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Women out Loud: Hearing Knowledge and the Creation of Soundscape in Islamic Indonesia

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Theorizing Sound Writing

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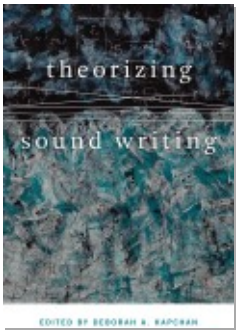

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PART THREE

Theorizing Sound Writing

ANNE K. RASMUSSEN

8. Women Out Loud

Religious Performance in Islamic Indonesia

SOUNDING THE SCENE: SOUTH JAKARTA, INDONESIA, AUGUST 2014

I am with my longtime consultant, colleague, and friend, Hajjah Ibu Maria Ulfah,[1] in the living room of her home on the sixty-ninth anniversary of Indonesian independence from the colonial rule of the Netherlands (*hari kemerdekaan*), August 17, 2014. Ibu Maria's neighborhood, Ciputat Baru, is decorated with red-and-white flags, and in addition to the national pageantry that is playing live on television, low-key, grassroots celebrations are going on in neighborhoods all over the country, a vast archipelago of seventeen thousand or so islands in an arch spanning about thirty-two hundred miles. Independence is one aspect of "imagined community" in this country comprised of hundreds of different ethnic groups and languages; religion is another (Anderson 1983). Ibu Maria and I are seated on the couch with a huge, encyclopedia-sized volume spread across our laps. We are exploring a multimedia educational Qur'an that, with the touch of a digital pen on a color-coded text, takes the student to audio recordings of nearly every aspect of each and every verse of the Qur'an, including: recitation (both melodic, *mujawwad,* and nonmelodic, *murattal)*; *tajwid* (rules for pronunciation, phrasing, and sectioning of the text); *maqamat* (Arab melodic modes); Indonesian and English translations of the Arabic text; associated *hadith* (recorded traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions); and *tafsir* (commentary, explanation, and interpretation). The most incredible feature of this, the latest development in a parade of didactic devices for learning to recite and understand the Qur'an in Indonesia, is that the digital pen is also an MP3

player and speaker. Touch the color-coded or numbered place in the book, and the device recites, translates, explains, and coaches in a way that ensures that eye and ear work together in the experience of hearing and understanding the recited Qur'an.

Scholarly works that treat the Qur'an in context, as it is experienced among Muslims and people in the Islamicate world, emphasize its orality (see, for example, cited works by Crow, Ergin, Frishkopf, Gade, Graham, Hirschkind, Lee, Nelson, Rasmussen, and Sells). The word *Qur'an* means "recitation," and while it may be read (in the original Arabic or in translation), it is more commonly and by necessity recited (by the reader) and heard by everyone. Ergin, in her explication of the soundscape of sixteenth-century Istanbul mosques, summarizes the ideology to which scholars refer:

> One needs to perceive the text acoustically in order to understand its message. Ideally, one should read and hear the text at the same time, bringing together two different modes of perception for a multi-sensorial communication of the message. However, even a cursory acoustic perception of the Qur'an in the background will bestow blessings upon the hearer. (Ergin 2008, 212)

Ibu Maria positions the magic pen over a page of the giant book and taps on the fourteenth verse of the chapter Āl 'Imrān, an apparently random choice:

> The love of desired objects, like women and children and stored up reserves of gold and silver, and pastured horses and cattle and crops, appears attractive to people. All this is the provision of the hither life; and it is Allah with Whom is an excellent abode. (Qur'an 3:14; translation Khan 1991, 49)

We listen to the passage. She then taps on the Indonesian translation, the English translation, the associated *hadith,* the explanation of *tajwid,* then back to the recitation. It catches me by surprise. Without warning I hear the voice of Pak Moersjied Qori Indra, whose rich baritone with its full, nasal resonance brings with it a wave of sensation and memory. His melodic *mujawwad* recitation in the Arab scale, *maqam hijaz* is a model exposition of Arab melody, something that requires no replay, no analysis—although one can be made,[2] no words—although volumes will be written. In that moment, the sounded is heard, understood, and signifies on multiple levels. Although I have lost touch with Pak Moersjied, the resonance of his voice sends me to my first class with this fine reciter some fifteen years earlier.

The first time I heard a *tawashish* in the context of a class at the *Institut Ilmu*

al-Qur'an, it was literally "music to my ears." The melodic line in the Arabic musical mode, *maqam sabà,* caused my hair to stand on end. As I listened to the voice of our guru, I appreciated the resonant nasality that was enhanced by his exacting pronunciation of the Arabic text. I was able to imagine the movement through time of the musical mode that Pak Moersjied sang in terms both of the melody's intervallic content and its progression through the various stations of the *maqam* as it is realized in Arab music performance practice. For me, this performance was powerfully moving. If I listen to a recording of this song, or perform it myself, it has the same effect. An audition summons a sensorium of emotion and memory that is challenging to capture in words on a page, though we try with Sisyphean stubbornness.

Pak Moersjied, a *qar'i,* or master reciter of the Qur'an, and our teacher, performed the Arabic poem *Ara it-Tayiran* ("I See a Bird"), then wrote the text on the board in Arabic, and subsequently invited his class of about fifteen college-age women (and me) to sing the song, phrase by phrase, until we mastered the Arabic poetry and the specific melodies that were assigned to each line of the text.[3] The myriad affective musical and social elements that spoke or, more appropriately, sang to me were many. First was the power of our teacher's voice: present, nasal, focused, and loud. Second was his relaxed demeanor. Learning to recite the Qur'an was, I thought correctly, serious business; but Pak Moresjied's class seemed fun, and the college-age women I was among seemed to think so too![4] Third, I could perceive and appreciate the intervallic content of *maqam sabà,* with its neutral or half-flat second degree, a note called *sika* in Arabic; its distinctive flattened fourth degree of the scale, which then leads to an augmented second degree between the fourth and fifth scale degrees; and somewhat later on, a modulation that tonicized the sixth degree, Bb, which became the ground note (*qarar*) of *maqam Ajam,* a musical mode whose intervallic content is like a Bb major scale. Are you with me? It doesn't matter. This kind of music-theory metalanguage means nothing to the students of recitation with whom I shared this singing. In Indonesia, such rules of melody, their adherence to the system of Arab musical techniques and aesthetics, and the way that melody "is applied to" (*mengaplikasikan*) the sacred text of the Qur'an are activated only when sounded. In this context, theory is sounded, not written. This is sound theory.

Beautiful but formulaic melodies were assigned to each line of text of this classic Arabic poem, a *tawashih*. These melodies were characteristic of a performance practice I knew from my own experience of Arab music, experience that I accumulated a half a world away from Jakarta, Indonesia, in places such

as California, Michigan, New York, and Virginia. Dramatic and improvisatory embellishment of the melody with trills and slides was expected of everyone as we learned the *tawashih* with the performance practice of Arab singing. The result in class was a heterophonically textured, almost cacophonous wall of noisy singing, redolent with participatory discrepancies and the thick texture that invites anonymous yet collective participation by all.[5]

STUDYING THE SOUNDS OF ISLAMIC INDONESIA

My contribution to this volume attempts to translate into words the experience of learning through hearing, something that affected me profoundly when I lived in Indonesia. I was in the country—based in its teeming capital city, Jakarta, with a population of nine million people and at least, or so it seems, that many cars and motorcycles—in order to learn through *doing fieldwork,* beginning tenuously in 1995 and 1996, continuing throughout the year in 1999, and on various occasions during the 2000s up to this writing. My project aims to document and interpret various kinds of Islamic performance: Qur'anic recitation, liturgical and paraliturgical song, and popular instrumental and vocal music that is activated with the syntax of Arab musical styles and informed by several Arab world, Indonesian, and global trends and traditions.[6] My work is notable for the recognition of the vibrant and creative performance of religion in Muslim Indonesia and its introduction of professional and amateur women and their students, who are reciters, teachers, and specialists in the communication of religious knowledge (Rasmussen and Harnish 2011; Rasmussen 2010, 2009, 2005, 2001). The power, presence, and permissibility of women's voices in the Islamic soundscape is something that was made known to me through hearing knowledge and is something that I have tried to convey in my writing and presentations, with or without the soundprints of those voices that might be made accessible though experience, live demonstration, or recordings. In the second chapter of my monograph, titled "Hearing Islam in the Atmosphere," I discuss the public practices of listening that I observed, overheard, absorbed, and eventually shared along with the creation of the Islamic soundscape, something I found to be an essential aspect of Islamic culture in Indonesia, or at least my experience of it as a musician and ethnomusicologist. At that time, I did not conceive of my work as an acoustemology, to recall Steven Feld's initiative, as outlined in his 1996 publication, to "argue the potential of acoustic knowing, of sounding as a condition of and for knowing, of sonic presence and awareness as

potent shaping forces in how people make sense of experiences" (97). I associated Feld's ideas with his field site of indigenous people, waterfalls, and exotic birds in Papua New Guinea; Feld's ideas did not seem applicable to urban Jakarta, a place to which most ethnomusicologists are not attracted.[7] Nor were "sound studies" or "sound writing" officially on my radar or within earshot; although in retrospect, I believe that in the translation of my experience and understanding into words, I have been tempting these three methodologies for some time.

To make a move toward sound studies has strategic legitimacy in the contexts I describe. Claims about "music and Islam" (a phrase that personifies and gives agency to both entities in a way that misrepresents each of them) are always controversial. Approaching the topic of "music and Islam" requires what has become a ritual for writers: a review of the permissibility of music during the time of the Prophet Muhammad based on the interpretation of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (the social and legal practice of Muslims), and the interpretation of this corpus by subsequent communities of believers, from the Abbasid Caliphate to the present-day Taliban.[8] This prerequisite literature review should then be followed by the explanation that in Arabic thought, music (*musiqá*) is a category separate from singing (*ghina*) and chanting, or recitation (*tilawa*). Thus, things that sound "musical" to the outsider, whether they be a scholar, journalist, or musical tourist, and that may be described as "music" according to certain epistemologies, may not even actually be "music" at all in local or Arabic-informed dialects, including those in Muslim Indonesia. In the context of Indonesian Islam, a great deal of which transpires in the Arabic language, it is then important to signal which aspects of Arabic thought about anything, music or women for example, have been imported along with the language and which have not. Among Indonesians in the business of religion, music is a marked category that generally means song with instruments; however, adherence to categories of music, song, and recitation are not rigid, as numerous instances in my ethnography reveal.

Given the distinction between the categories "music," "song," and "recitation," exchanging the term "music" for "sound" therefore, for the analysis of any Muslim context, may be seen as a welcome development. We can make similar acclamations about UNESCO's category of "intangible cultural heritage," which takes the emphasis off "music" in sensitive Islamicate-world contexts and replaces it with the vague and more encompassing term "cultural heritage." Sound studies and perhaps by extension sound writing cover all of the bases, from sound to music and beyond. The "sonic universe," to quote soundscape studies pioneer

R. Murray Schafer (1993, 5), and as a field of inquiry "sound studies," can potentially encompass the interdisciplinary collection of scholars and approaches, both native and non-, that are necessarily involved in the creative expression of religious culture in any context. Furthermore, sound studies and sound writing invite those who are intimidated by or bored with the category "music" and all of its trappings. On top of the music literacy that is required for the music scholar, there is a lexicon of musicological metalanguage, an example of which was deployed in the fourth paragraph of this essay, that seems to be created by and for those who reside in the "special domain" of music (Stokes 1997, 1). Playing music and singing as a methodology for fieldwork and teaching is also not required for sound studies and its products.

While referring to Qur'anic arts and the music that is associated with Islamic culture as "sound" is safe, it seems to be a demotion. The analysis of sound seems to me to emphasize the scientific, the random, and the natural aspects of our lifeworld rather than the very purposeful, rehearsed, public, and in many cases artistic and virtuosic repetition that constitutes Jakarta's Muslim soundscape, however it is overheard. Furthermore, the Muslim sound world in Indonesia also extends decidedly to the musical and to music. Songs that have structured, repeated melodies and forms are well beyond the domain of "language performance," to borrow Frishkopf's apt descriptor, such as the *tawashih* described at the outset of this essay (2009). And when musical instruments, composition, arrangement, and production enter the mix, we are squarely in the domain of music. To reiterate, scholars of Islam insist on its orality: on the importance of sound and of hearing as a methodology for knowledge; on the existence of the text as one that is sounded in recitation and not merely read; and on transformative experiences through movement and sound as it is heard, spoken, recited, chanted, sung, shouted, and played (either on instruments or through speakers) that are central to the experience of the religion, from the mundane repetition of daily ritual, to the quest for and encounter with states of elation, ecstasy, rapture, trance, and union with the divine. Rather than ask how to theorize sound writing, perhaps we should be asking why we are still struggling with writing at all when the limitations of the medium, particularly as applied to sound worlds, have long been exposed (see, for example, Blacking, Stokes, Small). One depressing response to this question may be the admission of compliance with a Western, male, logocentric hegemony of economy and power that offers little variation to its system of just reward. With the variety of media that we have had at the ready for more than a century, why just write?

HEARING, LISTENING, LEARNING, KNOWING

The singing I experienced when among reciters and their students in Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia meant something to me, in part because I spent the formative years of my life as an adult musician acquiring a hearing literacy in and for Arab music, through first observing and then absorbing "techniques of the body" (Mauss 1934). Although I am an outsider to the tradition, understanding Arab music through both cognitive and kinesthetic channels has been my ambition and passion since the late 1980s, beginning in graduate school and as a methodology for fieldwork, research, and teaching. My learning experience resonates with that of many who work *through* music. Virginia Danielson, whose monograph on the Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum is an invaluable guide to the musical values and aesthetics of twentieth-century Cairo, writes of the process of acquiring cultural literacy in Egypt:

> I came into the society of musicians in Cairo as one who had to be taught why Umm Kulthum's singing was good singing. I did not become, in the course of my years in Egypt, an objective observer of cultural expression: My story, and the language of my interpretation of Umm Kulthum's story is that of a Western musician and academic who learned to love and value Arabic singing. (1997, 3)

Like Danielson who, in the course of her research on the Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum (d. 1975), had to be taught by Egyptians, both people on the street as well as connoisseurs who patronized and performed the music of Umm Kulthum, *why* this singer and her music were so good, I had to learn how to hear, listen to, perceive, and eventually love Arab music through being musical. Experience as a singer and instrumentalist flourished in expansive ways during graduate school through work with two fine musicians: a mentor, A. J. Racy, and a colleague, Scott Marcus. Arab musicality facilitated my first explorations as an ethnomusicologist *doing fieldwork* by interviewing, listening, and playing music among Arab musicians and audiences in Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, Michigan, Chicago, and California. As a college professor, I have taught through practice and performance since 1991. While my fingers and voice learned to do what they needed to play the Arab lute, the '*ud,* and to sing, and I trained my mind to understand the music though mastering various literatures, this new context in Indonesia introduced me to the challenges and opportunities of an embodied musicality.

My relationships in Indonesia were more often than not facilitated by a mutual involvement in Arab music. In fact, this common interest became a *fieldwork hook.* In my research process, our musical performance and talk about that performance constituted one of the strongest sites of meaningful exchange and still does. Arabic singing and discourse about music is a common middle ground. Oddly, it isn't a native discourse either for me or for the Indonesians who make the performance of Arabic melody and text a priority, but Arab music is something we are keen to talk and know more about.

Our pursuit of Arab music, although different in orientation, represents a kind of egalitarian meeting place. Arabic language performance, studying the musical *mujawwad* style of Qur'anic recitation, singing songs in Arabic for any number of public events, writing popular songs *bernuansa Islam* (with Islamic flavor), as some of the college-age women I came to know did, and just listening to Arab music with Indonesians has been the medium through which I learn about Islamic performance and the people for whom it matters in Jakarta and in a number of places throughout the archipelago to which my initial contacts in Jakarta led me.[9] By participating in its performance, I have learned about Indonesian Islam. Learning through listening, and then hearing, and then, ideally, knowing, makes up for the inadequacies of the linguistic sophistication I possess either in Indonesian or, particularly in Arabic, this language of aesthetic and intellectual prestige that all of this performance is *about.*

In studying *qira'a,* the performative, melodic, *mujawwad* style of Qur'anic recitation, during the early stages of this project, the intensity of the experience was almost overwhelming. To practice channeling the word of God through the body, with language that is thought to be so beautiful that it could only come from a divine source, was profoundly stunning. I often felt that I played the part of an *enfant sauvage,* the wild child, who has special needs and disabilities but whose senses are also heightened, intensified, and ultraperceptive.[10] Listening to the performative music of the Jakarta soundscape was one way I could train myself to be literate in Indonesian culture. Hearing knowledge complimented the race to understand this place through the medium of *bahasa Indonesia,* the national language, and through the mountain of texts in history, anthropology, and music that I was trying to digest in this exciting and overwhelmingly challenging stage of the project.

LISTENING TO THE JAKARTA SOUNDSCAPE

In his "critical genealogy" of the now quotidian term *soundscape,* originally coined by R. Murray Schaeffer (1993), Ari Kelman notes that rather than to curate a particular soundscape, which was Schaeffer's original intent, "Scholars of sound ask how does sound circulate and how does it contribute to the ways in which we understand the world around us" (Kelman 2010, 215). While I didn't understand everything in the Jakarta soundscape, my auditory perception of the environment became sharper as time went on, and I became willingly dependent on my hearing perception. Sounds that were at first perplexing, comical, or annoying later became commonplace and acquired meaning for my family and me. I eventually began to trust my ears and to welcome the call of the knife sharpener or the broom salesman, who passed by our house walking their cart full of wares through the neighborhood alerting potential customers of their passing. I began to hear the difference between the engines of the three-wheeled *bajai* and various sizes of motorcycles, cars, and trucks, especially those that frequented the spaces I habitually occupied. I came to expect the jingle of the ice cream vendor, the rumble of the Toyota *Kijang* pulling into the driveway at about six in the evening, the morning din of the nursery school on the corner. Ever present were the nocturnal *musang* (civit cats) on the roof, and the growling and yowling of feral cats in the act of procreation (*sedang kawin*—getting married), and the chorus of dogs, often inspired by the morning call to prayer. The sounds of Islamic ritual and recreation, apprehended aurally, were what opened my mind to the possibility of a project on the performance of Indonesian Islam: of groups of women practicing recitation down the street; Umm Kulthum on the radio; religious music videos on television; our houseman (*penjaga)* practicing the recitation of the Qur'an in the garage in the evening; and the rhythms of five mosques that were in earshot of our house in the Jalan Banka complex of the Kemang Raya neighborhood of South Jakarta. Intimidating yet alluring, these sounds eventually measured out the day in more and more predictable ways. In fact, once I knew which sounds interested me, I was able to filter my soundscape, to "orchestrate my environmental acoustics" Schaeffer (1993, 4), excluding sounds that were interruptive or meaningless or inviting them back in only when I had the time or inclination to savor them.[11]

The term *soundscape,* which has come to capture our imagination as a comprehensive auditory landscape in which background noise is foregrounded as aesthetic texture with sonic valence, is actually a radical revision of the term.

In his attempt toward "Rethinking the Soundscape," Kelman (2010) reminds us that the original definition of soundscape as conceived by R. Murray Schafer, the Canadian composer who originated soundscape studies, is more specific:

> His notion of "the soundscape" is far from the broad, descriptive term that it has since become. . . . it is suffused with instructions about how people ought to listen; and it traces a long dystopian history that descends from harmonious sounds of nature to the cacophonies of modern life. Schafer's soundscape is not a neutral field of aural investigation at all, rather, it is deeply informed by Schafer's own preferences for certain sounds over others. (Kelman 2010, 214)

Ethnomusicologists who encourage students to "become alive to their soundscape" (Titon 2008, 2010 Introduction) would agree that the identification of individual voices in the complex texture of a sonic environment involves "making informed distinctions about sound (as) a social process in which context plays a crucial role" (ibid., 230; see also Corbin 1999, Wainwright and Wynne 2007).

Deborah Kapchan takes the mere acknowledgment of and identification of or within sound environments several steps further with her introduction of the phrase "literacies of listening." Kapchan asks how we can acquire the ability to learn other cultures through participating in their sound economies (Kapchan 2009). In her account of experiencing Sufism in France among a group of female *Faqirât* (Sufi ascetics, literally, "poor ones"), she writes:

> My focus shifts away from the role of discourse and towards the importance of the auditory in enacting transcendent experiences of the sacred. Examining how ways of listening (like ways of speaking) structure perception and create an ethnos of religious community, I argue for the primacy of listening and memory in developing auditory "literacy." (Kapchan 2009, 67)

Kapchan's quest for a literacy of listening takes us beyond the mere recognition, identification, and categorization of sounds to sonic knowing, sensation, and memory. Her notion of listening literacies is one that connects nicely with Christopher Small's action, "musiking," a concept that glosses interaction and communication through the medium of music and musicality, the latter made manifest in reception, reaction, and communication about music and, I will extend, about sound.

THE AFFECTIVE POWER OF ARAB MUSIC IN INDONESIA

In my description and analysis of Arabic Indonesia, I try to convey the experience of *tarab,* the Arabic-language concept that indexes aesthetic excellence and communal elation borne of both repertoire and performance practice and that has at its core performative interaction (Racy 1991). *Tarab* unfolded, for example, during an evening when two champion reciters who had invited me to Medan, Sumatra, brought me to a *Haflah al-Qur'an,* or more literally, a "Qur'an party." At this event alternation between recitation and singing among women and men was replete with communal ecstatic indulgence among a vociferous group of about sixty participants gathered for the occasion. Their responses, in the Arabic language, of encouragement and acclamation became part of the performance. Audience response was even part of my performance, singing and playing on the *'ud.* That my hosts, Yusnar Yusuf and Gamal Abd al-Nasr Lubis, and I listened to cassettes of Umm Kulthum during the hour drive to and from the "Qur'an party" only enhanced this musical road trip. From the back seat I was able to observe and absorb the way they engaged with the recordings, singing along and commenting, and also to join in this ritual of pleasurable and interactive reception myself. This evening and many other occasions confirmed for me the proximity between Islamic ritual and music. When reciters—men and women, professionals and amateurs—consistently show interest in musical performance and collaborations with me, their enthusiasm for "musiking" is clear (Small 1998). Many instances in the research process helped to confirm that for many reciters, a seamless flow—from recitation, to singing, to music, and back again—is the norm and not the exception.[12]

Simultaneously, and to complement new experiences of Arab music in Indonesia, the entire soundscape gradually became a close consultant: Hearing Islam in Indonesia is not an option; it is a certainty. Architecture in Indonesia, even in Jakarta, is porous, and the sonic dimension of the built environment is interpenetrating. Neighborhoods are acoustically accessible and penetrable. And because even the smallest group will amplify their activities, pushing them into the public space, sometimes with a great deal of distortion, my access to or at least observation of innumerable contexts was enabled through orality. I could often hear where I could not go; and as I learned more about the sound sources of Islamic Indonesia, I was able to more accurately guess at the biographies of the sounds I heard. The "insight," or more accurately "in-hearing," into

religious and social life that such a permeable physical environment offered, turned my ears into "cognitive organs" that invited me to "reach beyond the noise," a reach that Alice Cunningham Fletcher made when listening to Native American ritual—one she likens to the then quotidian experience of listening to scratchy, noisy wax-cylinder recordings. Through hearing practices I was able to, as ethnomusicologist Veit Erlmann writes, "conceptualize new ways of knowing in a culture and of gaining a deepened understanding of how the members of a society know each other" (Erlmann 2004, 3).

My education came through the soundscape, but my progress as a student of this sonic landscape was enabled and enriched in multifold ways by my ability to participate in it, not only as a musician and an ethnomusicologist, but also as a female voice.

WOMEN'S VOICES

Among the most salient features of both the continuous localization of Islam in Southeast Asia, as well as of the Islamization of the Indonesian Muslim ecumene is the public participation of females. I was able not only to study this phenomenon, but perhaps partially in the spirit of *dakwa* (from the Arabic, *da'wa,* to strengthen or promote religious faith and practice) to become a participant. Not long after I started visiting the Institut Ilmu al-Qur'an, I was encouraged to seek out Maria Ulfah, in part because she was a woman and a respected teacher, but also because as a woman, reasoned an acquaintance—then assistant, and now colleague, Dadi Darmadi—"my voice would be better matched to hers." It was this nudge that led me to practice regularly with the young women that Maria Ulfah was coaching and to begin to take into my body the rigorous work of Arabic language performance in Indonesia. The challenges of recitation are the criteria for which it is judged and comprise the separate elements of its aggregate aesthetic affect. The long, melismatic, single-breath phrase is prized, so a line of recitation will be preceded by a long pause and a deep belly breath, the phrase, and then a dramatic release and gulp of air after a line's delivery. Maria Ulfah's recitations tended to begin on the lowest grumble, for example, the note A or G an octave and a half below middle C. As the phrases developed, the range expanded until we all were trying to hit an E-flat or F an octave and a half above middle C in our chest voices. There is the description and it is accurate. But no sound writing can tease out the sensation of making or hearing this progression of sound with your body. The challenges of *tajwid,* the system that governs the pronunciation

and sectioning of the text, was my great weakness; however, by mimicking my teachers (students included), I became more and more aware of the nuances of pronunciation, articulation, duration, and effects of timbre, such as nasality, that are employed in the course of language performance. I was able to "go with the flow," as in Turino's explication of "flow," where skill level is balanced with the inherent challenges of recitation (2008, 4). I sat close to the women around me, close enough to feel the vibration of their breath and the warmth of their bodies, and absorbed their demeanor, breathing with them and vocalizing with them, trying to share the sensation as they physically enacted, through practice and repetition, the sacred and challenging text. Finally, the construction of melody-in-time and its adherence to the performance practice conventions of the Arab *maqamat* (musical modes) was a most important location for auditory knowledge and expression.

In channeling the word of God through the human body, Qur'anic reciters—women or men—activate an inner spirituality: the melding of the mundane and the sublime toward a personal experience of the Divine. While the objective is to recreate the archetypal, the result is unapologetically personal, as the voice, more than any other human performing apparatus, is always identified as belonging to a particular body (see Rasmussen 2011). Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that these are particular women's bodies with their distinct voices activating powerful, individualized, and highly specialized performances, there are a number of ways in which a woman's personal and physical individualism is obscured.

First, although it may be represented as a solo and individual act, the performance of language in an Islamic context is actually a "communal endeavor."[13] The performer of Qur'anic recitation or devotional song is doing something that everyone has practiced and experienced (see Sells 1999, Marcus 2007). Second, the performed text is immutable. The delivery can vary widely depending on the person and the context, but there are no surprises in the words. Hirschkind helps us to understand the importance of orality by juxtaposing the logocentric process of persuasion by argument with hearing with the heart:

> That Muslim scholars have been relatively uninterested in elaborating an art of persuasive speaking owes in part to the way revelation affected their conceptions of the efficacy of speech. . . . The message itself has been articulated in the most perfect of possible forms, the Qur'an. This is made evident in many parts of the Qur'an where the failure to heed the words of God is attributed to a person or community's inability or refusal to hear *(sam')*. (2004, 134)

Even melody as a concept is thought to be "already out there" only to be taught, practiced, mastered, and applied in performance. The eminent musician and scholar of Arab music A. J. Racy, in his work on "musical ecstasy," the Arabic term is *tarab,* tells us that because modal improvisation is "tuneless" or "compositionally neutral," this "safeguards religious texts from the imposition of external, or humanly contrived compositional creations. Tuneless music allows the sacred words themselves to structure the performance as well as to accommodate the desirable melodic embellishments of the talented reciter" (Racy 2003, 97).

No matter how perfect the message, however, it is always preferable to have it transmitted by the beautiful voice of the talented reciter (Rasmussen 2010, chap. 3). Nina Ergin, in her study of the soundscape of Ottoman Istanbul (2014), delves into the records of Istanbul's numerous mosques to discover explicit directions for reciters who have "the capacity in reading the Qur'an with a beautiful voice." The directives of mosque patrons elaborate that "every one of them will read from the holy Qur'an with a soul-caressing voice in a way that will awake pleasure in the listener" (ibid.).[14] To revisit Hirschkind, quoted previously, reception through hearing by listeners (Arabic: *sami'a*) is as much a part of the aesthetic complex as is performance. Often demonstrated through physical and sounded behavior, reception, as it is embodied and performed, of this ideally perfect message (with its compositionally neutral but optimally sublime melody and rendered by a soul-stirring voice), then becomes the site where meanings, individual and collective, take shape.

In Arab music the notion that the performer and audience constitute a "feedback loop" (Racy 1991) is an ideology and practice with deep historical roots. Danielson writes of reception as an articulated and crucial component of performance. She remarks that the musical authorities of early nineteenth-century Cairo all count audience as among one of three to five components of music; the others generally include text, melody, rendition, and in the case of instrumental music, composition and accompaniment.[15] Although the lineage of these ideas is tenuous, the reciprocal and symbiotic relationship between performer and audience (including other performers) is deeply embedded in overlapping traditions of sacred and secular and has significant implications for our consideration of audition and of sound knowledge, as it is described by this volume's editor, Deborah Kapchan: "a non-discursive form of affective transmission resulting from acts of listening" (Kapchan, this volume).

WOMEN OUT LOUD

In a recent visit to Jakarta, Dadi Darmadi, an anthropologist and professor at the Islamic National University (UIN, Universitas Islam Negri) and affiliate of the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM, Pusat Penilitian Islam dan Masharikat) recalled the formative power of Ibu Maria's voice when he was a young man and serious contestant in various recitation competitions. He clarified that even if people weren't studying with Maria Ulfah, her cassettes and didactic recordings permeated the market of eager reciters beginning in the 1980s. Her voice was in the air and in your ear, he remembered. Pak Dadi's remarks remind us that women who can be heard although not always seen have a long history in Islamic contexts and in other situations, where the appropriateness of women's public performing bodies may be problematic (see also Ergin 2014).

There is no question that virtuosity and excellence is cultivated, practiced, noticed, and rewarded among men and women, some of whom achieve star status; yet I suggest that mechanisms are in place that deemphasize the female reciter as superstar so that women may escape any accusations of being self-absorbed divas. In this way the women are always working for the good of the community. Just as Indonesian female reciters work in the business of religion and at the service of the state, women's voices elsewhere seem to serve similar nationalist projects. Amanda Weidman, for example, explicates the situation for female would-be divas of South Indian classical music in the early twentieth century (2008). Her study describes a process whereby women's voices were cast as "natural," thus excusing a new cohort of emergent professional singers—often invisible to the public, thanks in part to the recording industry—from any indulgent behavior in the physicality and emotionality of Indian singing. Notions of the "natural" female voice were conflated with ideas of God-given talent and the child virtuoso, further removing the female singer from the hard work and creative agency that are thought to accompany artistic work. These "politics of voice" aligned with the emergence of the Indian nation that, as in the case of Indonesia, harnessed the power and labor of women for the agendas of male statecraft (see also Suryakusuma 1996 on the Indonesian case, Mooallem 1999, and Rasmussen 2010, chap. 6). This new natural, meaningful female voice allowed respectable middle- and upper-class women to pursue music and deemphasized the role of the female singer, heretofore fulfilled by the *devadasi*, unmarried female devotees of the temple.

Alessandra Cucci's work with female *shikhat* (plural from the honorific term

for female *sheikh*) of rural Morocco elucidates a scenario where women's voices are described as "embodying the countryside" (2012). To explain why a voice is said to "smell like the soil," she writes that singers are not valued for their individual talents:

> The voice of these *shikhat* is instead valued exactly because it is a marker and an expression of a collective identity, rather than for its individuality or for its power to express a singer's own identity. Its timbre, which is said to embody or perhaps *must* embody coarseness or roughness, allows the audience to be transported via the senses—hearing, smelling, tasting, and more importantly, touching—to the rocky soil on which it all began. (Cucci 2012, 18)

I suggest that these examples align with the Indonesian case, not because of similarities in voice qualities; in fact, the registers and timbres of Moroccan *shikhat,* South Indian classical singers, and Indonesian women who recite the Qur'an are all remarkably different, suggesting that there is much to pursue should we switch our focus from "ideologies of language to ideologies of voice" as Weidman proposes (2008, 136). Rather, the connection I hear is one where the power, intimacy, hard work, and individual accomplishment associated with women who sing is given license to operate within the constraints of patriarchal societies.

In channeling the Word of God through the human body, Qur'anic reciters—women or men—activate the Sufi objective of inner spirituality: the melding of the mundane and the sublime toward a personal experience of the Divine. As elsewhere in the Islamicate world, the Muslim soundscape in Indonesia is difficult to legislate because it both represents and activates the intersection of hearing, knowledge, piety, and power through individual and collective experience. Through a national competition system, however, banks of judges, ranking criteria, and a point system scientifically distill the experience of recitation into an objectively measurable act. The competition system is yet another uniquely Indonesian institution that invites and controls women's participation and for measured periods of time amplifies and channels the Islamic soundscape in all of its glorious variation.

An exercise in nationalism, the *Musabaqah Tilawatil al-Qur'an,* or MTQ, celebrates the diversity of Indonesia under the umbrella of Islamic unity and tolerance. The production of competitions at various regional and national levels is overseen by a department within the national Ministry of Religion, the Institute for the Development of Qur'anic Recitation (*Lembaga Pengembangan Tilawatil*

Qur'an, or LPTQ). As stipulated in the national planning guide, eighteen ongoing competitions take place during the weeklong festival. These include recitation by male and female adults, teenagers, children, and the blind; calligraphy; team quiz contests; team presentations combining recitation, translation, and interpretation; contests in the seven styles or dialects of reading; and memorization. The colorful and celebratory nature of the event is impressive, as is the fact that 50 percent of the contestants in all categories are female. Add to this parades, opening and closing ceremonies, speeches, and performances by any number of reciters at the ready, and music and dance groups who perform Islamic and regional arts, and the result is an impressive demonstration of the "festivalization of religion" (Rasmussen 2010, chap. 4).

With its attention to hierarchical judging and material reward, the state-sponsored competition may inadvertently control the inherently mystical aspect of internalizing and collectively experiencing God's word. In the context of competitions, the performance act is rigidly proscribed. It seems as though contestants—both male and female—are concentrating so hard on producing a flawless recitation that the technical aspects of their recitation overshadow any emotion. Furthermore, because they are being judged on *adat* (or proper behavior, including the way they are dressed, the way they enter and exit the stage, and the way they carry and place the Qur'an on its stand), a contestant will minimize any extraneous physical action or emotional display.

I submit that government patronage of religious festivals and competitions is a function of both tolerance and control of the Islamic soundscape and what it might represent. In the Indonesian Islamic context, the performance of language and music embodies not only the power of persuasion, but also the temptation of elation for all who produce and experience the sound. The festivalization of religion tempers this society teetering on the brink of religious ecstasy through national competitions with banks of judges, ranking criteria, a point system, prizes, and media hype. Here feeling, emotion, interiority, reception, and participation are erased from the board, and objective perfection is theoretically and practically privileged.

WOMEN, KNOWLEDGE, POWER

Since the early days of its introduction to the archipelago, the Arabic language, witnessed and apprehended through the aural and oral media, has represented and activated learning, knowledge, and power. When women and girls are present

in the soundscape, their voices contribute to the acoustic colonization of space, whether they are seen or not. Competence in the language of their religion leads to knowledge and power in other social spheres. Doorn-Harder's work reveals the ways in which access to Qur'anic texts through both traditional education, often in the context of the *pesantren,* or Muslim boarding school, along with the modern methodology of *ijtihad,* new and reasoned interpretations of Qur'anic text, has enabled women to discourse substantively on the issues that affect the control of women's intellects and physical bodies—from access to education and the workplace to polygamy and rape (2006).[16] Doorn-Harder does not, however, address the door that is opened to ecstatic states, hearing as knowing, and extralinguistic communal and physical experience that may be facilitated by accessing religious texts.

Letting Arabic "live on the lips" of Muslims in the words of Graham (1987) allows Indonesians—whether they understand Arabic or not—to both feel the language and let others experience it. The roots of women's involvement not only in access to religious texts but also in their interpretation and their presentation as lectures, lessons, recitations, and artistic performance are long. The power and beauty of these texts when recited or alluded to in song, as well as the mystery surrounding their sound, both in their divine origin and human creation, ensures that the reception of such texts occurs on the cognitive level of the mind, the emotional level of the heart, and the spiritual level of the soul. That women in Indonesia are so prominent as reciters, particularly when compared their numbers elsewhere, may be a function of their "talent" for sounding the divine while being controlled by patriarchal institutions of society and state.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

My goal in this essay has been to give the reader a sense of what it was like for me to learn through listening and to test the parameters of learning by communicating through sound, as a woman and among both women and men. That my experience was noisy, "redolent with participatory discrepancies," loud, and musical should come across in my sound writing. I have also suggested some of the reasons why the voices of women and girls are a significant presence in the Jakarta soundscape. Hardly an exception, their voices have helped to define the culture of Islamic "noise," to use Attali's alternative to the sound-music continuum, in the country with more Muslims than any other in the world, in ways that are both aesthetically valued and politically salient. I have also questioned

why, when generations of scholars of Islamic culture have insisted on the primacy of sound throughout the history and contemporary experience of the Muslim religion, we hobble ourselves with the singular medium of academic writing. Even as innovative as the sound writing in this volume is, are we not in part worshipping a false idol, the one that the academy has presented to us as the only one with value? In "The Splash of Icarus," the introduction to this volume, Kapchan tells us that while there are a few ways to write about music, ethnopoetics is the only sound writing that attempts to "evoke its SOUND on the page." Reviewing writing as a "recent technology," perhaps still in development, our colleague insists, "It is not writing that is a prison house per se, but our modes of perception, of listening and translation, that must be broken through" (Kapchan this volume). While I struggle to break through, I wonder if as scholars, we are all complicit in the hegemony of the written word, where the mistrust of aurality and orality and the prestige of literacy exclude sound knowledge for both capitalist and ideological reasons. After all, we have (once again) become more and more of an oral culture, fueled by bits and bites of hearsay and local knowledge, some of it viral, some of it crowd-sourced, all of it trending in one way or another. It is only within the last ten years or so, of my academic consciousness, that social fields have converged to bring on a serious conversation about forms of communication that might prove as effective, yet remain as prestigious, as the written word. Such considerations are often prefaced with serious doubts about the sustainability of academic publishing, combined with such revelations as "given the options afforded by digital media," or "unleashing the potential enabled by new (digital) technologies," as if it is our *technologies* that will enable us to understand things in new ways, ways that aren't written down. Yet if we look at our *listening* practices today compared with the revelations and forecasts of a variety of voices from the phonograph's naissance at the turn of the twentieth century, I see more similarities than remarkable developments.

Mark Katz's compilation of primary documents about the phonograph at the turn of the twentieth century, source readings from voices of the past, demonstrate the various receptions of and imaginative uses for the phonograph among men and women of the day (Katz, Taylor, and Grajeda 2012). Their writings demonstrate that listeners were excited about listening alone, rather than in social collectives; that the phonograph afforded the listener a variety of musical options with which to nurture and develop an eclectic ear; that listening in the home to *any* style of music could happen at *any* time of day or night; that a listener could now choose between radio and recorded music, or of course listen to the latest

recordings on the radio; that speeches, poetry, literature, and famous voices could constitute "a well-stocked oratorical cellar" for the connoisseur of good words. Listening could happen communally in formal settings, as in a private salon, at parties to compliment socializing, and to facilitate dancing. Testimonies of the time divulge that people harbored a passion for recording themselves and listening to those recordings right away, a technology that was as possible with a cylinder recording as it is with a smartphone, and that making good (studio) recordings was really hard work. None of these voices from over a hundred years ago strike me as old-fashioned, naïve, or passé. In fact, these voices from a century ago seem to predict and recite many of the listening practices we sustain as central to our consumption of recorded sound today, all of them facilitated by the latest technologies. It makes one wonder, when we can see a century of consistency in our listening practices and our abilities to circulate sound in complement to writing, why sound knowledge, learning through listening and through participating in the practice of humanly organized sound, has not been able to achieve either the exchange value or the use value of the written word. It is clear that however open-minded our institutions, those of us who traffic in music and sound still occupy, as Martin Stokes writes, a "precarious periphery" where "music is still considered a domain of special, almost extra-social, autonomous experience" existing "somehow outside of the 'real-life' of which social reality is assumed to consist" (1994, 1). Perhaps, as Herschkind has illuminated, our hearts and minds are not open and ready to hear a more perfect message.

NOTES

1. A word about names and people is in order here. *Hajjah* is an honorific title that indicates that a woman has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca, the *Hajj*. *Ibu* means woman, mother, Mrs., and is generally used to preface women's names; for example, I am Ibu Anne. I am deeply indebted to Hajjah Ibu Maria Ulfah; her husband, Dr. Mukhtar Ikhsan; and her sons Rifki and Labib and Labib's wife, Novi, for hosting me in their home in August 2014. Ibu Maria became the most important consultant for my work on women's roles and the culture of Qur'anic recitation in Indonesia over the course of my fieldwork in the late 1990s and subsequent visits to Indonesia up to the present.

2. An analysis of the reciter's exposition of the *maqam Hijaz* would mention the intervallic relationships of the *maqam,* with its characteristic augmented second between the second and third pitches of the scale, along with at least three "accidental" notes employed by the reciter within a rather short phrase (the leading tone of the fourth degree, the sharped seventh degree of the scale, and the penultimate flatted fifth degree of the scale).

3. For a transcription into musical notation and a transliteration and translation of the text, please see Rasmussen 2001.

4. Absent from my academic description are the jokes, the cajoling, the flirtation between the teacher and his female students, and the instances of collective empathy, where the mistake of a good (or even not so good) effort was met with group laughter or a knowing sigh.

5. Here I combine references to both Charles Kiel's term *participatory discrepancies* and Tom Turino's discussion of participatory music making.

6. Arab language performance: the call to prayer, recitation, collective ritual and paraliturgical song, and religious popular musics are informed by several streams of Arab music, including trends both contemporary and ancient from the Arabian Peninsula, particularly Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and the more mainstream musical practices of Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, which began to be disseminated via mass media in the early twentieth century. See Rasmussen 2010 for a fuller account.

7. The lion's share of the work of ethnomusicologists and anthropologists of music is focused on courtly and regional Gamelan traditions and on popular music and theater. It is fair to say that all ethnomusicologists pass through Jakarata, but few chose the city as their research site—with the exception of Jeremy Wallach, whose book *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia 1997–2001* derives from the author's experience in Jakarta.

8. See Shiloah and Freemuse for accounts of both.

9. My book of 2010 includes a useful map of my research sites (xxii). Numerous cities and villages on the Island of Jakarta figure into my project, including the famous cities of Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya, but also less well-known places including Gontor, Lamongan, Jember, Madiun, and Jombong. Various invitations also took me to Sumatra (Indralaya in the south and Medan in the north), Palankaraya, Kalimantan, and Palu Sulewesi. I was fortunate to be a guest at nine different Islamic boarding schools, where the soundscape became both a consultant and informant.

10. Here I make reference to the 1970 French film by director François Truffaut.

11. On several occasions I gave lectures to Jakarta expats, in which I included an invitation to listen to the Islamic soundscape and particularly the call to prayer. On more than one occasion I was stopped in the grocery store or elsewhere by someone in the audience who confessed that they now listened to the call to prayer with completely different, and educated, ears. No longer did they just tune it out, rather, they tuned it in. I have received similar feedback from students who have traveled abroad and sent me an e-mail about hearing the call to prayer in situ after being introduced to it in one of our classes.

12. During my stay in Jakarta, in August 2014, I was asked to perform four times over the course of ten days (playing the *'ud* and singing). For one of those performances,

Maria Ulfah and I rehearsed two songs by Umm Kulthum, one that we had performed in the past and another that was new to me. I stayed up late, searched on YouTube, and rehearsed over and over with Ibu Maria, in the house and in the car, until I had learned the Umm Kulthum song composed by Ahmad Rami, *Ifrah ya Albi*, to her satisfaction.

13. I borrow this phrase from Scott Marcus, who describes his conversations with several neighborhood men who give the call to prayer in Cairo. He writes, "Giving the *azan* is, as a consequence a communal endeavor" (Marcus 2007, 9).

14. Used by permission of the author, Nina Ergin.

15. Kamal Husni, the son of Egyptian composer Dawud Husni and himself a *hafiz al-turath* (a custodian of the musical heritage frequently called upon as a teacher), articulated five major components of traditional song: text (*al-nass*), composition (*al-lahn*), rendition (*al-ada'*), instrumental accompaniment (*al-alat al-musahiba),* and audience (*al-jumhur).* Kamil al-Kula'i also indicated that "qualities of voice, proper delivery, and demeanor for the singer, and proper listening incumbent upon the audience" are essential to a good performance, and musicologist Mahmud al-Hifni cited listening (*al-istima'*) as one of the four pillars of the musical renaissance of early twentieth-century Cairo. It is thought that such concepts, particularly the notion of reception as key to performance, are consistent "through the ages" of the Arab world (Danielson 1997, 11).

16. Doorn-Harder studies the two large Muslim social organizations of Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah and their women's organizations.

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