the technocratic unsound can be traced back to the colonial urban politics of French occupation, reformulated later by the Moroccan authorities into a »positive technocracy nationalized and Islamicized«.[42] Almost 60 years after the disaster, the Moroccan technocratic regime is still in place, together with its unsound. While most of the Agadir population today is concentrated in peripheral areas of the city and in the adjacent towns of Inezgane and Dcheira, the reconstructed city centre mainly hosts administrative buildings and touristic infrastructures. The low sound intensity in this area is striking in comparison to other large Moroccan cities, and the run-down aspect of the 1960s modernist buildings accentuate the impression of an almost ghost-like city. This impression culminates on top of the Oufella hill, the site of the former city *kasbah* (citadel) which was entirely destroyed by the 1960 earthquake, now a flat wasteland, with only its external walls rebuilt since the catastrophe.

During my field research in Agadir in 2018, I visited a local non-governmental organisation (association ASVTS), created in 2002, and dedicated to seismic risk prevention. Without any support from the state, this organisation provides basic information to the population on seismic activity and teaches life-saving behaviours for emergency situations. I had the chance to film images of a modern seismometer acquired by this organisation in 2012 for the real-time monitoring of seismic activity in the area. Although modest in size and impact, this initiative attests of the efforts of Agadiri

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 1007.
39 Ibid., 1010.
40 Cf. Goodman 2010.
41 Ibid., 192.
42 Ibid.

citizens to appropriate seismic expertise for the benefit of the community. In my film *Salam Godzilla*, the images shot at the association ASVTS enter into a dialogue with other sources, referring to the technocratic unsound. This includes excerpts of European newsreels footages showing the destruction of Agadir with testimonies by some of the survivors of the earthquake, close-ups of damaged concrete structures as well as images of the newly reconstructed Agadir. Together, these images suggest a certain continuity in sound practices between the 1960s and the present, while highlighting the increasing importance of non-governmental organisations in the Moroccan society since the 2000s.
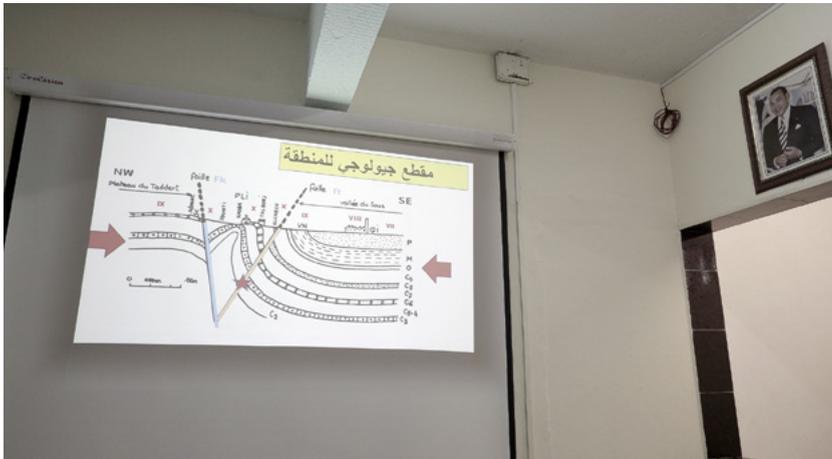

Figure 1: Room of the organisation ASVTS for seismic prevention in Agadir. Still from *Salam Godzilla* (Aubry 2019).

Ibn Ighil's *Tale of Agadir*

The news of the Agadir earthquake quickly propagated throughout the country in 1960, as did survivors' accounts in the years following. Ibn Ighil, a well-known minstrel-poet (*anddam*) living in the oasis of Touzounine, south of Agadir, composed a chanted poem in the Berber-Tashelhit language about the earthquake from what he had heard shortly after the catastrophe. The poem was turned into a song for *Salam Godzilla* in collaboration with the singer Ali Faiq, based on the following transcription by Brown and Lakhsassi (1980)[43]:

43 Brown / Lakhsassi 1980.

THE TALE OF AGADIR
Praise be to God, The Exalted. Destruction is like a wadi.
Whenever you come, O Time, it gets up and leaves.
I.
Agadir has been destroyed. Buried in it someone's thousands.
Woe! They died, all the people, none escaped.
All those who were there, the tribe, totally obliterated.
They hadn't accomplished their ambitions, nothing was finished,
Arab and Berber, no one escaped it.
Whoever had entered it, never again would get out.
Jews died, and Christians, too, on that day,
And Muslims, with a curse, and those who were righteous.
Children died, and women, too, on that day.
II.
Gold was buried, carpets buried; Those shops
Of goods, all gone, nothing in them but wind;
The quarter of Ihshash destroyed in an instant, nothing in it but dirt.
There's Talborjt, tiles and marble completely hidden;
Pillars of reinforced cement, here they are, no longer supporting a thing;
Abattoir and Ville Nouvelle, little remained of them;
There they were, cracked through, not yet having fallen on that day;
Founti and the Great Citadel became powder, powder.
Praise be yours, O God, it happened in a minute;
At midnight, just like a dream.
III.
Some wretches were pulled out, their soul hadn't left them.
Ready to rise, they were, to become conscious.
Some were pulled out, to be taken to that which is everlasting.
They didn't inform their companions, they saw no one;
They abandoned friends and children simply passed on.
Some carried on, their time hadn't ended;
They still make use of worldly possessions.
Not all Muslims were the same in that catastrophe.
Orphans and children were quite lost,
Their parents died, leaving them only sorrows.
IV.
Where are those who were strong, Whose money wasn't small?
Praise be yours, O God, they are begging with their hands for something small.
Whoever saw them became saddened; O God, why is it like that ?
Divine omnipotence, who will oppose it?
A creature can do nothing, for it's God who does as he wishes:
He is the Powerful and the Punisher. Those who want to be happy

Will avoid, let's hope, the forbidden, if they want to be saved.
Mighty God has sworn his oath that those who do not return
To walk along the path of the Prophet of the Pegasus Alborak
Will be struck by Him with starvation, until they experience awareness.
V.
Where is that place of the righteous men,
Of the carpets, of the trays and tea?
God has destroyed it with fate. There is nothing in it but wind,
Children of Adam, listen: You've no common sense,
Those who have seen all of their grandparents pass away,
Have sent off their parents and their children, too,
While they remained behind them, occupied with the pleasures of this world.
One who has faith, if he truly sees what happens,
One who is owed debts will forgive in order to be happy;
And he will continue to pray and fast. Let's hope he can be saved,
Leaves words to those who want them, so that they not disturb him.
Because this world is not everlasting; in it there is nothing but sorrow.
For those who occupy themselves with it, until their hearts become filled with remorse.

The moral of these words, truly, I am going to summarize them:
I finish my words with God, may he have mercy on our parents;
May he have mercy on my Master Muhammad, and the Companions and upon us.
May Our Lord forgive our sins when we pass before him.
O Messenger of God, our intercessor, guarantee all of us.
The remembrance of God's name is good: it indeed provides courage;
For those who say it, the horrors of this world are resolved;
God places them in his paradise when they descend into the earth.
There it is (the story of) Agadir!

The poem contains »facts about the earthquake«, Brown and Lakhsassi comment, as well as »a moral and a warning«, alluding to the possibility that »God destroyed Agadir as a punishment for the iniquities of its inhabitants«.[44] Ibn Ighil's poem can also be approached as a kind of oral *re-enactment* of the earthquake, allowing for a comparison with the »technocratic unsound« described above. I situate my interpretation of the poem within the onto-epistemological configuration of traditional Berber societies in Morocco. This configuration is described by Simenel in terms of »analogism«,[45] which comes close to Feld's notion of »relational ontology«.[46] Within such a scheme,

44 Ibid., 129.
45 Cf. Simenel 2016.
46 Cf. Feld 2017.

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meaning emerges by bringing things and facts into relation with known analogies.[47] Knowledge, therefore, is not »acquired«, but shaped through an »ongoing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection«.[48]

There it is, the story of Agadir!

Figure 2: Performance by Ali Faiq. Still from *Salam Godzilla* (Aubry 2019).

In his poem, Ibn Ighil uses the analogy of a »flooding river« (*asif*) in order to explain the earthquake and its consequences.[49] As a common metaphor for total destruction and death in Tashelhit poetry, the word is also associated with disasters caused by »evil spirits (*jnoun*)«, with »dreadful noise«, sometimes even with »war and other catastrophes of human origins (*siba*)«.[50] I suggest that the destruction of the city of Agadir is rendered by the poet as a list, or rather as a »collection«[51] of people, goods, neighbourhoods, construction materials, moral values and other continuities, that were affected, killed, obliterated, wounded, buried, covered, cracked trough or disintegrated. The poet, it seems, proceeds through the construction of a *virtual* Agadir, guiding the listener through various places and spaces, *materialising* them at the same time as they are destroyed through his detailed descriptions. In order to reinforce this impression, or rather the *affect* caused by destruction, the poet uses expressions and analogies borrowed from various sources, including the *Quran* and

47 Moutu 2007, 93.
48 Feld 2017, 93.
49 Cf. Brown / Lakhsassi 1980.
50 Ibid., 129.
51 Cf. Moutu 2007.

the French technical vocabulary of construction.[52] By bringing these elements into *new* relations with each other, the poet manages to re-enact the catastrophe on an affective level. At a certain point, the feeling of loss reaches its climax and the »reconfiguration process«[53] can start for the listeners, individually and collectively. As Moutu notes, time is an important aspect of the »ontological work of collections«.[54] In them, he writes, »we encounter momentary loss, a returning and a projection towards the future«.[55]

Analogical listening and the Berber-Tashelhit unsound

Ibn Ighil's oral sounding and listening practices are part of a larger »acoustemology«,[56] that is a way of *knowing-through sound,* particular to the members of the Berber-Tashelhit community. Because the Berber-Tashelhit acoustemology heavily relies on analogies in order to make sense of the world, I also propose to describe their listening as *analogical listening.* Analogical listening generates its own instance of s*onic materiality*, I argue, which is not necessarily related to »physical« properties of sound. Rather, materiality »discloses itself« as it is *created* through oral sounding and listening.[57] If Ibn Ighil's sound world cannot be heard in a »cochlear« sense, it can perhaps be better apprehended as »a-audible« (etymologically meaning »toward audible« or, »not heard yet«).[58] Next to the »technocratic unsound« of the Agadir experts, I suggest that Ibn Ighil's analogical listening further figures a *different* unsound. Like its technocratic counterpart, the poet's unsound equally relies on the virtual, the not-audible-yet, the possible and the future in order to respond to desires and anxieties in the present. The Berber-Tashelhit unsound therefore is figured as a particular becoming-in-sound of the community. It does so not by relying on scientific concepts, but by establishing analogies between what is experienced and what is already known. As such, the Berber-Tashelhit unsound is »dialogical and polyphonic«,[59] as well as »always experiential, contextual, fallible, changeable, contingent, emergent, opportune, subjective, constructed, and selective«.[60]

52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 97.
54 Ibid., 104.
55 Ibid.
56 Cf. Feld 2017.
57 Henare / Holbraad / Wastell 2007, 14.
58 Cf. Ibid.
59 Feld 2017, 13.
60 Ibid., 14.

Throughout the film *Salam Godzilla*, the technocratic unsound and the Berber-Tashelhit unsound enter into a dialogue. Embodied by the voice of Ali Faiq, Ibn Ighil's »*Tale of Agadir*« provides a counterpoint to the visible achievements of the city's experts in seismology and urban planning. At first, the song may appear as a mere tribute to the victims of the earthquake amongst the Agadir population, and to the city itself as it existed before its destruction. »With the reconstruction, the city has lost its soul«, as I was often told by local people during my stay in Agadir. In my understanding, the song can also be heard as the affirmation of a particular Berber-Tashelhit affect about the city and its possible becoming. If the reconstruction cannot be changed back, the desire for a *future Agadir* can still be expressed, different than the one already realised under the command of the technocratic regime since 1960. The unsound in Ibn Ighil's poem provides thus a starting point for attuning to new affective futures of the city, more in line with the present aspirations of its people, and thus resisting the policing power of the current technocratic unsound. This approach is further complicated in the film through the introduction of additional unsounds, which I briefly review below. Together, these instances create a local *unsound field* which is not unified, emerging rather as an accumulation of heterogeneous sonic ontologies, processes, actions and affects.[61]

The »French Speech Archives« and the colonial unsound

In addition to his vocal re-interpretation of Ibn Ighil's poem, the Agadiri singer Ali Faiq was essential to my film by contributing his own research on a set of colonial music recordings, excavated from the »French Speech Archives« (*Archives de la Parole*). Documenting songs from a handful of minstrel-poets (*Rwais*) from the Agadir region in the 1920s, these recordings were made in Morocco by engineers of the French *Pathé* record company, and donated later to the Speech Archives. Following their digitisation in 2013, Ali Faiq started studying these lesser-known songs in order to share them with the community of Berber-Ishlhin listeners. By attending to the effects of colonial misrepresentation and dislocation on Rwais music, he was able to familiarise himself with colonial epistemology. He made a point to show that the recordings were incorrectly described in the archive metadata, reclaiming them at the same time from the colonial noise map for his own community. My film *Salam Godzilla* features one brief sequence alluding to Ali Faiq's research on colonial sound archives. In that sequence, he sits in front of his computer and presents a song by Raissa Abouche Tamassit from the *Pathé* recordings, audible later in the film. As a product of colonial epistemology, the recorded voice of Abouche Tamassit is a »virtual sound-being«[62] that belongs to

61 Cf. Steingo / Sykes 2019.
62 Cf. Hoffmann 2015.

a *colonial unsound,* I suggest, characterised by racist ideas on natives. The »colonial unsound« is materialised in *Salam Godzilla* first through the online music archive on Ali Faiq's computer, and again in the next sequence through a facsimile reproduction of a *Pathé* shellac record.

Performing onto-epistemological resistance

Central to the film *Salam Godzilla*, the Rwais dance sequence comes as an attempt to stage an ›onto-epistemological battle‹, between a record player and two *Rwais* dancers. By this, I mean a redistribution of the sensible[63] and of the possible, via a particular material configuration of things and bodies. This approach relies on the transformative power of performance, rather than on the representational or symbolic dimension of images. The unsound is central to the re-negotiation of *who* gets to feel *what* in a particular situation, I argue. It is the nexus of sound material and affective capacities that can be enacted through performance in order to achieve a transformation of the subject. As such, the unsound can be brought into relation with the notion of agency, the individual or collective capacity to enact social change. With the unsound, change is enacted at an experiential and affective level, a necessary condition for change on a social-political level.

The Rwais dance scene in my film includes elements from three different sources, brought into ambiguous relationships via mixing and editing. The first source is the audiovisual documentation of a performance staged within complicity from Ali Faiq and the artist Abderrahim Nidalha. Two dancers from the region, Lahcen Aattar and Ali Bazegra, were invited to perform »traditional« *Rwais* dance steps next to a turntable placed on the ground. Rwais dancers are well-known for the heavy stomping in their choreographies, which we thought could be regarded as a bodily form of conversation with the Earth itself, in reference to the earthquake. We pushed the idea further by adding the presentation of the record player in order to visually capture the jumps of the needle following each of the dancer's steps. This created a disruption in the colonial unsound of the *Pathé* record playing on it. The second source is an Earth drone recording, borrowed from a documentary on seismic activity, and representing the continuous »voice« of the Earth in the film sequence. The third source is a close-up video capture of a »vibrating suitcase«, a device used by the local organisation ASVTS for visualising the effects of seismic waves as part of their program of earthquake prevention. Edited together, these elements follow a simple dramaturgy in which the dancers appear at first to be in a conversation with the droning Earth, progressively entering a »battle« against the record player, shaking the ground with increasing intensity, and ultimately

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63 Cf. Rancière 2005.

making the colonial record playback ineffective. Despite its obvious mise-en-scène, the sequence participates in an attempt to redistribute agency to the Rwais dancers and possibly to the Earth itself. The redistribution happens through a disruption of the colonial unsound at its most vulnerable level, that is the material fragility of the record and its playback device. As a result, the Berber-Tashelhit unsound, embodied here by the two dancers, is allowed to become the driving force in this configuration, through a re-enforcement of affective and sensory capacities.

It can easily be argued that this redistribution only happens on a symbolic level with *montage*, and through the mediation of my own, exterior position. The basic principle of the sequence, however, emerged from my conversations with the protagonists beforehand, and was supported by them. This principle is clearly »performative« in Judith Butler's sense (1990), as it is as an »act« through which the subject »comes into being« as a new »I«.[64] In this case, the performance creates a break in the colonial representation of the protagonists as »native« and »subaltern« subjects, turning their dance movement into a powerful means for reclaiming agency and self-sovereignty. This effect can be visibly apprehended and potentially reiterated as part of new performances. The scene therefore informs the production of empowering forms of embodied, postcolonial knowledge and subjectivity, I argue, encouraging also future discussions and experiments beyond the film.

Figure 3: Rwais dance sequence. Still from *Salam Godzilla* (Aubry 2019).

64 Butler 1990, 2.

Interspecies Unsound

As part of my research on the 1960 earthquake in Agadir, I wanted to find additional examples that could be considered as an expression of the »voice of the Earth«. This brought me to a beach in the town of Anza near Agadir, containing about 300 footprints left by several dinosaurs species on the Cretaceous ground layer, approximatively 100 million ago.[65] I visited the site for the first time in 2017 and met Samir Benteyane, the keeper of the dinosaur tracks. I recorded some video of him, interacting with the site and the dinosaur footprints, which later became part of my film *Salam Godzilla.* One can see Samir Benteyane indicating the position of the dinosaur footprints, sometimes cleaning them from sand with water, and explaining their specificity. He also performs a kind of choreography in order for visitors like myself to better visualise the dinosaur paths, thus re-enacting the walk of several dinosaur species. Samir's guided tour of the site ends with a series of sand drawings on the beach representing dinosaurs, an exercise complicated by the encroaching presence of sea waves.

While watching the shots a bit later, I was struck by Samir Benteyane's care and attention for the footprints, and by his affective way of relating to dinosaurs across geological time. I decided to invite him to do another sand drawing session outside of his work activities, while interviewing him also about his interest in dinosaurs. Dinosaurs are »important«, he declares in a shot, because »the traces they left us can help us live, and *survive*«. Researching about them can also »make you *feel* what life is about«, he adds. By affectively engaging with »extra-human« traces at an existential level, Samir Benteyane managed therefore to enter into a kind of horizontal relationship with them. This way of relating also has also an important sonic dimension, I suggest, albeit a *silent* one. By expressing his desire »to speak with dinosaurs in order to know what they think«, Samir Benteyane recognises the possibility of an »extra-human« *voice* in them, which I suggest represents a particular form of *unsound*. This kind of unsound is of a truly interspecies kind, attesting to »the enmeshments of human existence and responsibility with various co-species«,[66] and even with extinct ones, I should add. More pragmatically, as a man, who grew up in a slum in Agadir and later found himself unemployed, Samir Benteyane was able to turn the dinosaur site in Anza into a source of regular income for himself through visitors' financial contributions. The relation that I describe here in terms of *interspecies unsound* emerged thus from the necessity for him to subsist economically, as part of the region's touristic economy. However, I argue that this doesn't seem to alter the sincerity of his interest and affective engagement with dinosaurs. It perhaps rather characterises the current human awareness of existence in a time of global ecological crisis, where individual economic survival and global species' survival appear more entangled than ever.

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65 Cf. Masrour / Lkebir / Pérez-Lorente 2017.
66 Tiainen 2017, 360.

Figure 4: Samir Benteyane at the dinosaur traces site in Anza beach. Still from *Salam Godzilla* (Aubry 2019).

A few years ago, when a team of palaeontologists led by Professor Moussa Masrour from the Agadir Ibn Zhor University came to study the traces, Samir Benteyane was also present and assisted them. He is therefore well aware of the basic methods and discourses applied in the scientific field, as his posts on his Facebook page also demonstrate. This didn't fundamentally change the nature of his own relation with the site. Quite in the contrary: I argue that researching dinosaurs perhaps not only helped him »feel what life is about«, but also what *else* it could be about. With its potential to facilitate »trans-species flows of becoming«,[67] Samir Benteyane's unsound and possibly other, similar interspecies ones, might come as a necessary condition for a future shared planetary survival. This is the reason why I decided that Samir should be the only protagonist in *Salam Godzilla,* whose speech needed to be heard without any ambiguity. His declarations are featured in the closing scene of the film, hopefully opening new perspectives in »unsound studies«.

67 Ibid., 363.

Performing »troubled« white aurality

Before sharing my conclusions on *Salam Godzilla* and the unsound in this chapter, I want to return briefly to my own presence in the film, and to the situatedness of my own practice as a sound researcher and field recorder. A major part of the *Salam Godzilla* film's soundtrack was composed from my own recorded sound improvisations inside the »Salam« movie theatre in Agadir. The recordings were produced in the course of several sessions, using a performative approach based on controlled acoustic feedback. Equipped with my field recording microphone and recorder, a portable loudspeaker, and a couple of FX pedals, I continuously fed the mic sound into the loudspeaker while recording. This generated a feedback tone, which was further modulated by slowly changing my position in the space, as well as the orientation of the mic and the equalisation of the audio signal. The mic also picked up the traffic sound from the outside, highlighting the building's position in a somewhat busier part of the centre of Agadir. Later on, I introduced additional sounds in the feedback loop, by playing back audio files from my computer via headphones and amplifying them with my microphone. These files included documentary films on the earthquake, some of my own field recordings, music recordings made in the region by Paul Bowles in 1959, as well as excerpts from the 1956 *Godzilla* film soundtrack.

Parts of these sessions have been video documented by the cameraman Abdelah El-moukadem, and are featured in the film, turning myself into a protagonist. These images might be ambiguous, as it is perhaps not clear that I am not simply *recording* the space. Feedback improvisation has been part of my practice as a sound artist for a long time, as a means to enter into a *relationship* with places. The decision to appear in the film emerged from the felt necessity to disclose myself in the context of my research in Agadir. As a white European male subject, my position is clearly marked by privilege, situated also within a long, racialised history of Western research in North Africa. On the level of sound recording, this history relates to »white aurality«,[68] that is a conscious intention by Western sound artists to focus on »sound-in-itself« as a phenomenon »distinct from, or preceding sociality, discourse, meaning and power«.[69] By appearing in the film with my sound recording apparatus, I therefore become vulnerable to critique, which is at the same time an occasion to reflect on my own position. My performance inside the »Salam« movie theatre is therefore an attempt to stay with the ›trouble‹ of white aurality, while engaging with the place through sound and listening on a bodily and affective level. De-linking oneself from hegemonic apparatuses is arguably a delicate process, requiring to unlearn certain practices and discourses in order to allow for *minor* affects to emerge and grow within oneself. The particular sociality and history of the »Salam« movie theatre is progressively revealed in the film through a series of visual shots made on location, and via historical documents,

68 Cf. Thompson 2017.
69 Ibid.

which are brought into dialogue with my own presence and sounds. A particular affect emerges from the juxtaposition of these elements, I suggest, attesting to a process through which cultural differences are made »visible and negotiated«.[70]

Figure 5: Sound performance by Gilles Aubry inside the »Salam« movie theatre. Still from *Salam Godzilla* (Aubry 2019).

Additional perspectives on Salam Godzilla

Several options could be considered in order to situate my film *Salam Godzilla* within the field of art practice and knowledge production: is it a »technoecological« film?[71] An ethnographic film? An interspecies artwork? A »transcultural montage«?[72] Or – to propose a new term – an »*un*soundscape«? Each of these terms come with particular connotations regarding the status of the sounds and images within the film. This status is fluid, I suggest, oscillating between an audiovisual composition, a discursive essay and a documentation of »real« performative situations. This is clearly the case with the vocal performance of Ali Faiq, with my own sound performance inside the »Salam« movie theatre, and with the Rwais dance performance. In the latter case, however, the original dance performance has been re-articulated through editing and the introduc-

70 Cf. Suhr / Willerslev 2013.
71 Cf. Tiainen 2017.
72 Cf. Suhr / Willerslev 2013.

tion of additional images, blurring once more the borders between the documentary and the fictional.

The film, finally, raises questions about the onto-epistemological propositions embedded with in it, and about the various modes of positionality, agency and accountability it evokes. I have attempted to derive various instances of unsound from the social position of particular groups or individuals. These positions may remain at times too vague, or too general. As an example, the category of »scientific, technical and bureaucratic« experts, from which I derived the notion »technocratic unsound«, was certainly not a homogenous group. It included people from different origins (European, North-American and Moroccan), and from different socio-economical groups, although most of them were male. What matters today, I argue, is the troubling continuity in technocratic management from the colonial context of French occupation, to the postcolonial one of Moroccan Independence, and the present one of globalisation and biopolitical power. The »colonial unsound« and the »technocratic unsound« are thus historically and ideologically linked together. They anticipated the present »methods of abstraction that neoliberal markets and biopolitical managers use to measure and organize society«.[73] The link here is arguably the predominant racialised and patriarchal ideology of neoliberal capitalism, currently supported by more or less »soft« authoritarian regimes, of which contemporary Morocco offers a perfect example. As Robin James argues, neoliberal ideology has been increasingly *naturalised* in recent philosophical discourses using the sonic model of »acoustic resonance«.[74] It therefore becomes urgent to propose other sound models, she claims,[75] which I attempted here by troubling and diversifying the »unsound«.

Regarding agency and accountability in the film, I already mentioned that I am the only one accountable for the film in *itself*. Some of the participants have been credited for their own ideas and contributions, namely Ali Faiq, Samir Benteyane, Abderrahim Nidalha, the Rwais dancers Lahcen Aattar and Ali Bazegra. I need to add to the list the artist Dounia Fikri, featured in the »Tibetan bowl« scene near the end of the film. Her sound performance was not merely staged under my direction, but rather adapted from her own sound-based meditation and self-help practice. Additional »extrahuman« entities were also tentatively given agency in the film: the droning Earth, dinosaurs, the seismograph, the record player and Godzilla herself. Easy to say from the privileged position of a film director, which is why I am not suggesting that the film should be apprehended as an *actual* alternative ecology, powerful enough to radically de-hierarchise the relations between its various participant beings. Like the concept of »acoustic resonance«, the film is just a model, an abstraction for apprehending the possibility of »different worlds«,[76] expressing also my desire to engage with such

73 Cf. James 2019.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Cf. Henare / Holbraad / Wastell 2007.

worlds. The *real* engagement took place during my research and making of the film in Morocco, through a series of situations, encounters and exchanges, whereby differences in positions were addressed. In that sense, *Salam Godzilla* contributes to a »pluriversal dialogue« that is neither embedded in culturalism nor absolute particularism, but in the realisation that multiple loci of enunciation coexist and are entangled through the coloniality of knowledge, being and power.[77]

Towards a politics of the unsound

I have identified several modes of sounding and listening, further describing them in terms of »unsound«, in an attempt to denote their specific virtuality, affect, becoming and situatedness. The potential offered by the notion of unsound to engage on the level of theory with the inaudible, the not-yet-audible, the virtual, and simply the possible, was one good enough reason for me to introduce it in my study in Morocco. Although it is in itself an abstract concept, the unsound refers to aspects of experience, which are far from abstract, I argue, but rather they are clearly embodied, lived and felt. By refusing to clearly distinguish between the material and the affective dimensions of sound and listening, the unsound is therefore open to alternative, often marginalised sound histories. These histories are related to ways of knowing and being *in* sound, that often cannot be accounted for using theories *about* sound itself, like in the case of Ibn Ighil's poem about the Agadir earthquake. As a result, sound itself, as an autonomous physical object and as a phenomenon participating in sensory perception, loses its significance in my study and becomes de-centred. Listening, to the contrary, is particularly relevant to it as an embodied experience, and as a voluntary act of »registering« (human and extra-human) voices that give »an account of themselves«.[78] Sounding, finally, is perhaps the most crucial aspect in my study. As I have attempted to demonstrate with Ibn Ighil's poem and Samir Benteyane's interspecies interactions, sounding is indeed not limited to the production of physical sound, and can consist as well in generating virtual sound worlds via affective, poetic and bodily engagement. Because the effects of virtual sound worlds come to matter in the lives of particular groups of people, these worlds should be taken into account when registering sound histories, I argue. The unsound, as a name, is also relevant to me because it seems to directly refer to that part of felt experience that refuses to be recorded, measured, quantified or domesticated.

The politics of a hypothetical field of unsound studies have, therefore, a lot to do with the de-centring of scientific factuality, privileging instead the affirmation of the possible. Because embodiment and affect are central to such a politics, it certainly also

77 Cf. Mignolo 2011.
78 Cf. Farinati / Firth 2017.

comes close to certain feminist discourses on sound and listening,[79] albeit perhaps with less emphasis on vocality and a greater interest in »attunement« and »opacity«. While »attunement« perhaps particularly resonates with the preoccupations of political ecology,[80] »opacity« allows for additional alliances with *Black Sound Studies.* In his account on sonic Afro-Modernity,[81] Alexander G. Weheliye shares thoughts on sound and »opacity«, which I find helpful in order to better situate the unsound and its affordances. »Opacity is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy«, he notes, »but subsistence within an irreducible singularity«.[82] »Thinking sonically«, he suggests, »adduces a mode of divining the world that sounds its multitude of opacities without drowning their singularities in the noise of transparency«.[83] »The sonic opens up possibilities for thinking, hearing, seeing, apprehending the subject in a number of different arenas«, he continues, clarifying also that it is by no way »preconscious«, or in »strict opposition to the visual or the language«.[84] If white aurality is perhaps characterised by its desire to disappear within »the noise of transparency« while still keeping its privileges, »black aurality« finds an important way of subsisting in sonic opacity. The sonic provides a new analytic framework »that does not posit meaning and/or intelligibility as its teleological end point«, Weheliye finally notes, but focusses rather on »texture« and »interwovenness«.[85] To conclude, I suggest that the politics of the unsound is perhaps fundamentally a politics of subsistence in opacity, to which sound provides the means. Like Ibn Ighil's poetic response to the 1960 Agadir earthquake, the unsound allows us to affectively survive catastrophes by creating virtual-material worlds, despite apparent »rational« impossibilities. As such, the unsound perhaps comes as a claim for the possibility of being and experiencing *despite* scientific evidence, enacting thus a form of »epistemic disobedience«,[86] and therefore also a form of resistance.

79 Ibid.
80 Cf. Kohn 2013.
81 Cf. Weheliye 2005.
82 Ibid., 104.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Cf. Ibid.
86 Mignolo 2011, 46.

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