Arab Sounds in a Contested Space: Life Quality, Cultural Hierarchies and National Silencing

Ori Schwarz
Tel-Aviv University

Abstract
Sounds and sonic norms and regimes characterize both spaces/territories and individual bodies. The article explores the meanings of and reactions to Arab sounds in Israel—political struggles over muezzins, stereotypical representations of Israeli-Palestinians as loud, etc.—in order to offer general insights into the role of the sonic (both actual sounds and their discursive representations) in the new 'cultural' racism, in the everyday ethnicized experience of one's body, and in shaping relations between ethnic and national groups.

Keywords
cultural racism, habitus, Israel, mosques, national space, sound

On 6 June 2011 Israeli parliamentarian Anastasia Michaeli Submitted a bill banning the use of loudspeakers by mosques, and classifying it as 'noise pollution'. The bill sparked a heated public debate. In a press release, Michaeli claimed:

'Muslim clerics must find another way to call to prayer or send religious and national messages, not through defiance and demonstration of ownership [at the expense of] life quality as they do today, but in a way that doesn't disrupt the lives of citizens, and takes into consideration that we live in a Western and civilized country'.

This short extract reveals in a nutshell the Israeli public discourse on muezzins: first, their sound is conceived of as a weapon in a territorial conflict, a 'demonstration of ownership'. Second, muezzins allegedly disrupt the life of Jews and impair their quality of life. Third, their sound disqualifies Israel as a 'Western and civilized country', identifying it as part of the 'uncivilized' Arab Orient.

In this article I discuss Arab sounds—religious and secular alike—in the contested space of Israel. By studying the role of sound in the relations between Israel's Jewish majority and Palestinian minority, I wish to demonstrate that sounds are important for students of ethnicity and nationalism for several reasons, which are analytically independent but often intertwined in reality.

First, sonic habitus or styles are often racialized. Loudness and engagement in specific sonic practices are ascribed to groups and read as identifying markers. These perceived differences are constitutive of hierarchies of civilizedness and worth that justify ethnic domination—classification schemes instrumental of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1997). Sonic experience also evokes emotional reactions and moral judgements (Schwarz 2012) that inform intergroup relations.

Second, the belief in intergroup differences in sonic habits helps to construct ethnic others as life quality threats, justifying segregation and exclusion. Sonic sensitivities and stereotypes are thus instrumental of the 'new', cultural racism (Balibar 1991), as in Jacque Chirac's infamous comment on the 'noise and smell' ('Le bruit et l'odeur') of African immigrant families that disturb their working-class French neighbours.

Third, since sound spreads over space, it may characterize it and hence have obvious political meaning. Control over the sound of a given space symbolizes its political ownership/domination; hence the audibility of national and ethnic minorities may constitute an arena for struggle or negotiation over their civic status, cultural saliency, and territorial claims.

Below I discuss these three aspects while studying the sonic dimension of nationalized bodies and discourse in contemporary Israel, exploring questions like: what meanings are ascribed to Arab sounds in Israel, and how do these meanings inform everyday intergroup interactions? Are sensuous experiences of sonic space and particular sounds within it nationalized, and how? Which discursive resources are available
for talking about sounds of national others and to nationalize/racialize or denationalize/deracialize particular sounds or even the very category of ‘loudness’? These empirical questions may provide theoretical insights into the role of sensuous experience in intergroup relations, and how sociologists of race, ethnicity and nationalism should address it.

Despite much critique on the visualocentrism of the social sciences (e.g. Bailey 1996; Pinch and Bijsterveld 2012), the sonic’s role in the production of the social—and in particular, the sonic dimension of ethnic and national identities and intergroup relations—remains unacknowledged. As shown below, at least in the Israeli/Palestinian space, sonic practices are often ethnicized and nationalized, hence play a significant role in the constitution of both nationalized space and performed, embodied national difference in everyday life.

Data, methods and structure

The research explores the role of perceived sonic difference in intergroup relations by identifying its cultural meanings, discursive representations and subjective experience. The analysis draws on three major sources:

1. News articles on relevant topics such as Michaeli’s bill, local conflicts between Jewish and Arab communities over sound (muezzins, open-air weddings), Arabic announcements in trains, etc., published in Israel’s three main news-websites (Ynet, NRG-Ma’ariv and Haaretz) between 2006-2012. These news articles inform us about actual political and legal battles over Arab sounds, and employed repertoires of political action and discursive frameworks.

2. All 10,933 reader-comments on 38 relevant news articles and op-eds published on these websites during this period. While some articles did not discuss sound in the body-text (stories on discrimination of Arabs; neighbour-relations between Jews and Arabs; and residents ethnicity’s impact on real estate prices), all of them prompted reader-comments (‘talkbacks’) that discussed Arab sounds. While news articles represent official political discourse produced by parliamentarians, spokespersons and editors subjected to norms of politically correctness and respectability, online reader-comments are written by ordinary people (including political activists), and are not edited (although illegal incitement is sometimes censured). The reader-responses section beneath online-articles is a space where hundreds of readers discuss anonymously and often aggressively the article or each other’s statements. Whereas non-representative, they are a good source for identifying common judgements, assumptions, and stereotypes (for further discussion see Sella-Sheffy 2006; Shor & Yonay 2011).

I analysed both articles and reader-comments to map the main logics, lines of argumentation, and stereotypes/predication employed by speakers. This strategy is typical of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with which I also share the view of discourse as socially constituted (reflecting social structures and power relations) and socially constitutive (reproducing and creating groups, categories and power relations) (Wodak & Meyer 2009). While this view is common among sociologists of boundary work, my interest lies in the intersection of the discursive and the somatic.

3. In-depth semi-structured interviews conducted for a larger study on sound and society with sixty-seven Israelis from five designated groups, two of them from nationally-mixed living environments (residents of a nationally-diverse working-class town; and university students living in ethnically- and nationally-heterogeneous dormitory/neighbourhood). The sample is non-representative but highly-diverse in national, ethnic, class/status, geographic, and age terms. Over-representation of residents of nationally-diverse environments enabled me to study experiences of actual Jewish-Arab interactions, which although mediated by prevalent discourses represented in the other datasets, cannot be reduced to them.

Interviewees were asked about their experience and judgement of various sounds (music, silence, noises) in various contexts (e.g. to describe the sounds of their neighbourhood; sounds they like; or situations of encounter with sounds they considered inappropriate), and about their familiarity with sonic stereotypes. Interview data tell us how the sonic dimension shapes both actual interactions between Jews and Arabs; and the ways Jews and Arabs imagine and discursively construct each other and themselves.

The article moves from the most obviously political public discourse toward the private politics of the individual body. The first section discusses the political symbolism of sonic presence as an ownership
Struggling over the sound of the land

Israeli-Jews and Palestinians are engaged in an on-going struggle over territory. Since shaping the soundscape may be interpreted as appropriation-act, contested territories are often sites of struggle over 'sonic supremacy' (Oosterbaan, 2009). Even in the minor local conflict Oosterbaan studied in a Brazilian favela, sounds operated as weapons in a politics of presence: the Pentecostal church used electronically amplified prayers and Gospel music to define the favela as a neighbourhood of hard-working believers, and to outdo the 'funk' music associated with crime-gangs.

My data clearly indicate that the 'Mosque Bill' and other conflicts over Palestinian audibility in Israel are interpreted by Jews and Palestinians alike as struggles over both Palestinian’s place in Israel—their civic status, cultural saliency, and claims over the land—and Israel’s cultural character (Arab sounds like muezzins challenge the Western-secular image of Israel fostered by its liberal elites). Political and legal battles against muezzins are thus carried out by an unusual coalition of affluent liberals protecting their 'life-quality' and 'Western culture' and (often working-class) ultra-nationalists defending their national pride and the land’s 'Jewish character'. However, even when residents endeavour to frame their struggle in nationally- and culturally-neutral terms of 'law enforcement' or 'life quality', multiple other actors (supporters and opponents, Jews and Arabs) renationalize their claims, re-introducing the national dimension. This dynamics was not only reported in news articles, but also demonstrated in the reader-comments. Israeli political discourse and public policy are often preoccupied with demography and maintaining the 'Jewish majority' in Israel and in specific localities within it (Yiftachel 2006; Yiftachel and Yacobi 2003), however, opposition to Arab residents in mainly-Jewish neighbourhoods or villages is often justified in cultural terms of 'retaining the Jewish character'. This language of cultural 'character' is also used to exclude ultra-orthodox, Mizrahi-Jews, or refugees. Thus, whereas Israeli citizenship is based on ius sanguinis, policies toward minorities are cast in ius cultus terms closer to Germany’s Leitkultur discourse (Pautz 2005), and may be defended against racism allegations (Arabs should be excluded, the argument goes, not for being Arabs, but for behaving as such, thus taking-over the locality’s cultural character). My data contain many references to the alleged unique sonic habits of Arabs that render their presence in mainly-Jewish residential and leisure spaces undesired.

For now, I wish to stress that sounds 'colour' spaces, shaping their perceived 'character': in Israel, shouts over windows and loud low-brow music are enough to mark a neighbourhood as Mizrahi and poor (Schwarz 2012). This also applies to religious sounds, such as the addhan, a loud call to prayer cantillated by Muezzins five times daily. This tradition—allegedly dating back to Muhammad's time, although modified by recording and amplification technologies—is a significant component of Islamic observance and Islamic soundscape. In some European towns addhan has lately provided Islam with the same public audibility Christianity had since medieval times. Hence, for some Christian Britons and Germans, muezzins symbolize Islamic takeover of Europe (Langer et al. 2011); Whereas in Hamtramck, Michigan, public debate and referendum over the muezzin have been interpreted as a choice of collective identity, between suburb's 'Catholic character' and its 'tolerant character' (Weiner 2009).

In Singapore, where accelerated urbanization has created multi-religious urban spaces, the government has imposed restrictions of muezzins' volume while introducing radio broadcast of the addhan, despite Muslim resistance (Lee 1999). This move represents extreme individuation of the addhan, which still acoustic unite the believers-community, but no longer identifies spaces as Muslim, thus significantly reducing Islam's public salience. Whereas Lee lauds this use of technology to solve religious conflicts, it may be considered a project of silencing or dispossession from public presence, justified by neo-liberal sanctification of private space and the modern middle-class concept of freedom from sonic intrusion (Schwarz 2012, Sennett 1979). For loud sounds don't only colour public space: they also permeate into the most private space, the home.

Unlike most European countries, in Israel it is not Islam’s visibility (new minarets: Cesari 2005) but its audibility that sparks public debate. Reader-commentators often framed the discussion on muezzins as an issue of political domination and land ownership, claiming muezzins were out of place in Israel since it's
'the state of the Jews', not an 'Arab country' (all quotes are excerpts from the reader-comments data). Arabs were described as those who 'take over the country' and its 'public space', or as 'guests' who don't know their place and behave like home-owners.

Some readers suggested amplified addhan were a political statement, an attempt 'to show they are here', 'show Islam is present', or 'occupy territories'. Some claimed that addhans are directed at Jewish rather than Muslim villages, as a 'political-environmental weapon against the Jewish population' in a 'psychological warfare', aimed at making Jews suffer and encouraging their emigration. Though common in the reader-comments data, these arguments are generally absent from official political discourses, although they echo the 'Zionist premise that Israel is a territory and a state that “belongs” to, and only to, the Jewish people' (Yiftachel & Yacobi 2003).

Secular Arabic music, just like addhans, is similarly interpreted as an attempt to 'demonstrate national ownership', or 'drive Jews away from places': whether it be an Arab record played by swimming pool patrons, or live music by the Arab scouts orchestra, some reader-commentators would perceive it as a demonstration of Arabs 'habit of spreading their sounds out of religious territorialism', since 'the noise Arabs produce is a substitute for physical sovereignty'.

Israeli-Palestinians, both politicians/activists cited in the press and ordinary reader-commentators, also framed noise conflicts as a national issue of rights over the land: when residents of an affluent Jewish gated community in nationally-mixed Jaffa filed complaints against mosques and demanded to silence Arab churches and the scouts' orchestra, Arab residents and politicians interpreted silencing as another instrument of dispossession of Arabs by national and gentrification dynamics. Demonstrators against the silencing waved Palestinian flags and stated they 'would not be moved from our sacred land', challenging complainants' attempts to denationalize the conflict. Similarly, a common Arab reaction to the 'Mosque Bill' was that 'Islam was here before Michaeli [who immigrated to Israel in 1997; in another version: 'before the state of Israel']', and will stay many years after her—framing the conflict through the Palestinian national ethos of sumud (steadfastness).

Against this unusual Jewish-Arab alliance in nationalization-work, liberal-secular reader-commentators and politicians attempt to neutralize the national/religious dimension by framing muezzins as 'religious coercion', and symmetrically calling for a ban on noise nuisances caused by orthodox Jews (loud music from Hassidic vans, or 'Shabbat sirens' on Friday evenings).

Alternatively, they framed Arab sounds as 'noise' in value-neutral terms (decibels). Reader-commentators and politicians who employed this strategy, including environment minister Gilad Erdan, often mention technological solutions a-la-Singapore (replacing muezzins with radio broadcast, SMSs, or cellular applications) that would retain Muslim ritual while eliminating its public sonic presence.

However, for some Jews this presence was not merely a nuisance but a source of shame. Thus, an (alleged Jewish-immigrant) reader-commentator called to 'make them shut up', since 'foreign tourists who hear it think they have mistakenly arrived at Egypt or Jordan': the sound of mosques defames his beloved country in front of outsiders (possibly including his own friends or relatives) by presenting it as Oriental/Arab. Similarly, an interviewee (immigrant from Ukraine) experienced muezzin as a nuisance, while enjoying church bells: both disturbed her sleep, but the latter also coloured the space as Oriental, which for her clearly meant culturally inferior. Anti-muezzins campaigns are also campaigns for the purification of space from its shameful Arabness.

Arab secular sounds similarly challenge the space's Westernness, and Jews often frame their demand for quiet as defence of Western values in the clash of civilizations. Thus, when the municipality of the Jewish middle-class, mainly-Ashkenazi village Kfar-Varadim protested against loud open-air weddings at nearby Arab villages, they retaliated by playing to their neighbours classical music (Mozart, Beethoven and Puccini, a choice they admitted was not incidental). By doing so (and publicizing it) they presented themselves as the incarnation of Western civilization vis-à-vis the Levant (just as suggestions to replace muezzins with iPhone applications contrast 'primitive' Islam and 'progressive' high-technology, evoking well-entrenched dichotomies: Richardson, 2004).

Whereas some reader-commentators criticized this move as 'arrogant' and 'racist', others professed having used this tactic themselves against Mizrahi-Jewish neighbours. This tactic tries not only to eliminate Arab sounds from the public space, but also to employ and validate existing cultural hierarchies. Those who play music too loud in unregulated sites are presented as uncivilized Levantines, whereas middle-class Jews demand quiet on behalf of Western civilization.

Not only Arab wedding music and addhans, even Arabic speech may be considered 'sound out of place'. When an NGO urged Israel Railways to announce stations in Arabic (Israel's second official
language), the management declined, claiming it would make the trip 'loud' and will produce 'unnecessary noise' that would disturb passengers. Whereas (as demonstrated below) Arabs are often believed to be loud, there is nothing intrinsically loud about their language. However, vocal announcements demand all passengers' attention in a given moment remind to the existence of Arabs co-passengers in this non-Arab space.

Similarly, a Jewish student interviewee told me that 'among Jews, Arabs sitting in groups are perceived as noisy; probably because they talk Arabic it's perceived as “noisy”, not as a speech, I hear that often', whereas another student from the same dormitory said the security guards no longer allow Arabs to seat outside, talk loud and smoke water-pipe. In their study of nationally-mixed dormitories in Jerusalem, Erdreich and Rapoport (2006) documented how by filling the dorms' common areas with their omniscient auditory presence—yelling to one another across common spaces, laughing, chatting, and singing—female Israeli-Palestinian students claimed the space as Palestinian. Jewish-Israeli students could find this auditory salience unpleasant, as demonstrated by this message left on a student online discussion-forum: 'the dorms turned into a Palestinian refugee camp, Muslim Arab smoke water-pipe everywhere, scream, go wild, and all that with Umm Kulthum at hundreds of decibels in the background'. The dormitory where my interviewees lived banned such claim-making through its strict policy.

While amplified sounds colour wide spaces, sonic regulation of nationalized space also applies to interpersonal conversations. An Arab interviewee told me she used to feel embarrassed by looks people gave her while talking Arabic in public transport. However, over the years she learned to overcome her anxiety about talking loud, for which she is happy. She portrays this self-transformation in political terms: for her, talking Arabic is a way to show Jews 'we stay here'—the very same words used by Israeli-Palestinian public figures in sonic conflicts in Jaffa and elsewhere. Palestinians thus interpret attempts to restrict Palestinian sounds as a continuation of the Nakba.

Israel is abundant in structural factors that produce an imagined space in which Arab presence is reduced to minimum (strong segregation in housing, employment, education, and social networks; independent marriage markets; discriminatory signage etc). Arab sounds function as a 'provocative' reminder of the presence of a considerable Palestinian minority within the Jewish nation-state. Obviously, muezzins calling for prayer at 4 AM and loud open-air weddings disturb Jewish neighbours regardless of their nationalization: they violate their right to silence, and hence their quality of life. But nationalized sounds are even more disturbing: they simultaneously violate the perceived identity of space as belonging to the national collectivity.

While expansive sounds may help the subaltern appropriate contested space, attempts (such as Michaeli's) to purify the space sonically are related to—though distinguished from—the purification of space by actual exclusion of social groups (Sibley, 1995). The construction of nationalized/ethnicized space is not merely a discursive accomplishment: it involves the enforcement of a national/ethnic sonic order (Vannini et al. 2010), and the silencing of nationalized/ethnicized sounds on behalf of ethnic domination.

Hierarchies of Silence

 Sounds are read as marking identities not only of (nationalized) spaces, but also of people. The analysis below relies on Rogers Brubaker's assertion that nations and ethnoi are not ontological categories, but rather epistemological/cognitive ones, lenses through which people experience some situations but not others. Whereas Barth (1967) substituted an ontology of group-boundaries for the ontology of group-characteristics, and students of racialization studied emergent classification schemes identifying practices with groups (Omi and Winant 1986), Brubaker denies groups exist, focusing instead on 'groupness' as 'a contextually fluctuating variable' (Brubaker 2002; 2006).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is so salient in Israeli's everyday life, that almost any interaction between Jews and Arabs is experienced through the national lens (hence, unlike other discriminated groups, Israeli-Palestinians experience their everyday stigmatization/discrimination as national oppression: Mizrachi & Herzog 2012). However, my data show that Arab sounds are ethnicized by employing a general common framework that ascribes loudness to all low-status groups.

Just before the interview's end, interviewees were asked whether there are any groups (occupational, ethnic, age, national, class, etc.) stereotypically considered to be louder or quieter than others (a formulation chosen to reduce social desirability bias); and whether they believe these collective representations were grounded in reality. The replies were conclusive: quiet and sonic restrain were strongly identified with
Ashkenazim, the highly-educated, professionals, and (less so) the rich, whereas loudness was associated with Mizrahim (especially North Africans), Arabs, manual workers, and the poor. Interviewees often considered these stereotypes at least somewhat true.

The same stereotypes recurred in the non-reactive reader-responses data and in accounts of 'noise' across the interviews (where interviewees mentioned the nationality/ethnicity of noise-perpetrators, assuming it to be relevant to their story), which supports the findings' validity. Throughout the data, this loudness was interpreted as indicating lack of civilizedness and social worth.

This discursive formation merges different (ethnic, national, class, cultural, and occupational) hierarchies, and views loudness (loud speech, inappropriate/loud music listening) as index of low-status in all forms. It was described by interviewees of all age, class and ethnic backgrounds, including Arabs and Mizrahi-Jews. These stereotypes are powerful constructions that inform perception: as social psychologists have repeatedly demonstrated, people register information that supports their prejudices while ignoring information that refutes them (e.g. Cameron and Trope 2004).

Indeed, some differences in sonic styles may well exist between Israeli-Palestinians and Israeli-Jews. This applies to almost any two populations, and high levels of national segregation in residency, employment, personal-networks, and media consumption, together with national tensions, are classic conditions for the emergence of distinct 'national habitus' (Edensor 2002). However, such differences are merely statistical: volume of speech or engagement in specific sound-emitting practices do not map neatly to national group-membership. To perceive these differences qua intergroup differences, one must employ ethnicized cognition that underplays intragroup variance, overestimates intergroup differences, and ascribes perceived differences to nationality/ethnicity. It is ethnicized cognition that brings a Swedish grandmother to ascribe the loudness of her African-Swedish granddaughter to her Africanness (Hällgren 2005) rather than to her age or personality.

The discursive formation portrayed above is instrumental in producing this ethnicized cognition. It is rooted in colonial ideology (that justified colonial domination in hierarchies of civilizedness), and on a deeper level, in the old strategy of European elites to foster manners (Bourdieu's 'embodied cultural capital') as markers of status and justifications for class domination within Europe and colonial domination outside it (Elias 2000), framed in terms of culture versus nature (McClelland 1995). This identification of noise with those at the bottom of ethnic, national, and class hierarchies, documented mainly for the 19th and early 20th centuries (Bijsterveld 2001; Vaillant 2003), still prevails, although disregarded. In contemporary Israel, loudness and specific sonic practices are thus ethnicized, used simultaneously to bolster both national boundaries and ethnic hierarchies among Israeli-Jews (often by comparing Mizrahi-Jews to Arabs).

Specific sonic practices identified by interviewees as 'Arab' includes playing loud music from cars ('If I hear very loud radio from a car, I would always find there a young guy, who may be either Mizrahi Jew or an Arab'; Jewish artist, Jaffa); and playing music from cellular phones without using headphones. One interviewee, mother of three children, supplied me with a racialized account of her delivery room experiences:

- 'Will you ask me later what I think about screams in the delivery room? (...) You won't, but you know, it's also a cultural thing'.
- 'What do you mean?
- 'I wouldn't scream. Like, I haven't screamed in childbirth. You try to hold it, you don't let it out. And some [women], the Arabs for example, and also Oriental Jews, for many of them it's like part of the thing, they scream mad-ly, like, it's part of the culture, screaming'.

'Civilized' birth-giving epitomizes the complete triumph of culture over nature, and hence, the ultimate civilizedness she identifies with Ashkenaziness. Other interviewees supported their belief Arabs were louder with everyday experiences: one interviewee from a nationally-'mixed' city supported her claim that Arabs 'always shout' by describing Arab mothers calling their children from the other side of the playground (ca. 30 feet away), thus setting a bad example instead of educating them to be quiet (shouting from afar is often considered a typical sonic marker of 'bad neighbourhoods': Schwarz 2012). Another interviewee who believed 'Arabs produce more noise, they are louder (...) it's not necessarily positive or negative, but it's a matter of culture that you meet actually in almost any friction with this population', supported it with encounters with Arabs while hiking, eating in hummus-eateries, and as a football referee in children's league, where Arab children use 'much higher volume, and more aggressively'. The identification of Arabness/Mizrahi-ness with loudness and uncivilizedness was also manifested in the reader-responses: while discussing muezzins, reader-commentators described it as an 'uncivilized', 'disrespectful',
or 'primitive' way to call for prayer, demonstrating that Arabs are 'a bunch of barbarians'. This may rely on the Western middle-class individualistic norm that condemns any sonic intrusion by the community, but it surely relies on the common tendency to consider Arabs less civilized (Richardson 2004). Similarly, while commenting on a news article about a swimming pool manager who forbade Arab children to play Arabic music and suggested they played Hebrew music instead, commentators claimed that the very attempt to play their own music was 'uncivilized', showing bad manners.

The reader-comments data also includes many references to the alleged general loudness of Arabs (e.g. 'Arabs always like noise: shots in weddings, prayers screamed through loudspeakers, music in full volume in the car. Probably they all have hearing impairments, that's why there's no peace!!!!').

These stereotypes may nurture (or justify) discrimination and exclusion, as Arab neighbours are considered not only threat to Jewish sovereignty, but also a life quality threat. Time and again readers tell stories about their personal experience with loud Arab neighbours who shout or listen to Arab music at night; loud Arabs in the swimming pool; etc. Thus, one reader-commentator blamed Arabs for the dropping real-estate prices in his town:

'Prices fell because of their loud and vulgar culture, e.g. Arabs in Harish chose my pavement to be their living room, another example: the loud music, yelling at each other, things that are really unacceptable in our culture, which lowers apartments' value'.

Another commentator explained falling prices by

'the fact that when one Arab family moves in, the other Jewish families want to leave, not because they hate Arabs, but because it's uncomfortable. It's a different culture. They play music in deafening volume, they speak loud...'

This discourse obviously naturalizes, justifies and fosters further exclusion, discrimination, and residential segregation of Palestinian-Israelis: the loudness of Arabs is often used in the reader-comments data as an argument against residence of Arabs in all-Jewish villages and neighbourhoods. Sometimes arguments of 'life quality' and territorialism are intertwined. Thus, a Ukrainian immigrant interviewee distinguished between the quiet Russian-speakers living in his neighbourhood and the loud Arab visitors from adjacent Arab neighbourhoods who play loud music

('Every average Arab guy, once he gets a driving license and a car, he also gets a stereo, be it a stereo that costs more than his car, double subwoofer in the rear, and then he drives around in the neighbourhood, looking for some action, for girls, with loud music, so it’s a nuisance'), or have loud conversations on the street

('Whether they fight or laugh, like you know, you hear it in the whole building. Sometimes it disturbs, and also, it's not pleasant to hear it, you know, when Arabs shout outside your home, even if they shout at one another, like, he should go to his own village and shout there outside his home. Why should he seat on a bench outside my building, smoke water-pipe and shout?')

Although he later mentioned that some 'Russians' partake in similar activities and make similar noises, he used frames of cultural difference and national territorialism to justify his opposition to the presence of Arabs in the neighbourhood's public spaces.

Often reader-commentators referred to Arab sounds metaphorically, while claiming that the alleged loudness of Mizrahi-Jewish neighbours demonstrate their 'Arab' culture. Mizrahi neighbours are claimed to be 'uncivilized', loud (listen to loud music, shout at the stairwell) and inconsiderate, lower real-estate prices and impair neighbours' life quality, because they were essentially Arabs. Arabs thus turn from a concrete social group into a symbol of loud uncivilizedness, just as Jews did before (in the common German expression 'noise as in the synagogue': HaCohen 2011).

Arab interviewees shared the assumption that Arabs were louder and that loudness indicates lower status (thus participating in their own domination: Bourdieu 1997). Furthermore, they reproduced the model in a fractal manner, directing the same allegations of loudness qua uncivilizedness at the poorer, most deprived section of Israeli-Palestinian society—Bedouins. One middle-class Arab interviewee hinted heavily at Bedouins while blaming loud provincial Arabs who moved to her town in staining the whole Arab community as noisy; whereas another middle-class Arab interviewee from a nationally-mixed neighbourhood said explicitly that Jewish neighbours are quieter, whereas ‘Bedouins are the most noisy’. He used to have Bedouin neighbours, and prefers not to have any, since they are so loud: they yell, detonate firecrackers, shoot, and ‘usually you can find [their youths] driving around blasting’. It is of course possible that Bedouins in his town are statistically most prone to engage in these practices. However, the discursive strategy of passing the blame may be viewed as another demonstration of ‘the chain of Orientalism, in which
one recently stigmatized group evaluates other similar groups in terms of the extent to which they show the stigma' (Khazoom 2006:315): the very same images of 'loud uncivilized Orientals' are repeatedly reproduced.

In the opposite symbolic pole lies the construction of Europeanness. Interviewees often referred to this imagined pole, in relation to which Israeli-Jewish representation is a cultural lack: for them, being Israeli (even Ashkenazi Israeli) meant being uncivilized and loud compared to Europeans. While discussing their experiences abroad, interviewees positioned themselves vis-à-vis the imagined European and the 'loud Israeli' in various ways (similar to those described by Sella-Sheffy 2006). In their accounts concrete voices are always measured against the assumed Westernness of the speaker’s nationality and the symbolic pole of imagined Westernness, the epitomization of self-restraint and considerateness.

Like the construction of Arab sounds as territorial claims discussed earlier, the discursive construction of Oriental loudness is used to delegitimize Arab sounds and justify exclusion and segregation. However, it is different in not being openly nationalized, hence not threatening the progressive self-image of Israel's liberal, cosmopolitan elites. Instead, it supports their claims for status (as more civilized) and quality-of-life, and their self-concept of being a Western fortress, or in Israeli politician Ehud Barak's phrase, 'a villa in the jungle'.

**Bodies out of place**

Having discussed how Israeli-Jews experience and interpret Arab sounds and the discursive frameworks that mediate their experiences, the section below examines the perspective of those producing Arab sounds to explore questions of national habitus and self-positioning vis-à-vis national stereotypes and nationalized cognition.

The sonic dimension of the experience of national minorities as being bodies-out-of-place is powerfully demonstrated by Ibtissam (pseudonym), a young college-graduate Israeli-Palestinian interviewee from a well-to-do, highly-educated family. Though similar to many young middle-class Jews in her lifestyle, leisure and appearance, she experiences her sonic habits as incompatible with the demands posed by the spaces she inhabits.

She and her friends often get dirty looks from other patrons and reprimands from waiters, in fancy restaurants in Europe as in cafés in Israeli-Jewish towns. They sometimes feel 'embarrassed and uncomfortable about not being quiet', and occasionally choose less sonically-disciplined spaces, yet as a rule, she doesn't let dirty looks exclude her: despite having 'plenty of screw-ups and blunders with waiters, we still return to the same places. Like, it wouldn't stop us from going there, that's who we are!'

The last four words in the first person plural, which repeated in the interview, demonstrate that her speech style is a group style associated with **collective** (age/gender/national) identities, although not coextensive with any social group (Benor 2010). Ibtissam characterized the style of her and her girlfriends as having distinct prosodic features (including speech volume) and emotion display rules, which render it exceptional and conspicuous in these cafés: 'it gets louder, since all of us interrupt each other, get excited, and shout'. This style also proved embarrassing in the Jewish middle-class space of a quiet and peaceful massage studio, where an Arab friend of her screamed out of excitement upon hearing some personal news ('people started looking at me, and I felt my face soooo red (...) even the masseur heard us from inside. Such a gaffe').

Admittedly, Ibtissam masters other styles, and reflexively switches codes to formal, quiet style in college or at work. However, while with friends, talking loud is 'how we are', the only choice acceptable as authentic: style isn’t reflexively chosen but employed habitually. Whereas speech style (including volume) is shaped by impression-management strategies, the choice is constrained by linguistic, cognitive, and social factors (Benor 2010; Bourdieu 1991), and particularly by situation- and group-specific norms. Ibtissam sticks to this style despite social sanctions (she believes some people—including a quiet, 'posh' co-worker—are embarrassed by it and hence avoid going out with her). While performed in marked Jewish middle-class spaces, this style may shame its carriers and cast them as bodies-out-of-place. While in other contexts Ibtissam glorifies authentic self-expression as superior to Ashkenazi inhibition, it doesn't render her resistant to symbolic violence and shaming in these spaces.

While loud style is not employed by Arabs alone, once stereotypes exist, some Arabs acquire the same ethnicized cognition. Thus, another Arab student interviewee claimed that Arabs yell more often, ascribing it to their worse economic situation (being poorer allegedly makes them more 'negative' and 'stressed-out')
and their 'culture'. Speaking extremely quietly and softly, he reported using a louder, rougher tone while visiting his home-village.

The ethnicization of loudness may put middle-class Israeli-Palestinians in a complex situation: whereas embodying the stereotype may be a source of shame and further stigmatization and discrimination (adding discrimination based on cultural hierarchies to those based on naked racism and nationalism), not embodying it may be taken for inauthentic mimicry—a paradox well studied since the inauguration of the 'acting white' debate (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). The 'stereotype threat' is an effect of racial domination on the unconsciousness, as members of stigmatized groups are always at risk of confirming as self-characteristic negative stereotypes about their group (Desmond & Emirbayer 2010:335-7).

A fictitious representation of this paradox is offered by the successful Israeli sitcom Arab Labor, which tells the story of a middle-class Palestinian-Israeli family moving to a condominium in an upper-middle-class all-Jewish neighbourhood. While moving, protagonist Amjad Alian is anxious to make a good first impression. In the village, Amjad shouts while talking to his father, but when the movers arrive he begs them, 'when you arrive there, keep it quiet, because you know, it's Rehavia', and answered: 'don't worry, all my clients are Ashkenazim'. When the mover keeps shouting at his employees in Arabic, Amjad hushes him, fearing the loudness of his co-nationals would stain him and thwart his attempted integration into the Jewish middle-class. This actually happens when his father comes to visit and calls him from the stairwell: all neighbours open their doors and Amjad is extremely embarrassed. His attempts to dissociate himself from stigmatic representations of loud 'uncivilized' Arabs fail. In another episode, after a Jewish friend criticized 'Arab loudness' ('What's wrong with you that you talk in shouts (...) you, the Arabs living in Zion'), Amjad reacts by a dramatic conversion to the exclusive use of whispering, and by silencing his whole family.9

Throughout the series, Amjad tries to erase his Arabness and assimilate into Israel's Ashkenazi elite, through a project of strategic self-transformation of the Arab body and its marked embodied habits: he drives with seat-belts, pays inflated prices without bargaining, and experiments with vegetarianism, swimming, contemporary classical music, dog raising, feminism, and metrosexual masculinity, practices identified as opposed to Arabness, typical of upper-middle-class Ashkenazi Jews. Amjad identifies them with value in both senses—material success, and Western cultural progress. Since sonic style is a marked feature of Arabness, it is an indispensable component of this self-transformation.

Belonging to a national group may be correlated to some degree with mastery of corporeal competences and styles: as Tim Edensor suggested, national identity is thus embodied and performed through mundane choreographies, techniques of the body, and trivial expressive competences as the right volume of laughter in a given situation (Edensor 2002:88-98). While groups may intentionally distinguish themselves by developing oppositional styles, high level of segregation, dearth of intergroup contact, and different socialization-paths may unintentionally produce distinguished national habitus. Embodied habits of sound production and perception may pose resistance to self-transformation attempts. They inform the sensuous experience of national difference and belonging in a manner irreducible to discourse. Unlike Ibtissam, Amjad doesn't satisfy with acquiring mastery of another code to use in formal situations: he desires to erase his Arab body altogether, only to find out ever more markers of Arabness to be erased.

Like the fictitious Alians, Ibtissam’s family—who lived in a ‘good’ Jewish neighbourhood mainly populated by immigrants from the ex-soviet union—engaged in some stigmatized sonic practices that could identify them with national stereotypes and render their presence sonically conspicuous. Thus, Ibtissam reported usually playing music in full volume while driving (a practice strongly identified with Arab youths), much to her parents’ dismay; and her mother usually shouts while calling her from a different floor or outdoors (at the interview’s day, Ibtissam forgot her lunch, and her mother called her from the street until she noticed and stopped driving). These sonic practices rely on certain bodies: some middle-class Jewish interviewees reported not being able to properly shout even when they need to, and being appalled while witnessing such a behaviour, which they experienced as violating the sonic space of others.

One 'Russian' neighbour repeatedly filed noise complaints against Ibtissam’s family and the other two Arab families in the street. Ibtissam interpreted his motivation as racist, claiming he had explicitly confessed hating Arabs. Racism may indeed contribute to sound conflicts, either consciously (using noise laws as a mere pretext for racist harassment) or unconsciously (the 'loud Arabs' stereotypes increases the tendency to judge ambiguous sounds made by Arabs as loud and noisy: Sagar & Schofield 1980). Rather than replacing the social scientist role with that of the judge, we may use this case to explore the complex interrelations between discourses, cognition, and bodies: just as racist discourses may inform the sensuous experience of ethnic others, embodied sonic habits may be used against their carriers in micro-level national politics.
Whereas feelings of national animosity, territorial conflicts, and prevalent stereotypes and discourses surely inform the reactions to Arab sounds, no discussion of intergroup relations may ignore the ways in which bodies are themselves socialized to embody identity, read as identity marker, and struggled to be re-socialized in projects of self-change. While we should be cautious to avoid ascribing national/ethnic sonic habitus to groups, studying somatic styles and performances as components of *groupness* is essential to understand the sensuous dimension of group relations.

Conclusions

The case of Arab sounds in Israel offers several important insights for students of ethnicity, race and nationality. First, it demonstrates the importance of the sonic in struggles over territories, which are not restricted to physical access to territories and formal sovereignty. Groups also struggle over the symbolic appropriation of space, its appearance and sounds, and the *sensuous salience* of the various groups that populate it. Sound plays a major role in such conflicts, in which silencing is not a mere metaphor for discursive subjugation, but rather a material reality, the effect of laws, policies, symbolic violence and social norms that restrict sonic presence. The nation state may thus enforce one ‘sonic order’ at the expense of others, and questions of somatic order (Vannini et al. 2010), originally formulated as interpersonal, are reframed as political/structural questions.

Secondly, the sonic—and the sensuous in general—cannot be disentangled from discourse. Corporeal-sensuous experience is already ethnicized and racialized. The discursive construction of ethnic, racial, national and class identities—which attributes particular bodies with particular meanings and value to particular groups—shapes the most intimate sense-experiences of individuals. In particular, colonial discourses on progress and civilization are still forceful constructions that frame people’s everyday experience of selves and others. Just like our eyes, our ears are not colour blind.

Sonic norms and the discursive production of sonic hierarchies are important sites for students of symbolic violence. These racialized sonic habits and discourses deserve special attention due to the shift from old to new, cultural racism (Balibar 1991; Pautz 2005; Taguieff 2001). However, it should be noted that bad old national hatred and racism have not disappeared altogether. Among Israeli-Jews, liberal cosmopolitan elites are more prone to employ ‘cultural’ or ‘Leitkultur’ discourse against Palestinian-Israelis, whereas among other groups, explicitly professing crass anti-Arab sentiments is considered legitimate.

Thirdly, sonic habitus and styles are proved to be important components of the ethnically marked body: although acquired (hence susceptible to de- and re-socialization), these sonic features may easily cast bodies as others, out-of-place, or even a nuisance, thus nourish the discourses discussed above.

Although offering some general insights, Israel/Palestine has unique histories and state policies. The sonic dimension of group relations in other national contexts awaits further research and comparative studies are much needed.

The perspectives and mechanisms discussed in the article’s different sections are distinct, yet interrelated. All participate in the de-Arabization of Israeli sonic spaces, whether as a national-religious project of domination, a project of class-distinction, or a moral project with universal pretensions. Thus, the sounds produced by national minority families like the Alians or Ibtissam’s family may be considered ‘out-of-place’ for three reasons simultaneously: (1.) for demonstrating a distinct habitus that deviates from the embodied habits and dispositions of the hegemonic group, which are interpreted as indexical of moral, cultural and social worth; (2.) for being subjected to nationalized cognition that overplays and generalizes these differences and assumes an a-priori correlation between Westernness and civilizedness; and (3.) since Arab sounds draw attention to the very presence of Arabs in a ‘Jewish’ space and their claims over this space (usually less palpable due to segregation). Combined, these three components nationalize sounds produced by Arabs just as they endow nationalism with a sonic dimension, one that deserves our attention.

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Israel. Email: ori.schwarz@gmail.com.

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i 1.6 million Arabs constitute 20.5% of Israel's residents, not including most Palestinians living in the 1967 occupied territories (where Jews-Palestinians relations are shaped by different legal and social realities, which lie beyond this article’s scope).

ii The other groups included affluent retirees, subscribers of a classical orchestra; middle-class married urbanites who moved to the countryside; and librarians.

iii In many Jewish-Israeli villages, new families must be approved by admission committees that often justify their discriminating policies in terms of 'cultural compatibility'.

iv This self-silencing reaction was actually reported by a Jewish interviewee, daughter to a working-class Mizrahi family raised in a mainly-Ashkenazi middle-class town, where her family's loudness was notorious: only after engaging in over-correction did she find the middle-way.

v Ethnic animosity among Israeli-Jews is considered much less legitimate (as it threatens national unity and cannot be excused as reaction to warfare), hence 'cultural' difference plays much stronger a role in everyday racism against Mizrahi-Jews.