ETHICS OF PERFORMANCE AND SCHOLARSHIP

Mourning the Nightingale's Song: The Audibility of Networked Performances in Protests and Funerals of the Arab Revolutions

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Facebook Post Wednesday, February 2, 2011, at 12:09 p.m. CST
i'm being fed by three streams: AJE live, Twitter, and speak2tweet. the latter is a civilizing balm on the chaos in tahrir.

In the heart of the eighteen-day period of collective nonviolent protests (January 25–February 11, 2011) in Tahrir Square, in Cairo, Egypt, I posted the above status update on my Facebook timeline. "Speak2Tweet," as I referenced in the post, was a digital networked platform that offered a "voice to tweet" service.[1] Users called a phone number and left a voicemail, which was then converted into a short URL posted on the Twitter account, @Speak2Tweet.[2] Twitter users could then click on the link to hear the audio message. By the first Friday afternoon after its launch, after then-President Hosni Mubarak cut off internet and cellular connections, almost 2,900 spoken tweets had been posted on @Speak2Tweet. Activity spiked mostly during those eighteen days in late January and early February 2011 and shut down after April 11, 2011 (for reasons that remain unclear).[3] A few years later, the voice data files were no longer available online, their disappearance symptomatic of the "enduring ephemerality" of digital media (Chun 2008).[4]

Speak2Tweet was less about political utility—getting more people out on the streets, broadcasting explicit political claims, or networking activists through digital connectivity. Rather, recording a voice message enabled an affective attunement with the movement, a presence enacted through the materiality of sound. Egyptian artist Heba Amin, who juxtaposes archival recordings with visual images of urbanity in experimental film in her Project Speak2Tweet, reflected that the platform "became a gathering point for the sharing of intimate expression within a limited time-frame when people felt safe enough to expose their inner thoughts" (Amin 2014, 6), an intimacy of sharing enabled by the vocality of digital recordings. Speak2Tweet software developer Ujjwal Singh agreed that the platform gained momentum because of the affective capacity of voice: "Voices capture emotion, personality and the moment. It gives you the intangible that you can't get through text and data" (Liedtke 2011). Indeed, the affective politics of voice, and its mediation by communications technology, has been demonstrably crucial to the production of pious subjects (Hirschkind 2006) and democratic subjects (Kunreuther 2018). In this instance, not only did the sonic traces of recorded Egyptian voices make the personal experience of Tahrir Square political, these affective politics were further intensified by the transmedial and networked infrastructure of the Twitter platform.

The circulation of the recorded voice during the revolutions, and as revolutionary audio, echoes the anticolonial radio station, *Voice of Fighting Algeria*, which, as Frantz Fanon has argued (1965), enacted

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political solidarities during the Algerian revolution (1954–1962) through tactical listening techniques. These techniques, elaborates Ian Baucom, forged solidarities through "a complex labor in which [listening] subjects are at once gatherers and scatterers of the narratives of identity to which their ears are tuned" (2001, 25). In this article, I am similarly interested in the role of audio in communications technology and listening as a mode of political participation. Regarding social media practices during the Arab revolutions of the 2010s, I consider how sound circulates through and as networked digital media and how this process intensifies the affective politics of protest culture, drawing on recent literature in performance studies and media studies that seeks to collapse any false dichotomy between offline and online activism. Invoking Marcela Fuentes' concept of "performance constellations" and situating its promise in the work that sound acts enable, I turn to two specific historical moments. The article begins with fieldnotes from the first months of nonviolent protest actions in 2011 in Egypt and Syria and concludes with a discussion of protest funerals for Syrian revolutionary martyrs in 2018 and 2019. These beginnings and endings (of a sort) straddle hope and grief; they evoke the intensity of collective political actions and capture the multitudinous nature of the crowd at the protest event. I offer them not to cast a historicizing teleology onto the revolutions, but rather to provoke questions of sound, protest, and media at events critical to each revolution's history.

The role of sound acts, hailed in this issue as the power in and of embodied sound to strategically resist oppression and foment collective political action, has been studied in protest movements worldwide. Where and when bodies gather to disrupt and occupy space, they do so through sonic tactics, from banging on pots and pans to chanting slogans, that are often recognized as part of a "folk praxis" (Eyerman and Jamison 1998) that is accessible, participatory, and often intertextual in the hailing of past historical events in the present political moment (Manabe 2015). Making sounds enacts political presence both metaphorically and physically. At the Occupy Baluwatar protests in Nepal, political subjectivity forms through *āwāj* (voice)—a political allegory for democracy and an audible vocalization, sound, or noise that generates political presence (Kunreuther 2018). The "Human Mic" tactic deployed at Occupy Wall Street protests and rooftop chanting in Iran during the Green Revolution (Kheshti 2015), respectively, demonstrate the efficacy of vocal techniques to reclaim space from the state. While activists often aim to disrupt and occupy space through the production of sound, Ben Tausig (2019) insists that sounds of protest are rarely "unbounded" in either their allegorical or physical travel through political space; rather, the politics of sound are often "constrained" by geographical and social structures. This article expands this terrain of sonic protest to ask what happens when the political work of sound is uploaded and streamed as digital media that circulates on social media platforms such that the sonic geographies of protest encompass virtual spaces with and alongside physical spaces. Approaching sound acts as "bodily performance" and "digital networking" (Fuentes 2019, 65) helps to better understand digital media engagement as performance praxis, and likewise, to attend to the ways that politics are perceived and experienced through sensory apparatuses.

This article, exploring dynamics between sound, protest, and media platforms, listens for how the embodied sonic praxis of protests translates into the audio, visual, and text modalities of digital media. As Marcela Fuentes insists, networked protests are not divorced from live and copresent events. Rather, there is a "synergetic relation between on and offline environments" (Fuentes 2019, 20) that emerges through the "coaction of bodily and digitally networked protests" (3) that together form "performance constellations." Fuentes argues that performance constellations set change in motion through the constituent dynamics of performance—spatiality, temporality, embodiment, and participation. One way political change occurs online is through the use of digital technology and

connectivity to reconfigure social movements and forge affective publics in networked spaces (Tufekci 2017). Activists disrupt regimes of power through storytelling, hashtags, memes, and other narrative devices that harness affect, or the "energy that drives, neutralizes, or entraps" (Papacharissi 2014, 7) political sentiment. By intertwining live protests in public spaces with digital media tactics that interrupt virtual spaces, activists enact performance constellations through bodily actions and performative doings.

Given the salient role of embodied tactics in contemporary networked protests in performance, it seems appropriate to add an analysis of sound as part of the bodily sensorium that is affected by and affects networked collective action. I am particularly interested in audibility, or the appearance and perceptibility of sound objects, as a construct that helps navigate the mutually constitutive processes of live embodied practices and the circulation of these practices as recorded audio on social media. Audibility is a technological condition, sensory force, and social process through which affective publics emerge in networked spaces. It is technological in that it is produced by audio technology that records, compresses, circulates, and renders soundwaves in culturally specific practices. But to listen to digital media is not just to parse what is audible or inaudible as a novel departure from the tendency to notice visual material, a binary relation of media that Jonathan Sterne critiques as the "audiovisual litany" (2003, 15). Rather, the audibility of live and networked protests foregrounds many of the same questions raised to interrogate the production of social spaces: liveness, embodiment, spatiality, and materiality. Audibility is, therefore, also a sensory force and social process that constructs acoustic subjects and spaces through listening—who and what is rendered audible is a fundamental contestation that drives the politics of protest. Activists make their demands audible through techniques of vocalization, nonmusical and musical performance, and they occupy political space in silence or while listening (Silverstein 2019). Audibility in digital networked media similarly differentiates the power relations of certain subjects over others when some voices are muted and muffled while others are amplified and boosted across networked spaces. Audibility, as I will demonstrate, is crucial for understanding the affect-rich intensities that drive performance constellations, or networked protest performances, and forge political possibilities as imaginable, sensible, and perceptible.

I address these dynamics in two parts: first, how the composition techniques of social media, such as tweets and Facebook posts, translate sonic objects into written texts, and how the narrativity afforded to sonic objects and encounters helps express the stories of revolution as these travel from earwitnesses to online viewers. The assemblage of voices that emerge on social media, including artists, journalists, protesters, and spectators, make audible the sonic motifs, perspectives, and experiences that constitute the protest movements. Second, how the audibility of the crowd emerges in recorded footage of protest events, specifically the protest funerals that reclaimed Raed Fares and Abdel Baset al-Sarout, martyrs of the Syrian revolution. Approaching the live event and its circulation online as a performance constellation, I interrogate how the sounds of the crowd enable the mythologization of the martyrs' bodies and help mobilize the cause for which they died. Both of these approaches to audibility—as expressing voice and documenting sounds—are grounded in the notion that audibility is a compositional process that translates the "live" sound that occurs in physical spaces into representational spaces and, in so doing, alters the temporality and spatiality of the sonic experience. These processes are crucial to forging the stories that animate revolution— stories of martyrs, heroes, protesters, journalists, witnesses, and sympathizers.

Methods

The role of social media in mobilizing the Egyptian and Syrian revolutions has been widely contested. Though initially heralded as an unprecedented tool for political organizing (Lynch 2015), others pushed back on the tendency to celebrate digital democracy, arguing that privileging Western technology over the agency of Arab activists was a form of "digital Neo-Orientalism" (Della Ratta 2018, 110). By 2019, social media platforms were perceived ambivalently as a necessary evil, an echo chamber limited in its ability to spread awareness and yield material change, yet a technology that social movements and displaced populations depended on to communicate across geographical and political borders. My approach to the role of social media in the Arab revolutions acknowledges this complicated history while also recognizing how the affective intensity of the protests was driven by the participatory culture of social media. Through user posts and reflections on my participation in the revolution on Facebook, I draw on my complex ethnographic relationship to the field in order to distil the role of sonic performativity and sound media in the formation of affective publics.

I have engaged with Syria as my primary site of field research for approximately fifteen years (2004 to the present). I conducted short- and long-term visits (particularly 2007–2008), during which I immersed myself in copresent interactions across a broad range of social spaces and cultivated ethnographic relationships with variously situated social actors. When protests began in March 2011, I gradually shifted from immersive, copresent ethnography to what I call digital performance ethnography, a method that accounts for how we live and research in digital, sensory, and material environments, in which the presence of digital media shapes the techniques and processes of ethnography. A modality of performance ethnography, which underscores the role of copresence in the socially constructed space of the field, digital performance ethnography underscores how everyday social media practices are a site for worldmaking and lived experience. It differs from other practices of digital ethnography, such as "hashtag ethnography," which, in its presentation by Bonilla and Rosa (2015), approaches social media platforms as a field site for detached observation and analysis. Rather, just as performance ethnography critiques the positionality of the ethnographer in relation to their interlocutors, I propose that digital modes of performance ethnography account for how the researcher participates in and adds value to social media sites, rather than assuming that the researcher is a neutral outside observer. These politics of participation are especially crucial during social movements and armed conflict, where the ethics of passive and/or active spectatorship straddle a thin line between the fetishized consumption of mediatized events and a politics of solidarity with specific factions. To this end, I dedicate a considerable amount of space to ethnographic writing as a performance practice and method that arguably both cultivates relationships between the researcher (myself) and my interlocutors (users in my social media networks) and actively participates in protest culture.

The first section on translating sonic events into narrative writing turns to my own archive of activity on Facebook during the initial protests in 2011. To emphasize the intersection of traditional and digital ethnographic methods, I approached each status update and share on my timeline as a fieldnote, a writing genre and research strategy used by ethnographers to annotate the lived experience of ethnographic encounter. Like fieldnotes, my Facebook posts engendered an ethnographic space imbued with affect and expressed through writing conventions. Of course, Facebook posts do not afford a neutral or objective perspective; rather, they are biased, partial, and imbricated in the complex politics of global communication technology. It is not only that social media algorithms produce echo chambers among users or "homophilia" (Lynch 2015), nor is it only

about consumer awareness of the ethical ambiguities of Facebook. It is also that users are situated in specific habitus that condition the particular cultural practices that comprise social media platforms. In this way, Facebook posts and tweets are not altogether different from ethnographic fieldnotes. However, a critical distinction between Facebook activity and field notes is the public nature of social media. Whereas fieldnotes are intended for the ethnographer and rarely made accessible to others, social media activity is public by nature of its networked communication infrastructure. Drawing on social media as a source for ethnographic material generated by the ethnographer therefore calls attention to the performative politics of digital ethnography in the public domain.
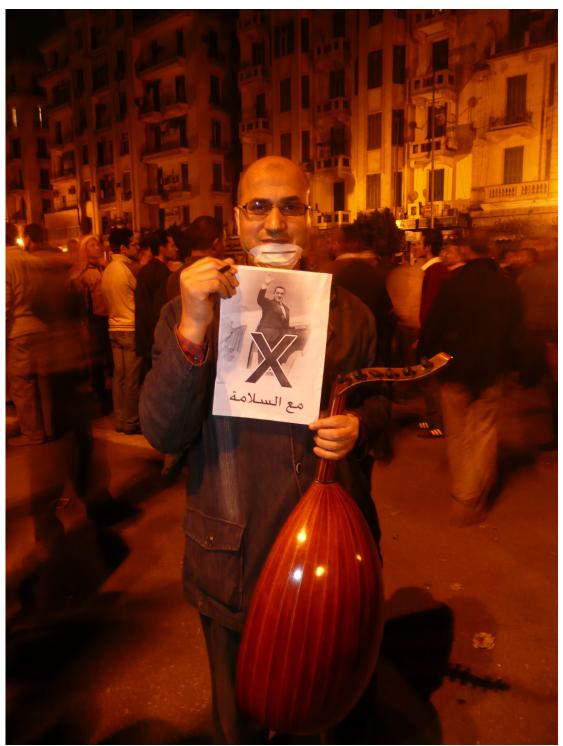
The second half of this article shifts away from the performative writing of Facebook posts as an ethnographic method and toward the circulation of digital record(ing)s of mourning events for revolutionary martyrs. Mourners record funeral protests to circulate these events on social media and engage viewers across vast geographical divides. Yet these recording acts reveal their "aural positionality" (Kheshti 2009, 15)—the individual and cultural perspectives that frame the experience of the aural—through how and what they record. I deconstruct their aural positionality with attention to how the intensity of the acoustic shapes the listening experience. Finally, as an ethnographic witness to the revolution, my writing about martyrs and how they are grieved gifts me space to mourn their loss and honour their legacy, and to expand the geography of revolution into academic spaces.

Sound in Protest Narratives

The eighteen days from January 25 to February 11, 2011, in Egypt marked the unanticipated start of a popular revolution that led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. Tens of thousands of protesters participated in what would not only catalyze a change of regime (albeit not toward the protestors' desired outcomes in the long term) but also inspire popular uprisings elsewhere in the Arab world. Part of what inspired solidarity—among those at Tahrir and others spectating from near and far—was the participatory performance culture in the public space. From a wired band stage to subversive *baladi* (folk) songs, protesters made Tahrir Square festive and politically salient. These performance happenings were crucial to the public display of affect at the uprisings, an affect that translated into political possibilities and, in both real life and networked platforms, united disparate publics across and despite ideological differences.

During this time, I was riveted to my screens. Twitter, Facebook, and news media shackled me to my phone and desk as I marvelled at the very possibility of a popular uprising against Arab authoritarianism. I participated by sharing media, often adding my own response. My posts, shared below, were emotionally charged, affect-rich, and written in a genre (Facebook status updates) characterized by its immediacy, urgency, and narrativity. They are indicative of how I constructed my subject position and, moreover, how social media blurs the boundaries between ethnographer, political sympathizer, witness, and interpreter.

Facebook post Sunday, January 30, 2011, at 1:54 p.m. CST
Check out the ʻud *on this dude. Actually,* is *that an* ud [*sic*]*?*

A protester in Cairo's Tahrir Square on January 29, 2011, holds up a poster of president Hosni Mubarak boarding an airplane with "Goodbye" written below. Al Jazeera English. This photo is reprinted under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic License. https://www.flickr.com/photos/aljazeeraenglish/5400759994/.

In the midst of the Tahrir Square protests in January 2011, a Facebook friend and fellow scholar posted an image of a male protester holding an ʿud on my wall. The protester posed in the crowd of Tahrir Square, with other protesters lingering in the background. He held his ʿud around the neck with his left hand and held up a sign in his right hand of an "X" superimposed over Mubarak and the phrase "Maʿ al-Salāma" (Goodbye) underneath. His post communicated that he was following the protests in Egypt as a "global citizen," that is, someone invested in the broader common good and without family, work, or other investments in the Middle East. I appreciated that, as actualized through this post, he participated in the networked publics who constituted the Tahrir Square revolution. His comments also focused exclusively on the instrument to the extent that the protests became a background context for this performance media. Finally, his playful distantiation ("Actually, *is* that an ud?") transformed the oud from a stabilizing index of Arabness into a signifying object that destabilized his relationship to the protest context under representation.

This post demonstrates how sound and performance media—the ʿud—mediate the formation of a public around Tahrir Square. In the hands of an unnamed protestor, the ʿud became a signifying object through which my colleague and I formed a public bond; it attests to the materiality of sound as performance and technology in the protest event. At the same time, the ʿud is also a record or trace of our bonding over Tahrir Square protests that exemplifies how social media facilitates feelings of engagement—for my colleague, between my colleague and me, and for myself. One among thousands of such expressions, our exchange is part of a communication flow that "accumulate[s] and disperse[s] through digitally enabled networks . . . and discursively call[s] into being further publics of support" (Papacharissi 2014, 7).

Particularly meaningful for me were moments in which political solidarities were performatively constituted through sound-based discourse. Here are two examples of protest acts in which political boundaries and contestations are signified by a sound object:

Facebook post Friday, January 28, 2011, at 9:50 a.m. CST
"i will stay on the air until police knock on my door." al jazeera english livefeed

This Facebook post is an excerpt from the live feed of a journalist affiliated with Al Jazeera English. At the time, on January 28, 2011, the Egyptian army had asserted their support for the protesters while the police continued to support Mubarak's state. The police began a crackdown on the press, and journalists found themselves at risk. As expressed in this statement, "I will stay on air until . . . ," this journalist is defiant about their right to freedom of speech and morally committed to the profession. What I would like to draw attention to is the significance of the imagined or projected event that threatens this moral promise: the "knock on my door." A discursive object that represents the sensory and material world of the subject, "knock" is at once sonic and tactile. The rapping of a hand, or perhaps arms, *upon* the door produces a sound that communicates to the listener—here, the journalist inside the room—that a violent encounter is on the horizon. The knock is a sound event through which the state enacts its authority; the journalist also hails this authority sonically by recognizing the knock as the encounter which ends airtime. Knocking fuels feelings of fear, defiance, and moral righteousness.

Facebook post Friday, February 25, 2011, at 6:43 p.m. CST
"Lebanese Musician Marcel Khalife cancels a concert in Bahrain saying that when shots are fired at protesters they also hit him . . ." (Khalife 2011)

Marcel Khalife is a renowned Lebanese musician who, in addition to his storied career as a composer, ʿud player, and ensemble director, is associated with pro-Palestinian resistance culture through his repertoire of Palestinian folk songs and adaptations of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's poetry. This article published in *Al Jazeera* suggests that Khalife expresses solidarity with the protestors in Bahrain by constructing a metonymic relationship between him and the protestors in which one stands for the whole. "Shots" are the discursive sound-object through which Khalife enacts this particular expression of solidarity. Grammatically, "shots" is a pluralized object that refers to an action, a sound, and a violent impact on flesh and body. By making his body vulnerable through the sensibilities of hearing, tactility, and physicality, Khalife expresses indignation at the Bahraini state.

Together, these two Facebook posts demonstrate how sonic signifiers are embedded in the discourse of protest and how protest actions, as sound acts, circulate through the discursive mediation of sound objects. Both instances involve the construction of protester subjectivity through the anticipation or evocation of a specific kind of event: an encounter with the state realized as a knock on the door heard by the subject or as a shot fired at the subject. It is the sound object that mediates the political formation of affect in these acts of defiance toward the state, which become narrativized into stories of protest. Sound is critical to mediating feelings of connectedness for networked publics, here coming together in solidarity. In a different direction, sound also demonstrates how physical and structural violence are critical forces in the affective economy of protests, that is, the accumulation and dispersal of public sentiment that drives political acts.

Facebook post: July 10, 2011
usually vocalists are "singer-poets" but this guy Ibrahim Qashush is a "martyr-poet" :/ [sic] . . . also here is the original political slogans as chanted live without the synthesized dabke beats (added postproduction)
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v-nM_7rlDvcpM)

This Facebook post annotates the death of the protest subject, specifically Ibrahim Qashoush. A Syrian protest singer from Homs who immortalized the protest song "Yalla Irhal Ya Bashar," Qashoush was reportedly murdered by *shabiḥa*, or thugs hired by the regime, though the actual identity of the singer and the murder victim remain contested (Harkin 2016). Factual accuracy notwithstanding, Qashoush's performance became the "soundtrack of the revolution" after his murder and remained so years afterwards. What is particularly grotesque about his story is how the *shabiḥa* deployed terror by massacring the sound-object itself: Qashoush's vocal cords were ripped out of his throat. What had transformed public space into a protest event and mobilized new waves of revolutionary affect among networked publics became the targeted object of terror and violence.

Vocal cords are instrumental in the formation of subjecthood (Schafers 2017). In death, Qashoush became a martyr; through martyrdom, he became what one Facebook friend called "a symbol for every victim of regime cruelty" (Facebook user July 10, 2011). In a comment responding to one of my Facebook posts about Qashoush in July 2011, the friend said that she knows only two names from Syria, "The little boy [Hamza] and this name (ibrahin Q) [sic]." She elaborated: "It's funny how we feel a need to put a name to the victims. Of course, and regrettably, he is one among many. In Egypt we had nearly 1000 unarmed martyrs, but we hold Khaled Said up as a symbol for every victim of regime cruelty." It is certainly the case that in the economy of protests, significant numbers of lives have been lost. Martyrdom creates subjects out of death. The public naming of martyrs is a speech act that, similar to the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and public campaigns against

disappearances in Latin America, graces the deceased or missing person with dignity in the wake of injustice. The discourse about Qashoush's vocal cords contains the record of injustice and a lament for anatomical folds of tissue whose stillness is a metaphor for the brutal tactics of regime force.

Since Qashoush's martyrdom, the political condition of mourning has scaled up from the loss of an individual to an existential state of grief for the revolution, its spaces, and subjects. Networked public life has also shifted during a protracted conflict beset by countless lives lost and buildings destroyed. In the next section, I ask how mourning is performed and how the circulation of these performances in networked public life manifests audibly. Shifting from the above discussion of the signification of sound-objects within protest narratives and events, I listen to the acoustic spaces produced in mobile video clips. I analyze cell phone footage for its acoustics, audibility, and sonic footprint in order to see how these sonic phenomena narrate and construct protest events and mourning rituals. As I move away from the discursive register of sonic writing into the audio domain of cell phone footage, I continue to pursue the question of the role of audibility in the circulation of political affect through social media practices.

Mourning

Persons, cities, revolutions. There is impossibly, unfathomably, much to mourn as the Syrian conflict persists. Figures of mourning have emerged throughout the conflict—from the first martyrs whose sacrifice was celebrated by funeral processionals that also served as protests against the regime to the nameless, traumatized bodies that scroll across phone and computer screens worldwide. In 2014, author Amal Hanano organized a seventy-two-hour long reading of the names of one hundred thousand Syrians killed during the conflict. Staged in Washington D.C., the "How Many More? Oral Memorial for Syria" event aimed to reclaim humanity for those whose death became but a statistic in international human rights discourse. Two years later, Lina Sergie Attar, an architect and nonprofit leader, mourned the destruction of her hometown, Aleppo. Elaborating on what the loss of her city means, Attar reflected that "we are witnessing a real death of the revolution as we have known it, and it has been dying for some time now" (Dlewati 2016). How individuals make sense of loss is both a personal choice and a political reckoning—not all shared Attar's sentiment that the revolution was dead, suggesting instead that the revolution be defined not by military defeat and the loss of place but as *thawra* (revolution), a state of mind that defies humiliation and brutality and demands dignity (Chabkoun 2016).

Years after mourning became a dominant mode of Syrianness, two revolutionary icons were killed by acts of violence in 2018 and 2019. Raed Fares and Abdul Baset al-Sarout were political figures central to galvanizing public support against the regime within Syria and across international networks. Their efforts were central to what would become Syria's protest culture—Fares penned banners that commented satirically on everyday moments in the conflict and put the village of Kafranbel on the map due to their broad international circulation in English-language networks. Sarout, known as the "Nightingale of the Syrian Revolution," moved individuals into action against the regime with his singing at anti-regime demonstrations in Homs. Their deaths, oddly occurring in the same season, marked not only the sorrowful passing of two major figures but also renewed grief and vengeance over the trajectory of the revolution.[5]

Across the region, funeral processionals (*jināzāt*) have been politicized into antihegemonic protests since at least the early twentieth century (Khalili 2007; Volk 2010; Ziter 2013). The politicization of

Syrian funerals into antiregime protests occurred primarily during the first years of the uprising, when funerary objects and practices actively transformed a killing act into performances of martyrdom and calls for justice. Funeral protests became spaces of violence due to their targeting by Syrian security forces, which anticipated that they would become oppositional, though not all did. They were also an indispensable genre for activists, who uploaded video footage of the events in order to expand the possibilities of participation beyond the physical space of the processional and onto digital platforms, where online viewers cocreated performances of martyrdom and participatory collective action (Wessels 2019). This proved crucial to sustaining the revolution during the mass displacement of Syrians to refugee camps, neighbouring countries, and Europe, among other destinations. Female Syrian Muslim refugees living in northern Jordan, for instance, "relived grief" when they accessed such footage daily (Boswall and Akash 2017, 176). Watching the mourners connected the women to their communities while also helping them cultivate a sense of Islamic morality that avoided *ghafla*, or negligence and carelessness. The cultural performances of martyrdom that took place at funeral processionals thus extended the technological possibilities for participation as well as the geography of revolution into sites of displacement.

Jināzāt tell stories of revolution, death, and mourning through processional theatre. Processionals, write Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Brooks McNamara, are "designed to compete with the existing environment around it [and to] employ distinctive elements to distinguish it from everyday movement through space" (1985, 2). They are a "performative community practice" (Cox 2017, 481) that "insert[s] death into spaces of protest" (Mittermaier 2014, 586) through mourning rituals and protest repertoire. Fundamental to the ritual elements of antiregime funeral processionals, yet often overlooked and underheard, are the ritual sonic objects that make *jināzāt* a powerful part of public culture during the conflict. These include traditional vocal practices such as laments, wailing, and crying, each of which expresses "suffering" through nondiscursive and affect-rich acts of performance and is more often than not gendered feminine in ways that generate a "sense and sensibility of public cohesion" (Kunreuther 2018, 14). Ritual sonic objects at Syrian funerals also include nonvocal sounds, such as gunshots or the revving of motorcycle engines, that prostheticize the mourners' aural presence. This sonic "repertoire of contention" (Tufekci 2017, 89) is at once local and prescient to the political demands and emotions of the processional event and intersecting with broader geographies and longer histories of protests, whose repertoires are, as those working in sound studies have demonstrated, intertextual, subversive, and visceral (Kheshti 2015; Kunreuther 2018; Manabe 2015; Sonevytsky 2019; Tausig 2019).

My discussion of the *jināzāt* of Raed Fares and Basel Abdel al-Sarout draws on these histories while attending to the effects of technological mediation and digital circulation in making protest funerals audible. If the auditory dynamics of *jināzāt* convey the local meanings and significance of politics, mourning, and political sentiments, audibility is a register for the political and communal sentiments of collective mourning. Audibility, in other words, announces public space in the moment of its contestation. It connects disparate sound acts through the constellative work of performance occurring asynchronously between live public space and virtual social media platforms, and it mobilizes revolutionary affects—grief, mourning, and vengeance.

My approach to affective politics of audibility leads me to argue for a particular sonic materiality associated with processionals, protests, and funerals, what I provisionally call the grain of the recording. This grain is not that of an individual voice, instrument, or performer, as first famously proposed by Roland Barthes in *The Grain of the Voice* (1985), but more a multitudinous and processual phenomenon to which I attribute a particular kind of affective and acoustic intensity that

is at once political and aesthetic. Funeral processionals have particular grains. What is significant is how these grains are mediated by cell phone technology and web technology as the footage circulates on the web, and how these grains are vital to the storytelling of the revolution. Attuning to the grain of the recording also draws attention to the role of listening bodies in the affective economy of revolution. Protests, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (2019), are as contingent on listening and responsorial bodies as they are on chants and music. Participants negotiate the spatial and temporal conditions of protest landscapes through listening as part of an entire sensorium of experience.[6] The value of theorizing audibility vis-à-vis the concept of the "grain" is to explore an acoustics framework, wherein the intensity of sound has affective value and effects that contribute to public sentiment. Acoustic intensity, affect, and sonic materiality, in other words, helps us to understand how sound-based performances circulate through listening as a mode of participation and witnessing that connects bodies across disparate spaces and times.

Raed Fares was an activist leader of the Syrian revolution. He was from Kafranbel, a town that gained wide visibility on social media through its sardonic political slogans hand-painted on banners in English and Arabic, intended for the international community watching the revolution. Fares initiated these banners when he realized the Fridays of protest were not enough to effect political change and to create international pressure on the regime. He also started Radio Fresh to distribute independent media in Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo provinces (supported by the Obama administration through radios and media supplies). In addition to his public relations organizing, he built infrastructure in and around Kafranbel, known for its local political autonomy from jihadi militants and the regime. He set up daycares and schools and trained over 2500 journalists. Along with his colleague and fellow activist Hamud Juneid, he was assassinated in November 2018, most likely by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a jihadi group linked to Al Qaeda, which controlled Kafranbel and the greater area checkpoints at certain moments during the conflict.

Fares's death triggered mass collective grief by millions who identified with the revolution. Grieving him on Facebook, Sergie Attar posted: "we used to wake up early every Friday to see what brilliance Raed Fares had come up with on the latest Kafranbel banners. This Friday we woke up to unthinkable news. The brilliant man is gone. My friend is gone. Our collective grief is overwhelming. It is truly Black Friday" (Attar 2018). For many, his death marked the "day the Syrian Revolution died" because of his work to animate the political sentiments for a global English-speaking public and his local work leading Kafranbel, a symbol of democratic organizing in an opposition movement beset by a lack of cohesive political vision among its leaders (Grisholm 2018).

Two thousand mourners reportedly attended the funeral processional of Fares and Juneid in Kafranbel on November 23, 2018. In a composite video of cell phone footage released by Smart News Agency, the funeral begins indoors, presumably in a mosque, with a *munshid* chanting prayers to seek pardons for the deceased. The footage then cuts to an outdoors processional wherein around eight men carry each deceased body, draped with standard household bedding, on a bier through the crowd. A mourner drapes an opposition flag over one of the bodies, presumably Fares.

The next segment of footage features mourners weaving through Kafranbel's narrow village streets. Significant here are several ritualized sounds of funerals that blend protest rituals with death rituals. The crowd engages in call and response chants, repeating the vocal repertoire that has animated protest funerals over years of conflict. Gunshots are fired in quick succession, a sonic index of the death event. Female ululations (vocal trills) pierce the air, a ritual grieving practice of some communities, though this practice is contested by local interpretations of Islamic doctrine (Lange

2012). Finally, street traffic noise, specifically motorcycle engines, is the prominent keynote in this soundscape of mourning. The revving of motorcycle engines is possibly a means to display vehicular capital and thereby ascribe a certain kind of honour to the deceased. Indeed, the accumulation of engine noise suggests a larger than typical number of motorcyclists processing at this funeral. These accrete into an acoustic force of loudness that is characterized by its very excess (Quintero 2019), an excess that makes political action and martyrdom audible.

The footage then cuts to the arrival of the protest processional at the site of burial. Taken from close proximity, the camera lens centres on the burial pit, scored by the crisp sounds of shovels hitting small rocks in the dirt. The laborious breathing of those handling the shovels comes through on the recording, making audible the exertion behind their efforts. Jackets rustle with each movement. Shovellers verbally direct one another to collaboratively lower Fares's body into the burial site (the footage does not document the funeral prayers conventionally recited during the lowering of the corpse into the ground). The contrast between the intimate texture of these sounds and the prior urban soundscape of motorcycles and chants is jarring. These sounds are not ritualized elements of communal and political performance but audible traces of the labour of mourning.

Crisp and intimate, these sounds chronicle a political moment of mourning and document the ordinariness of revolution. Figures emerge, of collective male mourners, of embodied political commitment, of martyrs whose silence and stillness are marked by the actions of those who hail their sacrifice. The footage, likely from multiple sources, circulates in ways that extend the participatory mode of witnessing and being present during a burial rite for a political martyr. The audibility of ritual sonic objects registers political affect and grief by realizing public acts of mourning as both excessive and intimate. This is a particular kind of acoustic grain that emerges through listening to and for the relationship of sounds to their sources. In the next moment, I shift to considering the acoustic grain of the *jināza* as less about how sound indexes mourning and more about acoustic intensity and the (in)coherence of bodies making sounds as they create public spaces and moments of mourning.

Abdul Baset al-Sarout was a well-known leader of the Free Syrian Army who gained household recognition through his protest chants and singing at anti-regime demonstrations in Homs. His performances circulated broadly such that he became an iconic figure of the revolution, whose presence at demonstrations increased turnout and political motivation. A goalkeeper for the Syrian youth soccer team, he became a commander during the siege of Homs (2011–14). He was displaced to Idlib following the surrender of Homs to the regime. He migrated briefly to Turkey only to return to Syria to resume his struggle against the regime by joining Sunni Islamist factions. He was killed in combat in June 2019 in Tel Meleh, a town in the Hama province that was attacked by the regime in an offensive against rebel-held areas. As the editors of the journal *Al-Jumhuriyya* wrote, his death was received by many with a trifold sense of grief: "sorrow" over the loss of an individual who spent "eight years of total immersion in the revolution"; "melancholy" over the affective return to the "foundational moments of the revolution, and its crest," circa 2011 and 2012; and "anguish" over the online posthumous attack on Sarout by Assad loyalists.[7]

Memory politics notwithstanding, Sarout received a martyr's funeral that began at a hospital in Reyhanli, Turkey, where he was taken for treatment, and returned across the border to the town of al-Dana in the Idlib province. Numerous YouTube videos document the mourners gathered in Reyhanli. The videos feature an open public square occupied by a large, dense, mostly male crowd followed by a processional through Reyhanli's streets (Syrian Portal 2019). The crowd carried a

closed coffin draped with a green cloth, a "body so often carried on the shoulders of crowds raised one last time by mourners chanting for him, rather than with him" ("The Days of Abd al-Basit" 2019). As a testament to Sarout's legacy as a singer and chant leader for anti-regime demonstrations, an embodied practice of vocal politics that he sustained throughout eight years of protests and militancy, the crowd of mourners shouted, clapped, and chanted throughout the processional. Whistling and ululations punctuated the recording, along with an aberrant cough by the person holding the recording device (Bozkurt 2019). Ambient sounds also emerged in the sonic footprint of the footage, an urban soundscape of traffic, loud engines revving, and background noise.

The shouting and clapping are at times in unison, and at other times dispersed in ways that animate less a sense of collective mourning in tandem and more an assemblage of stochastic, or randomly determined, acts of mourning. As Ben Tausig writes, spontaneous and stochastic chants enable a dense, "horizontal cloud of political feeling, impossible to locate but politically present" (2019, 151). The politics presented by these chants are sorrow and melancholy over the loss of Sarout's life, a death that symbolizes the trajectory of the revolution from its purported crest in 2011 and 2012 to its descent into armed conflict, with groups chaotically vying for resources, territory, and ideology.

As a listener engaging with this sorrowful "cloud of political feeling" through social media technology, I am confronted with its acoustic intensity, one shaped as much by the inchoate dynamics of stochastic participation as by the affective space of grief and mourning. If acoustic intensity is a function of the acoustic density of sonic occupation, as Sonevytsky (2019), following Martin Daughtry, proposes, what happens when "big" and "energetic" sounds "occupy space dynamically"? What happens to the acoustic intensity of the listening experience when sound is "layered," "amplified," and "diminished"? If protest spaces emerge through the tactical bodies that gesture, chant, march, and occupy historically and politically contingent social spaces, listening is a mode through which political subjects move through and constitute political spaces across time and space. Fundamental to a discussion of acoustic intensity is its dynamism, how it waxes and wanes depending on both the emergent and spontaneous nature of chanting and the position of the recording device. When listening to the YouTube videos for research purposes, Greg Manuel noted that "when the coffin nears the camera's vantage point, the chanting is much more distinct and unified. As the coffin moves further away, the chanting is matched by more diffuse shouts and statements of individual crowd members."[8] Ben Tausig describes this phenomenon as "panoramic listening" (2019, 179) that occurs when a listener is positioned at a distance from the wavelike sonic flow of rallies, as chants "rise and recede" although the panorama here is constituted through temporal, spatial, and technological distance. The compelling question that Tausig raises is whether panoramic listening "washes away the grain" of the crowd, whether the rising and receding of chants as protesters move closer, then further, serves to "reveal" or "obscure" (2019, 179) the grain of the collective protest.

Modulating this question, we might ask what happens when grain is "washed away" by the technology that mediates the experience of those accessing these phenomena through social media. How are distance and proximity perceived after the sonic transduction (Helmreich 2015) that occurs during recording, uploading, and playback? And more importantly, how does this shape the acoustic-affective experience for listeners? What social media users listen to is of a different grain than what mourners listen to in immediate, live surroundings. What social media users listen for is the communication of political sentiment through an acoustic listening experience.

Rather than consider grain to be "washed away," I suggest that the acoustic value of grain shifts in the recordings of Sarout's funeral processional. Here, and in contrast to Fares's funeral processional, the grain of mourning becomes embedded in an acoustic framework that privileges the intensity and density of sound recording over an index of sound sources (e.g., gunshots, chants, motorcycle engines, ululations). As particular sound sources become untraceable, not visible, or unclear in their transduced, digital format on social media, the effects of acoustic intensity are paradoxically to render vitality to the event. The loudness of the crowd communicates an excess of political and emotional sentiment; it is not noise as "calculated [political] disruption" (Kunreuther 2018, 19) but rather an acoustic intensity that crafts worlds and performs martyrdom. It is the chaotic, spontaneous, and unplanned movement of persons, crowds, and the sounds that they produce that gives these protest processionals their political possibility. It is the capacity of sounds to collapse distance, to carry a sense of home to displaced listeners. When sounds are mobile, as they always are, their politics are constitutive of movements—political, physical, and performative.

Conclusion

In her introduction to *Theorizing Sound Writing,* Deborah Kapchan notes when "an opportunity for empathy [was] lost because the world did not listen" (2017, 13). Reflecting on a poem by William Carlos Williams, "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus," which describes the landscape painting, *The Fall of Icarus* by Brueghel the Elder, Kapchan invokes how a farmer ploughing a field by the seashore failed to notice the splash of Icarus drowning. She urges us to attend to "the future in ways that make the splash of Icarus not only visible, but audible" (13). Listening for the barely audible is a sound act that intervenes in structures of power—the power of attention and the power of representation. Listening to make certain subjects more audible is likewise a sound act that shifts topographies of power in live public spaces and mediatized virtual spaces. This article has dwelled in acoustic spaces that, like the splash of Icarus, have failed to be noticed.

The challenge of thinking about audibility is not only the privilege afforded to the image in the representational economy (and particularly violence in the Syrian conflict), but also how these mediations are vital to global civic engagement and the narratives that sustain such engagement. As a witness to and sympathizer of the Arab revolutions, I have continually listened in—to events as they unfold, to the sounds of power and violence, to voices whose testimonies are silenced by dominant narratives, and to cultural expressions of conflict and displacement. As an ethnographer seeking to amplify the role of sound and aurality in the protests, I consider how power becomes (in)audible through sonic contestations, interrogating the political, representational, and affective economy of sound in particular historical moments. These efforts hope to prompt an urgency of listening across borders as a practice of critical engagement that leads to better understandings of how we engage with the political processes through which voices emerge or are suppressed. This urgency remains especially important in light of the mass displacement of Syrians, among other refugee populations, for whom sound acts mobilize affective publics across geographic and temporal divides.

There is, of course, a limit to my capacity to interpret ethnographic spaces through social media platforms. As my discussion on mourning and protest events suggested, I was unable to directly access the communities who participated in the funeral protests and unable to address experiences of mourning from the perspective of copresent participant-observation. I therefore presented these materials as a listener engaged not in the immediacy of the event and the community in which it

took place but removed temporally, spatially, and socially from its occurrence. An ethnographer positioned differently in relation to these communities might be able to gain access in different ways.

Nonetheless, it is through the affective politics of sound—when sound affords an intensity and granularity imbued with political potential and promise—that I, and others, am able to sustain the presence of connection, however networked, decentred, and partial. In my discussion of what happens when the worlds of Egyptian and Syrian protests become audible through ethnographic engagements with networked technology, I have located audibility in the sonic markers of protest, the acoustic intensity of the crowd, and the grain of mourning, all of which bear an affective value that translates into the political work of protests and mourning. When and how sound becomes inscribed into networked public life, whether through participatory social media or ethnographic and performative writing, the audibility of performance has the power to craft narrative, mobilize affect, and transform political possibilities.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. SayNow originally developed the software for celebrity fans to leave fanmail, later acquired by Google in 2011. See Singh and Mardini (2011).

2. A Twitter account, @AliveInEgypt, transcribed messages, mostly in Arabic, into text. An internet-based radio station played recordings (http://egypt.periszkopradio.hu).

3. Speak2Tweet was relaunched on July 23, 2012, in Egypt, and again in Syria in late November during an internet blackout, though it was not used with the same frequency in Syria as in Egypt. Later attempts to revive the platform in Sudan and Egypt in 2019 were met with a similar lack of activity.

4. The data is stored on now-defunct servers (gstatic.com) and no longer available to the public.

5. Thank you to Michael Rakowitz for identifying vengeance as a mobilizing affect of protest funerals.

6. See Sonevytsky (2019) regarding relying more on ears than eyes at the Woman's March due to poor visibility, large crowds, and relative height.

7. Loyalists reportedly deleted social media tributes and blocked social media users who posted about Sarout in order to defame his legacy and portray him in memoriam as a "terrorist." See "The Days of Abd al-Basit" (2019).

8. Greg Manuel, October 21, 2019. I wish to acknowledge Greg's work, in the role of research assistant, to provide a preliminary identification and analysis of funeral processional media. See also Bozkurt, YouTube video.

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