Toward a Theory of Sound: Power Relations in Israel-Palestine from an “Acoustemological” Frequency

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Abstract  Sound—existing at the interface of physiological reception and vibratory signal—enfolds us, saturates our bodies, and constitutes a critical part of our sensory map of the world, yet it is rarely conceptualized or studied as explicitly political. Rather, an apolitical understanding of sound persists despite its well-documented historical deployment in struggles to control physical territory and living populations via mechanisms of privation, amplification, surveillance, and self-regulation. Sound’s relative marginalization in the field of political science may stem, in part, from the difficulties inherent in measuring and analyzing something so intrinsically ephemeral. If it is considered at all, sound is most frequently is conflated with language and understood through the frame of semiotics and discourse. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Israel and Palestine in 2015, this paper lays out a preliminary methodological approach to the study of politics through sound, drawing attention to specifically acoustic forms of knowledge production and how these might be researched. Looking at two cases related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it demonstrates, on the one hand, how an ethnographic attention to sound may advance empirical understandings of contentious politics in particular settings, and, on the other, what a sound-centric interpretive methodology in political science might entail.

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The emergent turn to visuality and materialism in political science has forged new pathways toward understanding power as physically situated and as significant beyond the domain of rational action, resource capacity, or path-dependent institutions. This research,\(^1\) which has received a great deal of scholarly attention, has significantly expanded the ways in which the discipline understands agency and causality, even as it has drawn attention to sight and space as important loci of political contention. Yet due to a singular focus on visuality, this line of research affords only an impressionistic roadmap by which to comprehend diversifying modes of control and resistance in today’s technologized global reality. Visuality has eclipsed a more holistic approach to sensory understanding—obscuring the significance of smell, touch, taste, hearing, and synesthetic perception in the political realm. Because of the way in which these other senses are naturalized in contemporary Western thought, fading into the background, as it were, to their more prominent sibling, vision, political science has tended to overlook “the lesser senses” as productive vehicles for critical investigation.

Sound, I posit, represents a particularly salient counterpoint to visuality and materiality in the political sphere. Its significance may be recognized intuitively in the claims that it has on our everyday—from the alarm clock, to the commute, to the dynamics of classroom—sounds regulate and produce the fabric of our lives. Sound, of course, will have its own perspectival limitations, and my emphasis on aurality should also not suggest that I am inattentive to the deeply synesthetic nature of knowing and perceiving. The object of this paper, however, is to demonstrate how a sustained attention to the auditory realm will uncover dynamics that are central to practices of power that might otherwise be left unheard, using the highly politicized and intractable context of Palestine and Israel as a grounding for an empirical analysis and exploration of what a sound-centric methodology might involve.

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\(^1\) See, for example, Benedict Anderson, Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, Stephen Graham, Derek Gregory, David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, David Lyon, Timothy Mitchell, Timothy Pachirat, and James Scott, Edward Soja, and John Urry; and in the Israeli-Palestinian context, Chiara DiCesari, Linda Quiquivix, Helga-Towil Souri and Eyal Weizman, among many others.
This paper, then, begins by laying out a theoretical framework for conceptualizing sound, placing it in conversation with debates on power that constitute the epistemological foundations for much of the work done in global and comparative politics. From this base, I offer a sound-power typology as a useful intellectual construct for thinking through sound in the political sphere. This is followed by a discussion of two methodological approaches to sound-power in an empirical setting. The first example represents a mode of inquiry which thinks about sound, analyzing references to sound drawn from the oral testimonies of Israeli Defense Force soldiers speaking about their operational experience. The second example, which examines the impact of Israel’s anti-rocket air raid siren, or Tzeva Adom, on a public’s relationship with the Israeli state, offers an example of research that thinks through sound, problematizing not only the sort of data that is deemed valuable for the production of knowledge in political science, but also the Cartesian premise of mind-body dualism.

Embedded in each discussion are references to specific methods that researchers might employ to attune themselves to the power relationships that sound reveals, as well as an analysis of the ways in which an attention to fine-grained sensory and material empirics produces an inherently subjective engagement with instantiations of power—a position that must be acknowledged and explicated in order for the claims to sustain critique, but that is all the more ‘powerful’ for the reflexivity it enforces. I conclude by returning to the question of how sound complicates understandings of power in the discipline and offer a new category for thinking through the ways in which actors determine the conditions of their political life.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Conventional conceptualizations of power undergirding the discipline of political science enfold an immense range of institutions and relationships. Power is commonly thought of under such headings as political, military, economic, or social; alternately it is imagined in accordance
with the ways in which it manifests, as in Joseph Nye’s distinction between “hard” or “soft”² forms of power, or Walter Russell Mead’s notion of “sharp” or “sticky” power.³ Even after the “faces of power” debates⁴ that swept parts of academia in the 1970s and ‘80s and greatly deepened our understanding of the concept, most discursive uses of power in mainstream political science⁵ still fall back on a straightforward, Dahlian notion of A’s ability to make B do something B would not otherwise do.⁶

More recently, Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall have argued for the importance of expanding disciplinary approaches to the conceptualization of power, and in this effort they developed a taxonomy that breaks the concept into four “modes,” namely compulsory, institutional, structural, and productive.⁷ Briefly (and hopefully without doing damage to the concepts by reducing them overly), compulsory power, which serves as the foundation for much of realist thought, emphasizes “control by identifiable actors over the objections of other actors through deployment (even if only symbolically) of resources.”⁸ Institutional power centers on actors’ control of others in indirect ways, with a focus on formal and informal institutions that

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mediate through rules and procedures. Structural power produces the relative social capacity of subjects, determining not only capability but also interest. This conceptualization undergirds the work of much scholarship influenced by Karl Marx, though it appears elsewhere as well. Finally, productive power refers to the constitution of subjects via discursive practices. Barnett and Duvall note “conceptually, the move is away from structures, per se, to systems of signification and meaning.”

The versatility of this taxonomy provides an important advantage for a theory of political sound in that it makes possible the comparison of different literatures on power within a singular “language” or conceptual frame. This has allowed me to bring theories from scholars who have highlighted power’s physicality (often understood through visuality, materiality, and biopolitics) into conversation with more mainstream research, which focuses on the workings of political power through actors, regimes, or institutions. I do this not in order to pin theorists down as “realists” or “constructivists,” but so as to understand where an attention to the auditory realm might advance new understandings of political power in empirical debates. Following Barnett and Duvall’s taxonomy, then, the initial conceptual apparatus behind my theory of sound-power is structured as follows:

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The “other” box represents a placeholder category for that order of power which complicates, or exceeds, Barnett and Duvall’s taxonomy and which is brought to the fore via an attention to sound. I will return to this category in my concluding comments after treating the empirical cases. Proceeding from this framework, and thinking inductively about what might constitute “data” that could be harnessed in evidence of a theory of sound-specific power, I sought a means by which to organize the broad range of mundane, everyday sounds that are present in the empirical world. In order to address these systematically, I disaggregated “sound,” breaking it into four anthropocentric classes—silent, inaudible, perceptible, and hazardous. Doing so makes it possible to trace the ways in which sound functions as a mechanism of power across a material dimension while keeping track of the type of political influence it wields at the same time. Overlaying these classes of sound with Barnett and Duvall’s categories resulted in the following typology:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound-Power</th>
<th>Compulsory</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Productive</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silent</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaudible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptible</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazardous</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

This chart, then, represents categories of power that constitute the epistemological foundations of political science research, with an overlay of four anthropocentrically delimited classes of sound. The perceptible range of human hearing extends from approximately 20 to 20,000 hertz (Hz), or cycles per second, depending on age, health, and genetic disposition. Occurring between the ranges of 0.001 to 20 Hz, infrasound falls below the typical spectrum of frequencies.

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12 This presumes, alongside Max Weber, the centrality of the concept of power to the study of politics. In “Politics as Vocation”, Weber notes that politics is best understood as the effort to share or distribute power, either among states or among groups within a state. Max Weber, “Politics As a Vocation,” in C.Wright-Mills and Hans Gerth, Eds. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 1958. pp. 77-82.

13 As a point of reference, dogs hear a range of frequencies from 40 to 60,000 Hz; bats hear a range of frequencies from 1000 to 200,000 Hz.
human audibility. Ultrasound, at the high end of the spectrum, is equally inaudible to humans. In my typology I have grouped both together in the category of “inaudible.” Because of the broad application of infra- and ultrasound in military, medical, and other technologies, I include them in the typology as important sources of sound-power, even though they are not present in the cases that I present in this paper.

Scholars disagree as to whether silence exists in any absolute sense (assuming the presence of a gravitational atmosphere in which sound waves may propagate). Yet it remains useful as an analytical category; consider, for example, the impact of “silence” on inmates in solitary confinement, or the “silent” Standing Man political protests that swept Turkey in 2013. Finally, the “hazardous” category stands apart from the others in the sense that it is not delimited by frequency but rather by the physiological response it triggers. In terms of high volume and the physiology of ears, the human threshold for pain begins at approximately 110 decibels (Db). This threshold, and the politics that surround it such as noise abatement laws in urban settings, the use of music as torture in war, or the vibrational impact of wind turbines, is an important site of political contention and relationships of power. The “X’s” in the fields above stand in for the body of disparate sound-power “events”14 identified in my work in Israel and Palestine, and as such, provides an aggregated snapshot of the breadth of this research as well as a quick understanding of how sound-power is, and is not, commonly present in this political setting. The sonic events that these X’s represent will be discussed in detail below in the case studies.

THINKING ABOUT SOUND

This section analyzes three texts published by the Israeli nongovernmental organization “Breaking the Silence.” Founded in 2004 by Israeli veterans who wanted to share experiences which, in their minds, had been hidden from the broader Israeli society, the NGO collects testimonies from soldiers who served in the Israeli Defense Force, the Border Guard, and the

14 Conceptualizing sound as an “event” allows me to isolate causal action and to distinguish one sound within the cacophony of possible options for analysis.
Security Forces in the Occupied Territories since September 2000. Most of the more than 1000 testimonies have been collected anonymously. Breaking the Silence crosschecks the accounts with eyewitnesses and/or the archives of other human rights organizations active in the region\(^{15}\) and makes the testimonies available publicly. According to the organization, the testimonies are published “verbatim, with only minor alterations to language to remove identifying details and clarify military terms.”\(^{16}\) Other than short introductions, the three texts I treat here consist entirely of testimonies without secondary analysis.

I initially came across these testimonies when I was doing fieldwork in Israel in 2015 and my trail of informants ran dry. Attempting to think through the manner in which Foucaultian notions about the disciplining capacity of sight might manifest in a sonic register, I had been trying to find soldiers who might be willing to discuss the ways in which sound was used in basic military training in the Israeli Defense Force. With limited contacts on the ground, however, I faced the challenge of how to gain access to first-hand accounts of military operations and life in the field. I read these testimonies, then, rather against the grain of their intended message. One might say that I read them with a critical ear—culling any and all references to sound in order to analyze these within my sound-power framework. Given that the interviewers soliciting the testimony were in no way attentive to sound as an object of inquiry, I had low expectations about how useful this strategy would prove to be. I was surprised, then, to note how frequently sounds were referenced—not only in a descriptive, atmospheric sense, but also specifically as a mechanism of power (though they were, of course, not always identified in those terms by the soldiers). In the 296 testimonies examined, I found over 78 unique references to sound or sonic

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\(^{15}\) Breaking the Silence Official Website. “About Us,” Online at: http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/about/organization

events.\textsuperscript{17} Many of these, of course, underscored the commonality of experience across different postings and eras—a soldier’s inability to sleep because of the sounds of war, the firing of warning shots, or instances of yelling and verbal harassment, for example were mentioned again and again. Similarities enabled me to loosely group the evidence in broad categories, making it possible to speak of a “family resemblance”\textsuperscript{18} among different sound events. In what follows, I will discuss two “families” of evidence that model how one might use sound to think through the operation of power in an empirical context.

The first cluster of evidence centers around the twinned operational objectives of “demonstrating a presence” and “disruption.” At face value, these seem like weapons of the weak in that they may harass, or intimidate, but are unlikely to be determinate in coercive, or compulsory struggles for power. Indeed, these strategies are frequently at play in “everyday” policing in the Occupied Territories. And yet, they play a role in formal war as well: in July 2014, citing “incessant rocket fire from Gaza,” Israel launched heavy air and artillery strikes against Hamas-led Gaza Strip. When the air attack failed to fully suppress individual rocket offensives after ten days of shelling, the Israeli Defense Force initiated a ground assault, sending troops into Gaza. Soldiers described entering a wasteland in which neighborhoods had been “erased.”\textsuperscript{19} Others claimed not to have seen a living person outside of their own platoon during their entire time in Gaza Strip.\textsuperscript{20} One First Sergeant in the Armored Corps, stationed fourteen

\textsuperscript{17} It would be possible to think that this number appears low, undermining the supposition that sound features centrally in the soldier’s experience. It is important to keep in mind, however, that in the context of these interviews references to sound were entirely unsolicited. Sound was not the topic of the interview, nor was the subject of sound in any way introduced or elicited.


\textsuperscript{19} \textit{This is How We Fought in Gaza: Soldiers Testimonies and Photographs from Operation Protective Edge}. Breaking the Silence (2014): 27

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{This is How We Fought in Gaza: Soldiers Testimonies and Photographs from Operation Protective Edge}. Breaking the Silence (2014): 29, 34
kilometers south of Gaza City at Deir al-Balah (“Monastery of the Date Palm”), described sitting among the rubble on the early morning after their night entrance into Gaza:

There wasn’t anything to do and people started dozing off…after we had taken over the neighborhood in the night. There was no threat and it was quiet, and suddenly there’s this command on the two-way radio … ‘Guys, all the tanks in a row, firing positions, all together facing the neighborhood of al-Bureij, we’re commencing engagement.’ … I personally asked my commander, ‘where are we firing at?’ He told me, ‘pick wherever you feel like it.’ And later, during talks with the other guys—each one basically chose his own target, and the commander called it on the two-way radio, ‘Good morning al-Bureij. We are carrying out a good morning al-Bureij, guys.’ That was the quote. Basically to wake up the neighborhood, to show those guys that the IDF is here and to carry out deterrence. … And then the commander says on the radio, ‘3, 2, 1…fire!’ And everyone fired shells wherever they wanted to, obviously. Nobody had opened fire at us—not before, not after, not during.”

The “good morning al-Bureij” engagement, then, involved firing at a village from a distance in order to “wake them up” and to “carry out deterrence.” In this instance, it is the sound of firing that is the key agent; there was no threat to the soldiers, and nothing in particular was being targeted as the village was out of firing range. The sonic presence of gunfire was itself the intended operational objective. It disrupted sleep (to the degree that the citizens of al-Bureij were able to sleep in the context of ongoing military action); announced the nearby presence of a military force, heralded and laid claim to the newly conquered territory and, via a sonic show of force, served as a deterrent to any would-be challengers. This weaponization of sound marks a pointedly straightforward and brutal application of power at a micro-scale. “Tuning in” to the particulars of the sound-event, though, reveals multiple modalities of power at play: on the one hand, the sound of the volleys will mandate the waking of the Palestinians in the neighboring village—a relatively straightforward instantiation of compulsory power. On the other hand, the sound (alongside the physical presence of the military) altered the physical environment in such a way as to reenact and reinforce territorial claims—both for the present moment and extending into future imaginaries as a deterrent. This understanding of sound’s operation is most readily

21This is How We Fought in Gaza: Soldiers Testimonies and Photographs from Operation Protective Edge. Breaking the Silence (2014): 81-82.
understood via structural conceptualizations of power, in which factors exogenous to the active participants determine possible outcomes. Whether or not sound, in its ephemerality, can be said to structure outcomes beyond its resonant presence is debatable, of course. But this very tension raises questions about temporality and duration of causal factors in a constructivist account: how long does a condition have to persist in order for it to take on a key role in shaping outcomes? An attention to sound brings this sort of concern to the forefront.

Sound in the above account may also be said to have had a “productive” effect, in the sense that it announced a physical presence and communicated an aggressive stance—generating knowledge and framing a discourse. Yet because sound is not, strictly speaking, language, its function as a mechanism of power does not fit into Barnett and Duvall’s description of productive power without “stretching” the category. I will return to the ways in which sound-power challenges and exceeds these categories as I move through further examples. The following excerpt, describing events in the West Bank city of Nablus in 2004, echoes the objectives described in the “good morning al-Bureij” maneuver. Here, an artillery soldier testifies to the routine weaponization of sound in the context of an interview with a Breaking the Silence interlocutor:

Another time we went at three in the morning in a Safari and threw stun grenades in the street. For no reason, just to wake people up.

What was the point?

To say, ‘we’re here. The IDF is here.’ In general, they told us that if some terrorist heard the IDF in the village, then maybe he’d come outside to fight. No one ever came out. … We didn’t understand why we were throwing grenades. We threw a grenade. We heard a “boom,” and we saw people waking up. When we got back, they’d say “great operation,” but we didn’t understand why. This happened every day—a different force from the company did it each time, it was just part of the routine, part of our lives.


Much like the 2014 example from Gaza, making noise, in this case, appears to have been the primary objective of the operation—with the expectation that the generated noise would harass a target population, demonstrate strength, and disrupt normalcy. In both cases, the impetus to generate aggressive sound was commanded by those in a leadership position, suggesting that this strategy was not merely a byproduct of a zealous group of soldiers or an emotional response to a particular event. Rather, sound appears to have an institutionalized role in Israeli military operations, serving as a low-cost, high-impact weapon that operates across multiple registers to dominate and control populations and territory. In this regard it represents, perhaps, a turn toward “non-lethal” weapons as an ethically preferable solution to problems of population control, suggesting that tactics of repression are more acceptable if they do not result in a body count. Currently there are not any human rights laws that relate specifically to sound, although noise pollution is handled under environmental laws by several countries and international courts. For governments with shaky human rights records, sound-based strategies of domination, then, represent one way by which to repress populations while still purporting to abide by international standards.

Thus, when the Israeli Defense Force detonated twenty-nine “sound bombs” over a period of five nights in a Palestinian residential area in Gaza in November 2005, United Nation’s Middle East convoy Alvaro De Soto could call the booms an “indiscriminate instrument” that effected collective punishment, but could not accuse Israel of human rights violations. The sonic booms, produced by airplanes flying at high speed and low altitude, cracked walls and shattered windows. Residents testified to nosebleeds, miscarriages, panic attacks, hearing loss, and disorientation. The category of “non-lethal” weaponry, which makes survival, or life, the ultimate benchmark for defining permissible aggressive action, represents an abysmally low


standard for engagement outside of a wartime context. The incorporation of material sound into this category of weapon demonstrates an extreme case of the smaller, everyday strategies described in soldier’s testimonies treated in this paper.

One more data point in this vein bears exploring. In 2004, an artilleryman stationed in the settlements of Gush Etzion, south of Jerusalem, described the now-familiar process that the IDF refers to in formal language as “demonstrating a presence.” What is distinctive about this example is the colloquial moniker given to the operation. Coined “Happy Purim” (in Hebrew, Chag Purim Sameach), the name refers to a revelrous Jewish religious holiday in which noise making and sound play a significant part. On Purim, people dress in costume and make noise in the streets; the Biblical story of Purim is chanted from the Scroll of Esther, and the faithful are commanded to hear every word. Listeners boo, hiss, stamp their feet, and wield a ra’ashan, or noisemaker, to blot out all utterances of the name “Haman,” the story’s antagonist and the vizier to the Persian King Xerxes I. Part of the celebration of the annual holiday, then, involves ritualistically annihilating the sound symbolizing their historic enemy. Thus, semantically linking this sonic act of ritual annihilation and celebration to a contemporary military maneuver in the Occupied Territories adds a layer of significance to sound’s functioning:

Normally the point of ‘Happy Purim’ is to stop people from sleeping. It means going into a village in the middle of the night, going around throwing stun grenades and making a noise. Not all night long, but at a specific time. It doesn’t matter how long you do it, they don’t set an end time. They say, ‘Okay, [Palestinians] threw stones at you today in Husan, so go do a Happy Purim there.’

With this cultural background, we come to understand the IDF’s use of sound in Gush Etzion to represent a literal “blotting out” of the Palestinian villagers. With recurrent stochasticity, the IDF appropriates the soundscape of the village, obliterating any organic (Palestinian) sounds that might lay claim to the space and imposing their own presence. In the process, the operation becomes a mnemonic that links the current action of throwing stun grenades to a long narrative of

oppression and survival, the Jewish religious calendar, ludic celebrations with friends and family, and an existential threat. Sound-power, here, is compulsory, certainly, but also taps into institutional forms of power at two levels: first, as an institutionalized tactic of aggression and domination utilized by the IDF over a documented ten year span; second, as a mechanism that both relies on institutionalized religious frameworks and modes of thought and, simultaneously, reinforces and reanimates those same cognitive structures in the contemporary political sphere.

The Oslo Accords of the early 1990s divided the Occupied Territories into three areas—Area A, Area B, and Area C—each of which designates a different system of sovereignty, with Area A being mostly under Palestinian control and Area C being entirely under Israeli control. Much has been written about the Israeli cooptation of space and control of visual signifiers as a strategy of late-modern colonial occupation and state formation. The material instantiations of these modalities of governance—separation barriers, checkpoints, land appropriation, buffer zones, entry-permit regimes and identification cards, and the dominance of high ground and airspace—are all familiar indicators of particular techniques of governance and domination that have come to characterize the state’s engagement with “security” in the context of the enduring Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Israeli justification for this complicated spatial arrangement, and the military presence that enforces it, is that the system is designed to protect Israeli citizens while giving Palestinians greater independence. Research that begins from a visual starting point has demonstrated effectively the extreme constraints on mobility that Palestinians face as well providing insight into the ongoing harassment and subjugation that these restrictions enable.

Paying attention to the sonic component Israeli-Palestinian power relations in the post-Oslo era, however, introduces a heightened awareness of the experiential, embodied, modes of domination that equally characterize a Palestinian reality. A sonic sensibility also hints at what might be understood as a fifth modality of power—constituting something not fully captured by Barnett

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27 See, for example, Derek Gregory, Stephen Graham, Linda Quiquivix, Helga Towil-Souri, and Eyal Weizman, among others.
and Duvall’s taxonomy—namely a modality that works directly on the sensory body in ways that sear domination and obedience into a Palestinian consciousness. This “searing,” and the politics it spawns, will be discussed again in a different context below, when Israeli citizens react to the signature sound of the civil air raid siren.

A second family “cluster” of responses in the Breaking the Silence testimonies points to instances of verbal harassment and one-way communication. At first blush, this body of evidence appears to move into the linguistic realm, muddying my theoretical construct by interpolating spoken language into the more banal “noise” that has been isolated and discussed thus far. It would be correct to say that in this cluster these modes of knowledge production are entangled, but I aim to demonstrate that meaning-making can be disaggregated from language, and that a rigorous attention to sound might enable this process, allowing us to think political science differently—identifying, in the process, new actants in the political sphere and perhaps developing the critical listening skills and vocabulary to combat sound-power when it is wielded against us.

I am not unique in disaggregating signification and language in this way, though few assign importance to “banal” sound in the way that I am attempting to do. Roland Barthes, perhaps, most closely models this approach in his 1968 essay “The Grain of the Voice.” Barthes sought to distinguish between semantic and sonorous modes of communication and listening, drawing attention to the meaning we derive from timbre and pitch. Comparably, in his influential essay “How to Do Things with Words,” philosopher of language J.L. Austin also sought to break apart various ways in which speech operates and in order to show how utterances constitute acts

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30 I am using the term “actants” in the Latourian sense to denote both human and nonhuman actors so as to allow for “sound” to have its own agency. Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
that may be held distinct from the linguistic message.\textsuperscript{31} For Austin, multiple modes of communication are embedded in performative “speech acts,” and words can only reveal part of that story.

In this effort, I want to turn to a short rhyme—a rhyme being a linguistic trope that takes on significance because of the way in which there is a correspondence of sound between words or word endings—that became popular among some magavnikim, or Israeli border guards, as a tool of harassment in 2009.\textsuperscript{32} A First Sergeant working in the Seam Zone\textsuperscript{33} described both the boredom of the eight-hour shifts and the emotional numbness that emerges vis-a-vis the Palestinians that pass through the border. In an interview with a Breaking the Silence representative, the soldier describes what she claimed was a common activity that helped pass the time:

So, you can catch [the Palestinians] and make them stand in formation.

Formation?

Yes. Stand in formation, and there’s that famous Border Patrol rhyme--wahad hummus, wahad ful, ana bahibbak Mishmar HaGvul (One plate of hummus, one plate of beans, I love you Border Patrol)…. They’re made to sing it. Sing and hop. Just like rookies, the kind of hazing stuff in basic training, about which soldiers’ parents are always raising hell. It’s the same thing. Only much worse. If anyone laughs, or the soldiers decide he’s laughed, he gets punched. Why did you laugh? Boom. A fist.\textsuperscript{34}


\textsuperscript{33} The Seam Zone refers to a swath of land that is east of the Green Line (the line demarcating the eastern extent of Israeli territory in the 1949 Armistice Agreement) and west of the Separation Barrier that Israel began erecting in the early 2000s. Palestinian residents of the Seam Zone are cut off from neighboring towns and communities in the West Bank. The Seam Zone is also home to a large number of Israeli settlers.

The linguistic content of the rhyme borders on the nonsensical: “one plate of hummus, one plate of beans, I love you Border Patrol” does not, in itself convey any particular message. The strength of this sound-power event lies in the temporal rhythm of the ditty, the sonic correspondence between the words, and the fact that the Palestinian detainee is being forced to verbalize the rhyme, thereby making himself complicit in the stupidity of the message and the enactment of the humiliation. In addition to being forced to stand “in formation,” the detainee is made to hop along with the rhyme as he sings, further accentuating the embodied character of the indignity. Here, it was not language per se, but rather the act of “voicing,” or self-authoring against one’s will, that generates a set of meanings and enacts relationships of power. It is this sort of “self-betrayal” that Suzanne Cusick, writing about the use of music as a torture device in American detention camps in Iraq and Afghanistan, points to as being particularly prized by interrogators because the psychic damage it inflicts. This is not an isolated example. Other testimonies bear witness to forcing Palestinians to sing the Hatikva, or Jewish national anthem, or tricking Palestinians into making funny sounding words, as in the following instance:

…Somewhere this sensitivity was entirely lost in those two weeks there. It felt like being in a world apart, where I did things which, after getting out of there, I suddenly realized. … All those retarded jokes of ‘give me al bidubi’ (expecting the Arabic speaker to ask ‘what is the bidubi,’” in Arabic ‘shubidubi”) and stuff like that.37

The soldiers who are “in” on the joke have a laugh at the expense of the confused and disadvantaged Palestinian who doesn’t know why he is being derided. The category of power that is enacted in such instances of hazing is complicated. On the one hand, it’s a

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35 Suzanne Cusick, “You are in a place that is out of this world…”: Music in the Detention Camps of the “Global War on Terror,” Journal of the Society for American Music, 2, No. 1 (January, 2008): 17.


38 Although “hazing” was how the First Sergeant in the Seam Zone understood the act, I am not sure if hazing offers an appropriate analogy for what is going on here. Most hazing is understood as a period of harassment perpetrated by members of an in-group that precedes eventual cessation and the
straightforward case of coercion, in which the threat of physical force backs up a demand to verbalize nonsense words. On the other hand, a subtler process is at play in which tactile sound is harnessed as a vehicle of domination and control, and each utterance takes on its own agency, resulting in self-inflicted subjugation. If this secondary process, then, were operating in the domain of abstract thought we might be able to understand the dispositif of power as akin to Gramscian hegemony, or as Lukes’ “third face of power” in the way that it impacts the individual directly—almost from the inside, as it were. We might also understand what is going on as a version of Lisa Wedeen’s “politics as if,” in which actions belie attitudes. Yet none of these conceptualizations sufficiently account for the emotional (and political) repercussions that such performance entails when it is enacted on a near-daily basis at a very personal level. An attention to sound heightens our awareness of this liminal power that exists between straightforward coercion and naturalized, or embodied, norms in ways that merit further scrutiny and may apply across a variety of political settings.

It is worth noting here, that sound, like all forms of power, is always relational and therefore indiscriminate in its effects. There is nothing about sound that inherently lends itself to serving power—it may just as equally constitute a modality of resistance—though, as this paper demonstrates, it is rarely purely neutral. Sound’s ambivalent utility and the omnidirectional propagation of sound waves guarantees that any given sound event may impact a broad swath of individuals—anyone within earshot. Thus, it is important to remember that sound, in the above

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40Military contractors have been working to create devices that eliminate this indiscriminate quality of sound so as to better exploit sound’s destructive capacity and utility as a weapon. The Long Range Acoustic Device, developed by the American company LRAD Corporation, is perhaps the most prominent among these efforts. This device blasts concentrated sound, “beaming” it in a thirty-degree conical projection so that the operator is protected and the target is relatively isolated. The LRAD is capable of deafening targets, generating up to 162 Db, and has been used (thus far at non-deafening
examples, is impacting both the Israeli soldier and the Palestinian traveler simultaneously. Both sets of ears are subjected to the same unfunny joke—both parties have to engage in the meaningless ritual exchange in order for the “joke” to work. The Reserves Sergeant quoted above describes a loss of sensitivity that is akin to the desensitization that Palestinians undergo at her hands. In the end, both parties walk away dulled.

While the examples represent the actions of individual soldiers, there can be little doubt that the Israeli military establishment, at the institutional level, does not recognize the significance of sound. A contrasting example, in which sound serves as source of emotional support, drives this point home. An education corps NCO, serving in Gush Etzion, described the difficulty of introducing information that might be deemed critical to the military mission, and how this dramatically limited her programming options. Describing her job as Sisyphean, the Sergeant fell back on bringing in entertainment troupes because these represented the one category of “education” that would receive ready approval from her chain of command.41 One such activity was an in-the-field broadcast of the army radio show Kola Shel Ima, or “The Voice of the Mother.”42 Communications scholar Oren Meyers, who has written on the role of the Kola Shel Ima broadcast in Israeli society, describes the live field broadcasts as important components of the show, and ones that are geared toward conveying, in a sonic format, the “authentic feeling of the field.”43

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42 In Breaking the Silence: Women Soldiers Testimonies, the education corps NCO testifying translated the program’s name colloquially as “Mom’s Voice.”
The visited unit is expected to convey rugged “authenticity” and thus the soldiers are asked to share with the broadcaster and the audience the unit’s amusing folklore tales, chants, and songs. The focus on this kind of field authenticity and its construction is sensed every time the broadcast shifts from the studio to the field: at each transition, as part of their “authenticity work” the soldiers are expected to produce a lot of joyful noise. When they fail to do so, they are encouraged on-air by *Kola Shel Ima’s* field reporters to raise their volume.

Here again, the sound of the broadcast—the ambient noise of an outdoor space in contrast to the controlled setting of the studio, the stated desire for content that combines semantics with a specifically auditory and sensory register (folklore tales, chants, and songs)—is the variable that does the work and achieves a (political) outcome. The relevance of sound qua sound is made explicit when the scaffolding of language is taken altogether and the soldiers are asked to “produce a lot of joyful noise” at a high volume.

In the context of this reassuring and highly orchestrated soundscape, it falls to language, ironically, to interrupt the otherwise politically seamless acoustic message. In a breach of protocol, one on-air speaker subverted the audial “massage” by stating, “during the next two hours we will give you the impression that it’s a lot of fun serving here. We’ll make you think we are really having a ball. Enjoy listening!” The commander of that unit was forced to apologize at length on air, underscoring the military’s understanding of the power that sound exerts in boosting morale, as in the case of the army broadcasts, or tearing it down, as in instances of verbal harassment.

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47 It seems clear that the objective of the Kola Shel Ima broadcast is to boost morale alongside propagating a positive message about the Israeli army’s mission. Whether the program achieves this goal today, or whether participants are engaging in what Lisa Wedeen refers to as politics “as if” in *Ambiguities*
In this section I have sought to illustrate, first, some ways in which sound functions as a dispositif of power in empirical settings. I chose to focus on two “clusters” of sound-derived evidence drawn from testimonies from Israeli soldiers in the field—statements that pointed to sound as a mechanism of disruption and presence-making, and sound that was utilized as a form of harassment and persecution. I could equally have chosen to focus on a category of statements that centered on the way in which banal sounds generated tactical knowledge, or how this genre of sound-power may be manipulated to intentionally confound an enemy, but as the mechanism of power at play in these examples will be brought forth in the next section I set these aside. There were far too many sound-events in the testimonies for me to be able to treat in one paper—the purpose, then, in selecting a few representative incidences was to encourage a sonic sensibility and to model a methodological approach that relies on sound as a “tuning fork” for political research—thinking about sound to get at questions of power or a particular politics on the ground. In the section that follows, I pivot slightly, pushing on the question of what it might mean to think through sound, as we began to do by separating language from the grain of the voice, and what type of interpretation this might enable.

THINKING THROUGH SOUND

Anthropologist Steven Feld coined the term “acoustemology,” serendipitously marrying the words “acoustic” and “epistemology” to name the mode of knowing that he observed among the Kaluli peoples of Papua New Guinea in the late 1970s. 48 In contrast with the method described in the section above, which operates on the assumption that sound-events are important in the political world and should be sought out and analyzed by whatever methods may serve, an


of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria, is less clear and would require further investigation. In any case, the programming appears to be aimed foremost at the families (often mothers) at home. See, for example, Alona Ferber, “When an Israeli Soldier Hears His Mom on the Radio: An Army Radio show that helped soldiers stay in touch with family before the smartphone era today helps parents deal with the anxiety of wartime.” Haaretz, July 24, 2014. Online at: http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.606919.
acoustemological starting point turns critical listening and sound itself into a method of inquiry—one that, I argue, produces important insights in the political, as well as anthropological, realm. In this section, I trace the sound of the Israeli civil defense air raid alert, or Tzeva Adom, in order to inquire into the ways in which this sound is constitutive of local-level conceptions of conflict, Zionism, and national security. In so doing, I ask how a ‘sonic ethnography’ might be useful for excavating relationships of power and breaking apart the notion of agency in relationship to political attitudes. I argue here that sound produces a particular kind of physical space, as well as particular kinds of bodies, and that this process speaks directly to an epistemology of power that is rarely captured in political science.49

When the Tzeva Adom, or “Color Red,” sirens go off in Sderot, Israel, residents have fifteen seconds to get to a bomb shelter. That is the length of time it takes Qassam rockets fired from Gaza to land in the township after they have been perceived by the Israeli anti-rocket radar detection system. Residents have been taught to use their own heartbeat to count down the seconds, listening to the thudding rush of blood as a way of marking time. In the silence that follows the 15 seconds, you will either hear a high pitched whine, which indicates that the immanent explosion will be close by, or nothing—a pregnant stillness—in which case the rocket may fall at the far side of the village or in a neighboring town or field. During periods of intense conflict, the air raid siren alerting residents to incoming rockets has sounded as many as twenty times per day. The psychosomatic impact of living under the rockets and sirens is profound; many residents of Sderot live with ongoing traumatic stress response (OTSR), a diagnosis that is

I argue elsewhere that the Tzeva Adom siren also enforces a particular temporality that unites the nation of Israel and the Jewish diaspora in an “emergency time,” and connects contemporary crises to historical ones via allusion. I do not elaborate on this here due to space constraints, but the mechanisms at play are similar to the one described in the “Happy Purim” example detailed above. “The Sound of Conflict: Tzeva Adom and Qassam Rockets in Sderot, Israel,” Working Paper, Presented to the Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility, New York, February 2016.
comparable to the more familiar post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but which takes account of the ongoing, or “living” nature of the trauma.\textsuperscript{50}

The development town of Sderot was established in 1951 by Jewish Mizrahi immigrants from Morocco and Tunisia on the border of what was then Egyptian-controlled Gaza. This initial settlement formed part of larger Zionist state-building initiatives of the 1950s and ’60s in the peripheries of the new Israeli state. Development towns were intended, on the one hand, to absorb the influx of approximately 200,000 Mizrahim (Jews of Middle Eastern or Arab descent), and on the other, to advance the Judaization of territory.\textsuperscript{51} In the 1990s, the population of Sderot swelled, absorbing a wave of Jewish émigrés from the fragmenting Soviet Union. The dusty, blue-collar development town was declared a city in 1996. Today approximately 24,000 people reside there, many of whom are employed in the Osem food processing and packaging factory. Economic prospects in Sderot are slim, particularly since several industries relocated in the face of ongoing physical insecurity. On the one hand, Sderoti settlers understand themselves to be the vanguard of the Zionist project, holding ground (literally) in the line of fire. At the same time, they attest to being excluded from the dominant, urban, Ashkenazi majority—both culturally and politically in terms of public funding and civil defense.\textsuperscript{52} The feeling of being apart, or distinct, from the rest of Israel is exacerbated by their lived experience under the “siren regime.”\textsuperscript{53} Since the Second Intifada in 2000, Sderot has been the target of over 5000 rockets fired into Israel from


\textsuperscript{52}In 2008 residents of Sderot and other Gaza Belt communities marched on Tel Aviv and Jerusalem to protest the perceived lack of Israeli concern and pro-active military response. Shutting down major highways, they paraded in front of the Defense Ministry and the Supreme Court, blaring recorded “Tzeva Adom” sirens from loudspeakers to drive home their message.

\textsuperscript{53}Conversations with the author. In conversations, residents often referred to the “siren regime” and “rocket regime” and seemed to use these interchangeably.
Gaza; the most recent rocket exploded without injuries in an open field just south of town on January 1, 2016.54

The most common munitions to descend upon Sderot are Qassam rockets—simple steel pipes lacking any targeting capacity and often hand-welded by Hamas militants.55 Over time, successive generations of Qassam rockets have increased in range from three to 17 kilometers, even as their carrying capacity has increased from 0.5 to about 15 kilograms of TNT and accompanying packed shrapnel.56 As the rockets evolved, so did the civil alarm system. In 2004, in the wake of the first rocket fatalities57 and widespread angry protests against the State for its perceived failure to protect its citizens, the Israeli Defense Force decided to upgrade the extant alarm system and to customize it for the rocket threat. Israeli civil defense units and Home Front soldiers spread out on foot through the 1.9 square miles of Sderot to ensure that the new electronic loudspeaker system, hooked into the early warning radar, could be heard everywhere.58

Almost immediately, the sound of the sirens became a topic of popular contention. The new alarm sounded different. Instead of a continuously ascending and descending tone—a sound kept current in a post-World War I global imaginary by its frequent inclusion in wartime movies—the new system played a recording of a woman’s voice repeating “shachar adom, shachar adom,” meaning “red dawn.” This recording, and the program name, was changed once

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54 Sderot Media Organization. Available online: http://sderotmedia.org.il/

55 The spent casings are collected and stored at the police station in a glass case in the parking lot. They are so prevalent that they have become a favorite medium for Sderoti artists and are repurposed as humanistic statues that have pride of place in the park-like traffic circles around town.


again, two years later, when the IDF acceded to a petition by parents of the children in Sderot whose name was “Shachar.” The experience of having their given name sound the threat of death was compounding the emotional distress brought about by the sirens themselves.59 In July 2006, the siren began to call out “tzeva adom.”

Israel began developing its “Iron Dome” ground-based rocket defense system in 2007. The system was tested in 2008 and 2009, and was deployed in southern Israel in 2011, in which year the Israeli Air Force reported an interception success rate of 70 percent.60 Linked to the Iron Dome detectors, the Tzeva Adom siren system connects in turn to Israeli radio and television stations, centralizing alerts under Home Front Command’s control and making it possible to trigger simultaneous alarms across Israel-Palestine as necessary in service of national security. In order to further protect residents of Sderot, living less than one kilometer from Gaza, the newly updated sound system was accompanied by a thoroughgoing physical conversion and fortification of the city. Rooftops and public buildings were reinforced, bomb shelters were installed on streets, and schools that could not be retrofitted with sufficient concrete were abandoned and rebuilt according to the needs of the security situation. When the dust of construction settled, a double city had been born.61

Superimposed upon the “everyday” city of stoplights, traffic circles, residences, businesses, community centers, and falafel shops was an exceptional, irregular, emergency city—one that hid in plain sight and was triggered, like the bodies of the residents themselves, by the siren sound. At the first dry crackle of the Tzeva Adom, the transformation takes hold. In this


61 I am grateful to the members of the Graduate Institute of Design, Ethnography and Social Thought, and particularly to Scott Brown, whose comment planted the seed for this line of thinking. New School for Social Research GIDEST Workshop, November 2015.
irregular city, bus stops suddenly come into focus as bomb shelters, a grey wall that goes unnoticed but for its function as a canvas for bright street art unexpectedly lurches forward again, revealed as a foot-thick slab of concrete that serves as a protective barrier for the community center behind it. Even the familiar equipment of a playground quivers with the ringing of the Tzeva Adom and shifts shape: what was once a large, beneficent orange and black snail—a hollow home base for a game of hide-and-seek—transforms into a chain of reinforced concrete culverts with little more than a coat of paint as the pitch of emergency rises.

The manifold transformations of space that are precipitated by the onset of the siren are paralleled by transformation of the resident’s relationship to the spatiality of their city. Boundaries between human bodies and everyday spaces erode as both human and object are subjected to the same penetrating, material sound waves, and both transform accordingly. Sound produces the subject and the city in a certain way, and in so doing, bonds residents to their double city via the experience of threat, risk, and existential fear. In 2009, a home beeper system was added to the repertoire of sonic alert protections. Home Front Command again went door-to-door, offering to install beepers within the home. These have a slightly faster response time than the municipal sirens, thus buying residents three to four additional seconds to get to a bomb shelter. While many installed the beepers initially, most have since disabled them, citing the trauma that arises from having a sound signal emanating from inside the intimate (if not technically protected) space of the home. Children, reportedly, were afraid to enter in the same room as the beeper.62

Bedrooms, like bus stops, take on secondary valences that rarely fully fade after a trauma. They become everyday monuments to crisis and material reminders of an ongoing fight for a particular kind of nation, against a particular kind of enemy. In some sense, the ongoing process

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62 Conversations with the author. Sderot, July 2105.
represents an example of the Lefebvrian production of space with a posthuman twist: bodies and spaces are co-constituted and mutually produced via a third, ethereal (yet equally spatialized and agentive) element—the nationalized soundscape. After providing a brief historical and political context, the preceding paragraphs demonstrated the ways in which sound produces and alters space and place. A secondary and more demanding claim this section begins to make (in conversation with the discussion on sonic bodies that follows), is that these structural factors determine conditions for political attitudes toward national security, Zionism, patriotism, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—thus linking the sound of the civil defense siren directly to local and global politics. In order to assess how effectively sound achieves these claims, we must situate the research within our larger framework of power, thereby interrogating the mechanism at play in Sderot and sussing out the precise way in which this transformation takes hold.

In the examples above, sound alters the significance of familiar objects and spaces. To use a visual analogy (so difficult to avoid in our visually overdetermined English vocabulary), sound brings latent meanings into high relief. In so doing, sound produces two orders of knowledge simultaneously. The first: abstracted, cognitive, inextricable from the social world, language-based, and discursive. This is the sort of knowledge that is produced when, as in the example above, the bus stop is recognized as a bomb shelter. Both the concept of the bus station and the bomb shelter are accompanied by various semiotic and socially conditioned responses that flow from their identification. The second order of knowledge that sound produces is “automatic,” triggering a host of physical reactions, from elevated heart rates, to panic attacks and emplaced traumas. Although this way of knowing may not be readily translated into language, it cannot continue to be ignored by researchers seeking to understand mechanisms of political

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power, particularly when, as in the case of the Tzeva Adom, this second order of embodied knowledge is so inextricably linked to the first, abstracted, epistemology. The agent, in these examples of sound-power, then, sits outside of categories of power that work through the interactions of specific actors, as in Barnett and Duvall’s understanding of how power operates in compulsory and institutional registers; it also sits outside of the social relations of construction that characterize structural and productive registers of power. Sound fuses social relations of constitution with individualized agency at the level of the perceptive body. The following section will elaborate on how this plays out, again in the context of Sderot.

Boundaries between individual and communal subjectivity similarly erode as the sound of the Tzeva Adom coerces a shared response: at the most basic level, heart rates rise, breathing accelerates, adrenalin fires through the circulatory system, priming the body for flight. Not all bodies react identically, of course, and reactions can change over time and with increased exposure to the siren trauma. And yet, approximately 30 percent of the residents of Sderot suffer from active symptoms of OSTR and receive psychiatric assistance in coping with the trauma.65 Physiological reaction to the experience of the siren is so pronounced that gastroenterological specialists have identified a new condition prevalent among Sderotis, which they named the “Kassam Colon” because it is triggered by siren and rocket sounds.66 Beyond involuntary physical reactions, the residents of Sderot exhibit other behaviors in common: they run for shelter upon hearing the siren, often encountering each other in various states of deshabille in hallways, stairwells, or, if they make it in time, in the shared bomb shelters of their apartment buildings. They drive with their windows down so that they may hear the siren in their car. They know where the closest bomb shelter from every point in their daily routine. This disciplining has


occasioned a host of social responses, ranging from despair to bravado. In the Age of Instagram, Facebook, and #bombshelterselfies, upturned faces and online community comments encourage Israelis to “keep on smiling” in the face of the attacks. Less happily, many children of Sderot have developed a synesthetic aversion to the color red (which translates as adom) and burst into tears upon seeing it in their everyday environment, even when the siren-sound is not present.67

The illustrated book *Tzeva Adom*, by Esther Blau Marcus, was written with the intention of combatting that issue. In the book, “Red” is one of the characters and who expresses sadness that children fear him. Red says:

> because of me, many children were frightened and scared. Every time they heard the call on the loudspeaker, ‘tzeva adom!’ they began to run and cry…no one even wants to hear my name….it’s all because of the Kassam missiles that threaten the residents of the Western Negev. No one wants to hear and certainly not encounter Kassam missiles.68

Here, a personified a visual entity (Red), distances himself from the sound that has become attached to his persona. The phenomenology of hearing features heavily in the excerpt, attesting to the significance of sound itself (as distinct from the physical threat of the rockets) in dictating psychosomatic behavior. Red also presents his readers with an unambiguous antagonist, saying, “it’s all because of the Kassam missiles,” thereby reproducing in the minds of the readers a Manichean construction of the complicated Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In this example, sound, visuality, and physicality bleed into one overriding semiotic framework: that of a nation at conflict with an incomprehensible enemy and the persistent threat of death—a mode of being that Chris Hedges refers to as “the psychosis of permanent war.” 69 Whether manifested as fear or

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67 Conversations with the author, July, 2015.


social networking bravado, the “automatic knowledge” that is acquired nearly unconsciously via the simple fact of living in one place rather than another, inscribe conflict and trauma into flesh as bodies synch up with political sounds (much like the mechanism at play in the instance of the Palestinian singing and hopping while detained at a checkpoint). In the process, muscle memories are created alongside cognitive ones, linking the very act of running for cover or posting a selfie to the performance of patriotism, citizenship, and territorial claims. It is precisely this “automatic” manner of knowing that fuses ideology and physical threat, producing, perhaps, a less conscious or sub-conscious reaction to the larger Palestinian-Israeli conflict and limiting the possibility for critical engagement.

As the sound-power of the Tzeva Adom places its demands on the body, residents are disciplined to behave in directed ways and are reminded of their role in larger society; performance and citizenship permeate the urban fabric as well as the body and mind. In this understanding, the Tzeva Adom represents more than a straightforward warning—it becomes a siren song for patriotic sacrifice. This is particularly resonant when one considers that Sderotis are “free” to relocate—a freedom that is constrained by the usual economic and social factors that make mobility easy for some and difficult for others. Yet construction is booming and residents say that people are moving to Sderot—specifically because they see it as one way to “protect Israel.” One resident claimed, “If we leave, the next target will be Beer Sh’eva. And after that Jerusalem. And Tel Aviv. By staying here we are maintaining the defense.” This behavior—volunteering to live in perpetual danger in order to perform patriotism and Zionist citizenship—


71 I have discussed disciplining behaviors that evolve from personal experience, but The Home Front Command also offers instruction manuals detailing how to react to the Tzeva Adom siren: “What Do I Do When I Hear a Siren or a “Red Alert” (“Tzeva Adom”)?” *The Home Front Command and The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services*. Translated to English by the Ministry of Aliyah and Immigrant Absorption. 2014.


73 Conversations with the author. July, 2015. This sentiment appears common; news articles about Sderot in national publications such as Haaretz and Jerusalem Post frequently print similar quotes.
may be linked, according to Oren Yiftachel, to an belief system that equates patriotism to capital for upward mobility in Mizrahi development towns.\textsuperscript{74} Thus, siren alerts and their attendant sounds have come to constitute a kind of force projection that serves, paradoxically, to harm, protect,\textsuperscript{75} and produce its citizenry simultaneously— all under the aegis of national security.

I have demonstrated that as a dispositif of political power, the \textit{Tzeva Adom} sound operates across multiple registers. At the level of coercion and compulsion, it works on the body and the senses. As an institutionalized and administrative technology of civil defense, it unifies the nation under a sonic regime. As a keynote in the soundscape of Sderot, it determines and delimits the range of possible, or probable, thought within its sonorous envelope. Finally, the siren-sound generates a form of automatic knowledge—becoming data in its own right that can be harnessed to transforms space, time and political attitudes.

Part of my assertions rest on an assumption that sound, once perceived by a minded body, can translate into something that may be conceptualized as “thought.” Scholars who trace their epistemological lineage to the distinguished work of Descartes would no doubt disagree with my claim that sound may translate to thought in this way. I remain on firmer footing, perhaps, in asserting that non- or pre-linguistic sound functions, much like music, by triggering emotion (emotion being, in this way of thinking, distinct from “reason” or knowledge). Yet sound, as I have tried to show with the example of the \textit{Tzeva Adom}, goes beyond emotion to offers a model for understanding power that is not strictly tied to language or representation but rather works at the physical level to reinforce, or at times counter, prevalent conceptions. Greg Goodale, writing about the sounds of war, similarly argues “to dismiss sound as purely emotive is to ignore the


\textsuperscript{75} Lian Zucker and Edward Kaplan posit that without the sirens the casualty rate in Sderot would be nine times worse than it currently is. Lian Zucker and Edward Kaplan, “Mass Casualty Potential of Qassam Rockets,” \textit{Studies in Conflict and Terrorism}, 37 (2014).
power of sound to complete enthymemes and to persuade.”

In Goodale’s reading, sound “fills in” semantic omissions, making sense of an argument or lived experience in the face of incomplete or uncertain knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In a special issue on power, Millennium editors Felix Berenskoetter and Michael Williams write that “the question ‘what is power’ is inevitably an ontological one whose answer is guided by theoretical and methodological choices.” Selecting sound as a point of entry into these debates reflects my own ethnographic sensibility—one that prioritizes grounded, inductive research even as I strive to develop a theory that is broadly applicable across political contexts and geographic settings. Thus, the methods for studying sound that I showcased in this paper were not politically neutral, but rather made possible the opening (and closing) of sites of inquiry and potential for political action.

Sound knowledge (if you will), because of its embodied nature, insists that the mode of thought produced is always already particular: gendered, aged, classed, raced, physiologically dependent. In contrast to the God-trick often perpetrated by visual data that obscures perspective and politics, hearing is personal and reflexive, making it a strong source for social and political critique. Paradoxically, the order of knowledge derived from hearing also easily evades critical analysis because of its naturalized status in contemporary thought. Only by paying attention to sound’s power and asking ourselves what impact it has can we begin to utilize it (and understand how it is being utilized against us). Without a critical ear, sound constitutes a powerful wellspring for the reproduction of ideology and social order.


I would like to close with a proposed amendment to the power taxonomy that I have been working with in this paper. Sound-power, as I have tried to show, manifests across all classes of power, but it also exceeds them in interesting ways. Without a name, this “surfeit” mechanism will continue to be conflated into extant models and epistemologies, making it difficult to assess its particular relevance to the discipline of political science. Identifying this modality of power at a highly abstract level makes it possible, then, to examine its utility outside of a framework of sound, thereby laying a foundation by which to determine its generalizability. My amended taxonomy adds a fifth class of power as follows:

Thus, “generative power” speaks to that order of power that is pre- or non-lingual and that manifests at the seam of individual perception/reaction and socially existing (and historically contingent) understanding. In this position, it has the capacity to reinforce “rational” knowledge, serving to fortify the status quo, but also the capacity to disrupt and jar such knowledge—acting in these instances as a force of change. Generative power is always embodied and as such, in the discipline of political science, it concerns questions that pertain to the ways in which the human body is increasingly coopted into frameworks of sovereignty, citizenship, global security, and capital. Methodologically, it speaks to ways in which we can begin to argue for ethnographic methodologies to exist more easily the subfields of international relations or comparative politics, alongside more dominant positivist approaches. In fine-tuning our listening receivers to the

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79 Naming is, of course, itself always a political act. I think that “productive power” would actually be a more intuitive name for the mechanism of power that I am trying to capture, but since the term is already claimed in Barnett and Duvall’s taxonomy, I settled on “generative.” Given the emphasis that Barnett and Duvall place on language-based signification and meaning in their conceptualization of “productive power,” I think that their category could profitably be renamed “discursive,” leaving room for the fifth category to become “productive.”
embodied experience of politics we open new avenues for research and begin to develop a new vocabulary for imagining political solutions.
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